

Coleridge's Contributions - As a ⁽¹⁴⁾ Romantic Critic.

S.T. Coleridge is the greatest of the Romantic critics. He stands so high among literary critics of the world he is named with ^{only} Aristotle and Longinus! His 'Biographia Literaria' is the greatest book of English Criticism. He is the first to ground literary criticism in Philosophy, Psychology and Metaphysics. With him criticism begins as a serious intellectual discipline of wide scope. Herbert Reade considers him as 'head and shoulders above every other English critic'. He showed his dissatisfaction with the neo-classical tradition of criticism and gave it a new force and direction. He paved ways for the other Romantics to tread on with firm steps. His influence is so immense that even the modern critics feel indebted to him.

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Coleridge's greatest contribution to literary criticism is his theory of Imagination. He has given an exaggerated and transcendent importance to imagination and links it with the forces of fertility. It is something like a divine Potency in the poet that stimulates his creative act. As God ordered the world out of chaos, similarly the poet makes a good poem out of the materials taken from his surroundings. It is because of this creative power that he transforms the familiar into new and also strange. He believes that a work of art is an organic unity and the process of its creation is an organic process. It is done by imagination that enables the poet to unite the natural thoughts with natural diction and heart and head.

The combination of heart and head the kernel of Coleridge's Theory of imagination. He comments that the 'continuous undercurrent of feelings evokes genuine admiration in a great poet. Its lack generates a great disgust. In the simple words, imagination is a unifying power that empowers the poet to reveal the beautiful and permanent forms of nature. Coleridge calls it secondary imagination, distinct from

the primary imagination. The primary imagination presents to mind its own world as external to itself and it exists in every human consciousness while the secondary imagination is a rarer and more active capacity that belongs to the artist. It represents and recreates the external world in its completeness. It can break the barrier between the mind and the matter.

According to Coleridge, Art is not merely a copy of Nature, rather it is a recreation. There is something common between the nature and the poet's soul that enables the poet to create the forms of Nature according to his ideals. In short, the imagination of the poet diffuses, dissolves and recreates and works in the same manner as the divine imagination works.

Further more, Coleridge clearly differentiates imagination from fancy. The essential difference between the two, as pointed out by him is that imagination modifies the things, combines them and is a process of living growth. Whereas fancy, on the other hand, can combine and recombine the things but it cannot transform them. The objects with which it plays are 'fixities' and 'definitives'. In fact, it is mechanical in character. It is an associative and associative power, whereas imagination is a shaping and modifying power. It is a faculty of bringing together images which remain, when put together, the same as when apart. They are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence.

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Coleridge has also advanced a comprehensive theory of Poetry. He makes a distinction between a 'poem' and 'Poetry' that puzzled his commentators. He clarifies that Poetry is a wider category than that of a poem. He ^{elaborates} explains that it is a kind of activity which can be engaged in by painters or philosophers or scientists and it is not confined to those who employ metaphorical

Language Poetry in ~~the~~ ^{this} larger sense brings the whole soul of man to activity with each faculty playing its proper part according to its relative worth and dignity. It is distinguished from science by the preponderance of those powers of mind which are spontaneous rather than voluntary and in which the effort required bears no proportion to the activity ^{enjoyed} required. In short, Coleridge defines Poetry through the account of how the poet works, and the poet works through the exercise of his imagination. As regard, function of Poetry, he says that the proper and immediate objective of Poetry is the communication of immediate pleasures.

Besides, in his lectures on Shakespeare, Coleridge explicitly illustrates the principles of counter action and organic growth. He thinks that a poet does not create. A poem is not created. It grows itself like a tree, as if with an inner life of its own. This view is contradictory to that of Aristotle that art is an imitation of Nature. It is also an attack on the neo-classical tradition of Shakespeare's Criticism that he holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life.

His theory of Poetry and Comments on Wordsworth's Poetic Diction are equally important. He emphatically refutes Wordsworth's Doctrine of Selection of the real language of men 'low and rustic'. To make it short, Coleridge explains Wordsworth's own poems and points out that the language of a great Poetry is the language of men of common sense. Even the language of rustics becomes that of the common sense, when it is put to the process of selection.

Thus, we see that Coleridge is the first to introduce the element of imagination as a criterion in the criticism of Poetry. He lends the charm of imagination to the real and force of reality to the imaginary: -