Coleridge: The Enslavement Of Opium

Samuel Taylor Coleridge illuminated Romantic movement through his imaginative poetry. His works provide critiques of the organization of society, religion, and literature. However, Coleridge developed an opium addiction at a young age that wasn't publicly known and evidence of it can be witnessed throughout his works. It shall be argued that his addiction influenced his melancholy writing style, his creative topics, and his dissatisfaction of many of his works.

The Romantic period ideal that poetry should be for the average reader impacted Coleridge's straightforward writing technique. However, the tone of his works are rather somber. His schooling years were as he described "depressing and friendless" which began a lifelong desire to express his emotions throughout his poetry. The following quote from "The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem", "No cloud, no relique of the sunken day/Distinguishes the West, no long thin slip/Of sullen light, no obscure trembling hues" (Stanza 1) describes the speaker comparing the day to a shipwreck. The darkness of the wording resembles what Coleridge must've felt during his childhood which influenced his need to latch to laudanum, an opium that killed his physical pain (due to rheumatic fever) and eventually, his belief of his emotional suffering. Coleridge was academically a strong student which showed in his ability to write but his delusions were also evident in the visionary of what he wrote about.

Coleridge wrote about some quite fictitious happenings. For example, "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" tells of a Mariner describing a disastrous journey he took on a ship. The quote "Four times fifty living men,/(And I heard nor sigh nor groan)/With heavy thump, a lifeless lump,/ They dropped down one by one." (Part 3, Lines 216-220) describes the deaths of the crew by Death and Life-in-Death, all except the Mariner. The "magic" that the Mariner uses to tell the Wedding Guest this story to begin with seems too fake to believe that Coleridge wasn't under the influence when writing this piece. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner" embodies the ideas of the Supernatural, delusions, and suffering of individuals. The delusions evident through the use of Supernatural characters and actions were created to show Coleridge's inner sufferings by the death of the crew and punishment of the Albatross hung on the Mariner. The poem is soundly wrote but the topic of the work leads the reader to believe that Coleridge wasn't as stable as he seemed to be.

Samuel Coleridge wrote and translated over 20 volumes of work throughout his lifetime. He was also deeply influential in the field of literary criticism. His criticism wasn't only towards other poets and the events following the American and French Revolutions, it was mainly towards himself. Coleridge's drug use along with his pressures from work brought confusion and depression which was physically evident to the people closest to him (such as William Wordsworth). During his elevated drug dependency later in life, he develops a desire to edit much more of his work than he earlier did with Watchman (1796). However, he does create many new pieces such as Biographia Literaria (1817), Aids to Reflection (1825), and Church and State (1830). As stated by Molly Lefebure who in Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium writes "S.T.C.'s imaginative powers and concentration were literally destroyed by the drug: his intellectual capacity was fearfully eroded, his. . . truth hopelessly distorted. . ." (p. 14) describes why he edited his works, he truthfully believed he didn't write them well enough. His

depression and need of euphoria assisted his dependency and need to be better because ultimately, it made him feel as if he was actually living for something.

In conclusion, Coleridge's addiction is evident in his woeful writing style, his imaginative storytellings, and his need to improve his works. His dependence on opium emerged from his physical ailments and depression and stuck with him throughout the rest of his life and literary works. Although he was under the influence majority of his life, he still managed to become a leader of the Romantic movement through his thinking about literature's inspiration and influence on innovation of the French Revolution by attracting progressive writers and followers. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's addiction didn't define his life, his skill of writing did.

Works Cited

1. Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner (Text of 1834) by Samuel Taylor Coleridge." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43997/the-rime-of-the-ancient-mariner-text-of-1834. Accessed 6 Mar. 2019.
2. Dendurent, H. O. The Wordsworth Circle, vol. 6, no. 3, 1975, pp. 155–158. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/24039265. Accessed 9 Mar. 2019.
3. Lefebure, Molly. Samuel Taylor Coleridge: A Bondage of Opium. New York: Stein and Day, 1974. Print.
4. "Samuel Taylor Coleridge." Poetry Foundation, Poetry Foundation, www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/samuel-taylor-coleridge. Accessed 9 Mar. 2019.
5. "The Nightingale." Representative Poetry Online, rpo.library.utoronto.ca/poems/nightingale. Accessed 9 Mar. 2019.