

## Coleridge's Poetic Theology of the Imagination

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### Course Description

Today Coleridge is mostly known as a writer of the sensitive conversation poems and the fantastic "Rime of the Ancient Mariner," but the greater part of his writing was philosophical and theological in nature. We see the influence of Coleridge's Christian Romanticism for example, in C.S. Lewis when he uses the term in Pilgrim's Regress and in his defense of objective beauty in *The Abolition of Man*. From the Church of England to Socinian heresy and back to orthodox Anglicanism, Coleridge's intellectual journey in the *Biographia Literaria* shows a mind voracious for deep philosophical reflection married to profound poetic experience, wedded together in the mysteries of Christianity itself.

Composing his great work with the hopes to show "that the scheme of Christianity, as taught in the liturgy and homilies of our Church, though not discoverable by human reason, is yet in accordance with it," Coleridge sought to stave off not only empiricist and rationalist objections to the faith with Romantic belief in the imagination, but to defend orthodoxy that such Romanticism might apparently threaten. In an effort to understand Coleridge's project of Christian Romanticism, we will read his poetic, philosophical, and theological works with attention to the core argument running through all of his writing: that the Imagination is an indispensable resource for seeking God's truth, not to supplant but to more fully submit to what Coleridge termed "the whole truth in Christ."

### Course Objectives

Objectives for this course include: (1) understand Coleridge's literary methods, (2) understand the theological, historical, and literary background to Coleridge's poetry, (3) articulate the literary value Coleridge's poetry has, especially in a Protestant and specifically Anglican context, and (4) consider and develop answers to major questions surrounding the texts in question.

### Course Format

The format of the course will be predominantly one of mini-lectures followed by guided discussion. The instructor will often be doing most of the talking, but generally to illuminate and draw out themes from the text for discussion, rather than in pure lectures. Thus, students will be expected to come having read and engaged with the text selection for the week, and with thoughts prepared to contribute.

Classes will meet via Zoom for two hours each week and will be recorded for later viewing by students who cannot participate. Additional student

participation and instructor interaction can take place on our private discussion board.

### Course Requirements

1. Weekly readings (due before our meeting each week).
2. Weekly interaction with fellow participants and the instructor in live class sessions.
3. Weekly participation in the online discussion forum.
4. For those taking the course for-credit: Composition of a 3k-5k argumentative essay that presents a thesis statement-driven position about Coleridge's work or its influence. The paper should be 12-point Times New Romans font, with regular margins and standard citations (I will accept either MLA or Chicago Style).

### Assessment and Weighting

**Class Participation 25%**

**Discussion Forum Participation 25%**

**Essay 50%**

### Course Texts

Required: Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Major Works, Oxford World Classics.

Recommended: Coleridge's Poetry and Prose, Norton Critical Editions.

### Course Schedule

Week	Dates	Discussion Topics/Themes	Reading
1	4/12-18	Introduction	"Essay on Faith" <a href="http://www.gutenberg.org/files/44795/44795-h/44795-h.htm#Page_341">http://www.gutenberg.org/files/44795/44795-h/44795-h.htm#Page_341</a> "Confessio Fidei" <a href="http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8488/8488-h/8488-h.htm#section157">http://www.gutenberg.org/files/8488/8488-h/8488-h.htm#section157</a> Apologia Pro Vita Sua 113
2	4/19-25	Developing Political and Theological Thought	"A Moral and Political Lecture" 604-613 & "Lay Sermons" 660-665
3	4/26-5/2	Mature Reflections	"Aids to Reflection" 666 & "On the Constitution of the Church and State" 686
4	5/3-9	<i>The Reader's Autobiography</i> , 1: Aesthetic Development	<i>Biographia Literaria</i> Chapters 1 & 2 157-181, Chapter 4 194-206
5	*5/10-16	<i>Reader's Autobiography</i> , 2: Poetic Theology	<i>Biographia Literaria</i> Chs 12-14 280-320, Ch. 24 473-482
6	*5/17-23	Conversation Poems, 1	The Eolian Harp 27, Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement 29, This Lime Tree Bower My Prison 38, Frost at Midnight 87

7	*5/24-30	Conversation Poems, 2	Fears in Solitude 92, The Nightingale: A Conversation Poem 99, Dejection: An Ode 114, To William Wordsworth 125
8	*5/31-6/6	Poetics of Aspiration and Agony	Religious Musings 13, Kubla Kahn 102, The Pains of Sleep 121
9	*6/7-13	A Fragment	Christabel 68
10	*6/15-20	The Masterpiece	<i>Rime of the Ancient Mariner</i> 48

\*On the 5<sup>th</sup> I will be leaving Missouri with my wife for her pending surgery on the 5<sup>th</sup>. For this reason it will be necessary to end the course early. May 11<sup>th</sup> is the last day of my regular semester, so ideally it would be best to hold the last sessions prior to her surgery. This would require us to double up with 2 meetings per week. We will negotiate this change on the first day according to what works for everyone.