

Biographia Literaria Quotations

Writer: Samuel Taylor Coleridge | Generated: Jan 26, 2026

Quote 01: Poetry vs Prose: *"A poem contains the same elements as a prose composition; the difference must consist in a different combination of them; in consequence of a different object proposed."*

Explanation:

Coleridge says both prose and poetry use the same elements—words and structure. But their purposes are different. Prose is for expressing truth, while poetry aims to give pleasure. So the same parts are used, but arranged differently.

Quote 02: Poetry vs Poem: *"What is poetry? is so nearly the same question with, what is a poem? that the answer to the one is involved in the solution of the other."*

Explanation:

Coleridge says that the questions "What is poetry?" and "What is a poem?" are nearly the same. The answer to one includes the other. Both reflect the poet's own thoughts and emotions shaped by imagination.

Quote 03: Nature and Activity of a Poet: *"The poet, described in ideal perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity."*

Explanation:

A true poet uses all parts of the human soul together—reason, feeling, and imagination. Each part works in balance. In this way, a poet like Milton or Shakespeare creates with full energy and harmony.

Quote 04: Creation of Good Poetry: *"Finally, a good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy is drapery, motion its life and imagination the soul, that is everywhere and in each."*

Explanation:

Coleridge compares poetry to a living body. Good sense is the body, fancy is the clothing, emotion is the life force, and imagination is the soul. All these must work together to create great poetry.

Quote 05: Meter in a Poem: *"If metre be superadded all other parts must be made consonant to it?"*

Explanation:

Coleridge says metre is not necessary in all poetry. However, if used, it must complement the other parts well. A poem is an organic whole, so metre must match its emotion, style, and purpose.

Quote 06: Disagreement with Wordsworth: *"Every man's language varies according to the extent of his knowledge, the activities of his faculties and the depth and quickness of his feelings."*

Explanation:

Coleridge disagrees with Wordsworth's idea of using simple rustic language. He says people speak differently based on their education, thinking, and emotion. So language varies from person to person.

Quote 07: Primary Imagination: *"The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I Am."*

Explanation:

Coleridge defines primary imagination as the basic human power to perceive the world. It is a copy of God's creative act, present in our limited human mind. It helps us understand reality.

Quote 08: Secondary Imagination: *"It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still, at all events, it struggles to idealize and to unify."*

Explanation:

Coleridge says secondary imagination breaks things apart to create something new. Even if full creation is not possible, it tries to make things ideal and unified. It mixes feeling, thought, and vision.

