KUBLA KHAN

Dejection : An Ode S.T. Coleridge

Prepared by:

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Dear Student,

‘We are sending you the Study Material on Coleridge. Only two poems - *Kubla Khan* and *Dejection: an Ode* are prescribed for you this year.

Apart from reading the prescribed poems, you must go through a few of Coleridge’s other poems too. This, of course, stands for other poets also. Familiarise yourself with not only the prescribed poems of the various poets, but with a few of their other important ones too. *Kubla Khan* is supposed to be a supreme example of Romanticism, and was written when Coleridge’s creative powers were at their height. The second poem, the ‘Ode’, though Romantic in temperament, is different in theme and content.

Poems always lend themselves to different interpretations, and these two poems are no exception. However, steering clear of various controversies, we have tried to discuss the poems in as simple a manner as possible. Exhaustive notes are also provided without which, it goes without saying, any discussion is incomplete.
1.

SECTION - A

About the Author

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was born on the 21st of October, 1772, in Devonshire. His father was a simple-minded clergyman. The poet, the youngest of thirteen children, displayed from his earliest years great fondness for reading, and entered the Grammar school when six years of age. We have a full account of his early years, which truly proves how in his case the child was father to the man. It is important to note, in the light of his later tastes and of his writings, that the book which above all others fascinated and impressed him was the *Arabian Nights Entertainments*. As he says “I took no pleasure in boyish sports, but read incessantly. So I became a dreamer”. Alas ! I had all the simplicity, all the docility of the little child, but none of the child’s habits. I never thought as a child, never had the language of a child”.

When he was eight years old, according to his own account, he ran away from home after a quarrel with his brother who had provoked him, and slept that night on the bank of a stream, an adventure which he dated as the beginning of his continuous later ill-health.

In 1782, Coleridge’s father died, and a place was found for him at Christ’s Hospital, the London charity school, where Charles Lamb was his junior. Lamb describes Coleridge as the “Poor, friendless boy.”

At school he was an omnivorous reader: he was interested in metaphysics, in theology, and especially in Neo-Platonism. During the last two years at school, he was interested in poetry, especially the sonnets of Bowles, which, by their spontaneous and fresh simplicity, and genuine love of nature, exercised a great influence upon him. His own verse written during these years, though often above the average, requires no special comment.

In 1791, he entered Jesus College, Cambridge. His University career was passed in stirring and stormy times. He firmly embraced democratic and communistic views, and had deep sympathy with the French Revolution of 1789. In religion, as in politics, his views were strongly radical. An interesting development took place at this time: owing to debt, and disappointment in love, Coleridge disappeared in December 1793 and enlisted in the Light Dragoons at Reading under the name of Silas Tomkyas Comber Bache (Coleridge retained the initials). In April 1794, he was discharged after his family and friends intervened on his behalf, and he returned to Cambridge.

On a Vacation walking tour, he met Robert Southey, poet and ‘sturdy Republican’, at Oxford in June. Soon a friendship was formed, and during the following three weeks or so Coleridge outlined a plan to establish (in a remote part of America) a communistic settlement which was called Pant isocracy. Twelve gentlemen were to sail with twelve ladies; two or three hours’ work a day suffice for their support giving ample leisure for study and poetry. But the project did not make an\headway, and the scheme was slowly and silently dropped.

1. *Supplement to “Biog. Lt.”*
2. *Unitarian: member of a Christian church which rejects the doctrine of the Trinity and believes that God is one person.*
The only practical consequence of the American scheme was Coleridge’s marriage on October 4, 1795, at Briston to Sara, sister of Edith Fricker, whom Robert Southey was to mam. The Coleridges settled in a cottage in Clevendon in Somerset. In September, 1796 their first child Hatley as born.

Coleridge had no means of supporting a home, beyond an offer of payment for am verse he might write, made by a Briston publisher named Cottle. He tried several schemes for gaining a livelihood: delivered lectures on various topics, literary and political, preached in ‘Unitarian churches’, published his first volume of poems, wrote for the press, and finally started *The Watchman*, a magazine devoted to politics and literature. But with the tenth number, the publication of the magazine came to an end.

On the marriage front, Coleridge did not enjoy domestic harmony. In fact there was no real sympathy and understanding between him and his wife. Thus domestic anxieties and depression of spirits brought on attacks of neuralgia and it was probably at this time that he began the use of opium as a relief, a habit which was to mar his best years, and indeed the whole of his life. In fact, Coleridge suffered long spells of appalling ill-health, and his addiction to opium only served to complicate the problems.

In 1797, began his famous friendship with William Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy. Coleridge moved to Nether Stowey in Somersetshire, and shortly afterwards the Wordsworths settled in the neighbouring village of Alfoxenden. “Our principal inducement,” writes Dorothy Wordsworth, “was Coleridge’s society”. Each had seen, and admired, a little of the other’s work, but they had only recently become personally acquainted. The friendship between the two poets stands as one of the most famous and most fruitful in the annals of English literature. And we cannot forget Dorothy also. As Coleridge says: “We were three people, but only one soul”. The stimulus of Wordsworth’s companionship helped to mature his poetic genius, and the sympathetic, intelligence of Dorothy Wordsworth also had the happiest effect upon Coleridge’s imagination. Free for a time from domestic anxiety, and happy in the new company, Coleridge rose to the zenith of his poetical career. Their walks together on the Quantock hills resulted in the epoch-making volume of poems called *The Lyrical Ballads*. (1798) “The Ancient Mariner formed part of the Ballads. Indeed during, the short time—from June, 1797 to September, 1798 — that this close friendship lasted, Coleridge wrote almost all his best poetry,—*The Ancient Mariner, The Nightingale*, the first part of *Cristabel, The Dark Ladle, the Ode to France, Fears in solitude, Frost at Midnight, Kubla Khan*, and so on.

This brief and fruitful period also marks the completion of Coleridge’s poetical career. Two poems alone of later date can claim to rank with those just mentioned; the second part of *Chrisibel* (1800) and the melancholy *Ode on Dejection* (1802). Walter Pater in his *Appreciations* observes, “What shapes itself for criticism in Coleridge’s poetic life is not, as with most true poets, the gradual development of a poetic gift, determined, enriched, retarded, by the actual circumstances of the poet’s life, but the sudden blossoming, through one short season, of such a gift, already perfect in its kind, which thereafter deteriorates as suddenly with something like premature old age. “Henceforward Coleridge is the critic and the Philosopher, rarely the poet. The tyranny of opium had spread its dark shadow over his life, and we find an excellent account of his state of mind at this time in all its bitter sadness in the pathetic *Dejection* ode, from which a few lines may be quoted here:

There was a time when though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness.
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But now afflictions bow me down to earth;
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But O, each visitation
Suspends What Nature gave me at my birth,
Dejection ode is indeed his pathetic farewell to poetry, as sincere as it is sad.

After the publications of Lyrical Ballads, Coleridge started for a tour through Germany with Wordsworth and Dorothy, to learn the language and study contemporary philosophy and science. German philosophy and literature peculiarly fascinated Coleridge.

On his return to England in 1800, Coleridge aimlessly moved from place to place. When Wordsworth married and settled at Grasmere in the Lake district, Coleridge and his family followed in July 1800, where they, in turn, were followed by the Southey's who shared their house, Greta Hall near Keswick.

Relations with his wife grew worse and worse, and Coleridge plunged into depths of misery. He fell in love with Wordsworth's sister-in-law, Sarah Hutchinson, a woman of deep sympathy and understanding. He even toyed with the idea of taking a separation from his wife.

Failing health induced him to try the effect of warmer climates. So he left for Malta in June 1804, where he was very well received by the English Colony. He was appointed there as the temporary secretary to the governor Sir Alexander BaYl. From this time onwards, Souths^ took more oy 'ess fu\ respotvsWity for maintaining Coleridge's family. But there was no improvement in his health. Cut off from friends and congenial intellectual environment, he found life unbearable there, and returned to England after two years.

He wandered from place to place, ill and self-reproachful, and finally went to live with the Wordsworths for two years and produced another periodical, “The Friend”, his second attempt at periodical editing, of which twenty-seven numbers appeared. Sara Hutchinson, who had copied the manuscripts for the printer, left to live with a brother in Wales. Coleridge missed her immensely, his life and work falling to pieces. He left for London, and soon got involved in a miserable quarrel with Wordsworth which was never completely patched up.

Still, however, his wonderful powers continued to find new admirers, and his lectures on Shakespeare and Milton in London were “a sort of rage.” Since these lectures were delivered extemporaneously, only fragmentary records exist of them.

Separation from his wife took place at this time, and this was followed by estrangement from many-old friends too. Continued ill-health at last forced him to place himself in the hands of a sympathetic doctor of Flighgate, Mr. Oilman, in the year 1816. He lived in the doctor’s house until his death, eighteen years later, and under his care he gradually overcame the craving for opium, and regained some measure of restored health. He renewed old friendships, formed new ones and showed occasional flashes of genius. During this period he produced the Lay Sermons, Biographia Literaria, with its invaluable analysis of the principles and language of poetry, the Aids to Reflection, and the Notes on Shakespeare. According to Traill, an eminent critic, “Coleridge is in the domain of Shakespearian commentary absolute king.”

Coleridge had extraordinary powers of conversation, and it was as a talker....a marvellous talker that he is noted during the last ten years of his life. His reputation and his attractive personality brought to Highgate some of the finest minds of the day. In fact he became the sage of Highgate, and the house a place of pilgrimage for writers and thinkers.

He died on 25 July, 1834 and was buried in Highgate churchyard. A few months previously he had composed his own epitaph:

Stop, Christian passer—by ! -stop, child of God.
And read with gentle breast. Beneath this sod
A Poet lies, or that which once seein'd he,
O. lift one thought in Prayer for S.T.C, :
That he who many a year with toil of breath
Found death in life, may here find life a death !
Mercy for praise—to be forgiven for fame  
He ask’d, and hoped, through Christ. Do thou the same!

Coleridge planned much, but achieved little. Carlyle, a well-known critic, wrote: “His cardinal sin is that he wants will. He has no resolution.” Coleridge was incapable of sustained effort. On this aspect, let us note the opinion of two or three famous critics. Oliver Elton observes in his *A survey of English Literature*: “The history of his life is largely one of designs unfulfilled—mere broken arcs—and of surmises thrown out rather than worked out. His life is a record of dissipated energies, wasted manhood unfulfilled promises and pre-mature decay.”

Hudson points out in *An outline History of English Literature*: “A man of gigantic genius, he was absolutely wanting in will power, and his slavery to opium, which lasted many years, helped still further to paralyse his energies. So the divinely-gifted Coleridge shambled through life, dreaming great dreams and projecting great books, but the dreams were never realised and the books were never written. All his work is fragmentary; yet his was so original and seminal a mind that in theology, philosophy and literary criticism (to which he gave much time in later years) he exercised an influence out of all proportion to the bulk and apparent importance of his writings.

What is best in Coleridge’s poetry is very small in amount, but that little is of rare excellence. His personal poems like *Dejection: an ode*, and *Work without Hope*, have pathetic interest in connection with the tragedy of ineffectiveness which made up so much of his life. But his historical importance is due mainly to such poems as *The Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel* which represent the triumph of romanticism as fully as Wordsworth’s narrative poems represent the triumph of naturalism. Coleridge took the supernatural as his particular province, and far beyond any writer before him he treated the supernatural in a purely poetic way. It will be remembered that Wordsworth saved naturalism from the hard literature to which it was tending by touching fact with imagination. Coleridge saved supernaturalism from the coarse sensationalism then in vogue by linking it with psychological truth.

Another notable critic, I. A. Richards, is also worth quoting: “He is the Great Disappointment”; the man who might have but didn’t; the waster of unparalleled talents; ’ the type specimen of self-frustrating genius; the procrastinator, the alibi fabricator and the idler.”
2. A BRIEF NOTE ON THE CHARACTERISTICS OF ROMANTIC POETRY

Before coming specifically to romantic poetry we will first give a very brief survey of English Poetry. Of course you must supplement this account with a reading from any good *History of English Literature*.

Modern English Poetry is about six hundred years old. It can be conveniently discussed under the following headings.

1. Age of Chaucer.
2. The Elizabethan Age.
3. The Puritan Period.
4. Restoration Period.
5. The Classical Period.
7. The Victorian Age.

Now follows a brief estimate of all these periods.

1. **Age of Chaucer (1340-1400)**:

   Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400) has rightly been called the father of modern English poetry. He was a many-sided genius. He adopted an eleven syllable line as his favourite verse-form from the Italian poet Boccaccio.

   Chaucer’s most important and endearing work is *Canterbury Tales*. This poem is the finest narrative in English literature, abounding as it does in story-interest, humour and characterisation.

   The Age of Chaucer is notable for the development of the popular ballad, metrical romance, dream allegories and satire.

2. **The Elizabethan Age**:

   Broadly speaking the period (1580-1620) may be regarded as the Elizabethan Age. It is one of the greatest periods in English literary history. Its two main characteristics were:
   
   (i) Growth of Nationalism.
   (ii) The influence of Renaissance learning.

   Both these tendencies are reflected in contemporary literature. Amongst the foreign influences, Italian, French and Spanish were more pronounced.

   In poetry, new verse forms like the “sonnet” and “blank verse” were introduced and experimented with. Songs, pastoral poems, and sonnets were extremely popular. Spenser was the greatest Elizabethan poet, and his masterpiece, the *Faery Queen* was written during 1589-96. The sonnets of Spenser, Sidney and Shakespear were quite popular. The Elizabethan Age was primarily the age of drama. Shakespeare wrote all of his famous dramas between 1591 and 1611.
The general trend of Elizabethan literature was “Romantic”. Display of imagery and emotion were two marked traits of poetic diction.

3. The Puritan Period:

This period covers the years (1625-1660). This is also known as the Age of Milton as he was the most prominent poet of this period. This age was characterised by a reaction against earlier Elizabethan extravagance and imaginative enthusiasm. The poetic pendulum swung towards sober intellectuality and controlled emotion. Milton perfected blank verse as an instrument of poetic expression.

This period was one of gradual transition from the vigour, gaiety and imaginative freedom of the Elizabethan to that of artificial cheer, philosophic melancholy, and Puritan sobriety.

4. Restoration Period:

Also known as the Age of Dryden, it extends over the years 1660-1700. John Dryden was the greatest poet of this age. Poetry was marked by intellectual vigour, wit and polish, and dominated by classical traits—balance, exactness and polish. It lacked emotion and high imagination: and it was largely didactic (moralistic) or satirical in intention. The ode was also a favourite form. Blank verse was replaced by the heroic couplet.

5. The Classical Period (1700-1750):

It is also known as the Age of Pope or the Augustan Age. Alexander Pope was the greatest poet of this period. Classicism dominated English Poetry almost throughout the greater part of the eighteenth century. Main characteristics of classicism were as follows:

(a) Reason and common sense were preferred to ‘emotion and imagination’.
(b) Nature or supernaturalism were seldom or never treated in poetry.
(c) Most of the time it was the poetry of the town rather than of the country side.
(d) Poetry was chiefly written in Heroic couplet.
(e) Poetry was largely satirical or didactic in intention.
(f) Diction and imagery were conventional.
(g) Poetry abided by rules which were practised by the Age of Dryden and the contemporary French poets.
(h) Metrical regularity was strictly adhered to.
(i) Epigrammatic quality and didactic spirit were widely cultivated by poets.
(j) Elizabethan qualities of rhetoric, eloquence, conceit and bombast were discarded. In their place ‘classical qualities of balance, exactness and polish were encouraged.’

Pope’s contribution to the development of classicism in England was the largest. He perfected the heroic couplet. He also laid down rules for writing poetry by publishing his famous “Essay on criticism”. He taught his contemporaries to “Follow Nature”—but in a different sense. What he meant was an exact reproduction! of everyday life and manners, as opposed to anything wild or extravagant. It was not to describe flowers and the trees and the changes of season,—it was to copy the men and manners of polite society. Pope was the author of numerous well-known epigrams, (short, pithy saying).

6. Romantic Revival and Romantic Revolt (1798-1832):

In English this period was ushered in by Wordsworth and Coleridge in the Lyrical Ballads of 1798, as a protest and revolt against the so-called classicism of the previous century. The movement started as a conscious reaction against the Neo-classical poetry of the 18th Century. In this sense, the movement was known as the romantic Revolt. But the movement is also known as the Romantic Revival, in the sense that the romantic qualities, which were suppressed by the Age of Pope, were revived during this period.
Interest in Spenser, Shakespeare and Milton was revived. Since the spirit of the Romantic poetry was akin to that of the Elizabethan age, the Elizabethan literary forms and subjects were revived again—the sonnet, the lyric, the pastoral, the blank verse, the Spenserian stanza, the ballad, and soon. The same fullness of imagination, richness of language, vastness of conception, lyricism and picturesqueness which pervaded the great Elizabethan works are to be found in Romantic Poetry. In Coleridge and Byron, Shelley and Keats was revived that passionateness, restlessness and curiosity, that sense of wonder and mystery, which marked the age of Elizabeth.

**We can sum up the main characteristics of the Romantic poetry as follows:**

(i) Emotion and Imagination were once again preferred to reason and common sense.
(ii) ‘Individuation’ as opposed to obedience to ‘Authority’ was revived. The poet was not bound to follow “Ancients” or “fixed rules”. He was free to write as he pleased.
(iii) Interest in Nature and Supernatural was revived.
(iv) Interest in the common man—the peasant, the labourer, the shepherd—was revived.
(v) Interest in the Past, the Middle Ages, was a marked feature of Romantic poetry.
(vi) Interest in Greek art, myth and literature was another characteristic feature.

The Romantic Revival was the “second great creative period” in English Poetry—the first being the Elizabethan Age. Great poets flourished during this period, who enriched the romantic tradition by making significant contributions. Thus Wordsworth revived interest in Nature by writing such poems as “Tintern Abbey.” He struck a democratic note by publishing his short lyric, “The Solitary Reaper.” Coleridge revived the elements of wonder and mystery by writing “The Ancient Mariner”, “Kubla Khan” and “Christabel”. Shelley enriched lyricism by writing such immortal lyrics as ”Ode to the West Wind,” “The Cloud,” etc. Keat’s contribution was no less outstanding. He revived interest in the Middle Ages in his, “The Eve of St. Agnes” and “Ea Belle Dame Sans Merci.” Besides, he was a great Hellenist (a lover of Greek art and literature), as is evident from his “Ode on the Grecian Urn”. Byron popularised the qualities of romantic sadness” by creating the Byronic Hero. All these great poets were lovers of nature, although they appreciated it in their own individualistic manners.

**7. The Victorian Age (1832-1870)**

Romantic rather than classical spirit prevailed during this period. It was, however, modified to reflect current attitudes in science, religion, politics and philosophy.

The two great poets of this period were Tennyson and Browning. Poetry of this period was romantic in so far as:

(i) It was dominated by imaginative and emotional elements,
(ii) It experimented with new verse forms.
(iii) It was dedicated to the worship of beauty.

The Victorian Poetry differed from the poetry of the Romantic Revival in three important aspects:

(i) It was more intellectual in tone,
(ii) It treated serious problems of society,
(iii) It evinced higher degree of technical perfection.

The lyric remained a favourite form during this period. Robert Browning developed a new type of lyric known as the “dramatic monologue.”

You must read at least one good History of English Literature. You may consult “A History of English Literature” by A. Compton-Rickett, or The Cambridge History of English Literature Vol. XI. You may also consult, if you can get, A Critical History of English Literature by David Daiches.
Coleridge’s name, in the history of English poetry, is always associated with those of Wordsworth, Keats, Shelley, and Byron; for all these poets were subject to the same influences, and present such characteristics as link them together into a group. The tendencies that they show and the qualities which they impart to their poetry have won for them the name of Romantics, and the movement which they represented has come to be known in English literature as the romantic Movement. Coleridge’s poetry reveals that he had a marvellous power of imagination. This imagination helped him to dream great dreams and see great visions. He possessed also the power of translating into vivid symbols for the eye and the ear the beauty which he saw in his dreams and visions. His poetry also reveals the remarkable gift which he had for presenting romantic pictures and images of rare beauty. His poetry indeed is always full of Romantic elements, and these arise from his study of the medieval part and from his bringing into his poems mystic and supernatural elements. Indeed, the supernatural, the marvellous, the Romantic, these seemed to Coleridge, fit subjects for a poet, not so much on their own account, as for the sense of an abiding mystery in things which thej awaken in contemplative minds. The Rime, Kubla Khan and Christabel are the greatest poetic achievements, where the poet with his supreme powers of poetic vision, feeling and expression, has captured for man’s enjoyment the subtlest and the most wonderful fancies”.

From : Fifteen Poets (OUP)

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE (1772-1 834). son of the vicar of Ottery St. Mary, Devon, was educated at Christ’s Hospital (Lamb, in his Elia essay, describes him there) and at Jesus College, Cambridge. In 1795 he made the acquaintance of Wordsworth, and the two poets lived for about a year at Nether Stowey and Alfoxden in Somerset. Their Lyrical Ballads, containing Coleridge’s Ancient Mariner, appeared in 1798. Coleridge wrote the first part of Christabel and Kubla Khan in 1797, and some of his best poems during 1798-1802. Dejection was written in 1802. In 1804 he travelled to Malta and Italy, returning in 1806 broken in health and a prey to the use of opium. He spent much of the latter part of his life in the houses of friends; after 1816, of a kindly surgeon, James Gillman, at Highgate. In 1817 appeared his Biographia Literaria or literary autobiography, and in 1825 his Aids to Reflection, in the first of which he did much to introduce German philosophy to English thinkers. He died in 1834.

You will see Coleridge-he who sits obscure
In the exceeding lusture and the pure
Intense irradiation of a mind,
Which, with its own internal lightnings blind,
Flags wearily through darkness and despair.

‘COLERIDGE: was a muddle-bained metaphysician, who by some strange freak of fortune turned out a few real poems amongst the dreary flood of inanity which was his wont. It is these real poems only which must be selected, or we burden the world with another useless book... There is no difficulty in making the selection- the difference between his poetry and his drivel is so striking.’

The first estimate is that of Shelley, writing characteristically penetrating, aerially imaginative, poetry to Maria Gisborne. The second is that of William Morris, writing characteristically swashbuckling and robustly dogmatic prose to the Kelmscott Press about a selection from Coleridge. But the two approach each other more closely in substance than they do in manner, Both stress Coleridge’s preoccupation with the things of the mind, and both stress his lack of stamina, his inability to sustain his flight at its highest pitch. Even those who doubt whether Coleridge is one of the greatest of English critics will readily admit that he is one of the most brilliantly illuminating; but even in this field the brilliance is spasmodic. Truth springs out clear-cut, silhouetted for a moment on the sky-line by the lightning-flash of the sudden phrase; but the lightning is transitory and the tree merges again into the shades of night.

Something the same is true of his poetry, though with this difference, that he produces his best criticism at those moments when his mind is kindled by his imagination, but his best poetry when
mind is as nearly as may be laid asleep. He wrote three poems which are by common consent among the most notable in our language, in their own kind, indeed, unapproachable. Besides these he turned out a great body of work, a good deal of it trivial, and the bulk of it competent enough versifying, but characterless, no better and no worse than could have been turned out by plenty of other poets. Morris was no doubt extravagant in depreciation, but he was right in this that Coleridge of all poets is the easiest from whom to select. He stands or falls, as a poet, by three poems, and a most remarkable and imperishable trio they are, remarkable not only for their excellence, but also for their diversity in excellence. All three present the supernatural, the world of faerie and of dreams, but each presents it in its own distinctive way.

Of all modern poems *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* comes nearest to achieving an impossible, the impossibility for the modern writer of writing a genuine ‘ballad’. Coleridge at least grazes the clout because, for all that he applies to the task a sophisticated and inevitably imitative technique, he can throw-back to the true ballad spirit and maintain it, the spirit which is content to record vividly and leave it to the hearer to comment, which will record the extraordinary with as matter-of-fact a nonchalance as the humdrum. It is a mistake to suppose that the ballad-writers did not regard the supernatural as supernatural; they did; but they also regarded it as, given the necessary conditions, normal. If at the dead hour of the night you heard the bridles ring, the bridles were elfin and the hair of your head stood up; but if you were unlucky enough, or foolhardy enough, to be at the right place at the right hour, you were likely, in the normal course of events, to hear the elfin bridles. *The Ancient Mariner* is a masterpiece of vivid description, but nothing in it is more remarkable than the way in which the transition from the detailed, matter-of-fact, and accurate description of the voyage towards and from the South Pole to the equally matter-of-fact description of the avowedly supernatural manifestation of the phantom ship is managed with so little change of tone that one hardly, in a rapid reading, realizes that the transition has been made. If one has unwisely shot an albatross, then sooner or later strange things will happen. But the strange things will be described with the same clear circumstantial detail as the rising of the sun upon the other hand. There is no question of an incursion, a border raid, of the super-natural on the natural; both are parts of a whole.

*Christabel* is wholly different in spirit; the two realms are sharply defined, and the denizens of the one trespass on the confines of the other. It is different also in method, and those who, with Keats, dislike poetry that has a palpable design upon them dislike it, for the design is palpable in conception and gross in execution. Coleridge is as determined as the fat boy to make his readers’ flesh creep, and he proposes to do it not by the method of plain statement but by the method of ‘suggestion’. This method can be terrifyingly effective when used with restraint, but Coleridge’s determination is so relentless that he loses all finesse. Hence the vagueness, hence the frequent appeals to the Heavenly powers, hence the mastiff-bitch, that irritating hound. And in one instance Coleridge perfectly betrays his method for inspection. He wrote first

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Behold! her bosom and half her side
Are lean and old and foul of hue.
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Surprising, no doubt, and repellent, but direct. This is the technique of *The Ancient Mariner* and this therefore will never do. So Coleridge rewrites it, with a suggestive aposiopesis (incidentally sacrificing an essential rhyme and forgetting in the second part that he has rewritten it).

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Behold! her bosom and half her side—
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
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And we either shiver deliciously or turn away from the too patent garden-path according to temperament. *Christabel* is a masterpiece, but to many readers an exasperating masterpiece.

*Kubla Khan* is a masterpiece of another, and, I think, far higher order, though ‘masterpiece’ is probably too conscious a word to describe rightly so unconscious a poem. There is no valid reason to doubt Coleridge’s own account of its composition. It is true that the most of us, if we write anything in dreams, write unpublishable doggerel. But take a man with as peculiarly associative a mind as Coleridge’s (*The
Road to Xanadu showed its singularly ‘prehensile, amalgamating’ quality), a man with an adequate training in poetic technique, and a man in whom the subconscious was so much less far below the threshold of consciousnes than with most of us; put this man under opium, and there is no reason why the outcome should not be Kubla Khan, that most perfect of all records of dream-experience, with the coherent incoherence of a dream. One may or may not like it; it is ‘fanciful’; it is ‘intangible’; it ‘has no relation to life as ordinary men and women live it”; but no one who is not deaf to the music of poetry, and blind to the images of poetic fancy, can deny that in its own kind it is beyond criticism, securely hors concours; storing in one vial all the sorceries of Romanticism’, distilled by a process of which only Keats and Coleridge fully knew the secret.

A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon lover!

Kipling, who amongst many other things, was himself a master of words and a sensitive literary critic takes the two famous lines of Keats on the magic casements and these three of Coleridge, and he says, ‘Remember that in all the millions permitted there are no more than five-five little lines—of which one can say: “These are the pure Magic. These are the clear Vision. The rest is only poetry.”

M.R. Ridley

KUBLA KHAN

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
Through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the hills,
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e’er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing.
A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail.
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher’s flail:
A’nd’mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!
The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the Tountain and the caves. It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny measure—dome with caves of rice!
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song.
To such a deep delight 'twould win me.
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those eaves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry. Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread.
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

DEJECTION: AN ODE
[WROITTEN APRIL 4, 1802]

Late, late yestreen I saw the new Moon,
With the old Moon in her arms;
And I fear, I fear, my Master dear!
We shall have a deadly storm.

Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence.

WELE! If the Bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Aeolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For io! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light
(With swimming phantom light o’erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap. foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!
A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief.
In word, or sigh, or tear-
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood.
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo’d,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze-and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen:
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!
My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze for ever
On that green light that lingers in the west:
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.
O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth-
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!
O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me
What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower, Joy,
Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.
There was a time when, though my path was rough.
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.
Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality’s dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture legthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav’st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tarn, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,
Or lonely house, long held witches’ home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and a peeping flowers,
Mak’st Devils’ yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty Poet, e’en to frenzy bold!
What tell’st thou now about?
’Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans of trampled men, with smarting wounds —
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with cold!
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings -all is over-
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright
And tempered with delight,
As Otway’s self had framed the tender lay,-
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way:
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.
'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep:
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing.
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes.
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady! friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayestthou ever, evermore rejoice.

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KUBLA KHAN

*Kubla Khan* presents certain serious problems for the readers as well as critics. On the first reading, especially without any background knowledge, everyone is bound to ask the question: what is it all about? Is there any connection between the first and the second part? Is it merely a fragment?

These questions are not easy to answer. But it definitely stirs up an old argument: Should we enjoy the poem as it is—as a self-contained independent unit? Or should we seek background knowledge—poet’s life, his other interests and preoccupations, and so on.

Votaries of the former belief, no doubt, have some point. But *Kubla Khan* presumably supports the latter view—that we do need some background knowledge to understand and appreciate this poem.

This poem, though written probably in 1797-98, was published for the first time in 1816, along with a Preface in which Coleridge calls it a fragment and tells us about his source and method of composition, which we quote in full:

In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to lonely farm-house between Porlock and Lynton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in Purchas’s *Pilgrimage*: ‘Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were enclosed with a wall’. The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awakening he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast. But, alas without the after restoration of the latter.”

Modern critics do not give much credit to the Preface that Coleridge wrote much after the composition of the poem. They hold the Preface responsible for much of the confusion and mystery that the poem has given rise to over the years.

What is the position of the modern criticism? For one, it does not consider the poem as a ‘fragment’, as claimed by Coleridge. For another, it detects an essential unity between the two parts (Lines 1-35, and Lines 36-54). Further, regarding its theme, there is also a measure of consensus that the poem is about “the act of poetic creation” (Humphry House); ‘Kubla Khan’ is a poem about poetry (George Watson). In fact Watson claims it with an assertiveness: “What is ‘Kubla Khan’ about? This is, or ought to be, an established fact of criticism: ‘Kubla Khan’ is a poem about poetry. It is probably the most original poem about poetry in English”. For Graham Hough (*The Romantic Poets*), what underlies the poem is the theme of *Poetic inspiration*. 
Earlier critics like Livingstone Lowes (*The Road to Xanadu*), tracing out the references that Coleridge gathered from his immensely wide reading of these months, comes to the conclusion that the poem is meaningless. He treats the relation between the parts as ‘inconsequential’. He also talks of the ‘vivid incoherence’ of the second part. All this is indeed the result of having been told beforehand that the poem was a dream, or the result of a dream. And Humphry House’s pertinent questions acquire an added force when he asks:

“If Coleridge had never published his Preface, who would have thought of “Kubla Khan” as a fragment? Who would have guessed it as a dream? Who, without the confession, would have supposed that “in consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed”?

Be that as it may. the fact remains that the Preface had stirred up a great deal of critical activity. What is the best course open for us then? Obviously, to steer clear of some of the confusing, difficult and indepth studies of the poem, and adhere to somewhat simpler and easily accepted approaches.

We proceed with the premise, then, that *Kubla Khan* is not a fragment: it is a complete whole, with the two parts having a basic unity. What is this basic unity? It is this point which remains to be discussed.

We know one thing for certain that this poem contains echoes and reminiscences of a number of other books which were sub-consciously influencing his thoughts and fancies. The elements of the remote, of the distant in time and space, of luxury and extravagance, of art and music and dance, of incredible sweetness and glamour are all suggested at once.

All these are facts, established facts, but can lead us nowhere in so far as the basic question is concerned: what is the poem about? Medical evidence ‘discounts the notion that opium produces either dreams in sleep or waking hallucinations’. Of course, this poem may have been written in great speed, but it does not follow that it was written ‘in waking’ up after dreaming a dream. It seems to have been written deliberately, consciously, with a lot of preparation (reading etc.) and a definite critical theory about poetry.

Let us take the poem as it is and see what it offers. The fifty-four lines of the poem divide clearly at line 36. The first section, often in coldly literal detail, describes the Khan’s ‘rare device’. Purchas’s Pilgrimage (1613) tells hardly more than that the Khan built a movable palace in a beautifully enclosed park. Coleridge is much more specific, and concentrates many of Purchas’s details, and some others, into a closely consistent picture.

But, to begin with the beginning: what do we find in the first thirty-five lines? Somebody (Kubla Khan, in fact) did something specific—decreed the erection of a pleasure dome; its shadow ‘Floated midway on the waves’; and it was a ‘miracle of rare device’ since, though it was ‘sunny’ it contained “caves of ice”. But right in the beginning, the importance of river Alph is emphasized: the pleasure-dome is ordered to be built where the river Alph ran, and it is ‘sacred’.

The “so” of line 6 conveys the impression that the location was chosen deliberately by the Khan: because the sacred river ran here, so he ordered the pleasure-dome to be built here.

Then follows a detailed description of the setting: the size of the tract of fertile ground that Kubla had walled as an immense garden, with walls and towers, gardens and rills; flowers borne by the plants and trees were fragrant like incense; there were sunny spots of green lawn amidst thick forests—a place of paradisal happiness.

But most of all, the description deals with the sacred river with special reference to the chasm from which the river issued, the fountain hurling up the huge fragments, and the disappearance of the river into the “caverns measureless to man”.

You will notice that the impression that we get is that the setting is more important than the pleasure dome itself.
Besides, what sort of atmosphere is sought to be evoked through these images? (12-30). Well, an atmosphere of fear, enchantment, violent and uncontrollable energy, oblivion and death, and forebodings of strife and struggle.

Thus, this work of art, so to speak, is not set down just anywhere in nature but has been very carefully accommodated to its natural setting. It crowns nature.

The place indeed is special: it is dominated by the sacred river; it is carefully walled off and set apart, a kind of earthly paradise, walled off like Milton’s paradise.

But we must pay attention to the opening of line 12, which presents a curious grammatical problem. What is the force of “But” ? in the opening of the line ? Does it mean: but how unlike the rest of the garden was the chasm? Or: In what sharp contrast to the enfolded sunny spots of greenery was that awesome chasm? The landscape is cleft by the chasm and it makes the place “savage”.

At any rate, the “But oh” signals a shift in mood, from sunlight to shadow, or from sunlight to moonlight.

The place is savage, holy and enchanted, and the appropriateness of the spot as one in which a woman might wail for her demon lover connects the place with the darker aspects of the supernatural. The more sunlit and paradisiacal aspects of its sacred character have been emphasized in the first eleven lines. The description of the chasm completes the picture of a place which we should today call numinous. (Pertaining to a divinity ; suffused with feeling of a divinity.)

It is sacred in all the senses of that word—not merely the divine but including the demonic—in short, the numinous as primitive man apprehends it.

The river Alph participates in this quality. If it waters the blossoming garden of the incense-bearing trees and sparkles in the sun, it is also violent and darkly mysterious. The river is associated with both past and future. In its tempestuous descent Kubla Khan can hear the voices of the past (“ancestral voice”) predicting the future (“prophesying war”). The river Alph has other significance too. (See Study Notes).

The pleasure dome as a thing of art, then, is imposed upon a very special portion of nature. It is located very precisely in the enclosed tract. Its shadow is reflected in the waves of the river at a point midway between the bursting forth of the river and its disappearance—at a point, at least, where the sound of the source fountain and of the waterfall into the abyss can both be heard as a “mingled measure”.

The dome is a work of art imposed upon a particular nature; it crowns and dominates that nature; but it also incorporates some of the polarities of nature. The sunny dome imitates the heavens, but it imitates the earth as well with its ice caves. Its holding together in one artifact such extremes is referred to as miraculous:

“

It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure - dome with caves of ice.”

Indeed, harmony and reconciliation are the essential features of the dome. Or should we say reconciliation of opposites, which makes it a ‘miracle of rare device’.

But the walled garden, reminding one of an earthly Paradise, contains knowledge of the threat of its own possible destruction. Kubla Khan’s fortune is precarious. According to the prophecy, he faces war. The earthly paradise is not held as a permanent gift, it is subject to change, subject to destruction. In other words, the ideal life is always open to forces of evil.

Now we come to the real problem-the last eighteen lines of the poem. Here is the most characteristic dream-feature of the poem-the sudden switch from Kubia and the Xanadu landscape.

As we stated earlier, many scholars who regard this poem as a fragment, do not see any logical connection between the first thirty-six and the last eighteen lines. But we can argue that the last eighteen lines actually complete the poem, and that the break between the two parts is a ‘meaningful’ break.
No doubt, with the second part, we come to a new topic, and the poet now speaks in his own person and has a vision of an Abyssinian maid singing of Mount Abora. If the first section of the poem might have been read from a book or presented in a dream or sketched in reverie, suddenly we now have a person speaking. “I once saw a damsel with a dulcimer in a vision.”

The damsel is from a far-away land, playing a music of unutterable melody and sweetness. And now comes the crucial line “Could I revive within me.” As Humphry House points out, this line can be interpreted in two ways. If a strong emphasis (and therefore necessarily also a strong metrical stress) is put upon “could”, the word can be taken to imply “If only I could, but I can’t,” and the whole poem can be made to appear to be about the failure and frustration of the creative power. But if the emphasis on “could” is slight, then the condition is an “open” condition, like “Could You make it Wednesday instead of Thursday, it would be easier for me”, then it would imply that there is every possibility of creative achievement.

The second interpretation, of course, seems to be more appropriate because, as House says: “not only is it biographically relevant to point out that in 1797-98 Coleridge, so far from bemoaning the loss of creative power, was only just discovering its strength; but also the whole rhythmic character of the paragraph requires this view”.

Coming back to our discussion of the poem, we observe that the “I” of this poem will not, of course, build the dome as Kubla did, He will build it with music. But he sets a condition: if he could revive in himself the music of the maid in the vision, it would so stir him to joy, that he would become truly creative and could himself produce a musical recreation of the Khan’s pleasure dome. Or, we can say, he will build that dome in words, in poetry. But, if the speaker could indeed recover the vision and build the dome for us, he would pass beyond the bounds of poetry as we know it and become himself a numinous thing-a creature to be held in awe and dread as one who had indeed been in paradise and tasted its milk and honey-dew. Poetry reaches beyond itself and aspires to vision so intense, that the poet becomes seer and prophet, the teller of truth. In proportion as the poet succeeds, he becomes the man set apart from his fellows, to be viewed, perhaps, with superstitious dread.

Notice that in the line “I would build that dome in air”, the speaker seems to be challenging comparison with the Khan. Of course, the Khan is an oriental despot-all powerful—who has merely to decree and Lo! there is this pleasure—dome. But the poet seems to say something to this effect: ‘I will build what Kubla built’. But his mode of building sets him at the other extreme from the great Khan. He becomes not emperor or ruler, (in order to bring into existence a miracle of rare device’, a person has to be no less than an ail-powerful ruler), but a poet who needs nothing but divine inspiration; he needs to be in a state of poetic frenzy. He becomes a man cut off from his fellows by a magic circle and of whom all cry, “Beware, beware”. If the shudder of awe and the warning whispered by those listening to his song are a compliment and a testimony to his power, they also mark his exile and his isolation. In other words, to recover the joy excited by the revived visionary music would involve its penalties as well as its triumph.

By now, perhaps, the relationship between the two parts is somewhat clear to you. It is just because the first part presents the dome and the river with all its setting so completely, beautifully and finally, that we accept the authenticity of the creative impulse in the second part and find in the last word “Paradise” a fact, not a forlorn hope. “Kubla Khan”, observes Humphry House, ‘is a triumphant positive statement of the potentialities of poetry. How great those potentialities are is revealed partly in the description of its effects at the ending of the second part and partly in the very substance and content of the first.”

To reinforce the argument that Kubla Khan is a poem about poetry, let us quote George Watson here (Coleridge the poet):” Anyone who objects that there is not a word about poetry in it should be sent at once to the conclusion and asked, even if he has never read any Plato, what in English poetry this is like:

“Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise”. 
There are dozens of parallels in Renaissance English to this account of poetic inspiration, all based—though rarely at first hand—on Plato’s view of poetic madness in the *Ion* or the *Phaedrus*—The ‘flashing eyes’ and ‘floating hair’ of Coleridge’s poem belong to a poet in the fury of creation. Verbal resemblances to the text of Plato itself confirm that the last paragraph of the poem is a prolonged Platonic allusion. Socrates, in the *Ion* compares lyric poets to ‘Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when under the influence of Dionysus’ and adds that poets ‘gather their strains from honied fountains out of the gardens and dells of the Muses. Ion himself, describing the effects of poetic recitation, confesses that when I speak of horrors, my hair stands on end...The very phrase ‘holy dread’ is Platonic (Laws 67 ID). That ‘Kubla Khan’ is in some sense a comment on Plato’s theory of poetry is not really in doubt. *(Note: Students are familiar with Plato. It may be worth-mentioning here that his dialogues fall into three groups: the first group consisting of the *Euthyphro* and the *Crito*, the second and the most famous consisting of the *Phaedo*, the *Symposium*, and the *Republic*, and the third group consisting of *Timaeus* and the *Laws).*

**STUDY NOTES**

4 (i)

Line 1: Xanadu: province of Tartary; the name of a town said to be not far from Pekin, the ancient capital of the Chinese Empire and the summer capital of the emperors. Its Chinese form is Shangtu. Kubla Khan: (1216-1294), was the founder of the Mongol Dynasty in China, and one of its greatest rulers. He conquered China in 1267, and thus overthrew the Ling dynasty, which had ruled for 319 years. The Chinese capital of Peking was built by him; also grandson of Genghis Khan, the notorious world conqueror, who made an inroad into India also. Kubla lived in great style and grandeur. Marco Polo spent seventeen years at his court.

These two names—Xanadu, Kubla Khan—sound the note of remoteness and romance arising from unfamiliar objects and names.

L. Pleasure-dome: a palace for pleasure or holiday enjoyment

dome: rounded top of a building. Here dome stands for a grand, magnificent structure with all the usual architectural features.

decree: order to be built.

Alph: a legendary river. Rivers and springs are commonly associated with poetry in classical and Renaissance poetry, “The very name ‘Alph’ offers an easy clue in its resemblance to the Alpheus of Milton’s *Lycidas*, where it is associated with the Sicilian Muse of pastoral poetry. And the river of poetry was a preoccupation of some Romantics too... The sacred river is the most traditional element in a poem otherwise evasive in its sophistication” (Watson).

Why the river was sacred has not been made clear. This idea is particularly Hindu or Eastern, for only in the East do people treat rivers as holy. For example, the Ganges is a sacred river in India.

Caverns: Caves, underground gorges. One of the widespread beliefs about rivers is that they run underground for some distance.

Measureless to man: the depth of which cannot be ascertained by man.

L.5. Sunless Sea: not exposed to the rays of the sun. Some dark, subterranean lake. This is another detail which is hard to imagine but which makes for the picturesqueness of the description.

L.6. twice five mile: an archaic form of saying ten miles.

L.7. girdled: encircled.

L.8. sinuous rills: streams winding in and out like serpents; tortuous rivulets.
L.9. *incense-bearing tree:* Trees laden with fragrant blossoms. (A sensuous phrase) This is an echo of Shakespeare’s description of Arabian trees yielding gums which are fragrant like incense.

L.11 *sunny spots:* ground exposed to the warm rays of the sun.

L.12. *But oh!* etc.: Suddenly, the poet rivets his attention on a different scene which he views with awe and wonder, as shown by the exclamation.

*L.12. romantic chasm:* a narrow ravine, gorge or deep hollow is called *romantic* in the sense of its being mysterious and fearful to look into.

L.13. *athwart:* across

*Cedarn cover:* through a wood of cedar trees; the cedar is an evergreen tree,

L.14. *Savage place:* the place was strange, primitive and fearful. Why fearful? Because it held unknown terrors of magic and witchcraft. The words *holy* and *enchanted* reinforce an atmosphere of vague fears and magic associations.

L.15. *a waning moon:* The waxing and waning moons are ascribed different powers and virtues in magic and witchcraft.

L.16. *demon-lover:* ghastly lover; those who claim that the poem achieves its effect mainly by “far-reaching suggestiveness” cite particularly lines 12-16 as an example. Other lines being 29-30. Furthermore, the proper names used are also highly emotive and suggestive: Xanandu, Kubla Khan, Alph, Abyssinian and Mount Abora, even Paradise. These names undoubtedly add to the total effect of the poem.

About *demon-lover:* it is important to point out that this is a reference to Eastern legends where a woman, after falling in love, discovers that her lover is a demon (or a supernatural spirit), and thereafter seeks for him in places such as this chasm.

L.17. *seething:* coming up with a hissing or bubbling noise; bursting forth.

L.18. The whole line stands for one word: ‘earthquake’, when the earth seems to pant and feel suffocated and bursts out in cracks and other fearful noises.

L.19. *momently:* every moment, always; this is a peculiar use of the word. *was forced:* gushed forcefully.

L.20. *half-intermitted burst:* the bursting of the current being but now and then.

L.21. *vaulted:* made a circular motion or somersault; in other words, huge fragments leapt up, and then fell down in a semi-circular movement.

*rebounding hail:* like hailstones leaping up after striking the earth; a picturesque simile and the result of close observation: as hail falls and is shattered, it flies in fragments. So did the objects thrown up by the current inside the cavern.

L.22. again an apt simile from day to day life; the flying pieces of rock were like the grains flying up when struck with a flail by a farmer.

*thresher,* person who threshes grain that is, one who separates grain from chaff with an instrument known as flail.

L.23. *at once and ever:* continuously; the water intermittently threw up pieces of rock.

L.24. If: the fountain.

L.25. *meandering:* winding with a mazy motion: the river Alph followed a tortuous, bewildering course. Note the musical effect of this line; it is onomatopoeic—the sound echoes the sense; alliteration leads to the musical effect.

L.28. *sank in tumult:* flowed tumultuously, noisily, only to become silent afterwards.
Lifeless ocean: This can mean that the sea was calm, with no waves in it. Or, perhaps there were no living creatures in it.

L.29. Ancestral voices ...war: highly suggestive and elusive line; much is left to our imagination. The impending war can only mean that Kubla’s earthly paradise is under threat of destruction. It is claimed by some critics that the line, like others in the poem is of value for its sonority and suggestiveness rather than for its “meaning.”

L.31. dome of pleasure: the dome is a characteristic feature of Islamic architecture, and is appropriate to the Khan referred to as the emperor of China in the poem.

L.32. since the pleasure-dome stood on the banks of river Alph, the shadow of that magnificent luxury-palace fell in the middle of the river.

L.33. mingled measure: mingled sounds of the gushing waters of the fountain and the swift current of the river Alph flowing through deep hollows.

L.35. It was the work of cunning artists and designers. Rare and marvellous human skill had gone into its construction; “it was most wonderfully planned”; the rarity consisted partly in the contrast between the sunny dome and the caves of ice. Line 36: A sunny...ice: Note the contrast between the sun at one end and ice at the other. The contradiction promotes wonder instead of incredulity.

L.35-36. On these lines, Humphry House comments as follows:

The “Caves of Ice” need special attention. Some discussions of the poem seem to imply that they belong with the “caverns measureless to man”; but there surely can be no doubt that in the poem they belong closely and necessarily with the dome...

The very line shows the closeness by the antithesis, the convex against the concave, the warm against the cold. It is not necessary to invoke Coleridge’s own statement of the theory of the reconciliation of opposites in art1 (“the heat in ice” is even one of his examples) to see that it is the holding together of these two different elements in which the miracle consists. They are repeated together, also within the single line, 47, in Part Two. Lowes shows clearly how in Coleridge’s memory the caves of ice came to be associated with the sacred river; and in his sources the ice does not indicate terror or torment or death (as Miss Bodkin seems to think Coleridge’s ice does here), but rather the marvellous, and the delight which accompanies the marvellous; the ice is linked specifically to the fountains sacred to the moon. This marvelousness is present also in “Kubla Khan”, but there is more: ice is shining, clear, crystalline, hard; and here it adds greater strength and austerity to what would be otherwise the lush, soft, even sentimental, core of the poem. As it is, the miracle of rare device consists in the combination of these softer and harder elements. And when this is seen in relation to the act of poetic creation, in the light of which all Par on e must be understood, its function is still plainer: such creation has this element of austerity in it.

For this is a vision of the ideal human life as the poetic imagination can create it. Part one only exists in the light of Part Two. There may be other Paradises...but this is the creation of the poet in his frenzy. And it is because he can create it that he deserves the ritual dread”.

Line 37. An abrupt transition, but we have already established the basic connection between the two parts. dulctoner: a musical instrument; a kind of primitive piano; the word has an archaic and musical appeal.

L.39. An Abyssinian maid: a girl belonging to Abyssinia (in Ethiopia); introduced apparently as another element of romance.

L.41. Mount Ahora: seems to be reminiscent of “Mount Amara” in Milton’s Paradise Lost (Book IV, L.218)

Mount Amara: was a high mountain, said to be near the source of the river Nile. The children of Abyssinian Kings were brought up in beautiful garden palaces on the top of this mountain, lest they should rebel. The place enjoyed perpetual spring, and was claimed by many to be the
true Paradise. The girl of Coleridge’s dream probably sang in praise of Mount Abora. What sort of praise? Probably she sang in praise of its exotic splendour, eternal charm and exquisite beauty.

L.42-47. The lines depict the power of poetic imagination. The poet needs only ‘inspiration’ to emulate Kubla’s feat; he does not need to be a tyrant with full authority over his surroundings.

L.43. Symphony and song: melody and music of her song.

L.44. Ould win me: enrapture, enthuse, enchant me.

L.45. That music...long: the inspired poet would also come out with such impassioned verse, may be sung to the accompaniment of some musical instrument, that those who ‘heard’ him would be able to visualize clearly that sunny pleasure-dome and those caves of ice in their imagination; i.e. his poetry would call up in the imagination so vivid a picture


that the hearers would think they saw the real objects (The power of music is well-known. Remember Tansen and his feats).

L.49-54. Beware! Beware \ etc. Why? Because people would take him to be a magician. Only a magician can attempt such a feat.

L.51. Weave...thrice: i.e. perform magic incantations for protection from him, since his ability to call up this vision proves that he possesses occult powers.

An inspired poet is almost like a magician with glittering eyes and dishevelled hair. He radiates a mysterious and uncanny power and has to be contained within a circle, so that others may not be affected by him. (a common practice in magic; you are already familiar with the importance of the word “thrice”). He is nearly divine in his inspiration, for he is brought up on the food of the gods. His exaltations, ardours and enthusiasms are the result of poetic inspiration: and poetic inspiration is sustained by divine visions and immortal longings. He is on the earth, but his mind and soul are lost in heavenly pursuits.

Such a poet can produce the illusion of reality in the minds of listeners.

Notice that Lines 49 to the end mark a further transition in the poem: from the lady with a dulcimer to the poet inspired by magic powers.

L.50. His flashing...hair: the typical signs of one under the influence of supernatural powers; poets are supposed to be under such an influence when visions come to them.

Flashing eyes: ‘the seeing eyes’ as Carlyle puts it, of the poet.

Floating hair: poets are usually found growing their hair Song.

L.53-54. These are the signs of his being a favoured or immortal creature. He is not a man like other men.

According to Coleridge, the poet is a specially gifted being endowed with special susceptibilities and sustained by food which comes to him direct from heaven. That is, he lives on divine impulses and inspirations more than other men.

Holy dread: the sacred idea of divine awe and reverence which is due to the poet.

For he...Paradise: for the poet has partaken of the same divine food as was dropped from Heaven to save the hungry Israelites.

Honey-dew: in this word the allusion is to the book of Exodus of the Old Testament of the Holy Bible: God Almighty appeared before Moses in a dream and commanded him to lead the Israelites, the chosen people of God, out of Egypt and added that He himself would appear before them in the form of a cloud by day and the Pillar of Fire by night to show them the way
in the wilderness and He showered Manna or Divine Food upon the hungry Israelites and the milk of Paradise to quench their thirst.

All this means that the poet had received the gift of divine inspiration by reviving the song of the Abyssinian maid.

L.54. **Paradise** : What is this Paradise?

Critics differ in their interpretation of this word too. We will quote Humphry House here. At this point we must caution you that sometimes you may get confused and wonder which interpretation to believe in. At this level i.e., at (Hons.) level, you have to wrestle with such problems. You have to, so to speak, ‘meander’ your way through a ‘maze’ of differing, sometimes confusing critical opinions, and arrive at your destination. What destination? Not the ‘sunless sea’ or ‘ocean’, but a considered, definite and a bold formulation of your own opinion, supported closely by the text.

Here is what House has to say:

‘Positively, it causes a distortion of the poem if we try to approximate this Paradise either to the earthly Paradise of Eden before the Fall or to the Heavenly Paradise which is the ultimate abode of the blest. It may take its imagery from Eden, but it is not Eden because Kubla Khan is not Adam. Kubla Khan himself is literally an oriental Prince with his name adapted from Purchas. We may, if we persist in hankering after formal equations, incline to say he :s the Representative Man, or Mankind in general: but what matters is not his supposed fixed and antecedent symbolic character, so much as his activity. Within the landscape treated as literal he must be of princely scope, in order to decree the dome and gardens: and it is this decree that matters, for it images the power of man over his environment and the fact that man makes his Paradise for himself. Just as the whole poem is about poetic creation at the imaginative level, so, within the work of the imagination, occurs the creativeness of man at the ethical and practical levels. This is what the poet, of all men, is capable of realising... the name of Kubla is repeated only once after the first line, and the place of its repetition is significant:

‘And amid this tumult Kubla heard from far

Ancestral voices prophesying war’.

This is essential to the full unity of the conception: the Paradise contains knowledge of the threat of its own possible destruction. It is not held as a permanent gift; the ideal life is always open to forces of evil; it must be not only created by man for himself, but also defended by him. It is not of the essence of this paradise that it must be lost; but there is a risk that it may be lost.” (Coleridge).

Towards the end, we quote Allan Grant:

“Many of the features of the landscape of Kubla Khan are referable to specific sources in books of oriental travel and history. One could not, however, even if one wanted to, map out or diagrammatize the relationship of the river, plain and caverns. Yet within the poem they seem to suggest very powerfully a sense of the surging up of the river of life, Alph (or Alpha, the first letter of the Greek alphabet), and the fertilizing of the garden of life before it sinks into an unfathomable sea of death.” (A Preface to Coleridge).
4.

DEJECTION : AN ODE

This poem describes the feeling of apathy and despair which was at once a cause and a result of Coleridge’s indulgence in drugs and which finally destroyed the best part of his poetic career. Before we take up the poem for discussion, it would be appropriate if we tell you what is meant by the term ‘Ode’. The Ode is a form of Lyric poem, characterized by its length, intricate stanza forms, grandeur of style and seriousness of purpose, with a long and venerable history in classical and post-Renaissance poetry. It is often written in celebration of some special event.

The Greek poet Pindar (518-438 B.C.) established this form. His odes were written to glorify the winners of the Olympic and other games. His poetry is marked by elevated thought, bold metaphor, and the free use of myths. He modelled his stanzas on the dramatic chorus, using a threefold pattern like the dance rhythm of strophe (moving to left), antistrophe (moving to right), and epode (standing still); the rhyme scheme is fixed.

Some English poets like Gray in “The Progress of Poesy” (1754) followed the regular or Pindaric ode. Others, like Cowley, came out with the modified form of the Pindaric Ode, called the irregular ode: each stanza follows its own pattern with varied line lengths, rhyme schemes and numbers of lines.

Coleridge and Wordsworth use irregular ode form for their “Dejection” (1802) and “Intimations of Immortality” (1807) poems respectively.

With this brief introduction to an ode, we can now take up Dejection. This poem is considered to be the most extended of the conversation poems. It was first written as a poetical letter of 340 lines, dated 4 April, 1802, and sent to Sara Hutchinson. An intermediate version—shortened and with considerable revisions, and this time addressed to Wordsworth, appears in a letter sent to a friend, William Sotheby, on 19 July, 1802. The final version was published for the first time in the Morning Post of October 1802. where ‘Edmund’ is substituted for the ‘Sara’ of the first version. In his collected works of 1817, Sibylline Leaves, Coleridge uses the word ‘Lady !’, and is addressed to his wife Sara.

Watson sums up the position thus: ‘It seems best to think of the first version of 1802 as a conversation poem which, by some vagary, has been cast into the form of a rough-and-ready ode. In the ensuing months it was trimmed to less than half its original length, purged of most of its private reference, and set forth upon the world as one of the oddest compromises in English poetry: an intensely, bitterly, almost indecently private poem of an unhappily married poet, cast

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1. Conversation poems: Between August 1795 and April 1798, Coleridge composed the group of poems popularly known as the ‘conversation Poems’ — like “The Eolian Harp”, “This Lime-Tree Bower my Prison”, “Frost at Midnight”, “Fears in Solitude”, and “Dejection”. These poems, displaying a distinctive style, have been called ‘meditations in blank verse’. Strictly, a conversation is an exchange between two persons. But these poems are rather monologues, being addressed to wife, son, a loved one or a friend.

that Coleridge had scarcely ever achieved.... It is by this startling contrast of the formal and the informal that the poem lives, and for just this reason there can be no doubt of the superiority of the final version, where the original 340 lines have been reduced to a tight-packed 139. Coleridge is so exuberant a poet, and so little self-critical in his creative moments, that it is exceptional to watch him at work, as here, with
the pruning-hook...... On the whole, it is surely clear, the reduction of the ode to its familiar form is a continuous triumph of critical acumen,” (Coleridge the Poet).

Dejection is one of a number of poems written in the early months of 1802 by Coleridge and Wordsworth. They include Wordsworth’s Resolution and Independence, and Intimations of Immortality ode. Each of them is a response to a sense of irreparable loss, and the phrase “There was a time” from Dejection becomes the opening line of the Immortality Ode. Each poet seems to be suffering a crisis of confidence in his poetic gift, fearing the loss of his creative imagination; and each uses the word dejection to describe the accompanying mood. Each poet conceived of and responded to the crisis in his own way and the paradoxical result was the creation of three Romantic poems on the subject of the loss of the poetic imagination. The paradox is most clearly stated and felt in the final Dejection which had by now become a poem about the inability to make poetry.

An interesting point about this poem is that in it we find a change in Coleridge’s attitude to Nature. And you can understand this change better if you read two of his earlier poems: The Eolian Harp (1795) and Frost at Midnight (1798) In the first poem the poet expresses the idea that the same Divine Spirit pervades the entire universe. The poet thinks that one cannot help loving all things in a world which is so permeated by the Divine spirit. (Remember “The Ancient Mariner’”). The poet shows his keen sensitivity to Nature and to every object of Nature. Wordsworth, you should remember, firmly believed in this idea.

Frost at Midnight shows Coleridge’s attitude to Nature much more clearly, and Wordsworth’s complete and overwhelming influence is quite evident. In the third stanza of the poem, the poet says that God speaks through Nature and that Nature will educate and mould his child. Nature exercises a great educative influence.

This is one attitude to Nature. But in the first stanza of this poem itself, we find the poet expressing the belief that outward objects merely reflect or mirror our own thoughts and moods. This idea provides us with a clue to Coleridge’s later view of Nature. It is in Dejection Ode that we find the above belief fully developed:

“O Lady! we receive but what we give

........................................................................ shroud! (IV)

.............................................................................

He now believes that Nature can give no joy to those who have no joy already in their hearts. Bitter failures and disappointments in life led Coleridge to lose faith in Nature as a healing power.

The final version of the Ode is often compared with the original verse letter addressed to Sara Hutchinson. Many critics feel that the original version is more personal and painful and therefore more ‘sincere’. That may be the case, but we must guard ourselves against giving undue importance to Coleridge’s private griefs during the period preceding the composition of the original version. For, it was not for nothing that he reworked the poem so as to cut out all the associations that had occasioned the poem originally, wanted to bring before the public a finished work of art, and not a mere rambling sort of piece. But does the ode convey a sense of completeness and unity? Humphry House on this point observes: ‘I think it is opinion of many readers of the Ode, that brilliantly successful as most of it is, as parts, yet it fails to achieve complete artistic unity. By comparison with "Frost at Midnight" or "The Ancient Mariner" or "Kubia Khan" it is not a whole poem.” (We will discuss this statement in our study Notes, when we come to stanza j VII).

One more point needs your careful attention. The poem will make complete sense only if you do not forget that after cutting and pruning the original version, it was brought forth as an Ode addressed to William Wordsworth. It was only after some estrangement with his friend that Coleridge substituted "Lady" for "Edmund" and the poem was altered so as to erase all allusions to their friendship. But that does not alter the fact that Wordsworth’s personality is all pervading in the Ode. What is more, as we mentioned earlier 1 also, the Dejection Ode and Immortality Ode have interesting points of comparison and contrast. In the VI stanza, Coleridge refers to his past joy and describe his present mood of grief.
Wordsworth, in the opening stanza of his Ode, expresses the same idea: "It is not now as it hath been of yore." But in Wordsworth's Ode grief finds relief and ends in joy; in Coleridge's poem grief finds no relief and ends in dejection.

Both poems reveal the irregular rhyme pattern and the interspersing of long and short lines. (See Bowra's The Romantic Imaginations for a discussion of the two odes).

STUDY NOTES

5 (i)

Motto: The stanza forms part of the ballad from "Percy's "Reliques"-Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence. In this ballad, Sir Patrick Spence has superstitious fear of "new Moon/with the old Moon in her arms", as it portends a "deadly storm." Coleridge incorporates this idea in his poem. Thomas Percy's collection of ballads Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765) made a great impression on the Romantic poets.

Well: The conversational tone of the opening gives the poet the opportunity to make his whole poem a gradual crescendo.

Stanza 1 Bard: The poet who wrote the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, which describes the wrecking of Sir Patrick's ship off Aberdeenshire in a violent storm, Sir Patrick had correctly foreseen the advent of a 'storm.

Weather-wise: having the ability to speak wisely about the weather.

that....trade: winds which are more busy, i.e. more rough and stormy.

lazy flakes: mild wind, as compared with active wind, breaks the cloud in pieces or fragments which move about in the sky lazily.

dull....draft: dull, melanchaly breeze

rakes upon: touches gently

Aeolian lute: While discussing the poem The Eolicm Harp, Allan Grant Comments: The aeolian or wind-harp was a German invention of the early seventeenth century consisting of a sounding board designed to amplify, as in any stringed instrument, the vibrations of the strings stretched over it. Lying near an open window it would produce a thin 'etherial' sound in response to the wind blowing over it. producing a 'natural'music. Its appropriateness as a metaphor for Romantic poetry is obvious. Compare its appearance in Dejection: an ode..... Wordsworth used it in his verse.... (Prelude, 1805. Book I)... Shelley and Hazlitt both referred to it explicitly when attempting to define the nature of poetry. (A Preface to Coleridge P. 106).

(Aeolus in ancient mythology was the god of the wind).

For lo!: The poet now gives reasons for the lute to remain silent (the preceding line).

Winter-bright: as bright as in winter.

I see ....lap: The new moon is covered with an unearthly light and is thus encircled by a thread-like circular line producing the impression that the old Moon is in the lap of the new. (There was a superstition that if the old moon was seen in the lap of the new, there would be heavy rains and furious storms. Coleridge takes this idea from Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence.)

Ind oh!: so far the poet has only stated the possibility of the coming of a furious storm. But now, in these lines, the poet already notices the wind developing into a storm and rain falling in a slanting direction.

those sounds... and live: There was a time when natural objects moved him deeply. But is not so now. The poet's heart is benumbed by .pain; so he welcomes the approaching storm, hoping that it would
‘shake’ him out of his paralysing pain. It may not relieve his pain, but certainly it will at least give some life to that pain and break the sluggish monotony of that pain.

**Stanza II:** The first four lines of this stanza give expression to Coleridge’s grief. But these are not ordinary lines. Sadder lines than these were never perhaps written by any poet in description of his own grief. What actually occasioned this feeling of intense dissatisfaction, sense of utter dejection and hopelessness? A large part of it was occasioned by an increasing awareness of the fact that his inborn gift of imagination was decaying and that his interest was shifting to philosophy and metaphysics, or ‘abstruse research’—as he calls in this “Ode”. In other words he was becoming more and more of a philosopher or thinker and less and less of a poet. The ‘shaping spirit of Imagination’ was deserting him. This change greatly distressed him, and finds expression in this heart-rending and deeply pathetic poem.

- **A pang**: a deep-rooted sense of pain
- **Void**: empty
- **Drear**: desolate, dull and monotonous.
- **Stifled**: suppressed *unimpassioned grief*: grief which manifests no deep feeling, no sense of total involvement.
- **A grief... or tear**: Intensely moving lines, expressing the poet’s dilemma and pathos in the choicest of words.
- **O Lady**: This may be considered as the second part of the stanza. Originally, in the manuscript, the expression was ‘O William”, i.e. William Wordsworth. You will realise that this makes far more sense.

The poet now gives a beautiful picture of the skyscraper late in the evening. But he views everything with a ‘blank’ gaze. He cannot *feel* the beauty of the sky and the stars.

- **Wan**: pale, cheerless
- **Heartless**: joyless
- **Throstle**: a kind of singing bird.
- **woo’d**: induced, persuaded. The song of the bird persuades the poet to forget his grief and think of other things—things which can give him some relief.
- **blank an eye**: with a vacant eye; without any expression in the eyes; without reacting to the scene in anyway; empty of emotion and intelligence.
- **Crescent Moon**: semi-circular moon.

*I see them... they are*: The poet can ‘see’, but cannot ‘feel’. Coleridge here gives expression to an experience of double consciousness. His sense perceptions are vivid and in part agreeable; his inner state is faint, blurred, unhappy. The power of ‘feeling’ has been paralysed by metaphysical or abstract investigations. The power of ‘seeing’, less dependent upon bodily health, stands aloof, somewhat indifferent, and yet mournful and critical. By ‘seeing’ he means perceiving and judging; by ‘feeling’ he means that which induces one to react. We can call these as Coleridge’s different modes of perception. But, as Humphry House insists, this is “not primarily a poem about modes of perception. It is a poem about unhappiness and about love and about joy. Of the later autobiographical poems there is least of self-pity in it, the self-analysis being all the clearer and more mature therefore, because the sense of love and of joy is so strong. This idea of joy was a guiding principal of Coleridge’s life.” (Coleridge)

Humphry House is of the view that in our zeal to find some sort of philosophy reflected in his poems, we should not overlook the presence of affections and feelings in them.

**Stanza III:** The mood, in this stanza as well as the previous one, is peculiarly modern, recognizable as free-floating anxiety to the psychoanalyst or as existential dread to the existentialist philosopher. Its chief characteristic is that it is a generalised and inexplicable feeling which cannot be located in any particular source,
Existentialism is a philosophical trend which stresses the importance of existence, as opposed to the view held by most philosophies and theologies that man’s actual existence in the world is less significant than some pre-existing essence. In general, existentialism takes the view that the universe is an inexplicable, meaningless and dangerous theatre for the individual’s being, his existence. Everyone has to assume the responsibility of making choices that determine the nature of this existence. This freedom puts man into a state of anxiety, surrounded as he is by infinite possibilities, while remaining ignorant of the future, except for the fact that his life is finite, and will finish, just as it began in nothingness.

**genial spirits**: sympathetic, sociable; or happy, cheerful spirits.

**smothering weight**: pressing, crushing burden.

**passion**: stirring of feelings; excitement.

**whose.... within**: whose real source of joy, happiness and creativity lie in the heart itself. (The metaphor of the fountain is, like the aeolian lute, an important Romantic image. It appears in *Kubla Khan* and in Wordsworth’s definition of poetry in the 1800 Preface as ‘the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.’ Fountain is used as a metaphor of creativity).

*I may not ....within*: We can also explain it like this: ‘I cannot hope to derive from external Nature the life and depth of emotion which have their source in the soul.’

**Stanza IV**: An important stanza, depicting Coleridge’s changed attitude to Nature, contradicting his own earlier stand, and also Wordsworth’s philosophy of Nature—the belief that Nature has a life of its own, that a Divine spirit passes through all objects of Nature, and so on.

In this stanza, the poet says that Nature has no life of its own, and that we transfer to it our own moods and our own feelings.

**O Lady !**: The poet addresses, Sara, his wife.

**We receive...give**: We find in Nature whatever we have transferred to it from our own hearts. In other words, we see things according to our own moods.

**And in...live**: Nature lives only in our imagination. It has no life of its own. If it seems full of life, it is because we have endowed it with life.

**Ours.... shroud**: Wedding garments symbolise festivity, joy and happiness. *Shroud* is cloth in which a dead body is wrapped. Hence it is a symbol of grief or mourning. What the poet wants to convey is that it is our thoughts which make Nature bright and attractive or dark and gloomy, as the case may be. If we are happy, Nature too seems to be joyous, as though celebrating a festival. But if we are sad, Nature too seems to be in mourning. In other words, it is our thoughts which make Nature seem happy like a bride or wretched like a dead man. Thus, Coleridge here is contending against the Wordsworthian doctrine of the influence of Nature. (Recall here “The Ancient Manner”. Lines 244-247; then lines 313-317, depicting a close affinity between outside world and mental states of mind. This is what links the two poems together.)

**And would....Earth**: If we wish to see anything of high and noble quality in nature, so that it may give some solace to the wretched, ever-worried mankind, then from our own souls some light should come forth and envelop the whole Earth. We pretend to read a deep significance in Nature (as Wordsworth did, and Coleridge himself did in his earlier poems like *The Eolian Harp*). But in fact the cold and lifeless objects of Nature do not lend any inspiration to care-worn mankind, nor can they teach us moral or spiritual lessons. The light which illumines dark Nature comes from our own hearts and minds.

**And from...element**: The soul of a human being must itself send forth a sweet and powerful voice which will endow the varied sounds of Nature with sweetness.

**Of Us own birth**: having its origin in the soul itself and not in any external object.
Of all...element: a sweet and powerful voice, coming out of the soul itself, gives life and cheerfulness to all the sweet sounds of Nature. Thus, the joy, the radiance, the inspiration to stir and stimulate a man comes from his inner self and not from Nature.

The above stanza shows Coleridge’s complete disillusionment with Nature and as we said earlier, contradicts Wordsworth’s view of Nature as expressed in the following lines in Tintern Abbey:

And I have
felt A presence ........................................
.........................................................................
and in the mind of man .........................

Stanza V

In this stanza, the poet touches upon the source of the ‘light’, the radiance, the bright mist which pervades all objects of nature. The source lies in the joy in one’s heart. And it is this joy which leads to acts of poetic creation.

What is this ‘joy’ anyway? According to Humphry House, the joy of ‘Dejection’ must be understood as involving the ‘deep delight’ which ‘Kubla Khan’ shows at the centre of creative happiness.” It is a special kind of joy, a solemn joy, a state of being when the emotional and intellectual faculties are in equipoise. It is closely related to the ‘shaping spirit of imagination’—something which activates the poet’s imagination, which in turn ‘creates’ and ‘forms’.

This beautiful...power: The power of the soul, or the mental light, is not only beautiful in itself but is also capable of creating beautiful things. In other words, the poet, with his fertile imagination, can make beautiful objects.

Life...and shower: “Joy is at once life and the thoughts and feelings which arise from life; joy is at once that cloud which pours forth the shower and the shower itself

Joy...Heaven: “Joy is the power-giving principle and the power itself which, uniting in imagination Nature with us, gives us the gift of a new Earth and new Heaven”; in other words, if we ally or unite ourselves with Nature, i.e., open our hearts and minds to the influences of Nature, then it is joy, and joy only, in our hearts which enables us to view the Earth and the Heaven in a new light.

We...rejoice: It is because of the joy in our own hearts that we feel happy.

We thence...sight: From there flows all that delights our eyes or ears.

All melodies...light: All the sweet sounds of the external world are echoes of that sweet and powerful voice, and all the beautiful colours that we see in the external world are a reflection of that light (which flows from the joy in our own hearts). In other words, an artist’s main source of inspiration is the joy in his own heart. External nature cannot help him at all if there is gloom or distress in his heart. (This was the case with Coleridge, and hence his dejection).

Stanza VI

The opening line should remind you of some other poem—also by a Romantic poet. Which poem?

This joy,...distress: ‘The joy within me enabled me to make light of my sufferings.

And all.happiness: ‘All misfortunes served merely as material for my Fancy’ to weave new visions of happiness.’

For hope...seemed mine: a beautiful simile, merging into a metaphor. Hope is compared to a climbing plant which twines round a tree. Just as the fruits and leaves of a plant growing around a tree seem to belong to the tree itself, similarly many bright prospects, spawned by hope, seemed to belong to the poet, even though they belonged to someone else.
But now...birth: Earlier, hope kept his spirits high, but now sufferings and misfortunes have almost crushed him; the poet doesn’t care if these sufferings have robbed him of his native joy.

But Oh...! Imagination: Now comes the real crush. What galls him most is that every fit of mental dejection obstructs the operation of that faculty which enabled him to ‘create’ and ‘form’, and which he was endowed with by nature at the time of his birth. In other words, his sorrows and misfortunes have weakened his inborn creative imagination.

my shaping...Imagination: “my imagination, which creates and forms”.

For not...ail I can: Coleridge says that his only resource against his increasing melancholy was deliberately to divert his mind from his feelings, to cultivate a quiet mode of life, and to immerse himself in deep metaphysical studies, in the hope of changing his nature and conquering his excessive sensitiveness.

Till that...my soul: the metaphysical speculations which at one time formed only one small part of his nature, gradually took possession of his whole being; with the result that speculative and philosophical strain in him has become the ‘habit’ of his ‘soul’, weakening thereby his creative faculty. In other words, abstract or metaphysical investigations, which he began as a bulwark against ‘afflictions’, have completely taken possession of his soul. It is this fact which he regrets, for it has led to a complete drying up of his creative powers.

Stanza VII

We said in the beginning that some critics claim that the Ode fails to ‘achieve complete artistic unity’, and is brilliantly successful only in parts. And it is stanza VII which primarily comes in the way of accepting the Ode as a whole. Let us see what Humphry House has to say on this point.

“In the received text, the opening of stanza VII especially, and its placing and relevance, are serious obstacles to accepting the poem as a whole. The stanza opens with a sudden twist of thought, in very awkward language:

“Hence, viper thoughts,..................
................................................
...........................................unnoticed”.

And the “Viper thoughts” against which this revulsion occurs are the famous meditative stanza about the loss of his “shaping spirit of imagination”, ending with the lines:

“Till that which suits..........
.................................
.............of my soul”

The phrase “reality’s dark dream” then applies to the firm, sad honesty of self-analysis which make the greatness of that stanza”. (Coleridge.) The purpose of quoting House’s views at length is to enable you to form your own opinion also. Let it also be remembered that House’s analysis of the poem is based on his close comparison between the published Ode and the original version. If we forget the original version, then perhaps we can find coherence and unity in the poem.

Viper thoughts: poisonous thoughts; a viper is a kind of poisonous snake.

that coil...mind: ‘poisonous thought which wind about my mind just as a snake coils itself round its victim’. The bite of a viper is deadly. Similarly, the poet seems to say, if he remains engrossed in thoughts of dejection and sorrow, and if he continues to mourn the loss of his ‘shaping spirit of Imagination’, then his own will and mind would be totally paralysed and benumbed.

‘Viper thoughts’, perhaps, can also be applied to the ideas expressed in the previous stanzas. For, even though the thought-process is somewhat rambling and loose, a clear theme emerges—poet’s intense...
pain and a sense of desolation. And in this stanza he wants to get away from all this—‘reality’s dark dream’. Reality is too cruel, and makes life appear like a frightening dream.

**turn,, unnoticed** : During all these thoughts, the wind has been raging furiously for a long time. It is as though the poet suddenly remembers the wind which he mentioned in the first stanza.

**What,...forth** : (The place of the lute in this poem is in sharp contrast to the speculations it gives rise to in *The Eolian Harp.*) Beginning in a ‘sobbing moan” the kite sends out a scream of agony by torture lengthened out at the wind’s height. In other words, to the poet, the sound of wind playing upon the lute seems to be the lengthened scream of one who is being tortured and who cannot bear the pain. (In “The Eolian Harp”, the lute gives rise to different speculations.)

The verse gathers momentum here

*Crag* : rock

*mountain-tain* : small mountain lake.

*clomb* : the old past tense of *climb*.

*peeping flowers* : flowers peeping from amongst the leaves.

*MadLutanist* : The wind is called a frenzied, reckless lute-player because of Devils’ ‘Yule’ that it makes.

*Devils’ Yule* : Christmas weather, with wild revelry fit for devils. Yule : Christmas.. The wind is supposed to be celebrating Devils’ Christmas, hence, an unholy Christmas.

The idea is that if Devils were to celebrate Christmas, (which can’t be a happy occasion for them) they would scream and shriek and make a terrible noise—the like of which was being made by the wind at present.

*With worse...song* : The wind is making sounds which are even worse than those which are heard during the bleak months of winter. (There is more of howling and shrieking of the wind—storms etc.—in the winter season.)

*Thou Actor* : The poet now imagines new roles for the wind : as a tragic actor, and as a bold mighty poet.

*perfect.... sounds* ! : it can produce all the sounds that are sorrowful.

*thou... bold* : thou powerful poet who, in a state of frenzy (poetic inspiration) can boldly express whatever you want to describe.

*host in rout* : *army* running away in defeat. (The poet now guesses the meaning of wind’s sounds.)

*deepest silence* : the fury of the storm subsides : the wind is now silent, but in this mood also, she is not inactive (to the poet, of course).

*It tells...loud* : the poet is now reminded of a different story.

*Otway* : Thomas Otway (1652-85) was a dramatist, noted for *The Orphan* and *Venice Preserved*, both plays containing heroines whose sorrows drowned contemporary audiences in tears. In the original draft of the poem, Coleridge wrote *Wordsworth’s* for *Otway’s* and the allusion in lines 121-5 is to Wordsworth’s *Lucy Gray* :

There is no similar episode in Otway’s works. In a way Coleridge is paying a tribute to Wordsworth in these lines. Allan Grant makes these observations on stanza VII:

“The language of strophe VII shows a sense of straining after effect, a falling back on eighteenth-century diction in an effort to match appropriately the mood of the storm. The last strophe follows only uneasily on the heels of this outburst. But behind the strident tones of the mad lutanist we feel some stirring of the imagination, through scenes of Alpine loneliness to pictures of public and private distress, the battle cries and groans and the wailing of a lost child.
(The emphasis in this stanza is not so much upon the creativeness of the wind (as Actor and poet) as upon the evils, torments and sorrows which it appears to create.)

**Stanza VIII**

This stanza ends on a quieter note. The poet, though still restless himself, is full of tenderness and good wishes for his wife. It presents quite a contrast with the previous stanza.

*Full ....keep* : The poet does not want his wife Sara to keep awake.

*Vigil: sleeplessness* : to keep vigils means to remain awake.

*but a mountain-birth* : this has been taken for an allusion to the mountains in travail which will bring forth—a mouse, i.e., nothing of importance. Another explanation is *May the storm be only local, confined to the mountains*. The first interpretation seems to be more appropriate. The line should be taken as a wish that what seems to be terrible and destructive (‘may this storm’) may turn out after all to be a mere nothing, or a trifle that cannot disturb Sara’s peace.

*Joy... Voice* : joy should raise her spirits and lend a sweetness to her voice.

*from pole to pole* : from one end of the world to the other end.

*To her ...live* : all things may live for her sake only.

*eddy* : a whirlpool; a whirlwind; as a verb, to move round and round.

The metaphor of the whirlpool in connection with the spirit or soul is quite apt. All things of this world may not only dedicate their existence to her, but may also become a vital force like a whirlwind, to add energy and strength to her spirit.

*guided from above* : guided, getting inspiration from Heaven. The last three lines seem more appropriate as being addressed to Wordsworth. Wordsworth, still a child of Nature and getting divine inspiration, has not lost his inborn joy, which is the life-breath of poetry. But since Coleridge himself is out of the race now, he seems to be passing on the torch of poetic creation to his best friend.
5.

CONCEPTS OF IMAGINATION

The term ‘imagination’ has been variously defined: as a power responsible for visual images, singly or in association; as the capacity for making from these images ideal combinations of character and objects, on the one hand, and chimeras and castles in the air, on the other; as a sympathetic projection of the artist into character and situation; as the faculty which creates the symbols of abstract conceptions; and as creation itself, the “shaping power” inherent in man.

For the Romantic poets and critics, imagination was no longer a passive recipient of impressions, but an active agent conferring upon external nature its significance and unity. For the mystic Blake the imagination was “spiritual sensation,” “the eternal Body of Man.” The material world of 18th c. empiricism had for him no existence, and Reason was a spectre and a negation. Some writers, notably Coleridge, have fought to distinguish the imagination from other similar faculties of the mind (especially ‘fancy’, which in the eighteenth century was synonymous with imagination) and define it as the principle of creativity in art. In the famous chapter 13 of Biographia Literaria (1817) Coleridge described the poetic 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 unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.”

The imagination, that is, is able to “create” rather merely reassemble, by dissolving the fixities and definites —the mental pictures, or images, received from the senses —and unifying them into a new whole. And the fancy is merely mechanical, the imagination is “vital”; that is, it is an organic faculty, which operates not like a machine, but like a living and growing plant. In chapter 14 of the Biographia, Coleridge explores the way in which the imagination creates harmonious wholes (poems) out of disparate experience: “This power... reveals it selfiin the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea with the image... a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order.” The faculty of imagination, in other words, assimilates and synthesizes the most disparate elements into an organic whole — that is, a newly generated unity, constituted by a living interdependence of parts whose identity cannot survive their removal from the whole.

“Fancy”, according to Coleridge (BL 1817), ..., has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space”. To Coleridge, thus, the fancy is a mechanical process which receives the elementary images - the “fixities and definites” which come to it ready-made from the senses —and, without altering the parts, reassembles them into a different spatial and temporal order from that in which they were originally perceived.

Most critics often tended to make fancy simply the faculty that produces a lesser, lighter, or humorous kind of poetry, and to make imagination the faculty that produces a higher, more serious, and more passionate poetry. And the concept of “imagination” itself is as various as the modes of psychology that critics have adopted (associationist, Freudian, Jungian) and the ways in which they conceive the essential nature of a poem (as essentially realistic or essentially visionary, as “object”, or as “myth”, as “pure poetry” or as a work designed to produce effects on an audience).

Coleridge and wordsworth employed various verbs in describing the process of imaginative composition (unify, abstract, modify, aggregate, evoke, combine). Metaphor came to be defined as the result of
creative thinking rather than as superficial decoration. Rejecting the notion that figurative language is adventitious decoration, they, along with other writers like Hunt, Hazlitt and Ruskin, described poetic language as the result of the activity of the whole sentient being, involving processes which, the absence of a more precise term, they called “imagination”.

THE ROMANTIC IMAGINATION

If we wish to distinguish a single characteristic which differentiates the English Romantics from the poets of the eighteenth century, it is to be found in the importance which they attached to the imagination and in the special view which they held of it. On this, despite significant differences on points of detail, Blake, Coleridge, Wordsworth, Shelley, and Keats agree, and for each it sustains a deeply considered theory of poetry. In the eighteenth century imagination was not a cardinal point in poetical theory. For Pope and Johnson, as for Dryden before them, it has little importance, and when they mention it, it has a limited significance. They approve of fancy, provided that it is controlled by what they call “judgement,” and they admire the apt use of images, by which they mean little more than visual impressions and metaphors. But for them what matters most in poetry is its truth to the emotions, or, as they prefer to say, sentiment. They wish to speak in general terms for the common experience of men, not to indulge personal whims in creating new worlds. For them the poet is more an interpreter than a creator, more concerned with showing the attractions of what we already know than with expeditions into the unfamiliar and the unseen. They are less interested in the mysteries of life than in its familiar appearance, and they think that their task is to display this with as much charm and truth as they can command. But for the Romantics imagination is fundamental, because they think that without it poetry is impossible.

This belief in the imagination was part of the contemporary belief in the individual self. The poets were conscious of a wonderful capacity to create imaginary worlds, and they could not believe that this was idle or false. On the contrary, they thought that to curb it was to deny something vitally necessary to their whole being. They thought that it was just this which made them poets, and that in their exercise of it they could do far better than other poets who sacrificed it to caution and common sense. They saw that the power of poetry is strongest when the creative impulse works untrammelled, and they knew that in their own case this happened when they shaped fleeting visions into concrete forms and pursued wild thoughts until they captured and mastered them. Just as in politics men turned their minds from the existing order to vast prospects of a reformed humanity, so in the arts they abandoned the conventional plan of existence for private adventures which had an inspiring glory. As in the Renaissance poets suddenly found the huge possibilities of the human self and expressed them in a bold and far-flung art, which is certainly much more than an imitation of life, so the Romantics, brought to a fuller consciousness of their own powers, felt a similar need to exert these powers in fashioning new worlds of the mind.

The Romantic emphasis on the imagination was strengthened by considerations which are both religious and metaphysical. For a century English philosophy had been dominated by the theories of Locke. He assumed that in perception the mind is wholly passive, a mere recorder of impressions from without, “a lazy lookeron an external world.” His system was well suited to an age of scientific speculation which found its representative voice in Newton. The mechanistic explanation which both philosophers and scientists gave of the world meant that scanty respect was paid to the human self and especially to its more instinctive, thought not less powerful, convictions. Thus both Locke and Newton found a place for God in their universes, the former on the ground that “the works of nature in every part of them sufficiently evidence a deity,” and the latter on the principle that the great machine of the world implies a mechanic. But this was not at all what the Romantics demanded from religion. For them it was a question less of reason than of feeling, less of argument than of experience, and they complained that these mechanistic explanations were a denial of their innermost convictions. So too with poetry. Locke had views on poetry, as he had on most human activities, but no very high regard for it. For him it is a matter of “wit,” and the task of wit is to combine ideas and “thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy.” Wit, in his view, is quite irresponsible and not troubled with truth or
reality. The Romantics rejected with contumely a theory which robbed their work of its essential connection with life.

Locke is the target both of Blake and of Coleridge, to whom he represents a deadly heresy on the nature of existence. They are concerned with more than discrediting his special views on God and poetry: they are hostile to his whole system which supports those views, and, even worse, robs the human self of importance. They reject his conception of the universe and replace it by their own systems, which deserve the name of “ideaHst” because mind is their central point and governing factor. But because they are poets, they insist that the most vital activity of the mind is the imagination. Since for them it is the very source of spiritual energy, they cannot but believe that it is divine, and that, when they exercise it, they in some way partake of the activity of God. Blake says proudly and prophetically:

This world of Imagination is the world of Eternity; it is the divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body. This World of Imagination is Infinite and Eternal, whereas the world of Generation, or Vegetation, is Finite and Temporal. There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the divine body of the Saviour, the True Vine of Eternity, The Human Imagination.

For Blake the imagination is nothing less than God as He operates in the human soul. It follows that any act of creation performed by the imagination is divine and that in the imagination man’s spiritual nature , is fully and finally realized. Coleridge does not speak with so apocalyptic a certainty, but his conclusion .is not very different from Blake’s:

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.

It is true that he regards poetry as a product of the secondary imagination, but since this differs only in degree from the primary, it remains clear that for Coleridge the imagination is of first importance because it partakes of the creame activity of God.

This is a tremendous claim, and it is not confined to Blake and Coleridge. It was to some degree held be Wordsworth and Shelley and Keats. Each was confident not only that the imagination was his most precious possession but that it was somehow concerned with a supernatural order. Never before had quite such a claim been made, and from it Romantic poetry derives much that is most magical in it. The danger of so bold an assumption is that the poet may be so absorbed in his own private universe and in the exploration of its remoter corners that he may be unable to convey his essential experience to other men and fail to convert them to his special creed. The Romantics certainly created worlds of their own, but they succeeded in persuading others that these were not absurd or merely fanciful. Indeed, in this respect they were closer to earth and the common man than some of their German contemporaries. They have not the respect for unsatisfied longing as an end in itself or the belief in hallucination and magic which play so large a part in the mind of Brentano, nor have they that nihilistic delight in being detached from life, of which Novalis writes to I Caroline Schlegel:

I know that imagination is most attracted by what is most immoral, most animal; but I also know how like a dream all imagination is, how it loves night, meaninglessness, and solitude.

This was not what the English Romantics thought. They believed that the imagination stands in some essential relation to truth and reality, and they were at pains to make their poetry pay attention to them.

In doing this they encountered an old difficulty. If a man gives free play to his imagination, what assurance is there that what he says is in any sense true? Can it tell us anything that we do not know, or is it so removed from ordinary life as to be an escape from it? The question had been answered in one sense by Locke when he dealt so cavalierly with poetic wit, and a similar answer was given by Blake’s revolutionary friend, Tom Paine, in his Age of Reason:
I had some turn, and I believe some talent for poetry: but this I rather repressed than encouraged as leading too much into the field of imagination.

This is a point of view, and it is not new. It is based on the assumption that the creations of the imagination are mere fantasies and, as such, divorced from life. The problem had troubled the Elizabethans, and Shakespeare shows his acquaintance with it when he makes Theseus say:

The poet’s eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And, as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen
Turns them to shapes, and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name,

This would have won the approval of an Italian philosopher like Pico della Mirandola, who thought that the imagination is almost a diseased faculty, and would certainly have welcomed Theseus’ association of the poet with the lunatic and the lover. Even those who did not venture so far as this thought that the creations of the imagination have little to do with actual life and provide no more than an agreeable escape from it. This was Bacon’s view in *The Advancement of Learning*:

The imagination, being not tied to the laws of matter, may at pleasure join that which nature hath severed and sever that which nature hath joined, and so make unlawful matches and divorces of things.

Bacon regards this as a harmless and not unpleasant activity; but not more. Though the Elizabethans excelled almost all other ages in the creation of imaginary worlds, their gravest thinkers made no great claim for them and were on the whole content that they should do no more than give a respite from the cares of ordinary life.

Such a position is plainly unsatisfactory for poets who believe that the imagination is a divine faculty concerned with the central issues of being. Indeed, it must be difficult for almost any poet to think that what he creates is imaginary in the derogatory sense which Bacon and his like give to the word. Poets usually believe that their creations are somehow concerned with reality, and this belief sustains them in their work. Their approach is indeed not that of the analytical mind, but it is none the less penetrating. They assume that poetry deals in some sense with truth, though this truth may be different from that of science or philosophy. That Shakespeare understood the question is clear from what Hippolyta says in answer to Theseus’ discourse on the imagination:

But all the story of the night told over,
And all their minds transfigur’d so together,
More witnesseth than fancy’s images,
And grows to something of great constancy,
But, howsoever, strange and admirable.

Hippolyta has sense enough to see that a poet’s inventions are not an “airy nothing” but stand in some relation to reality. In this she presents a view which is in opposition to that of the Platonist Pico but which has some affinity with that of Guarino, who says that the statements of poetry are true not literally but symbolically. For Hippolyta the creations of the imagination are related to living experience and reflect some kind of reality.

The Romantics face this issue squarely and boldly. So far from thinking that the imagination deals with the non-existent, they insist that it reveals an important kind of truth. They believe that when it is at work it sees things to which the ordinary intelligence is blind and that it is intimately connected with a special insight or perception or intuition. Indeed, imagination and insight are in fact inesparable and form for all practical purposes a single faculty. Insight both awakes the imagination to work and is in turn sharpened by it when it is at work. This is the assumption on which the Romantics wrote poetry. It means that, when their creative gifts are engaged, they are inspired by their sense of the mystery of things to probe it with a peculiar insight and to shape their discoveries into imaginative forms. Nor is this process
difficult to understand. Most of us, when we use our imaginations, are in the first place stirred by some alluring puzzle which calls for a solution, and in the second place enabled by our own creations in the mind to see much that was before dark or unintelligible. As our fancies take coherent shape, we see more clearly what has puzzled and perplexed us. This is what the Romantics do. They combine imagination and truth because their creations are inspired and controlled by a peculiar insight. Coleridge makes the point conclusively when he praises Wordsworth:

It was the union of deep feeling with profound thought; the fine balance of truth in observing, with the imaginative faculty in modifying the objects observed; and above all the original gift of spreading the tone, the atmosphere, and with it the depth and height of the ideal world around forms, incidents and situations, of which, for the common view, customs had bedimmed all the lustre, had dried up the sparkle and the dew drops.

So long as the imagination works in this way, it cannot fairly be accused of being an escape from life or of being no more than an agreeable relaxation.

The perception which works so closely with the imagination is not of the kind on which Locke believed, and the Romantics took pains to dispel any misunderstanding on the point. Since what mattered to them was an insight into the nature of things, they rejected Locke's limitation of perception to physical objects, because it robbed the mind of its most essential function, which is at the same time to perceive and to create. On this Blake speaks with prophetic scorn:

Mental things are alone Real; what is call'd Corporeal, Nobody knows of its Dwelling Place: it is in Fallacy, and its Existence an Imposture. Where is the Existence Out of Mind or Thought? Where is it but in the Mind of Fool?

Coleridge came to a similar conclusion for not very different reasons:

If the mind be not passive, if it be indeed made in God’s image, and that, too, in the sublimest sense, the Image of the Creator, there is ground for the suspicion that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false as a system.

When they rejected the sensationalist view of an external world, Blake and Coleridge prepared the way to restoring the supremacy of the spirit which had been denied by Locke but was at this time being propounded by German metaphysicians. Blake knew nothing of them, and his conclusions arose from his own visionary outlook, which could not believe that matter is in any sense as real as spirit. Coleridge had read Kant and Schelling and found in them much to support his views, but those views were derived less from them than from his own instinctive conviction that the world of spirit is the only reality. Because he was first a poet and only secondly a metaphysician, his conception of a universe of spirit came from his intense sense of an inner life and from his belief that the imagination, working with intuition, is more likely than the analytical reason to make discoveries on matters which really concern us.

In rejecting Locke’s and Newton’s explanations of the visible world, the Romantics obeyed an inner call to explore more fully the world of spirit. In different ways each of them believed in an order of things which is not that which we see and know, and this was the goal of their passionate search. They wished to penetrate to an abiding reality, to explore its mysteries, and by this to understand more clearly what life means and what it is worth. They were convinced that, though visible things are the instruments by which we find this reality, they are not everything and have indeed little significance unless they are related to some embracing and sustaining power. Nor is it hard to see what this means. Most of us feel that a physical universe is not enough and demand some scheme which will explain why our beliefs and convictions are valid and why in an apparently mechanistic order we have scales of values for which no mechanism can account. Locke and Newton explain what the sensible world is, but not what it is worth. Indeed, in explaining mental judgements by physical processes they destroy their validity, since the only assurance for the truth of our judgements is the existence of an objective truth which cannot be determined by a causal, subjective process. Such systems embody a spirit of negation, because in trying to explain our belief in the good or the holy or the beautiful they succeed only in explaining it away. That is
why Blake dismissed atomic physicists and their like as men who try in vain to destroy the divine light which alone gives meaning to life, and proclaimed that in its presence their theories cease to count:

The Atoms of Democritus
And Newton’s Particles of light
Are sands upon the Red sea shore,
Where Israel’s tents do shine so bright.

The Romantics were concerned with the things of the spirit and hoped that through imagination and inspired insight they could both understand them and present them in compelling poetry.

It was this search for an unseen world that awoke the inspiration of the Romantics and made poets of them. The power of their work comes partly from the driving force of their desire to grasp these ultimate truths, partly from their exaltation when they thought that they had found them, unlike their German contemporaries, who were content with the thrills of Sehnsucht, or longing, and did not care much what the Jenseits, or “beyond,” might be, so long as it was sufficiently mysterious, the English Romantics pursued their lines of imaginative enquiry until they found answers which satisfied them. Their aim was to convey the mystery of things through individual manifestations and thereby to show what it means. They appeal not to the logical mind but to the complete self, to the whole range of intellectual faculties, senses, and emotions. Only individual presentations of imaginative experience can do this. In them we see examples of what cannot be expressed directly in words and can be conveyed only by hint and suggestion. The powers which Wordsworth saw in nature or Shelley in love are so enormous that we begin to understand them only when they are manifested in single, concrete examples. Then, through the single cases, we apprehend something of what the poet has seen in vision. The essence of the Romantic imagination is that it fashions shapes which display these unseen forces at work, and there is no other way to display them, since they resist analysis and description and cannot be presented except in particular instances.

The apprehension of these spiritual issues is quite different from the scientific understanding of natural laws or the philosophical grasp of general truths. Such laws and truths are properly stated in abstract words, but spiritual powers must be introduced through particular examples, because only then do we see them in their true individuality, indeed, only when the divine light of the imagination is on them do we begin to understand their significance and their appeal. That is why Blake is so stern on the view that art deals with general truths. He has none of Samuel Johnson’s respect for the “grandeur of generality,” and would disagree violently with him when he says, “nothing can please many and please long, but just representation of general nature.” Blake thought quite otherwise:.

To Generalize is to be an Idiot. To Particularize is the Alone Distinction of Merit. General Knowledges are those Knowledges that Idiots possess.13

What is General Nature? is there Such a Thing? what is General Knowledge? is there such a Thing? Speaking All Knowledge is Particular.14

Blake believed this because he lived in the imagination. He knew that nothing had full significance for him unless it appeared in a particular form. And with this the Romantics in general agreed. Their art aimed at presenting as forcibly as possible the moments of vision which give to even the vastest issues the coherence and simplicity of single events. Even in “Kubla Khan,” which keeps so many qualities of the dream in which it was born, there is a highly individual presentation of remote and mysterious experience, which is in fact the central experience of all creation in its Dionysiac delight and its enraptured ordering of many elements into an entrancing pattern. Coleridge may not have been fully conscious of what he was doing when he wrote it, but the experience which he portrays is of the creative mood in its purest moments, when boundless possibilities seem to open before it. No wonder he felt, that if he could only realize, all the potentialities of such a moment, he would be like one who has supped with the gods:

And all should cry. Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

It was in such experience, remote and strange and beyond the senses, that the Romantics sought for poetry, and they saw that the only way to convey it to others was in particular instances and examples.

The invisible powers which sustain the universe work through and in the visible world. Only by what we see and hear and touch can we be brought into relation with them. Every poet has to work with the world of the senses, but for the Romantics it was the instrument which set their visionary powers in action. It affected them at times in such a way that they seemed to be carried beyond it into a transcendental order of things, but this would never have happened if they had not looked on the world around them with attentive and loving eyes. One of the advantages which they gained by their deliverance from abstractions and general truths was a freedom to use their senses and to look on nature without conventional prepossessions. More than this, they were all gifted with a high degree of physical sensibility and sometimes so enthralled by what they saw that it entirely dominated their being. This is obviously true of Wordsworth and of Keats, who brought back to poetry a keenness of eye and of ear which it had hardly known since Shakespeare. But it is no less true of Blake and Coleridge and Shelley. The careful, observing eye which made Blake a cunning craftsman in line and colour was at work in his poetry, it is true that he was seldom content with mere description of what he saw, but, when he used description for an ulterior purpose to convey some vast mystery, his words are exact and vivid and make his symbols shine brightly before the eye. Though Coleridge found some of his finest inspiration in dreams and trances, he gave to their details a singular brilliance of outline and character. Though Shelley lived among soaring ideas and impalpable abstractions, he was fully at home in the visible world, if only because it was a mirror of eternity and worthy of attention for that reason. There are perhaps poets who live entirely in dreams and hardly notice the familiar scene, but the Romantics are not of their number. Indeed, their strength comes largely from the way in which they throw a new and magic light on the common face of nature and lure us to look for some explanation for the irresistible attraction which it exerts. In nature all the Romantic poets found their initial inspiration. It was not everything to them, but they would have been nothing with out it; for through it they found those exalting moments when they passed from sight to vision and pierced as they thought, to the secrets of the universe. I Though all the Romantic poets believed in an ulterior reality and based their poetry on it, they found it in different ways and made different uses of it. They varied in the degree of importance which they attached to the visible world and in their interpretation of it. At one extreme is Blake, who held that the imagination is a divine power and that everything real comes from it. It operates with a given material, which is nature, but Blake believed that a time would come when nature will disappear and the spirit be free to create without it. While it is there, man takes his symbols from it and uses them to interpret the unseen. Blake’s true home was in vision, in what he saw when he gave full liberty to his creative imagination and transformed sense-data through it. For him the imagination uncovers the reality masked by visible things. The familiar world gives hints which must be taken and pursued and developed:

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour.

Through visible things Blake reached that transcendent state which he called “eternity” and felt to create new and living worlds. He was not a mystic striving darkly and laboriously towards God, but a visionary who could say of himself:
I am in God’s presence night the day,
And he never turns his face away

Of all the Romantics, Blake is the most rigorous in his conception of the imagination. He could confidently say, “One Power alone makes a Poet: Imagination, The Divine Vision,” because for him the imagination creates reality, and this reality is the divine activity of the self in its unimpeded energy. His attention is turned towards an ideal, spiritual world, which with all other selves who obey the imagination he helps to build.

Though Blake had a keen eye for the visible world, his special concern was with the invisible. For him every living thing was symbol of everlasting powers, and it was these which he wished to grasp and to understand. Since he was a painter with a remarkably pictorial habit of mind, he described the invisible in the language of the visible, and no doubt he really saw it with his inner vision. But what he saw was not, so to speak, an alternative to the given world, but a spiritual order to which the language of physical sight can be applied only in metaphor. What concerned him most deeply and drew out his strongest powers was the sense of spiritual reality at work in all living things. For him even the commonest event might be fraught with lessons and meanings. How much he found can be seen from his “Auguries of Innocence,” where in epigrammatic, oracular couplets he displays his sense of the intimate relations which exist in reality and bind the worlds of sight and of spirit in a single whole. His words look simple enough, but every word needs attention, as when he proclaims:

A Robin Red breast in a
Cage Puts all Heaven in Rage.

Blake’s robin redbreast is itself a spiritual thing, not merely a visible bird, but the powers which such a bird embodies and symbolizes, the free spirit which delights in song and in all that song implies. Such a spirit must not be repressed, and any repression of it is a sin against the divine life of the universe. Blake was a visionary who believed that ordinary things are unsubstantial in themselves and yet rich as symbols of greater realities. He was so at home in the spirit that he was not troubled by the apparent solidity of matter. He saw something else: a world of eternal values and living spirits.

Keats had a more passionate love than Blake for the visible world and has too often been treated as a man who lived for sensuous impressions, but he resembled Blake in his conviction that ultimate reality is to be found only in the imagination. What it meant to him can be seen from some lines in “Sleep and Poetry” in which he asks why the imagination has lost its old power and scope:

Is there so small a range
In the present strength of manhood, that the high
imagination cannot freely fly
As she was wont of old? prepare her steeds,
Paw up against the light, and do strange deeds
Upon the clouds? Has she not shown us all?
From the clear space of ether, to the small
Breath of new buds unfolding? From the meaning
Of Jove’s large eye-brow, to the tender greening
Of April meadows?

Keats was still a very young man when he wrote this, and perhaps his words are not so precise as we might like. But it is clear that he saw the imagination as a power which both creates and reveals, or rather reveals through creating. Keats accepted the works of the imagination not merely as existing in their own right, but as having a relation to ultimate reality through the light which they shed on it. This idea he
pursued with hard thought until he saw exactly what it meant, and made it his own because it answered a
need in his creative being.

Through the imagination Keats sought an absolute reality to which a door was opened by his
appreciation of beauty through the senses. When the objects of sense laid their spell upon him, he was so
stirred and exalted that he felt himself transported to another world and believed that he could almost
grasp the universe as a whole. Sight and touch and smell awoke his imagination to a sphere of being in
which he saw vast issues and was at home with them. Through beauty he felt that he came into the
presence of the ultimately real. The more intensely a beautiful object affected him, the more convinced he
was that he had passed beyond it to something else. In Endymion he says that happiness raises our minds
to a “fellowship with essence” and leaves us “alchemized and free of space”:

Feel we these things? that moment we have stept
Into a sort of oneness, and our state
Is like a fleeting spirit’s. But there are
Richer entanglements, enthrallments far
More self-destroying, leading by degrees
To the chief intensity.

The beauty of visible things carried Keats into ecstasy, and this was the goal of the desires, since it
explained the extraordinary hold which objects of sense had on him and justified his wish to pass beyond
them to something permanent and universal. Keats’ notion of this reality—was narrower than Blake’s, and
he speaks specifically as a poet, whereas Blake included in the imagination all activities which create or
increase life. Moreover, while Blake’s imagination is active, Keats suggests that his is largely passive and
that his need is to feel the “chief intensity”. But he is close to Blake in the claims which he makes for the
imagination as something absorbing and exalting which opens the way to an unseen spiritual order.

Coleridge, too, gave much thought to the imagination and devoted to it some distinguished chapters
of his Biographia Literaria. With him it is not always easy to disentangle theories which he formed in
later life from the assumptions upon which he acted almost instinctively before his creative faculties
began to fail. At times he seems to be still too aware of the sensationalist philosophy of his youth. From it
he inherits a conception of a world of facts, an “inanimate cold world,” in which “objects, as objects, are
essentially fixed and dead.” But as a poet he transcended this idea, or turned it to an unexpected
conclusion. Just because the external world is like this, the poet’s task is to transform it by the
imagination. Just as “accidents of light and shade” may transmute “a known and familiar landscape.” so
this dead world may be brought to life by the imagination. Coleridge justified this by a bold paradox:

Dare I add that genius must act of the feeling that body is but a striving to become mind that is
mind in its essence.

What really counted with him was his own deep trust in the imagination as something which gives a
shape to life. What this meant to him in practice can be seen from the lines in “Dejection” in which he
explains that nature lives only in us and that it is we who create all that matters in her:

Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

Coleridge does not go so far as Blake in the claims which he makes for the imagination. He is still a
little hampered by the presence of an external world and feels that in some way he must conform to it. But
when his creative genius is at work, it brushes these hesitations aside and fashions reality from a shapeless, undifferentiated "given". In the end he believes that meaning is found for existence through the exercise of a creative activity which is akin to that of God.

Coleridge advanced no very definite view of the ultimate reality which poetry explores. If we may judge by "Kubla Khan," he seems to have felt, at least in some moods, that the mere act of creation is itself transcendental and that we need ask for nothing more. But perhaps the evidence of "Kubla Khan" should not be pressed too far. Indeed, if we turn to "The Ancient Mariner" and "Christabel," it seems clear that Coleridge thought that the task of poetry is to convey the mystery of life. The ambiguous nature of both poems, with their suggestion of an intermediate state between dreaming and waking, between living people and unearthly spirits, gives an idea of the kind of subject which stirred Coleridge's genius to its boldest flights. Whatever he might think as a philosopher, as a poet he was fascinated by the notion of unearthly powers at work in the world, and it was their influence which he sought to catch. Of course, he did not intend to be taken literally, but we cannot help feeling that his imaginative conception of reality was of something behind human actions which is more vivid than the familiar world because of its sharper contrasts of good and evil and the more purposeful way in which it moves. This conception was developed only in poetry, and even then only in two or three poems. Coleridge seems to have been forced to it by a troubled and yet exciting apprehension that life is ruled by powers which cannot be fully understood. The result is a poetry more mysterious than that of any other Romantic, and yet, because it is based on primary human emotions, singularly poignant and intimate.

Wordsworth certainly agreed with Coleridge in much that he said about the imagination, especially in the distinction between it and fancy. For him the imagination was the most important gift that a poet can have, and his arrangement of his own poems shows what he meant by it. The section which he calls "Poems of the Imagination" contains poems in which he united creative power and a special, visionary insight. He agreed with Coleridge that this activity resembles that of God. It is the divine capacity of the child who fashions his own little worlds:

For feeling has to him imparted power
That through the growing faculties of sense
Doth like an agent of the one great Mind
Create, creator and receiver both,
Working but in alliance with the works
Which it beholds.

The poet keeps this faculty even in maturity, and through it he is what he is. But Wordsworth was fully aware that mere creation is not enough, that it must be accompanied by a special insight. So he explains that the imagination

Is but another name for absolute power
And clearest insight, amplitude of mind,
And Reason in her most exalted mood.

Wordsworth did not go so far as the other Romantics in relegating reason to an inferior position. He preferred to give a new dignity to the word and to insist that inspired insight is itself rational. Wordsworth differs from Coleridge in his conception of the external world. He accepts its independent existence and insists that the imagination must in some sense conform to it. Once again he sees the issue illustrated by childhood:

A plastic power
Abode with me; a forming hand, at times
Rebellious, acting in a devious mood;
A local spirit of his own, at war
With general tendency, but, for the most,
Subservient strictly to external things
With which it communed.

For Wordsworth the imagination must be subservient to the external world, because that world is not
dead but living and has its own soul, which is, at least in the life that we know, distinct from the soul of
man. Man’s task is to enter into communion with this soul, and indeed he can hardly avoid doing so,
since from birth onward his life is continuously shaped by nature, which penetrates his being and
influences his thoughts. Wordsworth believed that he helped to bring this soul of nature closer to man,
that he could show

by words

Which speak of nothing more than water we are how exquisitely the external world is fitted to the
individual mind, and the individual mind to the external world. This, it must be admitted was not to
Blake’s taste, and he commented: “You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting and fitted.” But
for Wordsworth this was right. Nature was the source of his inspiration, and he could not deny to it an
existence at least as powerful as man’s. But since nature lifted him out of himself, he sought for a higher
state in which its soul and the soul of man should be united in a single harmony. Sometimes he felt that
this happened and that through vision he attained an understanding of the oneness of things.

Though Shelley’s mind moved in a way unlike that of his fellow Romantics, he was no less attached
to the imagination and gave it no less a place in his theory of poetry. He understood the creative nature
of his work and shows what he thought of it when in Prometheus Unbound a Spirit sings of the poet:

He will watch from dawn to gloom
The lake-reflected sun illumine
The yellow bees in the ivy-bloom.
Nor heed nor see, what things they be;
But from these create he can
Forms more real than living man,
Nurslings of immortality!

Shelley saw that though the poet may hardly notice the visible world, he none the less uses it as
material to create independent beings which have a superior degree of reality. Nor did he stop at this. He
saw that reason must somehow be related to the imagination, and he decided, in contradistinction to
Wordsworth, that its special task is simply to analyse the given and to act as an instrument for the
imagination, which uses its conclusions to create a synthetic and harmonious whole. He calls poetry “the
expression of the Imagination,” because in it diverse things are brought together in harmony instead of
being separated through analysis. In this he resembles such thinkers as Bacon and Locke, but his
conclusion is quite different from faculty and through it he realizes his noblest powers.

In his Defence of Poetry Shelley controverted the old disparaging view of the imagination by
claiming that the poet has a special kind of knowledge:

He not only beholds intensely the present as it is, and discovers those laws according to which
present things ought to be ordered, but he beholds the future in the present, and his thoughts are the germs
of the flower and the fruit of latest time... A poet participates in the eternal, the infinite, and the one,

For Shelley the poet is also a seer, gifted with a peculiar insight into the nature of reality. And this
reality is a timeless, unchanging, complete order, of which the familiar world is but a broken reflection.
Shelley took Plato’s theory of knowledge and applied it to beauty. For him the Ideal Forms are a basis not
so much of knowing as of that exalted insight which is ours in the presence of beautiful things. The poet’s
task is to uncover this absolute real in its visible examples and to interpret them through it. It is spiritual in the sense that it includes all the higher faculties of man and gives meaning to his transient sensations. Shelley tried to grasp the whole of things in its essential unity, to show what is real and what is merely phenomenal, and by doing this to display how the phenomenal depends on the real. For him the ultimate reality is the eternal mind, and this holds the universe together:

This Whole
Of suns, and worlds, and men, and beasts, and flowers,
With all the silent or tempestuous workings
By which they have been, are, or cease to be,
Is but a vision; - all that it inherits
Are motes of a sick eye, bubbles and dreams;

Thought is its cradle, and its grave, nor less
The future and the past are idie shadows
Of thought’s eternal flight - they have no being: Nought is but that which feels itself to be.

In thought and feeling, in consciousness and spirit, Shelley found reality and gave his answer to Prospero’s nihilism. He believed that the task of the imagination is to create shapes by which this reality can be revealed.

The great Romantics, then, agreed that their task was to find through the imagination some transcendent order which explains the world of appearances and accounts not merely for the existence of visible things but for the effect which they have on us, for the sudden, unpredictable beating of the heart in the presence of beauty, for the conviction that what then moves us cannot be a cheat or an illusion, but must derive its authority from the power which moves the universe. For them this reality could not but be spiritual, and they provide an independent illustration of Hegel’s doctrine that nothing is real but spirit. In so far as they made sweeping statements about the oneness of things, they were metaphysicians, but, unlike professional metaphysicians, they trusted not in logic but in insight, not in the analytical reason but in the delighted, inspired soul which in its full nature transcends both the mind and the emotions. They were, too, in their own way, religious, in their sense of the holiness of reality and the awe which they felt in its presence. But, so far as their central beliefs were concerned, they were not orthodox. Blake’s religion denied the existence of God apart from men; Shelley liked to proclaim that he was an atheist; Keats was uncertain how far to accept the doctrines of Christianity. Though later both Coleridge and Wordsworth confirmed almost with enthusiasm, in their most creative days their poetry was founded on a different faith. The Romantic movement was a prodigious attempt to discover the world of spirit through the unaided efforts of the solitary soul. It was a special manifestation of that belief in the worth of the individual which philosophers and politicians had recently preached to the world.

This bold expedition into the unknown, conducted with a scrupulous sincerity and a passionate faith, was very far from being an emotional self-indulgence. Each of these poets was convinced that he could discover something very important and that he possessed in poetry a key denied to other men. To this task they were prepared to devote themselves, and in different ways they paid heavily for it, in happiness, in self-confidence, in the very strength of their creative powers. They were not content to dream their own dreams and to fashion comforting illusions. They insisted that their creations must be real, not in the narrow sense that anything of which we can think has some sort of existence, but in the wide sense that they are examples and embodiments of eternal things which cannot be presented otherwise than in individual instances. Because the Romantics were poets, they set forth their visions with the wealth that poetry alone can give, in the concrete, individual form which makes the universal vivid and significant to the finite mind. They refused to accept the ideas of other men on trust or to sacrifice imagination to argument. As Blake says of Los,

I must Create a System or be enslav’d by another Man’s.
I will not Reason and Compare: my business is to Create.
The Romantics knew that their business was to create, and through creation to enlighten the whole sentient and conscious self of man, to wake his imagination to the reality which lies behind or in familiar things, to rouse him from the deadening routine of custom to a consciousness of immeasurable distances and unfathomable depths, to make him see that mere reason is not enough and that what he needs is inspired intuition. They take a wider view both of man and of poetry than was taken by their staid and rational predecessors of the eighteenth century, because they believed that it is the whole spiritual nature of man that counts, and to this they made their challenge and their appeal.

From

The Romantic Imagination

By: C. M. Bowra
ACADEMIC SESSION 2010-2013
Test Paper
on
Kubla Khan

MM : 50

Attempt any two questions. All questions carry equal marks.

1. “Kubla Khan perfectly records a dream - experience and it has no relation to life as ordinary men and women live it.” Discuss.

2. “Kubla Khan is an ecstatic reverie on the power of the poet.” Discuss.

or

What is ‘Kubla Khan’ about? This is, or ought to be, an established fact of criticism: “Kubla Khan” is a poem about Poetry.” Do you agree with this view? Give a reasoned answer.

3. Give a brief appreciation of the poem Kubla Khan.

4. Would you regard Kubla Khan as a fragment? If not, then show how it is a complete poem possessing a basic unit.

5. Discuss the romantic elements in the poem.
ACADEMIC SESSION 2012-2013

Test Paper
On
Dejection : an Ode

M.M : 50

Attempt any two questions. All questions carry equal marks.

1. “I think it is the opinion of many readers of the Ode, that brilliantly successful as most of it is, as parts, yet it fails to achieve complete artistic unity.” (Humphry House). Do you agree with this assessment of the Ode. Give a reasoned answer.

2. Write a note on the “mood” of the poet in the Ode and account for it.

3. What attitude of Nature does Coleridge express in the Dejection Ode? In what way does this attitude differ from that of Wordsworth and from his own earlier attitude?


5a. The Ode “is a psychological analysis as acute as it is tragic, of his own mental, emotional state viewed throughout in conscious and deliberate contrast with that of his poet friend, Wordsworth.” (Selincourt). Comment on this statement.

or

5b. Compare and contrast the Dejection Ode and the Immortality Ode. (Get help from The Romantic Imagination by C.M. Bovvra).