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## UNIT 30 COLERIDGE : KUBLA KHAN & DEJECTION : AN ODE

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### Structure

- 30.0 Objectives
- 30.1 Introduction
- 30.2 Coleridge: Life and Works
- 30.3 Coleridge as a Critic
- 30.4 Coleridge as a Poet
- 30.5 Kubla Khan
  - 30.5.1 Introduction
  - 30.5.2 Structure
  - 30.5.3 Substance
  - 30.5.4 Interpretation
  - 30.5.5 As a Romantic Poem
  - 30.5.6 The Supernatural Element
  - 30.5.7 Glossary
  - 30.5.8 Questions for further study
- 30.6 Dejection: an Ode
  - 30.6.1 What is an Ode
  - 30.6.2 Introduction to the Poem
  - 30.6.3 Substance
  - 30.6.4 Interpretation
  - 30.6.5 As an Autobiographical Poem
  - 30.6.6 As a Romantic Poem
  - 30.6.7 Glossary
  - 30.6.8 Questions for further study
- 30.7 Suggested Reading

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### 30.0 OBJECTIVES

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The target reader is the student who wants to acquire Post-Graduate level proficiency in English literature, and the objective of this unit is to **furnish** him with Samuel Taylor **Coleridge's** life and literary words, especially his poetry, Two poems, Kubla Khan and Dejection: an Ode, have been chosen for detailed analysis as these are representative **enough** to give a comprehensive view of Coleridge as a poet.

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### 30.1 INTRODUCTION

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The component parts of the Unit are as follows:

- (a) Coleridge's life and works
- (b) **Coleridge** as a critic
- (c) Coleridge as a poet
- (d) Critical analysis of Kubla Khan with **glossary** and possible questions
- (e) Critical analysis of 'Dejection: an Ode' with glossary and **possible** questions
- (f) Suggested further reading
- (g) Appendix : The texts.



The Romantic Revival has been discussed in detail in the Unit on Wordsworth's *The Prelude*. Needless to say, Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834), Wordsworth's closest poet-friend, belonged to that Movement. The Romantic Revival of the closing years of the eighteenth century, which began with the publication of the *Lyrical Ballads* in 1797 and extended **upto** the middle of the nineteen thirties, was a reaction to and also a product of eighteenth century classicism, and the remarkable point about Coleridge is that the element of reaction to the classical norms is most prominent in his poetry. So, he is often called the 'most romantic' of the romantic poets.

Coleridge's part in the making of the *Lyrical Ballads* seems, in a word, to obtain a 'willing suspension of disbelief' for the supernatural. This aim is emblematical of the best of his poetry.

Born in 1772, Coleridge was at Jesus College from 1791 to 1794. In 1797, he **married** Sarah **Fricke**, the sister of Southey's wife. His **friendship** with Wordsworth and his sister Dorothy with whom he had long walks made him the kind of poet that he was. The three influenced one another's thought and sensibility. There are most curious points of similarity between the careers of Coleridge and De Quincey, especially in that both were failures in the sanctuary of home, and both were the slave of opium. German metaphysics fascinated Coleridge, and turned the poet into a philosopher. This caused no enrichment to his poetry, but the combination of poetic sensibility with philosophical subtlety made him an almost perfect critic. His years of full poetic inspiration were few, two at the most (1797-98), and hence the quantity of his best work is in inverse proportion to its quality.

It is not necessary to attribute the decay of Coleridge's poetic powers, or rather the 'stinting' of the poetic flow, to Germany or to opium; probably this would be to confuse cause and effect. The real cause was something innate in the man, which he himself was painfully aware of. It was his high ambition to reach beyond the reachable, his desire to discover the deepest region of the soul, and his continuous discovery that 'words' – the only material of poetry – falls **short** of that supreme requirement.

His stress on music suggests his attempt to transcend the limitations of literalness and **to** make the words yield as much as they could. But, unlike Shakespeare, he could

not make his words deliver the richest. Under the pressure of demand they broke, often became incoherent. This explains the fragmentary nature of much of his later poetry. Another reason of his sudden decadence is his lack of **self-confidence**, which can partially be attributed to his addiction to narcotics.

This caused deep frustration in him. He worked by fits and succeeded in flashes, and failed to finish long and ambitious works undertaken by him.

Broadly speaking, there are four periods in Coleridge's poetic career. The earliest period extends from 1794 to 1796 and it includes works like *the Song of the Pixies*, *Lines on an Autumnal Evening* and *Lewti* (1794) and *Religious Musings* (1795-96). Then came the second and blossoming period (1796-97) when he wrote *Ode to the Departing Year: The Lime Tree Bower: Frost at Midnight, Fears in Solitude*, etc. Full blossoming came in the next phase when he was at the height of his poetic genius. Great poems like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Christable-and Kubla Khan* were written during this period. And the fourth and last period came with a decline in inspiration and achievement. Two poems of great merit, of course, were written in this period too: *Dejection: an Ode-and Love*,

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### 30.3 COLERIDGE AS A CRITIC

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Today Coleridge is better remembered as a critic than as a poet. His *Biographia Literaria* is a great work in which one gets for the first time solid theories of criticism. The starting point of Coleridge is, of course, Wordsworth's preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*. Then he proceeds to examine Wordsworth's poems and, in the words of Cazamian, 'certain intentions, as well as certain successes or failings, of Wordsworth are caught and illuminated to their depths; so searching is the light, that it is even cruel.'

Despite his romantic sensibility, in his criticism Coleridge is very objective. He does not disregard 'facts' and tries his best to be unprejudiced. Even T.S. Eliot's criticism draws heavily from Coleridge's viewpoint and stand. Owing to this objectivity, Coleridge can reach the essential depth of any kind of art and discover the harmonizing and sustaining force therein. About his Shakespeare criticism, Cazamian observes, 'His remarks on Shakespeare show a sound intuition of the profound unit; of dramatic art'. His imaginative perception seldom fails him, and so his famous distinction between fancy and imagination, despite its mysticism, is so convincing and revealing. Fancy, according to Coleridge, is the mechanical joining of impressions stored in memory whereas imagination is an organic development of the mind which has the power to reveal the essential, and even the ultimate, truth of life.'

German metaphysics fascinated him and turned the poet into a philosopher. The combination of poetic sensibility with philosophical subtlety made him an almost perfect critic.

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### 30.4 COLERIDGE AS A POET

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Coleridge belonged to an age of great poetic output. There was a sudden efflorescence which lasted for about three decades, and then withering set in. To know this phenomenon well is in a way to understand Coleridge best. Every great writer is inextricably linked with the life and thought of the people of his time.

The Renaissance may be taken as the starting point. It was an age of questioning, and so, of self-awareness and self-discovery. Something 'new' was needed and demanded: a new set of values; a new god, so to say. People became aware of the immense potentialities of the human mind.

Logical reasoning came as the **new** too, as if mysteries of nature could be solved with that and the proper perspective grown the 17<sup>th</sup> century brought science and the **concomitant** tilt towards materialism. Sir **Issac** Newton revolutionised human thought and attitude and Locke's philosophy tried to explain the universe in terms of logic and material order. The eighteenth century built the 'society' on these postulates and glorified 'order' and 'pattern'. The Industrial Revolution brought the assurance of comfort and prosperity. In literature, 'norms' were dug out from ancient classics, and 'content' was confined to the immediate and the tangible. The stress was on form, and the subject matter was limited to that which yielded to reasoning. Dissident voices (Blake, Gray, etc) were heard but ignored.

And then fresh wind began to blow. It was so powerful that it seemed to be sudden, as if there was a complete overturning of everything. There was a feeling and sense of 'freedom.' In Wordsworth it was the freedom of going into Nature and breathing to one's fill her pure and purifying air. In Coleridge it was the freedom of entering the strange and mysterious zone of the supernatural. Byron and Shelley craved for a new social order based on intellectual freedom, scientific reasoning, and unprejudiced political system. Keats sang. 'Ever let the fancy **roam/Pleasure** never is at home.'

Though much of it came from native factors—a reaction to excess of emphasis on pattern and order, and on a concept of 'totality' within measurable limits—sizeable influence **came** from the continent, especially from France and **Germany**. German philosophers of the eighteenth century were busy exploring the **emotional** behaviour of man, the world of imagination, the sense of wonder **unfolding** an ever - increasing area of awareness, and this was reflected in the German literature of the time which treated supernatural as an extension of the known world of nature, often dealing in the eerie, the strange, and the mysterious. More than anyone else. Coleridge, because of his sojourn to Germany and his passionate reading of German literature, was influenced by it.

French Revolution was another exotic factor that had much to do in shaping the mind of the English poets of the time.

The French Revolution was the sudden and violent outburst of a general feeling seething long in the European mind. People wanted freedom: freedom from the oppression of monarchy, **from** the dictates of the church, from superstitions and social customs. As a matter of fact, in the world of thought and systematic development of an idea. England was the pioneer. England's struggle for freedom dated back to the Medieval times and matured up through Renaissance. Reformation, Civil War, Commonwealth, and so on. It gave inspiration to other nations. If the seed of French Revolution lay in the writings of Voltaire and Rousseau, these philosophers, in their turn, derived much from the English exponents of political and social freedom. But what was an undercurrent of intellectual refinement and cultural development in England became violent, armed revolution in France against monarchy and all its **institutions**. Poets and artists of England felt attracted towards it in the beginning. Wordsworth and Coleridge went to France to actively participate in the revolution, but, seeing the bloody and blind turn it took, withdrew from it, though the cardinal ideas that had caused the revolution silently and **imperceptibly** crept into the English mind and brought about a change in life, thought and attitude of the English people.

Wordsworth was most enthusiastic about the French Revolution in his early youth. But his direct encounter **with** the Revolution was enough for him to be disillusioned. The Revolution took a bloody turn, innocent people lost their lives, power-mongering was rampant; it was, as if, one set of despots being replaced by another. Atmosphere **in** France reeked with opportunism, intrigue, greed and violence, Coleridge also saw **this** with pain. Both of them returned to England, to the soothing English nature, to their love for the native soil and their innate conservatism. Wordsworth felt that his stay in France was a '**waste** of years" Coleridge felt the same.

But these poets, despite their aversion to the later turns and final outbursts of the French Revolution, brought with them the essential ideas that had prompted the Revolution. One such idea was the concept of the dignity of the human soul. The Romantic poets of England now felt- and it was in sharp contradistinction to the 18<sup>th</sup> century attitude -that categorization of men must be made on moral standards and not on material ones. Economic prosperity or high social position does not make one good or great; it is the quality of the soul that matters and decides the category. With this feeling running strong in them, the poets felt that they had a moral role to perform. Wordsworth thought that he was a 'teacher', and Coleridge, like an oriental guru, took his readers to a visionary world to enter which 'willing suspension of disbelief becomes a precondition.

Despite their love for peace, conservatism, pride in English tradition, in their imaginative flight, interest in the soul of nature, in the strange and the eerie, and in this humanitarian zeal, one perceives the impact of the essential ideas that lay behind the great upheaval of France.

So, influences came from various exotic sources; the native soil offered a rich tradition alongwith the impetus to break away from that tradition and to create a new one; and, above all, the genius of the poet made everything melt into a new 'concoction'; and, as a result, Coleridge's pen produced, among others, three poems of matchless merit, poems that could make any literature of the world proud of itself: *Kubla Khan*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*.

Broad and basic qualities in Coleridge's poetry are the following:

- a. Artistic treatment of the supernatural
- b. Medievalism
- c. Herman nature and external nature: relationship in reciprocity
- d. Creation of a dream-world authenticated by psychoanalysis
- e. Imaginative flights
- f. Lyricism

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## 30.5 KUBLA KHAN

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### 30.5.1 Introduction

Written in 1797. 'Kubla Khan' was first published, at the request of Lord Byron, in 1816. The book contained an 'introduction' which throws light on the circumstances that prompted the poet to write the poem:

'In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill-health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, 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 'Purchase' 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 had 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 awaking 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 or 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!

So, Coleridge says that the poem is a '**fragment**' and, that too, of a dream. We seems to be apologetic about it, as if trying to say that the readers should not take it **very seriously**, should not look for any deeper meaning or wider suggestion. An **amoral boon** of heightened imagination can cause such **embarrassment** in its creator. It is not a poem of statement or **communication** of an idea but one of imaginative exploration, of the discovery of the essentials of artistic creation and the relation between the natural and the supernatural. It is a poem equally powerful on its literal and **symbolic levels** obliterating with perfect ease the distinction between the common and the strange, the immediate and the remote, the worldly and the other-worldly.

### 30.5.2 Structure

Obviously there are three parts in the poem. In the **36-** line first part the poet describes the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan, an emperor in ancient China. It has three **stanzas** of 10, 20 and 6 lines respectively. It is on the nature and quality of that **art** which reflects life and its strange, **unintelligible** complexities.

**The** second and the third parts are in one stanza, the second covering 5 lines and the third part the remaining **13** lines, In the second part the poet is referring to an Abyssinian singing girl whom he had seen in a 'vision'. It is about art that transcends life. The third and final part creates the picture of an inspired **poet** who can bring about a revolution in the world, a yogi who can change the meaning of life. Here is art that can change life and the world.

### 30.5.3 Substance

**Kubla Khan**, an ancient powerful king of China, once ordered the building of a majestic pleasure - house in Xanadu. Alph, the sacred river, ran through Xanadu, making it a fertile land. The course of the river was through dark and immeasurable caverns. And finally it fell into a dark Sea. **The** land, ten miles in **perimetre**, was fertile, and it was well fenced with walls and towers. It had bright gardens, winding streams and **fragrant** trees bearing sweet-smelling flowers. **There** were forests, as old as hills, in the **midst** of which there were green grassy patches of **land**, bright with sunshine.

The most remarkable thing here was a deep, **mysterious chasm** which went down the hill covered with cedar trees. It was a savage and desolate place like one we would imagine to be the haunt of a woman in mad **love** with a demon, coming here in the light of waning moon, waiting for him, though he has left her after having **made** love with her.

A powerful spring of water gushed forth **from** this gorge. Deep down, there was an incessant turmoil, as if the earth was breathing fast, and this panting **of the** earth resulted into a big throw of water which carried alongwith it big and small chunks of stone like rebounding hail or scattered grain when beaten by the thresher. The fountain that came out with these rocks and stones took the form of the sacred river. Alph, which followed a meandering path through wood **and** valley and reached the deep and dark caverns, and then fell with noise in the 'lifeless' ocean. And in this tumult Kubla Khan heard the voices of ancestors prophesying **war** (i.e. destruction of this idyllic place and palace).

The shadow of the **dome** of this pleasure house fell on the waves in the middle of the **iver**. **Many** notes **from** the fountain and the caves resounded and got **mixed**. The **orchestric** effect was miraculous, and no less miraculous was the sight of the pleasure - dome that stood on caves of ice with domes flooded with sunshine.

The poet is reminded of a vision he once had; it was of an Abyssinian maid who played on her dulcimer and sang of Mount Abora. Her symphony and song were so excellent that if the poet could revive that in his poetry he would enjoy heavenly bliss and create art as charming as Kubla Khan's palace.

His music would, then, create the embodiment of the mystery in God's universe, the mystery of contraries woven together, the dichotomy of light and darkness, life and death, the 'sunny dome' and 'caves of ice'. Such great poetry brings about a great change in man's thought and attitude. Great poets are true revolutionaries. In their poetry lies the message of change and rebirth. Ordinary people are usually conservative. They dread changes. So they are afraid of great poets. They want to imprison them or to make them ineffectual. They try to fan up popular sentiments against them. They know that the great poets are nourished by heavenly bliss and benediction.

### 30.5.4 Interpretation

Apparently the poem is 'a fragment' or a series of fragments. First, it is about a palace the poet had heard of; and then it is about a singer the poet had dreamt of, and finally it is about a poet he had wistfully imagined of.

But it can never be called an incoherent poem. Rather it is one of the most balanced, methodical and concentrated poems in English literature. What is the poem about? Many critics ask. The simple answer is, it is about poetry. The later part of the poem is very clear in its purpose; the earlier part requires symbolic interpretation.

Kubla Khan desired a pleasure dome to be built in Xanadu. The abruptness with which proper names are introduced reminds us of John Donne; with the same unabashed deftness Coleridge takes us immediately into the heart of the matter. We are immediately transported to the strange and complex world of artistic creativity.

The word 'decree' is important. It includes desire, order, determination, 'Xanadu', the name, suggests remoteness, as if there is something exotic, mysterious, desire-evoking, thought-provoking in life. Alph flows through Xanadu, and Alph is a 'sacred' river. Its flow through the garden is the quest for the ultimate reality, 'the desire of the moth for the star' in art. It goes through mysterious caverns, and finally falls into a sunless sea. The 'sunless sea' is 'death' where life finally ends. A particular area with a perimeter of ten miles is fenced in with walls and towers and within that boundary there are gardens and small winding rivers, The trees in the gardens bear fragrant flowers. The forests are as old as the hills on which they have grown. It refers to the beauty and agelessness of art, its universal validity and charm.

But the most remarkable thing here is a deep, mysterious gorge that runs down the slope of a green hill across a wood of cedar trees. It is a wild and awe-inspiring place as holy and bewitched as the one haunted by a woman wandering about in search of her demon-lover in the dim light of a waning moon. The poet creates a supernatural world to suggest the inexplicable depths of art, areas where art ushers us in and we are terrified or benumbed. This 'chasm' may be the unfathomable 'unconscious' of the human mind, the reservoir of our memories, impressions and dreams. It is a 'savage place', Beyond the reach of knowledge, beyond the territory science is capable or qualified to explore.

Deep down the chasm, a turmoil is going on ceaselessly, as if some thick liquid is boiling there. It is like the breathing of the earth: 'fast thick pants' suggest the sexual act. It is about the creative process of the earth. Water is ejected out of the earth's belly in the form of a fountain, and with it huge boulders come out like pattering hailstones or scattered grain when the thresher beats it under his flail to separate it from the chaff. The fountain takes the form of the sacred river. Alph, Pure poetry is something divine; its journey is from the deep recesses of the human mind to

heavenly bliss. It is born of the panting tumult (the **creative** urge), it flows through a **fertile** land (the creative process), it is sacred (purifying), and finally it is lost in **oblivion** (lifeless ocean). And it gives a vital message; that however lovely and **divine** art may be, it has the vulnerability of being destroyed because wars are **inevitable**. The ancestral voice is the voice of human experience. The strange **dichotomy** in man is that on the one hand he is capable of creating art 'par **excellence**' and on the other he fights like his primitive ancestor with his neighbour and fellowman and turns bestial, brutal and destructive. In intellect he can rise very high **but** in morality he can stoop lowest of the low. He has raised great monuments and **he** has also felled them. Wars have razed beautiful civilizations to dust.

The shadow of the dome of the pleasure palace fell on the waves of Alph and it covered half the breadth of the stream. The stream looked lovely, half of it breadth-wise, in shadow and half in light. In the sound of the waves of the river two notes mingle, the gurgling sound of the fountain, and the deep sombre note that came from the depth of the caves. The entire construction of the palace was a miracle of mixture of opposites. Its top was flooded with sunshine but its foundation lay in the caves of **ice**. Great art is like this: it embodies the **essence** of life, and life is a complex of contradictory experiences. In Kubla Khan's palace Coleridge finds 'ideal art'.

Then the poet moves to the second part of the poem. In the first few lines of the second half he refers to his dream in which he had the vision of an Abyssinian damsel playing on her dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora. And in the following portion of the second half the poet expresses his wish to recreate the perfection of the Abyssinian maid's song in his own poetry. Obviously, in the mind of the poet, both Kubla Khan's palace and the damsel's song are perfection of art. A poet who can achieve this perfection brings about a great change in society. In the poet's mind comes the picture of a saga-like, inspiring medieval singer of the Middle East on hearing whom people would come out of their stale customs and dead habits and be ushered into a new life, a new awareness. Such a poet with his 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair' is like the pied piper of **Hameline** on hearing whose flute children would leave their homes to follow his path, however unknown and adventurous it might be. The poet wants to be one like him. **Like** his contemporaries Coleridge also wants to be a revolutionary, a preacher, a Messiah.

But he knows that the conservative **people** are **afraid** of any big change. They would like to continue in their life of 'pig satisfaction'. So they would try to restrict the dreamer from doing what he can. They would like to make him non-functional by using the magical method of weaving a **circle** around him thrice. **They** know that the poet is divinely inspired; he has taken Amrit that makes **one** immortal. Like Keats's nightingale he is 'not **born** for **death**'.

So in all the three **pictures**-Kubla Khan, the Abyssinian maid, and the visionary poet-Coleridge sees the perfection of art. In the first picture it is art that best **reflects** life with all its complexities and contradictions; in the second picture it is art that transcends life and becomes celestial; and in the third **picture** it is art that **changes** life by infusing new ideas and new hopes in the mind of man. 'Kubla Khan,' therefore, is a poem about the nature and function of art. **There** is hardly anything that is **fragmentary** about this poem. It is a well-knit, highly concentrated poem with a clear point of reference.

### 30.5.5 As a Romantic Poem

If there is truth in what C.H. Herford says about Romanticism ('Romanticism in an extraordinary development of imaginative sensibility') then 'Kubla Khan' is one of the most romantic poems of English literature. Imaginative sensibility cannot develop perhaps any further. Xanadu is an imaginary place. Kubla Khan, though a historical character, has been treated imaginatively, as if he was, first and **formost**, a **dreamer**-architect. The 'romantic **chasm**', 'savage place', 'woman wailing', 'demon-lover'-they



are all creation of heightened imagination. And when 'Kubla heard from far, Ancestral voices prophesying war' it is romanticism at its very best.

The intricate pattern of the palace, the interweaving of the 'sunny dome' and 'caves of ice', effortless blending of the natural and the **supernatural**; everything is in the romantic spirit, Kubla Khan's palace is just what the poet would have it in his **dream**. This wish- fulfillment is a romantic quality.

Remoteness in time and remoteness in space are traits of romanticism. **Kubla Khan** is not only an ancient king but in the poem he is also a mythical character belonging to **hoary pre-history**. Xanadu; the very sound of the word suggests remoteness, as do words like 'Lilliput' and 'Brobdingnag', 'Alph' is another such word, so is Mount Abora'. Proper names create exciting, half-lit domains in which the imagination of a writer gets space enough for free flight.

The use of the supernatural is another romantic trait in Coleridge. The 'woman wailing for her demon lover' is undoubtedly a supernatural image-

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

The kind of nature **imagery**, personification of nature that is found in the poem, is typical of **romantic** poetry. Nature seems to reflect **human** experience, wish and ambition.

Apparently disjointed **pictures** are harmonized with the thread of romantic imagination. The essential meaning emerges when we, with the help of our imagination. **Overcome** the apparent difficulty, break the upper crust of incoherence, and go deep into the poem to discover the harmony.

### 30.5.6 The Supernatural Element

Influenced by 18<sup>th</sup> century German poetry. Coleridge made extensive use of the supernatural in his poetry. His most successful poems are excellent poetry, some say, despite their supernatural element, and some say, for their supernatural element. Supernaturalism is so powerful an element in his poetry. **And** he has treated the supernatural in such a way as to make the reader feel that it is so very natural, very much a part of the total scheme of nature. Supernaturalism comes most powerfully in 'Christable' and 'The Rime' of the 'Ancient Mariner.' Not so much in 'Kubla Khan,' and yet it seems that it hovers on the entire poem: right from the mention of Xanadu to the magical weaving of a circle round the 'troubadour' to **restrict** him **from** his function of leading the world to a new profile and awareness. The description of the palace makes it an other-worldly construction; the Abyssinian maid singing of Mount Abora is a dream vision: and the poet-with **exuberant** wildness **seems** to be someone who visits one in dreams and cannot be found in the world of man and nature.

But the **very** specific mention of something supernatural comes when the 'savage place' is described as 'holy and enchanted':

As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted. By woman wailing for her demon - lover !

**Supernaturalism** is not an embellishment in Coleridge's poetry; it is an organic part of the total texture. The natural and the supernatural are fused into one entity, and it is his **power** of imagination that does **this** miracle.

### 30.5.7 Glossary

- (a) Xanadu : Name of a city. It corresponds to modern **Shantung** in China. Coleridge in his reading of Purchase found it **called Xanadu** or Xaindu. In

dreams names change and in this poetical dream a much better-sounding name has been found.

- (b) Kubla Khan : The grandson of Chingiz Khan. He was the founder of the Moghul Dynasty in China. He built the city of Beijing and made it his capital. Marco Polo visited his court and from his accounts it is known that he was a lover of art and learning.
- (c) **Alph**: An imaginary river, not traceable in geography. Coleridge read of **Alpheus**, a river often associated with the Nile. In his 'dream' the name is shortened.
- (d) Demon-lover: A supernatural being, and the lover of a mortal woman. Generally to inspire awe about a desolate place and picture of a demon is created as Shakespeare refers to Setebos in 'The Tempest.'
- (e) Ancestral Voices: Voices as if coming from a distance, and warning and educating Kubla Khan. These are the voices of hundreds of years of experience and wisdom, voices of racial unconscious.
- (f) Abyssinian Maid : An unmarried girl of Abyssinia. To a European of Coleridge's time Abyssinia, an African country, was a far-off land. The word 'Abyssinia' has also its musical effect.
- (g) Mount Abora : The reading source of this word is Milton's Mount Amara in 'Paradise Lost,' Book IV. Where it stands for heavenly bliss.
- (h) Holy dread: Dread for something which is divine, holy. Greatness causes awe. The common man is startled to see a great poet who is very uncommon, unique.
- (i) Honey dew: Divine honey. It was believed that divine honey fell in small particles with the dew drops at night and if one could take a few drops of it one would turn immortal. Poetic inspiration is like that: it can make a man immortal.
- (j) Milk of Paradise: It is also 'nectar'. Adam and Eve lived on this milk before they were banished from heaven to the mortal world.

### 30.5.8 Questions for further study

- (a) Would it be correct to describe 'Kubla Khan' as a finished fragment? Give reasons for your answer.
- (b) There is deep psychological realism behind Coleridge's use of the supernatural in his poetry. Consider the statement with reference to 'Kubla Khan.'
- (c) Discuss 'Kubla Khan' as an allegorical poem.
- (d) Do you think remoteness and strangeness constitute the essence of Coleridge's romanticism in 'Kubla Khan'?
- (e) What picture of a poet is Coleridge's ideal?
- (f) Kubla Khan's palace, as Coleridge describes it, best represents the strangeness, mystery and contradictions in life. Do you agree?
- (g) Recreate an imaginary picture of the Abyssinian maid playing on her dulcimer in the form of a short story.
- (h) Do you think it is impossible to enjoy Coleridge's poetry without 'willing suspension of disbelief'?

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## 30.6 DEJECTION: AN ODE

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### 30.6.1 What is an Ode?

J.A. Cuddon's definition of an ode is quite comprehensive: 'A lyric poem, usually of some length. The main features are an elaborate stanza-structure! a marked formality and stateliness in tone and style (which make it ceremonious), and lofty sentiments and thoughts. In short, an ode is rather a grand poem; a full-dress poem. However, this said, we can distinguish two basic kinds; the public and the private. The public is used for ceremonial occasions, like funerals, birthdays, state events; the private often celebrates rather intense, personal and subjective occasions; it is inclined to be

meditative, reflective. Tennyson's *Ode on the Death of the Duke of Wellington* is an example of the former; Keats's 'Ode to a Nightingale', an example of the latter.'

### 30.6.2 Introduction to 'Dejection : an Ode'

The poem opens with a four-line quote from the 'Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence' first printed by Thomas Percy in his 'Reliques of Ancient English Poetry' in 1765. The romantic poets of the nineteenth century were greatly influenced by Percy's collection. In the lines quoted by Coleridge, the speaker says that he has seen the old Moon holding the new Moon in her arms and he is frightened. He fears that a deadly storm might follow. Such strange forebodings take place in nature.

The relevance of these lines is that Coleridge wants such a storm to come in his life to arouse him from the spiritual slumber he is now in. The slumber is painful to the poet because it deprives him of his enjoyment of life and nature, and makes him unable to write poetry. At some stage of life Wordsworth also felt the same crisis and he has pictured it in his 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality'. Shelley's invocation of the west wind is also in the same spirit. But unlike these two poets. Coleridge is very sentimental and that makes the immortality Ode and the West Wind Ode superior in quality to Coleridge's 'Dejection'.

'Dejection: an ode' is a verse letter written to a 'Lady'. There is doubt about the identity of this Lady, in all likelihood it was Sara Hutchinson. But in a letter to his friend Poole. Coleridge gave him the impression that the poem was addressed to him. Later he told some people that it was addressed to Wordsworth. It was originally addressed to Wordsworth and subsequently 'William' was replaced by 'Lady'. Coleridge, however, meant that it could be addressed to anybody with a happy disposition and contented mind. The poem is actually about the poet himself; it is a kind of confession. One confesses to one who is just the opposite type: a sinner to a holy priest, a guilty person to one who is pure of heart, and a sad man to one who is full of joy. It does not **matter** much whether it is addressed to Sara or Poole or Wordsworth: what matters is that it is a dejected Coleridge confessing his failings to one who is enviably joyous. Originally the poem had 340 lines. Later Coleridge cut it short to 139 lines and divided it into eight parts. The drastic revision was made by Coleridge the critic who expunged the 'too personal' details and retained only those of universal significance but the revision has also taken away much of its beauty. At times the truncation becomes uncomfortably perceptible. Humphry House believes that the revision has affected its merit, in its revised version, he maintains. 'It fails to achieve complete artistic unity, it is not a whole poem.'

### 30.6.3 Substance

In the four-line quote from the 'Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence' **there** is the foreboding of a deadly storm, Such deadly **storms**, however destructive, bring about a change by causing a stir in the soil and making the plants sprout out of seeds. The poet feels that he is lying dormant and requires a new lease of poetic life. He wants to shake off his dullness and be creative once again.

The poet has melancholy of a subdued kind. It does not burst into any strong emotion. It is corroding his mind. He looks around and sees that everything in nature is excellently fair but he is not deeply touched by anything. He sees, but does not feel.

He has lost his genial spirits. The beauty of natural objects can no more lift **from** his heart the overwhelming burden of his grief. His attempt to gaze at the green light on the western horizon is futile, The real sources of passion and life are within one's heart and when they have dried up he cannot expect the external forces to animate him. Man receives from nature what he gives to nature. Nature lives in our life. Her joys and sorrows are taken from man. It appears to be happy or sad according to our

mood. The objects of nature are lifeless and cold. If we want to see some high or noble quality in nature, something better than the commonplace, we must send forth a light, a glory, and a radiance, to cover the natural objects, from our heart. Sweet and powerful voice must come out of human feelings to endow the sounds of nature with sweet charm.

The lady addressed to is pure of heart. So she is full of joy. Therefore to her nature is always-festive, The poet finds a contrast between his mood and the mood of the Lady.

The poet remembers that in his earlier days he had this joy though the path of his life was rough. In those days he even used his misfortunes as material to weave visions of delight. Then hope grew around him like a creeper growing around a tree. Natural objects seemed to be his own, as if an extension of his own personality. But now his care-worn heart has no joy. He cares little for this loss of joy but his loss of imagination is the real loss. He was born with superb power of imagination but it is almost dead now. He tried to be patient, forgetting the loss he had suffered, So he tried to cultivate the study of metaphysics so that once again he could be 'natural man' who does not sigh or shed tears all the time. This was his plan. He practised it but it did not help him much. Tangled in metaphysics, he is still sad, unable to rouse imagination in him, unable to be creative, thoroughly incapacitated, and so melancholy.

The poet's mind is in the grip of sad thoughts born of the tragic reality of his life. He wants to get rid of them so that he can listen to the wind once again. In the raving wind he hears a prolonged scream of agony. It is a 'mad' scream, and the poet thinks that the wind should go to places where its howling will not sound so discordant as it does here - to bare crag, mountain tairn, to some blasted tree, some pine grove far away from any woodman's reach, or some witch-haunted lonely house. It is now causing havoc in this rainy month of April, creating the atmosphere of 'Devil's Christmas'. The tragic atmosphere is full of the painful sound of the wind. So the wind is like an actor, or even a poet. The sound made by the wind at the moment seems to be similar to the one made by a retreating army, its members groaning in pain and quivering in cold. The sound is silent and there is a brief pause. Then another sound is heard, less fearful, a bit pleasant even. It is like the tender story, written by Thomas Otway, of a little girl who lost her way on a desolate moor near her home. The little girl moaned low in grief and fear, and at times screamed loudly so that her mother might hear her and come to her rescue. The wind is imitating these sounds.

Care-worn the poet is sleepless, but he wants that his 'friend' may never suffer this sleeplessness. Sleep is a wonderful anodyne that heals all ailments. In the night the storm may blow and the stars may twinkle, but they cannot touch the person in profound sleep. The poet wishes her to rise in the morning, joyous and cheerful. He wants that the purity and freshness of her heart may spread all over nature. There is something divine in her heart and all things in nature should share that celestial element. The poet wants her to rejoice forever. May no 'dejection' be in her life.

### 30.6.4 Interpretation

In Shelley, it is dialectics: if winter comes spring cannot be far behind. In Coleridge it is erratic, incomprehensible, magical. If the old Moon is in the lap of the new Moon, a storm is in the offing. The thin crescent moon is bordering the whole of the moon which is visible in the form of a faint shadow, and it is a rare sight, and Coleridge, like the writer of the 'Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence' believes that it forebodes a sudden stir in nature in the form of a strong gale.

He himself is passing through a dull, monotonous phase. There is pain in his heart which is gradually corroding him. There is no violence in this pain, nothing spectacular about it. Dull, boring pain, like weevil, is eating into the vitals of his

personality. He wants a big shake, a storm, to rouse him to creativity. Shelley prays to the West Wind to make him its lyre, to lift him from the thorns of life where he has fallen: Coleridge does not have that strength for prayer. He also needs that kind of a lift, but he knows that it 'can come to him, if at all, through a miracle. There can be no 'reason' behind it, nor can prayer do anything, but strange things happen in nature, call it supernatural, and so a strange turn **may** come in his life also. Pain is corroding, self-defeating, unproductive. He needs joy which is elating, purposeful and creative.

Wordsworth also felt the same crisis.

'Dejection: an Ode' was written in 1802 and Wordsworth's 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality' was written in 1806. Prior to the writing of these poems the two poets had identical feelings, long discussions, and **apprehensions** of a failure of their only talent. With Coleridge it was a deeper crisis. C.M. Bowra points out: "He knew that something catastrophic had happened to him, and he was afraid that his creative gifts were ruined. He put the blame on his lack of happiness but he knew that whatever the cause might be, the results were grave indeed." Wordsworth tried to overcome the feeling with the help of a broad philosophy, a larger view of life. Much of his 'Ode' is a reply to Coleridge's problem, and indirectly he helps himself too. Coleridge addresses Sara Hutchinson and says that she is full of joy, and so to her everything is blissful, whereas he is full of sadness and therefore to him everything is dreary. (When Coleridge cut the poem short to half its original length, Sara Hutchinson' became the 'Lady' : many people think that originally it was not Sara but Wordsworth whom the poet had addressed. Whatever it might have been, in its final form the address is to the 'Lady' . It makes the poem impersonal).

Wordsworth turns to Coleridge's six-year-old child **Hartley** and finds exuberance in him. The child's unbridled joy makes him philosophise about life and its growth through years. And he feels that through philosophical understanding one can rationalise the loss and **regain** confidence. Wordsworth never **seems** to be entirely broken down, but **Coleridge** is out and out a wreck. It is so, more because of Coleridge's idea that nature cannot be benign enough to extend a hand of comfort in our hours of need because she does not have **any** distinct entity: she is not a positive force. She is just what we make of her. If we are happy we see happiness everywhere in nature and that **makes** us all the more happy, and if we are sad we see sadness every-where in nature and that makes us gloomier. Coleridge comes close to **Tagore's** subjective philosophy:-

'T is the colour of my consciousness  
That makes the emerald green  
and the ruby red.  
I look up to the sky  
and light flashes  
in the east and the west.  
I see the rose and call "Beautiful".  
And it turns beautiful.

(Tr. D. Ganguly)

But **Tagore's** 'I' is part of godhead, and Coleridge's 'we' is nothing more than the human mind and its reflexes. He knows that **the** Lady is full of joy which is given only to the pure of heart. When we are very close to nature this joy is born in our heart, and as it matures it gives birth to other joys and everything turns **colourful and melodious**. There was a time in Coleridge's life **also** when **he experienced** this celestial joy which enabled him to overcome all strain and suffering. His imagination was very active at that time, but **thereafter** each moment of dejection has weakened his imagination and enervated his soul. He turned to philosophy, tried to get some solace in broad generalizations about human fate. Metaphysical ideas have all the more destroyed his poetic faculties. The poet is unhappy that he has turned away

from existence to essence, from experience to philosophy, but he knows that it is all because of the waning of his imagination. Thus the poem, though autobiographical, takes up the basic issue of imagination-ratiotination relationship, something that Keats allegorically presents in 'Lamia,' Personal tragedy becomes a symbol of human destiny.

The poet tries to take a violent turn, away from the dull boring pain, to a tempest so that there be new equations and new developments. If pain is inevitable, wailing is better than sobbing.

Moods change as winds do. A strong gale is replaced by a tender wind, as tender as Otway's story of a small girl who had lost her mother in a lonely wood. The strong wind or the tender breeze, mind in great ruffle or in the grip of subdued, gnawing pain, it is the suffering of being uncreative. The entire poem is an implicit prayer for spontaneous joy- the kind of joy that the Lady has - because that joy alone can revive the lost poetic inspiration. Life's experiences become universal metaphor and the 'confessional' comes through significant nature imagery.

The 139-line poem is divided into eight uneven parts. It has a single theme-- dejection, need for love to overcome it and prayer to nature for a stormy shake up -- and it is elaborated in great length. *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* is also divided into parts; seven in all. But in that poem the narrative develops part by part, sequentially. Here it is one emotional situation. Division into parts gives the semblance, of course, of a mini epic. The situation is so vital for the poet, the involvement so great, the urgency so acute, that he feels that some amount of epic expanse is necessary to accommodate all.

### 30.6.5 As an autobiographical poem

Both Wordsworth and Coleridge felt almost simultaneously that their poetic powers were on the decline. This unnerved them because their total identity was in being poets. The loss of that identity would mean spiritual death to them. Decline in that 'one talent' made them apprehensive of 'death'. It caused fear. Wordsworth tried to overcome fear by turning to religio-philosophical explanation of the soul's journey, and to a large extent revived mental strength again. Coleridge also turned to philosophy but he thought that it was a poor compromise, and it deepened his frustration. C.M Bowra rightly points out: The problem which concerned both friends was that of poetical inspiration. Each felt that his hold on it was precarious and asked why this was so. Wordsworth faced the problem in the first three stanzas of the Ode and then abandoned it for at least two years: Coleridge, slower perhaps to start but quicker one he had started, told of his crisis in the poem which he afterwards called "Dejection".

The first full version of 'Dejection' was called 'Verses to Sara'. In this address to Sara Hutchinson there was reference to some private matters which was omitted later on. The final version was printed in the *Morning Post* on October 4<sup>th</sup>, Wordsworth's wedding day. Coleridge tried to sincerely tell his friends of the psychological crisis he was undergoing. Even before Wordsworth completed his Ode, Coleridge gave full and powerful expression of his feelings, and there was so much of appeal in it that it touched all, and Wordsworth could not escape involvement, and tried to console Coleridge, and in the process expounded a philosophy from which he also tried to derive psychological sustenance.

'Dejection' gives us an inkling of Coleridge's mind. The images are of night, darkness, howling storm, crescent Moon, Viper thought, dark dream. Devil's yule, lonesome wild, etc. It suggests despair of the worst kind. But there is one redeeming factor: his realization that joy is the most important thing in life, and it comes like a fountain from within. He is happy to see this redeeming joy in his 'Lady'. As the bliss of the Nightingale is the ideal Keats would try to reach and achieve and finally

realise that it is beyond his merit and share, so is the 'joy' of the 'Lady'. Coleridge's ideal, he knows, is impossible for him to achieve.

Despite the autobiographical element, despite the powerful personal note, Coleridge has succeeded in universalising his experience. 'Dejection' is about a **human** experience more than an experience of Coleridge himself. Perhaps every work of art has its origin and roots in some personal feelings and experience but the more an artist transcends it the more successful his art becomes. Coleridge has found proper 'objective correlative' for the emotion he intends to communicate.

### 30.6.6 As a Romantic Poem

Though the theme of 'Dejection: an Ode' is the failure of romantic imagination and subsequent grief on account of that, the poem is one of the finest examples of romantic poetry. In emotional depth, passionate feeling, intensity of experience and expression, selection of images, lyrical flow, structural arrangement etc. it is a representative poem of the Romantic Revival.

The Great Romantics, particularly Wordsworth and Coleridge, made their lives the subject matter of their poetry. The autobiographical element is very much pronounced in Wordsworth's 'Tintern Abbey'. 'The Prelude' and 'Ode on Intimations of Immortality'; among Coleridge's poems 'Dejection' is most overtly autobiographical. The tone of moralising is very prominent in Wordsworth; this romantic element of didacticism is not so prominent in Coleridge though 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' has a clear moral in it. The 'moral' is implicit in 'Dejection'. Joy redeems, and so one should try to overcome **grief** and be joyous.

The poem opens with a strange reference. The extract from a ballad, quoted at the very outset says that if the old Moon is in the lap of the new Moon a storm is in the offing. The whole of the moon is faintly visible because a bit of sunlight reached it being reflected from the earth. On its edge the crescent new moon looks like a bright girdle holding the old moon as if in its lap, The connection between this sight and a possible storm is entirely magical or superstitious. But the romantic imagination of the poet accepts it as **something** that inevitably happens. ,

**Then** the outwards storm becomes an inner gale; or, the poet wants that there should be a big stir in his mind so that he comes out of the lethargic barrenness which had deprived him of creativity. **Almost** imperceptibly the external **storm** becomes an inner fury and the poet **wants** to make use of it;

Might now perhaps their wanted impulse give,  
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move **and** live!

This relationship between the external and the internal, outer nature and inner **nature**, is a romantic belief.

The subjective approach that the external world is nothing more than what **we** think of it, that **human** imagination is **the most** important thing, is essentially romantic;

O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live:  
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!

The objective approach that the **quality** of the external world is independent of what man thinks of it is classical in spirit; Coleridge's view is just the opposite.

In 'Dejection' the theme of the poem is just the 'mood' of the **poet**, a mental state. This emphasis on a psychological condition, giving mind so much of importance, is a romantic trait. There is a contradiction, of course. The poet says that he has lost the

power to 'feel', but the entire poem is an expression of great anguish, intense feeling about a troubled mind. So it is an apprehension of loss, more than real loss. The poet wants that a storm should come to unsettle him from his dull, lethargic state, and make him more dynamic, even if it would mean devastation. But there is great dynamism in the poem as suggested by the music, the tone, and the imagery. In his love for the 'Lady' Coleridge expresses his gratitude to and love for all those human beings whose heart is full of love and joy. Personal appreciation turns into romantic humanism and appreciation of the basic qualities and values of life. Glorious and divine love weds us to Nature but it is 'undreamt of the sensual and the proud'. This hatred for, the sensual and the proud, is very much in the tradition of romantic poetry.

Coleridge, like Wordsworth in his 'Immortality Ode', wistfully looks back and remembers those days when things were much better, more glorious, and without any sense of deprivation.

This memory of the lost Paradise is romantic in spirit. The poet believes that as we move away from our paradisaic state of innocence we keep on losing our spirit of imagination. We try to compensate the loss with our acquisition of knowledge but there can be no compensation of this vital thing, the creative imagination which enables us to discover the divine in nature.

In the seventh part of the poem the poet himself becomes almost delirious, a 'mad Lutanist' and in imagery free of all inhibitions tries to catch the essential spirit of the wind which can remove all 'viper thoughts'. The sudden outburst softens down in a 'tragic calm' at the end of the section where he refers to the 'tender lay' of a little child. This part of the poem reminds us of the great romantic poem of Shelley, 'Ode to the West Wind'. And the final section of an appreciation of the spiritual quality of the Lady whom the poet adores. The tone is now subdued, as if tempered by love, and this redemption in love, as in *The Ancient Mariner*, is romantic. 'Dejection', then excels as a romantic poem.

### 30.6.7 Glossary

1. Bard: The poet who composed the Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence, describing the wrecking of Sir Patrick's ship off Aberdeenshire in a fierce storm.

Weather-wise: wise about weather; one who can predict changes in weather.

4. That ply a busier trade; stronger and rougher (wind)
6. draft: blowing of air

dull sobbing draft; moisturous soft wind making a sobbing sound rakes; touches lightly

7. Aeolian lute: A musical instrument played upon by the wind (Acolus in ancient mythology was the god of wind).

Lines 6-7: 'In Romantic poetry the Aeolian lute is a standard symbol of the poet's mind worked upon by nature's inspiration (the wind), and the lute moaning to the "sobbing draft" conveys to the reader a mood of despair.' (Raymond Wilson).

9. The new moon winter bright: the new moon as bright as in winter.

9-12 The 'moon' is a favourite and significant image in Coleridge. It serves diverse purposes, always at the service of a situation or a mood. C.M. Bowra, of course, holds that in Coleridge the moon is 'a symbol of the poet's power to transform the material world of imagination.'

- 13 I see the old moon in her lap: 'the faint outline of the whole moon is seen, lit by the sunshine which the earth reflects, so that it seems as if lying in the hollow of the crescent moon.'



14. Squally blast: strong, devastating wind.  
 17. raised me : inspired me.  
 18. sent my soul abroad : enkindled my imagination.  
 9. Wanted impulse : ordinary II excitement.  
 21. pang : intense pain  
 25. Lady : (possibly) Sara Hutchinson  
 26. **Throstle** : a singing bird  
 woo'd : persuaded  
 27. balmy and serene : calm and soothing.  
 29. peculiar tint of yellow green : the western say looks yellow-green : it is a **rare** sight, superbly beautiful.  
 36. cloudless, starless lake of blue ; the clear sky.  
 37. I see, not feel : This is the real problem with the poet. Once he used to feel, and now he can only see, the beauty of nature.

### III

38. genial spirits: natural cheerfulness.  
 40. these : various, lovely, forms of nature.  
 41. smothering weight : crushing burden.  
 39-46 In the outward forms nature is very beautiful but the poet's grief, like a heavy burden, covers his heart and spirit-to-spirit contact with nature is not possible. Moreover, something has dried up within and this depletion causes his imagination lie dormant. Now with physical eyes he can see but he has no inner vision to see beyond the physical, to reach the heart of the matter and feel the life of things.

### IV

- 47-49 Nature is beautiful because we attribute beauty to **her**, and when our imagination is defunct, emotional death sets in, and then **nature is also dead** for us.  
 51 that inanimate cold world; the world of nature **full** of lifeless **objects**.  
 52 **The** poor loveless ever-anxious crowd ; suffering humanity of **teeming care-worn** millions in whose life there is no love, **no** grace.  
 53-55 Nature's beauty is **born** in the **human** soul. It means it is **human appreciation** which makes something beautiful. Beauty is not an **objective** entity, **independent** of man. But the gifted one **alone** is capable of **producing** joy in heart and thereby makes nature beautiful and enjoys that beauty. To the rest there is neither joy nor beauty.

### V

59. pure of heart : Sara whose heart is pure and innocent.  
 63. this beautiful and beauty making power: the inner creativity of the **soul** is beautiful in itself and also capable of making natural abjects beautiful by **casting** a glow of imagination on them.  
 68. Wedding Nature to us : joining nature with **human** mind.  
 69. Joy : the creative principle.  
 75. suffusion : covering

### VI

76. Dallied with distress : made light of sufferings  
 79. Fancy : imagination  
 81. Foliage : **leaves**  
 89. abstruse : metaphysical ; abstract  
 89-90 Metaphysics has deprived the poet of all natural joy  
 91. Sole resource : only pre-occupation.

92-93 Philosophical thinking was one of many pre-occupations earlier, but now it fills his total mind and has become a habit with him.

## VII

94. viper thoughts : poisonous ideas.  
95. reality's dark dream ; the dark world of nightmarish reality.  
104. Mad Lutanist : the storm as furious as an impassioned musician playing on his lute with all fury.  
106. Devil's yule : Christmas weather, with wild revelry fit for devils, Yule : the season of feast of **Christmas**. [The wind, in devillish madness, seems to be celebrating the revelry of Christmas].  
107. timorous : quivering  
108. Actor : **one** who can efficiently produce all kinds of tragic note.  
120. Otway's self: The poet Otway himself. Thomas Otway (1652-85) was a **playwright** famous for *The Orphans*-and *Venice Preserved*. A sentimental writer.

Tender lay: delicate story with tragic appeal.

[Originally the line read 'As William's self had made the tender lay'. It referred to **William** Wordsworth's tragic tale of Lucy Gray. Later, when differences with **Wordsworth** developed, Coleridge changed the name to Otway.]

## VIII

127. Vigil : wakefulness  
128. With wings of healing ; with **soft** invigorating touch.  
129. 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.' (Hollingworth).  
136. eddying : moving in a circular motion.  
135-36 May all things of the world receive life and joy from endless source of bliss.

### 30.6.8 Possible Questions

1. 'Dejection : an ode' is a dirge over the grave of creative imagination. Do you agree? Give reasons for your answer.
2. Trace the autobiographical element in 'Dejection; an Ode'.
3. Write a note on the elements of romanticism in 'Dejection: an Ode'.
4. Comment on the imagery of 'Dejection: an ode'.
5. **Analyse** the structure of 'Dejection : an Ode'.
6. Explain the following lines and state what light is thrown on Coleridge's philosophy of nature:  
O Lady! we receive but what we give,  
And in our life alone does Nature live.
7. What attitude to Nature does Coleridge express in the Ode to Dejection? In what ways does this attitude differ from **that** of Wordsworth and **from** his own earlier attitude?
8. In the 'Dejection' Ode the triumph of Coleridge as an artist consists not in transcending his neurotic state but in giving it an adequate verbal shape. Do you agree with this view?

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