

# Romanticism – samual taylor coleridge and joseph turner assignment

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In a reaction to the rational, conformist conventions of the Augustans, writers and artists of the Romantic era advocated the transcendence of rationality through a sublime and imaginative connection with the natural world. This emancipation from traditional social and moral restraints informed their literary, artistic and philosophical pursuits. It was these qualities that marked the movement as unique in the history of European intellectual discourse. Romanticism derived largely from the 'transcendental idealism' of Emmanuel Kant, which proposed that things exist outside the intellect that we simply cannot comprehend through pure reason.

Three Romantic texts ??? Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison' and 'Kubla Khan' and Joseph Turner's painting Snowstorm: steamboat off a harbour's mouth ??? reveal how the human imaginative appreciation of the natural world is able to transcend physical limitations as well as the restrictions of technology and logic. Coleridge, in particular, was a true proponent of the Romantic tradition. He described the uniting of reason and feeling as 'intellectual intuition' and saw imagination as 'the ultimate synthesising faculty, enabling humans to reconcile differences and opposites in a world of appearances. His poem 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison' clearly exemplifies the power of the imagination, combined with the redeeming and regenerative power of nature, which enables him to overcome the isolation of egotism. The intimate, personal nature of this conversation poem engages the reader as they are transported with the poet to new locations and perhaps themselves transformed. Coleridge presents an idealised view of pastoral England with vividness, intensity and delicacy, thereby stimulating the senses and the mind.

Colours used to evoke mood and imagery, 'blue betwixt two Isles Of purple shadow!' is integral throughout. His vision is visceral, bringing enlightenment and contentment to the poet and the reader. The poet also controls light intensity to great effect; binary opposites reflect his thought process, as in "pale beneath the blaze". He contrasts dark and light, pale and radiant, shadow and sunshine throughout. His thoughts also move from the finite 'dell, overwooded, narrow deep' of the first stanza to the infinite 'wide, wide heaven' of the following stanzas.

Antithetical concepts of freedom with restriction, absence with presence and the imagined with the real create a systolic and diastolic rhythm that merges Coleridge's psychological beliefs with his imaginative experience, aligning with what Kant describes as the individual's 'subjective reality'. The structure of the poem is cyclic, with emphasis on pain before pleasure, with 'well, they are gone, and here I must remain' before the later stanza that begins with 'A delight comes sudden in my heart, and I am glad as myself were there. The poet ceases feeling isolated and communes with nature, imagining that he is with his friends, before ending by referring to the lime-tree bower beneath which he sits, and to his friend, the 'gentle-hearted Charles', once again. The illumination of nature's power and its ability to transform can also be seen in another of Coleridge's poems 'Kubla Khan'. The first stanza, set inside the walls of Kubla Khan's 'pleasure dome' in Xanadu, contrasts with the second stanza which takes the reader outside those confines, reflecting the same systolic and diastolic thoughts that are evident in 'This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison'.

As Xanadu is a synonym for 'paradise' or 'utopia', the poem can be considered a reflection on Coleridge's perception of heaven, linking to the pantheistic belief that God is found in nature. 'The sacred river Alph' running through this paradise represents in the realm of a poet's imagination a holy and divine place. The 'caverns measureless to man' reflect the endless creations that can emanate from such a powerful imagination. The 'walls and towers' that encircle the fertile ground and the 'enfolding' of greenery speak of the poet's energy in trying to capture and hold onto nature's power and beauty.

The intensity of the world outside the tamed garden highlights the power of the natural world in contrast to the ultimate fragility of man-made structures. The 'dome of pleasure' built by Kubla Khan may be taken to represent the man-made and may perhaps be a comment, on a wider scale, to the Industrial Revolution. Coleridge juxtaposes this with an image of the natural flow of the river to sea, showing his greater appreciation for the creative force of nature. Joseph Turner's painting *Snowstorm; steamboat off a harbour's mouth making signals in shallow water, and going by the lead* also contrasts the natural world and the man made.

Like the eruption of the natural world in *Kubla Khan*, this painting illustrates an extreme phenomenon of nature ??? a snowstorm at sea. The Neo-Classicalists believed that technology would triumph over nature. Turner's painting, however, depicts the awesome power of nature, and its sublime beauty, as it overpowers technology. The steamboat, representing the latest

technology of the time, is a symbol for the Industrial Revolution, which was in full swing by this point.

The experience of being caught in a storm on board the steamboat, provided Turner with the conception for his painting. Turner claimed that he had the ship's sailors strap him to the mast, so as to capture the true atmospheric conditions of the event. ' I wished to show what such a scene was like' Turner wrote. ' I got the sailors to lash me to the mast to observe it [the storm]; I was lashed for hours" The sleet, the bitterly cold, roaring winds and the surging waves throwing up sea spray were the atmospheric conditions Turner needed to feel.

This personal experience of such a sublime moment in nature enabled him to record, through his painting, the feelings and emotions of an individual's experience of the storm. While Turner's original idea for the painting emanated from actual experience, its execution derives from complex imaginative truths. The painting has a very clear relief like surface and the texture is picturesque, as the brush strokes are very evident. Turner wanted to be innovative and to challenge tradition, to produce works that depict a sublime atmosphere and spirit.

The painting is an emancipatory expression through its intensity of hue, which renders the image of the boat barely recognisable, thus challenging Neo-Classical mechanistic properties of sharp colours and realism. All three texts ??? the Turner painting and the two Coleridge poems ??? depict the sublime beauty of nature and its ability to transform a negative human mind-frame and to transcend the man-made products of the Industrial Revolution.

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While the ways in which each of the individual texts show this differs, they each allow the responder to appreciate the same ideas.

Coleridge provides two different perspectives in his poems ‘ This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and ‘ Kubla Khan’. The first is an entirely first-person perspective, typical of his conversational poems, enabling the reader to become involved on a personal level. ‘ Kubla Khan’ is mainly narrated from a third-person perspective, giving it a grander story-like feel. Like “ This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison” Joseph Turner’s “ Snowstorm: steamboat off a harbour’s mouth” represents a personal appreciation of an extreme natural event.

The event is shown to be as violent as it is beautiful and the form enables the viewer to visually appreciate it and connect with it on a transcendental level. It clearly illustrates the power of the natural over the unnatural. As Northrop Frye has argued, ‘ Romanticism has brought into modern consciousness the feeling that society can develop or progress only by individualising itself, by being sufficiently tolerant and flexible to allow an individual to find his own identity within it, even though in doing so he comes to repudiate most of the conventional values of society. ‘