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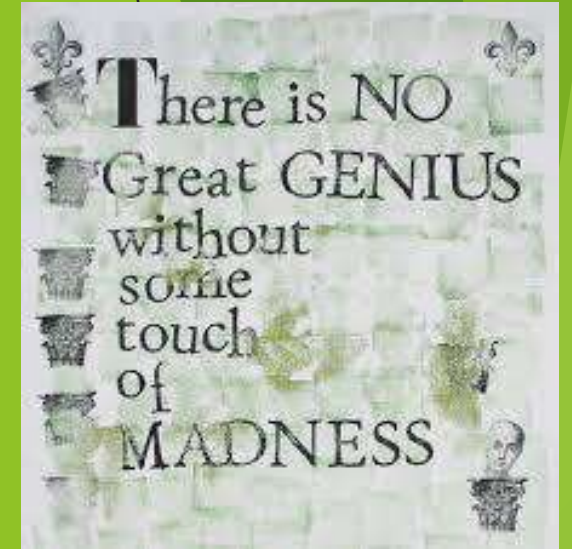
Name of Course: *CCV: British Romantic Literature*

Topic of the E-Content

**British Romantic Literature: An
Overview**

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Semester III
Paper: CCV

British Romantic Literature: An Overview



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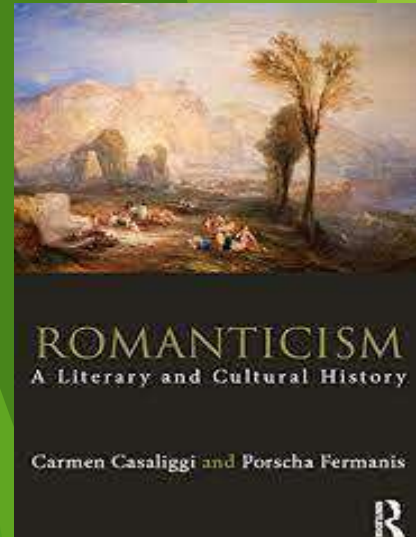
Introducing Romanticism

What is Romanticism?

Romanticism is a complex artistic, literary, and intellectual movement that originated in the second half of the 18th century in Western Europe, and gained strength during the Industrial Revolution. It was a revolt against the aristocratic, social and political norms of the Age of Enlightenment and the notion of decorum propagated by the Neo-classical poetry. It was a reaction against the scientific rationalization of nature.

Unlike “eighteenth-century,” the adjective “Romantic” denotes not just a period, but a style, a movement, a way of thinking, an “ideology,” even a way of being in the world.

The Romantic spirit can be defined as an accentuated predominance of emotional life, exercise of imaginative vision. Protest against decorum and custom which in science theology and literature generally tend to fetter the free human spirit.



7. ROMANTICISM IN ENGLISH LITERATURE (THE 19TH CENTURY)

The Plan:

1. Historical Background.
Definition of the term.
2. The Early Romanticism
a) Robert Burns
3. The Lakists
a) William Wordsworth;
b) Samuel Coleridge.
4. The Later Romantics
a) George Gordon Byron;
b) Percy Bysshe Shelley;
c) John Keats.

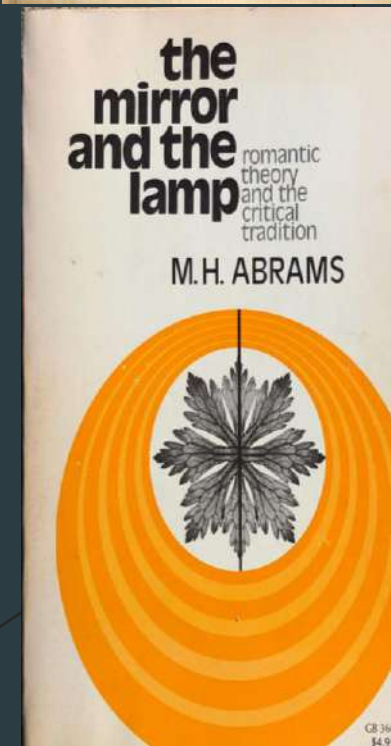
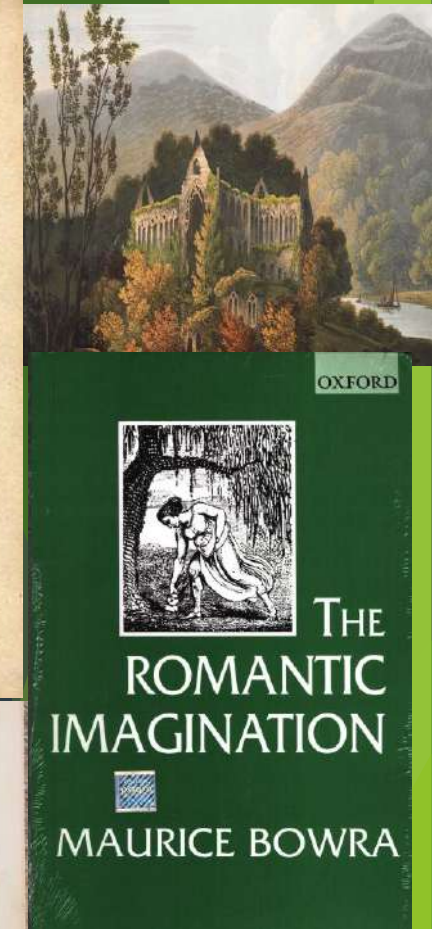
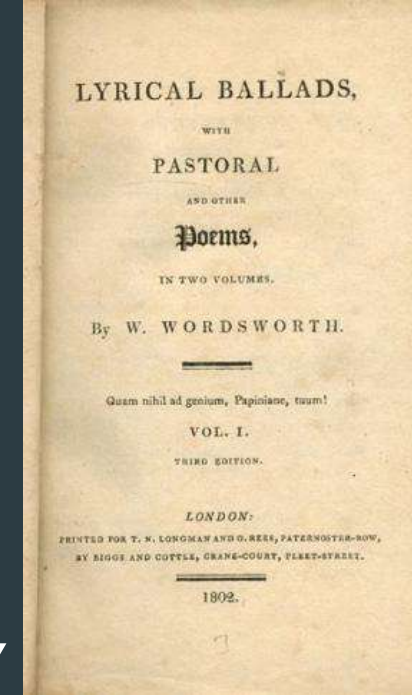
The word **romantic** has a very complex and interesting history. In the Middle Ages Enromancier, romanz meant to compose or translate books in the vernacular. The work produced was then called romanz, or romance.

A roman or romant came to be known as an imaginative work and a 'courtly romance'. The term also signified a 'popular book.' By the 17th century in Britain and France, 'romance' acquired a derogatory connotation of something fanciful and bizzare.

It was during the 18th century that the term attained new dimensions. **Friedrich Schlegel**, the German critic first used the term Romantic as a description for a school of literature in contrast to the classical school of literature at the beginning of the 19th century, which gradually attained distinction and wide acceptance and was carried forward to all the other parts of the world including England and France. He defined it as "literature depicting emotional matter in an imaginative form."

FEATURES OF ROMANTIC POETRY

1. INDIVIDUAL AND SUBJECTIVITY
2. HIGH IMAGINATION
3. LOVE FOR NATURE
4. SUPERNATURALISM
5. SIMPLICITY IN STYLE AND DICTION
6. ESCAPISM, CELEBRATION OF ISOLATION AND MELANCHOLY
7. RELIGIOSITY
8. RURAL LIFE
9. MEDIEVALISM
10. SIGNIFICANCE OF THEMES OF MEMORY, CHILDHOOD, NOSTALGIA





William Blake
(1757 – 1827)



Lord Byron
(1782 – 1824)



John Keats
(1795 – 1821)



William Wordsworth
(1770 – 1850)



Samuel Taylor Coleridge
(1772 – 1834)



Percy Bysshe Shelley
(1792 – 1822)

ROMANTIC
POETS

Some noted painters of the Romantic Age

- John Constable
- William Blake
- J.M.W. Turner



In England, Romanticism had its greatest influence from the end of the eighteenth century up to 1832. Its primary vehicle of expression was in poetry. Some famous poems included in the undergraduate syllabus

A POISON TREE.
I was angry with my friend;
I told my wrath, my wrath did end.
I was angry with my foe;
I told it not, my wrath did grow.
And I waterd it in fears,
Night & morning with my tears;
And I sunned it with smiles,
And with soft deceitful wiles.

I WANDERED lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the Milky Way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such a place and company;
I gazed—and gazed—but little thought
What wealth the show to me had brought:
For oft, when on my couch I lie
In vacant or in pensive mood,
They flash upon that inward eye
Which is the bliss of solitude;
And then my heart with pleasure fills,
And dances with the daffodils.
—William Wordsworth

CCXXIII
A slumber did my spirit seal;
I had no human fears:
She seem'd a thing that could not feel
The touch of earthly years.
No motion has she now, no force;
She neither hears nor sees;
Roll'd round in earth's diurnal course
With rocks, and stones, and trees.
W. Wordsworth

Text
edited with
Introduction,
Notes and
Explanations
**William
Wordsworth**
LONDON:
Printed by T. Dutton, Whitefriars,
25, MARK LANE.
ALBEMARLE-STREET.
**Lines
composed
a
few
miles
above
Tintern
Abbey**
S.C. Mundhra

*She walks in Beauty,
Like the Night,
By dusky Cypre
and Starry Seas.
And that is best
Of both, and bright,
None is her light,
And her Eyes
Two shadows are,
That under Light
Which leaves to
gaily Day leave.*
Lord Byron

IA OUR,
MENT OF
SH TALE.
RD BYRON.

To A Skylark
By: Percy Bysshe Shelley
Yet if we could scorn
Hate, and pride, and fear;
If we were things born
Not to shed a tear,
I know not how thy joy we ever should come near.
Better than all measures
Of delightful sound,
Better than all treasures
That in books are found,
Thy skill to poet were, thou scorner of the ground!
Teach me half the gladness
That thy brain must know,
Such harmonious madness
From my lips would flow
The world should listen then, as I am listening now.

Stanza 1
My heart aches, and a drowsy numbness pains
My sense, as though of hemlock I had drunk,
Or emptied some dull opiate to the drains
One minute past, and Lethe-wards had sunk:
'Tis not through envy of thy happy lot,
But being too happy in thine happiness,—
That thou, light-winged Dryad of the trees,
In some melodious plot
Of beechen green, and shadows numberless,
Singest of summer in full-throated ease.
Line 5 is an apostrophe to the nightingale whose happiness causes him to "singest of summer in full-throated ease". The nightingale is referred to as a "light-winged Dryad of the trees". In Greek Mythology, Dryads are the female spirits of nature (nymphs) who preside over forests and groves. The two mythological references establish a surreal mood—that state between reality and dreaming perhaps. This supports the theme that the poet wants to escape reality, and does.

*Season of mists and mellow fruitfulness,
Close bosom-friend of the maturing sun;
Come herin with her keen beam to be dressed blip
The Doves with their faint that convert the blitheness
To herin with apples the sun's rays
And fill all furrows with sunniness to the core
To smooth the river, and plump the high shales
With a white hazzel: to rob hard days more
And still more later flowers for the bees
Until they think warm days with sunny beams
For I know how her blossoms these charming cells
The light not seen thus: for the sun's rays*

*To the Skylark
And then more birds:
That from heaven or earth
Sweetest bird that
In perfect theme of unperished bliss
In the golden lighting
Of the sun's beam
In which, I feel, as in lighting
The first of the sun
The sun and stars, but yet—how the world
The first of the sun
The sun and stars, but yet—how the world*

Romanticism thus was seen as a literary movement, **a profound shift in sensibility**, which took place in Britain, and throughout Europe roughly between 1770 and 1848. Intellectually it marked a violent reaction to the enlightenment.

Politically it was inspired by the revolutions in America and France. Emotionally it expressed an extreme assertion of the self and the value of individual experience, together with the sense of the infinite and the transcendental. Socially it championed progressive causes.

No other period in English literature displays more variety in style, theme, and content than the Romantic Movement of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Furthermore, no period has been the topic of so much disagreement and confusion over its defining principles and aesthetics. **The collection of poems published as *Lyrical Ballads* in 1798 by William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) is traditionally identified as the beginning of English Romanticism.**

William Wordsworth in his *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* (1798) defined the poet as 'a man speaking to men', emphasizing on the communicative value of literature and identified poetry as the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility

In "Chapter XIV" of the *Biographia Literaria*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge discusses the nature and purposes of poetry. "*A poem is that species of composition which is opposed to the works of science by proposing for its immediate object pleasure, not truth.*"

Looking at Coleridge's

Kubla Khan

Kubla Khan

BY SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

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 momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 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 fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!

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 caves 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.

PURCHAS HIS PILGRIMES.

IN FIVE BOOKES.

The first, Contayning the Voyages and Peregrinations made
by ancient Kings, Patriarkes, Apostles, Philosophers, and
others, to and thorow the remoter parts of the knowne World:
Enquiries also of Languages and Religions, especially of the
modern diversified Protestitions of
CHRISTIANITY.

The second, A Description of all the Circum-Navigations
of the GLOBE.

The third, Navigations and Voyages of English-men, alongst the Coasts
of Africa, to the Cape of Good Hope, and from thence to the Red Sea,
the Abassine, Arabian, Persian, Indian, Shoaes,
Concinnens, and Hands.

The fourth, English Voyages beyond the East Indies, to the Islands of Japan,
China, Cutchinbina, the Philippine with others, and the Indian Navigations
further prosecuted: Their full Commerce, nobly vindicated against Turke
Treachery; victoriously defended against Portugall Hostilitie;
gloriously advanced against Moorth and Ethiope Perfidie;
truly commended against Ignorance and malicious Calumnies.

The fifth, Navigations, Voyages, Traffiques, Discoveries, of the English Nation
in the Eastern parts of the World: continuing the English-Indian occurrences,
and containing the English Affairs with the Great Siam, in the Persian
and Arabian Gulles, and in other places of the Continents, and Islands of and
beyond the Indies: the Portugall Attempts, and Dutch Difficulties,
shortly and fully set forth, and many other reasonable
RELATIONS.

By Iuan Purchas, Author. The First Part. As far as he hath been able.

Unus Deus, Una Veritas.

LONDON

Printed by William Stansby for Henrie Featherstone, and are to be sold at his shop in
Pauls Church-yard at the signe of the Rose.

1625.

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“Kubla Khan” is a lyric that evokes romanticized Oriental landscapes. Along with two other poems namely “*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*” (1798) and “*Christabel*” (1816)—it constitutes Coleridge's most significant works on supernaturalism whereby Coleridge wanted to create a “**willing suspension of disbelief**”.

The Preface with which Coleridge introduced Kubla Khan to public in 1816 raises two very important concerns

- 1) The Preface composed in the third person describes the poem as an opium induced creation, a subjective visionary experience. Coleridge claimed that he had composed it after he experienced an opium-influenced dream after reading Samuel Purchas's *Pilgrimage* describing Xanadu, the summer palace of the Mongol ruler and Emperor of China Kublai Khan. Upon waking up, he set about writing lines of poetry until he was interrupted by "a visitor from Porlock". The writer of the verse and author of the preface seem to be distanced aesthetically.
- 1) Coleridge also claims that the poem is a ‘fragment’ of 54 lines. The poem could not be completed according to its original plan as the interruption affected him. .

Kubla Khan:

OR

A VISION IN A DREAM.

OF THE
FRAGMENT OF KUBLA KHAN.

THE following fragment is here published at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity, and as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed poetic merits.

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

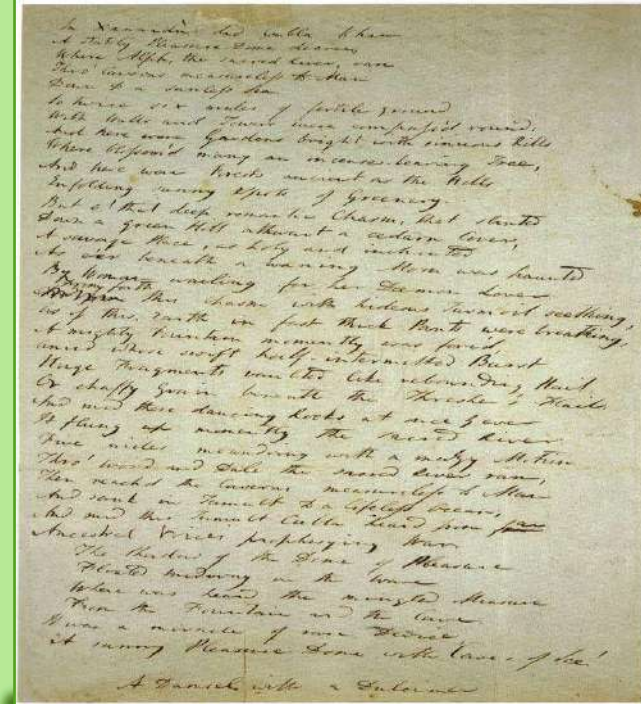
- The poem begins with a description of a magnificent palace built by the Mongolian ruler Kubla Khan during the thirteenth century. It talks about the process of creation of Paradise and ends with the relation of art with dream. The poem also alludes at the role of memory in imaginative and creative activity.
- The enormous “pleasure-dome” described in the first few lines convey a sense of grandiosity and magnificence.
- In contrast to the structured dome and its gardens, the landscape surrounding Kubla's dome is wild and untamed, covered by ancient forests. **Milton's description of the Garden brings out this Dionysian / Apollonian (natural vs civilised) contrast into play.** It is also the birthplace of the river Alph. The connection between dream-consciousness and poetic vision is an ancient allegory which can be seen in Medieval dream poetry.



In the second stanza, the tenor of the poem shifts from the balance, harmony and tranquility in the first few lines to an uncanny suggestion of the preternatural. The poem describes how a woman visits the haunted gorge and wails for her demon lover.

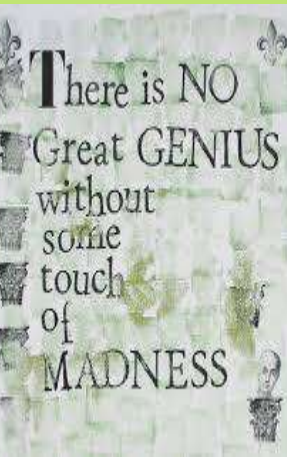
The poet then talks about how Kubla Khan's **visions are interrupted by** his ancestors "prophesying war." As the river originates like a fountain out of the chasm and runs along its meandering course, the narrative shifts from third to first person.

The poet then goes on to mention about a **vision** of an Abyssinian maiden playing dulcimer. He wishes to recount the sense of power that exudes from successful poetic creation. It is with this dream and unfulfilled wish that the poem suddenly comes to an end.





Coleridge refers to the Platonic idea of creation in the poem an idea wherein Plato felt that poets were endowed with spiritual powers of divinity which enobled them and made them **visionaries and creative geniuses**. The poem sets before us two antithetical territories of the imagination and shows a way of blending the contraries together, as though a fuller kind of creativity should partake of both. The blending happens, not in the objective world, but within an act of consciousness.

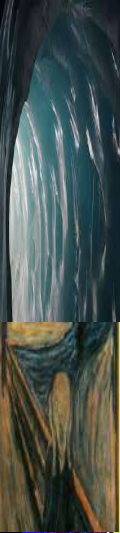


The contrasted image serves to situate the setting of the poem to a realm that does not actually exist on earth but possible only in dreams or the poetic imagination, only a dreamer can reconcile the **opposing binaries** together. The river Alph gets lost for ever into the lifeless ocean. The images become symbolic evocation of life and death. The lively, sacred river fuses with the lifeless ocean and meets with it end, as the journey of life comes to a final closure.

The form of the dome creates an impression of sublimity due to its spherical shape. "Alph, the sacred river" originates from the tumult under the earth and runs in a meandering course before it merges with the sunless sea. The river becomes a metaphor of life and poetic creativity that originates from the depths of darkness. It could be symbolic that Coleridge picked the name of the river as Alph since it represents the first letter of the Greek alphabet (Alpha), which symbolises the Beginning; the origin of life.



The tone of the final stanza changes suddenly. The intrusion of the narrative "I" in the epilogue contributes to the dissociation of the content of the epilogue from the vision. The poetic persona claims that the revival of the maiden's song would enable him to recreate Kubla's magical pleasure



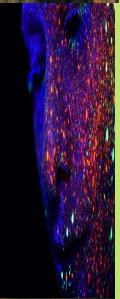
Coleridge makes use of the dream within dream format to suggest that maiden's song is the inspiration for the dome. Only the inspired artist would be able to hear it. The world would look at him with awe for his visionary powers. The poem shows how the ideal creator, ideal poet, ideal creation are fused and blended together.

The stone shattering the image of the shadow and the visitor from Porlock are presented as hindrances to imagination and they remind us of Blake's portrayal of Urizen as an inflexible authoritarian figure.

Coleridge wanted to refer to the Platonic idea of creation whereby the artist is viewed as an inspired genius, whom many regard as madman as well. Genius, madness and creativity bear close associations to each other.

In *Absalom and Achitophel* Dryden wrote 'Great wits are sure to madness near allied,/ And thin partitions do their bounds divide' to bring out the close association between madness and creativity.

Men have called me mad', wrote Edgar Allan Poe, 'but the question is not yet settled, whether madness is or is not the loftiest intelligence—whether much that is glorious—whether all that is profound—does not spring from disease of thought—from moods of mind exalted at the expense of the intellect. In modern psychiatry these conditions would be recognized as bi-polar mood disorder in its gentle form to acute schizophrenia in its extreme state. Studies have revealed that William Blake, Byron, Tennyson, Lewis Carroll, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Jonathan Swift, Leonardo Da Vinci, Vincent Van Gogh, Balzac, Sylvia Plath, Anne Sexton, Tennessee Williams and several others were affected with some form of mental illness or the other.

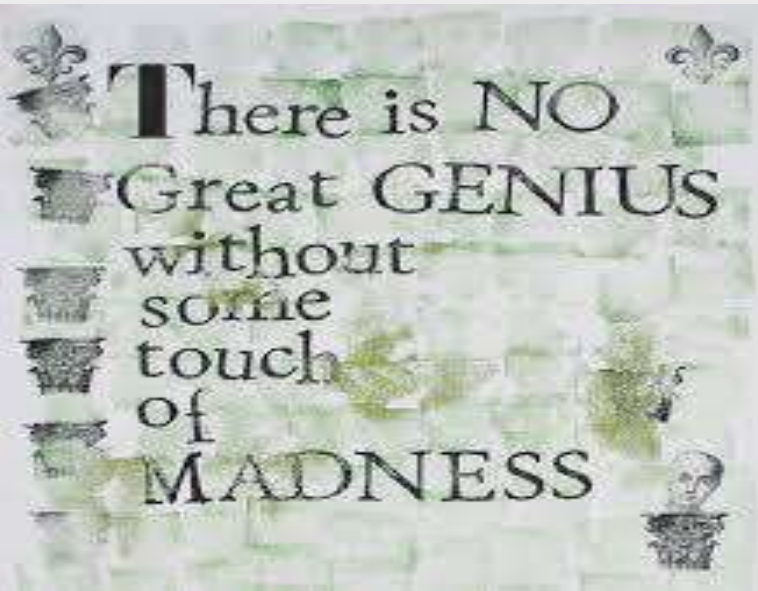


Madness and creativity

- Madness, according to Greeks like Plato was essential to creativity for it was a gift from heaven. Madness, was nobler than sober sense, for ‘madness came directly from God whereas sober sense was merely human.’
- Plato claimed that he who came ‘to the doors of poetry untouched by madness of the muses, believing that technique alone would make him a good poet’ was wrong for ‘he and his sane compositions [would] never reach perfection but [would be] utterly eclipsed by the performances of the inspired madman. For many Greeks madness was an inducement to prophecy and poetry. Possession was seen as hallmark of sub-divinity rather than a cause of dangerous contagion. In his *Ion* Plato declared that ‘all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed.’ The poet, according to him, was ‘a tender, virgin soul stimulated into rapt passion,’ a ‘light winged holy thing’ who had no invention in him until he had



Notion of Vision and Visionary



The role of the poet as an inspired artist received a new momentum in Romantic poetics. The poet was not only regarded as a **visionary artist** but also seen as a **tormented outcast**.

The notion of the 'furor poeticus' was integral to the Western conception of lyric poetry. It was believed that a poet was literally possessed by 'frenzy' or 'ecstasy' bequeathed by God during the act of creativity. The world failed to understand the mania which inspires his genius and looked at him with awe and wonder.

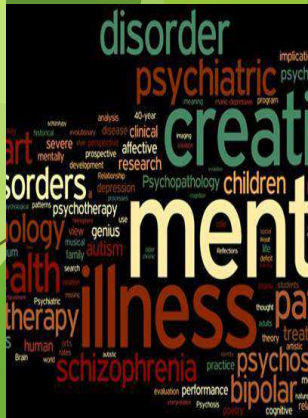
The visitor on business from Porlock whom Coleridge mentions in the Preface to his poem may be a fictional personification of the inhibiting factors interrupting the recovery of the whole inspiration. The visitor becomes a symbolic manifestation of reality which impedes the poet's visionary flights. The poem ends with an intrusion of the narrative "I" longing to re-create and revive a lost vision. He knew as a poet he would still reach closer to Kubla's

The age of Enlightenment prohibited and curbed all forms of mania and delirium as detrimental to life and society and insisted on rules decorum and order. The Romantic Imagination is symbolically represented as a challenge that breaks through all surface and emerges from the ground in the image of the fountain which bursts out of the depths of the earth, in the same way as poetry originates from the depths of human consciousness.

The role of the poet as 'mad genius' was established within Christian Humanism, which fostered the notion of 'good madness.'

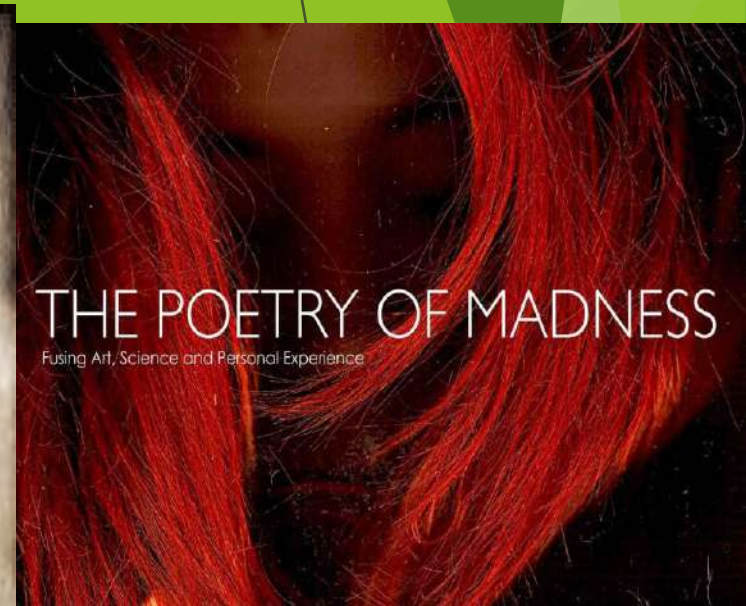
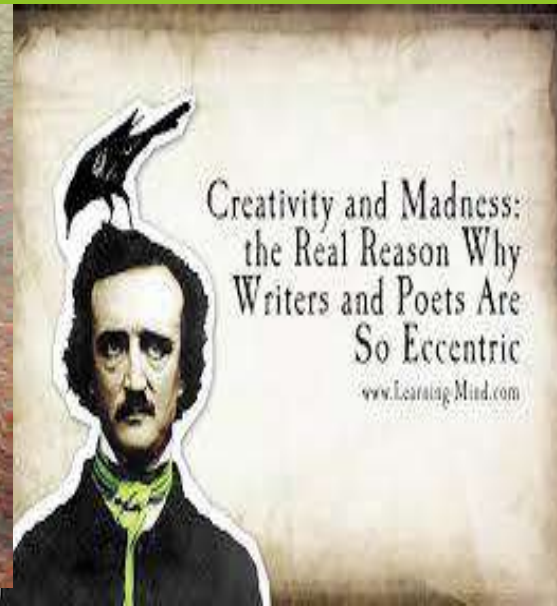
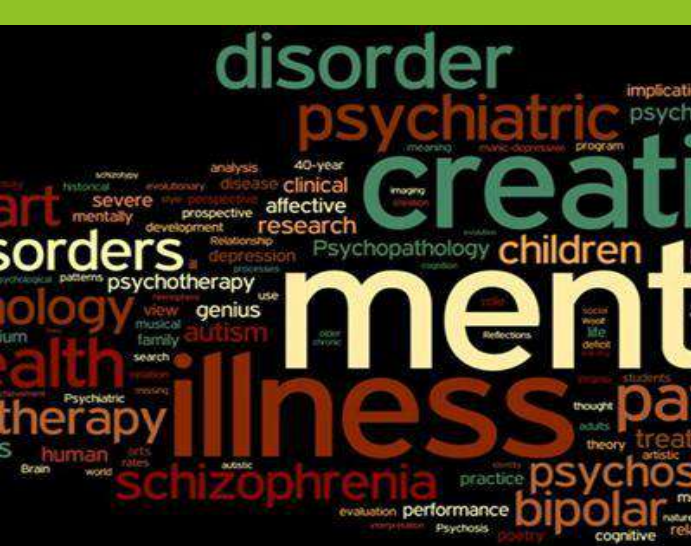
Madness has always been fraught with a duality. On the one hand it was regarded as a liberating principle conducive to creativity yet at the same time it was secluded from the community of reason and sought to be silenced by the 'agencies of reason,' other,.

Although 'poetry of madness' appears to be a self-contradictory term, yet there exists a possible link between its two components. In a state of insanity, unconscious processes predominate over conscious ones and determine the responses to experiences. So the inspired poet would approximate the miracle which was left unfinished by the royal grandeur.



The poetic voice in the poem *Kubla Khan* claims that the inspired artist would evoke awe and wonder among others and people would be wary of his presence for people would not be able to comprehend his visionary insights. Coleridge alludes to the debate between madness and genius and how the world fails to discriminate one from the other.

The notion of madness always carries a double implication. Whereas, on the one hand, it emphasizes a state of possession and inspiration, yet, at the same time, it seeks to challenge the notion of order and established codes of conduct so people look at it with apprehension and doubt.



The dream about Xanadu is an inspired vision- the artist's purpose is to capture such vision in words. In attempting to do so, the poet encounters two serious difficulties: first, he realizes that language is an inadequate medium to recreate paradise; second, the visions themselves, by the time the poet attempts to write about them, gets faded into oblivion and have to be reconstructed from memory. Between the conception and the execution falls the shadow. The fragmented images cohere to form a unified vision of transcended reality. This is the crux of Coleridge's concept of poetry- to stimulate a coherence of apparently discordant sensations. It is a poem about poetic creation as well. The man who has "drunk the milk of paradise" is the inspired poet, though he is admired by all yet in reality he is actually an isolated figure caught within his innermost core of imaginative awareness.

Sources/ Further Readings

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Questions for assignment

1. When and how did the Romantic Period formally begin in England?
2. Name some noted painters of the Romantic period.
3. What did Coleridge claim in the Preface to *Kubla Khan*?
4. Who mentioned the term *furor poeticus*? What does it mean?
5. What do you mean by the term subjectivity? Name any important poem of Wordsworth which depicts a subjective consciousness.