The Dejection Ode:
Clinical Depression & the Sound-Light Struggle

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Abstract

Coleridge's "Dejection: An Ode" can be clinically read as a resonant expression of his suffering from major depression at the time when he wrote his Ode. In this poem, he complains of perceptive failure, emotional barrenness and spiritual inertia, which have brought about disconnection between him and his surroundings. Therefore, while still fully aware of Nature's physical beauty, he feels deprived of the inner power to interact with it. Besides, he is stripped by his depressive disorder of his creative mental powers, especially his faculty of imagination.

The present study highlights the symptoms of Coleridge's clinical depression in the Dejection Ode, and explores how Coleridge expresses his psychological infirmity in terms of failure to respond feelingly to Nature. The study makes an interpretation of what Coleridge means by the muteness of his soul's voice, and the lack of his inner light, and draws special attention to the significance of sound and light in the Ode, and to the presence, the progression and the interplay of these two factors, both

internally and externally. Taking note of these two factors in play through the Ode, the study finally clarifies how the depressed Coleridge manages to overcome his dejection by means of his re-vitalised power of imagination.

The Context of the Ode's Composition

At a time when he felt defeated by troubles and frustrations, Coleridge composed his "Dejection: An Ode" in April 1802. A succession of physical illnesses had kept him bedridden for much of 1801 and the early months of 1802 – for which reason, he had repeatedly expressed his belief in his letters of 1801 that he was dying. Bad health contributed in both Coleridge's poverty and his growing reliance upon opium, which he took regularly to overcome severe physical pains, and maybe to escape psychological anguish, as well. As a result of his consequent addiction to opium, he suffered from a severe sense of guilt, from the exhaustion of his mental powers, and from an eventual conviction that he was losing his creative power of imagination and, with it, his poetic expression. Simultaneously, Coleridge lived in marital discord, which resulted in a strong realisation that he could live neither with his wife nor without his children – a realisation that filled him with regret for not being able to live up to his expressed belief in the

"indissolubleness" of his marriage, nor to his responsibilities of fatherhood.

Coleridge's physical, economic, social and psychological problems were accompanied, even more effectively, by his serious concern over the unfortunate breach that was continually growing between him and his inspirer and best friend William Wordsworth. Unluckily, this breach was increasingly isolating him from the Grasmere circle (the intimate intellectual and literary circle of the Wordsworths and the Hutchinsons, who lived in the neighbourhood, and amongst whom he felt most at home)[1]. Moreover, a most serious cause for Coleridge's dejection at that time was his overwhelming yet hopeless love for Sara Hutchinson. The totality of all these troubles and misfortunes ultimately affected Coleridge so strongly that they made him believe in the death of his poetic gift, due to his "keenly developed sensitivity and insight, a sixth sense about himself that allowed him to arrive at such conclusions" (Siferd, 1995).

The Ode was first written on the 4th April 1802, in the form of an anguished verse-letter addressed and sent to Sara Hutchinson, revealing Coleridge's desperate love for her (whom he affectionately called Asra), grumbling about his discontentment with his wife, and bitterly complaining of the decline of his poetic powers. Undergoing a number of revisions, however, the letter was carefully reworked into the Ode's final

version, eliminating conflicting emotions and self-pity, so that "we could see at last what he *really* meant to say in the work" (Stillinger, 1994: 99). The final version first appeared in print in 1817 [2], reshaped to be an autonomous, coherent poem on the decline of Coleridge's imaginative powers, on his mental-spiritual failure, on his loss of interaction with Nature, and on his hopeless gloom. Thus reworked, it gave a direct, comprehensive response to Wordsworth's open queries in the "Ode: Intimations of Immortality" – which, written only a month earlier, had wondered about the loss of earth's "celestial light," its "glory" and its "visionary gleam," and had thus corresponded, though unintentionally maybe, to Coleridge's own condition at that time.

Although much revised by Coleridge to appear as impersonal as possible, "Dejection: An Ode" speaks so outspokenly and in such a confiding voice that the biographical element in it is unavoidable. Despite the multiple revisions that it underwent, made especially with the purpose of removing, reducing, or at least modifying the too personal elements in it (such as Sara's name, and hints of Coleridge's domestic displeasure), a careful analysis of the poem's final version still reveals abundant evidence of Coleridge's personal life. The removal or modification of intimate social evidence has indeed not rid the Ode of private

psychological evidence, obviously due to the highly subjective nature of the work.

The Dejection Ode lucidly expresses Coleridge's mental-emotional disturbance at the time of its composition. It is indeed the cry of a clinically depressed soul. It unmistakeably exhibits symptoms of the case that is psychiatrically known as major depression. This kind of depression is usually caused by a number of contributory factors [3.] Among these factors are: stress of every kind, feelings of helplessness, low self-esteem, and lack or loss of a supportive social network. The symptoms of this kind of depression are, generally speaking: intense feelings of dejection, loss, failure and rejection, plus feelings of disappointment, hopelessness and guilt. To these persistent mood disorders, other characteristics of major depression may be added: irritability, inactivity, difficulty in thinking and concentration, and lack of interest in outside events and objects. Ultimately, a depressed person gets "locked into a trance-like state… [becoming] emotionally aroused with negative emotions" (Tyrrell & Elliott, n.d.).

In the Dejection Ode, all these symptoms are observable on Coleridge, as the present study demonstrates. At times, they are found squarely expressed. In other instances, they are either decipherable through symbolism (the wind and the wind harp), or are traceable (as this

study propounds) through the presence, the progression and the interplay of sound and light throughout the poem.

Tracing Coleridge's Mental-Emotional State in the Ode

Using the flexible form of the Pindaric ode, which allows for irregular stanza and line length, the fluctuation of the rhyme pattern, and the variation of the metrical movement, which quickens or slackens with the emotional intensity of the verse (Holman and Harmon, 1992: 329), the Ode begins in a confiding tone, with Coleridge's disclosure of his thoughts and emotions to an intimate yet unspecified addressee, who in the second verse paragraph appears to be some "Lady". To this "Lady" (who could be Sara Hutchinson, as in the original version, or any other female character), Coleridge analyses his overwhelming depression. Within his complaint, two epithets of special significance stand out: that his inexpressible grief is "unimpassioned" (l. 22) and that his mood is "heartless" (l. 25). Obviously, what Coleridge complains of here is emotional dryness. As an outer reflection of this inner barrenness, he hears (in ll. 6-7) the "sobbing" of a "dull" draught "moaning" through the wind harp next to him. That "dull" draught (equivalent to his "*dull* pain" of l. 20) is so pathetic that, to his ear, it "better far were mute" (l. 8). Thus, starting from the poem's first verse epigraph, the wind's *sound*

takes its momentous position throughout the Ode as an external echo for Coleridge's internal voice, the voice of his despondent soul [4].

When the poem begins, Coleridge's internal voice of grief is "stifled" in his chest (l. 22), and "finds no natural outlet, no relief / In word, or sigh, or tear" (ll. 23-24). Correspondingly, the wind's moan through the wind harp is "stifled" with pain and self-pity. He hence prays for a wild storm to blow out there in the open world, with a loud scream that would release his soul from its confinement, and relieve his heart. In the past, Coleridge recalls, whenever he felt low-spirited, he would be healed by the wild *sounds* of Nature, which he wishes to be heard now – namely, the "swelling" gust (l. 15) and the "loud" night shower (l. 16). It is such powerful "sounds" of Nature (l. 17) that used to "raise" him, "awe" him, and "send [his] soul abroad" on flights of imagination (ll. 17-18). It is therefore not enough for him, in the far depths of his present dejection, to hear the song of a thrush (l. 26) in order to get the impulse that may raise his spirits and make his feelings "move and live" (l. 20). Rather, he finds himself encouraged by the appearance of the new moon (ll. 9-14), and by the superstition in the "Ballad of Sir Patrick Spence" related to this sight, to wish that a rainy storm would presently blow with real loud, tempestuous sounds that may "perhaps their wonted impulse

give" (l. 19). Thus only may his depressed soul find an outlet for its "stifled" voice, and have an eruption of its lethargic feelings.

In parallel with the complementarity of Coleridge's inner voice and the sound of the wind, the Ode brings into play reciprocity between Coleridge's inner light and the natural lights beyond. Due to the "darkness" of his grief at the poem's outset (l. 21), he fails to respond emotionally to the "winter-bright" new moon that is "overspread with phantom light" (ll. 9-11). Nor does his "blank eye" (l. 30), in his present "wan and heartless mood" (l. 25), allow him to respond duly to the western twilight, which is unnaturally green (ll. 28-29 and 42-44), or to the sparkling of the stars above him (ll. 32-34). Although aware that he is actually still capable of perceiving the beauty of nature, and is still capable of acknowledging and cherishing natural sources of light as being "all so excellently fair" (ll. 31-38), he complains that he fails to respond to them feelingly: "I see, not *feel*, how beautiful they are" (l. 38, emphasis added). Such failure definitely marks a cataclysmic loss for someone who gives spiritual perception priority over sensory perception, for someone, like Coleridge, who believes in the supremacy of "inner senses" over physical senses [5].

This leads Coleridge, in a clear surge in the tone of the dramatic monologue, to elaborate further on his inability to *feel* Nature. He explains that his "genial spirits" (l. 39) (meaning his innate emotional and mental powers, which used to keep him attached to Nature [6]) now fail him, and are therefore ineffective in lifting "the smothering weight" that burdens his heart (ll. 39-41). The result of this spiritual failure is the hopeless futility of his natural contemplation. All the variety of "outward forms" in Nature, and all the beautiful manifestations of sound and light in it, no more have the power to help him in his distress, however hard and long should he contemplate them now (ll. 42-46).

Wisely enough, Coleridge realises that the reason behind the lack of spiritual communication between him and Nature is no problem with Nature – which he admits not to have lost its spiritual power [7]. Rather, unable to "proceed from the SELF" (as he describes it in the *Biographia Literaria*, chap. XII: 186) due to his mental and emotional exhaustion, he feels that he stands outside the affinity which exists between natural elements, unable to participate spiritually in the "one Life." The clinically depressed Coleridge is obviously full of feelings of dejection and rejection. He is also full of the feelings of failure, loss and hopelessness. It is his hopeless loss of inward liveliness, he believes, that lies behind his

failure to respond to Nature. He contends that he has irretrievably lost that inner power in him that should make him rightly responsive to life. And the result, typically, is a terrible sense of inactivity and a regretful lack of interest in outer stimulation – as he "may not hope from outward forms to win / The life and passion whose fountains are within" (ll. 45-46). Thus is he locked up into the state of depression, and is emotionally aroused with nothing but negative thoughts and emotions.

In the fourth verse paragraph, Coleridge further carries his philosophical argument by elucidating to his "Lady" that the relationship between man and Nature is reciprocal. He tells her that "we receive but what we give, / And in our life alone does Nature live" (ll. 47-48). He says it is we who entitle Nature to affect us – "Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud" (l. 49). And (in lines that interestingly bring the interplay of sound and light to more attention) he explains this further by stating that our spiritual readiness to interact with Nature and to receive messages from it is a prerequisite for catching hold of Nature's spiritual power:

> *Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth*
> *A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud*
> *Enveloping the Earth—*
> *And from the soul itself must there be sent*
> *A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,*
> *Of all sweet sounds the life and element.* (ll. 53-58, emphasis added)

In order to be able to perceive Nature feelingly, light and melody must come forth from within one's very soul. Sweet sounds in Nature, he says, lack life and substance in one's ears without that "sweet and potent voice" of one's very soul.

Until this point, Coleridge does not name the spiritual element that is essential for him to regain the glorious light and melody of his soul, and then to regain interaction with an active, living Nature – not the "cold, inanimate world" that miserable people know (l. 51-52). Consequently, he resolves in the next paragraph to specify this missing "element" that would enable him to "behold [things] of higher worth" (l. 50) in Nature. This "sweet voice" (ll. 57 and 71), "this strong music" that needs be produced "in the soul," (l. 60), this "light" and "luminous cloud" (ll. 54-55, 62 and 71) that must issue forth from the soul to envelop the world in "glory" (l. 62), and this "beautiful and beauty-making power" (l. 63), he then states, is nothing but "Joy".

In an explanatory note on the meaning of the word "Joy" for Coleridge, the cyber Norton edition of the poem [8] states that "Coleridge often uses [it] for a sense of abounding vitality and of harmony between one's inner life and the life of nature." Thus, Coleridge enthusiastically clarifies to his "Lady" that Man's vital harmony with nature, is what, in man's eyes, dresses "wedding Nature" of line 68 with her "wedding

garment" of line 49, and makes him see both Earth and Heaven in an enlightened way (l. 69). This is the power that in "Dejection: An Ode" Coleridge lacks; it is, in a sense, the opposite of depression. If he only manages to "rejoice" as he used to do in the past, by reviving this Man-Nature harmony in himself, then from his "rejoicing" would "[flow] all that charms or ear or sight" (l. 72-3). The regeneration of the "voice" and "light" of "joy" inside him would make him insightfully aware of, and rightly responsive to, every beautiful element of Nature, whether heard or seen, as "All melodies [are but] the echoes of that *voice*, / All colours a suffusion from that *light*" (ll. 74-5, emphasis added).

A problem arises here with Coleridge's failure to find this "Joy" inside him, and then to be able to pour forth his own "light" and "voice." In lines 64-65, he states that the power of "Joy" "ne'er was given, / Save to the pure; and in their purest hour." The "Lady" whom he addresses is one who is "pure of heart" (l. 59), and is hence liable to respond to Nature. He himself, though, in his persistently impure mood, is not such any more, he thinks. This reveals by implication that the clinically depressed Coleridge feels that he has been denied the blessing of "Joy" for probably being unworthy of it – hence has he long been dogged, he thinks, by "visitations" (l. 84) [9]. He thus expresses an unmistakeable attitude of low self-esteem. This, along with other contributory factors of

depression, inspires Coleridge with his negative feelings of helplessness. It hence causes him yet another typical symptom of depression, which is mental exhaustion. He complains of this in terms of the "suspension" of his mental faculty of imagination (l. 86).

Coleridge begins the sixth verse paragraph with a wistful memory of the time when he still owned his active power of imagination. "Fancy" – as he presently (l. 79) calls that power – once filled his world with hope, and made him "dreams of happiness," even out of his very adversities:

> *And all misfortunes were but as the stuff*
> *Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:*
> *For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,*
> *And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.* (ll. 78-81)

Among things that his imagination supported him with, in the past, was enabling him to live the happy experiences of others, and to get joy from the fanciful sharing of other people's joy. But that time is gone; and Coleridge's imagination has ceased to be, he laments. He no more owns what M. H. Abrams (1958: 68) calls "the reciprocating power of the mind" that may raise his soul through awareness of life, of beauty, and of happiness in the natural world around him.

Here, Coleridge gives two reasons for the diminution of his imagination. The first is the so many "afflictions" that he has been through. These have not only deprived him of his "mirth," but also, and

more importantly to him, "suspended" his "shaping spirit of Imagination" (ll. 82-86). The second reason is his "abstruse research" into philosophy, theology and metaphysics, which has consumed his mind, and has taken away "From [his] own nature all the natural man" (l. 90). This "abstruse research" was once Coleridge's escape from a horrific reality; it was, he says, his "sole resource" and "only plan" (l. 91) in order "not to think of what [he] needs must feel, / But to be still and patient" (ll. 87-88). But what has happened is that the cold matter-of-factness and dry logic of the philosophical approach have supplanted a big portion of the tender feelings, the spontaneity and the creativeness of Coleridge's old, imaginative mind-set, to the extent that they have "almost grown the habit of [his] soul" (ll. 92-93). In the final analysis, his imagination has ended up no more capable of helping him obtain the spiritual uplift of which he is in dire need at this stage.

Coleridge is thus left alone with "viper thoughts" of depression and hopelessness that "coil around [his ailing] mind" (l. 94). Still without inner light, he suffers amidst "Reality's *dark* dream" (l. 95). Yet, with a move that feels like a sudden awaking, he turns away impulsively from that "dark dream" of his "reality" to what is more substantially real around him – to the sound of the wind harp in his window. Again, it is response to sound that serves as his psychological gauge. It suddenly

attracts his attention that the wind (which he earlier wishes would blow) has actually "long... raved unnoticed" (l. 97). However, it upsets him that this hoped-for wind is producing nothing better than "a scream / Of agony by torture lengthened out" (ll. 98-99). To his great disappointment, the wind's sound through the musical instrument is violently mournful; it only obsessively echoes the anguish inside him, instead of driving it away. In fact, it only brings him thoughts that are maybe darker and more painful (Beer 1959: 90).

Coleridge therefore turns to addressing the wind in an aggressive manner, telling it that it would be more befitting of it to blow in remote, deserted places (ll. 99-103), far away from him and his wind harp. Imagining those wild scenes (ll. 100-3), he plunges into motley descriptions of the wind that he apostrophises – all descriptions of which pre-eminently revolve around the wind's shrill, eerie sound (ll. 104-9). Resentfully, he first personifies this wind as a "Mad Lutanist" who sings of icy desolation in the middle of a richly flourishing vernal scene (l. 107). Next, the wind is visualised as an "Actor" who is "perfect" in weeping and lamentation only, and in moving others to such feelings, and then as a "mighty Poet" who is brazen in expressing frenzy and anguish (ll. 109-16). Remarkably, by thus addressing the wind (whose sound is the external echo for his own internal voice), Coleridge sees in himself

the Lutanist, the Actor, and the Poet described. He confronts himself as having become good at nothing but expressing remorse and self-pity, unable as he is to respond to Nature's beauty, nor even to the formerly pined-for rainy blast. For now he finds the sound of that blast greatly distressing, once telling of men trampled in a battlefield (ll. 112-113), and then of a tumultuously rushing mob (ll. 115-16) – both scenes being characterised by anarchy, pain, shuddering, and much groaning. Such is the inner sound of his resentful soul at that stage.

Soon next, however, after a sudden "pause of deepest silence" (l. 114), the wind unexpectedly slows down, and its sound turns softer, "less deep and loud" (l. 117); and Coleridge correspondingly witnesses an unexpected drop in his self-centredness. The wind's tale now becomes a "tale of less afright," and is, more significantly, one that is "tempered with delight" (ll. 118-119) – in other words, mitigated with a sense of "Joy," or maybe some degree of amusement. Although it is hard to see how this tale is characterised by any of that, such it sounds at least to Coleridge's anxious ears. What Coleridge hears the wind singing now (instead of the wind harp's screams of agony and torture, and of all the groaning and shuddering of miserable souls that it conveyed to his ears earlier) is a "tender lay." It is a musical piece about the innocent moans and screams of a little girl, alone, crying for her mother because lost,

although she is "[n]ot far from home" (ll. 120-125). Such, understandably, feels his soul at this stage. His present need for the inspiring "Joy" of old is much like that poor child's desperate yearning for its mother—nor is its mother truly far away, he now realises.

Strangely, Coleridge himself admits the poor quality of this story. He mocks its melodramatic nature. He compares it to the exaggerated tragedies for which the 17th-century dramatist Thomas Otway was famous (l. 120). He actually feels so shocked by his own mawkish self-pity that he is suddenly awakened to the reality of his state and the reality around him, is driven out of his self-centredness, and is made suddenly aware of warm, unselfish feelings inside him. Here, the earlier-pined-for sound of the storm is at last heard, to "raise" Coleridge and "send [his] soul abroad" (ll. 17-18). And with the aid of his re-activated imagination, he hears that inner "music" that wafts his spirits above apathy, ennui, and imaginative paralysis, away from his self-obsessed confinement (see Barth 1988: 98-99). While conversing with the wind (and by implication, with his own soul speaking through the wind), Coleridge, unawares and by degrees, transcends his "grief," and is, at least for the moment, rid of his depression.

Although it is midnight at this stage, the freshly healed Coleridge, euphoric at his own self-release, has no desire to sleep. Rather, with his

relieved soul, he wants to stay fully conscious, in order to enjoy his present spiritual uplift, and to keep vigil over his "Lady," acting like her own guardian angel. Celebrating the power of Joy after so many years of depression, he now wishes his "Lady" everything that is opposite to the state of depression, which he has long suffered from. Kindly and tranquilly, he turns the storm into a "mountain-birth" for her, acting contrary to the state of spiritual death and the black ideas of depression. He sends her "gentle Sleep," flying "with wings of healing" (ll. 126-8), relieving her of every possible cause of grief or pain. That "gentle Sleep" is opposite to the torturous sleeplessness and the agonizingly disturbed sleep that are characteristic of depressed souls. He lights "all the stars" in the heavens brightly above her dwelling, to watch silently over her (ll. 130-31). Unlike their sparkling above him and the new moon's brightness in the first verse paragraph, their light will shine full of life for her every night. And he finally showers her, while soundly asleep, with passionate prayers.

Coleridge's warm wishes for his "Lady" eventually bring him and her to daylight. When day breaks, she will still enjoy his blessing. She will wake up endowed with all shapes of "Joy":

With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,

Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice. (ll. 132-134, emphasis added)

These unselfish wishes actually describe Coleridge's moment of breaking the vicious cycle of clinical depression through a "cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal" act (Tyrrell & Elliott). He excitedly reflects his release from depression onto his "Lady". He wishes that "simple spirit, guided from above" (l. 137) what he realises to be most significant for a happy, stable life. The "light heart" he wishes her is the opposite of his depressed heart in line 41, burdened with "the smothering weight" of dejection. Her "gay fancy" (reminiscent of his own in the past, which used to make him "dreams of happiness" in line 79) will always be the opposite of his "spirit of Imagination" that was earlier suspended, in line 86. Her "cheerful eyes" will perceive life and beauty feelingly, with the inner light of joy, unlike his "blank" eyes of the second and third verse paragraphs. Similarly, she will always be able to feelingly hear the melody of creation, as joy will always "attune her voice," and make it pour forth, to give "life and element" to "all sweet sounds" in Nature (ll. 56-58). Finally, with joy "lift[ing] her spirit", her soul will always be fresh, active and free, unlike the imprisoned soul that once struggled long and hard inside him to find release (ll. 17-20). With that spirit, that heart and those senses, she will always be perceptively and interactively

attached to the life of Nature: "To her may all things live, from pole to pole, / Their life the eddying of her living soul" (ll. 135-136).

A Record of Psychological Victory

The Dejection Ode has proved itself to be among Coleridge's masterpieces. In fact, many critics find it the most significant of his poems. E. M. Bewley (1940: 420), for example, believes that it is "the most important poem that Coleridge has left behind;" and that it is Coleridge's "most mature and accomplished production". E. L. Griggs, in his headnote to "A Letter," believes the Ode to be "a work of art with a timeless and universal significance" (Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, 2:790). Indeed, besides its poetic accomplishment, the Ode has more than one issue of import about it. Interestingly, Coleridge's very process of memorialising the failure of his power of imagination in the poem turns after all into a documentation of this power coming back to life in him (See Abrams 1957: 39). Even more significantly, Coleridge's lamented "dejection" is gradually overcome through the poem, by virtue of his revived power of "Joy". This "dejection" changes into graceful selflessness, whereby Coleridge manages to become one more time "Awake to Love and Beauty" – to use Coleridge's own words in his "Reflections on Having Left a lace of Retirement" (l. 64).

The Ode's final movement from darkness to light, from stormy night to calm day, is most telling. In the last verse paragraph, light is celebrated. It initially fills the noble heart of the "Lady," and thence overflows to fill the scene in lines 132-34 (indeed, her heart itself when she wakes up is "light," if a play on the word is to be considered here). Yet, this inner and outer light and this lightness of the heart and spirit cannot arguably be thus celebrated by Coleridge without his personal involvement, heart and soul, in the scene, and in the joyful experience of his "Lady." It is certainly striking that the very last word in a poem that records personal depression, the word whose resonance should remain after the poem is over, is the word "rejoice" – as the "Lady" will "ever, evermore rejoice" (l. 139).

A number of critics have found the end of "Dejection: An Ode" a fully victorious one. J. R. de J. Jackson (1980: 960), for one, finds it "calm, even hymn-like in its final lines, and we are made to feel that the fit of despondency, like the storm, has passed." E. Kessler (1979: 13-14) finds that what Coleridge himself undergoes in this conclusion is projected onto another person who stands for Coleridge's "ulterior consciousness", in this instance his "Lady", for whom his wish is, at the moment, true of himself. A similar reading is offered by R. Parker (1975:

208), who finds that the poet's blessing upon his "Lady" is the means for his release from distress.

Conclusion

"Dejection: An Ode" is a remarkable document for reading Coleridge from a psychiatric point of view. It vividly depicts the symptoms of major depression that he was suffering from, and it further depicts him breaking the vicious cycle of clinical depression through a "cognitive, behavioural and interpersonal" act. His self-absorption, his negative view of himself and his abilities, his pessimistic view about his losses, his inertia and ennui, and all the other symptoms of depression that he expresses, all are witnessed dissolved at a moment of sudden awaking, an epiphany which comes to him after an unplanned and unexpected flight of the creative imagination.

It may be argued that the Dejection Ode is "a record of great loss and partial restoration" (Hill 1983: 189), that Coleridge's final recovery is only timid, limited and temporary. However, his final emotional-psychological state is undeniably more relieved than his state earlier. Coleridge's imagination does finally make him "dreams of happiness" (l. 79), like it used to do in the past. He manages at last to break away from the confines of self-centredness and self-pity. In fact, he manages to imaginatively live the joyful experience of his "Lady," and thus to take

"fruits, and foliage, not [his] own" for his own (l. 81). And seen as such, the poem can be held as a record of true psychiatric victory.

Notes

[1] In October 1802, William Wordsworth married Mary Hutchinson, Sara's sister; so, their families were more firmly united.

[2] It therefore had later to be much revised and purged of personal references in order to be made publishable. Its original 340 lines, arranged in 20 verse paragraphs, were gradually reduced to 139 lines in only eight verse paragraphs in the *textus receptus*, which was published in Coleridge's *Sibylline Leaves* (1817) and later reprinted in his lifetime in his *Poetical Works* of 1828, 1829, and 1834.

[3] According to Denise Mann on *WebMD*, as well as to the *Britannica Concise Encyclopaedia* (2005), *The Oxford World Encyclopaedia* (1998) and the *Columbia Encyclopaedia* (2001).

[4] It is nothing new in the Coleridgean critical canon to state that Coleridge is the specialist synthesiser of the subjective and the objective. For many decades now, Romantic scholars have been pointing out the equilibrium and the interaction between man and Nature, between the perceiving self and the object perceived, in Romantic poetry in general, and in Coleridge's poetry in particular. Romantic imaginative rationality attempts to know both itself and the external world through imaginatively projecting itself into and identifying itself with the external object, thus making the object the counterpart of its own consciousness. Notable among studies that explored this relationship are those of Robert Langbaum (1957), and Stephen Prickett (1970). However, the most important scholar that explored Romantic philosophy and the Romantic poets' self-identification with their objects of contemplation is M. H.

Abrams. Abrams (1957) shows (through the examination of such symbols as Wordsworth's correspondent breeze and Coleridge's wind harp) how metaphors of the breeze are not only a stimulating aspect of the landscape, but also an outer correspondent, a vehicle for radical change in the poet's mind.

[5] For Coleridge, a major indicator of his emotional-mental problem is the disconnection between his physical senses and his inner senses. In fact, external senses for Coleridge are only minions, mere conceptual models, for the inner perceptive faculties, the "internal senses," which are responsible for knowledge-acquisition (See Lyon 1965, pp. 246-48). In a letter of 14 October 1797 to John Thelwall, Coleridge writes,

> I can contemplate nothing but parts & parts are all *little* – ! – My mind feels as if it ached to behold & know something *great* – something *one & indivisible* – and it is only in the faith of this that rocks or waterfalls, mountains or caves give the sense of sublimity or majesty! – But in this faith *all things* counterfeit infinity! (*Collected Letters*, 1:349)

Two days later, he writes to Thomas Poole, naming the thing that is "one and indivisible" in the previous letter as "the Vast" which stands particularly for the non-empirical side of life:

> From my early reading of Faery Tales, Genii &c. &c. – my mind had been habituated *to the Vast* – & I never regarded *my senses* in any way as the criteria of my belief .I regulated all my creeds by my conceptions not by my *sight* – even at that age. (*Ibid.*, 1:354)

[6] In the old use of the adjective "genius," according to the explanatory footnotes attached to the Norton edition of the poem.

[7] As Stephen Gill (1989, p. 200) takes him to mean here. Luther Tyler (1985), though, sees that the Ode's motto is Coleridge's bold statement on the supremacy of man's mind over Nature, and his denouncement of the belief in Nature's enlightening and healing powers, which he once shared with Wordsworth.

[8] See note 6 above for details of the source.

[9] Grippingly, Coleridge calls his problems and pains "visitations", apparently taking them to be inflicted upon him as punishment from God. It is clear for anyone who reads Coleridge's notebooks of this period that Coleridge was living with the sense of guilt concerning his domestic affairs, the illicit nature of his love for Sara Hutchinson, and, above all, his addiction to opium.

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Appendix

The Final Version of "Dejection: An Ode"

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

I

WELL! If the bard was weather-wise, who made
The grand old ballad of Sir Patrick Spence,
This night, so tranquil now, will not go hence
Unroused by winds, that ply a busier trade
Than those which mould yon cloud in lazy flakes,
Or the dull sobbing draft, that moans and rakes
Upon the strings of this Æolian lute,
Which better far were mute.
For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!
And overspread with phantom light,
(With swimming phantom light o'erspread
But rimmed and circled by a silver thread)
I see the old Moon in her lap, foretelling
The coming-on of rain and squally blast.
And oh! that even now the gust were swelling,
And the slant night-shower driving loud and fast!
Those sounds which oft have raised me, whilst they awed,
And sent my soul abroad,
Might now perhaps their wonted impulse give,
Might startle this dull pain, and make it move and live!

II

A grief without a pang, void, dark, and drear,
A stifled, drowsy, unimpassioned grief,
Which finds no natural outlet, no relief,
In word, or sigh, or tear—
O Lady! in this wan and heartless mood,
To other thoughts by yonder throstle woo'd,
All this long eve, so balmy and serene,
Have I been gazing on the western sky,
And its peculiar tint of yellow green:
And still I gaze—and with how blank an eye!
And those thin clouds above, in flakes and bars,
That give away their motion to the stars;
Those stars, that glide behind them or between,
Now sparkling, now bedimmed, but always seen;
Yon crescent Moon, as fixed as if it grew
In its own cloudless, starless lake of blue;
I see them all so excellently fair,
I see, not feel, how beautiful they are!

III

My genial spirits fail;
And what can these avail
To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?
It were a vain endeavour,
Though I should gaze forever
On that green light that lingers in the west!
I may not hope from outward forms to win
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.

IV

O Lady! we receive but what we give,
And in our life alone does Nature live:
Ours is her wedding garment, ours her shroud!
And would we aught behold, of higher worth,
Than that inanimate cold world allowed
To the poor loveless ever-anxious crowd,
Ah! from the soul itself must issue forth
A light, a glory, a fair luminous cloud
Enveloping the Earth—
And from the soul itself must there be sent
A sweet and potent voice, of its own birth,
Of all sweet sounds the life and element!

V

O pure of heart! thou need'st not ask of me

Dr. Basil Q. Muhammad

What this strong music in the soul may be!
What, and wherein it doth exist,
This light, this glory, this fair luminous mist,
This beautiful and beauty-making power.
Joy, virtuous Lady! Joy that ne'er was given,
Save to the pure, and in their purest hour,
Life, and Life's effluence, cloud at once and shower,
Joy, Lady! is the spirit and the power,
Which wedding Nature to us gives in dower
A new Earth and new Heaven,
Undreamt of by the sensual and the proud—
Joy is the sweet voice, Joy the luminous cloud—
We in ourselves rejoice!
And thence flows all that charms or ear or sight,
All melodies the echoes of that voice,
All colours a suffusion from that light.

VI

There was a time when, though my path was rough,
This joy within me dallied with distress,
And all misfortunes were but as the stuff
Whence Fancy made me dreams of happiness:
For hope grew round me, like the twining vine,
And fruits, and foliage, not my own, seemed mine.
But now afflictions bow me down to earth:
Nor care I that they rob me of my mirth;
But oh! each visitation
Suspends what nature gave me at my birth,
My shaping spirit of Imagination.
For not to think of what I needs must feel,
But to be still and patient, all I can;
And haply by abstruse research to steal
From my own nature all the natural man—
This was my sole resource, my only plan:
Till that which suits a part infects the whole,
And now is almost grown the habit of my soul.

VII

Hence, viper thoughts, that coil around my mind,
Reality's dark dream!
I turn from you, and listen to the wind,
Which long has raved unnoticed. What a scream
Of agony by torture lengthened out
That lute sent forth! Thou Wind, that rav'st without,
Bare crag, or mountain-tairn, or blasted tree,
Or pine-grove whither woodman never clomb,

Or lonely house, long held the witches' home,
Methinks were fitter instruments for thee,
Mad Lutanist! who in this month of showers,
Of dark-brown gardens, and of peeping flowers,
Mak'st Devils' Yule, with worse than wintry song,
The blossoms, buds, and timorous leaves among.
Thou Actor, perfect in all tragic sounds!
Thou mighty Poet, e'en to frenzy bold!
What tell'st thou now about?
'Tis of the rushing of an host in rout,
With groans, of trampled men, with smarting wounds—
At once they groan with pain, and shudder with the cold!
But hush! there is a pause of deepest silence!
And all that noise, as of a rushing crowd,
With groans, and tremulous shudderings—all is over—
It tells another tale, with sounds less deep and loud!
A tale of less affright,
And tempered with delight,
As Otway's self had framed the tender lay—
'Tis of a little child
Upon a lonesome wild,
Not far from home, but she hath lost her way
And now moans low in bitter grief and fear,
And now screams loud, and hopes to make her mother hear.

VIII

'Tis midnight, but small thoughts have I of sleep
Full seldom may my friend such vigils keep!
Visit her, gentle Sleep! with wings of healing,
And may this storm be but a mountain-birth,
May all the stars hang bright above her dwelling,
Silent as though they watched the sleeping Earth!
With light heart may she rise,
Gay fancy, cheerful eyes,
Joy lift her spirit, joy attune her voice;
To her may all things live, from pole to pole,
Their life the eddying of her living soul!
O simple spirit, guided from above,
Dear Lady, friend devoutest of my choice,
Thus mayest thou ever, evermore rejoice.