

ENGLISH

Imaginative journeys using Coleridge's poetry and Salvador Dali's work

Primary text: poetry by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

Related material: "The Persistence of Memory" by Salvador Dali

He who writes about an imaginative journey must have experienced one himself. He would grow to discover and set out a most challenging aspect of a journey of the imagination: that one's journey is affected and influenced by his or her culture, family, surroundings and religion. A good composer will also illustrate how one's broadened knowledge benefits from the impacts of external factors on his or her imaginative journey. Two great composers, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Salvador Dali do exactly this.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was a romantic and metaphysical poet who lived in the 18th century England. His main focus was on religion and nature and a great influence was the romantic doctrine of pantheism. Coleridge's style covers two kinds of poems: conversational, with a strong expansion-contraction structure, such as the poem 'Frost at Midnight' and supernatural, with a strong focus on the imaginary, as seen in the poem 'Kubla Khan'.

The poem 'Frost at Midnight' is about childhood, parenthood and growing up. It focuses on what a father wishes for his son's life, while reminiscing back to his own childhood.

The poem starts in a contracted state of contemplation and silence. The alliteration "stillness...makes a toy of thought" personifies the whole setting and sets the mood as mysterious and very calm; it also further emphasizes the power of nature and time to encourage thoughts and feelings. The poem then starts expanding, with the trigger of a fireplace in the poet's proximity. The fire, frequently referenced in the second stanza of the poem, is a metaphor for the poet's thoughts" flickering, changing yet very meaningful; the fire in the fireplace is also referenced through visual and sound imagery. The use of fire shows, thus, that one's surroundings can trigger an important imaginative journey which broadens the understanding of the world. This is reflected in the next part of the poem, where the poet thinks about his son's future after having remembered his past. The child himself, just an infant, is a symbol of life and new beginnings. The act of holding the child has the effect of representing a new start in life, for both the father and son, and new opportunities for the father to live through his son's eyes.

The poet strongly wishes that his child will grow up to be in harmony with nature, thus achieving a greater connection with God and spirituality. The clear doctrine of pantheism is present in the quote "They God...which from eternity doth teach, himself in all things, an all things in himself", as is his wish for his son's future. The father also wishes his son to experience the world in all its intensity, saying "But thou, my Babe! Shalt wander like a breeze..."

From the techniques used in this poem, it is clear that an imaginative journey is influenced by family, religion and surroundings and that in this case, Coleridge has been successful in broadening a reader's understanding of the world.

He has been equally successful in the poem 'Kubla Khan', an incomplete work based on the composer's own imaginative journey while in an opium-induced trance. This is a supernatural poem which shows the poet's hidden desires and wishes, and a man invading Paradise.

In the first stanza, strong imagery is created through alliteration – "measureless to man" – and sibilance such as "sunless sea" or "sinuous rills". The effect of this imagery is to show that Paradise is very relative to all people, one's perception of it being biased and based on his or her needs and

desires. This challenges a reader's view by showing that there is not only one Eden, but a different one for each person.

Various references to sexuality are combined with religious views in the poem. The poet describes nature as male and female reproductive organs separately, symbolising Adam and Eve. The Capital Sin is symbolised by the hinted-at sexual acts, as seen in the phrase "As this earth in fast thick pants was breathing". This challenges a reader's perception of sexuality and religion by harmoniously combining the two.

Another very strong technique in the poem is the characterisation of Kubla Khan. He is described as a seemingly greedy man which would go to any extent to have his wishes and demands met. From Coleridge's own writings, where he wonders about dreaming and waking up to a physical item from the dream, a reader can conclude that Kubla Khan is in fact a metaphor for the poet, with the whole poem expressing his hidden desires and feelings.

Once again, Coleridge has been successful in challenging the reader's view of the world and also demonstrating that the knowledge gained from an imaginative journey reflects a traveller's desires and needs.

Salvador Dali's work, the painting *The Persistence of Memory* is a surrealist artwork showing a textural contrast between hard and soft surfaces and how time is irrelevant in a dream. The textural contrast is made through the placement of soft, melting pocket watches on hard, defined surfaces; this shows that in a dream, time is unimportant, but a dreamer's surroundings will show in his dreams.

The painting is very similar to the poem 'Frost at Midnight' as it shows some mountains in the background believed to be from Dali's childhood. Similarly, Coleridge's poem examines the poet's childhood.

Like 'Kubla Khan', the image associates sexuality and nature through the ants attacking a watch. It is known that Dali has used ants to represent the female reproductive organs and the fact that they are attacking a watch shows their violence. Similarly, Coleridge describes a wild natural setting as human reproductive systems.

In conclusion, both Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poems 'Frost at Midnight' and 'Kubla Khan' as well as Salvador Dali's painting *The Persistence of Memory* challenge a reader's view of the world by showing that a traveller's family, culture, religion and surroundings influence his or her imaginative journey; any experiences gained from this also challenge a reader's view of the world as they often reflect the traveller's hidden desires and needs.