from: **Effusion XXXV. Composed 20 August 1795, at Clevedon, Sommersetshire**

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And thus, my Love! as on the midway slope

Of yonder hill I stretch my limbs at noon,

Whilst through my half-closed eyelids I behold

The sunbeams dance, like diamonds, on the main,

And tranquil muse upon tranquility:

Full many a thought uncalled and undetained,

And many idle flitting phantasies,

Traverse my indolent and passive brain -

As wild and various as the random gales

That swell and flutter on this **subject lute**!

And what if all of animated nature

Be but **organic Harps** diversely framed,

That tremble into thought, as o’er them sweeps

Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,

At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

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**Dejection: An Ode (composed c. July 1802)[[1]](#footnote-1)**

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 Aeolian lute,

Which better far were mute.

For lo! the New-moon winter-bright!

And overspread with phantom light, 10

(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! 20

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! 30

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 40

To lift the smothering weight from off my breast?

It were a vain endeavour,

Though I should gaze for ever

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, 50

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

What this strong music in the soul may be! 60

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 -- 70

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, 80

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 -- 90

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, 100

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? 110

'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, -- 120

'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, 130

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.

1. Last time, we were reading Coleridge’s “The Nightingale”. What was the function of the nightingale? What kind of (poetic) attitude was required to appreciate the nightingale?
2. Look at the extract from Coleridge’s “Effusion...” The title of the subsequent versions of this poem is “The Eolian Harp”. (Aeolian harps were placed lengthways in front of open windows, where their stings were played by the wind).

Can you see any functional parallel between the nightingale and the eolian harp (the “subject lute”)? Why is the (image of) the eolian harp/eolian lute so important for the speaker? How would you characterise the speaker’s attitude in “Effusion”?

1. What are the possible implications of the term “dejection”? What are your expectations, when you read the title?
2. Read through “Dejection: an Ode”. Can you notice any *structural* similaritiesbetween “The Nightingale” and “Dejection”?
3. Stanza I. What are the similarities and differences between the “subject lute” of “Effusion” and the “Eolian lute” of “Dejection”? (You may look at stanza VII as well)
4. What does the speaker expect from the sound of the storm? (I.)
5. Stanza II. What are the characteristics and the consequences of the speaker’s dejection? What are the stakes of these symptoms for the “Romantic poet”?
6. Last time, while reading “The Nightingale”, you were asked whether it was possible to see anything “just as it is”. (And the answer was “no”.) What kind of answer does stanza II of “Dejection” give to that question? What are the stakes, for the poet, of this answer?
7. Stanza III. Can you detect any difference between stanzas I. and III. concerning the role the speaker ascribes to “nature”?
8. Stanza IV. Concentrate on the relationship between mind (the speaker/the subject) and nature (the object). What is the function of nature? What is the function of the mind? Can you detect any change between “The Nightingale” and “Dejection” as far as Coleridge’s attitude to this relationship is concerned?
9. Stanza V. What is the “beautiful and beauty-making power”? What is Joy? What is the function of the “Lady”? Is there (are there) any character(s) in “The Nightingale” who is (are) comparable to her? You may also consider stanza VIII.
10. Stanza VI. What’s happened to the speaker since he was young? Explain: “not to think of what I needs must feel” – what are the possible implications of this line?
11. What are the “viper thoughts? Why does he turn to the wind? Is there any parallel between stanza VII and Shelley’s “Ode to the West Wind”? What are the similarities and the differences between them? What can explain the difference (considering the previous stanzas)?
12. What is the function of the Lady?

1. The first, 1802 version of the poem, was entitled “A Letter to ---“. The version you can read here is the one that appeared in *Sibylline Leaves* in 1817.

   [↑](#footnote-ref-1)