

Poetic Craft and Metatextual Reflection in Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Shelley's 'The Question'

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Abstract—The theme of artistic inspiration and creative production is explored in both Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' and Percy Shelley's 'The Question'. This paper delves into the metatextual dimensions of these themes through the critical lens of New Formalism. Although the term 'metatextuality' was coined in the 20th century, the Romantic era's preoccupation with poetic inspiration, imagination, and self-reflection renders many of its works implicitly metatextual. Both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question' engage deeply with the processes and limitations of artistic creation, embedding within their form, structure, and content a commentary on poetry itself. These poems function on two levels: they present visionary, often dreamlike imagery while simultaneously acknowledging the failure of language and form to fully capture the poets' imaginative impulse. This paper demonstrates how metapoetic meaning arises from both thematic content and formal elements such as meter, rhyme, sound devices, and structural shifts. Moreover, this paper explores the ways in which the poets suggest that truly accurate representation of artistic vision may be not only impossible but dangerous. Ultimately, this study reaffirms the value of formalist close reading in understanding Romantic poetry's engagement with its own making. By centering metatextuality as a key feature of Romantic poetics, it opens up new avenues for exploring poetic self-consciousness across other works of the period and beyond.

Index Terms—metatextuality, art, creativity, New Formalism, Romanticism

I. INTRODUCTION

With its profound ability to express feelings melodically, poetry has captivated humanity since prehistory, and through the ages that followed it. As such, it is considered the oldest genre of literature; existing well before the spread of literacy, commercial printing, and mass media (Goldberg, 2007). From the tragedy of love to the horrors of war, poetry encompasses a spectrum of human sentiments and experiences, often extending those emotions and ideas beyond their real-life scope. This ancient legacy is reflected in the numerous genres that subcategorize poetry, including ballads, sonnets, epics, and more. Furthermore, each literary age had its own 'spin' on poetry; most notably the Romantic age (1798-1837), during which poetry became the foremost genre (Goldberg, 2007). And creative expression becomes a quiet rebellion, challenging imposed boundaries and envisioning realms of freer thought and inner autonomy (Hyasat & Ibrahim, 2025).

Paralleling developments such as the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, Romantic poetry is characterized by its focus on freedom, nature, and human psychology, as well as its allusions to classical mythology (Callaghan, 2019). Three major schools coexisted in this literary era, the Lake School, that of Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Southey (Callaghan, 2019), the Cockney School; a derogatory term associated with the poets Keats, Hunt, and Hazlitt (Wu, 2001), and finally, the Satanic School of Shelley and Byron. Among the key developments of the era is the 'revolution of the imagination' which took place, granting creative imagination a chief role in the process of creating art (Goldberg, 2007). The Romantic poets reflected intensely on poetry as a genre, as evidenced by Wordsworth's musings on what poetry is. He criticized earlier notions of poetry, especially those of the 18th century, which he saw as obstacles to free and natural expression. Wordsworth, the founder of the Romantic revolution, viewed inner psychology as the premier source of poetic and creative expression, defining poetry as 'a spontaneous overflow of emotions that is recollected in tranquility' (Wordsworth, 1800). This definition partly explains why romantic poetry is diverse, both in the various forms the poets wrote in, and the topics they broached.

Coleridge, who co-authored *Lyrical Ballads* alongside Wordsworth, wrote several canonical poems including 'The Rime of the Ancient Mariner' and the enigmatic 'Kubla Khan'; the latter of which is discussed in this paper. While at first glance the poem may appear disjointed, mystical, and puzzling; its central theme; creativity and its limits, is very characteristic of romantic poetry, which has so often turned inward, reminiscing on the craft of poetry itself (Hogsette, 2014). Similarly, Shelley's 'The Question' holds as a main theme poetry and artistic inspiration.

This Romantic intrigue in poetry as a craft could be considered metatextual, despite the fact that the term 'metatextual' only emerged in the 1970s. In comparatively analyzing the formal aspects of both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question', one can find multiple metatextual elements that tackle what the poem itself is. This analysis will be conducted through the

critical lens of New Formalism, which allows for a close reading of the poems' aesthetic and structural features while acknowledging their historical embeddedness.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Despite not spanning a large number of years, the prolific and impassioned nature of the body of work of the Romantic era makes it a pivotal moment in literary history, marked by a radical shift in literary aesthetics, themes, and creative processes. Scholars have widely agreed that Romantic poetry introduced a 'revolution of the imagination' (Abrams, 1971), which turned poetry into a more subjective genre that is not afraid to broach the sublime, and stretch the boundaries of artistic expression. This occurred in tandem with major historical upheavals, most notably, the French Revolution and the Industrial Revolution, which deeply influenced the period's poetic concerns with freedom, nature, and individual consciousness (Curran, 1993). These prescient themes have made Romanticism the subject of much interest in the scholarly world, with academics like Abrams (1971) and Bloom (1973) exploring Romanticism's focus on internal experience, imaginative vision, and the autonomy of the poetic self.

Romanticism's emphasis on self-reflection and artistic consciousness lends itself heavily to the concept of metatextuality, or in other words, the self-referential quality of texts that draw attention to their own nature as constructed works. Although the term 'metatextuality' was only formally introduced by Gérard Genette in the 1970s, its thematic and structural presence in Romantic poetry is evident in multiple poems, which frequently meditate on the act of poetic creation itself, positioning the poet not merely as a speaker but also as a reflective creator.

Critics such as Wheeler (1981) and Stillinger (1995) have explored the fragmented and dreamlike structure of Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' seeing it as emblematic of the Romantic reflection on creative process and its limitations. Terenguto (2024) highlights Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' as a quintessential example of how imagination creates polysemous allegorical poetry that transcends literal meaning, using imagery such as the sea to explore the unconscious and life's cyclical nature.

As for Shelley, Vox (2020) argues that his works intertwine sensory imagery with abstract philosophical inquiry, exploring the tension between aesthetic experience and creative pursuit. While Shelley's 'The Question' is a lesser-discussed poem, it garnered some attention for its preoccupation with the aesthetics of poetic inspiration. LitCharts (n.d.) points out that in the poem, Shelley deploys a dream-vision framework to examine the ways in which imagination, nature, and poetic creation are interconnected. The analysis focuses on how the speaker's passage through a lush, flowering landscape embodies the Romantic motif of nature as a source of beauty and renewal, just as the extensive catalogue of flowers mirrors the rich array of imaginative perception.

In comparing and contrasting the ways in which 'The Question' and 'Kubla Khan' present the theme of creative and artistic creation, we glean insights into how different poetic devices, forms, and structures reflect the unique spirit of the Romantic age, with its precocious deployment of meta poetry.

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The critical lens of New Formalism is very apt for the analysis of the metatextual dimensions of both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question'. New Formalism emerged in the 1990s in response to the dominance of historicist and politicized literary criticism. It calls for a renewed emphasis on the aesthetic, sonic, and structural properties of literary texts, building on the older literary school of formalism. A formalist stylistic analysis focuses on the ways in which literary devices shape meaning and emotion across texts, uncovering their symbolic and aesthetic functions that might otherwise go unnoticed (Abuhammam et al., 2025). A New Formalist analysis retains this emphasis on aesthetics and symbolism. Importantly however, new formalism is unlike Formalism or New Criticism, since it does not advocate for sequestering the text from its historical or cultural contexts. Rather, it argues that form is historically situated and ideologically significant (Levine, 2006).

Romantic poetry simply cannot be separated from the environmental, social, political, and historical context of the moment in which it flourished; yet, the aesthetic and dense literary value of the poetry of that era makes its form, structure, and linguistic devices just as notable as the surrounding context. This makes New Formalism highly suitable for its analysis. In both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question', form is not just a vessel for meaning, but a thematic agent in itself. The self-referential nature of the poems drags the reader's attention to the limits of language and the constructed nature of poetic vision. These elements are most accurately understood through the concept of metatextuality. A close reading of both poems, as set forth by New Formalism, allows for the appreciation of the particularities of syntax, diction, meter, sound patterns, and imagery, and it is in these minute details that the gist of Romantic poetry lies. There is evidence that Coleridge believed in the importance of the poem in itself, seeing as he introduced into English literary criticism the idea of the 'organic form' of literary works. As such, he viewed each work as both self-originating and self-organizing (Academy of American Poets, 2025; bartleby.com, 2025). This, combined with Wordsworth's aforementioned definition of poetry, makes the Romantic poem itself, with all its linguistic and acoustic characteristics, something to closely analyze.

New Formalism enables the analysis of these formal characteristics, showing their integrality to the poems' metatextual dimensions. As Wolfson (2001) and Levine (2006) argue, poetic form is an expressive site that carries ideological, emotional, and philosophical weight.

While the manifold nature of Romantic poetry lends itself to its analysis through numerous critical lenses, New Formalism is ideal for a nuanced reading of Romantic metatextuality, as it combines a close analysis of the formal aspects of the poems, as well as an appreciation of their contextual frames.

Metatextuality, dubbed so by Genette (1997), refers to a text's explicit or implicit commentary on itself or on the nature of texts and textuality. When a text is metatextual, it calls attention to the creative processes of writing, reading, and interpretation, showcasing the constructed nature of literary works (Genette, 1997; Allen, 2000). Through metapoetic devices, a poem or literary text becomes self-referential, inviting readers to consider not only what is being said, but also, how it is being said and the limits of language itself. Instances of metatextuality could be found in non-literary texts, including journal articles. For example, the article "A systematic literature review of academic research on EFL learners' use of multi-word units (MWUs) in Jordan" exhibits metatextuality by systematically reviewing and commenting on prior research on multi-word units while guiding readers through its novel methodology and findings, effectively functioning as a text-about-text (Al-Zyoud et al., 2025).

Metatextual texts contain two levels of dialogue, which often overlap (Genette, 1997; Waugh, 1984). While this is a challenging characteristic to spot in poetry, which tends to condense ideas, the shift in the tone or theme of the poem may hint at a change in the level of dialogue (Hutcheon, 1980). Later in this paper, the presence of these two levels of dialogue in 'Kubla Khan' will be explored. Perhaps the most mystifying characteristic of metatexts is the fact that they are conscious; they recognize their status as a creative work (Allen, 2000; Waugh, 1984). In both 'The Question' and 'Kubla Khan', the final stanzas hint at these poems gaining a conciseness. This characteristic could also be found in Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn', where the poem, through its description of an ancient Grecian urn reflects on its own nature and particularly its longevity as a creative work. Connected to this theme of consciousness is the idea that meta texts break the fourth wall. While the listener is not addressed in either 'Kubla Khan' or 'The Question', the fact that poet and speaker blend in the poems (and in Romantic poetry by and large), makes it so it that the listener feels directly spoken to.

While Romanticism predates the concept of metatextuality, the fact that Romantic poets heavily explored the boundaries of poetic expression and the act of creation adds a meta element to their work (Eagleton, 2015). To add, the Romantics' focus on individual subjectivity and the sublime naturally led to poetic works that recognize their own provisionality and the limitations of creative expression (Abrams, 1999). The concept of metatextuality helps modern readers grasp the tension between aspiration and limitation inherent in artistic creation; a theme so common in Romantic poetry. 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question' are examples this, as they not only present visionary content but they also reflect on their own status as constructed artifacts, highlighting the fragmentation, ambiguity, and incompleteness that characterize so much of Romantic poetry (Levine, 2006).

IV. DISCUSSION

Known for its surreal and imaginative imagery, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' (1816) remains an integral part of any English literary canon. Importantly, Coleridge had written it in 1797 while under the influence of opium, to which he was addicted (Holmes, 2000); which significantly adds to the hallucinatory atmosphere in which the poem is imbued. Coleridge's altered state as he wrote the poem explains the subtitle 'Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment'. Instantly, the 'or' gives away the fact that is not a poem to be plainly read. It expects the listener to consider it from multiple perspectives. This hedge is followed by 'a vision in a dream'; this foreshadows the primary theme of the poem; the idea that this poem only captures part of the dream, a mere vision of it; or as the speaker says in the subtitle 'A fragment'. The meta aspect comes in here. The poem admits its fragmented nature, stating that even if it is taken as a whole, it remains just a 'fragment'. Through the subtitle, the speaker, very likely Coleridge himself, purports to be a visionary, as evidenced by the use of the word 'vision'. The notion of the poet as a visionary with transient inspirations echoes Romantic ideals about the nature of artistic genius and the sublime (Abrams, 1971).

The shift from the subtitle to the first line of the poem may seem awkwardly rough at first; but this awkwardness dissipates as the listener has already been told that the poem is 'a vision in a dream'. It reflects what dreams are: random, unexpected, and uncanny. The opening couplet 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan/ A stately pleasure-dome decree' assumes an almost liturgical cadence, due to its unusual syntax and iambic tetrameter. This careful construction mirrors the meticulous construction of this 'pleasure-dome' as decreed by the mystical titular figure of Kubla Khan; a mongol Emperor. The pleasure-dome, in this reading, becomes a metapoetic emblem of the poem itself: designed, elevated, and finite (Brooks, 1947). The tone and formal rhythm shifts in the following line, as the 'sacred river Alph' is described as descending through 'caverns measureless to man'. The irregular metrical stress mirrors the immeasurability of the caverns. The ensuing lines of the first stanza paint a picture of the area surrounding Kubla Khan's palace, perhaps an attempt on the part of the speaker to fully capture this vision; an endeavor he later admits is fruitless. The shift in the rhyme scheme from ABAAB to CCDBDB reflects the cohesive entropy of dreams, where events are completely random, yet somehow connected.

The second stanza exclamatively starts with 'But, oh'. The speaker's usage of such an interjection mirrors the way someone describing a dream they had would speak, as people's memories of their dreams tend to be sporadic. This adds

to the metapoetic quality of the poem. Here, the speaker returns to the description of the mysterious river 'Alph' after the perfunctory description of the area around the palace. The oxymoronic description of the chasm as 'savage' and 'holy' at once underlines the dialectical tension between aesthetic containment and imaginative excess present in the poem. The speaker vacillates between control and surrender, evoking what John Hollander describes as 'the instability of vision when confined to the limits of language' (Hollander, 1985, p. 113). In the first part of the second stanza, the rhyme scheme goes back to what it was in the first part of the first stanza, which is ABAAB, although the meter here is pentameter rather than tetrameter. Here, the poem is metatextually conscious of its fragmentation of form, admitting it in its subtitle, 'A Fragment'.

The chasm described in this middle stanza erupts into a fountain, so potent that it casts 'huge fragments' of rock into the air. This mirrors the fact that poem is a sudden gush of visionary ideas; so powerful it overpowered his ability to creatively express what he saw. Interestingly, the speaker describes the river as having 'momentarily' 'flung up', showing how these visions are ephemeral. Metapoetry here is intrinsically linked with metaphor, as the extended metaphor of the river mirroring creative genius could be taken as the poem recognizing its status as a creative work. There is another shakeup in the rhyme scheme in this part, reflecting the meandering description of the river. From a New Formalist standpoint, such phonetic patterning is not ornamental, but constitutes meaning through aesthetic experience (Pinsky, 1998). 'Kubla Khan', in fact, exemplifies one of New Formalism's central claims, that form is never neutral. This is reflected in Coleridge's fragmentary structure and rhythmic texture, which contributes to its metapoetic quality. In this same stanza, the speaker speaks of 'ancestral voices prophesying war'. The paradox in 'ancestral' and 'prophesying' shows that the fragmentation is multi-dimensional, spanning time and space, vision and sound. This oscillation between the historical and the visionary, aligns with Vendler's (2002) assertion that Romantic poetry negotiates new forms of authority by reshaping inherited genres. The final lines of the second stanza are sonically rich, as is the whole poem. These lines mix assonance, consonance, and alliteration, such as in 'mingled' and 'measure'. This almost deliberate effort in making the poem sonically dense makes the speaker's admission that he cannot capture the full picture of this vision even sadder.

The two levels of dialogue central to the definition of metatextuality are most prominent in the third and final stanza of 'Kubla Khan'. After having described the palace, its surrounding areas, and the mysterious river Alph, the speaker goes on to describe 'a damsel with a dulcimer,' with the latter being a type of stringed instrument.

The speaker uses the personal pronoun 'I' to explain that he saw this 'Abyssinian maid', showing the climax of his visionary emotions. Unfortunately, he cannot 'revive within (himself) her symphony and song', just like he cannot revive the vision and fully capture it for the listener of this poem. This is metapoetic, showing that all of the above descriptions do not encapsulate the full reality. In other words, the poem offers commentary upon itself. As the poem is approaching its end, the speaker deploys epizeuxis in 'all should cry beware! beware'. It is unclear who 'all' is, but if it is taken to mean the audience itself, the poem here breaks the fourth wall, adding another metapoetic implicature. Perhaps the audience would have been so overwhelmed had creativity been able to capture the vision that they would have been reduced to shock, awe, and terror. The image of the 'flashing eyes' and 'floating hair' supports the idea that if creativity had the ability to capture its muse, the results would be Frankensteinish. In the final lines, the lexical field of magic is used in 'weave a circle thrice' and in the image of 'honey-dew', positioning poetic creation as an act that transgresses on the boundaries of what is real and again highlighting the role of the poet as a visionary.

Overall, the form and imagery used in 'Kubla Khan' carry its primary theme: the inability of creativity to capture its muse. In the poem's admission of its failure to accurately encapsulate what it wants to show listeners, it admits its status as a creative creation, which is highly metapoetic.

Although it has received much less critical acclaim than 'Kubla Khan', 'The Question' by Percy Bysshe Shelley (1824) is a quintessential Romantic poetic, carrying themes such as beauty, the imagination, nature, and artistry.

Right from the start, Shelley constructs a sealed lyrical universe, beginning with an act of solitary observation that situates the speaker within a liminal space between dream and waking. The opening lines, 'I dreamed that, as I wondered by the way, Bare winter suddenly was changed to Spring', exemplify what New Formalist critics identify as the 'primacy of the lyrical moment' (Fried, 2009). The speaker's 'dream' opens an imaginative space, away from empirical reality, granting Shelley the license to suspend narrative temporality in favor of a static aesthetic tableau. The transformation of 'Bare Winter' into 'Spring' is a seasonal, as well as a formal shift: a poetic awakening into color, music, and sensuality, terms Shelley delves into through richly textured visual and auditory images. The juxtaposition between winter and spring is an extended metaphor that represents the change from creative rut to the gush of ideas; an experience many creative people undergo.

Throughout the ensuing lines and stanzas, Shelley deploys enumerative imagery to catalogue a range of natural elements, most strikingly flowers. The natural images of the 'waters murmuring', 'bank of turf', and the 'stream' evoke a sense of fertility, both in nature and in imagination. The rhyme scheme of the first stanza, ABABABCC, captures the perfect unity and melody of the dream the speaker has; a dream that turns out to be but fleeting by the end of the poem. The following stanza outlines the various flowers that become the speaker's muse, such as the 'daisies', 'faint oxlips', and 'tender bluebells'. The structure of the list fosters a rhythm of variation-within-repetition, a compositional logic akin to musical phrasing. The catalogue thus becomes an engine of the poem's formal coherence, binding image to image without requiring semantic progression. The rest of the second stanza delves deeper into an unnamed 'tall flower that

wets-/Like a child, half in tenderness and mirth-/Its mother's face with Heaven's collected tears, /When the low wind, its playmate's voice, it hears.' The complex mixture of simile, metaphor, and personification to describe the flower's playfulness shows that the tools of creativity are manifold (LitCharts, n.d.). This idea is echoed earlier, as the listing of such different types of flowers shows that the sources of creativity are also diverse.

More images are explored in the third stanza of the poem, including an image of dew that is 'drained not by the day'. This is the first indication that the speaker's dream is ephemeral and unrealistic. Yet, the speaker continues to describe other images such as the 'ivy serpentine' and the 'dark buds', showing that they have not yet developed the awareness that their dream is fleeting. The poem's penultimate stanza continues with a lot of the formal devices used in the preceding stanza, including polysyndeton, with the repeated use of the conjunction 'and'. This shows that the speaker is still fully engrossed in their dream, even though listeners probably recognize, by now, that there is a catch. This slight dramatic irony is metatextual, as the speaker is not as privy as the listener is to the irrationality of this dream.

This metapoetic aspect is at its utmost in the final stanza, where another level of dialogue shines through. The closing stanza retreats from the lush sensory world into a somber epiphany, 'Methought that of these visionary flower/ I made a nosegay.' A sense of regret takes over the speaker as they realize this dreamlike rush of creativity is transitory. The flowers are merely 'visionary'. As this is commentary on previous elements of the poem, this final part of 'The Question' is clearly metatextual. The speaker then states that he wanted the flowers to be 'bound in such a way/ That the same hues, which in their natural bowers/ Were mingled or opposed, the like array/ Kept these imprisoned children of the Hour/ Within my hand-'. This evokes a key theme of the poem; the inability of creativity to capture its muse. Those seasonal flowers could only have been 'mingled' in a dream; in real life, their presence beside each other breaks the rules of nature. The 'imprisoned children of the hour' presents a dark image; to take the flowers out of their natural habitat, to take a vision out of a dream, is to make it prisoner to a world where it is not fully understood or appreciated. Here, the poem and the nosegay are one and the same. Both are failed attempts at creating something that is too perfect to be natural. The poem recognizes that it, in itself, is an art, just like the nosegay, as evidenced by its careful attention to sonic and formative devices.

After the mid-stanza caesura, the speaker awakes from his dream, 'elate and gay', rushing to show someone his bouquet, only to wonder who the person would be, 'I hastened to the spot whence I had come/ That I might there present it!-Oh! to whom?'. Critics have often read those lines in the context of Shelley's turbulent romantic relationships, which may have led him to lament the fact that he has no one to present the bouquet to, especially after his estrangement from Mary Shelley (Mellor, 1989). Yet, the poem's earlier focus on the nature of creativity and artistic creation makes it more likely that these lines are also about this theme. The speaker mourns the fact that his artistic vision is not appreciated by anyone, either due to his failure to fully capture what he saw, or due to the fact that the audience may not be able to fully grasp this vision.

In conclusion, 'The Question' reveals itself not merely as a Romantic exploration of nature and imagination, but as a metatextual reflection on the nature of poetic creation itself. Shelley constructs a carefully ordered lyrical world, structured through regular meter, rhyme, and imagistic enumeration, only to gradually deconstruct its permanence. The speaker's belated realization that the bouquet of flowers is 'visionary,' and his inability to identify a recipient for it, acts as a metaphor for the fragility of artistic expression and the uncertain role of audience (LitCharts, n.d.). The bouquet becomes a stand-in for the poem, both fleeting products of inspiration that cannot endure the waking world. This self-referential awareness, especially in the final lines, reveals the speaker's isolation and gestures toward the poet's own anxiety about who, if anyone, will understand or appreciate the artistic vision. By folding this reflection into the very structure and content of the poem, Shelley explores the limitations of poetry itself, most notably its impermanence and the small niche it occupies in a world where art is coveted by many, yet understood by few.

Both 'Kubla Khan' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge and 'The Question' by Percy Bysshe Shelley hold at their core the key theme of artistic creation and inspiration. This nexus of theme and genre is what makes the poems metapoetic; in other words, their form mirrors their main idea. Not only are the poems thematically connected, but their take on this theme is also similar; since the poems ultimately conclude with the idea that creative craftsmanship has its limits. When the speaker of 'Kubla Khan' laments his inability to fully capture the serenity of the Abyssinian maid, his creative muse, he says, 'Could I revive within me/ Her symphony and song'. This echoes Shelley's final rhetorical question, 'Oh! to whom?'. Both speakers, and by extension, both poets, recognize the failure of creative works to capture their full vision.

While when it comes to theme, one can find various similarities between 'The Question' and 'Kubla Khan', the poems' formal structure and meter vastly differ. 'The Question' is a lyric poem arranged into five octaves each with a steady ABABABCC rhyme scheme. Iambic pentameter is used throughout (LitCharts, n.d.). The neat predictability and organized rhythm of this poem is contrary to the fragmented form of 'Kubla Khan', which follows no set form, and has stanzas with varying numbers of lines. Meter in 'Kubla Khan' is much less strict, with the poet shifting between iambic tetrameter and iambic pentameter. Despite these differences in the formal arrangement of both poems, each poem's form represents the nature of creative work. The controlled meticulous detail of Shelley's craft, as evidenced by his use of rhyme, meter, and sound devices reflects the importance of aesthetics when it comes to representing creativity. At the same time, the fragmented meandering form of 'Kubla Khan', represents the unpredictability of creative inspiration which cannot be put into neat boxes. The poems are aware of their respective forms, which is where metapoetry comes in. 'Kubla

Khan', in its subtitle states it is a 'fragment', whereas 'The Question', in its final stanza metaphorically compares the poem to a 'nosegay', which implies that each element of the poem has been minutely selected and crafted.

This introduces another element into the comparison of both poems as they relate to the concept of metatextuality, which is the observation that metapoetry is subtler in 'The Question' than it is in 'Kubla Khan'. In 'The Question', the metapoetry is couched in metaphor; it is noticeable only when it is clear that the 'nosegay' is a metaphor for artistic creation. In 'Kubla Khan', the two layers of verse are much clearer. The 'pleasure-dome' of the first stanza is mentioned again in the last stanza with the speaker commenting that if he could revive the maid's voice he 'would build that dome in air', with the poem clearly understanding that its previous descriptions of the emperor's castle are but a glimpse of how it truly looked like in the vision. This idea could be found in 'The Question' as well, but in a quieter way. The dark metaphor 'imprisoned children of the hour' shows that the poet's craft cannot recapture the sublimity of natural beauty, where flowers are most beautiful in their seasonal peak. The poet can only 'imprison them', which in itself has dark connotations, suggesting that it would be unnatural and perhaps even sinister. The implication that if art could fully capture its muse it would have sinister implications is very clear in the final stanza of 'Kubla Khan', where the speaker says that had he been able to reproduce the maid's song, the listener would have 'flashing eyes' and floating hair'; or in other words, he would go crazy. As a remedy for this madness, the speaker suggests ways to halt his ungodly power of artistic creation by 'weav(ing) a circle round him thrice'; which is an allusion to magic. To put this another way, the speaker would go as far as resorting to magic to shield himself from the excesses of creativity. Perhaps, it is better that poets are not as powerful as to recreate their muses; both poems suggest.

Both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question' suggest that artistic inspiration is eclectic. In its cataloguing of various natural elements such as 'the lush eglantine', the 'cherry-blossoms', and 'the wild roses', the speaker of 'The Question' embodies not only the deep Romantic attachment to nature, but also the fact that creative inspiration gleans its distinctiveness from the fact that it draws from multiple muses. This is also shown by the fact that Shelley deploys a plethora of poetic devices, which implies that creativity is expressed through diverse avenues. For example, alliteration of the /w/ approximant sound is seen in the first octave, such as in 'I dreamed that, as I wandered by the way, /Bare Winter suddenly was changed to Spring.' Yet, it is not just sound devices that Shelley uses, as his poem is very symbol-heavy as well. The 'winter' of the aforementioned line comes to represent the absence of creativity, while 'spring' is a symbol for the return of this lost inspiration. The diverse sources and expressions of creativity is a theme in 'Kubla Khan' as well, despite it perhaps being subtler. The 'pleasure-dome' which the poem opens by describing is perhaps a symbol for hedonistic creativity; a luxurious palace of a Mongol royal that amuses the speaker. Yet, it is not the opulent trappings of the palace that the speaker focuses on in the stanza, rather it is the gardens that surround it. As opposed to a forest for example, gardens imply human control of nature, as they are arranged and cultivated by humans. This perhaps suggests that beauty should be tamed for it be appreciated, just like creative inspiration should be compressed for it to reach its audience. While the palace, the river, and the gardens are visual muses, it is the auditory muse, as exemplified by the image of the Abyssinian maid on the dulcimer, that captivates the speaker the most. This is evidenced by the fact that it awakens him to the realization that he cannot recapture his muse, as discussed earlier. This mixture of visual and sonic elements that inspire the speaker of 'Kubla Khan' are very similar to the diversity in the natural elements that inspire the speaker of 'The Question' to write their poems, showing that poetic inspiration is portrayed to be eclectic in both poems.

Both 'Kubla Khan' and 'The Question' discuss the theme of artistic creation, but they are also reflections on the act of writing itself, making them deeply metatextual. Each poem is self-aware of its own creative process: Coleridge's 'Kubla Khan' openly presents itself as a 'fragment,' a broken glimpse into a larger, lost vision, while Shelley's 'The Question ends' with a quiet but haunting question, 'Oh! to whom', acknowledging the central paradox of poetic communication. The structure of each poem mirrors this self-reflection: Shelley's tight rhyme and meter suggest control and deliberate craft, while Coleridge's shifting form and abrupt transitions reflect inspiration's fleeting, chaotic nature. What both poets ultimately reveal is that poetic creation is always, in some way, incomplete. No matter how carefully arranged the flowers or how vividly imagined the pleasure-dome, the full vision of the muse can never be fully captured on the page, only approached, hinted at, or mourned.

V. CONCLUSION

In their handling of the idea of creative inspiration and production, 'The Question' by Percy Shelley and 'Kubla Khan' by Samuel Taylor Coleridge become imbued with metatextual elements. The poems recognize their status as literary works, making them self-aware 'organic forms'; the latter being a concept Coleridge introduced into English literature. Interestingly, the poems do not idealize or romanticize their status; rather, they acknowledge its limitations. No matter how inspirational the muse, flowery the language, or deep the meaning, art will always be incapable of capturing the vision of the artist. Darker yet is the implication in both poems that had art had this ability, it would be dangerous. This is clearer in 'Kubla Khan', where the final stanza shows how a too-powerful artist would drive his audience to madness. Similarly, in 'The Question', it is implied that a perfect recreation of an inspirational vision would break the rules of nature, and thus fail at recapturing the full picture.

Furthermore, both poems have two levels of verse: one where their vision is laid out, and another where they comment on their inability to recreate this vision. In including these two levels of verse, the poems almost break the fourth wall, discussing with the hearer directly the first stanzas of the respective poems.

These metapoetic characteristics could be investigated in other poems written in the Romantic era, including John Keats' 'Ode on a Grecian Urn' and 'Ode to a Nightingale'; two poems which carry art as a theme, and comment on their status as a piece of art. Even though metatextuality is a relatively new concept, emerging only after significant literary ages such as the Shakespearean era, the Romantic era, and the Victorian era, evidence of metapoetry should be investigated in those older poems. This investigation may help uncover why poetry as a genre is often self-reflexive, even in eras where the line between speaker and poet is not as blurred as it was in Romantic poetry. Is there something about poetic form that is inherently metapoetic? Poetic devices, such as enjambment, caesura, and alliteration, are more often than not reflective of meaning in a poem; a unity of form and meaning that can hint at metapoetry, especially when the main theme of a poem is artistic creation itself, as is the case with 'The Question' and 'Kubla Khan'.

These observations display the extent to which 'The Question' and 'Kubla Khan' could be read as meta texts. In their quest to lament the failure of their craftsmanship to reproduce their inspirational muses, the poems become self-aware. How intentional this self-awareness is on the part of the poets is something to be investigated in future research. Read through the lens of New Formalism, the analysis presented in this paper reaffirms the inseparability of form and meaning, illustrating how metapoetic elements are embedded not only in the content of the poems but in their formal structure as well. The dual-layered verse, the shifts in voice, and the self-referential commentary all serve to expose the constructed nature of the poetic work, inviting readers to engage with the poem both as an aesthetic object and as a meditation on its own making. Rather than presenting artistic inspiration as a purely transcendent or divine phenomenon, both poets suggest that creative work is constrained by language, form, and the medium of poetry itself. To add, the latent danger of perfect artistic representation, as implied in both texts, speaks to Romantic anxieties about the power and limits of the artist.

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