



# SELECTED READINGS IN ENGLISH LITERATURE

Volume 2

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**SELECTED READINGS  
IN  
ENGLISH LITERATURE**

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## CONTENTS

William Wordsworth .....	5
Earth Has Not Anything to Show More Fair .....	5
The Solitary Reaper .....	6
The Daffodils .....	7
Lines Written Above Tintern Abbey (Excerpts).....	8
Samuel Taylor Coleridge .....	13
Kubla Khan .....	13
George Noel Gordon Byron .....	17
Song for the Luddites .....	17
Sonnet on Chillon .....	18
Childe Harold's Pilgrimage (Canto III, Stanzas 18-25) .....	19
Don Juan .....	24
Canto III, The Isles of Greece.....	25
Canto IX, Stanzas 1 — 9 .....	30
Canto XI, Stanzas 9 — 11.....	35
Canto XII, Stanzas 5 — 6 .....	36
Percy Bysshe Shelley .....	38
Song to the Men of England .....	38
The Mask of Anarchy (Stanzas 37-43, 47-51, 65-79, 89-91) .....	40
Liberty .....	47
Ode to the West Wind .....	49
One Word Is Too Often Profaned .....	53
John Keats.....	55
On First Looking into Chapman's Homer .....	55
Isabella (Stanzas 14-16) .....	56
Ode to a Nightingale .....	58
Ode on a Grecian Urn .....	62
Walter Scott .....	67
The Heart of Midlothian (Chapters 6 & 7) .....	67
William Cobbett .....	96
Excerpts from <i>Rural Rides</i> .....	96

Excerpt from <i>Cottage Economy</i> .....	98
Excerpt from <i>Cobbett's Sermons: On the Rights of the Poor</i> .....	99
Jane Austen .....	104
<i>Pride and Prejudice</i> (Chapter I) .....	104
William Hazlitt .....	109
On Familiar Style (Excerpt from the essay) .....	109
Charles Lamb .....	114
The Superannuated Man .....	114
Thomas Hood .....	127
The Song of the Shirt .....	127
Ernest Charles Jones .....	132
The Song of the Future .....	132
The Song of the Low .....	135
A Chartist Chorus .....	138
"Organize — Organize — Organize" .....	140
John Watkins .....	142
Lines on Shell, Killed at Newport .....	142
William James Linton .....	144
The Gathering of the People .....	144
Gerald Massey .....	147
The Men of "Forty-Eight" .....	147
Thomas Frost .....	150
The Secret (Excerpts: Chapters VII & VIII) .....	150
An Anonymous Chartist Writer .....	165
The Politics of Poets (No. 1) .....	165
Charles Dickens .....	168
<i>Dombey and Son</i> (Excerpt: Chapter I) .....	168
<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i> (Excerpt from Book III, Chapter 10).....	183
William Makepeace Thackeray .....	201
<i>Vanity Fair</i> (Excerpts from Chapters 36 & 37) .....	201
Charlotte Brontë .....	219
<i>Jane Eyre</i> (Excerpts from Chapters 5 & 7).....	219
Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell .....	246
<i>Mary Barton</i> (Excerpts from Chapters 8, 15 & 16).....	246
George Eliot .....	261

Adam Bede (Chapter 27) .....	261
Alfred Tennyson .....	274
Break, Break, Break .....	274
Maud (Excerpt: "Birds in the high Hall-garden") .....	275
Ulysses .....	277
In Memoriam (cxxx) .....	281
Robert Browning .....	283
My Last Duchess.....	283
Home Thoughts from Abroad.....	287
A Toccata of Galuppi's.....	288
Elizabeth Barrett Browning .....	293
The Cry of the Children .....	293
Thomas Carlyle.....	301
Past and Present (Book III Chapter XI: Labour) .....	301
John Ruskin .....	309
The Stones of Venice (Vol. II, Chapter 4: St. Mark's) .....	309
Matthew Arnold .....	318
Shakespeare .....	318
Arthur Hugh Clough .....	320
Say Not the Struggle Nought Availeth.....	320
William Morris .....	322
The Earthly Paradise .....	322
An Apology .....	322
Chants for Socialists .....	324
The Day Is Coming .....	324
No Master .....	328
The Pilgrims of Hope.....	330
V. New Birth .....	330
XI. A Glimpse of the Coming Day .....	332
Algernon Charles Swinburne .....	337
Cor Cordium .....	337
A Child's Laughter .....	338
Thomas Hardy .....	340
Tess of the D'Urbervilles	
(Excerpts from Chapters 42 & 43).....	340

In Time of "The Breaking of Nations" .....	354
Afterwards .....	355
Oscar Wilde .....	357
An Ideal Husband (Excerpt from Act I) .....	357
Appendix I Biographical Sketches .....	366
Appendix II A List of Books from Which the Texts in This Anthology Are Taken .....	389

**WILLIAM WORDSWORTH**  
***EARTH HAS NOT ANYTHING TO SHOW***  
***MORE FAIR'***

Composed upon Westminster Bridge on September 3, 1802, this is one of the better known of Wordsworth's numerous sonnets. Here is a vivid picture of a beautiful morning in London, while the silence awakened Wordsworth's religious belief and made him think of God. The language used is simple and effective.

Earth has not anything to show more fair:  
Dull would he be of soul who could pass by  
A sight so touching in its majesty:  
This City now doth, like a garment, wear  
The beauty of the morning; silent, bare,  
Ships, towers, domes, theaters, and temples lie  
Open unto the fields, and to the sky;  
All bright and glittering in the smokeless air.  
Never did sun more beautifully steep<sup>2</sup>  
In his first splendour valley, rock, or hill;  
Ne'er saw I, never felt, a calm so deep!  
The river glideth at his own sweet will:  
Dear God! the very houses seem asleep;  
And all that mighty heart is lying still<sup>3</sup>!

**NOTES**

1. This sonnet follows strictly the Italian or Petrarchan form, with the rhyme-scheme abba, abba, cdcdcd and the clear division between the octave and the sestet.

2. steep — bathe, shine on.

3. all that mighty heart is lying still — Here "mighty heart" refers to the earth.



## THE SOLITARY REAPER<sup>1</sup>

Here is a poem by Wordsworth in which the author describes vividly and sympathetically a young peasant girl working in the fields and singing as she works. It was based upon an actual personal experience of the poet at one of his tours.

Behold her, single in the field,  
Yon solitary Highland<sup>2</sup> Lass!  
Reaping and singing by herself;  
Stop here, or gently pass!  
Alone she cuts and binds the grain,  
And sings a melancholy strain<sup>3</sup>;  
O listen! for the Vale profound  
Is overflowing with the sound.

No Nightingale did ever chaunt<sup>4</sup>  
More welcome notes to weary bands  
Of travellers in some shady haunt,  
Among Arabian sands<sup>5</sup>:  
A voice so thrilling ne'er was heard,  
In spring-time from the Cuckoo-bird,  
Breaking the silence of the seas  
Among the farthest Hebrides<sup>6</sup>.

Will no one tell me what she sings? —  
Perhaps the plaintive numbers<sup>7</sup> flow  
For old, unhappy, far-off things,  
And battles long ago:  
Or is it some more humble lay<sup>8</sup>,  
Familiar matter of to-day?  
Some natural sorrow, loss, or pain,  
That has been, and may be again?

Whate'er the theme, the Maiden sang  
As if her song could have no ending;  
I saw her singing at her work,  
And o'er the sickle bending; —  
I listened, motionless and still;  
And, as I mounted up the hill,  
The music in my heart I bore,  
Long after it was heard no more.

### NOTES

1. The poem contains four eight-lined stanzas of iambic verse. Most of the lines in each stanza are octosyllabics. The rime-scheme for each stanza is abccdd.

2. **Highland** — belonging to the Highlands or the northern part of Scotland.
3. **a melancholy strain** — a sad tune.
4. **chaunt** — old spelling for "chant".
5. **Arabian sands** — the deserts in Arabia.
6. **Hebrides** — a group of islands off the northwestern coast of Scotland.
7. **the plaintive numbers** — the mournful verses (referring to her song).
8. **lay** — a short lyrical or narrative poem meant to be sung.

### THE DAFFODILS<sup>1</sup>

This is one of the many poems written by Wordsworth on the beauty of nature. There is a vivid picture of the daffodils here, mixed with the poet's philosophical and somewhat mystical thoughts.

I wandered lonely as a cloud  
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,  
When all at once I saw a crowd,  
A host of<sup>2</sup> golden daffodils;  
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,  
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.

Continuous as the stars that shine

And twinkle on the Milky Way<sup>3</sup>,  
They stretched in never-ending line  
Along the margin of a bay:  
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,  
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.

The waves beside them danced; but they  
Outdid the sparkling waves in glee:  
A poet could not but be gay,  
In such a jocund company:  
I gazed — and gazed — but little thought  
What wealth the show to me had brought:

For oft, when on my couch I lie  
In vacant or in pensive mood<sup>4</sup>,  
They flash upon that inward eye  
Which is the bliss of solitude;  
And then my heart with pleasure fills,  
And dances with the daffodils.

#### NOTES

1. This poem contains four six-lined stanzas of iambic tetrametre, with a rime scheme of ababcc in each stanza.

2. a host of — a great number of.

3. the Milky Way — a broad belt of faint light, consisting of countless stars too faint to be seen separately and shining like a river across the sky at night (银河, 天河).

4. In vacant or in pensive mood — in an unthinking mood or in a seriously thoughtful mood.

#### LINES WRITTEN ABOVE TINTERN ABBEY<sup>1</sup>

(Excerpt: Lines 1 — 93)

The full title of the poem is *Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye<sup>2</sup> during a Tour*. In the poem Wordsworth tries to express his attitude toward the external world

of nature and to show the effect of nature upon his life and philosophy, and he finds something mysterious in nature that leads to God or religious mysticism. The excerpt given below contains about the first half of the poem. Here the poet begins by showing his great delight in the enjoyment of beautiful natural scenery, but he proceeds to preach his idealist philosophical view on the mystical effect of nature upon the human soul.

Five years have past; five summers, with the length  
Of five long winters! and again I hear  
These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs  
With a soft inland murmur. — Once again  
Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,  
That on a wild secluded scene impress  
Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect  
The landscape with the quiet of the sky.  
The day is come when I again repose  
Here, under this dark sycamore, and view  
These plots of cottage-ground, these orchard-tufts,  
Which at this season, with their unripe fruits,  
Are clad in one green hue, and lose themselves  
'Mid groves and copses. Once again I see  
These hedge-rows, hardly hedge-rows, little lines  
Of sportive wood run wild: these pastoral farms,  
Green to the very door; and wreaths of smoke  
Sent up, in silence, from among the trees!  
With some uncertain notice,<sup>3</sup> as might seem  
Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,  
Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire  
The hermit sits alone.

These beauteous forms,<sup>4</sup>  
Through a long absence, have not been to me  
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:  
But oft, in lonely rooms, and 'mid the din  
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them

In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,  
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;  
And passing even into my purer mind,  
With tranquil restoration:<sup>5</sup> — feelings too  
Of unremembered pleasure: such, perhaps,  
As have no slight or trivial influence  
On that best portion of a good man's life,  
His little, nameless, unremembered acts  
Of kindness and of love. Nor less, I trust,  
To them I may have owed another gift,<sup>6</sup>  
Of aspect more sublime;<sup>7</sup> that blessed mood,  
In which the burthen<sup>8</sup> of the mystery,  
In which the heavy and the weary weight  
Of all this unintelligible world,  
Is lightened: — that serene and blessed mood  
In which the affections gently lead us on, —  
Until, the breath of this corporeal frame<sup>9</sup>  
And even the motion of our human blood  
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep  
In body, and become a living soul:  
While with an eye made quiet by the power  
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy,  
We see into the life of things.

If this

Be but a vain belief, yet, oh! how oft—  
In darkness and amid the many shapes  
Of joyless daylight; when the fretful stir  
Unprofitable,<sup>10</sup> and the fever of the world,<sup>11</sup>  
Have hung upon the beatings of my heart—  
How oft, in spirit, have I turned to thee,  
O sylvan<sup>12</sup> Wye! thou wanderer thro' the woods,  
How often has my spirit turned to thee!

And now, with gleams of half-extinguished thought,<sup>13</sup>  
With many recognitions dim and faint,  
And somewhat of a sad perplexity,<sup>14</sup>  
The picture of the mind revives again:  
While here I stand, not only with the sense  
Of present pleasure, but with pleasing thoughts  
That in this moment there is life and food  
For future years. And so I dare to hope,  
Though changed, no doubt, from what I was when first  
I came among these hills; when like a roe  
I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides  
Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,  
Wherever nature led: more like a man  
Flying from something that he dreads, than one  
Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then  
(The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,  
And their glad animal movements all gone by)  
To me was all in all. — I cannot paint  
What then I was. The sounding cataract  
Haunted me like a passion; the tall rock,  
The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,  
Their colours and their forms, were then to me  
An appetite;<sup>15</sup> a feeling and a love,  
That had no need of a remoter charm,  
By thought supplied, nor any interest  
Unborrowed from the eye. — That time is past,  
And all its aching joys<sup>16</sup> are now no more,  
And all its dizzy raptures. Not for this  
Faint I, nor mourn, nor murmur; other gifts  
Have followed; for such loss, I would believe,  
Abundant recompense. For I have learned  
To look on nature, not as in the hour  
Of thoughtless youth; but hearing oftentimes<sup>17</sup>

The still, sad music of humanity,  
 Nor harsh nor grating, though of ample power  
 To chasten and subdue.<sup>18</sup>

## NOTES

1. This poem was written in blank verse (i.e., unrhymed iambic pentametre).  
**Tintern Abbey** — a ruin in Monmouthshire that had been a monastery.
2. **the Wye** — a river in East Wales and West England.
3. **notice** — intimation, announcement.
4. **These beauteous forms** — referring to the scenery described above: the hedge-rows, the pastoral farms, wreaths of smoke among the trees, etc.
5. **with tranquil restoration** — with my spirits restored to quietude.
6. **To them I may have owed another gift** — Here “them” refers back to the “beauteous forms” mentioned above.
7. **of aspect more sublime** — of a more sublime appearance.
8. **burthen** (archaic) — burden.
9. **this corporeal frame** — here referring to the human body.
10. **the fretful stir / Unprofitable** — human activity both vexatious and pointless.
11. **the fever of the world** — worldly desires and passions.
12. **sylvan** — silvan, meaning: wooded.
13. **with gleams of half-extinguished thought** — i.e., when the thought about this secular life grew dim.
14. **of a sad perplexity** — (the mind) in a state of being perplexed by the mysteries of human life that leads to sadness.
15. **Their colours and their forms, were then to me/An appetite** — The colours and forms of the cataract, the tall rock, the mountain and the deep and gloomy wood seemed to me at that time something that I hungered for, that I strongly desired.
16. **aching joys** — intense feelings of joy.
17. **oftentimes** — many times, frequently.
18. **The still, sad music of humanity ... to chasten and subdue** — These few lines show the author believed that nature had a moral and spiritual significance and helped him to understand the mystery of human life. “chasten” — to purify the human soul; “subdue” — to bring into refinement.

# SAMUEL TAYLOR COLERIDGE

## KUBLA KHAN<sup>1</sup>

*Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream* is said to have been composed in the summer of 1797. The poet dropped asleep after taking an anodyne which was prescribed to him for his health. He was reading from an old book of travels entitled *Purchas his Pilgrimage* the following passage: "In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately palace, encompassing sixteen miles of plain ground with a wall, wherein are fertile meadows, pleasant springs, delightful streams, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the midst thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure." According to Coleridge, he "continued for about three hours in profound sleep" and "during which time ... he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines". The author went on to say that on awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that ... with the exception of eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone had been cast. So the poem was left a fragment.

Although the greater part of the fragment has to do with Kubla Khan and his pleasure-dome, the mention of "an Abyssinian maid" playing "on her dulcimer" and "singing of Mount Abora" seems to be entirely extraneous material. Thus the poem has no coherent meaning and is wrapped up in an atmosphere of the supernatural and the fantastic. However, the poetic imagery and the haunting melody in the poem have attracted many students of English literature.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  
A stately pleasure-dome decree:<sup>2</sup>  
Where Alph,<sup>3</sup> the sacred river, ran  
Through caverns measureless to man  
Down to a sunless sea.



So twice five miles of fertile ground  
With walls and towers were girdled round:  
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,<sup>4</sup>  
Where blossom'd many an incense-bearing tree;  
And here were forests ancient as the hills,  
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted  
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!<sup>5</sup>  
A savage place! as holy and enchanted  
As e'er beneath a waning moon<sup>6</sup> was haunted  
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!<sup>7</sup>  
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  
A mighty fountain momently was forced:<sup>8</sup>  
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst  
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,  
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:  
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever  
It flung up momently the sacred river.  
Five miles meandering with a mazy motion  
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,  
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,  
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:  
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far  
Ancestral voices prophesying war!<sup>9</sup>

The shadow of the dome of pleasure  
Floated midway on the waves;  
Where was heard the mingled measure<sup>10</sup>  
From the fountain and the caves.  
It was a miracle of rare device,  
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!