

Time allowed: 45 minutes · 25 marks

Read the two poems printed below carefully, then answer the question that follows.

Poem A

Christabel (extract from Part I)

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (written 1797, published 1816)

Her gentle limbs did she undress,
And lay down in her loveliness.
But through her brain of weal and woe
So many thoughts moved to and fro,
That vain it were her lids to close;
So half-way from the bed she rose,
And on her elbow did recline
To look at the lady Geraldine.
Beneath the lamp the lady bowed,
And slowly rolled her eyes around;
Then drawing in her breath aloud,
Like one that shuddered, she unbound
The cincture from beneath her breast:
Her silken robe, and inner vest,
Dropt to her feet, and full in view,
Behold! her bosom and half her side —
A sight to dream of, not to tell!
O shield her! shield sweet Christabel!
Yet Geraldine nor speaks nor stirs;
Ah! what a stricken look was hers!
Deep from within she seems half-way
To lift some weight with sick assay,
And eyes the maid and seeks delay;
Then suddenly, as one defied,
Collects herself in scorn and pride,
And lay down by the Maiden's side! —
And in her arms the maid she took,
Ah wel-a-day!
And with low voice and doleful look
These words did say:
'In the touch of this bosom there worketh a spell,
Which is lord of thy utterance, Christabel!
Thou knowest to-night, and wilt know to-morrow,
This mark of my shame, this seal of my sorrow;
But vainly thou warrest,
For this is alone in
Thy power to declare,
That in the dim forest
Thou heard'st a low moaning,
And found'st a bright lady, surpassingly fair;
And didst bring her home with thee in love and in charity,
To shield her and shelter her from the damp air.'

Poem B

Don Juan, Canto I (extract, stanzas CVIII–CXIII)

George Gordon, Lord Byron (1819)

CVII

And stolen glances, sweeter for the theft,
And burning blushes, though for no transgression,
Tremblings when met, and restlessness when left;
All these are little preludes to possession,
Of which young passion cannot be bereft,
And merely tend to show how greatly love is
Embarrass'd at first starting with a novice.

CVIX

Julia had honour, virtue, truth, and love,
For Don Alfonso; and she inly swore,
By all the vows below to powers above,
She never would disgrace the ring she wore,
Nor leave a wish which wisdom might reprove;
And while she ponder'd this, besides much more,
One hand on Juan's carelessly was thrown,
Quite by mistake — she thought it was her own;

CX

Unconsciously she lean'd upon the other,
Which play'd within the tangles of her hair:
And to contend with thoughts she could not smother
She seem'd by the distraction of her air.
'Twas surely very wrong in Juan's mother
To leave together this imprudent pair,
She who for many years had watch'd her son so —
I'm very certain mine would not have done so.

CXI

The hand which still held Juan's, by degrees
Gently, but palpably confirm'd its grasp,
As if it said, 'Detain me, if you please;'
Yet there's no doubt she only meant to clasp
His fingers with a pure Platonic squeeze:
She would have shrunk as from a toad, or asp,
Had she imagined such a thing could rouse
A feeling dangerous to a prudent spouse.

CXII

And Julia sate with Juan, half embraced
And half retiring from the glowing arm,
Which trembled like the bosom where 'twas placed;
Yet still she must have thought there was no harm,
Or else 'twere easy to withdraw her waist;
But then the situation had its charm,
And then — God knows what next — I can't go on;
I'm almost sorry that I e'er begun.

CXIII

And Julia's voice was lost, except in sighs,
Until too late for useful conversation;
The tears were gushing from her gentle eyes,
I wish indeed they had not had occasion,
But who, alas! can love, and then be wise?
Not that remorse did not oppose temptation;
A little still she strove, and much repented,
And whispering 'I will ne'er consent' — consented.

Question

Compare how the poets present the experience of physical desire and the attempt to resist it.

In your response you should:

- compare the methods both poets use to present their ideas
- refer to relevant contexts
- explore different interpretations of each poem.

Poem A: S.T. Coleridge, Christabel Part I (pub. 1816) Poem B: Lord Byron, Don Juan Canto I, stanzas CVIII-CXIII (1819)