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**S. No 16 B.A.Part-1 English Hons, Topic: Analysis of the poem *Youth and Age*
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Romanticism often glamorises and, indeed, romanticises youth: the liberty and sincerity of childhood and adolescence, or the innocence of the child, who, for Wordsworth, was ‘the father of the man’ rather than vice versa. ‘What happened when the Romantics grew old’ would make for an interesting undergraduate English dissertation. Keats, Byron, and Shelley famously never did. Wordsworth did, and abandoned many of his earlier political views. Coleridge, too, and it was Coleridge who wrote what is perhaps the greatest Romantic poem about growing old. In *Youth and Age* he muses upon his loss of youth as old age begins to creep into his very bones, rendering his body weaker as he realises he lacks the vitality he enjoyed during his younger years.

‘You’re only as old as you feel’ might be a rough paraphrase of the main sentiment driving this poem. If we can but remain young in mind, then we are young, no matter that our bodies may be growing older. No: as Coleridge asserts, ‘Youth and I are house-mates still.’ Coleridge’s friend Leigh Hunt described ‘Youth and Age’ as ‘one of the most perfect poems, for style, feeling, and everything, that were ever written’; as well as being widely admired by his contemporaries, ‘Youth and Age’ was also one of Coleridge’s favourites among his poems.

Coleridge appears to have begun working on ‘Youth and Age’ in 1823, when he was in his early fifties. We know from portraits of the poet that he aged prematurely: he looked frail, and had completely white hair, when he was still only middle-aged. By the time he wrote ‘Youth and Age’ in the 1820s, he was just over a decade away from death, although ‘Youth and Age’ concerns itself less with mortality and approaching death than with the process of ageing, of feeling his youthful strength and vigour sap away from him. The metaphor of the house is revealing: his body is ‘This breathing house not built with hands’, implying that a human body is somehow inferior to a man-made house, since it decays so quickly and nothing can be done to restore it. (Of course, this was in the age before plastic surgery, botox, and the like!) The ‘house’ returns, though, in the more positive line that declares, ‘Youth and I are house-mates still.’ Finally, the mind can control the (weakening) body: ‘Life is but thought: so think I will / That Youth and I are house-mates still.’