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| **KUBLA KHAN (cc 1797)**  A Vision in a Dream. A Fragment  In Xanadu did Kubla Khan  A stately pleasure dome decree:  Where Alph, 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,  Where blossomed 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!  A savage place! as holy and enchanted  As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted  By woman wailing for her demon lover!  And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,  As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,  A mighty fountain momently was forced:  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!  The shadow of the dome of pleasure  Floated midway on the waves;  Where was heard the mingled measure  From the fountain and the caves.  It was a miracle of rare device,  A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!  A damsel with a dulcimer  In a vision once I saw:  It was an Abyssinian maid,  And on her dulcimer she played,  Singing of Mount Abora.  Could I revive within me  Her symphony and song,  To such a deep delight 'twould win me,  That with music loud and long,  I would build that dome in air,  That sunny dome! those caves of ice!  And all who heard should see them there,  And all should cry, Beware! Beware!  His flashing eyes, his floating hair!  Weave a circle round him thrice,  And close your eyes with holy dread,  For he on honey-dew hath fed,  And drunk the milk of Paradise. |

Coleridge published “Kubla Khan” (cc1797) for the first time in 1816**,** with the following preface:

“The following fragment is here published at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity [Lord Byron], and, as far as the Author's own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the ground of any supposed *poetic* merits.

In the summer of the year 1797, the Author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farm-house between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire*.* In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed***,*** from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chairat the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in *Purchas's Pilgrimage*: ``Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall.'' The Author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awakening 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 though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some 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 has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!”

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”My indisposition originated in the stump of a tooth over which some matter had formed: this affected my eyes, my eyes my stomach, my stomach my head… Laudanum gave me repose” (Letter to George Coleridge, March, 10, 1798. in *SL,* 67).

“Had I but a few hundred pounds but 200, half to send to Mrs Coleridge, & half to place myself in a private madhouse, where I could procure nothing but what a Physician Thought proper, & where a medical attendant could be constantly with me for two or three months… then there might be Hope. Now there is none” (To Joseph Cottle, April 26, 1814, in *SL,* 173).

“the practice of taking opium is dreadfully spread – throughout Lancashire and Yorkshire, it is the common dram of the lower order of people” (Letter to T.G. Street, September 19. 1808, in CL, V. 125-26).

I did not “at any times taken the flattening poison as a stimulus, or for any craving after pleasurable sensations” (SL, 223).

“I know, it will be a vain attempt to persuade Mrs Morgan or Charlotte, that a man, whose moral feelings, reason and understanding, and senses are perfectly sane and vigourous, may yet have been *mad ­­*-- And yet nothing is more true. By the long long Habit of the accursed *Poison to my Volition* (by which I mean the faculty *instrumental* to the Will, and by which alone the Will can realise itself – it’s Hands, Legs, & Feet, as it were) was completely deranged, at times frenzied, dissevered itself from the Will, & became an independent faculty: so that I was perpetually in the state, in which you may have seen paralytic Persons, who attempting to push a step forward in one direction are violently forced round the opposite.” (Letter to John Morgan, Saturday, 14 May, 1814, *SL,* 175)

*Biographia Literaria* (1817, C’s intellectual autobiography)

Primary imagination: normal human perception; secondary imagination: - poetic creation

“The IMAGINATION then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary IMAGINATION I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The **secondary Imagination** I consider as an echo of the former, **co-existing with the conscious will**, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate**:** or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it strugglesto idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.

FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.”

The sanity of the mind is between superstition with fanaticism on the one hand, and enthusiasm with indifference and a diseased slowness to action on the other. For the conceptions of the mind may be so vivid and adequate, as to preclude that impulse to the realizing of them, which is strongest and most restless in those, who possess more than mere talent, (or the faculty of appropriating and applying the knowledge of others,)—yet still want something of the creative and self-sufficing power of absolute genius. For this reason therefore, they are men of commanding genius. While the former rest content between thought and reality, as it were in an intermundium of which their own living spirit supplies the substance, and their imagination the ever-varying form; the latter must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality. These in tranquil times are formed to exhibit a perfect poem in palace, or temple, or landscape-garden; or a tale of romance in canals that join sea with sea, or in walls of rock, which, shouldering back the billows, imitate the power, and supply the benevolence of nature to sheltered navies; or in aqueducts that, arching the wide vale from mountain to mountain, give a Palmyra to the desert. But alas! in times of tumult they are the men destined to come forth as the shaping spirit of ruin, to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of a day, and to change kings and kingdoms, as the wind shifts and shapes the clouds [8]. The records of biography seem to confirm this theory. The men of the greatest genius, as far as we can judge from their own works or from the accounts of their contemporaries, appear to have been of calm and tranquil temper in all that related to themselves. (*BL,* 1817)

C. searches for “an antidote to that *restless craving* for the *wonders of the day*, which in conjunction with the *appetite* for *publicity* is *spreading* like an efflorescence on the surface of [the] national character.” (*Lay Sermons,* 1816, 9, italics added)

“if there exists means for deriving resignation from the general discontent […] that antidote and these means must be sought for in the collation of the present with the past, in the habit of thoughtfully assimilating the events of our own age to those of the time before us.”(*Lay Sermons,* 1816, 9, italics added)

S. T. Coleridge: *The Friend,* No. 8. Thursday, October 5, 1809. - Essay on Luther and Rousseau

1.)“I have ... derived the deepest interest from the comparison of Men, whose Characters at the first view appear widely dissimilar, who yet have produced similar effects on their different Ages” [...] “It is not from identity of opinions, or from similarity of events and outward actions, that a real resemblance in the radical character can be deduced.” [...]

“But the heroic Luther, a giant awaking in his strength, and the crazy Rousseau, the dreamer of love-sick tales, and the spinner of speculative cob-webs ; shy of light as the mole, but as quick-eared too for every whisper of the public opinion ; the teacher of stoic pride in his principles, yet the victim of morbid vanity in his feelings and conduct! From what point of likeness can we commence the comparison between a Luther and a Rousseau?”[…]

“the effects produced on their several ages by Luther and Rousseau, were commensurate with each other, and were produced in both cases by what their contemporaries felt as serious and vehement eloquence, and […]I am disposed to plead for a resemblance in the men themselves, for that similarity in their radical natures” [...]

2.)“Whoever has sojourned in Eisenach, will assuredly have visited the Warteburg, interesting by so many historical associations, which stands on a high rock, about two miles to the south from the city gate. To this castle Luther was taken on his return from the imperial Diet where Charles T. had pronounced the ban upon him, and limited his safe convoy to one and twenty days. [...] To this friendly imprisonment the Reformation owes many of Luther's most important labours. In this place he wrote his works against auricular confession [...] and translated the New Testament. Here too, and during this time, he is said to have hurled his inkstand at the devil, the black spot from which yet remains on the stone wall of the room he studied in.” [...]

“Methinks I see him sitting, the heroic student, in his chamber in the Warteburg, with his midnight lamp before him, […] Below it lies the Hebrew Bible open, on which he gazes, his brow pressing on his palm, brooding over some obscure text, which he desires to make plain to the simple boor and to the humble artizan, and to transfer its whole force into their own natural and living tongue. And he himself does not understand it! Thick darkness lies on the original text […] Disappointed, despondent, enraged, ceasing to think, […] he sinks, without perceiving it, into a trance of slumber ; during which his brain retains its waking energies, excepting that what would have been mere thoughts before, now […] shape and condense themselves into things, into realities. All at once he sees the arch-fiend coming forth on the wall of the room” [...]

“I see nothing improbable, that in some one of those momentary slumbers, into which the suspension of all thought in the perplexity of intense thinking so often passes, Luther should have had a full view of the room in which he was sitting, [...], and at the same time a brain-image of the devil, vivid enough to have acquired apparent outness” [...]

3.) “He [Luther] was a poet indeed, as great a poet as ever lived in any age or country; but his poetic images were so vivid, that they mastered the poet's own mind ! He was possessed with them, as with substances distinct from himself: Luther did not write, he acted poems. The Bible was a spiritual, indeed, but not a figurative armoury in his belief: it was the magazine of his warlike stores, and from thence he was to arm himself.” [...]

4.) “Such was Luther under the influences of the age and country in and for which he was born. Conceive him a citizen of Geneva, and a contemporary of Voltaire : suppose the French language his mother-tongue, [...] conceive this change of circumstances, and Luther will no longer dream of fiends or of anti-Christ — but will he have no dreams in their place? [...] And might not a perfect constitution, a government of pure reason […] have easily supplied the place of the reign of Christ in the new Jerusalem? […] Henceforward then, we will conceive his reason employed in building up anew the edifice of *earthly* society, and his imaginationas pledging itself for the possible realisation of the structure. We will lose the great reformer, who was born in an age which needed him, in the Philosopher of Geneva, who was doomed to misapply his energies to materials the properties of which he misunderstood, and happy only that he did not live to witness the direful effects of his system.”

*On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1829): “I expressed my belief, that in no instance had the false use of a word become current without some practical ill consequence, of far greater moment than would *primo aspectu* have been thought possible.”

Plato: *Ion*

“the Muse first of all inspires men herself; and from these inspired persons a chain of other persons is suspended, who take the inspiration. For all good poets, epic as well as lyric, compose their beautiful poems not by art, but because they are inspired and possessed. And as the Corybantian revellers when they dance are not in their right mind, so the lyric poets are not in their right mind when they are composing their beautiful strains: but when falling under the power of music and metre they are inspired and possessed; like Bacchic maidens who draw milk and honey from the rivers when they are under the influence of Dionysus but not when they are in their right mind. And the soul of the lyric poet does the same, as they themselves say; for they tell us that they bring songs from honeyed fountains, culling them out of the gardens and dells of the Muses; they, like the bees, winging their way from flower to flower. And this is true. For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing, and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state, he is powerless and is unable to utter his oracles.”

Plato: *Republic,* book X.

“**we shall be right in refusing to admit him [the poet] into a well-ordered State, because** **he awakens and nourishes and strengthens the feelings and impairs the reason**.[…]

“we are ready to acknowledge that Homer is the greatest of poets and first of tragedy writers; but we must remain firm in our conviction that hymns to the gods and praises of famous men are the only poetry which ought to be admitted into our State. For **if you** go beyond this and **allow the** **honeyed muse to enter, either in epic or lyric verse, not law and the reason** **of mankind, which by common consent have ever been deemed best, but pleasure** **and pain will be the rulers in our State.”**

QUESTIONS:

Extract from the essay on Luther and Rousseau

1. Read part 1.) attentively:
2. What is the task Coleridge sets for himself in this introduction to his essay on Luther and Rousseau?
3. Does Coleridge like Rousseau? What does he think about him? (And, by analogy: what could he think about the French philosophers who played such a great role in the French Revolution?)
4. Does Coleridge appreciate Luther?
5. What are the two most important similarities between Luther and Rousseau?
6. Read part 2.) attentively:
7. What did Luther do in the castle of Warterburg? What are the three important things enumerated in this extract?
8. Can you imagine Luther sitting and trying to translate the Bible? Why does he become frustrated?
9. What happens when he stops thinking and reading?
10. In what kind of mental state does he have a “brain-image of the devil, vivid enough to have acquired an apparent outness?”
11. In part 3.) Coleridge takes an account of Luther as a poet
12. What are his characteristics? What does the “but” between the two clauses of the first sentence indicate?
13. Does poetic possession appear in a positive, or rather in a negative light?
14. How would you explain the sentence: “Luther did not write, he acted poems”? - considering the explanation Coleridge gives in the last sentence of this passage. What does “acti[ing] poems” have to do with eloquence?
15. In part 4.) Coleridge eventually arrives at the comparison of Luther and Rousseau: he imagines Luther living in Rousseau’s time, i.e. before the French Revolution.
16. What would Luther dream about? What do you think, who would he struggle against?
17. In his own time, he wanted to build a “New Jerusalem”, and the “reign of Christ” – what would he build in Rousseau’s time?
18. In what sense can the “building up anew of the edifice of *earthly* society” be dangerous? How can you relate this sentence to the French Revolution?
19. What was wrong with the Philosopher of Geneva (i.e. Rousseau/Voltaire)? What were the direful effects (i.e. the bad consequences) of his system?

Extract from Plato:

*Ion*: What are the characteristics of the poet? *Republic:* Why are poets banned from Plato’s Republic?

Preface to “Kubla Khan” (1816):

1. In the first sentence, Coleridge adopts a singular attitude to his poem. What does he call it?
2. What is the meaning of “anodyne”? What is its effect?
3. Try to reconstitute the steps of the process of composition of “Kubla Khan”.
4. Underline all the similarities that you find between this description and Coleridge’s outline of Luther’s attempt at reading of the Bible and his subsequent hallucination of the devil.
5. Considering Coleridge’s definition of the “secondary [poetic] imagination”, can “Kubla Khan” be considered a poem?

“Kubla Khan” (cc. 1797):

1. What is the meaning of “decree”?
2. How does the poem’s structure reflect that of the preface?
3. Enumerate the issues that appear *both* in the essay on Luther and Rousseau, *and* in “Kubla Khan”?
4. Considering the extracts from Plato, what would Plato say of the inspired poet of the last stanza?