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Imagining Nature a Second Time

Poetry and Gardens in Kant and Coleridge

Cody Staton[*]

ABSTRACT

This article examines the relationship between poetry and philosophy, or particularity and universality, by way of the theories of imagination offered by Kant and Coleridge. I examine two ways in which the imagination is said to create a second nature through gardens and poetry. Both Kant and Coleridge describe the beauty of nature as supplying the imagination with the material necessary to reimagine nature or to create a new nature compatible with and reliant upon original nature. For Coleridge and Kant, the poet and gardener imagine nature well beyond the material givennness but instead give rise to reflections on the relationship between the universal and particular.

Keywords: Kant, Coleridge, imagination, poetry, nature, landscape gardens

RÉSUMÉ

Cet article examine le rapport entre poésie et philosophie, ou entre particularité et universalité, par le biais des théories de l'imagination proposées par Kant et Coleridge. J'examine deux façons dont l'imagination est censée créer une seconde nature à travers les jardins et la poésie. Kant et Coleridge décrivent tous deux la beauté de la nature comme fournissant à l'imagination le matériau nécessaire pour ré-imaginer la nature ou pour créer une nouvelle nature compatible avec la nature originelle et s'appuyant sur elle. Pour Coleridge et Kant, le poète et le jardinier imaginent la nature bien au-delà du donné matériel, donnant ainsi lieu à des réflexions sur la relation entre l'universel et le particulier.

Mots-clés : Kant, Coleridge, imagination, poésie, nature, jardins paysager

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[*] PhD in Philosophy, independent scholar, 3186 Jade Ct., Canton GA, USA – mcodystaton@gmail.com

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CODY STATON

Samuel Taylor Coleridge once remarked that a person seeking to understand the way that he views the world could be described as follows:

> In the Preface of my Metaphys. Works I should say – Once & all read Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c – & there you will trace or if you are on the hunt, track me.[1]

Of the three German-speaking philosophers, Kant stands out as the most significant for Coleridge. And for a philosopher-poet obsessed with the power of the imagination, this is not at all an astounding discovery. His philosophical reflections are as equally imaginative as are his poetic writings. Who else but Coleridge, an admirer of Kant, could have created Xanadu, a wild paradise that takes readers to the summit of the sublime? Plenty of commentators have appreciated this relation, though none that I know of have investigated Kant and Coleridge on imagination in view of the relationship between poetry and philosophy itself, thus examining the relationship between universality and particularity.[2] Moreover, what the imagination enjoys and truly seeks more than anything is an original and unmitigated connection with nature. This sort of active affinity of imagination and nature becomes the very source for the imagination to continue imagining nature, thus forming the familiar in novel ways. As Kant says in the *Critique of Judgment*, through works of art, especially poetry, the imagination sets out to create nature a second time.[3] The most immediate way that we actively pursue an ongoing and dynamic relationship with nature is through the creation of gardens, which are quasi rearrangements of nature itself. In other words, through gardens we like to imagine how we can poetically and imaginatively emulate the imagination of God, or so I will claim.

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[1] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, edited by Kathleen Coburn (New York and London: Routledge, 1957–), ii, 2375. Hereafter cited as *CN*. I would like to sincerely thank the two anonymous readers of my text who offered insightful and encouraging remarks and also pointed to some of the passages quoted as touching on broader issues at work in romanticism as a whole.

[2] For a discussion on Kant and Coleridge on the power of imagination and the trivial indifference as to how Coleridge derived his ideas, see especially Hume, Robert D. "Kant and Coleridge on imagination." *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 28.4 (1970): 485-496. Similarly, Peter Cheyne develops a thoughtful reflection on the practice of contemplation as comprising the combination of imagination, logic, reason, and aesthetic experience. See Cheyne, Peter, *Coleridge's Contemplative Philosophy* (Oxford: OUP, 2020).

[3] Kant, *Kritik der Urteilskraft* in *Kants gesammelte Schriften*, Ausgabe der Koniglich Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1901–), §49, AA 5: 314. Hereafter cited as KU.

Kant's theory of imagination can be classified as multifaceted and contributing to all aspects of creative life. This is true not only for the poet, but for the very way in which an object becomes a representation for us in the first place. For Kant, the imagination can work on, retrieve, and create any kind of object—be it empirical, aesthetic, or transcendental. In the third *Critique*, he describes the imagination as operating in free play, whereby it is not restricted by the understanding to conform to its rules. What the imagination loves most is to play with the rhythms of nature in the winding streams and billowing clouds and loves equally to recreate that nature in poetry or in gardens.

In his theoretical writings, Coleridge says next to nothing about gardens nor of their comparison to the wildness of nature, nor even of their necessary role as venues for strolling that serve to plunge the romantic poet into reflection. This is somewhat strange given that Coleridge and other English romantic poets spent as much time as possible in the Lake District in Cumbria of northwest England, where some of the country's finest walks can still be had among rolling hills, rock outcroppings, and large stretching lakes. This is certainly not the case for his on-and-off friend and fellow poet Wordsworth, who spent time in that country and dedicated the poem "Grasmere" to the pursuit of "plain living and high thinking" while living there. Most especially in "Tintern Abbey," he writes of the "wild green landscape" in which the "sportive wood run wild." In that collection, he was apparently unimpressed with the contributions to the *Lyrical Ballads* (1798 / 1800) by Coleridge, claiming that he would remove the "Rime of the Ancient Mariner" in the next edition. But Wordsworth floats as light as air as a poet, perhaps never coming down, as he never lifts a finger to say anything philosophical. The same cannot be said of Coleridge, who in all instances of his poetry was after sublime landscapes captured only in the imagination—landscapes such as Xanadu that go beyond the verge of what Kant would call grotesque and toward what Coleridge would characterize as paradise.

Moreover, Coleridge was the most philosophically mature thinker in the English language of his day, perhaps the most reflective since Hume. In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge waxes on the aesthetics of poetry, but more importantly he there characterizes the imagination—perhaps owing to his reading of Kant, Tetens, Fichte, and Schiller—as comprising several functions. We will set out to discover the function of the imagination, according to Coleridge and to examine what role Kant plays in this endeavor. My instinct is that, even though we can consider Coleridge to have drawn inspiration from a number of thinkers, the imaginative aquifer for him, the original source of inspiration, comes from nature itself, not from Kant or any other writer. This reflection on the imagination in Kant and Coleridge—a topic that has been thoroughly discussed already—will promote a broader consideration of the relationship between philosophy and poetry, between the natural and the arranged, and between the universal and the particular.

We will begin by examining Kant's theory of imagination before taking up consideration of Coleridge's original account of imagination. This will allow us to view the standpoint that each take with regard to nature and poetry. Along the way, we will give some voice to the landscape garden and how it, much like poetry, enables the philosopher-poet to consider the nature that we inherit in light of the nature that we create through art. This gives us the further advantage to reflect on the dynamic relationship between universality and particularity.

1. Imagination in Kant

Kant's critical conception of the imagination continues to be a source of both inspiration and controversy among commentators. It is clear that his decision to regard the sensible and intellectual powers of the mind as being distinct in kind obliged him to nominate the imagination as the third, mediating power that is both intellectual and sensible, active and passive, productive and reproductive. For our purposes, I will simply highlight the creative aspects of the imagination that will have more to do with our theme here.

In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant is primarily concerned with delineating the transcendental functions of the imagination that create schemata, which serve to create a priori time-determinations that translate the otherwise abstract categories from mere forms for judging into rules that apply to the sensible conditions of time. In the case of determinative judgment, the imagination plays the supporting role for the understanding. Kant's revamped consideration of the imagination came about in the late 1780s when he stumbled upon the idea that the power of judgment, no less than reason and the understanding, required a critique of its use and application. What Kant then discovered was that judgment does not always follow the rules of the understanding. In its reflective mode, judgment either proceeds according to the play of the imagination alone (aesthetic) or makes declarations alongside the understanding's concepts insofar as reason projects a teleological aim for judgment (teleology).

In its aesthetic mode, judgment finds the mere free play of the imagination's reflections on nature's forms to be purposeful in itself, even though no concept of the object's purpose is presented for judgment to subsume; rather, judgment finds pleasure in the imagination's reflections to be purposive. As a whole, judgment simply forms a different standpoint with regard to the presentations given by the imagination and understanding. In a lecture note, Kant is said to have characterized the two faculties as often having different aims as follows:

> Imagination and understanding are two friends who cannot do without one another but cannot stand one another either, for one always harms the other. The more universal the understanding is in its rules, the more perfect it is, but if it wants to consider things *in concreto* then [it] absolutely cannot do without the imagination.[4]

Kant's designation of the *in concreto* schematization of the dog in the first *Critique* indeed refers not to a particular dog, but rather to the universal applicability of the concept through the schema that exhibits it in intuition.[5] The more the understanding learns to rely on the imagination's *in concreto* expressions of the concept, the more concepts the understanding can produce. From the "four-footed animal in a general way," the imagination renders the particularity of given sensible intuitions more universal by way of exhibiting outward the production of concepts, namely, by enabling the understanding to produce more concepts.[6]

In the third *Critique*, we find Kant characterizing the relationship between imagination and understanding in such a way that the latter does the bidding of the former. In §9, Kant describes the "*free play* of the cognitive powers" as contributing to judgments of taste.[7] Rachel Zuckert has observed that Kant refers to the free play in three ways: as a free play of imagination, as a free play of imagination *and* understanding, and as the free play of imagination *with* understanding.[8] These arguments contribute to the general condition of the mind that Kant refers to as the "lawfulness without a law" or the "lawfulness of the contingent," both of which are said to establish the purposive unity of representations without being governed by a concept of the object purpose.[9]

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[4] Kant, V-Lo/Dohna, 24: 710.

[5] Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, A141/B180. Hereafter cited as KrV.

[6] Compare Kant, JL §16, 9: 99n, §16, 100, and §17, 5: 232.

[7] Kant, KU, §9, 217.

[8] Rachel Zuckert, *Beauty and Biology*, *An Interpretation of the Critique of Judgment* (Cambridge: CUP, 2007), 279–305. I have discussed this topic more extensively in Staton, "In Search of Play: Schiller's Drive Theory as a Turn Away From Kant [À la recherche du jeu. La théorie schillérienne des pulsions : une mise à distance de Kant]," *Les Cahiers philosophiques de Strasbourg*, vol. 52 (2022): 69–95.

[9] Cf. Kant, KU, 5: 240–41; cf. §15, 5: 226 and §17, 5: 236.

However it is that the imagination plays with nature, we must consider both cognitive powers to be involved, except in instances of entirely free beauties. In this case, I take it that Kant conceives of the imagination as operating independently, such as is the case when it reflects on or plays with "designs *à la grecque*, the foliage on borders or on wallpaper" that, in themselves, "represent nothing, no object under a determinate concept, and are free beauties."[10] Likewise, Kant indicates such shapes as can be found in "flowers, free designs, lines aimlessly intertwined and called foliage: these have no significance."[11] However, when the understanding does become involved in the act of representation, we discover that a concept of the object's purpose is presented alongside the aesthetic judgment. This is the case in the "beauty of a horse, of a building (such as a church, a palace, an arsenal, or a garden house) [for they] presuppose a concept of the end that determines what the thing should be, hence a concept of its perfection, and is thus merely dependent (*adharierende*) beauty."[12] If Philip Malaband's interpretation is right, readers need not worry about the inclusion of empirical concepts in instances of dependent beauty, for the latter is not a negative aesthetic judgment, but simply a sub-species of free beauty.[13] This is all to say that aesthetic judgments and the ideas that the imagination creates and reflects on often involve some level of understanding. A gardener could more easily create a winding lane lined by colorful azaleas if he had knowledge of the soil, light, and water conditions to sustain their lives.

What the imaginative gardener or poet do most of all is to rearrange the ordinary into something spectacular for us. In this regard, Kant claims that "the imagination ([in its role] as a productive cognitive power) is very mighty when it creates, as it were, another nature out of the material that actual nature gives it."[14] The imaginative poet reassembles the humdrum and "routine" in order, through imagination, to begin to believe in the power of nature again and to also realize our original orientation and connection to nature, however much we seduce ourselves into believing that we are apart from nature. Kant writes that through such endeavors, "we maybe even restructure experience."[15] The Kantian thinker of the third *Critique* is not the Newtonian acolyte most people claim that he is, for in §49, he argues that through the imaginative power we may "continue to follow analogical laws, yet we also follow principles which reside higher up, namely, in reason (and which are just as natural to us as those which the understanding follows in apprehending empirical nature)."[16] Of course, in the creation of a second nature, the imagination exceeds the reach of the understanding, but this activity is no less natural to us than any other mental activity. Kant specifies that, "although it is under that law that nature lends us material, yet we can process that material into something quite different, namely, into something that surpasses nature."[17]

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[10] Kant, KU, §16, 5: 229–30.

[11] Kant, KU, §4, 5: 207; cf. §16, 5: 229.

[12] Kant, KU, §16, 5: 229–30; cf. 5: 242

[13] Philip Malaband, "Understanding Kant's Distinction between Free and Dependent Beauty," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 52. 206 (2002): 66–81.

[14] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[15] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

Moreover, what the imagination creates space or possibility for is the production of aesthetic ideas that emulate the heights of reason's ideas. An aesthetic idea, he claims, "cannot become cognition because it is an *intuition* (of the imagination) for which an adequate concept can never be found."[18] But as Andrew Chignell notices, natural beauty enables one's aesthetic ideas to "contemplate one rational idea in particular—that of the world fully systematized," namely, as admitting of purposiveness throughout.[19] This would explain why Kant refers to aesthetic ideas as "*unexpoundable* representations of the imagination (in its free play)."[20] What the imagination does is to exhibit form in a way that nature itself did not produce. In its production of aesthetic ideas, the imagination emulates the universality of reason's ideas without ever reaching such heights. The poet genius transforms the natural world with which he communes by creating an illusory nature to coexist with actual nature. Kant argues that it is "actually in the art of poetry that the power of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to full extent. Considered by itself, however, this power is actually only a talent (of the imagination)."[21]

We will come back to Kant's reflections on poetry later on, but I would like to turn to Coleridge's theory of imagination with an idea toward the end of our discussion to assess how, if at all, Kant's notion of the imagination creating a second nature played a role in Coleridge's ideas.

2. Imagination in Coleridge

Coleridge's comments on the history of modern philosophy show him to be an enigma among English writers and philosophers. He is the only thinker of his generation of consequence who finds that Locke, Hume, and others entirely reduced the powers of imagination to mere laws of association. But more problematic as a whole is the fact that the whole of modern thought prior to Kant had mistakenly reduced experience itself to mere atomistic sensations thought to be taken up singularly by the imagination.[22] As to Hume in particular, he writes:

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[16] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[17] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[18] Kant, KU, §57, 5: 342.

[19] Andrew Chignell, "Kant on the Normativity of Taste: The Role of Aesthetic Ideas," *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 85.3 (2007): 431.

[20] Kant, KU, §57, 5: 343.

[21] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

> How opposite to nature & the fact to talk of the one *moment* of Hume; of our whole being an aggregate of successive single sensations. Who ever *felt* a single sensation? Is not every one at the same moment conscious that these co-exist with a thousand others in a darker shade, or less light.[23]

One could argue that Coleridge perhaps unfairly characterizes Hume's theory here, but his point is that no simple representation could possibly exist. If one were to follow the logic of Hume's associationism account, it would follow that all seemingly simple presentations immediately contain references to other representations, according to Coleridge.

In contrast to modern philosophers prior to Kant, Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* aims to clarify "the powers of association . . . and on the generic difference between the faculties of Fancy and Imagination . . . as laying the foundation Stones of the Constructive or Dynamic Philosophy in opposition to the merely mechanic."[24] Coleridge views his distinction as being the very thrust of his creative impetus toward the *dynamic philosophy* in opposition to the mechanistic style that he seeks to criticize. This was no doubt a deliberate intention on his part to distance his view of the imagination from the view of his on-again, off-again friend, Wordsworth, who included imagination among the powers of perception and association.[25]

Coleridge holds that not only are perceptions an act of imagination, but that there are imaginative acts that exceed the domain of sensible intuition, to put it in Kantian terms. On the whole, Coleridge characterizes the imagination as follows:

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[22] On this, see Kathleen Wheeler, "Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: a Hegelian Solution to Kant?" in Jasper, D. (ed.), *The Interpretation of Belief: Coleridge, Schleiermacher, and Romanticism*. (London: Palgrave MacMillan), 20. Despite a rather bizarre nineteenth century interpretation of Kant as a whole, Wheeler makes some insightful remarks on perception being a power of imagination.

[23] Coleridge, *CN*, II, 2370.

[24] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, E.L. Griggs (ed.) (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 1956–). Letter to R. H. Brabant, 29 July 1815, iv, 971–72. Hereafter cited as *CL*.

[25] See Wordsworth's 1815 Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*.

> 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 external act of creation in the infinite I AM.[26]

Coleridge's assignment of the imagination as serving the role of the "repetition in the finite mind of the external act of creation in the infinite I AM" is very likely drawn from the Book of Exodus, in which God is said to be self-determining or self-defining his continual acts of creation through the work of Moses (Exod. 3: 14). Or, Moses participates in the act of God's creation through the primary imagination's active perception of the world created by God.[27] The poet-philosopher thus communicates directly through nature in the very act of perception. Plato held similar ideas about *methexis*, though whereas he was indeed critical of the poet's capacity to participate in divine creation with any real knowledge of the Good, Coleridge and the romantics view the work of the imagination as the vector through which God reveals the beautiful mystery of nature.

Not only is the imagination the very living power of human perception, but it also actively creates the dynamic life of the self who can say "I am." In the *Biographia*, the imagination is said to be a "sacred power of self-intuition."[28] Coleridge then compares this human quality to the way in which "the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar," or how the imagination in some individuals, "who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennæ yet to come. They know and feel, that the *potential* works *in* them, even as the *actual* works on them!"[29] The senses are thus organized by the imagination such that the imagination even anticipates the physical development of the body yet to be realized. Although Coleridge was critical of Aristotle, we might think of this power of imagination as a kind of *dunamis* in which the potentiality within and the actuality from without are made possible. The imagination is like the horned fly that will grow and adapt in a new guise into which it has not yet grown. The primary imagination creates space for that which has yet not been realized in perception but will be necessary for that which is to come.

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[26] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Biographia Literaria*, edited by Adam Roberts. (Edinburgh: EUP, 2014), xiii, 205. Hereafter cited as *BL*.

[27] I am extremely grateful to the anonymous reviewer who pointed out this connection. For a commentary on the quasi-religious philosophy of Coleridge and its development in relation to Kant, see James Vigus, "The Philosophy of Samuel Taylor Coleridge" in Mander, W.J. (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of British Nineteenth Century Philosophy*. (Oxford: OUP, 2014), 520–40.

[28] Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 173.

[29] Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 173.

What the primary imagination does is to remove that "film of familiarity" or the habitual from our hearts, thereby allowing us to assume a new standpoint or attitude toward the familiar.[30] More than that, the imagination either creates or finds the object that we need. Shakespeare speaks of how the "imagination bodies forth," such that

> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them into shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and name.[31]

Rather than fleeing into the mystical universe of the heavens and becoming lost in the unknown, it is the imagination that indeed ventures out into the unknown, but in doing so this same power forms, shapes, and creates a bodily object for that which was hitherto inaccessible to us. The world that the imagination discovers through a poem or through a garden is the discovery of a familiar world, but with each visit we find something novel. So, Coleridge and Shakespeare argue that where the imagination takes us is local and that we know this place by name. As the Bard has Prince Hal declare in Henry IV: "If all the year were playing holidays, to sport would be as tedious as to work, but when they seldom come, they wished-for come" (Henry IV, Part 1). It is as if the local garden that you often frequent regularly replaces seasonal plants, yet the perennial trees and shrubs are permanent fixtures. Each visit welcomes you with new accents to the familiar. A poem or great work of literature that one greatly loves will over time also reveal new ways of seeing the characters, of understanding the arc of the narrative, and even allow one to understand oneself in a different light.

For Coleridge, all efforts of the imagination are opposed to the reductive enterprises of mere materialism, or the material drive itself, as Schiller would call it, for Coleridge writes to a friend against Newton that his experiments render the human mind and soul to be a lazy onlooker to the world:

> My opinion is this—that deep Thinking is attainable only by a man of deep Feeling, and that all Truth is a species of Revelation. The more I understand of Sir Isaac Newton's works, the more boldly I dare to utter to my own mind & therefore to *you*, that I believe the Souls of 500 Sir Isaac Newtons would go to a making up of a Shakespeare or a Milton. .

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[30] Coleridge, BL, xiv, 208.

[31] Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Act V, Scene 1, 1845–48.

> .. Newton was a mere materialist—*Mind* in his system is always passive—a Lazy Looker-on on an external World. If the mind be not *passive*, if it be indeed made in God's Image, that too in the sublimest sense—the Image of the *Creator*—there is ground for suspicion, that any system built on the passiveness of the mind must be false, as a system.[32]

It is the imagination that actively looks and thus changes the world through its unique standpoint. Far from a mere passive observer, the primary imagination creates a unique order and connection with nature. We might not be far off when considering this original, immediate, and authentic (non-mediated) connection to the natural world to be a kind of *logos* in the sense in which Heraclitus describes its capacity to interpret the myriad changes of nature, or the way in which the heart-mind (*xin*, 心) in the classical Chinese traditions interpret the rhythmical movements of nature as emerging from *dao* 道.

Primary imagination is an active shaping of the world that is a non-mediated productive encounter that we have with the world. This is where we actively participate with and create the world that we at the same time experience. Primary imaginative encounters involve all our unmediated experiences through which perception assumes a particular standpoint, but these unique and individual perceptions belonging to different individuals are not isolated but rather collective. As Kathleen Wheeler points out, imagination does not merely guide perception, but is the active perceptive power itself.[33] We all actively participate in the creation of the world given to us. Coleridge is thus not interested in giving privilege to the artistic genius but rather considers all humans as being endowed with this capacity to productively perceive the world without recourse to assistance. Primary imagination enables the mind to perceive what would otherwise be that "secret ministry" of nature.[34]

Coleridge's mariner is one whose imagination developed the capacity to reimagine how to live with the natural world, again, after having sinned against the world by doing a "hellish thing" when he kills the albatross (190). This turn comes about when the mariner in the moonlight recognizes how even the water snakes receive grace from God, a scene upon which he reflects:

> O happy living things! No tongue

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[32] Coleridge, Letter to Thomas Poole, 23 March 1801, CL, ii, 709.

[33] Wheeler, "Coleridge's Theory of Imagination: A Hegelian Solution to Kant?" 16–18.

[34] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "Frost at Midnight" in *The Complete Poetical Works*, edited by Ernest Hartley Coleridge (Oxford: OUP, 1912). Hereafter cited as PW.

> Their beauty might declare:
> A spring of love gushed from my heart,
> And I blessed them unaware:
> Sure my kind saint took pity on me,
> And I blessed them unaware.[35]

It was in that instance of his imagination having recognized how grace is dealt to all living things that the mariner in the “self-same moment” was relieved of the albatross from around his neck. He then develops the ability to use his example of sinning against nature to teach how “he prayeth best, who loveth best, all things great and small; for the dear God who loveth us, He made and loveth all.”[36] The mariner is Coleridge’s beacon of hope for humanity, in that he, like all humans, succumbs to flawed and failed attitudes toward other living things, but through experience realizes how to transform in the hopes of humanity itself improving. The injunction to ourselves is not an act of contrition or of forgiveness, but simply for the imagination to acknowledge the mutual right of existence for other individuals and other species.

It is here that the imagination of the mariner discovers that “spring of love” gushing from his heart. Our finite human understanding relies entirely on the senses and imagination to furnish it with the material from which we may think, thus consciousness itself, according to Coleridge, relies on the imagination: “What we cannot *imagine*, we cannot, in the proper sense of the word, conceive.”[37]

In addition to the primary imagination, Coleridge reflects on how individuals seek to recreate what the primary imagination enjoys through the medium of art:

> The secondary 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 re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[38]

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[35] Coleridge, PW, Part IV, 198.

[36] Coleridge, PW, Part VII, 209.

[37] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Aids to Reflection in the formation of a manly character on the several grounds of prudence, morality and religion, illustrated by select passages from our elder divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton* (London 1825), aphorism vi, 44. Hereafter cited as *AR*.

[38] Coleridge, *BL*, xiii, 205–06.

Coleridge's comment that the secondary imagination dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates is likely borrowed from Hume, who argues in the *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* that the imagination has an "unlimited power of mixing, compounding, separating, and dividing these ideas."[39] The exception here is that Coleridge does not believe that either the will or the imagination are bound to the laws of association. It is no coincidence that Tetens writes in his *Philosophische Versuche* that the imagination (*Dichtkraft*) is always "separating (*trennen*), dissolving (*auflösen*), combining (*verbinden*), mixing (*vermischen*), and as a result creating new images."[40] For Tetens, by way of the *Dichtkraft*, the "soul can not only place and order its ideas as a curator of a gallery of images, but it is also a painter that invents and produces new paintings."[41] I think that Coleridge was quite fond of Tetens's ideas about the imagination, as he writes that this secondary power does not merely involve a productive force of creation, but likewise destroys or dissolves "in order to re-create" nature a second time, as if the imagination were an art curator or landscape gardener. "It is essentially *vital*" in that the very guts of its activity involves the production of life.

The secondary imagination is the instrument of the poet, who draws upon his will to recreate nature through the poem. One might think of the will here being construed in the Kantian sense of *Willkür*, the power of choice, and not *der Wille*, the purely practical power of reason that legislates the moral law. Art, and especially poetry, is that very means through which the cipher interprets the mysteries of nature through the medium of language. For Coleridge, this is an imaginative effort to recreate the world created by God through the media of poetry and song. Even the method of writing is distinguishable in a poet by way of being either mechanic or organic, or what Coleridge would refer to as *dynamic*. We will say more about Coleridge's reflections on poetry and about his poetic writings later on, but suffice to say for now that the secondary imagination is a fundamental and authentic means of finding value beyond the material givenness of nature. Forests in themselves are beautiful, but the poem sheds light on what is not immediately seen. So often, the "best things dwell out of sight," as Emily Dickinson notices.

It is not that the primary merely supplies the secondary, as they both have different modus operandi and differing aims or goals. In addition to the two modes of imagination just mentioned, Coleridge also speaks about a third mode in which the mind indulges in fantasy or fancy, which is tied to memory and the laws of association: “In association then consists the whole mechanism of the reproduction of impressions, in the Aristotelian Psychology. It is the universal law of the *passive* fancy and *mechanical* memory.”[42] He writes in the fourth chapter of his *Biographia* that sustained reflections on the powers of the mind brought him to the conviction that “fancy and imagination were two distinct and widely different faculties, instead of being, according to the general belief, either two names with one meaning, or at furthest, the lower and higher degree of one and the same power.”[43] On this point, Coleridge criticizes Wordsworth for coupling these two distinct powers of imagination and fancy: “I reply, that if by the power of evoking and combining, Mr. W. means the same as, and no more than, I meant by the aggregative and associative, I continue to deny, that it belongs at all to the imagination.”[44] Coleridge claims that Wordsworth mistakenly groups them together as one power, for he did not realize that a “man may work with two very different tools at the same moment; each has its share in the work, but the work effected by each is distinct and different.”[45]

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[39] Hume, David. *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Oxford: OUP, 2007), 34.

[40] Tetens, J.N. *Philosophisches Versuche ueber die menschliche Natur und ihre Entwickelung* (1777), vol. 1. Leipzig: M.G. Weidmanns Erben und Reich. [Edited by Udo Roth and Gideon Stiening. Berlin: de Gruyter, 2014.], I.15.8; I, 139. Hereafter cited as PV.

[41] Tetens, PV, I.13; I, 107.

Fancy is that which the individual must make recourse to when lacking access to the imagination. Coleridge claims that the difference between imagination and fancy can be likened to the distinction between Cowley and Milton: “Milton had a highly *imaginative*, Cowley a very *fanciful* mind.”[46] In other words, by Coleridge’s estimation, Cowley’s mind was wed to association and memory while Milton broke through to imagination and freed his verse from mechanical nature. As he writes at the close of chapter thirteen:

> Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; and blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word choice. But equally with the ordinary memory it must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.[47]

Moreover, fancy is the artifice the spectator erects as a kind of prop or gimmick to fool us into believing that the ridiculous inauthentic display—the origin of all humor—is indeed genuine. So, Coleridge accepts the fact that the mind often lives in fantasy, that we create fanciful artifices or stories to clothe our mind in the kind of drapery that we imagine to make our lives interesting, and it may even be useful from time to time.[48] Philosophers are often guilty of creating such elaborate theories of such sorts in order to assist or prop up their reflections, but most are entirely empty.[49] In his commentary on Milton, for instance, Coleridge notes the work of fancy being operative in Eve succumbing to temptation in her dream.[50] That naked unconscious exposure to the world in dreams is perhaps a thrusting of the unimaginable and rebuked aspects of oneself onto the world, aspects that, when seen as images exterior to ourselves, we then reject about ourselves.

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[42] Coleridge, BL, v, 75.

[43] Coleridge, BL, iv, 63.

[44] Coleridge, BL, xii, 198.

[45] Coleridge, BL, xii, 198.

[46] Coleridge, BL, iv, 64.

[47] Coleridge, BL, xiii, 206.

What Coleridge taps into his discussion of fancy may be owed to the drive theory developed just years prior by Friedrich Schiller. From the psychoanalytic point of view, fancy is that aspect of the unconscious shielding itself from the will (secondary imagination driven by the will that wants to pursue life). Fancy is a conscious effort on the part of the I to suppress creativity in order to pursue immediate, sugary satisfaction at the level of material drives. Coleridge was well aware of Schiller, thus it might have been that he had similar thoughts about the repetitive and boring uses or abuses that the imagination could endure at the behest of mere fancy.[51]

Now, we will come to the question of whether or not Coleridge's sketches of the imaginative powers of the mind are Kantian. If we allow that the secondary imagination is that which operates on that which is given in intuition, thus transforming material into a new nature, we can affirm that they have the same idea. But Coleridge's notion of the primary imagination seems to exceed the limits of reason itself, a venture that Kant would declare impossible or enthusiastic, even fanatical. As a whole, Coleridge's chief aim is to articulate the kind of philosophy that could transcend the critical limits imposed by Kant in order to achieve the principle of a total and undivided philosophy, whereby "philosophy would pass into religion, and religion become inclusive of philosophy."[52] After all, experience is itself a magical endeavor, for Coleridge. As he waxes in one of his notebooks:

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[48] Peter Cheyne argues that understanding the creative thrust of Coleridge's view of the mind involves distinguishing between two layers, a higher order of thought and imagination, and the lower order of memory and association. He argues that Coleridge's view of the mind is that genuine reflection happens through thoughts at the extreme higher order. See Cheyne, Peter. "Coleridge's 'Order of the Mental Powers' and the Energic-Energetic Distinction" in Cheye, Peter (ed.), *Coleridge and Contemplation* (Oxford: OUP, 2017): 171–92.

[49] Coleridge, *AR*, aphorism ii, 109.

[50] See John Beer, "Coleridge and Baxter on Dreaming," *Dreaming: Journal of the Association for the Study of Dreams* 7 (1997): 166.

[51] Coleridge translated Schiller's *Wallenstein* plays in 1800, an affair that he did not enjoy.

> In the paradisiacal World sleep was voluntary & holy—a spiritual before God, in which the mind elevated by contemplation retired into pure intellect suspending all commerce with sensible objects & perceiving the present deity.[53]

This is to say that the imagination can create a new nature wherein one communes with the spirit of God. Coleridge describes his idea of religion and philosophy merging into one another or allowing for an absolute standpoint in which the finite I realizes its moral destiny in an aesthetic path toward the infinite as follows: "We begin with the I KNOW myself, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in God" (*BL*, xii, 191). Imaginative thought is thus a religious affair: "To think (Ding, denken; res, reor) is to *thingify*" (*CL*, iv, 885). We create the world God wanted us to by way of the imagination and thought and, for Coleridge, it seems that the only limits to thingifying the world are the limits that we impose on ourselves.[54] In what follows, we will discuss the subject matter or object of Coleridge's reflections, namely, nature itself and the nature created by the imagination. I will begin by drawing a distinction made by Kant concerning nature itself and the nature that we create a second time through gardens.

3. Gardens and Nature

I would like to first provide some descriptive arguments of how the two philosophers describe natural beauty, with some comparative remarks to Xanadu given in *Kubla Kahn*, wherein it seems clear that Coleridge depicts that imaginative place as much more sublime than beautiful. We will discuss imaginative creations by examining Kant's account of nature in connection to landscape gardens, which are truly and literally second natures.

For Kant, the beautiful in nature exceeds the beauty of art beyond all measure: "This superiority of natural beauty over that of art, namely, that—

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[52] Coleridge, *BL*, xii, 191.

[53] Coleridge, CN, i, 191.

[54] For an argument that Coleridge, like Schlegel, fought against the prevailing trend of totally systematizing philosophy with grounding first principles, see Alexander J.B. Hampton, "Romanticism and System in Coleridge and Schlegel," *Symphilosophie: International Journal of Philosophical Romanticism* 5 (2023): 265–99. Hampton characterizes this effort as "striving toward an ideal that could never be fully attained," precisely because the ideal sought after was freedom (267–68).

even if art were to excel nature in form—it is the only beauty that arouses a direct interest, agrees with the refined and solid [*gründlich*] way of thinking of all people who have cultivated their moral feeling."[55] Yet, he resists the idea that landscape gardens are anything more than an artful arrangement of nature's products. At the same time, Kant argues that the English landscape garden "drives the freedom of the imagination to the verge of the grotesque."[56] Due to the seemingly unrecognizable distinction between the landscape garden and natural beauty, the imagination is not constrained to follow rules and, hence, "taste can show its greatest perfections in designs made by the imagination."[57] So, while the understanding fails to discover any "utility" or purpose in such a representation, the imagination finds greater freedom when playing with nature's forms in this way.[58] In characterizing landscape gardens as a kind of painting, Kant considers the English garden to be filled entirely with free beauties, which he describes as presenting nothing in the way of purposes, but pleasing entirely on account of their form.[59]

Kant argues that, in the example of "a beautiful garden . . . the purposes are not sufficiently determined and fixed by their concept, so that the purposiveness is nearly as free as in the case of *vague* beauty," hence there can be no *ideal* beautiful garden.[60] An ideal must involve a degree of conceptual involvement, but "an ideal of beautiful flowers, of beautiful furnishings, or of a beautiful view is unthinkable."[61] Just why the beautiful garden represents a middle ground between *vague* (free) and *fixed* (dependent) beauties may have a simple answer: it depends on the arrangement of the natural elements. This task is not unlike that of a painter, for "in painting, in sculpture, indeed in all the visual arts, including architecture and horticulture insofar as they are fine arts, *design* is what is essential," and because landscape gardens are a kind of painting, some are simply more artfully arranged than others.[62] This is not exactly an astounding claim, as he is simply claiming that the enjoyment of a garden depends on how the gardener shapes the landscape.

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[55] Kant, KU, §42, 5: 299.

[56] Kant, KU, 242.

[57] Kant, KU, 242.

[58] Kant, KU, §51, 323. Despite this, it has been said that Kant offers a poor argument of the landscape garden as mere ornamentation insofar as he supposedly fails to appreciate the way in which topography frames the so-called picturesque landscape. On this, see Michael G. Lee. *The German Mittelweg: Garden Theory and Philosophy at the Time of Kant* (London: Routledge, 2007).

[59] Kant, KU, §51, 323n.

[60] Kant, KU, §17, 233.

[61] Kant, KU, §17, 233.

[62] Kant, KU, 225.

Gardens, for Kant, beyond their functional purposes, are contrapurposive, unless the design is such that the imagination is sustained in its reflection for an extraordinary length of time. Kant's distinction between the wild jungle of Sumatra and the pepper garden leaves little doubt that the latter fails to animate the imagination in its free play with any vigor approximate to that of the former:

> *Marsden*, in his description of Sumatra, comments that the free beauties of nature there surround the beholder everywhere, so that there is little left in them to attract him; whereas, when in the midst of a forest he came upon a pepper garden, with the stakes that supported the climbing plants forming paths between them along parallel lines, it charmed him greatly. He concludes from this that we like wild and apparently ruleless beauty only as a change, when we have been satiated with the sight of regular beauty. And yet he need only have made the experiment of spending one day with his pepper garden to realize that once regularity has [prompted] the understanding to put itself into attunement with order which it requires everywhere, the object ceases to entertain him and instead inflicts on his imagination an irksome constraint.[63]

We have already seen how the creation of a second nature must arise from the imagination wanting a break from the mundane regularity of life. Kant goes on to describe how the regular order of the pepper garden could only entertain us up to the point in which we rediscover the wild and unconstrained beauty of the natural world. Order and regularity deriving from rules simply lull taste to sleep and cannot sustain its desire for beauty for very long. As he writes: "Everything that [shows] stiff regularity (close to mathematical regularity) runs counter to taste" in that regularity becomes too boring and can "serve the understanding only for cognitive purposes."[64] By contrast, "where only a free play of our representational powers is to be sustained (*unterhalten*) (though under the condition that the understanding suffers no offense) as in the case of pleasure gardens, room decoration, all sorts of tasteful utensils, and so on, any regularity that has an air of constraint is [to be] avoided as much as possible."[65] Nor does it seem to be the case that imitation of nature's forms could satisfy taste's original predilection for the beauty of the wild. It appears universal that we could all appreciate a bird singing for hours, he claims, but our own songs grow tiring after a period of time, and were we to mimic the bird singing by studying the patterns of the tune in order to replay it with an instrument, for example, this "strikes our ear as quite tasteless."[66]

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[63] Kant, KU, 243.

[64] Kant, KU, 242.

[65] Kant, KU, 242.

Waterfalls, tall canyon rock walls with fissures, a forested mountain vista of fall color all speak to movement in the imagination that cannot be reducible to the enjoyment of mere charms. Enjoying the charms of rhythmic sensations, such as in the sounds of a rippling mountain stream flowing over rocks or the flickering light of a fire is quite different than the imaginative *play of tones* or *wit*, in that the latter involve the imagination's play with nature, whereas the former plays with the imagination. As he writes in the *Anthropology*: "We play with the imagination frequently and gladly, but imagination (as fantasy) plays just as frequently with us, and sometimes very inconveniently."[67] The former we find beautiful, whereas the latter is merely agreeable. I think that we can safely declare that this distinction is exactly what Coleridge meant by the differences between fancy and imagination.

Perhaps Friedrich Schiller, who committed himself to a close study of Kant's third *Critique*, characterized the allure of the beautiful even more clearly: the pleasure that we find in the beautiful derives from the feeling in the imagination that the object *appears* free, and no other condition has a more influential hold on the imagination than the desire for freedom.[68] Hence, the free play is often an interchange between the imagination and understanding, in which the latter's search for concepts is set into motion by the imagination's play with the representation's shape.

Whereas the beautiful is immediately an invitation to pleasure, the sublime initially repulses an individual, but still offers some promise to come closer. Kant cites towering cliffs and waterfalls as examples of the kind of natural terror that nonetheless invites us closer. The sublime in fact becomes an invitation from nature for us to look within and discover our moral destiny. Rather than examining Kant's account of the sublime, I will simply discuss the wildness of Xanadu as described in Coleridge's *Kubla Kahn*.

It is not insignificant that the Preface to the poem *Kubla Kahn* opens with a third person account of a "sacred river" that "ran through caverns measureless to man down to a sunless sea." Coleridge's speaker goes on to describe an abundance of "fertile ground" with "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." This is the overture to his garden paradise spoken of in the third person, before he, as the poet, assumes the voice of the one who shall challenge that "romantic chasm."[69] Despite this towering depiction of stately walls and overwhelming forests, it comes across as stunningly beautiful, irrespective of the enormity of it all. Coleridge continues to describe how "from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething

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[66] Kant, KU, 5: 242.

[67] Anth, 7: 175. See Zuckert, *Kant on Beauty and Biology*, 285.

[68] Schiller, Friedrich. "Kallias or Concerning Beauty: Letters to Gottfried Korner" in: J.M. Bernstein (ed.), *Classical and Romantic German Aesthetics* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003), 162.

> As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
> A mighty fountain momently was forced:
> Amid whose swift half-intermittted burst
> Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
> Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail.[70]

Whatever the sense of these lines, it is clear that the quickening of natural beauty toward danger approaches, as Coleridge then speaks of "dancing rocks" when Kubla sank into a cavern where the pleasure dome floated away. It was only by way of a "music loud and long" that he could even begin to "revive within" himself "her symphony and song," such that all who heard the music could likewise build such domes in the air. All of this language speaks of the secondary imagination inventing a sublime array of cliffs and cities in the sky that overwhelm the imagination and defy anything mimetic about fancy. In my view, both levels of imagination are present in Xanadu; of course, we witness the primary imagination's original and spontaneous creation that is "coinstantaneous with" nature itself, while the secondary imagination recovers that original production via the work of poetic writing and the sound of music that calls the listener toward safety. Fancy is all but banished from Xanadu.[71]

In *Frost at Midnight*, Coleridge speaks reverently about the beauty of nature such that he "saw nought lovely but the sky and stars," but that his newborn child will "wander like a breeze by lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds, which image in their bulk both lakes and shores and mountain crags."[72] Of course, all of this imagery is indicative of an imagination capable of both receptivity and productivity, of taking in the finite particular beauties and of actively shaping them through one's perception. It is not enough that beauty is *there* in nature, one must creatively interact with all of it in order to silence the deadening weight of mimetic fancy and to harness the full potential of imagination. Fancy is that which retreats from nature, and would rather shield the individual through mimetic, dead rhythms rather than release the individual into the unknown potentiality of nature.

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[69] Coleridge, PW, 297.

[70] Coleridge, PW, 297.

[71] For a sample of similar views regarding the imagination's role in Coleridge's Kubla Kahn, see John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1927), 324–77; and Michael Raiger, "Fancy, Dreams, and Paradise: Miltonian and Baconian Garden Imagery in Coleridge's Kubla Kahn," *Studies in Philology* 10.3 (2013): 637–65.

[72] Coleridge, PW, 242.

As such, Coleridge continues that, through such a process of internalizing the beauty of nature, "so shalt thou see and hear the lovely shapes and sounds intelligible of that eternal language, which thy God utters."[73] This is also clearly evident in *Hymn Before Sun-rise, in the Vale of Chamouni*, in which Coleridge writes:

> Sing ye meadow-streams with gladsome voice!
> Ye pine-groves, with your soft and soul-like sounds!
> And they too have a voice, yon piles of snow,
> And in their perilous fall shall thunder, God![74]

In other words, God speaks to us through beautiful nature. While Kant argues that nature's beauty symbolizes the morally good, Coleridge declares that natural beauty *is* the morally good. It should not take much effort to appreciate how Coleridge produced the image of the starry skies above and the moral law within.

One might question why Coleridge does not deliver a theoretical tract on the beauty of nature and the simple answer is that such a process would have been an unnecessary tedium for him. After having produced such beautiful poetry, why should he detain himself with a commentary on works that are already available for anyone with imagination? Such a rhetorical question is similar to Coleridge's response as to why Kant did not pen replies to those who misunderstood the transcendental object:

> When Kant therefore was importuned to settle the disputes of his commentators himself, by declaring what he meant, how could he decline the honours of martyrdom with less offence, than by simply replying, 'I meant what I said, and at the age of near fourscore, I have something else, and more important to do than to write a commentary on my own works.'[75]

In the end, the two philosophers simply disagree as to the extent that the imagination can and *should* go in its reflections on nature. Coleridge conceives of a kind of imaginative dance with nature that exceeds human (finite) ability whereas Kant views this as an imagination saturated with a loss of reason and thereby lost in insanity. Perhaps, for Coleridge, it is a weakness of the will that we succumb to mere rationality in the face of the irrational sublime instead of turning toward the ultimate kind of imaginative knowing that grasps the world beyond reason. In the final section, we will turn toward the highest and ultimate art, as for both philosophers, poetry is the sincerest connection and sustaining activity of life.

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[73] Coleridge, PW, 242.
[74] Coleridge, PW, 379.
[75] Coleridge, BL, ix, 108.

4. Poetry as Imagining Nature a Second Time

In his *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge openly declares that: "No man ever yet was a great poet, without being at same time a profound philosopher."[76] Elsewhere, he declares that "a great poet must be implicitè if not explicitè, a great metaphysician."[77] Kant similarly held poetry to be the very apex of art, as he writes in the third *Critique* that poetry "holds the highest rank among all the arts . . . It expands the mind: for it sets the imagination free."[78] But while poetry takes on not only the form of written or oral verse, it can "include the arts of painting, horticulture, and architecture, as well as the arts of composing music and verse (*poetica in sensu stricto*)."[79] We have already seen how Kant considers landscape gardens to be artful arrangements of nature not unlike how a poem is a decorative design of language.

Without doubt, Kant views poetry as the highest form of aesthetic evaluation, "for it lets the mind feel its ability—free, spontaneous, and independent of natural determination—to contemplate and judge phenomenal nature as having (*nach*) aspects that nature does not on its own offer in experience either to sense or to the understanding."[80] Poetic imagination, both for the writer and reader of poems, allows us to see a second nature, *as if* one could transform life itself through higher feelings of beauty that stretch ever higher toward moral feelings.[81] Moreover, poetry enables the mind to "feel its ability to use nature on behalf of and, as it were, as a schema of the supersensible."[82] Schematizing nature through poetry produces an aesthetic model that can otherwise only be thought as an archetype of reason.

Poetry *in the strict sense*, for Kant, represents the pinnacle of artistic achievement because it displays the unique originality of the writer that, when accomplished, contains nothing of imitation in it whatsoever. Imitation, Ralph Waldo Emerson would later write, is nothing but sheer suicide. What the poet achieves is the creation and communication of an aesthetic idea that no concept can ever match:

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[76] Coleridge, BL, xv, 220.
[77] Coleridge, CL, ii, 810.
[78] Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.
[79] Kant, Anth, 7: 246.
[80] Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.
[81] Cf. Kant, KU, §42, 5: 300–01.
[82] Kant, KU, §53, 5: 326.

> By an aesthetic idea I mean that representation of the imagination which induces much thought, yet without the possibility of any definite thought whatever, i.e. *concept,* being adequate to it, and which language, consequently, can never get quite on level terms with or render completely intelligible.[83]

No concept can ever be found adequate to the imagination's aesthetic idea because no concept can ever invite the feeling of *spirit* (*Geist*) that a poem induces in the imagination. Kant refers to the spirit in aesthetic ideas as the "animating principle of the mind" that awaken such a spirited feeling when "they arouse *interest* by means of *ideas*. For this sets the imagination into motion."[84] For Kant, spirit is the animating force that awakens ideas, while taste serves to regulate them.[85]

Kant's example for the enlivening power of spirit in aesthetic ideas is, of course, the work of poetry. "A poet," he argues, "ventures to give sensible expression to rational ideas of invisible beings, the realm of the blessed, the realm of hell, eternity, creation, and so on."[86] One has to wonder if the obvious example of this would not be Dante, who writes in the *Inferno* of how the passage through hell and his ascent improved his spirit:

> For better waters, now, the little bark
> Of my poetic powers hoists its sails,
> And leaves behind the cruelest of the seas.
>
> And I shall sing about that second realm
> Where man's soul goes to purify itself
> And become worthy to ascend to heaven.[87]

One can already appreciate the nod that Dante makes toward the second nature that his imagination creates and passes through. Hell exists only in imagination and reason as two different expressions of one idea. By projecting imaginary opposites—heaven and earth, life and death—one can ascend toward that which would be unimaginable without its counterpart. As he says in the *Inferno*, "love conducts us to one death" (*amor condusse noi ad una morte*).[88] What Dante does is that he as a poet

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[83] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[84] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 313 and Anth, 7: 225

[85] Kant, Anth, 7: 246.

[86] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[87] Dante, *Purgatory*, Canto 1, 1–6 (trans. Mark Musa).

> Takes [things] that are indeed exemplified in experience, such as death, envy, and all the other vices, as well as love, fame, and so on; but then, by means of an imagination that emulates the example of reason in reaching [for] a maximum, he ventures to give these sensible expression in a way that goes beyond the limits of experience, namely, with a completeness for which no example can be found in nature. And it is actually in the art of poetry that the power of aesthetic ideas can manifest itself to the fullest extent.[89]

In other words, poetry consists of being the "art of conducting a free play of the imagination as [if it were] a task of the understanding."[90] The poet breaks free of experience but by way of a free play of imagination that makes sensible what is otherwise mystical.

There are good reasons, however, to believe that Milton was the poet whom Kant had in mind as the true poetic genius.[91] For instance, he writes of Milton's *Paradise Lost* as follows:

> Poetry offers many materials in the world of invisible beings, so that Milton in his *Paradise Lost,* one of the most magnificent poems, has delivered such things, about which one would otherwise know nothing. When one [otherwise] tries to think of a sublime invisible being or of a malevolent character opposing the Lord of the world and the supreme governor, what kind of ideas can emerge?[92]

Perhaps then it is not merely that the poet conveys the beautiful, but that he in fact is able to communicate the sublime in a way that is also beautiful. As Milton says in the third chapter of *Paradise Lost*:

> So much the rather thou, celestial Light,
> Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers
> Irradiate; there plant eyes, all mist from thence
> Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell
> Of things invisible to mortal sight.[93]

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[88] Dante, *Inferno*, Canto 5, 106.

[89] Kant, KU, §49, 5: 314.

[90] Kant, KU, §51, 5: 321.

[91] Sanford Budick makes this argument in *Kant and Milton* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010).

[92] Kant, V-Anth / Mensch 25: 991.

[93] Milton, *Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Blackwell-Wiley, 2007), Book 3, 69.

Milton writes that what the poet truly wishes to achieve is to express something that succeeding generations will not let die. The poet desires above all to say the unsayable and to be remembered in a way that James Dickey expresses as a fervent request from "the God of the wildness of poetry," namely, "Lord, let me die, but not die out."[94] The poet and philosopher recognize the reality of our finitude. We can live knowing that we are dying, but those committed to ideas cannot live with the idea of their ideas dying out.

Perhaps the reason why Coleridge has been less popular than other romantics is simply that he did not die out at a young age, as did Keats.[95] This is unfortunate, given that Coleridge viewed a great poet to be similarly a great philosopher, for "poetry is the blossom and the fragrancy of all human knowledge, human thoughts, human passions, emotions, language."[96] For Coleridge, the question regarding what poetry is nearly at the same time a question concerning who the poet is, as it is a "distinction resulting from the poetic genius itself."[97] He adds:

> The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, and spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, to which we have exclusively appropriated the name of imagination.[98]

This is not some whimsical power put into play by way of an angel having bestowed this gift on an individual. The poet is dishonest who does not recognize that it takes the whole of one's will and the power of understanding to manifest the power of imagination. We need not worry over our second nature neglecting original nature, for not only is our imaginative and poetic creation of the new nature ongoing, but as Coleridge argues, the imagination "blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature; the manner to the matter; and our admiration of the poet to our sympathy with the poetry."[99] Coleridge thus view natural beauty as superior to art in every way, and as serving as the source of life insofar as the imagination harmonizes and blends the new nature with constant reflections on the nature that is given. This is a task that demands a philosopher to likewise be a poet and vice versa. It is not enough that we inherit life, we must make something of it.

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[94] James Dickey, *For the Last Wolverine* in *The Whole Motion*.

[95] Among many other valuable contributions to the works of Coleridge, this is a speculation raised by Malcolm Guite. For an excellent commentary, see *Mariner: A Voyage with Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (London: Hodder Faith, 2018).

[96] Coleridge, BL, xv, 220.

[97] Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

[98] Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

[99] Coleridge, BL, xiv, 213.

I take it that what Coleridge means when he argues that a great poet must also be a philosopher is that it requires the kind of imagination to balance and harmonize the universal as it is expressed in the particular individual. And in doing so, "all seasons shall be sweet to thee,

> Whether the summer clothe the general earth
> With greenness, or the redbreast sit and sing
> Betwixt the tufts of snow on the bare branch
> Of mossy apple-tree, while the nigh thatch
> Smokes in the sun-thaw; whether the eave-drops fall
> Heard only in the trances of the blast,
> Or if the secret ministry of frost
> Shall hang them up in silent icicles,
> Quietly shining to the quiet Moon.[100]

Here, the imagination's balancing of the relationship between the individual and the changing seasons is not unlike the relationship between harmonizing poetry and philosophy, and in the orientation or standpoint that one assumes toward particularity and universality. It requires the imaginative power of perception to embrace the universe everywhere *anywhere* it expresses its finite particular instances of beauty. It is both a recognition of the power of the other *there* endowed with grace and the power of the other *here* in my perception. Coleridge closes the fourteenth chapter of the *Biographia* by writing: "Finally, good sense is the body of poetic genius, fancy its drapery, motion its life, and imagination the soul that is every where, and in each; and forms all into one graceful and intelligent whole."[101]

For Coleridge, there are no rules of instruction that can coerce a genuine imaginative effort toward creation. True poetic production involves originality:

> Could a rule be given from without, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art. It would be μορφωσις, not ποιησις. The rules of the imagination are themselves the very powers of growth and production. The words to which they are reducible, present only the outlines and external appearance of the fruit. A deceptive counterfeit of

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[100] Coleridge, PW, 242.
[101] Coleridge, BL, xiv, 214.

> the superficial form and colours may be elaborated; but the marble peach feels cold and heavy, and children only put it to their mouths.[102]

Rather than having the imagination instructed by understanding, both Kant and Coleridge claim that the imagination leads in artistic production. We have seen in the previous sections how Kant and Coleridge articulate their theories of imagination. Coleridge's brief sketches do indeed shed light on his feelings as regards the function of imagination in poetry, its proper subject matter, and how imagination likewise brings about a feeling of life. It must be that the function of the primary imagination is to inaugurate a subliminal communication with nature itself that simply defies language. After all, what the poet truly desires is to bring into existence what was previously held to be unsayable in poetry. Dylan Thomas riffs about poems containing "sandstorms and ice blasts of words

> such slashing of humbug, and humbug too, such staggering peace, such enormous laughter, such and so many blinding bright lights breaking across the just-waking wits and splashing all over the pages in a million bits and pieces all of which were words, words, words, and each of which were alive forever in its own delight and glory and oddity and light.[103]

Poetry and philosophy seek universality in the particular and the particular in the universal. A poet begins by looking to heaven, only to bring us to earth, again, or vice versa. It is a matter of finding the heavenly on earth or of finding the earthly in the heavenly. Seamus Heaney, for example, will write in his famous poem about his father digging potatoes and that he cannot dig like his father who dug like his father before him, but that he can only dig with the pen. Coleridge is an exception in that he is one of the few who both writes poetry and criticizes it from a philosophical standpoint, something that he was apt to do often.

For instance, Coleridge was well aware of the commentaries that Ben Johnson wrote about Shakespeare, adding that he found Johnson's meditations to be overly-inundated with factuality rather than communicating what the language of the poem actually excites. To most critics and poets, he attributes the problem of "an undue predilection for the *dramatic* form in certain poems, from which one or other of two evils result. Either the thoughts and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks."[104] Balance by way of imagination would eliminate this problem.

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[102] Coleridge, BL, xviii, 267.

[103] Dylan Thomas, "Notes on the Art of Poetry" in James Scully (ed.), *Modern Poetics* (Columbus: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 210.

Despite their disagreements, Coleridge describes Wordsworth's poetry as achieving "IMAGINATION in the highest and strictest sense of the word," even if he is clumsy and even "recondite" in the way of fancy.[105] In other words, Wordsworth knows how to work through the secondary imagination in order to achieve the otherwise ineffable but lacks a "graceful" approach to the ordinary. Quoting Wordsworth's *Elegaic Stanzas*, the imagination is to "add the gleam, the light that never was on sea or land, the consecration, and the poet's dream." So, Coleridge finds Wordsworth's poetry to be fitting for someone suited to study the particularity of that poet's words in order to render that unique projection of the imagination to be beautiful. But Coleridge likewise opposes all scientific study of poetry. The highly theoretically-minded poet is too awkward and lacks the kind of natural finesse needed for the imagination to achieve an original voice that would harmonize the universal and the particular. The celebrated poet James Dickey once said that he desired for his writing process to take on the ease that an athlete achieves in competition, or that of a bird that spontaneously and instinctively knows the right effort needed to land on a flimsy branch. Cliff divers who spin and whirl many times in the air as they freefall never see the water and yet always know just when to straighten out their bodies for a safe landing. The poet seeks to perfectly express an idea in the same way that the athlete exerts the perfect amount of energy needed to pull off a feat of athletic excellence that simply amazes onlookers. Dickey describes this effort of the poet as "consciously working toward an unconscious act."[106]

What the poet in the style of Dickey and Coleridge aim for is an imaginative effort that becomes truly imaginary, in that the blending for a universal completion can be met in the particular instance, such as in the poem or in the high jump of an Olympic athlete, who aims to perfectly achieve greatness (universal) in each and every jump (particular). This is exactly what Coleridge was after in his characterization of poetry, I believe, as he writes as follows:

> A poem is that species of composition, which is opposed to works of science, by proposing for its *immediate* object pleasure, not truth; and from all other species (having *this* object in common with it) it is

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[104] Coleridge, BL, xxii, 315.

[105] Coleridge, BL, xxiii, 329.

[106] James Dickey, *Self-Interviews* (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1970) 59.

> discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the *whole*, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component *part*.[107]

Again, we find that classical struggle between universality and particularity to be at play in the very definition of poetry. The poet is to bring about the immediate individuality of an object that invites pleasure while the contemplation of the poet is that of the whole. What this requires on the part of the poet is to entertain a kind of "negative faith," Coleridge argues.[108] It consists of simply distinguishing illusion from delusion, such that the influence of mere images, which work their influence on fancy, are juxtaposed to actual words and true faith.[109] As Coleridge writes:

> The poet asks only of the reader, what as a poet he is privileged to ask: viz. that sort of negative faith in the existence of such a being, which we willingly give to productions *professedly ideal*, and a disposition to the same state of feeling, as that with which we contemplate the *idealized* figures of the Apollo Belvedere, and the Farnese Hercules.[110]

So, then, negative faith is what the poet must posit as being imaginary *and* true in the ideal nature that he creates. John Donne, for instance, in the opening lines of *Song* (1633) dares the reader to bring about inevitable impossibilities precisely because they are beautiful: "Go and catch a falling star . . . tell me where all past years are . . . teach me to hear mermaids singing, or to keep off envy's singing, and find what wind serves to advance an honest mind."[111] All of this is a curious combination of imagining that involves astronomical paradoxes, the reversibility of time, and both the avoidance of ill humors and the potential of the weather teaching us virtue. And yet, it all renders a faith paid in full by the reader because Donne asks us only to imagine the magical renderings of nature that we already wish to be true.

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[107] Coleridge, *BL*, xiv, 211.

[108] Coleridge, *BL*, xxii, 313.

[109] Coleridge, *BL*, xxii, 313. The entire quote reads as follows: "The effect is similar to that produced by an epic poet, when the fable and the characters are *derived* from Scripture history, as in the *Messiah* of *Klopstock*, or in *Cumberland's Calvary*: and not merely *suggested* by it as in the *Paradise Lost* of Milton. That *illusion*, contradistinguished from *delusion*, that *negative* faith, which simply permits the images presented to work by their own force, without either denial or affirmation of their real existence by the judgment, is rendered impossible by their immediate neighbourhood to words and facts of known and absolute truth. A faith, which transcends even historic belief, must absolutely *put out* this mere poetic Analogon of faith."

[110] Coleridge, *BL*, xxiii, 385.

[111] Donne, John. *Song* in *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, 4th edition, edited by Ferguson, Salter, and Stallworthy (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1996), 264.

What Coleridge advocates is a harmonious balance of classical English poetry with its formalistic and mechanical styles and the then contemporary Romantic approach, a "wish expressed for [in] the union of the characteristic merits of both."[112] Some might hold that *nature is beautiful if it looks like art*, but we could likewise argue that *art is beautiful when it looks like nature*.

According to Kant, it is from the expression of the beautiful in nature that we can then think the whole of nature as being purposive, as if it were an organized living system filled with a myriad of organisms working toward certain aims in and through nature. This is not unlike the lines of certain poems that both operate within the larger structure of the whole and also contain within themselves enough to communicate a principle for life, such as in the lines of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who writes:

> This, all this, beauty blooming,
> This, all this, freshness fuming,
> Give God while worth consuming.[113]

Xanadu is beautiful because it does not merely look like art. Recall Herder's argument regarding the kinaesthetic features of sculpture, how *touching* the stone with the eyes is an invitation of the outside to the inner soul and a pushing of the soul outward into the formation of the object of reflection. Xanadu does not merely project an artful arrangement of an idealized paradise—as is the case or goal in the landscape garden—but rather artfully recreates nature a second time. In the production of Xanadu, the primary imagination rediscovers that original orientation that we have to nature, one that secondary imagination can only write about by way of metaphor and that fancy can never relate to, even intermediately through some other source.

Toward the close of *Kubla Kahn*, Coleridge declares that those having passed through Xanadu should "weave a circle round him thrice,

> And close your eyes with holy dread
> For he on honey-dew hath feed,
> And drunk the milk of Paradise.[114]

Perhaps this third weaving is the declaration that one should weave through the beauty of nature, fully immersing the senses through primary imagination.[115] "And close your eyes with holy dread," for we have nothing to fear of the sublime; it will set the individual free, "for he on honey-dew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise." Perhaps also there is nothing approaching the milk of paradise more than to live with one's whole body and imagination fully integrated with the natural beauty that we can only imagine to be arranged by God or is rather speaking to us in unmitigated ways precisely because God wishes us to discover both our purposes and the purposiveness of nature through the beautiful nature from which we emerge. We can set the imagination free by strolling through and creating gardens, or by reading and writing poetry with such language that requires a continual creation of nature, both in primary and secondary imagination.

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[112] Coleridge, BL, xvi, 223.

[113] Gerard Manley Hopkins, "Morning Midday and Evening Sacrifice" in Gerard Manley Hopkins: *A Selection of His Poems and Prose by W.H. Gardener* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1963), 44.

[114] Coleridge, PW, 298.

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[115] After all, Kant in the crux of his argument concerning the powers of the mind declared that "there must be something that is third" to mediate sensibility and understanding—namely, imagination (KrV, A138–39/B177–78).