

**POETIC IMAGINATION SHAPING THE ROMANTIC FRAGMENT:  
THE CASE OF *KUBLA KHAN***

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**Abstract**

Since the early nineteenth century, various works of literature, literary theory, criticism, philosophy, and other forms of art have faced a sudden change which has raised contradictions and suspense. This upheaval is represented also by fragmentary writing. The list of fragmentary artists is long, starting from Romantic thinkers and writers, such as Schlegel, Keats, and Coleridge, to the Modern and Postmodern ones, such as Adorno, Beckett, Blanchot, and others. The present study focuses on Coleridge's aesthetic doctrine as influenced by German philosophy and as containing ideas on the essence and kind of poetry, the concept of "organicity" of the poetic work, as well as on the source, function and purpose of poetry, and specifically on Coleridge's *Kubla Khan, Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment* as the expression of his concern with the fragility of poetic imagination which in fact shapes the fragmentary character of his poem.

**Keywords:** Romanticism, literary theory, fragment, Coleridge, poetry

**ROMANTİK PARÇAYI ŞEKİLLENDİREN ŞİİRSEL İMGELEM: *KUBLA KHAN VAKASI***

**Öz**

On dokuzuncu yüzyılın başlarından bu yana çeşitli edebi eserler, edebiyat kuramları, eleştiriler, felsefeler ve bunların yanı sıra diğer sanat dalları ikilem ve belirsizliği doğuran ani bir değişimle karşı karşıyadır. Parçalı yazı, bu karmaşanın temsilcisidir. Parçalı yazıyı benimseyen sanatçıların listesi uzundur; öyle ki, Schlegel, Keats, Coleridge vb. gibi Romantik düşünür ve yazarlardan başlayıp Adorno, Becket, Blanchot vb. gibi Modern ve Postmodernlere kadar uzayıp gider. Bu çalışma, şiirin özü ve türü, şiirsel eserin "organikliği" kavramı, şiirin kaynağı, işlevi ve amacı hususunda Coleridge'in Alman felsefesinden etkilenen estetik doktrini ve özellikle de Coleridge'in aslında şiirinin parçalı karakterini şekillendiren şiirsel imgelemin

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kırılğanlığı hususundaki ifadesi olarak Kubla Khan, Or, a Vision in a Dream: A Fragment eserine odaklanmaktadır.

*Anahtar Sözcükler:* Romantizm, edebi kuram, parçalı, Coleridge, şiir

### **Introduction: Towards a Romantic Aesthetics**

Romanticism was a wide-spread movement in Europe, where great German philosophers and poets had an enormous impact on many British Romantic artists of the nineteenth century. Romanticism marked a change of epoch in terms of literary practice and literary theory and criticism, and therefore Romanticism was not simply a period of unrestrained and marvelous inspiration in the midst of a history of art in general, but rather a revolution in terms of artistic expression, philosophy, history, life, being, and anything else that one can think of, name or imagine.

The critical tenet of Romanticism was primarily a reaction against Classicism, Neoclassicism and Enlightenment, and thus there was a noticeable shift of interest, from ancient Greek and Rome literatures to the national ones. With respect to literary theory and criticism there was also a great development of ideas and opinions regarding the subject matter and language of the literary work, as well as the author's emotions, sensibility, and imagination. In this way, the "Romantic period adds to the two existing since Antiquity critical theories on art – the mimetic and the pragmatic ones – a third one which is the expressive theory of authorship. The major critical concern is now the poet in that the producer of art has moved to the centre of critical attention, the true function of art being the communication and expression of the artist" (Golban, 2012, p. 129).

Against the Neoclassical emphasis on reason, rationalism, order and common sense in the way various topics were treated, as well as against the normative prescriptions regarding the artistic content and form, Romanticism enables the artistic freedom and emphasizes the importance of feelings, emotions, inspiration, and especially imagination, which is considered the most significant human faculty. Therefore, in Romanticism, literature becomes the expression of the writer's own thoughts and feelings, and as a consequence the concern with individual experience becomes one of the main characteristics of Romanticism. Another very important feature which contrasts the Neoclassical critical view is the interest with the imaginary, non-real, fantastic, mysterious, or even demonic components of human inner world and nature. However, nature constitutes the source of artistic expression, a spiritual healer, a mirror of the human life, but also it is regarded as a supreme or divine entity.

The Romantic critical ideas blossomed from the German philosophy, Friedrich Schlegel and his brother August Wilhelm Schlegel being actually the real founders of Romanticism as a literary movement and the critical leaders of the German and European Romantic School of poetry: “In literary theory, Friedrich Schlegel introduced the term “romantic” and promoted self, individualism, and subjectivity, whereas his brother August Schlegel introduced the principle of the organic form in connection with themes and ideas which develop according to their own nature” (Golban, 2018, p. 197). In particular, this famous organic principle in literature becomes a main concern in British literary theory and practice as we can notice in Coleridge’s works. In *On Dramatic Art and Literature*, August Wilhelm Schlegel distinguishes between mechanical and organic form, the latter being “innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination contemporaneously with the perfect development of the germ”. So to speak, in order for the organic form to emerge, an idea must be allowed to develop itself and flourish, displaying its purest essence.

Friedrich Schlegel’s critical ideas regarding the Romantic doctrine are concerned with the writer’s self and subjectivity as the main means for literary creation, the poetic genius having the highest ranking role in the attempt of reaching the absolute truth. As he had a major influence on his contemporary Romantic artists, critics and also later scholars of Europe, Thomas Carlyle turned Schlegel’s concept of “subjective mind” into “unconscious”. As summarized by Harry Blamires, Carlyle’s ideas express the fact that “it is not the conscious mind, “the mind as acquainted with its strength” that is the spring of health and vitality, for its concern is with the mechanical and the overt. The unconscious is the source of dynamism, for it is in touch with the region of meditation, those mysterious depths that lie below the level of conscious argument and discourse” (Blamires, 1991, p. 261). This idea is again adopted by Coleridge and profoundly expressed in his poem *Kubla Khan*.

‘Another important idea that Coleridge borrowed from Schlegel and displayed in his literary work was the idea of fragment, which was in fact a great contribution to the Romantic aesthetics, and a very important subject and for long discussed in the twentieth century. The fragment could also be considered a reaction against the Neoclassical normative prescriptions concerning the artistic content and form.

### **Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Aesthetic Doctrine**

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was the only British artist who incorporated the German philosophy in his discourse *Biographia Literaria*. He was influenced by philosophers like Kant, Schelling, Fichte, but he mostly picked up on Friedrich Schlegel’s critical ideas. In this

way, Coleridge created his own aesthetic doctrine which consisted of a range of complex ideas and principles of literary theory and criticism displayed in his *Biographia Literaria*, and applied on his literary practice. The focus of his critical discourse was on the essence of poetry, the kind of poetry, the poetic imagination, the concept of “organicity” of the poetic work, the source of poetry, the function and the purpose of poetry.

For Coleridge, the essence of poetry represents the universal truth itself which is disclosed to a poet at the moment of a spiritual or intellectual enlightenment that, according to Coleridge, is understood and acknowledged by means of levels of perception, such as the level of senses, emotions, intellect, reason and intuition. Besides the essence of poetry, Coleridge also discusses in his discourse a type of poetry that is different from the other literary works of the Romantic British writers (who aimed at creating their poems by using every day things, but with a charm of novelty, and display the beauty and the wonders of our world) and which involves the supernatural. Coleridge, unlike other Romantic British writers, uses supernatural elements in his poems because, in his view, they enable the poet to introduce the mysterious forces of the mind. Therefore, the kind of poetry Coleridge prefers

should be directed to persons and characters supernatural or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith. (Black, Conolly, Flint, Grundy, LePan, Liuzza, McGann, Prescott, Qualls, Waters, 2017, p. 448)

The concern with poetic imagination is extremely important for the British Romantic writers, as it is considered the main human faculty and the only valuable creative principle for a Romantic writer. Coleridge, who picked up on German philosophy, is the only one of his contemporary fellows who develops his own theory of poetic imagination in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), “showing its importance as a vital human faculty and arguing about its usefulness of operation not only in poetry but also in philosophy and even science” (Golban, 2008, p. 79). Inspired by Immanuel Kant and Friedrich Schlegel’s ideas on imagination that there are two forms of imagination, one unconsciously creating the real world, and the other consciously creating the ideal world of art, Coleridge also differentiates between two forms of imagination, which he names “Primary Imagination” and “Secondary Imagination”. According to Coleridge, the “Primary Imagination” is a common human faculty which allows man to discern, organize, control and order; therefore, it is concerned with the rational processes of the human mind which makes the man aware of himself and the external world. On the other hand, the Secondary Imagination represents the poetic imagination; thereby, not

every man can possess it, but the poet as it is regarded as the principal faculty of the poetic genius. The “Secondary Imagination” has crucial importance for poetic activity, Coleridge claims, “even if all objects were essentially fixed and dead”, because it “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate”.

Another essential aspect of the “Secondary Imagination” regards its mode of operation which distinguishes itself from the one of the “Primary Imagination”, just as it differs from “Fancy”. For Coleridge, “Fancy” has “no other counters to play with but fixities and definitives”, so it is mechanical and imitative. Thus, all the processes it involves are just a mix of similar and contrasting images and impressions without blending them into a single entity, merely constructing superficial decorations, which for a talented man it is very possible if he simply understands how to make combinations out of his perceptions and memories. Contrary to “Fancy” and “Primary Imagination”, “Secondary Imagination”, in Coleridge’s opinion, “generates and produces a form of its own”, in this way metamorphosing and joining into unity the nature of what it perceives. Therefore, Coleridge continues his line of argumentation, the aim of poetic creation is to attain

the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual, with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familiar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order; judgment ever awake and steady selfpossession, with enthusiasm and feeling profound or vehement; and while it 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. (Black, Conolly, Flint, Grundy, LePan, Liuzza, McGann, Prescott, Qualls, Waters, 2017, p. 451)

Inspired by August Wilhelm Schlegel’s organic principle in literature, Coleridge creates his own concept of “organicity” of the poetic creation. As Schlegel distinguishes between mechanical and organic form, Coleridge also differentiates between the modes of operation of “Secondary Imagination” and “Fancy” in his *Biographia Literaria*. The “Secondary Imagination” has a “shaping and modifying power”, its quality being different from the one of “Fancy” which is concerned only with the association of images and impressions. Coleridge compares the mode of operation of the “Secondary Imagination” to the biological or organic growth. Therefore, the employment of Secondary Imagination and its illustration through poetic techniques, such as the special use of language, according to Coleridge, enable a poem to express its organic form. Through his theory of the “organic form” of poetry, Coleridge reacts against the Neoclassical view of art as an object created by

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the deliberate use of skill and artifice and whose goal is the pleasure of a fixed taste of the public, but takes the poetic work to another level. For Coleridge, a poem is a living, free, self-governing and self-determining entity, which exists, develops and grows just like any other natural being according to the laws of its own nature.

Regarding the function and purpose of poetry, Coleridge asserts that by the use of the “Secondary Imagination”, the cold and motionless world perceived by the “Primary Imagination” is turned into a beautiful and joyful world, so the purpose of poetry is in fact pleasure. As a result, a poem, claims Coleridge,

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 discriminated by proposing to itself such delight from the whole, as is compatible with a distinct gratification from each component part. (Black, Conolly, Flint, Grundy, LePan, Liuzza, McGann, Prescott, Qualls, Waters, 2017, p. 602)

### **Friedrich Schlegel on Fragment**

Another important concern for Coleridge was the idea of fragmentary writing which he borrowed from Friedrich Schlegel, who was particularly passionate about fragments, considering that “many works of the ancients have become fragments. Many works of the moderns are fragments at the time of their origin” (cf. Tanehisa, 2009, p.1). In his *Lectures on the History of Literature, Ancient and Modern*, Friedrich Schlegel defines his work as fragmentary: “My work [thus far] in the fields of literature, literary art history, and literary criticism, as it has involved excessively diverse and various matters, has remained entirely fragmentary” (cf. Tanehisa, 2009, p.1).

The fact that Schlegel considers the modern works and his work fragmentary suggests that the governing foundation behind his thinking is actually the idea of fragment. In his *On the Study of Greek Poetry* (1795), Schlegel asserts that fragments, into which “a whole, complete in itself” has “been torn”, are a sort of “a chaos of everything sublime, beautiful, and charming, which – just like the Chaos of old out of which, according to legend, the world emerged – waits a love and hatred in order to separate the different parts and to unify the similar parts”. Here, Schlegel makes use of the *whole – chaos* and *whole – part, love – hatred* oppositions to define the fragment. In 1797, he writes in *Lyceum Fragments* 103: “Many works, whose beautiful concatenations are praised by many people, have less unity than a hodgepodge of ideas that, animated by a spirit of spirit, aspire for one aim. What binds the ideas together is [...] an unconditionally social spirit” (cf. Tanehisa, 2009, p.2) , and then

continues: “In contrast to these works, artifacts whose connectivity can be doubted by none are, as the artist himself fully understands, not a work at all, but only a fragment – or many fragments, assemblies, or dispositions” (cf. Tanehisa, 2009, p. 2). Here, Schlegel refers to the Romantic hermeneutical circle, where interpretation starts from the comprehension of the individual parts and proceeds to the attempt to grasp the meaning of the whole, which will also lead to a better understanding of each individual part, be it definite or indefinite (another concept in Romanticism which was actually open up by the literary form of the fragment). These parts are fragments which must be connected to each other in order to build unity and to be apprehended, so the whole could be fully understood.

In *Athenaeums Fragment 206*, Schlegel writes that “[a] fragment, like a small work of art, has to be entirely isolated from the surrounding world and be complete in itself like a porcupine”. Its unity represents Schlegel’s opinion of the whole of things which is, in its turn, represented by a chaotic universe of infinite oppositions. Thus, the fragment is singular and irreducible, and for the Romantic aesthetics it represented an expression of freedom.

### **Theodor W. Adorno on Fragment**

The twentieth century critical views of the fragment of the French intellectual Maurice Blanchot contradict Schlegel’s perspective of the fragment as a hedgehog rolled up and isolated to the outside world. Blanchot endeavors to grab the Romantic fragment from its seeming closure and assert a form that does not necessarily eliminate the idea of totality, but goes beyond it by traversing or breaking the continuity of it.

However, in order to understand better Blanchot’s view of fragmentary writing, we should first consider Theodor W. Adorno’s perspective of fragmentation. In his *Aesthetic Theory* (Adorno, 2002, 45), Adorno states that “the fragment is that part of the totality of the work which resists totality”. According to the German thinker, there is always a totalizing past or future whole that comes before the fragment, but the respective whole is unavailable or just hypothetical at the given time. Therefore, without the promise of totalization that precedes the fragment, there cannot be such thing as fragment. Both the fragment and the apparent absent totality belong together.

Adorno’s view on fragmentary writing is closely connected to his opinion of art, which in his opinion, faces a decline. He agrees with Hegel’s famous statement regarding art, from the first of the *Lectures on Aesthetics* (1820) that “art, considered in its highest vocation is and remains for us a thing of the past”. Therefore, Adorno writes in his book that:

The ideological, affirmative aspect of the concept of the successful artwork has a corrective in the fact that there is no such thing as a perfect work. If perfect works did exist, this would mean reconciliation was possible amidst the unreconcilable to which art owns its allegiance. It would then be a case of art annulling its own concept, the turn to the fragile and fragmentary is in reality an attempt to salvage art by dismantling the claim that works are what they cannot be and to which they must nevertheless aspire; both moments are contained in the fragment. (Adorno, 2002, p. 190)

He suggests that the use of the fragment in modern literature is involved in a philosophico-historical process. A very good analysis of this fragment and on Adorno's endeavor to define the fragmentary writing is given by Leslie Hill in her book – *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch* (Hill, 2012, p. 2-9). More exactly, fragmentary writing here plays the role of a symbol of broken promises as art is facing a failure in both cultural and socio-political terms, being unable to preserve itself, “its highest vocation”, and its own position in the social and political fields, but instead maintaining a fragile, temporary, maybe even a false autonomy. In other words, fragmentary writing represents in this context a manifestation of a wide-reaching history that uttered the decline of modern art. Nevertheless, art's function is to carry on no matter what and keep “playing the game”. However, it does not mean that failure would free the art from the possibility of continuing in failure. According to Adorno, even though the fragment is the proof of the totalization's failure, it is also an endeavor to compensate for the faults of art by bringing it back to its very obligations even though it cannot fulfill them. Thereby, the fragment here represents a protest; a resistance to those social, political and economic forces that made art become a mere consumer product. Moreover, for Adorno, the fragment also attempts to save the prospect of artistic expression by insisting on what art must commit to – to persevere – even though its result might be unsuccessful. But in Adorno's view, the work of art is not governed by success.

### **Maurice Blanchot on Fragment**

For many critics, the fragment induces and spreads mostly negativity since it is described as the interruption of continuity, the destruction of unity, the contestation of authority, and the violation of norms. If many have linked the fragment to an irreversible past, or to an uncooperative present, the French thinker, Maurice Blanchot attempts to turn the fragment towards an unchangeable future and beyond the connection to any past or present. As Leslie Hill argues in her *Maurice Blanchot and Fragmentary Writing: A Change of Epoch*, the fragment is not anymore seen in a negative light, but it proclaims “an always other

promise of futurity” (Hill, 2012, p. 7-8). Taking such a position in describing what fragmentary writing is or is not meant a lot of risks for Blanchot. The possibility of a totality, even the negative one visualized by Adorno was not a risk at all. On the contrary, the biggest risk is represented by the separation of the fragment from any possible whole, which means that the fragment cannot be identified as fragment anymore, but something new, an uncontrollable force of diffusion, expansion, rapid increase, and abundance. Through this risk, the fragment manifests its resistance to all forms of identity and certainty and it declares itself anew, as something totally different from what it was or from what it pretended to be. As Blanchot affirms in *The Writing of Disaster*:

Fragmentary writing might well be the greatest risk. It does not refer to any theory, and does not give rise to any practice definable by interruption. Even when it is interrupted, it carries on. Putting itself in question, it does not take control of the question, but suspends it (without maintaining it) as a non-response. If it claims that its time is when the whole – at least ideally – is supposedly realized, this is because that time is never certain, is absence of time, absence in a non-negative sense anterior to all present-past and seemingly posterior to all possibility of any presence to come. (cf. Hill, 2012, p. 8)

Hill calls this questioning “sovereign disobedience”, which means that it necessarily contests authority, including its own, and links it to Blanchot’s pivotal notion of the neuter. In *The Step Not Beyond*, Blanchot claims that:

The demand of the fragmentary, not being the sign of the limit as a limitation of ourselves or of language in relation to life or life in relation to language, nevertheless offers itself, withdrawing as it does so, as a play of limits, a play that is not yet in relation to any kind of limitation. The demand of the fragmentary: a play of limits in which no limitation is in play; the fragmentary a dissociation of the limit and limitation, in the same way that it marks a deviation from the law, such that this deviation is not captured or pre-empted by the law, itself understood however as deviation. (cf. Hill, 2012, p. 213)

This does not mean that the fragment represents a mere piece of literary flotsam after the fall of modern writing, or a remnant of some lost totality, but a doctrine without doctrine of eternal return. Blanchot’s endeavor to use the fragmentary as a consequence of the eternal return was also a parallel to what he called *the neuter*. If dialectics gathers everything into unity, such as a country, a national language, a work of art, the neuter, just like an irrepressible force, disperses identity and proclaims multiplicity and proliferation of difference.

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The fragment, for Blanchot, is linked to a different temporality which is not new, but if seen as such, marks what Blanchot calls “a change of epoch”. The fragment is not an aesthetic object anymore, but a demand. It is more than a simple intervention to the philosophical. It takes writing and thinking from the shelter of philosophy and brings them to another level that is not yet named, to *the timeless Outside*. Therefore, as affirmed by McKeane and Opelz in their *Romanticism and after in France*, fragmentary writing does not correspond to anything identified as such (McKeane & Opelz, 2010, p. 47). It is a form without form, or a surplus to form, but that, nonetheless, cannot be identified as such. The fragmentary might be considered an infinite opening to new relations that exceed totality.

Blanchot’s view of fragmentary writing contradicts both Adorno’s and Schlegel’s views. The fragment is not linked to a negative past totality, but to a different temporality, stepping beyond totality. Through a non-closure (against Schlegel’s vision of the fragment as a porcupine rolled up and enclosed to the outside), the fragment represents an infinite exposition to new relations that exceed totality.

#### **Practical Argumentation: *Kubla Khan, Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment***

With respect to literature, fragmentary writing started in Romanticism mostly as a reaction against the Neoclassical prescriptive norms, and continues nowadays as well, witnessing its “bestowed” inheritance of the past and unsure prospect of future. As regarding the British literature, Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s *Kubla Khan, Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment* represents a fragmentary poem.

The preface of the poem informs the readers on how the poem “came into existence”. Thus, the poem’s origin is actually the result of taking “an anodyne” (opium), reading an old travel book about the subject matter of the poem, falling asleep, and dreaming. In other words, this is how inspiration is provided, the author being the “receiver” of the lines of the poem, as the poetic images appear to him without any effort or volition – “all the images rose up before him [the author] as *things*, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort”. When the author woke up, he started to write down all the lines he remembered, with the mention that at that particular time he had a great account of “all the images that rose up before him”– “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”. Unfortunately, he was disturbed on a business matter by a person from Porlock, who detained the author above an hour. On his return, he could not remember more than “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”.

This preface suggests how fragile the process of artistic creation is, there being an enormous risk of failure, in the sense that the inspiration can go away, and therefore the artwork may be left incomplete. There are many references made to inspiration throughout the preface, Coleridge aiming at mystifying the status and provenience of inspiration and denying the role of the conscious mind and its active control over the artistic creation. For instance, the speaker can only create his art by dreaming the poem and by being given its lines in his dream, this fact suggesting the idea of a supernatural inspiration that has a crucial importance for poetic activity. Also, the narrator is depicted as a passive and receptive individual who receives the poem itself from an outside source. The speaker’s status as a receiver is further revealed by other expressions encountered in the preface of the poem such as “vision” and “The Picture”, and as well as at the end of the preface by the phrase “what had been originally given to him”. Moreover, the speaker’s dependence on this supernatural inspiration, without which he cannot finish his poem in spite of all his efforts, also implies the fragility of the creative process, which, in its turn, is once more displayed when the speaker is interrupted by a visitor from Porlock and forgets the lines that were “originally given to him”, leaving thus the poem “incomplete”.

Due to the images and lines that were given to him without any conscious effort and the loss of inspiration, Coleridge calls his poem “A vision in a Dream. A Fragment”. As Hill writes, the fragment is

the time between times, between remembering and forgetting; continuity and discontinuity; obedience and objection” and the “unreconciled tension between the artwork and its unraveling, between its gathering and its dispersion, between the time past and the time still to come. (Hill, 2012, p. 2)

So far, the preface of the poem has claimed the fragility of the creative process, as the narrator has the role of a recipient, and he wrote the poem at the time of his recollection, but still lost those memories of the images and lines that were given to him as he was disturbed by a visitor. The poem itself also displays the concern with the process of artistic creation, consisting of two sections: Kubla’s successful construction of the palace and the lyrical I’s awareness of how the dome lacks essence. The first section of the poem reveals Kubla Khan’s dome and gardens as products of the artificial modification of landscape. From the very command of Kubla (“degree”, I.2) to its completion (II, 31-36), the work represents the

combination between the human order, in other words the people's power to organize, dominate, and control, and nature, the material used in the creation of the palace. The human order is expressed by planning and ordering ("decree", I.2), building ("with walls and towers [...] girdled round", I.7), and measuring ("twice five miles", I.6.). Nature seems at first passive as Kubla's craftsmen (who are referred to in the text only through Kubla's command of the construction) could manifest their power over it in order to shape and modify it as they were told by their commander. However, after a certain point, nature becomes active, or better said dynamic, violent and uncontrollable. Nature is expressed in the text as something holy and supernatural ("sacred river" I.3, II.24, "holy and enchanted" II.14, "haunted" II.15, "demon-lover" II.16.), as the wild, mighty and threatening ("savage" II.14, "with ceaseless turmoil and seething" II.17, "mighty fountain [...] forced" II.19, "vaulted" II.21, "lifeless ocean" II.28, "war" II.30), and as the immeasurable ("measureless" I.27).

The opposition human-nature represents the conflict between creative instincts and the hindrance creativity faces due to the intellect that attempts to control, order, and dominate. As the palace reaches its completions, it demonstrates that the human order succeeds in its mission of crafting and modifying the landscape regardless nature's violent actions. However, even though the work seems complete, it lacks essence, this idea being expressed in the "A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!" II.36. Therefore, the palace is merely a "fancy" construction. *Kubla Khan* is the expression of many of Coleridge critical views, one very prominent being his theory of imagination, which consists of the distinction between Primary Imagination and Secondary (Poetic) Imagination. As he claims in his *Biographia Literaria*, "Secondary Imagination" distinguishes itself from the "Primary Imagination", just as it differs from "Fancy" through its mode of operation. "Fancy" has "no other counters to play with but fixities and definitives", so it is mechanical and imitative. It involves just a mix of similar and contrasting images and impressions without blending them into a single entity, merely constructing superficial decorations. Kubla's palace represents this "Fancy", which is a form that lacks essence.

Secondary Imagination differs from Primary Imagination and Fancy "in degree and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to recreate", Coleridge says. If the lyrical I is identified with Kubla Khan, then, he is a man able to arouse the Secondary Imagination. He is superior to ordinary men, as he does not only achieve knowledge of himself through "the Primary Imagination [...] the living power and the prime agent of human perception [...] in the finite mind the eternal act of creation in the infinite I

AM”, but also reaches a higher self-consciousness through the Second Imagination. However, just as the author, Kubla Khan or the lyrical I faces a loss of inspiration, and as the author received the images and the lines in his dream or vision he had, but now could not remember anymore, the lyrical I or Kubla Khan saw in a vision “A damsel with a dulcimer [...] It was an Abyssinian maid” III. 37, 39, whose song, which would give him the desired inspiration to finish his pleasure-dome, could not remember anymore. Therefore, just as the narrator of the preface (who is the actual author, but hides his identity) describes the author’s poem as being incomplete because after he was disturbed by that visitor from Porlock, he forgot the lines he received in his dream, the pleasure-dome, as it lacks essence – the essence being represented by the Abyssinian maid, who in her turn lacks form, but is the source of inspiration – is incomplete. Neither the author, nor the lyrical I or Kubla Khan could achieve a perfect work of art.

In the preface of the poem, the author exercises a kind of distancing from himself, or tries to create ambiguity regarding his identity in order to allow the readers to bring into the play their own considerations and to create their own meaning with the help of their imagination. The speaker there refers to himself in the third person as “the Author”, and uses third person pronouns as well: “he”, “him”. At the end of the prose preface, when the speaker mentions a different text (*The Pains of Sleep*), uses the first pronoun to refer to himself, and therefore, his identity is revealed. The same strategy is used in the poem as well. At first, the lyrical I describes Kubla Khan’s creation of his own Paradise represented by the pleasure-dome and everything that surrounds it, and in the last stanza the lyrical I introduces himself, also creating ambiguity with regard to his identity. As the poem is incomplete, the true identity of the lyrical I is not revealed to the readers. Because the poem is a fragment, it traverses totality, offering an unsure prospect of the future. Thus again, the readers are invited come up with their own interpretation of whether the lyrical I is indeed Kubla Khan or not.

The preface announces the poem’s main concern, which is the poetic imagination, as well as its fragmentary character: “Yet from the still surviving recollection in his mind, the Author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as it were given to him [...] but the tomorrow is yet to come”.

These words, besides the fact that they disclose the fragmentary character of the poem, and expressing the opposite of Schlegel’s perspective of the fragment as a closure to the world outside, leave an opening, which in Blanchot’s view, as expressed in McKeane’s and Opelz’s *Romanticism and after in France*, is an infinite exposition to new relations that exceed totality

(Mckeane & Opelz, 2010, p. 47). Coleridge's poem is an always other promise of futurity. *Kubla Khan* represents an uncertain prospect of the future, which through its fragmentary character contests any form of authority. The time of the poem is not the fullness of the present, but a time between times, between remembering and forgetting, between continuity and discontinuity, between the past (as the author recalls some of the images and lines that were "originally given to him") and the time yet to come (as he was disturbed by a visitor and forgot the rest of the lines, "but the to-morrow is yet to come").

Another important matter in Coleridge's aesthetic doctrine is the concern with the supernatural. In the preface, the speaker talks about a "supernatural" inspiration as he can compose just by dreaming, where the lines are given to him by an outside source, which remains mysterious as we are not told who or what that source exactly is. The same idea appears in the poem itself, where the lyrical I (or Kubla) needs a supernatural inspiration coming from a muse to complete the pleasure-dome, or otherwise the work will not be perfect. Neither the author nor the lyrical I can reach perfection in their works.

In the poem, the nature is depicted as something holy and supernatural as well. Two very important episodes are the course of the "sacred" river and the demonic love. The river is depicted at first as something peaceful and pleasurable, but after leaving the gardens of the pleasure-dome, it becomes violent and wild. The river may represent the first letter in the Christian theology, where in the Book of Revelation, God describes Himself as the "Alpha and Omega", which means the first and the last or the source of all things and their end that can as well represent the model and the source of human creativity from conscious to unconscious. The river's course starts from the gardens of the palace which are a symbol of human reason where people can control, dominate and organize. Therefore, the river's journey begins with rationality, the reasonable parts of the mind that people can control, but as it leaves the gardens and takes its journey to a "savage place" (II.14), where it reaches "the caverns measureless to man" (II.27), and sinks "in tumult to a lifeless ocean" (II.28), it becomes wild, violent, dynamic and uncontrollable – which might represent the unconscious. As summarized by Harry Blamires, Carlyle's ideas express the fact that

it is not the conscious mind, "the mind as acquainted with its strength" that is the spring of health and vitality, for its concern is with the mechanical and the overt. The unconscious is the source of dynamism, for it is in touch with the region of meditation, those mysterious depths that lie below the level of conscious argument and discourse. (Blamires, 1991, p. 261)

Therefore, the river's course might serve as a map of the human mind and its creative powers that lie in the unconscious, where undesired, mysterious and hidden ideas come to surface. The river's journey cause of being so violent, wild and uncontrollable may be due to the fact that it reflects the violent resistance evoked by these types of thoughts, which attempts to prevent them from coming to the surface.

The river's name can also symbolize the river-god Alpheus who, in some accounts, was depicted at first as a passionate hunter that fell in love with the nymph Arethusa, but she turned herself into a well. Alpheus metamorphoses himself into a river in order to unite its waters with those of the well Arethusa. The violent course of the river might also represent what Alpheus endures throughout his transformation until he sinks his waters "in tumult to a lifeless ocean" (II. 28) – the well Arethusa.

As the author "created the poem in his dream", dreams consist of a universe built up by symbols that, in their turn may have a supernatural character. For example, the demonic love, where the woman is wailing for her demon lover. Coleridge borrows this image from the German Flyer myth. The flyer refers to a demon who takes the form of a young handsome man, visiting women in their *sleep*. According to Freud, dreams are wish-fulfillments and, as he cited Du Prel in his *The Interpretation of Dream*, "when desire bestirs itself, then comes fantasy, and presents to us, as it were the object of our desire" (Freud, 1997, p. 45). In this case, symbols may be a means of disguise in dreams which come in a distorted form because of the dreamer attempt to repress it. The wish of both the author and lyrical I is to achieve a perfect artwork, but perfect works do not exist. Whenever a wish-fulfillment is unrecognizable one tends to defend himself against this wish, and as a consequence the wish is unable to express itself, but takes a distorted form. Therefore, the demonic love may simply display a distortion, where the woman wailing for her demon symbolizes the inspiration the author so much desires in order to achieve perfection in his work of art (but he does not recognize it), reflecting his wish into the lyrical I, who in his turn wants the same thing. As perfect artworks do not exist, then a supernatural inspiration that comes from a god or a muse is the necessary precondition for artistic creation.

### **Conclusion**

*Kubla Khan, Or, a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment* is the expression of Coleridge's aesthetic doctrine in general, and, in particular, of his concern with poetic imagination, the supernatural and the fragmentary. The loss of inspiration, which has a supernatural character, obstructs both the author and the lyrical I from achieving a perfect work of art, but due to the

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poem' s fragmentary character, it manages to always offer a promise of a future time, which in turn, implies a completely different point of view regarding thinking and the time itself, as we do not talk about a dialectic temporality, but a different one, one that represents “a change of epoch” as Blanchot calls it. This prospect of futurity, which will always be uncertain, is first expressed in the preface when the author writes “but the to-morrow is yet to come”, and then in the poem itself as it is left as a fragment with an opening to infinite possibilities of interpretations for the readers and, as Hill cites Blanchot, new relations to “the streaming flow of the timeless outside” (Hill, 2012, p. 9) which exceed totality.

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