

6-15-1994

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Recommended Citation

Zimmer, Paul Edwin (1994) "The Person from Porlock," *The Mythic Circle*: Vol. 1994 : Iss. 17 , Article 8.
Available at: <https://dc.swosu.edu/mcircle/vol1994/iss17/8>

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Mythcon 51: The Mythic, the Fantastic, and the Alien

Albuquerque, New Mexico • Postponed to: July 30 – August 2, 2021



Additional Keywords

Poetry; The Person from Porlock; Paul Edwin Zimmer

THE PERSON FROM PORLOCK

by Paul Edwin Zimmer

*I am the person from Porlock,
If you wish to dream, then beware,
Lest the telephone's ring or the door's knock
Should shatter your castles in air.*

In Xanadu did Coleridge
A vision strange and rare describe:
From Alph the Sacred River's bridge
He saw the vision rare and rich
While on an opium high.

For Kubla Khan did Coleridge
A stately metered form create,
Of strong iambic rhythms stitched—
and then some rotten Sonovabitch
Broke up his vision opiate,
And wove the mundane round him well,
And closed his eyes to Poetry,
And made his vision from him flee,
And—sold what he had come to sell,
saying—

*I am the Person from Porlock,
If you dare to dream I am there;
I hide in your doorbell and in your clock,
And in a stranger's unkind stare...*

But oh! that new Romantic style enchanted
Dawned there, all green: the word discovered!
A savage style! Original, and wanted,
As e'er after, in passing years was hunted
By modern moaning for a love-life fevered!

Three verses meandering with amazing wonders,
Through worlds of tale this metered epic ran,

Reaching for beauties unattained by man,
Then sank in the tumult of a ceaseless thunder;
A loud thunder Coleridge heard—and swore—
Some Turkey rapping at his chamber door!
The Turkey from Porlock saying—*Nevermore*
The damsel with a Dulcimer
From your vision will you hear!

Had Coleridge remembered
Her symphony and song,
Then his epic, thus dismembered,
Would have gone on long—and long
All about that dome in air,
Those caves of ice! That sunny dome!
And could we that long poem bear?
Or would we cry—a bore! Beware!
An endless poem's tedious fare!

Weave an ending for your poem
And close your poem with image sharp,
Do not on one theme always harp,
And drown your art in "bor-e-dome."

*We all know the person from Porlock;
He hunts for the poet who tries;
And yet—maybe—at times his abhorred knock
Could be a blessing in disguise.*

*Watch out for the Person from Porlock;
His insidious ambush abort.
The secret is—avoid pushing your luck,
And purposely keep your poem short!*