

Sound Advice to a Young Poet or The Birth of the Literary Critic

By
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The young man knocked upon the door as the light began to fade.
"ello," he said, I've heard Sam's 'ere," to the pretty country maid.
"Come in," she said, with a winning smile, and led him up the stair:
she opened the guest room door and said, "There's a visitor for you, sir."

At a desk sat a man scribbling furiously, oblivious to his guest.
Who crossed the room, took off his hat, and tapped him on the chest.
"Another new poem? Let me look." For a moment or two he read.
Then he sat down heavily on the couch and tiredly shook his head.

"Sam, I've tried me best to explain to you, but you seem to pay no heed.
You ought to be writing the kind of poems the public wants to read.
It's seventeen-ninety-seven now, Sam; it's not the Middles Ages
and folks want to read some modern stuff." Sadly, he turned the pages.

"Kubla Khan and Xanadu? Sacred rivers and a sunless sea?
And for God's sake, Sam, can you please explain, what's an 'incense-bearing tree'?
And 'twice five miles of fertile ground'? Why can't you just say ten?
If I were you I'd rip it up and start all over again."

"Now I'm sure that you've got some talent, Sam, but frankly this is crap.
I've had a really good idea that could put you on the map.
There's like this sailor and this old boat and like this ghostly floating wreck,
and this albatross comes flying down and wraps itself round his neck."

"Now it needs some thought and a storyline, but come on, Sam, let's be fair,
it beats some ancient geezer with flashing eyes and floating hair.
It isn't just the river, is it, old mate, that's meandering in a maze?
And let's be frank, Sam, who the hell plays a dulcimer these days?"

"If you ask me, Sam, where you've gone wrong and I know you don't want it said,
but it's all that bloody opium; you should knock it on the head."
And on that note the young man stood and gravely tugged his forelock.
"I'd love to stay and talk poems, Sam, but it's a long walk back to Porlock."