

S. T. Coleridge's Poem "Kubla Khan" (1798)

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The speaker of the poem tells us that a Mongol king called Kubla Khan traveled to the land of Xanadu. In Xanadu, there is "a fascinating pleasure-dome that was 'a miracle of rare device' because the dome was made of caves of ice and located in a sunny area". The setting of the poem refers that there are two contrasting images: the first is good where the blossomed gardens with incense-bearing trees, and "sunny spots of greenery," the other image is evil which refers that the king is hearing the voices of war and the hostile image that "across the 'deep romantic chasm' in Xanadu there are 'caverns measureless to man' and a fountain from which 'huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail'." The redeeming image is that the king discovers "a miraculous sunny pleasure-dome made of ice."

The last stanza of the poem refers that the speaker mentions an Eastern image on Mount Abora where a maid is playing on a dulcimer and singing a song that carries him to a dream to a pleasure-dome in air and he can drink "the milk of Paradise."

As in "Frost at Midnight," "Dejection: An Ode," and "Christabel," the main theme arises throughout this poem is "the power of dreams and of the imagination". Michelle Levy states that Coleridge's "fascination with the unknown reflects a larger cultural obsession of the Romantic period" (694).

Coleridge wrote the poem under the influence of opium. The poet creates a fantastic world and explores "the depths of dreams and creates landscapes that could not exist in reality". The "sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice" represents the fantastic world which fascinates the speaker about the legendary place where the king Kubla Khan lives.

The exemption of this poem that makes it different from other Coleridge's poems is the revealing of evil nature:

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover!
And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
A mighty fountain momently was forced:
Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
It flung up momently the sacred river (lines 12-24)

However, this poem includes the admiration or the adoration of nature like the other poems of the poet.

The speaker's warning of the frightening character might be the king himself "Beware! Beware!/His flashing eyes, his floating hair!" or an imagined evil. The king is mythologized and the creative power of evil is demonstrated metaphorically.

The form of the poem coincides with the loosening images of imagination. The poem consists of three variant stanzas in size. The meter is iambic tetrameter.

<http://www.gradesaver.com/coleridges-poems/study-guide/summary-kubla-khan-1798> in MLA Format

Gordon, Todd. Weinbloom, Elizabeth ed. "Coleridge's Poems "Kubla Khan" (1798) Summary and Analysis". GradeSaver, 31 May 2011 Web. 3 January 2018.

In "Secret(ing) Conversations: Coleridge and Wordsworth," Bruce Lawder highlights the significance of Coleridge's use of a feminine rhyme scheme in the above stanza, in which the last two syllables of the lines rhyme (such as "seething" and "breathing"). Lawder notes that "the male force of the 'sacred river' literally interrupts, and puts an end to, the seven successive feminine endings that begin the second verse paragraph" (80). This juxtaposition of female forces versus male forces parallels the juxtaposition of Coleridge's typical pleasant descriptions of nature versus this poem's unpleasant descriptions. In most of Coleridge's works, nature represents a nurturing presence. However, in "Kubla Khan," nature is characterized by a rough, dangerous terrain that can only be tamed by a male explorer such as Kubla Khan.

The last stanza of the poem was added later, and is not a direct product of Coleridge's opium-dream. In it the speaker longs to re-create the pleasured-dome of Kubla Khan "in air," perhaps either in poetry, or in a way surpassing the miraculous work of Kubla Khan himself.