

MURSHIDABAD ADARSHA MAHAVIDYALAYA

ACADEMIC YEAR-2023-24

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

TEACHER: SUKANTA BARMAN, ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, STAGE-II

CLASS: 4TH SEM DATE: 07/08/2024

Topic of discussion

Kubla Khan: a poem about a creative process/A poem of creativity

The headnote to "Kubla Khan" serves as what Warren Stevenson calls an "imaginative adjunct to the poem". Such an understanding of headnote reinforces the view that "Kubla Khan" is a poem about creative process.

Coleridge sensed that he composed a poem in simultaneous response to a vision seen during "a profound sleep, at least of the external senses" He asserts that "he has the most vivid confidence, that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines;"

All that remained for him to do upon waking was to embody the creation in written form, that is, transfer it from mind to paper, thereby giving it an externalized mode of existence. Had the act of transferring the "composition" from mind to paper been completed, it would have represented the final but all-important step in the creative process, for externalizing the artist's conception not only gives it a concrete embodiment, but also makes it accessible to others who can then respond to it as the artist responded. Unfortunately, this last step of the creative process was interrupted by "a person on business from Porlock" who detained Coleridge "above an hour". Then in reality it was only 59 lines.

The landscape described in stanzas one and two of "Kubla Khan" is the usual starting point for any reading of the poem in terms of the creative process. The relational pattern established in the first two stanzas between the chasm, fountain, river, caverns, and underground sea does suggest the mind and its activities. As Irene Chayes argues, "the landscape with its descending levels would be the mind as structure, and the processes within it, summed up in the flowing of the river, 'meandering with a mazy motion,' the mind as activity".

Xanadu is a specific element or locale within the landscape. It is "In Xanadu" not "At Xanadu." Thus, everything described in the first two stanzas is "In Xanadu" - the fountain, chasm, river, caverns, sea, as well as Kubla Khan, his garden and his pleasure-dome. If the landscape reflects the mind and its activities, then Xanadu is the symbolic name for the mind.

Some identify the fountain in "Kubla Khan" with creativity and say it "corresponds to the imagination in its primary sense". The fountain is a necessary component for creativity in the poem. The river Alph is also a necessary condition for creativity in that it presumably fertilizes the ground upon which creation takes place in the poem.

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Kubla Khan in the light of Imagination: Primary, Secondary and Fancy

Coleridge is famous for his theory of Imagination – Primary, Secondary and Fancy. Each element within the poem “Kubla Khan”’s mind-landscape may be more precisely identified. Some identify the fountain in "Kubla Khan" with creativity and say it "corresponds to the imagination in its primary sense". The fountain is a necessary component for creativity in the poem. Fountain may serve as a creative power. Fountain’s "ceaseless turmoil seething" suggests something vital but nevertheless chaotic. As the immediate source of the river in the visible or conscious region of Xanadu, the fountain and the chasm from which it "momently" gushes represent the well-spring through which the unconscious becomes conscious. The fountain-chasm symbolizes the initiating point of conscious thought, depicted as a violent but potentially fertile springing forth from what has been "sunless" and "lifeless," dark and unformed. Because the passage from the unconscious to the conscious is shrouded in mystery, the place where that passage or birth occurs is appropriately "holy and enchanted", like the originating stage of life itself.

Just as it goes too far to identify the fountain with the imagination in its primary sense, Irene Chayes's claim that the river "corresponds to the secondary imagination" may be unconvincing. Like the fountain, the river is also a necessary condition for creativity in that it presumably fertilizes the ground upon which creation takes place in the poem, but the river itself is not a creative power any more than the fountain is. Nevertheless, even as the fountain is "holy and enchanted," the river is properly termed "sacred" because it represents the stream of thought; it is the life of the mind, the unifying first principle of all mental activity, signified by its name, Alph. As indicated earlier, the river flows through the conscious realm of Xanadu from a source ultimately rooted in the unconscious to a terminal point that returns it once again to that dark, mysterious region. In contrast to the fountain-chasm, the "caverns measureless to man" represent the initiating point of the unfathomable unconscious, the "sunless" or "lifeless" underground sea. There, the river is seemingly lost as it becomes undifferentiated in the formless sea but only to well up again through the fountain-chasm, ever new yet ever the same.

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KUBLA KHAN: NATURE POEM/PHYSICAL LANDSCAPE

KUBLA KHAN: LANDSCAPE/MINDSCAPE

KUBLA KHAN: Psychological poem/Freudian mind analysis

KUBLA KHAN: Role of the River Alph

“Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is a remarkable poem of Nature. /Romantic poem.

“Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is a poem depicting physical landscape.

“Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is a psychological poem.

“Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is a poem that can be analysed from Freudian concept of the unconscious.

“Kubla Khan” by Coleridge is specifically a poem about the river Alph.

The basic structural feature of Xanadu is its circularity, defined by the course of Alph, "the sacred river". Rising out of the "deep romantic chasm" amid the turbulent but intermittent gushings of a "mighty fountain" which is its source in the upper or visible region of Xanadu, the river flows "with a mazy motion / Through wood and dale" until it reaches "the caverns measureless to man". There it descends "in tumult" into what is called alternately a "sunless sea" or "lifeless ocean", that is, into the lower, hidden region of Xanadu. The visible and hidden regions of Xanadu correspond to the conscious and unconscious realms of the mind, an identification Irene Chayes terms "fundamental to the meaning of the first two stanzas". The course of the river unites those two realms, for as Warren Stevenson points out, "the river presumably returns to the fountain via the sunless sea, like a serpent with its tail in its mouth-the ancient symbol of eternity". In so doing, the river both completes and renews its circular flow which then becomes perpetual in its motion. Stevenson's reference to the *ouroboros*, a symbol frequently employed by the Gnostics and the alchemists, is quite apropos. In some versions of the symbol, the serpent's body is half light and half dark, suggesting a basic dichotomy united through the circle.

The structure of the Xanadu landscape is analogous in that it encompasses both light and dark, visible and hidden, conscious and unconscious aspects united through the circular course of the river. Because the circular pattern in Xanadu involves motion, it is also analogous in function to the meaning attached to circular motion by the alchemists for whom it signified "that which brings into being, activates and animates all forces in a given process, sweeping them along with it, including those forces which would otherwise act against each other". As the basic structural pattern of the Xanadu mind-landscape, circular motion allows depiction of the conscious and unconscious, the measured and measureless aspects co-existing in the mind's processes. The perpetual, circular course of the river reflects the unity of the diverse and seemingly opposed elements.