

Kubla Khan: Critical Analysis

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'Kubla Khan' is one of the most popular poems written by S.T. Coleridge. It was written in 1798 and published in 1816. It is one of those three poems which have made Coleridge, one of the greatest poets of England, the other two being *The Rime of Ancient Mariner* and *Christabel*. Coleridge himself describes this poem as the fragment of a dream, a vision seen perhaps under the influence of opium-which he saw when he had fallen asleep after reading the account of Kubla Khan in an old book. Kubla Khan is a brilliant achievement in the field of supernatural poetry.

The poem begins with the description of the kingdom of Kubla Khan. The action takes place in the unknown Xanadu (a mythical city). Kubla Khan was the powerful ruler who could create his pleasure dome by a mere order. Alpha was the sacred river that passed through Xanadu. It followed through the measureless caverns (caves) to the sunless sea. There were gardens in which streams were following in a zigzag manner. The gardens had many flowers with sweet smells and the forests had many spots of greenery. The poet gives a beautiful description of the remote and distant landscape of Xanadu. Coleridge writes -

"So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round,
And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree,
And here were forests ancient as the hills
Enfolding sunny spots of greenery."

There was a wonderful chasm sloping down the green hill.
The Cedar trees were growing on both sides of the chasm.
The place was visited by fairies and demons. Coleridge then gives a medieval tale of love and romance. When the moon declined in the night it was visited by a woman. She was sad for her lover. From the chasm shot up a fountain violently. It threw up stones. They were falling down in every direction. The sacred river Alpha ran through the woods and dales. Then it reached the unfathomable caverns and sank noisily in to a lifeless ocean with a tumult. In that tumult Kubla Khan heard the voices of his ancestors. They warned him of approaching war and danger.

In the second part of the poem Coleridge describes the pleasure dome of Kubla Khan. There was a mixed music of the fountains as well as the caves. It was bright with sunlight and also had caves of ice. Then the poet tells the reader about

his vision. In his vision he saw an Abyssinian maid playing upon her dulcimer. The poet desires to revive these symphony and song. Her music would inspire with divine frenzy. With the divine frenzy he would recreate all the charm of Kubla Khan's pleasure dome. The poet would be divinely inspired so people would draw a circle around him, and close their eyes with divine fear. The poet must have fed on honey dew and drunk the milk of paradise.

The supreme strength of Coleridge as a poet lay in his marvelous dream faculty; one might say that the dream faculty lay at the root of his greatness as a poet and his weakness as a man. "It is the dream element which makes Kubla Khan a thing of wonder in English poetry. Actually the poem had its origin in a dream. It possesses the qualities of a dream. It has no logical consistency of ideas. It is a procession of images expressed in language of haunting melody. It contains no story, no thought, no moral, no allegory or symbolism. It is appreciated for its shadowy vision and haunting music.

Kubla Khan is a poem of pure romance. All the romantic associations are concentrated in this short poem. It contains many sensuous phrases and pictures like bright gardens, incense bearing trees laden with blossoms, sunny spots of greenery etc.