

A Stylistic Analysis of Coleridge's Kubla Khan

MEHREEN SHAKOOR

Research Scholar

Mphil in Linguistics

Lahore Leads University, Pakistan

Abstract:

This research article has analysed “Kubla Khan”, a famous poem by S.T Coleridge. The analysis has been carried out under the paradigm of stylistics. Main purposes for conducting this research were to find out the style of poetic diction in Kubla Khan, to evaluate the poem for any autobiographical elements and to analyse the use of imagery in the poem. The grounds on which the poem was analysed were graphological level, grammatical level, syntactical level, and phonological patterns. Analysis of the poem has been carried out by using the model of Leech and Short (1981). This research can be used as a layout for the study of structure and style in Coleridge’s poetry. The themes, views, and treatment of nature by the poet can also be evaluated by taking this research as a base.

Key words: S.T Coleridge, Poetry, Stylistic analysis

1. INTRODUCTION

In the words of Robert Frost “Poetry is the kind of thing poets write”. A poet uses some specific words and expressions in his work which distinguish him from others. His arrangement of words, his style expression, his use of specific poetic devices make his work a unique piece of art. The style of writing a poet assists the readers in order to pay attention on what has been

tried to say by not actually saying it. Today most of the poetry is read silently in isolation but still it carries the feel of being spoken aloud, and the reader should practice "hearing" it in order to catch all of the artfulness with which the poet has created his work. Every literary writer has his own style. But how can we distinguish his style from others? Every collection of poetry seems to be the same. To gain insight of any phenomenon occurring in this world we need to dissect it into pieces. Same is the case with language, for understanding the phenomenon underneath, for investigating linguistic techniques and devices, for gaining insight to the author's intentions we need to dissect the particular piece of work. And the most fruitful tool for this dissection is Stylistics.

Word stylistics is itself derived from the word style, which means that stylistics studies different styles. It studies proper use of language in proper place. Leech (1969) states that "style is the way in which something is spoken, written or performed". Style can be written or spoken, literary or non-literary but it is particularly associated with written literary text. The purpose of stylistics analysis is to investigate how the resources of language code are put to use in production of actual message. According to Wales (2001), "The goal of most stylistics is not simply to describe the formal features of texts for their own sake, but in order to show their functional significance for the interpretation of the text; or in order to relate literary effects to linguistic 'causes' where these are felt to be relevant."

Leech and Short say that (1981, p.13) "Stylistics is simply defined as the (linguistic) study of style, is rarely undertaken for its own sake, simply as an exercise in describing what use is made of language". It gives the answer why and how does the writer choose certain expressions of language which lead towards aesthetic effect. In poetry aesthetic function cannot be separated from manipulation of linguistic codes, this aspect makes stylistics as an interesting and researchable discipline for both literature and linguistics students. Stylistics has different levels and categories for analysis of language. This

research has used the below given levels of stylistics analysis by focusing the model of Leech and Short (1981) and its application on the selected poem of S.T Coleridge.

1.1 Levels of Stylistic Analysis

Following are the levels of stylistic analysis. We analyse the text according to these levels.

1. **Graphology:** “Graphology is the analogous study of a languages writing system or orthography as seen in the various kinds of handwriting or topography”(Alabi 2007, p.170). Graphology is visual coding of spoken material. Leech (1969, p.39) states that “It refers to the whole writing system: punctuation and paragraphing as well as spacing”. Graphological devices are; punctuation, paragraph, stanza, imagery.

2. **Phonology:** “Phonology describes the ways in which speech sounds are organized in English into a system” (Ofuya 2007, p.14). Phonological devices are; Alliteration, Assonance, Consonance. Onomatopoeia, Rhyme etc.

3. **Morphology:** Mark and Kirsten (2005, p.1) find that “Morphology refers to the mental system involved in word formation or to the branch of linguistics that deals with words, their internal structure, and how they are formed”. Morphological devices are; Compounding, Affixes, and Coinages, etc.

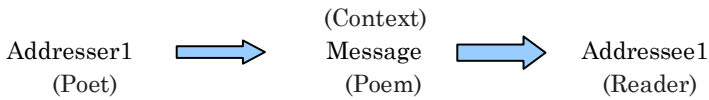
4. **Lexical:** This deals with level of “Lexis”. Lexis is the vocabulary items that make up a language or the body of words known and used by a particular person. The major devices are; Analogy, Apostrophe, Connotation, Hyperbole, Irony, Metaphor, Personification, Pun, Simile.

5. **Grammar/Syntax:** Syntax, According to Tallerman (1998, p.1) means ‘Sentence construction’: how words group together to make phrases and sentences”. Syntax is related to Words, phrases, sentences, parts of speeches, and clauses etc. The aim in this branch of language is to analyze the internal structure of sentences in a language and the way they function

in syntactical sequences; clauses, phrases, words, nouns, verbs, etc.

1.2 Introduction and thematic analysis of the poem:

S. T Coleridge is one of the first lot of famous romantics. In his poetry we find supernatural elements with the flight of imagination. It is beyond the capacity of the normal mind to write such an imaginative and creative poem. Kubla Khan in particular is a symbolic poem which allures supernatural images in mind of a reader. The poem seems to be a fairy tale and magical story that deals with mystical ancient figures. Kubla Khan (son of the Great Genghis Khan) is ordered to build a pleasure dome in Xanadu, where the river Alph runs in the measureless dark caves, above which mild sun shines. The immeasurable caves, wilderness forest, the dark silence and the demon lover create mysterious and supernatural image in the mind of a reader. The theme is foregrounded through the linguistic items like, mighty mountain, ancestral voices, flashing eyes, and demon-lover. The writer used vocabulary like this to reveal the supernatural elements in nature. In the opening stanza, the title character decrees that a "stately pleasure-dome" be built in Xanadu. Xanadu is described more romantically in the second stanza. The final paragraph presents a first-person narrator who recounts a vision he once had of an Abyssinian maid playing a dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora. The poem is different in style, incomplete and subtitled as "fragment". Its language is highly stylised with a strong emphasis on sound devices...The first stanza depicts Khan's pleasure dome built alongside a sacred river fed by a powerful fountain. It has followed the iambic tetrameter. The second stanza of the poem is the narrator's response to the power and effects of an Abyssinian maid's song and incorporate lighter stresses in stanzas. The poem deals in third person narration. The poem can only be understood by thematically understanding of context and content.



The Poem:

1. In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
2. Where Alph, the sacred river, ran
3. Through caverns measureless to man
4. Down to a sunless sea.
5. So twice five miles of fertile ground
6. With walls and towers were girdled round:
7. And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills,
8. Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree;
9. And here were forests ancient as the hills,
10. Enfolding sunny spots of greenery. ,

11. But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
12. Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover!
13. A savage place! as holy and enchanted
14. As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
15. By woman wailing for her demon lover!
16. And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething,
17. As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
18. A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:
19. Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst
20. Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
21. Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail:
22. And 'mid these dancing rocks at once and ever
23. It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
24. Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
25. Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
26. Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
27. And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
28. And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
29. Ancestral voices prophesying war!

30. The shadow of the dome of pleasure
31. Floated midway on the waves;
32. Where was heard the mingled measure
33. From the fountain and the caves.
34. It was a miracle of rare device,
35. A sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice!
36. A damsel with a dulcimer
37. In a vision once I saw:
38. It was an Abyssinian maid,
39. And on her dulcimer she played,
40. Singing of Mount Abora.
41. Could I revive within me
42. Her symphony and song,
43. To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
44. That with music loud and long,
45. I would build that dome in air,
46. That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
47. And all who heard should see them there,
48. And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
49. His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
50. Weave a circle round him thrice,
51. And close your eyes with holy dread,
52. For he on honeydew hath fed,
53. And drunk the milk of Paradise.

2. Analysis

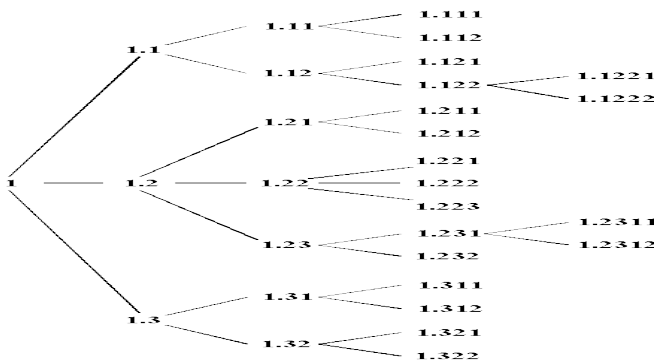
2.1 Graphological level:

This poem contains three stanzas. This is a fifty-four-line lyric in three verse paragraphs. Paragraph one contains eleven lines. The second stanza contains twenty-five lines. And the third stanza contains eighteen lines. There is a usual pattern of capitalization. Each line starts with a capital letter. We can see the use of unusual punctuation in the poem for example: full stop, comma, colon, exclamatory mark and apostrophe are used

in this poem. The purpose of extensive use of punctuation at the end of the poem is to pause, stress and create a usual effect. For example:

round:	ocean:
war!	of ice!
caves of ice!	hair!
bearing tree;	cover!
lover!	was forced:
flail:	A savage place!
'twould	'mid

Benzon (2003) made the mind up to show the organizational structural pattern of the poem.



There are different clauses and sentences which run over the whole poem. This shows that the poet intended the poem to be read in parts. There is no apparent unity of the discourse. This is because when the reader reads the first line, he gets a sense of incompleteness and, therefore would like to read on to find out 'what' has been tried say actually. Taking a close look at the whole poem, we find that every line of the poem in fact creates a pulling forward effect, though there may be differences in the degrees of strength. This creates the effect of uniqueness and supernatural effect in the poem as a whole.

2.2 Phonological Level:

The poem deals with the unusual patterning of sound in its lines. The poem covertly contains metrical irregularity having no uniformity in the form of musicality. In the first place, the rhyming word of every line is linked by alliteration (of syllables or measures) to one of the words closely preceding it, 'Kubla Khan' 'dome decree' 'river ran' 'measureless to man', 'sunless sea'. First line of the poem contains symmetrical patterns of assonances on stressed syllables:

In **XAN**.. | ..a **DU**. | ..did **KUB**.. | ..la **KHAN**
/æ/, /u/, /u/, /æ/.

The poem emphasises the use of the "æ" sound. The stressed sounds, "Xan", "du", "Kub", "Khan", contain assonance in their use of the sounds /æ/, /u/, /u/, /æ/.

Secondly, there is an intermittent consonant of /n/ in the latter half of the extract: ran, caverns, man, down, sunless.

Fourthly, there is an internal rhyme(i.e. as opposed to the end-rhymes prescribed by the verse pattern) between pleasure and measure, despite the two-line gap between them.

Through caverns measure**less** to man (line 4)

Down to a sun**less sea**. (line 5)

So twice **five** miles of **fertile** ground (line 6)

With walls and **towers** were **girdled round** (line 7)

The rhyme scheme found in the first seven lines is repeated in the first seven lines of the second stanza. Unity and harmony within (sub)sections of the text are created by the repetition of single sounds (alliteration/ consonance and assonance) .The stress pattern is:

ABAAB CCDBDB

**Khan, Decree, Ran, Man, See, Ground, Round, Rills,
Tree, Hills, Greenery.**

There is a heavy use of assonance, the use of vowel sounds in words placed near to each other. The use of alliteration is also extensive, repetition of the first sound of a word, within the poem including the first line: "In Xanadu did Kubla Khan". There are also irregular patterns in rhyme scheme. The only word that has no true connection to another word is "dome" except in its use of a "d" sound. The poem is foregrounded on the bases of phonological level, which is to create a rhyming and musical effect while reading. For example;

ground round: rills, hills, enchanted slanted
cover! lover! seething, breathing, ran, man

2.3 Morphological and Lexical Level:

The poem "Kubla Khan" has a very cohesive structure. The poem is divided into three major sections. Each of three sections has three more sub-sections. The conjunctions and determiners are used to create links between lines and sentences, sentences and stanzas, and stanzas and the whole of the extract of Kubla Khan that we have today. In this poem, parallelism can also be seen e.g. in lines 50 and 51 by the use of "And all". This poem comprises the stylistics devices like repetition, words like "sacred river" line (24, 26), "tumult" line (28, 29) and "beware" in line 49.

The following lexical devices have also been employed in the construction of the poem. The use of anaphora i.e. referring back and repetition of words, at the start of many lines can easily be seen.

And all who heard should see them there, (line 47)
And all should cry, Beware! Beware! (line 48)
His flashing eyes, his floating hair! (line 47)

In this poem, the poet has used many archaic words such as, "honey-dew hath fed," and "Xanadu". At semantic level there are many words used by Coleridge, such as, in line (5, 11, 18, 28,) sunless, lifeless, ceaseless. In this poem the metaphors are a little more difficult to find and understand. One of the

metaphors used by Coleridge is "lifeless ocean". The final stanza of this poem comprises major metaphor for what happened to Coleridge in the course of writing this poem. It has been documented in quite a lot of biographical notes of Coleridge that one day while smoking opium he fell asleep. And he dreamt this poem in that sleep, as soon as he got up, he started writing this poem and kept on writing until someone interrupted. And after that he never was able to remember what more he had to write in this poem, that's why we are left with an uncompleted fragment of a fantastic poem. He wished that he could resurrect "revive" his vision but could never in actual.

The use of simile has also been employed in the poem. Coleridge uses a simile to compare the haunting savagery of this place with the image of a "woman wailing for her demon-lover" under the light of a "waning moon." For example;

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail,
(Comparison).

As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing,
(Comparison).

The pattern of capitalization is also unusual. There are three types of capitalization:

1. Capitalization of proper nouns; Xanadu, Kubla Khan, Abora
2. Capitalization of common nouns; Paradise.
3. Capitalization of exclamatory words with exclamatory mark; Beware!

The unusual capitalization of words focus on the supernatural and mystical effect which is also the theme of the poem.

2.4 Syntactical level:

Coleridge deviates from grammatical rules many a times in this poem such as in line 6, he uses, "so twice five miles of fertile ground" instead of 'ten' mile. In line 39, 40, poet deviates at

grammatical level poet used “a damsel with a dulcimer” “in a vision once I saw” this arrangement or this pattern is not correct one. In line (16, 29, 46), he used “As e'er”, “And ‘mid”, “‘twould win me”, respectively.

Surface structure: In Xanadu did Kubla Khan (line 1) A stately pleasure-dome decree (line 2)

Implied structure: Kubla Khan decreed a stately pleasure dome in Xanadu.

3. Conclusion:

On semantic level a reader understands what the words used by poet literally mean but there are other levels too by which poetry is analysed. All of other levels that form the meaning of a literary piece have been studied in the analysis of this poem too. The overall feel of a poetic piece forms the overall meaning of that writing. The particular feel of ‘Kubla Khan’ has been constructed through the distinguished combination of linguistic units in the poem. The researcher has evaluated through the stylistic analysis of the poem at different levels that it carries autobiographical elements. Poet has used his overall preference of supernatural elements in this poem too which we can observe in quite a lot of other poems of his too. Poet by using different vocabulary items has also been successful in portraying the dreadful side of nature to his readers. The uniqueness and irregularity of poetic language has extensively been practiced in this poem by Coleridge. Device of imagery has largely been used for creating a very strange (supernatural) land in which the poem is set. The significance of this piece of art by S.T Coleridge is that even though the poet himself confessed that it was an incomplete poem of his, it has never ceased attracting the attention of literary readers ever since it was written in the early romantic period till date. The research has evaluated every stylistic aspect present in the poem because of whom it has become a marvellous milestone in English literature through the

centuries.

REFERENCES:

- Crystal, D. *New Perspectives for Language Study. 1: Stylistics.* University of Reading. Print.
- Leech, G. *A linguistic guide to English Poetry.* London: Longman, 1969. Print.
- Leech, G. and Short, M.H. *Style in Fiction: A linguistic introduction to English Fictional prose.* London: Longman, 1981. Print.