

'kubla ritz and 'adultery' by essay



Since the beginning of human existence, there has been once practice, one instinct, one single obsession that we cannot escape. Some may call it necessary; others say it's a gift. It can be controlling, enlightening but it's oh so powerful. It isn't the need for food, safety or shelter. It isn't love nor greed nor vanity, but sex, ladies and gentlemen. With the evolution of human communication poets have been using the power of words to describe the practice of sex, and the emotions that come with it.

As a guest speaker invited to this years festival, I have explored how sex is expressed through poetry from a multitude of cultures and eras. It has become apparent that the traditions and values of a society shapes the form, right down to the style of language and words used, of poetry from its respective era. While values have and will continue to change, sex is a universal practice, and therefore a universal theme of poets the world over. To demonstrate this, I will analyze three poems: 'Kubla Khan,' by Samuel Coleridge, 'Sexual Healing,' by Marvin Gaye and David Ritz and 'Adultery' by Carol Ann Duffy. Although all poems have the same central theme of sex, the way they express it differs quite radically.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan
A stately pleasure-dome decree:
Where Alph, the sacred river,
ran through caverns measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.
These are the opening lines of Kubla Khan, in which the era of its poet is made clear. Samuel Coleridge was from the Romantic period, an era in which freedom, simplicity and the humble life were reflected through poetry. Above all else though, Romantic poetry featured a strong presence of nature, wild and untamed, the opposite to the stiff formal gardens of Victorian England.

So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were girdled round:
The influence of Romanticism is immediately apparent in the first two stanzas of Kubla Khan, alongside a feeling of the east and a touch of exoticism. And there were gardens bright with sinuous rills
Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree; Coleridge constantly relates to nature within Kubla Khan, making it inherent to Romantic poetry, yet this poem is not strictly about nature. At first glance it is description of Coleridge's drug-induced version of Paradise, but a common interpretation of Kubla Khan is that it is an allegory for Coleridge's repressed sexual desires and feelings. But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted
Down the green hill athwart a cedarn cover! A holy place! As holy and enchanted
At this point of the poem, connections can be made between his words and sexuality, such as 'fertile ground' and potency, or 'deep romantic chasm,' a metaphor for a part of the female anatomy.

He refers to this chasm as holy and enchanted, alluding to the mystery of women. It is almost as if Coleridge himself is mystified and awed up until the point of worship for this chasm that women possess. A savage place! as holy and enchanted
As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted
By woman wailing for her demon-lover! Coleridge paints a vivid picture of a woman tormented by love and desire, wailing with an almost religious fervor. This is accentuated by use of exclamation marks. Thus, the previously mentioned romantic chasm becomes a simile for the extremity of almost religious passion displayed by the wailing woman. And from this chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething
As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing
A mighty mountain momentarily was forced: In three swift lines, Coleridge

describes the moment of climax, while making use of rhyme, personification and alliteration.

In the following lines, the fountain and its 'rebounding hail' becomes one with the river mentioned at the beginning. Here, you can understand why he originally thought of the river Alph as sacred. After all, the river is but a metaphor for the seed of life produced by men. If the chasm is holy, than it makes sense for the river which flows into it to be sacred, too.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
In these lines, Coleridge uses alliteration and rhyme to describe the rivers journey to the 'caverns measureless to man,' a metaphor for the womb. Of all poetic techniques, visual imagery is the strongest, while use of other devices such as similes, metaphors and personification only serve to heighten the reader's experience. The Romantic era allowed poets to infuse simplicity, nature and imagination together. The perhaps unintentional brilliance of Kubla Khan is how Coleridge manipulated his words in order to include elements of Romanticism yet express lustful and passionate thoughts.

The strong presence of nature as a theme allowed the evocative Kubla Khan to be accepted into the era it was written in. As time progressed, the modesty of the 18th and 19th centuries gave way to societies less afraid to read about lust, passion and sex. This transition can be seen in poems from the 20th century. In the late 1970's an R; B singer by the name of Marvin Gaye and his biographer David Ritz co-wrote the lyrics to the famous reggae style ballad 'Sexual Healing.' Although hundreds of years separate Kubla

Khan from Sexual Healing, the poems still talk about a common theme. The 1970's were characterized by growing distrust in the government, increased influence of the women's movement, and concern for the environment.

The events of these times were reflected in and became inspiration for poems and song lyrics of this era. Unlike Kubla Khan, the words of Sexual Healing have no double meaning. Ritz wrote with clarity, simplicity and as apparent in the first verse, complete honesty. I'm hot just like your oven I need your lovin' Baby I can't hold it much longer It's getting stronger and stronger A rhyming pattern of AABB emerges, while the simile 'hot just like your oven' describes the narrator's arousal. The next stanza starts, 'Whenever these blue teardrops are falling / And my emotional stability is leaving me.

'Blue is generally a color associated with melancholy, and thus perfectly describes a state of emotional sadness. 'Darling I know you'll be there to relieve me / the love you give to me will free me.' Here, sex is seen as calming, sensual, and as a healing process. A major feature of Sexual Healing is repetition. At one point, the words 'Heal me, my darling,' are repeated four times in a row.

This is done to emphasize how sex can alleviate anxieties of the soul. Written in an era of flower children, anti-war movements and free love, the song Sexual Healing can be seen as a protest against sexual brutality. American culture of the 70's is reflected in the laid back rhythm, soothing language and overall mood. Social change and society's values are prevalent in the

fact that sex is written about so openly. To do so in the Victorian, Romantic, Elizabethan era or even the early 1900's would be completely inappropriate.

As time progressed, society's values evolved to the point where people are not fazed by blatant mentions of sex, whether in music, film or literature. 'Adultery,' a poem by Carol Ann Duffy was written in the early 90's and is an example of how society's changing views on sex can be represented through poetry. It is written in first person, through the eyes of a woman whose husband has been having an affair. Wear dark glasses in the rain.

The first line immediately sets a tone of deceit. Wearing dark glasses on a sunless day would only serve to conceal identity, and so the poem begins by introducing the secrecy of adultery. Regard what was unhurt as though through a bruise. Guilt. A sick, green tint.

'Regard what was unhurt.' Here, we can infer that the narrator is the one upon whom adultery was committed against. The bruise is a metaphor for her husband's guilt, both a sickly green in color. New gloves, money tucked in the palms, the handshake crackles. Handscan do many things.

Phone. Open the wine. Wash themselves. These lines describe the meeting between her partner and his lover.

New gloves signify a new relationship, the beginning of an affair. The description of the hand's abilities describes the date: he phones the lover, opens the wine, and after it all washes his hands clean, both literally and symbolically, in order to rid himself of guilt. Suck a lie with a hole in iton the

way home from a lethal, thrilling nightup against a wall, faster. The man sucks on a polo mint on the way home from a night with his lover.

These words are also a metaphor – the breath mint represents all of his lies, and the holes in them that she can see through. A lethal, thrilling night, is an oxymoron, showing how his night was dangerous in terms of his marriage and matters of the heart, yet it was exciting all the same. These lines are written spitefully, especially at the word faster, as if their own lovemaking wasn't good enough or fast for him..

.. Languageunpeels to a lost cry. You're a bastard. What is meant in these words is how the man and his lover started off with simply talking, which in turn unpeeled into passionate cries, during a moment in where words are no longer necessary.

Language has been reduced to the inarticulate cries of passion. ' You're a bastard.' She speaks bluntly, angrily and directly. His lying, cheating and betrayal are summed up in this one line.

Do it do it do it. She imagines the whispers, the moaning or the cries of her husband's lover. The absence of punctuation creates a feeling of urgency, where one can imagine this being said amidst the throes of passion. Sweet darkness in the afternoon, a voice in your eartelling you how you are wanted, which way, now. Sweet darkness is another oxymoron, as the word darkness often implies a somber mood. The fact that there is ' sweet darkness in the afternoon' invokes images of a room with the curtains pulled shut – more deceit.

' Telling you how you are wanted, which way, now,' alludes to the physical mechanics of sex, and the line ends with urgency in the word now. Pay for it in cash, fiction, cab-fares back to the life which crumbles like a wedding cake. He pays for the wine in cash, so there is no credit card receipt or statement to arouse suspicion. The word fiction represents more of his lies. ' Cab-fares back to the life which crumbles like a wedding cake.

' The mention of a wedding cake is quite important, as it is symbolic of marriage, which in this case is falling apart. Then, selfish autobiographical sleep in a marital bed, the tarnished spoon of your body stirring betrayal, your heart over-ripe at the core. He comes home and sleeps on his own, without holding her, as the words selfish and autobiographical suggest. She refers to it as ' a marital bed.' It is almost as if she calls it a marital bed out of spite, as opposed to the way a happily married couple would refer to their bed as ' our bed.' Thus, the use of ' a,' an indefinite article, makes the bed sound impersonal and temporary.

You're an expert, darling; your flowers dumb and explicit on nobody's birthday. Here, she is patronizing her husband's attempt to keep her happy by giving her flowers without occasion to. They are dumb because they are unwarranted and explicit because they are so obviously suspicious. So write the script – illness and debt, a ring thrown away in a garden no moon can heal, your own words commuting to bile in your mouth, terror -and all for the same thing twice. And all for the same thing twice.

These stanzas outline the selfishness and greed for sex that her husband displayed, as he ruined everything for sex from two women. The same words

are repeated on two levels, firstly because adultery involves two relationships, and secondly to outline the stupidity of his affair. His wife was there and available to him, yet he went through with the deceit, the lies, and the betrayal all for the same thing twice. Her husband's lust became sinful and his obsession with sex destroyed his marriage, as shown in the line, ' a ring thrown away in a garden.' The mere fact that sex, especially the uglier side of it, can be discussed so bluntly shows just how much society has changed. At first, lust and sex were written about with a very subtle demeanor, as can be seen in ' Kubla Khan.

' In contrast, poetry concerning sex became more open in manner as the years went by. The protest against sexual brutality in ' Sexual Healing' would certainly not have been acceptable even two decades before its time, let alone 200 years. Further exposure to lust and sex in the media led to poems such as ' Adultery' being written. This poem's acceptance in contemporary society displays a progression of international maturity in regards to sex, but at the same time the loss of modesty. Ultimately, all poems have differing representations of the same theme, which is shaped by the society of its era. William Wordsworth once said that ' poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings.' Lust and sex are among the most powerful feelings that human beings are capable of, and there is no doubt that poets will continue express their passion, elation or anguish on this subject.