

the
I
D
O
L



winter . . . 1961

In This Issue

Editorial Comment	- - - - -	1
A Man of Resolution	- - Wayne Somers	2
Credo On Love	- Lawrence H. Lentchner	4
The Almost Death of Death	- Lawrence H. Lentchner	5
Problems of the Poets	- - John Throne	8
On Her Departure	- - - Paul Wiener	10
Dramatic Sonnet	- - - Paul Wiener	10
Homeward Bound	- - - Lebus	11
Xanadu Revisited	- - - - -	12
An Interpretation of Kubla Khan	- Daniel Schwarz	13
The Back Road to Xanadu	- Stephen H. Polmar	15
A Christmas Story	- - Douglass Allen	20
Notes on Contributors	- - - - -	20

COVER ARTIST — Fred Wilkes

THE IDOL

the
Quarterly Magazine
of
UNION COLLEGE
JANUARY 1961

Vol. XXXVII No. 2

The Staff

Editor

Stephen H. Polmar

Business Manager

Gilbert Bell

Managing Editor

Neil Jaffee

Editorial Staff

David Crandall

George Dicenso

Melvin Epstein

Thomas Grange

Lawrence Lentchner

Richard Olsen

Donald Rous

Daniel Schwarz

Lee Shepps

Wayne Sommers

Peter Sussman

Paul Wiener

Art Staff

Editor

Noah Hershkowitz

Associates

Skip Pott

Fred Wilkes

Business Staff

Circulation Manager

Gerard Zimmerman

Gordon Puls

Faculty Advisor

Professor Alan Nelson

THE IDOL is published four times a year at Union College, Schenectady, New York. Yearly subscription rate: two dollars. Individual copies: fifty cents. Printed at Schenectady Printing Co., 502 Broadway, Schenectady, N. Y. Editorial offices at Washburn Hall, Union College, phone EX 3-9232. The Publisher's advertising representative: W. B. Bradbury Co., 219 East 44th Street, New York 17, N. Y.

EDITORIAL COMMENT

Four years ago, a beret-bearing freshman, bedecked in paint splattered dungarees, tattered sweatshirt, and ripped tennis sneakers, sans socks, appeared suddenly upon the Union College campus and boldly declared to the world—"La Renaissance est ici". Yet, despite all the prophet's mystical incantations and oil paint revelations, the rebirth of wonder has not been attained, and we presently find ourselves quite far from any artistic Kingdom of Heaven.

Why hasn't our "*Renaissance*" become a reality? What can account for the deficiency in creative and artistic productivity? Can we wholly attribute Union's artistic and literary poverty to its student body directly? — I'm afraid so. Union students are generally unimaginative, uncreative and apathetic, with respect to art, music, drama and literature. However, this unfortunate situation is not the fault of the stu-

dents themselves. We cannot expect exceptionally talented students in these fields to be attracted to a college so obviously deficient in facilities in those areas.

Another point to be considered is the admission policy at Union. Preference seems to be given to the all-round boy, — but the all-round boys aren't generally artistically inclined. The *balanced* student is mediocre rather than exceptional. The *balance* that Union College has achieved is a stagnant and static one, rather than a more desirable dynamic *balance*, which can only be attained by the interaction of individuals or groups of exceptional and differing talents.

When these deficiencies are remedied, then, and only then, can we expect a *Renaissance* of the creative arts at Union.

S.H.P.

The *Idol* welcomes contributions from the student body, and whenever possible will print those of merit. Manuscripts should be deposited, along with the name and college address of the author, in the *Idol* mailbox in the Student Activities office. Rejected manuscripts will be returned. Upon request published manuscripts will also be returned.

A Man of Resolution

by Wayne Somers

Mr. Powell took the bottle of air freshener from under the bathroom sink and held it up to the light. Only two days ago he had diluted it with water, and now it was almost empty again. He sighed, put the bottle back, and returned to the living room.

He had been reading a letter from his wife, the third from her in the past month. Each letter had been shorter and more urgent than the one before. So far, he had answered none of them.

They all said the same thing: Mrs. Powell did not love Mr. Powell; never had, in fact. Mrs. Powell loved someone else, with whom she was living, sleeping, in fact. Mrs. Powell would not come back to Mr. Powell under any circumstances. Mrs. Powell wanted Mr. Powell to divorce her.

Mr. Powell had just decided to answer the latest letter, when something prompted him to go and check the air freshener.

There was no doubt, it would be gone by morning. It would be best to go to a drugstore right now and buy a new bottle.

Mr. Powell prided himself on being a man of resolution, and so, cold, windy and late as it was, he put on his overcoat and quickly left the apartment.

There were few people on the streets of the residential section where Mr. Powell lived, and no other customers in the drugstore.

He had just left the store, when a tall, emaciated man in a black overcoat came across the sidewalk and addressed him earnestly.

"Have you found Christ yet, brother?"

Mr. Powell's first reaction was total incomprehension, then shock, then embarrassment.

"No," he stammered finally, "I'm sorry . . . I . . ." He started walking away. But the man followed at his elbow.

"O friend, you don't know me, but I knew as soon as I saw you that you didn't love Christ. *Please* don't walk away, friend, stay and let me tell you about Our Lord. O, I've prayed for you, friend; for you and everyone who has strayed."

Mr. Powell shivered and kept walking. It was the most compassionate voice he had ever heard. He despised it.

"You don't have to take my word for it, friend, it's all right here in the Holy Bible. The Word of Gawd, friend. . . ."

He remembered the glimpse he had had of the man's unshaven face. His features were almost obscenely sharp beneath a thick tangle of black hair.

"O, I was lost in sin, too! You have no secrets from me, Brother, I know, I know you."

Mr. Powell hunched his shoulders and walked faster. The part of his back

nearest his tormenter felt exposed, as though he might at any moment be stabbed. He kept his eyes front and desperately scanned the sidewalk ahead for refuge.

"I drank, I stole, I blasphemed, I went to whores, but God has forgiven me, and He'll forgive you too. Christ *died* for you! O, friend, you're running away from Gawd! I can't let you. Just stop a minute and let me *tell* you . . ."

Mr. Powell no longer heard the words, although he was still aware of the man's presence at his side. They had entered the business district, now deserted except for an occasional car. Mr. Powell was conscious only of the pleading man at his elbow and the necessity of walking still faster, of escaping.

His glance darted across the street to a single lighted window on the second story of an office building. A man was silhouetted there, one foot on the windowsill, casually smoking a cigarette and looking down at the street.

Mr. Powell looked quickly back to the sidewalk. His legs ached. He became aware of another voice.

"Why should you run? He has no right to chase you through the streets like a criminal. Turn on him! He can't hurt you."

Mr. Powell tried not to listen to this voice. He sensed that it was even more dangerous than the first voice.

"Tell him to leave you alone or you'll call a cop."

"You're afraid to! You're a coward; you always have been and you always . . ."

Stopping suddenly, Mr. Powell shut his eyes and flung his arm in a violent backward arc toward his pursuer. He struck nothing. The bag containing the bottle of air freshener flew from his grasp and was smashed on a concrete doorstep. He opened his eyes again and looked frantically around: there was no one in sight.

Mr. Powell sighed deeply several times, and then, as the perfumed vapor from the broken bottle began to surround him, he gradually ceased trembling.



Credo On Love
by Lawrence H. Lentchener

I know not Please . . .but Yes! — Peter Lefcourt

I

Humanity's hips have been placed between bookends,
The pages too tedious for persons mundane,
Replaced by tales of Orphan Annie
Where every woman finds her snookums.

Mary Worth, I love your body.
Seeking a rebirth of Yes sexuality
I rip rugged pages from leather-bound books
To spread them before you that you might look
At the butcherous bounty of materiality
Blasphemist of Beauty.

II

Death betrays corruption of human nerves—
They tingle not at finger's feel.
If in life the same is real,
How can love reveal its verve
of undulation?

My nerves shed tears of acid pain
In seemingly futile search for love
Of love. Answered only by coos of doves,
Their frightened feathers disturbed again.
Genuine prostitution reigns.

Copping their plea for virginity,
Spreading their minds for righteous thought,
Fair maidens sleep with teachers they've bought.
We've acknowledged a lie as a deity,
and practice atheism.

III

"It was all shining,
It was Adam and maiden."

When once, before I bubbled to birth
I held in grained hand the being of Woman,
I trembled not at her un-patrician
Movements of glory, wide-eyed in mirth
of exultation.

I knew not Please, nor she, but Yes!
We divined the spectorial maypole of Spring
In the Summer which hungrily clings
To the tongue-tipped tumult of a god's caress
It was; It is; Yes!

The Almost Death of Death

Lawrence H. Lentchner

The curtain of gauzed dawn
Revealed its linen. In time,
Eruptions of bold light condensed
To haze, as it to warn
Of a helter-skelter day — unrhymed.
The wood discarded its single pretense
Of slumber. The day commenced
In innocence — no harlot boughs
Revealed their foliage. So safely endowed
With mask of beauty, Death took a long stride.

The line he bore was straight
As a quiver. One shivered to guess
Of his destination. No procrastination
Was present, but steady deliberate
Steps to the summit, and facing the West
He almost succumbed to imagination.
An opaque cloud contained the nation
In this moment of a demon's slip.
The sudden cold gave chattering lips
A voice of surprise, retreat and forewarning.

A grin took hold, then vanished,
And spying a scene with alacrity
He turned to the green-boughed meadow below.
Objective sighted, he finished
His thought. His face assumed finality.
He approached a clearing in which his foe
Lay moving together and he cried, "No!"
Yet still they embraced in lover's dance,
No product of pomp and circumstance.
His orders ignored, they knew only the other.

The maiden was fair skinned;
Her golden locks revealed no flaw.
Flesh alike was tender, yet firm,
And filled with passion it pinned
Her lover to her breast. She saw
No sight but that of her man's, in turn
With an image of he and she burned
With bliss. Their god was their hands
That searched and found with each demand.
Death again cried vociferously, "No!"

(continued)



He stomped upon the earthen sod;
His voice grew deep and again
The sky turned black in fits of gust.
It seemed that love was regally barred
From lying on the earth's terrain.
So Death smirked at the scene of lust,
Waiting for closure as sure they must.
But still they moved in simple rhythm,
Two advanced in single system.
And he weakly uttered another, "No!"

Defeat was displayed in his brow
As his "No's!" were ignored in succession.
Death's struggle to end the native act,
Mirrored of creation, endowed
By mind, refused all intervention.
The simple scene of Queen and Jack
Became a god reflected back.
But Death declined to acknowledge defeat;
Better to die than accept retreat.
Falling, he whisperingly mumbled, "No."

Death and the sky reversed
As he fell to the green-again grass,
His features decrepid and visibly torn.
The sky turned bright as rehearsed.
Crickets crackled in holy mass
As love displayed its highest born.
The maiden sighed, her wrist adorned
With lover-made bracelet of clover.
Her man slept and by chance turned over,
Secure in his knowledge she was there.

Alone and awake she viewed the dawn
And seeing the product of lovers
Creation, she felt the pride in her satiation.
She turned to the stranger. She was his pawn,
As pity erupted in breast. No other
Thought intervened, no hesitation
Did she feel. She raised his head
And he struck her down dead!

Problems of the Poets

by John Throne

It is easy to attack a poet, to tear him or his ideas apart, to tell him that his form is feminine, ambiguous, disjointed, artificial, obscene, and trite. But before you attack a poem, you must look at what goes into writing a poem. Let us look at the difficulties and privileges, and countervailing forces that are synthesized in a poem.

The poet is a creative force, thrusting and forging, but he must also be a receptor, a sensitive entity. A thrusting and creative force, pushing fist-like and phallic-like, finds it difficult to be sensitive and receptive. It doesn't stop long enough to sit back and see and hear and touch; thus it loses the opportunity for external inspiration and revelation. The poet becomes lost in his own fighting world. The other extreme is, of course, the uncreative, totally descriptive character who receives and recounts, a sort of effete feminine form. How do these opposing forces synthesize? Successfully united, they resemble the modified aspects of both extremes, i.e. a poet who receives but who uses what he sees as symbols of his ideas, a creation out of reception.

Form: the sonnet, the lyric, and iambic pentameter, amongst others, restrict the poet's forceful flow of words. A poet, when he is subjected to form, many times resorts to triteness. When he has to fill in a syllable or two he has little choice as to the words he can use. Phrases like "away," "of three," "to me," "but thee," end gloriously what could have been a forceful line. Form, therefore, distinguishes a truly great poet who can so choose and arrange his words as to achieve force, from a lesser poet who resorts to triteness. A poet may, for instance, write,

"I know the world has changed, and I am lost . . ." But, he really wants to say,

"I know the world has changed, and I am confused." This line breaks his iambic pentameter. He is forced to change, possibly to,

"I am confused, the world I know has changed." Rhyme, of course, aggravates, to a great degree, the problem of form. Thus, you can see, lines have to be altered many times until they achieve form and also, let us not forget, syntax.

Probably the greatest problem facing any author, whether he be an author of poems, novels, music, or sketches, is the question of generalization. The poet asks himself, "How explicit should I be? How ambiguous can I allow myself to be before I lose my reader? How nebulous can I be? How much interpretation can I allow my reader? Am I explaining too much or too little? Am I being verbose or ambiguous?" Take, for example, a poem that describes the action taking place in a room. The poet wants to tell the reader the size of the room. He could describe it verbosely by saying, "The room 22 by 36 by 9 feet," or ambiguously by saying, "A big room . . ." both of these descriptions are undesirable. Where are we to find the synthesis of these two extremes? Here the poet runs into real difficulty, for he doesn't know how much the reader can infer from his suggestive phrases. If he says, for example, "a room big enough for

a flight of airmen," he is probably assuming too much of his reader. An airman, naturally, would know how many men there are in a flight, but the average reader would not. Therefore, the poet's task is not only complicated by his desire not to be over- or under-explicit, but also by his reader's cultural background. He must find a description that is general enough to allow the reader to infer his own interpretation of the description, but not general enough to allow the reader to misinterpret, e.g. making either a very small or very large room out of the poet's medium sized chamber.

A poem incorporates two forces in its intent. These two forces are emotion and didacticism, both egotistic in their extremes. A poet may complain about his life or the lives of others. He may grieve, lament or scream. A poet may rejoice in his existence and about the existence of others. He may sing, dance, or lie contented. The other force is deductive, father-image didacticism. The poet, who obviously has seen all there is to be seen, emotes, "Thus you must do . . ." or "Thus you must not do . . ." Both extremes are dangerous, although the former lachrymation or rejoicing has a far richer potential than dry didacticism. Emotions are generally more compatible to the sympathy than is a rule book. But, emotion is dangerous too; for the author must not assume that the reader will cry or laugh in the same manner as the author. The poet may cry as he remembers a beautiful beach, but the reader, having never seen the beach, cannot feel an equal sentiment. A person who has never danced a "cha-cha-cha" cannot possibly enjoy a line that says "syncopating to the cha-cha-cha . . ."

Revelations and ideas come to most poets in bursts and fits, in spasmodic minor chords, illogical in their pursuit and context. The poet, then, if he wishes to convey the same ideas to his reader must put the idea into a medium, a context of logic or a web of mood. A phrase may enter his mind, "sudden tensed cries of quiet," which means nothing out of context, just a collection of sounds. But, put into context, it begins to take form,

"Our eyes turned away from each other in
Sudden tensed cries of quiet; we waited . . ."

The author must be careful not to lose sane form for the sake of pet phrases and his own egotistic emotions. He must present the revealed phrase in the context of its revelation to him.

Emotions very often are expressed in forms that are classed by society as "obscene," "over-emotional," "sick." If he is describing a disease, he must not be "gross" or "sick." If he is describing sexual intercourse, he must not be "obscene." If he is describing the death of his mother, he must not become a wet rag. The poet must be tactfully euphemistic and suggestive. He must be suggestive instead of "obscene," horrible but not "gross," and lachrymose but not honestly emotional.

As I said, it is easy to attack a poet, but, before you do, first think of his problems as well as his faults and try to be a little understanding of them.

On Her Departure

I saw a flow'r that bloomed but once a life,
And only when its hours were few I came.
So beautiful it was that with a knife
I cut the stem, its countenance to save,
And cried to see it ne'er remained the same.
The petals, like a memory were clear,
Retained the somber luster of their shell.—
No more than this, a reminiscent tear
That dried up when emotions called no more;
Its cause was gone; effect — a mock farewell.
The living form I knew but a frame,
The picture once encased had lost its tone.
How little hope depended on its name,
The flower's presence left me more alone.

Dramatic Sonnet

And when I flung my heart at her, she cringed,
So hot is was, when burned the furnace in my chest.
The sparks of mad desire alighted, singed
The festal offer of her pleading breast.
And then a futile cry — a hoarse despair
She hurled at me, and burned the grounds with tears.
I crawled into my womb, and cried, aware
That dreams would rape my memory, and jeers
A thousand imps would cast into my night.
And yet, when devil's fire of silence shone
But full, I thought I heard her call me. Right
In midst when heaving curses on the bone
From which she came, to plague me with her love,
I thought I heard her call me, from above.

Paul Wiener

Homeward Bound

by Lebus

People till I could scream.
Spruced up for their jobs
They dress to impress
Not merely to cover
Slim limb or pompous paunch.
Snobs
From dormitory village
To the south of the town.
You know jolly well
Their feet are playing hell,
So penpushing, petty, and pure.
What's it all for?

What's it all for?
What's it all for?
You're back on the train
Away from the bright lonely roar
Of the town
Down
Through streetloads of boxes
Each filled to its brim—
Squalor and children,
Numberless annual children,
The dole.

Here at least they are living.
Through the trim and tidy outskirts—
Petticoats are carefully hid—
No frank and honest mention
But convention
And feline hand-hid hinting
From the seething sewer of their minds
No humour
In their mean-eyed houses
Trim. These teleminde people
With their typists' titter or hollow
Pompous boom.
The business youth
With bowler hatted head.
To tell the truth
He might as well be dead.

Left behind the train
And empty din.
Away up the hills
With the whisky wind
The frisky wind
In the stark-striped roundness of the
winter trees
Behind—the tip-tilt crescent of the
moon.
Walking barefoot where nobody
Cares.

Xanadu Revisited

The most effective method of analysis and interpretation of poetry is wholly dependent upon the poem in question. For some, an interpretation based upon the poem's internal consistency of imagery and organic unity is sufficient. For others, the analyst must search beyond the confines of the written word, and interpret the work in terms of its synthesis and those factors which influenced that process. In the case of the *Kubla Khan* it is doubtful that either approach is wholly satisfactory. Perhaps consideration of both methods will bring us closer to an understanding of the enigmas of the *Kubla Khan* and the ways of the human creative imagination.

KUBLA KHAN

by Samuel T. Coleridge

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,
So twice five miles of fertile ground
With walls and towers were gridded 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.
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.

Five miles meandering with a mazy motion
Through wood and dale the sacred river ran,
Then reached the caverns measureless to man,
And sank in tumult to a lifeless ocean:
And 'mid this tumult Kubla heard from far
Ancestral voices prophesying war!

The shadow of the dome of pleasure
Floated midway on the waves;
Where was heard the mingled measure
From the fountain and the caves.
It was a miracle of rare device,
A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice!
A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision once I saw:
It was an Abyssinian maid,
And on her dulcimer she played,
Singing of Mount Abora.
Could I revive within me
Her symphony and song,
To such a deep delight 'twould win me,
That with music loud and long,
I would build that dome in air,
That sunny dome! those caves of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His flashing eyes, his floating hair!
Weave a circle round him thrice,
And close your eyes with holy dread,
For he on honey-dew hath fed,
And drunk the milk of Paradise.

? 1797-?1800.

1816

An Interpretation of the Kubla Khan

by David Schwarz

If variety of possible interpretation were the criterion for evaluation of a work of art, "Kubla Khan" by Samuel Coleridge would stand almost unique in the poetry of the English language. Innumerable scholars and psychoanalysts have attempted to analyze and interpret the fifty-four lines conceived by Coleridge during a sleep induced by an anodyne. Had these lines not been published by the author specifically as a "psychological curiosity," perhaps it would never have been even conjectured that "Kubla Khan; or a Vision in a Dream" is only a fragment of an uncompleted work.

Coleridge claimed that he had composed between two and three hundred lines during his opium dream. However, while he was recording the lines after he had awakened from the dream, he was interrupted by a call from a business associate. After the visitor had departed, Coleridge was unable to recall the remainder of his dream.

The total imagery of "Kubla Khan," I believe, can be interpreted with sexual connotations. I feel that a valid continuity of sexual symbolism can be established without resort to intellectual prefabrication.

Superficial examination of the biographical material of Samuel Coleridge would confirm that such an interpretation is, at the least, possible.

However, I believe that poetry can be interpreted by careful examination and analysis of the imagery and metaphors. That is not to say I reject scientific objectivity in the interpretation of art; rather it is to define the path I have taken in my explanation of Coleridge's imagery.

Let me reiterate that this is merely one of a great number of possible interpretations. It has been hypothesized, for example, that the fountains, rills and forests represent nature. The "caverns measureless to man" and the "sunless sea" connote prenatal states and death, respectively, by this interpretation. It follows, then, that the sacred river signifies life which flows through nature from the pre-natal stages to death.

The poem-fragment is divided into two distinct sections. The first discusses, I think, the act of sexual intercourse; the second predominately expounds the feeling of pleasure elicited by the experiences described in the first.

By my interpretation, Alph, "the sacred river," represents an ejaculation which flows "through caverns measureless to man," the vagina, "down the to sunless sea," the womb. These images exist within the "pleasure" house of Kubla Khan. "The fertile ground" is a metaphor for the female

reproductory organs; they are surrounded by the external female genitalia,, i.e., the "walls and towers." The "gardens with sinuous rills" is a further vivid metaphor for the female genitals. "An incense bearing tree" represents a sensitive female organ found in the "gardens."

"That deep romantic chasm" slanting across "a cedarn cover" evokes the image of contact between the "chasm," the vagina, and "the cedarn cover," a phallic reference. "From this chasm . . . a mighty fountain," the erected phallus, "flung up momentarily the sacred river," which meandered "with a mazy motion" through the "caverns measureless to man," the vagina, down to the "sunless sea," the womb. The "ancestral voices prophesying war" might be related to a guilt feeling which perhaps accompanied Coleridge's sexual experiences.

The opening lines of the second section serve as a comment on part one. Mention of the sounds heard from the "fountains and caves" and of the impression evoked from the "sunny pleasure-dome with caves" serves at once as a complement and summary of the first section.

The author alludes to an attempt to recollect a past dream of an "Abyssinian maid" playing on a dulcimer. He wishes to recapture her "symphony and song;" if he could revive his past enjoyment of her "symphony and song," he would feel the presence of the pleasure-dome with its "caves." Thus we see that "symphony and song" stands as a metaphor for a former sexual relationship which the author is striving to recapture. "All who heard . . . the song and symphony of the maid," would recall the pleasure house with its "caves." He who has heard the music of the maid, the author concludes has fed "on honey-dew," has "drunk the Milk of Paradise."

Separately, each of these postulated sexual symbols is absurd. Not even the most ardent of Freudian scholars maintains that every cavern represents the female vagina, that every "sunless sea" or "lifeless ocean" is a metaphor for the womb. Notwithstanding certain minor difficulties, I believe, a sexual interpretation of "Kubla Khan" is internally consistent. Such an interpretation finds its validity in the continuity of metaphor which can be established.



The Back Road To Xanadu

by Stephen H. Polmar

"IN XAMDU did Cublai Can build a stately Palace, encompassing sixteene miles of plaine ground with a wall, wherein are fertile Meddowes, pleasant springs, delightfull Streames, and all sorts of beasts of chase and game, and in the midst thereof a sumptuous house of pleasure, which may be removed from place to place." Upon reading these lines Samuel Taylor Coleridge closed his eyes—the journey to Xanadu had begun.

The sythesis of the "Kubla Khan," a fragment of a poem, cast up whole by ebullient fountains from the depths of human imagination, has been one of the greatest enigmas of English literature. Some authorities have regarded the poem merely as a fantastic dream of a very talented opium addict. The most laudable interpretation of the work has been that of John Livingston Lowes entitled *The Road to Xanadu*, in which each image in Coleridge's dream has been traced back to its source in the poet's own reading experience. And yet, I feel that Lowes has not uttered the last word in the interpretation of the "Kubla Khan," but has only opened new avenues of investigation and given his successors a sound factual foundation upon which to build. The greatest deficiency in Lowes' thesis is his neglect of Coleridge as a human being, considering him something of an electronic computer into which books of travel and

adventure were fed, and through the mechanism of the hypothetical "imagination creatrix," the "Kubla Khan" was produced.

The points which must be considered in an interpretation of the "Kubla Khan" are twofold:—First, from which sources the images in the dream were derived. Second, the mechanism by which the images were associated and the dream itself synthesized.

The origin of the images which constitute Coleridge's dream vision has been a point of vigorous controversy. In 1893 John Mackinnon Robertson attempted to explain the images as "an abnormal product of an abnormal nature under abnormal conditions." However, in *The Road to Xanadu* John Livingston Lowes offers irrefutable proof that the images of the dream vision were derived from Coleridge's wide reading experience.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure-dome decree

These lines very closely resemble the last lines that Coleridge read from *Purchas' Pilgrimage* before embarking upon his journey to Xanadu. "In Xamdu did Cublai Can build a stately Palace." Later in the passage Purchas describes a fertile plain surrounded by a wall, in the midst of which a house of pleasure was located. The line *So twice five miles of fertile ground With walls and towers were gridled round*

may easily be equated to this brief

reference. Other passages in *Purchas' Pilgrimage* have also found their way into the "Kubla Khan."

*And there were gardens bright with
sinuous rills,
Where blossomed many an incense-
bearing tree;
And here were forests ancient as the
hills,
Unfolding sunny spots of greenery.*
This fragment may well have been based upon the following passage from the same source:

"His name was Aloadine, and was a Mahumetan. Hee had a goodly Valley betwixt two Mountaynes very high, made a goodly Garden, furnished with the best trees and fruits he could find, adorned with divers Palaces and houses of pleasure, beautified with gold Workes, Pictures, and Furnitures of Silke."

However, only with the assistance of additional material from *Bartram's Travels* could the scene have been completed. It was Bartram to whom Coleridge was indebted for his "chasm, with ceaseless turmoil seething," and "mighty fountain." Wrote Bartram—

"Just under my feet was the enchanting and amazing chrystal fountain, which incessantly threw up, from dark, rocky caverns below, tons of water every minute, forming a bason, capacious enough for large shallops to ride in, and a depth of four or five feet of water, and near twenty yards over, which meanders six miles through green meadows, pouring its limpid waters into the great Lake George. . . . About twenty yards from the upper edge of the bason . . . in a continual and amazing ebullition where the waters are thrown up in such abundance and amazing force, as to jet and swell up two or three feet above the common surface: white sand and small

particles of shells are thrown up with the waters . . . when they . . . subside with the expanding flood, and gently sink again."

Wrote Coleridge:
*A mighty fountain momentarily was
forced;
Amid whose swift half-intermitted
burst
Huge fragments vaulted like rebound-
ing hail,
Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's
flail:
And, mid these dancing rocks at once
and ever
It flung up momentarily the sacred river.
Five miles meandering with a mazy mo-
tion
Through wood and dale the sacred
river ran.*

Compare the fountain described by Coleridge with this Floridian geyser from *Bartram's Travels*:

"The ebullition is astonishing, and continual, though its greatest force or fury intermits, regularly, for the space of thirty seconds of time . . . the ebullition is perpendicular upwards, from a vast ragged orifice through a bed of rocks . . . throwing up small particles or pieces of white shells, which subside with waters, at the moment of intermission . . . yet, before the surface becomes quite even the fountain vomits up the waters again, and so on perpetually."

The similarity is undeniable, and it may thusly be assumed, that since Coleridge was familiar with both *Bartram's Travels* and *Purchas' Pilgrimage*, that the scenes in the "Kubla Khan" were derived from these sources.

THE river Alph, the sacred river of Xanadu, nowhere mentioned in *Purchas' Pilgrimage* or in *Bartram's Travels*, is supplied by Bruce; the river is the Nile which rises from two foun-

tains closely resembling those described by Bartram, even though Bartram's fountains were in Florida. Coleridge was familiar with James Bruce's *Travels to Discover the Source of the Nile* and could have easily incorporated the idea of a sacred river from that text, especially since the link to the fountains of Bartram's Florida would have made the transition from one set of fountains to the next with relatively little difficulty.

The sacred river in Xanadu is the Alph, not the Nile. The association of the two is quite simple. Both the Nile and the Alpheus, from which the name Alph was derived, were believed to be subterranean rivers. Reference to both rivers and their association was made in Pausanias' *The Description of Greece* translated in 1704 and Seneca's *Quaestiones Naturales*, both well known by Coleridge.

Many more illustrations of correlation of Coleridge's readings to passages in the "Kubla Khan" have been found. May I refer the interested reader to the nineteenth chapter of Lowes' *The Road To Xanadu*. There is now little doubt that the images of Coleridge's dream vision were obtained from the poet's extensive readings, and not synthesized upon the spot, as was previously thought by Robertson, under the catalysis of an opiate.

CONCERNING the question of the mechanism by which the aforementioned images were associated and the dream itself synthesized, I find much to be desired in the explanation put forth by John Livingston Lowes. The mechanism of image association, Lowes' so-called "Hooked Atoms," by which images containing some similarities are fused, or the similarities in the two images serving as a transition from one to the other, would be perfectly

acceptable if Samuel Taylor Coleridge were an electronic computer. But this is not the case. Coleridge was a human being, not merely the sum total of his reading experiences. Modern psychology has shed considerable light upon the construction and significance of dreams, and with this additional insight we might re-examine the "Kubla Khan," in order to determine the mechanism by which the images were associated and the dream world of Xanadu brought into being.

Dreams, according to Freudian theory, are the result of the subconscious breaking through the repression of conscious controls. In dreams, the conflict between two pressures is clearly manifest. The first is an urge to express basic instinctual drives, while the second is the necessity to suppress these urges in the interest of social acceptability. However, in dreams, there being no conscious control, suppressive pressures cannot wholly dominate or eradicate the drive toward expression of basic urges. Under pressure, the dream resorts to symbols to transform or disguise its socially forbidden ideas.

AT THE time of the composition of the "Kubla Khan," Coleridge had retired to a farm between Linton and Purlock because of "ill health." It is known that the poet had had a bitter quarrel with Charles Lloyd just previous to his retirement, and that the prescription of opium was to relieve his mental, rather than his physical distress. Furthermore, Coleridge by this time was aware of the inadequacy of his marriage, and being a man in his mid-twenties, he was easily attracted to other women. "There are a number of very pretty young women in Stowey, all musical, and I am an immense favourite," wrote Coleridge in November of 1796. That Coleridge was a man

both capable and desirous of love is evident in this fragment from the first preserved letter written to Sara Hutchinson.

"If I have not heard from you very recently, and if the last letter had not happened to be full of explicit love and feeling, then I conjure up shadows into substances—and I am miserable." That Coleridge was mentally distressed and frustrated is undeniable, and that any study of the synthesis of the "Kubla Khan" that does not take these factors into consideration, can never be considered reasonable or realistic.

LET US re-examine the "Kubla Khan" in terms of Freudian dream symbolism and Coleridge's mental state.

In Xanadu did Kubla Khan

A stately pleasure dome decree

This image serves as a bridge between the conscious and the subconscious. The mention of the "pleasure-dome" has been equated to the houses of pleasure referred to in Aloadine's Paradise by Purchas. The thought of such places might have given Coleridge promise of relief from both his frustration and despair, encouraging him to dream on.

The mention of the Alph, and its

course through the "caverns measureless to man," "Down to a sunless sea" is an obvious disguise for the act of intercourse. The Alph is the male ejaculum, the "caverns measureless to man," the vagina, and the "sunless sea" the womb. May I point out, however, that at no time did Coleridge realize his symbolism, for in an attempt to suppress the expression of the urge from sexual intercourse, his mind had disguised it, so that the urge in final form could not be recognized even by the dreamer himself.

A description of a landscape follows. Such scenes have been recognized as being symbolic of the female genital region, as is the "deep romantic chasm." The placement of a "woman wailing for a demon-lover" strengthens the interpretation, i.e., association of chasm and woman. The true identity of the wailing woman, however, presented some difficulty. Searching back into Coleridge's past I found reference to a young woman named Mary Evans. It is known that Coleridge had been in love with Miss Evans, and it was only his infatuation with the "Pantisocracy scheme" and Sarah Fricker, that brought the affair to an abrupt conclusion. Even during his engagement to Sarah Fricker, Coleridge harbored great affection for Mary Evans, and upon realizing the failure of his marriage the longing for Mary may have grown stronger, until he could no longer repress it.

It must be noted that in no description of fountains or valleys which Coleridge was known to have read are these scenes seen in the human terms in which Coleridge envisages them.

*And from this chasm, with ceaseless
turmoil seething*

*As if this earth in fast thick pants were
breathing*



At this point, while orgasmic motion reaches a climax within the depths of the chasm, the source of the sacred river is recalled.

A mighty fountain momentarily was forced:

Amid whose swift half-intermitted burst

Huge fragments vaulted like rebounding hail

Or chaffy grain beneath the thresher's flail.

The "swift half-intermitted burst" corresponds to ejaculation at the moment of orgasm. This view is further reinforced by the mention of "the thresher's flail," which fits into the Freudian category of symbolic phal-luses.

Without warning the dream scene is shifted.

A damsel with a dulcimer

In a vision once I saw

And on her dulcimer she played

Singing of Mount Abora

Lowes finds the origin of this vision in Purchas' description of Aloadine's Paradise.

"There by divers Pipe answering divers parts of those Palaces were seene to runne Wine, Milke, Honey and cleere water. In them hee had placed goodly Damosels skillfull in Songs and Instruments of Musicke and Dancing, and to make Sports and Delights unto men whatsoever they could imagine." But who were these damsels to Coleridge? Perhaps they were the "very pretty young women in Stowey" of whom he was an "immense favourite," for whom he would have gladly built a pleasure-dome, if they would have inhabited it with him. Or perhaps the vision of a damsel was a recollection of Mary Evans. These possibilities cannot be neglected.

When the poet himself is considered

as a human being, the images of the "Kubla Khan" take on new meaning. The visions in the dream were derived from Coleridge's readings, yet of themselves had no great associative or synthetic force. However, when they are infused with the frustrating life experience of the poet, they gain new significance and their association becomes meaningful. The poet's frustrations, as I have pointed out, were mainly sexual, and thus the images assumed a like nature. Under the careful direction of Coleridge's subconscious mind they were employed as disguises for repressed sexual urges and desires. Indeed, the dream of the "Kubla Khan" may have been a mental substitute for that which the poet could not attain physically.

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Griggs, E. L., *Collected letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* Oxford, Clarendon Press (1956)
- Jastrow, J., *Freud: His Dream and Sex Theories*, Permabook Edition (1959)
- Lowes, J. L., *The Road to Xanadu* Vintage Books, New York, (1959) Copyright—1927



A Christmas Story

by Douglass Allen

A green-blue pine to a maple did say
Why do you sleep while all year I play
The leafless maple shrugged its head
And only fell asleep instead.

Soon snow did fall o'er both the trees
The pine did play, the maple freeze
And caroling flowed throughout the town.
Men came and cut the pinetree down.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Douglass Allen

A Christmas Story, Douglass Allen's contribution to this winter issue of the *Idol*, was written for a young child. Most of his creative efforts have led to poetry of various and sundry forms and themes, ranging from politics to theology. Doug is a junior pre-medical student and the Assistant News Editor of the *Concordiensis*.

Lawrence H. Lentchner

Lawrence Lentchner's latest contributions to the *Idol*, *Credo on Love* and *The Almost Death of Death* mark the greatest advances in his poetic career. The beauty of the *Credo* rests in the power of each phase, as well as the dynamic organic unity of the whole. *The Almost Death of Death* might well be termed a contemporary pastoral poem.

Lebus

The man behind the nom de plume is well known and admired for his numerous prose expositions which have appeared in the *Concordiensis* within the past few months. The name Lebus was an attempt at disassociation, hoping that his poetry would in no way dull the luster of his excellent prose. I personally find the nom de plumes unnecessary.

Stephen H. Polmar

The Back Road to Xanadu, the Editor's contribution to this issue, is an attempt at a biological, psychological and historical interpretation of the synthesis of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. He could not accept Daniel Schwarz's interpretation upon the basis of the internal consistency of sexual imagery within the poem, and sought more concrete proof of its validity.

Daniel Schwarz

Daniel Schwarz, a sophomore English Major, has been a very active member of the *Idol* staff for the past year. *An Interpretation of the Kubla Khan* is Dan's first contribution to the *Idol*, and is representative of the revival of interest in literary criticism on campus.

John Throne

The need for an essay concerning problems of contemporary collegiate poets, has long been felt. The ideas expressed by John Throne in *Problems of the Poets* are by no means in complete agreement with those of the members of the editorial staff, however, we do feel the essay worthy of publication, if for no other reason than to make our readers cognizant of the problems of at least one of our poets.

Paul Wiener

Paul Wiener, promising freshman poet, is represented in this issue by two short poems, *On Her Departure* and *Dramatic Sonnet*. The latter is rather fascinating and open to considerable speculation and interpretation (the validity of which, the poet will inevitably deny.)

Wayne Somers

The Man of Resolution, a short story, is Wayne Somers' second contribution to the *Idol*. His style closely resembles that of the late Clyde M. Barrie, of whom he was a great admirer. (Mr. Barrie past on early last summer, he died of suffocation, having been smothered under a fallen pile of rejected manuscripts.)

UNION INN



Always the Best
Sandwiches and Beer



517 UNION STREET

Hungry on Sunday?

COOK YOUR OWN MEAL WITH
GROCERIES — COLD CUTS

from VROOMAN'S

200 NOTT TERRACE

OPEN EVENINGS and SUNDAYS

Magazines - Beer - Soda

Phone FR 7-9834

DEWITT RESTAURANT



118 - 120 JAY STREET
SCHENECTADY

WADES CHARTER COACHES

Chartered Busses — Tours



1312 HELDERBERG AVENUE
SCHENECTADY, N. Y.

Owen Optical Co.

Prescription Opticians



CONTACT LENSES
ARTIFICIAL EYES — HEARING AIDS
154 Barrett St. 1019 Keyes Ave.
FR 4-5825 EX 3-7792

*Complete Line of Hobby and
Craft Supplies*



120 STATE ST.
Schenectady

Phone
FR 4-9823

DIAMANTE

RESTAURANT and BAR

Visit Our New Dining Room

Specializing in Spaghetti
also
Steak and Sausage
Sandwiches

NOTT ST. — opp. Nott St. Gate

WALLY'S DINER

Home Made Pies

GOOD COFFEE

325 ERIE BLVD. SCHENECTADY

Open Daily - 5 a.m. - 7 p.m.

FREE PARKING

5 Rooms Available
For Private Parties

Mother Ferro's Restaurant

Italian - American Food



1115 Barrett St.
Schenectady 5, N. Y. DI 6-9554

City Hall Launderette

529 LIBERTY STREET

Do It Yourself Laundry

WASHERS — 25c a wash
(Holds up to 10 Pounds)

Large Dryers — 10c for 10 min.
(Holds up to 40 Pounds)

Open 24 Hours a day — 7 days a week

Dall's

"Men Shop"

1599 Union St. EX 3-7000

HILL'S Jewelers



*All Your Jewelry Needs Plus
Complete Repair Service*

467 STATE ST. Phone EX 3-2862
Schenectady, N. Y.

SCHUHL'S ESSO SERVICE



Most Conveniently
Located to Serve
Your Every
Motoring Need



715 NOTT ST. FR 2-2815

L & M MOTEL

Rice Road — Near Exit 26

2 MILES FROM UNION COLLEGE
SCHENECTADY, N. Y.

FR 2-4731

PINE GROVE DAIRY, INC.



1120 ERIE BOULEVARD
Schenectady, New York

UNION MEN

*Take That Evening Study Break
at the 'Skeller*

Prices are Always Low

CLASS OF 1964 MOST WELCOME

PETER PAUSE

opp. North College Gate



OPEN DAILY — 7 A.M. to 9 P.M.

Closed Saturday

Job Printing

Plastic Binding

SCHENECTADY PRINTING CO.

INCORPORATED

502 Broadway Schenectady 5, N.Y.

Telephone FR 7-8838 — FR 7-8839

MEET ME IN
THE MEETING HOUSE

○
CHARCOAL BROILED
STEAKS - CHOPS - CHICKEN - FISH

○
Also Select Sandwich Menu

DAILY 11:30 A.M. to 11:30 P.M.
SUNDAY 2 P.M. to 9 P.M.

○
HOTEL VAN CURLER

●
COMPLIMENTS
OF
A
FRIEND
●

●
CALARCO

Wholesale Grocery Company

2010 MAXON ROAD
Schenectady, New York

●
Complete Commercial
Food Service Equipment

○
H. HORTON & CO., INC.

Phone Albany 3-2181

○
410 BROADWAY
ALBANY, NEW YORK
