

This week's readings touched upon the imaginary kingdoms and its cities. I am first intrigued by Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Kubla Khan*. At first, I was wondering how the poem would be relevant to the class. Then it occurred to me that the image of the summer palace called Xanadu is reflected through Coleridge's description of the river. Besides the fact that it is a bit odd to focus on the river instead of the grandiose structure and the palace, it seems to me that the river possesses negative energies. Violence and ghostliness are evident in verses like "as holy and enchanted / As e'er beneath a waning moon was haunted / by woman wailing for her demon lover!" In this light, the nature of the river might be indicative of the character of Kubla Khan. In other words, by describing the geography--the grounds and river--of Khan's palace, Coleridge was able to imply his imagination of an emperor in the Far East. However, it remains unclear to me why such a topic would be of interest to a British poet living in the 1700s.

It would be unfair to discuss Coleridge's piece but not Bysshe Shelley's *Ozymandias*. This poem is in effect a conversation between the narrator and a traveler. Then, a story within a story takes place, Ozymandias discuss a ruined statue that celebrates their ruling and claims to be the "king of kings." It is quite ironic that the statue is almost destroyed entirely, with the face in the sand, and the body has fallen. The inscription that remains seems to be an ironic reminder of the empire that Ozymandias once has ruled. Yet, through the status of the statue, we can posit that built at the height of its rule, Ozymandias has become ancient history. Indeed, while political power has faded, the power of art remains.

Last but not least, I would like to emphasize how much I like Italo Calvino and all of his works. I have been fascinated by Calvino's work since high school. Every time I read *Invisible Cities*, I discover something new. Similar to Shelley's *Ozymandias*, the story unfolds as conversations between Marco Polo and Kubla Khan. One of the key arguments when reading *Invisible Cities* is whether the cities described in the book are real or fictional. The invisible cities under the writing of Calvino are real cities taken apart into fragments and pieces, then reassembled, linking seemingly irrelevant spaces together. As Polo once has said, "Every time I describe a city I am saying something about Venice." In this light, Polo travels and sees other cities in relation to his memories of Venice. In effect, since the depiction of images is more and more about the conversation between Khan and Polo towards the end of the novel, it is possible that the cities depicted are merely fictional words, and the cities are coming out of the imagination of the two characters.

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