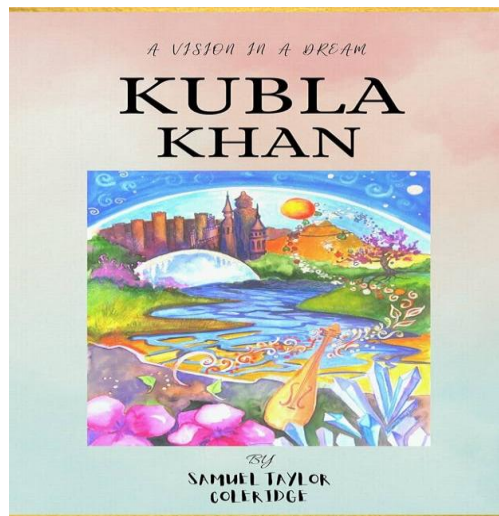


Kubla Khan by Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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Kubla Khan

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge The poem was first published in 1816 (first written in 1797), Xanadu is the capital city of Kubla Khan.



Back to the 13th century, Kubla Khan was a real person, he was one of the grandchildren of Genghis Khan and starting from the 1260 he became the great Khan or ruler of the Mongolian Empire. He build the city of zhang do as his capital were he established the yuan dynasty which ruled for more than a century.

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 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.

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 momentarily 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 momentarily 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.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772–1834) was an English poet, literary critic, philosopher, and theologian, who is best known for his role in the Romantic Movement, alongside his friend and collaborator William Wordsworth. Coleridge's work has had a profound influence on literature and thought, with his poetry, critical theories, and philosophical inquiries leaving an enduring legacy.

His first major work, *Poems on Various Subjects* (1796), garnered attention, but it was his collaboration with Wordsworth on *Lyrical Ballads* (1798) that marked a turning point in English literature. The

collection, which included Coleridge's famous poem "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," is considered the beginning of the Romantic Movement in England. Coleridge's emphasis on imagination, nature, and emotion in poetry set the tone for the Romantic era.

His critical work, particularly *Biographia Literaria* (1817), is highly regarded for its exploration of literary theory and criticism. In this work, Coleridge introduced concepts such as the "willing suspension of disbelief" and offered insightful analyses of Shakespeare and other poets.

Coleridge is remembered not only for his imaginative and influential poetry, such as "Kubla Khan" and "The Rime of the Ancient Mariner," but also for his pioneering work in literary criticism and his profound philosophical inquiries into the nature of the human mind and creativity.

About the poem

"Kubla Khan," written by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1797 and published in 1816, is one of the most famous and enigmatic poems in English literature. The poem is known for its vivid imagery, dream-like quality, and its portrayal of the mystical and the sublime.

Coleridge claimed that the poem was composed in an opium-induced dream. According to his account in the preface to the published version, he had fallen asleep after reading a passage about the Mongol emperor Kublai Khan and his palace in the book *Purchas his Pilgrimes* by Samuel Purchas. Upon waking, Coleridge began to write down the lines of the poem that had come to him in his dream. However, he was interrupted by a visitor and was unable to recall the rest of the vision upon returning to his work. As a result, the poem is often described as a fragment, though some scholars believe that Coleridge may have crafted the story of the interrupted dream to enhance the poem's mystique.

"Kubla Khan" is divided into two parts, which differ in tone and content:

1. **The first part (lines 1-36)** describes the construction of the pleasure-dome by Kublai Khan in Xanadu, a mythical city. It is characterized by rich, elaborate imagery, with descriptions of a paradisiacal landscape,

including the sacred river Alph, caverns, gardens, and forests. The tone is majestic and somewhat serene, reflecting the grandeur of the emperor's vision.

2. **The second part (lines 37-54)** shifts to a more personal and introspective mood. It introduces the figure of a “damsel with a dulcimer” who sings of Mount Abora. This part of the poem has a more fragmentary and elusive quality, often interpreted as a reflection of the poet's own creative powers and the fleeting nature of inspiration.

Summary of the poem

The poem begins with the depiction of the grand and opulent palace that Kublai Khan, the Mongol emperor, decrees to be built in the city of Xanadu. The palace, described as a “stately pleasure-dome,” is set in a fantastical landscape where nature and artifice blend seamlessly.

- **Opening Vision:** Coleridge introduces Xanadu as a place of marvels, where “Alph, the sacred river,” flows through a landscape of both beauty and terror. The river winds its way through “caverns measureless to man,” eventually sinking into a “sunless sea.” This imagery conveys a sense of the mysterious and the infinite, highlighting the awe-inspiring power of nature.
- **The Pleasure-Dome:** The dome itself is surrounded by a vast, fertile landscape, enclosed by walls and towers. The gardens within this enclosure are described as bright and filled with winding streams (“sinuous rills”) and “incense-bearing trees.” These images evoke a sense of paradise, a place where nature is cultivated and controlled to create an idealized environment.
- **The Savage Chasm:** Despite the beauty and order of the pleasure-dome and its gardens, the surrounding landscape includes a “deep romantic chasm” that slants down a green hill. This chasm is described as a wild, enchanted place, filled with untamed natural forces. It is a “savage place” as “holy and enchanted” as any haunted by supernatural beings. From this chasm, a powerful, seething fountain erupts, sending massive fragments of rock into the air. This tumultuous scene contrasts with the calm, ordered beauty of the pleasure-dome, emphasizing the unpredictable and chaotic aspects of nature.

- **The Prophetic Voices:** As the sacred river Alph flows through the landscape, it reaches the caverns and disappears into the lifeless ocean, creating a sense of finality and doom. Amid this tumult, Kubla Khan hears “ancestral voices prophesying war!” These voices introduce a sense of impending conflict and destruction, suggesting that the peaceful and ordered world of Xanadu is threatened by darker forces.

The second part of the poem shifts focus from the external world of Xanadu to the inner world of the poet’s imagination and the creative process. This part is more fragmentary and dream-like, reflecting the elusive nature of inspiration and artistic creation.

- **The Damsel with a Dulcimer:** Coleridge recalls a vision of a “damsel with a dulcimer” he once saw in a dream. She was an Abyssinian maid, playing a dulcimer and singing of Mount Abora, a mythical, far-off place. This vision represents an ideal of beauty and inspiration, a source of creative power that the poet longs to capture and express.
- **The Poet’s Aspiration:** The poet expresses a deep yearning to revive within himself the “symphony and song” of the Abyssinian maid. He believes that if he could do so, it would fill him with such creative energy that he could “build that dome in air”—a metaphor for creating a work of art as magnificent as the pleasure-dome of Kubla Khan. This section of the poem reflects Coleridge’s belief in the transcendent power of imagination and the creative process, but also its elusive and fleeting nature.
- **The Visionary Artist:** The poet imagines that if he could achieve this creative vision, all who heard his creation would be entranced by its beauty and power. However, they would also be awed and fearful, recognizing the divine and otherworldly nature of the poet’s inspiration. The poet would be seen as one who has “drunk the milk of Paradise” and whose “flashing eyes” and “floating hair” mark him as someone touched by the supernatural. The final lines evoke both admiration and caution, suggesting that true artistic inspiration is both a gift and a burden.

Themes of the poem

- **Imagination and Creation:** The poem explores the nature of artistic inspiration and the creative process. The vision of Xanadu represents the

ideal of artistic creation—an ordered, beautiful work that emerges from the imagination. However, the chaotic and untamed forces of nature also play a crucial role in this creation, symbolizing the unpredictable and often uncontrollable aspects of inspiration.

- **The Sublime and the Supernatural:** “Kubla Khan” is filled with imagery that evokes the Romantic concept of the sublime—a sense of awe and wonder in the face of the vast, powerful, and mysterious forces of nature. The poem also touches on the supernatural, with references to enchanted places, prophetic voices, and the poet’s own visionary experiences.
- **Fragmentation and Incompletion:** The poem’s fragmentary nature is central to its meaning. Coleridge’s account of the poem as an incomplete vision interrupted by mundane reality highlights the tension between the fleeting nature of inspiration and the desire to capture it in a finished work of art. The incomplete structure of the poem mirrors this tension, suggesting that the full realization of artistic vision is ultimately unattainable.

“Kubla Khan” continues to captivate readers with its beauty, mystery, and profound insights into the human mind and creativity.