

KUBLA KHAN

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

By Samuel Taylor Coleridge

(With the author's preface)

The following fragment is here published at the request of a poet of great and deserved celebrity [Lord Byron], and, as far as the author's own opinions are concerned, rather as a psychological curiosity, than on the grounds of any supposed *poetic* merits.

In the summer of the year 1797, the author, then in ill health, had retired to a lonely farmhouse between Porlock and Linton, on the Exmoor confines of Somerset and Devonshire. In consequence of a slight indisposition, an anodyne had been prescribed, from the effects of which he fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence, or words of the same substance, in *Purchas's Pilgrimage*¹: "Here the Khan Kubla² commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall." The author continued for about three hours in a profound sleep, at least of the external senses, during which time he has the most vivid confidence that he could not have composed less than from two to three hundred lines; if that indeed can be called composition in which all the images rose up before him as things, with a parallel production of the correspondent expressions, without any sensation or consciousness of effort. On awaking he appeared to himself to have a distinct recollection of the whole, and taking his pen, ink, and paper, instantly and eagerly wrote down the lines that are here preserved. At this moment he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour, and on his return to his room, found, to his no small surprise and mortification, that though he still retained some vague and dim recollection of the general purport of the vision, yet, with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast, but, alas! without the after restoration of the latter!

[...]

Yet from the still surviving recollections in his mind, the author has frequently purposed to finish for himself what had been originally, as were, given to him. [...]

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.

La Xanadu vru Kubla Khan
Un dom-al-poftelor, pe unde
Alf, râul sfânt, curgea avan
Prin peșterile mult afunde
Spre-a mării sumbre unde.
Deci dar, a-ncins cu foișoare
Și zid o vale roditoare,
Aici: grădini, pâraie-ntortocheate
Și mulți arbuști mustind tămâie;
Și codrii vechi, de când e lumea poate,
Vrând, parcă, pajiti să mângâie.

But oh! that deep romantic chasm which slanted

Dar, ah! acel adânc abis romantic

¹ Samuel Purchas was a 17th century cleric and the author of several highly popular books containing accounts of travels in various foreign countries. The book that Coleridge was reading is *Purchas His Pilgrimage: or Relations of the World and the Religions observed in all Ages and Places discovered, from the Creation unto this Present*.

² Concise information about the historical figure of Kubla Khan and Xanadu may be found [here](#).

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.

Ce printre cedri năzuie spre deal!
Un loc sălbatec, fermecat, hieratic,
Așijderi celor unde și-ar boci
O fată pe ibovnicul-satană!
Și din acest abis, gemând, urlând,
Ca un tumult din funduri de pământ,
Izvor vânjos zvâcnește, aruncând
Pe când țâșnește-n sus, din când în când,
Mari steiuri, ca o pleavă, pretutindeni,
La fel ca săltăreții bobi de grindeni;
Iar printre jucăuțele pietroaie,
Cad stropi din râul sacru, ca o ploaie.
Drum lung prin codru, încâlcite sunt
Meandrele râului sfânt
Ce-n hău de peșteri fără fund îl poartă
Și-apoi, tunând, l-înghețe-o Mare moartă.
Aici i-ajung lui Kubla la urechi,
Profetizând războaie, glasuri vechi!

Umbra altarului plăcerii
Plutea, pe val, în drumul său,
Pe unde răzbăteau puzderii
De sonuri din pârau și hău.
Sclipea ca în soare miracolul rar;
Altarul plăcerii cu bolți de cleștar!

Am văzut ca-ntr-o părere
O domniță cu-un chimval,
Era o abisiniană:
Din chimval și glas zvonea
Despre Muntele-Abora.
Cântul acestei fete dacă
L-aș reînvia în mine,
Ar putea, cred, să mă facă
Să clădesc din muzici line
În văzduh acel altar
Însorit, cu bolți de sloi!
Cei ce-acestea vede-le-ar
Ar striga toți: Înapoi!
– Ochi vâlvoare, păr vâlvoi!
În triplu cerc să fie-nchis!
Și cum de el să nu te sperii?
Căci a sorbit lamura mierii
Și laptele din paradis.

(Romanian translation by Dorin Tudor)