**KUBLA KHAN**

### Samuel Taylor Coleridge

**Samuel Taylor Coleridge** 21 October 1772 – 25 July 1834) was an [English poet](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_poet), [literary critic](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_critic), philosopher, and theologian who, with his friend [William Wordsworth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Wordsworth), was a founder of the [Romantic Movement](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Romantic_Movement) in England and a member of the [Lake Poets](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lake_Poets). He also shared volumes and collaborated with [Charles Lamb](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Lamb), [Robert Southey](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Southey), and [Charles Lloyd](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Lloyd_(poet)). He wrote the poems [*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rime_of_the_Ancient_Mariner) and *[Kubla Khan](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kubla_Khan" \o "Kubla Khan)*, as well as the major prose work *[Biographia Literaria](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Biographia_Literaria" \o "Biographia Literaria)*. His critical work, especially on [William Shakespeare](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Shakespeare), was highly influential, and he helped introduce [German idealist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_idealist) philosophy to [English-speaking](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English-speaking) cultures. Coleridge coined many familiar words and phrases, including "[suspension of disbelief](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Suspension_of_disbelief)".

Coleridge's poetry is known for its vivid imagery and use of the supernatural, which are both prominent in 'Kubla Khan.' He was also known for his experimentation with form and language, as seen in the complex structure of this poem. Coleridge claims in the preface that he was interrupted while writing, and could therefore not finish the poem as he has planned. It was not until he was encouraged by Lord Byron to do so that Coleridge published the piece. Today, the poem is considered to be one of, if not the, most famous example of Romanticism in the English language.

**Theme**

### The Transformative Power of the Imagination

### The Interplay of Philosophy, Piety, and Poetry

### Nature and the Development of the Individual

## Kubla Khan Analysis

### Lines 1-12

Or, a vision in a dream. A Fragment.

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.

In these lines from the poem Kubla Khan, the poet Samuel Taylor Coleridge([Bio](https://poemanalysis.com/samuel-taylor-coleridge/biography/) |[Poems](https://poemanalysis.com/samuel-taylor-coleridge/poems/)) narrates how Kubla Khan ordered a stately pleasure house to be built and what was subsequently done to get it built. Kubla Khan ordered the erection of a magnificent pleasure palace on the banks of the sacred river ‘Alph’ which flowed underground for a long distance through unfathomable caves into a sea where the rays of the sun could not penetrate.

Accordingly, for this purpose, a [plot](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/plot/) of fertile land covering ten miles was enclosed with walls and towers all around. On one side of this land, there were gardens full of aromatic trees where sweet-smelling flowers bloomed. There were meandering streams flowing through these gardens making the place exceedingly beautiful. On the other side of the land were thick primeval forests as old as the hills within which there were [plots](https://poemanalysis.com/definition/plot/) of grassy land warmed by the rays of the sun. Thus, Coleridge creates a vaguely but suggestive romantic palace. “In reading it “, Swinburne observes about these artistic touches, “we are       wrapped into that paradise where music and color and perfume are one; where you hear the hues and see the harmonies of heaven.”

### Lines 13-31

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!

These are the most famous lines of Coleridge’s poem ‘Kubla Khan‘ and have been highly appreciated for the effortless adaptation of the sound and rhythm to the various parts of the descriptions. While describing the beautiful grounds, the poet seems to have been attracted by the most remarkable mysterious chasm which stretched across the hill covered with cedar trees. It simply defied all descriptions and was a highly romantic place and wore a mysterious aspect. It seemed an enchanted place haunted by demons and fairies and frequented by a disappointed lady-love weeping for her demon-lover under the light of the fading moon.

The vagueness and mystery of this place suggested witchcraft and its practice as they are associated with such surroundings. From this chasm, a fountain gushed forth every moment so violently that the trembling earth round about appeared like a man breathing hard while dying. It momentarily threw up huge fragments of rock which tossed up and then fell to the ground in all directions like hailstones from the sky or like chaff flying about when crushed with a flail.

From this chasm also sprang up the sacred river, Alph which flowed with a zig-zag course for five miles through forest and valley and then fell into the calm and tranquil ocean through the unfathomable caverns. As it fell into the ocean, it created a great roaring sound. In the midst of this uproarious noise, Kubla Khan heard the voices of his ancestors prophesying that the time was near when he should indulge in ambitious wars. In the pleasure-house, Kubla Khan became addicted to luxury so his ancestors urged him to shake off his lethargic and luxurious life and be ready for a life of adventures and wars.

### Lines 32-42

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.

These lines further describe the charms of displayed by the pleasure palace of the emperor at Zanadu. The pleasure-house of Kubla Khan was a very romantic and beautiful palace. The poet here says that the reflection of the pleasure-dome fell between the fountains mingling with the echoing sound coming out of the caves created for the onlooker an [illusion](https://poemanalysis.com/literary-device/illusion/) of really rhythmical music. The palace was the construction of rare design and a wonderful triumph of architecture as it combined in itself a summer and a winter palace. The top of the building was warm because it was open to the sun while the low-lying chambers were kept cool by ice which never melted.

In the next lines, Coleridge introduces a beautiful girl brought from a distant country, to complete the picture of the romantic atmosphere. He says that once in his dream he saw a girl who was brought from Abyssinia. She was singing of her native land Abyssinia and Mount Abora. The poet means to suggest that her song showed homesickness. She had been brought from her country to a distant land China and wanted to return home and to play freely and happily once more with other girls of her country.

### Lines 43-55

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.

These lines conclude the unfinished poem. When the poet saw an Abyssinian girl singing a melodious song and producing an exquisite melody on her dulcimer in the pleasure palace of Kubla Khan, his imagination was seized by the great power of music. In these lines, he says that if he could recall or learn the ravishing music of the Abyssinian girl, he would build the beautiful palace of Kubla Khan in the air. He would be filled with his swelling notes.

Helped by his quickened imagination he would be able to reconstruct the whole scene. The long practice of this divinely inspired music will enable him to reproduce the whole palace in the air as beautiful and ethereal as the palace of Kubla Khan together with its sunny dome and caves of ice.

His inspired imagination would create “a willing suspension of disbelief” and the readers would feel that the entire beauty of the palace has been captured for them. They would be struck with awe created by his flashing eyes, steaming hair, and lips.

His frenzied condition would frighten them so much that they would guard themselves against coming into close contact with him. In order to save themselves from being infected by his magical charm, they would confine him within a magical circle three times.

The poet has tasted the manna and nectar of divine poetic inspiration and has developed a catching influence of music in his looks. In order to save themselves from the effect of his charm, they would shut their eyes.