

Samuel Taylor Coleridge
Kubla Khan
More challenging questions!

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There seems to be a break in the poem at Stanza 4, presumably marking the spot where the poet was disturbed and thereupon forgot the essentials of his dream. He tries to pick up the threads once again, speaking of the shadow of the dome falling on the river. His imagery, however, has become confused. He says the dome was a miracle, and yet there is the paradox of a sunny pleasure-dome but in caves of ice!

A very clear break then occurs as the poet no longer even attempts to pick up on the earlier thread of the poem. He now speaks of another vision -- part of the same dream, or a separate one entirely -- in which he sees a young Abyssinian woman playing music on her dulcimer. Her song is of Mount Abora, a mountain in Abyssinia or Ethiopia.

This vision too is fading quickly. Yet the poet believes that, if only he could remember the dream, it would rekindle the excitement of it all -- and then he would attempt to rebuild the pleasure-dome in his imagination. There is extensive use of magical / mystical language in this final stanza: "weave a (magical) circle", "holy dread", "honey-dew" and "milk of Paradise".

1. The poem "Kubla Khan" has as a subtitle: "Or a Vision in a Dream. A Fragment."
 - Are these words important for our understanding of the poem? Comment. (4)
 - Does it make any difference to our understanding of the poem to know that the poet had probably been under the influence of opium before writing? (4)
2. Comment on the significance of the name "Alph" for the leading river running through Xanadu. (4)
3. "Where blossomed many an incense-bearing tree."
"Here were forests ancient as the hills."
 - Comment on the imagery in the above two lines. (4)
4. Comment on the use of words bearing a religious / mystical / magical tone. (4)
5. "As if this earth in fast thick pants were breathing."
 - What is particularly descriptive about the above line? (4)
6. Somewhere in Stanza 4 or 5 is the point where Coleridge was disturbed. When he returned, he had lost the thread of what he was saying.

Can you identify where this break occurred? Give reasons for your answer. (4)
6. "For he on honey-dew hath fed, and drunk the milk of Paradise."
 - These lines are also meant to paint a religious / magical picture. How? (4)

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