

The Man Who Memorized Kubla Khan

by Con Chapman

*In Boston town there lived a man
besotted much by poetry:
Where Charles, the dirty river, ran
Through sewers measureless to man
Down to a sunless sea.*



*And as he made his daily round
through Boston Common's most holy ground
'long winding paths and up gently rolling hills
he read himself Coleridge's Kubla Khan
'cause up his spine it always sent cold chills
that made his countenance paler and wan.*



*But oh! He felt that he was unfulfilled at last
Because he'd read the poem since he was a boy
And felt his time on this earth receding fast
And yet had ne'er plumbed its deep mystery vast
And treated it as an amusement, a toy.*

*And so he determined to memorize the verse
To seal it in his soul, for better or worse.
Then he would comprehend its strange essence
That had so long concealed its lessons.
Huge gulps of poesy did he consume
To trace the poet's madness by its plume.
He leapt from word to word with great endeavor
and by that means he crossed the sacred river.*



*For miles he meandered with a wary motion
While onlookers stared at the mumbling man.
Down streets the ghastly poem-breather ran
Until he reached the grey and lifeless ocean
Where heard he from a tavern of ill fame
A shrill woman's voice calling out his name!*

*The tumult of the scene of mating
Floated over his stunned head;
He looked askance at the dating*

*And seemed to think he was dead.
It was a vision both fierce and dreadful
That left him empty and sorely fretful.*



*A damsel with a dulcimer
In a vision then he saw;
She was a pale Connecticut maid
And on her dulcimer she played
Singing of Deep River town.*

*Could I revive within me,
He thought, her eerie song
To such a deep delight 'twould win me
That with music loud and long
I would build that bar in air,
Those spider plants! those cubes of ice!
And all who heard should see them there,
And all should cry, Beware! Beware!
His bloodshot eyes, his unkempt hair!*

*Weave a circle round him thrice
And with bemusement shake your head,
For he on cod and beans hath fed
And drunk the beer of Paradise.*

