Brothers in Lore:
Southey, Coleridge, Thalaba, 'Christabel' and 'Kubla Khan'

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THE COLLABORATION BETWEEN COLERIDGE AND HIS BROTHER-IN-LAW and friend Robert Southey has been honoured more in the breach than in the observance—often acknowledged but rarely explored. We know, of course, that it began well before the more famous one between Coleridge and Wordsworth and that it lasted longer too. Coleridge and Southey met and began planning Pantisocracy in 1794. They married sisters, the Frickers, in 1796, and they lived together in Keswick from 1801-4. And they published together as late as 1812—by which time Coleridge had become estranged from Wordsworth, after the terrible falling out of 1810.

If the collaboration with Southey was longer lasting than that with Wordsworth—it was also, at times, just as intense and productive. Indeed, if it did not give rise to poems as famous as 'The Ancient Mariner' and *The Prelude*, it did bring forth works that, at the time, were seen as innovative and revolutionary—as defining examples of the new poetry that we today call Romanticism. Here, I examine a rather neglected period of the collaboration in which mutual compositional influence had major results. I have three purposes in doing so: first to intervene in debates about the genesis and nature of Romantic Orientalism; second to reassess the importance of the Coleridge/Southey partnership in the careers of each and thus in Romanticism; third to throw new light on the composition of three of Romanticism's finest and most original poems—'Kubla Khan', 'Christabel' and *Thalaba the Destroyer*.

In mid-July 1799 Coleridge returned from Germany to Nether Stowey, the centre just two years earlier of his most intense experience of the stimulating effect of his circle of poet-friends. In mid-July 1797, excited by the arrival of the Wordsworths to live nearby, and at the visit of Charles Lamb, he had been inspired to write 'This Lime Tree Bower My Prison'—a breakthrough poem in which, buoyed by the presence of friends, he had first perfected the conversational style that appeared to be a spontaneous overflow of feeling. Throughout that poem of July 1797, Coleridge invoked the friends whose departure on a hill-walk had prompted its writing: 'My friends, whom I may never meet again'; 'my Sister & my Friends! to whom / No sound is dissonant, which tells of Life!'.[1] The poem was an acknowledgement and a gift: Coleridge left it unprinted but sent it in letters to two absent friends—Charles Lloyd and Southey—its function being to show older members of his West Country circle the exhilarating effects of the just-arrived poets and thus ensure that the newcomers would be welcomed. In the letter to Southey, the poem seems an overflow into verse of Coleridge's chatty and excited prose: both aim to include Southey vicariously in a new experience of friendship and verse-sharing: the prose tells Southey that Wordsworth offers him a 'suit of

[1] *Collected Letters of S. T. Coleridge*, ed. E. l. Griggs (Oxford, 1956-71), I, 332-36. Henceforth *CL*.

rooms' if he wants to visit Alfoxden; the poem namechecks their mutual collaborator Lamb (CL, I, 336). The letter effectively 'publishes' the poem as a group-derived text within the larger group, and as a sample of the advances that community has allowed Coleridge to make over the poetry of his youth. Between the lines, Coleridge also uses the letter to show Southey the direction in which he wishes to lead the coterie. He praises the parts of Southey's poem 'Mary, Maid of the Inn' that are 'properly colloquial'; he disavows the manufactured, ignorant and inflated style of his own 'Song of the Pixies' and 'Monody on the Death of Chatterton', old poems which Southey wanted to publish in a volume he was compiling to raise money for Chatterton's impoverished family—a coterie project designed to honour the boy-poet the Bristol poets revered. A conversational poetry arising from immediate, shared experience would be the new Coleridgean mode of the group: a few months later Coleridge's parodies of Lamb's, Lloyd's and Southey's deviations from this mode would cause it to split. Angry, the parodied friends dropped Coleridge; piqued, he instead developed his collaboration with Wordsworth.

Returning from Germany in summer 1799, Coleridge found Stowey a painful contrast to the heady days of July 1797. Southey, Lamb and Lloyd were still estranged and the Wordsworths had not, and would not, come back. There was no circle of friends and poets; Coleridge was restless and unproductive. Southey, meanwhile, had begun to find Lloyd unreliable, and was himself unsettled. His wife—sister, of course, of Coleridge's spouse—then persuaded him to go with her to Somerset in search of seaside air to benefit her health. Once in the vicinity, the sisters engineered a reconciliation between the poets. By 20 August, Southey was staying in Stowey. He had with him a new poem he was drafting, an Oriental romance concerning sorcerers and the Arabian youth who destroys their empire of evil spells. The youth is named Thalaba—meaning 'seeker after truth', a term usually used of religious zealots (the plural form of the noun is Taliban). He also brought his commonplace book in which he had copied extracts from Eastern travel narratives and histories. Coleridge, meanwhile, had his own Oriental draft to show Southey—some verses later published as 'Kubla Khan'. Western Somerset became a meeting point of Eastern fantasies.

The reconciliation led to a renewal of creative energy for both poets: they worked together at the same table on their own poems and also on joint ones. They began a collaborative Oriental epic on the life of the prophet Mohammed. This poem grew out of the same material Southey was using for *Thalaba*—George Sale's translation of the *Koran* (1734) as well as D'Herbelot's *Bibliotheque Orientale* (1697). The idea was that Coleridge would write the first book, Southey the second and so on. But of this dramatic scenario all that Coleridge completed was the opening invocation:

> Utter the Song, O my Soul! The flight and return of Mohammed,
> Prophet and Priest, who scatter'd abroad both Evil and Blessing,
> Huge wasteful Empires founded and hallow'd slow Persecution,

Soul-withering, but crush'd the blasphemous Rites of the Pagan
And idolatrous Christians.—For veiling the Gospel of Jesus,
They, the best corrupting, had made it worse than the vilest.
Wherefore Heaven decreed th'enthusiast Warrior of Mecca,
Choosing Good from Iniquity rather than Evil from Goodness.

Loud the Tumult in Mecca surrounding the Fane of the Idol;—
Naked and Prostrate the Priesthood were laid—the People with mad shouts
Thundering now, and now with saddest Ululation
Flew, as over the channel of rock-stone the ruinous River
Shatters its waters abreast, and in mazy uproar bewilder'd,
Rushes dividuous all—all rushing impetuous onward.[2]

The poem seemed more typically Southeyan than Coleridgean: the empire-building power of religion, the self-righteous relish for religious violence, the destruction of idolatry by an austere monotheist in the grip of his own vision had featured in Southey's first epic *Joan of Arc* (1796) and in the joint work *The Fall of Robespierre.* But 'Mohammed' also bore a certain similarity to the first part of 'Kubla Khan'—in which an eastern potentate also founds a civilisation by force of arms.

Southey was the more successful: he wrote a hundred and more lines of the second book—and what he wrote was very promising—exciting, suspenseful, dramatic, fast moving, engaging the readers' sympathies for the hunted refugee Mohammed.

Cloakd in the garment of green, who lies on the bed of Mohammed,
Restless and full of fear, yet semblant of one that is sleeping?
Every sound of the feet at his door he hears, & the breathing
Low of inaudible words: he knows their meaning of murder,
Knows what manner of men await his out-going, & listens
All their tread, & their whispering, till even the play of his pulses
Disturbs him, so deep his attention. the men of the Koreish
Fix on the green-robed youth their eyes; impatiently watchful
Wait they the steps of his rising, the coming of him whom they hated.
He rises & makes himself pure, & turning towards the Caaba,
Loud he repeats his prayer: they hear, & in eagerness trembling,
Grasp the hilts of their swords–their swords that are sworn to the slaughter.
But when the youth went forth, they saw, &, behold! it was Ali!
Steady the hero's face: it was pale, for his life was a blessing;
It was calm, for in death he lookd on to the crown of the Martyr.
Dark as they were of soul & goaded by rage disappointed
They shed not the blood of the youth; but remember'd their Chieftain his father,

[2] S.T. Coleridge, *Poetical Works*, ed. J.C.C. Mays, 6 vols (London and Princeton, 2001), I, i, 568-71. Henceforth CPW.

Abu Taleb the good, & respected the virtue of friendship.
Baffled, & full of wrath, through Mecca they scatter the tidings:
'He has fled, has discover'd our plans, has eluded our vengeance.
'Saw ye the steps of his flight? where lurks he, the lying blasphemer?'
Now to the chase, to the chase! seize now the bow & the quiver;
Now with the sword & the spear, -- ye stubborn of Mecca! pursue him, --
Seek him now to the North & the South, to the sunset & sunrise,
Follow, follow the Chosen one's flight! They rush from the city
Over the plain they pursue him, pursue him with cries & with curses—
Sounds that rung o'er the plain, & rung in the echoing mountain;
And Mecca received in her streets the din of their clamorous uproar.
But the voice of the Moslem, the silent prayer of the faithful
Rose to the throne of God; & tears of the heart overflowing
Interceded for him whom they lovd & believed his Apostle.[3]

Despite the promise of Southey's beginning, 'Mohammed' ground to a halt and, by January 1800 was in effect abandoned. Its failure is instructive, however: the project showed the two poets more clearly their respective strengths and interests; it clarified what kinds of Orientalist poet Southey and Coleridge were. Southey was inhibited by his scepticism about whether Mohammed himself believed his own claims. An epic on a male Joan of Arc, who believed his own inspiration even if others did not, Southey was prepared to write. One on an imposter, who pretended to an inspiration he did not feel, he was not. And so the failure with 'Mohammed' ' established the direction of the Islamic poem Southey had already begun—*Thalaba*. Over the next eighteen months, he worked on a story of an austere prophet who believed himself chosen by God and who destroyed the sensual civilizations that had perverted monotheism into idolatry. *Thalaba*'s theme, like that of 'Mohammed', is the power of religious faith—enthusiasm—to create revolutionary movements and the power of these to topple empires. It is an historical east—a place where civilizations rose, came into conflict, and fell—that interests Southey, with religion the motive power. His subject is not the nature of belief as such, but belief's social and political power as an ideology. It follows that the psychology of his characters, and the landscapes they inhabit, are of less importance to him than historical events—pursuits, battles, conquests. It is these that *Thalaba* dramatizes—the hero's escape across the desert strongly resembling Mohammed's. The poem is shaped by Southey's central poetic drive to deal, in narrative form, with the effects of religious conviction on the historical stage. Southey is essentially a narrative poet.

Narrative epics were not Coleridge's forte; the 'Mohammed' experience would confirm him as a different kind of poet—especially a different kind of Oriental poet. He did not get far before abandoning the joint poem. In 1823 he recalled that, if he had completed it, he would have focused on a theological

[3] *Robert Southey. Poetical Works 1793-1810*, gen. ed. Lynda Pratt, 5 vols (London, 2004), V, 476-77. Henceforth SPW.

debate between different kinds of believers. The psychology of belief fascinated Coleridge, not its social and ideological effects—and his failure to progress in the Mohammed project reflects the fact that it was to be a narrative poem of battles, conquests, defeats and victories before it was a debate about the relation of mind, world and God as conceived by people of different faiths. This failure, moreover, is related to that of 'Kubla Khan'—another poem which begins, but does not progress far, with a narrative about an Eastern man of power and empire builder. 'Kubla Khan' turns aside from the mode in which it begins—a historical narrative about the building of a pleasure dome, and its prophesied destruction by war—and looks instead at the mental conditions required to make dreams seem real—to build that dome in air. It was as if, then, 'Mohammed' reaffirmed Coleridge's direction by repeating a failure: he could begin, but not sustain, narrative poems. He would not be able to complete an Oriental epic; for him the Oriental poem was, instead, a genre in which exotic beliefs could be dramatized—a zone of dream, spells, magic and enchantment, where strange relationships of mind and world could be played out. From failure came a new, internalized Orientalism of the imagination.

Nevertheless, each poet did borrow something from the other through the intense period of collaboration of which 'Mohammed'' was one outcome. Their time together in August-September 1799 was not just a period when their different directions became clarified but was also a period of influence—of conversation and of reading merging together, so that who originated what scarcely mattered, and each borrowed from the other images, stories and ideas that seemed, for a while, to belong to both.

The results of this borrowing of images, stories and ideas are evident in both 'Kubla Khan' and *Thalaba*. Although both existed as unfinished drafts when the poets came together, both were changed by the meeting: as a result, each alludes to the other. We cannot be certain exactly what happened in which order, so I'm going to conjecture two scenarios of influence—alternate versions of how the poems were shaped and reshaped in late summer 1799.

Scenario One:

'Kubla Khan' was, Coleridge wrote in 1816, composed in 1797 but left unfinished. There is however, no evidence of what state it had reached before May 1799, when one of Coleridge's companions on his hiking tour of the Harz mountains noted in his journal that Coleridge had quoted, 'from a Poem of his own' the lines 'And here were Forests, ancient as the Hills,/ Enclosing Sunny Spots of greenery'.[4] Southey had certainly not seen this poem before the reconciliation in Somerset. But it seems that it was shared that August in Nether Stowey for its opening lines, 'In Xanadu did Kubla Khan a stately pleasure dome decree', are alluded to in lines that were eventually published in Book I of *Thalaba*:

[4] Charles H. Parry, in a journal-letter headed 'Göttingen May 4, 1799', Bodleian MS Eng. misc.d.608 f 181r.

Where high in air a stately palace rose.
Amid a grove embowered
Stood the prodigious pile;
[. . .]
Here studding azure tablatures
And rayed with feeble light,
Star-like the ruby and the diamond shone:
Here on the golden towers
The yellow moon-beam lay,
Here with white splendour floods the silver wall.
(103-19; SPW, III, 9-10)

This passage is Southey's description of the illusory garden of Irem that appears to Thalaba in the desert. The obvious inference to draw is that in August 1799 Southey heard Coleridge recite 'Kubla Khan' and in response introduced this passage to his poem: the 'stately palace', in particular seems too close to Coleridge's 'stately' pleasure dome not to be related to it. If so, we can see Southey's narrative poem about the clash of religious ideologies being reshaped by Coleridge's descriptive set-piece of an Eastern pleasure garden. Southey suspends his narrative drive so as to introduce an episode in which he lingers on an exotic landscape—a place of enchantment like Xanadu. Coleridge has nudged Southey towards a less austere, more languorous Orientalism in which the East is a zone of unreality, an exotic locale for sensual, magical paradises. Behind both stand Spenser's bower of bliss, Milton's evocation of Eden and especially Sir William Jones's 1767 poem 'The Seven Fountains, an Eastern Allegory', in which 'stately', 'palace' and 'dome' appear together in a description of an eastern king's landscape garden:

The nymphs returning with the stately car,
O'er the smooth plain with hasty steps they came,
And hail'd their youthful king with loud acclaim;
With flow'rs of ev'ry tint the paths they strow'd,
And cast their chaplets on the hallow'd road.

At last they reach'd the bosom of a wood,
Where, on a hill a radiant palace stood;
A sumptuous dome, by hands immortal made,
Which, on its walls and on its gates, display'd
The gems that in the rocks of Tibet glow. (82-91)[5]

[5] In *Poems, consisting chiefly of Translations from the Asiatic Languages. To which are added, two Essays, I. On the Poetry of the Eastern Nations. II. On the Arts, Commonly Called Imitative* (Oxford, 1772). On Jones's influence see Michael J. Franklin, *Sir William Jones: Selected Poetical and Prose Works* (Cardiff, 1995).

Later in *Thalaba*, in parts of the poem written after the 1799 reconciliation with Coleridge, more such enchanted palaces and gardens appear: they are illusionary Edens designed by evil sorcerers to tempt Thalaba away from the path of rectitude, his road of dedication to an invisible, abstract God. But they all bear the marks of 'Kubla Khan'—registering how strongly Southey was impressed by his friend's verse. Coleridge, it appears, provided a Jones-derived Orientalism of dreamlike descriptions and scenes that suggest illusory mental states and these tempted Southey away from the direct plot of his action-packed narrative poem. Ultimately the dreamy paradises prove false—as Kubla's pleasure dome also does, because their peace and beauty is built on violence. Whereas Kubla's paradise garden is threatened by ancestral voices prophesying war, Thalaba's turns out to be a sorcerer's illusion.

If the pleasure garden reveals the poets' partnership—their sharing of ideas, images and forms—what supersedes them demonstrates their incipient difference. While for Coleridge the true pleasure dome is that built in the imagination of the poet, for Southey pleasure comes instead from the justification of the righteous. Thalaba's dedication to his austere God is rewarded when, guided by his faith, he avenges the killing of his father, at the cost of his own life. Right has prevailed, through violence, and the knowledge that it is has prevailed is its own reward. Thus in Southey's poetic scheme, the Coleridgean paradise garden provides scenery and decoration and is not essential to the moral action of the poem. Nevertheless, the Coleridgean effect is shown in the difference of *Thalaba* from the abandoned 'Mohammed', for 'Mohammed' would have been faithful to a real person and real historical events—its purpose being verisimilitude to the actual, as if Southey could take the reader beyond the texts from which he gleaned his knowledge to offer a transparent view of history. *Thalaba*, taking up where 'Mohammed' left off but mostly written after the meeting with Coleridge, is more a mixture of genres—an epic that pretends to realism like 'Mohammed' *'* though the events narrated are fictional, but also a romance that foregrounds its own fictionality, telling tall stories of magic spells and exotic realms, as if the Orient was a fantastical world summoned up by the geographical fantasies and travellers' tales of western texts. It thus fits the bill of Orientalism as Edward Said defined it—a western construction of the East taken from old books,[6] knowing and caring little for present day conditions on the ground—that was then projected onto the East, as if the construction could be mapped onto reality. Yet at the same time it undercuts this process of mapping a textual fantasy-world onto reality, by foregrounding its own textuality in its notes, which openly reveal it to be a conglomerate of travellers' tales and stories, and, therefore, to be unreliable as a guide to the real.[7]

[6] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western Conceptions of the Orient* (London and New York: 1978).

[7] See Javed Majeed, *James Mill's The History of British India and Orientalism* (Oxford, 1992) and Nigel J. Leask, *Romantic Writers and the East: Anxieties of Empire* (Cambridge, 1993). Also, Diego Saglia, 'Words and Things: Southey's East and the Materiality of Oriental Discourse', in Lynda Pratt (ed.), *Robert Southey and the Contexts of English Romanticism* (Aldershot, 2006), pp. 167-86.

Scenario Two:

The second scenario turns the chronology and the course of influence around and places Southey as a crucial source of the poem that became 'Kubla Khan'. It goes thus: what if the lines in *Thalaba* preceded those of 'Kubla Khan'—if Southey's 'stately palace' was the chief source of Coleridge's 'stately pleasure dome'? If, in effect, much of 'Kubla Khan' was a response to *Thalaba*? To argue thus, we have to set aside the 1797 date that Coleridge, nearly twenty years later, gave for his poem—or at least believe that, when he heard Southey's lines in 1799, he modified what he had already drafted. It's a possible scenario: we know Southey had drafted Book I of *Thalaba* already when he arrived at Nether Stowey because he tells us so in letters and in a dated copy of the manuscript.

What does it matter if Coleridge misdated his poem—or omitted to mention his 1799 revisions—when he came to publish it in 1816? It matters because if he modified or developed his lines on a paradise garden in the wake of reading Book I of *Thalaba*, or the Orientalist excerpts transcribed in Southey's commonplace book, then his relationship with Southey is as significant an influence on one of Coleridge's greatest poems as that with Wordsworth was on 'Dejection: an Ode'—and this is an influence we—and he—have failed to account for. It matters too because it helps explain where Coleridge's Orientalism came from and of what kind it was. It's a question of both adoption and rejection, about Coleridge learning the lesson of the failure of 'Mohammed'' and jettisoning Southey's narrative machinery so as to create, from Southey's paradise gardens, a new kind of Orientalist poem—an internalised poem about the way in which the imagination dreams up exotic fantasies in response to its reading of travellers' tales. In effect, 'Kubla Khan' becomes a self-reflexive and self-conscious meditation on the East as a purely textual realm—a dream-world that westerners make up in response to their reading of unreliable travel accounts. It is not Edward Said's projection of fantasies derived from old books onto the real Orient, but a reflexive commentary on the making, from our reading, of fantasy worlds that stay fantastical: domes in air. The process of making-up this dream world as one reads is what interests Coleridge, not any real Orient that might be reached beyond the text. His Orientalism, sharpened as he borrowed from but also understood his difference from Southey, does not just internalise the quest romance (Harold Bloom's definition of the romantic lyric)[8] but also reflects upon that internalisation—with Thalaba's pursuit of his goal through the Arabian desert transformed into a quest within for the source of imagination's creative power.

The textuality and internality of Coleridge's Orientalism is not simply a matter of a likeness between a few lines of Southey's verse and a few of Coleridge's: Southey's commonplace book, which he brought with him to Somerset, contained passages transcribed from European stories about the

[8] See Harold Bloom, 'The Internalisation of the Quest Romance', *Romanticism and Consciousness: Essays in Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York, 1970), pp. 3-23.

paradise gardens of Aloadin, Irem and of Kublai Khan to which Coleridge's poem is verbally close. Indeed, after a long note from Samuel Purchas on a paradise garden, *Thalaba* cites Odoricus's tale of

> a certaine countrey called Melistorte, which is a very pleasant and fertile place. And in this countrey there was a certeine aged man called Senex de monte; who round about two mountaines had built a wall to inclose the sayd mountaines. Within this wall there were the fairest and most chrystall fountaines in the whole world: and about the sayd fountaines there were most beautiful virgins in great number, and goodly horses also, and in a word every thing that could be devised for bodily solace and delight, and therefore the inhabitants of the countrey call the same place by the name of Paradise. (SPW, III, 259)

Southey's notes acted as sources for Coleridge, as the commonplace book was no doubt open on the table as the friends started work on 'Mohammed' in Nether Stowey. They then decided to travel together to Coleridge's birthplace, Ottery St Mary in Devon, walking south past Porlock and the overgrown walled gardens near Culbone and discussing Oriental travel books on the way. From Ottery they proceeded to Exeter where Southey made more excerpts from travel books in the cathedral library.[9] In September, they parted and Coleridge took the same route back to Stowey—with Oriental travels still on his mind. It may have been on this trip that, ill with dysentery, he rested at a farmhouse a quarter of a mile above Culbone church, dosed himself with opium, and reworked his poem on a paradise garden in the light of the reading matter and conversation that the weeks with Southey had brought him. Certainly, no sooner did he arrive home than he wrote to Southey about *Thalaba* and about Niebuhr's travels in Arabia (CL, II, 533). It's at least possible then, that although a draft of some of 'Kubla Khan' existed, it took firmer shape in late summer 1799. As Elizabeth Schneider showed, some very powerful textual evidence suggests much of the text dates from this time.[10] For instance, as Schneider reveals, the phrase 'midway on' appears elsewhere in Coleridge's oeuvre only in writing that dates from autumn 1799-spring 1800 (it appears in 'Love' and, as 'midway on the ocean', in *The Piccolomini* (CPW, III, i, 487; Act III, scene iii, 64)). The phrase alludes to Walter Savage Landor's *Gebir* (1798)—a poem to which Southey introduced Coleridge after their reconciliation at Stowey: 'midway on the wave' is Landor's locution. The word 'momently' also appears for the first time elsewhere in Coleridge's work in late 1799 in his translation of *Die Piccolomini*: 'the whole scene moves and bustles

[9] See Southey's letter of 18 October 1799 to Humphry Davy, 'At Exeter the advantage of a good library induced me to employ my time in laying in materials, a magazine of information, winter-stores for this country, where there is a dearth of books. So I travelled into Egypt & the Levant & Persia & the East Indies with every traveller whom I could find going that way – Fryer – Olearius – Mandelslo – De la Roque – the lying Lucas – Chardin the Jeweller who is worth them all,' SL, letter 447.

[10] Elizabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and 'Kubla Khan'* (Chicago, 1953; rpt New York, 1966), pp. 132, 208.

momently' (CPW, III, I, 255; Act I, scene iv, 92). Wordsworth picked this word up, as if he were alluding to a recently encountered 'Kubla Khan', in a letter he wrote to Coleridge on Christmas Eve 1799 about his visit to the Yorkshire waterfalls and caverns: 'the stream shot from between the rows of icicles in irregular fits of strength and with a body of water that momently varied'.[11] Then there is the phrase 'deep delight': aside from 'Kubla Khan', Coleridge uses it for the first time in 'Lines Written in a Concert Room', composed while the poets were together in Exeter: 'such songs in such a mood to hear thee sing,/ It were a deep delight' (CPW, I, i, 598). But it also occurs in a passage originally intended for Book II of *Thalaba* which was written in autumn 1799 (Southey later moved it to Book IX): 'that with such deep and undefined delight' (IX, 536; SPW, III, 515). If this reveals the allusive relationship between the two poems, highlighting the poets' renewed mutual influence, it also suggests that much of 'Kubla Khan' was developed in autumn 1799. Schneider also notes that William Taylor, in a letter to Southey that Coleridge may have read in Stowey, states 'I am glad . . . you are intending to build with the talisman of song a magic palace on the site of the Domdaniel of Cazotte'. Taylor's letter also included some verse, later published in the *Monthly Magazine*, which mentions a girl and an Abyssinian bishop.[12] And Schneider (207-8) points out that the second volume of Southey's *Annual Anthology* (1800), in preparation during autumn 1799, contains Joseph Cottle's *Markoff: a Siberian Eclogue*, featuring the line 'I, who in caves of ice have oft reclined'. Was Cottle alluding to what he had just seen in Coleridge, or did Southey introduce Coleridge to Cottle's poem?

A Third Scenario?

A third scenario is also possible, in which the influence is mutual and each poet develops his poem in the light of the other's draft and the excited conversations that followed as they renewed their friendship: not so much make-up sex as make-up text. Indeed, the famous 1816 preface in which 'Kubla Khan' was said to have been composed in a farmhouse near Culbone is a semi-fictionalised account that, if it relates to his return, without Southey, from Exeter in 1799, tellingly locates Coleridge's inability to continue the poem to the end of that period of intense creative partnership. In favour of this conjecture is that fact that it's highly unlikely that Coleridge found a copy of Purchas's *Pilgrimage* in such a farmhouse—it was a rare and learned book—or that he possessed a copy and carried it with him (there's no record of his owning the extremely large and heavy tome). But he may have been reading extracts from it in Southey's hand. It was not until he visited Grasmere, the following year, that he encountered a copy—Wordsworth's—in a country cottage—Dove Cottage. His 1816 preface compresses and conflates different

[11] *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth. I. The Early Years: 1787-1805,* ed. Ernest de Selincourt, rev. Chester L. Shaver (Oxford, 1967), p. 279.

[12] *A Memoir of the Life and Writings of the Late William Taylor of Norwich.* ed. J. W. Robberds, 2 vols (London, 1843), I, 227.

moments of his past creative life into a potent myth about the creative mind and the Orientalist poet. Within that myth are allusions that hint, in disguised form, at the text's debts to others, a practice that, notoriously, Coleridge followed when borrowing from Schlegel and Schelling in his *Biographia Literaria* (drafted over the same period as the 1816 preface).

Whichever scenario we adopt—and it will probably never be possible to decide which is correct—what is clear is that their collaboration allowed each of the poets to experiment with different versions of Orientalism, so that Coleridge became, for a while, a more Southeyan writer—and vice versa. The result of this was that each was able to develop a new direction, in which their existing strength was clarified after having been modified by what they learnt from the other as they traded ideas, stories and images for a month of intense friendship.

The larger significance for accounts of English poetry is twofold—that the collaboration with Southey was more important than critics have often allowed for, reminding us that Coleridge's Romanticism was nearly always a collaborative discourse—whether with Wordsworth, Southey, Sara Hutchinson or J. H. Green. But also that Orientalism in English verse was refined in the process, with *Thalaba* and 'Kubla Khan', the two most influential Oriental poems of the era, each pushed by the collaboration in the direction of an Orientalism marked by exoticism and fantasy derived from travellers' tales, and explicitly or implicitly a self-reflexive meditation on the effects of reading these texts—a literary Orientalism, rather than a narrative aiming transparently to portray verifiable historical events. In *Thalaba* a narrative of action was still strongly present but overlaid with dreamy passages; in 'Kubla Khan' the narrative of action is truncated, and the dreamy passages become allegories of the poet's creativity. The former, of course, is more Saidian than the latter since it is at least partly mapped onto a supposed real Orient; neither, however, offers to tell a truth about a real historical place in the way the abandoned epic 'Mohammed' would have done.

Thalaba and Christabel

After Coleridge's return home, Southey stayed in Exeter and the south. There, he found his mental health failing him and eventually fled to Bristol, where he put himself under the treatment of Dr Thomas Beddoes. A trip to a warmer climate and a change of scene was recommended, and so in spring 1800 he set sail for Portugal. He took with him the *Thalaba* manuscript so as to continue drafting it. The collaboration with Coleridge was still an essential support: as soon as he arrived in Lisbon on 1 May, he wrote requesting Coleridge to send him the manuscript of *Christabel*—still a work in progress.

It appears that Coleridge did send him the manuscript, although he was still working on the poem in autumn 1800, for in December Southey wrote verse of his own in response to it—nothing less than a prequel to Christabel of several hundred lines. He intended these lines to be the last book of *Thalaba*; clearly he was so powerfully energised by Coleridge's poem that he chose to

make the climax of his Oriental romance a back-story that renewed the collaboration of autumn 1799 from lonely exile. But Southey's prequel was also motivated by puzzlement and critique, as if he needed to dramatize in more straightforward narrative terms the moral ambiguity of *Christabel*—where action gets suspended and who is innocent and who guilty cannot be decided. Thus *Thalaba*, an Oriental tale, gets sidetracked into the chivalric world of Coleridge's poem as Southey tries to resolve—to create an narrative of public actions and reactions to explain—what, in *Christabel*, is an internalised, psychological trauma—the cause of the fall from innocence into guilt, and the redemption from this guilt.

The prequel contains a sub-Spenserian knightly tournament, described in archaic diction, in which the hero Thalaba fights Sir Leoline. Leoline, it is explained, was once the champion of the virtuous damsel and her mother who ruled the land; however, he has been enchanted by the evil sorcerer—the hell hag—who has usurped the throne. He now fights on the hell-hag's side against the damsel and her mother. Clearly, this is a displaced version of the plot of Coleridge's tale in which Leoline is enchanted by the witch-like Geraldine to turn against his own daughter and her virtuous mother. Southey may well have read the line that Coleridge omitted from the poem when he published it in 1816, comparing Geraldine's body to the 'sea wolf's hide' (CPW, II, i, 659)—that is, identifying her as a foul hag, a werewolf who has changed shape into a beautiful woman. Southey's 'hell hag' is certainly foul in body and deed:

> An {old} & hideous blind old Hag
> Hath brought this evil on us; she hath made
> Her giant son our tyrant & by spells
> {So} Hath won the many to her cause
> That from their loyalty and ancient faith
> Recreant, bewitched to ruin, they themselves
> Give their own children for her sacrifice.
> Strong is her giant son,
> Yet is his trust in {illeg. word} & wizard guile,
> A fraudful enemy
> And daily at their Tyrant idols feet
> With hymns of adoration & of joy
> They shed the life of man. (SPW, III, 313)

Southey's story of witches, knights and enchantment is a Spenserian response to Coleridge's Gothic romance. It explains Leoline's retreat to his lonely castle in the woods by creating a story about his shameful past. Evidently, Southey was trying to work through the mysterious relationship of innocence and guilt in Coleridge's poem, for he turns Thalaba into a figure who performs the same role as Bard Bracy would have performed in *Christabel*, restoring the proper relationship of damsel-daughter and knight by helping to free Leoline from the evil spell that has him fighting against the virtuous. Thalaba's archery lures

Leoline onto the holy ground under the oak tree, a spot sacred to the damsel's mother, and there the damsel's innocent words have power to lift the spell:

> On rushes Leoline.
> And now beneath the Holy Oak
> He lifts the sword to strike!
> The Damsel caught his arm,
>
> She looked him in the face—she called his name –
> The well-known tones awakened him—
> The spell that had abused his noble soul
> Lost all its power, he dropt the impious sword.
>
> (SPW, III, 315)

It is significant that in Southey's conventional chivalric version, it is the knight and not the innocent damsel who is enchanted and guilty; the damsel's virtue is not compromised as it is in Coleridge's poem: it restores Leoline. In Coleridge's poem, the restorative power of innocence is in much more trouble, for Christabel is tainted by her complicity in her seduction by Geraldine, and must herself be redeemed before her father can be freed from the spell that binds him. Southey effectively rewrites Coleridge's version of the chivalric tale with a more orthodox morality and more conventional understanding of gender and sexuality.

Having awoken to his true self, Leoline immediately joins Thalaba in fighting on the damsel's side against the usurping hell hag and her son. Southey gives him no interiority; he is simply a fighting champion: evil is to be destroyed by good on the battlefield; the two do not co-exist within a character unless that character is bewitched. Leoline at least redeems himself but has to content himself with the supporting role, for it is Thalaba who is the appointed remedy and who destroys the hell hag. The damsel and her mother are restored to rule their rightful realm, but the poem then displays no further interest in them: Thalaba leaves them behind as he journeys underground to the source of all evil spells, which he will destroy. The *Christabel* characters form merely an episode in his larger mission: they are introduced to Southey's poem to narrate, in terms of external, dramatic action, questions about shame, complicity, sin and guilt that Southey will not explore by giving his hero a morally ambivalent internal dimension. There is no psychological complexity in Thalaba—nor in the damsel, her mother and Leoline: it is never explained *why* the knight is so susceptible to evil spells. But his shameful actions act as a prequel giving a narrative precedent for his susceptibility to Geraldine's spell in Coleridge's poem. And the prequel, as an allusive intervention in Coleridge's poem, suggests that muscular deeds can redeem guilt. Southey needed to resolve *Christabel's* moral and narrative suspense—its summoning of guilt as an arresting power—by creating redemptive action. Here then, on the fantasy Oriental stage allowed by *Thalaba*, he imagines might restoring right, and his

own input reshaping Coleridge's indulgence of paralyzing moral ambiguity and narrative stasis as it had the year before when the 'Mohammed' project, the *Thalaba* draft and the poets' walking and talking had changed Coleridge's direction in 'Kubla Khan'. This was now not a collaborative trading of images, ideas and stories but an attempt to recreate such a collaboration from a distance—an attempt that, the distance being so great, inevitably failed and that revealed more about the poets' growing differences than what they had in common. Southey was trying, but not succeeding except by force, to guide his friend—the prequel was both an allusive tribute and a corrective to a manuscript poem on which, Southey knew, Coleridge was still working. He aimed to give Coleridge impetus in a new direction even as he was himself altering the direction of his own Oriental poem by suddenly introducing Coleridge's characters into it.

Southey knew he had been sidetracked by his fascination for Coleridge's new poem, and by his desire to resolve what Coleridge's fragment left unresolved. He dropped Leoline, the tournament, and the damsel because they introduced new elements and characters just as his poem approached resolution, thus displacing its hero and his quest to the margins. In a letter to a friend, he declared 'You will I know not be displeased at the total omission of the Queen & Leoline—a bungling piece of botch work at which my own conscience and taste revolted very soon'.[13] So he pruned the new characters out of the published poem.

Nevertheless, if the draft was ultimately omitted and Southey's prequel to *Christabel* never published, the decision to write it in the first place is telling. It reminds us—as does the earlier relationship with 'Kubla Khan'—that *Thalaba* is a poem whose genesis was intimately bound up with the relationship with Coleridge, as a poem shaped by Southey's desire to generate, from Coleridge's fragments, historical romances that combined fantasy and action and that would act out in external events, (and in the process create a causal explanation of), the moral ambivalence and psychological complicity that Coleridge kept discovering in the old genres of ballad and romance. Both 'Kubla Khan' and *Christabel*, then, were seminal for Southey's poem—just as it, in its early books and sources—had been influential on Coleridge. And *Thalaba*, blending the historical and the fantastical, was seen by critic Francis Jeffrey as *the* defining example of the 'new system' that Southey, Coleridge and Wordsworth had together introduced into English poetry. Its hallmarks included 'an affectation of great simplicity and familiarity of language'. It combined 'perpetual exaggeration of thought' with 'splenetic and idle discontent with the existing institutions of society'.[14] What we now call Romanticism—what Jeffrey called Lake poetry—that is to say, emerged in its quintessential form from the collaboration—both an intimate exchange and a mutual differentiation—of Coleridge and Southey.

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[13] *The Collected Letters of Robert Southey*, gen. eds Lynda Pratt, Tim Fulford, Ian Packer, letter 567 (Romantic Circles, 2009-) http://www.rc.umd.edu/editions/southey_letters/,

[14] Francis Jeffrey, review of Robert Southey, *Thalaba the Destroyer. Edinburgh Review*, 1 (1802), 63-82.