Kubla Khan Reconsidered

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IN THE 8th ISSUE OF *THE FRIEND* (October 5, 1809), Coleridge describes Luther's vain effort to translate a passage from the Bible, the 'Trance of Slumber' resulting from his frustration, and his subsequent hallucination of the 'Devil':

> '[Luther] ceasing to *think,* yet continuing his brain on the stretch in solicitation of a thought; [...] sinks, without perceiving it, into a Trance of Slumber: during which, his brain retains its waking energies, excepting that what would have been mere *Thoughts* before, now (the action and counterweight of his outward senses and their impressions being withdrawn) shape and condense themselves into *Things,* into realities!'[2]

John Beer draws a sweeping parallel between Luther's vision after a period of 'intense thinking' and the state of the 'Author' in the preface to 'Kubla Khan' to argue that the poem's images were 'the subject of intense thought on Coleridge's part'.[3] In fact, both 'Kubla Khan' (c.1797) and the introductory note Coleridge attached to it in 1816 can be productively reread in the context of Coleridge's essay on Luther and Rousseau in *The Friend.* The 'Author', like Luther, has a 'vision in a dream': falling asleep over Purchas's *Pilgrimage,* he has a vision of Kubla's dome, while Luther, falling asleep over the Bible, has a hallucination of the devil. In what follows, I will argue that apart from the fact that Coleridge speaks about Luther very much as he does of himself in the preface, both the poem supplemented by the preface and the essay on Luther and Rousseau offer commentaries on the political implications of the relationship between hallucinatory reading, poetic vision, and the potentially dangerous, daemonic power of words.[4] For Luther's hallucinatory reading is also linked, in Coleridge's mind, to his being a 'great poet'. However, being 'possessed' by his visions, and '*acting*', rather than '*writing*' poems, he also resembles, according to Coleridge, the 'crazy Rousseau', whose words had 'direful' consequences (*F* II 110-121). Associating possession with the dangerous power of words, the essay on Luther and Rousseau can thus bring into focus the political potentials of the 'Author's' original vision, the performative character of Kubla's speech act, as well as the historical implications of the ecstatic 'I' of the last stanza. It may eventually suggest that the introductory note to 'Kubla Khan' can be read as a second 'decree', a written declaration that can distance the conservative Coleridge from his own

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[2] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *The Friend.* (*F*) Ed. Barbara E. Rooke. 2 vols. Vol. 4 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Princeton: Princeton UP, 1969. Vol. 2. p. 120.

[3] Beer, John. *Coleridge, the Visionary*, Chatto & Windus, 1959. p. 206.

[4] On Coleridge, 'Kubla Khan', and the daemonic, see: Gregory Leadbetter, *Coleridge and the Daemonic Imagination,* New York, Plgrave Macmillan. 2011. 183-200.

poem. It may indicate that the Coleridge of 1816 (as opposed to Luther, Rousseau, Kubla Khan, and the 'Author' of 1797 described in the preface) is a poet-critic,[5] someone who re-reads his own poem in an attempt to avert its potentially 'direful' consequences.

The first version of Coleridge's essay on Luther and Rousseau appeared in 1809. It proposes to establish a parallel between 'the heroic Luther' and 'the crazy Rousseau' on the basis of 'the similarity of their *radical nature*' (*F* II 113, italics added). With this comparison, Coleridge aims to give a model for the right reading of 'the pages of history' (*F* II 111): an insight into the 'real resemblances' between certain historical figures can render 'the whole more intelligible' (*F* II 111). Focusing on the right way of reading history, he anticipates the educative project of *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), which advances the reading of the Bible as a 'Guide for Political Skill and Foresight'. For, according to Coleridge, the proper interpretation of the Scriptures (such as the distinction between symbols and allegories) can instruct the politician into the right ways of reading the 'records of History' (*F* II 111), which, in its turn, can help him shape the nation's future in accordance with its past.[6] Coleridge's emphasis on proper models of interpretation indicates that by the time of composing the preface to 'Kubla Khan', he already predicates nation formation upon an attentive hermeneutic activity.

In the essay in *The Friend*, rather than focusing on the identity of opinions of the different historical characters, or establishing parallels between their 'outward actions', Coleridge wishes to foreground the similarity between their 'effects', their 'instruments' and their 'circumstances' (*F* II 111). In the case of Luther and Rousseau, this parallel 'effect' stems from the same 'instrument': the power of their words. As he puts it: 'the effects produced on their several ages by Luther and Rousseau, were commensurate with each other, and were produced in both cases by [...] serious and vehement *eloquence*' (*F* II 113, italics added). It is (partly) this eloquence, as he argues elsewhere, that rendered Rousseau's system so dangerous: his intoxicating arguments were 'calculated' to exert, 'on noble and imaginative Spirits', 'a peculiar fascination' (*F* II 123).

Edward Duffy associates Coleridge's fear of Rousseau's daemonic power with the 'concluding exhortation' of 'Kubla Khan': 'Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair / Weave a circle round him thrice / And close your eyes with holy dread.'[7] This parallel also supports Lucy Newlyn's claim that the last lines of 'Kubla Khan' indicate that 'there is some danger, Coleridge suggests, that his enchantment may be contagious'. And this, according to Newlyn, equally testifies to 'Coleridge's interest in the power of the word to 'make things happen'.'[8]

In his 1818 edition of *The Friend,* Coleridge places the essay on Luther and

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[5] I owe special thanks to Dr. James Vigus for drawing my attention to Coleridge's acting, in fact, as a 'poet-critic' in the preface, who 'attains to a notion of his notions' (*BL*, 1, 132).

[6] On the political import of 'symbolic' reading, and interpretation in general, in *Lay Sermons* see also: Balforur, Ian, *The Rhetoric of Romantic Prophecy.* Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2002.

[7] Duffy, Edward, *Rousseau in England,* University of California Press, 1979. pp. 63-64.

[8] Newlyn, Lucy. *Reading, Writing, and Romanticism.* Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000. pp. 76-77.

Rousseau among the Landing Places, which are offered to readers (these 'fellow-labourers'), who are tired of the tense intellectual effort (*F* II 17) that Coleridge has required from them. Yet, this 'Landing Place' partly serves to prevent what it stages. For Luther, who, by 1818, becomes the title figure, is far from representing the ideal reader of *The Friend*. Firstly, he suffers the 'great irritability of the nervous system', which, added to 'the impressions made upon him in early life, and fostered by the theological Systems of his Manhood', can, according to Coleridge, explain 'all his apparitions' (*F* II 116). Hence, what he lacks is precisely what Coleridge asks from his own readership: an attentive and thoughtful hermeneutic activity (*F* II 117). Secondly, it was 'The Darkness and Superstition' that 'moulded his mind': he 'deemed himself gifted with supernatural influxes', because his ideas were 'more in sympathy with the spirits who he was to influence" (*F* II 119). Thus, the fact that his firm principles, his 'standard[s derived] from a common measure already received by the Good and the Wise' (*F* II 113) were coupled with an 'irritability' and the influence of the (Catholic) superstitions of his age resulted in his becoming a 'great Reformer' (*F* II 121) who, at the same time, 'hurled his inkstand at the Devil' (*F* II 115).

Meanwhile, the description of Luther is equally evocative of Coleridge himself. Coleridge admits that he himself is not excepted from seeing 'ghosts and apparitions' (he meticulously describes the state when '*our* thoughts, in states of morbid *Slumber*, become at times perfectly *dramatic*' and 'the Vision appears to talk to *us* its own thoughts in a voice as audible as the shape is visible', *F* II 118, italics added), while the allusion to Luther's 'deranged Digestion' and his taking of 'de-obstruent medicines' (*F* II 115-116) may also bring to mind Coleridge's own problems with his digestive system, triggered by his opium-habit.[9] However, these are the scenes of reading and writing depicting Luther at work that offer the most provoking parallels—as well as the most conspicuous differences—between the two men.

One scene of reading depicts Luther in the midst of 'intense thinking', trying to exorcise the 'cloud of Darkness conjured up between the Truth of the sacred Letters and the eyes of his Understanding' (*F* II 120). Yet, he cannot understand, let alone translate, what he perceives: the efforts of his understanding being 'baffled', he can see '*nothing-but-Words*' (*Ibid.*, italics in the original). The book appears to be a sheer multiplication of letters, which his mind is incapable of bringing into a meaningful totality.

It is at this moment of utter frustration that, giving up 'thought' and 'attention generally', he 'ceas[es] to think'. Turning away from the Bible, he 'sinks, without perceiving it, into a Trance of Slumber.' In this second phase, 'what would have been mere Thoughts before […] shape themselves into *Things,* into Realities' (*F*: 2, 120), and Luther has a 'brain-image of the Devil, vivid enough to have acquired apparent *Outness*' (Ibid).

Luther's way of reading clearly parallels that of the 'Author' of 'Kubla

[9] See: Holmes, Richard, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections, 1804-1834.* London: HarperCollins. 1999.

Khan.' Although the 'Author' was under the effect of an 'anodyne' while falling asleep above the pages of Purchas's *Pilgrimage*, during his sleep he similarly had a vision in which 'all the images rose up before him as *things*'. And even if the term 'anodyne' seems to be a mere euphemism for opium or laudanum, and the tranquillity it is supposed to entail seems to stand in a sharp contrast with Luther's 'irritation', early 19th century debates around opium use, as well as Luther's actual 'Trance of *Slumber*' (italics added) point to the political potentials of the term. Virginia Berridge suggests that in the early 19th century, opium use was generally associated with the 'irritable' lower classes,[10] and what was supposed to distinguish the opium-eating habit of the working classes from that of the literary circles and the middle classes was precisely the assumption that the former ones took opium as a stimulant, whereas the later ones professedly took it as an anodyne.[11] The choice of 'anodyne', therefore, not only marks the medicinal use of opium in Coleridge's early years, but also the important boundary he sought to maintain between himself and the 'mob'. As he kept emphasising, he had not 'at any times taken the flattening poison as a stimulus, or for any craving after pleasurable sensations'.[12] Thus, when he was struggling, by the time of composing the preface, with 'Restlessness & incipient Bewilderment' (as an effect of temporary opium withdrawal, *SL,* 173.), he always took tranquilisers rather than stimulants.

Secondly, even though Coleridge is reading Purchas whereas Luther is reading the Bible, both readings are characterised not so much by a 'willing', but rather by an un-'willing suspension of disbelief': the forgetting of the mediated character of the images, and a failure to achieve any interpretive activity. Interestingly, both Luther's way of hallucinatory reading, and that of the 'Author' of the preface—triggered by a doze of laudanum—mirror the kind of (non-)reading that is proper, according to Coleridge, to the audience of gothic romances. In a footnote attached to Chapter 3 of *Biographia Literaria*, he draws a sharp distinction between the process he calls 'reading' and the 'amusement' offered by the gothic, and enjoyed by the 'devotees of the circulating libraries'. For these latter, reading turns into an opiate: the 'materiel and imagery of the doze [being] supplied ab extra', it induces a 'trance', and the 'suspension of all common sense' (*BL* I 48, n. 2., italics added).[13] Of course, Coleridge himself is not exempt from the possibility of yielding to the

[10] These, as Coleridge puts it, easily 'become *restless* and *irritable* through the increased temperature of collected multitudes', and are, therefore susceptible to fanaticism (*BL,* 1. 42., italics added) .

[11] Berridge, Virginia. *Opium and the People: Opiate Use and Policy in 19th and early 20th Century Britain*. 2nd ed. London: Free Association, 1999. Although Berridge does not allude to Coleridge, Coleridge equally remarks in a letter dating from 1808: 'the practice of taking opium is dreadfully spread – throughout Lancashire and Yorkshire, it is the common dram of the lower order of people.' (*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*. Ed. Earl Leslie Griggs, vol. V. Oxford: Calrendon Press 1956-1971. pp. 125-6.)

[12] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Selected Letters,* (*SL*) Ed. H.J. Jackson, Oxford: Calderon Press, 1987. p. 223.

[13] As he writes: 'the whole *materiel* and imagery of the doze is supplied *ab extra* by a sort of mental *camera obscura* manufactured at the printing office which *pro tempore* fixes, reflects and transmits the moving phantasms of one man's delirium, so as to people the bareness of an hundred other brains afflicted with the same trance or suspension of all common sense and all definite purpose.' On the political implications of this specific passage, see Timár, Andrea. 'Re-Reading Culture and Addiction: Coleridge's Writings and Walter Benjamin's Analysis of Modernity and the Addict.' *Critical Engagements: a Journal of Criticism and Theory,* II./2. Autumn /Winter 2008. 210-31..

intoxicating effect of the gothic. As he admits in his review of Lewis's *The Monk:* 'we feel no great difficulty in yielding a temporary belief to any, the strangest, situation of things.'[14] Yet, as he is also eager to underline, his own suspension of disbelief is deliberate and only temporary: 'But that situation once conceived, how beings like ourselves would feel and act in it, our own feelings sufficiently instruct us; and we instantly reject the clumsy fiction that does not harmonise with them' (*Ibid.*) As always, Coleridge proposes a mindful control over the reading process.

However, both the readers of the gothic and the 'Author' of the preface to 'Kubla Khan' are characterised by the skipping of the medium of the book, that is, the obliteration of its textual or linguistic manifestation. In fact, this is a *constant* characteristic of Luther's reading habits as well. Luther, according to Coleridge, fought against 'an Army of Evil Beings headed by the Prince of the Air [which] were no metaphorical beings in his Apprehension' (*F* I 119). Interpreting the 'metaphor', or, as he will later call it, 'the symbol in a literal i.e. phaenomenal sense', he exhibits the 'folly and danger of interpreting *sensually* what was delivered of objects *super*-sensual'. And this, according to the later Coleridge, is very the ground on which 'the whole branchery of papal superstition and imposture' was based.[15] Coleridge repeats the same charge against Luther's way of reading in the next sentence of the essay: 'The Bible was a spiritual indeed but *not a figurative* armoury in his [Luther's] belief' (ibid. italics added). Hence, Luther, as at least this specific essay suggests, does not consider the Bible the symbol of the Logos, but its sheer medium: instead of the 'translucence' that characterises the symbol,[16] he opts for an (impossible) transparency. However, the meaning of the Bible does not manifest itself without due attention to its letter, and the confusion of writing (requiring a thorough, 'symbolic', or 'metaphorical' *reading*) with the reality of *visions* (rising from the printed pages) can also explain why Luther hurled his inkstand at the Devil (*F* II 115). Coleridge himself, as opposed to both Luther and the 'Author' of the preface, takes great care not to take stories literally. When he accounts the episode with the ink-stand, and reflects upon the black spot it 'actually' left on the wall of Luther's room, he stresses that the spot immediately offers itself to two possible readings: 'being capable of a double interpretation, it is equally flattening to the Protestant and the Papist' (F I 115)

Yet, when he is reading Purchas, he similarly forgets about the letter of the text, and, finding himself in an artificial paradise, he has a vision of Kubla's dome. At the same time, the 'Author' of the preface not only speaks about a

[14] http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/coleridge.reviews

[15] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *On the Constitution of the Church and State,* Ed. John Colmer. Vol. 10 of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976. The whole passage runs as follows: 'the understanding of the same symbol in a literal i.e. phaenomenal sense, notwithstanding the most earnest warnings against it, the most express declarations of the folly and danger of interpreting sensually what was delivered of objects super-sensual—this was the rank of wilding, on which 'the prince of this world,' the lust of power and worldly aggrandizement was enabled to graft, one by one, the whole branchery of papal superstition and imposture' (p. 120)./

[16] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. *Lay Sermons.* Ed. R. J. White. Vol. 6. of *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972. p. 30.

vision rising out from letters, but about the 'parallel production of the correspondent expressions' as well. In fact, Luther, just like this 'Author', was also a poet. As Coleridge writes, Luther 'was a Poet indeed, as great a poet as ever lived in any age or country' (*F* II 119). In the same sentence, however, he also alludes to Luther's obsession, which, retrospectively, renders him a lesser poet: '*but* his poetic images were so vivid that they mastered the Poet's own mind! He was possessed with them' (*F* II 119, first italics added). The potential danger of Luther's possession is all the more pressing that it immediately turns his *poetic* words into '*armouries*', which clearly signals the politically threatening potentials of the 'Trance of Slumber', and the subsequent hallucination, or visions rising out from the printed book. The whole passage on Luther as a poet reads as follows: 'The Bible was a spiritual indeed but not a *figurative* armoury in [Luther's] belief: it was the magazine of his war-like stores, and thence he was to arm himself, and supply both shield and sword, and javelin to the elect […] LUTHER did not *write*, he *acted* poems' (*F* II 119, original italics). Literally enacting the way he reads, Luther 'acts' his poems, instead of 'writing' them. In this sense, as will be argued below, his words parallel the speech act, the performative 'decree' of the Khan.

Luther's words, as 'instruments', have great power (and therefore, 'effect'), because they camouflage themselves as *the* pure medium in the mystic sense of the term. His language makes the reader forget its medium, the letter, or the text, that is, the fact, that it has to be deciphered, interpreted, or simply, *read*. Hence, his words transmit the trance they are generated by, and have a hallucinatory 'effect': like the words of Rousseau's and the poetic 'I' of 'Kubla Khan', they have the power to intoxicate.

According to Coleridge, a more specific 'effect' of the erasure of both the iterability and the readability proper to writing is the illusion that that speech act is always applicable, regardless of the historical or political context. At least, this is the problem that he outlines at the end of the essay, when he imagines Luther living in Geneva in Rousseau's time:

> Conceive [Luther] as a citizen of Geneva, and a contemporary of Voltaire… conceive this change of circumstances, and Luther will no longer dream of Fiends or of Antichrist – but will he have no other dreams in their place? […] might not a perfect constitution, a government of pure reason […] have easily supplied the place of the reign of Christ in the new Jerusalem? […] Henceforward then, we will conceive his reason employed in building up anew the edifice of *earthly* society, and his imagination as pledging itself for the possible realisation of the structure. We will lose the great reformer, who was born in an age which needed him, in the Philosopher of Geneva, who was doomed to misapply his energies to materials the properties of which he misunderstood, and happy only that he did not live to witness the direful effects of his system.
> (*F* II 120-121)

First of all, Geneva may make one think of Calvin, the other father of Reformation, and Coleridge indeed remarks in a footnote attached to the essay that in 'Calvin's own city, some half a dozen only of the most ignorant believed in Christianity in any form' (*F* II 113n.) at the end of the 18th century. Small wonder that Luther, had he lived two centuries later, might have been influenced by the 'Darkness' of another, more 'enlightened' age. More importantly, however, the passage suggests that words, for Coleridge, do not have value in themselves: his emphasis falls on the 'effect' produced by the uncontainable, performative power of these 'instruments'. Because both Luther's and Rousseau's words possess power (they, as Newlyn put it with regard to 'Kubla Khan', 'make things happen'), and they perform precisely in an erasure of their written (and, therefore, historical) character, they become weapons that potentially unleash violence. At least, they fascinate those who succumb to their visionary power without actually reading them, without being aware of their eminently written, that is, historical character. As he also asserts in *On the Constitution of the Church and State*: 'I expressed my belief, that in no instance had the false use of a word become current without some practical ill consequence, of far greater moment than would *primo aspectu* have been thought possible'(*Ch & St*, 24). The fact that the violence unleashed by Rousseau's system went far beyond Rousseau's intentions suggests that no matter whether the use of a word is 'false' or 'proper', time and space always weaken the words' reference back to a locatable source. The same 'instruments' (i.e. words) can have different 'effect', depending on the way they are read (or not read), and on the constellation of the 'circumstances' on which they are imposed (see above: *F* II 112).

In the terms of the distinction made in *Biographia Literaria* between the 'absolute' and the 'commanding genius', both Luther and Rousseau are commanding genii, impressing their 'preconceptions on the world without' (*BL* I 32). Had Luther lived in Rousseau's time, his words, like Rousseau's, would have acted as the 'shaping spirit of ruin, to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to substitute the fancies of the day, and to change kings and kingdoms, as the wind shifts and shapes the clouds' (Ibid, italics added.) For the conservative adept of Burkean expediency that Coleridge was in 1809, the destruction of the wisdom of ages would, of course, be unacceptable.

The parallel between Kubla Khan and the 'commanding genius' has been well established since John Beer's reading of the poem, to which Gregory Leadbetter has added an important modification: Coleridge's own participation in the daemonic forces represented by the Khan. Conspicuously, Coleridge also sees something of himself in both Luther and Rousseau. Rousseau, like Coleridge, represents a daemonic force that is both attractive and repulsive to Coleridge. As Duffy also argues:

> 'Behind Coleridge's constant tirades against the licentious minds and manners of the French, there thus emerges hints of a more ambivalent attitude toward 'crazy Rousseau'—a not unadmiring

> demonization, a sensitivity to the seemingly raw and unleashed energy of Rousseau's personality. But if the Rousseau of the older and more conservative Coleridge is a daemonic force, he is one less to be revered than to be contained and feared.' (63.)

However, Kubla Khan, representing Coleridge's 'daemonic' part, is to be 'contained and feared' not only because of the daemonic force he embodies, but also because his geometrical plan is slightly reminiscent of Rousseau's. In *The Friend,* Coleridge argues that Rousseau's 'universal Principles [...] necessarily suppose uniform and perfect Subjects, which are to be found in the *Ideas* of pure Geometry and (I trust) in the *Realities* of Heaven, but never, never in Creatures of Flesh and Blood' (*F*: 2, 133).

Kubla's geometrical garden, his 'twice five miles of fertile ground / With walls and towers [..] girdled round', is the 'effect' of his powerful, performative 'decree'. This 'decree' is of 'radical nature' (*F* 2: 113), exactly like the speech acts of a Luther turned into a Rousseau: it 'build[s] up anew the edifice of *earthly* society', and, just like 'Declaration of the Rights of Man' (influenced by Rousseau's *Contract*), it silences those 'ancestral voices' upon which, according to the Burkean Coleridge of 1816, the organic unfolding of history should be predicated.

In other words, Kubla's 'decree' performs a State, a 'stately pleasure-dome' into existence, through a singular act of speech. His words are, precisely, 'armouries', and their linguistic power, or 'effect', is eminently historical: they superimpose themselves upon the non- or pre-linguistic forces of nature. When he hears the meaningless 'tumult' as being the 'voice' of some ancestors, he endows this nature with an arbitrary meaning, and thereby also posits, and again through language, the identity of his State as against the fantasy of a potentially threatening past. In this sense, the last lines of the first part of the poem exhibit the invention (rather than the intervention) of history and the accomplishment of the institution of Kubla's State.[17] Thus, by the time he published the poem, Kubla's civilisation may represent the worst of Coleridge's nightmares, similar to his dream of Luther's turning into a Rousseau and building a New Jerusalem on earth.

Consequently, the would-be ecstatic poetic persona of the epilogue (possessed with the song of the Abyssinian maid) would also obtain the restrictive 'but' that Coleridge applies to Luther conceived of as a poet. His words have a potential, similar to Luther's and Rousseau's, of turning into weapons if transmitted to an audience susceptible to rapture. Like Luther, this 'I' is 'a Poet indeed [...] but his poetic images [are] so vivid that they master[...] the Poet's own mind! He [is] *possessed* with them' (*F* II 119). Could he indeed 'revive' the song of the Abyssinian Maid, and build, or 'decree' that 'dome again', then, from the point of view of the conservative Coleridge of 1816, he

[17] Jerome McGann influentially interprets the 'ancestral voices prophesying war' as an 'intervention' of history into Coleridge's 'escapist' dream. (McGann, Jerome. *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation*. University of Chicago Press, 1983. p. 99.)

would be duly exorcised from the (political) community—exactly like and for the same reasons as Plato's poet, banned from the Republic. Thus, for a Coleridge re-*reading* his poem in 1816, it is the same '*folly*', and perhaps also '*danger* of interpreting *sensually* what was delivered of objects *super*-sensual' that characterises Luther, which is exhibited in the last stanza of 'Kubla Khan': 'Beware! Beware! / His flashing eyes, his floating hair!'

However, since words can always have 'some practical ill consequence, of far greater moment than would *primo aspectu* have been thought possible', the poem has the potential to yield readings that establish an author figure 'behind' the Khan's utterance who is disturbingly similar to the Khan himself. And because this figure is also similar to the one from whom the conservative Coleridge of 1816 wanted to distance himself—the radical poet and political journalist that he used to be, or else, the 'commanding genius' who easily metamorphoses from poet into politician—Coleridge does everything to relive the poem's political implications in the preface.

As has been mentioned, the kind of hallucinatory reading that characterises both Luther and the 'Author' is linked, in Coleridge's thinking, to the appearance of visions, and the potential of the 'corresponding expressions' to become 'armouries', dangerous weapons that unleash violence. However, even though Coleridge, by evoking this connection in the preface, does admit the 'real resemblance' (*F* II 111) between Luther and himself, he tries to contain what seems to be hardly containable. For Coleridge, as opposed to both Luther and Rousseau, is well aware of the possible 'effects' his enchanting vision may have under certain 'circumstances'. He is poet critic, who 'attains to a notion of his notions', 'reflects on his own reflections' (*BL* I 132), and is re-reading his own vision in order to control it.

First of all, the term 'anodyne', together with the emphasis on the lack of 'effort' serve as a warning sign that the 'Author' produced something that he did not want to produce. In 1814, Coleridge already laments in a letter that laudanum constitutes a 'poison' to his 'volition', which, 'dissevered from the Will', renders him similar to 'paralytic Persons, who attempting to push a step forward in one direction are violently forced round the opposite' (*SL* 175). The 'honey-dew' of the poem, which is clearly evocative of opium,[18] is therefore reduced, in the preface, to the status of a mere anodyne, which not only has a tranquilising effect, but also inhibits the working of 'volition', which would allow for the proper performance of the 'Will'.[19] Further, the 'Author' is, in fact, *saved* from becoming a possessed visionary in the preface, that is, from being identifiable with the ecstatic 'I' of the last stanza: the (posited or fictional) arrival of the person on business from Porlock, just like the fictitious

[18] The Abyssinian Maid of the last stanza, as Paul Youngquist and Nigel Leask also seem to imply, can equally be read as a figure of the Orient, and, therefore, as a figure for the transport through opium to (artificial) paradises. (Leask, Nigel. 'Kubla Khan and Orientalism: The Road to Xanadu Revisited.' Romanticism 4.1 (1998): 1-22; Youngquist, Paul. *Monstrosities: Bodies and British Romanticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press. 2003.

[19] This seems to be all the more important for the Coleridge of 1816 because it was around this time that he was working on his definition of the imagination; and the secondary, or poetic imagination should be always 'co-existing with the conscious will' (*BL* 1, 141.)

friend in Chapter 13 of *Biographia,* or the posited listeners of the conversation poems, disrupts Coleridge's potentially dangerous flights of fancy.[20] Thirdly, Coleridge's emphasis on the 'broken charm', that is, the foregrounding of the repetition involved in the actual composition of the poem places an accent on the written character of a text to be *read*, rather than to be indulged in by succumbing to both its visionary and incantatory charm. Hence, when he recommends that we should read the poem as a 'psychological curiosity', this curiosity might be the obsession of the ecstatic poet, a possible mirror image of Luther, whose words, unless they are *read,* have the potential of turning into weapons that can be used for good *or* ill. Consequently, the preface appears as a second decree, a declaration from Coleridge's part, which overwrites the one starting the poem. It brings into existence an 'author' different from both the 'Author' and the poetic persona of the epilogue.

In fact, the same attempt at the containment of the 'daemonic' occurs in the 1818 edition of *The Friend.* Whereas both the 1809 and the 1812 editions of the essay on Luther and Rousseau include a long disquisition on Coleridge's own experience with ghosts ('A Lady once asked me if I believed in ghosts and apparitions, I answered with truth and simplicity: *No, Madam! I have seen far too many myself*', etc. *F* II 118), this passage disappears in the 1818 version only to reappear on the next pages as a separate essay under the heading 'Ghosts and Apparitions'. Of course, the 1809 essay did need editorial shaping, for the long digression disrupted the argument. However, the moving of the passage to the next pages, that is, the spatial separation of the speaking subject ('Coleridge') from 'Luther and Rousseau', relieves Coleridge's own hallucinatory experiences of the political implications he attached to the seeing of ghosts in the previous essay, which compared two historical figures on the basis of their 'radical nature'. And even if in the 1818 essay on 'Ghosts and Apparitions' Coleridge also alludes to Luther when describing himself ('Now substitute the Phantom from Luther's brain for the images of *reflected* light (the fire for instance', *F*: 1, 145), he does manage to disentangle the problem of apparitions (and especially his own) from the Rousseau question. Hence, although Coleridge admits that he is—as the preface to 'Kubla Khan' also indicates—similar to Luther in some respects, he refuses the presumption that this similarity might lie in their common 'instruments', 'effects', or 'circumstances'. We again witness the poet-critic at work, who (re)reads his own writing and reflects upon it, in order to better control the way it is read, and the author figure it potentially engenders.

[20] See also: Perkins, David. 'The Imaginative Vision of 'Kubla Klan': On Coleridge's Introductory Note', *Coleridge, Keats, and the Imagination: Romanticism and Adam's Dream*, Eds. J. Robert Barth and John L. Mahoney. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1990. p. 180.