

Coleridge's Desire for Other Jouissance: A Lacanian Reading of *Kubla Khan*

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Summary

This article argues that desire begins Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* and moves it forward. Coleridge projects himself onto Kubla's garden, transcends his pleasure-dome, and wishes to revive the Abyssinian maid's song in order to build that dome in air and experience a moment of jouissance. Subjectivity is returned in the end by Coleridge's move from pleasure to jouissance and back to Kubla's garden to reconcile conflicting desires for Symbolic pleasure and Real jouissance. Although desire begins the quest for the maid's song as the lost object-cause of desire, the inspired poet returns to the Symbolic order to prove that he is trapped in desire for the maid as an ever-eluding signifier that has a foot in the Real and cannot be articulated by Coleridge.

Opsomming

Hierdie artikel voer aan dat begeerte Coleridge se *Kubla Khan* begin en dit vorentoe dryf. Coleridge projekteer homself in Kubla se tuin, transendeer sy plesierpaleis en begeer om die Abessiniese diensmeisie se lied te laat herleef met die oog daarop om daardie paleis denkbeeldig (*in air*) te herskep en 'n oomblik van *jouissance* te ervaar. Subjektiviteit word uiteindelik herstel deur Coleridge se beweging van plesier na *jouissance* en terug na Kubla se tuin om teenstrydige begeertes vir Simboliese genot en Werklike *jouissance* te versoen. Alhoewel begeerte begin met die soektog na die diensmeisie se lied as die verlore objek-oorsaak van begeerte, keer die besielde digter terug na die Simboliese orde om te bewys dat hy in sy begeerte vir die diensmeisie vasgevang is as 'n immer ontwykende aanduier wat 'n voet in die Werklike het en nie deur Coleridge verwoord kan word nie.

Introduction

Catherine Belsey states that “for psychoanalysis, dreams recall a desire that is present in the memory, whether or not it was ever realized” (2008: 97). The seemingly disorganised *Kubla Khan* that is a narrativisation of Coleridge's desire, is believed to be a dream, and Perkins is right to say that dreams “might rise from our inmost being where we are one with the all” (2004: 258). George Watson, beautifully, states that one knows “everything ... about [*Kubla Khan*]” yet not “what it is about” (1977: 119). The “incantatory magic”

(Prickett 1970: 3) of Samuel Taylor Coleridge in *Kubla Khan: or, A Vision in a Dream* (1797) and the indeterminate meaning of the poem have haunted Coleridge scholars, though some have simply referred to “the Romantic theme of lost inspiration” (Perkins 2004: 256) to be the underlying idea. Mahoney believes that *Kubla Khan* is one of the great imaginative trio (with *Christabel* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*) that “celebrate[s] the power of mind, [and] of imagination to shape diversity into harmony, [and] to achieve a sympathetic oneness with the beauty of nature” (2011: 135). These are apt interpretations of the poem, for universal bond and unity the lack of which Coleridge suffered was of paramount importance to the imitative poet who was influenced by Unitarian ideas and whose poem can be said to be a quest for what seemed to him as lost wholeness.

To these readings one might add the poet's self-realisation, or discovery of the self and consciousness of his (fragmented) identity which might have been the result of his unhappy marriage, world of fear and grief as well as failed domestic life from which Coleridge did not want to flee, for, to name one reason, Sara Hutchinson was really a source of joy to him. The Wordsworthian holy communion with nature gave place to the linking of man and mother nature (as a source of inspiration) in Coleridge who passionately felt the need to return to a mother figure who seems to be the Lady in *Dejection* or the Abyssinian maid in *Kubla Khan*. According to Prickett “to create a symbol of the mind in nature was, for both Wordsworth and Coleridge, to produce a symbol of the relationship between the mind and nature” (1970: 39).

What seems to be ignored and thus, makes *Kubla Khan* apt to be read in the light of Lacan is that Coleridge's imaginative attempt and poetic wish was to create his poetic ego and remember the unity between man and mother nature as the only place for love and joy, and not necessarily gain a “philosophic mind” (l. 191) as Wordsworth refers to in his *Intimations of Immortality*. This is reminiscent of Homans' words that “the child learns to love nature by gradually extending his love for his mother, and nature takes on a maternal configuration – the borders between nature and mother are permeable” (1980: 32). As a poetic creation about the process of othering that indicates Coleridge's desire to return to the mother as well as telling the story of the desire for jouissance, *Kubla Khan* is Coleridge's attempt at giving some expression to his story of the repressed unity, and remember the unique experience of jouissance. As a fragment that can evoke a moment of jouissance, the poem seems to be a wonderful display of Coleridge's mental journey that will be discussed in the light of Lacan and his ambiguous terminology.

Accordingly, the argument of this article ventures to settle the fact that *Kubla Khan* is the poet's search for (lost) identity, joy and spiritual renewal, and reveals an epiphanic moment of jouissance when the desire for the Abyssinian maid as the object-cause sets Coleridge's desire in motion. Thus,

we will have to see how Coleridge, caught in the Lacanian Symbolic order and unable to express himself, creates a utopian setting and recovers a dream in order to establish his identity as a poet, and experience an escape from the harsh realities of the society to a different state where there is the possibility of a moment of *jouissance*. What the concept of *jouissance* adds to the previous studies is that Coleridge's return to Kubla's pleasure-garden in the figure of the inspired poet is the poet's reconciliation of conflicting desires of Symbolic integration and Real *jouissance* after having failed to articulate the maid who has a foot in the forbidden zone of the Real. This article uses *jouissance's* modalities in ways mostly agreed upon and referred to by Lacan scholars.

Discussion

The present study grows from the current trend of Lacanian psychoanalysis that is a still-growing approach to literary texts. The critical findings of this study, hopefully, fill the gap in previous research where a good number of critics in the field support the claim that the Abyssinian maid of Coleridge's *Kubla Khan* is, merely, a source of inspiration or a symbol of the creative power of imagination.

Traditionally, the poem has been approached from the Nietzschean view of the dual Dionysian and Apollonian forces representing disorder and order respectively. Lee Spinks refers to the role of art and the mediation of the Dionysian by the Apollonian in the poem while David Perkins believes that the poem shows the power of the poet and the theme of (lost) inspiration. And Edward Bostetter in his *The Romantic Ventriloquists: Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats, Shelley, Byron* shows the disjunction between the Romantic poets' vision of the ideal and the real. One can also refer to the criticism of Elisabeth Schneider, J.B. Beer, Eli Marcovitz, M. H. Abrams and J.L. Lowes as highly significant cases of psychological approach to Coleridge's poetry.

One trend in the Lacanian research is to see how the debatable concept of "jouissance" works in literary texts and discloses things about the unconscious. Ehsan Azari in his *Lacan and the Destiny of Literature* approaches the poetry of John Donne and John Ashberry as well as Shakespeare's plays and Joyce's novels based on Lacan's conceptualisation of desire, *jouissance* and the *sinthome*. The relationship between Coleridge's poetry and 20th century psychoanalysis is explored by Lisa Stokes-King as an instance who has shown interest in Coleridge's inability to access a language capable of recreating his visions. Joel Faflak in *Subjects Presumed to Know: The Scene of Romantic Psychoanalysis* is concerned with the emergence of the discourse of psychoanalysis within certain romantic texts and how they show the effects of the unconscious. The necessity of character revelation makes the Lacanian approach an apt one to learn more about identity construction, subjectivity

and (the desire towards) death. Thus, this study is a new consciousness of Coleridge and his poem *Kubla Khan* in which he wishes to recreate the vision of the Abyssinian maid as the signifier that cannot be easily articulated.

Kubla's Garden

Kubla the "Big Other" in the poem is, actually, the creator of a garden whose walls separate it from the world, and cause fragmentation. Interestingly enough, Coleridge imagines a utopian setting – a state of mind – by which he seeks to show that he is willing to make an imaginative leap from the constraints or the pleasure principle of a fatherly world where dreams cannot be realised. Coleridge makes the setting the land of desires and, a refuge from reality which seems to be the poet's attempt to fill the void or gap caused by Kubla, and access the inaccessible jouissance by locating the missing object within the maid who has a relation to the signifier of the other. In other words, Coleridge transforms Kubla's (father's) garden (Abyssinia or China, and it must be noted that the Romantics, in contrast to the 18th century poets, paid great attention to the Orient) to a secret enclave where he is likely to experience joy, and which provides him (the child) with bliss, and the sense of unity with the mother (Abyssinian maid). Coleridge cannot reach the maid, for according to Lacan, "the demand for love directed to the mother will theoretically always be disappointed since the mother desires someone else by law" (Ferrell 1996: 88). The garden is a place ruled by the rules of Kubla who possesses the maid who belongs to that Oriental setting and, from a Lacanian view, desires Kubla. To access joy and meet the maid's desire, Coleridge who identifies himself with the father-like Kubla feels the need to do the same creation: go beyond the barrier of Kubla's garden and create a more lively garden.

Coleridge feels like a child who has left his mythical home for Kubla's garden. His search for a promised land, and the desire to fix the broken bond between himself and the mother as the first other, and experience a (re)fusion with the mother gave birth to Xanadu as a replica of a promised land. Since Coleridge was after the satisfaction of his wish for wholeness, desire to (re)experience a bliss, and gain a lost paradise, he gave birth to the African/Abyssinian setting that would imply the poet's desire to return to Abyssinia as home to joy. In Behrendt's words, *Kubla Khan* is, truly, a poem "of human inability to sustain a paradisaal, visionary state in the face of the interruptions of a mundane world that is inherently inhospitable to "vision"" (2012: 137). Coleridge needed to leave Kubla's garden for a more paradisaal and blissful state.

Coleridge uses the unifying symbols of the river, cave, symphony, and dome belonging to the unconscious of his poetic garden to show a unified world. Hazlitt was the first who associated rivers with creativity: "the principle of

the imagination resembles the emblem of the serpent [...] for ever flowing into itself, – circular, and without beginning or end” (Beer 1977: 270). The miraculous sunny caves of ice are, also, often associated with creativity and unity. Pragatwutisarn’s words are noteworthy that “the cave representing the mother’s place is forgotten and has to be remembered” (2008: 93). Kubla’s garden as a mental projection shows that Coleridge had already decided on the truth of his imaginative world where he could experience a moment of jouissance. Wylie believes that the reflection of “the light of the sun as the expression of God is his essential form of energy” (1984: 504). The sun that shines on the caves stands as a symbolic image of the sublime suggesting a feeling of frustration and pleasure not easily comprehensible, and very close to the feeling of jouissance indeed. According to Faflak the poem’s “miracle of rare device” (l. 35) figures the shifting topography of the poet’s drifting imagination, and thus the powerful and threatening mobility of mental processes, associations, and representations” (2012: 392). “A sunny pleasure-dome with caves of ice” (l. 36) that is “a miracle of rare device” reminds us of Daiches’ words on the shaping spirit of poetic imagination that is “both warm, in its sympathy with all creation, and ice cold with the coldness of ecstasy” (1971: 898). Full of cold fear of pleasure and warm hope for jouissance, Coleridge abounds his poem with symbols highly associated with his wish to experience unity and joy. The truth of Coleridge’s poetic world seems to be more real and adequate than Kubla’s human creation, for it is the poet’s idealising and unifying power of the (secondary) imagination that reconciles opposites and creates unity and, in Carlson’s words, mediates “between the ideal and the real world” (1988: 25). From Coleridge “we learn the adequacies of the imagination and the inadequacies of things as they are” (Bromwich 2011: 169). Coleridge’s imagination was the means by which Coleridge could approach jouissance or the symbolic silence lying beyond words.

Jouissance

Not lust or libido in the Freudian sense of the term, the controversial Lacanian jouissance and the pursuit of it have been matters of dispute among Lacan scholars. One of the influential ways scholars have tried to make this clear is that they have defined it with desire. Accordingly, subjects are believed to be split between desire and jouissance, and “desire, propelled towards a jouissance that it cannot have, is synonymous with lack” (Parkin-Gounelas 2001: 83). Braunstein, also, refers to the significance of what the incomprehensible jouissance implies and how it stands as the opposite pole of desire (2003).

According to Lacan, “desire is a defense, a defense against going beyond a limit in jouissance” (Fink 1997: 165) and the subject “does not simply satisfy

a desire” but “enjoys [jouit] desiring” (qtd. in Evans 1998: 5). Since desire is a function of language, it originates from the Other and manifests lack. It “seeks only transgression, and that makes desire entirely dependent on the law (that is, the Other) which brings it into being” (Fink 1997: 207). Our desires can be expressed through language but language cannot satisfy the poet’s desire: “it is precisely because desire is articulable that it is not articulable” (Lacan 1966b: 302). Desire seems to be of being one with the Other. This is why Braunstein, based on Lacan’s teachings, understands that jouissance “can only be approached through language and that the other is always involved” (2003: 107-108) which shows why Coleridge creates Kubla’s garden to approach jouissance. According to Malpas and Wake “desire could only be satisfied in the end, which is to say in death: it can thus become the desire for annihilation of self and other” (2006: 172).

Scholars who have written on jouissance have used the following to clarify the term: sensation beyond pleasure; enjoyment; painful pleasure; satisfaction, and it must be noted that Lacan says “jouissance appears not purely and simply as the satisfaction of a need but as the satisfaction of a drive” (Lacan 1992: 322); pleasure in pain; suffering; senseless pleasure; moment of intense feeling; pain beyond pleasure and language; momentary return to the imaginary order, and “the only possible escape from the symbolic function” (Castle 2007: 170). Lacanian theory assumes jouissance to be ultimate fulfilment, but this ultimate, pleasing wholeness must be sacrificed upon entrance into the Symbolic. However, though it has been sacrificed, the subject can still experience traces of jouissance by connecting with an object of desire and through art” (Coats 2004: 93). Malpas and Wake define jouissance as “ecstatic or orgasmic bliss that transcends or even shatters one’s everyday experience of the world” (2006: 211), and Braunstein believes that the term is “the dimension that opens beyond satisfaction precisely because the path of desire, which would lead back in search of the lost and impossible object, is closed and only “driving” is possible” (2003: 106).

Ragland-Sullivan sees jouissance as “the essence or quality that gives one’s life its value” (1995: 88) which signifies the fact that jouissance is linked to the death-drive which is the “name given to that constant desire in the subject to break through the pleasure principle towards [...] a certain excess jouissance; thus, jouissance is ‘the path towards death’” (Evans 1996: 94). Based on this, Coats defines jouissance as “the point where life and death fuse” (2004: 95) and Sarup claims that jouissance “creates a space in which the human subject is confronted by the unconscious which is striving to express what is really forbidden to the speaking subject – jouissance and death” (qtd. in Castle 2007: 170).

Coleridge seems to suffer from his cutting off of the promise of jouissance experienced in contact or perfect unity with the mother’s body. As it will be discussed the concept of jouissance is traced in the Abyssinian maid’s song who as Coleridge’s object of desire appears to belong to the Real. Kubla’s

happy garden is the “pleasure principle” of the poem, or the law that prevents Coleridge as a subject to experience the bliss of perfect joy. Kubla’s happy garden hinders jouissance which “does not point to anything, nor does it serve any purpose whatsoever; it is an unpredictable experience, beyond the pleasure principle” (Braunstein 2003: 106-107). The sad poet prefers to build a different state and “that dome in air” (l. 46) symbolising fulfilment and unity, where the feeling of jouissance can be experienced. According to Quinet, in Lacanian terms, sadness belongs to the sphere of jouissance located beyond the pleasure principle” (2002: 5). Coleridge shows this in the figure of the inspired poet at the end of the poem who seems likely to have visited jouissance beyond pleasure. Having touched the Real with no promise of articulating the maid, Coleridge comes back to the Symbolic order to secure the position of a sane subject desperate to tell the story of a failed grasp of the missing object.

The Abyssinian Maid

The Abyssinian maid “in a vision once I saw” (l. 38) has been the focus of much commentary. The maid for whom Coleridge shows passion is one of the most important projections present in Coleridge’s disturbing fantasy of Kubla’s colonisation of her. Coleridge recalls the vision of the maid and is drawn into a reverie to see her, i. e., Coleridge unconsciously desires the maid, and his space of fantasy, to use Zizek’s words, “functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desires” (1992: 8). Braunstein says that “desire points towards a lost and absent object; it is lack in being, and the craving for fulfilment in the encounter with the lost object. Its concrete expression is the phantasy” (2003: 106). One may like to say that Coleridge wishes, enviously, that the ghost-like Abyssinian maid appear to him as a muse or be revived and possessed by him: “from his store of memory or imagination, [Coleridge] invokes the Abyssinian maid as a muse” (Perkins 2004: 257). Coleridge’s muse as a proxy for Sara Hutchinson can represent the hidden, the dark, the repressed or the unknown that must be remembered. She is not a phallic mother but a mother substitute or (maternal) other by whom female or other jouissance is realised.

The strange imaginary encounter between Coleridge and the maid shows that he feels in exile from her, and desires to experience unity with her. Despite the fact that the maid is related to the poet’s desire, Coleridge’s constant sense that the maid is missing from his life confirms that his desire for her is a lack. The missing maid who appears as a stranger, an other and a delusion to Coleridge is associated with darkness, lack and the death-drive. The attempt to remember her and “revive within me / Her symphony and song” (ll. 42-43) signifies that his pleasure is beyond satisfaction, and her loss has, for Coleridge, been lack of her as an object (a). Evans states that “there

is only one object of desire, objet petit A [...] not the object towards which desire tends, but the cause of desire. Desire is not a relation to an object, but a relation to a lack" (1996: 38). Since the maid is missing, she becomes the lack and the cause of Coleridge's desire. Coleridge is constantly drawn towards the cause but reaches its signifier, a.

According to Boothby (2013), from a Lacanian account, "the conception of death, albeit a loss of loved person or some abstraction such as a person's country, liberty or an ideal in the Freudian sense, can be conceived of as opening "a hole in the real"" (Lacan 1958-59: 292). Coleridge projects this hole on the screen of the maid who appears as not only the ideal woman of the poem but also a musical space in which he can locate his unified being. The maid as the signifier of jouissance and reflection of Coleridge's desires arouses jouissance in him who feels jouissance for her because she leads him to such madness manifest in the "flashing eyes" and "floating hair" of the inspired poet whom "all should cry, Beware! Beware!" (l. 49).

Excluded from the Symbolic order or Kubla's garden, the Abyssinian maid seems to be associated with the impossible Real as another domain of experience. The maid is not present, has no name, is unsayable and cannot be inscribed in the Symbolic order or Coleridge's poem; nor can her song be remembered or revived or symbolised. House believes that when Coleridge uses the word "could" to represent his wish to revive the song, there is blockage in the process of creation and this is "a vision of the ideal human life ... this is the creation of the poet in his frenzy" (1953: 122). She is beyond Coleridge's control, and represents the hidden that has reappeared; in other words, he approaches her in order to know his own desire as well as what she wants or desires. Coleridge transforms the repressed to poetic language in order to make the unknowable experience of jouissance momentarily knowable. This seems tempting enough to take the maid as the object a of the poem.

Object a

Up to now, I tried to link the role of the Abyssinian maid with Coleridge's desire whose male gaze of the imagination captures and objectifies her "in a vision once" (l. 38). His masculine gaze and desire not only objectify but also silence her, thus, she comes back to haunt his mind as an uncanny figure (return of the repressed and the forgotten). Perhaps one reason for the poem to be a fragment is that Coleridge never reaches the maid, and leaves the poem with no end. The maid who has a foot in the Real comes and leaves as a visionary figure, and it is, again, Coleridge who is left sad, and his lack not filled (the gap is neither filled nor materialised). In "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" (1797) Coleridge cannot accompany his friends and suffers his absence from the scene. Miller says his condition is that of a loner as described

by Roland Barthes: "It is the other who leaves, it is I who remain. The other is in a condition of perpetual departure, of journeying; the other is, by vocation, migrant, fugitive; I – I who love [...] am motionless [...] nailed to the spot" (2009: 61-62). According to Fink "an object becomes object a at the very moment one is threatened with its loss" (1997: 38). Obsession with loss begins Coleridge's poem where he can experience the temporary stay of object a that will soon be lost.

From the 1960s on, Lacan used object a differently, and, actually, "Thing" gave place to object a. When the subject enters language, through symbolic castration, the subject becomes a speaking being and is constituted by a primordial loss that cannot be filled and relates to the idea of a lack marking both the subject and the Other. Thus, when we mourn the loss of someone it is because we view ourselves to be their lack, i.e. viewing oneself as the object cause of desire for the Other is one particular way that the subject deals with such an inherent lack (Salecl 2004). Object a that belongs to the realm of the Real is the desire (as lack) and the substitute for the missing jouissance, for it is the object that reminds one of the lost jouissance. The Abyssinian maid functions as the object a causing Coleridge's desire. The maid as the object a or the missing object of Coleridge's desire signifies lack and is a reminder of the lost other. She represents Coleridge's desire for the m(other), primordial love, joy and harmony. Coleridge's mourning the absence of the maid implies that she is not the reachable final meaning for him, and that he cannot experience perfect unity in the Real.

According to Homer, object a is "the left-over of the real; it is that which escapes symbolization and is beyond representation" (2005: 88). The maid's "symphony and song" (l. 43) are beyond the poet's words, and as something unknown must be just revived. Though desirable and unattainable, the song is not outside Coleridge who wishes to revive the song (transferred to Kubla's art) and create "that dome in air". To Coleridge, the unattainable maid comes as the Lacanian Real, object of desire, interruption and threat causing horror, for she is an impossible/dead object only to be revived. As a sign, the maid represents a void that can never be filled.

Azari believes that the object a is "a reminder of the lost other [and] always escapes language" (2008: 114). It is the lack that lures Coleridge beyond language with the wish to circle around the maid, for reaching her would be the end of life. The song as a mirror and a form of art is the language that can remind Coleridge of the primordial joy.

Fay's words are also relevant that "the artwork is song, which the speaker claims to have heard in the vision but no longer be able to recall" (2012: 113). The maid's voice/song as an object is absent within the text. To put it in other words, Coleridge wishes to revive an object of desire – coming from his unconscious – that is deferred, and not easily deciphered. Lacan suggests that "when there is a gap in the Symbolic order and the place of the Other is deleted or seriously disordered, a gap opens in the Imaginary order, leading to various

imaginary distortions, and also new phenomenon in the Real order such as (auditory hallucinations)” (Sarup 1992: 109). It seems that it is the maid’s song that sets Coleridge’s desire in motion. Since it is not reachable, Coleridge continues his life as an inspired poet who has circled around object a and is circled around by others.

Coleridge’s wish to revive the song implies his attempt to refind what is missing (like a child crying for its mother). Coleridge’s never-ending search for the lost object of desire that is not reachable transforms it into a figure of jouissance or false promise. Coleridge is never able to achieve wholeness or build the dome in air. The maid’s song comes as treasure in a worthless chest or the link between the subject and the other. Azari says that the “subject’s desire is directed to this object rather than the Other, which is an impossible object” (2008: 19). Coleridge wishes to immerse himself in the song and move to some nameless state. He, therefore, imagines listening to a song that, simultaneously, hears and does not hear – a song that does not exist but in Coleridge’s fantasy – and wishes to become one with. He knows the song (the impossible object) only through language, which is why it is considered as a symbol of lack. The poet’s wish to be inspired by the song is the desire for the uncanny return of the repressed, and proves that he is unable to transform his suffering and pain into language. Suppression of the poet’s desire is best shown in “that deep romantic chasm” (l. 12) that is “holy and enchanted” (l. 14) and from where “with ceaseless turmoil seething” (l. 13) “a mighty fountain momentarily was forced” (l. 19).

Since speech does not help Coleridge with his unknown feelings, he imagines or wishes to revive the song. This shows Coleridge’s difficulty in describing what seems to be a dream now recalled. The interdependence between the two figures and the painful pleasure of the encounter makes Coleridge demand to revive a vision that is lost to him. This comes as a kind of fantasy through which the poet sustains the illusion of unity with the maid. He enjoys thinking and remembering the song that acts as a source of inspiration for Coleridge who, with the song revived, can make the pleasure dome in air, i.e. become one with the world, and experience the Real in a moment of jouissance. Thus, he may be able to transcend pleasure (Kubla’s pleasure-dome) and reach beyond himself and the walls of the garden in the object. Kubla’s garden shows the horror of a distinction that has occurred: Coleridge and mother. The “twice five miles of fertile ground” of the garden is surrounded with walls – number ten, according to Cirlot “raises all things to unity and is considered the number of perfection” (1963: 223) – the transgression of which helps Coleridge be identified with sensation beyond pleasure as a way of accessing jouissance. Coleridge recalls a dream he already has within himself, and his tendency to remember is his desire for the return of the primal joy. Coleridge’s poetic confrontation with the Real, and impossibility of complete satisfaction are shown in his use of “if” signifying that he has not been able to decipher the maid’s song into language. Coleridge

who suffers the loss of the experience itself begins a search that is caused by a first loss, the acceptance of which is his symbolic castration. He manages to realise “some compensation for loss” (Miller 2009: 61) and that is his imagination which can help him approach the moment of jouissance in order to compensate for the loss caused by the absence of the maid.

Coleridge sees himself as a the creator of a dome that is sacred, sublime and aesthetic. The imaginative dome he will create with symphony and song – disbelief must be willingly suspended – shows the desire for the fullness and unity of life. Kubla’s pleasure dome is “a literal and geographically delineated place in Xanadu” (Fay 2012: 113), and the garden is representative of the pleasure principle that limits jouissance. Coleridge imagines “the shadow of the dome of pleasure / Floated midway on the waves” (ll. 31-2) which may imply that Coleridge’s aim seems to be objectless, and Kubla’s dome is likely to be destroyed, for what is “heard from far” is “ancestral voices prophesying war” (ll. 29-30). Waves are often associated with joy and death, thus, Coleridge’s search for joy is a dangerous one that may lead to death. In his discussion of *Richard II*, Žizek refers to how Bushy describes the object a in consoling the Queen: an entity that has no substantial consistency, which is in itself “nothing but confusion” and which acquires a definite shape only when viewed from a standpoint distorted by the subject’s desires and fears – as such, a mere “shadow of what it is not” (qtd. in Harris 2010: 104). The shadow as well as the song he remembers seem to be visionary and confusing, thus, Coleridge’s desire to build the dome in air is his poetic attempt to give shape to the song and become one with everything. He recognises that the world of shadow can be more real than the supposedly real world of Kubla. Coleridge desires to be one with the shadow of the dome that, to him, best shows the dome as a symbol of lack and may be more real than the dome itself.

Desire is shown in the act of wailing that must be read with other parts of the poem, especially in the image of the adrift dome as well as the non-realised song. The sound of “woman wailing for her demon-lover!” (l. 16) – who is another attribute of Coleridge’s mind – seems to be painful and suggests Coleridge’s wish to experience painful pleasure or visit demon-lover who does not exist at all. “Wail” or impending mourning shows lack of speech and the inability to express desire as well as mourning absence, for Coleridge anticipates his object of desire through loss, wailing and mourning for the lack. The “demon-lover” is, the same as the maid, absent and, therefore, another cause of desire for the wailing woman to be haunted by for ever. Coleridge’s pursuit of the loved object might be tragic, for in order to revive the song of the Abyssinian maid within himself, he must die a symbolic death – the milk and honey that appear in the final lines of the poem suggest Coleridge’s wish to die a symbolic death – and experience jouissance that comes as a demon-lover. The “ancestral voices prophesying war” (l. 30) heard by Kubla symbolise, according to Robert Graves, “the threat against Britain” (Schneider 1970: 239), and anticipate, according to Faflak, “the collective

unconscious of Carl Jung” (2012: 393). As an attribute of Coleridge’s personality, Kubla who is placed in the Symbolic order represents Coleridge’s death-wish and the desire to suppress “ancestral voices” or the “no” / “name” / “law” of the father calling the poet back to the Symbolic order. Lacan states that “it is in the name of the father that we must recognize the support of the symbolic function which, from the dawn of history, has identified his person with the figure of the law” (1977a: 67). Jouissance is visionary and always under a threat from the world of reality. The voices cry that the price or pound of flesh paid for accessing jouissance is castration or giving part of the self away. Not irrelevant to what is mentioned here, lines 110 through 111 from act five, scene six of Shakespeare’s *The Two Noble Kinsmen* read: “That we should things desire, which do cost us / The loss of our desire!” As a mourning figure, Coleridge wails for his beloved object, and is afraid of death and loss of his desire, for that would mean confronting the Real. The death-drive that begins in the unconscious is associated with the Real and jouissance, and is “a drive which embraces the negative horror of the Real” (Kearney 2003: 98).

Death, according to Smith, “is not an object but a law” (2010: 188). Coleridge’s death-driven mind seeks the primal unity, and his use of opium can be, in this regard, said to be a means to not only soothe his pain but also open himself up to the pleasure of death, and experience primordial joy and unity. Coleridge sees that death is where he can meet the fulfilment of his wishes, for what Coleridge was wishing for was death or renouncement of his split self in the face/song of the Abyssinian maid as the other in whose gaze Coleridge is caught. Smith beautifully differentiates between death that “would destroy everything” and death-drive whose job is “to preserve” (2010: 9). Therefore, Coleridge’s poetic journey in this poem is from life (Kubla’s pleasure-dome on earth) to death (the poet’s jouissance-dome in air) and back to life in Xanadu. However, it must be noted that despite the fact that the poet is where he began his poem, he is not the same person but one who has fed on “honey-dew” and “drunk the milk of Paradise” (ll. 53-54), for contact with the Real leads to horror.

The way the poet is described in the concluding lines of the poem – “flashing eyes, floating hair” (l. 50) – reminds us of Lacan’s words in his *Seminar II* where he compares the frightening head of Medusa to the Real as the “object of anxiety par excellence” (1988: 164). The society must “beware” Coleridge the poet and “weave a circle round him thrice” (l. 51) whose eyes show his fear of the Abyssinian maid as well as fear of castration by a symbolic father-figure. The poet as a threat to the Symbolic order and Kubla’s garden is circled around as he circled around the Abyssinian maid without gaining her. In Evans’ words, “objet petit a is any object which sets desire in motion [...] the drives do not seek to attain the objet petit a, but rather circle around it” (1996: 128). The river circles around the garden and reaches “down to a sunless sea” (l. 5), as the poet circled around the Abyssinian maid and reached a shadowy dome in air; and now the poet himself is circled around by the society, and

wishes to reach the mother sea symbolising both pleasure of life and jouissance of death. Fear dominates but Coleridge never reaches death or the "sunless sea". According to Kristeva, the origin of all poetic activity is fear: "any practice of speech [...] is a language of fear [...] a language of want" (1982: 38). The experience of jouissance via words is a fearful pleasure, a "holy dread" (l. 52) not accepted by the society.

It is important that Coleridge should see "the shadow of the dome of pleasure / Floated midway on the waves" (ll. 31-32). The river in the garden – itself a primordial image and a mirror – erupts from the unconscious part of the poet's mind, and is representative of Coleridge's repressed material that has returned and is transformed through this fragmentary poem, into an expression of his desire for the sea of joy. Coleridge supposed that "the garden of Eden, where language began, was in Abyssinia" (Bloom & Trilling 1973: 256). And Wordsworth, in book 6 of *The Prelude* sings of "the mighty flood of Nile / Poured from his fount of Abyssinian clouds / To fertilize the whole Egyptian plain" (ll. 615-617). If Kubla's garden is representative of the Symbolic order, then Coleridge's quest is from language and pleasure to jouissance and a prelinguistic world that appears in the closing lines of the poem where Coleridge receives milk, honey and dew (inspiration) from the river of his muse, the maid. Spinks states that "the sacred river represents the aesthetic transformation of pre-cultural energy into a form that reconnects humanity with the power of the natural world" (2003: 34). Coleridge seeks refuge in the motherly dome that is associated with honey and milk symbolising "female tenderness and mercy [...] The promised land is a land flowering with milk and honey" (Ferber 2007: 126) that may also refer to something felt within, something the poet wishes to revive and remember.

To sum up, I am concerned to suggest that Coleridge who sees the maid as the reconciler of life and death, reconciles conflicting desires for Imaginary wholeness, Symbolic integration, and Real jouissance in the unifying figure of the inspired poet, for he can touch the Real by means of the object a, the Abyssinian maid. In other words, Coleridge's poetic attempt to touch the Real ends only in meeting the object a in the shape of the Abyssinian maid whom he has seen in a vision.

In Mahoney's words, the poem moves towards "triumphal conclusions of blessing and redemption, of acclaim for the poet who "on honey-dew hath fed, / And drunk the milk of Paradise" (2011: 136). Coleridge does not pay for the jouissance, and the inspired poet implies that Coleridge's subjectivity lies in realising the significance of existence in the Imaginary and the Symbolic. Coleridge's desire is different from Antigone's, for it does not seem genuinely for death, and mourning for his former self, he returns to the Symbolic register. For Lacan "what ultimately matters is not the truth but the hour" (1977b: 16) and, in Lacanian terms, truth is "a relationship between a subject and the unconscious. There is nothing certain in the unconscious" (Sarup 1992: 41). In the hour of inspiration, Coleridge develops into an

inspired poet to prove that the poet who has had the chance to re-experience the Imaginary order can create different truths. Coleridge in his own hour and acting on his own desire avoids the hour of the Abyssinian maid as the object of desire and his separation from the other's desire helps him transfer his desire to another object. Thus, his return to the Symbolic order is his surrendering to the hour of the Other and entry into language. According to Lacan, "the hour and truth refer to the occasion when a subject enters language" (Azari 2008: 91). Coleridge does not die in the Real but dies to be born in language as the inspired poet who wishes to tell his story as the truth of his hour. It is at this particular moment that the inspired poet repeats Coleridge's visit to the Real and, since this cannot last long, Coleridge returns to the Symbolic order as a poet with a deeper insight into reality.

Coleridge who was mad for the maid and her song, mourns for what is or was lost (the lost object) signifying that he does not die, and bears the separation from the maid. His symbolic return to the society and decided preference for the world of reality may be the reason he remained a poet to the end of his life; he could keep himself in the hour and experience a moment of jouissance without experiencing the (Real) horror of confronting death required for the full experience of that joy. Accordingly, Sarup defines the Lacanian Real "as a realm which has a link to the dimensions of sexuality and death" (1992: 85). *Kubla Khan* ends with a gap – the maid's absence creates the gap/hole that can be opened in the Real – and the inspired poet experiences no breakdown which implies the fact that there has been not too much jouissance that is deadly. The egoist Coleridge leaves the inspired poet at the end to, like the Ancient Mariner, continue telling the story of doomed desire. The miracle of "pleasure-dome with caves of ice" (l. 36) that does not leave Coleridge's mind, suggests the imaginative reconciliation of pleasure and jouissance, and reality and Real that was present from the very beginning of the poem. This represents unity (becoming one with nature; joining the vast and becoming identityless) that is, from Lacan's point of view, subject's supreme desire. According to Lacan, "an eternal and irreducible human desire ... an eternal desire for the nonrelationship of zero, where identity is meaningless" (Jackson 1981: 77). In short, with the help of imagination may Coleridge remain hopeful to recollect the maid's song and a moment of jouissance amid loneliness, duty and responsibility. Coleridge is transformed: jouissance of the Abyssinian maid transforms him to the poet who has drunk "the milk of Paradise" (l. 54) and is able to feel (and not only see) unity and the joy of integrating his inner thoughts and feelings to the poetic landscape of Kubla.

Conclusion

To conclude the discussion of *Kubla Khan* as a literary object, this article has applied Lacanian desire and jouissance to Coleridge's poem in order to show his wish for pleasure, and hope to obtain jouissance via the maid's song as object a. Coleridge imagines jouissance with the help of the maid as a fantasy that makes a limited jouissance possible, and wishes to overcome lack. Not truly liberated from the restrictions of the Symbolic order, Coleridge who remains trapped in desire seeks refuge from the Symbolic order of his society in his poem that is potential enough to yield textual jouissance. Coleridge can still imagine, anticipate and experience a fleeting moment of jouissance as well as nature's gifts of love, unity, and joy even after he is over with his fragmentary poem.

Coleridge's return to nature (sunless sea or mother earth) provides him with the chance to find an outlet for what seems to be hidden and repressed. Coleridge's desire for self-discovery and satisfaction of the desire to know himself and experience unity shows itself in his poetic attempt to build paradise on earth. As long as the maid is absent, Coleridge can desire; thus, as a subject who has gained an imaginative insight into the truth of lack, he seems to be reconciled with the existence of an imperfect world. As Norris notes "Romanticism holds out the utopian idea of a merging between mind and object, a state of awareness so finely attuned to experience that all such distinctions drop away and the knower is at one with the known" (1982: 94). The secret of the inspired poet that is never revealed acts as the lack the desire for which may begin another fragment with the possibility of a moment of jouissance. Yes, desire does not know what the object is but beware, Coleridge the poet might have, temporarily, experienced the object that, now and then, is remembered in such fragments.

Coleridge loses part of himself, in his poetic attempt, to master the surrounding people and objects. Coleridge's return signifies that he can never reach the perfect stage leaving his dome in the air. Coleridge's story then becomes the story of lover being constantly subjected to the desire and the gaze of the other which causes a continuous fragmentation of the split self that strives for unity. Coleridge never reaches the maid and her unmaterialisable song, for she cannot be realised and understood by Coleridge, and repeatedly, Kubla (father, society) disrupts unity. Subjectivity is returned in the end.

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COLERIDGE'S DESIRE FOR OTHER JOUISSANCE: ...

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