

Coleridge's Orientalist View of Mahomet

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Abstract: From an Orientalist viewpoint, Coleridge and his poems were shaped by the discursive web of the 18th century culture, and he was not free from the worldliness of historical forces. However, it is not difficult to see resistance towards dominant ideologies in his poems. One example is Coleridge's sentiment towards the systematically-misrepresented Islam and its prophet. Coleridge's radical interpretation of Islam in the 1790s made him feel the need, with Southey, for a model of moral regeneration after observing European corruption and having lost his radical interest in the millennial politics of the French Revolution. The radical act of composing "Mahomet" signifies Coleridge's endeavor to change the distorted image of Mahomet and Islam that to him was the beginning of the Unitarian revolution and the symbol of the revolutionary France. However, he perpetuates the prejudice of Christianity's superiority over Islam as a deviation of the true religion introduced by Christ. Coleridge's approach is imaginative reconciliation of Christo-Islamic inspirations to offer his political thoughts and avoid identification with English Unitarianism.

Key words: Coleridge, orientalism, Mahomet, islam, christianity

Oueijan (2000) knows Orientalism as "an essential poetic feature" (p. 5) and Said (1978) defines Orientalism as "the discipline by which the Orient was (and is) approached systematically, as a topic of learning, discovery and practice" (p. 73). Coleridge approaches the Orient in his poems that are culturally constructed and therefore opens to Oriental

inspirations of his day. Coleridge's poems as carriers of Orientalist ideologies are not neutral reflections of the reality of the Orient or true narratives of certain unchanging events, for a poem as a cultural production has a deep investment in the political character of the society in which it is produced. Coleridge could not be indifferent to the ideologically-made representations of his day circulated through different texts. Coleridge's Orientalism is textual, and his ideas concerning the East can best be studied in his poems. In "Mahomet" (1799) as an instance Coleridge seems to keep in tune with many of his contemporary writers in representing Mahomet as a revolutionary figure, but he imaginatively reconciles the Orient with home in order to create a model for a better universe in which opposites are united, the universal bond is kept and a return to the origins of true religion is made possible. Although Coleridge seems to attack European corruption and false religion of the Christian West by desiring the Islamic figure of Mahomet to bring liberty and regeneration, he still perpetuates the prejudice of Christianity's superiority over Islam. Coleridge uses Mahomet and Islam as models for the regeneration of European civilization that he found corrupt, and it is his desire to return to the Abyssinian Christianity which he believed to be the true religion revealed by Christ. In "Kubla Khan" composed in the same year, the poet wishes to revive the song of the Abyssinian maid from Abyssinia where he knew to be home to primitive and true Christianity as well as "the Garden of Eden, where language began" (Bloom & Trilling, 1973, p. 256). This shows that, from an Orientalist' point of view, it is not Islam itself he wishes for but the origins of Christianity. Thus, imaginative reconciliation of Christo-Islamic inspirations can be considered as a political act of revival of Christian morality and moral regeneration. Although Coleridge blends religions in a higher critical mode after German idealists like Kant, and does not emphasize Islam's sensuality and knows it to be the continuation of Christianity and the belief in the unipersonality of God, it is Christianity that must guarantee the universal bond and moral regeneration, for it is Christ, not Mahomet, that is the Teacher.

In the 18th century it was the discourse of Oriental despotism that shaped the West's view towards representation of Islam which, of course, was a kind of projection of fear, difference, terror and aspiration on the East. Oriental despotism is a dominant theme in Landor's *Gebir* (1798) and Beckford's *Vathek* (1786), and Coleridge's *Kubla* with Shelley's *Othman* are well-known despots. Said (2000) agrees with Foucault that "discourse

is not only that which translates struggle or systems of domination, but that for which struggles are conducted” (p. 243). The interaction of the Western Christianity and Eastern Islam was the confrontation of two world powers or two cultural histories and thus it served as a source for poetic inspirations. Hachicho (1994) believes that “English (and in fact European) interest in the Near East came with the rise and spread of Islam all over the lands” that was “associated with the Holy Scriptures, as an antagonist religion to medieval Christianity” (p. 196). This confirms that it was critical for the West to distort the image of Islam and represent it as a threat, deviation and associated with tyranny. In the 19th century, it was dissatisfaction with the French Revolution’s promises of liberty and fraternity that made Coleridge and many others change view of Islam: it was the only way of salvation and no longer the religion of an illogical and too professed a race. Islam was no longer thought of as the background of despotism but interpreted as a radical force to compensate for the French Revolution’s loss. Coleridge’s “Mahomet” in which the Christian perspective is maintained can be read as an example of a subversive voice that survived the powerful cultural forces that might have silenced its message of Islam as a model not threat in a time when the idea of a secret political alliance between Muslims and English Unitarians politically regarded as being against Church and State was in the air. Thus laying bare the political unconscious of Coleridge’s poem will tell us about the complex cultural problems of his age, his Western consciousness, and the extent to which he had kept the taste of a European in representing the East. According to Altick (1975), “almost every literary work is attended by a host of outside circumstances which, once we expose and explore them, suffuse it with additional meaning” (p. 5). The West and many Western works of art had shown Christianity as the word of God in opposition to the falsely imitated words of Islam. To Coleridge “universalist redemption” was anticipated only through “liberal Christianity” (Ulmer, 2004, p. 353) and two of the reasons Coleridge disagreed with Pitt’s government were the influence of his friendship with John Thelwall who was a fervent adherent of Christian principles, and Pitt’s war with France. In the Foucauldian sense that power can be productive, the attempts of Western Orientalists to show Islam as an aberration and a threat to Christianity served Coleridge to be attracted towards the Eastern revolutionary Islam despite the fear of invasion from the Islamic East that was implanted in his mind. What is important is that for Coleridge associations of submission

and tyranny with Islam are not as strong as it is the case with Byron or Southey who was not a firm believer in the Islamic prophet as Coleridge was. Coleridge uses Islam as the context and its prophet as the hero that offers liberation of Christianity from corruption and priesthood tyranny.

COLERIDGE'S IMAGINATIVE CREATION OF MAHOMET

Loomba (2000) says “the Orient has to be feminine so that Europe can be masculine” (p. 47). This implies the importance of certain binary oppositions in the formation of realities about the East and the West. Besides masculinity and femininity, such binaries as enlightenment and backwardness or self and other that were ideologically constructed were influential in shaping orientalist frames of thought. *The 1001 Nights* helped the association of Islam with magic, exoticism, backwardness and difference which would enrich Christianity with opposing signifieds to the extent that many Orientalists see the confrontation between the Christian West and the Islamic East the confrontation between two world powers. Coleridge had relied on the French Revolution as the site for improvement of mankind as well as better political conditions. However, disillusioned with the event, Coleridge conducted a revolution in his mind replacing Christianity with Islam that was thought to be “a heretical imitation of Christianity” (Said, 1978, p. 66). Coleridge’s imaginative mind was home to the cultural interactions of Islam as the religion of the Middle East and Christianity as that of the West, and such poems as “Kubla Khan,” “Mahomet” or “France: An Ode” that refer to disillusionment with the French Revolution were shaped by cross-cultural encounters and contemporary works of art.

Many of Coleridge’s political ideas and poems were shaped by Beckford’s *Vathek* (1786) and Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801) that is about a Unitarian revolution in the Near East, and in his *On the Constitution of the Church and State* (1830), he attacks commerce and the ills of the society, and highlights the unifying role of the Church of England that implies Coleridge’s patriotic sentiment towards control at home and abroad. In 1790 Coleridge’s mind was obsessed with Southey’s thoughts, poetry and his project on “a world-revolution in which egalitarian rationalism would smash the idols of priestcraft and tyranny” (Leask, 1998, p. 4). Coleridge lost radical interest in the millennial politics of the French Revolution after 1798. This turned Coleridge’s and Southey’s eyes towards

Islam as both a model of regeneration and liberation of the West from corruption. However, according to Sharafuddin (1994), Southey's view towards Islam, implicit in his *Thalaba*, was "more than positive, but he deliberately avoided explicit commendation" (131). Islam had to be judged, according to Said (1978), as "a fraudulent new version of ... Christianity" (p. 59) or "a misguided version of Christianity" (p. 61). The discursive formation of binary oppositions made Coleridge reconcile Christianity and Islam in order to offer his political thoughts in his Romantic poems and conservatively avoid identification with Jacobins of the time. Coleridge agreed with Schlegel's 1800 idea that "it is in the Orient that we must search for the highest romanticism" (p. 98).

"Mahomet" was a fragment and part of an intended, desired, Islamic, unfinished epic that was first published in Coleridge's *Poetical Works* in 1834. Coleridge's and Southey's collaborative work to which "Mahomet" was the short contribution was called "The Flight and Return of Mohammed" whose radicalism is manifest in Coleridge's "Mahomet" and "Kubla Khan" (1799) as well as Southey's *Thalaba the Destroyer* (1801). In 1799, Southey and Coleridge collaborated on Mahomet as a savior, an idol-breaker, a liberator, and a revolutionary figure making universal reform possible. Coleridge would portray his own understanding of Mahomet which means that he was an observer of the Orient and tried to approach her in a British effort of knowing her. This also signifies that exact depiction was not important to those who would write on the Orient, and historical facts had to serve literary interests, for to quote Coleridge's (1971) Orient was "a symbol for an uncorrupted, primitive monotheism" (p. 105) where he would seek liberty and equality. However, the figure of Mahomet is not depicted as an Other in the poem, and Coleridge thinks more of uniting Islamic and Christian inspirations. "Mahomet" does not approve the ideology of Islam's backwardness against the West's enlightenment associated with Christianity. The figure of Mahomet is more of a politicized and ideological construction in an Oriental setting—Mecca. Coleridge was engaged with Islam, and "Mahomet" was Coleridge's radical idealism inspired by this engagement. His imaginative vision would see Islam as a revolutionary culture, an alternative of earlier Protestantism, and the context for liberty, fraternity, moral development, equality and anti-Trinitarianism which Hedley (2003) would see as "Socinianism" and believe that "one marginal product of Reformation theology was a strong rejection of the doctrine of the Trinity" (p. 50). Desiring revolution, the

socinian Coleridge would seek the event practiced by Mahomet after Napoleon the defender of liberty failed. Napoleon who was praised by Coleridge, was an admirer of Mahomet and Islam although Said (1978) believes the sympathy for Islam was part of the project of waging “a uniquely benign and selective war against Islam” (p. 82). However it must not be forgotten that after the dissatisfaction with the French Revolution, ideals of liberty and brotherly love were sought in Islam as a newly made concept no longer signifying opposition and threat. In *The Courier*, Coleridge (1978) refers to “Napoleon’s admiration of the Muslim faith and its possible political value for Revolutionary France” (p. 262).

The image of Islam—already introduced to the West by Orientalists and *The 1001 Nights*—in Coleridge’s “Mahomet” as an English Romantic poem is a different image. Coleridge’s message in “Mahomet” could face overwhelming opposition by the British government had he not conservatively married opposing images in his esemplastic imagination that seeks to idealize and unify. The image of Islam first appeared, as alterity, in *The Nights* and one thing was confirmed and that was the association between Islam and the supernatural, magic, despotism and fatalism. There is no reason why Coleridge as a European would read *The Nights* and NOT take the stories as true. Talking to the Ifrit in *The Nights*, the merchant says: “Verily from Allah we proceeded and unto Allah are we returning. There is no Majesty, and there is no Might save in Allah, the Glorious, the Great! If I slew thy son, I slew him by chance medley” (Burton, 2006, p. 25), or when Sindbad the sailor is carried by the large Rukh and finds himself surrounded by mountains he says “there is no Majesty and there is no Might save in Allah” (p. 402). Orientalists would attribute meekness and reason to Christians, and fanaticism and fatalism to the religion of Mohammedans. Renan (1896), the French historian, referred to the obviousness of “the actual inferiority of Mohammedan countries” (p. 85) that was taken as a true piece of information. This is why Said (1978) believes the West always tried to appropriate the image of Islam as a Western attempt for “dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient” (p. 3).

About the derogatory descriptions of Islam, the prophet Muhammad and what exists in Dante’s *Divine Comedy* (1307-1320), Said says “the discriminations and refinements of Dante’s poetic grasp of Islam are an instance of the schematic, almost cosmological inevitability with which Islam and its designated representations are creatures of Western

geographical, historical, and above all moral apprehension” (p. 69). One is reminded of Veese’s (1989) claim that after all a “work of art is the product of a negotiation between a creator and practices of a society” (p. 12). Islam rose in the 7th century and associations of threat and despotism with Islam go to the 14th century Islamic hegemony over a large part of the world and the threat imposed on Europe by the Turkish empire in the 15th century. Sharafuddin (1994) refers to the relation between tyranny and the religion of Islam, and mentions the fall of Adam and the manifestation of God in several prophets afterwards. “The European encounter,” Huntington (1996) believes, “with the orient ... turned Islam into the very epitome of an outsider against which the whole of European civilization ... was founded” (p. 70). It is not surprising that Coleridge refers to Mahomet in his poem as the figure “who scatter’d ... evil” and “huge wasteful empires” (ll. 2-3) that is a reference to reformation at the cost of constructing “huge wasteful empires.” Nevertheless Coleridge’s hero has also “scatter’d ... blessing” and has “crush’d the blasphemous rites of the Pagan/and idolatrous Christians” (ll. 2, 4-5). Coleridge’s implicit confirmation of the Mohammedan fanaticism appears in lines 13 and 14 of his poem where Mohammedans are “in mazy uproar bewilder’d, / all rushing impetuous onward.” By referring to the image of rushing rivers that appears in the final lines of “Religious Musings” (1795) Coleridge might have been thinking of the passion of people against Napoleon, the misguided French Revolution, and the millennial return of Christ whom Coleridge knew to be of Unitarian belief. Muslims were known for having “no sense of discipline,” being “good rioters and bad fighters,” and “if encouraged, they make an infernal nuisance of themselves” (Koestler, 1946, p. 155). Sharafuddin (1994) states that “the Romantic movement emerged as resistance to massive despotism”—one of the themes of Coleridge’s “Religious Musings” is the end put to priestly despotism—and that “its writers were reacting against political and cultural centralization” (p. xvii). However, it was the Orient (2000) that “liberat[ed] them [the Romantic poets] from the chains of Classical traditions” (Oueijan, 2000, p. 5), and Coleridge as an explorer of liberty liberated himself from regularity, conventions and fixed ideological constructions. Writing on “liberty,” Coleridge would try to “reconcile the universal and pure idea of liberty with the quotidian need for stable, efficient, and practicable government in the moral world” (Edwards, 2004, p. 33). Coleridge’s counter-discursive attempts and dissenting voice questioned cultural stereotypes but the

question remains that how much it is possible for a Western Romantic poet to liberate himself from historical, political and religious ideologies of his time that have gone into shaping him and his poetry. Coleridge's ambiguous sentiment towards Islam was because "on the one hand, [Islam] offered a convenient symbol of the tyranny they all sought to overcome" while on the other, Islam "offered an alternative to the compromised or corrupted political and social systems of Europe" (Sharafuddin, 1994, p. xxi). As the Orient was thought to be a distorted version of the Self, Islam was regarded as a non-Christian religion or an extension of the Western religion's exiled self. Islam was shown to be hostile, threatening and other, and gradually written words became the reality of Islam. "The impact of colonialism, of historical development: all these were," according to Said (1978), "to Orientalists as flies to wanton boys, killed—or disregarded—for their sport, never taken seriously enough to complicate the essential Islam" (p. 105).

Islam had been interpreted, by Western scholars, as a full-of-passion, exotic and offensive religion. Beckford identifies Vathek with Islam as the religious Other. Byron, in *Don Juan* (that began in 1818 till his death), celebrates the Nile and supports Napoleon while showing disgust for Muslims and Islamic rituals obvious in the contemptuous language used for the portrayal of Easterners. Southey used Iranian theology in his Indian poem "The Curse of Kehama" (1810) which refers to the Muhammedan religion the information for which he brought from *The Nights!* De Quincey in his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater* (1822) sees himself nobler than any Turkish man, and compares Fanny's grandfather to a crocodile. It was believed that "wherever there has been murder, war, protracted conflict involving social horrors, 'Islam clearly played an important part'" (p. 79). Islam as a discourse was believed to be "the harsh law of Muhammed ... binding men with heavy fetters" and "the language of the Qur-an is fierce ... written in letter of fire" (Payne, 1987, p. xii). After the French Revolution emphasis was laid on the radicalism and Protestantism of Islam. There is no doubt that Coleridge changed the view of Islam with his words however, it should not be ignored that by the turn of the 19th century the shift in Coleridge's sentiment towards Islam was, by and large, a conservative act of hiding his radical ideas in such an era of political unrest so that he would not be identified with French Jacobins. For a long time and before the conflicts between France and England, Coleridge was an admirer of the French Revolution which he believed to

be more humane than the American one. From a Lyotardian point of view the French Revolution was, to Coleridge, a metanarrative, and Coleridge regarded it as “the means of collective, human salvation, the prelude to the establishment of the millennium” (Kitson, 1989, p. 201). Coleridge would try to justify the Revolution’s atrocities as the aftermath of the former oppression. However, in *Biographia Literaria* (1817), Coleridge refers to the French invasion of Switzerland as the cause of his dissatisfaction with the Revolution. Bainbridge believes that for Wordsworth Napoleon’s coronation as Emperor in 1804 marked the end of “the revolutionary period and ... a return to the pre-1789 forms of church and state” (Ferber, 2005, p. 459).

Coleridge’s tendency towards the Orient can be related to his disillusionment with the Revolution which was an instance of “imperfect and fragmentary theory applied as wholesale remedy to a practical crisis.” It was “a system of mechanized morality ... at odds with Coleridge’s own moral and political philosophy” (Edwards, 2004, pp. 21-22). Brice refers to one of Coleridge’s letters to his brother George which is about Coleridge’s recantation of his support of the Revolution: “of the French Revolution I can give my thoughts the most adequately in the words of Scripture—‘A great and strong wind rent the mountains and brake in pieces the rocks before the Lord; but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a Fire—and the Lord was no longer in the fire’:” (Brice, 2007, p. 134). Coleridge was not in agreement with the earlier ideology of the triumph of Christianity over Islam, but was sure of Islam as the only means of a second coming if such a thing was expected. He shattered, indirectly, that full-of-horror image of Islam and, in line with S. Johnson, E. Burke, and P. B. Shelley, believed in the reactionary Islam as a political discourse that could raise and support what was low in England. Islam had emphasized egalitarian values and liberty, and this could not be left unnoticed to a radical, dissenting, and Unitarian poet in favour of the Protestantism of Islam. Romanticism highlighted the connection of poetry with Christianity and that leaves no wonder why a considerable number of Coleridge’s poems like *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798) have been read in such a context. He knew Christ as the teacher of the universal message of brotherhood as well as the universal laws of morality. Although Coleridge was an adherent of Christianity in the 1790s, he was a troubled Christian who could not ignore attacks on orthodox Christianity. Before the

wide consumption of Oriental tales, the image of the cruel Muslim had become shaped as the very reality of how Muslims are. The ossified idea was hard to change, and Orientalists were unwilling to change it however, Coleridge's thoughts and writings shaped the culture.

Muslim identity or history has been exposed to Orientalist representations where the East is improperly represented and the Western eye sees Arabs and Muslims as one. Ideologically speaking, the most important figure in Islam had to be represented as an anti-Christ, a threat, an imposter, or a magician. The development of such misconceptions of Mahomet was in line with other attempts at showing Islam as a deviation or an Other. To many Orientalists Islam was the real Orient, and Mahomet had to be represented as false and flawed. Said argues that being afraid of the power of Islam, Europeans viewed Mahomet as "the disseminator of a false Revelation" (Said, 1978, p. 62). A prominent work of art read by Coleridge was Voltaire's *Mahomet the [i]mposter* (1741) in which the writer's skepticism, satire and anti-Islam tendencies are manifest in the portrayal of Mahomet. Voltaire believed that superstition was at the heart of every religion, and Edward Gibbon, the 18th century writer with whose works Coleridge was familiar, believed in prophets as men who could make mistakes and were flawed. Superstition was abhorred by many Romantic writers like Coleridge or De Quincey who described African superstition in *Confessions* (1822) as "wild, barbarous, and capricious" (De Quincey, 1971, p. 108). In Coleridge's time it was public belief that prophets were not exempt from error, and were prone to mischief, passion and cruelty. Heseltine, in describing his account of Marco Polo's visit to the East describes the Easterners as "full of contrasts ... chivalrous, but roused when angry to unexampled ferocity" (Heseltine, 1953, p. 363) or "thundering" as a "ruinous river" and "all rushing impetuous onward" as Coleridge would say in "Mahomet" (ll. 11; 12; 14). Under the influence of a variety of perspectives, Coleridge's look at Mahomet was ambivalent: Mahomet was not only a bringer of good and liberty but also of waste and bloodshed. It is worth noticing that there were three spellings of the name: Mahomet, Muhammad and Muhamed which signifies that as the Orientalists knew Orient(s), different versions of the prophet had been created with imprecision to suit certain discursive practices.

1790s marked Coleridge's interest in the figure of Mahomet. Stubbe introduces Mahomet as the first revolutionary hero 800 years before Luther and his reforming revolution against the Catholic Church. As Napoleon

was a symbol of revolution and liberty in an age of oppression, so was Mahomet to Coleridge. In the modern discourse of the West, Coleridge looked at Mahomet as a Promethean figure or a liberating model and projected the features of a Romantic hero on Mahomet making him a symbol of liberty and such a revolutionary savior as Napoleon was expected to be. Mahomet became the Napoleonic figure who would restore what was lost in the course of the French Revolution. The word Mahomet did not mean superstition or despotism any more but the end to superstition and church / state corruption, and Mahomet was to restore Christ's "truth," "love," and "Equality". Stubbe (1975) says Mahomet's mission was to restore the "old religion, not to introduce a new one" (p. 180) and Mahomet was not an initiator of a new religion but intended the restitution of the true intent of the Christian religion. This is why I do not see a replacing of Christ with Mahomet but an imaginative reconciliation of Christian and Islamic features to suit Coleridge's desire of an ideal model.

The religion of Mahomet, as Coleridge (1978) says in *The Courier*, is "more adapted to call forth all the energies and practical enthusiasm of the human heart" (p. 260). In "Mahomet" Coleridge uses "evil" and "wasteful Empires" to show Mahomet as a figure with shortcomings which were "balanced by the fact that he 'crush'd the blasphemous rites of the Pagan'" (Leask, 1998, p. 13). The Mahomet that Coleridge had created was a reformer to purify Trinitarian idolatry (paganism, superstition, priesthood and tyranny) and critical of the "naked and prostrate ... priesthood" (l. 10) that had corrupted true Christianity. Coleridge was always afraid of a Catholic rebellion and was worried about priests exploiting Irish superstition, for he believed in "Catholicism and Hinduism" as "forms of idolatry" (Fulford & Kitson, 1998, p. 39). Coleridge defended Mahomet the "enthusiast" who would defeat "idolatrous Christians" of the West which was a totally different picture from Voltaire's Mahomet whose personal despotism was emphasized by him. Coleridge's Mahomet was a revolutionary figure that would use the discourse of religion to push forward his cause of revolution, passion, enthusiasm, energy and power needed to reform both the world without and the world within. The figure was a Romantic hero indeed and a bringer of revolution. Coleridge believed that "the fall of kings and the violence of revolutions will be balanced and reconciled on the scales of divine justice" (Brice, 2007, p. 126) and Christ will teach "Universal Equality" (Coleridge, 1971, p. 218).

The more conservative “Kubla Khan” (1799) does not seem to be as radical as “Mahomet” in which Coleridge’s political radicalism is explored. Since his youth Coleridge was a Jacobin and shared revolutionary zeal with Wordsworth and Southey, and believed in the necessity of reform. 1794 marked Coleridge’s immersion in Unitarian (anti-Trinitarian) theology and multifarious reading of Joseph Priestly—specially his *The Corruptions of Christianity* (1782)—the well-known Unitarian philosopher of the time who was himself under the influence of Thomas Emlyn the Unitarian Minister. Coleridge came to be fascinated with the Unitarian Islam as a fictional narrative and revolutionary model. He could not be manifest with his Unitarian beliefs, for Unitarianism was associated with Islamic radicalism, conspiracy, French Jacobinism, and Church adversaries. Both Southey and Coleridge believed in the Unitarian and Islamic belief that all religions confirm the unity and unipersonality of God who has no associates. He refers to, in his *Anima Poetae*, his thought on the construction of Mahomet either as “representative of unipersonal Theism” or as “an idolater with his gods ... and a fetish-worshipper who adored the invisible alone” (Coleridge, 1895, p. 290). By textually exploring Islam and reconciling Christian and Islamic inspirations, Coleridge created a new model in his myth-making imagination that was inspired by the figure of Mahomet. What was important to Coleridge was what he said, in “Lectures on Revealed Religion,” he had found in Priestly’s writings: “primitive Jewish Christianity” and idolatrous Trinity that was “responsible for the “mysteries” with which Church and State governments continue to dupe the ignorant masses” (Coleridge, 1971, p. 212). Coleridge’s poems are manifest in neither the French Revolution context nor the so-called Godwinian radicalism. The reason for Coleridge’s attraction to Unitarianism was his hostility towards Trinitarian Christianity. Norman O. Brown sees Islam representing “a return to the original Mosaic theocratic or theopolitical idea” (Brown, 1982, p. 372). Accordingly “Mahomet” can be viewed as the return of the repressed in a dissenting, unorthodox poet with the body of his Unitarianism disguised in the cloak of conservatism.

As a subject of the anti-Islam web of Orientalist discourses, Coleridge would not be willing to be identified with Muslim-Unitarian implications. Gradually Coleridge’s radicalism gave place to his conservatism and thus reduced the quality of his poetry. Even then conservatives were known as possible conspirators or dissenters who might have been against the established codes and beliefs of the time—Trinity, the original sin, divinity

of Christ. Coleridge might seem to muster support for the existing political ideologies however, it is his philosophical conservatism that is hidden between the lines of his poem. Coleridge's 1816 preface to a poem like "Kubla Khan" defines his conservative act of self-effacement and anti-Islamic tendencies. In the preface that includes a passage from his "The Picture; or, the Lover's Resolution" (1802), Coleridge introduced Purchas's *Pilgrimages* as the source for the poem not Southey's *Thalaba* the first book of which was his model. This way the poet denied his alliance with the Islamic Orient and republicanism immunizing himself against possible accusations of conspiracy and treason. Coleridge who was an adherent of a pre-revolutionary regime wrote his *Constitution of the Church and State* in 1830 where he believes that the Church of Christ is otherworldly and it is through the National Church that the condition of the world may be improved. Coleridge saw Paganism as the symbol of corrupt priesthood (institutional religion) as well as a threat to Christianity the libertarian vision of which he had emphasized in his lectures. Therefore, he followed the ideology of Christian rightness and Pagan wrongness in "Mahomet" where he sees otherness in Paganism, and self in Christianity, and conservatively makes Islam the ideal Self. Islam in "Mahomet" represents a return to true Christianity and is a critique on the false Christianity practiced by corrupt priests.

Coleridge would always think of a figure who would overthrow idolatrous beliefs with the vision that "idolatry" would stand for despotism, and traditional authority. Since Coleridge was always a lover of liberty Mahomet, representative of the enlightened ideology of Islam, becomes the Bringer of Liberty, the Liberator of men from religious tyranny, and the Reformer heralding the fall of Trinitarianism. In "Destruction of the Bastille" (1789) Coleridge sings "Yes! Liberty the soul of life shall reign, / Shall throb in every pulse, shall flow thro' every vein!" (ll. 49-50). Most important to Coleridge was moral revolution: by the revolutions he expected to occur in Britain by 1796, he hoped for a more perfect society in a millennial age. He desired to find an Oriental figure and setting as the place proper to both lost visions and Pantisocracy programs of a Utopia. Under the influence of David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), Coleridge paid more attention to the relationship between Nature and a moral world. It was after disillusionment with the French Revolution that people like Coleridge returned to nature to seek refuge and expect the Millennium. Again the influence of surrounding forces is obvious: while

against colonialist expansions, Coleridge wanted to have his own pantisocratic colony where millennial conditions of equality, simplicity, and public property could be created. Coleridge whose imagination was already caught with the Pacific, was not ignorant of Britain's economic system and, although against colonial expansion as he was influenced by Burke, he desired his own pantisocratic colony. Mckusick states that to Coleridge "the exotic islands of the South Pacific seemed to offer a safe haven for revolutionary enthusiasm" (Fulford & Kitson, 1998, p. 108) and he produced, in *Table Talk*, the following words: "colonization is not only a manifest expedient—but an imperative duty on Great Britain. God seems to hold out his finger to us over the sea" (Coleridge, 1990, p. 369). Coleridge like other British Romantic poets could not act outside historical forces surrounding him to the extent that Spivak believes "nineteenth-century British literature cannot be read 'without remembering that imperialism ... was a crucial part of the cultural representation of England to the English'" (Knellwolf & Norris, 2007, p. 244).

The word "Pantisocracy" or an all-equal-society coined by Coleridge and also a poem by him (1794) meant "a utopian community in which power and produce would be shared equally amongst all its members" (O'Flinn, 1988, p. 75), for if all reason they are equal. Lee says Pantisocracy was "a government of self-rule that emphasized the equality of all its members" (Lee, 1998, p. 694). The Pantisocratic Coleridge was after a mixture of or reconciled version of Arab and Christian pastoralism both in nature and imagination, for to him the East would mean a return to the past and a setting uncorrupted by European civilization. Again the influence of a contemporary cannot be ignored: Southey's *Thalaba* as a "Bedovin herdsman ... descends as an iconoclast on Baghdad and other corrupt cities of the plain, imposing by force their return to an ideal republican simplicity" (Butler, 1990, p. 143). Southey's religious, destiny-chosen, Christo-Islamic figure destroys Domdaniel the world of the magicians that bring misery and corruption to mankind. Sharafuddin (1994) shows Southey's purpose to find commonality between "Islam and Christianity so as to liberate the West from a self-regarding ... tyrannical perspective" (p. 49). Coleridge desired a utopian "stable society in which the conflicting passions of men would be stilled in obedience" (Brinton, 1962, pp. 76-77) to a superior will resulting in the Blakean system and belief of ultimate happiness and prosperity of mankind. It must be mentioned that Edwards (2004) believes "to categorize Coleridge as a

Utopian is to misread his doctrine of ideas” (p. 33). This signifies that Coleridge, the same as Southey, would project Western corruption on the East and use the East to show his desired setting and critique the West. Nature was associated with both the Orient and primitive Christianity, for Romantic nature-writing was “part of a massive Western global project of describing the world’s natures in all their diversity” (Bewell, 2004, p. 11) to suit colonial objectives. As the East was colonized by the West, so was nature colonized by the Romantic poets and poetry. Influenced by Thomas Burnet’s ideas, Coleridge believed in the Millennium and improvement in both air and man’s condition, and nourished the fantasy of a utopia of egalitarian values and freedom from corruption. The Neoplatonic belief that “all created things were ... evolving towards their divine source” (Wylie, 1989, p. 497) was dominant in the last decades of the 18th century. Thus, the figure of Mahomet in the radical context of the Protestant Islam was the best poetic device to give expression to Coleridge’s political thoughts concerning the rise of Mahomet and millennial explorations.

CONCLUSION

Said begins his *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) with a reference to T. S. Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent” to show that ideas must be understood within historical contexts: “This historical sense, which is a sense of the timeless as well as of the temporal and of the timeless and of the temporal together, is what makes a writer traditional No poet ... has his complete meaning alone” (Said, 1993, p. 2). The Orient has served as the cultural enemy of the Occident as well as a proper reservoir of inspirations to Romantic poets who were always fervently called on to imitate Oriental literatures and reconstruct the Middle East through poetry that had to serve trade, economy and ideology. Although Coleridge seems to attack European corruption and false religion of the Christian West by desiring the Islamic figure of Mahomet to bring liberty and true religion, he still perpetuates the prejudice of the binary opposition of Christianity and Islam in his poems. Coleridge uses Mahomet the Islamic prophet as a model for the regeneration of European civilization, and the bringer of true religion that is primitive / Abyssinian Christianity. Imaginative reconciliation of Christo-Islamic inspirations is a political act of revival of Christian morality that must guarantee the universal bond.

Coleridge as a subject of the 18th century web of dominating ideologies incorporated major ideologies of his day but believed that “Western Christendom and particularly Protestant culture has absorbed Christian ideas, however imperfectly, into its actual structures” (Hedley, 2003, p. 292). In the radical act of composing “Mahomet” Coleridge tries to change the distorted image of Islam and show resistance to the false Orientalism of his day. Radicalism was a political force (and discourse) during the 1790s that went into shaping many of Coleridge’s poems. Of course, Edwards (2004) does not see eye to eye with this and refers to Jonathan Clark that “radicalism emerged in the 1810s and 1820s” (p. 16). Edwards’ focus on “real” radicalism is on “anti-clericalism” and the “desire for disestablishment” (p. 19). In the 1790s Coleridge was an adherent of empowering liberty as well as moderate reform and revolt against old European regimes. His notion of “human freedom” as a “personal, theistic, Absolute will” reflects his “utilization and transformation of German Idealist thought” (Barbeau, 2000, p. 594) and indicates his radical poetic policies. The dejection in his poetry is due to the decline of radical views being replaced by conservative acts of omitting lines—“Frost at Midnight” (1798 / 1828)—or adding prefaces—“Kubla Khan.”

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