

# ALTERED STATES OF LITERATURE

## shamanic assimilation and romantic inspiration

### ESTADOS ALTERADOS DE LITERATURA: ASSIMILAÇÃO XAMÂNICA E INSPIRAÇÃO ROMÂNTICA

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#### ABSTRACT

This article deals with the connections between the assimilation of certain shamanic practices related to Romantic inspiration in English literature. The interest in the world of altered states of consciousness as a manifestation of the sacred is typical among Romantic writers in nineteenth-century England. These writers in fact sought the manifestation of the world of dreams by means of ingesting substances that alter consciousness, thus assimilating a practice that is likewise and primarily shamanic. This search is the object under investigation in this article, which aims at showing that, despite conspicuous cultural differences, there are indeed similarities that pervade shamanic practices and the Romantic ideal in their quests toward the sacred.

#### KEYWORDS

Shamanism, romanticism, assimilation

“A theater seemed suddenly opened and lighted up within my brain, which presented nightly spectacles of more than earthly splendor.”<sup>1</sup>

Shamanic practice is intrinsically connected to altered states of consciousness. The interest in the world of such altered states of mind as a manifestation of the sacred is likewise typical among Romantic writers, who were in fact assimilating an age-old shamanic practice. Despite the obvious cultural differences in their taking such substances, some similarities indeed draw shamanism and Romanticism close together in their mutual endeavor toward the unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> DE QUINCEY. “The pains of opium” from *Confessions of an English opium eater*, p. 452.

## SHAMANIC PRACTICES AND ALTERED STATES OF CONSCIOUSNESS

Shamanic authority stems not only from their being able to communicate with the spiritual world and hence have access to certain mysterious forces such as those that command the natural forces of rain and harvest, but also from their ability to control these forces by means of ritual and sacrifice known to them only. These shamanic practices involve the achievement of an altered state of consciousness on the part of the shaman by means of an extreme and conscious derangement of the psyche, that is, of a conscious attempt at an ecstatic state of awareness. This is in turn accomplished through a number of techniques that involve fasting and/or the ingestion of sacred plants, as well as drum beating accompanied by rhythmic chants and dramatic performances.

Once the altered, or ecstatic, state of consciousness is achieved the shaman is given access to the mysterious forces of the supernatural world. He can thus perform a wide range of extraordinary activities such as the transformation into animal form, the prediction of future events as well as the unfolding of past ones, the making of rain along with any other weather manifestation, and the healing of the sick as well as the mortal infection of the healthy. Eliade sees shamanism as the power of human strength against supernatural forces, and shamans as the repositories of such power:

Shamanism is the assurance that human beings are not alone in a foreign world, surrounded by demons and the “forces of evil.” In addition to the gods and supernatural beings to whom prayers and sacrifices are addressed, there are “specialists in the sacred,” men able to “see” the spirits, to go up into the sky and meet the gods, to descend to the underworld and fight the demons, sickness, and death.<sup>2</sup>

Apparently doomed to become a dead issue in American anthropology, the category of shamanism has resiliently endured and not only proved its critics wrong but also engendered a multi-disciplinary industry among writers and others interested in the practices of the ancient healers. As Jane Atkinson points out, Clifford Geertz was among the crucial critical voices on shamanism as he “deemed it one of those ‘desiccated and insipid categories by means of which ethnographers devitalize their data,’” along with R. F. Spencer, who “consigned it to a disciplinary ‘dustbin,’” and Michael Taussig, for whom shamanism was nothing but a “made-up, modern Western category, an artful reification of disparate practices... residues of long-established myths intermingled with politics of academic departments”.<sup>3</sup> Atkinson argues that despite such recent dismissals, the study of shamanism from the 1980s on has “witnessed a resurgence – some call it a renaissance – in scholarship”.

The argument in Atkinson’s article is that shamanism cannot be generalized into a single manifested phenomenon, that is to say, “the category simply does not exist in a unitary and homogenous form”.<sup>4</sup> She is aware that most of the study of shamanism today is actually done outside the scope of anthropology, and that the one new scientific or

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<sup>2</sup> ELIADE. *Shamanism*: archaic techniques of ecstasy, p. 509.

<sup>3</sup> ATKINSON. *Shamanisms today*, p. 307. The works quoted by Atkinson are: CLIFFORD, *Religion as a cultural system*; SPENCER. *Review of studies in shamanism*; TAUSSIG. *The nervous system: homesickness and Dada*.

<sup>4</sup> ATKINSON. *Shamanisms today*, p. 308.

academic area in which this happens is among modern psychologists. Atkinson recognizes that despite comprising a plurality of representations, shamanism does present some recurring configurations “that appear among widely dispersed populations, some attributable to historical connections, others not”.<sup>5</sup> According to Atkinson, recent studies on psychological states have offered ways “to explain these recurring likenesses in terms of universal human proclivities instead of historical diffusions and cultural survivors”.<sup>6</sup>

Hence, the explanation for shamanic practice and behavior, along with its role in native cultural survival, lies in a fundamental human proclivity, but that its current totalized identity as a subject for study is indeed also the result of Western concerns and cultural investments.

The scientific approach of anthropology has made it, until recently, inadequate for the understanding of shamanism in its complex dynamics, and the way it challenges logical scientific ways of analysis. As E. J. Langdon and G. Baer put it, “characterized by hysteria, ecstasy, magic, and transvestism, shamanism is alien to the rational positivistic worldview of science”.<sup>7</sup> Up until the mid-twentieth century, anthropology still considered shamanism as detached (primitive) from the social (civilized) context of the modern world. Hence, no adequate theory for this study of the protean phenomenon had been conceived and the understanding had always remained fragmented. According to Langdon, anthropology had three main concerns when debating shamanism: “the problem of the definition of a shaman; the psychic experience of the shaman; and the definition of shamanism as religion or magic.”<sup>8</sup>

With the advent of countercultural concerns in the second half of the twentieth century, the research on psychotropic plants brought forth a new stimulus for the studying of shamanic practices, so often linked to altered states of consciousness induced by sacred plants, leading scholars to begin approaching shamanism with a more encompassing understanding of this phenomenon based not only on the “primitive mentality” of an exotic figure but also as a force in the processes of social identity. Langdon traces a brief line going roughly through the Beats, passing through Aldous Huxley, then Timothy Leary, and finally Carlos Castaneda as the main representative figures of the underground tradition that in a way would help shamanism to be seen and hence studied by scholars, as well as making room for native voices to speak directly about their worldview, as a “pervasive and encompassing phenomenon which persists, although modified, in the face of the rapid changes occurring throughout this century”.<sup>9</sup>

Those scholars who first produced authoritative work on shamanism, like Eliade, were still looking at the phenomenon with a particular emphasis on either the individual, that is, the shaman himself, or the essential archaic elements of the shamanic practices. Today, the study of shamanism has developed more globalizing and dynamic social and

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<sup>5</sup> ATKINSON. *Shamanisms today*, p. 308.

<sup>6</sup> ATKINSON. *Shamanisms today*, p. 308.

<sup>7</sup> LANGDON; BAER. *Portals of power: shamanism in South America*, p. 1.

<sup>8</sup> LANGDON; BAER. *Portals of power: shamanism in South America*, p. 3.

<sup>9</sup> On the quoted authors see BURROUGHS; GINSBERG. *The yage letters*; HUXLEY. *The doors of perception*; LEARY. *The psychedelic experience*; CASTANEDA. *The teachings of Don Juan*.

cultural approaches, rather than the proto religion-oriented methodology.<sup>10</sup> As Langdon indicates, the shamanic practices, while preserving their essential ideology and techniques, should be regarded not only as limited to specific individuals, but also as forces of a social complex in its myriad patterns and ambiguities. Hence, the challenge of current scholars interested in shamanism is to “understand its various forms and expressions as a dynamic cultural-social complex in various societies over time and space”.<sup>11</sup> Taking for instance the above-mentioned representation, by Eliade and others, of the shaman as a specialist in the human soul, one should consider that the very terminology that these scholars use may present some inherent ambiguity. “Soul” is a Christian ontological concept not found in the Indian worldview, which does not share the Western Christian rational duality of body and soul, good and evil, consciousness and unconsciousness. The Indian mind operates with a more unifying vision of the forces of the universe, typical of magical understanding and opposed to rational thought.

Despite having definite recurring features that provide Western scholars with enough evidence to systematize and analyze the phenomenon as a religious practice, shamanism itself, as seen by the Indians, shows a variety of specializations closely connected to the shaman’s abilities and purposes, which reveal the intricate relations between the concept of power and shamanism. The recognizable features, which make it possible for scholars to represent shamanism as a somewhat distinguishable phenomenon, are on the one hand the process of shamanic initiation, which, through isolation, fasting, and ingestion of sacred plants, provides the power involving visions, body detachment, and chants; and on the other hand the mastery of shamanic techniques, such as dream control, soul flight, sacrifice, and animal metamorphoses, leading to weather control, healing, clairvoyance and divination.

## ROMANTIC ASSIMILATION OF SHAMANIC PRACTICES

The dismissal of art as unprofitable ornamentation and the rise of imaginative writing as a political force at the turn of the eighteenth century in England can be considered key elements in the works of Romantic poets whose aesthetic achievements mirrored “the gigantic shadows that futurity cast upon the present,”<sup>12</sup> only to reaffirm their political views toward social revolution in a society ruled by a philistine utilitarianism whose ideology aimed at reducing human relations to rational market exchanges. But the Romantic ideal offered both an enclave to escape the grind of historical rational materialism and a chance of transcending history itself on the wings of artistic sublimity. Hence, the conception of art, intimately related to the new

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<sup>10</sup> See TAUSSIG. *The devil and commodity fetishism in South America*; TAUSSIG. *Shamanism, colonialism and the wild man: a study in terror and healing*; CHAUMEIL. *Between zoo and slavery: the Yagua of Eastern Peru in their present situation*; CHAUMEIL. *La politique des esprits: chamanismes et religions universalistes*; LANGDON. *La muerte y el más allá en las culturas indígenas latinoamericanas*.

<sup>11</sup> LANGDON; BAER. *Portals of power: shamanism in South America*, p. 4.

<sup>12</sup> SHELLEY. *A defense of poetry*, p. 765.

philosophy of the aesthetics to be found in the works of Kant, Hegel, Schiller and Coleridge, to name a few, acquires what would later become our contemporary notion of symbolic meaning and aesthetic experience, and becomes a new way to suppress historical differences so that it can be raised to the notion of a mystically sovereign entity closely knit to the matter at hand in the world of altered states of consciousness.

The influence of altered states of consciousness on the writings of the Romantic poets has also been considered important to their imaginative output.<sup>13</sup> Writing at a time when the restrictive views of Freudian psychoanalytical thought had not yet established their authority, Romantic poets regarded the world of such deranged states of mind as a true source of divine manifestation and poetic inspiration. According to Elisabeth Schneider, who sets out to debunk Coleridge's alleged opium-induced mystical inspiration when writing "Kubla Khan," "symbolic interpretations in literature... have originated largely from extraneous considerations," which deal mainly with Freudian sexual symbolism.<sup>14</sup> Schneider denies such literary interpretations that sex should "underlie almost all human action, thought, and dream," since, according to her, despite the success of Freudian thought, it "tells us little about any poem".

Schneider believes that the attentive reader of the Romantic poets who took opium should question what these writers referred to as their own dreams: "we cannot say to what extent De Quincey's famous dreams were fact and to what extent literary fiction."<sup>15</sup> Without having to discuss what Schneider means by "fact" contained in dreams, let us just say that her position leaves little doubt of her own skepticism. As part of her debunking exercise, Schneider stated, "[T]he native tendency of both De Quincey and Coleridge toward neurotic dreaming undoubtedly converged with a literary vogue."<sup>16</sup> She is in fact referring to the attraction to the unknown world of dreams which "were becoming a notable feature of Romantic literature in England"<sup>17</sup> in the nineteenth century. According to Schneider, this literary vogue, and not opium, was the real background of the "dream writing of Coleridge and De Quincey".<sup>18</sup> Leaving her exercise aside for a while, Schneider then recognizes that Romantic writers were attracted to altered states by the "lure of the spectacular," and hence became in fact interested in reproducing "the shifting phantasmagoria of dreams as well as to fathom their significance".<sup>19</sup>

Having a less biased agenda to pursue, Alethea Hayter states, "[I]f De Quincey had never used opium, he might still have written about his dreams".<sup>20</sup> According to Hayter the Romantic poets' interest in dreams outdid their opium habits, and they actually

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<sup>13</sup> See for instance Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English opium eater* and "The pains of opium," Coleridge's "The ancient mariner" and "Kubla Khan," Shelley's "Marianne's dream," Byron's "The dream," and Keats's "La belle dame sans merci."

<sup>14</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 9.

<sup>15</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 77.

<sup>16</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 77.

<sup>17</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 77.

<sup>18</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 78.

<sup>19</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 79.

<sup>20</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 67.

“thought that there was a strong link between dreams and the process of literary creation”.<sup>21</sup> Romantic writing represents reason outdone by imagination and therefore the world of dreams becomes an ideal source for those poets enslaved by the unfathomable. The Romantic interest in the world of altered states of consciousness and the ensuing ingestion of mind-altering substances might have in fact established the basis for dreams as part of the human rather than only divine manifestation. As Hayter points out, “till the Romantic period dreams were not generally felt to be in themselves an interesting part of the human experience”.<sup>22</sup> However, Romantic writers valued dreams not only for their representation of hidden moral lessons or possible psychological insights, but also, as Hayter writes, “as aesthetic experiences of intrinsic value”.<sup>23</sup> Thus, we can say that Romantic writers, like shamans, use the world of altered states of consciousness as a realm of its own, whose visionary spaces manifest the sacred endowment of becoming a poet. Like the shaman to be, the poet recognizes his calling in the vivid uniqueness of the dream world:

Our life is two-fold: Sleep hath its own world,  
A boundary between the things misnamed  
Death and existence: Sleep hath its own world,  
And a wide realm of wild reality.<sup>24</sup>

According to Hayter, in “The dream,” from which these lines come, Byron sets out the three cardinal Romantic doctrines on dreams: “that they are a revelation of reality, that they can form and influence waking life, and that the dream process is a parallel and model of the process of poetic creation.”<sup>25</sup>

The uniqueness of the dream world, in which images and words are magically connected, was therefore a mystical calling for those poets whose imaginative creativity led them to wish for some way of experimenting with that connection without being asleep. Hence, the conspicuous attraction for the Romantic poets of mind-altering substances, which could reveal to the waking eye the secrets of the sacred.

The use of substances that alter consciousness is common to shamanic practice. In order to get in touch with the spiritual forces that help them diagnose and heal the sick, by mysterious means that include the use of sacred chants, shamans have been using hallucinogenic preparations throughout the ages. The healing attributes of these sacred plants are related both to their chemical properties and to their mystical powers, as well as to the ritualistic preparation and ingestion. Thus, we can say that these substances, present in the so-called sacred plants, carry in themselves not only some seemingly unexplainable healing powers, but also the key to fantastic spiritual worlds only comparable to those of dreams. Some of the most renowned Romantic poets made use of laudanum, a derivative of opium, either to alleviate their physical pains or simply to experience the

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<sup>21</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 67.

<sup>22</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 68.

<sup>23</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 69.

<sup>24</sup> BYRON. *The dream*, p. 57.

<sup>25</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 69.

world of dreams induced by the ingestion of the drug.<sup>26</sup> Many of these writers attempt to record their extraordinary perceptions either under the effect of the drug or afterwards. Hence, one can contend that these Romantic poets, in a way, daringly appropriated this shamanic tradition of ingesting hallucinogenic substances in their eagerness to personify the possessed poet and to embrace the ideal of magical inspiration.

The use of substances that enlarge man's perceptions and parallel them to those seen only in dreams was an important issue among many Romantic poets who in fact became addicted to opium. Those poets were able to exercise their literary creative geniuses in relation to hallucinogenic substances, in a much more flexible environment than today.<sup>27</sup> Their experimentation with opium, most notably in the form of laudanum, led many of them to drug addiction. The effects of such use, or abuse, over the poets' imagination and hence their own work has been a controversial matter for scholars.<sup>28</sup>

The issue at stake here has been the effect of opium on the creative processes of writers who use it. In M. H. Abrams book, after drawing out a certain pattern of imagery from the works of four opium-addicted poets, he concluded that those patterns were in fact written memories of the fantastical dream world of opium. Schneider, on the other hand, came to opposite conclusions. After studying medical reports on the effects of opium, which showed that its habitual consumption does not lead to either imaginative creativity or hallucinogenic visions, Schneider deduced that the most famous poem by Coleridge, contrary to the author's statement and scholarly opinion, had not been altogether the product of an opium-induced dream. In fact, she believed that opium closed off the real world rather than opened dream worlds for Coleridge: "Opium more than any other cause has been held responsible for the failure of Coleridge both to fulfil (sic) all the promise of his genius and to win his everyday living by steady labors".<sup>29</sup> The same could be said with respect to Lowes, who after analyzing Coleridge's poetry deduced that it reflected only a real dream of sleep. As for Hayter, she claims that the conclusions of her own book "lie somewhere in between the extremes of the two American scholars [Abrams and Schneider], but are rather at a tangent to them".<sup>30</sup> Despite a slight overall inclination toward the acceptance of the powers of opium related to a Romantic magical inspiration, Hayter indeed writes, "[N]o clear pattern of opium's influence on creative writing – always discernible, recognizable and complete in the work of all writers who took opium – has emerged from this survey".<sup>31</sup> Hayter acknowledges that the effects of

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<sup>26</sup> Marcus Boon argues, "[W]riters discussed narcotics in the eighteenth century and before – because opium was a drug that was in wide use in European society from the time of the Renaissance, if not earlier" in *The road of excess-a history of writers on drugs*, p. 18.

<sup>27</sup> For the most notable works related to the dream world of opium by some of these poets, see: DE QUINCEY. *Confessions of an English opium eater*; COLERIDGE. *Kubla Khan or a vision in a dream*, a fragment, p. 346-349.

<sup>28</sup> See LOWES. *The road to Xanadu*; ABRAMS. *The milk of paradise*. The effect of opium visions on the works of de Quincey, Crabbe, Francis Thompson and Coleridge; SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*; HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*.

<sup>29</sup> SCHNEIDER. *Coleridge, opium, and "Kubla Khan"*, p. 31.

<sup>30</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 14.

<sup>31</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 331.

opium might arouse the deep recesses of a “man’s mind and memory,” which could be perhaps an indirect reference to some personal experimentation. Yet, in her postscript Hayter makes clear that her involvement with the subject did not include such endeavors, since, as she said, “no curiosity or wish for new experience could nerve me to enter such a world of wretchedness”.<sup>32</sup> She confesses that there are voices echoing in her mind, which she would rather not hear, since “their paradises may have been wholly or partly artificial; their hells were real”. In a way, Hayter’s position is typical of scholars whose work deals with what they themselves do not experience and therefore should not be taken as authoritative pieces.

According to John Sutherland, Hayter seems another scholar “falling into the fallacy of ecstatic composition”.<sup>33</sup> Sutherland believes, like Schneider, that nothing worthwhile has ever been written under the influence of drugs. Taking Hayter’s book as the “definitve account of narcotics and literary creation in the nineteenth century,” Sutherland nevertheless uses it to help debunk the theory that some drugged artists did indeed create masterpieces. As Sutherland tells us, Hayter enumerates several cases in which the writers, who had been taking opium to uphold extreme pains of diverse causes, do not recognize their own opium-induced dictated narratives after reading them in a sober state. The first of such accounts listed by Sutherland, following Hayter, who in turn was guided by Schneider, is that of the actress Perdita Robinson, who in 1791 took “nearly eighty drops of laudanum to relieve the pain of rheumatism”. After falling asleep and having a strange dream about a lunatic, Mrs. Robinson woke up and dictated a poem on the subject to her daughter. The next day Mrs. Robinson had no recollection whatsoever of having dictated what was later to be called “The maniac.” According to Sutherland, the poem is “no masterpiece, nor do its octosyllabics give much impression of spontaneity. But the anecdote (whose authenticity Hayter accepts) is described as ‘interesting’”.<sup>34</sup> This anecdote thus serves as a parallel to the similar accounts that follow, concerning Walter Scott and Wilkie Collins.

The first one is about Walter Scott’s *The Bride of Lammermoor*. As Sutherland informs us, Scott had been suffering from excruciating stomach pains from 1817 to 1819, for which he sought “help of large doses of laudanum – as much as 200 drops in six hours, a mind-numbing intake”. This was the only way Scott managed to go through the ordeal of dictating the last part of his novel. As Sutherland tells us, like Mrs. Robinson before him, when Scott “recovered and read the printed narrative, he did not recollect one single incident, character or conversation it contained”. The next case is that of Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone*. Collins, who had also been taking large amounts of laudanum to alleviate his rheumatic gout, also dictated the conclusion of his work, as Sutherland puts it, “to the accompaniment of his screams”. Once again, “when he saw the proofs of the last part of the book, he was not only pleased and astonished at the

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<sup>32</sup> HAYTER. *Opium and the romantic imagination*, p. 342. Hayter’s option seems to lie in a fear of having to undergo the hellish worlds the poets she analyzed had themselves experienced.

<sup>33</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

<sup>34</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.



finale of the story, but did not recognize it as his own”.<sup>35</sup> According to Sutherland, scholars have been increasingly debunking such stories based on detailed analysis of the original manuscripts, which seem to indicate that “the shuddering amanuensis recoiling from the shrieking novelists are an outright invention.”<sup>36</sup> Thus, without the amanuensis, whose presence appears to be an inextricably necessary part of such versions about imaginative inspiration under the influence of opium, these scenarios of the screaming drugged artist dictating his visionary accounts and then, following Sutherland, being “astounded by later seeing what he had unconsciously written and painstakingly revised [are] extremely unconvincing”.<sup>37</sup>

After enumerating such stories, Sutherland then turns to “the most famous and influential of the opiate-inspiration stories... that coiled around Coleridge’s ‘Kubla Khan’”.<sup>38</sup> Coleridge himself, writing what many consider the most famous preface in literary history, declared that after the ingestion of an anodyne (laudanum), he

fell asleep in his chair at the moment that he was reading the following sentence in *Purchas’s pilgrimage*: “Here the Khan Kubla commanded a palace to be built, and a stately garden thereunto. And thus ten miles of fertile ground were inclosed with a wall.”<sup>39</sup>

As the story goes, the poet awoke and started putting down the distinct recollections of his vision, which are what we have in “Kubla Khan,” but before he could finish it, Coleridge tells us, “he was unfortunately called out by a person on business from Porlock, and detained by him above an hour”.<sup>40</sup> As he returned and tried to resume his writing, the vision had almost completely faded, “with the exception of some eight or ten scattered lines and images, all the rest had passed away like the images on the surface of a stream into which a stone has been cast”.<sup>41</sup>

According to Sutherland, scholars have already demonstrated, by means of comparing the many variants between the published text and the manuscript, that Coleridge’s preface contains too many improbabilities.<sup>42</sup> As an example Sutherland reminds us, quoting Zachary Leader, of “Coleridge’s having carried with him to a lonely farmhouse the book by Purchas (a volume about the size of a double bed, apparently)”.<sup>43</sup> As in the previous cases, Sutherland states that, once again, “the evidence of the manuscript and manifest revision would lead one to be skeptical”. As he maintains, all these cases may be interconnected in their fabrications. Hence, as Collins “was dramatizing the account of how he wrote *The Moonstone*,

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<sup>35</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

<sup>36</sup> See MILLGATE. *Walter Scott: the making of the novelist*; PETERS. *The king of inventors: a life of Wilkie Collins*; LONOFF. *Wilkie Collins and his Victorian readers*.

<sup>37</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

<sup>38</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

<sup>39</sup> COLERIDGE. *Kubla Khan or a vision in a dream. A fragment*, p. 346.

<sup>40</sup> COLERIDGE. *Kubla Khan or a vision in a dream. A fragment*, p. 346.

<sup>41</sup> COLERIDGE. *Kubla Khan or a vision in a dream. A fragment*, p. 346.

<sup>42</sup> See LEADER. *Revision and romantic authorship*; LEADER. *Writer’s block*; BATE. *Perspectives of criticism*; HOLMES. *Coleridge: darker reflections*.

<sup>43</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

he clearly took his cue and scenic props from Scott,” who in turn might have probably taken his from Coleridge’s poem, “which he would have read shortly before embarking on his novel”.<sup>44</sup> As for the author of “Kubla Khan,” Sutherland believes that his embroidering “may have been inspired by Perdita Robinson’s account. And she may have made the whole thing up to add some Shakespearean glamour to a bad amateur effort.”<sup>45</sup>

At the end of his article, Sutherland asks himself “why authors of the stature of Scott and Collins should have mystified their working procedures this way”. Possible answers are that the writers saw the opium fable as “something equivalent to the found manuscript in Gothic Fiction,” or that there was “a tincture of guilt,” since the “drug was taken not for pleasure, nor solely as an analgesic, but in the highest service of art”. Sutherland ends by saying that in spite of our love for the idea of the magical inspiration, common sense tells us “that it must be as hard to write well under the influence of laudanum or benzedrine as to drive well under the influence of alcohol”. Whether Sutherland is conjecturing after his own personal experience of having not only experimented with opium but also tried to write under its influence, and whether one can detect the influence of ingesting mind altering substances to yield altered states of literature in the writings of the Romantic poets still remains an unsolved matter, perhaps because it is ultimately irrelevant. The real issue is that they did take opium and did not conceal it. On the contrary, they may have gone to the extreme of making up famous prefaces to render their altered states of literature and visionary experiences that which reason fails to represent, and to, why not, “deceive” those for whom even literature should have to be explained. Overall, we can see how critics have felt the need to “explain away” as purely regrettable the experimentation with mind altering substances, rather than seeing their possible positive connections related to the resulting assimilation of shamanic practices in their representations of the sacred.



## RESUMO

Este artigo trata das conexões entre as assimilações de certas práticas xamânicas, relativas à inspiração romântica na literatura de expressão inglesa. O interesse no mundo de estados de consciência alterada como uma manifestação do sagrado é típico entre os escritores românticos na Inglaterra do século 19. Esses escritores, de fato, buscavam a manifestação do mundo dos sonhos pela ingestão de substâncias que alteram a consciência, assimilando, portanto, uma prática que é igual e primordialmente xamânica. Essa busca é o objeto de investigação deste artigo, que procura mostrar que, apesar das diferenças culturais mais conspícuas, similaridades permeiam as práticas xamânicas e o ideal romântico em suas peregrinações ao sagrado.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Xamanismo, romantismo, assimilação

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<sup>44</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

<sup>45</sup> SUTHERLAND. *Turns unstoned*, p. 30.

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