Coleridge’s Chrysopoetics

Coleridge's Chrysopoetics: Alchemy, Authorship and Imagination

By

Kiran Toor

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To my parents,
who taught me to follow inspiration wherever it led

Art is Lies that tell the Truth
—Picasso

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INTRODUCTION

> If you or I crib a little something, that's plagiarism.
> But if Samuel Taylor Coleridge cribs stuff from Germany, don't you feel another word for it?
> —Stanley Cavell[1]

Authorship, whether of a poem, a novel, an essay or, indeed most especially, a monograph, begins with an uncomfortable confrontation with difference. To establish oneself, as one must claim to do in a dissertation, as a distinct, original, creative contributor to a field that has otherwise never known such wisdom as one is about to expound, is to establish oneself in contradistinction to a separative "other." Predicated upon the fundamental validity of a coherent "self" against an objective other who is "not self", authorship begins with alterity.

Everyone who reads Coleridge must come to some conclusion about the nature of self-directed authorship, intellectual indebtedness, and plagiarism. Frequently cast as an embarrassment or as an instance of deplorable authorial insecurity and emotional dependence, Coleridge's plagiarisms have led to a series of critical enquiries that disclaim his authenticity and trace his work back to some other, more original, source. It is the purpose of this book to reassess the significance of the act of plagiarism and to question its position in Coleridge's aesthetics.

We are too much in love with Coleridge's plagiarisms. To discuss Coleridge as a thinker is inevitably to discuss Coleridge as a plagiarist. An undoubted literary impostor, Coleridge assumes various different voices and directly copies the works of numerous thinkers. Impressed by his borrowings, critical endeavours to understand Coleridge's theory of the imagination, or to appreciate his attempt to exhibit the relation of philosophy to poetry, often run afoul of a prevailing concern for his lack of originality and authenticity. The result is that it has become impossible to consider Coleridge without considering the tortured question of his intellectual debt to "others." Writing in the voice of distanced others, and

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[1] Stanley Cavell, 'In Quest of the Ordinary: Texts of Recovery', in *Romanticism and Contemporary Criticism*, ed. by Morris Eaves and Michael Fischer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 183-239, p. 231.

against the backdrop of numerous translations, adaptations, borrowings and outright thefts, Coleridge confronts his reader with the difficulty of understanding his claim to authorship. It has, as a result, become commonplace to read Coleridge's prose by turning close attention to critical source-hunting and to highlighting his patchy derivations from other people's works.[2]

Most instances of source hunting and claims for precedence used as evidence for Coleridge's plagiarisms are grounded in a binary configuration of identity and alterity (i.e. Coleridge is Coleridge because he is not Wordsworth; or, Coleridge's writings are his own because they are not Schelling's). The problem of intellectual debt and plagiarism, cheek by jowl with the question of originality and authorship, relies upon the Cartesian bifurcation of the "self" and an objective other who is "not self." Insistent upon locating Coleridge's sources as "out there", and envisaging his plagiarism as an inauthentic claim to the words of "other" writers, rather than an assimilation into or an emergence out of his "own" range of thoughts, critics have remained true to their Cartesian heritage.

A philosophy of the self that begins with Descartes can advance only along Cartesian lines. Therefore, it is not my intention to question Coleridge's plagiarisms, but rather the *tradition* in which we have understood their relevance. Seen as violating the principles of unity and sacred selfhood by relying upon source texts *outside* itself, plagiarism is typically characterised as ancillary to the creative process and as a sign of creative incapacity. It is also, traditionally, less worthy of interest. As we shall see, however, to read Coleridge's reliance upon "other" voices and his necessary identification with the "other" as bearing witness *against* his authenticity is to read Coleridge by the light of a tradition in which he does not belong. Subsuming his voice under the aegis of "other" writers whom

[2] There is an extensive literature on Coleridge's plagiarisms. For the earliest accusations of plagiarism against Coleridge see Thomas De Quincey, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge', *Tait's Edinburgh Magazine*, n. s., 1 (1834), 510-11. See also James Ferrier, 'The Plagiarisms of S. T. Coleridge', *Blackwoods Edinburgh Magazine*, 47 (1840), 287-99. Norman Fruman offers what is easily the most exhaustive account of Coleridge's unacknowledged borrowings in *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972). Other important works include: Thomas McFarland, 'The Problem of Coleridge's Plagiarisms', in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 1-52, and James Engell and W. J. Bate, 'The German Borrowings and the Issue of Plagiarism' in the editors' introduction to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and W. J. Bate, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), pp. cxiv-cxxvii. Hereafter referred to as BL.

he heavily plagiarises, and characterising much of his poetry as though guided by some "other" hand ("these are very fine Lines, tho'…hang me, if I know or ever did know the meaning of them, tho' my own composition"), Coleridge realigns his view of authorship and creative imagination with a tradition of thought in which questions of original authentic voice and influence are most markedly perplexed.[3] Deliberately alienating himself from his words in order to vex the question of a unified authorial subjectivity, Coleridge arrives, rather paradoxically, at a deeper understanding of the true nature of the "self." Coleridge's tendency, as he puts it, "to *abstract*…and then by a sort of *transfusion* and *transmission* of my consciousness to *identify* myself with my Object", surpasses the Cartesian split between selfhood and otherness and performs a unique hermeneutic gesture in which the self is posited not only *against* the "other", but can also *become* it.[4] Simply put, Coleridge's prose involves the wholesale incorporation of the words of other writers to such an extent that we might say it *becomes* the work that exerts its effect upon it. This confusion or, more accurately, *transcension* of the "I am" (self) – "it is" (other) distinction is at the very heart of Coleridge's theory of imagination and is the key to appreciating his unique aesthetics or, what I have termed, his "Chrysopoetics."

"Chrysopoetics", a derivative of the Greek terms "chrysos" (gold), and "poïein" (to create), is variously known as alchemy. It is the metallurgical art of extracting metals from their ores, purifying and alloying metals, and transforming base matter into gold. Put simply, it performs the possibility of transmuting one thing into an "other." Writing of alchemy that: "The essence was truth, the form was folly: and this is the definition of Alchemy", Coleridge details a metallurgical tradition in which it is possible to go beyond ("meta") "allon" ("that which *differences*, makes *this* other than *that*").[5] By situating Coleridge in the alchemical tradition, we might reconfigure his plagiarisms as an attempt to go *beyond* the formal limitations of categories of selfhood and otherness. Offering an aesthetic solution to an ontological problem, the Chrysopoetic project proposes a new vocabulary by which the subject-object dichotomy of the Cartesian tradition may be resolved, or better, "dissolved."

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[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Marginalia*, ed. by H. J. Jackson and George Whalley, 6 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), V, p. 116. Hereafter referred to as CM.

[4] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000), IV, p. 975, *italics mine*. Hereafter referred to as CL.

[5] CM II 825, *italics mine*.

It is worth noting here that the concern of this work is not physical alchemy *per se*, but a specific kind of alchemical hermeneutics. Taking Hermes Trismegistus as his guide (after whom hermeneutics itself takes its name), Coleridge evokes a heterodox and fluid notion of authorial voice. Capable of a transformative power which can turn a desired other inward and situate the self in the other, the Hermetic author collapses conventional distinctions between subject and object. As we shall see, alchemy is a quintessentially Hermetic art founded upon the unique decentring multiplication of a "nonoriginal origin" under several pseudonymous identities. By constructing subjectivity and authenticity through a variety of otherness and artificiality, the Hermetic spectrum ranges from misrepresented authorship to an authentic one, and complicates the usual polarisation of authenticity and fraud. Arising out of an undifferentiated source anterior to linguisitic differentiation, the nonoriginal origin or prelinguistic "self" transposes itself into a projected "other" in order to express itself *as self*. This narrative strategy, in which an unwritten "self" writes itself into existence in the form of an "other", emphasises the mutually negotiated nature of creativity. In becoming *other*, the subject becomes more fully him*self* and, in the guise of the other, succeeds in heightening the authenticity of the self. Put differently, it is only through the "other" that the Hermetic artist fashions forth an authentic poetic "self" and, in so doing, manages at once to destroy authenticity as well as to preserve it.

It perhaps goes without saying that not everyone has the epistemological strength of a Coleridge. Founded entirely upon a fraudulent art form with a tendentious history, Chrysopoetics is essentially an aesthetic of the *impossible*. In the Cartesian interstice between "pure" self and "projected" other, Coleridge locates what he refers to as "a *golden* tertium aliquid" or "golden third something," in which authentic voice is synonymous with artificial otherness, and the quickest way to the "self" is inevitably through the necessary fictions of the "other."[6] Performing not merely a rhetorical subvention but a complete transcension of the dualist assumptions of modern epistemology, the Chrysopoetic author *opposes* himself in order to become *more fully* himself. In this light, the mountebank's art becomes a fitting aesthetic analogue for the workings of the creative imagination, which Coleridge defines in part by its alchemical propensity to "dissolve, diffuse, and dissipate, in order to re-create."[7] More precisely, the Hermetic epistemology promotes an undoubtedly

[6] CL IV 550, *italics mine.*
[7] BL I 304.

derivative but essentially transformative "play" in the usual interstice between the self and the other. Self-expression is more accurately the expression of the self in the *form* of an 'other' (a transformative re-creation of the self *as* other), and all imaginative expression is necessarily a kind of "play"giarism.

In presenting this analysis of Coleridge's plagiarisms, I have no excuses to make. I do not deny that Coleridge plagiarised nor do I suggest that his borrowings have been exaggerated and their importance distorted. Instead, this book is based upon an appreciation of alchemical imagery in understanding those stages of authorial creativity usually assigned or dismissed as plagiaristic, uncreative, and unoriginal. It is, in other words, an extended attempt to assess the poetic potential of alchemy in Coleridge's writing. The position which I seek to establish is, quite simply, that Coleridge's plagiarisms re-enact the transformative and performative dimensions of the imaginative and creative act. Redefining the tradition in which the concept of plagiarism is typically understood, Coleridge expounds a uniquely transformative aesthetic in which self-expression *necessarily* occurs in the form of an other.

In this study, the term "plagiarism" will be taken in a wide sense, encompassing a range of forms of derivative writing, or any writing that confounds the traditional Cartesian boundaries between "self" and "other." This definition has the advantage of opening up the discussion of plagiarism proper, that is to say the appropriation of the work of one author by another, to forms of writing which would not necessarily be included in more traditional approaches. The transformations enacted by Coleridge's use of source texts, his manipulation of the voices of others and modification and transplantation of "himself" under the voices of "others", all fail to heed the conventional constraints of Cartesian epistemology and demand a new hermeneutic of plagiarism. Calling into question the very act of authorship, "playgiarism" in the broader sense makes explicit the intertextual and other-dependent dimension of all narrative. Rather than a bifurcation with the self on "this" side and "other" opposite, it is the imaginative potential of a transformative aesthetic that an author not only enters into a dialogue with the other, but necessarily *becomes* it.

Moving away from the notion of plagiarism as a kind of creative incapacity, the starting point for this book is an awareness of the coexistence of plagiarism and creation in the Coleridgean corpus. In order to expound upon this idea, it has been necessary to review Coleridge's plagiarisms in the context of the Hermetic and alchemical approaches with which he was familiar. Tracing Coleridge's various encounters with the

Hermetic tradition throughout his life, in works as varied as those of Plato, Marsilio Ficino, Ralph Cudworth, Jacob Boehme, Herman Boerhaave, and F. W. J. Schelling, I hope to emancipate Coleridge from the misnomer of "plagiarism" that has too long muddied his true achievements. For Coleridge, locating one*self* in the words of an *other* is not so much the activity of an impostor poet, but a fundamental expression of a hermeneutic which *goes beyond* the formal limitations of categories of "otherness" altogether, and employs a literary fraud in order to manifest a philosophical truth. While in Cartesian terms, Coleridge falls short of a standard of sincerity and originality, the Chrysopoetic formulation offers a more detailed attention to, and respect for, the artificiality of authenticity and, accordingly, the authenticity of Coleridge's art(ifice).

PART ONE:

THE HISTORY OF WHAT NEVER WAS

CHAPTER ONE

AUTHORING THE SELF: TOWARDS A HISTORIOGRAPHY OF OTHERS

[Perhaps it is his] nature,
Not to be other than one thing.
—Shakespeare, *Coriolanus*, IV, vii, ll. 41-2.

i. The Mirror, the Lamp, and the Line of Direct Contact

I. A. Richards writes that in order to expound upon Coleridge's theory of imagination, one must "start where he himself in the *Biographia*… really started: that is, with a theory of the act of knowledge, or of consciousness, or, as he called it, 'the coincidence or coalescence of an OBJECT with a SUBJECT.'"[1] Since Descartes, the central problem of philosophy has been the relationship between the individual self and the external world. One consequence of the "birth" of the subject in Cartesian dualism, and a crucial problem in aesthetics, is the attempt to explain how a subject can have thoughts which correspond to an object essentially separate from it. Specifically, how do ideas in the mind relate to the world around it? How does the mind know the material realm? Essentially, what *is* the relationship between the subject and the object, the self and the other, the mind and the world? The way in which we choose to answer these questions determines the way in which philosophies of selfhood, authenticity, originality, and creativity, ultimately progress.

The evolution of the imagination in the history of philosophy, after the claims of Cartesian dualism had taken hold of the Enlightenment mind, is typically granted a rather straightforward genealogical progression. The conventional lineage concerning the relationship between the individual self and the external world, between subject and object, begins with an early mimetic concern with the "object", then traces the rise of the

[1] I. A. Richards, *Coleridge on Imagination* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1960), p. 44.

"subject" in Western thought with its "birth" in Cartesian philosophy and its culmination in German idealism, through to its "death" in post-modern thought.[2] James Engell, in *The Creative Imagination*, is one proponent of this progressive and linear configuration of the development of the imagination. Positing the mechanists on one side and the idealists on the other, Engell sustains a clear line of development from the materialist to the idealist view, suggesting that the imagination either reflects reality and is therefore *object*-centered, or is created by the observer and is therefore *subject*-regulated. Enlisting Coleridge to support his position, Engell quotes his distinction between the early natural or material philosophers who "give the whole to the object and make the subject the mere result of that", and the later idealists who "give the whole to the subject and make the object a mere result involved in it."[3] This divisive conceptualisation of the historical development of the imagination is the product of a system of thought which sees the inception of the "self" in Cartesian philosophy advancing out of the allegedly inferior mimetic trends of the past and progressing through to, and culminating in, the primacy of subject-oriented idealism. The subject eventually comes to prevail over the object, and this becomes the hallmark of the romantic imagination.

Recently, Robert J. Griffin, in his study of literary historiography, notes that a genealogical assessment which documents the evolution of imagination from object-focused materialism through to subject-focused idealism is operative "in every student's initiation into Romantic periodisation," and continues to be the prevalent view in almost any survey of the history of imagination, "particularly one that uses the Norton anthology."[4] One classic example of this conventional historiography is M. H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp*. Tracing a great shift in the historical conceptualisation of the creative mind, supposedly, through a change in the metaphors used to describe it – the mirror and the lamp of his title – Abrams divides authorship into either a mimetic or an essentially productive act: "If Plato was the main source of the philosophical archetype of the reflector," writes Abrams, "Plotinus was the chief

[2] For more on this conventional lineage, both its elaboration and its subversion, see Frederick C. Beiser, *German Idealism: the Struggle against Subjectivism 1781-1801* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 1-2, 6, 9.

[3] James Engell, *The Creative Imagination* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), p. 330. The citation is taken by Engell from Coleridge's *Lectures 1818-1819 on the History of Philosophy*, ed. by J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), I, p. 115. Hereafter referred to as LHP.

[4] Robert J. Griffin, *Wordsworth's Pope: a Study in Literary Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 111.

begetter of the archetype of the projector."[5] For Abrams, while mirror metaphors are continuous through Locke and the eighteenth century, lamp metaphors are prominent in the Cambridge Platonists who influence Coleridge.[6] In fact, suggests Abrams, the shift of emphasis from the former to the latter, from the "mirror" to the "lamp", is the informing impetus behind the romantic theory of creativity as it emerges around the beginning of the nineteenth century, and it is from this decisive switch that art is reconfigured as no longer merely mimetic but expressive.

The notion of a linear progression of the imagination out of an early object focus to a later concentration on the subject is widely dispersed throughout literary criticism. René Wellek, in his volume on 'The Romantic Age' in *A History of Modern Criticism* (1955), published two years after Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp*, links "the rise of an emotional concept of poetry" to "the implied rejection of the imitation theory."[7] Similarly, in *The Order of Things* (1966), Michel Foucault sustains the view that:

> Up to the end of the sixteenth century, resemblance played a constructive role in the knowledge of Western culture. It was resemblance that largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them… And representation – whether in the service of pleasure or of knowledge – was posited as a form of *repetition*: the theatre of life or the *mirror of nature*, that was the claim made by all language, its manner of declaring its existence and of formulating its right of speech.[8]

More recently, Richard Kearney in *The Wake of Imagination* (1988) applies Abrams's titular metaphors to represent the difference between pre-modern and modern theories of imagination. "The mimetic paradigm of imagining is replaced by the productive paradigm," summarises Kearney, "the imagination ceases to function as a *mirror* reflecting some external reality and becomes a *lamp* which projects its own internally

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[5] M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1953), p. 59. It is worth mentioning here that Abrams appropriates the mirror-lamp distinction from William Butler Yeats. I will return to examine the precise nature of Abrams's (mis)appropriation of Yeats's words in the final chapter of this book.

[6] Abrams, p. 59.

[7] René Wellek, 'The Romantic Age', in *A History of Modern Criticism*, 4 vols (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1955), II, p. 2.

[8] Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: an Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 19, *italics mine*.

generated light onto things."[9] Similarly, in *Instruments and the Imagination* (1995), Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman note: "the mirror is an image of the mind reflecting nature through poetry; this is the *neoclassical* goal of clear picturing. The lamp, on the other hand, portrays the mind as a radiant projector illuminating the objects perceived and actively operating on the world that the poet inhabits; this is the *romantic* goal."[10] In *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth Century French Thought* (1994), Martin Jay provides what is perhaps the most summative view: "If the Romantics abandoned the mirror, they did so – to borrow the metaphor M. H. Abrams appropriated from William Butler Yeats – in order to light the lamp of inner inspiration." He explains: "They saw creation as emanation on the model of rays of light sent out from the sun; the mind was less a receptor of illumination than its expressive projector."[11] Following the general contours sketched out by Abrams, critics continue to identify an evolutionary continuum of creativity throughout history. Ranging from mimetic to expressive theories of English (and somewhat earlier, German) romantic criticism, or, from mimetic to "I-representative" literature which expresses the experiences and state of mind of the poet in his "proper person" as opposed to the experiences of some objective "other", contemporary criticism stresses the central opposition between *self*-inspired and *other*-directed theories of inspiration and creativity.[12] Upholding a linear temporal axis of progressive development with the self on 'this' side and the other on 'that' side, critics represent the development of creativity as a tidy linearity, advancing along an "accumulative wave, across the century line", and reaching its apex in the subjective idealism of the romantic age.[13]

The pervasiveness of such historiographies is particularly exacerbated in Coleridge studies where the development of his thought is considered an exemplary model of this historical development. Since it is really only with Kant and the German idealists in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century that the productive imagination becomes, as it were, officially recognised by mainstream Western thought, Coleridge is important for the decisive role he plays in shaping British romantic discourses on the self by

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[9] Richard Kearney, *The Wake of Imagination: Toward a Postmodern Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), p. 155, *italics mine.*

[10] Thomas L. Hankins and Robert J. Silverman, *Instruments and the Imagination* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 88.

[11] Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: the Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (California: University of California Press, 1994), p. 108.

[12] Abrams, p. 98.

[13] 'Editors' Introduction' in BL lxxi.

importing central concepts from German romanticism and idealism into contemporary debate. Afraid of reducing the mind to cold mechanism, Coleridge is said to have put behind him the associationist psychology of Hartley and to employ the language of Kant, Fichte, and Schelling in order to frame his opposition. Saturated with German concepts and terminology, Coleridge's aesthetic speculations are typically understood as progressing out of early mimetic and materialist explanations towards the triumph of the subject in German idealism. According to James Volant Baker, for instance, it is only after Kant takes hold of Coleridge "as with a giant's hand" that the *coup de grace* is irrevocably administered to the object-based materialism of Hartley.[14] Advancing out of an early "wobble" in mechanical and associationistic explanations, writes Baker, Coleridge moves onto the more "mature" traditions of Kantian idealism and Schellingian *Naturphilosophie*.[15] This straightforward chronology informs the critical tendency to divide Coleridge's life according to the prevailing character of conventional historiographical enquiry in which earlier mimetic and object-based mechanistic concerns prevail and are later ousted by the more sophisticated metaphysics of subject-focused creativity. Progressing, as Engell explains, from "Gerard to Tetens, then Tetens to Coleridge – with the added interpolations of Schelling", Coleridge's metaphysics advance in "one line of direct contact" and pursue the legacy of the mimetic model of imagination to its final and justifiable ends.[16] As we shall see, this insistence upon a linear progression of thought, emerging out of mere object-directed mimesis and culminating in the primacy of the self, not only informs our understanding of the development of Coleridge's theory of the imagination but also, and rather more damagingly, feeds our tendency to criticise his apparent lack of originality and authenticity in the formulation of it.

ii. Authoring Coleridge's Plagiarisms: The Myth of Solitary Authorship

Because a philosophy of the "self" that begins with Descartes can only progress in a Cartesian way, one outgrowth of this subject-object dualism is that it colours not only our concept of the "development" of the creative imagination, but also our understanding of notions of "authenticity" and

[14] BL I 153.
[15] James Volant Baker, *The Sacred River: Coleridge's Theory of Imagination* (New York: Greenwood Press Publishers, 1957), pp. 9-12, 22-31.
[16] Engell, p. 123.

"authorship." Since the Cartesian mind is bent upon dividing the world into a series of binary oppositions progressing along a path of linear development, and culminating in the predominance of the "subject", a key function of this system (and our particular inheritance from it) is the perpetuation of a fundamental rift and promotion of the sacred "self" against an external "other." Indelibly marked by the finitude of indissoluble distinctions, Cartesian discourses of authorial "selfhood" and "authenticity", like discourses of historical progression, are predicated upon the privileging of a coherent "self" over an objective other who is "not self." Because of the high premium put upon the unified "self", ideas of originality and invention are defined against the counter-ideal of mere classical imitation or mimetic repetition of "others." Originality, according to this view, is defined as the product of a "unique" self, unfettered by the impurities of an external "other", and the sole source and origin of its discourse (i.e. I am *me* because I am *not you*, or, my writings are my *own*, and therefore "original", because they are *not yours*). Preserving the sanctity of a unified identity and coherent originality, the truest and most original "author" in the Cartesian light is one who is associated with the purity of singularity and selfhood alone. Originality, simply put, is the product of one who is *entirely* "self."

In *Romantic Theatricality*, Judith Pascoe refers to this as the defining "romantic mythology" of the writer who seeks inspiration in solitude and for whom "the encroachments of the [other] wreak havoc on the authenticity of the composition process."[17] Almost invariably, she explains, the self is defined against the alterity of a perilous nether world of exteriority, peopled by estranged "others" who contaminate the pure unity of the authorial self. Discriminating against the "other" in favour of the self-same, a text may be said to have "authentic" value only if it is the work of a particular author, or of a particular *self*, unsullied by an extraneous "other." Denouncing the mimetic model of creativity as object-based *reproduction* and *duplication*, authorship must arise from *within* and be perfectly *unborrowed*. The accusation of inauthenticity, then, is founded upon the formalist opposition between a self-originating artist and one who takes on the words of an *other* who is *not part of himself* but who impresses upon him from *without*. Unsurprisingly, in Coleridge criticism this strategy of separating pure self from impure other, or authentic from inauthentic authorship, is deftly employed not only in understanding the progress of Coleridge's theory of imagination, but also in fuelling charges

[17] Judith Pascoe, *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry and Spectatorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. xi.

of plagiarism against him since his death. Since an author has formal value precisely because he does *not* bear witness to the influence of some "other" more "original" mind, Coleridge, as the product of numerous unacknowledged debts, fails to free his work from the influence of "others" and – so to speak – fails to "author" it.

It is worth pausing here to point out that Harold Bloom's seminal work, *The Anxiety of Influence*, appears to be one of the most obvious and glaring exceptions to this general trend. Against the otherwise inflexible notion of singular authority and subjective autonomy, Bloom raises awareness of the importance of the influence of the "other" upon the "author" and rebukes the common insistence upon originality at the expense of the other: "We need to stop thinking of [the] poet as an autonomous ego," he writes, "every poet is a being caught up in a dialectical relationship…with another poet or poets."[18] Expanding upon this idea in a companion volume, *A Map of Misreading*, Bloom suggests that poetic production is a series of deflections of the burden of "others." Every poet "misreads" his predecessors in order to establish his own individuality, and every poem is thus a "misprision" of an earlier one. Enumerating six varieties of poetic misprision, Bloom even goes so far as to concede that plagiarism is one form of this "revisionary ratio" of what has come before.[19] However, while Bloom goes some way in elucidating the indebtedness of every author to a series of "others", he nevertheless ends up reiterating the Cartesian bias. Stressing that authorial indebtedness to "others" causes "anxiety" among authors, Bloom asserts that it is justifiably so: "for what strong maker desires the realisation that he has *failed to create himself*?"[20] While authorship is certainly other-determined, he writes, it inevitably results in a constant struggle *against* beleaguering forces, in which the poet "*wrestles*" with his precursors.[21] Showing his allegiance to authorial "selfhood" alone, Bloom surmises that the "influence, and more precisely poetic influence" of another is "more of a *blight than a blessing*"; where it does operate successfully, it operates "as misprision, as deliberate, even perverse revisionism."[22] Thus while

[18] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p. 91.
[19] Harold Bloom, *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 126.
[20] Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 5, *italics mine*.
[21] Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 5. For more on this view of Bloom's criticism see Thomas McFarland, *Originality and Imagination* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), pp. 10-14.
[22] Bloom, *Anxiety*, p. 50.

Bloom's premise appears to be an exception to the trend of positing authorship *against* otherness, he still upholds poetic singularity and autonomy as the *ideal*, separating it off from any evidence of poetic influence or vicarious expression which he refers to as "a particular kind of catastrophe", namely "the primal catastrophe of poetic incarnation."[23] Whilst denying the possibility of sacred autonomous authorship, Bloom's expostulations on the negative influence of the "other" continue to betray his treasuring of sacred "self-same" originality.

Much has been made of the record of Coleridge's frailties – particularly his fondness for borrowing the words of other writers. That his work is highly derivative and "externally" sourced by several "others" is unquestionable. The bearer of many intellectual debts, Coleridge weaves quotations and material from numerous writers into the fabric of much of his work. Our usual attempts to understand such borrowings betray our critical heritage and frequently earn Coleridge the reputation of an unmitigated liar and inauthentic fraud. As Dorothy Wordsworth put it: "He plagiarised; he procrastinated; he spent a dismaying amount of effort in deceiving himself, and seeking to deceive others."[24] Accepting the validity of the fundamental dualism between self and other, and treasuring singularity while concomitantly denying derivativeness, our historiographical solipsism is encoded in critical discussions of Coleridge's authorship. As Walter Jackson Bate explains: "Throughout most of his life the unconfident Coleridge – inhibited when he tried to write directly and formally in his own voice (inhibited, that is, when he was trying to write anything he felt really important) – became most completely alive and the resources of his mind most open when he could talk or write vicariously."[25] Similarly, R. A. Foakes, in his introduction to Coleridge's *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, contends that they "can hardly be thought of as 'composed' like books," instead they are "full of quotations or echoes of *other* writers."[26] Richard Haven notes that Coleridge's most sustained and systematic philosophical arguments are those "which follow most closely the thought of someone *else*", and Norman Fruman in *Coleridge: the Damaged Archangel* presents Coleridge as "an anxious

[23] Bloom, *Map of Misreading*, p. 9.
[24] Dorothy Wordsworth, *The Letters of William and Dorothy Wordsworth*, ed. by Ernest de Selincourt, 8 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), II, pp. 398-399. This testimony appears in a letter to Catherine Clarkson on 12 April 1810.
[25] Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge* (New York: Collier Books, 1968), p. 37.
[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, 2 vols (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), I, p. liv, *italics mine.* Hereafter referred to as LL.

man of limited intellectual powers," driven by the security of a reputation which can be "won only by appropriating the work of *others*."[27]

Certainly, in the vocabulary of Cartesian dualism, the "self" that claims authorship of Coleridge's texts appears to be nothing more than a curious array of free-floating "others." The authorial self we encounter upon reading Coleridge is *not* an autonomous agent. Consequently, estimates of the value of Coleridge's writings and his stature as an original philosopher have not fared very well. The improprieties of his plagiarisms inspire little confidence in his "originality", and the failure of Coleridge's philosophy, particularly his philosophy of the imagination, to stand up under the aegis of a singular self-contained authorship tends to disintegrate it into disrepute.[28] Charges of plagiarism have much exercised Coleridgean commentators, and particular interest circulates around the controversy of his unacknowledged borrowings from the German philosophers. Kant, Schelling, and his disciple Steffens, are the most obvious examples. Engell states simply that Coleridge's idea of the imagination, and his use of it to form critical values and to apply them to particular works, "is not original": "In forming his conception of the imagination, Coleridge *draws on nearly every other writer who discussed the subject*."[29] Likewise, T. M. Raysor dismisses Coleridge's central theory of imagination as "unfortunate", and René Wellek perceives Coleridge roving amidst the ideas of transcendental Germans with little originality.[30] In a section entitled 'Coleridge's Philosophy and Criticism', Wellek points out that: "at crucial points in his writings Coleridge uses Kant, Schelling, and A. W. Schlegel, reproducing the very pattern of sentences and the exact vocabulary." The result, he suggests, is that much of what impresses critics about Coleridge's theory of imagination "is simply the teaching of Schelling and cannot be made the basis of a claim for Coleridge's philosophical greatness."[31]

It is well known that book twelve of *Biographia Literaria* embarks upon a discussion that is a verbatim translation of Schelling. Going

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[27] Richard Haven, *Patterns of Consciousness: An Essay on Coleridge* (Massachusetts: University of Massachusetts Press, 1969), p. 2. This analysis of Norman Fruman's *Damaged Archangel* is provided by John Beer in *Coleridge's Poetic Intelligence* (London: Macmillan Press, 1977), p. xii.

[28] For more on this view see Paul Hamilton, *Coleridge's Poetics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell Publisher ltd., 1983), pp. 8-12.

[29] Engell, p. 328, *italics mine.*

[30] Cited in R. H. Fogle, *The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism*, (California: University of California Press, 1962), vii.

[31] Wellek, II, pp. 152-3.

further, Joseph Warren Beach holds that "every leading idea" in Coleridge, "every turn in the argument, every ingenuity of metaphysical invention, is taken straight from either Steffens or Schelling."[32] While Engell and Bate in their introduction to *Biographia* propose that "a strong case could be made for the Fichtean, rather than Schellingian provenance of these chapters", Nigel Leask retorts with what has become a commonplace in Coleridge criticism: "it's really a quibble *which* of the Germans most influenced Coleridge", what is important is that "his theory of the Imagination is best approached *via the German debate*."[33] This train of argument is further sustained by John Stuart Mill who asserts that: "Coleridge is anticipated in all the fundamentals of his theory by the great Germans of the latter half of the last century", and by Mary Warnock who, treading closely on the heels of Mill, asserts in her book *Imagination*: "I shall take it for granted in the following pages that there is no need to dispute Mill's words, and hardly any need to amplify them."[34] Warnock's condemnation of Coleridge is particularly decisive: he is "a voracious, though a careless and inaccurate reader." He not only copies out great passages of philosophy without stating his sources, writes Warnock, but "he pretends to have thought of things for himself which he obviously borrows" and he claims to be "the first to think of things which he plainly recognizes, when he reads them, as somehow speaking directly to him, but which he never actually formulates himself."[35] Where Coleridge's musings are first articulated in the work of previous thinkers, she stresses, "Coleridge just copies it" and "we should not risk claiming, therefore, any of Coleridge's views as his own original thought, even those which look most as if they were derived from his introspection."[36] In the end however, it is still Fruman, throwing up his arms as if in defeat, who sounds the most definitive death knell: "Coleridge really ha[s] no coherent theory of the imagination, or of mental functioning in general," he writes, "…and because his sources are so diverse, it is futile to expect consistency…The scattered bits and pieces represent diverse coins, jewels, bullion, and promissory notes, mainly (but not entirely) scooped up in

[32] Joseph Warren Beach, 'Coleridge's Borrowings from the German", *English Literary History*, IX (1942), 36-58 (p. 49).
[33] 'Editors' Introduction' to BL xii; Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988), p. 108, *italics mine*.
[34] John Stuart Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1950), p. 45. Also cited in Mary Warnock, *Imagination* (London: Faber and Faber, 1976), pp. 72-73.
[35] Warnock, p. 73.
[36] Warnock, pp. 73, 76.

repeated raids on the unguarded Brinks truck of German romanticism."[37] While Fruman's version has not gone uncontested, he nevertheless poses the question that must of necessity haunt any study of Coleridge's thought:

> When we consider how deeply the insights and principles of Schlegel are diffused throughout Coleridge's works, and when we remind ourselves further of the multitude of borrowings from German thought elsewhere in the prose writings, are we not forced substantially to modify the exalted claims made for Coleridge as an *original* critic and aesthetician?[38]

As a product of all the "others" who come before him, and as an amalgam of all the thinkers whose words he employs in place of his own, Coleridge incites us to ask whether his writings may accurately be considered his "own."

Certainly, Coleridge has done little to dissuade his readers from such misgivings. Admitting the provenance of his German predecessors in an 1804 notebook entry, Coleridge teases: "In the Preface of my Metaphys. Works I should say – Once & all read Tetens, Kant, Fichte, &c – & there you will trace or if you are on the hunt, track me."[39] Indeed, as he prophesies, Coleridge's violation of the principle of intrinsic originality and his proclivity for supplementing his thought with the words of "others", has led to a long tradition of scholarship in which critics generally satisfy themselves with pointing out his sources and aligning comparative passages in target texts. In fact, instances of source-hunting and cataloguing abound so readily in Coleridge criticism that any attempt to establish his uniqueness as a thinker tends to become obscured. As Warnock rather flippantly remarks: "Where Coleridge stops quoting someone else, he becomes more than usually incoherent", but "none of this need concern us in detail."[40] To study Coleridge, then, is traditionally to study all the "others" to whom he is heavily indebted; and of course Coleridge scholars have found no lack of relevant evidence. Carving out

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[37] Norman Fruman, 'Ozymandias and the Reconciliation of Opposites', in *Coleridge's Theory of Imagination Today*, ed. by Christine Gallant (New York: AMS Press, 1989), pp. 49-64, p. 56.

[38] Fruman, *Damaged Archangel*, p. 211.

[39] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Kathleen Coburn, 5 vols (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1957-1990), II, p. 2375. Hereafter referred to as CN.

[40] Warnock, pp. 100, 73. Two of the most exemplary cases of the inventory style approach to Coleridge's writings are McFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* cited above, and John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1927).

inventory style histories of Coleridge's source material, examining the relation of his writings to those whom he read, by whom he was influenced, or from whom he borrowed, and cataloguing his ideas as but a mere amalgam of all the "others" who came before him, Coleridge's critics have remained true to their Cartesian heritage. However, as we shall see, to study Coleridge's *sources* is by no means the same as to understand his *meaning*. In order to expound upon this in more detail, let us return first to the question of the fundamental validity of the historical rift between the subject and the object in the development of theories of imagination and authorship.

iii. Mythical Progressions: A Critique of Progress

It seems necessary here to say something more about the lineage upon which histories of authorial imagination and creativity, along with criticisms of Coleridge's alleged inauthenticity, have been understood. Specifically, it is worth pausing to reconsider whether or not we have been entirely accurate in our adoption of the linear scheme of historical progression which posits "self" on one side and the "other" against it. By Abrams's own admission, the historiography of *The Mirror and the Lamp* offers a systematic distinction between philosophies that are essentially *co-existent*. Abrams tells us in the opening lines of his chapter on 'The Development of the Expressive Theory of Poetry and Art' that his study posits "separately and in sequence developments that are *in fact* concomitant and interdependent."[41] Dividing literary history into periods dominated by either the mirror *or* the lamp, Abrams separates *procedurally*, that is, methodically or even *falsely*, what is in fact inseparable and "interdependent." He writes that many of "the characteristic patterns of romantic theory", that is, expressive or anti-mimetic modes of thought, are to be found "variously developed, in earlier writers." By "shifting the focus and selecting the examples," Abrams self-confessedly and strategically chooses to emphasise "the novelty" of early nineteenth-century thought rather than its "continuity" with the past.[42] By isolating interdependent elements into chronological sequence, Abrams sets the stage for his notion that the imagination progresses along a linear path of development until its radical, epochal break from the past in the late eighteenth century. Opting for dramatic narrative over historical accuracy, Abrams's bifurcation of mirror and lamp, receptor and projector, other and

[41] Abrams, p. 71, *italics mine.*
[42] Abrams, p. 70

self, is in fact founded upon the *false* division of concomitant faculties for the sake of creating a linear chronology and divisive epistemology. Laying down this "simplification", as he terms it, Abrams rearranges interdependent processes "for convenience of exposition" and, in so doing, provides a historical division between object– and subject–based creativity, or between the early configurations of the "mirror" and later concentrations on the "lamp", solely for purpose of ease of understanding.[43] As we have seen, this neat delineation of subject-based originality in the romantic age has informed most critical histories written after it. Rather problematically for our purposes then, a narrative division which Abrams recounts in order to stage a linear development and "evolution" in the history of imagination, because it is inherent to story telling and a simple aid to understanding, has become the prevailing tradition of our thought and has tended to obscure the more complex literary history which underlies it.

Like Abrams, Engell notes that his account of the development of the creative imagination also rests upon sweeping generalisations for the sake of clarity rather than accuracy. Classifying early thinkers as propounding a solely mimetic form of art, he writes: "in the Middle ages and the Renaissance…there was comparatively little psychological penetration into exactly how the mind recreates and holds within itself a picture of the world, or why genius in art is more than technical superiority."[44] Against this mimetic strain, Engell posits Coleridge's notion of creativity, which is "almost the reverse of that found in classical and mediaeval thought, and which, in fact, persist[s] into the eighteenth century."[45] Employing naïve historicism in order to emphasise the romantic exultation of the authorial "self" over the merely mimetic re-presentation of the "object", Engell sustains the conventional, albeit mistaken, historiography of linear imaginative progression. Having asserted the rift between the eighteenth century and all that came before it, Engell in the very next breath concedes that "in this simplified overview exceptions come to mind", and he specifies that the speculations of Ficino are a general exception to the rule.[46] However, while he begins to signal to his reader the inherent falsification in any history which divides an entirely mimetic past from a more self-expressive romanticism, Engell develops the issue no further and abandons any specific enquiry into "the speculations of Ficino", never to return. Like Abrams, while Engell admits his divisive misnomer, he does little to remedy it. The pervasiveness of Engell's historiography of

[43] Abrams, p. 70-1.
[44] Engell, p. 11.
[45] Editors' introduction to BL, xcvii.
[46] Engell, p. 11.

romantic imagination is evinced in George J. Leonard's work, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage*. Following Engell, Leonard asserts that: "In Coleridge…high art's attention has been turned 180 degrees from Ficino."[47] Such critical assertions, as we shall go on to see in the following chapters, are by no means an accurate or even fair assessment of the work of either Ficino or Coleridge. Given the overwhelming influence of the mirror-lamp historiography upon the writings of many thinkers, and the more rudimentary influence of the rift in Cartesian constructions of selfhood and otherness upon our understanding of notions of authorship, originality, and authenticity, I would suggest that it is necessary to emancipate our understanding of Coleridge's thought from this fraudulent linearity. Studies of Coleridge's plagiarisms have too long suffered from the fundamental misnomer of the schism between subject and object, self and other, and if Abrams and Engell admit that their division is flawed, how indeed can we persist in understanding Coleridge by it?

Upsetting established chronologies even further, Frederick C. Beiser in his recent study *German Idealism: The Struggle against Subjectivism 1781-1801*, demonstrates that the historical and epistemological divide which traditionally situates German idealism against earlier materialist philosophies is equally misguided. Demonstrating fissures in the conventional lineage, Beiser maintains that German idealism is not the story of the triumph of the subject against earlier object-based materialism, but is in fact an account of progressive *de-subjectivisation*. In Beiser's words, the accepted chronology which interprets the development of the dominant epistemology out of object-centered materialism towards subject-centered idealism is "tendentious philosophically and anachronistic historically."[48] Where the conventional view holds that German idealism is a radical form of subjectivism, expanding the powers of the self to encompass the entire world, Beiser suggests that idealism is in fact the product of another, if not entirely opposite, impulse. Rather than an increase in subjectivity, writes Beiser, German idealism never abandons the importance of the *thing-in-itself* and, as such, is "an attempt to establish a satisfactory form of *realism*" and *naturalism*.[49] In Beiser's analysis, idealism emerges not as the logical progression of a Cartesian tradition of philosophy in which the self is sacred and primary, but as the

[47] George J. Leonard, *Into the Light of Things: The Art of the Commonplace from Wordsworth to John Cage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), p. 70
[48] Beiser, p. ix
[49] Beiser, p. 3.