

The Trinitarian Dialectics of Child Development and The Perceptive-Creative Act of Faith in the Work of Samuel Taylor Coleridge

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WE ARE BORN IN, AND INTO, LIMINALITY. From a graft within the mother's body, we erupt into natal separation, and into our unique existence. We discover our mother's unique subjectivity, and subsequently we discover our selves. The cleaving separation, however, is not clean cut, but is complicated by a consistent blurring of the boundaries of self and (m)other, self and world. In this space of this liminality and ambiguity, we meet the dark chasm of doubt, and so, concurrently, we make continual leaps of faith. For Coleridge, this faith is not only an essential component of birth and child development, faith is *itself* a creative act. And as we continue to leap in, and into faith, so do we continue to grow and to develop. It is a growth which, for Coleridge, operates via the dialectics of the Trinity. Coleridge's spiritually-inflected studies of child development have very rarely been taken seriously as sophisticated theoretical treatise. The task of this paper, subsequently, is to amend this academic elision, and to advocate Coleridge's work as a unique contribution to proto-psychoanalytic explorations of child development, and concomitant elucidations on subjectivity and notions of reality. Coleridge's 'reality,' of course, includes God. At times, therefore, Coleridge offers a fascinating inversion of some of the dominant assumptions of psychoanalytic studies of child development. Peppered with psychoanalytical contextualisation, concurrently, this paper aims to attend to Coleridge's theoretical and poetical insights on child development, implicitly arguing for their continued relevance. This work will ultimately conclude that, for Coleridge, childbirth, child development, and spiritual (re)development in adulthood, repeat the structural dynamics of the Trinitarian dialectic. These dynamics are then repeated within the intra-psychic components of the individual, who internalises the simultaneous union and separation of the Trinity. This separation, moreover, is the space which allows for faith. Indeed, faith, as Coleridge sees it, is a perceptive-creative act, and it is through faith that things simultaneously come into existence, and are revealed as having always existed with God, from the beginning.

CONTACT

"For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring." (Acts 17:28)¹

In the legacy of Julia Kristeva and Elissa Marder, psychoanalytic thought has largely come to see birth as a process which uniquely problematizes the

¹ *The Bible*. Authorized King James Version, Oxford UP, 1998.

distinction of I and Other.² A womb ejects, an umbilical cord is cut, and mother and child are rendered—at least biologically—distinct. The foetus/graft which once grew within, and as part of, the mother's body, transforms into a new and separate being at the moment of birth. Yet, according to Kristeva, Freud, Lacan, and Winnicott—to name a few canonised psychoanalysts—it is not until at least 6 months *after* physical birth when an infant is psychically 'born,' this being the moment in which their individual subjectivity is developed as distinct from the mother's.³ The split event of birth, consequently, complicates notions of agency. The event of birth itself is staggered according to its different vantage points, and it is thus unclear when 'birth' even occurs. Birth, an event we do not consciously remember, even predates subjective experience⁴. Consequently, despite being the framing event and ground of our entire existence, birth is in many ways an unknowable mystery. It is a proposition of this paper that Coleridge, writing 200 years prior, presents proto-psychoanalytic expositions on birth and child development which similarly complicate notions of subjectivity, temporality, and reality. Coleridge's work, however, acts in inverse of the somewhat pessimistic tone of many psychoanalytical writings on birth, where birth is a traumatic tearing from the mother, a feeling of loss, or an entrance into an eternal feeling of lack⁵. For Coleridge, the splitting that occurs in birth and child development is not negative, it is divine. In fact, it is a divine repetition of the subjective dialectics of the Christian Trinity, that which Coleridge calls "the primary Idea, out of which all other Ideas are evolved [...] the Mystery (which is but another word for Idea) in which are hidden all the Treasures of knowledge" (CN IV 5294).⁶

In the *Opus Maximum's* essay on child development, "the Origin of the Idea of God in the Mind of Man",⁷ the Trinitarian subjective structure is repeated within the mother-infant relationship which becomes, for Coleridge, a paradigm for "the whole problem of existence" (OM 131). Indeed, as Alexander J. B. Hampton notes, this "relationship between the mother and the newborn reflects that between the individual and God, for God's love is

² C.f. Marder, Elissa. *The Mother in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction: Psychoanalysis, Photography, Deconstruction*. Fordham University Press, 2012; Kristeva, Julia. *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Columbia University Press, 1982.

³ C.f. Marder, Kristeva, *ibid*; Lacan, Jacques. *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis, 1954-1955 (Book II)*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Sylvana Tomaselli, Norton, 1991; Freud, Sigmund. "The Sexual Theories of Children." 1908. *Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, 24 volumes. Vol IX. Edited and translated by James Strachey. Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74, pp.207-250.

⁴ Marder 27

⁵ C.f. Lacan, Jacques. *Seminar XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. 1963-64. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller, translated by Alan Sheridan, Norton, 1998; Kristeva, Julia. *Strangers to Ourselves*. 1988. Translated by Leon S. Roudiez, Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1991.

⁶ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, and Seamus Perry. *Coleridge's Notebooks: A Selection*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002; The fundamental place of the Trinity in Coleridge's thought has been explored by Trevor Levere in "Coleridge, Chemistry, and Philosophy of Nature" *Studies in Romanticism* vol. 16, no. 1, 1977; and S. H. Ford in Ford, S. H. "Perichoresis and Interpenetration: Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Trinitarian Conception of Unity." *Theology* 89.1 (1986)

⁷ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor. "the Origin of the Idea of God in the Mind of Man." *Opus Maximum*. 1819-1823. Ed. Thomas McFarland. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002, pp. 119-27.

absolute and unreflecting like the love that is prior to the subject-object distinction" (49)⁸. The mother, perceived as "One and indivisible" (*OM* 131) is compared to God: "That which the mother is to her child, a someone unseen and yet ever present, is to all" (*OM* 126). However, the mother is known to the child before he knows God. As such, the mother not only reflects the relationship between the individual and God, but occupies the Trinitarian *position* of the Father in early development. Indeed, the proceeding movements of the passage correspond to the Trinitarian positions as outlined by Coleridge in *Table Talk*:

Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Iipseity	Alterity	Community
Thesis	Antithesis	Synthesis
Will	Reason/Word	Love/Life
		(<i>TTI</i> 77)

From Ipseity, Father, to Alterity, the mother is then recognised as an Other. In this juncture, the mother acknowledges God as the "something, to which my [mother] looks up, and which is more than my mother" (*OM* 131). The mother's acknowledgement of an Other is concurrent with the child's. There is a "more than my mother," and so the mother is not only All, but has an outside, and boundary to her subjectivity. Subsequently, it is in this moment of recognition that the infant's subjectivity is born (*OM* 132). The mother alluded to in the title as the "Idea of God in the Mind of Man" here occupies the Trinitarian position of Christ the Son, the "sole adequate, Idea, in God, of God" (*CL* IV 771). Following Alterity, moreover, is Synthesis, that is Love. Indeed, Love, for Coleridge, is itself Holy, whether directed toward parent or God. As Coleridge writes in his Notebooks: "Love is essentially the same, whether the Object be a helpless Infant, our Wife or Husband, or God himself" (*CN* IV 5463).⁹ It is concurrently the *position* of Love within the subjective dialectics of the Trinity which is Holy.

In this Synthesis of Love, however, infant and mother do not return to an earlier moment of fusion where "[e]re yet a conscious self exists, the love begins; and the first love is love of to another" (*OM* 121). Post-Alterity, this Synthesis is a union which retains the unique subjectivities of the mother and infant. As a structural repetition of the Trinity, Coleridge's presentations of birth and child development consequently portray a simultaneous union and separation. Indeed, this notion is emphasised in Coleridge's 1803 *Notebook* sketches which pre-amble his depictions of child development in the *Opus Maximum*. In fragmented, proto-Modernist, prose, Coleridge deconstructs the agencies and subjectivities within birth:

Contact—the womb—the amnion liquor—warmth + touch/—air cold

⁸ Hampton, Alexander J. B. *The Coleridge Bulletin*, vol. 27, no. 1, 2006

⁹ C.f. "If ye love not your earthly parent, how can ye love your father in heaven?" (*CL* IV 771)

+ touch + sensation & action of breathing—contact of the mother's knees + all those contacts of the Breast + taste & wet & sense of swallowing—

Sense of diminished Contact explains the falling asleep—/this is Fear, and this produces Fear—

Eye contact, pressure infinitely diminished, organic Connex (con to ken) proportionately increased. (CNIV f 28)

Contact, here, is paradoxical. Denoting touch, communication and union, 'contact' also refers to the coming together of multiple, *distinct*, entities. As such, contact, first union, becomes Alterity. Self-consciousness and the knowledge of an Other come about through "con"—knowing—and "tact"—touch. But this "contact of the mother's knees" diminishes into a "swallowing," or dissolution, of both self and other. Later, in the *Opus Maximum*, this becomes the infant's "witness of its own being [having] been suspended in the loss of the mother's presence," causing the infant to believe they no longer exist. "I am not here," he cries, "touch me, Mother, that I may be here!" (OM 132). In both, however, "Eye contact" restores the boundaries of their subjectivities. From "con to ken," the infant moves from consciousness, to "ken," a self-perception, and self-consciousness. The infant, seeing that he is seen through the eyes of an Other, learns to see himself. The passage, therefore, holds the tension of both union and separation within its linguistic and structural choices, and thus portrays a Trinitarian logic to child development. It is a Trinitarian structure which consists of, simultaneously "that Unity or Indivisibility," and "that Distinction the most manifest," (CL II 1196): God as simultaneously All, and His consubstantial parts.

Concurrent with this simultaneity, for Coleridge Christ's existence did not temporally succeed God's. Instead, the Son was, is, and always has been, eternally with the Father "from the beginning" (CM III 305). In his Trinitarian structuring of psycho-spiritual birth, accordingly, Coleridge departs from the notion that birth is a process in which a creative agent exists prior to its created products. Instead, Coleridge's notion of birth radically undercuts notions of linear, successive, temporality. As D. B. Ruderman writes, the *Opus Maximum* portrays infancy as "paradoxically essential and disruptive to linear narratives of development and change" (7).¹⁰ Coleridgean infancy, according to Ruderman, is returned to, re-experienced, and fraught with temporal contradictions. Following this, one can elaborate that linear temporality is not only disrupted by Coleridge, it is stretched into circularity. Indeed, in Coleridge's Trinitarian dialectics, child development obeys the circular motion of Perichoresis, that is, "the primary, absolute, co-eternal circulation of Deity," the "eternal proceeding from the Father to the Son and from the Son to the

¹⁰ Ruderman, D. B. *The Idea of Infancy in Nineteenth-Century British Poetry: Romanticism, Subjectivity, Form*. London: Routledge, 2016.

Father” with the “procession being in its nature circular” (*OM* 205-6).¹¹ This circular temporality of creation renders it a process without beginning or end. Creation, as such, is not *ex nihilo*, or linear. Instead, creation is always a discovery of that which was always there, from the beginning. In the Trinitarian dialectics of child development, temporality is side-stepped all together. Accordingly, the Trinitarian motion and structure of creation becomes a permanent presence of both union and distinction. In “Essay on Faith,” Coleridge terms this “Prothesis”: “a primary unity which gives itself forth into two things” (*Marginalia* II 990). As he elaborates in an 1818 Notebook entry, Prothesis is “not synthesis” but is the “potential identity of both” thesis and antithesis (*CN* III 4418). It is, as he describes it in his Letters, “pregnant Indistinction” (*CL* IV 807). Coleridge’s Trinitarian dialectical dynamic of child development concurrently holds both primary unity, and natal separation, in simultaneity and suspension.

CONSCIOUSNESS

“for the memory of a MOTHER—of all names the most awful, the most venerable, next to that of God!” (*CL* II 905)

This Trinitarian dialectic, repeating within the structures of birth, and of child development, enacts a further repetition within the intra-psychic dynamics of the individual. In his poem “Frost at Midnight” (1798; revised 1817), Coleridge dramatizes this Trinitarian dialectic in his portrayals of self-consciousness, describing a process of internal Alterity, in parallel to the development of the infant sleeping at the speaker’s side. The speaker, in self-conscious reflection, identifies a mysterious “thin blue flame” (13), which, a “companionable form” (19), acts as a psychic mirror. The familiar flame, however, is also repeatedly described as a “*stranger*” (26), as an unknown Other. Consequently, the flame has often been read as exemplary of the Freudian Uncanny.¹² According to Freud, the Uncanny is an eerie confrontation with that which is simultaneously (un)familiar, that which is “in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from” (241).¹³ For Freud, the primordial basis of the Uncanny is the repressed memory of “the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings” (244), that is, the body of the birthing mother. In similitude, “Frost at Midnight” repeatedly situates its references to the “*stranger*” within buried

¹¹ As S. H. Ford notes, we are indebted to Coleridge for coining the technical term “interpenetration” as an equivalent of perichoresis: “it is the key to his vocabulary for the reconciliation of opposites-not contraries.” (21)

¹² C.f. Hogle, Jerrold E. “The Gothic Ghost As Counterfeit and its Haunting of Romanticism: The Case of ‘Frost at Midnight’” *European Romantic Review*, vol. 9, no. 1, 1998; Miall, David S. “The Displacement of Emotions: The Case of ‘Frost at Midnight’” *The Wordsworth Circle*, vol. 20, no. 2, 1989.

¹³ Freud, Sigmund. “The Uncanny.” 1919. *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*. 24 volumes. Vol XVII. Edited and translated by James Strachey, Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1953-74.

allusions to mother, curiously absent from the poem. The speaker, for example, watches “that fluttering *stranger!* and as oft / With unclosed lids, already had I dreamt / Of my sweet birth-place” (3.1-6). In “birth-place,” one can simultaneously read the speaker’s corporeal origin—that is, the mother’s body—and a displacement of this very body in its reference to geographical origin. The birth-mother is rendered at once familiar and unfamiliar. In stanza four, moreover, the speaker describes how he had “hoped to see the *stranger’s* face, / Townsman, or aunt, or sister more beloved, / My play-mate when we both were clothed alike!” (3.19-21). From stranger, to distant townsman, to family, the stanza moves from unfamiliarity to the closeness of kin. In Coleridge’s referencing of aunt and sister, moreover, the mother is hidden as the equidistant connector of the two figures. For Frederick Kirchoff, the speaker subsequently “internalize[s] his mother’s mirroring function through identification with his sister” (374) with whom he was “clothed alike.” This mirror, however, is invisible, and the mother is situated as a concealed and silent centre which haunts the text as a phantasmic presence of an absence.

Paralleling the speaker’s self-reflective recounting of his—repressed or otherwise—memories of development, the reader is reminded of the new-born infant sleeping at the speaker’s side, whose breath “[f]ill[s] up the intersperséd vacancies / And momentary pauses of the thought!” (46-47). In this interlacing of adult and infant development, Coleridge implies that the developmental process is never ‘complete.’ Instead, through ongoing repetitions of Trinitarian developmental dialectics, we are continually ‘re-born,’ and continually (re)develop within the potentiality of “vacancies” and “pauses” in self-reflection. As Anya Taylor comments, for Coleridge, “the multiplicity of the inward experience of persons depends on a similar multiplicity of person in a Trinitarian divine being: if God can be three in one and be a person, so can the human being made in his image”.¹⁴ Concurrently, the speaker’s meditative self-reflection in “Frost at Midnight” parallels the primary self-consciousness within subjective development as it is described in the *Opus Maximum*. The flame, an (un)familiar stranger, becomes a focal punctum for self-conscious introspection. In parallel to the mother’s gaze in the *Opus Maximum*, which allows the infant to see himself through an other’s eyes, the Uncanny flame in “Frost at Midnight” provides the external point from which the individual can see himself from the ‘outside.’ In stanza two, for example, the speaker describes the flame: “Methinks, its motion in this hush of nature / Gives it dim sympathies with me who live” (17-18). The speaker seemingly both identifies with the flame, watching it, as it watches back in “dim sympathies.” The “sympathies,” without an obvious agent, imbricate both the speaking subject and alien other within a mutual gaze of self-watching and self-consciousness. In the mutuality of this gaze, however, there is Alterity. Self-consciousness, after all, splits the speaker into two components: self-as-perceiver (as the observer), and self-as-perceived (through identifying with the flame). Arguably,

¹⁴ Taylor, Anya. “Coleridge on Persons and Things.” *European Romantic Review* 1.2 (1991), pp. 174-75

a similar structure occurs in the split between the individual and mother at the dawning of subjectivity as Coleridge describes it in the *Opus Maximum*. “With the awakening of self-consciousness, the first sign or representative of which is not its own bodily shape but the gradually dawning presence of the mother’s, the conception of life is elevated into that of personhood” (OM 134). It is the othering of the mother—the recognition of her as a distinct entity—which allows the internal self-othering necessary for self-consciousness. The mother, who once “contain[ed] his own self” (OM 131) is now the figure which is contained within the psyche as the foundational *structure* for self-Otherity. Self-consciousness is thus presented as the internalisation of the Otherity of self and (m)other in child development, which, as we have seen, repeats the structure of the Trinity.

Indeed, in both “Frost at Midnight” and the *Opus Maximum*, this Otherity features as a developmental juncture. In the *Opus Maximum*, subjectivity is born in a moment of self-othering: “It [the infant] becomes a person, it is and speaks of itself as ‘I’; and from that moment it has acquired what it may loosen and deform, but can never eradicate—a sense of an otherity in itself which no eye can see, neither his own or others” (OM 132). In an unmistakable reference to the Trinitarian position of Otherity as it is laid out in *Table Talk*, Coleridge suggests that the dawning of self-consciousness is a dawning of internalised otherness, a splitting of the self. Concurrently, one might read the uncanny “stranger” in “Frost at Midnight,” as an introjected Otherity within the self, “which no eye can see.” The self is simultaneously united and divided into consubstantial parts. Indeed, it is notable that term “stranger” is closely associated with the Trinity. In Genesis 18, three “strangers,” acting in perfect unity, and speaking in one voice, declare, in a moment of revelation-creation, that the barren Sarah would soon bear a child. This came to be seen as an early revelation of the Holy Trinity, and provided the basis for Andrei Rublev’s famous 15th century icon, variously called *The Hospitality of Abraham*, or, *The Trinity*. Coleridge, too, discusses this passage, and describes how the strangers portray the Trinity as not being made up of persons, but of *positions* (CN V 6157). In his 1798 footnote to “Frost at Midnight,” Coleridge elucidates this allusion. He describes: “in all parts of the kingdom these films are called strangers, and supposed to portend the arrival of some absent friend”.¹⁵ Akin to the uncanny, the stranger is both alien, and an “absent friend.” “Frost at Midnight,” as such, can be rendered a conversation poem between not only speaker and infant, speaker and flame, or speaker and God, but the speaker and himself. However, while a Freudian reading of this mysterious incorporated Otherity might deem this self-othering to be symptomatic of a self-alienation, and an alienation between self and society,¹⁶ for Coleridge, it is the opposite. Faithful to the Genesis story, which emphasises that one must treat strangers as friends, the ‘Other,’ here, whether within or without, is one

¹⁵ Qtd. in Mellor, Anne K. “Coleridge’s ‘This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison’ and the Categories of English Landscape.” *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 18, No. 2, (1979), pp. 697, n. 2

¹⁶ c.f. Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and Its Discontents*. New York: W.W. Norton, 1962.

who must be loved. Following the consubstantial structure of the Trinity, which recognises both individual persons and community as synonymous within God, Coleridge's portrayal of Alterity is not evidence of an existential alienation, but emphasises that, within a Trinitarian structure, individuation and union can co-exist.

In the poem's 1812 revision, the flame-stranger is affiliated with the Will. In the final stanza, Coleridge describes: "still the living spirit in our frame, / Which loves not to behold a lifeless thing, / Transfuses into all things its own Will".¹⁷ Correspondingly, the flame is not only associated with the (m)other, but the very ground of all creation, and the Trinity.¹⁸ For Coleridge, the Will is "the power of originating a state" (*OM* 182), "that which is essentially causative of reality, essentially and absolutely" (*OM* 220). To meditate upon one's Will, as the speaker does via the flame, therefore, is to "see deeper than reality the Will as the Ground essentially causative of all real Being, and therefore essentially of its own Being—the Will super-personal, and transcending all relation, and by an eternal Act affirming its own Being, eternally self-personed, the I AM" (*CN* 5.6918). The Will, as ground of all creation, becomes affiliated with the I AM, that is the creative self-causative power of God who announces, in Exodus 3:14, "I AM that I AM" (*KJV*). Within self-conscious introspection, therefore, one is able to see into the Will of God which resides within one's self. The flame as "living spirit," after all, has "its own Will." It's Will, whilst occupying the human "frame," is a form of Alterity. As such, Coleridge alludes to that which he later terms, "duplicity of the I in Man".¹⁹ That is, "a mystery which no words can communicate to another, but which to be known must be inwardly watched and listened to [...] [A] double I corresponding to the double will and mind".²⁰ For Coleridge, the Will and mind is double because of free Will. There is, for Coleridge, a finite Will of man, and an infinite Will of God. Since Will is free, the individual must make a *choice* to perceive, and to follow, the Will which God has for them. As such, the Will is not only the *ground* of Trinitarian creation, but is an *act* of perceptive choice. The Will is, like God Himself, a "coinherence of act and being which is the ground ... of all things, and of all acts [...] [in] the absolute I AM" (*OM* 188).

FAITH

"I seem rather to be seeking, as it were asking, a symbolic language for something within me that already and forever exists, than observing anything new [...] as if that new phenomena were the dim Awakening of a forgotten or hidden truth of my inner

¹⁷ Qtd. in Jack Stillinger's delineation of Coleridge's revision of the poem in "Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems." *The Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*, vol. 89, no. 4, 1995.

¹⁸ Notably, Nicholas Reid describes Coleridge's Will as "the ground of the Trinity," in "Coleridge and Schelling: The Missing Transcendental Deduction." *Studies in Romanticism*, Vol. 33, No. 3 (Fall, 1994), pp. 472

¹⁹ Add. Mss. 47,542, ff. 12b.

²⁰ *ibid.*

nature. It is still interesting as a Word, a Symbol! It is the Logos the Creator”

(CNII 2546)

This perceptive act, for Coleridge, is synonymous with the act of faith. In choosing to perceive “a mystery which no words can communicate to another,” we are, he believes, in faith choosing to perceive what God has known from the beginning. Faith, subsequently, is fundamental to Coleridge’s understanding of creation and development. It is even synonymous with it. For Coleridge, it is through faith that we perceive, and subsequently create, ourselves and our world. This is exemplified in the *Opus Maximum*, where the infant’s primordial act of perceptive faith is their belief in, and acknowledgement/creation of, the existence of the (m)other. “The babe acknowledges a self in the mother’s form years before it can recognize a self in its own. Faith, implicit Faith, the offspring of unreflecting love; is the antecedent and indispensable condition of all its knowledge” (OM 121). The reader, however, is aware of the mother’s existence, and so, like God, knows that the infant’s seeming ‘creation’ of the mother is really a perceptive discovery of what was already in existence. Following the ‘creation’ of the mother, the infant discovers, or creates, their own subjectivity, or sense of ‘I.’ This occurs when the infant and mother join in the act of faith that is prayer. The infant, seeing that the mother has an outside of herself to which she prays, “learns to pray in the mother’s prayers” (OM 126). A child’s faith in the mother thus parallels—and repeats—man’s faith in God. Recognising the mother, and recognising God, is recognising the source of oneself. Indeed, for Coleridge, believing in one’s self is an act of faith: “[T]he mind itself is the actual hypothesis. I ... place such and such a conception under [‘any series’ of phenomena] and in so doing make my own faculties and the reality implied in them the support of the [conception] and the pledge of their consistency” (OM 271-71). This faith in the self, moreover, is synonymous with a faith in God. As Coleridge writes in an early note, “If I am asked how I know that I am, I can only reply, ‘because I am’: this is the absolute ground of my knowledge” and this is “Because God is” MS 29 III 66-67).²¹ Consequently, the very process by which we develop (or perceive) the existence of our self and others’ in an act of faith is rendered a creative act, a repetition of the self-causative power of the I AM.

The primary Imagination I hold to be the living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM”. (BL I 304)

It is through this same understanding of creation as perception and faith that one might reevaluate Coleridge’s theory of the Primary Imagination. As Coleridge describes in *Biographia Literaria*, the Primary Imagination is an act

²¹ Coleridge similarly writes in a letter to Griggs in 1818, “I am: because I am in God, or I am because God is” (Griggs, *Opé cit.*, V, letter 1096, 12 January 1818).

wherein one chooses to perceive, and to discover, so as to create. Through an act of perceptive faith, God's "living Power" is revealed "in the finite mind," as it is paralleled within the pregnant centre of "the infinite I AM." Indeed, Coleridge often links the Primary Imagination to childbirth. "The rules of the IMAGINATION," Coleridge describes in a later chapter, "are themselves the very powers of growth and production" (*BL* II 84). The creative mind, moreover, is described as a kind of "brain womb," animated by the "esemplastic" power of the creative I AM (*BL* I 295). Within the repetition of the I AM in childbirth, and in subsequent acts of the Imagination, the perceiver is thus invited to perceive God's infinite "Will super-personal" (*CN* V 6918). Seeing "deeper than reality," the act of Imagination is concurrently another act of perceptive faith, a seeking of that which lies beyond one's known reality. Indeed, as Graham Pechey has noted, Coleridge "produces a theory of the imagination the terms of which are translatable into a theory of the working of faith, such that faith and imagination for him are in fact figures for one another".²² The act of creative faith, however, is once again rendered an act of perceptive discovery of the pre-existent. The Primary Imagination, in the finite mind of the observer, is a "repetition." God's realm, contrastingly, is beyond temporality, is "infinite." As such, creation is once again rendered a perceptive discovery of that which was, is, and always shall be, in existence with God. Not only this, the infinite Will of God, resides within the core of the individual. As Kiran Toor writes, for Coleridge, "the person of 'philosophic imagination' discovers through reflection his own inner reality, his own self-actualizing potential for future development. Art therefore acts like nature and, in creation, brings forth what is already predetermined within" (264).²³ For Coleridge, one's capacity to creatively perceive, and one's ground for the faith the creative act necessitates, arises through an intuitive faculty within the core of the individual, as stemming from the predetermination of the infinite Will.

Correspondingly, Coleridge, following Kant and Schelling, asserts that philosophical thought can be constructed from an individual's primordial faculty of intuition.²⁴ As Coleridge describes, philosophical thinking is "an activity which creates the validity of its own postulates; it is not a body of theoretical knowledge" (*OM* 134). Going further, Coleridge argues that it is not only that philosophy's *validity* is created by its theoretical postulates, but that philosophical truth is *itself* created out of the postulates themselves. To intuit, and to believe, therefore, is to create. Consequently, Poesy—that is, the metaphysical co-inherence of Philosophy and Poetry (*CN* IV 4692)—is deemed as the result perceptive faith. Indeed, Coleridge goes on to link philosophy to faith in *Aids to Reflection*, wherein he states: philosophy is "the servant and

²² Pechey, Graham. "'Frost at Midnight' and the Poetry of Periphrasis." *The Cambridge Quarterly*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2012, pp. 231.

²³ Toor, Kiran. "Offspring of his Genius?: Coleridge's Pregnant Metaphors and Metamorphic Pregnancies." *Romanticism*, Vol. 13, No. 3, 2008.

²⁴ Elinor S. Shaffer writes a useful history of the Eighteenth-century idea of the "postulate of philosophy" — the notion that philosophy is constructed first and foremost from following through an intuition. In Shaffer, Elinor. S. "The 'Postulates in Philosophy' in the 'Biographia Literaria.'" *Comparative Literature Studies*, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1970.

Pioneer of Faith [...] of thinking on subjects beyond the bounds of sensible experience; the grounds of the real truth" which is discovered within "the spiritual Nature and Being of Man" (188). The intuitive faculty within the individual, therefore, allows one to perceive, through an act of faith, "real truth" as a potentiality which will become actualised. In the philosophic imagination, therefore, the individual contains the seeds of their own creations, or, more accurately, their discoveries. In *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge explores this via an inspection of "the sacred power of self-intuition" in insects

who within themselves can interpret and understand the symbol, that the wings of the air-sylph are forming within the skin of the caterpillar; those only, who feel in their own spirits the same instinct, which impels the chrysalis of the horned fly to leave room in its involucrum for antennae yet to come. They know and feel, that the potential works in them, even as the actual works on them! (BL 1.167)

In a parallel movement to the Primary Imagination and its repetition of the creative I AM, the insects are self-causative, developing from within their core, in accordance with their intuitively known pre-existing patterns of development. For Coleridge, therefore, within faith that creates there is only a difference of degree between "the actual & the potential" (HM 8195 49). To have faith, and believe, in accordance with *God's Will*, is to create, that is, to perceive, and to discover.

In warning, however, Coleridge writes of faith's potential to 'create' phantom realities. This occurs via the false, of "apostatic" Will, a Will which alienates the subject from recognizing its inner unity with the divine Will, and God (*Say* 1:65). This apostatic Will, if actualised, creates its own reality by destroying the true 'reality' of God. It "annihilates the actual [...] In the potential swallowing up all actuality, so that the potential as merely potential remains the only form of its reality" (*ODI* 41-43). Indeed, can even create a reality of Evil. As the *Opus Maximum* states, "in Will alone causation inheres. To will Evil, therefore, is to originate Evil" (*OM* 238). And it is in child development wherein these phantom creations of a false reality, and this potential for 'bad faith,' begins. In an upbringing divorced from God or Love, one can develop a 'false self,' as opposed to a 'true self'.²⁵ The infant, consequently, no longer has faith in the mother, and so does not 'create' (discover) her. The infant eternally reaches, instead, for a self outside of itself. Knowing no Other, however, the infant becomes alienated from itself, and so cannot acquire self-consciousness, nor self-knowing (*OM* 120-22). The self-alienated individual thus develops a "mere phantom" self, desiring the company of things rather than persons (*OM* 122-25). In inverse of the

²⁵ Notably, these terms and concepts are lifted into the work of Winnicott, for which Coleridge has not yet been recognised as a source. C.f. "Communicating and Not Communicating Leading to a Study of Certain Opposites." *The Maturation Process and the Facilitating Environment*. New York: International Universities Press, 1963.

Trinitarian dialectical developmental structure, the infant develops through the “oscillator movement from the individual to the outward unreceiving object regularly returning back as to its only centre” (*OM* 78). “[O]utward objects [...] acquire an interest that does not belong to them, by this constant association with the mind and with the feelings” (*OM* 125). Consequently these objects gain “a false worth which is foreign to their nature.” In synchronicity, the self then “borrows from the objects a sort of unnatural outwardness.” The self “becomes as it were a thing.” By “attributing namely of subjective powers & personal agency to the mere objects of the senses, to objects as objects,” the person is diminished to the level of the thing, and the thing raised to the level of a person. As such, Coleridge concludes, “we need not travel to the coasts of Africa for Fetish-worshippers” (*OMII* 72).

These notions bear a striking resemblance to Marx and Engels’ theories of commodity fetishism and reification. For Marx and Engels, in commodity fetishism, the commodity gains a magical “phantom-like” objectivity from the energy and sociality behind the human labour which has been extracted and then concealed in the commodity’s marketization. In its own act of faith, capital, and the commodity, are invested with *belief* in their monetary worth. Subsequently, their worth is created.²⁶ In reification, concurrently, human beings are transformed into thing-like commodities. We become subject to the laws of the thing-world, and are subsequently alienated from themselves, and from each other. The two-fold process, therein, constructs a phantom reality of “a definite social relation between men, that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things” (83). In Coleridgean fetishism, however, the original source of the relational energy that is inversed in phantom commodification and reification does not only lie in the relations between, and labour of, the commodities’ creators. Alienation, for Coleridge, is an alienation from God, and from the I AM, through the apostatic Will. It is an alienation, moreover, which extends into the dynamics of a community. In commodification, materialism, and any reality created through the ‘bad faith’ of the apostatic Will, one is alienated, disconnected, and dis-unified. Coleridge goes on to lament:

Hence almost everywhere we behold religion degraded into ceremonies, and then, by the reaction before described, the ceremonies animated into a strange and unnatural magic. Hence for state policy we have statecraft and the mockery of expedience; for the fine arts, a marketable trade; for philosophy, a jargon of materialism; and the study of nature conducted on such principles as to place it in doubtful rivalry with the art and theory of cooking. (*OM* 126)

Religion, and art, are inverted, commodified. Philosophy, without faith, is monodidactic, ‘fact.’ In art, spirituality, development, and creation, therefore,

²⁶ c.f. Marx, Karl and Engels, Frederick. *Collected Works: Capital*, vol.1. New York: International Publishers, 1996.

Coleridge invites us to seek within one's core the source that is the divine Will, and, through faith, perceive, discover, and create, according to the infinite I AM.

Ultimately, for Coleridge, the development of the subject, and their actual spiritual reality follows a Trinitarian dialectical structure and dynamic. These dynamics, repeated in, and introjected by, the individual, follow a logic of simultaneous union and separation. In separation resides the leap of faith, which perceives, discovers and creates, that which was always with God, from the beginning. Coleridge's spiritually-centred understandings of reality, consequently, depart from the dominant ontologies of current psychoanalytical and psychological theories of child development. Coleridge's treatise, in contrast, transform notions of separation as alienation, into separation as potentiality for faith, of lack, into love, and of solipsism, into community. As such, a Coleridgean reading of modern psychoanalysis today might even interpret the dominant understanding of a lacking, and alienated subject as a 'phantom self.' Indeed, one might even connect the universalisation of this phantom self to the hyper-materialist contexts in which canonic modern psychoanalysis has been written. Evidently, we can, whether religious or not, extract from Coleridge's treatise a fundamental call for the right kind of faith. It is a call to follow one's true self, a call for love, for community, and for art and philosophy which is not "a marketable trade" (*OM* 126) but a dynamic and living palimpsest. Coleridge does not only call for the writer's faith, after all, but also for the reader's in "[t]hat willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith" (*BL* 14.5). A philo-poetic text itself, therefore, is rendered an interface, a juncture of a reader and writer's mutual acts of faith. Perhaps, one might argue, the text even becomes a materialisation of a synthesis, as an actualisation of a reader and writer's mutual faith which renders them simultaneously distinct and united.