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NEW IMPRESSIONS XI

Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel

ANDREW KEANIE

SINCE IT WAS published in 1971, Norman Fruman's *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* has perplexed and divided its readers. The book reinvigorated the debate about Coleridge and plagiarism, and widened the split between those critics who eulogise, or ignore, Coleridge's plagiarisms and those who condemn them. Coleridge, like Wordsworth, wanted his *modus operandi* to be seen on its own terms, though critics have tended to take neither at his word. Andrew Bennett, for instance, has recently investigated Wordsworth's paradoxical denial that he *wrote* poetry at all, but somehow intuited and improvised it into existence, and has shown persuasively that Wordsworth's surviving manuscripts actually reveal a painstaking process of 'writing, re-writing, deleting, scratching out and overwriting . . . revision and replacement, deletion, review, re-revision, alteration, correction and editing'.¹ Bennett's unmasking of a writer's myth about himself broadly follows in Fruman's footsteps; but where Bennett disputes Wordsworth's denial of writerly labour, Fruman is most concerned to explode Coleridge's running denial of plagiarism:

Intellectual dishonesty in a man of genius seems bizarre, as does petty greed in a man of great wealth. Yet compulsive acquisition of reputation or power derives from overmastering personal needs, the ultimate sources of which are always obscure. The broad outlines of Coleridge's profoundest

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intellectual aspirations are clear enough: above all he was driven by a desire to achieve a reputation for dazzling creative gifts and universal knowledge.²

The central thesis of *The Damaged Archangel* is simple: Coleridge was an unusually dishonest writer who nevertheless persuaded people that the originality, rigour and significance of his works were beyond question:

in ways . . . destructive of his . . . peace of mind, [Coleridge] presented to the world, both in his private correspondence and in his public utterances, a personal portrait of childlike innocence and severe moral rigor. His letters in later life can be positively embarrassing, as when he writes, 'I have never knowingly or intentionally been guilty of a dishonorable transaction, but have in all things that respect my neighbor been more sinned against than sinning,' or, 'I know the meaning of the word Envy only by the interpretation given in the Dictionaries . . .' Not many men could bring themselves to write, even if they believed it true, 'I can trace in my heart no envy, no malice, & no revenge,' or refer to their 'constitutional indifference to praise.' (p. 59)

The book sold so well, according to Thomas McFarland, because it made 'available, in a form that . . . gained much popular attention, evidences of Coleridge's weaknesses that many intellectuals, the long history of the plagiarism charges notwithstanding, ha[d] been reluctant to confront'.³ If Coleridge is not quite the immensely original man we think (or would like to), the poet's 'protean . . . moral and intellectual self-images' become suspiciously ingenious (p. 420). Coleridge can be 'striden[t]' in one passage and 'formal[ly] stiff' in another, but, for Fruman, all moments are the manifestations of Coleridge's 'internally consistent pattern of act and motive' (pp. 299, 300, 415).

Fruman had not published any related material in an academic journal prior to the publication of *The Damaged Archangel*, nor had he revealed his attitude towards Coleridge at any academic conference. It was without warning, then, that he

released *The Damaged Archangel*, intended not least for those who accepted that Coleridge had 'read every book that came [his] way without distinction' and had successfully interiorised a whole world of eminent thinkers' thoughts from Plato's to Davy's, and who, therefore, could not be blamed for having, and using, the resources of the 'world within [himself]'.⁴ '[L]arge, copiously documented, carefully proofread, and very handsomely designed, jacketed, and printed', *The Damaged Archangel* appeared in the mainstream market, and its impact was maximised by journalists' 'unquestioning trust' in Fruman's scholarly integrity (YR, pp. 252, 255). Fruman managed to plant the charge of bogusness without having to analyse it in a way that the specialists would have vetted. The professional Coleridgeans' distaste would not be fully expressed until 1974, when McFarland's review essay, 'Coleridge's Plagiarisms Once More', showed that the book went down easily, like a bad oyster (YR, pp. 252-3 and *passim*).

Through the nineteenth century, and much of the twentieth, articles by (among others) De Quincey, James Ferrier, J. M. Robertson, John Sterling, James Stirling, René Wellek, and Joseph Warren Beach had appeared, disclosing this or that unacknowledged borrowing in Coleridge, but they had little cumulative effect. Writing in 1961, Carl Woodring had said that Coleridge (as the young editor of *The Watchman*) 'ransacked many . . . sources for scraps to imitate, adapt or plagiarise . . . The scramble for copy banished joy, creativity, and honesty'.⁵ Woodring's comment on Coleridge's prentice methodology glimpsed Coleridgean sterility and wintry discontent at odds with the heady language and high poetic pollen count of, say, 'Kubla Khan': it was the kind of insight that prompted Fruman to attempt to measure the 'plain' Coleridge so strenuously (p. xix). Fruman made such a powerful impression because he laid out the evidence en masse, and put it all in the context of Coleridge's private insecurities. A book so readable and sensational is likely to stir feelings of guilt, shame or indignation in any Coleridgean who prefers to cherish, or pursue, different explanations when such obvious ones are available. No other book like it on Coleridge has been published.

In McFarland's view, *The Damaged Archangel* is, in one sense, a very good book: 'there is an unusually sound command of relevant secondary literature, most particularly that of the scholarly journals' (YR, p. 253). Yet he also made it clear that, however much it might impress readers who do not 'command . . . the Coleridgean materials', *The Damaged Archangel*, with its 'pervasive omissions and distorting selectivities', was not to be trusted (YR, pp. 255, 265). McFarland found Wellek's scholarship trustworthy, having commended at length, in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969), Wellek's 'very wide background of reading in the literature and philosophy of German Romanticism'.⁶ By contrast, McFarland asserted, Fruman's 'failure of culture' was bound to irritate cultured readers (YR, p. 265): Fruman had treated Coleridge's philosophical concerns 'briefly, incoherently, and almost without understanding of their meaning' (YR, p. 283). By arguing that *The Damaged Archangel* is a contrivance, McFarland attempted to exclude Fruman altogether from the first rank of literary critics. Why read what Fruman himself called a 'long and arduous' book (p. 415), when, say, Hazlitt's delightfully urbane acidity on the same subject is ready to hand?

Hardly a speculation has been left on record from the earliest time, but it is loosely folded up in Mr Coleridge's memory . . . Mr Coleridge . . . has only to draw the sliders of his imagination, and a thousand subjects expand before him, startling him with their brilliancy, or losing themselves in endless obscurity –⁷

McFarland pointed out that Fruman's 'selectivities that verge on suppression . . . and . . . forcings of evidence' were prerequisite to the construction of an argument designed to achieve 'victory' rather than to illuminate the 'truth' about Coleridge (YR, pp. 255, 254). Fruman could, in one place, diagnose '[t]he problem [a]s part of the detritus of modern scholarship and the top-heavy reputation Coleridge is now bearing as the Da Vinci of literature', and, in another, say that 'Evidence abounds for almost any view one wishes to take' of Coleridge (pp. 292, 420). By undermining some of his own arguments,

Fruman made himself the object of particularly harsh criticism: McFarland called him 'unthinking', and said it would have been better had he pushed on to new territory, leaving the 'cultural *cul de sac*' of 'contradictoriness', 'insinuation', 'prurience', 'speculation' and 'triviality' behind (YR, pp. 279, 278, 279, 254, 276). The scandal of *The Damaged Archangel* – so persistent in its demand for answers to questions such as 'Why did Coleridge claim to be translating Schiller before he knew any German?' and 'Why did he criticise Italian poets before he knew Italian?' – had broken.

McFarland supported Coleridge's assertion of his unprecedented learning, stating

the unarguable truth . . . that Coleridge marginally annotated a vast number of books – many hundreds of them. Far more were read than were annotated, and not all those known to have been annotated can be found . . . There is nothing to equal this in the entire history of culture. (YR, p. 275)

If we consider that Coleridge read incessantly, we may be prepared to accept the view (which he wanted us to accept) that he refined and enlarged the organic unity of his mind beyond other writers' capacities, save Shakespeare's, and became measurelessly erudite – as though in keeping with his having been '*habituated to the Vast*' at the age of 8.⁸ Were such the case, to accuse him of stealing would indeed appear footling, and McFarland constantly wondered at the trouble Fruman had taken, and at 'the remorseless triviality' of his concerns (YR, p. 276).

De Quincey, Coleridge's 'fellow plagiarist' with his 'special insight into Coleridge's mind' (p. 469), at times anticipated the inclination of such twentieth century scholars as Walter Jackson Bate, prepared to forgive Coleridge's small crimes in order to gain the greater Coleridgean good:

[Coleridge] spun daily, and at all hours, for mere amusement of his own activities, and from the loom of his own magical brain, theories more gorgeous . . . [than those of

any writer from whom Coleridge borrowed]. With the riches of El Dorado lying about him, he would condescend to filch a handful of gold from any man whose purse he fancied.⁹

Several critics have felt that even if Coleridge did practise the arts of the thief, he practised them almost in passing, while refining them beyond opprobrium. John Livingston Lowes mentioned 'those unconsidered trifles which genius has the trick of filching as it goes', thus awarding Coleridge – and himself (*CPT*, p. 32) – special dispensation in an otherwise proprietorial world.¹⁰ For McFarland too, it was more important that Coleridge stood 'before the mysteries of existence', and that, although Coleridge 'foundered' before them, those mysteries did elicit from him some of the most beautiful lyrics of the Romantic period (*CPT*, p. 254). Thirty years on, Kelvin Everest, while conceding that Coleridge was often 'wilfully obscure, bittily disorganised, eclectically derivative and compulsively devious in [his] constant rhetorical manoeuvring', looks benignly on Coleridge's 'marked . . . dependen[cy]' on other writers' words.¹¹ Everest does raise the 'seriously problematic' issue of Coleridge's plagiarisms, but not without first setting out the complex and unprecedented psychological context in which Coleridge worked: '[Coleridge] was equally interested in the vexed relation between his consciousness and the unconscious drives and activity of the mind. The dual pressures he was subject to in these contexts make for the tormented shapelessness of his maturity' (p. 19).

Analogously, Seamus Perry has contextualised Coleridge's plagiarisms as symptoms of something deeply characteristic: 'Amidst the fierce debate about Coleridge's habit of borrowing, his recurrent habit of *self*-borrowing has been, perhaps, oddly overlooked'. Introducing the lively, musical concept of 'Coleridge's self-echoings', Perry suggests that related clusters of concepts flourished unifyingly in disparate areas of Coleridge's work, expressing, here, the Mariner's fears – 'the repulsive multiplicity of "a million million slimy things"' – and there, the metaphysician's anxieties – incited by the 'disabling immersion in the diversity of sense experience'.¹² As though borrowing

and adapting Hugh Sykes Davies's argument that Wordsworth fashioned his idiom with 'cumulatively evocative words', Perry implies that Coleridge fashioned an eclectic idiom within which an imaginative world evolved, sustaining a dizzying diversity of verbal species.¹³ The Mariner's million slimy things and the metaphysician's million digressions are all part of Coleridge's 'One', a self-sustaining ecosystem of interconnected concepts and insights, whose instinctual forces and rhythms can know nothing of propriety or intellectual property.¹⁴ Eager to believe that Coleridge's works outshine doubts about how he created them, such critics, less indignant than McFarland, have accommodated the presence of *The Damaged Archangel* more easily. There is plagiarism; and there is, in Tilar J. Mazzeo's words, 'legitimately unconscious' plagiarism.¹⁵

Although it stimulated a debate that ultimately led to more finely honed insights into Coleridge's creative processes, *The Damaged Archangel* has remained a book *sui generis*, standing apart from the mainstream of Coleridgean commentary. If one were to read a single book about Coleridge, and *The Damaged Archangel* were the book, one would probably be impressed by the author's comprehensiveness, and find him a most accomplished debunker of canonical sentimentality. But once considered in the light of subsequent criticism, Fruman's argument seems paradoxically to debunk *itself*, in that the more it deplores Coleridge's habits of mind, the more it draws renewed attention to Coleridge's meltingly exquisite modes of thinking. If the book is, as McFarland complained, 'a sieve much too coarse to catch the nuances', then it nevertheless implies the nuances that it misses with an odd kind of perceptiveness (YR, p. 280). For example, the case against Coleridge's implied application to posterity for special status as a creative 'dreamer' is sometimes laconic: 'It is not easy to think of any artist on whom sleep regularly inflicted such frightful torments' (pp. 364, 365). But sometimes it is less reserved:

The question arises, how do we know that anything Coleridge has recorded about his dreams is true? Since on his own acts and motives he is never to be automatically trusted, how do we know that in the accounts of his

dream life he was not writing for posterity and deliberately moulding the stuff of reality into the airy shapes of fantasy? May not his dreams, even when scrawled in the privacy of his notebooks (sometimes in code), be part of an elaborate charade, the ultimate intent of which was to enhance his intellectual or moral image? (p. 367)

Such frankness provoked specialists into making better sieves to catch what Fruman had missed. *The Damaged Archangel* was deeply uncomfortable because, after it, attitudes to Coleridge had to be thought through in a fundamental way, given the scope of its charge: 'Though most scholars are impressed only by clear verbal echoes in the citation of parallel passages, there is no reason to suppose that a skilful imitator would confine himself to the direct borrowing of words' (p. 55). As his argument gathers momentum, Fruman even implicates such writers as Lowes – 'a most unfortunate influence on Coleridge studies' (p. 313) – in the conspiracy: 'One of the primary effects of Lowes' *Road to Xanadu* is not only to fix Coleridge in our minds as a library cormorant, but to mythologize him into a veritable cloud of cormorants ranging over all the seven seas of books, with insatiable appetite' (p. 119).

When McFarland described *The Damaged Archangel* as 'tendentious to a degree almost not to be credited', he had in mind not just Fruman's 'unrelenting assault upon Coleridge' but also his many sideswipes at leading Coleridge scholars (YR, pp. 253, 252). In his thirty-four-page review, McFarland deftly countered Fruman's book of nearly 600 pages: 'when "the Bard", to use Professor Fruman's often repeated nickname for Shakespeare, writes most memorably of Cleopatra, he is simply "plagiarising" North's Plutarch. Are we then to speak of "Shakespeare, the damaged archangel"?' (YR, pp. 269-70). John Beer said that Fruman would have spoken differently had he taken into account McFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (1969);¹⁶ and McFarland himself provides some convincing evidence that Fruman's blindness to both contemporary and previous studies was selective (YR, pp. 282-3). For McFarland – whose own book was one Fruman missed sight of – Fruman's book was 'derivative', a

clumsy rehashing of the ideas of, amongst others, James Ferrier, Adrien Bonjour, Beach, Giorgio Orsini and Wellek, ideas that were unevenly synthesised into a properly encompassing argument. McFarland also bemoaned Fruman's 'lack of cultural and conceptual sophistication', and lamented the 'heavy and unseeing tread' with which Fruman stalked 'through the lives and thoughts of superior sensibilities' (YR, pp. 253, 266, 281). After all, Wellek's earlier argument had been that Coleridge was more a failed principle of literary organisation than a single successful voice – 'no doubt a great mediator of ideas' with 'in most of what he wrote a certain unifying temperament which cannot be mistaken, but if we look more closely we find that Coleridge has built a building of no style'.¹⁷ By comparison, Fruman's argument was much more bluff, and blunt, hunting out every nuance Coleridge ever borrowed. While in *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* McFarland sensitively portrayed a Coleridge able to make omelettes without really being responsible for the taking and breaking of others' eggs, Fruman insensitively portrayed Coleridge, the guilty omeletteer, amidst an incriminating accumulation of eggshells.¹⁸ What is, in my view, an altogether more adequate portrayal of Coleridge was not made available until a generation later, when Richard Holmes presented, in a footnote of marvellous tact, Coleridge as the plagiarist's plagiarist:¹⁹

Where he stole – and one repeats, he did steal – he also transformed, clarified and made resonant. He brought ideas to life in a unique way. Moreover, far more than any of his German sources, he always wrote as a poet. His exquisite sensitivity to language, his psychological acuity, his metaphors and extended images of explanation (as well as his sudden asides) have no equivalent in his German sources, not even in Schlegel. It is this aspect of his work that has proved most enduring. To sum up: one can say that Coleridge plagiarized, but that no one plagiarized like Coleridge.²⁰

For Holmes, more calmly than for McFarland, Coleridge made himself a refining conduit for the flow of German philosophers'

ideas to England. The ideas Coleridge took over were, 'afloat in the *Zeitgeist* throughout Europe', says Holmes: 'But time and time again it is Coleridge who formulates them most subtly and most memorably in his generation' (*DR*, pp. 280-1 n.). Yet paradoxically it was no doubt Fruman who had led Holmes to see just how essential dishonesty always was to Coleridge's artistry.

Before the publication of *The Damaged Archangel* it had been possible to speak euphemistically of the inspired poet's occasional 'collapse' into outright plagiarism.²¹ Once the book's implications had had time to sink in, it could no longer be denied that Coleridge was guilty as charged. The impact of Fruman's thesis was such that it became essential for critics to learn how interrelated the dynamics of inspiration and indebtedness in Coleridge were. Holmes for example has been able to accept that, as Fruman said, Coleridge's 'falcon eye scann[ed] the textual terrain for the poetic nutriment of striking images and word clusters' (p. 240).²² Holmes has similarly agreed that Coleridge's apprehension did rise with each reprint of 'Hymn Before Sun-Rise in the Vale of Chamouni', some of which Coleridge lifted silently from a poem by Friederica Brun, then little known in England (*Damaged Archangel*, p. 29; *DR*, pp. 251-2); he has also conceded that Coleridge's 'Mutual Passion' – inspired, according to Coleridge, by one of 'our elder poets' – is practically identical to Ben Jonson's 'A Nymph's Passion' (*Damaged Archangel*, p. 41). McFarland explored this theft with a more exquisite sense of justice, and a greater sympathy, than Fruman did:

what in this instance makes Coleridge's revision different from the countless imitations and variations that poets produce of one another is that it seems very important for him, along with his own additions, to keep a large part of Jonson's precise wording. (*YR*, p. 274)

But it took Fruman to raise the issues of Coleridge's plagiarisms in a way that elicited from McFarland such penetrating counter-analyses.

If few recent specialists have wished to act as Fruman's cheerleaders then that may be because they feel with Holmes that 'Coleridge was a special case' (*DR*, p. 280 n.). The sources of Coleridge's duplicity – for Holmes, 'an acute problem in psychological terms, obviously connected with the mendacious habits of drug addiction, his astonishing lack of self-worth, and the moral humiliations of his private life' (*DR*, p. 281 n.) – are deeper than the details provided by Fruman and McFarland, because the language of Coleridge is 'a threshold which we cross to enter an imaginative world corresponding to Coleridge's own at the time'.²³ When Coleridge said 'I regard truth as a divine ventriloquist: I care not from whose mouth the sounds are supposed to proceed, if only the words are audible and intelligible', he knowingly situated himself in the grey area between propriety and impropriety.²⁴ The Frumans of Coleridge's posthumous existence would suspect Coleridge the thief lurking behind the cloak of disinterestedness – 'An indispensable condition of [Coleridge's] intellectual superiority was its effortlessness and his total lack of ambition' (p. 66); the McFarlands would celebrate Coleridge's sublime handling of the 'mosaic materials', and identify the exigencies of his 'neurotic technique of composition' as the inspired eccentricities of genius (*CPT*, p. 32). When you consider Coleridge's assertion that 'Kubla Khan' came into being, as he puts it in the Preface, 'without any sensation or consciousness of effort', you will probably, depending on your preferred line of interpretation, get the explanation you're looking for. But perhaps it seems a little easier now, thirty-four years after the publication of *The Damaged Archangel*, to revisit Coleridge's *modus operandi* without excessive admiration for the purported measurelessness of his mental wealth on the one hand, and without prejudice against the guiltiness of his conscience on the other.

Walter Jackson Bate once noted Coleridge's 'self-destructive way of calling attention to the matter [of his plagiarisms]' and the spectacle of 'the guilt-laden Coleridge . . . throwing out hints, as if wishing to be discovered' (p. 136). At other times, however, Coleridge's guilt would be compounded by his anxiety not to seem anxious – 'so tormented [was he] in his

personal life, so protean in his intellectual attainments' (CPT, p. 254). This sort of formative, compounded anxiety permeates Coleridge's poem, 'The Reproof and Reply' (1834), which we might read as Coleridge's response to the issues raised so provocatively in *The Damaged Archangel*. Fruman mentions the poem once, although he analyses Coleridge's more obviously 'imitated' poetry with great energy (pp. 31, 39). In order to supplement his defence against charges of plagiarism – trembling as he was in the anguish of threatened discovery and degradation – Coleridge sometimes postured as the whimsical pilferer. Robbery is no sin if it is whimsical: anything to dilute the charge of theft. Bate said Coleridge 'could not . . . be even mildly conscience-free about [his plagiarisms] as De Quincey was able to be' (p. 137): 'The Reproof and Reply' is Coleridge's attempt to develop a self-protective sense of humour around a personal reality he found particularly uncomfortable. As McFarland puts it, the guilty, neurotic Coleridge 'presents us with the paradox of a burglar who seems more intent on setting off the alarm than on robbing the safe' (YR, p. 270). There could be no other reason for the title, and sub-title, of the poem that he wrote in 1823:

The Reproof and Reply²⁵

Or, The Flower-Thief's Apology, for a robbery committed in Mr. and Mrs. —'s garden, on Sunday morning, 25th of May, 1823, between the hours of eleven and twelve.

For those of us disarmed by urbanity, the intentionally comical finicking of the subtitle may compare favourably with, say, the firm introduction to chapter 7 of *The Damaged Archangel*: 'Coleridge's numerous misdatings, oversights, unacknowledged borrowings, and the like may not be merely the inevitable slips and errors of a complex and stress-laden lifetime but the result, perhaps characteristically, of deliberate action' (p. 43). The poem begins with a small explosion of vehemence ('FIE, Mr. Coleridge!') from Coleridge's neighbour, but the non-seriousness of the accusing tone is immediately established by the word 'FIE' – often an expression of mock dismay rather than real distaste. (Fruman would profess a more

straightforward sense of 'great shock' at Coleridge's lack of scrupulousness – pp. 40, 48). This absence of authentic invective, if not confirmed by the first or second lines

(– and can this be you?
Break two commandments? and in church-time too!),

or by the eighth or ninth

(You, that knew better! In broad open day,
Steal in, steal out, and steal our flowers away?),

is surely confirmed by the eleventh or twelfth

(What could possess you? Ah! sweet youth, I fear
The chap with horns and tail was at your ear!).

By the end of the first stanza the reader has (Coleridge hopes) been inveigled into droll complicity with the thief. The 'sounds of late, accusing fancy brought' (l. 13) are the fantasised consequences of an act of theft all too real: the 50-year-old Mr Coleridge has just purloined a handful of his next-door neighbour's flowers, and been scolded. The underside of the poem contains a complex reality of immensely subtle sins, which Coleridge wishes to cover up forever, but knows he cannot. Anticipating the controversy over the authenticity of his achievements as a writer, Coleridge 'hears' the charges read out in the courtroom of his mind: G. N. G. Orsini's assurance – that his object was 'not to put Coleridge in the dock and indict him for felonious misappropriation of other men's thoughts'²⁶ – may differ from what McFarland called Wellek's 'strangely legalistic quibbling over [Coleridge's] sources and precedents' (*CPT*, p. 14), but the quasi-courtroom wrangling in the psychodrama of 'The Reproof and Reply' was to play itself out in twentieth century Coleridge studies.

When it was first published, 'The Reproof and Reply' was prefixed with the motto: 'I expect no sense worth listening to, from the man who never does talk nonsense'. Coleridge

craftily infuses an expression of anxiety with a summery haze of comedy:

Now hear the meek Parnassian youth's reply: –
A bow – a pleading look – a downcast eye, –
And then . . .

(ll. 14-16)

He then borrows Chaucer's tone of 'manly cheerfulness', which has something irresistible, and, therefore, for Coleridge, in this mood, something irrefutable about it.²⁷ The corpulent Coleridge could not, in his wildest dreams, have passed as an apple-cheeked, orchard-raiding 'youth'. Instead – just as, in the Franklin's Tale, Aurelius is preposterously plangent as he, lovesick and hopeless, pleads with the already married Dorigen²⁸ – Coleridge, knowing himself to be in the wrong, becomes spuriously woebegone, and wheedles his way out of an embarrassing situation with a wide-eyed protestation of innocence, and with his tongue in his cheek:

Fair dame! a visionary wight,
Hard by your hill-side mansion sparkling white,
His thoughts all hovering round the Muses' home,
Long hath it been your Poet's wont to roam,
And many a morn, on his becharméd sense
So rich a stream of music issued thence,
He deem'd himself, as it flowed warbling on,
Beside the vocal fount of Helicon!

(ll. 17-24)

In the remaining thirty-nine lines of the poem Coleridge, amidst a foppish flutter of mock-epic phrases and epithets, continues to play (and, like Hamlet, really be) what he says he is: a poet entranced by the loveliness of the ground upon which he trespasses, plucking 'both flower and floweret at [his] will' (l. 50). He attempts to get off the hook with winningly callow bombast:

Say, can you blame? No! none that saw and heard
Could blame a bard, that he thus inly stirr'd . . .

(ll. 28-9)

In such a context an argument like Fruman's (which Coleridge saw coming) – that the author of 'Frost at Midnight' and 'The Ancient Mariner' 'worked primarily from books' (p. 320) – can seem querulous. For McFarland, Fruman's prolonged querulousness is really a symptom of his inability to organise his material as efficiently as the scholars he did not consult (including McFarland) could organise theirs. Some of Fruman's more happily formulated viewpoints (like Holmes's) are to be found in his notes.²⁹ Many readers feel it more rewarding to experience the intoxicating charm of Coleridge's lyrics (and recent critics' appreciation of that charm) than to search for sobriety in Fruman's overflowing text. As Rosemary Ashton says, 'the idea of Coleridge treading, in terms of his wide reading, "the garden's maze, like No-man's-land" and taking what suits him, is an alluring one'.³⁰ The 'youth' in 'The Reproof and Reply' has (he demurs) been 'bewitched' into doing something that in ordinary circumstances would have been theft:

But most of *you*, soft warblings, I complain!
 'Twas ye that from the bee-hive of my brain
 Did lure the fancies forth, a freakish rout,
 And witch'd the air with dreams turn'd inside out.

(ll. 36-9)

These lines are more than an eloquent rush of familiarly jostling syllables. Coleridge knows how to create the climate in which his critics' hostility may be softened: would it not be churlish to point out the minutiae of Coleridge's borrowings when the wind of his genius is blowing such a gale – again? Coleridge has composed a (to borrow Perry's phrase) 'self-echoing' music that might just have the power to vindicate him without the help of other argument. Apart from the rousing 'intentional alliterativeness', learned originally from Spenser, the lines conjure the sort of hard-to-paraphrase dream-scenery with which Coleridge, at his best, had furnished the 'charmed sleep' of 'The Rime'.³¹ 'The Reproof and Reply' is a hauntingly persuasive denial of plagiaristic guilt. Coleridge argues that he was, in fact, *sleepwalking* when he, for want of a more

appropriate word, stole. In this respect, he was at one with the universe:

All Nature *day-dreams* in the month of May.
And if I pluck'd 'each flower that *sweetest* blows,' –
Who walks in sleep, needs follow must his *nose*.

(ll. 46-8)

Coleridge's plea cannot be taken seriously (though it can, and indeed does, demand to be taken), but it cannot be seriously refuted without cost to the refuter: the more comprehensive, and meticulous, the refutation, the more unpleasantly exacting the refuter may appear. Fruman, more or less alone, was prepared to pay.

Buoyed up by the poem's soporific afflatus, Coleridgean genius need not worry about plagiarism. In the balmy air of his narcoleptically bucolic vision, things are not called by their usual names. Instead, Coleridge continues to breed – and to celebrate that he is breeding – a living idiom in which compactness or complication of expression may flourish for him felicitously. J. C. C. Mays appreciates this, observing that Coleridge's 'texts . . . are unstable, subject to revision, the limits of what is his are endlessly negotiable, so much being made up of adaptations, borrowings, "quotations"'.³² Like Poe's 'The Purloined Letter', 'The Reproof and Reply' is, according to Robert Morrison, 'a text with a past . . . rooted in the dynamics of thievery, creativity, and pursuit'³³ – with the difference that, as Coleridge 'silently removes the texts of others in order to assimilate and transform them within grander designs of his own' (p. 436), he develops more cankering anxieties about doing so than Poe does. He sleepily, and sloppily, misquotes Wordsworth's 'Intimations of Immortality' Ode³⁴ because he has become a drugged version of Wordsworth. (Fruman notes Coleridge's 'apparently dreamy indifference to such terrestrial activities as citing specific authorities', p. 91.) Of course Coleridge could have quoted his friend correctly, but a genius does not borrow words, and doff his hat in the direction of the lender. Nor does he punctuate the course of Alph, the sacred river, with the typographical marks of

quotation, which would break the continuity of the passion, by reminding the reader of the printed book which was the poem's source. Coleridge wants to operate beyond propriety and impropriety in the same way that Nietzsche will later want to think beyond good and evil.

McFarland endorses academically what Coleridge's 'Reproof and Reply' suggests furtively and skittishly. 'The Reproof and Reply' is a neat illustration of Coleridge's beguiling and paradoxical creativity in harmony with itself, in the presence of which Fruman's thesis does indeed seem (in McFarland's words) to 'exhibit . . . an uncontrolled medley of incompatible tones' (YR, p. 265). In the end, the book, on its own, will mislead the reader in earnest pursuit of the movements of what Hazlitt called Coleridge's '*tangential*' mind (*Selected Essays*, p. 726), but it can provide tangentially thinking Coleridgeans with an invaluable perspective not provided elsewhere. Coleridgean seriousness swells under the surface humour of 'The Reproof and Reply': Coleridge would not have exposed himself to the accusations of a Fruman, if some profound, heartfelt truth were not developed in the exhibition. By the end of the poem it is clear that the momentum of Coleridge's metaphorical defence has been designed to outstrip any syllogistic prosecution:

Thus, long accustom'd on the twy-fork'd hill,
 To pluck both flower and floweret at my will;
 The garden's maze, like No-man's-land, I tread,
 Nor common law, nor statute in my head;
 For my own proper smell, sight, fancy, feeling,
 With autocratic hand at once repealing
 Five Acts of Parliament 'gainst private stealing!
 For Chisholm speaks, 'Poor youth! he's but a waif!
 The spoons all right? the hen and chickens safe?
 Well, well, he shall not forfeit our regards –
 The Eighth Commandment was not made for Bards!'
(ll. 49-63)

So, there he is, with his idiosyncratic gifts for self-analysis and affective performance, tangentially protesting his innocence. As Mazzeo says, he is 'not unknowing but simply unable to

render accounts' (p. 341). Equipped with the foursquare assumption that all plagiarism is wrong, Fruman inspected Coleridge's writings and found him thoroughly guilty – as guilty as sin:

Vulnerable as a flayed man, never able to deafen himself to the inner voices that bore witness to his thoughts and actions, he was likely to respond with frantic anxiety to any direct charge of misconduct. At all costs the humiliating accusation had to be denied, his perfect integrity maintained. (p. 418)

In today's critical climate, many would see it as boorish to line up behind Fruman, yet it would be equally wrong to think that *The Damaged Archangel* amounts merely to the damage left behind by an ambitious, if misguided, critic. There are bad writers' plagiarisms, and there are the great writers' skilful uses of other writers' words. Ian Donaldson has recently noted in these pages how Ben Jonson viewed his personal situation 'through the historical prism of a figure from the classical past for whom he feels a particular admiration and affinity . . . remember[ing], in the very texture of [Seneca's] language' his own thoughts.³⁵ If one may admire Jonson's transparently plagiaristic methods, should one be obliged to condemn Coleridge's *modus operandi* solely on the grounds that Coleridge disguised it?

Fruman's book's rightness or wrongness may be heatedly argued, but it is more important to recognise that it has been perhaps *the* most prodigiously provocative book ever written about Romanticism. The poet in the dock, 'harried by a remorseless prosecutor intent upon diminishing a literary giant' – as Fruman (p. xix), himself borrowing from Orsini (p. 102), said – has formulated defences with an inextinguishable life in them. In its own way, 'The Reproof and Reply' is one such defence conducted in the spirit of what Rosemary Ashton has called Coleridge's 'uncanny talent for being beforehand with his critics in analysing himself' (p. 274). In reducing the idea of performing himself as a thief to the vanished intimacy of a domestic occasion he obliquely asserts that the republic of

non-plagiarists is a sterile place from which any spirited writer would be glad to be excluded. In 'Coleridge and the Explosion of Voice', Gavin Drummond states that 'Coleridge's is not the only voice [in his poetry], but in competing with other, older voices his emerges as dominant and individual'.³⁶ This point of view becomes even more plausible when one rereads *The Damaged Archangel* (and 'The Reproof and Reply') today. McFarland judged that Coleridge himself 'could have received no more excruciating punishment than that inflicted by Fruman's book' (YR, p. 286). But Coleridge has not actually been present to suffer the 'punishment'. His corpus, however, joyously persists on its own terms regardless.

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NOTES

¹ Andrew Bennett, 'Wordsworth Writing', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 34 (2003), 3-8: 7.

² Norman Fruman, *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* (1971), p. 59. Further references are given in parentheses in the text.

³ Thomas McFarland, 'Coleridge's Plagiarisms Once More: A Review Essay', *Yale Review*, 62 (1974), 252-86: 252. Further references, to YR, are given in the text.

⁴ S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819: On Literature*, ed. R. A. Foakes, 2 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1987), p. 386. Fruman comments that Coleridge's famous saying, 'all men are either Aristotelians or Platonists' is actually taken from Goethe (p. 114).

⁵ Carl Woodring, *Politics in the Poetry of Coleridge* (Madison, Wis., 1961), p. 21.

⁶ Thomas McFarland, *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition* (Oxford, 1969), p. 12. Hereafter CPT.

⁷ *Hazlitt's Selected Essays*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (1970), pp. 726-7.

⁸ *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. E. L. Griggs, 6 vols. (Oxford, 1956-71), i. 354.

⁹ Thomas De Quincey, *Recollections of the Lakes and the Lake Poets*, ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth, 1970; repr., 1986), p. 40. De Quincey did accuse Coleridge of plagiarism; but, as

McFarland said, 'De Quincey's accusation was ameliorated by an acute and sympathetic analysis of the possible psychological explanation for Coleridge's actions, by a favourable attitude towards Coleridge's intrinsic originality, and finally, by a casualness that led him into citing Coleridge's source as Schelling's "Kleine Philosophische Werke" (the work in question is actually the *System des transscendentalen Idealismus*)' (CPT, p. 3).

¹⁰ John Livingston Lowes, *The Road to Xanadu: A Study in the Ways of the Imagination* (Boston and New York, 1927), p. 233.

¹¹ Kelvin Everest, 'Coleridge's Life', in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (Cambridge, 2002), pp. 17-31: 26.

¹² Seamus Perry, *Coleridge and the Uses of Division* (Oxford, 1999), pp. 25, 26.

¹³ Hugh Sykes Davies, *Wordsworth and the Worth of Words* (Cambridge, 1986), p. 83.

¹⁴ *The Notebooks of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. Kathleen Coburn et al., 5 vols. (Princeton, NJ, 1957-2001), iv. 5075.

¹⁵ Tilar J. Mazzeo, 'Coleridge, Plagiarism, and the Psychology of the Romantic Habit', *European Romantic Review*, 15 (2004), 335-41: 337.

¹⁶ John Beer made this observation at the Coleridge Summer Conference 2004 in his paper, 'Coleridge's Fantasizing Imagination' (23 July 2004).

¹⁷ René Wellek's *Kant in England 1793-1838* (Princeton, NJ, 1931), pp. 66-8. See also Wellek's 'Coleridge's Philosophy and Criticism', in T. M. Raysor (ed.), *The English Romantic Poets; A Review of Research* (New York, 1950), p. 96.

¹⁸ Chapter 1 of McFarland's *Coleridge and the Pantheist Tradition*, 'The Problem of Coleridge's Plagiarisms' (pp. 1-52), esp. 'the concept of "plagiarism" cannot stand the stress of historical examination. We encounter the term so rarely that we are perhaps not so critical of it as we should be. It applies mainly to the stricken efforts of undergraduates to meet demands far beyond either their abilities or their interests. But it has no proper applicability to the activities, however unconventional, of a powerful, learned, and deeply committed mind' (p. 45).

¹⁹ Beer's view is that Fruman's 'indictment of [Coleridge's] misdemeanors [has held] back the development of more positive

views of his reputation for a generation': 'Seamus Perry's *Coleridge and the Uses of Division*', *Romanticism on the Net*, 18 (2000), 2.

²⁰ Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Darker Reflections* (1998), p. 280 n.; further references, to *DR*, are given in the text. In the *TLS* (30 Apr. 1999) Fruman called Holmes's book 'shockingly partisan, credulous and misleading' (p. 14).

²¹ Walter Jackson Bate, *Coleridge* (1968), p. 135.

²² Richard Holmes, *Coleridge: Early Visions* (1989), pp. 42, 43 n.

²³ John Beer, 'The Languages of *Kubla Khan*', in Richard Gravil, Lucy Newlyn and Nicholas Roe (eds.), *Coleridge's Imagination* (Cambridge, 1985), pp. 220-62: 221.

²⁴ *Biographia Literaria* I, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, Bollingen Series LXXV (Princeton, NJ, 1983), p. 164.

²⁵ *Coleridge: Poetical Works*, ed. E. H. Coleridge (Oxford, 1912), p. 441.

²⁶ G. N. G. Orsini, 'Coleridge and Schlegel Reconsidered', *Comparative Literature*, 16 (1964), 97-118: 102.

²⁷ 'I take unceasing delight in Chaucer. His manly cheerfulness is especially delicious to me in my old age. How exquisitely tender he is, and yet how perfectly free from the least touch of sickly melancholy or morbid drooping!' *Table Talk* I, ed. Carl Woodring, Bollingen Series LXXV (Princeton, NJ, 1990), p. 466.

²⁸ 'For wel I woot my servyce is in vayn; / My gerdon is but brestyng of myn herte. / Madame, reweth upon my peynes smerte; / For with a word ye may me sleen or save. / Heere at youre feet God wolde that I were grave! / I ne have as now no leyser moore to seye; / Have mercy, sweete, or ye wol do me deye!' *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. A. C. Cawley (1958), p. 317.

²⁹ For example: 'Between extreme dependence and the most subtle influence there is, obviously, an unbroken chain of gradations. Because literary criticism, especially in recent decades, has either steered clear of the problem of originality, or scornfully exiled the matter from the courts of evaluation, critics must insist dogmatically that the distinction between a seemingly completely independent work, and one that has been subtly influenced by another, or a third that is a gross imitation, can have

no bearing on a poem's *inherent worth* (another vague term that struts about as an objective reality'), p. 529.

³⁰ Rosemary Ashton, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford, 1996), p. 351.

³¹ 'The poet has placed you in a dream, a charmed sleep, and you neither wish nor have the power, to inquire where you are or how you got there.' *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (1936), p. 36.

³² J. C. C. Mays, 'Coleridge's "Love": "All he can manage, more than he could"', in Tim Fulford and Morton D. Paley (eds.), *Coleridge's Visionary Languages: Essays in Honour of John Beer* (Cambridge, 1993), pp. 49-66: 57.

³³ Robert Morrison, 'Poe's De Quincey, Poe's Dupin', *E in C*, 51 (2001), 424-41: 437.

³⁴ Coleridge mentions 'each flower that *sweetest* [Coleridge's italics] blows', whereas Wordsworth wrote 'the *meanest* [my italics] flower that blows'.

³⁵ Ian Donaldson, 'Biographical Uncertainty', *E in C*, 54 (2004), 305-22: 319.

³⁶ Gavin Drummond, 'Coleridge and the Explosion of Voice', *Prometheus Unplugged*, 13 Apr. 1996 virtual conference: <<http://Prometheus.cc.emory.edu/panels/3D/G.Drummond.html>>, 7.