**Reading 8**

**Biographia Literaria, Chapter XIII**

Based on: Martin Procházka, “The Phantasmal Imagination: *Biographia Literaria* and Continental Philosophy,” unpublished lecture at “London-Paris Romanticism Seminar” School of Advanced Studies, University of London, 13 January 2017.

**The Epigraphs**

In the introduction to the thirteenth chapter of *Biographia Literaria* Coleridge indicates that **his philosophical approach is different from traditional metaphysics**. Metaphysics explains the unity of the world in two ways:

The approach, indicated by the first epigraph to Chapter 13 of the *Biographia* from **Book V of Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (l. 469ff)**, assumes a single spiritual essence (“intelligence”) which is the origin and primary cause (God), main principle and final purpose (Good). The single spiritual essence is connected with individual things and creatures by the Great Chain of Being, thanks to which they can ascend from material to spiritual forms of existence. In this system, the spiritual essence is self-sufficient: A.O. Lovejoy (*The Great Chain of Being*) maintains that according to Milton’s tract *De Doctrina Christiana*, God is perfect in Himself, not through His creation, and that humans can approximate his perfection only when pursuing their spiritual self-improvement. Hence, **Milton’s notion is an example of a radical monism**, a ‘totalitarian’ **unity which does not need plurality for its own materialization**. This concept of unity of the world as the Absolute Subjectivity of God was carried to extremes (emphasizing the absurd and evil nature of the cosmic order) by Byron in his mystery *Cain* (1821).

The second approach, epitomized by the following epigraph from **Leibniz’s books *De Ipsa Natura*** (On Nature Itself, 1698) **and *Specimen Dynamicum*** (An Essay in Dynamics, 1695), is based on **an interplay of two principles**. These are, according to Leibniz, **matter and entelechy** (the final cause, the power determining the forms of individual creatures and things), or, according to Descartes, **extension and motion**.

Both approaches converge in the third epigraph from ***Hymn III* of the early Christian mystical and Pantheistic poet, bishop Synesius of Cyrene**, addressing Holy Trinity, in particular **God the Son and the Holy Ghost**:

O Child unspeakable! O sacred Birth!

Comprising what does bear and what’s brought forth!

A middle thing (not from *without* pour’d *in*)

Within the hidden plan which I revere

Deeply abides.[[1]](#footnote-1)

**This reveals Coleridge’s interest in Neoplatonism and Pantheism**, evident, for instance, from the marginalia to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. One cannot resist a temptation of seeing Coleridge’s book as an ambitious project **to continue Synesius’s attempt to “harmonize some of the most subtle aspects of the mystical theologies of paganism and Christianity.”**[[2]](#footnote-2)

**Coleridge’s Points of Departure**

**The first sentence of Chapter 13** refers to the previously mentioned Cartesian binary (extension vs. motion), paraphrased under the influence of Schelling’s *System of Transcendental Idealism*, as **matter and motion**.[[3]](#footnote-3) While Leibniz and Descartes assume “intelligence already existing and complete,” **the approach derived from Schelling’s *Transcendental Idealism* is dialectical**: it may represent intelligence’s “history to the mind from its birth to its maturity.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

Despite this rather consistent monism (manifesting itself in Coleridge’s emphasis on the origin of the whole process in the Absolute Subjectivity of God), **the opening reflections on imagination** in Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria* may be read in **a different, pluralistic key**, using Kant’s hypothesis of sensuously unrepresentable concepts - *De mundi sensibilis et intelligibilis forma et principiis* – On the Form and Principles of the Sensible and Intelligible World, 1770).

**The unity of the world is the result of its innumerable projections.** Contrary to Leibniz, in Coleridge’s opinion, this unity is not granted by the freely creating God. Coleridge attempts **to explain the multiplicity of worlds** **by means of speculative genealogy** (Schelling’s influence). He postulates the existence of “**two contrary forces, the one of which tends to expand infinitely, while the other strives to apprehend or *find* itself in this infinity**.”[[5]](#footnote-5) **The dynamic unity of these forces, called by Coleridge “one power,” can be understood by us only “intuitively.”**

**Differential Nature of Coleridge’s Notion of Unity: The Infinite**

**This unity** is neither a universal principle nor a central concept (neither Kant’s Pure Reason nor his moral Law): it **has a *differential* nature**: **a relationship of *infinitely divisible* quantities**: if one of the forces is infinitely expanding, the other is “finding” itself in an infinite number of permanently dividing points, since neither the direction nor the orientation of this expansion are given in advance. C. refers to Kant: *An Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Quantities into Philosophy* (Ein Versuch den Begriff der negativen Grössen in die Weltweisheit einzuführen, 1763) - **differential calculus**. C. emphasizes their importance for the solution of problems of “space, motion and infinitely small quantities.”[[6]](#footnote-6)

The two forces constituting Coleridge’s “one power” do not work in a determined and limited space and time. Being the *a priori* “conditions of all possible directions” as well as “infinite” and “indestructible,” they cannot neutralize one another. Their interplay causes what Coleridge terms “a tertium aliquid, or **finite generation**.”[[7]](#footnote-7)

Traditionally oriented scholars interpret Coleridge’s forces as energy (life force, creative power) and reflecting consciousness, which is the highest product of organic growth.[[8]](#footnote-8) This concretization, however, neglects an important fact about the differential nature of the relation. According to D.W. Smith, in such a relation **the quantities “have no determined value but [...] nevertheless are determined reciprocally in that relation**.” From the identification of elements one must advance to the determination of the nature of their **structural relationship.**

**The Finite Generation: Effects of Forces and “Signs”**

The finite generation consists of beings and things, which are no mere sensuous ideas. They seem to be the **“effects”** (Deleuzean term) **of unconsciously operating** (and, indeed, only speculatively suggested) **forces, or concretizations of the differential relationships between them in diverse spatio-temporal relations**. As a result, Schelling returns to Leibniz’s theory of “les petites perceptions”, or, more precisely, to its substantial revaluation in the work of **Salomon Maïmon**. According to Maïmon, these “unconscious perceptions constitute the ‘ideal genetic elements’ of perception” or “the differentials of consciousness.” These differentials were later called by **Gilles Deleuze** “Ideas” or “Essences.”[[9]](#footnote-9)**Schelling** also **wrote about the necessity of this return** in 1797, in his ***Ideas of the Philosophy of Nature***, which Coleridge knew and quoted in *Biographia Literaria*.

**According to Deleuze, the “effects” of forces concretizing their differential relationships in spatio-temporal relations can be interpreted as *signs*, which are not “a sensible being, nor even a purely qualitative being (*aistheton*), but the being *of* the sensible (*aistheteon*).”****This “being *of* the sensible” poses a question of its own limits as “an immanent Idea or differential field beyond the norms of common sense and recognition” (the sublime).[[10]](#footnote-10)**

**Problematic Nature of Coleridge’s Imagination: Monism vs. Pluralism.**

**The Meaning of Coleridge’s Hoax**

**The problematic nature of Coleridge’s concept of imagination, the clash between its declared monism and “enveloped” or “implicated”** (Deleuzean terms) **pluralism** **is evident in the central part of Chapter 13 of *Biographia Literaria*.** This part does not take the form of a philosophical text. It is a **literary hoax**, a letter from an invented friend or reader, who advises Coleridge to delete from his book the chapter on imagination, having more than one hundred pages. The fictitious friend therefore recommends Coleridge to print only his theses, and incorporate the chapter into his “announced treatises on the Logos or communicative intellect in Man and Deity.”[[11]](#footnote-11) However, **Coleridge never wrote these books**.

**The position of Coleridge’s fictitious friend is ambiguous.** **On the one hand**, he refers to Coleridge’s theory as “so directly the reverse of all I had ever been accustomed to consider as truth.” Therefore Coleridge quotes the second book of *Paradise Lost*, where death is **a mere phantasm, yet of dreadful power.** If we subscribe to the idea that imagination produces multiplicities which are mere “effects” of forces, **how can “true” images be distinguished from the deceptive simulacra or phantasms**? All Milton is doing, is to give the phantasms a flavor of **pagan mythology** (both Ancient Greek and contemporary Saami shamanism - Lapland, explored by 18th century travelers). **On the other hand,** Coleridge’s fictitious friend admits to have been as enchanted by Coleridge’s treatise as **by mythical poetry inspired by divine power** “an orphic tale” (this is a very complex node of references – the most important feature seems that Wordsworth’s *Prelude*, see the commentary below, represents the French Revolution as the outburst of creative energy which is identical with the “Truth” innate to the humanity).

**“Signs of Art”: Subversive and Liberating Gestures, Phantasms and Simulacra**

In Coleridge’s hoax, the signs of an unwritten philosophical treatise become, to use Deleuze’s phrase, “**the signs of art**.” The “signs of art” **cannot be explained empirically, but they can be “felt or sensed [...] from the transcendental point of view” as “the differential limit[s]” of human sensibility. Only art can give us a real unity, the unity of non-material signs and wholly spiritual meaning.** This unity of sign and sense “appearing in the work of art” is called “the Essence” by Deleuze. This essence is “the highest and absolute difference.”[[12]](#footnote-12)

Consequently, **Coleridge’s hoax does not have to be interpreted as a mere trick**, performed in order to avoid the philosophical elaboration of the notion of imagination. Rather, **it is a liberating gesture, giving art a position above philosophy**, and a different dimension to the preceding metaphysical reflections and the following definition of imagination.

The fictitious reader does not characterize Coleridge’s treatise on imagination only by an extract from a poem. The verse passage is preceded by another entirely invented quotation: an expanded figure of speech, a sequence of symbolic metaphors, comparing the inside of one of “our light airy modern chapels of ease” to the dark and vast interior of a monumental Gothic cathedral seen on a tempestuous night through flashes of moonlight. This sublime architecture evokes feelings of grandeur and reverence and also “a chilly sensation of terror,”[[13]](#footnote-13) since its **structure and ornaments lose their fixed religious and historical meaning in the spectral play of lights and shadows**. Moreover, the building itself becomes spectral in the play of “surface effects” and “phantasms”[[14]](#footnote-14):

suddenly emerging into broad yet visionary lights with coloured shadows of fantastic shapes, yet all decked with holy insignia and mystic symbols; and ever and anon coming out full upon pictures and stone-work images of great men, with whose *names* I was familiar, but which looked upon me with countenances and an expression the most dissimilar to all I had been in the habit of connecting with those names. Those whom I have been taught to venerate as almost super-human in magnitude of intellect, I found perched in little fret-work niches, as grotesque dwarfs; while the grotesques, in my hitherto belief, stood guarding the high altar with all the characters of Apotheosis. In short, what I had supposed substances were thinned away into shadows, while everywhere shadows were deepened into substances.[[15]](#footnote-15)

In contrast to the Kantian sublime, whose purpose is to find the certainty of the moral law in human beings, **Coleridge’s passage produces a feeling of indistinct terror referred to in Edmund Burke’s theory of the sublime**. This terror **obscures the rational implications of Coleridge’s symbolic image, darkens the common sense and shatters the values formed by traditional education: religious sentiment and reverence to spiritual authorities.** As a result, **the sense attributed to imagination in Coleridge’s hoax is clearly subversive.**

Yet the passage describes nothing other than the action of what Coleridge, in the conclusion of the chapter, calls “a secondary imagination.” This power “dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and unify. It is essentially *vital*, even as all objects (*as* objects) are essentially fixed and dead.”[[16]](#footnote-16) **Instead of the world of bodies and objects and of generally accepted values, imagination creates a new world of *events and surface effects*.** Starting from Lucretius’s atomism, these effects are called **simulacra and phantasms**.[[17]](#footnote-17)

**Simulacra and phantasms do not depend on objects: they are not signifiers with fixed signifieds. They are independent, non-material signs, the “signs of art”, which, at the same time, are the *intensities* of sensuous perceptions. They are signs, whose meaning is based on the differences of imperceptible stimuli and may be said to unify the duality of aesthetics.** Deleuze points out that phantasms represent neither an action nor a passion, but **the results of action and passion, that is, pure events**.

**The Meaning of the Two Poetic Extracts (see also the commentary below)**

**The shift from chaos**, where a “substance” cannot be distinguished from a “shadow,” **to this aesthetic integration**, is marked by two quotations from poems. The first is from Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and describes how Satan saw a strange “Fantasm” at the gate of Hell, a being of a substance “that shadow seem’d” and a “shape [...] that shape had none / Distinguishable in member, joynt, or limb.” When the indistinct spectre haughtily answered his question, Satan started a fierce fight with him. They were separated by a monster called Sin, which explained to Satan that the spectre was his “only son” begotten with her and named Death.[[18]](#footnote-18) **While in Milton’s story the phantasm of Death is identified with dark, chthonic forces of chaos[[19]](#footnote-19) and the with dissolution of moral and cosmic order, in Coleridge’s allusion, the phantasm signifies a moment of crossing a boundary between the world ordered by authoritative representations and the world of created by the imagination.** It can be said that here *Biographia* converges with other romantic works, for instance Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* and some prophetic poems by Blake, where the correspondence between macrocosm and microcosm is represented subversively as the relationship imposed by an usurper of sacred power (Shelley’s Jupiter and Blake’s Urizen). The shapeless phantasm of Death in Milton’s *Paradise Lost* can be understood as a precursor of Demogorgon in *Prometheus Unbound*. **Both Shelley’s and Blake’s works can be read as projects of liberation of a creative potential of language and universal creative forces active in humans.**

The second quotation from Coleridge’s own poem addressed to Wordsworth expresses the feelings of wonder at this new world, caused by the reading of *The Prelude*.**The extract thematizes the author’s vision as “[a]n orphic tale,” which has an obscure meaning. This meaning emerges as an effect of intensities of individual phantasms** (emotional ideas or, in Coleridge’s words, “passionate thoughts”). Rather than a representation of a certain thought or activity, **it is a music, such as that invoked in the final lines of *Kubla Khan***:

Could I revive within me

Her symphony and song,

To such a deep delight ’twould win me,

That with music loud and long,

I would build that dome in air,

**Coleridge’s hoax thus becomes an important parable of the nature and working of the imagination.** The invented letter is a fragment searching a new form for its fulfilment, a form that, in Blanchot’s words, “mobilizes – renders mobile - the whole, even while interrupting it in various ways.”[[20]](#footnote-20) In this respect it comes close to the most daring romantic visions of the new art, especially to the notions of fragment and romantic irony in the work of Friedrich Schlegel.

**The Chapter’s Conclusion: Return to Hierarchies**

However, the closing part of Chapter XIII of *Biographia Literaria* does not confirm this tendency at all. Instead of an ambitious romantic vision of art the text gives a formalized definition, whose main purpose is to eliminate all relations of imagination to simulacra and phantasms. Here Coleridge returns to the traditional metaphysical method described in the introduction of this paper. **His definition is strictly hierarchical, and it does not raise any doubts about what is the original and what is its true copy:** “all human Perception” is “a repetition in the finite mind” of the only lawful representation, “the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM.” “The secondary Imagination [...], co-existing with the conscious will,” is an identical copy of the primary: its “echo,” which does not differ qualitatively from its model, but only “in degree and in the mode of its operation.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

**Commentary on Extracts quoted in Chapter XIII**

1.

**“If substance might be call'd that shadow seem'd,**

**For each seem'd either!”**

A modified quote from *P.L.* Bk. II, ll. 669-70.

The Phantasm of Death and the Original Sin sit before the gate of Hell:

Before the gates there sat 648

On either side a formidable shape.

The one seemed woman to the waist, and fair,

But ended foul in many a scaly fold,

Voluminous and vast, a serpent armed

With mortal sting. About her middle round

A cry of Hell-hounds never-ceasing barked

With wide Cerberean mouths full loud, and rung

A hideous peal; yet, when they list, would creep,

If aught disturbed their noise, into her womb,

And kennel there; yet there still barked and howled

Within unseen. Far less abhorred than these

Vexed Scylla, bathing in the sea that parts

Calabria from the hoarse Trinacrian shore;

Nor uglier follow the night-hag, when, called

In secret, riding through the air she comes,

Lured with the smell of infant blood, to dance

With Lapland witches, while the laboring moon

Eclipses at their charms. The other shape,

**If shape it might be called that shape had none**

**Distinguishable in member, joint, or limb;**

Or substance might be called that shadow seemed,

For each seemed either, black it stood as night,

Fierce as ten furies, terrible as Hell,

And shook a dreadful dart: what seemed his head

The likeness of a kingly crown had on. 673

The passage had a great attraction for Coleridge and can be seen as **one of the sources of the passage representing Death and Life-in-Death in the *Ancient Mariner*.** Here it is used to represent **the repressive nature of Christian doctrine based on the fear of Death and the Original Sin**. It combines the ancient mythology and Christian religion in the manner which Coleridge might not have found acceptable.

2.

**“An orphic song indeed…”**

S.T. Coleridge, “To William Wordsworth, Composed on the Night after His Recitation of a Poem on a Growth of an Individual Mind” (January 1807)

C. became familiar with the five-book version of *The Prelude* before his departure for Malta in 1804, but has not seen the expanded (thirteen-book) version (*The Prelude*, the text of 1805) W. read to him at Coleorton (Coleorton Hall in Northern Leics., the country house of Sir George Beaumont, W’s friend and patron, an amateur landscape painter, lover of the picturesque and a vehement critic of J.M.W. Turner (and admirer of Sir Joshua Reynolds). Beaumont invited W. and C. to stay in a cottage on his estate.

C’s poem refers to W’s French experiences (Book IX of *The Prelude*) and his developing alienation from those who were closest to W. (Mary Hutchinson – W’s wife, Dorothy – W’s sister), and from his mistress Sara Hutchinson (sister of Mary H.). C’s annotations in MS B of *The Prelude* were limited to the second part of Book VI (crossing the Alps in the mist and the apostrophe of Imagination): “for the deadening of a too strong feeling which the personal Passages, so exquisitely beautiful, had excited.” At that time C’s relation to W. was ambivalent: on the one hand he expressed veneration for his poetry, on the other hand, he criticized his moral standards, cf. “Latin Lines to William Wordsworth as Judge” (Dec 1805 – 1807-10?): “I have come to recognise you, fully and willingly, as poet, sage and my most honoured Friend, but *not* as Judge” (translation from Latin).

Excerpts commenting on *The Prelude*:

More than **historic**, that **prophetic** Lay (3)

…

Thoughts all too deep for words! (11; paraphrasing W’s “Intimations” Ode “Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears”)

…

Of more than Fancy, of the Social Sense

Distending wide, and Man beloved as Man,

Where France in all her Towns lay vibrating (27-29)

….

For thou wert there…

Amid a mighty nation jubilant

When from the general Heart of Human kind

Hope sprang forth like a full-born Deity!

Of that dear Hope afflicted and struck down,

So summoned homeward, thenceforth calm and sure

From the dread Watch-Tower of man’s absolute Self (33-40)

…

**The Angel of the vision!** Then (last strain)

Of Duty, **chosen Laws controlling choice,**

**Action and Joy!** **– An orphic song indeed,...** (45-48)

**“The Angel of the vision” - Apocalyptic Imagery referring to the French Revolution but also to Milton’s “Lycidas” 154-64: “**Look homeward angel now, and melt with ruth” (pity).**Theme of “land’s end” boundary of land and sea, life and death:** the "great vision of the guarded mount" in Milton’s poem refers to a story about how some monks reportedly saw a vision of St. Michael on St. Michael's Mount (Mont St. Michel) in Normandy. The vision encompasses the Atlantic coast of France (as far as Bayonne in Spain). **Poetry of hope is contrasted with the power of laws.** The hope is that of the liberation from deadening oppression by the burst of free creativity – the French Revolution.

**Echoes of *The Prelude* in the following lines of Coleridge’s poem** (50-54)**:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| “To William Wordsworth” (50-54) **significantly reworks** a passage from *The Prelude*  The truly great  Have all one age, and from one visible space  Shed influence! They, both in power and act,  Are permanent, and Time is not with *them*,  Save as it worketh *for* them, and not *in* it. | *The Prelude* 1805, X.975-84  There is  One great society alone on earth:  The noble living and the noble dead.  Thy consolation shall be there, and time  And Nature shall before thee spread in store  Imperishable thoughts, the place itself  Be conscious of they presence, and the dull  Sirocco air of its degeneracy  Turn as thou mov’st into a healthful breeze  To cherish and invigorate thy frame |

**Even after the ultimate decay** **of “what [France] once Promised”** (*The Prelude* X.964-5) **there is a hope of the eternal unity of “the noble living and the noble dead”.**

**For C., “the truly great” are like the Absolute Personality of God** (Milton, “On His Blindness”). W’s poem, although it admits the decay and defeat of the French Revolution, is the sign of this, trans-historical greatness, a **Revelation of trans-historical Truth (Truth of Nature) innate to human nature**:

thy work

Makes audible a linked lay of Truth,

Of Truth profound a sweet continuous lay,

Not learned but native, her natural notes! (56-60).

1. Synesius of Cyrene, “Hymn III”, in *The Ten Hymns of Synesius, Bishop of Cyrene*, trans. and ed. Alan Stevenson (n.l.: printed for private circulation, 1865) 11. A more recent interpretation of this passage shows that Synesius’s Trinitarianism is actually based on the “pagan quaternity that maintains a monad presiding over a triad, as opposed to the Christian Trinity.” Jay Bregman, *Synesius of Cyrene: Philosopher, Bishop* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Bregman 88. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Coleridge freely paraphrases Schelling’s reference to Descartes’ treatise *Le Monde, ou Traité de la Lumiére (The World, or the Treatise on Light*, 1663) in *The System of Transcendental Idealism* (Section C, §1). As Helge Kragh shows, the concept of “matter” was problematic for Descartes, since the “corpuscular entities” of which matter consisted were “infinitely divisible”. Therefore Descartes “rejected the idea of the smallest particles, atoms”, re-discovered by many of his contemporaries, and preferred the notion of “extension” as “a primitive property that defined physical reality”, since “a body must necessarily be extended”. Helge Kragh, *Higher Speculations: Grand Theories and Failed Revolutions in Physics and Cosmology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. S.T. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (1817), ed. John Shawcross (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907) 1:196. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Biographia Literaria*, 1:196. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. *Biographia Literaria,* 1:196. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Biographia Literaria*, 1:197-98. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. . M.H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (New York: W.W. Norton and Co. Inc., 1961]), Chapters VII and VIII. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. D.W. Smith, “Deleuze’s Theory of Sensation,” *Deleuze: A Critical* Reader, ed. Paul Patton (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Smith 35. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:200. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Smith, “Deleuze’s Theory of Sensation,” 34. See Gilles Deleuze, *Proust and Signs*, trans. Richard Howard (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004) 52, 113. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:199. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, trans. Mark Lester and Charles Stivale, ed. Constantin V. Boundas (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990) 4-5, 256-57. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:199. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. *Biographia Literaria*, 1:202. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Cf. Gilles Deleuze, “The Simulacrum and Ancient Philosophy,” in *The Logic of Sense*, 274, 275, 260. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book II, ll. 742, 669, 666-68, 728, 765, 804. *The Poems of John Milton*, ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1961) 217-20. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Milton’s “Sin” has the form of Scylla in Homer’s *Odyssey*. According to Greek myths, Scylla was a daughter of Phorcis or Hecate and Charybdis. (Robert Graves, *The Greek Myths* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1961] 2:368). According to Lévi-Strauss’s analysis of the Oedipus myth, the opposition “chthonic - autochthonous” has a crucial importance for the formulation of an analogy between the order of microcosm (kinship and social relations) and the order of macrocosm:

    The inability to connect two kinds of relationships [the chthonic, that is, the dependence of the humans on the earth from which they were born, and the autochthonous, in which they can free themselves from this dependence] is overcome (or rather replaced) by the assertion that contradictory relationships are identical inasmuch as they are both self-contradictory in a similar way.

    (Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology*, trans. Claire Jacobson and Brooke C. Schoepfe [New York: Basic Books, 1963] 216)

    Although the contradiction between the chthonic and the autochthonous origin of mankind cannot be solved in itself, Lévi-Strauss shows that a logical correlation, depending on an analogy can be formed:

    the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life validates cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true. (*Structural Anthropology*, 216)

    This is, according to Lévi-Strauss, “a provisional formulation of the structure of mythical thought” (*Structural Anthropology*, 216). [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Maurice Blanchot, “The Athenaeum,” trans. Deborah Esh and Ian Balfour, *Studies in Romanticism*, 22 (summer 1983):171. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, 1:202. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)