COLERIDGE ON DRAMA

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INTRODUCTION AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In the Preface to his book The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, Richard Harter Fogle states

> There is . . . I am confident, a need for such a study as I here introduce; a study of Coleridge's criticism in itself, tentatively accepting the metaphysical assumptions on which it is based and focusing upon its central principles and inner relationship; endeavouring without direct regard for its external connections to the past and the present to see it as a whole, yet at the same time anxiously regardful of its permanent significance and its bearing upon practical criticism.[1]

These are the principles on which I have based this thesis, applied more particularly to Coleridge's criticism of drama. Coleridge's philosophy has been examined frequently--the most objective and judicious study is that of Owen Barfield in his book What Coleridge Thought[2] and the best study of the philosophic basis of Coleridge's criticism is that of J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature.[3] Coleridge's affinities with other

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[1]Richard Harter Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism (Berkeley and Los Angeles; University of California Press, 1962), p.x.

[2]Owen Barfield, What Coleridge Thought (London: Oxford University Press, 1972).

[3]J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry, 1791 - 1819 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

Romantic critics have also been studied, and probably the best account here is still that of M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp.[4] But, apart from Fogle's The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, no extensive study has been published on Coleridge's practical application of his critical theory, although in comparatively recent years a number of articles have been written on the subject, for example Barbara Hardy's "'I have a smack of Hamlet': Coleridge and Shakespeare's Characters,"[5] and M.M. Badawi's "Coleridge's Formal Criticism of Shakespeare's Plays."[6] Coleridge's views on drama have been still more neglected--to date no book purely devoted to this subject has been published.

This thesis, then, concentrates on Coleridge's practical criticism of drama. I have not gone into the subject of Coleridge's indebtedness to contemporary and earlier German and English critics: I consider that this long-standing discussion has lost much of its zest and is now becoming somewhat repetitive. There is no doubt, for example, that Coleridge owed much to A.W. Schlegel and there seems little point in continuing to

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[4] M.H. Abrams, The Mirror and the Lamp (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

[5] Barbara Hardy, "'I have a smack of Hamlet': Coleridge and Shakespeare's Characters," EC, VIII (1958), 238 - 255.

[6] M.M. Badawi, "Coleridge's Formal Criticism of Shakespeare's Plays," EC, X (1960), 148 - 162.

show similarities ad infinitum. Every critic and thinker builds on the work of others and we should not think the less of him for it. The variety of critics and philosophers from whom Coleridge borrowed material--including Schlegel, Kant and the German thinkers,[7] Cudworth and the Cambridge neo-platonists,[8] Plato, Plotinus, Hobbes, Locke and Hartley,[9] and the late eighteenth century English critics[10]--indicates that he was indebted to no one person exclusively. We can learn much by examining how a critic has been influenced by his predecessors--we can gain a clearer idea of the direction in which his thought developed, for example. But this work has been done. Coleridge could never have achieved consistency in his thought and criticism if he had been a mere plagiarist, if he had merely adopted without transforming and fusing into his own theory material from such a wide and even conflicting variety of sources. And, as

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[7]Norman Fruman, for example, in his book Coleridge The Damaged Archangel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1971) has made a thorough and scholarly analysis of Coleridge's debts to the Germans. See especially Chapters 14 and 16.

[8]See R.L. Brett, "Coleridge's Theory of the Imagination," Essays and Studies, new series II (1949), 75 - 90.

[9]See Judson S. Lyon, "Romantic Psychology and the Inner Senses: Coleridge," PMLA, LXXXI (1966), 246 - 260.

[10]See Robert Witbeck Babcock, The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, 1766 — 1799 (first published by the University of Carolina Press, 1931. This edition New York: Russel & Russel, 1964), Chapter XVI.

I have indicated in this thesis, Coleridge's criticism is consistent. He synthesised the materials he borrowed into his own distinct critical framework.

Nor have I attempted to evaluate Coleridge's criticism by arguing whether or not his conclusions are acceptable to the twentieth century. It would be arrogant to assume that the critical conclusions we have come to in this century are either final or perfect, for the criticism of any age is necessarily rooted in time and subject to influence from temporal social factors. For the same reason I have not taken as the directing purpose of my thesis an examination of the extent to which Coleridge has influenced twentieth century criticism. My main concern is with the extent to which Coleridge's criticism is true to itself, with its consistency and the extent to which it answers the purposes for which he devised it. This thesis, therefore, is rather of an expository than an evaluative nature, although I have occasionally commented favourably on the flexibility of Coleridge's criticism and on the logic of his literary theory, and although I have concluded that the critical issues which he considered to be important are still important and that he cannot be ignored in a study of the development of criticism.

Coleridge's dramatic criticism can only be understood by reference to his philosophy and his purposes in criticising drama. Accordingly I have given an account

of these in Part I "The Philosophic Basis and the Aims of Coleridge's Dramatic Criticism." In Chapter I I have examined Coleridge's literary theory as a whole, concentrating on his concept of the unconscious in literary creation, on the imagination and fancy, on organicism, and on the relation of his dramatic criticism to his critical structure. In Chapter II I have explained what he was trying to prove and refute in his lectures. One of Coleridge's most important purposes--the defence of the moral value of Shakespeare's works--can only be understood by reference to Coleridge's moral approach to literature as a whole, and I have also given an account of this in my second chapter. Part I, then, relates the dramatic criticism to the literary criticism as a whole, and explains what aspects of literature and drama Coleridge emphasises. In Part II, "Coleridge's Theory and Application of the Principle of Genre," I have shown that Coleridge's dramatic criticism is organised along generic lines, and that his concept of genre is both complex and flexible enough to be equal to the task of the analysis and criticism of drama. In Part II I have devoted a chapter to his theory of genre itself and one chapter each to his views on the history play, tragedy and comedy. Finally, I have devoted a chapter to an examination of Coleridge's remarks on Romeo and Juliet as an example of his practical criticism.

Most of the primary material on which this thesis

is based comes from Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism,"[11] Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism[12] (both edited by T.M. Raysor) and Coleridge on Shakespeare: The text of the lectures of 1811 - 12, edited by R.A. Faokes.[13] Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism has two volumes: the first contains marginalia and the manuscripts of lectures Coleridge gave on Shakespeare, the second contains reports of Coleridge's lectures. Much of the material in volume II is in reported speech in which Coleridge is referred to in the third person or as "the lecturer." I have considered it unnecessarily tedious stylistically to mention in the text of my thesis each time I have quoted material from volume II that my quote is a report from one of Coleridge's lectures, but have tried to make this fact clear less obtrusively in the context in which I have quoted it. Of the reports which survive of Coleridge's lectures by far the most important and complete are those of his

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[11]Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (2 vols.; London: Constable & Co., 1930).

[12]Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable & Co., 1936).

[13]Coleridge on Shakespeare: The text of the lectures of 1811 - 12, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971). This text, more fully documented, is to form part of volume V of The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, general ed. Kathleen Coburn (16 vols. projected; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969—).

1811 - 12 series of lectures, and most of these were transcribed by J.P. Collier. Collier published these transcripts in 1856 in the form of Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton by the late S.T. Coleridge, and Raysor used this as his copy text for that part of Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism which gives the reports of the 1811 - 1812 lectures. Unfortunately by 1856 Collier had been guilty of some literary forgeries, starting with his History of Dramatic Poetry, published in 1831. That Collier did not forge the material he claimed to have transcribed from Coleridge's lectures is clear from the similarities of his transcripts to certain of Coleridge's manuscript lectures, published for the first time in volume I of Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism.[14] Besides, the notes in his diary indicate that at the time of Coleridge's 1811 - 1812 lectures, Collier, still in his early twenties, hero-worshipped Coleridge[15] and attended his lectures. But in his article "The text of Coleridge's 1811 - 12 Shakespeare Lectures"[16] and in his Introduction to Coleridge on Shakespeare, Foakes has shown that Collier transcribed

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[14]See Raysor's comments in Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, II, 25.

[15]See the Introduction to Coleridge on Shakespeare, especially p.6.

[16]R.A. Foakes, "The Text of Coleridge's 1811 - 12 lectures, Shakespeare Survey, XXIII (1970), 101 - 111.

Coleridge's lectures into his diary, and that he changed these transcripts quite considerably for Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton. The diary and original transcripts still survive, and Foakes has based the text of Coleridge on Shakespeare on them. This text is therefore more authoritative than Raysor's version of the 1811 - 1812 lectures based on Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton. Accordingly I have wherever possible used the Foakes text in quoting from these lectures, except in such instances where I consider that Collier's later alterations of his transcripts were honest and purely for the sake of clarity, and in each of these cases I have given my reasons for preferring the Raysor version.

Coleridge's dramatic criticism was produced mainly between the years 1808 and 1818. I have not tried to show any chronological development in his thought on drama because much of my primary material consists of manuscript lectures and marginalia which cannot be dated except by reference to the rather uncertain evidence of watermarks. Raysor has suggested dates for some of these fragments, but his suggestions are tentative. I have found very little evidence of discrepancy or inconsistency of opinion or thought in Coleridge's dramatic criticism despite the comparatively wide range of years separating some of the comments, and I have concluded, with Owen Barfield, that the develop-

ment of Coleridge's thought

> was so consistent, or, if it is preferred, "organic," that later views are for the most part implicit in the earlier. They are at all events not contrary, so that what is explicitly stated in, say, 1830, may (to borrow a neat phrase from Professor J.R. de J. Jackson) be "relevant as a foreseen conclusion" to a passage from 1816 or earlier.[17]

Finally, I should like to draw attention to two points in connection with typographical practice in this thesis: firstly, I have capitalised the initial letters of the words "reason" and "understanding" when I have used them in the specifically Coleridgean sense, in order to avoid confusion between the Coleridgean and common meanings; and, secondly, throughout this thesis brackets [ ] enclose the interpolations of Coleridge's <u>editors</u>. Raysor encloses within brackets his suggestions for words which are illegible or blurred in Coleridge's manuscripts, for example, and I have preserved this typographical detail in quoting from his editions of Coleridge's criticism. I have reserved angle brackets < > for those occasions when I have wished to make some comment of my own in material quoted.

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[17] Owen Barfield, <u>What Coleridge Thought</u>, p.5.

Although the opinions expressed in this thesis are my own, I have been guided and encouraged by many whom I should now like to thank. I owe, first of all, a great debt of thanks to Dr. A. de Villiers who has supervised my work on Coleridge since the beginning of 1971. He has not only given me the benefit of his considerable knowledge of literature and criticism, especially that of Coleridge, Hazlitt, and the Romantics, but has given me moral support, constructive advice, and has been at all times understanding and sympathetic. I should also like to thank Professor Butler and the members of staff of the English Department at Rhodes University who helped mould my ideas as an undergraduate and gave me the benefit of their insight into literature. In addition I owe thanks to Professor Butler for giving me the opportunity of delivering a research colloquium at his house in 1971; I have profited from the helpful comments which he and the members of staff made on that occasion. The substance of this colloquium, in revised form, now constitutes part of Chapter VI of this study. I am grateful to Rhodes University for granting me scholarships for the years 1971 and 1972, and to the staff of the Rhodes University Library for being constantly helpful in my search for material for this thesis. Finally, I owe hearty thanks to my parents: without my father's support this thesis could never have been produced, and

my mother has typed it calmly and capably at short notice. I must point out that the faults of this work are entirely my own and its merits derive from the guidance and co-operation of those I have mentioned above.

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PART I

THE PHILOSOPHIC BASIS AND THE AIMS OF COLERIDGE'S DRAMATIC CRITICISM

CHAPTER I

COLERIDGE'S LITERARY THEORY

Coleridge's literary terms can only be understood in relation to the end to which he used them. This end, of course, was literary criticism, but a critic will often invent terms or use already established terms in a special and individual way in order to deal with a particular aspect of literature which he thinks is important. Critics like F. R. Leavis and Norman Fruman[1] misunderstand Coleridge's theory of imagination, for example, because they examine it (in Leavis's case) as a philosophical theory or (in Fruman's case) as an attempt to explain with psychological accuracy the workings of the poet's mind in the act of creation, whereas Coleridge was trying to account for the unity of a work of art and to show that a relationship exists between the act of creation and the act of perception. Unless the student of

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[1] F. R. Leavis, "Revaluations (XIII): Coleridge in Criticism," Scrutiny, IX (1940 - 1941), 57 - 69 especially 68 - 69.
Norman Fruman, Coleridge The Damaged Archangel (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972), especially Chapters 14 and 16.

Coleridge realises that Coleridge saw the unity of a work as being important, and that his critical approach is therefore oriented to emphasise, describe and account for this unity, the theory of imagination and in fact the whole body of criticism will be meaningless to him.

Coleridge's ideas on criticism and on art in general are set out most clearly in his three essays "On the Principles of Genial Criticism Concerning the Fine Arts," in the "Fragment of an Essay on Taste. 1810," the "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty. 1818," and the essay "On Poesy or Art."[2] Throughout these essays it is a central contention that the taste for art is an intellectual quality relating to the understanding, and is therefore based on certain fixed principles. His comments on taste itself show clearly his idea both of the nature of the work of art, and of our appreciation of it. In explaining why the metaphor of taste was adopted to denote our appreciation for a work of art, rather than another sense such as sight, he remarks that the senses can be divided into two categories—the organic and the mixed. The organic senses are those in which our sensory perception is not mixed with a

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[2]These will be found in Biographia Literaria, ed. John Shawcross (2 vols; London: Oxford University Press, 1907), II, 219 - 263. Hereafter referred to as B.L.

consciousness of the relevant sense organ itself. The two organic sense organs are the eye and ear--when watching or hearing something we are not distinctly conscious of our eyes and ears. The Mixed senses, on the other hand, are those in which our sensory perception is mixed with a distinct consciousness of the sense organ involved. Such are the senses of taste, touch and smell. Taste, he points out, is particularly suitable as a metaphor for the enjoyment of a work of art, because in both cases we are conscious both of the object of perception (the work of art), and of the effect the perception is having on ourselves. The metaphor is superior in such a context to either that of touch or smell, because it denotes a greater sense of enjoyment than the former, a greater dignity in employment than the latter:

> Taste, therefore, as opposed to vision and sound, will teach us to expect in its metaphorical use a certain reference of any given object to our own being, and not merely a distinct notion of the object as in itself, or in its independent properties.[3]

While it is important in understanding the concept of taste in its artistic sense to see the relationship between the primary or physical use of the word and its metaphorical use, however, it is also important to distinguish the two: whereas the

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[3] "Fragment of an Essay on Taste. 1810," B.L., II, 248.

primary use of "taste" denotes physical sensation, the metaphorical use denotes intellectual perception:

> By taste, therefore, as applied to the fine arts, we must be supposed to mean an intellectual perception of any object blended with a distinct reference to our own sensibility of pain or pleasure, or vice versa, a sense of enjoyment or dislike co-instantaneously combined with, and appearing to proceed from, some intellectual perception of the object;--intellectual perception, I say; for otherwise it would be a definition of taste in its primary rather than in its metaphorical sense. Briefly, taste is a metaphor taken from one of our mixed senses, and applied to objects of the more purely organic senses, and or our moral sense, when we would imply the co-existence of immediate personal dislike or complacency. In this definition of taste, therefore, is involved the definition of fine arts, namely, as being such, the chief and discriminative purpose of which it is to gratify the taste,--that is, not merely to connect, but to combine and unite, a sense of immediate pleasure in ourselves with the perception of external arrangement.4

For this reason, whereas taste in its primary sense is arbitrary and whimsical--a man cannot explain why he likes a certain kind of food except that he "has a taste for it"--taste in its metaphorical sense is not, since it relates to the intelligence and understanding:

> No person of common reflection demands even in feeling, that what tastes pleasant to him ought to produce the same effect on all living beings; but every man does and must expect and demand the universal acquiescence of all intelligent beings in every conviction of his understanding.5

In "Fragment of an Essay on Taste," then, Cole-

4"Fragment of an Essay on Taste. 1810," B.L., II, 248.

5"Fragment of an Essay on Taste. 1810," B.L., II, 249.

ridge states one of the central problems of criticism--that although we become subjectively involved in a work of art through our enjoyment of it, our appreciation is an intellectual one and therefore based on fixed principles, unlike our physical taste for food. He hints furthermore that the moral sense, too, is involved in our enjoyment of art. This paradox is central to Coleridge's whole theory of criticism, and in the other essays he expounds further on the difference between the primary and metaphorical senses of the word taste by describing the enjoyable sense of the former by the word "agreeable," while claiming that the latter has for its object beauty. Although the moral nature of the work of art does not fundamentally relate to its beauty (Coleridge is careful to distinguish between the "beautiful" and the "good") it nevertheless contributes a great deal to its richness and hence to our enjoyment of it, as will be seen later in this chapter.

The distinction between these three qualities ("the agreeable," "beauty" and "the good") is important because Coleridge claims that art is primarily concerned only with beauty. For him "all the fine arts are different species of poetry," and the common factor, or (as Coleridge puts it) "the common essence" of all the fine arts "consists in the excitement of emotion for the immediate purpose of pleasure through

the medium of beauty."[6] All Coleridge's definitions of poetry stress that the property peculiar to it alone, thus characterising and helping to define it, is its orientation towards providing immediate pleasure (as opposed to the delayed pleasure resulting from the understanding after hard work of a complicated or abstract logical argument, either in philosophical or mathematical form):

> herein contra-distinguishing poetry from science, the immediate object and primary purpose of which is truth and possible utility. (The sciences may and will give a high and pure pleasure; and the Fine Arts may lead to important truth, and be in various ways useful in the ordinary meaning of the word; but these are not the direct and characteristic ends, and we define things by their peculiar, not their common properties).[7]

Because this pleasure springs from beauty, however, it will not (or should not) vary from man to man. Works of art do not "delight us merely by chance, from accidents of local circumstances--in short, please us because they please us," for

> there exists in the constitution of the human soul a sense and a regulative principle, which may indeed be stifled and latent in some, and be perverted and denaturalized in others, yet is nevertheless universal in a given state of intellectual and moral culture; which is independent of local and temporary circumstances, and dependent only on the degree in which the faculties of the mind are developed; and which, consequently, it is our duty to cultivate and improve, as soon as the sense of its actual existence dawns upon us.[8]

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[7]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism": Preliminary Essay, B.L., II, 220 - 221.

[8]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism": Essay the Second, B.L., II, 227. In the actual essay this extract is part of a long rhetorical question.

The fact that not all men can appreciate all types of beauty, therefore, does not detract from the universality of the principles of taste in its metaphorical sense as the sensory perceptor of beauty--such men have simply not developed fully their latent powers of intellectual perception.

The principles of taste and the nature of beauty are so nearly the same that a discussion of the one necessarily involves a discussion of the other; accordingly, Coleridge's judgments on taste are arrived at by implication in his description and definition of beauty. He starts off by distinguishing the beautiful from the agreeable. The agreeable, in turn, can be divided into two classes, firstly, that which "agrees with our nature," "that which is congruous with the primary constitution of our senses." An example is the colour green which is "naturally agreeable to the eye." In this sense, therefore, "the word expresses, at least involves, a pre-established harmony between the organs and their appointed objects." In the second class are those things which have become agreeable to us by associations or by force of habit:

> In the second sense we convey by the word agreeable, that the thing has by force of habit (thence called a second nature) been made to agree with us; or that it has become agreeable to us by recalling to our minds some one or more things that were dear and pleasing to us; or lastly, on account of some after pleasure or advantage, of which it has been the constant cause or occasion. Thus by force of custom men *make* the taste of tobacco, which was at

first hateful to the palate, agreeable to them.[9] An example of something which becomes agreeable by association is "the crutch that had supported a revered parent" which "becomes agreeable to the affectionate child."[10] The beautiful, by contrast, does not depend on association. Thus

> A lady would see an admirably painted tiger with pleasure, and at once pronounce it beautiful,—nay, an owl, a frog, or a toad, who would have shrieked at the sight of the things themselves.[11]

Nor is the beautiful something "naturally agreeable." It is "that in which the _many_ becomes one." An example is the "frost on a window-pane" which

> has by accident crystallized into a striking resemblance of a tree or a seaweed. With what pleasure we trace the parts and their relation to each other, and to the whole! Here is the stalk or trunk, and here the branches or sprays—sometimes even the buds or flowers. Nor will our pleasure be less, should the caprice of the crystallization represent some object disagreeable to us, provided only we can see or fancy the component parts each in relation to each, and all forming a whole.[12]

It is in the relation between part and whole that beauty consists, therefore: the moment we see the

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[9] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 231.

[10] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 231.

[11] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 232.

[12] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 232.

parts as forming a whole we have appreciated the beauty they constitute. Coleridge thus defines beauty as "Multeity in unity,"[13] and to illustrate his definition he discusses the form of the wheel, whose beauty consists in the relationship between the wide circumference and the narrow centre with the spokes slanting out, like the sun's rays, connecting the two. Even if the wheel is disfigured with tar and dirt, we can perceive its beauty by abstracting the figure and contemplating that. If the material of the wheel were agreeable, however, the whole would be more pleasing:

> imagine the polished golden wheel of the chariot of the Sun, as the poets have described it: then the figure, and the real thing so figured, exactly coincide. There is nothing heterogeneous, nothing to abstract from: by its perfect smoothness and circularity in width, each part is (if I may borrow a metaphor from a sister sense) as perfect a melody, as the whole is a complete harmony. This, we should say is beautiful throughout. Of all "the many," which I actually see, each and all are really reconciled into unity: while the effulgence from the whole coincides with, and seems to represent, the effluence of delight from my own mind in the intuition of it.[14]

Here the beauty is seen as relating to the figure of the wheel contemplated abstractly, as relating therefore to the form of the wheel. As I shall show later in this

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[13]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 232.

[14]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 233.

chapter, in Coleridge's literary theory beauty is a formal quality. In this case the abstract figure represents the form, while the material of the wheel--wood disfigured by tar in the one case, gold in the other--represents the content. In the latter case the beauty will be enhanced because the agreeableness of the material (content) matches and fulfils in the concrete product the beauty of its form which is essentially abstract, but the beauty is latent in the figure even when the material or content is disfigured or of inferior quality. Thus Coleridge says that "the result, then, of the whole is that the shapely (i.e. formosus) joined with the naturally agreeable, constitutes what, speaking accurately, we mean by the word beautiful (i.e. pulcher).[15] Normally in his criticism, however, Coleridge reserves the word beautiful strictly for the formal reduction of the many to one, and this use of "beautiful" rather than some other praise-word therefore contradicts the trend of his total aesthetic as it emerges from the essays.

In describing the material of the wheel above I have used the word "agreeable." As the extract just quoted shows, the agreeable can be subsumed into beauty, but only the "naturally agreeable:"

> the first species of the Agreeable can alone be a component part of the beautiful, that namely which

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[15]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 234.

> is naturally consonant with our senses by the pre-established harmony between nature and the human mind.[16]

This first class of the agreeable is akin to beauty in that it involves a harmony that every man feels. The only difference is that, unlike beauty, its harmony does not stem from the relation between part and whole, and that it cannot be analysed. Coleridge stresses constantly that beauty necessarily implies harmony, thus, "beauty is harmony and subsists only in composition."[17]

So far in this essay Coleridge has merely considered form in the abstract and content in a very general sense--he has in fact merely discussed our perception of the sensuous aspects of art. He realises, however, that another and very important aspect of art is its representational capacity--those aspects of life that it represents, and the philosophical ideas that it implies through them. He notes that we may consciously perceive only what the work represents, while the beauty springing from the form nevertheless moulds our appreciation:

> but we are conscious of faculties far superior to the highest impressions of sense; we have life and

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[16]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 233.

[17]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 233.

> free-will.--What then will be the result, when the Beautiful, arising from regular form, is so modified by the perception of life and spontaneous action, as that the latter only shall be the object of our conscious perception, while the former merely acts, and yet does effectively act, on our feelings?[18]

Coleridge cites the example of the painting the "Dead Man reviving from the touch of the bones of the prophet Elisha" by his friend Allston. It is composed in a circular design, but this is not at first evident. This painting is full of life and motion so that the "stiffness, that would result from an obvious regular figure" is

> swallowed up, and the figure of the group as much conceded by the action and passion, as the skeleton, which gives the form of the human body is hidden by the flesh and its endless outlines.[19]

Here the scene represented is the content, coloured with all the action and passion of real life, and this absorbs our conscious interest. Yet the form, in its presentation and shaping of the content, is responsible for much of the delight we feel in observing the picture. In fact the greater the complexity in the relationship between content and form, the greater the richness of its beauty. Thus Coleridge remarks on

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[18]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 234.

[19]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 234.

Raphael's Galatea,

> with what multiplicity of rays and chords within the area of the circular group, with what elevations and depressions of the circumference, with what an endless variety and sportive wildness in the component figure, and in the junctions of the figures, is the balance, the perfect reconciliation, effected between these two conflicting principles of the FREE LIFE, and of the confining FORM! How entirely is the stiffness that would have resulted from the obvious regularity of the latter, _fused_ and (if I may hazard so bold a metaphor) almost volatilized by the interpenetration and electrical flashes of the former.[20]

Beauty relates only to the design of the work, therefore. Yet the design receives life from its representation, while the thing represented receives existence from the design, for nothing can exist in material life without form. The relationship between design (form) and the thing represented (content) is the same as that between the skeleton and the flesh.

The relationship between content and form is still more clearly seen when Coleridge considers what place stimulants of the senses occupy in a work of art:

> When I reflect on the manner in which smoothness, richness of sound, &c., enter into the formation of the beautiful, I am induced to suspect that they act negatively rather than positively. Something there must be to realize the form, something in and by which the _forma informans_ reveals itself: and these, less than any that could be substituted, and in the least possible degree, distract the attention, in the least possible degree obscure the idea, of which they (composed into outlines and surface) are the symbol. An illustrative hint may be taken from a pure crystal, as compared with an opaque, semi-opaque or clouded mass, on the one

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[20]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 235.

> hand, and with a perfectly transparent body such as air, on the other. The crystal is lost in the light, which yet it contains and embodies, and gives a shape to; but which passes shapeless through the air, and, in the ruder body, is either quenched or dissipated.[21]

The stimulants of the senses represent the content which makes up the form and allows the informing idea of the work to have concrete existence. Shaped within the work of art they constitute the symbol of the idea from which they stem. Form and content fused within the total work of art, therefore, symbolise the artist's idea--the whole work is a symbol. When content and form are exactly matched, as in the case of the crystal, the informing idea of the work illuminates it perfectly--"the crystal is lost in the light." When, as in the case of the transparent body, there is no content to embody the form, and hence no form to shape the ideas, art cannot exist because the ideas cannot take on concrete existence. When the content is imperfect it dulls or obscures the ideas, as in the case of light shining on an opaque mass. It is not the content per se of the work that is important, therefore, the events related within a literary work, for example, but the extent to which the content gives expression to the creator's ideas. The end of artistic

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[21]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, _B.L._, II, 238.

creation is the ordering of the work in such a way that the informing idea is clearly conveyed. This might seem to represent a contradiction in Coleridge's aesthetic, since we have already learnt that the excitement of pleasure through beauty is the end of art. In fact, there is no contradiction, for only the mind or spirit can reduce multeity into unity and thus produce beauty, just as it is the mind, informing the body, that gives unity to our lives and actions. Only when the informing idea has entirely illuminated and organised the content of the work, can it have that harmonious relationship of part to whole which is the essence of beauty. Thus Coleridge claims that "the Mystics" were referring to the same concept of beauty as he,

> when they define beauty as the subjection of matter to spirit so as to be transformed into a symbol, in and through which the spirit reveals itself; and declare that the most beautiful, where the most obstacles to a full manifestation have been most perfectly overcome.[22]

Just because beauty implies the subjection of matter to spirit, however, does not mean that it is synonymous with good--there is a clear difference between the two:

> The GOOD consists in the congruity of a thing with the laws of the reason and the nature of the will, and in its fitness to determine the

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[22]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 239.

> latter to actualize the former: and it is always discursive. The Beautiful arises from the perceived harmony of an object, whether sight or sound, with the inborn and constitutive rules of the judgement and imagination: and it is always intuitive. As light to the eye, even such is beauty to the mind, which cannot but have complacency in whatever is perceived as pre-configured to its living faculties.[23]

Beauty then is essentially of an amoral nature, and in fact a beautiful work of art may even be immoral. Thus, Coleridge imagines a conversation between Milton and a stern Puritan in which the poet, while admitting that York Cathedral is evil, resulting from and hence symbolising extravagance pride and the suppression of the people, still maintains firmly that it is beautiful. The good is clearly of a more exalted nature than beauty, and it could even be argued from the above extract that whereas beauty relates to the Understanding, the good relates to Reason. Another difference is that the good can lead to the actualisation of a state of affairs in accordance with Reason, whereas beauty has a more abstract existence and does not motivate any mode of conduct. In a concise passage in which Coleridge examines the differences between beauty, the agreeable, and the good, he notes that the good and the agreeable both differ from beauty in one common respect--that they both act on the will, whereas

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[23]"On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, <u>B.L.</u>, II, 243.

beauty does not:

> The safest definition, then, of Beauty, as well as the oldest, is that of Pythagoras: THE REDUCTION OF MANY TO ONE. . . . The sense of beauty subsists in simultaneous intuition of the relation of parts, each to each, and of all to a whole: exciting an immediate and absolute complacency, without intervenence, therefore, of any interest, sensual or intellectual. The BEAUTIFUL is thus at once distinguished both from the AGREEABLE, which is beneath it, and from the GOOD, which is above it: for both these have an interest necessarily attached to them: both act on the WILL, and excite a desire for the actual existence of the image or ideas contemplated: while the sense of beauty rests gratified in the mere contemplation or intuition, regardless whether it be a fictitious Apollo, or a real Antinous.[24]

Nevertheless, an element of moral feeling in a work intensifies our enjoyment of it, and although in music and painting "a sensual perfection with intellect is occasionally possible without moral feeling," this is impossible in poetry. It is not that refined pleasures themselves are more enjoyable (indeed, Coleridge points out, given the choice we would no doubt opt for the sensual), but that gross pleasures jade the appetite, whereas refined pleasures stimulate it. It is the excellence that moral feeling gives a work, rather than the defects its absence occasions, that determines its value in a work of art:

> Suppose its presence, and then there will accrue an excellence even to the quality of the pleasures themselves; not only, however, of the refined, but

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[24] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, B.L., II, 238 - 239.

> also of the grosser kinds,--inasmuch as a larger sweep of thoughts will be associated with each enjoyment, and with each thought will be associated a number of sensations; and so, consequently, each pleasure will become more the pleasure of the whole being. This is one of the earthly rewards of our being what we ought to be, but which would be annihilated, if we attempted to be it for the sake of this increased enjoyment.[25]

It would seem to be the moral feeling in poetry, therefore, which "brings the whole soul of man into activity."[26]

Although beauty is primarily an intellectual matter, it is recognised by an act of intuition rather than deduced by discursive logic (as I have shown above). And it seems that Coleridge describes it as intellectual mainly in order to distinguish it from the sensual taste (where "taste" is used in the primary sense of the word). Thus he points out that

> We have sufficiently distinguished the beautiful from the agreeable, by the sure criterion, that, when we find an object agreeable, the <u>sensation</u> of pleasure always precedes the judgment, and is its determining cause. We <u>find</u> it agreeable. But when we declare an object beautiful, the contemplation or intuition of its beauty precedes the <u>feeling</u> of complacency, in order of nature at least.[27]

When we make an intuitive judgment we are merely calling into our conscious mind one deduced from

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[25] "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty. 1818:" <u>B.L.</u>, II, 252.

[26] <u>B.L.</u>, II, 12.

[27] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay Third, <u>B.L.</u>, II, 242.

principles so deeply rooted in our nature that they and the judgment from which they stem are embedded in the unconscious.[28] Our appreciation of beauty, therefore, is rooted in our unconscious, and in order to explain why we find something beautiful we have to make ourselves conscious of those principles embedded in the unconscious. This is like trying to remember a name which is "on the tip of one's tongue:"

> the only necessary, but this the absolute necessary, prerequisite to a full insight into the grounds of the beauty in the objects of sight, is—the directing of the attention to the action of those thoughts in our own mind which are not consciously distinguished. Every man may understand this, if he will but recall the state of his feelings in endeavouring to recollect a name, which he is quite sure that he remembers, though he cannot force it back into consciousness.[29]

Before examining Coleridge's concept of beauty

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[28]I prefer to use the term "unconscious mind" rather than the more fashionable "subconscious," because it has in Coleridge's use a wider meaning than the latter. It denotes, as I shall show, an area of the mind which has common ground with the natura naturans, an area in which the principles of life are instinctively embedded. By contrast we normally mean by the word "subconscious" a kind of dormant memory in which experiences now forgotten are lying asleep but not dead and still indirectly affecting our actions. Owen Barfield, in his book _What Coleridge Thought_ (London: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp.79 - 80, also warns against identifying Coleridge's "the unconscious" with "the subconscious," pertinently claiming that Coleridge employs a "depth-psychology" indeed, but one which "twentieth-century theory has not yet overtaken." (p.80)

[29]"Fragment of an Essay on Beauty. 1818:" _B.L._, II, 250.

any further, it is necessary to consider his concept of the unconscious. The first thing to notice about the unconscious is that it does not differ from man to man, that we all share a common unconscious. Thus Coleridge can speak of the "trans conscientiam communem:"

> there is a _philosophic_ (and inasmuch as it is actualized by an effort of freedom, an _artificial_) _consciousness_, which lies beneath or (as it were) _behind_ the spontaneous consciousness natural to all reflecting beings. As the elder Romans distinguished their northern provinces into Cis-Alpine and Trans-Alpine, so may we divide all the objects of human knowledge into those on this side, and those on the other side of the spontaneous consciousness; citra et trans conscientiam communem.[30]

It is in the unconscious that the spiritual senses have their being. Thus Coleridge notes

> a system, the first principle of which it is to render the mind intuitive of the _spiritual_ in man (i.e. that which lies _on the other side of_ our natural consciousness) must needs have a greater obscurity for those, who have never disciplined and strengthened this ulterior consciousness.[31]

Just as we have no difficulty in detecting and recognising objects in the material world with our physical senses, for they exist and do not vary in themselves, so we should have no difficulty in recognising spiritual qualities which have just as real an existence:

> all the organs of sense are framed for a corresponding world of sense; and we have it. All the

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[30] _B.L._, I, 164.

[31] _B.L._, I, 168.

> organs of spirit are framed for a correspondent world of spirit: though the latter organs are not developed in all alike. But they exist in all, and their first appearance discloses itself in the moral being.[32]

The intellectual apprehension of such qualities as beauty is not a matter of opinion or evaluation, but of immediate recognition. Here, therefore, is the answer to the paradox that while our appreciation of beauty is subjective, beauty itself is a fixed quality and does not vary from man to man--we all have the same spiritual senses and the objects they exist to apprehend do not vary in themselves. Furthermore, the same spirit that runs through nature runs through the common unconscious--the human spirit.

To show how this can be it is necessary to explain Coleridge's views on the spirit and its mode of cognition. For Coleridge, our self-consciousness is the only ground of our knowledge of which we can be certain:

> The transcendental philosopher does not inquire, what ultimate ground of our knowledge there may be out of our knowing, but what is the last in our knowing itself, beyond which we cannot pass. The principle of our knowing is sought within the sphere of our knowing. It must be something, therefore, which can itself be known. It is asserted only, that the act of self-consciousness is for us the source and principle of all our possible knowledge. Whether abstracted from us

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[32] B.L., I, 167.

> there exists any thing higher and beyond this primary self-knowing, which is for us the form of all our knowing, must be decided by the result.[33]

Coleridge further enforces this statement with the observation that "for to us, self-consciousness is not a kind of being, but a kind of knowing, and that too the highest and farthest that exists for us."[34] There remains the problem of how we know (in the philosophical sense) things outside of ourselves. In arriving at a solution to this problem, Coleridge examines the knowledge process inductively. First of all he notes that "during the act of knowledge itself, the objective and subjective are so instantly united, that we cannot determine to which of the two the priority belongs."[35] If we examine the cognition process by focusing on the objective phenomenon waiting to be discovered, for the subjective intelligence to "supervene" to the object,[36] as natural scientists do, we always end up by discussing the subjective intelligence—we find ourselves deducing the laws behind

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[33]B.L., I, 186.

[34]B.L., I, 187.

[35]B.L., I, 174.

[36]This is a Coleridgean use of the word "supervene," denoting intellectual apprehension of an object by the subjective intelligence. See B.L., I, 175.

natural phenomena:

> the necessary tendence therefore of all natural philosophy is from nature to intelligence; and this, and no other, is the true ground and occasion of the instinctive striving to introduce theory into our views of natural phaenomena. The highest perfection of natural philosophy would consist in the perfect spiritualization of all the laws of nature into laws of intuition and intellect. The phaenomena (the material) must wholly disappear, and the laws alone (the formal) must remain. Thence it comes, that in nature itself the more the principle of law breaks forth, the more does the husk drop off, the phaenomena themselves become more spiritual and at length cease altogether in our consciousness. . . . The theory of natural philosophy would then be completed, when all nature was demonstrated to be identical in essence with that, which in its highest known power exists in man as intelligence and self-consciousness. . . .
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> This may suffice to show, that even natural science, which commences with the material phaenomenon as the reality and substance of things existing, does yet by the necessity of theorizing unconsciously, and as it were instinctively end in nature as an intelligence.[37]

If we start off by focusing on the subjective intelligence, on the other hand, as transcendental philosophers do, we soon find ourselves forced to discuss the objects to which the intelligence supervenes, for hard as we may try to exclude the objective and consider final rather than efficient causes of things, we find ourselves forced to admit "THAT THERE EXIST THINGS WITHOUT US."[38] The philosopher has to treat "this faith as nothing more than a prejudice, innate

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[37] B.L., I, 175 - 176.

[38] B.L., I, 179.

indeed and connatural, but still a prejudice," since he cannot logically explain how "something essentially different from ourselves, nay even in apposition to ourselves"

> could possibly become a part of our immediate consciousness (in other words how that, which ex hypothesi is and continues to be extrinsic and alien to our being, should become a modification of our being.

Such a "faith" contradicts the very ground of all philosophy (as of common sense knowledge) which is the principle "I AM." Nevertheless he can reject neither of these two positions, but can reconcile the two

> only by the supposition, that the former is unconsciously involved in the latter; that it is not only coherent but identical, and one and the same thing with our immediate self-consciousness.[39]

This leads Coleridge to his ten theses in Chapter XII, in which he explains his theory of knowledge, showing all knowledge as deriving from the final principle I Am. He starts off by claiming that "truth is correlative to being," since we cannot know without knowing something—"knowledge without a correspondent reality is no knowledge."[40] Since each truth derives its validity from some other truth, there must be one truth on which the validity of all others ultimately depends. This truth must therefore be self-

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[39]B.L., I, 178.

[40]B.L., I, 180.

grounded, containing its own validity in itself, and there can be only one such truth since if there were others they would help to affirm its existence and it would not therefore be truly self-grounded. Such a truth cannot be exclusively either an object or a subject since an object cannot be independent of a subject, and a subject necessarily implies an object. If it were a subject, its object would serve to affirm its being and it would not be self-grounded, and vice versa. It must therefore be at once subject and object to itself. Such a state of affairs manifests itself only in the principle of SUM or I AM, whose synonyms are spirit, self and self-consciousness. Here subject and object are identical because in self-contemplation the self-consciousness is a subject which

> becomes a subject by the act of constructing itself objectively to itself; but which never is an object except for itself, and only so far as by the very same act it becomes a subject. It may be described therefore as a perpetual self-duplication of one and the same power into object and subject, which presuppose each other and can exist only as antitheses.[41]

Since "I know myself only through myself," and the self-consciousness is "the one only immediate truth in the certainty of which the reality of our collective knowledge is grounded," it follows that "the spirit in

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[41] B.L., I, 183.

all the objects which it views, views only itself."[42]

This does not mean merely that in contemplating objects we in a sense project ourselves into them, however--Coleridge is not just talking of the self-consciousness of the individual human being engaged in the act of contemplation, but of the final ultimate and absolute self-consciousness, the Sum or I Am, which manifests itself only in God. The individual human being partakes of only a minute portion of this collective self-consciousness, and hence in our case the ground of existence and the ground of the knowledge of existence are not identical, as they are in the case of the Divinity:

> If a man be asked how he _knows_ that he is? he can only answer sum quia sum. But if (the absoluteness of this certainty having been admitted) he be again asked, how he, the individual person, came to be, then in relation to the ground of his _existence_, not to the ground of his _knowledge_ of that existence, he might reply, sum quia Deus est, or still more philosophically, sum quia in Deo sum.
>
> But if we elevate our conception to the absolute self, the great eternal I AM, then the principle of our being, and of knowledge, of idea, and of reality; the ground of existence, and the ground of the knowledge of existence, are absolutely identical, Sum quia sum; I am because I affirm myself to be; I affirm myself to be because I am.[43]

The divine principle of the self-consciousness as manifested in the material world Coleridge calls nature,

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[42] _B.L._, I, 184.

[43] _B.L._, I, 183.

and we ourselves partake of it. His argument is fine-ly summed up in his statement that the final cause of all things can only be something

> that is in and of itself at once cause and effect (causa sui), subject and object, or rather the absolute identity of both. But as this is inconceivable, except in a self-consciousness, it follows, that even as natural philosophers we must arrive at the same principle from which as transcendental philosophers we set out; that is, in a self-consciousness in which the principium essendi does not stand to the principium cognoscendi in the relation of cause to effect, but both the one and the other are co-inherent and identical. Thus the true system of natural philosophy places the sole reality of things in an ABSOLUTE, which is at once causa sui et effectus. . . in the absolute identity of subject and object, which it calls nature, and which in its highest power is nothing else than self-conscious will or intelligence. In this sense the position of Malbranche, that we see all things in God, is a strict philosophical truth; and equally true is the assertion of Hobbs, of Hartley, and of their masters in ancient Greece, that all real knowledge supposes a prior sensation. For sensation itself is but vision nascent, not the cause of intelligence, but intelligence itself revealed as an earlier power in the process of self-construction. . . .
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> Bearing then this in mind, that intelligence is a self-development, not a quality supervening to a substance, we may abstract from all degree, and for the purpose of philosophic construction reduce it to kind, under the idea of an indestructible power with two opposite and counteracting forces, which by a metaphor borrowed from astronomy, we may call the centrifugal and centripetal forces. The intelligence in the one tends to objectize itself, and in the other to know itself in the object.[44]

To sum up, nature is the manifestation of God's spirit in the world, and we partake of it, for we too exist in God. God manifests himself in us through our

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[44] B.L., I, 187 - 188.

spirit, which is seated in the unconscious. This explains Coleridge's statement that man's spirit has "the same ground with nature,"[45] that "of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves,"[46] and that the life which is in them is in us likewise. And it also explains how man's mind can be the "very focus of all the rays of intellect which are scattered throughout the images of nature"[47] (a statement which critics frequently quote with an air of understanding, with the hint that it sums up Coleridge's whole view of the relationship of art to nature, but which they constantly fail to explain): for man's conscious mind focuses his unconscious, formulates its vague knowledge and images into clear ideas as a telescope when focused makes a blurred scene clear and sharp to the eye; and the unconscious contains in itself the "rays of intellect" scattered through nature, since it is a manifestation of nature. When the human spirit views itself in the objects it sees, therefore, it perceives other manifestations of the same universal consciousness from which it stems itself. Coleridge's philosophy, therefore, begins

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[45]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 258.

[46]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 259.

[47]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 257 - 258.

"with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD."[48] It is one of the paradoxes of life that we cannot lose ourselves in God until we have attained knowledge of self. As I will show in Chapter II of this thesis, goodness depends on altruism and the transcendence of self, and literature (like philosophy) should both help us to attain self-knowledge and encourage us to transcend the self.

Unless the above theory has been thoroughly understood the essay "On Poesy or Art" will be meaningless, for it is here that Coleridge explains the poet's ability to penetrate the external forms of things and disclose the mysteries of the universe, the laws governing all things. At the beginning of the essay Coleridge defines Art. His definition--

> Art, used collectively for painting, sculpture, architecture and music, is the mediatress between, and reconciler of, nature and man. It is, therefore, the power of humanizing nature, of infusing the thoughts and passions of man into every thing which is the object of his contemplation; color, form, motion, and sound, are the elements which it combines, and it stamps them into unity in the mould of a moral idea[49]

--determines the whole course of the essay, for in it Coleridge deals with the relation of poetry to nature

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[48] _B.L._, I, 186.

[49] "On Poesy or Art," _B.L._, II, 253.

and man and, indirectly, man's relation to nature. In the previous essays he has dealt mainly with beauty in its formal aspect, merely hinting occasionally at the kind of content necessary to realise in concrete the beauty of the form when contemplated abstractly (see the example of the wheel cited earlier in this chapter). In this essay he goes beyond such a concept, showing how the poet's ideas enter and mould his subject matter thus determining the nature of the final work of art. It will be noticed that art is not synonymous with beauty. In "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty," Coleridge had asserted that although an element of "moral feeling" in a work enhances its beauty, it is not a necessary integral part of it, and cannot therefore be included in its definition. In the definition of art, on the other hand, he claims that art "stamps" the elements which make up the content of the work "into unity in the mould of a moral idea." It would seem necessary to conclude, therefore, that although something amoral can be beautiful, it cannot be Art.[50] It will also be

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[50] I record this judgment with a certain hesitancy because Coleridge contradicts himself somewhat on this point. Thus in "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty" he had claimed that music and painting may attain to a kind of beauty without moral feeling, whereas in "On Poesy or Art" he sees the "moral idea" as playing a necessary part in the creation of art as a whole. Again, were one to accept the conclusion I have come to it would seem that the Cathedral over which Milton and the Puritan argue in the third essay "On Genial Criticism," cannot be art if (as they both agree) it is immoral (unless of course an

noticed that in its process of humanising nature art is like the spirit that "in all the objects which it views, views only itself."

The assertion that true art consists in the action and reaction of mind and nature to each other is a central tenet in Coleridge's aesthetics. Thus Coleridge claims that

> As soon as the human mind is intelligibly addressed by an outward image exclusively of articulate speech, so soon does art commence. But please to observe that I have laid particular stress on the words "human mind,"--meaning to exclude thereby all results common to man and all other sentient creatures, and consequently confining myself to the effect produced by the congruity of the animal impression with the reflective powers of the mind; so that not the thing presented, but that which is re-presented by the thing, shall be the source of the pleasure. In this sense nature itself is to a religious observer the art of God; and for the same cause art itself might be defined as of a middle quality between a thought and a thing, or, as I said before, the union and reconciliation of that which is nature with that which is exclusively human. It is the figured language of thought, and is distinguished from nature by the unity of all the parts in one thought or idea. Hence nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part; and a work of art will be just in proportion as it adequately conveys the thought, and rich in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity.[51]

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immoral idea can be classed as a form of moral idea). Probably the answer is that in his definition of Art, Coleridge is already thinking of his subsequent discussion on poetry, and has injudiciously allowed this to influence him.

[51] "On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 254- 255.

It is our impression of any object, the way we react to it, that art concentrates on, then. But whereas this is a common factor of all the arts, it is poetry which most clearly expresses the interrelationship between man and nature, between the intellect and feelings, mind and spirit, conscious and unconscious. All the arts "express intellectual purposes, thoughts, conceptions, and sentiments which have their origin in the human mind,"[52] but poetry "elevates the mind by making its feelings the object of its reflexion."[53] In this respect, whereas the other arts manifest the "Sum quia in Deo sum" human consciousness viewing itself in nature, poetry manifests the I Am, becoming both subject and object to itself by contemplating itself. In the creation of poetry there is an interrelationship between passion and order. The passion or excitement which generates the creative act is ordered, and this order itself evokes an excitement in the reader and presumably in the poet as well: "by excitement of the associative power passion itself imitates order, and the order resulting produces a pleasurable passion." It is in this respect that poetry elevates our minds, making "the feelings the object of its reflexion"— we are made to reflect on the passion that the poem has

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[52]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 255.

[53]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 254.

excited in us. There is also an interrelationship between passion and the images it creates or organises within the poem--passion impregnates the images with human interest, while the images temper the passion:

> So likewise, whilst it recalls the sights and sounds that had accompanied the occasions of the original passions, poetry impregnates them with an interest not their own by means of the passions, and yet tempers the passion by the calming power which all distinct images exert on the human soul.[54]

Because poetry concerns itself so deeply with the effect that nature has on us, it is

> the preparation for art, inasmuch as it avails itself of the forms of nature to recall, to express, and to modify the thoughts and feelings of the mind.[55]

It is the assertion that art as a whole, and especially poetry, should concentrate on the subjective reaction to objects in nature rather than the objects themselves, that lies at the basis of Coleridge's distinction between imitation and copy:

> If there be likeness to nature without any check of difference, the result is disgusting, and the more complete the delusion, the more loathsome the effect. Why are such simulations of nature, as waxworks figures of men and women so disagreeable? Because, not finding the motion and the life which we expected, we are shocked as by a falsehood, every circumstance of detail, which before induced us to be interested, making the distance from truth more palpable. You set out

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[54]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 254.

[55]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 254.

> with a supposed reality and are disappointed and disgusted with the deception; whilst in respect to a work of genuine imitation, you begin with an acknowledged total difference, and then every touch of nature gives you the pleasure of an approximation to truth.[56]

A concentration on the objects themselves results in a copy in which there is a faithful and dull likeness in every detail to the original or model. In imitation, on the other hand, likeness and difference to the original model are mingled and reconciled with the artistic representation:

> in all imitation two elements must coexist, and not only coexist, but must be perceived as coexisting. These two constituent elements are likeness and unlikeness, or sameness and difference, and in all genuine creations of art there must be a union of these disparates. The artist may take his point of view where he pleases, provided that the desired effect be perceptibly produced—that these be likeness in the difference, difference in the likeness, and a reconcilement of both in one.[57]

Thus "the impression on the wax is not an imitation, but a copy, of the seal; the seal itself is an imitation."[58]

In his explanation of what he should imitate in nature, Coleridge implicitly solves the mystery of how the artist can reconcile within the artistic representation both likeness and difference. He should imitate

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[56]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 256.

[57]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 256.

[58]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 255.

"the beautiful in nature,"[59] and the beautiful is "the unity of the manifold, the coalescence of the diverse." This is a mere rephrasing of his earlier definition of beauty as "unity in multeity." What is new, however, is his statement that "in the concrete" beauty is "the union of the shapely (formosum) with the vital."[60] Coleridge now claims that for beauty to exist in concrete form it must have something of the quality of life. This leads him to his distinction between beauty in the "dead organic" and in the "living organic." It is important to point out that beauty can exist in the "dead organic" as well as the "living organic," just as a wheel disfigured with tar and dirt, although it does not seem beautiful, has beauty when contemplated abstractly. In fact beauty in the dead organic is beauty in the abstract, depending on "regularity of form."[61] But the higher form of beauty is that in the "living organic" realised in concrete form. The dead organic can be beautiful but it cannot be Art. The dead organic, in work that has pretensions to art, is

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[59]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 256.

[60]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 257.

[61]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 257. Cf. "Fragment of an Essay on Beauty," B.L., II, 251: "Order is beautiful arrangement without any purpose ab extra;—therefore there is a beauty of order, or order may be contemplated exclusively as beauty."

the copy of the mere external form of nature--the natura naturata. To produce true "living organic" art, the artist must imitate nature, show the spirit at work within her, must "master the essence, the natura naturans, which presupposes a bond between nature in the higher sense and the soul of man."[62] The true artist must penetrate the husk of the external forms of nature and show the relation of the husk to the life force within. He must therefore reconcile the internal with the external, and he can do this only by contemplating his own unconscious which has the same ground with nature, and in which he is instinctively aware of the life force that runs through all things manifesting God's unifying spirit. The true artist is the man who is most aware of his own unconscious:

> In every work of art there is a reconcilement of the external with the internal; the conscious is so impressed on the unconscious as to appear in it; as compare mere letters inscribed on a tomb with figures themselves constituting the tomb. He who combines the two is the man of genius; and for that reason he must partake of both. Hence there is in genius itself an unconscious activity; nay, that is the genius in the man of genius. And this is the true exposition of the rule that the artist must first eloign himself from nature in order to return to her with full effect. Why this? Because if he were to begin by mere painful copying, he would produce masks only, not forms breathing life. He must out of his own mind create forms according to the severe laws of the intellect, in order to generate in himself that co-ordination of freedom and law, that involution of obedience in the prescript, and of the prescript in the impulse to

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[62]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 257.

> obey, which assimilates him to nature, and enables him to understand her. He merely absents himself for a season from her, that his own spirit, which has the same ground with nature, may learn her unspoken language in its main radicals, before he approaches to her endless compositions of them. Yes, not to acquire cold notions—lifeless technical rules—but living and life-producing ideas, which shall contain their own evidence, the certainty that they are essentially one with the germinal causes in nature,—his consciousness being the focus and mirror of both,—for this does the artist for a time abandon the external real in order to return to it with a complete sympathy with its internal and actual. For of all we see, hear, feel and touch the substance is and must be in ourselves.[63]

The artist's object should be "so to place" the "images of nature . . ., totalized and fitted to the limits of the human mind, as to elicit from, and to superinduce upon, the forms themselves the moral reflexions to which they approximate."[64] Two very important points are contained in this statement: firstly that the images in nature must be so transformed by the artist that the human mind can understand and appreciate them ("fitted to the limits of the human mind"); and secondly that he must, as well as presenting the forms of nature, draw attention to their moral significance and the feelings which they evoke in us ("the moral reflexions to which they approximate"). The "forms" do not merely suggest these "moral reflexions," they "approximate" to them—our

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[63]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 258 - 259.

[64]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 258.

moral feelings in observing the forms of nature are not just subjective projections onto something fixed and dead, therefore, for the moral quality exists in the form itself, which manifests God's spirit. Nature is itself symbolic of God's ideas, and is a work of art in that its unity derives from the spirit of God which organises the whole. Thus Coleridge points out that "nature itself is to a religious observer the art of God,"[65] and that "nature itself would give us the impression of a work of art, if we could see the thought which is present at once in the whole and in every part."[66] It is precisely because most of us cannot see the unity of nature and interpret its symbolism, however, that we need the artist. Hence great art is always of a moral nature, communicating moral truths and evoking moral feelings. The artist interprets nature to us by simplifying its symbols, and thus art is "the abridgment of nature."[67] In his imitation of nature he combines likeness with difference by showing us the shape (which we can all see) and the spirit within (which the lesser mortals comprising the vast majority of mankind do not see). But he imitates nature in more than just this sense,

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[65]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 254.

[66]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 255.

[67]"On Poesy or Art," B.L., II, 262.

for his whole work of art imitates the unity of nature. Just as God's ideas in embodying themselves organise objects into unity (to those of us with a large enough spiritual view to see the whole), so does the poet organise his content as well as he can into a unity which clearly conveys his ideas. The more closely unified his work is the more beautiful it will be, the <u>greater</u> the number of parts unified within the whole the <u>richer</u> will be its beauty, the more clearly the work conveys the idea on which it is based the more nearly perfect a symbol it will be, for "a work of art will be just in proportion as it adequately conveys the thought, and rich in proportion to the variety of parts which it holds in unity."[68] But in any case the more nearly perfect a symbol the work is the more closely unified and hence beautiful it will be, because the work is always based on the idea, springs from it naturally, and it is this informing idea that organises the parts into unity.

It is in Coleridge's concept of the symbol that the separate strands of his argument on aesthetics in all the essays come together, for in the symbol the abstract form of beauty is realised in concrete, the artist's ideas reach fulfilment, and nature is interpreted clearly by imitation. Thus Coleridge claims

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[68] "On Poesy or Art," <u>B.L.</u>, II, 255.

that "the artist must imitate that which is within the thing, that which is active through form and figure, and discourses to us by symbols--the Natur-geist, or spirit of nature,"[69] and shortly afterwards he considers the relation of the idea to the work of art: it must not be confused with form, yet the form (that is, the organised content of the work) springs from the idea:

> The idea which puts the form together cannot itself be the form. It is above form, and is its essence, the universal in the individual, or the individuality itself,--the glance and the exponent of the indwelling power.[70]

Here is the germ of Coleridge's whole theory of organicism--that content and form alike spring from the informing idea of the work. In the symbol image and idea, content and form, are alike unified, and the creative taste of the poet (as opposed to the critical taste of the reader) can be fulfilled only in an artistic symbol, for

> TASTE is the intermediate faculty which connects the active with the passive powers of our nature, the intellect with the senses; and its appointed function is to elevate the _images_ of the latter, while it realizes the _ideas_ of the former.[71]

Finally, one of the most important aspects of the symbol is that it renders comprehensible to us the _potential_ in things, enables us to see beneath the sometimes ugly

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[69] "On Poesy or Art," _B.L._, II, 259.

[70] "On Poesy or Art," _B.L._, II, 259.

[71] "On the Principles of Genial Criticism:" Essay the Second, _B.L._, II, 227.

surface to the inner wonder:

> They and they only can acquire the philosophic imagination, the sacred power of self-intuition, 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![72]

This passage is enlightening because it sums up the relation between Coleridge's philosophy and his theory of literature: we should concentrate, he feels, on the potential in things in order to understand them at all; only by symbols can we apprehend the potential, and art is the best means of creating and translating symbols.

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Since beauty in concrete form is always "living organic," organicism—the term which Coleridge normally uses to denote the living organic[73]—is an extremely

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[72]_B.L._, I, 167.

[73]Only in his essay "On Poesy or Art" does Coleridge distinguish between the "living organic" and the "dead organic." Elsewhere "organic" always refers to the "living organic" and is usually contrasted to "the mechanical."

important concept in his criticism. I have already shown that Coleridge is deeply concerned with the idea that organises a work of art. The word "organisation" in Coleridge's use means more than just a process of ordering or arranging, it denotes a vital ordering by a life principle from within, like that in nature. And "organisation" in Coleridge's literary criticism always implies organicism. Briefly, to anticipate the argument of this section, organisation in literature is that process in which a work of art is created so that part and whole have the harmonious relationship of life itself, clearly allowing the idea from which they stem to shine through them, as the spirit manifests itself within the body. But, like the term "symbol," organicism is not just a term which Coleridge uses to describe a work of art, but a concept which is an integral part of his philosophy, springing from his belief that there runs through all things in nature an "antecedent unity" or organising power. Thus the phenomenon of organicism is strongly implied (though not mentioned) in the following passage which has no reference at all to literature:

> in the world we see every where evidences of a Unity, which the component parts are so far from explaining, that they necessarily pre-suppose it as the cause and condition of their existing as those parts; or even of their existing at all. This antecedent Unity, or Cause and Principle of each Union, it has since the time of Bacon and Kepler been customary to call a law. This crocus, for instance: or any other flower the reader may have in sight or choose to bring before his fancy. That the root, stem, leaves, petals, &c. cohere to

> one plant, is owing to an antecedent Power or Principle in the Seed, which existed before a single particle of the matters that constitute the size and visibility of the crocus, had been attracted from the surrounding soil, air, and moisture. Shall we turn to the seed? Here too the same necessity meets us. An antecedent Unity (I speak not of the parent plant, but of an agency antecedent in the order of operance, yet remaining present as the conservative and reproductive Power) must here too be supposed. Analyze the seed with the finest tools, and let the Solar Microscope come in aid of your senses, what do you find? Means and instruments, a wondrous Fairy-tale of Nature, magazines of food, stores of various sorts, pipes, spiracles, defences---a house of many chambers, and the owner and inhabitant invisible! Reflect further on the countless millions of seeds of the same name, each more than numerically differenced from every other: and further yet, reflect on the requisite harmony of all surrounding things, each of which necessitates the same process of thought, and the coherence of all of which to a System, a World, demands its own adequate Antecedent Unity, which must therefore of necessity be present to all and in all, yet in no wise excluding or suspending the individual Law or Principle of Union in each.[74]

Coleridge describes nature itself in terms of organicism and organisation. In fact it is impossible to understand organicism fully without having mastered his view of what life is. For Coleridge life is more than just a biological process; he uses the term to denote the antecedent spirit which manifests itself in a unifying

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[74]S. T. Coleridge, Aids to Reflection in the Formation of a Manly Character on the Several Grounds of Prudence, Morality, and Religion. Illustrated by Select Passages from our Elder Divines, especially from Archbishop Leighton (First Published 1825. This edition Bohn's Standard Library, London: George Bell and Sons, 1884: revised with "Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit" and the "Book of Common Prayer" added), pp.40 - 41.

force. Thus he claims that

> the most comprehensive formula to which life is reducible, would be that of the internal copula of bodies, or . . . the power which discloses itself from within as a principle of unity in the many.[75]

He goes on to state that if it were not for the fact that he wishes to avoid the charge of using "jargon,"

> I should . . . have borrowed a scholastic term, and defined life absolutely, as the principle of unity in multeity, as far as the former, the unity to wit, is produced ab intra; but eminently (sensa eminenti), I define life as the principle of individuation, or the power which unites a given all into a whole that is presupposed by all its parts. The link that combines the two, and acts throughout both, will, of course, be defined by the tendency to individuation.[76]

Thus beauty itself--unity in multeity--is the life principle, and hence it is wrong to say that Coleridge's literary theory lays its emphasis on the life-likeness of a work of art, since according to his definition of life a good work of art has life.

Whether a thing has life or not depends on the kind of arrangement of its parts: when they are arranged in such a way as to result in death, they are said to be mechanised and the whole is said to be mechanical; when they are arranged in such a way as to result in life,

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[75] S. T. Coleridge, Hints towards the Formation of a More Comprehensive Theory of Life, ed. Seth B. Watson, (London: John Churchill, 1848), pp.41 - 42. Hereafter referred to as Theory of Life.

[76] Theory of Life, p.42.

they are said to be organised, and the whole is said to be organic. Mechanisation and organisation, however, are akin in that in both there is a relation between part and whole. Thus Coleridge points out that in its "utmost latency . . . life is one with the elementary powers of mechanism, that is, with the powers of mechanism considered as qualitative and actually synthetic."[77] The difference is that in mechanisation order is imposed on the object to be unified, its parts are arranged, from without, whereas in organisation the unifying agent acts spontaneously from within the object: "thus we may say that whatever is organized from without, is a product of mechanism; whatever is mechanised from within, is a production of organization."[78] But the difference is not just that in organisation the unifying spirit comes from within; this same spirit modifies (as opposed to connects) each part of its material as it works, and there is the implication that it does so simultaneously in every part, while mechanism deals with each part separately, merely connecting them in a loose aggregation:

> The distinction, or rather the essential difference, betwixt the shaping skill of mechanical talent, and the creative, productive life--power of inspired genius: In the former each part [is] separately

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[77] Theory of Life, p.42

[78] Theory of Life, footnote, p.42.

> conceived and then by a succeeding act put together. . . . Whence [arises] the harmony that strikes us in the wildest natural landscapes,—in the relative shapes of rocks, the harmony of colors in the heath, ferns, and lichens, the leaves of the beech and oak, the stems and rich choc[ol]ate brown branches of the birch and other mountain trees, varying from verging autumn to returning spring—compared with the visual effect from the greater number of artificial plantations? The former are effected by a single energy, modified ab intra in each component part.[79]

This ab intra unifying force is always an idea or spirit, and the better it organises its material the more clearly it will shine through the whole it thus creates. Organisation, therefore, implies that dynamic ordering of discrete units (which become parts) into a whole so as to make that whole a perfect symbol of the informing and unifying idea. It seems that organisation produces an imitation, whereas mechanisation produces a copy.[80] In a copy we see only the external form of the original, not the life force within; in an imitation we are shown the spirit which illuminates the external form. In just the same way, in

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[79] Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (2 vols.; London: Constable & Co., 1930), I, 4 - 5. Hereafter referred to as S.C.

[80] But Coleridge is inconsistent on this point. For example he regards Beaumont and Fletcher as being "mechanical" poets, but although he sees them as being inferior to Shakespeare, he thinks they are nevertheless admirable writers, and nowhere does he complain that they produce mere copies of life and nature. See, for example Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism, ed. Thomas Middleton Raysor (London: Constable & Co., 1936), pp.42 - 43, p.44 (Lewis Note), p.88. Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism is hereafter referred to as M.C.

mechanisation order is merely formal, imposed from without, there being no spirit to illuminate the external form; whereas the contrary is true of organisation—it is the spirit itself that organises the work:

> Coleridge here explained the difference between what he called mechanic and organic regularity. In the former the copy must be made as if it had been formed in the same mould with the original. In the latter there is a law which all the parts obey, conforming themselves to the outward symbols and manifestations of the essential principle. He illustrated this distinction by referring to the growth of Trees, which from peculiar circumstances of soil, air, or position, differed in shape, even from trees of the same kind, but every man was able to decide at first sight which was an oak, an ash, or a poplar.[81]

The antecedent spirit which produces the work will be manifested in slightly different ways according to the circumstances in which the whole is produced, but its essence can be clearly recognised nevertheless. There is no need to sacrifice individuality to clarity, in fact clarity is realised most fully in individuality, for the clarity with which the spirit shines through the work and the tendency to individuation are both prerequisites for life, the latter springing naturally from the former. As Coleridge points out in the passage already quoted from Aids to Reflection, the "Antecedent Unity . . . must . . . of necessity be present to all

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[81] Coleridge on Shakespeare: The text of the lectures of 1811 - 12, ed. R.A. Foakes (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971), p.107. Hereafter referred to as Foakes.

and in all, yet in no wise excluding or suspending the individual Law or Principle of Union in each." It is in this sense that a poem, like a plant, can have "the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination."[82] Since it is the unifying spirit or idea that organises the work in order to embody itself and give itself concrete life as perfectly as possible, the degree of perfection of the form and the extent to which the idea is realised will be the same:

> The organic form . . . is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form.[83]

In fact (as I have shown on p.40) the informing idea is the germ or "essence" not only of the content but of the form, too, and content and form are little more than convenient abstractions that cannot be distinguished in reality.

So far in this section I have dealt with Coleridge's explanation of the different means by which organic and mechanical works are produced. But the distinction between organic and mechanical works would be pointless for the purposes of evaluative criticism if there were not a difference between

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[82] S.C., I, 223.

[83] S.C., I, 224.

the final products matching the different methods by which they were created. In fact Coleridge's explanation of the different modes of creation of the two kinds of product is really no more than a postulate which accounts for the difference of the final result: he sees that some works have life (defined as unity in multeity or a tendence to individuation) and others do not, and he assumes that those which do must be produced in the same way as things in nature are produced --by a universal germinal force from within enabling the product to grow. The perceptible difference between a thing or work of art which is mechanical and one which is organic is that in the latter there is a greater complexity in the relationship between part and whole. The part is at once a means to the realisation of the end, and an end in itself. Thus Coleridge claims that "the spirit of poetry, like all other living powers,"

> must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one,--and what is organization, but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means![84]

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[84] S.C., I, 223. It is interesting to compare Blake's statement "On Homer's Poetry," in Blake: Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (revised ed. from Nonesuch Press, 1957; London: Oxford University Press, 1969), p.778, that "when a Work has Unity, it is as much in a Part as in the Whole: the Torso is as much a Unity as the Laocoon."

When part and whole have this kind of relationship, the parts of which the whole is composed are said to be "reciprocally means and end," and the reciprocity is the final test of organicism:

> a whole composed, _ab intra_, of different parts, so far interdependent that each is reciprocally means and end, is an individual, and the individuality is most intense where the greatest dependence of the parts on the whole is combined with the greatest dependence of the whole on its parts; the first (namely, the dependence of the parts on the whole) being absolute; the second (namely, the dependence of the whole on its parts) being proportional to the importance of the relation which the parts have to the whole, that is, as their action extends more or less beyond themselves. For this spirit of the whole is most expressed in that part which derives its importance as an End from its importance as a Mean, relatively to all the parts under the same copula.[85]

Organicism, therefore, is merely a more perfectly complex, unified form of mechanism. And the critic has to examine an organism as a mechanism, examine the relation of parts to each other and to the whole, before he can demonstrate the organic unity of the whole. As Coleridge himself points out:

> The office of philosophical _disquisition_ consists in just _distinction_; while it is the priviledge of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical _process_ of philosophy.

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[85]_Theory of Life_, p.44. On the whole question of means and ends in Coleridge's critical theory and its roots in eighteenth century English criticism, see Emerson R. Marks, "Means and Ends in Coleridge's Critical Method," _ELH_, XXVI (1959), 387-401.

> But having done so, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the <u>result</u> of philosophy.[86]

James Benziger is therefore wrong in his article "Organic Unity: Leibniz to Coleridge," when he claims that the organic theory sees the one but not the many in all it views, for the unity of a work of art can, according to Coleridge's theory, be demonstrated only by showing the relationship of its parts to one another and to the whole.[87]

- 3 -

It is by means of the concept of imagination that Coleridge explains how the poet gives his work organic unity. To do so, he has to show not only how the poet unifies his work, but how he is able to perceive this unity in nature itself which is his inspiration, for the poet imitates nature (see section 1). As in the case of the explanation of the mode in which organisation operates, Coleridge's account of imagination is really a postulate explaining how the poet is

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[86] B.L., II, 8.

[87] PMLA, LXVI(1951) 24-48.

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able to give his work unity: he sees that the poet's work has a special kind of unity, and he postulates that it is the poet's powers of perception and his insight into the unity of nature, which enable him to give his own work unity. To anticipate the argument of this section, Coleridge, in his discussion of the creative or secondary imagination, describes the means by which the poet unifies his work; in his discussion of the primary imagination, Coleridge explains how the poet is able to intuit the unity of nature which is his inspiration.

The creative imagination, in Coleridge's criticism, is the "esemplastic" power, or the power of shaping many things into one.[88] Its basis lies in the poet's own passion. Thus Coleridge mentions

> That gift of true Imagination, that capability of reducing a multitude into unity of effect, or by strong passion to modify series of thoughts into one predominant thought or feeling--those were faculties which might be cultivated and improved, but could not be acquired. Only such a man as possessed them deserved the title of poeta who nascitur non fit-- he was that child of Nature, and not the creature of his own efforts.[89]

Passion, projected by the poet into his work, is that "ab intra" force which modifies and organises each part of his material into an artistic whole. This

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[88] See B.L., I, 107.

[89] S.C., II, 91.

element of passion is characteristic of all works of genius. Thus Coleridge remarks that images

> become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant passion; or by associated thoughts or images awakened by that passion; or when they have the effect of reducing multitude to unity, or succession to an instant; or lastly, when a human and intellectual life is transferred to them from the poet's own spirit.[90]

Passion, then, is the unifying power which is the basis of the imagination, and the imagination is by far the most important constituent of poetic genius, for it is "the poetic genius," Coleridge asserts,

> which sustains and modifies the emotions, thoughts, and vivid representations of the poem by the energy without effort of the poet's own mind,—by the spontaneous activity of his imagination and fancy.[91]

The fact that the poet utilises passion in poetic creation does not necessarily mean that he identifies with the subject matter, however—passion springs from the excitement of artistic creation, not from involvement with the world created. And in fact the poet can be both inspired by passion and completely detached from the world he is creating. Thus Coleridge claims that in writing Venus and Adonis, Shakespeare, "himself unparticipating" in the charac-

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[90] B.L., II, 16.

[91] S.C., I, 166.

ter's own passions, is

> actuated only by that pleasureable excitement, which had resulted from the energetic fervor of his own spirit in so vividly exhibiting, what it had so accurately and profoundly contemplated.[92]

But whereas passion does not force the poet to identify with his subject matter, it does make him fuse his own personality into his work, giving it the human feeling and truth that art requires, for it "provides that neither thought nor imagery shall be simply objective, but that the passio vera of humanity shall warm and animate both."[93]

It is possible, however, to have passion and not imagination, for imagination is the power of summoning the creative passion at will. No one can be a true poet without imagination, although the creative passion may be latent in him. Certain people can produce beautiful poems when roused into passion by circumstances, but this does not make them poets, for the true poet can rouse passion within

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[92] B.L., II, 15.

[93] S.C., I, 166. In this respect Hazlitt's term "gusto" is similar to Coleridge's "passion." "Gusto in art," Hazlitt explains, "is power or passion defining any object," and he adds that "it is in giving . . . . truth of character from the truth of feeling . . . in the highest degree of which the subject is capable, that gusto consists." The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, ed. P.P. Howe (21 vols; reissued by AMS Press, 1967, corr. London: J.M.Dent and Sons, 1930 - 1934) "On Gusto," IV, 77.

himself on his own and independently of inspiring circumstances. It is for this reason that Coleridge does not regard the composer of the "song of Deborah" as a true poet:

> When I read the song of Deborah, I never think that she is a poet, although I think the song itself a sublime poem: it is as simple a dithyrambic production as exists in any language; but it is the proper and characteristic effusion of a woman highly elevated by triumph, by the natural hatred of oppressors, and resulting from a bitter sense of wrong. . . . we have no reason, however, to suppose that if she had not been agitated by passion, and animated by victory, she would have been able so to express herself; or that if she had been placed in different circumstances, she would have used such language of truth and passion. We are to remember that Shakespeare, not placed under circumstances of excitement, and only wrought upon by his own vivid and vigorous imagination, writes a language that invariably, and intuitively becomes the condition and position of each character.[94]

Moreover passion itself must be ordered in artistic creation. Coleridge claims that "in everything, blending the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight. . . . In Poetry . . . it was the blending of passion with order,"[95] and he sees poetic metre as originating in "the balance in the mind effected by that spontaneous effort which strives to hold in check the workings of passion."[96]

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[94] S.C., II, 136 - 137.

[95] Foakes, p.85.

[96] B.L., II, 49.

The concept of imagination discussed so far can be seen to be the same as the "secondary imagination" of Chapter XIII of Biographia Literaria. The secondary imagination, according to Coleridge,

> dissolves, diffuses, dissipates in order to re-create; or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead.[97]

In this description the fusing, unifying, and humanising powers which (as I have shown above) Coleridge attributes to the creative passion are all lumped together and shown to be the means by which the secondary imagination achieves its ends. The secondary imagination is contrasted to the fancy, which,

> has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phenomenon of the will, which we express by the word CHOICE. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association.[98]

Whereas the imagination modifies the units it deals with, then, the fancy can only string them together loosely. It does not have true unifying power and can only deal with fixities and definites. This being so, whereas the imagination is capable of organisation, the fancy can only produce mechanisation.

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[97] B.L., I, 202.

[98] B.L., I, 202.

Each of these two creative powers has its parallel in the cognitive faculties of the brain. Whereas fancy is allied to the passive memory, the secondary imagination is allied to the dynamic "primary imagination" which is the "living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception, and . . . a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM."[99] It is in the primary imagination that the god-like principle of Sum is seated therefore, the mind echoing the divinity by contemplating itself and becoming both subject and object to itself. Since we have already discovered (see section 1) that the self-consciousness is synonymous with the spirit, and that the spirit is in the unconscious, it follows that the primary imagination is the means by which the man of genius reaches his unconscious and discovers his affinity with nature. The wording of the passage in which Coleridge explains the difference between the primary and secondary imagination, moreover, seems to imply that whereas the activity of the secondary imagination is a conscious one, the perception of the primary imagination is unconscious:

> The secondary Imagination, I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the *kind*

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[99] *B.L.*, I, 202.

> of its agency, and differing only in _degree_ and in the _mode_ of its operation.[100]

The position of the "yet" just after "co-existing with the conscious will seems to indicate that the primary imagination does not co-exist with the conscious will. The primary imagination, then, is that instrument by which the poet _apprehends_ the truth, the secondary imagination that by which the poet _communicates_ the truth artistically and by imitation moulds his work into the unity which, by means of the primary imagination, he has intuited in nature. In claiming that the secondary imagination is of the same kind as the primary and differs only in degree and the mode of its operation, Coleridge is in fact asserting that the creative power is functionally related to the perceptive faculty, since it consciously presents perceptions (which originate in the unconscious) in a heightened form and moulded into an artistic whole.

Normally in his writings Coleridge uses the term Reason to denote that faculty which in Chapter XIII of _Biographia Literaria_ he calls the primary imagination. The fact that these two terms do denote the same faculty can be seen by a glance at the following passage quoted from _The Friend_ (1818):

> I should have no objection to define Reason . . . as an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phaenomena. But then it must be added, that it is an

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[100] _B.L._, I, 202.

> organ identical with its appropriate objects. Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth, &c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves reason. We name God the Supreme Reason. . . . Whatever is conscious Self-knowledge is Reason; and in this sense it may be safely defined the organ of the Super-sensuous; even as the Understanding wherever it does not possess or use the Reason, as another and universal eye, may be defined the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phaenomena of perception: that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience. In short, the Understanding supposes something that is understood. This may be merely its own acts or forms, that is, formal Logic; but real objects, the materials of substantial knowledge, must be furnished, we might safely say revealed to it by Organs of Sense. The understanding of the higher Brutes has only organs of outward sense, and consequently material objects only; but man's understanding has likewise an organ of inward sense, and therefore the power of acquainting itself with invisible realities or spiritual objects. This organ is his Reason.[101]

Like the primary imagination, then, Reason is synonymous with self-consciousness or self-knowledge, like the primary imagination it is the prime agent of human perception in that it has as its object ultimate spiritual reality (whereas the Understanding, in contrast, can only arrange "the phaenomena of perception"), and like the primary imagination it repeats the divine "I AM," both in being identical with the spiritual

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[101] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, The Friend, ed. Barbara E. Rooke (2 vols., 1969), I, 155 - 156. Throughout this thesis I refer only to volume I which contains the 1818 text of The Friend. This edition of The Friend is volume II of The Complete Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, general ed. Kathleen Coburn (16 vols. projected; London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969---).

objects it intuits, and in being the instrument of self-knowledge. It seems, then, that Coleridge departs from his usual terminology in this instance in Biographia Literaria, to stress the fact that the faculty which he normally calls the Reason is really one mode of operation, a special channelling of the imagination, and that the imagination is not only a poetic quality but an agent of perception as well.

Coleridge's distinctions between imagination and fancy, and between the primary imagination and the secondary imagination, have confused, puzzled and dismayed many critics. One of the most recent Coleridge scholars, Norman Fruman, denies that the distinction between imagination and fancy has any use whatever:

> Has any critic ever attempted to write a history of English poetry on the basis of this famous distinction? Can one imagine going through a play of Shakespeare's or a book of Paradise Lost and declaring that this is Fancy in operation and that Imagination? Experimental psychology has yielded no data in the past one hundred fifty years to support any compartmentalizing of the mind's functions in this way. And in the same century and a half, although innumerable commentators have applauded Coleridge's formula, none that I know of has attempted to apply it systematically to concrete poems, [102]

and he complains that such men as Schelling and Coleridge never entertained the notion of supporting their theories with objective, scientific evidence, never cared to "stoop to peering through microscopes or patiently study-

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[102] Norman Fruman, Coleridge The Damaged Archangel, p.181.

ing rats in a labyrinth."[103] But nowhere does Coleridge indicate that he means these terms to be applied in this way. He merely argues from the fact that some poems do and others do not have the special artistic unity which he describes as "organic," that some poets must have a mental power which enables them to create this unity--a conclusion which it would be very difficult to disprove. Imagination and fancy are attributes pertaining to the poet rather than to the poem, but their results, organic and mechanical works, _are_ distinguishable by a process of intellectual discursion, as I have shown in section 2 (although possibly not all critics would agree on whether a work was organic or not). The usefulness of this distinction is testified to by the widespread modern use of the term "organic unity." Coleridge did not try to explain anatomically the workings of the poet's mind simply because he could have had no notion of how to do so--the task was then, is now, and probably always will be hopeless. There are limits (at present, anyway) to the information that science can supply--it is highly unlikely, for one thing, that the study of rats in a labyrinth will ever lead us anywhere near a conception of the human mind in artistic creation. But if Coleridge's passages on the imagination

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[103] _Coleridge The Damaged Archangel_, p.183.

are not scientific, neither are they, as Fruman claims, merely "prose poems celebrating an abstraction: the complex of thoughts and feelings and desires through which works of art are brought into being,"[104] constituting "a glorious hymn of praise to man's creativity, as he understood it, and as it was idealized by German metaphysics," for Coleridge's statements that the poet modifies images and fuses them together into a whole by means of the imagination rather than just aggregating them, and that the poet's creative ability springs from his powers of perception, are judicious ones which it would be difficult to deny.

It is a mistake, then, to see the concept of imagination as being a scientific study of the workings of the mind in the creative act. But equally is it a mistake to see this concept as being strictly philosophical. This seems to be the trap into which F.R. Leavis falls when he complains of Coleridge's statement that images "become proofs of original genius only as far as they are modified by a predominant thought or passion"[105] that it is "imperfectly formulated."[106] This passage does not require formulation, simply

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[104]*Coleridge The Damaged Archangel*, p.189.

[105]*B.L.*, II, 16. See pp.52 - 53 above.

[106]F.R. Leavis, "Revaluations (XIII): Coleridge in Criticism," *Scrutiny*, IX (1940 - 41), 68 - 69.

because it is an observation rather than a theory. Coleridge is pointing out that each image must be so modified by the idea or thought which directs the work as to unite harmoniously with all other images to form a chain of images which constitutes a theme; only if the images refer to and reinforce each other can the work have the unity and coherence that we expect from a work of artistic genius. There is a great deal of philosophy in Coleridge's literary criticism--his concept of the unconscious, for example, is highly philosophical, but in arguing about literature Coleridge uses inductive reasoning: he examines the attributes of art itself and then proceeds to deduce its relation to nature and man's being philosophically. Those passages which have the most direct bearing on literature are empirical. There is in Coleridge's theory of literature a close interaction between accurate observation of the characteristics of poetry and philosophical deduction of its relation to man and nature, and man's relation to nature. His theory is neither exclusively philosophical nor exclusively scientific or psychological. And the philosophical deductions and hypotheses always illustrate and serve to explain in more detail his empirical observations. It is this fact which makes his theories of imagination and organic unity so richly satisfying and enlightening.

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It remains to consider the relation of Coleridge's dramatic criticism to his literary theory as a whole. The first three sections of this chapter constitute an outline of Coleridge's philosophy and literary theory in their fully developed form. But by the time of his 1811 - 1812 series of lectures, which constitute the most important single body of his dramatic criticism, Coleridge's ideas on literature were still relatively unformed. In this section, therefore, I shall indicate briefly wherein his literary theory differs in 1812 from that of 1818 - 1819 (about the time when "On Poesy or Art" was written, and the date which J.A. Appleyard takes as representing the full maturity of the literary theory[107]), and how the dramatic criticism develops thereafter.

Coleridge's concept of imitation is still in a relatively elementary stage by 1812. In "On Poesy or Art" Coleridge sees the poet as penetrating the natura naturata, the external husk of things, to represent

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[107] J.A. Appleyard, Coleridge's Philosophy of Literature: The Development of a Concept of Poetry, 1791 - 1819 (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1965).

artistically the divine spirit, the natura naturans within, which is itself objectively perfect. To this end, Coleridge maintains, the poet should retreat into his unconscious, which has the same grounds with nature, and in which the divine spirit manifests itself. A copy, he claims, is the exact portrayal of the natura naturata, whereas an imitation allows us to perceive the natura naturans at work within. In his 1811 - 1812 lectures, Coleridge seems to conceive of nature only as being natura naturata, and does not appear to have formulated his idea of the natura naturans yet. His notion of imitation at this stage is somewhat like that of Sir Philip Sidney—that the poet should perfect nature by representing it as being better than it is. Thus Coleridge, in his third lecture of 1811, is reported as saying that

> It would be necessary for him . . . to enquire whether poetry ought to be a copy, or only an imitation of what is true nature? According to every effect he had been able to trace, he was of opinion that the pleasure we receive arose, not from its being a copy, but from its being an imitation; and the word imitation itself means always a combination of a certain degree of dissimilitude with a certain degree of similitude. If it were merely the same as looking at a glass reflection, we should receive no pleasure. A waxen image after once it had been seen pleased no longer, or very little, but when the resemblance of a thing was given upon canvas or a flat surface, then we were delighted.
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> In poetry it is still more so; the difference there is of a higher character. We take the purest parts and combine them with our own minds, with our own hopes, with our own inward yearnings after perfection, and, being frail and imperfect, we wish to have a shadow, a sort of prophetic

> existence present to us, which tells us what we are not, but yet, blending in us much that we are, promises great things of what we may be. It is the truth (and poetry results from that instinct--the effort of perfecting ourselves), the conceiving that which is imperfect to be perfect and blending the nobler mind with the meaner object.[108]

Coleridge has come to the conclusion that the poet should blend the objective with the subjective in his work, then, but his reason for coming to this conclusion is different from that which he will give some years later. Whereas in 1811 he seems to consider that man is superior to nature and should strive to transcend it, by 1818 he will claim that the poet should "eloign" himself from nature by retreating into his own unconscious in order to see through the natura naturata and "learn her unspoken language in its main radicals."[109]

It is by means of the development of his concept of "meditation" in poetic creation that Coleridge reaches his mature opinion on poetic imitation. As early as 1808 he realised that a play with a mere accurate portrayal of life and people as they are would not satisfy us--we are concerned rather with the significance behind things, why they _must_ be as they are. Thus Coleridge points out that

> Shakespeare's observation was preceded by contemplation: he first conceived what the forms of things

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[108] _S.C._, II, 80 - 81.

[109] _B.L._, II, 258.

> must be and then went humbly to the oracle of nature to ask whether he was right.[110]

Coleridge maintains that the poet in the act of creation should not rely on his observations alone to furnish him with material for his work, but should use observation to confirm and prove what, as a result of earnest thought on life, he already suspects to be true. Only in this way can he give his work the universality which great art requires. Meditation provides the philosophical element which enables the poet to present important truths in his work, therefore. Thus Coleridge is reported as saying that

> When he used the term meditation, he did not mean to say that Shakespeare was without observation. Mere observation might be able to produce an accurate copy of a thing, and even furnish to other men's minds more than the copyist possessed, but they would only be in parts and fragments: Meditation looked at every character with interest--only as it contains in it something generally true and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem.[111]

Just as the poet should show us the significance behind things as well as the things themselves, so, in character presentation the dramatist should strive to show us not merely the character's individual qualities, but the essence of his personality as well. Coleridge considers that the secret of Shakespeare's

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[110] S.C., II, 17.

[111] Foakes, p.67.

success in characterisation is that his characters are individualised types:

> Shakespeare's characters are all genera intensely individualized; the results of meditation of which observation supplied the drapery and the colours necessary to combine them with each other.[112]

If the dramatist merely relied on observation in literary creation, his characters would be merely idiosyncratic, not at all typical, and no amount of observation can make up for a lack of meditation. Thus Coleridge, in his seventh lecture of 1811

> appealed to his auditors whether the observation of one or two old nurses would have enabled Shakespeare to draw this character of admirable generalization?--No, surely not: Were any man to attempt to paint in his mind all the qualities that could possibly belong to a nurse, he would find them there, [113]

and in the same lecture he pointed out that

> There was a vast difference between a man going about the world with his Pocket-book, noting down what he hears and observes, and by practice obtains a facility of representing what he has heard and observed--himself frequently unconscious of its bearings. This was entirely different from the observation of that mind which, having formed a theory and a system in its own nature, has remarked all things as examples of the truth, and confirming him in that truth, and above all enabling him to convey the truths of philosophy as mere effects derived from the outward watchings of life.[114]

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[112]S.C.,I, 137.

[113]Foakes, p.79

[114]Foakes, p.78

The dramatist then, bases his characters on an idea, which is the result of meditation, and tests this idea in the simulated world of experience which he portrays in the play itself by means of observation.

In his remark, in the passage just quoted, that the mind of the dramatist forms "a theory and a system in its own nature" in the process of meditation, Coleridge is groping his way towards an understanding of the way in which the writer or philosopher discovers truth. His ideas are still unformed however--he is discussing the way in which a man discovers his psychological affinites with other men, rather than with God and the universe, and nature in this context refers rather to the constitution of the human mind than the natura naturans. At this stage of the development of his dramatic theory, Coleridge merely considers that meditation leads the dramatist to understand other people more clearly, to create characters so typical as to be representative of universal human qualities and who will speak for all humanity: the dramatist he maintains, should consider the characteristics he has in common with all other men and then feel himself into the situations of the characters he creates by asking himself "How should I act or speak in such circumstances?"[115] By the 1818 series of lectures, however, Coleridge's

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[115] S.C., II, 267.

concepts of nature and imitation have reached their maturity, and the term meditation has acquired greater complexity and comprehensiveness of meaning. He now claims that it is by means of meditation that the poet discovers nature or the divine principle as it manifests itself in him and in all beings, and that this is the means by which he discovers ultimate truth. And of all writers Shakespeare, Coleridge maintains, had the greatest power of meditation:

> Shakespeare shaped his characters out of the nature within; but we cannot so safely say, out of *his own* nature, as an *individual person*. No! this latter is itself but a *natura naturata*, an effect, a product, not a *power*. It was Shakespeare's prerogative to have the *universal* which is potentially in each *particular*, opened out to him in the *homo generalis*, not as an abstraction of observation from a variety of men, but as the substance capable of endless modifications, of which his own personal existence was but one, and to use *this one* as the eye that beheld the other, and as the tongue that could convey the discovery.[116]

Here is the manifestation in Coleridge's dramatic criticism of his belief that the artist must "eloign" himself from the natura naturata in order to learn the "unspoken language" of nature "in its main radicals," must retreat into the unconscious in order to perceive the natura naturans. In contrast, the dramatist who merely creates his characters out of his own individual nature succeeds only in reproducing ridiculous,

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[116] *M.C.*, pp.43 - 44.

idiosyncratic versions of himself, thus falsifying the nature of drama:

> [There is] no greater or more common vice in dramatic writers than to draw out of themselves. How I---alone and in the self-sufficiency of my study, as all men are apt to be proud in their dreams---should _like_ to be talking king! I am the king who would bully kings. Tut! Shakespeare in composing had no _I_ but the _I_ representative.[117]

This dramatic "vice" Coleridge calls "ventriloquism"--that kind of dramatic creation in which the characters do not exist independently but merely as spokesmen for the dramatist, speaking lines no different from those he speaks in his own character. Thus Coleridge complains of Beaumont and Fletcher's _The Noble Gentleman_ that Marine speaks lines far too dignified for him:

> What can be more unnatural and inappropriate (not only is, but must be _felt_ as such) than such poetry in the mouth of a silly dupe? In short, the scenes are mock dialogues, in which the poet solo plays the ventriloquist, but cannot suppress his own way of expressing himself.[118]

Coleridge's statement that Shakespeare was "himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness"[119] is not mere vague eulogy therefore --he is claiming that of all writers Shakespeare had the

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[117] _M.C._, p.44.

[118] _M.C._, pp.89 - 90.

[119] _S.C._, I, 224.

greatest facility in reaching his unconscious and the divine spirit of nature manifested therein, of consciously utilising the unconscious in poetic creation. And this same power enabled Shakespeare to give his work organic unity, in contrast to the awkward mechanism of Beaumont and Fletcher's works:

> What had a grammatical and logical consistency for the ear, what could be put together and represented to the eye, these poets <Beaumont and Fletcher> took from the ear and eye, unchecked by any intuition of an inward impossibility, just as a man might fit together a quarter of an orange, a quarter of an apple, and the like of a lemon and of a pomegranate, and make it look like one round diverse colored fruit. But nature, who works from within by evolution and assimilation according to a law, cannot do it. Nor could Shakespeare, for he too worked in the spirit of nature, by evolving the germ within by the imaginative power according to an idea--for as the power of seeing is to light, so is an idea in mind to a law in nature. They are correlatives that suppose each other. [120]

Whereas Beaumont and Fletcher are guided only by ordinary, human, fallible logic, Shakespeare uses the divine force of nature itself to direct his works, allowing each work to evolve and grow from the informing idea according to the law of nature, rather than manufacturing the work according to artificial rules.

But the difference between Coleridge's remarks on drama and those on poetry consists not merely in

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[120] M.C., pp.42 - 43.

the greater maturity of the latter. To a large extent his poetic theory appears to have developed out of the dramatic, and many of the concepts of Biographia Literaria--that of imagination, for example--can be seen as natural developments from points, like Coleridge's remarks on the role of passion in poetic creation, made in the early lectures on Shakespeare. And Coleridge sees drama as being, like all forms of literature, a species of the genus poetry. He does have a concept of drama as distinct from that of poetry in its narrower sense, however. In his realisation that words convey not merely an intellectual meaning but a certain mood, the passion of the speaker, as well, lies the germ of Coleridge's theory of drama as a form:

> words are the living products of the living mind and could not be a due medium between the thing and the mind unless they partook of both. The word was not to convey merely what a certain thing is, but the very passion and all the circumstances which were conceived as constituting the perception of the thing by the person who used the word.
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> Hence the gradual progression of language--for could it be supposed that words should be no object of the human mind? If so, why was style cultivated in order to make the movement of words correspond with the thoughts and emotions they are to convey, so that the words themselves are a part of the emotion? [121]

Although Coleridge is describing style, a non-dramatic device, here, his remark that words not only label objects but betray the state of mind of the speaker

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[121] S.C., II, 104 - 105.

shows a firm grasp of the concept of drama--the direct presentation of different characters with different ways of speaking and behaving.

Coleridge's idea of the difference between the other arts and drama is that whereas the former _imitate_ reality, drama imitates "reality (objects, actions or passions) under a _semblance_ of reality,"[122] and Coleridge explains that whereas "Claude imitates a landscape at sunset, but only as a _picture_ . . . a forest-scene is not presented to the audience as a _picture_, but as a forest."[123] Whereas in poetry and painting our pleasure arises from the fact that we are distanced from the work, encouraged to admire its likeness to life itself but not to confuse it with life, in drama we are encouraged to suspend "the will and the comparative power" as we do in sleep, and temporarily accept the imitation for reality. Drama, therefore, presents a greater illusion of reality by partly creating the condition of reality. It is true that poetry can also use illusion as the means to its ends, but Coleridge does not claim that this is a generic characteristic of poetry. In the famous "willing suspension of disbelief" passage, he is discussing his own poetic treatment in

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[122] _S.C._, I, 199 - 200.

[123] _S.C._, I, 200.

the *Lyrical Ballads* of the supernatural:

> it was agreed, that my endeavours should be directed to persons and characters supernatural, or at least romantic; yet so as to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.[124]

His object in these poems, he claims, was to make the human interest, the human reactions to the supernatural, so true to life that the reader would accept the supernatural element as the necessary condition for the presentation of this human interest, and would therefore voluntarily suspend disbelief in the supernatural. Coleridge was purposely creating an apparently unreal setting in order to make us turn our attention to the greater psychological and spiritual reality within our own being, and encouraging us temporarily to accept this unreality not in order to concentrate on it but on the more important human themes of the poems. This is a very different matter from creating a semblance of reality.

For Coleridge, one of the most important means by which a dramatist creates a semblance of reality is characterisation--the creation of characters noticeably different from one another and each with its own personality distinguishable from that of its creator. Shakespeare, he maintains, is the supreme master of this art.

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[124] *B.L.*, II, 6.

By meditating on nature as it manifested itself in his own spirit Shakespeare was able "to paint truly a vast multiplicity of characters by simple meditation; he had only to imitate such parts of his character, or to exaggerate such as existed in possibility, and they were at once nature and fragments of Shakespeare."[125] Coleridge's concept of genius in characterisation is in fact very much like Keats's concept of negative capability, especially in the respect of negation of self.[126] Thus Coleridge remarks that

> The great prerogative of genius (and Shakespeare had felt and availed himself of it) is now to swell itself into the dignity of a god, and now to keep dormant some part of that nature, to descend to the lowest characters; to become anything, in fact, but the vicious.[127]

Shakespeare's dramatic virtue consists in suppressing his individual personality and becoming the characters he creates, changing his own nature for this purpose, like Proteus. As I have already shown, Coleridge opposes this kind of characterisation to that in which the dramatist creates characters who are merely copies of himself. But in poetry there is no need for the creator to change his own character, since he is not creating a "semblance of reality." The "egotistical

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[125] Foakes, p.67.

[126] On this point see Barbara Hardy, "Keats, Coleridge and Negative Capability, Notes and Queries, CXCVII, 299 - 301.

[127] Foakes, p.79.

sublime" may be a virtue in poetry, though it is out of place in drama, and Coleridge praises Milton for this very quality. Thus he claims that Shakespeare and Milton occupy "the two glory-smitten summits of the poetic mountain," and that

> While the former <Shakespeare> darts himself forth, and passes into all forms of human character and passion, the one Proteus of the fire and flood; the other <Milton> attracts all forms and things to himself, into the unity of his own IDEAL. All things and modes of action shape themselves anew in the being of MILTON; while SHAKESPEARE becomes all things, yet for ever remaining himself.[128]

The "Proteus" quality, in fact, is a fault in poetry, since it either disrupts the uniformity of style essential for a good poem, or leads to ventriloquism, a fault in any literary form. Thus Coleridge lists as one of Wordsworth's poetic faults

> an undue predilection for the dramatic form in certain poems, from which one or other of two evils result. Either the thought and diction are different from that of the poet, and then there arises an incongruity of style; or they are the same and indistinguishable, and then it presents a species of ventriloquism, where two are represented as talking, while in truth one man only speaks,[129]

and he says that he dislikes "dialogues in verse"

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[128] B.L., II, 20.

[129] B.L., II, 109.

because

> I cannot but think that a great philosophical poet ought always to teach the reader himself as from himself. A poem does not admit argumentation, though it does admit development of thought.[130]

Here is another difference between drama and poetry, then: drama develops its thought or theme by means of conflict or "argumentation" between characters, (thus again creating a ~~vicious~~ vivid illusion of reality) whereas poetry derives its development of thought from the logical processes of the poet's own mind set down in writing.

Although he maintains that drama presents a semblance of reality, however, Coleridge is careful to point out that this semblance does not deceive us--it is an illusion not a delusion. Coleridge both denies that we believe the events of a play to be real while we are watching it, and denies that we are fully aware that the events of the play are not real. His point of view on this question and his distinction between illusion and delusion can be seen in the following passage on our state of mind in watching a play:

> I find two extremes in critical decision: the French, which evidently presupposes that a perfect delusion is to be aimed at--an opinion which now needs no fresh confutation; the opposite, supported by Dr. Johnson, supposes the auditors throughout as in the full and positive reflective knowledge of

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[130] M.C., p.411.

> the contrary. In evincing the impossibility of delusion, he makes no sufficient allowance for an intermediate state, which we distinguish by the term illusion.
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> In what this consists I cannot better explain than by referring you to the highest degree of it; namely, dreaming. It is laxly said that during sleep we take our dreams for realities, but this is irreconcilable with the nature of sleep, which consists in a suspension of the voluntary, and, therefore, of the comparative power. The fact is that we pass no judgement either way: we simply do not judge them to be unreal, in consequence of which the images act on our own minds, as far as they act at all, by their own force as images.[131]

In watching a play, Coleridge claims, we ourselves aid the illusion by voluntarily suspending the comparative power: "we _choose_ to be deceived." It is on these grounds that Coleridge argues that the strict observance of the unities of time and place in drama is unnecessary. Drama, he claims, should be addressed rather to the imagination than to the senses, since it is by means of our imagination that we aid the dramatic illusion by willingly suspending our disbelief, and the imagination has control of both time and space.[132] Violation of the unities of time and place, therefore, will not hamper our suspension of the comparing power. To suppose the unities of time and place necessary, Coleridge says, is

> to suppose as evident a falsehood as that the drama impresses with pleasure only as it is supposed to be reality. The truth is, it is never believed to be real. In a farce written to ridicule ancient

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[131] _S.C._, I, 128 - 129.

[132] _S.C._, I, 198.

> plays the chorus is represented as lamenting for some crime which a man who had just escaped had committed, when one of the characters comes in and exclaims, "Why don't you run for a constable; why do [you] remain there doing nothing?" The height of delusion, the utmost point to which it can arrive, is that we do not think about its being real or false, but are affected only by the vividness of the impression, independent of the thought of reality.[133]

Certain kinds of improbabilities do prevent us from suspending our comparative power, but these are incidents of far more import and weight than mere matters of time and space (which are really the concern of the senses), incidents which strike our reason as being untrue to nature. Coleridge claims that

> Whatever tends to prevent the mind from placing it[self] or from gradually being placed in this state in which images have a negative reality must be a defect, and consequently anything that must force itself on the auditors' mind as improbable, not because it _is_ improbable (for that the whole play is foreknown to be) but because it cannot but _appear_ as such.[134]

The extent and amount of improbability the dramatist can risk in his play depends on the various stages of its development and of our surrendering of judgment. Because we are only gradually induced to suspend the comparative power "by the art of the poet and the actors,"[135] a strong improbability in the first scene may so startle the judgment as to prevent our accepting

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[133] _S.C._, II, 83.

[134] _S.C._, I, 128.

[135] _S.C._, I, 129.

the illusion at all. Thus "many things would be intolerable in the first scene of a play that would not at all interrupt our enjoyment in the height of interest."[136] This is especially true if "the interest and plot" depend[137] on this initial improbability. On the other hand "many obvious improbabilities will be endured as belonging to the groundwork of the story rather than to the drama in the first scenes, which would disturb or disentrance us from all illusion in the acme of our excitement."[138] Shakespeare can afford the improbably division of the realm and banishment of Cordelia in the first act of King Lear, for instance, because they are merely the incidents which set in motion the tragic events of the play.[139]

To the unities of time and place Coleridge opposes "homogeneity, proportionateness, and totality of interest,"[140] which he more often terms "unity of interest." Unfortunately Coleridge does not explain exactly what he means by this term, and he uses it very seldom. But from the facts that he applies it only to drama and that he states that works with unity

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[136] S.C., I, 130.

[137] S.C., II, 322.

[138] S.C., I, 130.

[139] S.C., I, 130.

[140] S.C., I, 4.

of interest are the product of genius and can only be effected by a "single energy modified ab intra in each component part"[141] it is clear that unity of interest is organic unity as it manifests itself in drama. By stating that he prefers this term to "unity of action,"[142] Coleridge implies that the two terms are roughly equivalent, but he prefers to approach the question of how an action is presented in a unified way from the point of view of the effect the play has on the audience, the interest they feel in the whole. In the words "homogeneity, proportionateness and totality" of interest Coleridge explains wherein unity of interest consists. It would seem just to assume that a play which has unity of interest is one in which the interest we feel in each part is in proportion to the interest we feel in the whole (proportionateness and totality of interest), and in which the nature of the interest we feel in one part is consistent with that which we feel in all the others (homogeneity of interest).

To anticipate the argument of the rest of this section, I suggest that homogeneity of interest refers to the consistency of mood induced in an audience by the overall atmosphere of a play, and that, for Coleridge,

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[141] S.C., I, 4.

[142] See S.C., I, 4; S.C., II, 83.

this atmosphere springs from the chain of images which runs through a play and constitutes a theme. It is probable that Coleridge uses the term unity of interest so seldom because it is difficult to test the amount of interest we feel in each scene and to assess whether this is in proportion with our interest in the whole--literary criticism, being an art, tends to be ineffective in dealing with calculations as essentially mathematical as this. But we can test whether our response, our emotional reaction, to one scene is in harmony with our responses to the other scenes, and furthermore, by examining the play in detail we can show why the play arouses consistent or inconsistent responses in us. This is what Coleridge is doing in the following passage:

> A unity of feeling pervades the whole of his <Shakespeare's> plays. In Romeo and Juliet all is youth and spring--it is youth with its follies, its virtues, its precipitancies; it is spring with its odours, flowers, and transiency:--the same feeling commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and Montagues, are not common old men; they have an eagerness, a hastiness, a precipitancy--the effect of spring. With Romeo his precipitate change of passion, his hasty marriage, and his rash death, are all the effects of youth. With Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of spring; but it ends with a long deep sigh, like the breeze of the evening.[143]

Here Coleridge examines the feelings that Romeo and

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[143] S.C., II, 279.

Juliet evokes in us, shows briefly what elements in the play have evoked these feelings, explains the images (of youth and spring) which run through the play and help to unite it and which constitute its atmosphere, and he further explains the pertinence of the images within the play's total structure. And Coleridge does much the same thing in commenting on Richard II:

> The plays of Shakespeare, as before observed of Romeo and Juliet, were characteristic throughout: --whereas that was all youth and spring, this was womanish weakness; the characters were of extreme old age, or partook of the nature of age and imbecility.[144]

Here Coleridge is deeply concerned with the homogeneity of the plays he discusses, and it seems as if homogeneity of interest reappears under the guise of "unity of feeling" and "unity of character." In such passages Coleridge comes remarkably close to a concept of "image cluster," and indeed he seems to have considered the "chain of images" as a particular feature of drama, thus he comments that the "series and never broken chain of imagery, always vivid and, because unbroken, often minute,"[145] in Venus and Adonis, is a sign of Shakespeare's dramatic genius manifesting itself in his poetry.

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[144] S.C., II, 279.
[145] B.L., II, 15.

Coleridge has a concept of drama, therefore, although he does not spend as much time as we would wish in his criticism on discussing action. In his comments on the particular form that imagery and other poetic elements take in drama, moreover, he made a rich and valuable contribution to criticism.

CHAPTER II

COLERIDGE'S MORAL APPROACH TO LITERATURE AND THE PURPOSES OF HIS DRAMATIC CRITICISM

A critic's approach to any work is always determined by his idea of the aims of criticism, even if this idea is unconscious or indistinctly formulated. And unless we can gain some understanding of the critic's aims, of what he is trying to prove about the work or works under study, his method will be incomprehensible to us. Most modern criticism, for example, aims primarily at an objective, almost scientific description and analysis of the literary work stressing the way in which the whole achieves its effect and leaving the reader to derive unassisted what moral or ethical value he may. To the modern student of literature, used to such critical aims, Coleridge's literary criticism may seem somewhat eccentric, because, for Coleridge, the ultimate criterion of literary excellence was a moral one, and his demonstration of the unity of the work and the relationship of part and whole is subsumed into his discussion of the way in which the moral idea which is the germ of the work permeates the whole. His critical method, therefore, was directed towards the end of showing the moral value of the work he was discussing. Thus

Coleridge is reported as saying at the end of his fifth lecture of 1811 that "above all" he had "taken the great names of Milton and Shakespeare rather for the purpose of illustrating great principles than for any minute examination of their works."[1] And in his prospectus to the 1818 lectures Coleridge states

> Under a strong persuasion that little of real value is derived by persons in general from a wide and various reading; but still more deeply convinced as to the actual *mischief* of unconnected and promiscuous reading, and that it is sure, in a greater or less degree, to enervate even where it does not likewise inflate; I hope to satisfy many an ingenuous mind, seriously interested in its own development and cultivation, how moderate a number of volumes, if only they be judiciously chosen, will suffice for the attainment of every wise and desirable purpose.[2]

One of the purposes of Coleridge's dramatic criticism, then, is to assess and illustrate the moral worth of the plays he discusses.

But Coleridge's concept of morality is neither rigid nor simple, and it must be examined and understood before we can see how it influences his literary criticism. Particularly important is the distinction (so far almost entirely unnoticed by scholars and critics of Coleridge) in his philosophy between morality and prudence. Morality is concerned with principles, prudence with maxims. Principles and maxims need not conflict

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[1] *S.C.*, II, 110.

[2] *S.C.*, II, 301.

with each other, indeed Coleridge points out that most of our maxims have been produced by those men who had the most thorough understanding of principles, but maxims are of less value as guides to our conduct than are principles:

> from persons, who had previously strengthened their intellects and feelings by the contemplation of PRINCIPLES--Principles, the actions correspondent to which involve one half of their consequences, by their ennobling influence on the agent's own soul, and have omnipotence, as the pledge for the remainder--we have derived the surest and most general maxims of prudence. Of high value are they all. Yet there is one among them worth all the rest, which in the fullest and primary sense of the word is, indeed, the Maxim, (i.e. the Maximum) of human Prudence; and of which History itself in all that makes it most worth studying, is one continued comment and exemplification. It is this: that there is a Wisdom higher than Prudence, to which Prudence stands in the same relation as the Mason and Carpenter to the genial and scientific Architect: and from the habits of thinking and feeling, that in this Wisdom had their first formation, our Nelsons and Wellingtons inherit that glorious hardihood, which completes the undertaking, ere the contemptuous calculator (who has left nothing omitted in his scheme of probabilities, except the might of the human mind) has finished his pretended proof of its impossibility.[3]

As will become apparent in the course of this chapter, Coleridge uses the terms principle and maxim in both an intellectual and a moral sense, and he does not always distinguish clearly between the two senses. But this is not a sign of confused thinking, rather it testifies to his refusal to admit a divorce between intellectual

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[3]*Friend*, I, 118.

and moral matters, for according to Coleridge, "in the moral being lies the source of the intellectual."[4] Considered in both intellectual and moral sense, maxims are conclusions based on experience, whereas principles are self-evident and exist independently of experience. Thus Coleridge explains that

> A Maxim is a conclusion upon observation of matters of fact, and is merely retrospective: an Idea, or, if you like, a Principle, carries knowledge within itself, and is prospective. Polonius is a man of maxims. Whilst he is descanting on matters of past experience, as in that excellent speech to Laertes before he sets out on his travels, he is admirable; but when he comes to advise or project, he is a mere dotard.[5]

And elsewhere he maintains that

> The English public is not yet ripe to comprehend the essential difference between the reason and the understanding—between a principle and a maxim—an eternal truth and a mere conclusion generalized from a great number of facts. A man, having seen a million moss roses all red, concludes from his own experience and that of others that all moss roses are red. That is a maxim with him—the greatest amount of his knowledge upon the subject. But it is only true until some gardener has produced a white moss rose,—after which the maxim is good for nothing. . . .
> Now compare this in its highest degree with the assurance which you have that the two sides of any triangle are together greater than the third. This, demonstrated of one triangle, is seen to be eternally true of all imaginable triangles.

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[4] Friend, I, 115.

[5] "Table Talk," June 24, 1827, in The Table Talk and Omniana of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. T. Ashe (London: George Bell and Sons, 1884), p.47. Hereafter referred to as Table Talk and Omniana.

> This is a truth perceived at once by the intuitive reason, independently of experience. It is and ever must be so, multiply and vary the shapes and sizes of triangles as you may.[6]

Maxims, then, come within the sphere of the Understanding--that process of empirical logic based on experience, and therefore fallible, whereas principles depend on the Reason--that process of intuitive discovery by which we apprehend eternal truths. Coleridge makes this connection clearer in a passage in The Friend (1818) in which he claims that

> Every man must feel, that though he may not be exerting different faculties, he is exerting his faculties in a different way, when in one instance he begins with some one self-evident truth, (that the radii of a circle, for instance, are all equal,) and in consequence of this being true sees at once, without any actual experience, that some other thing must be true likewise, and that, this being true, some third thing must be equally true, and so on till he comes, we will say, to the properties of the lever, considered as the spoke of a circle; which is capable of having all its marvellous powers demonstrated even to a savage who had never seen a lever, and without supposing any other previous knowledge in his mind, but this one, that there is a conceivable figure, all possible lines from the middle to the circumference of which are of the same length: or when, in the second instance, he brings together the facts of experience, each of which has its own separate value, neither encreased nor diminished by the truth of any other fact which may have preceded it; and making these several facts bear upon some particular project, and finding some in favour of it, and some against it, determines for or against the project, according as one or the other class of facts preponderate: as, for instance, whether it would be better to plant a particular spot of ground with larch, or with Scotch fir, or with oak in preference to either. Surely every man will acknowledge,

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[6]"Table Talk," August 24, 1831, in Table Talk and Omniana, pp. 136 - 137.

> that his mind was very differently employed in the first case from what it was in the second; and all men have agreed to call the results of the first class the truths of _science_, such as not only are true, but which it is impossible to conceive otherwise: while the results of the second class are called _facts_, or things of _experience_: and as to these latter we must often content ourselves with the greater _probability_, that they are so, or so, rather than otherwise---nay, even when we have no doubt that they are so in the particular case, we never presume to assert that they must continue so always, and under all circumstances. On the contrary, our conclusions depend altogether on contingent _circumstances_. Now when the mind is employed, as in the case first-mentioned, I call it _Reasoning_, or the use of the pure Reason; but, in the second case, the _Understanding_ or _Prudence_.[7]

Prudence is entirely concerned with the self. Not only are the maxims of prudence based on personal experience, but prudence motivates men to act out of self-interest. Principles, however, existing, as they do, independently of experience, contain their own motivating truths which they inspire men to uphold without regard for personal safety or self-advancement. Coleridge's ideas on prudence and principles are illustrated in his discussion of the Elizabethan era as compared to the Stuart and Republican age. He sees the Elizabethans as being motivated primarily by prudence, the Republicans by principles, and it is obvious that from a moral point of view he prefers the latter:

> It was almost miraculous to compare the state of mind in the reigns of Elizabeth and James with the reigns of Charles the 1st and 2nd, when republicanism was so prevalent. In the former period there

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[7]_Friend_, I, 158 - 159.

> was an amazing development of power, but all connected with prudential purposes: an attempt to reconcile the moral feeling with a full exercise of the mind and the gaining of certain ends. In that age lived Bacon and Burleigh, and Sir Walter Raleigh, and a galaxy of great men of which they formed a part. Coleridge lamented that they should have degraded their mighty powers to such base ends, and dissolve[d] their pearls in such a worthless acid, to be drunken as it were to an harlot. What was the favour of a Queen or a Court to such a man as Lord Bacon but mere harlotry?
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> Compare this age to that of the republicans: it was an awful age indeed, and most important as compared with our own: when England overflowed from the fullness of grand principle, from the greatness which men felt in themselves, abstracted from the prudence with which they ought to have considered whether they were adapted to mankind at large.[8]

Although Coleridge sometimes equates the Understanding and prudence, he usually uses the term "Understanding" to denote the conclusions our experience leads us to make, while he reserves the term "prudence" for the motivating force which leads us to act on the conclusions of the understanding in our own best material interest. But, as we have seen, the understanding, being based on personal experience alone, can show us probabilities but not certain truths. Similarly prudence, which both leads us to act on the conclusions derived from personal experience by the Understanding and refers us back to ourselves by inducing us to act in our own self-interest, can be misguided. We might be wrong both about the means by which we can best further our own interests and about what our own

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[8]Foakes, pp. 66 - 67.

interests really are. Just as the Understanding cannot lead us to truth so prudence can never lead us to morality, for (as I have shown) truth exists independently of human experience and outside of the self, or our concern with our own material interests, and morality is the highest peak of truth. Thus Coleridge claims that "that grand prerogative of our nature, A HUNGRING AND THIRSTING AFTER TRUTH," is "the appropriate end of our intelligential, and its point of union with, our moral nature."[9] The moral sense, then, is also concerned with truth, but it is truth of a higher order, and it comes into operation as an organ of truth after the intellect has reached the limits of its capacity. The important point to notice is that there need be no conflict between the intellect and the moral sense, for both have truth for their object. Furthermore the moral sense depends on the intellect to the extent that we can discover moral truth only after we have discovered intellectual truth.

Coleridge's ideas on the relationship between intellectual and moral truth can be seen in his discussion of the Reason and Understanding. The Understanding, as I have already shown, is that faculty by which we deduce certain conclusions from the facts of experience. It is empirical logic, and, since it is based only on

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[9] _Friend_, I, 495.

experience, is fallible. Coleridge maintains that the higher animals possess a measure of Understanding,[10] and that it is Reason--a much higher quality--alone that distinguishes us from the animal world. The Reason is at once the means by which we perceive the spiritual and the spiritual or divine as it manifests itself in us. Thus Coleridge says that

> I should have no objection to define Reason . . . as an organ bearing the same relation to spiritual objects, the Universal, the Eternal, and the Necessary, as the eye bears to material and contingent phaenomena. But then it must be added, that it is an organ identical with its appropriate objects. Thus, God, the Soul, eternal Truth &c. are the objects of Reason; but they are themselves <u>reason</u>. We name God the Supreme Reason.[11]

Reason is the means by which we transcend the self and the material world to discover eternal truths. He therefore describes it as

> the organ of the Super-sensuous; even as the Understanding wherever it does not possess or use the Reason, as another and inward eye, may be defined the conception of the Sensuous, or the faculty by which we generalize and arrange the phaenomena of perception: that faculty, the functions of which contain the rules and constitute the possibility of outward Experience. In short, the Understanding supposes something that is <u>understood</u>. This may be merely its own acts or forms, that is, formal Logic; but <u>real</u> objects, the materials of <u>substantial</u> knowledge, must be furnished, we might safely say <u>revealed</u>, to it by Organs of Sense. The understanding of the higher Brutes has only organs of outward sense, and consequently material objects only; but man's understanding has likewise an organ

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[10]<u>Friend</u>, I, 154 - 155.

[11]<u>Friend</u>, I, 155 - 156.

> of inward sense, and therefore the power of acquainting itself with invisible realities or spiritual objects. This organ is his Reason.[12]

In this sense Reason itself is intuitive, in that it perceives the spiritual immediately. But Reason can manifest itself only in the Understanding, and is therefore dependent on it:

> Reason cannot exist without Understanding; nor does it or can it manifest itself but in and through the understanding, which in our elder writers is often called discourse, or the discursive faculty, as by Hooker, Lord Bacon, and Hobbes: and an understanding enlightened by reason Shakespear gives as the contra-distinguishing character of man, under the name discourse of reason.[13]

Coleridge therefore distinguishes another sense of the term "Reason," and this is Reason as it manifests itself in the Understanding, or the Understanding enlightened by Reason:

> there is another use of the word, Reason, arising out of the former indeed, but less definite, and more exposed to misconception. In this latter use it means the understanding considered as using the Reason, so far as by the organ of Reason only we possess the ideas of the Necessary and the Universal; and this is the more common use of the word, when it is applied with *any* attempt at clear and distinct conceptions. In this narrower and derivative sense the best definition of Reason, which I can give, will be found in the third member of the following sentence, in which the understanding is described in its three-fold operation, and from each receives an appropriate name. The Sense, (vis sensitiva vel intuitiva) *per*ceives: Vis regulatrix (the understanding, in its own peculiar operation) *con*ceives: Vis rationalis (the Reason or rationalized understanding) *comprehends*. The first is impressed

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[12] *Friend*, I, 156.

[13] *Friend*, I, 156. The Shakespearean reference is to *Hamlet* I.ii.150.

> through the organs of sense; the second combines these multifarious impressions into individual Notions, and by reducing these notions to Rules, according to the analogy of all its former notices, constitutes Experience: the third subordinates both these notions and the rules of Experience to ABSOLUTE PRINCIPLES or necessary LAWS: and thus concerning objects, which our experience has proved to have real existence, it demonstrates moreover, in what way they are possible, and in doing this constitutes Science. Reason therefore, in this secondary sense, and used not as a spiritual Organ but as a Faculty (namely, the Understanding or Soul enlightened by that organ)--Reason, I say, or the scientific Faculty, is the Intellection of the possibility or essential properties of things by means of the Laws that constitute them. Thus the rational idea of a Circle is that of a figure constituted by the circumvolution of a straight line with its one end fixed.[14]

Just as the Reason cannot exist without the Understanding, therefore, the Understanding can prove nothing certain or really important without the help of the Reason. Coleridge calls Reason as it manifests itself in the Understanding, Science, or "pure Reason."[15] Pure reason conveys a "right notion" whereas reason in its moral sense, "the conscience, or effective reason, commands the design of conveying an adequate notion."[16] The right notion is the certainty derived both from experience (the Understanding) and from the principles of Reason, the notion conveyed in the instruction "do so and so, and the sum will always prove true."[17] The

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[14]Friend, I, 157 - 158.

[15]Friend, I, 159.

[16]Friend, I, 43.

[17]Friend, I, 43.

adequate notion embraces the higher truths of morality as well. The same Reason that manifests itself in our Understanding when applied to the motives of our conduct, becomes the conscience, another term for which, as I have indicated above, is the "effective Reason:"

> This reason applied to the motives of our conduct, and combined with the sense of our moral responsibility, is the conditional cause of Conscience, which is a spiritual sense or testifying state of the coincidence or discordance of the FREE WILL with the REASON. But as the Reasoning consists wholly in a man's power of seeing, whether any two ideas, which happen to be in his mind, are, or are not in contradiction with each other, it follows of necessity, not only that all men have reason, but that every man has it in the same degree. For Reasoning (or Reason, in this its secondary sense) does not consist in the Ideas, or in their clearness, but simply, when they are in the mind, in seeing whether they contradict each other or no.[18]

Coleridge makes it clear that our conscience should be our main guide in life, that all our powers should be ordered in such a way that we perceive and act on both intellectual and moral truth:

> For it is in the primacy of the moral being only that man is truly human; in his intellectual powers he is certainly approached by the brutes, and, man's whole system duly considered, those powers cannot be considered other than means to an end, that is, to morality.[19]

The conscience leads us to act on principles, on certain truths. Prudence is no substitute for the conscience as a guide to behaviour, because if we are motivated by prudence alone, we will be constantly sacrificing princi-

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[18] Friend, I, 159.

[19] S.C., I, 134.

ples to our own material interests, constantly attempting, like the courtiers of Elizabeth I, to "reconcile the moral feeling with a full exercise of the mind and the gaining of certain ends."[20]

Coleridge's opinions on morality are illustrated in his remarks on education. His concept of education is a broad one, and he is primarily concerned with the cultivation of the soul (or moral nature) of the pupils. He particularly stresses the importance of encouraging affection and intellectual accuracy in the children. Thus Crabb Robinson, reporting one of Coleridge's 1808 lectures on education in a letter to Mrs. Clarkson, isolated three cardinal rules of education formulated in the lecture: "These are 1. to work by love and so generate love: 2. to habituate the mind to intellectual accuracy or truth: 3. to excite power."[21] The first two factors mentioned are, for Coleridge, the basis of the development of the moral power. The first factor arouses in the pupil a love and sympathy for humanity, an altruism which is one of the ends of a moral sense. This leads to natural dignity, a respect for one's own nature, which, when generalised and applied to others, as happens naturally, leads to a reverence for the

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[20]Foakes, p.66.

[21]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 11.

nature of man as a whole:

> I trust that my heart is not the worse, or the less inclined to feel sympathy for all men, because I first learnt the powers of my nature, and to reverence that nature--for who can feel and reverence the nature of man and not feel deeply for the afflictions of others possessing like powers and like nature.[22]

The second factor--"intellectual accuracy"--is the basis of moral truth, for morality is not merely a matter of behaviour, but a way of life based on knowledge of the truth culled from life and the universe by earnest thought and meditation. A man can never achieve moral goodness if his logic is vague or inaccurate. Thus in his lecture on education mentioned above, Coleridge

> advised the beginning with enforcing great accuracy of assertion in young children. The parent, he observed, who should hear his child call a round leaf, "long," would do well to fetch it instantly. Thus tutored to render words conformable with ideas, the child would have the habit of truth without having any notion or thought of moral truth. "We should not early begin with impressing ideas of virtue [or] goodness which the child could not comprehend." 23

The implication is that, given a sound intellectual training and the ability to discover intellectual truth, the moral sense and the love of moral veracity will come naturally. And in fact Coleridge shows this process in the reverse in a lecture on education in the 1813 - 1814 series. Here he states that there is a

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[22]S.C., II, 110.

[23]S.C., II, 12.

connection between "intellectual accuracy" and "moral veracity":

> for this end boys should not be accustomed to utter words which they did not understand. Having first used words of no meaning, they soon use those of half meaning, then those of vicious meaning.[24]

Similarly, in Biographia Literaria, again discussing "the close connection between veracity and habits of mental accuracy", he claims that

> the cultivation of the judgement is a positive command of the moral law, since the reason can give the principle alone, and the conscience bears witness only to the motive, while the application and effects must depend on the judgement.[25]

Coleridge's whole statement of the importance of emotion and intellect in the moral education is summed up succinctly in the sentence,

> Stimulate the heart to love, and the mind to be early accurate, and all other virtues will rise of their own accord and all vices will be thrown out.[26]

The third cardinal rule of education--"to excite power" --refers to the power of one's own nature, to intellectual and moral strength. What Coleridge appears to be saying is that only by fully developing the powers of our nature--both intellectual and emotional--can we achieve a true moral sense and the goodness which this faculty has for its object.

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[24] S.C., II, 296.

[25] B.L., II, 116 - 117.

[26] S.C., II, 12.

To sum up, Coleridge maintains that morality is the peak of truth. This being so, the moral and intellectual natures of man can and should co-exist harmoniously, for both have truth as their object. But they co-exist harmoniously only if the intellect serves the moral sense (or Reason in its highest capacity). If the intellect is made to serve the self (or our concern with our own material interests) it falsifies itself, since truth and morality exist independently of human experience and can only be attained by the transcending of experience. We should be guided, both morally and intellectually, primarily by principles, therefore, rather than by the maxims of prudence, which, springing from experience, only refer us back to our own experience and to the self.

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Having considered Coleridge's concept of morality, it is now possible to examine his views on the moral function of literature. He maintains that it is no coincidence that "the divinest truths of religion should be revealed to us in the form of Poetry,"[27] for

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[27]Foakes, p.89.

> He had often thought that Religion (speaking of it only as it accords with Poetry, without reference to its more serious effects) is the Poetry of all mankind, so as both have for their object:
> 1. To generalize our notions; to prevent men from confining their attention solely or chiefly to their own narrow sphere of action, to their own individualizing circumstances; but by placing them in aweful relations merges the individual man in the whole, and makes it impossible for any one man to think of his future, or of his present lot in reference to a future, without at the same time comprizing all his fellow creatures.
> 2. That it <sic> throws the objects of deepest interest at a distance from us, and thereby not only aids our imagination, but in a most important way subserves the interest of our virtues, for that man is indeed a slave who is a slave to his own senses, and whose mind and imagination cannot carry him beyond the narrow sphere which his hand can touch or even his eye can reach.
> 3. The grandest point of resemblance: that both have for their object . . . the perfecting, the pointing out to us the indefinite improvement of our nature, and fixing our attention upon that. It bids us, while we are sitting in the dark round our little fire, still look at the mountain tops struggling with the darkness, and which announces that light which shall be common to us all, and in which all individual interests shall dissolve into one common interest, and every man find in another more than a brother.[28]

This passage, with its assumption that the ultimate end of art is to help us transcend the dross of the flesh and the mundanity of matter by strengthening the spirit is reminiscent of the criticism of such neo-platonists as Sir Philip Sidney.

In another passage, Coleridge, like Sidney, compares the value of history unfavourably with that of poetry:

> Thucydides, it was true, had written the history of the Peolponnesian War, but what cared we for

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[28]Foakes, pp. 88 - 89.

> the Peloponnesian War? But woe be to the Statesman . . . who had not availed himself of the wisdom contained in the tale of Troy divine.[29]

For Coleridge the Peloponnesian War is a fact of history which no longer concerns us vitally. Its significance lies merely in the train of cause and effect which has affected the evolution of the modern world. Being rooted in time, facts have a merely temporal importance. Literature, on the other hand, is concerned with elevating the human mind above mere facts to the universal and eternal principles behind them. Thus in a somewhat confused passage shortly after that just quoted, Coleridge imagines crowds of souls entering Heaven, saying, apparently to Homer or poets of his stature, "To thee I owe the first development of my imagination, to thee I owe the withdrawing of my mind from the low and brutal part of my nature to the lofty and perpetual."[30]

Indeed Coleridge, again like Sidney, considers that literature should not adhere too closely in its nature and general representation, to real life, the world of external reality, in which facts are grounded:

> In poetry . . . we take the purest parts <presumably the essences of things in nature> and combine them with our own minds, with our own hopes, with our own inward yearnings after perfection, and,

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[29] Foakes, p.65.

[30] Foakes, p.66.

> being frail and imperfect, we wish to have a shadow, a sort of prophetic existence present to us, which tells us what we are not, but yet, blending in us much that we are, promises great things of what we may be. It is the truth (and poetry results from that instinct—the effort of perfecting ourselves), the conceiving that which is imperfect to be perfect and blending the nobler mind with the meaner object.[31]

Here the particular kind of truth which literature embodies is seen, not so much as consisting in a Johnsonian "just representation of general nature" as being a matter of ideal potential. By concentrating on moral and spiritual truth the literary work enables the reader to strive for spiritual perfection and to go some way towards fulfilling his own potential. The poet's object in creating illusion is not to seduce us from reality but to transfer our attention from the self and the external husk of things, to which we give undue importance, to the more important potential within our own souls by making this potential seem more vivid, more real to us. Thus, in his own poetry, Coleridge attempted

> <u>to transfer from our inward nature</u> a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith.[32] <my italics>

And literature, he considers, should sink us in a

> delightful dream of our inner nature which was in truth more than a dream. It was a vision of what

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[31] <u>S.C.</u>, II, 80 - 81.

[32] <u>B.L.</u>, II, 6.

> we might be hereafter--which was the endeavour of the moral being to exert, and at the same time to express itself in the infinite.[33]

Unlike Sidney, however, Coleridge is not led by his belief that literature has a moral end to demand that poetic justice be strictly observed in literature, that the good should be rewarded and the bad suffer. Among the charges that Sidney had levelled at the study of history was that

> the historian, being captived to the truth of a foolish world, is many times a terror from well-doing, and an encouragement to unbridled wickedness. For see we not valiant Miltiades rot in his fetters? The just Phocion and the accomplished Socrates put to death like traitors? The cruel Severus live prosperously? The excellent Severus miserably murdered? Sylla and Marius dying in their beds? Pompey and Cicero slain then, when they would have thought exile a happiness? [34]

whereas poetry shows us

> virtue exalted and vice punished. . . . For, indeed, poetry ever setteth virtue so out in her best colours, making Fortune her well-waiting handmaid, that one must needs be enamoured of her.[35]

As we have seen, Coleridge considered that we should do good not out of a desire for any material reward (for this is prudence, not true goodness) but for the sake

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[33] S.C., II, 110.

[34] Sir Philip Sidney, "An Apology for Poetry," in English Critical Texts, ed. D.J. Enright and Ernst de Chickera (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), p.19.

[35] "An Apology for Poetry," p.19.

of the ultimate truth embodied in the principles of morality. Those writers who try to bribe us into being good by showing virtue prospering, therefore, falsify the nature of morality by reducing it to material terms. And this was the charge which Coleridge levelled against much of the children's literature of his time:

> I infinitely prefer the little books of "The Seven Champions of Christendom," "Jack the Giant Killer," etc., etc.--for at least they make the child forget himself--to your moral tales where a good little boy comes in and says, "Mama, I met a poor beggar man and gave him the sixpence you gave me yesterday. Did I do right?"--"O, yes, my dear; to be sure you did." This is not virtue, but vanity; such books and such lessons do not teach goodness, but--if I might venture such a word--goodyness.[36]

"Goodyness" appears to be that form of prudence in which the motive for doing good is the selfish desire for a respectable reputation.

It is the distinctions between prudence and morality, goodness and goodyness that enable Coleridge to escape the rigidity of the eighteenth century (and earlier) moral view of literature. John Dennis, for example, writing of _Coriolanus_ in 1712, had taken exception to this and other Shakespearean tragedies because he felt that

> the author of a just Fable must please more than the Writer of an Historical Relation. The Good must never fail to prosper, and the Bad must be

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[36]_S.C._, II, 13.

> always punish'd: Otherwise the Incidents, and particularly the Catastrophe which is the grand Incident, are liable to be imputed rather to Chance, than to Almighty Conduct and to Sovereign Justice. The want of this impartial Distribution of Justice makes the Coriolanus of Shakespear to be without Moral,[37]

and that

> indeed Shakespear has been wanting in the exact Distribution of Poetical Justice not only in his Coriolanus, but in most of his best Tragedies, in which the Guilty and the Innocent perish promiscuously. . . . The Good and the Bad then perishing promiscuously in the best of Shakespear's Tragedies, there can be either none or very weak Instruction in them: For such promiscuous Events call the Government of Providence into Question, and by Scepticks and Libertines are resolv'd into Chance.[38]

Similarly, Johnson, in the Preface to his edition of Shakespeare's plays (1765) had complained that Shakespeare

> sacrifices virtue to convenience, and is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose. From his writings indeed a system of social duty may be selected, for he that thinks reasonably must think morally; but his precepts and axioms drop casually from him; he makes no just distribution of good or evil, nor is always careful to shew in the virtuous a disapprobation of the wicked; he carries his persons indifferently through right and wrong, and at the close dismisses them without further care, and leaves their examples to operate by chance.[39]

Since Coleridge believed that virtue is its own reward

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[37]John Dennis, "On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear," in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, ed. D. Nichol Smith (2nd ed. rev; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p.26.

[38]"On the Genius and Writings of Shakespear," p.26.

[39]Samuel Johnson, "Preface," in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, p.114.

and that men need no ulterior motive to be good, he was able to accept a greater degree of unpleasant realism in the action of a play than most earlier English critics had been. He does not object, for example, to the fact that as undoubtedly good a character as Cordelia suffers at the end of King Lear. The term "poetic justice" crops up very seldom in his criticism, and then not always in the sense of a system of just deserts.[40] And although he complains that the "pardon and marriage" of a character as evil (in his eyes) as Angelo, at the end of Measure for Measure, "baffles the strong indignant claim of justice,"[41] he is here referring to the justice administered by man and society rather than the justice meted out by fate. His objection is not that Shakespeare depicts a world in which evil prospers, but that he sets a bad example of justice in making his characters pardon a man whose crimes they are fully aware of.

Coleridge, then, does not demand that the literary work be made "moral" at the expense of the facts of life. The poet must be a good man, but his goodness consists not in giving us clear-cut advice on morality totally abstracted from the real world, but in exploring

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[40]For a fuller discussion of Coleridge's use of the term "poetic justice," see Chapter VI, section 2 of this thesis.

[41]S.C., I, 113.

morality and human nature by searching his own heart honestly:

> I quite agree with Strabo, as translated by Ben Jonson in his splendid dedication of the Fox--that there can be no great poet who is not a good man, though not, perhaps, a goody man. His heart must be pure; he must have learned to look into his own heart, and sometimes to look at it; for how can he who is ignorant of his own heart know anything of, or be able to move, the heart of any one else? [42]

Poetic excellence therefore necessarily implies philosophical profundity, and indeed Coleridge believed that "No man was ever a great poet without being a great philosopher."[43]

For Coleridge the greatest and the most moral of all poets was Shakespeare, because he explored human nature most philosophically and at the greatest depth. Coleridge constantly points out how much Shakespeare "elevates and instructs,"[44] and how he keeps "at all times the high road of life."[45] Shakespeare's greatness is the highest that any poet can attain--the glory of having penetrated behind the facade of external reality to discover by Reason the eternal principles of life, and the seeing not only what is and what always will be, but why it must be so;[46] and this, in Cole-

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[42]M.C., p. 427.

[43]S.C., II, 314.

[44]S.C., II, 18.

[45]S.C., II, 266.

[46]Thus Coleridge claims that Shakespeare "first conceived what the forms of things must be and then went

ridge's terms, is a search for the ultimate spiritual reality, the principle of unity behind all things. Coleridge frequently, therefore, draws attention to Shakespeare's exemplification of moral principles; to give but one example:

> Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the great end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortune, if they withdraw us from or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing, until the time had escaped when we ought to have acted.[47]

In Coleridge's criticism Shakespeare is at once the touchstone of excellence in literary insight generally, and, in particular, of excellence in dramatic creation. In his lectures on Shakespeare Coleridge gives the reasons for Shakespeare's greatness, explaining his art, the nature of his genius, and relating the one to the other. In his lectures on other dramatists, like Beaumont and Fletcher and Ben Jonson, Coleridge at once explains wherein their own literary virtue consists and measures them against Shakespeare, showing why they are not of his stature.

One of Coleridge's main purposes in his lectures on drama, therefore, is to show that Shakespeare is greater than all other poets because his works are

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humbly to the oracle of nature to ask whether he was right." S.C., II, 17.

[47]Foakes, p.128.

more moral. An important subsidiary purpose is to show that those critics (and although he seldom mentions names his attack seems to be directed against the eighteenth century critical tradition) who thought Shakespeare's works immoral were wrong, and that their judgment was the result of a shallow and artificial view of life, a view which saw only the veneer, not the essential hidden from sight which only true philosophy can discover. Coleridge's defence of Shakespeare's morality against this view is both forceful and aggressive, and it can be summarised under two points. The first is that those who level a charge of immorality against Shakespeare mistake manners for morals:

> It was absolutely necessary, in order to form a proper judgment <on the question of the morality of Shakespeare's works>, that a distinction should be made between _manners_ and _morals_, and that distinction being once clearly and distinctly comprehended, Shakespeare would appear as pure and admirable a writer, in reference to all that we ought to be, and to all that we ought to feel, as he is wonderful in reference to intellectual faculties.
>
> By manners he meant that which was dependent on the particular customs and fashions of the age. Even in a state of comparative barbarism of manners there might be and was morality.[48]

According to Coleridge Shakespeare sometimes offends against our manners or sense of decency, but he never clothes "vice in the garb of virtue"[49] or makes vice

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[48] Foakes, pp. 72 - 73.

[49] _S.C._, II, 266.

appear pleasant or morally permissible. Grossness is not the same as immorality, just as manners are not the same thing as morals.

The second and more aggressive line of defence is that Shakespeare, by his grossness, steadfastly prevents us from seeing evil and impure passion as anything but abhorrent or merely amusing, unlike the drama of sentiment (of Coleridge's own time) which tends to euphemise and glorify pleasure and passion. In other words, Coleridge takes the offensive here and claims that the "refined" alternative to Shakespeare's grossness is itself immoral, and that Shakespeare has at least the virtue of calling a spade a spade:

> In Shakespeare there are a few gross speeches, but it is doubtful to me if they would produce any ill effect on the unsullied mind, . . . but in some of the modern moral plays, as well as in some novels, there is a systematic undermining of all morality; [they are] written in the true cant of humanity that has no object, where virtue is not placed in action, or in the habits that lead to action, but, like the title of a book I have heard of, they are a "hot-huddle of indefinite sensations." In those the lowest excitements to Piety are obtruded upon us. . . .In short, I appeal to the whole of Shakespeare's writings whether his gross is not either the mere sport of fancy, dissipating the low feeling by exciting in us intellectual feelings, and only injuring where it offends: while the modern Dramas injure in consequence of not offending. Shakespeare's worst passages are grossness against the degradations of our nature: our modern plays are too often delicacies in favour of them.[50]

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[50] Foakes, p.74.

The drama of sentiment[51] delighted in euphemism. Not only did it gloss over the basics of life, refusing to show any element of coarseness, but it refused to see evil as being innate in man, maintaining that evil was instilled by social institutions and that once these had been abolished man's basic goodness would be released and the problems of the world would be solved. Coleridge's objection is that too much euphemising of the facts of life is dangerous: the sentimental drama, for example, leads us to accept and delight in sin and sensual passion merely for its own sake, by presenting them in fine colours. In contrast, Shakespeare's coarse jokes are far healthier because they lead us to laugh at grossness, thus rejecting it and helping us to transcend the sensual. In similar vein is Coleridge's attack on the novelist Samuel Richardson, whom he dislikes because he concentrates our attention on

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[51] I use the phrases "drama of sentiment" and "sentimental drama" as convenient terms for that form of drama, arising in the mid-eighteenth century and reaching its most extreme form in the works of Kotzebue (1761 - 1819), which gained its effect entirely through an appeal to the emotions rather than to the intellect or sense of humour. For an excellent brief account of the work of Kotzebue and other "Jacobin" dramatists see Crane Brinton, The Political Ideas of the English Romanticists (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), Chapter I "Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin," pp. 8 - 47, especially section 4 "The Jacobin Dramatists," pp. 36 - 40. I have avoided the term "Jacobin drama" because although Coleridge disliked the political views that manifested themselves in such plays, he objects to them mainly on moral and artistic grounds.

our passions and the lower part of our nature:

> R<ichardson>, he allowed, evinces an exquisite perception of minute feeling but there is a want of harmony, a vulgarity in his sentiment. He is only interesting. Shakespeare, on the contrary, elevates and instructs. Instead of referring to our ordinary situations and common feelings, he emancipates us from them and, when most remote from ordinary life, is most interesting. . . . C<oleridge> took occasion on mentioning R. to express his opinion of the immorality of his novels. "The higher and lower passions of our nature are kept thro' seven or eight volumes in a hot-bed of interest. Fielding is far less pernicious, for the gusts of laughter drive away sensuality."[52]

Perhaps it would not be too much to say that Coleridge also finds the drama of sentiment immoral because it distorts life as it really is and tries to pass off fantasy for reality with the sole real object of creating pleasurable emotion and excitement, entirely unconnected with truth, in such a way as to give the audience mere superficial entertainment. Thus Coleridge complains of a play he saw in Germany,

> in which the wife of a colonel who had fallen into disgrace was frantic in the beginning, middle, and end; frantic first for grief, and afterwards for joy. A distortion of feeling was the feature of the modern drama of Kotzebue and his followers. . . .its misanthropes were tender-hearted, and its tender-hearted were misanthropes.[53]

But the most dangerous trait of the sentimental drama is that, far from inspiring us to perfect ourselves, to aspire to a higher moral state, it shows us our own

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[52]S.C., II, 18.

[53]S.C., II, 284 - 285.

basic goodness, so that even our vices are made to seem virtuous, and thus leaves us smug and self-satisfied. Coleridge complains that the sentimental drama has just as much morality,

> and just that part of it, which you can exercise without a single Christian virtue--without a single sacrifice that is really painful to you!--just as much as flatters you, sends you away pleased with your own hearts, and quite reconciled to your vices, which can never be thought very ill of, when they keep such good company, and walk hand in hand with so much compassion and generosity.[54]

In contrast to this, Coleridge places the Elizabethan English and the seventeenth century French drama. And it is here that we see Coleridge's most unbiased and considered view of the French drama, when he does not feel himself obliged to defend the supposed "irregularity" of Shakespeare's art to the classical order of the French. Both the Elizabethan and the French seventeenth century dramatists appeal to our intellects, and thus animate our souls, whereas the sentimental drama

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[54] B.L., II, 160. Lamb had much the same opinion of the sentimental drama. He complained that in this type of play the spectator has

> his coward conscience (that forsooth must not be left for a moment) stimulated with perpetual appeals --dulled rather, and blunted as a faculty without repose must be--and his moral vanity pampered with images of national justice, notional beneficence, lives saved without the spectator's risk, and fortunes given away that cost the author nothing.

"On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century," in The Works of Charles Lamb, ed. Sir Thomas Noon Talfourd (London: George Bell and Sons, 1885), p. 405

excites our emotions and our senses, and deadens our souls:

> the French tragedies are consistent works of art, and the offspring of great intellectual power. Preserving a fitness in the parts, and a harmony in the whole, they form a nature of their own, though a false nature. Still, they excite the minds of the spectators to active thought, to a striving after ideal excellence. The soul is not stupefied into mere sensations by a worthless sympathy with our own ordinary sufferings, or an empty curiosity for the surprising, undignified by the language or the situations which awe and delight the imagination.[55]

It is not, Coleridge points out, that Elizabethan and French seventeenth century drama has no emotional effect on us, but that this is in proportion with rational mental activity, whereas in sentimental drama the emotional response which the play strives for is an irrational one rooted in our own selfishness and self-pity. The tragic scenes of the "elder dramatists of England and France," he claims,

> were meant to affect us indeed, but within the bounds of pleasure, and in union with the activity both of our understanding and imagination. They wished to transport the mind to a sense of its possible greatness, and to implant the germs of that greatness during the temporary oblivion of the worthless "thing we are" and of the peculiar state, in which each man <u>happens</u> to be; suspending our individual recollections and lulling them to sleep amid the music of nobler thoughts.[56]

The essential difference between Coleridge's moral approach to literature and that of the eighteenth

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[55] <u>B.L.</u>, II, 158.

[56] <u>B.L.</u>, II, 159 - 160.

century is that eighteenth century critics tend to expect the moral element of a work to take the form of moral advice and incentives to the audience to be good, whereas Coleridge sees evil as springing from the self and therefore maintains that literature should make the audience forget themselves, lose themselves in the contemplation of principles which are out of reach of the senses and beyond the self. And he seems to imply that the good playwright uses dramatic illusion, which by an appeal to the imagination of the members of the audience encourages them to suspend their comparing power and lose their own individual identity, as a means to this end--hence his remark quoted above, that the great Elizabethan and French dramatists instilled in us a sense of our potential "during the temporary oblivion of the 'worthless thing we are.'" The value of literature, for Coleridge, is that it stimulates our imagination to contemplate something greater and more spiritual than ourselves. He claims that we should encourage children to read anything,

> which, being beyond their own sphere of action, should not feed self-pride. By the cultivation of our highest faculties we are alone superior to everything around us; and by the power of imagination (of which there was both intellectual and moral) in our present imperfect state, are we enabled to anticipate the glories and honours of a future existence. Without these we are inferior to the beast that perishes.[57]

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[57]*S.C.*, II, 293.

And literature, he thinks, cultivates our spiritual vision by giving us a love of "the Great" and "the Whole." Thus in a letter of 16th October, 1797, to Thomas Poole, Coleridge remarks,

> from my early reading of Faery Tales, & Genii &c &c--my mind had been habituated to the Vast--& I never regarded my senses in any way as the criteria of my belief. I regulated all my creeds by my conception not by my sight--even at that age. Should children be permitted to read Romances, & Relations of Giants & Magicians, & Genii? --I know all that has been said against it; but I have formed my faith in the affirmative.--I know no other way of giving the mind a love of "the Great," & "the Whole."--Those who have been led to the same truths step by step thro' the constant testimony of their senses, seem to me to want a sense which I possess--They contemplate nothing but parts--and all parts are necessarily little--and the Universe to them is but a mass of little things.--It is true, that the mind may become credulous & prone to superstition by the former method--but are not the Experimentalists credulous even to madness in believing any absurdity, rather than believe the grandest truths, if they have not the testimony of their own senses in their favor?--I have known some who have been rationally educated, as it is styled. They were marked by a microscopic acuteness; but when they looked at great things, all became a blank & they saw nothing--and denied (very illogically) that any thing could be seen; and uniformly put the negation of a power for the possession of a power--& called the want of imagination Judgment, & the never being moved to Rapture Philosophy! 58

Nichol Smith, in the Introduction to his Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, protesting against the verdict that Coleridge and Hazlitt "were the first to recognize and to explain the greatness of Shake-

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[58] Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. Earl Leslie Griggs (6 vols; Oxford: at the Clarendon Press, 1956 - 1971), I, 354 - 355.

speare,"[59] has asserted that "the eighteenth century could almost lose itself in panegyric of Shakespeare."[60] As I have shown, however, one respect in which Coleridge was more genuinely appreciative of Shakespeare than most of the eighteenth century critics Nichol Smith mentions, is in that of the morality of Shakespeare's plays. Robert Witbeck Babcock, in his book The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, somewhat more cautiously claims that "the genesis of super-idolatry of Shakespeare lay in the late eighteenth century" after 1766,[61] and that admiration for Shakespeare as a "moral philosopher" in particular developed only after 1767.[62] Despite their zeal in defending Shakespeare's morality, however, Coleridge would hardly have approved of these critics' defence or the type of moral thought it showed. The "new interest" in Shakespeare's morality, according to Babcock, "involved the question as to whether Shakespeare provided a good book of moral etiquette as a whole."[63] To back up his point, Babcock quotes Kenrick

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[59] Nichol Smith's Introduction to Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, p.xi.

[60] Nichol Smith's Introduction to Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, p.xiii.

[61] Robert Witbeck Babcock, The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, 1766 - 1799 (first published by the University of North Carolina Press, 1931. This edition New York: Russel & Russel, 1964), p.xxvii.

[62] The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, pp.130 - 131.

[63] The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, p.131.

describing Shakespeare in 1773 as a

> moral philosopher; his works containing a practical system of ethics . . . have perhaps contributed more to form our national character . . . than all the theoretical books of morality which have appeared in our language.[64]

Coleridge would have been horrified at the confusion of a "practical system of ethics" with moral philosophy--it is precisely that aspect of eighteenth century thought which confounds morality in maxims and practical advice on ethical conduct which he attacks so vigorously in his lectures and writings, for example:

> It was never my purpose, and it does not appear to be the want of the age, to bring together the rules and inducements of worldly prudence. But to substitute these for the laws of reason and conscience, or even to confound them under one name, is a prejudice, say rather a profanation, which I become more and more reluctant to flatter by even an appearance of assent, though it were only in a point of form and technical arrangement.[65]

Babcock is wrong, therefore, when he states that

> Point for point, from all the different angles, the early nineteenth century merely echoed the late eighteenth. In short, if the question were raised as to whether the nineteenth century produced any new criticism of Shakespeare, the answer would have to be--no.[66]

As I shall show in the remainder of this chapter, Babcock's claim is as extreme and untenable (with regard

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[64] Quoted in The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, pp. 131 - 132.

[65] Friend, I, 410.

[66] The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry, p.226.

to Coleridge, anyway) as the prejudice against the eighteenth century which he is attacking. It is true, for example, that both the late eighteenth century critics and Coleridge defended Shakespeare's morality; but since Coleridge had a substantially different concept of morality from that of the eighteenth century critics, he cannot be said to be either echoing or developing an eighteenth century line of argument on the moral effect of Shakespeare's plays. Criticism, after all, changes not only with differences of opinion as to the worth and interpretation of the works of specific writers, but also with the change and development of concepts inseparable from that criticism--such as concepts of morality, philosophy, and aesthetics.

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Another object of Coleridge's dramatic criticism, and in particular of his Shakespearean criticism, is to prove that Shakespeare's judgment is equal to his genius. Again this is partly a reaction against much eighteenth century criticism which had seen Shakespeare as the great child of nature, an original, wild and untutored genius, who, however, lacked art. During the early years of the eighteenth century Shakespeare

was seen as being a genius in so far as he was a sublime poet of nature, showing his audience life and truth as it really was. Thus Pope claimed that

> The Poetry of <u>Shakespear</u> was Inspiration indeed: he is not so much an Imitator, as an Instrument, of Nature; and 'tis not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks thro' him.[67]

But such comments were usually followed by a regretful remark on Shakespeare's lack of judgment. "Judgment" was most commonly used in the eighteenth century to denote the human powers of discrimination. When applied to the process of creating art, however, as Babcock points out, it seems to have meant "conscious artistry."[68] Thus, to say that Shakespeare was the sublime poet of truth and nature but that he lacked art was the same as saying that Shakespeare had great genius but poor judgment. Shakespeare lacked art or had poor judgment to the extent that he violated the principles of decorum in drama by mixing tragedy and comedy and failing to observe poetic justice and the unities of time, place and action. The eighteenth century critics tended to evaluate Shakespeare, as they evaluated most other poets, according

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[67] Alexander Pope, Preface to "The Works of Shakespear," (1725) in <u>Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare</u>, p.44.

[68] <u>The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry</u>, p.127.

to a "beauties and faults" system, by weighing the merits of his works against the demerits. The general opinion was that Shakespeare's beauties arose from his genius, whereas his faults arose from his judgment. And until the last decade of the century, no poet was seen as having so immense a gap, so wide a gulf, between his beauties and faults, as Shakespeare.[69] Johnson, for example, wrote that

> The work of a correct and regular writer is a garden accurately formed and diligently planted, varied with shades, and scented with flowers; the composition of _Shakespeare_ is a forest, in which oaks extend their branches, and pines tower in the air, interspersed sometimes with weeds and brambles, and sometimes giving shelter to myrtles and to roses; filling the eye with awful pomp, and gratifying the mind with endless diversity. Other poets display cabinets of precious rarities, minutely finished, wrought into shape, and polished unto brightness. _Shakespeare_ opens a mine which contains gold and diamonds in unexhaustible plenty, though clouded by incrustations, debased by impurities, and mingled with a mass of meaner minerals.[70]

Later in the century, however, critics started to glorify Shakespeare even _because_ of his contraven-

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[69]Thus in the mock Preface to his burlesque play _The Tragedy of Tragedies_ (staged in 1731), Fielding, parodying the style and manner of the commentators of his time on Shakespeare, says of the imaginary author of his work that "he is very rarely within sight through the whole Play, either rising higher than the Eye of your Understanding can soar, or sinking lower than it careth to stoop." _Eighteenth Century Comedy_, ed. Simon Trussler (2nd ed. rev; London: Oxford Paperbacks, 1969), p.219 .

[70]Johnson, "Preface," _Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare_, p.125.

tion of the rules. Johnson had soberly claimed in 1715 that "there is always an appeal open from criticism to nature."[71] Mrs. Montagu, in 1769, asserted that "Heaven-born genius acts from something superior to rules . . . . and has a right of appeal to nature herself."[72] Morgann, in 1777, declared that Aristotle would have said that "true Poesy is _magic_, not _nature_ . . . . To the Magician I prescribed no laws."[73] In short, what the eighteenth century critics had done was to create an unbridgeable gap between nature and criticism, genius and the rules, and, although eighteenth century critics eventually granted Shakespeare judgment, as Babcock points out,[74] it was at the price of destroying their critical framework and maintaining that Shakespeare was above human estimation. Thus, in 1785, the _Universal Magazine_ referred to Shakespeare's "own divine and incomprehensible genius."[75]

Coleridge disagreed with the whole critical

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[71]Johnson, "Preface," _Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare_, p.110.

[72]Quoted in _The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry_, p.52.

[73]Maurice Morgann, "An Essay on the Dramatic Character of Sir John Falstaff" (1777) in _Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare_, p.235.

[74]_The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry_, pp.127 - 131.

[75]Quoted in _The Genesis of Shakespeare Idolatry_, p.125.

and philosophical theory which led the eighteenth century to posit an opposition and contradiction between Shakespeare's judgment and genius. He maintains that "the contra-distinction itself between judgment and genius, rested on an utterly false theory."[76] The fact that eighteenth century critics saw Shakespeare as being above their rules and had to appeal on his behalf from criticism to nature demonstrated, in Coleridge's view, the inadequacy of eighteenth century criticism. It was the divorce in critical theory between art and nature which had led to the contra-distinction between genius and judgment, and, in reaction, Coleridge asserted firmly that "art cannot exist without nature."[77] Thus Coleridge's defence of Shakespeare's judgment is more than just that—it involves, too, a demonstration of the falsity of the old system of criticism and an attempt to build a new one. "Imagine not I am about to oppose genius to rules," Coleridge states,

> Nó! the comparative value of these rules is the very cause to be tried. The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty.[78]

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[76] S.C., II, 305 - 306.

[77] S.C., I, 222.

[78] S.C., I, 223.

Coleridge thinks that the placing of Shakespeare beyond human rules of criticism only leads to vague and unprofitable eulogy or anarchy and incomprehension:

> it was a happy medium and refuge, to talk of Shakespeare as a sort of beautiful _lusus naturae_, a delightful monster,--wild, indeed, without taste or judgment, but like the inspired idiots so much venerated in the East, uttering, amid the strangest follies, the sublimest truths. In nine places out of ten in which I find his awful name mentioned, it is with some epithet of "wild," "irregular," "pure child of nature," etc., etc., etc. If all this be true, we must submit to it; tho' to a thinking mind it cannot but be painful to find any excellence, merely human, thrown out of all human analogy, and thereby leaving us neither rules for imitation, nor motives to imitate. But if false, it is a dangerous falsehood; for it affords a refuge to secret self-conceit,--enables a vain man at once to escape his reader's indignation by general swoln panegyrics on Shakespeare, merely by his _ipse dixit_ to treat what he has not intellect enough to comprehend, or soul to feel, as contemptible, without assigning any reason, or referring his opinion to any demonstrated principle; and so has left Shakespeare as a sort of Tartarian Dalai Lama, adored indeed, and his very excrescences prized as relics, but with no authority, no real influence.[79]

Obviously, therefore, Coleridge did not deny that the eighteenth century _enjoyed_ Shakespeare, as Nichol Smith and Babcock seem to imply. Coleridge's complaint is that eighteenth century critics and readers did not enjoy Shakespeare for the right reasons, and that their critical system was not adequate

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[79] _S.C._, I, 219 - 220.

to deal with him. It is in this light that Coleridge's statement that "foreigners" (German critics like Schlegel) first taught the British to "appreciate justly" Shakespeare's "mighty genius"[80] must be seen--"appreciate" here means more than just "enjoy;" it denotes a systematic understanding and a critical and aesthetic enjoyment rising from fixed and eternal principles.

Coleridge, then, proposes to build a new system of literary criticism which will be adequate to deal with all writers. One of his declared intentions in giving the 1811-1812 lectures was to "erect some standard by which all writers of verse may be measured and ranked."[81] This intention is repeated in the prospectus to his course of lectures in 1818-1819:

> To convey, in a form best fitted to render them impressive at the time and remembered afterwards, rules and principles of sound judgment, with a kind and degree of connected information, such as the hearers, generally speaking, cannot be supposed likely to form, collect, and arrange for themselves, by their own unassisted studies.[82]

According to Coleridge, the old criticism had been based on accidents of taste, and was thus subject to the ravages of time, whereas his critical system would escape prescriptiveness by subjecting the work only to the laws of eternal reason, and by taking into account

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[80] S.C., II, 164.

[81] S.C., II, 46.

[82] S.C., II, 300.

the historical conditions under which the work was produced:

> Not only a multitude of individuals but even whole nations [are] so enslaved to the habits of their education and immediate circumstances as not to judge disinterestedly even on those subjects, the very pleasure from which consists in their disinterestedness---subjects of taste and belles lettres. Instead of deciding concerning their own modes and customs by any rule of reason, nothing appears natural, becoming, or beautiful but what coincides with the accidents of their education. In this narrow circle individuals may attain exquisite discrimination, as the French critics have in their own literature, but a true critic can no man be without placing himself on some central point in which he can command the whole; i.e., some general rule, which, [as] founded in reason, or faculties common to all men, must therefore apply to all men.
>
> This will not produce despotism, but on the contrary true tolerance. He will indeed require, as the spirit and substance of a work, something true in human nature, and independent of circumstances; but in the mode of applying it, he will estimate genius and judgement according to the felicity with which this imperishable soul has clothed and adapted itself to the age, place, and existing manners.[83]

In other words, by concentrating on the eternal truths of the human psyche, Coleridge believes that he can create a critical method whose judgments will never grow suspect through time.

Coleridge's contribution to the genius/judgment controversy was to maintain that genius cannot exist without judgment anyway. His reasons for coming to such a conclusion can be seen in incredulous statements, such as, "What, are we to have miracles in sport? Or does

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[83]S.C., I, 221.

God choose idiots to convey divine truths by?" [84] The implication is that truth itself can only be discovered by intelligent judgment; it cannot be a matter of accident or uninformed genius. Coleridge never considers systematically the relation between genius and judgment, as he does between many of the other terms and concepts in his philosophical and critical system, such as Reason and Understanding, or fancy and imagination; but from such statements as "the judgement of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius--nay, . . . his genius reveals itself in his judgement, as in its most exalted form," [85] it is clear that genius depends on and manifests itself in judgment. In fact the same might be said of genius and judgment as Coleridge remarked on the distinction between genius and talent:

> Genius must have talent as its complement and implement, just as, in like manner, imagination must have fancy. In short, the higher intellectual powers can only act through a corresponding energy of the lower.[86]

Judgment is clearly the lower "intellectual power," but without judgment no man could be a genius, although presumably judgment can exist without genius--and

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[84] S.C., I, 229.

[85] S.C., I, 126.

[86] "Table Talk," August 20, 1833, in Table Talk and Omniana, p.252.

Southey, the "jewel-setter,"[87] the example of talent without genius, would probably be a case in point. Shakespeare's judgment is revealed by Coleridge in the particular details of construction of the play, or in the form that the incidents of the play are communicated to us. Thus Shakespeare shows fine judgment in having other characters present to witness the Ghost's initial appearance in Hamlet, so that we do not think that this is merely a work of the hero's overwrought imagination.[88] His judgment is also shown in the naturalness of each character's language and behaviour. In fact Coleridge is always commenting on Shakespeare's judgment in his lectures, even when he does not state that he is doing so. For example, his statement that Shakespeare "never wrote anything without design,"[89] in so far as it contradicts the old belief that Shakespeare wrote irregularly and almost instinctively, rather than according to a rational plan, would also seem to imply a comment on Shakespeare's judgment. Coleridge, therefore, uses the term "judgment" to describe the skill and artistry with which Shakespeare orders the incidents and particular events of the play

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[87] See B.L., I, 221.

[88] Foakes, p.125.

[89] S.C., II, 124.

(the means) to the end, which is his intention, the effect he requires the work to have on the audience. As such this is one of the most important terms in his dramatic criticism.

Lastly, Coleridge intended to prove in his lectures that Shakespeare's works are the result of meditation as well as observation. This distinction is related to that between genius and judgment in that it, too, is used to refute the eighteenth century image of Shakespeare as a mere "child of nature." The eighteenth century had seen Shakespeare as being the mirror of life and nature, and this had been a term of praise, but there was also an implication that he showed what he observed with as little discrimination as a mirror reflects what passes before it. Particularly, it was felt that no principle of philosophy or learning guided his works:

> That much knowledge is scattered over his <Shakespeare's> works is very justly observed by Pope, but it is often such knowledge as books did not supply. He that will understand Shakespeare, must not be content to study him in the closet, he must look for his meaning sometimes among the sports of the field, and sometimes among the manufactures of the shop.[90]

Just as the later eighteenth century critics had claimed that Shakespeare was above the rules of criticism, so they frequently praised Shakespeare for being

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[90] Johnson, "Preface," in *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, p.127.

above ordinary human philosophy. The germ of this trend can be seen in Johnson's statement that

> There is a vigilance of observation and accuracy of distinction which books and precepts cannot confer; from this almost all original and native excellence proceeds. Shakespeare must have looked upon mankind with perspicacity, in the highest degree curious and attentive.[91]

In fact the late eighteenth century frequently seemed to think that the faithful reproduction of nature was superior to a philosophical study of it. Coleridge disagreed. For him, external nature as we see it, life as it actually takes place, and people as they really are, were largely a matter of accidentality, containing in themselves little worth unless enlightened by the penetrating lamp of philosophy, showing us the significance of these apparently trivial details within the divine structure of the universe. Observation alone, therefore, will produce a mere copy of life, showing the accidents of life and nature, whereas, to create a significant artistic whole, the poet must produce an imitation of life showing things not only as they appear, but also as they are in essence. Imitation, Coleridge asserted, is "not the mere copy of things, but the contemplation of mind upon things,"[92] and to produce an imitation of life the poet

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[91] Johnson, "Preface," in Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare, p.128.

[92] S.C., II, 91.

must use observation guided by meditation or philosophical insight which is the result of thorough and earnest contemplation. Thus Coleridge is reported as saying that

> When he used the term meditation, he did not mean to say that Shakespeare was without observation. Mere observation might be able to produce an accurate copy of a thing, and even furnish to other men's minds more ideas than even the copyist possessed, but they would only be in parts and in fragments: Meditation looked at every character with interest--only as it contains in it something generally true and such as might be expressed in a philosophical Problem.[93]

It is because he has the power of meditation that Shakespeare can describe "feelings which no observation could teach:"

> Shakespeare's observation was preceded by contemplation: he first conceived what the forms of things must be and then went humbly to the oracle of nature to ask whether he was right.[94]

The same power and process enables Shakespeare

> to have the _universal_ which is potentially in each _particular_, opened out to him in the _homo generalis_, not as an abstraction of observation from a variety of men.[95]

Coleridge discusses Shakespeare's meditation most often in connection with his characterisation. He claims that no amount of observation alone could produce a character representative of an entire species

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[93]Foakes, pp. 67 - 68.

[94]_S.C._, II, 17.

[95]_M.C._, p.44.

or class of human beings, which could speak for the human race. Meditation enables Shakespeare to create characters which are, in modern terminology, individualised types. Meditation allows him to arrive at the type, and observation individualises this and makes it into a believable character:

> The truth is, Shakspere's characters are all *genera* intensely individualized; the results of meditation, of which observation supplied the drapery and the colours necessary to combine them with each other.[96]

Thus, both in the case of his remarks on genius and judgment and in that of his remarks on meditation and observation, Coleridge is rebelling against a view, prevalent in much eighteenth century criticism, that Shakespeare wrote erratically and almost instinctively as a freak instrument of nature, rather than as a thinker and an artist who mastered the secrets of life and ordered them in each work in such a way as to form a synthesized and organic whole. For the eighteenth century, Shakespeare was a genius in so far as he was a poet of exquisite observation and a child of nature. For Coleridge, Shakespeare could not be a genius unless he combined his brilliance with judgment and tempered his observation with meditation--"no man was ever a great poet without being a great philosopher."[97]

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[96] *S.C.*, I, 137.

[97] *S.C.*, II, 314.

Bearing these views in mind, it is not surprising that he rejected the eighteenth verdict that Shakespeare had little education;[98] for an uneducated man would indeed seem unlikely to possess the powers of judgment and meditation which Coleridge imputes to Shakespeare:

> What was the Love's Labour/'s/Lost? Was it the production of a person accustomed to stroll as a vagabond about the streets, or to hold horses at a playhouse door, and who had contented himself with making observations on human nature? No such thing! 99

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Coleridge's purposes in giving his lectures, then, can be summarised:

1) To erect a standard by which all writers can be evaluated. This involved creating a new critical system, since, to his mind, the eighteenth century critical system had proved itself inadequate.
2) To illustrate the moral principles of the work

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[98]This view gained predominance after Richard Farmer had produced his brilliant and scholarly "Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare," (1767). Farmer's essay can be found in <u>Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare</u>, pp. 151 - 202.

[99]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 107.

under study and to test their validity--this was the central test of the greatness of the work. In his lectures, therefore, Coleridge tried to show that Shakespeare was the greatest of all writers because he contained the most sanguinary moral principles.

3) To show that the eighteenth century system of criticism was not based on nature, that their method of criticism was therefore philosophically untenable, and, particularly, that their criticism of Shakespeare was incompetent.

4) To show that, when examined philosophically, the eighteenth century contra-distinction between genius and judgment was invalid.

5) To show that Shakespeare was the poet of meditation as well as of observation, and that in fact no great literary work can be produced without the aid of both, contrary to the eighteenth century belief.

6) Finally, to show that Shakespeare was in his own right a great philosopher and not just a freak instrument of nature, and that in fact every great poet must of necessity also be a great philosopher.

To the claims of Babcock that Coleridge added nothing to eighteenth century critical remarks on Shakespeare, one need only reply that he subjected their critical structure to the test of philosophy and

found it wanting, and that out of what seemed to him to be the anarchy of late eighteenth century criticism he built a systematic structure, a new system of rules, so that Shakespeare and all other writers could be justly estimated without either eulogy or scorn according to philosophic criteria. As Herbert Read points out,

> The distinction of Coleridge, which puts him head and shoulders above every other English critic, is due to his introduction of a philosophical method of criticism.[100]

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[100] Herbert Read, Coleridge as Critic (London: Faber and Faber, 1949), p.18.

PART II

COLERIDGE'S THEORY AND APPLICATION OF THE PRINCIPLE OF GENRE

CHAPTER III

COLERIDGE'S CONCEPT OF GENRE

As I have pointed out in my first two chapters, Coleridge attempts throughout his lectures on drama (and indeed in all his writings on criticism) to build up a methodological _system_ of criticism--a critical structure sure and eternal because based on reason and permanently true philosophy. Such a system necessarily involves some means of classification, and Coleridge obviously realised this. He was fully aware of the danger of misunderstanding a work and slandering it by that form of critical rigidity which judges one genre by the criteria of another, and he asserts that the critic, while bearing in mind the criteria of general poetic excellence, should also apply to the work under study evaluative criteria derived from the particular principle on which the _class_ or (as he elsewhere terms it) "genus" of the poem is based:

> I should call that investigation fair and philosophical, in which the critic announces and endeavours to establish the principles, which he holds for the foundation of poetry in general, with the specification of these in their application to the different _classes_ of poetry. Having thus prepared his canons of criticism for praise and condemnation, he would proceed to particularize the most striking passages to which he deems them

> applicable, faithfully noticing the frequent or infrequent recurrence of similar merits or defects, and as faithfully distinguishing what is characteristic from what is accidental, or a mere flagging of the wing. Then if his premises be rational, his deductions legitimate, and his conclusions justly applied, the reader, and possibly the poet himself, may adopt his judgement in the light of judgement and in the independence of free-agency. If he has erred, he presents his errors in a definite place and tangible form, and holds the torch and guides the way to their detection.[1]

And in his practical criticism Coleridge adheres to this principle: as Richard Harter Fogle points out in his book The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism, it is not often noticed how frequently Coleridge uses words like "class", "kind", "species", and "genus".[2] His whole defence of Shakespeare, for example, depends on a point of classification--that Shakespeare is writing a different type of drama from that of the classical and neo-classical dramatists.

At first glance it may appear as if a system of classification and a concept of genre would seem arbitrary, in Coleridgean terms "mechanical", and therefore out of place in Coleridge's "organic" theory of literature. Coleridge's philosophy, as I have indicated in my first chapter, is deeply concerned with wholeness, unity in his system being the ultimate reality, and he believed that

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[1] B.L., II, 85.

[2] Richard Harter Fogle, The Idea of Coleridge's Criticism (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1962) p.3. See also note 6 to Chapter One, p.162, where Fogle gives a rough count of all the significant instances of the use of these terms in Coleridge's criticism.

all attempts to divide reality must necessarily distort it. Thus, "we ask not what proportion" the long neck of the swan

> bears to the body;--through all the changes of graceful motion it brings itself into unity, as an harmonious part of an harmonious whole. The very word "part" imperfectly conveys what we see and feel; for the moment we look at it in division, the charm ceases.[3]

However, just as the critic must analyse a work in order to show its organic unity, so must he classify, for analysis is impossible without a system of classification:

> The office of philosophical _disquisition_ consists in just _distinction_; while it is the priviledge of the philosopher to preserve himself constantly aware, that distinction is not division. In order to obtain adequate notions of any truth, we must intellectually separate its distinguishable parts; and this is the technical _process_ of philosophy. But having so done, we must then restore them in our conceptions to the unity, in which they actually co-exist; and this is the _result_ of philosophy.[4]

The point is that distinction is not the same as division. The philosopher knows that the terms he is distinguishing are really inseparably interrelated, that they are artificial but necessary fictions, and he reconciles them at the end to show their essential unity. The process of generic distinction in literature is much like that of critical analysis of a poem. Just as in the latter the critic sees the part of the poem both as an end in itself and as an organic component of the whole, so in the former

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[3]_B.L._, II, 245.

[4]_B.L._, II, 8.

the critic considers the work both in relation to its own genre and in relation to the whole body of literature.

Another reason why a system of generic classification might seem to betray the philosophical grounds of Coleridge's criticism is that he argues that the organic work acts "creatively under laws of its own origination."[5] Each work, therefore, is produced according to its own individual principles. This being so, we might be tempted to ask, should it not be judged by criteria derived from its own principles rather than from the principles of a class to which the work is supposed to belong? Will not the judging of the work by generic criteria rather than criteria derived from its own laws stifle the work's individuality for us, and lead us to misunderstand the work itself? Coleridge does not formulate a precise answer to this question--as Fogle points out "Coleridge's value on this subject lies not in an articulated system but in his perception that kind and individual co-exist."[6] It becomes clear from a reading of Theory of Life that (according to Coleridge) in reality things differ in degree, and that we have to abstract our notions of the different classes from the gradations in nature in order

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[5] S.C., I, 223.

[6] Fogle, p.4.

to render intelligible the differences between things in the whole scale of nature. Although class is always an abstraction and therefore subjective, however, it need not be arbitrary, and Coleridge gives certain indications as to how different classes can be abstracted from degrees of difference without falsifying the basic nature of the constituents of the classes. The philosopher must first examine things in their simplest forms. This will reveal kind. He should then study the degrees of evolution of the thing. From here onwards his distinction of objects into classes is necessarily intuitive. But since he shows the whole evolutionary pattern, rather than just his own ideas of kind, he guards against arbitrariness and error:

> For as to abstract the idea of kind from that of degrees, which are alone designated in the language of common use, is the first and indispensable step in philosophy, so are we the better enabled to form a notion of the kind, the lower the degree and the simpler the form is in which it appears to us. We study the complex in the simple; and only from the intuition of the lower can we safely proceed to the intellection of the higher degrees. The only danger lies in the leaping from low to high, with the neglect of the intervening gradations. . . . these degrees will themselves bring forth secondary kinds sufficiently distinct for all the purposes of science, and even for common sense, . . . for this is one proof of the essential vitality of nature, that she does not ascend as links in a suspended chain, but as the steps in a ladder; or rather she at one and the same time ascends as by a climax, and expands as the concentric circles on the lake from the point to which the stone in its fall had given the first impulse.[7]

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[7]Theory of Life, p.41.

Coleridge's system seeks to show unity in multeity in anything under study, to show the germ which controls the development of the whole. Genres can be seen as the channels through which the various forms of literature which can now be distinguished have developed. Coleridge's concept of genre is therefore different from that of the neo-classicists in that, whereas for them genres were eternally the same, being governed by certain fixed rules, for Coleridge they are constantly developing, and can be judged only by reference to the laws of their creation. Thus he claims that:

> Could a rule be given from _without_, poetry would cease to be poetry, and sink into a mechanical art. . . . The _rules_ of the IMAGINATION are themselves the very powers of growth and production. The _words_, to which they are reducible, present only the outlines and external appearance of the fruit.[8]

Certain key principles, the "germs" of their respective genres, can be isolated, however, as will become clear later in this chapter. As Fogle points out,[9] the value of genre in Coleridge's system is that it reconciles the particular with the universal, the individual with the kind. It can separate the body of literature into different types while making allowance for individual differences of works within each kind.

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[8] _B.L._, II, 65.

[9] Fogle, pp.3 - 4.

True to his philosophic method, Coleridge comes to his conclusions on the characteristics of the various genres as a result of examining the very beginnings of literature and then showing its evolution and gradual diversification. He sees poetry as a whole as beginning in religious ritual merged with hero-worship of past warriors:

> the established religion . . . was a local polytheism, namely, a worship of departed heroes, and of the powers of nature personified, sometimes separate, but more often confounded together, so that the god was at once a traditional hero, and the symbol or spirit of some part of nature. For Polytheism among a rude and illiterate race would almost necessarily blend with hero worship.[10]

At these religious rituals hymns would be sung in praise of the god, and these would have both narrative and lyrical parts, the narrative recounting the god's actions, and the lyrical addressing the god directly and being of a devotional nature. The narrative parts of the hymn gradually came to be given to different individual singers, while the lyrical parts continued to be given to the chorus:

> In the hymns of celebration the different voices would sometimes sing in chorus, sometimes separately, and in

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[10] S.C., I, 184.

> responses. The narrative parts of the hymns, containing accounts of the God's own actions . . . would be sung in notes less removed from animated dialogue, than in devotional and lyric addresses. The mode of relating events in rude and simple states of society is always highly dramatic, and before any distinct idea of a drama had been conceived, the narrative parts of the hymn would already have become a sort of heroic dialogue in recitative. This greatly interesting the passions and curiosity of auditors and spectators, [it] would gradually be divided from the lyric or choral parts. Each singer would soon attach themselves to some particular part, and in speaking in the character of the heroes would feel himself as assuming that character gradually. . . . The devotional part always remained under the form of chorus.[11]

At this stage poetry has already become drama, because, for Coleridge, the essence of drama is that "instead of simply narrating the actions of men, it represents men acting; or if it narrates, it is narrative in representation."[12] It is important to notice that in this explanation of the rise of drama Coleridge has remained true to his belief (which will be examined in more detail later in this chapter) that the critic should concentrate both on what is essential to the literary work under study and on what is accidental. Here he has shown what is essential to drama—live representation—and what is merely accidental, arising from the same ritual and devotional circumstances which gave birth to drama itself—the chorus. In his examination of the evolution of early forms of literature Coleridge constantly uses this dual

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[11] S.C., I, 185 - 186.

[12] S.C., I, 183.

method so that he can show that Shakespearean plays adhere to the essentials of good drama, and that those classical rules such as the unities, which they have been criticised for violating, are really only accidental elements in the early dramatic works to which modern dramatists under different circumstances can no longer be expected to adhere.

Elsewhere in his criticism, Coleridge classifies "the first form of poetry" (presumably the "ritual" type of poetry described above) as being the epic, whose essential characteristics are an episodic sequence and a completely "objective" tone:

> The first form of poetry is the epic, the essence of which may be stated as the successive in events and characters. This must be distinguished from narration, in which there must always be a narrator, from whom the objects represented receive a colouring and a manner;--whereas in the epic, as in the so-called poems of Homer, the whole is completely objective, and the representation is a pure reflection.[13]

Coleridge is pointing out--to rephrase his comments in modern terms--that epic has an omniscient, reliable narrator, and it is interesting to note that he is here anticipating modern critical thought on narrative technique and point of view. He is distinguishing epic, which has an objective or reliable narrator, from those forms of narrative, like the novel, which give a certain "slant" to the story itself through the introduction of a fictional narra-

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[13] S.C., I, 138.

tor with a definite personality of his own. The fact that Coleridge goes on to discuss drama, indicates that he means to distinguish epic, drama, and such narrative forms as the novel, according to their modes of presentation to the audience. But this purpose becomes forgotten, and he goes on to discuss the differences between the philosophical ideas on which epic and drama are respectively based instead. Nevertheless it seems clear that he originally meant to distinguish between the completely objective form in which drama is presented, with the action taking place directly on stage, and the subjective form of presentation of the modern prose fiction work, coloured by the personality of the fictional narrator who intervenes between the events of the story and the audience; and to show both forms as springing from epic which (like the novel) has an episodic structure, and (like drama) displays the events which make up the basic story in an objective manner.[14]

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[14]It is interesting to compare the statement of the modern critics Robert Scholes and Robert Kellogg in their book, The Nature of Narrative (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), pp. 51 - 52, that

> Oral narrative invariably employs an authoritative and reliable narrator. He is gifted, like Homer and the "Author" of the Old Testament, with the ability to observe an action from every side and to tell the secrets of men's hearts. . . . We are also accustomed to referring to this reliable, omniscient, omnipresent narrator as "objective." By this we mean that, again like Homer and the authors of Old Testament narrative, he does not talk about himself, but about the characters and actions of his story. Nor does he cultivate the intimacy of his audience at the expense of their sympathy with the story.

And, on page 4 of their work, they contrast the mode of

In the evolution of drama, the first stage after epic, the stage in which poetry becomes drama, is the "historic drama" or history play. This is the transition stage between epic and tragedy, which Coleridge regards as being the purest form of drama and which, in fact, he frequently denotes by the term drama. In commenting on the history play Coleridge considers it both in relation to the development of the dramatic form, and to that of the philosophical ideas towards the tragic vision. The link between the history play and epic is the fact that both tell of the actions of some character in the past; but, whereas the emphasis in epic is on event (and therefore on an orderly successive sequence), a history play should show us the <u>spirit</u> of our past, since, for Coleridge, one of the most important functions of the historic drama was to arouse patriotism and an almost mystical feeling for their country in the hearts of the audience. Thus the history play should sacrifice the episodic sequence of epic for a sequence which, although less chronologically successive, would emphasise more the cause and effect sequence of history. In this way the history play is able to show the significance behind

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presentation of narrative to that of drama:

> By narrative we mean all those literary works which are distinguished by two characteristics: the presence of a story and a story-teller. A drama is a story without a story-teller; in it characters act out directly what Aristotle calls an "imitation" of such action as we find in life.

events, rather than just the events themselves:

> In order that a drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed. In the composition, care must be taken that there appear no dramatic improbability, as the reality is taken for granted. It must, likewise, be poetical;—that only, I mean, must be taken which is the permanent in our nature, which is common, and therefore deeply interesting to all ages. The events themselves are immaterial, otherwise than as the clothing and manifestation of the spirit that is working within. In this mode, the unity resulting from succession is destroyed, but is supplied by a unity of a higher order, which connects the events by reference to the workers, gives a reason for them in the motives, and presents men in their causative character. It takes, therefore, that part of real history which is the least known, and infuses a principle of life and organization into the naked facts, and makes them all the framework of an animated whole.[15]

Coleridge therefore defines historic drama as being "a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect to cause and time poetically by dramatic fiction."[16]

But the true germ of the particular genre is the philosophical idea which moulds the form of the play to its own ends. Thus Coleridge explains that the "drama" and the epic are both "founded on the relation of providence to the human will;"[17] but from here the two genres differ, because each takes a different point of view as

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[15]S.C.,I, 138 - 139.

[16]S.C.,I, 139.

[17]S.C.,I, 138.

to what this relation is:

> In the epic poem fate is represented as overruling the will, and making it instrumental to the accomplishment of its designs. . . . In the drama, the will is exhibited as struggling with fate, a great and beautiful instance and illustration of which is the Prometheus of Aeschylus; and the deepest effect is produced, when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will, and the opposition of the individual as springing from a defect.[18]

Though he uses the word "drama" here, it is clear that Coleridge means tragedy, both because his definition of comedy, which is a form of the general category of drama, is inconsistent with this description, comedy, as Coleridge sees it, laying its emphasis on the human body and senses, while tragedy lays its emphasis on the will, intellect and spirit; and because echoes of the distinction made in the passage quoted, applied to the difference between <u>tragedy</u> and epic, can be found in reports of his verbal lectures, where Coleridge was naturally more careful about his terminology; for example,

> Fully to comprehend the nature of the Historic Drama, the difference should be understood between the epic and tragic muse. The latter recognizes and is grounded upon the free-will of man; the former is under the control of destiny, or, among Christians, an overruling Providence.[19]

Comedy developed out of tragedy, being an attempt to ridicule others by means of a burlesque of tragedy:

> Let two persons join in the same scheme to ridicule a third, and either take advantage of, or invent,

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[18] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 138.

[19] <u>S.C.</u>, II, 277.

> some story for that purpose, and mimicry will have already produced a sort of rude comedy. It becomes an inviting treat to the populace, gains an additional zest and burlesque by following the already established plan of tragedy; and the first man of genius who seizes the idea, and reduces it into form, into a work of art, by metre and music, is the Aristophanes of the country. How just this account is appears from the fact that in the first or old comedy of the Athenians, all the _dramatis personae_ are living characters introduced under their own names.[20]

Comedy therefore starts as a kind of inversion of tragedy for satirical purposes. The two forms (early Greek tragedy and comedy) have only one thing in common--that both are ideal, as indeed are the comedies and tragedies of Shakespeare: "that is, the comedy of Aristophanes rose to as great a distance above the ludicrous of real life, as the tragedy of Sophocles above its tragic events and passions."[21] In all other respects the two forms are complete opposites. Coleridge agrees with Plato that it is "the business of one and the same genius to excel in tragic and comic poetry, and that the tragic poet ought at the same time to contain in himself the powers of comedy"[22] because "opposites illustrate each other's nature."[23] This being so, Coleridge defines comedy in terms of tragedy,

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[20] _S.C._, I, 189.

[21] _S.C._, I, 169.

[22] _S.C._, I, 168.

[23] _S.C._, I, 168.

showing how their basic principles conflict. The essence of tragedy is a concentration on the human will, representing the spirit as subjugating the sensual aspects of the body in a struggle for the attainment of some great goal:

> The tragic poet idealizes his characters by giving to the spiritual part of our nature a more decided preponderance over the animal cravings and impulses than is met with in real life.[24]

In comedy, on the other hand, the mind is shown as being a slave to the body and the sensual instincts: "The comic poet idealizes his <characters> by making the animal the governing power and the intellectual the mere instrument."[25] The comic vision or "sportive ideal . . . subsists in the perfect harmony and concord of the higher nature with the animal as with its ruling principle, its acknowledged regent."[26] It is for this reason that the coarseness of the Aristophanic allusions and jests is justified in context--it is necessary in order to present a point of view and philosophical idea frankly and fearlessly; and the coarse jests are therefore means ordered to an end:

> Hence we may admit the appropriateness to the old comedy, as a work of defined art, of allusions, descriptions, etc., which morality can never justify--and only with reference to the author himself,

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[24] S.C., I, 170.

[25] S.C., I, 170.

[26] S.C., I, 171.

> and only as being the effect rather [than] the cause of the circumstances in which he wrote, can consent even to palliate.[27]

Up till the passage just quoted, Coleridge has been using the words "comedy" and "tragedy" to denote the essential elements of tragedy and comedy. He then moves on, in the passage above, to describe some of the aspects of one form of embodiment of the comic principle--a sub-species of the comic genre--namely, the "old comedy" of Aristophanes. Coleridge now proceeds to distinguish this form of comedy from a new type arising at this stage of history--the middle comedy as produced by Menander and Philemon. This form moves further away from the old comic structure which was dominated by the idea of tragic destiny. The old comedy had imitated the ideas and structure of tragedy in order to invert its ends; both had been essentially ideal. The middle comedy was less ideal, more concerned with ordinary life and experience. In fact Coleridge seems to doubt whether this is really comedy at all--he seems to think that comedy must necessarily be the opposite pole to tragedy, so that each can be defined in terms of the other:

> Euripides had already brought tragedy lower down and by many steps nearer to the real world, and the passionate admiration which Menander and Philemon expressed for him, and their open avowals that he was their great master, entitle us to consider it

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[27]<u>S.C.</u>, I, 171.

> [the new comedy] as a middle species between tragedy and comedy--not tragi-comedy, a thing of heterogeneous parts, but a complete whole founded on principles of its own. Throughout we find it distinguishing itself from tragedy, not, as the genuine old comedy, contrasting and opposing. . . . The entertainment, or middle comedy, remained within the circle of experience. Instead of the tragic destiny it introduced the powers of chance. . . .[28]

In a broader sense, the middle comedy distinguishes itself from both tragedy and the old comedy in that it is an altogether inferior form of drama. Besides opposing mundane experience to the idealism of tragedy and comedy, it opposes prudential advice to their presentation of the eternal questions of true morality:

> In tragedy [the moral] law, [either as obeyed] or violated, above all consequences--its own main[tenance or violation con]stituting the most important of all consequences--[forms the ground; the new come]dy, [is based on] prudence or imprudence, enlightened or misled self-love. The whole moral system of the entertainment, exactly like that of fable, (here a hint concerning its unfitness for children) consists in rules of prudence.[29]

I have already discussed Coleridge's ideas on the differences between prudence and morality in Chapter II of this thesis. To recapitulate briefly, the end of morality can only be achieved by the means of altruism and transcendence of the self, while prudence is characterised by egoism and a desire for personal rewards and safety. Prudence is an amoral quality, therefore, being not at all concerned with questions of good and evil in

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[28] S.C., I, 171 - 172.

[29] S.C., I, 172.

themselves, but its egoism contradicts the very principle of morality. Literature, according to Coleridge, should help us transcend the self and contemplate truth and morality, and in as far as prudence obstructs this aim it obstructs the end of literature.

Here, therefore, we see the flexibility of Coleridge's generic method of criticism--he does not confine himself to a discussion of differences in form between tragedy, old comedy and middle comedy, but relates the formal differences to the ideological differences, shows not only the differences between tragedy and comedy but their essential similarity, and relates the principles on which each is based (idealism and a concern with morality in the case of tragedy and old comedy, experience and a concern with the prudential in the case of middle comedy) to the criteria of general poetic excellence.

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Coleridge considered that drama in the ancient world developed no further than this, the Romans merely presenting "imitations or translations of the Greek drama."[30] He therefore moves on to discuss the origins

[30] S.C., I, 190.

of "modern" drama. The barbarian invasions and the consequent "dark ages" had sundered the links of nations with classical civilisation; nothing was known of the ancient literature, and so drama had once more to evolve from a primitive state.[31] Since the circumstances of its birth were different, the final result, too, is different from classical drama. This re-birth took the form of Mystery plays produced by the clergy and nobles in order to spread the message of Christianity to the illiterate masses. And so, once more, drama had its origins in religion.[32] Because, to attract audiences, the plays had to delight as well as teach, tragi-comedy came into being. This was a new form, unknown in the ancient world, which came into being in the modern world rather than the ancient because of different germinal circumstances; the early Greek rituals, as Coleridge describes them, were spontaneous, originating from the legends of the people, and therefore they would not have had to try to attract audiences as the producers of the Mystery plays did:

> the necessity of at once instructing and gratifying the people produced the great distinction between the Greek and the English theatre. To this we must attribute the origin of tragi-comedy, or a representation of human events more lively, more near the truth and permitting a larger field of moral instruction, a more ample exhibition of the recesses of the

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[31]"The Origins of Modern Drama," S.C.,I, 189 - 196.

[32]S.C.,I, 192; S.C.,II, 8.

> human heart under all the trials and circumstances that most concern us, than was known or guessed at by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides.[33]

This tragi-comedy became the root from which both modern tragedy and modern comedy were to develop. The fool and the clown of "modern" drama Coleridge considers to have evolved from Vice and the Devil.[34] The Mysteries were succeeded by Moralities or "dialogues and plots of allegorical personages,"[35] and gradually some characters of these dramas, such as Nero, became so famous that they were introduced in their own right "instead of the moral quality for which they were so noted."[36] And so modern drama came into being.

In discussing modern drama Coleridge gives a new definition of the form. As I have already mentioned in this chapter, he had defined drama as being "narrative in representation." The purpose of that definition was to enable the critic to detect the point at which poetry becomes drama. This new definition is a more complex one which has an evaluative potential and can be applied to sophisticated forms of drama:

> A theatre, in the widest sense of the word, is the general term for all places of amusement thro' the ear or eye in which men assemble in order to be

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[33]S.C., I, 194.

[34]S.C., I, 195, 192.

[35]S.C., I, 195.

[36]S.C., I, 195.

amused by some entertainment presented to all at the same time. . . . The most important and dignified species of this genus is, doubtless, the STAGE (res theatralis histrionica), which, in addition to the generic definition above given, may be characterized (in its Idea, or according to what it does, or ought to, aim at) as a combination of several, or of all the fine arts to an harmonious whole having a distinct end of its own, to which the peculiar end of each of the component arts, taken separately, is made subordinate and subservient; that, namely, of imitating reality under a semblance of reality. Thus, Claude imitates a landscape at sunset, but only as a picture; while a forest-scene is not presented to the audience as a picture, but as a forest: and tho' in the full sense of the word we are no more deceived by the one than by the other, yet are our feelings very differently affected, and the pleasure derived from the one is not composed of the same elements as that afforded by the other, even on the supposition that the quantum of both were equal. In the former it is a condition of all genuine delight, that we should not be deluded.[37]

The first part of the definition specifies that drama (which Coleridge here denotes by the word "stage") belongs to the genus of "theatre," or public entertainment. The second part of the definition points out that it is a harmonious synthesis of all the other arts, and the final part of the definition states that the end of drama is "to imitate reality under the semblance of reality." In this phrase drama is shown to be similar to all other arts in that it imitates (rather than copies) reality, but shown to be different in that only drama requires us to pretend for the moment that the imitation is real. This is the basis of Coleridge's theory of dramatic illusion, and it enables him to dispose with the more

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[37]S.C., I, 199 - 200.

particular definition that drama is live representation, since this is necessarily included in the idea of imitating reality under the semblance of reality--we would not be able to pretend that the representation was in fact reality if one actor recited all the parts.

Just as Coleridge uses a more complex definition of drama in discussing Elizabethan or "modern" plays, so he believes that modern drama is richer and more complex than the ancient. Both forms have beauty, but the beauty of the one must not be judged by criteria abstracted from that of the other. Coleridge's whole defence of Shakespeare and his contemporaries is based on his claim that they are writing a different type of drama, which has different rules, and therefore must be judged by different criteria:

> We call, for we see and feel, the swan and the dove both transcendently beautiful. As absurd as it would be to institute a comparison between their separate claims to beauty from any abstract rule common to both, without reference to the life and being of the animals themselves--say rather if, having first seen the dove, we abstracted its outlines, gave them a false generalization, called them principle or ideal of bird-beauty and then proceeded to criticize the swan or the eagle--not less absurd is it to pass judgement on the works of a poet on the mere ground that they have been called by the same class-name with the works of other poets of other times and circumstances, or any ground indeed save that of their inappropriateness to their own end and being, their want of significance, as symbol and physiognomy.[38]

The point is that a literary work must be judged accord-

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[38] *S.C.*, I, 196.

ing to the extent to which it has realised its end, and if the ends of two respective works are different they cannot be expected to use the same means. The Greek dramas were intended to appeal to the "outward senses."[39] This being so, observation of the unities was important. The Shakespearean drama, on the other hand, was intended to appeal to the reason and the imagination:

> The Shakespearean drama appealed to the imagination rather than to the senses, and to the reason as contemplating our inward nature, the workings of the passions in their most retired recesses. But the reason, as reason, is independent of time and space; it has nothing to do with them. Hence the certainties of reason have been called <u>eternal truths</u>; <u>ex. gr.</u>, the endless properties of the circle--what connection have they with this or that age, this or that country? The reason is aloof from time and space; the imagination [has] an arbitrary control over both; and if only the poet have such power of exciting our internal emotions as to make us present to the scene in imagination chiefly, he acquires the right and privilege of using time and space as they exist in the imagination, obedient only to the laws which the imagination acts by.[40]

It is true that in another passage Coleridge stated that "the plays of Shakespeare"

> are in no respect imitations of the Greeks: they may be called analogies, because by very different means they arrive at the same end; whereas the French and Italian tragedies I have read, and the English ones on the same model, are mere copies, though they cannot be called likenesses, seeking the same effect by adopting the same means, but under most inappropriate and adverse circumstances.[41]

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[39] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 198.

[40] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 198.

[41] <u>S.C.</u>, II, 159.

But here the word "end" is being used in a broader sense to mean, for example, that both classical and Shakespearean tragedies achieve the tragic effect which is the end they are striving for.

Coleridge explains the difference between Shakespearean and classical drama more fully in comparing the difference between them to that between Latin and the Romance languages which he seems to have thought were formed out of "the decayed Roman and the northern tongues."[42] The Romance languages, he claims, are

> less perfect in simplicity and relation, the privileges of a language formed by the simple attraction of homogeneous parts, but yet more rich, more expressive and various, as one formed out of a chaos by more obscure affinities of atoms apparently heterogeneous. As more than a metaphor, as an analogy of this, I have named the true genuine modern poetry the romantic; and the works of Shakespeare are romantic poetry revealing itself in the drama. If the tragedies of Sophocles are in the strict sense of the word tragedies, and the comedies of Aristophanes comedies, we must emancipate ourselves of a false association from misapplied names, and find a new word for the plays of Shakespeare. They are in the ancient sense neither tragedies nor comedies, nor both in one, but a different genus, diverse in kind, not merely different in degree,--romantic dramas, or dramatic romances.[43]

Yet in his lectures Coleridge discusses Shakespeare's "comedies" and "tragedies," rather than his "romantic dramas, or dramatic romances," despite the fact that

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[42] S.C., I, 197.

[43] S.C., I, 197.

in another passage he says of Shakespeare:

> Divide his works into three great classes; no division can be made that applies to tragedy and comedy, for nature acknowledges none of these distinct sharp lines, and Shakespeare is the Poet of Nature, pourtraying things as they exist.[44]

The answer to this mystery seems to be that Shakespeare writes some plays with a predominantly tragic element, others with a predominantly comic element, even though these plays are not so tightly and unnaturally organised as to conform to classical rules of composition. It is therefore convenient to class them as tragedies and comedies while remembering that they are in fact different from the original Greek tragic and comic forms, having evolved from them--the concept of genre should not be applied so arbitrarily as to violate the work's individuality.

Coleridge's comparison of the difference between ancient and modern art with that between ancient and modern literature shows his conception of the different creative ends in each of the two ages:

> The Shakespearean drama and the Greek drama may be compared to statuary and painting. In statuary, as in the Greek drama, the characters must be few, because the very essence of statuary is a high degree of abstraction, which prevents a great many figures being combined in the same effect. In a grand group of Niobe, or in any other ancient heroic subject, how disgusting even it would appear, if an old nurse were introduced. Not only the number of figures must be circumscribed, but nothing

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[44] S.C., II, 313.

> undignified must be placed in company with what is dignified: no one personage must be brought in that is not an abstraction: all the actors in the scene must not be presented at once to the eye; and the effect of multitude, if required, must be produced without the intermingling of anything discordant.
>
> Compare this small group with a picture by Raphael or Titian, in which an immense number of figures may be introduced, a beggar, a cripple, a dog, or a cat; and by a less degree of labour, and a less degree of abstraction, an effect is produced equally harmonious to the mind, more true to nature with its varied colours, and, in all respects but one, superior to statuary. The man of taste feels satisfied, and to that which reason conceives possible, a momentary reality is given by the aid of the imagination.[45]

Here the characteristic excellencies of ancient art and literature are seen as being concord, dignity and abstraction, and Coleridge describes the means they use to achieve these effects. In modern art, on the other hand, there is a greater concentration on concrete reality, and an effect of harmony is produced out of apparent ugliness and discord. In each form a work is excellent to the extent that it achieves its end—the full exploitation of the possibilities of the form—but the form or genre of modern painting is superior to that of ancient statuary because it has a greater potential, because it can raise and transform the ugliness of common life to beauty whereas the statuary cannot admit discord. Modern art, since it appeals to the imagination rather than the senses, can afford to show a larger canvas, greater themes and greater variety, to suggest the

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[45] S.C., II, 159 - 160.

sublime and the infinite, as is made clear by another passage in note form:

> Ancients, statuesque; moderns, picturesque. Ancients, rhythm and melody; moderns, harmony. Ancients, the finite, and, therefore, grace, elegance, proportion, fancy, dignity, majesty,—whatever is capable of being definitely conveyed by defined forms or thoughts. The moderns, the infinite and [the] indefinite as the vehicle of the infinite; hence more [devoted] to the passions, the obscure hopes and fears—the wandering thro' [the] infinite, grander moral feelings, more august conceptions of man as man, the future rather than the present,—sublimity.[46]

The big danger in generic criticism, as Coleridge sees it, is to mistake the accidental circumstances of the composition of a particular work or type of work for essentials. The essential of the work is the spirit which creates it, runs through it, and gives it life. The accidentals are the particular circumstances of the time and place in which the work was produced, which it incorporates as material, and which often limit or modify its form in some way:

> Poetry in its essence [is] a universal spirit, but which in incorporating itself adapts and takes up the surrounding materials, and adapts itself to existing circumstances. What it cloaks itself in, it glorifies like a plant, dependent on the soil for many things, yet still retaining its original form[?] Essentials, therefore, and accidents are the two grounds of judgement.[47]

And in another similar passage, Coleridge claims that "to judge with fairness of an author's works, we must

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[46] S.C., I, 222.

[47] S.C., I, 230 - 231.

observe, firstly, what is essential, and secondly, what arises from circumstances."[48]

Coleridge clearly thinks that the neo-classical critics have mistaken the accidentals of drama in the ancient world for the essentials of all drama. The unities of time and place, for example, were accidentals, being "mere inconveniences attached to the local peculiarities of the Athenian drama."[49] In particular, unity of place had to be observed in the Greek theatre since the chorus was always on stage, the plays were not divided into scenes or acts, and therefore there was no way of indicating realistically a change in the place of the action to the audience.[50]

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[48]S.C., II, 260.

[49]S.C., I, 5.

[50]See S.C., II, 263. It is interesting to compare the views of the modern critics Fred B. Millett and Gerald Eales Bentley on this point. Discussing ancient Greek drama on page 31 of their book The Art of the Drama (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1935), (hereafter referred to as Millett and Bentley), they claim that one of

> the repeated problems of the dramatist was the necessity of explaining the constant presence of the chorus, which also offered almost insuperable difficulties to any change of place or time. This is the chief reason why Greek tragedies generally had unity of place and tried to have unity of time.

The general trend of Coleridge's comments on the unities in the Greek and Elizabethan theatre would seem to be acceptable to the modern critical mind, therefore. It is important to notice, however, that he was obviously unaware that the Elizabethan plays themselves were not divided into scenes or acts as such, although he is correct in as far as there were presumably times when, no characters being on stage, the audience would be

It remains to consider Coleridge's application of the principle of genre to practical criticism and evaluation, and particularly to the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries, since it is easily conceivable that as ardent an admirer of Shakespeare as Coleridge might fall into the trap of condemning all those dramatists who do not use the same means and who do not write the same type of drama as Shakespeare. His method of criticism is first to examine objectively the characteristics of the writer. He occasionally notes

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more easily able to imagine a change in the place of the action than was the case in the Greek theatre. But it should also be borne in mind, contra such generalisations however true on the whole, that the Greek dramatists did not always observe the unities. Thus E.F. Watling, the translator of Sophocles: Electra and Other Plays (Hammondsworth: Penguin Books, 1953), points out in his "Notes to Women of Trachis," p.216, that

> Trachis, the scene of the play, is a town on the Malian Gulf, between Thermopylae and the mouth of the river Spercheus. Some twenty miles out to sea, beyond the narrow entrance to the gulf, lies the north-westerly tip of the long island of Euboea, the point at which Heracles is reported to have paused on his homeward journey. The time allowed for the passage of the various persons to and fro between these two places, and for the intervening incidents, would seem to strain dramatic licence to an excessive degree if we considered the play as a continuous action; it is rather to be read as a sequence of episodes separated by indefinite lapses of time.

obvious excellencies, but is wary of condemning any characteristic as a fault at so early a stage. Thus, in a highly systematic study of Ben Jonson's literary characteristics he decides that Jonson is original and that his works are very different from Shakespeare's. His characteristics, as noted by Coleridge, can be summed up thus:

1) His characters are abstractions--one prominent feature is taken from the whole man, blown up and personalised.
2) He observes accurately, but only what is likely to appeal to the senses. He does not concern himself with moral or intellectual characteristics but with manners.
3) These manners are exhibited in such a way as to bring out the predominant humours of the piece.
4) He invents plots and situations very skilfully for the display of his characters.
5) Great opulence of thought is evident in his works, but this is not the result of a "growth from within," as in Shakespeare, but rather "the produce of an amassing power in the author," which becomes evident in the fact that he borrows a great deal from earlier writers.[51]

The fact that Jonson is original indemnifies him from

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[51] M.C., pp.46 - 47.

any charge arising from his borrowing from earlier writers--to have achieved this originality he must have transformed these materials into his own ideal, just as the plant incorporates elements drawn from the soil into its own form.

Coleridge's verdict on Jonson is that his dramas present caricatures rather than characters. This being so, his comic plays fail to pass the test of comedy. This does not mean that his plays are bad, however--they are excellent in another genre, namely, farce:

> comedy demands characters, and leaves caricatures to farce. The safest and truest defence of old Ben were to call his _Epicaene_ the best of farces. The defect in the Morose, as in other[s] of Jonson's _dramatis personae_, lies in this: that the accident is not a prominence growing out of and nourished by the _character_ which still circulates in it, but the character rises out of the accident --say rather, consists in the accident. . . .
> P.S.--All the above, and more, will have been justly said, if and whenever the drama of Jonson is brought into "comparisons of rivalry" with the Shakespearean. But this should not be. Let its inferiority to the Shakespearean be at once fairly owned; but at the same time as the inferiority of an altogether different _genus_ of the drama. On this ground, old Ben would still maintain his proud height. He no less than Shakespeare stands on the summit of his hill,--and looks round him like a master--tho' his be Lattrig and Shakespeare's Skiddaw.[52]

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[52] _M.C._, 56 - 57. c.f. Millett and Bentley, p.116: "In general it may be said that melodrama is a lower form of tragedy and farce a lower form of comedy."

Thus, in Coleridge's system respect can be given to a writer as an expert in his own genre, while the critic is still able to retain a complex evaluation scale owing to the fact that one genre can be considered superior to another. The important rule is not to criticise plays in one genre by the criteria of another--Jonson's works, which are really farces, should not be criticised according to the rules of comedy. Coleridge's observations on Shakespeare's Comedy of Errors, which he regarded as a farce, explain why the characteristics of Jonson's plays, as described above, make them comedies rather than farces:

> A proper farce is mainly distinguished from comedy by the license allowed, and even required, in the fable, in order to produce strange and laughable situations. The story need not be probable, it is enough that it is possible. A comedy would scarcely allow even the two Antipholuses; because, although there have been instances of almost indistinguishable likeness in two persons, yet these are mere individual accidents, casus ludentis naturae, and the verum will not excuse the inverisimile. But farce dares add the two Dromios, and is justified in so doing by the laws of its end and constitution. In a word, farces commence in a postulate, which must be granted.[53]

In short, comedy should present us with universal truths and should prefer a probable impossibility to an improbable probability, since its end is the communication of a kind of truth. The end of farce, however, is pure amusement, as is made clear by another of Coleridge's

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[53]S.C., I, 99.

comments on this form:

> The definition of a farce is, an improbability or even impossibility granted in the outset; see what odd and laughable events will fairly follow from it.[54]

This being so, caricature is an excellence in farce to the extent that it causes amusement. Since the emphasis is not on truth to life in this form, moreover, Jonson's invention of situations for the display of his characters is perfectly legitimate whereas in comedy this would be a fault since it is an artificial device.[55]

A direct attack on the practice of criticising across genre lines can be seen in Coleridge's defence of Jonson's _Catiline His Conspiracy_, and _Sejanus_:

> A fondness for judging one work by comparison with others, perhaps altogether of a different class, argues a vulgar taste. Yet it is chiefly on this principle that the _Catiline_ has been rated so low. Take it and _Sejanus_ as compositions of a particular kind---viz., as a mode of relating great historical events in the liveliest and most interesting manner, and I cannot help wishing that we had whole volumes of such plays. We might as rationally expect the excitement of the _Vicar of Wakefield_ from Goldsmith's _History of England_, as that of _Lear_, _Othello_, etc., from the _Sejanus_ and _Catiline_.[56]

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[54]"Table Talk," April 7, 1833, in _Table Talk and Omniana_, p.206.

[55]cf. Millett and Bentley who claim that Oscar Wilde's _The Importance of Being Earnest_ is a farce on the grounds that "the fundamental humor of the piece is based on situation, not character, and . . . a large proportion of the comic scenes are the result of gross exaggerations." (p.122).

[56]_M.C._, pp. 57 - 58.

Here again, as in many of his remarks on Shakespeare mentioned above, Coleridge's defence rests on the claim that the means of these plays are well ordered to achieve the end desired; and indeed in Coleridge's critical theory one of the main reasons for classifying plays into genres is to make criteria of criticism accord with the extent of difference between the means and the ends of the different plays themselves.

Beaumont and Fletcher fare less well than Jonson in Coleridge's evaluation. They are the most "lyrical of our dramatists,"[57] and show great literary talent, but their very lyricism makes them unsuitable to be dramatists:

> I scarcely recollect any scene or passage in Beaumont and Fletcher that is exclusively tragic, that is not in a higher degree poetic--i.e., capable of being narrated by the poet in his own person in the same words, with strict adherence to the character of the poet.[58]

Coleridge was well aware, therefore, of the need to distinguish between poetry and drama. He did, however, consider Beaumont and Fletcher masters of comedy, but comedy of an inferior type to the Shakespearean which is similar to tragedy in being an inversion of the tragic method and end:

> There is a kind of comedy which whoever produces must be capable of tragedy (Cervantes, Shakespeare); but there is another kind, and that, too, highly amusing, which is quite heterogeneous. Of this latter Fletcher was a great master. The surface and all its flowers

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[57] M.C., "Lewis Note", p.44.

[58] M.C., p.84.

> and open pleasures, serious or light, were his property--all his eye can see, ear hear--nothing more.[59]

Fletcher, therefore, is a dramatist of great skill, but his greatness is confined by his inability to transcend the sensuous.

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As we have seen Coleridge's concept and application of genre are far from arbitrary. He classifies works into species and sub-species in order not to confuse the criteria for judging the success with which one play has ordered its means to its own end with that of another whose end is quite different. At the same time he constantly bears in mind the fact that terms of classification are necessarily artificial and subjective, and does not try to force any work into an existing genre. Sometimes, instead, he defines a new genre, purely for the purpose of criticising certain individual works, as he does in his discussion of Jonson's historical plays, or describes and gives a name to the state to which certain plays have evolved from a certain genre, as in the case of the "romantic drama" of Shakespeare. Once

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[59] M.C., p.84.

these terms have served their purpose, however, they are forgotten--Coleridge never mistakes the label for the creation. Furthermore, Coleridge's concept of genre is complex. As Fogle points out,

> For him a literary genre will depend: (1) upon general human nature, in which it is grounded; (2) upon time, place, and circumstances--as these, for example, account in part for the difference between Greek tragedy and the "romantic drama" of Shakespeare; (3) more vitally upon the mental faculties that determine the genre in their scope, arrangement, and relative dignity; (4) correspondingly, upon the depth and breadth of reality which the genre is capable of imitating; and (5) upon the specific literary effect that is intended. Above all, genre in Coleridge is "motivated." Superficial form acquires meaning and life from the intellectual, emotional, and artistic reasons for its existence.[60]

In fact a sixth and very important factor could be added to this list--the philosophical view of life which gives rise to a genre, like the vision of the defeat of the rebelling human will by the powers of destiny, which is, for Coleridge, the core of tragedy. It is this complexity and all-inclusiveness of definition and description which keeps Coleridge's views from critical rigidity.

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[60] Fogle, p.4.

CHAPTER IV

COLERIDGE ON THE HISTORY PLAY

Coleridge's ideas about the definitive characteristics of the history play have been explained in the last chapter. It is essential to bear these ideas in mind in considering how he applies them to a study and analysis of the genre. To sum up: the history play must show the history of the people to whom it is addressed; there must be no dramatic improbabilty in the plot, as we accept the factual reality of the events in the play far more implicitly than we do in the case of tragedy or comedy; it must be "poetical"---that only must be shown which is permanent in our nature; the events of the play should be subservient to the idea conveyed of the spirit of the time and the law of cause and effect; hence consistency of cause and effect and the unity of interest implied by the spirit at work in the times replace the chronologically successive time sequence of the epic. For Coleridge, then, the history play, although superficially re-enacting a series of events from a specific time and place in the past, should transcend the merely temporal and show us the "principle of life and organization" in history, making the "naked facts . . . the framework of an

animated whole."[1] Moreover the history play need not be strictly accurate in its representation of past events--its real duty is to show "the essential truth of history."[2] The "informing idea", the principle that gives the work unity, therefore, is the poet's conception of the spirit of the period of which he writes; and this serves to distinguish the history play formally from tragedy, for example, whose informing idea lies in the conflict between the flawed tragic hero and the invincible powers of fate. Inevitably Coleridge's theory of the history play lays far less emphasis on character than does his theory of tragedy; for whereas the tragic hero's character plays an extremely important part in unifying the play, the unifying principle in the history play is an abstract force akin to zeitgeist.

Just as the playwright should point beyond character to the spirit at work in the times, in writing a history play, so he should point beyond events themselves to their significance; it is because Jonson's Catiline His Conspiracy and Sejanus concern themselves mainly with events rather than the chain of cause and effect, that they cannot be considered to be history plays--they constitute rather "a mode of relating great historical events in the liveliest and most interesting

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[1] S.C., I, 139.

[2] S.C., II, 32.

manner."[3] E.M.W. Tillyard, analysing the Elizabethan view of history, comes to the same conclusions, pointing out that for the Elizabethans "the chain of cause and effect, not the unrelated fact, is the essence of history."[4] To back up his views, Tillyard quotes from the Mirror for Magistrates:

> But seeing causes are the chiefest things
> That should be noted of the story writers,
> That men may learn what ends all causes brings,
> They be unworthy the name of chroniclers
> That leave them clean out of the registers
> Or doubtfully report them; for the fruit
> Of reading stories standeth in the suit.[5]

Tillyard also draws a distinction between plays like Gorboduc,"where the political morality came first, and the facts of history counted for little as mere information", and the Chronicle Plays, which show a tremendous thirst for factual knowledge of history and "exploit the mere accident of successive events,"[6] being comparatively unconcerned with the philosophical overview. Tillyard claims that, although Shakespeare owed something to the Chronicle Plays and to factual chroniclers like Holinshed, he was more inclined to the philosophical type

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[3] M.C., p.58.

[4] E.M.W. Tillyard, Shakespeare's History Plays (first published by Chatto and Windus, 1944. This edition Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p.86. Hereafter referred to as "Tillyard".

[5] Tillyard, p.86.

[6] Tillyard, p.105.

of chronicler, like Hall. His views, obviously based on wider reading of English literature and a more thorough, scientific study of the age as a whole than Coleridge had the advantage of, seem to bear out Coleridge's conclusions. Jonson's plays, from this point of view, would fall into the category of Chronicle Play.

Since many of Shakespeare's tragedies as well as his so-called "history plays" are set in the past, it becomes necessary to define and describe the history play carefully if it is to assume the status of a genre in its own right, because, as Coleridge realised, "there is as much *history* in *Macbeth* as in Richard <II>"[7]. As has been pointed out in the last chapter, Coleridge defines the "historic drama" as "a collection of events borrowed from history, but connected together in respect to cause and time poetically, by dramatic fiction."[8] In other words the poet must both remain roughly true to the events of the past which he shows, and use his poetic ability and philosophical insight to present these events in such a way that they manifest to the audience a deeper significance than history, studied accurately and objectively, normally conveys.

Coleridge draws a distinction between Shakespeare's "pure" history plays, his "mixed" dramas, and the other

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[7] *S.C.*, I, 143.

[8] *S.C.*, I, 139.

plays which, although drawing on history to a certain extent, are primarily either tragedies or comedies:

> The distinction does not depend on the quantity of historical events compared with the fictions, for there is as much *history* in *Macbeth* as in *Richard* <II>, but in the relation of the history to the plot. In the purely historical plays, the history *informs* the plot; in the mixt it *directs* it; in the rest, as in *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Cymbeline*, *Lear*, it subserves it.[9]

Coleridge does not explain what he means by the words "informs" "directs" and "subserves", but it is possible by drawing on his remarks on the part that history plays in Shakespearean drama, to make an intelligent conjecture. The following discussion is in the nature of an interpretation of what Coleridge seems to have meant by these terms rather than an explanation of them, and is necessarily subject to a degree of uncertainty, therefore. Nevertheless such an interpretation has to be undertaken in order to attain any comprehensive notion of Coleridge's concept of the history play. It is important to point this out because careful study of the way in which Coleridge uses these terms has led me to conclude that there is an inconsistency between his theory of the history play and his approach to it in practical criticism, as I will explain at the end of this chapter.

For Coleridge *Henry IV* is a mixed drama because characters are "introduced merely for the purpose of

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[9] *S.C.*, I, 143.

giving a greater individuality and realness ... ., by presenting, as it were, our very selves."[10] It would seem, then, that a play is a "mixed" drama, rather than a pure "historic drama", when the poet no longer uses only historical events and characters in his attempt to convey artistic and philosophical truth, but invents major characters of his own with whom we can identify. By contrast, the object of the pure history play is that of "familiarizing men to the great names of the country, and exciting patriotism."[11] The emphasis in this sentence is on national feeling, a concern for the community of the state rather than for individuals. And, if this sentence is compared with the previous passage quoted, it would seem that Coleridge thinks that the nation itself is the true subject of a "pure" history play, and that too close a focus on individuals will obscure this subject.[12]

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[10] S.C., I, 143.

[11] S.C., I, 153.

[12] It is interesting to compare the views on the history play of the modern critic, Georg Lukacs. In his book, The Historical Novel, trans. Hannah and Stanley Mitchell (new ed.; London: Merlin Press, 1962), especially Chapter Two, "Historical Novel and Historical Drama", pp. 89-170, Lukacs, developing the ideas of some of those nineteenth century German thinkers and critics, such as Hegel, Lessing and Goethe, who most influenced Coleridge himself, approaches the history play in much the same way as Coleridge, yet comes to surprisingly different conclusions. Like Coleridge he is interested in the manner in which the history play should be faithful to history, and, like Coleridge, maintains that the play should reflect not specific historical detail but rather those sociological conditions and forces peculiar to the

For Coleridge, King John, Henry VIII, and Richard II are Shakespeare's only "pure" history plays, and of these Richard II is the purest. Each of these plays is predominantly patriotic (Richard II and King John, especially, have some very patriotic orations), and none of them has a character so intensely focused as to dominate the whole of the audience's attention. It is true that Richard is a fully individualised character, but his weakness and inability to fulfil successfully his role as king provides an occasion for

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age and which constituted its zeitgeist. But whereas Coleridge concludes that the history play should therefore not distract the audience's attention from the state of the nation and the spirit that runs through it as a whole by concentrating too sharply on one individual, Lukacs argues that the playwright should create as his hero a highly individualised central character embodying in extreme form the dominant characteristics of the age. This is the "world-historical individual" (p.103) whose role it is to come into collision with other forces either in opposition to the zeitgeist (as in the case where the antagonist is a decaying ruling class), or accordant with it but in opposition to his own particular manifestation of the zeitgeist in his ideals. Lukacs, therefore, lays a much stronger emphasis on characterisation in his theory of the historical drama than Coleridge does. Nevertheless he insists that the zeitgeist of the period must inform the characterisation:

> the greatness of dramatic characterisation, the ability to make characters live dramatically does not only depend, therefore, on the playwright's ability to create character, in itself, but rather, indeed above all, upon how far it is given him, subjectively and objectively, to discover the characters and collisions in reality that will correspond to these inner requirements of dramatic form. [p.103]

us to see the discord in the state. Each of the plays, too, shows a deep concern for the health of the body politic. Therefore, when Coleridge states that in a purely historical play the history _informs_ the plot, he seems to mean that the study of the life and development of the nation in its past and an invocation of sentiment connecting and identifying the audience with their country form the main interest of the play, so that the nation itself, and not any single character, is the hero. When he says that in the mixed drama the history "directs" the plot, he means that the historical study of the nation channels the writer's presentation of the events of the play, providing an important and organic context which we are never allowed to forget, but which does not form a theme. Here individuals, such as Falstaff and Prince Hal, dominate. The events spring from history, and there is much concern with the safety of the state, but the nation itself is not the hero.

By an extension of these ideas it would seem logical to assume that a play in which history subserves the interests of the plot is one in which history is no longer an organic part of the play, where it merely serves a subordinate purpose, such as supplying a setting to give the events in the play a sense of reality. Although the playwright may represent historical events faithfully, the development of the play is no longer channelled or generated by the historic setting; history is no longer the inspiration. This type of play can be

divided into two sub-species: that in which there is a minumum of historical evidence to guide the poet, and that in which a great deal of historical detail is included in the play. King Lear is an example of the first type. Here, as in the case of Milton's Paradise Lost, the poet takes a myth or old legend and supplements the story's shortness, its lack of fact and detail, with poetic invention. The fact that it is an old story "rooted in the popular faith"[13] is enough to counteract its improbability. In such a case the poet draws upon his poetic intuition, his ability to see essential truth, in order to build on the legend and represent it dramatically in such a way that it will seem true to the audience. The truth, however, is of a different kind from that of history. It has a mythical or poetic truth rather, and the audience accepts it with faith rather than with literal belief. There is an interaction between historical fact and myth here. On the one hand the small amount of historical fact which exists is enough to dispel doubt; on the other, the legendary nature of the story, accepted popularly by faith, and the particular treatment the poet gives the story, evokes a poetic belief from the audience:

> Milton . . . has taken for his subject that one point of Scripture of which we have the mere fact

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[13] S.C. I, 59.

> recorded, and upon this he has most judiciously constructed his whole fable. So of Shakespeare's "King Lear": we have little historic evidence to guide or confine us, and the few facts handed down to us, and admirably employed by the poet, are sufficient, while we read, to put an end to all doubt as to the credibility of the story. It is idle to say that this or that incident is improbable, because history, as far as it goes, tells us that the fact was so and so. Four or five lines in the Bible include the whole that is said of Milton's story, and the Poet has called up that poetic faith, that conviction of the mind, which is necessary to make that seem true, which otherwise might have been deemed almost fabulous.[14]

Antony and Cleopatra is an example of the second of these sub-species--that in which, although a great deal of historical events are included in the play, history is nevertheless subservient in the plot:

> But of all perhaps of Shakespeare's plays the most wonderful is the Antony and Cleopatra. [There are] scarcely any in which he has followed history more minutely, and yet few even of his own in which he impresses the notion of giant strength so much, perhaps none in which he impresses it more strongly. This [is] owing to the manner in which it is sustained throughout--that he lives in and through the play--to the numerous momentary flashes of nature counteracting the historic abstraction, in which take as a specimen the [death of Cleopatra].[15]

It is clear that Coleridge regards this play primarily as a tragedy, not a pure history play or "mixed" drama, because he claims that it is a "formidable rival of the Macbeth, Lear, Othello, and Hamlet."[16] From the words

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[14] S.C., II, 175 - 176

[15] S.C., I, 86

[16] S.C., I, 86

"the numerous momentary flashes of nature counteracting the historical abstraction," it seems that here there is an even greater emphasis on individuality than in the "mixed" drama; that history is being used to present and glorify these characters, rather than the characters being used to make the history alive. The difference between the "mixed" drama and that in which history subserves the plot, therefore, seems to be one of degree: in a play like _Antony and Cleopatra_ (and _Macbeth_ would presumably fall into the same class) there is an even sharper focus on the individual rather than on the community, and history adds only excitement and setting.

In a class of its own is _Troilus and Cressida_, which "forms an intermediate link between the fictitious Greek and Roman histories, which we may call legendary drama, and the proper ancient histories; _ex.gr._ between the _Pericles_ or _Titus Andronicus_ and the _Coriolanus_, _Julius Caesar_, etc."[17] Here the main interests are the love affair between Troilus and Cressida and the question of the morality of the characters, but interwoven with these is the "secondary and subordinate purpose . . . of opposing the inferior civilization but purer morals of the Trojans to the refinements, deep policy, but duplicity and sensual corruptions of the Greeks;" [18] and

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[17] _S.C._, I, 108

[18] _S.C._, I, 110.

Shakespeare's ruling impulse

> was to translate the poetic heroes of paganism into the not less rude but more intellectually vigorous, more featurely warriors of Christian chivalry, to substantiate the distinct and graceful profiles or outlines of the Homeric epic into the flesh and blood of the romantic drama--in short, to give a grand history-piece in the robust style of Albert Durer.[19]

Here history at once "subserves" and dominates. It subserves to the extent that the morality and sophistication of the Trojan and Greek camps reflect that of Troilus and Cressida respectively, providing a wider context and significance to the character portrayed; and it dominates to the extent that Shakespeare brings the Homeric legend to life by injecting it with Christian chivalry which his audience is more likely to understand and appreciate.

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Coleridge only comments on one history play--"pure" or otherwise--in detail, and that is Richard II. This is the most patriotic of Shakespeare's history plays, and Coleridge seems almost to regard patriotic sentiment as fulfilling the role that excitement and action do in tragedy: "an historic play requires more excitement than a tragic; thus Shakespeare never loses an opportunity of

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[19] S.C., I, 110 - 111.

awakening a patriotic feeling."[20] His actual analysis of Richard II is in some ways rather disappointing after his theory of the history play, however. Having hinted that he is going to examine the play as an example of the "historic drama", whose great end is patriotism, where the emphasis is on the nation and the spirit of organisation in history rather than on the individual, he proceeds to take almost exactly the same approach to it as he does to Shakespeare's tragedies, analysing the characters as individuals, and making hardly any mention of patriotism beyond eulogising such patriotic orations as the famous "This royal throne of kings" speech[21] [II.i.40 - 52]. Coleridge's analysis of the play must be examined in detail for this to become clear, however.

He points out that, just as in Romeo and Juliet unity of feeling is supplied by the theme of youth and spring, the dominant characteristic which permeates the whole of the world represented in Richard II is weakness and ineffectuality:

> The plays of Shakespeare, as before observed of Romeo and Juliet, were characteristic throughout: --whereas *that* was all youth and spring, *this*

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[20] S.C., II, 279

[21] S.C., I, 143

> was womanish weakness; the characters were of extreme old age, or partook of the nature of age and imbecility.[22]

This "womanish weakness" applies not only to Richard, but to all the men of the King's party who, unlike Bolingbroke, put the welfare of the body politic above personal profit. Thus the Duke of York "is an evidence of a man giving up all energy under a feeling of despair,"[23] the Queen, Bushy and Bagot are shown as "talking high, but performing nothing,"[24] and the frequent occurrence of punning indicates that the characters are wasting their passions on words rather than actions, Gaunt on his deathbed being only one example.[25] In fact the play as a whole "is a history of the human mind, when reduced to ease its anguish with words instead of action, and the necessary feeling of weakness which such a state produces"[26]. Coleridge sees the collective mind of the whole nation within the play as being diseased, therefore. In his view the play shows England at a stage when the energy that should be used to generate action, is being turned into sentiment.

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[22] S.C., II, 279.
[23] S.C., II, 281.
[24] S.C., II, 281.
[25] See. Foakes, pp.118 - 119
[26] S.C., II, 281.

Such a state of mind is very similar to Coleridge's view of Hamlet's personality, and it is significant that, in the lectures of 1811 - 1812, he discussed Hamlet immediately after Richard II, and in the same lecture--lecture XII. Although these characteristics of weakness do not apply only to Richard, they are intensified in his character. He shows, for example,

> constant overflow of feelings; incapability of controlling them; waste of that energy which should be reserved for action in the passion and effort of resolves and menaces, and the consequent exhaustion [as in the threats of III.ii.36 - 62] and throughout.[27]

He shows his weakness by "seeking refuge in despair,"[28] and shows "a sort of wordy courage that betrays the inward impotence."[29] Coleridge seems to take Richard's character as the epitome of the condition of the nation as a whole, therefore, and he points out that Richard's position is that of "exponent of the life and power of the state."[30]

The above remarks would seem to indicate that Coleridge does show a concern in analysing the play to examine the state of the nation as a whole rather than the characters of mere individuals. In the rest of his commentary on Richard II, however, he spends most

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[27] S.C., I, 155.

[28] S.C., I, 155.

[29] S.C., I, 155.

[30] S.C., I, 151 - 152.

of his time analysing characters, especially that of Richard. It is possible that, by examining the state of mind of the King, who is the epitome of the nation itself, Coleridge meant to show the state of the nation in the play. But he does not make the connection clear. And his analysis of Richard is mainly confined to <u>individual</u> characteristics, such as the weakness and proneness to flattery that the position of kingship has instilled in him, which cannot apply to the nation in general.

Richard, in Coleridge's view, is the central figure who unites all the strands of the play. The action centres round him--York strives to be loyal to him, and Bolingbroke rebels against him. In Coleridge's words "it is Richard that breathes a harmony and a relation into all the characters of the play."[31] This is because we tend to see the characters primarily in their relationship to Richard. Coleridge points out that the "characters are connected, all by likeness and contrast."[32] York, like all those of the King's party, is similar to Richard in that he wastes his passion in words and fails to apply his wisdom in action:

> York is a man of no strong powers of mind, but of earnest wishes to do right, but contented if in himself alone he have acted well; he points out to

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[31] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 150.

[32] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 154.

> Richard the effects of his extravagance, and the dangers by which he is encompassed, but having so done he is satisfied: there is no future action; he does nothing, but remains passive.[33]

And Bolingbroke is seen as a complete contrast to the King, whereas one is a man of thought, sentiment and weakness in action, the other is a man of strength and ambition. Furthermore "in the one, all is ambitious hope of something yet to come" (Bolingbroke), "in the other it is desolation and a looking backward of the heart."[34]

The characterisation of Richard is therefore very important in Coleridge's analysis of the play. He sees Richard's character as being consistent throughout, in the sense that it does not develop, preserving the same basic characteristics. Dr. Johnson, in the notes to his edition of Shakespeare (1765) had claimed that in prosperity the King is "imperious and oppressive; but in his distress he is wise, patient and pious."[35] Coleridge disagrees,[36] considering that Johnson has mistaken the temperamental Richard's constant change of <u>mood</u> for a change of character:

> It was true, Coleridge admitted, that the first misfortune Richard meets with overwhelmed him, but so

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[33]Foakes, p.117.

[34]<u>S.C.</u>,I, 147.

[35]<u>Dr.Johnson on Shakespeare</u>, ed.W.K.Wimsatt (first published in the U.S.A. by Hill and Wang,1960. This edition Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1969), p.115.

[36]Foakes, p.119.

> far from his feelings being tamed or subdued by it, the very first glance of the sunshine of hope exalts his spirits, and lifts the King into as strange a degree of elevation as before of depression of mind; and the mention of those in his misfortunes who had contributed to his downfall, but who had before been his nearest friends and favourites, calls forth expressions of the bitterest hatred and revenge. <for substantiation Coleridge quotes from I.ii, where Scroop tells Richard of the death of Bagot and Green in resisting Bolingbroke>[37]

This, for Coleridge, shows the inconsistency and capriciousness of Richard's moods, and it is a constant note throughout the play: "throughout his whole character may be noticed the most rapid transitions from insolence to despair, from the heights of love to the agonies of resentment, and from pretended resignation to the bitterest reproaches."[38]

Although Richard is weak, he is not "deficient in immediate courage, as appears by the last assassination, or in powers of mind, as appears by the foresight he exhibits throughout the play."[39] But he has a weakness "of a peculiar kind", arising from

> an intellectual feminineness which feels a necessity of ever leaning on the breast of others, and of reclining on those who are all the while known to be inferiors. To this must be attributed as its consequences all Richard's vices, his tendency

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[37] Foakes, p.120.

[38] Foakes, p.121.

[39] Foakes, p.119.

> to concealment, and his cunning, the whole operation of which is directed to the getting rid of present difficulties. Richard is not meant to be a debauchee; but we see in him that sophistry which is common to man, by which we can deceive our own hearts, and at one and the same time apologize for, and yet commit, the error.[40]

Richard is not so bad as to make revolt against him justifiable, however, and Coleridge claims that Shakespeare sees the distinction between the individual character of the sovereign, which may be criticised as not befitting that of a king, and the sanctity of his official position, which must be respected. Shakespeare, in Coleridge's view, thus steers the true middle course between the extremes of the royalist "rants" of Beaumont and Fletcher, and the "sneers" of Massinger:[41]

> Without the hollow extravagance of Beaumont and Fletcher's ultra-royalism, how carefully does Shakespeare acknowledge and reverence the eternal distinction between the mere individual and the symbolic or representative, on which all genial law, no less than patriotism, depends.[42]

For Coleridge, Shakespeare demonstrates the true nature of loyalty in York's attitude to the King, that of

> religious loyalty struggling with a deep grief and indignation at the king's vices and follies; and adherence to his word once given, in spite of all, even the most natural, feelings.[43]

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[40] S.C., I, p.149.

[41] S.C., I, p.151.

[42] S.C., I, p.147.

[43] S.C., I, p.153

In order that we can identify ourselves with this feeling of loyalty, and sympathise with it, it is important that we do not actually dislike Richard. So

> Shakespeare has contrived to bring the character of Richard, with all his prodigality and hard usage of friends, still within the compass of our pity; for we find him much beloved by those who know him best. The Queen is passionately attached to him, and his good Bishop (Carlisle) adheres to the last. He is not one of those whose punishment gives delight; his failings appear to arise from outward objects, and from the poison of flatterers around him; we cannot, therefore, help pitying, and wishing he had been placed in a rank where he would have been less exposed, and where he might have been happy and useful.[44]

If the play is to have the desired effect on us, we must be relatively objective in our attitude to its events, to be able to condemn the revolt without making light of Richard's faults. For this reason

> Shakespeare has represented this character <Richard> in a very peculiar manner. He has not made him amiable with counterbalancing faults; but has openly and broadly drawn those faults without reserve, relying on Richard's disproportionate sufferings and gradually emergent good qualities for our sympathy; and this was possible, because his faults are not positive vices, but spring entirely from defect of character.[45]

Coleridge sees <u>Richard II</u> as developing in the friction and inter-relationship between the three characters, Richard, Bolingbroke, and York. Bolingbroke is the main agent of the action. Whereas Richard constantly gives vent to his feelings in words, Bolingbroke

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[44]<u>S.C.</u>, II, .281.

[45]<u>S.C.</u>, I, 149.

has constantly to hide his feelings, to curb his natural haughtiness: "in Bolingbroke is defined the struggle of inward determination with outward show of humility."[46] He is constantly checked by his uncle, but the old man is too passive to check Bolingbroke's actions, and Coleridge draws attention to the lines,

> Well, well, I see the issue of these arms
> I cannot mend it [II.iii.152 - 154]

to prove this. Like Richard III, Bolingbroke has great courage and ambition, but whereas that character attempted great things only to feed his inward feeling of superiority",[47] Bolingbroke is a man with a genuine grievance, whose desire to recover his lands leads him, almost unconsciously, to plan to depose the rightful king and take his place.

Coleridge's remarks on the genre of the history play, and his analysis of Richard II as an example of the "pure" history play, therefore, show a strange mutual inconsistency. Although he claims that the great object of the history play is to encourage patriotism, he says comparatively little on the subject in analysing the play itself. It is true that he commends Shakespeare's demonstration of true loyalty in the character of York, and implies that the necessity of en-

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[46] S.C., II, 281.

[47] S.C., I, 153.

couraging such loyalty influenced Shakespeare in the creation of Richard's character, but Coleridge does not give this a great deal of attention, and it is certainly not dignified into a theme. Nor does he show how Shakespeare has ordered his play to fulfil the aim of encouraging patriotism. In fact Coleridge treats _Richard II_ as if it were a tragedy in a historical setting, including amongst other material some fine pieces of patriotic oratory. Despite the fact that he hints that the "pure" history play should not focus too sharply on the individual, he in fact analyses the play in terms of an interaction between three individuals: Richard, Bolingbroke, and York. And he considers Richard almost as a tragic hero, whose defect of character gives rise to the whole action, rather than showing the part that the nation as a whole plays in the drama. Thus he remarks that Shakespeare presents "the _germ_ of all the after events, in Richard's insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, favoritism, and in the proud, tempestuous temperament of his barons."[48] Here the "informing idea" of the play is seen as lying in character, as in tragedy, not in the spirit of the time in which the play is set, as in Coleridge's _theory_ of the history play.

It seems probable, therefore, that although Coleridge's critical sensitivity and logic led him

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[48] _S.C._, I, 153.

to intuit the aims of the history play, and to see it as differing from other dramatic genres, he did not have enough first hand knowledge of the subject to be able to work out an approach to the history play in which his theory could be practically applied.

CHAPTER V

COLERIDGE ON COMEDY

It is difficult to understand or describe Coleridge's concept of any dramatic genre, because in criticising a play he uses not only generic criteria, but also criteria of ideal excellence embodied in his concept of the "romantic drama". This is a yardstick of dramatic potential, rather than a form; indeed "romantic drama" rises above the philosophical and formal limitations which genre imposes, giving the poet greater freedom and power of appeal to the imagination, and thus enabling him to present a more balanced view of life and a higher form of truth. In real life, according to Coleridge, only Shakespeare was able to write drama of so high a standard.[1] This dual criterion is responsible for much of the apparently confused and fragmentary nature of Coleridge's dramatic criticism, for he seldom makes it clear whether he is discussing a play as a construct within a generic tradition or as a work to be measured against the evaluative standard of "romantic drama".

This is especially true of Coleridge's comments

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[1] On "romantic drama", see Chapter III of this thesis.

on comedy. Whereas in his analyses of Othello, Hamlet, and Romeo and Juliet, he at least estimates wherein the tragedy of the situation lies, he seldom considers a comedy in the light of its comic effect. He examined only two comedies in any detail--Love's Labour's Lost and The Tempest--and in both cases comic effect is almost ignored. His object in examining the former is really to prove that Shakespeare was more learned than is often thought, while the latter is examined only as a "romantic drama."

Nevertheless a kind of comic theory can be deduced by comparing Coleridge's remarks on Shakespearean comedy with those on Greek comedy in his manuscript lecture "Greek Drama"[2] on the one hand, and with those on the comedy of Shakespeare's contemporaries on the other. In the manuscript "Greek Drama" Coleridge states that both comedy and tragedy are "ideal"--that is, both are based on philosophical ideals tested in a poetic simulation of the world of experience, rather than on direct reflection in detail of the world of experience per se. He points out that "Aristophanes rose to as great a distance above the ludicrous of real life, as the tragedy of Sophocles above its tragic events and passions,"[3] and one of his reasons for concluding that the

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[2] S.C., I, 167 - 173.

[3] S.C., I, 169.

"middle comedy" of Menander and Philemon is inferior drama and untrue to the fundamental comic tenets is that it "remained within the circle of experience."[4] In all other respects tragedy and comedy are complete contraries, and Coleridge claims that comedy started as a burlesque inversion of the tragic philosophy within the same basic form for satirical purposes.[5] Whereas tragedy portrays earnestness and is itself earnest, a comedy is "one great jest, that comprehends a world of jests:"[6]

> All else are as contraries: tragedy is poetry in its deepest earnest--comedy, poetry in unlimited jest. Earnestness consists in the direction and convergence of all the powers of the soul to one aim, and the voluntary limitation of its activity in consequence; the opposite, therefore, in the apparent abandonment of all definite aim or end, the removal of all bounds in the exercise of the mind, and <comedy> attains its real end, as an entire contrast, most perfectly, the greater the display of intellectual wealth squandered in the wantonness of sport without an object, the more /the/ life and vivacity in the creations of arbitrary will.[7]

Tragedy (for Coleridge) depicts a hero whose sense of purpose inspires him to order his world as much as he can, and this sense of purpose and the resulting order transfer themselves to the form itself. Comedy, on the other hand, concerns itself with the freedom of the

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[4]*S.C.*, I, 172.

[5]See my Chapter III.

[6]*S.C.*, I, 169.

[7]*S.C.*, I, 169.

human spirit. It will not subject its characters to the dictatorship of a sense of purpose but gives them the freedom that can only come with aimlessness; and once again this vision transfers itself to the form so that comedy even risks anarchy to assert its ideal of freedom:

> In short, in the tragedy the constitution is monarchical, but such as it existed in elder Greece, limited by laws and therefore more venerable; all willingly adapt and submit to the majesty of the heroic sceptre. The comedy, on the contrary, is poetry in its most democratic form; and it is fundamental principle with it, rather to risk all the confusion of anarchy, than to destroy the independence and privileges of its individual citizens. Place, verse, characters, even single thoughts, conceits, and allusions,—each turns on the pivot of its own free will. [8]

The sense of purpose is an intellectual quality establishing control of the mind over the lusts and weaknesses of the flesh. Freedom from a sense of purpose results in the enslavement of the mind to the body. Hence

> The tragic poet idealizes his characters by giving to the spiritual part of our nature a more decided preponderance over the animal cravings and impulses than is met with in real life. The comic poet idealizes his by making the animal the governing power and the intellectual the mere instrument. [9]

Comedy is built round the "sportive ideal" which

> subsists in the perfect harmony and concord of the higher nature with the animal as with its ruling principle, its acknowledged regent. The understand-

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[8] S.C., I, 170.

[9] S.C., I, 170.

> ing and practical reason are represented as the willing slaves of the senses and appetites, and the passions arising out of them.[10]

It is not clear whether Coleridge thinks that the Greek comic dramatists try to persuade us to accept this free "sportive" vision of life, or whether he thinks they just pretend to advocate such an ideal in order ultimately to convince us of its futility. Either way he obviously regards the view that true freedom consists in sportiveness as unrealistic, for he claims that comedy is not

> a mere crowd of vices and follies, but whatever qualities it represents, even tho' they are in a certain sense amiable, it still displays them as having their origin in some dependence on our lower nature, accompanied with a defect in true freedom of spirit and self-subsistence, and subject to that unconnection and contradiction of the inward Being, to which all folly is owing.[11]

Rule of the higher nature by the animal nature, far from giving rise to freedom, leads only to folly. Although we may regard the vices and follies of the "sportive" character as being amusing and possibly lovable, we cannot but see (in Coleridge's view) that they spring from a mistaken way of life. The implication is that comedy should make it clear that the "sportive" philosophy leads to folly, thus balancing its presentation of the ludicrous with a serious

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[10] S.C., I, 171.

[11] S.C., I, 170.

undertone. It is not clear whether he thinks that the Greek comic dramatists intended to do this at all, nor (if so) whether he thinks they succeeded. Since he believed that only Shakespeare could make folly the vehicle of wisdom, however,--"Shakespear, the only one who has made passion the vehicle of general truth, as in his comedy he has made even folly itself the vehicle of philosophy"[12]--he probably thought Greek comedy to be marred by a lack of seriousness.

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Comedy, then, should point to something greater and more serious than the ludicrousness and folly of its own fictional world. It should act as an ironic contrast to an implied ideal of perfection. Whether Greek comedy does this or not, that of Shakespeare does it in greater measure. Coleridge believed that Shakespeare constantly leads us to contemplate the spiritual and the infinite, and that even those comic passages which offend against our sense of decency present grossness in so ludicrous a light that we reject it with

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[12] _S.C._, II, 315.

laughter. Such passages are "always calculated to raise a gust of laughter that would, as it were, blow away all impure ideas or . . . excite disgust against them."[13] They dissipate "the low feeling by exciting in us intellectual feelings" and are thus "against the degradations of our nature."[14] Wit and fancy--the main constituents of Shakespearean comedy--perform a similar moral function in his poetry. By interacting with a great deal of intensity, they keep the reader's mind busy and active. In this state no low, impure thoughts can enter the mind, for it is emotional and intellectual passivity which is the mental receptacle of base desires. Thus, in Venus and Adonis Shakespeare represents

> the animal impulse itself, so as to preclude all sympathy with it, by dissipating the reader's notice among the thousand outward images, and now beautiful now fanciful circumstances, which form its dresses and its scenery; or by diverting our attention from the main subject by those frequent witty or profound reflections, which the poet's ever active mind has deduced from, or connected with, the imagery and the incidents. The reader is forced into too much action to sympathize with the merely passive of our nature. As little can a mind thus roused and awakened be brooded on by mean and indistinct emotion, as the low, lazy mist can creep upon the surface of a lake, while a strong gale is driving it onward in gales and billows.[15]

This enormous activity of mind which staves off evil is (for Coleridge) a predominant feature of Shakespearean

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[13]Foakes, p.73.

[14]Foakes, p.74.

[15]B.L., II, 16.

comedy (by which I mean in this case the comic element in his drama as a whole). It can afford to present grossness because the very activity of the thought it generates in its readers by means of its complex imagery and witty conceits, prevents them from accepting or dwelling on the grossness. Laughter, for Coleridge, is an intellectual reaction. Such laughable comedy, therefore, is far less pernicious than the "sentimental drama"[16] which encourages intellectual inertia, euphemises our base desires and holds them up as idols.

In another passage on the language of conceits, Coleridge explains how the witty play of images can evoke the imagination and express the sublime:

> there is an effort in the mind, when it would describe what it cannot satisfy itself with the description of, to reconcile opposites, and to leave a middle state of mind more strictly appropriate to the imagination than any other when it is hovering between two images: as soon as it is fixed on one it becomes understanding, and when it is waving <sic> between them, attaching itself to neither, it is imagination. Such was the fine description of Death in Milton, "Of Shadow like, but called Substance," etc.
>
> These were the grandest effects, where the imagination was called forth, not to produce a distinct form, but a strong working of the mind still producing what it still repels, and again calling forth what it again negatives, and the result is what the Poet wishes to impress, to substitute a grand feeling of the unimaginable for a mere image.[17]

It is important to note that as the above pas-

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[16]On Coleridge's view of the "sentimental drama" see my Chapter II.

[17]Foakes, p.82.

sages (those on Venus and Adonis and the conceit) show, techniques which are basically comic, such as wit and the conceit, can be used for non-comic ends, that is, they can be used to imply the serious without passing through the medium of the ludicrous. As I shall show later in this chapter, Coleridge's concept of comedy is not functionally related to a theory of the laughable, and there are several "comic" effects in Shakespeare's plays, for example, which are not in context funny. His reluctance to accept mere comic entertainment as the end of any genre (except farce which he regarded as a form not of the first rank in profundity), and his insistence that the sportive ideal should be shown to be a foolish one, on the whole lead him to examine comedy as an element in Shakespearean drama, rather than a form which Shakespeare used. Comedy is examined from a technical point of view rather than a philosophic one. Thus he examines the relationship between three "powers" that the dramatist employs, one of which is wit, a fundamental comic technique:

> There are three powers: Wit, which discovers partial likeness hidden in general diversity; subtlety, which discovers the diversity concealed in general apparent sameness;--and profundity, which discovers an essential unity under all the semblances of difference.
>
> Give to a subtle man fancy, and he is a wit; to a deep man imagination, and he is a philosopher. Add, again, pleasurable sensibility in the threefold form of sympathy with the interesting in morals, the impressive in form, and the harmonious in sound,--and you have the poet.
>
> But combine all,--wit, subtlety, and fancy, with profundity, imagination, and moral and physical

> susceptibility of the pleasurable,---and let the object of the action be man universal; and we shall have---O rash prophecy! say, rather, we have---a SHAKSPEARE.[18]

Although profundity is here described as a "power," it is evidently a more comprehensive one than wit and subtelty, incorporating the results of both, and in fact it is closer to an end of drama. As it is described in this passage, profundity includes the findings of both wit and subtlety in that it reconciles the two opposites which are essential to each other. The similarity of wit to profundity is more immediately obvious in that the discovery of likeness in diversity is a step towards the discovery of unity in all things. But in order to demonstrate this essential unity, it is also necessary to show the apparent disparates concealed beneath what appears to be unity. As I have shown in Chapter III, Coleridge believed that it is necessary to distinguish between things before showing the similarity between them. Hence subtlety comes into play. Whereas in wit the emphasis is on a partial <u>likeness</u> which we had not previously noticed between two things, and in subtlety on <u>diversity</u> which we had not observed between things which appear to be the same, in profundity there is a just balance between unity and diversity. In a kind of two-fold vision we see at once the apparent and superficial diversity of things and the underlying unity, the root from which the differences spring. The facts that

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[18] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 230.

the likeness is partial, and that wit is associated with fancy, imply that wit is one of those essentially artificial qualities, like the Understanding, which deal with the superficial nature of things. Profundity discloses essential reality, and would therefore be aligned to the Reason. It is a synthesis of subtlety and wit and is therefore more complete than either of the two opposite qualities reconciled in this synthesis. The fact that Coleridge regards the end of all philosophy and art as being the ultimate reality, the essentail unity behind all things, indicates that profundity is the end of all drama, no matter of what genre. Since wit is an indispensable element of profundity and and also a fundamental comic technique, every good play, even tragedy, must partake of something of the nature of comedy, just as every good comedy, like all plays, shares an aspect of the tragic aim.

Indeed Coleridge saw the tragic and comic as being essential to each other, and he agrees heartily with Socrates's statement in Plato's The Symposium that

> it was the business of one and the same genius to excel in tragic and comic poetry, and that the tragic poet ought at the same time to contain in himself the powers of comedy

because "opposites illustrate each other's nature."[19]

As I have pointed out in Chapter III, Coleridge believed that tragedy and comedy both present a slanted

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[19] S.C., I, 166.

view of life and that Shakespeare rises above these forms to give a more balanced view. Logically one would expect tragi-comedy to be the happy medium, but Coleridge displays a certain ambivalence in his opinions on this genre. It is true that he states in a lecture manuscript, "The Origins of Modern Drama," that

> the necessity of at once instructing and gratifying the people produced the great distinction between the Greek and the English theatre. To this we must attribute the origin of tragi-comedy, or a representation of human events more lively, more near the truth, and permitting a larger field of moral instruction, a more ample exhibition of the recesses of the human heart under all the trials and circumstances that most concern us, than was known or guessed at by Aeschylus, Sophocles, and Euripides,[20]

but the indications are that the manuscript from which this extract was taken was an early one prepared for the 1808 lectures,[21] and on later occasions he gave a contradictory opinion which gives evidence of greater consideration of the matter. Thus,

> Of that species of writing termed _tragi-comedy_, too much has been produced, but it has been doomed to the shelf. With Shakespeare his comic constantly re-acted on his tragic characters. Lear, wandering amidst the tempest, had all his feelings of distress increased by the overflowings

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[20] _S.C._, I, 194.

[21] There are strong echoes of this manuscript lecture in H. C. Robinson's report of the lecture of 5th Feb. 1808. See especially _S.C._, II, 8, and Raysor's footnotes in _S.C._, I, 189, 190 and 193.

> of the wild wit of the Fool, as vinegar poured upon wounds exacerbate/s/their pain; thus even his comic humour tends to the development of tragic passion,[22]

and

> in Beaumont and Fletcher's tragedies the comic scenes are rarely so interfused amidst the tragic as to produce a unity of the tragic on the whole, without which the intermixture is a fault. In Shakespeare, this is always managed with transcendent skill. The Fool in Lear contributes in a very sensible manner to the tragic wildness of the whole drama.[23]

The fault of tragi-comedy, then, is that the tragic and comic elements normally conflict, disrupting unity of feeling. It is true that tragedy and comedy are essential to each other, that they are opposites which can only be defined or understood in terms of each other, as we know day only as it exists in terms of night; it is also true, therefore that either one of these forms can gain more effect, highlight its own nature by drawing on elements of the other; but it is important to remember that while tragedy and comedy are in some respects opposites essential to each other, in most respects they are mutually exclusive contraries, each contradicting the other's basic vision, each exciting an emotional effect contrary to that of the other. It takes a dramatist with profound philosophical insight, therefore, to

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[22] S.C., II, 266, from a report of Lecture I of Coleridge's 1813 - 1814 series.

[23] "Table Talk," July 1, 1833, in Table Talk and Omniana, p.234.

explore their nature so deeply that he sees beyond the contrary to the essential common factors that they share, the common root of both. Such a writer (and Shakespeare, in Coleridge's view was the only one who succeeded) will be able to use one for the purpose of the other. Thus he comments that

> A great part of the Genius of Shakespeare consisted of these happy combinations of the highest and lowest, and of the gayest and the saddest. He was not droll in one scene and melancholy in another, but both the one and the other in the same scene: laughter is made to swell the tear of sorrow, and to throw as it were a poetic light upon it, and the tear mixes a tenderness with the laughter that succeeds.[24]

In The Tempest, Shakespeare is able to suggest tragedy in the plot against the lives of Alonzo and Gonazlo, and yet use it to heighten comic effect:

> The scene of the intended assassination of Alonzo and Gonzalo is an exact counterpart of the scene between Macbeth and his lady, only pitched in a lower key throughout, as designed to be frustrated and concealed.[25]

This seems to indicate that the tone of a play will be determined by the nature of its ending, whether happy or catastrophic. If the ending is to be a happy one, we should not be led by the tone to expect a catastrophe, otherwise the high seriousness the tone has instilled in us will conflict with the true nature of the ending. Coleridge goes on soon after this passage to show that

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[24]Foakes, p.106.

[25]S.C., I, 135 - 136.

a romantic drama with a light tone, like The Tempest, can embody just as profound a psychological study of evil as Macbeth can. He points out that the characters involved in the assassination plot in The Tempest exhibit

> the same profound management in the manner of familiarizing a mind, not immediately recipient, to the suggestion of guilt, by associating the proposed crime with something ludicrous or out of place,--something not habitually matter of reverence. By this kind of sophistry the imagination and fancy are first bribed to contemplate the suggested act, and at length to become acquainted with it. Observe how the effect of this scene is heightened by contrast with another counterpart of it in low life,--that between the conspirators Stephano, Caliban, and Trinculo in the second scene of the third act, in which there are the same essential characteristics.[26]

In his remarks on Falstaff, too, Coleridge shows how comedy can and should suggest the tragic in a serious undertone. For Coleridge, Falstaff is by no means only an amusing character. Indeed he is suggestive of evil in so far as, like Iago and Richard III, he sets too high a store by intellectual power unqualified by emotion and the moral sense. This sense of values is for Coleridge deeply at fault, and he regards such characters as dangerous, because, being ruled only by the intellect, and having no altruistic principles springing from the emotions to guide them, they are

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[26] S.C., I, 136.

likely to be motivated entirely by self-interest:

> The characters of Richard III, Iago, and Falstaff, were the characters of men who reverse the order of things, who place intellect at the head, whereas it ought to follow like geometry, to prove and to confirm.[27]

Although Coleridge never mentions the word "prudence" in connection with these characters (indeed they could hardly be considered to be prudent as such), they can be seen to have something of the "prudential" about them. Men who are motivated by "prudential purposes"[28] are swayed only by egoism taking the form either of the desire for personal safety or for self-advancement, not by the moral feeling. They "attempt to reconcile the moral feeling with a full exercise of the mind and the gaining of certain ends."[29] They try to make their Reason (one of whose most important aspects is the moral feeling) subordinate to their intellect. In both Falstaff and Richard III, according to Coleridge, there is "an overprizing of the intellectual above the moral character; in the most desperate and the most dissolute the same moral elements were to be found."[30] It would seem that Richard III is the desperate one, Falstaff the dissolute. Richard III is desperate in that he

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[27] S.C., II, 286 - 287.

[28] Foakes, p.66. See my Chapter II.

[29] Foakes, p.66.

[30] S.C., II, 284.

directs all his powers to one aim--self-advancement. He has the tragic quality of earnestness, therefore, but this earnestness is based on the mistaken belief that self-advancement is a worthy aim in life. Falstaff, on the other hand, almost but not quite embodies the sportive principle. He has no great purpose in life, but nevertheless he does not subject his intellect to the rule of his senses: Coleridge claims that even Falstaff's "sensuality was subservient to his intellect, for he appeared to drink sack that he might have occasion to shew his wit."[31] Falstaff is dissolute rather than desperate because he does not serve evil wholeheartedly--his ruling purpose in life seems, according to Coleridge, to be the enhancing of his own reputation. It is because this ruling purpose is such a trivial one that Coleridge calls Falstaff a "man of degraded genius" rather than "a degraded man of genius":

> Falstaff, not a degraded man of genius, like Burns, but a man of degraded genius, with the same consciousness of superiority to his companions <as Iago> , fastened himself on a young prince, to prove how much his influence on an heir apparent could exceed that of statesmen.[32]

Despite the amusing triviality of Falstaff's aim in life, however, he has a great potential for evil, and

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[31] S.C., II, 287.

[32] S.C., II, 287.

Coleridge sees Henry IV Parts One and Two as embodying a struggle between the corrupting influence of Falstaff and the innate goodness and nobility of Prince Hal:

> in his own estimation F<alstaff> is the superior who cannot easily be convinced that the prince has escaped him; but . . . as in other instances S<hakespeare> has shewn us the defeat of mere intellect by a noble feeling, the Prince being the superior moral character who rises above his insidious companion.[33]

Falstaff, then, escapes being a tragic villain only because his dissolute behaviour and his trivial aim in life detract from the intensity of his evil (indeed he is corrupt rather than evil), and because his designs fail.

Just as comedy should suggest tragedy, so tragedy can re-inforce its own high seriousness by incorporating a comic element (as in the case of the Fool in King Lear, mentioned above) or by using comic techniques for a serious end. As Raysor points out, Coleridge regards one of the functions of comedy as being to "re-inforce the tragic effect by ironical contrast."[34] Coleridge is not prepared, however, to accept the principle of comic relief in tragedy, since this disrupts unity of feeling by interrupting the tragic tone. It is almost certainly for this reason that he rejected the porter scene in Macbeth as being an interpolation.[35] In fact

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[33] S.C., II, 210.

[34] Raysor's Introduction to S.C., I, xxxvii.

[35] See S.C., I, 75, 77 - 78 and Raysor's note on p.78.

Coleridge always appears extremely reluctant to accept comic entertainment merely for its own sake. He is not prepared to accept the comic quality of the pun as an adequate justification for its existence, for example, although he regards puns as springing partly from an "exuberant activity of mind," which is presumably a comic instinct:

> Play on words either [due] to 1. exuberant activity of mind, as in Shakespeare's higher comedy; [or] 2. imitation of it as a fashion, which has this to say for it—"Why is not this now better than groaning?"—or 3. contemptuous exultation in minds vulgarized and overset by their success, [like] Milton's Devils; or 4. as the language of resentment, in order to express contempt—most common among the lower orders, and [the] origin of nicknames; or lastly, as the language of suppressed passion, especially of hardly smothered dislike.[36]

Saying that puns may spring from an exuberant activity of mind and that they may be used to portray dramatically such a state of mind, is a very different matter from accepting them merely for their exuberant quality, however. This means that in theory he is willing to accept puns in comedy in as far as they portray exuberance in characters, although he is not prepared to accept them on their surface, entertainment value. In practice he only defends puns in the serious plays (the tragedy and the serious History Plays, especially Richard II). His most common line of defence is that puns are the natural outlet for

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[36] S.C., I, 22. The literary references in 1. and 2., as Raysor points out, are to Romeo and Juliet, II.iv.85 - 86, and to Paradise Lost, vi.609 - 627.

angry passion, and that Shakespeare is quite justified in putting them in the mouths of indignant characters, therefore. Puns, in his view, spring naturally from passion:

> The passion that carries off its excess by play on words, as naturally and, therefore, as appropriately to drama, as by gesticulations, looks, or tones. This belonging to human nature as _human_, independent of associations and habits from any particular rank of life or mode of employment,[37]

and he defends the use of puns in _Hamlet_ by arguing that they are quite in place as psychological indications of Hamlet's near-hysterical condition since the ludicrous is closely associated with terror, is a kind of escape from it:

> The terrible, however paradoxical it may appear, will be found to touch on the verge of the ludicrous. Both arise from the perception of something out of the common nature of things,--something out of place: if from this we can abstract danger, the uncommonness alone remains, and the sense of the ridiculous is excited. The close alliance of these opposites appears from the circumstance that laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy: in the same manner that there are tears of joy as well as tears of sorrow, so there is a laugh of terror as well as a laugh of merriment. These complex causes will naturally have produced in Hamlet the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous,--a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium.[38]

In his remarks on laughter Coleridge explains

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[37]_S.C._, I, 149.

[38]_S.C._, II, 274.

the similarity between the comic and the tragic, and how it is that each can be used to re-inforce the other. Laughter, for him, is a reaction to the incongruous when the incongruous object is not associated with danger:

> *I think Aristotle has already excellently defined the laughable . . . as consisting of, or depending on, what is out of its proper time or place, yet without danger or pain. Here the _impropriety_ . . . is the positive qualification; the dangerlessness . . . the negative.[39]

And, in another remark on laughter he explains that

> Laughter is a convulsion of the nerves; and it seems as if nature cut short the rapid thrill of pleasure on the nerves by a sudden convulsion of them, to prevent the sensation becoming painful.

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[39] _M.C._, p.441. *This is an extract from a section entitled "ON THE DISTINCTIONS OF THE WITTY, THE DROLL, THE ODD, AND THE HUMOUROUS. THE NATURE AND CONSTITUENTS OF HUMOUR. RABELAIS, SWIFT, STERNE, which Raysor has reprinted from _Literary Remains_, relegating it to an appendix (_M.C._, pp. 440 - 446), since he considers that parts of it may show signs of editorial expansion. For this reason future quotations from the passage from which this extract is taken will be marked with an asterisk. _Literary Remains_ was edited by H.N. Coleridge, who, although on the whole scrupulously faithful to the general tenor of Coleridge's beliefs and opinions, frequently rephrases his fragments into a more coherent and articulate form, on occasions going to the extent of expanding short but suggestive sentences to paragraph length. Although this passage is based partly on a manuscript lecture on Wit and Humour, which Raysor has included in the text of _M.C._,(pp.117 - 120), it almost certainly contains material from sources now lost, as Raysor points out in a note on p.440. For this reason I believe myself to be justified in quoting from this passage material whose thought or opinion is nowhere else exactly repeated in Coleridge's criticism, offering the palliative that H.N.C. never to my knowledge _falsifies_ Coleridge's opinions. As Raysor himself points out in his article "Coleridge's Manuscript Lectures," _M.P._, XXII (1924), 17 - 25, "H.N. Coleridge was a very ingenious and intelligent editor, and one can, in the main, be sure that the published text gives Coleridge's thought, and nearly his words."(p.25).

> Aristotle's definition is as good as can be;--surprise at perceiving anything out of its usual place, when the unusualness is not accompanied by a sense of serious danger. *Such* surprise is always pleasurable; and it is observable that surprise accompanied with circumstances of danger becomes tragic. Hence farce may often border on tragedy; indeed, farce is nearer to tragedy in its essence than comedy is.[40]

Incongruity, then, is a common element in both the tragic effect and the ludicrous (or comic effect), and it is because this is so that a comic element can be used to re-inforce a tragic effect, and vice versa.

The emphasis in Coleridge's remarks on comedy tends to be on comic techniques rather than on a philosophical theory of comedy as a form. Although he defined comedy for the purpose of his lecture on Greek Drama, he does not relate Shakespearean comedy to this concept as such, but seems to use it rather as a means of exploring the essence of the comic. Comedy in "modern" drama, therefore, can be most profitably explored by an examination of Coleridge's views on comic techniques. The most important of these is wit, a term which Coleridge gives a wide frame of reference. In its most philosophic form, wit refers to the intellectual process of finding partial likeness in apparent unlikeness, as I have shown earlier in this chapter. More particularly, however, he uses it to denote the two methods by which this partial likeness can be discovered and conveyed.

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[40]"Table Talk," August 25, 1833, in *Table Talk and Omniana*, p.256.

These are the type of wit, closely related to fancy, which deals mainly with images, and that inferior form which consists in apt expression, and which is really no more than an unusual turn of phrase:

> *Perhaps the most important of our intellectual operations are those of detecting the difference in similar, and the identity in dissimilar, things. Out of the latter operation it is that wit arises; and it, generically regarded, consists in presenting thoughts or images in an unusual connection with each other, for the purpose of exciting pleasure by the surprise. This connection may be real; and there is in fact a scientific wit; though where the object, consciously entertained, is truth, and not amusement, we commonly give it some higher name. But in wit popularly understood, the connection may be, and for the most part is, apparent only, and transitory; and this connection may be by thoughts, or by words, or by images. The first is our Butler's especial eminence; the second, Voltaire's; the third, which we oftener call fancy, constitutes the larger and more peculiar part of the wit of Shakespeare. You can scarcely turn to a single speech of Falstaff's without finding instances of it.[41]

Although three species of wit are referred to in this passage, Coleridge hardly ever discusses the first, the wit of thought. Of the other two forms the wit of imagery is far superior--so much so that Coleridge is at times reluctant to call it wit at all:

> It is not always easy to distinguish between wit and fancy. When the whole pleasure received is derived from surprise at an unexpected turn of expression, then I call it wit; but when the pleasure is produced not only by surprise, but also by an image which remains with us and gratifies for its own sake, then I call it fancy. I know of no mode so satisfactory of distinguishing between wit and fancy. I appeal to the recollection of those

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[41] _M.C._, pp.440 -441.

> who hear me, whether the great part of what passes for wit in Shakespeare, is not most exquisite humour, heightened by a figure, and attributed to a particular character? Take the instance of the flea on Bardolph's nose, which Falstaff compares to a soul suffering in purgatory. The images themselves, in a case like this, afford a great part of the pleasure.[42]

In contrast the wit of words (which he also describes as the "French wit") is both idle and short-lived, uttered by

> men of cleverness, who, having been long in the world, have observed the turns of phrase which please in company, and which, passing away the moment, are passed in a moment, being no longer recollected than the time they take in utterance.[43]

But the wit of fancy "produces surprise by a permanent medium, and always leaves something behind it, which satisfies the mind as well as tickles the hearing."[44] This type of wit appeals more to the intellect. It is also capable of referring beyond its own amusing facade to serious matters:

> the wit of Shakespeare is, as it were, like the flourishing of a man's stick, when he is walking, in the full flow of animal spirits: it is a sort of exuberance of hilarity which disburdens, and it resembles a conductor, to distribute a portion of our gladness to the surrounding air. While, however, it disburdens, it leaves behind what is weightiest and most important, and what most contributes to some direct aim and purpose.[45]

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[42]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 124.

[43]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 124.

[44]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 124.

[45]<u>S.C.</u>, II, 124 - 125.

Shakespearean wit, then, is the product of both exuberance and thought. Unlike the Greek comic techniques which have a "sportive" quality, it is not mere "intellectual wealth squandered in sport," but has a serious aim, that is, its function goes beyond that of comic entertainment. And whereas the French type of wit merely displays words in an unusual combination with very little regard to actuality--belonging therefore to the category of the grotesque, which, Coleridge explains, comes into being "when words or images are placed in unusual justaposition rather than connection, and are so placed merely because the juxtaposition is unusual"[46]--the Shakespearean wit has a firmer basis in reality since it presents concrete images.[47] Because

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[46] M.C., p.442.

[47] It is interesting to compare Hazlitt's theory of wit in "Definition of Wit," The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, XX, 352 - 363. Hazlitt does not divide wit up into different classes, but has a comprehensive concept of it, roughly corresponding to Coleridge's wit of fancy. For him the wit of words and the wit of thought are merely aspects of wit, the means by which we detect, express and clarify an absurdity or incongruity in the thing we are describing:

> it is only when the two contradictory natures are found in the same object that the verbal wit holds good, and the real wit or *jeu d'esprit* exists and may be brought out wherever this contradiction is obvious with or without the *jeu-de-mots* to assist it. . . . an absurdity may be written on the face of a thing without the help of language; and it is in detecting and embodying this that the finest wit lies. Language is merely one instrument or handle that forwards the operation: Fancy is the midwife of wit. <p.355>

The wit of words or of thought alone, if it does not detect or express an absurdity that objectively exists,

the wit of fancy juxtaposes images rather than words, it is more able to form an organic part of a play, for it can associate itself more readily with the theme as manifested in its predominant concepts: Shakespeare's wit is "so interwoven with all his other characteristic excellencies, that I am . . . incapable of comprehending . . . how it can be detached from his other powers."[48]

Shakespeare's wit is normally combined with humour. The difference between the two is that wit is "impersonal" while humour "always more or less partakes of the character of the speaker."[49] Coleridge's explanation of the origin of the term provides clear evidence that he had at least some understanding of the Elizabethan theory of character :

> the origin of the word humour may be traced to the science of Pathology. The ancients were unacquainted with its present meaning. They considered the human body as the repository of four humours, viz., blood, phlegm, bile or gall, and the black bile, and according to the predominance of either of these they believed the character to be sanguine, phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholy.[50]

Although humour, for Coleridge, springs from an amusing or eccentric character trait, he maintains that the man of humour deals gently with the characters he draws

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is, for Hazlitt, not wit at all:

> Farther, mere sense is not wit. Logical subtilty or ingenuity does not amount to wit (although it may mimic it) without an immediate play of fancy, which is a totally different thing. <p.363>

[48] M.C., p.42

[49] M.C., p.111.

[50] M.C., p.112.

for us, respecting their natures, and seeing man's nature as a whole as being in some respects too great for the world. Thus Coleridge claims that humour acknowledges "the hollowness and farce of the world, and its disproportion to the godlike within us,"[51] so that the laughter is not so much at the character, but rather at his incongruity in his environment, owing to the greatness of his soul and the pettiness of all that surrounds him, and ultimately, therefore, at the world. And Coleridge seems to imply that we identify ourselves with the humorist (the term Coleridge uses for the object of humour)[52] so that we, too, are led to see the disproportion of the godlike in our own spirits to the world, to see ourselves as being in some respects humorous. The humorist is therefore akin to the tragic hero in that both have a quality of greatness springing from the human psyche and both are essentially out of place in the world, but he is amusing because he bestows his attention on little things whose importance he exaggerates grossly. Coleridge quotes the example of Sterne's Uncle Toby who finds unceasing delight in the fortifications he employs himself on in his garden, "totally abstracted from the

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[51] M.C., p.119.

[52] see M.C., p.113.

remotest idea of utility."[53] A basic technique of humour is to make the little"great, and the great little, in order to destroy both, because all is equal in contrast with the infinite."[54]

Humour is distinguished from the ludicrous (or laughable), in that, whereas the latter is its own end, achieving its means by the demonstration of a "disproportion between a definite act and a definite purpose or end, or a disproportion of the end itself to the rank of the definite person,"[55] humour has a deeper, more philosophical purpose--namely to "contemplate a finite in reference to the infinite."[56] A certain amount of confusion is caused by the fact that Coleridge uses humour to refer both to the comic technique of character presentation and to the juxtaposition of images or concepts of the finite and the infinite. Thus, it appears from the passage on Shakespeare's wit, quoted earlier, that Coleridge regarded Falstaff's remark comparing the flea on Bardolph's nose to a soul suffering in purgatory as an example of humour. Yet Coleridge maintains elsewhere that Falstaff's character is one of wit rather than humour, because his remarks

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[53] M.C., p.113.

[54] M.C., p.119.

[55] M.C., p.118.

[56] M.C., p.119.

are impersonal and do not spring from his own character:

> The speeches of Falstaff and Prince Henry would, for the most part, be equally proper in the mouth of either, and might indeed, with undiminished effect, proceed from any person. This is owing to their being composed almost wholly of wit, which is impersonal, and not of humour, which always more or less partakes of the character of the speaker.[57]

It would appear, therefore, that such Falstaffian remarks as that quoted above, where Bardolph's nose is seen to be to a flea as purgatory is to a human soul, are humorous because they place the finite in juxtaposition or comparison to the infinite, while they are at the same time witty rather than humorous because they are impersonal and not exclusively characteristic of the speaker. It is also important to note that humour is not necessarily superior to wit. Coleridge admires Falstaff and his remarks a great deal, despite the fact that he regards them as being witty rather than humorous. And he is willing to accept that a dramatist may use dramatis personae in his play who are not characters but structural devices for drawing attention to a certain character or part of the play to heighten a certain dramatic effect. Thus "Pistol, Nym, etc., do not please us as characters, but are endured as fantastic creatures, foils to the native wit of Falstaff."[58]

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[57] _M.C._, p.111. c.f. _M.C._, p.50.

[58] _M.C._, p.50.

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Having reduced Coleridge's beliefs about the nature of comedy and the best comic techniques and how they should be used to some form of order, it is now possible to consider his comments on the comedy produced by Shakespeare's contemporaries in the light of this body of theory, to see how, in Coleridge's view, their techniques and methods of using them are inferior to Shakespeare's, or where comparable in excellence, and why. Since certain of Coleridge's views on the characteristics of Elizabethan comedy have already been dealt with in Chapter III, I will restrict myself in this section to those not already mentioned, and especially to a discussion of comic _techniques_.

He considers the techniques both as means to an end, testing them on efficiency in achieving the desired purpose, and on their own, as microcosmic manifestations of the work and its philosophy itself. Thus it is right that Ben Jonson should use caricatures rather than characters, since he is writing farce rather than comedy, yet this does not alter the fact that a caricature is not as satisfying as a balanced character springing from the depths of the thorough

meditation and observation of the poet:

> Ben's *personae* are too often not characters, but derangements;--the hopeless patients of a mad-doctor rather than exhibitions of folly betraying itself [in] spite of existing reason and prudence. He not poetically, but painfully, exaggerates every trait; *i.e.*, not by the drollery of the circumstance, but by the excess of the originating feeling.[59]

In other words, Jonson's characters suffer from an excess of humour. Some aspect of character has grown completely out of proportion to the rest, in flat contradiction of the facts of experience. In fact this is not a growth at all, for Jonson has based the character on the humour, rather than vice versa:

> The characters in his plays are, in the strictest sense of the term, abstractions. Some very prominent feature is taken from the whole man, and that single feature or humour is made the basis upon which the entire character is built up.[60]

For this reason

> the defect in the Morose, as in other[s] of Jonson's *dramatis* personae, lies in this: that the accident is not a prominence growing out of and nourished by the *character* which still circulates in it, but the character rises out of the accident--say rather, consists in the accident.[61]

The implication is that the predominant humour of a character, although in itself disproportionate, should always refer us back to the character itself, perhaps even as a guide to the understanding of the entire

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[59]*M.C.*, p.50.

[60]*M.C.*, p.46.

[61]*M.C.*, p.56.

character.[62]

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[62]Hazlitt has much the same criticisms to make against Jonson, but his opinion of him is generally more unfavourable and unlike Coleridge he is not prepared to excuse Jonson's caricatures and improbable situations as being legitimate techniques of farce:

> Shakespeare's characters are men; Ben Jonson's are more like machines, governed by mere routine, or by the convenience of the poet, whose property they are. . . . He wears out a jest to the last shred and coarsest grain. His imagination fastens instinctively on some one mark or sign by which he designates the individual, and never lets it go, for fear of not meeting with any other means to express himself by. A cant phrase, an odd gesture, an old-fashioned regimental uniform, a wooden leg, a tobacco-box, or a hacked sword, are the standing topics by which he embodies his characters to the imagination. They are cut and dried comedy; the letter, not the spirit of wit and humour. Each of his characters has a particular cue, a professional badge which he wears and is known by, and by nothing else. Thus there is no end of Captain Otter, his Bull, his Bear, and his Horse, which are no joke at first, and do not become so by being repeated twenty times. . . . In Ben Jonson, we find ourselves generally in low company, and we see no hope of getting out of it. He is like a person who fastens upon a disagreeable subject, and cannot be persuaded to leave it. His comedy, in a word, is not what Shakespeare somewhere calls "bless'd conditions." It is cross-grained, mean, and mechanical. It is handicraft wit. Squalid poverty, sheer ignorance, barefaced impudence, or idiot imbecility, are his dramatic common-places--things that provoke pity or disgust, instead of laughter. His portraits are caricatures by dint of their very likeness, being extravagant tautologies of themselves; as his plots are improbably by an excess of consistency; for he goes thorough-stitch with whatever he takes in hand, makes one contrivance answer all purposes, and every obstacle give way to a predetermined theory. For instance, nothing can be more incredible than the mercenary conduct of Corvino, in delivering up his wife to the palsied embraces of Volpone; and yet the poet does not seem in the least to boggle at the incongruity of it: but the more it is in keeping with the absurdity of the rest of the fable, and the more it advances it to an incredible catastrophe, the more he seems to dwell upon it with complacency and

Jonson's other fault is that there is not enough moral interest in his plays. I have already pointed out that Coleridge sees all literature as having a moral end, and that he seems to regard comedy that does not refer, implicitly or explicitly, to the serious as being in some respects trivial. He attacks Jonson not on these grounds, however, but rather from the point of view of dramatic effect, claiming that we can have no empathy for characters who are not good at heart and consequently lovable, and that therefore our interest in the play soon flags. Coleridge clearly does not regard the purely ludicrous as being able to sustain our interest. There must also be something else which involves us in the play, preferably characters with whom we can sympathise and identify, and a theme involving concepts which concern us all. Although he can appreciate Jonson's comic technique, and although he acknowledges Jonson's mastery of farce, he thinks that his plays lack something. Thus Coleridge remarks of Volpone,

> This admirable, indeed, but yet more wonderful than admirable, play is from the fertility and vigor of

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> a sort of wilful exaggeration, as if it were a logical discovery or corollary from well-known premises. He would no more be baffled in the working out a plot, than some people will be baffled in an argument. "If to be wise were to be obstinate," our author might have laid signal claim to this title.

"On Shakespeare and Ben Jonson," The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, VI, 39 - 40.

> invention, character, language, and sentiment the strongest proof how impossible it is to keep up any pleasurable interest in a tale in which there is no goodness of heart in any one of the prominent characters. After the third act, the play becomes not a dead, but a painful weight on the feelings. . . . Bonario and Celia should have been made in some way or other principals in the plot--which they might be, and the objects of interest, without being made characters. In novels, the person in whose fate you are most interested, is often the least marked character of the whole. If it were practicable to lessen the paramountcy of Volpone, a most delightful comedy might be produced, Celia being the ward or niece instead of the wife of Corvino, and Bonario her lover.[63]

It is interesting to note that Coleridge has been led here to contradict his own principles, since he would change the entire play without regard to its organic unity, throwing to the winds respect for the work as a self-sufficient individual whole in its own right, in order to make it conform to his own ideal.

Coleridge's attitude to Beaumont and Fletcher is similar, although he did not rate them as great as Jonson in terms of general dramatic ability. They, too, are masters of their own form--that type of comedy which is contrary to tragedy rather than its essential opposite. As in the case of Jonson, too, he complains that Beaumont and Fletcher present no likeable characters. Their comedies

> are most of them disturbed by the fantasticalness or gross caricature of the persons or incidents. There are few characters that you can like (even though you should have had erased from you all the

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[63] M.C., p.55.

> filth that bespatters the most likeable, as Piniero [in The Island Princess for instance), scarcely any you can love. How different from Shakespeare, who makes one have a sort of sneaking affection for even his Barnardines, whose very Iagos and Richards are awful, and, by the counteracting power of profound intellects, rendered fearful rather than hateful.[64]

There is a deeper flaw in Beaumont and Fletcher's writings, however--the revelling in grossness and the details of lechery that Coleridge sees as being characteristic of their work. Whereas Shakespeare presents grossness in such a way as to excite our intellect, making us laugh and reject the grossness, thereby implying a higher ideal, Beaumont and Fletcher appeal directly to our sense of the lewd:

> In Shakespeare the mere generalities of sex, mere words oftenest, seldom or never distinct images--all head-work, and fancy-drolleries, no sensation supposed in the speaker, no itchy wriggling. In Beaumont and Fletcher the *minutiae* of a lecher.[65]

But the fault lies deeper than mere grossness--it springs from an ignorance of the true nature of morality, an inability to see deeper into right and wrong than the mere prudential--and it applies to all of Beaumont and Fletcher's plays, being in fact more apparent in their tragedies:

> Beaumont and Fletcher always write as if virtue or goodness were a sort of talisman or strange something that might be lost without the least fault on the part of the owner. In short, their chaste ladies value their chastity as a material thing, not as an

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[64] *M.C.*, p.82.

[65] *M.C.*, p.83.

act or state of being--and this mere _thing_ being merely imaginary, no wonder that all their women are represented with the minds of strumpets, except a few irrational humorists, far less capable of exciting our sympathy than a Hindoo who had had a basin of cow-broth thrown over him--for this, tho' a debasing superstition, is still real, and we might pity the poor wretch, though we cannot help despising him. But Beaumont and Fletcher's Lucinas are clumsy fictions. It is too plain that the authors had no one idea of chastity as a virtue--but only such a conception as a blind man might have of the power of seeing, by handling an ox's eye. In _The Queen of Corinth_, indeed, they talk differently--but it is all _talk_, for nothing is real but the dread of losing a reputation. Hence the frightful contrast between these women (even those who are meant for virtuous) and Shakespeare's. So, for instance, _The Maid in the Mill_--a woman must not merely have grown old in brothels, but have chuckled over every abomination committed in them with a rampart sympathy of imagination, to have had her fancy so . . . [?] drunk with the minutiae of lechery as this icy chaste virgin.[66]

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[66] _M.C._, pp. 81 - 82. cf. Hazlitt's remark in Lecture IV, "On Beaumont and Fletcher, Ben Jonson, Ford, and Massinger," of his "Lectures on the Age of Elizabeth," that in the drama of Beaumont and Fletcher

> there is a too frequent mixture of voluptuous softness or effeminacy of character with horror in the subjects, a conscious weakness (Ican hardly think it wantonness) of moral constitution struggling with wilful and violent situations, . . . The tone of Shakespear's writings is manly and bracing; theirs is at once insipid and meretricious, in the comparison. Shakespear never disturbs the grounds of moral principle; but leaves his characters (after doing them heaped justice on all sides) to be judged of by our common sense and natural feeling. Beaumont and Fletcher constantly bring in equivocal sentiments and characters, as if to set them up to be debated by sophistical casuistry, or varnished over with the colours of poetical ingenuity. Or Shakespear may be said to "cast the diseases of the mind, only to restore it to a sound and pristine health": the dramatic paradoxes of Beaumont and Fletcher are, to all appearances, tinctured with an infusion of personal vanity and laxity of principle.

The Complete Works of William Hazlitt, VI, 249 - 250.

Massinger shares the fault of Beaumont and Fletcher in that he, too, alienates us from his characters. Coleridge sees Massinger as using a satirical rather than a comic technique. He seems to regard satire as being inferior to comedy, probably because we are not given an opportunity to see the good qualities of the characters and like them:

> Massinger—Vein of <u>satire</u> on the <u>times</u> . . . not, as in Shakespeare, the natures evolving themselves according to their incidental disproportions from excess, deficiency, or mislocation of one or more of the component elements, but what is attributed to them by others.[67]

The difference between humour and satire, in Coleridge's view, therefore, is that whereas humour shows us a character with one feature in amusing disproportion to the rest, satire slants or misrepresents a character in such a way as to make him seem ridiculous. Whereas humour is truthful and sympathetic, satire comes closer to slanderous gossip. In addition Coleridge dislikes such plays because the nature of drama is violated by the playwright's constant intrusion by putting his own words into characters not suited to them, thus becoming guilty of that heinous dramatic crime, ventriloquism. In contrast, Shakespeare allows his characters to develop naturally before us, leaving us to infer their natures from their actions:

Shakespeare's Sir Andrew Aguecheek and Osric [are]

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[67] *M.C.*, p.93.

> displayed by others, in the course of social intercourse, as by the mode of their performing some office in which they are employed; but Massinger['s] Sylli comes forward to declare himself a fool, *ad arbitrium auctoris*, and so the diction always needs the *subintelligitur* (the man looks *as if he thought* so and so) expressed in the nature of the satirist, not of the man himself . . . The author mixed his own feelings and judgments concerning him, but the man himself, till mad, fights up against them and betrays, by the attempt to modify [them], an activity and copiousness of thought, image, and expression which belongs not to Sylli, but to a man of wit making himself merry with his [own] character.[68]

Massinger thus falls short of the ideal represented in Shakespeare. It is true that

> He excels in narration, and for the most part displays his mere story with skill. But he is not a poet of high imagination; he is like a Flemish painter, in whose delineations objects appear as they do in nature, have the same force and truth, and produce the same effect upon the spectator. But Shakespeare is beyond this;--he always by metaphors and figures involves in the thing considered a universe of past and possible experiences; he mingles earth, sea, and air, gives a soul to everything, and at the same time that he inspires human feelings, adds dignity in his images to human nature itself.[69]

It is in this respect that Shakespeare is greater than his contemporaries, that he recognises the dignity of human nature and adds to it by fixing an eye on the great potential resident in the human spirit, while he also represents life as it is. By using genuine humour as well as wit, he shows care and respect for human nature, whereas his fellow dramatists want only to

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[68] *M.C.*, pp. 94 - 95.

[69] *M.C.*, p. 96.

mock it. Moreover, Shakespeare can use comedy to suggest or imply the ideal and serious.

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Coleridge, then, does not have a concept of "modern" comedy as a form. This is probably because he sees a genre as being constituted of means ordered to an end, and he clearly cannot accept pure comic entertainment as being a worthy end. Although he can applaud the way in which a successful comic dramatist achieves his effects (as, for example, in the case of Jónson) he cannot help but regret the lack of a serious, ideal, or philosophical element, which is, by normal standards, not essential to comedy. And he seldom analyses wherein the ludicrousness of a comedy consists. In his few comments on Measure for Measure he treats the play rather as a philosophical and moral problem on argument, than a comedy:

> the pardon and marriage of Angelo not merely baffles the strong indignant claim of justice (for cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness, cannot be forgiven, because we cannot conceive them as being morally repented of) but it is likewise degrading to the character of women.[70]

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[70] S.C., I, 113 - 114.

And he examines The Tempest as a "romantic drama" with a light tone without explaining why the tone should be light, and making hardly any reference to comic effect. It is true that comedy need not be defined in terms of the laughable, but Coleridge attempts no definition whatsoever, and makes no attempt to show how such plays as The Tempest differ in kind from tragedy. In many respects, in fact, Coleridge seems uneasy with comedy, and his defence of Shakespeare's puns, for example, is often unconvincing since it explains their merit only within a tragic context. As Raysor points out, Coleridge "felt obliged to attack the neo-classical point of view" on Shakespeare's puns, "but he himself was too sober-minded for entire sympathy with humorous fancies," and his remarks in the defence "suffer from the romantic unwillingness to accept the frivolities of Shakespeare, and from Coleridge's unwillingness to make the necessary admissions to hostile criticism."[71]

On the whole Lamb's comic theory is more congenial to the modern mind than that of Coleridge. Lamb's more practical understanding of the stage embodied in his concept of stage illusion (as opposed to Coleridge's more theoretical concept of dramatic illusion) enabled him to see that character portrayal on stage involves interpretation as well as representation, that (especially

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[71]Raysor's Introduction to S.C., I, xxxiv.

in comedy) much of our enjoyment springs precisely from the fact that the illusion is not complete, that the actor, far from representing the character he is playing with perfect naturalness, retains a separate identity to a certain degree and in his own person as agent for the playwright comments on the character he represents in a kind of sub-insinuation. For example, the realistic portrayal of a coward on stage would give us no pleasure:

> The most mortifying infirmity in human nature, to feel in ourselves, or to contemplate in another, is, perhaps, cowardice. To see a coward done to the life upon a stage would produce anything but mirth. Yet we most of us remember Jack Bannister's cowards. Could anything be more aggreable, more pleasant? We loved the rogues. How was this effected but by the exquisite art of the actor in a perpetual sub-insinuation to us, the spectators, even in the extremity of the shaking fit, that he was not half such a coward as we took him for? We saw all the common symptoms of the malady upon him; the quivering lip, the cowering knees, the teeth chattering; and could have sworn "that man was frightened." But we forgot all the while--or kept it almost a secret to ourselves--that he never once lost his self-possession; that he let out, by a thousand droll looks and gestures--meant at us, and not at all supposed to be visible to his fellows in the scene, that his confidence in his own resources had never once deserted him. Was this a genuine picture of a coward; or not rather a likeness, which the clever artist contrived to palm upon us instead of an original; while we secretly connived at the delusion for the purpose of greater pleasure, than a more genuine counterfeiting of the imbecility, helplessness, and utter self-desertion, which we know to be concomitants of cowardice in real life, could have given us?72

Lamb realises, as Coleridge does not, that the character who "comes forward to declare himself a fool, ad arbi-

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72 "Stage Illusion," The Works of Charles Lamb, p. 422.

trium auctoris" is a legitimate device of comedy, that it is the "subintelligitur (the man looks as if he thought so and so) expressed in the nature of the satirist not of the man himself"[73] that provides much of the pleasure of comedy. He is therefore more able to appreciate the comedy of manners than is Coleridge.

Lamb's notion of the dramatic distance between the characters on stage and the audience, too, enables him to appreciate plays (like Restoration and eighteenth century comedies) which represent libertinism and immorality. Such plays, he claims, do not harm our morals at all, because we in no way identify with the characters on stage who live in a different world from us and are not part of our own reality. In fact we wear the shackles of morality and necessary restriction "the more contentedly for having respired the breath of an imaginary freedom."[74] He points out of the comedies of Congreve that

> No good person can be justly offended as a spectator, because no good person suffers on the stage. Judged morally, every character in these plays--the few exceptions are only *mistakes*--is alike essentially vain and worthless. The great art of Congreve is especially shown in this, that he has entirely excluded from his scenes . . . not only anything like a faultless character, but any pretensions to goodness or good feelings whatever. Whether he did this designedly, or instinctively, the effect is as

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[73] See Coleridge's remarks on Massinger, section 3 of this chapter.

[74] "On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", *The Works of Charles Lamb*, p.402.

> happy, as the design (if design) was bold. I used to wonder at the strange power which his Way of the World in particular possesses of interesting you all along in the pursuits of characters for whom you absolutely care nothing--for you neither hate nor love his personages--and I think it is owing to this very indifference for any, that you endure the whole. He has spread a privation of moral light, I will call it, rather than by the ugly name of palpable darkness, over his creations; and his shadows flit before you without distinction or preference. Had he introduced a good character, a single gush of moral feeling, a revulsion of the judgment to actual life and actual duties, the impertinent Goshen would have only lighted to the discovery of deformities, which now are none, because we think them none.[75]

This more tolerant view seems to detect and express the spirit of comedy far better than Coleridge's somewhat ponderous moralising and theorising. But if we assign literary value to a work which we assert has no moral effect or influence (except a negative one) we degrade the function of literature to that of mere entertainment. It is precisely because Coleridge conceived literature as having a far more important role that his comments on comedy sometimes seem so serious, philosophical and idealistic as to miss the point. And since we still tend to demand of all art that it communicate some kind of moral truth, since, further, we have never been able to decide what importance should be laid on entertainment value, what on some form of "enlightenment" in our evaluation of comedies, his remarks on

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[75]"On the Artificial Comedy of the Last Century", The Works of Charles Lamb, p.403.

comedy should at least claim a measure of respect.

It is mainly in Coleridge's vision of comedy as an element pervading drama that the value of his comic theory lies, however--in the contribution to an understanding of the intellectual role that wit and other comic devices play in life as in drama, and especially in tragedy. Particularly interesting is the interaction in his theory of the Aristolelian idea of the laughable on the one hand and the sympathetic imagination on the other. The first forms the basis of his theory of the ludicrous. He justifies the use of techniques which are basically comic in tragedy by demonstrating that, when used to indicate something incongruous in a situation, they can, where Aristotle's negative qualification for the laughable--dangerlessness --is absent, be used to heighten an effect of terror or eerie wildness. The second, as evidenced in his theory of humour, is used to check the use of the laughable for its own trivial ends or for harmful satirical purposes in Coleridge's ideal dramatic hypothesis, so that our laughter is harnessed to a worthy end--the recognition at once of our own folly and greatness and the fostering in us of an understanding and love of human dignity.

CHAPTER VI

COLERIDGE ON TRAGEDY

Although he never explicitly said so, there can be little doubt that Coleridge's favourite dramatic genre was tragedy. Of the six plays--*Hamlet*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello*, *Richard II*, and *The Tempest*--which he analysed in the most detail and referred to most often, four are tragedies. Moreover, in each of these four cases Coleridge tried to assess wherein the tragedy of the situation lay, thus showing an interest in tragic theory, although he never actually quotes or mentions the work of past tragic theorists. By comparison he examined only two comedies--*The Tempest* and *Love's Labour's Lost*--in any detail, and in neither case did he relate his observations to a theory of comedy.

Coleridge's preference is hardly surprising, bearing in mind the key importance he assigns to passion in his view of the process of artistic creation. As I have pointed out in my first chapter, passion is the basis of the imagination, and therefore plays an extremely important part in the creative act. And the passion that the writer infuses into his work "provides

that neither thought nor imagery shall be simply objective, but that the *passio vera* of humanity shall warm and animate both."[1] Not only this, but the evoking of fine and noble passion in the audience is one of the most important ends of literature, since (in Coleridge's view) such passions are altruistic and thus help members of the audience to transcend the self and contemplate the universe, nature, and God. Literature therefore should try to evoke such passions as are

> not only permanent in themselves but always and solely to be gratified by the same outward excellences, the same in essence tho' infinitely varying in form, subject, and degree. Such are our imagination, our delight from the clear perception of truth, and our moral sense, including our awe for the greatness, our pity for suffering, and our indignation at wrongs. In short, has the pleasure you have received had any tendency to make you a better man, or to keep you a good one, or to reward you in part for having been so? [2]

Of all dramatic genres tragedy both embodies and evokes the most intense passion. Coleridge was aware of this fact, and there can be little doubt that this is why he likes tragedy so much. Thus he remarks that tragedy originated in the Ancient Greek hymn to Bacchus who was

> worshipped in the mysteries as representative of the organic energies of the Universe, that work by passion and joy without apparent distinct consciousness, and rather as the cause or condition of skill and contrivance than the result; and thus [he was]

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[1] *S.C.*, I, 166.

[2] *S.C.*, I, 246.

> distinguished from Apollo and Minerva, under which they the Ancient Greeks personified the causative and pre-ordaining intellect manifested throughout nature.[3]

He adds shortly afterwards that associated with Bacchus are "all the vehement and awful passions and the events and actions proceeding from such passions."[4] For Coleridge, then, the genre of tragedy is concerned primarily with the mystery of life and with the passion or intensity with which we (represented by the characters on stage) react to life when living most fully, rather than with a strictly rational chain of cause and effect in human affairs.

This does not mean that tragedy is not at all concerned with the logic of destiny (indeed, as I shall show, Coleridge considers that the logic of the tragic fall is highly important), but merely that in a tragedy objective, rational logic should be subsumed into the "passio vera." Nor does it mean that there should not be an element of hard and profound thought in tragedy--Coleridge makes it quite clear that no play of any genre should appeal only to our emotions. If a play is a good one, according to his theory, our emotional and intellectual reactions to it should be inseparably fused. If a play concentrates on evoking emotional reactions only, it must necessarily be divorced from truth, and

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[3] S.C., I, 184 - 185.
[4] S.C., I, 185.

for Coleridge truth was the highest end of literature. His main complaint against the sentimental drama of his time was that it totally ignored any human reaction but the emotional, whereas the tragic scenes of the "elder dramatists of England and France"

> were meant to affect us indeed, but within the bounds of pleasure, and in union with the activity both of our understanding and imagination.[5]

The audience's reaction to "sentimental drama" is devoid of any spiritual or intellectual quality, therefore, and as a result, the tears aroused have virtually no significance, being little different from those produced by peeling an onion or shaving the upper lip, and (by implication) as short-lived. Thus he remarked of Moore's <u>The Gamester</u> that

> The situations . . . were frequently very affecting, but in the language of the piece there was nothing that was valuable. It was extremely natural for anyone to cry at seeing a beautiful woman in the depths of anguish and despair at seeing her husband, who had ruined himself by gaming, poisoned at the very moment he had come into a large fortune, and might have lived in affluence and happiness; but there was nothing in it to improve the heart, or enlighten the understanding. To be sure it produced tears, and so would a blunt razor on shaving the upper lip.[6]

In fact Coleridge seems to have considered that such appeals to our pity by representing utter disaster with no consolation whatever, are merely painful: this is part of the point behind the blunt razor image. Unless there

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[5] <u>B.L.</u>, II, 159.

[6] Foakes, p.32.

is some kind of logic in the play to account for the catastrophe, therefore, and to give a sense of meaning to its pathos, watching the action on the stage becomes an act of masochism. Coleridge clearly did not think that the exercise of the sympathetic imagination and pity is itself pleasurable:

> Pain [should be] no more than what is compatible with co-existing pleasure and to be amply repaid by thought; else onions or shaving the upper lip [may serve as satisfactory substitutes for tragedy].[7]

It is for this reason that Coleridge disliked the scene in which Gloucester is blinded in *King Lear*, considering that "in this one point the tragic has been urged beyond the outermost mark and *ne plus ultra* of the dramatic."[8]

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For Coleridge, then, tragedy must combine intense passion with a high level of thought. To demonstrate how tragedy is able to combine these two qualities it is necessary to consider his definition of tragedy already discussed in Chapter III of this thesis. The main characteristic of the tragic form according to this description,

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[7] *S.C.*, I, 204.

[8] *S.C.*, I, 57.

is earnestness, which consists in the "direction and convergence of all the powers of the soul to one aim, and the voluntary limitation of its activity in consequence."[9] The word therefore connotes the high seriousness that springs from dedication, purposefulness, or single-mindedness. It is the sense of purpose in the main character or characters, and the aura of high seriousness associated with it that provides the passion of tragedy. Since a sense of purpose is also an intellectual quality, depending on mental decisions, the passion springing from it is not of an un-rational nature, although it may go beyond the bounds of reason in its intensity, and although there may be something wrong with the reasoning behind the hero's sense of purpose. Coleridge makes it very clear that the spirit and the reason (he uses the two almost synonymously here) dominate in the constitution of the tragic hero, as in that of tragedy as a whole. There seems in fact to be the implication that the sense of purpose depends on this disciplined order within the hero's character, where all powers and faculties are arranged in such a way as to achieve the ends of the mind and spirit with the utmost possible efficiency:

> the tragic poet idealizes his characters by giving to the spiritual part of our nature a more decided preponderance over the animal cravings and impulses than is met with in real life. . . .
>
> The ideal of earnest poetry consists in the

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[9] S.C., I, 169.

> union and harmonious melting down, the fusion of the sensual into the spiritual, of the man as an animal into man as a power of reason and self-government, which we have represented to us most clearly in the plastic art, or statuary, where the perfection of form is an outward symbol of inward perfection and the most elevated ideas, where the body is wholly penetrated by the soul, and spiritualised even to a state of glory.[10]

This does not mean, however, that the reason and spirit of the tragic hero are infallible or perfect. Coleridge sees tragedy as representing a struggle between the will of the tragic hero and fate, "and the deepest effect is produced, when the fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will, and the opposition of the individual as springing from a defect."[11] The wording of the last clause implies that the tragic hero is wrong even to oppose fate--it is his defect that makes him take such a course. His sense of purpose is thus basically at fault, being irrational in opposing this higher and intelligent will, but not, as we have seen, un-rational. Moreover, as Coleridge points out elsewhere,

> tragedy is not a collection of virtues and perfections, but takes care only that the vices and imperfections should arise from the passions, errors, and prejudices which arise out of the soul,[12]

so that, although the hero's sense of purpose is of an intellectual nature, it may be swayed by irrational passions so deep-seated as to be instinctive, part of his

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[10] S.C., I, 170.

[11] S.C., I, 138.

[12] S.C., I, 170.

nature, and ineradicable.

The informing principle, or "germ" of tragedy, therefore, is the conflict between the tragic hero and fate, where the tragic hero's flaw is responsible for bringing about his fall. The concept of a tragic flaw, of course, is as old as Aristotle, but Aristotle's view of tragedy also implies a reason for dissatisfaction with the tragic cosmos: his view is that tragedy should excite pity and fear, and he claims that we feel pity in observing "unmerited misfortune;"[13] a basic technique of tragedy, he implies, is to make the audience feel that the tragic hero does not deserve to suffer as much as he does.

In asserting that fate is a higher will than that of man, Coleridge gives it the image of the Christian God, and deprives it of the power of being either wrong or bad--or rather, if it were ever so, humans being inferior in virtue and brainpower would not be able to recognise the fact. It is easy to overstate this point, however, triumphantly exhibiting it as a sign of the Romantic dilution of tragedy with Christianity. It is important to notice that this higher and intelligent will does not enter the struggle, the conflict of the play, actively, but rather manifests itself

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[13]Aristotle, The Poetics, trans. S. H. Butcher (New York: Hill and Wang, a Dramabook, 1961), Chapter XIII, p.76.

in certain inexorable laws, which the hero either opposes, or for some reason is unable to obey. Coleridge is merely making it clear that fate is not positively unjust, and that the tragic hero brings about his own fall. Since the hero's opposition springs from a defect which is an organic part of his personality, not a sin, we can still pity him while offering up our vote of confidence in God. Nor is God responsible for the hero's defect, for Coleridge tends to adhere to the Rousseauist principle that it is society, its institutions and methods of education, which is responsible for producing good or bad men.

The nature of Coleridge's tragic theory becomes clearer when we compare it to that of Aristotle. Aristotle's theory of tragedy, although it takes the tragic flaw into account, tends to lay its emphasis on the tragic disaster and the audience's reaction of pity and fear to the hero's downfall. He thus tends to concentrate on the end of tragedy, its catharsis. Aristotle is not overtly concerned with the cause of the tragic disaster, the proximity of tragedy's relation to real life, or the "truth" of tragedy. He does point out that the poet should deal in universal rather than particular truths, but he does not expound any further than this on the question of truth in tragedy, nor does he consider the truths tragedy conveys in themselves separately from the effect of pity and fear which he

maintains they should arouse in us. His theory is affective.

As has frequently been observed by critics, Coleridge does not concentrate much on the ends of tragedies. But this is not necessarily a sign (as Sylvan Barnet claims, for example[14]) that Coleridge's Romantic beliefs make him unwilling to contemplate or accept disaster as complete as occurs in tragedy. It is merely a sign that Coleridge's theory of tragedy is not affective. In fact he would probably have objected to such theories on the grounds that they emphasise the emotional effect that a play has to the detriment of the intellectual effect, or the quality of emotion that the play appeals to. By such criteria sentimental drama is no different in kind from tragedy, and in fact affective theories can be used to make very poor works respectable, (although this is not to say that Aristotle himself falls into such a trap). To avoid such inherent dangers Coleridge concentrates on the logic of tragedy, the particular cause of the tragic disaster. Since he places the responsibility for this event solely on the shoulders of the tragic hero, his discussion of tragedy is much more concerned with showing how the germs of the catastrophe are evident already in the tragic hero's character, with discussing the mistakes the hero is

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[14] Sylvan Barnet, "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains," Shakespeare Quarterly, VII (1956), 9 - 19, esp. 10 & 11. Hereafter referred to as Barnet.

making, how he brings about his own fall through his own actions based (ultimately) on his own mistaken philosophy, and how he opposes the "higher and intelligent will." In short, Coleridge is concerned with the inevitability of tragedy rather than its horror, and he therefore concentrates on the germ and development of the tragic situation rather than its end, which, given his tragic theory, is a foregone conclusion.

The word "inevitable" in the last paragraph was used in an impressionistic sense. The tragic disaster *seems* inevitable because it is so logical an end to the train of events which springs from the initial circumstances. It does *not* mean that the catastrophe is predestined, but that, given the tragic hero's defect, his mistaken choice in opposing the higher will is predictable. Coleridge makes it quite clear that the tragic hero has free-will. In fact in his view this is the main difference between epic and tragedy:

> the difference should be understood between the epic and tragic muse. The latter recognizes and is grounded upon the free-will of man; the former is under the control of destiny. . . . In epic, the prominent character is ever under this influence, and when, accidents are introduced, they are the result of causes over which our will has no power. . . . In the tragic <play> , the free-will of man is the first cause, and accidents are never introduced; if they are, it is considered a great fault. To cause the death of a hero by accident, such as slipping off a plank into the sea, would be beneath the tragic muse, as it would arise from no mental action.[15]

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[15] *S.C.*, II, 277 - 278.

Coleridge's method in examining tragedies tends to be to consider the tragic defect, how it affects the hero's character and actions; to discuss the need in life for whatever quality is lacking or impaired in some way in the tragic hero; and to show how the dramatist has developed the tragic situation by measuring the hero's lack of this quality against the need for it in life in a kind of artistic experiment, placing him in just those circumstances where the lacking or impaired quality is needed most. This is illustrated in a report of Coleridge's third lecture in the 1813 - 1814 series. The lecture is on Hamlet:

> Mr. Coleridge, in his third lecture . . . has shewn that the intricacies of Hamlet's character may be traced to Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. That this character must have some common connection with the laws of our nature, was assumed by the lecturer from the fact that Hamlet was the darling of every country where literature was fostered. He thought it essential to the understanding of Hamlet's character that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. Man was distinguished from the animals in proportion as thought prevailed over sense; but in healthy processes of the mind, a balance was maintained between the impressions of outward objects and the inward operations of the intellect: if there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man becomes the creature of meditation, and loses the power of action. Shakespeare seems to have conceived a mind in the highest degree of excitement, with this overpowering activity of intellect, and to have placed him in circumstances where he was obliged to act on the spur of the moment. Hamlet, though brave and careless of death, had contracted a morbid sensibility from this overbalance in the mind, producing the lingering and vacillating delays of procrastination, and wasting in the energy of resolving the energy of acting. Thus the play of Hamlet offers a direct

> contrast to that of _Macbeth_: the one proceeds with the utmost slowness, the other with breathless and crowded rapidity.[16]

From this experiment embodied in tragedy we can draw certain conclusions about the value of the quality which the tragic hero lacks, or deduce the existence of a universal law with which he has been rendered unable to comply by his defect. The law or "truth" discovered in _Hamlet_ is that "action is the great end of existence."[17] Hamlet cannot obey this law since the constitution of his own character ensures that he is "continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve,"[18] until it is too late. His failure to obey this law brings about the catastrophe.

In such a theory of tragedy, where the emphasis is so heavily on character, where the tragic hero is seen as bringing about his own fall so entirely, the sense of tragic sadness or pathos springs not so much from the catastrophe itself as from the fact that one defect should bring about the ruin of a character so fine in all other respects. We have been expecting the catastrophe, since our knowledge of the hero's character enabled us to predict it, and in any case we know that the tragic hero has brought his ruin upon his own head, but our pity is nevertheless aroused by the fact that "all

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[16] _S.C._, II, 272 - 273.
[17] Foakes, p.128.
[18] Foakes, p.128.

that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of this one quality"[19] which is enough to destroy him. From the law which the play embodies it is possible to draw a further conclusion for the benefit of humanity, namely, (in the case of Hamlet) that it is a "moral necessity" to preserve "a due balance between our attention to outward objects and our meditation on inward thoughts--a due balance between the real and the imaginary world."[20]

Thus Coleridge sees in tragedy a constant tension between character and the qualities which life demands. The higher will makes itself evident in various laws which mankind can break only at its own peril. As we have seen this will does not enter the tragic struggle actively, and seems to be little more than a personification of necessity, used as a means of equating the rather harsh laws of existence with Right, and making the tragic universe Christianly respectable. In fact its laws need not even be ones associated with morality or religion, as I have shown above in the case of Hamlet. Nevertheless, whether moral or immoral, the breaking of these laws brings disaster on the hero's head.

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[19]Foakes, p.128.

[20]S.C., I, 37.

Macbeth, for example (according to Coleridge), is not basically an evil man, but he is morally selfish. He would prefer to attain his ends innocently but he does not realise that "he who wishes a temporal end for itself does in truth will the <u>means</u>."[21] Macbeth is a self-tempter who, by yielding to the witches' temptation, loses his free-agency, and by conspiring with supernatural forces of evil, by committing an unnatural crime, condemns himself to a life of morbid superstition, for "who by guilt tears himself live-asunder from nature is himself in a preternatural state."[22] The tragedy in this play is that so fine a character should be ruined through the defect of selfishness. Coleridge is harder on Macbeth than one might expect a Romantic to be, considering the Rousseauist social principles, and the belief that man is naturally good, which the Romantics inherited. One might have expected him to emphasise the "milk of human-kindness" aspect of the man. But selfishness springs from self-love, which for Coleridge, is the basis of all evil. By allowing himself to become seduced by the prophecies of the witches, with their tantalising talk of the throne, Macbeth himself cultivates the seeds of evil in his soul, becomes a slave

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[21] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 72.

[22] <u>S.C.</u>, I, 76.

to his own wishes and the power of evil itself, and cuts himself off from nature.

Coleridge's long "digressions" on various aspects of life and morality are not irrelevant to his purpose at all, therefore--he is merely clarifying and expounding on the laws which become evident from a reading of the play. Thus, since Romeo and Juliet portrays love it is important to discuss the play in relation to the real nature of love as we know it, in order to understand and benefit to the fullest extent from the play, to test its principles against the touchstone of life, and to translate the artistic experience into clear philosophical knowledge:

> Wherever love is described as being of a serious nature, and much more when it is to lead to a tragical end, it depends on a law of the mind which Coleridge believed he should make intelligible.[23]

It is because Coleridge can find no such law demonstrated in Oedipus Rex that he considers it inferior to Shakespearean drama. Unless Oedipus can be shown to have brought his fate upon himself by committing some tragic error, the play seems illogical and absurd:

> None of the plays of Shakespeare were built upon anything but what was absolutely necessary for our existence, and consequently must be permanent while we continue men. Take the admirable Tragedy of Orestes, or the husband of Jocasta, yet whatever might be the genius of Sophocles, they had a fault.

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[23]Foakes, p.87.

> There we see a man oppressed by fate for an action of which he was not morally guilty: the crime is taken from the moral act, and given to the action; we are obliged to say to ourselves that in those days they considered things without reference to the real guilt of the persons.[24]

The first sentence is confused and confusing. But it seems to indicate that Shakespeare's plays are based upon principles of life which are eternally true. The phrase "absolutely necessary for our existence" admittedly does not seem to fit in with such an interpretation, since principles of this kind are true rather than necessary, forces which govern our lives anyway, rather than laws invented to help us survive. Coleridge does often write confusedly, however, and unless he is referring to such principles, this sentence has no logical connection with the rest of the passage, which argues that there should be a link between the responsibility of the tragic hero for breaking some moral law (i.e. his guilt) and his fate. Coleridge is arguing, in fact, that the tragic hero should deserve his fate, should be guilty, and that poetic justice should be observed.

As we have seen this is not Coleridge's usual position. Usually he insists only that there should be a logical connection between the actions of the hero and his fall, not that the tragic fall should serve as a punishment for the crimes of the guilty hero. The difference is a major one: in the first case the hero need

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[24] Foakes, p.87.

not be committing a crime at all, but merely running his life in such a way as to lead logically to disaster, perhaps through ignorance. Hamlet suffers not because he is evil in the normal Christian sense but because he is constitutionally incapable of swift and effective action at a time when it is needed. Macbeth unwittingly sets himself on the road both (in this case) to destruction and evil when he allows himself to desire a throne, not realising that desiring an end in fact involves willing the means. It is ignorance of or inability to comply with the basic laws of life, not the acts of which the hero is guilty, that is the basis of tragedy in these cases, and these represent the most thorough fulfilment in practice of Coleridge's tragic theory. It is not Coleridge's tragic theory that is at fault in his criticism of Oedipus Rex, therefore, but rather his lack of insight into this particular play. His inability to find a logical connection between action and fate seems to have led him to overstate the need for it to the extent of demanding strict poetic justice for once.

In fact not only does Coleridge use the term "poetic justice" very seldom, but even then not always in a conventional sense. Thus

> a beautiful close--poetic justice indeed! All are punished! The spring and winter meet, and winter assumes the character of spring, spring the sadness of winter.[25]

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[25] S.C., I, 12.

Here the word "poetic" is stressed as if one form of poetic justice would be more poetic than another. He seems in fact to be using the word poetic almost as a synonym of "beautiful", and claiming that this poetic beauty springs from a reconciliation of opposites. This is hardly the conventional meaning of the term. Again, speaking of Romeo and Juliet Coleridge claims that

> In all cases Shakespeare never made his characters win your esteem, but left it to the general command of the passion and poetic justice. It was most beautiful in the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet that the great characters he had principally in view are presumed innocent from all that could do them injury in our feelings concerning them, and yet the other characters, which deserve little interest themselves, derive it from being instrumental in those situations in which the most important personages develop their thoughts and passions.[26]

Here it is by no means clear what Coleridge means by the term "poetic justice". Sometimes the meaning of a certain word or term he uses can only be deduced from the general sense of the sentence or paragraph; this is one of those cases. Coleridge appears to be saying that Shakespeare achieves our good opinion of Romeo and Juliet by keeping them innocent of any act that we might consider unworthy; and that indeed in all his plays Shakespeare never tries to build up great or exaggerated images for his characters, but rouses our passion and hence love by showing them as innocent of any crime and

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[26]Foakes, p.77.

therefore not really deserving of the end they receive. In this case "poetic justice" would seem to mean just the opposite of a system of just deserts--it seems to describe the tragically pathetic image we have of the two lovers. That Coleridge was aware of the conventional meaning of the term is obvious from his statement on King Lear that

> with excellent judgement, and provident for the claims of the moral sense, for that which relatively to the drama is called poetic justice; and as the fittest means for reconciling the feelings of the spectators to the horrors of Gloster's after sufferings. . . Shakespeare has precluded all excuse and palliation of the guilt incurred by both the parents of the base-born Edmund by Gloster's confession that he was at the time a married man and already blest with a lawful heir of his fortunes.[27]

But this is a very rare case, and it seems as if he is trying to justify or rationalise the blinding of Gloucester which, as I have pointed out earlier in this chapter, revolted him.

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The opinion which I have tried to oppose in the last paragraph is merely one aspect of a general view that Coleridge, like the other Romantics, is too "soft"

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[27] S.C., I, 57.

to appreciate or criticise tragedy truly or effectively. Just as the Romantic poet cannot damn the villain he creates, this point of view runs, so the Romantic critic cannot censure the tragic villains of the plays he studies. Thus George Steiner claims:

> The Rousseauist and romantic vision had specific psychological correlatives. It implied a radical critique of the notion of guilt. In the Rousseauist mythology of conduct, a man could commit a crime either because his education had not taught him how to distinguish good and evil, or because he had been corrupted by society. Responsibility lay with his schooling or environment, for evil cannot be native to the soul. And because the individual is not wholly responsible, he cannot be wholly damned. Rousseauism closes the doors of hell. In the hour of truth, the criminal will be possessed with remorse. The crime will be undone or the error made good. Crime leads not to punishment, but to redemption. That is the _Leit-motiv_ in the romantic treatment of evil, from _The Ancient Mariner_ to Goethe's _Faust_, from _Les Miserables_ to the apotheosis of redemption in _Gotterdammerung_.[28]

And Sylvan Barnet, in his article "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains," claims that

> Romanticism is fundamentally optimistic, and its view of man and the universe as essentially good leaves little room for the powers of darkness. Moreover, most philosophic systems tend to exclude the possibility of tragedy, if for no other reason than that they explain too much, whereas the genuinely tragic poet's awareness and sensitivity exceed his knowledge. The "closed" system which the philosopher strives to create almost always includes an explanation of the cause of evil, and once evil has been explained, it rarely can hold its place in tragedy.[29]

Barnet thinks that this applies particularly to Coleridge

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[28]George Steiner, _The Death of Tragedy_ (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p.127.

[29]Barnet, p.10

"the most philosophic of all the English Romantics."[30] I will show later in this chapter that Coleridge can and does accept evil and villainy in tragedy without trying to excuse them, and that he can do so consistently with his Romantic beliefs. Meanwhile it is as well to study his Romantic "optimism."

Coleridge does believe man to be basically good, and he does appear to praise Shakespeare frequently for respecting (according to Coleridge) this belief himself. Thus he remarks approvingly on Shakespeare's treatment of the characters of priests, especially Friar Laurence in Romeo and Juliet:

> As he might not again have an opportunity, he would here compare the different manner in which Shakespeare had treated the priestly character, and other writers. In Beaumont and Fletcher they are described as a vulgar mockery; as in other characters, the errors of a few were mistaken for the character of the many, but in Shakespeare they always brought with them your love and respect: he made no abstracts, no copies from the bad parts of human nature; his characters of priests were drawn from the general.[31]

It is not merely religious reverence which inspires Coleridge to make this statement, for he generalises it to apply to mankind as a whole in the words "as in other characters," and by talking generally of human nature rather than just of the worth of the clergy.[32] Goodness,

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[30] Barnet, p.10.

[31] Foakes, pp. 86 - 87.

[32] In other passages such as S.C., I, 9, 230, Coleridge remarks on Shakespeare's reverence not only for priests but for all the established professions.

therefore, is the norm, evil is accidental, a distortion or perversion of natural order, and is not representative of general nature. One of the reasons for Coleridge's dislike of satires is that they deal with accidents of nature, rather than with general truth.[33] His attitude to evil is indeed Rousseauist, and he often tends to pity a character with a fault as being the victim of circumstances, rather than blame him. Thus he remarks of Shakespeare's works that

> There was no one character in which Envy was portrayed, excepting in Cassius in Julius Caesar; yet even there it is not hateful to you, but he has counterbalanced it by a number of excellent feelings. He leads the reader to suppose that it is rather something constitutional, something derived from his mother which he cannot avoid: throwing the blame from the will of the man to some unavoidable circumstance, rather than fix the attention of the reader on one of those passions which actually debase the mind.[34]

And he says of the apothecary passage in Romeo and Juliet (Act V, scene i) that

> Shakespeare . . . intended to convey that in every man's face there was either to be found a history or a prophecy; a history of struggles past or a prophecy of events to come. In contemplating the face of the most abandoned of mankind, many lineaments of villainy would be seen, yet in the under features . . . would be traced the lines that former sufferings and struggles had impressed, which would always sadden, and frequently soften the observer, and raise a determination in him not to despair, but to regard the unfortunate object with the feelings of a brother.[35]

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[33] See my Chapter V.

[34] Foakes, p.87.

[35] S.C., II, 207.

In the extracts just quoted Coleridge has gone beyond the legitimate bounds of criticism to treat the fictional world of the poet as if it were life itself, and to impose his own philosophical views onto Shakespeare's work. This is a case of over-interpretation rather than misinterpretation, however; few critics would argue with Coleridge's basic tenet that Cassius and the apothecary are not thoroughly evil, blameworthy villains. It is Coleridge's speculation as to the faults these characters do have, the theory of evil that he reads into Shakespeare that the modern critic finds illegitimate. Coleridge's fault here is not misreading the evidence, but deducing more conclusions from it than it will suggest. Such cases occur fairly frequently in his criticism. It is less easy to prove him guilty of misinterpretation in this respect, however.

Sylvan Barnet has tried to do just this in his article "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains," where he claims that usually Coleridge quite wrongly attempts to mitigate the evil of Shakespeare's villains by finding reasonable motives for their crimes, or by justifying the psychology of their behaviour. He cites the case of Edmund, the villain of King Lear, as an example. Coleridge claimed that Edmund's crime was motivated by his resentment at the scorn of his illegitimacy and the "licentious levity" with which his mother and the "circum-

stances of his birth"[36] are spoken, and that his powerful mind, frustrated by the restriction this social stigma imposes upon him, rebels and turns to evil. His shame

> sharpens a predisposition in the heart to evil. For it is a profound moral, that shame will naturally generate guilt; the oppressed will be vindictive, like Shylock, and in the anguish of undeserved ignominy the delusion secretly springs up, of getting over the moral quality of an action by fixing the mind on the mere physical act alone.[37]

Barnet has two objections; firstly, that Edmund probably does not hear the remarks in Act I, scene i, about his mother and his birth (agreeing with Kittredge at this point); and secondly (incorporating many objections in one) that Edmund's illegitimacy is meant to be a symptom of his moral deviation not a motive for his crimes, that he is given his powerful intellect to make him an impressive and frightening adversary to Lear and Cordelia not to give him psychological consistency, that Elizabethan audiences would not have been interested in the villain's character or motives but only in his strength and dangerousness, that many Elizabethan villains are "out of nature" and that Coleridge cannot accept this.[38] Barnet's first objection is extremely weak—even if Edmund does not hear Gloucester's talk

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[36] S.C., I, 56.

[37] S.C., I, 62.

[38] Barnet, pp. 15 - 17.

of his birth in Act I, scene i, it is obvious from his soliloquy in Act I, scene i, lines 1 to 22, that he is both aware and resentful of the remarks made, whether to his face or behind his back, about his birth. Furthermore he constantly mentions the stigma attached to his bastardy throughout the play, specifically using this as a reason to revenge himself on the established world of the legitimates. In his second line of attack against Coleridge, Barnet leaps blindly into the trap of the intentional fallacy--he argues, apparently from intuition, what Shakespeare's intentions in writing the play are likely to have been, what the Elizabethan audiences were likely to have demanded from the play, and uses this as a basis of interpretation, disregarding what the text itself suggests. Shakespeare was quite capable of creating a villain who is at once powerful and psychologically consistent, and Coleridge realised this.

Anyway, despite his Romanticism, Coleridge _can_ accept and admire a villain so utterly evil as to be "out of nature." Barnet claims that Coleridge shows an extraordinary reluctance to accept Shakespeare's "out and out villains" as thoroughly and completely evil because such an acceptance contradicts his basic philosophy. What Barnet seems unaware of is the fact that Coleridge does not always demand that a character be "true to life" psychologically. Thus he claims that

Goneril and Regan are

> proofs of superlative judgment and the finest moral tact, in being utter monsters, nulla virtute redemptae, and kept out of sight as much as possible--they being indeed only means for the excitement and deepening of noblest emotions towards the Lear, Cordelia, etc., and employed with the severest economy.[39]

In effect Coleridge is saying that Goneril and Regan are used merely as foils to Lear and Cordelia, showing up their basic goodness by contrast. Moreover he obviously thinks the contrast is very effective. It is true that he notes approvingly that these two characters are used comparatively little in the play, but this is common sense rather than a squeamish or over-idealistic reluctance to see evil on the stage--if they are merely foils to the good characters, they should be used only as much as is required to make the contrast effective. Over-use of such characters would concentrate attention on them for their own sakes, diverting the audience from Lear and Cordelia.

Coleridge can also accept a major character as an "out-and-out-villain," however, and Iago, who shows the "motive-hunting of motiveless malignity"[40] is a case in point. Iago is admirable, for Coleridge, precisely because of his immense power of evil. He remarks that Shakespeare

> had read nature too heedfully not to know that courage, intellect, and strength of character were

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[39] M.C., p.83.

[40] S.C., I, 49.

> the most impressive forms of power, and that to power in itself, without reference to any moral end, an inevitable admiration and complacency appertains, whether it be displayed in the conquests of a Napoleon or Tamerlane, or in the foam and thunder of a cataract. But in the display of such a character it was of the highest importance to prevent the guilt from passing into utter monstrosity--which again depends on the presence or absence of causes and temptations sufficient to account for the wickedness, without the necessity of recurring to a thorough fiendishness of nature for its origination. For such are the appointed relations of intellectual power to truth, and of truth to goodness, that it becomes both morally and poetic/ally/ unsafe to present what is admirable--what our nature compels us to admire--in the mind, and what is most detestable in the heart, as co-existing in the same individual without any apparent connection, or any modification of the one by the other. That Shakespeare has in one instance, that of Iago, approached to this, and that he has done it successfully, is perhaps the most astonishing proof of his genius, and the opulence of its resources.[41]

It is important to realise that when Coleridge states that it is "morally unsafe" to portray a monstrously evil character with great powers of courage and intellect perverted to carry out the purposes of a black heart, he does not merely mean that this will have a bad moral effect on the audience; he means that intellect, courage and strength of character enable and inspire a man to reach the truth, which is a function and inseparable part of goodness, and that a play which showed such qualities being used to pursue evil instead would be likely to be untrue to the universal nature of morality and truth, therefore--hence the passage about

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[41] S.C., I, 58.

the "appointed relations of intellectual power to truth, and of truth to goodness." Since literature reflects the universal nature of morality and truth, it would also be "poetically unsafe" to present such a character Iago is such a "monstrosity," he is out of nature, but although a psychological freak, he does not represent the philosophic impossibility of a fine mind combined with a despicable heart, simply because he has no heart. For Coleridge Iago is one of "those characters where the pride of intellect, without moral feeling, is supposed to be the ruling impulse."[42] Other examples are Richard III and Falstaff:

> the characters of Richard III, Iago, and Falstaff, were the characters of men who reverse the order of things, who place intellect at the head, whereas it ought to follow like geometry, to prove and to confirm.[43]

Richard III at least has a motive of a kind, however:

> The inferiority of his person made him seek consolation in the superiority of his mind; he had endeavoured to counterbalance his deficiency.[44]

But Iago is a study in pure unmitigated evil. And the reason for this evil is that he has no emotions to restrain his intellect from evil acts: his character is completely "passionless . . . all <u>will</u> in intellect."[45]

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[42]Foakes, p.116.

[43]<u>S.C.</u>,II, 286 - 287.

[44]Foakes, p.116.

[45]<u>S.C.</u>,I, 49.

Although Iago is a psychological impossibility, Coleridge sees him as exemplifying evil philosophically, for Coleridge saw evil as being complete egoism, and egoism as springing from rule by the intellect alone, devoid of the emotions, imagination and the moral feelings that combined with the intellect help to make up the Reason, and which help to transfer a man's attention to something other than self-contemplation or self-gratification.[46] In other words Coleridge is prepared to accept an utterly monstrous villain as a major character, even though he does not believe such a person would occur in real life, provided the nature of evil can be illuminated and explored through a study of his character. Iago's evil is philosophically possible because he has no emotions, moral feeling or imagination, to elevate him out of himself or to channel his intellectual power into its natural search for truth and goodness.

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For Steiner, the dismal failure of Romantic attempts at tragedy is a result of the essentially untragic vision at the core of their and their age's

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[46]See my Chapter II.

philosophy, the optimism, the belief in social progress, and the Christian belief in redemption and a compensating heaven for the guilt and suffering of mankind.[47] Yet, despite the fact that Coleridge's tragedy Remorse is an exceptionally bad tragedy (if it can be called a tragedy at all), his criticism escapes most of the Romantic evils. It is true that occasionally his Romantic philosophy urges him to excuse a character's faults a little too easily--as in the case of his remarks on Cassius, quoted above, but such cases are rare, and he makes no attempt to excuse the arch-villains Iago, Richard III, Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. He tries to explain the motives of the last three mentioned, and even claims that Lady Macbeth feels remorse at her deed,[48] but at no stage does he persuade us that any of these characters have any justification for their crimes. Nor does he try to graft the concept of poetic justice onto tragedy. It is worth considering Remorse to see why it is so signal a failure, therefore. Don Alvar has been away from Spain for many years, heartbroken after an attempt on his life by hirelings of his brother, Don Ordonio, who

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[47] The Death of Tragedy, Chapter IV.

[48] S.C., I, 72--one of the most eloquent passages in all Coleridge's criticism. He describes Lady Macbeth as feeding herself with day-dreams of ambition, she mistakes the consequences of the realities of guilt. Hers is the mock fortitude of a mind deluded by ambition; she shames her husband with a superhuman audacity of fancy which she cannot support, but sinks in the season of remorse, and dies in suicidal agony.

loves Donna Teresa whose heart is lost to Don Alvar who returns her love. The play shows the attempts of Don Alvar, disguised as a Moor, both to try by devious means to make his brother feel a pang of remorse and repent, and to win Donna Teresa once more. By the end of the play he has accomplished the second purpose and is about to achieve the first, having revealed his true identity to both Don Ordonio and Donna Teresa. Don Ordonio is struggling with his conscience, beset by remorse for his guilt, when a band of Moors led by a woman whose husband Ordonio has killed bursts in. He is stabbed by Alhadra, the Moorish woman, and dies crying "ATONEMENT!"[49] Steiner comments:

> In Coleridge's Remorse, the problem of the quality of repentance is made the centre of the drama:
> Remorse is at the heart, in which it grows:
> If that be gentle, it drops balmy dews
> Of true repentance; but if proud and gloomy,
> It is a poison-tree that pierced to the inmost
> Weeps only tears of poison!
> Remorse, I, i.
>
> Coleridge was far too perceptive not to realise that there is in the entire notion of redemptive remorse something fraudulent. The villain of the play, Ordonio, gets to the heart of the matter:
> Alvar: Yet, yet thou may'st be sav'd--
> Ordonio: Sav'd sav'd?
> Alvar: One pang!
> Could I call up one pang of true remorse!
> Ordonio: . . . . remorse! remorse!
> Where gotts't thou that fool's word?
> Curse on remorse!
> Can it give up the dead, or recompact
> A mangled body? mangled--dashed to atoms!

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[49]Remorse V.i. in The Poetical Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. James Dyke Campbell (London: Macmillan and Co., 1903) pp.360 - 398, esp.p.397.

> Not all the blessings of a host of angels
> Can blow away a desolate widow's curse!
> And though they spill thy heart's blood
> for atonement
> It will not weigh against an orphan's tear.
> Remorse, V.i.

> A superb answer, and one that cuts to the heart of the distinction between romanticism and a tragic sense of life. But the prevailing mythology proved too strong, and the drama ends on a note of redemption.[50]

Steiner's comment is perceptive. But it is not mainly, if at all, the redemption theme that makes the tragedy fail. Tragedies, after all, frequently end on a note of elation as well as ruin--Oedipus's worldly ruin is accompanied by a great gain in spiritual wisdom, Hamlet dies, if we are to believe Horatio, with a good chance of getting to Heaven, and Antony and Cleopatra die having found something greater and more glorious than the petty Roman world. What is fatal to tragedy is a division of the tragic hero, the focal point of the play, into two opposing characters, and the successful conclusion of a romance in the last act to counterbalance the tragic disaster. It is true that a tragedy can have two heroes--<u>Antony and Cleopatra</u> manages it quite successfully, for example--but only where the two heroes complement each other and reinforce each other's stature. When they are in opposition to each other the audience's attention wavers from one to the other, and neither attains

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[50] <u>The Death of Tragedy</u>, pp.131 - 132.

true tragic stature. In any case Don Alvar is far too superhumanly good to make a tragic hero. In contrast, Ordonio's evil seems far greater than it is. For four acts the play has the typical melodramatic structure of one good character versus one bad character, until suddenly in the fifth act we discover that the villain is not as evil as he seemed, and the good character tries to bring him to repent. Unfortunately the unsatisfactory contrasting relationship between the two central characters is now replaced with an even more disastrous one--that of the spiritual patient and the redeemer. The one character who should be the tragic hero, whose remorse the play exists to illustrate, whose struggles with his conscience ought to represent the heroic peak of the play, seems in the last act when he is accompanied by his good brother, little better than a sulky schoolboy telling his father his sins. If Ordonio had fought his own evil, achieved his atonement alone, unaided, and had accepted death as the price, he might have achieved tragic stature in our minds; when he is aided by a man who is much wiser and stronger in character he has no chance, when in addition our attention is diverted by his redeemer's romance, he seems almost insignificant. Unfortunately, too, owing to the character-structure of the play, it seems very much as if Ordonio, the third member of an eternal triangle, has to be sacrificed to convenience,

rather than bringing about his own tragic fall logically. Finally, the fact that poetic justice is (albeit almost accidentally) observed with Don Alvar and Donna Teresa reunited and Don Ordonio dead, makes the play seem little more than a particularly soulful melodrama. These are faults which spring from the peculiar structure of the play, from Coleridge's dramatic ineptitude, however, not from his tragic theory, which was far more realistic.

CHAPTER VII

AN EXAMINATION OF COLERIDGE'S ANALYSIS OF <u>ROMEO AND JULIET</u> AS AN EXAMPLE OF HIS PRACTICAL CRITICISM

So far this thesis has concerned itself with relating Coleridge's dramatic criticism to his literary theory as a whole, considering his concept of genre, and examining his critical judgments under generic headings, such as "Coleridge on Tragedy". As I have pointed out in my Introduction, I chose this approach to help bridge the gap between Coleridge and the twentieth century, since we tend to approach literature generically now, and because Coleridge himself foreshadows this trend, generic classification being at the heart of his critical system.

At the same time, however, he was aware that the critic cannot be content with having created a critical system--he must test its validity and prove its use in practical application. Coleridge's generic system is particularly interesting because of its flexibility--precisely because of the fact that he knew that classification is not enough, that each work as well as having certain generic characteristics is also an individual in

its own right and therefore requires special attention and criticism and evaluation according to its own rules, the rules by which it creates itself.[1] An attempt to approach Coleridge's dramatic criticism merely by examining its relation to his literary theory cannot succeed, because in so doing the critic inevitably overlooks the many excellent practical judgments which Coleridge made, while a generic approach ignores such psychological and philosophical insights, no matter how brilliant, as relate to the work as an individual in itself independent of its generic nature. A fair picture of Coleridge's criticism, with all its virtues and faults can, therefore, be given only by examining and describing his actual analysis of some play and relating this both to his generic statements and his literary theory. I have chosen his analysis of this particular play for examination because it shows clearly his critical faults and excellences, because it exhibits the closest relationship to his remarks on literary theory, on life, and a practical description and evaluation of the work itself, because despite its importance little has been said of it so far in this thesis, because this was obviously one of his favourite plays and forms a key place in his view of Shakespeare's works, and because although his remarks on this play show clearly that it deviates from his idea of the norm in tragedy he does not think any the worse

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[1]See Chapter Three of this thesis.

of it.

The material on which this chapter is based consists of Coleridge's marginalia, whose date is uncertain except that they could not pre-date the Stockdale edition of Shakespeare published in 1807[2] in which they were written, lectures six, seven and eight of 1811, and part of lecture one of 1813. Although in each case I have, in a footnote along with the source-reference, indicated the dates of the lectures of Coleridge's from which I have quoted, I have not tried to show any chronological line of development in Coleridge's thought on the play because of the uncertainty of the date of the marginalia which, together with the 1811 lectures, form the bulk of my material. Besides, as I have pointed out in my Introduction, in my examination of the whole body of Coleridge's dramatic criticism I have found no evidence of significant discrepancy of thought even between remarks on related topics separated by a wide range of time. Occasionally there are changes of emphasis from marginalia to lecture, or from one lecture to another, but these cannot be taken as reliable evidence of development of any line of thought, for Coleridge's somewhat confused and digressive style of lecturing and his lack of preparation for lecturesmeant that he might well not get beyond the first point he wished to make, so that the course of his lecture would be dic-

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[2] See Raysor's Preface to S.C., I, ix, n.3.

tated less by careful and planned thought than by the impulse of the moment. Coleridge's 1811 lectures on Romeo and Juliet, for example, expand in great detail on two points made in the marginalia--Shakespeare's method of creating characters by meditation on his own nature, and Shakespeare's idea of love--glossing over or ignoring others which occupy just as important a place in the marginalia. A reading of the lectures (lectures seven and eight) themselves suggests that this is merely because Coleridge strayed characteristically from discussing Romeo and Juliet to discussing love in real life, occasionally referring back to the play as parallel evidence.

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Judging from the attention he devoted to it and the remarks he made about it in lectures, Romeo and Juliet was one of Coleridge's favourite plays. But, although he considered it to be one of the masterpieces of literature, Coleridge did not regard it as being, like his other favourites--Hamlet, Othello, Macbeth, King Lear, Richard II, and The Tempest--one of Shakespeare's best works:

> Coleridge now proceeded to Romeo and Juliet . . . because in it were to be found all his <Shakespeare's> excellencies, such as they afterward appeared in his more perfect Dramas, but differing from them in being less happily combined: all the parts were present, but they were not united with the same harmony: there were

> many passages where the whole of his excellence was discovered, and nothing superior could be found in the productions of his after years. The distinction between this play and others was that the parts were less happily combined, or to borrow a phrase from the Painter, the whole work was less in keeping: there was the production of grand portions: there were the limbs of what was excellent; but the production of a whole, in which each part gave delight for itself, and where the whole gave more intellectual delight, was the effect of judgment and taste, not to be obtained but by painful study, and in which we gave up the stronger pleasures, derived from the dazzling light which a man of genius throws over every circumstance, and where we were chiefly struck by vivid and strong images: taste was a subsequent attainment, after the Poet had been disciplined by experience, and adds to genius that talent by which he knows what part of his genius he can make intelligible to that part of mankind for whom he writes.[3]

Clearly Coleridge regarded Shakespeare's other great love tragedy, _Antony and Cleopatra_, as being a better work--he wonders whether the play is not "in all exhibitions of a giant power in its strength and vigor of maturity, a formidable rival of the _Macbeth_, _Lear_, _Othello_, and _Hamlet_",[4] and claims that "perhaps of Shakespeare's plays the most wonderful is the _Antony and Cleopatra_".[5] Yet, although there is evidence that Coleridge gave, or at any rate planned to devote a lecture on February 18th, 1819 to comparing the two plays,[6] very little comment (apart from purely textual remarks) survives in marginalia

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[3]Foakes, pp.75 - 76.

[4]_S.C._,I, 86.

[5]_S.C._,I, 86.

[6]See _S.C._,II, 319 - 320.

or reports of lectures on Antony and Cleopatra, whereas a relatively large body of material survives on Romeo and Juliet. The reason is that despite its relative inferiority, Romeo and Juliet is in his view more important among Shakespeare's works because in it we see clearly his development as a dramatist. Since in this play Shakespeare is obviously (for Coleridge) still developing the techniques responsible for his dramatic supremacy, we can the more easily see what these techniques consist of, how they work, by comparing within the same play those instances where they have succeeded and those where they have failed. The importance of Romeo and Juliet in Coleridge's view of Shakespeare's works can only be shown by explaining his theory of the development of true dramatic genius.

Coleridge considered the main fault of Shakespeare's early works to be a quality akin to artificiality, an excess of polish and wit springing from the fact that these plays were the product of thought and meditation untempered by the observation that comes with experience. He points out that "true genius begins by generalizing and condensing; it ends in realizing and expanding. It first collects the seeds,"[7] and he considers Love's Labour's Lost to be Shakespeare's first play because

> it has the least observation, and the characters are merely such as a young man of genius might have made out himself. But it has other marks; it is all in-

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[7] S.C., I, 92.

tellect. There is little to interest as a dramatic representation, yet affording infinite matter of beautiful quotation.[8]

In his early years, according to Coleridge, the genius dramatist will be more concerned with discovering and communicating truth. His plays, therefore, will be largely ideal--that is, concerned with ideas and at least partly abstracted from life, like a philosophical problem. In his desire to convey the truths he has discovered as effectively and vividly as possible, he will frequently sacrifice the rules of good taste to the end of strong expression, be guilty of a certain degree of sensationalism (to use a modern term). Taste comes only with observation and that knowledge of reality which experience alone can teach, for taste in this context denotes that sense by which the writer is able to render his expression conformable to nature (in the sense of external reality). The perfect work of art (as I have shown in the first chapter of this thesis) results from the meeting and fusing of meditation and observation within the creative process, so that the truths conceived in meditation can be tested in the simulated world of

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[8] S.C., II, 314. Coleridge changed his mind quite frequently as to the exact order of Shakespeare's plays. He did not always consider Love's Labour's Lost to be Shakespeare's first play--see S.C., I, 237, for example. He always considered it to be one of the earliest works, however.

experience which is the poet's representation of life. Taste is responsible for making this representation a just one, but meditation always comes first and is also primary in importance, for the essential truth, the real point of the work, lies not in its truth to nature (again in the sense of external reality, or the natura naturata), but in the justness of its representation and in its faithful expression of the eternal laws of the universe. Thus Coleridge points out that "the idea" is "always _a priori_, tho' incarnated by observation _a posteriori et ab extra_,"[9] and that

> Shakespeare's observation was preceded by contemplation: he first conceived what the forms of things must be and then went humbly to the oracle of nature to ask whether he was right. He enquired of her as a sovereign; he did not gossip with her. Shakespeare describes feelings which no observation could teach.[10]

With so philosophical a task, meditation is in fact very much akin to the process of reasoning used in philosophy: "meditation looks at every character with interest, only as it contains something generally true, and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem."[11] Since only meditation can uncover the eternal truths which are the object of literature (as of philosophy), it is more important that the young dramatist should

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[9] _S.C._, I, 229.

[10] _S.C._, II, 17.

[11] _S.C._, II, 117.

master the art of meditation before he acquires taste:

> It would be a hopeless symptom, in Coleridge's mind, if he found a young man with a perfect taste. In the early works of Shakespeare a profusion of double epithets would be found, and sometimes the coarsest words were used if they conveyed a more vivid image, but by degrees the associations are connected with the image they are to impress, and the Poet descends from the ideal into the real world so far as to conjoin both, to give a sphere of active operations to the ideal, to elevate and refine the real.[12]

In Coleridge's view, however, two main faults nevertheless result from an excess of meditation over observation. The first is that since observation alone can give drama its sense of immediacy, presence of life, and the verisimilitude essential to its imitation of reality "under a semblance of reality",[13] a deficiency of this quality must necessarily detract from the play's dramatic nature. The fact that the simulation (as opposed to the imitation) of life is imperfect, makes it poetic rather than dramatic. Secondly, and as a result of the first fault, the characters will not be fully translated from their prenatal existence as concepts or ideas into life-like beings. Both these faults are strongly marked in *Love's Labour's Lost*:

> This play in reality contained in itself very little character. The *dramatis personae* were only the embryos of characters. Biron was afterwards seen

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[12] Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

[13] *S.C.*, I, 199 - 200.

> more perfectly in Benedict and Mercutio, and Rosaline in Beatrice, the beloved of Benedict . . . .The poet in this play . . . was always uppermost, and little was drawn from real life.[14]

For Coleridge Romeo and Juliet appears to mark the transition of Shakespeare from poet into dramatist. There are still passages where

> the Poet is not entirely blended with the Dramatist, at least not in that degree which is afterward noticed in Lear, Hamlet, Othello and Macbeth. For instance, Capulet and Montague frequently talked language only belonging to the Poet, and not so much characteristic of passion as of a faculty,[15]

and Coleridge cites Capulet's speech in Act I, scene ii,

> Such comfort as do lusty young men feel,
> When well apparelled April on the heel
> Of limping Winter treads, even such delight
> Among fresh female buds shall you this night
> Inherit at my house,[16]

as a case "where the Poet forgets the character and speaks in his own person",[17] thus being guilty of a fault akin to ventriloquism. He sees a similar fault in Act III, scene v where Capulet admonishes Juliet for resisting the proposed marriage to Paris: "a noble scene! Don't I see it with my own eyes? Yes, but not with Juliet's."[18] And Act IV,

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[14] S.C., II, 108.

[15] Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.81.

[16] Quoted from the transcript of Coleridge's seventh lecture of 1811 in Foakes, p.81.

[17] Lecture seven, 1811: Faakes, p.81.

[18] Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 11.

scene v, in which Juliet is supposed dead by her family is flawed for Coleridge in a slightly different way which nevertheless stems from Shakespeare's relative lack of dramatic skill; he is worried by the tone, the lack of tragic elevation:

> As the audience knew that Juliet is not dead, this scene is, perhaps, excusable. At all events, it is a strong warning to minor dramatists not to introduce at one time many different characters agitated by one and the same circumstance. It is difficult to understand what effect, whether that of pity or laughter, Shakespeare meant to produce--the occasion and the characteristic speeches are so little in harmony: ex. gratia, what the Nurse says is excellently suited to the Nurse's character, but grotesquely unsuited to the occasion.[19]

But against these occasional lapses from dramatic art Coleridge sets Shakespeare's brilliant characterisation in the play, especially as evidenced in such figures as Mercutio and the Nurse.

It is from Coleridge's remarks on Romeo and Juliet that we learn most about his theory of characterisation, for it is here that he explains most about the interrelationship between meditation and observation in the creation of character, and his method of describing the characters makes it clear, implicitly if not explicitly, what part each of these two faculties played in their creation. According to Coleridge two types of character can be discerned in Romeo and Juliet. The first is that

> in which passion is drawn, and drawn truly, but not individualized further than as the actor appears on

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[19] Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 11.

> the Stage: It was a very just description and development of the passion without giving . . . the philosophical history of it; without knowing how such a man became acted upon by that particular passion, but leading it through all the incidents and making it predominant.[20]

This type of character, then, approximates to the "type" or "stock character", who has one predominant characteristic which is exhibited in a number of different circumstances, and is used to develop the plot, but claims little further interest. Although such a character's predominant feature may be described, it is not really explored, and does not claim any central interest, as Hamlet's brooding mentality does, for instance. Tybalt is a character of this kind. He is

> a man abandoned to his passions, and with all the pride of family only because he thought it belonged to him as of such a family, and valuing himself highly simply because he did not care for Death.[21]

These are all general characteristics commonly associated with members of Tybalt's high rank; none of them distinguishes the character as an individual, and indeed Coleridge describes Tybalt as a "class character":

> Coleridge knew no character in Shakespeare, unless indeed his Pistol, which could be called mere Portraits of Individuals: while the reader felt all the delight arising from the individual, there was a sort of class character which made Shakespeare the Poet of all ages.
>
> Of this kind was the character of Tybalt, a man abandoned to his passions. . . .[22]

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[20]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

[21]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

[22]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

It is important to note that the word "class" is being used primarily as a synonym of "type" rather than "rank"; Coleridge is commenting on the interaction of typical and individual qualities in Shakespeare's characters, and pointing out that in such characters as Tybalt there are more typical features than individual. Nevertheless these typical qualities, such as pride of family, spring from Tybalt's high rank. It is also important to realise that Coleridge is not dividing Shakespeare's characters strictly into types and individuals. The Raysor version of the above quoted passage helps to clarify the issue. Here Coleridge is reported as saying

> I know no character in his plays, (unless indeed Pistol be an exception) which can be called the mere portrait of an individual: while the reader feels all the satisfaction arising from individuality, yet that very individual is a sort of class character, and this circumstance renders Shakespeare the poet of all ages.
>
> Tybalt is a man abandoned to his passions. . . .[23]

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[23] Lecture seven, 1811: S.C., II, 129 - 130. Although the Foakes text, based on the transcript of Coleridge's lectures in Collier's diary, has on the whole more authority than the Raysor, based on Collier's Seven Lectures on Shakespeare and Milton published in 1856 (see my Introduction), I believe there are instances in which Collier, recognising an element of confusion in the notes in his diary, and aided by a thorough knowledge of the mode of reasoning of the man who had once been his hero, honestly and intelligently (albeit with a licence we might be unwilling to admit), silently clarified the passage in question by rephrasing his notes. It seems to me that this is such a case, and that the Raysor version of the passage quoted above, with its vision of the "class" quality and the "individual" quality as being opposites which are at once essential and complementary to each other, producing a beneficial whole when reconciled, is more characteristic of Coleridge than the same passage in Foakes.

According to the wording of this passage, which I prefer to that in the Foakes text, every one of Shakespeare's characters has this "class" quality at its core, and hence "class character" is not a label which can be given exclusively to characters like Tybalt. Nevertheless it is clear from his general statements that such characters have far more of "class" in them than of "individual". It is worth examining this first type of character carefully and showing how characters of this type interact with each other in the play, according to Coleridge, before discussing the second type and how it differs from the first.

Another example of the first type of character is Capulet. He is

> a worthy, noble-minded old man of high rank, with all the impatience of character which is likely to accompany it. It is delightful to see the sensibilities of nature always so exquisitely called forth, as if the Poet had the 100 arms of the Polypus, thrown out in all directions to catch the predominant feeling. We might see in Capulet the way in which Anger seizes hold of everything that comes in its way, as in the lines where Capulet is reproving Tybalt for his fierceness of behaviour, which led him to wish to insult a Montague and disturb the merriment:
>
> Go to, go to,
> You are a saucy boy. Is't so indeed?
> This trick may chance to scathe you--I know what.
> You must contrary me: marry, 'tis time.
> Well said my hearts! You are a princox; go.--
> Be quiet or--More light, more light, for shame!--
> I'll make you quiet: What? Cheerly, my hearts.
> <Romeo and Juliet I.v>
>
> The line--"This trick may [chance to] scathe you:--I know what" was in allusion to the Legacy Tybalt might expect; and then, seeing the lights burn dimly, Capulet turns his anger against the servants: so that no one passion is so predominant, but that

> it always includes all the parts of the character, so that the reader never had a mere abstract of a passion, as of anger or ambition, but the whole man was presented; the one predominant passion acting as the leader of the band to the rest.[24]

These characters, then, are not so simple as to be mere one-dimensional abstracts of passions. Shakespeare has given each of them a predominant character trait or passion--rash, arrogant impetuousness in the case of Tybalt, and impatience in the case of Capulet--but the predominant passion is never allowed to become separated from the character itself; in each case the whole character can be seen in the outburst, and each outburst of passion is slightly different as the circumstances giving rise to it vary.

In some respects the two characters, Tybalt and Capulet, are opposed to each other. Each represents a different effect that pride of family can have on a person, and Coleridge clearly disapproves of Tybalt's personality and approves of that of Capulet, so that one takes on the nature almost of a bad person, the other that of a good. The difference is that whereas high birth has simply made Tybalt arrogant--he has "pride of family only because he thought it belonged to him as of such a family"--without making him feel that he has any obligation to improve his character, Capulet's high rank has made him "worthy and noble-minded". Their place in

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[24]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.77.

society has given both of the two characters a certain precipitancy (a common characteristic of all the characters in this play, according to Coleridge, as I will show later on in this chapter). This takes the form of rash impetuousness in Tybalt--he is "abandoned to his passions" and he values himself highly because he is careless of death--and of a more moderate impatience in the case of Capulet. Coleridge hastens to point out that the grounds on which Tybalt bases his high opinion of himself are false, for courage is a quality "which it was a disgrace not to have, but which a wise man never brought forward but when it was required",[25] knowing the value of life: it is not only the heroes who are subject to error in Coleridge's interpretation of tragedy--all the characters seem to be compared to a kind of ideal norm of behaviour and ethics in his mind, and even such comparatively minor characters as Tybalt can provide instructive lessons in morality. The difference between Capulet's impatience and Tybalt's impetuousness is that the latter quality is mixed with arrogance and the immaturity of youth.

As I have shown in my first chapter, Coleridge regarded Shakespeare's characters as individualised types. In the creation of such beings it is meditation which

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[25]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

enables the writer to arrive at the essential core of the character--the type--and observation which individualises it, makes the product of meditation credible and life-like by adding fine human strokes of detail:

> Shakespeare's characters are all _genera_ intensely individualized; the results of meditation, of which observation supplied the drapery and the colours necessary to combine them with each other.[26]

This being so, it is clear that such characters as Tybalt and Capulet, who are predominantly typical rather than fully rounded individuals, are produced as a result of a greater degree of meditation than observation.

The second type of character which Coleridge discerns in _Romeo and Juliet_ is no less a product of meditation--Coleridge makes it clear that every character must be based on meditation in order to be successful--but it is more individualised. Two such characters are Mercutio and the Nurse, and, as in the case of Hamlet, Shakespeare has "availed himself of his psychological genius to develop all the minutiae of the human heart"[27] in their creation. Mercutio's qualities,

> that exquisite ebullience and overflow of youthful life, wafted on over the laughing wavelets of pleasure and prosperity. . . . Wit ever wakeful, fancy busy and procreative, courage, an easy mind that, without cares of its own, was at once disposed to laugh away those

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[26] _S.C._, I, 137

[27] Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.78.

of others and be interested in them,[28]

all stem from his position as a young, rich gentleman. This is the essence of Mercutio's character, the copula by which all apparent paradoxes in his nature are reconciled: all melt into "the common copula of all, the man of quality and the gentleman, with all its excellencies and all its faults."[29]

Mercutio's character too, therefore, is founded on a type. In fact the only difference between this second kind of character and the first is that the second is more fully drawn, made more life-like by the greater addition of detail in characterisation. This explains Coleridge's statement that

> Shakespeare's characters might be reduced to a few, that is to say to a few classes of characters. If you took his gentlemen for instance; the character of Biron was seen again in Mercutio, in Benedick, and a variety of others. They were men who combined the politeness of the Courtier with the faculties of intellect; the powers of combination which only belong to an intellectual mind.[30]

In showing how the details spring from the type, one can see how meditation and observation interact in characterisation, how observation can be "the child of meditation."[31] None of the Nurse's characteristics, for example, are accidental--they all spring naturally from her position, circumstances and environment. Thus, because her mind

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[28]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet, S.C., I, 8.

[29]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet, S.C., I, 8.

[30]Lecture six, 1811: Foakes, p.68

[31]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.78

has never been trained,

> in all her recollections she entirely assists herself by a remembrance of visual circumstances. The great difference between the cultivated and uncultivated mind was this, that the cultivated mind would be found to recall the past by certain regular trains of cause and effect, whereas with the uncultivated it was wholly done by a coincidence of images or circumstances which happened at the same time.[32]

Similarly her "garrulity" is a result of old age, her arrogance of ignorance and "the pride of real meanness at being connected with a great family", and her grossness springs from her situation as a servant.[33] All these details are the products of observation, but it is a form of observation guided by meditation, so that no detail will be meaningless--every one will have a significant relationship both to the character as a whole, enabling us to understand its inner nature more perfectly, and to life itself. That is why Coleridge says of the character of the Nurse that "more in fact was brought into one portrait here than any single observation could have given, and nothing incongruous to the whole was introduced."[34] Thus the details, which are the products of observation become little more than extrapolations from the type, which is the result of meditation.

In fact in this second class of characters there is an even greater degree of meditation than in the first

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[32]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, pp. 79 - 80.

[33]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.79.

[34]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.80.

type (although it is not as great in proportion to the degree of observation as in the first case). Coleridge says of the first type of character that in it there is

> a very just description and development of the passion without giving . . . the philosophical history of it; without knowing how such a man became acted upon by that particular passion",[35]

thus implying that in the second type of character we do see the "philosophical history" of the passion. It would seem, therefore, that a high degree of observation in the creation of character stimulates further the poet's meditative processes, already in operation, presumably by forcing him to work out the relation between the details of his actions (in the description of which observation plays the principal part) and the basic personality or copula (the result of meditation) which explains all the details. It seems, too, that it is in the relation of the character's actions to his basic personality or the philosophical concept on which the character is based, that the psychological genius of the poet comes into play:

> It was one of the great advantages of Shakespeare that he availed himself of his psychological genius to develop all the minutiae of the human heart;-- that he, shewing us the thing, makes visible what we should otherwise not have seen: just as, after looking at distant objects through a Telescope, when we behold them afterwards with the naked eye, we see them with greater distinctness than we should

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[35]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.76.

otherwise have done.[36]

It is not always clear whether Coleridge is classifying these two types of characters according to purely descriptive criteria or evaluative ones. On the one hand he realises that some of the characters in a play must necessarily be relatively simple, treated with less psychological realism than the central characters, so as not to distract attention from them:

> It could not be expected that the poet should introduce such a character as Hamlet into every play; but even in those personages which are subordinate to a hero so eminently philosophical, the passion is at least rendered instructive, and induces the reader to look with a keener eye, and a finer judgment into human nature,[37]

thus implying that it would be impractical to populate a play with highly complex characters and that there is a place too for simpler, less individualised, but nevertheless instructive characters based on valid philosophical concepts. On the other hand, he describes Mercutio, one of the second class of characters, as being "one of the truly Shakespearian characters,"[38] which would seem

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[36]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.78

[37]Lecture seven, 1811: S.C., II, 131. I have followed the Raysor text here because it seems to make more sense than the Foakes, which is very close to this, but has the word "instinctive" instead of "instructive". "Instructive" clearly makes more sense in context. This would seem to be another case in which Collier has made an honest and common-sense alteration to the notes in his diary, which must therefore be accepted.

[38]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.78.

to imply that Tybalt and Capulet are not up to the mature Shakespearean standard. His statement that "Capulet and Montague frequently talked language only belonging to the Poet, and not so much characteristic of passion as of a faculty,"[39] moreover, plainly hints at over-simplified characterisation; and the fact that it is apparently only in Romeo and Juliet that Coleridge sees these two types of character, would seem to indicate that Shakespeare advanced beyond the first type when he shed the faults and weaknesses of his literary youth. In short, Coleridge's opinion of the first class of characters, such as Tybalt and Capulet, is that they are less individual than the second type, and oversimplified, even bearing in mind the fact that some characters must necessarily be drawn with less detail than others. Although Shakespeare has erred to some extent in the creation of these characters, however, he has erred on the right side--that of an overbalance of meditation rather than observation, so that they are at least typical rather than idiosyncratic. Tybalt and Capulet represent glorious failures in Shakespeare's creation of character, for the flaw in their creation was to become one of the virtues of his successful characters--this extreme typicality, the result of meditation, when redeemed by the indi-

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[39]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.81.

viduality springing from a greater proportion of observation, was also the reason for the greatness of such characters as Mercutio and the Nurse in <u>Romeo and Juliet</u>, and Hamlet.

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Coleridge's analysis of <u>Romeo and Juliet</u> is unusual in another respect--namely that he places less emphasis on the heroes and more on the whole cast of characters as representative of a community than he does in the other tragedies. He points out that "the groundwork of the tale is altogether in family life, and the events of the play have their first origin in family-feuds."[40] These quarrels affect the whole community, even down to the servants of the two great families:

> With his accustomed judgement Shakespeare has begun by placing before us a lively picture of all the impulses of the play, like a prelude; and /as/ human folly ever presents two sides, one for Heraclitus and one for Democritus, he has first given the laughable absurdity of the evil in the contagion of the servants. The domestic tale begins with domestic/s /, that have so little to do that they are under the necessity of letting the superfluity of sensorial power fly off thro' the escape-valve of

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[40] Marginalia on <u>Romeo and Juliet</u>, <u>S.C.</u>, I, 5.

> wit-combats and quarreling with weapons of sharper edge, all in humble imitation of their masters.[41]

Moreover, the catastrophe is one that befalls the whole community rather than just the heroes, for the death of Romeo and Juliet represents a terrible blow to the houses of Montague and Capulet. Thus Coleridge asserts of the end of the play that "all are punished."[42]

In a sense, therefore, the death of Romeo and Juliet is (for Coleridge) a disaster that the whole community has brought upon itself, and the tragic flaw which brings about the disaster, and which is common to all the characters, is precipitancy. This is the quality which causes the family feuds: "in family quarrels . . . wilfulness and precipitancy and passion from the mere habit and custom can alone be expected,"[43] and the rashness with which Romeo acts is but a symptom of the general impetuousness of the whole society. This precipitancy is not wholly a bad thing, however. Although in Tybalt and, to a lesser extent, Capulet, it results from pride of family--an egoistic, and therefore in Coleridgean terms evil impulse--it also arises more generally as a wholesome effect of Spring (in the case of Capulet) and youth (in that of Romeo). In fact Coleridge sees the

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[41]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C.,I, 6.

[42]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C.,I, 12.

[43]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C.,I, 5 - 6.

play as a whole as being about youth and Spring, their effects and the impulses they give rise to. It is youth and Spring which provide the unity of feeling, the spirit which unites the whole play, and precipitancy is merely the tragic flaw arising from them:

> A unity of feeling pervades the whole of his Shakespeare's plays. In Romeo and Juliet all is youth and spring--it is youth with its follies, its virtues, its precipitancies; it is spring with its odours, flowers, and transiency:--the same feeling commences, goes through, and ends the play. The old men, the Capulets and Montagues, are not common old men; they have an eagerness, a hastiness, a precipitancy--the effect of spring. With Romeo his precipitate change of passion, his hasty marriage, and his rash death, are all the effects of youth. With Juliet love has all that is tender and melancholy in the nightingale, all that is voluptuous in the rose, with whatever is sweet in the freshness of spring; but it ends with a long deep sigh, like the breeze of the evening.[44]

Here Coleridge comes surprisingly close to a concept of image clusters; in fact it is only a failure to examine the imagery of the play in detail that prevents him from doing so. Thus he sees that in the play youth is associated with Spring and both give rise to precipitancy. Yet youth also lends itself to love and hence to gentleness and tenderness, while Spring, as well as giving rise to impetuousness, is also associated with the beauty, delicacy and transience of flowers. Coleridge sees the play as being the battle-ground in which such opposite qualities as tenderness and precipitancy contest against each other, in which the maturity and wis-

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[44]Lecture one, 1813: S.C., II, 265.

dom revealed in true love struggle to rise above the precipitancy of the lovers' environment and society. For Coleridge the play could be criticised successfully, therefore, only by first of all ascertaining what love is--hence the long and, even to his nineteenth century audience,[45] unduly moralising passages in his analyses. Thus any attempt to explain justly Coleridge's view of the play must start by concentrating on his view of love. Unfortunately Coleridge appears to have become so interested in whether the love of Romeo and Juliet is true and permanent and in relating Shakespeare's ideas on love in the play to love in real life, that he forgot to make clear its relation to the actual plot. Nevertheless, although somewhat obscured by digression, the connection between the love affair and the bringing about of the catastrophe is implicit in Coleridge's remarks, and the following exposition will attempt to clarify it without doing violence or giving a substantially different emphasis to Coleridge's own comments.

Coleridge takes a platonic view of love, defining it as being

> a perfect desire of the whole being to be united to some thing or some being which is felt necessary to

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[45]Thus, in his Diary, Crabb Robinson remarked on one of Coleridge's lectures on Romeo and Juliet, the eighth lecture of 1811:

> C. unhappily relapsed into his desultory habit and delivered, I think his worst lecture. He began with identifying religion and love, delivered a rhapsody on brotherly and sisterly love, which seduced him into a dissertation on incest. I at last lost all power of attending to him any longer. . . .

> its perfection by the most perfect means that nature permits and reason dictates.[46]

The dawning of love as a passion (as opposed to the appetite on one hand and the spiritual state on the other) comes with the realisation of imperfection and the need for completion and fulfilment, not only sexually, but spiritually through communion with another and complementary mind:

> It is inevitable to every noble mind, whether man or woman, to feel itself of itself imperfect and insufficient, not as an animal merely, but altogether as a moral being. How wonderfully therefore has providence provided for us, to make that which is necessary for us a step of that exaltation to a higher and nobler state. The Creator had ordained that one should possess what the other does not, and the union of both is the most complete ideal of the human character that can be conceived.[47]

This passion, however, has to find its proper object and then submit to discipline before the fulfilment is gained. As in poetry, so in love, passion must be blended with order:

> In everything, blending the similar with the dissimilar is the secret of all pure delight. Who should dare then to stand alone, and vaunt himself in himself sufficient? In Poetry Coleridge had shown that it was the blending of passion with order, and still more in morals, and more than all was it (which woe be to us if we did not at some time contemplate in a moral view solely) the exclusive attachment of the sexes to each other.[48]

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[46]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.84. (In the Foakes text this passage is italicised. Since I have quoted the passage on its own, I have considered further emphasis to be unnecessary).

[47]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, pp. 84 - 85.

[48]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.85.

For most of the rest of this lecture, and for at least half of lecture eight, Coleridge, unfortunately for the clarity of his argument, was seduced into a long digression on the meaning of marriage, its importance for society, its spiritual goodness which elevates mankind above the animal kingdom, and the method by which parents should dissuade brothers and sisters from wanting to marry each other. Despite the irrelevance (for us) of the comments, they must claim a measure of respect since they constitute an integral part of Coleridge's method of relating art to reality—by using the play as a springboard for a discussion of moral principles, and even by indicating that it is suitable for such an exercise, he was showing his high esteem of it. Nevertheless, he can be faulted for going beyond the play itself in his discussion. The point that this digression obscures is that not until the passion of love finds its proper object can it submit to and be blended with the order and discipline which characterise love as a spiritual state. Just as creative ability, when blended with order, transcends chaos and refines itself into poetry, so love, when it finds its proper object, transcends mere precipitate passion and refines itself into an elevated spiritual state. This transcendence of precipitancy is all-important, for (to summarise the argument of the rest of this chapter) as Coleridge sees the play, Romeo's love before he meets Juliet is characterised by impetuousness and

precipitancy, because (not having found its proper object) unblended with order. At this stage he merely partakes of the general precipitancy which characterises his community, although his impetuousness springs from the passion of love rather than from pride of family. His serenity once he has met Juliet is indicative of the depth and genuineness of his love--the passion has found its proper object. This serenity is induced by the effect that true love has on his imagination. But the events around him and the frustrations to their love drag him back into the precipitancy he has transcended, and summon back the rashness that is their ruin.

The precipitancy of Romeo's passion can be seen in the extravagance of his expression when describing Rosaline and protesting his love for her to Benvolio in Act I, scene ii, lines 88 - 93:

> When the devout religion of mine eye
> Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires;
> . . .
> One fairer than my love! the all-seeing sun
> Ne'er saw her match since first the world begun.

On this passage Coleridge comments, "the positiveness of Romeo in a love of his own making--and the boastfulness, never shewn of what's near the heart--again shewn."[49] This rash boastfulness, however, is merely the result of Romeo's yearning for spiritual completion and fulfilment, and Coleridge claims that Romeo

> says that he had a different feeling towards Juliet from that he had towards Rosaline. He adds that

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[49]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 7.

> Rosaline was the object to which his overbuilt heart attached itself; that [in] our imperfect nature, in proportion as our ideas are vivid, they seek after something in which they may appear realized--As men of genius, conscious of their own weakness, are ready to believe persons whom they meet the modes of perfection, when in truth they are worse than themselves: they have formed an ideal in their minds, and they want to see it realized; they want it something more than shadowy thought; their own consciousness of imperfection makes it impossible for them to attach it to themselves, but [in] the first man they meet they only see what is good, and thus have no conjecture of his imperfections, and they fall down, and adore almost, one greatly inferior to themselves.
>
> Such is frequently the case in the friendships of men of genius, and still more frequently in the first loves of ardent feelings and strong imaginations; but still, for a man, having had the experience, without any inward feeling demonstrating the difference, to change one object for another seems without example. But it is perfectly accordant with life: in a life of such various events, such a shifting of scenes, and such a change of personages, we may have mistaken in thinking that he or she was what in truth he or she was not: we may have suffered unnecessary pangs, and have felt idly directed hopes, and then a being may arise who has more resemblance to our ideal: we know that we loved the former with purity, and yet it was not what we now feel; our own mind tells us that the former was but the y earning after the object; in the latter we have found the object correspondent to the idea we had formed.[50] . . .

Far from showing fickleness or frivolity, therefore, Romeo's first shortlived love demonstrates his nobility, even generosity, of mind, in that he is aware of his own imperfection and believes an inferior being--Rosaline--able to complement it and supply what is lacking. He

> became enamoured of the ideal he formed in his own mind, and then, as it were, christened the first

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[50] Lecture eight, 1811: Foakes, pp.96 - 97.

> real being as that which he desired. He appeared to be in love with Rosaline, but in truth he was in love only with his own idea. He felt the necessity of being beloved which no noble mind can be without. . . .[51]

Romeo's passion for Juliet is shown to be true love by his greater serenity and calmness--passion has become blended with order. Thus Coleridge notes in the balcony scene, Act II, scene ii, "the contrast with Romeo's former boastful positiveness, [Shakespeare's] skill in justifying Romeo from inconstancy by making us feel the difference of the passion."[52] He cites, too, Juliet's unselfish and genuine anxiety for Romeo's safety in Act II, scene ii, lines 62 - 65, as a sign of her true love: "with love, pure love, the anxiety for the safety of the object--the disinterestedness by which it is distinguished from the counterfeits of its name."[53] Again, he sees Romeo's good-natured ease in his jesting with Mercutio in Act I, scene iv, lines 36 - 96, as a sign of the genuineness of his love: "Romeo's half-exerted, half-real ease of mind, here again compared with [the manner of his love for] Rosaline. His will had come to the clenching point."[54] The last

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[51]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.86. c.f. Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet, S.C., I, 6.

[52]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 8.

[53]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 9.

[54]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 9.

sentence, strange as it may seem, is highly significant, for Coleridge adamantly insisted that "love was an act of the will,"[55] and in his eighth lecture of 1811, "ridiculed the sickly nonsense of Sterne and his imitators, French and English, who maintained that it was an involuntary emotion."[56] This point of view is explained in a small section by Coleridge in the Omniana which he and Southey published in 1812:

> Love an Act of the Will
>
> Love, however sudden, as when we fall in love at first sight, (which is, perhaps, always the case of love in its highest sense,) is yet an act of the will, and that too one of its primary, and therefore ineffaceable acts. This is most important; for if it be not true, either love itself is all a romantic hum, a mere connection of desire with a form appropriated to excite and gratify it, or the mere repetition of a day-dream;--or if it be granted that love has a real, distinct, and excellent being, I know not how we could attach blame and immorality to inconstancy, when confined to the affections and a sense of preference. Either, therefore, we must brutalize our notions with Pope:--
>
> "Lust thro' some certain strainers well refined
> Is gentle love and charms all woman-kind;"
>
> or we must dissolve and thaw away all bonds of morality by the irresistible shocks of an irresistible sensibility with Sterne.[57]

It is the active decision to love someone, therefore, that translates love from a mere sentiment having its whole being in the fantasies of the imagination to a

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[55]Lecture eight, 1811: S.C., II, 207.

[56]Lecture eight, 1811: S.C., II, 207.

[57]Table Talk and Omniana, p.410.

concrete fact of reality, and from a mere whim or passing fancy to a spiritual pledge to which the lover's whole nature is committed and which he can only break by breaking faith with himself. Thus Romeo's active decision to love Juliet is yet another sign of the genuineness of his passion. The fact that he has committed himself to loving her is shown by such details as his "rushing to Juliet" in contrast to his "running away from his Rosaline to woods and nature, in which she indeed alone existed, as the name for his yearning."[58]

Although it is genuine, however, this is a more youthful love than that of Othello, for example, and accordingly we see different aspects of the passion in the two respective plays. In Othello we see a more mature, serious love, since the glamour of youth has worn away, and the hero enters "the marriage state with deep moral reflections on its objects and consequences."[59] In Romeo and Juliet, on the other hand,

> it was Shakespeare's intention . . . to represent love as existing rather in the imagination than in the feelings, as was shewn by the imaginative dialogue between the hero and heroine, in the parting scene in the third act.[60]

At first sight there appears to be a contradiction here, for in idiomatic speech when something is said to exist

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[58]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C.,I, 7.

[59]Lecture eight, 1811: S.C., II, 207.

[60]Lecture eight, 1811: S.C., II, 207.

in the imagination its reality is being denied, and thus a love that exists in the imagination could hardly be said to be genuine. Coleridge makes his meaning clear when he explains that this is "a love in, tho' not merely of, the imagination."[61] (my italics). It is the imagination that supplies the glamour by associating the love with the beauty of nature:

> Love was not like hunger: Love was an associative quality: the hungry savage is a mere animal, thinking of nothing but the satisfaction of his appetite. What was the first effect of love, but to associate the feeling with every object in nature--the trees whisper, the roses exhale their perfumes, the nightingales sing, the very sky seems in unison with the feeling of love: it gives to every object in nature a power of the heart, without which it would indeed be spiritless, a mere dead copy.[62]

This harmony stands in sharp contrast to the chaos, conflict, and precipitancy around the two lovers. They have been able to escape not only the violence of their environment, but the impulsiveness of their own youth, and they have achieved this by means of the imagination. Nor is Coleridge using the word in any common sense. He has already implicitly begun the comparison between poetry and love by stating that in both passion is blended with order. It now becomes clear that in the love between Romeo and Juliet order is supplied by the same agent as in poetry--namely the imagination. For (as I have pointed out in my first chapter) it is the imagination which, according

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[61] Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 9.

[62] Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.86.

to Coleridge's aesthetics, gives life and unity to the dead and discrete objects around us. By associating their love with the beauty of nature, Romeo and Juliet in effect acquire the power of the ideal poet in Coleridge's literary theory to give the empty forms of common things life and vitality in their own perception.[63] Their whole perception, therefore, takes on the nature of a work of art, for a work of art is always an imitation rather than a mere copy, and an imitation is distinguished from a copy (at this particular stage of Coleridge's literary theory) by the injection into it of the author's own personality by means of the imagination. The true, imitative poet's perception of his material, furthermore, is characterised by the "conceiving that

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[63] I have considered the possibility that Romeo and Juliet are meant (in Coleridge's terms) to see through the husk of external reality, the natura naturata, to the dynamic force at work within manifesting God's creative spirit unifying the material world, and that they have perceived the ground that the human spirit shares with nature in the higher sense; but, although tempting, I think such an interpretation would be unsound. Firstly, he does not claim, in the passage I have quoted on the preceding page, that nature <u>is</u> "in unison" with their love but that it <u>seems</u> so. Romeo and Juliet cannot therefore be said to have discovered a law in nature correspondent to a law in <u>human</u> nature. Secondly, as I have pointed out in section 4 of my first chapter, Coleridge does not seem by 1812 to have worked out precisely man's affinity to nature, or to have formulated his theory that the poet retreats into the unconscious, in which the spirit is seated, to experience the ground he shares with the natura naturans. At this stage of the development of his literary theory Coleridge still seems to think that the poet perfects nature, not that by his special insight he discovers a perfection that objectively exists in the spirit at work within.

which is imperfect to be perfect and blending the nobler mind with the meaner object."[64] In just such a way do Romeo and Juliet inject their own personalities into their perception of nature, and make nature itself more perfect by associating their feelings with nature. There is even a possibility that Coleridge sees Romeo and Juliet as creative agents within the play, whose perception forms part of the play. They share the common characteristic of intense passion, and passion in his literary theory is the creative agent which modifies "a series of thoughts into one predominant thought or feeling" to produce "unity of effect."[65] It is almost certainly passion, too, which is the "single energy, modified _ab intra_ in each component part"[66] to effect artistic creation from within the work itself. Moreover he seems to imply that certain parts of a play are produced, as it were, by the characters themselves, with the images fused together and modified ab intra by the characters' own passions, and that the serene and harmonious parts of _Romeo and Juliet_, for example, arise from the outlook on life of the two lovers, the wild, mad passages of _King Lear_ from the mad King himself:

> Other passions distort whatever object is presented to them. Lear accused the elements of ingratitude,

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[64] _S.C._, II, 81.
[65] _S.C._, II, 91.
[66] Marginalia on _Romeo and Juliet_: S.C., I, 5.

> and the madman imagined the straws on which he trampled the golden pavement of a palace; but, with love, every thing was in harmony, and all produced natural and delightful associations.[67]

Whether or not this is true, however, Coleridge's view of Romeo and Juliet in love shows remarkable similarities to his view of the ideal poet: both are elevated above the chaos of life by the imagination.

Ultimately the family feuds drag Romeo down from his exalted state, however, and it is the killing of Mercutio which involves him, once more, unwillingly in the precipitancy around him. Coleridge points out that

> On the Death of Mercutio the catastrophe depended, . . . it served to show how indifference and aversion to activity in Romeo may be overcome, and roused by any deep feeling that is called forth to the most determined actions. Had not Mercutio been made so amiable and so interesting an object to every reader, we could not have felt so strongly as we do the necessity of Romeo's interference, or connecting it so passionately with the future fortunes of the lover and the Mistress.[68]

Romeo's honour cannot allow him to ignore the death of his friend or leave it unrevenged, and so the violence of his society necessarily claims him again. Fogle is right in seeing Romeo as in part the victim of "the agents of the family principle"[69] in Coleridge's interpretation, therefore, and his point of view is borne

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[67]Lecture eight, 1811: S.C., II, 206 - 207.

[68]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.79.

[69]Fogle, p.13.

out by Coleridge's statement that

> In all cases Shakespeare never made his characters win your esteem, but left it to the general command of the passion and poetic justice. It was most beautiful in the Tragedy of Romeo and Juliet that the great characters he had principally in view are presumed innocent from all that could do them injury in our feelings concerning them, and yet the other characters, which deserve little interest themselves, derive it from being instrumental in those situations in which the most important personages develop their thoughts and passions,[70]

which seems to indicate that Romeo and Juliet are on the whole passive in the action of the play, that things happen to them rather than their being agents of the action (although the passage is somewhat obscure). This point should not be over-emphasised, however--Coleridge makes it clear that Romeo shares fully in the general tragic flaw of precipitancy. Although it is a circumstance beyond his control--the killing of Mercutio--that involves Romeo in the family feuds once again, and although this is the turning point of the play, Coleridge makes it clear that Romeo over-reacts to his subsequent exile: on Act III, scene iii, lines 24 - 30, in which Romeo passionately bewails his exile to the Friar, Coleridge remarks admonishingly, "all deep passions [are] a sort of atheists, that believe no future."[71]

For Coleridge the rest of the play exhibits Romeo's overcoming of his precipitancy and his gaining

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[70]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.77.

[71]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 10.

of wisdom and maturity. To the intensity of his love is added the beneficial effect of patience born of sorrow. Thus on Act V, scene iii, lines 59 - 60, in which Romeo attempts to avoid combat with Paris, he remarks, "the gentleness of Romeo shewn before as softened by love; but now by love and sorrow and the awe of the place."[72] And on Romeo's speech in the tomb in Act V, scene iii, lines 88 - 120, Coleridge comments, "here, here, is the master-example how beauty can at once increase and modify passion."[73]

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Despite the brilliance of some parts of Coleridge's analysis of Romeo and Juliet, the value of its conclusions and even much of its argument is doubtful. In his criticism he is too ready to idealise and moralise while ignoring certain practical points. For example, he hastens to argue from the change in Romeo's amorous behaviour that he is genuinely in love with Juliet, and that he just thought he was in love with Rosaline, but he neglects to consider whether or not

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[72]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 12.

[73]Marginalia on Romeo and Juliet: S.C., I, 12.

the fact that Romeo's love for Juliet unlike that for Rosaline was both returned and consummated, could alone have effected this change of behaviour, and that it might be short-lived. The psychological critic would surely argue that such a release of sexual frustrations would have the effect of easing Romeo and making him behave more calmly. Any attempt at proving by close examination of Romeo's behaviour that he is in love with Juliet is bound to run up against such realistic arguments. In short, there are times when examining the events of the play as if they had really taken place, examining the characters' behaviour with an attempt at psychological insight, do not reveal the things we really want to know; and it is at times like these that we realise the inadequacy of such a critical approach unsupplemented by others, even when applied to drama, which with its direct presentation of its matter is in some ways the most life-like genre.

The more conclusive way of arguing that Romeo is genuinely in love with Juliet is by treating the play as an artefact and arguing that Romeo's passion for Rosaline could only have the function of serving as a contrast to the later love affair, and that this confirms our hopes and suspicions that the love for Juliet is genuine and mature in contrast to the earlier immature passion. This point of view implies that the passion for Rosaline represents not merely Romeo's "first love", but the whole of

his adolescent immaturity, a stage in his life, and that henceforward we can expect him to act more maturely. Coleridge seems to be working towards this point of view near the end of lecture seven:

> Shakespeare had described this passion in various states, and he had begun, as was most natural, with love in the young mind. Did he begin with making Romeo and Juliet in love at the first glimpse, as a common and ordinary thinker would do?--No--he knew what he was about, he was to develop the whole passion, and he takes it in its first elements: that sense of imperfection, that yearning to combine itself with something lovely. Romeo became enamoured of the ideal he formed in his own mind, and then, as it were, christened the first real being as that which he desired. He appeared to be in love with Rosaline, but in truth he was in love only with his own idea. He felt the necessity of being beloved, which no noble mind can be without.[74]

Here we seem to be encouraged to see Romeo's passion for Rosaline as a stage in his maturity and the development of his emotions rather than just his first love, to see the incident as less a real event than part of a theme, outside the world of real time, which the play is presenting. Unfortunately, immediately afterwards Coleridge reverts to treating the play as if it were life itself, and becomes embroiled in problems: "Shakespeare then introduces Romeo to Juliet, and makes it not only a violent, but permanent love at first sight, which had been so often ridiculed in Shakespeare."[75] Coleridge's problem is acute. He now has either to justify love at first sight in real

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[74]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.86.

[75]Lecture seven, 1811: Foakes, p.86.

life or to show why the case of Romeo and Juliet should be an exception to the usual folly of such hasty amour. He tries to extract himself from this mire (in the next lecture) by a flurry of words, but only sinks deeper:

> Coleridge certainly did not mean to justify so foolish a thing, as a general maxim, as love at first sight: to express himself more accurately, he should say that there is, and has existed, a feeling, a deep emotion of the mind, which could only be called love momentaneous, not necessarily love at first sight, nor known by the being himself to be so, but by many years of after experience.[76]

In other words, love at first sight may be genuine, but can only be proved to be so by the passage of time. Since the play does not provide enough time to test the love, we are left with the same problem. Here we see one of Coleridge's weakest characteristics--the throwing up of a smoke-screen of fine-sounding words (the term "love momentaneous" is transparently fraudulent) and the escape into digression with a brief promise (never fulfilled) to return to the problem later: "but before he entered into this apparent paradox, he should mention the opinion known throughout Europe by the appellation of the judicious Hooker."[77] This leads Coleridge into a long digression on marriage--it is not surprising that his audience lost patience with this lecture. It is easy to ridicule Coleridge here, but his problem is

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[76]Lecture eight, 1811: Foakes, p.90.

[77]Lecture eight, 1811: Foakes, pp. 90 - 91.

caused by treating the play too much as if it were life itself; this was an approach common to all critics of the age, for they knew no other, and Coleridge is to be credited with at least catching a glimmering of another method, even if he was not able to formulate it consciously.

It is worth considering briefly just how much of a glimmering Coleridge does have of the play as artefact. His term "unity of interest" places its emphasis not on the world presented in the play but on the play's structure[78] and the effect it has on the audience. And Coleridge claims that unity of interest is a special virtue of Romeo and Juliet.[79] Yet he appears to contradict himself on this point, for if the play has the "limbs of what was excellent" but does not constitute a "whole in which each part gave delight for itself, and where the whole gave more intellectual delight,"[80] it can hardly be said to have unity of interest. The answer to this problem would

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[78]On the question of Coleridge's formal criticism of drama see M.M. Badawi, "Coleridge's Formal Criticism of Shakespeare's Plays" EC, X (1960), 148 - 162, and Barbara Hardy, "'I have a Smack of Hamlet': Coleridge and Shakespeare's Characters," EC, VIII (1958), 238 - 255. Both are admirable articles.

[79]S.C., I, 5.

[80]Foakes, p.75.

seem to be that _Romeo and Juliet_ has homogeneity of interest not proportionateness of interest. I have already suggested in section 4 of Chapter I that homogeneity of interest refers to the consistency of mood and of the emotional responses that the different scenes evoke in us, and that it is the chains of imagery that create this homogeneity. "Unity of feeling" appears to be synonymous with homogeneity of interest and, as I have pointed out, Coleridge claims that unity of feeling is one of the most important characteristics of _Romeo and Juliet_. Coleridge's remark that the excellencies of _Romeo and Juliet_ are of a poetic rather than a dramatic nature, and his penetrating comment on the way in which Shakespeare uses Mercutio's death as an instrument for the bringing about of the tragic denouement, moreover, show that he is capable of treating a play as a work of art rather than a slice of life.

But criticism cannot always be tested merely by its conclusions--the method is really more important in blazing the trail for others to follow, in eliminating fallacies which breed superficiality and subjectivity. If Coleridge's method is partly marred by treating drama too much like life, it has other virtues. In his analysis of _Romeo and Juliet_ Coleridge provides an excellent explanation of how Shakespeare, and thus other writers by following Shakespeare's example, can create characters

which are at once realistic and typical, and, although Coleridge's ideas on the interaction of meditation and observation may seem quaint to modern eyes, they provide an excellent method of showing how the dramatist combines philosophical profundity and psychological validity in characterisation. Perhaps most valuable of all, we see him dynamically transforming the eighteenth century "beauties and faults" system of criticism to account for Shakespeare's development. Coleridge analyses Romeo and Juliet according to a "beauties and faults" system, but he relates the beauties and faults to each other, showing why the beauties are beauties and the faults are faults; he does not excuse the faults or glorify them as being the products of genius, but rather shows how and why such a genius could produce such flaws, sees in them, paradoxically, the germs of his future excellence, and makes them meaningful within the context of Shakespeare's development as evidenced by his works. Thus he shows the organic relation of beauties and faults to each other, and the logical relation of both to aesthetic criteria. Although, once again, we may not accept the conclusion, we must admire the brilliance and comprehensiveness of the method and intention.

CONCLUSION

Coleridge's dramatic criticism consists largely of fragments--scattered notes whose chronological relations to one another are unclear, and which give the impression of being unfinished, of being hasty attempts to record brilliant thoughts and insights whose value Coleridge has insufficient patience to explain.

This does not mean that Coleridge's dramatic _theory_ is fragmentary, however, or that his thought is inconsistent. His criticism often _seems_ fragmentary merely because we misunderstand the purposes behind it, because we expect a methodical description and evaluation of different plays whereas Coleridge is searching for the _principles_ of drama, of dramatic criticism, and of life and human nature on which all literature is based. His purpose in examining different plays is, on the whole, merely to illustrate these principles, not to provide a comprehensive catalogue of plays with the reasons for their success or failure. He seems to be content with deducing these principles and leaving to us the thorough application of them to actual works.

That Coleridge's thought is consistent is proved by the fact that he never contradicts himself explicitly,

seldom implicitly. This is because his criticism is intimately related to his philosophy, from which it gains system. His philosophy stresses the unity of nature without which nothing in nature would be comprehensible to us. His literary theory stresses the way in which the poet shows us this unity and renders nature intelligible to us. More particularly, Coleridge's dramatic theory, like his literary theory as a whole, derives its consistency from his conviction that the proper object of criticism is the demonstration of the way in which a work makes itself and its subject matter intelligible to us, the way it reveals its own unity in the complex interrelationship between part and whole, the informing idea and the form. Drama, like all literature, makes life meaningful by revealing in its own reflection of organic unity the meaning of nature. The unity of the work of art is Coleridge's constant theme.

Another indication that Coleridge's ideas on drama are not fragmentary, even if the criticism itself appears to be so, is the complexity, comprehensiveness and flexibility of his concept of genre. It is by means of generic criticism that Coleridge applies his literary theory to particular plays; and it is by studying his ideas on genre, therefore, that the student of Coleridge can best see the interaction in his dramatic criticism of literary theory and practical criticism. Coleridge

never tries to force a work into any genre, never tries to criticise a work in one genre by the criteria of another. Rather, if a particular work does not fit naturally into an existing genre, Coleridge deduces its own generic principles from its informing idea, as in the case of his remarks on Jonson's Sejanus and Catiline His Conspiracy. In his generic criticism there is a just balance between description and evaluation. He describes objectively the idea which organises the particular kind of work, and then assesses the philosophical depth and truth of this idea. He both considers the extent to which the means has fulfilled the end, and estimates the value of the end. He is thus able to avoid prescriptiveness while at the same time reserving the right to assess works according to fixed and just principles.

Although Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice is on the whole highly consistent, it is in his application of the principles of genre to practical criticism that the occasional inconsistencies in his critical system reveal themselves. This is usually because his theory is ahead of his practical ability to apply it. For example, he is aware that the history play, ideally considered, presents a community rather than portraying individual characters for their own sake. But his method of criticism is not advanced enough to enable him to see and explain how the play-

wright does this, and he is forced to fall back on describing the play in terms of character studies.

It is impossible to assess exactly Coleridge's influence on twentieth century criticism, owing to complicating factors such as the question of how much Coleridge himself owed to Schlegel and the German critics. Nor have I tried to estimate Coleridge's influence on us in this thesis. The conclusions of any age's criticism are subject to the dictates of fashion and social idiosyncracies peculiar to the times; twentieth century criticism is just as fallible as that of any other age, and to value Coleridge only to the extent that he has influenced us would therefore be both misguided and arrogant. But it is worth pointing out that we still share Coleridge's concern that criticism should be objective and based on fixed principles while avoiding prescriptiveness; that we still tend to emphasise the "organic" unity, completeness and self-sufficiency of a work of art; and that our criticism, like his, has a generic bias while striving to avoid neo-classical rigidity of classification. Whether we agree with Coleridge's conclusions or not, we must admire the insight and breadth of vision which led him to anticipate the critical issues which we now find so important.

SHORT FORMS OF CITATION

EC	*Essays in Criticism*
ELH	*Journal of English Literary History*
JHI	*Journal of the History of Ideas*
MLN	*Modern Language Notes*
MP	*Modern Philology*
PMLA	*Publications of the Modern Language Association of America*

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