COLERIDGE'S CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE'S PLAYS

Having discussed in detail Coleridge's views on general issues arising out of his treatment of Shakespearian drama, let us now have a close look at his criticism of the individual plays of Shakespeare.

We may begin by pointing out that little attention has been paid to Coleridge's criticism of the form of Shakespeare's plays; the critics seem eager to highlight Coleridge's supposed neglect of form. For example, Rene Wellek accuses Coleridge of placing undue emphasis on characters. According to him, "Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare is largely character analysis. The play as a play is either ignored or minimized".¹

Alfred Harbage in the introduction to his edition of Coleridge's criticism² does not mention anything about Coleridge's criticism of form. Even T.M. Raysor, whom Fogle calls as the "indispensable editor"³ of Coleridge's Shakespearian criticism, remarks that Coleridge treated Shakespeare's plays as if they were novels. Raysor says that Coleridge's primary point of view as a critic was not dramatic but literary and "the result of such criticism is always to subordinate plot to character; that is, to criticize plays as if they were novels, and to forget the numerous conventions of

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the drama for the sake of psychology". 4 In fact, Badawi can be regarded as the only critic who, for the first time, realized the importance of form in Coleridge's analysis of Shakespeare's plays. Unfortunately, however, in his discussion of Coleridge's treatment of the form of Shakespeare's plays, he too, forgets that the meaning of a play cannot be studied in isolation from the dramatic structure. 5 His attempt to find out the meaning of a few Shakespearian plays in Coleridge's analysis led him to abstract it from the total dramatic or artistic pattern rather than to show how Coleridge emphasizes that the play unfolds the meaning only gradually.

We may assert here that Coleridge was the first modern critic to write actual formal criticism of Shakespearian plays in detail. If Fogle's words are to be used, it can be said that Coleridge discusses nothing but structure and his "whole account of the Shakespearian drama is a description of its organic inter-relations". 6 Before going into details, however,

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6 Fogle, op. cit., pp. 113-14.
it is necessary here to remind ourselves that Coleridge's view of structure was different from that of the eighteenth century critics. It was not a mechanical conception of form nor was it based upon the discussion of Aristotelian categories of a beginning, a middle and an end. As is clear from Coleridge's views on dramatic unities and organicism, Coleridge does not isolate the external action or the plot from the whole artistic pattern of a play. By plot Coleridge means only story or fable which is only one constituent of the whole. The story or fable in this sense is merely the "canvas" (Raysor, I, 226) on which the excellence of the dramatist is displayed. It is "the manner, the situations, the actions and reactions of the passion" that are important to complete the whole. The events in themselves are "immaterial otherwise than as the clothing and manifestation of the spirit that is working within" (Raysor, I, 139). In view of this organic conception of the form, Coleridge makes the outward action or external movement expressive of that poetic or dramatic vision which a particular play contains. It is to be noted here that the philosophic vision of human experience which a Shakespearian play is believed to contain is not the same as the eighteenth century conception of the moral of a play. Dramatic poetry, according to Coleridge, "must be poetry hid in thought and passion, not thought or passion disguised in the dress of poetry". This truth or thematic concern is expressed through every part of the play. Every scene contributes towards the revelation of the poet's meaning or, in other words, the themes of the play. Thus a Shakespearian play has some meaning and significance, but it must be interpreted as an autonomous work of art, and its significance lies in the total organic structure of the whole. It, therefore, must be studied as a dramatic piece. This view will become clear if we look into Coleridge's criticism of Shakespearian plays.
Critics\(^7\) have often complained that the only criticism of Coleridge lies in his analysis of the first scenes and that Coleridge could never reach the catastrophe of the plays. In fact, however, in Coleridge's analysis of the first scenes lies the "germ" of a new critical attitude -- something absolutely new in the history of Shakespearian criticism. They are the "microcosm" of the structural harmony. Coleridge was the first to realise that a Shakespearian play is a moving and developing phenomenon. Since the play grows and develops, we should know its development from the very beginning. As we shall see while dealing with Coleridge's criticism of individual plays, Shakespeare's first scenes always, according to Coleridge, prepare the audience for the catastrophe. In a Shakespearian play, we get "expectation in preference of surprise":

\[\text{God said "let there be light, and there was light -- not there was light. As the feeling with which we startle at a shooting star, compared with that of watching the sunrise at the pre-established moment, and so low is surprize compared with expectation.} \]

(Raysor, I, 225)

That Coleridge was interested in the plot of Shakespeare's plays is clear from his Marginalia where he gives equal importance to plot and character. Even the plans of Coleridge's lectures make it amply clear that Coleridge was as interested in the discussion of dramatic structure as in character-analysis (Raysor, II, 27; II, 318-19). However, the criticism that has come down to us in the form of second-hand reports of Coleridge's lectures concerns itself mainly with his analysis of Shakespearian characters. This, however, cannot be regarded as a conclusive proof of his lack of interest in the

\(^7\) Sylvan Barnet, "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains", Shakespeare Quarterly, 7 (1956), No.3, p.11.
plots. Even in the actual reports, we have sufficient evidence of Coleridge's interest in the structure of plays. For example, in the ninth lecture of 1811-12 series, we have a brilliant analysis of the plot of *The Tempest*.

For the sake of convenience we can divide Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare's plays in two groups. In the first group, we can place plays like *Romeo and Juliet* where Coleridge discovers the details of a full-length Shakespearian philosophy. In the second group can be included plays like *The Tempest* which Coleridge analyses with a view to proving his thesis that Shakespeare's judgement is equal to his genius. However, in both these types, Coleridge never forgets that he is analysing these plays primarily as dramatic writings.

I

*Romeo and Juliet*, according to Coleridge, is among the earliest of Shakespeare's works. This is clear not only from the fact that in it are to be found "specimens of all the excellencies" which Shakespeare afterwards displayed in his more perfect dramas but also from the fact that the parts are "less happily combined". All the parts are more or less present but they are not united in the same harmonious ways as is to be found in Shakespeare's later woks. Coleridge says:

> Grand portions are produced: we have limbs of giant growth; but the production, as a whole, in which each part gives delight for itself, and the whole, consisting of these delightful parts, communicates the highest intellectual pleasure and satisfaction, is the result of the application of judgement and taste.  

*(Raysor, II, 128-29)*

The unities of time and place are not observed by Shakespeare in this play but the unity of action or "homogeneity, proportionateness, and totality of interest" are
amply present in the play (Raysor, I, 4). "As this is the particular excellence of Shakespearian dramas generally so it is especially characteristic of Romeo and Juliet".

The vision which is expressed through the characters of Romeo and Juliet (as we shall see in the next chapter) is the permanency of true love. Following Plato, Coleridge defines love in the following may:

Love is a desire of the whole being to be united to some thing, or some being, felt necessary to its completeness, by the most perfect means that nature permits, and reason dictates.

(Raysor, II, 142)

According to Coleridge, this passion of love is described by Shakespeare in various states. The play does not open with Romeo and Juliet in love at first sight. The passion was to be slowly developed (Raysor, II, 144). In the very first scene of the first act, Romeo is depicted already love-bewildered, "the necessity of loving creating an object for itself". He appears to be in love with Rosaline but in truth he is in love with his own idea of love. It is in the line of this philosophy that Coleridge justifies the transition of Romeo from Rosaline to Juliet, since it was due to his own sense of imperfection and his yearning to combine itself with the other lovely half. "Romeo became enamoured of the idea he had formed in his own mind, and then, as it were, christened the first real being of the contrary sex as endowed with the perfectness he desired" (Raysor, II, 144). In Juliet, Romeo's search for his better half gets realized.

This theme of Platonic love is embedded in the subject-matter of "family feuds". The groundwork of the tale is altogether in family life, and the events of the play have their first origin in family feuds:
Filmy as are the eyes of the party spirit, at once dim and truculent, still there is commonly some real or supposed object in view, or principle to be maintained -- and tho' but equal to the twisted wires on the plate of rosin in the preparation for electrical pictures, it is still a guide in some degree, an assimilation to an outline; but in family quarrels, which has proved scarcely less injurious to states, wilfulness and precipitancy and passion from the mere habit and custom can alone be expected.

(Raysor, I, 45)

All these impulses which emanate from these types of family feuds have been placed before us. It is "like the prelude". As "human folly ever presents two sides, one for Heraclitus and one for Democritus", Shakespeare has given the laughable absurdity of the evil in the contagion of the servants. The domestic tale begins with the domestics. "They 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 wit-combats and quarreling with weapons of sharper edge, all in humble imitation of their masters" (Raysor, I, 6). There is a sort of "unhired fidelity", an "our-ishness" about it "that makes it rest pleasant on one's feelings" and all that follows to [the conclusion of the Prince's speech] is a motely dance of all ranks and ages to one tune, as if the horn of Huon had been playing" (Raysor, I, 6).

The "precipitation" which is the character of the play is revealed throughout as, for example, in the speeches of Friar Lawrence and of Romeo (II, vi, 6-11). Subsequent events only conform and intensify this characteristic for this precipitation is to be found not only in the love theme but also in the theme of family feuds (Raysor, I, 9). About Scene v of Act IV in which Juliet is supposed dead by her family, Coleridge says that the scene is perhaps excusable as the audience know that Juliet is alive. However, 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..." (Raysor, II, 11). The occasion and the
characteristic speeches are so little in harmony. What the
Nurse says is excellently suited to her character but
grotesquely unsuited to the occasion (Raysor, II, 11).

Scene i of Act V (lines 1-2 etc.) in which Romeo dreams
the night before he hears that Juliet is dead, is an example of
"Shakespeare's fondness for presentiment and as if aware -- yet
reconciling with the superstition, all reconciling of opposites
-- of anything unusual as unlucky". Romeo buys poison of the
apothecary in Act V, scene i, lines 34-86. This, Coleridge
says, is "so beautiful as to have been selfjustified", yet what
a fine preparation for the tomb scene. Romeo in the tomb (V,
iii, 88-120) is the master example of "how beauty can at once
increase and modify passion". The end is characteristic of the
whole play (Raysor, I, 12):

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.
(V, iii, 290-309)

Thus a unity of feeling pervades the whole of this
drama. Coleridge may be quoted in full:

[It is all] youth and spring - it is youth with
its follies, its virtues, its precipitancies; it
is spring with its odours, flowers, and
transcency; - the same feeling commences, goes
through and ends the play. The old men, the
Capulets and the Montegues, 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.

(Raysor, II, 265)

The "profusion of double epithets", "multitude of rhyming couplets", and the use of "coarsest terms to convey a vivid image" can be found here also as in other early works of Shakespeare. However, "by degrees the associations are connected with the image, they are designed 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, and to elevate and refine the real" (Raysor, II, 129).

As is obvious from the above summary of Coleridge's views, he is most consistently concerned with the totality of the play. The discussion of the theme of love is not simply a matter of abstracting the moral directly from the characters' speeches as was the common practice in the eighteenth century. The theme, on the other hand, is related to character and to the structure of the play. The form and the scenic juxtaposition is related to the nature of experience (i.e., true love) that Shakespeare is trying to mediate. The scene of Romeo's infatuation with Rosaline serves to highlight Shakespeare's deeper thematic concern. According to Coleridge, the early scene brings into focus the nature of the tragic passion that dominates Romeo's life after his meeting with Juliet. The plot, thus, is used by Shakespeare (according to Coleridge) in order to unfold his thematic design rather than just tell an interesting story.

Coleridge's comments on Shakespeare's failures in the play, too, have a similar burden. The greatest drawback in the
play, says Coleridge, is its lack of the kind of harmony that gives unity to Shakespeare's great masterpieces. The stress, thus throughout in Coleridge's criticism of *Romeo and Juliet* is on formal and structural aspects.

II

The students of Shakespeare that have not read a word of Coleridge's criticism must surely have come across the phrase, "I have a smack of Hamlet myself". It is his criticism of the character of Hamlet that has given to Coleridge his image of a psychological critic *per se*. The impression still persists that Coleridge was guilty of setting Shakespearian criticism on the wrong course for more than a hundred years by treating Shakespeare's characters as living, historical personages. It is commonly believed that Coleridge isolated characters from their dramatic contexts and analysed them as if they were real persons.

It may, however, be stated without the fear of contradiction that such an impression is entirely wrong and derived from insufficient knowledge of Coleridge's actual criticism. As a matter of fact, Coleridge is, right from the beginning, concerned with Shakespeare's design in the plays, specially in *Hamlet*. It is a different matter that he thinks the character of the protagonist to constitute the main ingredient of Shakespeare's total design. That such indeed is the case will become obvious in our treatment of Coleridge's criticism of *Hamlet* as a dramatic work.

Before going on to discuss Hamlet's character, Coleridge seeks to discover the design of the dramatist behind the portrayal of Hamlet's character:
The first question that we should ask ourselves is -- what did Shakespeare mean when he drew the character of Hamlet? He never wrote anything without design, and what was his design when he sat down to produce this tragedy.

(Raysor, II, 192)

The design of the dramatist, according to Coleridge, is:

Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth, that action is the chief end of existence -- that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or indeed otherwise than as misfortunes, if they withdraw us from, or render us repugnant to action, and lead us to think and think of doing until the time has elapsed we can do anything effectually.

(Raysor, II, 197)

The main theme of Hamlet, as Coleridge points out, is the superiority of action over thought. The tragedy of Hamlet results from the fact that there is a lack of due balance "between our attention to outward subjects and our meditation on inward thoughts -- a due balance between the real and the imaginary world" (Raysor, I, 37). The effect of this overbalance of imagination is beautifully illustrated in the "inward brooding" of Hamlet who is made by the dramatist the chief object to make the theme clear. Coleridge significantly adds that the meaning of the whole cannot be inferred by isolating the protagonist from the circumstances as both act and react on each other (Raysor, II, 192-93). Hamlet, according to Coleridge, is placed in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in. He is the heir-apparent of a throne, his father dies in suspicious circumstances, and his mother excludes her son from his throne by marrying his uncle. This is not enough. The ghost of the murdered father is introduced to assure the son of the crime. However, what is the effect on the son? Still he delays action till action is of no use, and he becomes a victim of circumstances. Thus, according
to Coleridge, Shakespeare "wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the chief end of existence". This theme is presented not only through the protagonist, but, adds Coleridge, through the arrangement of the scenes and events.

Another theme i.e., the theme of love, is also present in the play. However, as Coleridge points out, it is not made important for "in any direct form to have kept Hamlet's love for Ophelia would have made a breach in the unity of interest" (Raysor, I, 30) and would have diverted the attention of the audience from the main theme. This theme is presented only indirectly as it is often "suggested to thoughtful reader" by Hamlet's "spite to the poor Polonius". Hamlet's anger was due to the fact that Polonius has proved to be an obstacle in the way of Hamlet's love for Ophelia. This theme is presented only in subordination to the main theme since Shakespeare sees to it that nothing should divert the attention of the audience from the main idea i.e., Hamlet's delay.

That Coleridge is concerned with the totality of the play's effect becomes clear when he points out that in conformity to the main theme of the play, the tempo of Hamlet is also "marked by utmost slowness as contrasted with the breathless and crowded rapidity of Macbeth" (Raysor, II, 2730). It is to be noted here that Coleridge begins with a comment on the tempo of the play. Thus it is not the character of Hamlet that is the starting point for Coleridge but the dramatic consideration of form which leads us on to the character of the protagonist.

The opening scene of the play contains the germ of the plot. It focusses the attention inside -- since it is a tragedy "the interest of which is eminently ad et apud intra, as Macbeth is ad extra": 
...no poetic descriptions of night, no elaborate information conveyed by one speaker to another of what both had before their immediate perceptions... -- yet nothing bordering on the comic on the one hand, and no striving of intellect on the other. It is the language of sensation among men who feared no charge of effeminacy for feeling what they felt no want of resolution to bear. Yet the armour, the dead silence, the watchfulness that first interrupts it, the welcome relief of guard, the cold, the broken expressions as of a man's compelled attention to bodily feelings allowed to man, -- all excellently accord with and prepare for the after gradual rise into tragedy...

(Raysor, I, 20)

The opening prepares the audience for the appearance of the ghost. The "armour", the "dead silence", etc. - every detail prepares the audience for the arrival of something uncanny and unnatural and establishes the dramatic credibility of the ghost as a spirit of the dead father urging the son to take revenge. Coleridge now perceptively points out: the "preparation informative of the audience [is] just as much as was precisely necessary". The question of Marcellus: "what! has this thing appeared again tonight?" shows that the ghost has already appeared once and is not merely a figment of their own heated imagination. "Even the word 'again' has its credibilizing effect" (Raysor, I, 20). Coleridge emphasizes the fact that the ghost is not "the representative of the ignorance of the audience" but an "intelligent spirit". Though Horatio "anticipates the common solution" but with Marcellus' words "this 'thing' becomes at once 'apparition', and that too an intelligent spirit that is to be spoken to":

Then the shivery feeling, at such a time, with two eye witnesses, of sitting down to hear a story of a ghost, and this, too, a ghost that had appeared two nights before [at] about this very time. The effect of the narrator to master his own imaginative terrors; the consequent
elevation of the style, itself a continuation of this effort; the turning off to an outward object, 'you same star'. O heaven: words are wasted to those that feel and to those who do not feel the exquisite judgement of Shakespeare.
(Raysor, I, 20-21)

It is to be noted here that even before Coleridge, the ghost scene of Hamlet was repeatedly praised by the critics throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The critics were fascinated by the way Shakespeare had made the ghost convincing and by the "awe-inspiring nature of the ghost". This treatment of the scene, however, on the whole, was isolated, having no connection with the plot and the rain theme. Coleridge, too, appreciates the judgement of Shakespeare by which the ghost is made credible. Unlike them, he, however, does not wrench this scene out of the plot. His analysis refers again and again to the main theme of the play that, in spite of the convincing evidence of the ghost, Hamlet will delay in action. Moreover, the scene has yet another dramatic function: that is, of introducing the protagonist to the audience. According to Coleridge, Shakespeare with his skill attempted to make the ghost convincing only to arouse interest in the hero himself. The great interest which Shakespeare gradually arouses in the ghost is shifted to Hamlet when Horatio, for the first time, mentions his name. According to Coleridge, Shakespeare knew the psychology of the audience; otherwise, the appearance of Hamlet and his encounter with the ghost would not have been as successful as they actually are.

After the ghost scene, relief is provided by the court scene (I, ii) which also introduces the main character. "How judicious that Hamlet should not have to take up the leavings of exhaustion" (Raysor, I, 22). The fact that Shakespeare does not make Hamlet appear in the first scene but introduces him in the royal court and that too after introducing a subordinate
character (Laertes) first, shows the judgement of Shakespeare in the dramatic building up of the character of Hamlet.

Coleridge’s comment on Act I, scene iii shows that he was not at all unaware of the importance of structure or plot while analysing Shakespeare’s plays:

The scene must be regarded as one of Shakespeare’s lyric movements in the play, and the skill with which it is interwoven with the dramatic parts is peculiarly an excellence of our poet. You experience the sensation of a pause without the sense of a stop.  

(Raysor, I, 23)  

The scene also throws light on the character of Ophelia and Laertes. The carefree nature of Ophelia is reflected in her short general answers which may be contrasted with the long speeches of Laertes. Her "natural carelessness of innocence" is very different from that of Laertes for she cannot think "such a code of cautions and prudences necessary to its own preservation".

The fourth scene of the first act is a scene of Hamlet's encounter with the ghost. The ghost appears for the first time before Hamlet. To emphasize the fact that Hamlet's "own disordered fancy has not conjured up the spirit of his father" (Raysor, II, 193). Shakespeare makes him seen by others even before Hamlet has done so. He is prepared by them to witness the re-appearance of the ghost. When Hamlet sees it, "he is not brought forward as having long brooded on the subject". The moment before the ghost enters, Hamlet speaks of other matters like the coldness of the night and observes that he has not heard the clock strike. He also talks about the custom of drinking and indulges in some moral reflections. Suddenly, the ghost appears. According to Coleridge, the same thing occurs in Macbeth also in the Dagger scene. The moment before the hero
sees it, he talks about some indifferent matters. Thus in both cases the preternatural appearance has all the effect of abruptness, and the reader is totally divested of the notion that the figure is a "vision of highly wrought imagination" (Raysor, II, 193). Thus Coleridge comments:

...the co-presence of Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo is most judiciously contrived for it renders the courage of Hamlet and his impetuous eloquence perfectly intelligible. The knowledge, the unthought of consciousness, the sensation, of human auditors, of flesh and blood sympathists acts as a support, a stimulation, a tergo, while the front of the mind, the whole consciousness of the speaker, is filled by the solemn apparition. Add, too, that the apparition itself has by its frequent previous appearances been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This accrescence of objectivity in a ghost that yet retails all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity, is truly wonderful.

(Raysor, I, 25)

The scene of Hamlet's encounter with the ghost shows Shakespeare's knowledge of human nature. After his meeting with the ghost Hamlet tries to escape from his "feelings of overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous -- a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium" (Raysor, II, 274), as Coleridge beautifully points out. It is clear that after his meeting with the ghost, his mind "has been stretched beyond its natural pitch and tone". It seeks relief by change. To disguise the horror, "he tries to escape from the uncommon reality by connecting something of the ludicrous with it".

Coleridge's isolation of the element of "dark" laughter in Hamlet anticipates modern drama. The theatre of the absurd, especially plays like Waiting for Godot and Endgame transcend tragedy because the situation delineated in them is much more
tragic than tragedy can bear. The horror is metaphysical, and the intensity of the metaphysical horror blends naturally with the ludicrous and the grotesque. The situation described by Coleridge after Hamlet's encounter with the ghost is very much like the situation in absurd drama. The tragic is so intense that it becomes fused with its opposite. Thus what Coleridge attributes to Shakespeare anticipates the twentieth-century dark comedy.

About Hamlet's talks to the players (III, ii), Coleridge says this is "one and among the happiest [instances] of Shakespeare's power of diversifying the scene while he is carrying on the plot" (Raysor, I, 30). Without ignoring the unity of the plot, Shakespeare possesses the power to diversify the scene. This is an example of unity in multeity. Organic unity, according to Coleridge, does not mean exclusiveness only; it can be inclusive also.

Coleridge's remark on the Prayer scene has caused much controversy among the critics of the historical school (Raysor, I, 32; II, 196). Coleridge does not accept Dr. Johnson's verdict on the Prayer scene as "so atrocious and horrible, as to be unfit to be put into the mouth of a human being". The fact is, as Coleridge puts it, that Dr. Johnson did not understand the character of Hamlet and censured this as a part of Hamlet's indecision and irresoluteness. In fact, Dr. Johnson has mistaken the "marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, and horror-striking fiendishness. Hamlet forbears and postpones his uncle's death, until he can catch him in some act "that hath no relish of salvation in it" (Raysor, II, 196). He refuses to take his life except when he is in the height of his iniquity.

Raysor is one of the critics who criticize Coleridge for his comments on the Prayer scene. He quotes Stoll in his favour. According to him, Dr. Johnson is nearer to the
Elizabethans on this point than Coleridge, who did not possess sufficient knowledge of Elizabethan literature. "Analyses in Elizabethan literature show that contemporaries of Shakespeare would not be horrified at such a motive in a revenge play, but also that they would take it seriously, as Johnson did" (Raysor, I, 33 note).

Coleridge does not accept Dr. Johnson's criticism that Shakespeare followed the novel on which he had based the plot of Hamlet's voyage to England. Coleridge's answer to this is that Shakespeare has adhered to the original not because he lacked invention to alter or improve a popular narrative but he did not "wantonly vary from it" for it suited his own purpose. He wanted to explain some great truth inherent in human nature. He saw at once how consistent the original was with the character of Hamlet, "that after still resolving, and still deferring, still determining to execute, and still postponing execution", he showed finally the infirmity of his disposition, gave himself up to his destiny and hopelessly placed himself in the power, and at the mercy of his enemies" (Raysor, II, 197).

Even after the scene with Osric, we find Hamlet still indulging in reflection, and hardly thinking of the task he has undertaken. He is full of purpose, but devoid of that quality of mind which is necessary to accomplish purpose i.e., the ability to act.

In one of the reports of Coleridge's lectures, he seems to suggest that chance or accident too played an important role in the plot of Hamlet. Coleridge cites Hamlet's capture by the pirates, as explained in his letter in Act IV, scene vi. He says that it is "almost the only play of Shakespeare, in which mere accidents, independent of all will, form an essential part of the plot" (Raysor, I, 35). This, however, according to Coleridge, is in harmony with the character of Hamlet: "how judiciously in keeping with the character of over-meditative
Hamlet" (Raysor, I, 35). Most of his actions are determined either by accident or by a "fit of passion".

Here Coleridge seems to refute his own theory of drama (as opposed to epic) which envisages drama as an art where "the free will of man is the first cause" (Raysor, II, 278). Accidents are never introduced in it. If they are introduced, it is considered a great fault. The downfall of the hero is not by chance but because of his own weakness (Raysor, I, 142).

In the first two scenes of the last act, Shakespeare "seems to mean all Hamlet's character, to be brought together before his final disappearance from the scene" (Raysor, I, 36). His meditative excess in the graveyard scene, his yielding to passion, his love for Ophelia, his tendency to generalize on all occasions, his fine gentlemanly manners and his fondness for premonition -- all have been highlighted by Shakespeare. This summing up of Hamlet's character just before his death is an important technique in Shakespeare. It is a structural feature with a thematic purpose. Had it related merely to character, it would have been unnecessary. This happens in Othello also where the protagonist relives his moments of glory and grandeur in the last scene, and in Macbeth where the last two soliloquies remind us of Macbeth's earlier imaginative bent of mind. Here also towards the close of the play, there is an attempt on the part of the dramatist to make Hamlet relive and display again his earlier moments of idealism, and this is necessary for understanding the full significance of the tragic denouement.

III

While comparing Shakespeare with Schiller, Coleridge says:
Schiller has the material sublime; to produce an effect, he sets you a whole town on fire, and throws infants with their mothers into the flames or locks up a father in an old tower. But Shakespeare drops a handkerchief, and the same or greater effects follow. (Raysor, II, 351)

In Othello, we find a perfect blending of Shakespeare's genius with his judgement. The choice of a subject remote from the primary interests, circumstances and feelings of the poet himself show Shakespeare's power of dealing with a subject objectively. He is the man who "though happy in his domestic and conjugal relations, can yet paint a noble and generous mind under the pangs of jealousy, loving to desperation a being whom he believes unworthy of that love". From a handkerchief, he "can weave a dreadful issue of human calamity" (Raysor, II, 91-92).

The basic theme of the play is the undermining and consequent transmutation of the protagonist's consciousness by a villain of superior intelligence (Raysor, II, 209; II, 125). Coleridge points out "the dreadful habit of thinking of moral feelings and qualities only as prudential ends to means".

Here Coleridge points out the dangers of placing the intellect above moral faculties. In Iago, as we shall later see, is portrayed an intellectual villain who aims at disrupting the moral and spiritual foundations of Othello's existential edifice. The contrast between these two characters clearly brings out the difference between intellect and moral undertones. If Iago represents the intellectual position of a rationalistic villain, Othello shows the process by which the intellect overwhelms the moral faculties. The play shows how he moves towards achieving this falsified self which leads to an alienation from the higher self and from society till ultimately he succumbs to his baser passions. This theme thus
involves a psycho-moral interpretation of the play and its characters.

Coleridge goes on to suggest that the title of the play *Othello*, *The Moor of Venice* shows that in it the effect arises from the "subordination of all to one, either as the prominent person or the principal object". The play thus belongs to the category of plays which includes *Coriolanus*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet* and *Hamlet*. In the other category can be placed plays where the total effect is produced by "a co-ordination of the characters, by a wreath of flowers" (Raysor, I, 41). This category includes plays like *Twelfth Night*, *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, *As You Like It*, and *The Winter's Tale*.

The opening of the play like so many first scenes of other Shakespearian plays contains the germ of the main theme and prepares the audience for what is to follow. "The admirable preparation so characteristic of Shakespeare" is the introduction of Roderigo as the dupe on whom Iago first exercises his art. The scene introduces not only Iago's character but the main theme of the play as well: "Iago's rehearsing on the dupe Roderigo his intentions on Othello" (Raysor, I, 44).

Coleridge does not accept Dr. Johnson's objection that little or nothing is wanting to render *Othello* a regular tragedy but to have opened the play with the arrival of Othello in Cyprus, and to have thrown the preceding act into the form of narration (Raysor, I, 49-51). As we have seen in an earlier chapter, Coleridge shows that the unities are not the end in themselves but the means of achieving a particular end. "For in all acts of judgement it [can] never be too often recollected and scarcely too often repeated, that rules are
means to ends, -- consequently, that the ends must be determined and understood before it can be known what the rules are or ought to be" (Raysor, I, 50). Coleridge says that in Othello, Shakespeare has produced the "most perfect work" (Raysor, II, 17) :

Lear is the most tremendous effort of Shakespeare as a poet; Hamlet as a philosopher or meditator; Othello is the union of the two. There is something gigantic and unformed in the former two, but in the latter everything assumes its due place and proportion and the whole mature powers of the mind are displayed in admirable equilibrium.

(Raysor, II, 351)

Coleridge's criticism of Othello, brief though it is, is a remarkable illustration of the application of a unitive and holistic approach to Shakespearian drama. That Coleridge was capable of acute psychological analysis of character cannot be denied. One of the finest examples of such analysis, as we shall soon see, occurs in Coleridge's criticism of Othello -- his comments on the sources of Iago's malignity. However, the excellence of this kind of criticism should not blind us to what Coleridge was basically engaged in doing : the unravelling of the poetic (or visionary) core of the plays. Keeping this in mind, we should turn once again to the passage quoted above. Where in the eighteenth century shall we find the kind of distinction based on imaginative effects of the plays that we get in that passage? Who else, before Coleridge, had suggested the union of the poetic and the meditative in Othello, the finish of its perfection and the roundness of its total achievement? This, we should think, is another proof of our contention that Coleridge's achievement as a psychological

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8See pp. 240-46 below.
critic of character has over-shadowed the ground of his true greatness as a critic of Shakespeare.

IV

Coleridge's analysis of *Macbeth* is unfortunately very brief. The nature of the moral problem in the play, the fine tuning of the analysis of the chief protagonist's character, the subtle distinctions made between the two characters with regard to the genesis and effect of crime, all these pertain to character criticism and shall be considered in the next chapter. However, what still remains -- the analysis of the opening scene in the main -- must be approached in the light of the numerous stray comments made elsewhere in relation to the other plays or in the discussion of general themes. We may, for example, recall a comment of general bearing made while dealing with *Othello*. Coleridge there made a distinction between two kinds of Shakespearian drama. On the one hand, there are plays that acquire a kind of cumulative beauty through a collocation of characters: all interesting, none outstanding. Coleridge has the romantic comedies and the last plays in mind -- *A Mid-Summer Night's Dream*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale*. These are, to use modern terminology, plays of theme, verbal texture, poetic suggestion and atmosphere. Then, there are the other kinds of plays -- works in which the protagonist/protagonists dominate whether as active agents or passive objects. The way Coleridge treats this other kind of Shakespearian drama in his actual critical practice would suggests that he would not be satisfied by their description as mere plays of character. Character in them is fused into some overwhelming ethical, philosophical or visionary concern. Character is also subtly mixed with plot and the dramatic design (as in *Hamlet*). While dealing with this second category of plays, including *Macbeth*, Coleridge never attempts to
isolate character from the dramatic context though the focus naturally is on the psychological and moral aspects of the character. In view of the fact that for Coleridge Macbeth belongs to the second category of plays, it is not surprising that he concentrates on the characters of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. We, too, should therefore postpone a discussion of the two protagonists to our next chapter and see here briefly what Coleridge has to say about the opening scene.

The opening scene of Macbeth at once strikes the key note and gives the predominant spirit of the play:

The opening of Macbeth should be contrasted with that of Hamlet. In the latter the gradual ascent from the simplest forms of conversation to the language of impassioned intellect, yet still the intellect remaining the seat of passion; in the Macbeth the invocation is made at once to the imagination, and the emotions connected therewith.

(Raysor, I, 67)

As against Hamlet, here the opening excites wonder. It offers a direct contrast to Hamlet in yet another way. While Hamlet proceeds with "utmost slowness, the other [moves] with breathless and crowded rapidity" (Raysor, II, 273). Similarly, the "wild wayward lyric" of the opening of Macbeth can be contrasted with the "easy language of common life" with which Hamlet opens (Raysor, I, 20).

Having successfully pointed out the beauty of the opening scene in Macbeth, it is a little disappointing to find that Coleridge could not see the dramatic significance of the Porter scene (Raysor, I, 75; I, 77). We have already quoted his comment in Chapter IV. He thought that the Porter's soliloquy was in poor taste and hence probably an interpolation. Coleridge could, however, see the beauty of the concluding lines and thought them truly Shakespearian.
The comments on Lady Macduff and her son highlight the dramatic significance of the scene (IV, ii):

The scene, dreadful as it is, is still a relief because a variety, because domestic. Something in the domestic affections always soothing because associated with the only real pleasures of life. (Raysor, I, 77)

Coleridge found a sympathetic echo in Shakespeare's delineation of domestic scenes. However, it is not just personal sympathy that makes Coleridge appreciate this particular scene; he praises it for its fine emotional quality and its contribution to the play's tonal variety.

The unity of the play as a whole, according to Coleridge, lies in its moral discriminations. In this respect, Coleridge's criticism of the play anticipates some excellent remarks of L.C. Knights. Since, however, this aspect pertains to character criticism we will take it up in our next chapter.

V

We may begin our discussion of Coleridge's criticism of *King Lear* with the brief aside that he analyses various characters as primary source material, with a more or less explicit assumption that a careful study of the relationships of different characters is likely to bring us nearer to Shakespeare's meaning in the play. However, he does not undermine the importance of the plot. It is through characters that the structure or unity of the play as a work of art is revealed. Coleridge's analysis of different characters and their relationships among themselves helps to bring out the main themes of the play i.e., the theme of ingratitude, the theme of the suffering and madness of Lear, the theme of unwilling resignation of power and the theme of moral and social evils like illegitimacy.
Lear's anxiety, his distrust and jealousy, all are described, and these qualities of Lear determine the nature of the plot. "...these facts, these passions, these moral verities" provide the groundwork on which "the whole tragedy is founded" (Raysor, I, 55). Thus, according to Coleridge, the play presents a study of the mind and mood of Lear, whose character, passions and sufferings constitute the main subject-matter of the play. The triple division of the kingdom and Lear's trial of love prepares us for further action while Cordelia's 'Nothing' is "well contrived to lessen the glaring absurdity of Lear". On the one hand, it forces our attention away from "the nursery tale" character of the story "the moment it has answered its purpose"; on the other, "it supplies the "canvas to paint on the complete picture" (Raysor, I, 61).

The problem in King Lear can be studied from an altogether different standpoint. Lear's sufferings are a natural result of his own actions. Though he makes a triple division of his kingdom, his desire to transfer his power is not genuine. Kent's punishment very clearly shows this inherent contradiction in Lear's character. At one moment he divests himself of power but at the very next moment he is sticking to it. Coleridge's remark, "Lear's moral incapability of resigning the sovereign power in the very moment of disposing it" (Raysor, I, 61) anticipates modern critics like George Orwell who, in his essay "Lear, Tolstoy and the Fool", presents the same view-point.9

Taking examples from the life of Tolstoy and quoting passages from Lear, Orwell shows the psychological phenomenon of the difficulty in the life of a man who wishes to resign

power. The apparent resignation of power is based on an unconscious hypocrisy but the difficulty arises when the moment of the real abdication of power comes. Though Orwell has nowhere mentioned it but his essay may have been based on the development of this insight provided by Coleridge's statement. The insight is ethical as well as psychological. Here it is necessary to point out again that it is difficult to separate ethics from psychology because ethical observations are based on psychological insights. Badawi in his analysis has made an attempt to separate psychology from morality\(^\text{10}\) which is neither possible nor desirable. Coleridge's psychological concerns have ethical bearings.

Coleridge touches the problem of Lear's madness. Contrasting Edgar's madness with that of Lear, Coleridge says that Edgar's madness is feigned while Lear's is real. "In Edgar's ravings Shakespeare all the while lets you see a fixed purpose, a practical end in view; -- in Lear's there is only brooding of one anguish, an eddy without progression" (Raysor, I, 65). Edgar's false madness takes off part of the shock from the true madness of Lear, "as well as displaying the profound difference". Thus Coleridge emphasizes the psychological effect of Edgar's pretended madness.

Lear's madness, Coleridge says, is the natural result of his daughters' ingratitude:

\[ \text{[I, iv, 259. Ingratitude, thou marble-hearted fiend]} \]

The one general sentiment, as the mainspring of the feeling throughout in Lear's first speeches. In the early stage the outward object is the pressure; [the mind is] not yet sufficiently familiarized with the anguish for imagination to work upon it. \(\text{(Raysor, I, 63)}\)

\(^{10}\) Badawi, op. cit., p.122.
All Lear's faults increase our pity. Coleridge says, "we refuse to know them otherwise than as means and aggravations of his sufferings and his daughters' ingratitude" (Raysor, I, 65). As a result of the ingratitude of his daughters, Lear becomes mad. Even at such an early stage [I, v, 43; let me not be made, not mad...], Coleridge says that Lear anticipates his madness. "The deepest tragic notes are often struck by a half sense of an impending blow". The fool's conclusion of this act by "a grotesque prattling" seems to indicate the dislocation of feeling that has already begun and is to be continued (Raysor, I, 64). Even before this, in Act III, scene iv, we get "the first symptoms of his positive derangement" in Lear's despair and the growing madness in the storm (Raysor, I, 65). The next scene provides an interval for Lear in full madness to appear.

Apart from the various themes which the play highlights, Coleridge's remarks on other aspects are also significant. Coleridge's dramatic approach makes him say that even the metre and the movement of the play lead us to the catastrophe, which he compares with the speed and movement of Macbeth and Hamlet:

Of all Shakespeare's plays Macbeth is the most rapid, Hamlet the slowest, in movement. Lear combines length with rapidity, - like the hurricane and the whirlpool, absorbing while it advances. It begins as a stormy day in summer, with brightness, but that brightness is lurid and anticipates the tempest. (Raysor, I, 54)

Thus the pace of the action is in accordance with the theme of the play and one of its central motifs.

According to Coleridge, Shakespeare did not take the trouble of inventing stories. "He seizes hold of popular tales" (Raysor, II, 266). It was enough for his purpose to select from those that had already been invented or recorded and become a part of popular tradition "-- names we had often heard of, and
of their fortunes, and we should like to see the man himself. It is the man himself that Shakespeare for the first times makes us acquainted with" (Raysor, I, 226). It was this fact that makes Coleridge say that the plot in Shakespeare's play is the canvas only. "The plot interests us on account of the characters, not vice-versa" (Raysor, I, 226). It is not to lessen the importance of the story as has often been understood and criticized by the critics but to emphasize the fact that his stories are derived from popular tradition. According to Coleridge, the absurdity of his tales has often been a reproach to Shakespeare from those critics like Pope and Johnson who do not understand them. According to these critics, there are many improbabilities that would "disturb or disentrance" us from all illusions in the acme of our excitement. Shakespeare, however, has nothing to do with the probability of the stories. "It was enough for him that they had found their way among the people". Everybody understands them to be true, though childish, as, for example, in King Lear, the story has a nursery-tale character -- "there was once upon a time a king who had three daughters and he said to them, tell me how you love and I will give my kingdom to her that loves me best, and so one daughter said etc. etc." (Raysor, II, 17). It is true that in Lear and in The Merchant of Venice, "the interest and situation" are derived from the assumptions of a gross improbability but the works of Shakespeare's contemporaries like Beaumont and Fletcher, are all "founded on some one out of the way accident or exception to the general experience of mankind". But "observe the matchless judgement of Shakespeare", Coleridge says, "in the play". Though the conduct of Lear is improbable yet it can be excused since it was an old story, rooted in popular faith, a thing taken for granted already and consequently without any of the effects of improbability. Secondly, because it is "merely the canvas to the characters and passions -- a mere occasion --
not (as in Beaumont and Fletcher) perpetually recurring, as the cause and \textit{sine qua non} of the incidents and the emotions (Raysor, I, 59). This obvious improbability will be endured as belonging to the "groundwork of the story rather than to the drama".

Let the first scene of Lear have been lost, and let it be only understood that a fond father had been duped by hypocritical professions of love and duty on the part of two daughters to disinherit a third, previously, and deservedly, more dear to him, and all the rest of the tragedy would retain its interest undiminished, and be perfectly intelligible. The accidental is nowhere the groundwork of the passions but the \textit{κάθοδος} of that which in all ages has been and ever will be close and native to the heart of man -- parental anguish from filial ingratitude, the genuineness of worth, tho' coffered in bluntness, the vileness of smooth iniquity. (Raysor, I, 59)

Even to \textit{The Merchant of Venice}, the same remarks apply. Thus these two were popular tales but where "so excellently managed" by Shakespeare that both have become "representations of man in all ages at all times" (Raysor, II, 266). In the first three acts of \textit{Lear}, Shakespeare carries the human feelings to the utmost height; therefore in the following two scenes they seem to "sink and become feeble", "as after the bursting of the storm we behold the scattered clouds dispersed over the heavens" (Raysor, II, 17). The piece is remarkable as, for example, the scene of Lear's despair and growing madness in the storm (III, iv). Coleidge comments that Lear's suffering could be shown so vividly only with the help of plastic arts of Michael Angelo "inspired by a Dante":

\textit{What a world's convention of agonies! Surely, never was such a scene conceived before or since. Take it but as picture for the eye only, it is more terrific than any a Michael Angelo inspired}
by a Dante could have conceived, and which none
but a Michael Angelo could have executed. Or let
it have been uttered to the blind, the howlings
of convulsed nature would seem converted into the
voice of conscious humanity.                      (Raysor, I, 66)

Thus Coleridge remarks, "from such stuff as this", Shakespeare
has produced the "most wonderful work of human genius" (Raysor,
II, 17).

Coleridge's "vindication of the melancholy catastrophe"
of King Lear is significant. His comment "last, sad yet sweet
consolation of his death" (Raysor, I, 66) sums up the total
meaning or significance of the play as a tragedy. This,
however, is one of the basic controversies about the play:
whether the final message is affirmative or negative. Does it
make us accept the scheme of things or rebel against it? 11

It is to be noted that the neo-classical age was
incapable of appreciating the elements of intense pain and
suffering in King Lear due to their idea of the divine
governance of the universe. The cosmic order of the
Enlightenment was a perfect mechanistic order which was
regulated in accordance with the universal law by the Divine
Ordainer. The divine dispenser of the universal scheme of
things could not have devised laws that were unjust and cruel
to man. It is obvious that with such a world-view in the
background, the contemporaries of Locke, Descartes and Newton
could not but believe that the classical precepts about poetic
justice in drama were eminently reasonable. King Lear, these
critics discovered, violates poetic justice in the most

11 G.R. Hibbard in his article, "King Lear: A Retrospect, 1939-
79", Shakespeare Survey, 33 (1980), pp. 1-11, presents both
the viewpoints chronologically.
reprehensible manner. Nahum Tate (1681) therefore, makes drastic changes in the play, reduces the element of suffering and pain, shows Lear as surviving his ordeal and marries off Cordelia to Edgar.  

The idea of the play as an optimistic "Christian" drama has been accepted most forcefully by Bradley who in his Shakespearean Tragedy has offered an alternative title, "The Redemption of King Lear". The affirmative view of King Lear is also accepted by the Christian interpreters  of the play, which include, R.B. Heilman and John F. Danby. The negative or pessimistic approach was adopted by some critics in the nineteenth century, e.g., by Swinburne. It has also found favour with some other critics after the second world war. The best known exponents of this view in the twentieth century are Empson, Žan Kott and Barbara Everett. Coleridge anticipates the Christian interpreters of the twentieth century, although, unlike them, he does not schematize the play. It is his insight that may have been adopted by Bradley and others.

VI

Richard II, according to Coleridge, is a purely historical play i.e., history is the moving spirit of the play

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14 Swinburne, A Study of Shakespeare (London, 1880).

(Raysor, I, 143). In this play, Shakespeare has blended the epic with the tragic. Shakespeare had to deviate from history in order to give a dramatic impression to the whole:

Shakespeare in blending the epic with the tragic, has given the impression of the drama to the history of his country. By this means he has bequeathed as a legacy the pure spirit of history. Nor that his facts are implicitly to be relied on, or is he to be read, as the Duke Marlborough read him, as an historian, but as distance is destroyed by telescope, and by the force of imagination we see in the constellations, brought close to the eye, a multitude of words, so by the law of impressiveness, when we read this play, we seem to live in the era he portrays.

(Raysor, II, 278)

Thus a history play, Richard II is not devoid of its significance as the purpose of the dramatist is to induce the value of patriotism and to represent the ethos of a particular age at a particular time. "The spirit of patriotic reminiscence is the all-permeating spirit of this drama, praeteriit gloria mundi" (Raysor, I, 143). The dramatist takes every opportunity to effect great object of the historic drama, that is of exciting a steady patriotism, a love of just liberty and a respect for all those fundamental institutions of life which bind men together.

Since the purpose which this history play seeks to fulfill is to make the spectators aware of the national history, Coleridge says, it was a play "not much acted". "From the length of the speeches; the number of long speeches", and from the fact that almost all the events are historically presented in their results, "not produced by acts seem, or that take place before the audience this tragedy is ill-suited for our present large theatres" (Raysor, I, 142). Even the
characters in the play are not introduced merely for the purpose of giving "a greater individuality and realness", by presenting as it were, our very selves. All this and the frequent violation of the unity of time is "a proof that the pure historic drama had its own law". For example, scene iii of the Act I "if compared with any of Shakespeare dramas", we would find nowhere this violation of the succession of time (Raysor, I, 147).

The first scene of the play contains the germ of the ruling passion which was to be developed hereafter. Thus Richard's hardiness of mind, arising from kingly power, his weakness and debauchery from "continual and unbounded flattery"; and the haughty temper of the barons; "one and other alternatively forming the moral of the play, are glanced at once" (Raysor, II, 279) in the first scenes. The first scene prepare us for the catastrophe. In Richard's insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, favouritism, and in the proud tempestuous temperament of the barons are presented the germ of all the after-events. "The judgement with which Shakespeare always in the first scene prepares, and with what a concealment of art, for the catastrophe" is remarkable in Richard II.

Shakespeare's wonderful judgement appears in the historical plays. By the introduction of accidents in this history play Shakespeare gives it a reality and individual life and thereby he makes it a drama and not a history. Thus the scene of the Queen and the Gardener "realizes the thing, makes the occurrence no longer a segment but gives an individuality, a liveliness and presence to the whole (Raysor, II, 284). Since a historic play requires more excitement than a tragic, Shakespeare always introduces some scene or the other which while serving this purpose, is also in keeping with the spirit of the play. For example, old Gaunt's accusation of Richard of
having "farmed out the island" is full of excitement yet awakens a patriotic feeling. "The propriety of putting so long a speech into the mouth of an old dying man might easily be shown" (Raysor, II, 279).

The play does not follow the unities of time and place but, according to Coleridge, an inner organic unity is perceptible throughout. Like Romeo and Juliet, where all was youth and spring, here in this play "everything has a womanish weakness, the characters were to extreme old age, or partook of the nature of age and imbecility". The length of the speeches was adapted to a delivery between acting and recitation, "which produced in the auditors a docility or frame of mind favourable to the poet, and useful to themselves" (Raysor, II, 279). This is very different from the modern plays where "the glare of the scenes with every wished-for object realized", the mind becomes bewildered in surrounding attractions, whereas Shakespeare, "in place of ranting, music and outward action, addresses us in the words that enchain the mind, and carry the attention from scene to scene" (Raysor, II, 280).

It is to noted here that in the discussion of this play as well as in the analysis of The Tempest, Coleridge shows his aversion to the staging of these plays which is often regarded by the critics as Coleridge's aversion for the stage in general. It is significant that Coleridge objected to the naturalistic style of presenting Shakespeare's plays, which diminished the importance of poetry in them. It is only the contemporary practice of representing Shakespeare's plays as realistic plays which gives more importance to stage artifacts and consequently lessens or minimizes the poetic appeal of the play, which is objected to by Coleridge.
VII

Coleridge thinks that *Troilus and Cressida* can scarcely be classed with Shakespeare's Greek and Roman history dramas since it forms "an intermediate link" (Raysor, I, 108) between the fictitious Grek and Roman histories or, in other words, between legenaday dramas and the proper ancient histories. It can be placed between a play like *Pericles* or *Titus Andronicus*, on the one hand, and *Coriolanus, Julius Caesar* etc., on the other.

According to Coleridge, the play is problematic and difficult to be characterized. "There is none of Shakespeare's plays harder to characterize":

> The names and the remembrances connected with it prepare us for the representation of attachment no less faithful than fervent on the side of the youth, and of sudden and shameless incostancy on the part of the lady. And this, indenend is the gold thread on which the scenes are strung, tho' often kept out of sight and out of mind by gems of greater value than itself. (Raysor, I, 109)

It is to be noted here that in the seventeenth century (1679) the play was adapted and modified by Dryden. On the grounds of the ungrammatical, coarse and affected language of the play, and with a view to removing "that heap of rubbish, under which many excellent thoughts lay wholly buried". Dr. Johnson too was disgusted with the characters. He found the characters of Cressida and Pandarus merely "detested and condemned".

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However, unlike his predecessors, Coleridge finds the play a work of genius as it combines a philosophic vision with poetry. The contrast in characterisation highlights this vision. In Cressida is drawn the portrait of vehement passion "that having its true origin and proper cause in warmth of temperament, fastens on rather than fixes to, some one object by liking and temporary preference" (Raysor, I, 109). This he has contrasted "with the profound affection represented in Troilus, and alone worthy the name of love". In him is shown:

...affection, passionate indeed -- swoln from the confluence of youthful instincts and youthful fancy, glowing in the radiance of hope newly risen, in short enlarged by the collective sympathies of nature -- but still having a depth of calmer element in a will stronger than desire, more entire than choice, and which gives permanence to its own act by converting it into faith and duty.

(Raysor, I, 110)

Hence with an excellent judgement and "with an excellence higher than mere judgement can give", Shakespeare has shown that when at the close of the play Cressida has sunk into infamy "below retrieval and beneath a hope", the same will "which had been the substance and the basis of his love", the same moral energy snatches him aloof from all neighbourhood with her dishonour, "from all lingering fondness and languishing regrets, while it rushes with him into other and nobler duties, and deepens the channel which his heroic brother's death had left empty for its collected food" (Raysor, I, 110).

Apart from this study of the nature of love, Coleridge finds out another "secondary and subordinate purpose" Shakespeare has inter-woven with his two characters, the 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 (Raysor, I, 110). The masterly group of Agamemnon, Nestor and Ulysses presents the Greek view while Achilles, Ajax and Theresites represent the Trojan. Through them, Shakespeare intends to put forward the lesson of "subservience and vassalage of strength and animal courage to intellect and policy". However, Coleridge says that Shakespeare does not take pains to connect this view with the former "more interesting" moral impersonated in the "titular" hero and heroine of the drama.

VIII

It was Coleridge's desire to discover the deeper philosophical and poetic undertones of Shakespeare's plays that led him to condemn Measure for Measure as the most painful production. "The play", Coleridge says, "is Shakespeare's throughout". However, it is "the most painful -- say rather, the only painful part -- of his genuine work" (Raysor, I, 113). Like the neo-classical critics, Coleridge passes judgement on the characters as a moralist. Thus in Angelo he fails to see any justification since the "pardon and marriage of Angelo baffles the strong and indignant claim of justice". He must not go unpunished "for cruelty, with lust and damnable baseness cannot be forgiven" and because we cannot conceive them as "being morally repented of". It is likewise degrading the character of woman. Similarly, Isabella "herself contrives to be unamiable and Claudio is detestable". The whole pattern of the play, according to Coleridge, is inexcusable where the comic and tragic part equally border on the horrible, "the one disgusting, the other horrible".

Coleridge's failure to appreciate this, perhaps Shakespeare's most Christian play, is the result of his missing
its poetic core. He may have been diverted from the right approach to the play by his concern, typical of his predecessors, with character in isolation from the verbal and poetic texture. He paid too much attention to Angelo's offence and to the fact of getting his reprieve from the Duke, and ignored the more important fact that Angelo's offence is typical of human frailty. With a little more attention to verbal texture, Coleridge could have seen, like Wilson Knight\(^{18}\) and F.R. Leavis\(^{19}\) in the present century, the quasi-allegorical nature of the play's pattern of themes. On the whole, Coleridge's failure to appreciate this most remarkable of Shakespeare's plays is a blind spot in his criticism of Shakespearian drama.

**IX**

If Measure for Measure is the only play the greatness of which remained unrecognised by Coleridge, *Love's Labour's Lost* gained immensely from the attention paid to it by the critic whose method and approach suited it in a remarkable way. The reason why Coleridge succeeded here (as he did in the case of the narrative poems) was the fact that in this early play he found justification of his view regarding Shakespeare's judgement being commensurate with his genius. At the same time, Coleridge's favourite thesis concerning Shakespeare being a philosophical poet also seemed to prove right by the evidence he could gather from the play. Whatever the reason, it is undeniable that Coleridge's critique of *Love's Labour's Lost* is one of his most enjoyable.

*Love's Labour's Lost*, says Coleridge, is the earliest of Shakespeare's dramas, "probably prior to the *Venus and Adonis*

\(^{18}\)C. Wilson Knight, op. cit.

\(^{19}\)F.R. Leavis, "The Greatness of Measure for Measure" *Scrutiny* 10 (1941-2), no.3, pp. 234-46.
and sketched out before he left Stratford" (Raysor, I, 93). This is clear from the internal evidences since a young author's first work almost always bespeaks his recent pursuits and

[his] first observations of life are either drawn from the immediate employments of his youth and from the characters and images most deeply impressed on his mind in the situations in which those employments had placed him; -- or else they are fixed on such objects and occurrences in the world, as are easily connected with, and seem to bear upon, his studies and the hitherto exclusive subjects of his meditation.

(Raysor, I, 97)

This is exactly as was the case with Ben Jonson who after having served as a soldier in "Flanders", filled his early plays with soldiers, pretended or true, and their "absurd boasts and knavery of their counterfeits". One of his most popular characters, Captain Bobadil, says Coleridge, was the mockery of an officer. Similarly, Lessing's first comedies are placed in the universities and consist of events and characters "conceivable in an academic life". Shakespeare, too, being a man of genius gives his early plays, a colour or tincture of his past life. Love's Labour's Lost affords the "strongest possible assumption" that Shakespeare was not an ignorant man and that the former part of his life had been passed in scholastic pursuits. What Coleridge says here may or may not be good conjectural biography but, as literary criticism, it is partly valid since a life of learning is one of the thematic polarities in the play and is opposed to the experience of love.

Coleridge finds scarcely any trace of Shakespeare's observation of nature in this work. The dialogue consisted either of remarks upon what is "grotesque" in language, or "mistaken in literature" (Raysor, II, 107). All this gives it
an appearance of being written by a man of reading and learning "and the force of genius early saw was excellent, or what was ridiculous".

The wonderful activity of thought that is displayed throughout the first scene of the play, is made natural by the choice of characters and by "the whimsical determination" on which the drama is founded:

A whimsical determination certainly; - yet not altogether so very improbable to those who are conversant in the history of the middle ages, with their Courts of Love, and all that lighter drapery of chivalry, which engaged even mighty kings with a sort of serio-comic interest, and may well be supposed to have occupied more completely the smaller princes, at a time when the noble's or prince's court contained the only theatre of the domain or principality.

(Raysor, I, 93)

This sort of story, Coleridge says, was suited to Shakespeare's times, when English court was still "the foster mother of the states and the muses" and therefore, the countries, and men of rank and fashion indulged in affected display of wit, point and sententious observation. During that time, even the Protestants were eager "to distinguish themselves by long and frequent preaching". All this is reflected in the first scene.

The comic matter chosen is a ridiculous "imitation or apery of this constant striving after logical precision, and subtle opposition of thought, together with a making the most of every conception or image, by expressing it under the least expected property belonging to it, and this, again, rendered specially absurd by being applied to the most current subjects and occurences" (Raysor, I, 94). These phrases, their modes of combination and their ridiculous misapplication of them is most
amusingly exhibited in Coastar while "examples suited to the gravest propositions and impersonations, or apostrophes to abstract thoughts impersonated, which are in fact the natural language of only of the most vehement agitations of mind" are adopted by the coxcombrity of Armado as mere artifices of ornament.

This kind of intellectual strain is exhibited not only in the first scene but in many other parts of the play, although "a more serious and elevated strain". Biron's speech, for example, at the end of the fourth act is an excellent specimen of it. "It is logic clothed in rhetoric" (Raysor, I, 94).

Even the diction and allusions of the play, according to Coleridge, afford a "strong presumption" that though "Shakespeare's acquirements in the dead language might not be such as we suppose in a learned education, his habits had, nevertheless, been scholastic and those of a student" (Raysor, I, 97). The style of narration in the play, like that of Ageon in the first scene of Comedy of Errors, and of the Captain in second scene of Macbeth, "seems imitated with its defects and its beauties" from Sir Philip Sydney, who was available to Shakespeare in manuscripts. The chief defect of this style consits in the "parenthesis and paranthetic thoughts" and descriptions which suit neither the passion of the speaker, nor the purpose of the person to whom the information is to be given, "but manifestly betrays the author himself, -- not by way of continuous under song, but -- palpably, and so as to show themselves addressed to the general reader" (Raysor, I, 96).

The purposed display of wit, though sometimes it disfigures his graver scenes, more often serves to double "the natural connection or order of logical consequence in the
thoughts by the introduction of an artificial and sought for resemblances in the words", as, for example, in the third line of the play:

    And then grace us in the disgrace of death;

The number of rhymes, and the sweetness as well as smoothness of metre, and the number of acute and fancifully illustrated aphorisms are in keeping with the spirit of the play. It shows that "true genius begins by generalizing and condensing; it ends in realizing and expanding. It first collects the seeds" (Raysor, I, 92). Coleridge perceptively remarks that the exquisite beauty of his blank verse in this "very earliest work" is remarkable though the tendency to rhyme was strong (Raysor, I, 93).

That a Shakespearian play has some central core of meaning is clear from Coleridge's analysis of Love's Labour's Lost. Though the play is the earliest of Shakespeare's works and is a satire on pedantry and wit, yet even there, we can find some traces of Shakespeare's philosophic vision. Biron's speech on love at the end of the fourth act is an "excellent specimen" of it. As Coleridge says:

    It is logic clothed in rhetoric; -- but observe how Shakespeare, in his two-fold being of poet and philosopher avails himself of it to convey the profound truths in the most lively images....
    (Raysor, I, 94)

This philosophic vision is not detached from the whole dramatic context. As Coleridge says, it remains, "faithful to the character supposed to utter the lines, and the expressions themselves constituting a further development of that character" (Raysor, I, 94).
Rosaline's final speech to Biron in which she asks him to undergo penance is important as it unravels the whole meaning of the play as well as the significance of the title. Biron's remorse and penance is necessary as he is "a man replete with mock,/Full of comparisons and wounding flouts". This, according to Coleridge, implies that love's labour is wasted without the education of the soul. Thus in the end, Shakespeare "draws the only fitting moral which such a drama afforded".

X

Before beginning his discussion of The Tempest, Coleridge says that his avowed aim here is to show that the judgement of Shakespeare is commensurate with his genius, "nay, that his genius reveals itself in his judgement as in its most exalted form" (Raysor, I, 126).

The Tempest, says Coleridge, is a specimen of romantic drama, i.e., of a drama the interest of which does not depend on historical facts and their associations. Here the errors in chronology or geography, "no mortal sins in any species are venial, or count for nothing" Raysor (I, 131). The interest of the play depends only on that faculty of human nature which is called imagination which owes "no allegiance to time and place":

In this play Shakespeare has especially appealed to the imagination, and he has constructed a plot well-adapted to that purpose. According to his scheme, he did not appeal to any sensuous impression... of time and place, but to the imagination....

(Raysor, II, 169)

Coleridge further says that, as regards the scenery, the work is meant for recitation rather than for stage, that is to
say, description and narration supplied the place of visual exhibition, "the audience was told to fancy that they saw that they only heard described; the painting was not in colours but in words".

Coleridge's remark here, as elsewhere, seems to suggest that he belongs to the anti-theatre group. It is true that it goes to the credit of twentieth century critics, particularly to Granville-Barker who realized that Shakespeare's plays are for the stage and they must be studied with reference to the theatre. In fact, the greatest contribution of twentieth century critics is that it has sent back Shakespeare to the theatre. However, Coleridge too, unlike Dr. Johnson and others, is not contemptuous towards the stage. He shows his acute theatrical sense in his analysis of the different aspects of the play. Even the characters of Ariel and Caliban are analysed with reference to the stage. His remarks here on scenery and spectacle show his disgust with the contemporary manner of presenting Shakespeare's plays on the stage. According to him, in Shakespeare's plays the appeal was made to the imagination and therefore too much emphasis on scenery and decor mars the true spirit of these plays. He was completely justified when he realized the importance of dramatic poetry in these plays.

The opening of the play is "admirably appropriate" to the kind of drama The Tempest is, - "giving as it were the keynote to the whole harmony". The romance opens with a busy lively scene. It prepares and initiates the excitement required for the entire piece, yet does not demand anything from the spectators, "which their previous habits had not fitted them to understand" :

It is the bustle of a tempest, from which the real horrors are abstracted; - therefore it is poetical, though not in strictness natural -- ...

purposely restrained from concentrating the interest on itself, but used merely as an introduction or tuning for what is to follow.

(Raysor, I, 132)

The opening thus is organic. It gives the whole a poetic note and therefore in accordance with the spirit of drama. It also prepares the audience for future action. Moreover, the exquisite judgement of Shakespeare is shown in this very first scene. First there is noise and confusion of storm on board the king's ship. Then in the silence of a deserted island, the poet introduces Prospero and Miranda:

Shakespeare had pre-determined to make the plot of this play such as to involve a certain number of low characters, and at the beginning he pitched the note of the whole. The first scene was meant as a lively commencement of the story; the reader is prepared for something that is to be developed.

(Raysor, II, 171)

In the next scene, Shakespeare brings forward Prospero and Miranda. Here the judgement of Shakespeare is at its best. This is reflected first in the doubts that occur in the mind of Miranda. It communicates the exquisite feelings of a female brought up in a desert, but with all the advantages of education, all that could be communicated by a wise and affectionate father (Raysor, II, 171).

With his excellent judgement, Shakespeare introduces Prospero in his magic robe which he lays aside and we come to know him to be a being possessed of supernatural powers. He then narrates to Miranda the story of their arrival in the island and this is conducted in such a manner that "the reader never conjectures the technical use the poet has made of the relation, by informing the auditor of what is necessary for him to know":


Prospero's speeches... contain the finest example of... retrospective narration for the purpose of exciting immediate interest, and putting the audience in possession of all the information necessary for the understanding of the plot.

(Raysor, I, 132)

Another remarkable thing, Coleridge points out, is the perfect probability of the moment chosen by Prospero to open out the truth to his daughter, "his own romantic bearing, and how completely anything that might have been disagreeable to us in the magician, is reconciled and shaded in the humanity and natural feelings of the father" (Raysor, I, 133). In lulling her daughter to sleep, he exhibits "the earliest and mildest proof" of his magical power. The sleep is functional as it stops the narrative at the very moment when it was necessary to break it off, in order to excite curiosity, and "yet to give the memory and understanding sufficient to carry on the progress of the history uninterruptedly" (Raysor, II, 173).

Apart from the fact that the scene serves its own dramatic function in the whole fabric of the plot, the scene is remarkable as it displays Shakespeare's wide knowledge of human nature and "generally of the great laws of the human mind". When Prospero asks Miranda to recollect her past by the image of any house or person, Miranda recollects four or five women who tended her. This, Coleridge says, is exquisite. "In general our remembrances of early life arise from vivid colours, especially if we have seen them in motion; for instance, persons when grown up will remember a bright green door, seen when they were quite young...". Miranda, however, who was somewhat older, recollects four or five women. She might know men from father but "women she knew by herself, by the contemplation of her own figure in the fountain". She remembers to have seen something like herself, "it was not herself, and it brought back to her mind what she had seen most like herself" (Raysor, II, 174).
The manner in which the lovers are introduced is equally wonderful. It is love at first sight. In the purity and sophistry with which this scene is executed it may be contrasted with Dryden's vulgar alteration of it, in which a "mere ludicrous psychological experiment, as it were, is tried -- displaying nothing but indelicacy without-passion" (Raysor, I, 135). According to Coleridge, Prospero's interruption of the courtship seems to have no sufficient motive, still his alleged reason, "least too light winning/ Make the prize light", is enough for the "ethereal connexious of the romantic imagination, although it would not be so for the historical". The first dawn of disobedience in the mind of Miranda to the command of her father is very finely drawn. In fact, the whole courting scene in the beginning of the third act between the lovers is a "masterpiece".

The scene of the intended assassination of Alonzo and Gonzalo is an exact counterpart of the scene between Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: "how well the poet prepares the feelings of the readers for this plot, which was to execute the most detestable of all crimes, and which in another play, Shakespeare has called 'the murder of sleep'":

[Unlike the scene in Macbeth, this scene here is] pitched in a lower key throughout, as designed to be frustrated and concealed, and exhibiting 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.

(Raysor, I, 136)

Coleridge displays here his dramatic sense when he contradicts Pope's objection about the conspiracy. According to
Coleridge, without this conspiracy the play would lose its charm which nothing could supply. The effect of this scene is further heightened by contrast with another counterpart of it "in lowlife", that is, between the conspirators -- Stephano, Caliban and Trinculo -- in the second scene of the third act. The same characteristics may be found here also.

Thus, Coleridge says, the admirable judgement of Shakespeare is observable in every scene, "still preparing, still inviting, and still gratifying, like a piece of music" (Raysor, I, 178). It is in comments like this that Coleridge rises to the heights, and shows what criticism was capable of doing if combined with imaginative sympathy.

XI

Coleridge begins his critique of Antony and Cleopatra by eulogising Shakespeare. According to him, it is useless to compare Shakespeare with other dramatists. "Shakespeare can be complimented only by comparison with himself" (Raysor, I, 85). All other eulogies are heterogeneous (e.g. in relation to Milton, Spenser etc.) or flat truisms (e.g., to prefer him to Racine, Corneille or even his own immediate successors Fletcher, Massinger, etc.). The highest praise that can be offered to Shakespeare particularly with regard to this play is that it is "a formidable rival" of Macbeth, Lear, Othello and Hamlet, even if it is not in "all exhibition of a giant power in its strength and vigour of maturity":

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]
(Raysor, I, 86)

The play presents a contrast with Romeo and Juliet "as the love of passion and appetite opposed to the love of affection and instinct" is shown. Feliciter audax is the motto of Shakespeare's style. This "happy valiancy" of his style is the representative and result of all "the material excellencies so expresset" (Raysor, I, 86).

XII

The writings of Shakespeare, Coleridge says, were like "a wilderness in which were desolate places, most beautiful flowers and weeds", and even the titles of the plays were appropriate and showed the judgement of the dramatist, "presenting as it were a bill of fare before the feast". This was peculiarly so in The Winter's Tale, which presents "a wild story calculated to interest a circle round a fire side" (Raysor, II, 275).

Having highlighted the poetic heart of the play, Coleridge focusses attention on one of the improbabilities in the play. It seems "indolence" on the part of Shakespeare not to have in the "oracle" provided some ground for Hermione's seeming death and fifteen years concealment (Raysor, I, 119). This, Coleridge says, might have been shown by some "obscure sentence of the oracle" as, for example, "never shall he ever recover an heir if he have a wife before that recovery". This suggestion, made so casually by Coleridge has often been quoted by critics and commentators in order to highlight the fact that The Winter's Tale is probably the only play of Shakespeare in which a vital piece of information is concealed from the
audience. Shakespeare never shocks his audience by surprises at the end in the manner of a modern detective novel. His practice, on the contrary, is just the opposite. We may here recall the famous Johnsonian comment in the Preface that the end of a play by Shakespeare is "the end of expectation". Coleridge would have whole-heartedly agreed with Johnson in this matter. As a matter of fact, he himself compared the effect of a Shakespeare play's ending to that of watching a sunrise. Shakespeare never startles. In view of all this, Coleridge's comment on Hermione's supposed death serves to act like a mild censure of Shakespeare's practice in The Winter's Tale.

We may conclude the present chapter by reminding ourselves how Coleridge's criticism of individual plays marks an important stage in the development of Shakespeare criticism, and this notwithstanding the fact that Coleridge, in many ways, continues the traditional critiques of particular plays handed down by the eighteenth century. There are definite points of departure. Coleridge pays attention to the unitive vision mediated by different plays. An attempt is made to relate character to the play's philosophical core of meaning. Emphasis is placed on poetic qualities and on atmosphere. The organic nature of a play's design is highlighted by concentrating on the opening scenes. These qualities make Coleridge's criticism radically different from the eighteenth century critical tradition.