CHAPTER VI

COLERIDGE'S CRITICISM OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHARACTERS

Coleridge is often regarded to be the initiator of a tendency which reached its culmination in Bradley and which treats Shakespearian characters as "friends for life". According to the critics, Coleridge tends to consider Shakespeare's characters as living beings, thus interested in their motives and actions in terms we normally ascribe to non-fictional beings. Coleridge, according to these critics, fails to make a distinction between drama and real life when he says that "Shakespeare's characters are like those in life to be inferred by the reader, not told to him" (Raysor, I, 227). Critics had almost unanimously declared Coleridge to be the progenitor of that tendency which led to ridiculous probings, as in the question, "Where and when did Ophelia learn her songs?" which, however, got its fitting reply in L.C. Knights's article, 'How Many Children Had Lady Macbeth?' Professor Rene Wellek, for example, criticizes Coleridge for blurring the distinction between art and life. According to Professor Wellek, Coleridge's comment on Polonius as the "personified memory of wisdom no longer possessed", leads to confusion since a fictional character has no past beyond the "statements of the author." It is on the same ground that Alfred Harbage

2 Coleridge's Shakespearian Criticism, ed. T.M. Raysor, (London, 1930). Subsequent references are from this edition and are included in the text with volume no. and page no.
criticizes Coleridge's analysis of Edmund's character. According to him, Coleridge in his supply of "palliating motives" to Edmund, goes beyond the intention of the dramatist.  

In the light of these accusations, it is worthwhile to consider Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare's characters in detail.

It is true that Coleridge says :

[Shakespeare] was not a mere painter of portraits, with the dress, features and peculiarities of the sister; but a painter of likenesses so true that, although nobody could perhaps say they knew the very person represented, all saw at once that it was faithful, and that it must be a likeness.  

(Raysor, II, 34)

Coleridge's theory of imitation, as we have seen, helps us to realize that true likeness does not mean exact copying. Shakespeare reflected manners not by "a cold formal copy" but by "an imitation". An exact transcript of nature in stead of being a beauty would be a blemish. In fact, characters in a Shakespearian play, as Coleridge points out, are :

... a result of meditation on the design of which observation supplies the drapery and the colours that are to harmonize with the other figures. Shakespeare had virtually surveyed all the great component powers and impulses of human nature, seen that the different combinations and subordinations were the individualizers of men and showed their harmony by the effects of disproportion, either of excess or deficiency.  

(Raysor, I, 233)

In the light of this, if we go back to Wellek's objection, the first question that we should ask ourselves is :

5 Alfred Harbage, "Introduction", Coleridge on Shakespeare (Harmondsworth, 1969), p.27.
what constitutes the statement of the author? According to Coleridge, Shakespeare draws his characters, "not by any one description, but by such opinions, half-right-half wrong, as the friends, enemies and the man himself would give and the reader [is] left to draw the whole" (Raysor, II, 232) and it has to be drawn from the whole course of the play. Hamlet's words, therefore, should not be taken as the author's conception of Polonius but "take his advice to Laertes" and "the reverence of his memory by Ophelia" and we will find him a statesman of some merit. Thus Coleridge remarks:

It is a common error to mistake the epithets applied by the *dramatis personae* to each other, as truly descriptive of what the audience ought to seek or know.

(Raysor, I, 47)

Coleridge does not study characters removed from their dramatic context. He treats his characters "in motion and action, dynamically developing in a variety of relationships with other characters, with circumstances and with external events". Whereas for Aristotle "drama is a human action, for Coleridge it is a human character in action". That is why Coleridge considers the plot as the canvas only. "The plot interests us on account of characters and not vice-versa":

Take away from Much Ado About Nothing all that which is [not] indispensable to the plot, either as having little to do with it, or, at best, like Dogberry and his comrades, forced into the service when any other less ingeniously absurd watchman and night constable would have answered; take away Benedict, Beatrice, Dogberry and the reaction of the former on the character of Hero, and what will remain? In other writers the main agent of the plot is always the prominent character. In Shakespeare so or not so, as the character is in itself

---

calculated or not calculated to form the plot. So Don John, the main spring of the plot is merely shown and withdrawn.

(Raysor, I, 226)

Moreover, it is Shakespeare's ability to conceive a character imaginatively, "in that state of being, in which there is neither past nor future but all is permanent in the very energy of nature":

> It is mistake to say that any of Shakespeare's characters strike us as portraits: they have the union of reason perceiving, of judgement recording, and of imagination diffusing over all a magic glory. While the poet registers what is past, he projects the future in a wonderful degree, and makes us feel, however slightly, and see, however dimly, that state of being in which there is neither past nor future but all is permanent in the very energy of nature.

(Raysor, II, 168)

Even when Coleridge studies Shakespearian characters psychologically, he is not interested in their motives and actions just for their own sake. His interest in the psychology of the characters does not lead him to study Shakespearian characters as psychological cases. For example, Alice Snyder in her article describes those psychological theories which she thinks Coleridge has made use of in his study of characters. According to Snyder, Coleridge's criticism of Shakespearian characters owes its significance to psychology. Coleridge's interest in the motives, mood or intellectual conviction of the characters led him into the domain of abnormal psychology. Even his philosophical vision, i.e., his persistent attempt to do away with philosophical dualism, to prove to himself that extremes do meet, to reconcile all opposites, anticipates the contemporary modern psychological attempt at monism. In order

---

8 Ibid., p.24.
to prove the thesis Snyder tabulates all the comments taken from Coleridge's analysis of different characters.

It is our contention here that Coleridge's interest in the motives of the characters leads him to study these characters philosophically. It is from the observation of human nature placed in the dramatic context that he derives his philosophical generalisations. Coleridge's justification of Edmund's character too, must be seen in this light.

Viewed in this perspective, it becomes clear that, according to Coleridge, Shakespeare does not allow his characters to be individuals only. They become universal in the sense that they acquire symbolic significance. Iago remains an Iago though the philosophic vision behind his conception, as Coleridge tells us, serves the purpose of the dramatist to show the dangers of the supremacy of intellect over moral aspects. Hamlet too, while showing the importance of action over thought, remains an individual:

> The essence of poetry is universality. The character of Hamlet, & C., affects all men; addresses to personal feelings, the sympathy arising from a reference to individual sensibility spurious.

(Raysor, II, 9)

The dramatist, acting the part of a "ventriloquist", distributes his own "insipidity" among the characters (Raysor, II, 162). Meditation helps him to look at every character with interest, "only as it contains something generally true, and such as might be expressed in a philosophical problem" (Raysor, II, 116). That is why these characters become embodiments of the "ideal reality" Shakespeare portrayed:

Shakespeare's characters from Othello and Macbeth down to Dogberry and the Gravediggers may be termed
ideal realities. They are not the thing themselves, so much as abstracts of the things, which a great mind takes into itself, and there naturalises them to its own conception.  
(Raysor, II, 162)

These characters are permanent — "permanent while men continue men — because they stand upon what is absolutely necessary to our existence" (Raysor, II, 146).

Another important point of interest closely related to the previous one, which is throughout implied in Coleridge's analysis of Shakespearian characters and which was a subject of discussion throughout the nineteenth century was the question of Shakespeare's impersonality. In the nineteenth century, there were two camps. Critics like Dowden⁹ believed that Shakespeare was auto-biographical and allowed his personality to be reflected in some of his works as in Romeo and Juliet, Hamlet, and also in his sonnets. Of course, there is a very simplistic view of Shakespeare's identity in his works. Some other critics believed that Shakespeare is throughout dramatic and impersonal. Even in the twentieth century, Sissoon, in his lecture, "The Mythical Sorrows of Shakespeare" thought that the personalist approach to Shakespeare was wrong and thus descredited this vision of art as self-expression.¹⁰ According to him, the greatest of Shakespeare's critics, Coleridge, regarded Shakespeare as impersonal. As a matter of fact, Coleridge's views are difficult to understand. Though he uses the words like impersonal, universal and objective in his criticism of Shakespeare, he cannot be regarded as a pure impersonalist.

---
Shakespeare, according to Coleridge, made himself all characters; "he left out parts of himself, and supplied what might have been in himself". Since his observation was preceded by contemplation, "he first conceived what 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, in other words, described feelings which no observation could teach. "Nothing was given to him but the canvass" (Raysor, II, 17). Coleridge starts his famous analysis of Hamlet by highlighting that Shakespeare's characters are drawn from his intellectual and moral faculties ["Shakespeare's mode of conceiving characters out of his own intellectual and moral faculties..."] (Raysor, I, 37).

Moreover, according to Coleridge, a certain type of character repeatedly appears in Shakespeare's early plays. He is a young man, a perfect gentleman, possessing an extraordinary power of intellect. This gentleman appears sometimes as Biron in *Love's Labour's Lost*, sometimes as Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* and sometimes as Benedick in *Much Ado About Nothing*. Although Coleridge does not at all say that the character is auto-biographical, yet his insistence that the character is a product of meditation rather than of observation and his appreciation of the element of intellectual keenness and gentlemanliness in Shakespeare himself, keep us thinking that it might be due to Coleridge's wish to identify Shakespeare himself as the prototype of this character.

Shakespeare's characters may be reduced to a few -- that is to say, to a few classes of characters. If you take this gentleman for instance, Biron is seen again in Mercutio, in Benedick and in several others. They are men who combine the politeness of the courtier with the faculties of high intellect -- those powers of combination and severance which only belong to an intellectual mind. The wonder is how Shakespeare can thus disguise himself, and
possess such miraculous powers of conveying what he means without betraying the poet, and without even producing the consciousness of him.
(Raysor, II, 118)

Though Dogberry and the Nurse are highly individual, yet there was no Dogberry and no Nurse in real life of which Shakespeare's characters are a copy. It is Shakespeare who is present in his Dogberry and in his Nurse:

In the meanest character it was still Shakespeare; it was not the Nurse in Romeo and Juliet, or the Dogberry in Much Ado, or the blundering constable in Measure for Measure, but it was this great and mighty being changing himself into the Nurse or the blundering constable that gave delight.
(Raysor, II, 162)

Coleridge might compare Shakespeare to Proteus, a god in Greek mythology "who now flowed, a river; now raged, a fire; now roared, a lion", he assumed all changes but still "in the stream, in the fire, in the beast, and under all the multitudinous resemblances he always retained the awful character of the divinity". More importantly, Coleridge says that a real life Lear could never have thought the thoughts that Lear thinks in Shakespeare's play. So Lear's thoughts are Shakespeare's thoughts and hence Shakespeare is present in his Lear. All this does not amount, however, to saying that Coleridge's Shakespeare was a personalist Shakespeare or an auto-biographical Shakespeare. What we are saying is only that Coleridge's impersonal Shakespeare is a complex phenomenon. Coleridge's Shakespeare is not an impersonalist Shakespeare in the ordinary sense of the word. This is clear from the following when Coleridge says:

Shakespeare's characters from Othello and Macbeth down to Dogberry and the Grave-digger, may be termed ideal realities. They are not the thing themselves, so much as abstracts of the things, which a great mind takes into itself, and there
naturalises them to its own conception. Take Dogberry: are no important truths there conveyed, no admirable lessons taught, and no admirable allusion made to reigning follies, which the poet saw must for ever reign? He is not the creature of the day, to disappear with the day, but the representative and abstract of truth which must ever be true, and of humour which must ever be humorous.

(Raysor, II, 162)

Coleridge's position can be understood in the light of his theory of drama and imagination. Shakespeare's creative intelligence is present everywhere in his dramas which establish a "mean between his ventriloquism and self-dissolution projecting himself into all things but never relinquishing his identity":\n
He alone preserved the individuality of his character without losing his own.

(Raysor, II, 16)

Thus, according to Coleridge, all the persons in Shakespeare's plays are Shakespeare's creations and not persons in real life. Shakespeare's skill, however, lies in convincing us that they are so as to make us emotionally involved with them. Each character, therefore, becomes at once a symbol of universal human nature, the representative of a class and an individual. The symbolic or the philosophical function that these characters fulfill, cannot be realized independently. That can be conceived by entering fully into real life-like situations of characters and their actions. Our analysis of Coleridge's criticism of various Shakespearian characters in the following pages will make this point clear.

\[11\text{Fogle, op. cit., p.108.}\]
Even a cursory look at the Marginalia and the newspaper reports of Coleridge's lectures makes it clear that Coleridge gives more attention to Hamlet than to any other character of Shakespeare. Before beginning our discussion of Coleridge's analysis of Hamlet, it is necessary to recapitulate briefly the eighteenth century views of the character. This becomes all the more necessary in the light of the charges made by Raysor and other critics that Coleridge's theory of Hamlet was only a more fully developed form of ideas borrowed from Schlegel and the English predecessors of Coleridge.

As we have already seen in our previous chapter, an interest in the character of Hamlet, or rather in the psychological complexities involved in the character of Hamlet, began in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. It was then, that the critics concentrated their attention on the character of the hero in which they discovered the postponement of revenge until it had involved the death of Polonius and other characters. Even earlier, i.e., in 1709, we find a concern with Hamlet's state of mind in Steele's essays which contain the germ of one of the most important ideas of the pre-Romantic analysis of Hamlet's character. Though Steele does not point out the cause of Hamlet's delay, he believes that the most important element in Hamlet's character is his deep melancholy at the thought of his mother's hasty marriage.

The interest in the inner workings of Hamlet's mind increases as the century advances. The faint beginning of the idea that the character of Hamlet is central to the play can be seen in the brief reference to Hamlet in the Earl of

Shaftesbury's Characteristics. "It may be properly said of this play, if I mistake not, that it has only one character or principal part". This idea, too, was greatly developed in the late eighteenth century when the critics came to regard the character of Hamlet to be the only thing worthy of attention in the play. Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet, which was published anonymously and was later attributed to Sir Thomas Hanmer, is the next important document in the history of Hamlet criticism. Bradley gives its author the credit for having noticed for the first time the problem of delay in Hamlet.

These critics did notice the fact of Hamlet's delay but they could not find anything of psychological interest as the cause of the delay. The recognition of the fact, however, was important in itself as the later critics were soon going to base various psychological theories of Hamlet's character on the fact of Hamlet's delay in taking revenge. Dr. Johnson does not specifically refer to Hamlet's delay but he is the first critic to have pointed out that Hamlet remains passive throughout the play. Hamlet is no more a noble man of action as, according to Conklin, he was in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. He has now come to receive keen psychological interest.

The real psychological analysis of Hamlet's character may be said to have begun with Henry Mackenzie (1780). His

---

criticism of Hamlet may be regarded as the turning point in the history of Hamlet appreciation. Mackenzie interpreted the delay of Hamlet as a result of the excess of emotions and moral scrupulousness in him. In his two essays in The Mirror (April 18 and April 25, 1780), he gave a firm direction to Hamlet criticism. He presented Hamlet as a man with an extreme sensibility of mind. Following Mackenzie, Richardson (1774), too, pointed out that Hamlet could not take revenge due to the excess of emotions in him, and Robertson (1788) thought that Hamlet was too good to take revenge. All these essays were extremely influential as they anticipated and, in a way, influenced, a new vogue of analysis of Hamlet. Goethe stressed the extreme sensibility of the mind of Hamlet in his portrayal of the hero as a weakling and too fragile for the harsh realities of this world. A.W. Schlegel presented Hamlet as a tragedy of thought. Hamlet is lost in intellectual labyrinths and is, therefore, unable to cope with reality.

Coleridge's criticism of Hamlet was to some extent an extension and a gradual development of these ideas. Though any direct influence of these character critics of the eighteenth century is difficult to trace, it is not unthinkable that being a voracious reader he was certainly familiar with the ideas of his English predecessors. It is a point of controversy if Coleridge borrowed his critical ideas from Schlegel or arrived at them independently. There is no doubt that there is a remarkable resemblance between the critical perception of Coleridge and that of A.W. Schlegel (Raysor, I, lii, Intro.).

---

18 Ibid., pp. 121-24.
19 Ibid., pp. 480-89.
Coleridge, however, denies the charge levelled against him that much of his interpretation of Hamlet was derived from Schlegel and that he was only borrowing from his German contemporary. No direct proof is there to establish Coleridge's priority over Schlegel except the fact that Coleridge himself claims to have conceived his analysis of Hamlet as early as 1798, when he quotes Hazlitt to prove his independence and originality. Coleridge says that Hazlitt himself had replied to an assertion of his plagiarism from Schlegel in these words:

That is a lie; for I myself heard the very same character of Hamlet from Coleridge before he went to Germany and when he had neither read nor could read a page of German.

(Raysor, I, 19)

This, however, cannot be regarded as sufficiently authentic since Hazlitt would not testify it. The note was published after the death of both Hazlitt and Coleridge.

It is true that the influence of Schlegel certainly confirmed, developed and moulded many of the ideas of Coleridge. Even the conceptual affinities between Schlegel and Coleridge were inevitable, for both of them studied the works of Kant and had been students at Gottingen under Heyne (Raysor, II, 238). Both, as romantic critics, raised a rebellion against the neo-classical rationale of generality and mechanical procedure. We are not here defending Coleridge or exculpating him from the charge of plagiarism. It can be said, however, that his analysis of Hamlet's character was independent of Schlegel's in spite of certain apparent similarities. Reports of J.P. Collier and the records of Robinson are ample testimony to Coleridge's independence according to which Coleridge's views were developed by the end of 1810 while Schlegel's lectures were published in 1811. Not only his independence but his superiority also over the German critic can be acknowledge
as his interpretation of Hamlet is much more "sympathetic,
penetrating and comprehensive" (Raysor, I, liii) than
Schlegel's.

Another point of controversy about Coleridge's criticism
of Hamlet relates to the problem of its objectivity. Critics
like Raysor argue that Coleridge's analysis of Hamlet is not
completely "objective and critical" as he could not keep
himself away while analysing Hamlet's character. Coleridge's
remark: "I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so"
(Raysor, II, 352) is often taken by the critics as a proof to
show the identification of Coleridge with Hamlet. These critics
further get support from the remark of Robinson and quote it as
confirmatory evidence of this view of close relationship
between Coleridge and Hamlet.

Last night he [Coleridge] concluded his fine
development of the Prince of Denmark by an eloquent
statement of the moral of the play. "Action" he
said, "is the great end of all". No intellect,
however grand, is valuable if it dra[w]s us from
action and lead[s] us to think and think till the
time of action is passed by and we can do nothing".
Somebody said to me, "this is a satire on himself".
"No", said I, "it is an elegy". A great many of his
remarks on Hamlet were capable of a like
application.

(Raysor, I, 229)

T.S. Eliot criticizes those critics like Goethe and
Coleridge whose "minds often find in Hamlet a vicarious
existence for their own artistic realization". The kind of
criticism, according to Eliot, which Coleridge produced in the
writings of Hamlet is the most "misleading" kind possible. Like
Goethe, Coleridge too made his "critical aberrations the more
plausible for the substitution".21 of his own Hamlet for

---

Shakespeare's. He made Hamlet a medium for his own subjective expressions which should have subsided in the process of artistic criticism.

It is difficult to agree with Eliot's views. Professor Deb thinks that Eliot does not take into account the tremendous influence that the "time spirit exerted on the emotional complex of the romantic artist". Deb quotes Beer to show that "the predicament of the romantic artist originated" in his awareness of the universe alienated from human glories and his desires to contemplate a universe other than the universe of common perception. "Coleridge was after all, a romantic artist, sharply conscious of a crisis in culture and sensibility", and when he took to the business of criticism, "his inquiries were naturally directed towards the exploration of spiritual realities in a work of art". 22 He tried to achieve his ideal with reference to the philosophical perspectives of his mind which worked under the "unremitting strain of self-isolation and self-involution". His critical study of Hamlet is a case in point.

Coleridge may be said to have attached himself to Hamlet emotionally, but this attachment was not a kind of self-identification; it was only his enthusiasm at his own brilliant exposition of one of the major Shakespearian characters. It may be regarded as a biographical coincidence but certainly not an approach to Hamlet. "Posterity had forgotten both the apologetic tone and the occasion of his innocent remark. It was made in conversation, and it was surely provoked by irresistible truth". 23 Moreover, Coleridge's

remark, "I have a smack of Hamlet myself" only implies his discovery of the presence of "a smack of Hamlet" in his own being just as much as this "smack" is present, though often unidentified, in every human being. As we shall see in our analysis of Coleridge's views on Hamlet, Coleridge considers Hamlet a character "of such universal interest" that it "ought to belong, to all mankind" (Raysor, I, 29). Thus it can be said that though not completely detached from his inner self, "from the metaphysical infrastructure" of his intuitive insight, Hamlet is portrayed objectively.

Before taking into account what other critics have said about Coleridge's criticism, let us first consider Coleridge's own analysis of Hamlet's character. Coleridge was most interested in the "problematic" character of Hamlet and devoted more attention to him than to any other tragic hero of Shakespeare. The reason for this may be, as Coleridge himself points out, that: "...Hamlet was the play or rather Hamlet was the character in the intuition and exposition of which I first made my turn for philosophical criticism..." (Raysor, I, 13). This cannot be denied since throughout his analysis of Hamlet is implied a pattern of moral and philosophical values. Coleridge makes Shakespeare's design in Hamlet clear when he says:

In Hamlet I conceive [Shakespeare] to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to outward object and our meditation on inward thoughts -- a due balance between the real and the imaginary world. In Hamlet this balance does not exist -- his thoughts, images, and fancy [being] far more vivid than his perceptions, and his very perceptions instantly passing thro' the medium of his contemplations, and acquiring as they pass a form and colour and not naturally their own. Hence great enormous intellectual activity and consequent proportional aversion to real action, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities.

(Raysor, I, 37)
Thus the focus of the play is on a moral problem. Hamlet's character, as a matter of fact, is used by Shakespeare as a means for introducing a theme, and that theme is: what matters in life is not thought but action:

Shakespeare intended to portray a person in whose view the external world, and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim, and of interest in themselves, and which began to interest only, when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet beheld external things in the same way that a man of vivid imagination, who shuts his eyes, sees what has previously made an impression on his organs.

(Raysor, II, 192)

The effect of this "vivid imagination" is beautifully illustrated in the inward brooding of Hamlet. His mind, unseated from its healthy balance, is forever occupied with his inner world: "the betrayed habit of brooding over the world within him" (Raysor, I, 38). This also results in his "aversion to externals". In spite of the fact that he was placed in the "most stimulating circumstances", Hamlet does nothing. His energies are wasted in "endless reasoning and hesitating", in constant urging and solicitation of the mind to act and "as constant an escape from action", in ceaseless reproaches of himself for sloth and negligence. The whole energy of his resolution "evaporates" in these reproaches:

...the prodigality of beautiful words, which are, as it were, the half embodyings of thoughts, that make them more than thoughts, give them an outness, a reality sui generis, and yet retain their correspondence and shadowy approach to the images and movements within.

(Raysor, I, 38)

However, Coleridge points out that there is no indecision about Hamlet, as far as his sense of duty is concerned. He knows well the urgency of the deed of taking revenge and over
and over again makes up his mind to do it. For example, when the players and the two spies withdraw themselves, he breaks out into a "delirium of rage" against himself for neglecting to perform the "solemn duty" he had undertaken. He realizes the difference between the "factitious and artificial display of feeling" (Raysor, II, 194) of the player with his own "apparent indifference". Hecuba was nothing for him yet the player wept for her and felt agony at her suffering. Hamlet, on the other hand, is unable to arouse himself to action, unable to obey the commands of his dead father.

His inaction was, Coleridge says:

...not from cowardice, for he is drawn as one of the bravest of his time -- not from want of forethought or slowness of apprehension, for he sees through the very souls of all who surround him, but merely from that aversion to action, which prevails among such as have a world in themselves. (Raysor, I, 193)

The utmost he arrives at is a disposition, a mood to do something. Hamlet's "running into long reasonings", his carrying off the "impatience and uneasy feelings of expectation by running away from the particular into the general", his aversion to personal concerns, and escape to generalisations (Raysor, I, 39), all result from his "ratiocinative meditativenss", from his "predominant idealism" (Raysor, I, 25). His words give substance to shadows, and he is dissatisfied with commonplace reality since "it is the nature of thought to be indefinite while definiteness belongs to reality" (Raysor, II, 273). He finds himself in a constant state of abstraction. His soliloquy, "oh that his too, too solid flesh would melt", arises from his "craving after the indefinite". It is an expression of his "morbid craving for that which is not". This "self-delusion" of his mind is fully
exemplified in his words when he says "It cannot be, but I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall, to make oppression bitter". This perpetual exertion of his mind causes the exhaustion of his bodily feelings: "taedium vitae" oppresses his mind.

Very perceptively, Coleridge points out that Hamlet's madness is not real though such a mind like his is "near akin to madness". Coleridge quotes a remark of Dryden, "Great wit to madness nearly is allied", and says that the greatness of the genius of Hamlet led him to a perfect knowledge of his own character. He realizes his weakness that in spite of "all strength of motive", he was unable to carry into act his own "most obvious duty". His madness is assumed, Coleridge points out, when he finds that "witnesses have been placed behind the arras to listen to what passes, and when the heroine has been thrown in his way as a decoy" (Raysor, II, 195).

Coleridge makes searching explorations of the psychological complexities involved in Hamlet's character and presents various aspects of his personality, i.e., his despondency, his impulsiveness, his aversion to action, his momentary enthusiasm, his constant reproaches and his feigned madness. It is through this psychological unravelling of the inner workings of the mind and heart of the protagonist that Coleridge makes the underlying implied philosophical pattern of the play clear:

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 when we can do anything effectually. (Raysor, II, 197)
In imparting this moral truth, Coleridge says, Shakespeare has shown us the fullness and force of his powers: "all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of one quality:

He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine but the great object of his life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

(Raysor, II, 198)

Hamlet, in Coleridge's criticism, thus becomes a universal figure a prefiguration of the human predicament relating to the conflict between essence and existence, thought and action. Coleridge highlights Hamlet's universality by pointing out that "constant aversion to action prevails among such as have a world in themselves" (Raysor, II, 193).

Of such universal interest, and yet to which of all Shakespeare's characters could it have [been] appropriately given but to Hamlet? For Jacques it would have been too deep; for Iago, too habitual a communion with the heart, that belongs or ought to belong, to all mankind.

(Raysor, I, 29)

Raysor feels that Hamlet has been romanticized by Coleridge. He argues that Coleridge's point of view was literary and not dramatic. Coleridge's theory, says Raysor, may be questioned:

...above all because of its inconsistency with the impression of vigor which Hamlet seems always to make upon the audience. If Hamlet's weakness was not noticed before the end of the eighteenth century and perhaps still remains unnoticed by audiences, it may be questioned whether Shakespeare, obliged as a dramatist to make his central meaning obvious to the dullest mind, could have had the intention ascribed to him. 24

According to Raysor, this "romantic" interpretation of Hamlet involves another characteristic defect in its neglect of the historical background. Since Coleridge's knowledge of The Elizabethan age and contemporary stage conditions was not sufficient, he failed to understand the motive in Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius at the time of prayer.

It is true that Coleridge's historical knowledge was not sufficient but in analysing the character of Hamlet, Coleridge exhibited an unusual depth of understanding and richness of perception. To say that he neglected the artform and technique of Shakespeare's plays will be a distortion of truth. As we have seen in our chapter on the plays, a number of Coleridge's observations on Shakespeare's command of theatrical knowledge are present in his Marginalia and reports, where Coleridge showed his sense of the theatre. Moreover, Coleridge's treatment of Claudius and Polonius is a proof that Hamlet has not been romanticized by Coleridge. A presentation of Hamlet as a romantic figure would have implied "a proportionately more villainous Claudius and a senile and doddering Polonius". The play's structure is such that the more highly one thinks of the former, the less one is tempted to think of the latter two. Yet Coleridge often defends both Polonius and Claudius. Coleridge clearly says that "Shakespeare never intended us to see the king with Hamlet's eyes". All this shows that Coleridge was capable of adopting an objective approach to Hamlet's character.

It can be accepted that Coleridge analyses Hamlet psychologically. He makes Hamlet psychologically more interesting when he tries to go deep into the inner working of

---

Hamlet's mind. Coleridge's psychological analysis of Hamlet's character is remarkable for a high degree of sensitiveness and minuteness of observation. His analysis, however, is not exclusively psychological. Two important points must be noted in this regard:

1. The character of Hamlet is viewed as a part of the total dramatic structure i.e., Coleridge does not isolate it from the total design of the play.

2. It is a part of that philosophic vision which the play unfolds.

In other words, Coleridge sees the individual character, just as he sees the "poetic image, as the product of modifying imagination". He sees the "shapely play as a hierarchical pattern of character in which the psychological reality is impossible". Coleridge is interested in psychological truth but he is equally interested in the dramatic unfolding of the character. He regards the character of Hamlet as one constituent unit of the whole, as a part of the total structure, and not as an independent psychological entity. It is the dramatic function which controls and guides the character. Even the entrance of the protagonist is described in dramatic terms:

The unobtrusive and yet fully adequate mode of introducing the main character, young Hamlet, upon whom transfers itself all the interest excited for the acts and concerns of the king, his father.

(Raysor, I, 22)

His analysis of Hamlet's character is perfectly "linked with the aesthetic probabilities of dramatic conventions". As an example, we may quote the following lines:

---

26 Barbara Hardy, op. cit., p.244.
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.

(Raysor, II, 25)

Coleridge's point of view may be regarded as inclusive in the sense that it makes the point of view of the spectator and of the actor also:

In any direct form to have kept Hamlet's love for Ophelia before the audience, would have made a breach in the unity of the interest; but yet to the thoughtful reader it is suggested by his spite to the poor Polonius, whom he cannot let rest.

(Raysor, I, 30)

Robert Langbaum criticizes Coleridge for isolating Hamlet from the plot. Coleridge, as Langbaum says, explains the intricacies of his character, not by referring us to the rest of the play and to Hamlet's function in the plot but by referring us to "Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy and to the constitution of our own minds". Thus according to Langbaum, "Hamlet's 'wild transition to the ludicrous' is explained not as a madness deliberately assumed to deceive the king but as an expression of extreme anguish and horror" and Hamlet's delay is explained not as due to the external obstacles "which prevent him from executing the revenge but as due to the 'overbalance of imagination' which indisposes him for action". It is difficult to accept Langbaum's view for Hamlet's madness, feigned or real, is both dramatic and expressive of Hamlet's state of mind. Moreover, it is wrong to say that Coleridge isolates it from the

circumstances in which he is placed. The effect of "the overbalance of imagination" and the effect of "a superfluous activity of thought" are related to the more complex and wider issues of the play.

The important point of Coleridge's analysis of Hamlet's character is that, in the ultimate analysis, Coleridge's discussion of Hamlet is not psychological but moral and philosophical. Coleridge goes beyond the psychological aspects and comes to grapple with the philosophical and thematic issues involved. Apart from the widespread impression, expressed in casual comment, that Coleridge's character criticism is purely psychological, there have been specific attempts made by critics who ought to know better to characterise Coleridge's analysis of Hamlet as predominantly or exclusively psychological. There is, for example, Roberta Morgan's study of "The Philosophical Basis of Coleridge's Hamlet criticism", in which the author propounds the theory that Coleridge's analysis of Hamlet is a product of his attempt to graft a version of faculty psychology on to the eighteenth century associationism. To envisage a faculty-psychology outlook on Coleridge's part would attribute to him the assumption that all experience is static, that characters in a play -- especially the character of Hamlet -- are fixed and unchanging in their attitude to life and that, in this particular case, Hamlet had always lacked balance and his mind was always diseased. Coleridge's actual comments on the play, however, do not support the presence of such an assumption in his view of Hamlet. As a matter of fact, Coleridge implies that Shakespeare presents Hamlet in a situation where his inability to act brings out the truth that

---

action and not thought is the end of life. The fact that in Coleridge's criticism of Hamlet the focus is on an ethical rather than psychological issue is borne out by the way the play has been treated by some of the most important critics of the present century. It may not be regarded as irrelevant to refer here briefly to one or two modern views of Hamlet in order to show how the Coleridgean train of thought has continued in our own age too.

L.C. Knights, in an important study of the play, (An Approach to "Hamlet"), suggests that Hamlet's state of mind incapacitates him for meaningful action. His overwhelming preoccupation with evil, though philosophically significant, is not normal. Moreover, the action of the play is not intended to be viewed from Hamlet's point of view. Hamlet is indeed the focus of some of the play's irony. This view of the play comes very close to that of Coleridge and highlights the essential features of his approach. Coleridge also seems to have anticipated another modern scholar-critic of the play. M.M. Mahood, in her book Shakespeare's Word Play, says that Hamlet's basic problem is that he refuses to identify himself. His is an unlimited, unbounded consciousness. In the realm of speculation, of which Hamlet is an inhabitant, no choice is necessary, and there is no self-definition. This is Hamlet's basic problem because in the world of action both choice and self-definition are essential. According to Professor Mahood, there is development in Hamlet's character. The moment of recognition and of self-definition comes for him in Ophelia's grave when he cries: "This is I/Hamlet the Dane".

These two views, briefly summarised above, are illustrative in a way of Coleridge's approach to Hamlet and representative of his continuing influence among critics who have, in important ways, distanced themselves from the Romantic criticism of Shakespeare.

***

We may begin our discussion of Coleridge's analysis of Polonius, with reference to Rene Wellek's remark that Coleridge does not make any distinction between art and life. In ascribing Polonius a past, Coleridge goes beyond the "statements of the author". That such a view is not correct would become clear if we remember what, according to Coleridge, is the way of defining a character in a play. Shakespeare, says Coleridge, does not draw his characters "by any one description". There need not necessarily be any "pompous description" of a character by himself. His characters are to be drawn from "the whole course of the play", by such opinions "half right half wrong" as his friends, enemies and the man himself would give -- "as the reader is left to draw the whole" (Raysor, II, 266; I, 232). This mode of inferring Shakespeare's characters by the readers might be truly exemplified in the character of Polonius.

Polonius, who may rightly be called as the "personified memory of wisdom no longer actually possessed" (Raysor, I, 225) or as "a man of maxims" (Raysor, II, 352) is, according to Coleridge, often misrepresented by the actors. Shakespeare never intended to represent him as a buffoon or to bring out the "senility or weakness of Polonius' mind". It is to Hamlet that Polonius is contemptible because "in inwardness and

---

31 Rene Wellek, op. cit., p.182.
uncontrollable activity of movement, Hamlet's mind is logical, contrary to that of Polonius, and besides, as I have observed before, Hamlet dislikes the man as false to his true allegiance in the matter of succession to the crown (Raysor, I, 24). Hamlet's dislike for Polonius was thus due to political reasons (Raysor, II, 266). Hamlet was sure that Polonius had assisted his uncle in his usurpation of the throne and was creating hurdles in his love with Ophelia. His "spite" for Polonius was therefore natural. Coleridge warns us that Hamlet's speeches should not be taken at their face value since Shakespeare never intended us to see Polonius with Hamlet's eyes: "Hamlet's words should not be taken as Shakespeare's conception of him" (Raysor, II, 266).

In Polonius a certain "induration" of character arose from his "long habit of business", but if we take his advice and admonitions to Laertes and the reverence of his memory by Ophelia, we will find that he was a statesman of business "though somewhat past his faculties". Polonius is always made respectable, though the application of the maxims, which he acquired as a result of his experience, requires no "fineness of tact". One particular feature which belonged to his character was that "his recollection of past life was of wisdom and shewed a knowledge of human nature, whilst what immediately passed before, and escaped from him, was emblematical of weakness" (Raysor, II, 266).

Though derivative in general, Coleridge's analysis of Polonius' character is heavily drawn from Dr. Johnson's criticism. Johnson in his notes describes him thus: "such a man excels in general principles, but fails in particular application. He is knowing in retrospect, and ignorant in foresight. While he depends upon his memory and can draw from his repositories of knowledge he utters weighty sentences, and give useful counsels..." (Vickers, op. cit., Vol. V, p. 157).
Polonius' character is remarkable for its acuteness of observation. His comments on "fishmonger" and "god-kissing carrion" passages (Raysor, I, 26) are attempts, on the one hand, to explain difficult textual cruces and, on the other, means of focussing on Hamlet's valuation of a man against whom he is strongly prejudiced. On the whole, Coleridge's analysis of Polonius' character is objective and brings into light his ability to dissociate himself from the irresistible charm of Hamlet's character so that he can view Polonius as he is in himself.

II

For Macbeth's character, it is crucial to decide the extent of the role of the supernatural powers in leading Macbeth on the path of crime. The important question is how much power, for good or evil, is provided by Shakespeare to the weird sisters to determine Macbeth's character and action? If we consider the sisters as simply harmless beings devoid of any power of control, then Macbeth is mainly responsible for his acts and his crimes fall heavily on himself. On the other hand, if the sisters possess the power to determine behaviour, Macbeth becomes a man trapped in their design, helpless to choose only evil. Thus the basic question that arises is whether Macbeth's character shaped his destiny or his destiny shaped his character.

Throughout the eighteenth century, the witches in Macbeth were considered to be the product of the "credulous or heated imagination" of Shakespeare to satisfy the bad tastes of the time. It was the genius of Shakespeare that helped him in making them interesting. The critics in general agreed that Macbeth is a "detestable monster" who himself is responsible for his downfall.
Dr. Johnson, in his *Notes*, admits that the events in the play are too great to admit any influence of particular dispositions and that the course of action necessarily determines the conduct of the agents. Like Lady Macbeth, Macbeth too is merely detested, and the readers "rejoice" at their "fall".\(^{33}\)

Macbeth, according to Mrs. Montague, is a man with "vehement passions and aspiring wishes". The bad man is "his own tempter", and the judgement of the poet is shown in the way the poet has given to Macbeth "the very tempter to be wrought upon by such suggestions".\(^{34}\)

Gentleman bitterly criticizes the introduction of these supernatural creatures since the dramatic representation of these evil beings "tends to impress superstitious feelings and timidity upon weak mind". These creatures owe their existence in Shakespeare to the barbarous tastes of the time in which Shakespeare wrote with "possibly an oblique design of flattering the favourite opinion of James the first".\(^{35}\) Even the fact that the author has "historical tradition to countenance his introduction of them cannot exculpate his supernatural beings from rational censure". According to Gentleman, the man "who premeditates the worst means at first must have by nature a deep depravation of heart" and such Macbeth appears infected with from the very beginning. The conscientious struggles which we find him engaged in show his most "villanious nature".


\(^{35}\) Ibid., pp. 384-85.
These critics completely undermined the importance of the supernatural in the play and thought that since the witches produce only a "comical effect" on the audience, Macbeth should be staged without the help of these "ghostly aids".

Richardson interprets Macbeth's character in psychological terms, and attributes Macbeth's downfall to his ruling passion i.e., ambition.\(^\text{36}\) Under the influence of this passion, Macbeth undergoes a complete transformation from "a valiant, dutiful, mild, generous and ambitious" man to a "false, perfidious, barbarous and vindictive" villain. Richardson does not pay attention to the accountability of the witches in Macbeth's fall and strongly condemns those "historians of an ignorant age" who, "addicted to a superstitious belief in sorcery, ascribed them to a preternatural agency".

Whately recognized that though the dominant trait of Macbeth's character is his ambition, resulting from his vanity, the prophecies of the witches and the instigations of his wife, too, are important as they are constantly engaged in removing all the remains of humanity from him.\(^\text{37}\)

Coleridge, for the first time, realized the full dramatic significance of the witches without minimizing Macbeth's own part in his tragedy. Pieced together and read thoroughly, the Marginalia and the lecture notes do present a coherent view of the entire play, especially that of its protagonist. Coleridge gives the weird sisters supernatural powers and regards them as the kernel of the Macbeth story: They are not simply the projections of Macbeth's evil thoughts, nor merely an objective presentation of his inward being. They have their own objective

\(^{36}\) Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 121.
\(^{37}\) Ibid., pp. 408-20.
identity and work as objective agents of the evil power rather than having a merely psychological existence. Coleridge says:

The weird sisters [are] as true a creation of Shakespeare, as his Ariel and Caliban, the Fates, the Furies, and the materializing witches being the elements.

(Raysor, I, 67)

The sisters are "awful beings" and possess "mysterious nature". They lead evil "minds from evil to evil and have the power of tempting those who have been the tempters of themselves" (Raysor, II, 270). In this way, they are the "keynote" of the whole play. They possess the power to foretell future events. A part of their prophecy had already been fulfilled but "the major part was still contingent, still in Macbeth's moral will" (Raysor, I, 68).

Thus the witches, according to Coleridge, can exercise their powers only on those who are prone to evil. The greater part of the tragedy, however, is to be decided by Macbeth's own choice. "In the tragic", Coleridge believed, "free will of man is the first cause". The will is exhibited as struggling with Fate, and "the deepest tragic effect is produced when the Fate is represented as a higher and intelligent will and the opposition of the individual springing from a defect" (Raysor, I, 138). Therefore, to deny Macbeth his part in bringing about his own downfall and the fall of others by ignoring his own choice and "free will" is to misrepresent the play. Coleridge does not agree with his contemporaries, like Hazlitt, who consider Macbeth utterly helpless in the face of these supernatural powers. For example, Hazlitt says:

Macbeth himself appears driven along by the violence of his fate like a drunken man; he staggers under the weight of his own purposes and the suggestions of others, -- he stands at bay
with his situations and from the superstitions owe and breathless suspense into which the communications of the weird sisters through him, is hurried on with daring impatience to verify their predictions, and with impious and bloody hand to tear aside the veil which hides the uncertainty of the future. He is not equal to the struggle with fate and conscience.38

In modern times, Wilson Knight too has undermined the significant role of Macbeth's choice and emphasized the importance of the supernatural. He says that will-power is absent in Macbeth. He may struggle but cannot fight. "He can no more resist than a rabbit resists a weasel's teeth fastened in its neck, or a bird in the serpent's transfixing eye".39

Coleridge, to some extent, anticipates Bradley who too realizes that these powers influence Macbeth but they do not determine his course of actions. He is free to choose.40 Indeed, he may have chosen before his meeting with the sisters.

In order to show that evil was there in Macbeth, Coleridge makes a comparison between his character and that of Banquo. The sisters appeared to Banquo also, and he too was a fated beneficiary of their prophecies; but it was Macbeth, who "yielded to temptation" and thus "forfeited his free agency":

But o how truly Shakespearean is the opening of Macbeth's character given in the unpossessedness of Banquo's mind, wholly present to the present object — an unsullied, unsacrificed mirror; and [it is] in strict truth of nature that he, and not Macbeth himself, directs our notice to the effect produced to Macbeth's mind, rendered temptable by previous dalliance of the fancy with ambitious thoughts.

(Raysor, I, 68)

Banquo’s mind is like a mirror; it reflects as it sees, but the mind of Macbeth is not unpossessed like that of Banquo. Their difference in behaviour shows that the prophecies of the weird sisters were only an externalization of Macbeth’s heart-felt desires. He had already nurtured the hopes to be the king. Macbeth reacts very differently from Banquo. The "talkative curiosity" of the open-minded and "open-dispositioned" Banquo is contrasted with the "silent, absent and brooding melancholy" of his partner Macbeth:

The questions of Banquo [are] those of natural curiosity -- such as a girl would make after she had heard a gypsy tell her school fellow's fortune -- all perfectly general, or rather planless. But Macbeth lost in thoughts, raises himself to speech only by their being about to depart: "Stay, you imperfect speakers"; and all that follows is reasoning on a problem already discussed in his mind, on a hope which he welcomes, and the doubts concerning its attainment he wishes to have cleared up. His eagerness - the eager eye with which he had pursued their vanition, compared with the easily satisfied mind of the self-uninterested Banquo.

(Raysor, I, 68-9)

The "causatic" relationship between the "germ of the guilt" and its "birth date" is made clear through the dialogues of Banquo and Macbeth. Coleridge's interpretation here tends to perceive Banquo as a person without ambition, envy or malice, in fact without having a dramatic identity. In this respect, he serves as a good foil to Macbeth. Coleridge analyses the character of Banquo as a means of concentrating the attention on the hero and to show that his will is free. Under the command of his own ambition, Macbeth is dragged by the witches' power and promises and moves hypnotized to their prophecies. The way Macbeth "evades the promptings of his conscience before the commission of a crime shows his ingenuity". This can be compared with his "total imbecility" and helplessness after the commission of the crime since the crime can no longer be "deluded" (Raysor, II, 270).
Coleridge shows how easily the hypocrite in Macbeth overcomes the voice of his conscience. The "cowardice of his own conscience discloses itself in the murder of the old king". Thus it was not only the witches but his own choice that led him on to the course of crime. While focussing on Macbeth-Witches interaction, Coleridge highlights the relationship between the supernatural and free will. The witches may know the future but they are not given control over man and destiny. Coleridge sees Macbeth as fated by the evil in his own heart. Macbeth is driven to murder not only by supernatural powers but also by his own wife. Lady Macbeth, according to Coleridge, too shapes and guides Macbeth's career as a murderer:

Macbeth [is] described by Lady Macbeth so as at the same time to describe her own character. Intellectually considered, he is powerful in all [things] but has strength in none. Morally [he is] selfish; i.e., as far as his weakness will permit him [to be]. Could he have everything he wanted, he would rather have it innocently -- ignorant, as alas! how many are, that he who wishes a temporal end for itself does in truth will the means; hence the danger of indulging fancies.

(Raysor, I, 71-2)

Coleridge does not make Macbeth utterly monstrous. He does not make the reader "rejoice" at Macbeth's fall. Macbeth wants to be selfish but he does not have the ability. In spite of his crimes and the moral degeneration he undergoes, Macbeth is not inherently evil. "Could he have everything he wanted, he would rather have it innocently".

Badawi helps us in pointing out that Coleridge interprets Macbeth as a man deceived in himself. Before the murder, "the inward pangs and warnings of conscience are interpreted into

prudential reasonings" and after the deed "ever and ever mistaking the anguish of conscience for fears of selfishness and thus as a punishment of that selfishness, plunging deeper in guilt and ruin" (Raysor, I, 76) till in the end "all is inward no more prudential perspective reasonings" :

[He] mistranslates the recoilings and ominous whispers of conscience into prudential and selfish reasonings, and after the deed -- the terrors of remorse into fear from external dangers -- like delirious men that run away from the phantoms of their own brain, or, raised by terror to rage, stab the real object within their own reach.

(Raysor, I, 80)

Macbeth hopes to avoid the mental torture he experienced after one crime by committing another. But this does not enable him to evade his sense of guilt. His later actions proceed from terror and cowardice though his cowardice too is "compatible with his heroic character" (Raysor, I, 82) till in the end he deludes himself into believing that the tortures of his mind are due not to remorse but to the knowledge that Banquo's son, Fleance, lives : "still mistaking conscience for prudence".

It is to be noted here that though Coleridge describes the character in psychological terms, his main concern is with the theme of the play. The description of the different states of mind of the two main characters is no doubt psychologically very convincing. It is not simply a description, but a subtle analysis of the dominant passions of the two protagonists. We have reasons here to disagree with Badawi who makes a strict demarcation between moral and psychological approaches and regards Coleridge's analysis of Macbeth as moral. In fact, the boundary line between the two is very thin. As we see, here is an example of a moral aspect presented psychologically. Coleridge adopts a holistic approach in the sense that he does
not isolate character from the thematic and dramatic context of
the play. He studies it with reference to other characters
also. Coleridge himself says: "The general idea is all that
can be required from the poet, not a scholastic logical
consistency in all the parts so as to meet metaphysical
objections" (Raysor, I, 68).

Lady Macbeth, "like all in Shakespeare, is a class
individualized". According to Coleridge, she was a woman of
"visionary and day dreaming turns of mind", with her eyes fixed
on her sole ambition. She wishes to see her husband on the
throne. Her high ambition shows that she is incapable of
distinguishing between fantasy and reality. Hers is the
valiance of a day dreamer:

She mistakes the courage of fantasy for the power
of bearing 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.

(Raysor, I, 72)

The woman in her was dead, as she "evinces no womanly, no
wifely joy at the return of her husband". Her sex, however,
"occasionally betrays herself in the moment of dark and bloody
imagination". Coleridge in his lectures does not agree with the
common opinion of the critics that the passage in which she
alludes to "plucking her nipple from the boneless gums of her
infant" shows that she is "devoid of mercy and womanly
feelings". "If she had regarded to this with the savage
indifference", there would have been no force in her appeal but
"her allusion to it and her purpose in this allusion" is to
show that she considered" no tie so tender as that which
connected her with her babe" (Raysor, II, 271).
Coleridge points out another instance where the most exquisite trait of her womanly nature was exhibited. It is in the "faltering of her resolution", while standing over Duncan in his slumbers: "Had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done it" (Raysor, I, 27).

It must be noted here that the eighteenth century critics and theatrical presentations emphasized the utter monstrosity in Lady Macbeth's character. She was stigmatised as the "fiend-like queen" who is positive and conscious in her choice of evil. According to these critics, she denies the tenderness traditionally associated with her sex since she finds pleasure in traditionally masculine hardness. Coleridge contradicts this point of view. Like her husband, she is never meant to be a monster as Coleridge evokes a good deal of sympathy for her. She is so much a victim of her own fantasy as anyone else is. She is not aware of the means she is employing to achieve her temporal end. In this respect, she may be contrasted with Goneril and Reagan who are practical and are fully aware of their deeds and their consequences. Even her sleep-walking shows that while her voluntary actions and sentiments are all inhuman, "her involuntary nature rises against her habitual feeling springing out of the depraved passions, and in her sleep she shows herself to be a woman, while waking she is a monster. According to Coleridge's thesis "Shakespeare never creates truly odious and detestable characters". He always saves the "honour of human nature by mingling strokes of nature and humanity in his pictures" (Raysor, II, 217). Lady Macbeth too is not an incarnation of evil but a human being. Coleridge thus evokes some sympathy for Lady Macbeth. She is a truly tragic character.

On the whole, our analysis of Coleridge's treatment of the two protagonists in *Macbeth* attempts to show that Coleridge's interest was not purely psychological. As elsewhere, Coleridge tries to unravel the moral and philosophical implications of Shakespeare's design in the play, and keeps the psychological analysis of character subservient to the larger pattern.

### III

Coleridge's famous comment on Iago "the motive hunting of motiveless malignity" is often quoted by critics and scholars to summarize Coleridge's views on Iago, whose character, says Coleridge, Shakespeare executed "without disgust without scandal", thus with complete objectivity (Raysor, I, 49). The phrase, however, does not mean as it is often thought to mean, that a complete absence of all motives characterizes Iago's actions. In fact, the phrase suggests a very close connection between Coleridge's philosophical and theoretical concerns and his practical analysis of Shakespearian characters.

In Iago, Coleridge says, "the pride of intellect without moral feeling is supposed to be the ruling impulse" (Raysor, II, 181). Unlike some neo-classical critics who tried to supply their own imaginative motives in place of Iago's, Coleridge realized that there is something in Iago's villainy which cannot be explained in words. Only two motives, "disappointed passions and envy", that Coleridge finds in Iago, cannot account for the enormous malignity in his character. Coleridge's belief in the two motives is not incompatible with the belief that there is something more, deeply ingrained in him and this is, as Coleridge says, his "pride of intellect without moral feeling". This is supposed to be his ruling passion. Iago reverses the order of things since "he places
intellect at the head". Iago, as Coleridge says, "conscious of his superior intellect, which urged him to commit the most horrid crimes, gave scope to his envy, and hesitated not to ruin a gallant, open and generous friend in his moment of 'felicity' because he was not promoted as he expected". Othello was superior in place, but Iago thought him to be inferior in intellect, and unrestrained by conscience "trampled" upon him (Raysor, II, 287).

Iago is a character of complete moral depravity. He is one of those Shakespearian characters in whom:

the intellectual powers were found in a prominent degree, while the moral faculties were wanting, at the same time that he taught the superiority of moral greatness. Such is the contrast exhibited in Iago and Othello -- Iago's most marked feature is his delight in governing by fraud and superior understanding the noble-minded and generous Moor. (Raysor, II, 209)

His attempt at disrupting the spiritual and moral rootings of Othello's consciousness implies an alienation of the self from the individual and society. The real motive is nowhere mentioned but throughout implied in Shakespeare's portrayal of Iago's character.

Thus, in Iago is portrayed a person who is alienated from his own self, a person whose vain pride of intellect makes him fall in love with his own self. He, therefore, develops a contempt for those whom he considers intellectually inferior to himself. In his efforts to disrupt the protagonist's spiritual integrity and cohesiveness, he shows his strong tendency to make dupe of those who are not intellectually so advanced. This superior intelligence has destroyed not only Othello but, before him, also made Roderigo a prey. It was, in fact, Roderigo on whom Iago "first exercises his art and in so doing
displays his own character". Roderigo, as Coleridge says, though "fitted and predisposed to be a dupe by his own passion", is a person who is not without "moral notions and sympathies with honours which his rank, connections had hung upon him". In Iago, we find:

the dread of contempt habit[ual] to those who encourage in themselves and have their keenest pleasure in the feeling and contempt for others. His high self opinion -- and how a wicked man employs his real feelings as well assumes those most alien from his own, as instruments of his purpose.

(Raysor, I, 45)

For him, there is nothing beyond self. Egotistical self-regard is the only reason through which reality can be apprehended. He relies on his own will but he possesses no real will. It was a reflection of his own inner chaos, a result of his pride in his falsified self.

Coleridge's analysis of Iago hints at "the dreadful habit of thinking of moral feeling and qualities only as prudential ends to means" (Raysor, I, 125). Iago does not conceive the world as an organic, moral order. Self-regarding reason has brought about a petrification of imaginative sympathies in him. He thus denies his link with the human world and believes only in self-regarding reason. In Iago we find the "coolness of a preconceiving experimentor". He considers this world as a labortory where he is experimenting on people without any involvement with them. His passionless character is described by Coleridge thus:

Iago's passionless character, all will in intellect; therefore a bold partisan here of a truth, but yet of a truth converted into falsehood by absence of all the modifications by the frail nature of man.

(Raysor, I, 49)
It is interesting to recall here that Bradley in his Shakespearean Tragedy quotes Coleridge's phrase about Iago's "motiveless malignity" with the suggestion that his great predecessor had failed to account for Iago's villainy in proper psychological, human terms. Bradley rejects the Coleridgean view and then goes on to define Iago's motives in terms of his inherent sense of superiority, or his vanity. Bradley never hints at the fact that such indeed had been Coleridge's own diagnosis. Perhaps, the striking phrase, "motive-hunting of a motiveless malignity" caught Bradley's eye and he chose to ignore Coleridge's oft-repeated view that in Iago, as in Falstaff and Richard III, Shakespeare was dealing with the disastrous consequences of amoral intellectual pride.

Modern criticism of Iago tends to see him either as a descendant of the vice of the moralities or as the traditional stage devil. One of the recent critics, Bernard Spivack, who examined all the characteristics of medieval vice, tries to prove that Iago too possesses similar qualities. According to him, Iago's traditionally motiveless role beneath a mask of motiveless malignity shows that he resembles the Vice. In this way, "the difficulties encountered in the play, particularly the ambiguous nature of Iago's motivation, are seen as the result of an attempt to 'translate' the popular but amoral, seducer of the Morality stage into realistic Elizabethan-Jacobean drama".

43 A.C. Bradley, op. cit., p. 209.
Stoll, in his *Art and Artifice* (1933), pointed out the ambiguity of Iago's motives. The motives that he explains throughout the play are not sufficient for the enormous vallainy of his nature. Stoll concludes by saying that "he is a son of Belial, he is a limb of Satan".  

Wilson Knight considers Iago "as a kind of Mephistopheles. Leavis too reduced Iago to "a necessary piece of dramatic mechanism designed to trigger off Othello's jealousy". According to Leach Scragg, it would be equally arguable that it is to the stage Devil, not the Vice, that Iago is indebted. He thus does not agree with Spivack and says that "he would revert once more from the unnoticed seducer to the motivated antagonist, from the amoral to the immoral".  

However, Iago cannot be reduced to such figures as the Vice or the Devil. Stoll diminishes the Iago of Bradley by making him a piece of dramatic machinery as Leavis undermines the importance of Iago by making Othello so easy a victim. Some other critics, Maud Bodkin, for example, have found in Iago an archetypal meaning when they see in the devil "our tendency to represent in personal form the forces within and without us that threaten our supreme value. She fails to notice the psychological truth in his character i.e., "a powerfully  

---

49 Leach Scragg, op. cit., pp. 63-4.  
imagined and impressively convincing tempter". As Ralph Berry points out (and this accords with Coleridge's own belief):

I do not believe that the mature Shakespeare, at the height of his powers, created a single personage who could not be accepted as an entirely credible human being.51

Theatrical productions have also shown that a psychological naturalistic study of Iago is better than a perfectly Satanic figure. Marvin Rosenberg confirms the point when he says that Iago played as Vice is seldom successful.52 Coleridge's remark in Othello:

the motive hunting of motiveless malignity - how awful! In itself fiendish; while yet he was allowed to bear the divine image, too fiendish for his own steady view.

(Raysor, I, 49)

shows that he does not consider Iago to be a devil. In his malice, he is "a being next to devil, only not quite the devil". He does not commit evil only because it is evil. Iago does evil not out of knowledge but out of lack of knowledge, out of a limited vision of his intellectual faculties. He is therefore a human being and his actions too are to be judged psychologically and morally. He was "not a fellow with a countenance predistined for the gallows;... but by an accomplished and artful villain who was indefatigable in his exertions to poison the mind of a brave and swarthy Moor (Raysor, II, 277). In the total design of the play, he stands for a particular evil -- rejection of all moral faculties.

However, he is not alone in his possession of this evil as Othello too demonstrates it in his distrust for Desdemona. Thus Coleridge's analysis of Iago's character shows that Coleridge is capable of remarkable psychological subtlety when psychological delineations border on moral perception.

***

The neo-classical critics considered Othello implausible, not true to life. He was regarded as a character not adequately motivated. Rymer and his friends bitterly criticized Shakespeare in his portrayal of Othello on this ground. Shakespeare was charged with the violation of the rule regarding decorum. The very fact that a European was shown as having fallen in love with a veritable negro was a breach of the common law with regard to decorum. Moreover, most of the eighteenth century critics found motivation in Othello to be rather weak. They thought that jealousy was the essential trait without which it was impossible to ascribe any reason for his actions. Dr. Johnson in his Notes refers to:

... the fiery openness of Othello, magnanimous, artless, and credulous, boundless in his confidence, ardent in his affection, inflexible in his resolution and obdurate in his revenge....

Johnson's comments, however, are appreciative. The gradual progress which Iago makes in the Moor's conviction and the means he employs to inflame him are so artfully natural that though "it will perhaps not be said of him as he says of himself, that he is a man not easily jealous yet we cannot but pity him when at last we find him perplexed in the extreme".

\footnote{Vickers, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 25-59.}
\footnote{Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 165-66.}
\footnote{Ibid.}
It is strange that psychological critics like Richardson do not say anything about Othello. In 1775, Elizabeth Griffith, and in 1795, Wolstenholme Parr, too, emphasize jealousy as the most characteristic passion of Othello's character. According to Parr:

...the complexion of Othello, that had placed him at such a distance from Desdemona's love, and with other considerations had so much increased his tenderness and gratitude for her passionate declarations in his favour, becomes afterwards a powerful weapon for the arm of jealousy.57

Even the German Romantic critics like Schlegel could understand Othello only after "presuming in him a predisposition to jealousy, a jealous habit."58

Coleridge's analysis of Othello "overturns" the accepted opinion when he finds that there is sufficient motive for Othello's actions and his actions are perfectly convincing. His view of Othello, as Raysor says, is based on the "paradox that he is not a jealous character".59 Coleridge poses a question regarding Othello's character: How did Shakespeare originally conceive Othello? Was he a Negro or a Moor? Coleridge ridiculed the idea of making Othello a Negro for we cannot suppose Shakespeare "so utterly ignorant as to make a barbarous Negro plead royal birth" (Raysor, I, 46). Shakespeare learned the spirit of the character from Spanish poetry which was prevalent in England in his time. Negroes, during that time, were considered to be slaves while Moors were a part of the proud class of warriors. Othello too was a "gallant moor, of royal

57 Ibid., Vol. VI, p. 619.
59 Ibid., p. lviii.
blood, combining a high sense of Spanish and Italian feelings" (Raysor, II, 350; II, 276).

Coleridge's analysis of Othello's character is remarkable for its psychological subtlety which, according to Raysor, ranks as one of his best achievements in psychological analysis. While comparing Othello's character with that of Leontes, Coleridge says that jealousy is not the passion by which Othello can be characterized. According to Coleridge, "Shakespeare's description of this passion is mainly philosophical" (Raysor, I, 122) and the symptoms which characterize a jealous person do not find any place in Othello's heart. "The jealous mind that once indulges this passion has a predisposition, a vicious weakness, by which it kindles a fire from every spark, and from circumstances the most innocent and indifferent finds fuel to feed the flame" (Raysor, II, 276). Othello does not possess this predisposition to suspicion. The five symptoms which can easily be traced in Leontes in The Winter's Tale or in any jealous person, but cannot be found in Othello, are (Raysor, I, 122-3):

1. excitability by the most inadequate causes;
2. grossness of conception, and a disposition to degrade the object of it. "Sensual fancies and images";
3. shame of his own feelings exhibited in moodiness and soliloquy;
4. "And yet from the violence of the passion, forced to utter itself, and therefore catching occasions to ease the mind by ambiguities, equivoces, talking to those who cannot and who are not known not to be able to understand what is said -- a soliloquy in the mask of a dialogue"; and
5. lastly, the sense of vulgar ridicule, as distinct from high sense of honour.
According to Coleridge, Othello does not possess these qualities because Shakespeare idealises the character of the Moor, whom he presents as a "Noble Moor".

Coleridge quotes examples to point out the good nature of Othello. He was "noble, generous, open-hearted, unsuspicious and unsuspecting" (Raysor, II, 276). His "self-government, generosity and open-heartedness", all are revealed in the play. Othello's trusting nature, which can be contrasted with Leontes' behaviour to his true friend Camillo, is displayed in his speech to the Duke (I, iii, 283-5), where he expresses his belief in Iago's "honesty and trust" (Raysor, I, 124). His absolute trust in Iago which he reveals often in his speech with other characters shows that Othello is not a jealous character. It was according to his wish that Iago was given the charge of bringing Desdemona to Cyprus. Coleridge's comment, "Is this jealousy", on the dialogue between Othello and Desdemona shows that, according to Coleridge, jealousy is not the dominant trait of Othello's character (Raysor, I, 52-3). Even when Othello becomes suspicious, the very sight of Desdemona drives away Othello's suspicion. This ideal relationship is described by Shakespeare in Act III, scene iii, ll 282-83 (Raysor, I, 53). "It is", as Coleridge says, "by the best moral feelings that Desdemona attached herself to Othello and Othello to Desdemona" (Raysor, I, 124).

Then why did Othello kill his beloved wife? To understand the "essence" of Shakespeare's protagonist, "we must perseveringly place ourselves in his situation and under his circumstances" (Raysor, II, 125). Then only we will realize the "solemn agony of the noble Moor" which is "fundamentally" different from the "wretched wishing jealouslys" of Leontes and "morbid suspiciousness" of Leonatus. Because Othello's character is deliberately ennobled by Shakespeare and because
his love with Desdemona is almost idealized, it was not the revenge of a jealous man but "the agony of a noble soul" who was deceived into believing his "superhuman lady-love destroyed".

Othello has no life but in Desdemona, but his belief that his "angel had fallen from the heaven of her native innocence, wrought a civil war in his heart". Coleridge says:

Jealousy does not strike me at the point in his passion; I take it to be rather an agony that the creature, whom he had believed angelic, with whom he had garnered up his heart and whom he could not help still loving, should be proved impure and worthless.... It was a moral indignation and regret that virtue should so fall: 'But yet the pity of it, Iago! O Iago! the pity of it, Iago!'

(Raysor, II, 350)

Moreover, since his honour was concerned, "Iago would not have succeeded but by hinting that his honour was compromised".

His conduct here was different from that of the jealous Leontes in The Winter's Tale whose jealousy proceeds from an evident trifle, and something like hatred was mingled with it. Nor does Othello's reaction resemble that of Leonatus in Cymbeline who accepts the wager and exposes his wife to the trial. Their actions denote "a jealous temper already formed". In Othello, the knowledge of Desdemona's infidelity came to Othello not by any one else but by a person whom every person including Othello considered honest. Moreover, Iago's subtle suggestions were quite new to him, and they did not correspond with anything of a like nature within himself. He does not get excited by the insignificant or trivial causes. It needed the tricks and insinuations not by "a fellow with a countenance predestined for the gallows" but by an "accomplished and artful villain" (Raysor, II, 276).
Coleridge's interpretation of Othello provided a clue to Bradley who too does not consider jealousy as his important characteristic. Othello's fall, as Bradley sees it, is brought about through his own noble qualities. His virtues are the very means of his ruin: "his trust, where he trusts is absolute", and an unsuspecting nature prevents him from realizing the evil and malignity of Iago's heart. In this sense, Coleridge conceived of Othello as a heroic figure, a conception first presented by Dr. Johnson and one that reached its culmination in Bradley.

This view is, however, criticized by some influential twentieth-century critics. T.S. Eliot in 1927 opposed this view of Othello. Stoll, too, dismissed the interpretations of Coleridge and Bradley, and insisted that it was useless to find out any key to Othello's character. No reasonable psychological interpretation or a just motive can be assigned to his acts. Othello's character cannot be analysed in terms of human psychology. The hero's transition from one state to another is psychologically impossible and "owing to the convention, not infrequent in tragedy and comedy, as in myth and legend, of believing at the critical moment the detrimental thing that is cunningly told". The tragedy does not occur because of any genuine human predicament. In real life, no person would so easily believe a person like Iago. Stoll believed that Shakespeare was interested in exciting incidents and thrilling spectacles. A convincing imitation of real life was not his aim. Neither his characters nor their actions are true to life since he was more concerned with the psychology of the audience than that of his characters.

---

Stoll's substitution of theatrical effects in place of the subtle psychology of the protagonist, however, is as misleading as Leavis's Othello who is so easy a victim of Iago's conspiracy. In place of Coleridge's (and Bradley's) Othello, Leavis gives us one who is not blameless. He does not accept the picture of Othello as a noble and trusting hero driven to commit the murder of his wife by the insinuations of Iago. There is a vein of 'obtuse and brutal egotism' and a 'ferocious stupidity' in him. His tendency to self-deception, his lack of self-knowledge, his self-centeredness, his promptness to jealousy -- all these make him an easy victim of Iago. What we should see in Iago's prompt success is not so much "Iago's diabolic intellect as Othello's readiness to respond".

Though Leavis too makes Othello psychologically coherent and credible, yet he adopts a wrong hypothesis. Coleridge is to some extent right when he says that Othello is not a jealous character. It is true since jealousy is simply a consequence of all the causes represented in the play. The theme of Othello, as Coleridge points out, is the danger of placing intellectual faculties above the moral ones. Iago in this sense represents the position of an intellectual villain who destroys the moral foundations of the protagonist's psychic edifice. The contrast between the two characters thus brings out the contrast between two opposite world-views. However, Iago is not the only person who can be blamed for this. If he represents the intellectual position of a rationalistic villain, Othello shows the process how the intellectual faculties gradually overpower the moral ones. As soon as he fails to listen to his conscience, he falls

63 F.R. Leavis, "Diabolic Intellect and the Noble Hero", op. cit., p. 140.
64 Ibid., p. 140.
a prey to the superior intellect of Iago. Thus, according to Coleridge, Shakespeare shows how Othello moves towards achieving the intellectual position of Iago, till ultimately he succumbs to his baser passions. It may be argued here that, as Coleridge claims, jealousy is not the prominent characteristic of Othello's temperament but this does not mean that Othello does not display jealousy as the play unfolds. However, as Coleridge himself makes it clear, jealousy is not a vice of his mind, a culpable tendency as can be found in Leontes. Coleridge seems to suggest that it proceeds from his absolute trust in Desdemona.

Coleridge's comments on the last speech of Othello (V, ii, 349-51) show that this is the language of his falsified self when he deludes himself into vain excuses:

Othello wishes to excuse himself on the score of ignorance, and yet not to excuse himself - to excuse himself by accusing. This struggle of feeling is finely conveyed in the word "base", which is applied to the rude Indian not in his own character, but as the momentary representative of Othello.

(Raysor, I, 54)

It is to be noted that T.S. Eliot in his "Shakespeare and the Stoicism of Senecca" too finds a false rhetoric in Othello speech. Othello is deluding himself, since it is the language of "the human will to see things as they are not". It is, Eliot says, "the terrible exposure of a human weakness -- of a universal human weakness". Coleridge too arrives at the same conclusion though by a different process.


We may conclude by briefly suggesting here that Coleridge's concern with the motivation of the two main characters in the play -- Iago's malignity and Othello's jealousy -- transcends psychology the moment we realize that at the back of Coleridge's mind is his perception of the play's thematic pattern. Shakespeare, it is implied, does not refer the spectator to life outside the theatre, to real men and women. The fictional characters have their being within the design of the play, and the design is determined by the philosophical insight Shakespeare wished to mediate.

IV

Coleridge begins his analysis of Lear's character by stating the moral implications of Lear's demand from his daughters. This demand originates in the "selfishness of [the] loving and kindly nature" of Lear. The triple division of the kingdom "as the relative rewards of which the daughters were made to consider their several portions" is not without its "due significance, not without its due forethought". It helps us to see in Lear:

...the strange yet by no means unnatural mixture of selfishness, sensibility, and habit of feeling derived from and fostered by the particular rank and usages of the individual; the intense desire to be intensely beloved, selfish and yet characteristic of the selfishness of a loving and kindly nature.

(Raysor, I, 55)

In Lear we find "a feeble selfishness, self-supportless and leaning for all pleasure on another's breast". Lear's anxiety, his distrust and jealousy all originate in Lear's wish to enjoy his daughters' "professions of love".

Throughout his life Lear has developed the habit of getting his commands obeyed instantly. His "inveterate habits of
sovereignty convert the wish into claim and positive right, and the incompliance with it into crime and treason" (Raysor, I, 55). This also brings out another characteristic defect in Lear's personality, as Coleridge points out, "Lear's moral incapability of resigning the sovereign power in the very moment of disposing it" (Raysor, I, 61). Though he has transferred his powers yet he is unwilling to do so practically. Kent's punishment clearly shows this inherent contradiction in Lear's nature. His "trial" of love is but a "trick" and the grossness of the old king's rage is in part the "natural result of a silly trick suddenly and most unexpectedly baffled and disappointed" (Raysor, I, 55). Cordelia's negative reply provokes the vanity of his pride. Coleridge sums up the psychological complexities involved in the whole process of Lear-Cordelia relationship. Lear's whimsicality is a natural result of his age and the position he enjoys:

Old age, like infancy, is itself a character. In Lear the natural imperfections [are] increased by life-long habit of being promptly obeyed. Any addition of individuality [would be] unnecessary and painful. The relations of others to him, of wondrous fidelity and frightful ingratitude, sufficiently distinguish him. Thus he is open and ample playroom of nature's passion.

(Raysor, I, 62)

In Cordelia's blunt reply, "Nothing", Coleridge notices the "pride and sullenness" which is caused by her disgust at the ruthless hypocrisy of her sisters. Coleridge thus tries to resolve a very controversial problem whether Cordelia is an embodiment of virtue or she can be held responsible for her father's tragedy. Coleridge seems to suggest that Cordelia's responsibility cannot be denied (Raysor, I, 61). Coleridge has psychologised Cordelia in order to drive attention away from the improbability in the following scenes. "It was contrived to lessen the glaring absurdity of Lear" in his unwillingness to resign the physical power.
Coleridge's analysis of different characters serves to highlight and intensify the basic issues involved in the play. His comments on the "difference and diversity" in the characters of Cornwall and Albany (Raysor, I, 56), Kent's goodness and Steward's baseness and on other figures show the psychological depth of his mind.

After describing Lear, the persona patiens of the drama, Coleridge goes on to describe the person second in importance -- "the main agent and prime mover" of the drama -- Edmund. Edmund, Coleridge says, has been portrayed by Shakespeare "with the same felicity of judgement", and in the same easy and natural way as he describes Lear and prepares us for the "casual communication" of "origin and occasion" of Edmund's malignity (Raysor, I, 56). From the very beginning of the play he has stood before us in "the united strength and the beauty of earliest manhood". He was not only gifted with the "high advantage of person" but was "endowed by nature with a powerful intellect and a strong energetic will". "Pride" was the natural consequence of these qualities combined with the fact that he was the "known and acknowledged" son of the "princely" Gloster:

Edmund, therefore, has both the germ of pride and the conditions best fitted to evolve and ripen it into a predominant feeling. Yet hitherto no reason appears why it should be other than the usual pride of person, talent and birth, a pride auxiliary if not akin to many virtues and the natural ally of honourable [impulses].

(Raysor, I, 56)

In spite of these qualities, certain causes worked to force him to adopt a course of evil. Coleridge analyses each one of these causes when he gives a justification of his villainy. Coleridge regards Edmund's "illegitimacy" as an important factor. In his own presence, his father "takes shame on himself" for the frank acknowledgement of Edmund's being his son. The aggravation of "the stain of bastardy" was too heavy
for him. Coleridge emphasizes his sense of shame and humiliation when he hears his own father talking about his mother and the circumstances of his birth "with a most degrading and licentious levity", with an "excusing shrug of the shoulder", and in a tone "betwixt waggery and shame" (Raysor, I, 58). His lust for power has thus a psychological origin as this lies in his sense of inferiority, "the consciousness of its notoriety" that everybody knows his illegitimacy. This has also been the spring motive of his hatred of his brother Edgar whose "stainless birth and the lawful honours were the constant remembrances of his debasement" (Raysor, I, 57). Consequent to all these feelings:

the corrosive virus which inoculates pride with a venom not its own, with envy, hatred, a lust of that power which in its blaze of radiance would hide the dark spots on his disk, [with] pangs of shame personally undeserved and, therefore, felt as wrongs, and a blind ferment of vindictive workings towards the occasions and causes. (Raysor, I, 57)

Coleridge says that his sense of shame could have been lessened from "co-domestication with Edgar and their common father" but that has been cut off by an absence from home and a foreign education from boyhood to the present time, and the "product of its continuance, as if to preclude all risks of his interference with his father's views for the elder and legitimate son" (Raysor, I, 59).

Thus, Edmund is analysed by Coleridge as having sufficient motives for his baseness. While analysing these motives, Coleridge points out the cause of evil in Edmund. "Thou unpossessing bastard" is the "secret poison" of Edmund's heart. Edmund does not commit crimes just for the sake of deriving pleasure or satisfying his lust for power but he has his own causes and his conduct therefore can be justified.
This accords with Coleridge's own theory that Shakespeare does not create utter monsters. Shakespeare, as Coleridge says, seeks "to prevent the guilt from passing into monstrosity which 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.

(Raysor, I, 58)

It is only in Iago that he has approached this and there he has done it successfully. That is perhaps the "most astonishing proof of his genius and the opulence of its resources".

Coleridge's explanation of evil in Edmund thus has a moral bearing. Moreover, the very fact that explanation of evil is possible gives it moral undertones. Edmund is despised and scorned by everyone including his father. His sense of shame "sharpens a predisposition in his heart for evil. For it is a profound moral, that shame will naturally generate guilt; the oppressed will be vindictive, like Shylock, and in 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" (Raysor, I, 62). Coleridge thinks that Shakespeare was determined to prevent evil in Edmund from passing into utter monstrosity. He was obliged to do so because of the presence in the play of Goneril and Reagan in whom Coleridge says, "wickedness is shown in an outrageous form". They are:
... in perfect sympathy of monstrosity. Not a sentiment, not an image that can give pleasures on its own account [is] admitted. Pure horror when they are introduced, and [they are] brought forward as little as possible.

(Raysor, I, 63)

Thus Reagan and Goneril are the only pictures of the unnatural in Shakespeare. Shakespeare has left "their hideousness unsoftened or diversified by a single line of goodness or common human frailty" whereas in Edmund:

... for whom passion, the sense of shame as a bastard, and ambition, offer some plausible excuses, Shakespeare has placed many redeeming traits. Edmund is what, under certain circumstances, any man of powerful intellect might be, if some other qualities and feelings were cut off.

(Raysor, II, 354)

Alfred Harbage criticizes Coleridge's justification of Edmund's villainy on the ground that:

Edmund had to be supplied with palliating motives. Yet elsewhere he [Coleridge] deplores 'motive-mongering', thus suggesting the term 'character-mongering' to those whose aesthetic contemplations are disturbed in our times, by the suggestion that Lady Macbeth must have had children.

According to Harbage, Coleridge's romantic vision of the non-existence of absolute evil and his "idea of a bastard as evil per se, a lacuna in 'genial nature', make him justify Edmund's actions.

---

67 Alfred Harbage, "Introduction", op. cit., p. 27.
68 Sylvan Barnet in his article "Coleridge on Shakespeare's Villains" adopts the same view point as that of Harbage. Taking T.E. Hulme's definition of a Romantic as one who does not believe in the fall of man, Sylvan Barnet says that Coleridge's conception of man was essentially romantic.
Coleridge's justification of Edmund's motivated evil must also be seen as a part of his insistence on the idea of totality of a work of art. Evil in Edmund is psychologised so as to place in a dramatic context i.e., to present a contrast with the "motiveless malignity" of Goneril and Reagan. Thus, Edmund's motives mitigate the severity of the horror of the crime of Goneril and Reagan.

Coleridge presents a contrast in different characters in order to make the meaning of the play more clear. Kent is the nearest to perfect goodness of all Shakespeare's characters. He is, however, not a symbolic morality figure who stands for goodness. As Coleridge says, "he is most individualized" and he serves to mitigate the folly of Lear and thus arouses the spectator's pity and sympathy for him. "His passionate affection and fidelity to Lear acts on our feelings in Lear's own favour; virtue itself seems to be in company with him" (Raysor, I, 61). The punishment of Kent by Lear highlights the basic pattern of the play i.e., that Lear could not resign sovereign power even after he disposes it off physically.

As a contrast to Kent is the steward, the "only character of utter unredeemable baseness in Shakespeare" (Raysor, I, 62). Even here the judgement and inventiveness of the dramatist is reflected as he provides "a willing tool" to Goneril.

Romanticism with its organic view of nature, with its concept of a continually evolving world, and most important with its principles of reconciliation of opposites, is incompatible with the tragic view. For Coleridge, too, opposites meet, good and evil are ultimately reconciled partly because evil is necessary for the existence of good. Thus tragedy ceases to exist. Shakespeare Quarterly, 7 (1956), no.3, p.10.
The fool is another important character in King Lear. Here is, unlike all the other fools of Shakespeare, one of "the profoundest and most astonishing" of his characters. The most genuine and real of Shakespeare's fools is in Lear. Shakespeare does not introduce a clown or fool just for the sake of exciting the laughter of his audiences. "The fool is no comic buffoon to make the groundings laugh, no forced condescension of Shakespeare's genius to the tastes of his audience" (Raysor, I, 63; II, 74) Shakespeare had a loftier and a better purpose. With his skill and felicity of treatment Shakespeare here brings the fool into "living connection with the pathos of the play, with the suffering". Shakespeare uses the Fool "with terrible effects, aggravating the misery and agony of some of his most distressing scenes" (Raysor, II, 73). The contrast of the Fool wonderfully heightens the colouring of some of the most painful situations, "where the old monarch in the depth and fury of his despair, complains to the warring elements of the ingratitude of his daughters (III, iii) and the Fool interposes, to heighten and inflame the passion of the scene".

Lear wandering amid the tempest, had all his feelings of distress increased by the over-flowing 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.

(Raysor, II, 266)

The comment of the Fool on the folly of Lear increases our sense of his suffering. Thus the constant reactions of a comic character on the tragic one serves to heighten and intensify the tragic effect of the play. The Fool in this sense also performs the function of the chorus as in ancient drama. He supplies the place of some disinterested person, since his impartial and unbiased comments on the characters and their actions serve as interesting commentary on the play (Raysor, II, 218).
Coleridge's brief, though perceptive, comments on the Fool highlight the radical transformation of poetic and dramatic theory in the early years of the nineteenth century. The neo-classical ideal had excluded from the purview of dramatic art the possibilities of the interiorisation and amplification of pathos through its paradoxical fusion with sardonic humour. Shakespeare and his contemporaries had worked into the fabric of dramatic art the Renaissance philosophical tradition, going back to Erasmus, of the praise of folly. It is this transvaluation which gave to the continuance of the medieval stage figures of the Vice and the Devil in Elizabethan drama a strange richness and complexity. The Fool in _King Lear_ is the apotheosis of this medley. The neo-classical age could not, however, appreciate the presence of the comic in any form in the tragic genre. Tate, therefore, in his adaptation excluded the Fool from the play, and he remained excluded for more than a century and a quarter. It is to the credit of Coleridge that he fully appreciated the role and function of the Fool, and it is with him that the modern critical tradition really begins.

According to Raysor, _Lear_ offers no good opportunity for a psychological critic like Coleridge who is in search of some problem. Raysor quotes Coleridge's comment of 1819: "the Lear of Shakespeare is not a good subject for a whole lecture in my style" (Raysor, II, 327). Though Raysor does not forget to mention the profound analysis of Edmund's character and of Lear's motives for the division of the kingdom, yet he says that a psychological critic would personally prefer the other three great tragedies for his lectures. He further adds that almost any critic whether psychological in his interests or not, might feel his inadequacy before the sheer magnitude and terrific power of Lear for these are the qualities that do not
lend themselves to analysis.

The real reason for Coleridge's unconscious reluctance to undertake a philosophical probing of King Lear might be of an ideological nature. Coleridge's romantic and organicist view of nature, his preoccupation with Christian ethics, his faith in human perfectibility and his insistence on the reconciliation of contraries in life and nature, all these precluded his full involvement in the disturbing metaphysics embedded in the ending of King Lear. It would not be a wild speculation to say that though sensitive to much in Shakespeare, the age of Romanticism with its millennial and ameliorative vision of man was yet unappreciative of the sceptical strain in Renaissance literature.

V

According to Coleridge, Shakespeare never takes pains to make his characters win their audience's esteem, but leaves it to the general command of passion, and to poetic justice. "It is most beautiful to observe in Romeo and Juliet that the characters principally engaged in the incidents are preserved innocent from all that could lower them in our opinion while the rest of the personages, deserving little interest in themselves, derive it from being instrumental in those situations in which the more important personages develop their thoughts and passions" (Raysor, II, 130).

In Romeo and Juliet, according to Coleridge, the purpose of the dramatist is to depict his philosophy of love, of transcendent love. This theme is worked out in the character of

---

Coleridge thus tries to show that Romeo's change does not show him up as shallow or as a "weather cock" blown round by every woman's breath. In him, Shakespeare, the poet and the philosopher, combines "truth with beauty and beauty with truth" (Raysor, II, 156). Romeo's substitution of Juliet for Rosaline (Shakespeare) shown us that he had looked at Rosaline with a different feeling than at Juliet. Rosaline was the object to which his full heart had attached itself in the first instance; our imperfect nature, in proportion as our ideas are vivid, seeks after something in which those ideas may be realized.

... [Shakespeare] shown us that he had looked at Rosaline with a different feeling than at Juliet. Rosaline was the object to which his full heart had attached itself in the first instance; our imperfect nature, in proportion as our ideas are vivid, seeks after something in which those ideas may be realized.

Romeo's infatuation for Rosaline is actually the expression of his need for love. It arises out of his own need for loving rather than out of the qualities of the beloved. Thus it was not just infatuation. However, love which begins in infatuation fully realizes itself in Juliet. In her, Romeo finds the creature of his search: [Shakespeare] shown us that he had looked at Rosaline with a different feeling than at Juliet. Rosaline was the object to which his full heart had attached itself in the first instance; our imperfect nature, in proportion as our ideas are vivid, seeks after something in which those ideas may be realized.

Romeo's substitution of Juliet for Rosaline...
has a philosophical basis since love in Romeo is a result of the sense of his own imperfect nature. Keeping in mind the fact that Romeo is not a character of supreme psychological interest, Coleridge says that 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 judgement into human nature" (Raysor, II, 131).

Shakespeare has, according to Coleridge, this advantage over all other dramatists that he has availed himself of all the minutiae of the human heart. He thus shows what we should not otherwise have seen:

...just as after looking at distant objects through a telescope, when we behold them subsequently with naked eye, we see them with greater distinctness, and in more detail, than we should otherwise have done.

(Raysor, II, 132)

Coleridge says that we have been told that Shakespeare's characters are the mere fruit of his observation or as persons in real life but a look at the characters in Romeo and Juliet will refute this view. As an example we can take the character of the Nurse. All the qualities and peculiarities that can possibly belong to any nurse and may be "conjured up" by a man can be found preserved in this creation. In this picture of the old Nurse, nothing is omitted. This would not have been possible, had Shakespeare depicted his characters on the basis of his observation only. For even the closest observation of manners of one or two nurses would not have enabled Shakespeare to draw this character of "admirable generalisation". The character thus has not only psychological but philosophical
existence as well which found its shape in the mind of its creator:

The great prerogative of genius (and Shakespeare felt and availed himself of it) is now to swell itself to the dignity of a god, and now to subdue and keep dormant some part of that lofty nature, and to descend even to the lowest character -- to become everything, in fact, but the vicious.

(Raysor, II, 133)

In the nurse we have "all the garrulity of old age and all its fondness". It is a commonly accepted fact that in old age, as in infancy, the individual in nature is a representative "Like Larch trees, in describing one you generalize a grove".

The peculiarities of her nature can truly be found in an uncultivated mind. Romeo, at one time was the most delightful and excellent young man for her and she too was willing to assist him, but very soon her disposition turns in favour of Paris and for him too she begins to profess the same affection. Her mode of connecting by accidents of time and place, and her child-like fondness for repetition, all these are characteristic of a vulgar mind against the cultivated and educated which correlate them by the cause and effect. She recalls the past wholly by coincident images, or facts which happened at the same time. Coleridge quotes the whole paragraph (Act I, Sc. ii) to exemplify this (Raysor, II, 134-5). The visual impressions made on her mind are true to her character. "More is here brought into one portrait than could have been ascertained by one man's mere observation, and without the introduction of a single incongruous point" (II, 135).

The garrulity of old age is further strengthened by possessiveness and prerogative of a long trusted servant, "whose
sympathy with the mother's affections gives her privilege and rank in the house". Thus the nurse's great affection for Juliet is responsible for her privileged position in the household. She is not just a servant but a kind of mother figure. Thus in her are combined the arrogance of ignorance, with the pride of manners at being connected with a great family:

[We] have the grossness, too, which that situation never removes, though it sometimes suspends it; and arising from that grossness, the little low vices attendant upon it, which, indeed, in such mind are scarcely vices.

(Raysor, II, 134)

Coleridge emphasizes the point that in all the plays of Shakespeare "especially in those of the highest order" the personages were drawn "rather from meditation than from observation, or to speak more correctly, more from observation the child of meditation". Shakespeare's observations are not those of a man who goes to the world, with a pocket book in his hand, carefully noting down everything he comes across. "By practice he acquires considerable facility in representing what he has observed, himself frequently unconscious of its worth". Contrary to this, Shakespeare's observations are of a mind who:

...having formed a theory and a system upon its own nature, remarks all things that are examples of its truth, confirming it in that truth, and, above all, enabling it to convey the truths of philosophy, as mere effects derived from, what we may call, the outward watchings of life.

(Raysor, II, 132)

Hence it is that Shakespeare's favourite characters are full of such lively intellect. Mercutio, in this sense, is one of truly Shakespearian characters. He is a man possessing all the elements of a poet, "the whole world was, as it were, subject to his law of association". Whenever he wishes to impress anything, all things become his servants for the
purpose, "all things tell the same tale, and sound in unison". In him were combined all the manners and feelings of a perfect gentleman:

0 how shall I describe that exquisite ebullience and overflow of youthful life, wafted on over the laughing wavelets of pleasure and prosperity, waves of the sea like a wanton beauty that distorted a face on which she saw her lover grazing enraptured, had wrinkled her surface in triumph of its smoothness. 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 of others and yet be interested in them, -- these and all congenial qualities, melting into the common copula of all, the man of quality, and the gentleman, with all its excellencies and all its faults.

(Raysor, I, 8)

Wit is so habitual to him that even at the time of his death he indulges in it.

This picture of Mercutio, a perfect gentleman with extraordinary powers of intellect reminds us of Coleridge's analysis of other characters like Biron in Love's Labour's Lost and Benedict in Much Ado about Nothing. Coleridge does not at all say that this character is autobiographical since he repeatedly stresses the fact that Shakespearian characters are more products of meditation than observation, and also because he appreciates the element of intellectual keenness and gentlemanliness in Shakespeare himself. We may venture into saying that probably there is at the back of Coleridge's mind the desire to identify this character with elements in Shakespeare's own personality, an unconscious desire on Coleridge's part of identify his characters with the creator.

Coleridge does not accept Dr. Johnson's verdict that Shakespeare having carried the part of Mercutio as far as he
could, till his genius was exhausted, had killed him in the third act to get him out of the way. According to Coleridge, Mercutio's death is a dramatic necessity, since it rouses a Romeo into action. "Upon the death of Mercutio the whole tragedy depends; it is produced by it". The scene in which it occurs serves to show "how indifference to any subject but one, and aversion to activity on the part of Romeo, may be overcome and roused to the most resolute and determined conduct". Had not Mercutio been rendered so amiable and so interesting, we could not have felt so strongly the necessity for Romeo's interference, connecting it immediately, and passionately, with the future fortunes of the lover and his mistress:

By his loss it was contrived that the whole catastrophe of the tragedy should be brought about: it endears him to Romeo, and gives to the death of Mercutio an importance which it could not otherwise have acquired.

(Raysor, II, 133)

On the character of Tybalt, Coleridge begins by saying that Shakespeare's characters are individuals as well as class. There is no character in his plays (except Pistol) who 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" (Raysor, II, 130).

Tybalt is, in himself, a commonplace personage. He is a man abandoned to his passions -- with all the pride of family, "only because he thought it belonged to him as a member of that family, and valuing himself highly, simply because he does not care for death". His pride even in facing death is his most important characteristic. This is a quality that makes him a symbol of the whole class.
From his character Coleridge goes on to generalise, "this indifference to death" is perhaps more common than any other feeling, "men are apt to flatter themselves extravagantly, merely because they possess a quality which it is a disgrace not to have, but which a wise man never puts forward, but when it is necessary" (Raysor, II, 130).

Capulet is a worthy noble-minded old man of high rank, with all the impatience that is likely to accompany it. "It is delightful to see all the sensibilities of our nature so exquisitely called forth; as if the poet had the hundred arms of the Polypus, and had thrown them out in all directions to catch the predominant feeling" (Raysor, II, 130-31). Coleridge analyses Capulet's anger to show his dominant passion not in the abstract but pervading the whole being of a character. In Capulet, the "anger seizes hold of everything that comes in its way in order to express itself", as in the lines where he reproves Tybalt for his fierceness of behaviour; which led him to wish to insult a Montague, and disturb the merriment (I, ii) and then seeing the lights burn dimly, Capulet turns his anger against the servants. His anger is expressed in a variety of naturalistic ways. Even the small events and actions show his anger. Thus in him:

No one passion is so predominant but that it includes all the parts of the character, and the reader never has a mere abstract of a passion, as of wrath or ambition, but the whole man is presented to him -- the one predominant passion acting, if I may so say, as the leader of the band to the rest.

There is no need here to reiterate what has already been discussed elsewhere: the attention in Coleridge's criticism on Romeo and Juliet is focussed on Shakespeare's insight into the nature of love. His comments on the Nurse are sufficient to vindicate our stand about the true nature of Coleridge's character criticism. He was moving away from Aristotle to
evolve a kind of expressionistic theory of dramatic (and poetic) art. His character criticism should, therefore, be viewed in this light.

VI

The character of Richard II, says Coleridge, is admirably carried out and developed throughout the play. The theme of Shakespeare's judgement as commensurate to his genius was always at the back of Coleridge's mind while analysing Shakespearian characters. He held the view that Shakespeare created his characters with conscious and excellent strokes of an accomplished artist. For example, one of the prominent traits of Richard's character i.e., his attention to decorum and high feelings of kingly dignity - never forgotten throughout the play - is displayed in the very beginning. These anticipations show with what judgement Shakespeare wrote, and "illustrate his care to connect the past and future, and unify them with the present by forecast and reminiscence" (Raysor, I, 144).

Having impressed the dignified and kingly manners of Richard, Shakespeare leads the auditors to a full understanding of Richard's weakness. Till the end of the first act, Richard has appeared in all the beauty of royalty, though the selfishness of his character becomes apparent in Act I, scene iii, 188-90. A new light is thrown in the last scene of Act I. As soon as he is left alone, the inherent weakness of his character is immediately shown. His weakness, however, as Coleridge puts it, is of a peculiar kind. It does not arise from want of personal courage or from any inborn constitutional defect of his faculties. The fact that he is not deficient in immediate courage can be shown at the time of his assassination. His cowardice is a result of his tendency of "leaning on the breast of others" for support and "of reclining
on those who are all the while known to be inferiors" (Raysor, I, 149). He is thus shown (in Act II, Sc. ii, l. 5-13) as a man with "a wantonness in feminine show, feminine friendism, intensely woman-like love of those immediately about him, mistaking the delight of being loved by him for a love for him" (Raysor, I, 153). From this "intellectual feminineness", Coleridge says, emanate all his vices, viz., his tendency to concealment and his cunning.

Much psychological subtlety may be seen in this analysis of Richard's weakness. Richard, Coleridge says "is not meant to be 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".

A strain of sympathy must be noted in Coleridge's attitude towards Richards, and the cause of this sympathy is probably self-identification. The other major character with whom self-identification takes place is Hamlet. Both are failures in life, both have a reflective habit of mind, and both are impractical. His sympathetic attitude is reflected more clearly when Coleridge says:

Shakespeare has represented this character in a very peculiar manner. He has not made him amiable with counter-balancing 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.

(Raysor, I, 149)

Further resemblances and echo of Hamlet's character can be seen in Coleridge's remark that Richard wastes all the energy, mental or physical, in constant thinking. The energy which should be reserved for action is thus wasted in the "passion
and effort of resolve and menaces". "Constant overflow of feeling" and his incapability of controlling them leads to consequent exhaustion of his energy. All his energy of action is spent and nothing but despondency takes its place. His "seeking refuge in despair" is also characteristic of his inward weakness (Raysor, I, 155-6). In him we find great activity of mind without any strength of moral feeling to rouse him to action. Richard however, becomes "silent" in the end not because of "exhaustion". His habits of kingliness and the "effect of flatteries have from infancy produced a sort of wordy courage" in him that betrays his "inward impotence". This leads to "alternation of unmanly despair" and of "ungrounded hope and throughout the rapid transition from one feeling to its opposite", as in the rest of the scene (III, ii).

In Act V, v, 81-85 can be found the exalted idea of the only true loyalty which is developed in "this noble and impressive play". We have neither the "rants" of Beaumont and Fletcher, nor the "sneers" of Massinger yet:

> the vast importance of the personal character of the sovereign is distinctly enounced, whilst, at the same time, the genuine sanctity which surrounds him is attributed to, and grounded on, the position in which he stands at the convergence and exponent of the life and power of the state.
> (Raysor, I, 151-2)

Shakespeare has thus contrived to bring the character of Richard with "all the prodigality and hard usage of his friends". He is still within the compass of our pity for we find him much beloved by those who knew him best. "The Queer is passionately attached to him and his good Bishop (Carlisle) adheres to the last". Thus Coleridge says:

> 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. 

(Raysor, II, 281)

Coleridge does not accept Dr. Johnson's verdict in the Notes to his edition of Shakespeare when he says that Richard is insolent and presumptuous in prosperity but humane and pious in adversity (Raysor, II, 186-9). According to Coleridge, an utmost consistency of character can be perceived in Richard. "What he was at first, he is at last, excepting as far as he yields to circumstances : what he shewed himself at the commencement of the play, he shews himself at the end of it". Dr. Johnson assigns to him rather the virtue of a confessor than that of a king. It is true that he may be said to be overwhelmed by the earliest misfortune that befalls him, but so far from his feelings or disposition being changed or subdued, "the very first glimpse of the returning sunshine of hope reanimates his spirits". Thus Coleridge emphasizes that the character of Richard II is admirably executed, "the whole is joined with the utmost richness and copiousness of thought" and if an actor is capable of representing Richard II, he would delight us most of all Shakesperean characters, perhaps with the single exception of King Lear. "I know of no character drawn by our great poet with such unequalled skill as that of Richard II" (II, 188).

The next character "which presents itself" is that of Bolingbroke. The character contradicts Pope's line: "Shakespeare grew immortal in spite of himself". In him is defined the struggle of inward determination with outward show of humility. His first presentation "could only be compared to that of Marius by Plutarch exclaiming on the presentation of the consular robes : 'Do these befit a banished traitor?"
concealing in pretended disgrace the implacable ambition that
haunted him" (Raysor, II, 281).

In his dauntless courage and ambition, he is the rival
of Richard III. "The resemblance between the two is not very
apparent still very intimate". However, this is the greatness
of Shakespeare that he imparts distinctness and individuality
to the two characters though they have more or less the same
temperament. "The difference between the two is most admirably
conceived and preserved". In Richard III, the ruling passion
is his pride of intellect, without moral feeling (like Iago and
Falstaff) and ambition is the "channel in which the impulse
directs itself" (Raysor, II, 188). The inferiority of his
person makes him seek consolation in the superiority of his
intellect. "He thus endeavoured to counterbalance his
deficiency". In Bolingbrook too we find the same ambition.
While in Richard III ambition is only the means to serve his
ruling passion, pride, in Bolingbrook, on the other hand,
ambition is the end, and for the gratification of ambition he
employs his talents as means: "Ambition itself conjoined
unquestionably with great talents, is the ruling impulse". In
Richard III, all that surrounds him is only dear "as it feeds
his sense of superiority. He is not a vulgar tyrant like Nero
or Caligula. He has always some end in view and vast fertility
of means to accomplish that end. In Bolingbroke, on the other
hand, we find a man who has some personal grievance, "who in
the outset has been sorely injured". Then we find him
apparently encouraged by the grievances of his country and by
the strange mismanagement in the government, "yet, at the same
time scarcely daring to look at his own views, or to
acknowledge them as designs". He comes home under the pretext
of claiming his dukedom and "professes that to be his object
almost to the last; but, at the last, he avows his purpose to
its full extent, of which he was himself unconscious in the earlier stages". In other words, though he was his ambition to satisfy yet in the beginning it remains disguised as his enthusiasm to remove the grievances of his own countrymen. It is only in the end that he realizes his unconscious purpose.

Various events in the play are designed so as to reveal the character of Bolingbroke. For example, the scene of the quarrel between Mowbray and Bolingbroke (I, i, 150-51) seems to be introduced "for the purpose of showing by anticipation" the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke (Raysor, I, 147). Bolingbroke is a hypocrite who has a concealed ambition so there is observable "a decorus and courtly checking of his anger in subservience to a predetermined plan". He, therefore, remains calm even after receiving the sentence of banishment. This is in contrast to Mowbray's "unaffected lamentation". "In the one, all is ambitious hope of something yet to come; in the other, it is desolation and a looking backward to the heart! Even in later scenes, Bolingbroke's ambitious hope "not yet shaped into a definite plan" is beautifully contrasted with Mowbray's desolation (I, iii, 144-77). The fine struggle of the haughty sense of power and ambition with the necessity of dissimulation in Bolingbroke (III, iii, 31-36 and 61) may be contrasted with Richard's parade of resignation (III, iii, 144-45) when we find him easing his heart, and consuming all that is manly in words "never anywhere seeking comfort in despair, but mistaking the moment of exhaustion for quiet" (Raysor, I, 156). Similarly the conversation between York and Bolingbroke (III, ii) when Bolingbroke is approaching the castle serves to reveal the latter's character.

One point that must be noted, about Shakespeare's judgement in the character of Bolingbroke, says Coleridge, is
that in this character Shakespeare takes "the opportunity of sowing germ(s)", the full development of which appears at a future time (Raysor, II, 281). So Henry IV is prepared for in Bolingbroke. This is an example of how Shakespeare makes one play introductory to another. Another example can be found in Henry VI. All of Gloster's speeches are written by Shakespeare evidently with a view to develop later his favourite character, Richard III.

The beautiful "keeping of the character of the play is conspicuous" in the Duke of York (Raysor, II, 280). The play throughout is a history of the human mind, when reduced to ease its anguish with words in stead of action, and the necessary feeling of weakness which such state produces" (II, 28). In keeping with this spirit, York is presented as old and full of religious loyalty, struggling with his indignation at the king's vices and follies. Similarly the "weakness of old age and the overwhelming of circumstances can be seen struggling with his sense of duty. This can be exhibited in the "boldness of his words and feebleness of acts". He is an example of a man giving up all his energy under a feeling of despair.

He is a man of strong powers of mind, but of earnest wishes to do right. He is contented in himself that he has done well by telling Richard "the effects of his extravagances" and the dangers by which he is encompassed. But having done so he is satisfied. He does nothing but remains passive. Similarly when old Gaunt is dying York takes care to give his opinion to the king, but then he retires "into himself", without taking any concrete step.

The contrast of his character with Bolingbroke's throws further light on York. He is with Bolingbroke when he approaches the castle in which the unfortunate king has taken
shelter. York rebukes Northumberland and Bolingbroke for their evil motives against the king. His influence over them, too, is strong. Coleridge quotes the whole conversation to show how Bolingbroke's tone of self-pride and strong condemnation for Richard is checked by the "silent reproofs" he receives from his uncle York. "He passes from insolence to humility". York, however, contented from this change in tone, does nothing for the sake of truth. Though he is loyal to the king but a passive looker-on. York makes effort to retrieve himself in abstract loyalty, even at the heavy price of the loss of his son.

In the character of York "this species of accidental and adventitious weakness", is brought into parallel with Richard's continually increasing energy of thought, and as "constantly diminishing power of acting" (Raysor, I, 150), and thus it is Richard that "breaths a harmony and a relation" into all the characters of the play.

One of the redeeming features of Coleridge's criticism is the absence of schematization and over-abstraction - the bane of much twentieth century criticism. One comes to note this aspect particularly while dealing with Coleridge's subtle distinctions between the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke or when confronted with the sketches that he outlines of the remaining cast of the play. The focus in Coleridge's criticism of Richard II seems to be on the artistic design that emerges out of the subtle shading of character. The theme in all this is the favourite one of Coleridge : Shakespeare's judgement is commensurate with his genius. The emphasis on this theme results in the portrayal of the artist in Shakespeare, a far cry, indeed, from what our century, with its prejudiced eyes, has come to think of character criticism in general. In dealing with Richard II Coleridge ignores his own search for
philosophical meanings in Shakespeare. The fortunate result, as suggested above, is that, unlike modern critics such as Tillyard (Shakespeare's History Plays) Coleridge does not schematize the play.

VII

According to Coleridge's theory, though Shakespearian characters are ideal beings as they are the product of his meditation, distinctions can be made even among them. In one group, we can place characters in which the ideal is more prominent: "we are made more conscious of the ideal, though in truth they possess no more nor less ideality" (Raysor, II, 168). In the second group can be included those who are equally idealised yet they give the "delusion of reality". The characters in various plays may be separated into those where the real is disguised in the real, and those where the ideal is concealed from us by the real. "The difference is made by the different powers of mind employed by the poet in the representation".

The Tempest is one of those plays in which the ideal is predominant. The characters in the play follow organic unity. Here Shakespeare shows "the life and principle of each being with organic regularity". This is clear in the first scene of the play where the Boatswain "gives a loose to his feelings" and "pours forth his vulgar mind to the old counsellor" when the "bonds of reverence" are thrown off as a sense of danger impresses all -- "Hence! what care these roarers for the name of king? To Cabin; silence! trouble us not" (Raysor, II, 170). In these lines and in the further conversation between the Boatswain and Gonzalo, we see the true sailor with his "contempt of danger" and the old counsellor with his high
feelings, who instead of noticing the words addressed to him, "turns off, meditating with himself, and drawing some comfort to his own mind, by trifling with the ill expression of the Boatswain's face, founding upon it a hope of safety".

Coleridge says that an ordinary dramatist would, after the speech of the Boatswain, have shown Gonzalo moralizing, or saying something connected with the Boatswain's language. "For ordinary dramatists are not men of genius, they combine their ideas by association or by logical affinity". But "the vital writer" like Shakespeare represents men "on the stage as they are in nature". The soliloquizing of Gonzalo after the Boatswain's provocative remark proves that Shakespeare "transports himself into the very being of each personage, and, instead of cutting out artificial puppets, he brings before us the men themselves" (Raysor, II, 171).

Shakespeare is a "mighty wizard" and has the capability to introduce female characters" in all [their] charm, as if he was "conscious that he first had represented womanhood as a dramatist". Coleridge refers to the common opinion, held before his age, that Beaumont and Fletcher were the only dramatists who could faithfully portray female characters. The view, however, is "happily abandoned" now. The truth as Coleridge points out is the female characters in the plays of Beaumont and Fletcher are, "when of the light kind, not decent; when heroic, complete viragos" (Raysor, I, 133). But in Shakespeare, "all the elements of womanhood are holy".

In spite of the fact that all his women characters share the same virtue, there is something very peculiar about each character, whether in Miranda the maiden, in Imogen the wife, or in Katherine the queen. This "distinct individuality" yet
"variety" results from the fact that he never describes a character away from its situation (Raysor, I, 134). He "combines two things -- the person and the circumstances acting upon the person". Thus while displaying his vast excellence, Shakespeare never fails "to insert some touch or another" which makes it particularly characteristic of such person (Raysor, 172). Thus Miranda's doubts about the violence and fury of the storm, "such as it might appear to a witness on the land", can be made by Miranda only. Her doubts "could have occurred to no mind but to that of Miranda", who had been bred up in the island with her father and a monster only. She did not know what sort of creatures were there in a ship. "Others never would have introduced it as a conjecture". Thus of Miranda, Coleridge says that "she possesses in herself all the ideal beauties that could be imagined by any poet of any age or country" (Raysor, II, 180-81).

Coleridge's view that Shakespeare's women are ideal and not real does not agree with the generally-held modern view. For, according to most modern readers, all Shakespearian heroines are knowledgeable beings. Here we find a romanticization of Shakespeare's women. There is a sentimentalizing strain in Coleridge's criticism here. In this sense, Coleridge is the progenitor of the Victorian sensibility.

As against neo-classical critics who emphasized the supremacy of Shakespeare's genius, Coleridge insists that Shakespeare was a conscious artist who has created his characters artistically, and the plot is so designed as to suit the whole. Thus, "the storm and all that precedes the tale, as well as the tale itself", serves to develop the main character of the play and to reveal the design of Prospero. The manner in which the heroine is charmed asleep and the events afterwards
gradually lead us to expect the "appearance and disclosure of a being of the most fanciful and delicate texture". All the events are so planned as to lead to the entry of one of the most wondrous creature which goes "beyond our ordinary belief". The "entrance of Ariel, if not absolutely forethought by the reader, was foreshown by the writer" (Raysor, II, 175).

Shakespeare's genius as well as judgement is most remarkably shown in his portrayal of two characters: Ariel and Caliban. To accept the existence of such creatures, Coleridge says, "something what is called poetic faith is required and created". We cannot accept them if we try to apply our established notions of philosophy or try to judge them according to the historic faith.

Ariel is shown by Shakespeare as a spirit, "not as an angel, above man; not a gnome, or a fiend below man". Ariel has in everything the airy tint which gives it this name. He is neither born of heaven, nor of earth, but as it were, between both "like a May blossom kept suspended in air by farming breeze which prevents it from falling to the ground, and only finally and by compulsion, touching earth". He is all air, unlike Caliban who is all earth. "In air he lives, from air he derives his being, in air he acts; and all his colours and properties seem to have been obtained from the rainbow and the skies" (Raysor, II, 176-7). There is nothing about Ariel that cannot be conceived to exist "either at sunrise or at sunset", hence all that belongs to Ariel "belongs to the delight the mind is capable of receiving from the most lovely external appearances".

Ariel is never directly brought into contrast with Miranda lest the supernatural of one and the natural of the other neutralize each other (Raysor, II, 134). Ariel possesses
all the intellectual faculties without any trace of morality. "Shakespeare divests him of all moral character, not positively, it is true, but negatively" (Raysor, II, 176). Shakespeare has placed him under a kindly power and to good ends. The reluctance of sylph to be under the command even of Prospero is kept up throughout the whole play. After his first speech in which he describes the manner in which he raised the storm and produced the harmless consequences, we find him discontented. He is free from cruel confinement yet he is bound to obey the commands of Prospero. For even such a confinement is unnatural for an airy being eager for simple and eternal liberty.

Another example of admirable judgement and excellent preparation is shown in the way in which Caliban appears. Before his appearance, he is described in such a manner by Prospero as to lead us to expect the appearance of "a foul, unnatural monster". Coleridge's remark here shows that he is analysing The Tempest not as a closet play but has in mind all the conditions necessary for its successful presentation in the theatre. Coleridge says that it is our nature that we do not receive so much disgust from sound as from sight. Since Caliban is "too offensive to be seen first in all his deformity he is not seen at once but his voice is heard and this is the preparation" -- a preparation for the audience to receive a monster-like creature. Even after his voice is heard, he does not enter until Ariel enters "like a water-nymph". The entry of a supernatural creature lessens the effect of a sub-human one:

All the strength of contrast is thus acquired without any of the shock of abruptness, or of that unpleasant sensation, which we experience when the object presented is in any way hateful to our vision.

(Raysor, II, 177)
The character of Caliban is wonderfully conceived. While Ariel is a creature of air, Caliban is that of earth. He is "all earth, all condensed and gross in feelings and images". He partakes the qualities of a brute but is different from it in a sense. Like a brute, he does not show any trace of moral feeling. However, he does not possess absolute animal instincts. The dramatist has raised him above contempt, since, like a man, he is endowed with imagination (Raysor, I, 134; II, 178). His images are all earth, all drawn from nature, unlike those of Ariel which are drawn from air. "Caliban's images fit in with the images of Ariel":

Caliban talks of the difficulty of finding fresh water, of the situation of morasses, of other circumstances, which even brute instinct without reason could comprehend.

(Raysor, II, 178)

He is beyond animal passion as he does not employ any "mean figure" in his images.

Coleridge's method of analysing a character in terms of the imagery he uses shows that he is not unconscious of the functional role of figurative language in drama. However, he does not isolate imagery or any other part of the play from the whole but one is used to highlight the importance of the other and vice-versa. This inter-relation and interdependence of different parts to convey the meaning of the whole is an example of Coleridge's fine critical sense.

In his comments on Ariel and Caliban, Coleridge comes very close to interpreting them allegorically or quasi-allegorically. We are not sure what exact allegorical significance Coleridge gives to these characters. Does Ariel represent the delightful aspects of nature, the aspects that man may command to his own advantage? The resonance and suggestiveness in the
language of *The Tempest* and the contrast between the two characters have tempted critics to interpret the play allegorically. Coleridge may have been guided here by his own experience as a poet for in his poem *Kubla Khan* too, there is an unconscious allegory. It is to be noted here that Coleridge is different from the neo-classical critics who considered these creatures good pieces of poet's imagination but made no attempt to interpret them allegorically or poetically.

While describing the conspiracy against the life of Alzono, Coleridge also points out the characteristics of a Shakespearian villain and these can be applied to Antonio and Sebastian. A bad man develops a tendency to indulge in scorn and contemptuous expressions as a mode of getting rid of his own uneasy feelings of inferiority to the good. He develops another tendency of ridiculing good, "of rendering the transition of others to wickedness easy" (Raysor, I, 135). He scoffs at and scorns others without any regard to age and position in order to gratify his vanity and self-love.

On the whole, in his analysis of the chief characters in *The Tempest*, Coleridge adopts less of a psychological and more of a poetic approach. His character criticism is directed here, as elsewhere, towards an unravelling of the total design of the play. In his brief critique of the play we may discover the seeds of the symbolic and allegorical interpretations of modern critics like Wilson Knight.

VIII

Since Coleridge regarded *Love's Labour's Lost* as Shakespeare's first work, he found little "character" in it. There are only some "faint sketches" of some of his "vigorous portraits" of later plays (Raysor, II, 355). The *dramatis personae* were only the "embryos" or the germs of character afterwards more fully developed (Raysor, I, 92; II, 108). For
example, the characters of Biron and Rosaline are evidently the "pre existent" state of his Beatrice and Benedict in *Much Ado About Nothing*; his Costard is the groundwork of his Tapster in *Measure for Measure*; and Dull is a first sketch of Dogberry in *Much Ado About Nothing* (Raysor, II, 108). The old man Boyet came forward afterwards in Lafeu in *All's Well That Ends Wells* while in Holofernes is contained the sketch of Polonius. These characters are his "first rough draft" which he afterwards finished in other plays (II, 314). They are merely such as a young man of genius might have made out of himself. The characters are either "impersonated out of his multiformity, by imaginative self-position, or of such as a country town and a school boy's observation might supply" (Raysor, I, 92).

IX

Interestingly in his comment on Brutus in *Julius Caesar*, Coleridge problematises the character just as the innocent comments of Sir Thomas Hanmer in 1736 had focussed attention, for the first time, on Hamlet's delay and had thus problematised it. Coleridge quotes the soliloquy of Brutus:

> Brutus: It must be by his death: and for my part, I know no personal cause to spurn at him, But for the general. He would be crown'd: How that might change his nature, there's the question.  

(II, i, 10-13)

And his instant remark on this soliloquy is: "this is singular". Coleridge fails to find out any motive or rationale in Brutus' words (Raysor, I, 16). Coleridge gives Shakespeare the benefit of the doubt, as he always does whenever he fails to understand the meaning of any part of Shakespeare's character. He, therefore, says that since Brutus' character is not fixed but continuously evolving and growing, some motive can be traced afterwards. He wonders whether Brutus is here
motivated by patriotism only as is often attributed by tradition or history, or is it his ambition:

...surely nothing can seem more discordant with our historical preconceptions of Brutus, or more lowering to the intellect of this Stoico-Platonic tyrannicide, than the tenets here attributed to him, to him, the Stern Roman republican; viz. that he would have no objection to a king, or to Caesar, a monarch in Rome, would Caesar be as good a monarch as he now seems disposed to be.

(Raysor, I, 16)

Coleridge expresses his doubts when he says:

How could Brutus say he finds no personal cause; i.e., none in Caesar's past conduct as a man? Had he not passed the Rubicon? Entered Rome as a conquerer? Placed his Gauls in the Senate?

(Raysor, I, 16)

He ponders over the question why Shakespeare has not brought these things forward, "this is just the ground of my perplexity".

Thus Coleridge points out an element of uncertainty in Shakespeare's portrayal of Brutus' character. In modern criticism, Brutus is presented as an ambiguous character and like Hamlet, he too is regarded as a failed idealist. Coleridge is the first to point out this ambiguity in Brutus.

X

We may refer to Coleridge's brief analysis of the nature of Cleopatra's passion. He thinks that the art displayed in the character of Cleopatra is profound in this:

...especially, that the sense of criminality in her passion is lessened by our insight into its depth and energy, at the very moment that we cannot but perceive that the passion itself
springs out of the habitual craving of a licentious nature, and that it is supported and reinforced by voluntary stimulus and sought for associations, instead of blossoming out of spontaneous emotion.

(Raysor, I, 86)

This view of Cleopatra's passion is probably the earliest of its kind in that it moves away from the narrow confines of the traditional-moralistic evaluation of her character.

XI

There are a few more brief character analyses in Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare -- Oliver in *As You Like It* and Thersites in *Troilus and Cressida*, for example -- but it would be better now to sum up our discussion of Coleridge's character criticism and note its most outstanding features. We will also see to what extent our foregoing commentary supports our main contention in this work that Coleridge's character criticism in fact proceeds from his view of organicist and philosophical nature of Shakespeare's plays and not from an exclusive concern with psychology. Contrary to the common belief, Coleridge never emphasizes the merely psychological aspects of Shakespeare's characters. Psychology in his criticism is always subservient to his concern for the total artistic design of the play. We may also say that though the subtlety of Coleridge's character analyses is remarkable, he is not basically concerned to point out merely the subtleties and complexities of Shakespeare's art of characterisation. Coleridge cannot be charged with the attempt to "psychologize" Shakespeare's characters without regard to their fictional nature. We may go to the extent of saying that to call Coleridge as a psychological critic or as the progenitor of what has been called "character chasing" is not true at all.
We may call him the philosophical critic per se. He is the real initiator of the twentieth century concern with the themes of the plays. Had Coleridge been gifted with a little more of organising power, we would have got from him the first study of what may be called Shakespeare's vision of life.