

everywhere, mere portrait nowhere. In all his various characters, we still feel ourselves communing with the same human nature, which is everywhere present as the vegetable sap in the branches, sprays, leaves, buds, blossoms, and fruits, their shapes, tastes, and odours. Speaking of the effect, i.e. his works themselves, we may define the excellence of *their* method as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science....

4 Shakespeare's Plays: Major Treatments

(a) *Hamlet*

1. On the character of Hamlet: from notes taken by John Payne Collier of Lecture 12 of the 1811-12 series on 2 January 1812 (LL (CC) I.385-90)

The Lecturer then passed to *Hamlet*, in order, as he said, to obviate some of the general prejudices against Shakespeare in reference to the character of the hero. Much had been objected to, which ought to have been praised, and many beauties of the highest kind had been neglected, because they were somewhat hidden.

The first question was—What did Shakespeare mean when he drew the character of Hamlet? Coleridge's belief was that the poet regarded his story, before he began to write, much in the same light that a painter looked at his canvas before he began to paint. What was the point to which Shakespeare directed himself? He meant to portray a person in whose view the external world and all its incidents and objects were comparatively dim, and of no interest in themselves, and which began to interest only when they were reflected in the mirror of his mind. Hamlet beheld external objects in the same way that a man of vivid imagination who shuts his eyes sees what has previously made an impression upon his organs.

Shakespeare places him in the most stimulating circumstances that a human being can be placed in: he is the heir apparent of the throne; his father dies suspiciously; his mother excludes him from the throne by marrying his uncle. This was not enough, but the Ghost of the murdered father is introduced to assure the son that he was put to death by his own brother. What is the result? Endless reasoning and urging—perpetual solicitation of the mind to act, but as constant an escape from action—ceaseless

S } reproaches of himself for his sloth, while the whole energy of his resolution passes away in those reproaches. This, too, not from cowardice, for he is made one of the bravest of his time—not from want of forethought or quickness 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 within themselves.

How admirable is the judgment of the poet! Hamlet's own fancy has not conjured up the Ghost of his father; it has been seen by others: He is by them prepared to witness its appearance, and when he does see it, he is not brought forward as having long brooded on the subject. The moment before the Ghost enters, Hamlet speaks of other matters in order to relieve the weight on his mind: he speaks of the coldness of the night, and observes that he has not heard the clock strike, adding, in reference to the custom of drinking, that it is

More honour'd in the breach than the observance.
[I.4.16]

From the tranquil state of his mind, he indulges in moral reflections. Afterwards the Ghost suddenly enters:

HOR. Look, my lord, it comes.
HAM. Angels and ministers of grace defend us!
[I.4.38-9]

The same thing occurs in *Macbeth*: in the dagger scene, the moment before he sees it, he has his mind drawn to some indifferent matters. Thus the appearance has all the effect of abruptness, and the reader is totally divested of the notion that the vision is a figure in the highly wrought imagination.

Here Shakespeare adapts himself to the situation so admirably, and, as it were, put himself into the situation, that though poetry, his language is the language of nature. No words associated with such feeling can occur to us but those which he has employed especially on the highest, the most august and the most awful subject that can interest a human being in this sentient world. That this is no mere fancy Coleridge undertook to show from Shakespeare himself. No character he has drawn could so prop-

erly express himself as in the language put into his mouth.

There was no indecision about Hamlet: he knew well what he ought to do, and over and over again he made up his mind to do it. The moment the Players and the two spies set upon him have withdrawn (of whom he takes leave with the line, so expressive of his contempt,

Ay so; good bye you.—Now I am alone,—
[II.2.549, var.]

he breaks out into a delirium of rage against himself for neglecting to perform the solemn duty he had undertaken, and contrasts the artificial feelings of the players with his own apparent indifference:

What's Hecuba to him, or he to Hecuba,
That he should weep for her?
[II.2.559-60]

Yet the player did weep for her, and was in an agony of grief for her sufferings, while Hamlet could not rouse himself to action that he might do the bidding of his father, who had come from the grave to incite him to revenge:

This is most brave,
That I, the son of a dear father murdered,
Prompted to my revenge by heaven and hell,
Must like a whore unpack my heart with words,
And fall a cursing, like a very drab,
A scullion.
[II.2.582-7]

It is the same feeling, the same conviction of what is his duty, that makes Hamlet exclaim in a subsequent part of the tragedy:

How all occasions do inform against me,
And spur my dull revenge! What is a man,
If his chief good and market of his time
Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more.
I do not know

S Why yet I live to say this thing's to do,
Sith I have cause, and will, and strength, and means
To do't.

[IV.4.32-46]

S Yet with all this sense of duty, this resolution arising out of conviction, nothing is done. This admirable and consistent character, deeply acquainted with his own feelings, painting them with such wonderful power and accuracy, and just as strongly convinced of the fitness of executing the solemn charge committed to him, still yields to the same retiring from all reality which is the result of having what we express by the terms a world within himself.

Such a mind as this is near akin to madness: Dryden has said

Great wit to madness *nearly* is allied,
[*Absalom and Achitophel*, l.163, var.]

and he was right; for he means by wit that greatness of genius which led Hamlet to the perfect knowledge of his own character, which, with all strength of motive, was so weak as to be unable to carry into effect his most obvious duty. *Goethe*

Still, with all this he has a sense of imperfectness, which becomes obvious while he is moralising on the skull in the churchyard: something is wanted to make it complete—something is deficient, and he is therefore described as attached to Ophelia. His madness is assumed when he discovers 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.

Another objection has been taken by Dr. Johnson, and has been treated by him very severely. I refer to the scene in the third act where Hamlet enters and finds his Uncle praying, and refuses to assail him excepting when he is in the height of his iniquity: to take the King's life at such a moment of repentance and confession Hamlet declares,

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
[III.3.79]

He therefore forbears, and postpones his Uncle's death until he

can take him in some act

That has no relish of salvation in't.
[III.3.92]

This sentiment Dr. Johnson has pronounced to be so atrocious and horrible as to be unfit to be put into the mouth of a human being [in his notes on the play: Vickers V.159]. The fact is that the determination to allow the King to escape at such a moment was only part of the same irresoluteness of character. Hamlet seizes hold of a pretext for not acting, when he might have acted so effectually. Therefore he again defers the revenge he sought, and declares his resolution to accomplish it at some time

When he is drunk, asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th'incestuous pleasures of his bed.
[III.3.89-90, var.]

This, as Coleridge repeated, was merely the excuse Hamlet made to himself for not taking advantage of this particular moment to accomplish his revenge.

Dr Johnson further states that in the voyage to England Shakespeare merely followed the novel as he found it, as if he had no other motive for adhering to his original [see Vickers V.74-5; Coleridge was probably also recalling a note in Isaac Reed's 21-volume edition of Shakespeare (1803), XVIII.270]. But Shakespeare never followed a novel but where he saw the story contributed to tell or explain some great and general truth inherent in human nature. It was unquestionably an incident in the old story, and there it is used merely as an incident. But Shakespeare saw how it could be applied to his own great purpose, and how it was consistent with the character of Hamlet, that after still resolving, and still refusing, still determining to execute, and still postponing the execution, he should finally give himself up to his destiny; and in the infirmity of his nature at last hopelessly place himself in the power and at the mercy of his enemies.

Even after the scene with Osric, we see Hamlet still indulging in reflection, and thinking little of the new task he has just undertaken. He is all meditation, all resolution, as far as words are concerned, but all hesitation and irresolution when called upon to

act; so that, resolving to do everything, he in fact does nothing. He is full of purpose, but void of that quality of mind which would lead him at the proper time to carry his purpose into effect.

Anything finer than this conception and working out of a character is merely impossible. Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the great end of existence—that no faculties of intellect, however brilliant, can be considered valuable, or 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 escaped when we ought to have acted. In enforcing this truth Shakespeare has shown the fullness and force of his powers: all that is amiable and excellent in nature is combined in Hamlet, with the exception of this one quality. He is a man living in meditation, called upon to act by every motive human and divine, but the great purpose of life is defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve.

2. The character of Hamlet (1813): from Lecture 3 of the 1813 series in Bristol, delivered 4 November

(i) *Coleridge's notes, as transcribed by E.H. Coleridge* (LL (CC) I.539–42)

THE CHARACTER OF HAMLET

Shakespeare's mode of conceiving characters out of his own intellectual and moral faculties, by conceiving any one intellectual or moral faculty in morbid excess, and then placing himself, thus mutilated and diseased, under given circumstances: of this we shall have repeated occasion to restate and enforce. In *Hamlet* I conceive him to have wished to exemplify the moral necessity of a due balance between our attention to outward objectives, 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 far more vivid than his perceptions, and his very perceptions instantly passing through the medium of his contemplations, and acquiring as they pass a form and colour not naturally their own. Hence great enormous intellectual activity, and a consequent proportionate aversion to real action, with all its symptoms and accompanying qualities.

Action is transitory, a step, a Blow
[The motion of a muscle—this way or that—
'Tis done, and in the after-vacancy
We wonder at ourselves like men betrayed:
Suffering is permanent, obscure and dark,
And shares the nature of infinity.]
[William Wordsworth, *The Borderers*, III.1539–44]

Then, as in the first instance, proceed with a cursory survey through the play with comments, etc.

1. The easy language of ordinary life, contrasted with the direful music and wild rhythm of the opening of *Macbeth*—yet the armour, the cold, the dead silence, all placing the mind in the state congruous with tragedy.
2. The admirable judgment, and yet confidence in his own marvellous powers, in introducing the Ghost twice, each rising in solemnity and awefulness before its third appearance to Hamlet himself.
3. Shakespeare's tenderness with regard to all innocent superstitions—no Tom Paine declarations and pompous philosophy [alluding to Paine's 'Declaration of the Rights of Man', included in *The Rights of Man* (1790), and to his dismissal of Christianity as superstitious rubbish in *The Age of Reason* (1794)].
4. The first words that Hamlet speaks:

A little more than kin, and less than kind.
[I.2.65]

He begins with that play of words....No-one can have heard quarrels among the vulgar, but must have noticed the close connection of punning with angry contempt—add, too, what is highly characteristic of superfluous activity of mind, a sort of playing with a thread or watch chain, or snuff box.

5. And how the character develops itself in the next speech—the aversion to externals, the betrayed habit of brooding over the world within him, and the prodigality of beautiful words, which are, as it were, the half-embodiments of thought, that make them more than thought, give them an outness [i.e. a sense of being external to the mind], a reality *sui generis*, and yet retain their cor-

respondence and shadowy approach to the images and movements within.

6. The first soliloquy:

[O that this too too solid flesh would melt...]
[I.2.129]

Reasons why *tedium vitae* [i.e. a weariness with life] oppresses minds like Hamlet's—the exhaustion of bodily feeling from perpetual exertion of mind—that all mental form being indefinite and ideal, realities must needs become cold, and hence it is the indefinite that combines with passion.

7. And in this mood the relation is made—of which no more than it is a perfect model of dramatic narration and dramatic style—the purest poetry, and yet the most natural language, equally distant from the inkhorn and the provincial plough.

8. Hamlet's running into long reasonings—carrying off the impatience and uneasy feelings of expectation by running away from the *particular* in the *general*; this aversion to personal, individual concerns, and *escape* to generalization and general reasonings a most important characteristic.

Besides that, it does away with surprising all the ill effects that the two former appearances of the Ghost would have produced, by rendering the Ghost an expected phenomenon, and restores to it all the suddenness essential to the effect.

9. The Ghost, a superstition connected with the...truths of revealed religion, and therefore, O! how contrasted from the withering and wild language of the *Macbeth*.

10. The instant and over-violent resolve of Hamlet—how he wastes in the efforts of resolving the energies of action....and his quick relapse into the satirical and ironic vein.

11. Now comes the difficult task—[see I.5.92ff, from Hamlet's soliloquy, 'O all you host of heaven!...' to the end of the scene]. The familiarity, comparative at least, of a brooding mind with shadows, is something. Still more the necessary alternation: when one muscle long strained is relaxed, the antagonist comes into action of itself. Terror closely connected with the ludicrous, the latter the common mode by which the mind tries to emancipate itself from terror. The laugh is rendered by nature itself the language of extremes—even as tears are. Add, too, Hamlet's wild-

ness is but *half-false*—O that subtle trick to pretend to be *acting* only when we are very near *being* what we act—and this explanation of the same with Ophelia's vivid images, nigh akin to and productive of temporary mania....

12. Hamlet's character, as I have conceived, described by himself [see II.2.559–82, beginning, 'Yet I / A dull and muddy-mettled rascal...']. But previous to this, speak of the exquisite judgment in the diction of the introduced play [i.e. the play within the play]—absurd to suppose it extracted in order to be ridiculed from [an] old play. It is in thought, and even in the separate parts of the diction, highly poetical—so that this is its fault, that it is too poetical, the language of lyric vehemence and epic pomp, not of drama. But what if Shakespeare had made the language truly dramatic—where would have been the contrast between Hamlet and the play of *Hamlet*....

(ii) *From the report of Lecture 3 in the Bristol Gazette, 11 November 1813 (LL (CC) I.543–5)*

The seeming inconsistencies in the conduct and character of Hamlet have long exercised the conjectural ingenuity of critics; and as we are always loth to suppose that the cause of defective apprehension is in ourselves, the mystery has been too commonly explained by the very easy process of supposing that it is, in fact, inexplicable; and by resolving the difficulty into the capricious and irregular genius of Shakespeare.

Mr Coleridge, in his *third* lecture, has effectually exposed the shallow and stupid arrogance of this vulgar and indolent decision. He has shown that the intricacies of Hamlet's character may be traced to Shakespeare's deep and accurate science in mental philosophy. That this character must have some common connection with the laws of our nature was assumed by the lecturer from the fact that Hamlet was the darling of every country where literature was fostered. He thought it essential to the understanding of Hamlet's character that we should reflect on the constitution of our own minds. Man was distinguished from the animal in proportion as thought prevailed over sense; but in healthy processes of the mind, a balance was maintained between the impressions of outward objects, and the inward operations of the intellect. If there be an overbalance in the contemplative faculty, man becomes the creature of meditation, and loses the power of action.

Shakespeare seems to have conceived a mind in the highest degree of excitement, with this overpowering activity of intellect, and to have placed him in circumstances where he was obliged to act on the spur of the moment. Hamlet, though brave and careless of death, had contracted a morbid sensibility from this overbalance in the mind, producing the lingering and vacillating delays of procrastination; and wasting in the energy of resolving, the energy of acting. Thus the play of *Hamlet* offers a direct contrast to that of *Macbeth*, the one proceeded with the utmost slowness, the other with breathless and crowded rapidity.

The effect of this overbalance of imagination is beautifully illustrated in the inward brooding of Hamlet, the effect of a superfluous activity of thought. His mind, unseated from its healthy balance, is for ever occupied with the world within him, and abstracted from external things: his words give a substance to shadows, and he is dissatisfied with commonplace realities. It is the nature of thought to be indefinite, while definiteness belongs to reality. The sense of sublimity arises, not from the sight of an outward object, but from the reflection upon it; not from the impression, but from the idea. Few have seen a celebrated waterfall without feeling something of a disappointment; it is only subsequently, by reflection, that the idea of the waterfall comes full into the mind, and brings with it a train of sublime associations. Hamlet felt this: in him we see a mind that keeps itself in a state of abstraction, and beholds external objects as hieroglyphics. His soliloquy, 'O, that this too, too solid flesh would melt [I.2.129], arises from a craving after the indefinite, a disposition or temper which most easily besets men of genius—a morbid craving for that which is not. The self-delusion common to this temper of mind was finely exemplified in the character which Hamlet gives of himself: 'It cannot be, but I am pigeon-liver'd, and lack gall to make oppression bitter' [II.2.567-8]. He mistakes the seeing his chains for the breaking of them, and delays action till action is of no use; and he becomes the victim of circumstances and accident.

The lecturer, in descending to particulars, took occasion to defend from the common charge of improbable eccentricity the scene which follows Hamlet's interview with the Ghost. He showed that after the mind has been stretched beyond its usual pitch and tone, it must either sink into exhaustion and inanity, or

seek relief by change. Persons conversant with deeds of cruelty contrive to escape from their conscience by connecting something of the ludicrous with them; and by inventing grotesque terms, and a certain technical phraseology to disguise the horror of their practices.

The terrible, however paradoxical it may appear, will be found to touch on the verge of the ludicrous. Both arise from the perception of something out of the common nature of things, something out of place. If from this we can abstract danger, the uncommonness alone remains, and the sense of the ridiculous is excited. The close alliance of these opposites appears from the circumstance that laughter is equally the expression of extreme anguish and horror as of joy; in the same manner there are tears of joy as well as tears of sorrow, so there is a laugh of terror as well as a laugh of merriment. These complex causes will naturally have produced in Hamlet the disposition to escape from his own feelings of the overwhelming and supernatural by a wild transition to the ludicrous—a sort of cunning bravado, bordering on the flights of delirium.

Mr Coleridge instanced, as a proof of Shakespeare's minute knowledge of human nature, the unimportant conversation which takes place during the expectation of the Ghost's appearance; and he recalled to our notice what all must have observed in common life, that on the brink of some serious enterprise, or event of moment, men naturally elude the pressure of their own thoughts by turning aside to trivial objects and familiar circumstances. So in *Hamlet* the dialogue on the platform begins with remarks on the coldness of the air, and enquiries, obliquely connected indeed with the expected hour of the visitation, but thrown out in a seeming vacuity of topics, as to the striking of the clock. The same desire to escape from the inward thoughts is admirably carried on in Hamlet's moralising on the Danish custom of wassailing; and a double purpose is here answered, which demonstrates the exquisite judgment of Shakespeare. By thus entangling the attention of the audience in the nice distinctions and parenthetical sentences of Hamlet, he takes them completely by surprise on the appearance of the Ghost, which comes upon them in all the suddenness of its visionary character. No modern writer would have dared, like Shakespeare, to have preceded this

last visitation by two distinct appearances, or could have contrived that the third should rise upon the two former in impressiveness and solemnity of interest.

3. On the opening scene: from Coleridge's notes for Lecture 6 of the 1818 series, delivered in London, 13 February (LL (CC) II.138–40)

In all the best-attested stories of ghosts and visions....the ghost-seers were in a state of cold or chilling damp from without, and of anxiety inwardly. It has been with all of them as with Francisco or his Guard—alone, in the depth and silence of the night/ 'twas bitter cold and they were sick at heart—and not a mouse stirring [see *Hamlet*, I.1.8–10]. The attention to minute sounds, naturally associated with the recollection of minute objects—and the more familiar and trifling they [become], the more impressive from the unusualness of their producing any impression at all—gives a philosophic pertinency to this last image. But it has likewise its dramatic use and purpose, for its commonness in ordinary conversation tends to produce the sense of *reality*, and at once hides the poet, and yet approximates the reader or spectator to that state in which the highest poetry will appear, and in its component parts, though not in whole composition, really *is* the language of nature. If I should not speak it, I feel that I should be thinking it—the voice only is the poet's, the words are my own. That Shakespeare meant to put an *effect* in the actor's power in the very first words—'Who's there?'—is evident from the impatience expressed in the words that follow:

Nay, answer me: stand and unfold yourself.
[I.1.2]

A brave man is never so peremptory as when he fears that he is afraid. The gradual transition from the silence; and the recent habit of listening in Francisco's 'I think I hear them'; and the more cheerful call-out, which a good actor would observe, in the 'Stand, ho! Who's there?' [I.1.14]; Barnardo's inquiry after Horatio, and the repetition of his name (and, in his own presence, *respect* or eagerness alike), that implies him as one of the persons who are to appear in the foreground; and the sceptic attributed to him

(Horatio says tis but our fantasy and will not let belief take hold of him [I.1.23–4]) preparing us for Hamlet's after eulogy on him as one whose blood and judgment were happily commingled; the indefiniteness of the first opening out of the occasion of this anxiety:

gladness courtesy
WELCOME, Horatio!—welcome, good Marcellus.
MARCELLUS. What, has *this thing*, etc.
[I.1.20–1]

rising with the next speech into 'Touching this dreaded sight, twice seen of us' [I.1.25]. Horatio's confirmation of his disbelief—and the silence with which the scene opened again restored by the narration—the solemnity of it, and the exquisite proof of the narrator's deep feeling of what he is himself about to relate, by his turning off from it, as from a something that is forcing him too deep into himself, to the outward objects, the realities of nature that had accompanied it—'last night of all, etc.' [I.1.35ff.]—seem to contradict the critical law that what is told makes a faint impression compared with what is beheld, and does indeed convey to the mind more than the eye can see; and the interruption of the narration at the very moment when we are most intensively listening for the sequel, and have our thoughts diverted from the dreaded sight in expectation of the desired yet almost dreaded tale—thus giving all the suddenness and surprise of the original appearance:

Peace, break thee off!—look where it comes again!
[I.1.40]

The judgment in having two of the persons present as having seen it twice before, hence naturally confirming their former opinions; while the sceptic is silent, and after twice [having] been addressed by his friends, answers with two hasty syllables, 'Most like', and confession of horror ['It harrows me with fear and wonder': I.1.44].

4. Notes for a commentary on the play: from Coleridge's annotations in his interleaved copy of Shakespeare's works, made

for Lecture 3 of the 1818–19 series (delivered 7 January 1819), and Lecture 1 of the 1819 series (delivered 11 February 1819). The second lecture began with the note at III.1.55–87. (LL (CC) II. 294–301, 351–6)

Compare the easy language of common life, in which this drama opens, with the wild wayward lyric of the opening of *Macbeth*. The language is familiar; no poetic descriptions of night, no elaborate information conveyed by one speaker to another of what both had before their immediate perceptions (such as the first distich in Addison's *Cato*, [1712:

The dawn is overcast, the morning lowers,
And heavily in clouds brings on the day.]

which is a translation into poetry of Past 4 o'clock, and a damp morning)—yet nothing bordering on the comic on the one hand, and no striving of the intellect on the other. It is the language of *sensation* among men who feared no charge of effeminacy for feeling what they felt no want of resolution to bear. Yet the armour, the dead silence, the watchfulness that first interrupts it, the welcome relief of guard, the cold—the broken expressions as of a man's compelled attention to bodily feelings allowed no man—all excellently accord with and prepare for the after gradual rise into tragedy; but above all into a tragedy the interest of which is eminently *ad et apud intra* [directed towards and in what is *internal*—as *Macbeth e contra* is *ad extra* [directed towards what is external].

[I.1.20–9: *On Horatio's initial scepticism about the Ghost*]

The preparation *informative* of the audience, just as much as was precisely necessary—how gradual first, and with the uncertainty appertaining to a question, 'What? Has *this* THING appeared *again* to-night?' (even the word *again* has its credibilizing effect). Then the representative of the ignorance of the audience, Horatio (not himself, but Marcellus to Bernardo), anticipates the common solution—"tis but our fantasy"—but Marcellus rises secondly into dreaded sight—Then this 'thing' becomes at once an APPARITION, and that too an intelligent Spirit that is to be *spoken* to.

[I.1.30–6: *On the preparation for the entry of the Ghost*]

'Tush, tush, 'twill not appear'—then the shivery feeling, at such a time, with two eye-witnesses, of sitting down to hear a story of a Ghost, and this, too, a Ghost that had appeared two nights before about this very time—the effort of the narrator to master his own imaginative terrors—the consequent elevation of the style, itself a continuation of this effort—the turning off to an *outward* object, 'yon same star'—O heaven!—words are wasted to those that feel, and to those that do not feel, the exquisite judgment of Shakespeare.

[I.1.70–2: *On Horatio beginning his report of recent events*]

The exquisitely natural transit into the narration retrospective.

[I.1.76–110: *On the appearance of the Ghost*]

'of mine own eyes' [citing Horatio's 'I might not this believe / Without the sensible and true avouch / Of mine own eyes']—Hume himself could not but have faith in *this* Ghost dramatically, let his anti-ghostism be as strong as Samson against ghosts less powerfully raised [see David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (1748), Section X, Parts 1 and 2].

[I.1.126–46: *On reactions to the re-entry of the Ghost*]

Horatio's increased courage from having translated the late individual spectrum [i.e. spectre] into thought and past experience, and Marcellus' and Bernardo's sympathy with it, in daring to strike—while yet the former feeling returns in 'We do it wrong [being so majestical, / To offer it the show of violence]'

[I.1.151–66: *On the comments of Horatio and Marcellus after the departure of the Ghost*]

No Addison more careful to be poetical in diction than Shakespeare in providing the grounds and sources of its propriety.—But *how* to elevate a thing almost mean by its familiarity, young poets may learn in the cock-crow [i.e. the lines, 'The cock, that is the trumpet to the morn, / Doth with his lofty and shrill-sounding throat, / Awake the god of day...']

[I.1.169–71: *On Horatio urging that 'young Hamlet' be told about the Ghost*]

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.

[I.2: *On the opening of Scene 2*]

Relief by change of scene to the royal court—this on any occasion; but how judicious that Hamlet should not have to take up the leavings of exhaustion. The set, pedantically antithetic form of the King's speech—yet though, in the concerns that galled the heels of conscience, rhetorical below a king, yet in what follows, not without majesty. Was he not a royal brother?

[I.2.42: *On the introduction of Laertes*]

Shakespeare's art in introduc[ing] a most important but still subordinate character first—Milton's Beelzebub [the first of the fallen angels to be named in *Paradise Lost*, I.79ff.]—so Laertes, who is yet thus graciously treated from the assistance given to the election of the king's brother, instead of son, by Polonius.

[I.2.65: *On Hamlet's quibbling aside*]

'A little more than kin and less than kind': play on words [due] either to 1. exuberant activity of mind, as in Shakespeare's higher comedy; 2. imitation of it as a fashion which has this to say for it—why is not this now better than groaning? [as Romeo's word-play in 11.4 of *Romeo and Juliet* is better, says Mercutio, than 'groaning for love']; or 3. contemptuous exultation in minds vulgarized and overset by their success—Milton's Devils [as Satan and Belial mock their adversaries in *Paradise Lost*, VI.558–629]; or 4. as the language of resentment, in order to express contempt—most common among the lower orders, and origin of nick-names; or lastly, as the language of suppressed passion, especially of hardly smothered dislike. Three of these combine in the present instance. And doubtless [Richard] Farmer [author of a well-known *Essay on the Learning of Shakespeare* (1767)] is right in supposing the equivocation carried on into too much in the *son*.

[I.3: *On Polonius's speeches*]

....I do not believe that in this or the foregoing speeches Shakespeare meant to bring out the senility or weakness of Polonius's mind. In the great, ever-recurring dangers and duties of life, where to distinguish the fit objects for the application of the maxims collected by the experience of a long life requires no fine-

ness of tact, as in the admonitions to his son and daughter. Polonius is always made respectable. But if the actor were capable of catching these shades in the character, the Pit and Gallery would be malcontent [because actors were in the habit of representing Polonius as a buffoon].

[I.4.8–57: *On Hamlet's speech on the King's drinking, and his reaction to the entry of the Ghost*]

In addition to the other excellencies of Hamlet's speech concerning the wassail music, so finely revealing the predominant idealism, the ratiocinative meditateness, of his character, it has the advantage of giving nature and probability to the impassioned continuity of the speech instantly directed to the Ghost. The momentum had been given to his mental activity—the full current of the thoughts and words had set in—and the very forgetfulness, in the fervour of his argumentation, of the purpose for which he was there, aided in preventing the appearance from numbing the mind. Consequently, it acted as a new impulse, a sudden stroke which increased the velocity of the body already in motion, while it altered the direction. The co-presence of Horatio, Marcellus and Bernardo [the latter is not, in fact, present in this scene] is most judiciously contrived, for it renders the courage of Hamlet and his impetuous eloquence perfectly intelligible. The knowledge, the *unthought-of* consciousness, the *sensation*, of human auditors, of flesh and blood sympathists, acts as a support, a stimulation *a tergo* [i.e. from the rear], while the *front* of the mind, the whole consciousness of the speaker, is filled by the solemn apparition. Add, too, that the apparition itself has, by its frequent previous appearances, been brought nearer to a thing of this world. This accrescence [i.e. continuous growth; Coleridge's coinage] of objectivity in a Ghost that yet retains all its ghostly attributes and fearful subjectivity, is truly wonderful.

[II.1: *On Polonius's exchanges with Reynaldo and Ophelia*]

In all things dependent on, or rather made up, of fine address, the *manner* is no more or otherwise rememberable than the light motions, steps, and gestures of youth and health—but this is almost everything. No wonder, therefore, if that which can be *put down by rule* in the memory should appear mere poring, maudlin-eyed cunning, slyness blinking through the watery eye of

superannuation. So in this admirable scene, Polonius, who is throughout the skeleton of his own former skill and state-craft, hunts the trail of policy at a dead scent, supplied by the weak fever-smell in his own nostrils.

[II.2.173ff.: *On Hamlet's greeting to Polonius, 'You are a fishmonger', etc. and his image of a 'god kissing carrion' (modern texts read 'good'; 'god', a widely accepted emendation made in the eighteenth century, was in the text Coleridge used)*]

You are sent to fish out the secret. This is Hamlet's meaning. The purposely obscure lines, 'For if the sun, etc.', I rather think refers to some thought in Hamlet's mind contrasting the lovely daughter with such a tedious old fool, her father, as *he* represents Polonius to himself: 'Why, fool as he is, he is some degrees in rank above a dead dog's carcase—and if the sun, being a god that kisses carrion, can raise life out of a dead dog, why may good fortune, that favours fools, have raised a lovely girl out of this dead-alive old fool.'

[II.2.450–518: *On the First Player's speech, 'The rugged Pyrrhus...'*]

This admirable substitution of the epic for the dramatic, giving such a *reality* to the impassioned dramatic diction of Shakespeare's own dialogue, and authorised, too, by the actual style of the tragedies before Shakespeare (*Porrex and Ferrex* [i.e. *Gorboduc*, 1562, by Thomas Sackville and Thomas Norton], *Titus Andronicus*, [which leading scholars of Coleridge's time thought was not by Shakespeare] etc.) is worthy of notice. The fancy that burlesque was intended sinks below criticism. The lines, as *epic* narrative, are superb.

[II.2.550ff.: *On Hamlet's 'O what a rogue and peasant slave am I'*]

Here, after the recapitulation and character of Hamlet, recommence the particular criticism—as these lines contain Shakespeare's own attestation of the truth of the idea I have started.

[II.2.601: *On Hamlet's thought that the Ghost may be a devil*]

Sir Thomas Browne. These apparitions and ghosts of departed persons are not the wandering souls of men, but the unquiet walks of devils, prompting and suggesting us unto mischief, blood and villainy, etc. *Religio Medici*, sect. 37 *ad finem* [i.e. to the end].

[III.1.55–87: *On Hamlet's soliloquy, 'To be or not to be'*]

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

[III.1.102ff.: *On Hamlet questioning Ophelia, 'ha, ha! are you honest?', etc.*]

Hamlet here discovers that he is watched, and Ophelia a decoy.—Even this in a mood so anxious and irritable accounts for a certain harshness in him; and yet a wild upworking of love sporting with opposites with a wilful self-tormenting irony is perceptible throughout—e.g. 'I *did* love you [once]'—and the faults of the sex from which Ophelia is so character[istically] free, that the freedom therefrom constitutes her character. Here again Shakespeare's charm of constituting female character by absences of characters, = outjuttings [i.e. an absence of roughnesses or projections to relieve a smooth surface?].

[III.1.128–49: *On Hamlet's harsh words to Ophelia—especially, 'Those that are married already (all but one) shall live'*]

The dallying with the inward purpose [is] that of one who had not brought his mind to the steady acting-point—would fain *sting* the Uncle's mind, but—to stab the body!

[III.1.150ff.: *On Ophelia's 'O what a noble mind', etc.*]

The soliloquy of Ophelia is the perfection of love: so exquisitely unselfish.

[III.2: *On Hamlet's advice to the Players*]

Scene 2: one, and among the happiest, of Shakespeare's powers of diversifying the scene while he is carrying on the plot.

[III.2.98ff.: *On Hamlet's sharp retort to Polonius, 'It was a brute part of him, to kill so capital a calf...'*]

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 poor Polonius, whom he cannot let rest.

[III.2.155ff.: *On the play within the play*]

As in the first interview with the Players by *epic* verse [see above, note to 11.2.450–518], so here by rhyme.

[III.2.387ff.: *On Hamlet's soliloquy, 'Tis now the very witching time of night'*]

The utmost Hamlet arrives to is a disposition, a mood, to do *something*. What is still left undecided— while every word he utters tends to betray his disguise.

[III.2.390ff.: *On Hamlet's 'Now could I drink hot blood...Soft, now to my mother'*]

The perfect equal to any call of the moment in Hamlet, let it only not be for a future.

[III.3.11ff.: *On Rosencrantz's speech of concern to protect the King*]

To bring all possible good out of evil, yet how characteristically is this just sentiment placed in the mouth of Rosencrantz.

[III.3.27–9: *On Polonius offering to hide behind the arras and listen to Hamlet talking with his mother*]

Polonius's volunteer obtrusion of himself into this business, while it is appropriate to his character, still leaching after former importance, removes all likelihood that Hamlet should suspect his presence, and prevents us from making his death injure Hamlet in our opinion.

[III.3.36–72: *On Claudius's soliloquy, 'O, my offence is rank...'*]

The King's speech well marks the difference between crime and guilt of habit. The conscience is still admitted to audience. Nay, even as an audible soliloquy, it is far less improbable than is supposed by such as have watched men only in the beaten road of their feelings. But it deserves to be dwelt on, that final 'All may be well'!—a degree of merit attributed by the self-flattering soul to its own struggle, though baffled—and the indefinite half-promise, half-command, to persevere in religious duties. The divine medium of the Christian doctrine of expiation, in the—Not what you have done, but what you *are*, must determine—*Metanoia* [i.e. repentance (Greek)]

[III.3.75–98: *On Hamlet's refusal to kill Claudius at prayer*]

Dr Johnson's mistaking of the marks of reluctance and procrastination for impetuous, horror-striking fiendishness! [Dr Johnson found the speech 'too horrible to be read or to be uttered'; see p.00 above] Of such importance is it to understand the *germ* of a character. But the interval taken up by Hamlet's speech is truly awful! And then—'My words fly up'—O what a lesson concerning the essential difference between wishing and willing; and the folly of all motive-mongering, while the individual self remains.

[III.4.27ff.: *On Hamlet's accusation and Gertrude's response: 'almost as bad, good mother, / As kill a king and marry with his brother. Queen: As kill a king?'*]

I confess that Shakespeare has left the character of the Queen in an unpleasant perplexity—was she or was she not conscious of the fratricide?

[IV.2.14–23: *On Hamlet calling Rosencrantz a sponge*]

Hamlet's madness is made to consist in the full utterance of all the thoughts that had passed through his mind before—in telling home truths.

[IV.5.20ff. *On Ophelia's entry mad, and singing 'How should I your true love know?'*]

The conjunction here of those two thoughts that had never subsisted in disjunction, the love for Hamlet and her filial love, and the guileless floating on the surface of her pure imagination of the cautions so lately expressed, and the fears not too delicately avowed by her father and brother concerning the danger to which her honour lay exposed—. Thought and affliction, passion, murder itself, she runs to favour and to prettiness [the comment of Laertes at IV.5.188–9, substituting 'murder' for 'Hell']. This play of association is sweetly instanced in the close. 'My brother shall know of it: and I thank you for your good COUNSEL.'

[IV.5.124: *On Claudius's 'There's such divinity doth hedge a king'*]

Proof, as indeed all else is, that Shakespeare never intended us to see the King with Hamlet's eyes—though I suspect the managers have long done so.

[IV.5.155ff.: *On Laertes' response to the madness of Ophelia*]

Shakespeare evidently wishes as much as possible to spare the character of Laertes, to break the extreme turpitude of his consent to become an agent and accomplice of the King's treacherous [plot]—and to this end works the re-introduction of Ophelia.

[IV.6.13ff: *On the capture of Hamlet by pirates*]

Almost the only play of Shakespeare in which mere accidents, independent of all will, form an essential part of the plot; but here how judiciously in keeping with the character of the over-meditative Hamlet, ever at last determined by accident or by a fit of passion.

[IV.7.82ff.: *On Claudius praising Laertes for skill in fencing*]

First awakens Laertes' vanity by the praises of the report—then gratifies it by the report itself—and then, 'Did Hamlet so envenom with his envy'.

[IV.7: *On the report of the death of Ophelia*]

And that Laertes might be excused in some degree for not cooling, the Act concluding with the affecting death of Ophelia—who does no[w] seem like a little projection of land into a lake or stream, covered with spring-flowers, lay[lying?] quietly reflected in the great waters; but at length undermined and loosened, becomes a floating Faery Isle, and after a brief vagrancy, sinks almost without an eddy.

[V.1: *On the dialogue between Hamlet and the gravediggers*]

The contrast between the Clowns and Hamlet as two extremes—the mockery of logic, the traditional wit valued like truth for its antiquity, and treasured up like a tune for use.

[V.1.238ff.: *On Hamlet leaping into Ophelia's grave*]

Shakespeare seems to mean *all Hamlet's* character to be brought together before his final disappearance from the scene—his med[itative] excess in the grave-digging—his yielding to passion—his love for Ophelia blazing out—his tendency to generalize on all occasions in the dialogue with Horatio—his fine gentlemanly manners with Osric.

[V.2.219: *On Hamlet's 'We defy augury'*]

and his, and Shakespeare's, fondness for presentiment—'O my prophetic soul' [I.5.40]—and his 'Most generous and free from all contriving' [Claudius so describes Hamlet at IV.7.135] in his fencing-duel—and all at last done by shock and accident at the conclusion.

5. On Hamlet and Polonius: from *Table-Talk*, 24 June 1827

Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity; but every incident sets him thinking; and it is curious, and at the same time strictly natural, that Hamlet, who all the play seems reason itself, should be impelled, at last, by mere accident to effect his object. I have a smack of Hamlet myself, if I may say so.

A maxim is a conclusion upon observation of matters of fact, and is merely retrospective; an idea, or, if you like, a principle, carries knowledge within itself, and is prospective. Polonius is a man of maxims. Whilst he is descanting on matters of past experience, as in that excellent speech to Laertes before he sets out on his travels, he is admirable; but when he comes to advise or project, he is a mere dotard. You see Hamlet, as the man of ideas, despises him....

In the scene with Ophelia, in the third act [III.1], Hamlet is beginning with great and unfeigned tenderness; but perceiving her reserve and coyness, fancies there are some listeners, and then, to sustain his part, breaks out into all that coarseness.

(b) *Love's Labour's Lost*

1. On the power of Shakespeare's genius in his earliest plays

(i) *From notes made for Lecture 5 of the 1811-12 series, delivered 2 December 1811 (LL (CC) I 265-7)*

If there existed any outward testimony to give assurance to the high degree of probability derived from the internal evidence, I should not hesitate to place this play as the earliest of Shakes-