

quality of the general truths, conceptions, and images, and of the words expressing them, with which his mind had been previously stored. For the property of passion is not to *create*, but to set in increased activity. At least, whatever new connections of thoughts or images, or (which is equally, if not more than equally, the appropriate effect of strong excitement) whatever generalizations of truth or experience the heat of passion may produce, yet the terms of their conveyance must have pre-existed in his former conversations, and are only collected and crowded together by the unusual stimulation. It is indeed very possible to adopt in a poem the unmeaning repetitions, habitual phrases, and other blank counters which an unfurnished or confused understanding interposes at short intervals in order to keep hold of his subject which is still slipping from him, and to give him time for recollection; or in mere aid of vacancy, as in the scanty companies of a country stage the same player pops backwards and forwards, in order to prevent the appearance of empty spaces, in the procession of *Macbeth* or *Henry VIIIth*. But what assistance to the poet or ornament to the poem these can supply, I am at a loss to conjecture. Nothing assuredly can differ either in origin or in mode more widely from the apparent tautologies of intense and turbulent feeling in which the passion is greater and of longer endurance than to be exhausted or satisfied by a single representation of the image or incident exciting it. Such repetitions I admit to be a beauty of the highest kind; as illustrated by Mr. Wordsworth himself from the song of Deborah. "At her feet he bowed, he fell, he lay down; at her feet he bowed, he fell; where he bowed, there he fell down dead."⁸

1815

1817

From Lectures on Shakespeare¹

[FANCY AND IMAGINATION IN SHAKESPEARE'S POETRY]

In the preceding lecture we have examined with what armor clothed and with what titles authorized Shakespeare came forward as a poet to demand the throne of fame as the dramatic poet of England; we have now to observe and retrace the excellencies which compelled even his contemporaries to seat him on that throne, although there were giants in those days contending for the same honor. Hereafter we shall endeavor to make out the title of the English drama, as created by and existing in Shakespeare, and its right to the supremacy of dramatic excellence in general. I have endeavored to prove that he had shown himself a *poet*, previously to his appearance as a dramatic poet—and that had no *Lear*, no *Othello*, no *Henry the Fourth*, no *Twelfth Night* appeared, we must have admitted that Shakespeare possessed the chief if not all the requisites of a poet—namely, deep feeling and exqui-

8. Judges 5.27. Cited by Wordsworth in a note to *The Thorn* as an example of the natural repetitiousness of "impassioned feelings."

1. Although Coleridge's series of public lectures on Shakespeare and other poets contained much of his best criticism, he published none of this material, leaving only fragmentary remains of his lectures in notebooks, scraps of manuscript, and

lowing selections, which develop some of the principal ideas presented in *Biographia Literaria*: reproduce the text of T. M. Raysor's edition—based on Coleridge's manuscripts and on contemporary reports—of *Coleridge's Shakespearean Criticism* (1930); four minor corrections in wording have been taken from R. A. Foakes's edition of *Coleridge's Lectures 1808-1819. On Literature*

site sense of beauty, both as exhibited to the eye in combinations of form, and to the ear in sweet and appropriate melody (with the exception of Spenser he is [the sweetest of English poets]); that these feelings were under the command of *his own will*—that in his very first productions he projected his mind out of his own particular being, and felt and made others feel, on subjects [in] no way connected with himself, except by force of contemplation, and that sublime faculty, by which a great mind becomes that which it meditates on. To this we are to add the affectionate love of nature and natural objects, without which no man could have observed so steadily, or painted so truly and passionately the very minutest beauties of the external world. Next, we have shown that he possessed fancy, considered as the faculty of bringing together images dissimilar in the main by some one point or more of likeness distinguished.²

Full gently now she takes him by the hand,
A lily prisoned in a jail of snow,
Or ivory in an alabaster band—
So white a friend engirts so white a foe.

Still mounting, we find undoubted proof in his mind of imagination, or the power by which one image or feeling is made to modify many others and by a sort of *fusion to force many into one*—that which after showed itself in such might and energy in *Lear*, where the deep anguish of a father spreads the feeling of ingratitude and cruelty over the very elements of heaven. Various are the workings of this greatest faculty of the human mind—both passionate and tranquil. In its tranquil and purely pleasurable operation, it acts chiefly by producing out of many things, as they would have appeared in the description of an ordinary mind, described slowly and in unimpassioned succession, a oneness, even as nature, the greatest of poets, acts upon us when we open our eyes upon an extended prospect. Thus the flight of Adonis from the enamored goddess in the dusk of evening—

Look how a bright star shooteth from the sky—
So glides he in the night from Venus' eye.³

How many images and feelings are here brought together without effort and without discord—the beauty of Adonis—the rapidity of his flight—the yearning yet hopelessness of the enamored gazer—and a shadowy ideal character thrown over the whole.—Or it acts by impressing the stamp of humanity, of human feeling, over inanimate objects * * *

Lo, here the gentle lark, weary of rest,
From his moist cabinet mounts up on high
And wakes the morning, from whose silver breast
The sun ariseth in his majesty;
Who doth the world so gloriously behold
That cedar tops and hills seem burnished gold.⁴

And lastly, which belongs only to a great poet, the power of so carrying on the eye of the reader as to make him almost lose the consciousness of words—to make him *see* everything—and this without exciting any painful or laborious

2. Coleridge here applies the distinction between
Fancy
tive poem *Venus and Adonis* (lines 361-64).

attention, without any *anatomy* of description (a fault not uncommon in descriptive poetry) but with the sweetness and easy movement of nature.

Lastly, he previously to his dramas, gave proof of a most profound, energetic, and philosophical mind, without which he might have been a very delightful poet, but not the great dramatic poet. * * * But chance and his powerful instinct combined to lead him to his proper province—in the conquest of which we are to consider both the difficulties that opposed him, and the advantages.

1808

1930

[MECHANIC VS. ORGANIC FORM]⁵

The subject of the present lecture is no less than a question submitted to your understandings, emancipated from national prejudice: Are the plays of Shakespeare works of rude uncultivated genius, in which the splendor of the parts compensates, if aught can compensate, for the barbarous shapelessness and irregularity of the whole? To which not only the French critics, but even his own English admirers, say [yes]. Or is the form equally admirable with the matter, the judgment of the great poet not less deserving of our wonder than his genius? Or to repeat the question in other words, is Shakespeare a great dramatic poet on account only of those beauties and excellencies which he possesses in common with the ancients, but with diminished claims to our love and honor to the full extent of his difference from them? Or are these very differences additional proofs of poetic wisdom, at once results and symbols of living power as contrasted with lifeless mechanism, of free and rival originality as contradistinguished from servile imitation, or more accurately, [from] a blind copying of effects instead of a true imitation of the essential principles? Imagine not I am about to oppose genius to rules. No! the comparative value of these rules is the very cause to be tried. The spirit of poetry, like all other living powers, must of necessity circumscribe itself by rules, were it only to unite power with beauty. It must embody in order to reveal itself; but a living body is of necessity an organized one—and what is organization but the connection of parts to a whole, so that each part is at once end and means! This is no discovery of criticism; it is a necessity of the human mind—and all nations have felt and obeyed it, in the invention of meter and measured sounds as the vehicle and involucrum⁶ of poetry, itself a fellow growth from the same life, even as the bark is to the tree.

No work of true genius dare want its appropriate form; neither indeed is there any danger of this. As it must not, so neither can it, be lawless! For it is even this that constitutes its genius—the power of acting creatively under laws of its own origination. How then comes it that not only single Zoili,⁷ but whole nations have combined in unhesitating condemnation of our great dramatist, as a sort of African nature, fertile in beautiful monsters, as a wild

5. Coleridge is opposing the view that because Shakespeare violates the critical "rules" based on classical drama—the unities, for instance—his dramatic successes are marred by his irregularities and reflect the work of an uncultivated genius that operates without artistry or judgment. His argument is based on a distinction between the "mechanical form" central to aesthetic criticism

form results from imposing a system of preexisting rules on the literary material. Shakespeare's organic form, on the other hand, evolves like a plant by an inner principle and according to the unique laws of its own growth, until it achieves an organic unity.

6. Outer covering of part of a plant.

7. Utter of "Zoili" in the play.

death where islands of fertility look greener from the surrounding waste, where the loveliest plants now shine out among unsightly weeds and now are choked by their parasitic growth, so intertwined that we cannot disentangle the weed without snapping the flower. In this statement I have had no reference to the vulgar abuse of Voltaire,⁸ save as far as his charges are coincident with the decisions of his commentators and (so they tell you) his almost idolatrous admirers. The true ground of the mistake, as has been well remarked by a continental critic,⁹ lies in the confounding mechanical regularity with organic form. The form is mechanic when on any given material we impress a predetermined form, not necessarily arising out of the properties of the material, as when to a mass of wet clay we give whatever shape we wish it to retain when hardened. The organic form, on the other hand, is innate; it shapes as it develops itself from within, and the fullness of its development is one and the same with the perfection of its outward form. Such is the life, such the form. Nature, the prime genial¹ artist, inexhaustible in diverse powers, is equally inexhaustible in forms. Each exterior is the physiognomy of the being within, its true image reflected and thrown out from the concave mirror. And even such is the appropriate excellence of her chosen poet, of our own Shakespeare, himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper than consciousness.

1812

1930

From The Statesman's Manual

[ON SYMBOL AND ALLEGORY]¹

The histories and political economy² of the present and preceding century partake in the general contagion of its mechanic philosophy, and are the *product* of an unenlivened generalizing Understanding. In the Scriptures they are the living *educts*³ of the Imagination; of that reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the Reason in Images of the Sense, and organizing (as it were) the flux of the Senses by the permanence and self-circling energies of the Reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves, and consubstantial with the truths, of which they are the *conductors*. These are the Wheels which Ezekiel beheld, when the hand of the Lord was upon him, and he saw visions of God as he sat among the captives by the river of Chebar. *Whithersoever the Spirit was to go, the wheels went, and thither was their spirit to go: for the spirit of the living creature was*

8. The French writer Voltaire (1694–1778) vexed British nationalists with his description of Shakespeare as a barbarous, irregular, and sometimes indecent natural genius.

9. August Wilhelm Schlegel (1767–1845), German critic and literary historian, whose *Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature* (1808–09) proposed the distinction between mechanical and organic form that Coleridge develops in this lecture.

1. Creative.

1. Coleridge published *The Statesman's Manual, or The Bible the Best Guide to Political Skill and Foresight* in 1816. *Statesman's Manual* was intended as a

versal principles that should guide lawmakers in meeting the political and economic emergencies of that troubled era. His discussion there of symbol, in contradistinction both to allegory and to metaphor, has been often cited and elaborated in treatments of symbolism in poetry. Coleridge's analysis, however, is directed not to poetry but to his view that the persons and events in biblical history signify timeless and universal, as well as particular and local, truths.

2. The increasingly prestigious intellectual discipline of economics.

3. Those things that are educated; i.e., brought forth, and

in the wheels also.⁴ The truths and the symbols that represent them move in conjunction and form the living chariot that bears up (for us) the throne of the Divine Humanity. Hence, by a derivative, indeed, but not a divided, influence, and though in a secondary yet in more than a metaphorical sense, the Sacred Book is worthily intitled *the* WORD OF GOD. Hence too, its contents present to us the stream of time continuous as Life and a symbol of Eternity, inasmuch as the Past and the Future are virtually contained in the Present. According therefore to our relative position on its banks the Sacred History becomes prophetic, the Sacred Prophecies historical, while the power and substance of both inhere in its Laws, its Promises, and its Comminations.⁵ In the Scriptures therefore both Facts and Persons must of necessity have a twofold significance, a past and a future, a temporary and a perpetual, a particular and a universal application. They must be at once Portraits and Ideals.

*Eheu! paupertina philosophia in paupertinam religionem ducit.*⁶—A hunger-bitten and idea-less philosophy naturally produces a starveling and comfortless religion. It is among the miseries of the present age that it recognizes no medium between *Literal* and *Metaphorical*. Faith is either to be buried in the dead letter,⁷ or its name and honors usurped by a counterfeit product of the mechanical understanding, which in the blindness of self-complacency confounds SYMBOLS with ALLEGORIES. Now an Allegory is but a translation of abstract notions into a picture-language which is itself nothing but an abstraction from objects of the senses; the principal being more worthless even than its phantom proxy, both alike unsubstantial, and the former shapeless to boot. On the other hand a Symbol (ὁ ἔστιν ἅει ταυτηγόρικον)⁸ is characterized by a translucence of the Special⁹ in the Individual or of the General in the Especial or of the Universal in the General. Above all by the translucence of the Eternal through and in the Temporal. It always partakes of the Reality which it renders intelligible; and while it enunciates the whole, abides itself as a living part in that Unity, of which it is the representative. The other are but empty echoes which the fancy arbitrarily associates with apparitions of matter, less beautiful but not less shadowy than the sloping orchard or hillside pasture-field seen in the transparent lake below. Alas! for the flocks that are to be led forth to such pastures! *"It shall even be as when the hungry dreameth, and behold! he eateth; but he waketh and his soul is empty: or as when the thirsty dreameth, and behold he drinketh; but he awaketh and is faint!"*¹⁰ * * *

* * * The fact therefore, that the mind of man in its own primary and constitutional forms represents the laws of nature, is a mystery which of itself should suffice to make us religious;² for it is a problem of which God is the only solution, God, the one before all, and of all, and through all!—True natural philosophy is comprised in the study of the science and language of symbols. The power delegated to nature is all in every part: and by a symbol I mean, not a metaphor or allegory or any other figure of speech or form of fancy, but an actual and essential part of that, the whole of which it represents. Thus our Lord speaks symbolically when he says that "the eye is the

4. Slightly altered from the prophet Ezekiel's vision of the Chariot of God, when he had been "among the captives by the river of Chebar" (Ezekiel 1.1–20). Ezekiel was among the Jews who had been taken into captivity in Babylonia by King Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C.E. He was put in a community of Jewish captives at Tel-Abib on the banks of the Chebar canal.

poverty-stricken religion (Latin).

7. I.e., the Scriptures read entirely literally.

8. Which is always tautegorical (Greek). Coleridge coined this word and elsewhere defined "tautegorical" as "expressing the same subject but with a difference."

9. That which pertains to the species.

10. *Ibid.*

light of the body."³ The genuine naturalist is a dramatic poet in his own line: and such as our myriad-minded Shakespeare is, compared with the Racines and Metastasios,⁴ such and by a similar process of self-transformation would the man be, compared with the Doctors of the mechanic school,⁵ who should construct his physiology on the heaven-descended, Know Thyself.⁶

[THE SATANIC HERO]⁷

* * * In its state of immanence (or indwelling) in reason and religion, the WILL appears indifferently, as wisdom or as love: two names of the same power, the former more intelligential,⁸ the latter more spiritual, the former more frequent in the Old, the latter in the New Testament. But in its utmost abstraction and consequent state of reprobation,⁹ the Will becomes satanic pride and rebellious self-idolatry in the relations of the spirit to itself, and remorseless despotism relatively to others; the more hopeless as the more obdurate by its subjugation of sensual impulses, by its superiority to toil and pain and pleasure; in short, by the fearful resolve to find in itself alone the one absolute motive of action, under which all other motives from within and from without must be either subordinated or crushed.

This is the character which Milton has so philosophically as well as sublimely embodied in the Satan of his *Paradise Lost*. Alas! too often has it been embodied in *real* life! Too often has it given a dark and savage grandeur to the historic page! And wherever it has appeared, under whatever circumstances of time and country, the same ingredients have gone to its composition; and it has been identified by the same attributes. Hope in which there is no Cheerfulness; Steadfastness within and immovable Resolve, with outward Restlessness and whirling Activity; Violence with Guile; Temerity with Cunning; and, as the result of all, Interminableness of Object with perfect Indifference of Means; these are the qualities that have constituted the COMMANDING GENIUS! these are the Marks that have characterized the Masters of Mischief, the Liberticides, and mighty Hunters of Mankind, from NIMROD¹ to NAPOLEON. And from inattention to the possibility of such a character as well as from ignorance of its elements, even men of honest intentions too frequently become fascinated. Nay, whole nations have been so far duped by this want of insight and reflection as to regard with palliative admiration, instead of wonder and abhorrence, the Molocks² of human nature, who are indebted, for the far larger portion of their meteoric success, to their total want of principle, and who surpass the generality of their fellow creatures in one act of courage only, that of daring to say with their whole heart, "Evil, be thou my

3. Matthew 6.22: "The light of the body is the eye."

4. Pietro Metastasio (1698–1782), a minor Italian poet and author of opera librettos. Jean Racine (1639–1699), the great French author of verse tragedies. Set on dissociating himself from his youthful support for the Revolution, Coleridge enjoyed finding fault with French philosophy and culture. "Naturalist": one who studies natural science.

5. I.e., learned men who hold a mechanistic philosophy of nature.

6. The Roman Juvenal, in *Satires* 11.27 of Horace (Quintus Horatius Flaccus), had said, "From Heaven it descends, 'Know Thyself.'" The original saying, "Know Thyself," was attributed by classical

Satan and goes on to recognize, and to warn his age against, the appeal of that type of Romantic hero (exemplified above all by the protagonists in Byron's romances and in his drama, *Manfred*), which was in large part modeled on the Satan of *Paradise Lost*.

8. Intellectual.

9. In its theological sense: rejection by God.

1. In Genesis 10.9 Nimrod is described as "a mighty hunter before the Lord." The passage was traditionally interpreted to signify that Nimrod hunted down men, hence that he was the prototype of all tyrants and bloody conquerors.

2. Molochs, monsters of evil. In the Old Testament Moloch is an idol to whom firstborn chil-

good!"³—All *system* so far is power; and a *systematic* criminal, self-consistent and entire in wickedness, who entrenches villainy within villainy, and barricades crime by crime, has removed a world of obstacles by the mere decision, that he will have no obstacles, but those of force and brute matter.

1816

From Specimens of the Table Talk of Samuel Taylor Coleridge¹

January 3. 1823.

MATERIALISM.

Either we have an immortal soul, or we have not. If we have not, we are beasts; the first and wisest of beasts, it may be; but still true beasts. We shall only differ in degree, and not in kind; just as the elephant differs from the slug. But by the concession of all the materialists of all the schools, or almost all, we are not of the same kind as beasts—and this also we say from our own consciousness. Therefore, methinks, it must be the possession of a soul within us that makes the difference.

Read the first chapter of Genesis without prejudice, and you will be convinced at once. After the narrative of the creation of the earth and brute animals, Moses seems to pause, and says:—"And God said, Let us make man in *our image*, after *our likeness*." And in the next chapter, he repeats the narrative:—"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;" and then he adds these words,—"and *man became a living soul*."² Materialism will never explain those last words.

May 1. 1823.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN STORIES OF DREAMS AND GHOSTS.

There is a great difference in the credibility to be attached to stories of dreams and stories of ghosts. Dreams have nothing in them which are absurd and nonsensical; and, though most of the coincidences may be readily explained by the diseased system of the dreamer, and the great and surprising power of association,³ yet it is impossible to say whether an inner sense does not really exist in the mind, seldom developed, indeed, but which may have a power of presentiment. All the external senses have their correspondents in the mind; the eye can see an object before it is distinctly apprehended;—why may there not be a corresponding power in the soul? The power of prophecy

3. Spoken by Satan, *Paradise Lost* 4.110.

1. Around 1823 Coleridge's nephew Henry Nelson Coleridge conceived the project of preserving for posterity his uncle's wonderful talk, although from the outset he doubted his power to approximate the rushing cataract of his words or the encyclopedic range of the topics on which the

published in 1835, a year after Coleridge's death. In the 17th century, the term "table talk" came to designate books collecting fragments of the informal conversation of famous writers. In 1822 William Hazlitt had used the term as a title for a volume of his essays.
2. Genesis 1.26; 2.7.

might have been merely a spiritual excitation of this dormant faculty. Hence you will observe that the Hebrew seers sometimes seem to have required music, as in the instance of Elisha before Jehoram—"But now bring me a minstrel. And it came to pass, when the minstrel played, that the hand of the Lord came upon him."⁴ Every thing in nature has a tendency to move in cycles; and it would be a miracle if, out of such myriads of cycles moving concurrently, some coincidences did not take place. No doubt, many such take place in the daytime; but then our senses drive out the remembrance of them, and render the impression hardly felt; but when we sleep, the mind acts without interruption. Terror and the heated imagination will, even in the daytime, create all sorts of features, shapes, and colours out of a simple object possessing none of them in reality.

But ghost stories are absurd. Whenever a real ghost appears,—by which I mean some man or woman dressed up to frighten another,—if the supernatural character of the apparition has been for a moment believed, the effects on the spectator have always been most terrible,—convulsion, idiocy, madness, or even death on the spot. Consider the awful descriptions in the Old Testament of the effects of a spiritual presence on the prophets and seers of the Hebrews; the terror, the exceeding great dread, the utter loss of all animal power. But in our common ghost stories, you always find that the seer, after a most appalling apparition, as you are to believe, is quite well the next day. Perhaps, he may have a headache; but that is the outside of the effect produced. Alston,⁵ a man of genius, and the best painter yet produced by America, when he was in England told me an anecdote which confirms what I have been saying. It was, I think, in the university of Cambridge, near Boston, that a certain youth took it into his wise head to endeavour to convert a Tom-Painish companion⁶ of his by appearing as a ghost before him. He accordingly dressed himself up in the usual way, having previously extracted the ball from the pistol which always lay near the head of his friend's bed. Upon first awaking, and seeing the apparition, the youth who was to be frightened, A., very coolly looked his companion the ghost in the face, and said, "I know you. This is a good joke; but you see I am not frightened. Now you may vanish!" The ghost stood still. "Come," said A., "that is enough. I shall get angry. Away!" Still the ghost moved not. "By——," ejaculated A., "if you do not in three minutes go away, I'll shoot you." He waited the time, deliberately levelled the pistol, fired, and, with a scream at the immobility of the figure, became convulsed, and afterwards died. The very instant he believed it to be a ghost, his human nature fell before it.

June 24. 1827.

HAMLET.—PRINCIPLES AND MAXIMS.—LOVE.—

Hamlet's character is the prevalence of the abstracting and generalizing habit over the practical. He does not want courage, skill, will, or opportunity;

4. Coleridge recalls the episode in 2 Kings 3.15 in which the prophet Elisha, called before King Jehoram, foretells the King's miraculous victory

(1779–1843), who, following studies at Harvard, had traveled to England to enroll at the Royal Academy of Art.