Rehearsing Modern Tragedy:

A Benjaminian Interpretation of Drama and the Dramatic in Samuel Taylor Coleridge's Writings.

Clare Louise Almond

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Department of English Literature at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne
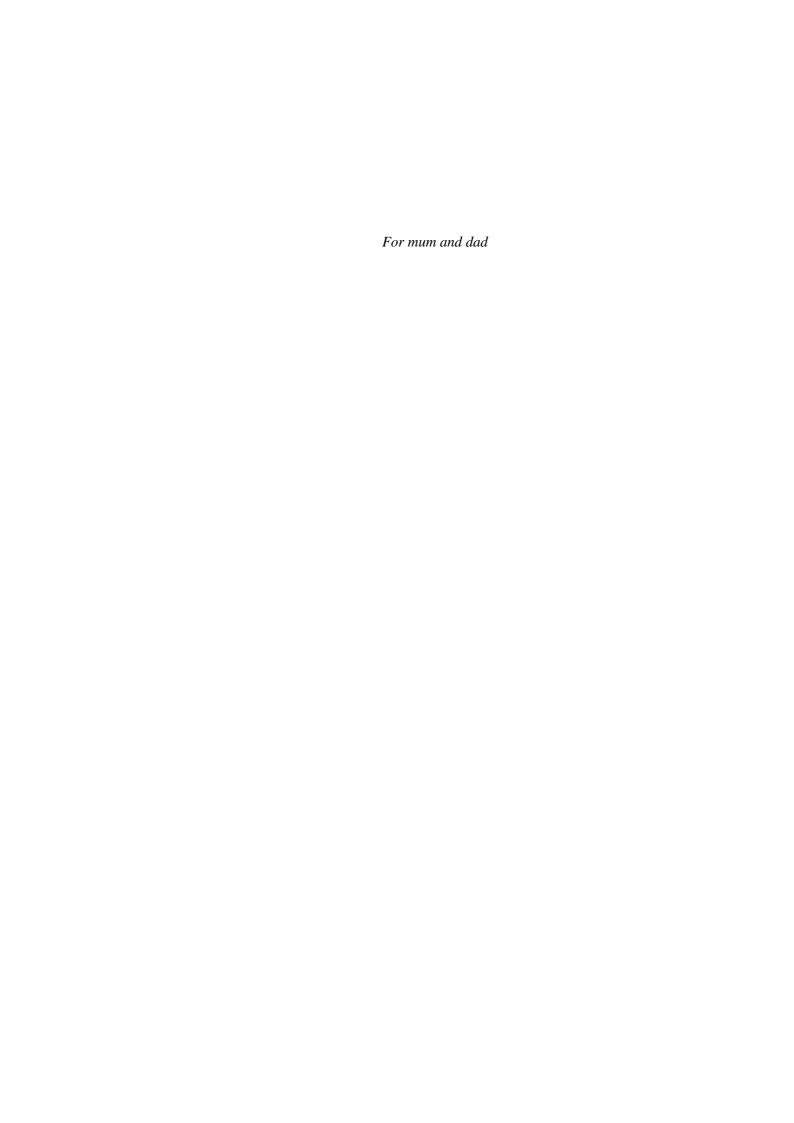
May, 2014

Abstract

This thesis offers a reappraisal of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's dramatic theory and writing. Although critical interest in Coleridge's dramatic work is relatively small in comparison to other areas, it is increasing. A central aim of the thesis is to add to this field of criticism by suggesting a greater significance of the dramatic in Coleridge's *oeuvre*. This is an area of Coleridge's work that can be illuminated by way of its interpretation using Walter Benjamin's reassessment of dramatic genres in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

A key assumption of the thesis is that Coleridge's dramatic work extends beyond the parameters of his activity as a playwright. It therefore positions key moments of his critical theory and poetic writing as dramatic. In viewing selected works in this way, a greater coincidence between Coleridge and Benjamin's work emerges most significantly through their shared themes of truthful representation and correct interpretation.

A short introduction highlights common themes between Coleridge and Benjamin and proposes a view of the two writers that follows Benjamin's concept of the 'constellation'. Chapter One draws together key critical interest in Romantic drama. It also aims to connect Coleridge's dramatic theory and works with key themes in *On German Tragic Drama*. Chapter Two explores Coleridge's dramatic theory in his Lectures before 1812 and offers a reading of the 'Critique of *Bertram'* that seeks to reassert the

importance of this piece. Chapter Three aims to reveal a dramatic current running through 'The Eolian Harp' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. The thesis culminates, in Chapter Four, with a reading of *Remorse* informed by Benjamin's critical model of the *Trauerspiel* in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.

In conclusion, the thesis offers up aspects of Coleridge's works that can be termed as dramatic so as to reveal their anticipation of a Benjaminian modernity. In this sense, it proposes that drama should be accorded more significance within Coleridge's *oeuvre* as it reveals a better understanding of some of his lesser known material and highlights some of his most original thinking.

For mum and dad

Contents

Acknowledgements

Introduction.

Towards a Literary Constellation: The Relevance of Walter Benjamin to Samuel Taylor Coleridge

> [Walter Benjamin] was a library-cormorant and devourer of ancient print quite in the manner of a Coleridge […and it was as] a metaphysician of metaphor and translation as was Coleridge, that Benjamin accomplished his best work.[1]

Literary criticism and the 'question of representation' lie at the heart of this project.[2] Both Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Walter Benjamin are known for their studies of philosophy, language and politics but it is the preservation of their focus upon literature—and within this specifically, their interest in 'the ability to tell a tale'—that highlights a connection between them.[3]

Casting Coleridge and Benjamin's works together within a constellation—Benjamin's historico-critical term to express a spatial rather than linear understanding of time— allows for the revival of a theory built around drama that remains ostensibly latent in Coleridge's *oeuvre*. Benjamin's conception of the constellation is expressed most fully in *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in which he puts forward a method of historical documentation that departs from historicism, which simply (and ineffectively) records information. Instead, Benjamin is interested in methods that allow past events to remain alive and vital in a connection with the present as 'a constellation which [one] era has

---

[1] George Steiner, 'Introduction', in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, introd. by George Steiner, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 7-24 (p. 9; p. 20).

[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, introd. by George Steiner, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p. 27. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *OGTD*.

[3] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, ed. and introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 83-108. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation S.

formed with a definite earlier one'.[4] The constellation works, as Hannah Arendt

explains, with reference to Benjamin's mosaic technique of criticism, by 'tearing

fragments out of their context and arranging them afresh in such a way that they

illustrate[d] one another and [are] able to prove their *raison d'être* in a free-floating

state'.[5] *Theses* is, of course, Benjamin's meridian cultural statement; a critique of the

modern condition structured in the manner of a materialist historiographical record

offering, in both its form and content, a 'revolutionary chance to fight for the oppressed

past' (*TPH*, p. 254). As one of Benjamin's final works, it carries within it strong

influential lines of revolutionary political thinking and, in its practical urgency, may be

considered to 'articulate a politics, not an aesthetics […] of redemption'.[6] Nonetheless,

its theoretical heritage is rooted in Benjamin's early critical undertaking, not least in the

ambitious *Habilitation* project, which sought to establish a new critical framework that

would redeem lost works and revive their interest in a liberated cultural canon. This

thesis is concerned with Benjamin's interest in reasserting the influence of what may be

termed an underclass of literature by judging it immanently, through its own artistic

references, rather than under the application of an external set of artistic rules inherited

from the literature of previous epochs.   Therefore, it locates, in Coleridge's

experimentation with Romantic drama, a call to judge his dramatic writing under its

own literary, historical and cultural conditions. However, the thesis is not a purely New

Historicist reading of Coleridge's work as I aim to highlight a literary engagement with

the historical in his dramatic writing of the kind that Walter Benjamin advocates in *The*

Origin of German Tragic Drama. Hugh Grady articulates the advantages of using

---

[4] Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations* (see note to 'The Storyteller', above), pp. 245-55 (p. 255). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *TPH*.

[5] Hannah Arendt, 'Introduction' to Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations* (see note to 'The Storyteller', above), pp. 7-58 (p. 51).

[6] Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 247.

Benjamin's approach to drama as a way of returning the form to critical analysis located within literary, rather than historical and social, theory. He aims to

> bring out other qualities of [Benjamin's] methods relevant to the present conjuncture in Shakespeare studies as the field searches for methods that go beyond an almost exhausted New Historicism […] Benjamin's project has a historicizing dimension, but history for him is always a construct of our present moment, and he is also deeply interested in aesthetic issues of form and genre as expressions of historical moments.[7]

This Benjaminian methodology has recently become a fruitful aspect of Shakespearean studies as Andrew Benjamin and Luis-Martinez Zenón have joined Hugh Grady in providing Benjaminian interpretations of Shakespeare's plays.[8] This thesis extends the interest shown in applying Benjamin's work on the mourning play into the new territory of nineteenth-century drama by highlighting its relevance to, and illumination of, Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice.

It is not surprising that both Coleridge and Benjamin engaged with a cultural critique of history, or the representation of historical events. Neither Coleridge nor Benjamin worked comfortably within the boundaries of their own cultural epoch. Even Coleridge's most recognised works divided, and at times eluded, his fellow writers, and Benjamin's arguably most scholarly work was rejected for a *Habilitation* (teaching qualification).[9] Not only were the two writers working outside their cultural moment, but central to their work is also the theme of temporal dislocation; it is this theme that George Steiner touches upon with reference to both writers' profound understanding,

---

[7] Hugh Grady, 'Hamlet as a Mourning Play: A Benjaminianesque Interpretation', *Shakespeare Studies*, 36 (2008), 135-65 (p. 137).
[8] Andrew Benjamin, 'Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time', in *Rethinking the Baroque,* ed. by Helen Hill (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 161-183, and Luis-Martinez Zenón, 'Shakespeare's Historical Drama as *Trauerspiel*: *Richard II* and After', *ELH*, 75 (2008), 673-706.
[9] For an introduction to the reception of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in the nineteenth century, see Richard Haven, 'The Ancient Mariner in the Nineteenth Century', *Studies in Romanticism*, 11, 4 (1972), 360-374. For a brief introduction to the background of Walter Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, see Gilloch, pp. 60-65.

and dextrous shaping, of language. Both Coleridge and Benjamin demonstrate the ability to use and critique language in a way that offers their readers, to follow Benjamin's expression, a 'unique experience with the past' (*TPH*, p. 254), and they do this through the temporally conditioned linguistic tropes of symbol and allegory. However, far from occupying a position of binary opposition, this thesis argues, with close attention to drama, that these tropes function similarly across Coleridge and Benjamin's critical engagement with drama. In so doing, they furnish Coleridge's writing with a theoretical framework that pushes beyond the boundaries of what we accept to be Romanticism and they place renewed emphasis on the Romantic influences working within Benjamin's modernist *oeuvre*. As a result, the Romantic Coleridge and the modern Benjamin can be brought together in a comparative study that takes both labels to their limits and fosters stronger links between the two literary epochs. This comparison, it is argued, turns on the form of drama; a form which Benjamin aims to reassess in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, under a critically obscure tradition of influence: the baroque theory of the *Trauerspiel*.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin sets out to rescue the long-forgotten and ignored genre of the *Trauerspiel*, a Baroque drama of the court suffused with intrigue and melancholy but lacking the rebellion and decisive action associated with classical tragedy and its Elizabethan descendant, revenge tragedy. In doing this, he rejects traditional modes of criticism based upon the judgement of a work and reconstructs the task of criticism as the activity of arranging works into a configuration whereby they simultaneously illuminate and destroy each other in a moment of revelation. Benjamin employs the imagery of fire (imagery that recurs throughout his

work as a way of explaining his view of effective representation) to describe the

moment when a work reveals its truth, or its 'meaningful image':[10]

> This [truth] content does not appear however by being exposed; rather
> it is revealed in a process which might be described metaphorically as
> the burning up of a husk as it enters the realm of ideas, that is to say a
> destruction of the work in which its external form achieves its most
> brilliant degree of illumination. (*OGTD*, 31) [11]

Here, Benjamin departs from the Romantic model of reflective critique to which the

term 'additive' can be applied and claims that the 'truth content' of an artwork is

revealed only when its outline is ignited by its shared flashpoint with other works (*TPH*,

p. 254).[12] This supports Benjamin's significant revision of the conventional

understanding of Romanticism according to two ideas: the constellation and allegory.

In these two representative tropes, whereby the temporal function of 'assembl[ing]'

ideas within a stellar structure and the linguistic function of allegory are reflected in one

another, Benjamin tracks a progress from the foundation of his thesis in philosophy to

its application in literary (and cultural) criticism (*OGTD*, p. 35).[13] I elaborate upon

Benjaminian constellation and allegory in Chapter One, but here it is important to

---

[10] Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 71 (quoted in Gilloch, p. 70).

[11] This imagery recurs throughout Benjamin's engagement with the representation of truth. The idea of illumination as burning in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is transferred to in 'The Storyteller' as a 'gentle flame' (S, p. 107) and then into *Theses on the Philosophy of History* as a quicker 'flash' and, further, to a more violent 'blast[ing]' (*TPH*, p. 247; p. 254).

[12] Benjamin describes Historicism as additive in the 'Theses of the Philosophy of History'. It is a form of documentation that simply 'musters a mass of data to fill the homogenous, empty time' and therefore, for Benjamin, it is a progressive method that does not achieve meaningful representation (*TPH*, p. 254).

[13] Benjamin reassesses Romantic self-critique in his dissertation, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism'. Here he finds in the early Romanticism of Friedrich Schlegel and Novalis a possibility of overcoming the progressive ideology proposed by Kantian philosophers such as Fichte, who see the activity of infinite reflection as a way of achieving a final goal of transcendental knowledge. Benjamin's transformation of the Fichtean tendency towards unending and unfulfilled reflection (the philosophical mirror image of Historicism) is based upon his reworking of the concept of time, which he sees as convoluted rather than successive. See Walter Benjamin, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), I, pp. 116-200. For further commentary on Benjamin's 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', see Rebecca Comay, 'Benjamin and the Ambiguities of Romanticism', in *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin*, ed. by David Ferris (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 134-151.

situate *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* within the context of his own work and to suggest its appropriateness for a reading of Coleridge's dramatic writings. In doing this, and elaborating upon it throughout the thesis, I hope to show that, whilst the two writers' works often evidence a shared theoretical grounding in early German Romantic theory (with its backdrop of Kantian and Post-Kantian philosophy), it is the literary function of drama and the application of this form to their own literary-critical thought that offers the strongest connection between Benjamin and Coleridge. Consequently, Benjamin's critical revision of the Romantic consciousness and the application of this to a bypassed dramatic form becomes a highly suggestive basis for the analysis of Coleridge's dramatic imagination.

The titles chosen for Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study and its introduction reveal much about the orientation of his study and stand as a microcosmic incorporation of some of the key issues—such as naming, originary moments and translation—within the study and its critical afterlife. Benjamin's choice of title for the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' highlights the central position it holds within the entirety of his academic studies as it stands not so much as a prologue to the *Habilitation* but its hybrid grounding. This is suggested in the hyphenated term 'Epistemo-Critical', which acts itself as a hyphen between his early and later work. As an epistemological piece, the Prologue looks back towards the work of his doctoral thesis, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', but it also stands as preparation for Benjamin's critical account of the *Trauerspiel*, which was set to move his interests from a philosophical engagement with Romanticism towards a literary engagement with the Baroque and modernity. The ideas put forward in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' give the reader of Benjamin's work an important link in the chain of his thought as it is this preparatory section of his *Habilitation* that acts as the pivot around which the sometimes seemingly disparate

elements of the Romantic consciousness and modernist consciousness are collected. Graeme Gilloch rightly points out that 'the *Trauerspiel* study concludes Benjamin's early writings just as it looks forward to its later ones: it is Janus-faced'.[14] However, to sharpen the focus of Gilloch's point further, it is during the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' at the start of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that this Janus-faced outlook occurs. The study is therefore balanced by its incorporation of Benjamin's preceding works on Romantic philosophy.

This contextual grounding of Benjamin's 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' feeds into, and can be an illustrative example of, his notion of origin, in which the term radically differs from a genitive process. As Benjamin asserts, 'The term origin is not intended to describe the process by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from the process of becoming and disappearance' (*OGTD*, p. 45). The extension of the structure of Benjamin's study as a way of denoting its connection to, and break away from, his other works comes to display the characteristics of his definition of origin. In the act of mining a literary 'genealogy of Modernity' out of the study of Romantic modes of consciousness and claiming critical equality for its historical temporality and its allegorical linguistic tropes, the formal structure of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* also ghosts its theoretical content as it embodies this conception of origin.[15] Since Benjamin's view of time is spatial rather than linear, his view of the origin cannot simply mark the starting point of a chain of events. In fact, it is this view of history as a chain of events with one origin that Benjamin hopes to overthrow in his *Trauerspiel* study. Rather, a moment of Benjaminian origin must emerge from a structure that already exists or, as Benjamin states, 'the eddy in the

---

[14] Gilloch, p. 87.
[15] Samuel Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), p.141.

stream of becoming' (*OGTD*, p. 45). This notion of an origin that emerges from a continuous stream, and, further, as an interruption in this stream, offers the possibility of capturing or preserving the material which is poised to disappear in a suspension with the material that is just emerging. Graeme Gilloch clarifies these qualities of origin:

> A temporal disturbance…as time folded back upon itself. Thus origin
> is an historical moment in which the idea is represented and
> recognised and the phenomena which compose it are redeemed.
> Origin becomes the *goal* of study, not its starting point.[16]

The study itself is focused on the *Trauerspiel*, which, Benjamin argues, is just such an example of this movement of origin. He relates the *Trauerspiel* to his preferred way of criticising work according to its 'exemplary character', which may materialise in the 'merest fragment' of the work and therefore offer the critic a path towards analysing works 'outside the limits of genre' (*OGTD*, p. 44). This freedom from generic rules allows Benjamin to assert that 'a major work will either establish a genre or abolish it; and a perfect work will do both' (*OGTD*, p. 44). In this way, Benjamin's work enacts the same process of origin as he describes in the *Trauerspiel* by establishing a new genre or strategy of criticism with which to reanimate works that fall outside the boundaries of genre and, as such, it becomes the formal incarnation of what its content describes. This is perhaps one of the reasons why the study was deemed to have fallen short of the requirements of a *Habilitation*: it was not easy to locate its philosophical or literary content within a definite critical tradition. Ironically, therefore, it can only have been a success, as this overturning of critical assumptions in order to achieve the goal of origin redeemed—the *Trauerspiel* genre—was exactly the driving force of the study.[17]

---

[16] Gilloch, p. 73 (emphasis in original).

[17] Benjamin's criticism of the *Trauerspiele* is intimately tied to his wider political theory and cultural critique. Therefore, for him, it is necessary to make a generic distinction between *Tragödie* and *Trauerspiel* which does not always occur in German (where *Trauerspiel* and *Tragödie* are accepted as

The problem of correctly naming, or at least identifying, the *Trauerspiel* is the defining

reason, Benjamin suggests, for the need to redirect the activity of philosophy from a

search for knowledge to a revelation, through representation, of truth. Benjamin sets

out his departure from Romanticism and philosophy early in the 'Epistemo-Critical

Prologue' and therefore he reasserts the ideas involved in his earlier work as both the

foundation and the discarded content of the current study. The restoration of the focus

upon transcendentalism (or the critique of this as seen in 'The Concept of Criticism in

German Romanticism') is at the same time, to use Benjamin's own phrase, 'mortifi[ed]'

(*OGTD*, p. 182) as the *Trauerspiel* study has transformed the study of Romantic

reflection into a reassertion that philosophical study should arise immanently from its

own representative function and force:

> The alternative philosophical forms represented by the concepts of the
> doctrine and the esoteric essay are precisely those things which were
> ignored by the nineteenth century, with its concept of the system.
> Inasmuch as it is determined by this concept of system, philosophy is
> in danger of accommodating itself to a syncretism which weaves a
> spider's web between separate kinds of knowledge in an attempt to
> ensnare the truth as if it were something which came flying in from
> outside. But the universalism acquired by such a philosophy falls far
> short of the didactic authority of doctrine. If philosophy is to remain
> true to the law of its own form, as the representation of truth and not
> as the guide to the acquisition of knowledge, then the exercise of this
> form—rather than its anticipation on the system—must be accorded
> due importance. (*OGTD*, p. 28)

Benjamin's argument is that philosophical study should embrace a more interpretative

mode of textual criticism that does not search for knowledge as 'knowledge is

possession' but rather searches for 'Truth, bodied forth in the dance of represented

synonyms). The issue is perhaps magnified, and serves Benjamin's argument better, on translation of his work into English as the term *Trauerspiel* is taken to mean, more literally 'a play of sadness' and therefore the sense by which it is tragic may be conceived as different from our understanding of traditional tragedy. On the translation of the word *Trauerspiel*, and how the problem of this translation is relevant to his project as a whole, see Samuel Weber, 'Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's *Origin of the German Mourning Play*', in Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, pp. 131-163 (p. 143).

ideas' (*OGTD*, p. 29). In a much simplified explanation, philosophy should not seek to

be scientific but should take a more theological view of textual representation. This

revision of the function of philosophy as a discipline involved with representation rather

than one based in the pursuit of knowledge provides grounds of thought on which

Benjamin and Coleridge's attitudes towards artistic representation, based on their

theological understanding of philosophy, coincide.

At first, Benjamin's point that objects or ideas are not realised 'from a coherence

established in the consciousness' but exist, of themselves, within 'an essence' that is

materialised only through representation seems counterintuitive to a study of Coleridge

(*OGTD*, p. 30). Coleridge's poetry and critical theory have long been associated with

the (poetic) imagination's transformation of the natural object into a corresponding idea.

However, his dramatic theory exhibits a different type of creative theory precisely

because the dramatic form depends upon the voice (as opposed to the text), the material

qualities of the stage and the momentariness of the represented form. As Benjamin

states, with sensitivity towards the advantages of oral representation in terms of his own

theory, in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, 'the speaker […can] produc[e] a bold

sketch in a single attempt' (*OGTD*, p. 29). Arising from this understanding of the

general and transitory nature of oral representation appears to be a shared interest in

correct reading according to a sensitivity to hermeneutical interpretation, the didactic

quality of texts, mysticism and doctrine. Similarly, both writers locate the Middle

Ages—the dramas of the Middle Ages specifically—as a starting point for their

understanding of dramatic forms that depart from classical drama. This link between

Benjamin and Coleridge offers the possibility of a revised view of Coleridge's dramatic

theory that distances it from traditional Romantic theory but preserves its status as a

theory of value. It does this partly because it offers a critical heritage but also because it

resolves two of the central reasons for the misunderstanding of Coleridge's dramatic work: the tendency towards contemplation rather than dramatic action and the surprisingly large role the audience plays in the summoning of stage illusion (an idea that counters the view normally associated with Coleridge of the creative supremacy of the poet). This idea is discussed more fully in Chapter Two with regard to an emergent dramatic theory that looked set to depart from Coleridge's Romantic influences before his reading of A.W. Schlegel, which drew him back towards a more conventionally Romantic elucidation of drama.

In the hermeneutical view of Coleridge's work, I follow Jerome McGann's reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which is dedicated to an explanation of the poem in the light of Coleridge's studies of the Scriptures. McGann argues that this highlights Coleridge's historicised understanding of the interpretation of texts based in the fact that 'the Scriptures are […] a living and processive organism, one that comes into existence in human time'.[18] Putting aside the debate concerning how successful the poem's symbolic structure may or may not be, and indeed whether or not it may be allegorical, this reading reveals definite coincidences between Coleridge and Benjamin's work on historical representation.[19] As outlined above, these instances come from a shared interest in the qualities of oral representation but are galvanised by the view that written texts that retain the didacticism and inconclusivity of oral representation—in short,

---

[18] Jerome McGann, 'The Ancient Mariner: The Meaning of the Meanings', in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 135-172 (p. 145).

[19] This debate stems from the divided nature of the *Rime*'s contemporary critical reception. The opposing views of the poem are usually summarised through the contrasting comments of Charles Lamb, a supporter of the poem on account of its imaginative qualities, and Robert Southey, who declared it to be a poor attempt at 'German sublimity'. See 'Robert Southey in *Critical Review*, 1798', in *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by J. R. de J. Jackson, 2 vols (London: Barnes and Noble, 1968), I, pp. 53-55 (p. 53). The classic reading of the poem as a work of Romantic imagination is Robert Penn Warren's 'A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading' in *Selected Essays* (New York, 1951), pp. 198-305. MH Abrams points out that 'The *Ancient Mariner* is neither an allegorical fable nor a symbolist poem' (see Jerome McGann, 'Romanticism and the Embarrassments of Critical Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 70 (1973), pp. 243-257 (p. 272)).

those that are open to a continuous process of interpretation—allow for a vitality within artistic representation, something that Benjamin would describe later as a 'unique experience with the past' (*TPH*, p. 254). I argue that the historically informed viewpoint that McGann recognises in his reading of the *Rime* comes from Coleridge's earlier work on drama in the *Lectures on Literature*, in which he starts to build an understanding of the dramatic form in its modern incarnation as something that requires an historical model that is distinct from the classical model based in myth. Specifically, this relates to the work Coleridge carried out on dramatic illusion and his much cited phrase 'the willing suspension of disbelief'.[20] This phrase, it is not frequently acknowledged, comes from his theory of dramatic illusion, expressed initially as the 'temporary Half-Faith'[21] of the audience rather than the 'poetic faith' of the reader (*BL*, II. 6). Therefore, through Coleridge's return to 'poetic faith' in his explanation of the *Lyrical Ballads* project in *Biographia Literaria*, a link between his dramatic theory and his poetic practice can be traced. The significance of the *Rime* as a document of historical or cultural interpretation allows for a reading of the poem that resists the repetition of traditional interpretations focused upon its linguistic framework of symbol conditioned by the assumed synonymy of symbol and Romanticism. McGann claims that this type of reading forgets that the symbols within the poem are not 'mere "secular" or "natural" facts' but are already 'pre-designed and pre-determined phenomena'.[22] The task of the critic is to explain these already interpreted meanings as a history of interpretation and not to try to divine any fixed or true sense of the poem's original meaning. In short, the critic's task is to read the poem's cultural history rather than its symbolic language.

---

[20]Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, Biographia Literaria, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, p. 6. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *BL*.

[21] *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), V (1987), p. 134.

[22] McGann, 'The Ancient Mariner', p. 162.

This analysis of the *Rime* is important to my study as it highlights an alternative method of reading Coleridge's work that takes as the dominant structure of interpretation time rather than language. Obviously temporality and language are inextricably linked within the question of representation (or rhetoric, to follow de Man) but a reading that takes temporality as the starting point of interpretation and in which language is considered as a result of this allows for Coleridge's work to be freed from the dominance of his own later statements on symbol and poetic imagination.[23] Furthermore, it traces a perhaps surprising line of dramatic and allegorical thought throughout his poetic and symbolic works, all of which turns upon his rather Benjaminian understanding of the representative difference between classical-mythical and modern-historical temporalities.

The key figures in this thesis, Coleridge's Mariner and Benjamin's Storyteller, are central to an understanding of the historical condition of humankind and highlight the suppressed nature of such a narrative method in the face of the cultural dominance of classical temporality. Both figures are involved in a society that recognises them yet deems them to be out of their time. The Mariner is an uncanny figure desiring to return to society from a displaced location on the extremities of known history, geography and mentality. The Storyteller uses an oral form of communication that does not offer his listeners an explanation but instead gives them an experience which, Benjamin argues, is becoming lost to the incessant march of progress and information. Crucially, these are not universal figures that are easily comprehended by all but are, as McGann states of the Mariner, 'transhistorical'.[24] The Mariner and the Storyteller are presented to us as representations of a barely understood world on the peripheries of human structures

---

[23] For a deconstructive critique of Coleridgean symbol, see Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp. 187-229.
[24] McGann, 'The Ancient Mariner', p. 157.

of consciousness, but, importantly, they are figures rooted in history, not conjured from myth. Both take their influence from the artisans of the Middle Ages rather than the artists of the classical age: Coleridge encases his Mariner's ancient tale in a mediaeval ballad and Benjamin aptly combines two 'archaic representatives' of storytellers, 'the resident tiller of the soil and the […] trading seaman' to arrive at 'the artisan class' of the Middle Ages from which his Storyteller originates (S, p. 84):

> If the peasants and seamen were past masters of storytelling, the artisan class was its university. In it was combined the lore of faraway places, such as a much-travelled man brings home, with the lore of the past, as it best reveals itself to the natives of a place. (S, p. 84)

In the Mariner, it appears that the 'lore of faraway places' and 'the lore of the past' are combined (S, p. 84). Despite the fact that, as Coleridge declares in *Biographia Literaria*, his task is to 'be directed to persons and characters supernatural', it seems clear that the Mariner is ancient but still discernibly human (*BL*, II. 6). He is 'in part at least, supernatural' but also therefore in part human and it is this insistently human, even if uncannily ancient, element of him that enables his casting in, to borrow Weber's term, Benjamin's 'genealogy of Modernity'.[25] The idea that Coleridge's Mariner is insistently human and that his tale is a communication of human experience is arguably to read the *Rime* against the grain of the prevailing (although diminishing) critical tradition. However, the similarities between Coleridge and Benjamin's intended renewal of poetry and criticism by breaking away from classical and neoclassical frameworks of authority lays the foundation for a Benjaminian interpretation of Coleridge based not in Romanticism but as part of the Baroque (*Trauerspiel*) constellation. This constellation reaches back to the mediaeval, the early modern, the German Romantics and forward into modernity. Coleridge's revised version of *The*

---

[25] Weber, *Benjamin's –abilities*, p.131.

Rime of the Ancient Mariner follows this path by taking a mediaeval ballad form and its interpretation by a scholar living around the late 1600s to the early 1700s, and pursuing supernatural tropes that reference the mysticism of Benjamin's chosen German Romantic writers. Crucially for this reading, Coleridge's poem was finished just five months after the completion of *Osorio* and converges with his dramatic ideas once again in 1817 with the publication of *Biographia Literaria*, *Sibylline Leaves* and the revival of *Remorse*. Drama stands at the centre of the connection between Coleridge and Benjamin and its radical potential to take Coleridge's work into modernity is not, I will argue, unnoticed by Coleridge. The 'glittering eye' (*AM*, I, 13) of the Mariner in the *Rime* becomes the 'commanding eye' of Alvar in *Remorse*, reminding us of Coleridge's persistent theme of illusion across the two texts, and it highlights Coleridge's mindful comparison between the mysterious protagonist of his drama and his most famous character, the Mariner.[26] The two are further twinned by ghostly appearances suggestive of their states as revenants and these identities, I argue, provide a strong link between Coleridge's dramatic temporality and that of the *Trauerspiel* as elucidated by Benjamin's reading of *Hamlet*. Furthermore, drama's role in providing common ground between these two writers can be extended through *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and 'The Storyteller' by way of their shared interest in counsel. The value of the Storyteller's tales rests in his ability to teach or pass down wisdom to his listener, and this talent seems to resonate through the Mariner as the Wedding Guest leaves the poem not only a 'sadder' but also a 'wiser' man (*AM*, l. 624). For both Benjamin and Coleridge, this didactic ability of men to represent wisdom through story comes from the Middle Ages. This sensitivity towards didacticism comes, for both writers, from

---

[26] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text),* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), I, 1, p. 372, l. 13. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *AM*; Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Remorse* (Printed Version) in *Poetical Works: Plays,* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 1227-1326, IV.2.55.

their juxtaposition of theological investigations into truth on equal terms with the philosophical investigation into knowledge. This background informs the thesis in terms of the hermeneutical possibilities that interest both writers and emerge from their interpretations of religious or mystical texts.

Links between Coleridge and modern critical theory have been suggested before. One recent example, Paul Hamilton's *Metaromanticism*, characterises the nature of these suggestions as being led by philosophy and as illustrative reference rather than sustained extrapolation. To return to Steiner's comment at the start of this Introduction, my study intends to return to Benjamin's specific focus upon representation—that which characterises him as a 'metaphysician of metaphor and translation'—in order to investigate the links between the two writers through their literary constellation rather than their philosophical lineage.[27] If their shared philosophical interests are taken from Kantian transcendentalism as the origin of a line of thought progressing through Fichte, Hegel, Freidrich Schlegel, Nietzsche and Habermas, then their literary constellation encompasses the mediaeval drama and ballads of Shakespeare, Goethe and Lessing amongst others. It is a particularly oral and dramatic constellation which, it is hoped, will redeem Coleridge's dramatic theory and assert its relevance within studies of Coleridge, the nineteenth century and literary history in its widest, Benjaminian, sense.

---

[27] Steiner, p. 20.

Chapter 1. Drama and the Dramatic in Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Walter Benjamin

1.1   The Debateable Romantics of Coleridge's Drama

This thesis will explore Samuel Taylor Coleridge's literary interest in drama. A key objective of the study is to review Coleridge's critical interest in this form and make links between this significant area of his literary biography and Walter Benjamin's use of drama and dramatic tropes. In doing so, I hope to highlight the literary significance of Coleridge's engagement with dramatic forms, something that has perhaps been overlooked in spite of the desire to vindicate the Romantic drama over the past three decades. During the course of the thesis, I intend to argue that Walter Benjamin's writing is key to an understanding of the recurrent turn towards the dramatic in Coleridge.[1] However, my aim is not to offer a thorough and complete study of Coleridge's proto-modernism, as exemplified through his coincidence with Benjamin, but to suggest that, by rescuing his dramatic works from long years of subordination to his poetic and philosophic activities (best accomplished by the New Historicist work that started in the mid-1980s) a clearer anticipation of Benjamin's thought comes into evidence.[2] In short, the main focus of the thesis is to uncover a better understanding of Coleridge's appreciation and use of the dramatic form under the conditions of his own social, political and literary context. In doing this, a secondary focus emerges, which is concerned with a Benjaminian critique of historical representation.

---

[1] The term 'dramatic' is used here to acknowledge the fact that Coleridge wrote in many forms other than drama (indeed, only a small percentage of his work is drama) but a significant amount of this other writing salutes the medium of drama in compelling ways. For example, Coleridge's poetry is often described as having dramatic qualities (see Kathleen Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981)) but is not concerned with the dramatic form. Similarly, a large proportion of Coleridge's critical theory is concerned with the theory of drama and the theatre.

[2] The term 'proto-modernism' has been used recently by Julian Knox to highlight elements of Coleridge's work that can be seen to anticipate Walter Benjamin's modern theory. See Julian Knox, 'Self-Portrait in a Concave Mirror: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Art of Translation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, 2011).

Coleridge's theory of drama, although incomplete, marks him as a somewhat compelling voice within the English Romantic literary canon. However, the interest in drama alone is not remarkable enough to set Coleridge apart from his contemporaries, as Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron all committed to producing material for the stage. Terence Allan Hoagwood highlights the paradox within our understanding of Romantic drama and starts to re-evaluate the 'declaration of the failure of Romantic drama as an art form' by highlighting the fact that this assumption is 'accompanied by a dissonant evidence—a growing cultural preoccupation with this supposedly failed genre'.[3] Hoagwood challenges the assumption that Romantic period drama was constricted by the political climate of the era and consequently failed as its writers were not able to invent a style of drama that could overcome their historical location. Instead, he claims that Romantic dramas should not be judged against other dramas produced under different social and political conditions (Elizabethan drama is the obvious example here) but that Romantic writers were, in fact, using traditional dramatic techniques differently from other, more successful, eras. Hoagwood's assertion, that Romantic dramatists often make a theme of 'their own mode of representation', which often, itself, deals with historical events, gives their plays an historical awareness that he describes as 'the historicity of history itself'.[4] Hoagwood's theory of Romantic drama therefore highlights the Romantic movement's involvement with its own social and political historical context and a New Historicist uncovering of this.

However, Coleridge's engagement with drama, when considered over the course of his career, appears to indicate a more profound investigation than Hoagwood implies into the dichotomous relationship between drama and poetry. In other words, his aesthetic

---

[3] Terence Allan Hoagwood, 'Prolegomenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama', *Wordsworth Circle*, 23 (1992), 49-64 (p. 50). Coleridge's public ambiguity surrounding drama is correctly highlighted by Hoagwood as he explains, 'Samuel Taylor Coleridge publicly deprecate[s] the state of theatrical art [but…] continue[s] to write *dramas*' (p. 50; emphasis in original).
[4] Hoagwood, p. 54; p. 57.

theory marks a clear distinction between the forms of poetry and drama (both should have their own theoretical framework) whilst also resisting the subordination of one theory to the other. Coleridge's interest in drama is sustained throughout his career, from early experiments with the form such as his collaboration with Robert Southey on *The Fall of Robespierre* (1794) to his lectures in later years. The continued engagement with dramatic forms and theory, although ostensibly critically subordinate to Coleridge's poetic and philosophic work, may form the starting point of a study of the importance of drama to his literary thought. However, dramatic forms and techniques also assert their presence in other, perhaps more central, areas of his work. During the course of the thesis, I investigate a dramatic discourse within two of Coleridge's major poems, 'The Eolian Harp' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. This works to disrupt the traditional understanding of him as a lyric poet. Of course, the revisions made by Coleridge to his poetry (and especially these poems) allow the reader to follow the poet's evolving mind and his theoretic or literary self-critique. As a general trend, the dramatic mode is more assertive in the early versions of his poetry and becomes overtaken by the poetic idealism of Germany in later versions. Nevertheless, in the case of the *Rime*, Coleridge seems to preserve within the poem a dramatic core—I argue that he does this through the character of the Mariner—even though he adds the argument, the gloss and alters the diction of the piece. Additionally, as Coleridge leaves behind his early radicalism (which would naturally appear to be the point in time at which his political ideals lend themselves to working with drama), his theoretical view of drama, whilst he does not declare it in a comprehensive or fully concluded statement, becomes increasingly sophisticated. The 'Critique of *Bertram*' navigates between Coleridge's discontent with popular theatre as a tool for social reform, a political deprecation of revolutionary France and, most importantly but perhaps less obviously, the declaration that a shift in the generic and formal rules of tragedy is required to support the

continued status of the tragic genre in the Romantic age.[5] The 'Critique' has often been

seen as an example of Coleridge's rushed additions to *Biographia Literaria* as a way of

balancing the length of the two volumes for publication and, as a result, it is treated with

passing interest but has not been given the philosophical or critical importance afforded

to other chapters. Whilst not contesting the fact that 'The Critique' was never originally

intended for inclusion into the *Biographia*, a reading that considers its literary

undercurrent will add to the established vindication—based upon Coleridge's biography

and his views upon social reform—of its place in the work.

Coleridge's use of dramatic tropes is often in greater evidence at points at which he

confronts the theoretical complexities and artistic limitations of the Romantic

movement itself. For example, he may consider the social and philosophical

implications of transcendental philosophy by way of an imagined dialogue with Sara in

early versions of 'The Eolian Harp' and, through revisions of the *Rime* contemplate,

among other things, the immediate, forceful and even horrific nature of speech to a

culture that was becoming increasingly accustomed to the written word. Coleridge turns

to his theory of drama in more detail in the *Lectures on Literature* that start in 1808 and,

as I discuss in Chapter Two, it is possible to discern a theory of drama in these early

lectures that both evolves from his early poetic experiments (especially in 'The Eolian

Harp') and highlights an engagement with aesthetic illusion that is markedly

independent from August Wilhelm Schlegel's theory.[6]

---

[5] I come to this conclusion by coupling 'The Critique of *Bertram*' with *Remorse* rather than *Zapolya,*
which has been the critical tendency. For an account of 'The Critique of *Bertram*' that takes as context
Coleridge's efforts to bring *Zapolya* to production, see Althea Hayter, 'Coleridge, Maturin's *Bertram*, and
Drury Lane' in *New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essays*, ed. by Donald Sultana
(London: Vision Press, 1981), pp. 17-37.
[6] Coleridge's use of Schlegel's ideas is, of course, controversial and will be discussed in more detail in
Chapter Two. I do not want to suggest that Coleridge was not heavily influenced by Schlegel when he
read his work but that Schlegel's work refocused his own Lectures upon poetic language in the dramatic
form rather than allowing him to extend his other concern with the visual nature of dramatic illusion. I
concentrate on the early lectures, especially the 1808 series and certainly before Lecture 9 of the 1811-12
series onwards, where it is generally accepted that his work shows Schlegel's influence.

Therefore, Coleridge's interest in drama does not set him apart from his contemporary writers, but it is perhaps the application of his theory of drama within his works that does. His disappointment with Byron (or at least the Drury Lane Committee) stems from a disappointment with what he perceived to be their critical blind spot in commissioning *Bertram* after he had apparently highlighted the impossibility of staging such a revenge tragedy in his own play, *Remorse*. Similarly, his disagreement with Wordsworth about the *Rime* was based on his own theory of artistic illusion, which was informed by his earlier theory of dramatic illusion. In this sense, it seems reasonable to propose that Coleridge's dramatic theory set him some way apart from his contemporaries and, by extension, the ensuing critical understanding of Romantic drama. It is the perceived notion that Coleridge's dramatic work occupied a position within the boundaries of the social and political attitudes of England in the nineteenth century and, more specifically, within the critical theory of Romantic literature that this thesis explores and, in some cases, challenges.

Here, three distinct aspects of our understanding of Coleridge emerge as points for consideration. Firstly, and above all, Coleridge's engagement with drama has, since the rise of New Historicism, been revived under the auspices of the social and political significance of the form, but its value, I hope to highlight, must also be explained through its origin as a literary phenomenon. Secondly, Coleridge's dramatic techniques or strategies—most notably a tendency towards contemplation over action—stemmed from his reassessment of Shakespeare and the introduction of a new way of understanding drama against the neoclassical critical theory of the eighteenth century. This new approach clears the ground for an engagement with Romantic drama that considers its active involvement within a literary context. Coleridge's dramas and

criticism of drama, therefore, go beyond other writers of the age who, as Hoagwood rightly points out, turn to contemplative modes in order to overcome the politically subversive implications of their dramas in performance. Coleridge's acute and studied awareness of the theories of stage illusion and dramatic character are not solely used to propound a polemic or to circumvent the censorious atmosphere of the English stage, but are used by Coleridge to engage directly with the dramatic practices of his age and provide a perhaps embryonic theory of this new activity of representation. Finally, Coleridge's awareness of the cultural and literary shift experienced across Europe by the Romantic movement and the consequences of this for the tragic genre furnished his own dramatic consideration of this shift, *Remorse*, with a rather radical undercurrent. The shadowy identity of Coleridge's central figure, Alvar, the harbinger of his reworked tragic form for the Romantic age, shows Coleridge exploring in advance of modernism a form of artistic representation that in some ways is not based on an idealist and transcendental philosophy but extends towards a Benjaminian view of history and language that takes as its focal point the inescapably creaturely nature of mankind.

The lack of critical engagement with Coleridge's dramas and dramatic theory, and the ensuing reclamation of this aspect of his work as social and political commentary, has contributed to a misconception of these works in which he is seen to reveal a cogent understanding of the link between art and (political) consciousness. It is for this reason that Benjamin's writing is appropriate to a reading of these areas of Coleridge's *oeuvre* as he both reappraises Romantic theory in 'On the Concept of Critique in Early German Romanticism' and builds upon this reappraisal in order to arrive at his own reworking of the criticism of drama in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Furthermore, the suitability of Benjamin for a reading of the moments at which Coleridge appears to be working outside the limits of Romanticism is emphatically demonstrated in Benjamin's

study of German Tragic Drama as it is the point at which Benjamin himself departs

from Romanticism and starts to formulate a theory of modernity which aptly turns on

drama.

Similarly, attention to Coleridge's dramatic works has tended to overlook the moments

in which his Romantic identity is questioned (sometimes by Coleridge himself) by

explaining the ultimate renunciation of his dramatic exploits as a failure of the writer or

the genre, and not as a signal of the limits of Romanticism itself. In response to this, it

may be beneficial to look into Coleridge's literary and philosophical work in light of his

willingness to confront the very conditions of the structures within which he is working.

The combined presence of dramatic theory and the strong influence of German writers,

which is sustained throughout Coleridge's literary career, sets him apart from other

English Romantic writers of the time.[7] Perhaps the best illustration of this is the

contrasting experiences of Wordsworth and Coleridge during their trip to Germany in

1798. Neither the German literary culture nor its language appeared to affect

Wordsworth and he actually wrote early drafts of the 'Lucy' poems and poetry that

would form sections of *The Prelude* while in Germany. Coleridge, by contrast, threw

himself into learning the German language and produced experimental poetry in

German hexameters. Although it did not materialise, he also planned to write a book on

the German dramatist, Lessing. Robert Southey's well-known review of *The Rime of

the Ancient Mariner* highlights the resistance to the German Gothic in England and

attempts to mark Coleridge's poem with the same kind of melodramatic qualities.[8]

Coleridge, however, would later, in the 'Critique of *Bertram*', display a subtle

understanding of the literary exchange between Germany and England that resulted in

---

[7] Rosemary Ashton provides a critically informed biographical account of Coleridge's experience in
Germany in *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 145-178.
[8] See 'Robert Southey in *Critical Review*, 1798', in *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, ed. by J. R. de J.
Jackson, 2 vols (London: Barnes and Noble, 1968), I, pp. 53-55 (p. 53).

the misapplication of the Gothic into English drama in what was to become a far more nuanced critical understanding of the Gothic genre than Robert Southey achieved in his criticism of the *Rime*.

In addition to this, it appears that a theory of drama lies at the base of much of Coleridge's writing, and it may even occupy a position within key aspects of his poetic and prose output. Kathleen Wheeler, for example, discusses what seems to be a dramatically articulated inclination towards the visual in Coleridge's own poetry, and his thoughts on poetry. She declares that 'the drama of the poem becomes the drama of the reading mind as it seeks metaphors to identify the literal actions in the poetic context with mental actions in the drama of the mind's struggle to apprehend some reality'.[9] Critical engagement with Coleridge's theory of the imagination correctly focuses on the strong influence of German philosophy, but a consideration of his poetic imagination which investigates his interpretation of this philosophy in terms of the visual space of dramatic creativity, especially in his often dramatic way of writing poetry, is less forthcoming. Recurring points of interest such as dreams, illusion, landscape, and the visualisation of images all combine in Coleridge's writing to produce a theoretical language which is as dramatic and visual as it is poetic, and this is evidenced in the considerable time Coleridge dedicates to drama throughout his writing. From the visually striking qualities of poems such as *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (which, again, dramatises deep psychological states) through to the recurrent interest in dreams, especially with regard to the illusionary aspect of theatre in his Lectures and *Biographia Literaria*; in the dramatic nature of some of his most renowned poetry, the evidence of his *Lectures on Literature*, the 'Critique of *Bertram*' in *Biographia Literaria* (Chapter

---

[9] Wheeler, p. 53.

23), and even in his literary hopes, drama and the theory of theatre seem to inhabit Coleridge's thoughts more than perhaps is acknowledged in Coleridge criticism. The links between Coleridge and Benjamin through their mutual interest in dramatic modes of writing strengthens the case for a view of Coleridge as a writer who was constantly aware of the historical significance of art and who maintained an involvement with its social influence. The connection between these two writers perhaps emerges through their initial interest in German Romanticism: whilst Coleridge relies heavily upon A.W. Schlegel's work in his *Lectures on Literature*, Benjamin's critical theory also originates from the Jena Romantic movement. My thesis will concentrate on Benjamin's writings on drama, especially *On the Origin of German Tragic Drama*, rather than his dissertation, 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', as the thesis engages primarily with similar issues to those within Coleridge's dramatic writing. However, before a direct comparison between Coleridge and Benjamin can be made, it is necessary to situate Romantic drama both within the context of Romanticism and within the critical traditions that have problematised the form since. The two themes that emerge from a study of Romantic drama's uneasy identity refer to the dichotomy of theatre and drama that emerged in the nineteenth century, when the idea of a mental theatre was introduced.[10] Criticism of Romantic drama's theatrical identity has often revolved around the politics of visual artistic representation, whereas criticism of internalised or perhaps closeted forms of drama often approach the theory of genre indirectly. By considering these two areas of Romantic drama criticism in the following sections of this introduction, I hope to provide a contextual backdrop to show later in the thesis how Coleridge's dramatic

---

[10] The term 'mental theatre' was coined by Byron to provide an apt description of his poetic dramas. A key study of this type of drama is Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (London: Pennsylvania University State Press, 1988). Coleridge's work is not considered in this study, highlighting the incompatibility of Coleridge's dramatic writing with the idea of a purely mental theatre.

criticism and practice can be viewed as engaging directly with issues of the visual and genre.

1.2   The Visual in Romantic Drama

The incongruity between the popular culture of sentimental and spectacular performances that owe much to the Gothic and the prevailing intellectual movement that favoured internalisation and isolation has, from the start, been noted as a major reason for the decline of serious drama in the Romantic age. Theatre has often been associated with action and revolution whilst drama can be understood in terms of reflection, contemplation and something closer to a lyrical retirement away from political realities. A major example of this lies in Terry Otten's study of Romantic drama, in which he concludes that the nineteenth century brought about the desertion of the stage as the leading poets chose to write 'experimental dramas', which were unsuitable for performance.[11] When he agrees with Allardyce Nicoll that 'not one [poet] produced a dramatic masterpiece which can be looked upon as a starting point for further art development,' he fails to take Coleridge into consideration.[12] As a result, Coleridge's greatest commercial success and perhaps the most considered response to the dislocation of Romanticism and drama seen in the nineteenth century, *Remorse*, is overlooked. Otten reads the assumed failure of English Romantic writers to produce tragedies suitable for performance as the result of the shift in cultural and spiritual values of the age and comes to the conclusion that, although these poets were aware of the need to accommodate this shift with a new dramatic form, their only answer was to abandon the stage:

---

[11] Terry Otten, *The Deserted Stage: The Search for Form in the Nineteenth Century* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 4.
[12] Allardyce Nicoll, *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, 6 vols (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955), IV, p. 63 (quoted in Otten, p. 148).

> Indeed, only when the stage was deserted, emptied of sets used
> superficially and emptied of actions used merely to advance a story,
> only then could subjective drama occur in which the hero created the
> set and the characters which mirror his inner states and conflicts.[13]

Coleridge's plays offer an alternative to this conclusion precisely because they envision setting and action as an essential part of their staging. Of the four plays Coleridge completed, only *The Fall of Robespierre* (a joint project with Robert Southey) can be considered a verse drama. Neither *Osorio* nor *Zapolya* fulfilled Coleridge's aspirations for their dramatic production but the revised *Osorio*, *Remorse*, was staged successfully at Drury Lane in the provinces and was taken to America. *Zapolya* missed reaching the Drury Lane stage but it did run for ten nights at the Surrey Theatre. Coleridge certainly did not abandon the stage, and this thesis proposes that instead he staged the era's major dramatic theme, the death of tragedy, as the key artistic idea in his dramas. As a result, Coleridge combines in his plays poetic contemplation with a will to action and verbal and imaginative representation with actual stage scenery. Finally, he presents to his audience the conflicting modes of tragic drama based in transcendental certainty and the anxieties borne by a new subjective age represented by its emergent modern drama.

In *Remorse*, as I will discuss in greater detail in chapter four, Coleridge's distinctly reflexive and inactive character, Alvar, becomes an ambivalent force in the play when we recognise that he is also attributed expressive and theatrical characteristics. His 'commanding eye' (*R*, IV.ii.55) links him directly with a will to 'impress [his] preconceptions on the world'.[14] This commanding nature, the underlying potential in

---

[13] Otten, pp. 148-9.

[14] Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), I, p. 32. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *BL*.
Coleridge's formulation of the commanding and absolute genius is an important factor in the understanding of his theory of drama. It has been discussed at length, and with a focus on the politics of spectacle, by Julie Carlson in *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994). Joseph Donohue discusses it in terms of Coleridge's treatment of Macbeth's fancy and imagination in his account of analysis of Shakespeare's characters in

the character of Alvar to project his inner self outwards, is perhaps surprising as he is seen as the poetic foil to his political brother and anti-hero of the play. However, it reveals a key characteristic of Coleridge's dramatic theory, one that also supports the view that he did not ascribe to the practice of closeting drama and that he gave it equal artistic value to that of poetry. Coleridge's notion of a commanding genius, whilst it is the more restless and uneasy type of genius, stands next to the ideal of the absolute genius that is associated with poets such as Shakespeare and Milton. In other words, a commanding nature is the dramatic manifestation of the (Romantic) imagination and, when writing about drama, Coleridge treats it as a compelling form of creativity in itself.

Coleridge marks this commanding nature of characters (and their creators) as the identifiable feature of dramatic creativity, since it always works towards the realisation of ideas. Whereas the absolute genius is given over to poetic idealism that 'rest[s] content between thought and reality' (*BL*, I, p. 32) and is connected with aesthetics, the commanding genius is connected to politics and worldly affairs. This connection between politics and drama through the commanding genius has important implications for Coleridge's dramatic theory as he identifies an aspect of his theory of the imagination that looks at drama in its own terms and not as the discarded literature of Romantic aesthetics. The idea of commanding genius forms one part of Coleridge's critical writing that displays the characteristics of Paul Hamilton's term, metaromanticism, as it both occupies a position within the Romantic doctrine of imagination and extends beyond this into a social and political milieu. The commanding genius is just one aspect of Coleridge's dramatic theory that sets it apart from poetry. Coleridge's engagement with dramatic illusion, especially in the early

---

Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970). My analysis of the terms in Chapter Two will chart a territory between these commentaries.

lectures, secures the variety of dramatic texts he produced as part of a dramatic theory

that should be recognised as a distinctly separate practice to his poetic theory. I

elaborate on these themes in Chapters Two, Three and Four, but in the following

sections of this introduction, I aim to discuss the historical and critical contexts that

support a reading of Coleridge's dramatic works as important to his body of work and,

more generally, to a better understanding of the radically modern nature of Romantic

drama.

The paucity of criticism of Coleridge's dramatic works and the more recent attempts to

reconcile these works within the context of the Romantic tradition often support the

view of the artistic devaluation of Romantic drama.[15] The intellectual desire to produce

works which stood in equal terms to Shakespeare provided Romantic writers with a

compelling motivation for dramatic production, yet the political and social conditions of

an increasingly middle class theatre-going public and the pressures of the French

Revolution, which owed much of its nature to theatricalism, served to make these

writers wary of such an overtly political medium. The physicality of the stage and its

actors added an uncontrollably real dimension to the poet's drama which threatened to

transform his 'self-sufficing' thoughts into frightening political realities (*BL*, I, p. 31).

Therefore, the critical view of the dramatic identity of the nineteenth century often gives

it two distinct faces: popular theatre, a low form of entertainment which held little

literary value and was reliant on spectacular staging, and poetic drama, which was

written for contemplation rather than action and was not intended for performance. The

legacy of this assessment of Romantic drama has caused an ellipsis in studies of the

---

[15] The paradox between the nineteenth century's popular interest in theatre and its intellectual interest in this medium is laid out by Hoagwood in 'Prologemenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama'. The troubled identity of Romantic drama and the paradoxical relationship between Romantic drama and Romantic theatre focuses much of the critical attention on Coleridge's dramatic work. See Julie Carlson, 'An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform', *Modern Philology*, 86, (1988), 22-33.

nineteenth-century canonical poets' dramas (particularly those of Coleridge) in favour

of their poetic and philosophical writing. Critics such as Julie Carlson, Jeffrey N. Cox,

Terence Allan Hoagwood and Frederick Burwick have noted this critical gap and have,

fairly recently, opened up research into drama as a literary form that was taken seriously

by the Romantic poets. In doing so, these critics have emphasised the significance of

drama in Coleridge's thought.

However, in spite of the resurgence of interest in Romantic drama, critical reception of

Coleridge's plays has changed emphasis only slightly. Contemporary attitudes towards

his plays judged them as unsuitable for the stage due to the fact that they lacked visual

spectacle and did not embrace the popular Gothic sentimentality of the period.[16] This

nineteenth-century tendency to categorise drama into popular Gothic and closeted forms

of theatre respectively has prompted more recent interpretations of these plays as

evidencing an anxiety surrounding the effects of the Romantic imagination on stage.

The polarisation of theatre and drama that occurred in the nineteenth century—the

former of which seeks to visualise and externalise thought and the latter of which is

concerned with internalisation and imagination—offers a simple explanation as to why

the canonical poets appeared to write poetic dramas that 'contributed to rather than

arrest[ed] the decline' of staged drama of the period.[17] A double reaction of the major

poets against the 'sickly and stupid German tragedies' that were becoming

commonplace in English theatres and the more complex theoretical movement from the

neoclassical adherence to the formal rules of tragedy to a modern framework of

subjective reality meant that both the social values and literary consciousness of the

major poets became alienated from the theatre.[18] Otten explains this:

---

[16] *Remorse* was the only play of Coleridge's to reach the stage without problems. *Osorio* was rejected
(then became *Remorse*) and *Zapolya*, whilst it was performed, was haunted by the circumstance of its
rejection at Drury Lane and Coleridge's controversial 'Critique of *Bertram*'.
[17] Otten. p. 3.
[18] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads*, in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical
Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 241-272 (p. 249).

> In rejecting eighteenth-century empiricism and positing the self at the centre of reality, nineteenth-century writers necessarily discarded conventional artistic forms. Traditional modes of understanding were no longer functional in the light of the intellectual and cultural revolution taking place.[19]

Otten rightly identifies the major reason for the desertion of the stage by major Romantic poets as a conflict between Classical dramatic structure conditioned by forces that lie beyond the individual (in the play this is identified as plot or fate) and the emergent modern structural immanence of plot that grows out of the subjectivity of its characters.[20] This structural conflict, I hope to argue during the course of the thesis, is recognised by Coleridge who, in *Remorse*, stages it through the conflicting attitudes of the two brothers, Ordonio and Alvar. Ordonio is presented as a character whose belief system is conditioned by the classical framework of divine retribution whilst Alvar is a character of modern values as he constantly resists the revenge format of Ordonio (and, on a political level, The Inquisition) in search of redemption, in Alvar's case, through the self-awareness that remorse brings.   By presenting the ideological tension between the brothers as thematic, Coleridge makes visual on stage the conflict between vengeance and redemption—or revenge and remorse—and transforms it into an exploration of the tragic genre. Through Alvar, who is the personification of a modern and redemptive set of cultural values, Coleridge puts forward the potential for a new Romantic tragic genre. Accordingly, Coleridge's *Remorse* presents an innovative examination of the Romantic turn to subjectivity and the effects of this upon the form of tragedy in the Romantic age. Crucially, this is achieved not only through critical theory but also within the textual fabric of Coleridge's own dramatic creation. The awareness

---

[19] Otten, p. 4.

[20] See Otten, pp. 7-10. Otten uses Coleridge's theoretical analysis of the organic nature of Shakespearean drama in the 1818 Lectures to highlight his point. However, he does not pursue this line of enquiry by analysing how Coleridge started to apply and experiment with this theoretical view of Romantic drama in his own plays. Had he done so, he may have seen Coleridge as a poet who was aware of the position he described and who, because of this, had the potential at least to circumvent it.

Coleridge shows of the effects of the Romantic movement upon the tragic genre and his resulting incorporation of this artistic change into his own dramas means that his dramatic work coincides with Benjamin's explanation of the German *Trauerspiel*.[21] However, before considering the implications for tragic genre of the Romantics' 'new [subjective] concept of reality' and Coleridge's dramatic attempts to resolve this 'structural impasse', a consideration of the effect it had upon the concept of visual — or theatrical — representation in general is required.[22] Critics such as Mary Jacobus and Julie Carlson have suggested that Romantic plays, including those of Coleridge, stand as part of an aesthetic treatise against the theatre in the Romantic period precisely due to the fact that dramatic action in these plays evolves from the mind of the character rather than the events of the plot.[23] As a result of this, a greater consideration of the moral integrity of the imagination, and how to correctly present the imagination's 'tide of unlimited meaning' in a visual medium that most closely mimics reality, becomes a key aspect of dramatic criticism in this period.[24]

Mary Jacobus' reading of the reception of *Macbeth* and the anxieties around staging it in nineteenth-century English theatres takes the issue of visual representation as its central focus. The main direction of her argument is that these anxieties became

---

[21] Perhaps the point at which Benjamin's description of the *Trauerspiel* genre and Coleridge's dramatic experimentation in *Remorse* coincide most strongly is the assertion that the action of the play comes from within characters of the play. This differs from a traditional concept of tragedy where an influence (such as fate or the Gods) initiates action from beyond the parameters of the stage. However, it can be noted that in *The Poetics*, Aristotle maintained that the tragic plot was initiated by a character through their choice to act (or even not to act). This decisive action (*prohairesis*) is perhaps overlooked by traditional interpretations of classical tragedy and thus serves to make the distinction between Romantic and modern versions of tragedy (such as Coleridge and Benjamin's) and classical tragedy wider than first assumed.

[22] Otten, p. 4.

[23] In particular, see Mary Jacobus, 'That Great Stage Where Senators Perform: *Macbeth* and the Politics of the Romantic Theater', *Studies in Romanticism*, 22 (1983), 353-87, and Julie Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism*. Carlson qualifies Jacobus' view of a Romantic withdrawal from the stage and argues that Romantic writers did consider stage performance when writing their plays. Hoagwood extends the argument against viewing Romantic plays as essentially solitary in their creation and reception by transposing the distinction between (mental) drama and (staged) theatre into an opposition between the private domain and the public domain. See Hoagwood, p. 53.

[24] Robert Langbaum, *The Poetry of Experience: The Dramatic Monologue in Modern Literary Tradition* (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 227, quoted in Otten p. 5.

symptomatic of the bias towards a presentation of contemplative characters on the nineteenth-century stage, which resulted in a malaise of serious theatre in this age. Jacobus locates anxieties of theatrical aesthetics not in a simple distinction between performed actions in the theatre and the (in)action of thought in the reading mind but in the fact that these issues become inextricably linked in the historical and literary contexts of the French Revolution and Romantic drama. The theme of political usurpation transposed into theatrical aesthetics as the usurpation of reality by a character's imagination within the play makes *Macbeth* a particularly apt expression of the dramatic issues playwrights struggled with in the nineteenth century. The play traces the transformation of Macbeth's aspirations to power into his transgressive deeds and takes as its theme the 'representation of desire' through an engagement with visual illusion.[25] In one sense, Macbeth's usurpation of Duncan is analogous to dramatic performance as it entails the externalisation of thought, or the making real of imagined potential, a point that Romantic dramatists and critics found problematic in the context of the political upheaval in France. Macbeth externalises his thoughts of regicide first by way of the supernatural Weird Sisters and then the through his own deluded conjuring of the dagger which leads him to murder Duncan. The structural framework of this play, in which events are implemented by a the supernatural force of the Weird Sisters, prevents the play from crossing over from a classical model to a Romantic model of tragedy as Macbeth is still considered to be acting in response to a force beyond his own subjectivity. This supports Otten's perceptive assertion that 'adopting Elizabethan dramaturgy to express modern subjective matter' was misguided as it was 'too like grafting an alien myth onto a new vision'.[26] Nonetheless, its theme of the illusion of visual representation, most obvious in the dagger scene, feeds directly into Coleridge's distinction between illusion and delusion in his dramatic theory.

---

[25] Jacobus, p. 355.
[26] Otten, p. 7.

The development of Macbeth's desire from thinking (imagining himself as king) to seeing (perceiving the dagger or being deceived by the potential it represents) to doing (acting upon these delusions and performing Duncan's murder) has a dual effect: his unnatural act creates political corruption and social decay but also the origin of the act in illusion (or, as Coleridge distinguishes it, delusion) is recognised, as Jacobus points out, even by Macbeth himself, as evidence of the usurpation of imagination over reality. In this sense, the visual representation of an idea reaches a potentially catastrophic climax as it threatens to overwhelm and cancel out the reality from which it came, leaving only itself, which refers back to nothing: the reality it has extinguished. Macbeth's final speech sees, in theatrical terms, the nihilistic effects of an imagination that is allowed to usurp reality:

> Life's but a walking shadow; a poor player,
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage,
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury;
> Signifying nothing.[27]

This theme of the usurpation of reality by representation and the political horror it engenders, Jacobus argues, becomes 'contemporized' in the nineteenth-century theatre as writers start to consider the 'inherent theatricality of the imagination itself'.[28] As the revolutionary desire of French citizens is played into reality with similar catastrophic results to Macbeth's unnatural act of regicide, this transformation of the revolutionary idea into practice seems to highlight also the danger of staging imagined political action to an audience that already has these ideas in focus. Lady Macbeth brings this most commanding aspect of theatrical representation to the fore when she rejects the

---

[27] William Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 975-999 (p. 998), V.5.ll. 23-27. All further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *M*.
[28] Jacobus, pp. 356-7.

'ignorant present' (*M*, I.4.55) and intervenes upon the work of 'fate and metaphysical aid […] / to have [Macbeth] crowned withall' (*M*, I.4.28-9). The unnatural manipulation of time in order to 'feel now / The future in the instant' is a characteristic trait of the usurper whose desires override reality in order to achieve his goal (*M*, I.4.55-6). To invoke the words of another of Shakespeare's potential usurpers, the 'strong imagination' displayed by Lady Macbeth and Macbeth in the power to visualise their desires, which results in delusory action, becomes an allegory for the too strong imagination of the theatre and its potential to incite delusory activity in its public.[29] As Jacobus states, 'the conjunction of theatrical and political concerns in the French Revolution (concerns figured also in the disordered hierarchies of *Macbeth*) became for Romantic writers a paradigm of their own unease about the power of the imagination'.[30]

This assessment of the Romantic attitude towards the theatre provides a convincing argument for interpreting the major poets' experiments with drama as an anti-theatrical project which also highlights the limitations of the theatre as an aesthetic form that favours representation above contemplation. As Mary Jacobus states, 'the metaphysics of presence might be said to constitute a distinct element in Romantic prejudice against the theatre' precisely because the act of representation in theatre 'is itself a kind of usurpation' which overrides the absolute and 'self-sufficing inner world' of the poetic imagination.[31] In this context, the balance of interest in these plays has unfailingly been weighted towards overarching Romantic ideologies which support an anti-theatrical lyricism intended to limit the imagination's presence on stage, due to its troubling potential to make real ideological possibilities that should remain theoretical. Consequently, as Terence Allan Hoagwood intimates, this view elevates the political

---

[29] William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 1167-1189 (p. 1176), II.1.l. 213.
[30] Jacobus, p.357.
[31] Jacobus, p. 375.

considerations in producing theatre above the aesthetic practices of the Romantic poets. Hoagwood declares that the 'central fact' of Romantic drama is the 'displacement of [contemporary] revolutionary socio-political content' which is 'displaced symbolically [...] across exotic, magical, or historically removed surface content'.[32] In other words, contemporary political theory and historical events are fictionalised or mythologised in order to submerge a prevailing political ideology within the plays. Consequently, the notion that common features of Romanticism (such as the imagination and symbolic language) are used in drama to serve political ends (rendering these plays inactive) and not as formal devices in their own right is perpetuated as experiments in dramatic representation turn on historical events rather than the writers' theoretical engagements with their epoch's revolution in literary theory.[33] However, Hoagwood's essay proposes an alternative view in which the act of turning action into contemplation of action on stage is connected more to a self-reflexive view of the historical condition of Romantic theatre itself than a universal suspicion of the aesthetics of theatrical representation.

In order to make this argument, Hoagwood returns again to a point originally made by George Steiner and articulated by Jeffrey Cox as Romantic philosophy's project of 'secularising the redemptive vision' of classical tragedy.[34] Cox explains that Romantic drama 'arise[s] from the ashes of traditional tragedy' and it can therefore 'no longer draw its plots from myth'.[35] An important consequence of this is that the Romantic, or

---

[32] Hoagwood, p. 51.

[33] A notable exception to this is Julie Carlson's study of Coleridge's dramatic interests in *In the Theatre of Romanticism*. Carlson identifies Coleridge's dramatic theory as not only conditioned by political forces but also as a time at which he is directly engaged with a theory of the imagination that can be applied to drama. Important aspects of this theory are the consideration of illusion and delusion and the willing suspension of disbelief, both of which are focused upon the audience's ability to understand the difference between feeling the artistic effects of drama whilst maintaining a knowledge that the drama is an illusion.

[34] Jeffrey Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England and France* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1987), p. 4.

[35] Cox, p. 22.

modern, man 'lives in historical time, where the future seems uncharted, ready to be shaped by the human will'.[36] In applying this to Romantic drama, Hoagwood highlights the idea that traditional dramatic representations of historic events present humanity underneath the backdrop of a divine eternity that is always beyond human knowledge and therefore operates in the play as a symbolic and external point of reference. He explains this in relation to *The Tempest*:

> Prospero's famous speeches of metadramatic metaphor [...] locate his (and "our") temporality against a stable screen of eternity; the mutability of the pageant proceeds across a stage whose durability outside the temporal frustrations of the play of the world is asserted, and more, assumed.[37]

In contrast, the Romantic ideals of perfectibility and perception question and destabilise this 'stable screen of eternity' by placing it also in the creative mind of the individual.[38] As a result, illusion (in this case the illusion of the pageant) becomes subject to its creation by the human mind and not, as in the case of Shakespeare's drama, subject to the ability or inability of the human mind to see it. As a consequence of this, the practice that Romantic dramatists undertook to fictionalise their own historical circumstances is as much concerned with the correct use of fiction or figurative devices in historical representation as it is with a sublimated political agenda. Hoagwood explains this:

> Not only do Romantic dramas, for example, come to us under the condition of their own historicity; they *thematize* historicity as a condition. What appears in the narrowly factual domain of political history as a dissolution of traditional (feudal and monarchical hierarchies) replicates itself in epistemological terms as a dissolution of the categories of certitude and, in aesthetics, a problematizing of the adequacy (or possibility) of representation.[39]

---

[36] Cox, p. 22.
[37] Hoagwood, p. 60.
[38] Hoagwood, p. 60.
[39] Hoagwood, p. 57.

Jacobus' assertion is repeated here, in that the activity of taking history as a theme in Romantic drama lays open the suggestion of the dangers of representing historical events on stage and proposes an anti-theatrical resolution to the problem. However, Hoagwood's interpretation also suggests that Romantic dramatists did not simply recoil from the stage but undertook the task of creating dramas that considered the problem of theatrical representation as part of their dramaturgical structure. The themes of the truthful representation of events and the ability to see or hear historical truth lie at the heart of both *Remorse* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and become the central focus of the modern turn in Coleridge's dramatic theory, which makes 'character rather than plot the soul of action'.[40] As Jeffrey Cox states:

> Romantic drama arose with the modern historical sense, the sense that history involves not only the past but a continuum running from the long ago through the present and into the distant future, the sense that this historical continuum might not follow a divine order and that the task of granting significance to history might fall to man himself.[41]

In the following section, I will discuss the critical trend since the 1980s, which has taken up this idea that Romanticism 'grant[ed]' a greater 'significance to history' than traditional Romantic scholarship has tended to afford.[42] The re-examination of the historical dimension of Romanticism that cuts through its aesthetical dimension (informed most notably by the theory of the imagination) has been underway for the past thirty years and has provided new insights into the social and political implications of the literature of the era. This thesis intends to utilise this critical stance to revive Coleridge's Romantic drama against the backdrop of a specific theory of the representation of history in dramatic forms. In turn, by examining this element of

---

[40] Otten, p. 5.
[41] Cox, p. 25.
[42] Cox, p. 25.

Coleridge's literary theory, I hope to strengthen this critical arena by rediscovering and reasserting the most historical of Coleridge's literary forms: drama.

1.3   The Generic in Romantic Drama

Mary Jacobus' analysis of the Romantic reception of *Macbeth* represents traditional scholarship that takes for granted the generic grounding of Romantic drama in classical and Renaissance tragedy and subsequently highlights how performance became limited under the thematic treatment of spectacle and revolution. Aware of this anxiety of influence at work within Romantic period drama, Greg Kucich summarizes the ideological constraint placed upon the artistic freedom of the English theatre, stating that, 'ever since Burke sparked the controversy over the French Revolution as theatrical spectacle gone out of control […] the playhouse itself [became epitomised] as the revolutionary drama playing itself out on the world stage of Europe'.[43] Over the past three decades there has been a critical movement away from this (self-) limiting view of Romantic drama that allows for a revival of it under other such contexts as aesthetic theory, social practices and the critical culture of the nineteenth century.[44]

The rise of New Historicism in the 1980s seems to have cleared the ground for an increased interest in Romantic drama — and, more specifically, offered an attempt to arrive at a comprehensive theory of Romantic drama. Critical examinations of Romantic drama in the early 1990s began to highlight a previously unacknowledged

---

[43] Greg Kucich, '"A Haunted Ruin": Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition and the Critical Establishment', in *British Romantic Drama: Historical and Critical Essays*, ed. by Terence Allan Hoagwood and Daniel P. Watkins (London: Associated University Presses, 1998), pp. 56-83 (p. 72).
[44] Although all of the following consider all three contextual categories stated, see Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991), Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance*, Erika Gottlieb, *Lost Angels of a Ruined Paradise: Themes of Cosmic Strife in Romantic Tragedy* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1981) pp. 45-71; for aesthetic theory; see Daniel P. Watkins, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 1993) and Hoagwood, 'Prologemenon' for social practices; and see Kucich, '"A Haunted Ruin"' for critical culture.

artistic engagement with the political and historical conditions under which Romantic

era writers were writing. Perhaps more importantly, they attempted to call into question

Thomas Lovell Beddoes' contemporary declaration that, 'just now the drama is a

haunted ruin!'.[45] This influenced ensuing critical thought up to George Steiner's *The*

Death of Tragedy, which suggested that the Romantic age did not support the

production of serious drama. However, the increasing critical will to vindicate

Romantic drama was supported by two influential studies of drama published in 1987:

Frederick Burwick's *Illusion and the Drama* and Jeffrey Cox's *In the Shadows of*

Romance. Both focus on Romantic dramas and their theories of aesthetics and illusion,

and have played an important role in highlighting the unique identity of this literary

form. Burwick's study offers a sustained view of Coleridge's original insight into

dramatic illusion and Cox's considers the relocation of the sense of the tragic from the

plot or action of the play to the character in Romantic drama.

With a sensitivity towards the material culture of the nineteenth century, New

Historicist practice returned Romantic drama to its nineteenth-century social and

political contexts and freed it from the theoretical models of both Romanticism (its

contemporary literary theory) and classicism (the established critical formula for

drama), under which it has struggled to be understood as a significant literary form.[46]

---

[45] Thomas Lovell Beddoes, *The Letters of Thomas Lovell Beddoes*, ed. by Edmund Gosse (London: Elkin Matthews and John Lane, 1894), p.51 quoted in Greg Kucich '"A Haunted Ruin": Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition and the Critical Establishment', in Wordsworth Circle, 23, II, 1992, pp. 64-76 (p. 64). The image of Romantic drama as a 'ruin' is relevant to this study as it coincides with a Benjaminian consideration of the ruin as a form of representation. Appropriately, the image of Romantic drama that has been propounded from the nineteenth century onwards has lent itself to an interpretation in terms of Benjamin's notion of the ruin that owes much to the originally Romantic conception of the fragment.

[46] Daniel P. Watkins argues that this type of criticism can be taken to a more extreme position as historical materialism. See Watkins, *A Materialist Critique*. Watkins' view is that historical materialism should be the prevailing form of criticism through which to view Romantic drama because traditional criticism (which favoured a view of Romanticism as largely lyrical) failed to discover the 'strong features of Romantic drama' (p.3). His aim is to return Romantic drama to its historical significance, which stems from new social and political ideologies, rather than its literary significance as a working through of these ideologies that Romantic writers used in a different way to lyric forms. Whilst this is a persuasive account of Romantic drama from a perspective that goes some way to highlighting the importance of drama that has previously occupied a marginalised position in Romantic studies, this type of reading

Where traditional criticism cited social and political forces as reasons for the lack of interest and even poor quality of dramas in the canonical poets, it did not combine these contextual considerations with accounts of how the Romantic poets attempted to overcome these forces in dramatic writing. As Kucich and others have highlighted, Romantic writers showed a consistent interest in drama throughout the period. New Historians and Historical Materialists have moved the study of Romantic drama on by embedding it in social and political ideologies, but in doing so they have continued to downplay its literary significance through the employment of these more sympathetic alternative critical frameworks. However, with special regard to Coleridge (whose *Osorio/Remorse* is the only play to be considered across the books of Steiner, Cox, Burwick and Watkins) I want to build on the work done by Cox and Burwick, who have started to uncover a theory emerging in the nineteenth century that treated the aesthetics of drama as something separate to, but not exclusive from, the poetic aesthetics of the Romantic movement. Furthermore, the theory of drama emerging within Coleridge's work placed some distance between the prevailing historical context of Romantic aesthetics and the prevailing generic theory of classical tragedy.   It is this understanding of Romantic drama in terms of a new aesthetic theory, which started to accommodate the social and political dynamics of the nineteenth century, that I believe is particularly relevant to Coleridge's dramatic practices and criticism.

George Steiner's landmark study of the decline of the tragic genre since the Elizabethan age provides a thorough account of the limitations encountered by Romantic writers in their attempt to produce a second dramatic age in England. Unlike the more recent

---

serves to dislocate the form from its undeniable literary context, especially when we consider that the Romantics themselves were grappling with a theory of drama in order to reconcile the form within their Romantic aesthetic ideology. Where Watkins does not distinguish Cox and Burwick from the traditional line of scholarship that views Romantic drama in lyric terms rather than in its own terms, I see them both handling, in different ways, a dramatic theory of genre and illusion that connects with but also departs from the traditional view of Romantic egotism and imagination. I am in agreement with Watkins that Richardson's *A Mental Theater* is more closely in line with traditional scholarship.

studies cited above and throughout this thesis, Steiner does not question the assumption that the quality of drama in England had deteriorated since the end of the Renaissance period and, instead, offers a sensitive portrayal of the reasons for this deterioration. However, Steiner's study is important not simply for its content but also for its specific focus upon tragedy, rather than drama in general. As such, it serves as a perceptive counterpoint to previous commentaries upon the poor state of the English drama. Greg Kucich confirms the need for more precision in the critical explication of Romantic drama during his discussion of the Romantics' attitudes towards the closeting of drama. He notes that all the major writers who have been ascribed with an 'antitheatrical prejudice' were, in fact, 'passionately engaged with the life of the stage'; for example, Lamb 'was an enthusiastic spectator' of many widely varied plays and Coleridge 'concocted a staggering array of potential dramatic projects' from a tragi-comedy to a pantomime. This enthusiasm for stage performance from two writers, despite their commitment to the inwardness of the imagination, suggests that they were tempted towards 'nonrepresentational' drama only when they considered tragedy.[47]

Kucich's focus upon the way in which the English Renaissance dramatic tradition came to be translated into Romantic dramatic practice reveals a view of this practice that reasserts its significance as a literary form. As he states, the 'radical shifts in material culture, critical theory, and aesthetic practice' of the nineteenth century gave rise to 'increasingly sophisticated evocations of mental conflict' within Romantic drama and also brought about the attempt to reconstruct the great achievements of 'traditional drama' within the Romantic era.[48] Importantly, this shift of emphasis from national and political associations of the English theatre with France and revolution to the English playwrights' attempts to recreate the fertile heritage of the Renaissance dramatic

---

[47] Kucich, p. 61.
[48] Kucich, p. 57.

tradition under their new models of Romantic aesthetic theory and practice suggests a need to consider further the ways in which Romantic writers were altering the characteristics of the drama for aesthetic (as well as political) purposes. As Kucich's essay starts to conclude, to write drama in the Romantic age was to undertake the 'impossibly divided assignment' of taking the dramatic model of one cultural epoch and recreating it in an era with entirely different cultural characteristics.[49] This approach to drama in the Romantic age explains certain paradoxes regarding Romantic writers' dramatic practices, such as their simultaneous reverence for and withdrawal from the stage, their attempts to copy the language and structure of Elizabethan drama when all other Romantic forms were engaged with breaking free from the restrictive structures of past literary epochs and the discrepancy between the critical dismissal of closet drama and the number of closet dramas produced. However, Kucich also points out that the strategy of closeting drama 'became a way of indirectly maintaining links with England's dramatic tradition while avoiding the severe pressures of confronting the mighty dead on their own terms'.[50] Again, this suggests the need for more focus upon the use of nonrepresentational drama. More specifically, it reveals a creative activity used by the Romantics, which allowed them to experiment with the form in order to arrive at their own generic reclassification of Romantic tragic drama before returning it to the stage as the reworked Renaissance tragedy of their own time.

Steiner's account of the decline of tragedy since the Elizabethan age and of the conscious struggle to restore this genre to all its former glory in the Romantic age is a good foundation on which to build this type of study. His argument turns on the idea that 'the Romantic vision of life is non-tragic', a statement that refers to the theme of remorse that appears, he asserts, in works from Coleridge to Wagner as 'an evasion of

---

[49] Kucich, p.71.
[50] Kucich, p. 71.

the tragic which is central to the Romantic temper'.[51] His analysis of *Remorse* concludes with the point that even though Coleridge shows a perceptive understanding of the artistic shortcomings of the ideal of remorse when applied to tragedy, this tragedy falters in the final scene as his tragic hero becomes simply a remorseful character, dying with the cry of 'atonement!'.[52] As Steiner states, even for Coleridge, who is aware that 'the entire notion of redemptive remorse is something fraudulent [...] the prevailing mythology proved too strong' and his play languishes in a melodramatic state of 'near tragedy'.[53] This conclusion that Romantic dramatic practices fell short of the model of tragedy rightly indicates the cultural shift away from divine judgement and towards social justice. However, Steiner continues to view this shift as a failing, in artistic terms, to arrive at tragedy because of his emphasis upon the resolution of the play, in which he highlights that Coleridge sticks doggedly to his theme of remorse in order to create a resolution that goes against the grain of the structural unity of his revenge tragedy. This reading can be qualified, however, by taking into account the fact that Coleridge's play embodies the warring ideals of revenge and remorse through its characters, themes and language. In fact, the play is ostensibly Coleridge's working through of this problem as it has presented itself in the Romantic Age. In terms of the resolution, Ordonio dies at the hands of Alhadra, a character who represents the traditional revenge format of tragedy. Not only has she personal reasons for vengeance upon Ordonio, who killed her husband, but she is also fighting politically for the cause of her oppressed brethren, the Moors. What appears to be at first victory for Alvar in his quest for Ordonio's remorse actually reveals Coleridge's conscious choice to turn his back on a remorseful outcome due to Alhadra's actions. Furthermore, it is revealed

---

[51] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 128; p. 133.

[52] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Remorse* (Printed Version) in *Poetical Works: Plays,* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 1227-1326, V.1.254. Further references to this edition are given as parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *R*.

[53] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 131-33.

that, throughout the play, Alvar was aware that his hopes would not come to fruition as 'his word was pledged to [Alhadra]' (*R* V.1.258). Under this light, Coleridge's play can be viewed as an experiment in dramatic form and genre in the modern Romantic age and his conclusions, far from promoting the decline of traditional tragedy, reveal his awareness of the complex challenges of bringing tragic drama into a modern age. Challenges which, ultimately, in the case of *Remorse* and Alhadra's characteristically tragic resolution, are unassailable.

Over the next paragraphs, I consider Coleridge's view of Romantic tragedy as part of a larger artistic shift away from classical tragedy (and, furthermore, a revolt from the rules of neoclassicism) and towards a new model for tragedy that attempts to build a credible version of the tragic in the Romantic age. This type of tragedy focuses upon the historical character of the individual and his inescapable subjectivity as opposed to the classical framing of a tragic hero who, in his fateful death, is at once punished and released from subjectivity. In reframing tragedy in this way, it also appears that Coleridge begins to distinguish between the two forms of drama and poetry on the basis that drama offers a vision of the individual as a subjective character, bound to the earth, and taking the form of creaturely life described by Benjamin in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. This opposes the poetic vision of the individual whose creativity and perception evidence a divine power, incarnate on earth, which came to be expressed by Coleridge famously as 'the One Life within us and abroad'.[54] Here, Coleridge's interest in the notion of the heroic, through dramatic character, is not simply the aim of his criticism but is a means of interrogating the representation of the character as a subjective individual as it is represented through the different discourses of drama and

---

[54] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', in *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text),* ed. by J.C.C. Mays, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Collected Works*, 16 vols (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2001), XVI, p. 233 (line 26). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation EH.

poetry. As will become clear in the following analysis, different artistic outcomes emerge when the human mind is represented within poetry and drama respectively. The noteworthy interest in dramatic character in the Romantic age highlights the point that Romantic writers identified the transition from art based upon myth to art based within history as particularly pertinent to the representation of the self. Again, in poetry, the poet's mind becomes a powerful transforming force designed to elevate both the poet and the perceptive reader to a state of insight only comprehensible in the aesthetic sphere, but, in drama, the focus upon the historical divests the form of an artistic framework that reaches beyond the human sphere to the divine. Both Coleridge and Benjamin were aware, in different ways, that this alternative vision of human subjectivity required a reworking of the idea of the tragic hero in dramatic theory.

Recent critical studies have already offered meaningful connections between some Shakespearean drama and Walter Benjamin's critical analysis of the *Trauerspiel* genre, and Benjamin himself gives some thought in his study to *Hamlet* and *Richard III*.[55] Added to this is a well-established background of research on Coleridge's *Lectures on Shakespeare*, in which Coleridge's psychological criticism of Shakespearean characters is often a central element. Most critical focus upon this aspect of Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism rests upon the course he delivered in 1819, a number of years after he read A. W. Schlegel's lectures on Shakespeare. While I elaborate further upon Coleridge's coincidence with Benjamin as an important aspect of his pre-Schlegel thought in Chapter Two, his analysis of dramatic character as it applies specifically to the dramatic mode is worthy of consideration in terms of what it offers to Coleridge's reworking of the idea of the tragic hero. Here, I follow and build upon Joseph

---

[55] See Andrew Benjamin, 'Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time', in *Rethinking the Baroque,* ed. by Helen Hill (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 161-183, and Luis-Martinez Zenón, 'Shakespeare's Historical Drama as *Trauerspiel*: *Richard II* and After', *ELH*, 75 (2008), 673-706.

Donohue's view of Coleridge's theory of the imagination as it relates to drama and the

dramatic imagination.

Donohue's chapter on Coleridge and Lamb in *Dramatic Character in the English*

Romantic Age is an essential grounding for this study as it seeks, at first, to deliver a

'Sense of the Dramatic' in the work of Lamb and Coleridge, making important

distinctions between the two writers as it does this.[56] Crucially, Donohue sources this

sense of the dramatic to the writers' statements upon the generally ideal condition of

poetry, but he observes that there must also be a recognition of the difference between

'dramatic and non-dramatic forms of the ideal' (*DC*, p. 285). Immediately, Donohue

observes that the broad categories of the dramatic and the poetic are bound together

within Coleridge and Lamb's critical theory but also hold a paradoxical position of

distinction. Furthermore, Donohue remarks that this understanding of the dramatic as it

works in and through the poetic is an important but undefined element of poetic

creativity:

> A distinction is necessary between dramatic and non-dramatic forms
> of the ideal. Unfortunately no clear discrimination of this sort appears
> in Romantic writing—witness Coleridge's reference to the poems of
> Wordsworth "in which the author is *more or less* dramatic"—and the
> problem is compounded by our lack of adequate vocabulary. (*DC*, p.
> 285; emphasis in original)

Donohue points out that the dramatic element of this relationship is most often revealed

through the poet's use of characters as 'human figures independent of their creator' and

the poetic element serves to maintain the ideal nature of this form of representation,

denying its transgression into the real (*DC*, p. 286). This weight of balance towards the

poetic, as we have already seen in Jacobus' analysis, served as the Romantic defence

mechanism against the potentially destructive capabilities of the imagination. Certainly,

---

[56] Donohue, p. 281. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text
using the abbreviation *DC*.

for Donohue, it allows Coleridge and Lamb to replace the physical theatre with a notion of the 'theatre of the imagination' (*DC*, p. 286). However, Donohue's observations here do more than simply repeat the common assumption of the use of poetry as an anti-theatrical device in Romantic drama. They also raise questions regarding the influence of a dramatic character independent from the author in poetry, which has an effect upon our understanding of Coleridge's poetry. No longer is the author's voice a unified expression or working through of Coleridge's inner thoughts but, essentially, a dialogue is established between the author and the character he has projected outwards into the poem or the drama. I focus upon these questions in Chapter Three of this thesis in an interpretation of Sara in 'The Eolian Harp', which is the type of characterisation that explores the tension between Coleridge's social, historical and dramatic imagination and his transcendent poetic imagination. The evident loosening of authorial control witnessed in Coleridge's dramatic theory and his tentative use of it in poetry anticipates Walter Benjamin's more radical view of the artistic object as independent from authorial intention. In addition, Coleridge's specific focus upon the dramatization of the human mind in Shakespeare's plays and drama more generally reveals significant tensions between the structure of tragic drama and the nineteenth century's new dramatic subject, the human mind. Against this backdrop, Donohue highlights Coleridge's distinction between Richard III and Macbeth according to their character traits which indicates the beginnings of a separation of the villain of historical tragedy and the anti-hero of tragedy.

Donohue asserts that the 'felt tension […] between human psychology and dramatic form' evidently recognised by Coleridge in his revisions to *Osorio* and expanded as a theme in *Remorse* highlights that Coleridge's dramatic work is a sensitive portrayal of a specific dramatic problem in his own epoch:

> Allowing for the fact that *Remorse* belongs to a convention of poetic drama which died in the course of the nineteenth century despite repeated attempts to prolong its life, we may nevertheless see in it one of the most ambitious attempts in English drama to give new life to time-worn theatrical traditions by infusing them with the spirit of fundamental conviction of man's nature, both in its ideal and regrettably real aspects. (*DC*, p. 300)

Donohue, then, places the 'representation of man's nature' at the centre of Coleridge's pursuit of a credible form of Romantic tragic drama which must present both the ideal and the real. In this statement, he indicates the careful balance between 'time-worn theatrical traditions' and the 'spirit […] of man's nature' that characterised a modern aesthetic that emerged in the Romantic era. This study claims that Coleridge was aware of and engaged with this balance throughout his dramatic writing and, in the second part of this chapter, I will turn to this sense of the modern in the dramatic, which is expressed by Walter Benjamin in his study of the German *Trauerspiel*.

1.4   The Benjaminian Turn: Coleridge's Drama and its Connection to Modernity

In the afterword to her 1981 study of Coleridge's theory of the mind, Kathleen Wheeler makes links between Coleridge's theoretical stance and that of 'modern critical theory such as that of [...] Walter Benjamin and other Marxists'.[57] Whilst her own book deals with Coleridge's use of the imagination in poetic language, she nonetheless shows awareness of the movement towards an historically informed study of Coleridge that by the end of the decade had taken hold. Her assertion that 'Coleridge more than any other Romantic except Blake was passionately concerned with the social and political influences upon the artistic consciousness' anticipates other major studies of the decade that sought to consider Romantic writers as embedded within the social and political

---

[57] Wheeler, p. 162.

culture of the era.[58] In effect, Wheeler's book is involved with the abatement of a view

of the Romantic imagination as largely confined to the aesthetic sphere in favour of, as

Nigel Leask's opening to his 1988 study claims, the 'demand of Imagination that it be

returned to a position of accountability in the practical realm'.[59] Leask's statement here

is perhaps the most forthright declaration amongst the new wave of historicist readings

that critical studies of Romanticism had reached a turning point. The Romantic

imagination was to be embedded more deeply in the politics and society of the

nineteenth century and could no longer be treated as an aesthetic theory cut off from the

social and political milieu that fashioned it. The point around which this New

Historicist reassessment of Romantic literature has pivoted is the persistent force of

history as both context and, remembering Hoagwood's establishment of a theory of

Romantic drama, theme.

The thematic treatment of history within Romantic texts is a key factor here as it imbues

Romantic literature with an immanent structure whereby historical context becomes also

the starting point of creativity by way of its internalisation into the creative fabric of the

text. This situating of the creative impulse within history (rather than as a perceptive act

that deals with a location beyond human knowledge and history) also radically alters

one's understanding of the aims and effects of Romantic creativity. Whilst it cannot be

denied that the Romantic imagination seeks a transformation of the natural into the

divine through the power of creative language, historically aware readings afford

Romantic texts a greater sociability than interpretations based upon traditional

transcendental readings. The transcendental impulse is met with an immanent structure

that encourages an understanding of Romantic texts based upon their participation

within a network of other, equally historically-conditioned, texts. No longer exclusively

---

[58] Wheeler, p. 163.
[59] Nigel Leask, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought* (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988), p.1.

creations of individually imaginative minds, Romantic texts produce meanings which arise partly out of a dynamic interaction, or conversation, with other literary and non-literary texts. The reassessment of Romanticism over the thirty years since Wheeler's statement has indeed repositioned Romanticism's historical moment by moving its critical theory away from what is traditionally perceived as 'Romantic' (a late-eighteenth/early-nineteenth-century phenomenon) and pushed it beyond its historical limits towards modernity precisely due to the excavation of an immanent structure at work within the texts. This unpicking of the Romantics' response to their own age of revolution and social change has revealed in 'Romantic texts [a] gesture toward alternative kinds of social organization that never quite come into focus';[60] a representation of the changing face of history encased within what, Wheeler notes, earlier decades of critical activity labelled the ahistorical and transcendental literature of Romanticism.[61]

Critical studies of the incongruity between this political reality that is both involved within, and extends beyond, the ideology and literature of the Romantic era seems to reach an appropriate climax in Paul Hamilton's *Metaromanticism*. At the basis of Hamilton's study lies the critical problem of how to reconcile historical reality within the aesthetic theory of Romantic self-critique and Romantic irony. Hamilton's identification of a metaromanticism running throughout Romanticism does not take

---

[60] Colin Jager, 'Review of Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory*', *Romantic Circles* (2009) <http://www.rc.umd.edu/reviews-blog/?m=200910> [accessed 12 January 2013] (para. 1 of 11). Whilst this view perhaps leaves Romanticism open to the critical dissection of deconstructive criticism, Tilottoma Rajan underlines the fact that, whilst the Romantics were engaged with aspects that come into keener focus in later modern and post-modern periods, these encounters were ultimately turned away more consciously than later periods have given credit for. As she states in the opening to *Dark Interpreter*, 'Unlike the Romantics, who consented to be educated in illusion before they discovered its limitations, I began with an automatic sense of irony toward a group of poets who I assumed to be sensitive only to daffodils. It took me some time to recognize that the Romantics were more modern than I had thought, and that their refusal to cross the threshold into modernism was a choice and not a failure.' Tilottama Rajan, *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p.9.
[61] Wheeler, p. 162.

issue with the early Romantic ideology of self-critique, which later—most notably

Marxist—criticism has condemned as a falsehood in that it 'is not *real* critique, but

rather a way to perpetuate itself while appearing to engage in critical activity'.[62] Rather,

metaromanticism is the enabling factor within Romanticism in which it immanently

'recognises its own *susceptibility* to Romantic ideology' and, in this recognition, it

highlights its own awareness of 'a basic discontent with its own habit of self-

reflection'.[63] In other words, Hamilton's metaromanticism uncovers points in the

Romantic cannon which struggle against its own habit of illusion and reveal an internal

materialism—or at least an attempt to break into political reality—which, though

perceptible, perhaps never quite comes to fruition. As Colin Jager states,

Metaromanticism contributes to a growing list of studies which share an 'abiding

interest in the political possibilities that adhere to a history of lost chances, foreclosed

opportunities, and near misses'.[64] Consequently, Hamilton's study, as the title suggests,

is concerned with reading an alternative (he calls it 'new') Romanticism into established

Romantic thought. As he states, metaromanticism 'search[es] out materialist

possibilities' implied within Romantic literature that are 'different from the inversion of

idealist philosophy which Romanticism invited and Marxism originally proclaimed'.[65]

The choice of terminology is an apt portrayal of Hamilton's project as unlike the term

metaphysics, which alludes to an indeterminate force working outside the physical

world, metaromanticism inverts this relationship. As a philosophically-led theory, it

takes the indeterminancy of Romanticism and draws out of it a materialism which it at

first denies in order to anchor Romantic art (the ideal) to an historical foundation (the

real). Hamilton's study is important because it finds a way to proclaim a political and

---

[62] Jager, para. 3 of 11 (emphasis in original).
[63] Jager, para. 3 of 11 (emphasis in original).
[64] Jager, para. 3 of 11 (emphasis in original).
[65] Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism*, (London and Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 15.

historical theory that has ghosted Romantic aesthetics from its inception: one that charts

a link between Romanticism and modern post-Marxist critical theory.

Metaromanticism is significantly informed by Hamilton's mapping of a philosophical

terrain of post-Kantian thinkers onto the literature and critical reception of Romantic

writing. Consequently, Hamilton's interest lies in the encounter with human

subjectivity and the representative possibilities of escaping it in the textual activity of

Romantic self-critique. The immanence Hamilton describes at work in Romantic texts,

therefore, has more to do with self-consciousness and, as Hamilton states,

'discontent[ment] with the immanence to which its own critique is restricted' than the

historical immanence described above.[66] Although in *Metaromanticism* steps towards a

more historical and communal understanding of Romanticism are revealed, Hamilton

chooses to 'recover [...] a neglected philosophical archive of a kind' that works within

Romantic literature.[67] This philosophical aspect of the study highlights the way in

which Romanticism wrestles with the legacy of its original idealising tendencies and

aspires towards a translation of individual subjectivity into historical consciousness only

to shrink back and produce nothing but, in the words of Friedrich Schlegel, a "poetry of

poetry".[68] Consequently, the study is rooted within a philosophical line that steadfastly

locates Romantic creativity within the artist's consciousness, as this Early German

philosophy is part of Romantic literature's historical context but it is also the aspect of

Romanticism that Benjamin sought radically to reinterpret. Whilst Hamilton

acknowledges the 'radical possibilities for critical transformation open to the work of

---

[66] Hamilton, p. 1.
[67] Hamilton, p. 3.
[68] Hamilton, p.2. As Hamilton points out, Walter Benjamin adapts Schlegel's phrase here to achieve the historical proliferation it seems Romanticism is bound up with yet ultimately denies by stating that 'the idea of poetry is prose'. This statement has a double effect of translating one form into another form in order to translate it out of itself, but, more importantly, it relies upon Benjamin's formulation of the idea, which offers a fluid and spatial notion of temporal consciousness in contrast to the linear progression of reflective critique.

art' offered by Walter Benjamin's interpretation of Schlegel (which emphasises the
continued creative process in the work's critical afterlife, free from its original authorial
intention), he remains sceptical of the length at which Benjamin interprets Schlegel's
socialising of poetry.[69]

Hamilton's engagement with Benjamin follows mainly philosophical and political lines,
taking 'On the Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism' as the foundation for his
engagement and referring to Benjamin's later political works such as 'The Work of Art
in a Mechanical Age of Reproduction' and *Theses on the Philosophy of History*. Taking
Benjamin's political conclusions as the result of his earlier work on German philosophy,
Hamilton reserves judgement on the appropriateness of Benjamin's messianic
interpretation of Schlegel in terms of its application to Romantic literature. This is
because he characterises Benjamin's 'tiger's leap in the dark' into the modern age as a
revolution too far, a complete break away from Romantic theory:

> The messianic moment in which [Benjamin] conceives the shedding
> of explanatory contexts […] initially looks obscure and apocryphal
> […] There is an unignorable historical difference between Benjamin
> and Schlegel […] Benjamin is driven to messianic philosophical
> exigencies by the attempt to conceive a proletarian revolution
> unprescribed by past Bourgeois or by deficient contemporary
> revolutionary examples.[70]

In contrast to Hamilton's application of Benjamin's early philosophical and later
political writing to the interpretation of Romantic consciousness, I assert that
Benjamin's work on German Tragic Drama plays a central role in charting a link,
through literary representation, between his critique of Romantic consciousness and his
politically motivated transformation of the historical consciousness. Hamilton's
assertion that the radical element of Benjamin's work entails the 'shedding of

---

[69] Hamilton, p. 10.
[70] Hamilton, p. 243.

explanatory contexts' can be contested with reference to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, which brings together philosophy and literary criticism in an effort to establish a contextual basis for the literatures—and by extension other modes of representation, histories and cultures—that fall either side of the traditional contextual line.[71] Hamilton correctly describes 'Walter Benjamin's aesthetics of history' by stating that it 'imagines strategies for blasting historical particulars out of the progressive narratives in which they have been embedded' but, crucially, he does not allude to the fact that, in order to be blasted out, the structure from which he conceives these narratives must first be reconceived not as progressive but as spatial.[72] In the *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, on which Hamilton's interpretation is based, Benjamin describes this as part of a thought process:

> Thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystallizes into a monad.[73]

The 'configuration' described here has its roots in Benjamin's constellation, first described in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, in which it supported, in the same way as the configuration in *Theses*, the monad. Consequently, in line with Graeme Gilloch's assessment of the *Trauerspiel* study, I see it as an important link between Benjamin's early philosophical engagement with Romanticism and his future engagement with historical representation. As he states, 'the conceptual repertoire [*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*] developed was to inform all Benjamin's subsequent writings'.[74] Consequently, Hamilton's study of the metaromantic impulse within Romanticism engaging with a materialism that Romanticism denies discerns a new

---

[71] Hamilton, p. 243.

[72] Hamilton, p. 243; p. 243.

[73] Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations* ed. and introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245-55 (p. 254). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *TPH*.

[74] Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 87.

reading of Romantic texts according to a desire to extend beyond their self-conscious framework. However, he stops short of a Benjaminian solution to Romanticism's infinitely progressive framework of becoming which is located in a reconceptualization of history according to the constellation and its consequent reworking of the notion of origin. This reworking is borne out of Benjamin's application of his philosophical theories to a literary criticism of Baroque drama and therefore does not 'shed an explanatory context' but seeks to build a new one and with it a new understanding of the contextual heritage of works of art.[75] Benjamin's reassessment of Baroque drama, the solution to the effects of self-critique that, he perceptively notes, Schlegelian Romantic theory attempts to resolve, offers a suggestive interpretive framework for a form not considered by Hamilton: Romantic drama. This framework supports Romantic drama by 'shedding' the traditional 'explanatory contexts' that present it as unsuccessful and allowing it to connect with other contextual references within an ever-shifting mass of references.[76] It does so using two key concepts from the *Trauerspiel* study: the constellation and allegory. These two phenomena, the former pertaining to the form, structure and genre of the *Trauerspiel* and the latter to its main linguistic trope, provide Benjamin with the tools for a new theory of the tragic genre.

1.5   Genre and the Constellation in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

In the introduction to the Verso Edition of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, George Steiner identifies the tension within Benjamin's desire to produce his own unique epistemological statement (Steiner goes so far as to refer to it as 'lyric') upon artistic representation and the need to encase this in a 'dispassionate' academic study that would fulfil the requirements of his *Habilitationsscrift* owing to its challenging

---

[75] Hamilton, p. 243.
[76] Hamilton, p. 243.

nature.[77] Steiner declares that 'the product of [Benjamin's] intentional and methodological disparities is, undoubtedly, a major work. But it is also a work which is flawed and difficult to place in focus'.[78] The personally important philosophical standpoint of Benjamin's 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' (and its influence throughout the rest of the thesis) is undoubtedly difficult and its connection to the literary focus of the work is not easy to keep in mind but it is also the way in which Benjamin can articulate a groundbreaking understanding of historical representation and its interpretation through the literary imagination.[79]

The central focus of the methodological element of Benjamin's study is to rescue German Baroque Tragedy from critical, and therefore cultural, obscurity. In this aim, the work is perhaps at its most accessible. The two key points of departure for Benjamin's vindication of the German *Trauerspiel* are, firstly, that the traditional critical application of Aristotle's theory of tragedy to all tragic forms is inappropriate to the *Trauerspiel* and, secondly, that the traditional understanding that these Baroque plays should not be staged is misguided. As discussed earlier in this chapter, the difficulty of reconciling Romantic era drama to the recognised stylistic template of classical tragedy based upon Aristotolean theory reverberates through Benjamin's claims, some sixty years later, for the *Trauerspiel* form. In both cases, generic difference from tragedy and the insistence of visual spectacle become their defining aspects and relate to Benjamin's models of the constellation and allegory, respectively. Therefore, these defining elements of both the *Trauerspiel* and Romantic drama provide

---

[77] Steiner, 'Introduction', in Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, introd. by George Steiner, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 7-24 (p. 15).
[78] Steiner, 'Introduction', p. 15.
[79] The thesis was submitted to the German Studies Department but was found inappropriate to this discipline and sent to the department of aesthetics or philosophy of art (Steiner, 'Introduction', p. 11). Steiner appreciates Benjamin's ability to apply his literary criticism to a philosophical field and draws a comparison between Coleridge and Benjamin in the talent they display as 'philosophers of language' or 'metaphysician[s] of metaphor and translation'. See Steiner, 'Introduction', p.20.

the clearest way in to a reading of Coleridge's dramatic identity following Benjamin's conclusions in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*.[80]

Coleridge's experiments with the form of revenge tragedy, its theoretical basis in his interpretation of Shakespeare and his criticism of contemporary Gothic drama suggest that he was engaged in a reworking of tragic genres. His experimental approach to the form, although overshadowed by the contextual lineages of classical and Renaissance tragic heritage and Romantic theory (which in themselves work against each other), may be illuminated through its participation within Benjamin's contextual constellation.[81] Similarly, Coleridge's understanding of dramatic illusion (which is initially radically different from that of his German counterpart, A.W. Schlegel) forms the basis of his experiments with vision and spectacle in *Remorse* that owe much to the trope of allegory. Through a reconsideration of tragic drama according to the new socio-literary requirements of Romanticism and the use of allegorical motifs in the language and spectacular effects of *Remorse*, Coleridge highlights an awareness of his own social, cultural and literary contexts that at once precludes and can be restored to a fuller understanding by Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study.

---

[80] Although my study is concerned with offering links between Coleridge and Benjamin's ideas on drama and showing how their dramatic theory shapes their understanding of historical representation, it is important to acknowledge their theoretical differences. There are obvious areas of incompatibility between Coleridge (especially in his later years and his poetic theory) and Benjamin. Possibly the most significant and major example in relation to this study is that Coleridge, more unquestioningly accepting of German transcendental philosophy and Romantic literary theory, expounds a theory of symbol with which Benjamin takes issue in *The Origins of German Tragic Drama*. For what is taken to be Coleridge's classic definition of symbol, see Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons,* ed. by R. J. White, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), vi (1972), pp. 29-30, and for the classic deconstructive reading of Coleridge's work on symbol, see Paul de Man, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality', in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187-228.

[81] In the Introduction to *Aethenium Fragments*, Friedrich Schlegel's Romantic manifesto, Peter Firchow notes the apparent unsuitability of drama for Romanticism when he states that Schlegel 'began to discover all sorts of "romantic" traits in even the most classical writers [...] only the Greek tragedians were excluded'. For a more detailed account of the discrepancy between Romantic theory and Greek Tragedy, see 'Introduction' to *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. and introd. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), pp.3-40 (p.20).

This restoring to vision of a previously overlooked form is the very essence of Benjamin's critical project, which uses the contextual basis of the constellation as opposed to influential lineage. Coleridge's dramatic interest, of which the play *Remorse* stands in the centre, may be misunderstood as part of its traditional English Romantic context but, taken out of this context and suspended within Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* constellation, it comes into fuller view. Through his critical model of the constellation, Benjamin is able to transform the manner in which individual artworks are critically received and understood. The constellation directly opposes the practice of judging artworks according to a common set of predetermined rules that are said to constitute a certain type of art or to the identification of common traits running throughout an artistic type.[82] These critical methods acknowledge neither the individual completeness of a work of art nor its vital contribution to the overarching structure— Benjamin calls it 'configuration'—of truth that they are collected together to represent. As Gilloch states, 'The facile compilation of examples and the arrogant postulation of rules should not be confused with the representation of ideas, the true task of criticism'.[83] With dense economy of phrasing, Benjamin explains the relationship between individual artworks and their contribution to their idea in the statement 'Ideas are to objects as constellations are to stars' (*OGTD*, p. 34). Just as stars are fixed in an arrangement that can only be perceived through the appearance of all individual stars that make up that constellation, so any idea can only be represented in its most illuminated form when individual objects (artworks) are collected together into a pattern that allows for their meaningful representation. In this way, individual artworks become significant because, being both representative of and containing within them the overarching idea to which they contribute, they 'contain as their truth content the idea

---

[82] Benjamin describes the former method as 'deductive' and the latter, 'inductive'. For Benjamin's full account of this, see *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, introd. by George Steiner, trans. by John Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), pp. 7-24 (p. 43). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *OGTD*.

[83] Gilloch, p. 69.

they compose'.[84]   Another analogy Benjamin uses to explain this notion is the mosaic,

in which the tiles that compose the greater pattern are individual fragments arranged so

as to reveal their 'meaningful image'.[85]   As Gilloch states, 'Like each individual

tesserae of the mosaic, the work of art is a constitutive fragment of the idea, and

simultaneously derives its significance from its location within it'.[86]   This view of

artworks as contributing to a constellation based upon representation of truth rather than

a formula which extracts meaning or knowledge allows for a form of criticism that not

only includes minor works and impoverished forms alongside canonical texts but also

allows for the interplay of otherwise apparently disparate and dislocated artworks.

Benjamin makes this point in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' in his statement that 'the

idea is the representation of the individual context within which the unique and extreme

stands alongside its counterpart' (*OGTD*, p. 35) and applies this to the *Trauerspiel* in

the opening to the second section of his study by declaring that research into this

dramatic form must not

> look for schools of poets, epochs of the *oeuvre*, or strata of individual
> works […] Rather, will it be guided by the assumption that what
> seems diffuse and disparate will be found to be linked in the adequate
> concepts as elements of a synthesis. And so the productions of lesser
> writers, whose works frequently contain the most eccentric features,
> will be valued no less than those of the great writer. (*OGTD*, p. 58)

This understanding of the German Baroque drama sees its value not in the contribution

it makes to a tradition or genre but in and through the connections the dramas make

with each other (and even other literatures) according to their common 'outline'

(*OGTD*, p. 48).[87]   In fact, it is only through the decay of the artwork, when works of art

---

[84] Gilloch, p. 70.

[85] Max Pensky, *Melancholy Dialectics: Walter Benjamin and the Play of Mourning* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), p. 71, quoted in Gilloch, p.71.

[86] Gilloch, p. 70.

[87] The notion of the outline is important as it suggests a central point in Benjamin's style of criticism: the disappearance of essence in such ideas as the mortification of the artwork as the true act of criticism and the notion of allegory as a mask. For an account of Benjamin's understanding of the difference between allegory and (Romantic) symbol in relation to the act of representation, see Bainard Cowan, 'Walter

are cast together in a moment of recognition that simultaneously illuminates and destroys them, leaving only their outline, that they can be critically 'redeemed' (*OGTD*, p. 34). As individual points of a constellation, works of art are not invested with a conclusive meaning by their creators, but their artistic content is continually renewed and revived through their critical reception in ever-evolving arrangements which, paradoxically, result from the 'ruinous action of criticism'.[88] Benjamin articulates this action of criticism in a metaphor that will form a central aspect of his later essay, 'The Storyteller', when he describes revelation of the truth of a work of art:

> The burning up of a husk as it enters the realm of ideas, that is to say a destruction of the work in which its external form achieves the most brilliant degree of illumination. (*OGTD,* p. 31)

This is a crucial aspect of Benjamin's conception of criticism, in which he establishes his opposition to Romantic reflection, which he believes cannot achieve the aim it has set itself of fulfilment through reflection. As Benjamin states, with reference to his doctoral thesis 'On the Concept of Criticism in Early German Romanticism', criticism is a form of 'mortification of the works' and it requires not the 'awakening of the consciousness in living works, but the settlement of knowledge in dead ones' (*OGTD*, p. 182). As a result, the artwork is not invested with significance at the moment of its creation by the author. Rather, Benjamin proposes that it is only at the point at which it is finally recognised by the critic as part of a meaningful constellation (which is also the point of its destruction) that it becomes significant. Gilloch explains this:

> Although individual works of art come into existence at a particular moment, their meaning is not [thereby] fixed by the author, but is instead continuously reconstituted in their afterlife. Origin as the recognition of the meaning of, and truth within, the phenomenon is

---

Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 109-122. Cowan explains that 'truth does not consist of a content to be possessed after digesting away the linguistic form of a philosophical inquiry; rather, as Benjamin insists, the truth *is* the form' (p. 114; emphasis in original).
[88] Gilloch, p. 72.

> not so much an occurrence *prior to* the afterlife of the work of art as, paradoxically, *its final moment of mortification*.[89]

Initially, this appears a radical break away from Coleridge's privileging of the Romantic ego, but I hope to show that, in terms of his dramatic ideas on the role of the audience in co-creating dramatic illusion, and in the suggestion of the critical afterlife of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, it is an appropriate expression of his theoretical interest in the possibilities of representation in its dramatic, not poetic, manifestation. These issues, as they apply to Coleridge's work, will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters, but it is necessary first to highlight some of the defining features of the *Trauerspiel* genre.

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, the *Trauerspiel* constellation ranges around Medieval religion and drama, Baroque art theory, Shakespeare, Calderón, Novalis, Goethe, Lessing, hieroglyphics and the Epic form in order to mobilize a network of contextual literature that sustains the *Trauerspiel* genre from points of reference outside the classical rules of tragedy.[90] From this assembly, Benjamin embarks upon

---

[89] Gilloch, pp. 72-3; emphasis in original. The critical afterlife is a central element of Benjamin's revision of 'criticism as a genre' (Gilloch p. 1). Briefly, Benjamin aimed to free works of art from the confines of authorial intention and aesthetic rules which, as artificial and reductive boundaries to a work's continually evolving significance, actually prevent its realisation or moment of perception. Instead, the work itself carries within it its own latent significance, which may be translated through different contexts and its significance 'redeemed' when the work is gathered together as part of an idea (constellation) and 'revealed fulfilled, in the totality of its history' (*OGTD*, pp. 45-6). For Benjamin, the afterlife also relates to the idea of language and translation (see 'The Task of the Translator') and history as aura (see 'The Work of Art on the Mechanical Age of Reproduction'). For further explanation of the notion of afterlife, see Gilloch, p.72-3.

[90] Benjamin draws on a wide range of sources to piece together the constellation of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. All are essential components of the work and, in a way, it is not necessary to distinguish between each of them as they together shape the idea of the project. Obviously, for the purposes of a reading of Coleridge's work (and indeed any work), I will draw more heavily on some influences than others and some will not be considered. For example, as my study is focused upon the literary element of both writers' works (which is, to a certain extent, informed by their national identities, especially in relation to drama and Romanticism), I draw upon Benjamin's references to Shakespeare (but not Calderón) and the Jena Romantics (from whom, of course, Benjamin both takes inspiration and critiques). While, due to the scope of the thesis, I do not provide analysis of German *Trauerspiele*, Shakespeare becomes a prominent figure in this area as Benjamin's asserts that *Hamlet* is a 'great...*Trauerspiel*' and he also considers *Richard III* in the study (*OGTD*, p. 136). Both Benjamin and Coleridge (whose extensive critical engagement with Shakespeare forms many of his *Lectures on Literature*) identify a strong exchange of influence between England and Germany through Shakespeare and Lessing. The

introducing a new form into the literary canon, one that 'like "tragedy" and "comedy" [is] a distinctive, legitimate dramatic form or "idea" possessing its own distinguishing features'.[91] To establish the German mourning play, or *Trauerspiel*, as a form in its own right, Benjamin relies upon his reworked notion of the origin, which invites an alternative explanation to the traditional view of classical tragedy and comedy as the sole sources of modern drama. By explaining origin as a moment that breaks through or out of an existing structure at a point at which disparate details move into a pattern that is significant to the critic, Benjamin frees dramatic forms from the rules of genre as they have become fixed by a critical predisposition towards Classical Greece.[92] Origin, Benjamin states, 'although an entirely historical category, has, nevertheless, nothing to do with genesis' and, consequently, it is not 'discovered by the examination of actual findings, but it is related to their history and subsequent development' (*OGTD*, pp. 45-6). In this way, origin does not, from a static root, initiate a process, but simultaneously embeds itself within and departs from its line of advancement. Benjamin describes this process in terms of the flow of a river: 'Origin is an eddy in the stream of becoming, and in its current it swallows the material involved in the process of genesis' (*OGTD*, p. 45). Just as an eddy breaks off from the main course of the river to alter the flow of the water, so the origin is a rupture in the material of 'the stream of becoming' that both takes from the material and re-establishes it as something new. To invoke Gilloch again, 'Origin is a temporal disturbance […] as time folded back upon itself'; its structure is not of continual progression but it is a 'rhythm' as it follows a 'process of restoration and reestablishment' (*OGTD*, p. 45).[93] Along the evolutionary line of tragic drama, the *Trauerspiel* embodies Benjamin's origin precisely because it cannot be

---

philosophical, ancient and theological constellations of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* are used in the thesis as explanatory context or brief illustration of overall points.
[91] Gilloch, p. 59.
[92] I have offered a general term 'details' here to describe Benjamin's description of the assembly of phenomena in an originary constellation as he uses different terms according to the differing contexts of his discussions. Other terms Benjamin uses are objects, fragments, monads and phenomena.
[93] Gilloch, p. 73.

counted as part of the generic chain that is sourced back to tragedy, but it does contain

artistic elements that are understood to be tragic. Benjamin explains this by stating that

the artistic moment of the *Trauerspiel* is not found in a set of rules that lead towards or

determine a set of universal and ideal qualities that stand as 'timeless' aesthetic

categories'.[94] The *Trauerspiel*, Benjamin reminds the reader on a number of occasions,

is a purely historical form which does not transform historical events into abstract ideas

but offers up the historical condition as the 'artistic core' of the plays themselves

(*OGTD*, p. 62). Therefore, whilst 'The *Trauerspiel* of the German Baroque appeared to

be a caricature of classical tragedy', Benjamin uncovers its true state as a form set apart

from classical tragedy (*OGTD*, p. 50). As a form of restoration, however, it becomes

classical tragedy's other; its uncanny repetition in a secular world that has recognised its

severance from divinity. Gilloch explains:

> Benjamin's key insight into the content of the *Trauerspiel* is the
> recognition that it is concerned with the portrayal, however
> outlandish, absurd or grotesque, of fallen, human history. [Its subject
> was] The catastrophic downfall of princes and kings, the sinister
> machinations of the court, the bloody butchery and ignominious ends
> of tyrants, [and] the pitiful sufferings of martyrs.[95]

A major difference between tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, therefore, is the source of power

within the contrasting forms: tragedy is subject to a divine and invisible force that

controls the progress of the play from outside both humanity and the structure of the

play, but at the heart of the *Trauerspiel*, and at the heart of its staging, lie the power

struggles of its inalterably human characters. Luis-Martínez Zenón declares this

structural distinctiveness of the *Trauerspiel*, which he believes to be a 'powerful tool for

assessing the relations of history and tragedy in Shakespeare's plays' as the starting

point for his reading of *Richard II*:

---

[94] Gilloch, p. 74.
[95] Gilloch, p. 74.

> "History" and "myth" address particular modes of involvement of the human subject in the course of dramatic action. Myth is the mode of classical Greek tragedy, and its essence lies in a theological worldview that sanctions godly intervention in the life and death of its heroes. Conversely, the historical mode engages in "the decisive confrontation between human-earthly perplexity and princely-hierarchical power".[96]

Tragedy is involved in the progression towards a denouement that envisions its hero's escape from the limitations of human consciousness expressed in a moment of divine fulfilment through death. The *Trauerspiel*, however, is a purely secular play which shows to its audience the violence, intrigue and suffering of human life as it is bound to the Earth. This insight into the nature of the *Trauerspiel* as the creation of a fallen mankind invests the plays with the qualities of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*. Devoid of any notion of the divine but cast in the image of tragedy, the *Trauerspiel* haunts the surety of classic tragedy as a monstrous encroachment of the material in art. Hamilton addresses the 'degree of acceptance of a completely physical definition of our lives' that divided nineteenth-century writers.[97] He notes that Coleridge resisted this 'shocking' acceptance of the body in writing due to its 'unacceptable materialism and its atheistic subversiveness'.[98] Whilst this may be true of the areas of Coleridge's work in which his metaphysical interest is most clear (in other words in his poetic theory and philosophical writing) and in his denouncement of the Gothic in drama, it does not always extend to the entirety of his dramatic work. As I will argue later, the secular nature of Coleridge's *Remorse* does not focus the work upon a form of aesthetic atheism but rather aims to consider the extent to which a play's hero and its characters can be cast within a dramatic structure that reconciles tragedy with the social ideals of the Romantic era. However, in the concluding sections of this chapter, it is necessary to highlight some of

---

[96] Zenón, pp. 673-4.
[97] Hamilton, pp. 13-14.
[98] Hamilton, p. 13.

the key aspects of Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study, which influence my reading of Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice.

1.6 *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*

The second section of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is devoted to Benjamin's elucidation of the distinction between the genres of Tragedy and *Trauerspiel*. For Benjamin, the classical model of tragedy sees a tragic hero who retains the potential to transcend his corporeal self and become reconciled with a divine temporality. This is open to the tragic hero as he inhabits a temporality of myth which operates beneath divine temporality but above historical temporality. He is closer to the gods than historical man as his identity is still informed through the direct work of the gods upon him. As Gilloch states, 'Greek tragedy presents the intercourse of mortals, gods and fantastical beings, locating them in an epoch outside ordinary historical life'.[99] The tragic genre is associated with a literary tradition of divine retribution which, translated down the line from classical literature to Renaissance and Elizabethan articulations of the genre, becomes a genre of the revenge of the powerful or just sanctioned by divine authority. Benjamin articulates this early in the second section of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* with reference to the 'artistic core of the *Trauerspiel*', which is based not upon ethics and 'the conflict with God and Fate, the representation of a primordial past' but upon politics and the 'princely virtues [and] princely vices' of the earth-bound monarch:

> For the object of [tragedy] is not history but myth and the tragic structure of the *dramatis personae* does not derive from rank—absolute monarchy—but from the pre-historic epoch of their existence- the past age of heroes. (*OGTD*, p. 62)

---

[99] Gilloch, p. 75.

The representative core of classical tragedy is grounded in the work of fate upon the tragic hero to cause his obliteration from the earthly, the human, and reconciliation with the divine. As Benjamin states, 'In classicism the tendency to the apotheosis of the individual who is perfect […] is clear enough' (*OGTD*, p. 160). The classical model of tragedy therefore progresses towards a moment of synthesis between the hero and a divine order whose tragic moment is of effacement and is final. Furthermore, there is one hero, one self, in tragedy that rises above his community as an archetypal human and aspires to the gods. In contrast, the representative core of Baroque *Trauerspiel* is based in the notion that historical man is 'denied direct access to a beyond' (*OGTD*, p. 79). Consequently, his tragic moment is based upon a sense of loss and the action of repetition or return; the character of tragedy in the *Trauerspiel* is sub-divided and dispersed across courtly stereotypes: the martyr, the tyrant and the intriguer. Classical tragedy works upon decisive action and linguistic brevity whereas *Trauerspiel* wallows in lamentation and verbosity. These artistic differences point towards the generic separation of tragedy and *Trauerspiel*.

The *Trauerspiel*, as a play of mourning and lamentation, documents the historical world's expression of the loss of the prospect of transcendence. This mournful gaze upon the world, argues Benjamin, is the prime characteristic of the Baroque, which 'knows no eschatology':

> For that very reason it possesses no mechanism by which all earthly things are gathered in together and exalted before being consigned to their end. The hereafter is emptied of everything which contains the slightest breath of this world, and from the baroque extracts a profusion of things which customarily escaped the grasp of artistic formulation and, at its high point, brings them violently into the light of day, in order to clear an ultimate heaven, enabling it as a vacuum, one day to destroy the world with catastrophic violence. (*OGTD*, p. 66)

The identification of the *Trauerspiel* as a dramatic form that is specific to the Baroque is a key factor in Benjamin's restoration of the form under his new critical strategy. In opposition to classical and Renaissance tragedy (which is customarily judged according to a set of rules), the Baroque era recognises the disappearance of the divine from the world. As a result, its art does not promise a fusion of the human and the divine or the fulfilment of knowledge within the individual. Instead, Baroque art is concerned with presenting mankind as the 'merely creaturely' and revealing 'the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation' (*OGTD*, p. 132; p. 92). Iain Chambers sums up this disappearance of the divine from the historical, or the secularization of the Baroque era: 'Humankind finds itself consigned to a permanent exile, exposed to the raging sickness of the world, where time, truth and the body are ravaged by history and the error of its ways'.[100] As a result, Baroque art becomes concerned with marking loss or, as articulated by Chambers, 'the art of testimony', and, as such, it becomes 'the ornamental, the decorative and the monumental'.[101] Applied to the *Trauerspiel*, this mournful state results in the desire to display: *Trauerspiele* consist of grandiose processions, the amassing of objects and a 'written word [that] tends towards the visual' (*OGTD*, p. 176).

Benjamin confirms this point when he elaborates upon the etymological significance of the genre, which is crudely translated as 'mourning play'. Benjamin states that 'these are not so much plays which cause mourning, as plays through which mournfulness find satisfaction: plays for the mournful' (*OGTD*, p. 119). This is an important distinction as it explains the excess and ornamentation of the plays. To reiterate the distinction made by Benjamin, mourning plays do not engender mourning in the audience, but mourning

---

[100] Iain Chambers, 'History, the Baroque and the Judgement of Angels' in *The Actuality of Walter Benjamin*, ed. by Laura Marcus and Lynda Nead (London: Lawrence and Wishart,1998), pp. 172-193 (p. 172).
[101] Chambers, p. 172.

is entwined within their action. As Zenón explains, mourning becomes the focus of these plays as they present humanity as 'essentially creaturely and time-bound'.[102] The resulting dramaturgy of the *Trauerspiel* is that it 'seldom stresses action; it is a drama of memory brought to expression, of characters grieving morosely for the scars left by the past upon the present, as well as on the uncertainties of the future'.[103] In the act of mourning, these plays become characterised by their verbal and visual ostentation: they are allegorical in language and emblematic in style. Nature and language no longer point towards a transcendental afterlife but the death inherent in nature and the endless signification of allegory mark a loss of essence that is mourned by the characters of the *Trauerspiele*.

The central character of the *Trauerspiel*, the Prince, is presented as a melancholic contemplator, who is racked by his historical condition and 'is almost incapable of making a decision' (*OGTD*, p. 71). He is the 'paradigm of the melancholy man' whose melancholy renders him contemplative rather than active and, like Hamlet, he is 'a spectator', the antithesis to the decisive hero of classical tragedy (*OGTD*, p. 142; p. 158). As a consequence of the stylistic inaction of the German Baroque plays, Benjamin points out, 'the older school of research persisted in the view they were never performed', a view which, he states, is 'certainly incorrect' (*OGTD*, p. 185). In ascribing the German mourning play to a specifically Christian postlapsarian framework that is borne out of the predominantly European political theology of the Counter-Reformation and the secular world of the Middle Ages, Benjamin demonstrates its former contextualisation in classical antiquity to be inappropriate. A potent illustration of this emerges when he contrasts the Baroque culture with that of the Renaissance:

---

[102] Zenón, p. 674.
[103] Zenón, p. 674.

> In contrast to the baroque the Renaissance does not appear as a godless and heathen period but an epoch of profane freedom for the life of the faith, while the Counter-Reformation sees the hierarchical strain of the middle ages assume authority in a world which was denied direct access to a beyond. (*OGTD*, p. 79)

According to Benjamin, then, the *Trauerspiel* is mistaken, at first, for an impoverished example of tragedy due to its exaggeration of certain stylistic aspects of classical tragedy: its characters, language and visual effects are hyperbolic rather than ideal. However, Benjamin warns, this is due to a critical confusion between Baroque drama and Renaissance drama. In a statement that seems not to carry its full emphasis in translation, Benjamin declares that 'Older research remained unaware' of the difference between the dramatic style of the two epochs due to the prevailing 'uncritical adherence to baroque theory of drama […] the theory of Aristotle' (*OGTD*, p. 49; p. 50).[104] This critical application of Aristotle's theory of tragedy to the *Trauerspiel*, which stakes no claim to Aristotolean theory, has caused a misunderstanding of the *Trauerspiel* in the manner of the misunderstanding with which it was itself charged under this type of reading:

> Commentators were all too ready to speak of distortion and misunderstanding, without first trying to discover the substantial reasons for this variation, and from here it was not too far to the opinion that the dramatists of the period had basically done no more than apply respected precepts in an uncomprehending way. The *Trauerspiel* of the baroque appeared to be a caricature of classical tragedy […The *Trauerspiel*] was seen as a distortion of the ancient royal drama, the bombast as a distortion of the dignified pathos of the Greeks, and the bloody finale as a distortion of tragic catastrophe. The *Trauerspiel* thus took on the appearance of an incompetent renaissance tragedy. And herewith arose a new classification, which necessarily thwarted any appreciation of the form in question: viewed as renaissance drama, the *Trauerspiel* stands condemned, its most characteristic features denounced as so many stylistic shortcomings. (*OGTD*, p. 50)

---

[104] I take Benjamin's statement to mean that critics applied the theory of Aristotle to Baroque drama without critically analysing the theory's efficacy in interpreting the form, rather than in its literal sense, which would suggest that Baroque theory was uncritically accepted by established research. In other words, Benjamin implies that, rather than using Aristotolean theory to highlight the shortcomings of the Baroque tragedies, the *Trauerspiel* form may show that the tragic form cannot always be successfully interpreted or understood using this model, which had been the case before Benjamin's study.

Here, Benjamin's vindication of German Baroque drama, using the argument that it

entailed a deliberate amendment of the model of classical tragedy, articulates also the

specific problems encountered in a section of English Romantic era drama. In the same

way that German Baroque drama was judged according to the classical model of

tragedy and compared with this model's true inheritor, Renaissance Tragedy, the

dramas of Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and Shelley all struggled under their age's

reverence of Shakespeare and his Elizabethan contemporaries.[105] George Steiner

addresses this issue as a major factor in the stifled quality of nineteenth-century English

drama in his declaration that we find in canonical English writers' bibliographies

'tragedies which are […] dismally bad' even though these writers entertained a 'tragic

ideal' in which they strove to produce a 'work to set beside Sophocles or

Shakespeare'.[106] In addition to the provision of an analysis of the adverse social

conditions the Romantic dramatists were working under, Steiner points out that, under

the social theory of Rousseau, the very notions of guilt and fate became radically

altered:

> The misery and injustice of man's fate were not caused by a primal
> fall from grace. They were not the consequence of some tragic,
> immutable flaw in human nature. They arose from the absurdities and
> archaic inequalities built into the social fabric by generations of
> tyrants and exploiters.[107]

Here, Steiner describes a shift in focus upon the causes of tragic suffering in Romantic

drama that, through its gesture towards the tragic structure of fate and its effect upon

character, delivers echoes of Benjamin's appraisal of the *Trauerspiel*, not least in the

identification of the emergence of the tyrant. No longer were Romantic dramas

concerned with the development of a plot that related a singular instance of heroic

---

[105] For a more in-depth account of this see Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 106-150. See also Greg Kucich, '"A Haunted Ruin": Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition and the Critical Establishment', in *Wordsworth Circle*, 23, II, 1992, pp. 64-76.
[106] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, pp. 122-3.
[107] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 125.

transgression; instead, they were concerned with the legacy of human suffering that this primal revolt left behind. In his appraisal of this shift in emphasis, Steiner highlights its influence upon the notion of redemption, a major social theme of the Romantic movement which, as he maps out, leads in drama to the theme of remorse. Steiner's conclusion here is that the theme of remorse throughout Romantic tragic drama can only mean that it is a flawed version of tragedy, a 'near tragedy' synonymous with the inferior and sentimental 'melodrama'.[108]

However, Benjamin's interpretation of this replacement of a fate conditioned by transcendental forces with a fate conditioned by historical forces highlights a more profound change in the artistic structure of these plays that is not merely thematic but is also fundamentally generic. To invoke Zenón again, Benjamin's revival of the *Trauerspiel* involved a complete rethinking of its generic foundations based upon the Baroque culture's subjective and temporal revolutions:

> The kind of historical experience contained in the baroque *Trauerspiel*
> relies on a genuinely dramatic conception of historiography: rather
> than the catastrophic event itself, history is for the *Trauerspiel* that
> woeful web of experiences that captures the subject in commerce with
> his own temporality.[109]

Unlike Steiner's view of Romantic tragedy, Benjamin discerns, in the Baroque, the artistic effects of the recognition of the loss of transcendental potential within mankind and the subsequent recognition of mankind as timebound. With reference to a quotation from the Early Modern German poet Martin Opitz, Benjamin declares that what Steiner sees as the 'social fabric' that caused the tragedies of Romantic drama (or, for Benjamin, the German *Trauerspiel*) was not simply what the plays were about, but gave

---

[108] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 133.
[109] Zenón, p. 674.

rise to their creative foundation.[110] As Benjamin states, 'the incidents listed [were] not so much the subject-matter but the artistic core of the *Trauerspiel*' (*OGTD*, p. 62). In this statement lies Benjamin's radical re-evaluation of dramatic genres on the basis of their artistic source, which, in turn, has implications for his conception of the representative modes of classicism and modernity, that is, in the blending of their aesthetic and temporal structures. These structures are often at their most noticeable in and through the protagonists of tragedy and *Trauerspiel*: the tragic hero and the fragmentation and dispersal of this figure of unity in the *Trauerspiel* across the respective characters of tyrant, martyr and intriguer. These figures, I argue in Chapter Four, can be discerned in the *dramatis personae* of *Remorse* through the characters of Alvar, Ordonio and Velez. It should be noted that to read Coleridge's Romantic drama as a German mourning play would be to misread Benjamin's study of this form, which he applies only to the specific artistic and cultural conditions of the *Trauerspiele* of Germany. However, Benjamin articulates that other plays, most notably those of Shakespeare and Calderón, appear as *Trauerspiel*-genre plays. He makes a distinction between Shakespeare's *Trauerspiel*, *Hamlet*, and those of Germany on account of Shakespeare's ability to 'strik[e] Christian sparks out of the baroque rigidity of the melancholic' (*OGTD*, p. 158). In this sense, Benjamin uncovers his insight into Shakespearean drama as he is able to discern a duality of influence within such a key play as *Hamlet*: its form and some of its content resonate with the Baroque melancholic tone, yet the play is still set against the values of a Renaissance dramatic tradition that invokes divine retribution. Graeme Gilloch alludes to Benjamin's reading of *Hamlet* as a signal of Benjamin's overarching critical intention, using the critical tool of the constellation, in the *Trauerspiel* study:

---

[110] The quotation is as follows: 'Tragedy is in equal majesty to heroic poetry, except that it seldom suffers from the introduction of characters of lowly estate and ignoble matters: because it deals only with the demands of kings, killings, despair, infanticide and patricide, conflagrations, incest, war and commotion, lamentation, weeping, sighing, and suchlike' (*OGTD*, p. 62).

> Hamlet is no tragic hero. He is instead the quintessential melancholic
> prince, paralysed by indecision, tormented by the consequences of his
> folly, and slain in a final royal bloodbath […] *Hamlet* as *trauerspiel*
> — the play is uprooted from its conventional context, and repositioned
> and illuminated afresh as a fragment of a different idea.[111]

It is this sensitivity towards Shakespeare as a Renaissance dramatist whose plays also

entail the 'non-renaissance', identified here as the Baroque, that is particularly relevant

to Coleridge's dramatic work (*OGTD*, p. 59). In this way, the traditional understanding

of Shakespeare's major, but ultimately unsuitable, influence upon Romantic drama may

be debated, since his plays are identified as contributors to a Baroque secularisation of

the tragic that was also expressed in an English Romantic context through the structural

emphasis upon redemption through remorse. In the final section of this chapter, I will

introduce the aspect of Benjamin's work that is apparently most at odds with

Coleridge's Romantic outlook: allegory.

1.7   Allegory and *Trauerspiel*

Benjamin dedicates the third and final part of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* to

the linguistic embodiment of the constellation: allegory. As with his activity of

rescuing the *Trauerspiel* from a critical obscurity based upon its misappropriation into

the genre of tragedy, his aim is to rescue allegorical representation from the critical

dead-end it had endured since its comparison with symbol in the Romantic era. Gilloch

states with reference to the figurative intention of allegory that it 'aspires to neither

clarity nor grace, but lays itself bare as meaningless verbosity, as the broken, arbitrary

language of fallen humanity and mournful nature'.[112] Benjamin reclaims allegory as the

figurative language of the postlapsarian world and, in doing this, he addresses what he

---

[111] Gilloch, p. 70.
[112] Gilloch, p. 81.

believes to be the mistaken opposition of symbol and allegory (and the false elevation

of the former above the latter) in the Romantic era. In short, Benjamin aims to show

that 'allegory is not failed symbol; it is the divine symbol's creaturely counterpart'.[113]

Benjamin's overarching argument is based upon a complex and wide-ranging

interweaving of theological, philosophical and contextual considerations that come

together to underline his point that the Romantic elevation of symbol above allegory as

a representative device is both misplaced and demonstrative of a misunderstanding of

their respective figurative functions.[114] In the opening sentence of 'Allegory and

Trauerspiel', he asserts his intention by declaring that, 'For over a hundred years the

philosophy of art has been subject to the tyranny of a usurper who came to power in the

chaos which followed in the wake of Romanticism' (*OGTD*, p. 159).[115] His aim in this

final section of the *Habilitation* is clear: he hopes to rebalance the existing status quo

under which aesthetic theory has operated since Romanticism adopted the symbol,

under false pretences, as the supreme form of artistic representation.

Benjamin is particularly critical of what he finds to be a misrepresentation of the

expressive function of the symbol as it is adopted from both theology and classicism

into Romantic aesthetics. In the first instance, Benjamin declares that, in search of a

redemptive solution to the postlapsarian state of mankind, Romantic philosophy took

'the unity of the material and the transcendental object, which constitutes the paradox of

the theological symbol, [and] distorted [it] into a relationship between appearance and

essence' (*OGTD*, p. 160). The basis of this distortion, it appears, lay in the fact that

---

[113] Gilloch, p. 81.

[114] Howard Caygill offers an introduction to allegory in Walter Benjamin's work in 'Walter Benjamin's Concept of Allegory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. by Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), pp. 241-54. Here, Caygill agrees that Benjamin's conception of allegory is 'rooted in the attempt to bring together the approaches of philosophy, aesthetics and cultural history' (p. 241).

[115] For a more detailed account of approaches to allegory in the Romantic era, see Theresa M. Kelley, 'Romanticism's Errant Allegory', in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (see note to Caygill, above), pp. 211-29.

'romantic aestheticians' adopted the symbol as a form of representation that promised a fleeting incarnation of the artistic image or, expressed in Benjamin's terminology, the realisation of an idea (*OGTD*, p. 159). It is a form of 'momentary totality' of which Benjamin is suspicious precisely because it offers an uncomplicated path towards the reconciliation of the divine and the human, which he believes is not available to historical man (*OGTD*, p. 165). The theological promise of the symbol as a form of representation that could be invested with a divine element was augmented by its transposition into the artistic representation of the heroic individual in classicism. Benjamin states that, 'in classicism, the tendency to the apotheosis of existence in the individual who is perfect […] is clear enough', but it is this elevation of the individual to a divine status that he sees as the delusionary vision of Romanticism, precisely because classical man's 'radius of culture' was mythic and therefore supported the 'thus perfected beautiful individual' in 'the circle of the "symbolic"' (*OGTD*, p. 160). It is helpful at this point to refer back to Benjamin's earlier essay, '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy', in which he states that the tragic hero exists in a 'magic circle' in that he is isolated from the rest of his community as a result of his ideal status.[116] Here, he contrasts the classical hero who is isolated from his community with the Baroque characters whose historical identity embeds them within their community: their projection is not upwards or beyond but outwards and among. This historical quality of the Baroque drama relies upon a representative trope, allegory, which deals with the earth-bound state of postlapsarian man:

> The Baroque apotheosis is a dialectical one. It is accomplished in the
> movement between extremes. In this eccentric and dialectical process
> the harmonious inwardness of classicism plays no role, for the reason
> that the immediate problems of the baroque, being politico-religious
> problems, did not so much affect the individual and his ethics as his
> religious community. Simultaneously with its profane concept of the

---

[116] Walter Benjamin, '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy' in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1996), I, pp. 55-58 (p.56).

> symbol, classicism develops its speculative counterpart, that of the
> allegorical. (*OGTD*, pp. 160-1)

Here, Benjamin cuts a path through theology and classicism that progresses towards his

theory of Baroque drama and introduces what would eventually be understood as his

theory of modernity.[117] Crucially, he divorces the 'radius' of classical 'culture' from

the 'radius' of Baroque culture, as the former is connected with the individual's

relationship with the divine and the latter with the political and religious machinations

of a community (*OGTD*, p. 160). As Samuel Weber states, he 'sought to establish a

radical discontinuity separating the Greek epoch from the Christian one, including their

respective theatres'.[118] The result of Benjamin's assertion that Baroque theatre bears no

evolutionary relationship with Greek theatre uncovers a key point of Benjamin's wider

generic theory. As counterparts to Greek tragedy and symbolic expression,

Trauerspiele and allegorical expression are not failing distortions of an apparent but

illusionary artistic ability to 'embod[y] the idea' (*OGTD*, p. 164). Instead, they give

rise to an alternative, purely secular, form of expression that is based upon signification

and the loss of meaning:

> Whereas in symbol destruction is idealized and the transfigured face
> of nature is fleetingly revealed in the light of redemption, in allegory,
> the observer is confronted with the *facies hippocratica* of history as a
> petrified, primordial landscape. (*OGTD*, p. 166).

Benjamin uses the notion of the landscape, or more often nature, as a bond between

Trauerspiel and allegory which, again, repeats his overarching argument that the

philosophical and literary canons have overlooked the expressive richness of both in

---

[117] Asja Lacis recalled in her memoirs that, in a discussion about his study with her, Benjamin had stated that, 'his investigation was not merely academic but directly related to current problems of contemporary literature […] Back then in Capri [she] did not really grasp the connection between allegory and modern poetics. Retrospectively [she] now underst[ood] how incisively Walter Benjamin had penetrated modern problems of form'. Quoted in Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 161. Benjamin's most explicit reference to modernity in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is in the section 'Baroque and Expressionism', pp. 53-56.
[118] Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p. 163.

favour of the synthesising action of tragedy and symbol. In this, he reminds the reader that nature and language, in their fallen state, contain within them not a divine coherence but only the markings of loss and the dispersal of meaning. He states that from the end of the Middle Ages to the start of the Baroque era, the attitude towards nature as it was represented in art followed the line of thought that, 'the imitation of nature mean[t] the imitation of nature as shaped by God' (*OGTD*, p. 180). This Romantic impulse towards the expressive power of symbol would appear to overcome the divides of the historical and linguistic consciousness of fallen mankind. As Bainard Cowan articulates, 'time seems to stop for this perfect moment, and problems of communication are annulled'.[119] By contrast, Benjamin transposes the historical condition of man into language in which, just as nature is rendered a landscape without essence—'a face - or rather […] a death's head'—meaning is 'hollowed out' in language (*OGTD*, p. 166).[120] In other words, the reconciliation between mankind and consciousness claimed by symbol is nowhere in allegory, which does not signify essence but simply signifies further signification.

The suspicion of symbolic redemption refers back to the philosophical debate between knowledge and representation established in the 'Epistemo-Critical Prologue' and Benjamin's initial redeployment of philosophy towards the 'representation of truth' rather than 'the acquisition of knowledge' (*OGTD*, p. 28). The key point here is Benjamin's assertion that, unlike knowledge, which may be 'a spontaneous product of the intellect', truth is associated with ideas which are 'simply given to be reflected upon [...they are] pre-existent' (*OGTD*, p. 30). An activity concerned with the representation of truth must therefore see representation as a gathering together and

---

[119] Cowan, p. 111.
[120] Gilloch, p. 83.

arranging of ideas so as to allow for their realisation through a configuration rather than the realisation of an idea through its representation:

> The striving on the part of the Romantic aestheticians after a resplendent but ultimately non-committal knowledge of an absolute has secured a place in the most elementary theoretical debates about art for a notion of the symbol which has nothing more than the name in common with the genuine notion […] For this abuse occurs wherever in the work of art the 'manifestation' of an 'idea' is declared a symbol. (*OGTD* p. 159; p. 160)

The function of allegory, therefore, is important to Benjamin's understanding of representation for two reasons. Firstly, as opposed to symbol, it stands as a purely representative device as it makes no pretention to the incarnation of an idea. Benjamin's quotation from Creuzer highlights this in the comparison between the two tropes, in which allegory 'signifies merely a general concept or an idea which is different from itself' as opposed to symbol, which is 'the very incarnation and embodiment of the idea' (*OGTD*, p. 164). In this sense, allegory is highly appropriate to the ornamentation of the Baroque era as it is concerned only with signs and signification and does not strive towards 'its abstract meaning' (*OGTD*, p. 162). Secondly, it becomes the chosen representative trope of a secularised world, which is declined 'direct access to a beyond' (*OGTD*, p. 79) exactly because it marks the loss of that 'abstract meaning' in human language. In opposition to the 'fleeting' revelation of nature in 'the light of redemption' that symbol can offer, allegory is concerned with 'the burning up of a husk as it enters the realm of ideas, that is to say the destruction of a work in which its external form achieves its most brilliant degree of illumination' (*OGTD*, p. 31). It is the suggestion of this allegorical view of communication that, I argue, appears in Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice as a counterbalance to his better established endorsement of symbol. This idea is perhaps best realised in the most famous dramatic scene of Coleridge's works as Alvar of *Remorse* unveils a picture, revealing, for a brief moment, the truth of his brother's attempt on his life before the

picture is consumed by flames. The image can be considered a striking dramatization of Benjamin's description of the effect of allegory, but Alvar's act gains further significance in the context of the play as the central struggle between sound and vision becomes a key aspect of Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice. While this aspect of *Remorse* will be considered in the final chapter of this thesis, I turn in the following chapter to an analysis of Coleridge's dramatic theory.

Chapter 2. Dramatic Illusion and Remorse in Coleridge's Early *Lectures on Literature*

2.1   Introduction: 'The True Theory of Stage Illusion'

> The true theory of stage illusion [is] equally distant from the French critics, who ground their principles on the presumption of *De*lusion, and of Dr. Johnson who would persuade us that our Judgements are as broad awake during the most masterly representation of the deepest scenes of Othello.[1]

The letter in which Coleridge declares his principle of stage illusion as a genuine theoretical basis for drama contains, in both its fluency and tone, a sense of genuine satisfaction upon the arrival of a theory he had been refining for years. It sees him settling upon a means of defining and judging the effect of theatrical productions upon an audience that is not only comprehensive but also novel. Furthermore, although this theory is composed of many ideas prevalent at the time, in its close analysis of the relationship between art and psychology, it is distinctively Coleridgean. The statement contained within the letter on 'the true theory of stage illusion' comes just fourteen months before the publication of *Biographia Literaria* and therefore, in spite of its confidence and original argument, it assumes a subordinate position in the history of Coleridge's theory to the statement upon poetic faith with which it is intimately linked.[2] Nevertheless, Coleridge's efforts to theorise the stage specifically by offering up a model of dramatic illusion that he found more satisfactory than the opposing views of the French theorists and Samuel Johnson, both derived from neoclassical rules of judgement, offers an incisive and profound study into the modern experience of (dramatic) art. As such, it highlights the importance of drama as a departure point for some of his most celebrated critical and poetic work.

---

[1] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Letter to Daniel Stuart, 1816', in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge,* ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-71), ɪv, pp. 641-2.
[2] Coleridge, 'Letter to Daniel Stuart', pp. 641-2.

Addressing the first point of reference for much of the criticism of Coleridge's theory of dramatic illusion, the 'tortured question [of his] "plagiarism"', Richard Harter Fogle sums up the argument for his originality and places it in the context of its fundamental importance for other areas of his work.[3] He observes that 'the vitality, subtlety, and concreteness of Coleridge's treatment of dramatic illusion is self-validating; it is organically alive both in itself and in its close relationship with Coleridge's whole way of thinking'.[4] This regard for Coleridge's dramatic illusion has recently been developed by Julian Knox in his doctoral thesis, 'Self-Portrait in a Concave Mirror: Coleridge and the Art of Translation'. Knox takes the trope of the mirror, used persistently by Coleridge throughout his critical work, and explores the link it makes between visual representation—not just in 'visual art' but also the '*active* creation of images'—and the poetic representation of spiritual time.[5] In this, Knox sees Coleridge as 'proto-Benjaminian' because his use of the mirror trope to connect the organic creativity of the human mind with a divine temporality that is, in fact, atemporal anticipates Benjamin's philosophy of history.[6] Coleridge's conception of time, when Knox considers it through the mirror trope, is not chronologically progressive but becomes rather a version of pure experience. In other words, time as chronology does not condition human experience but human consciousness as fluid and organic organises historical time:

> For Coleridge, time is not the mirror of history but is instead the focal point in the concave mirror of poetic consciousness which explodes time's homogeneity by projecting from it images that pay no heed to chronology […] and hence assume dimensions of what Benjamin would call "messianic time" or something close to it.[7]

---

[3] Richard Harter Fogle, 'Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion', *The Tulane Drama Review*, 4 (1960), 33-44 (p. 36).

[4] Fogle, p.37.

[5] Julian Knox, 'Self-Portrait in a Concave Mirror: Coleridge and the Art of Translation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, Los Angeles, 2011), p. 66; p. 65 (emphasis in original).

[6] Knox, p. 69.

[7] Knox, p. 66.

In the following account of the 1808 Lectures, I aim to make further links between Coleridge's emerging but inconclusive theory of drama and Benjamin's more forceful assertion of the dramatic form as the form which befits the modern condition of man. Whilst this view of Coleridge's 'proto-Benjaminian' character offers a fresh understanding of him as a Romantic writer, I am in agreement with Knox when he resists projecting a theory of modernity onto Coleridge, emphasising that, 'While it would be misleading to label Coleridge a "historical materialist", it is a testament to the originality of his historical philosophy that its echoes may be felt in the work of Walter Benjamin'.[8] Coleridge addresses the issue of history (and, further, historical representation) in his work, but is also willing to use his creative work to present conceptions of time other than a simple chronological mode as a way of confronting the sense of loss inherent in attempting to record felt experience in writing. However, the dividing line that inhibits an amalgamation between Benjamin's modernism and Coleridge's Romanticism is drawn when history and language converge within nature as the focal point for truthful representation. For Coleridge, nature is the living and tangible link to the divine by way of its expression of symbolic language, but Benjamin pulls nature in the opposite direction, into history, through his identification of it not with life but with death and its corresponding expressive trope, allegory.[9] Where some, most notably Paul de Man, have addressed Coleridge's attempts to overcome the constraints of time and language through the elevation of the conscious self in symbolic

---

[8] Knox, p. 69. I want to qualify my accord with Julian Knox by stating that, in certain areas, my aim is precisely to draw parallels between Benjamin's historical materialism and the historical materialism that can be drawn out of Coleridge's work, especially in relation to the character of the Ancient Mariner. I address the point, in Chapter Three, that although it is correct that Coleridge cannot be described as a historical materialist, the Mariner can be described in terms of a Benjaminian character who is a historical materialist, the Storyteller.

[9] In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin calls this 'natural history' and here refers to history that takes its identity from nature which is subject to the decaying process, rather than the more common term of natural history which refers to an epoch before human time (although the latter meaning complements the former in the context of his work). The key point is that Benjamin uses this form of history as a counterargument to the Romantic view of nature as a timeless element of the world: 'The nature of the creation which absorbs history back into itself is quite different from the nature of Rousseau'. Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne and introd. by George Steiner (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 47; p. 9. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *OGTD*.

language, and others are now starting to compare and contrast Romantic symbol with Benjamin's revival of allegory, my aim is to forge links between the two writers under the spotlight of the dramatic form.[10] The issue of symbol versus allegory remains a fertile source of interest in relation to both writers' work, but the complexities of this language-based inquiry, although always in mind, need to be put aside so as to highlight an alternative comparison between the two writers. This comparison, based in their formal interest in drama, may in some ways overcome the apparent incongruity between Benjamin's allegory and Coleridge's symbol.

The following chapter, which examines Coleridge's definition of dramatic illusion, focuses on an emerging network of ideas that were at a very early stage in the 1808 Lectures. The records surviving from this lecture series are more fragmentary than later series such as the 1811-12 and 1818-19 Lectures. Nonetheless, for the purpose of this study, the 1808 Lectures have important features that highlight their distinct contribution to the analysis of Coleridge's dramatic theory. First and foremost, these Lectures were given before the earliest date of the publication of A. W. Schlegel's *Über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* in 1809 and therefore the complication of Schlegel's influence upon Coleridge's thought is not a concern. Secondly, a consideration of the meaning of remorse in the context of human guilt and history that forms most of the undelivered Lecture Three is an important precursor to Coleridge's revised play, *Osorio* (the title of the play was later amended to *Remorse*).[11] Although this is an undeveloped concept in a set of notes for a lecture that Coleridge probably never gave, it does show

---

[10] In addition to Knox, Hugh Grady considers Benjamin's 'non-organic unity' located in allegory. See Hugh Grady, 'Hamlet as a Mourning Play: A Benjaminianesque Interpretation', *Shakespeare Studies*, 36 (2008), 135-65. Paul Hamilton departs from de Man's reading of Romantic irony by highlighting the dramatic, and hence, communal nature of Friedrich Schlegel's understanding of irony as 'permanent parabasis'. See Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003), pp. 19-20.

[11] The rewriting of *Remorse* was completed in 1813 but it could be as early as 1801 that Coleridge had the new title for the play in mind. For a more detailed account of Coleridge's attitude to *Osorio* and the process of its revision, see Jibon Krishna Banerjee, *Dramatic Works of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1994), pp. 144-163.

his tendency to theorise drama as an historical phenomenon. Finally, of the lecture notes that survive from this series, none are concerned with any one of Shakespeare's dramas specifically. Coleridge tended to introduce his lecture series with a historical description of the dramatic form and then move on to Shakespeare by arguing that he should be considered a poet rather than a dramatist. This general introduction would lead Coleridge into more detailed analysis of Shakespeare's individual plays. The surviving documents of the 1808 Lecture series consist of material from lectures one to four, which means that analysis of this series is confined to Coleridge's introduction to the dramatic form as it evolved in England and to his reasoning as to why Shakespeare should be termed a poet, not a dramatist. As a result, the reader of these lectures is focused not upon Coleridge's analysis of Shakespeare's language and the psychology of his characters (as is the case with the 1818 Lectures) but upon Coleridge's understanding of the dramatic form itself.[12] Added to this is the fact that the Supplementary Records attributed to this series consider, more independently of the poetic than do other lecture series, the stage as a visual art form. As a result of these features, the 1808 Lectures show Coleridge theorising the dramatic in and of itself and not bound by the complexities of its intertextuality with poetry.[13]

The specific importance of Coleridge's 1808 lectures is highlighted by Charles Mahoney. Stating that these lectures 'established much of the critical lexicon and many of the general principles to which Coleridge would return for the next eleven years', he presents them as the enabling foundation and characteristic enunciation of Coleridge's

---

[12] Obviously, this is not to say that Coleridge's 1808 Lectures did not become increasingly concerned with Shakespeare's plays and poetic language but that, for the reader or critic of these lectures, the written text that survives becomes focused more clearly upon the establishment of his dramatic theory.

[13] Again, I do not want to suggest that Coleridge was not concerned with the poetic in these lectures, especially as evidence of the lectures that do not survive suggests that the poetic was a key point of consideration. What I propose is that, as early lectures, the 1808 Lectures are uncomplicated by Coleridge's close following of Schlegel's dramatic theory that refined and added body to his own emerging stance. In this instance, Coleridge was able to work unfettered by a theory that, although it defined his own argument, also served to suppress other facets of his independently forged ideas.

singular voice in Romantic Shakespeare criticism.[14]   From these lectures, Coleridge establishes his position as a critic of Shakespeare's inherently poetic identity, a position upon which he builds in later lectures to produce his technique of close reading of Shakespeare's poetic language. Whilst this cannot be disputed, surfacing in 1808 is also a hidden critical lexicon that shadows many of his subsequent works. In the following account of dramatic illusion in the lectures, I aim to draw attention to an undercurrent of ideas within Coleridge's dramatic criticism that highlights his sensitivity towards drama as a staged form that is more immediately connected with its social and historical milieu. Further to this, I aim to highlight how Coleridge's theory of drama up to the nineteenth century shows an awareness that dramatic art represents the secular identity of man (although, unlike Benjamin, Coleridge does not consciously assert this notion). In short, I aim to demonstrate that Coleridge's critical engagement with drama is based on two main premises: firstly, that the combination of poetic dialogue and the visual realisation of images on stage made drama a captivating artistic medium but also one that must be closely regulated; secondly, that dramatic form and genre are conditioned by our representation of mankind and the experience of mankind in either a classical framework or a modern one, but fail if the two are confused in one play, a point that perhaps Coleridge was in the process of establishing in his dramatic theory and practice.

The second issue considered in this chapter is the historical character of Coleridge's dramatic motif, remorse. Remorse is considered by Coleridge firstly (and briefly) in the 1808 *Lectures on the Principles of Poetry* and he returns to it in Lecture XII of his 1818-19 series. Other than these two references, the only point at which he considers remorse is through the title and themes of his most successful play. It is, therefore, ostensibly a minor point of reflection in the context of his significant dramatic output

---

[14] Charles Mahoney, 'Coleridge and Shakespeare', in *The Oxford Handbook to Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 498-514 (p. 499).

but, as a motif, it becomes a key aspect of his dramatic work, especially when it is

studied in the light of his theory of illusion and of his account of the human will.[15] The

idea of remorse, and its association with the will, is most evident and most important in

Coleridge's *Lectures on Literature* before he encounters Schlegel's *Über dramatische*

Kunst und Literatur.[16] After he reads Schlegel's work, his own theory of dramatic

illusion is brought into line with early German Romanticism and feeds more smoothly

into his later account of poetic faith in the *Biographia*. This realignment of dramatic

illusion as an aspect of poetic theory serves to override the nascent theory of remorse, as

it serves Coleridge as an emotional and historical source of dramatic imagination. A

key moment in Coleridge's consideration of drama occurs when he links Shakespeare to

the poetic rather than the dramatic.[17] This innovative view, however, has not only

impacted upon the critical view of Shakespeare but also upon the critical view of

Coleridge. Whilst Coleridge's criticism of Shakespeare brings to light qualities of

Shakespeare's plays that were neglected by treatment of them under neoclassical rules

and gives us a fuller understanding of his plays, it has equally served to conceal some

---

[15] The idea of the will was common ground for critical theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Briefly, it was conceived as the instrument used by an individual to enable him to enter into an illusion. In an analysis of the will in Schlegel's account of dramatic illusion as compared with that of Coleridge, Burwick highlights Coleridge's original input into this field by making the will the decisive element of the spectator's choice to see the illusion. Unlike Schlegel, who views the will as something to be suspended in order to allow for the effect of illusion upon the individual, Coleridge claims that the individual chooses to activate his will to suspend his disbelief in the illusion before him. In Schlegel, the will is merely a marker of the difference between the real and the illusory: it must be suspended for an illusion to have effect. For Coleridge, by contrast, the will evidences the spectator's powers of imagination. The will, for Coleridge, becomes the key ground for aesthetic interaction between artist and spectator. For a full account of Coleridge's modification of Schlegel's concept of illusion, see Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991), pp. 191-231.
[16] It is accepted that the influence of A. W. Schlegel upon Coleridge's lectures is marked at Lecture 9 of his 1811-12 course. Coleridge's 1808 Lectures predate Schlegel's, which were delivered between 1809 and 1811. For a detailed account of the timing of both lecture series and a considered approach to the extent of Coleridge's use of Schlegel, see Foakes' account in Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), v (1987) pp. liii-lxiv; pp. 172-175. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *LL*.
[17] Coleridge's distinction between Shakespeare and drama (and his realignment of Shakespeare with poetry) comes into view initially through the titles of his lecture series. Of the twelve series that were given between 1808 and 1819, five included 'Lectures on Shakespeare' in their title (none of these proposed a commentary on drama). Only one series (1812) was dedicated to drama specifically, and this was split into two courses: 'Lectures on European Drama' and 'Lectures on Shakespeare'. The 1808 lectures in which Coleridge first makes the distinction between drama and Shakespeare are entitled 'Lectures on the Principles of Poetry'.

aspects of Coleridge's dramatic criticism that remained distinct from his analysis of Shakespeare's poetic plays. As a result, aspects of some of Coleridge's dramatic theory such as the motif of remorse, the commanding genius, and the use of personification and allegory in English drama from medieval plays to Shakespeare remain undeveloped and tend to be overlooked by critical research.[18] In the following pages, I offer an interpretation of Coleridge's working definition of dramatic illusion and its vehicle, the will, as it precedes the stage at which Coleridge may have been influenced by Schlegel's lectures. I aim to draw attention to Coleridge's awareness of the separate theoretical foundations of the dramatic form and the poetic form through a consideration of drama as an emotional and historical rather than an intellectual and mythical medium. By analysing these elements of Coleridge's early lectures, I aim to uncover an interpretation of drama in Coleridge's work that gestures towards the themes and motifs that Benjamin explores initially in his revival of the German mourning plays and later in essays such as *Theses on the Philosophy of History* and 'The Storyteller'.

Finally in this chapter, I apply my findings to a consideration of how the controversial premise of the 'Critique of *Bertram*' may have been misread as an attack on its author, Charles Maturin, and, to a lesser extent, the Drury Lane committee. Here, I want to argue that the 'Critique' can be understood as belonging to the *Biographia* much more than has previously been appreciated. Critics who consider the book an autobiographical piece have gone some way towards vindicating these chapters, therefore, as extension to this, it seems appropriate to consider them also in line with Coleridge's literary criticism. As Julie Carlson has suggested, the focus upon Romanticism's inability to overcome both an aesthetic view of the imagination as

---

[18] A notable exception to this is Julie Carlson, who has commented extensively on commanding genius and maintains that drama plays a key role in our understanding of Coleridge. See Julie Carlson, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

primarily reflective and its fear of the empiricist political philosophies seen in France have contributed to a view of a British Romantic identity that privileges mental theatre over practical dramaturgy. This 'entrenched' view of a 'withdraw[al] from the stage' of the British canonical writers, at least, has led to a dearth of critical engagement with the dramatic literature and theory of the British Romantic—and particularly Coleridgean—*oeuvre*.[19] In 'An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform', Carlson repositions Coleridge's theory of imagination within a dramatic (rather than poetic) context of active and collective participation in the play. She argues that Coleridge's specifically dramatic theory of imagination, which is based on his model of dramatic illusion (most thoroughly discussed in his lectures), puts forward the view that the aesthetic vision of a play may only come to fruition through the audience's will to experience it through the 'temporary Half-Faith' I focus upon in my understanding of his theory of illusion (*LL*, I, p. 134). In this way, it becomes clear that Coleridge's theory of imagination is not a fixed and universal theory but one that may be adjusted to suit the two different forms of poetry and drama. Carlson's interest in Coleridge's formulation of a dramatic imagination is based in Coleridge's interest in the theatre as a tool for social reform, particularly in opposition to the political philosophies of reason and sense coming from revolutionary France. However, as I will argue in the final section of this chapter, her reassessment of Coleridge's use of the 'temporary Half-Faith' of dramatic illusion has important implications for his literary theory concerning drama as much as his political theory concerning France (*LL*, I, p. 134). Therefore, I hope to re-establish a literary critical engagement with this text that is glossed over in the New Historicist movement and move towards its revival as an important piece of Coleridge's output. The literary engagement with Coleridge's dramatic theory must start, however, with his own historical understanding of modern drama as a form that

---

[19] Julie Carlson, 'An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform', *Modern Philology*, 86 (1988), 22-33 (p.22).

emerges under different circumstances to classical tragedy and it is, accordingly, here that I begin in the following analysis of the 1808 Lectures.

2.2   The Significance of the Middle Ages in Coleridge and Benjamin's Understanding of the Dramatic

The source of both Coleridge and Benjamin's versions of the modern dramatic form begin not in a mythical age described by the classical authors but in the tangibly historical setting of the Middle Ages. Both writers take medieval mystery plays as the point at which drama was restored to the European tradition as a new form, distinct from its classical predecessor. Coleridge introduces both the 1808 Lectures and the 1811-12 Lectures with an explanation of the development of the drama and, in these lectures, he comments on the specific nature of English drama.[20] The commentary on the evolution of the drama in both Ancient Greece and England shows Coleridge working out a considered distinction between the two dramatic forms according to their cultural and dramaturgical contexts, and the Middle Ages stands as the break between them. In a description of the evolution of drama in England, the flow of Coleridge's argument appears to silhouette the process of origin which forms the discursive foundation of Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. It is a process of interruption and restoration whereby, out of the mainstream of the established form, a new form erupts and establishes itself in its own right, paradoxically maintaining within its structure a continuation of the initial flow. This type of movement is also described by Coleridge in the notes for Lecture Two, which assert that the dramatic form has been

---

[20] There was a sense, in both lecture series, that Coleridge spent too much time on these topics and should have moved more swiftly onto the subjects as advertised (namely Shakespeare's plays and other literature). Henry Crabbe Robinson commented that Lecture Two of the 1811-12 series contained 'too much repetition in the definition, etc., of poetry […] and Greek theatre which might have been spared' (*LL*, I, p. 214). Foakes notes that Coleridge's insistence on these topics highlights their importance to him (*LL*, I, p. 215).

through 'a State of Chaos, out of which it was <for a while, at least> to proceed anew, as if there had been none before it' (*LL*, I, p. 48). This point is qualified, however, by the suggestion that the 'chain' back to ancient literature 'was never wholly broken' (*LL*, I, p. 48). Consequently, Coleridge builds up an image of the dramatic form having passed through an epoch under which it has become profoundly altered. The imagery used suggests a process of alchemy whereby the chemical structure of the form is permanently altered, but, in this case, the process progresses from a precious metal to a 'baser metal' (*LL*, I, p. 48). The language Coleridge employs in this description of the evolution of the dramatic form is suggestive of his sensitivity towards what Benjamin more openly terms the 'secular drama', which is concerned only with the historical identity of mankind (*OGTD*, p. 49). The culture upon which the modern drama is created contrasts with the classical structure of transcendence and is now a 'baser' reference point grounded in earthly form and content (*LL*, I, p. 48). Benjamin makes his assertion of this clear in a sub-section of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* entitled 'Immanence of Baroque Drama':

> Whereas the painters of the Renaissance know how to keep their skies high, in the paintings of the baroque the cloud moves, darkly or radiantly, down towards the earth. In contrast to the baroque the Renaissance does not appear as a godless and heathen period, but as an epoch of profane freedom for the life of the faith, while the Counter-Reformation sees the hierarchical strain of the middle ages assume authority in a world which was denied direct access to a beyond. (*OGTD*, p. 79)

Coleridge's description of a contrasting artistic age to the Renaissance is by no means as polemically organised, but it does draw upon imagery of light, used in a way that is strikingly similar to Benjamin's application of it in his observations upon the contrasting cultural inheritance of the Baroque drama and the Renaissance drama. Here, Coleridge describes the period between classical literature and the Renaissance in Europe:

> A dark cloud, like another Sky, covered the whole Cope of Heaven,
> but here it thinned away, & white Stains of Light shewed a Star
> behind it, and [h]ere it was rent, and a Star passed across in all its
> brightness, and vanished […] The ignorance of the great mass of our
> countrymen was the efficient cause of the reproduction of the Drama;
> & the preceding Darkness equally with the returning Light was
> necessary in order to the production of *Shakspere* — (*LL*, I, p. 48)

In the quotations above, Benjamin and Coleridge emphasise different epochs or timescales for their own distinct arguments. Benjamin describes the Baroque era as a period which contrasts culturally, but shares historical context, with the Renaissance; he uses it specifically as a critically overlooked precursor to the modernity of his era. In contrast, Coleridge comments more generally upon the gap between classicism and the Renaissance as a period of literary darkness. In spite of these differences, which mark the distinctive nature of each writer's argument—the former polemical and the latter more generally pedagogical—both Benjamin and Coleridge describe the history of the dramatic form as passing through an age in which access to the divine was cut off and emerging from it was a new, historical, creative base. Coleridge goes on, in this lecture, to state that stock characters of the English stage such as 'Harlequin and the clown' found their 'genuine Antecessors' in allegorical characters such as 'the Vice and the Devil' of the medieval morality plays (*LL*, I, p. 49). Clearly, here, in spite of Coleridge's later commitment to the imaginative power of symbol in language, his historical account of the English stage shows a sensitivity to the allegorical and historic roots of the dramatic form as it has evolved since the classical age.

Before describing this historical foundation of dramatic creativity, it is worth commenting upon the way in which the notes made by Coleridge for this lecture appear to mimic the rhythm of the Benjaminian origin. The passage quoted above, in which Coleridge allows his argument to crescendo towards an introduction of Shakespeare, breaks off at the point at which the idea of Shakespeare is announced. The flow of the

lecture as it is recorded is subject to a cessation and is then restored in the ensuing

paragraph with the statement that, 'The drama re-commenced in England as it first

began in Greece—in religion' (*LL*, I, p. 49). Here, Coleridge's argument, which starts

by mapping out the evolution of drama from a classical to a Shakespearean mode,

moves laterally to a consideration of the origins of the English stage as it begins,

historically, in the Mystery plays of the Middle Ages. The overlapping structure of

Coleridge's notes effects a displacement and re-establishment of thought similar to that

which is defined by Benjamin as a moment of origin whereby an 'original phenomenon'

comes into being only through a 'dual insight' that it is both 'a process of restoration

and re-establishment' and 'something imperfect and incomplete' (*OGTD*, p. 45).

Coleridge's working out of the historical evolution of the English stage seems to cohere

with Benjamin's understanding of origin, which 'is not intended to describe the process

by which the existent came into being, but rather to describe that which emerges from

the process of becoming and disappearance' (*OGTD*, p. 45). Shakespeare is placed at

the centre of this process both in terms of his location in the notes and as partaking of

both sides of Coleridge's historical evolution of the drama. For Coleridge, Shakespeare

emerges from the disappearance of the classical age and the becoming of the modern

historical age as his dramas take on both a celestial 'Light' that is inherently classical

but also contains darker, more allegorical references inherited from the Mystery plays of

the Middle Ages (*LL*, I, p. 48). Thomas de Quincey illustrates Coleridge's success in

highlighting Shakespeare's unique character:

> [The Lecture's] general purport was to clear the ground for a just
> estimate of Shakespeare by separating what he had individually from
> what he had as a member of a particular nation in a particular age: in
> order to which the progress of the drama was traced from the
> *mysteries* downwards to Shakespeare; and it was shewn that the Fool
> and the Clown were a bequest to the Shakespearean age from the
> mysteries—being representatives of the Vice and the Devil degraded
> into secondary parts; that these parts of Shakespeare were therefore to
> be considered as the necessary concessions to the lower part of the

> audience; but that, even out of this bad metal, he had wrought
> excellent workmanship. (*LL*, I, p. 56; emphasis in original)

Overall, to identify the structure of Coleridge's argument with Benjamin's description of a moment of origin pinpoints the moment at which his dramatic criticism may reach its most original form. Both Benjamin and Coleridge attempt to provide an alternative template for dramatic theory to that of Aristotle's *Poetics*, which cannot be applied to the new historical identity of drama, and they both locate the emergence of a specifically European form of drama in the medieval Mystery plays. Important, here, is that Benjamin sets out to declare the 'secularization of the mystery-play', which becomes a vital precursor to his later approach to literary theory, in which he aims to 'recreate criticism as a genre' (*OGTD*, p. 79).[21] The studied objective to revolutionise dramatic criticism in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* can be applied to Coleridge's more discursive approach to the history of drama in the *Lectures* in order to reveal a similar reassessment of the form that adds body to Coleridge's critical views and uncovers a modern dramatic subtext in his work.

Considering the evolution of the modern English stage further, Coleridge pursues the idea that the entry into a historically conditioned temporality has altered the chemical structure of the form of drama or, more specifically, tragedy in Lecture Two of the 1808 course. In this lecture, he marks a clear line of distinction between 'the Greek and the English Theatre' and offers English theatre a hybrid identity relating to both classical Tragedy and the Mystery plays of the Middle Ages:

> However this may be the necessity of at once instructing and
> gratifying the people produced the great distinction between the Greek
> and the English Theatre — to this we must attribute the origin of
> Tragi-comedy, or a representation of human Events more lively, more
> near the truth, & permitting a larger field of moral instruction, a more
> ample exhibition of the recesses of the human Heart under all the trials

---

[21] Graeme Gilloch, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002), p. 1.

> & circumstances that most concern us, than we had known or guessed
> at [in the classical model of the stage]. (*LL*, I, p. 52)

Here, Coleridge recognises that the English theatre departs from the classical temporality of a Greek theatre based in the 'Traditional Hero' as it takes as its subject 'human Events' and 'the human Heart' (*LL*, I, p. 43; p. 52). This is a key assumption as it highlights Coleridge's understanding that the concept of the heroic is no longer a unified concept in post-classical English drama. Rather, exhibiting a point of view similar to Benjamin's assertion of the *Trauerspiel* that it has 'no individual hero, only constellations of heroes', Coleridge asserts that heroic qualities can be disseminated throughout a play's *dramatis personae*, leaving no clear-cut heroic struggle between man and the gods but often ambivalent struggles between warring lead characters (*OGTD*, p. 132). The coincidence with Benjamin's view of the *Trauerspiel* is clear as Coleridge, in laying the foundations for his later point that Shakespeare should not be judged according to the classical rules of tragedy, divorces ancient Greek theatre from the modern English theatre. This action results, for Coleridge as it does for Benjamin, in the creation of a new form of drama that takes the totality of mankind—and not just its most elevated examples—as its subject. Though this is perhaps more traditionally conceived and articulated by Coleridge as the form of the tragi-comedy, both writers allow the purely tragic to be infused with a human emotion upon the genre's adaptation into an historical context. Whilst Coleridge's reasons for this adaptation of classical tragedy do not display the modern theoretical self-awareness of Benjamin's explanation of the *Trauerspiel*, they do lead him to draw similar observations about the nature of modern drama in general. Benjamin's exploration of mourning in the *Trauerspiel* is bound to a complex interweaving of philosophical and theoretical factors that will eventually form his theory of modernity, whereas Coleridge explains that the blending of tragedy and comedy came about due to the need to be 'not only instructive, but

entertaining' (*LL*, I, p. 49). The dual identity of the drama, as it was understood by Coleridge, would eventually become the focal point of his struggle to reconcile its artistic merits with this secondary purpose of entertainment that became the predominant concern of popular theatre in the nineteenth century. Already, in 1808, he had identified the tension felt within the modern drama between the combination of the tragic and comic:

> A useful rivalry commenced between the Metropolis, the residence of (independent of the Court & Nobles) the most active & stirring Spirits who had not been regularly educated […] & the Universities — the Latter prided themselves in their closer approximation to the ancient rules, & ancient regularity, taking the Theatre of Greece […] as a perfect Ideal without any critical collation of the times, origin & circumstances — in the mean time the popular Writers […] could not and would not abandon what they had found to delight their countrymen sincerely. (*LL*, I, pp. 53-4)

Here, Coleridge offers both an insightful critique of the rigid adherence to the rules of classical tragedy, which took no account of the cultural movement from dramatic art based in myth to the same based in history (and in turn led to the devaluation of Shakespeare in the eighteenth century) and a suggestion of his own devaluation of the modern stage in writings such as the 'Critique of *Bertram*'. The problem of the stage resided in the copy: the intellectual elite were compelled to repeat the classical mode of representing time, place and action within the drama as real, and sensational plays drawing in the crowds went to elaborate lengths to impress the audience with the visions and effects that made the stage an exact copy of the chosen setting. For Coleridge, however, reality was not the point of drama: the '*Unities of time and place were not essential to the drama*' because 'it is never believed to *be real*' but, equally, the drama should not simply descend into 'nothing but […] jokes and what was externally ludicrous' (*LL*, I, p. 227; p. 229; emphasis in original). To mediate between these two poles of English theatre, Coleridge built his theory of drama around his own rendering of Shakespeare's unique creativity and his accompanying description of the theatrical

conditions of the Elizabethan age, which supported Shakespeare's imagination through the disregard for (and less technologically advanced nature of) stage scenery. However, as already noted in Chapter One, the result of this, combined with the established political context of suspicion of the visual qualities of the stage, has caused Coleridge's dramatic theory to languish under the general assumption of its resistance to performance under the common label of anti-theatrical. In the following section, I hope to question this assumption regarding Coleridge's dramatic theory (and, more widely, his interest in the dramatic form) by reasserting Coleridge's original interest in illusion as concerned with drama and, more specifically, the audience's handling of the visual in drama. By tracing Coleridge's term dramatic 'Half-Faith' from his 1808 Lectures (*LL*, I, p. 134) through to his revision of this into the 'poetic faith' of the *Biographia*, I hope to show that Coleridge's early theory was not overtaken by his later, 'more polished' theory.[22] Rather, I find that Coleridge's half-faith of dramatic illusion maintains an independence from, and an influence upon, his later poetic faith in the poet's imagination.

2.3   Coleridge's Theory of Dramatic Illusion

Research concerned with Coleridge's efforts to define dramatic illusion has often addressed, since Coleridge himself highlighted the issue, the extent and importance of his indebtedness to Schlegel.[23] Against the backdrop of research from such critics as René Wellek and Norman Fruman, who sought to bring to light Coleridge's

---

[22] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, p.6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *BL*.

[23] Coleridge drew attention to the fact that his lectures were very close in nature to A. W. Schlegel's lectures on Shakespeare in an effort to defend Sir Walter Scott from accusations that he had plagiarised from *Christabel*. The issue of the coincidence of Coleridge and Schlegel's work has, from this admission onwards, jeopardised the authority of Coleridge's analysis of Shakespeare's plays as the originality of these lectures has been brought into question.

unacknowledged borrowings, the question of his plagiarism has grown into a more nuanced consideration of the particular timing of Schlegel's influence upon him and its effect upon his theoretical work.[24] R.A. Foakes draws our attention to this in his Introduction to the Bollingen edition of the *1808-1819 Lectures on Literature*, stating that although, within the context of criticism, Coleridge's indebtedness may not be serious, it 'does matter in as far as a knowledge of it helps to mark out the extent of his originality'.[25] Frederick Burwick has taken up this point and added significant detail to the variance between the theories of Coleridge and Schlegel, placing Coleridge's formation of dramatic illusion into a wider context that draws upon other works.[26] Both Foakes and Burwick locate Coleridge's early definition of stage illusion in the 1808 Lectures, in which Coleridge connects it with the notion of the waking dream. This concept is regarded as a strong theme running through nineteenth-century critical theory, but Burwick goes on to point out that Coleridge's original input to this field of inquiry is his considerable emphasis upon the will as the active element of the waking dream and the primary vehicle for illusion—a significant departure from Schlegel. It is Coleridge's understanding and application of the will in his theory of aesthetic illusion that 'marks out the extent of his originality' as it stands as the lynchpin between his early thoughts on dramatic illusion in the 1808 Lectures and his later explanation of poetic illusion in *Biographia Literaria*.[27] However, whilst it is clear that Coleridge's early dramatic work on the will as a mechanism for illusion laid the foundations for his celebrated definition of 'poetic faith', there are sufficient differences between the two versions to support the view that the latter definition does not simply supersede the

---

[24] René Wellek, 'Coleridge', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), II, pp. 151-87, and Norman Fruman, *Coleridge the Damaged Archangel* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1972), pp. 141-165.

[25] Foakes, 'Editor's Introduction' to *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, p. liv.

[26] Here, Burwick follows Elisabeth Schneider who argues that Erasmus Darwin's *The Botanic Garden* and Lord Kame's *Elements of Criticism* both influenced the content of Coleridge's lecture series. See Elisabeth Schneider, *Coleridge, Opium and Kubla Khan*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 91-109.

[27] Foakes, 'Editor's Introduction' to *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, p. liv.

former and that both theories can and should run parallel to one another (*BL*, II, p. 6).
In fact, the distinctiveness of the two theories lies in Coleridge's perception that the
dramatic is an essentially interpretative medium in contrast to the essentially creative
medium of poetry. As the dramatic writer must renounce a certain amount of creative
power to his audience, it is of paramount importance that this audience is offered
dramas that are composed, chosen and performed with aesthetic and moral integrity.

Perhaps the most notable aspect of the 1808 consideration of dramatic illusion is that it
sets Coleridge's analysis of illusion firmly in a visual and theatrical setting through the
discussion of imitation and copy in terms of stage scenery. Coleridge does not analyse
imitation in the Shakespearean sense of the meditative mind but stresses the ways in
which it is practically revealed through the visual decoration of the stage. This act of
transforming the theory of drama from a copy of reality (the three unities) to a
representation of experience (dramatic illusion) proposes a new understanding of both
the form of drama and of the efficacy of historical representation. Where the classical
model of tragic drama was built upon a fidelity to the idea of history as a
chronologically progressive phenomenon, Coleridge's Romantic model of drama
suggests a more fluid understanding of the truth of events in the individual's experience.
These comments on the nature of illusion in 1808 appear in the Supplementary Records
to the lectures and are concerned with the conscious effort of the spectator of a drama to
'encourage by [their] own Will' a 'temporary Faith' in the visual suggestion of the
drama as an apparent reality (*LL*, I, p. 130). The analysis is specifically applied to
illusion in drama, that which 'relates to the theatre and the art of acting' and the
'imitat[ion] of reality under a semblance of reality' and Coleridge's focus here is upon
the artifice of scenery (*LL*, I, p. 129, n. 15; p. 130). As a result, whilst Coleridge's
comments on illusion and the will can be seen as precursors to later commentary on the

nature of illusion in art, which, Foakes asserts, 'emerge pared down and more polished in expression' in later lectures and in the *Biographia Literaria*, they are considered here with sole emphasis upon a specific requirement of drama: the visual aspect of stage scenery (*LL*, I, p. 128). Setting the context of this account of dramatic illusion against the backdrop of the potential moral ambivalence of the theatre, which stems from its nature as an '*analogon* of deception' (*LL*, I, p.130; emphasis in original), or its appearance as reality, Coleridge accentuates the importance of the spectator's will in the creation of stage illusion:

> Stage Presentations are to produce a sort of temporary Half-Faith,
> which the Spectator encourages in himself & supports by a voluntary
> contribution on his own part, because he knows that it is at all times in
> his power to see the thing as it really is. (*LL*, I, p. 134)

In this conception of stage illusion, each member of the audience views a production that offers the effect of partial belief in the events and characters portrayed on stage. The spectator is given the power to choose to enter into this illusion by actively encouraging his belief in the production on the reassurance that, in full control of his judgemental powers, he can turn away from the representation at any time. This commentary appears as markedly distinct from Coleridge's later remarks concerning the task of the poet who draws from his own imagination imitations of nature in order to affect the reader so that he may partake fully in the author's illusion. The key point of difference lies in Coleridge's awareness of the visual qualities of the theatre, and he therefore simultaneously strengthens the ability of the spectator of the drama to 'voluntar[ily] contribut[e]' to the illusion whilst weakening the strength of his faith in the illusion to a 'temporary Half-Faith' (*LL*, I, p. 134). Here, the visual force of the theatre as a potential screen of deception makes it all the more important that an audience is furnished with its own interpretative faculty, described by Coleridge as a half-faith and therefore approaching the fully fledged poetic faith that the poet is allowed to produce in his reader. Imagination, not vision, is the main aesthetic trait of

poetry and it therefore offers Coleridge a solution to the problematic tension between illusion and delusion caused by the visual nature of staged theatre. However, in drama, Coleridge must emphasise the will as a judgemental device held by the audience as a way of ensuring their correct enjoyment of the play, as they are given the power to recognise illusion and to turn away from 'see[ing] the thing as it really is' whenever they choose (*LL*, I, p. 134). In this way, Coleridge's conception of the stage revolves around the playwright's responsible employment of the visual props of the play and the audience's willingness to understand and accept these props as features that support the play's illusory hiatus from reality. Inasmuch as members of the audience are required to activate their judgement in order to defend themselves against the usurping effect of visual devices within the play, the playwright is required to provide the correct environment for the audience to activate this judgemental will. This understanding of dramatic illusion influences Coleridge's later complaints about Gothic drama and sets the theoretical backdrop for his 'Critique of *Bertram*'. In a more intricate argument than perhaps first appears, Coleridge sees the failure of *Bertram* in the apparently irresponsible production and staging of a play that conformed neither to the fictitious distance achieved by successful dramatic illusion nor the transformation of the ideal of the hero that was occurring in the Romantic era. Presenting the characters and actions of the play as caricatures of reality (intensified duplications rather than distanced imitations), so-called popular playwrights denied the audience the artistic conditions through which they might separate the play from reality. In other words, a spectator of the English Georgian theatre was prevented from becoming a version of the ideal reader extolled by writers such as Coleridge and Charles Lamb precisely because all their time was spent reacting instinctively to the visions that overwhelmed them in the play.[28]

---

[28] Joseph Donohue gives a good account of both Coleridge and Lamb's understanding of the ideal as it should relate specifically to the form of drama in *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 280-312.

Turning his theory towards the poetic, Coleridge applies the qualities of the will to

Shakespeare, whose work is again based on the capacity to judge, but offers a different

effect. Here, Coleridge claims Shakespeare to be 'under the command of *his own Will*'

in order to argue that he is an artist of judgement (*LL*, I, p. 80; emphasis in original).

This point is made by Coleridge to show that Shakespeare need not be confined to the

classical rules of the three unities due to the fact that his dramas were not meant to be

true copies of reality but instead 'emplif[ied] general truths about mankind'.[29] The

distancing of Shakespeare from classical drama is accompanied by a movement towards

an aesthetic theory that appears to be based in the mind of the poet rather than the vision

of the audience:

> [Shakespeare] projected his mind out of his own particular being, &
> felt and made others feel, on subjects no way connected with himself,
> except by force of Contemplation — & that sublime faculty, by which
> a great mind becomes that which it meditates on. (*LL*, I, pp. 80-1)

According to Coleridge, Shakespeare's ability to represent a true image of reality that is

not merely a copy of real events but is a reflection of these events as filtered through his

imaginative and philosophical mind places him in a poetic rather than a dramatic

context. Here, the visual is subordinate to, and actually appears only through, the

writer's imagination; it is not real but ideal. By placing the will as a faculty of

judgement in Shakespeare's creative identity and using it as the controlling device of his

imaginative meditations, Coleridge achieves his aim to 'prove that [Shakespeare] had

shewn himself a *poet*, previously to his appearance, as a dramatic poet' (*LL*, I, p. 80;

emphasis in original). In an important move, Coleridge relocates the will as a device

used to safeguard against the dangers of the usurping power of the visual on stage from

the audience to the dramatist, and in so doing he also shifts focus from the visual reality

of stage presentations to the ideal nature of poetic drama, which focuses upon the

---

[29] Foakes, in *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, p. 126 (note 7).

'Nakedness of the stage' and is at its most theatrical only as a verbal medium (*LL*, I, p. 83). Coleridge expresses his view of the quality of drama that should be aimed for as 'something betwixt a Recitation & an *Re* presentation' (*LL*, I, p. 83; emphasis in original).

This is an important shift in Coleridge's thought as his dramatic theory of illusion has now been interwoven, and, to a certain extent, confused with the illusory effect that is achieved in poetic creativity. The former is concerned with the audience's reception of a play as it is staged and presented under the visual conditions of the theatre, while the latter is bound up with a more complex mobilisation of elements of this initial theory (such as the will and copy versus imitation) to reconsider the special qualities of Shakespeare's plays as owing to the dramatist's (poetic) imagination. Consequently, Coleridge's theory of dramatic illusion is often taken to span both of these areas of his criticism, and their significant overlap is fixed in a somewhat circular argument that starts with his declaration that an audience can 'voluntarily […] suspen [d their] Act of Comparison […which is] assisted by the Will', as a way of tempering the potential limitlessness of the imagination made visual on stage (*LL*, I, pp. 134-5). The use of the will is then carried over to a vindication of Shakespeare's poetic creativity on the grounds that he is in 'command' of his own 'will' against the suggestion of his own uncontrollable creativity. It is finally brought together, much later, in a clarified statement on the nature of illusion that comes to rest in poetry as the 'willing suspension of disbelief for the moment which constitutes poetic faith' (*BL*, II, p. 6). The extrapolation of dramatic illusion, therefore, starts and ends with the human will as a device which simultaneously enables and limits our involvement with illusion. Significantly, Coleridge's engagement with it is on both a dramatic and a poetic level and, although this has not always been recognised, these arenas remain distinct

throughout his theory of illusion, in spite of their confusion within Coleridge's view of Shakespeare.[30] Even in 1816, a year before his key statement on poetic faith was published in *Biographia Literaria*, Coleridge was still considering the 'true theory of stage illusion' that remained embedded in 'images' that appear in the theatre in a similar way as they do in dreams.[31] Although never far away from Coleridge's defence of Shakespeare as a poetic playwright, his theory of stage illusion is always bound up with a visual illusion that is not intuitive in the way that poetic faith is, but is more closely aligned with human psychology and the unconscious:

> It is not strictly accurate to say, that we believe our dreams to be actual while we are dreaming […] with the will the comparing power is suspended, and without the comparing power any act of Judgement, whether affirmation or denial, is impossible. The Forms and Thoughts act merely by their own inherent power: and the strong feelings at times apparently connected with them are in fact bodily sensations, which are the causes or occasions of the Images, not (as when we are awake) the effects of them. Add to this a voluntary lending of the Will […] and you have the true theory of stage illusion — equally distant from the French critics, who ground their principles on the presumption of *De*lusion, and of Dr. Johnson who would persuade us that our Judgements are as broad awake during the most masterly representation of the deepest scenes of Othello.[32]

Coleridge uses his theory of illusion here, in its widest sense, to counter the neoclassical theory of the unities and to emphasise the fact that the spectator of the drama must always voluntarily—that is, freely—choose to accept the drama's illusion. In this sense, Coleridge also offers a theory that not only argues against established dramatic theory

---

[30] See Earl Leslie Griggs, 'The Willing Suspension of Disbelief', in *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honour of George F. Reynolds*, ed. by E. J. West (Boulder, COL: University of Colorado Press, 1945), p. 243 and Dorothy Morrill, 'Coleridge's Theory of Dramatic Illusion', *Modern Language Notes*, 42, 7 (1927), pp. 436-44. Morrill draws together various references made by Coleridge to dramatic illusion and asserts that his theory becomes focused only upon his reading of German theorists such as Herder and Schlegel, declaring that his statement on the 'willing suspension of disbelief' in *Biographia Literaria* was probably 'the application to an earlier piece of work of a theory which was evolved later' (p. 443). Michael Tomko prefers to view Coleridge's final statement on poetic faith as a synthesizing tendency in Coleridge and he therefore reads Coleridge's views on stage illusion as a preliminary stage of his overall theory of illusion as it is expressed in *Biographia Literaria*. See Michael Tomko, 'Politics, Performance and Coleridge's "Suspension of Disbelief"', *Victorian Studies*, 49, 2 (2007), pp. 241-50. My views coincide more with J. R. de J. Jackson in 'Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare's Plays', *Modern Philology*, 62, 1 (1964), 13-21. Although less explicit than my argument, Jackson tends to separate spectacle in theatre and the dramatic in Shakespeare.
[31] Coleridge, 'Letter to Daniel Stuart', pp. 641-2.
[32] Coleridge, 'Letter to Daniel Stuart', pp. 641-2.

but also takes issue with the dramatic practice of sensation and spectacle in his own day.

It is this stretching of the theory of illusion both towards an alternative to classical

dramatic theory that is fit for a Romantic age and away from the theatrical spectacle of

this Romantic age that causes Coleridge's reconceptualization of Shakespeare as a

dramatic poet, and it does this by reducing the importance of the spectator's will in

reading visual illusion. Now, it is not the spectator's ability to 'see the thing as it really

is' but the 'consciousness of the Poet's mind', which is 'diffused over the Reader or

spectator', that allows for the correct reception of illusion (*LL*, I, p. 134; p. 86). As

Coleridge states, the poet's 'Genius, elevates us, & by being always in keeping prevents

us from perceiving any strangeness, tho' we feel general exaltation' (*LL*, I, p. 86). From

this revision of Shakespeare from a dramatist to a poet or 'dramatic poet' (*LL*, I, p. 80),

Coleridge transposes his theory of dramatic illusion into his poetic theory and practice,

the most famous example of which is in Chapter 14 of the *Biographia Literaria*:

> The excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the
> emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing
> them real […] my endeavour [was to…] transfer from our inward
> nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure
> for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief
> for the moment which constitutes poetic faith. (*BL*, II, p.6)

It is clear, now, that Coleridge's theory of illusion is located within the imagination and

that, accordingly, the aesthetic effect upon the reader is fixed securely in the creative

mind of the poet. However, the connection with drama is not lost entirely in this

consideration of poetic creativity and, in fact, exerts significant influence upon

Coleridge's view of himself as a poet. Coleridge's task in the *Lyrical Ballads* was to

convey to his readers the 'dramatic truth' of 'supernatural incidents and agents' so as to

encourage the reader to 'suppos[e] them real' (*BL*, II, p. 6). This was to complement

Wordsworth's task as a poet who possessed a 'meditative and feeling mind', whereby

he would

> Give the charm of novelty to things of every day, and to excite a
> feeling analogous to the supernatural, by awakening the mind's
> attention from the lethargy of custom, and directing it to the loveliness
> and the wonders of the world before us. (*BL*, II, p. 7)

Clearly, Coleridge furnished Wordsworth with a poetic faculty close to that of

Shakespeare, as his imaginative representation of everyday characters and events

reflects Shakespeare's ability to 'fe[el] and make others feel' (*LL*, I, p. 80). Coleridge's

poems, however, appear to be more visually forceful as they are cast outwards as

'shadows of the imagination' and, as they are concerned with the supernatural, they can

be seen to draw upon his recurring interest in ghosts and apparitions in his dramatic

theory (*BL*, II, p. 6). In this explanation, Coleridge brings his own poetry closer to his

view of drama in the 1808 Lectures precisely because this type of poetry carries with it

a greater danger for the reader to slip into a state of 'delusion' upon 'supposing' the

'incidents and agents' of his poems 'real' (*BL*, II, p. 6). Consequently, Coleridge's

poems in the *Lyrical Ballads* maintain a link with his early dramatic theory, not only in

the fact that both appear to be based in a consideration of visual effects, but also in their

joint concern with a specifically human psychology that deals with the supernatural as

opposed to the apparently more divine energy of poetic faith. Again, the strong

influence of the supernatural in Coleridge's work, and his willingness to use it in a

dramatic context, indicates the aptness of considering his dramatic interest in line with

Benjamin's theory of the mourning play. The notion of perpetual return and repetition

identified by Benjamin in *Hamlet* is a quintessential feature of the secular Baroque

drama and, as I will highlight in Chapters Three and Four, this can be drawn out of

Coleridge's lead characters such as the Ancient Mariner and Alvar in *Remorse*.

Therefore, at this point in his critical theory, Coleridge's understanding of the generic

problems within Romantic tragedy starts to emerge, creating a connection with

Benjamin's later theory of the *Trauerspiel* genre. Coleridge's attempts to give greater

definition to Romantic drama through his theory of dramatic illusion release important

implications regarding his claim that illusion is created by the human mind. Coleridge's

theory radically breaks away from the classical view that drama should be created and

judged according to an external set of criteria imposed upon the structure of the drama

in order to delude the audience into a false sense of the reality of the play. As a result,

he lays his theory open to a greater sense of human subjectivity that casts mankind as

both historically material and spiritually imaginative. Here, poems that are invested

with the feeling of 'dramatic truth' are given over to the supernatural as a device of

return rather than the divine as a device of transcendence (*BL*, II, p. 6). As I will argue

in Chapter Three, this is particularly applicable to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and

coincides with Benjamin's opposition of the tragic temporality of transcendence and the

inescapable immanence of the *Trauerspiel*:

> Dreams, ghostly apparitions, the terrors of the end […] all of these are
> part of the stock-in-trade of [the] basic form, the *Trauerspiel*. All of
> these are more or less closely orientated around theme of death, and in
> the baroque they are fully developed, being transcendental phenomena
> whose dimension is temporal. (*OGTD*, p. 134)

At this point, Benjamin offers a clear difference between the supernatural, as it

conditions the dramatic form of the *Trauerspiel*, and the function of the divine as one of

the controlling mechanism of classical tragedy's plot development. As already

mentioned, the *Trauerspiel* form becomes a distinct genre against tragedy under

Benjamin's charge. This establishment of the *Trauerspiel* as a form sufficiently

different from classical tragedy is motivated by Benjamin's emerging cultural critique, a

critique that overspills the limits of his *habilitation*. Therefore, the generic features he

draws from the *Trauerspiel* form, whilst reflective of the *Trauerspiele* themselves, may

not always be as distinct from the conventions of classical tragedy (or its descendants

such as Renaissance and Revenge tragedy) as Benjamin implies. For example, although

Benjamin counts *Hamlet* as a *Trauerspiel*, other Shakespearean plays that are harder to conceive of in terms of the mournful baroque *Trauerspiel* (such as *Macbeth* and *Julius Caesar*) also contain strong supernatural elements. Nevertheless, Benjamin's desire to yolk the supernatural to the *Trauerspiel* form may offer a useful insight into Coleridge's view of the supernatural, as it can be used in drama and writing that aims to achieve a 'dramatic truth' that arises from the historically immanent identity of modern culture (*BL*, II, p. 6). Coleridge's Shakespeare criticism, his own dramatic work and key aspects of his poetry signal a self-conscious awareness of the weakening of the divine, transcendental aesthetic framework of classical literature in the face of the increasing subjectivity of modern man. As such, human psychology and supernatural mystery take over as the source of creativity in his dramatic imagination. Although this reading of Coleridge goes against the grain of areas of his own critical theory and well-established critical movements that interpret his work according to his metaphysical and transcendental ideas, it nonetheless features alongside this criticism to highlight the multifaceted nature of Coleridge's ideas.[33] To give a brief example of Coleridge's ability to draw upon these two apparently opposing artistic sources in one work, one need only consider *The Rime*, which is traditionally viewed as a poem built upon a strong sense of Christian or at least divine judgement. However, it can also be considered in line with the 'the theme of death' as expressed in the *Trauerspiel*, as it is built upon layers of supernatural machinery and the Mariner's voyage of terror (*OGTD*, p. 134). Further to this, upon the Mariner's return to civilisation, he is treated as an abject being, an uncanny creature, part-human, part-other. These dramatic motifs all coincide with Benjamin's anti-transcendental theory of the mourning play, which is founded upon the idea that the fallen state of humanity is inescapably subjective. The

---

[33] The most significant area of Coleridge's work that opposes this view is his view of symbol as set out in *The Statesman's Manual*. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lay Sermons,* ed. by R. J. White, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols, (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), vi (1972), pp. 29-30.

duality of Coleridge's critical theory, and an indication of where Benjamin's modernist theory of drama becomes appropriate to Coleridge's dramatic theory, is brought into clearer view through the analysis of the distinction made by Coleridge between two forms of artistic genius, which is outlined in *Biographia Literaria*. The distinction between the commanding genius and the absolute genius is a significant, if small in size, aspect of his dramatic theory.

2.4   Coleridge's Commanding Genius and Benjamin's Intriguer

Throughout Coleridge's dramatic theory, motifs of poetic expression and motifs of dramatic expression are maintained in a parallel relationship that enables him to consider the 'absolute *Genius'* of the poetic mind as distinct from the '*commanding* genius' of the dramatic mind, yet, as I have argued above, they are also employed within and have influence upon the opposing form (*BL*, I, p. 31; p. 32; emphases in original). For example, Shakespeare's poetic imagination means that his dramas maintain a 'self-sufficing power' that gives them ideal qualities (*BL*, I, p. 31). Conversely, Coleridge's self-proclaimed dramatic imagination means that his poetry may be thought of as dramatic as it deals with the act of projecting his thoughts as visions that extend into reality. This view of the interchange between the poetic and the dramatic in Romantic forms of writing opens up a definition of the poetic drama that has often been synonymous with Byron's 'mental theatre'.[34] In the same way that poetry can invade the commanding structure of drama and render it contemplative, the dramatic involvement with turning thought into action can also affect poetry. The

---

[34] The phrase 'mental theatre' was coined by Lord Byron to describe his dramatic poetry. However, I have taken the term from Alan Richardson's general introduction to dramatic and poetic genres in the Romantic age in Alan Richardson, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age,* (London: Pensylvania State University Press, 1998) pp. 1-19 (p. 1).

influence of drama upon Coleridge's thought therefore causes a rupture that is not always recognised in his Romantic aesthetics, or, at least, has remained a problematic aspect of his poetry, especially the Mystery Poems. It is an issue that Kathleen Wheeler considers in her analysis of Coleridge's use of the term 'thingifying' when he contemplates the relationship between thought and object.[35] Although Wheeler interrogates this idea over a number of Coleridge's poems, crucially, for *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*, it highlights Coleridge's tendency towards the outward expression as a form of dramatisation of the mind in his poetry. Wheeler qualifies the extent to which Coleridge allows the dramatic to invade *The Rime* by considering the gloss and the verse as two distinct aspects of the poem and she sees the gloss as a foil for, or perhaps even a distraction from, the poem's real concern with the imagination. Nonetheless, she underlines that the presence of the gloss does highlight Coleridge's employment in his poetry of 'time sequence, causality and spatial determinations' that are part of a subjective, historical and dramatic experience that 'seem[s] contrary to the imaginative spirit […] both as it is exemplified in the verse's imaginative language, and as the imagination is elsewhere described by Coleridge'.[36] I consider this contradiction between poetic internalisation and dramatic externalisation in greater detail in Chapter Three, but Coleridge's willingness to admit into his poetry features that externalise thought and allow a dramatic quality to the form is an important aspect in the revival of his dramatic theory.

With this view in mind, it is possible to locate Coleridge's dramatic work outside the Romantic tradition with which Benjamin takes issue in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Although it may be true of Coleridge's poetic theory and practice, the

---

[35] Kathleen Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981), pp. 30-33; p. 31. Wheeler uses the term to describe the effect of the addition of the preface in *Kubla Khan* as this addition serves to make the poem not only a poetic text but also an 'artifact' (p. 30). The same principle occurs in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* with the gloss.
[36] Wheeler, p. 52.

assumption that Coleridge mobilises the imagination as an egotistical and transforming power that is engaged with the task of achieving a form of anti-self-consciousness is obscured by Coleridge's understanding of the dramatic. This is exemplified by the fact that Coleridge divides the faculty of genius into two categories: the absolute genius, which is aligned with aspects of the imagination that can be termed as poetic, and the commanding genius, which emerges as a dramatic and political facet of the imagination. Clearly, Coleridge's preferred model of creativity is that of the absolute genius, as he declares that the commanding nature of men 'who possess more than mere *talent*' but whose creativity is 'restless' qualifies the extent to which they display genius (*BL*, I, p. 31; emphasis in original). However, as Coleridge also makes clear in his explanation, the genius of commanding men remains a type of genius that is presumably imaginative as opposed to the mere talent of those who possess fancy. The effect of this division of genius into commanding and absolute can be said to highlight Coleridge's acceptance of a form of artistic expression that is not solely concerned with thought and the ideal but penetrates reality, as it is created for the very reason of its participation in society, politics and history. As Coleridge states, commanding geniuses 'must impress their preconception on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view' (*BL*, I, p. 32). The notion of Romantic reflection as an infinite process of thought transforming thought is challenged in this statement, as Coleridge allows for the process of reflection or thoughts 'present[ed] back' to be anchored to the 'world without' rather than the internal mind (*BL*, I, p. 32). As a result, Coleridge's dramatic theory is not based solely upon the search for a 'resplendent but ultimately non-committal knowledge of an absolute' (*OGTD*, p. 159), which was criticised by Benjamin, and it takes him into a more historically conditioned territory in which men of 'vivid' thoughts assume the task of 'realising them' (*BL*, I, p. 31). Coleridge's account of the commanding genius, therefore, stands as an example of the hidden critical lexicon of his dramatic work

referred to in the introduction to this chapter. Its significance lies in the fact that it highlights not only his attempts to theorise drama as an artistic form of equal importance to poetry but also his willingness to depart from Romantic aesthetics in order to accommodate the real and historical nature of dramatic expression.

In its visual and historico-political nature, the commanding genius allows for a comparison between Coleridge and Benjamin's view of drama as a historically conditioned form of representation. However, this link can also be extended by considering further the commanding genius as a character type. Here, it is apparent that Coleridge's description of historical figures who can be termed commanding geniuses foreshadows Benjamin's description of the intriguer figure in his study of the mourning play. Moreover, the characteristics of both the commanding genius and the intriguer also offer a way of interpreting both writers' critical engagement with the formal evolution of the tragic genre, since the introduction of the intriguer figure into tragedy is a key way in which classical tragedy is modified for both Coleridge's Romantic drama and Benjamin's Baroque-modern *Trauerspiele*. This comparison between the two writers' dramatic figures emerges in the way in which both writers conceive them as embedded in politics. Although Coleridge states that in 'tranquil times' characters of commanding genius are employed with an inert form of creativity akin to those of absolute genius in which they 'exhibit a perfect poem [...or] a tale of romance', in 'times of tumult', these men reveal themselves as

> The shaping spirit of Ruin, to destroy the wisdom of ages in order to
> substitute the fancies of a day, and to change kings and kingdoms, as
> the wind shifts and shapes the clouds. (*BL*, I, pp. 32-3)

This type of character, capable of using his significant powers of reasoning to bring down monarchic dynasties, emerges in Benjamin's study of the *Trauerspiel* as the intriguer, who is 'all intellect and will-power' (*OGTD*, p. 95). A key figure in the court

of the *Trauerspiel*, the intriguer orchestrates the downfall of the indecisive monarch and

his scheming is the driving force of the plot development of the *Trauerspiel*.

Coleridge's description of the commanding genius who is concerned with 'kings and

kingdoms' (*BL*, I, p. 33) and who is rooted firmly to the earth comes close to

Benjamin's intriguer character, who inhabits the court of the *Trauerspiel* and

understands this court as a secularised world built on 'rank [and] absolute monarchy'

(*OGTD*, p. 62). Just as the commanding genius comes to the fore during times of

political instability to cause the downfall of the established monarchical order, so does

the intriguer operate within a framework of 'killings, despair […] war and commotion'

(*OGTD*, note to p. 62).

Here, Benjamin's literary critical model, based upon the constellation, offers an

appropriate avenue for the disclosure of Coleridge's dramatic critical lexicon. Both

Benjamin and Coleridge considered Shakespeare's tragedies in their own critical

projects, and it is through their engagement with Shakespeare that they can be brought

together in a dramatic constellation that each of the three writers' 'own era[s have]

formed with a definite [other] one'.[37] Although Benjamin distinguishes between the

German *Trauerspiel* and the plays of Shakespeare that he attributes to the *Trauerspiel*

genre, he also draws out the innately historical nature of Shakespeare's tragedies, which

are set against the backdrop of the court.[38] Benjamin's application of the *Trauerspiel*

genre to Shakespeare can be extended, as Hugh Grady points out, to other

Shakespearean tragedies, especially those that take as their backdrop an historical

---

[37] Walter Benjamin, *Theses on the Philosophy of History*, in *Illuminations*, ed. and introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. By Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245-255 (p. 255). Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *TPH*.
[38] The most notable example of this is 'the great *Trauerspiel Hamlet*', which Benjamin takes time to analyse in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*OGTD*, p. 136). There is a growing interest in reading Shakespeare's plays according to Walter Benjamin's historical framework. In addition to Andrew Benjamin's Benjaminian interpretation of *Othello*, discussed here, see Hugh Grady, 'Hamlet as a Mourning Play' and Luis-Martinez Zenón, 'Shakespeare's Historical Drama as Trauerspiel: Richard II – And After', *ELH*, 75 (2000) pp. 673-705.

representation of the court. As he states, 'For readers of Shakespeare […*The Origin of German Tragic Drama*] presents ideas and analysis little discussed in English about Shakespeare's relation to his historical moment and to the dramatic form in which he wrote his noncomic plays'.[39] This idea can be extended further to consider the ways in which Shakespeare has been read and what this says about the relation of readers of Shakespeare to their own historical contexts and dramatic theories. By opening up Benjamin's dramatic critical framework, which is specific to the *Trauerspiel*, to other dramatic genres and theories, a new understanding of dramatic ideas throughout successive cultural moments emerges. This Benjaminian hermeneutical position offers a compelling methodology for literary criticism precisely due to Benjamin's insistence that it is immanent. In other words, the form's creative foundation lies within the historical rather than the divine, and a Benjaminian analysis of an individual play must take its tools of analysis from within the play itself. The two writers' approaches to dramatic criticism come close together here as their chosen techniques resist a rule-based formula for judging, in Benjamin's case, the *Trauerspiel*, or, in Coleridge's case, Shakespearean drama.

The character of Iago becomes a key figure through which to make the connection between Benjamin's view of the *Trauerspiel* and elements of Coleridge's work which lend themselves to an interpretation based upon Benjamin's model. Recently, Andrew Benjamin has contributed to this field of Shakespearean studies by showing how the machinations of Iago, the plotter or intriguer of *Othello*, lends this play to a Benjaminian reading.[40] Here, Andrew Benjamin explores Benjamin's concept of fate and guilt and applies it to an analysis of Shakespeare's *Othello*. The key point Andrew Benjamin makes is that fate in *Trauerspiel* plays does not operate in the same manner as

---

[39] Grady, p. 135.
[40] Andrew Benjamin, 'Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time', in *Rethinking the Baroque,* ed. by Helen Hill (Surrey: Ashgate, 2011), pp. 161-183.

tragic fate. As the *Trauerspiel* is the representative form of the fallen state of mankind, it is concerned with the world of 'Historical life' that renders all individuals unable to escape the 'abject condition of profane human existence' (*OGTD*, p. 62).[41] Fate, therefore, as a structural device within the plays does not operate from beyond the individual or the play as it does in tragedy but must assume a position within the world, or the world of the play. Again, Benjamin frames his understanding of the structural difference between the tragedy and the *Trauerspiel* in the religious uncertainties of the Baroque era, in which the natural world is cut off from the eternal only to reflect the death and decay of the historical process. Benjamin observes that Baroque art is not based in 'the antithesis of history and nature but the comprehensive secularization of the historical in the state of creation' and, as a result, the natural world and historical life come to reflect each other (*OGTD*, p. 92). Benjamin links this to the *Trauerspiel* genre through his comparison between the tone of mourning and commemoration in the *Trauerspiel* and a similar use of landscape as a memorial device in pastoral plays. In both cases, the physicality of the natural world is used as a place where historical life and events can be inscribed and collected. This view that 'History merges into the setting' counteracts the understanding of nature as the evidence of an external creative force and Benjamin reiterates his divergence from Romanticism by stating that 'The nature of the creation which absorbs history back into itself, is quite different from the nature of Rousseau' (*OGTD*, p. 92; p. 91). Relating this structural treatment of history and nature to the main characters of tragedy and *Trauerspiel*, Graeme Gilloch points out that this idea marks a key difference between the two genres. Where the death of the most elevated character in the *Trauerspiel* is a death bound to the earth, the death of the tragic hero is tied precisely to the possibility of transcendence. As Gilloch states of the

---

[41] Gilloch, p. 75. For a detailed account of the transition from tragic time and its association with myth to the historical temporality of the *Trauerspiele* which places significant emphasis upon the tragic hero's character, fate and legacy, see Samuel Weber, 'The Genealogy of Modernity: History, Myth and Allegory in Benjamin's *The Origin of the German Mourning Play*' in *Benjamin's –Abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), pp. 131-163.

Trauerspiel genre, 'The final death of the sovereign does not point to the prospect of everlasting life in the hereafter' but rather confirms the 'separation between divine and profane realms'.[42] As such, fate in the *Trauerspiel* cannot be seen as the culmination of a chain of events designed to bring an individual to his final destination, his destiny. This is due to the fact that the controlling force of this fate, the divine realm, no longer maintains a connection with mankind; instead, fate becomes grounded on earth and its power is contested between all creaturely individuals.[43] The sovereign of the mourning play is subject to a fate that lies dormant in the world around him; it is not the gods who hold sway over his final outcome but an unknown object that will one day gain an overwhelming significance in his life. The intriguer of the mourning play knows how to identify and use this object in order to lead the sovereign to his catastrophic death.

By applying this idea of fate in natural objects, or fate as revealed through the historical setting, to the dramatic action of the mourning plays, Benjamin highlights the fact that the tragic element of these plays does not come from the confident assertion that transgressive action will result in divine judgement but from the essentially meaningless transference of power between human beings. Benjamin progresses his distinction between Rousseauean landscape and pastoral or Baroque landscape by introducing the notion that, in the *Trauerspiele*, the 'court is the setting *par excellence*' (*OGTD*, p. 92). This serves to introduce a distinctly political and human element into the creative architecture of the plays as the plot development and dramatic action become controlled

---

[42] Gilloch, p. 76. Here, Gilloch emphasises a pertinent point regarding the difference between the Baroque and its ancestor, the medieval mystery play, in that the Baroque does not recognise redemption as the end point of death in the way that the medieval drama does. This is an important distinction to keep in mind as it highlights the divide Benjamin alludes to between the German *Trauerspiel* and the Shakespearean *Trauerspiel*, which traces these 'Christian sparks' and therefore reveals a redemptive framework in a way that the German *Trauerspiel* does not (*OGTD*, p. 158). For Benjamin's full commentary on this, see *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, pp. 157-8.

[43] Put more generally, Walter Benjamin's point is that tragic time progresses, through action, towards a sense of final realisation whereas in the *Trauerspiel* time does not march forwards but instead deals with intensification. In the *Trauerspiel*, 'fate is the entelechy of events within the field of guilt' (*OGTD*, p. 129).

from within their internal structure. As the linear progression of these plays is rejected

(due to the disappearance of anywhere to go) the action is correspondingly slowed down

as repetition and circular movement in the plot take over. As Benjamin states, 'In

contrast to the spasmodic chronological progression of tragedy, the *Trauerspiel* takes

place in a spatial continuum, which one might describe as choreographic' (*OGTD*, p.

95). This focus upon the effect of placing human subjectivity at the centre of dramatic

creativity highlights a link between German mourning plays and Romantic tragedies as,

despite clear differences between their view of nature, both genres place human

uncertainty at their centre. Whether it is the mournful human or the contemplative

human, the action of the play is halted, not in an anti-theatrical resistance to dramatic

representation, but in a way that conceives humanity as inherently theatrical. Unlike the

Romantic tragedy, however, self-conscious displays of theatricality are key to the

mourning plays. In contrast to Coleridge's commendation of the 'Nakedness' (*LL*, I, p.

83) of Shakespeare's stage, Benjamin views image and ostentation as the main figures

of representation in the *Trauerspiel*. A key aspect of the *Trauerspiel* is the fact that

fate, no longer served upon humans from a divine realm, must be summoned from

within the play and it therefore falls to significant objects of the 'stage property' to

reveal the fate of a character:

> Destiny is […] present among the objects […] For once human life
> has sunk into the merely creaturely, even the life of apparently dead
> objects secures power over it. The effectiveness of the object where
> guilt has been incurred is a sign of the approach of death. The
> passionate stirrings of creaturely life in man — in a word, passion
> itself — bring the fatal property into the action […] in so many
> German tragedies of fate, some trivial stage-property bears down on
> the victim. (*OGTD*, p. 132)

For Andrew Benjamin, this is the key aspect of the relationship between the intriguer

and the sovereign as the intriguer has an intimate—Benjamin terms it 'anthropological,

even physiological'—knowledge of the sovereign's passions and he recognises the

sovereign's fate in significant objects (*OGTD*, p. 95). As Benjamin states, 'the intriguer is the master of meanings' and he becomes the 'organizer of [the play's] plot' in order to bring the sovereign to his death (*OGTD*, p. 210; p. 95). This is the case in the relationship between Othello and Iago, as Iago recognises Desdemona's handkerchief as the object through which Othello's nature will be brought to its fate. If Iago here is the embodiment of Benjamin's intriguer, his language embodies Coleridge's concept of the commanding genius as he aims to 'bring [his] monstrous birth to the world's light'.[44] This view of the play radically transforms our view of Othello, turning him from a tragic hero whose fatal flaw is punished by the gods into a sovereign creature who is both a tyrant and a martyr. Briefly, Benjamin's conception of this character type is explained and put into the broader context of his study in George Steiner's introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*:

> The *Trauerspiel* is counter-transcendental; it celebrates the immanence of existence even where this existence is passed in torment. It is emphatically 'mundane', earth-bound, corporeal. It is not the tragic hero who occupies the centre of the stage, but the Janus-faced composite of tyrant and martyr, of the Sovereign who incarnates the mystery of absolute will and of its victim (so often himself).
> (*OGTD*, p. 16)

Othello's fate rises up from within his own nature and is brought to painful significance through the cruel manipulation of a meaningful object by Iago. Iago is the self-appointed antagonist and a creaturely twin to Othello, who thrives in the backdrop of 'war and commotion' (*OGTD*, note to p. 62), and fulfils Othello's early prediction that 'Chaos [will] come again' in the course of the Moor's downfall (*O*, III. 3. 93). In short, the tragic outcome of Iago's plot does not lie in a cathartic moment of purification and insight for Othello but in a hellish fall into a creaturely abyss. The analogy Benjamin

---

[44] William Shakespeare, *Othello*, in *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, ed. by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 819-853 (p. 827), II, i, ll. 395-6. All further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text using the abbreviation *O*.

draws between the intriguer and the devil throughout his study aptly expresses this

hellish outcome of *Othello*:

> If one thinks here of the intriguer and visualizes the tyrant, then the
> image of the court is not so different from the image of hell [as
> reacting to the Intriguer's manipulations the tyrant] "loses his senses
> while his body remains alive, for he no longer sees and hears the
> world in which he lives and moves about him, but only the lies which
> the devil plants into his brain and blows into his ears, until in the end
> he begins to rave and sinks into despair". (*OGTD*, p. 145)

In general terms, this passage confronts exactly the theme of illusion and delusion that

is present throughout Coleridge's consideration of the stage, although Coleridge

chooses to make sight the sense that can be distorted and deluded where sound remains

resistant to delusion. This idea is revealed in the distinction between Othello's true

identity as a figure of sound and Iago's distortion of this, which deludes him into

believing his sight. The success of Iago's malicious plan lies in his powerful

manipulation of vision as, in spite of himself, Othello falls victim to the heavy

suggestion of the 'ocular proof' of Desdemona's supposed infidelity with which Iago

presents him (*O*, III. 3. 365). Had Othello remained true to his own identity as a

character of sound, he would, like Teresa and Alvar in *Remorse*, have overcome visual

deception and averted the tragedy. The tragic nature of *Othello* is located not in

Roderigo's jealousy at the start of the play and the intention to 'poison [Brabantio's]

delight' against Othello through reports of his and Desdemona's love affair, but is

brought out at the end of the play as we realise that Iago is able to 'poiso[n] sight' (*O*, I.

1. 68; *O*, V. 2. 374). Coleridge also makes use of the theme of sound and vision, but

inverts the outcome seen in *Othello* by investing the characters of virtue in *Remorse*

with the ability to 'see the thing as it really is' rather than acting upon images which

they either think they see or which present only half-truths (*LL*, I, p. 134).

The conclusion of *Othello*, however, balances itself between the tragic vision of humanity and the vision of the *Trauerspiel*, and it, in fact, becomes the battleground for these two representative modes. If Iago's defeat of Othello indicates the status of mankind as a mournful and creaturely existence, then Othello's attempts to reclaim his heroic status signal also the continued existence of the tragic on the Renaissance stage. As he kills himself, Othello attempts to reassert his former identity as the 'noble Moor' (*O*, IV.1. 266), returning again to recounting a story of the kind he told to Desdemona when he held his esteemed position in society:

> in Aleppo once,
> Where a malignant and turbaned Turk
> Beat a Venetian and traduced the state,
> I took by th'throat the circumcised dog
> And smote him thus. (*O*, V. 1. 361-5)

In this act, Othello is revealed to match Iago as a commanding figure because he is able to bring his ideas into reality as he turns his dagger on himself. The act serves to steal the commanding and active identity from the demonic intriguer and offer it back to his victim, who the audience recognise again as Othello, the 'valiant Moor' (*O*, I, iii, 47) whose reputation was intact at the start of the play.

Coleridge's theory of the commanding genius is the enabling foundation of a similar kind of character-led dramatic structure that emerges in *Remorse*, although the final effect of this structure in Coleridge's play is left more open to account for his reluctance to draw conclusions about the dramatic form that was conditioned by his view of theatre in the nineteenth century. The commanding identity is more mobile throughout *Remorse* as it can be discerned equally in Alvar and Ordonio, but it nevertheless emerges, as it does in *Othello*, through both the vision and sight themes and is used in the manipulation of the play's objects, providing a contrast to the concern with imaginative recital and storytelling throughout the play. Whilst I investigate this idea in

Remorse in Chapter Four, it is necessary, here, to present briefly the way in which the roles of the intriguer and the commanding genius allow for a comparison between a Benjaminian interpretation of *Othello* and a similar interpretation of *Remorse* that highlights the two plays' differences inasmuch as it highlights their similarities, yet also shows how they both engage with dramatic features that Benjamin will later identify as pertaining to his new theory of dramatic genre and expressed in his analysis of the German *Trauerspiel*. The similarities lie in both Benjamin and Coleridge's (and even Shakespeare's) awareness that the post-classical dramatic form is a specifically historical phenomenon, but Coleridge shows more scepticism in relation to the moral uses of this type of drama and therefore he tempers the commanding influence of any one character so that no character expands his commanding identity to assume the status of an intriguer.

The relationships between the lead characters of both Shakespeare's *Othello* and Coleridge's *Remorse* highlight the difficulty inherent in navigating the fine line between sight and vision when making the choice as to what can be considered authentic representation. In Othello's final speech, Shakespeare allows the imagery of race and colour used throughout the play simultaneously to twin and to distinguish between Iago and Othello, and to confuse what is understood to be the traditional tragic ending. Benjamin's notion of the creaturely state of mankind creeps into the play's ending through the dismal sight and persistent presence on stage of Iago, who deals the remaining characters (and the extended community of the audience) a final insult through his resolve to hold continued power over them by declaring that 'from this time forth I will never speak a word' (*O*, V, 1. 310). This is testament to his enduring understanding that the visual is more open to deception and that truthful representation arises more frequently from a verbal narrative. Othello, on the other hand, uses his

speech to restore honourable qualities within himself and to finally extinguish the 'turbaned Turk' that the audience initially assumes resides within him as he 'smote him thus' when killing himself (*O*, V. 1. 362; 365). Although this serves to double Othello as both a villainous Turk and a heroic Venetian, it serves equally to double Iago's identity. Othello, in killing himself, claims to be killing only the 'circumcisèd dog', although his Venetian persona inevitably must die also (*O*, V. 1. 364). What remains, however, as Lodovico declares with sensitivity to the doubling of the two characters' identities, is Iago, the 'Spartan dog' (*O*, V. 1. 372). Here, Iago's almost oxymoronic identity in the context of the play is brought to the fore: a classical figure, the ancient Greek trained in war who, as a dog, is also the epitome of the creaturely state.[45] Important here is the idea that although Othello is seen as the protagonist, his position within the play is shared equally with Iago; both characters vie for the power and the status of the lead role and the significance of one cannot be separated from the significance of the other. Crucially, Iago is not an antihero but a 'hellish villain' who invites Benjamin's theory of the *Trauerspiel* into the otherwise tragic structure of the play (*O*, V. 1. 378).[46] Upon the conclusion of the play he remains, disconcertingly, a character the surviving community must deal with and, though incarcerated, he lives on within the community in the aftermath of the tragedy as a figure reminding them constantly of their inescapably creaturely identity.

The relationship between Alvar and Ordonio maintains a similar chiasmic structure to that between Iago and Othello. Although Ordonio has traditionally been taken as the antihero of the play, his brother, Alvar, may be seen to exert equal significance in the

---

[45] See Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's other history: of stones, animals, human beings, and angels*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1998), p.64.

[46] Coleridge's 1818 assessment of Iago as a character of 'motiveless malignity' can be taken as an apt example of where his dramatic criticism anticipates Benjamin's description of the intriguer figure in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (*LL*, 315). In both cases, these characters act, and force others to act, not in reaction to external circumstances but out of a seemingly irrational will to satisfy their own intellectual superiority and their desire for power.

play's characterisation and plot development. This time, however, Coleridge gives the amoral Ordonio over to the structure and form of tragedy. The ostensibly more virtuous Alvar becomes the shadowy reformer, a politically and culturally ambivalent figure who understands history not so much as a progressive temporality but one that is organised much more fluidly:

> Time, as he courses onward, still unrolls
> The volume of concealment. In the FUTURE,
> As in the optician's glassy cylinder,
> The indistinguishable blots and colours
> Of the dim PAST collect and shape themselves,
> Upstarting in their own completed image,
> To scare or to reward. (*R*, II. 2. 9-15)

Alvar's point that events of the past are not irretrievably lost as time moves on but can be reserved to reach a greater significance upon their reactivation in the future anticipates Benjamin's later conception of time as a 'continuum' from which a meaningful moment can be 'blast[ed] out' at any point within its trajectory (*TPH*, p. 253). This understanding of history as the totality of experience rather than the precursor to transcendence makes Alvar representative of the immanent *Trauerspiel* structure. This is a reversal of the Iago/Othello relationship, as Alvar is able to use his understanding of the mournful state of mankind to good effect in order to suppress Ordonio's attempts to deceive characters such as Teresa. Furthermore, the role reversal serves to remove the problems associated with the morally ambiguous legacy of *Othello*'s ending, as the commanding and amoral Ordonio is defeated, allowing for contemplation and idealism to triumph in an apparently 'non-tragic' ending. [47] Contrary to Steiner's assessment of the non-tragic ending of *Remorse*, this view of the play as engaged with Shakespearean drama perhaps rescues it from claims of its unsatisfactory denouement, as it sees Coleridge attempting to manipulate the dramatic form to create a new dramatic genre capable of reconciling the tragic with the Romantic

---

[47] George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), p. 128.

modes of divine retribution and forgiven repentance. Consequently, Andrew

Benjamin's view of *Othello* under a Benjaminian model becomes helpful in reassessing

Coleridge's attempts to rework tragedy for the Romantic age, which brought the divine

down into mankind. As Andrew Benjamin claims, *Othello* works according to the

'interiorization of fate' and therefore, the structural features of classical tragedy are

confronted and challenged by the *Trauerspiel* genre.[48] However, as I have attempted to

show above, Andrew Benjamin's argument can be built upon by considering

Benjamin's intriguer figure—or Coleridge's commanding genius—as a character who is

used to manipulate these dramatic genres. To reiterate, the assertion of this thesis is that

Coleridge's dramatic theory approaches a Benjaminian view of the secularisation of the

dramatic form that distinguishes itself from the classical structure of drama. In the

following section, I want to highlight another aspect of Coleridge's dramatic theory, the

concept of remorse, as a key element within his reconceptualisation of dramatic form

and genre.

2.5   The Dramatic Motif of Remorse

The image of Coleridge's dramatic theory I have tried to build up in this chapter is one

that, though intimately connected with his poetic theory, remains distinct from it. As a

historical, emotional and communal theory, it stands outside the Romantic theory of

imagination, which is built upon the premise of the solitary and perceptive mind. It

cannot be disputed that, in the history of Coleridge's aesthetic theory and practice,

dramatic theory is secondary to his poetic theory but, equally, no matter how

fragmented and incomplete it remains, it is nonetheless a promising indication of

Coleridge's most innovative foresight into modernity. The theory comes to a head in

---

[48] Andrew Benjamin, p. 178, n. 27.

Coleridge's extrapolation of remorse, a concept that, I argue, is used by Coleridge as a dramatic motif that anticipates Benjamin's use of melancholy in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. My starting point for this final analysis of Coleridge's lectures, a fragment thought to be used in preparation for Lecture Three, is ambiguous in that Coleridge's exact intention for its use is uncertain, but, if Foakes is correct in declaring it as part of the preparation for Lecture Three, its subject matter becomes significant in the fuller context of his dramatic writing due to the fact that this fragment considers what was to become the title and theme of Coleridge's most celebrated drama, *Remorse*.

The records available for Lecture Three come in the form of two separate sets of notes collected together. The first is a fragment in preparation for a lecture which was not given but had been intended to follow Lecture Two. Foakes suggests that 'the notes were probably never used' and the second set of notes are speculated to have been used as preparation for Lecture Three given after a two month break (*LL*, I, p. 60).[49] The fragment is of interest because, if it does take a position between the account of the evolution of drama in Lecture Two and the reconsideration of Shakespeare as a poet of judgement in Lecture Four, it frames the lectures (and Coleridge's work on drama) in a context that is not immediately artistic but comes, first, from human feeling and communal history. In this fragment, Coleridge asserts that the feeling of remorse comes upon us as a 'Fact, meant to make us sensible [of] a distant effect of something moraly [*sic*] wrong in our own past actions' (*LL*, I, p. 64). Furthermore, it also considers remorse as a feeling that intrudes upon our feelings (of regret) whether or not we will it to do so:

---

[49] Foakes points out that placing locating these fragments in the 1808 series and as part of preparation for Lecture Three is speculative due to the fact that 'there is so little external evidence to indicate what C talked about in most of these lectures, and, moreover, the dating of the entries is itself doubtful' (*LL*, I, p. 60).

> In cases […] not only independent of our will but out of ourselves, we find no difficulty in distinguishing Regret from Remorse – and what regards our own selves, yet which is not voluntary, the same distinction, one would think ought rationally to be made. Yet here commences a difference […] however unconscious of Blame we may feel ourselves yet a certain something more than Regret will haunt and sadden the heart, which if not Remorse is however a phantom and Counterfeit of Remorse. (*LL*, I, p. 64)

Coleridge was at this time struggling to fulfil his responsibility of delivering the lectures and seems to have written this piece during a two month break he took due to illness. His own struggles were compounded by thoughts that he himself had replaced Humphry Davy (who had contracted a serious illness) and this statement articulates attempts to reason and explain his feelings of guilt regarding this situation. The statement seeks to desynonymise regret and remorse, citing the key difference to be the self-reflexive capacity of remorse to 'haunt and sadden the heart' (*LL*, I, p. 64). While regret can be felt for others and does not cause the regretful individual to feel aggrieved, it is, 'perhaps in a majority of instances', accompanied by a more imposing feeling of remorse that troubles the individual (*LL*, I, p. 64). Furthermore, the feeling of remorse assumes an almost primal position within the individual's subconscious as a 'phantom', which originates in 'a distant effect of the guilt of ages past' (*LL*, I, p. 64). Remorse, therefore, becomes an example of mankind's fallen state, a relic from an original transgression and the fall into historical subjectivity.

Coleridge's definition also suggests that the feeling of remorse operates beyond the control of the will of the individual. As a function that is 'not voluntary', it becomes, in a sense, an unavoidable condition of mankind, a 'mysterious reality' that is 'a distant effect of something moraly [*sic*] wrong in our own past Actions' (*LL*, I, p. 64). This attempt to define remorse in terms of the individual's psychology within a wider framework of cultural guilt sees Coleridge linking remorse, his defining concept of the dramatic, to an historical consciousness rather than a perceptive form of creativity

associated with poetry. In contrast to his later statement on the willing suspension of

disbelief which he associates with 'shadows of imagination' (*BL*, II, p. 6) and the

creative process in poetry, Coleridge's first consideration of the will as a voluntary or

involuntary mechanism, which he would very soon after this statement use as the

creative basis of dramatic illusion, actually emerges from the 'phantom and Counterfeit

of Remorse' (*LL*, I, p 64). Associated with the heart and human feeling, remorse has a

melancholic effect upon the individual precisely because he cannot choose to invoke or

revoke it according to his will.[50] Consequently, Coleridge's focus upon remorse within

his lectures on drama links his understanding of dramatic creativity to a historical

sensibility of the graceless state of mankind and a melancholic vision that pertains to the

generic foundation of the Baroque mourning play as opposed to the classical tragedy.

Benjamin would later highlight this difference:

> The theory of mourning, which emerged unmistakably as a *pendant* to
> the theory of tragedy, can only be developed in the description of that
> world which is revealed under the gaze of the melancholy man.
> (*OGTD*, p. 139)

As outlined in Chapter One, the key difference between tragedy and *Trauerspiel* lies in

their temporal structure, the former taking its structure from myth and the latter from

history. Benjamin reasserts this idea in the closing pages of the middle section of his

study, '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy', by declaring that the melancholic has no vision of 'a

beyond' but 'the inspirations of mother earth dawn from the night of contemplation like

treasures from the interior of the earth; the lightning flash of intuition is unknown to

him' (*OGTD*, p. 79; pp. 152-3). According to Benjamin, one of the central characters of

the mourning play, the prince, embodies the state of melancholia and displays the

characteristics of contemplation and indecision. This figure can be located within both

---

[50] This understanding of remorse has definite reverberations in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*. In a
way, the Mariner is presented as the human embodiment of remorse who affects the Wedding Guest to
the extent that he is compelled to listen to the Mariner's story and, consequently, emerges from the tale as
both a 'sadder' (*AM*, l. 587) and 'wiser' (*AM*, l. 624) individual.

the *Trauerspiel* and the dramas of the Romantic period as a character of reflection rather than action. However, Benjamin's understanding of the *Trauerspiel* allows for a similar reassessment of other such inactive dramatic forms as Romantic drama, which have become misunderstood against the theory of classical tragedy precisely because their structure deals with the historical basis of human emotion and remorse, not divine retribution and revenge.

Hugh Grady's reading of *Hamlet* as a mourning play, already cited in this chapter, elaborates upon the connection between Benjamin's theory and Shakespeare's play according to their shared departure from classical tragedy. A key point raised by Grady is the dramatic conceit of the play-within-a-play used in *Hamlet* to reveal Claudius' guilt, and this can be applied to Coleridge's theory of Romantic drama as a remorseful form. This is because, as in the reassessment of *Othello* that Andrew Benjamin draws out from a Benjaminian interpretation of the play, Grady's identification of *Hamlet* as a mourning play also invites an understanding of Shakespearean drama which lies outside its traditional Renaissance or Elizabethan (generic) contexts. The use of the play-within-the play confirms Claudius' guilt but the staging of his guilt as a play with two audiences—the audience of the court and the audience in the theatre—also serves to confuse the boundaries between the court and the play. If the play has communicated the truth that Hamlet aims to reveal, it has also, by the end, revealed its own insubstantiality, its artifice. Members of the court are shown the truth, but this truth is represented as a work of fiction. Of course, this potential for the theatrical aesthetic to 'overflow[…] the boundaries of its own fictionality' and make a fiction of reality is exactly the characteristic of theatre that Coleridge seeks to temper.[51] This vision of the insubstantiality of the human condition runs throughout Shakespeare's plays and the

---

[51] Hugh Grady, 'Hamlet as a Mourning Play: A Benjaminianesque Interpretation', in *Shakespeare Studies*, 36 (2008), pp. 135-65 (p. 148).

unsettling metaphor of the world as nothing more enduring than the stage is repeated over again. George Steiner notes this repetitive analogy in Shakespeare, which 'identifies the earth with the stage in the notion of the *theatrum mundi*' (*OGTD*, p. 18). This is an important identification as the concept of the *theatrum mundi* serves to unite Shakespeare, Coleridge and Benjamin under a common interest in the Baroque as an artistic style that is aware of the problematic relationship between truth and visual illusion. Of course, Benjamin is most prominent in this as he gives his study of the *Trauerspiel* plays over to an investigation of the melancholy and the allegorical tendency of Baroque-period German mourning plays. Crucially, he offers a fresh classification of certain elements of Shakespeare for which we can use the term he offers in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*: 'non-Renaissance' (*OGTD*, p. 59). In turn, this new classification of Shakespeare has repercussions for our view of Coleridge's dramatic theory, which draws so heavily upon Shakespeare and, as pointed out in this chapter, anticipates Benjaminian mourning with the sentiment of remorse whilst also attempting to deal with the dramatic tendency towards the historical and the visual. Under Benjamin's critical theory, Shakespearean tragedy is lifted from its Renaissance context and classical genealogy and reassessed according to a robust and vigorously argued Baroque world view of secularisation that helps to place such aspects of the drama as the supernatural, a resistance to action and the staging of objects within a generic framework of the Baroque. The alteration of the generic pattern of Shakespearean tragedy to be read more in line with a mourning play paves the way for a reassessment of Coleridge's sensitivity towards these motifs in Shakespeare's and his own dramatic works.

2.6   The 'Critique of *Bertram*': Literary Anti-Jacobinism

Both the correct use of visual representation and the effect of the Romantic world view upon dramatic genre are persistent themes in Coleridge's engagement with drama. These themes come to the fore upon the inclusion of the 'Critique of *Bertram*' in *Biographia Literaria*. However, the intricacy and depth of Coleridge's critical involvement with drama—and *Bertram* as representative of Romantic drama in general—has been clouded by the very image of drama that he attempted to break in this critique. The popular taste for visually spectacular, Gothic genre dramas attacked by Coleridge in the 'Critique' left him open to substantial criticism. The analogy he drew between popular Gothic drama and political Jacobinism has been most commonly viewed as an argument weakened by the fact that he draws upon the Gothic for *Remorse*. Since Hazlitt's unbridled criticism regarding this critique, it has been difficult to separate the piece from Coleridge's chequered political history and his increasingly elitist view of art. Nevertheless, the justification of these two assumptions lies in the question of their precision. Both Coleridge's use of the term 'Jacobinism' and the issue of his duplicitous use of the Gothic can be reconsidered by placing the 'Critique of *Bertram*' into the wider context of his dramatic theory and also by considering the full version of the 'Critique' itself, not just that which appeared in the *Biographia*. This allows for a more sympathetic understanding of two areas of Coleridge's attack on the popular Gothic. Firstly, it claims for him a consistency that arises out of his enduring opposition to the Gothic genre against his own employment of a similarly spectacular but inherently different Baroque style akin to that outlined in Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. In addition, his choice of political terminology—Jacobinism—can be considered on a more nuanced level that mixes politics and literature within the

same idea and therefore counteracts the view that Coleridge was drawing a rather simplistic analogy between popular spectacle in the theatre and political extremism.

The design of the *Biographia Literaria*, in which the 'Critique of *Bertram*' appears, has been a long-considered feature of its critical heritage. It is common to regard the structure of the *Biographia* as a mirror of the view that, for Coleridge, the defining form of literature was poetry, since the work builds to the 'outstandingly important' chapters dedicated to his reading of Wordsworth's poetry (Chapters 17-20 and 22), which, 'in length, detail nuanced sensitivity, and theoretical principles [was] unprecedented [...] in English letters'.[52] However, the *Biographia* does not finish with these chapters; instead, for a variety of reasons, not least driven by the practicalities of filling the second volume, the reader is offered a coda of miscellaneous writing.   The two insertions preceding the *Biographia's* Conclusion, 'Satyrane's Letters' and the 'Critique of *Bertram'*, return the reader from Coleridge's better known subjects such as poetry and the Romantic imagination to the more prosaic and domestic world of letter writing, journalistic criticism and social reform in a significant turn towards the form of drama. Indeed, these chapters, which are concerned with drama more than poetry, are often considered as awkward insertions into the *Biographia* and seem to be at odds with the structure and aesthetic thrust of the work. Catherine Miles Wallace notes that these sections would, 'in sprit and content', befit Chapter Ten (concerned with Coleridge's religious and political opinions):

> The lively and amusing Letters complement the Watchman anecdotes
> in displaying the speaker's delight in observation, and his self-ironic
> humour. The critique of *Bertram*, like the earlier commentary on
> Jacobinism, asserts the dangers and depravity of political fanaticism.[53]

---

[52] James Engell, '*Biographia Literaria*' in *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge*, ed. by Lucy Newlyn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 59-74 (p. 64).
[53] Catherine Miles Wallace, *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1983), p. 141.

The juxtaposition of the final chapters and the earlier philosophical theories and innovative literary criticism (which accounts for the greater proportion of the *Biographia*) has often contributed to the less favourable reviews and criticism of the work. However, with an awareness of the gathering momentum of interest in Romantic drama in the later decades of the twentieth century, W. J. Bate offers a balance of opinion about the inclusion of the two pieces. He does not deny that the 'Critique' seems misplaced when taking into account the whole work as '[the] discussion [of the play] seems especially out of place in a book of such magnitude of mind'.[54] However, he does point out that if we look beyond this apparent mismatch, it nevertheless contributes 'often perceptive, even profound insights [into] poetry and drama that had been in Coleridge's mind for years'. Bate mentions less about 'Satyrane's Letters' as, in his view, 'their intellectual significance is limited', but he finds them an interesting inclusion from an autobiographical angle as they reveal 'the experiences of [such a great writer] on a trip that proved an important turning-point in his life'.[55] In a sense, as *Biographia Literaria* did genuinely evolve into Coleridge's autobiography through writing, it would be more surprising if these sections had been omitted. 'Satyrane's Letters' account for the significant influence of Coleridge's trip to Germany and the informal, but nonetheless consistently perceptive, style of a confirmed letter writer and the 'Critique' represents the significant time Coleridge gave over to both examining and writing drama. Following Bate, I focus the final section of this chapter upon the 'Critique of *Bertram*' as the dramatic aspect of the *Biographia* that commands the key

---

[54] W.J. Bate, 'Editors' Introduction' to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria* (see note to Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, above), I, pp. xli-cxxxvi (p. lxiv). Bate's assessment of these insertions is fairly scathing. He prefers their insertion to that of *Zapolya*, which, he suggests, Coleridge was considering 'shoving into the breach', but he nonetheless sees 'Satyrane's Letters' as 'limited' in their 'intellectual significance' and finds that there are 'several things' in the 'Critique' that 'we could justly complain, especially when we are considering it as part of what we regard as one of the master-works of literary criticism' (pp. lxiii-lxiv).
[55] Bate, p. lxiv; p. lxiii.

intellectual insights of the two pieces and stands as a studied conception of the problems concerning drama in Coleridge's historical and cultural context.

Other than Coleridge's innovative appraisal of Wordsworth's poetry in the *Biographia*, the best examples of his close reading of literature are to be found in his lecture series on drama, and he is well known as a critic of Shakespeare. M. M. Badawi's study of Coleridge as a Shakespeare critic suggests that the activity of reviewing his dramatic writing in order to understand what it reveals of his theory of art highlights the 'profoundly systematic nature' of Coleridge's criticism. Badawi asserts that the systematic approach to critical analysis propounded by Coleridge sets the foundation for his criticism of Shakespeare and, in his own study, he 'attempt[s] to relate [Coleridge's] aesthetic theory to his actual practice as a Shakespearean critic'.[56] Badawi is interested in highlighting Coleridge's innovation in literary criticism, which sees him elevate his style of drama criticism above that of the eighteenth-century critics and therefore the natural focus of the study is the Shakespearean criticism in the *Lectures*. However, Coleridge was more far-reaching in his dramatic criticism than on the subject of Shakespeare and, on a practical level, was just as much engaged with the practices of his contemporary writers as he was with those of the literary epoch before him. Consequently, in its aim to provide continuity between Coleridge's dramatic theory and his critical practice, Badawi's study is an appropriate starting point for a further investigation into the impact of Coleridge's aesthetic theory upon his dramatic *oeuvre* as a whole. In light of this, the commentary on drama in the *Biographia* is an important aspect of his dramatic writing and contributes significantly to the study of his view of drama. As Carlson emphasises, 'the disregard of [Coleridge's] dramatic discussions in the much-read *Biographia* [...] is a telling instance of critical blind spots' regarding the significance of Coleridge's plays and his extensive theorising of drama, and the

---

[56] M.M. Badawi, *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 4.

following analysis of the 'Critique' attempts to join Carlson in rebalancing this critical anomaly.[57] In agreement with Badawi's point that 'Coleridge had a theory of poetry which calls for serious analysis, and is not to be dismissed as mere rhetoric', I hope to extend the link between aesthetic theory and literary practice found in Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism into what seems to be, in the *Biographia*, an emerging consideration of the crisis of dramatic genre in the Romantic age.[58] The 'Critique of *Bertram'* plays a key role in this consideration as the article's supposed political rhetoric, intended by Coleridge to emphasise his moral outrage at the public's taste in drama, also reveals his keen awareness of Romanticism's struggles to recognise, and come to terms with, the decline of traditional tragedy. Here, I focus upon Coleridge's attempts to theorise the dramatic identity of his own age, which in turn focus upon his perception of a fault-line between the liberating ideals of Romanticism and the closed world of traditional tragedy. In the 'Critique', Coleridge acknowledges that this literary crisis, played out against the social and political backdrop of revolution, has equally brought about a departure from tradition in literary representation.

As a poet of the Romantic movement, Coleridge's attitude towards the imagination in poetry and criticism is assumed to be unswervingly bound up with a predisposition to internalise, or to turn the external world into thought. This association with the internalising force of the imagination in Romantic poetry has led to the long-held critical view that Romantic drama could not work as production in the theatre as it resists the active and outward capacity required for stage representation. As a critic who challenges this position, Carlson highlights an alternative view of the assumed link between the Romantic imagination and the limitations of Romantic drama. To do this, she puts forward the view that Coleridge distinguished between imagination's 'timeless

---

[57] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 23.
[58] Badawi, p. 4.

and universalizing features' and its 'historical and ideological content'.[59] The former
was associated with poetry and the individual's mind whereas the latter became the
domain of drama and the nation's collective mind. As a result, the notion of
imagination, for Coleridge, is divided. Poetic imagination and dramatic imagination
operate under different conditions and it is Coleridge's conception of dramatic
imagination that calls for the acknowledgement of a dialogue between the Romantic
imagination (in its Coleridgean dramatic manifestation) and its engagement with the
political concerns of the day. Carlson articulates this viewpoint:

> Because we are in the habit of viewing [Romantic] plays as artistic
> failures, we neglect to take seriously the seriousness with which these
> poets wrote and theorized about drama. Worse, we overlook the
> degree to which their conception of drama works against the
> compartmentalizing of aesthetic and political concerns [...] That
> [Coleridge's] *Remorse* and *Zapolya* are less well known than his
> 'Ancient Mariner' and 'Kubla Kahn' can be explained in part by
> criticism's tendency to measure 'success' on aesthetic criteria alone.
> But the disregard of his dramatic discussion in the much-read
> *Biographia*, for example, is a more telling instance of critical blind
> spots.[60]

The failure to distinguish between the Romantic imagination and Coleridge's
conception of a dramatic imagination that is directly involved with the social and
political sphere has led to the critical neglect of this aspect of Coleridge's 'Critique of
Bertram'. Carlson underlines this point throughout her article, linking 'the Coleridgean
theory of imagination' to his interest in the 'reform of politics and the modern stage'.[61]
Here, she modifies the established understanding of the incompatibility of the Romantic
imagination's tendency towards the absolute and the theatre's commanding status by
highlighting Coleridge's insistence that, though potentially problematic, the ideal may
be represented on stage upon a fine balance of the right social conditions and the correct
aesthetic conditions. In order to do this, Carlson points out that Coleridge's view of

---

[59] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 23.
[60] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', pp. 22-3.
[61] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 23.

Hamlet demonstrates an important variation from Jacobus' portrayal of Romantic theatre, in which *Macbeth* is employed as the Shakespearean play most representative of the anti-theatrical impetus of the Romantic movement. Jacobus' view of the Romantic stage as conditioned by the Romantic reading of *Macbeth* reaches the conclusion that 'the more the poet is credited with a self-sufficing inner world', as is the case in Romantic poetic theory, the more problematic a staged form of representation (that seeks to project images outwards) will become:

> The metaphysics of presence might be said to constitute a distinct element in romantic prejudice against the theatre […] romantic criticism of Shakespeare — the type of myriad-minded, negatively-capable, and God-like creator — tends to subordinate stage to page and actors to text.[62]

The counterargument to this critical analysis of the Romantic stage, which emerges in Carlson's assessment of Coleridge's view of *Hamlet*, highlights Coleridge's willingness to employ dramatic representation if it is used correctly. In his *Lectures*, Coleridge is careful not to present Hamlet's indecision and lack of action as virtues, preferring instead to consider his inaction as a flaw.[63] Coleridge praises Shakespeare's creation of Hamlet's character in terms of its consistency as, in spite of opportunities laid before him to act, he never does and he remains throughout the play a contemplative character. Nevertheless, this praise is specific to Hamlet's consistent character and does not extend to the extreme nature of his inactive character. The conclusion to John Payne Collier's notes on this subject in Lecture 12 of the 1811-12 course eloquently communicates this distinction:

---

[62] Mary Jacobus, 'That Great Stage Where Senators Perform: *Macbeth* and the Politics of the Romantic Theater', *Studies in Romanticism*, 22 (1983), pp. 353-387 (p. 375).
[63] A related point is made by Coleridge when he introduces his comparison between men of commanding genius and those of absolute genius in the *Biograpahia Literaria*. Here, he warns that an extreme version of either type of person (excessively inward or overly outwards) is undesirable as 'The sanity of the mind [should rest] between superstition with fanaticism on the one hand, and enthusiasm with indifference and a diseased slowness to action on the other' (*BL*, I, p. 31).

> Shakespeare wished to impress upon us the truth that action is the great end of existence — that no faculties of the 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 shewn us the fulness, and force of his powers: all that is aimiable 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 & divine but the great purpose of life defeated by continually resolving to do, yet doing nothing but resolve. (*LL*, I, p. 390)

Coleridge's view of Hamlet, therefore, contradicts the implication of Jacobus' assessment of Romantic stage theory, which is based upon the premise that the commanding medium of the stage, analogous to Macbeth's commanding character, should be controlled and limited by the closeting of drama. For Carlson, Coleridge's consideration of the theatre as a place where the ideal could be cast outwards is not a simple dismissal of it either on political grounds for its sensory subversiveness or on aesthetic grounds for its sensory limitations. Instead, she sees Coleridge attempting to piece together a finely balanced view of theatrical art which, precisely through its appeal to the senses, offers the possibility of engaging the nation's public (or at least the theatre-going public) in an aesthetically motivated project of social reform. Dramatic art has the advantage over poetry of 'reach[ing] to a wider audience [and achieves a] more direct access to the hearts of the people' because it is both a communal aesthetic and it elicits an immediate emotional response to the images it presents.[64] As such, it has a powerful capacity to teach audiences how to be good citizens by supporting them through their responses to represented events on stage and guiding and directing their imaginative response to the play. This is the ideal end of the drama and is achieved only when a play is of an artistic quality that will secure its audience to be under a 'willing suspension of disbelief' (*BL*, II, p. 6). As Carlson points out in relation to the theoretical discrepancy between *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*:

---

[64] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 28.

> Unlike other romantics, then, Coleridge considers the real question to
> be not whether imagination can make something happen but whether
> imagination 'impregnates' understanding or is overpowered by sense.
> This is the concern which underlies Coleridge's dramatic theory,
> criticism and practice.[65]

This is exactly the point at which Coleridge's denigration of his contemporary stage

productions comes into view. The problem with the Romantic stage was not borne from

the medium itself (although, as Carlson highlights, the reliance of theatre on the

material renders it a challenging medium) but from the irresponsible use of the medium

by playwrights and theatres that wrote to satiate the audience's demands rather than

attempting to cultivate their taste and judgement with reforming dramas. Too often,

Coleridge was witness to sensational plays that exploited the stage's sensory attributes

in order to please the public's ever-growing appetite for sentiment, shock and spectacle.

Consequently, he comes to the conclusion that the dramatic imagination cannot be

supported under the contemporary conditions of drama that involves only the senses.

The frustration that he is unable to hide when articulating the failure of the theatre of his

contemporaries to achieve the reforming potential he so clearly perceives within

dramatic art reaches its climax in the analogy he draws between the kind of unthinking

political extremism of Jacobinism and the public's salacious appetite for insensitive

dramatic production. It is this that comes to the fore in the controversial claims he

makes in his review of *Bertram*.

Coleridge's analysis of *Bertram* gives warning that the malaise of modern drama lies in

the fact that it presents the real world in the image of the ideal world of traditional

tragedy. In doing so, Coleridge draws a comparison between *Bertram* and an 'elder

production', *Atheista Fulminato* (*BL*, II, p. 212). As with his praise of Hamlet's

---

[65] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 30.

character, Coleridge's key point of comparison between the plays regards consistency.
He praises *Atheista Fulminato* as a model of a play documenting the decadence and
wickedness of its protagonist but nonetheless retaining moral integrity because it is
'throughout imaginative' and it results in the final judgement of the character (*BL*, II, p.
213). Drawing upon Aristotle's claim that the poet should 'prefer probable
impossibilities to improbable possibilities', Coleridge maintains that the characters and
events of a play should be permitted to be impossible in real life—and can be as
demonic as required—but it is essential that, in the world of the play, their actions and
their outcomes are appropriate and conceivable (*LL*, I, p. 218, n. 1). In other words,
Atheista Fulminato's antihero and his actions are of impossible conception but, in the
world of the play, they can be seen as probable occurrences. In this way, the aesthetics
of the play override the social and moral implications of the character or world of the
play as the character and the events of the play remain representative and always treated
with consistency. This works in *Atheista Fulminato*, because the play conforms to the
generic conventions of traditional tragedy in that Don John, a human who has raised
himself to sublime proportions, is ultimately 'swallowed up in a cloud of fire' in a final
act of divine retribution (*BL*, II, p. 219). However, this model is inverted on the
Romantic stage, which represents possible characters, palpable in real life, in
improbable circumstances or performing improbable actions. Furthermore, these
tangibly human characters are also cast in a post-revolutionary, republican society,
which signals the loss of a divine framework as upheld by the divine right of kings.
Consequently, tragedy in the Romantic age suffered a crisis of identity: formal rules of
traditional tragedy (such as a divine framework and idealised characters) were
transgressed, but this was not acknowledged in the generic classification or stylistic
conventions of the plays that were being written.

This style of play, therefore, in its blurring of the line between the real and the ideal, or politics and art, becomes a generic manifestation of Coleridge's definition of Jacobinism as it displays 'the confusion and subversion of the natural order of things in their causes and effects' (*BL*, II, p. 221).   In terms of content, Romantic plays presented a view of the world cut off from a greater divine order and, regarding characterisation, their heroes were not 'impersonated abstractions' but instead were given fallible and human characteristics (*BL*, II, p. 213; emphasis in original). The style of these plays, however, was not revised in order to accommodate this secularisation of content and the plays are eventually revealed to 'displa[y] hollowness' and become merely copies of the classical style (*BL*, II, p. 221). This idea is articulated in the 'Critique of *Bertram*' as Coleridge analyses Don John's lively hospitality towards the governor's ghost:

> [This scene] is susceptible likewise of a sound moral; of a moral that has more than common claims to on the notice of too numerous class, who are ready to receive the qualities of gentlemanly courage, and scrupulous honour [...] as the substitutes of virtue , instead of its ornaments. (*BL*, II, p. 220)

Here Coleridge's argument, as it is applied to the style of modern dramatists, converges with his complaint against the legacy of the eighteenth century's neoclassicist poetic style which prompted the *Lyrical Ballads*. Effectively, Coleridge reiterates here his distaste for the embellishment of language and the temptation towards the decorous in art, which simply 'display[s] their [own] hollowness' (*BL*, II, p. 221). As a result, the link drawn by Coleridge between Don John's character and the 'moral value of the play' portrayed in the character (and his eventual demise) is not only applicable to the morality of society but also to the integrity of literature (*BL*, II, p. 220). When Coleridge complains of the 'spirit of modern jacobinism' he does so first on the aesthetic ground that this spirit is a 'clumsy cop[y]' of the spirit of plays such as

Atheista Fulminato, which prompts a secondary social and political effect of 'vice and want of principle' (*BL*, II, p. 221). This is in clear evidence in Coleridge's opening remark on *Bertram*, as he takes issue with the purely spectacular device of the shipwreck, which bears no relation to the events of the play:

> But what was there to account for the prodigy of the tempest as *Bertram's* shipwreck? It is a mere supernatural effect without even a hint of any supernatural agency; a prodigy without any circumstance mentioned that is prodigious; and a miracle introduced without a ground, and ending without a result. Every even, every scene of the play might have taken place as well if *Bertram* and his vessel had been driven in by a common hard gale, or from want of provisions. (*BL*, II, p. 222)

Coleridge himself avoided using the device of the shipwreck to reintroduce Alvar to his native country, choosing instead to present him, at the start of the play, as having returned to Granada with no explanation as to how he arrived there. Indeed, his use of the supernatural in *Remorse* is limited mainly to verbal imagery and, in terms of spectacular display, it is confined to the incantation scene where Coleridge grounds it in a thorough consideration of the play's key dichotomies of vision and voice and classical tragic genre against modern Romantic drama. Where Coleridge sees his use of the supernatural in *Remorse* as justified on account of its importance to the play as a whole, he finds the supernatural in *Bertram* simply a self-serving device used to achieve unconsidered effect. This complaint against *Bertram* traces the systematic use of part of his aesthetic theory of drama (in particular the notions of copy and imitation and dramatic illusion) from its employment in terms of the poetic imagination into an engagement with the social impact of the evolution of the genre of tragedy. In his dramatic practice, Coleridge takes the genre of the revenge tragedy and attempts to play out its transformation into a tragedy of remorse for the Romantic age in order to reconcile this discrepancy between the spirit of Romanticism and the spirit of tragedy. I analyse Coleridge's willingness to work within both 'genres' of revenge and remorse in

my critical focus upon Coleridge's play in Chapter Four. In the closing remarks of this chapter, I want to consider how Coleridge's opposition to *Bertram* lies not in the rejection of *Zapolya* but in his acrimony that *Bertram* could be staged in the wake of *Remorse*, a play whose literary considerations should have signalled the outright rejection of *Bertram*. The attack upon *Bertram*, therefore, was not so much a professional attack upon its playwright or even an attack upon popular nineteenth-century spectacular drama (even at its worst), but an attack upon those at Drury Lane who had either not understood or not heeded the central message of *Remorse*: that traditional revenge tragedy and the Romantic tragedy based within a guilt framed by the sentiment of remorse (identified by Coleridge in the lecture he failed to deliver on the subject in 1808) must remain distinct in order to perpetuate the value of the tragic in a modern, post-revolutionary climate.

The inclusion of the 'Critique of *Bertram*' in the *Biographia* has often been accounted for by the claim that Coleridge needed to fill the book's second volume and that this piece, ready for print, was a relatively convenient way to fulfil his contract. Additionally, critics often account for the composition of the 'Critique of *Bertram*' as emanating from something approaching a professional jealousy on Coleridge's part after the Drury Lane Committee rejected *Zapolya* in favour of *Bertram*, and its inclusion in *Biographia* on the basis of his desire to identify himself as the author of the piece (he had first published it anonymously in a series of letters to the editor to the *Courier*). In defence of the inclusion, it is acknowledged that the material forms a significant part of Coleridge's literary biography as in it he confronts what he considers to be the defects of modern drama against the backdrop of Germany. However, it appears that Coleridge gave more thought to the additions than is generally assumed. One reason for this is that he considered using *Zapolya* to fill the available space but

rejected it in favour of the letters. This highlights that Coleridge had, above all other forms, drama in mind when choosing his additions, and it also reinforces the autobiographical and critical nature of the work. More importantly, this decision indicates that Coleridge's aim was to theorise drama rather than simply 'shove [*Zapolya*] into the breach'.[66] Here, the collecting together of material specifically focused upon drama implies that, although constrained by time, he was starting to do with drama in the final sections of the *Biographia* what he had done more thoroughly in the previous chapters with poetry. Although the attention to detail displayed in *Biographia*'s theory of the poetic imagination is perhaps lacking in the assembly of 'Satyrane's Letters', the 'Critique of *Bertram*' and also in his consideration of *Zapolya* as part of this section of his literary autobiography, it nonetheless highlights his view of the dramatic imagination as a theory that required distinction from poetry.

In the case of the 'Critique', Coleridge starts to lay the foundations for a systematic appraisal of modern drama. In structure, the 'Critique' starts by placing *Bertram* into a literary and historical context, thereby attacking the Drury Lane committee's management of the theatre and countering the assumption that the popular plays of the time came from Germany. Coleridge then departs from contextualising and, to establish the reasons for his vehement distaste of the English popular drama, he throws himself into an analysis of *Atheista Fulminato*, a play he describes as 'throughout imaginative' (*BL*, II, p. 213). Finally, Coleridge turns back to his departure point and performs a dissection of *Bertram*, through comparison with *Atheista Fulmanito*, in which he reveals the former as an example of the English 'brat' or 'lack-grace': a drama originating in the eighteenth-century confusion of Shakespearean criticism and Gothic novel which was then placed on stage in Germany and copied by English dramatists (*BL*, II, p. 212).

---

[66] Bate, p. lxiv.

This style of criticism, therefore, appears to be considered and systematic, using strategies that bring together a selection of material for consideration and analyse it according to literary and historical principles. Nevertheless, since Hazlitt's condemnation of it, the 'Critique of *Bertram*' has come under attack as an example of Coleridge's worst writing: a personally-motivated piece created for the self-serving end of covering up his own political inconsistencies and attacking a play that became more successful than his own. The reasons for this discrepancy between Coleridge's attempts to show a consistent and comprehensive effort to theorise the Romantic stage and the unfavourable reception of this attempt merit attention if only because they highlight the problematic and contentious nature of drama in the Romantic period.

Firstly, the appraisal of drama in the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries was more difficult to achieve in public than a commentary upon poetry. Of all the literary forms in the Romantic period, drama suffered the most from contextual forces. From a literary-philosophical standpoint, the Romantic imagination was incompatible with the material qualities and action of stage representation: the political state of Europe added to an artistic reluctance to portray political action on stage, while the economic backdrop of the theatres called for popularity over artistic merit, as did the social makeup of the theatre-going public. The subsequent turn away from theatre by the canonical writers, and the gap filled by populist or experimental writers, made it difficult to write about the form in a universally critical manner. As a result, Coleridge and his fellow writers were presented with a complex relationship between drama and their post-revolutionary political climate. With regard to *Bertram*, it is important to remember that, in Coleridge's view, the play carried more significance than its status as a rival to his own play. For him, the play was inexorably linked to a greater issue of reform of the British stage. It was the first play written by a modern playwright chosen

by the new Drury Lane Committee, which intended to put into motion this cultural reform. It must, therefore, have been a disappointment—Coleridge goes further and claims it was a 'weight of lead upon [his] heart'—to witness a Gothic drama designed to fulfil the public demand for shock and spectacle (*BL*, II, p. 229). At this point in the 'Critique', the combined factors of the Drury Lane Committee's failure to stick to its aspiration to revive the moral and artistic purposefulness of Shakespearean drama by staging *Bertram* and the 'thunder of applause' that the audience gave to this sensational play prompt Coleridge to politicise his reaction to the drama (*BL*, II, p. 229). The play itself becomes 'proof of the depravation of the public mind' and therefore comparable to the 'shocking spirit of Jacobinism' that became the legacy of the French Revolution (*BL*, II, p. 229). The negative reception of the 'Critique' shows that Coleridge failed to convince his readership, and subsequent critics, that the term Jacobinism could be applied to the drama, perhaps precisely due to the fact that it was such a politically loaded word. However, in order to consider further Coleridge's views on nineteenth-century gothic drama and to bring them into line with his much praised Shakespearean criticism, an appraisal of Coleridge's use of the term is worth looking into. By considering the notion of literary Jacobinism as part of his dramatic theory rather than his political ideals (as Coleridge perhaps aimed for when pointing out that this consideration of drama had been in his mind for years), we begin to account for Coleridge's apparent mishandling of the term 'Jacobinism' or the misunderstanding by others of his employment of the term. I would like to argue that, although it may not have been the correct choice of word given the meaning it carried, Coleridge used 'jacobinical' to identify modern drama and give it characteristics more than simply 'modern'. It is therefore apt that, as part of the 'Critique of *Bertram*', its place within *Biographia Literaria* is vindicated, or at least, explained.

The issue of Jacobinism, which casts a shadow over the 'Critique of *Bertram*', is further complicated by Coleridge's attempt to substantiate claims of ideological consistency by anchoring his complaint against modern theatres to the letters he wrote from Germany in 1798. His claim that 'Eighteen years ago [he] observed that the whole secret of the modern jacobinical drama [...] consists in the confusion and subversion of the natural order of things' is misleading: the letters to which Coleridge refers did not consider modern drama in line with Jacobinism, and it is only when Coleridge returns to these letters in 1809 (as 'Satyrane's Letters') that he turns his argument towards the issue (*BL*, II, p. 221). This unreliable claim, as Alethea Hayter points out, did much harm to the overarching argument about modern drama put forward by Coleridge in the 'Critique'. Hayter describes Coleridge's act of cross-referencing modern drama with political Jacobinism as a 'red herring', which he traces 'across his hunt after the truth of modern drama'.[67] In doing so, she advances the critical viewpoint regarding the appearance of the 'Critique' in the *Biographia* by specifying, in greater detail, the reason for its general reception as something as a dead-end in Coleridge's otherwise important work. This reason goes back to the original conception that the inclusion of the 'Critique' was simply an expedient method of filling content for the second volume. Whilst not denying the fact that the conditions surrounding the printing of the book required a 'hasty gathering-up of material to fill the second volume', she departs from the received viewpoint that the essay was inserted mainly for word count and had not commanded inclusion on account of its own literary value.[68] Instead, she identifies the fact that whilst Coleridge perhaps misguidedly placed his appraisal of modern drama in a personal context relating to the recent rejection of his play and an impulse to use the 'Critique' as evidence of his political steadfastness, the detailed consideration of modern drama possesses a gravity befitting its inclusion in the *Biographia*:

---

[67] Alethea Hayter, 'Coleridge, Maturin's *Bertram*, and Drury Lane', in *New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essays*, ed. by Donald Sultana (London: Vision Press, 1981), pp. 17-38 (p. 29).
[68] Hayter, p. 29.

> The whole incident of Drury Lane's rejection of *Zapolya* is really irrelevant to the permanent interest of the point Coleridge was making in the 'Critique', and they might never have been linked at all [...] if the hasty gathering-up of material to fill the second volume of *Biographia Literaria* had not brought together in fatal juxtaposition several discrete and unrelated fragments.[69]

As Hayter shows, the idea of Jacobinism seems to be the ground on which Coleridge's life and his literary views collide. Hayter considers the term in the light of Coleridge's social preoccupations with drama as a tool for reform and therefore regrets his substitution of the term 'modern drama' for 'Jacobinical drama'. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the critical confusion of life, literature and politics fed through the issue of Jacobinism in the 'Critique' can be acknowledged and also extended beyond its original critical understanding as a peculiarly personal and specific document. As already argued, rather than as an act of 'envy and callousness' directed towards one playwright, Coleridge tries to employ the term 'jacobinical' beyond the scope of its political meaning.[70] In the first letter to the editor of *The Courier*, much of which is cut from the 'Critique' in the *Biographia*, Coleridge seems to indicate this by employing the term 'extra political jacobinism' as the third point of his consideration of *Bertram* (*BL*, II, p. 260). The fact that Coleridge qualifies the term in order to extrapolate its original meaning beyond that of politics adds weight to the assumption that he intended to use it in a literary context, which, it seems, was for the purpose of theorising drama. In support of this, Coleridge claims his intention to build up to a transference of Jacobinism into literary terminology by grounding it in a discussion of the 'phrase *German Drama'* which he argues is a 'misnomer', and a critical analysis of the play *Atheista Fulmanito* (*BL*, II, p. 260; emphasis in original).[71] By both qualifying the term

---

[69] Hayter, p. 29.
[70] Hayter, p. 30.
[71] This play was adopted by Shadwell, who reworked it as *The Libertine*, and it was performed in England in 1676. The fact that the play was first performed in post-revolutionary Restoration England must have

in his use of it beyond its own meaning and then using it within a specifically dramatic context, Coleridge appears to point his readers in the direction of a new meaning that is bound to his conviction that drama should mediate and, in fact, patrol the boundary between the two extremes of ideal and real. This point is underscored through the language of Coleridge's criticism of Act IV of *Bertram*. To support his view that 'the shocking spirit of jacobinism seemed no longer confined to politics', Coleridge describes the audience's rapturous reaction to the re-entry of Bertram on stage as 'the melancholy proof of the depravation of the public mind' (*BL*, II, p. 229). Coleridge, here, does not describe Bertram as a character but as a 'human being' and therefore confuses (as the audience do) the boundary between imagined character and real figure (*BL*, II, p. 229). The fact that the audience forgets that Bertram is in fact a character causes Coleridge to forget that the audience is watching a play and he interprets this reaction in real terms. He declares that, in all the commotion of this act, the play's artifice, the 'actor, author and tragedy would have been forgotten' and even he would have suffered under a delusion (*BL*, II, p. 229). However, he was shaken out of this deception as his neighbour commented on the events of the play as if they were real and Coleridge was able to scorn him for this response. In its representation of a spectator observing spectators, this layering of interpretative figures is reminiscent of the effect of the *theatrum mundi* and recalls precisely the usurping tendency that theatrical performance, when it is not correctly monitored, achieves. Coleridge, here, is warning against the delusory effect of theatrical display built upon the misguided conviction that drama is a copy of reality, not an imitation. In this sense, Coleridge traces his aesthetic misgivings about Georgian theatre to France (as he does in his 'True Theory of Stage Illusion') and not to the Gothic influence of German literature. This complaint against the French style of dramatic illusion as delusion becomes also a complaint against the

---

served Coleridge's political viewpoint well, despite the fact that his main focus for analysis was the fact that he could identify it as 'throughout imaginative'.

vogue for sensation as the content of Georgian plays, whereby the presentation of violence and extreme characters is reflective of the Jacobinism of the French Revolution. Consequently, Coleridge's employment of Jacobinism is not simply a crude description of a style of play that he finds distasteful, but reveals a more complex consideration of the interdependency between public morality and dramatic achievement. As Carlson states, 'Coleridge condemns *Bertram*'s presence on stage [because] its immorality and appeal to the senses perpetuate the Jacobinism that ideal drama is intended to combat'.[72] The problem for Coleridge lies in the fact that dramatic Jacobinism is self-perpetuating unless the audience seeking popular plays is replaced by an audience seeking imaginative plays. As will be shown in Chapter Four, Coleridge himself offered a solution to this problem in his own stage play, *Remorse*, in which the issues involving dramatic illusion come under constant scrutiny.

To conclude, the complex relationship between the visual politics of Georgian theatre and the employment of the Gothic genre within these plays must be reviewed under Coleridge's dramatic theory. He has long been associated with a straightforward resistance of the use of Gothic tropes such as the supernatural and critics have suggested that his own employment of the supernatural signalled a weakness of his practice and discredited his critical reputation. Nevertheless, the problematic nature of the representation of the supernatural on stage arises predominantly for Coleridge when it is used for sensational effect. Coleridge draws a distinction between imaginative plays, in which the supernatural contributes to the consistency of a character, and sensational plays, in which the supernatural contributes nothing to the content of the play and becomes nothing other than a means of exciting the eyes of the audience. As has been discussed, Coleridge's discontent with *Bertram* also lay in the fact that its use of the

---

[72] Carlson, 'An Active Imagination', p. 31.

supernatural functioned for the purpose of entertaining the audience rather than as an integral element to the play. Again, Hayter makes this point, referring to the suggestion that Maturin had been advised to remove from the play the Dark Knight figure, whose influence upon Bertram made his 'later villanies become, not more pardonable but at least a consistent development'.[73] She states, with an understanding of Coleridge's complaint against the inconsistencies inherent within *Bertram*, that '[t]he physical embodiment on stage of the psychological process of temptation, or at least description of such an embodiment […] seems a perfectly legitimate theatrical device'.[74] Hayter's view that Coleridge may not have criticised *Bertram* to the extent that he did if Maturin had in fact retained his supernatural figure is an important factor in understanding Coleridge's attitude towards the supernatural. The final two chapters of the thesis follow this assumption of Coleridge's view of the supernatural by locating it in a dramatic context, and I argue that this aspect of Coleridge's work may also reveal a dramatic undercurrent in his poetic work. However, I begin Chapter Three by identifying the dramatic themes of correct interpretation and the social responsibility of the imagination in 'The Eolian Harp'. The ideas highlighted in this analysis form the foundation of my reading of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* according to the themes of vision, genre and Coleridge's controversial use of the supernatural in this poem.

---

[73] Hayter, p. 32.
[74] Hayter, p. 32.

Chapter 3. The Dramatic Turn in Coleridge's Poetry

3.1   Introduction

The problem of vision arrives in Coleridge's poetry with equal thematic force as in his dramatic theory and practice. In two of the major movements of his poetic creativity—the 'Conversation Poems' and the 'Mystery Poems'—Coleridge affords himself the freedom to create 'footless and wild' images, which see him attempting to deliver his reader to an ideal condition of 'a willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith'.[75] However, as argued in the previous chapter, this poetic faith is rooted in Coleridge's attempts to reconcile the visions of the imagination with the materiality of the stage and it therefore references his earlier reservations surrounding the borderline between illusion and delusion.[76] In this chapter, I aim to uncover the way in which Coleridge draws on his dramatic theory and exploits the dramatization of situations and characters in order to reveal his ongoing reservations of the poetic image and its translation into social reality.

In both 'The Eolian Harp' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge presents the reader with two characters engaged in a conversation (although one assumes the role of listener and the other dominates the speech) in which a vision is developed and questioned. Both Sara in 'The Eolian Harp' and the Wedding Guest in *The Rime* show

---

[75] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', in *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text),* ed. by J.C.C. Mays, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Collected Works*, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), XVI, p. 233 (line 24). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation EH. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1960-2002), vii (1983), ii, p.6. Further references to this edition are given after quotations in the text, using the abbreviation *BL.*
[76] The first publication of 'The Eolian Harp' (1796) and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1797) predate Coleridge's theory of the willing suspension of disbelief, which first emerges in the 1808 Lectures and is developed in the *Biographia Literaria* (1817), and both these poems were revised after 1817 and also after Coleridge can be considered to have been most engaged with drama. Nonetheless, both the first publications and the ensuing revisions often form a parallel line with Coleridge's dramatic interest and their alterations can be seen to mirror the changes in his dramatic theory as it becomes increasingly defined.

suspicion and even fear of their speakers' 'untamed' reverie and are positioned such that they encourage the reader to question the vision and control their own absorption within it (EH, l. 25). At points in both poems, these listeners break into the flow of the narrative stream to convey a suspicion or fear of the narrator's eye. This anxiety surrounding the speaker's desire to bring an insubstantial vision into reality forms the basis of the paradox that Coleridge identified throughout his literary work and which is clearly articulated in his dramatic theory: imaginative representation seeks to present that which is absent, but if the speaker succeeds in reifying his vision, it would signal simply his deluded state. Tilottama Rajan addresses this paradox in Coleridge's conversation poems and suggests that the poet creates himself as a figure doubled in the reverie of 'The Eolian Harp' in order to take into account the fact that artistic representation always assumes the status of usurpation. She conceives Coleridge's reverie persona as a double of the persona that is speaking to Sara:

> It is as though the experience is not possessed literally, and as though there is a latent recognition that poetry cannot become the unequivocal reappropriation of presence. This existence of a surrogate self, through whom the poet must represent himself in a place where he is not, points in turn to the surrogate status of literary signs, which also seek to take the place of the absent and to represent something which they cannot recapture.[77]

This anxiety surrounding the receiving of images from a character who is simply an image himself, or from the projection of a self who is elsewhere, returns in *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* through the suggestion of the Mariner as a revenant. Again Coleridge delivers to the reader an image of an experience that demands to be questioned in order for the reader not to fall into a state of delusion that threatens to damage both the security of his reason and, on a wider scale, the stability of society. Rajan's assessment of image and reality in the conversation poems rests upon the

---

[77] Tillottoma Rajan, *Dark Interpreter*: *The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 129.

centrality of the poet who takes the insubstantiality of figurative language as his theme. However, my reading of this poem and of *The Rime* seeks to consider how Coleridge uses the representation of others in order both to enable and to limit figurative language. This view sees his dramatic theory utilised in his poetic practice to offer a possibility of overcoming the problems posed by the idealism inherent in Romantic poetry and Romantic theory. Rajan's assessment of Coleridge's lyric poetry leads her to conclude that, although Coleridge's poetry maintains an important position in the canon because he was the 'only practicing poet who studied and contributed to the theory of Romanticism', it loses impact due to the fact that it is not part of an organised biographical structure:

> These lyrics […] are occasional poems and lack the climactic authority that they would have if they were the culmination of a sequence or planned collection […Coleridge's ideas in these poems] remain rehearsed rather than performed, [his resolution is] one that [he] reflects on in the privacy of lyric but never acts out in the more public mode of narrative or drama.[78]

By presenting a dramatic theme in Coleridge's poetry that predates, but also seems to influence, his dramatic output, Rajan's view can be balanced at least by asserting a more sequential development of his ideas than she affords. Although Coleridge's dramatic voice maintains a strong sense of lyricism, by opening his lyric poetry into his dramatic theory, a stronger line of thought throughout Coleridge's work can be perceived, as can the attempt to make this thought public, albeit in a limited sense. This chapter aims to show that both 'The Eolian Harp' and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* become important manifestations of Coleridge's dramatic theory as he mobilises dramatic motifs such as the will, community and the role of the emotions, especially remorse, to press forward a greater acknowledgement of the division of the Romantic imagination according to the poetic and the dramatic, respectively.

---

[78] Rajan, p. 259.

3.2   Symbol and Sociability in 'The Eolian Harp'

In 1928, George McLean Harper coined the term 'Conversation Poem' to describe and classify a group of Coleridge's poems dating from the second half of the 1790s which, Harper observes, achieve a certain uniformity on account of their 'qualities of style no less than of subject'.[79] Harper's essay brought together eight poems written by Coleridge between 1795 and 1807 that shared a similar structure and style and could be given a new generic label, itself borrowed from the title of one of the poems, 'The Nightingale. A Conversation Poem'. As he points out, this is a poetic form that can be structured around the natural and communal form of a conversation and, consequently, it invites the view that 'the poet of the Friendly Pieces lingers among us'.[80] In his introduction, Harper makes an impassioned case for the poems to be considered in contradistinction to the mystery poems, which are 'not of this world nor founded on history or circumstance' and, as such, he implies that these poems are practical rather than ideal.[81] Nonetheless, 'The Conversation Poem' is most commonly judged according to Romantic conventions of the solitary poet and his imaginative union with God and nature: in short, according to its lyric and ideal nature. Certainly, the figurative language of the conversation poems is spontaneous, flowing and allows for a symbolic relationship between the human and the natural, and this has lent it to the type of language-based criticism that has fixed Coleridge's identity throughout most of the twentieth century as a poet of the imagination. It is an opinion argued convincingly by M. H. Abrams, who sees the poet's ability to meditate upon—and thus vivify—nature as the quintessential feature of the conversation poems (although he refers to them as

---

[79] George McLean Harper, 'Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 144-157 (p.147).
[80] Harper, p.146.
[81] Harper, p. 145. Whilst I use Harper's distinction between the conversation poems and the mystery poems to underline my point that the conversation poems extend into community and the social world, as will become clear in the second half of this chapter, I do not agree with Harper that the mystery poems are unequivocally located in a 'magic realm' or 'unfathomable space' (p. 145).

part of his wider definition of the Greater Romantic Lyric). His view is based upon the

assertion that Romantic writers were concerned, above all, with the idea that the poetic

imagination defined mankind:

> In the extended lyrics, the visual report is invariably the occasion for a
> meditation which turns out to constitute the *raison d'être* of the poem.
> Romantic writers, though nature poets, were humanists above all, for
> they dealt with the non-human only insofar as it is the occasion for the
> activity which defines man: thought, the process of
> intellectualisation.[82]

This 'process of intellectualisation' is an undeniably prominent feature of Romantic

writing and Abrams' account of it here and in his other works must be considered as an

exemplary and essential critical account of Romanticism.[83] However, to return to

Harper's earlier account of Coleridge's conversation poems, a balance is struck in these

poems between the language of thought and the structure of talk. As such, the identity

of man in these poems emerges as a contested ground between the imaginative self,

which can be said to be concerned with the intellect, and the sociable community, which

is concerned with the other feature that defines man: emotion. As Harper presses, 'these

are [Coleridge's] Poems of Friendship' and they become examples of 'the expression of

his feelings which were occasioned by quite definite events'.[84] This view of friendship

in the conversation poems conceives it not as an abstracted or fictional device for the

sake of poetic effect but a very real attempt to capture in verse the relationships

Coleridge enjoyed with 'the golden inner circle of his friends'.[85] In other words, the

structure of the poem that is involved with Abrams' 'process of intellectualisation' is

also encased within a structural form that must externalise this thought due to the

---

[82] M. H. Abrams, 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 528-560 (p. 528).
[83] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 528.
[84] Harper, p.145.
[85] Harper, p. 145.

constant presence of an assumed other to whom the poem is addressed.[86] It is in this structural aspect of the poem, and its relation to human feeling as a source of creativity equal to that of the intellect, in which Coleridge's dramatic theory becomes manifest and serves to counteract the conventional view of the poems as exclusively lyrical.

The dramatic nature of the conversation poems has often been noted, but it has rarely been the source of extensive commentary. Coleridge himself preferred to describe this poetry as more suited to prose, as the motto to 'Reflections on Having Left a Place of Retirement' (*Sermoni propriora*) implies, and the prosaic style of conversation has brought about more critical attention than the dramatic devices at work within the poems. Nevertheless, Coleridge's propensity towards the dramatic becomes an underlying theme of critical analysis of the poems, as critics use the language of drama as a means of commenting on these poems. Early readings of the poems tended to highlight the innovation in their 'out-in-out' structure, which relies on an assumed listener and in which the narrator-poet can describe a setting which, in turn, prompts a meditation on his inner thoughts, always returning to the initial setting to bring him back into his society.[87] Harper claims that the conversation poems are, at times, 'soliloquies'; Abrams echoes this interpretation by claiming that 'The Eolian Harp' is, 'in the dramatic mode of intimate talk to an unanswering auditor in easy blank-verse paragraphs'.[88] Criticism of the 1980s extends these interpretations by detailing the symbolic language of the poems to elucidate the interplay between the landscape or nature of the descriptive passages and the poet's imaginative meditations in the central section of the poems, thereby making the imagery an outward display of the internal

---

[86] Abrams,'Structure and Style', p. 528.

[87] This structure has been termed as a systolic and diastolic arrangement, which further connects Coleridge's practice in these poems with the body and the emotions. See Albert Gérard, 'The Systolic Rhythm: The Structure of Coleridge's Conversation Poems' in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. by Kathleen Coburn (Englewood Cliffs, NJ.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), pp. 78-87.

[88] Harper, p. 145; Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 531.

mind. Kathleen Wheeler draws out Coleridge's philosophical considerations of reason, understanding and imagination, and the subject-object relationship, to provide a reading of 'The Eolian Harp'. This reading focuses on the active mind; there is the interplay between the poet's mind and the external objects of nature and the harp, and also the contrast between his mind and that of Sara:

> A censorious, reductionist, literal-minded, and pre-eminently passive observer seems to be contrasted with the creative perception of the speaker. The contrast may be seen as a characterization of the conflict within the mind between the reason and the understanding, the active and the passive faculties [...] Fundamentally, the mind is creative even in its perception, and experience is the outcome of that initial activity.[89]

The key point here lies in Wheeler's identification of the strategy employed by Coleridge to come to an understanding of the mind's creativity as a dramatic one based in characterization. Emerging within Coleridge's activity of 'characteri[sing...] the conflict within the mind between [...] the active and passive faculties' is the theoretical framework he would apply to drama in the *Lectures on Literature* and the *Biographia Literaria*.[90] By using a dramatic form of blank verse, imagined dialogue or soliloquy to encase figurative language and a theoretical framework that deals with the creative powers of the imagination, Coleridge introduces a form of action through interaction into his poetry. The desire to externalise thought as part of a conversation reveals a commanding, and thus dramatic, aspect of his poetry and complements his dramatic creations, which have said to have been anti-theatrical because they foreground passive, or inactive, characters. The technique of dramatisation in this poetry therefore complements Coleridge's technique of poetic contemplation given to some of the main characters of his dramas.

---

[89] Kathleen Wheeler, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981), p. 68.
[90] Wheeler, p. 68.

In connection with this idea of a dramatic element running throughout the conversation poems, the psychological element of these poems also anticipates Coleridge's understanding of the dramatic form as engaging with the human community rather than a spirituality of nature that we also see in the *Lectures on Literature*. As Scott Simpkins points out, Coleridge uses the conversation poem form to 'dramatize his thought processes under the guise of intersubjective communication'.[91] This is an important restatement of Abrams' earlier definition of the conversation poems, as it locates the narrator-poet's outward projection of his thought not into nature but into the community:

> [Romantic lyrics] present a determinate speaker in a particularized, and usually a localized, outdoor setting, whom we overhear as he carries on, in a fluent vernacular which rises easily to a more formal speech, a sustained colloquy, sometimes with himself or with the outer scene, but more frequently with a silent human auditor, present or absent. The speaker begins with a description of the landscape; an aspect or change of aspect in the landscape evokes a varied but integral process of memory, thought, anticipation, and feeling which remains closely intervolved with the outer scene. In the course of this meditation the lyric speaker achieves an insight, faces up to a tragic loss, comes to a moral decision, or resolves an emotional problem. Often the poem rounds upon itself to end where it began, at the outer scene, but with an altered mood and deepened understanding which is the result of the intervening meditation.[92]

For Abrams, the 'silent human auditor' is secondary to the 'outer scene' in terms of the change effected upon the narrator throughout the course of the poem.[93] It is the narrator's interaction with the landscape and his meditative description of it that results in the outcome of his 'altered mood' or 'deepened understanding' by the end of the poem.[94] In this way, the listener becomes simply a convenient justification for the narrator's verbalisation of his experience. However, for Simpkins, the listener is key precisely because s/he maintains the effect of externalisation, even when the narrator is

---

[91] Scott Simpkins, 'Coleridge's "Conversation Poems" as Speech Genre', *Semiotics* (1995), 242-9 (p. 244).
[92] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 527.
[93] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 527.
[94] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 527.

most deeply meditative. Here, Simpkins' point revises the view of an out-in-out structure by transforming the stage of the poet's meditations (the 'in' phase) into a contemplative stage that is intended to be voiced. As a result, the conversational style of the poem is more concerned with the dramatic idea of the commanding genius who 'must impress their preconceptions on the world without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of clearness, distinctness, and individuality' than of the absolute, or poetic, genius (*BL*, I, p. 32). This dramatization of a character's (in this case the character is the narrator-poet) thought process is a key point in Coleridge's thought and, as already argued in Chapter Two, whilst it may be considered to contribute to Coleridge's continued interest in the tension between sense and imagination, it is also intricately entwined with his views on social reform.

The conversation poems, therefore, appear to be an early creative utterance of Coleridge's emerging aesthetic theory, which would occupy his thought and work throughout the intermediate period of his life. As discussed in the introduction, drama and the dramatic take up a considerable amount of Coleridge's theoretical thought in these years and therefore mark Coleridge's departure from the recognised canon of British Romantic writers. Julie Carlson correctly points out that the period between 1807 and 1816 is when Coleridge fully commits to writing drama and uses it for his theories of art and social reform. However, during the preceding ten years, Coleridge does much of the groundwork for this dramatic phase of his career through his creative output, which includes *Osorio* and *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* but also, vitally, through his experiments with form, the emerging theme of the relationship between art and society and his evolving theory of the imagination in the conversation poems. In the following section, I analyse Coleridge's first conversation poem, 'The Eolian Harp', in order to discuss a philosophical and theoretical context for the poem that runs parallel

to his figurative and metaphysical insights and can be considered to anticipate and illuminate his dramatic theory. In doing so, I hope to suggest Coleridge's unique position in the Romantic canon as a writer of sociability as much as the solitary and one who represents a human creativity that is based within a tradition of human interaction and historical interpretation as much as it is revealed in and through the intellectual identity of mankind.

3.3 The Sociability of 'The Eolian Harp': Sound, Symbolism and Sara

Although Harper identifies 'The Eolian Harp' as the first conversation poem, he does not spend much time analysing it. The poem is instead used to reiterate his point that the style of the conversation poems allowed for the poet to 'step down from [his] intellectual throne at the bidding of love'.[95] Here, Harper again balances Abrams' intellectual definition of man with an emotional one. Referring to the tension between Coleridge's flight of imagination in the 'One Life' passage and his soon-to-be wife's warning against becoming subservient to the 'unregenerate mind', Harper touches upon a dramatic sense running throughout the poem that will emerge later in the two themes of Coleridge's dramatic theory (EH, l. 55). These themes are remorse, or a feeling of penitence for a rash or unjustified action (in this case it is the poet's willingness to isolate himself and fall under the spell of an uncontrolled vision) and the usurpation of the real by the ideal. It is the interplay between the visions of the imagination and the correct interpretation of these visions as regulated by either the intellect or a communal, emotional instinct that emerges in a dramatic reading of his poem upon which I wish to elaborate here.

---

[95] Harper, p. 148.

The identification of this dramatic discourse within the poem is complicated by two related factors. Firstly, the poem underwent numerous revisions between 1796 and 1828, and these revisions reflect Coleridge's shifting aesthetic, theoretical and political views. Secondly, the conception of the poem predates, by some thirteen years, Coleridge's most significant effort to theorise drama in the *Lectures*. Therefore, whilst it is possible to identify themes and motifs of Coleridge's emerging dramatic theory and experimentation with the dramatic form in the poem, its involvement with drama must be considered to remain at the service of Coleridge's wider involvement with poetry, philosophy and theory. 'The Eolian Harp' was first published in 1796 under the title of 'Effusion XXXV. Composed August 20th, 1795 at Clevedon, Somersetshire'.[96] The final version of the poem was published in 1828. For Coleridge, lines 21-29 appeared to be the lines which carried a great significance to the success of his poem and the history of the poem highlights his philosophical vacillations through the additions and deletions of the lines of this section. The most significant revision to the poem occurred in 1817 with the addition of lines 26-29, which start with perhaps the most famous line of the poem: 'O! the One Life, within us and abroad' (EH, l. 26). This passage, as has been noted by many critics, finally pulls together Coleridge's theory of imagination as a synthesising power that allows the self-conscious human a moment of perception as he is unified with the unself-conscious, spiritual world as it is manifested in the nature around him.[97] This final reworking was done at a time when Coleridge's theory of imagination was reaching its maturity. The influence of German philosophy had helped to define Coleridge's views on the imagination, as can be seen in the lectures of 1808

---

[96] For a full account of the poem in its numerous revisions, see Jack Stillinger, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), pp. 26-41.

[97] See Paul A. Magnuson, 'The Dead Calm in the Conversation Poems', *The Wordsworth Circle*, 3 (1972), pp. 53-60. Magnuson believes that Coleridge never fully attained a unity of mind and nature due to the fact that his central symbol, the harp, which is ultimately passive in the face of the breeze that animates it. Part of his evidence for this is the fact that Coleridge revised the poem so many times. thus signalling his dissatisfaction with it (pp. 54-56). Wheeler also provides an in depth commentary on the passive and active mind in this poem in a more positive light in *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (pp. 65-82).

and 1811-12, and his most comprehensive and philosophically-argued account of it came in *Biographia Literaria*, which was published in 1817, the same year in which these new lines were inserted. Important to my reading of this poem is the fact that, in its earliest publication (1796), the poem contains the lines relating his vision of 'Fairy-Land' but this vision is not balanced by the 'One Life' passage until 1817 (EH, l. 22). Coleridge acknowledged this between 1797 and 1815, when he chose to omit lines 21-25, and he finally reinstated them in 1817.

By 1817, then, the poem had become an expression of Coleridge's later philosophical views on language, which Abrams, representing the predominant school of thought on Coleridge's poetry, considers its identifying feature. As Wheeler explains, the inserted lines (ll. 26-33) 'effectively express the part-whole relation that became such a central part of [his] philosophy, and the essence of his definition of symbol'.[98] In the poem, Coleridge confronts the tensions between individual creativity and the social configurations that define humanity. On the one hand, the poet as narrator dares to allow the boundaries between nature and mind dissolve into 'the One Life within us and abroad' through figurative language, which both animates nature and allows the poet's mind to 'disengage from the physical locale' in a moment that appears to overcome the divided consciousness of post-lapsarian man (EH, l. 26).[99] Yet Coleridge also tempers this by holding 'these shapings of the unregenerate mind' in a poetic structure of social interaction through a poem that starts and finishes in direct conversation with another character, and, by extension, represents a dramatisation of his conversation with this character (EH, l. 55). Certainly, as Wheeler states, by the time the poem reaches its final shape, it becomes a worked example of Coleridge's philosophical commitment to the active imagination whereby a union between the narrator's mind and the nature

---

[98] Wheeler, p. 81.
[99] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 532. Abrams here is commenting upon *Frost at Midnight*, but the term is appropriate for all the conversation poems.

around him is ascertained through 'a gradual progression [...] from a state of relative passive observation to a highly responsive, articulate level of appreciation'.[100] However, this view of the poem only accounts for the understanding of Coleridge's active mind in the context of his theory of the poetic imagination and it pertains mainly to the conventional view of Coleridge as a theorist of symbolic language whose aim was the unity of mind, body and spirit. Much of the criticism that promotes this view dismisses the conversational element of the poems due to the fact that 'the dramatic mode of address [is] to an unanswering listener' and, because of the lack of conversational exchange, this subordinates its externalising structure to the internalising activity of the poet's mind.[101] In support of this idea, George Watson declares the identification of the poems as a conversation to be a misnomer:

> The name is both convenient and misleading. A conversation is an exchange; and these poems, a dozen or fewer, stretching from 'The Eolian Harp' [...] to 'To William Wordsworth' [...] and perhaps further, are plainly monologues. Those who met Coleridge in his later life, it is true, were inclined to find his conversation arrestingly one-sided, but this will hardly serve as an explanation of what is happening here.[102]

The identification of the poems as monologues rather than conversations here is interesting as, although Watson's point may downplay Harper's sympathetic appropriation the word Coleridge himself employed to identify his poetry, it still reasserts the fact that the conversation poems are essentially outward expressions. In other words, the poems remain steadfastly connected to the verbal medium rather than the act of reading; their recitative qualities form a definite connection with Coleridge's view of ideal stage productions as 'something betwixt Recitation & an *Re* presentation'.[103] Consequently, the poem makes use of two external locales for

---

[100] Wheeler, p. 67. For an extended commentary on the active mind as opposed to mechanical philosophy in Coleridge's poetry and philosophy, see Wheeler's introduction, pp. 1-17.
[101] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 533.
[102] George Watson, *Coleridge the Poet* (London: Routledge, 1966), p. 61.
[103] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature,* ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University

contrasting effects within the poem. The external natural landscape as subject to the poet's meditative and perceptive mind can be understood in terms of Coleridge's symbolic language and metaphysical preoccupations but is also balanced and controlled by another form of externality in the form of human community. In 'The Eolian Harp', Sara emerges as a figure of love and community, a character who is the focus of a form of externalisation that runs in the opposite direction to the external landscape. She is connected with Coleridge's renunciation of his vision at the end of the poem and her dramatic role as a listener who is able to interpret correctly the poet's outpourings seems to indicate a rather surprising limitation on the purely poetic visions of Coleridge's meditative transformation of the landscape surrounding him. Consequently, the poem can be viewed as an early account of issues linked with the correct enabling and limitation of aesthetic power and how this may affect the social, political and moral identity of a country's populace.

Whilst it took until 1817 for Coleridge to come to his most conclusive formulation of a 'synthesis of feeling and thought [...] embodied in the troublesome symbol of the harp', the earlier 'Effusion XXXV' gives important insight into Coleridge's early philosophical vacillations between Hartlean Associationism, where the mind is mechanical and passive, and a Berkeleyan philosophy of the active mind.[104] This period of philosophical uncertainty which is, in turn, reflected through Coleridge's creative exploits, is therefore an important starting point for Coleridge's middle-phase philosophical and creative activity, which sees him embrace drama as a way of reconciling the tension between the active and passive mind in his early poetry and, more importantly, the potentially boundless uncontrollability of the imagination. The

---

Press, 1969-2002), v (1987), I, p. 83 (emphasis in original). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *LL*.

[104] Magnuson, p. 54. See also 'The Struggle with Associationism', in Wheeler, *The Creative Mind*, pp. 1-16. Wheeler notes that Coleridge started to doubt Hartley from 1796 but only turned away completely from his philosophy in 1801 (p. 2).

1796 version of the poem is of particular interest to this idea as it anticipates Coleridge's more fully realised notions of symbol and interpretation in the 1817 'The Eolian Harp' and they refer to them, respectively. Additionally, it is precisely the thematic consideration of the correct form of interpretation based upon sound and vision which recur in *Osorio* and *Remorse*, and distinguish between the moral, the misguided and the immoral characters of the play.

The structure of 'The Eolian Harp', as has been discussed, moves from a description of the setting to a flight of the imagination and returns the poet to his initial setting, which is now infused with the moralising tone of Sara's 'mild reproof' (EH, l. 49). Therefore, the poem (and the poet's imagination) is firmly rooted within a social framework. Sara's presence in the poem has been the focus of much critical attention, both positive and negative. On the whole, critics who interpret the 1796 poem place her in a more domestic context and therefore highlight her reproof as part of a playful disagreement between lovers.[105] On the other hand, those considering the 1817 version of the poem with the 'One Life' lines inserted see Sara's presence in the poem as much more dogmatic thus limiting Coleridge's imagination and bringing the poem to a rather prosaic and confrontational end.[106] Not only does Sara function in the poem to remind Coleridge to 'walk humbly with [his] God' as conventional Christianity teaches but she also represents the 'family of Christ' thereby reminding Coleridge that he exists within a social framework which is based upon the notion of the family (EH, ll. 52-3). Coleridge started the poem around the time of his engagement to Sara, a biographical point which underscores his keen sense of community at this time, and marriage, as a

---

[105] For example Stillinger, pp. 26-41. See also Magnuson who reads the poem as Coleridge's failure to achieve the ideals of 'innocent love and wisdom' (p.56) because of his own inability to overcome the limitations of the symbol of the harp as it evidenced a passive, not active, mind. Consequently, he returns himself to Sara's 'hearthside humility' (p. 56).
[106] See Wheeler, 'The Radiating Imagination and the Censorious Reason in "The Eolian Harp"', in *The Creative Mind*, pp. 65-91.

socially recognised institution, can be determined in 'The Eolian Harp' to support its context of love and community. It is an idea that returns even in the mystery poems through the setting of the wedding party in *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner*. The early 'Effusion', therefore, is an outpouring of both feeling and imagination which is grounded comfortably within a domestic and inherently ordinary setting. Consequently, Coleridge is able to indulge in solitary and limitless reveries of 'Fairy Land[s]' as he knows he will always be returned to his community - to 'Peace, and [his] Cot, and [Sara his] heart-honour'd Maid!' (EH, l. 22; l. 64). Sara's function in the poem is therefore linked to the theme of interpretation seen throughout much of Coleridge's work. She is the foil to the poet-narrator and represents conventional interpretations of Christian life (from which she criticises her soon-to-be husband for departing) and her function as a character in the poem allows the reader more interpretative options.

The contrasting structural arrangements of the 1796 and 1817 versions certainly imply a change in attitude towards Sara's reproof for Coleridge himself, and this is paralleled by his advancing ability to reconcile mind and nature through the harp imagery. This attitude towards Sara relies upon Coleridge's satisfaction with his own ability to unify the two of them, through the 'imaginative synthesis of sensation, intellectual insight and faith' using the symbol of the harp.[107] The key difference between the two versions of the poem is the later insertion of lines 26-33, the 'One Life' passage, which goes some way to overcoming Coleridge's earlier problem of fusing the harp with the human mind which, at this stage in the poem's life simply, 'tremble[s] into thought' as an 'intellectual breeze' awakens it (EH, l. 46; l. 47). Therefore, in 1796, the human mind is portrayed as passive and subject to the randomness of an intellectual breeze, a point that has alarming moral implications: as the intensity of the narrator's imaginative

---

[107] Magnuson, p. 54.

experience increases, so does his isolation. As Magnuson explains, in the second verse

paragraph of the poem, the breeze, which had previously 'been associated with the force

of love [...] becomes the "intellectual breeze"' which prompts the narrator to climb a hill

alone in order to indulge his 'wild' , 'various' and 'random' fantasies (EH, l. 42).[108]

Consequently, the narrator must return this passage quickly to Sara, which not only

reinforces his relationship with others but also quells the growing sense of Romantic

egotism and returns him to a more 'humbl[e]' state (EH, l. 51). However, by 1817,

Sara's influence is disconnected from Coleridge's flight of imagination and consigned

to the final verse paragraph. It is replaced in the second verse paragraph by the 'One

Life' passage:

> O the One Life within us and abroad,
> Which meets all motion and becomes its soul,
> A light in sound and, a sound-like power in light
> Rhythm in all thought, and joyance everywhere—
> Methinks, it should have been impossible
> Not to love all things in a world so filled. (EH, ll. 26-31)

Crucially, Coleridge is able to achieve a sense of connectedness with the world again

through the 'force of love'; this time it is a more universal 'love [of] all things' and he

has been rescued from the morally dangerous expansion of ego witnessed through his

hill-top experience.[109] This is mainly due to the fact that he has been able to invert the

harp-mind dichotomy through a blending of sound and image, a point used by Coleridge

later in the identification of the morally secure characters in *Remorse*. With the

introduction of this passage, Coleridge allows himself to break off from the extended

metaphor of the harp as a symbol of the (passive) mind animated by some kind of

'Plastic and vast' external power and starts to explain the harp's musicality in terms of

the much more elevated notion of the 'sound-like power' living within the soul (EH, l.

47; l. 28). In this sense, the sounds of the poem become fundamentally more important

---

[108] Magnuson, p. 55.
[109] Magnuson, p. 55.

than the images as it is the 'rhythm in all thought' that connects humanity with the divine, and mind with nature, thus replacing the egotistical intellect (attached to vision) with a force of love common to all (attached to sound) (EH, l. 29). Wheeler explains:

> The first two lines of this [stanza], referring to the 'One Life' theme, raise the lute to the stature of life through a rather abstract, philosophical gesture [...] It attempts to overcome the chasm between mind and nature, subject and object, life and 'dead' matter... The 'sound-like power in light' may further indicate that even the parts of the poem where the imagery predominates, the musicality of the language still deepens the effects of the lines as they reach into pre-linguistic experiences and feelings [...] the ultimate outcome of the 'One Life' theme seems to be knowledge of 'joyance everywhere', and the 'love [of] all things', since all things in life are one.[110]

The central idea of interconnected life here anticipates, and is remarkably similar to, the moral climax of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, which again is clarified by the gloss of 1817. Just as the narrator of 'The Eolian Harp' is able to 'love all things' in the world through the union he feels between self and nature so the Ancient Mariner breaks free from his curse as 'a spring of love gushed from [his] heart / And [he] blessed [the water snakes] unaware'.[111] In both cases, the characters reach their moments of revelation within a landscape that is made indeterminate by the still, calm atmosphere of twilight. The fading light around Coleridge's cottage produces a 'world so hushed' that he becomes receptive to the sounds of the imagination such that 'twilight Elfins make, when they at eve / Voyage on gentle gales' (EH, l. 10; ll. 21-2), whereas the gloss to the *Ancient Mariner* makes it clear that 'By the light of the moon [the Mariner] beholdeth God's creatures of the great calm', which the Mariner himself describes as 'elfish light' (*AM*, gloss l. 285; l. 275). Although this twilight hour is often associated with the free

---

[110] Wheeler, p. 77. The critical language of Wheeler's passage here is distinctively modern or post-structuralist, and she uses it to bolster the view of Coleridge's theory of unity. However, Coleridge's reliance on sound and musicality also forms a connection with Walter Benjamin's view that music, or rhythm, is the most expressive form of human communication. In this way, the lute is not so much given life but the human mind is returned to 'dead matter' (Wheeler, quoted above).

[111] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text),* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 365-419 (l. 285). All further references to this work will be given in parentheses using the abbreviation *AM*.

flowing workings of the imagination, it is also representative of an intermediary state of

mind that recalls the waking dream and the state of willing suspension of disbelief,

which are both crucial requirements for the correct interpretation of stage plays and

which Coleridge theorises and calls upon during his attempts to reform the Romantic

stage. The interplay between light and sound ultimately allows Coleridge to negotiate

the territory between the active and the passive mind to produce characters who can

avoid submitting to their egotistical dream images and instead enter into a state of active

passivity in order to receive the 'sound-like power in light' (EH, l. 28). This

momentary, paradoxical state in which 'the mute, still air / Is Music' (EH, ll. 32-3) is

aligned with the fundamental human quality of love, which is the true source of the

fusion of mind and nature:

> The speaker himself brings to life the music of the breeze as warbling
> as if it were a bird. His genius then interprets the 'mute still air' as
> nevertheless alive as well, but simply momentarily at rest, potentiality
> instead of absence [...] Even emptiness is humanized, and a theoretical
> statement about imagination is also implied: silence and absence are
> only the moments before conscious awakening; they are not loss,
> emptiness or vacancy, but, at a conscious level, rest.[112]

Overall, the insertion of the 'One Life' theme and its encasement within a social

framework that allows for verbal expression, allows Coleridge to overcome the division

between mind and nature and the division between the conscious and unconscious self.

Crucially, this overcoming occurs only 'for the moment' (*BL*, II, p. 6) and the

'unregenerate' (EH, l. 55) qualities of the mind are brought back into line with the

admittedly Christian, but more importantly communal, ethos of the poem's structure.

As a result, Coleridge is able to remind the reader of man's guilty state but he also

warns against the misguided, almost Promethean, attempts of an unchecked faith in the

'process of intellectualization', which actually compound this guilt through man's

---

[112] Wheeler, p. 77. For a full analysis of Coleridge's imagery of sound as it relates to Romantic egoism, see Jill Rubenstein, 'Sound and Silence in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *English*, 21 (1972), pp. 54-60.

transgressive ambition to raise himself, in isolation, to a divine state of the undivided self.[113] Instead, Sara's presence, and the poet's requirement for her to be present, gives the poem a balancing feature based upon social interaction and marital love that is not always recognised but may be articulated as a cross between Harper and Abrams' views of the poem as the second 'activity which defines man' as friendship, the 'process' of feeling or love.[114]

3.4 Sound and Vision in 'Effusion XXXV': Coleridge's Dramatic Theory in Waiting

Coleridge does not achieve the same satisfactory outcome in the 1796 version of the poem as the breeze's effect on the harp is one of sexual union rather than innocent love, and the poem therefore becomes an expression of human guilt rather than naive innocence. The lute is 'caress'd, / Like some coy Maid half-yielding to her lover' but not only this, the language of the passage becomes a sensuous 'witchery of sound' as Coleridge makes full use of sibilance to give the audible impression of a dreamy blending of lovers who are 'tempt[ed] to repeat the wrong' (EH, ll. 14-15; l. 20; l. 17). Further sibilance is added with the words 'sequacious' and 'delicious' (EH, ll. 18-19) and, by the end of the passage, the setting of the couple's garden, which at first mirrored the innocence of the Garden of Eden through its 'emblems of innocence and love' has become a 'footless and wild' paradise that is morally dubious (EH, l. 5; l. 24). As Magnuson states, 'Ironically [Coleridge] fails to establish innocence and discovers instead his guilt'.[115] At this point, the narrator-poet of the 'Effusion' seems to have become dangerously beguiled by his 'idle flitting phantasies' and is at risk of allowing

---

[113] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 528.
[114] Abrams, 'Structure and Style', p. 528; In the *Rime*, this guilt is manifested in the Mariner's killing of the albatross and in 'Effusion XXXV' in the overtly sexual imagery associated with the lute.
[115] Magnuson, p. 55.

himself to become lost in the reverie (EH, l. 40). He turns back to his 'love' in order to wake himself from this insubstantial illusion that seems to have been allowed to float into his 'indolent and passive brain' (EH, l. 34; l. 41). The passage has often been the focus of critical attention in studies focusing on Coleridge's philosophical concerns with the passive and active brain, since the poem was written when he was revising his attitude towards the Hartleian system.[116] This is obviously the case, but the passage also appears to be an early manifestation of Coleridge's later concerns with illusion in drama.

This concern with illusion stems from the interplay of sound and vision imagery in the poem and also the way in which the structure of the 'Effusion' legitimises Sara's response to Coleridge's 'phantasies' in a way that does not occur in the 1817 version of the poem (EH, l. 40). Coleridge makes it clear, in the second verse paragraph, that the reverie is little more than a state of delusion in which the passive brain is transfixed by the sound of the breeze running over the harp's strings. The blending of sound and vision in the 1817 version of the poem is not yet achieved here as Coleridge declares that the sound that instigates his visions at this point is a 'witchery' (EH, l. 20). This type of sound, with its clear associations with the supernatural, does not carry with it associations with humanity, love and the ability to interpret the visual but instead with the insubstantiality of visions. Consequently, the narrator-poet is lulled into a semi-conscious state in which, 'thro' [his] half-close'd eyelids [he] behold[s] / The sunbeams dance, like diamonds on the main' (EH, ll. 36-7). The primary function of the sound of the harp in the 'Effusion' is to induce the narrator-poet to see visions of Faery Land and dancing sunbeams (which presumably also produce delusory tricks of the light). In this sense, whilst the poet has been seduced by the 'witchery of sound' produced by the

---

[116] Wheeler dates Coleridge's initial doubts concerning Hartley's system to around 1796 but acknowledges that he does not fully abandon this system until 1801. For a detailed discussion of this, see 'Introduction: The Struggle with Associationism' in *The Creative Mind*, pp. 1-17 (p. 2).

harp, the qualities of sound quickly become subordinate to the images they have produced within his 'half-clos'd eyelids' (EH, l. 20; l. 36). In this case, Coleridge's harp image has achieved nothing but a suspension of the poet-narrator's conscious state and a series of enthralling but insubstantial visions; in short, the poet is subject to a visual delusion. Jill Rubenstein's analysis of the poem as a working through of sound and silence in terms of Coleridge's attempts to resist the Romantic egoism that such personal poetry would indicate supports this view of the elfin passage as full of sound but 'essentially without substance':

> Coleridge's diction implies clearly that his better self, at least,
> disapproves of the wind-harp. Its notes are 'sequacious', a vaguely
> pejorative term suggesting servility and a lack of individuality; and the
> 'witchery of sound' is basically illusory like the bird of paradise,
> nowhere rooted in the earth. This noise catalyses the persona's mind
> to the projection of its own supernatural fantasies and destroys the
> receptive state that he had previously enjoyed.[117]

The problem Coleridge encounters here in the construction of his harp image is the conflict between illusion and delusion that he later discusses in terms of the theatre audience. The deluded audience is one that relies too much on visual effects and therefore loses the ability to judge what is true and what is purely fabricated. This audience has, in effect, fallen victim to the mechanical philosophy of the passive mind, about which Coleridge expressed his doubts through the imagery of this poem and, just as the narrator-poet has been here, they are thrown into a deluded state whereby they are not in control of their own thoughts, which have become 'uncall'd and undetain'd' (EH, l. 39). In short, (dramatic) delusion requires the mind to be passive. Throughout the theory of drama that Coleridge developed in his *Lectures* and in sections of the *Biographia Literaria*, he warned of the social and moral dangers of this inability to submit to the imagination willingly and only 'for the moment' and he attempted to offer a theory of illusion that supported the active interpretation of images (*BL*, II, p. 6). In

---

[117] Rubenstein, p. 55.

fact, his initial dramatic conception of this defence mechanism against the usurping

power of the image was conceived rather more defensively than his 'poetic faith' of the

imagination as a 'temporary Half-Faith' of visual interpretation (*LL*, I, p. 134). It is

precisely the controlling mechanism of the will that seems to be lacking in the narrator

of the 'Effusion', and the first verse paragraph of the poem ends as sound is overtaken

by image. Whereas illusion always returns the reader or audience to reality, delusion

reveals its own insubstantiality:

> It is unfortunately clear that the elfins passage with its indulgent blend
> of the marvellous with the whimsical, cannot really lead anywhere;
> the lines display an intricate musicality of diction which is rather
> wasted on their essentially irrelevant status in developing the poem.[118]

However, whilst the image may not lead anywhere for the narrator-poet himself, it does

return the poem back to Sara. As the second verse paragraph opens with the rather

affectionate exclamation of 'And thus my Love!', the reader is immediately reminded

that this poem is not simply a poem but also a conversation, or at least a monologue,

with a definite listener (EH, l. 34). This is significant as it appears that Sara has become

the substitute for the narrator's own will, as it is she who pulls him from his overactive,

and somewhat deluded, imaginary state. Here, it is apparent that before Coleridge

develops in his dramatic theory the view of the will as the controlling mechanism for

illusion, this poem conceives of the enabling and limiting action of the willing

suspension of disbelief over two people (the poet and Sara). This is developed further

within the stanza as he returns to her 'more serious eye' after having allowed himself to

imagine that all of 'animated nature' may be controlled by 'one intellectual Breeze', an

external power that divests the mind of activity and control (EH, l. 49; l. 44; l. 47).[119]

---

[118] Kelvin Everest, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1979), p. 219.

[119] As Magnuson states, 'The obvious problem is that if the mind is like an eolian harp, it is completely passive, and its products do not depend upon the active powers of the mind itself. [...] An additional problem in the use of the symbol of the harp is that if the soul, the 'I', is like a tune, then, as it appears in

Here, Sara's 'more serious eye' is invested with a meaning supplementary to that which implies her serious or even pious nature (EH, l. 53). It is, in effect, an eye that can identify the deluded imagination of her partner and prompt her to act in place of his as yet undeveloped (or undiscovered) will. As such, her 'serious eye', which represents marital love, human communion and 'the family of Christ' can be contrasted with the intellectual eye Coleridge constructs for himself as 'vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring' (EH, l. 53; l. 57). In this sense, Sara's presence in the 'Effusion' is not simply required as the silent listener, but she becomes part of Coleridge's emerging dramatic theory, in that her controlling power ultimately allows him momentarily to suspend his disbelief and submit to the 'shapings of [his] unregenerate mind' as her controlling will can always return him to, 'PEACE, and this COT and [her]' (EH, l. 55; l. 64).[120]

In the 1796 version of the poem, then, Sara functions as a silent audience for Coleridge, but nonetheless also controls the narrator's imagination through her stronger will, or reason, which rejects 'vain Philosophy's aye-babbling spring' and returns Coleridge to a more humble relationship with his surroundings (EH, l. 57). The pun on 'aye'—is it 'aye', 'eye' or 'I'?—also suggests that Sara has saved Coleridge from a rather destructive and isolating expansion of the ego, which again results in (or stems from) the dissonant sounds of a 'babbling' philosophy rather than a loving 'Faith that inly feels' (EH, l. 57; l. 60). As Rubenstein states, 'Destructive egoism involves the habit of projecting one's own feelings or fancies onto the outside world. This projection of selfhood often results in interfering noise which renders accurate perception or the

the poem, the mind has no control over itself. […] Coleridge recognised that his speculations ought to be wrong because the 'I' would be irrationally and capriciously constructed' (pp. 55-6).

[120] Sara's function in the poem has often been viewed negatively as many critical readings follow the 1817 version of the poem, which separates her from the imaginative and speculative passages, confining her to the final stanza. This invests her reproof with a more dogmatic and moralizing tone which is mirrored by the lack of musicality in the stanza (especially in the plodding sounds of the alliterative 'd's in lines 50-3). See Wheeler for an account of this. Stillinger, on the other hand, reads the 'Effusion' of 1796 and sees a much more familiar and even comical treatment of the relationship between Coleridge and his future wife. The changing relationship between the two must have had an impact upon Coleridge's portrayal of Sara between the years 1796 and 1817.

awareness of beauty impossible' and, as Coleridge's choice of title for the poem

implies, the narrator of the 'Effusion' must be prevented from indulging in such

uninhibited outpourings.[121] Again, much later, in *Biographia*, the issues of the

supernatural and the commanding and absolute genius, and the effects of these on the

individual's ability to interpret images in a morally aware manner, become central

components of Coleridge's dramatic theory. As he states, men of absolute genius, 'rest

content between thought and reality, as it were in an intermundium of which their own

living spirit supplies the substance, and their imagination the ever-varying form', a state

which the narrator of the 1817 version of the poem appears to achieve more completely

than that of the 'Effusion' (*BL*, I, p. 172). The narrator of the 'Effusion', however, is

the man of commanding genius, who 'must impress [his] preconceptions on the world

without, in order to present them back to their own view with the satisfying degree of

clearness, distinctness and individuality' (*BL*, I, p. 172). Again, this links to the contrast

between sound and image as the commanding genius is unable to attain a state of mind

that is paradoxically passive yet active and he relies on seeing, or viewing, their

'preconceptions on the world without' (*BL*, I, p. 172).[122]

3.5   *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*: Imagination and Interpretation

The two aspects of 'The Eolian Harp' discussed above—imagination and

interpretation—are central to the critical focus of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* in

the twentieth century. For many, the poem carries with it a sense of the uncanny. It is a

poem that seems to extend beyond the boundaries of the page; it beguiles its readers and

evades the language of objective criticism. The poet, the Mariner and the poem all

communicate through a 'strange power of speech' that characterises them, itself having

---

[121] Rubenstein, p. 54.
[122] Rubenstein calls this, 'wise passiveness', p. 56.

a profound effect on the Wedding Guest, who becomes 'A sadder and wiser man' by the end (*AM*, l. 587; l. 624). As Richard Haven states, the poem possesses 'something of the effect of its main character. It confronts the reader like an apparition whose presence is undeniable but whose nature and purpose are tantalizing and uncertain'.[123] Here, Haven alludes to the idea that the mutual mirroring of the Mariner and the poem seem to create its magical effect and their combined forces give *The Rime* its endlessly beguiling identity. We perceive the Mariner in the poem and the poem in the Mariner and, as readers, we see ourselves in both. *The Rime*, however, appears to be an apparition that is not fixed in the past but operates proleptically to confuse a number of boundaries: past, present and future; history and memory; the real and the imagined. In this way, Coleridge presents readers of *The Rime* with a poetic experience that is remarkably close to the modern experience of fragmentation and alienation and asks them to interpret their way out of it, always adding their own experience to the layers of the poem. Barbara Everett's essay on the poem offers a lucid understanding of this feature of the three mystery poems:

> The three poems all share a degree of the dreamy consciousness that makes them so startlingly foreshadow the modern. If they lodge like an arrow in the creative memory, it is because they hint at some archaic work of Modernism, in which a writer writes himself or herself, a reader reads herself or himself [...] It is through a transformed art of narrative—a narrative which Wordsworth scornfully complained, nothing coherent happens—that Coleridge found a remembered pastness, a use of history, entirely his own. And it made him one of the great progenitors not merely of 19th and 20th century verse, but of fiction too.[124]

In the following section, I consider the form of the poem and the character of the Mariner separately in order to understand better why their interplay within the poem produces such a stunning effect on its readers. The effect, I will argue, is concerned

---

[123] Richard Haven, 'The Ancient Mariner in the Nineteenth Century,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 11 (1972), pp. 360-374 (p. 373).
[124] Barbara Everett, 'Alphabetted', *London Review of Books*, 25 (2003) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n15/barbara-everett/alphabeted> [accessed 20 January 2012], p. 11 of 12.

with the collision of the competing forces of history and memory and the manner in which these phenomena were coming to be read distinctively in the nineteenth century. In doing so, I hope to show how Coleridge's dramatic theory, in which the role of interpretation is a key aspect, comes to a head in his construction of this poem. In addition, the interest in German Romantic philosophy and historical representation shared by Coleridge and Walter Benjamin allows for a reading of the poem that both reveals what Everett refers to as its modern consciousness and also underscores its surprisingly material identity. At this point, it is worth remembering Coleridge's choice of form for the poem, the lyrical ballad. The ballad form is not associated with the poetic but with voice, song and community and, as a result, it is a style that is depleted of ornament (as Wordsworth and Coleridge intended). This oral tale that is communicated in plain and simple language is balanced, perhaps most strikingly by Coleridge, through its novel application to the literary, not in the sense of adding to it a figurative language but rather by treating it as a written document that has been interpreted through successive generations. As the archetypal literary ballad, *The Rime*'s form is a collection of fragmented cultural interpretations and translations of the Mariner's story; it enacts an historical process as much as it reveals the memory of the Mariner and the creative mind of Coleridge.[125] In choosing to represent this historical evolution of his poem, Coleridge takes the poem away from the Romantic tradition of using the imagination to engage with universal truth and places it firmly in a human context, in which memory and interpretation become the key factors of its communicative make up. Coleridge's character, the Mariner, is a figure whose experience places him outside history but he is awash with memory and he offers those who can listen to him the experience within his memory. His memory, though, is arrestingly present. He himself is trapped in the vision when retelling the story and the

---

[125] Jerome McGann uses this term in 'The Ancient Mariner: The Meaning of the Meanings' in *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Method and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 135-172.

poem's visual force presses on the reader. Indeed, in an act of dramatic interpretation, the Wedding Guest becomes most troubled when he is most conscious of the Mariner's association with delusion, as rather than fearing the story in the 1798 version of the poem, the Wedding Guest fears 'that which comes out of [the Mariner's] eye' (*AM*, l. 372). The dramatic qualities of the poem and the insistence of memory in the Mariner make *The Rime* an example of Romantic literature that spills over into modernity and it is with this understanding of the poem that I hope to argue the Mariner can be seen as a version of Walter Benjamin's anachronistic Storyteller.

Since the publication of the poem, there have arisen two broad ways of interpreting it: there are readers who attempt to appreciate it in traditional terms (applying a formal critical system) and those who attempt to experience the poem, thereby submitting to a more personal, subjective response. Richard Haven's essay outlines these two separate critical lines by observing the evolution of interpretations throughout the nineteenth century. The essay traces a line from contemporary views critical of the fact that Coleridge did not give his readers enough familiarity of language, character or form to allow for critical examination. The most outspoken view of this kind comes from Southey's claim that 'many of the stanzas are laboriously beautiful; but in connection they are absurd or unintelligible [...] We do not sufficiently understand the story to analyse it. It is a Dutch attempt at German sublimity. Genius has here been employed in producing a poem of little merit'.[126] The opposing contemporary idea was that the poem possessed a magic that need not be analysed but should simply be felt. The best-known defence of Coleridge's poem comes from Charles Lamb, who wrote to both Southey (1798) and Wordsworth (1801) defending it. As John Spencer Hill points out

---

[126] 'Robert Southey in *Critical Review*, 1798', in *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, p. 53. Wordsworth also complained of the lack of character in the Ancient Mariner in his introduction to the 1801 version of the *Lyrical Ballads*.

in *A Coleridge Companion*, Lamb's comments were 'acute[ly] percept[ive]' and, I

would argue, are as relevant to modern *Ancient Mariner* criticism as they were in the

late-eighteenth or early-nineteenth centuries. As Hill points out, 'Lamb was

instinctively aware that Coleridge had struck a new note in English poetry'.[127] This

awareness of the poem's national identity is a key point, which anticipates New

Historicist readings of the poem from the 1980s onwards and allows, as Jerome

McGann argues, for a 'thoroughly revisionist view of the poem [where] "The Rime"

will once again begin to discover its future'.[128] Haven loosely argues that the poem's

most successful interpretations arise from those who allow themselves to use a

'different kind of criticism' and experience the poem, feeling it rather than analysing it

(he gives Lockhart's 1819 essay as the best example of this).[129] However, as he draws

his work to a conclusion, Haven points us towards the fact that interpretations from the

twentieth century onwards have returned to a formal critical language with more

success, partly due to the fact that we can now view the poem through different

historical and cultural periods of its criticism:

> It is easy, I think, to see how such [symbolic] interpretations arose. It
> is also easy to see that such interpretations represent not so much the
> discovery of 'meaning' inherent in the poem as an adaptation of the
> experience of the poem to the language and beliefs of the reader and
> critic. And much contemporary interpretation seems to me to reveal
> not so much an increase in understanding as a change in language and
> beliefs. Coleridge, Mather wrote, was 'familiar with the avenues of
> the soul.' Those avenues may be otherwise described in terms of
> Coleridge's metaphysics or of ours, or of Victorian theology, but the
> history of criticism might suggest that 'The Ancient Mariner'
> discloses rather than explains them.[130]

Haven's point seems to be that *The Rime* is a poem whose language and configuration is

adaptable to, and ever-evolving with, the coming of different ages. In accommodating

---

[127] John Spencer Hill, *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge's Poetry: an Introduction to the Major Poems and the Biographia Literaria*, (London: Macmillan, 1984), p. 153.
[128] McGann, p.172.
[129] Haven, p. 368.
[130] Haven, p. 373.

each epoch in the history of its criticism, it does not reveal itself entirely to any interpretative strategy but, instead, it takes these strategies into its textual fabric.

It is this transparency of cultural interpretation, this filtering of the poem through the different lenses of cultural epochs that allows the modern critic to view the poem as a poem based in historical reality rather than one of poetic idealism. The poem's representation of the process of critical interpretation brings Coleridge's interest in German Romantic literary critique to the fore and, further, it opens up a link between himself and the modern (Marxist) critical theory of Benjamin. This is due to the fact that the poem's form exposes symbolic discourse as historically conditioned and, as far as the poem and not the story is concerned, it highlights man's tendency towards infinite reflective critique. Rather than guiding the reader through the text to a moral, it gives the suggestion of a meaning whilst continually delaying it. It is the combination of this literary mimesis of history in the form of the poem with the earthly, earth-bound Mariner (who, rather than escaping subjectivity through death, returns to remind others of his experience) that confirms the link between Benjamin and Coleridge. Whilst the poem is aligned with history and the notion of critique, the Mariner is a truly material and human force of memory, a character created to offer his listener 'a unique experience with the past' (*TPH,* 254).

The following sections consider two very different views of Coleridge's poem. Robert Penn Warren's essay examines *The Rime* in terms of the more traditionally accepted notions of symbol and imagination. As I highlight, his essay recognises, but does not develop, the underlying historical and interpretative discourse in the poem's subtext. However, Jerome McGann offers a revisionist reading of the poem which focuses on

The Rime's textual history and uncovers Coleridge's engagement with the issue of interpretation. Although there are significant differences between the two essays in terms of critical technique and focus, both agree that *The Rime*'s foundation is Coleridge's Christian faith and that, from this, the poem considers how mankind uses imagination in order to better understand, and even reveal, its own humanity. At the heart of these analyses, as at the heart of the poem, stands a consideration of how the poem's meaning unfolds through its interpretations.

3.6   Robert Penn Warren: 'A Poem of Pure Imagination'

In one of the keystone essays of criticism in the twentieth century, 'A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading', Robert Penn Warren notes that, since Anna Barbauld's claim that *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* 'was improbable and had no moral', critical analyses of the poem have struggled to offer a unified response to the two central aspects of its identity: its internal supernatural machinery and its human relevance (the moral meaning), which Warren terms as the theme of the poem.[131] Warren proposes to overcome this problem by offering a reading of the poem's symbolism that allows for the 'vital integration' of the supernatural and the human whilst recognising that this is an elusive and 'never-ending process'.[132] His final comments on the poem succinctly conclude his efforts to read it as a work of 'pure imagination':

> I cannot admit that our experience, even our aesthetic experience, is ineluctably
> and vindictively divided into the "magical" and the rational, with an abyss

---

[131] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk* ed. by Carl Woodring, The Bollingen Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xiv (1990), p. 149.
[132] Robert Penn Warren, 'A Poem of Pure Imagination: An Experiment in Reading' in *New and Selected Essays* (Toronto: Random House, 1989), pp. 335-423 (p. 394; p. 398).

> between. If poetry does anything for us, it reconciles, by its symbolical reading of experience (for by its very nature it is in itself a myth of the unity of being), the self-divisive internecine malices which arise at the superficial level on which we conduct most of our living.
>
> And *The Ancient Mariner* is a poem on this subject.[133]

The critical activity of the essay is centred upon two themes and Warren articulates these as the sacramental vision and the imagination. The primary theme, sacramental vision, is concerned with the interpretative process as much as it is concerned with religion. The secondary theme, imagination, is arrived at through the exposition of symbol and therefore links back to how language conveys meaning. At the centre of these themes stand ideas surrounding the moral values of the poet's employment of his creative imagination and the moral values in the reading public's interpretative abilities. The themes are fused through symbol, he says, to produce 'a document [that stands as] the very central and crucial issue of the period: the problem of truth and poetry'.[134] Therefore, Warren's reading of *The Rime* is one that concentrates on figurative language and the poetic devices within Coleridge's Romantic text. However, Warren pays as much attention to the Mariner's fable as he does the poem. The fable is verbal, not textual, and conceivably relates to experience and the memory of experience as much as it does to the imagination. As a result, whilst Warren's reading comes from a critical tradition of understanding Coleridge as a poet of 'pure imagination', within his essay, it is possible to discern allusions (which may not be deliberate) to Coleridge's specifically dramatic imagination. This is revealed through his assertion that 'imagination not only puts man in tune with the universe but puts him in tune with other men, with society; it provides the great discipline of sympathy'.[135] This statement accords with Harper's view of the conversation poems discussed earlier and, further, it carries with it echoes of

---

[133] Warren, p. 399.
[134] Warren, p. 380.
[135] Warren, p. 384.

Coleridge's views upon the dramatic form, especially in relation to Shakespeare, in his 1808 Lectures.

In his primary theme, Warren investigates the poem's fable, that is, its 'story of crime and punishment and repentance and reconciliation' which, at first, points his interpretation of the poem towards an orthodox Christian reading of man's guilt, punishment and redemption.[136] Subsequent critics have given their own interpretations of this Christian reading by highlighting competing dimensions the poem's religious meaning. Whether the Mariner's crime is viewed as with or without motive, the punishment emanating from a benevolent or capricious God, the Mariner's blessing of the water snakes as conscious or unconscious and his eventual state of redemption as complete or incomplete, a Christian reading is characterised by the acceptance that Coleridge's poem has a definite meaning to be inferred and a transcendent force that is signified through the text. Warren's essay, however, is essentially (and characteristically) a lesson in reading or interpreting poetry. In it he stresses that Coleridge's poem is not allegorical but is built upon symbol, which, 'in Coleridge's view, is not arbitrary, but must *contain itself* [...] *it must participate in the unity of which it is representative*' and therefore, the Christian or moral story cannot be separated from its aesthetic value or function within the poem: the Mariner's moral fable is part of Coleridge's poem but it is also representative of the nature of the poem, or poetry, itself.[137] In this sense, the primary theme is not so much concerned with the religious considerations of the 'One Life' or 'Sacramental Vision' but with the poetic vision of Warren's secondary theme, the imagination, which is expressed through the sacramental symbols of the albatross and the water snakes. As a result, a Christian reading of the

---

[136] Warren, p. 355.
[137] Warren, p. 356 (emphasis in original).

poem is transformed as the Mariner's crime is no longer against God but is, instead, brought down to a human level as 'a crime against the imagination'.[138] The symbolic structure of the poem becomes immanent rather than transcendent as the Mariner's tale unfolds within the poem:

> We find the idea that the truth is implicit *in the poetic act as such, that the moral concern and the aesthetic concern are aspects of the same activity, the creative activity, and that this activity is expressive of the whole mind* [...] As a poem written out of this belief [*The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*] aims to interfuse as completely as possible its elements, that is, to present its materials symbolically, or implicitly as an absorbed import held in suspension, rather than allegorically or overtly. As a poem written about this belief, it aims to present a fable in which the moral values and the aesthetic values are shown to merge. In other words, the poem is, in general, about the unity of mind and the final unity of values, and in particular about poetry itself.[139]

The story held within the poem of the Mariner's 'moral experience' is a, 'statement of Coleridge's conception of the poet'.[140] In other words, at the heart of Warren's interpretation is the idea that Coleridge's poem is an experiment in writing poetry, or in transmitting meaning to a listener, a reader, an audience. In this, Warren focuses on the task of the (Romantic) poet who uses symbolic language as a type of divine code. 'A Poem of Pure Imagination' highlights the use of the symbolic language in the poem to make it a poem written about writing poetry, or at least a poem that considers how the imagination can transmit meaning. The story or fable that underlies the form of the poem, however, also makes it a poem which considers the distinction between a poem which is read and interpreted as a poem and the process of listening or being able to hear a story. Warren's argument is sensitive, in the way that Coleridge's poem is sensitive, to the temporal conditions of the creative process; the poem and its reception

---

[138] Warren, p. 370.
[139] Warren, pp. 384-5; emphasis in original.
[140] Warren, p. 387.

throughout history work both within time and out of time, and this is why the Mariner

and the poet are such compelling figures: they speak only to those who understand the

language of symbol and it is they who, 'cannot chuse but hear' (*AM*, l. 18).

3.7 Jerome McGann: Coleridge's Literary Ballad

In his influential essay, 'The Ancient Mariner: The Meaning of the Meanings' (1981),

Jerome McGann reorganises the traditional symbolic interpretative model of *The Rime*

to shed new light on its system of signification under a historically conditioned process

that was 'licensed and underwritten by Coleridge himself'.[141] Highlighting what he

terms the 'transhistorical' rather than universal quality of the poem, McGann identifies

its 'textual layers' and thereby shows how Coleridge's creative activity is involved with

(re)imagining the story and the poem through cultural epochs prior to himself, the

poet.[142] Consequently, McGann's interest takes the critical focus away from the

figurative language and the assumed symbolism of its Christian, or at least superstitious,

framework, which has long been proclaimed as the feature through which the meaning

of the poem is to be divined. Instead, McGann's focus is upon the competing and

complementary cultural narratives that are revealed throughout the course of the history,

and the interpretations, constructed by Coleridge for this poem. The events and story of

the ballad arrive at the reader's text as a collection or collage which has been either

experienced, created or interpreted (and in some cases all three) by the Mariner, the

Wedding Guest, and even the Hermit, through to a medieval balladeer, a poet

---

[141] McGann, p. 138.

[142] McGann, p. 157; 153. Here, McGann is referring to the poem's ideological make up: 'three fundamental ideologies: pagan superstition and philosophy, Catholic legend and theology and Broad-Church Protestantism' but the layering can be equally applied to narrative strategy.

(Coleridge) and, finally, beyond the poet, an eighteenth-century editor. Further, as

McGann points out, both the written text and the editor's marginal gloss must also

reveal in their culturally loaded diction 'pagan supersitions, Catholic theology,

Aristotelean science, and contemporary theological theory, to name only a few of the

work's ostentatiously present materials'.[143] In this layering of a narrative that Coleridge

fictitiously passes through the minds and voices of men before it is finally (re)imagined

by him, he invests it with both a sense of the modern condition and a persistent presence

of the ancient identified also by Benjamin in the *Trauerspiel.* It is a view of the poem

that is supported by Barbara Everett when she identifies it as 'hint[ing] at some archaic

work of Modernism' and she offers this as one reason for its haunting qualities as it

'becomes a past within a past within the memory of the self'.[144] This can be taken

further under McGann's assertion that Coleridge conceived this poem against the

backdrop of his hermeneutical theory of the Scriptures:

> The Bible comes to us bearing with it the history of its criticism; it is a
> writing which also contains its own readings and which generates the
> cumulative history of its own further retransmissions and
> reinterpretations.[145]

Crucially, McGann's reading of *The Rime* helps to redress some of the poem's most

negative criticism as the improbable and supernatural aspects of the poem are not read

as symbols but become part of a system of symbols passed on through historical

cultures. Essentially, Coleridge's formal structure for the poem indicates to the

historically-aware reader that she cannot and should not attempt to divine the meaning

---

[143] McGann, p. 153.
[144] Everett, p. 11.
[145] McGann, p. 159. Coleridge's application of his religious theory, especially in his textual interest in the Bible (presented in *The Statesman's Manual*), to politics and social reform offers another area of his work that can be related to the themes I follow in his critical engagement with drama. However, this area of his work deserves more detailed attention than this thesis can afford and, therefore, I refer to McGann and Julian Knox for interesting and related analyses of features of Coleridge's religious *oeuvre* that resonate throughout the themes of this thesis.

of the poem's symbolism as it comes to her through a fragmented layering of other

interpretations. What the reader can do, McGann argues, is interpret the meaning of

those meanings. In essence, the reader reads, and adds to, the historical extrapolations

of the poem, which, in a revolutionary way for a Romantic text, means that the poem is

not a 'Dutch attempt at German sublimity' (Southey above), or any sublimity at all, but

is, 'instead, a human—a social and a historical—resource'.[146] As a result,

Wordsworth's view that *The Rime* was not human is counteracted as it appears to us as

the most human of texts when it is considered under the view that it was created through

a shared historical process and not by one man's imagination. The implication of this is

that Coleridge, who intended to produce a kind of secular Bible or 'English national

Scripture' was also involved with the act of recreating or reconceiving himself, the poet,

as part of the textual history of the poem.[147] Through a self-conscious activity which

anticipates the poem's life in future (re)incarnations beyond Coleridge's own cultural

age, Coleridge was involved with the rather Benjaminian act of renouncing the authority

of the author to the authority of the artwork in order to renounce meaning in favour of

truth:

> In terms of the 'Rime', Coleridge's ideological commitment to a
> preconditioned ground of processive truth sanctions in its readers a
> diversity of interpretations based upon their particular lights. Because
> 'the whole truth', recognized or not, subsumes *a priori* all the
> interpretations, readers are encouraged to formulate their particular
> expressions of the truth. Coleridge's much-discussed symbolic
> method in the poem is nothing more (or less) than his rhetorical
> machinery for producing such interpretative results. In Coleridge's
> terms, the symbolically grounded interpretations are acts of witness
> rather than definitions, human events which dramatically testify to the
> desire to know and continually create the truth that has always set men
> free.[148]

---

[146] McGann, p. 172. McGann does qualify this by adding that the poem still retains Coleridge's Christian ideology, as his definition of symbol is not purely aesthetic but it is a 'sacramental and Christian view of symbols in which history itself is revealed as a sacramental and Christian symbol' (p. 164).
[147] McGann, p. 160.
[148] McGann, p. 154.

As has been suggested throughout this thesis, Coleridge remained committed to the idea that, whether it be drama, prose or poetry, literature must be created in a way that supports and directs its correct interpretation. This, of course, is achieved by a poet who is 'in command of *his own Will*' (*LL*, I, p. 80; emphasis in original). However, the surprisingly modern element of *The Rime* is Coleridge's ability to conceive of it as a piece that will be interpreted, differently, throughout future epochs; that it is a piece that is 'in a perpetual process of becoming'.[149] In this way, authorial control of the poem is loosened in order to accommodate an interpretative life of the poem in the future. Although this feature of Romantic theory, rooted in the early German philosophy of Friedrich Schlegel, is utilised in the modern critical theory of Walter Benjamin to claim a democratization of art, its unqualified application to Romanticism is often limited due to the fact that it goes against the grain of the elevation of the poet as a figure of meditative creativity in Romanticism. Paul Hamilton articulates this point:

> Is the romantic aesthetic open enough to reproductive possibility to be able to part company with its particular authorial occasion and survive only in the self-criticism it has given rise to? Can that original specificity be historicized as mere 'aura', and can the ensuing democratization of the image […] be accomplished without incurring a critical loss as well a 'messianic' interruption?[150]

Throughout *Metaromanticism,* Hamilton remains sceptical of linking the will of Romanticism to step outside its borders into the modern critical theory of Walter Benjamin, despite strong suggestions in this direction. Nevertheless, throughout the history of Coleridge criticism, there is an open willingness to link his work with elements of the modern, which often takes the continually progressive notion of art first conceived by the Jena Romantics as a starting point. This is perhaps most directly

---

[149] McGann, p. 154.
[150] Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), p. 10.

acknowledged by Kathleen Wheeler in the 'Afterword' to her study of Coleridge's poetry:

> The basic concept in Romantic aesthetics of the work of art as an object of constantly progressing and changing significance is the most immediate and obvious connection with modern critical theory.[151]

As Hamilton implies but refrains from developing, the basic premise of the perpetual becoming of art locates a theoretical ground that is shared by Walter Benjamin and Coleridge. Whilst Benjamin found that, by reaching back through the history of Germany to the Romantics, he could identify a foundation for his notion of the aura of the work of art, Coleridge looked across to the same group, his German contemporaries, to validate the mystical effects of some of his pieces that were, nonetheless, concerned with the notion of human, historical interpretation. In the final section of this chapter, I base my understanding of this shared concern with the perpetual state of interpretation (and, within this, the contested notions of truth and meaning) between Coleridge and Benjamin on an interpretation of the *Rime of the Ancient Mariner* based upon Benjamin's essay 'The Storyteller'.

3.8   The Ancient Mariner and Storytelling: Historical Materialism and Drama in *The Rime*

The history of *The Rime*'s textual revisions is well-known and has prompted diverse readings of Coleridge's motivations to revise the poem and much debate as to the extent of their success or failure. Whether or not the textual revisions are significant to *The*

---

[151] Wheeler, p. 162.

Rime's impact as a poem, what they have done is add an extra dimension to the distinction between each formal layer of the poem: the story, the ballad and the poem. McGann draws attention to this when he writes that Lamb's disappointment with the 1800 version of the poem came from 'the distance which the 1800 changes enforced between the "mariner's ballad" and "Coleridge's poem"'.[152] However, it is apparent that the separation of these two narratives signal the start of Coleridge's more 'complex effort to represent (if also to methodize) his poem as a literary ballad'.[153] In this way, what came out of the *Lyrical Ballads* experiment for Coleridge was not a lyrical ballad of a 'man speaking to men' but a literature passed through, and amended by, ensuing historical epochs: men speaking to men.[154] In other words, Coleridge's 1798 imitation of the ballad form and his subsequent reworking of the poem highlight his 'explicitly historicized theoretical view' of textual creativity and criticism through *The Rime*: a literary ballad of cultures speaking to cultures.[155]

One of Wordsworth's chief complaints about *The Rime of the Ancyent Marinere* (1798) was that its protagonist was not sufficiently recognisable as a man. This 'lack of distinct character [...] as a human being' ran counter to Wordsworth's 'principal object' for the volume, which was to 'make the incidents of common life interesting by tracing in them truly [...] the primary laws of our nature'.[156] This complaint, perhaps prompted by the negative reception from some to the *Lyrical Ballads* (and, in particular, *The Rime*), was not opposed by Coleridge, who instead made the distinction in Chapter XIV of *Biographia Literaria* between his and Wordsworth's aims for the collection of poetry. Coleridge makes it clear that it is not the Mariner as a figure that needs to, or

---

[152] McGann , p. 141.
[153] McGann, p. 141.
[154] William Wordsworth, 'Preface' (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads,* in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed, (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 241-272 (p. 255).
[155] McGann, p. 149.
[156] Wordsworth and Coleridge, *Lyrical Ballads*, p. 276; pp. 244-5.

even should, resemble a human, but only his feelings, as Coleridge's task in the project 'consist[ed] in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real' (*BL*, II, p. 6). This is an important distinction as Coleridge's aim is to give ordinary humans an extraordinary experience through 'dramatic truth' and 'poetic faith' and in doing so allow them to explore the 'shadows of imagination' (*BL*, II, p. 6). Charles Lamb's defence of *The Rime* was an exemplary contemporary assessment of the poem that read it according to this claimed intention. Crucially, Lamb focuses upon the tale as distinct from the poem and, within his praise, there is even a sense that it is distinct from poetry. When he states that he 'was never so affected with any human Tale' and that he was 'totally possessed with it for many days', it becomes clear that his experience of the poem is not based in an intellectual relationship between himself and Coleridge, the poet, but in a relationship of feeling between himself and the character of the Mariner. Lamb is able to overcome the textual distance of the poem and speak directly with the Mariner, whose 'feelings under the operation of such [miraculous] scenery dragged [him] along like Tom Piper's magic Whistle'.[157] In this sense, Lamb appears to have been in tune with Coleridge's conception of the poem and, as John Spencer Hill points out, he 'admires the poem, he is moved by it—but he does not attempt to interpret it'.[158]

Returning to Coleridge's objective, the Mariner's ancient and oral ballad, which is the source of the poem, is the creation of a mind that 'from whatever source of delusion has believed himself under supernatural agency' and for this reason it is vivid and compelling but does not invite interpretation that aims to divine a meaning or even a

---

[157] Charles Lamb, *The Letters of Charles and Mary Anne Lamb,* ed. E.W. Marrs, Jr, 5 vols (Ithaca, NY, and London: Cornell University Press, 1975), vol 1, p. 266 quoted in John Spencer Hill, *Hill, A Coleridge Companion: an Introduction to the Major Poems and the Biographia Literaria* (London: Macmillan, 1984), p.153.
[158] Hill, *A Coleridge Companion*, p. 153.

moral from it (*BL*, II, 6). This is precisely because it originates from the Mariner's delusion and this inhibits a critical response, as effective criticism can only come from readers or audiences that maintain a state of illusion. Coleridge's poem, however, gives the reader access to the effects of this ballad not through delusion but through the aesthetic experience of 'the willing suspension of disbelief for the moment' (*BL*, II, p. 6). This is the proper form of aesthetic illusion and a poetic experience that is designed to be interpreted, as Coleridge goes on to show through the gradual intensification of internal interpretation within the poem itself, from the Wedding Guest's initial misgivings about hearing the tale, through to the minstrel's authorship and onto the editor's gloss.[159] Consequently, the poem's form is made up of cultural interpretations of an original story which are, all along the way, concerned with how different individuals from different epochs have understood and become implicated within the tale as figures of its future dissemination, yet the original story itself cannot be broken into.

In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, therefore, it is possible to identify a tension similar to that constructed by Coleridge in 'The Eolian Harp' between the language of isolation and a formal concern with community. Both poems exhibit the poetic language of an isolated character who is both the creator and subject of the poem, yet these characters and their 'pure imagination' are set firmly within a community that resists surrendering fully to their poetic visions.[160] In the same way that 'The Eolian Harp' becomes a battleground for the competing forces of sound and vision, so *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* becomes a more complex, and perhaps inconclusive, working through of these

---

[159] See Huntington Brown, 'The Gloss to the Ancient Mariner' in *Modern Language Quarterly IV*, 1945, pp. 319-324 (pp. 319-20) and McGann p. 142 and p. 152.

[160] The phrase 'pure Imagination' originates in Coleridge's *Table Talk*. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Table Talk* ed. by Carl Woodring, The Bollingen Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xiv (1990), p. 149.

modes of interpretation. In the final section of this chapter, I focus upon the poem's

human characters, predominantly the Mariner and the Wedding Guest, but also the

ship's crew, the triumvirate who receive the Mariner on his return and, even more

distantly, the wedding party, to support the view of this poem as a human and historical

text. The collection of characters builds up a dramatic quality to the poem, the focus

upon the Mariner's confessional story to the Wedding Guest is reminiscent of

Coleridge's conversation poems and at the heart of the poem lies the Mariner's

rendition of his own metaphysical experience, which is communicated as a form of

experience about whose significance those hearing it are free to draw their own

conclusions. This layering is based upon Coleridge's own concern with formal and

generic experimentation, which sees Coleridge again confronting the dichotomous

relationship between the dramatic imagination and the poetic imagination and reveals in

his work an almost prophetic outlook towards the modern writing of Benjamin.

This anticipation of Benjamin is seen most clearly in the figure of the Ancient Mariner

and in the oral account of his tale, that is, his story as opposed to the poem. In his 1936

essay, 'The Storyteller', Benjamin outlines the evolution of the narrative strategies of

mankind. By contrasting different forms of 'human communication', of which

storytelling and information make up opposing ends of the spectrum, Benjamin

highlights the increasing distance between the relation of personal experience and a

presentation of experience through information.[161]   Benjamin's essay, though unrelated

to concerns with Romanticism, brings to the fore the same anxiety evident in Lamb's

ardent defence of the 1798 version of *The Rime*:

> The art of storytelling is coming to an end. Less and less frequently
> do we encounter people with the ability to tell a tale properly. More

---

[161] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, ed. and introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 83-108 (p. 88). Further references to this edition are given in parentheses after quotations in the text, using the abbreviation *S*.

> and more often there is embarrassment all around when the wish to
> hear a story is expressed. It is as if something that seemed inalienable
> to us, the securest among our possessions, were taken from us: the
> ability to exchange experiences. (S, p. 83)

The Mariner, once so securely part of a community that 'cheered' the ship as it left the harbour (*AM*, l. 21), ostensibly returns to the same community, his experience having rendered him an outcast or, to borrow Benjamin's phrase, he is 'something remote' (S, p. 83). His 'ability to tell a tale', it appears, has become a 'strange power of speech' and what appears to have been inalienable within the community that he left is now alien to the community to which he returns after his journey (*AM*, l. 586). In this sense, the Ancient Mariner is not simply an ancient man himself, but he represents the ancient modes of communication, of which storytelling stands out in direct contrast with modern representations of experience. Alluding to the competing requirements of ancient and modern experiential accounts, Benjamin notes that whereas the modern desire for information requires narrative to be 'shot through with explanation […] half the art of storytelling is to keep a story free from explanation' (S, p. 89). In their response to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge's friends and critics are divided along just these lines: those such as Wordsworth and Anna Barbauld who look for a way of explaining the poem or moulding it into a text with meaning, and those such as Lamb who do not demand that the poem or the poet explain anything.

Like the Wedding Guest in the poem, receptive readers are sunk into a state of mesmerism by the Mariner and his tale. They become the 'one of three' who 'cannot chuse but hear' the story (*AM*, l. 2; l. 18). This recalls Lamb's style of reading, whereby he does not expect the poem itself to create an explanation or reason for its existence, but he does listen to the tale and therefore receives its significance from his own

experience of it. In a manner that echoes Lamb's account of the effect of the Mariner's tale, Benjamin describes the effect a story should achieve when he declares that 'The most extraordinary things, marvellous things, are related with the greatest accuracy, but the psychological connection of the events is not forced on the reader. It is left up to him to interpret things the way he understands them, and thus the narrative achieves an amplitude that information lacks' (S, p. 89). This amplitude is achieved, precisely, through distance, as Benjamin states that storytelling 'combines the lore of faraway places, such as a much travelled man brings home, with the lore of the past as it best reveals itself to the natives of a place' (S, p. 85). Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, it seems, blends these two components precisely. He is a much-travelled man whose experience at sea seems to change him and he returns to a land in which he seems to have been lost to time, an ancient relic of a past age, which, though discernible to the new modern community, is relegated to lore, superstition and tradition: in contrast to information, the story contains nothing that can be checked with 'prompt verifiability' (S, p. 88). The Mariner returns to his own country to be received by the natives as an embodiment of their past and, to rework Everett's wider understanding of the poem as a document of modernity, as the Mariner returns to his 'own Countrée', he and his tale become a 'past within a past' in which the inhabitant can see the 'memory' of his former 'self' (*AM*, l. 570).[162]

As in their dramatic theories, both Benjamin and Coleridge make use of the Middle Ages to offer a form of literature that validates their attempts to offer a form of representation that deals with the immediacy and feeling of experience as opposed to the fragmentation and infinite piling up of explained meanings. Benjamin's comparison of the modern historian with the medieval chronicler clarifies his position:

---

[162] Everett, p. 11.

> The historian is bound to explain in one way or another the happenings with which he deals; under no circumstances can he content himself with displaying them as models of the course of the world. But this is precisely what the chronicler does, especially in his classical representatives, the chroniclers of the Middle Ages, the precursors of the historians today. By basing their historical tales on a divine plan of salvation—an inscrutable one—they have from the very start lifted the burden of demonstrable explanation from their own shoulders. Its place is taken by interpretation, which is not concerned with an accurate concatenation of definite events but with the way these are embedded in the great inscrutable course of the world. (S, p. 95)

Here, Benjamin draws attention to the difference between interpretation and explanation. Where the act of interpretation does not need to be based in language and is involved with the evolution and spiritual improvement of mankind, explanation deals only with language, allowing information or language itself to be added to *ad infinitum*. This is a view expressed by Benjamin when he talks of the practicability of the story and its pedagogic usefulness. He declares that a story 'contains […] something useful […] the storyteller is a man who has counsel for his readers [but…] counsel is less an answer to a question than a proposal concerning the continuation of a story which is just unfolding […] Counsel woven into the fabric of real life is wisdom' (S, p. 86). Implied here is the notion that the Storyteller equips his audience with the ability to retell a tale, which is based upon the same understanding of truthful narrative representation as he himself enjoys. This, again, reverberates strongly through Coleridge's poem in different ways. Firstly, and most obviously, it is connected with the declaration that the Ancient Mariner 'pass[es] like night from land to land/[He] knows the man must hear [him]/[and] to him [his] tale must teach' (*AM*, l. 586; l. 589; l. 590). The Mariner, with a weight of experience pressing upon him, feels it necessary to pass on counsel to others and, aptly, the effect of this teaching on the Wedding Guest is that he goes away 'a sadder and wiser man' (*RAM*, l. 624). However, the effect described by Benjamin is not

limited in *The Rime* to a superficial coincidence of didactic outcome; rather, the effect in the poem is fully realised as the 'continuation of [the Mariner's] story which is just unfolding' (S, p. 86) by way of the almost circular effect of the narrative trajectory of the poem. This can be explained by treating the poem as a narrative of the Wedding Guest's memory in the same way as the story is a narrative of the Mariner's memory.

This view of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* considers it to approach a metafictional structure, but, in this, it does not, as Romantic irony conventionally does, raise the issue of its own artifice; essentially, it documents the passing of experience into memory and memory back into experience in order to intensify the central effect of this experience upon the reader. In other words, Coleridge's role as the poet—and the creator of the piece—is radically negated due to the fact that the key creative force of the poem becomes memory rather than intellect. To reiterate Benjamin's view, the creativity of the Storyteller comes from the fact that 'he takes what he tells from experience and makes it the experience of others' (S, p. 87). The identities of the Mariner and the Wedding Guest at the start and the end of the poem are confused to the point that the Wedding Guest can be conceived as the double of the Mariner. As I will show, the structure of *The Rime* implies that the Wedding Guest takes on the mantle of retelling the story and thereby implies that the Wedding Guest will pass this responsibility on to the reader. Therefore, rather than questioning the legitimacy or truthfulness of the Mariner's tale, the doubling of the characters implies the reader's own fall into the experience of the poem. This metafictional moment occurs in the intimation of a circular narrative built up in the interplay between the final stanzas and the initial stanzas of the poem, which become a confusion of narrative voices. This reading of the poem considers similar issues to Susan Eilenberg's seminal reading of the 'strange power of speech' in the poem but it suggests also greater links with Coleridge's

dramatic theory (*AM*, l. 587). Susan Eilenberg considers 'quotation marks [as] the strangely unreliable indices of the borders of speech' within her wider account of the tale as exhibiting a variety of manifestations of 'the voice of the past'.[163] Specifically applied to Coleridge's returning interest in drama, this distortion of the boundary between different narrative voices again confronts Coleridge's theorising of dramatic genre based upon characterisation, and by extension to this, a different perspective upon the use of the supernatural in *The Rime*.

Read without punctuation, three characters, all distinct from the poet, can be discerned in the opening stanzas: the narrator (most often referred to as the minstrel), the Wedding Guest and the Mariner. However, the speech punctuation delineates only two speakers: the narrator must double as either the Wedding Guest or the Mariner. The Wedding Guest's lines are clearly delineated in these opening stanzas by speech marks, so it may be assumed that the Mariner narrates the scene and, by stanza six (1798) or seven (1800), embarks upon his tale. In this sense, the opening scene is presented as either a conversation, a dramatic exchange between Mariner and Guest, or as a dramatic monologue spoken by the Mariner (assuming that he will 'act out' the Wedding Guest's speech). The title of the poem supports this assumption: it is *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, the Ancient Mariner's rime. However, this assumption becomes complicated as the story of the poem unfolds, because part of the tale's function is that it becomes the experience of the Wedding Guest. The Mariner's almost mesmeric storytelling skill forces the Wedding Guest to 'listen […] like a three year's child' and, by the end of the poem, he is 'stunn'd', going away a 'sadder and a wiser man' (*AM*, l. 15; l. 622; l. 624). The connection with Benjamin's Storyteller is obvious here as the Mariner exchanges

---

[163] Susan Eilenberg, *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Literary Possession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), p. 35.

his experience and makes it part of the experience of the Wedding Guest. However, the connection also operates at a more profound level to affect the narrative structure of the entire poem. At this point, the result of the tale is revealed as the states of mind of the Mariner and the Wedding Guest have become indistinguishable, as have the states of mind of the receptive readers of the tale, like Lamb, who was 'possessed' by the poem for many days after. This psychological blending of the two characters is paralleled by a narrative blending as, upon the Mariner's departure from the action of the poem, the narrator reverts to referring to him in the third person. Indeed, the departure of the Mariner is emphasised by placing the declaration that the Mariner 'Is gone;[:]' through the enjambment of the line and also through the caesura created by the semi-colon (in the 1800 version it is a colon) placed directly after the statement. The effect of this line is further heightened by a sense of immediacy as the statement 'and now' locates the narrator and the poem insistently in the present and the departed Mariner firmly in the past (*AM*, l. 620). The reader is not told where the Mariner has gone but, perhaps more importantly, the final line of the poem, which refers to the Wedding Guest, resists conclusion, and the man who now matches the psychology of the Mariner in his inexplicable state of sadness, or remorse, is returned into the past tense and 'rose the morrow morn' (*AM*, l. 625). Effectively, the whole narrative thrust of these final stanzas propels the reader back to the start of the poem, which, as mentioned, confuses the boundaries between speakers. This cyclical action of the poem suggests a revised view that it is the Wedding Guest who narrates the poem. As a result, Coleridge achieves the storytelling feat of making one man's experience the experience of all those—or at least all those receptive to this style of narration—reading the poem.

The effect of this manipulation of narration between the start and end of the poem recalls the key themes of Coleridge's dramatic interest. In an important revision to

Wordsworth's drafts of his own poem, *The Ruined Cottage*, the Wedding Guest is not 'better and wiser' but 'sadder and wiser' as if he has taken a share in the Mariner's crime and its resulting guilt (*AM*, l. 624).[164] This reading opens up a clear connection with Coleridge's working through of the idea of remorse in the notes believed to have been prepared for Lecture Three of his 1808 series, as remorse is defined here as the 'guilt of ages past' and it is given distinctly haunting properties (*LL*, I, p. 64). As Eilenberg asserts, this haunting appears as a key component of the 'strange power of speech' attributed to the Mariner and, by implication, extended to the Wedding Guest and indeed any reader receptive to the story (*AM*, l. 587). The notion of remorse at work within the poem becomes more significant, however, when it is considered as an uninterrupted theme running through Coleridge's poetic and dramatic *oeuvre*. The attempt to theorise remorse as a motor of creativity sees Coleridge cross-referencing generic styles and motifs in both poetry and drama in order to attempt to theorise drama for the Romantic age and, as highlighted in Chapter Two, this is directly involved with the characterisation of the tragic hero. At this point, it is important to remember that Coleridge completed his first full length stage play, *Osorio*, in October 1797 and started *The Rime* in November of the same year. In the same way that the 'The Eolian Harp' can be considered to be a poetic rehearsal of the issues that would concern Coleridge over a decade later in his theory of drama, *The Rime of The Ancient Mariner* assumes a close relationship with the themes of guilt, remorse and penitence in Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice. Ordonio, the protagonist of *Osorio*, is presented as a figure who vehemently resists the feeling of remorse and in fact scorns those who place significance on the feeling, and he dies as his murderous crime is finally avenged through Alhadra's action, which is made to look as fateful and unavoidable as possible in the context of the unfolding of the final scene. Osorio (and his later incarnation,

---

[164] For information on this, see Mays' note to line 624 of *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, p. 419.

Ordonio in *Remorse*), therefore, becomes Coleridge's dramatic embodiment of the classical tragic framework whereby the protagonist pays for his crime with his life and, further, the memory of his character is dissolved. Indeed Osorio/Ordonio craves oblivion and it is this desire for his death to result in the erasure of his identity from earth and assumed transcendence against his brother's efforts to guard his life so that he may feel remorse and remain within the community that coincides with Benjamin's distinction between the tragic hero and the 'constellation of heroes' in the *Trauerspiel*:

> Whereas the tragic hero, in his 'immortality', does not save his life, but only his name, in death the characters of the *Trauerspiel* lose only the name-bearing individuality, and not the vitality of their role. This survives undiminished in the spirit-world.[165]

The Mariner is a direct reversal of Osorio as his retrospective narrative indicates that the 'hellish thing' he had done, although perhaps not consciously recognised at the time, immediately plunged him into a static state of melancholic repentance reflected by the physical inanimation of the ship as a 'painted Ship/Upon a painted ocean' (*AM,* l. 91; ll. 117-18). Therefore, since the Mariner's crime is not punished by death but by an experience designed to bring him to remorse, the quality of his tragic figure becomes remorse, not retribution. As such, the Mariner can be conceived as a mournful figure who comes to represent 'the very estate of man as creature' and befits the characterisation of the *Trauerspiel* (*OGTD*, p. 89). This idea is further strengthened by the ambivalence of the punishment served on the Mariner, the prize won by Life-in-Death in the dice game. This suggestion that the Mariner in fact becomes, as Eilenberg suggests, 'a zombie', strikes at the heart of the anxiety surrounding the reception of the poem and, since the poem's publication, this idea has linked it with the Gothic

---

[165] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne and introd. by George Steiner (London and New York: Verso, 1998), p. 136. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *OGTD*.

supernatural.[166] It is a strong suggestion in the poem as it is fed through many layers of the narrative structure through the notion that the Mariner's voice is resonant through the Wedding Guest, within the poem as the Hermit, the pilot and the boy meet him with abject horror, and through the Mariner's own uncertainty on the subject. Even though he assures the Wedding Guest that his 'body dropt not down' with the rest of the crew, he does admit that, at one point, he 'thought that [he] had died in sleep/And was a blessed ghost' (*AM*, l. 231; ll. 307-8). Added to this is the fact that his 'glittering eye' (*AM*, l. 13) is matched by those of the deceased Mariners, who depart the earth as their 'stony eyeballs glitter'd on' (*AM*, 1798 version, p. 475, l.17). The Mariner, it is suggested (most strongly in the 1798 version) has perhaps died, but the experience of his punishment and his resulting remorseful state of mind fulfils the generic code of a *Trauerspiel*-type play in which the characters are 'denied access to a beyond' (*OGTD*, p. 79). The Ancient Mariner adheres to Benjamin's description of the 'spirit world', which, in death, does not transcend but remains part of the earth as 'transcendental phenomena whose dimension is temporal'; examples of which are 'dreams, ghostly apparitions, the terrors of the end' (*OGTD*, p. 134; p. 135). By the end of the poem, the reader has confirmation that the Mariner has this type of identity. Not only does he appear as a ghostly figure of the past who inflicts a nightmarish tale upon the Wedding Guest, he also 'pass[es] like night, from land to land' to tell others his story (*AM*, l. 586). As a result, the Mariner appears in the same timeframe of the *Trauerspiel*, which 'stand[s] in the narrow frame of midnight, an opening in the passage of time' and he is 'the same ghostly image [which] constantly reappears' to those who listen to his tale (*OGTD*, p. 135).

---

[166] Eilenberg, p. 37.

However, if the Mariner can be treated as a revenant, or a spirit, that cannot transcend the earth, he is not the only earthly spirit in the poem. The polar spirit is, as the 1834 gloss states, 'one of the invisible inhabitants of this planet' and his 'fellow daemons' follow the boat after the Mariner's crime has been committed (*AM,* ll. 131-4; l. 393). Therefore, as Everett cogently points out, Coleridge's employment of the supernatural stands as a reversal of the decisively Gothic works around him at the time. This is due to the fact that his work originates from within a definite sense of community and religious—Christian—certainty in which the Gothic is not employed as a 'flight from the real' or even a commitment to intellectual isolation but is, instead, based in a desire to represent history truthfully.[167] In the case of *The Rime*, Everett argues that 'the true' for Coleridge was the painful history of the voyages of discovery in which his poem and its supernatural elements help him to work towards 'a kind of exorcism and expiation' of the fraught historical reality of these voyages:

> The process of regret and redress can be carried out by a writer only as an act of communication, of sharing, an opening up of sympathy. A poet cannot open up continents but he can make readers join in his solitude and shame, bringing about a kind of church, or 'pleasure-dome', of sympathetic conjunct attention. It is from this expiatory element, probably, that this darkness comes. [168]

This 'darkness', an alternative Gothic, seems filled with the sentiment of remorse that maintains its strongest links with drama. In the final chapter of this thesis, I turn to Coleridge's most successful play, and perhaps the most immediately successful work he produced, *Remorse*, which, as I have already suggested with reference to the 'Critique

---

[167] Everett, p. 11.
[168] Everett, p. 10; p. 11.

of *Bertram*', sees him conceiving the theatre as exactly that 'kind of church […] of sympathetic conjunct attention' to which his dramatic theory should be best applied.[169]

---

[169] Everett, p. 10.

Chapter 4. 'To the Avenger I leave Vengeance and depart!'
The Competing Discourses of Tragedy and *Trauerspiel* in *Remorse*

4.1   Introduction

Throughout this study, it has been maintained that New Historicist criticism emerges as the standard bearer of the revival of Romantic drama and it has paved the way for a better understanding of the form's overlooked position within Romanticism. By returning the form to the social, political and historical roots of the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, New Historicism frees drama, the most material of the major Romantic forms, from what can be understood, paradoxically, as the ideal constraints of the Romantic movement. The New Historicist critical return to history considers Romantic drama to be largely concerned with the political impact of the theatre upon society and society upon the theatre and, on the whole, it supports the view that Romantic dramatists had definite reservations concerning the representative qualities of theatrical display. At the heart of the New Historicist revival of Romantic drama is a thematic approach to the historical context of plays from this period, in which stage illusion comes to underpin Romantic playwrights' enthusiasm for, and misgivings about, the stage. However, it is the argument of this thesis that the theoretical location of the creativity of Romantic drama purely in its social and political milieu inevitably conceives the imaginative capacity of the playwright to be used at the service of specifically political requirements. A singularly historicist reading of Romantic drama, therefore, risks repeating the established view of this form as subordinate to others (namely poetry and the novel) simply because the Romantic imagination cannot be applied to drama in the same manner as it can be to a more inactive and isolated form of creativity. Whilst Coleridge's dramaturgical strategies may be read, as Julie Carlson has shown to great effect, as being directly involved with the social and political

conditions of his era, they are also engaged with a working through of the imaginative potential of this form of literature in the Romantic era. The following study of *Remorse* seeks to offer a 'more nuanced understanding' of Coleridge's use of the literary imagination in drama and to show how he may 'manipulate dramatic and literary conventions' in order to represent two inextricably linked problems of drama in the Romantic age.[1] In Coleridge's play, the social dangers of the imagination made visual on stage are considered alongside a related generic problem of the apparent impasse between the tragic genre and the Romantic ego. Both issues collide in the Gothic *zeitgeist* of the Romantic age, which is a central focus of this final chapter.

First, it is necessary to provide a brief plot summary of the play and highlight the key points of revision between *Osorio* and *Remorse*. The evolution of Coleridge's play from *Osorio* to *Remorse* is evidence of his commitment to the dramatic form and, crucially, to the ideas within the play that deal directly with dramatic representation and dramatic illusion. My reading, therefore, takes an holistic view rather than treating *Osorio* and *Remorse* as two distinct texts and is concerned with the themes that emerge across the both texts. The play opens as Alvar and his servant, Zulimez, return to Granada after having spent seven years abroad. Alvar is disguised on his return and his political links are ambiguous: he appears to have fought for the protestant Low Countries against catholic Spain and he is linked to the oppressed Moors in Granada through a pledge he has given to Alhadra, a Moorish woman. The opening scene of *Remorse* is dedicated to Alvar's account of his brother's (Ordonio) attempt on his life in order that he can usurp the love of Teresa, Alvar's lover. This is a major structural revision to *Osorio* as it replaces the scene in which Velez (Valdez in *Remorse*) presses Maria (Teresa in *Remorse*) to forget Albert (Alvar in *Remorse*) and marry Osorio

---

[1] George Erving, 'Coleridge as Playwright', in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Frederick Burwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 392-411 (p. 393; p. 394).

(Ordonio in *Remorse*). As such, this scene focuses *Remorse* upon the Albert/Alvar character's ambiguious identity and places the theme of the returning past only upon him rather than sharing it between himself and Maria.[2] In both plays, Albert/Alvar is not vengeful in the face of his brother's actions, but instead wants Ordonio to show remorse. However, failing to recognise Alvar, Ordonio employs him to evidence his own death and give Maria/Teresa reason to give up hope of his return and marry Ordonio. Albert/Alvar agrees to prove beyond doubt that he has died by acting as a conjurer who will produce the locket that Maria/Teresa had given to Albert/Alvar as a token of their enduring love. However, in the conjuring scene, he uncovers a painting which reveals the true circumstances of the attempt upon his life. In *Osorio*, Maria sees the painting and therefore her faith and hope in Albert's safe return is thrown into question. However, in *Remorse,* Teresa refuses to be duped by the supernatural spectacle and she leaves before the picture is revealed. Again, whereas Maria shares the burden of the theme of illusion with Albert (as she does with the theme of the returning past), Teresa is shielded from the confusion between reality and appearance, and represents, more clearly than Maria, an ideal faith in truthful representation. Finally, the revelation of the picture brings together the main plot and the sub-plot as it prompts Ordonio to have his Moorish assassin, and husband of Alhadra, killed. Alhadra is bent on revenge and does not rest until Ordonio is dead (in *Osorio* he is taken off stage by the Moors and in *Remorse*, he dies at the hand of Alhadra). Alvar has failed to ignite remorse in his brother, but maintains that he feared this conclusion whilst also reminding us of the pledge he had made to the avenger, Alhadra.

---

[2] This is supported by the removal of the 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' in which Maria's Foster-Mother recounts a story of past generations of the Velez household and served involve Maria more firmly with the ancestral theme.

4.2   Coleridge and the Gothic Vision of the Georgian Theatre

When Coleridge started his second play, *Osorio*, in 1797, he was writing for an epoch steeped in theatricality and a city in which the theatre absorbed all manner of the socially diverse populace. Theatres such as Covent Garden and Drury Lane had undergone drastic restructuring during the 1780s and 1790s in order to increase their capacity to make best use of the public's thirst for theatrical display, which could scarcely be contained within the walls of the theatres. As Gillian Russell points out, 'the discourse, practices and images of the theatre pervaded all aspects of [the] culture' and theatre's effect upon the social stability of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is a complex issue that remains open to debate.[3] In the Romantic age, theatre in both its forms—imaginative liberation and uncontrollable revolution—permeated the social and political arenas of life, where it promised freedom and threatened deluded violence but, perhaps above all and certainly most practicably, it made the business of theatre an especially lucrative occupation. The economic benefit of creating large theatres was obvious to the owners of the playhouses, but for those wishing to write plays it was a double-edged sword. A play capable of entertaining thousands of spectators at a time was compromised by the very fact that it had to appeal to the spectrum of society and also to be intelligible to the thousand-strong audience. In short, serious playwrights found themselves caught in a vicious circle: never before had the theatre offered the opportunity of reaching so many and such diverse audiences, but this number and diversity would only fill the theatres if they found in them something worth seeing. The volume of theatres also came at the cost of the style and quality of the dramas

---

[3] Gillian Russell, 'Theatre', in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832,* ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p.223. For further detail on the social and cultural role of the theatre in the Romantic period, see Russell's article. Drury Lane Theatre held over three thousand spectators at the time that Coleridge's *Remorse* was playing there (1813). See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Poetical Works: Plays,* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 1027-1028.

performed. Allardyce Nicoll states that 'the increased seating accommodation [meant that] the distance of the stage from the pit and galleries rendered subtle acting impossible and forced the performers to indulge in rant and bombast'.[4] The financial motivation to increase theatre capacity and accommodate a greater number of spectators gave rise to a social and aesthetic contradiction in the theatre of which, as highlighted in Chapter Two, Coleridge was well aware. The theatre offered great potential to support the social and moral security of the country by means of producing accomplished and thoughtful drama, but this was frustrated by the fact that spectators demanded theatrical spectacle. As theatres became larger, so Gothic melodrama began to increase in popularity.

This sensational form of theatre became ever more achievable with the gathering momentum of innovations in stage technology accompanied by a reliance upon stereotyped characters and often uncomplicated plots.[5] It is for this reason that Nicoll suggests that 'nearly all [poets of the time] were repulsed' by the inferior quality of literature afforded by theatre and therefore began to produce drama that was intended for reading rather than performance.[6] Nicoll offers a clear-cut division in drama: plays that were 'acted' and those that were 'unacted […] the former becoming, with the passage of the years, more and more trivial, the latter more and more divorced from theatrical needs'.[7] Criticism of Romantic drama from the 1920s to the 1980s takes Nicoll's assertion as a central assumption. However, as has been argued throughout this study, whilst the distinction between theatre and drama is useful as a way of defining the popular culture of the theatre, it is a less accurate representation of the activity of

---

[4] Allardyce Nicoll, *British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time* (London: Harrap and Co., 1925), p. 301.
[5] For a detailed account of the techniques employed to produce stage spectacles, see Paul Ranger, 'The Stage Spectacle', in *'Terror and Pity Reign in Every Breast': Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: The Society for Theatre Research, 1991), pp. 69-89.
[6] Nicoll, p. 303.
[7] Nicoll*,* p. 305.

writing drama. Poets may have been repelled by sensational theatrical productions, but, though they often lamented the state of the theatres, they were not put off from experimenting with dramatic forms intended for the Georgian stage. In a letter to William Lisle Bowles, Coleridge reflects Nicoll's assertion that the sensational nature of the recent output of Gothic literature was both overwhelming in quantity and distasteful, but this is balanced by the enthusiasm he shows for his own play in this style:

> [*Osorio*] is romantic & wild & somewhat terrible—& I shall have
> Siddons and Kemble in my mind—indeed I am almost weary of the
> terrible, having been an hireling in the Critical Review for the last six
> or eight months—I have been lately reviewing The Monk, the Italian,
> Hubert de Severac, & & c & & c—in all of which dungeons, & old
> castles, & solitary Houses by the Sea Side, & caverns, & woods, &
> extraordinary character, & all tribe of Horror and Mystery, have
> crowded on me—even to surfeiting— [8]

Coleridge's view of the melodramatic here is more ambivalent than Nicoll suggests as, whilst he is 'almost weary of the terrible' he admits, with a degree of enthusiasm, that *Osorio* is precisely that: 'romantic & wild & somewhat terrible'.[9] This duality in Coleridge's attitude towards Romantic theatre, which is bolstered by his persistent engagement with dramatic forms and theory, offers an alternative insight to Nicoll's distinction between plays written for theatrical performance and dramas intended for contemplation. Rather than evidencing the 'ever-widening gulf between the men of letters and the theatre', Coleridge's criticism of the content of the plays did not prevent him from writing a play that made full use of Gothic tropes and visual effects.[10] This apparent mismatch between his staunchly anti-sensational critical position and his dramatic practice is a discrepancy in Coleridge's work that is worth investigating. In view of his outspoken criticism of the rise of the Gothic in England (most notably

---

[8] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letter to William Lisle Bowles, 16th March, 1797, in *The Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs, 6 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956-1971), I (1956), p. 318.
[9] Coleridge, 'Letter to William Lisle Bowles', p. 318.
[10] Nicoll, p. 303.

through his reviews of the Gothic novels he cites above) and also of the public's

appetite for productions that played to their senses, the evidence of Coleridge's apparent

turn to these features in *Remorse* has often prompted the view that the success of his

drama is borne out of an 'act of hypocrisy' and, for this reason, it stands as a

compromised piece.[11] A more empathetic view of Coleridge's apparent hypocrisy may

term *Remorse* an act of expediency against the backdrop of the tightly-regulated

conditions of the theatres and a limiting combination of public demand and financially-

motivated theatre owners. Nevertheless, the prevailing critical view of *Remorse* fails to

reconcile Coleridge's activity as a critic with his creative endeavours in drama and most

often concludes that he became prepared to forego his artistic integrity and the

convictions of his dramatic theory in order for his play to succeed on the London stage.

This view is exacerbated by the fact that, perhaps with the exception of Byron,

Coleridge emerges as the canonical Romantic writer most involved with drama in its

public form. Wordsworth, Shelley and Byron all experimented to different degrees with

drama, but none of them matched Coleridge either in his extensive theatre criticism or

in the intensity with which he studied the Gothic genre through the intricate path of its

evolution from England to Germany and back onto the English stage. The interplay

between the spectacle of visual theatricality and the spectacle of the Gothic genre,

though not as consistently argued as other aspects of Coleridge's theory, certainly

emerges as a significant and unique contribution to the social, aesthetic and political

understanding of the English Romantic movement, precisely because it is involved with

the dramatic form. This fertile area of Coleridge's *oeuvre* is becoming the focus of

increased critical attention, which, drawing upon the established view of the distinction

between Romantic theatre and drama, is seeking to further define this dichotomy with

---

[11] Erving, p. 403.

specific reference to Coleridge's contradictory attitude towards the Gothic genre on

stage. A recent important contribution to the study of this aspect of Coleridge's

dramatic work is George Erving's chapter in *The Oxford Handbook of Samuel Taylor*

Coleridge. Erving bases his study of the four major plays completed by Coleridge on

one central assumption:

> Critical research must [also] attempt to account for the apparent
> conflict between Coleridge's dramatic practice and dramatic criticism.
> In the 1790s for example, he inveighs against the Gothic as a low-
> class art form imported from Germany yet he scripts *Osorio* as a
> Gothic melodrama explicitly indebted to Schiller's Gothic drama *The
> Robbers* and ghost story *Der Geisterseher*. In the 1810s, he condemns
> Gothic drama as 'Jacobinal' yet retains *Osorio*'s Gothic features as he
> positioned *Remorse* for the London stage.[12]

In the course of his analysis, Erving opens up the issue of Coleridge's hypocrisy by

reading both *Osorio* and *Remorse* as reflective of his overall evolution in thought from

politically radical and theologically Unitarian to altogether more conservative. The key

point of Erving's argument is that Coleridge surrenders the more politically, and

especially theologically, radical aspects of Albert's persona in *Osorio* as he becomes

increasingly conservative after 1805. The omission, from *Remorse*, of these radical

elements in *Osorio*, however, also heightens the Gothic effect of the play as key scenes

of contemplation such as the 'Foster Mother's Tale' and 'The Dungeon' are taken out,

which increases the ratio of spectacle to contemplation in the play. Furthermore, these

deletions imbue Alvar's character with increased shadowy and mysterious overtones on

account of the fact that his identification with a spiritualised nature is abandoned. The

deletion of Coleridge's Unitarian ideals from the play refocuses the use of nature and

Alvar's magical powers, but, as Erving points out, Coleridge maintains thematic

consistency with the earlier, more radically conceived play. Both *Osorio* and *Remorse*

are based on the thematic struggle between justified authority and its usurpation, correct

---

[12] Erving, p. 394.

interpretation and false recognition. These are precisely the issues at the heart of his dramatic theory, which, I have tried to argue, confronts the revolution in culture and art from the classical to the modern. Recalling the studies of Otten, Cox, Steiner and Gottleib, it can be argued that Coleridge's play represents the practice of a writer who had identified this 'structural impasse' of the stage of his era and who was attempting to propose its resolution.[13] The question therefore is not, as is often suggested, how does Coleridge's use of the Gothic evidence his political and aesthetic hypocrisy, but how is the generic status and purpose of the Gothic transformed under Coleridge's changing theological ideas? The answer, I propose, comes through Coleridge's presentation of Alvar's character in *Remorse*. In the manner of the Ancient Mariner, Alvar returns to his 'own countree' in order to instigate the moral reform of his society, a society which is both unknowingly estranged from divine influence and has become seduced by a form of representation that is reliant on vision to the exclusion of sound (or voice) and holds them in a state of delusion.[14]

This view of Alvar proposes that Coleridge's increasing withdrawal into religious conservatism rather counter-intuitively also invites a closer connection with modernity, precisely because it conceives of mankind as occupying a graceless existence of the kind that Walter Benjamin identified in the Baroque mourning plays. Erving's view of *Osorio* and *Remorse* is based on Coleridge's changing political and theological views in general but, applied to Coleridge's specific interest in the problems presented by drama

---

[13] Terry Otten, *The Deserted Stage: The Search for Dramatic Form in Nineteenth-Century England* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1972), p. 4. Other works that analyse Coleridge's dramatic works according to this theme are: George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (London: Faber and Faber, 1961), pp. 106-150; Jeffrey N. Cox, *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England and France* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987), pp. 1-25; Erika Gottlieb, *Lost Angels of a Ruined Paradise: Themes of Cosmic Strife in Romantic Tragedy* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1981), pp. 45-66.

[14] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text)*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 372-419 (line 570). Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *AM*.

in the Romantic era, it becomes a literary engagement with the representation of the

divine as an organising principle in Romantic tragedy. Erving intimates this when he

identifies the thematic consistency of Coleridge's use of the Gothic across *Osorio* and

Remorse as more important than his political inconstancy and links this to the

representation of the hero. Whilst Erving relates Coleridge's revisions to 'the elements

in British society he assigns to the roles of hero and villain', I would argue that this

view can be taken further and sees Coleridge engaging with the transformation of the

identity of the hero, at which point classical and Elizabethan tragic ideals founded upon

divine authority give way to Romantic tragic ideals based in the representation of the

self. [15] As argued throughout this thesis, the two overarching challenges to Romantic

drama in performance were its potential to create a deluded audience (and thus affect

the social integrity of the country) and its struggle to achieve a theoretically strong

model of tragedy that was capable of reconciling classical rules with Romantic ideals.

Albert's heroic status, sanctioned by a nature spiritualised in *Osorio*, is substituted for

Alvar's heroism, which, while still associated with the supernatural, magic and the

secular, struggles to make strong links with animated nature, science and, most notably,

the divine. Across both plays, the warring brothers can be seen to represent the

opposing forms of the traditional revenge tragedy and Coleridge's new Romantic tragic

drama based in remorse.

By keeping Erving's observations regarding the main character's heroic status in mind,

a revised understanding of the Gothic in Coleridge's dramatic practice comes into view.

This revised view situates the hero, rather than an external and divine controlling force,

as the creative source of drama. The hero also becomes the figure who sanctions the

interpretative ability of the play's audience. Coleridge himself mobilises the Gothic

---

[15] Erving, p. 394.

specifically when considering the interpretative ability of an audience or reader and the apparent coincidences between *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* and *Remorse* signal Coleridge's interest in this theme across both his poetic and dramatic theories. The 'glittering eye' (*AM*, l. 13) of the Mariner is replaced by Alvar's 'commanding eye', and these descriptions serve to link the two characters on account of their dramatic involvement with the visual.[16] Equally, both the poem and the play experiment with the earthly supernatural through an acknowledgement of 'the invisible […] Beings in the Universe', which forms the basis of their representative strategy involving the supernatural.[17] Whilst, as has been argued with reference to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, this is not exclusively tied to Coleridge's dramatic interests, it comes into play in *Remorse* through the thematic distinction between sound and vision and the way in which these interpretative features can lead to the illusion or delusion of an audience or reader. The point that emerges here is that, in Coleridge's criticism, his reference to the Gothic can be taken at face value as he describes sensational popular effects that certainly did dull the interpretative faculties of nineteenth-century theatre-goers. The traditional Gothic is based in sensation and vision and is enjoyed to the detriment of the imagination. Nonetheless, in his own dramatic practice, he transforms Gothic tropes to create devices that an audience must themselves meditate upon in order to arrive at a critical stance that engenders a morally sound form of artistic interpretation.

This positioning of Coleridge's Gothic practice as tangential to the Gothic of the popular stage identifies his dramatic practice—and indeed his 'true theory of stage illusion'—as entirely against the grain of the prevailing stage productions of his era,

---

[16] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Remorse* (Printed Version) in *Poetical Works: Plays,* ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 1227-1326, IV.2.52. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviaton *R*.
[17] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Epigraph' to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in *Poetical Works*, (see note to *The Rime*, above), xvi (1987), p. 371.

which may be the reason for his critical outburst at the staging of *Bertram*.[18] Even the

New Historicist revival of Romantic drama continues to find only a conventional use of

the Gothic as a strategic concealment of political ideals within the plays of the period, as

Hoagwood has shown in his article, 'Prolegomenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama'.

Certainly, the fictional strategies used by Coleridge in *Osorio* (such as the setting in

inquisitorial Spain, the employment of storytelling as an inactive mode of drama and the

famous incantation scene) accord with Hoagwood's proposal for a robust theory of

Romantic drama as they served Coleridge's need to represent symbolically his radical

politics in 1797. However, by the time *Osorio* was revised and took the form of

Remorse, Coleridge's political ideals had altered and, through his burgeoning theory of

imagination, his interest in aesthetic representation was strengthening. This is shown

through the passages he chose to cut from *Osorio* and the increased concern with vision

in *Remorse*. Both these factors signal a more complex theoretical drive in the later play

as Coleridge's concern with the efficacy and integrity of artistic means of representing

historical truth becomes a significantly more prominent feature. In this sense,

Coleridge's revisions to *Osorio* change the identity of the play from a commentary upon

the politics of eighteenth and nineteenth-century Europe and the tyrannical obsessions

of the antihero, Osorio, to an exploration of the relationship between aesthetic

representation and historical authenticity. As such, familiar Gothic thematic territory of

patriarchal authority and its link with the radical case against an autocratic patriarch

(which reaches its fullest conclusion as the reflection of an arbitrary divine power) is

replaced by a more unsettling Gothic supernatural concerned, at a generic level, with the

retreat of the divine assurance of classical tragedy.[19] The very fact that the title of the

play was altered from the eponymous *Osorio* to *Remorse*, which refers to a key aspect

---

[18] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Letter to Daniel Stuart, 1816, in *Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (see note to Letter to William Lisle Bowles, above)*, IV, pp. 641-2.
[19] In this way, Coleridge can be said to anticipate the second generation Romantics, especially Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*.

of Coleridge's dramatic theory, highlights this change in his thoughts about the play.
Crucially, it is Alvar, not the antihero Ordonio, who emerges as both a figure of
imaginative and political freedom and, more ambivalently, the dramatic embodiment of
the secularisation of tragedy that Walter Benjamin would later identify in the
Trauerspiel.

Finally, the identity of the *Trauerspiel* pervades *Remorse* in dramatic form and
character alike. It has already been argued that Benjamin's defence of the staging of the
Trauerspiel can be applied to the vindication of Coleridge's play as a drama written for
the stage.[20] In much the same way as in the *Trauerspiel*, the source of theatricalism
may not appear in the action of *Remorse*, but arises, instead, 'most certainly in its
theatrical representation', and this emerges not from the cumulative action of the plot
but from more isolated moments in the course of the drama (*OGTD*, p. 51). As
Benjamin argues, 'the quality of *theatre* speaks with particular emphasis in those violent
actions with their eminently visual appeal' (*OGTD*, p. 51; emphasis in original).
Although the violent nature of Coleridge's play is mostly relegated to off-stage
occurrences and encased within contemplations of human subjectivity, the visual appeal
of the play, mostly revolving around the conjuring scene (which actually does depict a
violent act but in static pictorial form), seems to have sealed its favourable reception. In
a contemporary review of the play, Thomas Barnes notes that the theatrical effects of
the play contributed in no small part to it success:

> We never saw more interest excited in a theatre than was expressed in
> the sorcery scene in the third act. The altar flaming in the distance,
> the solemn invocation, the pealing music of the mystic song,
> altogether produced a combination so awful, as nearly to over-power

---

[20] See Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, introd. by George Steiner, trans. by John
Osborne (London: Verso, 1998), p.51; p. 185. Further references to this edition are given in parentheses
in the text using the abbreviation *OGTD*.

> reality, and make one half believe the enchantment which delighted our senses.[21]

Here, the effect of the conjuring scene upon Barnes is a striking example of its 'dramatic truth' and it sees Coleridge producing within his audience members exactly the 'Half-Faith' that his theory of stage illusion proposes (*BL*, II, p. 6, (*LL*, I, p. 134). By considering the drama as an art-form that places the verbal alongside the visual and maintains an immediate relationship with its audience, both Coleridge and Benjamin consider what it means for experience to be presented under the aesthetic conditions of drama. Both writers break down the generic expectations of an audience that only knows Greek tragedy. George Steiner notes in the introduction to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* that tragedy is a mythic creation which 'acts out a rite of heroic sacrifice', whereas the *Trauerspiel* is 'not rooted in myth but in history'.[22] The difference here is that the two genres comply with competing temporalities: the tragedy is transcendent and concerned with divine time whereas the *Trauerspiel* is 'earth-bound, corporeal'.[23] As already noted, the distinction made by Benjamin between tragedy and *Trauerspiel* can be applied to a reading of Coleridge's *Remorse*, especially in relation to the brothers, Alvar and Ordonio, and their respective attitudes towards retribution for Ordonio's wrongdoings. Alvar, a kind of revenant himself, views time as a repetitive, historical phenomenon in which 'the past lives o'er again / In its effects, and to the guilty spirit / The ever-frowning Present is its image' (*R*, I.2.267-9). Here, Alvar's conception of time is strikingly similar to Benjamin's view of time in the *Trauerspiel* plays. In *Remorse*, however, the brothers are presented as foils for each other on the

---

[21] Thomas Barnes, 'Review of Samuel Coleridge, *Remorse*', *The Examiner*, 266 (31 January 1813), 73-4, reprinted in *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama,* ed. by Jeffrey N. Cox and Michael Gamer (Peterborough: Broadview Press, 2003), p 392.

[22] George Steiner, 'Introduction' to Walter Benjamin, *On the Origins of German Tragic Drama* (London: Verso, 1998), p.16; p.17.

[23] George Steiner, 'Introduction' to *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 16. Walter Benjamin elaborates upon the issues of temporality and language in two essays that precede *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. See Walter Benjamin, '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy' and 'The Role of Language in *Trauerspiel* and Tragedy' in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), I, pp. 55-58; pp. 59-61.

issue of temporality and genre, as Ordonio operates securely in the realm of tragedy.

He insists that his guilt should be paid for beyond the human world and he dies yearning

for oblivion, wishing that Alvar could 'forget' him (*R*, V.1.265). As he states just

before Alhadra satisfies her quest for vengeance upon him, 'Let the Eternal Justice /

Prepare my punishment in the obscure world' (*R*, V.1.228-9). Ordonio's character is

clearly framed in the structure of classical tragedy. He hires Isidore to kill Alvar but his

more significant crime lies in his own act of murder against Isidore. For this, and, in

spite of Alvar's attempts to make his brother achieve a state of remorse in the final

scene, Ordonio meets a cathartic resolution as he dies exclaiming 'Atonement' (*R*,

V.1.254). His final speech reiterates the sense of relief he feels as he has resisted the

purgatory he finds in his brother's '*curse*' of 'forgiveness' as he openly invites

Alhadra's vengeance for her husband whom he agrees he 'murder'd most foully' (*R*,

V.1.215; 235; emphasis in original). Dying, he declares:

> [Alhadra] hath aveng'd the blood of Isidore!
> I stood in silence like a slave before her
> That I might taste the wormwood and the gall
> And satiate this self-accusing heart
> With bitterer agonies than death can give. (*R*, V.1.260-4)

Through Ordonio, classical tragedy and the visual (especially the notion of the visual as

a form of delusion) are fused and opposed to the notion of the 'imperative voice within'

(*R*, I.1.72) which is associated with Alvar and the atmosphere of melancholy that

surrounds him. It is an atmosphere of melancholy that finds its zenith in the conjuring

scene that Ordonio instinctively feels is 'too melancholy' for his tragic pretentions and

in which Alvar is most directly associated with the *Trauerspiel* (*R*, III.1.1). In this

scene, Alvar employs all of his theatrical power to compel his audience—both within

and outside the play—to follow him to the crucial moment, whereupon his picture is

staged for the characters of the play and the audience alike. The picture stands as the

flash point for Coleridge's exploration of dramatic illusion and, as Sophie Thomas explains, 'as an agent of past action, and within a play [it] is […] extremely complex'.[24] Its complexity derives from the fact that, with this painting, Coleridge transforms the familiar notion of the play-within-a-play, a well-known dramatic device that perpetuates illusion whilst also calling to our attention the insubstantiality of the audience. Thomas proposes that the revelation of the painting may in fact work as a double negative in terms of Coleridge's understanding of the visual in drama as it actually shocks the viewer out of his 'temporary Half Faith'.[25] In the midst of the dramatic spell of the conjuring scene, this gives the viewer an opportunity to understand the truth of the attempt on Alvar's life, or to see Alvar's story 'as it really is' (*LL*, I, p. 134):

> What happens, then, when a painting becomes part of stage presentation, when pictures, as pictures, become part of the fabric of dramatic illusion? Is the picture of the assassination attempt only a painting, or does it provide the means to 'see something as it really is'? Arguably, the insertion of the painting disrupts illusion by foregrounding, among other things the act of seeing, as well as of creating, illusion.[26]

Thomas's view of the painting is based upon Coleridge's well-known comparison between a picture and a stage presentation in his 1811-12 *Lectures on Literature*, and she draws key comparisons between Coleridge's play and Schiller's *The Robbers*, which affected Coleridge profoundly. As a result, she locates her study in the 'rhetoric of vision [and] the veiled and the illusory nature of the very truths [both plays] are driven by'.[27] However, she also suggests that the painting is a means of enabling the accurate representation of past actions, as it is used by Alvar to break through Ordonio's constructed and delusory image of the past. Certainly, the painting replaces the locket

---

[24] Sophie Thomas, 'Seeing Things ("As They Are"): Coleridge, Schiller and the Play of Semblance', *Studies in Romanticism*, 43 (2004), 537-557 (p. 539).
[25] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature,* ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), v (1987), I, p. 134. Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses, using the abbreviation *LL*.
[26] Thomas, p. 539.
[27] Thomas, p. 541.

as the source of truth and sees both main characters vying for the supremacy of their version of the truth. Alvar uses the painting in the conjuring scene not only as a means of conveying truth but, more specifically, as a means of conveying the experience of truth. Effectively, the painting acts within Coleridge's play as a Benjaminian form of truth, which, in the moment of its revelation, simultaneously marks destruction. As Benjamin asserts in *The Origin of Tragic Drama*, the 'truth content' of a work is brought about by 'the destruction of the work in which the external form achieves its most brilliant degree of illumination' (*OGTD*, p. 31). The painting is the vehicle through which Alvar overcomes the delusion of the visual and momentarily brings poetic illusion, or the ideal, into the real. As the truthful representation of Alvar's story, the painting is an object that Alvar can destroy. As an object, the painting arrests the infinite trajectory of illusion upon illusion or, as it may be termed, the Romantic notion of infinite reflection. Instead, it confronts the audience with a form of representation that attains a Benjaminian effect precisely due to the fact that it has become an object. In fact, the image of the object aflame that Benjamin employs in both *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and 'The Storyteller' to convey how truth is best revealed is played out on Coleridge's stage through his stage directions:

> *(The incense on the alter takes fire suddenly, and an illuminated*
> *picture of Alvar's assassination is discovered, and having remained a*
> *few seconds is then hidden by ascending flames)* (*R*, III.1.134)

This vision on stage of Alvar's revelation of the assassination offers a dramatic representation of the storyteller figure, described by Benjamin much later, who 'is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed by the gentle flame of his story'.[28] By claiming for Alvar the ability to represent the experience of his story truthfully, Coleridge again makes links between this character and the Ancient Mariner, as both

---

[28] Walter Benjamin, 'The Storyteller' in *Illuminations*, ed. and introd. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 83-108 (p. 107).

can be seen as agents through which the past speaks with its full force. The Mariner

and Alvar use forms of representation (the oral story and the picture as object,

respectively) that cannot be broken down and, in their completeness, they resist

reflection in or translation into other forms. Alvar himself is well aware of this fact and

relates it to his own faith in the redemptive possibility of remorse, in which time is

understood, to draw upon Benjamin's vocabulary, as messianic rather than linear:

> Time as he courses onward, still unrolls
> The volume of concealment. In the FUTURE
> As in the optician's glassy cylinder,
> The indistinguishable blots and colours
> Of the dim PAST collect and shape themselves,
> Upstarting in their own completed image
> To scare or to reward. (*R*, II.2.8-15)

This view of both *Remorse* and its main character represents a departure from the

consensus of opinion that the later version of the play came to the stage as an altogether

less radical and theoretically compromised work. However, in spite of the fact that

Coleridge certainly did remove key sections of the play that voiced his own early radical

politics, I aim to show in the following section that the radical nature of Alvar's

character was not reduced but instead became linked not with politics but with the

literary. In order to do this, it is first necessary to turn back to the play's earlier

incarnation (*Osorio*) in which the Alvar character is named Albert.

4.3 Albert /Alvar

Following George Erving's suggestion that the revisions to *Osorio* affect the political

identities of each play 'to a greater degree than has been recognized', it seems

appropriate to position Albert/Alvar's dramatic function within the context of

Coleridge's political and theological radicalism.[29] As has already been noted, Albert

---

[29] Erving, p. 404.

represents religious heterodoxy as his ambiguous and non-conformist identity shows: he is a wronged brother, sympathiser to the 'Belgic states', a 'lover' who 'school'd [Maria] in some newer nonsense' and a 'Wizard' in Moorish robes who can 'bring the dead to life again'.[30] He is also the character who incites two passages that question, and provide alternatives to, the moral codes governed by the established Church. The first of these passages, 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', brings together Albert's various personae in a suggestive tale, the meaning of which somehow remains infuriatingly elusive to both Maria and the audience. Firstly, it is Albert as the sorcerer—in the words of the Foster-Mother, 'who'er he be'—who tells Maria to go to their Foster-Mother (*Os*, IV.2.6). The Foster-Mother then confirms the ancestral links between Albert (the wronged brother) and Maria, his lover, who share this 'common Foster-Mother' (*Os*, IV.2.5). Finally, the tale provides an imaginative connection between its protagonist and the mysterious sorcerer himself through his links with 'the late Lord Velez', his affinity with nature, his time in a dungeon and his journey to 'golden lands' and the 'new World' (*Os*, IV.2.50; 75; 78). In this sense, the tale allows the audience to perceive the sorcerer and Albert as one and the same. As Erving states, 'in addition to its structural function, the passage associates Albert with the tale's nature-boy protagonist and thus reinforces Albert's heterodox religious identity as a votary of nature and as the victim of political and religious persecution'.[31] Consequently, 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' brings out the non-conformist views suggested by the play through the persecution of the nature-boy at the hands of the Anglican Church, and, in its links with the characters of the main plot, it becomes a more directly radical (and therefore unacceptable) feature of the play. 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', however, affects Albert in more than just a political sense as, if he is indeed the nature-boy of the

---

[30] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Osorio*, in *Poetical Works: Plays*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 61-148 (II.1.30; 133; 140). Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses in the text, using the abbreviation *Os*.
[31] Erving, p. 404.

tale, his identity becomes inextricably linked with Coleridge's literary radicalism through the *Lyrical Ballads*. As I have discussed in relation to *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, Coleridge unearthed, in his Mariner, an almost forgotten manner of communication that allowed for the past to appear disconcertingly present. Both *The Rime* and 'The Tale' are concerned with the return of a repressed past and revolve around themes of human guilt and redemption and crucially they both appear in the *Lyrical Ballads* as poems concerning the listener's ability to interpret the real. Coleridge's statement upon the purpose of his poems in this collection reinforces this interplay between the supernatural, the human and the ability to interpret:

> The incidents and agents were to be, in part, at least, supernatural; and the excellence aimed at was to consist in the interesting of the affections by the dramatic truth of such emotions, as would naturally accompany such situations, supposing them real. And real in *this* sense they have been to every human being, who from whatever source of delusion, has at any time believed himself under supernatural agency.[32]

The identity of Albert, however, is never fixed for the audience and Coleridge does not resolve the truth of the sorcerer's identity as clearly as is often assumed. The ambiguity of Albert/Alvar's identity and the sorcerer's identity is an issue that runs across both plays. Therefore Coleridge's presentation of the moral superiority of spiritualized nature above the established Church becomes somewhat more ambiguous in both plays as it is not confirmed whether the character on stage is unquestionably the original figure of Albert/Alvar or is another in the shape of the original. In *Osorio*, we assume that Maria has drawn a similar instinctive response to the Foster-Mother's tale as the audience because she follows the Wizard into the dungeon to find out what he 'knows't of Albert' (*Os*, V.2.125) and in *Remorse* Teresa resolves to 'bend [her] course' to Alvar,

---

[32] Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, p. 6 (emphasis in original). Further references to this edition will be given in parentheses, using the abbreviation *BL*.

finally arriving at the dungeon where he is held prisoner (*R*, III.2.53). Nevertheless, her character is given no lines that would confirm this assumption. Furthermore, it is interesting that in her final recognition of Albert/Alvar in the dungeon, she only goes so far as to declare that she 'will call [the sorcerer] Albert/Alvar'; he is now the sorcerer with her lover's name (*Os*, V.2.128 / *R*, V.1.88). This refusal to allow the sorcerer's identity to merge fully with that of Albert/Alvar has the double effect of maintaining the sorcerer's status as an outcast and signalling that the true Albert/Alvar has not returned. This has two key implications for Coleridge's radicalism and his theory of illusion. Firstly, it uncovers Coleridge's doubts about the acceptability of heterodox religion and at least acknowledges the fact that these non-conformist beliefs will remain on the margins of established religion in England. However, it also signals Coleridge's doubts about his own aesthetic theory in terms of illusion. As Maria/Teresa is the character who represents Coleridge's formulation of poetic faith as the ideal form of representation, her inability to fully accept Albert/Alvar as her lost lover highlights the limitations of this use of imagination in (dramatic) representation as it resists completion or it cannot be assimilated fully with material reality. Maria/Teresa's status in the play is somewhat a reversal of Sara's status in 'The Eolian Harp', as she stands as the figure who invites the sentiments of the 'one life' passage in the poem into the dramatic discourse of the play. Nonetheless, Maria/Teresa's association with poetic faith and the 'One life' perception it may achieve maintains important differences to those of the poet-narrator in 'The Eolian Harp'. Firstly, the influence of this discourse upon the play is made more benign than it is in the poem as it is given to a secondary character who, as a woman, represents love and ideal marriage rather than intellectual creativity.[33] Secondly, the ambiguous blending of sound and vision in 'The Eolian

---

[33] Whilst both Teresa and Sara represent marriage as the social valorisation of the bond of love, they do so in significantly different ways. Sara is conceived more prosaically as a figure of down-to-earth domesticity and a pious conformist to established religion. However, Teresa is associated more freely

Harp' is rejected in the representation of Maria/Teresa who is clearly aligned with the ability to hear and a suspicion of the visual. This makes Maria/Teresa into a form of Coleridge's ideal audience as she can reject the images of delusion that usurp reality in order to construct imaginatively a truthful and ideal reality through a poetic meditation upon the dialogue of herself and others. In Burwick's terms, Maria/Teresa is the manifestation of Coleridge's distinction between 'the language of nature and the language of symbols. The former refers to objects, the latter appropriates the former but shifts the reference to feelings or ideas'.[34] Maria/Teresa's reluctance to accept the image of the sorcerer as her beloved Albert/Alvar sees Coleridge bringing his theory of dramatic illusion to its final uncertain conclusion as he presents Maria/Teresa's complete resistance to delusion as a potential force of delusion, or at least error, itself as she fails to accept the reappearance of the lost brother. Although she represents Coleridge's theoretical solution to the problem of the theatre's dangerous usurpation of reality, she also represents Coleridge's enduring reservations regarding the contradiction inherent in a singularly poetic imagination as Albert/Alvar's ideal and real personas are never fully reconciled by her. This doubling of Albert/Alvar conceives him as a representative of Coleridge's dramatic imagination, which is not concerned with the reconciliation of the ideal (the divine) and the real (the human), as in the poetic imagination, but positions the creative source of the dramatic in the fallen state of humanity. It is this understanding of Albert/Alvar as a representative of the unbridgeable severance of mankind from the divine and its ensuing impact upon aesthetic representation that connects *Remorse* so convincingly with the *Trauerspiel* genre.

---

with the notion of ideal love, which maintains a figurative position above Sara's mundane and unimaginative adherence to her church.

[34] Frederick Burwick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Penn State University Press, 1991), p. 218.

As a rather uncanny figure himself, Alvar's language in the play at times reflects the spectral repetition of time, in which 'the narrow frame of midnight, an opening in the passage of time, [allows] the same ghostly image [to] constantly reappear' (*OGTD*, p. 135). The most obvious example of this occurs in his confrontation with Ordonio during the conjuring scene, in which, disguised as the mystic, he asks his brother:

> What if his [Alvar's] spirit
> Re-entered its cold corse, and came upon thee
> With many a stab from a murderer's poniard? (*R*, III.1.87-90)

In this rhetorical question, Alvar does not simply repeat the spirit of the *Trauerspiel* through a baroque dwelling on violence and the physical horror of the body. Alvar's words here reflect precisely the generic convention of the *Trauerspiel*, which is governed by 'the world of spirits' (*OGTD*, p. 134). This world of spirits, in both Benjamin's theory and Alvar's rhetoric, does not comply with a classical model of tragedy as it figures death as transcendence. To explain this, Benjamin cites the words of the German *Trauerspiel* playwright, Gryphius, who declares that he does not 'bring forth a God from the machine, like the ancients, but rather, a spirit from the grave', and it is precisely this that Alvar is asked to do by his brother (*OGTD*, note to p. 134).[35] In a sense, Alvar acts as the figure in *Remorse* who embodies Coleridge's dramatic imagination, which may be considered to reach its fullest conclusion in the discourse of the *Trauerspiel*, and it is Alvar who highlights the play's repetitive framework and rather anti-classical temporality. As Beatrice Hanssen succinctly declares:

> Ruled by spectral time, the time of phantoms, the mourning play did
> not display the temporality of discrete, singular decisions typical of
> tragedy. Instead, it fell privy to a temporality of repetition, whose

---

[35] The fulfilment of this request makes up the content of the conjuring scene. As the creative force in the play, or at least the scene, Alvar takes on the role described by Gryphius and cited by Benjamin as he agrees to 'bring the dead to life again' (*R* II.1.163; II.2.70). Although this is actually contrary to what Alvar actually does, which is to 'call up past deeds, and make them live / On the blank canvass' (*R*, II.2.43-44).

operations announced themselves in the play's seemingly ornamental repetition of scenes.[36]

Although *Remorse* does not present a repetition of scenes, it does find its climax in the heavily ostentatious conjuring scene, which itself includes *Trauerspiel* elements of procession, music, repetition and objects.

Alvar's repeated questioning of Ordonio in the conjuring scene mirrors the structure of the *Trauerspiel* and, in doing so, illuminates a flood of generic features which lie dormant, waiting to be activated in the rest of the play. Alvar's simple dwelling on the potential outcomes of Ordonio's situation in the form of 'what if?' is both dramatically powerful and temporally significant (*R*, III.1.87). In the same way that Benjamin highlights the fact that in the hour of midnight 'time stands still like the tongues of a scale', Alvar pulls back the progression of the speech by the rhythmical repetition of his questions (*OGTD*, p. 135). Furthermore, the content of his questions refers each time to a somewhat macabre representation of his potential status as a revenant, his ghostly form and his ghastly appearance. It is as if Alvar builds up an image of the spiritual world of the *Trauerspiel* that stands in 'an opening in the passage of time, in which the same ghostly image constantly reappears' (*OGTD*, p. 135). To both Ordonio and Valdez, this is incomprehensible and horrifying, as they deal only with a formula of tragedy. Valdez, appalled by Alvar's suggestions, reacts to the earthbound imagery associated with the physical return of the spirit by framing Ordonio as a tragic hero. He declares that the 'unholy fancies' described by Alvar are incorrect and that Ordonio stands alone as his only son and 'Don Alvar's only brother […who is] most virtuous' (*R*, III.1.94; 99; 101). In this sense, Valdez presents Ordonio as the tragic hero who is justified by 'a father's blessing' but, for the audience who know Alvar's story, this

---

[36] Beatrice Hanssen, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels* (Berkeley: University of California Press, c1998), p.64.

conception of classical temporality is now powerfully discredited by the very fact that Alvar the sorcerer lays claim to the hero's virtue and Ordonio is confirmed as a villain (*R*, III.1.100).

The conjuring scene, as it is presented by Alvar, corresponds with Benjamin's characteristically aphoristic comment (which also reverses established wisdom) at the end of the first section of 'Trauerspiel and Tragedy' in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. Drawing on an often-used emblem in his work—the procession—Benjamin declares that 'Ancient tragedy is the fettered slave on the triumphal car of the baroque *Trauerspiel*' (*OGTD*, p. 100). The elaborate atmosphere of the conjuring scene, which is set in 'A Hall of Armory, with an Altar at the back of the stage [and] Soft Music from an Instrument of Glass or Steel' provides a baroque setting for just this juxtaposition of the temporalities of tragedy and *Trauerspiel* (*R*, stage direction to III.1). Furthermore, Alvar's confrontation with Ordonio highlights how the two versions of time are presented in Coleridge's drama. Ordonio's attitude towards the scene pertains purely to tragedy. When it becomes apparent that Alvar's spirit will not 'Pass visible before [the party's] mortal sense' (*R*, III.1.64), Ordonio immediately frames this absence in a system of transcendence. He claims his 'brother is in heaven' and his language serves to idealise Alvar whose 'sainted spirit' he asks to 'burst on [his] sight' (*R*, III.1.83-4) again. This dichotomy between the two brothers, based in the opposition between Romantic and classical tragic temporalities, is just one of a number of dualistic relationships that Coleridge establishes around the character of Alvar. In the final section, I return to the issue of the tragic genre through a comparison between Alvar and Alhadra. However, in the following section, I will discuss the relationship between Alvar and Teresa as representative of Coleridge's articulation of the divide within the (Romantic) imagination between a dramatic imagination and a poetic imagination.

4.4 Teresa: The Heroine of Poetic Faith

As mentioned earlier in this chapter, the removal of the more contemplative passages of *Osorio* to create *Remorse* suggests Coleridge's compliance with the sensational trappings of the Georgian theatre. However, if this is so, Coleridge's emphasis upon Teresa's role, especially in reading his most theatrical scene—the conjuring scene—becomes an important counterpart to the suggestion that *Remorse* surrenders to Gothic conventions and visual trickery. Teresa is an important figure in *Remorse*, not least because her role extends beyond her presentation as the pure and powerless victim of male patriarchy in Gothic fiction, an identity that is much more apparent in the Maria of *Osorio*. To explain, Maria, though resistant to the patriarchal line of Velez and his son, Osorio, lives under constant pressure to marry him in spite of her love for Alvar; a point which is highlighted in the opening scene of the play as, under the emotional weight of Velez's persistent appeals, she conceives herself as under the oppression of Osorio:

> Press me no more—I have no power to love him!
> His proud forbidding eye, and his dark brow
> Chill me like dew-damps of the unwholesome night.
> My Love, like a timorous and tender flower,
> Closes beneath his touch. (*Os*, I.1.79-83)

However, in *Remorse*, this representation of male tyranny, a conventional Gothic motif, is demoted to Act II in favour of the presentation of the returning Alvar. The Gothic picture of the opening scene is perhaps unfamiliar to an audience well-practised in traditional Gothic conventions. Alvar's opening exudes darker overtones of a Gothic supernatural which, although they may not be immediately apparent, are certainly built up over the course of the play and can be said finally to become present to the audience with a revenant, reborn from the sea, intent on making amends for past deeds. Although Reeve Parker opines that this earthly supernatural quality is reduced in *Remorse*, the

ambivalence surrounding the (attempted) murder of Alvar is preserved in the revised play and we can again perceive that the figure of Albert/Alvar who returns at the start of the play onto the coast of Granada may be 'a body inhabited by the "spirit" of [the] assassinated man: a wandering shade'.[37] The suggested link between Alvar and the Ancient Mariner is a compelling insight into the redemptive potential Coleridge discerns within these melancholic, archaic and dramatic figures. Both undergo profound psychological and bodily suffering at sea and return, unrecognisable, to their former communities. Recounting his experience to Teresa, Alvar echoes the Mariner's declaration that he 'thought [he] had died' (*AM*, l. 307) as he states that he remained on the rock the assassins left him on 'as though the hour of death were pass'd' (*R*, I.2.291). This tale has a similar effect upon Teresa as the Mariner's tale has upon the Wedding Guest as it 'perplex'd [her] / With obscure memory of something past / Which still escaped [her] efforts' to fully comprehend it (*R*, I.2.318-20). Consequently, it is implied that Alvar has the same 'strange power of speech' as the Mariner and, further, Teresa may be seen as the guardian of correct interpretation as the 'one of three' who 'cannot chuse but hear' the truth of Alvar's tale (*AM*, l. 587; l. 2; l. 18).

Furthermore, the wrongs of the past are placed within an ancestral framework whereupon Alvar returns with 'filial awe' in order to secure the remorse of his brother (*R*, I.1.9). Consequently, *Remorse* undergoes a generic transformation as the popular Gothic opening of *Osorio* is replaced with a Gothic sense of the returning past which emphasises the dramatic discourse and emotional weight of remorse; or as Coleridge terms it, 'the guilt of ages past' (*LL*, I, p. 64). As such, the play maintains much stronger links with the concept of dramatic illusion that ghosts Coleridge's early lectures and emerges, at times, in his poetic work as an aesthetics of fallen

---

[37] Reeve Parker, '*Osorio*'s Dark Employments: Tricking Out Coleridgean Tragedy', *Studies in Romanticism*, 33 (1994) pp. 119-160 (p. 137).

representation which finds resonance in the secularisation of the dramatic proposed in Walter Benjamin's revival of the mourning plays. The demotion of Teresa's struggle with Valdez is important as it, first and foremost, confirms that Coleridge did not aim to employ the popular format of Gothic sensationalism in *Remorse*, but, rather, hoped to alter it from within. Inasmuch as Alvar heralds the entrance of a new form of Gothic supernatural that is concerned with his ability to record the events of the past truthfully, Teresa represents a different way of envisioning the ideal femininity of the Gothic heroine.[38] No longer located in her identity as a woman, Teresa's ideal form is now located in her interpretative abilities and her association with the absolute aesthetics of poetic faith. Here, her role as the ideal reader is confirmed as it is she who must navigate her way through Osorio's attempts to 'wind up her fancy' and identify Alvar precisely (*R*, II.1.41).

To consider this in more detail, it is necessary to analyse Teresa's role in the context of Coleridge's concern with the visual culture of the theatre. Teresa is Coleridge's ideal reader in that she eschews the deceitful images that the visual culture of Georgian theatre both thirsted for and was deluded by, most notably in her choice to turn away from the 'mockery' of the conjuring scene (*R*, III.1.20). This revolves around the thematic struggle between vision and voice inherent in the relationship between Teresa and Valdez. Coleridge allows this battle to be played out between Teresa and Valdez on

---

[38] Erving's discussion of Coleridge's subversion of the literary strategy of the 'explained supernatural' seen in the popular novels of writers such as Anne Radcliffe offers a thorough account of Coleridge's transformation of the Gothic genre for the purposes of his own literary enterprises. See Erving, pp. 399-402. Teresa may be compared to Ophelia in *Hamlet* as she is the focus of the familial power struggle through the male line in the house of Velez. She differs from Ophelia, however, in the fact that she is not prepared to obey unreservedly her father's wishes and she is asked to go further than Ophelia by remaining faithful to her lover who is widely accepted to have died. Although Alvar questions her constancy in a similar though less excessive manner to that of Hamlet's questioning of Ophelia, she is afforded the opportunity in the play to prove her fidelity. Consequently, Teresa is given more agency and independence than Ophelia, a point which is drawn to our attention by Coleridge's replacement of Hamlet's 'get thee to a nunnery' speech with Velez's ineffective demand that Teresa marry Ordonio 'or to a convent'. The innocent victim of Hamlet's tragic downfall is replaced with a woman of agency and personal independence who has a (limited) involvement with the outcome of the play.

the grounds of the proof, or truth, of Alvar's fate at the hands of the assassins. It becomes defined most directly after the conjuring scene as, in a structural repetition of the first act, Valdez, again victim to Ordonio's deceit, reports what he thinks has been an act of witness to his son Alvar's death. This time, Valdez believes he has seen the proof himself through the picture of the assassination—in the first act, Ordonio simply tells Valdez that Alvar has been 'captured in sight of land' (*R*, I.2.67)—but Coleridge's employment of dramatic irony emphasises this man's deluded state by making him, in his opening sentence, confess to a 'father's blindness' (*R*, III.2.9). The irony continues through Teresa's insistence that the 'voice […] / Which whispers to [her] soul […] / Speaks yet the truth' (*R*, III.2.28-31) and Teresa's association with poetic faith is confirmed in Valdez's rather condescending judgement of her conviction:

> My child, we must not give religious faith
> To every voice which makes the heart a listener
> To its own wish. (*R*, III.2.34-6)

The implication in the exchange between Valdez and Teresa (in which Valdez's comments are laid open to rejection through Coleridge's framing of them in dramatic irony) is that Teresa's interpretative strategy, based within the religiously validated poetic faith, provides her with an unquestionably certain path to 'the Truth' (*R*, III.2.31). However, looking back at the progression of Coleridge's theory towards his notion of poetic faith, the certainty of this form of imaginative (re)creation of the truth is not as simple as may first appear. Recalling Coleridge's final, much revised, version of 'The Eolian Harp', the restfulness of the poet-narrator's final achievement of a 'faith that inly feels' comes only when his own poetic faith is connected with his lover's much more prosaic—or historic—ability to will him out of the illusions he creates for

himself.[39] In the same way, in both *Biographia Literaria* and Lecture Nine of the 1811-

12 series, Coleridge compares poetic faith (the ability, ahead of time, to conjure an ideal

'truth' from the imagination) to 'historic faith' (presumably, the ability to understand

the past in a truthful manner) but he is careful not to oppose the two (*LL*, I, p. 363).

Rather, poetic faith 'transcends even historic belief' (*BL*, II, p. 134) and is 'much

stronger than historic faith' (*LL*, I, p. 363) but it does not defeat or replace it. Indeed,

the implication of the comparison is that poetic faith and historic faith are two sides of

the same coin. This connection between the poetic and the historical is a crucial point

to remember in the case of Teresa as her status as a purely ideal character in a

predominantly historical form limits her impact (and therefore the impact of Coleridge's

most prized form of representation) within the play. On her own, her status in *Remorse*

is barely more important than Maria's conventional Gothic identity in *Osorio* as she is

at worst overlooked and at best questioned by other characters.

Nevertheless, the force of Teresa's role becomes strengthened by the fact that she is

twinned with Alvar, who is the representative of dramatic illusion. As a result, Alvar

and Teresa can be seen as the guardians of truthful representation: the poetic and

imaginative powers of Teresa are combined with the historic and dramatic powers of

Alvar in order to envision a 'completed image' of their experience (*R*, II.2.14). The

fusion of the dramatic imagination and the poetic imagination in these two characters

who were 'born in one day, like twins of the same parent' (*R*, I.2.99) is a clear reminder

that Coleridge's concept of poetic faith can be traced to its roots in the 'temporary Half-

Faith' of his dramatic theory (*LL*, I, p. 134). Albert/Alvar is the character through

which Coleridge considers visual illusion as a way of representing or re-visioning past

action to an audience who will sit in judgement of his brother and he is the character in

---

[39] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'The Eolian Harp', in *Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text),* ed. by J.C.C. Mays, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge: The Collected Works*, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001), XVI, p. 233 (line 60).

the play charged with the task of making others see events as they are, or to 'see the thing as it really is' (*LL*, I, p. 134). In this sense, Albert/Alvar's relationship with illusion is split: he needs to revive past actions in order to repair the corrupted images of the present (such as the shocking assassination painting and Maria/Teresa's locket, fallen into the wrong hands) but in dealing with these unstable images, he also needs to listen to his moral 'imperative voice within' (*R*, I.1.72). Therefore, Albert's stories emanate from his memory. His creative retelling of these stories is grounded in an original historical occurrence and they are used alongside images of guilt; they are, in short, the example of the dramatic imagination which is grounded in the remorseful state of human guilt. Zulimez points out that Alvar's almost magical talents as a painter can 'call up past deeds, and make them live / On the blank canvass' (*R*, II.2.43-4). In this way, Alvar's powers as an artist who can revive the past are bound to his role as the sorcerer who 'will uncover all concealed guilt' and are combined in his sole aim to 'rouse within' Ordonio 'REMORSE! That [he] can save [Ordonio] from himself' (*R*, III.1.33; I.1.18-19). As Sophie Thomas argues:

> The 'magic mirror' that Alvar wishes to hold up […] links Ordonio's particular lack of remorse to a general historical condition, in which aesthetic completion is a metaphor for human redemption'.[40]

However, Maria/Teresa's role in the theme of vision comes through her imaginatively constructed narratives. This becomes apparent when we compare Maria's opening speech to Albert's initial conversation with Maria as he returns to Granada in *Osorio.* Maria's first long speech is concerned with how she may navigate the truth of Albert's apparent disappearance and remain faithful to him in spite of the news that he may be dead. This debate between Maria and Velez establishes Coleridge's opposition between illusion and delusion throughout the play (where the trope of dreaming is often

---

[40] Thomas, p. 547.

exploited), an opposition which rests upon the extent to which the character (and, by extension, the audience) is in control of the illusion before it. As Burwick states, 'the power of illusion secured by volitional control of the imagination is a major concern of Coleridge's tragedy'.[41] Maria is keen to point out that, no matter how fantastical her 'sweet visions' may be, she is the one who 'shape[s]' and 'frame[s]' them and she is therefore in full control of them (*Os*, I.1.24; 28). Consequently, she is able to sustain her fidelity to Albert and the hope of his return, which enables her to avoid a tragic outcome to their love story. As she states, it would be 'horrible' if, 'in a most assur'd reality / [Albert] should return, and see a brother's infant / smile at him from [her] arms' (*Os*, I.1.51; 47-9). Furthermore, she uses these daydreams (or, in Coleridge's terms, these waking dreams) to defeat the delusions that have been fed to Velez and by which he has been deceived. Velez's deluded state is revealed by his willingness to believe an image that has been fed to him, over which he has no control as his subconscious, or sleeping dream, impresses upon him disturbing images of 'swarthy faces' and the capture of Albert (*Os*, I.1.65). The dream itself is an example of a delusion as it is given to, not conjured by, Velez, and even more so as it is a falsehood created by the antihero, Osorio. Consequently, Maria stands as the figure able to negotiate the territory of illusion and delusion within the play. It is she who offers the audience an example of how to use correctly Coleridge's two dramatic theories, the willing suspension of disbelief and poetic faith, without falling into the trap of believing that, 'the picture [is] the Reality' (*LL*, I, p. 134). Maria succumbs only to her own visions of the truth and therefore remains in full control of any image she perceives (in fact she actively rejects all of the play's pictorial representations). It is her rejection of the visual and her faith in the voice as a way of determining the truth of the past that set her

---

[41] Burwick, p. 269.

apart from the other characters in the play.[42] As a result, she becomes the figure

through which Coleridge expresses the most advanced point of his theory of drama (as

it crosses into his poetic theory), as she is able to understand the power of language to

activate the listener's imagination.

However, Maria/Teresa also displays limitations, and Coleridge resolves these through

the double bond of an imagined family connection and her romantic love with

Albert/Alvar. To Maria/Teresa, the visual is something to be viewed with suspicion and

distrust as it turns imagination into reality and confronts the eye with 'some trick' that is

so compelling that the spectator will be deluded into 'giv[ing] substance to the shadow'

(*Os*, III.1.112; 114). This notion is carried further in *Remorse* as Teresa is not prepared

to take part in the 'lawless mysteries' of the incantation scene and she leaves the scene

before the assassination picture is revealed (*R*, III.1.116). Unlike Albert/Alvar,

Maria/Teresa does not carry the burden of reprisal on her shoulders and she is at liberty

to create tales which are conjured from her imagination; consequently she becomes

linked with Coleridge's concept of poetic faith.[43] In short, Albert/Alvar uses illusion to

recreate the past: his dealings are with memory and recreating the true picture of the

past which, though contested, has existed and is known. Maria/Teresa, on the other

hand, refuses to deal in images. For her, truth comes only from a form of creative

illusion that is free from any restrictions based on what has been known and she

distrusts any visual replication of this past. For her, the only form of illusion that is

trustworthy is a highly personal form of imaginative narrative, such as the Foster-

---

[42] In his deluded state, Velez claims that Maria 'aptly[...] forgett'st a tale / [She] ne'er did wish to learn!' (*Os*, I.1.70-1), but, as we learn, she is right to do this as it is a tale of deception. Coleridge builds upon the theme of image versus narrative by linking Maria (and Albert) with the idea of the voice where sound plays as much of a role as the narrative. In this sense, Coleridge appears to be opposing vision and sound within the play where the different modes of image, action and report are secondary to these fundamentally philosophical concepts.

[43] Coleridge outlines poetic faith in Lecture 9 of his 1811-12 *Lectures on Shakespeare* which sees him departing from his notion of dramatic half-Faith and fully embracing A. W. Schelegel's dramatic theory. Perhaps Coleridge's most famous use of the term, 'poetic faith' is in *Biographia Literaria*, 'that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith', (*BL*, II, 6).

Mother's 'sweet tale', which creates an idealised future and targets the heart of what is true even if it bypasses what is real (*Os*, IV.2.70). This inability of Teresa to comprehend fully the visual aspects of the play (as she deals only in those images that are evident in the reader or listener's mind as a product of poetry) has significant implications for the scope of Coleridge's dramatic theory. Teresa is cast as the ideal; she is the character who represents his idea of poetic faith in its purest form. However, her character, and by extension, the notion of poetic faith as it works in the drama of *Remorse*, is never fully assimilated into the resolution of the play. Even in the resolution of the play, the audience is reminded that she is an outsider as she requests the other characters to include her in the reunion of Valdez and his son, Alvar. When Valdez finally recognises Alvar exclaiming, 'My son! My Alvar! bless, Oh bless him, heaven!', Teresa asks rather feebly, 'me too, my father?' (*R*, V.1.278; 269). Almost forgotten in this final scene, Teresa's poetic faith appears to be overruled by the dramatic action of a plot that is finally resolved in Alhadra's act of vengeance. Indeed, Coleridge's choice of resolution for the play brings together the parallel theories of vision and (tragic) genre upon which the characterisation of Teresa, Alvar, Valdez and Ordonio in the main plot have been developed. In the final section of this chapter, I will turn to the characters of the sub-plot in order to highlight the way in which Coleridge delivers his final statement on these themes as the characters of the main plot and those of the sub-plot are finally reunited in the closing scene of the play.

4.5   The Competing Narratives of Remorse and Revenge

The sub-plot of *Remorse* is free from the complexities of Coleridge's concern with aesthetic illusion and is clearly aligned with a personal and cultural struggle for justice. Alhadra, the driving force of this sub-plot, is a clear foil to Alvar's drive for remorse in

the main plot, as upon hearing the story of the attempt on his life she asks, 'Dreamt you of no revenge?' (*R*, I.2.306). In addition, she displays no interest in the imaginative activity of Teresa and Alvar, claiming that 'there is no room in [her] heart for puling love tales' (*R*, I.2.313). Therefore, Alhadra is a central figure in the play not simply because she can be identified as the character who represents those suffering under political and religious oppression but also because she holds revolutionary faith in, and is the bearer of, revenge in a plot that is driven by another character's aspirations for remorse. Whilst her stage presence is reduced in *Remorse*, her influence overall is significantly increased by Coleridge's augmentation of the bond between herself and Alvar. As has already been pointed out, 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' assumes a status in Coleridge's aesthetic theory beyond that of articulating the play's moral concern with the correct use of power and reform as he isolates the extract from *Osorio* and alters its formal identity by placing it in *Lyrical Ballads*. Indeed, Reeve Parker's description of the tale's 'ghostly genealogy' as the basis of many of the archaic echoes (presented in the drama as generational prolepsis) that haunt the plot of *Osorio* brings to light the same kind of temporal dissolution discussed with reference to the Ancient Mariner's identity in Chapter Three.[44] The fact that Coleridge identified 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' as an extract worthy of taking its place in the same volume as *The Rime* highlights the fact that Coleridge identified the figuratively haunting qualities of the tale as thematically consistent with, and, in terms of its dramatic origin, an especially apt complementary piece, to aspects of his literary ballad. Arising from these revisions to *Osorio*, therefore, appears to be a considered interaction between classical and Romantic tragic genres and, through the relocation of dramatic extracts into poetry, a connected consideration of the influence of Romantic theory upon poetry and drama respectively. In investigating these revisions, I highlight the fact that Coleridge does

---

[44] Parker, p. 148.

not, as Erving suggests, turn *Osorio* into the 'less religiously heterodox politically radical and altogether less complex drama' of *Remorse*.[45] Rather, whilst *Remorse* certainly does shed *Osorio*'s radical elements, perhaps in favour of a more popular and accessible (stage) version, it also refocuses the complexity inherent in both plays away from a questioning of the legitimacy of political hierarchy and towards a consideration of how the ideals of a society may be reflected within dramatic genre.

Much of the focus on the revision of this play centres upon the deletions of extracts from *Osorio*, but of equal importance are the lines in *Remorse* that are added, and especially the effect of these additions upon the ending of the play. Coleridge noted that the play struggled under the weight of the fact that it '*presupposes* a long story; and this long story, which yet is necessary to the complete understanding of the play, is not half told'.[46] Clearly, the central figure of this long story is Albert/Alvar, whose past is delivered to the audience through descriptions, some 'obscure' and others more defined, of his former life as a Maria's lover, Osorio's wronged brother and a political activist.[47] In these stories, his motivation for the pursuit of his brother's remorse is clear, but, crucially, in *Osorio*, this motivation for remorse is confused by his identification with another long story that is reported from even further beyond the boundaries of the play's timeframe in the sketchy identification of himself and the nature-boy protagonist of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale'. As such, Albert takes on overtones of revenge precisely because his personal motivation for remorse is mixed with a sense of cultural oppression associated with the punishment of the religious waywardness and cultural difference of the 'pretty boy' of the tale 'who never learnt a prayer, nor told a Bead' (*Os*, IV.2.30; 32). 'The Foster Mother's Tale', it seems, is Coleridge's first attempt to

---

[45] Erving, pp. 404-5.
[46] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 'Preface' to *Osorio*, in *Poetical Works: Plays* (see note to *Osorio*, above), pp. 149-50; emphasis in original.
[47] Coleridge, 'Preface' to *Osorio*, p. 149.

start to impart the narrative of the long story that precedes the action of his play and, in terms of the play's structure, it is introduced as a pastoral relief from the murderous cavern scene. However, both these aspects of the tale are problematic, not only because its identification of Albert with the boy of the tale serves to proliferate his supernatural status as a returning spectre of past generations, but also because Albert's influence upon the tale inverts its pastoral and absolute quality, rendering it more troublingly Gothic. As Reeve Parker states, 'The Tale's ghostly genealogy is embedded in a Gothic anti-pastoral' that is not contained within the parameters of the tale but encroaches, disturbingly upon its denouement, into the action of the play.[48] In fact, the tale effectively repeats the cavern scene's commanding force as just as Ordonio's story is finally acted out in his murder of Ferdinand so the youth on the boat can be considered to have returned to 'the land of his fathers' to (re)start the play as Albert. Parker explains: 'From just such a rumoured fate aboard a boat, also narrated by a younger brother, Albert returns, disguised at the beginning of the play'.[49] This identification of Alvar with the wronged nature-boy confuses Alvar's desire for a moral revolution based in the notions of remorse and forgiveness by both associating him with an unchanneled wildness and augmenting his personal motivations for vengeance. Reeve-Parker highlights this point through his discussion of the layers of haunting that pervade Albert's character in *Osorio*:

> The inseparability in Albert of motives to virtue and vengeance constitutes much of what Coleridgean drama is all about […] *Osorio's* 'harmony' consists in the repeated effects of such metaphors as 'haunt' […] They tease the reader across the border into ghostly impossibilities that generate the drama of vengeance hovering throughout the play.[50]

---

[48] Parker, p. 148.
[49] Parker, p. 150.
[50] Parker, pp. 143-4.

However, the omission of 'The Foster-Mother's Tale' from *Remorse* disassociates Alvar from the spirit of natural wildness and vengeance that defines the 'poor mad youth' of the tale (*Os*, IV.2.79). Whilst this does play down the radical ambitions belying *Osorio* and deletes a key moment of contemplative storytelling that counters the Gothic intensity of the play (two aspects that often lie at the heart of the critical disappointment in *Remorse*), it has the double effect of strengthening the theoretical distinctiveness of the later play. Here, Coleridge replaces the 'long story' that rests solely upon Alvar with stronger intimations of a preface to the play that lies in the relationship between Alvar and Alhadra.[51] Coleridge maintains a sense of Alvar's spectral identity in *Remorse* through the continued suggestion of the double identity of Alvar and the sorcerer, which comes into clearest view in the conjuring scene and Teresa's attitude towards him at the end of the play, a point which offers a stronger sense of consistency regarding Coleridge's employment of the Gothic than has been acknowledged. However, important to the overarching consideration of remorse and revenge that acts as the driving force of the plot is the disassociation of Alvar with any personal motivation for revenge. To achieve this, Coleridge does not complicate his Gothic play with a pastoral narrative that suffers under the supernatural associations of its protagonist but maintains a formal consistency with his protagonist by suggesting an ancestral link between him and the purveyor of revenge, Alhadra. Drawing on the trope of the dungeon, Coleridge creates a doubling of Alvar and Alhadra through their language that describes their time in confinement. In the shadows of the play's past, it is possible to ascertain that Alvar and Alhadra have met before in the dungeon. This link between the two starts with Alvar's metaphor for his hope in the first act:

> My long captivity
> Left me no choice; the very *Wish* too languish'd
> With the fond *Hope* that nurs'd it; the sick babe
> Droop'd at the bosom of its famish'd mother. (*R*, I.1.34-7; emphasis in original)

---

[51] Coleridge, 'Preface' to *Osorio*, p. 150.

The nursing imagery is then repeated in Alhadra's record of her time spent in the

dungeon, but this time, the reality is that she was 'the famish'd mother' who was

nursing her 'sick babe' (*R*, I.1.36-7):

> I was a Moresco!
> They cast me, then a young and nursing mother,
> Into a dungeon of their prison house[…]
> My infant quarrelling with the coarse hard bread
> Brought daily: for the little wretch was sickly—
> My rage had dried away its natural food. (*R*, I.2.200-3; 210-12)

The interplay between Alvar's metaphor for his own hope and Alhadra's despair at the

thoughts of failing in her maternal duties as the guardian of her child, essentially the

hopeful future of her race, forms a bond between the two characters before the

timeframe of the play. The meeting of the two is not unreservedly confirmed but is

definitely implied through Alhadra's description of the 'one human countenance' she

met in the dungeon:

> when the door,
> Slow opening at the appointed hour, disclosed
> One human countenance, the lamp's red flame
> Cower'd as it entered and at once sunk down. (*R*, I.2.205-8)

The suggestion, here, of a meeting arranged for an 'appointed hour' seems to connect

Alvar's political radicalism to this meeting and Alhadra intimates in a later meeting that

she recognises him:

> If what thou seem'st thou art
> The oppresses brethren of thy blood have need
> Of such a leader. (*R*, II.2.3-5)

The link between the two characters is then brought to its fullest point on stage when

Alvar claims that there has been a pact between the two of them. Alvar, it seems, has

returned to his country to identify his brother's crime against him. However, Ordonio is not simply identified with this crime but also, through his strong links with the Inquisition, can be seen as a figure of cultural oppression. Ordonio's guilt is doubled and, although Alvar cannot bring his brother to justice himself (presumably because he feels he should protect Teresa from any repercussions from his actions), he concludes that Ordonio will have to face the vengeance of Alhadra and her race:

> I sought the guilty,
> And what I sought I found: but ere the spear
> Flew from my hand, there rose an angel from
> Betwixt me and my aim. With baffled purpose
> To the Avenger I leave vengeance, and depart!
> Whate'er betide, if aught my arm may aid,
> Or power protect, my word is pledged to thee! (*R*, II.2.15-21)

By now, it has become clear that Alvar is absolved of any personal link with revenge in this play and that his quest for the remorse of his brother has become inextricably linked with the thirst of Alhadra for vengeance upon the oppressors of her race. Consequently, whilst Alhadra is given a central role within *Osorio*, her independence from the familial genealogy of the characters in the main plot, as implied by 'The Foster-Mother's Tale', renders her role in the play that of an uncomplicated representative of political oppression. She features thematically as the vehicle for personal and cultural revenge and, whilst her attitude towards vengeance wavers at points, her role is more or less straightforward in terms of bringing Osorio, the tyrant, to justice. Alhadra's dramatic status as the vehicle for revenge has important implications as the counterbalance to Albert/Alvar's connections with remorse. Ultimately, Alhadra provides Coleridge with a way of clearly demarcating the line between remorse and revenge as tropes of competing tragic genres in *Remorse*—something which does not happen in *Osorio*—precisely because he links her more strongly with Alvar in the timeframe preceding the action of *Remorse*. However, Coleridge takes this further by including in the play a second turn in the dungeon for Alvar whereby he is again the 'one human face' that

'sustain[s]' a female counterpart; this time, Teresa (*R*, V.1.43). Alvar, here, emerges as the support for both Alhadra's political reality and Teresa's poetic imagination as he rescues both from the inhuman depths of the dungeon. Therefore, the character of Alvar stands directly between Coleridge's active sub-plot and his inactive main plot and the death of his brother finally reveals the connection between the two through his link with Alhadra. Whilst Ordonio's death is ultimately legitimised as an act of vengeance for the only realised crime that takes place in the play's action (the murder of Isidore/Ferdinand), Alhadra's personally motivated act also brings about the play's cathartic resolution. The death of Alvar's dream of remorse arrives not only at the point at which the play's reality finally overpowers its imagined potential through Alhadra's action, but also at the conclusion to *Remorse* itself: the point at which the audience is awakened from the dream of the play. This is significant because, at this point, Alvar's connection with the revenge plot through his pact with Alhadra, and the effects of this, are at their most apparent. As Alvar points out in Act II, he has 'fought' a 'long time against oppression / And for the native liberty of faith / [he has] bled and suffered bonds' (*R*, II.2.6-8). Although Alvar has 'dreamt [...] of no revenge' against Ordonio for the personal suffering he has endured, his quest to, 'rouse within [Ordonio] / REMORSE!' becomes inextricably tied to the political plot attached to Alhadra's Moorish identity precisely because he fights for the oppressed (*R*, I.2.307; I.1.19-9). The inevitable progress of the plot has not only been realised by the end of the play but is also fully acknowledged in Alhadra's parting words. As she stabs Ordonio, she shows a clear understanding of the machine of justice through the atonement in which she is taking part, exclaiming 'The deed be mine! [...] Now take *my* life!' (*R*, V.1.254-5; emphasis in original). Similarly, although Alvar appears throughout the play as the figure who offers the audience an alternative form of social justice to that of reactive

punishment, he too concedes that even Heaven itself operates according to punitive

laws:

> Arm of avenging Heaven!
> Thou hast snatch'd from me my most cheris'd hope –
> But go! My word was pledged to [Alhadra]. (*R*, V.1.256-8)

In a mirror of Alvar's relationship with Teresa, it is apparent that the two characters

work only at their most effective when they are united as one. Just as the union of

Alvar's dramatic imagination and Teresa's poetic faith delivers the most faithful

representation of (past) experience, so Alvar and Alhadra's ambitions for their particular

form of justice are dependent on one another and their individual hopes may only be

reified in their association with the other. As a concluding statement, Alvar's words

upon the death of his brother appear to bring about Coleridge's final judgement on the

dramatic vision of the Romantic era. Coleridge's project of the dramatic representation

of remorse has envisioned his self-appointed hero, Alvar, taking the 'non tragic' vision

of Romanticism to the brink of dramatic realisation.[52] Yet, Coleridge concedes,

perhaps his 'most cherish'd hope' (*R,* V.1.257), the hope of restoring the English stage to

its former Elizabethan glory is, in the Romantic age, an unattainable vision and his

remorseful play finds its conclusion, once again, in the retributive mode of classical

tragedy.

---

[52] Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy*, p. 128.

Conclusion

Throughout this thesis I have argued that a productive and illuminating connection can be made between the works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Walter Benjamin. A fruitful starting point for addressing this link is the attempt of both writers to rescue the form of drama from what they perceived to be the generic stranglehold held over it by the classical age. However, I have demonstrated in my successive chapters that the link between the two writers becomes more profound as their theories of drama and dramatic genre unfold. Benjamin's understanding of the *Trauerspiel* as an immanent, that is, self-contained, form referring to nothing beyond itself focuses the critic upon drama as a material and 'counter-transcendental' form.[1] In other words, the 'formal language' of the mourning play concentrates not upon poetic expression but upon its 'content', its history.[2] As a result, the visual aspect of the mourning play, and the significance of the objects on stage, become the focus of meaning. Both the notion of divine authority that the hero must challenge, and the notion of an external system by which a play can be judged, are replaced in the mourning play with a profane community whose expressive ability comes from what lies within their historical situation. This secularised vision of the modern dramatic form emerges most notably in Coleridge's dramatic theory, as I have demonstrated, in his attempt to define his dramatic motif of remorse, the purely historical element of the dramatic imagination. I have traced this idea through aspects of his poetry and critical theory, and argued that it culminates in the portrayal of the warring ideals of remorse and revenge in the two brothers of his play *Remorse*. As Ordonio acts upon the classical vision of divine judgement and Alvar attempts to rescue him from his inevitable destruction by 'rous[ing] within him REMORSE' so Coleridge

---

[1] George Steiner, 'Introduction' to Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne and introd. by George Steiner, (London and New York: Verso, 1998), pp. 7-24 (p. 16).
[2] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* (see note to Steiner, above), p. 44.

presents the increasing tension between the generic rules of classical tragedy and the attempt to stage a Romantic ideal of human redemption as the modern tragic vision.[3]

My linking of Coleridge and Benjamin implies that there is a fluidity between the literary movements of Romanticism and modernism. I connect this in turn to a conscious movement, which becomes increasingly evident from the Romantic age, towards the resistance to the definition of categories. This is particularly insistent in Benjamin's *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*. As this study has outlined, a number of key critics, including Kathleen Wheeler, Paul Hamilton, Jerome McGann and Julian Knox have gestured towards and even proposed bridges between Coleridge and the modern, and my study builds upon the connections that they propose. However, in spite of a revival of interest in Coleridge's dramatic work following New Historicist attention to the plays, the modern turn in this significant area of his writing remains overshadowed by more established criticism that deals with his Romantic and classical genealogy. Although Julie Carlson has revived interest in the dramatic features of Coleridge's work, such as the concept of the commanding genius, which lie beyond mainstream critical interest, her work remains largely New Historicist and does not consider the strength of Coleridge's dramatic interest in formal or generic context. Similarly, Chris Murray's recent publication, *Tragic Coleridge*, is another example of the revived interest in Coleridge's drama. Murray argues that Coleridge's dramatic work was securely located within a Romantic ideology (in spite of the problematic reconciliation between Romanticism and the dramatic form) and he also finds classical influences running throughout Coleridge's dramatic *oeuvre*. Whilst I do not contest that these are strong elements of Coleridge's dramatic identity, my aim is to juxtapose his Romantic identity with intimations towards modernity that are best found in his

---

[3] Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Remorse* (Printed Version) in *Poetical Works: Plays*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001), pp. 1227-1326, I. 1. 18-19.

dramatic writing and, in a way, establish a dualistic vision of the dramatic form under the guardianship of Coleridge. Throughout this thesis, my aim has been to uncover the dramatic significance of Coleridge's work, argue for its contribution to the proto-modernist elements that lie within his literary achievements and underwrite his own (Romantic) theory. I have interrogated the ways in which this new understanding of Coleridge's dramatic theory can be considered to influence some of his major poetic works and the *Biographia Literaria*. These include a detailed understanding of the use of the will as it appears in his poetry as well as his dramas, the motif of remorse and the identification of Coleridge's dramatic supernatural as baroque rather than Gothic. I see these aspects of Coleridge's *oeuvre* as some of his most original work in one of the most problematic areas of Romantic literature. These areas of his dramatic work demand further investigation in order to highlight Coleridge as a unique figure whose work spilled over the boundaries of Romanticism into modernism and whose poetic and dramatic works overlap in a more significant manner than has been recognised.

In Chapter One, I established the critical and theoretical links between Coleridge and Benjamin based upon their shared interest in drama and the suitability of Benjamin's critical concept of the constellation to Coleridge's dramatic work. A key point of this Chapter was to rescue Coleridge's dramatic theory and practice from its assumed location within Romantic drama's resistance to action and withdrawal from theatrical spectacle. To do this, I introduced Benjamin's reading of the German mourning play in order to offer an alternative view of Coleridge's understanding of dramatic form and genre. A key assumption of *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* is that the drama of the German baroque age is a secularised form, which, in a particularly anti-tragic manner, acknowledges the severed links between mankind and the divine. This notion underscored my argument in Chapter Two, which set out the common themes between

Benjamin's *Trauerspiel* study, Coleridge's 1808 Lectures and the later dramatic writing in *Biographia Literaria*. This chapter connected Coleridge's portrayal of the evolution of the English stage to Benjamin's description of the secularised drama through the two writers' shared interest in the Middle Ages. It also aimed to reassert the significance of certain dramatic motifs in Coleridge's work, such as the commanding genius and the idea of remorse. My closing account of Coleridge's 'Critique of *Bertram*' sought to re-establish the importance of this work to the *Biographia* as a literary critical piece that highlights Coleridge's inherently perceptive identification of the problems encountered by serious drama in the Georgian age. A key assumption of this closing account in Chapter Two is that the supernatural in Coleridge's dramatic work may be revealed to act as a more complex engagement with the Gothic imagination that was commonly placed on stage in this period.

Chapters Three and Four were focussed upon a more detailed analysis of Coleridge's creative output. My reading of the dramatic in Coleridge's poetry started with the identification of the philosophical vacillations of 'The Eolian Harp' as a reflection of the working through of the dramatic notion of the will. This initial analysis of Coleridge's poetry under his dramatic theory invited a reassessment of the much-contested poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, in which I reconsidered the controversial use of the supernatural by framing it in the dramatic context of remorse. Here, the Benjaminian analysis of the dramatic in Coleridge's work became most suggestive as I was able to interpret the Ancient Mariner and Alvar as figures reminiscent of the dramatis personae of the *Trauerspiel*: uncanny and troubling revenants who return to their home communities as agents of an ancient past. However, a central aspect of my reading of *Remorse* in Chapter Four became also to highlight the limitations of this type of reading of Coleridge's work. Through his attempt to revive

the serious drama upon the Romantic stage, Coleridge both offers a vision of a new genre and turns away from it upon the dénouement of his flagship play, *Remorse*. In this way, the importance of Coleridge's journey into Romantic drama may be seen to approach Benjamin's description of the 'perfect work', as *Remorse* both establishes and abolishes a serious dramatic genre for the Romantic period.[4] However, Coleridge's play is resolved in a retributive manner with the death of the villain and, as a result, it offers a vision of a modern dramatic genre but one that is not taken to a final conclusion. Critics have traditionally seen this experimentation with the (Romantic) tragic genre as evidence of the failure of the form in the Romantic age, but I hope that this thesis has offered an alternative account of drama and the dramatic in Coleridge's writings. Through his perceptive engagement with the problems of dramatic form and style in the Georgian era and his anticipation of a modern dramatic framework, Coleridge offers a dramatic theory and practice which may be viewed as a significant aspect of his literary canon. I hope that my thesis has revived areas of Coleridge's *oeuvre* in which his perception of the modern is clear and that, equally, his turn away from it has been shown to signal not a failure but a willingness to work across literary and historic boundaries. At its fullest, Coleridge's willingness to reshape the dramatic, and more specifically the tragic, reveals a path from Romantic drama to Benjamin's account of modernity in *The Origin of German Tragic Drama* and beyond. Coleridge's dramatic theory operates as a constellation, drawing together elements of Shakespeare, the medieval, contemporary Gothic drama, German dramatists and German theorists. The constellation as an organising structure for Coleridge's dramatic work, which included translating and reviewing as well as writing, not only offers a form of coherence to a writer whose lack of logical progression has been cited as a major weakness but also enables him to theorise and practice drama against the backdrop of a

---

[4] Walter Benjamin, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, p. 44.

non-dramatic age. The Benjaminian interpretation of Coleridge's drama I have attempted here overcomes the constraints of historicizing and literary periodicity in order to illuminate the lost dramatic achievements of one of the most remarkable thinkers of our literary heritage.

Bibliography

Abrams, M. H., 'Structure and Style in the Greater Romantic Lyric', in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. by Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965), pp. 528-560

Ashton, Rosemary, *The Life of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996)

Badawi, M.M., *Coleridge: Critic of Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973)

Banerjee, Jibon Krishna, *Dramatic Works Of Wordsworth, Coleridge And Southey* (New Delhi: Atlantic Publishers and Distributors, 1994

Bate, Jonathan, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

Benjamin, Andrew, 'Benjamin and the Baroque: Posing the Question of Historical Time', in *Rethinking the Baroque,* ed. by Helen Hill (Farnham, Surrey: Ashgate, 2011)

Benjamin, Andrew, and Beatrice Hanssen, eds., *Walter Benjamin and Romanticism*, Walter Benjamin Studies Series (New York and London: Continuum, 2002)

Benjamin, Walter, *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, trans. by John Osborne and introd. by George Steiner (London and New York: Verso, 1998)

---------------------- *Illuminations*, ed. By Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999)

---------------------- 'The Concept of Criticism in German Romanticism', in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), I (1996), pp. 116-200

---------------------- '*Trauerspiel* and Tragedy' in *Selected Writings*, ed. by Marcus Bullock and Michael W. Jennings, 4 vols (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1996-2003), I (1996), pp. 55-58

Bowie, Andrew, *Introduction to German Philosophy: From Kant to Habermas* (London: Polity Press, 2003)

Brown,Huntington, 'The Gloss to the Ancient Mariner', *Modern Language Quartlerly* 4 (1945), 319-324

Burwick, Frederick, *Illusion and the Drama: Critical Theory of the Enlightenment and Romantic Era* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania University Press, 1991)

---------------------- *The Oxford Handbook to Samuel Taylor Coleridge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)

Carlson, Julie, *In the Theatre of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

--------------- 'An Active Imagination: Coleridge and the Politics of Dramatic Reform', *Modern Philology*, 86 (1988), 22-33

Cave, Richard Allen, ed., *The Romantic Theatre: An International Symposium* (London: Colin Smythe, Ltd., 1986)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 2 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1983)

Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Biographia Literaria*, ed. by James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), vii (1983)

--------------------------------*Collected Letters of Samuel Taylor Coleridge.* ed. by Earl Leslie Griggs (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1956-71)

--------------------------------*Lay Sermons* ed. by R. J. White, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), vi (1972)

--------------------------------*Lectures 1808-1819 on Literature*, ed. by R. A. Foakes, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), v (1987)

--------------------------------*Poetical Works: Poems (Reading Text)*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001)

--------------------------------*Poetical Works: Poems (Variorum Text)*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001)

--------------------------------*Poetical Works: Plays*, ed. by J. C. C. Mays, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xvi (2001)

--------------------------------*Table Talk* ed. by Carl Woodring, The Bollingen Edition of the Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, 16 vols, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969-2002), xiv (1990)

Chambers, Iain, 'History, the Baroque and the Judgement of Angels' in *The Actuality Of Walter Benjamin* ed. by Laura Marcus and Lynda Nead (London: Lawrence and Wishart,1998), pp. 172-193

Copeland, Rita, and Struck, Peter, T., eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010)

Cowan, Bainard, 'Walter Benjamin's Theory of Allegory', *New German Critique*, 22 (1981), 109-122

Cox, Jeffrey N., *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England and France* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 1987)

Cox, Jeffrey and Gamer, Michael, eds., *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic drama* (Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press, 2003)

Davis, R. T., and B. G. Beatty, eds., *Literature of the Romantic Period 1750-1850* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1976)

De Man, Paul, 'The Rhetoric of Temporality' in *Blindness and Insight* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 187-228

Donohue, Joseph W., *Dramatic Character in the English Romantic Age* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970)

Eilenburg, Susan, *Strange Power of Speech: Wordsworth, Coleridge and Literary Possession* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992)

Everest, Kelvin, *Coleridge's Secret Ministry: The Context of the Conversation Poems 1795-1798* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1979)

Everett, Barbara, 'Alphabetted', *London Review of Books*, 25 (2003) <http://www.lrb.co.uk/v25/n15/barbara-everett/alphabeted> [accessed 20 January 2012]

Ferris, David S., ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Walter Benjamin* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004)

Fletcher, Richard M, *English Romantic Drama 1795 - 1843: A Critical History* (New York: Exposition Press, 1966)

Fogle, Richard Harter, 'Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion', *The Tulane Drama Review*, 4 (1960), 33-44

Gilloch, Graeme, *Walter Benjamin: Critical Constellations* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002)

Gottlieb, Erika, *Lost Angels of a Ruined Paradise: Themes of Cosmic Strife in Romantic Tragedy* (Victoria, BC: Sono Nis Press, 1981)

Grady, Hugh, 'Hamlet as a Mourning Play: A Benjaminianesque Interpretation', *Shakespeare Studies*, 36 (2008), 135-65

Griggs, Earl Leslie, 'The Willing Suspension of Disbelief', in *Elizabethan Studies and Other Essays in Honour of George F. Reynolds*, ed. by E. J. West (Colorado: Boulder Press, 1945)

Hamilton, Paul, *Metaromanticism* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2003)

------------------ 'Drama as the Motor of Romantic Theory' in *Coleridge and German Philosophy: The Poet in the Land of Logic* (London: Continuum, 2007)

Hanssen, Beatrice, *Walter Benjamin's Other History: of Stones, Animals, Human Beings, and Angels*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998)

Haven, Richard, 'The Ancient Mariner in the Nineteenth Century,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 11 (1972), 360-374

Hayter, Alethea, 'Coleridge, Maturin's *Bertram*, and Drury Lane', in *New Approaches to Coleridge: Biographical and Critical Essays* ed. Donald Sultana (London: Vision Press, 1981), pp. 17–37

Hill, John Spencer, *A Coleridge Comapnion: an Introduction to the Major Poems and the Biographia Literaria* (London: Macmillan, 1984)

Hoagwood, T. A., and Daniel P. Watkins, eds., *British Romantic Drama Historical and Critical Essays* (London: Associated Universities Presses, 1998)

Hoagwood, T. A., 'Prologemenon for a Theory of Romantic Drama' *Wordsworth Circle*, 23, (1992), 49-64

Jacobus, Mary, 'That Great Stage Where Senators Perform: *Macbeth* and the Politics of the Romantic Theater' *Studies in Romanticism*, 22 (1983), 353-387

Jackson, J. R. de J., 'Coleridge on Dramatic Illusion and Spectacle in the Performance of Shakespeare's Plays', *Modern Philology*, 62, (1964), 13-21

------------------------- ed. *Coleridge: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols (London: Barnes and Noble, 1968), ɪ, (1968)

Jager, Colin, 'Review of Paul Hamilton, *Metaromanticism: Aesthetics, Literature, Theory*', *Romantic Circles* (2009) <http://www.rc.umd.edu/reviews-blog/?m=200910> [accessed 12 January 2013]

Knox, Julian, 'Self-Portrait in a Concave Mirror: Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Art of Translation' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of California, 2011)

Kucich, Greg, '"A Haunted Ruin": Romantic Drama, Renaissance Tradition and the Critical Establishment', *Wordsworth Circle*, 23, (1992) 64-76

Langbaum, Robert, 'The Dramatic Lyric and the Lyrical Drama', in *The Poetry of Experience* (New York: Norton 1957)

Leask, Nigel, *The Politics of Imagination in Coleridge's Critical Thought*, (Basingstoke: Macmillan Press, 1988)

McCalman, Iain, ed., *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999)

McGann, Jerome, J., 'Romanticism and the Embarrassments of Critical Tradition', *Modern Philology*, 70 (1973), 243-257

------------------------- *The Beauty of Inflections: Literary Investigations in Historical Methods and Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

McLean, George Harper, 'Coleridge's Conversation Poems', in *English Romantic Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. by M. H. Abrams (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 144-157

Magnuson, Paul A., 'The Dead Calm in the Conversation Poems' *The Wordsworth Circle*, 3 (1972), 53-60

Mays, Jim, 'Are Coleridge's Plays Worth the Candle?', *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 29 (2007), 1-16

Miles Wallace, Catherine *The Design of Biographia Literaria* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1983)

Morrill, Dorothy, 'Coleridge's Theory of Dramatic Illusion', *Modern Language Notes*, 42, (1927), 436-44

Murray, Chris, 'Coleridge and "Real Life" Tragedy' *The Coleridge Bulletin*, 29 (2007), 50-64

Newlyn, Lucy, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Coleridge* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002)

Nicoll Allardyce, *British Drama: An Historical Survey from the Beginnings to the Present Time*, (London: George Harap, 1925)

--------------------- *A History of English Drama 1660-1900*, Vol. IV, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1955)

Otten, Terry, *The Deserted Stage: The Search for Dramatic Form in Nineteenth Century England* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1972)

Rajan, Tillottoma, *Dark Interpreter* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980)

Ranger, Paul, *Terror and Pity Reign In Every Breast: Gothic Drama in the London Patent Theatres, 1750-1820* (London: Society for Theatre Research, 1991)

Richards, I.A. 'Coleridge: His Life and Work', in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Views*, 20th Century Views, ed. Coburn, K., (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 1967)

Richardson, Alan, *A Mental Theatre: Poetic Drama and Consciousness in the Romantic Age* (Philadelphia, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1998)

Rubenstein, Jill, 'Sound and Silence in Coleridge's Conversation Poems', *English*, 21 (1972), 54-60

Schlegel, Freidrich, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. and introd. by Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971)

Scott, Matthew, 'The Circulation of Romantic Creativity: Coleridge, Drama, and the Question of Translation', *Romanticism on the Net*, 2 (1996) <http://www.erudit.org/revue/ron/1996/v/n2/005715ar.html>

Simpkins, Scott, 'Coleridge's "Conversation Poems" as Speech Genre', *Semiotics* (1995), 242-9

Steiner, George, *The Death of Tragedy*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1961)

Stillinger, Jack, *Coleridge and Textual Instability: The Multiple Versions of the Major Poems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994)

Thomas, Sophie, 'Seeing Things ("As They Are"): Coleridge, Schiller and the Play of Semblance', *Studies in Romanticism*, 43, (2004), 537-557

Tomko, Michael, 'Politics, Performance and Coleridge's "Suspension of Disbelief"'', *Victorian Studies*, 49, (2007), 241-50

Watkins, Daniel P, *A Materialist Critique of English Romantic Drama*, (Florida University Press of Florida, 1993)

Weber, Samuel, *Benjamin's –Abilities* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008)

------------------ *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004)

Watson, George, *Coleridge the Poet* (London: Routledge, 1966)

Wellek, René, 'Coleridge', in *A History of Modern Criticism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995),151-87

Wells, Stanley and Gary Taylor eds., *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Complete Works* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994)

Whalley, George, 'The Mariner and The Albatross' in *Coleridge: A Collection of Critical Views* 20th Century Views, ed. Coburn, K., (Princeton, NJ: Yale University Press, 1967)

Wheeler, Kathleen, *The Creative Mind in Coleridge's Poetry* (London: Heinemann, 1981)

Williams, Raymond, *The Long Revolution* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1961)

Wordsworth, William, 'Preface' (1800) to *Lyrical Ballads,* in *Wordsworth and Coleridge Lyrical Ballads*, ed. by R. L. Brett and A. R. Jones, 2nd ed (London: Routledge, 1991), pp. 241-272

Zenón, Luis-Martínez, 'Shakespeare's Historical Drama as *Trauerspiel: Richard II* and After', *ELH*, 75 (2008) 673-706