

From

The Coleridge Bulletin

The Journal of the Friends of Coleridge
New Series 29 (NS) Summer 2007

© 2007 Contributor all rights reserved

<http://www.friendsofcoleridge.com/Coleridge-Bulletin.htm>

Something on William Shakespeare occasioned by *Wallenstein*

Joyce Crick

THIS IS a shortened version of a paper which The Friends of Coleridge kindly invited me to give at their Kilve meeting last September. In keeping with the overall theme, it started life under the proposed title of ‘Versions of the Tragic’ as exemplified in Schiller’s dramatic trilogy *Wallenstein* and Coleridge’s contemporary translation (1800) of its two major parts, *The Piccolomini* and *The Death of Wallenstein*. But in the event the paper developed, without any theoretical preliminaries about the characteristics of tragedies or by extension about the nature of the tragic (though Schiller for one had theorised much about both), into an attempt to show more practically how in the two sets of dramas the different literary aims and traditions, and the preconceptions of the two poets as to what makes for tragedy and for historical drama (*Wallenstein* has claims to be both) actually work out in the dramas themselves, in their dramaturgy, characterization and rhetoric,¹ and also in Coleridge’s judgements on them. This required some exploration, in STC’s favourite phrase, of the similitude in dissimilitude of the two sets of dramas, which took a step beyond the immediately obvious differences determined by the basic grammatical resources and limitations of the English and German languages—though of course these are invisibly and sometimes not so invisibly at work throughout.² Different literary traditions already offer other contexts for familiar forms and tropes, idioms, images and expressions, and the two *Wallensteins* are to be located historically in very different literary contexts indeed. As Coleridge’s literary world was far more familiar to my listeners than Schiller’s, far more indeed, than it is to me, I found myself dwelling on the German pole of their interaction. Nevertheless, the similitudes are overwhelmingly strong, as I hope to show, and starting with them may serve to tease out the dissimilitudes.

The first likeness is the primary text. It is necessary to say the obvious, for these are recognizably Schiller’s dramas in Coleridge’s words, and this is not, in Michael Hamburger’s phrase, a cannibalistic translation. ‘I endeavoured to render my author literally wherever I was not prevented by absolute differences of idiom,’ Coleridge declared.³ On the other hand, they are Coleridge’s words, and when, much later, he returns to judge the dramas, it is his own words, carrying his own reading, that he quotes.

The second likeness is the grand model they have in common for both tragedy and historical drama: Shakespeare. But it is not the same Shakespeare, and the two poets do not come to him from the same historical position. It is

¹ Less on this last, as I have written on it elsewhere; see ‘... Coleridge’s Translation of Schiller’s *Wallenstein*’, PEGS LVI (1984) 58-67.

² For details of linguistic differences, see Appendix: Coleridge as Translator of Schiller’s *Wallenstein* Plays, CC 16, III 1, 931-945 and Notes *passim*.

³ ‘Preface of the Translator’ to *The Piccolomini*, *ibid.* p. 205.

true, Coleridge had not engaged as closely with Shakespeare at the time of this translation as he was to do in his later literary lectures, but even so Shakespeare is from the start the great, almost taken-for-granted, presence in English poetry. So where Coleridge reads *Wallenstein* with a Shakespearean eye, using blank verse as the accepted verse-form for poetic drama and echoing Shakespearean diction quite naturally in his version, Schiller as he works on his *Wallenstein*-dramas reads Shakespeare with a—partially, at least—neo-classical eye, uses blank verse as a conscious innovation, echoing Shakespeare's rhetoric and imagery and matching him in the scale of his historical, subject-matter in an ambitious attempt to provide German culture with an achievement comparable to the English dramatist's. He did not come to be known as 'the German Shakespeare' for nothing.

Schiller's response to Shakespeare was really two responses, personally and historically. *Wallenstein* is the product of a mature stage in his career and representative of what is known by the simplifying label of Weimar Classicism. His earliest encounter with Shakespeare had been as a student, at first recoiling from the grand impersonality: '...I found it intolerable', he recalled, 'that the poet would slip through my hands and nowhere account for himself to me',⁴ but he was soon enthused by the mighty characters, the powerful emotions, the liberating free form of the English poet, and it was under this star, not under *Wallenstein*'s, that Coleridge first encountered Schiller's work. Famously, he sat up all night with heart convulsed and hair on end reading Schiller's first drama *Die Räuber* (in Alexander Tytler's translation of 1792), excited as much by the wild pathology of its terrorist-hero and the highly-coloured (prose) rhetoric as by his scene of remorse in the sunset.⁵ He was so carried away that he proposed on the spot to learn German so that he could translate all the works of this bard tremendous in sublimity. The play itself is a late product, ranting and rebellious, of the short-lived movement known as *Sturm und Drang*, which protested impotently against the despotism and provincialism of the order of petty German states: Schiller himself had to run away from the oppressive ducal military academy in Württemberg, where he was a medical student, to have his play performed in neighbouring Mannheim—and he stayed away. In the field of drama the movement broke more successfully from the decorum and rules of the predominant classical model as mediated by 17th-century French tragedy. These young dramatists were ready for Shakespeare, and Shakespeare (although available at the time mainly in Wieland's incongruously rational prose versions)⁶ was waiting for them. From the 1770s he became a cult, above all representing loose, open form

⁴ In: *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry* (1796).

⁵ Letter to Robert Southey 3.11.1794; Griggs, I, 122

⁶ C.M. Wieland translated twenty-two of Shakespeare's dramas between 1762 and 1766, based on the Pope-Warburton edition of 1747, and including Pope's Preface. He did them all into prose, apart from the 'fairy' play *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which he did into verse. Despite the rococo rationalism of his style, his versions were tremendously influential as a conduit. They were adapted and the canon completed (1775-1777) by Eschenburg, still in prose, but with a richer range of diction.

unrestricted by the artifice of the unities, large-scale characters and powerful feelings, exhilarating villains and complex psychology, range of register, movement, variety, and the wide canvas of national history. His was, as a young Goethe put it, 'a whole world'. Free form and strident speech became a substitute for political liberty. Shakespeare's work was used to counter the courtly and despotic associations of French neo-classicism in the name of German cultural identity, while the affirmative watchword 'Nature'—'Nothing so much nature as Shakespeare's people,' cried Goethe⁷—re-valued the Enlightenment's sceptical view of Shakespeare as barbaric, at best as wild untutored genius. At the same time Herder's historical and cultural relativism provided a more sober theoretical rationale to justify the Shakespeare cult and break with the idea that ancient Greek drama provided a universal paradigm: on the contrary, its forms were determined by the cultural conditions of its time and place, just as Shakespeare's were by his. A generation later, such generous cultural special pleading became, in August Wilhelm Schlegel's surveys of world literature,⁸ which Coleridge was familiar with, a wide-ranging and knowledgeable appreciation of cultural variety.

But Schiller developed away from the explosiveness of *Die Ränber*, the shift in his reception of Shakespeare, from avante-garde to canonical, corresponded to a major shift in his own writing, and not only in his. The Wallenstein dramas are among its first fruits. A brief excursus into German literary history might be in place here, starting with the ruinous long-term effects of the religious and dynastic hostilities of The 'Thirty Years' War (1618-1648), the war which a century and a half later Schiller wrote about at length as an historian, and which provides the historical material for the Wallenstein dramas. It took the German lands almost a century to recover from the devastation, economically and culturally, and even then they remained a patchwork of various disunited states. What continuity persisted lay in religion and music, not in literature, and certainly not in the theatre, courtly or popular, which depends on some sort of social cohesion to flourish (and, Schiller was to argue, which also helps to create that social cohesion). Schiller's generation had no golden age of literature to look back on, no corpus of national literature to reinforce a sense of nationhood and build on, only a loss, an absence—and a challenge. But as society and with it the theatre began to recover, with a new, more secure, middle-class audience, the repertory was mainly imported in polite translations: high neo-classical drama from the French or sentimental domestic plays from the English, providing models of the sort that the

⁷ In the manifesto of the movement, the collection of essays, mainly by Herder, but with contributions from young Goethe and others, *Von deutscher Art und Kunst* (1773)

⁸ See particularly his *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809-11), which Coleridge used in his own lectures on Shakespeare.

indefatigable Kotzebue could turn out by the dozen:⁹ Satyrane gives a wonderfully comic account of one such performance for and about the worthy bourgeois which Coleridge attended in Hamburg,¹⁰ and Schiller's polemical poem *Shakespeare's Shadow* (1797) rails against such petty themes and dramatists. Even when Shakespeare burst onto the scene, he too was imported in polite translation, in Wieland's civil prose, and with actor-managers relying on home-made versions of adaptations for the stage by Garrick or Nahum Tate.¹¹

It was surely time to make good the loss. With both nation and theatre in mind, there had been sporadic attempts to set up a National Theatre: in his three major dramas,¹² Lessing (whose biography Coleridge was also eager to write) heroically supplied the Hamburg Civic Theatre with the beginnings of a German repertoire, but the enterprise was premature: 'where is the point of a national theatre when we are not yet a nation?' he concluded sadly in 1768, as the Hamburg project came to an end. On the other hand, fourteen years later, in 1782, *Die Räuber* was the opening production of the new National Theatre in Mannheim: 'if we had the experience of possessing a national theatre, we would also become a nation' was Schiller's reply.

Still the gap remained to be filled. It is fair to say, I think, that every one of Schiller's dramas is in some respects a new experiment aiming to make a new audience. Characteristic themes and motifs recur: the prison, the tyrant, the manipulator, the idealist, the Utopian moment and vision of freedom, but the dramas are all different in genre, or dramaturgy, or diction. He followed the violent *Die Räuber* with a contemporary domestic tragedy *Kabale und Liebe* (1784, lit: *Intrigue and Love*, better as *Passion and Politics* in Robert James MacDonald's version), in which the class conflict characteristic of the sentimental genre is represented with a psychological depth and a satirical bite which are certainly not typical of the run-of-the-mill. But he was disappointed with his ambitious first attempt to get away from the narrowness and prose of ordinary lives, venturing in *Don Carlos* (1787) onto truly Shakespearean historical-tragical poetic territory. It was too long, its plotting too complicated; he had difficulty in combining its two strands of personal passion and power-politics; his innovative choice of blank verse¹³ in the interests of distance and

⁹ One such was *Lovers' Vows*, which, as readers of Jane Austen will know, caused such moral upheaval at Mansfield Park. See Coleridge's argument in his criticism of Maturin's *Bertram* that the corrupt sentimentality and Gothic horror of 'the German drama' was English in origin, returning to haunt the English stage (CC 7, II, 261-263). In fact, Kotzebue could turn his hand to any genre: his *Pizarro*, a conflation of two huge historical-geographical dramas of his, was a great success at Sheridan's Drury Lane, which Coleridge hoped to match with his *Wallenstein*.

¹⁰ *ibid.* pp. 183-184.

¹¹ There had been an earlier wave of popular barnstorming Shakespearean plays, including Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, from the late 16th Century, imported by English players fleeing the plague or the Puritans, but public and performance had subsequently been much tamed and the tradition largely lost.

¹² The comedy, *Minna von Barnhelm* (1767); the domestic tragedy, *Emilia Galotti* (1772); and the wonderful Utopian conversation-piece, *Nathan der Weise* (1779). Lessing had also acted as resident house-critic, publishing his wider commentaries as the *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* (1769).

¹³ Though there had been some scattered attempts at drama in blank verse from other hands, there were in effect only three significant dramas in blank verse in German before *Wallenstein*: Lessing's *Nathan der Weise* (1779), Goethe's *Iphigenie auf Tauris* (1787) and Schiller's own *Don Carlos* (1787).

high feeling made for prolixity—and the Mannheim actors, accustomed only to prose whether ranting or weeping, did not have the art of verse-speaking. Subsequently, directors have been happy to wield a scissors; actors have learned to speak verse, and it has become a lasting theatrical—and, in Verdi's version, operatic—success.

One consequence of this sense of failure was that Schiller did not produce another drama for the next seven years: *Wallenstein* was to signal his return to the stage, but writing and rewriting it took him all of three years (1797-1799), during which time it grew from one drama to three. Not that he had suffered a total writer's block in the interim: as well as writing poetry, histories, and founding and editing *Die Horen*, a literary journal remarkable for the talents that contributed to it, he took time out from the theatre for reflection: he was painfully aware that the thinker and the poet in him were often out of balance,¹⁴ but the major essays he wrote in these years, particularly those on the distinctive—subjective, reflective—nature of modern poetry (*On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*, 1796,) and on the place and function of art in modern society (*On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, 1795), proved immensely fruitful for his poetic practice, and he emerged a different dramatist. Two encounters had been critical for him, opening new vistas and compelling new thoughts and activities: with Kant's philosophy and with a Goethe he no longer perceived as a rival presence, but came to know as a friend and colleague.

Kant's argument for the disinterestedness of the aesthetic response was the premise for Schiller's advocacy of play, understood as the exercise of human potential uncommitted to action—and art is the highest form of play—and as the means for over-specialised modern society to recover its full humanity. As far as Schiller's poetic practice was concerned, the idea of aesthetic detachment also underpinned the increasing formality of his dramas and his abandonment of strident and low-mimetic effects in the interests of poetic distance. This applied particularly to the extensive revisions he made to *Wallenstein*, especially when he recast the first prose draft into verse. His aim was to distance the material on two levels: by jettisoning the language of everyday and its trivialising baggage to give himself the freedom to re-imagine the historical Wallenstein and frankly invent the idealist counter-figures of Max and Thekla, so revealing the 'honest illusion' of poetry, the—as Coleridge put it—'acknowledged total difference' between the imaginative representation of life entertained in a play of possibilities by performers un-seriously weeping for Hecuba, and the un-playful confusion and choices of life itself, whose tears are salt; at the same time declaring the delusory nature, or dishonest illusion, of the pretend-life represented in low-mimetic realism (though that word was not yet widely used of a literary mode), which cannot be a vehicle for the truth of art. It is a great pity that Schiller wrote his verse *Prologue to Wallenstein* too late for Coleridge to translate it, for it offers a dense summing up of just this range of problems which occupied him intensely too.

¹⁴ See the famous letter of 23 August 1794 in which he introduced himself more fully to Goethe.

Schiller's reception of Kant's ideas on aesthetics were moving him towards the new classicism which characterized his collaboration with Goethe, and, it would seem, away from a Shakespeare who had once been to him above all the creator of free forms and the instigator of shattering emotional effects. But many streams came together to maintain, and deepen his connection with the work of the English poet, and they flowed into the Wallenstein dramas. There was above all the grand Weimar project of two mature poets at the height of their powers of filling the great gap, of making a new German literature which should not stand unashamed besides the other literatures of the world. They collaborated directly in writing a collection of ballads and a series of satirical epigrams, *Xenien* (1796) on the mediocrity of current taste. Schiller's polemical poem, *Shakespeare's Shadow* (1797) belongs with these, as he rails against petty themes and petty dramatists. The two corresponded, Goethe from Weimar, Schiller from nearby Jena, on a range of practical and theoretical issues in literature and art. Where Schiller experimented in the forms of drama, so Goethe wrote definitive exemplars of the various genres: Novelle, Märchen, the Bildungsroman in *Wilhelm Meister*, the modern art-novel in *Die Wahlverwandtschaften*, the modern epic in *Hermann und Dorothea*, the inimitable universal world-drama in *Faust*. They read and discussed each other's work-in-progress, Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, Schiller's Wallenstein-dramas, which Goethe directed separately for the Weimar Court Theatre in 1799 when they finally made their belated appearance, with Schiller making additions and cuts up to the very last minute.¹⁵ Provincial Weimar became a centre for other writers too. *Die Horen* acted as a magnet for all the talents, including the new young generation of Romantics in Jena, despite their ambivalent attitude toward Schiller—among them August Wilhelm Schlegel. Translations were to be one means of extending the range of literary possibility. *Die Horen* carried Goethe's renderings of Cellini's *Autobiography* and Diderot's *Rameau's Nephew*, but these were only at the start of an even wider view of literature that, with the growing confidence brought by the Weimar achievements and the increasing accessibility of works in other languages led Goethe to a concept of world literature that went far beyond the national ambitions of the *Sturm und Drang* or the provinciality of the *Xenien's* butts. Part of the Weimar project was to make a literature in German worthy to equal the world canon, the match of both the ancients and the moderns. There was something unavoidably eclectic about the canon and the mediators: translators who were poets and scholars in one (J.H. Voss's *Virgil*; Ludwig Tieck's *Cervantes*; A.W. Schegel's *Calderon* and works from Sanskrit), or scholars who provided German texts transformed by poets; (Hammer-Purgstall's *Hafiz*, the starting-point for Goethe's *West-östlicher Divan*). Above all there was a new Shakespeare, sixteen of his plays done into German blank verse between 1797 and 1801 by A.W.

¹⁵ It was a manuscript copy of the uncut theatre version that Schiller's publisher Cotta sent to England and Coleridge translated, not the revised and polished version that Schiller finally had printed in 1800.

Schlegel.¹⁶ From now on Shakespeare was installed as one of the great figures of world literature, the peer of the ancients, no longer avante-garde but canonical—but also a lion tamed.

Nothing illustrates the closeness of the interaction between Weimar and Jena, and the Goethe/Schiller/Schlegel/Shakespeare nexus than the fact that Schlegel's first important general essay on Shakespeare, 'Etwas über William Shakespeare bei Gelegenheit Wilhelm Meisters', and specimen extracts of his first translations from *Romeo and Juliet*, *Hamlet*, *The Tempest* and *Julius Caesar*, with introductory commentaries, were all published by Schiller in *Die Horen* in 1796 and 1797, using the publication of *Wilhelm Meister*¹⁷ as the occasion for the essay, just when Schiller was at work on *Wallenstein*, struggling to poeticise his recalcitrant material, to stylize, formalise, control the sheer quantity of events and characters, find in the potential of verse to universalise, to—his characteristic word—idealise, some dignity for the clash of arms, some nobility for the enigmatic and ambitious traitor Wallenstein, and beauty for the freedom of spirit and doomed integrity of the two lovers.

He was reading Shakespeare under Schlegel's guidance, specifically *Julius Caesar* and *Macbeth*,¹⁸ as he worked on it, no longer the old *Sturm und Drang*'s voice of nature, but Schlegel's Shakespeare, who was 'a deeply thoughtful artist, not a blind genius run wild.'¹⁹ At the same time, still in search of a poetic form he was also reading Aristotle and Sophocles, and his comments on the crowd scenes in *Julius Caesar*, useful to him in rendering Wallenstein's army by selecting single, characteristic figures, indicate a neo-classical eye: 'in representing the character of the populace the subject-matter itself compelled him [Shakespeare] to have more of a poetic abstraction than individuals in view', he observed (letter to Goethe 7.4.1797). Likewise his observation on *Richard III*: '... how skilfully he represents what is not representable, I mean the art of using symbols where nature cannot be depicted. No Shakespearean play has reminded me so much of Greek tragedy' (to Goethe 28.11.1797). These classicising reflections colour his discussion of the way he is shaping his own material when, for example, he defends his dramatic verse in *Wallenstein* against the charge of verbosity, justifying even the garrulous Gordon's generalising sententia by reference to the ancients: 'Once you remember that all poetic persons are symbolic beings, that as poetic figures they always have to

¹⁶ The remainder were completed by Tieck's daughter Dorothea and Wolf, Graf Baudissin, under Tieck's supervision, between 1825 and 1833.

¹⁷ The fictional hero played Hamlet in his own performing version for the travelling theatre troupe he had joined. The episode, with its ironically perceptive exchanges about the characters and the nature of the drama provides a rich picture of how Shakespeare was popularly conceived and performed at the time. Wilhelm, the starry-eyed, wishes to give his audience excellence, and, reading the drama romantically as an organic whole, at first wants to perform it in its entirety, not lopping a single twig from the tree. He is persuaded by the practical actor-manager into tailoring it to fit the troupe's resources and the audience's expectations, so he reduces the cast and simplifies the plot radically – but manages to resist a happy end. Schlegel was more successful: Iffland performed his full version in Berlin in 1801.

¹⁸ His next work for the Weimar stage after *Wallenstein* was a prose adaptation of *Macbeth* along neoclassical lines, with the witches re-composed as archaic Fates!

¹⁹ *Vorlesungen über dramatische Kunst und Literatur* (1809-11).

represent and express humanity under its general aspects, and once you go on to think that in this way the poet, like the artist, should remove himself in an open and honest way from reality and remind us that he is doing so, then there is nothing to be said against this usage.' (to Goethe 24.8.1798). And the dramas themselves retain many other markedly neo-classical usages: each takes place in a single locale, generously interpreted; each takes place on a single day; major actions happen offstage (Max's death, Thekla's escape); set-piece narration is frequent; so are allegorical tropes in the language and classical stichomythia in the dialogue; decorum reigns, even in the language of the coarsest commanders; Gordon, a minor figure on the fringe of the action, functions as commentary and Chorus; even Agamemnon's red carpet is rolled out for Wallenstein's murder.

Nevertheless, writing to his friend Körner (8.1.1798), even as Schiller assures him he will find in the dramas the controlled power characteristic of the ancients, he promptly qualifies this: 'but it is certainly not a Greek tragedy, and cannot be, just as the age generally would not have thanked me for it, even if I had been able to make one of it. It has become too rich a subject, a universe in little... ' Richness, a whole universe: we are back to Shakespeare.

Against this, it is time to summarize those aspects of the dramas which can fairly, if loosely, be said to follow a Shakespearean model. Despite the allegories and the stichomythia, it is in the choice of blank verse and in his rhetoric that Schiller has learned from Shakespeare: Coleridge is quick to hear the echoes and give them back with advantages. In his 'Preface of the Translator' to *The Death of Wallenstein*, he compared them rather to the histories than to the tragedies, and it is certainly the case that here for the first time in German literature since Goethe's early attempt in *Götz von Berlichingen* is a major drama representing a major episode in national history. The scope and movement, the intertwining of human tragedy and larger historical destiny are comparable; the history represented is not. Where Shakespeare's histories, for all their moral and political complexities, are forward-looking and culminate in the triumph of the Tudor dynasty and the promise of national greatness here and now, the tragedy of *Wallenstein* ends with defeat and death, with the expectation of fifteen more years of war and the promise of further long-term devastation. And it could not be a national drama, for the nation, whether as audience or as polity, was yet to be made. The ducal stage contained multitudes, but you could walk across the Duchy of Weimar in a day.

Nevertheless, the complex psychology of Wallenstein himself shows how much Schiller has learned from Shakespeare's characterization of powerful individuals; his host of minor figures: the generals, opportunistic or greedy; the soldiers, loyal and independent, are sharply drawn representatives of their kind, and of humankind. The crowd scenes in *Julius Caesar* have left their mark here (and in the introductory drama *Wallenstein's Camp*, which Coleridge did not translate) in a vivid practice that belies Schiller's description of their figures as 'abstractions'. *Macbeth* has left its mark more specifically, and not only in the

figure of the domineering Lady Tertsy, but in the underlying interplay of character and destiny, and in a plot which turns on ambiguous and fateful prophecy. The Scottish play offered a way of dealing with Wallenstein's irrational reliance upon astrology, an historical given which caused Schiller great difficulties in making it plausible in a modern, secular drama. Just as Macbeth fatally misread the weird sisters' riddling prophecies, so Schiller's *Wallenstein* fatally misreads the conjunction of Jupiter and Venus. But this key misunderstanding also highlights a great difference in historical location between Schiller and his model: where Shakespeare could assume an audience that could give ready imaginative assent to such dark beliefs, Schiller, the child of the Enlightenment, could not do the same for his own age. Such supernatural figures 'live no longer in the faith of reason.' Initially he tried to deal with the problem by making Seni a comic figure—the residue is still visible in his black commedia del arte gown 'like an old Italian doctor'—but abandoned such overt scepticism, instead offering Max's beautiful affirmation that the old belief in the stars, like the old gods of nature, survives for the poet and the lover as a vehicle for the imagination of the heart—an affirmation more appropriate to the modern poet's sense of loss. The passage is Schiller's lyrical reworking of his own analysis of the nature of the modern poet, disenchanted, subjective, reflective, from his essay *On Naïve and Sentimental Poetry*. STC rewrote the passage in his finest Romantic vein:

The intelligible forms of ancient poets,
 The fair humanities of old religion
 The Power, the Beauty and the Majesty,
 That had their haunts in dale or piny mountain,
 Or forest by slow stream, or pebbly spring,
 Or chasms and wat'ry depths; all these have vanish'd.
 They live no longer in the faith of reason!
 But still the heart doth need a language, still
 Doth the old instinct bring back the old names,
 And to yon starry world they now are gone
 Spirits or gods, that us'd to share this earth
 With man as with their friend; and to the lover
 Yonder they move, from yonder visible sky
 Shoot influence down: and even at this day
 'Tis Jupiter who brings whate'er is great,
 And Venus every thing that's fair!

(*Piccolomini* II iv 123-138; PW III 1 367)

(Max was wrong about Wallenstein, of course, idealising his alternative father until the bitter end, when he can only deal with Wallenstein's treachery by choosing death.)

Disenchantment is not the only aspect of Schiller's contemporary world that shines darkly through the fabric of an apparently historical drama: so soon after the French Revolution the relation of the old order to the new is a

pressing theme, and—despite Schiller’s denials—the shadow of Napoleon is cast over the conflict between old feudal loyalties (in Octavio and Gordon) and Wallenstein, the charismatic leader. The Kantian vision of ideal humanity, of the mature responsibility of an integral self (in Max’s decision, and in the Pappenheimers’ choice of allegiance) tells us this is a just as much a tragedy of the Enlightenment, as the lyrical presence of the poet’s own voice in Max’s aria on the departure of the old gods tells us it is a poem on the brink of Romanticism.

This, then, is the *Wallenstein* that Coleridge, fresh from Germany, first read: an ambitious and eclectic historical-tragical trilogy with strong Shakespearean aspects intended to be part of a new German literary canon. There were, as we have seen, other aspects: structurally it is largely neo-classical, intellectually, it is highly contemporary—but it was the Shakespearean elements that STC brought to the fore in translating it—and in criticizing the other aspects. Put simply, his *Wallenstein* is a lot more Shakespearean than Schiller’s. He takes to the blank verse with ease (‘Schiller moves in it as a fly in a glue-bottle’ he remarked many years later, ‘How different from Shakespeare’s endless rhythms!’²⁰), and, following his model, uses prose for low-mimetic scenes, among the servants and among the generals, far more often than Schiller does. He increases the individuality of certain characters: Gordon becomes less of a Chorus and more of a Polonius; Wallenstein becomes cumulatively nobler, closer to what Max says of him than his actions imply. Above all, where Schiller’s language had echoed Shakespeare’s, Coleridge re-echoes it a hundredfold. One instance must suffice, a passage from Wallenstein’s central soliloquy where the echoes are patent:

Was it criminal
To make the fancy minister to hope,
And fill the air with pretty toys of air,
And clutch fantastic sceptres moving t’ward me?
(Macb V iii 40, II I 33-40; *Pic* IV 4 14-17)

This matter-of-literary-course assumption that Shakespeare’s verse-form and diction are natural for historical drama in English can also be seen in Coleridge’s refusal to translate the neo-classical allegorical images Schiller includes. The under-characterization of Thekla, and her over-heated rhetoric, roused his irritation. Indeed, as the years passed and he engaged with Shakespeare more closely for his literary lectures, his comments on the Wallenstein dramas, often made as marginalia in gifts of the book to friends, became both more negative and more differentiated. Here is the longest, probably made around 1808 in de Quincy’s copy (CC 16, III 1, 173-74), in

²⁰ 31.5.1834, in: Table Talk I ed. Carl Woodring CC 14, 484. Unfair to Schiller, in fact. Not only was Schiller new to blank verse, but STC was translating from an early copy made before Schiller had revised the text for print. However, when he did so, it was largely in the interests of polished regularity, not of Shakespeare’s expressive flexibility.

which his debt to the Shakespearean model colours his judgement on the other aspects:

The defects of these dramas are all of an instructive character; for tho' not the products of genius, like those of Shakespere, they result from an energetic and thinking Mind. 1. The Speeches are seldom suited to the Characters—the characters are truly, diversified & distinctly conceived—but we learn them from the actions, and from the descriptions given by the other characters, or from particular Speeches—The brutal Illo repeatedly talks a Language which belongs to the Countess, &c—. 2. Astrology (an undramatic superstition, because it inspires no terror, & it's foundation of **imagination** is overbuilt and **concealed** by it's scientific superstructure, with other causes from the imagery, either unpopular or swallowed up in more genial & pleasing associations, as the Sun & Moon) Astrology is made prophetic, & yet treated ludicrously—the Author as philosopher is in compleat discord with [the Writer] himself as Historian. This is a most grievous fault. 3. The Assassins talk ludicrously—This is a most egregious misimitation of Shakespere—Schiller should not have attempted Tragicomedy & none but Shakespere has succeeded. It is wonderful however, that Schiller, who had studied Shakespere, should not have perceived his divine Judgment in the management of his Assassins—as in Macbeth. They are fearful, and almost pitiable, Beings—not loathsome, ludicrous, Miscreants. 4. The character of Thekla = O, the bold Heroine of any Novel—Nothing of the Convent, no Superstition—Nothing of the Daughter of Wallenstein—nothing that her past life is represented by. 5. Wallenstein himself is a finer psychological than dramatic, and a more dramatic than a tragic character. Shakespere draws Strength, as in Richard the third, and even when he blends weakness, as in Macbeth, Yet it is weakness of a specific kind, that leaves the Strength in full & fearful energy—but Schiller has drawn weakness imposing on itself the love of power for the sense of strength (a fine conception in itself, but not tragic—at least, for the principal character of a long Drama!)). Hence, Wallenstein—with an exception (that of the Regimental Deputation to him in the second Part) evaporates in mock-mysterious Speeches. —These are the chief defects, I think. On the other hand, the character of Butler is admirable throughout—Octavio very good— Max—though it may be an easy character to draw, for a man of Thought & lofty feeling, for a man who possesses all the analoga of Genius—is yet so delightful, & it's moral influence so [plea] grand and salutary, that we must allow it great praise—The childish love toying with the Glove & Aunt Tertsky in the first act should be omitted—Certain whole scenes are masterly, & far above any thing since the Dramatists of Eliz. & James the first. (CC 16 III 1, 173-4).

To comment on some of these comments, I shall follow STC's numbering:

1. True, but STC is deaf here to the neo-classical convention of decorum.
2. STC has put his finger on Schiller's difficulty with the astrological motif. He overstates the ludicrousness of the treatment, presumably of *Seni*, but is most perceptive on the discrepancy between Schiller's given material ('the author as historian': the historical Wallenstein actually had his horoscope drawn by Kepler) and his modern secular disenchantment ('the author as philosopher').
3. A further point of contact with *Macbeth* where Shakespeare is the touchstone. STC's strictures are just. What he could not know is that the excessive length of the assassins' scene was a side-effect of Schiller's division of his unwieldy drama into two—very late in the process of composition. As the new *Death of Wallenstein* was disproportionately short in comparison with the over-long *The Piccolomini*, he was not above last-minute padding.
4. Alas, poor *Thekla*! Schiller's women are notoriously not his greatest achievement, but in translating, Coleridge has in fact made *Thekla*'s language more frantick than Schiller had, exaggerating, for example, its stridency as she envisages the coming destruction: his strictures apply more justly to his own *Thekla* than to Schiller's. Taking against the figure, he makes it more to his disliking. What he misses in her, of course, are the vivid little touches of Shakespeare's realism, and the strong individuality of his women.
5. Again the negative comparison with Shakespeare, here of the figure of Wallenstein in contrast to the grand villains Richard III and *Macbeth*, to make a subtle psychological point. Coleridge's appreciation of the scene with the Pappenheimers also approves its silent model: the encounter of Henry V with his soldiers on the eve of Agincourt.

In addition, Coleridge was one of the first (though Schiller himself was ahead of him) to observe how characteristic it is of Schiller to treat this or that figure in his dramas as his own lyrical mouthpiece: Max on the poetic language of the heart is a particularly telling instance of such 'ventriloquism', as Coleridge put it.²¹ Here too an unspoken comparison with Shakespeare's renowned 'impersonality' can be heard.

If these strictures were indeed made around 1808, it would be at a time when Coleridge was embarking on his literary lectures, in which Shakespeare was conceived as the touchstone of the true poet. Little wonder that a dramatist labelled 'the German Shakespeare', should be overshadowed in Coleridge's judgement—even his last, affirmative, sentence sounds like a grudging afterthought. He has had warmer things to say about Schiller, and in his translation practice actually made the dramas more Shakespearean than Schiller had—but then, he was composing within a given, Shakespearean, tradition; Schiller was writing to make a new one.