T S Eliot, Coleridge and Shakespeare's *Richard II*

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'I am not under the delusion that Shakespeare in the least resembles myself'.

IN THE QUOTATION ABOVE FROM *Shakespeare & the Stoicism of Seneca*, Eliot is thinking about critics such as Lytton Strachey 'the retired Anglo–Indian', or Wyndham Lewis with his 'messianic Shakespeare', who seem to be seeing Shakespeare in their own image, which he certainly does *not* want to do himself. The fact that he doesn't, he says, is 'my only qualification for writing about [Shakespeare]'. I have chosen to speak about Eliot in connection with Coleridge because, in 1936, Eliot thought Coleridge possibly the greatest Shakespeare critic there had ever been. I wanted to explore what Eliot, a poet and writer of poetic drama, had to say about dramatic poetry in particular, and why he thought that Coleridge marked a completely new beginning in Shakespeare criticism.

I shall look at what Eliot expected a Shakespearian critic to be, then move on to Coleridge, in order to see what *he* thought Shakespeare was doing when he wrote his history plays, especially *Richard II*, which Coleridge regarded as a masterpiece second only to *King Lear*.

In 1936, Eliot stated: 'The writings of Coleridge on Shakespeare must be read entire, for it is impossible to understand Shakespeare criticism to this day without a familiar acquaintance with Coleridge's lectures and notes'.

What did Eliot expect of a critic? Back in 1923, in *The Function of Criticism*, he admitted that he *used* to think that 'the only critics worth reading were the critics who practised, and practised well, the art of which they wrote'. He further maintained that 'the larger part of the labour of an author in composing his work is critical labour: the labour of sifting, combining, constructing, expunging, correcting, testing' – which he saw as a 'frightful toil – as much critical as creative – even the highest kind of criticism'. He added to these remarks that the critic should have a sense of fact, and that criticism should be 'an honest enquiry as far as the data permit'.

He writes more directly of the problems of the practising author of poetic drama as he learns the craft of play–writing, but he had long been deeply concerned with the moulding of the blank verse line by Shakespeare and his contemporaries. L C Knights, in an appendix to his '*How many children had Lady Macbeth?*' describes Eliot's influential essay on 'The Metaphysical Poets' as a necessary prelude to the study of Shakespeare. In discussing the elaborate images of Donne, Eliot states that 'some of Donne's most successful and characteristic effects are secured by brief words and sudden contrasts:

'A bracelet of bright hair about the bone'

where the most powerful effect is produced by the startling contrast of associations of 'bright hair' and of 'bone'. This close linking of images with multiple associations is characteristic of Shakespeare among others, prompting Dr Johnson's well–known complaint that in the work of the metaphysical

poets 'the most heterogeneous ideas are yoked by violence together'. But Eliot, himself, says that 'a degree of heterogeneity of material compelled into unity by the poet's mind is omnipresent in all poetry', an almost Coleridgean thought.

Writing on *Hamlet* in 1919, Eliot finds himself dissatisfied by what he sees as a distracting mixture of *kinds* of language, ranging from Horatio's lyrical:

> Look, the morn, in russet mantle clad
> Walks o'er the dew of yon high eastern hill

(which adds nothing essential to the central interest of the play or the portrayal of character, but could have come from a much earlier play, such as *Romeo and Juliet*), to Hamlet's:

> Sir, in my heart there was a kind of fighting
> That would not let me sleep…

when he is describing how he discovered the full treachery of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the language has an urgency which is integral to the force of the action at that point, absolutely characteristic of Shakespeare's full maturity. This – as Eliot sees it – sloppily careless mixture of styles is one reason why *Hamlet* is, for Eliot at that stage, an artistic failure.

Eliot is, as an author, concerned with finding the right language for poetry, and by extension for poetic drama; he is also concerned with the relation of language to character, ideas and action. The difficulty of getting this relationship right absorbs him even more than the difficulty of simply expressing himself in poetry. By 1956, in his essay *Poetry & Drama* after wrestling with dramatic, poetic language himself, during the writing of *Murder in the Cathedral, Family Reunion, The Confidential Clerk* and *The Cocktail Party*, he returns to the interchange between Marcellus and Horatio, commenting:

> This is great poetry, and it is dramatic; but besides being poetic and dramatic, it is something more. There emerges, when we analyse it, a kind of musical design also which reinforces and is at one with the dramatic movement. It has checked and accelerated the pulse of our emotion without our knowing it… I think that the examination of this one scene is enough to show us that verse is not merely a formalisation, or an added decoration, but that it *intensifies* the drama. It should indicate also the importance of the unconscious effect of the verse upon us.

Shakespeare, he acknowledges, has triumphantly succeeded in overcoming the kinds of problem that Eliot himself had struggled with in shaping his own poetic dramas. He writes in very similar vein about Othello's

> Keep up your bright swords, for the dew will rust them,

which may enlarge our view of Othello's character, while not interrupting but intensifying the drama, as poetry alone can do.

In 1933, in *The Use of Poetry & the Use of Criticism*, Eliot had said of Coleridge: 'What is best in his criticism seems to come from his own delicacy and subtlety of insight as he reflected on his own experience of writing poetry'. Here Eliot is seeing Coleridge, not as a student of German Idealist philosophy, but as a fellow poet, with a very similar critical approach to his own. By 1956, in *The Frontiers of Criticism,* he makes a more detailed assertion, going further. In considering a possible history of criticism, he admires Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*; Johnson represents the end of the 18th century literary tradition to which he belongs. Coleridge, however, marks a new beginning because of 'the scope and variety' of the interests which he brings to bear on his discussion of poetry:

> He established the relevance of philosophy, aesthetics and psychology; and once Coleridge had introduced these disciplines into literary criticism, future critics could ignore them only at their own risk. To appreciate Johnson an effort of historical imagination is needed; a modern critic can find much in common with Coleridge. The criticism of today indeed, may be said to be in direct descent from Coleridge…

However, Eliot does have reservations about Coleridge as a critic, and they are reservations that we may also feel at times. In *The Sacred Wood* (1920), he suggests that often Coleridge 'is diverted into a metaphysical hare and hounds', losing sight of the work of art as a work of art. In his 1923 essay, *The Function of Criticism*, he questions whether Coleridge's view of Hamlet, specifically, is 'an honest enquiry as far as the data permit', or 'an attempt to present Coleridge in an attractive costume'. One can find many instances of Coleridge the critic straying from the point or allowing himself to be over–subjective, but as we look at what Coleridge has to say about *Richard II* we will see whether, or how far, these objections apply – and, indeed, what else Coleridge is doing.

In a significant letter to Sir George Beaumont in 1804, Coleridge outlines a Grand Plan: he is looking at each scene of Shakespeare as if it were the only thing Shakespeare had written.

> I ask myself what are the characteristics – the diction, the cadences and metre, the character, the passion, the moral and metaphysical inherences, and fitness for theatric effect, and in what sort of theatres. All these I write down with great precision of thought and language.

He intends to do the same (but slightly less thoroughly) for all of Shakespeare's immediate contemporaries in order to discover what characteristics belong solely to Shakespeare, and what to his age: 'Thus I shall both exhibit the characteristics of the plays – and of the mind – of Shakespeare'. Even as late as 1825, Coleridge is still considering producing his own edition of Shakespeare: he retains his genuinely objective interest in the working of Shakespeare's mind, his genius and his judgment.

In a marginal note of 1811 he writes: 'As late as ten years ago I used to seek and find out grand lines and fine stanzas; but my delight has been far greater, since it has consisted more in tracing the leading Thought throughout the whole. The former is too much like coveting your neighbour's Goods; in the latter you merge yourself in the author – you become He'. It is clear from his later, detailed work, that certain plays were particular favourites: *The Tempest*, *Hamlet*, *Macbeth*, *Othello, King Lear* (though he thought it unsuitable for his style of lecturing), and *Richard II*.

Coleridge has very specific ideas about what a history play should be. The *Bristol Gazette* of 18th November 1813 reports on one of his lectures on Shakespeare:

> Fully to comprehend the nature of the historic drama, the difference should be understood between the epic, and the tragic muse. The latter recognizes and is grounded upon the free–will of man; the former is under the control of destiny, or, among Christians, an overruling providence… In the tragic, the free will of man is the first cause, and accidents are never introduced; if they are, it is considered a great fault. To cause the death of an hero by accident, such as slipping off a plank into the sea, would be beneath the Tragic Muse, as it would arise from no mental action.

He then goes on: 'Shakespeare, in blending the epic with the tragic, has given the impression of the drama to the history of his country. By this means he has bequeathed as a legacy the pure spirit of history, not that his facts are implicitly to be relied on'. It is interesting that there appears to be no mention of Holinshed in Coleridge's writings on Shakespeare. However, he says that 'We should not read [Shakespeare] as a historian, but 'as distance is destroyed by the telescope, and by the force of imagination we see in the constellations, brought close to the eye, a multitude of worlds, so by the law of impressiveness when we read his plays we seem to live in the era he portrays'. The effect of magnification and concern with minutiae is true of plays other than the history plays: of *Romeo and Juliet*, for instance, he had written that Shakespeare had 'availed himself of his psychological genius to develop all the minutiae of the human heart — that he, showing us the thing, makes visible what we should otherwise not have seen: just as after looking at distant objects through a telescope, when we behold them afterwards with the naked eye, we see them with greater distinctness than we should otherwise have done'.

He continues his account of the history plays by saying: 'One great object of his historic plays, particularly of that to be examined (*Richard II*) was to make his countrymen more patriotic, to make Englishmen proud of being Englishmen'. He had actually maintained, in an earlier manuscript note in 1810: 'In order that a drama may be properly historical, it is necessary that it should be the history of the people to whom it is addressed'.

This close linking of historical drama, nationality and patriotism may strike

us as surprising. When Coleridge returns to the subject in 1818, in a commentary on *Richard II*, he is still concerned with patriotism, but with an even greater emphasis: 'But this Richard II – oh God forbid that however unsuited for the stage or even there it should fall dead on the hearts of Jacobinized Englishmen – then indeed *Praeteriit gloria mundi* (the glory of the world has passed away). The spirit of patriotic reminiscence is the all–pervading spirit of this drama'. It seems that for him the propagandist educative purpose of the play has become yet more urgent, and he fears that the audience has become much less patriotic than he thinks is proper.

In the 1813 Bristol lecture, Coleridge remarks that *Richard II* is rarely acted. He is far from sorry that this is the case, because he has never seen any of Shakespeare's plays performed 'but with a degree of pain, disgust and indignation'. He considered the theatres of his day to be much too big, so encouraging too many bad performances, driving Shakespeare 'from the stage to find his proper place in the heart and in the closet'. In this opinion his views are not far from those of Hazlitt and Lamb.

We know that Edmund Kean played Richard II at Drury Lane in 1815 – Hazlitt reviewed the performance – but using Richard Wroughton's text, which had been substantially cut and had speeches by Wroughton himself added. Lines were borrowed from other Shakespeare plays—*Henry VI*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Richard III*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In the final scene, the Queen (who has not been sent home to France) laments over Richard's body; her lines were taken from Lear's speech over the hanged Cordelia. Though this shocks *us*, Wroughton's production was a considerable success, and went on being performed until 1828.[1]

Hazlitt thought that this 'alteration of *Richard II'* was the best that there had been, perhaps not realising quite how much the text had been modified. Kean and Mrs Siddons were his two favourite Shakespearian performers, but even Kean's performance has serious shortcomings for Hazlitt. Kean 'never wants energy, ingenuity and conviction, though he is often deficient in dignity, grace and tenderness'; when Kean acted Richard II, 'he made it a character of passion, that is of feeling combined with energy, whereas it is a character of pathos, that is to say, of feeling combined with weakness. He expresses all the violence, the extravagance and fierceness of the passions, but not their misgivings, their helplessness and sinkings into despair'. Hazlitt finds that it is 'only the pantomime part of tragedy' – the big physical performance – which can be guaranteed to make its effect in the theatre.

It would seem that the sheer size of the 19th century auditorium prevented even the best actors from conveying the subtleties of Shakespeare's writing. Lamb, another committed Romantic Shakespearian, has very similar views, which he expresses eloquently when considering the actor playing Hamlet, who must necessarily speak *ore rotundo,* confiding his most intimate secrets to hundreds at a time. But he concedes that there may be many in the audience

[1] *Shakespeare: The Critical Tradition—Richard II*, ed Charles Forker

who might never encounter Shakespeare at all if they did not see a performance, however inadequate, on the stage, and that they would be the poorer for it: 'I am not arguing that *Hamlet* should not be acted, but how far *Hamlet* is made another thing by *being* acted'.[2] [ref] As Hazlitt says: 'The representation of the character on the stage uniformly interferes with our conception of the character itself' (*A View of the English Stage*, reprinted in *The Examiner*, London 1818). T S Eliot values Hazlitt and Lamb as Shakespearian critics, as well as Coleridge; we see that all three 19th century critics have serious reservations about stage performance in their day.

We now return to Coleridge: 'were there an actor capable of representing it, the character of Richard II would delight us more than any other of Shakespeare's masterpieces, with perhaps the single exception of *King Lear'*. He finds this play to be 'a history of the human mind'. It is the interiority of the character that interests him, but he is interested in much more besides.

For Coleridge, perhaps Shakespeare's most remarkable achievement is the way in which he makes all aspects of the play work together into an organic whole, a *syngenesia*, as he puts it. Everything, from the smallest punning word–play to a sequence of actions, like the wholly invented scene between the Queen and the gardeners in which she is represented as learning that Bolingbroke has put the favourites to death and seized Richard himself, is an integral, seemingly inevitable part of the final completed design. This 'organic form' is well defined by M H Abrams: 'a good poem [we might equally say a good poetic play] is like a growing plant, which evolves by an internal energy into the organic unity which constitutes achieved form'. It is perhaps relevant in this connection that Coleridge prefers the phrase 'unity of interest' to 'unity of action'.

We will now look at several of the key characters to see how Coleridge thinks of them as part of the evolving pattern of the play.

Since Coleridge himself does so in Lecture 12, we will begin with the Duke of York. When Coleridge speaks of the presentation of York, he uses the painterly word 'keeping', one of the favourite critical terms of Hazlitt, who was of course a painter as well as a writer. As Hazlitt explains, the word refers to 'the proper subserviency of tone and colour in every part of a picture, so that the general effect is harmonious to the eye' – that is, the general effect of the complete picture, not merely of a figure within it, as discussed by Tom Paulin in *The Day–Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's Radical Style.* Applied to poetry or prose, it means 'agreement, congruity, harmony' throughout the whole work.

York is for us an establishment figure, a firm believer in the divine right of the anointed king, whoever he might be; 'old and full of religious loyalty', Coleridge says of him, 'a man of earnest wishes to do right'. Richard appoints him to be governor of the kingdom while he is in Ireland, even after York has told the king to his face that he thinks Richard is doing wrong. York remains

[2] *On the Tragedies of Shakespeare Condiered with Reference to their Fitness for Stage Representation, 1811.*

constant, rebuking Northumberland in Act III, sc. 3 for omitting Richard's title – for York, a sacred title — as king; Northumberland duly accepts the rebuke and apologises. York's deep moral sense remains with him; he is the kind of man the kingdom needs, even though, having expressed his feelings at moments of high drama, 'he retires', says Coleridge, 'as it were into himself and does nothing'. His failure to act is the result of 'the overwhelmingness of circumstance'. We can see an emblematic quality in York, while at the same time he has an individual personality.

Coleridge comments on Shakespeare's use of word–play – surely an example of 'heterogeneity compelled into unity by the poet's mind' – when York takes Northumberland to task. When Northumberland explains that he left out Richard's title 'Only to be brief', York's rejoinder is vigorous, spirited and instantaneous:

> The time hath been
> Would you have been so *brief* with him, he would
> Have been so *brief* with you to shorten you,
> For taking so the *head* the whole *head's* length,

Upon which Bolingbroke comments:

> *Mistake* not, Uncle, further than you should.

York answers him:

> *Take* not, good cousin, further than you should
> Lest you *mistake*. The heavens are o'er your head.

Coleridge remarks that 'the play on words is perfectly in character. The answer is in unison with the tone of the passion, and is connected with some phrase used'. Bolingbroke then says, very moderately:

> I know it Uncle, and oppose not
> Myself against their will.

But following this reply, one more point may be selected from Coleridge's full and perceptive analysis of this crucial scene. He draws the attention of his audience to Hereford's message to Richard:

> Harry of Bolingbroke
> Doth kiss King Richard's hand,
> And sends allegiance and true faith of heart
> To his most royal person.

Coleridge says that this is 'almost the only instance in which a name forms the whole line' and he suggests that it expresses Bolingbroke's opinion of his own importance, a hint of the 'preconcerted' ambition of Bolingbroke's intentions.

This account of York shows how his 'character' is developed and given extra life, while the use of word–play in a vigorously dramatic exchange underlines the exploration of the fitness of the king to rule, and the underlying

ambition of the usurper, which are understood by Coleridge to be such an important theme of the whole play. His analysis of Shakespeare's language here, and elsewhere, shows Coleridge at his most daring and subtle.

Coleridge considers more generally the much–debated question of whether puns belong in serious writing when he discusses the character of Gaunt:

> Old Gaunt indeed, and Gaunt in being old,

says Gaunt, and much more in similar vein, which causes Richard to ask:

> Can sick men play so nicely with their names?

Here Coleridge is responding to those critics – Dr Johnson is one that he cites – who think that puns or 'quibbles' are inappropriate in a serious work. He cites Johnson as saying that Shakespeare 'loses the world for a toy' and can no more withstand a pun or play upon words than his Antony could resist Cleopatra. Johnson was not the only critic to hold this opinion. But Coleridge's more flexible approach enables him to see how Gaunt's near–obsessive choice of words at this moment, when he is close to death and consumed by powerful feeling which must be released, is both moving and humanly convincing – again, part of the organic whole of the play.

Gaunt, like York and Gloucester, whose death is mourned in Act I, scene 2, is another of the sons of Edward III, one of the 'seven vials of his sacred blood'. Like York, he is of the old guard, full of the same 'religious loyalty, struggling with indignation at the king's vices and follies', and it is through him that we get our most vivid impression of all that England stands for, the symbolic and representational even transcending character at this point.

Coleridge makes very striking comments about Gaunt's magnificent speech which begins 'This royal throne of kings'. John Payne Collier in his account of this 1812 lecture reports that Coleridge considered that this speech was 'the most magnificent and truest eulogium on our native country which the English language could boast'. Coleridge went further:

> when [he] felt that upon the morality of England depended her safety, and that her morality was supported by our national feelings, he could not read these lines without triumph – when he reflected that while we were proudly pre–eminent in morals, our enemy [i.e. Napoleon, who was then at the height of his power] only maintained his station by superiority in mechanical means', and 'Every motive, every cause producing patriotism, was here collected…If this sentence were properly repeated, every man would retire from the theatre secure in his country, if secure in his own virtue.

Here we see Coleridge the poet–critic responding wholeheartedly to the splendour of Shakespeare's language. But he is also emphasising the true function of the history play as he sees it, to promote a sense of national identity and patriotic feeling. What surprises us is the close connection he

makes between patriotism and proper moral values. He seems fairly confident in the moral response of his countrymen. He is not yet making dark references to possible Jacobinism as we saw that he was to do by 1818, and it is striking that he makes this 1812 reference to the immediately threatening closeness of Napoleon, clearly regarding *him* as deficient in proper moral qualities – he has only 'mechanical means' at his disposal. By implication, therefore, Napoleon is unlikely to succeed in conquering England.

Patriotism may not be a sentiment which appeals to us so powerfully today, and we would certainly not link patriotism with any strong notion of moral rectitude. We may well respond warmly to the idealised and very lovely description of England as an island nation which has often withstood 'infection and the hand of war', and we are moved by Gaunt's vivid description of the destruction of England under Richard's misrule. We can certainly appreciate what Coleridge has to say about Gaunt's exchange with the Duchess of Gloucester in Act I, scene 2, when he tells her that he cannot avenge Gloucester's murder, because only God can punish the sin of God's anointed. For us, Gaunt is partly an individual personality, partly a symbolic figure who represents the chivalric ideal with a strong belief in the divine right of the king – Coleridge himself sees Gaunt as 'symbolical and representative'.

Gaunt's son, Henry Bolingbroke, in Coleridge's opinion, is presented as a practical man concerned with achieving his own egotistical goals, rather than an ethical figure like his father. Coleridge thinks that Bolingbroke's words reveal that he has a 'preconcerted' plan to usurp the throne, well before his exile and the seizing of his inheritance. From Act I, scene 1 onwards, Coleridge identifies a whole series of clues to Bolingbroke's ambition. For example, he cites the group of rhyming couplets, Act 1, scene 1, ll. 41–46, where Bolingbroke emphasises the treachery he sees in the outwardly virtuous–looking Mowbray:

> the more fair and crystal is the sky,
> The uglier seem the clouds that in it fly.
> Once more, the more to aggravate the note,
> With a foul traitor's name stuff I thy throat;
> And wish, so please my sovereign, ere I move,
> What my tongue speaks my right drawn sword may prove.

Coleridge contrasts these couplets with Mowbray's 'vehemence and sincere irritation', saying that they 'well express the preconcertedness of Bolingbroke's scheme'. Interestingly, Coleridge is reported as saying that this scene – by which presumably he means the whole episode of the quarrel between Bolingbroke and Mowbray – seems to be there to show 'by anticipation the characters of Richard and Bolingbroke'. He considers Bolingbroke's language, calm, controlled, decorous, courtly, bringing in Biblical reference, which is quite different in kind from Mowbray's direct, plain lamentation. Bolingbroke's very elaborateness suggests to Coleridge that Bolingbroke already has an ambitious scheme in mind, even though Bolingbroke won't allow himself to

acknowledge it. Here again, Coleridge is thinking and commenting very subtly – perhaps even too speculatively – on the use of language. He does not mention the fact that Mowbray's position is quite different from Bolingbroke's, since Mowbray is never to return home, whereas he sees Bolingbroke get four years lopped off the ten of his original sentence as Richard responds to Gaunt's distress.

We have already noted Coleridge's comments on Bolingbroke's self–importance, shown in the exchange with York outside Flint Castle where Richard is uneasily awaiting developments. Coleridge sees Bolingbroke as both prudent and hypocritical, which underlines the tendency of his criticism to be morally judgmental, and so perhaps not wholly detached, when assessing character. His analysis of Bolingbroke, interestingly, seems to be based very much on the language Bolingbroke uses, taken from the page rather than considering different ways in which the role might be acted on stage. He seems to be searching for a pattern of behaviour where perhaps there is none, with a tendency to extrapolate beyond the evidence.

The other major figure who needs to be considered is, of course, Richard himself. In the 1813 lecture in Bristol to which we have often referred, Coleridge says of Shakespeare's first scenes that they 'contain the germ of the ruling passion which was to be developed hereafter'. Richard opens the play with a decisive speech:

> Old John of Gaunt, time–honoured Lancaster,
> Hast thou, according to thy oath and bond,
> Brought hither Henry Hereford thy bold son,
> Here to make good the boisterous late appeal,
> Which then our leisure would not let us hear,
> Against the Duke of Norfolk, Thomas Mowbray?

Coleridge comments that here 'The weight of each *word* supplies all the relief afforded by intercurrent verse: while the whole represents the *mood*'. Coleridge presumably means that the end–stopped lines, the use of short firm words, suggest that the speaker is both regal and decisive; the king has made up his mind to settle the complaint which has been made, and to do so at once. However, before Act I is over, Richard will have revealed other sides to his nature which sow the seeds of all that is to come: his 'insincerity, partiality, arbitrariness, favouritism'. We can readily see what Coleridge means. Richard's arbitrariness, further complicated by his own involvement in the death of Gloucester, shows itself when, having given way to Bolingbroke and Mowbray, whom he could not order to settle their differences, he allows a formal trial by combat almost to begin, then brings it to an abrupt halt when the trumpets have already sounded the charge, and issues a decree of banishment to both combatants. His partiality shows itself when he shortens Bolingbroke's sentence because of Gaunt's response, and his insincerity in the 'striking conclusion to the first act', where his cruel sarcasm contrasts so damningly with his respectful address to Gaunt at the beginning of the play:

> Now put it, God, in the physician's mind
> To help him to his grave immediately!
> The lining of his coffers shall make coats
> To deck our soldiers for these Irish wars.
> Come, gentlemen, let's all go visit him:
> Pray God we may make haste, and come too late!

to which the sycophantic favourites blasphemously add 'Amen'.

Coleridge goes on to see Richard as a man 'not deficient in immediate courage, as appears by the last assassination, or in powers of mind, as appears in the foresight he exhibits throughout the play' – by foresight he seems to mean awareness of what is likely to happen – but 'weak and womanish' (weak, rather than a debauchee) with feelings 'which… are misplaced in a man, and altogether unfit for a King'. Richard swings from one feeling to its opposite in a moment (though without, says Coleridge, forfeiting our sympathy). It is worth quoting in full the summary of Richard's character which Coleridge gives in Lecture 12 of his London series, delivered in January 1812: 'So in the play from beginning to end he pours out all the powers of his mind: he seeks new hope, anticipates new friends, is disappointed, and at length makes a merit of his resignation. He scatters himself into a multitude of images, and in the conclusion endeavours to shelter himself from that which is around him by a cloud of his own thoughts' (a beautifully–expressed Coleridgean insight). 'Throughout his whole character may be noticed the most rapid transitions from insolence to despair, from the heights of love to the agonies of resentment, and from pretended resignation to the bitterest reproaches. The whole is joined with a richness and capaciousness of thought…'. Coleridge did not know of any other character who was so consistently depicted.

In this impressively shrewd summary of the portrayal of the king, Coleridge is clearly responding to the *poetry* which Shakespeare has given to Richard, selecting as one example the 'overflowing of Richard's feelings' as he lands at Harlech, having returned from Ireland, which is 'so beautifully descriptive of the sensations of a man and a king attached to his country as his inheritance and his birthright. His resolution and determination are depicted in glowing words…' Coleridge quotes the whole of the speech (Act III, sc. 2, l. 46 ff.) about Bolingbroke as a thief who revels in the night, ending with the exulting:

> For every man that Bolingbroke hath press'd
> To lift shrewd steel against our golden crown,
> God for his Richard hath in heavenly pay
> A glorious angel: then if angels fight,
> Weak men must fall, for heaven still guards the right.

However, these high words do not call forth any kind of action, as one might have expected: Richard is speedily devastated by the news he receives about the forces ranged against him.

Shakespeare, Coleridge states, makes drama of history – that is, modifies the genre of his play – by introducing 'accidents', wholly invented scenes which

nevertheless 'give an air of historic fact'. The scene with the queen and the gardeners seems irrelevant to the action, but actually makes for 'an immediate and lively sense of reality'. The same effect is made again by the 'affecting incident' when the Groom visits Richard in prison – a moving example of personal loyalty to the king as a man, and to the king's sanctity as 'the life and power of the state', from a humble person who knows him closely – and tells him how Bolingbroke rode in triumph on Richard's favourite horse, Roan Barbary. The king addresses this lowly servant as 'gentle friend': now that adversity has brought out the best in him, he seems a very different man from the apparently haughty, vain and self–indulgent figure of earlier scenes.

Coleridge singles out two other characters whose presence and attitudes help to ensure that Richard remains 'within the compass of our pity' – the Queen and the Bishop of Carlisle. Carlisle's loyalty – to Richard the king – remains unshaken: he impresses even the usurper Bolingbroke with his 'high sparks of honour'. The Queen is passionately attached to Richard from beginning to end, loyal to Richard the man: the scene of their enforced parting must move even the most cynical member of the audience, and it causes Richard to exclaim bitterly that he is now 'doubly divorced', from his crown and from his wedded wife. The action of the play is closing in towards the desperate, and ultimately hopeless, courage of Richard's final moments.

Coleridge has linked character and theme, totally appreciating the way in which Shakespeare himself has achieved the organic form of the play as a whole, as it has grown from the 'germ' which was sown at the outset. In his lecture, *The Three Voices of Poetry* (1953) Eliot described the work of the great poetic dramatist, such as Shakespeare, as 'a world in which the creator is everywhere present and everywhere hidden'. This is precisely the world which Coleridge in his account of *Richard II* has set before us. We may well recall Coleridge's comments on the world created in Shakespeare's *Venus and Adonis*, where 'You seem to be told nothing, but to see and hear every thing', and where we are struck by 'the utter *aloofness* of the poet's own feelings, from those of which he is at once the painter and the analyst'. Coleridge is not seeing Shakespeare in his own image, but trying to get the full meaning and implications of the language, and the relationship of the parts to the whole, as a poet needs to do: he is concentrating on 'fact', as Eliot would wish: 'an honest enquiry as far as the data permit".

In his lectures and notes on *Richard II*, Coleridge is at his best; he seems to avoid chasing after any 'hare and hounds': what he has to say about patriotism and the morality of the audience seeing a history play is fundamental to his conception of what a history play is – what it is *for*. It is perhaps an 18th century, rather than a 19th century, approach, but it does not get in the way of his in–depth analysis, or cause his own feelings to distort his view of the text.

If Eliot is correct in his 1936 assertion that 'Coleridge is an authority whose influence extends equally towards the good and bad', the lectures and notes on *Richard II* must surely be evidence on the side of the good.