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The Romantic Fascination with Shakespeare

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Dedication and Acknowledgments

I would like to dedicate this thesis to my grandparents, and especially my grandfather Miroslav, who has always pushed me to pursue education to the fullest extent, and follow in his footsteps by staying a student well into his retirement years.

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The Romantic Fascination with Shakespeare

Abstract: The contemporary consensus situates William Shakespeare at the absolute epicentre of the English Literary Canon. Despite his popularity amongst his contemporary audience, his works suffered censorship and editing after his death. Most famously, Nahum Tate constructed a happy ending for King Lear in 1681. This study will strive to examine the construction and rise of Shakespeare as a persona heralded as transcendent in the literary world, aligned with classical figures such as Socrates, Homer, Ovid, and others. The evidence will be examined chronologically, to construct a narrative ranging from Early German Romantic thinkers to William Hazlitt's commentaries; the narrative approach is crucial to appreciating how previous theories informed those that followed. The conclusion of the study will seek to clarify exactly why and how we have come to regard William Shakespeare as the immovable cornerstone of our Canon.

Disregarding any controversies concerning authorship, it is safe to proclaim that William Shakespeare stands alone atop the pyramid of the English Literary Canon. His name, to those in the field, or outside of it, has become completely synonymous to the discipline of creative, critical, and philosophical literary work. The name Shakespeare is the primary port of call when discussing the field. A mere 400 years on from his death in his home town of Stratford-upon-Avon, on the 23rd of April, 1616, Shakespeare continues to baffle, enlighten, and amaze. The 'Cult of Celebrity' exhibit in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington pools together Shakespeare and Austen; they have both inspired fanatical, cult like followings within the literary world. 'Will' and 'Jane', as they are wittily alluded to by the exhibitors, transcend the literary field far more than any other authors.

The crucial question is when this cult like devotion to the Bard and his works develop. One can safely perceive that Nahum Tate censored and altered *Lear* due to the general



distaste with the unbearable death of Cordelia, and the classically tragic ending. The legacy of the altered version is the division of Shakespeare's critics; the likes of Samuel Johnson, true to form, adored the sensibility Tate formed in the play; however, latter critics like August Wilhelm Schlegel and William Hazlitt rightfully derided the version as it was cheap sentimentality. August Wilhelm Schlegel was especially influential in formulating the early Romantic fascination with Shakespeare as a person, and of his works.

The *Sturm Und Drang* movement of the late 18th century, concentrated in Germany, was developed with the purpose of rebelling against French rationalism. However, the movement is not simply hostile towards rationalism, but indebted to the movement that inspired its hostility:

They overthrow the 'reasonable' compromises, the caution of the realists, and the half-heartedness of the 'pre-romantics'. True to their experience as Germans, their work has not the practical, political or economic range of the British and French; but, less restrained by social responsibilities in a country without public life or a cultural centre, they undermine more radically than any contemporaries the rule of 'polite society' in the sphere of culture.¹ (Roy Pascal, pg. 131)

Sturm Und Drang is the embryonic version of Early German Romanticism, which draws on the reactionary assertions made by Kant, independent of the movement, and Goethe, very much the centre of the movement. To fully understand why we revere Shakespeare as the centre of the literary canon, it is imperative to understand the German impact on that reverence. Kant, Goethe, Schiller, and the Schlegel brothers are responsible for the initial increase in popularity of Shakespeare to the German public. The European literary

¹ Pascal, Roy, The "Sturm und Drang" Movement, The Modern Language Review, Vol. 47, No. 2 (Apr., 1952), pg. 131



community is intrinsically connected, appreciating the works produced in other languages, therefore the work of Kant, Goethe, and especially August Wilhelm Schlegel on Shakespeare were revered for their transformative philosophical and critical work which inadvertently shaped opinions of English Romantics when they chose to address Shakespeare. The concern with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's work on Shakespeare was the apparent overuse of Schlegel's work, so far as replicating and translating critical standpoints the German critic developed. With Schlegel's work being relatively unknown due to a lack of translation, Coleridge allayed any concerns about replication by continuing Schlegel's dialogue and developing his standpoint, specifically on the opening scenes of the plays.² (Foakes in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 147)

Chapter 1- Germany's Prometheus from Stratford-upon-Avon

I. Goethe's awakening and Kant's Imagination/Understanding formula

Goethe's initial contact with Shakespeare was less so enlightening and ultimately inconsequentially visceral: 'So far I have thought little about Shakespeare ; entertaining notions, or feelings at a pinch, is the utmost I have been able to manage.'³ (J. W. von Goethe, 'Hamburger Ausgabe', pg. 492-3) With further dramatic production, Goethe came to certain, seemingly rather disheartening realisations about the impact of Shakespeare's work:

Having studied them he must be aware that Shakespeare had already exhausted the whole of human nature in all its tendencies, in all its heights and depths, and that, in fact, there

² *Great Shakespeareans*: Voltaire, Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge, ed. Paulin, Roger, The Arden Shakespeare, published by Bloomsbury, 2015 (Hereafter referenced as *Great Shakespeareans*)

³ Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Goethes Werke* ('Hamburger Ausgabe'), ed. Erich Trunz, 14 vols (Munich: Beck, 1981), 9: 492-3

remains for him nothing more to do. And how could one get courage only to put pen to paper if one were conscious in an earnest, appreciating spirit, that such unfathomable and unattainable excellencies were already in existence.⁴ (S. Axson, pg. 155)

In this excerpt from a letter to Eckermann, written on Friday, January 2nd, 1834, Goethe denotes that any dramatist must study the works of Shakespeare. The implications of this extract are self-evident; the work that Shakespeare has produced is dramatically infallible, leaving Goethe and other dramatists in a state of permanent impotence. Axson notes that Goethe was creatively freed from the stifling bonds of French classical drama by Shakespeare's influence, but mercilessly thrust into despair about the adequacy of his own dramatic work in comparison.

One can perceive the effect of Shakespeare's work in two ways; it can either illuminate, or disparage through perceived infallibility. When the work does illuminate, the individual consequently elevates the work and the artist who has that impact on them to exceptional standards. Goethe in 1771 is calling him 'Pan' 'Prometheus' and Christ. August Wilhelm Schlegel, expostulating on Goethe's Christendom of Shakespeare, declares him 'arisen and walking among us.'⁵(Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg.1) Reading on in Roger Paulin's highly informative introduction to the 'Voltaire, Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge' edition of Bloomsbury's series of critical book called *Great Shakespeareans*, we arrive at the crux, the kernel of the holistic reverence that Goethe, Schiller, and the Schlegel brothers foster for him. Paulin summarises Shakespeare's significance to Early German Romantic thinkers as such:

⁴ Axson, S. (1932). Goethe and Shakespeare. *The Rice Institute Pamphlet*, 19(2), 148-168

⁵



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Shakespeare acts as a catalyst; he is a mover and doer; he sets things alight; he unlocks older poetic traditions and gives younger poets the courage to emulate them.

(Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 3)

Romantic philosophy in general is in its infancy, set alight by Immanuel Kant and his theorem of the interaction between the intellectual, rational world and the spatiotemporal world; more succinctly, the interaction between the 'subject' and the 'object'. Shakespeare enlightens the young German dramatists' mind, and consequently discourages them as they appreciate the infallibility of his work. Yet Goethe, whilst appreciating this and admitting that it may seem futile to produce drama in the presence of such excellence, undergoes a maturation process. Reverence to Shakespeare as a father figure, with gradual attainment of maturity, dwindles as Goethe's own faculties become expanded, resulting in ironical distance.

(Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 3) The ironical distance is formulated through comforting scaffolding that Goethe develops along with Eckermann:

'A dramatic talent', Goethe continued, 'if it was of any significance, could not but take notice of Shakespeare, indeed it could not but study him. If it studied him, however, it could not but realise that Shakespeare had already exhausted the entirety of human nature, in all directions, and unto all depths and heights, and that basically there was nothing left for it, the successor's talent, to do. And whence should one have garnered the courage even so much as to take up the pen, once his serious and acknowledging soul were aware of such unfathomable and unattainable works of excellence, already done?... It is with Shakespeare as with the mountain ranges of Switzerland. Transplant Montblanc to the great plain of the Luneberg Heath, and words will fail you for very astonishment at its magnitude. But visit it in its gigantic



homeland, approach it via its great neighbours: the Jungfrau, the Finsteraarhorn, the Eiger, the Wetterhorn, the St Gotthard and Monte Rosa, and Montblanc would still remain a giant, yet it will no longer strike us with such astonishment. Incidentally, whoever finds it unbelievable,' Goethe continued, 'that a good deal of Shakespeare's greatness is attributable to his great and vigorous era, should ask himself whether he considers such a breath-taking phenomenon possible in today's England of 1824, in these bad days of divisive and criticising journals?'⁶ (Eckermann, 2 January 1824)

Is there resentment in what Goethe and Eckermann discuss? Or is it merely a comforting blanket that they can only feel inadequate because of the critical age and the unrepayable debt that literature owes to Shakespeare. The giant stands too tall, and is inaccessible as he has inundated the literary world with absolutely all the finalities and niceties that it requires. Goethe, upon picking up his pen in Shakespeare's literary tradition can offer nothing to expand upon the works that captured the finite limits of the human experience. Therefore, Goethe writes with reverence at the forefront of his mind and tries to achieve something in his works that is indebted to the giant. The debt he owes, Eckermann, Schiller, and Schlegel all owe to Shakespeare is, ironically, repaid through their reverence. *Sturm Und Drang* and German critics light the proverbial touch paper underneath the sleeping giant that is Shakespeare, and repay their debt in establishing his rightful place in the canon.

In Kantian philosophy, the mind has no content until it comes into contact with the world. The concept of Imagination is crucial to the Kantian theory as the mind has the cognitive frameworks and innate capacity to perceive the outside world and formulate it into a coherent and ordered model of time and space; cognition is related to these pre-existing frameworks, as Kant notes on the cognition of an object through the concept of

⁶ Eckermann, Johann Peter, *Gespräche mit Goethe in den letzten Jahren seines Lebens*, ed. H. H. Houben (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1913), 30 March 1824

understanding: "Thus the cognition of every, at least human, understanding is cognition through concept, not intuitive but discursive."⁷ (Immanuel Kant, pg. 93) This concept of Imagination is something that William Wordsworth, perhaps inadvertently alludes to in his introduction to *Lyrical Ballads*; the spontaneous outpouring of emotion is the Imagination as a capacity of the human mind synthesising the external object into coherent cognitive content. Synthesis between the Imagination and Understanding is one of subjective agreement manifested as aesthetic pleasure.⁸ (Rudolf Makkreel, pg. 47) Makkreel formulises the contrast between the subjective agreement and objective agreement, wherein representation is referred to a definite concept of an object; the concept is framework in the mind therefore the Imagination formulates Understanding in relation to known precedents therefore strictly dictating the Understanding. It is crucial to initially establish Kant's philosophy of the Imagination and Understanding for several reasons; primarily, we must understand the inspiration for the philosophical background that spawned German Romantic thought. Extending upon that, we can begin to discern that upon adopting the theories put forth by Kant, Goethe, Schlegel, and by further extension Coleridge, all utilised the precedents as empirical standards. Shakespeare and his works become examples of the philosophical concepts and distinguish themselves as superior to other works.

II. Friedrich Schlegel and his 'romantisch'

If we are to subscribe to the Kantian harmony between the subject and the object, we can begin to understand the strident efforts of the German Romantic movement to experience life in polarisations, which finds its ultimate resolution in unity. Kant's influence is palpable in the theories of Friedrich Schlegel. Ernst Behler describes the theory as 'an attempt to unite

⁷ Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Translated and edited by Paul Gyer, and Allen W. Wood. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998, pg. 93

⁸ Makkreel, Rudolf, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant: The Hermeneutical Import of the Critique of Judgement*, University of Chicago Press, 1990



[...] two antagonistic aesthetics, to find a synthesis of the antique and the modern, the Classical and the Romantic.”⁹ (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 34) Friedrich distinguishes the binaries for the theory as ‘creative enthusiasm counteracted by sceptical irony.’ The relationship between the Romantic and the Classical is described as one of the enthusiasm against restraint. The latter English Romantic philosophy perpetrated by Wordsworth is distinguishable in Friedrich’s theory. There is an interaction between the Classical traditions awoken by Shakespeare’s and his Romantic forays. The reverence for Shakespeare’s genius stems from Friedrich’s ultimate aesthetic ideal which was not an unquestionable triumph of the romantic, but its synthesis with the classical. (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 51) One of several passages in Friedrich’s works reads as such:

We may, indeed, apply to him the words of his own Hamlet:-

“He was a man, take him for all in all

We shall not look upon his like again.”

Clear and intelligible even to the understanding of a child, wondrous and fascinating to the youthful imagination, he is still the friend and fellow traveller of the full grown man, the confidant of his thoughts and most serious feelings; when the prime of his life is past, the poet is still his faithful companion; many other associates, to whom he clung in youth, appear empty and frivolous, and while he marvels to what they owed their former fascinating charm, our glorious Shakespeare retains all his value to the last, unshaken by the few solitary blemishes, defects of taste, as they are called, which

⁹ Immerwahr, Raymond, in *The Romantic period in Germany : essays by members of the London University Institute of Germanic Studies* S. S. Praver (Siegbert Saloman), University of London, Institute of Germanic Studies, 1970

are sometimes pointed out, but which are in general merely the offspring of our own misapprehension.¹⁰ (Friedrich Schlegel, pg. 267)

The tone to discern from Friedrich is ultimate and unhindered reverence; Schlegel is not disingenuous or embittered, as it may be mistakenly read, similarly to reading Goethe's exasperations about inadequacy; rather he appreciates the debt that we all owe Shakespeare. The persona that begins to develop is similar to the one Goethe depicts; Shakespeare has infallibility in human expression, and any rebuttal against perceivable deficiencies are quibbles forming from our own misapprehension of his genius. The ultimate aesthetic ideal is a direct reflection of the harmony between Imagination and Understanding in Kantian Romantic philosophy. The harmony of the two polarising school of drama into a cogent hybrid is one that Makkreel feels that Kant struggles to achieve in conceiving the theory of the subject and the object. The harmony is off kilter as the Imagination is dominant in informing and shaping the understanding as it fulfils the pre-requisite psychological constructs of beauty. The reciprocity that regulates and ensures harmony is not translated into a synthesis as Kant conceives synthesis differently; a one sided influence for the sake of unity.

Friedrich's appreciation and reverence for Shakespeare hinge on his perception of the location of the 'actual centre, the core of the Romantic imagination' (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 54) in Shakespeare. Shakespeare's spirit is wholly Romantic in Friedrich's perception (Raymond Immerwahr, pg.54), which does not detract from the preceding appreciation of Shakespeare as the marriage of the enthusiasm of the Romantic with the reserved nature of the Classical that impacts Goethe vehemently. Taking the precedent of Shakespeare as the core of the Romantic Imagination, Friedrich's theory of the romantisch is more discernible:

¹⁰ Schlegel, Friedrich von, *The aesthetic and miscellaneous works of Frederick von Schlegel, 1772-1829*; Millington, Ellen J., tr, Published 1849,pg. 267, London, H. G. Bohn, digitised by Google from the library of Oxford University



Friedrich sought first of all to understand the spirit of the romantic age and of the literature which it produced, to turn the attention of his contemporaries back to that age, and to help his own generation recapture its spirit. (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 49)

The influence that Kant has extended on German Romantic philosophy is clearly visible in the following excerpt:

Characteristically the romantic appears as a synthesis of disparate elements, particularly the fantastic and the sentimental, but also the 'mimic' (a term for the portrayal of the objective environment, which for Schlegel implies a historic reference), philosophical, psychological, didactic, rhetorical, and so on. Repeatedly, the symbol \pm is used to express a point of balance. (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 52)

There are two facets of the allusion to Kant's philosophy of the Imagination and Understanding, and the object and subject. The first is one that Makkreel disagrees with. The synthesis of disparate elements is hinging upon retaining its status as a synthesis through the presence of harmony between the Imagination and its resultant Understanding. This is where Makkreel interjects to, as aforementioned, assert that one disproportionately affects the other, Imagination overrides Understanding. The assertion in response to Kant and Schlegel throws up, when one considers the Wordsworthian school of perception, a dilemma that creates an impasse. It is hard to situate Makkreel in relation to Wordsworth's assertions on the spontaneous outpouring of emotion, but one may suspect that he would be far more partial to that philosophical perception. Imagination is disproportionate to Understanding, as harmony cannot be established. The spontaneous outpouring of emotion is too liberating to be

contained into Understanding. Crucially however, the theory is not substantiated by the content of Wordsworth's poetry. Each line is meticulously crafted to have the desired effect of creating feeling and sensation. Therefore, the logical faculties of Understanding are allowed to formulate and *synthesise* Imagination into a coherent body; the existence of such formulations is precisely why Kant's assertions about harmony seem altogether more plausible, and ultimately logical. Schlegel appreciates the balance that is paramount for the relationship between Imagination and Understanding; in *Brief über den Roman*, '[A]ccording to my point of view and my usage, that is romantic which presents a sentimental theme in a fantastic form.' (Foot note 53, Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 52)

Friedrich's obsession with balance represented by the mathematical symbol for it is not only a reflection of his own view of the Romantic relationship of the object and subject as formulaic, but draws on Kant's preaching's of harmony in expression. Without harmony, synthesis in Kantian terms cannot occur as Imagination has a disproportionate influence on the Understanding. We find Friedrich in the same camp. From here we can ascend and ascertain the regard he holds Shakespeare in. Dante's *Divine Comedy* he defines as romantic but altogether more transcendental in its all-encompassing scope than other Romantic works. Cervantes and his *Don Quixote* is the most romantic of romances. (Foot note 63, Raymond Immerwahr pg. 54) Friedrich pools together Cervantes, Dante, and Shakespeare as the ultimate pillars of Romantic ideal. Yet despite all this, Shakespeare, who is not necessarily attaining of the Romantic ideals of the English Romantic School concerning the sublime in nature, becomes the core of the Romantic imagination. Sublime nature is an integral pillar in Romantic ideology, yet Shakespeare is not overly encumbered by focusing on it like poets of the Romantic era. (See Shelley, 'Mont Blanc', 1816) As Friedrich's brother August states, Shakespeare becomes more the property of the Germans than the English. (Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 3) The reverence that German philosophy at the time holds for

Shakespeare is apparent as they internalise him as their own. He presents their ideals and unity of imagination in a theatrical format, a form that does not historically lend itself to the presentation of Romantic ideals.

III. August Wilhelm Schlegel: reverence, romantisch, and translation

August Wilhelm Schlegel has arguably become a more renowned Shakespearean figure in German Romantic philosophy than his brother Friedrich. Whilst he does share some of his younger brother's theoretical outlook on the movement, his mission to translate and popularise Shakespeare amongst the German public was far more influential. August's translations are transformational for the German Romantic School. Translations of Shakespeare predate August Wilhelm. Christoph Martin Wieland published his first translations in Zurich between 1762 and 1766. Despite the translations being in prose, Wieland is deserving of a tremendous amount of praise for bringing a version of the texts to the wider German reading public, who until then only knew the poet's works superficially. Even with its deficiencies due to its form and format, it proved to be a crucial foray into translating Shakespeare as it supplemented the increased popularity of Shakespeare in German critical writing. Those deficiencies however, are not as a result of a lack of appreciation or facility to execute them in verse. The implication is that Wieland felt that the essential elements of Shakespeare's plays could be reproduced in prose.¹¹ (Roger & Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg.98) Whilst perhaps an initially curious decision, it informs us of how the works were perceived in the German literary society. The genius does not exist merely in the verse but in the essential ideas and ideals of the text. If we are to label them as overarching themes, they become transferable to the prose format due to their unique

¹¹ In *Great Shakespeareans*, from Flodoard von Biedermann, *Goethe-Forschungen* (Frankfurt am Main: Rütten & Loening, 1879), 173; Ermann, *Shakespeare-Bild*, 55



universality of expression. Prose, as Goethe notes (Roger & Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg.98), allows the translation to resolve the intricacies of translating verse between languages with vastly varying syntaxes and grammatical rules. The understanding of the primary text and translation into prose allowed Wieland to reach a much wider learned readership. Prose allowed him to tackle some complex plays like *Othello* and *King Lear*, and other problem plays, ones that even Schlegel did not attempt to translate. Eschenburg latterly completed the works of Wieland but was very much allied stylistically to his predecessor; therefore a study of the impact of his works is less necessary.

Schlegel's translations of Shakespeare were initially published in the magazine *Die Horen* in the years 1795-6. The magazine was set up by Friedrich Schiller with a very specific purpose; 'to break down the partition between the aesthetic and the learned words, bring learning into society and taste into scholarship.'¹² (*Horen*, 1795, 1: v) The magazine aspired to reach a wider reading public with its scholarly and theoretical work. Schlegel had three essays published in the short-lived running of the magazine, as well as shorter excerpts of his translations. Schlegel's translating career began with an apprentice role to Gottfried August Burger, and from the experience, Schlegel developed a crucial advancement on the translations of Wieland and Eschenburg. The principles he laid out for his mentor in translating Dante transferred to his work on Shakespeare; he was to translate 'as accurately as possible, observing the constraints of the original terza rima and its peculiarities, a poetical translation that reproduces the character of the original.'¹³ (*August, Wilhelm Schlegel*, pg. 227-30) As much as Wieland's translations were a self-standing work of literary art, Schlegel's achieved multiple levels of such art. His appreciation of the intricacies of rhyme, form, and syntax allowed him to translate the plays accurately, relaying the meaning to the

¹² *Great Shakespeareans* from *Die Horen, Eine Monatsschrift herausgegeben von Schiller* [1795-7], 6 vols (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1959), 1: iv, v, ix

¹³ Schlegel, August Wilhelm, *Sämmtliche Werke*, ed. Eduard Böcking, 12 vols (Leipzig: Weidmann, 1846-7), 7: 38



German public. However, his own moulding of the rhyme and vocabulary was genius in its own right. Schlegel did not dilute the intentions of Shakespeare's plays through over-simplifying works to merely fit a rhyming structure in the German language. He synthesised verse in conjunction with translation to create a piece of art that is technically harmonious with the original text. The German Shakespeare becomes truly the Germans as it garners synonymous sympathies and intentions to the English Shakespeare. The biggest issue with translating Shakespeare is his complexity:

He appropriates language according to situation, not merely to status, often to the same character. It is his innate sense of rightness, of what is appropriate, which guides him, which causes his characters to speak in verse or in prose accordingly, that explains his endless variety. (A. W. Schlegel, pg. 44)

Examples of such complexity are rife through Shakespeare, most notably the ingenious grave digger in *Hamlet*, who as the lowliest character of all, provides adequate ripostes in perfect verse to the most linguistically gifted and endowed character in the English language, Prince Hamlet. It is no surprise to find Schlegel pronouncing Shakespeare 'herald of genius', 'a messenger from nation to nation.' (A.W. Schlegel, pg. 44) The universality that Shakespeare holds is the kernel of his appeal. The issue Schlegel faced was moulding the German language in a way so as to not sound monotonous; German is naturally very stiff and regular, and adapting it to the freedom of Shakespeare's English is seemingly impossible. Wilhelm von Humboldt was one detractor of the efforts that Schlegel extended; he writes to Schlegel that he is trying to solve the insoluble.¹⁴ (Anton Klette, vi) Schlegel's greatest gifts to the Romantic thought school are his translations. He can attempt to solve the insoluble as he

¹⁴ Klette, Anton, *Verzeichniss der von A. W. Schlegel nachgelassenen Briefsammlung* (Bonn: n. p.), vi



understands the playwright. He deciphers meaning as he has to translate every word, take every phrase, and consequently mould it and craft it to relay thought-processes that are in harmony to those of the playwright. August's own proclamation that 'no Englishman in print has ever understood him'¹⁵ (Ludwig Tieck) implies a deeper understanding due to his requirement to dissect every word, phrase and verse rhyme in the play. An English person need only to read Shakespeare and understand him. A German translator must read, dissect, translate, and consequently understand the vast intricacies that are intrinsic to the English language. The translations are truly remarkable feats and deserve their place as works of art.

The *Wilhelm Meister* essay of 1796 provides an insight into the influence that Kant had on Schlegel. August proceeds to laud Shakespeare as arisen and walking among the living, (Roger & Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 110) much like Christ the saviour. Yet his Kant-influenced tone is more revealing of the reverence for the playwright:

To grasp the overall meaning that creative genius places in its works, often preserves in the very core of their arrangement, purely, completely, sharply and definitely, to give it meaning and thereby raises observers who are less independent but nevertheless receptive, to the right level for seeing things correctly. But only rarely has it achieved this. Why? Because contemplating the characteristics of others closely and directly as if it were a part of one's own consciousness, is intimately related to the divine capacity for creation itself. (Roger & Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 111)

As Paulin notes, criticism is aligned with creation, and we can perceive the overarching philosophical grip that Kant's theory of harmony between the object and the subject has on German Romantic thought. From the excerpt, we can gauge the affiliation with the

¹⁵ Tieck, Ludwig, *Kritische Schriften*, 4 vols (Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1848-52), 1: 159



appreciation of synthesis in the relationship between Imagination and Understanding.

Harmony is essential for such synthesis. That is not to say that August is fully embracing of the Kantian formula, and is perhaps aligned to Makkreel's perception of the dilemma and the disproportionate influence the factors have on one another. Immerwahr argues that August is 'primarily concerned with the expansive effect of the poetic creation upon the imagination of the recipient [...] the romantic poet seeks to enchant the imagination by opening up prospects of a boundless distance.' (Raymond Immerwahr, pg. 55) The slight alienation from Kant is understandable as August sees this as the issue with the dramatic unities. The romantic poet facilitates expansion of the imagination through organic forms. The implications with that are that the Understanding is diminished in favour of a reawakening of an already established Understanding through a newly provided Imagination, sourced by the romantic poet. August, influenced heavily by his brother's own theoretical approaches to the romantisch, appreciates the capacity of Shakespeare to transcend the restraints of his own consciousness, transplant himself into the consciousness of other, and retroactively synthesise objects that are in precise Romantic harmony. One can perceive as to why Friedrich Schlegel places Shakespeare at the absolute core of Romantic thought; his works wholly personify and animate the philosophy of synthesis in harmony between the Imagination and Understanding that Kant imparts upon German Romantic philosophy. But not only this, Shakespeare's works are so transcendent and completely ignorant of any rules, they constantly reawaken the faculties of the imagination to re-examine something that was formerly understood as a dramatic unity.

The accomplishments of Schlegel's translations have to be tempered considering the criticism towards them. The major criticism revolves around the deficiencies of the German language. There is criticism of his aims to translate what is seemingly insoluble, and arguably, Schlegel heeded to that criticism as he always avoided the problem plays, avoided the dark in Shakespeare. Schlegel is naturally aware of the deficiencies that the German

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language has in its faculty to accommodate the complexity and obscurity of the original medium. With the limitations of the German lexicon, Schlegel produces a magnificent body of work that garners an acute appreciation of the puns and quips that are so prevalent in the works. Occasionally, Schlegel had to censor and alter his translation to accommodate it to German, but that is arguably where the works take on their own artistic merits; Atkinson speaks of him casting ‘over the plays a thin veil, which, transparent though it is, slightly dims the colours and blunts the contours.’ (Roger & Paulin in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 118)

Paulin comments that what he does achieve is a respect for the essential integrity of Shakespeare’s metaphorical structure. One can digress and argue that Paulin diminishes the achievement of Schlegel in the artistic merits of the translations. To even relay a semblance of the irony that is endemic to the intricacies of the English language is astonishing; having Czech as a native tongue allows me to appreciate the accomplishment in translating a joke into another language, and retaining the essence of the witticism. Vice versa, one of the great bodies of Czech comedic work about a fictitious genius Jara Cimrman, are thoroughly untranslatable because of the peculiarities of the language.

Christina Roger and Roger Paulin include a very informative passage on page 119 of the *Great Shakespeareans* book about the ‘felicitous’ adjustments that Schlegel makes in translating *Hamlet*. The recurring comment is the impact of the works in easing the obscurity of the alien original to the German reading audience, and by that extent, popularising and demystifying the shroud that surrounded Shakespeare. The homogeneity in tone and metaphorical structure are crucial to this act, and act as a catalyst in a wider appreciation of Shakespeare on the continent. The greatest playwright now becomes accessible to the wider audience in the native tongue which is thoroughly invaluable.

Chapter 2- The English awakening



I. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's romantisch

The section is deliberately titled with the German, and most prominently, Schlegelian term for the Romantic as there is a wealth of discussion concerning the originality of Coleridge's critical work on Shakespeare. In some cases, plagiarism is even associated with his ideas that he fervently maintained were thoroughly independent of Friedrich Schelling & August Schlegel:

In this instance, as in the dramatic lectures of Schlegel, to which I have before alluded, from the same motive of self-defence against the charge of plagiarism, many of the most striking resemblances, indeed all the main and fundamental ideas, were born and matured in my mind before I had ever seen a single page of the German Philosopher; and I might indeed affirm with truth, before the more important works of Schelling had been written, or at least made public.¹⁶ (A C Dunstan, pg. 190)

Norman Fruman, in *Coleridge, the Damaged Archangel* directs several assaults at Coleridge concerning his claims to have arrived at the same conclusions and ideas independently of Schlegel, especially when one considers the glaring references to Kant's philosophical work, which naturally influenced Schlegel. The priority between Coleridge and Schlegel is, as John Beer astutely points out, puzzling as Coleridge himself admits to the primacy of the Germans in their exposition of Shakespeare:

It was Lessing who first introduced the name and the works of Shakespeare to the admiration of the Germans, and I should not perhaps go too far, if I add, that it was Lessing who first proved to all thinking men, even to Shakespeare's own countrymen,

¹⁶ Dunstan, A. C., *The German Influence on Coleridge*, pg. 190



the true nature of his apparent irregularities... He proved that in all the essentials of art, no less than in the truth of nature, the plays of Shakespeare were incomparably more coincident with the principles of Aristotle, than the productions of Corneille and Racine, not with-standing the boasted regularity of the latter.¹⁷ (Beer, pg. 52)

The crux of the debate comes in the treatment of the 'organic' and what that entails to Coleridge's critical work. Coleridge has an important relationship to nature from which stem his theories on life which translate to theories concerning art. He thought about the nature of life and the energy that influences it and that translates to the organic form raised in art. In his critical writing, before 1810, there is little to suggest that he had read Schlegel. Whilst it does seem far too coincidental that they arrive at similar philosophical junctures without Coleridge interacting with Schlegel's work, it is far too reductive to diminish Coleridge's work on organic form being exclusively tied to nature, and merely following Schlegel's teachings. Foakes in *Great Shakespeareans* offers reasonable explanation to the matter:

Coleridge developed the contrast by relating the mechanic form to a copy, and organic form to 'the growth of Trees', and Schlegel's formulation helped him to realize that the best way to establish the idea of organic unity in Shakespeare's plays was to illustrate the growth of the play from, as it were, a seed planted in the opening scenes, or in the first introduction of a character. (Foakes in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 146)

Before latching onto the glaring influences of Kant and Schiller, it is crucial to examine that in practice, Coleridge and Schlegel are divided on the infallibility of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Coleridge does label Shakespeare as the absolute master of the dramatic

¹⁷ Beer, John, COLERIDGE'S ORIGINALITY AS A CRITIC OF SHAKESPEARE, *Studies in the Literary Imagination*; Fall 86, Vol. 19 Issue 2, September 1986, pg. 52



imagination¹⁸ (Cecil Maurice Bowra, pg. 46), but is opposed to the assertion of Schlegel that *Romeo and Juliet* is a play from which ‘nothing could be taken away, nothing added, without mutilating and disfiguring the perfect work.’ (Foakes in *Great Shakespearians*, pg. 146)

Coleridge however describes the play as one wherein the parts are less happily combined and not united in harmony, ‘a work composed before Shakespeare’s judgement and taste were developed.’ (Foakes in *Great Shakespearians*, pg. 146) Despite the discrepancy in opinion, the overwhelming influence of Kant’s theories of synthesis and harmony are tangible.

Similarities between Schlegel and Coleridge can be attributed to the two critics having similar philosophical sources, in Kant and Heyne. Dunstan notes that one of the most striking parallels between the two thinkers are their comparisons between ancient and modern drama with ancient and modern architecture. The obsession with ancient art is endemic to the Romantic Movement, and the reverence given to Shakespeare is quite often tinged with relations to the ancient philosophers and dramatists like Sophocles and Aristotle. Schlegel says: ‘The Pantheon is not more different from Westminster Abbey or the church of St Stephen at Vienna than the structure of a tragedy of Sophocles from a drama of Shakespeare’, whilst Coleridge says: ‘And as the Pantheon is the York Minster or Westminster Abbey, so is Sophocles compared with Shakespeare.’ (A. C. Dunstan, pg. 193) The similarities are stark but the inspiration differs, as Schlegel bases his remarks on Goethe, while Coleridge references Dante.

II. Kant ‘took possession of me as with a giant’s hand’¹⁹ (W. Christie, pg. 122)

¹⁸ Bowra, Cecil Maurice, *The Romantic Imagination*, Published July 8th 1961, Oxford University Press

¹⁹ W. Christie, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge, A Literary Life*, ed. Richard Dutton, published by Palgrave, 2007



Naturally, having read Schiller and Schlegel, Coleridge read plenty of Kant's early Romantic philosophy. He proclaimed the phrase about Kant in his *Biographia Literaria* due to the influence that the philosopher has on his theories of Understanding and Imagination:

From Kant he accepted the definition of understanding, by which he meant "the faculty of thinking and forming judgements on the notices furnished by the senses, according to certain rules existing in itself."²⁰ (Tahir Jamil, pg.39)

As these influences from Kant came late on in Coleridge's intellectual and theoretical development, we can perceive the overwhelming influence of the English Romantic school, particularly the Wordsworth school of Romanticism. In the Preface to *Lyrical Ballads*, which has become an indispensable piece of text in its own right, Wordsworth is absolutely clear that the senses are central to his whole poetic project; 'by fitting to metrical arrangement a selection of the real language of men in a state of vivid sensation.'²¹ (William Wordsworth, 741) The kernel of Wordsworth's ideology is the appreciation and centrality of sensation which is the evocation of bodily senses. It is the whole collection of senses that informs the imagination in its faculty to formulate images. Coleridge channels this appropriation of the sense in their relevant centrality; the senses formulate an understanding as much as they formulate the imagination, as judgement becomes crucial to bringing coherence to the object and subject without a disproportional influence. Coleridge essentially implies the harmony that exists for Kant between Understanding and Imagination, as judgement is formed through the harmonious ruling and its consequently informational faculties. There is a wealth of Coleridge's own words that substantiate his opinions on Kant and how they allow him to perceive Shakespeare: "we have shewn that he [Shakespeare] possessed Fancy, considered as

²⁰ Jamil, Tahir, *Transcendentalism in English Romantic Poetry*, pg. 39

²¹ Wordsworth, William, *Preface to Lyrical Ballads*, accessed at <http://www.bartleby.com/39/36.html>



the faculty of bringing together.’²² (John Spencer Hill, pg. 28) Fancy for Coleridge is very different to Imagination:

Fancy, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites.

The Fancy is indeed no other than a mode of Memory emancipated from the order of time and space...But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association. (John Spencer Hill, pg. 124)

The process of association in determining Fancy is crucial, without it Fancy cannot exist. However, what does stand out, and this is something Coleridge is susceptible to, is contradiction. He states that the grouping of objects which already carry certain associations is one of the poet’s choice; yet in 1834, in *Table Talk*, he proclaims that the images of Fancy ‘have no connexion, natural or moral, but are yoked together by the poet by means of some accidental coincidence.’ (Goblin Market, 12th April 1862, pg. 22 in John Spencer Hill, pg. 125) The major difference between Imagination and Fancy is what Kant states about Imagination; it has the capacity and faculties to synthesise images from the senses that feed said faculties. Fancy is inferior, as it can only construct patterns out of pre-determined fixities and definites, associations that are pre-determined through their nature.

III. Imagination and Shakespeare

Coleridge has several Theses for what he titles ‘Fancy Imagination Distinction’. Thesis VIII addresses the object and subject that Kant professes: ‘subject can refer to the particular

²² Hill, John Spencer, *The Romantic Imagination*, Published December 1st 1977, Palgrave



individual as well as to universal attributes of consciousness in general.²³ (Theodor W. Adorno, pg. 245) The object is the thing experienced through the senses. Coleridge offers up this thesis:

Whatever in its origin is objective is likewise as such necessarily finite. Therefore, since the spirit is not originally an object, and as the subject exists in antithesis to an object, the spirit cannot originally be finite. But neither can it be a subject without becoming an object, and, as it is originally the identity of both, it can be conceived neither as infinite nor finite exclusively, but as the most original union of both. In the existence, in the reconciling, and the recurrence of this contradiction consists the process and mystery of production and life. (John Spencer Hill, pg. 35)

The utilisation of the word 'finite', when considered in conjunction with the use of it to describe Fancy is what allows us to distinguish between the two terms. The spirit associated with the subject is not finite, therefore the faculties and senses of the object can furnish perception with sensations that formulate and synthesise the image. Imagination is unique in its capacity to synthesise whilst Fancy falls short in that capacity as it works only with finites, images formed through definite associations that determine the judgement. In relation to the poet and Imagination, Coleridge says the following in his 'Imagination and the Reconciliation of Opposites':

The poet, described in *ideal* perfection, brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone and spirit of unity that blends, and (as it were), *fuses*, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power to which we have exclusively appropriated the name imagination. (John Spencer Hill, pg. 39)

²³ Adorno, Theodor W., *Critical Models, Interventions and Catchwords*, Translated by Henry W. Pickford, Introduction by Lydia Goehr, Columbia University Press

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When one considers that for Coleridge, dramatic imagination is about fusion and unity of ideas, and intrinsically associated with the soul, we can safely assume his reverence for Shakespeare as he labels him the absolute master of the dramatic imagination. Placing him at the heart of dramatic imagination is very like Schlegel situating Shakespeare at the absolute core of the Romantic. The development of the persona of Shakespeare as speaking for all humanity is rooted in his unity of thought and uniting of the soul: ‘The dramatic imagination does not throw back, but brings close; it stamps all nature with one, and that its own, meaning, as in *Lear* throughout’²⁴(Coleridge, June 23rd 1834) It does not only unite; it stamps its own ideas and theories.

Coleridge becomes even sweeter and more reverential than in his philosophical discursions when discussing the characters that Shakespeare created, but true to form in channelling Schlegel and Kant:

Speaking of their effect, i.e. his works themselves, we may define the excellence of *their* method as consisting in that just proportion, that union and interpenetration of the universal and the particular, which must ever pervade all works of decided genius and true science. For Method implies a *progressive transition* and it is the meaning of the word in the original language.²⁵(*Friend* I. 457)

The union and harmony of the universal and particular is what defines Shakespeare’s characters as the cores of Romantic thought. Characters acts as vehicles and relays for Shakespeare’s unequalled universality. Coleridge insists that the characters spawn from the Poet’s imagination which is the ultimate distinguishing medal of unbridled genius.

²⁴ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Table Talk*, entry for June 23rd 1834; in *Table Talk and Omniana* of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. H. N. Coleridge, Oxford, 1917

²⁵ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *The Friend*, ed. Barbara Rooke, 2 vols [*The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, Bollingen Series LXXV, 4. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press; London: Routledge & Keegan Paul, 1969



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Imagination is wholly encompassing of the consciousness of the Poet; therefore to marry the two in unity and harmony is to achieve poetic genius as one can transfer the self-contained particular, and proceed to engage it with the universal. In *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, we can note that Coleridge does not think Shakespeare creates out of nature, through copying or *natura naturans*, but creates out of 'a power...the *universal* which is potentially in each *particular*...the substance capable of endless modifications.'²⁶ (Coleridge, 43-4) The power to create through universality and transfer it to Art is one not lost on the English Romantics. The influence of German idealism is self-evident, as Friedrich Schlegel says 'Shakespeares Universalitat ist wie der Mittelpunkt der romantischen Kunst'²⁷(Friedrich Schlegel, pg. 237), demonstrating that Shakespeare was the source of the German Romantic awakening as much as he was for the English.

Coleridge was extremely keen in his lectures to establish Shakespeare as a political hero: 'an absolute genius providing England with a philosophical and moral superiority over Napoleon, the commanding genius who had military and political domination over Europe.' (Foakes in *Great Shakespeareans*, pg. 163) The superiority is philosophical and moral because the many intellectuals, and essentially all Englishmen, Shakespeare was the greatest man who ever lived. He possessed the philosophical, romantic, and moral faculties that no other man could, and stood as shining symbol against the tyrant that Napoleon made himself throughout Europe between 1810 and 1812. Coleridge not only became a nationalistic promoter of Shakespeare, but one of his most fervent public defenders, as the public opinion concerning Shakespeare was one that deteriorated due to the bastardisation of his works; as aforementioned, *Lear* was neutered and bestowed with an ending it did not warrant by Nahum Tate. Hugh Blair, an exponent of Scottish common sense realism, which can

²⁶ Coleridge, Samuel Taylor, *Coleridge's Miscellaneous Criticism*, Harvard University Press, 1936

²⁷ Schlegel, Friedrich, *Athenaums-Fragmente : Und Andere Schriften*, Hofenberg, 2016



essentially be defined as naïve realism, a perception of the object as final, encapsulated the feeling towards Shakespeare in his most influential work *Lectures on Rhetoric*:

Great as he may be justly called, as the extent and force of his natural genius, both for Tragedy and Comedy, is altogether unrivalled. But, at the same time, it is genius shooting wild, deficient in just taste, and altogether unassisted by knowledge or art.²⁸

(Hugh Blair, II, 523)

Coming in his defence, Coleridge naturally refers to the understanding he has learnt of Imagination, demonstrating that even before his plays, Shakespeare was able to contain an ‘endless activity of Thought’. It was precisely his ability to contain Fancy and Imagination in a text that separated Shakespeare from the description provided by Hugh Blair. Blair essentially reduces Shakespeare’s faculties to merely Fancy, stating that the genius that is created is one that is uncontrollable and utterly coincidental. There is supposedly no consideration of the knowledge that Imagination can provide through its impact on judgement and understanding. Perhaps this is why Blair is associated with naïve realism, as it is naïve to assume that Shakespeare’s works exist in a vacuum. Works created with exclusively Fancy can indeed exist in a vacuum space as they can lack the requisite judgement and understanding that Imagination and its innate state of synthesis provide. The reduction and exclusion of the Poet’s consciousness from the creative process essentially reduces the work to a state of non-creation. It is not a natural, living piece as it only exists as a coincidental event wherein the associations and definites that are innate to Fancy are arranged in what is seemingly of a poetic form. It is a naïve realism that Coleridge defends against as the English Romantic era is permeated with German idealism. Lest we forget that Shakespeare, wholly

²⁸ Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric*, II, 1783



German to Schlegel, 'was the stick with which the German [idealist] movement of *Sturm und Drang* beat off the French cultural hegemony and initiated the Romantic revolution.'²⁹

(Jonathan Bate, pg. 9)

Coleridge has become synonymous with Shakespeare through his fervent defence of the Poet, and his highly influential criticism. Alfred Harbage perhaps best assesses the merits of what Johnson, Schlegel, and Coleridge achieved:

When we read Johnson, we think what a wonderful man Johnson is. When we read Schlegel, we think what a wonderful summary this is. When we read Coleridge we think what a wonderful artist Shakespeare is. Coleridge's is the criticism with immediacy, the power to evoke the works criticised; when he speaks Shakespeare is there.³⁰ (Harbage, 25-6)

Whilst the contributions of Schlegel are slightly devalued in stating that he provides a wonderful summary, even though both August and Friedrich laid the foundations for English Romantic idealism, the evocation of Coleridge in such lofty terms is warranted. Coleridge elevates the art and the artist that is Shakespeare. Schlegel does comment on the persona and his identity as German but as a translator in the main, he critiques and comments upon the brilliance of the plays, precisely because he had exceptional access to the faculties that Shakespeare imparted on the text. Coleridge elevates Shakespeare to become a nationalistic symbol of superiority over the rationalist French thought-school; the works allow him to do so as Shakespeare possesses moral universality and infallibility. Shakespeare is the ultimate

²⁹ Bate, Jonathan, *Shakespeare and the English Romantic Imagination*, Clarendon Paperbacks, 1989

³⁰ Harbage, Alfred Introduction to *Coleridge on Shakespeare: A selection of the essays and lectures of Samuel Taylor Coleridge on the poems and plays of Shakespeare*, ed. Terrence Hawkes, Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1969



and universal moral yardstick for not only playwrights and poets, but for artists and all man in general.

Chapter 3- Romantics and Reactionaries

I. The Romantic with gusto

William Hazlitt, unlike Samuel Taylor Coleridge, with whom he is closely associated, has become understudied and perhaps slightly underappreciated, with his works being read less than those of Coleridge. Perhaps that is understandable as Hazlitt was a critic and commentator, rather than a lauded poet and fascinating persona. It is fair to qualify Hazlitt as a Romantic on par with Coleridge, Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley, and Keats as he displayed a fervent opposition to materialism. His subscription to Kantian philosophy was in consummate ignorance due to his deficiency in understanding German; Hazlitt relied, to a certain extent, on what Coleridge had to say about Kant, Schlegel, and the rest of the German idealist movement.

The distinguishing factor in his appreciation of the works of painters was whether he deemed them to be full of gusto. He criticised English painters on a failure to even make a faint approach to Titian and Michelangelo. For Hazlitt, gusto in art is ‘the power or passion defining any object’; in Titian’s colours, ‘not only do his heads seem to think- his bodies seem to feel.’³¹ (William Hazlitt, pg. 201) Art in this respect must extend to the written word as he says this about Shakespeare and Milton:

³¹ Hazlitt, William, Selected Writings, ‘On Gusto’, ed. Ronald Blythe, Penguin Books, 1970



The infinite quantity of dramatic invention in Shakespeare takes from his gusto. The power he delights to show is not intense, but discursive. He never insists on anything as much as he might, except a quibble. Milton has great gusto. He repeats his blows twice; grapples with and exhausts his subject. His imagination has a double relish of its objects, an inveterate attachment to the things he describes, and to the words describing them. (William Hazlitt, pg. 204-5)

Hazlitt commends the invention that Shakespeare has. The attribution of it to his gusto, his passion for art is intriguing because of the established perception of the genius of Shakespeare's imagination. Despite being the measuring stick for painters, Hazlitt does not use the term to refer to poets and writers, regardless of the extraordinary amount of time to his critical work on Coleridge and Wordsworth. Robert Ready distinguishes between 'gusto' and 'interest', and maintains that despite the gusto with which Hazlitt himself wrote, the receptive audience and his fans place far more emphasis on the term than Hazlitt himself.³² (Robert Ready, pg. 537) Ready's sentiment is one I would mirror as 'gusto' to Hazlitt is one or both of: a term devoted more intrinsically to physical art like paintings, or an umbrella term for the faculties that writers like Coleridge, Shakespeare, and Wordsworth are adept at formulating to create Romantic works.

II. Imagination and Understanding to Hazlitt

As we know, Kant and his ultimate meaning eluded Hazlitt as he displayed a distinct lack of direct references to his writing. He does speak favourably of the philosopher, but lacks the access to his full meanings. Hazlitt's favoured quotation from the Kantian school becomes the

³² Ready, Robert, Hazlitt: In and out of "Gusto" Robert Ready Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 Vol. 14, No. 4, Nineteenth Century (Autumn, 1974), pp. 537-546



phrase ‘the mind alone is formative’³³(William Hazlitt, pg. 28), which endemically incorporates the imagination/understanding quandary that Kant debunks. The Romantics are correctly labelled as rebels, revolutionaries, and reactionaries because they rebelled against several schools of thought that seemed deficient; naïve realism, or direct realism is simplistic in postulating that the senses alone formulate perception; sensationalism feeds off similar realist faculties in postulating and overstating the overwhelming influence of the senses on the formulation of knowledge. The crux of what perplexes Hazlitt is the question of what is formative in the mind:

Hazlitt professed himself “utterly unable to comprehend” the nature of consciousness and the manner in which our ideas are produced. So are we all, to be sure. But he was convinced of the existence of some *active* principle or power in the mind, which operates upon or makes use of our impressions. This he calls understanding or reason, though there is at least one passage in which he clearly identifies it instead with the imagination. (William Hazlitt, pg. 23)

Hazlitt’s active faculty is developed into his idea about the sympathetic imagination which upon engagement can lead to a wholesome understanding of the object:

Objects, like words, have a meaning; and the true artist is the interpreter of this language... The more ethereal, evanescent, more refined and sublime part of art is seeing nature through the medium of sentiment and passion, as each object is a

³³ Schneider, Elisabeth, *The Aesthetics of William Hazlitt, A Study of the Philosophical Basis of his Criticism*, Octagon Books, New York, 1969



symbol of the affections and a link in the chain of our endless being.³⁴ (William Hazlitt, VIII)

Hazlitt often spoke of poets like Wordsworth in less than glowing terms, but commended those who avoided the practice of making something out of nothing to suit their poetic purpose. Objects do have meaning but they do not exist to be captured as poetic, however, a sagacious artist can shape the meaning into poetic form. The sympathetic imagination that Hazlitt employs ‘ordinarily exercises itself only when the artist and audience turn from nature to human nature.’³⁵ (J. D. O’Hara, pg. 554) These assertions articulated by O’Hara yield certain conclusions about Shakespeare’s role in this debate; Shakespeare’s universality of imagination and understanding exists due to his detachment from the Romantic ideals of the sublime and nature, and a subsequent focus on the composition of human nature and the whole human experience. Hazlitt makes the assertion that Shakespeare’s Romantic origins lie in his ‘dramatic fluctuations of passion’ (P.P. Howe, v, 52,): “In Chaucer we perceive a fixed essence of character. In Shakespeare there is a continual composition and decomposition of its elements, a fermentation of every particle in the whole mass, by its alternate affinity or antipathy to other principles which are brought in contact with it.” (P.P. Howe, v, 51,) It is precisely this constant decomposition and subsequent reformation that yields the fascination that Shakespeare provides, as the ultimate meaning constantly eludes the recipient as it constantly evolves and ferments. With this fermentation process, the whole mass garners differentiated meanings as varying interpretations shape the perception of the work. The crucial difference between Wordsworth and Shakespeare was the former’s reluctance to ‘look abroad into universality, if that alone constituted genius’³⁶ (Francis Bacon, Dedication,

³⁴ Hazlitt, William, *The Complete Works of William Hazlitt*, ed. P. P. Howe, Centenary Edition, VIII, 82 f., 1930-34

³⁵ O’Hara, J. D., *Hazlitt and the Functions of the Imagination*, PMLA Vol. 81, No. 7 (Dec., 1966)

³⁶ Bacon, Francis, *The Advancement of Learning*, Dedication, ed. Joseph Devey, 1605



Advancement of Learning) Bacon's favoured phrase would have become empirical given Hazlitt's desire for genius to be just that. It is entirely possible to speculate that Wordsworth had read Bacon's original meaning and indeed thrust himself into the centre of the world, but that is precisely what alienates Hazlitt from Wordsworth as he despised egotism. He had no love for Wordsworth's penchant to interpose his subjective values onto the object.

Consequently, Shakespeare ascends in comparison due to his objective and universal genius: "Shakespeare (almost alone) seems to have been a man of genius, raised above the definition of genius." "He was the Proteus of human intellect." (P.P. Howe, viii, 42,) The label of Proteus feeds on the literary tradition of Shakespeare, establishing characters like Richard III; ever-changing, and endlessly fascinating.

Robert Ready differentiates between 'gusto' and 'interest' for Hazlitt, but does note that Hazlitt seldom actually uses the term, and is quite pleased with himself when he does. (Robert Ready, pg. 537) O'Hara notes that despite his insistence on 'gusto' Hazlitt is enamoured with Shakespeare's indifference as his distinguishing trait. He states that we may 'suspect him of paradox-mongering' but states that in context, 'he is simply calling to our notice the disinterestedness of Shakespeare's formative imagination.' (O'Hara, pg. 560) We can suspect that the tone criticism appreciates is that gusto for Hazlitt is only replicable in painting and physical art, whilst the written word is not deficient of it, but can seldom replicate the solid state that physical art contains. Interest therefore is more applicable as we can see Hazlitt referring to Shakespeare's disinterestedness, therefore unquestionable objectivity, wherein he does not mould nature to his own subjective thought:

Born universal heir to all humanity, he was as one, in suffering all, who suffered nothing; with a perfect sympathy with all things, yet alike indifferent to all: who did not tamper with nature or warp her to his own purposes; who...was rather a pipe for

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the Muse's finger to play what stop she please, than anxious to set up any character or pretensions of his own. (P.P.Howe, viii, 42,)

Disinterestedness is essentially impartiality and objectivity, which is commendable and championed by Hazlitt. Shakespeare differentiates himself by not moulding nature to presuppose poetic qualities to it; it speaks for human nature with sympathetic imagination as the works are devoid of a superimposed ego that distorts the meaning through its own extravagant and overstated subjectivity:

It is observed by Mr. Pope, that 'If ever any author deserved the name of an ORIGINAL, it was Shakespeare. Homer himself drew not his art so immediately from the fountains of nature; it proceeded through Egyptian strainers and channels, and came to him not without some tincture of the learning, or some cast of the models, of those before him. The poetry of Shakespeare was inspiration: indeed, he is not so much an imitator, as an instrument of nature; and it is not so just to say that he speaks from her, as that she speaks through him.³⁷(William Hazlitt, Preface)

Hazlitt was phenomenally frank and forthright in his criticism therefore his unadulterated reverence for Shakespeare is filled with honesty. He finds little critique of Shakespeare as an icon of literature and sets the precedent for our reverence to Shakespeare as the ultimate referential point for the body of work that captures human nature in its truest form. Hazlitt, much like Goethe, Schlegel, and Coleridge before him comes to realise the insignificance of literary works that followed Shakespeare's: "Shakespeare had not been accustomed to write themes at school in favour of virtue or against vice. To this we owe the unaffected but healthy

³⁷ Hazlitt, William, Preface to Characters of Shakespeare's plays, Printed by C. H. Reynell, 21 Piccadilly, 1817



tone of his dramatic morality. If we wish to know the force of human genius, we should read Shakespeare. If we wish to see the insignificance of human learning, we may study his commentators.”³⁸ (William Hazlitt, *On the Ignorance of the Learned*)

Findings, Conclusions and Outlook

The conclusion that seemingly resonates most is the appreciation that great scholars like Goethe, Schlegel, Coleridge, and Hazlitt have for Shakespeare’s genius. They all revere Shakespeare for his immeasurable contribution to the study of human nature. No other writer has captured the essence of human nature in a more refined, complete, and capricious way. Naturally, even great scholars feel inadequate in the presence of perfection; yet none show resentment. They choose to show gratitude to Shakespeare. The attitudes that they take are ones to reassure any literary scholar. Goethe’s ironical distance and satisfaction with forging his own, slightly less complete path is one to reassure any budding scholar. Schlegel, Coleridge, and Hazlitt repaid their debt to Shakespeare by giving future contemporaries access to him. Their limitations prove crucial as we are all capable of forging our own interpretations from our own faculties, of the poet’s works.

³⁸ Hazlitt, William, *On the Ignorance of the Learned*, from *Table Talk, Essays on Men and Manners*, 1822



Appendix

Critical Evaluation

My key aims and objectives for this thesis was to determine why we have such unwavering reverence to Shakespeare, and how we have come to perceive his works as morally infallible. I think it was important to show the progression and development of idea through the early to late Romantic period, as Shakespeare rose to prominence once again as a retort to French rationalism. I certainly learnt a great amount of philosophical thoughts involved with the Romantic Movement, originating from Kant. There were issues with the relatively small amount of work of the Schlegel brothers, particularly Friedrich, that were translated into English, but I feel that I negotiated that problem by translating some German and getting an overall tone of their critique. Developmentally, I feel that this thesis has allowed me to actively link ideas from different critics and periods into a strong and cohesive argument. My main achievement to stem from this project was the ability to link philosophical frameworks into the actual commentary of the influence of Shakespeare, and display the links between the two factors. I feel that I also proved to myself that I can interact with difficult philosophical discourses and comment on them in an accomplished manner, whilst composing a sound thesis. Overall, I have been thrilled with the option of choosing to complete a dissertation as it has only reinforced my passion for the Romantic era and the persona that Shakespeare has become. It has allowed me to study Shakespeare from a completely new perspective as the focus was very much away from analysis of content, and much more about his influence on contemporaries and highly influential literary figures.

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