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MA Thesis

William Hazlitt's Dramatic Criticism on Shakespeare

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摘 要

威廉·哈兹里特是英国浪漫主义时期的散文作家、文学批评家和戏剧评论家。哈兹里特自幼受家庭熏陶，热爱自由、平等。青年时结识了骚塞、柯尔律治、华兹华斯和兰姆兄妹。他们一起写诗著文歌颂法国大革命，抨击英国政治。19 世纪 20 年代的英国正经历着莎士比亚作品的复兴，著名的演出在伦敦几乎每日可见。哈兹里特虽曾说过他爱读剧本甚于观看演出，然而对于和演员交往和观看表演他很感兴趣。

哈兹里特所著《莎士比亚戏剧中的人物》（1817）以优美流畅的散文笔调书写自己阅读和观看莎士比亚戏剧的独特感受，既有对情节、人物、台词等方面深刻细致的分析，又有对舞台演出精彩独到的批评。其文学论著中，他把个人品味视为文学批评的基础。在哈兹里特看来，文学批评是一项富有创造性和想象力的工作，它能充分体现每个人独有的创造力，一个优秀的文艺批评家首先应该是一位优秀的诗人。文学批评的目的并不在于消极地去发现和指出其他作家作品存在的缺陷，而在于记录一个生性敏感的诗人在面对一部作品时所得出的感悟。“我谈论我所思考的，我思考我所感受的”便是哈兹里特最有名的信条。

哈兹里特强调剧中人物的心理活动，并驳斥塞缪尔·约翰逊把人物分成一些固定的类型的看法。在他看来，每个人物角色都是独一无二的个体，只有充分理解了莎剧中的人物我们才能真正感受到莎士比亚作为一个剧作家所拥有的力量。哈兹里特认为，戏剧的目的在于教给人类道德和人性， 也只有通过悲剧以及人们在观看悲剧所产生的悲怅情绪才能达到这一教育目的。莎剧之所以伟大，就是因为莎士比亚理解自然的丰富性和其给我们带来的宝贵财富，并成为了自然的“合作者”。本文将从哈兹里特所处的时代入手，着重分析其莎士比亚戏剧评论的特点并比较他的文学批评与塞缪尔·约翰逊及同时代的科尔律治、兰姆的异同。

关键词：浪漫主义时期文学批评，哈兹里特，莎士比亚戏剧评论

ABSTRACT

William Hazlitt's Dramatic Criticism on Shakespeare

Xu Yang

William Hazlitt was one of the most distinguished prose writers to emerge from the Romantic period. Born in 1778 as the son of a Unitarian minister and educated at the Hackney New College for dissenters, young William got to know many of the leading intellectuals like Coleridge and Wordsworth who welcomed the French Revolution. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* was Hazlitt's first full-scale work of literary criticism, and his first major success. It consolidated his ideas about Shakespeare, drawing to some extent on the lectures of Schlegel and refuting the orthodoxy of Johnsonian criticism.

My thesis aims to explore some basic concepts and themes such as "passion", "gusto" and "sympathetic identification" in Hazlitt's literary criticism and analyse the characteristics of his dramatic criticism on Shakespeare. For Hazlitt, criticism is an imaginative and symbolic recreation of experience, valid in itself and having no obligation to point to some set of values beyond itself. Criticism requires individual creativity and like art, it is not progressive. Furthermore, criticism is not a negative activity discovering and pointing out the failings of writers. Rather, he prefers a more personal and individualistic method to provide the open and unencumbered response for a work of literature or art. "I say what I think: I think what I feel" was the most famous of his credo. The major features of Hazlitt's dramatic criticism are: creative, highly imaginative, enthusiastic and individualistic. These features are in line with the

romantic spirit. Finally, I will compare Hazlitt's criticism on Shakespeare with his precursors to trace their influences on him and with his contemporaries in order to find out their differences and similarities.

Keywords: Hazlitt, Romantic Literary Criticism, Shakespeare, Dramatic Criticism

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Need for the Study

William Hazlitt (1778-1830) was one of the most distinguished prose writers to emerge from the Romantic period. Leigh Hunt extolled him as "one of the profoundest writers of the day, and admirable reasoner, the best general critic, the greatest critic on art that ever appeared."(qtd. in Bromwich "Essays"80) The subjects of his lectures or essays on authors and their works include almost every name worth knowing in English literature from Chaucer to Hazlitt's own day—men of varied literary attainment of the Elizabethan era, wits of the restoration, comic writers, dramatists, poets, novelists of the eighteenth century and almost all his contemporaries. Reflecting on the course of Hazlitt's career, W.P. Albrecht divided Hazlitt's works into four groups—his philosophical writings, his political books and essays, his criticism of art and literature, and the essays of his last decade(5-6). From his earliest letters as a schoolboy and a young man, he was preoccupied with the imagination as key to human understanding and he strove all his life for the integration of imagination as a literary instrument with the moral and political needs of mankind. The serious modern evaluation of Hazlitt began with P.P Howe who led to an excellent edition of Hazlitt's works and gained momentum with the brilliant work of W. P. Albrecht, Walter Jackson Bate and John Bullitt. These authors clearly established Hazlitt as a major writer and critic who represented and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of the Romantic Movement. In fact, "any comprehensive examination of Wordsworth, Shelley, Byron, Coleridge, and Scott simply has to reckon with what Hazlitt said about these authors" (Sussman, 106). Distinguished critics like John Mahoney, Herschel Baker, David Bromwich and John Kinnard have not only discussed Hazlitt as a major figure in his own right, but also they

have convincingly demonstrated that the romantic movement cannot be adequately understood without considering Hazlitt's role in the movement.

Perhaps Hazlitt's greatest contribution to his time was the attention which he directed to Shakespeare. Chagrined by the lack of intelligent English criticism of Shakespeare, he praised without reserve A. W. Schlegel for his sympathetic interpretation and set to work to discuss each play with a gusto that has never been excelled. *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* was Hazlitt's first full-scale work of literary criticism, and his first major success. It consolidated his ideas about Shakespeare, drawing to some extent on the lectures of Schlegel and refuting the orthodoxy of Johnsonian criticism. He focuses mainly on the characters that appear in the plays, but also comments on the plays' dramatic structure and poetry, referring frequently to critical views that came before him, as well as the manner in which the characters were acted in stage performances. Hazlitt's dramatic criticism reveals true taste and judgement and he "made criticism a kind of creative writing, full of fascination and completely free from pedantry."(Baker, 192) Hazlitt, too, stimulates his readers by attending to the distinctive "feel" or experience of a literary work and to how that experience embodies the power of a literary imagination.

For the reader of today who wishes to read the plays of Shakespeare with unadulterated enjoyment, not deviating into dogmatic assertion or scientific research, Hazlitt is a sure guide. For teachers and students who want a better understanding of the Romantic period and its spirit, it is also worthwhile to read. Many of his essays contain analysis that was groundbreaking in Shakespeare criticism. Hazlitt argues in his essay "Coriolanus" against the idea that poetry has a moral or a political purpose. The essays "The Tempest" and "The Merchant of Venice" reveal Hazlitt's argument that even characters traditionally viewed negatively by audiences can still have a just cause. In the essay "King Lear", Hazlitt argues that a successful tragedy tells us that a character's strengths are equally his weaknesses. Similarly, the essay "Othello" describes how an individual's strength can easily be used against him, with tragic consequences. In his essay "Hamlet", Hazlitt argues that Hamlet is different from the other tragic heroes in that he acts more like a spectator than a participant in the action of the play.

In spite of these merits, little research has been conducted concerning Hazlitt's dramatic criticism in China. Out of the love for Shakespeare's plays and also for Hazlitt's special personal style, I chose this topic; I hope that through my efforts, I can demonstrate the unique charm of Hazlitt's essays and make some meagre contribution to the field of romantic dramatic criticism in China.

1.2 Literature Review

1.2.1 Hazlitt's Literary Criticism in General

Herschel Baker, in his *William Hazlitt* (1962), claims that in the essays Hazlitt "exemplifies the gusto, power and passion that he regards as the unique effect of art. His chief distinction as a critic lies precisely here, in his ability to perceive the imaginative truth of art and to convey the rapture that he feels." This book gives us a thorough and general view of Hazlitt and his many facets, traces the man's development as a critic, his association with the journals of his age, the roots of his critical stance and the general positions taken in his practical criticism.

Later, John Kinnard in his book *William Hazlitt: Critic of Power* (1978) uses the concept of "power" as a way of getting at Hazlitt's perspectives not only on literature but also on politics, religion, manners and morals. The unifying theme by means of which he seeks to bind together a chronological survey of Hazlitt's many diverse interests is "his vision of the continuity of 'power' and its motives ... as ruling force or authority, and ... as active, creative, or generative energy-that is the informing vision of all his criticism".

Professor Mahoney in *The Logic of Passion: the Literary Criticism of William Hazlitt* points out that critics have never been lacking for the task of providing some assessment of neither the aesthetics or the criticism, but "the real need ... is for a study that will look at the whole critical output... to let it speak for itself first, and then to search out underlying forces and themes that give shape and direction to the work" .So in his book, he tries to pose some questions about the relationship between Hazlitt's aesthetic view and his practical criticism. Mahoney briefly sketch the important questions of the setting of Hazlitt's criticism and the elements which seem crucial in the

shaping of the critic's attitudes and viewpoints in the first chapter, then he proceeds in a series of chapters to consider the major themes which run through Hazlitt's writings: the theme of nature, of emotional immediacy, of imagination and of the end of literature and criticism.

David Bromwich's book, *Hazlitt: the mind of a Critic* is an analytical study of Hazlitt's thought and criticism in art, literature, politics, and metaphysics. Bromwich seeks to establish Hazlitt as one of the three great English critics, with Johnson and Ruskin, a central writer of his period, and the most valuable critic of Romanticism. It is the first complete study of Hazlitt's criticism. Bromwich points out that Hazlitt remains "a rare instance of the speculative thinker who is also a representative observer—who can give a report on what lies directly before him which has the effect of prophecy. Originality is inseparable from such other words as imagination, power and sublimity for Hazlitt, and they are the major themes in his literary criticism. Hazlitt's prose is extraordinary varied and responsive, "he can be grave and clever, irritable and above dispute in the quick secession of his mood as his sentences move straight to the mark...The pace and consistency, the head-on stubbornness and willing imperfection of a man talking to you about what concerns his most are his constant strength", and in this aspect, Bromwich argues that he know no other writer in English who could combine them.

Hazlitt's first published book was a philosophical treatise. Entitled *An Essay on the Principles of Human Action*, it argued—against the grain of that Hobbesian and Malthusian tradition that linked the survival instinct to capitalist competition— that the mind is naturally "disinterested". Tom Paulin in his book *The Day-Star of Liberty: William Hazlitt's radical style* traces this idea back to the Scottish Enlightenment philosopher Francis Hutcheson, who argued that the power of appreciating beauty is antecedent to the principles of self-love and self-advancement. In the tradition that runs from Hutcheson to Hazlitt, "disinterestedness" is a form of empathy that yokes the aesthetic sense to the unselfish politics of "rational dissent". For Hazlitt, then, "disinterested" did not mean "detached" or "impartial". As Paulin puts it, "the disinterested imagination is capable of an empathy with a position it does not

share—indeed, which it opposes". Building on the work of the American scholar David Bromwich, Paulin argues that English criticism took a wrong turn when Matthew Arnold redefined "disinterestedness" as impartiality. The Arnoldian tradition, inherited by Eliot and Leavis, basks in pseudo-objectivity. Paulin wants us to return to the Hazlittian principle that "the disinterested imagination takes a position, but it is not entrenched, obdurate, or rigid; rather, it is based on an active and flexible way of knowing that is essentially dialogic. It doesn't talk to itself."

Some critics emphasize how Hazlitt's subjective style harms the essays. George Saintsbury, in 1949, emphasizes how the essays serve as only notes to the play while many other critics, like William Wimsatt and Cleanth Brooks argue that Hazlitt is an impressionistic critic. Patterson Jr. in his article "Hazlitt's criticism in retrospect"(1981) argues that Hazlitt should not be considered as top-ranking critics like Dryden, Coleridge, Arnold and T.S. Eliot because of his fragmentary style, impressionistic approach, self-contradictory attitudes in different works and his unjust undervaluation of the achievements of Byron, Coleridge and Keats. Patterson claims that Hazlitt is not a critic, but rather a "commentator on literature". In 1990, literary critic Janet Heller, in responding to the claims of subjectivity, claims, "Critics have alleged that Hazlitt's essays are disorganized and overly subjective. However, when one examines books like *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, it is clear that Hazlitt uses his personal responses to dramas and a special rhetorical structure to help the reader identify with tragic heroes and to arouse the reader's enthusiasm and sympathetic imagination." Heller later argues, "*Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, contrary to popular critical opinion, is perhaps Hazlitt's most successful attempt to implement his theory of drama criticism. He highlights Shakespeare's primary effects, enabling the reader to concentrate on the most important themes and characters."

The latest monograph on Hazlitt is Duncan Wu's *Hazlitt: the First Modern Man.* In this book, Wu argues that Hazlitt is modern both by his journalism and by his placing a modern importance on the psychology of character. Wu in his book also declares the importance of *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* in marking Hazlitt as a serious critic, arguing that *Characters* displays Hazlitt's strength to articulate the motivations and

morality of individuals in Shakespeare. He further points out that Hazlitt has brought a new approach responsive to the Romantic fascination with psychology. And therein lies the key to Hazlitt's modernity.

1.2.2 Hazlitt Dramatic Criticism in Particular

Harry T. Baker in his article "Hazlitt as a Shakespearean Critic" (1932) argues that Hazlitt's critical genius illustrates the "disinterested love of precision of truth", this love is a passion and it goes far toward explaining his present eminence and his unpopularity among his contemporaries. He further compares Johnson's "common sense criticism" with Hazlitt's creative and intuitive criticism and points out that reason alone will not carry a critic far enough in commenting on Shakespeare. Then the author parallels Hazlitt's position in literature with Newton's position in religion because "both are voices of inspiration, kindling the fire in the hearts of youthful listeners."

John Kinnaird considers "power" as a central term in Hazlitt's dramatic criticism. He describes Hazlitt's discussion of the poetic imagination in his essay "Coriolanus" as containing "perhaps the most original, and surely the most heretical, idea in the entire range of his criticism. Indeed, there is good reason to approach this idea with caution: for not only does the main thrust of its argument run counter to Hazlitt's own earlier doctrine... but it seems even to challenge one of the sacred articles of humanist faith since the Renaissance—belief in the beneficence of poetry". David Bromwich also points out that "the passage on Coriolanus is extraordinary" in its implications and that "no such passage will be found in the whole range of Coleridge's criticism". In Kinnard's article "Hazlitt and the 'Design' of Shakespearean Tragedy: A 'Character' Critic Revisited", he iterates Hazlitt's idea that nature and art are one in Shakespeare and the supreme "faculty" of Shakespeare's genius is that he sympathizes with "the impulses of nature". The essentially "dramatic" is "the essentially individual and concrete", the "circle of dramatic character" or "the mutual contrast and combination of the dramatis personae" is the first law of dramatic "design" in Shakespeare. What makes a dramatic character consistent is a consistent process of feeling in response to change, and especially in the character's sympathetic or antipathetic relations with other

organic natures like itself; for it is only through this responsiveness to others, as mediated by imagination, that a self is able to become conscious of its own nature, to know and express an "idea" of its feelings.

W.P. Albrecht analyses the reasons why Hazlitt prefer tragedy in "Hazlitt's Preference for Tragedy" (1956). In this article Albrecht elaborates Hazlitt's theory of imagination as it "affects his definitions and evaluation of both tragedy and comedy. Hazlitt describes what imagination does for both the poet and the audience. In the first place, it identifies the poet with his material and produces what is real and true. Imagination, then, is not only the agent of human perception, producing whatever reality man can know, but also, in poetry, it is the faculty that makes a further combination of "natural" forms and an "associating principle" which links the present with the past and thus validates emotion. Tragedy, says Albrecht, is superior to comedy because it reveals human character more truly and because it arouses more sympathy with other people. Its truth and morality depend, to a high degree, on sympathetic identification. In another dissertation "Hazlitt, Passion, and King Lear" (1978), Albrecht focuses on the role of Passion in Hazlitt's tragedy and especially in King Lear. For the Romantics, the power of passion is that it propels the mind—not merely out of selfishness, pride, or lethargy—but into a creative process of learning. Hazlitt's "logic of passion" seems to embrace both meanings. For one thing, this logic depends on the interplay of passion in varying degrees, as the characters both respond to the action and through the collision or conjunction of their passions to propel it forward. Secondly, in passion of great intensity Hazlitt finds the energy that, by stimulating the imagination into widely ranging metaphors, weaves another kind of dramatic texture. The passion aroused by confronting a painful world may bring the whole mind to bear on a process of moral re-ordering. The reader or viewer of a tragedy, by sharing this confrontation and thus drawing on all the resources of his own mind, acquires both knowledge and power.

James Mulvihill in his article "William Hazlitt on Dramatic Text and Performance" (2001) points out that the relation between text and performance is central to Hazlitt's dramatic criticism: Hazlitt's theatre criticism is sensitive not only to

how a dramatic context is altered by its performance, but how performance is conditioned by reception. Then he selects a number of Hazlitt's theatre notice and examines them, and finds that these notices reveal a sense of the complexly mediated ways by which drama authorize itself through performance. His conclusion is that Hazlitt's dramatic criticism "engages a performative dimension in Regency culture encompassing the production and reception alike of theatre", that is, performance and reception constructs each other, neither is a privileged practice, neither being wholly contained by the other.

Chapter Two

Basic Concepts and Themes in Hazlitt's Literary Criticism

2.1 The Critical Background of Hazlitt's Literary Criticism

Born in 1778, William Hazlitt was the son of a Unitarian minister. Religious and political radicalism were closely intertwined at this time, so young William's education at the Hackney New College for dissenters brought him into contact with many of the leading intellectuals who welcomed the French Revolution. Changes were taking place within the young Hazlitt as well. While, out of respect for his father, Hazlitt never openly broke with his religion, he suffered a loss of faith, and left Hackney before completing his preparation for the ministry.

Although he rejected the Unitarian theology, Hazlitt's time at Hackney left him with much more than religious skepticism. He had read widely and formed habits of independent thought and respect for the truth that remained with him for life. He had thoroughly absorbed a belief in liberty and the rights of man, and of the mind as an active force which, by disseminating knowledge, through both the sciences and the arts, could reinforce the natural tendency in humanity toward the good. He impressed upon him the ability of the individual, working both alone and within a mutually supportive community, to effect beneficial change by adhering to strongly held principles. The belief of many Unitarian thinkers in the natural disinterestedness of the human mind had also laid a foundation for the young Hazlitt's own philosophical explorations along those lines.

In 1798, he met Wordsworth and Coleridge. He wrote years later in his essay "My First Acquaintance with Poets" that "poetry and Philosophy had met together. Truth and Genius had embraced, under the eye and with the sanction of religion."(17: 107) .Later still, long after they had parted ways, Hazlitt would speak of Coleridge as "the only

person I ever knew who answered to the idea of a man of genius" (5:167).When he read Wordsworth's poetry he realized that this was something entirely new, and he began to see that Wordsworth's was the mind of a true poet. At that time, the three shared a passion for the ideas of liberty and rights of man. They tramped back and forth across the countryside, talking of poetry, philosophy, and the political movements that were changing the earth. This unity of spirit was not to last, but it gave Hazlitt validation of the idea that there is much to be learned and appreciated in poetry as well as the philosophy to which he was already devoted, and the encouragement to pursue his own thinking and writing. He believed that their poetry brought a new democracy to English literature. With Wordsworth, Coleridge, Lamb and Shelley, Hazlitt's literary theory and criticism represented a fresh new beginning for criticism and literature at his time. Mahoney summarizes the characteristics of this train of thought as follows:

> Its strongly emotional foundation, its scorn of abstraction and generalization, its image of nature as a fluid process of great richness and complexity, its advocacy of imagination as truly creative and shaping faculty which alone can represent the truth of reality—these and so many other emphases seem to represent the sharpest kind of break with the critical tradition (Mahoney, 7).

When compare Romanticism with Neoclassicism, many scholars tend to emphasize the distinctions or the "gulf" between those two periods and summarize the English Neoclassicism as characterized by a pronounced rationalism in philosophy and by a narrow and distinctive formalism in the arts and exemplified by major writers like Dryden, Pope and Johnson and Romanticism as characterized by emotion, imagination, naturalism and a revolutionary movement put forward by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Keats and others. But critics like Abrams, Bate and Mahoney would not focus on the "gulf" but rather on the continuity of the things shared in common by the writers of these two periods. Professor Bate suggests a possible methodology when dealing with the entire concept of the Romantic imagination in the early-nineteenth century. "Where it is most successful and informative", he contends, "the romantic conception of the imagination simply assumes and expands the theory of the mind that was developed during the eighteenth century by English empirical psychology—a theory of mind that has developed along with the empirical emphasis on concrete, particularized nature. Of its

application to romantic values in literary criticism, Hazlitt is the most notable example."(qtd. in Mahoney,8)

Eighteenth century writers, Hazlitt consistently contends, achieved a special kind of excellence, but not the highest kind of excellence. They are masters of form, of the artificial; they marshal all the resources of language to construct a criticism of life, to satirize, to reform. They are truly poets of reality whose basic artistic concerns generally precluded the sublime, the passionate and the imaginative. Still Hazlitt, while attempting to understand and evaluate the writers of the age and while relegating them to a position of lesser importance, does not underestimate the contributions of the age. Just as surely as Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton were exemplars of the spontaneous and the natural, so Dryden and Pope are models of the artificial, of "those who describe the mixed modes of artificial life, and convey general precepts and abstract ideas" (qtd. in Birrell, 210). The great emphasis, then, in both Hazlitt's approach to eighteenth century writers and to writers generally, is confrontation of the work itself, examination of the writer himself. The business of criticism for Hazlitt, as Mahoney puts it, is "not to reduce art to rigid cycles, to static periods, or to illustrate how certain writers in a given era reveal certain general qualities or abstract principles" (Mahoney, 25). It is much more complex. Hazlitt, says Elisabeth Schneider, "had taken the eighteen century with him when he entered the nineteenth" (qtd. in Bromwich "Hazlitt"21). This remark is illuminating because it explains a quality of fair-mindedness toward his immediate predecessors which sets him apart from the Romantic Movement as a whole. Bromwich also points out that Hazlitt is a writer who comes of age about 1800 and who "found himself at a confluence of the Augustan and romantic idioms: Hazlitt was only more resourceful than others in feeling what this could mean. He could choose to retain the eighteenth-century pattern of balance and antithesis. In fact, Hazlitt carries on the inherited mode wherever it suits him, comfortably for any stretch of sentences, though as a rule he breaks it up before a paragraph is done"(Bromwich, "Hazlitt"16).

2.2 Basic Concepts and Themes in Hazlitt's Literary Criticism

2.2.1. Individual Creativity

Hazlitt's philosophical roots were based on the British empirical tradition. While at Hackney, he read and learnt a great deal from empirical philosophers—especially from Hobbes, Locke, and Hartley. Those readings directed his attention from the metaphysical speculation and pointed toward the empirical approach with its emphasis on the nature and workings of the mind and the limitation of its experience. However, he increasingly found himself unsatisfied with the idea that the mind is passive and is mere gathering-place of sensations. In his "Essay on the Principles of Human Action", Hazlitt complains of the mechanistic approaches of Hartley which made the mind a captive of external reality and argues that "the aggregate of many actual sensation is...a totally different thing from the collective idea, comprehension, or consciousness of those sensations as many things, or of their relations to each other." Thus, he stressed especially the faculty of understanding as the real source of ideas which "alone perceives the relations of things, and enables us to comprehend their connections, forms and masses". (qtd. in Mahoney, 32)Also he read Hume and Smith and agreed with them that sympathy, rooted in the imagination, is a key in human response. As what professor Mahoney argues, Hazlitt "consistently deplored both the mechanistic psychology which made mind exclusively dependent upon sensation and the Hobbesian theory which made man little more than a self-serving brute" (34). He sought and developed an image of the mind as creative, as beginning with the materials of experience but as molding from them new images and new realities.

In the field of criticism, he does not treat criticism as a negative activity discovering and pointing out the failings of writers. Rather, he prefers a more personal and individualistic method to provide the open and unencumbered response for a work of literature or art. For him, criticism is the record of a sensitive man's encounter with a work of art. "I say what I think: I think what I feel" was the most famous of his credo. How to find a language to convey the critic's sympathetic experience of the great art became the continuing challenge.

It was this personal and individual perspective which marked most of his critical writing and what separated him from the contemporary criticism. The following paragraph in the essay "On Criticism" gives best expression to his idea:

> A genuine criticism should, as I take it, reflect the colours, the light and shade, the soul and body of a work: here we have nothing but its superficial plan and elevation, as if a poem were a piece of formal architecture. We are told something of the plot or fable, of the moral, and of the observance or violation of the three unities of time, place, and action; and perhaps a word or two is added on the dignity of the persons or the baldness of the style; but we no more know, after reading one of these complacent *tirades,* what the essence of the work is, what passion has been touched, or how skillfully, what tone and movement the author's mind imparts to his subject or receives from it, than if we had been reading a homily or a gazette. That is, we are left quite in the dark as to the feelings of pleasure or pain to be derived from the genius of the performance or the manner in which it appeals to the imagination, we know to a nicety how it squares with the threadbare rules of composition, not in the least how it affects the principles of taste (8:217).

Also in other very important essay "On Genius and Common Sense" he emphasizes this idea: "In art, in taste, in life, in speech, you decide from feeling, and not from reason, that is, from the impression of a number of things in the mind, which impression is true and well-founded, though you may not be able to analyze or account for it in several particulars" (8:31). For Hazlitt, criticism is an imaginative and symbolic recreation of experience, valid in itself and having no obligation to point to some set of values beyond itself. "No one can judge of poetry without possessing some measure of a poetical mind" (18:182), he says. Criticism requires individual creativity and like art, it is not progressive.

2.2.2. Gusto, Passion, and Sympathetic Imagination.

2.2.2.1. Gusto

The concern with "gusto" or emotional strength in a work of art is another major tenet in Hazlitt's literary criticism. Gusto is a term a term Hazlitt used to refer to qualities of passion and energy that he considered necessary to great art. In accord with his impressionistic approach to literature, Hazlitt's concept of gusto also suggests that a passionate and energetic response is the principal criterion for gauging whether or not a work achieves greatness. He defined gusto as "power or passion defining any

object"(4:77), it is "the conveying to the eye the impressions of the soul, or the other senses connected with the sense of sight, such as the different passions visible in the countenance, the romantic interest connected with scenes of nature, the character and feelings associated with different objects"(18:106) and "it is in giving this truth of character from the truth of feeling, whether in the highest or lowest degree, that gusto consists."(4:77) In the fine art of painting gusto is "where the impression made on one sense excites by affinity those of another"(4:78) and the term here suggests a totality of response involving the full range of human potential. It is a strong emotional response triggered by the object in nature and brought to that object.

Gusto is absolutely central to the experience of art and criticism; it is ultimately what distinguished art from a mere representation of reality, from what Hazlitt regarded as mere "objects of sight". Only when these objects become the objects of taste and imagination, when they penetrate to the sense of beauty and pleasure in the human heart and are revealed to the view in their inner core and structure, does great art begin. "Gusto" is the name that Hazlitt gives to the state of feeling, or sympathetic excitement, wherein the imagination defines the "internal character" or the "living principle" of its subject. But gusto is also the state in which the poet's sympathy properly discriminates, emphasizing those impressions most meaningful in the poet's (and therefore others') experience and modifying other impressions accordingly" (4:79). One of his most famous definitions of poetry is that "Poetry is the language of the imagination and the passions. It relates to whatever gives immediate pleasure or pain to the human mind. It comes home to the bosoms and businesses of men; for nothing but what so comes home to them in the most general and intelligible shape, can be a subject for poetry. Poetry is the universal language which the heart holds with nature and itself" and "poetry is the most vivid form of expression that can be given to our conception of anything, whether pleasurable or painful, mean or dignified, delightful or distressing. It is the perfect coincidence of the image and the words with the feeling we have, and of which we can not get rid of in any other way, that gives an instant 'satisfaction to the thought'" (5:7). The truth of poetry, therefore, depends upon the intensity of sympathetic excitement at the moment of creation as well as upon the intensity and frequency with which the poet

has shared the feelings of others. The truest poetry, the "most impassioned species," must be tragedy. Tragedy can be written, in fact, only in an age when passions flourish with elemental intensity.

The genre of tragedy was frequently cited in Hazlitt's discussions of "gusto". People are fascinated by and drawn to tragedy not simply out of a sense of escape or preoccupation with the grotesque or abnormal, the explanation is quite contrary: man's fascination with the tragic is tied intimately to his basic humanity. Great tragedy, he argues in another critical essay, is "like vessel making the voyage of life, and tossed about by the winds and waves of passion"(12:53) and Shakespeare is the tragedian of gusto. Tragedy, although it satisfies the love of power, at the same time controls it by appealing to human sympathy, with the result that love of power does not become-as it did with Iago--simply "love of mischief." (12:206). The feeling of power that tragedy instills comes not only from indulging one's passions but also from recognizing the truth of evil, escaping its delusions, and longing for the opposite good.

In a word, as what professor Mahoney says, gusto is "a strong and passionate excitement in the artist which communicates itself to whatever object in nature it turns, the emotional immediacy which pervades artistic subject and manner, form and expression, a psychological power which communicates the variety and complexity of human response" (71) and it is a singular emphasis in Hazlitt's criticism.

2.2.2.2 Passion

Romantic criticism held that passion brings all the faculties of the mind into an act of creation. Hazlitt calls "impassioned" poetry the best poetry. The most impassioned species of poetry, he says, and therefore the greatest, is tragedy. And Shakespearean tragedy is for Hazlitt the greatest of all dramatic achievements because its depth and extreme projection of passion breaks through the surface diversities of character to reveal, and precisely through that diversity, the latent unity of soul" that makes the whole world kin: "The passion in Shakespeare...is not some one habitual feeling or sentiment preying upon itself, growing out of itself, and moulding every thing to itself; it is passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individual is liable, and to which others are liable within him."(5:51) Shakespeare's

tragedies are "on a par with, and the same as Nature, in her greatest heights and depth of action and suffering. There is but one who durst to walk within the mighty circle, treading the utmost bound of nature and passion, showing us the dread abyss of woe in all in all its ghastly shapes and colors, and laying open all the faculties of the human soul to act, to think, to suffer, in direst extremities"(6:30-31). In *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*, Hazlitt argues that the third Act of Othello and the first three acts of King Lear are great exemplars of what Hazlitt regarded as the logic of passion that

> They contain the highest examples not only of the force of individual passion, but of its dramatic vicissitudes and striking effects arising from the different circumstances and characters of the persons speaking. We see the ebb and flow of the feeling, its pauses and feverish starts, its impatience of opposition, its accumulating force when it has time to recollect itself, the manner in which it avails itself of every passing word or gesture, its haste to repel insinuation, the alternate contraction and dilatation of the soul, and all 'the dazzling fence of controversy' in this mortal combat with poisoned weapons, aimed at the heart, where each wound is fatal (4:259).

This passage helps us to understand why, whenever Hazlitt tries to specify the distinctive "principle or moving power" of Shakespeare's genius, it is not "character" on which he lays most stress but "passion"—"the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstance". Passion emerges in his essays on the tragedies as an elemental force which, while it emanates only from within the characters and can be understood only through a knowledge of them as individuals, becomes more powerful than the several wills and minds through which it moves; it seems to acquire a life and momentum of its own, as Hazlitt expressly suggests when he speaks of the "sea," the "storm," the "tide" of tragic passion in Shakespeare. Hazlitt's interest is in "passion" as the energy of human conflict—as the dynamism of "circumstance," a force generated by sympathies and individual motives.

2.2.2.3 Sympathetic Imagination

One reason for preferring tragedy is evident among critics in the Romantic period. For Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt, and De Quincey, the tragic character comprises "true,"

"real," "natural," "permanent," "flesh and blood" qualities—because in tragedy the poet's imagination is so heightened that its product becomes uniquely "true." (Albrecht, 1042) Not all of these critics mean exactly the same thing by either "imagination" or "truth"; but for all of them and for other critics and poets in the Romantic period a poem's truth varies with the intensity of the poet's feeling. Hence tragedy, which Hazlitt calls "the most impassioned species" of poetry, becomes true to a very high degree. Because it is true, tragedy is also moral, not only because morality requires truth but also because the quality that makes tragedy especially true makes it especially moral. That quality, which is an important one in Romantic criticism, is sympathetic identification: a product of the imagination. Shakespeare's imagination, says Hazlitt, made him "greatest in what was greatest," that is, in tragedy. Hazlitt does not say that comedy lacks values dependent on imagination. But comedy takes a less sympathetic--and therefore less revealing view of human nature, and to the extent that it reduces the element of identification, it is less true and less moral than tragedy.

Like his contemporary critics, Hazlitt take imagination not as a "mere picture-making faculty or a compartment of the mind, but as a larger and more comprehensive capability which synthesized and unified the many resources of the human mind" (Mahoney, 87).Hazlitt describes what imagination does for both the poet and the audience. In the first place, it identifies the poet with his material and produces what is real and true. Hazlitt considers reality to be the phenomenal world of man's perceptions. "Poetry," says Hazlitt, "is an imitation of nature, but the imagination and the passions are a part of man's nature. We shape things according to our wishes and fancies", but poetry, Hazlitt adds, is more than "a mere description of natural objects": the "heightenings of the imagination" are also required. "Poetry represents forms chiefly as they suggest other forms; feelings, as they suggest forms or other feelings" (qtd. in Albrecht,1043).Imagination, then, is not only the agent of human perception, producing whatever reality man can know, but also, in poetry, it is the faculty that makes a further combination of "natural" forms. Our mind has the ability to mold and develop experience in accordance with its desires and images.

Imagination is above all else a creative power, with its ability to shape its material

into a new reality which heightens our sense of the reality we hear and see. Imagination is triggered by strong feeling, the basic concern of imagination is not with things as they are, but rather with things "as they are touched by the peculiar electricity of our psychic lives" (Mahoney, 89). Hazlitt divided poetry into two major classes, that of imagination and that of sentiment, and he described the poetry of imagination as "calling up images of the most pleasing or striking kind" and the poetry of sentiment as depending on the "strengths of the interest which it excites in given objects"(qtd. in Mahoney, 90) The greatest poetry combines the best of both kinds of imagination, and Chaucer, Spencer, Shakespeare, and Milton exemplify them in the highest degree. The poet of sensibility has thought and felt mainly about himself; but the writer of impassioned poetry brings to the moment of creation the feelings which he has shared with others, which modify and substantiate each other.

Hazlitt counters the reduction of morality to pleasure, pain and self-interest by formulating and defending the essential roles of imagination. He explains the identifying power of the imagination most fully in his "An Essay on the Principles of Human Action" wherein he argues that man is not naturally selfish and states clearly the moral function of imagination:

> The objects in which the mind is interested may be either past, present, or future. The last can alone be the objects of rational or voluntary pursuit; for neither the past, nor present, can be altered for the better, or worse by an effort of the will. It is only from the interest excited in him by future objects that man becomes a moral agent...The mind is naturally disinterested in its own welfare in a peculiar mechanical manner, only as far as it relates to its past, or present impressions...The imagination, by means of which alone I can anticipate future objects, or be interested in them, must carry me out of myself into the feelings of others by one and the same process by which I am thrown forward as it were into my future being, and interested in it. I could not love myself, if I were not capable of loving others. Self-love, used in this sense, is in its fundamental principle the same with disinterested benevolence. (1:2)

Although in general habit makes a person readier to identify his present self with his future self, the imagination may also identify one's present self with the future selves of others and thus make the sympathetic identification that results in benevolence. Imagination not only has the ability to conjure up distant objects and

experiences, but also the ability to sympathize with persons and actions with which we are not immediately familiar. One's readiness to put himself in another's place, share his feelings, and then act unselfishly may be encouraged by "habit and association." "A similar loss of self, habitually encouraged, is necessary to the poet who would write truthfully and universally. Those who have 'the largest hearts' have the soundest understandings; and he is the truest philosopher who can forget himself." (qtd. in Albrecht, 1044).Thus Shakespeare and Milton had a deeper sense than others of what was grand in the objects of nature, or affecting in the events of human life. The imagination's greatest power is sympathy, its ability to project and enter into another reality and to share its being. Unlike memory and sensation, which are directed to the past and present, the imagination is future-oriented and free from the intimidations of past and present. In his most optimistic estimate of the moral imagination, Hazlitt asserts that "The tendency of civilization and intellectual intercourse has been to extend the circle of sympathy with the circle of knowledge, to burst the barriers of tribe, nation, and colour, and to extort the confession that wherever there was a kindred feeling, there was a claim to pity, to justice, and humanity"("The Life of Napoleon Bonaparte",121) For Hazlitt, then, the lack of moral action represents the failure of imagination, an egotistic inability to expand our self-interest into common concern for others. For Hazlitt, Shakespeare's imagination expresses the power of the unconscious, as distinguished from the egotism that Hazlitt associates with self-consciousness. By exhibiting, as Hazlitt says, "the species through the individual"—that is, the power and complexity of human nature through the use of character—Shakespeare attracts our imagination and sympathy.

2.2.3. Nature and Art

One of the dominant themes which underlie Hazlitt's manner of dealing with a work of art, most basic and consistent was that great literature imitate nature—and yet the view of nature seems dramatically new, associated with the more general Wordsworthian-Romantic vision of nature as a vast, living, and evolving process.

Throughout Hazlitt's critical writing is a persistent attempt to break through traditional abstractions of nature, to see nature not as the "one clear, unchanged, and

universal light" of Pope, but as the concrete phenomena confronted in everyday life. Nature is to be clearly distinguished from art and the artificial, from what he regards as those objects and emotions which are dependent upon the will of man and the arbitrary conventions of society. Nature for Hazlitt has a naked, unconscious reality, and existence of her own to which art must render obeisance; she is the original, and art is but the copy. Shakespeare was cited constantly as the great model of imitation of nature in Hazlitt's sense; he was a co-worker with nature, a collaborator with her rich treasures and abundant variety. If Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton must be ranked as premier English poets, then Shakespeare must be ranked as the greatest of those four precisely because he was the "poet of nature":

> Chaucer excels as the poet of manners, or of real life; Spenser, as the poet of romance; Shakespeare as the poet of nature (in the largest use of the term); and Milton, as the poet of morality. Chaucer most frequently describes things as they are; Spenser, as we wish them to be; Shakespeare, as they would be; and Milton as they ought to be. As poets, and as great poets, imagination, that is, the power of feigning things according to nature, was common to them all: but the principle or moving power, to which this faculty was most subservient in Chaucer, was habit, or inveterate prejudice; in Spenser, novelty, and the love of the marvelous; in Shakespeare, it was the force of passion, combined with every variety of possible circumstances; and in Milton, only with the highest. The characteristic of Chaucer is intensity; of Spenser, remoteness; of Milton, elevation; of Shakespeare, every thin."(5:46).

In a word, Shakespeare's love and devotion to the accurate and exact rendering of nature was central to his art; it served no other cause and thus accounts for the stirring reality of his plots, the sense of life as lived in his characters, the vitality and concreteness of his lifestyle.

For Hazlitt, natural objects and phenomena have a special kinship with the imagination and with poetry because they have a special identity and independence of their own and are generated spontaneously without tempering or interference. Much of Hazlitt's most interesting speculation and much of his most vital practical criticism focus on the subject of variety and contrast within the unity of nature and on the consequent questions of how man deals with the variety and of how the artist represents or imitates them. Nature is quite regularly seen as a panorama of contrasts. This idea of

the reconciliation of opposites, of variety within an overall pattern of unity, is again manifested in human nature, which, for Hazlitt, was a continuing source of wonder and provided the artist with a fertile field of inquiry. He spoke with awe "There is an infinity of motives, passions, and ideas, contained in that narrow compass, of which I know nothing, and in which I have no share. Each individual is a world to himself, governed by a thousand contradictory and wayward impulses. I can, therefore, make no inference from one individual to another; nor can my habitual sentiments, with respect to any individual extend beyond himself to others."(5:101)

Shakespeare almost perfectly captures this sense of complexity of human motivation and the variety of human personality. His characters both in themselves and in their relationship with their dramatic peers are continually setting off contrasts in the imagination, continuing sharpening the reader's or spectator's awareness of the complexity of experience. Borrowing from life itself, Shakespeare created characters representing a spectrum of human behavior, and he created them as a result of what Hazlitt described as an unconsciousness of imagination which matches the unconsciousness of nature itself. Everything is in motion, and the genius of the painter was his ability to render the exact feeling of the moment, to capture the expression "en passant", in a state of progress or change, and, as it were, at the salient point.

CHAPTER THREE

Hazlitt's Dramatic Criticism

3.1 The Romantic Cult of Shakespeare's Plays

Some of the earliest stirrings of the Romantic Movement are conventionally traced back to the mid-18th-century interest in folklore which arose in England with Joseph Addison and Richard Steele treating old ballads as if they were high poetry. These activities set the tone for one aspect of Romanticism: the belief that products of the uncultivated popular imagination could equal or even surpass those of the educated court poets and composers who had previously monopolized the attentions of scholars and connoisseurs.

One of the early effects of this interest in the folk arts is the rise and spread of the reputation of William Shakespeare. Although he is regarded today as the epitome of the great writer, his reputation was at first very different. Shakespeare was a popular playwright who wrote for the commercial theater in London. He was not college-educated, and although his company had the sponsorship of King James, his work was not entirely respectable. The advocacy of genius and originality among such eighteenth-century critic such as Joseph Addison, Edward Young and William Duff prepared the way for the "Bardolatary" in the Romantic reception of Shakespeare. When Addison praised his "general great genius", he made it clear that "natural" was the crucial attribute distinguishing Shakespeare's work from the sort of literary excellence achieved through imitation of established forms of art.

British Shakespearean critics before the Romantic period such as Jonson, Dryden, Pope, and Johnson, followed the neoclassical doctrine. They could not deny Shakespeare's talent, but did not recognize the artistic value of his work. They were stuck in the dilemma of neoclassical mechanic aesthetics. They could not accept his indiscipline, his rejection of their concepts of drama which were derived in part from ancient Roman and Greek patterns. A good play should not mix comedy with tragedy,

not proliferate plots and subplots, not ramble through a wide variety of settings or drag out its story over months or years of dramatic time; but Shakespeare's plays did all these things. A proper serious drama should always be divided neatly into five acts, but Shakespeare's plays simply flowed from one scene to the next, with no attention paid to the academic rules of dramatic architecture (the act divisions we are familiar with today were imposed on his plays by editors after his death).

Because Shakespeare was a popular rather than a courtly writer, the Romantics regard him as the essence of folk poetry, the ultimate vindication of their faith in spontaneous creativity. In the decade between 1808 and 1818 three men produced some of the finest Shakespearean criticism ever written. At the time it was revolutionary in approach and unsurpassed in detail but it has continued to exert enormous influence on our manifold ways of thinking about Shakespeare. These three persons are: August Wilhelm von Schlegel, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Hazlitt.

In the first of his *Lectures on the Literature of the Age of Elizabeth (1819)* Hazlitt said that Shakespeare was "one of a race of giants"; he was "the tallest, the strongest, the most graceful and beautiful of them', but his fellow-dramatists constituted "a common and a noble brood" (4:153). Coleridge in his lecture "Shakespeare's Judgment Equal to his Genius" also exalted Shakespeare appears to "have possessed all the conditions of the true poet" and "himself a nature humanized, a genial understanding directing self-consciously a power and an implicit wisdom deeper even than our consciousness" (240).

Jonathan Bate in his introduction of the book *The Romantics on Shakespeare* argued that the Romantics' reinvention of Hamlet as a "paralysed Romantic" was their "single most influential critical art" (2). When we think of the Romantics on Shakespeare, we think first of Hamlet and what has become known as character criticism. But Romantics were not character critics alone. In Bate's view, Schlegel was a "powerful analyst of structure, Coleridge of language, Hazlitt of the theatre and politics" (2).Romantic Criticism thus "prefigures not only the character analysis of A.C. Bradley's Shakespearean Tragedy and the imagistic approaches of the critic, such as G. Wilson Knight and L.C. Knights but also movements such as 'Shakespeare in

performance' and 'political Shakespeare', which had in turn against the old 'new criticism' of the Knights generation" (Bate, 2)

Eliot's point is that we can never be right about Shakespeare, so "we should change from time to time to change our way of being wrong", "Nothing is more effective in driving out error than a new error" (qtd. in Bate, 3).This is how history criticism works; the Romantics are good at driving out assorted errors of Voltaire and Dr Johnson with new errors of their own. Early criticism was directed primarily at questions of form. Shakespeare was criticized for mixing comedy and tragedy and failing to observe the unities of time and place prescribed by the rules of classical drama. Dryden and Johnson were among the critics claiming that he had corrupted the language with false wit, puns, and ambiguity. Romanticism criticism brings us back to us things that we have forgotten about Shakespeare. It does more by example, above all by style and tone, than by precept; it shows us that criticism can be what Coleridge, following Milton, said poetry was: simple, sensuous and passionate.

Dr. Johnson thought that he was defending Shakespeare from the structures of rigorous neo-classical critics by demolishing such rules as the unities of time and place, and dismissing the decorum which does not allow the mingling of high and low, tragedy and comedy."There is", he wrote in the magnificent preface to his edition of Shakespeare in 1765, "always an appeal open from criticism to nature" (par.4); Shakespeare may not have followed the rules for the achievement of verisimilitude as laid down in such texts as the prefaces of Corneille and Racine, but this does not matter since he is "above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet of life" (par.8). However, as far as the Romantics are concerned, Johnson was "half-hearted" in his praise. (Bate, 4) In the same preface, he claimed that Shakespeare seems to write without any moral purpose and seems not to comprehend the design of his own loosely formed plots, that the language of the plays was frequently mean, tedious, obscure and bombastic.

A.W. Schlegel, Coleridge and Hazlitt all set up their own critical practice in conscious opposition to Johnson's. Schlegel argues that Johnson failed to consider Shakespeare's play as wholes; in his 1797 analysis of Romeo and Juliet, character by

character and scene by scene, demonstrating 'the inward necessity of each with reference to the whole. By the end of the analysis, he articulated a theory of the 'organic unity' of the great artwork:

> Form is mechanical when, thorough external force, it is imparted to any material merely as an accidental addition without reference to its quality; as, for example, when we give a particular shape to a soft mass that it may retain the same after its duration. Organic form, again, is innate; it unfolds itself from within, and acquires its determination contemporaneously with the perfect development of the germ. We everywhere discover such forms in nature throughout the whole range of living powers, from the crystallization of salts and minerals to plants and flowers, and from these again to the human body. In the fine arts, as well as in the domain of nature—the supreme artists—all genuine forms are organical, that is, determined by the quality of the work. In a word, the form is nothing but a significant exterior, the speaking physiognomy of each thing, which, as long as it is not disfigured by any destructive accident, gives a true evidence of its hidden essence (qtd. in Bate, 4).

True aesthetic unity comes from within; it is not impose from without in the form of "rules". Schlegel's achievement was to formulate this theoretical model and systematically apply it to the full range of Shakespeare's plays. The model depends on the critic's apprehension of hidden essence; as such, it is a departure from Johnson's common sense criticism "an adumbration of the many forms of twenties-century criticism which eschew the surface meanings of texts and seek to trace the secret figures in the carpet" (Bate, 5)

Under the guidance of a new organic aesthetics, Coleridge borrowed the concept of organic unity to express his own similar conception of the inward form; he established the theory of organic unity and coined the phrase "practical criticism", put the two together and developed a method of reading that was groundbreaking in his time. It is this theory that terminated the neo-classical Shakespearean criticism, and turned the direction for criticism, so rendered a huge influence in both western history of Shakespearean criticism and poetics. Coleridge said that Shakespeare's artistic judgment was equally important to his talent. Talent was not only nature's endowment, but a combination of consciousness and unconsciousness. The germs in Shakespeare's works proved his lofty artistic judgment. From a didactic tradition, the neoclassical

critics thought that Shakespeare had no sense of morality. Coleridge argued that Shakespeare might be coarse, might violate the decorum, but never be immoral. In his dramas we could find a balance of moral forces, the purity of love, and the nobility of women, these could not be evaluated by a mechanic moral standard of retribution.

Hazlitt greatly admired Schlegel's criticism—but he found it over-theoretical (a typically German fault, he said). He based his own criticism on the principle of sympathy, which he took to be the greatest quality of Shakespeare himself: "He seemed scarcely to have an individual existence of his own, but to borrow that of others at will, and to pass successively thorough 'every variety of untried being,'—to be now Hamlet, now Othello, now Lear, now Falstaff, now Ariel."(5:76) So it is that "where Schlegel theorizes, Hazlitt emphasizes; where the German expounds the unifying structure of the play, the Englishmen feels his way into it". (Bate, 7) A theatre reviewer, Hazlitt decided to publish an analysis of William Shakespeare's characters and in 1817 he published a collection of 34 essays, *Characters of Shakespeare's Play* to challenge the traditional view of Shakespeare that was established by earlier critics such as Samuel Johnson.

3. 2 *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays*

Characters of Shakespeare's Plays is a series of essays giving Hazlitt's impressions of and thoughts about all of William Shakespeare's plays then believed to be genuine, amounting to the first book of the kind that anyone had yet written. His main focus is on the characters that appear in the plays, but he also comments on the plays' dramatic structure and poetry, referring frequently to critical views that came before him, as well as the manner in which the characters were acted in stage performances.

Rather than an English critic, it was the German August Wilhelm Schlegel whom Hazlitt believed to be the greatest critic of Shakespeare's plays. Hazlitt here includes long extracts from Schlegel on Shakespeare, differing with him only with respect to what he called a "mysticism" that appears in Schlegel's interpretations. He shared with Schlegel an enthusiasm for Shakespeare that he found lacking in Dr. Johnson. "An overstrained enthusiasm", he remarks, "is more pardonable with respect to Shakespeare

than the want of it; for our admiration cannot easily surpass his genius" ("Lectures on the English Poets", 16).

What constitutes the power of Shakespeare's plays, as Hazlitt's says, is the way Shakespeare relies on reality and nature in his plays. The only way for Shakespeare to be great at theatre was for him to master an understanding of nature. This is achieved through Shakespeare's use of the imagination in order to unify each play within itself and create a realistic world. As such, every component of the world within the plays is a unique individual, and each character exists as independent from every other character. The characters interact and are connected, but within the drama their own personalities come out. In Hazlitt's theory, the contrast of characters was very important as Hazlitt explains: "The striking and powerful contrasts in which Shakespeare abounds could not escape observation; but the use he makes of the principle of analogy to reconcile the greatest diversities of character and to maintain a continuity of feeling throughout, has not been sufficiently attended to" ("Characters", 38).

Shakespeare's characters, according to Hazlitt, are dramatic based. The characters in a work written by someone like Chaucer are based on the narrative. The separation between the two types is a fixed type of character in Chaucer as opposed to a fluid character that changes based on the situation. Shakespeare's characters do have a type of essence that makes up their general disposition, but this disposition does not control the personality of the characters. Consistency of character results from a constant in the evolution of the characters and how they respond to situations. This consistency makes it impossible for character to separate their feelings from their identity, and it allows the characters to attain a kind of humanity. In arguing this view, Hazlitt contradicts the traditional view of theatre characters held during the 18th century.

Hazlitt credits Shakespeare with a profound knowledge of character. The nature of that profundity involves some unique views of what makes a "character" in imaginative literature. For example, one of the ways Shakespeare's imagination expresses "the species through the individual" reveals a unique facet of Shakespeare's mind—what Hazlitt calls "its generic quality, its power of communication with other minds." In his lecture "On Shakespeare and Milton," Hazlitt continues, saying that

Shakespeare's mind "contained a universe of thought and feeling within itself, and had no one particular bias or exclusive excellence more than other...He was the least of an egotist that its was possible to be. He was nothing in himself; but he was all that others were, or that they could become" (5:47) Because Shakespeare was "the least of an egotist", he was most able to express his experience of broadest range of characters. His lack of self-consciousness enabled him to dramatize the unique identities—actions, emotions, thought process—of many other kinds of people. Shakespeare's lack of egotism allowed him conceive the character "not socially or even emotionally and mentally, but perceptually" (Sussman, 76). When Shakespeare imagined a character, as Hazlitt remarks, "he not only entered into all its thoughts and feelings, but seemed instantly...to be surrounded with all the same objects" (5:48) Through Shakespeare's characters we not only think what they think, feel what they feel, but also see as they see.

In a similar manner, Hazlitt believes that Shakespeare's characters are more natural than the characters of fellow playwright Ben Jonson. Shakespeare allows the audience to understand how the characters work, while Jonson's operate like machines that are controlled by either the writer or by routine. Also, Hazlitt argues that the contrast between characters only reveals the complexity of Shakespeare's characterizations as he summarizes in his essay on Henry IV:

> We have already observed that Shakespeare was scarcely more remarkable for the force and marked contrasts of his characters than for the truth and subtlety with which he has distinguished those which approached the nearest to each other. For instance, the soul of Othello is hardly more distinct from that of Iago than that of Desdemona is shew to be from Æmilia's; the ambition of Macbeth is as distinct from the ambition of Richard III. as it is from the meekness of Duncan; the real madness of Lear is as different from the feigned madness of Edgar as from the babbling of the fool; the contrast between wit and folly in Falstaff and Shallow is not more characteristic though more obvious than the gradations of folly, loquacious or reserved, in Shallow and Silence; and again, the gallantry of Prince Henry is as little confounded with that of Hotspur as with the cowardice of Falstaff, or as the sensual and philosophic cowardice of the knight is with the pitiful and cringing cowardice of Paroles. All these several personages were as different in Shakespeare as they would have been in themselves: his imagination borrowed from the life, and every

> circumstance, object, motive, passion, operated there as it would in reality, and produced a world of men and women as distinct, as true, and as various as those that exist in nature. The peculiar property of Shakespeare's imagination was this truth, accompanied with the unconsciousness of nature: indeed, imagination to be perfect must be unconscious, at least in production; for nature is so ("Characters", 153).

An important component of Hazlitt's theory on Shakespeare's characters is his emphasis on the term passion and passion's effect on the characters. Hazlitt's understanding of the term is not limited to a feeling within characters. Instead, the passions of each character create a force that drives individual characters into conflict with each other. Actors fail at bringing Shakespeare to the stage successfully because they fail to capture this passion. However, the fault is not primarily theirs but the fact that only reading, and not watching, the plays is how the imagination can fully recognize the passion. In Hazlitt's appraisal of Shakespeare's plays, it is the impassioned expression of the feelings, carrying them "to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos' that elevates them as the highest example of dramatic art. As exhibited in the drama, the passions are inseparable from "the moral and intellectual parts of our nature'. Therefore the tragedy of Shakespeare does not address the emotions alone, but "stirs our inmost affections; abstracts evil from itself by combining with all the forms of imagination, and with the deepest workings of the heart, and rouses the whole man within us" (5:5-6). Hazlitt stressed the universality of Shakespeare's mind, 'its generic quality, its power of communication with all the other minds'. Like Coleridge, he discerned a selfless projection of self into the wide array of characters: 'he not only had in himself the germs of every other faculty and feeling, but he could follow them by anticipation, intuitively, into all their conceivable ramifications, through every change of fortune of conflict of passion, or turn of thought'. Once he has conceived a character the passions evolve organically as from the character's own being: "it's a passion modified by passion, by all the other feelings to which the individuals is liable'. Shakespeare's imagination seems to reside not in the author but to infuse itself into the very objects of its own creation. (5:47-53)

3.3 Hazlitt's Dramatic Criticism in Comparison with Dr. Johnson's

With his publication *The Plays of William Shakespeare* in 1765, Johnson made his contribution to the history of Shakespearean criticism. As with much of his work, Johnson left his own indelible mark on the field, his Preface has retained its influence to the present day. Johnson extolled Shakespeare as "exerts all the force of poetry, that force which calls new powers into being, which embodies sentiment and animates matter" (5:127). The following famous passage in the Preface embodies Johnson's warm embrace of Shakespeare's genius:

> Nothing can please many, and please long, but just representations of general nature. Particular manners can be known to few, and therefore few only can judge how nearly they are copied. The irregular combinations of fanciful invention may delight awhile, by that novelty of which the common satiety of life sends us all in quest; but the pleasures of sudden wonder are soon exhausted, and the mind can only repose on the stability of truth.
> Shakespeare is above all writers, at least above all modern writers, the poet of nature; the poet that holds up to his readers a faithful mirror of manners and of life(61-62).

The above passage also reflects the most important critical term in Johnson's Shakespeare criticism—"general nature". As the above passage will help to suggest, general nature comes out in the relations between "nature" and "particular manners". We can understand the "manners" first in their contrast with nature, consists of socially determined and personally cultivated habits, gestures, mannerisms and so on. These manners mark particular people out and make them and make them "of their time" or "of their place", but Shakespeare works in an exploratory and experimental way to uncover a principle concealed behind all the mere everyday "manners" which make them "particular" to their time and place. When Johnson writes of the "manners", he seems to be saying that a poet cannot represent nature without his immediate contact with life. In this sense, the "manners" do not have to be specific to Shakespeare's own society but are rather manners "found in the dead-and-gone society which remains atemporally human and therefore visible today" (Sussman, 149). These manners are spread out across time and are not culturally specific. Thus Johnson points out that those works which have withstood the test of time stand out not because of their age alone, but because, with age, those works have "been compared with other works of the same kind" and can therefore be "stiled excellent". It is Shakespeare's realism, Johnson

argues, that distinguishes him from other playwrights. In his characterization and dialogue, Shakespeare "overlooks the casual distinction of country and condition," striking at the center of humanity. The nature captured by Shakespeare's characters is exhibited in the "ease and simplicity" of their dialogues.

Johnson's works on Shakespeare were not devoted just to Shakespeare, but to critical theory as a whole, and, in his Preface to Shakespeare, Johnson rejects the previous belief of the classical unities and establishes a more natural theory on what makes drama work: drama should be faithful to life. In particular, Johnson claimed that "Among Shakespeare's other excellences it out to be remarked, because it has hitherto been unnoticed, that his heroes are men, that the love and hatred, the hopes and fears, of his chief personages are such as common to other human beings... Shakespeare's excellence is not the fiction of a tale, but the representation of life: and his reputation is therefore safe, till human nature shall be changed", and that "Shakespeare has no heroes...His story requires Romans or Kings, but he thinks only on men" (.64-65) Johnson is here renouncing a standard neo-classical formula for the creation of character. According to this formula, authors of tragic drama were obliged to portray their heroes in line with a social decorum, which is a doctrine of verisimilitude based on the illusion of universal "good manners". In comments of such as this, Johnson is affirming the importance of Shakespeare's characters as representations of "general nature" rather than of "manners" and the characters, ultimately for all their individual life, are "a species". In this way Johnson rejects the demand that plays should incorporate the incidentals or profession or rank as they appear from one historical and social perspective.

Hazlitt's viewpoint is different from Johnson's. In the preface of *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* Hazlitt establishes his focus on "characters" by quoting Pope's comment that "every single character in Shakespeare is as much an individual, as those in life itself". He finds Johnson's criticism as insufficiently valuing the tragedies, as well as missing the essence of much of the poetry. Johnson "reduced everything to the common standard of conventional propriety; and the most exquisite refinement or sublimity produced an effect on his mind, only as they could be translated into the

language of measured prose". Johnson also believed that every character in Shakespeare represents a "type" or "species", whereas Hazlitt, siding with Pope, emphasized the individuality of Shakespeare's characters, while discussing them more comprehensively than anyone had yet done.

Besides defending Shakespeare, Johnson was willing to discuss Shakespeare's faults, especially his lacking of morality, his vulgarity, and carelessness in crafting plots. For the most part, Johnson highlights surface-level defects in the Bard's works: his "loosely formed" plots, his "commonly gross" jests, and—most ironically—his "disproportionate pomp of diction and a wearisome train of circumlocution" (Johnson, p.19-20). The most egregious fault Johnson finds in Shakespeare, though, is thematic. Unsurprisingly, Johnson exhibits emphatic distaste for Shakespeare's lack of moral purpose. Johnson argues that he "sacrifices virtue to convenience". In leading "his persons indifferently through right and wrong" and leaving "their examples to operate by chance," Shakespeare has abandoned his duty as an author as the righteous Johnson would have that duty defined. This is, in his eyes, Shakespeare's greatest flaw, though it does not supersede his other merits.

Hazlitt's vision of nature "eschewed didacticism and moralizing, any pained or artificial effort to point up moral patterns or lessons" (Mahoney,58). There is, he constantly feels, a basic rightness in nature, a sense that she reveals her own meanings and mysteries, and that those who are truly unselfish and dedicated to her can detect them. Even the greatest artist, Shakespeare, was no more that a co-worker with nature, a humanized nature. "Art may be taught", he says, "because it is learnt: Nature can neither be taught nor learnt, the secrets of Arts may be said to have a common or pass key to unlock them; the secrets of Nature have but one master-key—the heart" (5:355) .Shakespeare, while seemingly the least moral of writers, was actually quite the opposite because of his complete rapport with experience, his complete commitment to translating its wondrous workings. He had no patience with what Hazlitt regarded as popular and superficial concepts of morality which see life in terms of "antipathies". The pedantic moralists tries "to make the worst of everything" while Shakespeare, whose "talent consisted in sympathy with human nature, in all its shapes, degrees,

elevations, and depressions," tried "to make the best" (4:346). Hazlitt once said that Shakespeare is the most moral of the playwrights because he never let morality intrude upon his faithfulness to nature. "Morality itself is negative, it dissects, whereas Shakespeare is the greatest synthesizer" (4:347). All the passions are found complex in his plays, just as they exist in nature.

In the strictest, classical sense of the terms, Johnson admits, Shakespeare's works cannot be fairly called comedies or tragedies. The relevant passage from the Preface contains the following statement: "Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but composition of a distinctive kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world" (Johnson, 66). He holds up the "tragicomedies" of Shakespeare as distinctly natural; in their "interchange of seriousness and merriment," they hold up "a faithful mirrour of manners and of life". Johnson preferred Shakespeare's comedies to his tragedies. He says of Shakespeare in the Preface that "in his tragick scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire." He also writes that Shakespeare's "tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy be instinct" (69). In tragedy, Shakespeare works against the grain of his natural disposition, and it is then that "his performances seems constantly to be worse, as his labour is more" (72-73).

Hazlitt, on the contrary, prefers Shakespeare's tragedies to comedies. To him, the greatest of the plays were the tragedies, particularly Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, and Hamlet. Though Hazlitt gives space to all the plays, he weights the tragedies much more heavily. As John Kinnaird points out, "only three of the book's first fourteen essays deal with non-tragic plays" (5). Though Hazlitt could find much to appreciate in the comedies, tragedy was to him inherently more important, and his comments on the tragedies are often integrated with his ideas about the significance of poetry and imaginative literature in general. As he expressed it at the end of Lear, "the greatest strength of genius is showed here in describing the strongest passions: for the power of the imagination, in works of invention, must be in proportion to the force of the natural

impressions, which are the subject of them" ("Characters", 127).

Even though there are fundamental differences between Hazlitt's and Johnson's dramatic criticism, and Johnson, in so many ways the epitome of neoclassic caution and conservatism, receives a remarkably tolerant and balanced judgment from Hazlitt. Johnson's criticism and his creative art are generally, he argues, not to his liking, not capable of being considered among the greatest literary efforts. But they must be judged with the tools and the methodology of criticism, and not with the pettiness and the venom of party politics. Little is gained by meeting prejudice and intolerance with more of the same. Johnson "had his prejudices and his intolerant feelings; but he suffered enough in the conflict of his own mind with them...His were not time-serving, heartless, hypocritical prejudices; but deep, inwoven, not to be rooted out but with life and hope, which he found from old habit necessary to his own peace of mind, and thought so to the peace of mankind. I do not hate, but love him for them"(4:104) What is important for Hazlitt is that he will not "allow any general approach to confine him, to force him to group artificially writers and works, to prevent him from expressing his delight where it is strongly felt"(Mahoney,25).

3.4 Hazlitt's Dramatic Criticism compared with his Contemporaries'

3. 4.1. Coleridge's Theory of the Organic Unity

British Shakespearean critics before Coleridge, such as Jonson, Dryden, Pope, and Johnson, followed the neoclassical doctrine. They could not deny Shakespeare's talent, but did not recognize the artistic value of his work. They were stuck in the dilemma of neoclassical mechanic aesthetics. Under the guidance of a new organic aesthetics, Coleridge started a new era of Shakespearean criticism. The prominent feature of Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism is the perspective of organic unity for literature. It is this theory that terminated the neo-classical Shakespearean criticism, and turned the direction for criticism, so rendered a huge influence in both western history of Shakespearean criticism and poetics.

Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism can be divided into four parts, namely, the dramatic language, form, morality, and dramatis personae. In the discussion of dramatic

language, Coleridge offered living language to combat with Lock's theory of arbitrariness in language representation. Words were not only signified objects, but the same with objects. Words had their own life and evolution. Language carried the author's feeling and thought. Coleridge developed a theory of symbol to oppose Lock's image language. A symbol was translucent, it revealed the truth for poets only, and it realized a unity of words and things, universal and particular, subjects and objects, etc. He held that poetry should follow the logic of passion, not the logic of grammar. The conceits and puns in Shakespeare's drama were the proper expression of feelings. Coleridge's argument about the organic form of Shakespeare's dramas was coherent. He first defined poetry as a reconciliation of parts and whole and defined Shakespeare's dramas as dramatic romance. The "son of nature" was a clumsy praise for Shakespeare, for his works were imitation but not copy. Imitation calls for differences, and it could get the essence of things and produce pleasure. Shakespeare's dramas were masterpieces of imagination, which had a power for the reconciliation of opposites. The theory of imitation and imagination that Coleridge developed from his criticism reconciled man and nature, subject and object, and made a great contribution for western poetics.

Coleridge said that Shakespeare's artistic judgment was equally important to his talent. Talent was not only nature's endowment, but a combination of consciousness and unconsciousness. The germs in Shakespeare's works proved his lofty artistic judgment. From a didactic tradition, the neoclassical critics thought that Shakespeare had no sense of morality. Coleridge argued that Shakespeare might be coarse, might violate the decorum, but never be immoral. In his dramas we could find a balance of moral forces, the purity of love, and the nobility of women, these could not be evaluated by a mechanic moral standard of retribution.

Coleridge was at his best in his practical criticism, which explores how Shakespeare's poetic language works, how "one sentence begets the next naturally; the meaning is all inwoven...Shakespeare goes on creating, and evolving B out of A, and C out of B, and so on, just as a serpent moves, which makes a fulcrum of its own body, and seems for ever twisting and untwisting its own strength" (qtd. in Bate, 5). Coleridge

"again and again pinpointed the workings of particular passages, or trace the growth of a play from germ to finished product."(Bate, p.6)Johnson criticized the speech in which Hamlet says that he will not Claudius while the other is praying because that would send him to heaven and not to hell where he belongs; the Christian moralist found it aesthetically and ethically scandalous for a "good" character to want to damn someone. Coleridge replied that because he had not looked for the 'germ' of Hamlet's character, Johnson had misread the scene: The Prince's words should not be taken at their surface value, for he is merely making an excuse for not acting. Prevarication is the germ. Johnson's dogged attention to the surface of the text could not be in greater contrast to Coleridge's probing for a psychological subtext and a hidden unifying essence.

Coleridge was probably the first one to use psychoanalysis in criticism. He said that Shakespeare's dramatis personae were the products of meditation, not merely products of observation. They had an organically formed personality and balanced elements of disposition. The nature of Hamlet's procrastination was his rich inward activity that prohibited outward action. This was the first integral interpretation for Hamlet. Coleridge said that Shakespeare's characters were "a class individualized"; this reconciled the neoclassical type theory and romantic individual theory. His "willing suspension of disbelief" in the theory of dramatic illusion reconciled neoclassical theory of delusion and Johnsonian theory of sober-mindedness. In a time of Johnson's Shakespearean criticism overwhelmed, Coleridge was urged to defend for Shakespeare and rebuild his fame. Benefited from the view of organic unity, he successfully terminated the neoclassical era in the history of Shakespearean criticism. His organic unity went beyond the organic analogy, and reached a height of thinking modes. Though some defects, his theory had its own life, established a special horizon for interpreting Shakespeare, and solved many long obsessed problems. Organic unity gave Coleridge's Shakespearean criticism the unprecedented breadth and depth, and has become an influential poetic theory.

3.4.2 Hazlitt's Evocative, Impressionistic Style

Heine stated that, up to his time, Hazlitt's was the best comment on Shakespeare. Perhaps his criticism lacked the profoundness and philosophical insight of Coleridge

and the affectionate appreciation of Lamb, but it is more inclusive than either. Hazlitt has not led us into a waste of philological or philosophical speculation. He does not put himself between Shakespeare and ourselves but helps us to know Shakespeare better as a poet and as a dramatist who saw life from many angles. He wished to think and feel for himself. If he did not drink deep, he was an expert taster. He wrote as he would have talked, guided by an unusually catholic sympathy. No one literary form or period, author or group of writers blinded him to the enjoyment of the long sweep of varied literary expression. He had not sworn allegiance to any school. Without historical or scientific equipment, he was possessed of a rare faculty for describing a literary movement and putting his finger on the central and impelling force. For the mere dates of an author's life or mere linguistic details, he had little interest. His enjoyment of Hamlet, Lear, Othello, was not affected by any questions of textual uncertainty or priority of composition. To him, it was sufficient that here was poetry of a high order, that here was something that made him glad to be alive.

As with his appreciation of literature, Hazlitt was not a formal critic of the drama and theatre. His taste was formed under the direction of his feelings. He wrote of the drama with gusto, not because it was a great literary form made illustrious by Shakespeare, possessed of formal technique and of a brilliant history, but because he liked to go to the play to see "the happy faces in the pit," to watch the actors in their parts and then, enriched by the happy experiences of the evening to go home to think it all over. "We like the stage because we like to talk about ourselves." "We do not like any person or persons who do not like plays" (4:128). His criticism is the vivid record of these impressions. Rarely did he analyze a play as a formal composition, nor was he much interested in the technique of the verse. The fine speeches held him and the varying gales of passion, as they sweep the characters into this or that extremity.

Not only was Hazlitt the first to give attention to dramatic criticism, but he was, also, without special training for this form of writing. He had always liked to go to the play and, in the years of his closest intimacy with Charles Lamb, had spent many evenings in the different London theatres. His fondness for the theatre and his natural zest in human action were a sufficient preparation for him in any work which required

the power of observation and of vivid description. As a critic of the stage, he conceived it to be his duty to be fair to the actor and to the public.

Hazlitt was no expert, but he knew what he liked, and when he found it he could record his gratification in the most explicit way. Immediate and total response was what Hazlitt had to give, and he frequently gave it best under the pressure of an impending deadline:

> Unlike Coleridge and Schlegel, who write their criticism from the study, and unlike Lamb and Leigh Hunt, whose reviews are not matched by large-scale extra-theatrical criticism, Hazlitt holds the singular position in the Romantic age of being an important writer of literary criticism who is equally at home in the study or in the pit; who in fact can include the accumulated impressions of repeated readings within the galvanized complex of the theatrical experience. Moreover, in a period when almost no play of lasting value was written, when Shakespeare was produced as altered -mangled, some would have it—by Gibber, Tate, and others, Hazlitt recorded the disappointment of his ideals in language that describes a major concept of the dramatic. In an age when the star actor far outshone the play in which he appeared, Hazlitt was able to wed his fascination with the Shakespearean character to his fascination with the major actors of his day. In so doing, he achieved a singular vision of the romantic hero in his encounter of evil and self' (Jr. Donohue, 705-706).

3.4.3. The Romantics' Insistence in the Non-Actability of Certain Tragedies of Shakespeare

In exalting Shakespeare's genius, Coleridge, Lamb and Hazlitt argues that his plays could not be adequately represented upon the stage. Shakespeare was thus acclaimed as the "closet' dramatist par excellence. Because Shakespeare addressed his imaginative power to the mind rather than the senses, as Coleridge explained it, "in the closet only could it be fully & completely enjoyed" ("Lectures on Literature I", 254). In Lamb's opinion, the plays of Shakespeare are less calculated for performance on a stage, than those of their demands upon the minds: "there is so much in them, which comes not under the province of acting, with which eye, and tone, and gesture, have nothing to do'("On the Tragedies of Shakespeare",240). The Romantic conviction that the stage performance was "an abuse of the genius of the poet" which Hazlitt reiterated with even more vehemence than either Coleridge or Lamb: "the reader of the plays of Shakespeare is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted, for our own parts, we

should never go to see them acted if we could help it' (5:222)

Coleridge acknowledged conditions that made proper performance of the plays virtually impossible: the enormous size of the theatre was at odds with good acting; the elaborate settings detracted from imaginative appeal of the language, the language itself had been altered for "modern ears". In the London theatres of the early nineteenth century, Coleridge lamented, acting and stage setting detracted from the conjuring power of Shakespeare's language. Emphasizing imagination rather than performance, Coleridge delineated the process of engaging an active, willing response to the dramatic poet. In the second lecture (21 November 1811) of his 1811-12 series, Coleridge distinguished between copy, as a replica of the real, and imitation, as the imaginatively created ideal, in order to demonstrate how imagination operates in artistic representation. The effects of reality are tied to the moment: "if mere pain for the moment were wanted, could we not go to our hospitals: if we wanted mere pleasure could we not be present at our public fetes." Coleridge attributed the aesthetic experience to an awareness of difference: "dramatic exhibition' required a sense of difference in representation. In Coleridge's formulation, drama provides an experience of illusion that gives us pleasure in the power of our imagination: "the real pleasure derived from knowing that the scene represented was unreal and merely an imitation'. In the third lecture (25 November 1811), he went on to clarify why only an imitation, not an copy, can produce "the great total effect". A copy reflects only the accidents of the moment. An imitation "means always a combination of certain degree of dissimilitude with a certain degree of similitude". It is our recognition of the difference that delights us. Even if the artist or poet has selected the "purest parts' of his material, they must still be blended with the mind. It is "not the mere copy of things, but the contemplation of the mind upon things". Thus, the effect of art can never be, or should never be, a confusion with reality. Our willing acceptance of the "truth" of art never lapses into a belief that it is real. Coleridge distinguishes illusion from delusion in terms of the conscious awareness of difference. He amplifies this curcial aspect of imitation by defining various degrees of illusion that result from the exposition of difference. Domestic tragedy and opera provide the two extremes of the scale. In domestic tragedy,

the difference is minimal and the effects may be "too real to be compatible with pleasure". In opera, the sense of reality is minimal, but the use of music and dance can "deeply affect and delight an audience". On the scale of reality and difference, Shakespeare achieves the balance; he seems to have taken the due medium and to gratify our senses from the imitation of reality. In achieving dramatic illusion, Shakespeare depended on the imagination of the spectator unsupported by the decorations of the stage. The disadvantages in present-day theater Coleridge attributed to dependence on stage machinery and the endeavor to make everything appear reality, rather than relying, as Shakespeare would have it, on the imagination of the spectators.

With this advocacy of the imagination over the physical apparatus of the stage, it would follow that the access to Shakespeare's plays might well circumvent the stage altogether. The play might best be performed in the theatre of the mind. Lamb was even more emphatic in recommending that Shakespeare be read rather than seen on stage. Lamb's "On Tragedies of Shakespeare" concludes that "Shakespeare is not fit for the Stage" (Bromwich, "Essays", 70). This conclusion did not result simply from his dissatisfaction with how the plays were performed, with the alterations to Shakespeare's text, with the tendency toward sentimentality and melodrama in contemporary performance. Indeed, the more powerful the acting, the more Lamb would be likely to object that theatrical representation had succeeded only in crudely externalizing the emotional and imaginative vitality of Shakespeare's plays. In that very act of externalizing, the spectator's attention is drawn away from the inward qualities and subjectivity which are the source of Shakespeare's greatest strength: "The things aimed at in theatrical representation are to arrest the spectator's eye upon the form and the gesture, and so on to gain a more favorable hearing to what is spoken: it is not what the character is, but how he looks; not what he says, but how he speaks to it"(Bromwich, "Essays", 68). To restore attention to what is said rather than to external appearances and actions, Shakespeare must be read. Lamb made it clear that the amorphous conjurings of one's imagination are much to be preferred to the characters and actions physically concretized in performance. The text is safe; the physicality of performance is dangerous. Upon the stage, he says, we must confront the body and bodily action,

whereas in reading we can enjoy exclusively the mind, and its movements.

Hazlitt, as an enthusiastic playgoer from an early age and later a drama critic, relished many of the performances he witnessed on stage. In some cases, as with Edmund Kean (to whom he refers frequently in this book, usually with admiration) and Sarah Siddons (he could "conceive of nothing grander" than her performance as Lady Macbeth), their interpretations of roles in Shakespearean drama left indelible impressions, extending his ideas of the potential of the characters represented. For example, in "Romeo and Juliet" he proclaims, "perhaps one of the finest pieces of acting that ever was witnessed on the stage, is Mr. Kean's manner of doing this scene [when Romeo is banished] He treads close indeed upon the genius of his author"("Characters",105).

And yet Hazlitt could also assert that the stage is not in general the best place to study our author's characters in. In his essay on *A Midsummer Nights' Dream*, Hazlitt compares the audience of a play with the reader of a book and remarks: "Poetry and the stage do not agree well together...The ideal can have no place upon the stage, which is a picture without perspective; everything is in the foreground...Where all is left to the imagination(as is the case in reading) every circumstance, near or remote, has an equal place of being kept in mind, and tells according to the mixed impression of all that has been suggested. But the imagination cannot sufficiently qualify the actual impressions of the senses...The boards of a theatre and the regions of fancy are not the same thing" ("Chracters", 97). In such statements, he approached the position of his friend Charles Lamb (to whom he dedicated *Characters*) who felt that no stage presentation could do justice to Shakespearean drama, that the artifice of the stage interposes a barrier between the author's conception and the audience's imagination. As Maloney put it, to both Lamb and Hazlitt, "the performance of Shakespeare in a theater must always be disappointing to an extent because the slightest departure from the vision conjured by the imagination is so immediately detected and so quickly a source of aesthetic displeasure." (103)

At least partly explaining why both Lamb and Hazlitt felt the inadequacy of Shakespearean stage performances was that the theatres themselves were huge and

gaudy, audiences were noisy and unmannerly, and dramatic presentations in the early nineteenth century were sensationalistic, laden with artificial and showy props. In addition, unless one sat down in the pit, one could easily miss the subtleties of the actors' facial and vocal expressions. Hazlitt throughout his book seems to waver between these two opinions—that frequently the actors offer the best interpretations of Shakespeare, and that no view of Shakespeare on stage can match the rich experience of reading the plays—without acknowledging the apparent contradiction.

Chapter Four

CONCLUSION

As a Romantic critic, Hazlitt's literary criticism differs conspicuously from his neoclassic precursors. Hazlitt emphasizes the psychological aspects of characters while attacking the view held by Johnson that places the characters as personality "species" instead of unique individuals. Hazlitt emphasizes that only through understanding the characters can Shakespeare's power as a playwright be understood. Hazlitt's literary theory within the essays emphasizes that theatre's purpose is to teach mankind about morality and humanity, and it can only do so through tragedy and the pathos that comes from tragedy. The only way for Shakespeare to be great at theatre was for him to master an understanding of nature. This is achieved through Shakespeare's use of the imagination in order to unify each play within itself and create a realistic world. As such, every component of the world within the plays is a unique individual, and each character exists as independent from every other character. The characters interact and are connected, but within the drama their own personalities come out.

An important component of Hazlitt's theory on Shakespeare's characters is his emphasis on the term "passion" and its effect on the characters. Hazlitt's understanding of the term is not limited to a feeling within characters. Instead, the passions of each character create a force that drives individual characters into conflict with each other. Actors fail at bringing Shakespeare to the stage successfully because they fail to capture this passion. However, the fault is not primarily theirs but the fact that only reading, and not watching, the plays is how the imagination can fully recognize the passion. In Hazlitt's appraisal of Shakespeare's plays, it is the impassioned expression of the feelings, carrying them "to the utmost point of sublimity or pathos" that elevates them as the highest example of dramatic art.

The concern with "gusto" or emotional strength in a work of art is another major tenet in Hazlitt's literary criticism. Gusto is a term a term Hazlitt used to refer to

qualities of passion and energy that he considered necessary to great art. In accordance with his impressionistic approach to literature, Hazlitt's concept of gusto also suggests that a passionate and energetic response is the principal criterion for gauging whether or not a work achieves greatness. Gusto is absolutely central to the experience of art and criticism; it is ultimately what distinguished art from a mere representation of reality, from what Hazlitt regarded as mere "objects of sight". Only when these objects become the objects of taste and imagination, when they penetrate to the sense of beauty and pleasure in the human heart and are revealed to the view in their inner core and structure, does great art begin. But gusto is also the state in which the poet's sympathy properly discriminates, emphasizing those impressions most meaningful in the poet's experience and modifying other impressions accordingly.

The third dominant theme which underlie Hazlitt's manner of dealing with a work of art, most basic and consistent was that great literature imitate nature—and yet the view of nature seems dramatically new, associated with the more general Wordsworthian-Romantic vision of nature as a vast, living, and evolving process. Throughout Hazlitt's critical writing is a persistent attempt to break through traditional abstractions of nature, to see nature not as the "one clear, unchanged, and universal light" of Pope, but as the concrete phenomena confronted in everyday life. Nature is to be clearly distinguished from art and the artificial, from what he regards as those objects and emotions which are dependent upon the will of man and the arbitrary conventions of society. Nature for Hazlitt has a naked, unconscious reality, and existence of her own to which art must render obeisance; she is the original, and art is but the copy. Shakespeare was cited constantly as the great model of imitation of nature in Hazlitt's sense; he was a co-worker with nature, a collaborator with her rich treasures and abundant variety. If Chaucer, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton must be ranked as premier English poets, then Shakespeare must be ranked as the greatest of those four precisely because he was the "poet of nature".

For Hazlitt, criticism is an imaginative and symbolic recreation of experience, valid in itself and having no obligation to point to some set of values beyond itself. Criticism requires individual creativity and like art, it is not progressive. Furthermore,

criticism is not a negative activity discovering and pointing out the failings of writers. Rather, he prefers a more personal and individualistic method to provide the open and unencumbered response for a work of literature or art. For him, criticism is the record of a sensitive man's encounter with a work of art. "I say what I think: I think what I feel" was the most famous of his credo. It was this personal and individual perspective which marked most of his critical writing and what separated him from the contemporary criticism.

As one of the major critics of Shakespeare, Hazlitt made substantial contribution to the study and interpretation of Shakespeare. The major features of Hazlitt's dramatic criticism of Shakespeare are: creative, highly imaginative, suggestive, enthusiastic, impressionistic and individualistic. These features are in line with the Romantic spirit. As with his appreciation of literature, Hazlitt was not a formal critic of the drama and theatre. His taste was formed under the direction of his feelings. He wrote of the drama with gusto, not because it was a great literary form made illustrious by Shakespeare, possessed of formal technique and of a brilliant history, but because he liked to go to the play to see "the happy faces in the pit," to watch the actors in their parts and then, enriched by the happy experiences of the evening to go home to think it all over. "We like the stage because we like to talk about ourselves." "We do not like any person or persons who do not like plays." His criticism is the vivid record of these impressions. Rarely did he analyze a play as a formal composition, nor was he much interested in the technique of the verse. The fine speeches held him and the varying gales of passion, as they sweep the characters into this or that extremity.

Not only was Hazlitt the first in his time to give attention to dramatic criticism, but he was, also, without special training for this form of writing. He had always liked to go to the play and, in the years of his closest intimacy with Charles Lamb, had spent many evenings in the different London theatres. His fondness for the theatre and his natural zest in human action were a sufficient preparation for him in any work which required the power of observation and of vivid description. As a critic of the stage, he conceived it to be his duty to be fair to the actor and to the public. Hazlitt was no "expert", but he knew what he liked, and when he found it he could record his

gratification in the most explicit way. Unlike Coleridge and Schlegel, who write their criticism from the study, and unlike Lamb and Leigh Hunt, whose reviews are not matched by large-scale extra-theatrical criticism, Hazlitt holds the singular position in the Romantic age of being an important writer of literary criticism who is equally at home in the study or in the pit; who in fact can include the accumulated impressions of repeated readings within the galvanized complex of the theatrical experience.

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