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The Embodiment of Grief

Passion and Rhetoric in Coleridge and the “New Rhetoricians”

Following recent work by James Engell, this paper sets out to explore points of connection between romantic literary criticism and the “new rhetoric” of the late 18th century. More specifically, it looks at how the earlier concept of the “rhetoric of passion” was taken up by Coleridge in his lectures on Shakespeare, focusing primarily on his treatment of Constance’s speech on grief in *King John*. The same passage was evoked and strongly criticised by such “new rhetoricians” as Lord Kames and Joseph Priestley, who claimed that its intricate imagery rendered it unnatural and unsuitable to the expression of profound grief. Coleridge, by refuting these charges, redefines the earlier concept of the “language of passion” and turns it into a more comprehensive critical idea, which is able to accommodate figurative language beyond the rules of classical rhetoric or a rigidly conceived associationist psychology. He is aided in this by two things: first, by his new understanding of reading as on-going experience (as opposed to Kames’s method, based on the analysis of a given passage in the light of pre-established rhetorical and psychological rules), and second, by his emphasis on the rhetorical “embodiment” that takes place in the “impassioned” literary text.

In 1802, the young Coleridge made the following observation to Sotheby: “every metaphor, every personification, should have its justifying cause in some *passion* either of the Poet’s mind, or of the Characters described by the poet” (*LL* 2:812).¹ The link between passions and figures was not Coleridge’s invention: widespread in the 18th century, it was first forged by classical rhetoric, and already then it was some-

1. The editor of Coleridge’s lectures calls this a “commonplace of eighteenth-century criticism,” taken over by Wordsworth (in his appendix on “Poetic Diction” to *Lyrical Ballads*) and by Coleridge. See S. T. Coleridge, *Lectures 1808–1819 On Literature*, 2 vols., ed. R. A. Foakes; *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 5, gen. ed. Kathleen Coburn (Princeton & London: Princeton UP, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1987), vol. 1, p. 86n. All parenthesised references in the text are to this edition.

what ambiguous. The orator wanting to raise strong feelings in his audience employed figurative language – and, in turn, such language was interpreted as evidence of his own passionate state. Figures, therefore, could be understood as both causes and effects of passions, leaving open the question of precedence: are passions in some measure effects of rhetoric, or is rhetoric an effect of passion? The fact that neither of these possibilities was discarded resulted in an all-important circularity whereby figures of speech became essential to accounts of the transmission of feeling. Later-18th-century philosophers and rhetoricians still preserved this fruitful ambiguity while rephrasing and extending the traditional view, with the help of the modern doctrine of the association of ideas. The transmission of feeling was no longer regarded as a task pertaining to the orator only; as sympathy, it became the fundamental dynamic of all forms of social behaviour. Earlier concepts of rhetoric – and especially rhetorical figures – were employed to throw light on a range of different areas. Adam Potkay convincingly argues that Hume explained religion on a rhetorical basis in *The Natural History of Religion*, and even his epistemology can be interpreted as a “rhetorical philosophy.”² While relying on rhetoric, Hume assigned passion a central place in his model of the mind, going as far as asserting that what had previously been called reason was nothing else but “calm passion.”

Partly in response to Hume’s account of the mind, understanding the mechanism of passions gained new urgency in the second half of the 18th century.³ Literary criticism – to use a modern term for something much more diffuse – offered a unique opportunity for such investigation. As Lord Kames asserted in his *Elements of Criticism*, studying the principles of art opened “a direct avenue to the heart of man.”⁴ In analyses of literary texts, both rhetorical and psychological questions could be raised in an immediate way, and the two inquiries could merge in a seamless unity. Drama

2. Adam Potkay, *The Fate of Eloquence in the Age of Hume* (Ithaca and London: Cornell UP, 1994), pp. 159–188 (esp. pp. 184–5).

3. Potkay writes, “during the course of the [eighteenth] century the analysis of the passions transcended its practical origins in classical rhetoric, exfoliating into the psychology of the ruling passion (Pope), the associationist analysis of complex passions (Hume, Hartley), the theodicy of the passions (Pope, Akenside), the passional foundation of morality (Shaftesbury, Hutcheson, Hume, Smith), poetic invocations of personified passions (the Wartons, Gray, Collins), and narrative enactment of passional agency (Richardson, Fielding). If, as Hume observed – and everyone else apparently believed – reason was to be the slave of passions, it was important to know our passions reasonably well” (Potkay, p. 163).

4. Henry Home (Lord Kames), *Elements of Criticism*, introd. V. Price (London: Routledge & Thoemmes Press, 1993), vol. 1, p. 33.

proved especially important, since it displayed the workings of the strongest passions, and besides, in the writings of moral philosophers theatre had already served as an influential model for the sympathetic transmission of feeling. Some of the most intriguing criticism of Shakespeare in the second half of the 18th century evolved from these complex concerns, and whether it appeared in rhetorical treatises or in books on “criticism,” it had a bearing on wider issues of moral philosophy. Indeed, to a great extent it was the work of moral philosophers whom James Engell also calls the “new rhetoricians.”⁵ Psychology of the passions and rhetoric go hand in hand in their writing and, although in a more implicit manner, they are still paired in Coleridge’s lectures. In the present essay I am going to focus on the relationship of Coleridge’s criticism to the “new rhetoric”:⁶ after a preliminary discussion of Coleridge and Kames (one of the most influential “new rhetoricians”), I shall focus on a passage from Coleridge’s lectures which will be understood as a response to Kames and his followers. My assumption is that for Coleridge, similarly to the “new rhetoricians,” these two areas (psychology of the passions and rhetoric) are two sides of the same coin; the paper itself is intended to show some of the consequences of this unity in Coleridge’s reading of Shakespeare. But let me first describe the relationship between my main concepts: passion, the body, and figures of rhetoric.

I

In his lectures, Coleridge simultaneously paid tribute to Shakespeare and criticised modern poetry on grounds very similar to those of Kames and other “new rhetoricians.” As he asserted in 1811, “all deviations from ordinary language must be justified by some passion which renders it natural” (271). Modern poets cannot achieve naturalness because they fail to observe this rule, whereas the earlier English authors were still aware of it. Apart from Shakespeare, Milton too managed to naturalize

5. Engell lists Adam Smith, George Campbell, Joseph Priestley, Hugh Blair, James Beattie, and – more distantly – Thomas Gibbons, Lord Kames, Thomas Sheridan, and Robert Lowth. James Engell, *Forming the Critical Mind: Dryden to Coleridge* (Cambridge, Mass. and London: Harvard UP, 1989), pp. 195–6. See also Engell, “The New Rhetoricians: Psychology, Semiotics, and Critical Theory,” in *Psychology and Literature in the Eighteenth Century*, ed. Christopher Fox (New York: AMS Press, 1987), 277–302.

6. The connection between romantic theory and “new rhetoric” was proposed by Engell, see esp. his “The New Rhetoric and Romantic Poetics,” in *Rhetorical Traditions and British Romantic Literature*, ed. Don H. Bialostosky and Lawrence D. Needham (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 1995), 217–232.

“deviations” of rhetoric into fine poetry, since he was willing to observe the “law of passion.” This latter phrase of Coleridge’s has scientific connotations, some of which were already spelt out by earlier authors who treated the principle of association (underlying the mechanism of passionate language) as corresponding to “laws of nature,” like gravitation.⁷ At the same time, phrases like “justification” and the “observing” of “laws,” so prominent in the “new rhetoricians,” evoke a legal discourse. In Coleridge, this can be detected almost everywhere, from his early remark to Sotheby to his 1812 lecture on Milton. Milton, he said,

subjected his style to the passions – bending and accommodating itself alternately from the slow thinking and reflecting movement, to the hurrying step of revenge, the stately proclamation of pride, and the equal course of immovable courage. (1:402)

In this passage, the passions are represented as law-givers to which Milton’s style is “subjected” – but interestingly, this process also produces the “subjects” of Milton’s poem. These poetical subjects are, for Coleridge, themselves passions or states of mind: “revenge,” “pride,” and “courage,” as well as the slow “movement” of thinking and reflection. Interestingly, Coleridge does not name the characters to whom these attributes and actions “belong.” Although he is probably referring to Satan, the point is that this reference is obscured, because he describes “the passions” as the real agents represented in Milton’s poetry, not only as the forces that govern his style. Indeed, the two aspects are hard to disentangle; Milton’s style is subjected to its subject: passion. Coleridge himself participates in the rhetorical “figuring” of passions when he refers to their physical attributes (“hurrying step,” “stately proclamation,” etc.), in effect personifying the passions. The technique of making passion the subject of poetry, but also making it a “subject” by personifying it, is familiar from the 18th-century poetic tradition, and is the master trope of Collins’s ode “The Passions,” which had a strong influence on the young Coleridge.⁸ The same type of personification was present in

7. Cf. the ending of Hume’s “Dissertation on the Passions”: “in the production and conduct of the passions, there is a certain regular mechanism, which is as susceptible of as accurate a disquisition, as the laws of motion, optics, hydrostatics, or any part of natural philosophy” (*The Philosophical Works of David Hume* [Boston: Little, Brown and Company, Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1854], 189–226, p. 226).

8. “The Passions oft; to hear her shell, / Throng’d around her magic cell, / Exulting, trembling, raging, fainting / Possess beyond the Muse’s painting” (Collins, “The Passions: An Ode to Music,” 3–6). The poem is echoed in Coleridge’s “Kubla Khan” (“mingled measure,” “measure” – “pleasure,” etc.).

dramatic criticism before Coleridge, as in Joanna Baillie's "Introductory Discourse' to Her *Plays on the Passions*," in which she speaks of the "wild tossings of despair; the gnashing of hatred and revenge; the yearnings of affection, and the softened mien of love."⁹ In all these instances what can be witnessed is the intention of depicting "inner" psychological processes, together with the necessity of having recourse to images of the body, of movement and of rhythm, while doing so. Passion is as strongly bound up with the body, as it is with rhetoric.

This conjunction between passion and embodiment can also be detected in Milton's famous dictum that poetry is "simple, sensuous, and passionate," a phrase which in Coleridge's hands was turned into a prescription and a touchstone whenever he spoke of good and bad poetry. In the above-quoted tribute to Milton, for instance, he clearly applied these very criteria to the poetry of their inventor: he emphasised both the "passionate" and the "sensuous" aspect of Milton's style, both essential to what I am going to refer to as the "embodied" aspect of language. On other occasions, he went into more detail about the three adjectives.¹⁰ In 1813, the *Bristol Gazette* reported him saying the following:

To judge with fairness of an Author's works, we must observe firstly, what is essential, and secondly, what arises from circumstances. – It is essential, as Milton defines it, that poetry be *simple, sensuous, and impassionate* – *Simple*, that it may appeal to the elements and the primary laws of our nature: *sensuous*, since it is only by sensuous images that we can elicit truth as at a flash: *impassionate*, since images must be vivid, in order to move our passions and awaken our affections. (1:515)

9. Joanna Baillie, *A Selection of Plays and Poems*, ed. Amand Gilroy and Keith Hanley (London: Pickering and Chatto, 2002), p. 13.

10. Milton's phrase was cited in lectures of 1808, 1811–12, and 1813 as well as in the essay "On the Principles of Genial Criticism" (1814). A note from 1808 highlights its importance: "Had these three words only been properly understood, and present in the minds of general Readers, not only almost a Library of false Poetry would have been either precluded or still-born, but what is of more consequence, works truly excellent, and capable of enlarging the understanding, warming & purifying the heart, and placing in the centre of the whole Being the Germs of noble & manlike Actions, would have been the common Diet of the Intellect instead" (1:139). John Dennis in *The Advancement and Reformation of Modern Poetry* (1701) had already adopted Milton's phrase, asserting that "Poetry is Poetry, because it is more Passionate and Sensual than Prose" (quoted in Martin Kallich, *The Association of Ideas and Critical Theory in Eighteenth-Century England: A History of a Psychological Method in English Criticism* [The Hague, Paris: Mouton, 1970], p. 41).

Coleridge here defines poetry in a psychological framework, focusing on the psyche of the reader. The aim of poetry is to make readers perceive truth “as at a flash” (i.e. not analytically) and to “move our passions and awaken our affections.” Both can be achieved by an appeal to the senses, to the passive and receptive in human nature (in the *Biographia*, the “sensuous” is associated with passivity).¹¹ Sensuous “vivid images” awaken passions, and themselves may be the products of passion, as 18th-century moral philosophy asserted. 18th-century “new rhetoric,” in turn, claimed that the power of creating “vivid images” in language belongs to rhetoric.¹² Their stance, however, had its own ambivalence, since their endeavour sprang from a need to move beyond traditional rules and concepts of rhetoric. As noted by literary historians, their work fits into a larger pattern of moving away from rhetoric towards poetics, even in their very attempt to “justify” rhetorical figures on a psychological basis.¹³ As I would like to show, Coleridge’s criticism is one step further away from the framework of classical rhetoric, but he does not efface rhetoric altogether. His attitude might be described in the words of J. Douglas Kneale as that of “romantic aversion”: a simultaneous turning away from and turning towards rhetoric, in order to make it work in new ways.¹⁴ Coleridge’s extensive reliance on Milton’s three words from “Of Education” is significant in this context too: in the treatise, Milton proposes poetry to be the final, crowning achievement of education, preceded only by the study of rhetoric (as the easier subject), “[t]o which Poetry would be made subse-

11. Coleridge discusses “sensuous” as opposed to “sensual,” “sensitive,” and “sensible” in *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and Walter Jackson Bate; *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge* 7 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), vol. 1, pp. 171–2.

12. Joseph Priestley for instance “argues that since vividness and strong emotions are tied throughout life to reality, the associated idea of reality should recur when the mind is stimulated artificially by such devices as vivid representation, ideal presence, or use of the present tense” (Priestley, *A Course of Lectures on Oratory and Criticism*, ed. Vincent M. Bevilacqua and Richard Murphy, Introduction by David Potter [Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1965], p. xxxix).

13. Ian Thomson diagnoses “a confusion between rhetoric and poetic” in their work. Cf. Thomson, “Rhetoric and the Passions, 1760–1800,” in *Rhetoric Revalued: Papers from the International Society for the History of Rhetoric*, ed. Brian Vickers, Medieval & Renaissance Texts & Studies 19 (Binghamton, New York: Center for Medieval and Early Renaissance Studies, 1982), p. 145. Cf. also Neil Rhodes, “From Rhetoric to Criticism,” in *The Scottish Invention of English Literature*, ed. Robert Crawford (Cambridge: CUP, 1998), 22–36.

14. For Kneale, “the ‘other’ that Romanticism at once turns to and away from is . . . the classical rhetorical tradition” (J. Douglas Kneale, *Romantic Aversion: Aftermaths of Classicism in Wordsworth and Coleridge* [Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1999], p. 4).

quent, or indeed rather precedent, as being lesse subtle and fine, but more simple, sensuous and passionate.”¹⁵ On the one hand, Milton here clearly states the worth of poetry in comparison with the “subtle and fine” (i.e., *thin*) rhetoric: poetry is of a higher value because it is fuller, one might say, more embodied. On the other hand, however, he asserts that its teaching must rely on the previous knowledge of rhetoric, hence the hesitation between “subsequent” and “precedent.” As I would like to show, Coleridge inherits from Milton not only the privileging of poetry but also the reliance on rhetoric in his lectures. He transforms or even displaces rhetoric, but its traces are preserved throughout his criticism.

“New rhetoricians” like Kames and Priestley examined Shakespeare’s style according to a “rhetoric of passion.” The plays offered almost infinite opportunities to study psychology in relation to rhetoric: to trace the workings of the stronger passions together with their (adequate or faulty) expression. In my interpretation, one of Coleridge’s aims in his lectures was to take up these investigations and to rephrase them in terms of his own “philosophical criticism.” Importantly, the term “philosophical criticism” had been used earlier by Priestley to refer to his own work; what is more, evidence suggests that it was associated with a whole brand of criticism, which seems more or less to cover the work of Engell’s “new rhetoricians.”¹⁶ In the work of Lord Kames, as well as in that of several other “new rhetoricians,” we find a treatment of rhetorical figures one by one (e.g. metaphor, simile, etc.), defining the conditions of their appropriate usage, and discussing examples of each – very often from Shakespeare. Coleridge frequently does the reverse: he discusses a play, and stops in order to call attention to a characteristic figure – and, to use a Coleridgean phrase, to “philosophize” it. He intends “not to pass any of the important conceits in Shakespeare” (1:312). But sometimes a particular figure is associated by him not only with a state of passion, but also with a figure in the sense of “character.” Moreover, it seems as if these figures were “figuring” some fundamental questions or dilemmas related to the “language of passion.” One of these is the figure of Grief represented by Constance in Shakespeare’s *King John* – the rhetorical figure related to her is personification which, as I have already intimated, has a special relevance to discussions

15. John Milton, “Of Education,” in *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, ed. Ernest Sir-luck (New Haven & London: Yale UP & Oxford UP, 1959), vol. 2, 362–415, p. 403.

16. Priestley refers to his “Lectures on Philosophical Criticism” in *An Examination of Dr. Reid’s Inquiry into the Human Mind* (1775); quoted in Kallich, 224. Vicesimus Knox in an essay (“On Philosophical Criticism and the little Assistance it gives to Genius”) associates “philosophical criticism” with “writers of North Britain,” i.e. with the Scottish critics. Quoted in Kallich, 220.

of the passions. The question posed by her speech for the “new rhetoricians” as well as for Coleridge concerns the limits of expression: are there any passions beyond expression? And, more generally, what is the relationship between passion and expression?

II

“Strong Passions commend figurative Language & act as stimulants” (1:86), wrote Coleridge in 1808. At this point in his notes, we find a series of epigrammatic statements about criticism and poetic language, all of which will be developed later on in the lectures. Following the quoted remark, there is a reminder: “German bad Tragedies ridiculed – in which the Dramatist becomes a Novellist *in his directions to the actors*, & degrades Tragedy to Pantomime” (1:86). The link with the preceding note is, very probably, that in bad tragedies (e.g. in Kotzebue), the strong passions are not expressed through adequate figurative language, the dramatist instead – in the manner of the sentimental novels – “tells” the actors how they are supposed to feel, so the actors, through lack of any other means, convey the feeling through movements. These are the plays Coleridge ridicules in 1811, which are “so well acted & so ill written that if the auditor could have produced an artificial deafness he would have been much pleased with the performance as a pantomime” (1:351). This is clearly sarcastic, but remarks made elsewhere reveal that Coleridge accepted the possibility that movement – and especially dance – can produce the highest pleasure and *move* the spectator (to echo the rhetorical term, *movere*). Discussing different degrees of stage illusion, he mentions the “mere dance at an Opera which is yet capable of giving us the highest pleasure, & which, with music & harmonious motions of the body, can, by thus explaining some tale, deeply affect and delight an audience” (1:227). In this respect Coleridge goes along with the spirit of the age in which such non-verbal forms as the pantomime, the ballet, or the melodrama (initially, musical drama with little or no speech) rose to prominence in the theatres.¹⁷ Nevertheless, he believed that the artistry of the poet requires that he be able to re-create such “movements” in language, through the dance of figures of speech. The rules of the figures are provided by the “strong Passions,” which are here (as often elsewhere) regarded as a cause of sorts, though not necessarily a sufficient cause: they simply “commend” the use of figurative language. But the nature of this causation is made a bit more prob-

17. Jane Moody, *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1770–1840* (Cambridge: CUP, 2004), pp. 79–80.

lematic by Coleridge's other word, "stimulants" – a stronger metaphor, gesturing towards physiology. It suggests that passions enhance mechanisms that had been there all the while, like figurativity in language.¹⁸ Moreover, its effects are "bodily," not under conscious command or "commendation." The metaphor therefore evokes medical descriptions, like that of Dr Brown in *The Elements of Medicine*, or the one Dr Baillie gave of the "unruly inmates" dramatized in his sister's *Plays on the Passions*.¹⁹ Coleridge's approach to the poetic uses of passion wavers between these two alternatives: passionate language as a result of conscious artistic choice, and as an involuntary, visceral reaction.

In the 18th century throughout various discursive fields (that of theatre, medicine, moral philosophy, rhetoric), there seems to have been a consensus that passions "stimulate" the body simultaneously with the mind. This is why passions were essential to a number of accounts problematizing the relationship between the two. According to one of the most influential theories, they triggered strong trains of association, which, among other things, offered a new explanation of why figures of rhetoric (based on similarity or contiguity, also major "laws" of association) were more likely to appear in passionate states. A related notion I have already alluded to was that passions were "contagious": that they circulated between different experiencing subjects by means of sympathy. Coleridge's lectures attest that passion and sympathy have a central place in his theories of criticism. In the 1808 notes, for instance, just before writing about "stimulation" he is concerned with the reader and with criticism: "Judging of Books by books, instead of referring what we read to our own Experience or making it a motive for Observation – one great use of Books" (86). For Coleridge, books should be tested against the reader's own experience, most of all, against the very experience of reading the book. The question he repeatedly asks is what mental "faculties" and passions are evoked by a given text.²⁰ In the

18. Cf. Coleridge's later criticism of Wordsworth in the *Biographia* where he writes about passion as "unusual stimulation": "For the property of passion is not to *create*; but to set in increased activity" (*Biographia*, 2:57). A discussion of this section can be found in David Vallins, *Coleridge and the Psychology of Romanticism: Feeling and Thought* (London & New York: Macmillan & St. Martin's Press, 2000), pp. 32–33.

19. Brown's significance for Coleridge is noted by Foakes, vol. 1, p. 222n. For Baillie, see Alan Richardson, *British Romanticism and the Science of the Mind* (Cambridge: CUP, 2001), p. 77.

20. For example, in 1811: We have to "determine ~~how~~ what rank, what <comparative> estimation, we ought to give to this part of our nature – whether it is one of those which tho' permanent in itself is perpetually varying the Objects that gratify it – such as Curiosity ☉

opening lecture of the 1811–12 series, he returned to this theme in a broader survey of the “Causes of false criticism,” a discussion of primary importance, offering a convenient starting point for a comparison of his general critical stance with that of Kames. Coleridge here employs the vocabulary of affect when he speaks of the “enormous *stimulant* power of Events making the *desire* to be strongly *stimulated* almost an *appetite*” (1:186, my italics) – an “appetite” being a passion which precedes its object, and, consequently, is in constant need of new objects.²¹ Also, recent events and “the unexampled Influence of Opinion” “have made us a World of Readers”: all men are “*anxious* to know what is going on in the world” (1:186). Coleridge here formulates the radical effects of the emergence of print culture, his language suggesting how the “World of Readers” is “reading” a new world into existence – importantly, driven by another passion, the anxiety to know. He also (somewhat ironically, for a lecturer) mentions the “passion of public Speaking,” and refers to novels – the ubiquitous theme of 18th-century discussions of the often “dangerous” encounter between text and feeling. It seems, then, that the “false criticism” of the age is at least in part describable as a confusion or dysfunction of affects.

Coleridge’s proposed remedy is to make readers reflect on their “own inward experiences,” which would, he hoped, result in a more conscious, and we might say, more rational approach to reading (as opposed to a taste for reading which he termed an unreflecting “appetite”). But Coleridge does not want to eschew feeling altogether, far from it.²² He wants to ground rational critical response in “proper” feeling – in both senses of the word. On the one hand, reading that is worthy of its name evokes feeling that is not an improper “base passion” but part of “our nobler

which turns with the disgust of Satiety from the former to pass from a dainty into a nuisance – or a base passion, such as Envy & its Mask, Scorn – or whether they are indeed the worthy & constituent Powers of our nobler Nature, not only permanent in themselves but always & solely to be gratified by the same outward excellencies, the same in essence, tho’ infinitely varying in form, subject, and degree – Such are our Imagination, our Delight from the clear Perception of Truth, and our moral Sense” etc. (1:185)

21. At least according to Kames: “And there is a material difference between appetites and passions, which makes it proper to distinguish them by different names: the latter have no existence till a proper object be presented; whereas the former exist first, and then are directed to an object: a passion comes after its object; an appetite goes before it, which is obvious in the appetites of hunger, thirst, and animal love, and is the same in the other appetites above mentioned” (Kames, vol. 1, p. 44).

22. Cf. “The view that thought must satisfy an emotional condition, and that meaning consists in an expressive purpose rather than mere logical relations was among Coleridge’s most enduring opinions” (Vallins, p. 34).

Nature.”²³ On the other hand, this feeling should be proper to the reader, that is, it should coincide with his or her “inward experiences.” Typically of Coleridge, qualities of the reading text and of the reading experience are inextricably linked: he proposes a way to discriminate between good and bad books and between good and bad reading simultaneously. The discrimination on both counts requires a constant and fastidious care; in fact Coleridge believes it even painful initially, so much so that he is ready to count this difficulty among the permanent causes of false criticism:

The effort & at first the very painful Effort of really *thinking* – really referring to our own inward experiences – & the ease with which we accept as a substitute for this, which can alone operate a true conviction, the opinions of those about us – which we have heard or been accustomed to take for granted &c – Shakespeare’s Constance/ & a Mother in real life – yet how many have declared the first unnatural – & admired the remote Silence of a German Tragedy, consisting of directions to the *actors*. . . (1:187)

From this passage it seems that one of the permanent causes of false criticism is the paradoxical nature of criticism itself. Criticism as an activity is, or can be, a “painful Effort,” but criticism as tradition, as a body of knowledge handed down to us, can be even worse: unreliable, misleading, or, quite simply, false. Coleridge implies that this is so not only because previous critics happened to make the wrong kinds of judgements, but because criticism conceived as the institution of making judgements on behalf of someone else, of pre-empting reader response, is erroneous. By re-imagining criticism as a process rather than a product, Coleridge makes it approximate reading itself, understood as a self-reflexive activity. In fact it is arguable that in the lectures generally he fashions himself as a reader, rather than a critic.²⁴ In the passage above, he announces his difference from (false) criticism, and rejects its authority as a finished product for the sake of the process of reflection on readerly

23. Here is another point of similarity with Kames who writes: “The science of rational criticism tends to improve the heart no less than the understanding. It tends, in the first place, to moderate the selfish affections: by sweetening and harmonizing the temper, it is a strong antidote to the turbulence of passion and violence of pursuit” (Kames, vol. 1, p. 9).

24. For example, in his 1808 notes: “I have never had any strong ambition of publishing, as or being known as an author – and yet, if with the consciousness of many infirmities I may have palliate[d] them by some better qualities, from activity of mind, & a passionate desire of attaining & communicating truth . . . I have passed the far greater part of my life and employed almost all the powers which Providence has entrusted to me, in ~~the acquisition of knowledge from Books~~ reading & in conversation” (LL 1:125).

experience. Ironically enough, though, this gesture of rejection has itself become part of the critical tradition by Coleridge's time. Grounding criticism in experience rather than authority is the primary aim of most thinkers in the Enlightenment tradition, and is also at the heart of Lord Kames's critical project. In his introduction to *Elements of Criticism*, Kames writes about the progress of philosophy and criticism in terms that are remarkably similar to those of Coleridge:

In later times, happily, reason hath obtained the ascendant: men now assert their native privilege of thinking for themselves; and disdain to be ranked in any sect, whatever be the science. I am forc'd to except criticism, which, by what fatality I know not, continues to be no less slavish in its principles nor less submissive to authority, than it was originally.²⁵

Kames shares with Coleridge the Enlightenment prerogative of *sapere aude*. At the same time he admits that criticism resists this burden of freedom, and continues to be "slavish" and "submissive." What he terms a mysterious "fatality" (the obscurity in criticism that resists Enlightenment) is what Coleridge analyses as "Causes of False Criticism." We can conclude that Coleridge's analysis is more subversive because, as we have seen, it implies a more fundamental critique of criticism itself. But if we turn to the practical solutions offered by the two theorists, we find that the one suggested by Kames is quite close to that of Coleridge: both aim to ground criticism in introspection, in conscious reflection on experience.

Kames's work can be viewed as an attempt to establish universal principles of human nature primarily through introspection, that is, through a reflection on the workings of the psyche, and to develop a "rational criticism" based on these principles.²⁶ Criticism, therefore, involves a rational reflection on what is, to a large extent, non-rational: the workings of the mind, in which (as in Hume's scheme) passions play a central role. Kames devotes the first chapters of *Elements of Criticism* to such fundamentals as the principles of association, emotion and passion, which he expounds mainly from practical examples taken from individual literary

25. Kames, vol. 1, p. 12.

26. Cf. B. I. Manolescu: "The practice of criticism in *Elements*, in contrast, involves making arguments based upon so-called universal principles of human nature . . . these principles validate critical judgement. One would only need an acquaintance with the principles of human nature to practice this criticism. Given that for Kames these principles are discovered primarily through introspection, one may need not go far to acquire the requisite knowledge" ("Traditions of Rhetoric, Criticism, and Argument in Kames's *Elements of Criticism*," *Rhetoric Review* 22:3 [2003] 225–242, p. 236).

texts. Moreover, he continues to elaborate on the universals of “human nature with reference to the fine arts” in several other chapters (like “On Beauty”), before he turns his attention to practical criticism. Needless to say, Coleridge would not have subscribed to some of Kames’s “universals,” most of all, to his strongly empiricist concept of mind. Nevertheless he follows a similar critical route when – from his first 1808 series to at least 1814 – he designs his opening lecture(s) to establish the principles of criticism based on introspection, and usually examines the critical vocabulary (“taste” and “beauty,” among others) in this light.²⁷ But if Kames’s method was reflexive, then that of Coleridge is doubly so for, importantly, he regards introspection as a guide in practical criticism as well. The reader should “measure” the text against his/her actual inner experience, not only against principles derived and generalised from a philosophical analysis of such inner experience. This is a major difference from Kames, and therefore it is not surprising to find Coleridge arguing with the critical tradition of Kames exactly at this point. His arguments are spelt out around the problem of passion and expression, figured by Constance in Shakespeare’s *King John*.

III

The argument in its fullest form can be found in Collier’s notes of the 1811 lecture. According to this, when complaining of people who “did not exert their own abilities” but “took for granted the opinions of others,” Coleridge offered the following anecdote:

This had been the case with a friend of his who observed ~~to him~~ that he did not think Shakespeare had made Constance in *King John* speak the language of nature where she said on the loss of Prince Arthur

Grief fills the room [up] of my absent child
Lies in his bed, walks up and down with me
Puts on his pretty looks, repeats his words
Remembers me of all his gracious parts

27. Later (in 1818) he very self-consciously chooses a different method – that of historical investigation – instead of “the proof from an analysis of the human mind in itself, in its component forms and faculties,” which he nevertheless calls “the only strictly scientific” one (2:47). We can easily identify this with the Kantian “*a priori*” method (and the historical one, perhaps, as Hegelian), but we might add that the Kantian method is, in this respect, similar to that of Kames.

Stuffs out his vacant garments with his form;
Then have I reason to be fond of grief?

Within three months after he had made this remark the friend died. Coleridge went to see his mother an ignorant tho' amiable woman who had scarcely heard the name of Shakespeare much less read him. Coleridge like King Philip in the Play alluded to, attempted to Console her & in reply in the bitter anguish of her grief she uttered almost a parody on the language of Shakespeare employing the same thoughts & a little varied in the phrazeology. (1:192–3)

In order to see the full import of this strange story, we need to know that Constance's speech (*King John*, 3.4.93ff) had been a matter of critical debate for decades. In *Elements of Criticism*, Kames found it especially artificial – and therefore faulty. Like a passage in *Richard III* (4.4.9ff), it was “undoubtedly in a bad taste.” In both cases, “[i]magery and figurative expression are discordant, in the highest degree, with the agony of a mother”; they employ “language too light or airy for a severe passion.” However, it is difficult to say whether Coleridge is actually referring to Kames's “false” opinion, or to other people influenced by him – and there were plenty of them, given the popularity of his work.²⁸ Someone close to the young Coleridge was Joseph Priestley who in his *Lectures on Oratory and Criticism* (1777) reiterated several of Kames's points, and repeated many of his examples. His main criterion of judgement was also the adequacy of passionate language:

Writers not really feeling the passions they describe, and not being masters of the natural expression of them, are apt, without their being aware of it, to make persons under the influence of a strong emotion or passion, speak in a manner that is very unsuitable to it. Sometimes, for instance, they seem rather to be describing the *passion of another*, than expressing their own.²⁹

28. In the 1797 *Encyclopaedia Britannica* article on the “Passions,” partly based on Kames, Constance was cited in connection with Grief (XIV 13 B). Cf. *Shorter Works and Fragments*, ed. H. J. Jackson and J. R. de J. Jackson, *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge 11* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), vol. 2, p. 1451n.

29. Lecture XIV (“Of the Influence of the Passions on each other, and other Circumstances relating to strong Emotions of Mind”); see Priestley, p. 103.

The “impropriety,” as Priestley calls it, of describing passion instead of expressing it, is most characteristic of French dramatists. Yet,

Even our Shakespeare himself, though no writer whatever hath succeeded so well in the language of the passions, is sometimes deserving of censure in this respect; as when Constance, in King John, says to the messenger that brought her a piece of disagreeable news,

Fellow, be gone, I cannot brook thy sight:
This news hath made thee a most ugly man.

The sentiment and expression in the former line is perfectly natural, but that in the latter resembles too much the comment of a cool observer. Of the same kind, but much more extravagant, is the following passage, which is part of the speech of Constance, giving her reasons why she indulged her grief for the loss of her son.³⁰

And Priestley goes on to quote the same lines as Kames, and Coleridge in his lecture.

Given the popularity of the argument and the example, it is uncertain whether Coleridge was thinking of Priestley, Kames, or someone influenced by Kames. But he repudiated their critical mistake in an odd manner, by offering the anecdote about the dead friend. Did he expect his audience to really believe it? Or was it a cautionary fable, devised to illustrate the fate of “false criticism” which involved nothing less than the death of its practitioner? At any rate, it offers a rhetorical solution to a theoretical problem: Coleridge strengthens his point by telling a story, supposedly from real life (the speaker personally involved in the events), with a strong emotional impact. This is an acceptable, even advisable means of persuasion. However, it is notable that Coleridge usually reverts to such solutions, and especially to stories about some “Friend,” when he has reasoned himself into a paradoxical position. The most famous example is the letter in Chapter 13 of the *Biographia*, but there are other instances as well.³¹ In this early case too, the “friend” is a figure covering but also calling attention to contradictory tendencies in Coleridge’s critical discourse. The main question here is: on what authority can the reader decide whether a specific passage is the “true” language of passion or not?

30. Priestley, p. 104.

31. In *Confessions of an Inquiring Spirit*, there are more than one “friends” representing different critical stances to the Bible, which are all important for Coleridge for some reason, but from all of which he wants to distance himself.

Very crudely, Kames's method was first to define the main characteristics of the passions (through introspection), then the main features of each major rhetorical figure, and then to compare the two in a given passage to see whether they coincide or not. As opposed to this, Coleridge suggests a more direct method: readers should be "really *thinking* – really referring to [their] own inward experiences." This approach is much more flexible: it enables the reader to differentiate between infinitely subtle "shades" of feeling, while Kames's method required him to focus on a few major types of passion (grief, terror, etc.) which gain a specific colouring in each passage. Coleridge does not set up rules of passion or of rhetoric in advance; instead, he recasts the reader not only as a critic who "understands" but also as someone who "experiences": each passage evokes a subjective response simultaneously with the unfolding of its verbal structure. This makes the question of critical judgement so straightforward that it becomes almost superfluous. The reader's sympathetic response and subsequent recognition that it coincides with his or her "proper feelings," is enough to prove that the text in question manifests the true "language of passion." This is another way to say what has been known for a long time, that "sympathetic criticism" comes much more naturally to Coleridge than the censorious "beauties and faults" approach of earlier critics like Kames. He allows little recourse to Kames's pre-established categories.

What appears as a straightforward and consistent critical strategy, however, starts to emerge as much more problematic if we consider how direct "inward experience" can be used in making public critical judgements, for instance, in the lecture theatre. In the very passage where Coleridge recommends grounding criticism in interiority, he offers as evidence an anecdote which is nothing if not external. Instead of referring to his own *inward* experience, he provides a story of a supposedly real mother in real grief, who repeats Constance's words. Through this fiction, Coleridge revives Constance to make her bear witness to Shakespeare's mastery, as if in an imagined courtroom. My argument is that this rhetorical "trick" is inevitable. It is the same strategy that we have witnessed in Coleridge's praise for Milton: in order to speak of passion as a principle that "governs" language, he needs to personify it, to clothe it in flesh and blood, which is the work of rhetoric. The moment Constance is effaced and substituted for an impersonal force in language, a second "Constance" must appear to utter her words. "Passion is speaking," this prosopopeia lurks behind the criticism of the "new rhetoricians,"

making it (to use a term revived by recent criticism), a *pathopoeia*.³² And the same figure becomes even more powerful in some of Coleridge's readings of Shakespeare when – as we shall see – he acknowledges the voice of passion even where earlier critics had considered it silent.

IV

Kames's rhetorical system contained an inherent contradiction, characteristic of late-eighteenth-century rhetoric in general. It is summed up conveniently by Ian Thomson in his "Rhetoric and the Passions, 1760–1800": "rhetoric is, according to one major definition, the art of persuasion, and one of its resources is to move its audience, and figurative speech assists this end: on the other hand, genuine passion is supposed *not* to resort to figures, which are now seen as artifice."³³ The artificial status of rhetoric is going to haunt Romantic thinking – Wordsworth condemns it as "poetic diction" but in the Preface he also admits that figures can be the natural expression of passions.³⁴ Coleridge in the lectures seems to be more firmly on rhetoric's side, but he needs a system of rhetoric – and a psychology – more flexible than that of Kames. One thing that Kames and several of his contemporaries take for granted is that there are two main kinds of passion: those that are favourable to (figurative) expression, and those that are not. In other words, there is a natural rule or limit, determining what feelings can and what feelings cannot be expressed. The terrain of inexpressible emotion is reigned over by the passion of grief. As Kames writes in the opening of his chapter entitled "Language of Passion": "A man immoderately grieved seeks to afflict himself, rejecting all consolation: immoderate grief accordingly is mute" (494). But grief is not alone a mute emotion. "Surprise and terror are silent passions for a different reason: they agitate the mind so violently as for a time to suspend the exercise of its faculties, and among others the faculty of speech." After all, it seems that Kames considers all of the most intense passions as tongue-tied: "Love and revenge, when immoderate, are not more loquacious than immoderate grief" (495). But not quite. The dividing line is drawn according to the strength of the passion ("immoderate"), but also according to its general tendency, whether it is a

32. Adam Potkay revives the 16th-century rhetorical term *pathopoeia* ("whereby the passions of the mind . . . are personified") to describe Hume's strategy in the *Natural History of Religion* (Potkay, p. 174).

33. Thomson, p. 144.

34. Cf. Kneale, pp. 50–1.

positive or a negative feeling (attraction or repulsion, grounded in pleasure or pain). The two criteria are not entirely separate, for a passion that is too strong is bound to be unpleasant according to Kames. Therefore, “figures are not equally the language of every passion: pleasant emotions, which elevate or swell the mind, vent themselves in strong epithets and figurative expression; but humbling and dispiriting passions affect to speak plain” (497). And again, figurative language “cannot be the language of anguish and distress” (498).

The reasons for this asymmetry lie in the tradition of moral philosophy. Seventy years before Kames, in 1692, John Dennis had already claimed that “no sort of imagery can be the language of Grief.”³⁵ As Martin Kallich explains, “Grief constricts the mind and fixes it upon a single object; therefore figures of speech would be entirely unnatural because they show the mind in motion.”³⁶ Hobbes in his “Preface to the *Passion of Byblis*” rejects more specifically simile as the natural expression of distress, and Kallich suggests that Dennis borrowed the idea from him. “Where there is leisure for fiction there is little grief,” Doctor Johnson wrote, dismissing the sincerity of *Lycidas*.³⁷ Kames and Priestley still consider simile, like allegory, unnatural in the highest states of passion, for the same reasons outlined by Hobbes. That is,

allegories, in common with comparisons, imply a considerable excursion of the mind from the principal object of its thoughts; and therefore, though a man in the greatest agitation of mind would not refuse a metaphor, he may easily be supposed to have his thoughts so much engaged as not to be at liberty to attend so particularly to a foreign object, as is necessary in order to note *many points of resemblance*, and make an allegory. Allegories, therefore, as well as comparisons, are the language of men tolerably composed, or only moderately elevated.³⁸

Priestley here is more generous than Dennis, allowing metaphor to “slip by” as natural to states of the highest passions. We may suspect (and it can be supported) that by this time figurativity was sometimes considered to be a fundamental property of language, not an external ornament.³⁹ But we can also see why Constance’s speech

35. Quoted in Kallich, p. 38.

36. Kallich, p. 38. (He also notes that the idea is present in Dryden and Boileau, among others).

37. Quoted by Kneale, p. 42.

38. Priestley, *Lectures*, p. 195.

39. Evidence for a changing attitude towards figures in the work of Priestley and Blair is discussed by Thomson, pp. 146–7.

on Grief was doomed to be considered a “blemish” even by the “new rhetoricians.” It contains an extended metaphor, that is, an allegory, in which “many points of resemblance” are indeed established between Grief and Constance’s dead son. Moreover, it is based on a personification, and according to “new rhetorical” rules, this figure can only qualify as the language of strong passion if it is “serious,” that is, if the speaker is so deluded as really to believe that (s)he is talking about something animate. Otherwise personification can only occur as “the exercise, or rather the *play*, of a mind at ease.”⁴⁰ But beyond these reasons (and any of these would be enough for Kames or Priestley to condemn Constance’s speech as “unnatural”) there is the deeply-rooted conviction that grief involves stasis in the mind and silence in language. In those moments, association stops. The only language of grief is silence.

When Coleridge proposes in his lecture that Constance’s speech is “natural,” he pushes back the limits of rhetoric and revises earlier psychology at the same time. Both acts are based on a conviction that language and mind permeate each other thoroughly. Passion cannot exist without some kind of expression, since it reveals itself only through its effects: symptoms of the body, the mind, or of language. It follows that passion cannot result in absolute stasis, even in the most extreme states. Coleridge was perhaps encouraged to make these revisions to earlier theory by Wordsworth, who, as a poet, had comparable aims. In the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads* he writes that his intention was “tracing” intense emotions like “the maternal passion through many of its more subtle windings, as in the poems of the IDIOT BOY and the MAD MOTHER,” or “the last struggles of a human being, at the approach of death, cleaving in solitude to life and society, as in the Poem of the FORSAKEN INDIAN.”⁴¹ Kames would have considered such feelings excessive and too painful, and therefore necessarily mute, or at least only appropriately represented in a language free from figures. For Coleridge, by contrast, the “Mad Mother” was the best modern example of “the blending, *fusing* power of Imagination and Passion.” Behind this difference, there is Coleridge’s changed concept of passion. Whereas in earlier associationist thought the strongest passions were considered unable to “focus” on anything external to themselves, Coleridge shows that in fact they make everything internal. As he writes about the “Mad Mother,” “the alien object to which [the attention] had been so abruptly diverted, no longer an alien but an ally and an inmate.”⁴²

40. Priestley, p. 254.

41. *Wordsworth’s Literary Criticism*, ed. W. J. B. Owen (London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1974), p. 72.

42. Coleridge, *Biographia*, 2:150–1 (Ch 22).

In his lecture of 1812 he quotes a favourite couplet from the “Mad Mother” (“The Breeze I see is in yon tree / It comes to cool my babe & me”) with its subtle personification of the wind, and asks, perhaps with a final sense of triumph over Kames: “This was an instance of that abruptness of thought so natural to grief and if it be admired in images can we say that it is unnatural in words which are in fact a part of our life and existence?” (1:380).

V

In summary, Coleridge by re-considering the “language of grief” in Constance’s speech, lifts a ban that had been unreasonably placed on the expression of states of strong passion. Meanwhile, a more general insight can also be discerned from, or rather *in*, his critical discourse. It is that passion is inseparable from rhetoric because it needs a body to show forth, which only rhetoric can lend it. While in medicine, or in the theatre, passions were observed through their physical symptoms, in poetry they could only be traced in figures of language, which was itself, for Coleridge, an “organ” and a “body” for thought. As a final comment, let me add two examples, each of which throws a different light on this structure (one medical, the other poetical) and opens it to further investigations. In the fragment of an essay of 1828, “On the Passions,” Coleridge attempts to delineate a theory of the passions which reconciles the materialist and idealist poles and – in the words of Alan Richarson – “works towards a physiological psychology that gives primacy to mind and makes the body its expression.”⁴³ He assigns each appetite and each passion an organ appropriate to it: the “chief Organ” of Grief, like that of Hunger, is the stomach. In spite of its medical and anthropological orientation, however, the essay ends up looking very much like lectures on literature, especially when it comes to the “figure” of Grief:

The *wanting*, the *craving* of Grief (Here quote from Shakespeare’s Constance in King John, and from the Greek Tragedians – & in all the passions I purpose to make free use of illustration from the Poets, especially Dante, Chaucer, Shakespear and Ben Johnson) the characteristic Supersession of the Appetite of Hunger – the equally characteristic wasting and marasmus of Grief – all these & there are many more, prove Grief to be a Hunger of the Soul.⁴⁴

43. Richarson, p. 43.

44. Coleridge, *Shorter Works*, 2:1451.

Grief, here, is literally embodied: it inhabits the body as much as hunger does, which it displaces.⁴⁵ Nevertheless, it does not cease to be elusive. It is accessible in no other way than through a train of symptoms, such as tears (Coleridge raises the question whether they might not be analogous to the watering of the mouth when we are hungry), or the best in literature.

My other example is from Shakespeare, who addresses the question of the “language of grief” in several of his plays.⁴⁶ In *Richard II*, there is a scene in which the Queen is grieving for her departed husband, and has an inexplicable presentiment. Here grief is figured again as a child; it is not an absent son, as for Constance, but an unborn child. The Queen says: “Some unborn sorrow ripe in Fortune’s womb / Is coming towards me, and my inward soul / With nothing trembles; at some thing it grieves, / More than with parting from my lord the king.” Bushy tries to soothe her by saying: “’Tis nothing but conceit, my gracious lady.” The Queen’s reply takes up the themes of grief, figurative language and silence in a way that must have been instructive for Coleridge:

’Tis nothing less: conceit is still deriv’d
From some forefather grief; mine is not so,
For nothing hath begot my something grief,
Or something hath the nothing that I grieve –
’Tis in reversion that I do possess –
But what it is that is not yet known what,
I cannot name: ’tis nameless woe, I wot. (2.2.34–40)

An implication of this passage is that the Queen’s grief is nothing more – but also nothing less – than conceit, both in the sense that it is fiction or fancy, and that it is a “figure of speech.” The self-reflexive conceit she devises plays on the analogy between “conceit” and “conception”; her unborn grief is like a child of nothing – like a figure of speech. There is nothing substantial in it, but this “nothing” is strangely

45. Cf. Richardson on “[m]aterialist, naturalistic, and embodied notions of the psyche” which were present in Coleridge’s thinking “throughout his career, particularly in regard to his speculation on the emotions and the unconscious” (p. 41).

46. On Renaissance views about the rhetoric of passion cf. Jacqueline T. Miller, “The Passion Signified: Imitation and the Construction of Emotions in Sidney and Wroth,” *Criticism* (Fall, 2001) 407–42. Also, Brian Vickers, “On the Practicalities of Renaissance Rhetoric,” in *Rhetoric Revalued*, 133–141; Vickers, “‘The Power of Persuasion’: Images of the Orator Elyot to Shakespeare,” in *Renaissance Eloquence*, ed. James J. Murphy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 411–435.

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substantial. In this respect it is exactly like Constance's grief, which is embodied by its very negativity, mere absence stuffing out "his vacant garments with his form." These two passages present the same account of passion and rhetoric that I have traced in Coleridge's criticism, and undoubtedly, he drew the strongest inspiration to rethink rhetorical and psychological traditions from them. Passion "shows forth" in language as a figure of rhetoric, but this does not mean that it is empty, "mere words." The negativity of rhetoric is the only means to point to a psychological region beyond representation. As if to acknowledge this region, Coleridge commented on the scene I have just quoted from *Richard II*: "Terra incognita of the Human Mind" (2:287). The "rhetoric of passion" has become, for him, the dialect of this unknown country.