**Coleridge - and the Implications of Authorial Self-Awareness in Shakespeare**

**Prelude – the sense in which Shakespeare expresses historicity of individual consciousness**

In Isaac Asimov’s epic, his novel sequence including *Robot and Empire*, a book deeply about remembering, there is a key moment of realisation. The robot Daneel self-creatingly draws upon his memories of the final words, - about the tapestry of human life and its transcendence of the individual, - of the epic’s messianic hero, the galactic detective Elijah Baley. ‘Perhaps’, said Daneel slowly, ‘Partner Elijah did not himself understand the significance of what he was saying.’

Historical significance, - a fruitful tautology, - unfolds historically. It is completely possible for a phenomenon, even one as vast and profound as the Shakespeare phenomenon, to have a significance only incompletely understood by its own creator, and in its own time. I am beginning in particular from Professor Shapiro’s claim that to understand Shakespeare biographically, and individualistically, - even if in appropriate measure and not on the model of literal one to one parity between life and works, - is an anachronism. It was not and is not an anachronism. But the full significance may not have been accessible to any Elizabethan, *including the author himself*, and this misleads the historically simple minded Shapiro.

That is, - due to the development *of* our awareness of history and historicity, - we now know that the full implicit historicity of historical phenomena can only be grasped when the grasp of historicity itself, as a reflexive reality, becomes accessible. *Shakespeare’s historicity, and its contribution to our sense of time and history, is in a sense posthumous and retroactive.*

‘Historicity’ I define as: *The reflexive recognition, woven consequently into our very sense of the phenomena, of irreversible process and event, in experience, civilisation, and ethos.* This implies that a phenomenon may manifest historicity to us in spades, whilst yet itself not incorporating *meta-analysis of historicity* as such. That, in a nutshell, was Hegel’s insight. For instance, Macbeth’s speech, ‘If it were done when ’twere done….’, profoundly evokes his failing abysmally, self-deceivingly, to access his potential and enacted self-knowledge, which is nevertheless paradoxically implicitly present. This evocation exhibits and enacts a grasp of historicity in personal micro-process which is comparable to one of the *pieces de resistances* of 19th Century post-Romantic accounts of explicit psychological historicity. Jane Austen’s Emma’s realises her own self-deception when she finally cottons on that Harriet Smith believes Mr Knightley to return her feelings, and then when she finally figures that Mr Knightley has loved her all along after all, and they are united (Jane Austen, *Emma*, 1813, Vol III, Chs. 11 & 13). Such moments in fiction, reciprocally influenced by Shakespeare, and influencing our awareness of him, enable us more clearly to grasp what Shakespeare achieved. Characteristically, cross-referentially, and like Shakespeare so often, Jane Austen ends her enactment of the profound process, *in nuce*, by wonderfully transposing this process of profound psychological historicity into a comic register:

‘Within half an hour, he had passed from a thoroughly distressed state of mind, to something so like perfect happiness, that it could bear no other name.

*Her* change was equal.—…………….

[*following his learning the news about Frank Churchill and Jane Fairfax’s betrothal*]…..He had ridden home through the rain; and had walked up directly after dinner, to see how this sweetest and best of all creatures, faultless in spite of all her faults, bore the discovery.

He had found her agitated and low.—Frank Churchill was a villain.— He heard her declare that she had never loved him. Frank Churchill's character was not desperate.—She was his own Emma, by hand and word, when they returned into the house; and if he could have thought of Frank Churchill then, he might have deemed him a very good sort of fellow.’

The Shakespearean grasp of dramatic historicity process clearly does not fall in any way short of this, itself implicitly as profound and as much a paradigm as Hegel in its mastery of historicity process.

In Europe the discovery of historicity is precociously pioneered, synoptically, by Giambattista Vico (1725 and 1744), the Neapolitan historical philosopher, and in England by Coleridge, who indeed generously recognised himself and his philosophy in that of his forbear Vico, nearly an hundred years before him. The author of ‘*Historical Consciousness*’ (Lukacs, 1968), John Lukacs, has recently argued (*At the End of an Age*, Lukacs, 2002) that, in ‘The Idea of Perfect History’, George Huppert (1970) establishes the existence of a forgotten and repressed tradition of accurate and creative historical enquiry in France, which came to fruition actually in the second half of the16th Century, which Oxford might even have known, one which undoubtedly influenced Vico. Remarkable as this is, my sense is that this development offers a proto-Enlightenment paradigm, and does not actually anticipate the Vico/Romanticism’s discovery of *historicity as reflexive irreversibility*. If we were to find this in Shakespeare, of course, we are home and dry (‘How all occasions do inform against me….’ in its subtle existentiality about time, comes very near, and then, more widely, the knowledge of irrevocable temporality found and enacted in plays like *Macbeth* and *Winters Tale* as a whole), but my baseline point is that, even if not, there is massively pervasive psychological and dramatic micro-historicity in Shakespeare, which can retroactively be recognised as historicity awareness and enactment, once historicity is discovered.

To the extent that Shapiro is aware of the problem at all – he is singularly slipshod and positivistic, as I have argued in <http://shake-speares-bible.com/2011/10/31/guest-post-by-dr-heward-wilkinson-the-significance-of-the-longevity-of-the-shakespeare-authorship-question/> – he confuses the phenomenon of the *enactment* of historicity, with the realisation of the *meta-concept* of it. *A* *fortiori*, the same applies, *mutatis* *mutandis*, to his central preoccupation with the narrower focus of the discovery of individual consciousness – Shakespeare’s ‘Invention of the Human’, in Bloom’s formula, - as opposed to the *meta-concept* of individual consciousness, biography, autobiography, and so on.

The latter *did* first emerge in Romanticism, and is expressed in the genius of such formulations as Coleridge’s definition of the framing process of poetic imagining: ‘to transfer from our inward nature a human interest and a semblance of truth sufficient to procure for these shadows of imagination that willing suspension of disbelief for the moment, which constitutes poetic faith’ (*Biographia Literaria*, 1817).

What was this Shakespeare Phenomenon, which so precociously brought psychological and dramatic historicity to the centre of our consciousness of human existence, which Coleridge, more than anyone, restored to us? We underestimate at our peril its sheer gothic enormity.

**A New Poetic which evokes process and the historicity of consciousness**

Shakespeare created single handed *a new poetic* – the Shakespearean enactive use of language. This use of language communicates psychic and contextual *process*, dramatic historicity of consciousness, as never before, and is picked up by poets like Donne and Marvell, up until what TS Eliot calls the *dissociation of sensibility* (Eliot, 1921), which he links with Milton and Dryden, and hence with the emerging Enlightenment, sets in, and is not recovered till the Romantics.

**Created Poetic Drama**  
Shakespeare pretty well single handedly *created poetic drama* in England, - and in a way no one else since has ever been able to match, unless we count Mozart, Wagner and Dickens!!

**Reviewed realistically in the History Plays**

Shakespeare *reviewed in history drama* virtually the whole sequence of events leading up to the advent of the Tudors

**Evaluated the Classical Inheritance**

Shakespeare *evaluated in his drama the classical inheritance* from both Greece and Rome, and made it contemporary

**Uses all dramatic forms and the first true Tragedy for 2000 years**

The Shakespeare phenomenon encompasses masterpieces in all the extant forms of dramatic art, - and new ones. As Frank Kermode pointed out, this includes *the only major tragic writing for 2000 years*. The successor works are mainly in the novel, and the only comparable tragic art at all, apart from the novel, is found in *Tristan und Isolde* and *Der Ring des Nibelungen.* Just as the great Greek tragedians combine the world of mythos, in its death throes, as it collides with that of logos and emergent rational consciousness as we know it, so Shakespeare embodies and combines the collision of the mediaeval world with modern self-consciousness, anticipating the Enlightenment and even beyond the Enlightenment. He miraculously manages seamlessly to interface European court drama with popular drama; and he manages to combine all of this in drama whose capacity to access the extremes of psychological light and shade is beyond anything nearly till the 20th Century. If *Macbeth* expresses the extreme of darkness, and the Van Gogh like vision of a world darkened by the symbolic raven, the monstrous crow, nothing like it is found in literature until Wagner’s raven-haunted *Gotterdammerung.* There is surely nothing as profound as this single achievement in a single lifetime in all world literature. Such a thing does not just accidentally happen – we do not have to endure what Ken Wilber might have called the ‘Whoops’ theory of the Shakespeare phenomenon!! This mind must have left his finger- and foot-prints all over the Elizabethan and Jacobean world.

**The vast range of lived knowledge**

For Oxfordians, there is *the vast range of lived knowledge* from every conceivable discipline and activity, both theoretical and practical, manifest in the writings

**Founding the Theatre in England**

We must probably add the founding of the public theatre in England itself, on the Oxfordian conception and timescale, as developed by Richard Malim in *The Earl of Oxford and the Making of Shakespeare.*

**Posthumous History of the Shakespeare Phenomenon**

And, of course, there is the subsequent *posthumous* history of the Shakespeare phenomenon, which is equally prodigious, equally in its huge and mythic proportions, and in its gradual diminishing and bonsai-ing into bourgeois Whig respectability of the archetypal and feudal greatness of this mythic tour de force, and in the associated unsolved mystery of the identity of the author, - and so we ourselves add a little to this mythos! The role Coleridge took in this subsequent history and in the profound enigma of its historicity is what I wish to focus.

A comparable undertaking in the realm of theatrical creation would be Richard Wagner’s music drama project, realised over 30 years, with the eventual assistance of the state coffers of Ludwig 2nd of Bavaria. Wagner, however, composed and wrote under his *own* name, though he spent much of his life on the run because of financial and political factors; he, too, was a squanderer and a huge risk taker. An impossible and hugely dominating man, eventually having to rely on royal patronage to pull this off, Wagner illustrates the scale of personality necessary to accomplish such gigantic feats. Another partial instance would be Charles Dickens’ public-creating apotheosis of the Victorian serial novel.

Now, given that we *also* conjecture that this gigantic and shadowy phenomenon was produced under a pseudonym, we may expect a shadowy element of the picaresque to have entered into it all! We would expect that this grandiose and monumental phenomenon would have become largely concealed, invisibilised, and inverted. To misquote Voltaire, if the Stratford man did not exist we would have had to invent him. So what did we expect? The consequent paradox is that the scale of this invisibilisation is also itself monumental. Listen to how even my great teacher, the critic F.R. Leavis, whose potency and grasp of the Shakespearean achievement, the Shakespearean realisations, was so great, slips seamlessly and unaware, in the parenthesis, into the Stratford hallucination in such a brilliant passage as this – writing about the vital centrality of the University!

‘A literature grows out of culture. A great poet, though he may have a profound influence on his native language by his supremely creative use of it (it developed and is kept living in creative use), didn’t create it. Shakespeare had an immeasurably great influence upon English, but couldn’t have done so had he not inherited from it a rich, supple, and exquisitely vital language. The indebtedness of Shakespearian English to the universities (though Shakespeare was notoriously *not* a classical or an English don) was immense – a subject on which a first year man reading ‘English’ could write at least a page or two, and a maturer student of distinguished mind, choosing it for a piece of original work, could make very much more of than a language specialist….. I will say no more on this head – and I have said nothing about the University Wits….’ (Leavis, 1969)

And this inversion is what we indeed find. Whilst there are a whole immense mass of fascinating and amazing subterranean materials, perhaps the three most extraordinary and ambiguous ones are:

**Picaresques: Groatsworth**

The first of the picaresque burlesques, Groatsworth, in 1592

**Picaresques: Sonnets**

The second, the publication of the Sonnets, in 1609

**Picaresques: The First Folio**

And of course, the *piece de resistance*, on the grandest scale of all, the publication of the First Folio in 1623.

**The Creation of the English Speaking Ethnicity worldwide**

There is also this to be considered. Without Shakespeare, Britain and the English-speaking world would have remained incurably provincial. Because of him, it is world-historical. Yet Whig and empiricist Britain and the English ethnicity has never been equal to its own world-historical figures, Shakespeare and Coleridge above all. *And the story of the authorship enigma is precisely the story of that inequality to our own collective history.*

By the time of the great Dr Samuel Johnson and the *Preface to Shakespeare*, the unique knowledge of the towering greatness and subtlety of the Shakespearean creation which is expressed, though likewise ‘eke under a shady veil is hid’, in Ben Jonson’s supreme tribute in the First Folio, has been lost. Impressive as the Preface is, Sam. Johnson is nevertheless all at sea, does not have an inward grasp of Shakespeare, seeing him as a kind of naturalistic story teller dramatic novelist, repeatedly denigrating and misunderstanding the greatness of the tragedies, and failing, with a paradoxical half-awareness, to grasp the Shakespearean poetic:

‘In tragedy he often writes with great appearance of toil and study, what is written at last with little felicity; but in his comick scenes, he seems to produce without labour, what no labour can improve. In tragedy he is always struggling after some occasion to be comick, but in comedy he seems to repose, or to luxuriate, as in a mode of thinking congenial to his nature. In his tragick scenes there is always something wanting, but his comedy often surpasses expectation or desire…… His tragedy seems to be skill, his comedy to be instinct.’

So it is Coleridge, and those he profoundly influenced, Hazlitt, Lamb, De Quincey, and Keats, who gives us back the great and the unique Shakespeare Ben Jonson evoked, and who gives us back the consciousness with which to appreciate him. The great Shakespeare critics since, such as FH Bradley, TS Eliot, DH Lawrence, Wilson Knight, Leavis, all write within the wake of the Coleridgean recreation of the Shakespearean consciousness. Coleridge has an instinctive understanding of the great courtier poet, and even seems to come within a hairs breadth of glimpsing the authorship puzzle:

“Shakespeare’s characters might be reduced to a few, that is to say to a few classes of characters. If you took his gentlemen, for instance; the character of Biron was seen again in Mercutio, in Benedick, and a variety of others. They were men who combined the politeness of the Courtier with the faculties of intellect; the powers of combination which only belong to an intellectual mind. The wonder was how he should thus disguise himself, and have such miraculous powers of conveying the Poet, without even raising in ourselves the consciousness of him.

In the address of Mercutio to Romeo regarding the Fairy Queen Mab….there would be noticed all the fancy of the poet, but the language in which was contained possessed such a facility that one would say, almost, that it was impossible for it to be thought, unless it were thought as naturally and without effect as Mercutio represented it. This was the great art by which Shakespeare combined the Poet and the gentleman, throughout borrowing from his own most amiable character that which could only combine them, a perfect simplicity of mind, a delight in what was excellent for its own sake, without reference to himself as causing it….” (Coleridge on Shakespeare, Payne Collier’s original notes, ed. RA Foakes)

And, in the Shakespeare Marginalia, which I have not yet been able to obtain, he unerringly finds his way to the extraordinary self-abasing kenosis of the passage in which, in my own exploration of *King Lear*, I found concealed the deepest expression I know of the abysmal kenotic darkness of the authorship concealment, the moment when Lear and the Fool stumble into Poor Tom’s hut, and Lear is catapulted into the madness he has been staving off:

'What a World's Convention of Agonies -- surely, never was such a scene conceived before or since -- Take it but as a picture, for the eye only, it is more terrific than any a Michael Angelo inspired by a Dante could have conceived, and which none but a Michael Angelo could have executed -- or let it have been uttered to the Blind, the howlings of convulsed Nature would seem concentred in the voice of conscious Humanity.'

The mighty-minded, hidden and burlesquing clown who created these works is vividly evoked for us, among many others, even by his bitter enemy Charles Arundel:

….in this action he shewid so greate discretion, and goverment as by his wisedome the matters were compowndid, and, an accorde made beinge more for his glorie then yf he had fowght the battell, this lie is verye rife w*i*t*h* him and in it he glories greatlie, diverslie hathe he told it, and when he enters into it, he can hardlie owte, whiche hathe made suche sporte as often have I bin driven to rise from his table laugheinge so hathe my L*ord* Charles howard, and the rest, whome I namid before and for the profe of this I take them all as wittnises

The Christological dimension of this clowning, which sinks such deep roots in the plays, and which is transmitted through the Coleridgean legacy, we may find evoked in the creator of the greatest Shakespearean poetic of the nineteenth century, whose vision, like that of the mercurial Shakespeare himself, is pervaded by the influence and ethos of the great Greek discoverer of perpetual evanescence, Herakleitos, Gerard Manley Hopkins:

O pity and indignation! Manshape, that shone

Sheer off, disseveral, a star, death blots black out; nor mark

Is any of him at all so stark but vastness blurs and time beats level.

Enough! The Resurrection, A heart’s-clarion!

Away grief’s grasping, joyless days, dejection.

Across my foundering deck shone

A beacon, an eternal beam.

Flesh fade and mortal trash

Fall to the residuary worm; world’s wildfire leave but ash.

In a flash, at a trumpet crash,

I am all at once what Christ is, since he was what I am, and

This jack, joke, poor potsherd, patch, matchwood, immortal diamond,

Is immortal diamond.