“I FAIN WOULD TELL THEE WHAT I AM; BUT DARE NOT!”:
METADRAMA AND POLITICAL IDENTITY IN COLERIDGE’S REMORSE

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate School
of the University of Notre Dame
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

by

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April 2007
For my parents, James and Amy, my first and favorite audience.
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to thank my advisor, Greg Kucich, for introducing me to the “raucous” Romantic-era stage. His keen editorial eye and helpful suggestions greatly improved the quality of this thesis. I would also like to thank the members of the Nineteenth-Century Area Seminar at the University of Notre Dame for their helpful comments on an earlier draft of this work. Finally, I would like to thank my friends David, Bob, Chris, Matt, and Yvonne for their part in making my thesis experience a much less remorseful one.
INTRODUCTION

During the last fifteen years work on the theatre has emerged as one of the most compelling new trajectories in Romantic-era studies. Recent scholarship on Romantic-era drama by Jeffrey N. Cox, Catherine Burroughs, Michael Gamer, Jane Moody, Julie Carlson, Anne Mellor, Daniel P. Watkins, Greg Kucich, and Daniel O’Quinn has firmly (re)established the political, cultural, and aesthetic importance of the theatre.¹ These largely new historicist critics have challenged the traditionally held position that Romantic-era theatre consisted of the male canonical Romantic poets’ “closet dramas” by focusing on performed drama, audiences, stage practices, and other material aspects of theatrical life.² Thus, modern critics have shown a renewed interest in Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s Remorse because it was the only one of the traditional “Big Six” Romantic poets’ plays that proved to be a popular stage success during his lifetime. As is generally


the case in studies of Coleridge’s work, critical investigations of Remorse have been particularly interested in teasing out the politics of the play.

Coleridge, like many of his fellow first-generation Romantics, including William Wordsworth, ardently supported the French Revolution in its early phase. Unfortunately for Coleridge and company, the redemptive promises of the French Revolution began disintegrating with the onset of the Terror and were completely destroyed by the ascension of Napoleon. While Wordsworth was content to admit that his previous support for the Revolution was among the follies of his youth, Coleridge, on the other hand, firmly maintained that regardless of whether he supported or opposed the Revolution his “political principles” had remained constant. Whereas critical examinations of Coleridge’s other writings have uncovered deeply ambivalent, highly complex, or even contradictory political positions operating within the text, studies of Remorse have tended to characterize the politics of the play as relatively straightforward and transparently conservative or anti-Jacobinical. These critics locate Coleridge’s


political identity within traditional binary oppositions like Whig/Tory or Jacobin/Anti-Jacobin. For example, Carlson argues that the “remorse” in the play’s title refers to Coleridge’s disturbed and regretful feelings about his radical political past.

This sort of reading of Coleridge’s politics, however, reflects only one side of a larger critical debate within Coleridge studies. The traditional view of his political history, as demonstrated by Carl Woodring, E.P. Thompson, and John Morrow, portrays Coleridge as a political apostate. This view maintains that Coleridge had flip-flopped from Jacobinical supporter of the French Revolution to outspoken Anti-Jacobinical opponent of the same. However, another critical trajectory developed over the last several decades by David V. Erdman, Thomas McFarland, Jerome Christensen, William Galperin, and Charles Mahoney has greatly complicated the critical understanding of Coleridge’s political identity. These critics maintain that the charge of political

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8 Carlson, Theatre 94-8 and “Remorse” 130-1.


apostasy presents an over-simplified picture of Coleridge’s incredibly complex political history. They argue that Coleridge is never truly an apostate because he never actually holds any political position; or, to put it another way, he always holds every possible position. As Erdman succinctly phrases it, “[Coleridge] is in truth ‘ever the same’ in the sense that he is never single-sided or single-minded but always both Jacobin and Anti-Jacobin, Radical and Tory, poet and moralist, intermingled” (lxv). While Erdman and company have ably traced-out this trend in Coleridge’s poetry and prose, they have completely ignored his plays. This thesis will attempt to complicate the well-represented critical charge of political apostasy in Remorse by extending the recent work of Erdman, McFarland, Christensen, Galperin, and Mahoney to Coleridge’s most successful play.

Galperin’s work offers the most direct entryway into thinking about Remorse in terms of multivalent politics. He argues that Coleridge turns to “theatricality” in order to demonstrate the sameness of two seemingly contradictory positions. Although Galperin is referring to theatricality in Coleridge’s prose writings, I would like to suggest that Coleridge uses theatricality to a similar end in Remorse as well. Studies of Coleridge’s play, however, have generally characterized it as “anti-theatrical” (Carlson) or even “perversely undramatic” (Peter Mortensen). Similarly, Reeve Parker, Lawrence Wynn, and Woodring all assert that Remorse’s eventual removal from the dramatic repertory


11 See Galperin 177-204.

was well deserved. More recently, however, Sophie Thomas has attempted to recover Remorse’s theatrical merits. She argues that what Carlson and others have seen as the play’s “anti-theatricality” may be more appropriately termed Coleridge’s “virtual theater” or metadrama (553-4). Thomas, however, is more interested in how Coleridge’s use of metadrama in Remorse relates to his theory of dramatic illusion than to his conceptions of political identity. In fact, one significant feature of metadrama is that it complicates fixed categories of identity—political and otherwise—by questioning the perceived nature of reality. Metadrama highlights the performativity and hence mutable or transitory quality of identity. Throughout Remorse Coleridge consistently subverts fixed notions of political identity through metadrama. Alvar, for instance, is a Spanish nobleman who chooses to play the role of a Moorish magician. He plays his part so convincingly that he winds up imprisoned in the dungeon of the Inquisition. I will

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14 See Sophie Thomas, “Seeing Things (‘As They Are’): Coleridge, Schiller, and the Play of Semblance,” *Studies in Romanticism* 43 (2004): 537-55. In *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* Cox and Gamer, the editors, highlight the theatrical merits of Remorse in two ways: by imaginatively reconstructing the experience of watching the play in the introduction and also in their editorial decision to include Remorse rather than the unperformed original version of the play, Osorio. See *The Broadview Anthology of Romantic Drama* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview Press, 2003) vii-ix.

15 Thomas uses Evlyn Gould’s term “virtual theater” to describe “plays that play on play.” I prefer “metadrama” because it is just as applicable and more widely recognized.

16 Thomas 539.

examine how metadrama—“real-life reference,” “literary reference,” “ceremony within the play,” and “role playing within the role”—in Remorse contributes to Coleridge’s defense of his own controversial political history.18 This thesis aims to complicate the critical understanding of Remorse’s politics by attempting to show that Coleridge uses metadrama in order to demonstrate the slipperiness of seemingly fixed categories of political identity.19

18 Hornby identifies six types of metadrama: “the play within the play,” “the ceremony within the play,” “role playing within the role,” “real-life reference,” “literary reference,” and “self-reference” (15). I do not wish to imply that Coleridge somehow anticipates Hornby’s metadramatic categories. I include these categories primarily because they provide a useful way of organizing the many examples of metadrama in Remorse.

19 Because Hornby asserts that the effects of metadrama are far more pronounced in performance (100-1 and 179), I have decided to use the version of Remorse that best approximates the performance text. See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Poetical Works III: Plays, ed. J.C.C. Mays, 2 vols., No. 16 in The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge, eds. Kathleen Coburn and Bart Winer (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2001) 2:1070-1134.
1.1 Introduction

Critics have generally not considered Coleridge’s engagement with Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic in terms of metadrama. Many critics have, however, recognized that Coleridge appropriates Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic in interesting ways in his play. In modern dramatic theory parlance, Hornby would classify Coleridge’s use of Spain and Napoleon as examples of “real-life reference metadrama” and the Gothic as an example of “literary reference metadrama.” By the time that Remorse appeared on the Drury Lane theatre stage in January of 1813, Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic had become recurring motifs in Romantic-era plays. As a result of their ubiquity, audience members would have developed certain expectations for these motifs when they occurred on-stage. I would like to suggest that Coleridge’s deployment of these motifs in Remorse is especially metadramatic. By constantly subverting the conventional audience expectations about Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic, Coleridge’s play presents political identity as fluid rather than fixed. I will begin by examining how Coleridge’s strategic use of Spain and Napoleon obscures the politics of the play. Then, I will investigate how Coleridge appropriates the Gothic in Remorse in order to further
complicate fixed notions of political identity. This chapter will attempt to demonstrate that Coleridge deepens ambiguities about political identity by simultaneously presenting contradictory portrayals of the politics of Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic.

1.1.1 Real-Life Reference Metadrama

Romantic-era theatre audiences were capable of detecting even the most subtle references to contemporary political events and figures. In January and February of 1813, English audiences would have been acutely receptive to any passing reference to the Peninsular War and/or Napoleon. At first glance, Coleridge’s play seems to present everything that a politically minded audience could wish for. Although Coleridge had retained Remorse’s Spanish setting from the earlier Osorio, it would have taken on additional political significance in 1813 due to England’s involvement in the Spanish Peninsular War. Napoleon is also invoked at a very early moment in the play. In the opening scene of Remorse, for example, the audience learns that Ordonio usurped Alvar’s birthright (1.1.10). For Remorse’s audiences, Ordonio’s usurpation would have explicitly aligned him with the ultimate usurper of the period, Napoleon. Thus, for the play’s audiences, the opening scene appears to establish Ordonio as the Napoleonic


22 Ibid., 179.

23 Osorio (1797) was written by Coleridge to be staged at Drury Lane Theatre at the request of Richard Brinsley Sheridan. Sheridan ultimately rejected the play, however, declaring it unfit for dramatic representation. Over the next fifteen years, Coleridge revised the play in order to improve its stageability and also renamed it Remorse. The play was accepted by Samuel Whitbread, Sheridan’s successor, in 1813. The most thorough account of these events comes from Coleridge himself, in the preface to the second printed edition of Remorse. See Coleridge *CW* 16.3.2:1063-9.
figure and Spain as the site where he will be defeated. Coleridge, however, greatly complicates these seemingly straightforward examples of “real-life reference” metadrama in *Remorse* by continually subverting audience expectations. For example, after hearing Alvar’s description of Ordonio’s crimes, audience members would have been anxiously anticipating the on-stage arrival of a ferocious tyrant. Instead, shortly after Ordonio’s pious first line—“Hail, reverend father!”—he becomes utterly “distemper[ed]” by the mere mention of Alvar’s murder (1.2.83, 109-111, 125). Similarly, *Remorse* is set in the “Black Legend” Spain of the Inquisition and oppression rather than the new Spain of heroic resistance to French tyranny. Throughout the play, Coleridge deploys Spanish and Napoleonic identifications only to undermine them. These numerous misidentifications raise questions about the stability of political identity. I would like to suggest that Coleridge’s strategic (dis)location of Spain and Napoleon in *Remorse* emphasizes the ambivalence of political identity.

1.2 Spain

From 1808, when the Peninsular War begins, until 1814, when the fighting was temporarily halted by the defeat of Napoleon’s army at the hands of the allied English and Spanish forces, discussion about England’s involvement in the continental Napoleonic Wars comprised one of the most pressing topics of national debate. By 1813, the tide had begun to turn decisively in England and Spain’s favor. Napoleon was being pushed back through Russia and his forces in Spain were steadily retreating.24 Thus,

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24 For a very recent historical account of the Peninsular War, see David A. Bell, *The First Total War* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2007) 279-93. For the most comprehensive study of Spain and
Alvar’s return in the play’s opening scene is entirely consistent with the anticipated restoration of the Spanish ancien regime. In this reading, Alvar can be seen as the brave Spanish noblemen, while Ordonio stands in for the French usurpers. When Alvar returns to reclaim his birthright, he is accompanied by Zulimez, a Moor. This pairing takes on additional significance in light of contemporary events. One can just as easily exchange the prolonged conflicts between the Spaniards and the Moors with the prolonged conflicts between the Spaniards and the English. The Spanish-Moor alliance of Alvar and Zulimez against Ordonio can be translated into the Spanish-English alliance in the Peninsular Wars against France. There is plenty of evidence in Remorse to support this reading of the Spanish setting. However, there is also plenty of evidence in Coleridge’s play which suggests a radically different reading of the Spanish setting.

In this alternate reading, the Spaniards are themselves the oppressors, rather than the oppressed. Lord Valdez, Ordonio, and Monviedro can all be seen as representatives of Spanish tyranny against the Moors. They refer to the Moors as “the brood accurst,” “infidels,” and “Traitors” (1.2.103, 3.3.16, 4.1.98); Lord Valdez holds the Moors responsible for Alvar’s murder (3.3.35); Ordonio had been a leading figure in the Spanish campaigns against the Moors (1.2.94-5); Ordonio murders the Moors’ chieftain (4.1); and Monviedro, along with the other members of the Inquisition, are regularly imprisoning and torturing suspicious Moors. The presence of this alternative reading of Spanish politics in Remorse generates confusion and disappointment in audience members. Coleridge is clearly playing off of his audiences’ expectations for the new Spain of the Romanticism, see Diego Saglia, Poetic Castles in Spain: British Romanticism and Figurations of Iberia (Atlanta, GA: Rodopi, 2000). Saglia does not, however, engage with the drama in his book.
Peninsular Wars. Rather than allowing for this contemporary picture of Spain to fully develop, however, Coleridge continually reintroduces the more traditional portrayal of Spanish oppression. Coleridge’s strategic subversion of Spanish heroism in Remorse left many audience members feeling as if they had been cheated or misled.

This sense of being cheated is especially pronounced in The London Times review of the opening night performance. The reviewer expresses palpable disappointment that the play did not follow-up on the potential political engagements promised by the provocative setting:

The Spanish war, offering to us the perpetual spectacle of heroic resolution struggling against arrogant strength,—individual bravery and disunited counsel proudly waving the sword in the eyes of the most powerful, connected, and disciplined mass of force that the modern world had seen…and we should not have been surprised to see the most distinguished geniusses (sic) of the age engrossed by the contest, and, in the language of Philosophy and the Muse, bequeathing to the ages to come the high lessons of wisdom for which that contest had been ordained…A drama has at length been produced by Mr. COLERIDGE, a writer already known to the public; and we were inclined to hope that the stigma of indolence and apathy was about to be taken away…if his object had been to asperse the Spanish character, [he] could not have constructed his machinery with more obvious designs.25

This lengthy excerpt illustrates two important points about Coleridge’s decidedly ambiguous use of Spain in his play: first, Remorse’s Spanish setting would have led audience members to anticipate a narrative wherein the heroic Spaniards subdue the oppressive evils of Napoleon and the French usurpers; and second, audience members would have felt a sense of disappointment when Coleridge’s play does not deliver on its “promised” subject matter. As this reviewer perceptively notes, it is ultimately unclear

whether Coleridge’s object is to celebrate or “to asperse the Spanish character.” In this sense, Remorse can be read either as a Pro-Spanish play or as an Anti-Spanish play. By upholding these two contradictory readings throughout the play, Coleridge highlights the ambivalence of political identity. The Spanish are simultaneously presented as the oppressors and as the oppressed. Coleridge further complicates political identity in Remorse through his ambiguous presentation of Napoleon. Much like the strategic application of the play’s Spanish setting, Coleridge offers multiple contradictory representations of the Napoleonic figure. His audience, in turn, knows that they are supposed to see Napoleon in the play, but they are ultimately unable to locate him; or, put another way, they end up recognizing traces of him everywhere. Coleridge augments the political ambiguities of the play by transforming “Napoleon-ness” into a disguise that is alternately worn by a variety of characters.

1.3 Napoleon

Contemporary theatre reviewers were often quick to point out Napoleon’s various manifestations on the English stage. In Matthew Lewis’s smash-hit Timour the Tartar; A Grand Romantic Melo-drama in Two Acts, which opened at Covent Garden in 1811, the title character of Timour (Tamburlaine) is clearly meant to stand in for Napoleon. In addition to the numerous references to Timour’s conspicuously short stature, he is also repeatedly referred to as “usurper” or “Tyrant” (1.1.163, 218; 1.2.78; 2.3.22). The play ends with Timour’s overthrow and the restoration of the old monarchical order. Notably,

26 All citations from Timour the Tartar are from the version of the play in Broadview 97-116.
many of the reviews of the play noted the Napoleonic likeness of the title character.\textsuperscript{27} The majority of these reviews found much to praise in the play’s mitigation of the Napoleonic threat. Others, like Leigh Hunt, mocked \textit{Timour the Tartar}’s rather tidy solution to Napoleon: “BONAPARTE…is perfectly shocked, no doubt; to hear of these terrible proceedings against him in ‘the finest theatre in Europe!’”\textsuperscript{28} By contrast, the contemporary reviews of \textit{Remorse} did not identify a definitive Napoleonic figure in the play.\textsuperscript{29} One possible explanation for the absence of Napoleonic identifications in the reviews of \textit{Remorse}, especially in comparison to the frequency of such identifications in the reviews of \textit{Timour the Tartar}, is that Coleridge is generally resistant towards strict bifurcations of political identity. Rather than making one character a Napoleonic prototype, as Lewis clearly does with Timour, Coleridge diffuses Napoleonic characteristics throughout several of his characters.

Whereas Coleridge’s contemporary critics were reluctant to identify a Napoleonic figure in \textit{Remorse}, modern critics have been much more assertive in locating Napoleon within the dramatis personae. Not surprisingly, the most popular choice for Coleridge’s Napoleon is Ordonio.\textsuperscript{30} As was suggested earlier, a convincing case can certainly be made for this identification: Ordonio usurps Alvar’s birthright, he is paranoid that the Moors are plotting to overthrow him, he is driven by vengeance, he delights in committing murder, and his fatal flaw is pride. While Coleridge undoubtedly promotes

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{27} For reviews of \textit{Timour the Tartar}, see Cox and Gamer 344-50.
\item \textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 349; reprinted from \textit{The Examiner} No. 176 (12 May 1811): 299-300.
\item \textsuperscript{29} A substantial number of contemporary reviews of \textit{Remorse} have been collected in \textit{Coleridge: The Critical History}, Ed. J.R. de J. Jackson (New York: Barnes and Noble, Inc., 1970) 111-98. For a critical analysis of reviews of \textit{Remorse}, see Wynn 14-21.
\item \textsuperscript{30} See Moore 449 and Cox and Gamer 166 and 206.
\end{itemize}
this identification of Ordonio with Napoleon, he also constantly subverts it: Ordonio’s ambition ceases with the removal of Alvar, he is extremely filial, his constant starts and fits are reminiscent of melodramatic heroines, and he has to recruit others to do his dirty work. Elaborating on this last point, Erika Gottlieb astutely observes that, “[Ordonio] is probably the least powerful of all romantic villains. When he wants to kill he hires an assassin; when he wants to use magic; he hires a magician” (56).

Although Ordonio clearly possesses some Napoleonic elements in his character so, too, do several other characters in the play.

Rather than locating the Napoleonic presence in Remorse in a single character, Carlson finds it operating at different times in Ordonio, Alhadra, the Moorish mob, Teresa, and even Alvar. Despite these momentary slippages, however, she asserts that Coleridge maintains strict dichotomies of “good” and “bad” characters. As was mentioned in the Introduction, the standard reading of the politics of the play conforms to Carlson’s mutually exclusive designations. Furthermore, this sort of approach to Remorse’s politics regards Coleridge’s political history as a matter of apostasy. Yet, by considering how Coleridge strategically uses metadrama in Remorse, we can see that the play’s politics do not fit into nice, neat compartments. “Real-life reference” metadrama primes the audience members for the identification of Napoleon in Remorse. Coleridge, however, never allows for that identification to be made. Instead, he emphasizes the fluidity of political identity by continually (dis)locating Napoleon. Where Lewis has Napoleon playing a part in his play, Coleridge has his characters variously playing the


32 Carlson Theatre 100-5 and 110-1.
part of Napoleon. Significantly for Coleridge’s defense of his personal political history, the characters in his play can perform the role of Napoleon without ever actually becoming Napoleon. By theatricalizing political identity, Coleridge confirms the consistency of his own political history.

Looking at Remorse in relation to the afterpiece that it was most frequently paired with, Thomas John Dibdin’s pantomime Harlequin and Humpo; or, Columbine by Candlelight, further reinforces Coleridge’s conception of political identity as a fluid construct. In “Spots of Time: The Structure of the Dramatic Evening in the Theater of Romanticism,” Cox introduces a new methodology for the study of performed drama in the Romantic Period. He argues that there exists a “theatrical intertextuality” between an evening performance’s mainpiece (a five act comedy or tragedy) and its afterpiece (oftentimes a pantomime or farce). Thus, Cox suggests that individual plays from the period should not be studied merely as isolated events, but in terms of “a multipart, motley mixture that carries a meaning beyond the limits of a particular work” (411).

According to Cox, in the case of Remorse and Harlequin and Humpo, the most obvious “theatrical intertextuality” can be seen in the plays’ respective treatment of “contemporary politics as theater” (417). Like Remorse, Dibdin’s pantomime engages with “contemporary politics” through the figure of Napoleon. Harlequin and Humpo comically represents Napoleon on-stage as Humpo, the King of the dwarves. Once the “Operatick” portion of the play gives way to the “Harlequinade,” Humpo becomes transformed into the stock figure of Pantaloon. David Mayer III, to whom any discussion

of Romantic-era pantomime is deeply indebted, describes Pantaloon as a decrepit old man who relentlessly pursues Harlequin and Columbine. He also notes that Pantaloon is generally characterized by his “egotism and ruthless stupidity.” By transforming the Napoleonic figure into the conventional Pantaloon character, Dibdin essentially seals his fate. Nineteenth-century English audiences would have been well-aware that Pantaloon, Lover, and Clown never win the day. Turning the Napoleonic character into Pantaloon renders him as powerless as the “toothless mastiff” guard dog in Coleridge’s poem, “Christabel.” The fact that Napoleon/Pantaloon is vanquished by an overtly English Harlequin, originally Arthur in the “Operatick” portion of the play, leads Cox to conclude that Harlequin and Humpo reinforces the conservative politics of Remorse.

While Harlequin and Humpo seems to uphold a system of political identification that conforms to binary oppositions, the play can also be seen as deepening ambiguities about political identity. Harlequin may subdue the evil Napoleon/Pantaloon, but he also possesses many Napoleonic qualities. Harlequin can be seen as a kind of jacobinical force: he is constantly undermining authority, especially Clown’s paternal authority over Columbine; he enacts a form of sexual rebellion by eloping with Columbine, who is typically engaged to Lover; and he is by far the most violent character in the pantomime. Furthermore, while Harlequin’s numerous magical transformations and disguises aid him in his quest to defeat Pantaloon, Lover, and Clown, they also raise

34 See Mayer 43-4 and 261.
36 See Cox “Spots” 420.
37 See Mayer 24, 38-41, and 48.
questions about the nature of identity. Similarly, the “transformation scene” itself, where all of the principal characters in the “Operatick” segment of the play discard their previous identities and costumes for new ones in the Harlequinade, also suggests the theatricality of identity. Harlequin and Humpo may appear to be a conservative anti-Napoleonic work, as Cox argues. At the same time, however, Harlequin’s subversive and revolutionary qualities combined with pantomime’s rich metadramatic elements, then, actually intensify the motifs of political ambiguity and fluidity present in Remorse.

Thus far, we have looked at two examples of metadrama in Remorse—Spain and Napoleon. By presenting two contradictory portrayals of Spain, Coleridge heightens the political ambiguities of the play by making it impossible for audience members to determine whether the play is presenting the Spaniards as heroes against Tyranny or as Tyrants themselves. By having various characters act like Napoleon at various times, Coleridge emphasizes the fluidity of political identity. The political ambiguities that I have been tracing in Remorse are even further deepened by Coleridge’s appropriation of the Gothic.

38 Ibid., 40-1.
39 Ibid., 20 and 24.
1.4 The Gothic

The Romantic Era witnessed the rise and also the eventual fall of Gothic drama. Gothic dramas were penned by both popular playwrights, like Lewis and George Colman the Younger, as well as major canonical figures, like Lord Byron, Percy Shelley, Joanna Baillie, and Charles Robert Maturin. The unprecedented stage success enjoyed by Lewis’s *The Castle Spectre* and Maturin’s *Bertram; or, The Castle of St. Aldobrand* attest to the immense popularity of the Gothic form for Romantic-era audiences. Gothic dramas generally adhered to a fairly standard formula: the exiled villain/hero returns to his native land accompanied by a robber gang; during the villain/hero’s absence, his arch-nemesis has married the villain/hero’s former love; the villain/hero eventually murders his arch-nemesis; the villain/hero’s former love goes insane; and finally, the villain/hero either a) commits suicide, b) is apprehended by the authorities, or c) perishes from excessive guilt or remorse. These Gothic tropes were so ubiquitous during the period that they acquired metadramatic significance. Mayer III, for example, argues that numerous Romantic-era pantomimes, including *Harlequin and Humpo*, contained satirical portrayals of mainstream Gothic drama. While Coleridge is not satirizing the Gothic in *Remorse*, he nonetheless presents it metadramatically.

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41 See Cox *Seven* 20-3 and Evans 25-31.

42 See Mayer 75-6 and 90-2. Cox also notes *Harlequin and Humpo*’s satirical treatment of the Gothic, see “Spots” 417.

43 For Coleridge’s most satirical treatment of the Gothic, see *Biographia Literaria* 2:207-233.
engagement with Gothic drama in Remorse enhances his representation of the ambiguous nature of political identity.

Critics have typically characterized Remorse as a sort of anti-Gothic drama. Thus, Cox claims that Coleridge invokes the Gothic “only to contest it” and Peter Mortensen argues that Coleridge “purifies” the debased Gothic form. Although Cox and Mortensen are undoubtedly correct in differentiating Remorse from the likes of The Castle Spectre and Bertram, they seem to be overstating their point in suggesting that the same poet who composed “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner” and “Christabel” was antipathetic towards the Gothic in his plays. John David Moore suggests that Coleridge was not opposed to Gothic elements per se, only to “jacobinical uses of those elements.” According to Moore, Coleridge capitalized on the “political polyvalence” afforded by the Gothic form in order to transform the Jacobinical Osorio into the Anti-Jacobinical Remorse with only minimal revision. Although Moore compellingly argues that Coleridge strategically employs the political flexibilities of the Gothic, he nevertheless concludes that Coleridge ultimately flattens out those ambiguities. A significant limitation of Moore’s analysis is that he examines only one scene—the play’s ending—as evidence that Coleridge had successfully converted a Jacobinical play into an Anti-Jacobinical one. A closer examination of the ending of Remorse, however, reveals

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44 Parker, on the other hand, considers Remorse to be a text-book example of popular Gothic drama (143). Parker’s reading of Remorse, however, should always be taken with a grain of salt because of her pronounced bias towards Osorio.

45 See Cox “Spots” 418 and Seven 30 and Mortensen 142-3.

46 See Moore 461.


48 Ibid., 463.
that Coleridge maintains Jacobinical and also Anti-Jacobinical Gothic elements. I would like to suggest that rather than flattening out the ambiguities of the Gothic, as Moore claims, Coleridge continually presents both the Jacobinical Gothic and the Anti-Jacobinical Gothic simultaneously. The presence of these two contradictory Gothics in Remorse highlights the political ambivalence of the play.

Coleridge did not add the Gothic elements to Remorse as part of his revision of Osorio. As Carlson puts it, “to a remarkable extent, Remorse preserves the heresies of Osorio but offers them to different effect’ (Theatre, 98). The specific “heresies” which he retains are the evil priests, castles with dungeons, dark caves, and the Incantation.49 Yet, when these standard Gothic elements appear in the early-nineteenth-century Remorse they do not function in exactly the same way as they would have in 1790s Gothic drama. Carlson’s point about Coleridge offering the Gothic in Remorse “to different effect” is certainly accurate. However, the important historical issues surrounding the use of Gothic conventions are conspicuously absent from her analysis.50 In Cox’s seminal analysis of the history and conventions of Gothic drama, he notes that the form flourished in the 1790s and then again in 1815.51 These dates are particularly significant because they link the popularity of Gothic drama to two major events in France’s Revolutionary history—the fall of the Bastille and the defeat of Napoleon at the Battle of Waterloo. Thus, the “political polyvalence” that Moore, following Ronald Paulson, attributes to the Gothic can be understood in terms of the French Revolution:

49 See Evans 262-6.
50 See Carlson Theatre 98 and 100.
51 See Cox Seven 8.
“the Gothic formula presented two views of tyranny—the sentimental view from the position of the helpless, and the revolutionary view from the position of the rebellious outcast.”\textsuperscript{52} Although each of these views suggests its contrary, meaning that the revolutionary action of a “rebellious outcast” also invokes nostalgia for the ancien regime, one position is generally dominant.\textsuperscript{53} The Gothic elements in \textit{Remorse} are so fascinating because Coleridge does not make one position dominant—he makes them both dominant. By embracing the two contradictory ends of the Gothic, Coleridge further augments the political ambiguities of \textit{Remorse}.

The opening scene of Act I presents a very standard Gothic beginning to the play. Alvar returns to his homeland for the first time following a six years absence, no one is waiting on the shore to welcome him home, he has not seen or heard from Teresa for years, and he immediately presents a plan to get back what is rightfully his.\textsuperscript{54} By choosing to begin \textit{Remorse} in this manner, Coleridge is deliberately priming his audience members to receive another prototypical Gothic villain-hero like Charles de Moor from Friedrich Schiller’s \textit{Die Räuber}.\textsuperscript{55} In \textit{Remorse}, however, these Gothic identifications are always somewhat incongruous. For Joan Mandell Baum, Alvar’s “non-heroic” entrance is disappointing to say the least: “Alvar’s presence is hardly that of the avenging fury; nor is he given sympathetic portrayal as a betrayed lord” (90).\textsuperscript{56} Baum’s commentary


\textsuperscript{53} See Cox \textit{Seven} 30.

\textsuperscript{54} See Cox \textit{Seven} 19-23 and Evans 113-7.

\textsuperscript{55} See Mortensen 133 and Thomas 545-6.

\textsuperscript{56} See Joan Mandell Baum, \textit{The Theatrical Compositions of the Major English Romantic Poets} (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1980).
provides an excellent illustration of just how innovative and politically complex Coleridge’s beginning truly is. The dialogue that occurs in this scene between Alvar and Zulimez dramatizes the two contradictory views of the Gothic examined earlier. Zulimez offers the “rebellious outcast” perspective. His (and the play’s) very first line is, “No sound, no face of joy to welcome us!” His indignation is characteristic of the returning villain-hero. That Alvar is the one who has been unequivocally wronged in this situation prompts Zulimez to further insist on traditional Gothic actions: “And let the guilty meet the doom of guilt!” (1.1.13). Alvar, on the other hand seems to embody the nostalgic view of the ancien regime. His arrival provides him with an opportunity not for declaring his vengeful designs, but for displaying his patriotism:

To hail at once our country, and our birth place.
Hail, Spain! Granada, hail! once more I press
Thy sands with filial awe, land of my fathers! (1.1.7-9).

Rather than following Zulimez’s suggestion that he take immediate revenge against his brother, Alvar maintains his “all too gentle purpose” of recuperating Ordonio, in order to “save [Ordonio] from himself” (1.1.11, 19). By Act II, scene ii, however, Alvar seems to have completely forgotten his original plan of recuperating Ordonio. There, he tells Zulimez:

That my return involved Ordonio’s death,
I trust, would give me an unmingled pain,
Yet bearable. (2.2.21-3)

57 My emphasis.
By qualifying his “unmingled pain” with “bearable,” Alvar certainly does not appear to be especially concerned whether he saves Ordonio because of his return or whether Ordonio dies because of his return. Thus, although Alvar may seem to represent a repudiation of the “rebellious outcast” Gothic as advocated by Zulimez, Alvar is continually slipping into the role of “rebellious outcast.” This slippage is most pronounced in Alvar’s plan to incite remorse in his brother.

Carlson has noted the striking similarities between remorse and revenge in Coleridge’s play.58 She does not, however, locate a potential explanation for this significant slippage. Carlson reads the similarities between remorse and revenge in the play as only temporary incidents. By arguing that Coleridge ultimately maintains separation between the two by associating revenge with the purely immoral Ordonio and remorse with the purely moral Alvar, Carlson upholds the fixed binaries model of political identity in Remorse.59 The play itself, however, encourages these slippages throughout. The very definition of remorse in Remorse highlights the similarities between the two:

**REMORSE** is as the heart in which it grows:
If that be gentle, it drops balmy dews
Of true repentance; but if proud and gloomy,
It is a poison-tree, that pierced to the inmost
Weeps only tears of poison! (1.1.20-4)

Coleridge’s definition points to two very different types of remorse. If the individual’s heart is “gentle,” then remorse truly is a recuperative process that results in “true

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58 See Carlson Theatre 103;
59 Ibid., 104-5.
repentance.” If, however, the individual’s heart is “proud and gloomy,” then remorse becomes a much more violent practice. Instead of the “balmy dews of true repentance,” this second type of remorse produces “only tears of poison.” Alvar seems to have little doubt as to which type of heart Ordonio possesses. His description of remorse is a far cry from “balmy dews of true repentance”:

Pray’d, that REMORSE might fasten on their hearts,  
And cling with poisonous tooth, inextricable  
As the gor’d lion’s bite! (1.2.253-5)

Alvar’s use of “poisonous tooth” reproduces both the language as well as the meaning of the second sort of remorse. Additionally, throughout the play, this second sort of remorse seems to be the only sort of remorse that is ever invoked. By making remorse as “inextricable as the gor’d lion’s bite,” Coleridge effectively disintegrates the boundaries between revenge and remorse. Thus, Alvar’s insistence on this excessively violent and painful form of remorse suggests that he is as much the “rebellious outlaw” as he is the upholder of the ancien regime. If Coleridge is aiming to complicate political identity, then this first scene definitely sets the proper tone for the play that follows. That Alvar has an overt resemblance to the traditional Gothic villain/hero is apparent. The question that remains for audience members is how far these similarities extend. Drawing the line between what Alvar is and what the Gothic villain/hero is becomes an impossible task. This confusion between these two contradictory views of the Gothic reaches its apex in the play’s final scene.

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60 Coleridge’s emphasis.
Set in the quintessential Gothic dungeon, the final scene of *Remorse* is clearly designed to stir up memories from previous Gothic dramas. For Cox, one of the most vivid examples of the political polyvalence of the Gothic can be found in the “liberation of enclosed spaces”: “While I have suggested that the largest pattern organizing these plays is a movement from enclosure to liberation, which mimics that of revolutionary festivals, it is important to remember that these plays also contain this potential tragic lament for a lost past” (*Seven* 30). Coleridge embraces the potential ambiguities afforded by this “liberation of enclosed spaces,” by both liberating the dungeon, but also ending the play within the dungeon’s walls. In *Remorse*’s version of the Gothic, the lost past is restored at the same moment as a “revolutionary festival.” While Gottlieb recognizes that the play concludes with a “strangely contradictory message,” she nevertheless classifies it as one of the play’s “particular shortcomings.”

Instead of judging the ending as either “good” or “bad” drama, Gottlieb’s analysis could be strengthened by further investigating what Coleridge might be attempting to say via this “strangely contradictory message.” What makes this final scene such an interesting example of Gothic drama is that rather than attempting to dissolve the tensions already present in the form, Coleridge uses them to his advantage.

The final scene enacts both the restoration of the proper hierarchical order in society and also a revolutionary victory for a historically oppressed class. The principal players in the restoration—Lord Valdez, Teresa, and Alvar—remain in the dungeon at the play’s end. Meanwhile, the symbol of radical revolutionary energies in the play—the Moorish mob—have just murdered Ordonio, their oppressor, in the same dungeon where

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61 See Gottlieb 65.
many of them had previously been imprisoned by the Inquisition, and are now running wild in the open spaces outside of the castle and dungeon. Coleridge drops the curtain right at this moment of intense indeterminacy. In fact, the performed version of Remorse was altered in such a way as to heighten the indeterminacy of the ending. In the version of the play that was originally submitted to John Larpent, the Licensor of Plays, the Moors escape not only from the dungeon, but from Grenada altogether:

We are surprised away! Away! this instant
The Country is in Arms! Lord Valdez heads them
And still cries out, “My son! My Alvar lives!”
Haste to the Shore! they come the opposite road—
Your wives & children are already safe—
The boat is on the Shore! the vessel waits (5.1.227-32)\(^{62}\)

This speech seems to suggest that the restoration of the proper aristocratic order results in the removal of the revolutionary threat. Notably, these same lines do not appear in the staged version of the play. While removing this speech certainly corrects what is far too tidy a solution to a centuries-old conflict, its removal also increases the tensions and ambiguities of the play. Keeping the Moors in Granada greatly deepens the uncertainties surrounding the play’s politics. The ending of the performed version can thus be read as both Jacobinical and also Anti-Jacobinical. The ending can be interpreted as Jacobinical because it allows the Moors to escape punishment for murdering Ordonio. However, the play’s ending can also be convincingly interpreted as Anti-Jacobinical since the proper social hierarchy has been restored thanks to Alvar’s return. Similarly, Alvar’s role in the ending can be seen as both that of the “rebellious outlaw” and that of the aristocratic

\(^{62}\) The Larpent Manuscript copy of Remorse has been re-printed in Coleridge CW 16.3.2:1136-90.
patriot. He is a “rebellious outlaw” because he incites a variety of remorse in Ordonio that produces “bitterer agonies than death can give” and also because he permits the Moors to escape unpunished (5.1.200 and 205). Nonetheless, Alvar is also a prototypical aristocratic patriot because he has restored the social order: “Oh let thy joy / Flow in unmingled stream through thy first blessing” (5.1.209-10). The final scene of Remorse demonstrates the fluidity of political identity through irresolution. Alvar could be a seen as either the villain/hero or as the aristocratic patriot. In effect, Alvar, like Coleridge, is always enacting the two contradictory views of the Gothic simultaneously—both the Jacobin and the Anti-Jacobin as well as the “rebellious outlaw” and the upholder of the ancien regime. In Remorse, the irresolution of the ending and the contradictory uses of the Gothic make assessments of political identity impossible. The play continually resists compartmentalization within circumscribed categories of political identity.

1.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, we have seen that Coleridge disrupts traditional boundaries of political identity by subverting his audience members’ original responses to the Spanish setting, the Napoleonic figure, and Gothic dramatic conventions. By evoking contradictory, yet equally valid interpretations of the political valences of Spain, Napoleon, and the Gothic, Coleridge is demonstrating the flexibility of political identity. Ultimately, Coleridge renders it impossible for audience members to distinguish whether the play presents the Spanish as the oppressed or the oppressors, Napoleon as an identity or a disguise, the Gothic view of Jacobinism or tyranny. These multiple
misidentifications all reflect Coleridge’s own controversial political history and his desire to assert consistency regardless of his perceived Jacobinism or Anti-Jacobinism.

The metadrama that we have examined up to this point—“real-life reference” and “literary reference” metadrama—affects audience members only. The next chapter will investigate two types of metadrama—“ceremony within the play” and “role-playing within the role”—that have an effect on audience members as well as other characters on the stage. The Incantation scene and Alvar’s disguises are intensely metadramatic and, as a result, they further complicate the binary opposition model of political identity.
CHAPTER 2:  
“FRUITS WITH TEMPTING RINDS”

2.1 Introduction

When Ordonio first encounters Alvar/the Moorish “wizzard” they engage in some brief bantering:

Ordonio: Sir! You are no dullard,  
But one that strips the outward rind of things!

Alvar: ‘Tis fabled there are fruits with tempting rinds  
That are all dust and rottenness within. (2.2.49-52)

Throughout *Remorse*, Coleridge is constantly stripping “the outward rind of things” through metadrama. Rather than uncovering “dust and rottenness within,” however, he continually finds more “tempting rinds.” These “tempting rinds” are put on display for audience members and on-stage characters alike. One of the play’s fundamental concerns is whether it is possible to ever strip through the outward rinds and eventually expose what is at the core. Coleridge thoroughly resists exposing the core of any of his characters; instead, he favors uncovering more and more “tempting rinds.” These “tempting rinds” can be interpreted, but never fully understood because there is always another “tempting rind” just beneath the surface. The Incantation Scene and Alvar’s numerous disguises offer numerous “tempting rinds” to the audience members and the other characters. By making his characters all rinds with no visible cores, Coleridge
deepens the ambiguities about political identity. Alvar plays a radical Moorish chieftain, a rebellious sorcerer, and a restorer of the ancien regime. That these various political identity performances exist not sequentially but simultaneously further heightens Coleridge’s depiction of the fluidity of political identity. First, we will look at the most intensely theatrical moment of the play—the famous sorcery scene. This chapter then concludes with an examination of Alvar’s costumes and indeterminate political performances. In this chapter, I will attempt to show that Coleridge deliberately blurs the line between what is performance and what is real in order to challenge the determinability of political identity. As a result, Coleridge provides a means for understanding his own controversial and contradictory political history.

2.2 The Incantation Scene

In the minds of more than a few critics, both Coleridge’s contemporaries and the modern sort, the famous Incantation was the only thing worth seeing in Remorse. As Carlson describes it, “the conjuring scene steals but also secures the show” (Theatre 108). The most famous eye-witness account of this moment of pure theatrical magic comes to us from Thomas Barnes, future editor of The London Times. Reviewing Remorse for Leigh Hunt’s The Examiner he writes,

We never saw more interest excited in a theatre than was expressed at the sorcery-scene in the third act. The altar flaming in the distance, the solemn invocation, the pealing music of the mystic song, altogether produced a combination so awful,
as nearly to overpower reality, and make one half believe the enchantment which delighted our senses.63

In addition to providing a beautiful description of the incantation, Barnes’s observations also provide a sense of the scene’s metadramatic effect. According to Barnes, the scene was particularly powerful because it almost managed to “overpower reality.” For Barnes and, one can assume, his fellow Drury Lane audience members, Coleridge’s Incantation scene toes the fine line between live theatre and life itself. What Barnes does not mention, however, is that the characters on stage are in the identical situation as the audience members in the pit and gallery. The scene provides an example of hyper-theatricality, through which the magnificent performance effects dominate the scene and audience as well as character responses to it. Lord Valdez, like Barnes, is caught between his own knowledge that Alvar’s performance is just that, only a performance, and the unmistakably “real” effect of the flaming altar, the solemn chanting, and “the pealing music of the mystic song.” Ordonio, on the other hand, clearly sees through the performativity of the scene—he knows that it is all fake, since he arranged it—though he still is unable to comprehend those features of the performance which Alvar improvises. His right and wrong reading of the scene heightens the element of performativity in it. He is incapable of distinguishing between what is performance and what is real. By including this metadramatic twist, Coleridge’s sorcery scene begs to be interpreted as something more than simple stage spectacle or a gimmick to fill the Drury Lane Theatre seats.

Unlike Barnes, modern critics have been far more interested in exploring the metadramatic implications of the Incantation scene. Several critics argue that Coleridge intended the scene to stand as a critique of contemporary theatrical spectacle and the public’s degraded taste. This view establishes a rather paradoxical relationship between playwright and audience. These critics have tended to buttress their claims through two sources. First, they point out that Alvar praises Teresa’s decision to excuse herself from the scene as the proper behavior:

Oh, full of faith
And guileless love, thy spirit still prompts thee wisely.
Let the pangs of guilt surprise the guilty.
Thou art innocent. (3.2.26-9)

The second source that they point to is Coleridge’s distinction between illusion and delusion in his prose. With regards to the first point, I would argue that Alvar commends Teresa for leaving the scene not because he is about to present a debased form of theatre, but because he is convinced that she played no part in his attempted assassination:

And I did curse thee?
At midnight? on my knees? and I believed
_Thee_ perjured, _thee_ a traitress! thee dishonour’d?
O blind and credulous fool! O guilt of folly!
Should not thy inarticulate fondnesses,
Thy infant Loves—should not thy maiden Vows
Have come upon my heart? (2.2.134-40)

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65 See Burwick 268.

66 Coleridge’s emphases.
Frederick Burwick has taken the second point up most thoroughly, and he finds that Coleridge’s Incantation offers up a theatrical delusion, which discredits it as theatre: “Not delusion (the surrender of reason to emotional sensations) but illusion (‘the willing suspension of disbelief’) is the proper engagement of the imagination thematically endorsed and dramatized in Remorse” (268). In more recent scholarly work, Thomas presents a possible alternative to Burwick’s well-established reading of the scene. She suggests that while the scene clearly warns against the dangers of delusion, it is also deeply engaged with the “status and function of the visual” (550). Thomas argues that the effect of the visual in Remorse “is clearly one not only of mirroring or doubling, but also, paradoxically, of obscuring—which suggests a resistance to certain aspects of the dramatic encounter, resistance to being taken in by the eyes, and by the present” (552).

Although Thomas hints at the potential political ramifications of this “resistance” to the visual, she acknowledges that the issue requires further exploration.67 I would like to argue that the status of the visual in the Incantation scene is a political issue for Coleridge. More to the point, he presents the visual and, really, all sensory experiences as examples of political indeterminacy. From a metadramatic standpoint, the performativity of theatre complicates seemingly straight-forward judgments about political identity.

Based on Hornby’s classification system for types of metadrama, the Incantation scene provides an example of “the ceremony within the play.”68 Significantly, the

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67 See Thomas 554-5.
68 See Hornby 55-63.
Incantation also serves as an example of what Hornby refers to as “invented ceremony.”

His description of this metadramatic technique is particularly illuminating:

> Playwrights and theatre practitioners seem to be trying to provide a ceremonial order against the social and existential chaos that threatens us all. But in the end their ceremonies are merely ‘private and solitary,’ conveying nothing to the audience but meaninglessness. (63)

The key term here is “meaninglessness.” The sheer multitude of on-stage (mis)interpretations of the Incantation ceremony highlights the meaninglessness of Coleridge’s invented ceremony. Rather than “uncover[ing] all concealed guilt,” the Incantation produces only greater confusion (3.2.23). The multiple (mis)interpretations of the scene participate in a fundamental confusion about Alvar’s motivations. Just as it was unclear in the play’s opening whether Alvar’s brand of remorse is equal to, if not worse than, revenge; in the Incantation scene, it becomes impossible to determine whether Alvar intends to heal Ordonio or wreak vengeance on him.

The major players in the Incantation scene are Alvar, Ordonio, Lord Valdez, Teresa, and Monviedro—the Inquisitor. Ordonio is the mastermind behind the Incantation. His intention for staging the ritual is to convince Teresa of Alvar’s death so that she will no longer have any excuse for not consenting to marry him. The key to the whole deception resides in a miniature portrait of Teresa, the existence of which is supposedly known only to herself and Alvar. Ordonio, having secretly learned of the portrait’s existence, instructs his hired Moor assassins to bring the portrait back to him. The ritual will conclude with the sudden appearance of the portrait on the altar, which will invariably persuade Teresa that her beloved is in fact dead. While Ordonio has pre-
arranged “an altar, incense, music” (2.2.124), he needs to recruit the right man to “play the sorcerer”:

Utter with a solemn gesture
Oracular sentences of deep no-meaning,
Wear a quaint garment, make mysterious antics (2.1.23-6).

Ordonio’s first choice is his Moorish hit-man, Isidore. Isidore refuses to accept the job for a very practical reason: he claims that since he is well-known, he will probably not make a convincing sorcerer (2.1.115-7). Instead, he points Ordonio in the direction of the mysterious, newly arrived Moresco “wizzard” who, as it turns out, is actually Alvar in disguise (2.1.118-25). Alvar, grateful for the opportunity to serve “the son of Valdez,” agrees to “play the sorcerer” and produce the portrait (2.2.65-6, 126). This is how Ordonio assumes that the Incantation ritual will be carried out. Valdez has also been informed of this “mere stratagem, / Which Love had prompted” (3.3.62-3). Alvar, however, has far different designs.

Act II concludes with a soliloquy wherein Alvar reveals his intended modifications to his brother’s schematic. Addressing the portrait of Teresa, he says:

Dear Image! rescued from a traitor’s keeping,
I will not now prophane thee, lovely Image,
To a dark trick. That worst bad man shall find
A picture, which will wake the hell within him,
And rouse a fiery whirlwind in his conscience. (2.2.149-53)

In the opening scene of the play the audience learns that among the belongings which Alvar brings with him to Granada is a painting of his attempted assassination (1.1.81-2).69

69 In the second printed edition of Remorse Coleridge further develops Alvar’s artistic talent. Zulimez says of him, “You are a painter, one of many fancies! / You can call up past deeds, and make them
By substituting his painting of the assassination attempt for Teresa’s portrait, Alvar plans to turn Ordonio’s Incantation into an adaptation of Hamlet’s adaptation of the Murder of Gonzago—The Mouse-Trap. The similarities between the above-quoted soliloquy and Hamlet’s soliloquy at the end of Act II strike me as no mere coincidence: “the play’s the thing / Wherein I’ll catch the conscience of the king” (2.2.614-5). Yet, Coleridge is not as interested in copying The Mouse-trap as he is in further complicating its already substantial indeterminacies. In terms of Coleridge’s Incantation, the significance of Hamlet’s play within the play is its central epistemological uncertainties. Uncertain as to whether he is seeking rightful vengeance or being deliberately misled by the Ghost of Old Hamlet to commit vile murder; Hamlet stages The Mouse-trap as a means to verify Claudius’s involvement in his father’s death. Like Hamlet, Alvar insists on using performance in order to judge Ordonio’s complicity in his attempted assassination. Also like Hamlet, Alvar seems to be deeply divided between prompting “true repentance” in Ordonio and torturing him further. What is most significant, however, is that in both Hamlet and Remorse, the performances can also be interpreted as backfiring on Hamlet and Alvar. In The Mouse-trap, the murderer is Lucianus, the nephew to the King (3.2.263). In Hamlet, the nephew to Claudius, the current King of Denmark, is Hamlet. In the end, it is impossible to confidently assert whether Claudius’s anxious reaction to

live / On the blank canvas” (2.2.42-4). Additionally, Coleridge attaches a lengthy footnote to this same speech where he includes a speech by Zulimez which tells of Alvar’s apprenticeship to Titian! See Coleridge CW 16.3.2: 1268-70.


71 A classic example of Alvar provoking/torturing Ordonio occurs in 5.1: Alvar (still disguised as the sorcerer): But Alvar—. Ordonio: Ha! it choaks thee in the throat, / Even thee; and yet I pray thee speak it out— / Still Alvar!—Alvar!—howl it in mine ear! / Heap it like coals of fire upon my heart, / And shoot hissing it through my brain!” (131-5).
the play is the result of guilt arising from his past regicide or fear arising from the play’s suggestion that his nephew may be planning to murder him. Likewise, Alvar’s performance in the sorcery scene leads Ordonio to believe that the sorcerer/Alvar is plotting to murder him. Similar to *The Mouse-trap*, then, the Incantation has the ultimate effect of raising questions about Alvar’s political identity.

Although the similarities between The Incantation scene and *The Mouse-trap* are fairly evident, there are several crucial differences worth noting as well. Coleridge most conspicuously resists this identification by making the Incantation appear less like a play. One possible explanation for why Coleridge renders the scene less play-like is that he is primarily interested in representing an extra-theatrical form of performance. One of the most significant alterations which Coleridge made to Osorio involved the removal of a substantial number of lines explicitly referring to the Incantation as a play. After the Incantation concludes, for example, Lord Velez (Lord Valdez in *Remorse*) praises Osorio (Ordonio in *Remorse*) for his excellent casting of the role of sorcerer:

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But that you lit upon
A fellow that could play the Sorcerer,
With such a Grace and terrible Majesty,
It was most rare good fortune. (3.1.158-61)
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While there is nothing particularly unusual about good acting in a play, the shift in emphasis from play to unholy ritual that occurs in *Remorse* renders Alvar’s performance as the sorcerer far more disturbing. The change, though subtle, is essential to Coleridge’s project to complicate conceptions and perceptions of political identity. Audience members and future readers are unable to fully determine whether Alvar is performing a role to save Ordonio from himself or is enacting “real” revenge. So long as the
Incantation is perceived as a play, Alvar’s performance remains contained within the walls of the theatre. When the Incantation is no longer recognized as a play, however, his performance becomes more frightening because it becomes unbound. In effect, all political identity can be seen as a performance and, as a performance, it is open to interpretation. In the Incantation scene in Remorse, Coleridge demonstrates just how diverse the interpretations about a particular performance can be. In the sorcery scene, the inability to recognize performance as such results in Alvar, a Christian Spaniard, being handed over to the Inquisition as a dangerous Moorish wizard.

Alvar’s Incantation generates several critical (mis)identifications. Furthermore, all of these respective (mis)identifications can be traced to interpretations of the visual. Lord Valdez leaves the scene as the most confused by far. He believes that the sorcerer’s power is real, that Alvar was murdered by Moors, and that the Inquisitors will hold himself and Ordonio accountable for the event. For Lord Valdez, everything rests in the painting of the assassination attempt: “This was no feat of mortal agency! / That picture—Oh, that picture tells me all!” (3.3.9-10). The sorcerer’s enchantments combined with the revelation of the painting provide all the proof that Lord Valdez needs to question the Moors’ allegiance. Ordonio also interprets the painting as a sign of Moorish treachery, but for different reasons. Thinking that Alvar is dead, he believes that Isidore is the only other living creature who knows about the assassination. Therefore, Ordonio considers the painting as a sign of Isidore and the sorcerer’s collusion against him. Ordonio fears that his role in Alvar’s assassination will be exposed and that the Moors are threatening renewed insurrection: “The mine is undermin’d! Blood! Blood!
Blood! / They thirst for thy blood! thy blood, Ordonio!” (3.3.124-5). In Ordonio’s eyes, the sorcerer represents a very clear and present danger to the security of Spain. As a leader in the last civil war against the Moors, he takes it upon himself to snuff out this rekindled threat. There is still another visual (mis)identification which Coleridge presents in this scene. In addition to the on-stage audience members watching Alvar’s Incantation, there is a second audience off-stage, in the left-hand wings, intently watching the proceedings. As soon as the picture of the attempted assassination appears, Moviedro and the familiar of the Inquisition storm the stage and promptly arrest Alvar:

First seize the sorcerer! suffer him not to speak!
The holy judges of the Inquisition
Shall hear his first words. (3.2.102-4)

Based on the scene that they have just witnessed, they determine that Alvar is obviously not a Catholic. They also interpret the scene, however, as potentially indicting Lord Valdez and Ordonio:

There is a dungeon underneath the castle,
And as you hope for mild interpretation,
Surrender instantly the keys and charge of it. (3.2.106-8)

In the world of Coleridge’s play, much like the France of his day, religious rebellion was deeply entangled with political rebellion. Act III, scene ii closes amidst heavy uncertainty. The divided on-stage reactions to the visual aspects of the Incantation raise suspicions about the political identities of Alvar, Ordonio, Isidore, and Lord Valdez. All of these suspicions, confusions, and uncertainties arise from a fundamental confusion

72 Coleridge’s emphasis.
between what is performance and what is real. Thus, audience members and on-stage characters alike are unable to confidently ascertain whether Alvar’s intention is to heal Ordonio or to actually intensify his suffering. Intriguingly, Alvar is placed in the role of the Moorish/revolutionary usurper of religious authority and he winds up in the dungeon of established power. Uncertainty exists on-stage and off as to whether Alvar is an ancien regime figure striving to restore his royal rights or a revolutionary usurper or possibly both. In Coleridge’s life, the inability of others to recognize his youthful Jacobin performance resulted in him being labeled an Apostate. In the final section of this chapter, we will see how Coleridge pushes the performative nature of political identity even further. Thanks to all of the disguises and role-playing in the play, all judgments of political affiliation are called into question.

2.3 Alvar’s Disguises

Throughout Remorse, Coleridge is constantly revealing that things are not as they seem. Rather than eventually “unmasking” the characters in order to openly display them as “good” or “bad,” or “Jacobin” or “Anti-Jacobin,” Coleridge seems to revel in deepening ambivalences. Like the conjuring scene, the metadramatic qualities of disguise, what Hornby terms “role playing within the role,” also greatly complicate judgments about political identity. Hornby argues that “role playing within the role” metadrama is often employed to suggest that identities can not be confined within fixed boundaries: “Role playing within the role…seeks directly to take us back to our limitless

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73 See Hornby 67-87.
selves” (73). By having characters on the stage wear costumes on top of previous costumes, it becomes impossible for the audience members and other characters in the play to determine “sides.” Coleridge is effectively dramatizing an issue of immediate relevance to himself: how does one differentiate between performances of Jacobinism and real political Jacobinism? *Remorse* suggests that this question, like many others related to political identity, is ultimately unanswerable. The differences between performance and reality often disintegrate in the play. Essentially all reality—political and otherwise—becomes indistinguishable from performance. Coleridge’s choice of setting in *Remorse* highlights exactly this sort of performance.

Earlier I discussed *Remorse*’s Spanish setting in terms of the Peninsular War and Napoleon. Here, I would like to examine how that setting is particularly conducive to developing the performative qualities of political identity. The playbill would have prepared audience members for the many costume-changes and disguises offered by *Remorse*’s setting.\(^74\) Just below the large font, bold typeface “REMORSE” is Coleridge’s note on the play’s setting: “Time—The reign of Philip the Second, at the close of the civil wars against the Moors, and during the heat of the prosecution which raged against them, shortly after the Edict which forbade the wearing of Moresco apparel under pain of Death.” By making explicit reference to “the Edict which forbade the wearing of Moresco apparel under pain of Death,” Coleridge is highlighting an important connection between appearance and political identity. So long as the Moors wear “Christian garments” they will not be perceived as direct threats to the Spaniards. Conversely,

\(^{74}\) The playbill advertising the first performance of *Remorse* can be found reprinted as the frontispiece to *CW* 16.3.1.
wearing “Moresco apparel” would have been interpreted as a direct threat of rebellion and, as such, was a crime punishable by death. The relationship between choice of dress and political identity was not just a novelty of sixteenth-century Spain; it also had a more immediate relevance to the French Revolution.

Coleridge might have been inspired to set his play in Spain in 1569 because it shared several notable similarities with France in the 1790s. The most obvious connection is that both countries were embroiled in seemingly endless cycles of violence. The Moors and Spaniards had been warring against one another for centuries, while France had experienced both the violence of the Terror within itself and the later Napoleonic Wars against the rest of Europe. What makes the link between 1790s France and 1569 Spain especially provocative is the role that clothing plays in the determination of political identity. Whereas political identity in Remorse takes the form of Moresco robes, in Reign of Terror France it was a matter of pants. The revolutionaries in France distinguished themselves from their aristocratic enemies by their dress. Since wearing culottes was an aristocratic fashion, those who did not wear them—the eponymously named “sans-culottes”—could equate breeches with Jacobinism. While there was no formal edict which prohibited one from wearing “culottes,” the most likely result for doing so would have been death all the same. Coleridge latches onto the possibilities presented by 1569 Spain in order to complicate the conflict over culottes as a viable indicator of political identity. In effect, Coleridge is arguing that the clothes don’t make the man a Jacobin. In Remorse, Coleridge has the character of Alvar dress-up in the

75 Cox and Gamer identify 1569 as the most likely year for the setting of Remorse. See Broadview 170n26.
forbidden “Moresco apparel” in order to complicate the relationship between clothing and political identity.

Alvar wears three different outfits in Remorse—all of them disguises. He first appears on the stage “wrapt in a Boat Cloak” (1.1). The next time that the audience sees him he is “in Moorish garments” (1.2). His final costume change is into the aforementioned “Sorcerer’s robe” (3.2). Interestingly, the only instance where the audience even receives an opportunity to see Alvar dressed in his “own clothes” is in the painting of his attempted assassination; which, Burwick claims would probably have been visible to only the first row or two of the audience.76 The fact that Alvar is always in disguise, that he has no clothes of his own, greatly complicates any attempt to figure out who he is and whose side he is on. His disguises are so compelling that his father, brother, and former lover are incapable of recognizing him until he reveals himself. He is alternately misconstrued as a rebellious Moorish chieftain, as a noble Christian Moor, and as an impious Moorish sorcerer. Alvar himself does not seem to have a very clear idea of who he is and what his political intentions are. He can be viewed as both the vengeful rebel as well as the remedial aristocrat. Alvar, much like Coleridge, is on every possible side. Given the strict dichotomies of Jacobin/Anti-Jacobin and rebel/Royalist, however, one can also argue that Alvar is never on any side. Similar to the Incantation scene, the secret to Alvar’s political identity mobility resides in performance. Also like the Incantation scene, the inability of other characters to recognize Alvar’s political performance as a performance results in (mis)identification and confusion.

76 See Burwick 303.
When Alhadra first sees Alvar walking along the seacoast her immediate impression is that he is a radical Moorish leader:

Teresa: Know you that stately Moor?

Alhadra: I know him not:
But doubt not he is some Moresco chieftain,
Who hides himself among the Alpuxarras.

Ter: The Alpuxarras? Does he know his danger,
So near this seat?

Alh: He wears the Moorish robes too,
As in defiance of the royal edict. (1.2.199-204)

Based solely on Alvar’s appearance in the forbidden garments Alhadra’s generalization is a fair one. She also, however, makes the inference that based on his appearance, Alvar lives “among the Alpuxarras”—a region still burning with the embers of Moorish rebellion. As it turns out, her inference is proven correct. Alvar has taken up residence in the Alpuxarras in the former cottage of Zagri, a deceased radical Moorish chieftain (1.1.101-3). In Act II, Alhadra visits Alvar at this residence and tells him that the Moorish cause could use a leader like him:

If what thou seem’st thou art,
The oppressed brethren of thy blood have need
Of such a leader. (2.2.3-5)

Alhadra’s proposition rests on the pivotal qualifier “if what thou seem’st thou art.” Alvar certainly seems like the second coming of Zagri. He tells Alhadra, “Long time against

77 The only other reference to Zagri in Remorse occurs when Alhadra calls Naomi “Brother of Zagri” while asking him to avenge Isidore’s murder (4.3.20). In Osorio, Alhadra also says that Zagri, “dar’d avow the Prophet, / And died like one of the Faithful! (1.1.255-6).
oppression have I fought, / And for the native liberty of faith, / Have bled and suffer’d
bonds” (2.2.6-8). Not only has Alvar fought against oppression in the past, but he has
fought against Spanish oppression in the past! After thwarting the attempted
assassination, Alvar “sought / The Belgic states; there join’d the better cause” (1.1.68-9).
“The better cause” involved fighting alongside “Philip’s scourge,” Maurice of Nassau,
against the Spanish forces in the Low Countries.⁷⁸ For Coleridge, the identification
between Alvar and Zagri has a further personal significance. Many of the poems which
Coleridge contributed to The Morning Post were signed either “Albert” (the name of the
Alvar character in Osorio) or “Zagri.”⁷⁹ The fact that these two Coleridgean pseudonyms
were interchangeable reinforces Alvar’s own slippage into Zagri in Remorse. One can
not fully determine to what extent Alvar is playing the role of Zagri as radical Moorish
chieftain. Alvar can be seen both directing and also condemning Moorish insurgency.
Yet, while Alvar may seem like a prime candidate to re-ignite the Moors’ campaign, it is
ultimately only a “seeming” resemblance. Additionally, Alvar’s “seeming” resemblance
to a Moorish chieftain also complicates any attempt to see him as a Spanish nobleman.
Alvar’s character simply does not correspond to rigid categories of political identity. He
is simultaneously the Moor and the Spaniard, the oppressed and the oppressor, the radical
and the reactionary.

⁷⁸ See Cox and Gamer 181n70 and Baum 88n58.
⁷⁹ See Woodring Politics 228. Woodring, who argues that neither Osorio nor Remorse is explicitly
political, does not offer any interpretation as to the possible significance of these Coleridgean pseudonyms.
2.4 Conclusion

The primary aim of this paper has been to complicate the critical discussion on Coleridge’s politics in *Remorse*. One way in which Coleridge deepens the ambiguities about political identity in *Remorse* is through multiple examples of metadrama. The Spanish can be viewed as both the oppressors and the oppressed. Ordonio might seem like the Napoleonic figure in the play, but so, too, do a variety of other characters at various times. The play engages with the Gothic in interesting ways as well. The ending of the play presents both of the two contradictory ends of the Gothic—there is open rebellion against oppression and also a restoration of the ancien regime. In the Incantation scene, Coleridge further disrupts traditional categories of political identity. Alvar condemns the scene as “a low imposture” but also directs it by playing the pivotal part of sorcerer (5.1.26). Through more disguises and role-playing Alvar manages to be simultaneously both a radical Moorish chieftain hell-bent on revenge and also a Spanish nobleman intent on restoring the proper social order. By examining these instances of metadrama in the play, I have attempted to show that Coleridge’s play is neither conservative nor radical. *Remorse*, much like Coleridge, can play the Jacobin as well as the Anti-Jacobin without ever contradicting itself. The play ultimately offers only uncertainties about political identity. In a play full of uncertainties and ambiguities, Alvar’s line, “I fain would tell thee what I am; but dare not!” provides an excellent motto for both Coleridge and *Remorse* (5.1.147). He, like Alvar, would willingly tell us what he is, but he dares not. As a result, the audience can only conjecture as to the true nature of both Coleridge and Alvar’s political identities. By dramatizing the performative
nature of political identity, Coleridge presents his defense against the charge of political apostasy.
WORKS CITED


