

**Dave Cope's**

**Shakespeare Course Handouts & Cues**

All original material copyright © David Cope. Revised: January 2, 2008

**File Two: Plays 1600-1611**

*Hamlet* (1600-01) 2

*Twelfth Night* (1601-02) 7

*Troilus and Cressida* (1601-02) 11

*Measure for Measure* (1604) 17

*Othello* (1604) 23

*King Lear* (1605) 29

*Macbeth* (1606) 35

*Antony and Cleopatra* (1606-07) 42

*Timon of Athens* (1608) 47

*Cymbeline* (1609-10) 49

*The Winter's Tale* (1610-11) 56

*The Tempest* (1611) 62

## ***Hamlet***

**1. Tragedy:** focuses on the fate of an individual whose downfall shakes the nation; unlike comedy, where the trajectories of individuals lead to a common celebration, here the focus is on the agonies and psychology of one man (and often his antagonist). In Aristotle's discussion of tragedy, this hero is one who may be superior in any number of ways, but who contains one fault that is his downfall. Tragedy works, according to Aristotle, when the audience recognizes and identifies with the struggles of this good or humane person; we are moved when he cannot free himself and experience sadness at his overthrow.

**2. Revenge Tragedy:** an Elizabethan sub-genre of tragedy, based on the **Senecan** model, which features at least six recognizable motifs. These are:

- (1) **blood revenge for the murder or flagrant injury of a relative** as the basic thrust of the plot;
- (2) **action prompted by the accusations of a ghost;**
- (3) **hesitation on the part of the hero** because of the need for proof or a suitable occasion to effect the revenge;
- (4) **madness, either feigned or real, as part of the hero's agon;**
- (5) **a Machiavellian villain;**
- (6) **numerous murders**, both on-stage and off, usually as part of the climax.

**3. Plot Types: GHOST STORY, A STORY OF INTERNATIONAL INTRIGUE, A MURDER MYSTERY ("CHESS GAME" BETWEEN TWO DANGEROUS OPPONENTS), A LOVE STORY, A DRAMA ABOUT DRAMA AND PSYCHOLOGY.**

**4. SIMILAR MOTIFS AND VERBAL ECHOES OF OTHER PLAYS:**

- <Portents (Horatio, 1.1) and playing (Polonius): *Julius Caesar*
- <A younger generation driven mad by their elders' disorders: *Romeo and Juliet*
- <A woman whose lover murders one of her relatives: *Romeo and Juliet*
- <Imagery of disease and decay and the relationship of speech to action: *Troilus and Cressida*, *Othello*, *The Winter's Tale*
- <characters arranging dramatic illusions to entrap other characters: *Merry Wives*

**5. STRUCTURAL PARALLELS AND PAIRINGS:**

- <Hamlet, Laertes, Fortinbras: sons defending murdered fathers; possible commentary on fitness to rule (vis-a-vis attitude toward action)
- <spying: 2.1: Polonius hires Reynaldo; 2.2: King & Queen hire R & G
- <Hamlet and Ophelia: feigned (?) madness and consideration of suicide / real madness and real suicide.

**6. OTHER IMPORTANT MOTIFS:**

<**The presence of the main character's mother:** Shakespeare is renowned for the numerous father-daughter and father-son combinations in his plays, but few plays include mothers e.g. (Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, Lady Macduff and, peculiarly enough, since the children are missing) Lady Macbeth.

- Thus the Gertrude-Hamlet relationship** has given twentieth century Freudian critics fodder for their examination of the supposed oedipal relationship. See Ernest Jones.
- <Claudius as a Machiavel and an overreacher. For the play to work, he must be perceived as clever, vicious, and yet possessing a conscience. His manipulative abilities should be most apparent in his persuasion of Laertes.

## 7. A PLAY ABOUT PLAYING: THE DRAMATIC MASK, THE IRONIES OF EMOTION

<Aristotelian notion of tragic hero: "so oft it chances.." (1.4.23-39). Hamlet describes Claudius, but he equally describes himself.

<2.2.329-61 (1204) Topical ref to "little eyases": children's companies who were successfully competing against more established companies and depriving actors of their income—a real problem, connected to the war of the theatres, in London.

<Hamlet's own "performances" (irony via real danger):

a. 1.5.169-80 (1199)—explanation of "antic disposition" to come.

b. 2.1.74-97 (1200)—playing to Ophelia.

c. 2.2.170-221 (1202-03)—playing to Polonius

d. 2.2.222-310 (1203-04)—playing to Rosencrantz and Guildenstern

e. 3.2.392-99 (1214) and 3.4.1-104 (1215-16)—playing to Gertrude

f. 5.2—performing the duel with Laertes (until the "playing" breaks down).

<Aesthetics of speech:

a. 2.2.109-11 (1202) Polonius weighing the language of Hamlet's letter.

b. 2.2.550-605 (1207) Acting, artifice, and emotion; use of play to manipulate Claudius.

—implications re audience psychology? nature of imaginative figures?

c. 3.2.1-45 (1209-10) Aesthetics of performance (with actor)

<the play within the play as a device employed for exposure (in some plays, it is to provide a killing ground (e.g. Kyd's *The Spanish Tragedy*, Webster's *The White Devil*); as a masque, it functions as a purifying device in *Merry Wives* and as a wedding entertainment in *The Tempest*.

## 8: "GHOSTOLOGY" AND THE SUPERNATURAL

<The supernatural: during this period, superstition is widespread; not only is there a terrifying fear of devils and Hell (stirred not only by the long tradition of apocalyptic storytelling culminating in Dante's vision of *Inferno*, but also by native traditions of fairies and other supernatural beings, ranging from the puckish Robin Goodfellow to banshees and "ghosties and ghoolies."

—a production of *Dr. Faustus* in which more devils appeared on stage than were in the cast: locals thought the play had called the devil from hell, and closed the theatre.

—the popularity of the *memento mori* and a greater awareness of death generally (the plague)

—James' own book on Witchcraft; puritan habit of finding the devil in everything not connected with their own beliefs: see Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses*.

<Some Examples in Shakespeare:

a. ghosts: *Hamlet*

b. "weird sisters" (witches): *Macbeth*

c. fairies and monsters: *MND*, *Tempest* (Ariel and Caliban)

d. fears and portents: *Comedy of Errors*, *Julius Caesar*

<"GHOSTOLOGY":

1. In Shakespeare's time, ghosts are real: they can either be blessed or damned.

2. When they return, something is wrong with the world or society: either they come to warn of possible troubles, or they come to mislead those to whom they appear (is the ghost *good* or is it *evil*?).

3. They generally appear at night and must return to their places by day.

4. In *Hamlet*, the afterlife seems to be divided into the traditional three-part structure described in Dante: Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Old Hamlet's ghost claims he's undergoing purgation (i.e. after purification, he may be released to heaven), yet he is "in fires"—an image more in keeping with hell.

**9. METAPHYSICS AND THEOLOGY:** The world of *Hamlet* seems to imply a neo-platonic Christian metaphysics involving an afterlife characterized by Heaven, Purgatory, and Hell. Unlike in Dante or St. Thomas Aquinas, however, the Devil is understood in the Manichaean sense, that is, he functions as an independent adversary of God. Thus, when Hamlet is confronted with the apparent ghost of his father, he is troubled with the question of whether the ghost comes from God or from the Devil—whether it is a blessed spirit warning him of danger or a damned one, trying to get him to damn his own soul. The ghost claims that it is in Purgatory by day—and is thus being purified of sins for which it had not done penance in life—yet its demand for revenge seems more in keeping with the worldly code of honor, which demands that one exact vengeance for the sins of others.

### Important Questions and Concerns

**<Follow the "chess game"** between Hamlet and Claudius. How much does each one know, and when? How does each cover his position? What explanations does Claudius give for not simply murdering Hamlet and being done with him?

**<Feminist interpretation and questions:** Feminists see the world of the play as a classic picture of the patriarchal society, in which males are socially privileged and yet constricted in their emotional lives, while women are kept as a "privileged" underclass, feted with luxury yet with little or no real voice in the exercise of power. In such an arrangement, the male under terrible stress will often take out his frustrations on the one he loves most. The questions, then, involve the kinds of roles women could play in this society, and the relationships of Claudius and Gertrude, and Hamlet and Ophelia.

- 1. What roles may Gertrude and Ophelia play in this society?** What is the extent of their power, education, etc.?
- How much does Gertrude influence the decisions of her husband—and when she does, where does that influence lie?
- What are the differences in the education of Laertes and Ophelia, and in the way their father treats them?
- 4. Most importantly, how much does Gertrude know** about Claudius's actions?
- What are her attitudes toward her son? (In some modern versions of the play, Hamlet is seen as the classic oedipal figure—in love with his mother, an attitude of which she is not completely scornful).
- What do you make of Hamlet's changed behavior—his abusiveness after earlier attitudes of kindness and gentle regard—toward Ophelia? In what kind of situation does she find herself?

**<The Exercise of Power and the Problems of International Relations:** Note the international stresses with which the court lives. What effects do international relations have on Claudius? on Hamlet? on the society as a whole? What are the causes of these stresses, and how do these inform our perceptions of characters and the action of the plot?

**<The question of the suitability to exercise power:** Follow the triple examination of this theme in the trajectories of Fortinbras, Hamlet, and Laertes—and in the ways in which they conduct themselves. What is Shakespeare implying about the qualities of the successful prince?

**<The ethical question: is it a righteous revenge?** This question centers on the inner conflicts between what society (at the time) would call just actions and what the religious moral code would seem to claim.

**<Madness / Sickness:** some critics have expended a lot of ink on the question of whether Hamlet is mad, or whether the madness he claims is part of his attempt to disguise what he's up to. Note all the metaphors of sickness, disease, etc., that crop up in his language. Are there times in the play when he indeed seems "mad" or is he merely overwrought? Is he aware of his own dilemmas and excesses, or is he a man whose consciousness cannot understand what he is about?

**<The Generational Question:** the play anatomizes the various ways in which a corrupt, self-satisfied older generation's defects are visited upon the younger generation: the sins of the fathers (and mothers) have devastating effects on their children, and in this world-gone-mad, the children must struggle to find the proper way to live--and here, only Horatio seems to have found that key.

### **NATURE OF THIS TRAGIC HERO?**

<He shows different sides of his character according to the situation and the people he is with. **Bradley says he is a changed man as of 5.2: see especially lines 219-24.**

**<His "antic disposition" (1199):** In a sense, everything Hamlet does is (except in soliloquy and with Horatio) is a performance designed to test his assumptions, other characters, and the claims of the ghost—he does not know whom to trust (other than Horatio), and proceeds carefully before acting.

**<The hasty oath of Act I is followed by sceptic mind, planning how to conduct himself:**

- **sidetracking:** use of Ophelia to set Claudius on wrong track ("madness" and romance).
- **"reading":** reading the performances of R & G, Polonius, the Queen, etc. by "throwing out an angle" to make them reveal themselves.
- **testing:** testing the ghost's claims via play within play, etc.

**<In another sense, the play seems to trace Hamlet coming to terms (too late) with a distasteful charge, coping with need for action only after struggling with his anxieties.**

- **Villain view:** holds that Hamlet changes, becoming more evil himself: the sensitive young man is rendered more and more villainous as he assumes his role—killing R & G without a thought, raging at Laertes over Ophelia's body, wanting not simply justice against Claudius, but wanting to wait to ensure that he will go to hell.
- **Inertia view:** Hamlet's delay is directly responsible for the numerous deaths: in the end, he must accept responsibility for this slaughter because he failed to immediately follow through on his charge.
- **Oedipal view** (psychoanalytic): Hamlet's oedipus complex is awakened by the murder of his father and the "incest" of his mother:

### **Ernest Jones: from *Hamlet and Oedipus***

For some deep-seated reason, which is to him unacceptable, Hamlet is plunged into anguish at the thought of his father being replaced in his mother's affections by someone else. It is as if his devotion to his mother had made him so jealous for her affection that he had found it hard enough to share this even with his father and could not endure to share it with still another man. Against this thought, however, suggestive as it is, may be urged three objections. First, if it

were in itself a full statement of the matter, Hamlet would have been aware of the jealousy, whereas we have concluded that the mental process we are seeking is hidden from him. Secondly, we see in it no evidence of the arousing of an old and forgotten memory. And, thirdly, Hamlet is being deprived by Claudius of no greater share in the Queen's affection than he had been by his own father, for the two brothers made exactly similar claims in this respect—namely, those of a loved husband. The last-named objection, however, leads us to the heart of the situation. How if, in fact, Hamlet had in years gone by, as a child, bitterly resented having had to share his mother's affection even with his own father, had regarded him as a rival, and had secretly wished him out of the way so that he might enjoy undisputed and undisturbed the monopoly of that affection? If such thoughts had been present in his mind in childhood days they evidently would have been "repressed," and all traces of them obliterated, by filial piety and other educative influences. The actual realization of his early wish in the death of his father at the hands of a jealous rival would then have stimulated into activity these "repressed" memories, which would have produced, in the form of depression and other suffering, an obscure aftermath of his childhood's conflict. This is at all events the mechanism that is actually found in the real Hamlets who are investigated psychologically.

The explanation, therefore, of the delay and self-frustration exhibited in the endeavour to fulfil his father's demand for vengeance is that to Hamlet the thought of incest and parricide combined is too intolerable to be borne. One part of him tries to carry out the task, the other flinches inexorably from the thought of it. How fain would he blot it out in that "bestial oblivion" which unfortunately for him his conscience contemns. He is torn and tortured in an insoluble conflict.

Jones, Ernest. *Hamlet and Oedipus*. New York and London: Norton, 1976: 69-70.

## ***Twelfth Night***

### **Key Questions**

1. Nature of love as represented?
2. Cross-dressing (homoerotic arousal? friction? nature of gender relations?)
3. Casting out Malvolio: nature of comedy
  - a. Contextualizing the play--the question of satire:
  - b. comedy: when does laughter become cruelty? social function of such art?
4. Frye's blocking character: who: Malvolio? the characters themselves?
5. Gender as constructed hierarchy preventing clear signals?

### **Some Motifs & Dramatic Devices**

- **CROSS-DRESSING / DISGUISE (with larger issues): the heroine disguises herself as a man as a means of empowerment.** Practically speaking, this was an easy way for the boy actor playing the heroine to act as a boy, yet the device in and of itself raises issues about gender and its representation—for whoever's playing her, *Viola is a woman*, caught in the hierarchies of gender typical of the period, and struggling to make her own way—to find herself, her place in society, and to fulfill her wishes.

#### **<In Shakespeare:**

- |                                  |                     |  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------|--|
| 1. <i>Two Gentlemen</i>          | Julia / Sebastian   | to find her supposed lover, Proteus              |
| 2. <i>The Merchant of Venice</i> | Portia / Balthasar  | to rescue Bassanio from Shylock                  |
| 3. <i>As You Like It</i>         | Rosalind / Ganymede | to find Orlando & get his love                   |
| 4. <i>Twelfth Night</i>          | Viola / Cesario     | to seek refuge / find love with Orsino           |
| 5. <i>Cymbeline</i>              | Imogen / Fidele     | to escape her father & Cloten / to find Poshumus |

#### **<Other important plays of this kind:**

1. Middleton, Dekker: *The Roaring Girl, or Moll Cutpurse*. (not disguise, but deliberate identity & defiance).
2. Jonson: *Epicoene, or The Silent Woman*. (disguise as misogynist means to bring down an obnoxious misanthrope).

### **WHAT TO MAKE OF CROSS DRESSING AS CULTURAL EXPRESSION?**

#### **Modern Critical views:**

- <Belsey: "radical discontinuity in the meaning of family"
- <Baker, Howard, Garber: cultural anxiety over the destabilization of hierarchy.
- <Claiborne Park: means for woman to be assertive without arousing hostility.
- <Levine: "deep-seated fears" that the self is not stable.
- <Jardine: "homoerotic arousal"
- <Dusinberre: site where women are free to play with gender identities.

### A New Historicist approach:

- <In 1570s, some women adopted masculine attire: women dressed as men were tried as prostitutes in Alderman's Court (1565-1605)
- <Howard sees a social breakdown: women of all classes flouting a system of state-regulated regulated dress.
- <Conservative complaints also centered on men dressing effeminately. **Philip Stubbes' *Anatomy of Abuses* (1583)** claimed that transgressions of dress code "don't just signal social disruption; they constitute it."
- <**The proclamation against "inordinate apparel" (1597)** stated that subjects must dress according to their social class (see Riverside 2004).
- <It would seem to follow from these cultural markers that in presenting cross-dressed heroines onstage, the playwrights were taking a political stance supporting the flouting of dress codes, and opposed to Puritan and conservative complaints about this change.

### **Sources re Cross-dressing**

- Bullough, Vern L., and Bonnie Bullough. "Playing with Gender: Cross Dressing in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries." *Cross Dressing, Sex, and Gender*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1993: 74-93.
- Garber, Marjorie. "Rosalind the Yeshiva Boy." *Vested Interests: cross-dressing and cultural anxiety*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992: 71-77.
- Woodbridge, Linda. *Women and the English Renaissance: Literature and the Nature of Womankind, 1540-1620*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois, 1986.

- **"Plans" Motif**
  - <Viola (disguise): 1.2 (443) > 1.4 (445)
  - <Maria (tricking Malvolio): 2.5 (456-57) > 3.4 (461-62)
  - <Toby (putting M. in dark room): 4.2 (467)
- **Letters as a device to connect or change characters:**
  - <Maria (to trap Malvolio): 2.5 (456)
  - <Andrew (to challenge Cesario / Toby's ruse to keep Andrew in his power: 3.4 (463)
  - <Malvolio (to connect with Olivia from dark room): 4.2 (468)
- **Ring as device: Olivia's ruse to get Cesario to return** 2.1 (449)
- **Spectacle:** yellow stockings, swordfights (comic—Andrew & Cesario / serious—Sebastian & Toby)

## Plot & Characters

### Plot Type: (Romance (mistaken identities) with minor Intrigues):

1. **Romance plots (mistaken identities):** Orsino>Olivia, Olivia>Cesario (Viola), Cesario (Viola)>Orsino
2. **Reuniting brother and sister** (twins theme from Plautus)
3. **Intrigue:** Toby's use of Andrew.
4. **Intrigue:** Toby's and Maria's intrigue re Malvolio.

**Social context:** the play not only explores the ridiculous posturing of the willful, but also presents satire of the type of the Puritan (see "Satire, the Puritan, and a Little History," and Appendix D, pages 1996-2008)

### Characters: who are these people?

1. **"The Lovers": Orsino, Olivia, Viola, Sebastian.** Situation and tonic key? What do you make of each of these? How does each "deal with" the situations he/she is dealt? What social and psychological assumptions may one make about each?
2. **Other Characters—Types (see "Comedy" page of syllabus):**
  1. **Parasite/Vice:** Toby
  2. **Gull:** Andrew
  3. **Killjoy:** Malvolio (Puritan / Jonson?)
  4. **Wise fool** (Feste)
  5. **Tricky slave:** Maria Note others: Ms. Quickly, Thersites, Caliban and Ariel
3. **Malvolio as a Character:**
  - a. **Topical Views:**
    1. Leslie Hotson's claim: Sir William Knollys, the pompous comptroller of the royal household.
    2. David Riggs' theory: Shakespeare's contribution to the poetomachia—Malvolio as a caricature of Ben Jonson—on the basis of a reference in the *Return from Parnassus II*, where Will Kemp remarks that Shakespeare has given Jonson "a purge that will betray his credit" (Riggs 84).
    3. The type of the Puritan as seen by his enemies: 2.3.140, 147
  - b. **Phases of his character: (Note that he cannot change except by suggestions arousing ambitions / hopes already present but hidden in his personality (like Macbeth later))**
    1. Self-righteous puritan / misanthrope (pages 446-47; 1.5)
    2. Puffed-up "lover" / ambitions exposed (pages 456-57, 461-62; 2.5, 3.4)
    3. Tortured prisoner (pages 467-68; 4.2)
    4. Enraged Pathetic (page 473; 5.1)
  - c. **What to do with the "outsider"?**

<If comedy shows social rejuvenation, what does casting out a character imply re the body politic?

<Yet Viola, Sebastian, and Antonio and the Captain are all outsiders in their way, too. Some are reconciled to the new society, some not: Why?

## Questions for Debate: *Twelfth Night*: Satire, the Puritan, & A Little History

Donna B. Hamilton (1992) claims that *Twelfth Night* may be seen as a loose allegory of the Elizabethan state in which Olivia/Elizabeth presides over a family/state pitting Toby and Maria as conforming Anglicans against the Puritan Malvolio. To support this contention, she points out that Toby and Maria exhibit the kinds of excesses that Puritans accused the bishops of, and that the famous exorcism scene (3.4. 84-125) displays the sort of interrogations that Puritans endured from their accusers. Hamilton supports her views by examining the case of John Darrell, a Puritan exorcist who had been convicted for this outlawed practice in 1598 and died in prison in 1602. She also claims that the major political event of the period—the rebellion and eventual beheading of the Earl of Essex—exacerbated the tensions between these rival factions and the government.

The history between the Puritans and the state church had long been a running sore in the government, which simultaneously had far more important issues to contend with: warfare with the Spanish at sea and on the continent, Tyrone's Irish uprising and, as the new century opened, Essex's rebellion (1601).

About the time Elizabeth was engaged against the Spanish Armada (1588), Puritans wrote the Martin Marprelate tracts attacking the Anglican church. A pamphlet war ensued from 1588-1590, and in the following years, Elizabeth's government struggled to contain this Puritan minority and to destroy the influence of the Catholic church altogether. Important events include the Hacket Conspiracy of 1591 (in which a Puritan fanatic proclaimed himself King of Europe), state proclamations against recusancy—enforcing Anglican church attendance against secret Catholics and non-conforming protestants (1591, 1593), and the 1593 trial and execution of three Brownists (Barrow, Penry, Greenwood). Yet the Puritan influence on the court continued to grow, in their objections to the immorality of the theatres, to "inordinate" clothing and extravagances, in their continuous critiques of Anglicans, and in their eventual request that the newly-installed King James appoint a commission to revise the protestant Bible.

Before and during this entire period, Elizabeth's major religious problem involved Catholics and was exacerbated by the imprisonment and eventual death of her cousin Mary Stuart, the Catholic claimant to the throne. The Arden and Throgmorton (1583) and Babington (1586) plots involved assassination attempts in the hopes of restoring a Catholic kingdom, and in 1586 the Pope himself offered a million crowns to finance Spain's attempt to invade and destroy protestant England. Connected with these are a propaganda war and consequent tightening of control over printed materials, massive arrests of Catholics (see Riverside 1994), the execution of Jesuits in 1584 and 1595, all of which also figure in the passage of recusancy ordinances and other close supervision of the intellectual life of the people.

The playwrights take up satire where the Martin Marprelate controversy left off, eventually expanding its scope to include every kind of courtly fop, rich country bumpkin, prostitute and miser, Puritan and priest. In 1599, Archbishop Whitgift and his council issued a proclamation against it; playwrights responded with "comicall satyres" in a *Poetomachia*—Jonson levelling blasts against court parasites and allegorized personal attacks against Marston and Dekker, who responded by "untrussing" the contentious poet. According to David Riggs (1989), Shakespeare's Malvolio is his contribution to the *poetomachia*—presenting the self-righteous puritan as a send-up of Jonson, whose personal arrogance and aesthetic contentiousness targeted Dekker and others as pretenders to the title of poet. Jonson's satire of Puritans is far more acerbic than Shakespeare's, in any case: Malvolio is almost likeable next to Ben's ridiculous Tribulation Wholesome and his deacon Ananias (*The Alchemist*, 1610) or the obnoxious Zeal-of-the-Land Busy (*Bartholomew Fair*, 1614), whose supposed skill at contention is overmastered by a puppet.

## *Troilus and Cressida*

### The Problem of Genre

#### From G. B. Harrison's Introduction: The Tragedy of TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

The earliest record of Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* is an entry in the Stationer's Register dated February 7, 1603, when it was assigned to James Roberts the printer with the note: "Entered for his copie in full Court holden this day to print when he hath gotten sufficient aucthority for yt, The booke of Troilus and Cresseda as yt is acted by my Lord Chamberlens Men." No copy of an edition of 1603 is known, and it is probable that this was a blocking entry . . . made by Roberts at the request of the players to prevent any other printer from publishing the play. Roberts had similarly entered *As You Like It*, *Much Ado about Nothing*, and *Henry V* in 1600. On January 28, 1609, Richard Bonian and Henry Walley entered "a booke called the history of Troylus and Cressida," and during the year issued a quarto edition with the title *The Historie of Troylus and Cresseida. As it was acted by the Kings Maiesties seruants at the Globe. Written by William Shakespeare*. This quarto was reissued during the year with a new title page: *The Famous Historie of Troylus and Cresseid. Excellently expressing the beginning of their loues, with the conceited wooing of Pandarus Prince of Licia. Written by William Shakespeare*. To this second issue was also added a remarkable Epistle to the Reader:

#### A NEVER WRITER TO AN EVER READER, NEWS.

Eternal reader, you have here a new play, never staled with the stage, never clapper-clawed with the palms of the vulgar, and yet passing full of the palm comical; for it is a birth of your brain, that never undertook anything comical vainly: and were but the vain names of comedies changed for the titles of commodities, or of plays for pleas, you should see all those grand censors that now style them such vanities flock to them for the main grace of their gravities; especially this author's comedies, that are so framed to the life that they serve for the most common commentaries of all the actions of our lives showing such a dexterity, and power of wit that the most displeased with plays are pleased with his comedies. And all such dull and heavy-witted worldlings as were never capable of the wit of a comedy coming by report of them to his representations, have found that wit there that they never found in themselves, and have parted better-witted than they came, feeling an edge of wit set upon them more than ever they dreamed they had brain to grind it on. So much and such savored salt of wit is in his comedies that they seem (for their height of pleasure) to be born in that sea that brought forth Venus. Amongst them all there is none more witty than this, and had I time I would comment upon it, though I know it needs not (for so much as will think your testern [sixpence] well bestowed) but for so much worth as even poor I know to be stuffed in it. It deserves such a labor as well as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus. And believe this, that when he is gone, and his comedies out of sale, you will scramble for them, and set up a new English Inquisition. Take this for a warning, and at the peril of your pleasure's loss, and judgments, refuse not, nor like this the less for not being sullied with the smoky breath of the multitude, but thank fortune for the 'scape it hath made amongst you. Since by the grand possessors' wills I believe you should have prayed for them rather than been prayed. And so I leave all such to be prayed for (for the states of their wit's healths) that will not praise it.

VALE

*Troilus and Cressida* was reprinted in the first folio of 1623 [where it is called *The Tragedie of Troylus and Cressida*], but there seem to have been difficulties. In two

surviving copies of the folio, the first page only occurs immediately after *Romeo and Juliet*; in all other copies it was printed without pagination between *Henry VIII* (the last of the histories) and *Coriolanus* (the first of the tragedies). The likeliest explanation is that some dispute over the ownership of the play arose during the printing of the folio which was not settled until after the rest of the tragedies had been set up.

## Two Primary Sources for the Love Story

**Chaucer, Geoffrey. "Troilus and Criseyde." *The Riverside Chaucer*. Third ed. Ed. Larry D. Benson. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.**

<After Dante's *Commedia*, Chaucer's five-book adaptation of Giovanni Boccaccio's *Filostrato* is the most influential and important text of late medieval literature. Chaucer's poem is arguably the most important source for Shakespeare's play, though Shakespeare handles the earlier poem's carefully developed motivations, sincerity and agony with intense irony in a play that has been called an important precursor to modern "savage comedy" (White 11).

<Situation: the Greeks besiege Troy in the war begun when Paris abducted Helen, the wife of Menelaus.

Major Characters:

Calkas: prophet who foresees the destruction of Troy and flees to the Greek camp.

Criseyde: Calkas' daughter, she remains behind, a beautiful woman who is branded as the daughter of a traitor.

Troilus: son of Priam, king of Troy, Troilus falls in love with Criseyde, but because she is an outcast, their love has to remain secret.

Pandarus: Criseyde's uncle, a go-between who arranges their meeting, and who ultimately deserts her in her hour of need.

Diomed: the Greek hero who, once Criseyde has been traded to the Greeks in return for the captive hero Antenor, seduces Criseyde and begins the process that destroys the lovers.

**Book One:** Story of Calkas' flight and Criseyde's precarious position; intro Troilus, smitten with her, and development of connection with Pandarus (her uncle).

**Book Two:** Criseyde's agony over whether to accept him as lover.

**Book Three:** Extended seduction scene and consummation of their love (high point).

**Book Four:** Calkas' suggestion of trade: Antenor for Criseyde: lovers' pledge and separation.

**Book Five:** Diomedes' seduction of Criseyde; Troilus driven mad, fighting valiantly until slain by Achilles: Boethian ascent into the heavens.

**In Chaucer:** **Criseyde** is a character whose innocence and thoughtfulness are emphasized; she is not the type of the female betrayer as she appears to be in Shakespeare, but a woman trapped in circumstances beyond her control. Her fall is tragic, loaded with pathos. **Troilus** is a hyperbolic character, yet his trajectory is one of learning to "give up his hopes"—his death is a Boethian exemplum of ascending to the heavens.

**Henryson, Robert. "The Testament of Cresseid."** *The Oxford Book of Late Medieval Verse & Prose*. Ed. Douglas Gray. Oxford and New York: Oxford U P, 1958.

<The greatest of the Scotch Chaucerians, Henryson rewrote the end of the story so that a dejected Troilus might meet and half-recognize the diseased Cresseid, who leaves him a ring as a final gesture before she dies. Shakespeare adapts some details from Henryson's version of the story, notably the emphasis on disease as a tonal motif in the play.

**Shakespeare probably relies most heavily on Chaucer and Henryson**, but their versions are versions of versions of versions, etc.

1. Benoit de Saint Maure's *Roman de Troie*. (Cressida as Brisida)
2. Guido delle Colonne's *Historia Destructiones Troiae* (1287).
3. Giovanni Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato* (14th cy.)
4. Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* (1380s)
5. John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (c. 1412-20)
6. Henryson's *Testament of Cresseid* (mid to late 15th cy).

### **Sources for the War Material: "The Matter of Troy"**

Greek: *The Iliad, The Odyssey*

Roman: Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid (incidental in *Metamorphoses*)

**War Material in the play:**

<*Metamorphoses* XIII for the quarrel between Ajax and Ulysses

<Chapman's recent translation of *The Iliad*

<Caxton's *Recuyell of the Historyes of Troy*, a trans. of Raoul Lefevre's prose version.

### **The Problems of Order, Value, and Commodification**

One of the major tasks in interpreting the Shakespeare play is to note the variety of ways in which the old story is being undercut, satirized, or re-read: for starters:

**<Note Ulysses on order & degree (1.3.75-138 / page 489-90) and Hector on law & value (2.2.163-93 / page 497)** as measures for action / interior contradictions.

**<ways in which sincere statements are undercut** by quarrels, petty rivalries, or by the commentaries of others.

**<choral function of Thersites:** his commentary, loaded with disease imagery, infects the play on a variety of levels.

**<debasing actions:** Greeks all kissing Cressida (4.5); Achilles & myrmidons gang up on Hector (5.7-8); Pandarus' parting shot: "bequeath you my diseases" as he exits.

### **Debate: Are Dollimore's perceptions of character accurate?**

**TROILUS' CHARACTER ("true," but hyperbolic—driven by his affections, emotions)**

<Dollimore claims that "misfortune brutalises him. He must depend for his identity and survival not on a stoic inner virtue but, quite simply, on his society; moreover what his society is, he ultimately becomes: 'savage.' . . . We might understand him thus: a thwarted lover rescues himself from his own vulnerability by acting out a savage revenge. . . . In short, we see . . . the way that sensitive people brutalise themselves in order to survive in a brutal world. The irony, or rather the tragedy, lies in the fact that, in so doing, they earn the esteem of their society" (41).

## **CRESSIDA'S CHARACTER (amalgam of types? adjusting according to situation?)**

<Dollimore: "By concurring with the powerful and dominant myth of female 'frailty,' Cressida makes ideological 'sense' of sudden dislocation and dispossession. But *Troilus and Cressida* makes available a counter-perspective: the discontinuity in Cressida's identity stems not from her nature but from her position in the patriarchal order. . . . The conflicting estimates of Cressida's actual worth indicate what is so frequently the case: the position of the subordinate becomes contradictory when there occurs a power struggle in the dominant. Identity is a function of position, and position of power; to be the object of power is also to be in part its effect (48)

### **Gayle Greene on Cressida**

The discrepancy between the idealized creature of Troilus's imagination and the Cressida we meet in the second scene is startling, and the juxtaposition of fantasy and reality casts some doubt, at this early stage, on the validity of his versions of reality. In her bantering with Pandarus, we see Cressida as a cynical coquette who acts in full understanding of the rules of the game, aware of the "wiles," "lies," "wards," and "watches" (II.ii.260-64) that are necessary to defend herself. The terms demonstrate a conception of love as combat which is consistent with so defensive a posture. Left alone, Cressida reveals herself in a soliloquy as a deliberate exploiter of Troilus's illusions, as exploitative of him as he is of her, though more conscious than he of the nature of their transaction:

Yet hold I off. Women are angels, wooing:  
Things won are done, joy's soul lies in the doing.  
That she belov'd knows nought that knows not this:  
Men prize the thing ungain'd more than it is.  
That she was never yet that ever knew  
Love got so sweet as when desire did sue. (I.ii.286-89) [sic]

Aware of herself as a commodity whose value varies with supply and demand, a "thing ungained" which "won" is "done," she creates an appearance of scarcity in what is essentially an attempt to sell herself. But she is merely complying with Troilus's desires and with the expectations of an entire society that values appearance and treats people as objects; she differs from the rest of her world only in the degree of self-awareness with which she plays. Simultaneously victim and critic of these processes, she is a commentator on the values with which she nevertheless conforms, in that peculiar relation to her society described by de Beauvoir in which "woman knows that the masculine code is not hers" and so "feels daily the ambiguity of her position" and can "put in question . . . ready-made values, hypocritical . . . morality." Cressida is, paradoxically, in a better position than the men to understand the principles that motivate her world, though she is helpless to act on what she knows. (139)

### **Interrogating Some Scenes**

#### **<1.2 (484-88)**

**With Pandarus:** banter / off-putting? Essentially defensive, or wanton?

Fears? that she's a "nettle in May" (lines 175-76)

**Solus:** Love --but a woman's wariness: "men prize the thing ungain'd more" (lines 289)

<Connect to Troilus / Hector on Value.

<The value of a human life seems a dominant theme in the play.

### <3.2 (502-05) FIRST MEETING OF THE LOVERS

- <She apprehensive? / he armed with reasons (wants to jump right in)
- <Profession of love & kiss (504): tender, but foreboding?
- <her self-awareness "two kinds of selves"--kind and unkind (504 / lines 148-50)
- <OATHS: true as Troilus, false as Cressid (504-05): as though she knows she'll be false? foreboding? aware that she might be used?

### <4.2--4.5 (509-16) ALBA AND KNOCKING; THE EXCHANGE; ABUSE OF CRESSIDA

- <Her Oath (511 / lines 99-101)
- <Troilus at first too resigned, later hysterical? What to make of his doubting her?
- <(513) GREEKS ALL KISS HER AND ABUSE HER: Note pattern: at first she's mute, then she mocks (state of mind? wit? craft? pragmatism?)
  - (page 513 / lines 13-34) THEY TAKE
  - (513-14 / lines 35-54) THEY ASK--SHE MOCKS
  - (514 / lines 55-63) ULYSSES' ASSESSMENT (I.E. SHE'S A WHORE)

### <5.2 (518-20) SEDUCTION OF CRESSID BY DIOMEDE

- <OVERLOOKING: Troilus and Ulysses> Thersites (seems to distance Cressida in a way that privileges Thersites' sarcasm first, Troilus' reaction second: but can we discern her feelings?
  - what was her "oath" (26)?
  - if one cannot conclusively determine that, what is the sense of the discourse between Cressid and Diomedes?
  - why does she give him the token? (60ff)
  - how well does she know what she's doing? (see 88-89 / 107-12)

### Privileging A Character's Perceptions: Soliloquies

- TROILUS (1.1.89-104) HIS DILEMMA, LOVING CRESSIDA (484)
- CRESSIDA (1.2.282-95) HER LOVE FOR TROILUS, WARINESS OF MEN (487-88)
- THERSITES (2.3.1-22) SARCASM ABOUT THE ENTIRE WAR, BOTH SIDES (497)
- PANDARUS (3.2.210-11) END SCENE: HIS SATISFACTION AT BRINGING THEM TOGETHER. (505).
- THERSITES (3.3.310-12) MOCKING ACHILLES (508)
- THERSITES (5.1.48-66) MID-SCENE: MOCKING THE GREEK WARRIORS (517)
- THERSITES (5.1.88-98) END SCENE: MOCKING DIOMEDE'S INCONTINENCE (518)
- THERSITES (5.2.190-96) END SCENE: MOCKING THE LECHERY OF LOVERS (520)
- THERSITES (5.4.1-16) BEGIN SCENE: MOCKING BOTH SIDES (522)
- HECTOR (5.8.1-4) UNARMED, RESTING--PREQUEL TO HIS DEATH (524)
- PANDARUS (5.10.35-56) END PLAY: "BEQUEATH YOU MY DISEASES" (525)

### Themes and Motifs: Prophecies

- "WHAT'S AUGHT BUT AS 'TIS VALUED?" (2.2.52; PAGE 495): the value of human life is the dominant theme, with the question of how well we may know ourselves connected to the ways in which society measures or assigns our worth.
- CONSIDER THE MOTIF OF PROPHECIES AND FOREKNOWLEDGE EXTENDING THIS THEME:
  - <CALCHAS leaves Troy because he has foreseen its demise.
  - <CASSANDRA prophesies its fall, and though others foresee disaster because of their choices (e.g. both Ulysses on order and Hector on law), none believe her.

<At times CRESSIDA seems to foresee her own trajectory.  
<ANDROMACHE, HECTOR'S MOTHER, CASSANDRA, and PRIAM all foresee Hector's death; Andromache and Hector's mother have had prophetic dreams (5.3.62-67).

- **UNDERCUTTING THE STORY:** In the end, Cressida is not killed, but departs with a lesson (page 519) involving her loss; he is enraged in battle, despairing, and exits disillusioned (525). Three other items contribute to the notion that this play is neither tragedy nor comedy, but a fierce satire, a precursor for modern **savage comedy**:

**<If there is tragedy here, it must reside in the heroic plot:** the lovers do not die for love or come to a final wisdom of recognition in this version of the story. They are merely stripped of their illusions. Nor does the play reify a comedy's sense of social rejuvenation or triumph of love.

**<Yet if the death of Hector is tragic, why is it undercut?** There is no honor in slaughter: Achilles is shown as dishonorable in the final combat, though Agamemnon celebrates the deed (see scene 9).

**<Both the Prologue and Pandarus's epilogue encourage us to mock the agon of the play.** See pages 483 ("Tis but the chance of war") and 525 ("Bequeath you my diseases").

### Some Critical Readings

Bevington, David, ed. Introduction. *The Arden Shakespeare Troilus and Cressida*. Third Series. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1998.

Boitani, Piero, ed. *The European Tragedy of Troilus*. Oxford and New York: Clarendon, 1989.

Bradbrook, M. C. "What Shakespeare Did to Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 9 (1958): 311-19.

Dollimore, Jonathan. "Emergence: Troilus and Cressida." *Radical Tragedy*. Durham: Duke U P, 1993.

Donaldson, E. Talbot. *The Swan at the Well: Shakespeare Reading Chaucer*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1985.

---, and Judith J. Kollman, eds. *Chaucerian Shakespeare: Adaptation and Transformation*. Detroit: Michigan Consortium for Medieval and Early Modern Studies, 1983.

Gordon, R. K. *The Story of Troilus*. Toronto, Buffalo, and London: U of Toronto, 1978.

Greene, Gayle. "Shakespeare's Cressida: A Kind of Self." *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz, Gayle Greene, and Carol Thomas Neely. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois, 1983.

Mann, Jill. "Shakespeare and Chaucer: "What is Criseyde Worth?" *The European Tragedy of Troilus*. Ed. Piero Boitani. Oxford: Clarendon, 1989.

Thompson, Ann. *Shakespeare's Chaucer: A Study in Literary Origins*. New York: Barnes and Noble, 1978.

White, Kenneth S. "Introduction: What is Savage Comedy?" *Savage Comedy: Structures of Humor*. Kenneth S. White, ed. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1978.

## ***Measure for Measure***

### **The Problem Play: Complicating a Simple Premise**

The play is, on its face, an exploration of the problem of establishing justice through civil rule, particularly with regard to sexual mores and marriage itself. Many critics have noted the contrast between the Duke's laxness and Angelo's strictness in the play's opening: *Measure for Measure* seems to develop a theme of correction, a middle way between either extreme. Yet Shakespeare complicates this simple formula:

- The "strict" ruler (Angelo) turns out to be driven by a previously unrevealed lust: the theme of excessive strictness is mixed with a theme of hypocrisy.
- The Duke—who sees his own failings—turns out to be a conniver who, in his attempts to find the middle way of justice, subverts ethics itself in his attempts to "catch" Angelo and free Claudio. His inability to "take charge" persists until the end of the play, when he suddenly becomes the prince he should have been from the beginning: yet even here he may be seen as unnecessarily cruel—letting Isabella grieve long after we know Claudio has been spared, toying with Mariana's hopes for her husband, and suddenly springing the question of marriage on Isabella.
- Re the question of marriage, Shakespeare poses the problem of what constitutes a lawful marriage and an honest contract through the characters of Claudio and Juliet, Angelo and Mariana, Lucio and Kate Keepdown, and even, perhaps, in the Duke and Isabella. This question had been posed and resolved in favor of the formal Anglican marriage contract and ritual at the Hampton Court Conference earlier that year: yet this play suggests that the legal resolution is inadequate—that a true marriage (such as Claudio's and Juliet's) may result in spite of not following the law; that the rite itself is sometimes a punishment, not a celebration (as with Lucio and Kate); or that love and forgiveness may prevail in marriage despite the injustices of one partner—a resolution borne of perseverance and devotion, not of legal prescription (as with Mariana and Angelo).

As the play ends, have we, indeed, come to the middle way of justice tempered by mercy—or do all these problematizations subvert the text's project? Must we insist, as Bloom does, that the play is nihilistic, "savagely bitter," and ultimately an unsurpassed "vision of sexual malaise?" (359). The play could also be seen as (1) a "simultaneous invocation and evasion of Christian belief and Christian morals" (Bloom 359), (2) an exploration of the difficulties of finding that middle way—the "happy" ending an arrival fraught with mystery and duplicitousness but nevertheless somehow "just" in the sense that an uneasy reconciliation has occurred, or (3) a savage comedy exposing corruption, lust, the inability of human institutions (such as courts, the legal system, the church) to transcend the human frailties of those in power.

### **The Problem of Character**

- **Duke Vincentio:**
  1. Why not enforce the laws himself rather than leave the task to Angelo?
  2. Why leave the state to Angelo if he knows of Angelo's past rejection of Mariana once she proved to be dowerless?
  3. When Angelo threatens Claudio's life and harasses Isabella, why doesn't he rescue them immediately instead of developing an elaborate deception?
  4. Why does he keep Isabella in suspense over Claudio's death when he knows that Claudio is alive, allowing her to grieve for more than a day? Why jerk Isabella and Mariana around before exposing Angelo?

- **Isabella:**
  1. Her trajectory is a difficult movement: how does one account for its passages?
    - a. Independent nun retreating from the world into religious meditation.
    - b. Terrorized young woman caught in Angelo's intrigue / learning to defend herself.
    - c. Willing and uncritical participant in the Friar's (Duke's) intrigues to free Claudio.
    - d. Silent bride-to-be (?) when the Duke springs the question of marriage on her.
- **Mariana:**
  1. Why should she want Angelo, given that he's spurned her over the lack of a dowry and that he has harassed Isabella?
  2. The "bed trick": who would have sex with a man, knowing he thinks she is someone else?
  3. Why does she plead with Isabella to support her in her bid to save Angelo's life, given that she knows what Angelo has tried to do to Isabella?

### Modern Views: The Problem of the "Bed Trick"

1. "**A tedious and artificial plot device**" (John Wain); a motif acceptable in folklore, but "too mechanical an expedient" to be believable (Jonas Barish): William W. Lawrence sees the use of the bed trick as an instance in which Shakespeare shows "extreme disregard of psychological truth, in the acceptance of narrative conventions" (Desens 12).
2. Modern audiences should **accept the device in the same spirit** as a renaissance audience would (M. C. Bradbrook, G. K. Hunter); further, "it was the means by which the injured heroine had won her rights against the man who had wronged her" (R. C. Bald) (Desens 13).
3. We should see the bed trick **as a theatrical convention**—a popular gimmick in this period—indeed, used in at least 44 plays (Margot Heineman, William Baille, William Bowden).
4. A **dramatic convention that allows "the dramatists . . . to probe some of the complexities of human behavior**, and that allows us the opportunity to examine some of our own views on gender, sexuality, and the amount of power any person, whether male or female, may acceptably exercise over another" (Desens 17).
5. The expression of a **libidinous male fantasy** (explored in Desens, chapter four).

### Some contextual background

- first play for the new King James (played at Whitehall, December 26, 1604).
- James had convened the **Hampton Court Conference** in Jan.-Feb 1604, at which a great number of religious issues were discussed, including the **question of the subject's obedience to the monarch, the nature of marriage**, and most famously, the retranslation of the Bible.
- "**New laws governing marriage** were put into effect as a result of the conference. Only a duly licensed cleric, in a parish church, between 8 a.m. and noon, and after The banns had been read on three successive consecutive Sundays or festival days, could legally pronounce a man and a woman husband and wife. Exception from these rules required a bishop's license" (Kernan 51).

<Note that the play presents "sex before marriage but after a verbal contract *de praesenti*, the death penalty for adultery, a debate on whether charity or chastity is the prior virtue, and forced weddings" (Kernan 51).

**Preview of characters:** Frye and others have suggested that **Angelo** and **Isabella** are both up-tight characters in denial: his narrow devotion to the letter of the law masks the lust that seethes beneath—and is a compensation for guilt over having natural desires; while her retreat to the nunnery is a way of avoiding the sexuality of mature adult life—she is not truly spiritually motivated, but hiding from her own desires. As in *Twelfth Night*, what is beneath emerges—though here, the complications of guilt and power lead to potential disaster (unlike Malvolio, who was a little power-crazy but mostly a dreamer, Angelo can and is willing to kill others for his narrow morality). Frye suggests that both Angelo and Isabella should be played as sexually attractive despite these peculiar personality qualities. **The Duke**, on the other hand, seems to undergo a lesson in leadership through this play: yet both he and Isabella (despite there being no words in the plot to confirm it) may be attracted to each other even as they plot together: this would render the Duke's question (and her acquiescence, if the director so conceives it) more believable.

<Bloom believes that Barnardine—with his refusal of all laws, his elemental disorder—is **the imaginative center of the play**, but I suggest that, speaking of plotting, **Lucio** has that honor: he is the “glue” character that moves most easily and thoroughly through all the various milieux—from court to street to bawdy house to prison to nunnery, etc.—and not only serves to keep the plot going—though bringing news, spreading gossip, and serving as catalyst, but also is one of its major sites for humor and as emblematic of society's disorders as anyone in the play: that he is forced to marry Kate Keepdown at the end is merely the emblem of the sexual disorders that rage throughout the play.

<If one were to follow the “director” aspect of the intrigue plot in the 3<sup>rd</sup>-5<sup>th</sup> acts as a thematic element, the fact that Isabella does not answer the Duke seems to indicate that Shakespeare has relinquished total control over his character, that Isabella is free to invent her own responses—or lack thereof.

### Two part plot structure

<**Note that this bipartite structure will surface again with the even greater formal division of the plot into two parts in *The Winter's Tale*.** In that play, Acts 1-3 and Acts 4-5 are separated by a 16 year hiatus.

- a. Acts 1-2: spiralling down to tragedy, with Angelo in command.
- b. Acts 3-5: intrigue plot, in which the Duke acts as a kind of “director-dramatist” and other characters become actors in his various plots: to save Isabella from Angelo (and incidentally, to marry her), to save Claudio and return him to Juliet, to expose Angelo, force him to repent and marry Mariana, to punish Lucio for his loose tongue by marrying him to a punk.

<Romance, though nominally a part of this play, seems so thoroughly foresworn that in the end it seems “forced” upon the characters (though there is the traditional wedding as formal reconciliation).

### **FIRST PART OF PLOT: SPIRAL TOWARD TRAGEDY**

1. **Opening scenes:** as with *Twelfth Night*, note the tonic keys:

- a. 1.1: formal assignment of roles to Angelo & Escalus (note Angelo's hesitancy). Why does the Duke leave Vienna? (See his “official” reason—1.3 (page 588): what does this say about him as character?)

- b. 1.2: Lucio with gentlemen & bawd: rowdy jests—yet a serious undertone once Ms. Overdone enters. When officers come in with Claudio, yet another “key”—pathos & anger—dominates the scene.
  - c. 1.3: Friary: Duke & Friar Thomas / 1.4 Lucio to nunnery (note how Lucio changes the tone).
2. 2.1:
- a. Escalus pleads for Claudio’s life: Angelo is adamant.
  - b. The lengthy arraignment of Pompey & froth: what’re the purposes of this part of the scene? (Note contrast between Claudio’s fate & Pompey’s)
3. 2.2: **First interview: Angelo & Isabella** (she learns to advocate for herself & for her brother—but what is she like in this first interview? / he is a “man of adamant”—but his lust/guilt is awakened.
- <Note that both of them are rigid, morally tense people whose public personas mask whatever is going on beneath. This is particularly true of Angelo, but in Isabella the pattern of awakening to herself at first involves a rigid moral sense and an enormous amount of inner uncertainty.
- <Isabella must be goaded by Lucio, who is a **catalyst** character in this scene. (Follow how he, too, changes through the play): from concerned friend, to gamester with bawds, to catalyst, to swollen gossip and back-biter, to penitent/fool.

4. 2.4: **Second interview: Angelo & Isabella: SOLILOQUY/ FOREGROUNDING**

- <**Soliloquies** foregrounding Angelo (& giving us access to his inner nature) end 2.3 and begin 2.4: read ‘em—in both there’s a sense of the man struggling with his guilt & desire—yet he’s anything but tentative when he goes after Isabella.
- <Read lines 30-170 not only for meaning/content but for the psychological states of the two characters, especially Isabella (pages 597-98)
- <**Isabella’s soliloquy** ends this scene: she too is foregrounded for her inner state.

**PLOT TURN: TO INTRIGUE**

5. 3.1: (pages 599-602) **Prison: interview of Isabella w. Claudio (note Duke-Friar OVERHEARING)**

- <**Duke-Friar’s admonition to Claudio (1-43 / 599)**: standard Boethian advice full of religious platitudes—if the Duke has already decided to intrigue for Claudio’s life, what meaning do these words have?
- <**interview of Isabella & Claudio (43-150 / 599-601), w. overhearing.** The scene develops serious questions about both death & about the value of chastity—it’s even a bit hysterical—yet is undercut by the Duke’s presence and by his plan.
- <**When the Duke springs his plan on Isabella (151-268 / 601-02)**, why is she content to go along with it (she’s been developed as hysterically pure up to this point)? Does extremity of emotion force a change on her? Note that, as in *Twelfth Night*, **the next stage of the plot is announced to us as a PLAN.**

6. **Story of Mariana / Duke's plan (199-258 / 601-02; 4.1 (606-07):** Are there plausible reasons for her to play along? e.g. "love," hope to change him, empowerment, property?

7. **What kinds of comic scenes does the second half of the play develop?**

<**READ Lucio & Duke-Friar (604):** has Lucio changed from earlier? What is his character?

<**Abhorson and Barnardine with Pompey (610):** a grim ironic humor here—Barnardine trying to learn Abhorson's "mystery" / Barnardine's refusal to die because he's been drunk.

<**The question of Ragozine's head being substituted for Claudio's:** no doubt (again) there's a kind of grim humor / "prison justice" here—but how does this scene (and the deception of Isabella, whom the Duke leads to believe Claudio is dead / 611) complicate the theme of justice / mercy AND the character of the Duke?

<**How does this scene complicate or contribute to the theme of justice & mercy? Do the setting up of Lucio, the employment of the Provost & others for the Duke's plan, and the deception of Isabella create the space for the comic resolution at the expense of the themes of justice and honesty, mercy and "right behavior"?**

8. **ACT 5: The Comic Trial and Exposures // Resolution and Marriages**

<**DEBATE: Madeleine Doran's perception of this (368) as the reversal of the roles of Isabella and Angelo, with the important difference that she gives mercy:** "Everyone knows of the general critical dissatisfaction with the ending. . . . Actually, I think Shakespeare has been at some pains to give it a formally satisfying ending, in the happily ironic reversal of the 'measure for measure' theme. Early in the play, Angelo answers Isabella's plea that he temper justice with mercy, with his announced intention to carry out justice in the strictest sense of measure for measure. With their roles reversed at the end of the play, Isabella is faced with the same problem with respect to him, and after a struggle she solves it by according him mercy" (368).

<**(614-16): THE TRIAL:** the serious trial of Angelo (which seems on its face a trial of Isabella, Mariana, and the Friar)—lending the seriousness of the situation a terrible irony since not even the audience knows how the Duke is going to resolve this business—is undercut by Lucio's banter and the Duke's impatience with him.

<**Page 618: What should we make of the Duke's offers of marriage to Isabel?**

- The text has not prepared us for him springing the question, and the fact that she doesn't answer his offer leaves us with a difficult director's problem: will she marry him? Is she pleased by the offer? If so, what of her religious vows—what has changed her sufficiently to make the offer attractive?
- She has been developed as one who is assertive when it comes to her purity and chastity, but also as one who is attractive to both Angelo and now the Duke: could non-verbal elements in the action prepare us in ways that the language does not?

- Or is the resolution intentionally problematic? Her silence seems to indicate that she's not committed, that the resolution is itself a problem (though productions often have her leaving the stage arm-in-arm with the Duke and the others—as though she is now ready to accept a course that wouldn't have been thinkable earlier).

**9. Final concerns:** Bloom calls this a comedy that destroys comedy by pushing it beyond the limits of what the form allows, problematizing characters, trajectories, even plot lines themselves. Similarly, Anne Barton points out (in the Riverside Introduction) that "the play itself has some of the qualities of a farewell: a sense of dissatisfaction with its own dramatic mode, concentrated in its notoriously troublesome final scene, and a predominant harshness of tone, a savagery even in its clowning. . . . the comedy as a whole is obsessed with the idea of death" (579). In any case, Shakespeare seems to struggle with the idea that a state cannot easily be just, that mercy itself is a difficult passage in a corrupt society.

### Some Sources

- Bloom, Harold. "Measure for Measure." *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead (Penguin/Putnam), 1998.
- Desens, Marliss C. *The Bed Trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power*. Newark: U of Delaware / London and Toronto: Associated U Presses, 1994.
- Doran, Madeleine. *Endeavors of Art: A Study of Form in Elizabethan Drama*. Madison: U of Wisconsin, 1954.
- Frye, Northrop. "Measure for Measure." *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1986.
- Gless, Darryl J. *Measure for Measure, the Law, and the Convent*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1979.
- Kernan, Alvin. "The King's Prerogative and the Law: *Measure for Measure*." *Shakespeare, The King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court 1603-1613*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1996.
- McGuire, Philip C. "*Measure for Measure*: 'A Little Brief Authority.'" *Shakespeare: The Jacobean Plays*. New York: St. Martin's, 1994.
- Shell, Marc. *The End of Kinship: 'Measure for Measure,' Incest, and the Ideal of Universal Siblinghood*. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins U P, 1988.

# **Othello**

## **Domestic Tragedy / Italianate Tragedy**

*Othello* is an early example of domestic tragedy, which departs from the Aristotelian formula involving the fall of leaders and the shaking of the state. Though he is a great general leading the forces of Venice, Othello's fall is concentrated in his personal life, and when he falls, the state simply replaces him with Cassio. The marked feature of this kind of tragedy is a greater emphasis on the intimate life of the hero rather than on the connection of the hero's life, conduct, and fortune to that of the nation.

The play also illustrates the vogue for Italianate tragedy, focusing on Machiavellian politics and on English ethnocentric prejudice regarding Italians and the renaissance city states of Italy: Italians were at once thought to be "super-subtle" and sophisticated, deceptive and cruel, the objects of English fascination and horror, as represented in tragedies such as John Webster's *The White Devil* or Ben Jonson's comic masterpiece, *Volpone*. Italian settings are also a significant feature of many romantic comedies and tragicomedies of the period, from *Much Ado About Nothing* to John Marston's *The Malcontent*. Most of these plays feature deception as a central motif, and the focus is often—though not always—on intimate familial conflict.

### **Aristotelian Features:**

1. Characters: two complex characters whose essential attributes are diametrically opposed: Othello and Iago. Desdemona and Emilia make up a second mismatched pair. Lesser but important characters include Cassio (an honest man) and Roderigo (a gull). The rest are generally present to advance the scene.
2. Plot: efficient, without much digression.
3. Diction:
  - <blank verse (noble characters and Iago when he's with Othello), couplets (Duke's pronouncements / Iago's banter), and prose (Iago in his conspiratorial role with Roderigo) to intimate social class and character.
  - <Tonic key via images of bestiality rel. to humans: Iago
  - <Iago's rhetorical ploys as a special stylistic characteristic; see especially 3.3, 4.1.
4. Thought: see "Themes" below note especially
5. Spectacle: the play develops several scenes with the tensions & threat of violence--swords drawn, etc. / firing of cannon at 2.1.55
  - <Note use of overlooking in 4.1
6. Song: drinking song in 2.3; musicians in 3.1; Desdemona's "willow" song in 4.3

### **Themes**

Honesty and the extent to which we can know others  
Honor as a code of ethics: its defects  
Trust: the "confidence man"  
The temptation and fall of man  
The nature and psychology of evil  
Racial stereotypes: the sexual nexus  
Sexual Politics: especially in Iago, Othello, Emilia

### **Use of Soliloquy and Aside to Foreground Iago**

By giving the audience access to the villain's mind as he plans his next move (and by presenting the objectified hero as valiant, forthright, loving, etc.—one worthy of our affections), the audience is placed in the helpless and knowing position of what is going to be done to snare the hero: we

are unwilling participants in a plot machine that slowly and surely destroys the one to whom we give our sympathies. This peculiar audience psychology, which is enhanced by the intensity of the poetry in all the crisis moments, is developed through the use of soliloquy and aside in which the villain often directly addresses us or hashes out the next steps of his plans. Note that here, as in *Richard III*, our access to the villain's mind is eliminated as the ramifications of his actions become apparent in the rush to climax:

- 1.3.383-404 (soliloquy): What Iago will do next—using Cassio to inflame Othello's jealousy.
- 2.1.167-78 (aside): Iago's plan to use Cassio's courteous behavior toward Desdemona as a means to enrage Othello.
- 2.1.199-201 (aside): "O, you are well tun'd now! But I'll set down the pegs . . ."
- 2.1.286-312 (soliloquy): his assertion that Othello has had Emilia in bed, and his desire to get even.
- 2.3.157-58 (aside to Roderigo): "go out and cry a mutiny."
- 3.1.335-62 (soliloquy): "What's he then that says I play the villain?"
- 3.1.382-88 (soliloquy): "Two things are to be done."
- 3.3.321-29 (soliloquy): "I will in Cassio's lodging lose this napkin"
- 4.1.93-103 (aside): "Now I will question Cassio of Bianca"

### Internal Cues as a Stylistic Feature:

This play features a pattern of characters stating (often unknowingly) the changes in their characters, plot cues, or lines that develop a reflexive irony:

- 1.1.65: Iago: "I am not what I am."
- 1.3.293: Brabantio: "She has deceiv'd her father, and may thee."
- 1.3.294: Othello: "My life upon her faith!"
- 2.3.204-05: Othello: "Now by heaven, my blood begins my safer guides to rule."
- 3.3.91-92: Othello: "When I love thee not, Chaos is come again."
- 3.3.206: Iago: "She did deceive her father, marrying you."
- 3.3.213: Othello: "I am bound to thee for ever."
- 3.3.347-48: Othello: "O now, for ever, farewell the tranquil mind!"
- 5.2.304: Iago: "from this time forth I never will speak word."

### Racist References in Othello

**Note:** Arthur L. Little, Jr. claims that in addition to its other themes, Othello "probes into his [Othello's] blackness" (305), yet the play also "is the text that will at once unsettle and fill in, substantiate and resolve what the audience suspects it already knows about the essence of blackness as the savage and libidinous Other" (305). In other words, the play explores the white racist anxiety over the stereotype of the sexually potent black male and his relationship to the white female: Little argues that "the scene of sexual intercourse between them [Othello and Desdemona] functions for the on- and offstage audiences alike, as the sexual site and sight of the play's racial anxieties" (306). While one should keep in mind that Othello is the play's hero and that the plot explores his undoing as a man who is noble, honorable and courageous, Little's claim may be substantiated as typical of the society of the play through the ways in which others see him. Almost the whole society in which Othello finds himself is racially biased against him; only Cassio, Montano, and Desdemona appreciate him for his inner qualities of courage and honor. The rest casually slander him for his physical qualities ("thick lips"), the above noted stereotype of his sexual prowess as a black man ("an old black ram is tupping your white ewe"), the filthiness ("the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou") or demonic qualities ("you the blacker devil") Europeans associated with his blackness. Further, he is often defined by his race/ethnic identity as "Moor," or "the Moor," effacing all his other qualities in the racial identification which

tags him as "Other." Finally, Iago deliberately plays the "race card" to get Roderigo to do his bidding. Shakespeare, of course, may have another agenda: representing the stereotype in order to expose it. If we accept the view that he is merely exploiting the stereotype, we buy into Iago's view of the Moor and miss the fact that Othello is the hero, the focus of the tragedy. Breakdown by character:

**Othello** (he seems to have absorbed racist definitions of himself):

3.3.263-65: "Haply, for I am black, and have not those soft parts of conversation that chamberers have"

**Iago:**

1.1.88-89: "an old black ram is tupping your white ewe"

1.1.115-17: "your daughter and the Moor are now making the beast with two backs."

<note Iago's general associations of Othello with animals and their sexual functions.

1.1.122-26: "your daughter . . . transported . . . to the gross clasps of a lascivious Moor"

1.3.346-47, 355-56: "these Moors are changeable in their wills" and Othello as "an erring barbarian"

2.1.225-26: "her eye must be fed; and what delight shall she have to look on the devil?"

2.1.226-35: good qualities "the Moor is defective in," leading Desdemona's "very nature" to "compel her to some second choice."

2.1.295: "the lusty Moor"

**Roderigo:**

1.1.66: "what a full fortune does the thick-lips owe"

**Brabantio:**

1.2.70-71: his daughter would never run "to the sooty bosom of such a thing as thou."

1.3.98: "to fall in love with what she fear'd to look on!"

**The Duke:**

1.3.289-90: "if virtue no delighted beauty lack, your son-in-law is far more fair than black"

**Emilia:**

5.2.130-31: "O, the more angel she, and you the blacker devil!"

5.2.160-61: "this deed of thine is no more worthy heaven than thou wast worthy her."

5.2.225: "O thou dull Moor"

### **Othello's Character**

Othello has made one serious breach of contemporary courting etiquette: in marrying Desdemona without consulting her father, he has thumbed his nose at Brabantio's fatherly check on his daughter possibly making a rash love choice. Othello is a great general, respected for his prowess in the field and hired by Venice to defend them against the Turkish threat. In his capacity as general, he claims that he is not good at civilized eloquence, yet he is in some ways defined by eloquent speeches in moments of high emotional intensity (his defense of his marriage in 1.2 and his death speech in 5.2). He may have a high opinion of himself, as in 1.2.30-32: "I must be found. My parts, my title, and my perfect soul shall manifest me rightly." Yet this may also be a sign of his forthrightness and honesty. His inner calm and command define him when others are full of passionate intensity, but when Iago cracks him open with jealousy, he is unable to control

the new emotions—jealousy, rage, fear of betrayal—that overwhelm him. He is also superstitious and has a form of epilepsy, yet his major character flaw seems to be an inability to perceive which of those under him are truly loyal to him: his references to the honesty of Iago (combined with Iago's own subtle use of psychological manipulation) are numerous, as below.

#### **Othello's references to the "honesty of Iago":**

<Note Iago's "I am not what I am" (1.1.65) / see also 1.3.399-402

1.3.284: "a man he is of honesty and trust"

2.3.5: "Iago is most honest"

2.3.177: "Honest Iago"

2.3.247: "Thy honesty and love doth mince this matter"

3.3.118: "I know thou art full of love and honesty"

3.3.258: "This fellow's of exceeding honesty"

5.1.31: "O brave Iago, honest and just"

5.2.148: "An honest man he is"

5.2.154: "honest, honest Iago"

#### **Othello as reported by others:**

Iago: (1. 399-402) "the Moor is of a free and open nature, that thinks men honest that but seem to be so, and will be as tenderly led by th' nose as asses are."

Montano: (2.1.35-36) "I have serv'd him, and the man commands like a full soldier."

### **Iago**

Iago is often compared to the devil, and there is a demonic element that defines him. He is primarily interesting for his subtle use of words and contexts ("reverse psychology"--the power of suggestion and of limiting another's access to the full context of an event), but contrary to Coleridge's claim that he is a "motiveless malignity," he has at least two motivations for wanting to destroy his boss:

1. Overlooked for promotion: 1.1.7-33, 41-65
2. Rumor that Othello has had sex with Emilia: 1.3.386-88, 2.1.295-99, and later in 4.2.145-47. (How seriously does he take this rumor? Can we tell?)

<Note his use of sexual imagery to arouse others: with Brabantio, he uses the images of his daughter "making the beast with two backs"; with Othello, he awakens his fears by talking of Cassio throwing his leg over him while talking of Desdemona in his sleep, or suggesting that she lies "naked with her friend in bed an hour, or more, not meaning any harm" (4.1.3-4) and that Cassio lies "with her, on her, what you will" (4.1.34).

### **Desdemona**

#### **<First: deception in marrying Othello without consulting her father?**

1.3.180-89: Her defense of Othello to her father and the assembled court

1.3.248-59: Her request to accompany Othello to Cyprus

2.1.113-64: Her defense of Emilia / wit combat with Iago

3.3.1-89: Her interview with Cassio and defense of Cassio to Othello

3.4.25-end: Missing the handkerchief / Accused by Othello of whoredom / defense of Cassio

4.1.232-60: Defending Cassio / Slapped by Othello / dismisses herself rather than offend him

4.2.24-171: Accused and abused by Othello / "comforted" by Iago

- 4.3 (entire): Her premonitions of death / Willow song / confusion over Othello's behavior and about the question of fidelity
- 5.2.1-125: Her defense of herself to Othello and his murdering her / her final words claiming she died "a guiltless death" and that "nobody; I myself" killed her.

### Emilia

**<First: a "simple bawd"? Note her pattern of assertiveness.**

- 2.1.96-112: Abused by Iago / after this, Desdemona takes up her defense.
- 3.1.41-55: helping Cassio get interview with Desdemona
- 3.3.1-89: With Desdemona during Cassio's interview
- 3.3.278-320: Stealing the handkerchief for Iago (for his affection?)
- 3.4.23-31: Desdemona misses the handkerchief / Emilia feigns ignorance and suggests that Othello is jealous.
- 3.4.99-105: "'Tis but a year or so shows us a man. They are all but stomachs"
- 3.4.155-61: She sees jealousy in men as "a monster begot upon itself"
- 4.2.1-19: Interview with Othello: she defends Desdemona
- 4.2.95-171: Consoling Desdemona and damning the villain that spread lies about her (with Iago present)
- 4.3.11-end: Her defense of women and excuses for adultery
- 5.1.111-23: Learning of the attack on Cassio / damning Bianca as a strumpet
- 5.2.84-167: Discovering the murder of Desdemona / standing up to Othello
- 5.2.176-235: Standing up to Iago, and being killed by him

### Cassio

**<Named as Othello's new second-in-command (Iago: 1.1.19-30)**

- 2.1.43-166: Arrival in Cyprus; courteous toward Desdemona
- 2.3.12-163: Iago unsuccessfully tries to awaken his lust for Desdemona, then gets him drunk and, when Roderigo attacks him, Cassio beats Roderigo.
- 2.3.165-249: Cassio is cashiered for bad behavior.
- 2.3.259-335: Iago convinces Cassio to sue for reinstatement with the help of Desdemona.
- 3.1.30-55: Cassio requests an interview with Desdemona.
- 3.3.1-34: His interview with Desdemona / her oath to help him.
- 3.4.106-201: A second interview with Desdemona, Iago present / Bianca enters and is angered at his request to work on the handkerchief.
- 4.1.47-169: Jests with Iago re Bianca, unaware that Othello is overhearing and thinking Cassio is talking about Desdemona.
- 5.1.23-104: Attacked and wounded by Roderigo / Bianca enters and worries about him, and Iago throws suspicion on her.
- 5.2.299-332: Othello asks for and gets Cassio's pardon; Lodovico appoints Cassio the new governor in Cyprus.

### Roderigo (a gull)

- 1.1: Iago gets him to wake Brabantio and, with a little help, accuse Othello of making off with Desdemona.
- 1.3.301-82: Despairs of ever having Desdemona—Iago bucks him up and says "put money in thy purse."
- 2.1.213-85: Iago convinces him to help destroy Cassio (to clear the way for his suit of Desdemona once both Othello and Cassio are out of the way).
- 2.3.144ff: After attacking Cassio, Roderigo is beaten and chased off.

- 2.3.363-382: Iago convinces Roderigo that his actions have achieved their goal—cashiering Cassio.
- 4.2.173-245: Roderigo is angered that Iago has taken all his money and there's nothing to show for it; Iago turns and persuades him to help kill Cassio.
- 5.1.23-62: Roderigo attacks Cassio, is wounded; before he can talk, he is killed by Iago.

### Some Sources

- Bartholomy, Anthony Gerard. *Black Face Maligned Race: The Representation of Blacks in English Drama from Shakespeare to Southerne*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State U P, 1987. [Chap. 5 "Ethiops Washed White" deals w. Othello]
- D'Amico, Jack. *The Moor in English Renaissance Drama*. Tampa: U of Southern Florida, 1991.
- Jones, Eldred. *Othello's Countrymen: The African in English Renaissance Drama*. London: Oxford, 1965. [PR658 .A4 J6]
- Little, Jr., Arthur L. "'An essence that's not seen': The Primal Scene of Racism in Othello." *Shakespeare Quarterly* 44.3 (Fall, 1993): 304-24.
- Loomba, Ania. *Gender, Race, Renaissance Drama*. Manchester U P, 1983. [John Cooper: authors, texts, specific characters, authorial and social attitudes, "even a proposed explanation behind the racist and sexist attitudes"; especially helpful for its discussion of Othello]
- MacDonald, Joyce Green. *Race, Ethnicity, and Power in the Renaissance*. London: Associated U Presses, 1997.
- Tokson, Eliot H. *The Popular Image of the Black Man in English Drama 1550-1688*. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1982.

## *King Lear*

### **A world in dissolution: "things fall apart; the center cannot hold"**

Bradley calls *King Lear* Shakespeare's greatest play as text, but not so in terms of performability. It demands an enormous range of emotions from many of the players, and many feel that it is not well-paced for performance; it *has* been a popular offering ever since World War II, when the play's central theme of a world shaken to its core resonated directly with the experiences of populations across the world. The role of Lear is particularly challenging, given that the actor must be aging (Lear himself is 80), and must represent the opening stages of senility and yet be as vigorous a presence as a young, powerful man. Occasionally, a veteran actor rises to the challenge of the role, and when this kind of magic happens onstage, audiences experience tragedy in a most transcendent way: this is indeed *powerful* art. In addition, the play's poetry is perhaps unrivalled.

- **Language keys:**

- a. **NATURE** (a variety of meanings, depending on context and who's using the term)
- b. **metaphors & figures of SIGHT / BLINDNESS**
- c. **THE WHEEL OF FORTUNE**
- d. **ANIMAL IMAGES and ALLUSIONS (see 1301)**
- e. **the word "NOTHING,"** which resonates in many different ways in the play.

- **PARALLEL PLOTS: THE LEAR PLOT and THE GLOUCESTER PLOT**

<Joined via **Edmund and Edgar**, who as villain and hero connect all the play's energies and ultimately embroil all the major characters in their final battle.

<the play is, in some sense, **a play about family and the stresses between generations**, not only in terms of the rising and ambitious young and their needs to take and exert power in the world, but about the difficulties of letting go of that power as one ages.

<the generational theme also plays on the business of **trust** and the lack of it, on the question of **wills and inheritances**, and on the problem of **understanding the characters of one's children** as they grow up and mature.

<**PLOT CAN ALSO BE APPROACHED VIA "GOOD" CHARACTERS AS A GROUP AND "BAD" CHARACTERS AS A GROUP:** the good are isolated as the bad rise and come together; the good come together as the bad fall apart.

### **HERO: LEAR? EDGAR?**

- **LEAR'S TRAJECTORY: a Job character, but also an aged Solomon in his grandeur and decline (see Bloom 477-79)**

Note that however unlovable he may be, Lear is loved and followed willingly by Cordelia, Kent, the Fool, Edgar, and Gloucester—all of whom see more in him than the raging or senile father the villains would make of him.

Lear (with Gloucester) is the focal point of the question of suffering—how much a man must endure, & what meaning his life may have in the face of that suffering.

**Arc:**

1. Initial dream: to shake his cares from his age
2. Inability to let go of power even as he attempts to do so
3. gradual realization that not only is power out of his hands, but that he is betrayed.
4. madness (contending with winds, prosecution of "Regan" (3.6), talk with Mad Tom, etc.)
5. Recognition of Gloucester (& shared sense of loss)
6. Begging forgiveness re his foolishness re Cordelia & Kent.
7. Taken prisoner (return of dream of shaking cares) (1339)
8. Final heartbreak: death of Cordelia-> his heart cracks & he dies.

• **EDGAR'S TRAJECTORY**

1. **The honest man trapped by his brother** (variation on Cain and Abel theme).
2. **disguise:** adopting the guise of madness / the visible form of self-abnegation ("I Edgar nothing am") replaced by the avenging hero.
3. **parallel to Kent:** caring for his father (who mistakenly hates him) even as Kent cares for Lear (who has banished him)
4. **Agent of resolution:** challenging Edmund, defense of honor, apparently in charge at end.

**Other Key Characters**

• **VILLAIN: EDMUND**

1. NOTE HIS **LANGUAGE OF NATURE** (AND LEAR'S): What does nature mean in each case?
2. **Overreacher:** first he wants his brother's place, to supplant his father; but he quickly plays on the interest of Regan and Goneril to aim at the kingdom itself. Bloom says he's as devious as Iago, but is less a chance-taker, more a strategic thinker.
3. **Machiavel:** note intrigue, using any means.

• **KENT: Honesty, Loyalty, Forthrightness—a man who would risk his life for Lear.**

1. **Parallel to Cordelia (honesty) and to Edgar (caring for Lear as Edgar cares for Gloucester).**
2. **Disguise:** clever, even assumes a different persona, but his temper / honesty still come out.
3. **Agent of exposure:** Kent's beating of Oswald gets him in trouble with Cornwall, which forces Lear to face the fact that Regan and Goneril have stripped him of all his powers. Similarly, his being thrown in the stocks makes Lear aware that Regan and Cornwall are not merely sleeping, but that something more sinister is going on.
4. **Bi-play with Fool during Lear's madness:** their exchanges and commentary are one of the means by which we may measure Lear's condition and feel sympathy for it.
5. **Depth of his feeling:** soliloquy ending 2.2 (1317), attending Lear in recovery 4.7 (1337), following Lear to his death 5.3 (1343)

- **FOOL: THE WISEST OF SHAKESPEARE'S FOOLS**—but pay attention to how he grows increasingly desperate in his need to save his king.

- **CORDELIA:**

1. Shares forthrightness of Kent, but is otherwise the least complicated of the characters.
2. Her marriage to France forms a **frame tale**: she leaves at the beginning and returns at the end.

- **OTHER CHARACTERS:** Regan, Cornwall; Goneril, Albany; Oswald; "single-note" characters differentiated largely through their roles and through contrasts with another character.

### **Some Important Points of Focus**

- **SOLILOQUIES AS MEASURE OF FOREGROUNDING A CHARACTER (AGAIN):**

1307	1.2	Edmund (beginning)	"Thou nature art my goddess"
1308		Edmund (middle)	"This is the excellent foppery of the world"
1309		Edmund (end)	"A credulous father and a brother noble,"
1309	1.4	Kent (beginning)	"If but as well I other accents borrow"
1314	2.1	Edmund	"The Duke be here tonight?"
1317	2.2	Kent (end)	"Fortune, good night, smile once more, turn thy wheel"
1317	2.3	Edgar (total scene)	"Edgar I nothing am"
1323	3.2	Fool (end—storm)	"This is a brave night to cool a courtezan."
1323	3.3	Edmund (end)	"This courtesy . . . shall the Duke instantly know"
1327	3.6	Edgar (end)	"When we our betters see bearing our woes"
1329	4.1	Edgar (beginning)	"Yet better thus, and known to be contemned"
1338	5.1	Edmund (end)	"To both these sisters have I sworn my love,"

- **REGAN AND GONERIL WORK LEAR OVER (1320-21).**

- <difference in their MOs? in their personalities?
- <effect on Lear? stage of his awareness? (consider initial desire).

- **LEAR'S STORM SPEECHES (1322).**

- <special attention to "strike flat the thick rotundity of the world"
- <problem of actors spending too much energy evoking hysteria (and becoming hysterical) when in fact the actor must exercise extreme control in capturing what appears to be "out of control"

### **Lear and the Problem of Suffering**

In *Lear* (and *Macbeth*) Shakespeare seems to have plumbed the depths of the cruelty that a human being is capable of, yet there's a parallel theme of loyalty and kindness too often overlooked in analyses of the play.

A. C. Bradley believes that "man is not represented in these tragedies as the mere plaything of a blind or capricious power, suffering woes which have no relation to his character and actions; nor is the world represented as given over to darkness. And in these respects *King Lear*, though the most terrible of these works, does not differ in essence from the rest. . . . Its final and total result is one in which pity and terror, carried perhaps to the extreme limits of art, are so blended with a sense of law and beauty that we feel at last, not depression and much less despair, but a consciousness of greatness in pain, and of solemnity in the mystery we cannot fathom" (241).

## Other Approaches

**<CHRISTIAN APPROACH:** Lear's and Cordelia's deaths as "crucifixion," and "the whole actions as a broadly allegorical account of the human soul purged by suffering" (Salgado 13). See 4.4. 23-24 (1332); 5.3.8ff (1339)—"redemptive."

**<HUMANIST APPROACH:** "Lear's long agony as a necessary process in his moral education, and Cordelia as the embodiment of a purely human "combination of integrity and charity" (14). G. K. Hunter claims "at the beginning of the play he is incapable of disinterested love, for he uses the love of others to minister to his own egotism. His prolonged agony and his utter loss of everything free his heart from the bondage of selfhood. He unlearns hatred, and learns love and humility. He loses the world and gains his own soul" (Salgado 14).

**<PSYCHOANALYTIC APPROACH:** Freud thought the play is "about the need to renounce authority and make friends with the necessity of dying" (Salgado 15), but his interest lay more in Hamlet than in Lear, as the latter seemed more archetypally structured and less ripe for psychoanalysis. See Rosenberg, following these summaries.

**<ABSURDIST APPROACH:** (from Jan Kott, "King Lear, or Endgame" in *Shakespeare Our Contemporary*). The play "shows us a tragic hero who is unaware that he inhabits the world of the grotesque: a Job whose sufferings are unredeemed by the existence of a finally omniscient and loving God" and "which dramatizes the absence of meaning in life and the world" (Salgado 16)

**Salgado claims that** "the death of Cordelia subverts almost all our expectations of tragic illumination, and his suffering of 'educative' or redemptive power. It casts the shadow of an enormous question mark on the conception of tragedy as an affirmation of life against evil and suffering, and with it on the existence of any intelligible moral order" (39).

**Jonathan Dollimore** claims that an "extreme stultification" is "working at the very heart of existence" in many tragedies of the era. "Time and again we encounter the idea of individuals and society being destroyed from *within*. The declaration in *King Lear* that 'humanity must perforce prey on itself' (V.ii.49) is just one instance of an idea which, in some plays, becomes a principle of their very structure. Often this involves a regressive pessimism which resembles the familiar tradition of *contemptus mundi*; now however it seems more desperate and characterised by *anomie* because lacking that tradition's compensating faith in the eternal" (21).

**Harold Bloom's** more assertive version of the absurdist approach claims that "everything about the tragedy of Lear is painful. . . . We do . . . wrong to speak of Lear's own permutations as being redemptive; there can be no regeneration when Love itself becomes identical with pain. Every attempt to mitigate the darkness of the work is an involuntary critical lie" (484-85)

## A Psychoanalytic Approach to *King Lear*

from Rosenberg, Marvin. "The Lear Myth." *The Masks of King Lear*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California, 1972: 329-335.

If we strip away the dress of language and thought in *Lear*, its key fantasy is seen to be similar [to folktales such as the Chinese story about a king with two treacherous daughters and one who, though dismissed, returns to save him]; as to occur not once, but twice. As in all folktales of this pattern, there are two main components: First, a father—often seeking the affection of his daughters—rejects the true love of a good child, and mistakenly favors bad ones; the good

child at first suffers in silence, while the father is severely punished for his error, and learns to be sorry he was so wrong. Second, the good child saves him from his pain and sorrow; he begs forgiveness, and the good child grants it.

Once we recognize this fantasy, we can easily enough trace it—from the child's point of view—to its source in human experience. It flourishes in infancy, though it does not end there. The child, insatiable for love and self-esteem, insistent on the role of the sole favorite, inevitably makes demands upon a parent that are rejected, because nobody can have—be—everything. The rejection often seems to be accompanied by a favoring of the child's rivals—brothers, sisters, the other parent. The child compensates in fantasy. The most daring dream is the *Oedipus* one. It provides, with little disguise, two satisfactions. The dreamer, wronged by the parent, murders him—though not intentionally, the daring is limited—and enjoys both the murder and an expiation through suffering. The *Lear* fantasy is more cunning; the parent suffers—dies—because he wrongs the dreamer, who himself may die, or at least endure noble martyrdom: for the suffering and death of the child dreamer is in the context the worst possible punishment for the father. (Freud found that children riven by feelings for—and against—their father often fantasized having been beaten by him.) The basic fantasy pattern is easily recognizable: Father wronged me. He'll be sorry. They'll all be sorry. Maybe I'll go away; and someday when he needs me, I'll come back and save him . . . Maybe I'll die . . . Then he'll be sorry.

This is a tenacious fantasy; grown men nurse variants of it, compensating for frustrated lives by dreaming of how their suffering will bring sorrow and retribution to the unappreciative around them. The theme sounds in some religious mythology, and reverberates in fairy tales and folklore. The innocent child-hero is almost always the youngest—for it is when we are youngest, when we have no other weapons to meet rejection, that we begin to arm ourselves with fantasy. The parent's blame—as in the story of Joseph and his brothers—may not be as conspicuous as the siblings', but he is partly responsible for any of the youngest's sufferings, and must be sorry. The child may sense abandonment from birth; hence the hero is frequently rejected as an infant; but later returns to punish the abandoning parent. This punitive impulse is as strong in the central fantasy of *Oedipus* as the more familiar Oedipal rivalry; it works less rigorously in a play like Euripides' *Ion*, where the parent is only symbolically killed; and it flowers into warm wish-fulfillments in the kind of ugly-duckling Cinderella tales where the least and most helpless turn out to be the most beautiful, the most powerful, the wisest, often divine or royal of birth. . . .

This generic fantasy seems most satisfying when it is complete with its second part: when, as in *Lear*, the parent who rejects the innocent child not only is made to realize, often through much suffering, how wrong he was, and is very, very sorry, but also is rescued by the child, and begs the child's forgiveness. . . . When the parents are in deep despair, the good, innocent children suddenly appear from somewhere and help their fathers to perceive the truth about their unjust behaviors. . . . The agony of Gloucester and Lear is accompanied by an interesting reversal of their roles, that grows from the central fantasy. Old fools are indeed babes again; the two old men are reduced to the naked, helpless state of infant dependency. Edgar, watching Lear disintegrate, says in a line that seems to look two ways, *He childed as I fathered*. Soon Edgar will be leading his father by the hand, caring for him, nursing him, the old man's only stay. Soon Cordelia will be mother and nurse to her *child-changed father*. The old men grieve for the errors they have made in mistaking their true children. Gloucester's son comes often into his mind. *Ah, dear son Edgar . . . If Edgar live, oh bless him*. Lear wakes from madness to find himself dressed in fresh clothes by his daughter, who gives him a tender kiss—and cannot forebear mentioning that she hopes it will repair the violent harms done him by her two sisters. The old king is now utterly helpless in his beloved daughter's arms. . . .

Lear has at last achieved his dearest wish—to spend his life in *her kind nursery*. He has had to pay a savage price both for what he has wished—to have her love—and for what he has done—rejected her love. Now the foolish, fond old man must beg his daughter's forgiveness; he is as humbled as a father may be.

But humility is not enough for Shakespeare. Mortality must be touched. In the earlier *Leir* play, the king lived on, as he would again in Nahum Tate's "poetically just" revision; and

Gloster's prototype lived on in the story from which Shakespeare took his subplot. But these are pale satisfactions. If the full force of the archetypal fantasy is to be evoked, the father must expiate his love for, and his rejection of, the good child to the uttermost limit. So Gloster must die, at the news of how good his rejected son has been to him. Edgar-Oedipus in fact kills his father, but in ambiguous guise: he tells his story too late, and Gloster's *flawed heart* bursts.

Lear's penitence must extend even further. Not only must he undergo his purgatorial punishment, sorrow, and repentance, not only beg for forgiveness and receive it; but now he must live long enough to see his good daughter die. This is the apex of the child's punishment dream: "I'll die, and he'll be sorry"; Lear's ultimate, inevitable punishment is his daughter's dying, which then kills him. . . .

I do not mean to suggest that Shakespeare consciously meant *Lear* to be the working out of this dream. But he did choose this story to adapt, and his adaptations are significant: particularly his deliberate doubling of the motif of father punishment, the increase of punishment to the ultimate death. Moreover, and this is perhaps the most important aspect of his artistic handling of the theme, the wronged child-hero recedes in importance; the emphasis is on the agony of the father for his guilt in siring the children, for his guilty wishes, for his folly—so much so that the focus on his suffering obscures the revenge outline of the play's structure. In Lear's depths—as in Gloster's—lie dark latencies that belong to old men: a *Laius* complex, we may call one, the impulse of the father to destroy his young child-rival; and beyond this—perhaps partly caused by it—the impulse to self-destruction. The reciprocation between child and father identities in Lear—and Gloster—is an important part of the dialectic of the play.

#### Works Cited

Bloom, Harold. *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Penguin Putnam / Riverhead, 1998.

Bradley, A. C. *Shakespearean Tragedy*. Third ed. Houndmills and London: Macmillan, 1992. [original ed. 1904].

Dollimore, Jonathan. *Radical Tragedy: Religion, Ideology and Power in the Drama of Shakespeare and his Contemporaries*. Second ed. Durham: Duke U P, 1993.

Rosenberg, Marvin. "The *Lear* Myth." *The Masks of King Lear*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London: U of California, 1972: 329-335.

Salgado, Gamini. *Text & Performance: King Lear*. Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1984.

# Macbeth

## Macbeth and Psychology

Many studies note the dual nature of Macbeth's psychology: the Machiavellian drive to power in his bloodthirsty ambition, coupled with an active conscience which carefully explores the ramifications of murdering Duncan (1.7.1-28) and which punishes him over and over again for the crimes he has committed. His psychology may be much more complicated than this contrary dualism, however. At times he exhibits rapid shifts in his mental state, as in the banquet scene, where the paranoid state brought on by the vision of Banquo's ghost suddenly shifts to a murderous suspiciousness brought on by the fact that "Macduff denies his person at our great bidding" (3.5.127-28), or in the first of two final meditations on his life, wherein his bullying of Seyton gives way to a quiet moment of realization that "my way of life is fall'n into the sere, the yellow leaf, and that which should accompany old age, as honour, love, obedience, troops of friends, I must not look to have" (5.3.23-27). His hallucination of the "air-drawn dagger" and the vision of Banquo's ghost may themselves be indicators of an advanced state of psychosis, an "abnormal mental state characterized by serious impairments . . . of higher brain functions," including "perception, cognition, cognitive processing, emotions or affect" which manifest themselves by "delusions, hallucinations, and significantly disorganized speech" ("Psychosis").

Lady Macbeth, too, shows signs of disturbed mental states: her obsession with hand washing in the sleepwalking scene has long been recognized as a symptom of obsessive-compulsive disorder, and as noted in class, she is obsessive even when we first meet her: planning out how she will manipulate her husband, then later presenting him with an already-developed plan on how to kill Duncan and throw blame on the grooms. She initially insists that she and her husband should "look like the innocent flower, but be the serpent under't" (1.5.63-64), and it could be fairly claimed that she is obsessive about hiding her true identity—though it turns out that the hidden part of her is not the "serpent," but a woman torn apart by her own complicity in the murders. We see the first intimations of this when, just before the murder of Duncan, she admits that "had he not resembled my father as he slept, I had done't" (2.2.12-13), and later, having attained the queen's crown, when she briefly opines,

Naught's had, all's spent,  
Where our desire is got without content.  
'Tis safer to be that which we destroy  
Than by destruction dwell in doubtful joy. (3.2.6-9)

Yet shortly after she whispers this admission to herself, she castigates Macbeth for his having voiced similar sentiments, stating that "things without all remedy should be without regard. What's done is done" (3.2.13-14).

Her passage is interesting, too, for the ways in which she is separated from the process of crime. First, Macbeth undertakes the murders of Banquo and Fleance without including her in the planning—she is no longer privy to his inner concerns—and we do not see her again until after the murders of Lady Macduff and her children. The stasis and solitude, combined with the horror at the murder of a woman and her children, seem to push her over the edge, where she exhibits her hand washing obsession, as well as a form of sleepwalking known as sleep terror disorder in which her overburdened subconscious mind emerges, reciting her crimes almost as a litany. Here we fully see the extent of what she has hidden and denied: her own conscience or, in Freudian terms, the superego she had been at pains to expunge earlier. She earlier claimed that she would have "dashed the brains out" of her own child (1.7.58), yet in the sleepwalking scene she laments the death of Macduff's wife (though, perhaps significantly, she does not mention Macduff's children) and sighs that "all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand" (5.1.42-43). Similarly, the spot of blood on her hands is the *sign* of the extent of her denial; when Duncan was killed, she had claimed "a little water clears us of this deed" (2.2.65). As noted in several classes, she is in major depression, one of the signs of which is a deep sense of guilt for one's actions, often accompanied by suicidal ideation. Lady Macbeth does not talk of killing

herself, but the doctor recognizes that she could do so when he orders the nurse to “remove from her the means of all annoyance, and still keep eyes on her” (5.1.66-67). The next time we hear of her, of course, is with the news that she has done just that.

The peculiarity of this twosome is that, despite her manipulateness in the opening scenes, they do seem to care for each other. She supports his thrust toward the crown, encourages him and supplies a plan, and attempts to stage-manage the perceptions of others when he loses his composure in the banquet scene. Later, when she has retreated into sleepwalking terror, he brings a doctor in to “cure” her; he does not cut her loose or shut her away. One might even speculate that, given the last time we see her, she is carrying a taper (a candle), there is added significance to the line, “out, out brief candle” in Macbeth’s final speech; once she is dead, life no longer has any meaning for him, but is “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing” (5.5.25-27). One is left, in this reading of their characters, with a feeling that this marriage is strangely a true bond between two people who love each other despite their corresponding mental impairments. Perhaps, indeed, they complement each other in their incapacities.

### Works Cited

“Psychosis.” *The APA Dictionary of Psychology*. Gary R. VandenBos, ed. Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 2007.

Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt et al. New York and London: Norton, 1997.

### Works Consulted

Holland, Norman. *Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 1964. [Holland’s analysis focuses primarily on oedipal conflict in Macbeth and on Lady Macbeth as a castrating woman or as a “mother” who projects Macbeth’s hostility against the king while bringing the tale to an “oral stage” wherein Macbeth can act out his oedipal fantasy. The essay concentrates on characters “as projections of psychological impulses rather than portraits of those impulses in real people” (230) and as such does not fully address the evidence of specific disorders within the context of the characters’ lives as portrayed.]

### Four Historical Cruces

from Alvin Kernan’s *Shakespeare, the King’s Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1995.

#### 1. The "line of kings that stretches out to the crack o' doom" (4.1.117)

The play dramatizes the Stuart Myth, a "mystical and legitimist version of Scottish history" (Norbrook, in Sharpe and Zwicker), that James had constructed and pushed as one part of his cult of divine right. He commissioned the drawing of an elaborate family tree going back to Banquo, and elsewhere he traced his line back to 330 B. C. and King Fergus, the first ruler of Scotland and reputed founder of the nation. The line supposedly continued through Duncan and his son Malcom Canmore, who was crowned at Scone in 1057, and on through the mythical Banquo, from whom the Stuarts claimed direct descent. (77)

**2. Equivocation as a current topic** [Father Garnet—Jesuit provincial executed in 1606 / see page 2010] The hot politico-intellectual topic of the day, "equivocation," was also picked up. In defending himself at his trial in March 1606, Father Garnet in his desperate circumstances had made use of the practice known technically as equivocation—saying something in a way that misleads the questioner but still avoids lying by stating in some obscure way the truth as the speaker

understands it. When caught out, Garnet defended equivocation as legitimate in cases where the need was great and the law unjust, which was certainly true for him. . . . Shakespeare too picked up the fashionable word and played with it in *Macbeth* in a grim and unsympathetic way. In the famous "knocking-at-the-gate" scene, the Porter lists among the other sinners knocking on the gate of Hell "an equivocator, that could swear in both the scales against either scale, who committed treason enough for God's sake, yet could not equivocate in heaven" (2.3.8-11). (76) [Cope Notes: the play is riddled with equivocation, centered on the language of the weird sisters from their opening "fair is foul and foul is fair" to the prophecies with which they delude Macbeth in 4.1. Their statements are often partially true, but each lacks an essential detail].

**3. The Political Use of Witchcraft, with a Nod to *Demonologie*** [See pages 1998, 2000, 2005, 2008] In a sensational case in Edinburgh in August 1593, a coven known as the Witches of Lothian . . . was charged with having conspired to keep James from returning from Denmark with his new bride, Anne, in 1590 . . . Under torture the witches revealed that they had practiced against the king's life as well. . . . a handkerchief of the king's was obtained and an image made which was passed to the Devil at a Witches' Sabbath with the ominous words, "This is King James the Sixth, ordained to be consumed at the instance of a nobleman, Francis Earl of Bothwell" (Watson) (85). . . . Witchcraft was just the hook to catch so popular and dangerous a man [as Francis Stuart, earl of Bothwell, a cousin who likely killed James' father and once had kidnapped James himself. The warlock Richard] Graham and the Witches of Lothian were not, most suspiciously, kept alive to appear as witnesses, but their forced confessions were used as the basis to try Bothwell for treason and witchcraft. . . . The record is quite clear: James made use of witchcraft to serve his political ends. His playwright transferred this device to the theater in *Macbeth*, whose witches are exactly like those James had described in *Demonologie* (86)

**4. The Absence of Cursing: The Increasing Influence of Puritans in Parliament** [See pages 2010-11]. The absence of swearing in the play indicates that it was either written or cleansed of profanity at some time after the Act to Restraint Abuses of Players was passed by Parliament on May 27, 1606. The act imposed a fine of 10 pounds on anyone who might "in any Stage play . . . jestingly or prophanely to speake or use the holy Name of God or of Christ Jesus, or of the Holy Ghoste or of the Trinitie, which are not to be spoken but with feare and reverence" (Chambers, 1923, IV, 338). (72)

### **A Machiavellian Critique of *Macbeth*: is he a true Machiavel?**

Quotes are from *The Prince*, by Niccolo Machiavelli. Trans. W. K. Marriott. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.

**Concerning those who have obtained a principality by wickedness:** . . . In seizing a state, the usurper ought to examine closely into all those injuries which it is necessary for him to inflict, and to do them all at one stroke so as not to have to repeat them daily; and thus by not unsettling men he will be able to reassure them, and win them to himself by benefits. He who does otherwise, either from timidity or evil advice, is always compelled to keep the knife in his hand; neither can he rely on his subjects, nor can they attach themselves to him, owing to their continued and repeated wrongs. For injuries ought to be done all at one time, so that, being tasted less, they offend less; benefits ought to be given little by little, so that the flavour of them may last longer. (14)

**Concerning cruelty and clemency, and whether it is better to be loved than feared:** . . . Every prince ought to desire to be considered clement and not cruel. Nevertheless, he ought to take care not to misuse this clemency. Cesare Borgia was considered cruel; notwithstanding, his cruelty reconciled the Romagna, unified it, and restored it to peace and loyalty. And if this be rightly considered, he will be seen to have been much more merciful than the Florentine people, who, to avoid a reputation for cruelty, permitted Pistoia to be destroyed. Therefore a prince, so

long as he keeps his subjects united and loyal, ought not to mind the reproach of cruelty; because with a few examples he will be more merciful than those who, through too much mercy, allow disorders to arise, from which follow murders or robberies; for these are wont to injure the whole people, whilst those executions which originate with a prince offend the individual only (23). . . This is to be asserted in general of men, that they are ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous, and as long as you succeed they are yours entirely; they will offer you their blood, property, life, and children . . . when the need is far distant; but when it approaches they turn against you. And that prince who, relying entirely on their promises, has neglected other precautions, is ruined; because friendships that are obtained by payments, and not by greatness or nobility of mind, may indeed be earned, but they are not secured, and in time of need cannot be relied upon; and men have less scruple in offending one who is beloved than one who is feared, for love is preserved by the link of obligation which, owing to the baseness of men, is broken at every opportunity for their advantage; but fear preserves you by a dread of punishment which never fails.

Nevertheless a prince ought to inspire fear in such a way that, if he does not win love, he avoids hatred; because he can endure very well being feared whilst he is not hated, which will always be as long as he abstains from the property of his citizens and subjects and from their women. (24)

## Thematic Analogues: Devils, The Theme of Evil and Its Effects on the Soul

### Some Other Plays Dealing With These Themes:

<**Christopher Marlowe's *Dr. Faustus***: the newly graduated doctor of theology sells his soul to the Devil and his minion, Mephistophilis, for 24 years of living "in all voluptuousness" (1.3.92), after which the devils drag him off to hell.

<***Hamlet***: Hamlet's fear that the ghost may be a devil who has assumed "a pleasing shape" and "abuses me to damn me" (2.2.600, 603) leads him to test Claudius' guilt with the mousetrap play. Claudius is guilty, but one is left wondering how a "blessed" ghost could incite the young man to revenge: a troubling paradox of the resolution, given that the revenge ends in chaos and death for so many.

<**Ben Jonson's *The Devil is an Ass*** treats the theme of damnation comically: the fool Fitzdottrel is swindled by Meercraft, a "projector" who cons him out of his money with a variety of schemes, promising him he'll be duke of Drowndland once he completes land reclamation. In the course of Fitzdottrel's foolish arc (which also involves his insane jealousy against his wife), he hires Pug, a pint-sized devil whom Satan has allowed to try his hand at catching souls; the humans about him are so wicked that he returns to hell, baffled.

<**Thomas Middleton's *The Witch*** (1616) involves the revenge of the duchess Rosamond, who is forced by her husband to drink a health from a cup made from her father's skull. In developing her revenge, she gets help from the witch Hecate, whose portrayal has been compared with the witches in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. See 3.5, a "probably spurious" scene, and the song "Come away, come away, Hecat"—found both in Middleton's play and in 3.5.34.

## Two Major Themes / Crossing Patterns

1. **Shakespeare's study of the effects of guilt on a man's conscience** (like Dostoevski's *Crime and Punishment*—the corrosive effects of acting on one's worst impulses)

## 2. The theme of free will and the nature of evil:

**Dramatic problem:** if the witches control Macbeth—if he is demon-possessed, there is no true tragic agony in the play—the ending is a foregone conclusion. For this play to work, Macbeth must act of his own free will. The witches may influence him by calling up suggestions already present in his mind, but his choices must be his own.

### Stages by which he's hooked in:

- a. Prophecy of witches—perhaps not taken seriously.
  - b. Given Cawdor ("what, can the devil speak true?"—yet "chance may crown me")
  - c. Malcom is established as king-to-be ("a step over which I must leap")
  - d. Horrified by his ambition—thinks to back off, but his Lady drives him to it.
  - e. The air-drawn dagger
  - f. The murder of Duncan
  - g. Conscience begins to work overtime / ambitions connect with fears of those who might oppose him—first Banquo and Fleance, then Macduff.
- **Mac & Lady Mac: crossing patterns [Note those speeches (1.7.28-82) which develop the psychological dynamic of their marriage.]:** note that she is the stronger of the two as the play begins, but once the effects of their actions begin to play upon their consciences, her trajectory is a descent into madness, while he gathers strength and power even as he alienates himself from those around him and from his own conscience.

## A Trove of Horror Techniques

### a. Spectacle:

1. the weird sisters
2. hallucinations: the air-drawn dagger, the ghost of Banquo, 4.1 the parade of apparitions

### b. Soliloquy and aside: interior struggles of both Macbeth and Lady M

#### 1. Macbeth: 6 SOLILOQUIES / 5 ASIDES

- a. Aside (1.3.130-44): "this supernatural soliciting"
- b. Aside (1.4.148-53): "That is a step"
- c. Soliloquy (1.7.1-28): "I have no spur"
- d. Soliloquy (2.1.33-64): the dagger
- e. Soliloquy (2.2.54-60): "when every noise appalls me"
- f. Soliloquy (3.1.47-71): "Our fears in Banquo"
- g. Aside (4.1.144-55): "The castle of Macduff I will surprise"
- h. Aside as to himself (5.3.19-29) "I must not look to have. . ."
- i. As to himself (5.5.17-28) "Out, out, brief candle"
- j. Soliloquy (5.7.1-4) "Bear-like I must fight the course"
- k. Soliloquy (5.8.1-3) "Why should I play the Roman fool?"

#### 2. Lady Macbeth: (4 SOLILOQUIES / 1 "UNCONSCIOUS CONFESSION")

- a. Soliloquy (1.5.1-30) "Hie thee hither"
- b. Soliloquy (1.5.38-54) "Unsex me here"
- c. Soliloquy (2.2.1-7) "That which hath made them drunk hath made me bold"
- d. Soliloquy (3.2.4-7) "Nought's had, all's spent"
- e. MAD scene: Unconscious confession (5.1.35-40, 42-45, 50-52, 62-64, 66-68)

**c. Images, Visual and Oral:**

1. **Blood:** dagger, washing, ghost, confession, etc.
2. **"blackness"** (much of the play happens at night—see images of 2.5)
3. **light** (torch—Banquo going to bed, doctor watching Lady M, "light thickens")
3. **time:** the inexorable—destroyer, redeemer (see Riverside intro 1358) present/future. See also(1.5.57-58); bank and shoal of time (1.7.6); recorded time (5.5.21); the time is free (5.9.21)
4. **"signs"** (chimneys blown down, "strange screams of death," falcon killed by owl, horses eating each other.
5. **abrupt noises:** owl shriek, bell, knocking
6. **animals:** raven, serpent, owl, crow, wolf, dogs, scorpions, beetle, many animals, vulture.
7. **fire, smoke, fume,** etc.

**d. The multiple deaths—attack on a king, an honest friend, a wife & kids, suicide of Lady M. <peculiar psychology of killing children? Does it elicit a certain kind of response in us?**

• **Major characters, counters to Macbeth: Banquo, Macduff, Malcom NOTE THAT NONE OF THESE IS WITHOUT FAULTS**

**a. Banquo: develops the moral center contrasting to Macbeth in early part of play:**

1. 1.2 his bravery (with Macbeth)
2. 1.3.51-61 interest in witches' prophecies—not immune
3. 2.1.7-9 "Merciful powers, restrain in me . . ."
4. 2.1.26-27 "So I lose none [honor] in seeking to augment it"
5. 2.3.130 "In the great hand of God I stand"
6. 3.1.2-3 "I fear thou play'd most foully for it"
7. 3.3.17 "Fly, good Fleance, fly!"

**b. Macduff: suspects Macbeth from the beginning; his wife killed, his heroism is penance:**

1. 2.3.107 discovers the murder--questions Macbeth's killing of the grooms: "wherefore did you so?"
2. 2.4.36 "No, cousin, I'll to Fife"
3. 3.4 Macbeth notices he hasn't come to the banquet.
4. 4.1 Witches play on Macbeth's fear of Macduff.
5. 4.2 His wife and child slain.
6. 4.3 **Malcom tests Macduff** / Macduff learns his wife and children are slaughtered—blames himself, then resolves to kill Macbeth.
7. 5.7 "If thou beest slain . . . my wife and children's ghosts will haunt me still"
8. 5.8 "was from his mother's womb untimely ripped"

**c. Malcom: cagey son becomes a cagey leader: a tester of others.**

1. 1.4 Admires Cawdor's end—"nothing in his life became him like the leaving"
2. 1.4 Established as prince of Cumberland
3. 2.3 Separates from Donalbain and goes to England.
4. 4.3 Testing Macduff (note his inexperience re Macduff's sorrow)
5. 5.4 "Let every soldier hew him down a bough"
6. 5.9 Calling home exiled friends and inviting all to coronation.

- **Minor Characters: Rosse and The Commoners & Lords and their functions:**
  - a. **Rosse:**
    - a. Duncan's "go-fer" act 1
    - b. 2.4 Questioning Macduff / joining Macbeth
    - c. 3.3 Who's the third murderer?
    - d. 3.4 At the banquet, wanting Macbeth to come to his table
    - e. 4.2 Reassures Lady Macduff and exits just before the murderers enter.
    - f. 4.3 Joins Malcom and brings the news of Lady Macduff's death to Macduff
    - g. 5.9 Among those who hail Malcom
  - b. **Lords & Commoners:**
    - a. 2.2 the grooms as scapegoats / victims
    - b. 2.3 the porter—comic relief? unknowing presager?
    - c. 3.1 the murderers
    - d. 3.6 Lennox & Lord "onto" Macbeth (note sarcasm)
    - e. 5.1 the doctor: witness / equivocating to get away
    - f. 5.2 Scots lords all joined with Malcom & the English
    - g. 5.3 Servant mocked for bringing news of the English force
    - h. 5.4 Seyton brings news of Lady Macbeth's death / messenger brings news of Dunsinane
- **Difficult Scenes:**
  - 1. (1377-78) 4.1 parade of apparitions: how to make this believable?
  - 2. (1380-82) 4.3 first, reading Malcom's intentions / second, the problem of rapid tonal shifts for Macduff (terrific strain on the actor)
- **The resolution: how does Macbeth's continuing sensitivity (altering with his brusqueness and abuse of his underlings) affect the resolution?**
  - 1. 5.3 abuse of servant followed by sorrow at the way his life turned out (22-28), followed by sarcasm with the doctor.
  - 2. 5.5
    - a. Preparing for seige, yet inwardly lamenting that he's "supp'd full with horrors";
    - b. the news comes that his lady is dead, prompting his most famous speech (17-28),
    - c. followed by rage at servant bringing news of forest moving
    - d. **recognition** that he's sold his own soul—determination to fight to the end (41-51)
  - 3. 5.8 resolution (pride?)—challenge to Macduff.

## A Chronology for *Julius Caesar and Antony & Cleopatra*

- 106 BCE birth of Pompey the Great
- 100 BCE birth of Julius Caesar
- 83 BCE birth of Mark Antony
- 69 BCE birth of Cleopatra
- 63 BCE birth of Octavius
- 60 BCE **First Triumvirate:** Julius Caesar, Crassus, Pompey
- 58-51 BCE **Caesar's Gallic Wars**
- 51 BCE Cleopatra's joint rulership of Egypt with her brother, Ptolemy XIII.
- 50 BCE Pompey opposes Caesar's bid for second consulate.
- 49 BCE **Caesar crosses the Rubicon** and attacks Pompey.
- 49-48 BCE Caesar takes Spain, crosses to Greece, and fights two battles with Pompey, losing at **Dyrrhachium** and winning at **Pharsalus**.
- 48 BCE Civil War between Cleopatra and Ptolemy XIII / Pompey flees to Egypt, where he is assassinated by Ptolemy XIII.  
Caesar comes to Egypt, defeats Ptolemy XIII, and takes Cleopatra as his mistress. Cleopatra with Caesar in Anatolia, Thapsus, and Rome until 44 BCE.
- 46 BCE Julius returns to Rome with unprecedented quadruple triumph.
- 45 BCE Julius defeats Pompey's sons at Munda, Spain.
- 44 BCE Julius killed by Brutus, Cassius, et al on March 15.
- 43 BCE Octavius Caesar, newly adopted as Julius' heir, defeats Antony at **Mutina**; they are later reconciled and, with Lepidus, form **The Second Triumvirate**.
- 42 BCE **Philippi:** Antony and Octavius defeat Brutus and Cassius. Antony takes the East; Octavius takes the West, and Lepidus is in charge of North Africa.
- 41-40 BCE Sextus Pompeius revolts at sea; Antony dotes in Egypt.
- 40 BCE **Treaty of Brundisium:** Antony and Octavius treat, Lepidus is shunted aside, and Sextus Pompeius gets some concessions.  
Antony marries Octavia and is bound to Octavius.
- 39 BCE **Treaty of Misenum:** after more trouble with Sextus Pompeius, Antony and Octavius conclude a treaty with him.
- 38 BCE Sextus Pompeius makes war, destroying two fleets of Octavius; Antony's legate, Ventidius, defeats the Parthians.
- 37 BCE **Treaty of Tarentum** extends Triumvirate, trades forces in struggle against Sextus Pompeius.
- 36 BCE **Naulochus:** with Lepidus, Agrippa destroys Sextus Pompeius; Octavius strips Lepidus of his powers; Antony's expedition to Parthia fails.
- 34-33 BCE Dalmatian wars; Antony refuses to meet with Octavia, who wants to patch up his differences with her brother.
- 32 BCE Antony divorces Octavia; Octavius requires oath of allegiance and declares war on Egypt.
- 31 BCE **Actium:** 2 September.
- 30 BCE Antony and Cleopatra commit suicide.

## **Antony & Cleopatra: Relationships**

**Note:** In 1.5,29-34, when Cleopatra speaks of Pompey and Caesar, she refers to that older generation of Roman leaders, Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great—not to the Octavius and Sextus Pompeius of the play. See refs. to 48 BCE in chronology.

**Octavius Caesar:** the future Augustus Caesar, Octavius was the son of Julius Caesar's niece Atia and the senator Gaius Octavius; Julius's will named him as his adopted son.

**Sextus Pompeius:** the youngest son of Pompey the Great.

### **Octavius's Superior Power at Sea**

While Antony had been engaged against the Parthians or in Egypt, Octavius and Agrippa had the problem of subduing Sextus Pompeius, whose power was at sea: they had to build up their fleets (ref. 41-36 BCE in chronology). W. W. Tarn claims that "at Actium, after preliminary losses and after burning a number, he [Antony] had 170 [ships] only (exclusive of Cleopatra's 60) carrying 22,000 troops, about 130 per ship, a very high figure. Octavian had anything up to 400 ships, carrying about 35,000 troops" (497). Antony's ships were also larger and unwieldy, whereas Octavius's were lighter, designed for service rather than for display. Plutarch reports that:

Caesar was overjoyed to see them [Antony's fleet] move, and ordered his own right squadron to retire, that he might entice them out to sea as far as he could, his design being to sail round and round, and so with his light and well-manned galleys to attack these huge vessels, which their size and their want of men made slow to move and difficult to manage. When they engaged, there was no charging or striking of one ship by another, because Antony's, by reason of their great bulk, were incapable of the rapidity required to make the stroke effectual, and on the other side, Caesar's durst not charge head to head on Antony's which were all armed with solid masses and spikes of brass. . . so that engagement resembled a land fight, or, to speak yet more properly, the attack and defence of a fortified place; for there were always three or four vessels of Caesar's about one of Antony's, pressing them with spears, javelins, poles and several inventions of fire, which they flung among them, Antony's men using catapults also, to pour down missiles from wooden towers. . . .

But the fortune of the day was still undecided, and the battle equal, when on a sudden Cleopatra's sixty ships were seen hoisting sail and making out to sea in full flight, right through the ships that were engaged. . . . Here it was that Antony showed to all the world that he was no longer actuated by the thoughts and motives of a commander or a man, or indeed by his own judgment at all, and what was once said as a jest, that the soul of a lover lives in someone else's body, he proved to be a serious truth. For, as if he had been born part of her, and must move with her wheresoever she went, as soon as he saw her ship sailing away, he abandoned all that were fighting and spending their lives for him, and put himself aboard a galley of five banks of oars . . . to follow her that had so well begun his ruin and would hereafter accomplish it. (772)

### **Works Cited**

- Plutarch. *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*. Trans. John Dryden. Chicago and London: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.
- Tarn, W. W. "The Roman Navy." *A Companion to Latin Studies*. Third ed. Ed. Sir John Edwin Sandys. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1925.

## **Antony & Cleopatra**

### **Follow Major Trajectories and Important Interrelationships**

1. **Antony:** his struggle with his Roman duty and his desire for love and freedom from responsibility; his struggle with age and the changing of the times. **Recall Antony (1166 & 1168), and Antony & Octavius (1169-70), also page 1175.**
2. **Cleopatra:** her initial manipulations of Antony (nature of her love?); her fears of losing him (first Fulvia, then Octavia), her concerns with the political nature of her love and the kinds of moves she would have to make, depending on which power is nearest; her struggle with her own aging—note her returns in memory to earlier times; and her final decision to "stand by her man."
3. **Octavius:** Note the keenly honed political sense with which he cracks Antony open; the efficiency of his movement, his "Romanness," his deviousness. Does this character grow, or merely triumph? He is a typical "strategic thinker" in the mode of Hamlet's Fortinbras: does his victory represent a major Shakespearean political theme?
4. **Enobarbus:** a "soldier's soldier," Enobarbus not only has the measure of his boss, Antony, but is also his right-hand man. A misogynist, he develops that anti-feminist position regarding the mixing of love and war, considering Cleopatra and all she represents as harmful to the goal of victory. When he finally turns on his master, Antony sends his goods after him, shaming him to the point where he commits suicide.  
<Pay close attention to his personality as revealed during major negotiation, among officers and other soldiers: with Agrippa, Menas, etc. Each brings out a different side of his personality, and while he may be accused of having a "loose lip," he also shows an astute grasp of the political implications of the decisions of superiors.
5. **Other:**  
<**women in this play: Cleopatra, Fulvia, Octavia, Charmian, Iras.** Who are they, and to what extent do they display a variety of responses to male power?  
<**The soothsayer:** as descendant of *Macbeth's* witches or of *Richard III's* Margaret, does he function in a similar way?  
<**What to make of the many sexual references?** Cleopatra is the central focus here: is she the "whore of Egypt" as the Romans would make her, or is her open sexuality a sign of a more liberated mentality?

### **6. Dramatic Form:**

- <**The many scenes** cause a problem for stage representation: it's important to emphasize that these were editorial insertions, and that one scene flows into another on stage without a break.
- <**the problem of movement** from Rome to Egypt to Athens, etc.—straining the audience's ability to identify "where we are." Costumes can in some ways help alleviate this problem, or use of changing background (drape).
- <**Shakespeare was risking something** by placing prominent polarities (shifting scenes) to show contrast between Egypt (luxury) and Rome (discipline). He had to depict both in a stark contrast if the play was to work.
- <**Some of the same logistical circumstances as *Julius Caesar*:** he was using some of the best known figures from antiquity—and thus was retelling a "known" story whose outlines he'd have to follow..

## **7. Adapted from North's translation of Plutarch:**

**a. language:** some close paraphrase and near-quotation, though generally he reworks the Plutarchan descriptions into his own phrasing.

**b. condensation and rearrangement:** he greatly reduces Plutarch's descriptions of the Parthian campaign, the war against Sextus Pompeius, and condenses the battle of Actium and subsequent deaths of Antony and Cleopatra into a few days of continuous action. Some events or descriptions are also shifted around, as per Enobarbus' desertion, which occurs much earlier in Plutarch's account.

### **c. Characters:**

**<Antony:** his aquiline nose, similarity to Hercules (traditionally descended from Hercules); his vaunting, raillery, drinking, which made his army delight in him. In love affairs, his agreeability, as well as his good humor, lavishness with his friends, etc.

**<Fulvia:** though she's not seen in the play, her character is also drawn from Plutarch. She is "a woman not born for spinning or housewifery, nor one that could be content with ruling a private husband, but prepared to govern a first magistrate, or give orders to a commander-in-chief. So that Cleopatra had great obligations to her for having taught Antony to be so good a servant, he coming to her hands tame and broken into entire obedience to the commands of a mistress" (751).

**<Cleopatra:** her iniquity comes directly from Plutarch, who saw her as stifling and corrupting Antony's goodness and sound judgment. Plutarch also developed her psychological adroitness and subtleties of speech.

**<Enobarbus:** Shakespeare greatly fleshes out this character, who is mentioned in Plutarch for his desertion of Antony, Antony's subsequent sending of his "equipment with his friends and servants" to him, and his death (771).

<Note that Shakespeare has practically transposed Plutarch's description of Cleopatra's barge (Riverside 1391 and 1405) and put it into Enobarbus' mouth.

## **8. Some feminist interpretations:**

**<Irene Dash (1981)** sees Cleopatra as a "woman of genius" combining her sexual and political selves. She threatens those associated with patriarchy, yet Antony—like her—shifts back and forth between lover and political animal, unsure of his place. Dash sees Octavia as the stereotypical woman defined by men, while Cleopatra defines herself in her own terms, even at the moment of death linking her personal and public self. (Kolin 153)

**<Angela Pitt (1981)** believes Cleopatra is not presented with a fatal flaw; rather, she is a threat to Antony and Rome. She is promiscuous sexually and politically. It is only when Antony is dying that she musters her dignity and courage. While Antony's character deteriorates, Cleopatra's is strengthened. (Kolin 173)

**<Linda Bamber (1982)** sees Cleopatra as the Other with whom the hero or Self is confronted in tragedy: the Self (Antony) goes through phases from misogyny to connectedness. Bamber believes that Cleopatra defines herself and sees patriarchy as a threat to her identity: yet we never see her inner life or feel her suffering—she is a performer (Kolin 183).

<**Peter Erickson (1985)** believes the play's an experiment in the "reformulation of masculine identity in the context of sustainable androgynous heterosexuality" (144), presenting a Cleopatra who reverses and transcends tragic feminine stereotypes and an Antony who deliberately loosens male bonds. Yet they are unsuccessful in "fashioning a new, wholly positive model of relationship," evoking a "painfully divided response." (Kolin 270)

<**Roberta Hooks (1987)** thinks "the psychosis at the core of the play involves issues of differentiation from a maternal environment and the difficulties of maintaining an integrated, reality-oriented perspective" towards the beloved. Antony's vacillations reflect contrary desires for a maternal safe zone (Egypt) and autonomy (Rome); death for him is an extension of the transcendence/stability he's sought in Cleopatra—a recapturing of the pre-oedipal union. (Kolin 347)

### **9. Other Notes: Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great as Shadowy Presences:**

1. Cleopatra recalls JC & Pompey as memories, as less than Antony: 1.5.29-34, 66-75
2. Agrippa remembers how JC "ploughed her, and she cropped": 2.2.227-28
3. Menas believes Pompey would not have signed the treaty his son did: 2.7.82-83
4. Canidius recalls Pompey's loss to JC at Pharsalia: 3.7.31-32
5. Antony recalls Philippi--and Octavius's failure to act there 3.11.35-40

## Timon of Athens

Characterized by Rolf Soellner as "Shakespeare's pessimistic tragedy," *Timon of Athens* features a hero who is first profligate with his money—confusing the responses of others to his own generosity with true friendship—and who later becomes the quintessential misanthrope, rejecting even those who have stood by him in his decline. As Apemantus remarks, Timon is a man who never knew "the middle of humanity, . . . but the extremity of both ends" (4.3.300-01)—a remark that not only sums up the hero's arc, but goes to the problem at the heart of his character. Such a man must be so prodigal with his funds out of a deep and unacknowledged anxiety precisely because he expects friendship in return for his kindnesses. He deludes himself that he is loved to such an extent that his anxiety turns to deepest loathing when others do not respond as he had, and his loathing of humanity is so extreme and generalized that one guesses there must be more than ordinary anxiety over his popularity at work here. Yet Shakespeare does not delve into the roots of the hero's psychology, content merely to register its effects on himself and on those who visit him in the wilderness. As such, it is difficult to invest ourselves in his character; he is as much a deluded and hysterical buffoon as a tragic hero.

The primary plot has a mechanical structure to it, too, largely composed of intimate interviews framed by the two banquet scenes. *Timon* progresses like an overly structured exemplary fable, presenting four generous actions and a banquet with masque of Amazons in its opening scenes, following this with three creditors making claims against him (2.2), and three requests for help with refusals (3.1, 3.2, 3.3). The second half of Timon's trajectory is signaled by a second banquet, this time of water and curses (3.5); after this, the hero is interviewed six times in the wilderness, a regular procession including Alcibiades and two prostitutes, Apemantus, the bandits, and Flavius (4.3), followed by the Painter and Poet, and Flavius and the Senators (5.1). The play has a more intimate structure than is usual in Shakespeare's plays, leaving less room for metadramatic variation and thus risking a "sameness" that could be deadly on stage.

The dramatist does provide variation, however, through the secondary plot involving **Alcibiades**, whose mercurial presence can generate an interesting contrast to Timon, for unlike Timon, Alcibiades takes rejection proactively, marching against the corrupt city rather than retiring to a cave. Further, while Timon rejects all loyalties, Alcibiades is defined by his loyalty, though it is of a peculiar sort. When he is banished for defending a condemned man before the senate (3.5; Nuttall 72), he *turns against* his country; his loyalties are to men he believes worthy, such as the condemned man and Timon in disgrace, not to a corrupt polis. As such, his plot line parallels Timon's in that both have rejected the city as a whole, though their responses to those rejections are radically opposed.

A second level of variation comes with the choral character, the cynic philosopher, **Apemantus**, who is at once the comedic voice that bursts Timon's serious pretensions and the raisonneur whose presence provides us with a reasoned response to the hero's emotional extremes. He is, indeed, one who has sought Aristotle's golden mean—that center between the extremes of excess and deficiency represented by Timon, and yet Apemantus himself is somewhat tainted by his own cynicism.

A final variation comes in the character of **Flavius**, the loyal steward who tells Timon the truth when he would not hear it, bears the brunt of his anger, attempts to help him through his difficulties and, when Timon is at his lowest, comes to comfort him. He is the only character whom Timon recognizes as a good man, and yet even the honest steward is rejected in the end.

### Background: Historical Note

Though the political setting of *Timon* is not per se important to understanding its characters, there is an interesting parallel to Aristophanes' great comedy, *The Frogs* (405 BCE); this play was pointed in its political criticism, coming during a particularly divisive period of Athenian in-fighting.

Led by Phrynichus and Theramenes, the "Four Hundred Oligarchs" seized the government in 411 BCE, though the naval fleet remained faithful to the prior democracy, recalling the charismatic but untrustworthy leader Alcibiades from exile. Democracy was restored in 407 BCE, and Alcibiades—always a divisive figure—provisioned his ships and sailed away. Meanwhile, the Spartans attacked the rest of the Athenian fleet, which lost a major battle at Arginusae. Because of a storm, the Athenian commanders left the survivors of wrecked ships to die, and as a result were prosecuted for negligence by Archidemus and Theramenes. Amid this chaos and a consequent countersuit, the demagogue Cleophon stirred up factional strife and was killed; also, Athenian commanders who had not moved their fleets to a more favorable base were destroyed by the Spartan Lysander in the same year as *The Frogs* won the Lenaea. Like *The Frogs*, Shakespeare's *Timon* is marked by pointed disgust with the city's political leaders, but Shakespeare seems curiously more sympathetic to Alcibiades, seeing in him a general frustrated by the highhandedness of politicians rather than the overt political opportunist he truly was.

### Shakespearean Links

Like *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*, *Timon* displays an intense satire of a society crumbling from within: politically and ethically corrupt, both parasitically and venereally diseased, featuring these disorders as indicators of social degeneration. Like *King Lear*, *Timon* features a man driven mad by those he loves most, and indeed the hero displays "an excessive fury, . . . a near-madness that transcends Timon's outrage at ingratitude" (Bloom 589); yet there is nothing of the grandeur of Lear's fall, nor the psychological complexities developed through Lear's daughters: "Timon has no family connections" and is alone, a man with "no origins" (Bloom 589). *Timon* shares with its immediate predecessor, *Coriolanus*, a military hero who turns against his country, but Alcibiades's affections include prostitutes, not a mother, wife, and children.

### Motifs and Themes

- 1. Food and money:** always associated together. When Timon is flush with cash, he holds a lavish banquet; when he is destitute, he gives a banquet of water. At his lowest point, he digs for roots in the cave and finds gold, which he angrily throws away to whomever visits him.
- 2. Philosophy:** *Timon* presents several philosophical concepts, ranging from the Aristotelian mean to that cynicism of the school of Diogenes Laertius, which held that virtue could only be found in simplicity and that conventional social attitudes were despicable.
- 3. Satire:** Bloom regards the play as "somewhere between satire and farce," a work of "immense personal bitterness," especially "a fierce animus against sexual indulgence" (589). The play satirizes almost everyone in it: poets and painters, senators and curled darlings of the nation are all shown as self-serving parasites, and yet Timon's reaction when he learns this shows the comedic foolishness of the misanthrope. Alcibiades is shown as a politician given to switching loyalties when his will is flouted, and even the cynic Apemantus, though genial, ultimately does nothing to "right the balance" in a society rotting from within.
- 4. The Two epitaphs (5.4.69-73).** The first two lines are reported in Plutarch as written by Timon himself, while the second two are supposedly from the Greek poet Callimachus; Plutarch presents them both to show a contrast in how people perceived Timon, but Shakespeare presents them as though they are one, presenting the contradiction as Timon's own.

### References

- Bloom, Harold. "Timon of Athens." *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.
- Nuttall, A. D. *Timon of Athens*. Boston: Twayne, 1989.
- Soellner, Rolf. *Timon of Athens: Shakespeare's Pessimistic Tragedy*. Columbus: The Ohio State U P, 1979.

## *Cymbeline*

### Introduction: A British Romance

Alternately damned by critics for the contradictory aims of its various plot lines and praised for its metadramatic theatricality, *Cymbeline* is perhaps Shakespeare's most fertile play for psychoanalytic analysis, and yet this writer has not seen a satisfying study in that vein. It is, beyond the psychoanalytic mine of erotic impulse, death-instinct undercurrents, Jungian journeys and explorations of identity itself, a complex play involving intricate plot turns, court intrigues and horrifying passages, a battle and the descent of a god in the hero's dream. That hero is hardly the focal point, however: like so many of the comedies, the heroine of this tragicomic romance is the central figure in the first of its two plots, and the key to its second.

The first of these is the Imogen-Posthumus plot beginning in a loss of trust, leading to Imogen's journey in disguise and Posthumus's exposure and penance. Imogen is the last of Shakespeare's cross-dressed heroines, and her journey is, if anything, more harrowing, more fraught with deep irony, loss of control and reliance on a steely patience and faith in herself, than the arcs of Viola, Rosalind, or even Portia. She is, of course, vindicated, and yet the perils presented by the men in her life (from her angry father, her foolish husband and the vicious Iachimo, to the villainous Cloten, the would-be murderer Pisanio—whose change of heart gives her a slender thread of faith—and her good-willed yet violent brothers) are so complicated and difficult that she must emerge in some ways as the most tried-and-true of Shakespeare's heroines.

Imogen's passage is, on the face of it, typical of the plot structure of romantic comedy as outlined by Northrop Frye, in which the young lovers are thwarted by a blocking figure or figures, pass numerous trials and come out triumphant, with the blocking figures either reconciled or cast out. More closely, she is seemingly betrayed by all the important men in her life, and while she is a strong woman, the unexpected loyalty of Pisanio and the good-hearted welcome of Belarius, "Cadwal," and "Polydore" give her in the wilderness restore her faith. Even as she learns how to function in her new life, and despite the apparent violent death of Posthumus, her husband returns to Britain and must undergo penance for losing her while simultaneously deciding where his loyalties lie as the war unfolds. He does redeem himself, and her acceptance is the *sign* that he is indeed a new man.

The second plot features the larger story of Cymbeline's family, with the abduction of his two sons twenty years in the past and his recent marriage to his present queen. The abduction story features a noble and loyal exposition in which the sons instinctively care for their "brother" Fidele (Imogen in disguise), defending "him" against the villainous dullard, Cloten, and thus revealing a violent streak which augurs danger for their enemies. They are simultaneously "barbarians" living in a cave and royal in their rage. The war itself leads to exposure and recognition of the sons, who prove their worth in battle, and a difficult-to-believe forgiveness for Belarius. The queen, on the other hand, is apparently behind the deportation of Posthumus, and wants to legitimize her hold on the throne by marrying her son to Imogen. She is a social climber, a cutthroat who orders a box of poison and hopes to try it out on Pisanio, Posthumus's servant, to "send a message" to Posthumus himself. Later, after Imogen's flight, the death of her son, and as the war with Rome begins, she inexplicably goes mad, and disappears from the plot. It may be said that, in order for Cymbeline's family to be restored, his queen must die and there must be a war, for these are the ways he will be extricated from her ambitious grip and restored to his sons.

Imogen's triumph, in the end, will be the crowning event in this restoration plot. Even here, it should be noted, Cymbeline himself participates in the events without the true agon of a Lear: as so many critics have pointed out, he seems absent even when he is present (Adelman 109), an onlooker to his own agon and even to the restoration of his family. The play ends as all

the riddles are unravelled, with all amazed, the king himself most astounded of all—possibly he is stunned by the many fantastic turns of events, too amazed to summon the emotions that must have driven his earlier life, and thus prepared to forgive and accept these changes willingly, even as the newfound *pax Romana* ushers in the magic of a new age.

#### Motifs:

**1. The past:** the *Cymbeline* plot resolves a family tragedy, beginning with the abduction of his two sons some twenty years in the past, and continuing with his marriage to Cloten's mother, who not only undermines Imogen's marriage to Posthumus (by getting her husband to banish Posthumus), but also incites *Cymbeline* to rebel against Rome. As with other romances, the play itself enacts the reconciliation and reunion of the family, but here also establishes an amicable ending to the war with Rome: the past is thus the necessary prologue to a long arc that culminates here.

**2. Asides:** as with Ben Jonson's famous tragedy *Sejanus* or Shakespeare's own *Troilus and Cressida*, *Cymbeline* features numerous asides as a way of exposing a character's true nature. This is particularly true of Cloten and the Queen, who are ridiculed by Imogen herself, the two lords (1.2, 2.1), and Cornelius (1.5).

**3. Disguise and Unmasking:** Disguise figures in a variety of ways in *Cymbeline*. As with Shakespeare's other cross-dressed heroines, Imogen's disguise as Fidele is a form of gender-bending comedy borne of a woman's need to empower herself in a man's world, but the motif here probes far more deeply into the issues of identity itself: not only is the mystery of Imogen's brothers enshrouded in their disguised identities, but the headless corpse of Cloten, dressed in Posthumus' clothes, calls the very nature of human identity into question: some commentators (see Peterson, below) have even suggested that Imogen's mistaken assumption that the corpse is Posthumus emblematically enacts the death of the "old" Posthumus so that a "new" Posthumus may be reborn. Others have suggested that the disguised corpse of Cloten is present as a reminder that death obliterates all identity.

**4. Props and Metadramatic Elements:** One of *Cymbeline*'s key features is unusual number of important props which figure repeatedly in the play: the ring and bracelet of 1.1, the box of "poison" which the queen gives Pisanio, telling him it is a curative (1.5), the trunk which Iachimo mentions in 1.6 and which figures importantly in 2.2; and the clothing of Posthumus, to which Imogen draws the attention of Cloten in 2.3, and which he appropriates in 3.5—leading to Imogen's own mistaken belief that Cloten's corpse is indeed her husband (4.2). The audience is thus not only tracking characters but also plot twists, through following the props as they reappear.

Beyond these reappearing props, the play also presents an extraordinary number of other onstage devices, ranging from the clothes of Posthumus and the boy's clothes adopted by Imogen, to the severed head and headless trunk of Cloten, all of which figure significantly in the coding of the play. Finally, as with *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, the latter stages of the plot emphasize metadramatic display, here ranging from the appearance of Posthumus's family ghosts to the *deus ex machina* of the crisis: the descent of Jupiter on an eagle, with tablets bearing the riddle.

**5. English ethnocentrism:** as in *Othello*, Jonson's *Volpone*, Webster's *The Duchess of Malfi* or *The White Devil*, *Cymbeline* features the stereotype of the smooth, subtle, and sophisticated Italian villain. Shakespeare and his contemporaries were fascinated with Italy: they respected it as the home of Latin culture and the birthplace of the renaissance, but they were also wary of it as a home for Machiavels, seducers, con men, and corrupt governments; further, in *The Merchant of Venice*, *Othello*, and *Volpone*, both Shakespeare and Jonson show that they

researched Italian governmental and court structures for their plays. Thus, English plays during this period display this "double-attitude" toward Italy, and in this play, we see that Iachimo is identified both as a ruthless *Italian* seducer and con man and a man capable of repentance. For further study of the phenomenon of English attitudes toward Italians and Italy, refer to *Italian Studies in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*, ed. Michele Marrapodi and Giorgio Melchiori. (London: Associated U Presses, 1999).

**6. Two complicated scenes with multiple actions (4.2, 5.5).** Many Shakespeare plays have difficult scenes involving many separate actions, overlooking scenes with multiple dialogues or lengthy speeches requiring close reading; one thinks of the various negotiating scenes (1.3, 2.2) and the overlooking scene (5.2) in *Troilus and Cressida*, or the back-story exposition and multiple character encounters in *The Tempest's* second scene. In *Cymbeline*, the first-time reader can easily lose the thread of action and thought in two such complicated scenes. For these readers, here's a quick summary of each:

#### 4.2 at the cave

**Lines 1-47:** In the cave, Imogen takes Pisanio's drug (recall the fact that Cornelius gave a sleeping potion to the Queen, who had requested a murderous poison, and that she gave it to Pisanio, hoping to kill him and thus send a "message" to Posthumus; also, Pisanio had given it to Imogen, thinking it was a curative).

**Lines 47-110:** Arviragus and Guiderius kill Cloten (who has dressed in Posthumus's clothes), and chop off his head.

**Lines 111-94:** Belarius sees that killing Cloten could expose them to the King's powers; they consider what to do with the body.

**Lines 195-290:** Arviragus and Guiderius bring in the seeming-dead Imogen and place her next to the corpse of Cloten.

**Lines 291-352:** Imogen awakes and thinks Cloten's headless corpse is Posthumus (because of the clothes); she is horrified, but then is taken prisoner by Lucius and the Romans, who have come to force the British to submit to their rule.

**Lines 353-end:** Lucius learns that Imogen (still disguised as Fidele) is alive, and questions "him."

#### 5.5 at Cymbeline's tent (recognition scene)

**Note:** in this scene, each revelation triggers another; the scene moves from anger and confusion to forgiveness and clarity.

**Lines 1-68:** the truth about the Queen.

**Lines 69-129:** Lucius asks that Cymbeline spare "Fidele," who talks apart with Cymbeline (Lucius wondering why Fidele "disdains" him, Belarius and the boys recognizing "Fidele" as their adopted brother).

**Lines 130-209:** Backed by Cymbeline, "Fidele" forces Iachimo to confess what he did to Posthumus and Imogen.

**Lines 210-34:** This causes Posthumus to come forward and reveal himself, demanding revenge; when "Fidele" tries to calm him, he slaps "him" and knocks "him" unconscious (229)—and Pisanio tries to wake "him," knowing "he" is Imogen.

**Lines 235-60:** Imogen awakes and spurns Pisanio as a poisoner—she is revealed to Cymbeline. Pisanio explains the box of poison, and Cornelius seconds him; Pisanio is thus exonerated.

**Lines 261-67:** Imogen and Posthumus are reunited (peculiarity in reference to "thy mother" in line 270).

**Lines 268-301:** Cymbeline is puzzled about Cloten; Pisanio explains the story, which leads Guiderius to reveal that he killed Cloten. Angry, Cymbeline sentences Guiderius to death.

**Lines 302-68:** This prompts Belarius to confess (in order to save the boy by revealing his true identity as a son of Cymbeline). Amazed, Cymbeline forgives Belarius as the boys are revealed as Cymbeline's lost sons.

**Lines 369-403:** Reunion of Cymbeline's family.

**Lines 404-58:** Posthumus forgives Iachimo and produces the tablet with the riddle; the soothsayer then explains the riddle, which makes sense of all the plot twists.

**Lines 459-85:** despite their victory, Cymbeline decides to submit to Caesar (thus beginning the era of the pax Romana), and thanks the gods.

### **Stages of Imogen's Trajectory**

#### **COURT (1.1-3.5)**

1. Posthumus deported, fight with her father; Posthumus's wager on her virtue (1.1-1.3)
2. Iachimo's assault on her virtue (1.6-2.2), and her rejection of Cloten (2.3)
3. Posthumus's rejection of her as untrue, based on Iachimo's lies (2.4-2.5)
4. Ordered by Posthumus to murder her, Pisanio refuses to follow orders and helps her flee in disguise as the boy Fidele (3.2, 3.4)

#### **CAVE (3.6-4.2)**

5. Her flight and rescue by Belarius, "Cadwall" and "Polydore" (3.6)
6. Sick and in despair, she takes Pisanio's "curative" after the two boys go hunting. Threatened by Cloten (wearing Posthumus's clothes), she is defended by "Polydore," who cuts off Cloten's head. The boys think "Fidele" is dead and place Cloten's headless corpse next to her before burial. She wakes, thinks Posthumus is dead, and is horrified: Lucius, the Roman, takes her prisoner.

#### **BRITISH CAMP (5.3-end)**

6. Belarius, the two boys, and Posthumus (disguised as a peasant) save Cymbeline; Posthumus is taken prisoner (5.3)
7. Posthumus's dream (5.4), the unmasking of Imogen (5.5), Iachimo's confession.
8. Belarius confesses and is forgiven; the boys are exposed and welcomed, and Posthumus is revealed, reunited with Imogen. Iachimo is forgiven, and the soothsayer unravels the riddle, foretelling a time of peace.

## Critical Arguments on *Cymbeline*: For Debate

**Frey, Charles.** "O sacred, shadowy, cold and constant queen': Shakespeare's Imperiled and Chastening Daughters of Romance." *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. Urbana: U of Illinois P, 1983: 300-01.

The tragedies rather insistently criticize the patriarch's own attempts to manipulate sons or sons-in-law for his own interest [yet] in the romances these themes intensify. Here problems of sons as tragic victims of their fathers' feuds are largely eliminated (save, possibly, for the example of Mamilius in *The Winter's Tale*). In *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *Winter's Tale*, and *Tempest*, such sons are nonexistent, lost, or killed, and only daughters are looked to for continuation of the central family. *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *Leontes*, and *Prospero* all have enmities in which they could tragically involve any sons of theirs, but when each such son appears to be eliminated (together with the wives of the fathers), the relation between each father and his sole daughter becomes central. The function of each daughter is not to represent, as a son might, the father in the father's battles but rather to leave home, travel widely, perhaps marry the son of her father's chief enemy (as in *Winter's Tale* and *Tempest*), and return home to instill virtues of forgiveness and the lesson of pardon to the father. The solution for patriarchal overcontrol and quasi-incestuous inwardness thus seems to be a dramatic destruction of the progenitive center and an explosion outward through time and space that leads to regroupings at the end and visions of a wide incorporative harmony.

It seems apparent that Shakespeare in these four romances celebrates a view of women as protectors and givers of life in a very special sense. Daughters such as Imogen, Perdita, and Miranda not only marry in ways that heal enmities but also they prove their love viable in settings that harbor lustful or permissive appetites, that is, they encounter in "nature" a rapacious Cloten or Caliban or a bawdy Autolycus, but they remain chaste and eventually chasten the appetites of their true lovers. . . . Often we see these daughters, moreover, rising from sleep and seeming death, as if to prove their miraculous power to awaken fresh life.

**Adelman, Janet.** "Masculine Authority and the Maternal Body." *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*. Ed. Kiernan Ryan. London and New York: Longman, 1999: 109.

*Cymbeline* is conspicuously without a centre; and its centrelessness seems to me related in ways not merely structural to the absence of Cymbeline himself as a compelling male figure. His absence in the play is so prominent, I think, because he strikes us as absent even when present, absent to himself: as the first scene with Lucius (III.i) makes comically evident, he has simply been taken over by his wicked queen and her son. And the failure of male autonomy portrayed grotesquely in him is the psychological starting point of the play as well as the determinant of its structural weaknesses; despite the prominence of the marriage plot, the repair of that failure is the play's chief business. But this goal is ultimately disastrous for its emotional coherence, and not only because the characters of the marriage plot are far more engaging than the relatively pasteboard characters of the *Cymbeline* plot: in *Cymbeline*, a plot ostensibly about the recovery of trust in woman and the renewal of marriage is circumscribed by a plot in which distrust of woman is the great lesson to be learned and in which male autonomy depends on the dissolution of marriage. Moreover, the effect of the Imogen-Posthumus plot is everywhere qualified by the effect of the *Cymbeline* plot, and the two plots seem to be emotionally at cross-purposes: if one moves toward the resumption of heterosexual bonds in marriage, the other moves toward the renewed formation of male bonds as Cymbeline regains both his sons and his earlier alliance with an all-male Rome, the alliance functionally disrupted by his wife. Hence the emotional incoherence of the last scene: the resolution of each plot interrupts the other, leaving neither satisfactorily resolved.

**Marshall, Cynthia. *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois U P, 1991: 36-37.**

*Cymbeline*, a play deeply concerned with the relationships—Geller's "covenants"—connecting people with one another, closes with a vision of the social aspects of Judgment Day. In contrast to the other last plays, in which the lost are restored singly, *Cymbeline* features a vast reunion, in which almost everyone experiences the return of a loved one believed to be dead. Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius are baffled by the presence of "Fidele," the boy they have interred. Belarius' stunned question, "Is not this boy reviv'd from death?" (5.5.119), implies the possibility of resurrection, although he hesitates to assume this has happened. Guiderius, insisting "we saw him dead" (5.5.126), apparently thinks he sees "Fidele's" ghost before him. Pisanio, who has feared for Imogen's life, recognizes her in disguise. Posthumus discovers the wife he thinks he has killed. And *Cymbeline's* three children—the two sons missing some twenty years, the daughter presumed dead after her flight from court—are restored to him. Each individual discovery signals a reprieve from death; occurring together, the various recoveries suggest a collective deliverance. Those recovered are not ghosts like the spirits who appear in Posthumus' dream. The contrast underscores the ability of these restorations to suggest a permanent family reunion to occur at the end of time. The vision is all the more pointed for the absence of the queen and Cloten who remain dead, evidently dismissed to damnation. For the characters who experience the momentous revelations of the final scene, the future is utterly transformed, remade into a dream of all that death had denied them.

The play's keen attention to the physical fact of death, coupled with the glorious reunions at the play's close, betray an emotional drive to deny death's mastery. The action of *Cymbeline* illustrates the inescapability of death. The despairing queen dies unrepentant; Cloten is beheaded; Imogen lies comatose through a mock funeral. The confusion of Cloten's corpse with Posthumus' underscores the ontological sense of death. Cloten's body is, after all, only a body; it might as well be Posthumus'. Dying is shown to be a grotesque denial of human identity, but the play leaps at the last from this inevitable personal loss to the wondrous possibility of general reunion.

**Peterson, Douglas L. *Time, Tide and Tempest: A Study of Shakespeare's Romances*. San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1973: 11.**

As the pastoral action progresses it becomes increasingly clear that we have entered a new mimetic world in which universals are unabsorbed by particularity. It is the world of Arcadian romance, in which the miraculous may occur—and in which the characters and actions, as well as caves and hills, may serve the purposes of emblematic narrative. Its inhabitants are pure exemplars. Belarius is Ideal Patriarch and Tutor; Arviragus and Guiderius (as Belarius, himself, observes in IV.ii.169-81) are exemplars of Ideal Royalty—of Ideal Honor, Civility, and Valor. Involved, as they are, in actions which make no claim to historicity, their "reality" resides in the truths which their actions figure forth. The same thing is generically true of those characters who move into the emblematic world of Wales from the historical world of *Cymbeline's* court. Imogen becomes the exemplar of a love which "alters not when it alteration finds" and Posthumus becomes the repentant sinner who through redemptive love regains his lost identity as his father's son, as husband to a princess, and as noble member of the body politic. Even Cloten, who along with his mother, is primarily an exemplar in the opening action, acquires another symbolic dimension—as the "old" Posthumus who must die before the "new" Posthumus can be born.

### **Select Bibliography**

Fawcner, H. W. *Shakespeare's Miracle Plays: Pericles, Cymbeline, and The Winter's Tale*. Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson U P; London and Toronto: Associated U Presses, 1992.

- Felperin, Howard. *Shakespearean Romance*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1972.
- Hartwig, Joan. *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State U P, 1972. [A genre study of the play as tragicomedy.]
- Marsh, D. R. C. *The Recurring Miracle: A Study of Cymbeline and the Last Plays*. Pietermaritzburg: U of Natal, 1962.
- Marshall, Cynthia. *Last Things and Last Plays: Shakespearean Eschatology*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois U P, 1991. [Chapter on *Cymbeline* explores the play's connection to Advent and the Christmas season, as well as its "concern with judgment, its image of the way death robs human identity, and its culminating apocalyptic scene" as an "inquiry into the bonds between the individual and society" (14).]
- Ornstein, Robert. *Shakespeare's Comedies: From Roman Farce to Romantic Mystery*. Newark: U of Delaware; London and Toronto: Associated U Presses, 1986. [This study explores the play's relationship to Fletcherian tragicomedy].
- Peterson, Douglas L. *Time, Tide, and Tempest: A Study of Shakespeare's Romances*. San Marino: The Huntington Library, 1973.
- Ryan, Kiernan, ed. *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*. London and New York: Longman, 1999. [Two essays herein explore "Masculine Authority and the Maternal Body: The Return to Origins" (Adelman) and "*Cymbeline* and the Unease of Topicality" (Marcus).]
- Simonds, Peggy Muñoz. *Myth, Emblem, and Music in Shakespeare's Cymbeline: An Iconographic Reconstruction*. Newark: U of Delaware; London and Toronto: Associated U Presses, 1992. [another attempt to interpret the play by establishing its genre, here via its iconography; the author sees it as a "renaissance tragicomedy."]
- Warren, Roger, ed. *Cymbeline*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1998. [The introduction explores the play for its pronounced theatricality, as an example of dramatic romance, and in terms of its style].
- - - . *Shakespeare in Performance: Cymbeline*. Manchester and New York: Manchester U P, 1989.
- Woodbridge, Linda, and Edward Berry, eds. *True Rites and Maimed Rites: Ritual and Anti-Ritual in Shakespeare and His Age*. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois, 1992. [Woodbridge's essay explores political redemption through peacemaking but also investigates the motifs of invasion, threshold crossings—a "repeated pattern of danger averted" (278)—and the motif of Imogen sleeping near "trunks" which is connected to "the menacing penetration of domestic thresholds" (279).]

## ***The Winter's Tale***

**1. Romance:** a term first employed by the 19<sup>th</sup> cy. critic Edward Dowden to describe the four late plays: *Pericles* (1607-08), *Cymbeline* (1609-1610), *The Winter's Tale* (1610-1611), and *The Tempest* (1611). These plays share a number of qualities:

- a. **a fairy tale quality** borne of their plots, which are enhanced in their mysterious and magical qualities through a variety of motifs, from sea journeys involving miraculous rescues and delayed discoveries, a princess leaving home to find her lost brothers in a cave, a hero riddled in a dream by his dead ancestors and by Jupiter himself, a winter's tale (told to while away the time until spring comes) in which miracle after miracle unfold after a man does penance for his own pride and jealousy—ending with a statue of his supposedly dead wife coming to life; and a great magician who, when given the chance to get revenge, finds a way to stir compassion and reunite old enemies under a banner of love.
- b. **confrontation with / transcendence of the darkness and despair** of the great tragedies: as though the older Shakespeare at once recognized the wolf that man can be to man, but simultaneously struggled through the journey for repentance, forgiveness, acceptance in these last plays.
- c. **journeys by water and shipwrecks** (or apparent shipwrecks) figure as plot turns in 3 of them (*Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*); in the fourth, the journey of Posthumus to Italy sets up a major plot turn.
- d. **Father-daughter relationships:** the hero father (who nevertheless has major faults) and his assertive, naive, or pristinely pure daughter.
  1. In *Cymbeline*, Imogen must defy her father for Posthumus, whose love is tested through a variety of crises in the play; in *The Tempest*, Miranda chooses Ferdinand and is tested by Prospero until he proves pure.
  2. In *Pericles*, Pericles must recover, as if by miracle, his lost daughter Marina, who restores his faith and prepares him for the discovery of his lost wife, Thaisa.
  3. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes must—again, as if by miracle—recover his lost daughter Perdita (and undergo a 16 year penance) before he may discover the wife he thought he'd lost—Hermione.
- e. **Miracles, spectacular events, dreams, visions, and magical or monstrous characters** all figure in these plays. The "spectacle" of many of these events is evidence of Shakespeare's continuing experimentation with stage effects, his awareness of and indebtedness to Jonson and Inigo Jones (among others), who developed many special effects as part of the court masques they invented; and lastly, these effects are important aspects of Shakespeare's own final trajectory: an older awareness that life itself is, in some sense, a mystery—and when things turn out, it is sometimes difficult to explain how.
- e. **Time** is important to all of them: in *Pericles*, Gower serves as chorus announcing the passage of years and the deaths and births and maturation of characters; in *Cymbeline*, events from years before (the kidnapping of the King's two sons) come full circle—the boys return and facilitate the resolution; in *The Winter's Tale*, Time is the chorus, and the play is divided into events from 16 years before (Acts 1-3) and those happening in the present (Acts 4-5); in *The Tempest*, the play itself is the final act of the story of Prospero, who was overthrown 12 years before the events of the play, and put to sea with his infant daughter; here, as in the other plays, the events of that earlier time come full circle.

## 2. The Play:

<Harold Bloom calls *The Winter's Tale* "a vast pastoral lyric, . . . a psychological novel, the story of Leontes, an Othello who is his own Iago" (639). He speaks of Leontes' "diseased sexual imagination" in which "male fear and resentment of women" emerge (see 2.2.194-86) as comic inelasticity endowed with "vicious eloquence" (643). The play has an extraordinary amplitude" (649), from its exploration of Leontes' jealousy and penance, the thematically pregnant sheep-shearing festival of 4.4, the character of Autolycus—whom Bloom describes as the "most amiable of all Shakespearean rogues" (649)—"and most of all, . . . "Perdita and Florizel celebrating each other in a natural ecstasy" (661).

## 3. Some Characteristics of this plot:

### a. Two parts:

1. Acts 1-3: jealousy and loss, beginnings of penance.  
<dramatic note: the downward spiral of the first three acts is so unrelieved that the play risks alienating its audience unless the characters of Leontes and Paulina are played with suitable panache.
2. Acts 4-5 regeneration and discovery, a triumph of love.

### b. Motifs:

- a. oracle
- b. abandoned child
- c. **Nemesis** character (Paulina) who drives the hero to penance and as a kind of **Cupid** masterminds the resolution.
- d. **Spring Festival Scene**: sheep-shearing, with **lovers** as King and Queen of May: **pastoral**
- e. honest and loyal underlings (Camillo and Paulina)
- f. oath (Leontes) page 1632
- g. dream (Antigonus) page 1632
- h. disguise (Polixenes and Camillo) page 1634
- i. **Lord of Misrule** (variation)—Autolycus (who is ironically turned to be agent of good in spite of himself).
- j. **Statue Scene**: dead spouse revived.

### c. Love as a theme:

- a. love destroyed and revived through penance (Leontes and Hermione);
- b. love tested and proven true (Perdita and Florizel)
- c. love as a reward for remarkable loyalty and fidelity (Paulina and Camillo).

### d. Age and Youth as themes:

- a. both fathers misuse their authority and are guilty of unwarranted suspicions and misjudging the characters of those around them (as Lear was). Here, Leontes' jealousy leads to the deaths of Antigonus and Mamillus, the loss (and apparent death) of Hermione, and the attempted murder of Perdita: he must do 16 years of penance and experience some revelations before he can be forgiven. Polixenes gets off more lightly, merely being made a fool of, and then reconciled to his son when it turns out that Perdita is a princess.
- b. Youth, as in all comedies featuring the springtime regeneration motif, is the instrument of social regeneration: even in his plays foregrounding the aged, he points out that wisdom is not a given, but must be earned, and that great experience can be as much a set of blinders as it can illumine our understanding.

#### 4. Peculiarities that have led to critical disagreements:

- a. **Shakespeare gives Bohemia a seacoast**, a point which prompted Ben Jonson to comment on his sloppiness: "Shakespeare in a play brought in a number of men saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some 100 miles" (Conversations with Drummond 599).
- b. **The famous stage direction "exit pursued by a bear"** has caused some speculation as to whether there was a trained bear or an actor in a bear suit.
- c. **Play breaks the Aristotelian unities** (as many of Shakespeare's plays do) of time, place, action: dividing into two parts separated by 16 years, taking place in a variety of locations.
- d. **Tone varies widely**: from the downward spiral from rage & jealousy to accusation and sorrow, followed by spritely peasant humor and celebration—which is again broken by parental suspicion and accusation, leading to flight and a series of "miraculous" exposures and recognitions. These "inconsistencies" seem a fault to some.
- e. **Some have claimed that the revealing of Perdita to Leontes** (5.2.1-111) as reported by three gentlemen is a fault in the play—but perhaps the true recognition has to occur between Leontes and Hermione and that Shakespeare wrapped up the Perdita plot this way so that it could serve as necessary prelude to the true exposure of the Statue scene.

### Three Key Scenes

1. **1.2 (1618-19)** Compare with Othello and Iago: Othello has to be goaded, persuaded, given "proof" and needled before his jealousy is activated: Leontes seems to weave a net for himself out of his own imagination, seeing things that are not.

- **Is this believable? Why so? Why not?**
- **He seems, too, to have set a trap for Hermione**: asking her to plead with Polixenes to stay and then blaming her when she succeeds.
- **Note the connection of Leontes' and Polixenes' innocence to original sin and "stronger blood" (67-74).**
- **Note Leontes' general attitude about women (129-34) and toward Affection (138-42).** This is a man who does not trust his own feelings and who, in his distrust of women, lays traps to "catch" others—finding "proofs" where there are none, as though his attitudes teleologically and obsessively pursue an outcome which is already foregone in his own imagination despite the lack of tangible proof. **A second statement showing his attitude about women: (189-96; page 1620).**
- **Second ploy: he leaves her alone with Polixenes**, then admits he's "angling" for her (180).
- **Leontes tries to get Camillo to see what he thinks he sees**, but Camillo defends Hermione and shames Leontes (279-84). **NOTE LEONTES' IMAGINATION WORKING ON HIM (285-95).**
- **Leontes commands that Camillo poison Polixenes**, which leads Camillo to inform Polixenes, and both of them flee.

## 2. 4.4 THE SHEEP-SHEARING FESTIVAL

<Bloom believes this scene should be on everyone's list of favorite scenes from Shakespeare, that it "contains the most beautiful of all Shakespearean pastoral courtships in its opening sequence" and that "this lovers' ceremony is so extraordinarily beautiful" and that it is "vital to the subtler aspects of *The Winter's Tale*" (652).

- **THE CINDERELLA MOTIF:** like Cinderella, Rapunzel, or Beauty and the Beast, a peasant girl (or a well-born girl who has lost her identity and seemingly become a peasant) falls in love with a rich boy; their love is tested and she is found worthy of him—(after which, if her identity has been lost, it is found) and they are married and live "happily ever after." The story of Perdita and Florizel follows this kind of plot motif from fairy tales.
- **Florizel and Perdita (lines 1-55):** note that he is ardent, she fearful that he's merely toying with her—and she is wary. She's uncomfortable with her role as May Queen, fearful of his father's power, and uncertain whether she should trust Florizel—yet is also sexually attracted to the point of verbally fantasizing their play together.
  1. **line 6:** calling his come-on "extremes" while withdrawing the complaint.
  2. **lines 7-14:** fears about the difference in their social status—and whether she can live up to the "Lady/Goddess" role she finds herself in.
  3. **lines 14-16:** he blesses the chance by which he met her (seems unaware of the depth of her concerns—is more impressed with his own luck than attentive to her concerns).
  4. **lines 16-20:** she fears his father will discover them.
  5. **lines 25-31: HIS REASSURANCES** (via myth allusions) are far from reassuring—in two cases, the transformed male lover impregnates the woman and leaves her; in the third, he becomes a servant who sets up a situation whereby the woman dies that the man may live:
    - Jupiter & Europa:** abducted by Jupiter in the form of a bull, she bore him 3 sons and was given presents, though he returned to his wife, Juno.
    - Neptune and Theopane:** in one of the variant stories of the golden fleece, Neptune wooed Theopane in the form of a ram; their offspring was the ram that bore the golden fleece of Aietes (Rose 197, 223 n.53)
    - Apollo re Admetus and Alcestis:** as punishment for killing the Kyklopes who made the thunderbolt that killed his son Asklepios, Apollo became (for a year) herdsman to Admetos, King of Pherai: grateful for good treatment and learning that Admetos was to die shortly, Apollo convinced the fates that Admetos could live longer if someone would die for him—which his wife Alkestis promptly did, showing him her devotion (Rose 140-41).
  6. **lines 31-35:** note his comparison of his attraction to her with the Gods: **his assertion of honor and faith while admitting he has lusts and desires.**
  7. **lines 35-40:** she's still worried that "you must change this purpose" or "my life."
- **Lines 55- 110) THE FESTIVAL BEGINS (A KIND OF LIMINAL SPACE as in MND)**
  1. **Lines 55-69:** Shepherd reminds her of her role as hostess: **the private concern retreats and her public persona takes over.**

2. **Lines 69-110: POLIXENES AND CAMILLO IN DISGUISE:** in the dialogue between Polixenes and Perdita, they seem to argue about Nature and Art and "Nature's bastards" (gillyflowers, pinks), but the real argument (at least from his point of view) is about whether she is using her son to climb socially in his kingdom. He suggests that marrying "a gentler scion to the wildest stock" leads to "a bark of the baser kind" (92-95), and probes her about "Nature's bastards" to get her to admit them to the garden.  
 <NOTE HIM ANGLING FOR HER  
 <Her innate nobility refuses to have anything to do with "bastards"—and she finds a way to compliment him (with flowers representing an age younger than his)—and moves on.
- **Lines 116-17: again, her fears of the price maids pay, in allusion to Proserpina.**
  - **Lines 127-35: ADMISSION OF HER SEXUAL ATTRACTION TO FLORIZEL** and his welcoming of it (135-45). Note that her fears return—that "you woo'd me the false way" (151).
  - **Lines 156-80: POLIXENES MEASURES HER BEFORE ACTING**
    1. **Lines 156-59:** though a "low-born lass," everything she does "smacks of something greater than herself"—**he sees why his son is attracted to her.**
    2. **Lines 166-80: QUERYING THE SHEPHERD:** Polixenes sounds out the old man to find out how deeply Florizel and Perdita have fallen for each other.  
 <NOTE PROPHECY: **Shepherd knows her worth per scroll and bundle she was found with:**
      - page 1632: Antigonus lays down scroll and bundle (between lines 46-48) which will endow the finder and prove Perdita's identity.
      - page 1633-34: lines 114-27: the gold, the "bearing-cloth for a squire's child" etc.
 <Peterson claims that "she shall bring him that which he not dreams of" has three meanings: (1) her grace and accomplishments, (2) proof of her birth, and (3) excellent lovemaking (*Time Tide and Tempest* 183)
  - **Lines 217-341: INTERLUDE with Autolycus toying with Mopsa and Dorcas, who are fighting over the Clown** (humor at the expense of the rustics)
  - **POLIXENES MEASURES FLORIZEL:** and finds out that Florizel is truly in love with Perdita but won't tell his father.
    1. When the Shepherd would formally contract the marriage of Florizel and Perdita (383-91), Polixenes stops the ceremony with questions about Florizel's manners (not telling his dad) (391-417), and then unmask and forbids the marriage (417-41)
    2. **POLIXENES EXITS / CAMILLO STAYS (441):**  
 <Recall **Camillo's current motivation: to return to Sicilia (see page 1634)**  
 <Shepherd's and Perdita's regrets

### 3. 5.3 THE STYLIZED FINALE: STATUE COMING TO LIFE /Leontes unites Paulina and Camillo

- **THE PYGMALION EFFECT:** as symbol: not merely the obvious unlooked-for miracle ending, but also the power of art to transform human suffering, to reunite the lost lovers.  
  
<This theme is even more prominent in *The Tempest*, where Prospero must lay down his art and become a mere man at the end, recognizing its power to change some lives, but ultimately finding its limits: one must, in the end, rely on prayer:  
**See the three farewells (pages 1680, 1682, 1685)**
- **THE HIDDEN PLOT:** as real story line, it's apparent that Paulina has been sheltering Hermione all these years (see lines 105-07, page 1649). Has, then, Hermione been secretly orchestrating the penance of Leontes, preparing him for the love he has rejected?
- **Recall that for both women there have been tangible losses as a result of Leontes' jealousy: both Mamillius and Antigonus are dead, and both have lost 16 years to this single purpose.**
- **Comic finale: not only reconciliations, but also WEDDINGS TO COME: Florizel & Perdita, Camillo and Paulina (NOTE THE TRANSFORMATION OF LEONTES FROM JEALOUS HUSBAND TO AGING CUPID).**

---

### AUTOLYCUS AS CHARACTER

**Sketching Autolycus:** his roguishness is entertaining, but somehow the Clown and Shepherd are "on" to him at the end—and force him to be penitent (if *only pro forma*—or is his change real?). **TRAJECTORY:**

- **4.3 (1635): picking the Clown's pocket**, warning him about himself.
- **4.4 (1638-39): selling ballads, sizing up his customers**, taking their money (note his astute tailoring of ballads he sells to the psychological conditions of his customers).
- **4.4 (1643-45): laughing about how he's cut all their purses** and sold all his trash.  
  
<exchanges garments with Florizel (so Florizel and Perdita can disguise themselves and escape).  
<**680-82: decides not to report Florizel** to the king (won't be honest—following the thieves' law)  
<**684-842: Clown and Shepherd think to tell the king that Perdita's a changeling**; Autolycus finds out about the gold and promises to help them find the king (who's taken ship)—Autolycus sees advantage in helping them.
- **5.2.124-74 (1649-50): Clown and Shepherd are now lords** (Autolycus has not profited). The new lords "lord it" over him and he begs them to "give you good report" to the prince; they demand that he "amend thy life" (155).

## *The Tempest*

### The Rarer Action in a Play of Power

Recent criticism of *The Tempest* has made much of what appears to be a valorization of European empire and colonization in the play, as seen in Prospero's relationship to Caliban and in the Machiavellian behavior of Alonso and his confederates. Barker and Hulme, for example, explore the "colonialist legitimation" which involves reinterpreting native reaction to the colonizer's "increasingly disruptive presence" as a sign of "native violence" (200-201), providing the exploiter with a rationale for enslaving native people and/or appropriating their land. Greenblatt sees the play as a fantasy of power legitimizing the authority of the social order, and yet he notes that it swerves away from the discourse of power in its implicit questioning of that order—in the storm's indifference to upper class assertions and the fact that sailors are the masters of this situation, in Caliban's claim to legitimate ownership of the island, and in the prices one pays for both plenitude and want. Indeed, the play decenters every political position taken in it, and its major theme—the question of whether Prospero will take revenge or be moved to compassion once Alonso has suffered his sea change—moves beyond the question of power altogether, leaving the questions the play has raised only partially and ambiguously answered. The play begins by destabilizing the social hierarchy, showing a clear example of mastery on the part of social inferiors and the complete uselessness of Lords and counselors in the situation of the storm. As it progresses, we are presented with three political positions, each of which is revealed as flawed; further, even the means to bring order and apparent peace to the represented society is discarded in the end—the aery spirit goes free, the reestablished duke throws away the powers that ensured his success in a Machiavellian universe, and the valorization of imperial colonialism is rejected, for Prospero sails off with his peers, swearing that he'll "retire me to Milan, where every third thought shall be my grave" (5.1.311-12). Indeed, the point seems to be that Prospero and other Europeans must give up the "colonial legitimation" these critics seem so anxious to prove. Yet even the political future, represented by the alliance of Ferdinand and Miranda, forebodes some trouble in their brief disagreement over whether Ferdinand plays falsely at chess and in Miranda's naive endorsement of the assembled courtiers as "goodly creatures" populating a "brave new world" (5.1.182-83).

The most appealing of the represented political positions is Gonzalo's vision of a perfect world (2.1.143-71), a naively egalitarian communal society of noble savages in which humans could live together in plenty without labor or force of arms, and where "all things in common nature should produce without sweat or endeavor" (160-61). Even as this position is revealed, it is undercut by the two "noble" rogues, Sebastian and Antonio, and when Gonzalo appeals to Alonso, the only response is "prithee no more; thou dost talk nothing to me" (171). The king to whom he appeals is the Machiavel who ruthlessly backed Antonio's usurpation of Prospero's power; the paradisaical vision Gonzalo presents thus cannot be taken seriously, for the world he inhabits precludes even the possibility of a golden age, does not in fact allow a naive old counselor to rule and, as Sebastian points out, at the same time eliminate the inequalities of power inherent in the concept of ruling.

Many critics feel that Gonzalo's position is further subverted by the example of Caliban; if we may take Caliban as the example of the native peoples described in Montaigne's "Of The Cannibals"—the source for Gonzalo's speech—it would seem obvious that Prospero's slave is not a noble spirit, but a monster of lust, rage and envy— and a walking commentary on the entire concept of the noble savage.\* Barker and Hulme's claim that his anger and envy are the result of

---

\*Earlier criticism often saw Caliban in a quite different light, accepting the dominant view that some are meant to rule and others to serve. Schmidgall, for example, claims that "if we are to understand Caliban fully we must see in him a creature of the theory of obedience" characteristic of the Elizabethan and Jacobean periods; Caliban reflects the "'abuse, carnal liberty, enormity, sin and Babylonian confusion' that result when 'right order' is undermined by disobedience" (188). Hirst seems to want it both ways; he points out the anti-colonialist passages that force us to "reas-

colonial exploitation might explain why Caliban isn't naturally noble, but his lust for Miranda cannot be explained via this rationale. His attempt to rape her takes place not when she is exploiting or abusing him, but during her attempt to teach him language (1.2.344-62). As a native presence, he claims "this island's mine by Sycorax my mother, which thou tak'st from me" (1.2.331); later, on discovering him, Trinculo thinks of the ten doits that Englishmen would pay to see "a dead Indian" (2.2.31-33). Beyond the appropriation of the island and Trinculo's reduction of his worth to being no more than a source of profit, the fact that he is physically exploited, threatened with torture and verbally abused as a "lying slave" and a "thing of darkness" argue that his spiritual debasement has at least some cause other than his natural predisposition despite Prospero's claim that he "us'd thee . . . with human care, and lodg'd thee in mine own cell" (1.2.345-47).

A second political position, that of the Machiavellian prince, is represented by Alonso, and by extension, by Antonio, Sebastian, and their servile counterparts, Trinculo and Stephano. Alonso and Antonio set the story in motion by usurping Prospero's dukedom, not killing Prospero outright only because Prospero was so beloved of his people. Machiavelli's claim that men are "ungrateful, fickle, false, cowardly, covetous" (24) and that the state should be maintained by being armed and willing to use whatever force is necessary is borne out in their behavior. Prospero loses his state because he trusts his brother, who gains it by swearing fealty to Alonso in return for the use of Alonso's army as means to expel Prospero. Antonio knows that "it is necessary for a prince wishing to hold his own to know how to do wrong, and to make use of it or not according to necessity" (Machiavelli 22), yet—as is often the case with those who overreach—persuades both himself and Sebastian that they should kill Alonso and Gonzalo on the island—a prize neither of them values much, and in a circumstance where there appears to be no hope of rescue. Trinculo's and Stephano's plot to kill Prospero is even more badly conceived, but involves the same sense of overreaching which ultimately leads such leaders to their falls.

Peculiar to *The Tempest* are the artificial means by which their falls are effected. First, the plot against Alonso and Gonzalo is foiled by Ariel, who wakes the potential victims just in time; the change that Prospero desires to induce in Alonso is developed by Ariel, who in the form of a harpy connects the loss of Alonso's son to his complicity in Antonio's plot against Prospero. Prospero has no such lever (loss of one's child) to use against his brother and Sebastian; accordingly, they are not spiritually changed by their experiences, but are put merely in their places. Boyce's claim that "the defeat of evil is not complete" (635) misses the point; neither Antonio nor Sebastian have experienced a great enough loss to prepare them for such a change of character. The plot of Caliban, Trinculo and Stephano is similarly foiled by supernatural solicitings and by their own short-sightedness, but it should be noted that of the three, only Caliban understands the seriousness of their aim—and only he realizes at the end that he should "be wise hereafter, and seek for grace" (5.1.295-96). The Machiavellian position is thus destabilized in this play by two weaknesses: first, the kind of striving one needs to maintain a principality and the view of humanity requisite to such maintenance are susceptible to the vice of overreaching, both in the prince and in his underlings. Justice cannot be said to prevail; nor can one be assured that the polis will ever be secure, and such unjust rulers inevitably fall through their own ambition. Secondly, the play presents a kind of providence in Ariel's disruptions of the two plots; the just and the potentially just man wake just in time and the criminally ambitious are thrown into confusion in ways that are only explainable in terms of active spiritual powers beyond the scope of realism.

Prospero represents the third—and perhaps the most ambiguous—political position in the play. He is cast as the just man, unfairly cast from his rightful position in society and yet making the best of a bad situation—raising his daughter carefully and exposing her to the precepts of proper conduct and the powers inherent in education. When he is confronted with the possibility

---

sess the situation," yet claims that Prospero is not simply an usurper but "benevolent" when he first comes to the island— assuming that the imparting of European culture and language is not cultural imposition but a kindly gesture (18-19).

of revenging himself on his enemies, he develops a stratagem to make them see the errors of their ways, to convert them to righteousness. As such he represents the platonic ideal—the philosopher king who has placed reason above both his will and his appetites and who can make decisions on the basis of the ethical means and ends necessary to obtaining justice for all—and yet he is also fraught with contradictions.

As a cast-off, he appropriates the island and enslaves its inhabitants in the same way that Europeans escaping oppression became oppressors when they landed in America. First, assuming his culture and ways are superior, he undertakes to educate Caliban to them, calling it a kindness; when Caliban will not be restrained by European values and attempts to rape Miranda, he is enslaved and forced to do menial work under threat of physical punishment. Ariel, on the other hand, is a kind of indentured servant; Prospero frees him on the condition that he endure a year of servitude in which he has no choice but to do what he is told: even freedom has a price. When Ariel complains, Prospero browbeats him and threatens to "rend an oak and peg thee in his knotty entrails till thou hast howl'd away twelve winters" (1.2.294-96). Thus it is that those who are subject to the sway of his greater power are used for the ends the "just man" decides are appropriate—"justice" in a fallen world has its own set of contradictions.

Though he is not a Machiavel, Prospero has indeed learned a Machiavellian lesson after his overthrow in Milan; there, he neglected power, studied his books and yet did not apply the lessons they would teach. Here, he uses his learning—his art—to manipulate others in an almost godlike way to an end that he has prescribed. He will of course set them free, but only after he has achieved his ends; even more peculiar is the fact that, once having learned that he must exercise power as deemed by the situation, he then throws his book and powers away. One wonders if he has learned anything by his experiences other than to rely on providence, yet it is clear that the natural hierarchy of nobility valorized in the play has triumphed in the end. Order has been restored by exercising power, sometimes in the hope of converting another by means of personal loss, introduction of guilt and subsequent conversion through mercy, sometimes by keeping others in the place preordained by those at the top of the hierarchy. The usurped and colonized island is deserted by the Europeans, and the future seems secure in the alliance of Ferdinand and Miranda. Even here, the resolution is ambiguous; the future queen naively sees in the inhabitants of her "brave new world" a group of "goodly creatures" (5.1.182-83), not realizing that cutthroat scheming has and could again threaten her peace and security. Finally, one may see a foreshadowing of disputes to come in the brief dispute over whether Ferdinand has played her false at chess.

Thus the play concludes by swearing off the exercise of power and at the same time intimating that such exercise will be necessary in the future. Gonzalo's "golden age" is exposed as a false dream; the Machiavellian destroys himself because there are no checks on his greed, and the just man must be unjust to some in order to maximize the justice he desires as an end. All positions are compromised, and in the end it is only in the "rarer action" of virtue—mercy and forgiveness—that the human spirit can rise above the travails of the world.

## Works Cited

- Barker, Francis, and Peter Hulme. "Nymphs and Reapers Heavily Vanish: The Discursive Contexts of The Tempest." *Alternative Shakespeares*. Ed. John Drakakis. London and New York: Methuen, 1985.
- Boyce, Charles. "The Tempest." *Shakespeare A to Z*. New York: Roundtable, 1990.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California, 1988.
- Hirst, David L. *The Tempest: Text and Performance*. London: Macmillan, 1984.
- Machiavelli, Nicolo. *The Prince*. Trans. W. K. Marriott. Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952.
- Schmidgall, Gary. *Shakespeare and the Courtly Aesthetic*. Berkeley: U of California, 1981.

## Other views of the play:

**A. Shakespeare's "Farewell to the Theatre" / letting go:** This is an attractive interpretation, but one that, in its narrowest reading decodes the play too closely as autobiographical allegory. Yet the play does address both the use of and relinquishing of one's powers as necessary steps in attaining a final achievement and farewell where "every third thought shall be my death," and the language of the theatre as *art*—which pervades the text—suggests that the illusions made by actors and the illusions of life are both, when the revels are ended, an "insubstantial pageant" in which "we are such stuff as dreams are made on, and our little life is rounded with a sleep" (4.1 156-58). The lessons of forgiveness and "letting go" are not individualized, but remain as the gist of the earned wisdom that characterizes Shakespeare's last works.

- Recall that in *Lear* he was already addressing the theme of letting go and the difficulties of doing so.
- Here, a means to let go is established: using one's powers to guide others to their own redemption, then relinquishing the powers.
- note that not all are redeemed: Antonio and Sebastian are only curbed, and Caliban's fate is unknown..
- tied up in this is the ability to transcend vengeance for virtue: forgiveness and a stern compassion: "the rarer action is in virtue than in vengeance" (5.1.27-28).

**B. Postmodern "Colonialist" interpretations:** According to these views, Prospero is the colonialist who has taken the island from its earlier inhabitants, enslaving Caliban and holding Ariel as a kind of "indentured servant" until he has repaid Prospero for freeing him from the oak. Most of the more influential studies since the 1950s have in some way articulated, commented on, or extended Octave Mannoni's 1948 study, *Psychologie de la Colonisation*, which observed in Prospero the "inferiority complex" found in many colonials—said complex manifesting itself in "irritability, authoritarianism and manipulation." The same theory traces in Caliban a "dependency complex" developed through contact with the European colonial, and exhibiting either subservient pandering to Europeans regardless of their actual authority, or outright rebellion borne of the rage at being forced into subservience.

- **Salutary Anxiety:** As variation on this theme, Stephen Greenblatt compares Prospero's use of "salutary anxiety"—raising the fears of those one wishes to manipulate, and when they lose hope, appearing benignly to forgive them—and thus psychologically binding them, as grateful inferiors, to oneself.
- **Sexual and Racial Politics:** Lorie Leininger claims that the sexual politics of the play requires that Prospero and Miranda be identified with Godlike virtue and virgin purity, whereas those of other races be cast as Vice figures defined by their animal sexuality—all to give the Europeans an agenda to keep the Other—the Vice—subservient.
- **Afrocentric interpretations** of Caliban stem from the island's location north of Tunis, from Prospero's claim that his mother, the witch Sycorax, was banished from Algiers (1.2.265), and from the fact that Prospero describes Caliban as "this thing of darkness" (5.1.275). Further, Shakespeare would have had access to travel narratives from Leo Africanus's *Geographical Historie of Africa* to Richard Hakluyt's *The Principal Navigations, Voyages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* for descriptions—many of them pejorative—of Caliban as an African.
- **American and especially Native American interpretations** of Caliban stem from some of the play's sources: references to a tempest in "the still-vexed Bermoothes" (Bermudas) as described in William Strachy's *A true reportory of the wracke, and redemption of Sir Thomas Gates, Knight; upon, and from the Ilands of the Bermudas*; and Montaigne's famous essay, "Of the Caniballes," which describes the supposed cultural behavior of Brazilian Indians ("Caliban" is a rough anagram for "cannibal"). Discovering Caliban, Trinculo is most impressed by his smell and monstrosity, commenting that when Englishmen "will not give a doit to relieve a lame beggar, they will lay out ten to see a dead Indian" (22.31-32).

A key point that many of these interpretations miss is that the thrust of the play is to give up the kind of appropriation so many of these critics are anxious to prove. Prospero must, to redeem himself, learn to forgive those who have injured him, find a way to help them redeem themselves, give up the island, free Ariel and, one guesses, Caliban (the text is unclear about Caliban's fate, except for his claim that he'll change his ways). The point is to recognize limitations, learn compassion, give up ambitions and the prizes one has taken.

**C. Harrison notes the play's FAIRY TALE QUALITY:** magician, spirits, daughter who marries the son of her father's enemy. **See notes for *The Winter's Tale* for fuller discussion of the "Romances" and their characteristic motifs.**

### Alonso's trajectory:

Follow his earlier history (as described by Prospero in 1.2) as a Machiavellian schemer who'll help Antonio supplant Prospero as Duke of Milan in return for Antonio's oath of fealty and for unspecified tribute, with his attempt to murder Prospero and Miranda by setting them adrift in a leaky boat. Twelve years later, he marries his daughter off to the King of Tunis and, on the return voyage, is wrecked in the tempest. Thinking his son Ferdinand dead, he is in despair which only deepens until Ariel appears to him as a harpy, accusing him of the murder of Prospero and naming the loss of Ferdinand as retribution for his sin (3.3.53-82). He is horrified—yet this chain of events serves to prepare him for penance and forgiveness, which follows, and he is in the end rewarded not only with a son, but a daughter-in-law in Miranda.

### The Love Story: Ferdinand and Miranda:

Critics have usually neglected the fact that the play dramatizes, in Miranda, the process of socialization. She has, as she points out, known only two men before meeting Ferdinand, and her memory extends only to dimly to women who once waited on her. She has no memory of her

mother, and given the fact that she has existed without any model of womankind in a masculine world involving an authoritarian father and a rapist islander, she must in effect create herself as a woman. Unlike most daughters of the time, she has been educated, attempts to teach Caliban how to read and, after his attempted rape of her, displays a strong sense of enraged honor, right and wrong.

With Ferdinand, she follows the pattern of Romeo and Juliet, falling in love at first sight—and like that match, her marriage would unite warring parties. The difference here is that, unlike the example of Juliet, the father is not only aware of the process, but tests her suitor to be sure that he is willing to work for her and that his motives are honorable. Part of Prospero's agenda, of course, is to use his daughter and Ferdinand as the centerpiece in his bid to unite Naples and Milan—to reestablish and advance his family's hopes: this is a feminist issue bound up in the question of power and the commodification of the individual, yet it could also be seen as engineering a "good" match for one's offspring, ensuring that her progeny will be "better off" than the previous generation. Modern feminists usually find Prospero's testing of Ferdinand an intrusion on Miranda—that she herself should be capable of determining what she wants and who is fit for her. Others may see Prospero's testing as a sign of parental love and care for his daughter—his need to test the potential suitor is seen, in this interpretation, as the final stage of parental guidance before letting go of the child.

Ferdinand appears, when we first meet him, as one amazed and comforted by the invisible Ariel's song remembering his "drowned father" (1.2.406): we meet him as one possessed by wonder even in his deep grief. When he first meets and begins courting Miranda, he seems to most modern students like a man with a load of stale come-ons (which Miranda wouldn't necessarily recognize, not having been subjected to the full range of boring pick-up lines out there); yet in forcing him to do servile manual labor for her sake, Prospero forces him to prove what kind of loyalty and true affection is connected to his obvious sexual attraction to Miranda.

### **For Debate: A Feminist / Cultural Reading**

Leininger, Lorie Jerrell. "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*." *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois, 1983.

The first result of this schematic representation of all virtue and vice as chastity and lust is the exclusion from the field of moral concern the very domination and enslavement which the play vividly dramatizes. The exclusion is accomplished with phenomenal success under the guise of religion, humanism, and Neo-platonic idealism, by identifying Prospero with God (or spirit, or soul, or imagination) and Caliban with the Devil (or matter, body, and lust). Within the Christian-humanist tradition, the superiority of spirit over matter, or soul over body, was a commonplace: body existed to serve soul, to be, metaphorically, enslaved by soul. In a tradition which included the *Psychomachia*, medieval morality plays, and Elizabethan drama, the "higher" and "lower" selves existing within each person's psyche had been represented allegorically in the form of Virtues and Vices. A danger inherent in this mode of portraying inner struggle lay in the possibility of identifying certain human beings with Vice-figures, and others (oneself included) with the representatives of Virtue. Such identification of self with Virtue and others with Vice led to the great Christian-humanist inversion: the warrant to plunder, exploit, and kill in the name of God—Virtue destroying Vice.

It was "only natural" that the educated and privileged be identified with virtue and spirit, and that those who do society's dirty work, and all outsiders, be identified with vice and matter. Ellen Cantarow has analyzed the tendency of allegory to link virtue with privilege and sin with misfortune, making particular power relationships appear inevitable, "natural" and just within a changeless, "divinely ordained" hierarchical order; Nancy Hall Rice has analyzed the manner in which the artistic process of embodying evil in one person and then punishing or destroying that person offers an ersatz solution to the complex problem of evil, sanctioning virulent attacks on

social minorities or outcasts; and Winthrop D. Jordan has discussed the tendency of Western civilization to link African natives, for example, with preconceived concepts of sexuality and vice. Jordan speaks of "the ordered hierarchy of (imputed) sexual aggressiveness": the lower one's place on the scale of social privilege, the more dangerously lustful one is perceived as being.

Thus in *The Tempest*, written some fifty years after England's open participation in the slave trade, the island's native is made the embodiment of lust, disobedience, and irremediable evil, while his enslaver is presented as a God-figure. It makes an enormous difference in the expectations raised, whether one speaks of the moral obligations of Prospero-the-slave-owner toward Caliban-his-slave, or speaks of the moral obligations of Prospero-the-God-figure toward Caliban-the-lustful-Vice-figure. In the second instance (the allegorical-symbolic), the only requirement is that Prospero be punitive toward Caliban and that he defend his daughter Miranda's chastity—that daughter being needed as a pawn to counterbalance Caliban's lust. In this symbolic scheme, Miranda is deprived of any possibility of human freedom, growth or thought. She need only *be* chaste—to exist as a walking emblem of chastity. This kind of symbolism is damaging in that it deflects our attention away from the fact that real counterparts to Caliban, Prospero, and Miranda exist—that real slaves, real slave owners, and real daughters existed in 1613 for Shakespeare's contemporaries and have continued to exist since then.

### Distinguishing Minor Characters:

- a. **Gonzalo** is a compassionate old counselor whose honesty is admirable, but whose optimism is at times foolish. His "golden age" speech (2.1.148-69) makes him the butt of the villains' jokes and it *is* poorly thought-out, as they make a point of noting. He has been compared to *Hamlet's* Polonius, but though he is somewhat long-winded and obtuse, he lacks Polonius's conniving nature. Gonzalo may be more akin to AYL's Adam—loyal, compassionate, and unflinchingly kind.
- b. **Sebastian and Antonio (1668-72)** What's the importance that they're not penitent at end? Both are sarcastic, quick-witted, cruel. Sebastian accuses Alonso & browbeats him in his sorrow ; Antonio is the instigator and leads Sebastian into rebellion plot (Note: common sense of such a tactic on the island?)
- c. **Stephano & Trinculo (1672-74. 1675-76)** Stephano Is a drunk and a bully; Trinculo is the nervous type, simpler. Both are gulls, led by Caliban through his ploy of becoming their "slave."

### The Resolution

Does this play resolve itself with a happy ending, with serenity & peace achieved? Or disillusion?

<Prospero has achieved his goal: marrying Miranda to Ferdinand as means to end the Machiavellian quarrel between himself & Alonso: one may read this as healing with love, though Prospero seems alternately dejected ("every third thought will be my grave") or aware of the tenuousness of his finale: "my ending is despair, unless I be relieved by prayer, which pierces so that it assaults Mercy itself, and frees all faults" (Epilogue 15-18).

<Though Prospero says (immediately after his conversion of vengeance to pity), "they being penitent, the sole drift of my purpose doth extend not a frown further" (5.1.28-30), they are *not* all penitent. Sebastian and Antonio remain unchanged by their experiences" and Prospero's only claim on them is a form of blackmail—exposing them to Alonso. Further, "Prospero's failure goes deeper than this. Fundamentally his art has had no effect whatsoever on the nature of Caliban" (Hirst 28-29). Thus critics like Jan Kott see *The Tempest* as "the most bitter of Shakespeare's plays" because it exposes the inability of art to change the world, with the retirement of the artist as a kind of surrender to the lack of spiritual progress in the world.

<Another view would modify Kott's position, claiming that the point is to recognize one's limitations: Prospero's magic *does* effect some changes in the world—it is the means by which Prospero ultimately comes to recognize himself and learn compassion; it allows him

(eventually) to free Ariel; it gives him a way to bring Alonso through penance to reconciliation. The failures with Antonio, Sebastian, and (perhaps) Caliban all seem to imply, in this view, that some can only be curbed—either because they are not yet ready to recognize and redeem themselves, or because they are truly fallen men and cannot find their way.

### **Some Other Sources for *The Tempest***

- Bloom, Harold. "The Tempest." *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human*. New York: Riverhead, 1998.
- Brown, Paul. "'This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine': *The Tempest* and the discourse of colonialism." *Political Shakespeare: Essays in Cultural Materialism*. Second ed. Ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield. Ithaca and London: Cornell U P, 1985, 1994.
- Carroll, William C. "The Changes of Romance: *The Tempest*." *The Metamorphoses of Shakespearean Comedy*. Princeton: Princeton U P, 1985: 225-43.
- Greenblatt, Stephen. "Martial Law in the Land of Cockaigne." *Shakespearean Negotiations: The Circulation of Social Energy in Renaissance England*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: U of California, 1988.
- Hamilton, Donna B. *Virgil and The Tempest: The Politics of Imitation*. Columbus: Ohio State U P, 1990.
- Kernan, Alvin. "The King and the Poet: *The Tempest*." *Shakespeare, the King's Playwright: Theater in the Stuart Court, 1603-1613*. New Haven and London: Yale U P, 1995.
- Leininger, Lorie Jerrell. "The Miranda Trap: Sexism and Racism in Shakespeare's *Tempest*." *The Woman's Part: Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*. Ed. Carolyn Ruth Swift Lenz et al. Urbana and Chicago: U of Illinois, 1983.
- Loomba, Ania. "Shakespeare and cultural difference." *Alternative Shakespeares 2*. Ed Terence Hawkes. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Mannoni, Octave. "Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization." *The Arden Shakespeare: The Tempest*. Third series. Ed. Virginia Mason Vaughn and Alden T. Vaughn. Walton-on-Thames: Thomas Nelson, 1999.
- Norbrook, David. "'What Cares These Roarers for the Name of King?': Language and Utopia in *The Tempest*." *Shakespeare: The Last Plays*. Ed. Kiernan Ryan. London and New York: Longman, 1999.
- Peterson, Douglas L. "*The Tempest*: 'Remember, for That's My Business with You.'" *Time, Tide and Tempest: A Study of Shakespeare's Romances*. San Marino: Huntington Library, 1973