'SKILL IN THE CONSTRUCTION'

DRAMATURGY, IDEOLOGY, AND INTERPRETATION

IN SHAKESPEARE'S LATE PLAYS

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the way dramaturgical techniques in Shakespeare's late plays are used to create a complex and radical exploration of the relationship between ideology and interpretation. It links such concerns via the multiple meanings of "construction", illustrated using the scene of reading at the end of *Cymbeline*, centred upon the prophetic label. In Part I, major reservations are expressed about the standard interpretative paradigms applied to late Shakespearian drama, and their effect on critical understanding. The deficiencies of a "Romance" reading and the problems with traditional attitudes to chronology, authorship, and collaboration are stressed; elements often marginalized as aesthetically inferior are defended; and two related areas of dramaturgical technique, theatrical spectacle and reported action, are emphasized. Part II focuses on reading individual late plays, with special emphasis on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. It adopts a reconstructed, politicized close reading, concentrating on issues relating to the problematics of interpretation within the plays. Individual chapters highlight different forms of "construction": art, history, truth, authority, display, narrative. Attention is drawn to how reading and interpretation are shown to be always inscribed within power relations and the performative dynamic of language.

There's more adoe to interprete interpretations,
than to interprete things: and more bookes vpon
bookes, then vpon any other subject. We doe
but enter-glose our selves.

Michel de Montaigne
(translated by John Florio)

Truth may seem but cannot be,
Beauty brag, but 'tis not she.
Truth and beauty buried be.

William Shakespeare

And the clear truth no man has seen nor will anyone
know concerning the gods and about all the things of
  which I speak;
for even if he should actually manage to say what was
  indeed the case,
nevertheless he himself does not know it; but belief
  is found over all.

attributed to
Xenophanes of Colophon
(c.580 - c.480 BC)

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PREFACE

I started this thesis with what felt at the time like a relatively simple aim. I wanted to show why some of Shakespeare's lesser-known, less-admired late plays (basically, that is, those other than *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*) were a good deal better than their long-term reputation would suggest, and so deserving of more positive and serious critical (and theatrical) attention than they ever seemed to receive. This remains one of my main objectives, though I am much more aware these days that it begs a number of significant questions. To help explain the shape the finished project has taken, I want to set out briefly here some of the thinking behind this original intention, and some of the ways in which my early ideas have developed (or survived) as my work has progressed. It needs to be emphasized, however (to introduce in passing another of my central themes), that what I offer below is very much a narrative constructed in retrospect, with the benefit – but also, therefore, through the distorting lens – of hindsight.

My interest began – as the body of the thesis itself begins – with *Cymbeline*. A series of increasingly fascinated (some might say, increasingly obsessive) encounters with this text – and it is perhaps worth stressing that I am talking specifically about *readings* here, the text on the page – were accompanied by a growing frustration at the manner of the play's treatment by the critical tradition. It seemed to me that commentators had almost entirely failed to address (or for that matter, to notice) key facets of its artistic and dramaturgical construction: its multiple puns and patterns, the extraordinary degree

to which its verbal texture has been shaped (down, in many places, to the most minute details of word and imagery), the controlled complexity and quality of its design - I could go on. In other words, to use a familiar trope, I became aware of a vast gulf between what I thought I could see in this play, and what the standard criticism was leading me to expect to see in it. Looking back now, I can formulate clearly what was only inchoate then, my sense that *Cymbeline*, misunderstood and marginalized for decades, is an exceptionally brilliant piece of work even for Shakespeare. It may have been derided and regarded with embarrassment by some of the dramatist's most ardent admirers, and valued by others merely for its heroine or its two songs/poems, but for me, *Cymbeline* as a whole stands as absolutely quintessential Shakespeare, and it lies at the heart of this thesis.

My initial impression of the critical tradition soon crystallized into a thoroughgoing dissatisfaction with the interpretative paradigms long dominant in this field. In company with most other students of Shakespeare in the twentieth century, I was introduced to *Cymbeline* within the context of the four late "Romances". From an early stage, I was troubled by this generic (and biographical) categorization, feeling that the "Romance" model of reading did little to enhance understanding either of *Cymbeline* itself, or of any of the other plays traditionally included under its rubric. It did even less, moreover, for a work usually omitted from the group entirely, and in which I was also already particularly interested, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I discuss my objections to the "Romance" classification of late Shakespearian drama in detail in Chapter Two. In its stead, I have adopted the non-generic term, "late plays", which I use throughout to refer, quite specifically, to six dramatic texts - namely, in alphabetical order, *Cymbeline, Henry VIII*

(*All Is True*), *Pericles*, *The Tempest*, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and *The Winter's Tale*. I should point out that "late plays" is a description not without its own problems, and I return to these as well in Chapter Two.

An important factor behind the choice of terminology here was my decision, taken from the start, to incorporate *The Two Noble Kinsmen* firmly within the scope of my discussion. Like a number of its more recent critics, I owe much of my initial enthusiasm for this play to the RSC production that opened the Swan Theatre in Stratford in 1986 (though I myself saw it when it transferred to Newcastle the following year). But I can also still recall the day, probably some five or six years prior to that, when I first came across an edition of *Kinsmen* (the New Penguin Shakespeare text, to be precise) in a bookshop. I distinctly remember wondering, with a peculiar mixture of confusion, annoyance, scepticism, and (I like to think) excitement, (a) how there could be a Shakespeare play that I had never even remotely heard of before, and (b) why it was not to be found in my own (newly-purchased) copy of the complete works. I mention this private memory here because it provides a partial reflection of the power to challenge and disturb which this drama still possesses. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is a dark and troubling work, one which by its very existence disrupts and destabilizes many of the standard narratives of Shakespeare's career. This is of course a quality that has had much to do with its being largely ignored in the mainstream realms of Shakespearian studies and performance until only recently.

Notions of disruption and unstable narratives tie in well with another key starting-point in my thinking about late Shakespearian drama, the sequence of action surrounding the "return" of Hermione at the end of *The Winter's Tale*. What has always stood out for me here

are the unresolved problems posed by the statue-scene (5.3) at the level of the plot – the fact that Shakespeare "cheats", so to speak. Having staged what feels like a miracle within the fictional world, the play then appears to deny that it was a miracle at all, through one brief, rather enigmatic sentence from the Queen herself (ll. 126-129), which in turn links back to a number of tantalizing hints given earlier on. But when all is said and done, the theory, frequently extrapolated from these hints, that the reportedly dead-and-buried Hermione has been living quietly sequestered at Paulina's house for sixteen years, makes little more "sense" in realistic terms than any magical metamorphosis from stone. And in any case, although it is often assumed or asserted outright in the criticism, this explanation of events is never directly stated in the actual play. The text of *The Winter's Tale* refuses to yield any explicit enlightenment about what is supposed to have taken place off-stage – on the contrary, it does its utmost (as it were) to emphasize that such "action" is not available to view or to reliable knowledge, that it exists only in the imagination of the audience. Even more crucially, the various separate pieces of information supplied about what happens to Hermione resist (re)arrangement into any fully coherent or reasonable narrative. That is to say, the play presents a story which seems, just at its climactic moment, to be deliberately lacking in the degree of internal narrative consistency normally associated with its general style of dramatic fiction.

I explore this aspect of *The Winter's Tale* in a bit more depth in Chapter Five, where I seek to enlarge on the disjunctions between the play's major acts of narration and the spectacular events of its final scene. What I want to pick up on for now is precisely the sense – so evident in the last two scenes of *The Winter's Tale* especially –

of a disparity or opposition between events that are dramatized on stage and those that are "only" narrated or reported. Shakespeare's late dramatic works in general are characterized by an abundance of elaborate spectacle and pageantry, and by an ostentatious reliance on extended passages of reported action. My whole approach to the late plays is built around these two unusual (and frequently frowned-upon) facets of their dramaturgy, which can be roughly classified (to give them a shorthand identification I shall be making use of throughout) as "spectacle" and "report". Both these categories – which to some extent reflect an inherent contrast between "showing" and "telling" – encompass a range of different theatrical and technical effects. In the former, I would include any significantly heightened or intense visual actions, inset shows and ceremonies, tableaux, and the like. With the latter, I am thinking particularly of expository narratives by characters and choric figures, direct-address soliloquies, and set-piece descriptions telling or re-telling deeds or events previously seen, unseen, currently visible, or supposedly happening or observed off-stage.

Examples of dramatic spectacle and reported action often appear together or in close conjunction, and these two distinctive components in the dramaturgical construction of the late plays are intimately interrelated on a number of levels. They also connect importantly to most of the central themes and concerns of the late plays as a group. Thus the devices involved all tend to work, for instance, to call attention to the processes of story-telling or the activities of staging and performing, in a way which links in with, and contributes strongly to, the well-known fictional and theatrical self-consciousness of late Shakespearian drama. Similarly, the juxtaposition and careful manipulation of moments of spectacle and report, showing and telling,

form vital ingredients in the recurring explorations across all these plays of issues to do with perception and understanding, interpretation and the construction of meaning. I discuss such connections further in Chapter Four, where I define more fully exactly what I have in mind by spectacle and report. Besides the closing two scenes of *The Winter's Tale*, the opening two scenes of *The Tempest* furnish a powerful illustration of the kinds of techniques and effects at stake. And *Pericles*, with the clearcut separations that it draws between its constituent parts of drama, narration, and dumb-show, is perhaps even more useful in this respect - indeed, I first pursued the topic at hand in an MA dissertation on this latter text, ideas from which (much improved, I hope) find their way into the present study.

The play I was least looking forward to working on when I began was *Henry VIII*. Here, I was acutely aware of a strong tradition of very unfavourable commentary, obviously tied up with a widespread belief in (some form of) divided authorship; unlike in the case of *Cymbeline*, though, I had no previous personal knowledge of the text to set against this. Influenced, like so many before me, by the predominantly negative tone of the critics, I approached *Henry VIII* with only minimal enthusiasm. However, the principles behind my desire to treat *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as a fully-fledged member of the late plays (and in doing so, generally to move beyond the model of the "four Romances") left me no grounds on which I could justify ignoring *Henry VIII*, should I have wanted to. And for me, now, it is *Henry VIII* that stands out as giving shape to this thesis, as the play that showed me the crucial intersections between my own original areas of interest - spectacle and report, metadrama and interpretation - and the realms of politics and ideology. This is a drama in which the politics of public display and

ceremonial performance, and the relationship between narrativity and the representation of history, the control of narrative processes and political power, shine forth particularly clearly.

It was my study of *Henry VIII* that really hammered home for me, even more than my work on *Cymbeline* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the fundamental limitations and inadequacies of the prevailing critical paradigms for interpreting late Shakespearian drama, and the attitudes to authorship and collaboration enshrined within them. In connection with this, it seems appropriate to relate that much of my early research on *Henry VIII* was conducted around the time of the so-called "Gulf War" of 1991. The play's unblinking analysis of the world of power politics, and its multi-layered examination of the manipulation of truth in the visual and narrative realms and at the level of public discourse, came to seem especially pertinent and perceptive against the background of a high-profile, media-dominating conflict in which truth was a notably heavy casualty; where the gap between word and deed in the political sphere was chillingly exposed in the ghastly euphemisms of "collateral damage" and "friendly fire"; and where, on the winning side, in age-old fashion, 'the word of God' was, in the words of the poet Tony Harrison (and in terms that I can easily imagine the play's figure of Cranmer understanding only too well), 'once again conscripted | to gloss the cross on the precision sight' ('Initial Illumination', [ll. 21-24]). I invoke such associations not so much to trumpet the "contemporary relevance" of *Henry VIII*, as to suggest the kind of valencies for the play that have been obscured or deflected by decades of unsympathetic criticism and authorship-obsessed approaches – and equally, and just as frustratingly, in many of the more favourable visionary and "romance" readings it has received.

It should be clear by now that mine is very much a project with a double focus. On the one hand, it sets out to offer detailed, broadly interpretative studies of a few plays that I regard as having been badly underrated and often only superficially understood; on the other, it seeks to call into question many of the ways in which Shakespeare's later works as a group have typically been read and interpreted. One common thread drawing these two sides of the project together is the concept of "construction". There is a manifest symmetry between my concern to explore the construction of meaning within the plays themselves, and my attempt to analyse how the meaning of the late plays has been constructed (and constricted) by the critical tradition. The double focus I am emphasizing here is reflected in the two-part structure of the thesis. Part Two consists of a series of "close readings" of specific texts, concentrating on the sort of features mentioned above. *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* both receive a chapter each, whilst relevant aspects of some of the remaining plays in the group are discussed more briefly in an opening piece, which serves as something of an introduction to the second section as a whole. In Part One, I spend much of my time scrutinizing (and criticizing) the standard critical and scholarly paradigms that have been applied to the late plays. In the process, I also trace my own debts to previous commentators, and sketch in a theoretical framework for the interpretations advanced in Part Two. This area of my work has kept expanding as the thesis has progressed, and Part Two has had to shrink accordingly, with the result that, in my comments on individual plays, I have had to be far more selective than I originally envisaged.

The chapters in Part Two are intended to be able to stand alone, and have thus been kept fairly self-contained, with little overlap of

content or argument. In contrast, the argument to Part One is more cumulative in nature. Here, a number of concerns and ideas recur with some regularity, get addressed from different angles, as I look to tease out the connections linking such diverse areas of enquiry as dramaturgy, authorship, history, and interpretation. This section of the thesis opens with a lengthy preliminary chapter examining one short passage from *Cymbeline*, which brings together just about all of the topics and interests touched on in the course of this Preface. I use the final portion of this opening chapter to indicate how it leads in to what follows. The rest of the first part covers issues relating to genre, chronology, collaboration and attribution, aesthetic distance and artistic self-consciousness, topicality, methods of reading, and so on. Much of the discussion is designed to stake out a space for my own readings, to make the case for why there are still new and relevant things to be said about Shakespeare's late plays. But Part One is not just a necessary preamble to Part Two. As I see it, the two sections of the thesis are utterly interconnected and mutually dependent. The dominant interpretative models constructed around the late plays have, as I stress throughout Part One, contributed greatly to the neglect of the features (and the texts) I focus upon in Part Two. At the same time, though, it is those very features, and the focus adopted in the second half, which most vividly expose the critical shortcomings and misrepresentations highlighted during Part One. The two sides of the project reinforce each other, need to be considered in tandem.

This brings me back to my opening comments on the subject of merit and value. Woven firmly into the structure of the planning and organization of Part One as a whole, and of the individual chapters in Part Two, is my original intention of praising and re-evaluating

misunderstood and poorly appreciated plays. For better or worse, this is a thesis built around the desire to rescue and redeem marginalized texts, to demonstrate the skill in their construction and the depth of their intellectual insight – and hence, perhaps, to reveal, if only by implication, new or disregarded aspects of the "genius" of Shakespeare. There are elements in my approach here that are liable to come across as theoretically suspect or seriously out of date. Issues of artistic quality, for example, have tended not to prove all that high a priority in recent critical thinking – though it is probably fair to say that they rank as more of an enduring concern for the "ordinary reader". But there is at least one respect in the present context in which the whole question of quality remains absolutely crucial. Estimations of literary (and dramatic) achievement and aesthetic worth played a fundamental role in shaping twentieth-century attitudes to the late plays – even to the extent of determining, for many critics, the very make-up of the group. What is more, long-standing aesthetic prejudices and decidedly questionable value-judgements lie at the heart of many supposedly objective assessments of empirical evidence in this field, most especially in the areas of dating and chronology, genre, and authorship attribution. One key consequence of all this is that highly disputable notions of what constitutes "good" art and "proper" Shakespearian drama still heavily influence which of the late plays are most studied, most performed, most admired.

There is, nevertheless, a definite tension within my own project at this point. My desire to resist certain conventional formulations, to read late Shakespeare "differently", leads easily, as is hinted at in the previous paragraph, into the dubious and dangerous realms of bardolatry – summoning up, most particularly, the sort of outlook on

Shakespeare which demands that "even the bad plays have to be good". I would note in passing that I have attempted to avoid the most obvious pitfalls that present themselves in this regard, by consciously distancing myself from the common strategy that automatically elevates Shakespeare's work above that of his contemporaries, or the sources on which it is based; and by refraining from offering judgements of other writers solely through the prism of studying Shakespeare. Above all, on this one matter, I have sought to address questions of authorship and attribution without recourse to the usual boring old assumptions about what Shakespeare would or could have written, or deluded (and palpably false) claims that his individual contributions are immediately distinguishable from those of his putative collaborators. But there is a wider, much more important problematic in operation here, which informs my whole methodology, and which I have done rather less to resolve, reaching at best an uncomfortable alliance between the old and the new. Whatever my pretensions to be different and forward-looking, the critical approach adopted in this thesis draws to a considerable degree on potentially outmoded and (for many) unsustainable concepts of personal authorship, authorial intention, and textual meaning. It is founded, moreover, at root, on largely unfashionable principles of formalist analysis, as applied through the processes of "close reading".

Any theoretical conservatism discernible in my methodology is, I hope, offset or tempered by my opposition to the political and intellectual conservatism that has characterized much of the available interpretative commentary on the late plays. In addition, it should be clear from the tone of the discussion so far that this is in no way a thesis that seeks to return to "old certainties" where late Shakespeare is concerned. Indeed, as I stress throughout Part One, I owe many

major critical and theoretical debts to the politically-oriented criticism that has evolved, in various forms, over the last few decades. Having said that, though, I have found close reading, and a focus on formal features and aesthetic effects, to be valuable tools in countering a strongly reductive and mechanistic tendency within such work. I am, in particular, unhappy with - suspicious of - 'the hermeneutics of suspicion', to borrow Kiernan Ryan's use of this phrase (*Shakespeare*, second edition (Hemel Hempstead, 1995), p. 44), that has typified the bulk of recent poststructuralist criticism of Shakespeare. As Ryan rightly suggests, the perspective that asserts its ideological mastery over the Shakespearian text essentially denies that text from the outset any scope for presenting effective political insights of its own - its own critique of past (and present) ideologies, historical power structures, and the representation of reality at the level of discourse. But for me, that is precisely what Shakespearian drama can - and does - do. Whilst the readings of the late plays I put forward in pursuing this line may at times seem to go against the surface meaning of the texts involved, I would argue that, more often than not, it is actually the limitations and distortions of critical (and performance) paradigms and interpretative expectations which I am reading against. So I prefer to think of my thesis as an exercise in reading "with" Shakespeare's late plays, irrespective of (and where necessary, in conflict with) the dictates of tradition, in an effort to release the aesthetic and intellectual complexity and radical potential which they still possess.

REFERENCES AND ABBREVIATIONS

All quotations reproduce the wording and spelling of the original as precisely as possible, except that obsolete letter-forms have been modernized, and spacing, type-faces, and capitalization, especially in titles and quotations from early printed books, generally standardized. I have chosen to preserve original u/v and i/j variations, not so much with an aim at any nebulous form of "authenticity", but because they usefully maintain some sense of historical difference. The representation of titles within the titles of books, articles, and so on, has also, on the whole, been standardized.

Unless otherwise indicated, and with the important exception of stage directions (see below), all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, edited by Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with others, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 1986); in similar terms, all references are keyed to this edition (which differs slightly in places from later incarnations of the Oxford text). Any substantive departures in Oxford from the original printed texts have been duly noted, and I have occasionally had recourse to those originals where I have felt particularly unhappy with Oxford's emendations or modernizations. For the non-canonical (or semi-canonical) *Edward III*, references are to the text in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, second edition, general editor G. Blakemore Evans, with J. J. M. Tobin (Boston, MA, 1997), pp. 1732-1773.

Whilst the Oxford edition has many advantages over other complete works, using it presents a number of specific problems where the late plays are concerned. These are most obvious when it comes to *Pericles*, for which the Oxford editors supply what they term 'A Reconstructed Text' (pp. 1167-1198). For the sake of consistency, I have adopted this as my basic text for quotations and references, but have taken extra pains in the Notes to document any divergences from the original, except where these are merely trivial. Where Oxford departs radically (as is frequently the case) from the first quarto of 1609 (Q1), I have gone back to the quarto-text, as reproduced in the 'Diplomatic Reprint'

included in the Oxford OSE, pp. 1201-1221; references to this are by the through-line-numbering (TLN) supplied. The Oxford editors also remove the conventional five-act structure imposed on *Pericles* by the editorial tradition. I have kept to their scene-numbering in references, but have had cause on occasion to invoke the familiar act divisions, as found in virtually every other modern edition of the play. Oxford's scene-numbering for the final acts of both *Cymbeline* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is highly individual too, but here again it has proved easiest to adhere to their system.

With the names of characters, I have generally reproduced the form and spelling given in Oxford, but could not bring myself to adopt all of their modernizations/alterations. Thus I prefer the Folio "Iachimo" to Oxford's "Giacomo" in *Cymbeline*, and the quarto form "Gerrold" (to their "Gerald") for the Schoolmaster in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. After much deliberation, and in spite of my own sense of the attractiveness of the alteration, I have also opted for the conventional "Imogen", as opposed to Oxford's "Innogen", partly out of doubts about the sufficiency of the evidence adduced, partly out of respect for the familiarity of the Folio form, and partly because of the level of editorial intervention such a change of name involves – the force of the change in relation to the evidence behind it. With certain other characters from the Shakespeare canon (most obviously, Falstaff), I have stuck to the familiar name or form of their name, whilst acknowledging Oxford's version in specific references. Having said all this, however, names in quotations always follow the spelling in the text cited. The minor variations that arise as a result are unlikely to cause much confusion, and in any case, I am not sure that complete uniformity, which must inevitably be spurious, is really desirable in this area.

For a variety of reasons, I have not adopted the Oxford re-titling of *Henry VIII* as *All Is True*, preferring to think of the latter more in the nature of a subtitle or authoritative alternative. I return to this subject in detail in the body of the text. In all other cases where Oxford re-titles a play, I have stuck to the familiar name (though again generally acknowledging their form in references). I also adhere to the weight of convention with the untitled poem most commonly known to history as *The Phoenix and the Turtle* (but in Oxford, *The Phoenix and Turtle*), since to do so seems as appropriate as anything where no title

carries authority. But I do use one "re-titling" rather disappointingly not advocated by the Oxford editors, favouring the form *Lucrece*, which is what appears on the title-page of the first edition of Shakespeare's poem, over the more traditional (and critically and culturally more problematic) *The Rape of Lucrece*.

Stage directions are quoted word-for-word as they appear in the original quarto and folio texts, since this is to present them in the least mediated form available. For Folio plays, I have used the *Norton Facsimile*, adopting its through-line-numbering for references. With *Pericles*, I have again had recourse to the Oxford OSE diplomatic reprint, which as noted above, comes with TLN supplied. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* poses more of a problem: here, stage directions are quoted from the facsimile reprint in Allen and Muir, pp. 836-881, but since this comes without any appended line-numbering, they are identified using the page-numbering of the original quarto, followed by the reference for the equivalent point in Oxford's text. Other references to the quarto text of *Kinsmen* adhere to the same pattern. In identifying stage directions in modern edited texts, I follow the convention pioneered by The Revels Plays series and silently adopted by Oxford, which numbers the lines of a direction with supplementary figures appended to the reference for the previous line of text (so for example, the opening stage direction of *The Tempest* in Oxford would be signified as 1.1. 0.1-2).

For the sake of convenience, and because nothing I have had to say is particularly affected by verbal details unique to any one edition, Biblical references are all keyed to the 1611 ("Authorized") King James Version, for which I have used the World's Classics edition by Robert Carroll and Stephen Prickett (Oxford, 1997). References to the works of Virgil and Ovid are to the Loeb editions listed in the Bibliography; references to the Chaucer canon, unless otherwise indicated, to the texts in the *Riverside Chaucer*. For Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, I have used the edition by Thomas P. Roche, Jr., with C. Patrick O'Donnell, Jr., Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1987). Where no other source is mentioned, statistics relating to Shakespearian drama are derived from the figures in Spevack. Dates cited for non-Shakespearian plays are those given in *Annals*. Birth and death dates for authors and other historical figures have been taken from the most reliable sources of information available to me. All dates given follow modern practice

regarding the start of the new year, and I have silently "updated" references wherever necessary to conform with this (particularly when it comes to records for court performances in the Jacobean and Caroline periods).

Because of my own position on the subject of authorship, I have deliberately erred on the side of caution and pedantry in the area of attribution. In particular, I have used the tag, "Beaumont-and-Fletcher" (always with the inverted commas, as a signal of its conventionality and provisionality), as a catch-all description to cover the canon of dramatic works that generally goes under these authors' names. All references to plays in this canon are keyed to the Bowers edition. In discussing any of the individual works involved, I have been wary of endorsing modern attributions which are not directly grounded in the available external evidence. In contrast to this, however, I have stuck to the modern convention of referring to the author of the three *Volumes of Chronicles* published in 1587 as Holinshed (and the volume itself as Holinshed's *Chronicles*), even though this text is the work of a number of different contributors. Since the 1587 edition survives in a variety of different states, I have found it easiest to key any references to the 1807-1808 reprint (identified throughout as *Holinshed's Chronicles* - see the List of Abbreviations, below). Where appropriate, though, I also include the original section, book, and chapter descriptions (as set out, that is, in the 1807-08 text). For comment on some of the issues involved here, see Annabel Patterson, *Reading Holinshed's 'Chronicles'* (Chicago and London, 1994).

This thesis comes heavily burdened with footnotes. I have been concerned in Part One in particular to trace the path of critical history and the powerful influence certain established models of reading have exerted on later interpretation - the way in which some of the main ideas in late play criticism grew up and came to be accepted, their place within wider cultural images of Shakespeare and Shakespearian drama, and the extent to which these dominant attitudes and paradigms have shaped and determined, curtailed and constrained, subsequent interpretation and understanding. In the light of this interest, I made a decision early on to focus almost exclusively on the public course of critical debate, as played out in the realm of printed criticism. I have thus largely ignored the (very large) body of work on the late plays to

be found in academic theses and dissertations, in the cheerful/foolish optimism that the same fate might not await my own study. But I have also made an effort to draw attention to ideas in earlier criticism not followed up on, critical paths not taken, more individual/idiosyncratic lines of interpretation that seem to me to have real value. Detailed references are given on the first citation of a work, after which abbreviated forms are used. Full publication information relating to all works cited here and in the Notes is included in the Bibliography. As well as a few works that I have not been able to track down, there will of course be some studies (hopefully not too many) which I have simply missed.

Of my three epigraphs, the first is found in John Florio's translation of Montaigne's *Essayes* (London, 1603), p. 636; the second (with apologies for the gender-specific language), in *Early Greek Philosophy*, translated and edited by Jonathan Barnes, Penguin Classics (Harmondsworth, 1987), p. 94 (Xenophanes's remarks are recorded in Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Mathematicians*, VII, 49); and the third forms part of Reason's threne in *The Phoenix and the Turtle*, ll. 62-64. The lines by Tony Harrison quoted in the Preface are from his Gulf War poem, 'Initial Illumination', originally published in *The Guardian*, 5 March 1991, and reprinted in his collection, *The Gaze of the Gorgon* (Newcastle upon Tyne, 1992), pp. 46-47.

Shakespeare studies carry on apace. Most of the research for this thesis was completed by the end of 1998, but I have sought, as far as possible, to keep abreast of work produced since. Even so, I have been unable to engage as fully as I would have liked with anything published since that date, including Gordon McMullan's monumental Arden 3 edition of *Henry VIII* (London, 2000), and the important collection of essays edited by Jennifer Richards and James Knowles, *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings* (Edinburgh, 1999). Amongst very recent work, some of the aspects of Shakespeare's dramaturgy and approach to history and politics that I focus on are addressed, though without any reference to the late plays, in Ronald Knowles, *Shakespeare's Arguments with History* (Basingstoke, 2002); and many of the issues raised in Chapter Three are explored, with a far wider focus, in Harold Love, *Attributing Authorship* (Cambridge, 2002). As the Richards and Knowles volume in particular testifies, many of the conventional paradigms and models of reading that

I concentrate on in Part I of this thesis have started to lose some of their influence in the last few years. On the other hand, the tenacity and persistence of the approaches I have sought to challenge can still be seen in such works as Joe Nutt, *An Introduction to Shakespeare's Late Plays* (Basingstoke, 2002), or, in terms of the canon "as a whole", David Bevington, *Shakespeare* (Oxford, 2002).

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Titles of periodicals and journals are given in abbreviated form where this is the effective title (or has become widely accepted as such), but otherwise I have kept abbreviations to a minimum, to allow ease of reference and to avoid confusion. Abbreviations not explained below or on their first appearance in the text can be found (or inferred from related forms) in *The Oxford Writers' Dictionary* (Oxford, 1996); the following list contains all other abbreviations used, as well as any abbreviated titles not explained in the Notes or immediately apparent from the Bibliography, or that might otherwise give rise to confusion. In references to any of the multi-volume works included here, except as indicated, the form given is followed by the volume number(s), date of publication (where relevant), and page number(s).

AEB	*Analytical & Enumerative Bibliography*
Allen and Muir	Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir, eds., *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto: A Facsimile Edition of Copies Primarily from the Henry E. Huntington Library* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1981)
Annals	Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975–1700*, second edition, revised by S. Schoenbaum (London, 1964)
BEPD	W. W. Greg, *A Bibliography of the English Printed Drama to the Restoration*, 4 vols (London, 1939–1959; reprinted 1970); references are by entry number

Bowers	Fredson Bowers, general editor, *The Dramatic Works in the Beaumont and Fletcher Canon*, 10 vols (Cambridge, 1966-1996)
Brumble	H. David Brumble, *Classical Myths and Legends in the Middle Ages and Renaissance: A Dictionary of Allegorical Meanings* (Westport, CT, 1998)
Bullough, *Sources*	Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, 8 vols (London and New York, 1957-1975)
Chambers, *Facts and Problems*	E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*, 2 vols (Oxford, 1930)
Companion	Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 1987)
Dent	R. W. Dent, *Shakespeare's Proverbial Language: An Index* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, and London, 1981); references are to the entry numbers in Appendix A
DNB	*The Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to 1900*, founded by George Smith, edited by Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 vols (London, 1937-1938; first printed 1885-1901)
Dowden, *Shakspere*	Edward Dowden, *Shakspere*, Literature Primers (London, 1877)
Dowden, *Shakspere: His Mind and Art*	Edward Dowden, *Shakspere: A Critical Study of His Mind and Art*, third edition (London, 1877); references to the first edition (London, 1875) are so specified
ELH	*ELH*
F	Folio
First Folio (the Folio, F1)	*Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies, Published according to the True Originall Copies* (London, 1623); all specific references are keyed to the *Norton Facsimile*

Fleay's "*Marina*"	F. G. Fleay, ed., *The Strange and Worthy Accidents in the Birth and Life of Marina. By William Shakspere, Transactions of the NSS,* Series I, nos. 1-2 (1874), 209-241
Halstead	William P. Halstead, *Shakespeare as Spoken: A Collation of 5000 Acting Editions and Promptbooks of Shakespeare,* 12 vols (Ann Arbor, 1977-1980); and its Supplement, *Statistical History of Acting Editions of Shakespeare,* 2 vols, *Shakespeare as Spoken,* vols XIII-XIV (Lanham, NY, 1983)
H&S	*Ben Jonson,* edited by C. H. Herford, Percy Simpson, and Evelyn Simpson, 11 vols (Oxford, 1925-1952)
Holinshed's Chronicles	Raphael Holinshed, [with others], *Holinshed's Chronicles of England, Scotland, and Ireland,* 6 vols (London, 1807-1808; reprinted from the second edition, London, 1587)
JEGP	*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*
North's Plutarch	Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romanes,* translated by Thomas North (London, 1579, and many subsequent editions)
Norton Facsimile	*The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare,* edited by Charlton Hinman (New York, 1968)
Norton Shakespeare	Stephen Greenblatt, with Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus, eds., *The Norton Shakespeare: Based on the Oxford Edition* (New York, 1997)
NSS	New Shakspere Society
OED	*The Oxford English Dictionary,* second edition, prepared by J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols (Oxford, 1989)

Oxford	Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, with John Jowett and William Montgomery, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 1986); also used generally to cover the whole Oxford Shakespeare project
Oxford OSE	Stanley Wells, et al, eds., *William Shakespeare: The Complete Works: Original-Spelling Edition*, The Oxford Shakespeare (Oxford, 1986)
PBSA	*Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*
PMLA	*Papers of the Modern Language Association*
Q	Quarto
Riverside Chaucer	*The Riverside Chaucer*, third edition, general editor Larry D. Benson (Oxford, 1988)
RSC	Royal Shakespeare Company
Rubinstein	Frankie Rubinstein, *A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sexual Puns and Their Significance* (London and Basingstoke, 1984)
Sc(s).	Scene(s)
Spedding, 'Shares'	James Spedding, 'On the Several Shares of Shakspere and Fletcher in the Play of *Henry VIII.*', *Transactions of the NSS*, Series I, nos. 1-2 (1874), 1*-18*; first printed as 'Who Wrote Shakspere's Henry VIII.?' *Gentleman's Magazine*, 187 (July-December 1850), 115-123
Spedding's Reply	James Spedding, 'Who Wrote Shakspere's Henry VIII.?', *Gentleman's Magazine*, 187 (July-December 1850), 381-382
Spencer and Wells	T. J. B. S[pencer] and S[tanley] W[ells], eds., *A Book of Masques: In Honour of Allardyce Nicoll* (Cambridge, 1967)
Spevack	Marvin Spevack, comp., *A Complete and Systematic Concordance to the Works of Shakespeare*, 9 vols (Hildesheim, 1968-1980)

STC	A. W. Pollard and G. R. Redgrave, comps., *A Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, & Ireland, and of English Books Printed Abroad, 1475-1640*, second edition, revised and enlarged by W. A. Jackson, F. S. Ferguson, and Katharine F. Pantzer, 3 vols (London, 1976-1991); references are by entry number
Sugden	Edward H. Sugden, *A Topographical Dictionary to the Works of Shakespeare and his Fellow Dramatists* (Manchester, 1925)
Third Folio Facsimile	*Mr William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, Published According to the True Original Copies: The Third Folio reproduced in facsimile*, with an Introduction by Marvin Spevack, The Shakespeare Folios (Cambridge, 1985)
Thomson, *Characters*	W. H. Thomson, *Shakespeare's Characters: A Historical Dictionary* (Altrincham, 1951)
Tilley	Morris Palmer Tilley, *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950); references are by entry number
TLN	through-line-numbering
TLS	*Times Literary Supplement*
Tucker Brooke	C. F. Tucker Brooke, ed., *The Shakespeare Apocrypha: Being A Collection of Fourteen Plays Which Have Been Ascribed to Shakespeare*, second impression (Oxford, 1918; first impression, 1908)
Wing	Donald Wing, with others, comps., *Short-Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England, Scotland, Ireland, Wales, and British America, and of English Books Printed in Other Countries, 1641-1700*, second edition, 3 vols (New York, 1972-1988); references are by entry number

PART ONE

APPROACHING SHAKESPEARE'S LATE PLAYS

CHAPTER ONE

READING CONSTRUCTIONS/CONSTRUCTING READINGS

Towards the end of *Cymbeline*, there occurs one of the oddest passages in the entire Shakespeare canon. When all the various revelations and reunions of the long last scene have just about been completed, the Roman Soothsayer, Philharmonus, assumes centre stage to deliver his interpretation of the prophecy contained in the tablet left with the sleeping Posthumus Leonatus by the god, Jupiter. The ensuing sequence, which supplies the main title for this thesis, is hardly over-familiar, and as I shall be examining it at length, it seems appropriate to quote it in full, from the moment where Posthumus first mentions his dream-vision and the tablet/label, through to the closing speech of the play:

POSTHUMUS
     Your servant, princes. Good my lord of Rome,
     Call forth your soothsayer. As I slept, methought
     Great Jupiter, upon his eagle backed,
     Appeared to me with other spritely shows
     Of mine own kindred. When I waked I found
     This label on my bosom, whose containing
     Is so from sense in hardness that I can
     Make no collection of it. Let him show
     His skill in the construction.
LUCIUS   Philharmonus.
SOOTHSAYER
     Here, my good lord.
LUCIUS   Read, and declare the meaning.
SOOTHSAYER (*reads the tablet*) 'Whenas a lion's whelp shall,
     to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be
     embraced by a piece of tender air; and when from a
     stately cedar shall be lopped branches which, being
     dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the
     old stock, and freshly grow: then shall Posthumus end
     his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace
     and plenty.'
     Thou, Leonatus, art the lion's whelp.
     The fit and apt construction of thy name,
     Being *leo-natus*, doth import so much.

The piece of tender air thy virtuous daughter,
Which we call '*mollis aer*'; and '*mollis aer*'
We term it '*mulier*', which '*mulier*' I divine
Is this most constant wife, who even now,
Answering the letter of the oracle,
Unknown to you, unsought, were clipped about
With this most tender air.

CYMBELINE   This hath some seeming.

SOOTHSAYER

The lofty cedar, royal Cymbeline,
Personates thee, and thy lopped branches point
Thy two sons forth, who, by Belarius stol'n,
For many years thought dead, are now revived,
To the majestic cedar joined, whose issue
Promises Britain peace and plenty.

CYMBELINE   Well,
My peace we will begin; and, Caius Lucius,
Although the victor, we submit to Caesar
And to the Roman empire, promising
To pay our wonted tribute, from the which
We were dissuaded by our wicked queen,
Whom heavens in justice both on her and hers
Have laid most heavy hand.

SOOTHSAYER

The fingers of the powers above do tune
The harmony of this peace. The vision,
Which I made known to Lucius ere the stroke
Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant
Is full accomplished. For the Roman eagle,
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
Lessened herself, and in the beams o'th' sun
So vanished; which foreshowed our princely eagle
Th'imperial Caesar should again unite
His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
Which shines here in the west.

CYMBELINE   Laud we the gods,
And let our crookèd smokes climb to their nostrils
From our blest altars. Publish we this peace
To all our subjects. Set we forward, let
A Roman and a British ensign wave
Friendly together. So through Lud's town march,
And in the temple of great Jupiter
Our peace we'll ratify, seal it with feasts.
Set on there. Never was a war did cease,
Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace.

(*Cymbeline*, 5.6. 427-487)[1]

This is peculiar even by the standards of *Cymbeline*! For all the

narrative suspense or emotional engagement it generates, the whole

passage could be viewed as redundant, supererogatory. Characterized

by a strange sort of textual excess, its most immediate effect seems

simply to prolong unnecessarily an already exceptionally drawn-out, incident-crammed final scene.[2]   A couple of minor loose ends in the plot do get tied up here, it is true, but the enigmas posed by the unexplained/unfulfilled prophecies are loose ends left rather gratuitously hanging to begin with.[3]

What I have termed textual excess is most strikingly displayed in the way the Soothsayer is required to read out the prophecy before he interprets it (ll. 437-444).   This reading is of obvious benefit to his on-stage audience, as ignorant as he of the contents of the tablet, but the theatre audience has already heard the divine message once in full during the previous scene (5.5. 232-238).   The sudden prominence bestowed on the prophetic text here is all the more surprising given that, appearing only belatedly in the first place, it has hardly been made to serve as a major structural device within the play.[4]   Exact, extended duplication of this order is the kind of basic, "undramatic" technique any skilled playwright might be expected to avoid at all costs. And Shakespeare usually obliges.   No other written document in his dramatic oeuvre – be it letter, oracle, proclamation, petition, or poem – is accorded the privilege of an uninterrupted and verbatim repetition of its entire contents.[5]   The re-reading is actually doubly significant in this regard because the unique narrative moment is matched at a bibliographical level: the two occurrences of the prophecy in the First Folio are printed, as Warren Smith has noted, absolutely identically, even down to the 'spelling, punctuation, hyphenation, and spacing of the letters'.   It is almost as though Jupiter's text were being presented, to quote Leah Marcus, 'like a properly "authored" document'.[6]   The exceptional narrative and textual situation that results is perhaps all the more noteworthy in a play where the wording and metrical state of

another document, Posthumus's letter to Pisanio, differ distinctly on the two separate occasions when parts of this are included in the dialogue.[7]

Nothing else in the passage approaches this extreme degree of textual duplication, but repetition and reiteration on a smaller scale are pervasive, making it easy to think that the mere imparting of information is not a high priority for the dramatist here. Thus the opening speech from Posthumus concerning his dream and discovery of the tablet (ll. 427-435) re-tells events which the audience has seen happen for itself; the Soothsayer's interpretation of the prophetic label (ll. 445-460) is riddled with verbal repetition, as he teases apart its various strands, elucidating them point by point, spelling out each and every step in his curious Latin etymologies; and the last speech from Philharmonus (ll. 468-478), after he has just interpreted the material traces of one vision, proceeds to recall, re-tell, and re-interpret his own earlier vatic dream from the eve of the battle (4.2. 346-355). Two visions, two prophecies, two interpretations, some seemingly simplistic dramaturgy, and what feels like a conscious effort on Shakespeare's part to defer the ending of the play for as long as possible. What is going on here?

In focusing on the oddities of this closing sequence, I am doing little more than echoing the general tenor of the critical debate, which has found these events uncommonly difficult to assimilate into its readings of the play. Cymbeline's abrupt volte-face in re-submitting to the authority of Rome despite British victory in the battle (ll. 460-467) is one element that has engendered critical anxiety.[8] But it is the re-introduction of the prophecy and the singular nature of its interpretation that have occasioned by far the most consternation.[9] There is nothing quite like the Soothsayer's exposition anywhere else in Shakespeare.[10] Nor is strangeness the only problem. Discussion of the prophetic label

has been complicated at every turn by its links to Posthumus's dream-vision, a piece of action routinely stigmatized for generations as a non-Shakespearian excrescence not worth gracing with any in-depth critical consideration.[11] The undeniable topical relevance of a prophecy that shares much of its language and imagery with the realm of Jacobean propaganda and panegyric has proved a further stumbling-block to appreciation (and one that has also been dragged into the authorship debate).[12] Serious doubts about the Shakespearian authenticity of the whole of *Cymbeline* appear at last to have been stilled, but the long-term persistence of the desire to remove vision and prophecy from the canon serves, if nothing else, as a testament to the peculiar, anomalous nature of these episodes.[13] Aesthetic principles and expectations that might have worked well enough in aiding understanding of the rest of the play can suddenly lose their relevance. Certainly, there is precious little here conducive to realist, mimetic, or psychological modes of reading.[14] I find it particularly interesting, then, that a passage which has provoked such intense anxieties over authorship and such marked interpretative dilemmas is itself so evidently concerned with the related topics of textuality and interpretation.

The interpretative challenge inherent in the prophetic text is a factor highlighted immediately by Posthumus. His opening speech in the above quotation seems directed towards re-creating in his listeners a sense of his own disorientation and incomprehension on first encountering the tablet. The overall import of what he is saying is clear enough, but the precise meaning (the "containing"), especially of the phrase 'so from sense in hardness' (l. 433), remains elusive.[15] The use of the word "sense" here provides an explicit link back to his initial attempt at formulating a response to the prophecy:

> 'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen
> Tongue, and brain not; either both, or nothing,
> Or senseless speaking, or a speaking such
> As sense cannot untie. Be what it is,
> The action of my life is like it, which I'll keep,
> If but for sympathy.
>
>   (5.5. 239-244)

There is some suggestion of understanding in these lines, a hint that Posthumus intuits a meaning in this 'rare' book (5.5. 227) relevant to his own experience, even whilst he cannot grasp fully what that correspondence might be - his life perhaps as either "senseless" or as incomprehensible to "sense" alone. Again, though, Posthumus's own words defy easy explanation.[16] In both these speeches - and this is an effect typical of *Cymbeline*, and of Shakespeare's late plays as a group - language appears to be straining at the very limits of its possibilities, challenging comprehension, almost rendering itself opaque in an effort to convey ideas or sensations somehow beyond the reach of normal discourse, to capture in words, as it were, that which is inexpressible.[17] Complexity of thought or expression is of no avail, however, in solving the mysteries of the prophecy. Help is called for.

So Posthumus seeks assistance from the Soothsayer, a professional truth-teller and licensed interpreter, blessed (in theory at least) with the requisite arcane knowledge, whose job is to explain the inexplicable, to mediate between the human and the divine, precisely, that is, to go beyond any limitations in human "sense", in physical perception and rationality, into the realm of the transcendent and the metaphysical. The role is executed by Philharmonus to perfection. Fulfilling the terms of the command from his general, Caius Lucius, to 'read, and declare the meaning' (5.6. 436), he uncovers a convincing relation between the abstruse riddles and word-games of the prophecy and actual people and happenings in the human world of the play.

Inspired interpretation reveals the hidden message of the god, as Philharmonus, in consonance with his name (significantly only now mentioned for the first time), produces a suitably mystic vision of cosmic concord and an actively beneficent Providence - 'The fingers of the powers above do tune | The harmony of this peace' (ll. 468-469).[18]

Caius Lucius's plain injunction, 'read, and declare the meaning', displays a positive confidence in the Soothsayer's abilities, yet it also implies that there is no insurmountable problem in such an action, that the declaration of the text's meaning can be accurately performed. The wider context suggests that the issue is not so simple. In line with the characteristic textual excess I have emphasized, Philharmonus gets to respond here, in effect, to two separate invitations to decipher the tablet. The direct command from Caius Lucius follows on the heels of Posthumus's express desire, outlining what is entailed in the process of interpretation, for the Roman general to let his Soothsayer 'show | His skill in the construction' (ll. 434-435). The phrasing of this indirect request is crucially ambiguous.

OED furnishes two primary definitions for the word "construction": (1) 'the action of constructing' and (2) 'the action of construing, and connected senses'.[19] The second is surely the more appropriate meaning to impute to Posthumus. He is calling on the Soothsayer to expound the prophecy as a construe, to undertake the grammatical and rhetorical exercise of construction, familiar to Shakespeare and his contemporaries as an integral component in the Elizabethan educational system.[20] The most relevant of the more specific glosses available in *OED* reads 'the construing, explaining, or interpreting of a text or statement; explanation, interpretation'; another applicable sense, now obsolete, is 'the action of analysing the structure of a sentence and translating it

word for word into another language; construing, translation'.[21] Between them, these clearly capture something of the activity Philharmonus is engaged in, as he recasts the mysterious language of the prophecy into words and concepts that make sense to those around him. But does he genuinely construe *the meaning* (the only meaning) of the prophetic label, an immanent, incontrovertible, and definitive meaning for its veiled terms? Or is the other aspect of Posthumus's word more apposite? Is Philharmonus just constructing an interpretation, imposing meaning and order, "making" (i.e. making up) sense, indulging, to quote *OED* again, in 'the action of framing, devising, or forming, by the putting together of parts'?[22] To put the matter slightly differently, is the ultimate source of meaning here the prophecy itself or Philharmonus?[23]

I am trying, through this series of questions, to draw attention to the fact that this passage which focuses so directly on acts of interpretation itself contains a very pointed interpretative crux. The Soothsayer's "reading" of Jupiter's prophetic label may solve the problems of interpretation that apply within the world of *Cymbeline*, but it creates in the process some very similar difficulties for the play's own audiences/readers. Thus in many ways, questions seem the most appropriate form of response. And for me a primary one must be, is either of the two main senses of the word "construction" uppermost at this moment? One possible route to an answer here could be to argue that this is one of those times in Shakespeare where the printed text can only be an insufficient guide, where actual performance is needed to clarify the situation. Having said that, however, performance history can be of little help here, since this closing sequence has been just as neglected in the theatre as it has in the study.[24] In any case, I am really seeking to broach a subject which theoretically precedes

performance, the complex issue of whether there is anything in the play-text to limit the range of valid interpretative choice at this point, anything that might work to determine the best or most accurate mode of reception or realization. In other words, does the presentation of this episode in *Cymbeline* encourage a reader - or suggest a theatrical performance which might encourage a spectator - to accept the Soothsayer's exposition of the prophecy as a genuinely authoritative construing of its meaning, or to recognise it instead as something more akin to an elaborate but unjustifiable and unsupportable constructing of meaning? Expressing the question a bit more fancifully, does the play want us to accept what Philharmonus has to say at face value; or are we supposed to react more sceptically to his remarks, does it maybe want us, to use the obvious term, to deconstruct them?

There are certainly aspects to the Soothsayer's interpretation that can cause it to appear more like a "constructing", a forging of meaning, than a construal. One of the biggest factors in this respect is the infelicitous and banal style Philharmonus is given, especially in his opening speech (ll. 445-454), with its numerous repetitions, and sudden and somewhat improbable recourse to Latin etymologies. The clumsy grammar that ensues from his confusion of pronouns and continual shifting of focus seems equally unfortunate and could be taken to show that Philharmonus is struggling to retain control of what he is doing.[25] The writing at this juncture is hardly the best blank verse in Shakespeare - indeed, the first half of the Soothsayer's exposition must come close to being quite the worst! The poetry remains desperately prosaic in a situation where the speaker can be assumed to be striving for transcendence.[26] Philharmonus's repetitive use of Latin creates problems on its own terms as well, irrespective of its effect on his

verse. His relation of 'lion's whelp' to 'Leonatus'/'*leo-natus*' is perhaps all very well, if rather spoiled by being spelled out a little too obviously. Far less convincing, though, is the rendering of the phrase about the 'piece of tender air' by means of '*mollis aer*' and '*mulier*' into 'this most constant wife'. If nothing else, "constant" in this context is a word disturbingly at odds with the extravagant verbal transformations and manipulations conducted to arrive at it.

Philharmonus is making use here of what was an accepted, much-repeated, seemingly reputable scholarly etymology which is (at least in part) of traceable descent.[27] Under his treatment, though, it comes across more as a trick, a cheat, than as a plausible derivation, remaining just as firmly prosaic as the blank verse in which it is couched.[28] However Philharmonus may be imagined to conceive of it, the etymological elucidation is frankly unsatisfying, not remotely able to support the weight his interpretation lays upon it.[29] Its explanation appears arbitrary, imposed, an academic/scholastic joke, part of a tradition of meaning requiring inside knowledge ('we term it') rather than any personal visionary insight or intuition.[30] As if these were not reservations enough, confidence in the Soothsayer's understanding and ability is unlikely to be much improved by his final gesture of re-introducing and re-applying his own pre-battle dream-vision. This brazen reinterpretation must be liable to act, if only fleetingly, as a reminder of something otherwise eminently forgettable, just how wrong he was with his initial exposition of its meaning. He succeeds in the end in fitting his dream to the way events have turned out, but that is not exactly a convincing form of prophetic divination.[31]

Despite all these problematic elements, however, the Soothsayer's interpretation of the label cannot easily be dismissed as entirely

arbitrary, mere "constructing". Thus Judiana Lawrence, a critic very much aware of the constrictions on interpretative certainty operating here, still forcefully points out that 'there *is* a conceptual link between the concluding events and the wording of the oracles'.[32] Reunion and revivification are as much central to the language of the tablet as they are to the action during these closing moments. There are also considerable aesthetic pressures at work to present Philharmonus's explication as a conclusive act of accurate reading. Questions of true and false perception and interpretation are of course a cardinal issue throughout *Cymbeline* - managing to be more prevalent than is usual even for Shakespeare - but the overriding movement of the rest of the final scene is one of plot conundrums being resolved, deceptions revealed, misreadings corrected, and of misapprehensions, or basic lack of apprehension, giving way at last to true plain seeing.[33] Philharmonus's expositions stand as the finishing link in the chain.

This is also true at the less obvious levels of poetic texture and verbal detail. As I mentioned in the Preface, the language of *Cymbeline* is patterned and organized to an unusually (even obsessively) high degree. The vocabulary of prophecy, vision, and their interpretations is tightly woven into this patterning, serving to resolve many of the play's word-games and to draw together a large number of its multiple strands of imagery. What emerges from this is a distinct impression of proper artistic closure being achieved, of secret, subliminal designs being fulfilled.[34] Thus, to treat iterative imagery first, there are salient references here to trees and newly flourishing growth; to the heavens, the subject of flight, and birds (in the shape of the two eagles); to lessening and vanishing; to music and harmony; and to the idea of joining and union.[35] Then, turning to individual words, I would

draw attention to the presence of the homophones "air"/"aer" and "piece"/"peace", and to the use of "tender" and "fit", these latter two specifically highlighted earlier on in conspicuous acts of punning.[36] Even the lack of sophistication in the Soothsayer's verse can be seen to contribute to this effect, as a deliberate simplification, even purification, of the linguistic and syntactic complexities and contortions that have predominated till now.[37] When Philharmonus speaks, everything becomes precise, carefully defined, neatly set out, with the important points reiterated in the interests of absolute clarity. At the same time, his learned etymologies replace the undisciplined polysemic punning of previous scenes with literal explanations designed to shut down areas of signification, limiting meaning to what really matters, to its core, its root components.[38]

Returning, then, to the central tension between constructing and construing, so much evidence on either side is utterly typical of this play, and of a final scene where the wondrous and the ludicrous go hand in hand throughout.[39] There is a strong progress towards closure, stretching far beyond the primary narrative dimension, but strong suspicions about the processes of closure are evoked too. Something of the reader's/spectator's position is reflected in Cymbeline's initial response to the Soothsayer: 'this hath some seeming' (1. 454). The rhetorical force of this interjection is presumably directed in support of Philharmonus: Cymbeline would seem to be impressed. Yet at a verbal level, 'some seeming' holds back a little, suggesting at least the possibility of a reservation of judgement.[40] The double implication reflects a condition of interpretation. Not only do the ambiguities around "construction" remain, they are unavoidable. Even my attempt to distinguish between the concepts of "construing" and "constructing"

breaks down in the light of *OED*.[41] Among its definitions for the verb "construe" can be found 'to give the sense or meaning of; to expound, explain, interpret (language)', and 'to expound, interpret, or take in a specified way (often apart from the real sense)'.[42] To maintain any distinction, these would need to be separable activities, differently designated. The problem is as much linguistic as conceptual. Thus *OED*'s entries for the verb "interpret" incorporate both 'to expound the meaning of' and 'to give a particular explanation of; to expound or take in a specified manner'.[43] Interpretation, even at its most convincing, always involves both construal and construction, is always a question of seeming.

Interpretation

So far, I have been seeking to highlight problems associated with the practice of reading, specific effects within the realm of textuality, and aspects of the nature and reliability of acts of interpretation. These topics stand together as key elements in what can be termed the problematics of interpretation, and there is an obvious overlap between my focus here and some of the central concerns and dilemmas of critical and interpretative theory. In particular, in stressing the divided and provisional character of "construction", I have had in mind Jacques Derrida's well-known formulation of the 'two interpretations of interpretation', with its opposition against the dream of certainty of the inevitability of interpretative play.[44] That "seeming" is an inescapable component of interpretation might appear to confirm beyond question the priority of the dimension of constructing over that of construing in Philharmonus's interpretation of the label. Yet this same idea can so

undermine the grounds for textual interpretation as to raise doubts about the possibility of ever safely making such a definitive claim in the first place.[45]   A potential interpretative impasse looms.   Brook Thomas expresses the difficulty thus:

> no matter how we try to accommodate ourselves to our roles as interpreters of the play, we are caught in a paradoxical situation that strains our efforts to find a rational solution.   In order to reach the point where we can isolate the perils of interpretation as a theme, we employ exactly the interpretive process which the play continually shows to result in error.[46]

It is certainly true that "seeming" in *Cymbeline* is a consistently troublesome and confusing, not to say dangerous concept.   This is a play where not only are the wrong people (and texts) trusted with great regularity, the wrong people are regularly distrusted too.   Thomas neatly captures this distinctive feature when he designates *Cymbeline* 'Shakespeare's case study of misreadings'.[47]   Significantly, the very word "seeming" is linked with an example of misreading by the King himself early on in the final scene, in a context which imbues it with strongly negative connotations.   Cymbeline responds to the revelations about his dead wife's activities with the complaint, 'who is't can read a woman?' (5.6. 49), and then, having heard the evidence from the Doctor corroborated by the Queen's waiting women, claims:

> Mine eyes
> Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
> Mine ears that heard her flattery, nor my heart
> That thought her like her seeming.   It had been
>   vicious
> To have mistrusted her.
>   (ll. 63-67)

This is not an isolated usage.   The connection between "seeming" (as either word or concept) and deception is repeatedly invoked in relation to forms of cross-gender (mis)understanding in *Cymbeline*.   Indeed, the absolute untrustworthiness of even good or perfect seeming is explicitly

lamented by both Posthumus and Imogen, in their respective (if unequal) diatribes against the opposite sex (see 2.5. 5-8 and 3.4. 54-57).

These associations are more than a little disturbing considering the emphasis that gets attached to "seeming" in the evaluation of the Soothsayer's performance. In the light of the mood of reconciliation that prevails within the action by this stage, however, it is at least arguable that Cymbeline's re-use of his own term in response to the exposition of the tablet works as a kind of corrective, another contribution to the processes of purification I referred to above when commenting on Philharmonus's interpretations. The word does seem to gain a newly positive force from being re-introduced at the climax of the final scene's long sequence of confessions and revelations, where all confusion is resolved, disguise laid bare, and trust restored or rightly removed within familial and cross-gender relationships. It is, perhaps, more this atmosphere of trust than any extra application of logical reasoning or rationality which suddenly allows "seeming" to acquire value here. Brook Thomas goes so far as to assert:

> belief in the soothsayer's interpretation is only possible
> because the characters have overcome their earlier
> doubts and now look at writing in a context of faith.
> Because they believe that the text originates with
> Jupiter, and thus has a real meaning, the characters
> are able to accept a possibly counterfeit text as
> legitimate.

This, though, is to lay too great a weight on the element of faith, at the expense of other factors.[48] Thomas effectively suggests that only an arbitrary, quasi-religious decision can cause Philharmonus's reading of the prophetic text to appear believable, or to be accepted as such. This limits the context in which the interpretation of the label takes place, and more or less presumes besides that no useful judgements can be made concerning the reliability of the evidence underlying belief.

Cymbeline's phrase, 'this hath some seeming', has resonances which carry over into each of these areas, helping to highlight both the cognitive, deductive side of the interpretative process, and the broadly social, interactive, and relational dynamic of interpretation and, for that matter, of the interpretation of interpretation.[49]

Certain aspects of that dynamic, issues to do with authorization, persuasion, and evaluation, are particularly pertinent here. Within the discursive space dramatized, the King's brief interjection seems to serve primarily, as I noted above, as a gesture of support for the Soothsayer, a public confirmation of the validity of his elucidation. Good seeming can thus be seen, in this instance at least, as a quality that is attributed from the outside. Yet whilst that attribution may be underpinned by belief – which could of course be founded simply on faith – it is also dependent on the act of expressing belief. Indeed, it is the *expression* of belief – which need not even derive from any true inner belief – which actually constitutes the attribution of good seeming. It is hardly incidental, therefore, that the only character who gets to respond verbally to Philharmonus at this moment is the figure holding all the effective power and authority, the King. Taking this into account, one could just as well argue that belief in the Soothsayer's interpretation is possible – and possibly necessary – because it receives royal commendation.

What I want to stress most here, though, is the way everything connected with the reaction to interpretation in this situation is conducted within the confines of political structures and discursive practices.[50] This includes the whole intellectual/emotional process of assessing or endorsing what Philharmonus has to say. Cymbeline's remark gives the impression (backed up in his later speeches) that he

finds the reading of the tablet reasonably convincing. In this respect, it signals the importance to belief of the plausibility and persuasiveness of the practitioner of interpretation, or of the interpretative act itself. This in turn conveys a sense of the degree to which belief and the interpretation of interpretation are subject to the pressures and objectives of rhetorical strategies. At the same time, though, the King's slightly provisional tone suggests something of a considered response on his part, reflecting both the need for and the power of judgement in the reception of interpretation. And these are factors which lead well beyond a reliance on faith, the influence of clever persuasion or manipulation, or any associated desire to be convinced.

I have tried to show in the previous section that Philharmonus's reading of the prophetic label cannot be dismissed as entirely, or simply, arbitrary. It is also clear from the overall action of the play that, whilst not all "seeming" is valid, not all seeming is necessarily invalid either. For example, Posthumus and Imogen are both obviously over-reacting in their attacks on the total unreliability of even the best forms of seeming, since it is evident that neither of them is in possession of all the relevant information. Appearances are not universally deceptive in the world of *Cymbeline*.[51] Similarly, misreadings and accurate or appropriate readings can often be properly separated off from one another. This is of course true for the theatre audience, with its superior vantage-point, but it is also true for characters within the play. Thus although almost everyone is prone to error, Cymbeline and Posthumus stand apart as conspicuously less perceptive than those around them in their complete inability to "read" accurately the Queen and/or Imogen.[52] So long as mistakes can be avoided, then the presence of "seeming" within interpretation does not fully prohibit

the possibility (outside of a context of pure faith) of making or identifying, with some confidence, correct or acceptable interpretative choices.

Indeed, the concept of "seeming" that I am trying to put across works against absolute indeterminacy just as much as it precludes the establishment of fully determinate meaning. The notion of the divided nature of seeming and construction, as explored above, sits fairly comfortably alongside the attitude that textual meaning in general is something which is both possessed and imposed, in a series of relations best characterized as dialectical. On these terms, interpretation (speaking now primarily of the literary-critical discipline, but also of ordinary reading, or the day-to-day activity) becomes a process of negotiation between text and reader, interpreter and audience. As Jonathan Culler writes:

> what we call our experience is scarcely a reliable
> guide in these matters, but it would seem that in
> one's experience of interpretation meaning is both
> the semantic effects one experiences and a property
> of the text against which one seeks to check one's
> experience.[53]

But this is no straightforward, two-way model Culler is proposing. What complicates the interpretative equation at every stage is the crucial influence of context, the importance of which Culler emphasizes via his 'formula' that '"meaning is context-bound but context is boundless"'.[54] As such a formula implies, the scope for the augmentation and accretion of context is potentially unlimited, and this principle, combined with the elements of negotiation and seeming inherent in interpretation, sets up a process of constant deferral, with textual meaning, at least in part, always theoretically having to be held in suspension. This is exacerbated in practical terms by the perpetual possibility that new

information might come to light to alter or advance understanding, or new insights, new contexts, impose themselves as relevant. In this way, interpretation is always open to extension or development, always at the mercy of history.

Yet whilst the need for negotiation and an ultimate reliance upon seeming may initiate an infinite deferral of meaning at a theoretical level, in the world of actual history, interpretation inevitably takes place and, as a consequence, meanings are produced. In turn, such meanings and interpretations function discursively, irrespective of how accurately they are grounded in a text or a textual effect. Edward Said's exploration of the idea of the inescapable worldliness of texts offers an especially useful means of getting to grips with this aspect of interpretation. According to Said:

> texts have ways of existing, both theoretical and
> practical, that even in their most rarified form are
> always enmeshed in circumstance, time, place, and
> society - in short, they are in the world, and hence
> are worldly.[55]

Interpretation, whether by design or by default, makes an impact upon that worldliness. It alters the manner in which a text is embedded in circumstance, changing or challenging how it is valued or understood, delimiting the terms of its referentiality.[56] And the interpretation of texts is at all times an arena of competition.

This last is a point well expressed by Christopher Norris, who notes, in the course of a summary of Said's argument, that 'texts are in and of the world because they lend themselves to strategies of reading whose intent is always part of a struggle for interpretative power'.[57] Such struggle is perhaps most obviously manifested wherever interpretation engages, more or less, explicitly or implicitly, with pre-existing interpretations. But it is at root a reflection of the essential

historicity of interpretation, the way all interpretative activity is bound up in social power structures, the ineluctable processes of time, the politics and psychology of inter-personal relations, and so forth. A further vital consideration here is that interpretation can only take place within the discursive space that is language-in-action. It follows from this that it partakes of many of the characteristics of speech-acts, and thus that acts of interpretation are never simply just about stating meaning, that they are shaped by motives and geared towards results, always implicated in that dimension of linguistic utterances described by Culler as 'the unstable difference between performative and constative'.[58]

The performative, objective-oriented energy inherent in linguistic utterances and in language in general is a factor of major relevance not only to the worldliness of interpretation but also to the way in which literary texts themselves are situated (or open to location) within history. For one thing, it contributes much to the ability of texts - even such texts as the riddling prophecies in *Cymbeline* - to evoke certain contexts, certain readings, more readily than others. Texts are not only, to quote from Said again, 'in the world', but

> as texts they *place* themselves - that is, one of their
> functions as texts is to place themselves - and they
> *are* themselves by acting, in the world. Moreover,
> their manner of doing this is to place restraints upon
> what can be done with (and to) them interpretively.[59]

There is a profitable connection between the notion of textual "self-placing" developed here and the concept of the "intention of the text" ("*intentio operis*"), as advocated by Umberto Eco.[60] If nothing else, the theory/metaphor of textual intention brings with it the definite practical advantage of rendering less immediately comic the attribution of agency to a text (or, by extension, to characters within a text). I would stress,

however, that invoking intention in this form is not an attempt to introduce some sort of pre-textual authorial force controlling the meaning of a text. Textual intention can be attributed solely in the light of a process of interpretation. As Eco himself concedes, 'it is possible to speak of the text's intention only as the result of a conjecture on the part of the reader'.[61]

Even so, it seems to me there is a crucial sense in which Eco's *intentio operis* needs to be thought of as very much an actual textual phenomenon. Intention is always liable to make itself felt within the realm of textuality as an impression arising from the suggestion of a subject position (or of multiple, muddied, contradictory, or incoherent subject positions) which the grammatical structures of language tend to communicate to a reader/auditor.[62] And any degree of intention that emerges in this respect is far from being merely a formal or incidental effect. Rather, it is a primary element in the performative, suasive rhetoric of a text, a symptom of its will to meaning, as it were. To quote Eco again, 'to recognize the *intentio operis* is to recognize a semiotic strategy'.[63] Eco's own perspective is resolutely textual, but it is certainly tempting, and can prove valuable, to push conclusions relating to the *intentio operis* into (suitably restrained) speculations about authorial intentions.[64] What appeals to me most, though, about the roughly parallel ideas of textual intention and "willed" meaning is that they offer a means, at the level of theory, of acknowledging and responding to a text's own rhetoric of intentionality. I include under this rubric such potential features as the appearance/illusion of an authorial "presence" or "voice" which a text may convey, any force this might carry, and what Seán Burke identifies as the 'authorial inscription' or 'authorial performance' that can exist within any given text.[65] With

the late Shakespearian dramatic texts that are my concern in this thesis, that inscription, as I try to argue below (and throughout), is found at its strongest at the level of the aesthetic, amongst the more distinctive characteristics of the plays' dramaturgy.

Returning to the ending of *Cymbeline*, the principles outlined above can be employed in the attempt to assess the play's treatment of the Soothsayer's prophetic expositions. It thus becomes possible, in theory, to achieve an effective answer to my earlier question as to whether either of the two main senses of "construction" is being put forward as predominant at this point in the text. For now, though, I want to move away from the ambiguities surrounding "construction", and the impracticalities of determining meaning, to concentrate instead, still looking at the final moments of *Cymbeline*, on key issues relating to the social positioning - the discursive contexts - of reading and interpretation. In addressing, however superficially, aspects of the critical theory of interpretation, I have of course been seeking to offer something of a rationale for my own interpretative practices. But I have also chosen to dwell on this material because I am interested in applying some of the insights of theory to an analysis of the way in which acts of interpretation and their various socio-political functions are represented within the Shakespearian text itself. A good illustration of the divided focus I have in mind here can be drawn from Said's emphasis on the intrinsic worldliness of texts. This has an immediate relevance to a play like *Cymbeline*, whose evident topicality works (once registered or admitted) to evoke a powerful sense of its own originating historical and political context, positioning the drama in relation to certain contemporary (and ongoing) interpretative controversies and struggles over meaning and power. It has as well, though, a precise

and equally important bearing on how texts operate within the world which the play creates, and most especially, for my purposes, during the events dramatized in its closing sequence.

Disrupting Authority: Prophecy and Dream

The worldly status of both the prophetic visions in *Cymbeline* is altered as a result of their interpretation. In view of the Soothsayer's overriding emphasis on divine intervention, it seems appropriate to suggest that each of the "texts" is canonized. So Posthumus's label, peculiar, unclear, its meaning (whether it even has meaning) uncertain, its referentiality open to debate, gets transformed into an emblem of the controlling influence of Providence. By the time Philharmonus has finished with it, it has come to be understood, and is therefore available to be re-read, as capturing and confirming all that is felt to be of value in the reconciliatory process. The Soothsayer manages to establish a continuity between good seeming and actuality which resolves all the anxieties about Jupiter's gift initially expressed by Posthumus, and with them, for that matter, those that adhere to two of the play's principal thematic problematics, appearance and worth. When he first discovers the label, Posthumus registers his distrust of its exterior promise (at 5.5. 227-231) in language which connects strongly to the vocabulary and imagery of clothing, disguise, appraisement, merit, and economics that pervades *Cymbeline*.[66] Now Philharmonus construes the tablet in such a manner that its contents can be accepted as living up to its rare appearance. Inner message and outward show are made to match, and material and spiritual value are finally seen to be in harmony. As for the Soothsayer's vision, the re-interpretation of this in the closing

moments similarly determines its emblematic importance. And whilst the new reading is put forward by Philharmonus without any reference to his earlier error, and is clearly intended (and accepted) as definitive, for those in the know it also serves as a corrective to his rather wide-of-the-mark former attempt, recuperating his dream for posterity, as it were.

Yet, as with the "*mulier*"/"*mollis aer*" etymology, elements emerge from this passage which give ample cause for scepticism regarding the validity of the Soothsayer's precise and limiting interpretations. I am not just thinking here of the need for Philharmonus to re-apply his own dream-vision, or the dual perspective inherent in the notion of "construction". Difficulties afflict the entire project of seeking a correlation between textual content and worldly events. In pursuing that project in this instance, moreover, Philharmonus is having to deal with two of the most unstable realms of signification and referentiality imaginable, prophecy and dream. Here, theoretical problems to do with the instability of textual meaning and the viability of interpretation are pushed to an extreme. It is striking, then, that in reproducing samples of these discourses, the play seems to go out of its way to point up the obstacles they pose to interpretation. In particular, it brings to the surface issues that work to complicate the claim to inspiration, as well as broader, equally unsettling questions relating to origin and intention, both of which tend to be more than usually obscure where dream and prophecy are concerned.

The peculiarly polysemic nature of prophetic discourse and the complex historical valency of political prophecy in the Renaissance have been analysed in detail by Howard Dobin, in terms that link well to my discussion here.[67] According to Dobin:

> more than any other text, prophecy makes the explicit claim of absolute truth and authority; however, the peculiarities of prophetic style cancel the possibility of locating definitive meaning. Prophetic content presumes transcendent meaning; prophetic form frustrates every effort to achieve even momentary meaning.

In the light of 'the unlimited license of symbolic meaning', prophetic discourse is revealed as 'the epitome of nonrepresentational language, rather than the authentic, divine model of referential meaning'.[68] Thus prophecy comes to stand, in effect, as the ultimate deconstructive (self-deconstructing) text, endlessly deferring concrete meaning whilst at the same time constantly promising ultimate revelation. Political prophecy, meanwhile, can succeed in maintaining a perpetual relevance for itself, especially within a culture where the possibility of genuine prophetic insight is widely accepted (or indeed, officially recognized), by being deliberately ambiguous or amphibolous, not signifying anything until (mis)interpreted.[69] In a world somewhat lacking in manifest divine intervention or verifiable inspiration, only the controlled, institutionalized authorization of interpretation can delimit the application(s) of a prophetic text. And the imposition of such control is politically essential in this period, because 'prophecy subverts authority', the unruly power of its amphibolous energy being open to release at any moment of interpretative struggle.[70] Only when carefully '"walled off"' within the confines of fiction, Dobin claims, can prophecy 'achieve fulfillment', and in the process (and for Dobin this is the point of the process) it loses any subversive impetus, as 'the plurality of interpretations is closed off and prophecy is made safe'.[71]

I have benefited hugely from Dobin's work, but I part company with him on this last issue, and it is perhaps pertinent that Dobin himself pays no consideration to the prophecies in *Cymbeline* which I

focus upon here.[72] The Soothsayer is of course proceeding, during the final moments of the play, with official (Roman and British) authorization, and he also receives what amounts to direct royal endorsement. But the main factors I have already sought to highlight – the central emphasis on interpretation as construction, the disquiet generated regarding the drive towards closure, the tentative feel to Cymbeline's 'some seeming' remark – all work to counter Dobin's general position on the operation of prophecy within historical fiction. I would argue instead that this play has been put together in a manner designed to call attention to the very real difficulties that interfere with ever pinning down prophetic meaning precisely. I find particular encouragement for this view in the way Philharmonus is made to repeat Posthumus's word 'construction' (l. 446) as he outlines the significance of the latter's surname. One effect of this is to offer a reminder of how Jupiter's prophetic text has itself been shaped, as part of the manipulation of the dramatic fiction, to fit the interpretation it receives. The label can only be made to mean what it does because of the 'fit and apt' name "Leonatus" chosen for the relevant character by the playwright. It is no great leap to suggest that the exposure of one prophecy as evidently grounded in a fiction might be meant to serve to invite questions concerning the potential fictionality of other forms of prophetic interpretation, questions which can in turn release some of the subversive energy of prophecy, as Dobin conceives of it, very much back into history.[73]

Instead of being an example of unfortunate textual excess, the juxtaposition of the two prophecies is crucial here, with the two interpretations shedding light upon each other, compounding any effects of strain. The treatment of the Soothsayer's own vision is especially relevant in this context. His second interpretation of this may go

unchallenged within the world of the play, but once he has put two contradictory interpretations into circulation, Philharmonus inevitably loses any claim to infallibility (or basic reliability). Moreover, the very fact that his first version is initially accepted as perfectly plausible before being (silently) rejected when proven otherwise casts a shadow across his similarly convincing new interpretation, raising the possibility that it might deserve to suffer the same fate. Once this suspicion has been entertained, it is quite easy to start picking apart the Soothsayer's final effort. Thus one may wonder whether the image of the Roman eagle "lessening" itself to vanish 'in the beams o'th' sun' (1. 474) really can signify the international accord and equality he reads into it. How exactly does lessening to vanishing point connote a uniting of favour? The tensions involved are multiplied by Philharmonus's use of the word 'foreshowed' (1. 475). The choice of this term (in distinction to the equally available "foreshadowed") makes conspicuous all the temporal ambiguities and paradoxes that typically surround the fictional representation of prophecy. It also seems to indicate an attempt on Philharmonus's part to re-write the past, to erase his earlier error by insinuating that he knew the truth all along. But in what sense can his cryptic vision logically be said to have *fore*shown something that was not apparent to anyone until after the actual event?[74]

Philharmonus's confidence in hindsight contrasts markedly with his tone when first expounding his dream-vision to Caius Lucius. It is worth digressing for a moment here to consider the brief sequence in which his own augury is introduced, since this specifically foregrounds some of the interpretative problems associated with the signification and referentiality of dreams.[75] Both the play's prophecies have their source in a dream, and it is hardly feasible to separate out the elements of

dream and vision in either case. But a few applicable distinctions can be suggested. Thus in some respects, dreams enjoy an even more liminal discursive status than prophecy. Prophetic texts necessarily present themselves as forward-looking, and can in effect take on a life of their own in history, independent of their origins, as a sort of free-floating, "pure" text.[76] Dreams, though, tend to stay more closely "attached" to their dreaming subject, evoking a clearer sense of an originating human consciousness. And once dreamed, they can only be represented in discourse in retrospect, as a past event now merely existing through descriptive reconstruction. So a dream always remains something of an absent presence, open to question as to whether it was ever "really" experienced, the truth of the matter known (and knowable) to the dreamer alone (if then).[77] The Soothsayer's dream is more remote from reality still, a personal psychic experience occurring only as a part of a theatrical fiction, and with the period of dreaming itself needing to be supposed to have happened off-stage, beyond the limits of the dramatic representation. To complicate the situation further, this dream gets made public in response to the enquiry from Caius Lucius, 'now, sir, | What have you dreamed of late of this war's purpose?' (4.2. 346-347). This could well imply that some form of inspired revelation is already expected from Philharmonus, thus indicating that, even within the play-world, his vision might be an invented fiction, a story "dreamed up" simply to please or pacify his commander.

In his original description of his own dream, Philharmonus himself takes pains to advert directly to certain imponderables that arise in the assessment and interpretation of dreams and visions in general:

> Last night the very gods showed me a vision –
> I fast, and prayed for their intelligence – thus:
> I saw Jove's bird, the Roman eagle, winged

> From the spongy south to this part of the west,
> There vanished in the sunbeams; which portends,
> Unless my sins abuse my divination,
> Success to th' Roman host.
>
> (4.2. 348-354)

The two self-interrupting parenthetical clauses here (ll. 349, 353) – so typical of the style of this play – are surprisingly complex in their effects, and can only really function, if paid any heed, to complicate the reception of this oracular dream.[78] In them, the Soothsayer appears to be either revealing substantive anxieties about his own talent and authority, or perhaps anticipating the doubts and anxieties of others. The phrase 'unless my sins abuse my divination' is a clear disclaimer in case his reading goes awry, a cop-out clause designed to preserve his professional reputation (even at the expense of his moral character) whatever should befall. But when it turns out that he did get things wrong, is it then right to assume that his sins did abuse his divination? If so, does this mean that they could do so (or are doing so) again? And if he really is such a skilled interpreter of the divine, why the need for the cop-out clause to begin with? Similar dilemmas arise from Philharmonus's first interruption to his overall syntax, 'I fast, and prayed for their intelligence'. Though this seems intended to ratify his personal vatic credentials, it offers information that lays open to dispute the accuracy of his attribution of the source of his vision. Have 'the very gods' truly responded to his devotional prayer and fasting, or do fasting and prayer provide a physiological (extreme hunger) or psychological (extreme desire) explanation to account for his dream on a more mundane level? The claim to authority turns out to be just as troubling as the waiver a few lines later.

On the face of it, Posthumus's dream (5.5. 122-216) is another matter entirely. Its on-stage presentation precludes any doubt about

its actual occurrence within the narrative fiction, and it is in any case clearly not simply a dream, but a fictively genuine supernatural experience which leaves behind a physical manifestation in the shape of Jupiter's prophetic label. Both the source of the dream and the authorship of the prophecy would appear to be confirmed beyond question as divine. The presence of Jupiter here has its own complex topical and theatrical resonances that I shall return to below, but there are two further aspects to this sequence I want to address now. First of all, whilst the tablet stands as indisputable material evidence of the reality of Posthumus's dream within the world of the play, one primary effect of his vision is to render that world itself distinctly dream-like. This is obviously partly how it initially affects Posthumus ("tis still a dream'), but the emotional confusion he experiences, the blurring between sleep and waking, is a feeling in which an audience might well share.[79] The radically unusual tone and style of this whole passage contribute to a general air of unreality and discontinuity, a sense perhaps that inner psychic desires are being dramatized, that the logic (or more precisely, the alogic) of dreams has finally taken over.[80] Criticism of this section of *Cymbeline* has of course been characterized, alongside sheer hostility, by bewilderment and a real lack of confidence about the best way to react to it, and on one level this seems absolutely appropriate. Posthumus's vision *is* perplexing - rather like a dream? - and part of its impact is to destabilize audience experience and understanding, and thus to remove any security about the true nature and authority of this dream of Jupiter.

Secondly, the dream-vision itself actually dramatizes certain key problems that attach to the establishment and maintenance of authority in any of its various (political, familial, religious, or textual) dimensions.

The dream-sequence enacts a conflict over authority (and specifically parental authority) in the realm of the divine, staging a revolutionary challenge to ruling power that is basically only quashed through a gesture of overwhelming (brute) force. Given that he is unwilling (or unable) to meet the objections of the ghosts until they have been scared into shutting up, Jupiter's own authority can easily emerge here as arbitrary, based solely on might. But as I emphasized back at the start of this chapter, reservations about authority apply in a rather different form to this entire episode. It is utterly typical of the reception of Shakespeare's works that a piece of action which explicitly problematizes the concept of authority should itself provoke intense doubts regarding its own authorship, its own textual status. There is a very real relevance at such a moment to a question posed by Marjorie Garber in connection with Shakespearian drama in general: 'is the authorship controversy in part a textual effect?'.[81] Pertinent too is her observation that 'the appearance of ghosts within the plays is almost always juxtaposed to a scene of writing'.[82] Garber herself links this distinctive technique to a recurring Shakespearian concern with dramatizing the difficulties of grounding authority and authorizing or authenticating authorship. In the Shakespeare canon, the "origins" of writing are repeatedly depicted as "ghostly".[83]

With the concern identified by Garber firmly in mind, I would suggest that critical anxieties or uncertainties about the quality and purpose of the dream-vision in *Cymbeline* need to be thought of as something more than just a reflection of prejudice and ingrained expectations (though they are that) or an unfortunate side-effect of the dramatic construction.[84] The unease that has dominated responses to the vision of Jupiter, and Garber's perception of a repeated pattern in

Shakespeare, both usefully reinforce my sense that Posthumus's dream is meant to be disconcerting, that a very equivocal representation of authorizing power is being put on display.[85]   There is a good case to be made for the argument that the process of calling into question the authorship of this passage has served on the whole as a perfect excuse not to face up to the implications of the play's dramaturgy in this respect.   Whatever the truth of that opinion, the scepticism about authority generated here carries over into the final scene, and Jupiter's label, however much it might appear a properly "authored" document (and even to a large degree because it appears as such), is inevitably caught up within it.

Disrupting Authority: Jacobean *Cymbeline*

Despite everything I have been saying so far, there is at least one sense in which the language and content of the prophetic label can be (have to be) thought of as truly "non-Shakespearian".   This moment that is textually "other", in terms of Shakespeare's regular practices and the printing of the First Folio, is, at the point of its borrowed Latin etymology, both linguistically and personally "other" as well.   And such "otherness" extends across the entire closing sequence, which draws upon a vast network of associated intertexts and contemporary political discourses.   The very depiction of Soothsayer and prophecy positions the play within a long tradition of literary and dramatic representations of magician/*vates* figures and riddling oracles - a tradition particularly associated with legendary history and romance writings.[86]   More specifically, Jupiter's message and its exposition are heavily imbued with images and themes which ultimately derive (so

far as Western literature is concerned) from Biblical prophecy. The resemblances, thoroughly traced by previous critics, relate especially to the motifs of the cedar, the freshly-growing branches, the lion's whelp, and (in Philharmonus's dream-vision as well as Posthumus's) the eagle.[87] Both this general context of Biblical prophecy and the actual fulfilment of prophetic "texts" within the world of *Cymbeline* help in the evocation of an event often seen to be the "key" to deciphering the "code" of the play, the approximately contemporary birth of Christ, historically located in the reigns of Augustus Caesar and (according to the chronicles) Cymbeline.[88] Precise Biblical echoes also seem to spread out, with the person of Jesus again relevant, into a broader (Christian) mysticism, through the submerged allusions that have been detected in this passage to the multi-purpose symbol of the phoenix.[89]

How immediate a source the Bible is here is almost impossible to determine, however, since (to follow another well-worn critical path) this realm of Biblical prophecy reaches the play already powerfully colonized and appropriated, exploited for its authorizing potential in political discourse and secular prophecies across centuries of European history.[90] For example, as H. L. Rogers has demonstrated, the tablet's vocabulary of tree-stocks, branches, and flourishing new growth connects strikingly to an oracular vision supposedly witnessed on his death-bed by Edward the Confessor, and easily accessible to Shakespeare via the pages of Holinshed's *Chronicles*.[91] The accepted interpretation of this prophecy read it as a prediction of renewed national prosperity and international accord, through the union of divided (Saxon and Norman) dynastic lines. However commonplace the imagery involved, the parallels between the prophetic label and Edward's vision are so strong as to make it hard not to assume some form of influence or allusion.[92] But the visions in

Cymbeline carry wider resonances still, echoing virtually all the main languages of prophecy - Biblical, classical, legendary, Galfridian - available to Shakespeare.[93] Most of these interrelated branches of prophetic discourse had been successfully subsumed into the myth-making, legitimating ideology and propaganda of the Jacobean monarchy and state apparatus.[94] The multiple historical and literary archetypes which underlie events at this juncture are thus all firmly part and parcel of the play's much-discussed Jacobean political topicality.[95]

So too are most of the images and symbols employed. Eagle, cedar, and lion, as "kings" of their respective domains, figured prominently in the construction of King James's public persona as absolute ruler and fount of earthly authority.[96] The powerful emphasis on peace, as is well known, seems to evoke James's professed role as international peace-maker, advertised in his personal motto, itself exemplifying the appropriation of Biblical language to political discourse, "*Beati pacifici*".[97] And the description in Philharmonus's vision of the westering Roman eagle vanishing in the beams of the (setting) sun invokes, as other critics have noted, the tradition of the *translatio imperii*, the westward translation of empire.[98] In its distinctive Jacobean incarnation (which incorporated its well-established post-Reformation associations, along with the extra valencies it took on in the light of the dynastic "Union of the Crowns" and the King's desire for a concomitant union of the kingdoms), this theory served to express and endorse the grandiose nationalistic theme of the ultimate historical replacement of Rome, as both imperial and religious power, by the divinely-sanctioned, Protestant, (re-)united British state.[99]

This considerable array of topical references and resonances makes it impossible to sustain any credible notion of *Cymbeline* as some sort

of self-contained, hermetically-sealed aesthetic artifact. Indeed, the presence of the *translatio imperii* motif is enough in itself to dispel any illusions along such lines. Even the major literary allusions embodied in the topos, to Virgil's *Aeneid* and Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia Regum Britanniae*, bring with them a vital political history and a concrete topicality. Both these texts offered authoritative models of national and imperial origins, combined with venerable cultural and racial pedigrees, which were habitually exploited (often in conjunction with fanciful elaborations of Biblical genealogies) for their patriotic propaganda value and mythic force.[100] Evident topicality, though, is one thing, what to make of it quite another. It is (to say the least) easy to see a complimentary or ideologically legitimating project at work in *Cymbeline*, in its multiple echoings of images and ideals cherished or propounded by King James. But many of the connections involved here encompass issues that were politically problematic or sensitive at the time: James's much-vaunted plans for the union of England and Scotland, for instance, met with intense suspicion and resistance on both sides of the border, and had largely foundered by the (probable) date of the play.[101] And besides, the notoriously equivocal tone of the final scene is a radical dislocating factor in the treatment of all this topical material, one which has a definite impact on the use of the *translatio imperii* in *Cymbeline*, and the degree of compliment to the reigning monarch which this might reasonably be thought to convey.[102]

With the benefit of hindsight (or what amounts to hindsight, that is, from the temporal perspective of the fiction), the Soothsayer's dream is unveiled as "really" prophetic of affairs totally hidden from all of the on-stage characters. By the terms of the Jacobean *translatio* (or its enabling premises), the progress of the eagle westwards "prefigures"

the "future" path of providential Christian history, and its culmination in the advent of the Stuart monarchy. In many ways, as I intimated earlier, this "Jacobean" reading has rather more going for it than either of those which the Soothsayer himself puts forward.[103] Yet there are some palpable interpretative tensions even in this. That a single prophetic utterance should give rise to a variety of different interpretations is no great cause for surprise, being symptomatic of the nature of prophecies (or dreams, or texts) in general.[104] But the fact that the few images in Philharmonus's vision readily express so many divergent positions, that they appear to be adaptable enough to fit in with just about any conceivable train of events in Romano-British relations, would seem to indicate that any meaning which might be derived here, no matter how plausible, is unlikely to be fully and exclusively justified by the "text" itself, or grounded in it alone.

In other words, the Soothsayer's dream, in true prophetic fashion, does little to constrain the precise details of its own interpretation. As it stands, it remains very much open to construction, and this very "openness", the sense that it is a particularly undemanding arbiter of its own meaning, seems reason enough for not reading its function as a straightforward affirmation or celebration of the Jacobean *translatio imperii*.[105] The indeterminacy of the prophetic text renders its meaning thoroughly dependent on external factors - chiefly, the course of (fictional) history and the historical/temporal perspective from which interpretation is conducted. And "history", as Dobin's work attests, is not the safest of tools with which to try to "fix" the meaning of prophetic discourse. Historical situations have to be interpreted and imbued with significance to get them to coincide with the terms of any given prophecy or historical schema; and the interpretation of history is

subject to much the same pressures as the interpretation of texts. So it can be taken for granted that, in the real world, the meaning and symbolic value of any moment, local circumstance, or identifiable phase of historical time are always going to be a matter of dispute, a site of interpretative struggle and ideological contention.[106]

Even so, there is plenty of scope for the "meaning" of history to become standardized, if only at the level of public discourse, whether through the influence of custom, consensus, historical awareness and understanding, historiographic tradition, official decree, or indeed, any type of acknowledgement or imposition (formal, tacit, unconscious) of a shared hermeneutic paradigm or licensed interpretative authority. And something of this can be seen at work in the play itself, where Philharmonus's authorized endeavours at interpretation have at least as much to do with establishing a communal significance for the events he describes, as with elucidating the inherent meaning of the prophecies. It is a process which has an obvious bearing, too, on the relationship between *Cymbeline* and the contemporary cultural environment in which it was first produced. As D. R. Woolf observes, 'all Tudor and early Stuart historical writing [. . .] reflects a conservative ideology of obedience, duty, and deference to social and political hierarchy'.[107] Woolf links this uniform interpretative paradigm to a wider system and atmosphere of shared beliefs, a 'national consensus on the adequacy and appropriateness of traditional forms of religion and governance'.[108] The idea that the Soothsayer's vision finds its fulfilment in the tenets of the Jacobean *translatio imperii*, it hardly needs to be said, slots into such an overall outlook on history and politics with ease.

Philharmonus's own final effort at elucidating this same dream, meanwhile, along with his exposition of Jupiter's label, might well pass

as the ultimate fantasy of perfected interpretation. There is in this something of a fictional analogue to the absolute interpretative ability and authority King James's conception and/or public formulation of his role as monarch caused him to lay claim to as his by right. In the words of Leah Marcus, 'James's kingship was an absolutism of the text'.[109] Again, though, this is to touch on a specific locus of tension within the consensus of the time. The degree of power James arrogated to himself as interpreter, author, and (above all) ruler provided one of the primary areas of political conflict and anxiety during the first decade of his reign (and beyond).[110] And this high-profile controversy was matched across the social structure by a range of oppositions and antagonisms between vested interests and established authorities, all reflecting the sort of ideological ruptures and faultlines much emphasized in certain strands of recent criticism.[111] So against or alongside images of prevailing interpretative paradigms, social consensus, and governing ideologies, it is possible to construct a rather different picture of, in Graham Holderness's words, 'a turbulent and rapidly changing period in which competitions for power and legitimation created contradiction and dissonance throughout the cultural and ideological structure'.[112]

Despite persistent critical assertions to the contrary, there is room for finding some of this "contradiction and dissonance" expressed in the written histories which the age produced – as an intentional, visible articulation of political divisions, contentious viewpoints, and recognizably (if only moderately) "unorthodox" opinions. There are stronger reasons still for endorsing Ivo Kamps's recent claim, that

> the political consensus [D. R.] Woolf discerns in the
> narrative histories is already challenged vigorously by
> historiographical means in the historical dramas of the
> late Elizabethan and early Stuart periods.[113]

This idea is particularly useful for the terms of my own argument, since whatever else it might be, *Cymbeline* is undeniably a form of chronicle history play. As such, I suggest, it accords well with Kamps's image of the genre, intersecting with contemporary Jacobean concerns, through its topical allusions and discursive borrowings, in a manner which cuts across - and in so doing offers a potentially radical perspective on - many of the issues and controversies referred to here.[114] The presence and treatment of the *translatio imperii* are again illustrative.

The Tudor-Stuart version of the imperial *translatio* garnered its authority from one dominant, effectively state-sanctioned line in the interpretation of history. But the meaning and value of the topos were far from fully settled within the culture of Jacobean England. Heather James has lately drawn attention, for instance, to the scope for competition between the institutions of city and state, arising from the way the civic dimensions of the foundation myth supplied a means for legitimating the transfer of authority, as she puts it, 'from one social sphere to another in London'.[115] The implications of the *translatio*, with its built-in imperialist agenda, for the internal politics of the British Isles can scarcely have proved anything other than unpalatable in certain sectors of Jacobean society (and not just in the light of the King's contested project of Anglo-Scottish union).[116] And even more fundamentally, the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries were a time of mounting scepticism amongst historians and antiquarians regarding the historicity of the "British" material of Geoffrey of Monmouth's *Historia*. Whatever the degree of cultural and symbolic force still invested in the *translatio imperii* motif, its underlying (implicit) historical authority was, slowly but surely, being systematically pulled apart.[117]

The obvious inference to be drawn from all this is that there was no single shared audience perspective on this matter waiting to be elicited by the play. I want to argue more particularly, though, that the design of the closing sequence of *Cymbeline* works to highlight that very absence. A number of factors contribute here. The moment in the final scene where the mythic power of the *translatio imperii* is first brought to bear is also the point at which the audience gets to witness Philharmonus being forced to revise his original exposition of his dream-vision to achieve an interpretation which can actually claim to tally with the passage of history in the invented world. It is not an auspicious conjunction. The memory of the Soothsayer's earlier error allows the uneasy, unstable relationship between history and prophetic interpretation to register as a palpable presence within this phase of the action.[118] And Philharmonus's own credibility is not notably enhanced by a second reading which, besides falling short of being exhaustive, comes across, as I argue in more detail below, as blatantly opportunistic, by no means disinterested, and engaged in advancing specific political ends. The gaps in his understanding and awareness testify strongly, too, to the way meaning can change according to perspective and circumstance, and hence, to the tensions and divisions, the shifting of the grounds and 'infinite regress', that perpetually afflict and destabilize the production and interpretation of history.[119]

To sum up on the issue of the *translatio imperii*, I would contend that, rather than simply exploiting its associations to eulogize British national destiny or extol the ruling Stuart dynasty, the play subjects the theory to a series of potent "quibbles", the overall force of which mounts up considerably.[120] What brings these quibbles to the fore, for me, is the way the final moments of *Cymbeline*, though crammed with the

tropes and terminology of royal panegyric, set about dramatizing – as opposed merely to performing or participating in – the very activity of celebrating regal and imperial authority. This has the effect of locating textual interpretation and aesthetic compliment firmly within an overtly political context in the on-stage world. One obvious reflection of that context is to be found in the hierarchical power structures that govern the dialogue here. These in turn are conducive to the heavy component of flattery in Philharmonus's language, as evinced especially in the deeply fawning manner in which he refers to Cymbeline (as at ll. 455-456 or 477-478). On the page at least, the Soothsayer's tone and approach suggest an eagerness both to please and to praise, and this raises the consideration that adulation and saying the right thing might be more important factors in interpretation at this juncture than anything as mundane as attempted accuracy. It is certainly the case that what Philharmonus says and what he actually does cannot easily be separated off from each other, responded to in isolation. Any clearcut distinction between the constative and performative sides of his exposition breaks down.

What I am driving at above all here is the crucial role played by context in shaping the direction of the interpretative process. This can be seen especially in some of the political and performative energies at work in the construction of Jupiter's label – the way interpretation is contextualized in the passage at hand. Analysis of the complicated discursive aspects of the Soothsayer's interpretations is perhaps something of an unlikely critical activity in which to engage, one that rather goes against the grain of the predominant tone of the closing sequence. And it has to be said that the atmosphere of wonder and mysticism in which *Cymbeline* concludes has most often been read as the

play's primary affective dimension, an all-embracing mood of celebration and awe which, by the time of the "final curtain", extends out from the stage (and the page) to embrace the audience (and the reader/critic) as well.[121] That the ending of *Cymbeline* is already anomalous on a large number of levels, however, suggests that easy or conventional effects are not really to be expected at this point. And to focus on the political content – and the political impact – of what Philharmonus has to say is to respond to specific elements and hints in the actual text.

The phrasing of the two separate invitations for the Soothsayer to speak (ll. 434-436) calls attention to some of the wider social and discursive contexts in which his interpretation of Jupiter's label is embedded. The act of declaring meaning renders interpretation a public event; and linked with the process of construction, at least as this is formulated by Posthumus, is a show of skill. The reading of the tablet, the whole business of producing meaning, is structured as a kind of performance. As a result, the relative priorities of revealing the text's real meaning and putting on an effective demonstration become blurred. A potential conflict arises between Philharmonus's message and its medium. The form and content of his exposition are, one might say, not entirely in harmony – or perhaps, rather, they are too much in harmony, too thoroughly interconnected. So whilst Philharmonus himself seems intent on evoking wonder at the mystical workings of Providence, any admiration generated in such a context might just as easily be a response to the technical and professional expertise on display. In similar terms, highlighting the Soothsayer's talent may be a means of investing his reading with a certain authority, but the requirement that he show this skill places his subsequent comments under conditions very much akin to those of a test. This in turn lays Philharmonus's

reputation on the line, making his claim to possess the requisite skill dependent on his success in presenting an explanation of the prophecy which appears convincing or acceptable. It is striking that in these circumstances, he offers nothing remotely corresponding to his earlier hedging about his own abilities or worthiness, speaking now instead with an authority which would seem to preclude the very possibility of error.

At the level of the fiction, therefore, the construction of the dialogue in this closing section ensures, through the dynamics of its initiating speech-acts, that the onus is firmly on Philharmonus here to do something. His reading is thus subject to whatever shaping effects might arise from the need to perform. Once again, the treatment of the Soothsayer's own vision helps bring this idea more into focus. On the two occasions he refers to it, Philharmonus manages to interpret this dream in a way which can be understood to tell his general exactly what he wants to hear at either instant. That is, in each case his reading is an expressly politic one. Some of the social obligations he is under are suggested in Caius Lucius's response to his original description and elucidation of his vision: 'dream often so, | And never false' (4.2. 354-355), the general exhorts him. It is a remark which stands as a suitably pious hope, but it carries inherently equal force as an implied command, a reminder of what is expected from an official army soothsayer at such a moment. Philharmonus has a designated role to perform, and it is reflected in his behaviour: before the battle, he uses his dream to deliver what amounts, in context, to a confident prediction of victory; afterwards, when the defeat actually experienced has effectively been set aside, he re-works the same vision to confirm (reaffirm) that the gods are still favouring Rome. Indeed, he goes quite a bit further than this. Although he compliments Cymbeline fulsomely, pronouncing divine

ratification for the latter's gesture with regard to the tribute, in his final lines, Philharmonus plainly asserts the pre-eminence of the agency and power of Augustus Caesar over that of his British counterpart in the renewing of peaceful international relations.[122]

There are, then, considerable pressures - political, professional, personal, or connected with the chain of command - at work, and, what is more, shown to be at work, within the action dramatized at the end of *Cymbeline*. The Soothsayer's interpretations are by no means insulated from this aspect of the on-stage atmosphere. What is just as important to register, though, is that Philharmonus's exposition of the label serves in many respects as the key event in the establishing of the play's concluding peace. It is his translation of Jupiter's obscure text into a revelation of reunion, revival, and divinely sanctioned promises of peace and prosperity, which elicits Cymbeline's sudden announcement of Britain's re-submission to Rome, and his agreement to carry on paying the disputed tribute. There is thus a sense in which Philharmonus manages single-handedly to turn defeat into victory for the Romans. Caius Lucius can hardly be imagined to have wished for a better result from that seemingly innocuous request/order, 'read, and declare the meaning'.[123] Textual interpretation and the decoding and elucidation of meaning are presented at a time and a place where they have a crucial rhetorical and ideological function, a direct historical impact within the world of the play. The act of interpretation that precipitates the final stage in the movement towards celebration, thanksgiving, and the creation of a state of transcendent wonder, has a specifically political dimension to it.[124] It possesses an evident persuasive thrust and a performative impetus that bear witness to the worldly context in which the invocation of a beneficent Providence and

the language and imagery of romance idealization and religious devotion are operating. A discursive framework is supplied, and the realms of politics and history reassert their presence in the drama at the moment of apparent transcendence.[125]

Construction

It is time now to start drawing together the strands of the discussion so far. The final moments of *Cymbeline* replicate with some precision the commonplace historical use of religion and prophecy in the processes of monarchic and dynastic legitimation. A favourable conjunction of circumstances in the on-stage world means that royal, personal, and national interests can be portrayed as all aligned, in mutual harmony. A single, if singular, instant in time is invested, by means of rhetoric, licensed interpretation, and royal fiat, with religious feeling and a quasi-mythological signifying power. The exploration in all this of some of the ideological ramifications of textual interpretation, and what might be termed the historical "embeddedness" of the imagery of transcendence, has the effect of reproducing in the theatre central elements in the network of relations surrounding the play in the early seventeenth century (and ever since). And of course, the themes and motifs that are here portrayed in the service of specific socio-political ends are also, palpably, those of contemporary Jacobean myth-making and panegyric. Certain laudable ideals - peace and unity, amity and reconciliation - are held up at the conclusion of the drama, and their appeal strongly registered. At the same time, though, the meanings and values they embody are presented as thoroughly wrapped up in discursive practices, complicated and compromised by the realities of history.[126]

Philharmonus's own activity in extracting exact referential meaning from the material he interprets points up the opportunities for linking texts directly to the world around them. Encouragement to pursue this sort of line with the play itself can be gleaned from the two separate invitations to speak which the Soothsayer receives. Posthumus's initial request seems to reach out from the invented fiction as an appeal or a challenge, a call to the audience for the application of skill in constructing the meanings of *Cymbeline*. From the printed page, Caius Lucius's 'read, and declare the meaning' stands out in much the same way. The play appears almost to solicit topical decoding; or as Leah Marcus puts it, '*Cymbeline* demands political interpretation'.[127] But what kind of political interpretation, interpretation to what end? It is here that I want to return to the fundamental ambiguity inherent in the notion of interpretative "construction". The topical resonances of this closing sequence need to be set alongside the ambivalences that adhere to Philharmonus's exposition of the divine message, the manifest tensions within his officially sanctioned interpretation. I would also contend that in its evocation of some of the constraints and pressures that can afflict (and restrict) interpretation when it is conducted within such a public forum, the play encodes its own resistance to a purely politic or state-serving project of exposition or theatrical realization.

In arguing this, I am adopting more or less Marcus's position that *Cymbeline* generates what she describes as 'an "unease of topicality"', and more specifically, 'an "unease with Jacobean textuality"'.[128] Given the particular conception of monarchy which King James espoused, this latter element extends almost by definition into an unease with certain aspects of Jacobean authority. This is reflected (far more convincingly, to my eyes, than the encomiastic agenda topical criticism has typically

managed to discover) in the depiction of authority figures within the text. To take the prime example of Cymbeline, whilst his final speeches contain some obvious echoes of James's hopes for peace and union, his characterization in general serves as anything but a positive illustration of personal monarchy and prerogative power.[129] As for Philharmonus, it seems fair to say that he functions in the end as something less than an unequivocal mouthpiece for Jacobean mythic discourse. Far the most awe-inspiring incarnation of authority that the play has to offer, though, is the eagle-riding Jupiter of Posthumus's dream. And obviously integral to its frame of reference here is the emblematic (and laudatory) identification of Jupiter/Jove with James that is a notable constituent in the period's lexicon of symbols.[130] I have already drawn attention, however, to the scepticism about authority that circulates throughout the vision sequence and in the passage at hand. The parallels available between deity and ruling monarch – not the least of which is Jupiter's reliance on the textual realm to express his meanings and purposes – allow that scepticism to stretch out and encompass the actual historical authority of the King, in a potent gesture of political demystification.[131]

Or at least, they create the potential for such an effect. But it would be wrong to leave the matter there, and as far as the political allegiances of *Cymbeline* in its own time are concerned, caution is still required. As Marcus remarks, 'much would depend on how the play was staged'.[132] This is especially true with regard to Posthumus's dream-vision, where, to quote Marcus again, 'the descent of Jupiter is perilously balanced between the compelling and the ludicrous'.[133] This means that, in performance, little emphasis or interpretative licence is required to start tipping that balance in one direction or another. And in the Jacobean theatre, to follow through with Marcus's argument, some such

emphasis could easily have been supplied. A staging that stressed the theatricality and artifice of the god's intervention - a 'theatrical "deconstruction"', in Marcus's phrase - could have worked to undercut the power and awe of Jupiter's presentation, and with it, any sense of what Marcus terms the play's 'Jacobean line'.[134] On the other hand, a no-holds-barred, extravagantly spectacular realization would presumably have let that "Jacobean line" shine through with unambiguous - one might even say stunning - clarity.[135] Alternatively again, of course, the reality could have fallen, or have tended to fall, somewhere between these two extremes.[136] But whatever the nature of early performance practice in respect of Posthumus's dream, the same range of possibilities, the same scope for nudging the tone of the action in different directions, is also a factor when it comes to the treatment of the interpretation of the label, and indeed, to the portrayal of Philharmonus himself.

There is little in all this that does not tie in comfortably with conventional notions of the essential "openness" of the Shakespearian text, or some of the more sophisticated formulations that have been applied to this characteristic aspect of the dramatist's work - "dialectical ambivalence", "complementarity", "perspectivism", and the like.[137] But openness in this context by no means equates to even-handedness, an unwillingness to take sides, or political indifference. Nor does it have anything to do with a striving for some sort of supposed aesthetic ideal of disengagement or disinterestedness.[138] For Marcus, rather, the very openness of the text/script is a potentially oppositional or subversive feature, the calculated product of a Shakespearian refusal to authorize meanings or to impose authorial authority that is itself a form of resistance to Jacobean "absolutism" (textual or political) and its preferred models of 'linear interpretation'.[139] Set against more straightforwardly

one-sided (monologic) representations of historical/political processes, or the accredited orthodoxies of Renaissance historiographical practice, admitting a multiplicity of perspectives and contrasting attitudes into the realms of history and politics is a mode of approach that acquires a genuinely disruptive, even dissident force. Accordingly, as Paola Pugliatti has argued, Shakespearian perspectivism can be understood as a strategy of 'active criticism', 'a sign of involvement rather than of aloofness'.[140] The result is a dramaturgy in which contending outlooks and opinions, incompatible lines of interpretation and understanding, are not simply laid out alongside each other as equal alternatives, but presented in tension, as interacting in ways that are more indicative of antagonism and struggle than of balance, harmony, or resolution.[141]

This is what happens at the end of *Cymbeline*. Here, the range of interpretative choice and the different perspectives the play sets up are effectively encapsulated in the two primary meanings available in Posthumus's word, "construction". And these do not sit easily together. On the contrary, they have a decidedly unequal impact on one another. They also carry strongly antithetical political implications. Marcus makes the point that the explication of the tablet 'might almost serve as a model for the reading of the play's "Stuart line"'.[142] In this respect, the extent to which *Cymbeline* appears to celebrate the Stuart/Jacobean line, how compelling it allows this to seem, depends in large measure on the way the interpretation of the label is presented and perceived, whether it comes across more as an accurate and authoritative construal, or as a dubious (if inventive) constructing of meaning. Of these two basic alternatives, though, the former brooks considerably less compromise. For the Soothsayer's explanation to pass purely as an act of objective elucidation and exegesis - and this is how it is implicitly presented by

Philharmonus himself – it would be necessary for any discordant elements within it to be suppressed, or stifled as irrelevant. The slightest indication that his reading is at all "constructed", imposed upon or projected on to the prophetic text, is sufficient to confute outright the notion that he is merely revealing the essential meaning contained within the tablet's riddling prose. But the effect is not the same in the other direction. The terms of the equation are not simply reversible, since the deconstructive perspective is, in this instance, far less of an all-or-nothing affair. That is to say, the argument that Philharmonus is at least partly engaged in constructing or manufacturing meaning is not significantly destabilized by the possibility that he may also, in part, be right, that his quasi-grammatical construction/translation may indeed lay plausible claim to possessing 'some seeming'.

On these terms, whereas the Soothsayer strives to be, or to appear to be, in complete control of the language of Jupiter's label, fashioning finite meanings from its polysemic instability, the force of the double meaning in "construction" inevitably works to undermine the validity and authority of his interpretation, challenging by association the basis of his transcendental and providentialist perspective. Its specific anti-essentialist implications also run counter to some of the principal tenets of the more obvious contemporary political dogmas and discourses here evoked.[143] In principle, the logic of this deconstruction applies no matter how convincing Philharmonus appears in performance. I would argue besides that it is very much a deliberate effect, something that is meant to be noticeable.[144] It does not immediately follow, however, that the more sceptical assessment of the Soothsayer's interpretation can be viewed as commensurate with the overall "project" or "outlook" of the play-text, a reflection of the basic *intentio operis* of *Cymbeline*. The

deconstruction of meaning/interpretation may not be negated here, but that does not go to prove it is not perhaps transcended or sidestepped instead. Other elements within the drama could work to neutralize – to contain – the impact of the ambiguity in "construction", setting up a functional gap between the text's constative and performative dimensions, its logic and its affect, its content and its form.

This, once again, is close to the position adopted by Marcus. She argues that the original 'contemporary milieu' of *Cymbeline* would have allowed or encouraged

> a mode of performance that read beneath and across the
> play's seemingly unbridgeable fissures and implanted a
> sense of underlying unity by uncovering an essence
> called union, identical with the person and power of
> the monarch.[145]

In this scenario, the fissures and disjunctions evident in the play are made visible precisely in order to be reassuringly disarmed. A symbolic or emotional resolution is thereby provided for otherwise intractable problems of language, interpretation, and authority/authorization. Marcus finds an interesting paradigm for this idea in the post-Freudian concept of "cryptonymy", used to describe the mechanism whereby 'a kind of "speech" can be given to gaps and splits which divide one area of the self from other areas and make it unavailable to the same discursive space'.[146] Cryptonymy, in Marcus's view, offers a means of arresting the insistent processes of deconstruction and the fragmentation of meaning which they produce. What she seems to have in mind here is a sort of counterpoising of irreconcilables that would obscure any hint of their irreconcilability, making it look as though everything were really in harmony after all, and thus enabling all the old accepted "truths" still to hold sway. In contrast to the possible "theatrical deconstruction" already discussed, therefore, a 'theatrical cryptonymy' of *Cymbeline*

> would call attention to the play's disjunctions and
> difficulties in order to beckon beyond them toward an
> idealized realm of political essence which can be said to
> have helped create them in the sense that it induces a
> sense of human inadequacy, but which also heals them
> by giving access to the very realm of essence from
> which they are revealed as mere ephemera, surface
> turbulence upon a political and artistic entity which is
> indissolubly organic, at one with itself at the level of
> deep structure.

And on these terms - and this is the crux of the argument - 'the play

would then, for all its surface questioning, reaffirm the royal line not so

much through King James as in spite of him'.[147]

The notion of cryptonymy Marcus develops here in fact has much

in common with the King's own political philosophy, and the neoplatonic

idealism and essentialist principles at its core.[148] It also goes a long

way towards redeeming the traditional "Romance" reading of *Cymbeline*,

in the face of a range of features that might appear to militate heavily

against this.[149] And it links in too - and romance and Stuart politics

come together as well in this - with the confident providentialism which

suffuses Philharmonus's interpretations, and which works to present the

benign will of heaven as being (what else?) in perfect conformity with

the interests of the Jacobean monarchy. Indeed, Philharmonus's entire

exposition of Jupiter's sense-resistant label can be seen to parallel the

operations of Marcus's cryptonymy, in the way it resolves and remedies

the verbal and referential ruptures which the unelucidated text sets up.

In this respect, moreover, it stands as something of a microcosm of the

play as a whole. In its very design, *Cymbeline* seems to be engaged in

a similar activity of overcoming disjunctions and revealing submerged

connections, as it draws together outrageously disparate strands of plot

material and widely divergent poetic styles and dramatic modes into a

unified and ordered discourse, a coherent aesthetic structure. It is a

process that is matched at a more subliminal level by the various word-games and image-patterns that run throughout the drama, and that come to a head in this closing sequence, converging to be all neatly tied up in the play's concluding acts of interpretation.

A certain conjunction between the realms of art and politics – a sense of aesthetic form reinforcing hegemonic attitudes and ruling ideologies – is evident in Marcus's own language as she outlines her theory of theatrical cryptonymy. And indeed, there is a whole side to the processes of political and psychological resolution she describes which might broadly be identified as "aesthetic". It is here, however, that Marcus's position seems to me to become most open to question, and it feels possible to take the argument a stage further at least, precisely at the level of form.[150] To do this, I want to focus on one remaining application to be found in Posthumus's multivalent phrase, 'let him show | His skill in the construction'. Coming at the end of a play that is Shakespeare's most overt and extended theatrical exercise in elaborate technical virtuosity, and that is richly supplied throughout with moments of self-conscious artifice, this carries with it a powerful and conspicuous self-reflexive dynamic.[151] Through its explicit invocation of the idea of a display of skill, Posthumus's comment embodies a direct allusion to the play's distinctive dramaturgy and design. In terms of its plot, scope, internal patterning, and verbal texture, *Cymbeline* itself (and its final scene in particular) stands as a calculated demonstration, a bravura exhibition, of skilful (narrative and dramatic) construction.

At the same time, however, *Cymbeline* is also a play that has proved notorious over the years for its supposed aesthetic failings and lapses of taste and judgement; and whilst most of the criticisms that have been directed at it in this area can safely be dismissed these days,

it is certainly a work not lacking in its share of narrative incongruities, hackneyed theatrical conventions, and crude technical contrivances.[152] For all my talk of skilful construction, the dramaturgy of the play is characterized at virtually every level by a juxtaposition of technical extremes, a constant intermingling of impressive virtuoso effects and elements of blatant clumsiness. As a consequence, *Cymbeline* manages to appear in places a thoroughly strained and maladroit creation, almost as laboured and inelegant, one might say, as Philharmonus's intrusive Latin etymologies. This in itself is not especially incompatible with the tenor of Marcus's argument. The image of old-fashioned/age-old devices and other similar disjunctive or obtrusive techniques being subsumed within a wider, controlled design fits in nicely with the "healing" pattern which she adumbrates. It is another matter, though, when it comes to the self-consciousness the play displays regarding its own status as an aesthetic object. This is much less readily accommodated to Marcus's model.

For one thing, the play's insistent emphasis on the mechanics of its own construction seems designed, at the very least, to evoke some sort of awareness of the technical strategies that make possible its broadly comedic outcome. Marcus's putative "theatrical cryptonymy", however, with its primarily emotional/aesthetic/idealizing procedures, and evident reliance on a certain degree of mystification, would appear to need to function at a more submerged, subconscious level, eliciting a general lack of formal analysis or reflection, an uncritical acceptance of the essential validity of the play's resolutions and the structures on which they depend. Beyond this, though, I would argue that the process of building palpable and all-too-familiar devices into the fabric of the fiction works to draw attention to the amount of artifice and conventionality involved in bringing to fruition the narrative's movement

towards closure.[153]   This in turn can be seen to cast doubt upon the plausibility and efficacy of that movement, exposing the depth of the gaps and splits, the irreconcilability of the disjunctions, that permeate the political and conceptual landscapes of *Cymbeline.*

Crucial here is the way the idea of skilful construction itself gets introduced at a moment that is, from a technical perspective, decidedly double-edged.   On the one hand, it occurs during a sequence in which the skilfulness of the play's design is particularly to the fore, as the finishing touches are applied to the elaborate operation of pulling together all of the drama's various narrative and thematic threads.   On the other, it comes at a point in the action where the complexity of the play's construction is perhaps most in danger of becoming a liability, of being viewed as self-defeating, an artistic failing, an exercise in overkill that threatens to overburden the entire dramatic edifice.   This leads me back to my comments at the start of this chapter on the "textual excess" apparent in this closing passage from *Cymbeline,* and the hostility and incomprehension this part of the play has provoked.   Especially pertinent in the present context is the way Posthumus's call for a display of skill from the Roman Soothsayer almost immediately prefaces - and is indeed instrumental in eliciting - the second on-stage reading of Jupiter's label, the single event here that most glaringly defies all the usual conventions of theatrical economy and skilful dramatic construction.

This distinctive mixture of ostentatious brilliance and apparent incompetence, the conjunction of the reference to skilled construction with an example of conspicuous dramaturgical ineptitude, is what brings into play all of the tensions and ambiguities surrounding the concept of "construction" that I have been exploring in this chapter.   The sense *Cymbeline* conveys of its own dramatic artistry as an inextricable

mixture of extreme skilfulness and heavy-handed artifice points towards the similarly divided nature of Philharmonus's efforts at interpretation. The circumstance whereby "construction" is problematized at the level of form activates, so to speak, the dual implication within Posthumus's use of the term. It is this perceptible symmetry that makes clear to me that the double meaning of which I have been making so much is by no means an accidental effect. What is more, the parallels involved here work in either direction. The ambivalences available at the verbal level – the opposition between "construing" and "constructing", the unequal impact the two primary senses of "construction" have upon each other – carry over into the arena of the play's self-referentiality. In much the same way, those aspects of the Soothsayer's "reading" of the label I have been seeking to emphasize throughout – its potent ideological ramifications, the image of skilful construction as a process of careful persuasion and manipulation, the suggestion that display might be more important than content, or a means of covering up for a lack of real insight, and so on – reflect back upon the design of the play as a whole.

This means that the basically sceptical assessment of Philharmonus's "construction" of the prophecy advocated above can be applied pretty much directly to the wider areas of the play's dramaturgy and design. Or to put this another way, the deconstructive dynamic I have been tracing in relation to the idea of interpretative construction operates just as effectively in terms of the play's overall aesthetic form. In this, as in other respects, *Cymbeline* can be said to register strong suspicions about the validity of the dramaturgical processes it employs, the "constructed" nature of its own resolutions. Moreover, the extent to which the play lays bare its intrinsic fictionality and artifice does much to undermine its own surface form, and thus to qualify or call into

question any political and ideological perspectives associated with that form. One might even go so far as to claim that it renders problematic the notion of aesthetic closure in general; and hence, that the play's formal self-consciousness embodies, or at the least hints at, a critique of the kind of political solutions and mythologies whose ultimate justification is essentially aesthetic - precisely the kind of position, that is, which a "theatrical cryptonymy" would work to express or endorse.[154]

This is not to suggest that, in its closing moments, *Cymbeline* is simply engaged in invalidating or repudiating the emotional impact of its on-stage events, or, for that matter, the ideas and ideologies which it draws upon at this point. It is more an exercise in contextualization that is going on. The skilful crafting of the narrative, the wondrously happy ending, the passion and pathos of the multiple reconciliations, the artistry of the play's design, the different layers of emotional affect these elements can generate, all are given the scope to register with genuine force. But they are also subjected to scrutiny, held up to analysis, framed and foregrounded so as to highlight some of their wider implications and consequences. One effect of this situation is well captured by Brook Thomas:

> while, on the one hand, Shakespeare's exposure of the
> play as a fiction keeps us from believing in the happy
> ending, on the other, it reminds us of the real power
> emanating from fictions.[155] "

Cymbeline creates, and participates in, that power, and makes its appeal very plain. It does not in the end, though, it seems to me, allow it to pass unchallenged, it does not let it, or the fictions themselves, have the final say. In the words of Jean Howard,

> the resolution of its complex plot may invite relieved
> assent to its culminating vision, but the very artifice
> of that resolution also reveals its contingency,
> suggesting that there is nothing either natural or

> inevitable about the familial and political arrangements
> that are the objects of negotiation and struggle in this
> tragicomic play.[156]

As these last two quotations indicate, there is little new about the type of reading of the play's formal design offered here. What I would say, though, is that, where they do get a mention in critical discourse, the impact and significance of the self-referential artistry of *Cymbeline* are often acknowledged only in passing, or almost as an afterthought.[157] My own view, rather, is that a thorough appreciation of the complexity and sophisticated self-referentiality of the play's dramaturgy is the place where interpretation and understanding of *Cymbeline* - and in this, it is representative of late Shakespearian drama in general - really need to begin. Before leaving this closing section of *Cymbeline*, however, and turning to the late plays as a group, I want to look briefly at one final element in its composition. The play's artistic self-consciousness, its insistent unveiling of its own fictionality, and the ambivalences it sets up towards the realms of interpretative, aesthetic, and ideological "construction", have a bearing back on Philharmonus's reading of the label, and, in particular, on the gender politics of his curious (and dubious) "tender air"/"*mollis aer*"/"*mulier*" chain of derivations.

Recent criticism has rightly drawn attention to the way the ending of the play works to exclude or distance women (and even the female principle in general, "the woman's part") from its closing processes of national reconciliation and rejuvenation.[158] Not only is the male line of succession re-established during the final scene, Imogen herself is presented as a perfectly willing accomplice to the entire proceeding. And the fact that she remains dressed in her page-boy disguise means the audience is offered a closing image of an almost exclusively masculine community. To quote Jean Howard again, 'Britain renews itself as women

are disempowered or disappear'.[159]   Something of a rationale and symbolic justification for this situation is supplied, as usual, in the Soothsayer's interpretation of the prophetic label. In the way he reads off 'this most constant wife' from the phrase 'a piece of tender air', Philharmonus effectively comes up with a solution to the problems of "reading" women earlier lamented by Cymbeline. He produces, that is, an explanation and endorsement for the outcome of events, and for Imogen's reduced position within that outcome, which lays claim to the warrant of being grounded and authorized at the foundational level of language.

The Soothsayer's invocation of the "*mulier*"/"*mollis aer*" etymology brings matters down to the point where gender differences, and social hierarchies of gender, are felt to be inscribed/legitimized within the fabric of language itself. The notion that womankind is the embodiment of a natural (even ethereal, quasi-mystical) tenderness, the possessor of a more tender disposition (implicitly contrasted here to the lion-like power, strength, and potential – the patrilineal inheritance – of the male/husband) is seemingly reflected in the very roots of language. The etymological becomes the ideological, and the workings of that ideology are further evidenced in Philharmonus's rendering of the multivalent Latin word, "*mulier*", as straightforward English "wife", rather than "woman" – an approach that equates status with identity, transmutes "nature" into role.[160]   There is, too, despite everything, a sense, borne out in this very terminology, in which not much has really changed in all this since the institution of the wager. Imogen is, after all, still being chiefly valued and celebrated for her unmatched wifely constancy, her impeccable chastity and devotion (compare 1.4. 53-67).

In this part of his exposition, as Jane Donawerth has observed, Philharmonus is following some of the basic 'principles of Renaissance

etymology'; and in the methodology and mode of interpretation he adopts, he is also both exploiting and affirming a particular world-view, a model of proper order and degree that finds its parallel in a correspondence theory of language, a belief (again orthodox for the period) in a direct connection, an intrinsic correlation, 'between words and things'.[161] This in turn feeds in to wider thematic motifs within the label itself, a whole symbolic nexus in which etymology and genealogy (not least through a shared vocabulary of roots, trees, stems, stocks, etc.), heraldry and social hierarchy, patriarchy, Jacobean monarchy, and divine providence emerge as all bound up together, interdependent and mutually reinforcing at the level of deep structure.[162] I have already stressed, however, how strained and unconvincing the "*mulier*"/"*mollis aer*" derivation can feel in this context, how much it is in danger of falling flat. What with its own weaknesses, and the contrived and potentially rather desperate nature of Philharmonus's exegesis in general, the etymology seems ill-equipped to support the edifice constructed around it at this point, too frail a component to help sustain the complex imagistic network and ideological system to which it belongs. And if that system itself requires recourse to such a tortured etymology, one might well be tempted to conclude, then it must be in trouble indeed.

The issues of language, lineage, gender, and interpretation that are at stake here all come together around a textual feature that goes notably unmentioned in the Soothsayer's reading of the label, the buried pun or auditory alternative in the phrase "tender air", just about the only available pun Philharmonus does not take advantage of, and possibly the one he might have been most expected to employ had events turned out differently. Imogen may end the play idealistically conceived of as 'a piece of tender air', but she is no longer the "tender heir" to her

father that she effectively begins proceedings as ('his daughter, and the heir of 's kingdom' (1.1. 4)). The failure of the Soothsayer to find any use for the "air"/"heir" homophone could be seen as a sign of the play's ultimate collusion with the patriarchal processes it is dramatizing, a symptom of its repression of its own gender anxieties. But one might equally argue that the lack of any direct play on this particular sense/meaning registers by its very absence - as a pointed silence, that works to expose the kinds of repression still in operation at the end of the drama, and thus at least to hint at a resistance to certain aspects of Jacobean patriarchy.[163] It is not just that Imogen's symbolic representation as "*mollis aer*" is what now gets in the way of her being a "tender heir", that she is deprived of her place in the succession seemingly simply because of her gender.[164] The fact that this hidden meaning is located within the language used to praise and idealize her is itself suggestive of the double-edged nature of that language, the extent to which it is implicated in the patterns of disempowerment acted out on stage.[165] And then finally, of course, the easy availability of an alternative way of reading to Philharmonus's, and one which so readily conjures up an unachieved outcome to events, offers yet another indication of the contrived and unstable nature of the play's closing harmonies, even in the arena of gender, and their dependence on certain fallible, challengeable, ideologically-inscribed interpretative choices.[166]

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This is to spend a long time on a short passage, one that inevitably passes quickly (and perhaps even extra-quickly in the drive towards closure) during performance. Yet this fairly unprepossessing extract

from *Cymbeline* relates more or less directly to all of the main concerns that I want to pursue in the rest of this thesis, as I turn my attentions towards Shakespeare's late plays as a group. It also offers, through the Soothsayer's role as textual exegete, a potential parallel to my own position as interpretative critic of Shakespeare. In many respects, though, Philharmonus stands for me as a model of how not to "read" late Shakespeare, and I have aimed throughout for an approach that is less geared towards producing definitive conclusions, smoothing over tensions, or constructing easy harmonies, the perfect resolutions of "romance". Having said this, the length of the treatment accorded Philharmonus's exposition above serves as something of a commentary on the limitations of my own readings elsewhere in this thesis, where I have not had the space to go into anything like the same degree of detail.[167]

Acts of interpretation proliferate in late Shakespearian drama. I am not just thinking here of the reading of written texts and documents, though documents of one sort and another are indeed a considerable on-stage presence in almost all of the late plays.[168] What I also have in mind are the repeated "readings" that get put forward of situations and events, of characters, actions, performances, spoken comments, visual displays, past history, present circumstances, and so on. Such elements amount in effect to a full-scale "textualization" of existence and experience within the fictional realm, of human perception and behaviour, and the whole of the natural world.[169] And the efforts at interpretation involved all function, like the Soothsayer's, within the discursive contexts that go to make up the human social sphere, that is, within the domain of ideology. Thus they can be found "performing" meaning, persuading and manipulating their listeners (and even the individual interpreter), inscribing value judgements, and all the time being influenced by, and

generating, all manner of (in its broadest sense) political activity. It is this interaction of interpretation and ideology that I most want to get to grips with - partly in terms of its impact on the reception history of late Shakespeare, its role in shaping critical understanding and analysis; but most of all, for the way I see it as already being analysed within the plays themselves, especially when it comes to the rhetorical (hegemonic) force associated with authorized, privileged voices, or with those interpretations that carry, or court, communal endorsement and precedence.

Other factors important to my work also emerge. In a thesis devoted to examining complexities in the treatment of interpretation, avoiding overly simplifying my own processes of interpretation suggests itself as an appropriate ideal, even if it is bound a lot of the time to remain only an ideal. With this in mind, I have sought to respond to as many different aspects of the "textuality" of the late plays as possible. As elsewhere, I have found it useful to pursue the parallels available here between the fictional world and the world of history - between, that is, issues relating to textuality within the dramatic action, and those that apply in relation to the plays/texts themselves.[170] With this in mind, the textual and theatrical problems and peculiarities that adhere to the action involving the Soothsayer again make the ending of *Cymbeline* a suitable starting-place. So too does the relative lack of attention this sequence has attracted. An interest in neglected and marginal moments typifies my approach, and I have been concerned at all times to bring to the fore the many strange and disjunctive effects that permeate the late plays. The recurrent inability of traditional criticism to cope with these elements is for me a pointer to the basic inadequacies of the principal critical models that have been applied to the canon of late Shakespeare.

Where all these lines of interest come together is in the concept of "construction", as applied above to the realms of interpretation, ideology, and dramatic art and artistry. Shakespeare's late plays, as a group, are distinguished by the self-conscious manner in which they display, to an extent that outstrips even most of his earlier work, their own artistic and theatrical strategies, their status as dramatic constructs. This feature tends to be especially in evidence at those moments in the plays that have prompted significant anxieties regarding their purpose, quality, textual status, or authorship, and that have suffered considerable critical neglect accordingly. The self-reflexive artistry of the late plays, which gives rise to both metadramatic and metafictional effects, is of course an enormous topic, and one that has itself by no means been neglected. But the two general areas of dramaturgy which I have already drawn attention to in the Preface - theatrical spectacle and reported action - stand out amongst this array of self-referential techniques as particular stumbling-blocks in the criticism of the late plays. Both are also of considerable relevance to the passage at hand.

The entire final scene of *Cymbeline* can be invoked as an example of extended spectacular action, both for its multiplicity of disguises and unveilings, and for the practical challenges posed by its staging, the careful manipulation of personnel and sight-lines it requires given the large number of people present on stage, and the various sub-groups into which they divide. Perhaps more immediately relevant in the current context, though, is the extravagant spectacle of the vision-of-Jupiter sequence in the preceding scene, to which the prophetic label is so intimately connected. As for reported action, the whole of the last scene is again illustrative, with its revelations dependent upon oddly

drawn out (and notoriously embroidered) narrative accounts of earlier happenings. More specifically, report and re-telling are very much a part of this closing passage, in such features as the re-reading of the label, Posthumus's description of his dream-vision, and the Soothsayer's recollection of his own vision-cum-dream. And as I noted earlier, this last visionary experience itself only exists in the play in the first place as an unverifiable report describing a never-staged event that is in any case a personal psychological affair, something that has to be reported to be made available to anyone other than the dreamer.

The multiplying of perspectives and uncertainties here provides a good indication of the forces that operate within the realm of report, and the way the processes of telling and re-telling shape and delimit how actions and experiences are perceived and understood. This applies not only to off-stage events, of course, but also to the "spectacles" presented to the view of the theatre audience. One of the reasons why spectacle and report are so often intertwined stems from the fact that visual effects generally need to be recast via description - put into words - to be given any determinate meaning or precise discursive significance. In the late plays, the conjunction of spectacle and report tends to coincide as well with some wider interpretative crux or dilemma, a particular locus of indeterminacy or site of interpretative conflict. Thus both elements are frequently linked, as here, with the worlds of the divine and the imaginary or unconscious; and they can figure prominently too, again as here, within the fields of political history and sex/gender relations. Throughout all this, the dramaturgy of the plays works to expose the gap between what is seen (or not seen) and what is said, to lay open to the audience the distance between the evidence available and the interpretations that are derived from it.

The overall design and construction of the late plays, then, sets up a process of exploration and demystification, the impact of which extends to the spheres of perception and cognition, to the ethics, intentions, and reliability of interpretation, and to the realms of the political and the ideological. The last factor means that any attempt to pin down the politics of these plays needs to come to terms with the skilfulness and radical complexity of their dramatic artistry. In arguing for the relevance of aesthetic concerns to political interpretation, I am in part seeking to bridge a divide in recent criticism, and one lately bemoaned specifically in connection with the late plays by Kiernan Ryan. I share Ryan's view that prevailing approaches to late Shakespearian drama have tended to reduce and normalize the complexity and distinctiveness of the plays' dramaturgy, and, like him, feel the need for 'a way of reading' that treats 'formal analysis and political evaluation' as essentially 'indivisible'.[171] What such a project requires, amongst other things, is a keen awareness of the divided, double-edged nature of aesthetic discourse, a characteristic well captured by Terry Eagleton when he speaks of the aesthetic as both

> the very secret prototype of human subjectivity in
> early capitalist society, and a vision of human energies
> as radical ends in themselves which is the implacable
> enemy of all dominative or instrumentalist thought.

As Eagleton goes on to warn, 'any account of this amphibious concept which either uncritically celebrates or unequivocally denounces it is thus likely to overlook its real historical complexity'.[172]

I return to this topic in Chapter Four, where I also address more fully the issues relating to dramaturgy, ideology, and interpretation raised in this chapter. Before that, though, in the next two chapters, I set out to examine in detail the critical and reception histories of

the late plays. Here, I have been very conscious of Fredric Jameson's

observation that,

> we never really confront a text immediately, in all its
> freshness as a thing-in-itself. Rather, texts come before
> us as the always-already-read; we apprehend them
> through sedimented layers of previous interpretations,
> or - if the text is brand-new - through the sedimented
> reading habits and categories developed by those
> inherited interpretive traditions.[173]

This sedimentation of interpretative tradition seems only too evident to

me in the criticism of the late plays. I would claim in particular that

accumulated layers of interpretation and ingrained habits of reading

have long functioned to inhibit understanding and appreciation of the

techniques and characteristics that I focus upon in this thesis. In

highlighting the development of the interpretative codes and paradigms

that have dominated the reception of these works, I have been hoping

above all to strip away some of the accretions (to stir up the sediment)

of critical tradition - to emphasize their historical contingency, expose

and account for their intrinsic limitations, draw attention to the way

they have determined interpretation and the influence they can still

exert even on work that appears to have moved beyond them, and so

forth. I have found that it is only when one gets down to the details

of the situation (laid out at length, wherever necessary, in my footnotes)

that the problems with such approaches, and the importance of moving

beyond them, become properly apparent. This, then, is the approach I

adopt in the following chapters, as I consider and attempt to assess

some of the many constructions, skilful and otherwise, that have been

placed upon these strange, elusive late texts of Shakespeare's.

CHAPTER TWO

GENRE, CHRONOLOGY, IDENTITY

In his last phase when hardly bothering
To be a dramatist, the Master turned away
From his taut plots and complex characters
To tapestried romances, conjuring
With rainbow names and handfuls of sea-spray
And from them turned out happy Ever-afters.

Eclectic always, now extravagant,
Sighting his matter through a timeless prism
He ranged his classical bric-à-brac in grottos
Where knights of Ancient Greece had Latin mottoes
And fishermen their flapjacks – none should want
Colour for lack of an anachronism.

A gay world certainly though pocked and scored
With childish horrors and a fresh world though
Its mainsprings were old gags – babies exposed,
Identities confused and queens to be restored;
But when the cracker bursts it proves as you
     supposed –
Trinket and moral tumble out just so.

Such innocence – In his own words it was
Like an old tale, only that where time leaps
Between acts three and four there was something born
Which made the stock-type virgin dance like corn
In a wind that having known foul marshes, barren
     steeps,
Felt therefore kindly towards Marinas, Perditas . . .

Studies of Shakespeare's late plays abound. The second half of the
twentieth century in particular saw a vast outpouring of academic ink
in this field, and there is little sign of any slackening off in such
scholarly industry with the advent of the new millennium. Most of
the commentary on offer takes as its focus the plays widely known as
the "four Romances" – *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale,* and *The
Tempest.* As a group, these have come to rank amongst the most popular

of all their author's works, both in the study and on the stage, and a broad consensus regarding the nature of the so-called "Romances", their respective merits and significance within the canon as a whole, has prevailed now for many years.[1]

The opening stanzas of Louis MacNeice's 1945 poem, 'Autolycus', quoted above, rehearse many of the central tenets of this consensus position.[2] MacNeice's short poem is mainly concerned with the worlds of *The Winter's Tale* and *Pericles* (besides the title reference, the only characters named are Perdita and Marina), but the existence of a larger group or genre is certainly implied. The closing years of Shakespeare's professional career are depicted as a time when the dramatist effectively turned his back on his past theatrical successes and established artistic practices to create a distinctive cluster of new works, similar in kind to each other, but strikingly different from anything he had previously produced. The resulting 'tapestried romances' (l. 4), exotic, escapist, sentimental, with their idealized heroines, stereotyped narrative incidents, and age-old conventions, are seen to move towards serene, "happy-ever-after" conclusions, expressing a direct, potentially didactic, moral vision, itself further reminiscent of the worlds of fairy tale and folklore. A perceived combination of effortless mastery and relaxed control furnishes evidence of an ageing playwright who has lost much of his interest in the practicalities (or even the medium) of theatre, to the extent of now, in MacNeice's calculatedly throw-away phrase, 'hardly bothering | To be a dramatist' (ll. 1-2). The image that emerges is thoroughly familiar to anyone remotely versed in the criticism of the "Romances", though the commonplaces in question have rarely been as pleasurably or intelligently expressed. And whilst the perspective adopted here is in some respects an ambivalent one, especially on the subject of technique, these stanzas

convey a clear sense of the features most responsible for the enormous growth in the popularity and prestige of the "Romances" during the twentieth century.[3]

Any recognition or acclaim which the plays may currently enjoy has not been granted easily, however. It is worth remembering that Shakespearian criticism knew nothing of "Shakespeare's Romances" for some two hundred and fifty years after the publication of the First Folio. What can appear now as an obvious, almost necessary, grouping of texts was only first identified/formulated as recently as the last quarter of the nineteenth century, in the work of F. J. Furnivall and (primarily) Edward Dowden. And identification alone was to prove no guarantee of appreciation. Dowden's innovatory classification, as proposed, was founded above all on biographical and psychological inferences, his well-known theory describing a Shakespeare emerging from a period of mental depression ('"Out of the depths"') into one of inner harmony and tranquillity, up '"On the heights"'.[4] Within this overriding emotional and spiritual narrative, Dowden himself expressed certain crucial reservations about the quality of some of the dramatic artistry on display in the "Romances".[5] These are as nothing, though, alongside Lytton Strachey's infamous hostile assessment from the early years of the twentieth century. In an iconoclastic critique of the sentimentalizing (re)constructions of Shakespeare's final period circulated by Dowden and his followers, Strachey asserted that the playwright's later output could best be accounted for as the work of a writer who was getting bored, 'bored with people, bored with real life, bored with drama, bored, in fact, with everything except poetry and poetical dreams'.[6]

Strachey's views may have received little support in recent times (at least overtly), but the dissident cry of his essay reverberated

powerfully for many years.[7]   It was only really in the decades after
the Second World War that the "Romances" *en bloc* came to be regularly
credited with genuine greatness.[8]   Primary critical responsibility for
establishing, justifying, and promulgating a positive enthusiasm for the
late plays falls, of course, upon the towering figures of G. Wilson Knight
and Northrop Frye.[9]   With Knight's impassioned, if frequently off-the-
wall, support and Frye's more theoretically-based, more sober advocacy,
understanding of late Shakespeare reaches fresh heights, in work
that marks a fundamental development and improvement upon earlier
criticism.[10]   But there are other, extra-critical, factors that can also
be discerned making their contribution to this new-found popularity –
a popularity which was to apply not only to the late plays themselves,
but also to Dowden's classificatory term, "Romances".   The 'poetry and
poetical dreams' (to use Strachey's dismissive phrase) available in the
"Romances" seem to have spoken particularly powerfully, and with
undeniably metaphysical resonances, in (to put the matter in the most
simplistic of terms) a post-Holocaust, post-Hiroshima world.[11]   And in
retrospect, the contemporaneousness of their rise to eminence with the
huge post-War growth of English Literature at University level, and
the prominence within that newly burgeoning professional environment
of formalist interpretative practices, appears anything but a simple
coincidence.[12]   In many ways, and however one feels about it, the
"Romances" can be thought of as one of the great success stories of the
formalization of Shakespeare studies in the twentieth century.[13]

     This is very much a schematic, not to say superficial, account of
a complex critical history, and I have been conscious in writing it,
in the light of the concerns outlined in the previous chapter, of
the stresses and strains necessarily inherent in constructing such a

narrative. Critical histories tend by their very nature, as well as in the way they are used, toward the polemical and the ideological, pursuing private agendas, imposing order even as they seek merely to describe.[14] The potted history just given cannot pretend to be exempt from such pressures, and is in any case intentionally partial in that it concentrates on only one aspect of critical (as against theatrical or literary-artistic) reception, interpretation. Thus it includes no attempt to trace the various traditions of historicist scholarship on the late plays, the mass of important work addressing their diverse theatrical, social, and political milieux. Such work is an essential component of the critical context one automatically inherits when approaching late Shakespeare, and without which my own criticism as it stands simply could not hope to exist.[15] But what dominates that context for me (and hence explains my focus here) is the concept of the "four Romances". Influential ideas connected with this, such as I have extrapolated from MacNeice's poem – the sense of a clean break in Shakespeare's career, of the "Romances" as a world in themselves, of a loosening in the ties binding Shakespeare to his art – have cast long shadows over the whole spectrum of late play scholarship and criticism, shaping apprehension and assessment at every level, conditioning how the plays have been read.

I have deliberately set out in this thesis to try to write a different narrative of Shakespeare's later career. To pick up on the argument of the Preface, there seem to me to be two obvious – indeed, vital – ways in which to go about this. These involve, in the first place, abandoning the generic classification, "Romances", which I find to be wholly, even ineptly, inappropriate; and secondly, devoting at least equal space to the two surviving plays from this period that are generally felt to

be collaborations between Shakespeare and John Fletcher (and that get regularly marginalized as a result), *Henry VIII* (*All Is True*) and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. I explore the subjects of attribution and collaboration in detail in Chapter Three, whilst I elaborate on my specific objections to the term, "Romances", in the next section, below. My own choice of descriptive label, "late plays", as defined in the Preface, is intended to be a good deal looser and less prescriptive. And something of this is reflected in that very definition (see above, pp. 2-3), where I have sought to offset or circumvent a number of prejudices and assumptions that have long bedevilled the criticism of the late plays, by listing the six works concerned in the most neutral manner possible, alphabetically, thus avoiding any suggestion of aesthetic, chronological, or authorial hierarchy.[16]

Only a small amount of precise information relating directly to the early history of the late plays has come down to us.[17] Furthermore (as is seemingly inevitable with Shakespeare), we have no positive or verifiable indication of what their author himself might have thought about them. Given the peculiar cultural forces and personal convictions and desires liable to operate around the "final" art-works of a writer so uniquely valued, it is no great surprise that speculation and surmise have flourished upon this paucity of information. Speculation and surmise are useful, very often necessary, critical tools, and they can be especially helpful where the evidence available to us remains tantalisingly *almost* complete.[18] But Shakespeare's final years do appear to have stimulated more than their fair share of inventive and extravagant flights of fancy from within the academic community, serious and semi-serious imaginative narratives purporting to explain or re-create the compositional genesis of the late plays. These have been advanced by

scholars and critics alike in support of theories of divided authorship, collaboration, or revision, or in an effort to account for shifts of direction in the dramatist's career, or to moot possible reasons for his retirement.[19] What most disturbs me in all of this is how many conjectural propositions and suppositions, typically with only the most flimsy of foundations, have become accepted as critical traditions, even being allowed to harden into facts. Some of the most widely-held and cherished beliefs pertaining to the late plays possess little genuine status beyond the level of myth.[20]

Probably the most famous, most entrenched of all such myths is the recurring biographical identification of the figure of Prospero with his creator, Shakespeare, and the concomitant representation of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's final play, the grand summation of his life's work, in which he expressed for all to see his serene farewell to the London theatre.[21] This trivializing, sentiment-ridden conceit has had an incalculable effect on attitudes towards, and analysis of, *The Tempest*, and on the cultural and aesthetic status afforded this play, as well as greatly influencing commentary on the late plays as a whole. It has also become well-enough known to have permeated beyond the narrow world of academic Shakespeare studies to form part of a wider, more popular conception of "The Bard".[22] Whilst it is rarely advanced with unqualified assurance nowadays, its influence remains pervasive, and continues to damage the reputation and standing of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen.*[23] I have attempted to escape from, or rather discredit, this persistent canard, and any other such questionable traditions as have accumulated around my chosen texts. In the process, I have hoped to avoid producing interpretations of the late plays that end up being utterly contingent upon highly debatable assumptions

regarding their inception, date, genre, historical context, original theatrical venue, or the mental state of their author.

The consensus view of the "Romances" I have outlined persisted virtually unchallenged well into the 1990s and, I would argue, is very much still current. As is well known, though, the broader realm of Shakespeare studies has changed dramatically during the last couple of decades, with significant expansions in performance criticism and theory, radical shifts of emphasis in bibliographical and textual studies, and the rise to institutional prominence of the politically-oriented discourses of feminist and gender critique, new historicism, and cultural materialism.[24] The traditional horizons of criticism have been expanded, its decorums redefined, and political and ideological understanding of Shakespeare genuinely revolutionized. The direct impact of any of this on the late plays collectively has as yet been relatively limited and disappointing, however, and little seems to have changed in the narratives being written about the group as a whole.[25] Having said that, individually, *The Tempest* (with its unique cultural status) has been credited with a huge amount of high-profile attention, itself widely-discussed, which has placed the play right at the heart of interpretative and methodological struggles and controversies within the Academy.[26] One achievement of this intensive investigation has been to foreground the essential fragility of some of the more conventional critical readings associated with this text.[27]

My own work is not directly aligned with any of the developing discourses mentioned above, but they have all exerted an influence on my thinking and on the scope of my research. In particular, I have found politically-oriented criticism truly liberating and enabling, whilst at the same time being dismayed by its repeated perception

and propagation of an essentially conservative, elitist, state-supporting politics in the late plays. There appears to me to be much greater opportunity than has been exploited for discovering potentially - and intentionally - challenging, resistant, or subversive political ideas in late Shakespeare. As is indicated in the Preface, I pursue this topic in conjunction with, and to a large extent via, an interest in the sort of aesthetic features and techniques that have tended to be neglected in the more recent critical trends - an interest more readily identified with the hermeneutics of "close reading".[28]

Situating one's own criticism in relation to existing work can often be little more than a conventional gesture, an acknowledgment of procedural expectations, or a (questionable?) rhetoric of authority. One specific effect of my own concerns, though, is to render an evocation of the history of late play criticism, with its patterns of developing and competing readings and discourses, something more than merely academic. In the course of my exploration of the ideological ramifications of interpretation within Shakespeare's late plays, my attention has been forced back consistently, and, I feel, necessarily, to the interpretative acts and evaluative paradigms that have been applied to the plays themselves by others. And certainly, on a more personal note, large parts of this study have been born out of deep discontent and a conscious sense of opposition to the critical tradition. One key impetus behind the approach adopted here was the recurring dissatisfaction I experienced in reaction to the bulk of the criticism of the late plays I was encountering back in the 1980s, when this thesis was first taking shape in my mind. Even so, I would not want to overstress my deliberately oppositional stance, nor assign critical history greater significance than the actual plays.[29] More important to me than anything

else has been the sheer pleasure of working with late Shakespeare, of exploring six texts which have long fascinated me, and for all of which I hold a very real admiration and enthusiasm.

Identity and the Problem of Genre

The idea that Shakespeare completed his career in the theatre with a linked series of dramatic "Romances" stands firmly entrenched as an integral element in contemporary understanding of the playwright's life and works. Dowden's original classification has given rise to a rigid model of the "four Romances" as a coherent, developing sequence, chronologically discrete from the rest of the canon.[30] Most of the more authoritative accounts of Shakespearian chronology have bolstered this construction, with the plays concerned being dated as a rule roughly as follows: *Pericles*, 1607-08; *Cymbeline*, 1609-10; *The Winter's Tale*, 1610-11; *The Tempest*, 1611.[31] Of these four, it is *The Winter's Tale* and, to a still greater degree, *The Tempest*, which have received by far the largest amount of critical attention, and been favoured with the most enthusiastic praise.[32] Indeed, many commentators have been happy to view *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* as little more than preparatory studies for the two supposedly later, greater works. A prime example is J. M. Nosworthy, whose 1955 Arden *Cymbeline* is a singularly apposite text to cite in this context due to the unique cultural authority it enjoyed until recently from being the standard single-volume edition of this play for nigh on the whole of the second half of the twentieth century.[33] Emphasizing what he regards as both the newness of the genre of Romance for Shakespeare, and the relative lack of a satisfactory dramatic tradition upon which the playwright could build, Nosworthy comments:

it is important that we should recognize from the outset that *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and, to a certain but insignificant extent, *The Winter's Tale* were the pioneer colonizing efforts of a Shakespeare more completely without a reputable model than he had ever been.[34]

The absence of any example to follow becomes a sufficient explanation in itself for the apparently blatant ineptitudes and inadequacies present in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* - being 'the first fruits of a new attempt', they are naturally 'experimental to a high degree and prone to partial or total failure'.[35]

This sort of argument, which both derives from and reinforces the conventional datings given above, underlies the widespread critical tendency to posit an evolutionary development in Shakespeare's ability to handle dramatic romance. That tendency is most clearly manifested in the common image of the "Romances" as a graduated progression from the seminal but badly flawed *Pericles*, through the moderate improvement of *Cymbeline* and the more assured achievement of *The Winter's Tale*, to the ultimate mastery and perfection of *The Tempest*.[36] Neat, and tidily schematic, this pattern, which carefully enshrines the "final play" as the crowning glory of Shakespeare's last recognizable group of works, has provided the basic archetype for innumerable books and studies on the "Romances".[37] It unquestionably served as the dominant twentieth-century model for understanding and elucidating these texts, and has been applied with a depressingly mechanical regularity at virtually every conceivable level. Thus individual critics have managed to persuade themselves that the same progressive technical development can be found across the "four Romances" in the treatment of such varied and unlikely features as music, theophany, dream, comedy/humour, vegetation rites, symbolism, work, and even that quintessential Shakespearian theme, appearance and reality.[38]

There are, however, as most responsible critics would acknowledge, a number of factors which militate against adopting such a carefully ordered and organized interpretative paradigm. In the first place, the accepted chronology for the "Romances" remains, in defiance of critical tradition, very much open to question. Whilst *Pericles* is almost certainly the earliest of the four, there is simply not enough firm evidence available to establish the relative dating of the other three with any real precision.[39] Then, in broader terms, the exact make-up of the "Romances" has always been somewhat unstable around the edges, with the boundaries of the group proving difficult to police. This is true even in Dowden's work, which reveals uncertainty in the handling of *Pericles* and what he describes as the 'fragments' of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[40] Partly as a result of Dowden's own vacillations, *Pericles* stayed pretty much peripheral until at least the 1930s, and it has continued to be excluded or sidelined on occasion due to the problematic nature of its surviving text, and persistent doubts over its authorship.[41] Of the other two, *Henry VIII* has come to be thought of more and more over the last half-century as belonging to the "Romances".[42] But in notable contrast, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has found only one or two critics willing to recognize it as a fully-fledged member of the group.[43] Mention should also be made at this point of the lost play, *Cardenio*, which F. David Hoeniger, for example, refers to, with a confidence I find bizarre, as 'the seventh of the Romances Shakespeare was involved with'.[44]

The inclusion of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* amongst the "Romances" (the presence of *Cardenio* is purely academic) offers a direct challenge to the popular evolutionary model described above, since hardly anyone has ever attempted to suggest that either work

marks an improvement upon *The Tempest*.[45] Furthermore, the fact that both plays date, so far as we can tell, from somewhere in the period 1612-1614 might appear to be enough in itself to overturn for good the idea of *The Tempest* being Shakespeare's final farewell to the stage.[46] And *The Two Noble Kinsmen* especially is of a markedly bleaker tone than the usual application of "Romance" implies, although that tone does connect interestingly to elements in the other texts that are often downplayed, their dark humour, grotesquerie, satire, or the sort of earthy realism MacNeice finds in the presentation of Autolycus.[47] With both plays dismissible as collaborative, however, such apparent problems have not worked to dislodge the prevailing "Romance" paradigm. On the contrary, they have all been quite successfully subsumed or contained within the critical orthodoxy descending from Dowden. It has remained possible, therefore, to talk with confidence about the "four Romances", and even, against all the evidence, to equate these with Shakespeare's "last plays". The tensions involved, though, do at last seem - and not before time - to be stretching the model I have outlined to breaking point.[48] I use the rest of this chapter to explore some of these tensions, as they impinge both on the processes of dating and defining the canon of "late" Shakespeare, and on the complex question of the genre of the late plays, turning first to the latter issue.

*

Dowden's initial formulation of his new generic category is put forward in the most general of terms:

> there is a romantic element about these plays. In all there is the same romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear -

> the daughters of Pericles and Leontes, the sons of
> Cymbeline and Alonso. In all there is a beautiful
> romantic background of sea or mountain. The dramas
> have a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to
> render the name "comedies" inappropriate; we may smile
> tenderly, but we never laugh loudly, as we read them.
> Let us, then, name this group, consisting of four
> plays, [. . .] Romances.[49]

Highly influential these remarks may have been, but they amount to

little more than a rather vague, almost artless identification of a few

distinguishing shared motifs. Dowden makes no attempt here to define

the genre of "Romance", nor does he specify any connections between

the "Romances" and pre-existing literature in a romance vein with

which Shakespeare could have been familiar.[50] Later critics have been

less reticent in both respects. In 1949, E. C. Pettet, in a study of

Shakespeare's use of romance traditions and conventions throughout his

career, claimed that 'the term "romances" can be applied to *Pericles*,

Cymbeline, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* in the restricted and

historical sense of the word'.[51] It is hard to be quite so sanguine

more than fifty years on, when faced with the accumulated mass – the

veritable mountain – of romance material that has been put forward

as being of relevance to late Shakespeare. An exhaustive account of

even only the most clearcut or most plausibly-proposed romance sources,

analogues, and influences seems barely feasible nowadays, but it would

need to include: remote archetypes, such as the *Odyssey*, Euripidean

drama, and Greek New Comedy; the surviving Greek Romances of the

second and third centuries and their Elizabethan translations; the fifth-

or sixth-century *Apollonius of Tyre* and its many subsequent redactions

and adaptations; various branches of the vast body of English and

European medieval romance, in prose and verse, epic, pastoral, historical,

chivalric, courtly, amorous, hagiographical; medieval miracle plays and

morality drama; European Renaissance epic poetry and prose romances and novellas; and even the entire Biblical/Christian story, with its all-encompassing world-view.[52]   In addition, and heavily influenced by these numerous traditions, there is the whole domain of English romance material contemporaneous with Shakespeare to consider: in pride of place, Philip Sidney's *Arcadia* and Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*; Elizabethan prose fiction, most notably Robert Greene's *Pandosto*; the plays of Greene, John Lyly and George Peele; the early Elizabethan romantic drama, preserved for us in a few surviving anonymous texts; Jacobean romantic and popular drama; historical romance material in chronicles and quasi-historical plays; voyage and travel literature; and underworld writings, popular pamphlets, and such less quantifiable ephemera as oral traditions, folk narratives, topical tales, sensational stories, ballads, legends, and so forth.[53]

All six of the late plays (and this would seem to apply to the lost *Cardenio* as well) can be linked in very obvious ways to some or other of these multifarious endeavours in the field of romance. Those that do not have a major or ultimate source in one or more of the areas concerned make direct allusion to the worlds of romance literature and story-telling instead.[54]   The presence in the above lists of some of the examples cited is, to be fair, dependent upon which Shakespearian texts are admitted to the discussion, but the removal of one or two individual strands would do little to reduce the bulk of the material involved.[55] Such an enormous range of literature serves as a pointer to the essential diversity and copiousness of "Romance", but it makes it very difficult to countenance any notion of a precise historical application for the term – or for that matter, of romance as a fixed generic form at all. From a modern perspective the situation is even worse, when "Romance"

can be stretched to cover anything from *Daphnis and Chloe* to Mills and

Boon, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* to the Star Wars movies.[56] As

Stanley Wells comments:

> the very word is shadowy, having associations with
> literature of various kinds, forms, and periods; with
> modes of sensibility; with languages; and with love. It
> can be spoken with an auspicious or a dropping eye;
> with a sob, a sigh, or a sneer; with the aspiration to
> define or with a defiance of definition. It means so
> much that often it means nothing at all.[57]

The relevance of most of the material adduced is not in question,

and is itself testimony (though only partial testimony at that) to the

sheer referential scope of the late plays. But as for the concept of

"Shakespeare's Romances", I am in complete agreement with Stephen

Orgel when he writes of Dowden's new generic category that it

> has proved as obfuscatory as it has been enlightening;
> various attempts to move beyond the circularity of the
> definition, refine its terms, establish the genre within a
> tradition, have revealed a good deal about the history
> of romance, but perhaps nothing so much as its ultimate
> inadequacy as a critical category for Shakespearian
> drama.[58]

As a formal description for late Shakespeare, then, "Romance" would

seem to have some very tangible problems. These can potentially be

offset, however, by thinking of the genre less as a fixed category or

form and more as a mode or ethos, capturing a particular tone or mood.

To quote Wells again:

> if the literary genre of romance can be defined – or
> described – it is not by formal characteristics. Rather
> perhaps is it a matter of certain recurrent motifs, and
> also of a recognizable attitude towards the subject-
> matter. Romancers delight in the marvellous; quite
> often this involves the supernatural; generally the
> characters are larger than life size. All is unrealistic;
> the logic of cause and effect is ignored, and chance
> or fortune governs all. Characteristic features vary
> somewhat from one sort of romance to another; and
> attempts at definition are bound to be circular – we
> can only decide what makes a romance by looking at

works to which the label has been attached and seeing
what they have in common.[59]

To focus on characteristic features is effectively to follow Dowden's

own unvarnished, intuitive approach, and the inevitable circularity in

attempts at defining romance to which Wells draws attention perhaps

suggests the wisdom of Dowden's original reticence in this regard.

But even in the discovery and enumeration of thematic connections,

critics have been able to expand upon Dowden's work, extending quite

considerably his list of the romance motifs shared across the late

plays.[60] This again is a reflection of the inherent breadth of material

that can be incorporated within a romance frame of reference, and again,

it poses problems with respect to delimiting the genre. As Howard

Felperin aptly remarks, 'coming to terms with romance is a difficult

task, precisely because romance, of all imaginative modes, is the most

fundamental, universal, and heterogeneous'.[61]

One of the most useful aspects to laying a special stress on the

attitude of the romancer, as Wells does in the above passage, is that

this at least offers some way of confining the potentially uncontrollable

inclusiveness of the mode. The romance effect becomes a question not

just of content but also of a very particular outlook and style of

presentation. This is what can be taken to set romance apart, to

signify its special concerns. An easy inference one can then make is

that the attitude ascribed by Wells to the romancer matches the attitude

romance is meant to create or convey. From here, it is no great step at

all for definition to come to determine reception rather than simply to

depend upon it, as the identification of genre starts to impose distinct

expectations about intent and proper emotional impact ("affect"). It is

this element in the critical process which I find the single biggest

drawback with the entire "Romance" reading of the late plays. Because of the inappropriate expectations and interpretative constraints it sets up, "Romance", as applied to late Shakespeare, has functioned, whatever Felperin's characterization of the genre, as an essentially reductive, homogenizing, value-laden, value-imposing term.

In the first place, romance has always tended to rank low in critical and cultural hierarchies of genre. Whilst Northrop Frye's work has done much to reverse traditional preferences and prejudices in this area, the view of romance as intrinsically aesthetically inferior, especially in relation to tragedy or epic, has been hard to shake off, and still recurs in late play criticism.[62] A corollary to this position is a condescension towards romance *per se* as an inherently non-serious kind of literary expression, mere entertainment, requiring little artistry from the romancer and less intellectual engagement from its audience.[63] This evaluation seems implicit in the writings of both Dowden and Strachey, and it underlies the phrase from MacNeice quoted earlier, describing a Shakespeare 'hardly bothering | To be a dramatist'. With its sustained defence of the innate seriousness of romance, and its systematic theoretical description of the form, Frye's criticism might appear to confute outright such a negative assessment of the genre. But in practice, it can easily function to perpetuate certain reservations about aesthetic quality, by deflecting attention away from specific details of content, style, or technique - the distinguishing features of individual texts - through its overriding preoccupation with grand structural narratives and mythic archetypes.[64] In Frye's conception, and for his like-minded followers, Shakespeare's late plays mark a return to the pure archaic roots of the romance genre in myth.[65] And this attitude is of course reflected in the massive body of commentary in

existence pursuing symbolic, mystical, spiritual, and quasi-anthropological readings of the "Romances", or exploring their position as generically and emotionally (and therefore not just chronologically) "beyond tragedy" in the way they complete archetypal story-patterns and total quest-myths.[66] Studies of this ilk tend to highlight the benevolent role of providence in the processes of plot-resolution. They also consistently privilege a related providential perspective expressed by some of the characters within the plays, most famously in the much-cited, proleptic summarizing remarks of Gonzalo in *The Tempest*.[67]

In this understanding of the genre, romance emerges as essentially naive, anti- or pre-ironic, unselfconscious. The result, to be frank, is a criticism that is itself strangely naive. My unease on this topic is shared by Felperin, who writes:

> nothing is more remarkable in Frye's writings on
> earlier romance than the absence of any suggestion that
> its representation of pristine mythic form may itself be
> ironic or problematic for the romancer himself [sic].[68]

A keynote to Frye's position in all this is the need to accept the conventions of romance as one would accept the conventions of any other genre. Indeed, for Frye, it is these actual conventions that carry the weight of interest in romance, that matter entirely for their own sake. The true greatness of the late plays is felt to reside in their ability to enter, to recapture, the world of romance naivety, to reproduce its pure conventionality.[69] Such a point of view does not begin to account for the evident self-consciousness of much of the artistry on display in late Shakespeare, the particular way in which the late plays consistently proclaim the artifice – the historically compromised and mediated, anything-but-pure conventionality – of their own conventions. And it effectively suppresses or skims over both the

highly self-reflexive nature of these texts, and the complexity of tone
and perspective they achieve through their deliberately obtrusive use
of creakingly stagy techniques and outmoded or archaic devices.[70]   I
return to this subject in Chapter Four, but will add here that I can
see no obvious means of reconciling the self-advertising construction -
the blatant "constructedness" - of the late plays with any paradigm of
romance that conceives of the genre as either "naive" or "sentimental",
irrespective of how specialized a definition those terms are being
given.[71]   Indeed, for me, it is precisely the quirky, idiosyncratic,
insistently visible dramaturgy of these six works - as evinced in the
kind of characteristics I have already sought to emphasize in Chapter
One - that most vividly exposes the deficiencies of the whole "Romance"
reading of late Shakespearian drama.

   A further major difficulty I have with Dowden's classification arises
from the fact that romance often gets thought of in opposition, almost as
an alternative, to the political world and to ideological concerns.[72]
There is, on the face of it, nothing inherently apolitical or, for that
matter, necessarily conservative about the romance genre - in many ways
potentially quite the reverse if one bears in mind its links with popular
literature or its frequently utopian trajectory.[73]   In Shakespearian
criticism, however, "Romance" has largely been made to function as a
de-historicizing, sentimentalizing description, one even valued for the
anti-political associations it can carry.[74]   The primacy of the "Romance"
model of interpretation has encouraged and facilitated a focus upon
fairy-tale, wonder, and wish-fulfilment purely as the mode or mood of
the late plays, and consequently very much not as themes or discourses
whose aesthetic and socio-historical implications might be being explored
or addressed within the texts themselves.[75]   Critical willingness to

incorporate *Henry VIII* into the "Romances", to absorb history into romance, serves, for me, to make the processes of dehistoricizing involved here quite unmistakable.

What easily follows on from this is a criticism in which political or topical ramifications are ignored. Alternatively, in a relatively strong interpretative tradition, history and politics do get attended to, but only in romance terms. In this latter case, the late plays are viewed as personal tributes to Jacobean monarchy, complimentary allegories or coded statements of its ruling ideologies, in work that itself tends to enact or collude in a mystificatory romancification of political practices and historical reality.[76] But both these lines of approach produce readings that bury beneath the weight of romance or mythic celebration the intensive analysis accorded to the subject of interpretation in late Shakespearian drama. They each overlook, or choose to disregard, the way in which the many acts of interpretation represented in these plays are shown to be deeply inscribed within discursive contexts and social power relations. And similarly, they fail to grasp or acknowledge the extent to which the "romance" perspective they extract from the texts is already directly politicized within the dramatic action by being associated with specific (and often, specifically problematized) political agendas and belief-systems.

In pursuing the critique of Frye's approach to romance which I have drawn upon above, Felperin argues strongly the need to complicate thoroughly Frye's model of the genre, especially where this concerns the underlying historical scheme that governs Frye's conception of the connections between romance and the realm of myth. Felperin is keen to emphasize here what he sees as an 'endless and dizzying dialectic between mystification and demystification' at work in *The Tempest* (the

one play on which he focuses), 'for which no final or stable synthesis seems possible'.[77] He does not attempt to remove *The Tempest* from the confines of the romance genre, but his essay stands as a formidable challenge to any unclouded view of romance as displaced, secularized, or, indeed, aspiring myth. For Felperin, the romance form, throughout its history, has always provided ample scope for a complex interplay between myth and irony, naivety and sophistication.[78] This is a general principle I would very much endorse, and Felperin's reading of *The Tempest* certainly chimes with my own, but his position still does not offer me sufficient reason for rehabilitating "Romance" as a description for late Shakespeare. Even setting aside the unfortunate pressures it can exert on the interpretation of individual texts, the term remains problematic, obscuring the major differences between the late plays themselves, and obfuscating their relations with the rest of the Shakespeare canon.

To create a separate category of "Romances" for late Shakespearian drama is to imply a totally new direction in the dramatist's career; but the suggestion that it is a turn to romance which specifically sets the late plays apart is one I find troubling. Romance literature is a considerable influence across the whole of Shakespeare's oeuvre, a recurring and powerful intertextual presence and inspiration, from *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, through *Henry V* and the so-called "Romantic Comedies", *All's Well That Ends Well* and *A Lover's Complaint*, and on, to *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*.[79] Possibly one of the best ways of thinking about romance might be to absorb generic concerns into notions of intertextuality, a standpoint essentially advocated by Richard Hillman.[80] Yet even here, I would see a danger in focusing exclusively on this one genre. The considerable

intertextual reaches of the late plays, a subject to which I shall often have cause to return, stretch far beyond the demesnes of romance, to take in, for example, Montaigne's *Essais*, North's Plutarch, the distinctly non-romantic form of Senecan tragedy, and those omnipresent figures in Shakespearian drama, Ovid and Virgil.[81]

The reading of the "Romances" as a gradually improving sequence, discussed above, has gone hand in hand with the belief that *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* represent repeated efforts at doing the same thing. Treating the four plays like this has led to extravagant claims for the fundamental interconnectedness of late Shakespearian drama. In fact, most attempts to describe their shared characteristics require considerable, and telling, exceptions.[82] *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*, it is true, do link together well in comparisons based on motif or structure - as in MacNeice's 'Autolycus'. In technical terms, though, *The Tempest* could hardly be more contrasted to the other three plays, and its effects of loss, restoration, and apparent death are equally very different.[83] But it is *Cymbeline* especially, with its fusion of elements from Roman and legendary British history, that has sat least happily within the traditional rubric of "Romance". Typically, when Nosworthy remarks that 'romance can carry a Cymbeline but not a Caesar', this is taken to reveal a failing in the play rather than in the classification being adopted.[84]

The very idea of accommodating the late plays under any single generic framework actually poses some quite fundamental problems of its own. To start with, they do not seem to have suggested themselves to Shakespeare's contemporaries as being connected in this manner. For that matter, there is precious little evidence from the period to link the four standard "Romances" together at all, except perhaps in the negative

reactions of Ben Jonson.[85] *The Tempest* and *Cymbeline* are printed as far apart as it is possible for two plays to be in the First Folio, whilst the same is true of *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale* within the Folio's 'Comedies' section.[86] It is the Folio itself, of course, that supplies our basic model for dividing up Shakespeare's dramatic works generically in the first place, but modern concepts of genre, as Stephen Orgel has repeatedly stressed, have tended to be more rigid and definitive than is appropriate for Elizabethan and Jacobean drama.[87] There are in any case plenty of other generic affiliations within the canon that have been under-explored or under-emphasized as a result of the consensus acceptance of "Romance".

To begin with features that have proven far too visible to be denied or passed over, all of the "four Romances" are broadly comedic in structure, have important elements of pastoral, and evoke the imagery and atmosphere of Shakespearian tragedy.[88] Confirming the relevance of this last genre, *Cymbeline*, to widespread consternation, is classified unambiguously as a tragedy in the Folio. But then this is a drama that displays characteristics of virtually every major genre imaginable. Even the semi-humorous application to it of Polonius's 'tragical-comical-historical-pastoral' description fails to capture the play's combined British and Roman dimensions – and *Cymbeline* cannot justifiably be omitted from any survey of Shakespeare's Roman worlds that aspires to be truly comprehensive.[89] Moving on, *Henry VIII* is obviously, if problematically, a chronicle history play, despite the desire of many critics completely to discount it as such.[90] *Cymbeline* and *The Winter's Tale* combine rather well with both *Much Ado About Nothing* and *Othello* as "slandered women" plays.[91] And *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can all be grouped together, along with *The Comedy*

of Errors, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Timon of Athens, and *Troilus and Cressida,* in the customarily disregarded category of Shakespeare's Greek and Hellenistic plays.[92] Such other generic connections - and there are more I might have mentioned - have not been totally ignored (as can be seen from my footnotes), but they have certainly been very much subordinated.[93] Yet the critical habit of concentrating almost solely on "Romance" at their expense is, it seems to me, at best open to question, and verging on the entirely arbitrary and irresponsible.

A far more obvious line of generic approach than any referred to so far, including romance itself, is to think of the late plays within the context of tragicomedy. This carries the primary benefit of being a dramatic category actually historically available to Shakespeare.[94] It has, however, gained surprisingly little mainstream support, despite its evident relevance to *The Winter's Tale,* and the fact that it is explicitly applied to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in the Stationers' Register entry for the original quarto edition of 1634.[95] The neglect of "tragicomedy" as a Shakespearian genre can be traced back to the First Folio, but there seem to be two main factors responsible for the general disfavour it has suffered.[96] Firstly, as with some of the other connections raised in the last paragraph, "tragicomedy" does not easily tie in with any neat division of Shakespeare's career into periods. It is much less helpful as a chronological distinction than "romance" because it can also be applied with at least moderate success to those notoriously awkward-to-classify plays, *Measure for Measure, All's Well That Ends Well,* and *Troilus and Cressida.*[97] Secondly, its unpopularity in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries is very definitely in part a result (and this may well have been an influence on the Folio compilers too) of its close associations with Fletcherian drama. It can scarcely be denied that simple (albeit

persistent) prejudice against the "Beaumont-and-Fletcher" canon has been a crucial force in conditioning attitudes here.[98]   A more precise source for reservations about the use of this term, though, can be traced to the idea that the late plays bear small relation to the critical theories of the tragicomic genre outlined by Fletcher himself, or by his Italian precursor in this field, Giovanni Battista Guarini.[99]   Yet, whilst this may provide an expedient means of asserting the individuality of Shakespeare's personal achievement, it is in many ways merely a false distraction, since Fletcher's actual tragicomic practices frequently fail to conform, as recent work has rightly stressed, to his own theoretical definition of the genre.[100]

As a classification for late Shakespeare, "tragicomedy" does have much going for it, and it is far more historically appropriate than "Romance" could ever be, no matter what Pettet's opinion.   Suitable because of its Jacobean vogue, it also serves as a reminder of some of the popular Elizabethan dramatic traditions recalled and revived in the late plays.   In its pastoral manifestations especially, tragicomedy is at least as strong a presence in late Shakespeare (though there is obviously considerable overlap here) as romance.[101]   But it brings its own special problems given my chosen focus, primarily the fact that it does not easily cover all six texts.   So *The Tempest*, despite certain structural affinities with revenge tragedy, does not generate anything that ranks for me as typical tragic (or tragicomic) emotion.[102]   And even "tragicomedy" still seems too narrow to encompass the astonishing mingle-mangle that is *Cymbeline* - a play that perhaps best belongs to that shadowy semi-category, the "tragedy-with-a-happy-ending".[103]   Nor does it really work as a description for *Henry VIII*, however much the tone of this play might be thought to be tragicomic.[104]   Indeed, I find

it hard to conceive of any generic term that could adequately apply to both *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, despite their apparent temporal proximity and possible similarly collaborative authorship.

Late Shakespeare

There are, then, it should be clear, serious problems of terminology where late Shakespeare is concerned. Given the real difficulties that beset all attempts to define the works of this period collectively by genre, I have had recourse instead to a description based on dating and chronology. My own choice of "late plays" is itself, however, and I do want to emphasize this, to a large extent merely a practical compromise.[105] Any successful act of (re-)labelling is going to colour the way the texts are subsequently perceived, but "late plays" does carry one basic advantage in this respect over "Romances", in that it is completely lacking in any generic component. It should, therefore, in theory, raise fewer expectations with regard to tone or feeling, and consequently exert a less immediate influence upon interpretation. This latter consideration has also contributed to my preference for "late plays" over "last plays" or "final plays", despite the fact that I am including in my group, in contrast to many critics who adopt either of these terms, the surviving plays that really do appear to have been the last ones in which Shakespeare was involved.[106] But "last" and its synonyms have acquired connotations I have no wish to perpetuate, suggestions, on the one hand, of conscious farewell and deliberate summing-up, and on the other, of a tired, retiring, supposedly written-out Shakespeare. *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* strike me as such tangible new departures, new directions, that even here any great

stress on finality would seem undesirable - especially since the relative dating of these two plays cannot be properly determined either.[107] Most of all, though, I have just wanted to get away from the sheer portentousness that has always tended to surround any talk of "lastness" in Shakespearian criticism.[108]

Nevertheless, to refer to the plays as "late" is inevitably to invoke some sense of their place within the progress of Shakespeare's broader career, and there are aspects to this that can be profitably explored without making too many assumptions about intentions or the dramatist's state of mind. The "lateness" of the late plays, in the sense of their temporal position in relation to Shakespeare's previous work, is made a palpable presence within the texts themselves by their overtly retrospective, recapitulatory cast. One of the richest areas of intertextuality for these works - and indeed a repository for what is effectively direct source material - is the rest of the Shakespeare canon itself, most especially early Shakespeare. *The Comedy of Errors* is the play that comes most readily to mind here, for the semi-generic links with *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* indicated above, its use of the *Apollonius of Tyre* story, the inherent romance tone of its Egeon-Emilia framing-plot, and the neoclassical structure it shares with *The Tempest* alone in the rest of Shakespeare.[109] Turning to my other three late plays, *Henry VIII* has much more in common with *King John* and the members of the First Tetralogy than it does with those of the Second Tetralogy; *Cymbeline* offers some close (sometimes bizarre) reminiscences of *Titus Andronicus* and *Lucrece*; and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, besides obviously reprising material from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, shares certain significant themes and plot motifs with *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and *Love's Labour's Lost*.[110]

It is also possible, without (I hope) being overly sentimental, to regard "lateness" as something of a contributory factor in the unusual dramaturgy of the late plays. I am thinking of the way the plays can convey the impression of being written by an artist willing to push techniques and conventions, not to mention language, imagery, syntax, and style, to their limits - in both directions, towards complexity and simplicity. There is an undeniable appeal in the temptation to view this aspect of their construction in the light of wider notions of "late works" in general.[111] Furthermore, whilst on this subject, if there is indeed any carelessness in late Shakespeare, anything about which the dramatist was truly 'hardly bothering', this is probably best located, I feel, not in the areas of ability and effort, but in practices that might be thought of as quintessentially "late" - a deliberate lack of adherence to prevailing aesthetic norms and accepted technical constraints, a flagrant flouting of theoretical prescriptions and conventional wisdom.[112] To approach the late plays in this manner, focusing on "lateness" as in effect a distinguishing trait, need not imply any great level of aesthetic mystification or biographical idealization. If these plays come across (as they often do to me) as the work of a writer who seems to believe he can do as he pleases, this may be a reflection, amongst other things, of precise historical circumstance, the position of respect and authority obtained for Shakespeare by the commercial success of his earlier years in the theatre.[113]

There is, as I noted earlier, something about Shakespeare's later career which seems to encourage critics to produce their own narrative characterizations of the man behind the plays. Pushed to offer one myself, it would be of an author profoundly concerned with exploring the value of his own art, its possibilities and limitations, and the place

of that art - aesthetically, ethically, politically - within wider literary traditions - personal, contemporary, national, European, classical. The late plays situate themselves firmly on a cusp of literary and dramatic history, facing both forwards and backwards in time, responding to new theatrical possibilities being opened up and simultaneously advertising their own dramatic and literary origins. A forward-looking dimension can be seen in their experimentations with technique, with pushing back the boundaries of poetic and theatrical expression. It is also very much present in the manifest influence on late Shakespeare of contemporary developments in the Jacobean theatre - the growth of the court masque, the innovatory drama (and dramaturgy) of Beaumont and Fletcher, the potentiality released by the Blackfriars theatre.[114] Then, in the other direction, pointing towards the world of the past, there are, to begin with, the well-known recollections of Shakespeare's own early drama and poetry that I have already mentioned. These stretch out into what seems to me a more general interest in the history of the Elizabethan theatre, evident, for example, both in the harking back to the drama of Shakespeare's youth, and in the conscious archaism of the late plays on a more extended scale, the way they revive, reapply, and parody outmoded or old-fashioned devices and techniques.[115] A feature I find particularly striking in this context is the number of major figures from the whole passage of Western literature whose work is engaged with in some fashion in late Shakespearian drama. Traditions of literary history are squarely evoked in the late plays, not just via some universal authorial anxiety or an inevitable intertextuality, but as a very specific recurring interest and theme.[116]

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The discussion so far has taken it for granted that "late plays" is actually a valid description for the works with which I am dealing. Any accuracy it has, however, is utterly dependent upon our narratives of Shakespearian chronology, which are of course far less precise and definitive than they are often made out to be.[117] One further reason for preferring "late" to "last" is that the first term is a little looser, more able to reflect the approximate nature of our knowledge in this area. The second great strain of Dowden's influence, the periodization of Shakespeare, has kept the image of the "Romances" as chronologically discrete from the rest of the canon at the forefront of critical thinking.[118] But it is by no means certain – rather, it is frankly unlikely – that Shakespeare's career did follow the neat tragedy/"romance" divide assumed in most twentieth-century criticism. Much recent work on chronology and the possibility of revision within Shakespeare's dramatic oeuvre has considerable implications for our understanding of the playwright's so-called final period. Even if one accepts, as I do, that my six "late plays" all belong to a time-span roughly covering the years 1607-1614, this is no guarantee that they fit together perfectly as a chronologically isolated group.[119]

The Oxford editors have posted the most important challenge in recent years to conventional opinion in this field by placing *Pericles* before *Coriolanus* in their chronology of the canon.[120] I would note too that *Antony and Cleopatra* could theoretically be later than, or at least contemporaneous with, *Pericles*, since both plays receive their first recorded mention at the same time.[121] *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra* may be impressively different from one another for plays often felt to be close together in date, but each has a more than passing connection with the late plays. The former shows some surprising

affinities with *Pericles* in its interest in names and the processes of naming, whilst the latter links especially well with *Cymbeline* through its subject-matter, virtuoso technique, and geographical scope.[122] At just this very basic level, then, there is no easy or foolproof way of separating off, either by date or by content and style, my group of "late plays" from these "late" tragedies.[123] In many respects, though, this is simply the start of the problem in defining the precise extent of Shakespeare's output in the years after 1607.

We do know for certain of one further "literary" work from this period to which Shakespeare contributed, the lost *impresa* for the Earl of Rutland that he and Richard Burbage received payment for in March 1613.[124] It is also conceivable that Shakespeare could have produced various minor or occasional verses during his later years, some of which may have survived - his epitaph, for example, might be one.[125] Another such text would be, if the notorious recent scholarship is to be believed, *A Funeral Elegy* by "W. S.", though like many people, I am deeply reluctant to recognize this unimpressive and obviously uncharacteristic poem of 1612 as canonical on the basis of the slender evidence so far put forward.[126] Whilst rummaging in the margins of the canon, I should mention that, besides *Pericles*, two other of the Third Folio supplementary plays, *The Puritan* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, lay some claim, admittedly small, to being late Shakespearian texts. Neither yields any convincing reason to take its attribution to Shakespeare seriously (and both may well be slightly earlier than 1607 anyway), but there remains the tantalizing possibility, discussed by the Oxford editors, that a short play by Shakespeare, now lost, might have been another of the 'foure Plaies in one' to which *A Yorkshire Tragedy* is announced as belonging in its 1608 quarto.[127]

Turning to more substantial, more firmly "Shakespearian" texts, a fundamental difficulty in constructing any chronology of Shakespeare's dramatic output lies in the fact that certain of the canonical plays cannot be reliably dated from external evidence at all.[128] *Coriolanus* is one of these, but even harder to pin down (because they lack any convincing topical allusions) are *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Timon of Athens*. Both these works could feasibly post-date 1607.[129] And both also offer, like *Coriolanus* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, significant thematic and stylistic similarities to the late plays.[130] Then there is the case of *Macbeth*, routinely assigned to 1606, yet only first mentioned in 1611 by Simon Forman. Whilst few critics would place the (putative) lost original form of the play that late, the likelihood of adaptation/revision (and the possibility at least of some Shakespearian involvement in that process) complicates the picture tremendously.[131] Revision may also have been carried out on *King Lear*, of course, which raises the issue of to what extent the independent version apparently preserved in the Folio text (and dated by the Oxford editors to 1610) needs to be thought of as another "late play".[132] It should almost go without saying that both *Macbeth* and *King Lear* have some very clearcut connections – strongly generic ones, at that – with *Cymbeline*.[133]

The subject of revision can be pursued into two further areas. Recent interest has largely been focused on Shakespeare as a reviser of his own plays, but the idea that he might have worked, perhaps in a supervisory capacity as resident dramatist to the King's Men, to revamp or supply additions for other people's plays, in connection with proposed or actual revivals, has long been entertained.[134] This is an aspect of Shakespeare's professional career liable only ever to remain a matter for speculation, since the nature of the potential work involved

is generally particularly unamenable (because of the small size of sample usually available and the chance of a deliberate disguising of style) to analysis using any of the standard authorship tests.[135] The best-known example, Shakespeare's possible involvement in the alterations to *Sir Thomas More*, almost certainly lies outside the period with which I am concerned.[136] A case that may belong to the appropriate years, though, and one which I find genuinely intriguing, is provided by the revisions and additions that appear in the 1610 quarto of *Mucedorus*, a play that has its own very obvious connections with late Shakespeare anyway.[137]

The area of revision left that I have in mind has to do with Shakespeare's own non-dramatic poetry, and furnishes firmer grounds for responsible speculation. Growing acceptance of the idea that the 1609 edition of the *Sonnets* might actually have been sanctioned by the author himself has entailed some considerable re-thinking with regard to the date of Shakespeare's final work on his sonnet-sequence as a whole. The *Sonnets* themselves are no doubt mainly earlier (and a sizeable proportion of them quite a lot earlier) than 1609, but revision of individual poems and/or shaping of the overall collection might well have occurred in the years leading up to publication.[138] There are good grounds, due to its close verbal parallels with *Cymbeline*, for believing either that Shakespeare was working on *A Lover's Complaint* not long before its appearance in print, or that, if nothing else, he carefully re-viewed it somewhere around that time.[139] This woefully-neglected poem is also directly echoed in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and its use of framing devices and multiple levels of narration makes it broadly relevant to late Shakespearian drama in general, and to my own interests throughout this study.[140]

What I am trying to get across is just how much information has to be omitted or suppressed in order successfully to maintain a properly Dowdenesque vision of the closing years of Shakespeare's professional career. This does not apply only with regard to genre and chronology. Since Dowden, it has proved almost impossible to exclude biography (and that has included the biography of Shakespeare's very last years, 1614-1616) from the criticism of the late plays.[141] To be made relevant critically, however, even biographical details have to be interpreted, and, still more importantly, selected in the first place. It is not difficult to see "comic/romance" elements in Shakespeare's later life that might relate to the perceived optimism of the drama he produced during that time: the marriages of his daughters in 1607 and 1616 (the former obviously the more relevant, and seemingly a more likely cause for celebration), the birth of his first grandchild in 1608. But these can be matched, possibly over-matched, by "tragic/historical" elements: the deaths of his mother and his three remaining brothers in the years between 1607 and 1613, or the less-fatal familial disruptions that can plausibly be associated with the threatened public scandals in which both his daughters became embroiled at different times. In Shakespeare's personal "family romance", and this should hardly come as a surprise, events cut both ways. So any "romance" tone in his later work could just as easily be a retreat from trauma and stress as a reflection of inner spiritual harmony.[142]

None of this need have any bearing on interpretation whatsoever — I aim to ignore it myself in the rest of this thesis — but it is worth pausing to consider why much else of what we know about Shakespeare's later life has rarely made the slightest impact on interpretation of the late plays, even on studies of a biographical persuasion. This is clearly

mainly because there is little romance to be seen in Shakespeare suing John Addenbrooke for debt in 1608, testifying in the Belott-Mountjoy lawsuit of 1612, or being petitioned to take sides in the controversy surrounding the Welcombe enclosures in 1614.[143] In addition, such information also reveals, in contrast to persistent habits of critical myth-making, a Shakespeare still actively involved in the mundane affairs of normal life.[144] On a rather different note, the one document available to us that can perhaps safely be relied upon to supply some real insight into the dramatist's private life, his will, does not tie in comfortably with any romanticized, idealized, or idolizing image of Shakespeare the man. Indeed, E. A. J. Honigmann has recently read the will (both on and between the lines) in such a manner as to create a picture of Shakespeare's character and feelings in his final years which is (without exaggeration) entirely at odds with traditional sentiments.[145] It is no great distance at all, though, from Honigmann's provisional historical reconstruction to Edward Bond's avowedly fictionalized and iconoclastic morbid, suicidal, guilt-ridden, bad-faith Shakespeare.[146]

One area the biographical line of approach has tended often to ignore or obscure is the communal, professional environment in which the late plays were produced. As a consequence, it has helped isolate these works from the material realities - and difficulties - of the Jacobean theatre during the years in question. We cannot reconstruct the initial theatrical reception of the late plays (though we can assume that they would have elicited a range of reactions from their original spectators), nor is there any need for modern interpretations to be dictated by how we think Shakespeare's contemporaries might have responded. Yet it seems likely that few of the biographical and generic preoccupations that have dominated criticism as a result of the

traditional "Romance" reading can have had much significance in the England of the early seventeenth century. For one thing, Shakespeare's ongoing performance profile as a playwright after 1607 would have been an amalgam built up from new works (appearing, it seems, at an average rate of about one a year); possible revisions or re-workings of his earlier plays (such as those discussed above); and straight (or "straightish") revivals.[147] On a broader level, the 1609 edition of the *Sonnets* stands as a reminder that the dramatist's image in the public domain was also dependent to some degree on (as well as being reflected in) the heavy publishing activity of these years: first editions of canonical and attributed plays, and new editions of previously-printed plays and of the two early narrative poems.[148] Such printing activity is itself quite possibly a sign of theatrical inactivity, given the strong presence of the plague in London, especially around 1608-1610. And whilst on this last subject, Leeds Barroll has suggested that the whole period from 1607 to 1613 was a time of considerable trial and tribulation for the King's Men, with the extensive closures presumably necessitated by the plague liable to have caused general unease within the theatrical community, and weighty financial pressures besides. It is a perspective that provides a contextualization of the late plays very different from Dowden's.[149]

Much, though, about Shakespeare's theatrical connections in his later years is still unclear. We have no evidence, other than negative, to show at what point his acting career might have come to an end, nor do we currently know when, or whether, he sold his shares in the King's Men.[150] Except for the obvious detail of a lack of any new plays from his hand after about 1613-1614, even Shakespeare's supposed retirement and return to Stratford - a "fact" so central to *Tempest* criticism and

readings that chart a Shakespearian progress towards profound personal contentment in his country retreat - remains obstinately absent from the documentary record.[151] His purchase of the Blackfriars Gatehouse in March 1613, however, for whatever purposes, suggests at least some level of ongoing engagement in the business affairs of the Company, and this can be seen, in view of the terms of the mortgage, to have extended (or have been planned to extend) beyond the date usually presumed for his final "retirement".[152] When it comes to convincing proof, there really is nothing that allows us to pinpoint that reputedly momentous occasion, not Prospero's Epilogue, not the death of Henry, Prince of Wales in November 1612, not the burning of the Globe Theatre itself on 29 June 1613.[153] The records are silent or uncertain, and little can be gained from treating guesses and desires as definitive truths.

I have been indulging in and rehearsing a deal of speculation and guesswork myself over the last few pages, so I hasten to stress that I am not trying to put forward the more imaginative or debatable ideas referred to here as anything other than possibilities. My main point is that much of this speculation is at least as valid as that which underlies the critical paradigms for understanding the late plays that have prevailed since Dowden. Alongside a pervasive sentimentality, there has been a constant trend to simplify narratives to produce clear patterns and, especially, neat interpretative separations - "Romances" from tragedies, plays from poems, performance from publication, not to mention a topic which I address in Chapter Three, "authentic" from "inauthentic" Shakespeare. All this has helped in the propagation of unnecessarily and, for me, regrettably simplistic or one-sided readings of the late plays. What I have attempted above is to give some sense of the scope available for reasonable dissatisfaction with existing critical

models and habits of thought, and to convey my impression that most of these are extremely difficult, if not impossible, to sustain on the limited evidence available to us.

It has seemed important to dwell on the many judgements, choices, assumptions, and limit-settings that underpin the more conventional lines of interpretation in order to register my deep suspicion of the way standard critical constructions get treated as though they were natural or indispensable. But of course, I have myself had to make all sorts of limiting decisions in my own approach, if simply to be able to begin. So whilst the preceding section sets out a number of factors which I feel should give us cause to complicate or modify our notions of what might properly constitute "late" Shakespeare, the rest of this thesis seeks to respond directly to only a very few of these. In other words, I have been content to proceed using a recognizably traditional formulation of the identity of Shakespeare's later works. Within this convenient framework, however, some of my reservations with prevailing paradigms are reflected in the particular focus adopted. Thus it is with a view to redressing the critical imbalances perpetuated in most studies of the late plays as a group that I concentrate my attentions in Part Two on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (space, unfortunately, has not permitted a return to *Cymbeline*).[154] And it is in much the same spirit that I pay only limited consideration to *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, which I discuss briefly, together with *Pericles*, in Chapter Five.[155] It is my hope that this deliberately distinct emphasis will help to broaden the accepted sense of what the general nature and typical concerns of late Shakespearian drama can be said to be.

All three of the plays given centre stage in this thesis have been repeatedly ignored and disparaged (and even disowned) in mainstream

criticism, and each can still certainly benefit from some favourable reassessment. Two of them, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, are of course widely looked upon as being collaborative, and as such have often been denied the sort of positive, detailed attention afforded eagerly and as a matter of course to Shakespeare's other dramatic texts.[156] Here, I have very much wanted to escape from the prejudices that have governed attitudes within Shakespeare studies to the subject of authorial collaboration. Presuppositions about the nature and value of "authentic" Shakespeare have hampered and marred the reception of both these plays, as well as having a strongly negative impact, already referred to, on *Cymbeline*. This thesis aims to challenge the view that rates these three dramas as obviously inferior to *The Tempest* and *The Winter's Tale*, or, for that matter, to most of the rest of the canon. *Cymbeline* in particular seems to me to be amongst the richest and most demanding and thought-provoking of all of Shakespeare's works, and there are hints around that it is at last beginning to be appreciated in a similar light by others.[157] Considering the way it explores and exploits just about all the recurring concerns and favoured devices found elsewhere in his oeuvre, whilst at the same time following no established pattern and happily "breaking all the rules", I would go so far as to suggest that *Cymbeline* might profitably be regarded as the dramatic text in which Shakespeare was "most himself".

Be that as it may, of the so-called "four Romances", *Cymbeline* is easily the one that has been most damaged by ingrained and simplistic theories about compositional order and genre.[158] But with each of the plays I focus on, I have been working, as I see it, in opposition to a consistent tradition of misunderstanding and ill-conceived denigration. This is plainly mirrored in the marginalization they have suffered for

much of the history of Shakespearian criticism, and for extended periods during the parallel history of Shakespearian performance.[159] In comparison with Shakespeare's plays in general, these three texts have all been significantly "under-read" (and under-performed). And just as I am consciously concentrating my attentions on works often marginalized by the critical debate, so too am I keen to embrace into my discussions, as is made clear in Chapter One, any sections of those works which have in turn been marginalized in the limited interpretative study they have received. This policy is especially important in the case of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where criticism has for too long been content (and the practice still flourishes) to occupy itself purely with supposedly identifiably "authentic" Shakespearian material. It is also relevant, though, to *Cymbeline*, certain parts of which have hardly ever found their way into critical commentary or performance.[160]

Having identified my concerns in such a fashion, the treatment of *Pericles* in this thesis could only appear anomalous without further explanation. Clearly, most of the comments expressed above relating to the critical histories of *Cymbeline*, *Henry VIII*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, or to typical attitudes towards Shakespearian collaboration, have equal bearing upon this play. I would stress, therefore, that I have not held back on my attention to *Pericles* out of any belief in its inferiority or inherent liminality, or from any sense that it is only minimally relevant to my project as a whole. On the contrary, I have largely been constrained in this matter by the practicalities of time and space. It has seemed preferable to allow myself the scope necessary for an adequate in-depth examination of three plays, than to try to deal with four in what would inevitably have been rather less detail. One key additional consideration here has been the problematic nature of

the surviving text of *Pericles*, since this renders a lot more difficult (although by no means impossible or unrewarding) the type of close critical analysis which I undertake for the other three plays. And there is also the handy excuse now available that *Pericles* has come to appear somewhat separated off from the rest of the late plays in terms of date, through the fact that it may be earlier than *Coriolanus*.[161]

I do not want to pin too much weight on this revised dating, however, because I still adhere to the view that *Pericles* is a seminal text for the work of Shakespeare's later period. For the bulk of this chapter, I have been pointing to elements that impede the construction of neat and easy patterns, that get in the way of reading the late plays as extra-closely connected, a self-contained series. And these remain important. But there are of course a number of characteristics that can be used successfully to link the plays of this group together. High amongst these are the shared dramaturgical effects that interest me, the use of theatrical spectacle and reported action I have already drawn attention to in the course of my discussion of the prophetic label in *Cymbeline*. Such features are very much present in *Pericles*, in a manner that does set this play apart to a noticeable extent from most of the earlier canon. It is not that an entire range of brand-new techniques suddenly captures Shakespeare's interest and imagination – spectacle and report are explored across the whole of his dramatic output, and in many respects, the effects that can be achieved through their interrelation and juxtaposition strike me as being at the heart of the bare-stage theatre in general. Nevertheless, in *Pericles*, they are granted a prominence previously unprecedented in Shakespeare, as the processes of story-telling, of narrative and dramaturgical construction, are made a central and explicit subject of interest.[162] I shall be

exploring this topic in more detail in Chapter Four. Before that, though, in the next chapter, I want to address the one major potential area of controversy outstanding regarding my decision to focus on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* within a study devoted to "Shakespeare's" late plays, that is, the question of authorship.

CHAPTER THREE

AUTHORSHIP, ATTRIBUTION, COLLABORATION

> What matter who's speaking,
> someone said what matter who's speaking.

The question of authorship has dominated reception and interpretation of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* over the last two centuries. At times, indeed, the authorship debate has come close to overwhelming all other forms of commentary completely. Work on these plays has often given the impression that there is nothing of interest to be said about them apart from determining exactly who wrote which bits – and more specifically, just how much (or rather, how little) Shakespeare himself was personally responsible for. The primacy of the model of the "four Romances" and the widespread cultural acceptance of *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's final play have undoubtedly had a lot to do with the long-term critical neglect of both *Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII*. It is the issue of authorship, however – the "authorship problem" – that has tended to serve as the justification for their marginalization. In this respect, the idea of divided authorship has fulfilled something of a felicitous double function, helping to authorize certain popular and convenient critical paradigms, by providing an excuse for ignoring those plays whose very existence is a threat to the validity of the paradigms concerned. More generally, of course, in addition to being used as a principle of exclusion, multiple/collaborative authorship has also consistently been invoked, equally negatively, as a determinant of

taste and quality. It is not merely a case here of "lesser" writers repeatedly receiving the "blame" for any passages that are felt to be inferior, out-of-place, objectionable, or in some other way supposedly unworthy of Shakespeare. Many critics down the years have viewed the whole notion of the possible presence of "alien" material in the canon – and particularly, when it comes to the late plays, the suggestion of John Fletcher's active (and approved) involvement – as an affront to the dignity and integrity of Shakespeare, a sullying of the purity of the master's oeuvre.

As I mentioned in the previous chapter, however, attitudes to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and (if to a slightly lesser degree) *Henry VIII* have shown signs of significant change in the last few years, and it appears that critical discourse has finally arrived at a situation in which it is no longer simply acceptable to cite the authorship question alone as grounds for disregarding these plays, for leaving them out of the account. No doubt numerous factors lie behind such a change of attitude, but three elements especially stand out for me in the present context. In the first place, there is the major expansion of interest over recent decades in the margins of the literary canon in general – in those texts that traditional interpretative models have, for one reason or another, either failed to take notice of, or deliberately sought to exclude. Secondly, this new emphasis has in turn been a crucial impetus in the emergence of late of a much more positive approach to the entire topic of theatrical collaboration and multiple authorship – a position that is itself closely tied up with a growing appreciation of the inherently collaborative nature of all dramatic activity, and, for that matter, of all forms of literary and textual production. And then thirdly, and perhaps most importantly, one can point to the pervasive influence within Renaissance literary studies

during the last ten-to-fifteen years or so of Michel Foucault's ground-breaking essay, 'What Is an Author?' ('Qu'est-ce qu'un auteur?'), and its provocative closing question, '"what difference does it make who is speaking?"' ('"qu'importe qui parle"').[1]

Foucault's essay, with its pioneering exploration of the concept of the "author-function" and its history, has become something of an obligatory starting-point for discussions of the subject of authorship in the realm of early modern drama, and indeed, can fairly be said to represent, in the words of Kevin Pask, 'the point of departure for any contemporary investigation into the history of the author'. There are, however, significant gaps and problems in the historical model advanced by Foucault, and as an exercise in historiography, his essay amounts to little more than a 'thumbnail sketch' (to quote Pask again).[2] This has rightly not prevented 'What Is an Author?' from playing a key role in recent re-evaluations of the relevance of "traditional" (post-Romantic) paradigms of authorship to English Renaissance drama in general (and Shakespeare in particular).[3] And in similar terms, it seems clear that Foucault's professed indifference to the identity of who is speaking has contributed much to the developing movement that seeks to treat collaborative (or potentially collaborative) dramatic works from this period in, so to speak, their own right, free from the burden of first establishing the identity of the individual dramatists responsible for them, or the extent of their respective shares.[4] But in spite of this undeniably positive and valuable legacy, my own attitude to Foucault's text, and its recent influence, is decidedly ambivalent, and I have sought to maintain a sense of that ambivalence throughout this chapter.[5]

With its distinctly epigrammatic tone, Foucault's closing question (insofar as it is either really "his" or an actual question) seems to

be acquiring for itself the status almost of a critical dictum.[6]   In

context, though, it is presented less as an established principle or

universal truism, and more as a hope or prophecy, part of a vision of

a supposedly desirable future in which discourse, fiction, and meaning

will all apparently circulate in relative freedom, unconstrained by the

limitations of the author-function and the baggage it brings with it, the

old questions about identity, authenticity, originality 'that have been

rehashed for so long'.[7]   Yet there are occasions (even for Foucault)

where the issue of who is speaking remains of fundamental importance.[8]

The example of marginal or oppressed voices, and their struggle/need

to be heard or recognized in their own proper form, comes especially to

mind.[9]   At a more prosaic level, in cultural terms, and for better or

worse, wherever Shakespeare is concerned, the question of authorship

is rarely a matter of indifference.[10]   In the case of my own work, to

speak of "Shakespeare's late plays" is automatically to invoke some

sense of an originating subject and a personal biographical trajectory

behind the texts themselves.   And I am more than happy to do so,

and to acknowledge Shakespeare's individual (authorial) agency as a

major factor in the creation of *each* of the plays that I focus upon in

this thesis.   But whilst this is to make use of a basically conventional

model of authorship, I would also argue strongly for the necessity of

modifying traditional paradigms in this area, of adopting an image of

Shakespeare-as-author that can accommodate without difficulty the idea

of Shakespeare-as-collaborator, and that no longer involves considering

collaborative or multiple authorship as an excuse for exclusion, or

grounds for condemnation.

This is particularly important in relation to the late plays, but it

is perhaps also more easily said than done.   Part of the trouble here

has to do with the roots of the concept of "late period" Shakespeare (at least as regards its familiar twentieth-century incarnation) in the work of Edward Dowden. Dowden's principal study provides an archetypal example of what Foucault refers to as the 'fundamental category of "the-man-and-his-work criticism"' ('cette catégorie fondamentale de la critique "l'homme-et-l'œuvre"').[11] And this is a category for which collaborative or multiple authorship poses a number of serious problems (indeed, the category itself effectively turns collaborative authorship into a "problem"). Most obviously, collaboration thoroughly compromises any idea of a direct "access" to the individual author behind the text, spreading uncertainty all the time as to just who is speaking when. It gets in the way too of biographical and psychologizing modes of reading that attempt to connect interpretation to an author's personal history, or to pursue the development of a single creating psyche across the length of a literary canon. And of course, in the case of Shakespeare, collaboration threatens to undermine all the established hierarchies of literary brilliance, continually raising the terrible spectre that one might be praising or condemning the wrong material, not recognizing (or misrecognizing) the touch of genius. Some of the consequences of all this are evinced in Dowden's use of the word "fragments" to describe the "Shakespearian" portions of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Such a description helps circumvent some of the more pressing anxieties over quality typically associated with collaborative texts (they're only fragments), whilst at the same time furnishing its own grounds for psychological speculation (why only fragments?), and reinstating the individual author as sovereign (they're Shakespeare's fragments only).[12] But this process of "fragmentation" also illustrates the way "the-man-and-his-works" school of criticism consistently reduces collaborative texts

(or texts that are thought of as being collaborative) to bits and pieces, parts and not wholes, thereby denying them, in any respect that matters, the status of proper "works".[13]

This kind of approach presupposes an ability to separate out (and confirm/identify the presence of) the work of different contributors, to distinguish one dramatist's writing from another's with a fair degree of precision. One of the great advantages of not paying attention to the details of authorship in collaborative texts is that this essentially bypasses the troublesome area of authorial attribution. My own choice of topic, however, with its emphasis on late *Shakespearian* drama, immediately brings questions of attribution and canonicity firmly back into play. What is more, the subjects of authorship and collaboration have always loomed large in the criticism of the late plays. To some extent, this is just a reflection of the fact that the boundaries of the canon are genuinely unstable at the close of Shakespeare's career, that in practical terms, the specifics of attribution remain uncertain here.[14] But it is also an effect of the fragility and inadequacy of the biographical and generic paradigms that have dominated interpretation, the way these depend on sidelining particular texts, and on denigrating collaborative authorship in order to do so. Discussions of authorship and attribution in the late plays have been directed and conditioned at almost every juncture by the governing prejudices and assumptions, the evolutionary patterns and romanticizing narratives, that I have been looking to get away from throughout. This is not to say, of course, that there are not plenty of other influences and considerations that enter the equation at this point. The processes of attribution are enveloped in all sorts of wider discourses, equally expansive and labyrinthine, if less interpretatively constricting or avoidable.

Authorship and collaboration, as they apply to Shakespearian drama,
are concepts that take in a broad range of related concerns, reaching
well beyond the (deceptively) simple matter of which plays or parts of
plays Shakespeare himself wrote. As an obvious example, "collaboration"
is a term that can be extended to cover more or less any aspect of the
realm of dramatic activity - rehearsal, production, performance, actor-
audience relations, and so on. Similarly, "authorship" can be seen to
embrace issues relating to textual transmission and textual integrity; the
text/performance dichotomy; intentionality and the notion of authorial
"voice"; the editorial tradition; and alongside the actual mechanics of
authorship attribution, the whole convoluted and frequently turbulent
history of Shakespearian attribution studies.[15] At a more general level,
the idea of authorship is always bound up in intractable and potentially
insoluble questions, both practical and theoretical in nature, to do
with authority and authenticity, authorization and authentication.[16]
These same questions, and the discursive pressures and epistemological
problems to which they point, are in turn central shaping elements in any
attempt to formulate or identify the canon of an author's works. Some of
the implications of this are reflected in Donald Foster's observation that
'all authorial canons are, in some measure, concessions to a collective
pretense, while having at the same time an imprecise, though positive,
correlation with historical fact'.[17] Determining authorship and defining
canonical boundaries are activities fully embedded in the material
conditions and processes of history, and the constraints of historical
knowledge. Even the criteria for what constitutes authenticity and what
might class as sufficient evidence to confirm it are continually open
to change, or as Stephen Orgel puts it, 'profoundly time bound'. And
besides, to cite Orgel again:

> the establishment of a canonical text, whether of
> Shakespeare or anything else, is only incidentally an
> objective and scientific matter. It involves much more
> basically doctrinal and political elements.[18]

Given the array of factors in operation, therefore, whereas reliable

information about the authorship of a text may often be frustratingly

limited, the subject of authorship itself is thoroughly overdetermined,

and consequently extremely difficult to analyse at all accurately or

effectively.

Needless to say, this is especially true when it comes to the

Shakespeare canon. Here, the many tensions inherent in the concept of

authorship *per se* are exacerbated enormously. This is due both to the

dramatist's singular and peculiarly forceful reputation as an author, and

to the intricate mediatory processes of theatrical, textual, and critical

transmission in which all of his plays are enmeshed. With Shakespeare,

though it should be emphasized that he is far from unique in this, the

authorship/text/performance nexus of relations is unstable at virtually

every level.[19] As for Renaissance dramatic texts in general, the various

differing forms of multiple authorship which the theatre of the time

produced - collaboration, revision, adaptation, interpolation, and so on -

are, contrary to much critical opinion, far from easy to identify at all

with any certainty, and even harder to distinguish from one another.[20]

This blurring of individual authorial input within the realm of the text -

an effect liable to be repeated, experience suggests, during the course

of any performance - is one of the reasons why certain post-Romantic

idealizing notions of authorship and individual genius are, as has come

to be stressed more and more in recent years, largely irrelevant to the

collaborative field of drama, and dangerously anachronistic with respect

to Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical practices.[21] Part of what I try

to do in the rest of this chapter is explore what model of authorship (if any) does remain valid in this context.

Authorship and the Late Plays

My own approach in this thesis is characterized both by a desire to treat collaborative or authorially "suspect" plays on their own merits (to accept them as whole "works" in their own right), and by a certain scepticism regarding our ability, generally speaking, to differentiate the contributions of individual dramatists within a single play beyond reasonable doubt. In dealing with the specifics of the authorship debates surrounding *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, however, I only have space to touch briefly on any of the issues referred to so far. What I want to focus on, therefore – and what makes a focus on authorship issues absolutely essential to my wider project – is the way in which "problems" of authorship, and the theories of textual creation and transmission to which they give rise, impinge directly, and inevitably, on critical interpretation. In fact, it is very much a two-way relationship that is involved here. As I have been emphasizing throughout, *Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII* are plays that for most of the last century-and-a-quarter have simply got in the way of the dominant models for interpreting late Shakespearian drama. Laying a particular stress on the idea of their divided authorship, and using this to dismiss them from full-scale consideration, has provided probably the major method of coping with this fundamental interpretative difficulty. It would be fair to say, though, that this tactic has always tended to be perceived as something of a makeshift solution even within the tradition that has employed it. This is one of the reasons why a few critics

have looked to go further at this point, not only by rejecting the part-ascription of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* to Shakespeare, but by denying the dramatist any portion at all in the writing of *Henry VIII.* The arguments in the latter case can quickly be passed over as utterly unconvincing, but with *Kinsmen*, although personally I find the evidence for Shakespeare's presence in this text pretty compelling, the play's non-Folio status does give some grounds for pause when it comes to admitting it to the canon.[22] Yet this circumstance in itself has really only served a secondary function in the critical tradition. That there are more important factors at work in all the narratives of collaboration and part-authorship that have been applied to late Shakespeare, all the questions about what to include and what to exclude, is reflected in the existence and standing of that other non-Folio and potentially collaborative play, *Pericles.*

As I indicated towards the end of the previous chapter, the subject of authorship is of as much relevance to this latter work as it is to *The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *Henry VIII.* Consequently, whilst I have paid only limited attention to *Pericles* elsewhere in this thesis, it has proved vital to incorporate it much more fully into the discussion in the course of this chapter. Indeed, *Pericles* is a play that usefully illustrates, frequently in extreme form, many of the concerns that lie at the heart of discourses of authorship – issues of authorial identity, text, provenance, textual transmission, intertextuality, collaboration, canonicity, authorial voice, and so on. What is more, most of these issues are already thematized within the dramatic action itself.[23] But in the way it has been treated (the largely comfortable berth in the canon it has been graced with), *Pericles* also affords a fascinating contrast to both *Henry VIII* and *Kinsmen.* The critical anxieties that tend to be associated

with problems of attribution and the topic of authorial collaboration have had a primary impact on the reception and reputation of each of these texts. And on the face of it, it might seem reasonable to expect that the three surviving late plays all regularly identified as collaborative or of mixed authorship would have received between them broadly similar critical attention.[24] The conspicuously unequal canonic status which they actually enjoyed during the twentieth century can therefore stand as a marker of how matters of authorship in the late plays are always about a good deal more than the mere facts of authorship (or even the prevailing opinions), of how canonicity here is never just a question of attribution.[25]

The influence that attitudes to authorship and theories of textual genesis can exert on critical interpretation is not something that only affects texts known to be (or typically categorized as) collaborative or of uncertain/debatable authorship. Arguments for multiple authorship or multiple layers of (ill-matched) re-writing have been advanced and seriously entertained at some time or other for all six of the late plays.[26] It is true that the sort of doubts concerning Shakespearian authorship that have adhered so strongly to sections of *Cymbeline* have never gained much credence when raised in connection with *The Tempest* or *The Winter's Tale.*[27] A more favourable response has been accorded, however, to theories proposing forms of major textual revision. In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, for example, the lack of total narrative consistency evident in the treatment of Hermione in the second half of the play has led to much speculation about the statue scene (5.3) being a later addition, or at least the result of a fundamental change of plan during the process of composition.[28] This theory has also been extended to cover the unusual sequence of reported action in 5.2, which from this

perspective is viewed as a make-shift replacement describing events originally either realized or intended to be realized on stage.[29]   Turning to *The Tempest*, the masque in Act 4 has often been read as a sign of adaptation, and particularly as an insertion written specially for the play's revival at Court during the celebrations for the wedding of the Princess Elizabeth in 1613.   And on an altogether more extravagant scale, John Dover Wilson managed to find evidence for wholesale re-composition in the lengthy narrative speeches of 1.2, which he claimed compressed into report, material that had been fully dramatized in an earlier version.[30]

There is nothing intrinsically implausible about the idea that these two, or for that matter any of the rest of the late plays, might have undergone substantial revision or adaptation (authorial or non-authorial) at some point in their progression from initial concept to performance, earliest script to publication.[31]   That all six members of my group survive only as "single-text" plays is not enough in itself to preclude the possibility that they may also once have existed in significantly different form.   What it does obviously mean, though, is that, unlike in the paradigm instances of *Hamlet* or *King Lear*, there are no alternative substantive texts available to back up any speculation in this area.[32] Even in the absence of independent quarto or folio textual traditions, however, there is still plenty of internal evidence to suggest the small-scale impact of authorial second thoughts, performance practice, or theatrical contingency, as well as plain human fallibility or indecision, on the state of the late plays as they have come down to us.[33]   And it is absolutely certain that the original printed editions preserve elements for which no playwright was responsible, and which were never part of the plays as they appeared on stage, in the shape of the work and working

habits of scribes, compositors, publishers, printers, and the like.[34] Thus
it goes without saying that the texts we possess are anything but
pure or pristine or somehow exempt from the imprint of history.[35] But
having acknowledged that, what stands out for me in the arguments for
revision outlined in the previous paragraph is the way in which textual
theory is being driven much less by any material features in the texts
concerned than by external factors relating to interpretative expectations
and critical predilections. The potential implications for interpretation
in all this are easy to see, since some of the most distinctive aspects
of the structure of The Tempest and The Winter's Tale are here treated
as essentially just accidents of transmission or incidental side-effects of
circumstance.

Whilst the proposed textual histories referred to above have never
been particularly endorsed by the critical community at large, they can
still plausibly be taken as symptomatic or indicative of wider attitudes.
So with both The Winter's Tale and The Tempest, critical suspicion has
been directed primarily at moments involving extended reported action
or examples of elaborate on-stage spectacle. There are clear parallels
in this to the history of responses to the vision of Jupiter and the
prophetic label in Cymbeline. And something very similar also takes
place in criticism and authorship work on Henry VIII, Pericles, and The
Two Noble Kinsmen, where spectacle and report have a distinctly high
profile amongst the material that is typically handed over to playwrights
other than Shakespeare.[36] The comparisons that can be made here
suggest that a recurring principle is in operation, reflecting general
assumptions and preconceptions regarding the nature of Shakespearian
aesthetics. In every one of these cases, the impulse to posit some form
of textual dislocation or divided authorship seems to arise as much as

anything from an unwillingness to accept certain related elements in the texts as intentional, artistically meaningful, or properly Shakespearian.[37] Characteristics that fail to fit in with prevailing interpretative paradigms are thus either conveniently explained away as evidence of adaptation, or read almost exclusively in terms of the information they supposedly convey about the contrasting practices of different authors. As a result, key aspects of the dramaturgy of the late plays, and especially of the lesser-studied texts in the group, have been obscured and neglected. Indeed, this line of approach has provided an excuse whereby the effects generated by the techniques in question - functional disjunctions or juxtapositions, pointed oppositions between showing and telling, the careful manipulation of narrational devices - can all be discounted, rendered aesthetically insignificant.[38] Much the same sort of desire to control what signifies, to specify what "really" matters to interpretation and meaning, underpins the entire tradition of commentary devoted to the effort to distinguish individual authorial contributions, to identify - and separate out - the authentic Shakespearian share in the writing of these texts.

Attribution

Modern approaches to authorship attribution in the Shakespeare canon stand in a direct line of descent from the pioneering work of the New Shakspere Society in the latter decades of the nineteenth century.[39] This is not just a general side-effect of historical progression, but a situation that involves a series of specific and deep-seated influences, connections, and debts. So for example, there is a close and conspicuous correlation between the Oxford Shakespeare's position on collaborative

authorship in the late plays, and the overriding tenor of the opinions expressed in the first volume of the Society's *Transactions*, published in 1874.[40] And that same volume effectively laid the ground-rules and set the standard for the entire twentieth-century debate concerning the authorship of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[41] The prominence which the subject of authorship received in the Society's proceedings from its very inception reflected the determination of its founder, Frederick J. Furnivall, to establish as a first principle the canon and chronology of Shakespeare's works.[42] In the effort to achieve this, Furnivall was aided primarily, at least to begin with, by a figure now rightly notorious in the annals of attribution studies, Frederick Gard Fleay. In a genuinely innovatory gesture, the two of them urged the necessity (and, in so doing, assumed and declared the feasibility) of imbuing the practice of authorship analysis with the rigour and system of scientific discipline.[43] Fleay announced the radical intellectual conversion which he felt this project required in a paper read at the Society's opening meeting:

> this [. . .] is the great step we have to take; our analysis, which has hitherto been qualitative, must become quantitative; we must cease to be empirical, and become scientific.[44]

As things turned out, Fleay's conclusions quickly proved too extreme, and too arbitrary, for his fellow Society members to swallow, and their enthusiasm for his work soon waned. But the new methodology itself, with its attribution tools of metrical tests and statistical tables, was championed by the NSS, during its early years especially, with a kind of missionary zeal.[45]

The scientific mode of inquiry prescribed by Fleay has been much touted as providing the valuable perspective of objectivity in the study

of authorship. Subsequent critics have often felt themselves able to invoke the authority of science to go beyond or against the warrant of existing external evidence, and declare certain conjectural attributions as proven and indisputable.[46] Yet the authorship of parts of *Pericles*, *Henry VIII*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* still remains contested, and for reasons that involve a lot more than any simple refusal to face up to the facts.[47] The path of commentary since the time of the NSS makes nothing apparent so much as the overwhelming difficulty of ever finding forms of internal evidence that can truly be regarded as definitive.[48] Indeed, the history of work in this field displays a recurring pattern, in which seemingly clearcut and reliable methods for distinguishing the contributions of different authors are shown after all, in one respect or another, to be seriously open to question. Thus even whilst the mainstream of current critical thought would happily endorse the NSS position (as of 1874) on the authorship of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, the techniques favoured by the likes of Furnivall, Fleay, and their early followers have long since been substantially discredited or superseded.[49] And the intervening decades have seen a variety of refinements and new approaches come and go. Broadly speaking, in the development of attribution procedures over the course of the last two centuries, metrical tests and parallel passages have given way to evidence based on linguistic preferences and image clusters, with this in turn being supplemented or supplanted of late by sociolinguistic criteria, and the statistical analysis of so-called "function words" and other types of verbal and grammatical minutiae.[50]

This gradual shifting in the principal lines of argument and in the primary quantitative evidence adduced seems likely to characterize the flow of future studies as strongly as it has that of previous work. What

significance should be attached to it, however, is very much a matter of perspective. On one level, such a situation is only to be welcomed, as an indication of the way improvements in the techniques of attribution down the years can render aspects of earlier evidence redundant or secondary. At the same time, though, it is also partly brought about by a number of practical considerations (a proliferation of variables, the ever-present potential for the re-evaluation of method and results, the lack of documentary corroboration for any divisions of authorship proposed, an unavoidable reliance on inference as opposed to direct observation) which lie at the heart of the problems of evidence emphasized in the previous paragraph. And these are factors which make it easy to argue the need for a sceptical or, at the least, highly cautious attitude towards the authority of internal evidence - especially as regards any categorical conclusions about authorial identity derived from it.[51] Then again, in the case of the three plays that are my current concern, the cumulative weight of the testimony amassed is for many critics sufficient to offset any built-in limitations in the testing processes as a whole, or any question-marks against the validity of some of the individual tests applied. Which is as much as to say, statistical evidence, by its very nature, deals more in probabilities and possibilities than in certainties or objective truths. So its credentials depend not on absolutes, but likelihoods. A relevant corollary to this is that attributions become more reliable the larger the samples (both for testing and for comparison) on which they are based. And of course, and just as importantly, the obverse also holds true: the smaller the samples examined, the less the value of any numerical evidence they might yield.[52]

Whatever the inherent merits and the actual authorizing power of internal evidence, however, certitude in the spotting of "inauthentic"

material and in the identification of separate authorial shares in *The Two Noble Kinsmen, Pericles*, and *Henry VIII* has hardly proved all that rare a commodity in critical discourse. On the contrary, downright confidence in this area has been decidedly the norm, even in the treatment of scenes or sequences too short to furnish any statistically significant results.[53] Similarly, in matters of attribution generally, Shakespearians have demonstrated a persistent tendency to dogmatism and unjustifiable assertion. What this points to more than anything is the basic historical sovereignty of alternative criteria - literary values, personal convictions, moral expectations - over scientific method in the shaping of beliefs about authorial identity. This trend is another that can be traced back to the work of the NSS. Thus for Furnivall himself, science was never the be-all and end-all in settling doubts relating to authorship. He constantly took pains to stress that the evidence of mathematics should always be subservient to conclusions founded on aesthetic judgements, or in his terms, 'the results of higher criticism'.[54] It is an attitude that also finds expression in Furnivall's writings in a recurring valorization of the intuitive tastes and critical acumen of gentlemen (and I use the word advisedly) of discernment and learning.[55] And it is further reflected across the breadth of the Society's proceedings in repeated appeals (almost mystical in tone) to the opinions of such "experts" in the field as Alfred Tennyson and Robert Browning.[56] Numerical tests get credited with importance only insofar as they back up subjective assessments which, to all intents and purposes, are already invested with authority. I would suggest that this same fixed outlook, with its double-pronged approach (and same relative priorities) of tastes supported by tests, is characteristic of most twentieth-century authorship work as well.[57]

The issue of collaborative/divided authorship in the Shakespeare canon has always been tied up with questions of quality and evaluation. Put baldly, this has meant that Shakespeare has usually been "rescued" from carrying responsibility for any parts of the plays critics have found to be not to their liking. Something of the circularity of this familiar situation is captured by Orgel, when he writes (in connection with the controversial poem, 'Shall I Die?'):

> the notion that a bad poem cannot be by Shakespeare is a very old one, and it involves a strategy of definition: it defines Shakespeare as the best poet, and then banishes from the canon whatever is considered insufficiently excellent.[58]

An equally significant side to the circular reasoning that operates around this topic is the fact that texts in turn get interpreted in the light of existing attributions. So typically, once specific material has been identified (predetermined) as being non-Shakespearian, it then becomes *de rigueur* for critics to (re)affirm its inferiority at every opportunity. It is one of the most telling ways in which the discourse of authorship analysis impinges on critical practice, and it is a process whose influence reaches to the core of contemporary understanding of late Shakespearian drama. The prejudices behind this sort of approach show up especially blatantly in some of the more obviously subjective contributions to the authorship debate, the kind of arguments that seek to expose in a given text qualitative, authorship-related variations in characterization, tone, plotting and planning, the use of sources, etc.[59] As a rule, such work just sees what it wants to see, hears what it wants to hear, reflecting prevailing notions about what Shakespeare is supposed to "sound" like, and what is "good" enough to be associated with his name.[60]

It seems safe to assume that attribution studies are always going to be predicated, in some measure, on particular images of Shakespeare,

and suppositions concerning the kind of poet and playwright he was. That is not the issue that really bothers me here. The fundamental methodological problem I am seeking to highlight lies in the way the constructions of Shakespeare used to sustain divisions of authorship generally wind up being, all claims and aspirations to objectivity and impartiality notwithstanding, the most limited, inhibiting, and conservative ones available. Now there is a sense in which a certain conservatism in authorship attribution at the methodological level is absolutely appropriate, and I myself am partly advocating it – in the form of a (nuanced) respect for external evidence, an awareness of the intrinsic limitations of internal evidence, and a careful adherence to the principles of rational argument and empirical observation.[61] But that is rather different from the kind of attitude I have in mind at this point. I am thinking more of the critical and ideological perspectives that tend to govern authorship work on Shakespeare, the conservative expectations and assumptions that have prevailed in assessing and understanding the politics, aesthetics, and "philosophy" of the texts under consideration, the meaning and purpose of the dramatic material Shakespeare would or could have produced.[62] When it comes to the plays that comprise my own chief area of interest, the driving force of the desire to expunge or bar from the canon anything that contravenes artistic preconceptions or offends critical mores is impossible to miss.[63]

Factors like the subjective nature of all literary comparisons and the unreliability (and immeasurability) of personal taste are what make the thought of a systematic, scientific line of approach to cases of disputed authorship so appealing. Yet even when such a methodology is genuinely adopted or sought after, questions of aesthetics, evaluation, and opinion are far from easy to circumvent entirely. Not only do they

influence and reinforce attitudes from (as it were) the outside, they are also actually integral to the whole testing process, to the extent that their impact can be felt at virtually every stage in the gathering and analysis of quantitative evidence. Interpretation and judgement are required in the first place in selecting which aspects of a text are likely to supply useful information regarding individual authorial practices; statistics have to be applied and interpreted to carry any meaning or value; and aesthetic criteria are present from the start wherever certain types of material – prologues and epilogues, inset plays, songs, rhymed verse – are excluded (as they commonly have been) from the metrical data compiled for the purposes of statistical comparison, or from any samples used as experimental controls.[64]

Perhaps the most crucial point to register in this context, though, is that every element available for analysis is a potential multiple marker, and needs to be considered accordingly. No single feature of a Shakespearian text is isolable as evidence of authorship alone, every separate trait and textual component, no matter how small or seemingly trivial, carries with it an abundance of possible information, and has implications that stretch into an array of different areas. Specific characteristics might truly represent the defining ("inimitable") quirks and idiosyncrasies of a particular author's style. But there is always the chance that they could result instead from some form of scribal or compositorial intervention.[65] Or moreover, and this is what I most want to bring out, that they owe their existence to distinct, controlled effects of aesthetic discourse – intentional stylistic modulations, tonal experimentation, intertextual allusions, literary topoi, and so forth. The hope of eliminating or bypassing the domain of deliberate artistic manipulation has of course been a primary impetus in the movement

within attribution studies towards a focus on what are claimed or presumed to be unconscious authorial habits. Cardinal difficulties arise even here, however. It is by no means necessarily clear what exactly constitutes an unconscious habit (or indeed, how to determine just whose unconscious is involved, and when); and it is often still perfectly feasible to pursue aesthetic effects themselves to the same "microscopic" level that this kind of work tends to operate at.[66]

It is important to emphasize that my arguments here are in no way intended to suggest that all of the evidence at our disposal is equally unreliable, or that attribution studies *per se* can be dismissed as a waste of time.[67] What I am trying to do, rather, is to convey a sense of the complex external pressures that mould the discipline, and of the overlapping discursive fields with which it has to contend – that is, to highlight a range of factors regularly played down or ignored within authorship work itself. This marks a good moment to return to Foucault's 'What Is an Author?', and its key interrogation of the concept of the "author-function". One of the characteristic features of the author-function that Foucault identifies is that 'it is not defined by the spontaneous attribution of a discourse to its producer, but rather by a series of specific and complex operations'.[68] These operations, and the history and ideology that accompany them, are what go to make up the principal processes of canon formation. Foucault himself draws attention to four main criteria employed 'through the ages' in the attempt to classify and identify authorial canons, to specify what belongs to an individual author-function. The first three of these are based on the principle of the existence of a high degree of consistency and individuality within an author's canon in the realms of, respectively, artistic quality, content and message (doctrine), and style;

and the last has to do with maintaining an awareness of the limits of possible historical knowledge during an author's own life-time.

In Foucault's opinion, what happens when these four criteria are invoked or applied is that an author is defined or conceived of as: (1) 'a constant level of value'; (2) 'a field of conceptual or theoretical coherence'; (3) 'a stylistic unity'; and (4) 'a historical figure at the crossroads of a certain number of events'.[69]   This figure of the individual human author, moreover, is seen to function within critical discourse as an explanatory, originating cause – a source of consistent expression, and a means of neutralizing contradictions and resolving differences.   I would qualify the rather negative tone of Foucault's discussion here by noting that the criteria involved are by no means inherently ridiculous, eccentric, or unreasonable.   As aids to attribution, they all have a certain obvious (and defensible) logic behind them, and a definite practical utility.   But alongside this, as Foucault's remarks suggest, they also enshrine particular attitudes and value judgements, and thus serve to create expectations and to impose beliefs and ideals, constructing similarities and differences which can then be imbued with significance.[70]   In other words, they are prescriptive as well as descriptive, active and influential forces as well as analytical tools, and it is this double-edged quality which characterizes the processes of attribution and establishing canonicity from top to toe.   Whatever its intentions or achievements, authorship work inevitably shapes and interprets, orders and evaluates, even as it seeks to identify and describe.   And the deep impact of this is plainly visible in the critical history of Shakespeare's late plays.

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The way in which critical perceptions and approaches to interpretation
and evaluation are thoroughly bound up with attitudes to authorship
and beliefs about authorial identity is only too apparent from the
criticism of the three plays where the question of authorship has
proved the most dominant concern. The effects of the intricate web of
connections that operates here can be seen at their clearest in relation
to *Henry VIII*. The major factor setting this play apart in this context
is the initial canonicity conferred on it by its inclusion in the First
Folio. This ensures that the authorship debate in this instance starts
off on a completely different footing than in the case of either *Pericles*
or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. With *Henry VIII*, the burden of proof, at
least to begin with, lies entirely on the side of the argument for non-
Shakespearian involvement.[71] Almost all of the work advanced in support
of this position has adopted the double strategy referred to above, in
which stylistic tests are marshalled in tandem with, and very often in
the service of, aesthetic judgements – the latter typically amounting
to "demonstrations" of the play's inferior artistry.[72] The theory of
Shakespeare-Fletcher dual authorship has in fact been intimately linked
with disparaging assessments of the quality of *Henry VIII* from the
moment that James Spedding first propounded it in print back in 1850.[73]
Spedding's seminal essay on the subject is precisely founded, explicitly
and unapologetically, on his conviction that the play as a whole fails to
live up to what a proper Shakespearian drama should be and do.[74] Like
many a critic after him, he employs the specific evidence of statistical
data solely to back up and justify his hostile impressions and personal
prejudices.[75]

The central role of Spedding's argument in the spectacular fall of
Henry VIII from critical and (especially) theatrical favour perfectly

illustrates the powerful impact of the authorship question on reception and interpretation.[76] Widespread acceptance of the idea of divided authorship has been instrumental in shaping the low critical esteem in which this text has been held for most of the last hundred years.[77] For many commentators, the supposedly proven fact of collaboration has been enough in itself to indicate inferiority. And since most contributors to the debate seem to have viewed Fletcher with unmitigated disdain, belief in his involvement in the play has done nothing but reinforce this negative attitude.[78] Multiply determined (not to say demonized) as of minimal importance – collaborative, Fletcherian, fatally flawed – *Henry VIII* has been easily sidelined. One prominent explanation for the eagerness with which it has been classed as essentially irrelevant (from just about any perspective that one cares to think of, canonically, psychologically, aesthetically, etc.) is the presence of Archbishop Cranmer's prophecy in the final scene (5.4. 14-62). With its topical allusions and language of personal compliment that explicitly breach the play's fictional boundaries, in direct contravention of certain time-honoured notions of aesthetic decorum, this has occasioned much critical anxiety and distaste.[79] The overriding reason for the great success of disintegration here, though – and the approbation which even transparently absurd and worthless theories have received – has been, without doubt, the need somehow to dissociate Shakespeare as far as possible from a text that post-dates *The Tempest*.[80] It is entirely to the point in this connection that the original work of Spedding and Samuel Hickson from 1850 was revived and reprinted under the auspices of the NSS in 1874, to be utilized in turn by Dowden.[81] The basic modern paradigms for understanding and conceptualizing Shakespearian drama are dependent from the outset on the effective expulsion of *Henry VIII* from the canon.

Pericles stands as a very significant contrast in this respect, long since credited with a pivotal canonic position in the standard generic and chronological narratives of Shakespeare's career. It has achieved this, moreover, in spite of never having enjoyed a popularity in the post-Restoration theatre that could begin to rival that of *Henry VIII* during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.[82] And on top of this, there are the somewhat more obvious impediments of its exclusion from the First Folio, and the fact that it survives in a textual state that is generally regarded as the least satisfactory of any work in the canon.[83] That *Pericles* should be accepted into the Shakespeare canon at all is by no means a foregone conclusion. As the Oxford editors point out, the details of its early printing history – original quarto attribution, Folio omission – place it in the rather uninspiring company of the apocryphal plays, *The London Prodigal* and *A Yorkshire Tragedy*.[84] There is, of course, one crucial difference between *Pericles* and these other texts, that the former has *sounded* Shakespearian to most commentators over the last two hundred years (if only in part), whereas the latter two have not.[85] It is also worth mentioning that a modicum of external evidence does exist – in the form of documentary references and elements of its later printing history – to distinguish *Pericles* a little further here.[86] But the secure niche that this play has gained for itself in the Shakespearian oeuvre has always been based at root more on critical judgements than on scholarly or bibliographical criteria, and is very much a reflection of the way in which it, unlike *Henry VIII*, can be slotted neatly into prevailing interpretative patterns and categorizations.

This is not to suggest that the peculiar nature of the text and uncertainties about the play's authorship have not given rise to many real procedural difficulties and critical insecurities. Appreciation of

the whole of *Pericles* has been far from universal. The first two acts in particular (Scenes 1-9) have been singled out for much abuse. And in general, the models of reading which have assured the play attention have also ensured that a good deal of that attention has been pretty facile.[87] Yet because *Pericles* has been seen to conform to expectations in the areas of overall (or guiding) tone, content, and most especially genre, its canonicity has been guaranteed. Strangely enough, the combination here of equally unclear textual and authorship problems has itself helped contribute to this outcome. The absence, until recently, of any single overriding theory of divided authorship has kept the subject of collaboration much more towards the back of the critical agenda than has proved possible with either *Henry VIII* or *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[88] And the customary emphasis on the indifferent state of the text, and its many supposed errors and ineptitudes, has facilitated the all-important reading of *Pericles* as by far the weakest of the "four Romances", an experimental, faltering first attempt.[89]

An attitude often encountered amongst critics arguing the case for Shakespeare's part-authorship of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is that this play has at least as much right to inclusion in the canon of his works as *Pericles*. It is a position that has a lot to recommend it, and is hard to dispute if one is only taking into consideration either the common view that regards both these non-Folio plays as Shakespearian collaborations, or the relative extent of Shakespeare's contributions to each under the conventional authorship divisions.[90] Despite the obvious appeal of such a "purist" approach to the problems and practicalities of attribution, however, it is by no means easy, as I have been trying to get across throughout this chapter, to circumvent the central role played by textual transmission and reception history in the processes

of canon formation. In many respects, the principal factor working to keep *The Two Noble Kinsmen* outside of the Shakespeare canon for the best part of the twentieth century was not so much the probable details of its actual authorship, as its printing history. Viewed from this perspective, the authorship status of *Kinsmen* is at least two degrees "worse", when it comes to endorsing it as Shakespearian, than that of *Pericles*. In the first place, it is explicitly described as collaborative on the title-page of its (belated) first edition.[91] And secondly, and even more crucially, it never managed to make it into the Shakespeare Folio tradition at all, eventually finding its way instead into the "Beaumont-and-Fletcher" canon, via the Second Folio of 1678.[92] This latter circumstance especially also serves to distinguish *Kinsmen* from *Henry VIII*, irrespective of whether or not they are both Shakespeare-Fletcher collaborations. It is because of the intrinsic difference in their original publication context that authorship work on these two plays, as I emphasized above, has proceeded – has had to proceed – along significantly different lines.

Certain aspects of this contrasting situation have actually proved beneficial to the appreciation of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Reading the body of commentary on the authorship of *Henry VIII* can be a depressing experience, given the vilification and abuse that one finds heaped with monotonous regularity both on Fletcher's supposed sections and on the play as a whole. In the case of *Kinsmen*, however, the main current of work in this area has at least tended to be more positive in tone, being geared towards trying to demonstrate Shakespeare's presence in specific portions of the text, rather than his absence. To put the distinction baldly – and I would stress that it is a very generalized distinction from the outset – with *Henry VIII*, critics have sought to prove parts

of the play unworthy of Shakespeare, and with *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, to prove parts worthy of him.[93]   Obviously though, it was the same transmission processes which left *Kinsmen* out of the canon in the first place that also functioned to keep it thoroughly peripheral to the world of Shakespeare studies until very recently.   And at the level of scholarship in particular, the play has suffered in relation to the rest of the dramatist's output from the way it has so often been omitted from books of the "Shakespeare and . . ." or "Shakespeare's Use of . . ." variety.[94]   But whilst it can never enjoy the (theoretically) safe position in the canon held by those plays included in the First Folio, within the realm of authorship studies, there has been (allowing for a few high-profile dissenters) a broad acceptance of Shakespeare's presence in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* since the middle of the nineteenth century.   With this in mind, it is noticeable that current interest in the play does not stem from any real change of emphasis in authorship work (any great innovations in attribution techniques or radical new theories of compositional genesis), but from a growing awareness of its literary and theatrical qualities, changing critical tastes, and the broad shift in attitudes towards the margins of the canon and the subject of collaboration which I drew attention to at the start of this chapter.[95]

In spite of any differences outlined above, however, and whatever the nature of recent developments and the reasons behind them, with all three of these plays, the primary thrust of the authorship debate, and of much critical interpretation, has been directed towards identifying the precise extent of Shakespeare's individual contribution to each (though very often this simply translates into defending or justifying the so-called "traditional" divisions of authorship).   In the process, the four principal criteria for determining the canon of an author's

works highlighted by Foucault, and the problems these carry with them, have been very much to the fore. To begin with the second of these categories, the notion of conceptual coherence clearly helps to account for how *Pericles* managed to secure its place in the canon so many years sooner than *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as well as for the way it has received so much more attention than *Henry VIII*. And the popularity of neat and coherent interpretative patterns is similarly evinced in the critical construction of a small group of Shakespeare-Fletcher collaborations at the end of Shakespeare's career, and especially, in the enthusiasm with which *Cardenio* has been fitted into this paradigm on what is, after all, some extremely slender evidence.[96]

The question of quality, the image of the author as 'a constant level of value', has, inevitably, proved an even more dominant concern. It is no coincidence, for example, that the position of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in the canon has become considerably more assured just as this play's aesthetic qualities have started to be more widely appreciated. A fairly obvious long-standing principle of authorship attribution (and the opposite also applies) is that people like to be able to assign to authors that they like, works that they like. With Shakespeare, of course, this tendency gets wrapped up in all sorts of wider cultural pressures, that do much to account for the frequent and often virulent attacks on the putative "non-Shakespearian" material in these plays. The habit of linking attribution to quality is reflected as well in the peculiar kind of "anthology-thinking" that has prevailed in authorship work on the late plays, where it seems to have been regularly assumed that any Shakespearian passages will stand out a mile from the matter around them, and necessarily be poetically brilliant, intellectually insightful, and psychologically penetrating. It is an attitude which, consistently

applied, would lead to the banishing of large chunks of the accepted canon for not being properly up to scratch.[97]

The third criterion that Foucault cites, the concept of the author as a field of 'stylistic unity', has proved an almost equally prominent factor in the processes of attribution. Commentators on the late plays are forever trotting out the idea that *The Two Noble Kinsmen, Pericles,* and *Henry VIII* all reveal two manifestly different styles of writing, which can only be explained as the work of two different dramatists. Yet there is at least one respect in which this is plainly a highly dubious proposition. It is not difficult to demonstrate that each of these plays is in fact built up from an array of different dramatic and poetic "styles". And that is pretty much what one would expect, considering that they all contain a multiplicity of plot material, a mixture of prose and verse, of "high" and "low", "comic" and "serious" scenes, and distinct "layers" of on-stage action - "framing" devices (choruses, prologues, epilogues), inset "texts" and shows of one sort and another, and so on. Moreover, stylistic unity is an especially suspect expectation in this context in the first place given the way in which drama is frequently precisely about the creation of identifiably different styles of speech for different characters and occasions (a technique, of course, for which Shakespeare is particularly, if often excessively, renowned).[98] Again, I am not trying to suggest that there is no correlation between style and authorship, that all stylistic variation is functional, that it is always best understood in terms of artistic design and tonal contrast. Clearly, some forms of stylistic difference are most easily made sense of at the level of authorship, and there is always going to be certain material that "feels" more like one dramatist's work than another's. But in the case of much of the "suspected" or "anomalous" writing in the late

plays, aesthetics and hermeneutics have repeatedly been subordinated to attribution, and the possibility of conscious stylistic manipulation to specific ends has tended to be either rejected out of hand, or simply ignored.

Some of the difficulties the emphasis on stylistic unity brings with it can be illustrated from *Pericles*. In this play, the creation of Gower very obviously stands - I would say undeniably, if it had not been denied - as an exercise in deliberate stylistic experimentation. This immediately raises the possibility that stylistic variations and peculiarities in the main action of the play (most notably Scenes 1-9) might themselves amount to something similar. Such a possibility, however, has been very vigorously resisted, and the strength of that resistance is an indication of the considerable investment authorship work has had - wherever it suits its purposes - in maintaining a sense of distance between "style" and intentionality, in making sure that certain elements in the texts are not imbued with too much dramatic or aesthetic significance.[99] It also links in to the last of the four criteria in Foucault's list, the question of the location of the author within a determinate period of history.

This particular tool of attribution is hard to pick holes in at a purely factual level, but things are a little more complicated when it comes to the area of ideas. Here, it can obviously be used to rule out the presence of specific attitudes and strategies within a text, to dismiss certain readings, certain perspectives, as inappropriate and anachronistic. But crudely applied, it can also become a way of simply encoding modern prejudices and misjudgements, of twisting the works of the past to fit the expectations of the present, of unduly limiting the intellectual capabilities of an earlier culture or the nature of the aesthetic it might

have achieved. And something of this can be seen reflected in late play criticism in the objections that have been levelled at some of the more unconventional and exploratory interpretative work generated by these texts, readings that attempt to uncover an artistic or conceptual purpose in features normally viewed exclusively as offering evidence for divided authorship. The opposition to such approaches often seems to be grounded in, to have as its excuse, nothing more than some flimsy preconception that neither Shakespeare nor any of the dramatists with whom he might have collaborated could have been engaged in anything remotely approaching the degree of self-conscious technical and stylistic innovation one finds, say, in the realm of twentieth-century literary experimentation.[100] This line of argument has tended to serve, too, as a means of resisting all the sort of factors I have been focusing on in this section, issues which, if acknowledged, strike at the heart of many of the central assumptions behind the whole process of authorship attribution. The anxieties about intentionality and sophistication that emerge from all this, along with those that surround the issues of coherence, unity, and quality touched on above, are symptomatic as well, however, of a general anxiety regarding collaboration, a widespread disinclination to attribute any great level of value, insight, artistic seriousness, or meaningful coherence to collaborative or multi-authored texts. It is some of the ramifications of this that I want to turn to next.

Collaboration

According to Foucault, 'since literary anonymity is not tolerable, we can accept it only in the guise of an enigma'. A similar assessment

of prevailing attitudes is expressed by Samuel Schoenbaum, when he

writes, at the beginning of one of the most influential studies of

authorship attribution in the area of English Renaissance drama, 'those

who study plays want to know who wrote them'.[101] Both comments are

in fact major generalizations, but they still get close to the essence of

a critical environment in which evaluation and understanding have long

been widely assumed to be dependent upon a knowledge of authorial

identity.[102] It is an outlook neatly satirized by George Bernard Shaw,

whose fictional drama critic, Flawner Bannel, required to pronounce his

opinion on a play whilst ignorant of the identity of the dramatist,

exclaims, 'you dont [sic] expect me to know what to say about a play

when I dont know who the author is, do you?'. As he adds a little

later:

> if it's by a good author, it's a good play, naturally.
> That stands to reason. Who is the author? Tell me
> that; and I'll place the play for you to a hair's
> breadth.[103]

But what if there should prove to be two – or more – authors? In

many respects, the problems and anxieties that are associated with

anonymous writing pale into insignificance beside those that attend

the issue of collaborative/multiple authorship. Collaboration has simply

never been properly assimilated into modern critical (and cultural)

conceptions of what constitutes literary authorship. Indeed, as Gordon

McMullan could remark only as long ago as 1994, 'astonishingly little

work has been done until very recently on the process and nature of

collaborative writing in any period of literary history'.[104] And as

Jeffrey Masten has observed,

> traditionally, criticism has viewed collaboration as a
> mere subset or aberrant kind of individual authorship,
> the collusion of two unique authors whom subsequent
> readers could discern and separate out by examining the

traces of individuality and personality (including hand-writing, spelling, word-choice, imagery, and syntactic formations) left in the collaborative text.[105]

Approached in these terms, collaboration can only really be seen as a "problem", something that has to be solved before interpretation – and, for that matter, editing – can properly begin. So, for example, Cyrus Hoy, writing about the realm of Renaissance collaborative drama in general, states directly that 'the work of defining authorial shares' stands as 'the necessary prerequisite to any informed critical appraisal of this body of drama'.[106] Part of the trouble with this position, as I tried to show in the previous section, is that attribution cannot actually be successfully conducted in total isolation from critical interpretation and other related forms of analysis. Perhaps even more importantly, it is precisely this kind of emphasis on separating out the individual authorial shares in a collaborative text that has helped to create and perpetuate the feeling that collaborative drama is somehow intrinsically disconnected and disjointed, a site of competing intentions and badly uncoordinated actions. As a corollary to this predominantly unenthusiastic attitude towards collaboration, prevailing models of authorship have typically asserted the inherent supremacy of works of art that are generated from a single creating mind.[107] There are plenty of reasons, however, especially when one looks beyond the field of literature, for questioning such a view. It is not simply that collaborative production is absolutely integral to the majority of performance arts, including, obviously, drama itself. Without collaborative authorship (or at least, multiple forms of "authorial" input), a whole range of art-forms – one might mention film, ballet, television, *lieder*, and even that great cultural bastion of "high art", opera – would all pretty much cease to exist. Of course, the degree of "active" collaboration behind any of the individual "works" in

these areas varies enormously; but even within the literary realm, as Jack Stillinger in particular has argued, many supposedly (and highly appreciated) single-authored texts are in fact made up, in one way or another, from the writing of more than one person.[108]

The extent to which the concept of collaboration has been viewed with a mixture of disdain and distaste amongst Shakespearians is well reflected in Charles Frey's observation that 'the presumed collaborator of Shakespeare's is often described as a wretched contriver of vastly inferior verse and drama'. The negative war-time associations of the term, "collaborator", which Frey specifically draws attention to, the sense this conveys of working with the enemy, seem to have long been in operation within the world of Shakespeare studies.[109] Against such a background, collaboration is almost bound to be perceived not just as an annoyance or a situation that is broadly undesirable, but as a form of betrayal, a possibility to be resisted at all costs. And this is clearly evinced in the deep-seated opposition that has often prevailed even within authorship work itself to the notion that Shakespeare ever did actually *actively* collaborate. One certainly does not have to look very far to encounter all sorts of narratives seeking to explain the apparent presence of other authors in the late plays in every manner imaginable apart from genuinely *collaborative* composition, Shakespeare working freely and directly with another dramatist. These can involve Shakespeare re-fashioning old plays or drafts of plays left behind by somebody else; other (which in this context generally serves to imply "less able") dramatists coming along and adding to or "mutilating" his existing works; or Shakespeare's colleagues trying to salvage something from his left-over writings, material that had remained, for whatever reason (retirement, death, sudden changes of circumstance, theatrical

exigencies), previously unfinished. As well as effectively distancing Shakespeare from the problematic realm of collaboration, such theories have offered critics plenty of leeway to speculate about what might have been lost in the process - the Shakespearian original "obscured" by the surviving palimpsest, or, especially in the case of *Henry VIII*, the play Shakespeare would have produced had he been able to finish it properly for himself.[110]

The urge to dissociate Shakespeare from the realm of collaborative practice has obviously also found expression in the efforts of critics who have resisted the standard arguments for collaboration in the late plays, and sought to advocate the unaided Shakespearian authorship of *Henry VIII* and/or *Pericles* (and even, in the case of Paul Bertram, of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*). But whilst the usual old negative perspective on collaborative/multiple authorship still holds good in a lot of this work, a far more positive assessment of the plays themselves tends to emerge. Reflected in this is probably the principal determinant in the reception of collaborative writing during the twentieth century, the fundamental methodological double bind that, until recently, effectively governed interpretative commentary in this area, especially in relation to Shakespeare. With multiple authorship (in all of its various guises) well nigh inseparably associated with images of aesthetic inferiority, those seeking to defend the intrinsic qualities, the coherent design and close construction, of plays such as *Pericles* and *Henry VIII*, have more or less been forced to espouse the line of sole Shakespearian authorship.[111] Criticism may finally have started to free itself from this particular hang-up, with collaboration now being approached, on the whole, in a much more enthusiastic frame of mind, but even so, other methodological dilemmas and choices still remain. The recent work of two critics keenly

sympathetic to the arena of collaborative writing, Masten and McMullan, for example, presents two virtually opposing ways of addressing the collaborative drama of the English Renaissance. For Masten, collaborative texts need to be dealt with on their own terms, not as an atypical or marginal form of dramatic production, and most specifically not in relation to any overriding paradigm of individual authorship. McMullan, on the other hand, has come up with a position not all that far removed from Hoy's, arguing that, 'for the political interpretation of plays in a collaborative canon, understanding of the processes and division of collaborative work is essential, since inappropriate readings may result from inadequate textual knowledge'.[112]

For my own part, I am absolutely not interested in attempting to identify the individual contributions of different dramatists in any of the late plays, largely because this has already been done so often, and generally so badly. Truth be told, I am far from convinced that *Henry VIII* and *Pericles* are in fact collaborative works. Setting that issue aside for the moment, however, I certainly do not see in any of these plays the competing intentions and ill-matched approaches that have been such a dominant theme of critical history; and it seems to me that the kind of position McMullan adopts is itself liable to give rise to the discovery of disjunctions and discontinuities in features that might easily be understood very differently within a different interpretative framework. In any case, I am not at all sure that we have the techniques available to determine the authorship of specific scenes and sequences with enough confidence to pinpoint precisely all of the material (and only that material) written by Shakespeare.[113] To return to the arguments of the previous section, many of those elements that have been of central importance in the authorship debate can also be

seen to contribute to the plays' aesthetic design, in a manner which seriously compromises their value as evidence for authorship.

A good illustration of this is provided by the case of Fletcher's well-known preference for the second person pronoun, "ye". Actually notable in both *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* for its relative scarcity in comparison to the supposed Fletcherian norm, where it does occur, "ye" has been seized on as offering especially strong evidence of Fletcher's presence.[114] Two passages, one each from *Henry VIII* and *Kinsmen*, can help to reveal some of the problems with this approach. *Henry VIII*, 3.1 contains a particularly high incidence of "ye", and is usually given to Fletcher primarily on this basis. But of the twenty instances of the word that appear in this scene, all but one are spoken by Queen Katherine, and it seems clear that this usage, which is also noticeably concentrated in certain speeches, serves as a marker both of her linguistic "otherness" (explicitly referred to at ll. 40-49), and of her sarcasm and growing anger towards the two Cardinals.[115] Another distinct cluster of "ye"s shows up in the Schoolmaster's speech at the beginning of *Kinsmen*, 3.6, where it has functioned as one of the very few pieces of "scientific" evidence to be put forward for Fletcher's authorship of this scene. Once again, though, and perhaps even more blatantly than in the example from *Henry VIII*, "ye" is obviously being used here as a characterizing device, one amongst a whole series of signs of Gerrold's verbal eccentricity and pedantry.[116]

One thing that a focus on the minor details of the language of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* in general reveals is the care and precision with which this play's verbal texture has been put together. In the light of this, and given that there are no good grounds for questioning its collaborative status, *Kinsmen* provides an object lesson in the degree

of complexity and integration collaborative authorship can achieve. To begin with, though this has typically been denied by unsympathetic critics, various chains of iterative imagery run right through the drama, including references to water, swimming, fishing, ships, horses, eyes, garlands, flowers, commerce, schooling, mastery, titles, and so on.[117] At an even more detailed level, the Jailer's Daughter is given, as Douglas Bruster has brilliantly demonstrated, a very distinctive personal idiolect, cutting across all of her scenes, and consisting of characteristic phrases and rhythms, a recurring bawdry, repeated references to games, numbers, odds and gambling, animals, and plenty of other recognizable traits.[118] In similar terms, and as Bertram was the first to point out, the kinsmen's use of the different forms of the second person pronoun (T/V forms) to each other falls into a definite and contrasting pattern, with Palamon always being the first to switch from the formal "you" that is their standard mode of address (as can be seen from 1.2 and the early part of 2.2) to a plainly insulting and angry adoption of "thou".[119] Features such as these show exactly how closely Jacobean dramatists could work together at the level of minute linguistic detail, and are in turn a reflection of the skilled construction and sophisticated dramaturgy that lie behind the *whole* of this play.

This aspect of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, for me, serves very clearly to indicate that the composition of the play must have been a process of careful, willing, and active collaboration – a process, therefore, in which Shakespeare himself was fully and committedly involved. Such an assessment is, in the end, like any other, only an extrapolation, but it is an extrapolation much more fully borne out by the actual text than any of the arguments for forced collaboration, uncoordinated and piecemeal composition, or mismatched intentions that have circulated for so long.

None of the many narratives of conflicting interests and approaches, of Fletcher mangling or deflating Shakespeare's lofty aims and ideals, of Shakespeare hurriedly or half-heartedly helping out in a crisis, stand up to proper scrutiny as an explanation for the state of this work.[120] Or to put this another way, nothing about *The Two Noble Kinsmen* - and the same can be said of both *Henry VIII* and *Pericles* as well - justifies the assumption that any greater degree of contingency, or any lesser level of artistic effort or seriousness of vision, went into its creation than into that of any other play in the Shakespeare canon. In view of all this, the idea of separating out Shakespeare's personal contribution - and for that matter, the whole notion that Shakespeare's contributions to any of these texts can be thought of as separable "fragments" - seems to me not only an exercise in wishful thinking, but a mode of approach that is totally beside the point.[121]

I would go so far as to contend that the very suggestion that a work such as *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can be broken down into its "constituent parts" is a fundamental misrepresentation, both of the text itself, and of the collaborative activity that went to produce it. On the same basis, to exclude the play from a study of late Shakespearian drama is fundamentally to misrepresent the path of the dramatist's career. It is not just a question here of the intrinsic limitations in our ability to divine the efforts of individual authors. There is a real possibility that the process of composition was too close, in places, for certain elements of the text ever to be described as being "by" one dramatist or the other - that is, that the writing of the play was not simply allocated out in discrete portions, that it does not (and never did) divide up scene-by-scene.[122] But in any case, whatever the exact intricacies of the distribution of labour, the image of a genuinely

collaborative enterprise that emerges from *Kinsmen*'s consistency and subtlety of design does much to offset all the usual worries about admitting "alien" or inappropriate material into the Shakespeare canon, or the feeling that the final form of the play might not have been properly "authorized" by Shakespeare. Of course, Masten's position on collaboration renders problematic the entire concept of an author-based approach in this context, an issue that I return to below. Assuming for now, though, the validity of such an approach (and my own study obviously falls firmly within this paradigm), for it to maintain any logic in relation to late Shakespeare seems to me to demand that it extends to encompass collaborative works as well. One might even say, to adopt a quasi-"romantic" perspective for a moment, that embracing *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, with all of its "non-Shakespearian" matter, completely and unreservedly into the canon, does fuller "honour" to the creativity and integrity of Shakespeare, and the overall trajectory of his career, than any of those approaches that seek to sift out the sections not written by him, and to concentrate only on his "individual" work, since these are effectively engaged in circumventing or denying the essentially collaborative spirit of this play.[123]

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To argue the need for collaborative texts to be admitted to the canon on an equal footing is one thing; to endorse all the main theories of collaborative authorship currently applied to the late plays (as set out, for example, in the Oxford Shakespeare), is quite another matter. My own approach, when it comes to the actual details of authorship, is to accept unhesitatingly the presence of both Shakespeare and Fletcher

in *The Two Noble Kinsmen* - and even, to some extent, to remain open to the possibility of Beaumont's involvement as well.[124] I certainly share the common opinion that the extraordinary, extreme poetry that fills most of the first and final acts is unlikely to be the work of anyone other than Shakespeare, being reminiscent of nothing so much as the clotted, knotted, astonishingly dense verse that is characteristic of his late plays in general.[125] It is also hard to deny that many of the scenes between the kinsmen in the middle three acts, and especially their dialogue in 2.2, bear all the principal hallmarks of Fletcher's style.[126] For the rest of the play, however, I am loath to make too many judgements or assumptions. Casual critics of *Kinsmen* often speak as if the standard divisions of authorship give Fletcher the whole of the Jailer's Daughter subplot, but in reality most of the major studies assign a number of the Daughter's scenes to Shakespeare, and I take it for granted that this part of the play was written collaboratively.[127] In the case of the "second" subplot of the countryfolk and the morris dance, routinely attributed to Fletcher simply because nobody has ever had anything good to say about it, here too I think it is possible to see signs of the writing of both Fletcher and Shakespeare. Thus in 2.3, whilst Arcite's opening speech (ll. 1-24) has a distinctly Fletcherian sound to it, his closing lines (80-88), for me, possess far more of a Shakespearian feel, and the dialogue in between is clearly comparable to the sequence involving the fishermen in *Pericles* (Scene 5).[128] In many respects, though, any attempt to identify the contributions of individual authors here starts to look fairly fatuous when one is faced with such a markedly intertextual scene as 3.5, which, with its dance that it shares with Beaumont's *Masque of the Inner Temple and Gray's Inn,* its borrowings from Cicero, Ovid, other learned writers, and grammar

textbooks, its snatches of popular songs and poems, numerous proverbial sayings, and so on, goes far to exemplify, in little, Roland Barthes's famous image of the literary text as 'a tissue of quotations drawn from the innumerable centres of culture'.[129]

In sum, then, I have approached *The Two Noble Kinsmen* on the basis that it is a carefully planned piece of collaborative writing, carrying a high degree of imaginative unity, and with both of its subplots fully integrated into the action, and fully relevant to the overall effect of the drama. I am much less inclined, however, to adhere to the view that regards *Henry VIII* as another Shakespeare-Fletcher collaboration. I would acknowledge that most of the more seemingly reliable authorship studies do come down strongly in favour of some Fletcherian involvement in this play.[130] Even so, it is still possible to feel that a lot of the evidence put forward remains unconvincing - or at the least, that it has a habit of proving ultimately far less convincing than it originally appeared.[131] What really stands out for me here, though, is the unremitting hostility authorship work has shown towards the play itself, and the fact that the idea of Fletcher's presence has consistently been used as an excuse to account for the drama's supposed failings. The whole tradition descending from Spedding bears primary responsibility for the way in which, over the last hundred years or so, *Henry VIII* has been misread and undervalued more than probably any other play in the Shakespeare canon. And because of this, I find it impossible to dissociate the subject of collaboration from the issues of quality and appreciation. In many respects, no doubt, this is just an unfortunate prejudice or hang-up of mine. At a general level, certainly, I would not want to argue, as I hope my own position on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* makes clear, that artistic success, conceptual

insight, or consistency of design can be read as straightforward or exclusive signs of single authorship. Yet there is one specific sense in the present context in which the notion of aesthetic quality does furnish some viable evidence against the case for divided authorship. The claim that *Henry VIII* is an inferior, broken-backed affair, lacking in aesthetic unity or any coherence of purpose, has played such a fundamental role in the argument for a non-Shakespearian presence in the play, that to query the adequacy of this reading, and to defend the artistic achievement of the drama, is in fact to challenge one of the central pillars in the entire theory of collaborative authorship.[132]

As far as solving the problems and uncertainties that surround it is concerned, *Pericles* provides perhaps the biggest headache of any of these plays, and I have been glad to be able to deal with it only briefly, because of the way it is so less central to my thesis. There is, in the first place, still no thoroughly satisfactory explanation for the state of the text as it has come down to us, although, apart from a few key cruxes, it seems to me rather less "bad" than it is generally considered to be.[133] Indeed, if the case of the Cholmeley Players is anything to go by, the quarto-text was viewed as a perfectly adequate basis for performance within the play's own time.[134] If *Pericles* really is a product of collaborative writing, then Wilkins is undoubtedly the most plausible candidate to be second dramatist, and I see no intrinsic reason why he and Shakespeare could not have worked together in genuine and active partnership.[135] Just as with *Henry VIII*, however, the fact that the play as a whole can be shown to possess an inbuilt unity of design serves to counter one of the principal elements in the case for divided authorship, the argument from inferiority and incoherence. In particular, *Pericles* reveals a tightly-knit network of imagery, running

from start to finish, which belies the sense of a "deep disjunction" between its two "halves" that emerges so strongly from the work of the proponents of collaborative/multiple authorship.[136]   And, as I try to get across in a later chapter, even the glaring and peculiar variations in style and (apparently) technical competence that are such a feature of this play, and that have so disturbed its critics, can be read as carrying a specific aesthetic purpose, as deliberate, controlled effects.

Once again, I would emphasize that consistency and complexity of design and a carefully organized verbal and imagistic texture are by no means necessarily indications of single authorship.   Their demonstrable presence in both *Henry VIII* and *Pericles*, however, in the face of reams and generations of critical writing to the contrary, is a clear pointer to the depth of the negative influence authorship work has exerted on interpretation, and the misrepresentations and distortions which it has helped to create and perpetuate.   One of the main reasons why many of the more sympathetic critics of these plays have resisted the idea that they might be collaborative is an entirely justifiable feeling that the critical approaches associated with such a position have done little to illuminate the texts concerned, and have in fact frequently served to divert attention away from many of the more interesting aesthetic effects and features that they contain.   It does not, moreover, seem all that misguided or unreasonable to feel, given the intrinsic limitations within attribution studies, the problematic history of the discourse, and its whole tangled relationship with the realm of bardolatry, that a case can still be made (without recourse to merely idealizing notions of individual authorial authority and textual/canonical integrity) for the sole Shakespearian authorship of both *Henry VIII* and *Pericles*.   My own inclination, with *The Two Noble Kinsmen* as well as these other two plays,

is, in the end (and this reflects the whole tenor of my argument during this chapter), to adhere to the attributions that accompanied them on their first appearance in print.[137] Having said that, though, in terms of my own actual interpretative activity, I have been much more engaged in exploring the areas of the plays' design and internal coherence - their skilful construction - than in focusing on specific questions of authorial identity. And indeed, the example of *Pericles* in particular suggests not only that the "authorship question" may well have no solution, but that it is probably the wrong question to be asking in the first place.[138]

In some respects, then, so far as my own work is concerned, it really doesn't matter who is speaking in these plays. In much the same way as the texts themselves can stand as individual works in their own right, so my own efforts at interpretation hold good, I would like to think, pretty much irrespective of authorship. Certainly, my reading of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* would have no need to change, in essence, if it were ever to be shown that Shakespeare himself had nothing at all to do with the play.[139] Yet at the same time, against such a blatantly idealistic position, I am of course approaching all of these texts within the context of the Shakespeare canon, and that context itself is bound to have shaped and influenced everything I have to say. This type of approach is by no means the only (or even necessarily the best) one available. Even from the perspective of authorial identity, *The Two Noble Kinsmen* has a place within the Fletcher canon (as, too, might *Henry VIII*), whilst *Pericles*, whatever the truth about its authorship, offers plenty of interesting parallels to the whole body of Wilkins's surviving work.[140] And obviously, there is no need to remain within an author-based paradigm at all in this matter. It is perfectly feasible

and appropriate to apply all sorts of other organizing principles to these plays, approaches built around such factors as company repertoire, the theatrical environment, sites of performance, contemporary events, social practices, and so forth. Nevertheless, it is worth stressing, in the light of the current critical situation, that the availability of alternative interpretative frameworks alone is not sufficient to invalidate the kind of emphasis on an individual dramatist's work and career that I have adopted here. Nor, for that matter, do such frameworks always circumvent all of the difficulties that accompany my own approach.

One of the more superficial appeals of the non-authorial models of reading that have come to be advocated more and more over the last few years, it seems to me, lies precisely in the way they appear to offer something of an escape from the arena of authorship attribution, and the multiple anxieties and uncertainties it brings with it. Given the nature of the surviving documentary evidence, however, just about any interpretative paradigm that can be constructed here (including, say, ones based on the likes of venue, occasion, date of performance, date of publication) is going to produce its own problems of "attribution" and designation around the margins of its "canon"; and this in turn means that any interpretations and assessments to which it then gives rise are going to be founded in places, just as those in my own work are, on suppositions, extrapolations, judgement-calls, and ultimately undetermined choices about what to believe or which theories or pieces of evidence to endorse. Also operating within modern thinking in this area, it hardly needs saying, is a powerful anti-authoritarianism, a conscious resistance to the role of "the author" as, in Foucault's influential phrase, 'the principle of thrift in the proliferation of meaning'.[141] Again, though, such an effect or impact is not necessarily the sole preserve of the

author-function. Any interpretative paradigm, crudely applied (and it is a fairly crude model of authorship Foucault himself is invoking at this point) has the potential to create and propound its own interpretative tyranny, to set up a discursive economy in which the meanings it produces are presented as determinate, as the ones - the only ones - that really matter.[142]

At a wider level, as I have already mentioned, the particular emphasis on collaborative practice adopted by Masten does indeed call into question the validity of the typical author-based ("man-and-his-works") approach to the drama of the English Renaissance. There are, though, for me, significant problems with the position that Masten (along with a number of other recent critics) takes up. It is only right and proper to acknowledge the inherently collaborative dimension (whether at the level of authorship, performance, publication, etc.) of the theatrical output of the time, and to draw attention as well to the overlap within such terms (and activities) as "composition", "writing", "creation".[143] But no matter how blurred or elusive the boundaries here, genuine (and material) differences between the various practices involved in the processes of textual (and theatrical) production still remain.[144] And besides, the catch-all focus on "collaboration" that has been emerging in critical discourse of late - the valorization, even, of collaboration in general as some sort of abstract, equalizing, almost "democratic" principle - seems in danger not only of ironing out such differences, but of obscuring the sheer variety in the forms of collaborative/multiple creation/"authorship" in which Elizabethan and Jacobean dramatists could (and did) engage. Even more importantly, Masten's central contention that collaboration was 'the Renaissance English theatre's dominant mode of textual production' is not actually borne out by the figures he

is able to cite - figures which are themselves in any case strongly dependent on the mainstream processes of authorship attribution, with all their potentially suspect principles for deciding what is collaborative and what is not, about which Masten himself is, rightly, so scathing.[145]

When it comes to my own work, the tensions and ambiguities that surround the topics of authorship and collaboration are reflected, and to a certain extent embraced, in the contrasting positions I have adopted on the authorship of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[146] One factor that does appear relatively definite in all of this is that collaborative composition was not, overall, the norm for Shakespeare. In any event, "authorship" as a concept is by no means the anachronism in this context it has sometimes been made out to be in the wake of Foucault. Notions of authorship, not entirely distinct from those that have developed since, were very much current during the period, both in the culture at large, and in connection with the world of the theatre.[147] The construction of Shakespeare himself as author/authority-figure - a contemporary classic - can be traced back well beyond the publication of the First Folio, at least as far as Francis Meres's *Palladis Tamia* of 1598.[148] And even Shakespeare's own apparent aversion to print (where his dramatic works are concerned), and to the trappings of authorial authority, is qualified in part by the sheer length of many of his plays (well above average for the time, and almost certainly too long for performance in full in the contemporary theatre), and the possibility (probability?) that he was therefore writing, as Richard Dutton has recently argued, with some sort of definite "readership" (with all that that entails) in mind.[149] In view of all this, it seems to me there are still grounds for, and profit to be gained in, pursuing the path of Shakespeare's personal authorial career - by way, that is, of a modified paradigm of authorship, one

which is capable of incorporating individual and collaborative writing, which does not depend on, or take recourse to, models of absolute individual agency (or, indeed, biographical/psychological romance), and which recognizes in addition the social and institutional positioning of that career. I try to balance the elements from the various sides of this equation in the chapters that follow.

CHAPTER FOUR

DRAMATURGY, IDEOLOGY, INTERPRETATION

A prominent feature of twentieth-century responses to late Shakespeare, and a particular touchstone of the "Romance" model of reading, is an emphasis on wonder. Wonder has been felt to be so important to the late plays as to be widely regarded as virtually a defining characteristic, a trademark effect setting these texts apart from Shakespeare's earlier comedies and, most of all, from the tragicomedies of the "Beaumont-and-Fletcher" canon.[1] It has even been invoked as a tool in the authorship debate, an aid in the identification of individual authorial shares in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, with the absence or muting of wonder at key points in the action, or anything remotely "impure" in its presentation, being seen as a tell-tale indication of the presence of Fletcher and his "typical" casual cynicism and ironic deflation.[2] For many critics, the evocation of wonder stands as the dominant element in the affective dimension of the late plays, the quintessence of what late Shakespearian drama is about. It is this sort of perspective that assumes a direct correlation between audience experience and the views of certain characters, that takes pronouncements about the mystical workings of Nature or Providence (as exemplified in Gonzalo's idealizing account of the events of *The Tempest*) as determinate, a reflection of the principal "message" and impression the plays are intended to convey.

Focusing on the wonder evoked both in and by the dramatic action has proved one powerful way of investing the late plays with some sort of extra-literary, extra-critical value and significance. In this type of

reading, it is the wonder they generate that elevates the "Romances" above simple entertainment, that produces their own special vision of the mystical, a narrative of wish-fulfilment that is somehow supposedly more than just wishful thinking; and it is within such wonder that the later Shakespeare can most clearly be seen effecting his distinctive aesthetic alchemy, his own particular "sea-change", as he transmutes the ordinary material and clichés of romance into something magical and mysterious, an experience veritably 'rich and strange'.[3] The plays themselves, meanwhile, emerge from all this as, in effect, myths of wonder, all the more poignant and profound for being presented as fleeting, transitory, masque-like in their evanescence. And certainly, wonder is a recurring feature in all these texts, one that links together many of those aspects that criticism has considered central: the symbolism and elevated poetry of the late plays; their quasi-miraculous reconciliations, recoveries of female characters, and restorations through the realm of the feminine; their masque-like qualities, neoplatonic ideas and influences, images of rule and majesty, and repeated celebrations of royal children, virginal purity, and the mysteries of inherent nobility – just about anything, that is, that requires levels of idealization and admiration to sustain it. But whilst such elements tie in neatly with the "Romance" model of reading, many of them also play a key role in topical interpretations of the late plays, and that is as good an indication as any of the way wonder, whatever else might be said about it, is firmly bound up in the realm of the political, always already implicated in ideology.[4]

It would be foolish, even in calling for a critical reassessment, to seek to deny the importance of wonder, as both idea and sensation, in late Shakespearian drama. *The Tempest* goes so far as to present a character who is, in terms of her name at least, an actual embodiment of

wonder, 'admired Miranda' (3.1. 37), the one who is to be wondered at - 'O you wonder' (1.2. 430).[5] And between them, *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* offer two reunion scenes (Scene 21 and 5.3 respectively) that, for sustained emotional uplift and extremes of wonder, outgo pretty much anything in the rest of Shakespeare. Even in these two plays, however, "wonder" looks to be deliberately undercut or distanced at times, as the action draws back from dramatizing certain potentially "wondrous" moments within the narrative, or frames the experience of wonder within ironic or disengaging effects. The remote feel of the Pericles-Thaisa reunion (Scene 22) and the report of the meetings between Leontes and Polixenes, Leontes and Perdita (5.2) stand as two obvious examples of what I mean.[6] In *The Tempest*, too, events and comments surrounding Miranda - one might mention her specific disclaimer to Ferdinand, 'no wonder, sir' (1.2. 431), Prospero's immediate deflation of her 'brave new world' speech (5.1. 184-187), and, possibly most disruptive of all, her conversation with Ferdinand (whatever its precise tone) over the chess-board (ll. 174-178) - work in a similar manner.[7] And effects of this sort can be found throughout late Shakespeare. So, whilst their focus on wonder seems designed to call up a realm of experience that is beyond the ordinary - in the words of Imogen's characteristically evocative phrase, 'beyond beyond' (*Cymbeline*, 3.2. 56) - I like to think of the late plays as occupied more with going, as it were, "beyond wonder", with making wonder one of their subjects rather than their primary end.

What emerges for me from late Shakespeare, then, is a complex and deeply equivocal representation and evocation of wonder. Apart from anything else, the plays are concerned with all sorts of different forms of wonder - admiration, astonishment, amazement, awe, even apprehension. A work like *The Tempest* goes out of its way to provide

as many angles and perspectives on the notion of "wonder" as possible, not all of them positive. So against its more appealing and pleasurable aspects, wonder is seen here as a tool of power, generating fear and suffering, inculcating values, promoting vested interests, propping up social structures, and, moreover, as a commodity to be exploited, an *affect* that can be manipulated to particular ends.[8] And in the late plays in general, there is an ongoing tension between the experience of wonder, the sense of rapture it can induce, and the value and impact of that experience. Wonder is indeed, as Peter Platt suggests, an integral element in the 'intellectual and epistemological destabilization' that operates within these texts.[9] It represents as well a potentially liberatory force, reaffirming the importance of the imagination and the emotions in the face of an oppressive rationalism, or a depressing and hostile reality. To quote Platt again, 'wonder becomes what cannot be assimilated rationally but instead exists in dynamic, dualistic play'.[10] But in spite of this vibrant, inspirational, interrogative dimension to it, wonder can also become, more reductively, an end in itself, and consequently, an impediment to action or engagement, a servant, whether by design or default, of the status quo, working to perpetuate existing hierarchies and established power relations, a mystificatory device that functions above all simply to distract and enthral.[11]

One very specific focus for wonder in all six of these plays is provided by displays and spectacles (and narratives of such events) particularly associated with the realm of "art", in its broadest sense. Masques, statues, tapestries, music, pageants, shows and games, formal combats, and the like all directly and obtrusively elicit wonder from their on-stage audiences. Art-works are admired especially for their ability to mimic or challenge Nature; and Nature itself (a strikingly

powerful personification throughout late Shakespeare) is celebrated in turn for its ability to create its own special beauties, its own kind of perfected, exemplary art. Nature's works and achievements in general (actual or attributed) are coated with praise, but wonder is reserved above all, in keeping with the conventional gendering of Nature as female that inevitably prevails here, for the idealized young heroines of the late plays. Conceived of as paragons of natural beauty, these women are further esteemed for their connections with the world of art. So between them, they are imaged or presented at times virtually as works of art; surrounded by art and aesthetic artefacts, objects of sensual delight; characterized as (naturally) expert artists; and closely linked with some of the most obvious of Nature's own "art-works" by means of the various, much-loved "flower-passages" that pervade the plays.[12]

The collocation of "Art" and "Nature" in late Shakespearian drama is of course well known, and has been much discussed. For my own part, the Nature/Art dialectic seems important not so much for any supposedly profound insights it makes available, as for the associations it brings with it, and the self-reflexive perspectives it helps to set up.[13] At the level of appreciation and wonder, Nature and Art evoke a similar aesthetic, a similar rhetoric of praise. Both, though, like wonder, are far from entirely straightforward concepts in the late plays. The famous "debate" between Perdita and Polixenes in *The Winter's Tale* (4.4. 70-108), for instance, whatever else it may achieve, problematizes any simplistic or purely idealistic notion of art or nature, not to mention belief systems or theories of social behaviour founded on particular models of either. In the process, moreover, the border between nature and art, between natural artistry and human artifice (and indeed, artistry and artifice in general), becomes thoroughly indistinct.[14]

It is the issue of artifice I most want to pick up on out of all of this. Here and elsewhere, the sense of the presence of artifice at work within the realms of both nature and art further complicates and compromises the plays' representations of wonder. In many ways, by destabilizing two of the principal grounds and occasions for wonder, the recurring emphasis on artifice calls into question the validity and appropriateness of much of the process of wondering in this context, and hence, of the feelings and experiences that go with it. The very object of wonder is rendered suspect. Art itself - even the celebratory or redemptive art-works for which the late plays are so renowned - is held up as deceptive, manipulative, purpose-driven, only-too-capable of self-consciously exploiting its own capacity for eliciting wonder. In similar terms, Nature is presented not only as shaped and controlled in places by the operations of (its own) art, but also, I would contend, as an artificial construct more generally, an idea or metaphor the meaning and "nature" of which are subject to discussion (or discursive formation), open to appropriation. All these tensions and dichotomies are in turn reflected, naturally enough, in the plays' heroines, figures who, whilst seemingly blessed with the best of both worlds, of art and nature, are also, generically speaking at least, very much (and very obviously) creations of fiction and artifice, representatives of an age-old tradition of impossibly idealized female saints and fairy-tale princesses - stock-type characterizations that are equally, of course, in their perfect beauty, carefully guarded chastity, and unshakeable devotion, archetypal expressions of male/patriarchal fantasies and desires.[15]

The pronounced interest in art, wonder, and the wondrous arts of representation within late Shakespearian drama reflects back upon the nature and composition of the plays themselves, their own artistry

and artifice and wonder-generating potential, whilst situations involving the reception of art, gestures of wonder at art, point in turn to the position and activity of the plays' actual audiences and readers, and the kind of forces at stake in the real-life aesthetic experience. The whole issue of reception is in fact made more-than-usually prominent over the course of the late plays by means of the various prologues, epilogues, and choruses that cut across the action. Figures like Gower and Time focus in the main on the development and treatment of the story within their respective plays, but the framing speeches in *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* concentrate at least as much on the commercial dimensions of the theatrical transaction, and the need to negotiate some sort of accommodation with their paying customers' expectations (and wallets). As they do so, they convey a certain ambivalence about the workings of the stage/audience relationship, acknowledging the role and importance of the audience on the one hand, revealing or relaying on the other a degree of anxiety at having to depend on its mutable co-operation and favour.[16] The parallels available between the art-works and related modes of display that appear within the dramatic narrative, however, and the medium that contains them, the plays' own status as fictional and theatrical constructs, release some rather more powerful, more far-reaching forms of unease here as well.

The kind of structural self-consciousness which the dramaturgy of the plays gives rise to, as I have already argued in relation to the ending of *Cymbeline*, allows the uncertainties and suspicions about the processes of art and display raised during the action to extend their frame of reference to take in the overall form of the plays themselves. One might say that the late plays distance themselves from their own surface aesthetic, that they create the conditions for interrogating the

extent to which they themselves are complicit in the vision they offer of art and wonder as wrapped up in the service of particular ends - as fulfilling fantasies and promulgating ideologies that all, in their own way, tend towards mystification and repression. It is also possible to detect here a certain suspicion of the need to fit in with the expectations and desires of an audience. Certainly, the plays manage to satirize on occasion the communal taste for (and ability to believe in) wonder and the exotic, and with it, the commercial value that such wonders command, the way they can be relied upon to sell.[17]

This sense of the commodification of wonder is made especially apparent during the brothel scenes in *Pericles*, where Marina is very much valued, spoken about, and advertised in terms of the exceptional aesthetic appeal she is felt to possess. The connection between art, wonder, and women that is strongly evident throughout the plays is thus explicitly linked to the realm of sexual objectification (and indeed, slavery), in a chain of associations that, in the context of the late plays as a group, finds its culmination in the disturbingly uninhibited imagery of the Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.[18] In the case of *Pericles*, the affinities that are suggested between art and prostitution, which already carry implications with regard to the trade that is theatre and the place of the stage in the early seventeenth century, are not just metaphorical. The commercial potential locked up in her artistic abilities is a major factor in enabling Marina to escape from the brothel (see Sc.19. 205-210). And though she gains lodging in what Gower refers to as an 'honest house', the income she generates through her various performances still goes to supply 'the cursèd Bawd' (Sc.20. 1-11).[19]

It is well known that images of performance and situations that mirror or parallel the theatrical process abound in late Shakespeare.

This internal emphasis on artistic and dramatic creation is matched at a structural level in the self-displaying virtuosity of the late plays, the way many of the more unusual aspects of their dramaturgy serve to highlight the artistic endeavour that lies behind them. One effect of this is to put form at the forefront of the dramatic experience. What to make of this insistent self-referentiality, however, has proved one of the major cruxes and stumbling-blocks of late play criticism. It has been variously viewed as simply parodic; as a means of intensifying effects and emotions; as a precautionary device designed to defuse scepticism before the audience's own incredulity kicks in; as a reflection of jaded tastes, a sign that the plays are catering for a coterie audience; as inherently inimical to wonder and aesthetic engagement; as a necessary adjunct to the evocation of extremes of wonder; as a straightforward error of judgement; and so on.[20] Part of the reason for the sheer range of responses here lies in the way this side of the plays' construction is of so little relevance to the dominant "Romance" model of reading. I set out the thinking behind my own approach to this topic in the following section. I start off from the premise, though, that, whatever else can be said about it, the self-reflexive nature of the dramaturgy of the late plays is a central element in the make-up and impact of these works, and most definitely not a failing or a feature that detracts from other aspects of their creation, that gets in the way of the wonder they are "really" trying to convey.

Dramaturgy, Ideology, Metadrama

Anyone looking to address the subject of late Shakespearian dramaturgy owes a primary debt to the work of Barbara Mowat, her innovative and

deservedly influential study, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* (1976). Mowat's book effectively lays the foundations for this entire topic, establishing its validity, and demonstrating its importance as a line of critical inquiry.[21]   I certainly regard myself as following along the same basic path that she sets down, despite the fact that her approach remains constrained by many of the interpretative paradigms I have deliberately sought to get away from.   Thus as her title makes clear, Mowat is happy to adopt the classification, "Romances", for the plays she discusses; and she also largely excludes from consideration *Pericles, Henry VIII,* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* (expressing regret only over the first of these), in her desire to deal exclusively with what she terms 'authentic Shakespearean strangeness'.[22]   But then Mowat was very much a pioneer in the field, taking on critical *bêtes noires* of her own, challenging a number of existing prejudices, and offering in the process some much-needed serious attention to *Cymbeline.*[23]   And the central tenet of her approach to the plays in question, that 'their meanings are absolutely contingent on their dramaturgy', is still one that, certain obvious problems aside, seems to me most appealing and appropriate.[24]

Particularly relevant to my own concerns is the chapter in which Mowat examines the obtrusive "dramatic tactics" of the "Romances", the way these plays so frequently, and so disconcertingly, lay bare the mechanics of their own construction.[25]   What she focuses on most of all here is the interplay between "representational" and "presentational" (roughly definable as "illusionistic" and "illusion-breaking") modes of drama, and the fluctuations in audience levels of emotional engagement and detachment to which this gives rise.[26]   For Mowat (and this is one prime aspect of the importance of her work), this interplay is a

thoroughly controlled and functional effect, part of a 'complex tactical dramaturgy', in which the audience is purposely 'repeatedly taken *in* and *out* of the illusion of reality'.[27] Central to this process is a deliberate and self-advertising use of archaic and seemingly naive "presentational" devices and techniques. In seeking to account for the specific impact of these, Mowat draws attention to the position of the "Romances" within a broad historical movement in English medieval and Renaissance drama (seen to be closely paralleled across the course of Shakespeare's own dramatic output prior to the late plays) away from an essentially presentational aesthetic format, towards a basically representational one - a movement characterized in simplistic terms as a progression from "telling" to "showing".[28] The picture is somewhat over-schematized for my taste (and Mowat underestimates the complexity and the degree of self-awareness in the treatment of "presentational" techniques in early Shakespearian drama), but the temporal factor it introduces is crucial. It is this which accounts for the old-fashioned, highly conventionalized feel of most of the presentational devices that appear in the late plays.[29]

Almost all of the elements in these texts that can be thought of as crude or theatrically outmoded fit comfortably into Mowat's category of presentational tactics. These include: expository soliloquies, dumb shows, awkward or peculiarly conspicuous asides, *deus ex machina* scenes and the stylized writing and old-fashioned verse-forms that tend to go with them, stock characterizations, "invisible" characters, obvious-but-impenetrable disguises, exit and "stand aside" requests, and 'obtrusive entrance announcements and doggerel exit signals'.[30] Mowat's brilliant analysis of *Cymbeline*, 1.5 - the sort of sequence long condemned out of hand by the critical tradition - shows how such "palpable devices" can

work together to produce some decidedly unusual effects.[31]   Set against the context of Shakespeare's personal stylistic development, and within what is (on the surface, at least) the broadly representational mode of the late plays, as Mowat herself emphasizes, the primitive devices and obsolete (or obsolescent) conventions concerned here can scarcely fail to come across, in some measure, as clumsy and disjunctive, if not regressive.   Valuable as Mowat's work in this area is, though, it is perhaps ultimately more successful in determining the nature of the plays' "presentational tactics" than in explaining their purpose, more useful for its focus on the insistent artifice of late Shakespearian drama than for its efforts to describe what this achieves.   So whilst the late plays are seen to display some strong anti-representational, anti-mimetic tendencies, these essentially just translate, for Mowat, into a new and more subtle mimesis, a dramaturgy which is, in the end, made to sound rather vague and banal, and surprisingly comfortable, in the way it conveys nothing more concrete or radical than 'a complex awareness of life', as it 'speaks directly to us about the strangeness of the world which we know through our own experience'.[32]

In a later chapter, Mowat extends her efforts to capture a precise sense of the distinctive nature of the "Romances" by relating them to the concept of "open form drama".   This is defined as:

> that drama in which cause-and-effect patterns are broken, generic conventions abandoned (and with them the easily established point of view, of attitude, that observance of generic conventions make [sic] possible), and the dramatic illusion repeatedly broken through narrative intrusion, spectacle, and other sudden disturbances of the aesthetic distance.[33]

Mowat's work in this area has more recently been extended by Boika Sokolova, in a study that offers a full-length, systematic application of Brechtian theory to the late plays.[34]   Sokolova takes as a starting-point

the evident similarities between the presentational devices that Mowat concentrates on, and Brecht's strategies of dramatic alienation and estrangement. One powerful justification for invoking Brechtian models in this context, as Sokolova herself observes, is the general influence of the conventions of the Elizabethan theatre - its non-illusionistic settings, unlocalized stage, informal and interactive characteristics, and so on - on Brecht's own formulation of his theory of epic drama.[35] But however much one feels that 'alienation strategies were part and parcel of the Elizabethan *conception* of drama', fundamental problems of anachronism arise in attempting to transfer Brechtian terminology and theory, with its specific twentieth-century political agenda, to late Shakespearian drama and the Jacobean world of the early seventeenth century.[36]

Sokolova gets round this situation in part by drawing on the work of Catherine Belsey, subsuming Mowat's notion of "open form drama" into Belsey's category of the "interrogative text" - the kind of text where, to quote Sokolova, 'the position of the author is difficult to locate, or ambivalent, or openly self-contradictory'.[37] Some of Belsey's own remarks make the connections involved here a little more explicit:

> if the interrogative text is illusionist it also tends to
> employ devices to undermine the illusion, to draw
> attention to its own textuality. The reader [sic] is
> distanced, at least from time to time, rather than wholly
> interpolated into a fictional world.[38]

Whilst I would not necessarily want to adopt for myself Belsey's choice of terminology, or go along with everything she has to say on this issue, her notion of the "interrogative text" clearly relates to my own sense that the late plays can be seen to interrogate the terms of both their own aesthetic and their political topicality.[39] Whatever the overall

usefulness of Belsey's classification, though, in the hands of Sokolova, it proves a relatively disappointing tool. Like Mowat, Sokolova ends up providing an interpretative framework that is rather more interesting than the interpretations she builds around it. Indeed, despite the expectations that her model sets up, she is oddly reluctant to attribute any great interrogative power to the plays themselves, or, for that matter, to their dramaturgy.[40] What she does introduce unequivocally into the debate, however, and what is entirely absent from Mowat's approach, and from "Romance"-style criticism in general, is an emphasis on ideology and the late plays' potential for ideological disruption. To quote Belsey again:

> the world represented in the interrogative text includes what Althusser calls 'an internal distance' from the ideology in which it is held, which permits the reader to construct from within the text a critique of this ideology.[41]

I have already had cause to introduce the notion of ideology into my own discussion on a number of occasions. It is time now, though, to address the issue in a little more detail, not least in order to explain my own use and understanding of the term. One powerful reason for the need for some such explanation is the fluid and multivalent nature of ideology itself. As Terry Eagleton observes, at the start of his excellent introduction to the subject, 'nobody has yet come up with a single adequate definition of ideology'. Eagleton himself goes on to list some sixteen definitions and formulations 'currently in circulation'.[42] Not all of these are mutually compatible or equally far-reaching in intent, but the instability in meaning they attest to, and the scope for disagreement this creates, give rise to some definite practical difficulties and disadvantages. These are hardly sufficient, however, to invalidate ideology as a concept, or to render it unuseful or unworkable. And in

many ways, the question of a precise definition is not as important here as it might appear.[43] In view of its nature, a certain flexibility in the treatment and understanding of ideology seems entirely appropriate. Indeed, one big factor behind the hostility and entrenched oppositions that have characterized critical debate in this area within Shakespeare studies in recent years is the adoption (on either side of the argument) of overly rigid and one-dimensional notions of ideology.[44] With this in mind, I begin from the position that ideology is best conceived of broadly, as a system or complex of varying effects operating within discursive practices and the human social field, which do not admit of easy summary, but about which one can make a number of specific and pertinent observations.[45] All I really try to do below is set out the most relevant usages and aspects of ideology as far as my own work is concerned.

In the first place, of course, there is the day-to-day (frequently pejorative) use of the term to describe 'a body of ideas characteristic of a particular social group or class', or of a specific political, cultural, or socio-economic theory or belief-system.[46] Then, at a more restricted level, ideology is associated with those 'ideas which help to legitimate a dominant political power', and particularly, wherever such a power is perceived to be unsatisfactory, undesirable, or pernicious, with oppressive and coercively normative values, hegemonic discourses of class, gender, race, religion, and so forth.[47] One can move on from here, and the area of identifiable individual *ideologies*, to the more sweeping basic Althusserian principle that ideology is 'a matter of the *lived* relation between men [sic] and their world'.[48] In Althusser's work, ideology emerges as directed primarily at the unconscious, as a realm of *affect* generated by the various (repressive and ideological)

apparatuses of the state. Its strength is such, moreover, that we are all situated "in" ideology, constructed, conditioned, and subjected by its many operations.[49] And it is clearly the case that one is always liable to be (and I inevitably will have been in places) deceived by aspects of one's personal inscription within ideology, unaware as to the total nature and impact of all one's own ideological predilections and predispositions.[50] But despite the crucial importance of Althusser's arguments, there are serious problems with his overall position, and I go along with most of the typical objections that have been raised about his work. In particular, Althusser seems ultimately to collapse ideology back into a single dominant (and institutionalized) form, which is in turn presented pretty much as a systematized absolute, a coherent whole, leaving little room for resistance or critique.[51]

The main force of my own emphasis is directed towards ideology as a domain of experience, a distorting and powerful (although by no means necessarily predominant or irresistible) influence on discourse and language use, perception and interpretation, apprehension, behaviour, consciousness, and so on. Perhaps the best way at this point to pin down any further what I mean by ideology is to invoke a number of existing descriptions and characterizations, all of which capture a part of the image that I have in mind, without in themselves expressing the full picture. Thus ideology 'goes to work on the "real" situation in transformative ways'.[52] It 'often or typically involves falsity, distortion and mystification'.[53] It represents 'a type of distorted communication that nevertheless has a functional equivalence to truth'.[54] Ideologies in general 'deny contradictions, seek to make the historical natural, and work to reproduce social formations'.[55] They 'present as obvious, simple, and universal – as reality itself – what is peculiar, complex, and

historically and socially specific'.[56]   In this respect in particular,

ideology is closely connected to Roland Barthes's notion of myth, the

central principle of which is that 'it transforms history into nature'.[57]

And also relevant in this context are Pierre Bourdieu's concepts of *doxa*

and *habitus*, the former referring to the largely unstated, unchallenged

assumptions and traditions that form the bedrock of a social order, the

latter, to the ingrained, often unconscious attitudes and beliefs that

regulate social and cultural behaviour, and provide a shared model for

dealing with and interpreting experience.[58]

Ideology, then, can profitably be described as having much to do

with mystification and naturalization, not to mention a host of other

similar activities and procedures.[59]   At the same time, though, it is

also, to quote Eagleton again, 'a matter of "discourse" rather than of

"language" – of certain concrete discursive effects, rather than of

signification as such'. Or put in another way, 'ideology is a function

of the relation of an utterance to its social context'.[60]   It is thus

very much linked to the performative, suasive, and coercive dimensions

of language use, those aspects of communication that go beyond mere

content, and in which truth and truth values (though not necessarily

the appearance of truth, the claim to truth) are not really of primary

significance.[61]   Indeed, ideology can be thought of as the realm of

ideas and beliefs, interests and convictions, that systematically distort

or impede efforts to arrive at (or make progress towards) the truth of

a given situation. It deceives and desensitizes, obscures false logic

in the production of meaning from events and propositions, works to

bypass the limitations in knowledge and perception that get in the way

of achieving properly definitive conclusions, and helps make dubious

propositions appear real and convincing. In addition, it tends to reveal

itself in the gaps and contradictions that show up between word and action, principle and practice, what is said and what is done. All this points in turn to the pivotal pressure ideology exerts on the sphere of representation (the aesthetic, spectacle, narrative and history, gender, images of the "natural", etc.).[62] And following on from this, in what perhaps is the fundamental issue in terms of my own approach, a major target or destination of all ideology is interpretation, the whole arena of the construal/construction of meaning.[63]

One of the most obvious ways in which ideological concerns are of relevance to late Shakespeare has to do with the Jacobean topicality of the plays themselves, the way they are located - the way their action and language serves to locate them - within contemporary cultural and political contexts. The treatment of Jacobean propaganda and myth, the ruling ideology of the times, however, always seems to me ambivalent (or designed to leave room for ambivalence), and in responding to this side of the plays' dramaturgy, I go along with David Norbrook's nicely understated observation that 'there is no need for twentieth-century readings to be more royalist than the King's Men'.[64] It is important to note as well that the political divides and fissures that can be detected in this period are apparent not only in Jacobean society at large, but also within the ruling class and the multiple apparatuses of the state. They even extend, crucially, to the Royal Family. Thus the earlier late plays coincide with the growing power and political activity of Prince Henry, and the developing gulf between the policies of the Prince and his household and those of the King and Court. Then, by the time of *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, this particular power struggle has given way to the complex effects of the Prince's early death, and the scope for mourning and regret which this brought with

it. Just as the critical tradition has managed to translate the late plays into straightforward tributes to King James, so too has it come up with idealizing readings that treat Henry as the implicit hero of these works. I would want to argue (once again) that what is going on here is not so much tribute or flattery, but reaction and analysis, accompanied by a large degree of scepticism regarding the ideological strategies associated with power and the pursuit of power.[65]

This is not, in the end, though, a thesis all that concerned with the original political topicality of the late plays, still less one that attempts to address their direct relation to the day-to-day interests and intrigues of the Jacobean court or the wider social scene.[66] My own interest in the political and the ideological involves a much more generalized focus on situations that seem to exemplify the workings of ideology, that connect to aspects of human behaviour, experience, and political activity that are not just confined to the specifics of a historical moment, but in many respects still ongoing and current. I have certainly felt it important to attend to the plays' intersections (both explicit and implicit) with some of the more prominent events, concerns, and discourses of the Jacobean world. And as I have been stressing throughout, the political environment of the period lends specific ideological valencies to many key elements and themes within the late plays, including most of those central to the "Romance" model of reading - romance itself, wonder, family relationships, providence, to name just a few.[67] But the fact that such features have a strongly political dimension to them is, in a sense, already perceptible from the manner in which they function within the fictional worlds which the plays create. And it is the relevance of ideology to this side of the dramatic action that I have primarily sought to address - the way

in particular in which the processes and treatment of interpretation, spectacle, and report give rise to a whole series of effects that fit in with the characteristics and operations I have been highlighting here, and that can therefore appropriately be identified, from a modern perspective at least, as ideological.[68]

For me, the concept of ideology offers the best means of getting to grips with certain central elements in the on-stage representation of social structures and interpretative practices in the late plays. What I want to emphasize alongside it at this point (and I see the two issues as very much complementary) is the notion of metadrama – or at least, specific aspects of it. I introduce this latter topic with some hesitation, however, since "metadrama" itself is another problematic term, with a number of associations that have little relevance to my own approach. A good basic definition, reflecting the range of meaning I have in mind, is provided by Chris Baldick, for whom "metadrama" (or "metatheatre") refers to 'drama about drama, or any moment of self-consciousness by which a play draws attention to its own fictional status as a theatrical pretence'.[69] I would also invoke the usage of "metadrama" advocated by Jean-Pierre Maquerlot, 'to designate all forms of playing within the *play-text* that call attention to the dramatic and theatrical codes subsuming the dramatic fiction'.[70] Understood in these terms, the idea of metadrama serves as a useful way of drawing together most of the facets of the plays' dramaturgy already focused on above, or given prominence by the likes of Mowat and Sokolova – "presentational" tactics, alienation effects, interrogative tendencies, deliberate archaism, the obtruding of conventions, and so on.

In a sense, of course, as Michael Mooney has observed, "metadrama" is something of a misnomer as a description for such techniques, since

'everything that occurs on stage *is* part of the drama'; there is nothing about any of the effects I am concerned with that literally takes place "beyond" the realm of the dramatic.[71] What is at stake here, rather – and the dimension of performance is crucial to this whole process – is more in the nature of an extra layer of awareness, an additional focus for responses, beyond that needed for the drama to function adequately, and over and above the arena of aesthetic appreciation *per se.* Having defended the relevance of "metadrama" in this respect, however, I would nevertheless note that the concept does not quite take in the full range of the self-referentiality of the late plays, which extends not only to their status as dramatic constructs, but also (and this has received a lot less critical attention) to their overall narrative construction, the organization of the fiction/story, and the codes and conventions which this follows. This ingredient in the "dramaturgy" of late Shakespeare seems best addressed in this context via the notion of metafiction. In the definition supplied by Patricia Waugh (speaking specifically with regard to 'novelistic practice'), this refers to the type of narrative 'which consistently displays its conventionality, which explicitly and overtly lays bare its condition of artifice, and which thereby explores the problematic relationship between life and fiction'.[72] Waugh's work is particularly useful to me for the links it identifies between this sort of artistic self-consciousness and the Russian Formalist theory of "defamiliarization" ("*ostranenie*"), with its emphasis on estrangement and the challenging of expectations, and its powerful conception of the renewal of perception as a principal function of all art.[73]

The idea of defamiliarization has a certain obvious significance in relation to the late plays, with their recurring interest in issues of perception and interpretation, repeated oppositions between showing

and telling, constant foregrounding of different modes of communication, abrupt changes of mood and shifts of technique, and, for that matter, ostentatious verbal and poetic experimentation and complexity. Still more importantly, the sense it brings with it of making strange the accepted and the conventional, of seeing anew (or even through) the familiar, connects very closely to the activities of exposing the codes and laying bare the device that I have been trying to draw attention to all along.[74] More than anything, it is these parallels within the processes of pointing up the artifices of construction - at the level of form, of politics and history, or in terms of the production of meaning and the formulation of ideas - that link together my three main areas of interest, dramaturgy, ideology, and interpretation. And this association, in turn, is what lends a cutting edge to the self-conscious artistry of the late plays, is what makes it something more than just a means of preventing audience over-engagement, pre-empting anxieties about narrative improbabilities, or introducing variations on the ubiquitous "world-as-stage" motif. It functions instead, I would argue, more as a principle of estrangement or distancing device - not one, however, that is geared towards mocking the experiences of the individual characters, or to lessening the value of their (or the audience's) emotional responses; but rather, that brings to the surface, that insistently renders visible, the forms and structures underpinning both the dramatic narrative itself, and also action and behaviour, interpretation and understanding, within the world of the fiction.[75] The connection between ideology and metadrama that emerges from all this helps to highlight the crucial (and very often neglected) third element in the standard Shakespearian "appearance and reality" theme that is so prominent across all of the late plays (and in much of the commentary on them), that is to say, the realm of representation.

Approaching the dramaturgy of late Shakespeare from the direction of such modern formulations as ideology, defamiliarization, metadrama, and so on, brings to mind Terry Eagleton's wry observation that,

> though conclusive evidence is hard to come by, it is difficult to read Shakespeare without feeling that he was almost certainly familiar with the writings of Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Wittgenstein and Derrida.[76]

It is worth stressing, therefore, that the kind of self-referential techniques that can be found in the late plays have plenty of parallels in the art and literature of Shakespeare's own time.[77] Some of the best commentary in this area addresses the plays in terms of Renaissance art theory, and, in particular, the mannerist tradition in painting, with its characteristic use of framing devices and explicit interest in modes of illusion and the subject of perspective. Such an approach gains encouragement from the many references in the late plays to the realm of the visual arts, including, most obviously, the Third Gentleman's powerfully allusive comment concerning 'that rare Italian master Giulio Romano' (*The Winter's Tale*, 5.2. 96).[78] But the effects involved here also have their precedent in the dramatic tradition (going right back to the medieval period), not least in the "presentational" tactics and forms of commentary and direct address (and the alternative perspectives these set up) associated with the sphere of "popular" dramaturgy - the sort of features Robert Weimann is referring to when he speaks of 'the extradramatic dimension of the *platea* tradition'.[79] In this respect, the self-referentiality of the late plays is yet another manifestation of their strong backward-looking dimension. This retrospective focus, though, is much more than a wistful harking back to a lost aesthetic. As John Cox has observed, such a turning towards the past at the level of dramaturgy conflicts strikingly with the "ruling taste" of the age.[80]

And the implications of this are especially significant when it comes to the two aspects of the plays' dramaturgy I shall be concentrating on from this point forward, on-stage spectacle and reported action.

Spectacle and Report

According to Cox, 'Shakespeare's interest in archaic dramaturgy flies in the face of the Jacobean penchant for "correct" standards in drama'. Moreover, whilst Shakespeare's dramaturgy in general can be said to be 'conservative [. . .] because of its archaism', such archaism 'stands in opposition to new forms of power and in that regard can arguably be called subversive'.[81] Thus the late plays find a way of resisting Jacobean strategies and images of power, and of 'qualifying privilege', by 'evoking an archaic dramatic tradition that had conceived of kings as human beings, not gods'.[82] The sense of stripping away the mystique, of desacralization even, that Cox identifies here, applies in relation not only to the figure of the monarch, but to the trappings of monarchy as well. And with their habit of calling attention to the techniques and artifices of presentation and of emphasizing the mechanics of their own construction, an element of demystification is also very much part and parcel of the plays' treatment of spectacle and reported action. This parallel becomes especially telling wherever spectacle and report intersect (as they often do) with the representation and validation of monarchical power within the world of the fiction – wherever they are employed to bolster its authority or fuel its processes of image-making and mythification.

The use of medieval-style dramaturgical techniques is one factor that sets the late plays apart from most of their contemporary drama,

including the tragicomedies of the "Beaumont-and-Fletcher" canon.[83] In ignoring prevailing notions of appropriate aesthetic form in this way, the late plays also offer a challenge to certain standard attitudes and assumptions linking aesthetic ideals to images of proper social order and decorum. Something of this challenge is reflected in the plays' reception history, where the more seemingly primitive aspects of their dramaturgy have long served as a focus for critical dissatisfaction. That dissatisfaction has regularly extended besides to the realms of report and spectacle, though here it is less a matter of a reaction against archaic techniques as such, and more a general sense that the features concerned are aesthetically undesirable - overly crude and simplistic, unsophisticated or incompetent, badly undramatic on the one hand, and on the other, nothing more than mere show. This sort of antagonistic commentary takes on, at times, a distinctly moralistic or patrician tone, which blurs the boundaries between aesthetic and social values (it is almost a question of etiquette), and suggests that what late Shakespeare is really being taken to task for in all this is a lack of the requisite level of refinement - from a social as well as an aesthetic perspective.[84] A better way of approaching the situation, it seems to me, is to recognize that the late plays are happy to resist aesthetic norms and expectations where necessary, that they are not afraid to offend against ruling tastes and prescribed style, to disrupt their own surface form and compromise their own aesthetic purity, in order to achieve a desired effect or an extra complexity of vision.[85]

The idea of disruption, of disturbing the flow of the drama, can certainly be applied in relation to spectacle and report in the late plays.[86] Many of the effects involved here - masques, dances, dumb-shows, processions, vision scenes, formal rituals, choruses, set-piece

messenger speeches and other extended descriptions, etc. – do clearly
have a tendency to stand apart from the main body of the action. With
this in mind, I want to turn at this point to Francis Berry's work on
the late plays, and particularly his notion of dramatic "insets".[87] These
constitute incidents or events, generally involving elements of report
and/or spectacle, that are somehow marked off from the drama's principal
time-frame or plane of reality, that obtrude or are recessed back from
the ordinary "here and now" of the fictional world.[88] Berry himself
largely concentrates on narrative insets, situations 'where the imagined
spectacle is at odds with the actual spectacle', or in which narrative
retrospection leads away from the imagined "present" of the on-stage
moment, creating a sense of 'a break from the dramatic *now*'.[89] But in
the late plays, examples of both report and spectacle regularly take the
form of "insets". And such insets are in turn a reflection of wider
thematic concerns, an ongoing interaction and juxtaposition of spectacle
and report that gives rise to a whole range of contrasts and oppositions,
highlighted by Berry, between the likes of foreground and background,
drama and narrative, "here" and "there", "now" and "then", showing
and telling, sight and sound, word and picture, and so on.[90] It is this
that brings the problematics of interpretation and representation and
issues of ideology and epistemology to the forefront of the dramatic
experience. Precise effects depend on the specifics of the individual
situation, and it is dangerous to over-generalize. It is still possible,
however, to identify a few basic characteristics of spectacle and
reported action as they appear in the late plays, and that is what I
want to try to do next, beginning with the former.

*

There is a real and important sense in which all drama (or at least, all drama with a visual component) can be said to be "spectacle". This may seem a hopelessly generalized position from which to set out, but in many respects it is historically quite apposite. As Stephen Orgel remarks, in the view of Renaissance theorists, 'the *mode of expression*, or the *means* of drama, was spectacle', and 'they included in the term *spectacle* everything one saw on the stage, from the mere appearance of the characters to the most elaborate kinds of scenic machinery'.[91] Not surprisingly, though, I am looking to focus on something rather more tangible than the visual dimension of drama *per se*, what can perhaps best be described as moments of significantly heightened spectacle. The late plays contain a rich diversity of this sort of material, which can be divided up across a variety of headings: courtly, political, ceremonial, chivalric, religious, supernatural, theatrical, artistic, carnivalesque, and no doubt one or two others as well.[92] Almost all the actions concerned fall within the rubric of the "show-within-the-show", gaining a particular metadramatic resonance from their position within the wider theatrical performance. They also tend to draw attention to the mechanics of their theatrical realization and their nature as "staged" events, emphasizing their own artifice in a way that highlights their function within the world of the fiction, or resonates powerfully in relation to parallel effects in the culture at large.

Elaborate on-stage spectacles and inset shows can be found right across the Shakespeare canon, but the best-known example of the form, the "play-within-the-play", is only tangentially present in the late plays, in the shape of the masque in *The Tempest*.[93] With many of the other spectacular actions on display, the spoken word is either completely absent or reduced to just one relatively minor component within a much

broader stage presentation. Or if specifically linguistic communication does have a significant role to play, this is often conducted at the level of texts (letters, inscriptions, tablets, etc.) that are seen to be read by the characters themselves, aloud or in silence.[94] In any case, at least as much demand is placed on an audience's visual perception as on its verbal awareness.[95] There is a clear connection here to Francis Berry's sense of a thematic opposition within late Shakespeare between sight and sound, showing and telling, word and picture, but it is worth remembering that few of the plays' inset spectacles, including those totally lacking in words, will prove literally silent in performance. For one thing, there is the basic practical consideration that, even during dumbshows, there is always going to be some noise made by the actors in their movement around the stage. More importantly, the spectacles of the late plays regularly call for some form of musical accompaniment or other (at times elaborate) sound effects.[96] Any perceptual contrast involved, therefore, would seem to be more one between the spoken word and alternative modes of communication or of transmitting/receiving information - whether aural (music, noise, coded sounds, even silence), or visual (the written/printed/inscribed word, statues, emblems, ritual actions, tableaux, costumes, gestures, and so on).

Dramatic components such as these tend not to translate well to the printed page, and, it must be acknowledged, can easily get passed over during reading or critical analysis. It is also fair to say that they have been generally underappreciated and poorly dealt with by a primarily literary-oriented critical tradition. This is, in part, a reflection of the fact that spectacle can only ever be fully present in performance, and is thus an even less stable element in the history of a play's transmission than the spoken dialogue. But it has a lot to do, too, with the way

spectacle has long been regarded, in a line of thought going right back to Aristotle, as decidedly the least important of the major components of theatre, mere show, on a lower aesthetic plane than the other essential characteristics of the drama.[97] Within the field of Shakespeare studies, extended spectacular effects have almost traditionally been treated with suspicion, and not infrequently condemned or written off (especially by anyone searching for a "pure" reading experience) as a regrettable manifestation of the contaminating influence of the theatre, an aspect of the plays far too disturbingly particularized in the actuality of performance. Indeed, the inclusion of a large amount of spectacle has routinely been seen as a mark of inferiority, a sign (for Shakespeare) of a descent to the level of "popular" taste.[98] Attitudes of this sort have had an especially powerful, and wholly deleterious, impact on the reception of *Henry VIII*, where elaborate spectacle is of course one of the most distinctive features in the play's entire dramaturgy.[99]

The low critical esteem in which spectacle has often been held may be a reflection of a questionable Aristotelian aesthetic hierarchy or certain well-known anti-theatrical prejudices, but it has other sides to it as well. This is true even in the case of *Henry VIII*. Here, it seems clear that spectacle has served as a kind of symbol or shorthand for all the "Fletcherian" features that have been felt to tarnish the play, or all the murky areas of history, politics, and topicality that Shakespearian drama is still widely supposed to transcend. Yet the suspicion of spectacle that has characterized commentary on this work can also to some extent be seen as a justifiable reaction against its theatrical treatment in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the way *Henry VIII* was made a vehicle for some of the more overblown excesses of Victorian spectacular theatre. The aesthetic evinced by such an

approach, with its heavy emphasis on precise historical verisimilitude and valorization of spectacle largely in-and-for-itself, is a long way away from the nature and spirit of the Renaissance stage, and seems to me to have little to do with the actual function or purpose of spectacle in the late plays, including in a work like *Henry VIII*.[100] One thing that it does connect to in the present context, however, is another potentially valid source of opposition to (or anxiety regarding) elaborate on-stage spectacle, what can easily be dismissed as puritanical, but may well at times be socially or politically responsible objections to the financial outlay involved in the creation of visually stunning display in what is, after all, only a form of public entertainment.

It has long been recognized that the late plays are unusually full of spectacle. One seemingly obvious indication of this is the fact that theatrical spectacle is rendered a very "visible" presence in the texts of the plays themselves, which (with the notable exception of *The Winter's Tale*) all contain a number of elaborate stage directions, of a sort not generally found in the rest of the Shakespeare canon.[101] The evidence afforded by these directions is not as immediately clearcut as it might appear, however, and their origin, significance, and purpose all present problems, and have been much discussed. Their existence certainly helps make an awareness of spectacle an uncommonly prominent element in the reading experience, but whether this reflects a parallel prominence of spectacular action in the plays as they were first performed, or is more just a side-effect of some peculiarity in their transmission or composition, is in some ways open to question. Without getting involved in all the details of the situation, I would note that the spectacle of the late plays is matched in part in such "later" tragedies as *Macbeth*, *Coriolanus*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, and that it links back especially

(in another of those retrospective gestures so characteristic of late Shakespeare) to some of the earliest works in the dramatist's oeuvre, the *Henry VI* plays and *Titus Andronicus*. Having said this, though, there seems no real reason to deny that the stage directions of the early printed texts do encapsulate a central and distinctive aspect of late Shakespearian dramaturgy – an emphasis on spectacle that is not just carried on in extended visual effects, but played out throughout in a wider thematic, an interest in shows and displays, costume and disguise, watching and seeing, emblems and signs, that is built into the language of the plays and embodied in the very structure of their plots.[102]

Spectacle, even in its form as stage directions, points beyond the printed page to the actualities of performance, but there is a strong sense, too, in which it leads on beyond the stage to the wider world outside. The spectacles of the late plays draw upon and evoke all sorts of shows and ceremonies from their contemporary culture: civic pageants, courts masques, religious rites, public celebrations, folk rituals, country customs, carnival, even the chivalric revival.[103] In this respect, and perhaps more than any other element in the dramatic action, spectacle might be said to ground the theatre in the external realities of history. Inevitably, though, prevailing interpretative paradigms and the choice of texts generally admitted to the group have had a heavy influence on which types of spectacle critics have concentrated on, and which areas of meaning have been most explored. A lot of the commentary on this topic has been rather narrowly metadramatic in its emphasis, finding in the intrinsic transitoriness and theatricality of spectacle something of a metaphor for the human condition – along the lines of, and often taking as a principal focus, Prospero's "revels" speech (*The Tempest*, 4.1. 146-163), with its evocative reflections on the vanished masque.[104]

Including *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* amongst the late plays, however, enhances the possibilities for quite a different approach. The latter work, for instance, especially concerned with rites and ceremonies associated with popular culture and the chivalric tradition, points to some of the social (and class) ramifications of spectacle and display; and the former brings to the fore the political dimensions of spectacle, its location within history, and its role in the propagation of political power and authority. This last aspect in particular has some telling implications for the treatment of spectacle elsewhere in late Shakespeare, in the dramatized "histories", say, of the worlds of *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*.

In this connection, I want to turn at this point to the key New Historicist themes of the politics of spectacle and the theatricality of power.[105] Of crucial importance here is the significantly "theatrical" character of Tudor and Stuart monarchy, the way spectacle and display were used in the service of the state, in effect as authorizing tools, to construct and disseminate images of royal power and magnificence. In the words of David Scott Kastan, 'a spectacular sovereignty works to subject its audience to - and through - the royal power on display, captivating, in several senses, its onlookers'.[106] It is a process in which awe and wonder play a considerable part. From one perspective, this sense of display as a form or expression of power leads on to the standard containment-model position articulated by Leonard Tennenhouse: 'stagecraft collaborates with statecraft in producing spectacles of power'.[107] But the self-conscious theatricality of the late plays does much to expose the performative nature and intrinsic artifice of the political spectacles they present. And the interrogation and dispersal of wonder I have been arguing for suggests a dramaturgy rather at odds

with the governing project of the state's spectacles of power. From this perspective, the relationship between stagecraft and statecraft in late Shakespeare appears anything but a matter of straightforward "collaboration". In any case, the theatre's ability to reproduce the trappings and spectacles of state in itself calls into question the mystery and authority of the real thing. The on-stage 'counterfeit of royalty', to quote Kastan again, 'raises the possibility that royalty is a counterfeit'.[108] The destabilizing force of that possibility links in to other aspects of the theatre of the time and the social energies surrounding it: the well-known anxieties provoked by the drama, the ambiguous social status of the actors, the inherent proteanism of performance. This last factor in particular, in implicit challenge to essentializing notions of stable social order and degree, allowed for a relatively untrammelled crossing of social and class boundaries in performance – a situation perhaps made especially evident in the plays' original cultural context through one very visible and highly socially resonant element in their overall "spectacle", costume.[109]

Many of the forces and anxieties concerned here come together in one of the most famous pieces of external documentation associated with the late plays, Henry Wotton's description of the burning of the Globe Theatre in June 1613. According to Wotton:

> the Kings Players had a new Play, called *All is true*, representing some principall pieces of the raign of *Henry* 8. which was set forth with many extraordinary circumstances of Pomp and Majesty, even to the matting of the stage; the Knights of the Order, with their Georges and Garter, the Guards with their embroidered Coats, and the like: sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous. Now, King *Henry* making a Masque at the Cardinal *Wolsey*'s house, and certain Chambers being shot off at his entry, some of the paper, or other stuff wherewith one of them was stopped, did light on the thatch, where being thought at first but an idle smoak, and their

> eyes more attentive to the show, it kindled inwardly,
> and ran round like a train, consuming within less then
> an hour the whole house to the very grounds.[110]

The fire itself provides a telling illustration of the kind of impact theatrical spectacle (or its attendant effects) can have on the material world. It seems, though, that, for Wotton, it is the very splendour of the spectacle on display that is a source, or at least a site, of unease. The process of reproducing, of accurately mimicking, the panoply and pomp of the state is evidently being viewed here with a keen sense of its charged political nature, if not downright suspicion. It is tempting to see too a rather moralistic satisfaction on Wotton's part in the way it is attentiveness to the "show" that causes the fire to be ignored or underestimated until it is too late. But above all, what Wotton appears to register in this brief account is the extent to which, in the theatre, all the symbols and trappings of majesty and "greatness" are subject to appropriation and representation (duplication), and in being so subject, are laid open to demystification. As Orgel points out, 'theatrical pageantry, the miming of greatness, is highly charged because it employs precisely the same methods the crown was using to assert and validate its authority'.[111] The metatheatricality of the late plays, moreover, their insistently self-displaying dramaturgy, lays bare the artifice involved in the production of that spectacle, and indeed, I would suggest, through the same sort of emphasis, renders suspect the "authority" of spectacle in general - political, theatrical, supernatural, and so on.

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In many respects, narrated or reported action might be said to be the very antithesis of elaborate spectacle. Where the latter is dynamic,

dramatic, intensely and often stunningly visual, first and foremost an effect of the theatrical "now", the former can be thought of as static, descriptive, primarily verbal, typically concerned with the events of a different time, a different place, seemingly almost better suited to the page than the stage. Nevertheless, spectacle and report are linked in a number of ways, not least through their very opposition, as two sides of the same coin, reflecting the two basic alternatives available in the presentation of material in the theatre, what one critic refers to as 'the playwright's eternal choice' of whether to 'show or tell'.[112] Report is also regularly used to describe or "present" spectacles that, for one reason or another, are not being shown on the stage. And a further connection is provided by the strongly negative criticism both have tended to attract. Of the two, this has possibly been even harsher and more damaging in the case of the realm of narrative and report. Whilst elaborate spectacle has generally come under attack for being, so to speak, too "theatrical", extended narrative effects have been condemned as rather more fundamentally out of place and inappropriate - not simply undramatic, but more or less intrinsically anti-dramatic.

The disparagement of reported action and on-stage narration as elements of the drama may not be traceable back to Aristotle, but it has venerable roots within Shakespeare studies, not least in the figure of Dr Johnson. Criticizing Shakespeare's own efforts in this area as particularly overblown and long-winded, Johnson argued that 'narration in dramatick poetry is naturally tedious, as it is unanimated and inactive, and obstructs the progress of the action'.[113] Rawdon Wilson, in an important study of narrative and narration in the Shakespeare canon, identifies Johnson's opinions here as the start of a tradition in Shakespeare criticism, an early manifestation of

a perspective, now integral to the ideology of orthodox
Shakespearean studies, that sees drama as superior to
narrative. It is more active, more virile one suspects,
and altogether more exciting.[114]

A powerful adjunct to this position has been a view of reported action

and internal narration as essentially primitive and inept, makeshift

devices used to paper over cracks in the story, to pass over quickly

material in which the dramatist is not really interested, to squeeze into

the confines of the play events integral to the plot that simply cannot

be shown on stage. Especially heavy criticism has been reserved in

this context for expository soliloquies and other similar forms of plot

explanation, the sort of situation in which characters hear or relate

information they themselves must know only too well, or tell and get

told things for the first time at just the right moment for the audience

to be able to listen in.[115] Report has also consistently been thought

of as a kind of stopgap technique, a desperate last resort, associated

with sudden changes of plan at the level of composition, or unforeseen

problems arising during the theatrical process. Alongside the basic

critical preference for "showing" over "telling", a dominant influence

in all this has been the widespread feeling that extended narrative

effects are a result, above all, of the fundamental scenic limitations of

the Shakespearian stage.

These last two attitudes, long endemic in critical commentary in

this area, are already evident in one of the earliest specific studies of

the subject, Nikolaus Delius's 'On Shakspere's Use of Narration in his

Dramas', from 1876. Delius defines his topic here as 'all those passages

in which the poet, through the mouth of a character, merely narrates or

describes what might have been scenically represented to the audience',

and immediately, the little adverb, "merely", sets up a hierarchy in which

narration/description is only ever going to be seen as a poor substitute for actual representation.[116] He goes on to argue:

> the causes which lead the poet thus to describe instead of dramatize, are as various as his procedure, and were no less determined by the nature of the stage properties in his days, and the necessities of the theatre, than by the artistic plan and performance from the poet's point of view.[117]

The trouble with this approach is not the emphasis it places on the influence on Shakespeare's dramaturgy of the demands and practicalities of the Elizabethan theatre. Rather, it is the opposition or tension it implies between the capabilities of that theatre and the art of the "poet". Reflected in this is another standard critical assumption, the notion that the use of internal narration and reported action is often determined by factors that have nothing to do with the artistic design, even, in a more extreme form, that the presence of narrative and report serves only to impede or compromise the overall aesthetic project.[118] When it comes to late Shakespeare, though, the range and complexity of the spectacular actions that are actually shown to the audience pretty much belies the idea of a dramaturgy significantly constrained by the limited stage and theatrical resources at its disposal.[119] And this in turn suggests that the choice of whether to show or relate (or indeed, show *and* relate) in these plays is directed primarily by the different effects the different modes of presentation have or make possible. I would argue besides that, far from being some sort of unfortunate or unavoidable drawback of the bare-stage theatre, narrative and report belong amongst its most interesting and important techniques.[120]

The non-illusionistic nature of the drama with respect to scene and location has the effect of making report (in a general sense of the term) to a large extent responsible for determining what (and where) the

stage is supposed to represent at any given point in the action. What characters say or convey about the situation around them has a major part to play in constructing the scenario which the audience is asked to imagine.[121] The flexibility of representation that accompanies the use of non-localized settings here means the "reality" of the on-stage image is constantly open to adjustment through language. Significant disjunctions can emerge too between the actions and events on display and what the audience hears tell about them.[122] In late Shakespeare especially, no easy relationship exists between sight and sound, word and deed, what is said and what is shown. The thematic concerns that arise from all this relate to the well-known Shakespearian interest in the role of the audience's imagination in piecing out the details of the fiction from the "imperfections" of the theatrical presentation. Perhaps even more to the fore in the late plays, though (in conjunction with their parallel exploration of the power of spectacle), is an interest in the illusion-making properties of language, as reflected in particular in the practices and processes of narrative and report.[123]

Whilst it is possible to speak of "report" as encompassing each and every reference, no matter how brief or trivial, by the figures on stage to the world around them and the details of its "history" and proceedings, any comment, description, rumour, observation, or piece of information they pass on, I am primarily interested, as in the case of spectacle, with the more extended examples of the form, the lengthy internal narratives, set-piece descriptions, and sequences of reported action that are so unusually prominent throughout late Shakespearian drama. The variety of terms just invoked gives an indication of the difficulty of coming up with any single description that takes in the full range of the effects I have in mind here. "Narrative", with its obvious

potential for confusion with the overall narrative/story each of the individual plays has to tell, and its connections in critical discourse with novelistic practice and the realm of narrative theory, is inevitably something of a problem in this context.[124] "Reported action" is a useful alternative in this respect, especially for the sense of an active/dramatic dimension it brings with it, but its value to me is compromised a little by the narrowly technical meaning it is sometimes invested with, to denote that action which is only portrayed through description, and not shown at all on the stage.[125] The shorthand term, "report", my own basic preference, effectively gets around this issue, since there seems no reason why it cannot be applied to speeches that recount events which the audience *is* made a witness to – events that as a consequence (in a technique highly characteristic of the late plays) are presented in the theatre in two (or more) different ways. And with its lack of any explicit reference to the notion of "action", "report" feels a more appropriate term too when it comes to the largely descriptive accounts of people and places that also go to make up a significant part of the plays' processes of telling and re-telling.[126]

In the end, though, it is hard to escape entirely from some use of the word "narrative" here. For one thing, alongside the various feats of telling and re-telling they contain, the late plays also include one or two important examples of prophecy, efforts at "fore-telling". Where that foretelling relates to events already in the past for the plays' original audiences, or whose outcome is otherwise known, it can indeed be thought of, in a sense, as a form of reported action. But the act of predicting or describing the future hardly qualifies as a piece of report in the context of the on-stage world. And in this respect, it links in with certain other of the internal narratives and inset-like moments

in late Shakespeare, situations in which characters envision alternative scenarios for themselves, or plot out in detail future behaviour and events that never come to pass. Such purely imaginative evocations of other worlds, other possibilities, represent a distinctly "narrative" effect, of the type I am interested in, but one that does not really fit in with any convincing model of "report".[127]

What I particularly want to get away from at this point, however, is the idea, so often encountered in the criticism of the late plays, of a simple opposition, a clash or a conflict in all this, between "narrative" and "drama".[128] The internal narratives, descriptions, and reports that appear in these works are all located within a dramatic setting, where the circumstances of the moment, the identity of who is speaking, the composition of the on-stage audience - who is saying what to whom, and when - all tend to have a bearing on the nature of the information conveyed and the way in which it is expressed. Within this context, the narratives presented, many of them long and elaborate and at times even virtuoso displays of linguistic skill and narratorial technique, become in themselves a kind of performance on the part of the actor/character who is speaking them. In the process, moreover, they can provide their speaker with plenty of opportunity for actually physically "performing", for accompanying the narrative she or he is delivering with all sorts of processes of illustration and efforts at (re-)enactment, through the use of gesture, mime, impersonation, and so forth.[129]

At the same time, of course, most of the speeches involved here are also distinctly "performative", re-telling events to specific ends, filtering them through a shaping perspective, imposing meanings and interpretations as they go. With the profusion of narrative effects on offer in late Shakespeare and the frequent discrepancies that arise

(whether from competing narratives or through a lack of correspondence between the verbal and the visual) between different versions of events, report is regularly shown to be unstable and untrustworthy, anything but disinterested. And the impact of this can extend even to cases where a single report of an unseen event is all that the audience has to go on. Here, it is important to lay to rest one fairly widespread critical assumption, the idea that, as Georg von Greyerz puts it,

> if the dramatist does not furnish us with the actual
> facts of the event, we are forced to assume that the
> scene actually took place in the form in which it is
> presented to us in the report.[130]

There are a few places in the late plays where this probably does hold true, where there are no serious grounds for doubting the accuracy or validity of a particular report; but equally, there are places where probably nothing could be further from the truth, where a reliance on one person's report alone leaves the audience's sense of what "actually took place" almost entirely up in the air.

That the late plays are unusually full of internal narratives and reported action has long been recognized. A typically unenthusiastic critical assessment of this situation is provided by Hugh Richmond, who remarks, in relation to Prospero's long account of past events in the second scene of *The Tempest*, 'all the late plays make laborious use of this kind of narrative'.[131] One common attitude to this facet of the plays' dramaturgy sees the presence of such a large amount of narration and apparently undigested plot explanation as an inevitable side-effect of the choice of stories being dramatized, the unhappy consequence of attempting to adapt for the stage material that is intrinsically ill-suited to the purpose.[132] And clearly, there is a sense in which the abundant use of narrative and report in late Shakespeare does serve as a means

of dealing with certain particular technical challenges posed by the stories the plays are trying to tell. It seems to me, though, that the question of cause and effect here operates the other way around to how it is ordinarily conceived of, that the stories the late plays relate have been chosen precisely for the scope they offer for exploring an array of narrative effects, and different aspects and techniques of the whole business of story-telling.

In this respect, the high-profile presence of narrative and report is matched at a thematic and a structural level in the wider emphasis on story-telling and the workings of narrative that runs throughout the plays. This is evinced, for example, in the explicit references to sources and preceding narratives, the stories behind the plays, found in the Gower choruses and the Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*; or in the prominent setting out of pre-play events that goes on in many of these works, and the feeling they tend to end with, of further stories to be told within the fictional world, or further plays to be performed in the real-life theatrical economy. In particular, the late plays seem to conjure up an image of ongoing narrative processes, of old and oft-told tales being preserved and transmitted, evoking even a certain mystique of story-telling.[133] But they also draw attention, through the metafictional self-consciousness I have already sought to stress, to the age-old conventions and technical mechanisms and contrivances needed for the stories they are telling to reach their conclusions.[134] Both these sides of their nature are further reflected in their ostentatious use of a broad range of specialist forms of (literary and theatrical) narrative techniques and devices - prologues, epilogues, and choruses; expository soliloquies; messenger figures and on-stage commentators; set-piece ekphrases and epic-style heroic descriptions; even, in the case of

The Two Noble Kinsmen, a full-scale classical *nuntius.*[135] It is in the plays' handling of reported action, however, that the issues involved here come together to receive their fullest examination.

Report functions in the late plays in at least four basic ways: to fill in events from before the beginning of the action; to comment on and/or explain events which the audience is in the process of watching; to re-tell, re-present, and at times virtually re-invent events which the audience has already seen acted out; and to describe events within the fiction that take place off-stage during the course of the drama, or that are actually supposed to be occurring at the very moment when the deliverer of the report is speaking. By means of these various operations, report takes on an important and complex relationship with both the on-stage and off-stage worlds. In the case of the latter, it helps to sketch in a history and to create the sense of a wider world going on concurrently with the action on stage, as well as, in places, of a world in the very process of happening, "now", just beyond the reach of the spectators' vision. Here, report is often associated with off-stage noises, explaining their cause and significance to any listeners on stage and to the theatre audience.[136] The reporting of off-stage events can become in addition almost explicitly an exercise in frustration, tantalizing the audience with what it is not being allowed to see, denying it (and this can apply equally to pre-play events) the evidence it needs to form a reliable judgement, and generally making a lot of play with the fact that all that is "really" going on off-stage is the usual back-stage theatrical activity. These effects are compounded by the acknowledgement in some of the plays' more extended reports of their own fundamental inadequacy, of the utter inability of any description to convey the true nature of the events they are seeking to describe.[137]

Where the realm of off-stage events is concerned, then, report is closely bound up with elements in the story that are, so to speak, doubly unreal, under-represented within the theatrical fiction. When it comes to reports of events and activities that are also shown on the stage, however, here the audience is confronted with material that is often disturbingly over-represented. Different accounts of an incident, different versions of proceedings, seem to compete with one another, and there is regularly a distinct non-correlation between what the audience sees and what it hears said. This can apply even in places where characters are simply commenting on the situation around them, or the way other figures on stage are behaving. Descriptions of actions and events within the dialogue, what are sometimes referred to as "internal" stage directions, are by no means necessarily an accurate indication of what actually takes place on the stage.[138] Indeed, in plays where the spoken word and the visual image are in places totally at odds, exploiting or playing up any potential disjunctions between showing and telling seems a more-than-valid option as a performance decision. And it is, above all, in the gap between the visual and the verbal that the audience gets to witness the multiple shaping effects of narrative and report – the operations of ideology and interpretation, memory and desire, in the construction of present meanings and the re-creation of the past, and the processes whereby actions are imbued with discursive significance, meaning is imposed on events, and events themselves are reconfigured to purvey particular meanings. All this has considerable implications for those reports of events which the audience does not get to see enacted, and the level of trust these can command. It would also be fair to say, though, that the realm of visual perception is itself rather seriously destabilized here, to the extent that it is not always

clear that ocular experience has that much more to offer, in terms of reliability and credibility, than "mere" report.[139]

As with spectacle, an interest in report and internal narrative on Shakespeare's part is far from entirely new to the late plays. Many of the issues involved here are touched upon elsewhere in the canon, not least in the three narrative poems (with *A Lover's Complaint* perhaps the most relevant of these in the present context). In dramatic terms, one might mention especially Rumour, the Chorus to *Henry V*, *Macbeth*'s "bloody sergeant", Friar Laurence's 'brief' (5.3. 228) forty-line re-telling of the story at the conclusion of *Romeo and Juliet*, and most obviously, with its complex exploration of perception, perspective, and the nature of theatrical illusion, the "Dover Cliff" sequence in *King Lear*.[140] And again, this interest is traceable back to the very early canon, with *Titus Andronicus* providing some notable examples – not only Marcus's infamous speech on encountering the raped and mutilated Lavinia (2.4. 11-57), but also Tamora's two completely opposing descriptions of the part of the forest where the events of 2.3 are supposed to take place (ll. 10-29, 91-115).[141]

In this last instance, as very often in the late plays themselves, the "actual" nature of the situation described remains unestablished and intrinsically undeterminable, and the audience is left with only the competing and unreconcilable narratives to cling on to. With the aid of this technique, and the general emphasis on narrative processes that runs right across their action, the late plays provide a powerful illustration of the way report functions as much as a process of interpretation and invention as one of simple description – a means of influencing perception and imposing or promulgating a particular understanding of reality. Narrative and report are repeatedly presented

as manipulative, purpose-driven, bound up in the affairs around them, and, even where they are not specifically engaged in deception, as possessing a prominent element of fiction at their core. But whilst they take on, in their more extended examples especially, many of the characteristics of story-telling and fiction-making, a large number of the narratives on offer are also, crucially, a form of history, relating, inscribing, and establishing for posterity the happenings of the on-stage world. In this respect, the late plays seem to capture a sense not only of how, as Hayden White puts it, 'all historical narratives contain an irreducible and inexpungeable element of interpretation', but also of, to quote White again, 'the extent to which descriptions of events *already* constitute interpretations of their nature'.[142] This is of particular significance in relation to *Henry VIII*, where the unreliability and competing authority of different accounts and versions of history is a dominant concern. Suspicion about the authority and reliability of report has, though, in terms of the plays as a group, implications that reach well beyond the realm of history and historical narrative, into such other areas as interpretation, representation, art and artistry, narrative tradition, and so forth. It also links in with the treatment and attitude to spectacle argued for above. Before turning to look more closely at the individual late plays in the light of all this, however, I want to touch briefly on a few remaining issues regarding my own methods and processes of reading and interpretation.

Reading and Interpretation

The elements of spectacle and reported action in the late plays, I have suggested, have both fared fairly indifferently at the hands of the

critics. Much the same can be said when it comes to their treatment in the theatre. With their tendency to be somewhat detachable from the action around them, elaborate spectacles and extended narratives have regularly been treated as expendable on the stage.[143] Where they are included, spectacular effects rarely get presented in a way that seeks to adhere with any real precision to the details of the original stage directions, or likely early performance practice. And in similar terms, lengthy expositions and reports are often chopped about, moved around, truncated, re-assigned. Spectacle, of course, as well as being altered or cut, can also easily be added to the action, and one common source for this type of interpolation lies in those spectacular events that are "only" described or reported in the original texts. The upshot of all this is that the very specific manipulation of spectacle and report I am interested in is hardly ever addressed on the modern stage. Those aspects of late Shakespearian dramaturgy that are my chief concern in this thesis have consistently been subordinated in performance, as in criticism, to an emphasis on such other, more popular features as "the story", character, Shakespeare's language, and so on.[144]

This is not just a gripe against present-day (and particularly institutionalized) theatrical practice for its failure to grasp or convey true Shakespearian complexity. Also reflected here is something of the essential problematic of attempting to "read" texts which represent (in whatever form) scripts originally devised for public performance (or with performance conditions in mind). Spectacle and report themselves clearly operate very much within the "now" of the theatrical moment, and the whole concept of metadrama seems fairly meaningless to me if divorced from a firm sense of the requirements and the actualities of dramatic presentation.[145] I have aspired to a mode of interpretation

that maintains throughout, therefore, an awareness of the domain of performance. This raises specific issues in relation to both report and spectacle. In the case of the latter, I have been keen to conceive of the action involved closely in terms of the implications of the original stage directions, in spite of the numerous problems surrounding the authority these command or the accuracy with which they represent the events they are supposed to describe.[146] With the former, I have looked to take account especially of the inevitable distance the presence of an actor/character introduces between the dramatist and the spoken text. It is axiomatic to my work that no-one on stage, no matter how great their authority within the invented world or how considerable their access to the audience through direct address, speaks as a simple mouthpiece for the author(s), or for the "meaning" of the play in which they appear.[147]

At a general level, the "readings" I have to offer seek to respond to the possibilities for theatrical realization built into the texts of the late plays, both in terms of the varying ways in which they might be staged whilst still remaining faithful to the existing scripts, and with regard to how they would or could have been staged in the Jacobean theatre. This is, more or less, to adhere to the standard notion of the text as "a blueprint for performance".[148] In view of such a professed emphasis, I would stress that, whatever the limitations or failings of my approach overall, there is nothing intrinsically "anti-theatrical" about the method of close reading adopted, even where this involves detailed and time-consuming analysis of scenes, speeches, or effects that pass by in a moment in the theatre.[149] I would also note, however, that the relative priorities of reading and performance are by no means entirely straightforward here. Individual performances are always a process

of interpretative intervention, unavoidably wrapped up in the complex dichotomies of construal/construction, and in this respect, are privy to no greater inbuilt interpretative authority than individual works of criticism or acts of reading.[150] Shakespearian drama has to be read in the first place in order to be performed at all.[151] And the sheer length of some of the late plays - most notably, *Cymbeline* - could well have precluded their complete performance in Shakespeare's own life-time (as it effectively has ever since), which at least raises the question of whether they might not have been written in part (or in places) with an eye towards publication or some sort of potential ideal (unavailable, impracticable) version of the theatrical experience.[152] In this connection, it is tempting to say of late Shakespearian drama (and indeed, of Shakespearian drama in general), as Harry Berger says of *Henry V*, that it is 'overwritten from the standpoint of performance and the playgoer's limited perceptual capacities'.[153]

In many ways, I would suggest, it is the complex, "overwritten", intricately constructed nature of the late plays that creates the need for (and makes worthwhile) the processes of close reading pursued in the second half of this thesis. Those processes themselves, however, raise a number of wider theoretical and methodological concerns that call for some comment here. As I have already indicated in earlier chapters, as a critical practice, "close reading" has fallen into a certain amount of disrepute, through its associations with overly narrow formalist approaches and the aims and ideals of the "New Criticism".[154] To adopt the techniques of "close reading", though, is not necessarily to espouse the politics and principles of earlier practitioners, and I go along with Peter Erickson in arguing for 'the continuing validity of a reconstructed close reading' - one that is geared towards 'ideological analysis', and

responsive to the insights and challenges of political criticism, textual

theory, and performance concerns.[155]   Attending to the self-aware, self-

reflexive dramaturgy and closely knit verbal and thematic texture of the

late plays in particular can call into question the kind of definitive

judgements and pronouncements about meaning and ideological tenor and

purpose found in much recent political criticism.   As Russ McDonald says

of *The Tempest*,

> the recognition that this is one of the most knowing,
> most self-conscious texts in the canon should warn
> us about pretensions to ideological certainty.   On the
> very issues that have most deeply concerned materialist
> critics and their American cousins - power, social
> and political hierarchy, the theatre as a political
> instrument, freedom of action, education, and race -
> *The Tempest* is at its most elusive and complicated.
> The play valorizes ambiguity and irony, ironizing its
> own positions and insisting upon the inconclusiveness
> of its own conclusions.[156]

For my own part, I want to use close reading to try to convey

and respond to precisely this range and elusiveness of meaning, and the

complex interplay of language, content, meaning, and form that I regard

as going on throughout late Shakespeare.   One notable advantage of this

approach, from my perspective, is the focus it encourages on the way

meaning is conveyed and created within the dramatic action, the terms

and conditions behind the numerous acts of reading and interpretation

that permeate the late plays.   It is here especially, I feel, that it is

possible to gain an increased sense of the sophisticated vision and

skilful artistry of the less-appreciated plays in the group, those texts

which seem to me to have been seriously misunderstood and undervalued

by the critical tradition.   Opposition to close reading as a critical

practice has stemmed not only from certain significant political and

theoretical concerns, however, but also, for better or worse, from a

reaction against the new readings and processes of re-evaluation often

associated with it (and very much an element in my own work), and the interpretative destabilization these bring with them. Richard Levin, for one, has long poured scorn on this type of approach, claiming, for instance, that 'no part of a play can displease many, and displease long, unless there is something seriously wrong with it', or arguing along the superficially convincing lines that any play of Shakespeare's possessed of genuine artistic merit could hardly have failed by now to convey its basic concerns and meanings to readers and playgoers alike.[157]

There is no doubt that defensive re-reading can easily slip over into interpretative over-ingenuity or special pleading – a situation, I might add, that can work particularly to obscure a text's ideological implications and impact. And with Shakespeare, as usual, the additional pressure of bardolatry also comes into play – not simply in terms of a danger that is best avoided, though, but also (in the hands of Levin, for example) as a conservative-tending accusation that can be brought to bear in an effort to discredit radical re-readings and to keep certain works in their place, denying them too impressive a level of complexity, artistic and intellectual ambition, or aesthetic control.[158] One way of tempering both of these factors is to strive for an approach that sustains the same interpretative principles as uniformly as possible across the different plays under consideration. But the major problem with Levin's position lies in its overriding stress on the authority of interpretative consensus and tradition. Understanding and evaluation always take place within specific historical conditions, susceptible to the influence of prevailing interpretative paradigms and aesthetic ideals.[159] And as I have been emphasizing throughout, interpretative attitudes to the late plays have long been governed by beliefs about biography, chronology, genre, authorship, affect, intent, original audiences, political

allegiance, etc., that are grounded in highly questionable assumptions or thoroughly one-sided interpretations of the available data.

At a wider level, when it comes to Shakespearian drama as a whole, the political meanings and perspectives associated with the plays have been heavily constrained in particular by the conservative, royalist, anti-populist opinions regularly attributed to the dramatist, and shared by many of the founding figures of Shakespearian criticism.[160] This situation has been reinforced by condescending or misguided notions about what Shakespeare would have been able to think or to communicate to his audience, and a widespread understanding of the operations and effectiveness of English Renaissance censorship that has encouraged a view of the drama as virtually incapable of any possibility of political radicalism or criticism of the Tudor or Stuart state.[161] The work of Annabel Patterson provides one of the keenest challenges to this kind of approach to Shakespeare, and I can do little better at this point than quote part of her own *modus operandi*. As she writes:

> I take the position that Shakespeare was one of our first cultural critics, in the sense of being capable of profound, structural analysis. I assume that he, as well as we, was capable of grasping not only the relation between the material conditions of life and those of its intelligibility (human self-consciousness), but also the function of all those practices that for want of precise definition we loosely denote as aspects of 'culture': reading, writing, theater-going, philosophizing, formal education, legal and constitutional rule-making.[162]

Valuable too in this context is Patterson's idea of "the hermeneutics of censorship", and the emphasis this places on the strategies for dealing with institutional censorship and regulation built into the aesthetic artefact.[163] Richard Dutton's important re-examination of the workings of theatrical censorship in the period is also strongly relevant here, with its essentially pragmatic assessment of the processes involved,

and sense of the willingness of the authorities to accommodate texts that offered scope for analogical readings, so long as these remained sufficiently distanced or ambiguous, open to "construction".[164]

The level of insight and power of critique that Patterson attributes to Shakespeare is something I find evinced in the self-referential dramaturgy of the late plays, these works' incessant obtruding of the mechanics of their own construction. There are problems/dangers with such an argument, however. Theatrical self-consciousness can serve many purposes, and its implications are rarely (if ever) entirely self-evident.[165] Self-reflection is not self-possession.[166] And whilst my approach assigns a certain degree of "metadiscursivity" to Shakespeare, it would be ridiculous to suggest that this could amount to absolute authorial control, apprehension, or detachment. There is here no single, all-encompassing narrative, no point of total insight, no position beyond ideology.[167] It is only too easy, too, in this context, to seek to deny or suppress the role of one's own interpretative activity, and pretend to some sort of direct connection between critic and author. But of course, whatever their status as explanations or translations of authorial or textual "meaning", all my "readings" of late Shakespearian drama are also a form of production, a process of "creative" synthesis, extraction, extrapolation, imposition - exercises in construction as well as construal.[168] They are not, however, by any means simply arbitrary, but built around techniques and methods of argument and persuasion that are open to assessment, capable of being tested, judged, argued against, rejected or defended in terms of the evidence they adduce or the procedures they adopt.

This links in, in a sense, with an important aspect of the plays themselves. Focusing on the kind of disjunctions between showing and

telling that interest me, and that resist accommodation within anything one might associate with a realist aesthetic, Orgel makes the point that such incidents provide an indication of the way 'the drama's reality is infinitely adjustable'. He goes on from here, from how Shakespeare frequently lies 'to us about things we know to be true, misrepresenting action we have seen taking place', to argue, crucially, 'that drama for Shakespeare does not create a world'.[169] Rather, Orgel suggests, 'it creates [. . .] something the Renaissance would have recognized as an *argument*, the purpose of which is - 'to persuade'.[170] To complicate this situation, in the case of the late plays, as I have attempted to show, argument and persuasion, and the processes of interpretation and construction on which they depend, are themselves regularly laid open to suspicion, brought into question. But to pursue such questioning, and to concentrate on the dramaturgical strategies that lie behind it, is to respond to something in the structuring, the argument, of the actual plays, to apply the levels of interpretation and judgement that they call for - implicitly, through the terms of their own skilful construction, and perhaps even, on occasion, explicitly. As the closing words of the opening chorus of *Pericles* have it (to turn here to what represents in pretty much any estimation the "entry-point" to late Shakespeare), 'What now ensues, to the iudgement of your eye, | I giue my cause, who best can iustifie' (TLN 63-64).[171]

PART TWO

READING SHAKESPEARE'S LATE PLAYS

CHAPTER FIVE

'THE VERITY OF IT IS IN STRONG SUSPICION'
SPECTACLE AND REPORT IN *THE TEMPEST*,
PERICLES, AND *THE WINTER'S TALE*

Reading (in the sense of interpretation, exegesis) is at best only ever a partial activity, and the constraints of space have meant I have had to be particularly selective in my approach during the second part of this thesis.[1] Rather, then, than attempting a survey of all the occurrences of spectacle and report in the late plays, I have sought to concentrate my attentions on how these techniques function in relation to some of the main thematic concerns of the three plays I have chosen to focus upon. Thus each of the next three chapters, as well as dealing with a different individual play, addresses that play in terms of a different central emphasis: in the case of *Cymbeline*, the subjects of art, artistry, and artifice; with *Henry VIII*, questions of politics, truth, and history; and for *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, issues to do with literary and cultural authority and the notion of mastery. In the rest of this chapter, though, to help set up a broader sense of the effects associated with spectacle and report in late Shakespeare, I want to look briefly at the remaining three plays in the group, beginning with *The Tempest*.

The Tempest

One could scarcely hope for a better illustration of the use and importance of spectacle and reported action in the late plays than the

opening two scenes of *The Tempest.* Contrasted in almost every way, and widely regarded as paradigmatic of the concerns and dramaturgy of the play as a whole, these two scenes come down, at root, to a set-piece opposition of spectacle and report, a very deliberate juxtaposition of cutting-edge theatrical virtuosity, and extended expository narratives that can seem as backward-looking in technique as in their temporal perspective.[2] The movement from the first to the second scene is not just a question of contrast, of course; it involves an absolute shift in the understanding and awareness of the audience. Nothing in the opening scene (as it stands in the First Folio) provides the slightest indication that its action is meant to represent anything other than a fictively "real" shipwreck and "natural" storm. As Anne Barton puts it, the audience 'remains secure in its grasp on the actual until the scene which follows'.[3] But when the storm is revealed to be magically manipulated and the shipwreck itself an illusion, everything changes, and spectators are placed in a situation similar to that of the visitors to the isle, whose reference points for determining reality are completely undermined, and who wander about in a world in which they are no longer sure of the distinction between dream and waking, uncertain what to believe, what to make of their own senses.[4]

The opening storm sequence provides as bravura a piece of staging as anything in Shakespeare, a clear attempt, if ever there was one, to stage the unstageable, and go beyond any supposed limitations inherent in the bare-stage theatre.[5] The significance of this scene, and much of the effect of the shift in perception that comes about in 1.2, is often felt to hinge on its unprecedented realism. Andrew Gurr, for example, suggests that 'the whole play depends on the initial realism of the shipwreck scene'.[6] And certainly, there are plenty of elements here

that can qualify as "realistic": the general sense of pace, of hustle and bustle; the powerful atmosphere of desperate action and impending doom; the sound and lightning effects called for; the wet mariners; and not least, the apparently careful accuracy of the scene's nautical detail.[7] Yet performance-oriented commentary has long drawn attention to the difficulty of staging this sequence effectively, especially if a full-scale attempt is made at a realistic re-creation of a storm using all the resources of the modern theatre. In particular, the dialogue, with its important expository and thematic functions, can easily become lost.[8] The need to integrate that dialogue with the sound effects, to orchestrate the interaction of words and noise so that what is said is actually audible to the audience, is one indication of the intrinsic stylization of this scene. Another is the seemingly direct-address nature of many of Gonzalo's remarks.[9] And indeed, a certain stylization is evident throughout. Various conventions and modes of theatrical shorthand (wet costumes, rapid entrances and exits, apostrophes to the elements, off-stage cries, etc.) are brought together to create a vivid impression of a storm. Much of what is supposed to be happening here, moreover, is conveyed through the merest suggestion, and for all the "spectacle" on offer, a lot of the principal "action", including the entire shipwreck, still has to be imagined as taking place off-stage.[10]

The point I am driving at is that the scene exploits the available conventions of its theatre to create an acceptable illusion of a storm. The nature of the dramaturgy in 1.1 encourages (if not requires) the audience to take the effects that it witnesses as a representation of the real thing.[11] And it is this process especially that is called into question by the realization that the storm is not what it seems. With the revelation that it is actually effected by Ariel (1.2. 194-239) and all under

the direction of Prospero, the conventions of theatrical representation are thoroughly destabilized, and with them, the ability of the audience to know, with proper confidence, what to make of what it sees. Problems of interpreting the visual run the length of the play, often serving to heighten the tensions surrounding the meaning of theatrical convention. A particularly telling example can be found in the conflicting views of the island expressed by Adrian and Gonzalo, and their mockers, Antonio and Sebastian, in 2.1 (ll. 37-111), where the audience, faced only with the evidence of the bare stage, is given virtually no objective data against which to test the alternative readings, and is left to rely almost exclusively on its responses to the characters involved and the dynamics of the on-stage situation.[12] What also happens with the new information that becomes available in 1.2, though, is that spectators are made aware of the way in which they have been deceived, and this brings into play a distrust of spectacle that has major implications for the whole of the rest of the drama.

This play of spectacular events opens with a piece of spectacle that appears at first to be one thing, and quickly turns out to be very definitely quite another. Almost from the outset, then, spectacle is exposed as untrustworthy, manipulative, fundamentally deceptive. The realm of the visual - signs and shows, theatrical performance and its scenic codes and conventions - emerges as a language that is potentially unreliable even at its most convincing.[13] But the experience of being deceived prepares the audience to be more sceptical readers of the play's - and Prospero's - later spectacles and set-piece performances. Fooled once by the processes of theatrical spectacle, the spectators of *The Tempest* are primed to attend more carefully to the nature and meaning of the drama's subsequent inset shows - Ariel's appearance as

the harpy, the masque, the chess-game, and so on. The interpretative self-awareness this generates, and the strong metatheatrical element to all this, direct attention as well to the audience's own role in "seeing" the action, the way the act of perception itself imbues the on-stage events with much of their significance. That is to say, the perceptual shift engineered in the opening two scenes highlights the extent to which meaning here, and the meaning of theatrical spectacle in particular, is created in the eye of the beholder, a function of interpretation – or at least, of specific interpretative choices and assumptions, and the expectations and strategies of persuasion that lie behind them.

The effects of this situation are further extended by the links spectacle takes on in the play, its connections with the theatricality of public shows and state rituals, and its associations with magic and the realms of neoplatonic ideals and aristocratic power.[14] Many of the spectacles Prospero conjures up with his magic and power, moreover, seem intended by him to carry a specifically emblematic function, to express particular ethical and political perspectives. But spectacle in *The Tempest* has a habit of missing its mark, falling apart, deconstructing itself – most obviously in the case of the interrupted masque, but one might also mention in this context the chess-game again, or Prospero's initial attempt to reveal his identity to the court party (5.1. 51-86 – see especially ll. 82-83).[15] Even the "meaning" of the banquet, its admonitory message and purpose, is hard to gauge until Ariel-as-harpy has explained matters, in a speech (3.3. 53-82), equating Prospero's own ends with providential design, that is a tissue of lies and half-truths from beginning to end. Through banquet, masque, and tempest, spectacle acquires its place as well in a process of literary allusion, a series of references to Virgil's *Aeneid*, within which, under the terms of the

reading suggested here, it helps challenge and compromise elements of that text's associated mythic power.[16] Perhaps the most disruptive and discomforting of all the play's manifestations of spectacle, however, comes in the mock-hunt at the end of 4.1. Here, many of the issues of class, hierarchy, and emblematic meaning touched on above are brought together, Prospero himself appears at his most tyrannical, and even some of the more authoritarian, exploitative aspects of the theatrical world and its power structures are hinted at, as Prospero's troupe of actor-spirits is reduced to the role of playing 'Dogs and Hounds' (TLN 1930) to fulfil the aims and summary justice of its master-director.[17]

The process of distancing the audience from the on-stage spectacle is mirrored to some extent within the dramatic action through the experience of Miranda at the start of 1.2. Her lines opening this scene convey the strength of her emotional response to the events she has just witnessed:

> If by your art, my dearest father, you have
> Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them.
> The sky, it seems, would pour down stinking pitch,
> But that the sea, mounting to th' welkin's cheek,
> Dashes the fire out. O, I have sufferèd
> With those that I saw suffer! A brave vessel,
> Who had, no doubt, some noble creature in her,
> Dashed all to pieces! O, the cry did knock
> Against my very heart!
> (1.2. 1-9)

Miranda emerges here, as Graham Holderness has suggested, as a kind of surrogate audience, an exemplar of the ideally engaged spectator. When the true nature of the storm is made apparent, therefore, and her reactions to its effects are dismissed as essentially irrelevant by her father,

> the artifice of theatrical construction and the experience of the empathic spectator are both distanced and estranged, framed and exposed, held up for the inspection of curiosity and the satisfaction of reason.[18]

Having "deconstructed" the ideally engaged spectator within Miranda, Prospero then sets about trying to re-construct his daughter as an ideally engaged listener to the long and complicated history (ll. 32-187) that he has to tell. In this instance, however, there is less requirement for the theatre audience to be taken along as well.

Prospero's self-interruptions to his lengthy narrative, concerned with ensuring that Miranda is still paying attention to him (ll. 78, 87, 106), serve also to render his report of pre-play events more easily digestible for the audience. At the same time, though, they do much to call attention to the extended, contrived, technically primitive nature of this exposition, and with it, to the level of artifice needed for the play to maintain its unity of time. Whether or not Miranda's response to his story (the nature of her on-stage behaviour) actually merits the fear that she might not be listening, Prospero's comments point to a particular anxiety on his part to get his version of events across to her, to make certain that she share his view on these matters.[19] The play offers no real grounds for questioning the basic details of Prospero's narrative, but his tortured syntax and laboured imagery suggest that this is a history presented from a very personal perspective, a far from objective or disinterested position. It is also clearly, to a certain degree, purpose-driven, not least in the way it seeks to provide a memory for Miranda, and to control her understanding and awareness of the past. In this respect, it is bound up as well in the patriarchal structures and power dynamics of the father-daughter relationship here; and indeed, as Paul Brown has noted, 'the production of narrative, in this play, is always related to questions of power'.[20]

Issues of power and perspective are even more to the fore when it comes to the explanatory/expository reports that accompany the first

appearances of Ariel and Caliban later on in this scene. On each of these occasions, Prospero shows himself adept at justifying present situations - his subjugation of both Caliban and Ariel - through past events. But a far greater sense of a struggle over representation and meaning emerges here. Caliban expresses some particularly forthright opposition to Prospero's interpretation of the past, and the ends that he makes this serve. And Ariel too can be seen to offer a dissenting voice against Prospero's history of the isle - a history which, despite Prospero's claim that he has to remind Ariel of it 'once in a month' (l. 264), must (in terms of narrative logic) have been imparted to him by the spirit in the first place.[21] With such an abundance of reported action, many key elements in the plot are presented already distanced and open-to-debate, filtered through a shaping perspective (or two), as sites of interpretative controversy from the start. Even with an event that it does get to "see", the storm, the audience has its own perspective further destabilized by the multiplying of narratives that goes on throughout the rest of the drama, where few of the extra details revealed seem to coincide all that much with what is shown or suggested in 1.1.[22] It is this reliance on and elaboration of report that accounts for much of the elusiveness of the play, its ambiguities and uncertainties, and what one might term its sensitivity to the problematics of interpretation. To quote Holderness again, 'there can be little doubt' that in *The Tempest*,

> the processes of story-telling, the means by which
> representations of the past are constructed, are made
> so obtrusively explicit that the relativities of memory
> and interpretation become insistently foregrounded.[23]

This has especially important implications in relation to the play's exploration of the creation of meaning and the production of history,

areas where an emphasis on the relativities of interpretation leads on in turn to a resistance to certain Jacobean political orthodoxies and associated ideological positions and assumptions. In this respect, moreover, the large amount of report in 1.2, far from being merely a crude device, an unfortunate by-product of some putative revision, or a feature necessitated by the classical structure or the distinctive nature of the plot (not to mention all the other charges laid against it), is actually fundamental to the entire effect of *The Tempest*, a mainspring of the play's design.

Pericles

Like the opening two scenes of *The Tempest*, *Pericles* is constructed around some very obvious oppositions and juxtapositions. Dumb-shows, choruses, and fully dramatized events are all carefully marked off from each other, given their own theatrical space and time, as Gower formally introduces and comments on the different modes of action over which he presides. More than any other play in the Shakespeare canon, *Pericles* foregrounds the way in which its action is presented, and the choices available for that presentation. Alongside this interest in some of the fundamental aspects of its own art, though, *Pericles* also gives off a strong impression of artlessness, not least, of course, through the figure of Gower himself, an old-fashioned device speaking in an archaic style and diction, with a tendency to apologize for the limitations of the resources at his disposal. This sense of artlessness carries over especially into the first two acts of the drama (Scenes 1-9), and, as I have already indicated in Part One, has been very much picked up on in the criticism.[24] But behind this surface simplicity and apparent lack

of artistry – and *Pericles* is a play that from the outset insistently problematizes surface appearances – ongoing patterns and processes of skilful organization can be made out, particularly when it comes to imagery and linguistic detail, situational echoes and parallels, but also, I would argue, in relation to the play's overall dramaturgical design and construction.[25] Alexander Leggatt has spoken perceptively of *Pericles* as a work of 'hints and suggestions', 'elusive undercurrents' that seem to 'broaden and complicate' its surface vision.[26] I want to look at a few such undercurrents in connection with the play's powerful emphasis on its own narrative processes.[27]

That emphasis is very clearly evident from the start, as Gower's opening chorus (Sc.1. 1-42) calls attention to the antiquity of the play's story, and the frequency with which it has already been re-told. Moreover, whilst Gower is busy advertising the sources he is supposed to be drawing upon, and the authority these command, he himself, in person and in the style that he is given, both embodies and imitates the play's own principal source.[28] For Gower, though, it is not simply the age and popularity of the story that invest it with value, but also the beneficial effects that it has had on others, and that it is still able to offer, the therapeutic and morally elevating potential it brings with it.[29] His perspective in this area is summed up in the proverbial motto, "the older a good thing, the better" (`Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius' (l. 10)), and indeed, reinforced in the manner in which this is expressed, as a Latin tag whose very presence is itself characteristic of the medieval verse the play is here imitating.[30]

Gower's language and arguments set up a relationship with the material he is introducing that is about more than just apologizing for or excusing its antiquity, that involves a specific sense of the story's

overall purpose and value. This is one indication of the way Gower functions not merely as story-teller, but as interpreter and, in line with his historical counterpart's seventeenth-century reputation, moralizer as well.[31] The Chorus Gower knows precisely who his goodies and his baddies are, and addresses his listeners in terms that assume (or seek to ensure) that they share the same attitude.[32] He presents himself explicitly as a kind of teacher, filling in as necessary any gaps in the story (Sc.18. 7-9), but there is a strong sense too in which his approach shades over into instructing the audience in more general terms – how to respond, who to identify with, what to think and feel.[33] *Pericles* is a play, though, in which structure, theme, and plot all work to highlight the operations, and many of the intrinsic difficulties, of interpretation. And the nature of the interaction between the choruses and the events that they frame creates a situation in which Gower's assessments can be tested against the spectators' own responses, subjected to some of the judgement he himself calls for. Consequently, it is by no means certain that the audience is meant to (or likely to) accept without question the interpretative authority of the Chorus.[34]

I would argue in particular that the relationship between the Gower choruses and the main body of the action becomes increasingly complicated as the drama proceeds, and the scenes which Gower presents move further and further away from the static, ritualized, rather archaic atmosphere and style of the early events in Antioch, Tyre, and Tarsus (where the tone is not very far distant from the Chorus's own style and proverbial/moralistic tendencies).[35] Gower's diction and metre change as well, of course, and he shows a growing concern (which might be taken as reflecting a growing sophistication on his part) with the workings of the audience's imagination.[36] But I see no reason to feel that the

response Gower elicits from his audience should be one of purely, as Doreen DelVecchio and Antony Hammond put it, 'faith and trust'.[37] On the contrary, it seems to me there are a number of factors which cause the Chorus's perspective on the action to come across as more and more problematic. These culminate in Gower's heavily moralistic and didactic epilogue, which, as various critics have observed, provides a highly limiting interpretation of the experience the play has to offer, translating its events into terms that capture little of their emotional or referential scope.[38] It is notable, in this connection, that one of the few principal characters not to get a mention in the Epilogue is by far the most morally ambivalent figure to be found in *Pericles*, Lysimachus. It is as if Gower's mode of elucidation hits something of a dead end in this instance, betrays some of its own inadequacies.[39]

Andrew Welsh suggests that Gower's moralizing summary 'turns his whole story into an emblem', and this links in, obviously enough, with the play's specific interest in the realm of emblems and related visual signs and shows.[40] But word and picture are rarely entirely in harmony in *Pericles*, and the process of moving from the visual to the verbal, of turning image and event into language, imbuing them with meaning, is very often a source of difficulty.[41] Even Gower acknowledges some of the problems at stake in commenting on the dumb-shows he presents.[42] The tensions involved here are further evinced in the interaction of the play's separated modes of choric narrative and ordinary drama, the different perspectives these bring with them, and the ways in which they do not quite manage to mesh. In particular, Gower can be seen to become somewhat less in tune with the theatrical situation, and a good deal fussier about the finer points of his narrative, as events proceed. He seems to get bogged down at times in minor details of

the plot that are potentially only of minimal relevance to how the story is progressing on stage, and shows a persistent concern to explain to the audience the workings of the dramatic action even as that action modulates into something more immediately recognizable as "normal" Shakespearian/Renaissance drama.[43] Especially intrusive and unhelpful to my mind, from the standpoint of explanation or instruction, is his belated desire to apologize, some two thirds of the way through the play, for relying on that oldest of narrative conventions, the using of 'one language in each sev'ral clime | Where our scene seems to live' (Sc.18. 6-7). This is not to suggest, however, that the Chorus is transformed into a straightforward figure of fun by all this, a device to be mocked as the advantages of drama over narrative are laid out. The effect of these elements is not simply to undermine Gower's authority, or to furnish characterizing features that distance the audience from his point of view. They also reflect back on the nature of the action presented (if not in Gower's own precise terms), focusing attention on the way in which this operates, defamiliarizing some of its most basic, taken-for-granted conventions, and highlighting the extent to which the audience has to be involved/complicit in the creation and construction of the fiction, in order for that fiction to succeed.[44]

It would be wrong, in any case, to set up too rigid an opposition between narrative and drama here. Gower himself, as presenter, is in many respects a quintessentially theatrical figure.[45] And elements of narrative and report are a very powerful presence within the main body of the drama. The Chorus's focus on the transmission of the story is paralleled by an interest within the action in the transmission of stories and the dissemination of information, through letters, gossip, rumour, the relation of personal histories, and so on. News heard and received,

picked up on and reported, propels the narrative. The entire plot is effectively initiated by story-telling, as Pericles, like the earlier suitors whose severed heads grimly overlook the opening scene, comes to Antioch 'drawn by report' (Sc.1. 78).[46] In similar terms, Marina's presence in the brothel is made known to the inhabitants of Mytilene by Boult as he repeatedly advertises her qualities in the market-place, fulfilling the Bawd's injunction to 'report what a sojourner we have' (Sc.16. 133).[47] Both the major reunion scenes, too, are structured around the telling of their own stories by the characters involved, as Marina responds to Pericles's requests to 'report thy parentage', 'tell thy story' (Sc.21. 118, 123), and Pericles obeys his instructions from the goddess, Diana, to give his and his daughter's misfortunes 'repetition to the life' (l. 232) in Ephesus.[48] The play even plays the game of threatening to pause just before its principal climax to re-tell its own story in words (Sc.21. 50-53), and seems to go out of its way at one point to dramatize the very basics of the passing on of information, as Thaisa is made to ferry question and answer almost verbatim from Simonides to Pericles and back during the banquet (Sc.7. 69-85).[49]

Gower's presence as narrator clearly helps attune the audience to an awareness of the narrative processes that run throughout the drama.[50] I would argue in addition that the direct, head-on approach to story-telling in the choruses links in with a more particular interest within the play in the processes of exposition and scene-setting. From Gower's initial basic designation of the stage-locale, 'This' Antioch, then' (Sc.1. 17), *Pericles* provides what amounts to virtually a developing sequence of examples of dramatic exposition, a variety of methods for introducing new characters, situations, and locations that become (almost precisely) progressively more sophisticated as the play goes on.[51] Thus

Thaliart's straightforwardly informative soliloquy at the beginning of Scene 3 is followed by: Cleon and Dioniza's laboured duologue in the next scene about the value of telling over their own miseries, which provides the excuse for them to inform each other of details they must know only too well, and thereby fill the audience in on the situation in Tarsus (Sc.4. 1-55); the slightly more naturalistic, but still heavily emblematic, dialogue of the three Fishermen in Scene 5, that fills Pericles in on the situation in Pentapolis; the rapid, wholly incidental, and more-than-a-little confusing comings and goings at the start of Scene 12, that establish Cerimon's interests, outlook, and reputation as a healer, through a few quick snapshots of his activities in Ephesus, and give opportunity for his expression of his personal philosophy; the workaday dialogue of the brothel-keepers (Sc.16. 1-53), seamlessly weaving exposition and action, that sends Boult off to the market-place in Mytilene, and helps cover the time until his return with the pirates and Marina; the brilliant, effortless comedy of the Gentlemen's passing comments at the opening of Scene 19, describing the unusual goings on in the brothel; and the precise evocation of shipboard etiquette that forms the prelude to the sea-borne reunion of Pericles and Marina in Scene 21.[52]

This use of a range of different scene-setting devices and more and more complex examples of exposition, and the self-reflexive emphasis on the telling of stories and the transmission of information that goes with it, points to a particular concern in *Pericles* with the mechanics of narrative - the techniques and contrivances that make story-telling possible, and on which the construction of the drama itself is shown to depend. In this respect, the play is as much engaged in exploring the processes of dramatic story-telling as in telling its own "simple" story. *Pericles* certainly brings to the fore, very strongly, some of the

affective dimensions of story-telling - its power and mystique, emotional and quasi-spiritual aspects, and the healing effects it can have when conducted in front of the appropriate audience. But it accompanies this throughout with an evocation of the artifices of story-telling, of the devices and conventions that underlie its own narrative, the stratagems, coincidences, and silences needed to bring about its happy ending (and to keep its plot in motion up until that point), and so on. A similar sort of self-consciousness is detectable across most other areas of the play's dramaturgy as well - in relation to, for instance, its use of stock character-types and situations, or the generic models and associations it draws on, and the expectations which these bring with them.[53]

Out of all this, too, comes a powerful underscoring of the extent to which situations, encounters, spectacles, are invested with meaning via words, through the processes of narrative and interpretation. It is an effect that stands alongside any sense of the value and "meaning" such events might appear to possess in or of themselves. And a similar dual perspective seems to me to characterize the play's attitude towards - its presentation of - its own art and artistry. One way of accounting for the distinctive dramaturgy of *Pericles* is to suggest that the play turns to the past to find a means of reinvigorating contemporary Jacobean techniques. So the power and panache of the second storm-sequence or the Pericles-Marina reunion, for example, are thrown into even greater relief by the contrasting style and technique of the earlier scenes. But the implied need for a turning to the past in this respect itself becomes a kind of commentary on the techniques and expectations of the present. Without pursuing the issue in any detail here, one might argue that the archaic dramaturgy of the play - reinforced towards the end in the renewed medievalizing of Gower's penultimate speech (Sc.22. 1-20) and

the distanced, conventionalized, in places almost perfunctory tone of the final scene - serves as a tool for pointing up the levels of artifice and manipulation still present and at work in even the most obviously skilful aspects of the play's construction. Or in slightly different terms, that in its very experimental confidence, *Pericles* reflects its own insistent self-questioning. I want to turn now, though, to look at *The Winter's Tale*, and specifically, the sequence of events surrounding the apparent death and the reappearance of Hermione, where spectacle and report are again given, maybe with an even greater degree of theatrical and metafictional self-consciousness, an all-important role to play.

The Winter's Tale

In their deployment of spectacle and reported action, the closing two scenes of *The Winter's Tale* provide almost a mirror image of the opening two scenes of *The Tempest*. The first of them, 5.2, brings with it one of Shakespeare's most sustained forays into the reporting of off-stage events.[54] Given that the entire thrust of the play's plot up until this point has looked to be moving towards the meeting of Leontes with his daughter, and his reconciliation with Polixenes, the fact that these encounters are presented in report, by three essentially anonymous and totally new speaking characters, comes as almost as big a surprise as the spectacular goings-on of 5.3.[55] I have already alluded in earlier chapters to the critical disapproval that has often been directed at the sudden recourse to reported action here.[56] The use of report in 5.2 is nothing if not pointed, however, and much of the scene's dialogue seems designed, in part, to pre-empt the more obvious criticisms that might be levelled against its content and its dramaturgy. In the first

place, in line with the overall metafictional self-consciousness of *The Winter's Tale*, the reports on offer repeatedly draw attention to the sheer improbability of what is being reported. As the Second Gentleman puts it, 'this news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion' (ll. 27-29). The incredibility of events renders them similar to a fairy-story even before the process of re-telling them has got going.[57] Secondly, report itself is declared to be a thoroughly ineffectual tool for conveying the true nature of what has been happening. Thus anyone not present at the meeting of the two kings, we are told, has 'lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of' (ll. 42-43) – a remark which comes precisely, of course, at a stage where the play is very markedly not allowing its own audience to see the events concerned, where it is exclusively relying on (inadequately?) speaking about them.[58]

5.2 also serves an important preparatory function, with report once again involved, through its news that the newly reconciled royal families have gone off to look at Giulio Romano's statue of Hermione, which Perdita has apparently somehow managed to hear about (see ll. 93-94). The gentlemen themselves express a desire to be present at this event, an experience which in this case the audience will be permitted to share in too.[59] Their conversation about the statue provides the first real hint of the spectacle that is in store in the following scene, and much of what is said here, as is well known, shows in a very different light in retrospect, after the events of 5.3.[60] The mention of Giulio Romano, with its sudden introduction of the Renaissance artist into what has seemed until now the primarily Hellenistic world of the play's Sicilia, is, however, profoundly disjunctive and disconcerting from the start, and only becomes more so as matters proceed.[61] All the talk about

the extreme lifelikeness of his artistry is another pointer forward, and forms an essential part of the blurring of the boundaries between art and nature, reality and illusion, that is such a prominent feature of the whole statue-sequence. Even the phrase used to describe Romano's work, 'newly performed' (l. 95), with its powerful theatrical associations and lack of specificity about the precise nature of what he has been doing, has a certain ambiguity and equivocation about it, which contributes to an atmosphere of uncertainty that carries over into the final scene, in relation not just to verbal meaning, but to the realm of the visual as well.[62]

So far as 5.3 itself is concerned, the question of what is being shown on the stage is rendered problematic from the instant the statue is first made visible. At the most basic of levels, as Leonard Barkan has observed,

> an audience new to the text would not know whether
> they were meant to believe that the actor revealed in
> the final scene was performing the role of a statue or
> of Hermione pretending to be a statue.[63]

This tension is exacerbated by all the references to how realistic the statue looks, how it seems almost to be moving and breathing (ll. 60-70). These obviously help prepare for Hermione's eventual "awakening", and are a signal of the characters' own perplexity about what it is that they are seeing; but they also serve as a cover for any minor, involuntary movements from the person performing the statue, and in this respect further complicate the nature of the representation here, exploiting or compounding any uncertainty on the audience's part as to whether or not it might actually have seen the "statue" move. Even after the Queen is known to be alive, ambiguity and equivocation still prevail. Tentativeness and qualification characterize the language ('but it appears

she lives' (l. 118), 'I saw her, | As I thought, dead' (ll. 140-141)), and Hermione's own explanation for what has happened to her, addressed specifically to her daughter, is decidedly uninformative when it comes to details:

>   Tell me, mine own,
> Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived?
>   How found
> Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,
> Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
> Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
> Myself to see the issue.
>   (ll. 124-129)

She is given nothing more to say, and Paulina expressly discourages any inquiries or discussion in this area from the other figures on stage (see ll. 115-119, 129-131).[64]

Exactly what happens to Hermione used to be one of the central concerns of the critical debate, but current criticism seems on the whole to have plumped firmly for the conclusion that she spends sixteen years hidden away in Paulina's 'removed house' (5.2. 106), awaiting the moment of her daughter's return to stage her own reappearance through the statue-trick.[65] Under the terms of this reading, Shakespeare simply deceives his audience into thinking Hermione is dead. Commentators and performers even go so far as to speak with confidence of Paulina's plan for the whole affair, speculating as to when she originally formulates this idea and first starts to put it into practice.[66] It is true that, whilst it hardly constitutes a full and thorough explanation of events, Hermione's claim that she has 'preserved' herself 'to see the issue' does more or less rule out any idea of a "genuine" resurrection here.[67] Furthermore, it is safe to assume that nobody in the theatre is likely really to have come back to life over the course of the play. Equally, though, nobody will really have spent sixteen years in seclusion during

the time that it takes for *The Winter's Tale* to be performed. And within the world of the fiction, the alternative to resurrection/depetrification is hardly that much more plausible at a realistic level. The more curiously one considers the situation, indeed, the harder it becomes to sustain. How could Hermione hide herself away for sixteen years? Why would Paulina come up with such a plan? What would be the point of the process? In what way could it have been implemented? Why the need for the whole charade with the statue? Where, when all is said and done, does Giulio Romano fit in to everything?[68] Other questions follow on from this: what is the audience meant to make of a Paulina who lies to Leontes for sixteen years, encouraging him to mourn for and feel guilty about causing the death of someone who is alive and well and living near by? What would Leontes's likely reaction be on discovering the "truth"? As Catherine Belsey remarks,

> the text provides enough hints of a 'realist' explanation of Hermione's return to life to make such a reading possible [. . .], but to believe that Hermione has remained in hiding for sixteen years makes a cruel parody of the mourning of Leontes and an absurdity of Paulina's solemn invocation to the statue, and is thus unsatisfactory precisely at the 'realist' level.[69]

The key point in all this is not that Shakespeare conceals the fact of Hermione's survival, deceiving his audience into believing she has died. By all the usual laws of the drama, Hermione *is* dead. The audience's knowledge of her death is, admittedly, dependent from the start on nothing more than a report from Paulina (3.2. 171-208). But then, death in this theatre is frequently only confirmed through report; and there is no substantive difference in their authority as evidence between Paulina's announcement of Hermione's death and the Servant's news of the death of Mamillius in the same scene (ll. 141-144).[70] In either case, the initial report is backed up by the progress of the plot,

the reactions of the other characters, and what the audience is told is going to happen afterwards (and is given no reason to assume does not happen). Leontes himself leaves the stage at the close of 3.2 with the express intention of going to see the bodies of his wife and son before burying them together (ll. 233-242); and as Stephen Orgel remarks in relation to this, 'Leontes is our guarantee that the two deaths are real: if Mamillius is dead, so is Hermione'. He goes on to add, 'by the same token, if Leontes is being deceived by Paulina about the reality of death, so are we being deceived by Shakespeare'.[71] There is nothing in the text of 3.2, however, to indicate that Paulina is lying; and significantly, elsewhere in the play where a report is designed by its speaker to deceive, this is made unmistakably apparent in the dialogue or from what the audience already knows.[72] If the declaration of Hermione's death is not true, moreover, what does this mean for all those other pieces of seemingly reliable information that are presented only via report - such crucial elements in the plot as Cleomenes and Dion's awe-inspiring description of the spiritual atmosphere of Delphos and the voice of the oracle in 3.1, and their claim to have preserved the oracle intact (3.2. 123-130), Antigonus's death and the shipwreck, or Hermione's protestations of innocence to the charges against her.[73]

Such reason as the audience is given for believing in the death of Hermione is not necessarily confined, either, to Paulina's speech and the fact that her news is accepted by the people around her. There is also the question of Antigonus's dream (or vision), and the soliloquy in which he describes this (3.3. 14-57). Antigonus himself is unsure as to exactly what he has experienced - dream, vision, ghost, hallucination (to quote Orgel, he 'keeps all the options open').[74] Manifestations of this sort (ghosts and/or "human spirits") in Shakespeare, though, are usually

only associated with figures who are categorically dead; and Antigonus certainly understands what he has seen as evidence that Hermione has died.[75] If he is right, of course, then the Queen's reappearance in 5.3 can only be the result of some form of resurrection. But Antigonus is not the most reliable of interpreters here. He also reads his instructions as a sign that the baby he is abandoning is really the child of Polixenes (something that is specifically denied by the oracle). And critics have taken pains to point out besides that Shakespeare and his audience need have had no difficulty in accepting the idea of an apparition of a living person's spirit.[76] Whatever one makes of the various conflicting possibilities, however, one thing which is clear is that, like Posthumus's vision in *Cymbeline*, this is an encounter with a definite "other-worldly" element to it. The information given to Antigonus about where to leave the baby is what makes possible the play's resolution, and the naming of the child as Perdita is fundamental to the fulfilment of the terms of the oracle - for its 'that which is lost' to be 'found' (3.2. 135). The level of insight and knowledge this involves, and the prophetic comment about his own fate (3.3. 33-35), suggest something more than a purely psychological experience on Antigonus's part, an event entirely "in his head". I would add too that the notion of an appearance by Hermione's living spirit sits more than a little uneasily with the description of the apparition's approach 'in pure white robes | Like very sanctity' (ll. 21-22), with its obvious evocation of the image of a saint in bliss.[77]

In the end, though, any discussion regarding the "truth" of this situation is essentially moot. After all, we are dealing here with a report of an exclusively off-stage event, nothing pertaining to which has "really" taken place. The very manner of the presentation afforded to this dream-vision gives rise to ambiguities and uncertainties which

cannot be resolved or explained away at the level of the plot. And the complexities and instabilities of representation at this point are further exacerbated by the context in which Antigonus's soliloquy is embedded, the way it is surrounded in 3.3 by elements of comic report (describing far-from-comic events), problematic spectacle (in the shape of the bear), and a strange, almost excessive accumulation of forms of theatrical shorthand - the prop baby and its accoutrements; the presence of the Mariner, no doubt suitably attired, in indication that a sea-board sequence is taking place (on a dubious coastline); storm effects; and even, it would appear, the sounds of an off-stage hunt. The result of all this is to create a powerful impression of a deliberate highlighting of stage conventions and questions of stage "realism", as well as of a testing of and pushing at the boundaries and the possibilities, both practical and conceptual, of theatrical representation.[78]

Issues to do with the limits of representation are also very much to the fore during Paulina's report of the death of Hermione. I have made the case above why it will not work to say that Paulina is simply lying here, since no reasonable or coherent narrative can be constructed around such an idea. But the question of the trustworthiness of her information and the possibility of corroborating what she has to say are matters raised directly by Paulina herself. Countering the response to her news by the unnamed Lord, 'the higher powers forbid!', she avers:

> I say she's dead. I'll swear't. If word nor oath
> Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring
> Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,
> Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you
> As I would do the gods.
>
> (3.2. 201-206)

In these lines, Paulina is touching on similar problems with regard to convincing others of the validity of her testimony as confront Hermione

during the trial.[79] With the particular gambit she adopts, however, in which her claims are immediately testable by anyone going and doing as she suggests, Paulina can hardly be lying to her on-stage audience (how could she get away with it?).[80] Yet a very distinct game with representation is being played out at this point. What the theatre audience itself precisely cannot do, of course, is 'go and see'; and if it could, it would find off-stage not a dead Hermione but a (presumably) living performer. At the instant where the conduct and construction of the narrative start to become problematic, where it is more important than ever to know the exact nature of the off-stage action (and the quality of the report describing it), the play calls special attention to the particular "fictionality" of the off-stage world, the extra degree of "unreality" associated with anything that is supposed to take place there. We are reminded, that is to say, that whilst Paulina may not be lying, the actor playing her part, on one level at least, certainly is. And the emphasis, both here in Paulina's speech (with its obvious pre-echoes of the statue scene) and in the extended reports of 5.2, on the fact that certain material is specifically not available to the view of the audience, not open to proper confirmation or corroboration, points in turn to the flexible truth-content of un- and under-represented action, the way the reality of such events is determined (and re-determined) entirely in the telling.

As things stand, therefore, all attempts at rationalizing Paulina's behaviour or Hermione's experience are doomed to failure, since they are forced to rely on speculation that can never be sufficiently grounded, that involves reading between the lines in areas in which the text itself is very pointedly silent. All one can really say is that, from the moment Paulina delivers her report, Hermione is dead, and - logically,

realistically, dramaturgically - cannot be anything other than dead; from the moment the statue starts to 'descend' (5.3. 99), however, she is alive, and *always has been alive*. There is no concord to this discord. The play disrupts any conventional realist expectations with respect to the creation and maintaining of narrative consistency. One potential implication of this, which has perhaps contributed to a critical reluctance to go down this path, is laid out by Belsey:

> if fiction can bring to life *without explanation* characters it has killed, disrupt intelligible patterns of relationship between events, then surely it refuses the responsibility of art to confront real issues?[81]

In a sense, though, as Orgel indicates, any anomaly here is only an extension of a more general trait in Shakespearian dramaturgy. So whilst all the evidence might point firmly towards Hermione's having died, this is not a sign that,

> at the play's conclusion, Hermione really is a statue come to life (we have the word of Hermione herself that this is not the case), but that Shakespearian drama does not create a consistent world. Rather it continually adjusts its reality according to the demands of its developing argument.[82]

And yet, drawing attention to this basic dramaturgical principle, which I have myself sought to emphasize in Chapter Four, hardly accounts for the extreme nature, the sheer audacity, of the situation here, why the play so spectacularly disrupts its inner consistency in relation to this particular sequence - a sequence in which issues of art and artifice, fiction and reality, truth and deception, knowledge and belief, are already central to the events being dramatized. Belsey goes further in trying to pin down the specific effects involved, arguing that the refusal of the play to make its plot credible, to fill in the gaps in its action, 'puts in question for the audience what it is to know *in* fiction and *through* fiction'.[83] On these terms, not only is the

verity of the play's own action placed under 'strong suspicion'; so too are any of the potential or accepted "verities" it might be thought to express or exploit. Indeed, the challenge to knowledge here creates a genuinely radical uncertainty in which belief (or disbelief) in almost anything is not merely brought under suspicion, but left in suspension. Far, then, from being a denial of artistic responsibility, one might say, this aspect of *The Winter's Tale* reflects back upon the nature of that responsibility, confronting some of the basic ambiguities that lie at the heart of the practice of finding meaning and structure in fictions and representations. I would argue, too, that the effect of this extends to take in – to open to interrogation and lay bare the implications of – many of the thematic concerns and techniques bound up with the play's achievement of its final resolution, issues to do with power and royal succession, social hierarchy, gender relations, aesthetic closure, faith, ritual, and resurrection, and so on.[84] As so often in the late plays, in other words, the self-conscious and ostentatious conjunction of spectacle and report brings to the surface all sorts of ideological, interpretative, and aesthetic tensions, both within the on-stage situation itself, and reaching out from the dramatic moment into the wider intellectual and political realms and culture beyond.

CHAPTER SIX

'WORDS ARE NO DEEDS'
HENRY VIII (ALL IS TRUE) AND THE POLITICS OF TRUTH

Pilate saith unto him, What is truth?
(John 18. 38)

Towards the end of *Henry VIII*, at the culmination of the christening ceremony for the baby Princess Elizabeth, the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Cranmer, assumes centre stage to deliver a lengthy visionary prophecy celebrating the coming glories of the reigns of Elizabeth and her successor, James. In language rich with resonance and allusion, Cranmer tells that his country will become a flourishing Paradisial land, free from danger, hunger, evil, internal strife, or religious dissension:

> Let me speak, sir,
> For heaven now bids me, and the words I utter
> Let none think flattery, for they'll find 'em truth.
> This royal infant – heaven still move about her –
> Though in her cradle, yet now promises
> Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings
> Which time shall bring to ripeness. She shall be –
> But few now living can behold that goodness –
> A pattern to all princes living with her,
> And all that shall succeed. Saba was never
> More covetous of wisdom and fair virtue
> Than this pure soul shall be. All princely graces
> That mould up such a mighty piece as this is,
> With all the virtues that attend the good,
> Shall still be doubled on her. Truth shall nurse her,
> Holy and heavenly thoughts still counsel her.
> She shall be loved and feared. Her own shall bless her;
> Her foes shake like a field of beaten corn,
> And hang their heads with sorrow. Good grows with her.
> In her days every man shall eat in safety
> Under his own vine what he plants, and sing
> The merry songs of peace to all his neighbours.
> God shall be truly known, and those about her
> From her shall read the perfect ways of honour,

And by those claim their greatness, not by blood.
Nor shall this peace sleep with her, but, as when
The bird of wonder dies - the maiden phoenix -
Her ashes new create another heir
As great in admiration as herself,
So shall she leave her blessèdness to one,
When heaven shall call her from this cloud of darkness,
Who from the sacred ashes of her honour
Shall star-like rise as great in fame as she was,
And so stand fixed. Peace, plenty, love, truth, terror,
That were the servants to this chosen infant,
Shall then be his, and, like a vine, grow to him.
Wherever the bright sun of heaven shall shine,
His honour and the greatness of his name
Shall be, and make new nations. He shall flourish,
And like a mountain cedar reach his branches
To all the plains about him. Our children's children
Shall see this, and bless heaven. [. . .]
She shall be, to the happiness of England,
An agèd princess. Many days shall see her,
And yet no day without a deed to crown it.
Would I had known no more. But she must die -
She must, the saints must have her - yet a virgin,
A most unspotted lily shall she pass
To th' ground, and all the world shall mourn her.
                    (*Henry VIII*, 5.4. 14-62)[1]

With its laudatory tone and firm sense of resolution and achievement, Cranmer's speech serves as an apt conclusion to the last of the play's many elaborate on-stage spectacles. And it is entirely in keeping with the dramaturgy of *Henry VIII* as a whole that that spectacle should go hand-in-hand with an example of extended narrative report. For the Archbishop's words, of course, though cast as prophecy, are also a form of history, bound up in all the usual temporal paradoxes that surround the representation of prophecy within history plays.[2] In this respect, they also blur some of the boundaries between the fiction and the world outside, as the 'children's children' Cranmer envisages who 'shall see this, and bless heaven', become, in effect, the Jacobean spectators of the play's original audiences.[3]

There are obvious parallels between this passage and the closing sequence of *Cymbeline*, and Cranmer's vision operates within a similar

symbolic economy to Jupiter's prophetic label and its interpretation by Philharmonus. Cranmer's speech draws on many of the same Biblical images and ideas, utilizes many of the same tropes and techniques of Jacobean panegyric, and takes its place within the same cultural and historical context of political prophecy.[4] If anything, though, in line with the more elaborate nature of his prophecy and its more explicit engagement with the external world of history, the Archbishop's frame of reference and intertextual appropriation of authority extend even further. His central conceit of the advent of God's chosen servant, emphasis on virginity, and focus on the new-born baby, echo a whole host of Old Testament Messianic prophecies and golden-age visions of a new dispensation.[5] These same elements also recall Virgil's famous Fourth Eclogue, with its child-centred hopes for the future, and the tradition of Christian exegesis associated with this poem.[6] The evocation of an earthly golden age obviously has major classical antecedents too, most notably in this context in Virgil's poem and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, analogue texts which help to invoke as an implicit presence here the strongly Protestant characterization of Queen Elizabeth as Astraea, the returning virgin goddess of Justice.[7]

This last factor points in turn to the most prominent "extra" element in Cranmer's discourse, the most extensive additional layer of reference in his project of praise and compliment. The Archbishop's language is steeped in the complex interlocking imagery and symbolism of the cult of Elizabeth, with all its powerful Reformation associations.[8] And whilst the tone of his vision connects closely to Jacobean modes of artistic panegyric such as the court masque, its form looks back to specifically Elizabethan dramatic traditions of monarchical celebration and tribute.[9] Where the Elizabethan dimensions of the speech perhaps reach their peak

is in the richly multivalent image of the 'maiden phoenix', which seems, amongst other things, to invest the Queen with a combination of both Marian and Christ-like characteristics.[10]   But this is also a phrase that reflects the extent to which the language of Elizabethan myth-making here contributes as well to the Jacobean topicality of the Archbishop's speech.   For, to follow a well-worn critical path, the terminology of the cult of Elizabeth, and high within it the image of the phoenix, acquired a new force during the early Stuart period in relation to the Jacobean Princess Elizabeth, especially round the time of her wedding in February 1613.[11]   As R. A. Foakes in particular has shown, Cranmer's prophecy 'resembles in its biblical echoes and stock complimentary imagery what was being said in many of the books celebrating the wedding'.[12]   Indeed, Foakes and others have gone so far as to link the composition of *Henry VIII* directly to the wedding celebrations, though it has to be said this idea considerably overstretches the evidence at our disposal, and, I would argue, rather flattens out the complexities in the play's engagement with its contemporary world.[13]

Cranmer's prophecy represents in many ways the most disruptive and obtrusive element in the dramaturgy of *Henry VIII*, and as such, has proved something of a standard starting-point for critical discussion. It certainly relates very closely to all the main interpretative cruxes and controversies in the reception of *Henry VIII* - issues to do with its tone and genre, political and topical agenda, aesthetic form and quality, authorship, and so on.   In particular, the speech stands at the heart of a number of influential models of reading that have been applied to this play.   With its emphasis on (re-)birth, wonder, peace and divine favour, and a golden future, and its association of the processes of renewal with a royal daughter, Cranmer's vision provides one of the clearest links

between *Henry VIII* and the other late plays, at least so far as the "Romance" approach to these works is concerned.[14] Its elements of monarchical tribute tie in well with the frequent courtly impulse in late play criticism, and have often been construed specifically in terms of a masque-like movement within the action as a whole, culminating in this moment of ultimate royal unveiling.[15] The Archbishop's perspective on history embodies a Providential design, which has been taken to provide a justification for Henry's actions, and which the King's championing of Cranmer in the fifth act can be seen to further, interrupting the *de casibus* pattern of tragic falls that has prevailed up until this point.[16] And this reflects in turn an especially strong trend in interpretation, which views the play as tracing Henry's growth in stature and moral authority as a monarch, as he finally learns to surround himself with good counsellors, and progresses, in a purely positive respect, from being 'a king who reigns' to 'a king who rules'.[17]

What all these readings have in common is that they respond to Cranmer's prophecy on, so to speak, its own terms, equating its mode and outlook with the overall perspective of the play. And it is clearly the case that Biblical imagery, nationalist sentiment, sheer confidence of vision, the location of the speech at the climax of the action, and the fact that its basic "prophetic" information is confirmed by the passage of history, do all come together to invest Cranmer's 'hymn of praise', as Peter Rudnytsky has termed it, with 'a compelling authority'.[18] But that authority, as Rudnytsky also attests, is at least challenged, and perhaps directly compromised, both by the context which the rest of the play supplies, and by some of the realities of history itself. It does not require much knowledge of events subsequent to the play's own time-frame to register that Cranmer's narrative offers a very selective

version of history. Apart from anything else, it ignores the reigns of two of Henry's own children, including that in which the Archbishop himself was to meet his death at the hands of the Tudor State.[19] Of course, the question of what Cranmer fails to mention might be regarded as essentially irrelevant to interpretation, extrinsic to the nature of the world which the play presents. It might, that is, were it not for the fact that many of the troubles and tribulations in store for the play's characters, both later in Henry's own reign and (for those that survived) during the decades that followed, are strongly evoked elsewhere in the dramatic action.

Henry VIII, in Alexander Leggatt's evocative phrase, is 'haunted by the future'.[20] Cranmer's own fate, for example, hangs over the whole of the council scene in 5.2, and the religious divides and controversies of the next fifty years are particularly signalled by the singling out of his reconciliation with the Bishop of Winchester as a moment of special tension/significance (see ll. 204-215).[21] The bloody history of sixteenth-century English martyrdom, and the violent end of another of Henry's closest servants, are summoned up in the fallen Cardinal Wolsey's advice to Thomas Cromwell:

> Be just, and fear not.
> Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,
> Thy God's, and truth's. Then if thou fall'st, O Cromwell,
> Thou fall'st a blessèd martyr.
> (3.2. 447-450)[22]

And these comments come not long after the Cardinal's irony-laden hopes for the future of his replacement as Lord Chancellor, Sir Thomas More:

> May he continue
> Long in his highness' favour, and do justice
> For truth's sake and his conscience, that his bones,
> When he has run his course and sleeps in blessings,
> May have a tomb of orphans' tears wept on him.
> (3.2. 396-400)[23]

Perhaps even more telling, though, considering the tone and emphasis of the final scene, are the numerous ironic foreshadowings that mark the play's presentation of Anne Boleyn. From the moment the Duke of Buckingham, on the way to his own execution, and in one of the play's most vivid images, refers to 'the long divorce of steel' that awaits him (2.1. 77), the eventual fate of Henry's second queen is made an implicit presence within the action.[24] Threats to Anne's life and health are a prominent feature of the fifth act, as in Henry's ominous fear, expressed during his final speech, that 'she will be sick else', if proper decorum is not followed (5.4. 73-74); or the description of her dangerous labour, in which her 'suffrance' makes 'almost each pang a death' (5.1. 68-69).[25] And her principal scene, 2.3, is absolutely packed with historical ironies and pre-echoes of her future, as it has Anne swear she 'would not be a queen | For all the world' (ll. 45-46), presents her thoughts on the sorrows of falling from such a position, and explores the possibilities of her being able 'ever to get a boy' (l. 44).[26]

Cranmer's vision, then, suppresses a bloody history, about which the rest of the play is by no means quite so silent. It also offers a decidedly simplified, sanitized version of the operations of Tudor royal succession. Again, the rest of the play furnishes reminders of some of the events which the Archbishop ignores. The reign of Mary Tudor is glancingly alluded to in Katherine's hopes for her daughter's future (4.2. 130-139) – an exercise in prophecy akin to Wolsey's comments on Sir Thomas More.[27] Anne's life-threatening labour, a detail apparently invented in the play, offers a kind of proleptic memory of the death of Jane Seymour and the birth of Edward VI.[28] And then, above all, there is the moment of the Old Lady's announcement to the King of the birth of Elizabeth, the child who is first described as 'a lovely boy', and then

as 'a girl | Promises boys hereafter' (5.1. 165-167).[29] This ostentatious highlighting of the discrepancy between the actual sex of the baby and Henry's much-trumpeted desires is an obvious pointer to the ultimately disastrous implications for Anne of her giving birth to a girl at this time.[30] It also provides a complicating context for Henry's endorsement of Cranmer's 'oracle of comfort' in the final scene, his claim that 'when I am in heaven I shall desire | To see what this child does' (5.4. 66-68). For the Old Lady's comments have already introduced the factor of the historical Henry's ambivalent attitude, whilst still here on earth, to the birth of his second daughter - a daughter he caused to be officially bastardized after the downfall of her mother.[31]

Henry's enthusiastic response to the Archbishop's prophecy (ll. 63-76) suggests at least a tacit approval on his part for the accession of the second monarch that Cranmer celebrates here, King James. In this respect, the on-stage Henry offers James a particular ratification of his place on the English throne that actual history had denied him: Henry VIII's will had specifically sought to exclude the Stuart succession (the Scottish claim to the English throne through the line of his elder sister, Margaret), in favour of the descendants of his younger sister, Mary, the wife of the Duke of Suffolk, and grandmother of Lady Jane Grey.[32] A similar bypassing of uncomfortable historical detail lies at the core of Cranmer's speech: the seamless, sexless transition from Elizabeth to James that is figured in the image of the phoenix conveniently ignores a whole history of controversy and insecurity regarding the succession during Elizabeth's reign.[33] It is true that, in these instances, there are no references or allusions within the action that directly evoke the more problematic aspects of the play's future world.[34] But Cranmer himself draws attention to the threat too much historical knowledge can

pose to the stability of the vision he is presenting ('Would I had known no more. But she must die'). And the Jacobean topicality of his speech also works to complicate the picture of smooth succession that he sets up. For if the wedding of Princess Elizabeth is relevant to the play at this point, then so too is the event that came close to overshadowing that wedding entirely, the death of Prince Henry in the autumn of 1612.[35] Cranmer's image of the spreading branches of the royal cedar (ll. 52-54), so reminiscent of the symbolism used to represent the two British princes in *Cymbeline*, would seem to strike an unavoidably hollow note against such a background.[36] Moreover, the Prince himself was characterized as a phoenix in many of the elegies written in the wake of his death.[37] It is worth remembering, too, that the absence or death of male royal children already hangs heavily over the action of *Henry VIII* - in the shape of Katherine's first husband, Prince Arthur, and the boy-children of Katherine and Henry who have all 'died where they were made, or shortly after | This world had aired them' (2.4. 189-190).[38]

In any case, the pressure of actual history is made a presence within the action here by the very ambition of the Archbishop's speech. Cranmer does not just offer a glowing evocation of (in Jacobean terms) past Elizabethan glories. He seeks to extend his golden-age vision into the Jacobean present, the play's own contemporary reality. As Leggatt succinctly comments, 'that takes some doing'.[39] It also smacks strongly of the most basic royal compliment and flattery, though this is a charge that Cranmer explicitly seeks to deflect from the outset ('the words I utter | Let none think flattery, for they'll find 'em truth').[40] One way in which any flattery of James is potentially tempered, of course, is through the exemplary, exhortatory force implanted in the vision of Elizabeth, the Queen who is presented as 'a pattern to all princes living

with her, | And all that shall succeed'.[41]   With this in mind, a remark

like 'few now living can behold that goodness' might suggest something

of a come-down since the time of Elizabeth.   There are definitely hints

around that all is not quite as perfect under James as it first appears:

if the new phoenix is so wonderful, why such a powerful sense of loss

and nostalgia for its predecessor?   And one can hardly help but wonder

how compelling Cranmer's vision could have sounded to any Jacobean

spectators who did not feel they were living in an earthly paradise, who

could not forget the less-than-perfect aspects of their daily existence.

Other details, too, not least the single word, 'terror', can unsettle the

certainties of the panegyric mode, perhaps even in relation to Elizabeth

herself.[42]   But there is another aspect to this speech, and its elements

of royal flattery, that I want to bring into consideration during this

chapter.   That is, the question of how it fits into and functions within

the world that the play dramatizes, and particularly, the role it performs

for Henry (and Cranmer) during the final scene.

According to Gordon McMullan, 'critics invariably treat (or want to

treat) this scene, with its climactic status, as Shakespeare's; attributional

methods suggest, however, that it is a Fletcher scene'.[43]   But this

is only true up to a point.   Certainly, the more idealizing ("Romance",

Providentialist, growth-of-the-King) lines of reading, those approaches

that find their rationale in the terms of Cranmer's vision, do often adopt

a single-author perspective, or at least look to authorize their focus by

associating Cranmer's voice directly with Shakespeare's.[44]   As I indicated

in Chapter Three, though, one of the key motivations apparent in the

argument for divided authorship from its inception is a desire precisely

to dissociate Shakespeare from this closing scene, with its language of

personal compliment to James, and explicit contemporary political and

topical engagement. Samuel Hickson, in particular, considered that the tone and content of the Archbishop's speech were out of character for Shakespeare, whose spirit, he felt, was only likely to have expressed itself in this area in much more generalized terms. Indeed, Hickson even managed to cite an alternative text to support this idea, the four lines of verse that appear on the frontispiece of the 1616 edition of James's *Works*, and that find their way into the Oxford Shakespeare under the title, 'Upon the King'. This quatrain, for Hickson, showed how Shakespeare 'could evade a compliment with the enunciation of a general truth that yet could be taken as a compliment by the person for whom it was intended'.[45] And something of Hickson's position persists even into the Oxford edition, which in including this poem obviously presses, if only tentatively, the case for its Shakespearian authorship, but which is noticeably careful to observe, in its introductory comments to *Henry VIII* (or rather, *All Is True*), that the final scene of the play, with its fulsome celebration of Elizabeth and James, is 'not attributed to Shakespeare'.[46]

In fact, in their original context, the lines that Hickson so prefers, with their assertion that 'knowledge makes the king most like his maker' (l. 4), are at least as nakedly flattering to James as anything in the Archbishop's words. One might say, they represent personal compliment masquerading as a general truth. They also embody a direct, mystical valorization of monarchy *per se*.[47] The context of Cranmer's speech, on the other hand, its position within the action of *Henry VIII*, brings with it elements that work to complicate any straightforward complimentary effect. This is not just a question of the evocation of uncomfortable historical detail. It has to do too with the play's overall dramatic form. Early work from the authorship debate can again help to illustrate the

situation. For James Spedding, discomfort over Cranmer's speech was only part of a wider dissatisfaction with the final act in general, and the oddly episodic nature of the play's construction. Spedding's views on the dramaturgy of the fifth act, which embody objections routinely re-echoed for much of the twentieth century, are worth quoting at some length here:

> the effect of this play *as a whole* is weak and disappointing. The truth is that the interest, instead of rising towards the end, falls away utterly, and leaves us in the last act among persons whom we scarcely know, and events for which we do not care. The strongest sympathies which have been awakened in us run opposite to the course of the action. Our sympathy is for the grief and goodness of Queen Katharine, while the course of the action requires us to entertain as a theme of joy and compensatory satisfaction the coronation of Anne Bullen and the birth of her daughter; which are in fact a part of Katharine's injury, and amount to little less than the ultimate triumph of wrong. For throughout the play the king's cause is not only felt by us, but represented to us, as a bad one. We *hear*, indeed, of conscientious scruples as to the legality of his first marriage; but we are not made, nor indeed asked, to believe that they are sincere, or to recognize in his new marriage either the hand of Providence, or the consummation of any worthy object, or the victory of any of those more common frailties of humanity with which we can sympathize. The mere caprice of passion drives the king into the commission of what seems a great iniquity; our compassion for the victim of it is elaborately excited; no attempt is made to awaken any counter-sympathy for *him*: yet his passion has its way, and is crowned with all felicity, present and to come. The effect is much like that which would have been produced by the *Winter's Tale* if Hermione had died in the fourth act in consequence of the jealous tyranny of Leontes, and the play had ended with the coronation of a new queen and the christening of a new heir, no period of remorse intervening. It is as if Nathan's rebuke to David had ended, not with the doom of death to the child just born, but with a prophetic promise of the felicities of Solomon.[48]

These comments are obviously presented by Spedding as severe strictures on the artistry of the play, but in many ways they get close to the heart of how its dramaturgy actually works. They also point to

some of the essential difficulties of sustaining a credible reading of *Henry VIII* as an out-and-out "Romance", or a full-scale endorsement of Tudor and/or Jacobean establishment ideology. As Spedding effectively demonstrates, the ending of the play does not achieve any obviously satisfying sense of resolution in emotional, ethical, or even ordinary aesthetic terms. That he should seek to account for this in the way that he does is perhaps inevitable. Spedding was writing at a time when the fifth act was routinely heavily truncated in performance, and theatrical tradition had transformed Katherine and Wolsey into the dominating tragic figures of the piece.[49] And his tone and approach indicate as well that he is working within an interpretative framework that sets little store by – is actively hostile to – the kind of overtly political actions and concerns found in the final act.[50] There is really no context here for offering any explanation other than a division in authorship.[51] But what if the unease that he feels is a reaction entirely in line with the play's technique, what if Cranmer's speech and the mood of the final scene are meant to be disjunctive? On these terms, the audience would be supposed to be unable to forget the elements which Spedding finds so disturbing, the memory of the earlier action, like the memory of later history, would persist as a backdrop to interpretation to the very end. Only in recent years has criticism come to recognize the possibilities of such a dramaturgy, and to allow the features Spedding describes some of their due weight as meaningful, controlled, skilful aesthetic effects.

Truth and History

It is not so long ago that critics could write with confidence about the absence of irony, depth, or complexity in *Henry VIII*, or suggest that

its action does nothing to evoke the manner (or the nearness) of the deaths of Anne, More, Cromwell, etc.[52] To such a perspective, the play's engagement with history takes place almost exclusively in the arena of solemnity and celebration, as an elevated, ceremonial response to great events - in Coleridge's terms, 'a kind of historical masque, or shew-play'.[53] Wilson Knight offers probably the fullest development of this line of thinking.[54] And Knight's approach is central as well to the long tradition of treating *Henry VIII* in the context of the other late plays, and more specifically (in the second half of the twentieth century), as a member of the "Romances".[55] Modern understanding of the more ironic dimensions of the play's dramaturgy, its complex, troubled engagement with the areas of history and historiography, only really begins with the work of Lee Bliss in 1975.[56] Bliss's position was developed especially in important studies by Frank Cespedes and Judith Anderson in the early 1980s, but it took a long time for these essays to be properly absorbed into the critical mainstream.[57] Recent commentary, though, has finally started to get to grips with the improved understanding of the nature of the play reflected in this work, finding a particular focal-point for the kind of concerns these critics raise, in the drama's alternative (and possibly original) title, *All Is True*.[58]

All the evidence suggests that the play which the First Folio calls 'The Famous History of the Life of King HENRY the Eight' was known to at least some of its original spectators as *All Is True*.[59] Three of our witnesses to the event of the burning of the Globe Theatre in 1613, Henry Wotton, Henry Bluett, and Matthew Page, employ this title, and Wotton's description of the play concerned tallies so closely with the action of *Henry VIII* as to make the co-identity of the two all but certain.[60] The connection is confirmed the other way around in the

accounts of the fire by Thomas Lorkin and Edmond Howes, who refer respectively to 'the play of Hen: 8' and 'the play, viz. of *Henry* the 8'.[61] The Oxford Shakespeare, of course, argues adamantly that *All Is True* represents the original title, and re-titles the play accordingly, but the editors seem to me to push the case a little too far, especially in their treatment of the testimony of Howes and Lorkin, and I have felt it preferable not to follow their approach.[62] *All Is True* itself is perhaps best regarded, as seems to be happening more and more these days, as a highly important subtitle or coequal alternative.[63] It certainly possesses a pithy, enigmatic quality that has a characteristic Shakespearian ring to it, reminiscent of such other titles (and subtitles) as *All's Well That Ends Well, As You Like It, What You Will.* And it is obviously relevant in all manner of ways to the nature of the play, as I examine further below. But the extended Folio version carries interesting implications as well, not least from its being the only title in the volume to include the word, "famous". From one direction, this might appear to confirm a celebratory side to the play's presentation of history; but it also serves as a reminder of how well the events of the period, whether shown or not shown on the stage, would have been known to its early audiences.[64]

Sticking with the historically familiar title, *Henry VIII,* has a certain practical advantage from my point of view, in that it keeps to the fore the historical dimensions of the drama, maintaining its visibility as a Shakespearian history play. This seems to me important at a time when *Henry VIII* is still regularly ignored or marginalized in studies of this genre.[65] Nevertheless, the very fact that it also has a place among the late plays is a sign of its distance from the rest of Shakespeare's English histories, and in certain respects (the kind of world that it

dramatizes and the world it was written in), *Henry VIII* obviously does stand apart from these works.[66] But other patterns of continuity within the canon help to bridge that distance. Emphasizing the historico-political qualities of the play can draw attention to its connections with the political drama from the second half of Shakespeare's career, such works as *Julius Caesar, Coriolanus, Troilus and Cressida, Timon of Athens.*[67] And its credentials as a history play are further reflected in its relationships outside the Shakespeare canon, its links to a whole clutch of plays dealing with events from the reign of Henry VIII, and its position within the realm of Stuart historical drama in general. The tendency to decry the belatedness of *Henry VIII* as a history play, to find other contexts in which to place it, has been heavily influenced by the low light in which these non-Shakespearian works, and the post-Elizabethan histories in particular, have typically been held.[68]

Ultimately, though, my main reason for wanting to stress the title with the more obviously historical side to it is with a view to resisting the "Romance" classification that has so often been applied to this play in recent years. This is not to deny that *Henry VIII* has strong generic affiliations with its companion late plays, parallel elements of comedy, tragedy, tragicomedy, and, indeed, romance.[69] But to read the play categorically as a "Romance" is effectively to see it through the eyes of a single character, to collaborate with Cranmer in a romancification of historical reality. It is also to cast the play's politics in the most straightforwardly orthodox of terms.[70] It is a gesture that seems to me to require a monumental act of forgetting, in relation to both history and dramaturgy. Against this, as Rudnytsky tellingly remarks, 'the effect of reinstating *Henry VIII* in its proper generic context is to discover that it is as ambiguous and unorthodox as any of its predecessors'.[71]

The distinction between history and romance is by no means entirely clearcut, however, and there are definite generic tensions and interplays at work in the drama, which are only partially dealt with by describing it as a "romantic history", or some such equivalent.[72] Even critics well attuned to the play's ironies and unorthodoxies have been happy to find a decisive climactic gesture in Cranmer's prophetic vision. Bliss, for example, makes the point that 'within the dramatic fiction of the play, the prophecy appears disjunctive rather than as the climactic revelation of a providential pattern in the events we have witnessed'. Yet she still goes on to suggest that Cranmer's speech manages to override the ambiguities and discontinuities of the rest of the action, to offer a truth that transcends history, an aesthetic, idealized, miraculous resolution for 'humanity's endless, profitless cycle of rise and fall'.[73]

The generic and interpretative tensions involved in all this can be seen to converge in the play's *All Is True* title. Cranmer's prophecy, with its strong emphasis on truth (both the truth which the Archbishop claims to utter and the religious truth he describes as being attained under Elizabeth), is in many ways the point where the play's different strands of interest in the subject of truth all come together, where, in the kind of reading proposed by Bliss, the confident assertion that "all is true" can finally gain some purchase.[74] In this respect, as a title, *All Is True* carries a certain "Romance" dimension to it, but it has significant "historical" implications and associations as well. Cranmer's vision activates, so to speak, a moment of hope, the possibility of a specific realization (in "future" history) of the ideals that it embodies. The prophetic focus and topical impetus of the speech exert a powerful pressure, pulling the Archbishop's words, as it were, out of the dramatic action, away from their own moment within the fictional world. But

this is a gesture that is shown to be characteristic of spectacle and narrative throughout the play. And I want to argue in particular that the processes of history intrude (and obtrude) even in relation to the moment of the prophecy itself, "re-locating" it firmly within its context in the on-stage situation. In this respect, the "historical" side of the *All Is True* title - the far-reaching analysis and exploration of truth it reflects, and above all, the concern with the politics and ideology of truth and representation it can be shown to signal - is too strong to be effectively transcended or deflected. For Cranmer's speech is bound up in all the ambiguities, ironies, and uncertainties that attach to the subject of truth in *Henry VIII*, and that cluster especially around the play's elements of history and narrative, theatricality and realism, spectacle and report. It is some of these multiple ramifications of the *All Is True* title that I want to turn to next.

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Most obviously, in terms of the context in which it has come down to us, *All Is True* is a title that connects to the elaborate on-stage spectacle of the play, the specific concern with the faithful re-creation of historical state occasions and their precise details of ritual and pageantry that is manifested in the text's uniquely extended stage directions.[75] This certainly seems to be a principal element in Wotton's understanding of its relevance, given his emphasis on the 'many extraordinary circumstances of Pomp and Majesty' in the play, and his assessment of these as being 'sufficient in truth within a while to make greatness very familiar, if not ridiculous'.[76] As I have already noted in Chapter Four, Wotton clearly sees a potential for political disruption in the precision of the spectacle

on display, a levelling, demystifying, satirical, even subversive force in the play's ability to re-create for itself the trappings and spectacles of state.[77] But another available meaning in the claim of the title, *All Is True*, furnishes an inbuilt defence mechanism against any charges of subversion or sedition, by invoking alongside the authority of accuracy or realism, that of absolute loyalty – true in the sense of being, to cite some relevant *OED* definitions, 'firm in allegiance; faithful, loyal, constant, trusty', or 'honest, honourable, upright, virtuous, trustworthy'.[78]

Wotton himself points to at least one more feature of the play relevant to its declared interest in truth (its claim to being true), in his description of the action as 'representing some principall pieces of the raign of *Henry* 8.' – an observation that effectively makes him the first commentator on the episodic character of the drama that has so troubled critics down the years.[79] As Wotton seems to have grasped, *Henry VIII* is not concerned with offering a single unified narrative, or a precisely delineated ongoing intrigue that draws to a climax in its closing stages. Central areas of attention, domestic, religious, and political, can be made out, but the overall progress of the action is not propelled by any conventional sense of a developing dramatic plot, much less of a story with a definite beginning, a middle, and an end. Even during the final scene, closure is only brought about by looking far into the play's future, and this evocation of later history at the conclusion of the drama directly mirrors the close concern with the past displayed at the start of the opening scene. The horizons of the play are extended prominently outwards at either end, in opposite directions, forwards and backwards in time, placing its events within a framework suggestive of the continuity of human history and of the cyclical nature of political rise and fall. The effect is of a striking kind of historical realism,

a true-to-life sensation, that is achieved deliberately at the expense of traditional aesthetic form, with the peculiar episodic construction of *Henry VIII* and its lack of obvious dramatic unity combining to produce a genuine impression of the rhythm of temporal processes and the actual essential disorder, complexity, and open-endedness of human affairs.[80]

Whatever its implications in relation to the play's distinct emphasis on realism, its sense of historical verisimilitude, *All Is True* as a title also clearly raises the issue of the relationship of the dramatized events to actual history. On the surface at least, of course, it presents the most confident assertion of historical accuracy. This firm declaration of truth is backed up explicitly in the Prologue (ll. 9, 17-22), and reflected in various well-known features of the action. First, there is the play's unusual closeness to its principal sources in Holinshed's *Chronicles* and Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*, with a number of its speeches reproducing the wording and phraseology of the underlying text almost exactly.[81] Added to this, the selection and shaping of the historical material points to a wide-ranging engagement with the chronicle tradition, stretching well beyond the two most immediate sources, which seems to indicate, if not a particular concern to get things right, then at least an interest in exploring the breadth of the possibilities available.[82] *Henry VIII* also shows a distinct self-consciousness about the processes of retailing the past, invoking on two separate occasions the concept of "chronicling" (1.2. 72-77 and 4.2. 69-72), the second of these in a set-piece example of giving both sides of the story, of weighing up the alternative judgements of history.[83] Then there is the special *frisson* of authenticity and realism available should the play ever have been performed (as it seems likely it was) at the Blackfriars, where the theatre occupied the exact same hall that formed the actual location for the divorce trial in 2.4.[84]

This scene, and the later council scene (5.2), also apparently dramatize the very process of history being recorded, presenting on stage the activity of scribes and secretaries in turning spoken words into written records. Interestingly enough, these are two of the sequences in the play where its direct verbal reliance on its sources is at its closest.[85]

Having said all this, however, *Henry VIII* is far from absolutely faithful to its historiographical sources. Its events are drawn from a period of some twenty-four years, but there is little obvious indication during the course of the action of the passing of any great lengths of time. A number of episodes are entirely invented, whilst elsewhere, details from the histories are changed with considerable freedom, and established chronology is re-ordered as well as compressed.[86] Some of these alterations achieve what amount to useful dramatic simplifications, with, for example, various different historical lords and dukes being silently merged to form the nameless titled characters of the play.[87] Other departures from the printed sources are of greater interpretative significance. In particular, the growth of the King's passion for Anne is placed conspicuously early in relation to its first mention in Holinshed, with the result that the general emphasis in the chronicles on the genuine nature of Henry's troubled conscience is seriously undermined, and any ambiguities surrounding his motives for the divorce are played up appreciably.[88] And one or two changes of historical detail can seem almost prodigal, just for the sake of it. Thus *Henry VIII* ends with the King taking part in a christening celebration that historically he was absent from, whilst it opens with the Duke of Norfolk giving an eye-witness account of events he did not actually attend, to the Duke of Buckingham, who declares his absence in the play, but was in fact present.[89]

On these terms, it is hard to take "*All Is True*" as a serious claim
to literal historical accuracy, the protestations of the play's Prologue
on the subject notwithstanding.[90]   Those protestations themselves, in
any case, are far from straightforward or unequivocal, raising questions
about the nature of the play's engagement with historical truth that can
be appreciated even without a knowledge of the more precise details of
the history of the period:

> I come no more to make you laugh. Things now
> That bear a weighty and a serious brow,
> Sad, high, and working, full of state and woe –
> Such noble scenes as draw the eye to flow
> We now present. Those that can pity here
> May, if they think it well, let fall a tear.
> The subject will deserve it. Such as give
> Their money out of hope they may believe,
> May here find truth, too. Those that come to see
> Only a show or two, and so agree
> The play may pass, if they be still, and willing,
> I'll undertake may see away their shilling
> Richly in two short hours. Only they
> That come to hear a merry bawdy play,
> A noise of targets, or to see a fellow
> In a long motley coat guarded with yellow,
> Will be deceived. For, gentle hearers, know
> To rank our chosen truth with such a show
> As fool and fight is, beside forfeiting
> Our own brains, and the opinion that we bring
> To make that only true we now intend,
> Will leave us never an understanding friend.
> Therefore, for goodness' sake, and as you are known
> The first and happiest hearers of the town,
> Be sad as we would make ye. Think ye see
> The very persons of our noble story
> As they were living; think you see them great,
> And followed with the general throng and sweat
> Of thousand friends; then, in a moment, see
> How soon this mightiness meets misery.
> And if you can be merry then, I'll say
> A man may weep upon his wedding day.
>   (Prologue, ll. 1-32)

None of the three references to truth here is entirely unproblematic.
The intention, apparently, is to make things only truthful, but intention
is not necessarily achievement.[91]   The earlier undertaking that audience
members 'may here find truth' does not exactly constitute a promise

that they will find nothing but the truth. And of course, the notion of 'chosen truth' would seem to rule out of court immediately any chance of getting the whole truth.[92] In this connection, as a further complicating factor, the Prologue's own description of the action of the ensuing play hardly adds up to the whole truth itself. Its emphasis on pity, sadness, and the fall of great ones omits any sense of the play's conclusion in (on-stage) celebration, whilst the declared absence of laughter, bawdy, fooling and fighting is belied by the porter scene (5.3), if nothing else.[93] But then, scarcely anything that the Prologue says can be taken at face value. Even the promise of realism in the representation, the opportunity to see the figures from the past 'as they were living', seems double-edged, concerned with more than simply stressing the accuracy of the play's re-creation of history — as Gordon McMullan puts it, 'either a simple exhortation to suspend disbelief or, more likely, a hint that the representations on the stage have contemporary political resonance'.[94] Such resonance, however, if carried over into the expected awareness of 'how soon this mightiness meets misery', becomes potentially considerably charged, evoking a sense of how easily or quickly those currently in positions of power or greatness might also fall. And merriness at this is perhaps not so difficult to sustain, in spite of the final couplet. For the proverbial sound and comic feel of the closing line might seem to suggest that a man, or a woman, could well have a reason (whether they know it or not) for weeping on their wedding day; and once one sets it against the backdrop of Henry VIII's own particular marital history, it is hard not to read this concluding flourish from the Prologue ironically.[95]

Judith Anderson has rather neatly suggested that 'the distinction between *Henry VIII* and Shakespeare's more universally admired history plays is, perhaps, not that it is more historical but that it is less

fictional'.[96] Such a distinction does not necessarily apply only in the context of the Shakespeare canon. As is well known, the renunciation by the Prologue of bawdy, merriment, and foolery in favour of stately and sorrowful proceedings probably contains an allusion to Samuel Rowley's play about the reign of Henry VIII, *When You See Me, You Know Me* – embodying, it would seem, a rejection of this earlier drama's rampant disregard for historical record, and also of its reliance on romance and folk traditions of history, particularly in its depiction of the King.[97] Yet *All Is True* is not exactly a phrase which can be easily interpreted as a claim for merely improved truthfulness. And as Joseph Candido especially has argued, Rowley's play appears to have exerted a definite influence on *Henry VIII*, above all in the latter's representation of the monarch. Thus Henry's impulsive anger, predilection for novel oaths, and characteristic ejaculation, "Ha!", all closely recall *When You See Me*, and the oral and popular traditions which Rowley himself exploited.[98]

Indeed, *Henry VIII* as a whole shows a particular interest in oral processes of history. The action itself offers a multiplicity of verbal histories, alternative explanations and versions of events, conflicting narratives and perspectives, uncorroborated stories concerning actions and motives, and information that seems to float free of any determinate source. Gossip and rumour are pervasive, and even slander in this world can turn out to be truth (2.1. 147-156).[99] In many ways, the Prologue provides the first of all these oral histories, offering an account of the play's events that, like so many of the narratives within the drama, is a mixture of truth and fiction. *Henry VIII* is also a play full of texts and documents, papers of one sort and another, written accounts, testimonies, and agendas, the building-blocks, as it were, of historiography. But its use of non-chronicle source material and the

emphasis on multiplying spoken narratives suggest an interest in the extent to which oral traditions preserve "truths" that might be absent from the historical record. Or indeed, to turn the situation around, the extent to which the historical record might be no more reliable than oral tradition.[100] In particular, I would argue, the play shows a concern with exploring the creation of history along lines that reach beyond the written record, historiography, into wider areas of what might be termed "historification", the full range of the processes involved in constructing the narratives of the past (and the present) which we call "history".[101] In this connection, it is noticeable that, even when *Henry VIII* specifically invokes the image of chronicling, with all its powerful associations with the historiographical tradition, the play's own chronicle sources, it does so in a context of oral history.[102]

Henry VIII occupies its own position within a third historifying tradition, that of dramatic representation, a form which in its very nature, as script and performance, cuts across the divide between oral and written histories, and brings with it the opportunity for presenting history in the guise of a living process.[103] Part of the effect of the Prologue's allusion to *When You See Me, You Know Me* is to evoke the wider context of Elizabethan and Jacobean theatrical explorations of the events of Henry's reign. Amongst other surviving works, *Sir Thomas More* and *Thomas, Lord Cromwell* stand out as particular influences on *Henry VIII*.[104] Another pre-existing drama which has a definite bearing on the play, not least because of the temporal proximity of its own historical action, is *Richard III*. The fact that the Buckinghams of the two plays are father and son provides a link that is twice referred to in the action of *Henry VIII*, first by the Duke's Surveyor, and then by the Duke himself (1.2. 194-199, 2.1. 108-132).[105] Yet both the invocations

of the past involved here refer to individual events which are only, if anything, peripheral presences in the earlier play, and certainly not shown on the stage.[106] They are allusions that are not quite allusions, recollections of Shakespeare's earlier drama that serve to emphasize the selectivity of dramatic history, that bring into play, in these terms, another layer of awareness, another complicating factor in relation to the multiple "truths" and versions of history already circling in and around the action of *Henry VIII*. And they are both, moreover, allusions that relate the events of the past in order to comment on the present, even though as they do so, the two characters concerned draw morals that are nothing less than diametrically opposed.[107]

What emerges strongly from these two examples, then, is a sense of history being manipulated to specific ends, even as the audience's hope of being certain about the "truth" of any given situation becomes more and more remote. One possible line of response to the play's *All Is True* title is to see in it an absolute scepticism in which any one view of history really does become as good as any other.[108] An alternative position, though, comes from Thomas Healy, who argues that the play is

> not claiming that there is no truth to be discovered;
> rather that it is a difficult but important pursuit,
> and one subject to revision within changing historical
> conditions.[109]

But whilst *Henry VIII* consistently removes any confidence as to which version of events on offer is the most reliable, it also consistently focuses attention on the uses to which the different versions produced are being put. That is to say, the play's interest in history and the re-telling of history relates as much to its ideological content as to its truth-value. By constantly drawing attention to the intrinsic limitations, the unreliability and downright deceptiveness of representation, whether

at the level of report or spectacle, the play highlights the contingency involved in establishing the political values and meanings that lie at the heart of the world that it dramatizes, the interpretative slippages and sleights of hand (and mouth) on which they depend. And the processes involved here can be traced by the audience, however demanding the task, through a focus on the gap between word and deed that is such a pervasive element within the dramatic action, and which the dramaturgy of the play works at all times to expose.

Word and Deed

As is now well recognized, Norfolk's description in the opening scene of the celebrations at the Field of the Cloth of Gold provides a paradigm of the workings of the dramaturgy of *Henry VIII*.[110] The way the action begins with an extended narrative of an elaborate political spectacle immediately points to a concern with the relationship between showing and telling, whilst the fact that the elaborate ceremonies involved are reported rather than presented is a sign of the thematic importance of spectacle within the play, beyond the level of simple theatrical show.[111] Having informed Buckingham that his illness in France has caused him to lose 'the view of earthly glory', Norfolk goes on to describe the various entertainments that took place there in terms that would seem to convey nothing but the utmost praise:

> men might say
> Till this time pomp was single, but now married
> To one above itself. Each following day
> Became the next day's master, till the last
> Made former wonders its. Today the French,
> All clinquant all in gold, like heathen gods
> Shone down the English; and tomorrow they
> Made Britain India. Every man that stood
> Showed like a mine. Their dwarfish pages were

As cherubim, all gilt; the *mesdames*, too,
Not used to toil, did almost sweat to bear
The pride upon them, that their very labour
Was to them as a painting. Now this masque
Was cried incomparable, and th'ensuing night
Made it a fool and beggar. The two kings
Equal in lustre, were now best, now worst,
As presence did present them. Him in eye
Still him in praise, and being present both,
'Twas said they saw but one, and no discerner
Durst wag his tongue in censure. When these suns –
For so they phrase 'em – by their heralds challenged
The noble spirits to arms, they did perform
Beyond thought's compass, that former fabulous story
Being now seen possible enough, got credit
That *Bevis* was believed.

<div align="center">(1.1. 13-38)</div>

He keeps up the same tone in response to the first hint of possible

scepticism from Buckingham ('O, you go far!' (l. 38)), with a defence of

his narrative that puts his own reputation as a nobleman on the line:

As I belong to worship, and affect
In honour honesty, the tract of ev'rything
Would by a good discourser lose some life
Which action's self was tongue to. All was royal.
To the disposing of it naught rebelled.
Order gave each thing view. The office did
Distinctly his full function.

<div align="center">(ll. 39-45)</div>

The characteristic late Shakespearian emphasis here on the limitations

inherent in even a highly skilful report further aggrandizes the quality

of the events concerned, implying that, for all its virtuosity, Norfolk's

initial description has failed to capture their full magnificence. And yet,

it soon transpires, whilst everything was apparently exactly as it should

have been ('all was royal'), nothing was quite what it seemed. The

treaty has been broken already, the expense was enormous, the nobles

are footing the bill, and it was all designed to fuel the ambitions of

Wolsey.

The change of perspective that is initiated as the dialogue develops

in 1.1 is the first of many such reversals within the play. With the

benefit of hindsight, the guarded elements and slight qualifications in Norfolk's language become more noticeable. His tendency to rely on what 'men might say' or what ''twas said', to pass on what 'got credit' and 'was believed' by the people watching, works to distance his own judgement from the general verdict he relates, relaying the official response the spectacle was designed to create. The sense of strain and pressure in his description that appears at first a reflection of Norfolk's effort to convey everything adequately, becomes instead in retrospect a comment on the inflated nature of the events themselves, a feature of the spectacle described rather than of the speaker's attempt to portray it. And the inability of the onlookers to distinguish who or what was best or worst, their constant need to revise judgements in the light of new events, as well as becoming a symbol for the audience's own position, serves as a reminder of the extent to which judgement, or at least public judgement, in such a context is constrained by the aims of the spectacle itself. It is not necessarily that people cannot make judgements, one notices, but that the situation requires them not to, the politics of the moment brings about a position in which no-one 'durst' be the 'discerner' foolish enough to 'wag his tongue' in judgement on the royal spectacle, or indeed, the royal person. And something of that same danger is presumably reflected in Norfolk's conversation with Buckingham and Lord Abergavenny, the testing out of each other's position that goes on before they start to become more critical in the views they express, to wag their own tongues in censure, if only of Wolsey.[112]

The process dramatized in this opening scene highlights the way events can mean different things depending on how one is looking at them, or even who one is talking to. Beyond this, though, it also

draws attention to the particular inculcating power of royal spectacle, its ability to shape people's perspectives to see it in the way it wants to be seen. And Norfolk's sense that 'all was royal' seems to remain with him even though "all" was directed by Wolsey. As so often in this play, the characters' criticisms of events are deflected away from the monarch, and the monarchical processes that entail the production of such spectacle. In later scenes, of course, it is the commentating gentlemen who analyse the play's political spectacles, picking apart motives, retailing gossip, looking for explanations, but also responding with enthusiasm or pity, in a not entirely detached way, to the show they are witnessing. That very involvement, however, is typical of the action of this play, where analysts and commentators are always bound up in some respect in the events they describe. Buckingham's litany of charges against Wolsey at 1.1. 168–193, for example, which might seem a natural extension of the processes of truth-telling and seeing behind the facade that he and Norfolk engage in with regard to events at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, are never documented, never fully corroborated, for all the detail he supplies. Buckingham himself is soon arrested for treason, in a charge that, it is perhaps still worth emphasizing, is by no means necessarily false. Norfolk, too, in the opening scene, is shown to have as limited a perspective as anybody, as he regales Buckingham with proverbial wisdom urging patience and restraint (ll. 123–149), which seems in the end to do little more than aid in the Duke's arrest, by diverting him from his plan to try to see the King.

Proverbial language is in fact another recurring element in the play's exploration of forms and modes of truth-telling. Henry himself introduces the most apposite example, in reminding Wolsey that 'words

are no deeds' (3.2. 154-155).   It is one of a number of moments in the

play where Henry effectively seems to damn himself out of his own

mouth.   For the gap between his own words and actions is frequently

only too evident.   Perhaps the most striking example occurs during the

divorce trial.   Immediately after Katherine has made her dramatic exit

from the scene, Henry offers what sounds like a ringing tribute to his

Queen, with a notable personal touch that intimates a sense of affection

rarely heard in this play:

> Go thy ways, Kate.
> That man i'th' world who shall report he has
> A better wife, let him in naught be trusted
> For speaking false in that.   Thou art alone -
> If thy rare qualities, sweet gentleness,
> Thy meekness saint-like, wife-like government,
> Obeying in commanding, and thy parts
> Sovereign and pious else could speak thee out -
> The queen of earthly queens.   She's noble born,
> And like her true nobility she has
> Carried herself towards me.
> (2.4. 130-140)

One would think he could hardly express more clearcut praise.   But as

so often, the pressure of context intrudes to complicate the situation,

and the harder it becomes to take Henry's words at face value.   For the

fact that Katherine is no longer present at this moment is crucial.   When

she appeals directly to him earlier in the scene (ll. 11-55), stressing the

same wifely virtues that he praises her for, Henry remains silent.[113]

And what sounds like private praise is actually public comment - though

it might be a public comment that is meant to sound like private praise.

In any case, it is hard to take Henry's position entirely seriously in the

light of his judgement on other husbands, since much of the point of

the divorce trial is precisely to help him get what he regards (for now)

as a better wife.   On these terms, Henry effectively adds himself to the

ranks of those who should 'in naught be trusted'.

This speech, with its difficulties of knowing whether Henry really means what he says or is just spinning a line, is characteristic of the presentation of the King in general. Even in relation to the multiple uncertainties of interpretation that pervade this play, Henry is an especially difficult figure to read, presented almost entirely within a public context, and almost entirely, too, from the outside, with no soliloquies, and only a few probable asides. Most of the time, it is far from clear what the King's own awareness of his actions is, if he is fully in control of things behind the scenes, or just plain muddling through in a way that matches his bluff exterior. In many respects, though, whether he is being sincere or hypocritical in this instance hardly matters. The effect is much the same either way. His words still serve as an exercise in damage-limitation and face-saving in relation to the trial, even if he really does think Katherine is the best wife in the world. And from her perspective, his commendations are valueless because too late - they come, as she herself has cause to say in a later instance, 'like a pardon after execution' (4.2. 122).

Similar factors apply with regard to Henry's long efforts later in the scene to outline his motives for pursuing the divorce (2.4. 153-227). The idea of conscience which he emphasizes is so insistently ironized during the dramatic action that it is hard not to find his claims here specious.[114] And again, effect is as important as intention. What is not always registered about Henry's defence of his behaviour is that it is a very blatant public statement of an official line, the story everyone is supposed to believe - 'mark th'inducement. Thus it came - give heed to't' (l. 166). In any case, that the King himself is thoroughly cognizant of the workings of power politics becomes evident in his interview with Cranmer in 5.1. Much of what he tells the Archbishop on that occasion

seems designed to show him how to behave, how to play the game of court intrigue properly, how to deal with his monarch. The word-games Henry plays with Wolsey on the subject of words and deeds in their final encounter carry with them the reminder of one of the reasons for Wolsey's fall from Henry's favour – the Cardinal's failure to deal adequately with Henry's warning, 'my good lord, have great care | I be not found a talker' (2.2. 78-79). The person who eventually manages to reconcile the King's words with his actions is Cranmer, in his final prophecy. It is a speech from a man who already owes his monarch a major favour, and its claims to God-inspired knowledge mask the fact that it pretty much tells Henry exactly what he wants to hear at this point.[115] The primary force of the King's public position regarding the divorce has been the need to produce a male heir. And it is Cranmer who solves Henry's problem in this respect after the birth of Elizabeth, who reconciles the King's words and his actions, making him 'a man', as Henry puts it (5.4. 64), by finding in the baby girl the promise of the future James I.[116] But the emphasis on the gap between word and deed here and throughout points to the degree of flattery to Henry that is going on in this sequence. Cranmer's vision may hold out the prospect of an ideal reality, but the play's focus is firmly on the politics of the moment, and the ideological appropriation of the idealized vision of truth. That is to say, the final scene of *Henry VIII* is not an exercise in imperial flattery and myth-making, but a dramatization of their processes, in which the persistent ironic vision of the rest of the action is still to the fore.

CHAPTER SEVEN

'CONSTANT TO ETERNITY'
MASTERY AND AUTHORITY IN *THE TWO NOBLE KINSMEN*

Critics of the late plays have tended to shy away from engaging too closely (if at all) with *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. Part of the reason for this, of course, is due to the post-*Tempest*, collaborative status of this text. But it also has a lot to do with its dark and troubling tone. In contrast to *Henry VIII*, there is no way at all *The Two Noble Kinsmen* can be accommodated to a serene, redemptive, positive "Romance" vision. The nature of the play can prove perplexing, too, for it is in many respects a strangely reticent work, that hardly conforms to any obvious type, and seems almost deliberately to frustrate its audiences' hopes and expectations. Its events are frequently ambivalent, uncertain, hard to grasp, difficult to know how to respond to, inconclusive or just plain abrupt.[1] In the context of the Shakespeare canon, it is something of an "outsider" play even setting aside the question of authorship. And in this respect it links in especially, in terms of tone and mode, with other works that might be said not to conform, that do not fit in with the standard patterns or categories, are experimental, individual, and so on. Thus it has much in common with those two other bleak and hard to place Greek plays, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Timon of Athens*, whilst it connects significantly as well, outside of the dramatic canon, to the *Sonnets*, *A Lover's Complaint*, even *The Phoenix and the Turtle*.[2]

The action of the play is characterized by a pattern of interruption and incompletion, with one sequence of on-stage spectacle after another

being suddenly and unexpectedly halted, left hanging in suspension.[3] Where such events and rituals do manage to conclude, prayers produce enigmatic responses from the gods, or funeral rites are performed long after they ideally should have been. At the heart of the drama is a morris dance, with some sort of pantomime accompanying the speech that introduces it, but both the visual elements here are frustratingly absent from (incompletely signalled within) the printed text. The dance itself, perhaps the most finished and successful spectacle actually presented on stage, is only saved at the last moment by the arrival of the Jailer's Daughter, mad enough to play the She-Fool without having to act or learn her part.[4] For a long time, of course, these two subplots of the morris dance and the Jailer's Daughter were both largely regarded with little enthusiasm, as being of little interpretative or theatrical value. It is only really with the development over the last couple of decades of a modern performing tradition that these elements of *The Two Noble Kinsmen* have come to be generally appreciated, and to be integrated into critical approaches to the play.[5]

As spectacle over the course of the action seems to become more and more problematic, unsuccessful, enigmatic, so the presence of narrative, the processes of narration, become more and more prominent. *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is full of extended narrative speeches, messengers' reports, set-piece examples of different narrative genres and traditions (elegiac, tragic, pastoral, epic), with its dénouement presented through an out-and-out classical *nuntius* speech. Indeed, the play shows a strong classicism in general, keeping its completed violent or competitive actions – of battle, games, and tournament – all largely off stage, with only aspects of their outcomes – garlanded victors, enhearsed kinsmen, captive knights – being shown to the audience. What it offers in their

place is the extremes of its poetry, in the first and fifth acts especially, where off-stage actions particularly accumulate.[6] And this poetry in turn reflects another aspect of the classicism of the play, being strongly evocative of the linguistic extremism of Senecan drama, and in the epic realm, of Statius's *Thebaid*, the work that lies behind Boccaccio's *Teseida* as well as Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, and which *The Two Noble Kinsmen* itself also seems directly to exploit.[7]

The particular deployment of spectacle and reported action creates, as is so often the case too in *Henry VIII*, a situation in which the audience is aware of events that it is being denied access to, not being allowed to see. In *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, this becomes an explicit concern in relation to the final tournament and the knights who are to take part in it. The contrasting choice of characters within the play as to whether to see or not to see for themselves becomes a reflection of many of the drama's central dichotomies. Emilia's refusal to go and watch in 5.5 (ll. 1-40), despite elaborate entreaties, contrasting with the eagerness of everyone else, is the only tactic she has available for marking out her distance from the events in progress.[8] For the theatre audience, however, the presentation of the tournament through off-stage sounds, messengers, and Emilia's troubled reactions, is an exercise in deliberate frustration that seems all the more surprising given the way the play has reduced the two hundred accompanying knights of the Chaucerian original to what would seem a theatrically manageable six. The alteration of the source makes the staging of the tournament a possibility which allows the fact of its off-stage presentation to maintain a measure of surprise.[9]

Notably different from the situation in *Henry VIII*, however, is the way report in this play is rarely presented as in any sense unreliable

or deceptive. There is no reason to take any of the major descriptions of off-stage actions in the play at anything other than their face value. But the emphasis on narrative suggests an interest in particular in the processes of art, in the depiction through words of characters and events, and the kinds of meanings and expectations that go along with this - the power that language offers to create such effects, and the ability of words to manipulate reality to create ideal images and to invest those images with particular value. Perhaps the most clearcut example of all this comes in the extended epic descriptions of 4.2, which follow on the heels of Emilia's soliloquy at the start of this scene, and in which the messenger and Pirithous catalogue the endowments of some of the kinsmen's accompanying knights. Here, indeed, a gap between report and action almost certainly does emerge, reflected in Theseus's comment about the knights, 'I long to see 'em' (4.2. 143). For these figures are given a build-up (in more ways than one) that it is hard to imagine anyone could actually live up to. The suggestion, and this recurs time and again beneath the surface in the play, is that no actions, no reality, could match the marvel of the words that can be used to describe them.

A further element to these particular descriptions and their connection to the play's interest in the realm of narrative art is their conscious echoing of earlier literary traditions, the way they are modelled not only on Chaucer, but on time-worn epic conventions, again stretching back beyond Chaucer, via Boccaccio, to Seneca and Statius, and before.[10] *The Two Noble Kinsmen* shows a persistent concern with placing its events against wider literary backgrounds and contexts. This applies not only in relation to the main plot, descended through Chaucer and his various sources, but also to the material added to

the Chaucerian narrative. This is strongly evocative of the world of Elizabethan romance especially, both in terms of the works of Sidney and Spenser, and through the folk customs and ballad traditions that find their way into each of the play's subplots.[11] What I want to do in the limited space left to me is look briefly at two aspects of the play's interest in narrative and story-telling that cut across its different worlds, issues relating to reported action and narrative authority.[12]

The Reach of Report

There is one sequence in the play which does focus on the unreliability and insufficiency of report, and the problems involved in accepting information supplied only at second hand. The opening scene of the second act introduces the subplot of the Jailer's Daughter and her family and friends, a story played out, as it were, in the margins of the main, Chaucerian narrative. The scene begins with a little dialogue between the Daughter's father and her Wooer, discussing the financial arrangements for the marriage that will eventually form the culmination of this line of the dramatic action. The Jailer, keen to emphasize his own limited resources, in contrast to anything which the Wooer might have heard, raises the issue of the untrustworthiness of report in his opening speech:

> I may depart with little, while I live; something I may cast to you, not much. Alas, the prison I keep, though it be for great ones, yet they seldom come; before one salmon you shall take a number of minnows. I am given out to be better lined than it can appear to me report is a true speaker. I would I were really that I am delivered to be. Marry, what I have – be it what it will – I will assure upon my daughter at the day of my death.
>
> (2.1. 1-9)[13]

The text allows no way of assessing the truth of the Jailer's remarks regarding his financial situation. Indeed, it is not even possible to confirm whether his report of the reports that have supposedly been circulating is accurate. The image of report as an "untrue speaker" is easy enough to accept, but it is not difficult, either, to see a vested interest on the Jailer's part in playing down his own wealth and status. That he bemoans the remuneration his job supplies at the very moment when, it transpires, he does actually have some 'great ones' in his care, might render his protestations suspect to a suspicious mind. Yet the Wooer himself seems happy to suggest that his prospective father-in-law is worrying unduly – 'sir, I demand no more than your own offer, and I will estate your daughter in what I have promised' (ll. 10-11).[14]

The thematic concern with the problematics of report is picked up again after the Daughter's entry, in a discussion about the kinsmen and their attributes and abilities. The Jailer twice declares his awareness of rumours that have been circulating about his new prisoners: 'they are famed to be a pair of absolute men' (l. 26), he observes, adding a little later, 'I heard them reported in the battle to be the only doers' (ll. 29-30). Both remarks recall Theseus's earlier tribute over the unconscious kinsmen in the aftermath of the battle:

> By th' helm of Mars I saw them in the war,
> Like to a pair of lions smeared with prey,
> Make lanes in troops aghast. I fixed my note
> Constantly on them, for they were a mark
> Worth a god's view.
>
> (1.4. 17-21)

The Jailer's two observations frame a comment from the Daughter, which calls into question a different aspect of the accuracy and reliability of report: 'by my troth, I think fame but stammers 'em – they stand a grece above the reach of report' (2.1. 27-28). Here, then, is the other

side of the coin. Whilst on the one hand, report exaggerates the nature of the Jailer's wealth, where the quality of the kinsmen is concerned, it seems, it can only come too short.

The Daughter herself is keen to sing the praises of the kinsmen, and provides her own distinctive report of the actions of these 'noble sufferers' now they are in prison:

> I marvel how they would have looked had they been victors, that with such a constant nobility enforce a freedom out of bondage, making misery their mirth, and affliction a toy to jest at. [. . .] It seems to me they have no more sense of their captivity than I of ruling Athens. They eat well, look merrily, discourse of many things, but nothing of their own restraint and disasters. Yet sometime a divided sigh – martyred as 'twere i'th' deliverance – will break from one of them, when the other presently gives it so sweet a rebuke that I could wish myself a sigh to be so chid, or at least a sigher to be comforted.
>
> (ll. 31-45)[15]

This picture of Palamon and Arcite in captivity forms part of a long-standing interpretative crux in the play, since it contrasts markedly with the behaviour of the kinsmen that the audience actually gets to see in the following scene (2.2).[16] Eugene Waith, commenting on the kinsmen's long laments for the lost joys of freedom (2.2. 6-55), is representative of the critical and editorial tradition at this point:

> critics have observed that these laments accord poorly with the description we have just heard of the kinsmen's good spirits and avoidance of any comment on their imprisonment. This may be one of the minor inconsistencies, less apparent in performance than in reading, which point to collaboration [. . .]. Fletcher seems to be showing how they arrived at the 'constant nobility' observed by the Jailer's Daughter, and demonstrated in ll. 55-115.[17]

There are in fact two particular problems of consistency between these two scenes, the question of the accuracy of the Daughter's report, and the workings of the time-scheme involved. Harold Littledale points more clearly to this latter disjunction:

> note that the two scenes [2.1 and 2.2] do not fit together exactly; in the prose scene the kinsmen are referred to as if in conversation, but in the verse dialogue which ensues they are made to begin with mutual salutations.[18]

These mutual salutations, and the nature of the ensuing dialogue, suggest strongly that what is being dramatized in 2.2 is the kinsmen's very first conversation since their imprisonment. On these terms, the Daughter has managed to hear them discoursing 'of many things' *prior* to their first greeting of each other in this new environment. As the remark from Waith indicates, the disjunction here is usually conceived of purely in terms of authorship, 2.1 being a Shakespeare scene, and 2.2 a Fletcher one.[19] I think this rather misses the point, and it is a point that has a bearing beyond this particular sequence. It seems hardly coincidental that the play's clearest instance of a gap or a contradiction between presented and reported action should occur in the one section where the subject of report and its potential unreliability is specifically addressed. And in any case, the pattern of established and ongoing activity that the Daughter's comments apparently indicate is not even entirely consistent with the situation suggested in 2.1 itself, the sense that the kinsmen are prisoners who have only just arrived, and who are still in the process of being newly attended to.[20] The more one looks for consistency and continuity here, the more they seem to slip away.

The play in fact clearly makes use of incompatible time-schemes both between and within the Daughter's story and that of the kinsmen. In the main plot, Arcite enters in 2.3 discussing the banishment that the audience, with Palamon, has just heard about at the end of 2.2. At the end of 2.3, he resolves to take part in the games that are happening that same day (l. 70), and in 2.5, enters as victor from those games. Thus one or two days at the most seem to pass in the kinsmen's (or at

least, Arcite's) world between 2.2 and 2.5. In 2.4, however, the Daughter is able to say of the imprisoned Palamon, 'once he kissed me - | I loved my lips the better ten days after' (ll. 25-26).[21] There is of course nothing particularly unusual about such minor temporal confusions and inconsistencies in Shakespeare or the drama of the period. But in this case, more than a simple double time-scheme seems to be involved. As has often been noted, the two main worlds of the play barely come into contact at all before the final scene, other than in the Daughter's descriptions of her off-stage encounters with Palamon.[22] Where they do interact or intersect, however, it is almost as if the characters in the subplot, like the Daughter in 2.1, get to witness a different version of the Palamon and Arcite story to that being presented to the theatre audience.

Another minor disjunction between the staging and reporting of events (this time rather less remarked upon in the critical tradition) occurs at the start of the fourth act.[23] Here, the Jailer receives news from his two friends about the encounter between the kinsmen and the ducal party in the previous scene (3.6), and the solution for the kinsmen's situation there decreed by Theseus. The First Friend claims to have come home 'before the business | Was fully ended' (4.1. 4-5), but did witness the moment of Hippolyta, Emilia, and Pirithous kneeling before the Duke and pleading for the kinsmen's lives. The Second Friend, who has seen everything, describes the success of this three-fold suit, and reveals that Palamon has cleared the Jailer of complicity in his escape. The events of the earlier scene are thus re-told, but in a subtly altered way, with some new information about Palamon's confession and his gift towards the Daughter's marriage (ll. 18-24), and by an audience (the two friends) whose presence is nowhere suggested

during 3.6 itself.[24] This report, in turn, as critics have often pointed out, seems to anticipate a sequence in 5.6, where Palamon and his three accompanying knights are all shown giving their purses in another donation towards the Daughter's wedding (ll. 31-36). In this latter case, the division of authorship has again been invoked as the explanation for the apparent inconsistency or seemingly unnecessary repetition involved in this duplication of reported and enacted gift-givings.[25]

Little divergences between word and deed, reported action and on-stage events, are far from uncharacteristic of this play, however, and generally seem to me to go beyond the level of simple accidents or irrelevancies in the process of composition. One might mention again the way the Jailer's comments on what he has heard about the kinsmen make it sound as if he could have been listening to Theseus's remarks in 1.5, even though the Jailer himself, like his friends with the events in the woods, was not present during the earlier scene. Or the fact that the Daughter's reports of her dealings with Palamon present this particular noble kinsman in a rather different light to anything the audience really gets to see of him. Even the relationship between the two subplots can come across as slightly out of joint, disconnected, not least in the way nobody ever says anything cogent about the Daughter's involvement in the morris dance. It is also noticeable that, whereas the Daughter and those immediately around her inhabit a social circle strangely lacking in personal names, the Athenian countrymen and women of 2.3 and 3.5 live in a world where names are thrown around with confusing abandon (see 2.3. 38-40, 3.5. 22-48).[26] The culmination of all the effects involved here comes, not surprisingly, in the Daughter's mad scenes, during which she is continually glancingly reflecting and re-figuring earlier events, in ways that rarely quite match up with what

the audience has seen or heard, as in her passing reference to 'Giraldo, Emilia's schoolmaster' (4.3. 12), which provides both a new identity and a previously unsuspected status for the play's pedant; or her description of the morris-dancing horse that Palamon has supposedly given her (5.4. 41-67), which suggests a knowledge on her part, how attained is not clear, of Emilia's parallel gift to Arcite.[27]

But there is another aspect to the description of the kinsmen that the Daughter provides in 2.1 which I want to pick up on here. One thing she draws attention to particularly is the 'constant nobility' that Palamon and Arcite supposedly display in accepting their imprisonment. What emerges more from the kinsmen's dialogue in 2.2, though, is a sense of their consistent inconstancy, the continual thwarting of their desire for constancy through external circumstances and their responses to them. Their difficulty in being able to follow up on a resolution has already been dramatized in 1.2, where they prevent themselves from leaving Thebes because of the duty of honour they perceive to fight for the uncle they despise (ll. 98-103), even though it is the city's very danger to their 'honours' (l. 37) which they have just been complaining about. In 2.2, the kinsmen begin the scene expecting to remain in prison for ever, listing the joys they will never be able to experience again (or at all), and developing a stoical position to deal with this; but by its end, Arcite at least has been freed, and by the time of 2.3 he is off to join in the sort of games they have lamented their eternal loss of in 2.2 (ll. 8-25). Still more to the point, of course, their pronouncements of perfect friendship and kinship cannot even outlast the immediate appearance of Emilia in the garden. Within moments of setting themselves up as paragons, denying that there could be 'record of any two that loved | Better than we do', or that 'our friendship | Should ever leave

us' (ll. 112-115), they are squabbling like spoiled children ('I saw her first'/'I saw her too' (ll. 163-164)), and intent on killing each other.

This brings me back to Waith's suggestion that the initial part of their conversation in 2.2 reveals the kinsmen arriving at the 'constant nobility' so admired by the Daughter. This seems to me at best only a partial explanation for what is going on here. The position of perfect friendship and kinship to which they eventually attain lasts the merest moment, and there is still no way of reconciling it all that closely with the behaviour the Daughter describes. Despite what she claims, all they seem to talk about is precisely their 'sense of their captivity'. In any case, even without any actual behaviour to compare it too, her report lays itself open to question concerning its reliability, by dint of its very unlikelihood. I am thinking particularly here of the rather precious imagery of martyred and chid sighs, and ideally sweet rebukes, which the Daughter comes up with. Her own words, too, can be seen to be not entirely self-consistent, for though she suggests that the kinsmen say 'nothing of their own restraint and disasters', it appears they are also 'making misery their mirth, and affliction a toy to jest at', an activity which perhaps gives the impression not so much of silence on the subject, as indifference.

The point I am driving at is that the Daughter's reports in 2.1 are at least as much about her own characterization as about the kinsmen's. In the distance between her description of Palamon and Arcite and their actual behaviour in prison can be seen her own processes of idealization, including the beginnings of her personal interest in Palamon (reflected in her keenness to have him correctly identified (ll. 50-52)). By the end of the scene, this has translated into an obvious dissatisfaction with her current lot, including the Wooer ('Lord, the difference of men!' (ll. 55-

56)). Wishful thinking, freedom, irresponsibility, irrationality even, and the chance of an escape from a mundane reality, from family, class, and expectations, can all be seen to combine in her remark, 'it is a holiday to look on them' (l. 55). It is on these terms, from within this context, that her idealizing image of the kinsmen's perfect and constant actions emerges and needs to be understood. The Daughter finds in the kinsmen all the appropriate qualities of romance heroes, but the nature of her description already associates the image she offers more with her own perspective than with any behaviour Palamon and Arcite could actually be exhibiting, and the gap between her report and what the audience actually gets to see only confirms the effect.

The mode of report that the Daughter adopts in 2.1 becomes her only form of expression during her next four scenes, as she delivers the series of soliloquies that so vividly convey her isolation and pain, and the nature of the world she is (or imagines she is) inhabiting.[28] The entire treatment of the Daughter's story is particularly interesting in this respect. Whilst she is still sane or clinging to sanity, her experiences and encounters with Palamon are presented to the audience almost exclusively by means of report.[29] Once she becomes mad, she gets to interact again with other figures on stage, but in what amounts to a series of mini- (and often parodic) plays-within-the-play. Thus her involvement in the morris is followed in 4.1 by her co-opting of those around her into acting out scenarios in her own mad world; the sequence in 4.3 where she becomes a Lady Macbeth figure observed by the Doctor; and finally by the events of 5.4, where she at last gets to play out a love-scene, with the Wooer now cast in the role of Palamon. The Wooer himself, interestingly enough, becomes more and more vocal as he takes on his parts in these little playlets, or gets his own long, lyrical report

about her Ophelia-like moment in 4.1 (ll. 52-103).[30] Eventually, of course,

the Wooer and the Daughter go off stage to bring about, it would seem,

her "cure", and presumably also to sleep together (5.4. 106-113). But

the exact nature of both these events is left tantalizingly unclear to

the audience. All that the text has to offer on her story beyond this

final exit is the moment of Palamon's enquiry about her health, and the

second gift-giving, with its deliberate highlighting of the uncertainty

of the situation at this point, as one of Palamon's knights enquires

about the Daughter, 'is it a maid?', and Palamon, speaking as far as he

knows, replies 'verily, I think so - | A right good creature more to me

deserving | Than I can quit or speak of' (5.6. 33-35).

This second gift of money towards her wedding ('to piece her

portion', as Palamon puts it (l. 31)), brings the Daughter's story full

circle, back to the point at which it started, the financial arrangements

relating to her marriage. The deliberate structuring that this seems to

involve again suggests that the disjunctive effects between on- and off-

stage action in this part of the plot are not accidental. And the sense

of careful design here is further reflected in the way the language and

form of 2.1 fit into all sorts of wider patterns within the play. The

scene effectively provides a brief prologue to the rest of the action of

The Two Noble Kinsmen, after the extended prelude of the events of the

first act. In its own turn, too, the Daughter's story enacts another

interrupted wedding to match that of the very first scene, set in motion

in this instance by the arrival of Palamon and Arcite and the nature of

her response to them in 2.1. The mention of sighs, financial references,

even the language of fishing in the Jailer's first speech, all contribute

to the play's iterative imagery, whilst the Daughter's carrying of rushes

as she enters (see l. 21) suggests a parallel to the flower-strewing Boy

of the opening procession (p. 1/1.1. 0.1-2).[31] The elaborate framing of the action of the play, prologue on prologue, is continued in the framing of the action within the scene, with the observing of Palamon and Arcite in 2.1 leading on to their similar observing of Emilia in the garden in 2.2. Finally, of course, the action of the play itself is framed by a Prologue, which has its own discussion of marriages and of maidenheads that may or may not exist any longer, that may still merit being paid out for (in another duplication of money-giving) after 'first night's stir' (Prologue, l. 6), and which the Daughter's own language in 2.1 specifically recalls, not least in her emphasis on the idea of 'constant nobility'.

Chaucer's Constant Story

The Daughter's commendations of the imprisoned kinsmen form part of a culture of praise within the play, the beginnings of which can also be traced back to the Prologue, and its deferential tribute to Chaucer and his famous works.[32] The force of the Prologue's argument attributes any hopes that it has for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* proving a 'good play' (l. 3) to the quality of its source, for the Prologue declares itself 'sure' that the play it presents has

> a noble breeder and a pure,
> A learnèd, and a poet never went
> More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent.
> Chaucer, of all admired, the story gives:
> There constant to eternity it lives.
> If we let fall the nobleness of this
> And the first sound this child hear be a hiss,
> How will it shake the bones of that good man,
> And make him cry from under ground, 'O fan
> From me the witless chaff of such a writer,
> That blasts my bays and my famed works makes
>   lighter
> Than Robin Hood'? This is the fear we bring,
> For to say truth, it were an endless thing
> And too ambitious to aspire to him,

Weak as we are, and almost breathless swim
In this deep water. Do but you hold out
Your helping hands and we shall tack about
And something do to save us. You shall hear
Scenes, though below his art, may yet appear
Worth two hours' travail. To his bones, sweet
   sleep;
Content to you. If this play do not keep
A little dull time from us, we perceive
Our losses fall so thick we needs must leave.
                    (Prologue, ll. 9-32)

Nobility, fame, and constancy again emerge as key terms in the rhetoric of compliment. I have already tried to draw attention to how nebulous and problematic the Daughter's image of the kinsmen's 'constant nobility' becomes in the light of their actual behaviour in 2.2. The clear verbal echo in her phrase of ll. 14-15 here suggests at least the possibility that similar effects may be at work in the Prologue as well.

Certainly, whatever else is going on in this speech, the opening lines of the Prologue referred to at the end of the previous section, with their language of deceptive appearances, of paying out for old in the guise of new, and their emphasis on the semblance of honour and modesty rather than necessarily the fact, puts the whole of the passage just quoted in a context where appearances and judgements, the nature of reputation and value, and so on, are already heavily complicated and compromised.[33] What is more, the very existence within the play of the Daughter's story, not to mention the morris-dance sequence, serves to call into question some of the terms of the praise handed out here. For the presence of such material inevitably sits uneasily alongside the Prologue's anxieties about letting fall the nobleness of its Chaucerian original. And of course, both these subplots, which in their style of humour and social setting challenge that "noble" image in at least two ways, have indeed often been regarded by critics as little more than an affront to the dignity of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*. Even the Prologue's

attempt to preserve a distinction between high-class, laureate Chaucer and the "lighter" world of Robin Hood, is threatened by the inclusion of the morris, for whilst the play's Lord and Lady of May (3.5. 127) are not identified as Robin and Marian, such an identification was a commonplace of this festive tradition, with the result that the morris unavoidably brings with it into *The Two Noble Kinsmen* associations of the world of Robin Hood.[34]

The Prologue's praise of Chaucer finds its authority in the external reality of the poet's reputation. Widespread admiration for Chaucer as founding father of English literature endowed him with a potent cultural authority which allows for the untramelled confidence of the Prologue's phrase, 'of all admired'.[35] Indeed, the tribute in the Prologue places the play itself in a long literary tradition of praising Chaucer that stretches back to his disciple, John Lydgate, and was particularly notably maintained in Renaissance England in the works of Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, and still more explicitly, *The Shepheardes Calender*.[36] Yet ambivalences regarding Chaucer's status can still be detected within the culture of the period, perhaps above all in relation to the nature of the language in which he was writing. Sir Philip Sidney, for example, in *The Defence of Poesy*, provides some comments that temper their praise a little with a sense of the need to make allowances for Chaucer's great distance in time:

> Chaucer, undoubtedly, did excellently in his *Troilus and Criseyde*; of whom, truly, I know not whether to marvel more, either that he in that misty time could see so clearly, or that we in this clear age go so stumblingly after him. Yet had he great wants, fit to be forgiven in so reverent an antiquity.[37]

This factor in the position of Chaucer in the Renaissance finds something of a reflection in the Prologue, which, whilst obviously not as

self-consciously archaizing as Gower in *Pericles*, does contain a number of quasi-medieval touches. The appeal to the aid of the audience near the end of speech is conventional enough in context, but associated with it, in the denial of being able to aspire to the level of Chaucer's art, is a version of the medieval modesty topos.[38] A further suggestion of trying to create a medieval tone is found in the peculiarly awkward couplet that precedes the naming of Chaucer, 'A learnèd, and a poet never went | More famous yet 'twixt Po and silver Trent'. This whole trope, with the claim to supremacy between two named geographical locations, is itself identifiably medieval.[39] Moreover, the strained syntax, the use of the epithet 'silver' as an obvious line-filler, and the way the choice of the second river here seems to be governed purely by the exigencies of rhyme, all suggest a distinctively Renaissance conception of medieval verse techniques. Chaucer is being praised in poetry which exploits ideas about the quaintness of medieval verse even as it asserts his genius. The effect is similar to Sidney's passing expression of ambivalence, and can even be seen as confirming the coming to pass of some of Chaucer's own fears. As he writes near the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde*, addressing his own poem:

> And for ther is so gret diversite
> In Englissh and in writyng of oure tonge,
> So prey I God that non myswrite the,
> Ne the mysmetre for defaute of tonge;
> And red wherso thow be, or elles songe,
> That thow be understonde, God I biseche![40]

Miswriting, linguistic change, and perhaps most especially "mismetering" combined to obscure many of the characteristics and subtleties, and at times even the basic competence, of Chaucer's verse during the Renaissance, as understanding of his language gradually slipped further away. Some fifteen years before the writing of *The Two Noble Kinsmen*,

Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer's *Works* had become the first to include a glossary.[41]

In the light of this, the Prologue's utter confidence in the nature of Chaucerian authority might seem a little misplaced. Certainly, a growing sense of historical distance sits uneasily against the notion of eternal constancy. It is true that the Prologue looks to associate this constancy most closely with the story itself, but this brings its own complications. The "there" where the story is supposed to be living is not obviously determined, but one "there" where Chaucer's works did very visibly live on was in the sixteenth-century tradition of black-letter volumes, which found its culmination in Speght's second edition of 1602.[42] One thing these reveal, however, is a constantly changing canon, with more and more works being attributed across subsequent reprintings, or included for their general Chaucerian associations. And Chaucer's own works in general suggest another problem with the notion of narrative constancy, in the way they can offer a multiplicity of versions of the same story. In particular, Theban material recurs time and again throughout the canon, whilst Chaucer also seems to have tried out a completely different version of the Palamon and Arcite story (or some aspect of it) in the unfinished *Anelida and Arcite.* One effect of this insistent intertextuality within the Chaucer canon itself is a re-telling of many of the darker elements of the mythography of Theseus, not least his abandonment of Ariadne, a story that forms a definite analogue, and probable model, for that of the Jailer's Daughter.[43]

The invocation of Chaucerian authority, therefore, the stress on eternal validity, constancy, nobility, can all be seen to become more and more problematic the further the nature of Chaucer's own authority is pursued. It is in fact a typically Chaucerian characteristic. The

Prologue's invocation of the authority behind the story it is introducing is another of its recollections of medieval technique, and a particular imitation of Chaucer himself, whose works display a superabundance of references to his own sources and literary authorities. For the modern critic, these invocations have become notoriously self-conscious and multi-dimensional, creating a figure who has been read, in the words of Lisa Kiser, as 'an authority on deauthorization'.[44] The Prologue to *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, self-consciously giving Chaucer a voice (ll. 18-21), rattling his bones underground, placing words in his mouth that are none too poetically competent, is operating in a similar field.

Mastery

The issue of authority and the processes of literary and personal praise do not really go away at any stage in *The Two Noble Kinsmen*. They are concerns that cluster in particular around Theseus. But they reappear most obviously in the centre of the play, in the scene of the morris-dance, with its parody authority figure of the Schoolmaster, Gerrold, and his penchant for invoking the multiplicity of authorities at his disposal (accurate and inaccurate, apposite and ludicrously inapposite) in relation to just about anything. This scene, with its extraordinarily rich intertextuality, is the point in the play where the darker elements of the Theseus myth intrude most strongly into the action.[45] It also links back directly to the play's Prologue, through the clunking rhyming couplets of Gerrold's own prologue to the dance, and his various efforts to offer praise to the Duke. Indeed, the elaborate framing devices that characterize this sequence – rehearsal speech, prologue, epilogue, envoi – form a parallel to the framing devices of the play as a whole, its own

elaborate introductory and concluding procedures. Gerrold's interruption of the hunt and praise of the Duke link back to the first act and the Queens' interruption of the wedding and their elaborate tributes to Theseus; and this in turn, in effect, re-works the literary tribute of the Prologue in terms of social praise and political hierarchy. Similarly, the doubling up of epilogue-style poems (ll. 139-148, 155-158) from Gerrold points forward to the close of the play, where Theseus's concluding speech, his final attempt to sum up the action, is followed by the Epilogue to the drama itself.

A particular concatenation of ideas runs through this latter sequence, linking in as well with the last of the play's long narrative speeches, another kind of closing gesture, Pirithous's description of the fall of Arcite from (or rather, with) his horse (5.6. 48-85). The figure of the Schoolmaster, with his pedantic pseudo-mastery over the authorities at his disposal, and his eventual successful, if somewhat hit-and-miss, control of his various performers, is reflected in the imagery of schooling and children that runs through the closing moments. Arcite's horse, scared by a spark, 'Forgets school-doing, being therein trained | And of kind manège' (ll. 68-69); the result is the extraordinary struggle for control between man and beast that Pirithous describes. Theseus translates this image into the closing moral of the piece, the final commentary on his own attempts to control the events around him:

> O you heavenly charmers,
> What things you make of us! For what we lack
> We laugh, for what we have, are sorry; still
> Are children in some kind. Let us be thankful
> For that which is, and with you leave dispute
> That are above our question. Let's go off
> And bear us like the time.
>
> (ll. 131-137)

It is a tone picked up, though perhaps with a more convincing sense of

deference, by the schoolboy-like speaker of the Epilogue. With their own version of the modesty topos, Theseus's words are perhaps an ideal place for the critic of late Shakespeare finally to leave the scene. And yet, it is characteristic of the late plays to complicate the situation, and to do so at a political and ideological level; for the Duke who here urges submission to the will of the gods is the same figure who throughout the play has aspired to a god-like austerity of will and judgement himself. Perhaps, then, for an image reflecting the nature of the dramaturgy of the late plays, one should turn instead, following all the patterns and visible modes of artistic construction that run through this play, to the moment of Arcite's calamity, where the skill of the rider to control, struggles with the power of the horse to resist, in a competition of nature and mastery that is reflected in the very form and design of the poetry, as Arcite himself ends up, for an instant, somehow seeming to hang, poised, like the speech itself, with 'strange art' (l. 79), heels over head, in a moment of suspension, equilibrium, and control, waiting to fall.