

Shakespeare's Stories

*An excellent play, well digested in the scenes,
set down with as much modesty as cunning.*
(*Hamlet*, II.ii.439–440).

Shakespeare is perhaps best known as a storyteller; many people who could not readily quote his poetry are likely able to recall the stories of *Romeo and Juliet*, *Julius Caesar*, *Hamlet* or *Macbeth*. Samuel Johnson observed that

His real power is not shown in the splendour of particular passages, but by the progress of his fable, and the tenor of his dialogue; and he that tries to recommend him by select quotations will succeed like the pedant in *Hierocles*, who, when he offered his house to sale, carried a brick in his pocket as a specimen.¹

Though I will very soon use certain quotations to discuss Shakespeare's poetry and wit—I will be recommending the house of Shakespeare at least partly for its bricks, as many others have—my starting point is “the progress of his fable,” and I will hope to show why Dr. Johnson might

¹Johnson, “Preface to Shakespeare” (1765), in *Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes Selected and Set Forth with an Introduction by Walter Raleigh* (London: Henry Frowde, 1908), 12.

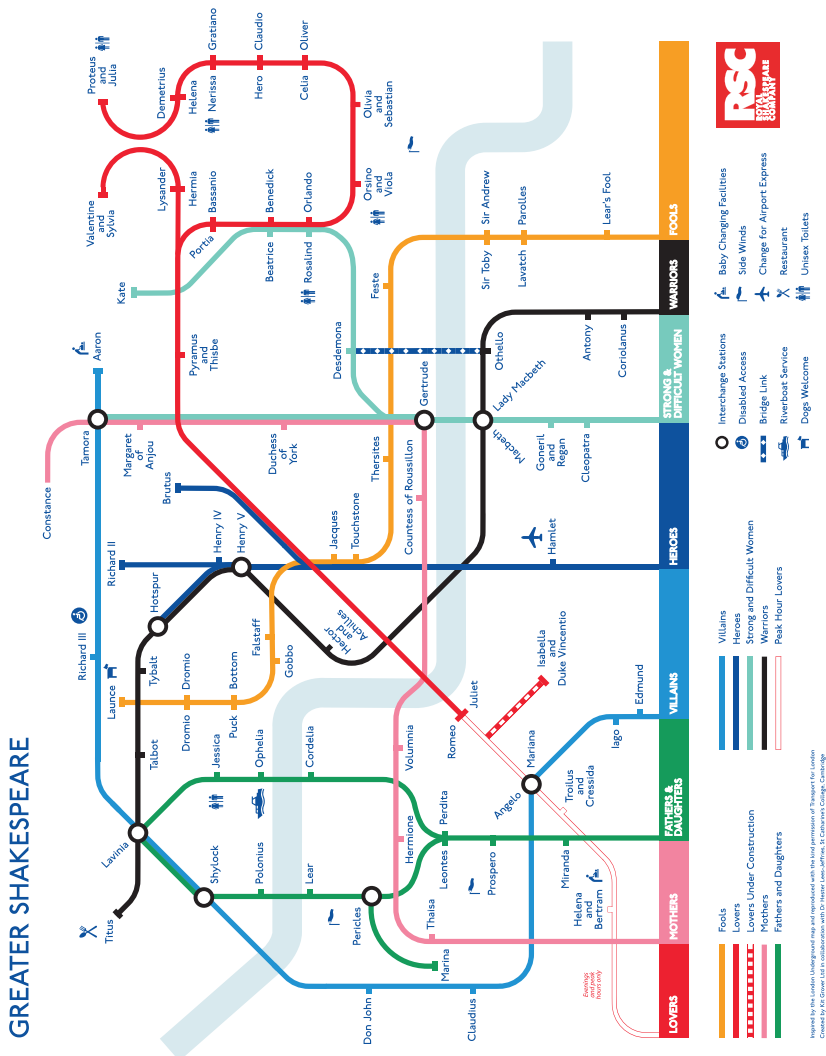


Fig. 2.1 “Greater Shakespeare” map, created by Kit Grover Ltd. in collaboration with Dr. Hester Lees-Jeffries, St. Catharine’s College, Cambridge. Inspired by the London Underground map and reproduced with the kind permission of Transport for London

locate so emphatically within the domain of storytelling the “*real* power” of an artist who is aesthetically powerful in many ways.

The simplest explanation is perhaps the one that Mark Turner has offered in his book *The Literary Mind*, that we think in stories and that our thinking, in a fundamental way, depends on our remembering and combining them.² We process experience, in its overwhelming complexity, by using the familiar to grasp the unfamiliar, searching at each moment for visceral scenarios that offer an analogical purchase on the world. According to Turner and Gilles Fauconnier, the mind follows imperatives in the course of ordinary thought that include:

Come up with a story
Compress what is diffuse
Obtain global insight

The above are fairly self-explanatory. Another basic imperative, which may require some elaboration, is “Strengthen vital relations.” The “vital relations” that are reinforced in conceptual integration are, as I shall discuss, such things as sequence (time), contiguity (space), causality, identity and intentionality. The compression of what is diffuse can be seen in Shakespeare’s skillful crafting of plays from diverse sources and from the inchoate materials of everyday experience. The task that was Shakespeare’s daily bread—coming up with a story—is, on this view, a fundamental and universal impulse of the mind. Small wonder, then, that there has always been an audience for narrative and dramatic literature, or that some of it has been perceived as making available a wealth of insight. “It is a truism,” says Edward A. Armstrong, “that the plots as well as incidents and characters in later plays are adumbrated in the earlier; but the psychological procedure deserves detailed scrutiny and the extent to which previous constellations of images contributed to settings, incidents and characterizations in later plays, as well as to their poetry, would provide a profitable subject for further study.”³ I certainly agree, and hope to offer here just such a detailed study of Shakespeare’s recombinant imagination.

²“*Story* is a basic principle of mind. Most of our experience, our knowledge, and our thinking is organized as stories. The mental scope of story is magnified by *projection*—one story helps us make sense of another.” *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford Press, 1996).

³Edward A. Armstrong, *Shakespeare’s Imagination: A Study of the Psychology of Association and Inspiration* (London: Lindsay Drummond Ltd., 1946).

A skillful playwright is able somehow to pack his/her story with a complexity that repays contemplation. One way to do this is to intensify a sense of causal connection among incidents of the drama, compressing time and space to show, selectively, the incidents most relevant to a chain of causality. Another way is to tell two or more stories at once, interweaving them into a complex plot. Another way is to populate the story with as many complex and evolving characters as the audience, with all its powers of concentration and all its innate social curiosity, can follow. Another way is to fill the minds of audience members not only with interest in what is happening, but with curiosity about what is going to happen and why. Each of these dramaturgic strategies, pioneered by Shakespeare, has been noted in its own right by previous literary scholars.

I. Shakespeare achieves a rich dramatic unity through selective **compression** of events, intensifying our sense of causality, intentionality and the passing of time.

The compression posited by conceptual-integration theory can occur within any of several logical relations: Any distance may be imaginatively compressed to proximity or presence; any span of time may be compressed to consecutive sequence or simultaneity; any chain of cause and effect may be compressed from a tenuous, diffuse connection to apparent immediacy and logical necessity; relations of analogy and similarity may be compressed to the relation of identity, and a multiple or diffuse intentionality can be compressed into more focused and singular form—as, for instance, when Shakespeare borrows details from the careers of various ambitious Scottish Thanes in order to make more extravagant the ambition of Macbeth.

Because we think in stories, dramatic works have a naturally strong claim on our attention, as they manifest the qualities most congenial and convenient to our thought. With regard to criteria for the aesthetic appraisal of drama, George Pierce Baker wrote, “The first principle of all is that a play must have unity...the great public does not permanently care for story-telling which leaves no clear, final impression.”⁴ Establishing this artistic standard was, in his view, a signal achievement of Shakespeare, whose “perfection of accomplishment...rests on minute care for the technique of the drama [which was] called into being by Shakespeare’s desire to fulfill at one and the same time his own wishes as to characterization and the wish of

⁴Baker, *The Development of Shakespeare as a Dramatist* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 148.

the audience for story.⁵ These interpenetrating matters of story and characterization are addressed in the present chapter, and they are similarly paired in the Victorian critic Richard G. Moulton's remark that "The appreciation of Shakespeare will not be complete until he is seen to be as subtle a weaver of plots as he is a deep reader of the human heart."⁶ Lisa Zunshine's more recent work offers us a cognitive framework for analysis of the characteristically literary imperative to read the human heart, and Fauconnier and Turner offer a cognitive analysis of the conceptual integration involved in weaving subtle plots; synthesizing these approaches yields a comprehensive account of the dramatic technique that Baker identifies above as Shakespeare's particular contribution.

Baker speaks of drama as requiring a "*selective compression* [my italics] of life so that it may be represented within the limits of five acts":

Such selective compression as I have just been noting makes, of course, for unity in the telling of the story, and if the first step in dramatic composition be so to select your incidents that you can illustrate within five acts the idea or the character which obsesses your mind for the time being, the second essential is that you shall not scatter the interest of your audience.⁷

Both the compression and the selectivity noted here are, as we shall see, distinctive principles not only for the art of drama, but for the ordinary workings of human thought. Compression "can consist in shortening the causal chain from many steps to few or only one...Scaling of cause and effect can also consist in reducing the number of different types of causal event...The range of effects, of kinds of effects, of causal agents, and of kinds of causal agents may be similarly compressed. Another scaling of cause and effect is to compress a diffuse or fuzzy causation into a sharp one."⁸

The story Baker tells can briefly be summarized as follows: The earlier Elizabethan playwrights tended to stage a series of related incidents without much in the way of continuity or climax, and Shakespeare's earliest efforts in comedy (*Love's Labor's Lost* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) show just this kind of weak development in plot. The most effectively

⁵ Ibid., 286.

⁶ *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist: A Popular Illustration of the Principles of Scientific Criticism*. (New York: Dover, 1966), 357; first printed in 1885.

⁷ Baker, 22.

⁸ Fauconnier and Turner, 313.

plotted of his early comedies (*The Comedy of Errors*) is built on the foundation of Plautus, which helped Shakespeare's writing develop a sense of dramatic economy. His early tragic melodrama *Titus Andronicus* shows some power of creating suspense, but then a vogue for chronicle history plays shifted his emphasis from plot to character: In the first tetralogy, "the actions are related one to another rather because historically they did happen in that order or because they happen to the same person or group of persons, than causally." Even *Henry the Fifth* is "a pageant and a character study rather than...a play in which Henry reveals himself by significant and deftly correlated action." Up to about 1596, Shakespeare could "characterize perfectly within the scene; he could develop from the merest historical suggestion characters which fitted perfectly into the chief historical incidents of the play...but he could not bind, or did not care to bind, all this crowding incident together except through some one central figure."⁹

Shakespeare's ability to "bind...incident together" developed as he worked in genres besides history. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* strongly emphasizes plot in its intricate choreography among the groups of characters whose interactions make the story: the lovers, the rustics, the fairies, and the framing mythic figures of Theseus and Hippolyta. "Here is... the masterly sense of dramatic values in originally separate groups of figures which was absent in the handling of the historical plays." Then, in *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare shows a true grasp of motivation, "not merely within the scene but so as perfectly to relate part with part within a play, and so as cunningly to expound character." It is not very long thereafter, in *The Merchant of Venice*, that he shows further that he has "acquired in perfection the art of so interweaving in his narrative many different strands of interest that if the sources were not known, no one would suspect him of bringing together incidents and episodes not originally connected." That is to say, he has learned how to achieve a seamless integration of narratives, a compression from many to one. *The Merchant of Venice* also shows that he can "hold at the same time two points of view—an absolute necessity for any great dramatist."

The public's growing appetite for suspense in drama, a curiosity about what would happen next and how, became closely tied to their observation of characters' interrelated emotional changes. Motivation, in a word, came to suffuse Shakespeare's dramatic storytelling, and soon he was integrating not only individual characters into mutually influencing

⁹Baker, 171–173.

groups, but groups of characters into a larger story, and finally different stories into a richly diversified drama where characters' interactions were marked by dramatic economy, compactness and selective compression of incidents. As he progressed in writing comedies, his tragedy and chronicle history plays also began to offer "exciting incidents neatly woven into a compact plot," and even showed a care for "motivation in characters other than the title part." More fully than any playwright since antiquity, Shakespeare, in his artistic maturity, composed tragedy as "a sequence of serious episodes leading to a catastrophe and all causally related." Characters, in comedy, revealed themselves in correlated action, and this principle of revelation turned out to be transferable to contexts in which the events were dismal and the affective states grim; the tensions relieved by laughter in a comedy could instead be directed toward a tragic effect. Such was his "toilsome acquirement...of the power to set more and more perfectly comprehended character...in a story of absorbing interest woven from many strands." Baker notes that tragedy preeminently involves "a struggle, a clash of wills,"¹⁰ which in a sense means that Shakespeare's ultimate dramatic achievement is the paradoxical one of creating strong unity around a clash. Drama involves compressions of time and causality,¹¹ and because it is, for the audience, a way of spending time, the tracing of these compressions can be a way of reflecting on the audience's or reader's experience and the artistry that orchestrated it. Baker remarks that a dramatist must illustrate character by selecting the scenes that "first, represent it dramatically, and, secondly, represent it in the *shortest space of time*."¹² Shakespeare's compression of time to yield a tight dramatic unity, intensifying our sense of causality and of intentionality, has been remarked upon frequently in so many words. Frank Kermode notes Shakespeare's habit of "altering and compressing to make a sharp theatrical point, telescoping events, expanding such

¹⁰Baker, 190–215, 259, 282, 264, 262, 156, 253, 283.

¹¹"[N]o conception of the movement of a drama will be adequate which has not appreciated the rapid sequence of incidents that crowds the crisis of a life-time or a national revolution into two or three hours of actual time" Moulton, 323; "[G]ood storytelling does not have to be realistic in matching stage time and story time. In fact...narrative time is allocated based on the emotional load and overall importance, and not some realistic rendering of time flow." Barbara Dancygier, *The Language of Stories: A Cognitive Approach* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 155.

¹²Baker, 182.

characters as the Nurse and Mercutio, cutting material and inventing new episodes” in telling the story of Romeo and Juliet.¹³ Herschel Baker remarks of *Richard the Third* that “events are notably compressed and rearranged to maintain the rapid tempo of the plot,” and of *Henry the Fourth, Part I* that

As in his other history plays...the so-called facts were artfully or ruthlessly deployed to tighten up the action and reinforce the theme...[T]he four main crises punctuating Henry’s reign...are so tightly squeezed together that they appear not widely spaced events but phases of a continuous and accelerating action...[T]hese telescoping and distortions give shape and speed and moral meaning to Holinshed’s inept narration; and just as they lead us to view Henry’s reign as one of urgent and successive perils and as a drawn-out act of penance for the crime of usurpation, so Shakespeare’s juggling with the ages and motives of his characters serves the other, cognate theme of Prince Hal’s preparation for the awful burden of the crown.¹⁴

The fact that elisions of time enable Shakespeare to present King Henry the Fourth’s fourteen-year reign as a single and continuous “act of penance” seems to me a clear case of narrative unity being created and intentionality intensified through time-compression.

Jean E. Howard also admires the time-compressions in Shakespeare’s dramaturgy:

By a dramatic sleight of hand Shakespeare makes it appear that the storm scene [in *Julius Caesar*] occurs both on the night following the Lupercalian festival and on the night preceding the Ides of March. Thus, Cicero begins I.iii by asking if Casca has seen Caesar home, presumably from the celebration of the Lupercalia. Yet the scene ends with Cassius

¹³Introduction to “Romeo and Juliet,” *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997) 1102.

¹⁴“King Henry, who is shown at the beginning as so ‘shaken’ and so ‘wan with care’ that his fatal illness in Part 2 occasions no surprise, was actually only thirty-six when he overcame his foes at Shrewsbury and ten years older when he died. Similarly his ‘unthrifty son’—a lad of sixteen at Shrewsbury—is made coeval with Hotspur, who, though depicted as a splendid youth, was actually thirty-nine in 1403 and thus a generation older than the wayward prince to whom he stands...as foil and rival.” Herschel Baker, Introduction to “Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2” *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 885.

saying that before morning the conspirators will go to Brutus's house; and from there, of course, they proceed to Caesar's. This blurring of the actual time scheme, however, is seldom noticed in performance.¹⁵

Howard also calls attention to time-compression in the thought of individual characters: "Involuntarily, [in the famous Cydnus speech] Enobarbus slips into the present tense midway through his description, the moment of vision collapsing *then* and *now*."¹⁶

II. Shakespeare blends stories together to make them reinforce one another.

We commonly find networks involving human action where the form of causation and intentionality in the blend is sharper, simpler, and stronger in the blend than it is in the inputs.—Fauconnier and Turner¹⁷

In *Shakespeare as a Dramatic Artist*, Richard G. Moulton sought to counter a tendency for critics to disparage Shakespeare's plotting, perhaps due to their experiencing Shakespeare more often on the page than on the stage. Noting the dominance of character-interest in criticism, Moulton lamented a general neglect of Shakespearean "effects which depend upon the connection and relative force of incidents, and on the compression of the details into a given space [of time]."¹⁸ In response, he points to the great economy with which Shakespeare marshaled the elements of his tales:

Shakespeare's plots are federations of plots: in his ordering of dramatic events we trace a common self-government made out of elements which have an independence of their own, and at the same time merge a part of their independence in common action...Analysis distinguishes the separate actions which make up a plot [and] notes the various bonds between these

¹⁵ *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration: Stage Technique and Audience Response* (University of Illinois Press, 1984), 169n.

¹⁶ "The barge she sat in, like a burnished throne, burned on the water...At the helm a seeming mermaid steers...From the barge a strange invisible perfume hits the sense..." *Antony and Cleopatra* (II.ii.192–213).

¹⁷ Fauconnier and Turner, 330.

¹⁸ Moulton, 323.

actions and the way in which they are brought into a common system: it being clear that the more the separateness of the different interests can be reduced, the richer will be the economy of design.¹⁹

The desiderata of bringing diverse actions into a common system and reducing the separateness of different interests are those of conceptual integration; the sense of their power to enrich the economy of design seems to reflect the intensification offered by conceptual blending—the richness being the density of implication, both logical and affective, in things that are complex and compressed. The careful tracing of “bonds” between distinct mental scenarios is precisely what blend theory undertakes to do.

Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* can also be seen as a decades-long process of recombining particular elements to produce the aesthetic wholes represented by his individual tales (Fig. 2.1). The skill of smoothly interweaving or blending stories is far from a trivial one. As the neurobiologist and Nobel laureate David Hubel has pointed out, specific regions of the brain devoted to kinesthetics, or music, or causal sequences, or analogies, have no trouble operating in tandem with each other, but have significantly more difficulty operating in tandem with themselves; it is, Hubel says, not hard to whistle a melody while navigating a complex ski run; it is much harder to simultaneously recall two ski runs, two melodies, two poems or two stories²⁰—the last of which Shakespeare appears to have done with some regularity and a notable mental dexterity.

Moulton recognizes *The Merchant of Venice* as an amalgamation of two different folktales—the pound of flesh, and the casket game—which are woven more tightly together by the addition of two other plots: the elopement of Jessica, and the comic story of exchanged wedding rings. The ‘pound of flesh’ story most centrally concerns Antonio and Shylock. Bassanio is the occasion for Antonio’s debt, and is thereby an instrument for linking the stories; the idea that a man might borrow money in order to woo a rich woman allows Shakespeare to unite, through

¹⁹Ibid., 359–365.

²⁰Lecture, “Thinking, and the Brain,” Cognitive Theory and the Arts seminar, Harvard University, Dec. 8, 2011; the fact that thinking of more than one story at a time requires mental labor near the limits of our ordinary capacity may help explain both the very widespread fascination with complex plots, and the fact that there exists a category of professional specialists—literary critics—whose job is to compare stories.



Fig. 2.2 Film still: Lynn Collins as Portia in *The Merchant of Venice*, 2004, dir. Michael Radford

Bassanio, the Antonio/Shylock story and the casket-story to which Portia belongs principally as a prize. Her eventual disguise as a doctor of law (a gender-bending dramatic irony continuing what Shakespeare had explored in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*) augments the interest of her character, transforming her from passive prize to active and ingenious heroine. The unthrifty friend in one story is mapped onto the fortunate wooer in the other story; the woman wooed and won, in the casket-game story, is granted the role of jurist in the blended story.

The elopement of Jessica helps to bring the main stories together in several ways: it allows stage time to pass between when the bond is struck and when the bond comes due; it allows the news of Antonio's trouble to be brought to Bassanio and Portia at Belmont; it provides a fresh outrage to Shylock, plunging him into an implacable fury. The Jessica plot strengthens not only the play's causal logic but its human interest: Jessica's relationship to her father lends him an additional depth, and her relationship with Portia deepens both characters. The same is true of Jessica's relationship with her new husband Lorenzo, whose personal appeal shores up that of Bassanio, the play's ostensible hero.²¹

²¹ Bassanio "has so little scope in the scenes of the play itself...that we see his strength almost entirely by the reflected light of the attitude which others hold to him; in the

The episode of the rings, at the end, neatly allows Portia to test her new husband's devotion to her against his friendship for Antonio—a knowing and plausible human touch on Shakespeare's part, which, like the Jessica story, deepens the play's character interest. It also underscores the play's symmetry of construction by distinguishing between the two characters in Bassanio—the friend and the lover—and so between the stories in which they are embedded. It also brings balance to the hybrid story by adding a pattern of complication and resolution that the comic side of the play would otherwise lack. Such dovetailing of constituent stories shows the compact synthesis made possible by *cross-space mappings*: the mapping of friend onto wooer in Bassanio, of daughter onto messenger in Jessica, or of romantic heroine onto law clerk in Portia (Fig. 2.2).

Lynn Collins as Portia in the 2004 film version (dir. Michael Radford) is seen here with the academic garb, short hair and goatee that project from a prototypical “attorney” space to make her the lawyer Balthazar.

Blend-theorists typically supplement their analysis of cross-space mappings with a diagram with the following components: (I) separate circles representing mental spaces, in this case the constituent stories and the blended one; (II) dots within these representing key structural elements (*lender*, *borrower*, and *friend* in one; *wooer* and *lady* in another); (III) lines drawn among the dots, representing conceptual links. Some elements in the blended space, like ‘Bassanio’, are composite; others like ‘lender’ and ‘lady’ are imported from the input spaces, and others, like ‘Jessica’ and ‘rings’, are introduced, via *imaginative completion*, to fill out the picture. Such diagrams can be a useful notation, but they do have drawbacks: they are static, schematic, and minimal, and in these ways completely unlike the volatile and vivid realm of cognitive experience they describe. One effect of any diagram is to occupy the viewer's visual imagination, which I think is probably better directed toward the interacting conceptual scenarios under discussion, in all their human-scale three-dimensionality. Even the term *mental spaces* carries an ambiguity as to whether one is discussing humanly inhabitable spaces, or abstract spaces like those marked by circles on a page. The diagrams often used by blend theorists can, in short, give an unfortunately

present instance we have no difficulty in catching the intellectual power of Lorenzo, and Lorenzo looks up to Bassanio as a superior.” Ibid., 86.

misleading impression of what the theory argues, or what it is—a wholly incorrect impression of reductiveness, which feeds into a negative preconception that many literary scholars have about cognitive approaches in general. For these reasons I will refrain, in this book, from presenting diagrams.

Crucial to Moulton's argument, and difficult to represent diagrammatically, is his point that Shakespeare "makes a plot more complex in order to make it more simple." The secondary stories, he says, "have the effect of assisting the main stories, smoothing away their difficulties and making their prominent points more prominent"; their characters, who are often just mechanically necessary in one plot, find dimensionality when assigned roles in the other: "the multiplication of individual figures, instead of leaving an impression of waste, is made to minister to the sense of dramatic economy."

It has often been noted that some Shakespearean characters, such as Richard the Third and Iago, are allowed to become, in a sense, the authors of the plays in which they appear, or at least the authors of the part that is under their control. Moulton points out what makes them authors of truly Shakespearean skill, which is their judicious parsimony: "There is [in Richard] a dreadful *economy* of crime: not the economy of prudence seeking to reduce its amount, but the artist's economy which delights in bringing the largest number of effects out of a single device."²² The principle of dovetailing, of economy, of "watching one device produce two effects" is a key to the plays' artistry and beauty.²³

Hardin Craig, a scholar of Shakespeare's sources, has similar ideas about Shakespeare's creativity: "Shakespeare's originality seems to have consisted in the selection of great significant patterns...in unequalled ingenuity in *fitting parts together* so that they reinforced one another, and in masterly skill in realistic amplification."²⁴ In his essay "Motivation

²²"No one will suppose that Iago has any other interest in reducing the amount of evil in the world beyond this economic interest of watching one device produce two effects, and leaving the hostile forces of goodness to work his ends without his troubling to draw upon his own resources of evil." 74–76, 100, 238.

²³"What form and colour are to the painter, what rhythm and imagery are to the poet, that crime is to Richard: it is the medium in which his soul frames its conception of the beautiful." *Ibid.*, 93.

²⁴Hardin Craig, "Motivation in Shakespeare's Choice of Materials," in *Shakespeare Criticism 1935-1960*, ed. Anne Ridler (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1970), 40.

in Shakespeare's Choice of Materials," Craig analyzes in *Macbeth* what blend theorists would identify as identity-compression; he shows the play blending personages from three different reigns that are described in Holinshed's chronicles:

Banquo belonged to the story of Macbeth...but mainly Shakespeare resorted for amplification to the chronicle of King Duff. In that he found the story of Donwald, a man whom King Duff never suspected, who murdered King Duff in the castle of Forres. This deepened Macbeth's guilt, since in his own story he had been an open rebel against King Duncan, but the story of Donwald amplified the plot in another way. Having, with the aid of his wife, drugged the two chamberlains who lay with the king, Donwald, although he greatly abhorred the deed and did it only at the instigation of his wife, induced four of his servants to cut the king's throat. When morning came, he slew the chamberlains and cleared himself of the crime by his power and authority, though not without being suspected by certain noblemen because of his over-diligence. Thus from the chronicle of King Duff came Lady Macbeth and all that pertains to her.

...The voice of sleeplessness comes from the chronicle of King Kenneth.²⁵

Besides compression, Craig's source-scholarship foregrounds another aspect of conceptual integration already noted above, which is its selectivity. Thomas Hanmer remarked in the eighteenth century that "a poet's judgment is particularly shown in choosing the proper circumstances, and rejecting the improper ones of the groundwork which he raises his play upon,"²⁶ and Charles Armitage Brown noted in the nineteenth century that "Those accustomed to examine the prototypes of Shakespeare's fables...well know how artfully he could appropriate incidents or shades in character, while he partially or almost wholly differed from the story."²⁷

In order to come up with the story of *Macbeth* as we know it, Shakespeare compressed what was diffuse—assorted treacheries in Scottish history, serving different agendas—into the singular career and agenda of one Scottish noble and king, Macbeth. The basic insight served by this compression was a highly partisan one: a heavy

²⁵Ibid., 43.

²⁶Hanmer, *Some Remarks on the Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* (London, 1736), 97.

²⁷Brown, *Shakespeare's Autobiographical Poems* (London: James Bohn, 1838), 32.

intimation of the wickedness of the historical enemy of the ancestors of Shakespeare's patron King James. In this, Shakespeare was simply doing for his new master what he had done previously by vilifying Richard the Third, historical enemy of the ancestors of Elizabeth Tudor. It is worth noting here that no special truth-value attaches to the insight attendant on conceptual blends; a sudden realization or epiphany may be quite incorrect, or based upon wholly false information, and still offer a powerful cognitive experience of extensive and suddenly apprehended coherence. In viewing or reading *Macbeth*, we come to realize how depraved Macbeth is, and it is a matter of genuine insight with respect to the constructed character, howsoever little it may illuminate or justly represent the historical individual who is travestied in the fiction. The blending of these several reigns in Shakespeare's story entails the compression of some of the aforementioned "vital relations" and the strengthening of others. The diverse times of the different historical incidents are made proximate with each other and identical with the present experience of the audience; the different locations—a heath, Inverness, etc.—are, as always in theatre, made identical with the space of the stage. Such collapsing of times and places yields a cognitive and affective intensification.

One especially compressed form of analogy, according to blend theory, is "role,"²⁸ a word which, in one of its senses, is of obvious relevance to any discussion of theatre, and which is relevant here in a slightly different sense: Sharing the *role* "Scottish Thane" is something that enables the historical Macbeth and Donwald, as chronicled by Holinshed, to be blended easily with each other to form the protagonist of Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. As Mark Turner has observed, "Blends can be constructed if two stories can be construed as sharing abstract structure."²⁹ The analogy between the Thanes, implicit in their shared cultural and political role, is easily compressed to the relation of identity. This blending and identity-compression serves to intensify the psychological reality of Shakespeare's Macbeth, furnishing him with a fall into secret treachery as well as with a wife tempting him to that fall. "Intentionality is often

²⁸"Role is a ubiquitous vital relation...Within mental spaces and across mental spaces, an element can be linked, as a role, to another element that counts as its value. Elements are roles or values not in some absolute sense but only relative to other elements. *President* is a role for the value *Lincoln*, and a value for the role *head of state*." Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 98.

²⁹Mark Turner, *The Literary Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 87.

heightened under blending,” Fauconnier and Turner note³⁰; the indelible intentionality of Lady Macbeth is intensified in this blend.

Hardin Craig traces how Shakespeare wove *King Lear* from disparate materials, and emphasizes the transforming and intensification of its sources’ emotional content:

It was natural and yet a stroke of genius that made Shakespeare combine two stories so different in their tone and yet so closely parallel in their course as that of King Leir and the blind king of Paphlagonia. He knitted those stories together with a naturalness which will always be amazing, but his general task may be described as permeating the Lear story with the tragic tone and temper of the Gloucester story.³¹

Where Shakespeare found several basically analogous (because politically ambitious) historical Thanes to work with in crafting the character of Macbeth, he seems to have been struck by an interesting contrast in considering the two stories that would become the sub-plots of *King Lear*. Analogy, as we have seen, is a key logical relation in the linking and integrating of mental spaces; disanalogy is as well.³² Leah Scragg similarly finds “antithetical patterning” in the plot of *The Two Gentlemen of*

³⁰Ibid., 101.

³¹“*The True Chronicle History of King Leir* is a rather bright and cheerful play. It furnished events for Shakespeare’s *King Lear*, but it did not furnish tone, atmosphere, the deeper significances and the tragic concept. These came from the story of the ‘Paphlagonian unkinde King, and his kinde sonne’ as narrated in the tenth chapter of the second book of Sidney’s *Arcadia*...Sidney furnishes active cruelty, filial ingratitude in a dreadful form, base deceit and dark intrigue. He furnishes the theme of hunted fugitives, exposure to storm, a cave of refuge (which may be the hovel), blindness, danger, destitution, and, more than all, the deepest possible reflection on tragic folly and the worthlessness of miserable life...From the fifteenth chapter of the second book of *Arcadia*, which treats of the story of Plangus, come by plain suggestion the machinations by which Edmund undermines and uproots Edgar. It is by means similar to those used by Edmund against Edgar that the corrupt stepmother achieves the downfall and banishment of Plangus. From that story also comes the suggestion for the disagreeably appropriate liaison between Edmund and the wicked daughters of King Lear...[Shakespeare] retains from the old play the sweetness of Cordelia and the faithfulness of Kent (Perillus).” Craig, 45–47.

³²“Disanalogy is grounded on analogy. We are not disposed to think of a brick and the Atlantic Ocean as disanalogous, but we are disposed to think of the Atlantic Ocean and the Pacific Ocean as disanalogous.... Psychological experiments show that people are stymied when asked to say what is different between two things that are extremely different, but answer immediately when the two things are already...analogous.” Fauconnier and Turner, *The Way We Think*, 99.

Verona, as “Julia’s deceptive appearance provides her with the means of discovering the truth about Proteus, while Proteus’s pose of friendship blinds Valentine to the true nature of his friend.”³³

In *The Cognitive Revolution in Western Culture: Volume 1—The Birth of Expectation*, critic Don LePan traces Shakespeare’s contributions to the invention of the complex plot. The difference between simple and complex plots is that in the former, like *Everyman*,

[I]t is impossible for the minds of the audience to move ahead of the action in any fashion other than aimless speculation. One thing happens, and then another thing happens in a sequence of more or less self-contained episodes...The curiosity of the audience is thereby restricted to an interest in what will happen next, with no single possibility regarded as being more likely to happen than others. A complex plot, on the other hand, entails not only a more involved blending of direct presentation with exposition, but also a much more complicated and complete knitting together of the developments of the story. Instead of forming an episodic ‘and...then’ sequence, the incidents are linked by numerous causal connections. The affective mechanism of the complex plot is to create a continual sense of anticipation among the readers or members of the audience by drawing them into this unfolding pattern of connections with the past and future of the story.³⁴

This account of plot seems highly convergent with the theory of conceptual integration, and indeed, though it is not his main focus, LePan takes notice of the complex cognitive underpinnings of plot: “[T]he formation of specific notions as to what is likely to happen is not as simple an operation as we might think; it requires the ability to combine various and often disparate pieces of information, which may have been received at several different times and places, in a particular way; to draw inferences from these data; and to project these inferences into the hypothetical realm of the future.”³⁵

III. Shakespeare offers audiences a rich experience of real-time conceptual integration.

³³Leah Scragg, *Shakespeare’s Mouldy Tales: Recurrent Plot Motifs in Shakespearian Drama* (London and New York: Longman, 1992), 48.

³⁴London: Macmillan, 1989 175.

³⁵*Ibid.*, 75.

The mind...must be conscious of a unity. It must also be conscious of a complexity of details without which the unity could not be perceptible. But the mere perception of unity and of complexity would not give the art-pleasure it does give unless the unity were seen to be *developed* out of the complexity, and this brings in a third idea of progress and gradual movement. —Richard G. Moulton³⁶

What Moulton calls the “art-pleasure” of perceiving conceptual convergence over time in a story appears to be related to the more general pleasure of economy noted above, a delight in seeing things dovetail, seeing things “brought into a common system” before our very eyes, and seeing “the separateness of the different interests” reduced.

Jean E. Howard, in her book *Shakespeare's Art of Orchestration: Stage Technique and Audience Response*, describes how “elements of the stage event...work together to produce a complex field of meanings.”³⁷ Her musical metaphor of “orchestration” captures the perceptual and temporal dimensions of blending, and it is striking how often she uses the words “assimilate,” “synthesize” and “integrate” to describe the response required of audiences by Shakespearean complexity, whether in regard to relationships between plot events, thematic elements, characters, or aspects of a character. Notably, since our experience of plays occurs in real time, with constraints on attention and memory, Howard’s references to integration, synthesis and assimilation almost always imply a process unfolding in time and requiring a pause.³⁸

Hardin Craig’s discussion of the source-blending that yielded *Macbeth* and *King Lear*, and Richard Moulton’s discussion of the blending that informs *The Merchant of Venice*, have in common a principal focus on the thought-processes of the writer of the story, and a critical or theoretical stance that is more synchronic than diachronic, as if the various elements involved in the blending were pieces of material laid out for a patchwork

³⁶Moulton, 324. He gives as an example the complex plot of *King Lear*, emphasizing the “convergent motion, by which actions, or systems of actions, at first separate, become drawn together as they move on.” 377.

³⁷University of Illinois Press, 1984, 14.

³⁸“Desdemona’s distracted song creates a moment of slackened tension in which the ultimate consequences of his transformation can be assimilated” Ibid., 12; “During such moments the audience is faced with the nearly impossible task of assimilating the opposing voices of the psychically divided hero.” Ibid., 73.

quilt whose relations were essentially spatial and simultaneous. This picture is, of course, complicated by the several ways in which a story is time-bound: it was written in a particular era; it is made out of episodes, or pieces of time, which it serves to coordinate; its composition was a process, if often a non-linear one, that the story-writer underwent, making some logical and causal links in the course of the telling that he or she may not have foreseen at the outset; and perhaps most importantly of all, for aesthetic criticism, the story as a finished work of art is a special experience-in-time constructed for its audience.

Howard observes that

To [discuss] the thematic and psychological patterns in the play... involves wandering back and forth, in retrospect, over its surface, imposing an abstract ordering paradigm upon events that, experienced sequentially, do not reveal a unifying meaning so readily. What this mode of criticism does, and it is a useful and necessary operation, is to spatialize a temporal phenomenon, to see it in one glance as a simultaneous whole.³⁹

What appears here, in Howard's reflections on her own critical approach, is a facet of conceptual blending: our instinct for translating temporal relations into spatial ones to make them easier to handle in imagination. (So strong and pervasive is this instinct that one might be tempted to think that there is no way to conceptualize time *except* spatially; we are able, however, to think about such phenomena as rhythm, waiting, remembering). Certain vital relations transform, under the pressure of conceptual compression, into certain others, and there are strong regularities as to which relation is thus translated into which other: just as analogy can compress to identity, time shows a remarkable ability to compress, in thought, to space.⁴⁰

³⁹ Ibid., 178.

⁴⁰ "A striking general property of blending is that it can compress one vital relation into another. Indeed, there are canonical compressions relating different vital relations... Our most basic understanding of time is achieved through cultural blends like the sundial, the watch, the calendar." Fauconnier and Turner, 315; "Compression can scale Time, Space, Cause-Effect, and Intentionality. Analogy can be compressed into Identity or Uniqueness. Cause-Effect can be compressed into Part-Whole... It is also a fundamental power of the way we think to compress Representation, Part-Whole, Cause-Effect, Category, and Role into Uniqueness... Vital relations are what we live by, but they are much less static and

Compression is largely a scalar phenomenon, and the changes it effects tend to be experienced as quantitative, along a continuum, before they become qualitative. Just as one might pass through a continuum of analogy, from weak to strong to strongest, before the relation in question seemed to be one of actual identity, our desire to think about long stretches of time tends to make us compress them into short stretches; we may watch a two-hour dramatization of a two-year war in order to understand the war better, then analytically spatialize the drama we have watched in order to gain perspective on it.

Howard considers the individual scene or scenario as the fundamental unit of conceptual manipulation—something that, through linking and combination, produces more complex unities. The integration of scene-sequences, in her view, offers an aesthetic intensification, as conceptual blending characteristically does.⁴¹ Noting how “one scene can recall an earlier scene to underscore changing circumstances,” she cites as an example the famous scene (III.iii) where Hamlet decides not to kill Claudius at prayer:

As Claudius kneels, Hamlet appears behind the praying king and meditates revenge. This visual configuration, recalling the player’s description of Pyrrhus poised to kill old Priam, suggests the new vulnerability of Claudius and the sudden power Hamlet has acquired through the play within the play.⁴²

The one tableau’s evocation of the other entails *cross-space mapping*, the sudden identification of King Claudius with Priam and of Hamlet with Pyrrhus. This particular mapping or scheme of association, which lends Claudius the pathos of Priam, arguably affects Hamlet’s decision not to kill him. It also underscores the volatile and unwilling *selectivity* of such mappings; when asking the player to recite “Priam’s slaughter,”

unitary than we imagine. Conceptual integration is continually compressing and decompressing them, developing emergent meaning as it goes.” Ibid., 101–102.

⁴¹ “Often, these sequences of linked scenes are orchestrated to gain power from one another and to achieve, collectively, an emotional and intellectual resonance no single scene could attain by itself.” Howard, 136.

⁴² Ibid., 124, 112.

Hamlet may have had his own father in mind as the relevant analog to the slain king.

Howard points out such “mirror scenes” as the street-fights in *Romeo and Juliet* and the “spine of court scenes” offering “three concrete visualizations of Hamlet’s changing relationship to Claudius in his public role as king.”⁴³ These mirror scenes and spines resemble what blend theorists call “mirror networks”—a type of conceptual-integration network in which several mental spaces share an organizing frame, rendering highly efficient the processes of comparison, cross-space mapping and imaginative substitution among their constituent elements.⁴⁴ Like the above critics, Howard notes the way that integration of scenarios can create a sense of clarity, immediacy and emotional force. She points to “crescendo effects,” as when consecutive scenes in *King Lear* (II.ii–iii–iv) “enact the same basic event, but each repetition is pitched at a higher level of intensity:”

The solo voice and the solitary figure of Lear are pitted against an ever more venomous succession of voices and an ever larger array of defiant bodies. As the dialogue moves relentlessly back and forth between the old king and his enemies, *it is as if a heavy ball were being tossed back and forth between a line of ever stronger people on one side and a single figure on the other*. Eventually, that unsupported figure must weaken; and Lear finally does, rushing from the stage crazed with grief and rage.⁴⁵

It is interesting to see that Howard’s elucidation of an emotional dynamic among these scenes in *King Lear* resorts for clarity—exactly as cognitive theory predicts—to a basic physical scenario or “image schema” with intuitive, palpable force-dynamics.

⁴³Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴“A mirror network is an integration network in which all spaces...share an organizing frame [i.e.] a frame that specifies the nature of the relevant activity, events, and participants.” Fauconnier and Turner, 122–123; “The sharing of the organizing frame automatically transfers a rich topology from space to space. Integration is provided in the blend by the shared frame and its elaboration. This elaborated frame is often already a common, rich, and integrated frame, like *race* or *debate* or *encounter*. The sharing of the frame throughout the network automatically preserves the Web connections between spaces.” Ibid., 337.

⁴⁵Howard, 123.

In the movement from scene to scene that Howard discusses, the mental integrations of the playwright can be shown at times to capitalize on disanalogy as a principle of connection among mental spaces; she notes that scenes may be connected not only by the relation of causality, but by tonal, philosophical and characterological and contrasts, just as we saw above with the fusion of starkly contrasting stories to make *King Lear*:

[T]he clowns' matter-of-fact approach to death *contrasts with and defines*, respectively, the lyrical and strangely soothing reveries of Gertrude upon the death of Ophelia and the probing and horrific speculations of Hamlet upon the skull of Yorick and the dissolution of great Alexander.

The notion of character-contrasts brings us now to the very important consideration of Shakespearean intersubjectivity—the way in which Shakespeare's plays are able to “weave many perspectives upon reality into an interlocking whole with generous acknowledgment that the Bottoms of this world have value as well as the Titania.”⁴⁶

As with her use of the phrase “crescendo effects” to describe emotional intensifications over successive scenes in Shakespeare, Howard's metaphor for the plays' intersubjectivity is a musical one—that of *counterpoint*, by which she means the impression of subjective difference and simultaneity created in the play's dialogue by, usually, an alternation between self-consistent, stylistically contrasting speakers: “[P]revented from passively adopting the perspective of either stage party...the spectator must develop a more complicated and comprehensive point of view, one indirectly shaped by the way in which, through its contrapuntal orchestration, the scene progressively defines and undermines the two limited perspectives it brings into such sharp juxtaposition.”⁴⁷ This more comprehensive audience-perspective

⁴⁶Ibid., 23.

⁴⁷Ibid., 57. “The spectator is forced to tolerate a deliberate division of his attention and to perceive one strand of stage speech in the immediate context of another...[S]uch a division usually brings to prominence oppositions in outlook, temperament, or values among stage participants and thereby calls into play the audience's powers of judgment and discrimination. More important, contrapuntal stage technique allows the dramatist to control the perspective from which the audience views stage action, inviting us to identify now with one, now with another, stage party or forcing at times our detachment from both.” Ibid., 53.

would be, at any moment, a conceptually blended one, allowing us to entertain unreconciled perspectives.

Howard calls attention to particular ways in which characters' perspectives are among the mental spaces that Shakespeare not only coordinates but blends: One of these is when a character "seems to voice some portion of the psychic life of another": for example, "Lucio, lurking on the periphery [of *Measure for Measure*, II.ii] and speaking only to Isabella, seems to make available to the audience some of Isabella's inner thoughts and emotions and thus make comprehensible the changing texture of her overt behavior."⁴⁸ Sometimes one character's attributes transfer to another: "On the one hand, we have the controlled and confident Othello...On the other, we have the passionate, enraged Othello who has been tainted by Iago's ideas and language." Sometimes, again, a plot calls for the compression of two characters' intentions and identities: "The rage of [Laertes] is manipulated and exploited [by Claudius], until the united energies of both coalesce around the intricate plan to kill the prince."⁴⁹ And sometimes "two contrapuntal voices actually are used to reflect the divided consciousness of just one of [the] characters."⁵⁰ This technique is one upon which Shakespeare relies for tragic pathos,⁵¹ but also one that he uses to great comic effect, as in *Twelfth Night* (I.v) where Viola's

uneasiness with her role and her script finds expression in a wonderfully compressed example of verbal counterpoint created by a single [character's] speech. At one and the same time Viola attempts to deliver her

⁴⁸Ibid., 71; "Maynard Mack calls [these] *umbrella speeches*, 'since more than one consciousness may shelter under them'." 78n.

⁴⁹Ibid., 14. This "orchestration" is not unlike a moment of literal orchestration in Prokofiev's *Peter and the Wolf*: When Peter enlists a friendly bird to help him catch the wolf, we hear the voice of the bird (flute) sounding Peter's theme instead of its own; it is instantly clear that the one character has taken up the agenda of the other.

⁵⁰Ibid., 69.

⁵¹"Consider, for example, Othello's terrible speech [IV.i] when, having struck Desdemona before Lodovico, he calls his wife back to him at Lodovico's request... Consider, too, the feast scene in *Macbeth* (III.iv), in which Macbeth's language fluctuates with terrifying suddenness between the welcoming words of fellowship he offers in his role as 'humble host' and the frightened outbursts he utters before the ghost who haunts his table." Ibid., 72–73.



Fig. 2.3 Film still: Francesca Annis and Jon Finch in *Macbeth*, 1971, dir. Roman Polanski

prepared text and to make inquiries and deliver rebukes in a fashion not at all in keeping with the decorum of her assigned task.⁵²

“Shakespeare was thoroughly a master of the mixed motives of human character,” William Hazlitt wrote,⁵³ and Jean E. Howard’s findings seem to corroborate this view. They also overlap strikingly with blend theory: besides synthesis and compression, she anticipates the theory’s concern with several interacting conceptual frames⁵⁴ and with the global insight delivered through their interaction. These concerns join in her discussion, as in mine, with the cognitive and aesthetic matter of intersubjectivity. Howard is, of course, not the only scholar interested in Shakespearean perspectivism. Herschel Baker similarly remarks on the “techniques of juxtaposition, inversion and antithesis [that] enable us to watch the action from many points of view,”⁵⁵ and Norman Rabkin and Wolfgang Iser are both recognized precursors in this area of inquiry. In

⁵²Ibid., 172.

⁵³*The Characters of Shakespeare’s Plays* (London: 1870), 113.

⁵⁴“As an unexpected voice suddenly disrupts the audience’s engagement with a developing line of stage action, a new *frame* through which to view that action is introduced. Such an occurrence significantly alters the audience’s perspective on the central stage action.” Howard, 57.

⁵⁵Herschel Baker, Introduction to “Henry IV, Parts 1 and 2” *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2nd edition (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 887.

his 2007 book *Shakespeare Thinking*, Philip Davis offers this apt description of Shakespeare's dialogue: "It is not just one speech mechanically following another in linear fashion, but a dialogue between two simultaneously different mental centres—plus the space thus created in between them. Out of that space, charged with joint meaning, may be generated further thoughts, new characters and newly evolving configurations."⁵⁶

In performance, *Macbeth* strikingly compresses into one space, in our minds, two incommensurate perspectives: the perspective of the guilt-stricken Macbeth, who can see a ghost among his guests, and urgently warns his wife about it, and the perspective of Lady Macbeth and the guests themselves, who cannot see a ghost among them. (Fig. 2.3)

The medium of film can be particularly effective at showing differences in perspective, as the camera captures in closeup the glances that show when attention is and is not shared. Francesca Annis and Jon Finch in the 1971 *Macbeth* offer a good example in this image. The dramatic entrance of Banquo's ghost is an example of how a conceptual incongruity or "frame clash" can occur among juxtaposed mental spaces—socio-cognitive ones, in the present case, or semantic ones in the case of much wit and poetry, as I shall also discuss. The aesthetics of the frame clash will be a common denominator in the following chapters discussing wit and poetry.⁵⁷

Jean E. Howard is onto something very important when she remarks that the contrapuntal or intersubjective sequences of particular complexity in Shakespeare's plays "*tax the audience* and stretch its powers of perception and judgment."⁵⁸ The same insight lies at the heart of Lisa Zunshine's project of assessing the place of intersubjectivity within literary experience. Zunshine's work, partly anticipated here by Howard's, is a major contribution to the nascent field of cognitive criticism because

⁵⁶ Philip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking* (London: Continuum), 34.

⁵⁷ "In such networks, both organizing frames make central contributions to the blend, and their sharp differences offer the possibility of rich clashes. Far from blocking the construction of the network, such clashes offer challenges to the imagination." Fauconnier and Turner, 131.

⁵⁸ "They often force us to assimilate two sorts of stage happenings at one time: a quarrel and a commentary on that quarrel; a persuasion scene and a simultaneous revelation of the psychic struggles of one of the participants. Frequently, contrapuntal sequences direct the audience's attention to oppositions in outlook, temperament, or value that are impossible to reconcile and that exert competing claims upon our assent and sympathies." Howard, 74.

it conceives of literary aesthetics not simply as a manifestation of universal mental capacities, but as representing a frontier of human mental life; they are the point at which we grapple—valiantly, ingeniously—with our own mental limits. We are human, and so we continually imagine things, yet we are *only* human, and so we can only imagine so much at a time, and can only sustain our imaginative work for so long at a stretch, and can only remember so much, at a given time, of all that we have imagined.

It was Zunshine who lately introduced into criticism the terms “Theory of Mind” (ToM) and “metarepresentation,” both originating in the field of cognitive psychology. Theory of Mind⁵⁹ is the mental faculty operative when one person makes inferences about what another feels or believes; a person’s “Theory of Mind” is his/her cognitive capacity to attribute mental states to other people. The term was developed for use in cases where this capability seems to be reduced, as with autism-spectrum disorders. “Metarepresentation” is “our evolved cognitive ability to keep track of sources of our representations (i.e., to metarepresent them).” This term too originates in the effort to characterize a nonstandard state, in this case schizophrenia, which typically entails “failure to monitor the source” of mental representations: patients fail to recognize their own thoughts and speech as originating from themselves. Zunshine, as literary critic, considers novels of various kinds—detective novels, stream-of-consciousness novels, those with unreliable narrators—as catering to the pleasure that people derive from the stimulation of their metarepresentational capacities. Such stories “demand outright that we process complexly embedded intentionalities of their characters, configuring their minds as represented by other minds, whose representations we may or may not trust.”⁶⁰ There is probably a distinction to be made between narrative fictions, where all these minds must coexist entirely in our imagination, and dramatic works, where the actors on stage offer support to our imagination and memory; even so, both kinds of fictions hold a strong intersubjective interest for us.

⁵⁹The word “theory” in the phrase “Theory of Mind” does not imply conscious conjecture or formulation of propositions, as it does, for instance, in “theory of evolution,” or in “blend theory”.

⁶⁰*Why We Read Fiction: Theory of Mind and the Novel* (Columbus: The Ohio State U. Press, 2006), 159.

The relevance of conceptual integration to these matters, and vice versa, may impress itself upon the literary-critical reader, as they all involve connection and embeddedness among variably configured mental representations. Metarepresentation is, indeed, at the heart of mental space theory, which first arose from the problem of referential opacity in language—that is, those cases where a clause is embedded in a psychological predicate. If I say, “John thinks the criminals should go free,” do you understand the characterization “criminals” to be part of John’s view or part of mine? The ambiguity of such cases had been a problem in formal linguistics, and Fauconnier’s introduction of “mental spaces” into linguistic analysis was a response to this dilemma.

A significant convergence between ToM phenomena and conceptual integration has to do not only with networks of mental connection, but with the normal limits of cognitive performance. Zunshine points out, and cites experimental data to support the claim, that “people have marked difficulties processing stories that involve [metarepresentation] above the fourth level.”⁶¹ For illustration, she cites a cartoon by Bruce Eric Kaplan in *The New Yorker*, in which a man says to a woman “Of course I care about how you imagined I thought you perceived I wanted you to feel.”⁶² Zunshine is interested in why complex subjective embeddedness (such as “A wants B to believe that C thinks that D wanted E to consider F’s feelings about G”) is more difficult for us to conceptualize than chains of causality (such as “A gave rise to B, which resulted in C, which in turn caused D, which led to E, which made possible F, which eventually brought about G.”).

⁶¹“Subjects had little problem with the factual causal reasoning story: error rates were approximately 5% across six levels of causal sequencing. Error rates on the [ToM] tasks were similar (5–10%) up to and including fourth-level intentionality, but *rose dramatically to nearly 60% on fifth-order tasks*.” Cognitive scientists knew that this “failure on the mind-reading tasks [was] not simply a consequence of forgetting what happened, because subjects performed well on the memory-for-facts tasks embedded in the [ToM] questions.” Zunshine cites Dunbar, “On the Origin of the Human Mind” in *Evolution and the Human Mind: Modularity, Language and Meta-Cognition*, eds. Carruthers and Chamberlain (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 200), 241; Zunshine, 28–29.

⁶²“Overwrought to the sixth level of mental embedment—the level at which our species is not that cognitively fluent—this statement about mutual sensitivity, caring, and understanding is literally incomprehensible and has to be deciphered with pen and paper, if one bothers to decipher it at all.” 29.

The concept of “Theory of Mind” is not universally embraced among cognitive linguists, psychologists and philosophers who are interested in social dimensions of communication, and a strong statement of preference for a different way of conceiving these phenomena can be found in *The Shared Mind: Perspectives on Intersubjectivity* (Jordan Zlatev, Timothy P. Racine, Chris Sinha and Esa Itkonen, eds.).⁶³ The editors of this volume object to what they consider to be basic assumptions of the ToM approach: that “there is a primary separation between the self and (the minds of) others” and that “the individual must bridge this separation either by some form of ‘theory’ or ‘simulation’ of the other’s mind, a process that is more or less fallible.” They argue instead that humans are “primordially connected in their subjectivity, rather than functioning as monads who need to ‘infer’ that others are also endowed with experiences and mentalities...similar to their own,” and that one therefore ought to resist the notion of a “monadic, individual mind, ultimately incapable of reaching out beyond its confines to the world and others,” and ought to challenge “the assumption (basic to ToM approaches) of the ‘opacity’ of social reality.” *“Despite the important empirical findings and hypotheses generated by the Theory of Mind (ToM) approach,”* they write [my italics], “it is our contention that its framing of the research question has significantly obscured rather than clarified what needs to be explained.”⁶⁴

Quite clearly, these scholars share a commitment to recognizing those aspects of our life and thought that are irreducibly social; their notion of “what needs to be explained” about subjectivity is tied to the reality and perhaps also the ideal of intersubjectivity.⁶⁵ I cannot fault them for this commitment, and have myself long been persuaded of the truth and importance of Wittgenstein’s view of unmediated intersubjectivity, which they cite:

“We see emotion.”—As opposed to what?—We do not see facial contortions and *make the inference* that he is feeling joy, grief, boredom. We

⁶³ Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2008.

⁶⁴ Zlatev et al., “Intersubjectivity: What makes us human?”, *The Shared Mind*, 2–8.

⁶⁵ They decry “the epistemological and methodological individualism inherited from the ‘possessive individualist’ cast of Western culture (and capitalism), and the dominant position accorded in this tradition to natural science and technology *vis-à-vis* the humanities and social sciences.” *Ibid.*, 12.

describe a face immediately as sad, radiant, bored, even when we are unable to give any other description of the features.⁶⁶

It strikes me, though, that the critique offered here by Zlatev et al. is probably spurred more by the terminological infelicity of the phrase “*Theory of Mind*” than by real disbelief in the phenomenon it designates. It seems clear that our real-time human interactions in daily life are not all conducted on the basis of “theories” about one another in the ordinary sense of that word; “theorizing” is not the same thing as perceiving and responding appropriately to the emotions of others. And yet, no less obviously, there is indeed a separation between “the self and (the minds of) others”; the bridging of this separation is indeed “more or less fallible”; the “opacity” of social reality is a fact of life. We can know at a glance that someone is in distress, but we may not know the reasons for this distress, or know who else knows the reasons. Zunshine is, I believe, right to infer that such imbalances and asymmetries of knowledge are at the heart of readerly interest in novels and other fiction, and the research that she cites about the limits of our intersubjective cognition must be counted among the “important empirical findings” that Zlatev et al. concede to investigations of ToM.

Fauconnier and Turner are also interested in the fact of limits on working memory, and they understand conceptual blending partly as a pragmatic adaptation in the face of such limits: compressed blends can be very useful as codes, shorthands and mnemonics. They remark on a limit on working memory observable in linguistic constructions of the form “The secretary of the wife of the president of...”. Where logical recursion occurs in speech, they point out, “Human beings typically top out after a handful of repetitions. We say, ‘The scarf my aunt bought’ and ‘The scarf my aunt my uncle married bought,’ but it gets hard at ‘The scarf my aunt my uncle my father disliked married bought.’”⁶⁷

⁶⁶Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Remarks on the Philosophy of Psychology*, Volume 2, translated by C.G. Luckhardt and M.A.E. Aue (Oxford: Blackwell, 1980); quoted in Zlatev et al., 4.

⁶⁷Fauconnier and Turner, 386; Brian Boyd considers the constraint of short-term or “working” memory as a defining factor in the experience of verse: “All verse depends on line length, on lines that usually take two to three seconds to utter—according to one explanation, the length of the human auditory present, our capacity to hold a sequence of sounds in our head at once; according to another, the size of working memory, which can cope with five to seven different chunks of information.” *Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition*, and Shakespeare’s *Sonnets* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), 16.

Conceptual blends, Fauconnier and Turner suggest, often arise from this constraint.

Both of these cognitive approaches address a point at which our capacities “top out,” a phenomenon that literary critics might identify either with a *reductio ad absurdum*—as in “Of course I care about how you imagined I thought you perceived I wanted you to feel”—or with the sublime; one can well imagine, hypothetically, an inspired dramatic, poetic or novelistic epiphany that conveyed, in an instant, just how “you imagined I thought you perceived I wanted you to feel.” Henry James is one artist who might accomplish such a thing, and Shakespeare is surely another. Shakespeare is an artist of both the absurd and the sublime—able to see the infinite regress of intersubjectivity and to hear language falling short, as when Mariana in *Measure for Measure* says that Angelo “thinks he knows that he ne’er knew my body, but knows he thinks that he knows Isabel’s.”⁶⁸ Even as they play for laughs, his works can overwhelm with their cognitive richness, intricacy, complexity, depth—whether in a layered metaphor that strains our inferential powers, or in the plot of a play, like *Othello* or *King Lear*, that represents minds “as represented by other minds, whose representations we may or may not trust.” The next chapter will turn its eye onto Shakespeare’s artistry of the absurd, and we will have more there of Zunshine’s “sociocognitive complexity” in both aspects—as an absorbing pleasure and a challenge. My chapters on wit and poetry will both link Shakespeare’s artistic eminence in those domains with an audience- and reader-experience of being overwhelmed by a certain cognitive abundance or surplus.

An interest in characters and emotions, and a capacity to monitor them, runs deep in human cognition, and some have posited an evolutionary link between our powers of integrating sequences and of integrating perspectives. Brian Boyd, for instance, writes: “As our imaginations have expanded, we have also become adept at metarepresentation: at entertaining multiple perspectives and understanding the relationship of one perspective to another, like that of successive moments of our past to each other and to the present or the future, or others’ perspectives on us or anything else.”⁶⁹

⁶⁸V.i.203–204.

⁶⁹*Why Lyrics Last: Evolution, Cognition, and Shakespeare’s Sonnets* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2012), 137.



Fig. 2.4 Film still: Kenneth Branagh, Nathaniel Parker and Michael Maloney in *Othello*, 1995, dir. Oliver Parker

Don LePan similarly links temporality with intersubjectivity in literary experience:

[P]lots seem ‘dramatic’ to us not as a result of the conflict itself, but as a result of the way in which complications are introduced which prevent the conflict from coming immediately to a head, or, even more frequently, as a result of conflict or potential conflict being *concealed* from one or more of the parties involved. Thus we are led to feel a continual sense of expectation of the conflict coming into the open and being resolved.⁷⁰

The representation of a character’s changes (“He’s full of alteration and self-reproving,” Edmund observes of Albany in *King Lear*, V.i.3–4), engages our causal capacities and our sociocognitive ones, and the depiction of characters whose changes are interdependent is an integration of integrations. “[T]he dramatist who seeds his stories with deceptions,” LePan remarks, “is able to reap a double harvest: to excite our imaginations into a formulation of the story in advance of its unfolding in action, and to evoke the rich effects of dramatic irony as the story emerges in

⁷⁰LePan, 176.

the continuing present tense of the action on the stage.”⁷¹ The classic instance in which Shakespeare, as a mature artist, seeds a story with deceptions to intensify its emotional impact is probably the plot of *Othello*.

In this moment from the 1995 *Othello* (dir. Oliver Parker), we watch as a smiling Iago (Kenneth Branagh) presses drinks upon the non-drinker Cassio (Nathaniel Parker) in feigned fellowship to bring about Cassio’s disgrace, with the collusion of Roderigo (Michael Maloney), whose part is to provoke the drunken Cassio into a brawl. (Fig. 2.4)

Meanwhile, as we know but Roderigo does not, Iago has misled Roderigo about his motivations and sympathies, and plans to discard Roderigo as soon as he has used him; in fact, Iago will murder Roderigo, though this plot-element is reserved as a surprise for us. The aesthetic effect of this plot is due partly to the sociocognitive complexity involved—we know that Iago knows that Roderigo knows that Iago intends to make Othello think ill of Cassio, and that neither Othello nor Cassio yet knows this, but we also know that Iago knows that Roderigo doesn’t know Iago’s full design—and it is partly due to the brilliant economy of Iago’s scheming, his ability to “make one device produce two effects,” as Richard Moulton says. This play makes elegant compressions and intensifications of causality and intentionality, and it vividly engages our capacity for rational expectation, as analyzed by LePan—something that blend theory would address as a mode of *imaginative completion*. LePan’s work, as noted, sees the scenarios of the complex plot as imaginatively interlinked to intensify our impressions of causality and intentionality.

Shakespeare’s plays are, and were, a source of pleasure, and they needed to be because the writer and his fellow players depended on a paying public for their living. This pleasure had various sources, including wit and poetry, but LePan’s particular focus is on the pleasure of rational expectation—Shakespeare’s use of which, he argues, is a compelling advance past most pre-Shakespearean drama,⁷² and past

⁷¹Ibid., 248.

⁷²Even in so early and, in some ways, light a work as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, LePan argues, “Shakespeare, both in his selection of story materials and in the ways in which he moulded those materials into a complex plot—arousing our expectations; delaying their fulfillment; sustaining highly dramatic effects; suggesting the passage of time through scenic structure; and saturating the action with dramatic irony—exhibited a degree and variety of technical accomplishment unprecedented in English drama.” 249.

Shakespeare's own early work, as for example *Titus Andronicus*, in which "anything can happen next."⁷³ The recognition of cause and effect is itself a source of intellectual pleasure, and it underlies at least two others in drama: the excitement of weighing possible futures at a given moment, with their respective implications and degrees of likelihood,⁷⁴ and the pleasure of having one's expectations (as of a character's ultimate marriage or death) satisfied, but in an unexpected way. "Minds predict features of their environments, which normally do not change rapidly from moment to moment," says Brian Boyd; "They tend to notice only what escapes their prediction, and they actually receive a dopamine reward when they detect something that has not been fully predicted"⁷⁵; such a reward might explain the pleasure that often accompanies the unexpected in conceptual blending—as with the plot twists that enhance storytelling, and as with the *frame clashes* that, I will show, provide a cognitive common denominator between wit and poetry.

The mechanism of our absorption in a complex plot is foregrounded intentionality, LePan argues. In Shakespeare's mature plays, "the awareness of the story and its network of intentions is constantly infusing an imaginative life into our interpretation of the action before us."⁷⁶ Even in Shakespeare's earlier and less richly intersubjective work, intentionality is foregrounded. LePan argues that *Richard III* manifests more strongly than any English drama before it, the technique of building plot around the intentions of a character; the audience member's mind is unconsciously enlisted in an identification with a strongly intentional mind within the represented world. We may be horrified as we watch Richard or Iago proceed through a string of victims, and yet we cannot help vicariously involving ourselves in the aims of whomever seems the most focused, comprehensive and goal-oriented consciousness presented in the play.⁷⁷ If a morally satisfying ending comes, it is because of the

⁷³Ibid., 270.

⁷⁴Shakespeare's arch-villains are particularly good at directing attention towards such contemplations: "Now, whether he kill Cassio, Or Cassio him, or each kill the other, every way makes my gain..." Iago, *Othello*, V.i.12–14; "Which [sister] shall I take. Both? one? or neither?" Edmund, *King Lear*, IV.vii.57–58.

⁷⁵Boyd, 21.

⁷⁶Ibid., 244.

⁷⁷"Clearly we cannot share the intentions of *all* the characters in a play when those intentions are in conflict with one another. What happens in such cases is that our imagination naturally attaches itself to the fullest or most omniscient intentions...Critics who feel

transfer of our vicarious interest to someone else with strong intentions, a Richmond or a MacDuff.

Drama, since Shakespeare, intensifies our sense of causality by omitting much of whatever might distract from it: “[T]he extraneous or inconsequential details that fill so much of daily life are whittled away in literature, leaving our imaginations free to focus on the future of the story. The complex plot...encourages the formation of expectations that are both more focused and more comprehensive than those in real life.”⁷⁸ When Shakespeare writes, in *Henry the Fifth*, “Small time; but in that small most greatly lived/this star of England,” the sense of a correlation between a small time and living greatly belongs partly to the historically short life of this particular king, but also belongs to the achieved intensity of the “small time” in which the play has transpired.

The affective intensifications wrought by temporal and causal compression in drama constitute one of the key themes of LePan’s discussion; another is the highly compelling, even addictive pleasure in what blend theorists call imaginative completion. Zunshine helps us to understand literature, in general, as being largely defined and structured by our almost irresistible instinct for imaginative completion in the area of intersubjectivity (As is said of Ophelia’s poetically mad discourse, “the unshaped use of it doth move the hearers to collection; they aim at it, and botch the words up fit to their own thoughts.”)⁷⁹; LePan helps extend this same principle along a temporal axis. Both critics are concerned with the broad phenomenon of curiosity as driving our investment in literary works—Zunshine highlighting the surprising intensity of our curiosity about other people’s thoughts and feelings, and LePan pointing out the intensity of our curiosity about whether and how our temporal/causal expectations will be fulfilled, especially insofar as they

disinclined to concede [a bond] with characters whom it is impossible for us to admire sometimes feel obliged to attribute the appeal of Richard III, for example, to our admiration for his ‘sense of humour’ or his ‘sheer cleverness’. In fact, what is operating is not any admiration for Richard’s qualities as a character, but an imaginative sympathy with the intentions he expresses with the plots in which he is continually formulating for us the future of the story.” 265–266.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 264.

⁷⁹ *Hamlet*, III.ii.381–382.

are expectations about the thoughts and feelings of others.⁸⁰ Curiosity, in both cases, is importantly not a passive wonder, but a state of imaginative engagement and activity.

To sum up the chapter so far, I believe that Shakespeare can be considered to be, in Moulton's phrase, "as subtle a weaver of plots as he is a deep reader of the human heart." The plays he wove are compact conceptual integration networks, with subplots made to augment plots by "drawing their mutual interweaving yet closer, and throwing their character effects into relief: the additional complexity they have brought has resulted in making emphatic points yet more prominent [that is, in *intensification*], and the total effect has therefore been to increase clearness and simplicity [that is, *global insight*]." ⁸¹ It seems to me that blend theory accounts very well, and very comprehensively, for the dynamics of creativity in general—for which Shakespeare's name is now a byword—and specifically for the principle of "watching one device produce two effects," which I follow Moulton in considering key to Shakespeare's artistry and enduring appeal. A significant part of blend-theory's value for literary criticism is its help in identifying beauties of economy and compression, in a clear and consistent way, across a full spectrum of artistic modes—from plots to puns and jokes, to metaphors, to rhymes, to stage effects, to updatings or adaptations of the plays, including cinematic versions.

What Lisa Zunshine's form of cognitive theory and criticism usefully contributes, quite apart from its focus on intersubjectivity *per se*, is a focus on the dynamic interaction of mental powers with their limits—something noted by Fauconnier and Turner and implicit in their blending model, but whose implications for literary aesthetics have not been fully explored. An encounter with cognitive limits is essential, I would argue, to the aesthetics of storytelling, and to those of wit and poetry as well.

⁸⁰LePan's argument has a strong historicizing dimension, in that he believes he can trace, through Shakespeare and other writers, the *rise* of this curiosity as a factor in Western culture; if this position seems to open him to charges of both bardolotry and cultural chauvinism (charges that he addresses, I think persuasively, in the second edition of his book), he at least cannot be accused of perpetuating a naively trans-historical essentialism about "our" interest in complexities of plot and character—the latter of which, especially, seem to me, too, to belong more fully to late-and post-Shakespearean literary representations.

⁸¹Moulton, 89.

IV. Shakespeare's playwriting career can be seen as a conceptual-integration network.

Far from bearing witness to his lack of inventiveness...Shakespeare's use of borrowed material supplies an index to an originality that is remarkable by the standards of any age.⁸²

[B]lending theory seems ideally adapted to analysis of intertextuality: it allows us to map the building of new meanings in flexible and combinatorial fashion as we combine a text with new contexts.⁸³

Source-hunting, practiced industriously in the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries was and is a sound instinct and a natural and fruitful approach to the study of Elizabethan literature. The trouble has been that those engaged in *Quellenuntersuchungen* have not known why they did it or have not known what to do with sources after they are found. Accounts of sources have been tucked away in the pages of learned journals and special studies, whence they have been available for mention, and for very little else, by editors of the works of Elizabethan authors. But the instinct was sound, because sources tend to furnish basal concepts.⁸⁴

I have so far considered Shakespeare's individual stories as conceptual-integration networks operating at once over the domains of time, space, causality and intersubjectivity. But how did Shakespeare "come up with a story"? One consideration emphasized by Brian Boyd is a basic incentive for efficient recycling and repurposing of ideas on the part of individual artists: "Writers strive not only for novelty, for ways of keeping readers' reward systems alive by ensuring prediction errors. They also strive to reduce composition costs—by borrowing and recombining where they can, ideas and devices that have worked for themselves and others"; "Even the greatest writers seek to reduce their invention costs while still availing themselves of the benefits of novelty. Recombination of successful existing design offers one of the likeliest routes to creativity in biological evolution as in human invention."⁸⁵ Hardin Craig, as noted,

⁸²Scragg, 11.

⁸³Eve Sweetser, "Whose rhyme is whose reason? Sound and sense in *Cyrano de Bergerac*," *Language and Literature*, February 2006, vol. 15 no. 1, 29–54.

⁸⁴Hardin Craig, 37–38.

⁸⁵Boyd, 22, 92.

observes that "Shakespeare's originality...consisted in the selection of great significant patterns, in the discovery of incidents, in unequalled ingenuity in fitting parts together so that they reinforced one another, and in masterly skill in realistic amplification."⁸⁶ In the remainder of this chapter, I will discuss some cases of "recombination of successful existing design" and of "fitting parts together" that have struck me in the course of reading and teaching Shakespeare.

The earliest works of Shakespeare tend to have the most readily identifiable sources: *Titus Andronicus* and *Venus and Adonis* are drawn from Ovid, and *The Rape of Lucrece* from Ovid and Livy—though with a strong stylistic and generic influence from such English complaint poems as Samuel Daniel's *The Complaint of Rosamond*. The two tetralogies of English history plays are derived from the historians Holinshed and Hall. *The Comedy of Errors* reworks two plays of Plautus into one—the separated twin motif being taken from *Menaechmi*, and the doubled servant motif from *Amphitruo*; onto these Plautine components, Shakespeare adds, as a framing device, a motif taken from Gower's medieval *Confessio Amantis* that he will reuse again much later in *Pericles*, Prince of Tyre—the story of a beloved wife lost at sea, who ashes ashore, survives, becomes a votaress, and is ultimately reunited with her loved ones. And finally, Shakespeare's transposition of the action from Plautus's Epidamnium to Ephesus—an Aegean city more familiar to his Christian audience because of its centrality to *Ephesians* and the *Acts of the Apostles*—lends his already composite play some of the conceptual structure of those texts, namely the Pauline injunction that wives must always obey their husbands and servants their masters (a view that is rendered problematic by the events of Shakespeare's comedy) and the reputation of Ephesus as a place where witchcraft is practiced, which Shakespeare uses to generate comical misapprehensions in his characters. *The Comedy of Errors*, managing to produce from these disparate sources a coherent and tightly plotted play that still reliably entertains audiences four centuries later, is an instructive case study in successful conceptual integration and compression—temporal, spatial, causal, and intentional. The later works display even more hybridity. *The Taming of the Shrew* seems indebted to Plautus for the same joke (identity-thief-as-gatekeeper) from *Amphitruo* that underlies an incident in *The Comedy of Errors*, but it is

⁸⁶Craig, 40.

also indebted to a long European tradition of shrew-taming tales. *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* derives its disguised-heroine story—extremely consequential for Shakespeare’s subsequent dramatic imagination—from the Portuguese novel *Diana Enamorada* by Jorge de Montemayor, but *The Two Gentlemen* adds several details, such as the Veronese setting, from the “Romeus and Julietta” story. It adds the two gentlemen, whose “bromance” vies with the disguised-heroine plot in importance, both for this play and for later ones. Having at first worked by imaginatively combining the works of others, Shakespeare soon began to recombine his own stories. Here is a brief survey of some ways in which he does so.

COMEDIES

Much Ado About Nothing features: a combative couple, as in *The Taming of the Shrew*; a protagonist who must learn to outgrow his wit, as in *Love’s Labour’s Lost*; a friar’s scheme to feign the death of an underappreciated young woman, as in *Romeo and Juliet*.

Twelfth Night features: a woman in male disguise employed as a servant by the man she loves, who sends her to woo a woman on his behalf, as in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*; a pair of siblings separated in a shipwreck, as in *The Comedy of Errors*; a kind ‘illegal alien’ arrested and facing execution for trespassing, as in *The Comedy of Errors*; a painful case of mistaken identity when this character is ‘denied’ by the one he’d sought, who doesn’t recognize him, as in *The Comedy of Errors*; a strikingly intense devotion on the part of this seeker-character, who is named Antonio here, as in *The Merchant of Venice*; some very tense uncertainty over the location of lent money, as in both *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Merchant of Venice*; a scapegoated character, as in *The Merchant of Venice*; the ‘madhouse’ confinement of one who is not mad, as in *The Comedy of Errors*; a woman’s ring-exchange ploy as in both *The Merchant of Venice* and *Two Gentlemen of Verona*.

HISTORIES

Henry the Fourth, Part One, while it draws its plot elements from the anonymous earlier play *The Famous Victories of King Henry the Fifth*, and from Holinshed’s *Chronicles*, also accomplishes a striking fusion of genres, being in effect simultaneously the history of Kings Henry the Fourth and Fifth, the comedy of Falstaff, and the tragedy of Hotspur. Mercutio

in *Romeo and Juliet* seems to have bequeathed his temper and mettle to Hotspur, and his wit to Falstaff; Mercutio is himself a fusion of two characters in source material. The story of Prince Hal who must learn to subordinate his wit to duty and decorum has some affinity with that same moral in *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, though with the context shifted from romantic comedy to history. There are affinities between this play and *Julius Caesar* in their depiction of a dangerous political conspiracy and the toll of secrecy on the conspirators' wives. Though Shakespeare probably had not yet written *Julius Caesar*, he very likely had already read the Plutarch material on which it would be based. Henry the *Fourth, Part One* is thus apparently influenced by the source material for *Julius Caesar*, just as *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is by the source material for *Romeo and Juliet*⁸⁷ and as *Othello* may be influenced by the Chronicle source of *Cymbeline*, if J.P. Brockbank is correct that this provided the name "Iago."⁸⁸

TRAGEDIES

Julius Caesar, while it draws its essential plot from Plutarch, appears in the context of Shakespeare's artistic development to reuse story elements that had proven theatrically effective already: with *Richard the Third* and the English history plays in general, it shares an interest in portraying the instability of usurped power, reflected here in the inability of Brutus to gain either civil order or personal peace from the assassination of Caesar. The double suicide of Cassius and Brutus interestingly resembles that of *Romeo and Juliet*; Cassius kills himself while mistakenly believing Brutus dead, just as Romeo does over Juliet. The pre-existing similarity of these stories may have been something Shakespeare noticed before he wrote either play—a possible explanation for the existence of both.

Hamlet is thought to be a revision of a simpler early play, by Shakespeare or someone else. The version we possess resembles *Julius Caesar* in its focus on the dilemma of whether to commit a murder to which one is prompted; it also may share with that play the famously

⁸⁷E.g. in the Verona setting, the character called "Mercutio," a rope ladder and a "Friar Lawrence".

⁸⁸Brockbank, "History and Histrionics in *Cymbeline*," in *Shakespeare's Later Comedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* ed. D. J. Palmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 235.

Oedipal complexity of this murder scenario, since Shakespeare knew from Plutarch that Marcus Brutus was widely rumored to be the illegitimate son of Caesar; like this Brutus, Hamlet is deciding whether he will become the murderer of his mother's lover, someone who is thus indeed conceivably his own true biological father. And like another Brutus whom Shakespeare had written about in *The Rape of Lucrece*—Lucius Junius Brutus—Hamlet is disguising a strong mind as a weak one.⁸⁹ Lucius Junius Brutus, who helped overthrow the Tarquin monarchy and establish the Roman Republic, was the ancestor of Caesar's assassin Marcus Brutus, whose deed was meant to recapitulate that of Lucius, as Shakespeare reminds us.⁹⁰ Shakespeare's knowledge of both Brutuses and their respective roles in the historical arc of the Roman Republic is something with which his reading of Plutarch would have equipped him. Lucius Junius Brutus foreshadows the tactically assumed madness of Hamlet and of *King Lear*'s Edgar, clearly a significant motif for Shakespeare. The range of composition dates for *Lucrece*, 1593–1594, is the same as that for *The Taming of the Shrew* with which *Hamlet* has several points of connection—a play within a play, a troupe of travelling actors hired to help in an elaborate mind-game—so perhaps Shakespeare worked on an early *Hamlet* around this time. Thomas Kyd's popular *Spanish Tragedy*, which provides an essential dramatic template for *Hamlet*, was being performed in 1592–1593. It features a play within a play, used as part of a revenge strategy. It begins with a ghost demanding revenge, and its avenger-protagonist, Hieronymo, is marked by a complex and ambiguous mixture of cunning, grief and madness.

In the creation of this early “ur-Hamlet,” Shakespeare (or someone else) was grafting the old Scandinavian legend of Amleth onto the Elizabethan revenge-tragedy modeled by Kyd. *Hamlet*, as we have it, is an interesting study in blending, and worth pausing over. The tale of Amleth, recorded by Saxo Grammaticus, places a strong emphasis on the mysterious mind of Amleth and his countrymen's fascination with him, and perhaps the challenge of depicting an exceptionally intelligent

⁸⁹Shakespeare writes of him, casting off his feigned simplicity: “But now he throws that shallow habit by,/ Wherein deep policy did him disguise;/ And arm'd his long-hid wits advisedly” *Lucrece*, 1807–1816.

⁹⁰“There was a Brutus once that would have brook'd/ Th' eternal devil to keep his state in Rome/ as easily as a king,” says Cassius, in manipulative reproach, to Marcus Brutus (*Julius Caesar* I.ii.159–161).

character was part of Shakespeare's interest in the story from the start.⁹¹ As Alfred Harbage observes, "[T]he folk hero of clever retorts and acute devices...is harmoniously transfigured into the man of intellectual subtlety: foxiness becomes philosophical aptitude. Shakespeare retained whatever in the traditional story served his purpose."⁹² The prince's emphatic disapproval of his mother's remarriage—something that many have taken as idiosyncratic to Shakespeare—is an element fully present in *Amleth*, and merely preserved in Shakespeare's play.⁹³ *Amleth* contains a proto-Ophelia⁹⁴ and a proto-Polonius,⁹⁵ both unnamed, who are

⁹¹"A brave man and deserving to be remembered forever! He shrewdly played the fool and with an amazing pretense of folly kept hidden an intelligence more sublime than mortal. By his cunning he not only saved his own life but also managed to avenge his father... Everyone was worsted and unable to open the hidden lock of the young man's cleverness." From William F. Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet: A Translation, History and Commentary* (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), 101.

⁹²Harbage, 110.

⁹³"When his mother cried out and began to weep for the folly of her son to his face, he said: 'Shameless woman, why do you try to conceal your immense crime with false tears? You revel like a whore in this abominable marriage of yours, incestuously embracing your husband's murderer and filthily caressing and fawning upon the man who slew the father of your son. So do mares couple with those who have overcome their mates. That is how animals behave, pairing with one after another. By your actions you show that you have wholly forgotten your former husband...[I]t is a waste of time to cry for my madness when you should be lamenting your own disgrace. Weep not for the flaw in another's mind, but for that in your own. As for the rest, keep this all to yourself.' With these reproaches, he wounded his mother and brought her back to leading a life of honor, showing her that her former passion was better than her current delights." Hansen, 102.

⁹⁴"They thought that the best way to expose his cunning was to bring him together with a beautiful woman in some secluded place where she could tempt him with the pleasures of love; for by their very nature emotions turn into passion so quickly that they cannot be skillfully concealed, the impulse being too powerful to be checked by cleverness; if, then, he was only pretending to be witless, he would immediately give into pleasure when the occasion was offered." *Ibid.*, 99.

⁹⁵"But a certain one of Fengi's [i.e. Claudius'] friends, who had more confidence than he had judgment, said that no ordinary trap would expose Amleth's intricate cunning; he was too obstinate to be reached by trivial efforts, and so it was useless to pit a simple test against his complex cunning. Thinking the matter through, he said, he had hit upon a subtler way, one which would not be hard to put into effect and would without a doubt lead them to learn what they wanted to know. Fengi was to pretend some important business and purposely make a show of departure. Amleth was to be enclosed alone with his mother in her bedroom, but before that it should be arranged for a man to station himself, unknown to the two of them, in a dark part of the room to overhear carefully what they should talk about; for if her son was at all sane, he would not hesitate to speak out to his own mother and would not be afraid to confide in the very woman who gave him birth. He himself eagerly volunteered to play the spy to show that he was just as ready to carry out a plan as to devise it." *Ibid.*, 101.



Fig. 2.5 Film still: Ian Holm as Polonius and Helena Bonham Carter as Ophelia in *Hamlet*, 1990, dir. Franco Zeffirelli

not related to each other, and who figure in the story as parallel instruments of the king in his unsuccessful efforts to find out what the prince is thinking. The fate of the proto-Polonius in *Amleth* is at once familiar and unfamiliar to us:

The man who had proposed the plan went secretly to the room in which Amleth was being enclosed with his mother and concealed himself under the straw. But Amleth had a remedy for the trap. Fearing that someone might secretly eavesdrop, he resorted at first to his usual silliness, crowing like a noisy rooster and beating his arms together as though he were flapping wings. Getting up on the straw, he began to leap all around to find out whether anything lay lurking there. When he perceived a lump beneath his feet, he clove the spot with his sword, stabbing the man who lay underneath, dragged him out of his hiding place, and slew him. He cut up the body, cooked the pieces in boiling water, and dumped them through the hole of the outhouse for the swine to eat, strewing the putrid refuse with the wretch's limbs.

Unlike in Shakespeare's high-medieval Elsinore, where the bedchamber is hung with an arras, this unfortunate meddling courtier hides himself "under the straw." This detail, along with the prince's acting like



Fig. 2.6 Film still: Nathaniel Parker as Laertes in *Hamlet*, 1990, dir. Franco Zeffirelli

a rooster and his method of disposing of the corpse are not chosen for inclusion in Shakespeare's play, though the more general scenario is used—an example, certainly, of *selective projection*.

The proto-Ophelia in *Amleth* is a mere cipher (“The woman whom his uncle had dispatched met him as though by chance in a dark spot, and he would have had sexual relations with her if his foster brother had not secretly warned him of the trap”) and Shakespeare's development of her into a powerfully moving character is surely a case of *imaginative completion*. The “foster brother,” simply as an ally of Amleth, prefigures the role of Shakespeare's Horatio, who has a namesake character in *The Spanish Tragedy*. Most importantly, Shakespeare's imagination seems to have taken up the proto-Polonius and proto-Ophelia figures and reconceived them as a father and daughter, bringing the conceptual frame of “family” to bear on these figures, and lending them a familial bond (intimated here by director Franco Zeffirelli's visual framing of Ian Holm as Polonius and Helena Bonham Carter as Ophelia) (Fig. 2.5).

Shakespeare then extends the family frame by the addition of a son and brother, Laertes. The father and daughter in Shakespeare's blended story both meet bad ends after allowing themselves to be used by the prince's enemy: the father does so more or less as in *Amleth*, and the daughter is stricken with grief,⁹⁶ goes mad (furthering the motif that already links *Amleth* and *The Spanish Tragedy*), and drowns herself. This last detail may have been suggested to Shakespeare by the drowning death of one Katherine Hamlet in the river Avon near Stratford in 1579, when Shakespeare was fifteen years old.

Kinship gives Laertes a powerful motive for revenge against the prince who has destroyed his father and sister. Here the shock of their loss registers on the face of Nathaniel Parker, as Laertes (Fig. 2.6).

Laertes exists in the world of the play as nemesis to the prince, destined to bring his death and the tragedy's end—and also, perhaps its ultimate moral outlook or ethos, as he and the prince forgive each other in their final moments.⁹⁷ The Polonius family, and particularly Laertes, are examples of the *emergent structure* that blending produces, bringing tight compression, coherence, and global insight. Relations of *analogy* tighten the coherence of the story; in seeking to avenge a father, as Hamlet realizes, Laertes mirrors him⁹⁸ (“[B]y the image of my cause I see/ The portraiture of his”). *Disanalogy* with Hamlet may have suggested to Shakespeare the fatal, unfeigned madness of Ophelia.

Though congruent in some ways—notably in the figure of an avenger who combines cunning and madness ambiguously—*Amleth* and *The Spanish Tragedy* are in other ways quite different types of stories, and the fusion of them has its rough edges. In *Amleth*, the king's fratricide is public knowledge, and the prince feigns madness so that the king will not think him capable of exacting revenge.⁹⁹ By changing the story

⁹⁶...after her lover kills her beloved kinsman, in a way notably reminiscent of Juliet.

⁹⁷Laertes: “Exchange forgiveness with me, noble Hamlet./ Mine and my father's death come not upon thee,/ Nor thine on me!” Hamlet: “Heaven make thee free of it!” (V.ii.329–332).

⁹⁸V.ii.77–78.

⁹⁹“Then he added incest to fratricide by taking the wife of the brother he had butchered...Amleth saw this and feared that he might make his uncle suspicious if he behaved intelligently. So he feigned madness and pretended that his mind had been damaged.” Hansen, 98.

so that the murder “needs [a] ghost come from the grave to tell” of it¹⁰⁰—perhaps in emulation of, and competition with, the effect Kyd had achieved by opening his play with a ghost—Shakespeare removes any good reason for the “antic disposition.” As Thomas Hamner wrote in 1736, “Shakespeare makes the young Prince feign himself mad. I cannot but think this to be injudicious; for so far from securing himself from any violence which he feared from the usurper, which was his design in so doing, it seems to have been the most likely way of getting himself confined, and consequently, debarred from an opportunity of revenging his father’s death...To speak truth, our poet, by keeping too close to the groundwork of his plot, has fallen into an absurdity.” Like many another absurdity, including those designed to elicit laughter which I shall consider in the next chapter, the famous strangeness of Hamlet’s feigned madness can be understood as a *frame clash*—between, in this case, the two imperfectly compatible revenge stories that *Hamlet* blends.

If there are such incongruities woven into the play that we have, there are also ways in which *Hamlet* is very effective as a distillation, fusion and improvement of its materials. *The Spanish Tragedy* and Shakespeare’s rough early tragedy *Titus Andronicus* both feature extravagantly metatheatrical revenge schemes, and the addition of a “players” motif to the Amleth material may have originally functioned in the ur-Hamlet much as it does in those plays. The mature Shakespeare, revising the play into the form we know, may have retained the theatrical theme but used it to augment the realism and seriousness of Hamlet as a character, drawing reflectively on the playwright’s experience in theatre.

Othello has its basic source material in *Gli Hecatommithi* by Giovanni Battista Giraldi. In the context of Shakespeare’s other work it also seems notable for: an elopement as in *Romeo and Juliet*, which is also an intercultural one as in *The Merchant of Venice*; a prompting to murder, as in *Julius Caesar* and *Hamlet*; a villain of evil intelligence as in *Richard the Third*, *Titus Andronicus* and Kyd’s *Spanish Tragedy*, somewhat resembling also the malicious Don John in *Much Ado About Nothing* and

¹⁰⁰Horatio. “There needs no ghost, my lord, come from the grave/ To tell us this” (*Hamlet*, I.v.124–126).

Cassius in *Julius Caesar* whose malice stems from “injured merit” (as Milton says of his Iago-influenced Satan). Othello has also been given Caesar’s epilepsy, perhaps to make manifest the weakness behind the character’s apparent strength. Also, interestingly for the incongruity of tone, the comic ironies in *The Comedy of Errors* are echoed in the tragic ironies of this play: Othello demands “the handkerchief!” with obsessive repetition just as Antipholus of Syracuse had demanded “my gold!” from Dromio of Ephesus; Othello’s tragic misreading of Cassio’s having the handkerchief strongly echoes the whole town’s comic misreading of Antipholus of Syracuse’s possession of a gold chain. Iago’s plot to make Othello jealous over the handkerchief seems indebted to Ephesian Antipholus’s plot to make his wife jealous by lending the gold chain to a courtesan. The courtesan reappears here in the character of Cassio’s paramour Bianca. Othello arrives to part the swords in a fray, just as Benvolio had at the start of *Romeo and Juliet*. Desdemona’s father is a tyrant to her, like Juliet’s, Hermia’s in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, and Cordelia’s in the later *King Lear*. Iago’s gulling of Roderigo closely resembles Sir Toby’s gulling of Andrew Aguecheek in *Twelfth Night*: both cunning characters are receiving regular payment from their dupes under pretense of serving as matchmakers for them.

Macbeth was written partly to gratify Shakespeare’s new patron King James I after his accession, and the play does for this king what Shakespeare’s English histories had done for the previous monarch: celebrate the rise of the reigning family through the downfall of an enemy. In the first tetralogy, that enemy was the ostensibly villainous and despotic King Richard the Third, overthrown and succeeded by Queen Elizabeth’s grandfather, Henry the Seventh. In this play, the villain is the Scottish king Macbeth, portrayed as a villain and despot who was justly overthrown after many crimes. In the context of Shakespeare’s artistic development, the night-creeping murderer Macbeth has an acknowledged antecedent in the also night-creeping Tarquin of *The Rape of Lucrece* (Macbeth compares himself to Tarquin), and this play seems to borrow some of that poem’s claustrophobic situatedness within the mind of the daylight-fearing criminal. *Macbeth* also owes to *Julius Caesar* an ambitious, human prompter towards murder (Lady Macbeth is like Cassius) and it owes to *Hamlet* an inscrutable supernatural one (The Weird Sisters are, arguably, like the ghost of Old Hamlet). The implicitly accusing ghost of Banquo resembles that of Julius Caesar in Plutarch. Perhaps Shakespeare wrote these particular tragedies, of Caesar, Hamlet

and Macbeth, or wrote them as he did, partly because he liked ghost stories, or knew that audiences would.¹⁰¹

ROMANCES

The Tempest was also written in part to gratify James I; it offers an ostensibly benevolent patriarch who rules strange new lands, has overcome witches, and is arranging a daughter's wedding (*The Tempest* was acted at James's daughter's wedding). The ruler's magic servant is to be freed after, like Shakespeare at retirement, putting on a final show. *The Tempest* culminates in the freeing of servants and the forgiving of enemies. These enemies are, principally, disloyal nobles, who loomed large in James's thought, but the end also advocates forbearance towards subjects tempted to insubordination; these include resistant "natives" like Caliban, and English opportunists such as Stephano and Trinculo. *The Tempest* draws details and inspiration from accounts of the New World, especially William Strachey's "True Repertory" of a 1609 Shipwreck in Bermuda.

In Shakespeare's oeuvre, *The Tempest* is something of a culmination, drawing on the storehouse of prior plays for a "rich and strange" synthesis of a high order. The play springs most directly perhaps from *King Lear*, in that it centrally concerns an angry old man and his daughter, whose relationship is mediated or transfigured by a storm. Also, as with

¹⁰¹cf. Mark Turner, "The Ghost of Anyone's Father," *Shakespearean International Yearbook*. Graham Bradshaw, Thomas Bishop, and Mark Turner, eds. Volume 4. Hants, U.K.: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2004, pages 72–97. "The concept *ghost* arises through conceptual integration, partly by compressing crucial vital relations between disparate conceptual elements...The blend receives its relevant temporal moment and spatial location from the second mental space, which does not have the living person...but the person in the blend is projected from the other space, the one with the living person. So the person in the blend has the form and manner of the living King Hamlet...The disanalogy between the two input mental spaces on the existence of the person is compressed into a set of related properties in the blend: the person in the blend (that is, the ghost) is incomplete, diminished or in various respects absent. The fact that the living King Hamlet is not in Hamlet's present means that King Hamlet cannot act directly in the usual fashion in Hamlet's present reality; and this lack of direct effect is projected to the blend, where the ghost cannot take vengeance through direct action. That is why he needs Hamlet. By the same token, the fact that the living cannot interact through normal physics with a person who is not in their reality is projected to the blend to give the ghost special invulnerabilities." 88–91.

one subplot of *King Lear*, this play features a supposedly benevolent and even therapeutic ‘mind game’ played by one party on a family member who has wronged him: Prospero’s humbling of Antonio by making him feel grief for a lost son is somewhat like Edgar’s treatment of blind Gloucester. The plot of a usurping brother echoes *King Lear* (Edmund and Edgar), *Hamlet* (Claudius and old King Hamlet), *Much Ado About Nothing* (Don John and Don Pedro) and *As You Like It* (Duke Senior and Frederick, Oliver and Orlando). The banished and banishing brothers in this play, as in *As You Like It*, are dukes, and the island setting of *The Tempest* is perhaps a reimagined Forest of Arden.

In *The Tempest*, as in *Measure for Measure*, the duke’s exile turns out to be in a sense voluntary, more a concealment than an abridgement of his power. Prospero’s plan to make Antonio experience the loss of his son Ferdinand is also, with the gender reversed, identical to the Friars’ plans, in *Romeo and Juliet* and in *Much Ado About Nothing*, to shock a community with the pain of a young person’s apparent death. *The Tempest* also has considerable similarity to *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* in that it features a user of magic (Prospero/Oberon) and his spirit-servant (Ariel/Puck); it also perhaps revises the relationship between Marlowe’s Doctor Faustus and Mephistopheles. *The Tempest* is predicated, like *The Comedy of Errors*, *Twelfth Night*, and *Pericles*, upon a shipwreck with Sunderings and reunions. In *The Tempest*, as in *Macbeth*, usurpers are tempted, and conspire to murder a king in his sleep. In this play, though, supernatural vigilance favors the innocent, and the close-call is recuperated into the play’s finally comedic economy. Prospero’s embrace of his daughter’s sudden love for Ferdinand seems implicitly to revise Old Capulet’s attitude in *Romeo and Juliet*; a traditional father-daughter conflict over liberty is here given a comedic (affirming or recuperative) acknowledgment instead of a tragic one. Miranda’s notional liberty is entwined with Caliban’s, and both seem undermined by this play, rather like the ‘liberty’ claims of the conspirators and citizens in *Julius Caesar*; Caliban’s enthusiasm for his “new master” Stephano seems unfortunate in much the same way as the Third Plebeian’s reaction to Brutus: “let *him* be Caesar!” Such an ironizing of liberty may have expressed Shakespeare’s own politics and temperament, or may have accommodated the taste of the monarchs under whom he worked.

V. The last part of Shakespeare’s career includes a play that has baffled critics, but which can be seen as a retrospective formal experiment in conceptual blending.

Cymbeline is one of Shakespeare's last plays, and its peculiar aesthetics have posed a longstanding challenge to criticism. It seems deliberately to embrace incongruity, as for instance in its setting, an incomplete fusion of imperial Rome with Renaissance Europe.¹⁰² The overdetermined setting is part of a broader hybridity, the recapitulation of elements from many earlier plays. Such recapitulation is characteristic of Shakespeare, but this play pursues it to an unusual extent, and with an apparent unconcern about integrating its elements into a smooth coherence. Harley Granville-Barker wrote that, in general, Shakespeare was "particularly skillful in the maneuvering of any two stories into a symmetrical whole. But here the attempt results in a very lopsided affair."¹⁰³ Don LePan finds in the play "so many interacting motivations and intentions and such a welter of interlocking incident that it is sometimes a struggle even for minds habituated to the complex plot to keep everything straight; to avoid becoming 'amazed with matter'."¹⁰⁴

Samuel Johnson's dismissal of the play is often cited:

To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.¹⁰⁵

Shakespeare, as we have seen, makes up his stories by combining scenarios from different sources, and often his skill is apparent in the smooth, seamless way he can achieve this integration. In *Cymbeline*, he seems to be trying for a different effect that is the opposite of seamless: he merges pieces of almost all his earlier works with exuberance, creating the incongruity and dissonance that annoyed Johnson, but also lending the story a strangeness that has something in common with the poetic strangeness

¹⁰²On discovering the sleeping heroine Imogen, the courtier Belarius exclaims "By Jupiter, an angel!" which seems to situate the speaker in both the pagan Roman and Christian epochs.

¹⁰³"The Artlessness of *Cymbeline*," in *Shakespeare's Later Comedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* ed. D. J. Palmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 225.

¹⁰⁴LePan, 286. With "amazed with matter," LePan is quoting King Cymbeline (IV. iv.33).

¹⁰⁵*Johnson on Shakespeare: Essays and Notes Selected and Set Forth with an Introduction by Walter Raleigh* (London: Henry Frowde, 1908), 183.

of his metaphors, with their clashing frames of reference. Johnson condemned the play for absurdity, confusion and impossibility, but I take its strangeness as an unusually direct invitation, on Shakespeare's part, into the kitchen of his mind, where we find him flinging together handfuls of ingredients with abandon and amusement. I suspect that the din of clashing frames of reference in this play is not a lapse in artistic competence but a new aesthetic choice, a cognitive music of dissonance that is intended, like other and later modernisms, to intimate a certain vastness of possibility, and is intended also to probe and challenge an audience's habitual ways of making sense of stories.

The play centers on Imogen, daughter of the British King Cymbeline who rules in the time of Augustus. It has many subplots: First subplot: Imogen's two brothers were stolen as infants and then raised in the Welsh wilds by the courtier Belarius who took them. Second subplot: Imogen has a wicked stepmother and wicked stepbrother, Cloten, who would like to secure their power by marrying Imogen to Cloten. Third subplot: Imogen has upset them and her father by marrying Posthumus, a foster child raised with her in the king's household, who is banished to Italy for the marriage. Fourth subplot: an Italian courtier manages to trick Posthumus into believing that he, Iachimo, has seduced Imogen, whereupon crazed Posthumus orders her murdered by his servant Pisanio back in Britain. Fifth subplot: rather than do so, Pisanio helps her disguise herself as a boy and flee. Sixth subplot: Rome invades Britain to enforce payment of a tribute which is owed.

Eventually the plot threads spin together: The cross-dressed Imogen accidentally shelters in the Welsh wilderness with her long-lost brothers and their adoptive father; the aggressive unwanted suitor and step-brother Cloten comes looking for her and is killed by one of her real brothers. Imogen is unconscious during this, having unintentionally administered to herself a sleeping potion that was concocted by her wicked stepmother. On waking, she mistakes the beheaded Cloten for her husband, whose clothes he happens to be wearing, because Cloten had planned—with truly horrifying psychic violence—to rape Imogen while dressed as her husband. Waking up seemingly bereaved, and alone because she has been left for dead, Imogen volunteers as page to the kind general Lucius who is leading the Roman invasion. A battle occurs, in which the British victory is brought about by the joint efforts of Posthumus, who fights in despair, and Imogen's two brothers, who have the advantages of innate nobility and a

vigorous outdoor upbringing. All reunions, revelations and reconciliations then transpire at the court of Cymbeline, including quite unexpectedly the reconciliation of Britain with Rome, when Cymbeline decides he will pay tribute after all, having proved his point by winning the battle.

This is the play in brief, and its constant indebtedness to the rest of Shakespeare's work can easily be observed. For the career of Posthumus, Shakespeare returns to a basic story he had told first in *The Rape of Lucrece*, and then in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*: An unwise young man boasts about his wife, inciting the jealousy of a rival who attempts to seduce her. In both *Lucrece* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the failed seduction turns into rape, which is successful in the tragic poem, and unsuccessful in the comedy. In *Cymbeline*, the unsuccessful villain then becomes a version of Iago from *Othello*, vindictively persuading a husband that the wife is unfaithful. Like Iago, Iachimo offers as proof a clothing accessory pilfered from her room. To steal this item, Iachimo hides himself onstage in a chest, as Falstaff had done in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. Iachimo's claim to have been merely testing Imogen, when his attempted seduction fails, echoes an excuse offered by the coercive magistrate Angelo in *Measure for Measure*,¹⁰⁶ and also echoes Malcolm's testing of Macduff in *Macbeth*.

The antique setting of *Cymbeline* combines the ancient Britain of *King Lear* with the Roman world of *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, the latter being specifically evoked by frequent references to Egypt, serpents and the Nile. The play's wicked queen recalls Lady Macbeth in both behavior and dialogue,¹⁰⁷ as well as Lear's elder daughters; her concocting potions from herbs connects her with Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet*, and with Puck in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Imogen cross-dressed as a page recalls the heroines of *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice* and *As You Like It*. The good servant Pisanio's plan to save Imogen by falsely reporting her death parallels in one way Antigonus's feigned compliance with an unjust execution order

¹⁰⁶"Angelo had never the purpose to corrupt her; only he hath made an assay of her virtue to practice his judgment with the disposition of natures." (III.i.161–163).

¹⁰⁷Queen: "May this night forestall him of the coming day!" (*Cymbeline*, III.v.68–69); cf. Lady Macbeth "O never shall sun that morrow see!" *Macbeth* I.v.61.

in *The Winter's Tale*, and strongly parallels, in another way, the plans concocted by friars, in *Romeo and Juliet* and *Much Ado About Nothing*, to pretend that a young woman is dead. As in the former play, the pretense involves a sleeping potion; as in the latter, it arises in response to a slander of infidelity. The reunion of long-lost siblings in *Cymbeline* recalls both *The Comedy of Errors* and *Twelfth Night*. There is a "head trick" substituting a decapitated person for someone else, as in *Measure for Measure*. And like *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Cymbeline* ends with an absurdly sudden and improbable reconciliation between parties who have been, up to that moment, deadly adversaries—Proteus and Valentine, in the one play, and Rome and Britain in the other.

Simply by inhabiting a story which calls for her both to cross-dress and to be given up for dead, Imogen combines the adventures of Julia (*Two Gentlemen of Verona*), Viola (*Twelfth Night*), Portia (*The Merchant of Venice*) and Rosalind (*As You Like It*) with the misadventures of Juliet and of Hero (*Much Ado About Nothing*). She is indeed twice given up for dead, being first reported dead, like Hero, and then taken for dead while comatose, like Juliet. Her cross-dressing is initially presented as an opportunity to observe her man unnoticed, as with Julia, but this plan is soon scrapped in favor of first exile in the wilderness, as with Rosalind, and then employment as a page, as with Viola. Imogen's father's excessive anger over her marriage groups her with Juliet, with Hermia (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*), Jessica (*The Merchant of Venice*) Cordelia (*King Lear*) and Desdemona (*Othello*); her husband's jealousy groups her with Desdemona, Hero and Hermione (*The Winter's Tale*). One could go on for many more pages detailing the dependence of this play's characters and situations on earlier Shakespearean creations.

One way to understand the peculiarity of *Cymbeline* then—alongside the theories that have been advanced about its being essentially an origin myth for civilized-yet-untamed Britain (J.P. Brockbank¹⁰⁸), or a quasi-allegorical salute to King James in his negotiations with Rome

¹⁰⁸"History and Histrionics in *Cymbeline*," in *Shakespeare's Later Comedies: An Anthology of Modern Criticism* ed. D. J. Palmer (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1971), 235.

and Catholic Europe (Emrys Jones¹⁰⁹), or a self-punishing self-parody (Harold Bloom¹¹⁰)—is as a career retrospective, undertaken for the enjoyment of the writer himself and his fellow players, and anyone else who might ever become familiar with his whole body of work; it could be thought of, in this case, as a *tour de force* of compression and blending which unfolds itself to activate the full conceptual network of Shakespeare's career as a playwright.

Shakespeare can be seen as having presented himself a daunting formal challenge: how to make one coherent play out of all his others. We know he enjoyed the challenge of creating with a self-imposed constraint, since he wrote 154 sonnets where he used not only rhyme and meter, but the additional constraint of having to reuse a keyword in each section or strophe of the poem. Here he can be seen to be doing the same thing at the level of plot construction—an intricate integration of many different domains, scenarios, or mental spaces—achieving, as in the sonnets, both coherence and a certain strangeness. The challenge of producing such a work would arguably make it closer, as an aesthetic project, to his longstanding habit of sonnet writing than is any other of his intricate plays. *Cymbeline*, like the *Sonnets*, can be seen as owing its existence to the artist's voluntary adoption of a strict and demanding constraint within which to work—the integration into a unified story (in terms of time, space, causality, intentionality and identity) of many diverse themes, thoughts and scenarios, which are all in some way significant to the writer, but which are also, in lacking any direct relevance to each other, partly aleatory—as rhymes are, or as a hand of cards is: the writer's array of previous stories said to him, as the randomly rhyme-suggesting sonnet form always had: very well, integrate *these*. The strikingly

¹⁰⁹“Cymbeline's final submission to Rome, even after he has won the war against the Romans...had some topical value in view of James's efforts to enter into friendly negotiations with Papal Rome. [When] Cymbeline emphatically announces: ‘Well, My peace we will begin...’, the audience must have made a complex identification: the peace is both the peace of the world at the time of Christ's birth, in which Britain participates, and is also its attempted re-creation at the very time of the play's performance, with Jacobus Pacificus, who was a ‘figure’ of Augustus, on the throne.” “Stuart *Cymbeline*,” in Palmer ed., 260.

¹¹⁰“*Cymbeline* is a pungent self-parody on Shakespeare's part: we revisit *King Lear*, *Othello*, *The Comedy of Errors*, and a dozen other plays, but we see them now through a distorting lens...What was he trying to do for himself as a maker of plays by the heap of self-parodies that constitute *Cymbeline*?” Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998), 621.

compounded *Cymbeline*, as we have it, might thus be thought of as representing not hypertrophic excess but actually a sort of parsimony—it is perhaps the smallest story into which Shakespeare could fit all of his others. Having shown in this chapter why a measure of Shakespeare’s power is to be found, as Dr. Johnson says, in “the progress of his fable,” I shall now undertake to explore, in the next two chapters, “the splendour of particular passages”—first in the wit that enlivens Shakespeare’s plays, and then in the poetry that transfigures and transcends them.

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