

SHAKESPEARE'S SEA CHANGES:  
the Reworked Patterns of Creativity

by

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of Creativity.

ABSTRACT

This study presents a view of Shakespeare's plays as a reworking of each other in order to highlight changes in their linguistic texture and in the attitudes to language portrayed within them. Each chapter presents two plays which have common features of style, and as the thesis progresses, I consider some of the ways in which later plays transmute the ideas and situations of the earlier ones.

My first chapter examines A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet. A playful spirit is evident in these plays through experimentation with conventional verse forms and through imagery which is used extensively as much for its own beauty as for the creation of atmosphere.

The second chapter focuses upon The Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing. Lyrical verse still appears in The Merchant, but a more serious interest in logical argumentation and its malleability emerges here. I see Much Ado as a reworking of Romeo and Juliet through its similarities in plot. This accentuates Shakespeare's changing concerns with language and illustrates his interest in the twisting of reason by the abuse of words.

My third chapter concentrates upon Hamlet and King Lear. In Hamlet Shakespeare dramatically displays language's shifting unreliability as a tool of communication. I view Lear as a reworking of Hamlet in its fascination with the search for sincerity in linguistic expression. Where Hamlet remains within the accepted rules of language, Lear breaks this barrier using intuitive logic. Here Shakespeare strains linguistic means to the limit.

Finally, in chapter four, I examine a regenerative style emergent in Measure for Measure and fulfilled in The Tempest. Measure for Measure is compared and contrasted with The Merchant to reveal how the linguistic treatment of the theme of justice has



metamorphosed. Similarly, The Tempest is seen as a reworking of the Dream in its totally different portrayal of love, theatrical imagination and magic. The earlier fascination with words gives way to the metaphor of theatre for life. It is the living of life at first hand which becomes important rather than the verbal description of it. The text of these plays develops towards a sparse simplicity which belies the complexity of their symbolism. Shakespeare has found a new mode of expression for the end of his career: one couched within ambiguity and metadrama. It is at once more sophisticated and more primitive.

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## INTRODUCTION

Full fathom five thy father lies;  
Of his bones are coral made;  
Those are pearls that were his eyes;  
Nothing of him that doth fade  
But doth suffer a sea-change  
Into something rich and strange.  
Sea nymphs hourly ring his knell:

Ding-dong.

Hark! Now I hear them - Ding-dong bell.

(I.ii.397-405)<sup>1</sup>

Ariel sings of coral and pearls, not of bones and blindness. Despite its ironic context, his song offers a celebration of transformation. In it the barren structure of the body, fretted by the sea, changes into a patterning of colour and intricacy. The eye sockets, like oyster shells, allow their contents to be

1) Shakespeare, William. The Tempest. Ed. Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1987.

transformed into a precious and mysterious opacity. Metamorphosis inhabits the centre of this song: it is a song of the spirit. It voices the possibility that mankind can be changed by the creative force of the soul, symbolised by the living breathing sea. Death is not an end, but a beginning, and the world is constantly in flux. Familiar things do not pass away, but are transformed and created into something new.

So it is with the creative energies of the artist. In order to be creative, he or she views life through fresh perspectives, gives structure to the everyday chaos of living, and rearranges elements of life into unfamiliar relationships. A work can be refashioned from an earlier structure or stylistic form into a new one. Stories, myths and plays can be twisted around, amplified in some parts and reduced in others to create original works. They become pieces which bear a relationship to the old works they grew out of and yet are unique in their expression and world view. New modes of expression develop necessarily alongside changes in perception; they are linked as inextricably as the two faces of one coin.

In my thesis, I chart the development of new phases

in Shakespeare's linguistic expression alongside the redevelopment of earlier themes or of similar elements in plot. In what I see as a cycle of reworking in his plays, where ideas or characters from earlier works are transformed into something new, there is also a clear manifestation of the organic metamorphosis of language through time. As Shakespeare's ideas changed and his attitudes towards language developed, he also altered the manner in which he used language within his plays.

Changes in the way Shakespeare used language can be seen as a series of stages or styles. In each individual chapter of my study, I illustrate one stage in the linguistic treatment of plot elements and themes. Where plot or theme are reworkings of an earlier play, their similarities and differences serve to highlight Shakespeare's fluctuating preoccupations and experimentation with language. Clear shifts in his perspectives are evident. The comparison and contrast of later plays with earlier ones, therefore, has an important function in detecting developments in linguistic styles and attitudes.

Although Shakespeare's choice of material upon which to base his play was governed to some extent by source

material, the initial choice of a source must have partially depended upon whether the theme or plot appealed to him. One source similar to another which had been used for an earlier play could invite a reworking of the same ideas from a different perspective.

Albert Feuillerat in his book The Composition of Shakespeare's Plays mentions the frequent practice of reviving old plays by heavily cutting some scenes and writing in entirely new ones.<sup>2</sup> This would save the cost of buying or the time involved in writing an original script. Old plays were disguised and changed so thoroughly by a number of authors that the initial plays were often unrecognisable. Shakespeare was most probably involved in this common practice and, therefore, would have the necessary skills readily to hand as can be seen in his transformations of earlier narratives and myths into drama.

It is also quite possible that he was able to gain

<sup>2</sup> Feuillerat, Albert. The Composition of Shakespeare's Plays. New Haven: Yale U P, 1953. 6-31.

inspiration from his own previous plays several years after writing them. He would be able to bring a more mature view to some of the ideas contained within them and blend those ideas with plot lines found in various sources. Added to this fresh perception with maturity would be the greater linguistic skills acquired through years of practice in playwrighting for the theatre: practice obtained by a restless urge to experiment with and improve on anything which had been tried before.

As well as comparing the plays, each chapter of my thesis represents a stage in Shakespeare's linguistic development from a highly embellished and decorative style towards a relatively austere plain diction which allows for several levels of metaphoric interpretation. Between the expansive experimentation of the plays contained in the first chapter and the symbolic theatricality of those in the last, there are intervening stages which repeatedly reflect the unreliability and limitations of words.

The resulting attentiveness to the formal aspects of language in rhetoric, pun, verse, or even image, draws attention to the surface of language itself. Questions emerge concerning its efficiency to express the mind of



an individual and the truth of its correspondence to the reality of existence. These questions preoccupy the minds of many literary theorists today, but it also seems likely that they had occurred to Shakespeare in the sixteenth century. This is so because every artist must know the material with which he or she is working: both to the extent of its malleability for various uses, and to the point of its limitations.

New words were being continually introduced into the English language during the 16th and Shakespeare was particularly sensitive to how some people would grasp the new vocabulary for consumption to ensure that they would become socially adept. In Love's Labour's Lost Moth and Costard discuss the young aristocrats:

Moth: They have been at a great feast of  
languages, and stolen the scraps.

Costard: O, they have lived long on the  
alms-basket of words. I marvel thy  
master hath not eaten thee for a word.

(V.i.39-42)<sup>3</sup>

3) Shakespeare, William. Love's Labour's Lost. Ed. John Dover Wilson. 2nd ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1962.

This accent upon the surface of language tends to render it opaque in the same way that someone who is concentrating upon cleaning the glass of a window does not see the street beyond. We all appreciate that words are present as a symbolic form, but it is only when we ignore this aspect that we apprehend the ideas behind them. In this preoccupation with the form of language, Shakespeare's age was very similar to our own. At times it can be fun to play with language for its own sake, but at other times it can obscure true communication, particularly if manipulated by the unscrupulous. Attention to the surface by one person can alter what is seen through it by another just as the shaping of optical lenses can alter sight. Language itself can be fashioned in the same way: a point Shakespeare frequently alluded to in his work.

Exactly this aspect is elucidated in Twelfth Night by Feste and Viola at a time when she is disguised, and renamed, as Cesario:

Feste:     A sentence is but a cheveril glove to a  
                  good wit: how quickly the wrong side  
                  may be turned out!

Cesario: Nay, that's certain; they that dally  
nicely with words may quickly make  
them wanton.

Feste: I would, therefore, my sister had had  
no name, sir.

Cesario: Why, man?

Feste: Why, sir, her name's a word: and to  
dally with that word might make my  
sister wanton. But indeed words are  
very rascals since bonds disgraced them.

Cesario: Thy, reason, man?

Feste: Troth, sir, I can yield you none  
without words; and words are grown so  
false, I am loth to prove reason with  
them.

(III.i.12-29)<sup>4</sup>

4) Shakespeare, William. Twelfth Night. Ed.  
Elizabeth Story Donno. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge:  
Cambridge U P, 1985.

Shakespeare touches upon many ideas about language here. Not only are words seen as social clothing which may be adjusted to good or ill purposes, but there is also the suggestion that reality itself can be changed by the manipulation of its symbolic labelling. Additionally, there is the suggestion that the correspondence between language and reality can dissolve in the breaking of promises, and that logic itself can be twisted to give a representation of the world which has nothing to do with its actuality.

There has been a long history of critics who have isolated a study of language as an entirely justified entry into the nature of Shakespeare's artistry. G. Wilson Knight introduced an entirely new way of looking at the unifying factors in Shakespeare's plays by examining the imagery in the early 1930's. Caroline Spurgeon extended this work by statistical analysis and Robert Heilman also explored the subject of imagery. This approach was taken up in fine detail when Wolfgang Clemen looked at the significance of sets of images in relation to their context in the early 1950's.

In another area of language study, William Empson was well ahead of his time in his investigations of

ambiguity. This work was a forerunner of the New Critical movement through its interest in the correspondences, contrasts, connotations and ambiguities within language. After Empson's first published work, interest also grew in the detailed study of the rhetorical aspects of Shakespeare's language as shown by the studies of Brian Vickers in his analysis of the prose/poetry dichotomy and in the work of M.M. Mahood on the nature of punning.

Literary theory arrived late to Shakespearean criticism, but when it did come its influence was revolutionary. Even if it was not entirely espoused by all critics, it was to exert an indelible influence on the nature of all postmodern criticism. In recent decades James Calderwood, Louis Montrose and Terence Hawkes have carried out work on the role of language as the medium of social interaction. This has been extended by Keir Elam and Andrew Kennedy in their studies of interactive dialogue. Currently a host of critics throughout the world, influenced by literary theory, continue to focus upon language as an important area of Shakespearean studies.

It is truly daunting to attempt to expand upon what has already been written on this subject. Even so, I hope to suggest a new perspective on the manner in which Shakespeare's language developed through time by looking at the plays as a reworking of each other. I shall take account of current thinking on literary theory without allowing myself to be engulfed by it. My intention is to foreground Shakespeare's work, not that of his critics. I shall examine such things as imagery, the verse/prose dichotomy, rhetoric and the various attitudes towards language which are presented in the plays. Where I hope to differ from other similar studies is in my comparative view of how these aspects of language developed in an integral manner to Shakespeare's reworking of one play into another.

My choice of plays to illuminate this process was a difficult one to undertake in that so many had to be excluded. In order to keep the area of research within a manageable compass, I have limited my primary interests to eight plays only but these range from early to late plays, from comedy to tragedy and romance. I have, unfortunately, been obliged to exclude the history plays from the sphere of exploration simply to keep a closer concentration upon the plays I have chosen.

The first chapter focuses on A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet. These are plays which particularly appealed to me when I was young through the beauty of their images and through the variety and regularity of their verse. Even now, they strike me as intuitively creative plays. I move on in the second chapter to A Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing, both plays which are fascinating in their clever twists and turns of logic, either in serious argumentation or in witty banter. My third chapter examines Hamlet and King Lear: plays which have a seemingly infinite depth of interpretation and are often viewed as Shakespeare's masterpieces. In my final chapter, I group together Measure for Measure and The Tempest hoping to show how the deceptively simple language style in the later play grew out of the tenor of the former.

Certainty about the chronological dating of the plays is notoriously elusive, but I shall take the general consensus of the majority of critics in ordering them. In writing about individual plays, I shall follow the approximate dates suggested in the most recent editions of the plays to hand, frequently the New Cambridge edition. The only play which is not

chronological in my treatment according to these guidelines is Measure for Measure, but I believe this exhibits the beginnings of the same style as The Tempest. Even if the general consensus about dating is incorrect in some instances, I feel that it is the changes in style between the plays which is important for the purposes of my studies. Neither is it necessary that all plays of one particular style should be directly consecutive. The seeds of one stylistic trend may emerge in one play and then lie dormant for several intervening plays before coming to fruition later. This seems to be the case in Measure for Measure whose stylistic innovations are withheld for the experimentation of the great tragedies, Othello, Macbeth and King Lear. It is the repeating and varying of patterns which is important as a basis for my study.

Even in comparing plays outside, as well as inside, my own specialised attention, one can see how style changes as one play is reworked into another. If, for example, Love's Labour's Lost is compared to A Midsummer Night's Dream, many similarities can be seen in the muddles produced by intermediaries between the sets of young lovers and in the theatrical conclusions in the last Act of each play. These similarities



suggest that the two plays are closely related, but when the speeches of Ferdinand or Holofernes are compared to those of Titania or Puck, there is a blossoming of lyricism and naturalistic imagery which marks out the Dream as one of Shakespeare's masterpieces.

Similarly A Comedy of Errors and Twelfth Night have much in common in the theme of separated twins who cause many confusions before finally being revealed to each other and the world. Where A Comedy of Errors is at times rather pedantic in its effort to make the action clear to the audience, Twelfth Night displays the hand of experience in its manipulation of dialogue to show decorum to character, situation and action. The mechanics of plot become far less apparent to the audience listening to the play and in their place, the text itself becomes so much more subtle in its depiction of human interaction.

One aspect of language upon which I focus in particular is Shakespeare's use of imagery. In many cases, the imagery provides a background atmosphere to the play absorbed subconsciously by an audience during performance. Type and quantity of imagery evolves through time, being refined to a point at which it becomes not verbal, but dramatic in nature.

Another area of particular importance in the study of language is the different types of versification and prose with respect to character. Distinctive verse or prose forms provide individual characters with separate personalities and different levels of formality. As Shakespeare developed this aspect of his work, he reached a high appreciation of decorum in a character's speech in relation to his personality and situation. An example which readily springs to mind is the speech mode of Hotspur in Henry IV Part 1.

Closely allied to this notion of propriety in a character's speech is the use of rhetoric. Shakespeare's skills in this area obviously developed through the techniques and traditions of Elizabethan rhetoric. According to Sister Miriam Joseph in Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language, education was based upon Latin grammar and classics.<sup>5</sup> This included the study of argument and rhetoric in philosophy, and led to the memorizing of hundreds of rhetorical configurations in

5) Joseph, Sister Miriam. Shakespeare's Use of the Arts of Language. 3rd rpt. New York: Hafner, 1966. 8-13.

grammar. There was also a vast interest in word derivation from Greek or Latin into English. Shakespeare remembered his lessons well as illustrated by his portrayal of Holofernes, the schoolmaster, in Love's Labour's Lost, and by his frequent use of classical mythology.

Rhetorical studies were constantly of practical use throughout Shakespeare's writings. He knew how to persuade an audience and how to play upon its emotions. This knowledge of the timings, rhythms and oppositions which can be created by rhetoric is frequently used by Shakespeare's characters to sway the opinions of others, such as in Mark Antony's speeches to the Romans after the assassination of Julius Caesar (III.ii). A theatre audience can therefore objectively observe the workings of rhetoric in performance.

Yet the system of exchange central to this process of communication is the currency of language. Ideas are reworked until new forms emerge from old ones as a play or a speech. Shakespeare, however, was well aware that the exchange of information is fraught with many counterfeits. If a word is ill-chosen, or if the cultural or personal nuances of a particular word are

different for giver and receiver, the information contained within will be changed accordingly. Similarly language will exhibit its shifting qualities through time, frequency of use or the changing life experiences of the individual.

As Shakespeare's chosen medium of expression was language, he knowingly used and commented upon its shifting qualities through his characters. Not only could he use it to create new plays from old, letting these shifting attributes work for him, but also he was aware of its limitations, the point at which it became inadequate to convey a stable reality for events in the outer world or movements in the inner depths of human emotion. In the following chapters, I shall chart Shakespeare's developing awareness of the uncertainties which invade and permeate the process of communication.

It therefore seems appropriate to begin with Shakespeare's experimentation with traditional forms in the Dream. In this play he took up the challenge of a large variety of verse forms and fitted them to an array of different characters. He filled its scenes with a myriad of images from rural life and yet still maintained a concentrated unity throughout the play. I

see this stage as a light-hearted gambolling in the expansive fields of language: the first significant phase in the development of a prodigious talent.

CHAPTER 1HEAVENLY DISCOURSE

The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact  
 (V.i.7-8) <sup>1</sup>

says Theseus in A Midsummer Night's Dream and so reveals his limitations as a lover in his cautious reliance upon rationality. Both the Dream and Romeo and Juliet illustrate the antithesis of such a constraint in allowing the heart and mind free rein in exploring all possibilities. This process is shown to be fraught with attendant dangers, yet it is also demonstrated to be the only path towards true self knowledge.

Such a journey into the land of the imagination,  
 (whether it be into the madness of a nightmare vision,

1) Shakespeare, William. A Midsummer Night's Dream. Ed. R. A. Foakes. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1984. All further references will be to this edition.

the vagaries of sexual love, or the creativity of theatrical representation), must demand a similarly expansive language in which to express the boundless character of fantasy. Both plays lead their audiences into worlds in which anything is possible, either through the extensive magic of dreaming or the profound emotion of love. Shakespeare found the key to unlock the portrayal of these imaginative worlds in the comprehensive variety of imagery and linguistic forms drawn from the world in which he lived.

A Midsummer Night's Dream (approx. 1594) is particularly renowned for its delightful evocation of the English countryside; a feature which is closely linked with its fairy inhabitants. Shakespeare's magical forest teems with life whether it be natural or spiritual. Dream logic fuses with detailed observation to create a world which envelops both the intimate details of sensory experience and the fathomless subconscious 'magic' of the human mind.

Imagery plays an important part in the development of the play's atmosphere. The dominant image is that of the moon in its ambiguous role as promoter of romance

and guardian of chastity. Its presence is associated with the notions of constancy and inconstancy which form the play's major preoccupation of love's madness. Moonlight permeates the imagery of the play from the vows of the young lovers through to the revels of dancing fairies, the timing of the court's planned nuptials and the setting for the play performed by the rude mechanicals. The dew believed to drop from the moon on midsummer's night was associated in Renaissance times with magical healing power, and so it is also a symbol of restoration.

In addition to the moon imagery, there is an enormous quantity of natural description of all types. According to David Young, a descriptive passage frequently takes the form of a wide-sweeping panorama and this is usually associated with the fairies, particularly Oberon and Titania.<sup>2</sup> When Oberon describes

2) Young, David P. Something of Great Constancy: The Art of A Midsummer Night's Dream. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966. 74-83. Rpt. in Shakespearean Criticism. 26 vols to date. Ed. Laurie Harris and Mark Scott. Michigan: Gale Research Co, 1986. Vol. 3. 453-57.



how the flower he calls "love in idleness" acquired its magical properties, he recalls the entire setting in which the action took place:

Thou rememberest  
 Since once I sat upon a promontory,  
 And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back  
 Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath  
 That the rude sea grew civil at her song,  
 And certain stars shot madly from their spheres  
 To hear the sea-maid's music?

(II.i.148-154)

This broadens the scope of the play as a whole to include the wider universe as well as the small locality in which the action is played out. Magic pervades this fictional universe and is part of a rich all-encompassing diversity.

Another technique by which this is achieved, according to Young, is the process of listing. The lists may vary from a simple list of fruits:

Feed him with apricocks and dewberries,  
With purple grapes, green figs, and mulberries.

(III.i.144-145)

to a more complex list of images:

Or, if there were a sympathy in choice,  
War, death, or sickness did lay seige to it,  
Making it momentany as a sound,  
Swift as a shadow, short as any dream,  
Brief as the lightning in the collied night,

(I.i.141-145).

Again, the world of the play is widened to encompass as much of life as possible. Young states:

Here is the imagination again, attempting to comprehend everything available to it, pouring forth a cornucopia of sensuous experience that threatens either to drown us in its profusion or widen our horizons. Here variety and unity are simultaneously expressed.<sup>3</sup>

3) Young, David in Shakespearean Criticism 3: 457.

It is exactly this, the imagination, that much of the play has as one of its major concerns. Sensory stimuli are mixed up in a crowded confusion through which the imagination must apprehend some unity of life. It seems to me that Bottom's synaesthesia on awakening from his enchantment is a direct reflection of this type of apprehension. Each category in life is closely allied to another. There are no clear-cut divisions.

In the same way that the fairies are written into the landscape so that the two become inseparable, so the rural people equally belong to the natural world and the social organisation of man. According to Elizabeth Sewell in her The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History, the names of the mechanicals do not only reflect their trades, as in for instance 'bottom' being the name for a weaver's bobbin to hold his thread and Snug referring to a close join in carpentry, but they also reflect the natural world.<sup>4</sup> Thus Snug could refer

4) Sewell, Elizabeth. The Orphic Voice: Poetry and Natural History. Rpt London: Harper and Row, 1971. 59-168, 129-130.

to the nestling of birds, Quince to the fruit, Snout to an animal's nose and Flute to the voice. There are also bawdy connotations which could be attached to these names adding to the natural element.

Apart from this sheer variety of allusions to the natural world contained in the play, the Dream is also the play in which Shakespeare most revealed his versatility in the use of conventional forms of verse and his playful control of the verse/prose dichotomy. In Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream, Stephen Fender shows particular interest in the way that courtly language is used:

the courtly style is used both seriously and ironically -- seriously, when the complexities of its tone, vocabulary and syntax are fully engaged to define the subtleties of love; ironically, when it is spoken by a character whose behaviour no longer squares with his view of himself.<sup>5</sup>

5) Fender, Stephen. Shakespeare: A Midsummer Night's Dream. London: Edward Arnold Ltd, 1968. 38.

He applies this particularly to the language of the young lovers in describing how they first give professions of love in formal rhetorical style. One intimation of what may come in later scenes, however, may be found in Hermia's hyperbolic interruptions to Lysander's formal lament upon the course of love.

Lysander: The course of true love never did run  
smooth;

But either it was different in blood -

Hermia : O cross! Too high to be enthralled to low.

Lysander: Or else misgrafted in respect of years -

Hermia : O spite! too old to be engaged to young.

(I.i.134-38)

Hermia could be played as if she is teasingly deflating Lysander's courtly sentiments here and this would provide a contrast between formal language and the spontaneous humour of youth.

As the lovers become embroiled in the spells of the wood, it becomes clear that the formal rhetoric of

courtly love will not suffice to deal with the situation. Gradually, this breaks down until, in the quarrel between all four of them, Lysander, taking Helena's part against Hermia, descends to:

Get you gone, you dwarf,  
You minimus of hindering knot-grass made,  
You bead, you acorn.

(III.ii.328-30)

I think this creates obvious humour as Lysander desperately searches for an expression scathing enough to describe the small, but clinging, Hermia. Gone is the elegance of rhyming couplets as frustration and aggression dictate rhythm and sound. It is only when the 'dream' is over and the lovers face Theseus once again that they try to integrate back to their previous lives by the use of courtly language. Even so they are at a loss to describe fully what they have just been through.

Those who clearly do not habitually speak verse are the mechanicals. Their evident simplicity suits the prose style. It seems to me that one feature which particularly stands out is the degree by which the

speech flows smoothly from one to another despite any differences or misunderstandings. This can be seen clearly in the co-operative banter of III.i. where excitement is expressed in the close linking of one speech with another through "Ay. . ,Yes. . ,Nay. . , Well. . ,If that may be. . ,Not a whit. . ,What sayest thou?" Each speech is answered or added to by another to promote a sense of easy goodwill. Although the mechanicals are simple creatures, they create indulgence in the audience by their earnest manner and willingness to enter into the group activity. The humour created here is widely different from that in Love's Labour's Lost where there is much clever wordplay and punning simply for its own sake. The mechanicals are usually totally unaware of the humour in their conversation, and much of it, I think, comes from this lack of awareness.

Wolfgang Franke, in his article "The Logic of Double Entendre in A Midsummer Night's Dream", picks out many incidents of bawdiness in the double meanings of the mechanicals' speech and sees this as entirely appropriate for a wedding entertainment, as the play is

thought to have been. He says:

It was possible to surround the marriage rite with great religious and ceremonial solemnity and yet leave room for a burlesque on the animal instincts which it sanctifies.<sup>6</sup>

As a far cry from the mechanicals' style, when the speech of the fairies is examined, it can be seen that rhyme is a particularly strong characteristic in common with the court characters. Couplets give an elegance to court speech, and yet they can also be used to give an incantatory quality when applied to the short-lined tetrameter rhythms of the fairies. Puck, especially, uses short spell-winding couplets:

Through the forest have I gone,  
But Athenian found I none  
On whose eyes I might approve  
This flower's force in stirring love.

(II.ii.72-75)

6) Franke, Wolfgang. "The Logic of Double Entendre in A Midsummer Night's Dream". Philological Quarterly 58.3 Summer 1979: 282-297, 294.



These ground rules are particularly interesting for their variations or, indeed, lack of variation where one might expect it. One example of the lack of variation occurs when Titania awakes to find and fall in love with Bottom. In most of Shakespeare's plays, when a character of higher status talks on familiar terms with one of lower status, the higher character will descend from verse to prose to be in keeping with the person to whom he or she is talking. In this instance, even though Titania is talking of love to Bottom, she keeps firmly in the verse mode while Bottom speaks in prose. This accentuates the difference between the two characters and the absurdity of the situation. Another use of language to point to the ridiculous occurs when the mechanicals attempt to speak verse whilst performing their Pyramus and Thisbe play. It clearly goes against the grain and much humour ensues from their mistakes. This is accentuated by the device of giving the court party interjections in prose to criticize the play. It is the only time that Theseus and Hippolyta use prose and seems expressly to make the bungled verse of the mechanicals appear even more unnatural.

The use of all the different verse forms and prose in this play makes it stand out amongst Shakespeare's

work for its sheer variety. Just as multiplicity is a dominant feature of the descriptions within the play, it is also a feature of its language. This does not interfere with the play's total unity. The intricate convergences of the plot lines ensure that the play is bound up tightly as a whole. Concurrently, the different modes of speech are so cleverly interconnected and juxtaposed that each has a contrasting relationship to the other. It is this total impression of harmony in spite of diversity which survives any temporary changes from one speech mode to another. Harold C. Goddard cites Theseus' comment in V.i about his hounds. They are harmoniously musical in just the same way as the play's different characters and speech patterns produce a totally unified overall design.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the immense variety of expression here, the dream-like apparition of A Midsummer Night's Dream, and later The Tempest, create an interesting illustration of the perceived inadequacy of language. It seems to me that Bottom's speech on awakening from his 'dream' is a

7) Goddard, Harold. The Meaning of Shakespeare. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951. 74-80, 74-76.

clear example of this inadequacy. Bottom nearly proves himself to be the ass he fears through his inept struggles to describe the indescribable. Sentences are begun, only to be broken and recommenced in a futile attempt to place his dream experience into the neat formulation of words. What remains is a welter of disconnected sensations which seemingly reveals a chaos of the senses:

The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of  
man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to  
taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to  
report what my dream was.

(IV.i.208-11)

Possibly Bottom is not quite the muddled buffoon here, however, that many take him for on a first hearing. Faced with the impossibility of conveying his dream experience through logical language, he seeks to synthesize a new way of expressing a transcendent experience. What he is saying is that it is as impossible for the deep feelings of the heart to find expression in words as it is for the eye to hear, the ear to see, and so on. Shakespeare suggests in Sonnet 23 that it is possible for these things to occur,

however, through the use of the imagination and through love:

O, learn to read what silent love hath writ:  
 To hear with eyes belongs to love's fine wit.  
 (11.13-14)<sup>8</sup>

The imagination is essentially portrayed as a silent medium and, indeed, rationality seems to work against it rather than help to clarify it in any way. Words must be used in an entirely new way to suggest its workings rather than to describe them logically. Thus Bottom has recourse to synaesthesia perhaps to suggest, not describe, what his experience has been. It is then, and only then, that creativity can spring out of chaos.

Another illustration of an attitude towards the way language works is picked up by Elizabeth Sewell.<sup>9</sup> She

8) Shakespeare, William. The Sonnets. Ed. Douglas Bush and Alfred Harbage. Middlesex: Penguin, 1970, 43. All further references will be to this edition.

9) Sewell: 132-133.

sees the mechanicals as the great experimenters with language in this play and argues that in this manner they are closely allied to Shakespeare's craft. The rural tradesmen, unlike Shakespeare, are entirely new to the art of creating drama to interpret and make sense of the world around them. Therefore, in their bumbling mistakes, the process becomes more evident. Sewell quotes Sir Walter Raleigh in his History of the World where he tells the story of Theseus and Ariadne. In the telling of that tale he says that Theseus "received from her a bottome of thread" in order to guide himself through the labyrinth. In the Dream, it seems likely that Bottom is the holder of the thread in order to guide the players through the labyrinth of language.

Central to the experience of creating art is the use of the imagination and, according to Sewell, this is what Bottom undergoes in his vision. He emerges a wiser man, able to lead his players forward in an exploration of the relations between the natural world and the mind of mankind. He is the only rural character who interacts with the fairies and has a role in the central concern of chaotic love. His movement from one sphere to the other, from the chaos of life in the natural world to humanity's attempt at ordering experience through art

and language, expresses the play's concern with the dynamism that exists between the two facets of living. This dynamism, involving the metamorphosis of the raw experience of living into a form intelligible to humanity, can be seen in the language of both A Midsummer Night's Dream and The Tempest.

The amazing variety of character, plot and linguistic forms in the Dream finds a unity in its picture of the imagination. David Marshall in his fascinating article "Exchanging Visions: Reading A Midsummer Night's Dream" describes the verbal methods with which Shakespeare made it plain that the play was an illustration of this uniting force.<sup>10</sup> Imagery is sometimes used to accentuate a duplicity of individual experience, for example in the "parted eye" of Hermia's awakening (IV.i.186). Conversely, it is also used to portray the unity of two people as a "double cherry" as Helena appeals to Hermia in the name of their past friendship (III.ii.209).

10) Marshall, David. "Exchanging Visions: Reading A Midsummer Night's Dream". E.L.H: Journal of English Literary History 49.3 Fall 1982: 543-75.

Marshall also notes that all the mechanicals are joiners or menders of some sort. He embellishes his argument here by pointing out that there is a large proportion of words with the prefix 'con' (together) spoken by the mechanicals later in the play. Finally, the argument is clinched by his observation that the word 'mend' or 'amend' appears many times within the last scene of Act V:

Theseus: The best in this kind are but shadows;  
and the worst are no worse, if  
imagination amend them.

(V.i.205-6)

Multiplicity of experience is present even as the time draws near for the epilogue. Firstly, Bottom suggests an epilogue (V.i.343) which is hastily refused by Theseus in favour of the Bergomask dance. Then Theseus begins:

The iron tongue of midnight hath told twelve

(V.i.341)

and goes on to display the shadow of an epilogue in:

This palpable-gross play hath well beguiled  
The heavy gait of night. Sweet friends, to bed.

(V.i.345-346)

Thirdly and finally, Puck's epilogue closes the play in the short-lined rhythms and rhyming couplets of fairy speech. It is surely no accident that the words 'mend' and 'amend' appear four times within this speech, notably once in each of the first and last couplets:

If we shadows have offended,  
Think but this and all is mended -

. . . . .

Give me your hands if we be friends,  
And Robin shall restore amends.

(V.i.401-402, 415-416)

This epilogue is allowed to stand at last as the most appropriate of all three for A Midsummer Night's Dream with its echoing insistence on the word 'mend'. The audience has given away its own way of perceiving the world for the duration of the play, and has instead allowed itself to be taken over by the multiplicity of viewpoints presented by the playwright and players. It



is the imagination which will mend the many parts of experience back together again and restore the unity of life as the audience lives it once more, so much the wiser for the Dream.

During the formulation of ideas for the Dream, it is likely that Shakespeare was also developing thoughts on Romeo and Juliet (approximately 1596). Just as the Dream seems to cram a vast amount of detail into its imagined world, Romeo and Juliet is remarkable for the number of its oppositions and polarities. Every quality of life in this play coexists with its opposite in an ever-fluctuating dynamic partnership. I suggest that this is truly seeing with a "parted eye"(IV.i.186). Whatever extreme the human heart is capable of feeling, the potential is also present for the reverse. Love exists together with the antithetical features of hatred and death right from the very start of the young people's romance. This effect is largely achieved through the play's imagery which dallies from one extreme to the other throughout the text. Norman Holland lists these polarities as:

love-hate, old-young, male-female, water-fire,  
 night-day, long-short, sweet-sour, vice-virtue,  
 and even dog-cat.<sup>11</sup>

One example of this technique of opposition which seems obvious to me is in the major image pattern based upon the light of love and the darkness of the tomb. When Romeo first sees Juliet, he says: "O she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" (I.v.43)<sup>12</sup> Towards the end of the play, when Romeo drags the body of Paris into the Capulet tomb, he means to bury him in a "triumphant" grave.

On entering the tomb, he finds not a grave, but:

11) Holland, Norman. "Mercutio, Mine Own Son the Dentist". Essays on Shakespeare. Ed. Gordon Ross Smith. University Park: Pennsylvania State U P, 1965. 3-14, 13.

12) Shakespeare, William. Romeo and Juliet. Ed. G. Blakemore Evans. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1984. All further references will be to this edition.

a lantern, . . .

For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes

This vault a feasting presence full of light.

(V.iii.84-86)

The feasting presence is surely reminiscent of the Ball where the lovers met and Juliet's father called for "More light". As the ballroom is darkened by hate, the tomb is brightened by love. It is clear from the imagery that the love of Romeo and Juliet is not of this world. Where the moon played such a prominent part in the Dream's imagery, many of the light images here refer to the sun or starlight against the blackness of the night sky.

The emphasis upon the heavens in this imagery is associated with the strong coupling of love and death. This pairing is so insistent that it pervades the whole play. There is an intensification of this linking from Act III onwards as the play darkens its mood with the death of Mercutio and turns towards the expectedly tragic outcome. From this point on, love is not mentioned without the accompanying reference to death until Romeo and Juliet's love is seen as inseparable from it. The prophecy of the Prologue is gathering

strength towards its fulfilment. Juliet's false death in Iv.v results in a preparatory mourning for her family. Capulet sees her as gone to her lover Death:

Death is my son-in-law, Death is my heir,  
My daughter he hath wedded. I will die,  
And leave him all; life, living, all is Death's.

(IV.v.38-40)

This puts life into the context of death and paints a bleak picture for those who have not found something in life to supersede death's domination. What Shakespeare seems to suggest is that love is what gives life its meaning and yet life itself is only a temporary flowering. Death and love are its opposing conditions. The lovers are seen in the context of not only the society of Verona, but also amongst all God's creatures under the starlit heavens. Imagery drawn from religion, too, increases this broadening aspect of love. Romeo's and Juliet's love takes on the tone of a religion, particularly in their first meeting. Even though this is one of the contemporary conventions of love poetry, there is something elemental and all-inclusive here which points to their love being much greater than the limited life-span they are destined to fulfill.

Linked with the images of heaven in Romeo and Juliet is bird imagery. This is particularly prevalent in the balcony scenes. The lark becomes interchangeable with the nightingale when Romeo wishes to stay with Juliet rather than flee Verona at dawn. He would rather pretend that outside circumstances are favourable to them and be caught by death in Juliet's presence than live away from her. His death, I think, is also foreshadowed in association with another bird image when he wishes that he were Juliet's bird. Juliet replies that she should kill him with too much cherishing; she sees, in other words, that love to such an extreme could be dangerous.

There are different types of animal imagery in Romeo and Juliet. Just as the natural world features widely in the Dream, it is found particularly in the bawdy scenes often provided by the banter of Mercutio. Love is described in bestial terms which reflects upon Mercutio's carnality and immaturity. This contrasts well with Romeo's new found love. When Romeo is missed by his friends in the street after the Ball, Mercutio refers to him by saying: "The ape is dead" (II.i.16), and is very much surprised later to find that both the ape and the poser are truly dead in Romeo.

Additionally, Mercutio's animal imagery is present in scenes of aggression. Perhaps the most striking incidence occurs after he is mortally wounded by Tybalt:

A plague a' both your houses! 'Zounds, a  
dog, a rat, a mouse, a cat, to scratch a man to  
death!

(III.i.90-92)

Plants, too, feature strongly in Romeo and Juliet in their ability to bring good or evil. Friar Laurence first appears gathering plants for medicinal uses and this immediately precedes Romeo's entrance for the scene in which he tells the Friar of Juliet and requests marriage (II.iii). This plant imagery incorporates the double nature of all life as seen in the play and reminds me of the ambivalence present in the use of Puck's "'love-in-idleness'" flower (II.i.168). In the Dream, the flower represents the vagaries of young love, whereas in this play the connotations are wider:

Two such opposed kings encamp them still  
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will.

(II.iii.27-28)

Despite the all-encompassing imagery present throughout the play, one type of imagery seems to be created particularly for the purpose of distancing the audience from direct emotional involvement with the action according to Norman Holland.<sup>13</sup> This is imagery drawn from the use of books, words or even letters. One way in which Holland's idea could be illustrated within the action of the play is to look at the scene where Romeo first kisses Juliet. She says: "You kiss by th' book." (I.v.109) Here, perhaps, she could mean the prayer book, a thought suggested to her after Romeo's reference to sin, or she could be commenting upon the form their love professions have taken: that of the sonnet (ll.92-105). This brings the audience much closer to the surface text of the play and distances them from involvement in the action.

When the verse in the text is examined, it seems that Shakespeare had a definite purpose in doing this which was to draw attention to the form itself in its imaginative illustration of the subject matter. Many of the first scenes of the play are deliberately based upon

13) Holland: 12.

the Petrarchan sonnet form. This can easily be seen in the structure of the Prologue, for instance, where the whole story of the play is told in microcosm.

The placing of the story in sonnet form creates distance between audience and action, thus enabling the audience to take a more thoughtful view of the play. Interestingly, the last rhyming couplet runs:

The which if you with patient ears attend,  
What here shall miss, our toil shall strive  
to mend.

(Prologue: 13-14)

In the light of the manner in which Shakespeare used 'mend' in the Dream, it seems to me that this could easily refer to a reinterpretation of the story through the use of the creative imagination. The chorus promises that whatever the audience may lack in this synoptic conventional telling of the tale, they will gain in the retelling of it. This may just as well refer to the style of the telling as much as to the content of the story.



It is not at all surprising given Shakespeare's interest in language that he was a participant in the fashion of sonneteering as an expression of courtly love in the late 1500's. Neither is it surprising that the author of the Dream should then wish to challenge, remodel and investigate the relationship to reality of this literary form. Romeo and Juliet made full use of the sonnet form and all its conventions. In "The Definition of Love: Shakespeare's Phrasing in Romeo and Juliet", Jill Levenson describes the play as "an anatomy of love poetry". She adds:

this early tragedy investigates the very stuff of amatory poetry, placing its components - its vocabulary, rhetorical devices, and concept of love - in a wide variety of contexts to test their flexibility and compass.<sup>14</sup>

Levenson goes on to say that the Prologue is a cliched Petrarchan sonnet which fully suggests by use of

14) Levenson, Jill. "The Definition of Love: Shakespeare's Phrasing in Romeo and Juliet". Shakespeare Studies 15 (1982): 21-36, 22.

the words "passage" (1.9) and "traffic" (1.12) that it is to become something dynamic when it changes its form to drama. Romeo is at first portrayed as the conventional melancholic lover when Benvolio's help is enlisted to find out what is the cause of his mood. Shakespeare was to use this device again in Hamlet when Hamlet's friends are enlisted as spies to find out whether love is the cause of his melancholia. Romeo, like Hamlet, is concerned with the emptiness of a "Misshapen chaos of well-seeming forms" (I.i.170) and is plagued with the loss of an integrated self:

Tut, I have lost myself, I am not here,  
This is not Romeo, he's some other where.

(I.i.188-189)

Such things, it seems to me, point to an absent sense of reality: a preoccupation with empty forms, whether they concern a concept of love or of revenge. It could infer a dissatisfaction with the sonnet to fully express the sincerity of true love. Certainly, I believe that the sonnet is shown to be false here: it seems to work superficially, but what it does express is not a true love for Rosaline. It is merely the self-reflexive infatuation that Romeo feels for her.

The sonnet form continues to be the basis of the text in the exchange between Romeo and Benvolio about Romeo's feelings for Rosaline. There are many echoes of Shakespeare's own sonnets as Romeo classically expands upon the cruelty of his mistress. When Benvolio asks whether Rosaline has sworn to be chaste, Romeo replies that she has and adds in a typical sonnet conceit:

. . and in that sparing makes a huge waste;  
For beauty starved with her severity  
Cuts beauty off from all posterity.

(I.i.209-11)

This compares with one of Shakespeare's sonnets about the young man, another of his variations on courtly love, in which he bewails the young man's celibacy:

Look what an unthrift in the world doth spend  
Shifts but his place, for still the world enjoys it;  
But beauty's waste hath in the world an end,  
And, kept unused, the user so destroys it.

(Sonnet 9: 9-12)

As pointed out by Jill Levenson, the language of the play abounds with the Petrarchan conceits of beasts,

fish, canker, fire, Cupid, madness, myth, sainthood, military equipment and assault. She also discusses the classical use of hyperbole and oxymora. Formal classicism aside, however, I feel that when Romeo woos Juliet at the ball, the repetitive form of rhymes is used to create a much more lyrical verse. Rhyme answers rhyme across the two different speakers creating a timid duet which, although formal, contrasts markedly with the stiff artificiality of Romeo's opening speeches on Rosaline.

This beautiful scene illustrates Shakespeare's success in converting the sonnet form into drama. Winifred Nowottny discusses the manner in which he converted the Petrarchan conceit of darkness and light into visual effects.<sup>15</sup> Capulet's call for "More light" (I.v.26) demands that torches should be physically brought onto the stage to emphasize Romeo's words "she doth teach the torches to burn bright!" (I.v.43) Similarly the scene in the tomb could demand a similar

15) Nowottny, Winifred. "Shakespeare's Tragedies". Shakespeare's World. Ed. James Sutherland and Joel Hurstfield. London:Edward Arnold, 1964. 48-78, 52.

interplay between light and shadow on stage to accentuate the imagery.

Another aspect of the sonnet form known as blazon is discussed by Gayle Whittier in her article "The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized".<sup>16</sup> Whittier describes the introductory sonnets to Rosaline as the exaggeration of traditional form rather than love poetry directed towards a realistic character. It seems in these passages that Shakespeare is going almost to the point of burlesque in his exaggeration of the sonnet form, even as he did in his own Sonnet 130:

My mistress' eyes are nothing like the sun;  
Coral is far more red than her lips' red;  
If snow be white, why then her breasts are dun;  
If hairs be wires, black wires grow on her head.

(11.1-4)

Whittier compares the blazon used for Rosaline to the

16) Whittier, Gale. "The Sonnet's Body and the Body Sonnetized in Romeo and Juliet". Shakespeare Quarterly 40 (1989): 27-41, 29-34.

much more subtle expression used for Juliet's descriptions. She also compares Romeo's verse to Juliet with the verses that Mercutio speaks to conjure up the bawdy image of Rosaline outside the Capulet garden. This carries blazon to the point of indecency itemizing Rosaline's sexual assets. It is a scene which does not appear in Brooke's poem so it is entirely Shakespeare's creation and, I think, makes an interesting contrast to the language which is being used at the other side of the wall in the balcony scene.

Only when Romeo sees Juliet in the tomb and he perceives her as dead do I see that there is anything approaching the traditional blazon style in their more mature relationship:

beauty's ensign yet  
Is crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks,  
And Death's pale flag is not advanced there.

(V.iii.94-96)

Death's flag, however, is certainly present in the language and becomes more visible just before Romeo's suicide:

. . . shake the yoke of inauspicious stars  
 From this world-wearied flesh. Eyes, look your last!  
 Arms, take your last embrace! and, lips, O you  
 The doors of breath, seal with a righteous kiss  
 A dateless bargain to engrossing Death!

(V.iii.111-115)

Thus blazon becomes associated with death and the dismemberment of bone fragments in the tomb. This occurred earlier in the play (IV.iii) when Juliet feared madness as a result of waking alone from the Friar's potion. In Shakespeare's language, true love cannot be itemized into component parts because to do so is to kill its very essence.

I think this demonstrates Shakespeare's awareness of the inadequacy of traditional verse forms to truly express love, and yet he used, experimented with and extended the conventional language of the sonnet throughout the course of the play. As I have previously mentioned, several commentators suggest that one reason for the use of traditional inflated language is to maintain a distance between the play's events and the audience. Norman Holland describes Mercutio's mode of speech and its effects as similar in function to what is

happening in the play as a whole. He says Mercutio:

pulls down the imposing forms and idols of others  
but . . . he sets up in their high place his  
own artificial gestures - puns, rhymes, jokes,  
set speeches and other masks.

He is

warding off the dangers of emotion with a smoke  
screen of words.<sup>17</sup>

This appears to be partially what Shakespeare is doing with the language in this play: setting up formal language in order to experiment with it (as in the Dream) and then to subvert it.

Another critic who has looked closely at the formality of the language here is Harry Levin. He pays particular attention to the way in which the frequent use of rhyme in the first act gives way to a more sincere blank verse as the play develops. Added to this

17) Holland: 10-12.



is the imposition of an unnatural geometrical form on utterances in the first part of the play. Reduplication of certain words is a common occurrence in the initial act. This type of rhetoric is plain in Escalus's accusation that the two houses of Verona have begun:

To wield old partisans, in hands as old,  
Cank'ered with peace, to part your cankered hate.

(I.i.85-86)

A prominent feature here is its pairing and balancing of words, just as the Petrarchan images are also paired and balanced in other sections of the play. It seems by this example that the polarity associated with the feud appears in rhetorical structure as well as in imagery. This is reminiscent of the multiplicity apparent in the language of the Dream. I believe that where a resolution of multiplicity and chaos became possible through the imagination in the Dream, it seems that a similar resolution is suggested through the power of love in this play. This view can be supported by Levin's analysis of the language of the play:

Against this insistence upon polarity, at every level, the mutuality of the lovers stands out, the one organic relation amid an overplus of stylized expressions and attitudes.<sup>18</sup>

Romeo and Juliet as personalities begin to emerge from the background of formal utterance as the play progresses. They mature into a plainer style of language, more compressed in imagery, as they learn how to express themselves in the face of danger and sorrow. A description of how, later in the play, formal language becomes the emblem of those who have the narrow perception of society at large is given by David Laird in his article "The Generation of Style".<sup>19</sup> He cites the tomb scene as an example of this. The scene is opened by Paris and closed by Prince Escalus both giving highly

18) Levin, Harry. "Form and Formality in Romeo and Juliet". Shakespeare Quarterly 11.1 Winter 1960: 3-11, 10.

19) Laird, David. "The Generation of Style in Romeo and Juliet". The Journal of English and German Philology 63.2 1964: 204-13, 205-6.

structured speeches built upon the sestet form. Within this scene, Romeo and Juliet reveal their new language of love which tends much more towards plainness and honesty than any of their speech earlier in the play. They have outgrown the Petrarchan sonnet in order to express true love in the real world.

Finally the lovers are metaphorically and literally "raised" above the myriad polarities and possibilities of life when Montague suggests the building of gold statues. As the binary imagery and structure is seen to merge into the true language of love, so the lovers themselves become an affirmation of life over death.

Both A Midsummer Night's Dream and Romeo and Juliet portray imagined worlds full of the chaos and contradictions of daily life. However extraordinary these fictional worlds may be, I think that they still remain true to human experience, and are largely concerned with the problem of finding a united perspective. In order to describe the variety and scope of life, Shakespeare sought to go beyond conventional means of expression. This he did, carrying the Renaissance idea of the conceit to new heights of excellence. These two plays contain some of the most

beautiful imagery in English Renaissance writing, and go far beyond anything previously achieved in the exploration and expansion of conventional linguistic forms.

## CHAPTER 2

### WORDS, WIT AND WISDOM

The Merchant of Venice (approx. 1597) was written at about the same time or immediately after Romeo and Juliet and contains much of the musicality, the enjoyment of language which is a feature of the latter play. Rather than attempting to pour a whole world of detail into the text of the play, Shakespeare created a dichotomy in the settings of Venice and Belmont which represents two extremes in living. Venice is the hard world of trade where both sides of a bargain must be proved equivalent and Belmont is the softer world of love which must incorporate a subtler form of negotiation.

Negotiation is also a key element in Much Ado About Nothing (approx. 1599). This play develops further through the barbed wit of Beatrice and Benedick the agile argumentation established in the court scene of The Merchant. Where logic is used in argument and counter-argument in The Merchant to create dramatic tension, it is used in Much Ado to create comedy and

misunderstanding. Both these plays display an increasing interest in the logic of argument and how it may be subverted. Additionally, in Much Ado, the imagery becomes less romantic and lyrical.

The Merchant, however, does contain some colourful imagery which is given free expression in lyrical mode. Nothing could be more evocative than the picture created by Salerio when he empathizes with Antonio's fears of shipwreck as:

dangerous rocks,  
Which touching by my gentle vessel's side  
Would scatter all her spices on the stream,  
Enrobe the roaring waters with my silks . . .  
(I.i.31-34)<sup>1</sup>

The ship becomes a woman whose perfumes are dispersed, whose clothing is emptied and stolen by the greedy ocean. There are shades of Ophelia here. Sea imagery

1) Shakespeare, William: The Merchant of Venice. Ed. M.M.Mahood. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1987. All further references will be to this edition.

continues through the play as a reminder of the risk inherent in trading by ship and in journeying overseas for the sake of love. Chance plays a large part in the wrecking of Antonio's ships and it is figured as a random force within the storm-tossed sea too great for human influence.

In contrast to this is the classical imagery surrounding Belmont which suggests harmony and peace. This is at its height in Act V when the lovers are about to be reunited at Belmont. It sets Portia's home apart from the fluctuating fortunes of Venice and conveys a sense of riches used wisely. Portia is herself the controlling goddess of these riches which are spiritual as well as material.

In addition to the sea and classical imagery which lend much to the romantic feel of the play, musical images play an important part. As Portia announces the beginning of Bassanio's trial, she calls also for music as an accompaniment either to failure when he can make "a swanlike end"(II I.ii.44) or to success when music is

Even as the flourish when true subjects bow  
To a new crowned monarch.

(III.ii.49-50)

This mood is reasserted in Scene V when Lorenzo orders music to accompany the still night air. He and Jessica look towards the ideal which is unattainable on this earth, even at Belmont:

There's not the smallest orb which thou behold'st  
 But in his motion like an angel sings,  
 Still choiring to the young-eyed cherubins;  
 Such harmony is in immortal souls,  
 But whilst this muddy vesture of decay  
 Doth grossly close it in, we cannot hear it.

(V.i.60-65)

Perhaps Shakespeare is hinting through Lorenzo that love, in whatever straightened circumstances, is as close a view of the ideal as one can get in this life.

Ifor Evans in The Language of Shakespeare's Plays supports a claim for the importance of musicality in the play by drawing attention to the musical imagery in this last act.<sup>2</sup> He cites Lorenzo when the young man describes the lulling effect of music upon a herd of

2) Evans, Ifor. The Language of Shakespeare's Plays.  
 2nd ed. London: Methuen, 1959. 102.



young colts. He continues:

Therefore the poet  
Did feign that Orpheus drew trees, stones and floods;  
Since nought so stockish, hard, and full of rage,  
But music for the time doth change his nature.

(V.i.79-82)

The poet referred to here must surely be Ovid, but Evans suggests that Shakespeare too is using the music of language in the same way as Ovid's Orpheus plays his pipe.

G. Wilson Knight in The Shakespearian Tempest remarks on the clear opposition between images of harmony and disharmony in The Merchant.<sup>3</sup> Music and love are set against storm, wind, shipwreck and beast imagery. Belmont is a stronghold of music, love and riches for which Bassanio must hazard his life in journeying over the dangerous seas. Shylock, on the

3) G. Wilson Knight. The Shakespearian Tempest. Rpt. London: Oxford U P, 1940. 127-141, 127-29.

other hand, directs Jessica to "stop my house's ears - I mean my casements"(II.v.33) when threatened with the presence of music in the streets. He is the type of man Lorenzo complains of when he says:

The man that hath no music in himself,  
Nor is not moved with concord of sweet sounds,  
Is fit for treasons, strategems, and spoils;

(V.i.83-85)

Frequently associated with the forms of music and language is the discipline of mathematics, and so it is in the choice of imagery for The Merchant of Venice. David Brady, in his article "The Sum of Something: Arithmetic in the Merchant of Venice", traces the use of a covert image of the equation throughout the structure of the play.<sup>4</sup> In the latter half of the C16th, maths was just starting to become popular in England with the importation from Europe of various text books on the subject. It seems entirely appropriate that Shakespeare

4) Brady, David. "The Sum of Something: Arithmetic in The Merchant of Venice". Shakespeare Quarterly 36.1 Spring 1985: 10-30.

should have the newly fashionable concept of the equation in mind when considering his fictional world of commerce and the weighing of arguments in a court of law. What Shakespeare seems to do, according to Brady, is to compare Portia's place in Bassanio's affections with that of Antonio. This mode of critical thought pays dividends later in the play when Bassanio gives his ring to Balthasar. He has weighed up the worth of Portia and found her light on the scale compared to his gratitude to Balthasar plus his love for Antonio. Brady reasons that when Portia finally reveals that she was Balthasar, this cancels out the equation and leaves Antonio as the remainder.

Another aspect of the mathematical language which exists as an undercurrent of the play is the concept that trade must be balanced and that something extra gained on one side nullifies the transaction. Brady illustrates a balanced equation by citing the marriage agreement between Portia and Bassanio who comes "by note" (III.ii.140). In exchange for this note which he has won in the trial, Portia has promised to pay the bearer her hand in marriage and her entire estate. In legalistic terms she makes sure the bargain is "confirmed, signed, ratified" (III.ii.148) by giving an

inventory of what she is transferring to Bassanio as the marriage portion. In the case of moneylenders, however, the interest they gain is seen as something extra to unbalance the equation. This is also the case when Shylock must unavoidably take his interest in the form of Antonio's blood.

I think this view of the play does seem to have its uses as long as it is not taken too far. Adherence to the letter of the law can be seen to consist of a strict balance between two opposing forces. Judgements according to the law are either right or wrong to the point of mathematical precision. It is, however, one of the major points raised by The Merchant that a strictly scientific implementation of the law might be inadequate to administer true justice in all the extenuating circumstances to which humanity is subject. Possibly the precise form of the mathematical equation runs through the play in order that it may be undermined in the interests of true Christianity at last. The question is raised as to whether any static linguistic structure can truly contain a descriptive formula for the delightfully chaotic vagaries of the human condition.

It is not only in the imagery that The Merchant

could be described as a play towards the end of Shakespeare's lyrical period. Ifor Evans comments that:

Verse prescribes the mood in which we accept the play, gathering up the fairy-story of the caskets, the shabbiness of Bassanio's motives and the elements of incipient tragedy of the Shylock and Antonio theme, and holding them united in a charmed and magical world.<sup>5</sup>

Alfred Harbage states in the introduction to his edition of Shakespeare's Complete Works that at 73.5% of the total lines, The Merchant has the highest quota of blank verse in all the comedies.<sup>6</sup> There is only 21% prose and 5.5% rhymed verse.

It is certainly true, I believe, that the choosing of the caskets is considerably softened and lightened by the gracious language which surrounds it. Formal

5) Evans: 102.

6) Harbage, Alfred, ed. William Shakespeare: The Complete Works. Pelican ed. New York: The Viking Press, 1969. 31.

rhetoric with classical images sustains the light-hearted romance in the choosing of the caskets and the bond made between Portia and Bassanio. Portia's speech culminating with the giving of the ring (III.ii.149-174) has an incantatory quality based around the rhetorical use of the number three. She describes herself by using asyndeton (the piling up of words or phrases without a conjunction) as

unlessoned, . . . unschooled, unpractised (1.159)

Happy . . . happier . . . Happiest (11.160-163)

Bassanio will be her

. . . lord, her governor, her king (1.165).

Then she gives her house, servants and self to Bassanio with the ring, saying

Which when you part from, lose, or give away,  
Let it presage the ruin of your love.

(11.172-3)

The rule of three in the structure of this speech is

rather wittily subverted at its beginning when Portia says:

. . . that only to stand high in your account  
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,  
Exceed account.

(11.155-157)

Through the musical quality of this repetition of three, the language of the play echoes some of its thematic concerns. Three is particularly significant in the triangular relationship of Antonio, Bassanio and Portia. Even in the details of the play, three is a constantly occurring motif: Portia has three suitors and there are three caskets in the marriage trial. When Bassanio wins Portia's hand she proclaims herself thrice happy, Bassanio calls her a "thrice-fair lady" (III.ii.146) and Portia would be "trebled twenty times" herself (III.ii.153).

In Mediaeval and Renaissance times, the number three had several concepts associated with it. In addition to being linked with spirituality, which some critics have said is a major quality of Belmont, it was taken to be the number which denoted fertility. This

has obvious connotations in the context of the three pending marriages (Portia/Bassanio, Nerissa/Gratiano, Jessica/Lorenzo) and, indeed, in terms of increase of money by trade or usury.

Many folktales include three as a number of completeness. If a suitor was given a trial involving a threefold test, such as the choice of caskets, the testing of his personality was thought to have been infallible. Three also stood for harmony in that it takes one mediator to reconcile two opposites. For example, the intervention of Balthasar with her knowledge of the law is needed to bring a solution to the Shylock/Antonio confrontation, or on another plane, to the competition between Portia and Antonio for Bassanio's love.

In addition to reflecting the central concerns of the play in this manner of repetitious rhetoric, other forms are also used in order to gain control of a situation. The formality of Bassanio's speech in Act III of The Merchant calls to mind the Duke's pivotal speech in III.ii.275-96 of Measure for Measure. Speaking in rhyming couplets, he summarizes Angelo's behaviour and anticipates future action to avert tragedy. In The



Merchant, Bassanio reads the note contained within the lead casket and then continues in rhyme to claim his bride (III.i.139-148). The situation is pivotal to the whole play in that it clearly states Bassanio's position in regard to Portia just before Shylock's plan impinges on it and is brought into action. It seems that at both these moments in the two plays a degree of ceremony is attained by the use of rhyme. In The Merchant it is also the point at which the mood of the play changes from comic to tragic potential. The subsequent action at first seems out of the control of the speaker, Bassanio, and is then controlled and resolved through Portia.

It seems to me that another facet of the language of this play is that even though much of it is written in verse, some of the prose given to Shylock is extremely powerful. This is achieved almost without the use of imagery. When he does use the image "land rats, and water rats"(I.iii.19), he will not allow it to escape his lips without immediate literal translation as "pirates"(1.20). One of the most striking speeches of the whole play is written in prose: that in which Shylock claims common humanity and equality for the Jews along with Christians(III.i.42-52). Brian Vickers in

The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose describes Shylock's prose here as "the great innovation in this play". He explains this statement by saying that:

previously such rhetorical solos had been the province of clowns, but now for the first time a serious character has been given a long highly structured speech, one which is completely organic to the themes and action of the play.<sup>7</sup>

The speech begins with a horrifying answer to Salerio's request for common sense: what good would a pound of flesh be to Shylock? The answer "To bait fish withal"(1.42) is so abrupt and brutal as to beg for justification. That justification is followed by a series of rhetorical lists and questions building to a climax of "Revenge"(1.54). I believe that this is masterly use of prose in the balancing of phrases, the sustaining of suspense through a series of growing climaxes and the employing of natural rhythms of speech repetitively in order to gain some of the nobility of

7) Vickers, Brian. The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose. London: Methuen, 1968. 82, 86.

verse. Questions are set up to produce silent responses in the audience which follow the obvious logic of Shylock's argument. It is here that Shylock's miserly economy with words works towards gaining audience sympathy and involvement in this justification of an inhuman act. Shakespeare, I would suggest, is showing that wrong breeds wrong, regardless of creed or race; that all people could be capable of such cruelty. Many critics have felt that this sympathy for Shylock has resulted in his character being rounded out too much in comparison to his role in the rest of the play.

Shakespeare, however, does immediately deflate any respect gained by Shylock in his next exchange with Tubal. Here the language is used in quick suggestion and reply as Tubal plays with the emotions of Shylock until he becomes demeaned almost to the point of comedy. As Tubal breaks the bad news of Jessica's prodigality, Shylock with his mechanically raw responses becomes reminiscent of the Pantalone character in the *Commedia dell'Arte*. Tubal is probably using Shylock for his own vendetta against the Christians, alternating in Shylock a sense of persecution with a sense of glee at Antonio's losses. Shylock progresses along this highway of treachery by short jerky phrases as if breathless for

revenge. This was emphasized by Sir Lawrence Olivier in Jonathan Miller's BBC production.

As a direct contrast to the emotional load on the Shylock/Tubal dialogue is the humorous speech of Launcelot Gobbo. Here Shakespeare returns to the witty banter of Love's Labour's Lost, but this time uses it in a way more closely associated with character and context. Considerable skill is displayed by Gobbo in his dialogue with Lorenzo(III.v.30-52). According to Thomas Moisan, this is dialogue designed to subvert a different type of law to that of the court: the obedience of servant to master.<sup>8</sup> When Launcelot is caught dallying with Jessica and playfully criticizing Lorenzo for converting her into a Christian, Lorenzo fires back with the information that Launcelot has caused a Moorish woman to become pregnant. After Launcelot has quibbled his way out of this accusation of ignoring race and religion, Lorenzo hopes to have the last word with:

8) Moisan, Thomas. "'Knock me here soundly': Comic Misprision and Class Consciousness in Shakespeare". Shakespeare Quarterly 42.3 (1991): 276-90.

How every fool can play upon the word! I think the best grace of wit will shortly turn into silence, and discourse grow commendable in none only but parrots.

(III.v.36-39)

This serves only to spur Launcelot on to more quibbling over preparing the table for dinner. To Lorenzo's instruction:

Will you cover then, sir?

Launcelot replies:

Not so, sir, neither, I know my duty.

(III.v.44-45)

Moisan's point is that Launcelot deliberately misunderstands his master in order to subvert the hierarchy of class while still affirming it. In the above instance he misunderstands 'cover' the table to mean 'put your hat on' which he refuses to do in the presence of his master out of respect, yet remains insolently disobedient. Even the repetition of his master's use of 'sir' seems to lend a modicum of respect to the master's use of the word to his servant. An

interesting balance is achieved between the two parties as they vie for supremacy in word play, which could well influence social status.

In addition to noting Moisan's comments on this scene, it is important to appreciate the effect that its context has in the play as a whole. Directly preceding the court scene, it seems to me that it prefigures the trial light-heartedly through the manipulation of words to win an argument and even, in a macabre sense, through the discussion which makes the audience wonder whether the meat (or the pound of flesh) will ever be put on the table! There is also the criticism of Lorenzo by Launcelot for marrying and converting a Jew. This has reverberations later in the forced conversion of Shylock to Christianity.

Linguistic control of events during the action of Shakespeare's plays is more frequently assigned to men as this would appear natural to an Elizabethan audience. Portia, in The Merchant, subverts this usual state of affairs, not only by using a disguise, but also by the manner in which she communicates with her male peers. This has attracted many feminist critics to The Merchant in recent years. In Anna Parten's article

"Re-establishing Sexual Order: The Ring Episode in The Merchant of Venice" she states:

Portia, after all, represents Shakespeare's first effort to create a comic heroine capable of controlling and directing the action that develops around her, and it is arguable that - at least from the Elizabethan point of view - he overplayed his hand.<sup>9</sup>

Portia's assertiveness is a far cry from Katherine's compliance in the last Act of The Taming of the Shrew. She must give herself away in the absence of her father and therefore at times must take on the role of that father even in the casket scene. In fact, as far as the law is concerned, she must perform the office of a man in giving herself away under a legally binding contract. When Bassanio and Gratiano leave for Venice, Portia and Nerissa tell their husbands that they are to stay at a

9) Parten, Anne. "Re-establishing Sexual Order: The Ring Episode in The Merchant of Venice". Women's Studies 9.2 (1982): 145-55. Rpt in Shakespearean Criticism 4: 356.

convent retreat. Instead, they make themselves 'honorary' men in order to go into the world and control the implementation of government. Karen Newman in her article "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in the Merchant of Venice" points out that Portia's linguistic labours in the trial scene depend:

on a knowledge of history and precedent, on logic and reasoning, and on rhetoric, all areas of education traditionally denied to women.<sup>10</sup>

Having achieved her aim of releasing Antonio and of winning the ring from Bassanio in the guise of Balthasar, it is important from the Elizabethan standpoint that she reverts to an appearance of the traditional role of subservient wife. Elizabethans were particularly afraid of the idea of a dominant wife as it was frequently linked in the popular imagination with husband-beating and cuckoldry: hence Benedick's fears associated with Beatrice in Much Ado. Portia, however,

10) Newman, Karen. "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in The Merchant of Venice". Shakespeare Quarterly 38.1 (1987): 19-33, 30.



retires from a threatening position when she allows the ring back to Bassanio through Antonio. Even so, a close examination of the text will reveal that she still refers to Belmont as "my" house, and is very much in control as she informs Lorenzo and Jessica of their allowance, and Antonio of his sea ventures' success. Having cast off her assumption of male clothing and linguistic mannerisms, she emerges as autonomous in her femininity.

Language is also seen as the medium of control in another sphere: that of accuser and accused. M. Lindsay Kaplin in his article "Slander for Slander" explains the way in which justice was administered in the Renaissance era.<sup>11</sup> The crown would hear reports, either from appointed investigators or private individuals, of the disloyal or illegal conduct of subjects. Slandorous evidence would be gathered until the accused individual would either have to prove his innocence or suffer the penalty for the crime. Punishments were administered as public entertainment in order to shame criminals and to act as a deterrent for future offenders.

11) Kaplin, M. Lindsay. "Slander for Slander in Measure for Measure". Renaissance Drama 21 (1990): 23-54.

Kaplin points out that the problem with this system was that fictitious slander could be used for private revenge and the method of public punishment depended upon the loyalty of the populace at large for its intended effect. If the ruler was seen to be cruel or over-enthusiastic in the administration of justice, then the whole purpose of public prosecution would work against the crown rather than for it. Those who accused must themselves have acquired a spotless reputation to avoid counter-accusation. A modern illustration of the dangers of this type of system can be seen in Arthur Miller's The Crucible.

The Merchant, I suggest, contains many instances of good report or, conversely, slander and accusation. Bassanio is enamored of Portia and sings her praises to Antonio in terms of her reputation. She is described as the golden fleece whose report attracts many Jasons in quest of her. However, when the Prince of Morocco comes to choose a casket, he finds:

'All that glisters is not gold;

. . . . .

Gilded tombs do worms enfold'.

(II.vii.65 & 69)

From this it is clear that reputation can be based upon fact or fiction, it can be merited or undeserved.

In the case of Shylock, it is clear that the Jew has no love of Christians from the outset. When Bassanio offers him Antonio to be guarantor of his debt, Shylock must consider Antonio's reputation. He admits that

Antonio is a good man

but qualifies this immediately with

My meaning in saying he is a good man is to have you understand me that he is sufficient [economically for the bond].

(I.iii.13-14)

Soon afterward it becomes apparent that Antonio has publically slandered Shylock in the past by calling him a dog. A situation is therefore set up by Antonio's suggestion that if his reputation to repay money is found to be false, then Shylock can with more justice exact the penalty. As this challenge comes to fruition and Shylock asks for the penalty agreed upon by law, the cruelty of this punishment turns against Shylock and he

exposes himself to an accusation of heartlessness. He has also attempted by slander to subvert the power of the governing party and must therefore pay the penalty. Here Shakespeare inverts the situation by showing the cruelty of the Christians. They spare the Jew's life, but strip him of all identity in the confiscation of his riches and the forced conversion of his religion. In Jonathan Miller's BBC production, this point was graphically illustrated by the dumbfounded gazes of the Christians one to another at the sound of Shylock's wail of despair.

From this evidence it seems clear to me that Shakespeare was becoming interested in the use of language as a tool of social control, and this is further explored in Much Ado. As previously mentioned, Much Ado has many features of its plot-line in common with the earlier play Romeo and Juliet and therefore makes an interesting target for comparison. The similarities in the events within these two plays, and also their sources, is striking. Features in common include a masked Ball, a friar who hides the young female lover by feigned death, a planned wedding, a balcony scene on or off stage as an important part of the action, a tomb scene and the idea of death by grief.

Both plays also involve a feud. These two plays, therefore, seem to form a complementary pair particularly in the light of their different, yet merging genres.

That Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy whilst Much Ado is a comedy suggests that the later play could have been viewed as a reworking of the earlier one. Shakespeare, taking the same type of scenes in both plays and dealing with a similar subject, may have been making a restorative comedy of the preceding tragedy. They are united, moreover, by a leaning towards each other's genre. Romeo and Juliet contains many of the themes and aspects of comedy even though it is normally classed as a tragedy. The Ball, the wedding, the theme of love, the music and the bandying wit of Mercutio all create a lighter atmosphere than we might expect from that of tragedy. In contrast, Much Ado has several elements of tragedy in its sensational church scene where the purposed bride is slandered and denounced. Her pitiful rejection could well have led on creatively to something like the fearful madness of Ophelia in Hamlet. Another tragic element in Much Ado lurks in the serious

exhortation of Beatrice that Benedick should "Kill Claudio".<sup>12</sup>

Much Ado and Romeo and Juliet are also similar, I believe, in the extent to which the imagery creates variation upon a central motif in terms of poetic depth. Taking the same subject of animals for the imagery in both plays, Shakespeare reworked the imagery of the former into that of the later play in order to suit its theme. In contrast to the aggression and carnality of animal metaphors in Romeo and Juliet, they are often used in Much Ado to depict the game of love, but this time it is from the baiting and trapping of animals that Shakespeare forged his images.

The bait used to trap the lovers is the use of words: a food which is either wholesome or poisoned. Benedick described Claudio's words once he has fallen 'in love' as "a very fantastical banquet, just so many strange dishes" (II.iii.17). Beatrice and Benedick are

12) Shakespeare, William. Much Ado About Nothing. Ed. F.H.Mares. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1988. All further references will be to this edition.

brought together by the wholesome bait of an underlying truth in that they really do love each other even though they will not allow themselves to recognise it. Benedick is described by Claudio as a "hid-fox" when he waits in the arbour to overhear his conversation with the Prince. Beatrice, in Hero's words, "like a lapwing runs/ Close by the ground" (III.i.24-25) so that she can gain a hiding place from which she can hear the conversation about herself. Once they realise that they both feel the same, then they stick to each other with faith regardless of what anyone else might say.

Hero and Claudio are less constant because they do not have this faith. They are easy victims to the slanderous lies of Don John. When Claudio does eventually learn the truth from Borachio, he says "I have drunk poison while he uttered it"(V.i.215). In other words, he realises that he has been baited with poison by this man's slanders. Like Leander, he is drowned when the winds of tragedy blow out the guiding torch of his faith in Hero. Both Much Ado and Romeo and Juliet feature a contrast of the certainty of love and the confusion of appearances in society. Anything which is the currency of society, be it language or money, is

liable to be viewed as a potential poison.

In Much Ado, I feel that the difference between the planes of love and society are emphasized by the beast imagery which refers to the animal nature of love in the context of society's couplings. Benedick is particularly afraid of being 'cuckolded' by any woman he might marry. Both the idea of beasts as carnal and that of faithlessness is included in this metaphor. 'Cuckolding', according to the Oxford English Dictionary, comes from the ancient belief that if the spurs of an emasculated cock were transplanted onto its comb, they would grow into horns. The connotation is that Benedick is afraid of being unmanned and put to public shame by a wife's lack of faithfulness: to be transgressed against in this way is to be made into a sexless beast.

Another type of imagery prevalent in Much Ado, particularly in the scenes involving Dogberry and the Watch, is drawn from clothing. There is a clear dichotomy within both Much Ado and the earlier Romeo and Juliet comprising the reality of a situation and its appearance through words. In Much Ado, conventional society thrives upon verbal constructs, perhaps even



more so than in Verona. Messina is a town which relies heavily upon appearances as its social currency. Shakespeare emphasizes this aspect of the town by using fashion as part of the play's imagery. Clothing images are repeated frequently in other plays. They are used as an indication of empty social rank in The Tempest when Trinculo and company are baited by a rack of fancy raiments, and in Macbeth when the borrowed robes of kingship sit uncertainly on the usurper's shoulders. The malais of shallow appearances in Messina, however, extend far beyond the changing fashions denounced by Borachio. Words are the clothes of ideas, and it is through words that an artificial reality is created. I consider that only those with a particular maturity and strength of conviction can see through the clothing of words to the truth or falsity beyond. An integral part of the verbal action portrayed in Messina is the use of deception.

Given the emphasis on words themselves in Much Ado, Shakespeare chose to write largely in prose (approximately 72%) in order to make the play seem more 'wordy' and to speed up the rate of delivery.<sup>13</sup> This

13) Harbage, ed.: The Complete Works. 31.

lends itself well to the Beatrice/Benedick scenes where quick responses and flashes of wit are truly in character. Imagery set within prose is necessarily less musical and expansive. Here Shakespeare excluded classical or heavenly imagery in favour of down-to-earth details which would directly relate to the local action of the play. This makes an interesting contrast to his previous style in The Merchant. Shakespeare seems to have taken the example of his previous witty exchanges in Love's Labour's Lost and matured that style by applying what he had learnt about blending logical argument and character in The Merchant.

Dogberry and the Watch are one group of characters who undermine this logicity. Shakespeare extended the work he did with Launcelot Gobbo in The Merchant by presenting the confusion of these clownish characters in Much Ado. Dogberry is necessarily a fool in order to obfuscate his submission of the evidence against Borachio and Don John. Like Launcelot Gobbo, he uses misunderstanding to subvert the normal rules of communication. Keir Elam in his book Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse infers that language can become comically conspicuous by a suspension of normal

referentiality.<sup>14</sup> I think this is clearly the case in Dogberry's scenes where malapropisms are hilariously nonsensical. It reveals a lack of control of expression through language and thus a lack of control in influencing events through communication with others. The effectiveness of such communication becomes random and events are left to chance.

One example of Dogberry's talent to confuse the issue occurs when he requests audience of Leonato to report discovery of the plot against Hero. He is so long getting to the point that Leonato exclaims:

Neighbours, you are tedious.

Dogberry: It pleases your worship to say so, but we are the poor duke's officers, but truly, for mine own part, if I were as tedious as a king, I could find in my heart to bestow it all of your worship.

(III.v.14-17)

14) Elam, Keir. Shakespeare's Universe of Discourse: Language Games in the Comedies. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1984. 14.

I suggest that here Dogberry, like Gobbo, is reversing the roles and subverting the usual master/servant hierarchy. Well might he question his inferiors later: "Dost thou not suspect my place?" (IV.ii.61) Unlike Gobbo he is not doing this consciously, but the new meanings emerge accidentally from his lips producing an added irony. Of course, the result of all this 'tediousness' is that the important message about Hero does not get through. The accent falls upon the form of the message rather than its essential content.

Apart from the humorous malapropisms of Dogberry, many other different types of language are used in Much Ado to express the love of Claudio for Hero and the love of Beatrice and Benedick. When Claudio sees Hero on his return to Messina, he professes love in conventional style in keeping with the rehabilitation of the warrior. Claudio proclaims love because it is correct to do so at such a juncture. He sees an attractive and eligible girl. This is ascertained by her reputation for modesty and her financial and social standing. I think it is important to note, however, in keeping with the general prose style of the play, that at no time does Claudio resort to verse in his expressions of love. It is

clearly a love born of the world. Alexander Leggatt stresses the importance of formality versus naturalism in the linguistic expression of characters in Much Ado.<sup>15</sup>

Claudio is conspicuous in his use of conventional forms which emphasizes his care for the social side of life. According to Leggatt, two great scenes in the play depend very much upon Claudio's formality. He sees the wedding scene as representative of the dangers and the mourning scene at the tomb as representative of the strengths of convention.

Beatrice and Benedick, too, have a worldly love, but I believe this is expressed in strikingly different and natural language compared to that which is used between Romeo and Juliet. It is an entirely fresh portrayal of two lovers and the language they use. The relationship between Beatrice and Benedick is hammered out in realistic and deeply psychological terms with much humour to sugar the bitter pill. It is a discourse which puts an entirely new interpretation upon the classical

15) Leggatt, Alexander. Shakespeare's Comedy of Love. London: Methuen, 1974. 151-67.

concept of the dear enemy. Whereas Romeo and Juliet are lovers across the feud of opposed families, Beatrice and Benedick are lovers in spite of the fact that they are locked into a feuding situation themselves. In order to convey this, Shakespeare used the sparkling wit characteristic of playful sparring. Beatrice never reaches the shrewishness of Katherine in The Taming or the manipulative control of Cleopatra, yet it is in her relationship with Benedick that Shakespeare attained a climax in joyous repartee. The wit of Beatrice and Benedick is so enlivening that it overshadows the main plot comprising the melodramatic story of Claudio and Hero. Considerable tension between the two plots helps to buoy up the play in spite of its tragic elements.

Although Romeo and Juliet illustrates an absorption on the part of the author in extending the forms of verse, Much Ado displays an intense interest in the workings of language as a tool of communication. Even the plot is generated by an analysis of how the temporality of speech can mean the difference between a character gaining knowledge or missing it completely.

Timing and chance play a large part in the frequent situations where conversations are overheard. When Don

Pedro suggests that he woo Hero for Claudio himself, he is overheard by two people: firstly, by a servant of Antonio who repeats the story to his master which eventually filters through to Leonato, and secondly, by Borachio who repeats the story to Don John. Thus the impetus for good and bad are set in motion at the same time. The characters are simply made to influence events with the help of chance opportunities or by the contrivance of baiting someone to overhear a conversation at the right time. Many chance occurrences are a result of a message, either written or verbal, which goes astray.

Another interesting facet of this play is the action of fictitious accounts upon the 'real' world of Messina. According to Richard Henze in his article "Deception in Much Ado About Nothing", lies perpetrated by Don John which bring about the near downfall of Hero are counterbalanced by the Friar's well-intentioned lie about Hero's death.<sup>16</sup> Deception is also used to bring

16) Henze, Richard. "Deception in Much Ado About Nothing". Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 11 (1971): 187-201.

together Beatrice and Benedick when neither of them will admit the truth to themselves that they love each other despite of their verbal warfare. Strangely here, deception becomes the servant of truth.

Deception and truth are also mixed in some of the overheard conversations which take the form of covert messages to the one who is listening. In Act II Sc.3 Benedick is beginning to soften towards the idea that he too may marry some as yet unknown lady, when the Prince enters with Claudio. The Prince requests a particular song about male infidelity which, I think, prepares and reassures Benedick further that he may well be in control of any future relationship rather than being a victim. Then follows a conversation between Claudio and the Prince about Beatrice's passion for Benedick. Of course, as stated, this conversation is built upon a true situation even if Beatrice does not recognise it herself, and it is something that Benedick is particularly pleased to hear in spite of himself. Therefore, like Juliet's seeming acquiescence to marriage with Paris in order to fit society's and her father's expectations of her, this intrigue is well-timed and well-placed as far as the affections of



its recipient are concerned.

Similarly, in Act III Sc 1, Beatrice is subjected to verbal intrigue when she is fully ripe for it. She is invited to listen by Hero who sends off Margaret to tell her that the conversation in the orchard is all about her. This ensures that she is ready and willing to actively listen to anything. She has been baited into the trap in keeping with the play's animal hunting imagery. Consequently, she is ready to receive the criticism which is launched at her. Again, a modicum of truth is used in the message that she hears:

Disdain and scorn ride sparkling in her eyes,  
Misprizing what they look on, and her wit  
Values itself so highly, that to her  
All matter else seems weak.

(III.1.51-54).

Hero goes on to say that to be "from all fashions / As Beatrice is, cannot be commendable" (III.1.72-73). This indicates that she is criticized for being unconventional and not fitting in to the society of Messina. Benedick's love is held out to her as being desirable, but then, in teasing manner, Hero threatens

to scotch Benedick's affections by "some honest slanders"(1.84) at Beatrice's expense.

This foreshadows the slandering of Hero herself by Don John to his brother and Claudio. It is made doubly interesting by the fact that not only is the besmirching of Hero's name achieved by a verbal message, but also by a visual representation in the offstage balcony scene. This balcony scene is entirely different from the one in Romeo and Juliet for many reasons. Importantly, it is reported rather than acted on stage. Geoffrey Bullough states:

It is truly remarkable that Shakespeare does not present the scene in which the hero sees his 'rival' climbing to his betrothed's window; for such a scene is found in all the analogues . . . . Malicious cause and misinterpreting effect are more important than the scene itself could be.<sup>17</sup>

17) Bullough, Geoffrey. Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare. 8 vols. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul. 1957-1975. Vol.2: 76.

In this reworking of the balcony scene, the audience is now put into the position of many of the characters in the play itself. Instead of being allowed to sympathize with Claudio in seeing what he sees, the audience must rely upon the uncertainties of a verbal account. The emphasis is taken away from the dramatization of the incident itself, and is placed upon the reactions of those duped by and victim to the trick plus the reactions of bystanders such as Beatrice and Benedick. The balcony scene here creates division amongst the lovers, not consummation. The young male protagonist in Much Ado is a passive observer rather than an active wooer, the secrecy is replaced by public show and the young lady is there in name only.

Conversely, Juliet's haunting words in Romeo and Juliet indicate that it is only Romeo's name which needs to be banished from their meeting:

What's in a name? That which we call a rose  
 By any other name would smell as sweet;  
 So Romeo would, were he not Romeo called,  
 Retain that dear perfection which he owes  
 Without that title.

(II.ii.43-47)

I suggest that the two plays provide an ironic contrast with regard to naming in the balcony scenes. Juliet wishes Romeo's name to be changed because to do so would be to rid him of society's ties without losing his essential identity. Claudio misperceives Margaret as Hero because she is called by the latter name and he is at the time particularly concerned with her behaviour towards him in relation to society. These two situations are present in the sources of Brooke and Bandello respectively, but Shakespeare emphasizes the importance of the name. This concern with naming re-emerges in the wedding scene of Much Ado where Claudio reveals his confusion brought about by two contradictory concepts of his bride expressed by only one name. When Hero asks why she is so accused, the answer is remarkable:

Claudio: To make you answer truly to your name.

Hero: Is it not Hero? Who can blot that name  
With any just reproach?

Claudio: Marry that can Hero;  
Hero itself can blot out Hero's virtue.

(IV.i.73-76)

It is only in the final wedding scene that Shakespeare provides the antidote to this confusion, but as Carol Cook points out, it is never really resolved for Claudio.<sup>18</sup> He greets the discovery of his contracted bride's true identity with:

Claudio:        Another Hero!

Hero:            Nothing certainer:  
                  One Hero died defiled, but I do live,  
                  And surely as I live, I am a maid.

(V.iv.62-64)

The failure of the friar's plan to make Claudio realise spontaneously Hero's true worth shows that Claudio is unable to integrate his two concepts of Hero and find forgiveness for her through love. She remains a silent cipher who must represent the chaste wife in society. Claudio, too, according to William O. Scott

18) Cook, Carol. "The Sign and Semblance of her Honor: Reading Gender Difference in Much Ado About Nothing". Publications of The Modern Language Association of America 101 (1986): 186-202, 198-99.

is left living a lie with a false concept of himself.<sup>19</sup> Scott suggests that the search for true identity after a mistaken way of living is one of the main preoccupations of comedy. He says that the concepts of name, a place in society and self-definition through the reflection of a loved one are all important aspects of the search for identity. Language is the filter through which all these concepts are realizable. All still hangs upon name and the reputation of that name in society. In this play's reported balcony scene, Shakespeare shows his concern with theatricality as a medium of deception and with the power of words in the construction of a seeming reality. These factors have a considerable bearing on the language in which any play is written.

Another aspect of public roles makes a significant contribution to the intricacies of both plays: that of gender and how it is made manifest in communication. Swordplay was a particularly male pursuit and carried

19) Scott, William O. The God of Arts: Ruling Ideas in Shakespeare's Comedies. Lawrence: U of Kansas Publications, 1977. 1-2.

with it the concept of masculine honour. Love was particularly the province of the female and, again, carried the concept of honour in pre-marital chastity or marital faithfulness. When Romeo is infatuated with Rosaline, this seems to rob him of all the ability to indulge in masculine pursuits. Later, when he falls in love with Juliet, he is still able to speak in metaphoric verse, yet has recovered his ability to answer back to Mercutio's bawdy wit in like tone. Unfortunately, he also recovers his ability to fight and it is this masculine trait which produces the death-dealing conflict in the play. Just before killing Tybalt, he complains:

O sweet Juliet,  
Thy beauty hath made me effeminate,  
And in my temper softened valour's steel!

(III.i.104-6)

Gender roles also play a major part in Much Ado About Nothing. As previously mentioned, Benedick has a considerable fear of becoming a cuckold if he marries. At the outset he is depicted as a valiant man on the field of battle. This puts him high up in the stakes of masculinity. It is this very factor, however, which

makes it harder for him to adjust to the softer requirements of peace without a fear of losing all to a feminine pose of love. Claudio, I believe, makes the transition more easily because he is within the safety of a strong sense of the conventional. He values correct behaviour above all else and it is correct to think of healing the wounds of war by the establishment of a family. His love for Hero is a conventional pose, but a practical one. Benedick, on the other hand, is outside convention and so, like Romeo when the testing time comes, has only his own faith and judgement to rely on.

When Benedick recognizes his love for Beatrice, he tries to express it by the traditional melancholic pose in the writing of poetry. He complains that he is "truly turned/ over and over"(V.ii.26-27) in love, just like Leander, the good swimmer, who drowned. It is not this, however, that the wise Beatrice wants of him in love. She wants him to perform the office of a man in challenging Claudio. He must prove his love in a masculine way and even brave possible death for her sake. Beatrice herself reveals masculine elements in her suggestion that Hero should be avenged. She foreshadows Lady Macbeth in her wish to be a man so that she can do a man's work and in her ruthless



determination to actively achieve her goal. Where male and female must lean towards each other in order to make a successful communicative relationship, Beatrice is wise enough to do most of the leaning in view of Benedick's fears. She reassures him that he will not lose his masculinity by marrying her. A balance is thus achieved without too great a compromise on either side.

Carol Cook discusses the use of language by both sexes. Wit is regarded as a male attribute in its ability to stab and wound. This is evident in the characters' attitudes to the wit and sparring of conversation. Silence is the female's passive attribute which leaves her vulnerable to being misread. Beatrice, in her rather male volubility of wit, is less of a threat to men than a possibility of emasculation into silence. This would carry with it all the connotations of becoming a misunderstood victim. It is for this reason that Benedick likens the image of his married self to a sign hanging above an inn door. Cook states:

In becoming a cuckold, a man relinquishes his role as the teller of jokes, the manipulator, reader, and subject of language, and falls instead to the woman's position as the object of

jokes, the silent, legible sign . . . . silent herself, she becomes a cipher, the target of unconscious fantasies and fears, and is dangerously vulnerable to the representations and misrepresentations of men.<sup>20</sup>

Both The Merchant of Venice and Much Ado About Nothing seem to grow out of Shakespeare's deeper interest in the theatrical possibilities of language. Whereas the imagery in The Merchant is reminiscent of that in the Dream and Romeo and Juliet in its expansiveness, being drawn from the classical world, the sea and the world of music, the imagery of Much Ado is toned down to the everyday level of animals and clothes in order to better agree with the pettiness of Messinan society. Language in The Merchant is frequently based upon the logic of argument, and great development is made in the use of prose for the dramatic and tragic character of Shylock. In Much Ado logic is taken even further in the delightful banterings of Beatrice and Benedick, perhaps Shakespeare's highest achievement in sparkling wit.

20) Cook: 189.

Above all, however, there is a concern in both plays with the power of language to control others and subvert the conventional hierarchy. This can be seen in the way that women must use masculine modes of expression in order to gain credibility and autonomy, and in the manner in which social hierarchy is shown to be fragile when exposed to simple confusion. Added to this is the power of accusation whether based on factual evidence or fiction, and the ability of words to reverse the situation so that accuser and accused are seen to be two sides of the same balance.

After reaching these conclusions about the malleability of language, it is no surprise that Shakespeare went on to question its reliability as a tool of true expression and its capacity to evince reality. The one great fear, which must have occurred to Shakespeare, is that once language is isolated as a symbolic system separate from its external referentiality, then all else, in both psychological and external worlds, becomes chaos and void.

CHAPTER 3SOMETHING OF NOTHING

'Nothing' is a word which occurs frequently in Shakespeare's two great tragedies: Hamlet (approximately 1601) and King Lear (approximately 1605). The word had become prevalent in as early a play as A Midsummer Night's Dream, and occurs in a particularly dramatic manner when Romeo stops Mercutio's delightful eulogy on Queen Mab in mid-stream:

Romeo: Peace, peace, Mercutio, peace!  
Thou talk'st of nothing.

Mercutio: True, I talk of dreams,  
Which are the children of an idle brain,  
Begot of nothing but vain fantasy,  
Which is as thin of substance as the air,  
And more inconstant than the wind . . .

Benvolio: This wind you talk of blows us from  
ourselves.

(I.iv.95-104)

It is this inner world of dreams and its relation to reality which achieves paramount importance in Shakespeare's two greatest tragedies. Language itself, as the connection between a blind storm of the psychologically unknown and the outer world of reality, comes under close scrutiny in these plays. The limits of language are tested to the extreme in a questioning of the power of words to express fully the personal psychological world. Accuracy of expression presents a challenge as to how detailed that expression can be made before words become inadequate. The question presented by Hamlet and King Lear is how much of language (something) can be made out of a non-linguistic inner consciousness (nothing).

The mystery of the great unknown that pervades Hamlet is introduced by the appearance of the late king's ghost. First Horatio, and then Hamlet, enjoin the phantom to speak. It is a visual representation of that part of humanity purported to live on after death. Hamlet, in requesting to hear the ghost speak, is seeking a direct communication framed in the medium of language from the spirit. The ghost's preliminary silences serve to deepen the mystery and to raise the question of whether this spiritual being can or will

speak at all. When the ghost does eventually communicate with Hamlet, it is to tell him that the secrets of the grave are not for mortal ears. Death itself seems to be a tempest, a purgatory, which cannot be expressed in words.

Such proximity to the ineffable serves only to stimulate Hamlet to question everything in terms of the universal antithesis of life and death. When the ghost does speak out to him in words, it poisons life with their utterance, in much the same way that Claudius murders Hamlet's father by a corrosive liquid poured into the ear. Hamlet's moral dilemma of whether to become a murderer himself by taking revenge or to bear all insults with an intellectual stoicism intensifies this questioning.

In The Question of Hamlet, Harry Levin stresses the importance of the question as a grammatical construction in the play.<sup>1</sup> Levin points to the large number of questions in the play and their quality of being

1) Levin, Harry. The Question of Hamlet. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1959. 19 and 69.

unanswerable. He notes 70 question marks within 322 lines of the graveyard scene alone. I think this high concentration is significant in a setting with the gravedigger half in and half out of the grave. Another particularly pointed stress on the activity of questioning itself, says Levin, occurs in the "To be or not to be" soliloquy with "that is the question"(III.i.56).<sup>2</sup> The rhythm and structure of this first line lends itself to an emphasis on the activity of questioning. This is surely true of the play as a whole: questions are frequently answered by questions and the quibbling nature of Hamlet's language leaves the other characters baffled as to his meaning.

I believe that it is this bafflement which gives the play its universal quality. Hamlet's questions are those which can be answered only by a god. As the words of prayer ascend to heaven (and, as Claudius comments, these are useless without sincerity) it is humanity's hope that they will be answered. The answer, however,

2) Shakespeare, William. Hamlet. Ed. Philip Edwards. New Cambridge ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1985. All further references will be to this edition.

must be in non-linguistic form leaving those who pray baffled as to whether it amounts to something certain or nothing at all. This begs the question as to whether words themselves are useless if they have only a great emptiness behind them, and whether a human soul amounts to anything at all if it is merely a manifestation of an unintelligible god. This universal question of what is the nothingness central to consciousness gives the play its baffling quality, as indeed it portrays in its language the absence of any firm answer about the terms of existence.

Thomas McAlindon in his Shakespeare and Decorum describes Hamlet as "An exceptionally mimetic play" and goes on to say "it enacts its own meaning, exemplifies its own moral".<sup>3</sup> Hamlet must formulate some means of a rational solution to his moral problem with the help of "wild and whirling words" (I.v.133) and others must try to understand him through language which he uses to obscure rather than to reveal. The uncertainties and shifting meanings of words are displayed by his quick

3) McAlindon, Thomas. Shakespeare and Decorum. London: Macmillan, 1973. 44-79, 79.



wit and punning manner. It is language undermining itself until it seems that there can be no definitive meaning behind any word or phrase. To those characters who take a stable meaning for granted, I think there is little wonder that he appears mad. Hamlet's words, although deliberately contrived to fit an antic disposition, are in some ways truly a reflection of the turmoil within.

What does enable an audience to follow the workings of Hamlet's mind to so great an extent is the series of soliloquies which punctuate the first four Acts. Nigel Alexander sees them as inner debates, each of which is worked out later in a corresponding dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Alexander describes the first two soliloquies as having a bearing on memory, the second two as being about action and conscience and the fifth and sixth as being the reflection of a passionate wish to kill the king. These make up the traditional Elizabethan terms of the three powers of the soul: Memory, Understanding and Will. The presentation of inner debate in this way does not run

4) Alexander, Nigel. Poison, Play and Duel. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1971. 62-68.

smoothly as a rational progression. In many performances of the play, large sections of the text are cut. Many of the soliloquies are contradictory, particularly the fifth and sixth of the series which take the tone of an overriding lust for revenge: "Now could I drink hot blood"(III.ii.351). Shakespeare, here, has attempted to chart the thinking processes of his major character by highlighting the different arguments Hamlet presents to himself. A different whole is created by the juxtaposition of all seven soliloquies as a series with all their contradictory forces, yet because the character himself is portrayed as not fully knowing his own mind, then neither can the audience fully know the mind of Hamlet. No absolute is offered in the form of a finite character portrayal or in the form of a standard by which to measure Hamlet's moral deliberations. The audience is forced to fall back upon its own experience and moral criteria, its own inner debate about life and death.

When Shakespeare came to write King Lear, a few years later, he carried this reworking of the representation of a mind in relation to language one step further. In Lear there are few soliloquies, and those are given to Edmund. The audience does not gain

the closeness with Lear that it does with Hamlet. There is no direct communication of this type, yet Shakespeare shows the apparently uncensored workings of Lear's mind through his madness. According to Paul Jorgensen in his book Lear's Self-Discovery, Lear hardly ever rises to a true dialogue with other characters.<sup>5</sup> He states his wishes and expects them to be obeyed. It is as if he must work out the psychological storm within himself before he can truly communicate with others. Even when in conversation with the Fool, he shows evidence of his own unspoken thoughts continuing below the surface. One statement connects with another several lines back as if the current of thought has continued submerged behind the brooding facade that is Lear in the early stages of the play. The audience is given only glimpses of what is going on in Lear's mind rather than any attempt at a cohesive exposition. Cohesion is, however, present in the sum of these insights and this remains true even when Lear becomes totally irrational during the storm.

The effect, in my view, is a duality of language: a

5) Jorgensen, Paul. Lear's Self-Discovery. Berkeley: U of California P, 1967. 69-82.

random surface with little relation to logic. This obscures major themes in Lear's thinking, but they arise again and again in different forms. As Lear meets Poor Tom, the image of his daughters' cruelty bursts out from the subconscious though not in any way related to the actual situation except by the factor of homelessness, lack of shelter:

Lear: Didst thou give all to thy daughters? And art  
thou come to this?

(III.iv.48-49)<sup>6</sup>

The connections Lear makes in his madness are different from those which govern rationality. There is clearly a sub-text indicated of which the audience sees only a part. This makes Lear a more believable character in the drama than he would have been had Shakespeare attempted to portray madness by totally rational language.

I think Lear's abandonment of rationality's logical

6) Shakespeare, William. King Lear. Ed. E.A.M. Colman. Challis Shakespeare. Sydney: Sydney U P, 1982. All further references will be to this edition.

forms is much greater than Hamlet's. Instead of using words in a fairly normal context and displaying their shifting unreliability, Lear breaks down any relationship between language and external reality. It is his inner reality which prompts directly what connections he will make with the outside world and this is reflected in his language. Yet Lear, like Ophelia, seems to convey some "matter" in his madness. His disintegration is not total in the storm scenes because a new logic, the logic of insight, takes over where the accepted correspondences between language and reality are abandoned. Lear retains this consistent force throughout his mad scenes.

One reason for his consistency is an ongoing questioning of the accepted values of life. Winifred Nowottny's article "Lear's Questions" enumerates his concerns as "the nature of his own status and identity, the nature of knowing, the nature of need, the nature of the gods" and indirectly "the problem of the inherent guilt of the flesh".<sup>7</sup> These are the questions provoked

7) Nowottny, Winifred. "Lear's Questions". Shakespeare Survey 10 (1957): 90-97, 91.

by his own abdication of power and the subsequent cruelty of his elder daughters. Stripped of all the luxuries and emblems of status which differentiate mankind from animals, Lear examines his identity to find it based upon the outward trappings he had lost. When he is confronted by the image of Poor Tom as a "poor forked creature" it becomes clear that man's only difference from the animal kingdom is his ability to communicate with others and to love them. Language, therefore, becomes again the great testing ground for humanity.

Lear proceeds to strip himself not only of his clothes, but also of the normal faculty of communication. I believe that he becomes unaccommodated man, not only in the abandonment of power and followers, but also in the breaking down of the correspondences between words and reality. Nowotny says that where Hamlet seeks the knowledge of existence through the medium of words from a reluctant ghost, Lear enacts an extremity without language, entering purgatory himself in order to gain knowledge by direct experience. Lear gains the stature of an Oedipus. His hitherto blind trust in words to substitute for "the thing itself" (III.iv.109) in the initial test of his daughters' love

rebounds upon him when the power of language is removed to reveal what lies beneath. It is then that he "suffers into truth" (Aeschylus) and realises the extent of Cordelia's love and the emptiness of words.

It is Cordelia's utterance of the word "nothing" at the beginning of the play which causes Lear's rejection of her. He takes the word to be a total absence of love. To him the word 'nothing' does not mean, but is, absence. Sigurd Burckhardt contrasts this sharply with the beginning of Gloucester's parallel plot.<sup>8</sup> When Gloucester asks to see what is in Edmund's hand, his reply is: "Nothing, my lord" (I.ii.31). Gloucester is the exact opposite to Lear in that he relies solely upon his ability to decipher non-verbal clues rather than upon language. He will not take anyone on faith. Therefore, when faced with the word 'nothing', Gloucester is bound to investigate further to his cost. That cost is the physical putting out of his eyes which is displayed graphically on stage. Henceforward, he must

8) Burckhardt, Sigurd. Shakespearean Meanings. New Jersey: Princeton U P, 1968. 237-59, 242.

rely almost exclusively on words to find his place in the world. This is memorably portrayed in Edgar's description of the cliff at Dover. Gloucester believes in it so totally that he attempts to end his life by jumping over it.

Lear pays for his own Hubris by learning the real meaning of nothing at the play's shattering conclusion. He regains his sanity in the love of Cordelia only to be fully aware and ripe for the coming of this terrible epiphany. In the storm, words had been used in a totally different way to illustrate a deeper psychic reality. In the end, words do fail Lear and he is left only with a universalized primal scream or howl. This terrible ending is one of the most harrowing moments in literature: it is the point at which linguistic expression can go no further. It is not surprising that Shakespeare turned to a more mythical style with regeneration as its subject in later plays.

Hamlet and King Lear are two plays in which the way language is used directly reflects the attitude to language within the subject matter of the plays. In this way they are metalinguistic. In Hamlet, Prufrock and Language, Zulfikar Ghose remarks that sixteen out of



twenty scenes in Hamlet begin with reference to "someone's anxiety to speak or to hear or to want to know what the words mean".<sup>9</sup> There is a constant preoccupation with the use of words. Claudius demonstrates his attitude to speech early in the play when he explains away his over-hasty marriage by the use of oxymoron. He forces opposites together in language in order to denote a similar melding of opposites in reality, to show that it is possible without being outrageous:

With mirth in funeral and with dirge in marriage.

(I.iii.12)

Polonius similarly uses language to manipulate others, even going so far as to use fictional slander against his son through a spy in order (hopefully) to be contradicted. There is a stress on the political use of language throughout the play especially by means of these two characters.

Absurdity in language is also an important facet of

9) Ghose, Zulfikar. Hamlet, Prufrock and Language. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1978. 31.

the play. Osric, who appears in the fifth Act when Hamlet has become much more straightforward in his utterances, provides a telling contrast by using the fanciful embellishments of the court to an extreme. Hamlet is quick to pick this up and turn it to mockery by outspeaking Osric in the same mode. He also uses this strategy when confronted by the gravedigger's obtuse logic and deliberate misunderstandings in the graveyard scene. Here the nothingness of what lies behind language is exposed by the unearthing of Yorick's skull. This is perhaps the most memorable image associated with Hamlet, as is the blasted heath in conjunction with King Lear. As Hamlet remembers the physicality and personality of the jester, the quintessence of transitory life and communication, the audience along with Hamlet is confronted by the fact of the empty skull. I feel it is an emblem not only of death, but of the passing of language and even memory. What is left is a void.

What the skull contains within life is the means of processing reality through language. A person may have a firm internal appreciation of the outer world, an unreliable version of reality which touches it at certain points of reference, or a complete fiction with

no relation to the world. All this depends upon the relation between an individual's perception of reality and its correspondence with words. I think it is the latter alternative of a complete fiction which constitutes interesting possibilities in relation to Lear. Here, it leads to the total breakdown of language due to its non-referentiality. If it means nothing, then there is nothing. In Hamlet, the possibility of self-referential language as fiction is explored in parallel to reality. If an ordered closed world of fiction can be created with the illusion of viability, then it may be possible to parallel events in the outer world of reality and thereby learn how to control it. This would be a form of creating, or writing, one's own life.

Hamlet attempts to do precisely that. The play is rife with references to the mind as a book upon which life and knowledge may be inscribed as a system of signs. Hamlet, when subject to his father's command, vows that from henceforth nothing else will interfere with its inscription in "the book and volume" (I.v.103) of his brain. Jonathan Goldberg in his article "Hamlet's Hand" describes the importance of references to the written word in Hamlet and of the frequent use of the

word "hand". The human character becomes "a locus of inscription". Goldberg traces the link between the two meanings of the word "character" to a common Greek root. The same word could mean "to sharpen or brand" with its connotations of character-building or it could refer to the sharpening or branding instrument, in this case, language. It is thus easy to see the artistic logic behind Shakespeare's stress upon words being engraved onto the mind as if by hand.

Other examples occur when Horatio describes the ghost to be as like the dead king as Horatio's own two hands are similar, and Hamlet is at great pains to disguise his hand (in the sense of handwriting) in his letters to the English king to bring about the deaths of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. In fact Hamlet disguises his own elaborate style by the plain and simple style of authority; a fashion which has all but taken over today with the advent of the typewriter and computer printer. Goldberg comments:

the fair hand is legible, but its very legibility means that it cannot be owned as a mark of individuality. It represents a transcendent authority and appears to be

de-corporealized, moving in language but not through an individual's body.<sup>10</sup>

An extension of the hand is also the weapon. This provides a link between words and actions: the mouth, the ear and the hand culminate in the sword, another instrument of cutting or engraving leading to death. There is reference to the "desp'rate hand" of Ophelia in taking her own life even though hers was not a death by sword. Later in the duel scene Laertes tells Hamlet that the "treacherous instrument is in thy hand"(V.ii.296). In this play it is an expression which could as well refer to the pen as the sword both literally and metaphorically in the sense of engraving language upon the brain. Indeed, Hamlet himself says "many wearing rapiers are afraid of goosequills"(II.ii.318). Polonius, too, is stabbed behind an arras. Presumably the arras would be a patterned one, in accordance with Elizabethan fashions, which suggests to me on one level that the mistaken identity was brought about by concealment behind a system of signs. In this way language is

10) Goldberg, J. "Hamlet's Hand". Shakespeare Quarterly 39.3 (1988): 307-327, 323.

undermined and shown to be treacherous. Moral doubts cannot but intrude to erase its apparent certainty.

Hamlet seeks proof of Claudius's guilt through a fictional re-enactment of the crime. Not only does this confront Claudius with a mirror image of his guilt, but it enables Hamlet to recreate reality through a purely fictional world which he controls. The problem is here, as elsewhere in Hamlet,

"in . . . the attempt to arrive at that combination of words which creates a meaning which, hitting upon a correspondence between language and reality, at last breaks down the barrier between the two".<sup>11</sup>

The creation of a world of artifice over which complete control is sought is indeed the situation portrayed in Lear's ritualistic division of his Kingdom. It is a scene enacted to ratify Lear's already determined plans to favour his favourite daughter. Emily Leider in "Plainness of Style in King Lear" describes

11) Ghose: 91.

this scene as full of the measured phrases of rhetoric. She points out there are "three requests for profession of love" which anticipate "three responses, three bequests, a triple division of land".<sup>12</sup> This compares with the casket-choosing scene in The Merchant of Venice. There, also, a father is providing for his daughter. It is the theatrical nature of this scene which is remarkable, the upholding of a parallel fiction to life in order to control real events.

All goes disastrously wrong when Cordelia tells the truth to Lear about her divided loyalty to a future husband and himself. She will not play the court game of language use which Lear has come to believe equivalent to the real world. He is a king used to his commands being obeyed and his opinions sealed as facts by the flattering agreement of others. Language is the medium by which he has been upheld as king. Cordelia's "nothing" therefore strikes a very deep fear in Lear's consciousness. He must believe one of two alternatives: either that language itself does not directly convey

12) Leider, E.W. "Plainness of Style in King Lear". Shakespeare Quarterly 21.1 (1970): 45-53, 46.

reality or that Cordelia does not love him. Painful though it may be, he chooses the latter to preserve his own identity.

In doing so, however, he causes a major rift in the purposed ceremony and succession, seemingly calls down the wrath of the gods and leaves himself adrift in a correspondingly disordered universe. It is at this point that Lear breeches the rules of rationality which underlie the madness in Hamlet. Shakespeare has reworked the theme of madness in order to enter its linguistic implications fully. Language itself suffers disorder and lack of logical hierarchy at the hands of Lear. When he goes out into the storm, he tries to command the winds to abate, the thunder to stop roaring, but to no avail. Like his daughters, it refuses to obey him; striking him rather than caressing him with flattery.

As the crisis increases, says Leider, Lear's language is pared down to a simplicity of grammatical construction. It is only plain direct sentences which may carry the burden of suffering that is laid upon him. Yet, at the same time:



it pushes out, bursts seams, stretches the limits of the pentameter line, expands vocabulary through metaphor, compounding and coining words.<sup>13</sup>

Other characters must similarly change their speech in order to communicate with Lear.

In his article "Madness in King Lear" Kenneth Muir cites the Elizabethan dramatic tradition of allowing fools and madmen to be the purveyors of "unpopular truths".<sup>14</sup> He points out that when Lear has sunk into madness far enough to be used for this purpose, then the fool disappears from the play. Where Lear and the fool converse as they journey across the landscape, Lear's speech is cast in prose to be in keeping with the quick banter of the fool. Hamlet, also, descends to prose to display his quickness of wit and to appear less princely in madness. Lear is going through a time of less regal bearing as both he and the fool become outcasts

13) Leider: 52-53.

14) Muir, Kenneth. "Madness in King Lear". Shakespeare Survey 13 (1960): 30-40, 33.

travelling from one castle to the next. He assumes experimental language as a vehicle for truth just before he sinks that further "Fathom and half"(III.iv.38) into madness. Even so, I believe that the storm scenes derive much of their power from Lear's verse and imagery. He remains noble even in his rantings, yet it is a precarious nobility counterpoised against the infantile nursery rhymes of the fool.

The imagery used by Lear is particularly important in his journey towards self-recognition. The striking force of the storm is portrayed when the whole world becomes a seed pod for mankind upon which Lear wishes destruction:

And thou, all-shaking thunder  
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' th' world,  
Crack Nature's moulds, all germens spill at once  
That make ingrateful man!

(III.ii.6-9)

Nature, not the petty details of everyday life, is the basis of much of Lear's imagery reflecting the universality of the play's questions. According to Wolfgang Clemen, as humanity constantly oversteps the

mark in social behaviour, so also do Nature and the elements exceed their bounds.<sup>15</sup> This is stressed in Lear's speeches as well as in the physical storm. The animal kingdom also provides a rich source of imagery, again reflecting the preoccupations of the play through the equation of human beings with dumb beasts.

Edmund, Goneril, Regan and Cornwall only rarely use imagery. The audience gains little insight into what they are feeling; it is only their plans and attitudes which become apparent. Edmund uses the rhetorical balancing of phrases rather than imagery to convey the scheming quality of his thinking.

Much of the suffering in the play is portrayed through the imagery of disease and animal suffering at the claws of predators. Lear's elder daughters become the predators who in addition become associated with the force of the storm itself. It seems to me that they are as much Lear's hounds of hell as the Eumenides are those of Orestes in the Greek play of that name.

15) Clemen, Wolfgang. The Development of Shakespeare's Imagery. Rpt. London: Methuen, 1966. 133-58, 148.

Despite the profusion of cataclysmic imagery, the play as a whole stays within the realms of credibility. This is achieved mainly through the structure, which frames the madness of Lear within the more active elements of the play, through the anchoring of the mad scenes by the contrast of the more unimaginative characters such as Cornwall and Regan, and also through the contrast of the Fool's imagery which constantly juxtaposes everyday things with Lear's universe of elemental forces. Lear curses the "thick rotundity o' th' world" and the Fool answers with:

O Nuncle, court holy-water in a dry house  
is better than this rain-water out o' door.

(III.ii.10-11)

This blends the image of court flattery, previously an everyday occurrence, with its later absence in terms of strict practicality. My interpretation is that it is better to be blessed with a sprinkling of possibly dubious benefit than to be deluged by a tempest. At least there is comfort in a dry house.

The imagery also provides Shakespeare with a dramatic

shortcut to various effects. Clemen states:

the development towards dramatic imagery  
is a development towards condensation and  
suggestiveness.<sup>16</sup>

Shakespeare builds up a background of mood with the play's patterns of imagery. These can be instantly touched upon at any time with heart-wrenching results through the sheer speed and unexpectedness of use. In this way, Lear uses the imagery of death in describing his hand:

Gloucester: O let me kiss that hand.

[illegible]

This line uses the already established animal imagery in the smelling out of death and it contrasts death with love and the most active part of the human body in the

16) Clemen: 103.

hand. Frequently Lear's interjections have an uncanny double entendre conveying that Lear's subconscious is in knowledge of the truth even if his conscious mind is unaware of it.

The Fool's everyday imagery in Lear owes a lot to Hamlet. The Prince seeks answers to the universal questions of life, yet is hampered by the immediate details of existence. Whereas Lear's madness is enacted against the sweeping background of the blasted heath where the sky is as important as the boundless horizon, Hamlet must act out his madness in the stifling confines of the Danish court. He must argue his way into madness using puns and misunderstandings in a world of petty obstacles to his larger desires. Whereas Lear is overwhelmed by hyperbole, Hamlet holds a microscope to life in the hope that some tiny detail will give up its essential truth.

Wolfgang Clemen identifies much of the imagery in Hamlet as that of the ulcer, of poisoning, of rot and decay.<sup>17</sup> He also points out that the imagery is largely

17) Clemen: 113-18.

affected by Hamlet's mood in that it becomes much more brutal and obscene in times of rage. This imagery, of course, affects the overall atmosphere of the play. Another type of imagery in Hamlet is drawn from every aspect of daily life creating a detailed portrayal of educated courtly life. Hamlet uses metaphors from law, the theatre, music, nature, the sport of hunting, the life of a soldier and that of a courtier. This extends the range of his character portrayal. Caroline Spurgeon points out that the imagery in Hamlet does not, as in Lear, denote bodily strain as indicative of mental anguish, but as an all-pervading corruption.<sup>18</sup> This does not, therefore, put the blame on Hamlet for his condition, but portrays it as a general condition throughout Denmark.

It is this ulcerated centre, a hollow absence in the centre of things which is the most dominant image in the play. The word "nothing" appears many times within Hamlet together with the dramatic images of the empty

18) Spurgeon, Caroline. Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us. Rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge U P, 1966. 316-18, 338-43.

skull and the little patch of empty ground, be it a grave, a stage, a battleground or the setting for a duel.

David McDonald identifies the three phases of a deconstructive text as absence, discontinuity and difference. He defines deconstruction as "the process implicit in the attempt to supplement a signifier for an absent signified". In Hamlet he finds an infinite chain of absences and substitutions. The ghost is a substitution for the absent father, Claudius is the substitution for the absent king and husband, Hamlet himself provides a substitute in artificial madness for his absent rationality at times, even though he dislikes "seeming" himself, which is a substitute for absent sincerity. McDonald sees the crux of the drama as the Mousetrap play within which all previous events are mimetically substituted in the present by actors who are themselves substitutes for the absent characters in the scene. This, of course, is watched by Claudius who is forced to recognise his own part in the drama.

The deconstructive process seems to begin with the Ghost of whom McDonald says:



The Ghost is a discontinuity in the order of Being: a metaphorical spacing in a metonymical order, the presence of a void, or a semblance where a presence should be.<sup>19</sup>

It displays an absence of language by refusing to speak to Horatio and in its first appearance to Hamlet. This signifies that it is withholding a secret. Concealed knowledge is implied by its lack of speech. The Ghost also provides another important aspect of deconstruction: that of deferral. It divulges only some of its secret when it is ready. In addition, Hamlet is often signifying an absence within himself. He does not know himself and must therefore defer action until his self-knowledge is more complete.

When the travelling theatre arrives, Hamlet is confronted by new possibilities. Drama, like the ghost, provides a presence where there is an absence - a fiction parallel to the factual world which is absent.

19) McDonald, David. "Hamlet and the Mimesis of Absence: A Post-Structuralist Analysis". Educational Theatre Journal 30.1 (1978): 36-53, 38-39.

According to McDonald, in the Pyrrhus - Priam scene, Hamlet can see Pyrrhus as Claudius killing Priam as Hamlet Senior. At the same time, he sees himself in the future as Pyrrhus (the avenger) and Priam as Claudius, a configuration which is echoed in the prayer scene where Claudius kneels oblivious of Hamlet's uplifted sword. It is this scene between Pyrrhus and Priam which illustrates the uselessness of revenge.

McDonald believes that a similar doubling occurs in The Mousetrap as Claudius watches the play. Claudius sees himself both as the murderer and as Hamlet's future victim and this creates a loss of firm identity. Further doubling is present in the two portraits of Gertrude's husbands, both substitutes for their absence in the play or scene and one substituted for the other in Gertrude's affections. Rozencrantz and Guildenstern also are doubles of themselves when they become spies, substitutes for the absent friends they once were to Hamlet.

So much of Hamlet hangs upon dualities: a trait also common in King Lear. In Hamlet, however, the dualities are a part of the shifting landscape of signs. Hamlet sees below the surface of things around him to their

opposites beneath: a clown behind a skull, loss and betrayal behind a woman's potential for creativity, enemies behind friends and a funeral behind a marriage. His final duel is fought with a representative of himself: Laertes is the symbol of an unhesitant revenger for his father. When both are destroyed, the defences are opened up to reveal Claudius as the killer behind the mask of Laertes. The dying Hamlet is left with the concern that he will be represented correctly in the world. This is left in the hands of Horatio who has shown an ability to speak truthfully and with loyalty. He thus becomes the story's new author within the play's projected future: he stands in for the absent Hamlet.

In my opinion, deconstructive elements also abound in King Lear. As previously stated the trigger for tragedy in both the parallel plots is the word "nothing". It is what Lear and Gloucester make of this word which influences all subsequent action. Both accept a fiction as a substitute for an aspect of reality. Lear believes that Cordelia has no love for him because he substitutes the word for the reality. He believes Cordelia's love is absent. Gloucester accepts the fiction that Edgar does not love him and that he is, indeed, actively seeking his life rather than believing

that the story made up by Edmund is truly "nothing". He accepts Edmund's story as a substitute for the love of Edgar in his absence.

Doubling is also a major deconstructive element in Lear as in Hamlet. Lear and Gloucester are doubles in their opposing attitudes to language: Lear taking the signifier as the signified, Gloucester blinding himself to any reliability in the spoken word in favour of what he can gather first hand. Both are punished by a total reliance on the opposite state of affairs. The doubling does not stop there, however. Cordelia and Edgar are counterparts of each other and both undergo a forced absence while other images of them take their place in the minds of Lear and Gloucester. Poor Tom is also a substitute for the absent identity of Edgar. He recognises this himself:

Poor Turlygod! Poor Tom!

That's something yet. Edgar I nothing am.

(II.iii.20-21)

Here again something has been made out of nothing by language and fiction.

It seems to me that another parallel with Hamlet occurs at a turning point in the action. Both plays have their action changed at the dramatization of a fiction by which the main protagonist wishes to control the real world. This occurs in Lear's mock trial of his elder daughters (III.vi.20-76). In this case, no control is gained as there are no direct consequences of the scene except that Lear is confronting the issue of his daughter's treachery. He makes his daughters answerable for their crime even though their presence is only imaginary. Lear appears to sense this fact when he says that Regan has escaped. He concludes that there must be some disease ("cause") which has turned their hearts against him. Regan must be anatomized, a perverse form of blason, in order to find the source of corruption. Lear's healing process begins from this point onwards. Sleep and the watchful eyes of a loyal few play a large part.

The ending of Lear can also be illuminated by deconstruction in its recognition of the now real absence of Cordelia's love brought about by her death. This becomes an unbearable fact for Lear who hovers on the edge of a substitution in a fictional delusion that she is still alive. There is no clear trace left in the

world as in Hamlet where Horatio is left to tell the story. What the audience is given in Lear is the injunction to:

Speak what we feel, not what we ought to say.

(V.iii.326)

I think this constitutes one of the most abrupt endings in Shakespeare along with one of the strongest statements. It places the emphasis firmly back upon the word, yet uses few words in which to do it. In keeping with the later part of the play, strong emotion is expressed simply and powerfully, and this is what the audience is left with as they leave the auditorium. No distancing from the sorrow of Cordelia's and Lear's death is allowed by the artful placing of emotion into the formal patterns of verse. It is Shakespeare's practical illustration of "the worst" in fictional form, but an illustration which may well have been intended to reveal the importance of sincerity in everyday speech. King Lear, in fact, deconstructs its own language towards silence. "Silence" is Hamlet's last word (V.ii.337), but in Lear it is acted out practically by the complete breakdown of language in the final moments of extreme stress.

Richard Fly in his article "Revelations of Darkness: The Language of Silence in King Lear" describes Lear as being reduced to a howl. He comments further:

Like Lear confronting the unspeakable fact of his daughter's death, language at these extreme moments can only point beyond itself and expire in silence. . . 19

The deconstruction of language to this point is an ongoing process in Lear. Those characters who can speak in a more cogent manner are those who are attempting to bring about the downfall of truth and sincerity.

The way in which language is often on the point of breaking down into nursery rhymes, nonsense words and primitive noises is discussed by Ann Barton in her article "Shakespeare and the Limits of Language". She states:

19) Fly, Richard. "Revelations of Darkness: The Language of Silence in King Lear". Bucknell Review 20.3 (1972): 73-92. Rpt in Shakespearean Criticism 2: 273.

Only madness and folly are truly articulate, and their speech hovers continually on the edge of meaninglessness, the place where words dissolve into pure noise or inarticulate cries.

In the last scene, there are repetitions of single words as if the mind of the speaker is trying to come to terms with something for which the word is inadequate, as if there must be somewhere a word beyond it which will truly express a concept or emotion and therefore at least give the illusion of graspability and control. Barton describes the alienation of a familiar word through constant repetition in the hope that a new meaning could be deciphered from its very essence of sound:

So, Lear's five-times-repeated "Never" in the last scene is like an assault upon death, an assault in which the word itself seems to crack and bend under the strain.<sup>20</sup>

20) Barton, Ann. "Shakespeare and the Limits of Language". Shakespeare Survey 24 (1971): 19-30, 26-27.



It is at this point that Shakespeare achieves his full portrayal of nothingness: the nothing that lies behind language whether in life or death. Hamlet was one stage in the subversion of the accepted forms of language, but Lear squeezes it to its limits. Language is the raw medium with which every writer works and it is one of the ironies of any artist's material that the more it is stretched to embody new ideas, the more the artist becomes aware of its limitations. In these two great plays Shakespeare tests his material and creativity to the extreme, recognizing and, at the same time, overcoming the limits of language. What he creates in Hamlet, and to an even greater extent in Lear, is truly something of nothing.

CHAPTER 4RATHER NEW-DYED THAN STAINED WITH SALT WATER

The colours of resurgence and renewal, which would prove a contrast to the linguistic unreliability and nihilism apparent in Hamlet and Lear, were formulated within the span of these tragedies in the latter half of Measure for Measure (1604). Shakespeare experimented with a new austere style in this dark comedy which encompassed ambiguity and theatricality. He held this tendency dormant until it re-emerged in the romances and came to its full multi-layered development in The Tempest.

In Measure for Measure, Shakespeare extended the preoccupations of The Merchant of Venice in its aspects of argumentation and of the law's dependence upon language. Additionally, there is a deeper and darker insight into the workings of the human mind as found greater expression in the tragedies: Othello, Macbeth, and King Lear. During the second half of the play, however, the tragic and psychological element dwindles and is replaced by an interest in theatricality. Shakespeare returned to this theatrical aspect after

Lear and used it for a more distant perspective of life in drama. The Tempest exemplifies this surge towards metadrama and is discussed in more detail later.

Measure for Measure shows considerable similarity in theme to The Merchant of Venice (approx.c.1597). Both are concerned with the workings of the law, a plea for mercy and the way in which the law hangs upon language for its interpretation. Nevertheless, the language of the later play, Measure for Measure, loses much rich imagery. Instead, it displays a self-consciously dramatic and theatrical effect.

The first half of the play appears to be a realistic drama with in-depth psychological studies of Isabella and Angelo. This changes to what has seemed to some as a theatrically managed morality play where the characters seem less important than the mechanics of a self-conscious plot. A few critics have suggested that Shakespeare really gave up on this play after finding himself having built up Angelo and Isabella at the expense of a clearly defined plot. This seems highly unlikely. A more credible explanation is that although Shakespeare was still working towards the penetrating psychological insights of the three great tragedies

which immediately followed Measure for Measure, the second half of the play took the form of an experiment towards the romance style of The Winter's Tale or The Tempest. This portion of the play contains a paucity of any type of imagery.

Perhaps the most important aspect of language developments in Measure for Measure as pointed out by Ifor Evans is this change towards a less embellished approach. Evans says the play

marks a profound stage in the development of Shakespeare's language. Delight in the patterns of speech for their own sake has gone, and so have the more decorative of rhetorical flourishes. Instead there is argument, analysis, compression, a curious . . . searching.<sup>1</sup>

There seems to be a resurfacing of the questioning of life and death present in Hamlet, but without the poetic richness of earlier plays. In my view, the result is a play which is more localised, more

1) Evans: 138.

earthbound in relation to the plane of heaven above. Emphasis falls upon logical argument rather than the romantic or even spiritual spheres, despite the spiritual context of Isabella's plight.

Thus the tone of the play can withstand the type of imagery which is introduced here. Rarely was Shakespeare quite so explicit in sexual imagery or so insistent in a link between sex, disease and death. By juxtaposing the two extremes of existence in this way, procreation and annihilation, he creates a tension and an ambivalence throughout Measure for Measure around the question of sex. The play recalls the mood of Sonnet 129, "Th'expense of spirit in a waste of shame", and incorporates the problem of sexually transmitted diseases in the Elizabethan and, incidentally, in modern times. The effect of this imagery is to darken the play's mood considerably and to make it unlike the more festive comedies. There is a threat contained in the language of the low life which contrasts markedly with The Merchant's marine, musical and classical imagery.

Surprisingly, in contrast to this dark ambiguity, it is Lucio who sometimes uses imagery in a more positive manner hearkening back to the lyrical use of imagery in

The Merchant. This is possibly the result of a more positive attitude towards sex as opposed to the repression around him. Lawrence Hyman in "The Unity of Measure for Measure" sees the play in terms of the acceptance of sin as a natural condition of human life.<sup>2</sup> He says that Shakespeare balances the necessity of sex for the production of the next generation with the sterility of chastity. I think Hyman's opinion is clearly borne out by the Sonnets. The "waste of shame" sonnet (129) is equally balanced with those sonnets which encourage the beloved young man to marry and to father children (for example, Sonnets 1-4): not to do so would be an equally wasteful shame. Sexual desire is usually a subject of intense ambivalence in Shakespeare and this is evident throughout the language of Measure for Measure.

The most likeable characters of the play are the very people against whom the Duke is directing his clean up campaign: they seem to be the most fallible, the most human, especially when contrasted with the

2) Hyman, Lawrence. "The Unity of Measure for Measure". Modern Language Quarterly 36.1 (1975): 3-20.

austerity of an Angelo or an Isabella. When Julietta is in dire straits expecting the birth of her child and the death of her common-law husband at the same time, it is brothel-tongued Lucio who comes to her aid in alerting Isabella, and he it is who provides the most positive image of her pregnancy:

as blossoming time  
That from the seedness the bare fallow brings  
To teeming foison, even so her plenteous womb  
Expreseth his full tilth and husbandry.

(I.iv.41-44)<sup>3</sup>

This image closely echoes Sonnet 3 when Shakespeare asks the young man:

For where is she so fair whose unear'd womb  
Disdains the tillage of thy husbandry? (ll.5-6)

An additional type of imagery used in Measure for

3) Shakespeare, William. Measure for Measure. Ed. N.W.Bawcutt. Oxford: Oxford U P, 1991. All further references will be to this edition.

Measure is that of 'the copy', either a copy as a reflection or as a man-made figure. Ifor Evans cites the "unscoured armour"(I.ii.165) and the "scarecrow of the law"(II.i.1) as examples.<sup>4</sup> He points out that this type of imagery emphasizes the appearance of someone rather than the reality. Further to Evans' comments it seems that, in these two examples, it is particularly the law which is attacked as something made by man, yet hollow and corruptible. The result, I think, is a travesty of mankind. The law's representative in Vienna is Angelo, himself a hollow man, merely using the forms of law for his own purposes. This has much in common with one of the constantly occurring motifs of Hamlet, that of 'seeming' and, indeed, the Duke's thoughts on death as addressed to Claudio in prison echo those of Hamlet.

This emphasis upon 'seeming' is increased by the frequent use of ambiguity in speech. In The Structure of Complex Words William Empson discusses the double meanings inherent in Shakespeare's use of the

4) Evans: 138.



word "sense" in Measure for Measure.<sup>5</sup> The word is initially established in meaning as 'sensuality' by Lucio when speaking to Isabella. He describes Angelo as

one who never feels

The wanton stings and motions of the sense,

(I.iv.58-59)

From then on, the sexual meaning hovers around this word even when used to express 'sensibility' or 'sensibleness'. This is sometimes achieved through the use of cues within the context. An example occurs when Angelo is about to dismiss Isabella after her first interview with him. He comments:

She speaks, and 'tis

Such sense that my sense breeds with it.

(II.ii.143-44)

The use of the word 'breeds' tends to shift meaning away from Angelo's primary meaning of 'sensibility'

5) Empson, William. The Structure of Complex Words. London: Chatto and Windus, 1951. 270-88, 270-80.

towards 'sensuality'. Later, in Act V, the Duke tells Mariana that it is "Against all sense" to ask her to plead for Angelo (V.i.429). Here again the word takes on a secondary meaning of 'sensuality' and Empson suggests that Vincentio is hinting that Isabella lacks the sensuality to appreciate the temptations of the flesh. He reinforces his view by noting that only a few lines later, Isabella concedes that:

A due sincerity governed his deeds  
Till he did look on me.

(V.i.447-48)

Along with this new recognition of sensuality comes the possibility of marriage for Isabella to the Duke. Empson's theory accounts for the shifting dark atmosphere of Measure for Measure and, in my view, shows that more complex methods were used from those used in The Merchant to build up mood in this play. Even so, the end result is one which appears less wordy, more compact.

Another study of the ambiguous language in Measure for Measure was undertaken more recently by Ralph

Berry.<sup>6</sup> He defines two levels of language in the play to correspond to its two structural levels of state and prison, freedom and restraint. The language used by the State is ambiguously sexual in many instances. Berry gives several words which may have a sexual undertone such as 'satisfaction', 'organs' and 'know'. In addition to this he cites the symbolic elements of 'beheading', 'garden' and 'key' in certain contexts. Throughout the speech of Angelo, Vincentio and even Isabella, there is a sexual repression threatening to surface.

Berry suggests further that the Duke himself uses his control of the action in the state to moderate his own ambivalent feelings of sexual repression and licence. Vincentio chooses Angelo as his representative and is therefore implicated to some extent in what he does. Angelo could be seen to undergo test and punishment as surrogate for Vincentio. This may explain why Vincentio's comment "I find an apt remission in myself" (V.i.501) seems to mean not only that he can

6) Berry, Ralph. "Language and Structure in Measure for Measure". University of Toronto Quarterly 46.2 (1976-77): 147-61, 152-61.

find it within himself to pardon others, but also that he finds himself purged of any potential towards sexual corruption. Berry uses his observations on ambiguous language to support the theory that Vincentio, in the setting up of the whole situation, is punishing and duly exonerating himself. Perhaps the giving of free licence to sexual corruption in Vienna could be taken as a passive indulgence in the sin itself, and it is this which leads the Duke to legitimise sexual practice in the State and, consequently, in himself.

A measure of Vincentio's importance in the play as a whole may be seen in the ratio of his lines to those of others. Isabella, Angelo and Lucio are perhaps the most memorable characters of Measure for Measure. Even so, the Duke's part is at least half as long again.<sup>7</sup> Vincentio was given 820 lines in comparison to the next two biggest parts, Isabella and Lucio, who both have under 500 lines. This is clearly indicative of the emphasis Shakespeare laid upon the function and role of the Duke within the play, and results in a predominance of verse (approximately 62%).

7) Harbage, ed.: The Complete Works. 31.

Most of this is blank verse apart from the unusual soliloquy in the third act spoken by Vincentio in rhyming couplets (III.ii.275-296). I mentioned this in Chapter 2 with reference to the speech in The Merchant through which Bassanio claims his bride (III.ii.140-149). It is a place of change in the direction of the play. When Bassanio, shortly afterwards, appears to be out of control of the situation with the news of Antonio's impending punishment, Portia steps in to master subsequent events. On the other hand, the formal rhetoric spoken by Vincentio heralds the disintegration of his well-planned action and the forcing of his hand to compensate for events running amuck. It takes the form of a brief summing up of the issues involved in Angelo's behaviour and is almost spell-like in its anticipation of the planned action. There is considerable formality at this pivotal point of the play, where the Duke must step in to intervene before his previous plan comes to tragedy. It is also the point at which the play changes character from a realistic drama to an overtly theatrical metadrama.

Another interesting and unusual application of formal rhetorical technique in Measure for Measure

occurs in Act III where Vincentio tells Isabella about Mariana's false position in regard to Angelo. According to Joanne Altieri, although the Duke speaks in prose, the whole passage (III.i.183-191) is highly patterned with antithesis, chiasmus (repetition of ideas in inverted order), antimetabole (repetition of words in inverted order) and other balanced forms.<sup>8</sup> The Duke begins:

The hand that hath made you fair hath made you good. The goodness that is cheap in beauty makes beauty brief in goodness; but grace, being the soul of your complexion, shall keep the body of it ever fair.

(II.183-86)

This is structured writing indeed, and it creates a curious mixture of intimacy and formality between the two characters. Altieri suggests that this awkwardness illustrates Vincentio's secret love for Isabella and her innocence of all things carnal. In my view, it is a

8) Altieri, Joanne. "Style and Social Disorder in Measure for Measure". Shakespeare Quarterly 25.1 Winter 1974: 6-16, 13-15.

precursor of the Prospero/Miranda dialogue at the beginning of The Tempest (I.iii.1-186). This too has the strange mixture of intimacy and distance with an uneasiness created by the interjection of short phrases. It is also the first time that Vincentio has descended to prose. Brian Vickers suggests that this has a calming effect after the tempestuous scene between Isabella and Claudio.<sup>9</sup> He, too, comments on a sense of intimacy in Vincentio's manner of speech to Isabella which is consistent with the personal nature of her situation, the divulgence of secrets concerning Angelo, and the conspiracy of the bed-trick. Isabella and Vincentio can be clearly linked with each other in this scene by the similarity in their mode of expression.

The subtlety in the use of prose rhetoric here is a far cry from its use in the speeches of Shylock. While Shylock's use of rhetoric was certainly groundbreaking in its own right, here it is used to convey the nuances present concerning the quality of a relationship and its

9) Vickers, Brian. The Artistry of Shakespeare's Prose. London: Methuen, 1968. 319-23.

probable future trends.

Prose holds a conspicuous place in Measure for Measure overall. This is what one would expect from a comedy, but true to the play's dark nature, there are many other uses of the prose form here than simply to provide light amusement. Between The Merchant and Measure for Measure, Shakespeare had perfected his use of prose in As You Like It, and now used it for serious comment and a variety of dramatic effects. One example of this in Measure for Measure is the enquiry made by Angelo and Escalus into the behaviour of Elbow's wife and Master Froth (II.i). It is obvious that Pompey is involved in prostitution, but the speech of both Pompey and Elbow is so chaotic as to avert prosecution. Elbow's speech is rich in malapropisms frequently resulting in a reversal of meaning, and Pompey's speech is so digressive that it is impossible for Escalus to follow it with any sense. This calls to mind the confusions created by Dogberry and the Watch in Much Ado.

Although this must be one of the funniest scenes in Shakespearean writing, there is a serious point raised by it. Words are abused by a representative of the law (Elbow) in a muddled attempt to bring evidence against



Pompey and Froth, and words are seemingly scattered around arbitrarily by Pompey resulting in the avoidance of the said prosecution. The whole enquiry becomes a travesty through the twisting of words upon which the law depends. According to Brian Vickers, Pompey is consciously using logic in some scenes, yet subconsciously perverting it. This is particularly plain in the scene between him and Abhorson when

the sight of a bawd and an executioner arguing with the tools of Aristotlean logic is one of the choicest of Shakespearean inversions.<sup>10</sup>

By showing the subversion of the law in the twisting of language, I believe Shakespeare illustrated that there is no ideal life of the community. Life must be bounded within the letter of the law, within the social rules and customs which humans provide for themselves as best they can. Such a system is never perfect, because of the corruptibility of language upon which it is built.

Although Shakespeare used comedy in the subversion

10) Vickers: 318.

of the accepted levels of society in The Merchant through Launcelot Gobbo, in Measure for Measure he applied it to the law itself in more dominant scenes in relation to the play as a whole. This strengthens his presentation of fraudulent use in the language upon which the law is based.

A comparable perversion of language occurs on a more serious note in the highly charged and dramatic second scene between Isabella and Angelo (II .iv). At the start of the scene the two characters are plainly talking at cross-purposes. Ambiguity ensures that the same words mean different things to both of them. Here Angelo is using the law to his own ends and this is reflected in the corruptibility of words. When Isabella is made aware of Angelo's true meaning, she lays stress upon the power of words which can be used either for right or wrong in the enforcement of the law:

O perilous mouths,  
That bear in them one and the selfsame tongue,  
Either of condemnation or approof,  
Bidding the law make curtsy to their will,  
Hooking both right and wrong to the appetite,  
To follow as it draws!

(II.iv.173-78)

This, of course, is exactly what happens in The Merchant when Shylock attempts to use the law for his own evil purposes.

Further examples of Shakespeare's handling of a close alliance between language and the law occur in both Portia's mercy speech in The Merchant (IV.i.180-201) and Isabella's mercy speeches to Angelo (II.ii.26-157). Both describe the concept of mercy as a quality of the true monarch and plead the use of mercy as a necessity if it is to be expected at the Last Judgement.

In The Merchant Shakespeare sets up the audience to listen intently to Portia. Shylock has just answered the suggestion that he should be merciful with "On what compulsion must I? Tell me that"(IV.i.179). This is clearly Portia's big chance to persuade him and she pours her heart-rending appeal out with as much rhetorical skill as can be mustered. Although logical, this is language used to sway the emotions rather than the intellect. It therefore seems all the more shocking when Shylock indicates her failure by brutal insistence upon the law.

In Measure for Measure, on the other hand, Isabella's speeches are situated quite differently within the text. They are part of an on-going dialogue involving logical argument and equally logical response. The language she uses is emotive, but never does Shakespeare allow Isabella full licence to break the balance of logical argument between the two characters. It is, however, in response to these mercy speeches that Angelo gives the first signs of yielding. Isabella gathers force throughout the scene, but she is stopped by abrupt dismissal before she gains total dominance. It seems to me that in Portia's speech, rhetoric is used to stir the emotions; in Isabella's dialogue, although her words are an emotional appeal to Angelo, this emotion is kept within strict limitations in order to win a skilful contest of logical argument and counter-argument.

It therefore comes as a disappointment to the feminist, after the independence of Portia in The Merchant or Rosaline in As You Like It, to see in Measure for Measure the powerless situation of women particularly in the play's resolution. Indeed, throughout the play, women are described by the imagery of signification as pages upon which men may write or as soft material which may bear an impression. This is much

more in line with traditional Elizabethan thinking than the subversions of Portia. Isabella, despite her persuasive rhetoric, cannot influence Angelo to give her brother a free pardon. In fact, it is this masculine rhetorical skill which gets her into trouble.

Christy Desmet describes the contemporary attitude to the embellishments of rhetoric in "Speaking Sensibly". She points out that rhetoric was often seen metaphorically as a woman or as something appertaining to women such as jewellery. Either the embellishment could raise a woman's status to reflect her true worth or it could show the falsity of the wearer. A courtier might seem all the more polished for his rhetoric or it may be used as a mask to disguise a scheming mind. Isabella's sensible rhetoric produces sensuality in Angelo. As Desmet notes, Isabella reflects back at Angelo his own rhetorical methods in the use of "maxims, analogies and allegories".<sup>11</sup> The conclusion I draw further to Desmet's argument is that Angelo sees his own

11) Desmet, Christy. "'Speaking Sensibly': Feminine Rhetoric in Measure for Measure and All's Well That Ends Well". Renaissance Papers 1986: 43-51, 50.

rhetic in Isabella and therefore sees his own lustful image in this linguistic embellishment. In addition to seeing the nun, he also perceives the whore of his own imaginings.

It comes as no surprise that, in the absence of a true voice of their own, women in this play are best silent or, if not silent, hidden. Secrecy and silence are pivotal to the convent and the bed-trick. At the close of the play Isabella, along with all the other women characters, except possibly Mistress Keepdown, will be silent under the government of men.

This seems a bleak end to a comedy if it is to be taken as such. It seems incredible that the author who created the subversive and vital Portia could have meant that an audience should be content with the fate of these women. Therefore, it seems to me that an ironic reading, one which exposes the suppressed state of women in Elizabethan times, would be appropriate here. By showing the manner in which women were gagged in Elizabethan society, Shakespeare created a much more powerful tool for the improvement of women's status in the linguistic milieu of the time. Instead of illustrating the manner in which a clever woman could

evade existing social rules in order finally to gain her own voice, Measure for Measure uses the more indirect methods of irony and ambiguity. In The Merchant, Shakespeare appealed to the audience's intellect through the example of a woman's active subversion of male values in order to find a place for herself. In the subsequent play of Measure for Measure, he appealed to the audience's emotions through the language of repression and through a picture of women bereft of the means to express themselves. In this reading it is the later play which argues the case for women more forcefully.

Power and its dependence on language use is also the subject under scrutiny when the play is viewed as a metaphor for the role of theatre in politics. As previously stated, slander could be a problem for a ruler and this was particularly true if it came from the theatre. One way to counter this was to use the theatre for officially sanctioned slander against someone working against the interests of government. Vincentio does this in his theatrical management of events in Vienna. The important point is that he must be present in disguise to ensure that things do not get out of his control.

This view of the events in Vienna as theatre is put forward by Anthony B. Dawson in his article "Measure for Measure, New Historicism, and Theatrical Power". In it he states that the Duke abandons his political power temporarily in favour of the theatrical power of the writer/director. The Duke questions the validity of direct rule and so brings about an artificial situation which is a subversion of it. In the final scene, theatrical power is used to reinstate political power but the illusion is being deconstructed by its many unresolved problems even as it is being constructed. Dawson cites the 1985 production of the play at Stratford, Ontario (directed by Michael Bogdanov) as emphasizing rather than minimizing the difference between the first and second halves to reveal the subversive quality of the play's last scene. He concludes that the "elaborate restitution at the end of Measure for Measure is more hoax than reaffirmation".<sup>12</sup>

Subsequent to this, Lindsay Kaplin also agreed that

12) Dawson, Anthony. "Measure for Measure, New Historicism, and Theatrical Power". Shakespeare Quarterly 39.3 (1988): 328-41, 341.



the Duke sets up his own substitute in a theatrical presentation of life in Vienna.<sup>13</sup> He adds that Vincentio selects Angelo specifically in order to test out his quality after knowing about his treatment of Mariana, and waits in disguise to see what will happen. The flaw in the Duke's plan is that he is himself culpable for selecting someone whose reputation is in doubt. Vincentio is identified with Angelo through this substitution.

Into the complicated web Shakespeare places Lucio the fabricator who, like the Duke, uses fictional methods for purposes of slander, accusation and revelation. A major difference between the two of them is that the Duke is symbolic of the State's power, whereas Lucio attacks this power by slandering first Angelo and then Vincentio himself as "the old fantastical Duke of/ dark corners" (IV.iii.154-5). He seems uncomfortably near the truth in this respect. Lucio's presence in the last scene of the play is a reminder of Vincentio's guilt in playing this

13) Kaplin, M.Lindsay. "Slander for Slander in Measure for Measure". Renaissance Drama 21 (1990): 23-54.

fantastical role and allowing Angelo to take his place. He therefore threatens Vincentio's status as ruler. It is for this reason rather than any other that Lucio receives the harshest penalty.

In Measure for Measure, as opposed to The Merchant, Shakespeare created a more dynamic picture of how dangerous it was when a fictional construct in the form of slander, either as theatre or accusation, was taken to be fact. The Merchant provided a view of individual prejudice and disharmony caused by the mechanisms of slander, but in Measure for Measure he portrayed dramatically the fragility of a ruling power. This power was reliant for its continuance upon linguistic constructs which formed a balance of theatre and fiction in the running of society. The play questions the relationship between fiction and fact by its examination of slander between subject and ruler. Finally, I believe, it asserts in the last scene that a cleverly constructed fiction can itself become fact embodied as a social norm if all dissident elements are eliminated.

This is indeed a major concern of The Tempest (approximately 1611) in its purgation of rebellious voices. It is, however, a play closely modelled upon A

Midsummer Night's Dream in its characters. Many of the Dream's characters have their counterparts in The Tempest: Puck/Ariel, Oberon/Prospero, Bottom/Caliban, the young lovers/Ferdinand and Miranda, the mechanicals/Stephano and Trinculo. Shakespeare appears to have applied ideas concerning governmental control and techniques for illustrating them that began to develop through Measure for Measure, and later plays, in order to rework the Dream into an entirely new play.

The Tempest is a play concerned very much with the natural world. It displays, even so, little of the embellished and rich language that appears in the Dream; yet Shakespeare's control of plain dramatic language is often underestimated. The island in The Tempest is a scene of the mind, a 'paysage moralise', according to James Walter in his article "From Tempest to Epilogue: Augustine's Allegory in Shakespeare's Drama".<sup>14</sup> Detailed descriptions of scenery in the style of the Dream are excluded because this would be to make

14) Walter, James. "From Tempest to Epilogue: Augustine's Allegory in Shakespeare's Drama". PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America 98.1 (1983): 60-76, 62.

the island too tangible in set form to the audience. The scenery's ambiguities allow each character to have a different view of the island according to the tenor of his or her inner thoughts and motivation. It is a reflection of inner psychological landscape. The whole play is structured in accordance with its content and therefore the audience, too, is given no conclusive view of the island, but is left to form an aggregate of independent opinions.

Verbal metaphor is kept to a minimum. Unlike the listing of images which gives the Dream its particular vitality, the language is kept plain and sparse: austere in its economy. G. Wilson Knight explains this lack of imagery in terms of the play's dramatic function: "poetic actualization . . . is here the ruling principle throughout".<sup>15</sup> The play, therefore, is devoid of copious amounts of metaphor and imagery because it embodies its own metaphor in dramatic rather than in linguistic terms. Like Measure for Measure, it can be

15) Knight, Wilson G. The Shakespearian Tempest. Rpt. London: Oxford U P, 1940. 218-66, 247.

interpreted in terms of religion, the theatre, or the layers of different levels of existence within one personality. Again the audience is left free to pick its own way through ambiguities which represent so much even in their simplicity. Lengthy and particularised images may open out a play by their sheer volume and variety, but here Shakespeare suggests boundless possibilities by their absence.

Interestingly, it is the character of Caliban who gives any descriptions of the island in conventional form. This is a clear opposite to the technique used in the Dream where the fairies were largely responsible for landscape description. In The Tempest, the magic seems to be separate from the land and yet working on it. Caliban is representative of the lower rather than higher forms of life, and yet he is given some of the most beautiful lines of the play. He, as much as the fairies before him, is melded with the land and his language shows this in lyrical description. This raises a curious point, I think, in that it seems that language is therefore not considered to be one of the higher functions of existence. It is definitely earthbound:

I prithee let me bring thee where crabs grow,  
 And I with my long nails will dig thee pig-nuts,  
 Show thee a jay's nest, and instruct thee how  
 To snare the nimble marmoset.

(II.ii.161-164)

The change in Shakespeare's style between the Dream and The Tempest can be seen clearly in the use of fewer words to express greater content. Ifor Evans discusses this development in Shakespeare's later works citing Prospero's relation of his expulsion to Miranda as a clear example of this economy (I.ii.121-132).<sup>16</sup> Within these twelve lines Prospero gives the bare outline of how the plot between Alonso and Antonio came about and how it was carried out to the point of usurping the Dukedom. The story is viewed only as relevant if heard in reference to the present situation in the 'reality' of the play. Therefore, the style is brief to the point of haste; a quality further illustrated by the short broken phrases in which it is spoken:

16) Evans: 209.

whereupon,  
 A treacherous army levied, one midnight  
 Fated to th'purpose did Antonio open  
 The gates of Milan, and i'th'dead of darkness  
 The ministers for th'purpose hurried thence  
 Me and thy crying self.

(I.ii.127-132)

The verse forms of the Dream are far less complex than the above in the way that it breaks and works against its own rhythms to produce something very close to prose.

Although there is a considerable amount of verse in The Tempest, prose plays an important part as the speech of Trinculo and Stephano. Humour is present in these roles, but I feel it is mostly visual rather than linguistic. There are no confusions of words, but there are confusions of sight. Metaphor is sometimes taken as the literal, as in the case of Caliban being mistaken for a fish, so there is a twisting around of the usual form from literal to metaphor. Whereas the speech of the mechanicals in the Dream is closely interconnected (as previously described in Chapter 1), the speech between Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban shows many

unanswered questions and misunderstandings, particularly in II.ii.

Throughout the play, Caliban stands out as an unusual verse speaker, especially if thought of, like Bottom, as the lowest form of creation. He is given nobility in his savagery and naivety; no longer does this provide the substance for humour. His descriptions show his limitation in experience, but they show an in-depth knowledge of the land. The blank verse raises him above Stephano and Trinculo in moral stature, even though they often refer to him as half animal (again shades of Bottom) and Prospero acknowledges him as his "thing of darkness" (V.i.275).

Prospero's speech is blank verse even though he is the principal magician in the play. In fact he is kept clearly human by his lack of rhyme and by his troubled mode of thought. As previously stated, this is verse deliberately created to sound close to prose. The result is speech which has some hint of poise and cadence, and yet, at the same time, works against itself to portray a man troubled in mind and spirit. It is only at the end of the play in the Epilogue that Prospero is allowed to speak in rhyming couplets. This may be partly because



it was a conventional form to employ as epilogue, but also because it gives a complete break from the content of the play. As a framing device, it draws attention to the play's fictionality, and the use of a spell-like form makes the audience aware of the trance state in which it has been held. Thus, in order to break the spell, it is brought to the surface of the text in rhyme; ripe for destruction by the obliterating white noise of applause.

Ariel, too, does not use speech in the expected way after Puck in the Dream. In the earlier play, magic and rhyme are closely allied, but Ariel rarely uses rhyme unless in song. When he is speaking to the human characters, he is imprisoned and earthbound by the use of blank verse. It is during the songs that Ariel comes close to the sublime:

Come unto these yellow sands,  
And then take hands;  
Curtsied when you have, and kissed  
The wild waves whist,  
Foot it featly here and there,  
And sweet sprites bear  
The burden. Hark, hark!

(I.ii.374-380)

The freedom and etherial quality of magic is also present in the wedding masque devised by Prospero. Here Ceres, Iris and Juno all use rhyming couplets to celebrate and bless the marriage of Ferdinand and Miranda. This makes an interesting comparison to the blessing at the wedding by the fairies in the Dream. Here the blessing has more gracious formality and ceremony.

It is not only in the masque itself, of course, that Prospero orders events theatrically. As a contrast to the way in which Bottom struggles to find words to describe his experience in the Dream, Prospero, like Vincentio, redefines experience as an ordered art form for the sake of the other characters and his master plan. Shakespeare stresses the artificiality of some scenes set up by Prospero through suddenly placing them into a wider context. Robert Pierce in his article "'Very Like a Whale': Scepticism and Seeing in The Tempest" examines the way in which Shakespeare introduces this concept of artificiality.<sup>17</sup> He alters an

17) Pierce, Robert. "Very Like a Whale: Scepticism and Seeing in The Tempest". Shakespeare Survey 38 (1985): 167-73, 168-69.

audience's view of the initial shipwreck by the manner in which it is successively reported.

Firstly, the audience experiences a shipwreck in realistic form. It is unusual in the plays for such a catastrophe to be deliberately performed on stage rather than indirectly reported. The speech of the characters is often desperate and to the point. Fear of imminent calamity dictates the mood of the scene. This is followed immediately by a second version of the shipwreck. Prospero literally persuades Miranda (and the audience) not to believe the evidence of eyes and ears. The "wreck" is as insubstantial as a cloud; a work of art "So safely ordered" (I.ii.29) that no-one is hurt. Thirdly, Ariel gives his account of the shipwreck, this time from a performer's point of view. He gives an insight into the process of creating art out of chaos at close quarters. One of The Tempest's rare images is employed here when Ariel says:

the King's son Ferdinand,  
With hair up-staring - then like reeds, not hair -  
Was the first man that leapt.

(I.ii.212-214)

Ferdinand is strangely metamorphosed into a creature of the water like his father in the song afterwards. I believe it is a fictional confrontation with death and chaos, and yet a moment of creation. This mutability in the way events or circumstances are seen is typical of the play as a whole and emphasizes the part that language plays in the ordering of different viewpoints. The glimpse of chaos caught by Ferdinand is totally manufactured by Ariel's inventiveness and limited by Ariel's desire to protect from harm.

This mutability is expressed in the language itself. Ariel's comparison of his own storm to that of Jove exhibits a complicated twisting into the negative:

Jove's lightning, the precursors  
O'th'dreadful thunder-claps, more momentary  
And sight-outrunning were not.

(I.ii.201-203)

The above comparison of Jove's with Ariel's lightnings cleverly disguises a shift in tense. As Ariel resumes the report of his own creations, he slips into the present rather than the past. This eases the transition into a strangely smooth flow rather than an abrupt

interruption. The overall impression of the multi-directional account seems to disorientate the listener in the same way that the sailors are disorientated by the many directions of the storm.

It follows that if language is seen as dynamic, constantly shifting in meaning according to who is using it and what his or her mental attitudes are to the world, then doubt is cast onto its reliability as a medium of communication. Stanton B. Garner in "The Tempest: Language and Society" discusses the way in which Shakespeare shows this to be true in the characters' use of language.<sup>18</sup> He describes sound in general as part of the island's illusion and language as a part of this illusory sound system which must be tested. This explains Prospero's constant anxiety in I.ii that Miranda should be following him closely when he is telling the tale of how he lost his Dukedom. The very act of communication becomes as important as its content. If the difficulties of the medium itself are not overcome, then the whole intention in Prospero's staged shipwreck as far as Miranda is concerned is gone to waste: to successfully communicate his intentions to Miranda is to give them viability in the world.

18) Garner, Jnr., Stanton B. "The Tempest: Language and Society". Shakespeare Survey 32 1979: 177-87.

There are many instances, however, where language shows up its treacherous nature. Antonio and Sebastian use equivocation to devalue what Gonzalo is trying to say about an optimistic view of their situation on the island. They feel that he is constructing through the use of language a false picture, which is as miraculously produced as Tunis by the harp of Amphion:

Antonio: His word is more than the miraculous harp.

Sebastian: He hath raised the wall, and houses too.

Antonio: What impossible matter will he make easy  
next?

(II.i.85-87)

I think this passage compares interestingly with Prospero's "cloud-capped towers" speech (IV.i.146-163). Garner says of Antonio and Sebastian that as they are:

Consummate sophists, they play with  
non-referential language, severing words from a  
concern for truth.<sup>19</sup>

19) Garner Jnr.: 179.

Language is also used as an instrument of persuasion in making one thing seem very like another. This technique is used by Antonio in persuading Sebastian to kill Alonso. At first Sebastian is aware that the plan is a mere fiction or 'dream' created by Antonio. Antonio's reply is to use this image back again in saying that the sleeping king is almost the same as being already dead, at least in appearance. He makes words replace reality. I believe that it is Antonio's use of Sebastian's image of sleepiness which tips the balance and persuades him to attempt the murder. Antonio says he expects no difficulties with the other courtiers when they get back home due to their susceptibility to taking what is said as literal fact:

They'll take suggestion as a cat laps milk;  
 They'll tell the clock to any business that  
 We say befits the hour.

(II.i.286-288)

Here Shakespeare is describing the process that he has just illustrated in Antonio's coercion of Sebastian.

It is therefore a hard task for Ferdinand and Miranda, like Romeo and Juliet, when they fall in love

at first sight, to express this love to each other. They must find the language in which to clothe their love without misrepresenting it. Initially, it is attempted by courtly hyperbole, but this seems to produce more of a gulf between them rather than to provide a medium of communication. Later, in the log-bearing scene, they find true expression through simplicity. This could well have been expected from the author of Lear. At the end, the lovers are depicted playing chess, perhaps a symbol of the necessity for logical communication as a base for society.

Nevertheless, in a similar manner to the conclusion of Lear, there is a silence at the end of the The Tempest. Prospero refuses to enumerate Antonio's sins and, in his turn, Antonio seems strangely silent on his future allegiance to the rightful Duke. Caliban, too, is silent on any feelings of guilt. His main concern seems to be with having been taken in by Trinculo. Prospero also has the quality of mystery about him in that he promises that every third thought should be of the silence of the grave. I think that Shakespeare stresses by this that the deeper feelings of guilt or disillusion are inexpressible.



A wider view of the structure of The Tempest in relation to a theme of the limitations of language is given by Gayle Greene in "Excellent Dumb Discourse".<sup>20</sup> The first scene of the shipwreck, she says, is characterized by pleas, injunctions, curses, howls and prayers. Language is presented as ineffective in the face of damnation and as a barrier to the acceptance of true grace. As the play progresses, other means are sought to attain salvation. Thus the characters who cannot achieve salvation are those who manipulate language to achieve their ends: characters such as Antonio and Trinculo who use language to conceal rather than to reveal. The instrument of grace seems to be, in part, the magic upon which Prospero can draw. This magic appears as visions and unearthly sounds, but entails little speech. In fact, silence is necessary for the working of the charm at the wedding masque. Therefore, those characters who are at one with the magic of the island are also those who can find grace and are able to go forward more wisely in the knowledge of the true values upon which a new society may be built.

20) Greene, Gayle. "'Excellent Dumb Discourse': Silence and Grace in Shakespeare's Tempest". Studia Neophilologica 50.2 (1978): 193-205, 196-97.

Language and magic seem to form a complementary pair in The Tempest in that magic relies upon the presence or absence of language at the appropriate times. Magic is created by spells cast in words, written as well as spoken, but it is also destroyed by an untimely word. The fiction produced by the magic is temporal and artificial. Prospero, as director of events, turns life into art only for a time, in the same way that Hermione is apparently transformed into a statue in The Winter's Tale.

Lynne Magnusson in her article "Interruption in The Tempest" discusses the role of interruption in the frequent breaking of artistic order to point out its artificiality and contrast it to the disorder of life itself.<sup>21</sup> Prospero orders events into a fiction so that the characters may grasp certain truths. An example of this might be the trials he manufactures for the love of Ferdinand and Miranda, or the remorseful connections Alonso is guided to make between his past conduct and his drowned son by the illusion of the harpies. In both cases, the trials simply desist or are interrupted by further events or speeches rather than being carried

21) Magnusson, Lynne. "Interruption in The Tempest". Shakespeare Quarterly 37.1 1986: 52-65.

through to a culminating resolution. They are shown up deliberately as fabrications by the frequent reappearances of Prospero and Ariel.

Interruption also plays a major part in the closing of this play. Like the Dream, there is a wedding performance, but this time given by the spirits. The masque requires silence so that the spell be not broken, but Prospero breaks it himself with words of Stephano's conspiracy. Magnusson points out that the masque is broken because of its absences: the things its ordering of life into art excludes. Life deconstructs art by its very urgency. In the following "cloud-capped towers" speech (IV.i.146-163), Prospero compares this interruption of the masque with the passing of life itself:

We are such stuff  
As dreams are made on, and our little life  
Is rounded with a sleep.

(IV.i.156-158)

Life cannot have the controlled order of art and therefore the illusion is shattered by thoughts of discordant elements in the form of the Stephano conspiracy. There is here, however, a hint that life

itself may consist of an inscrutable ordering imposed upon it by an unknown dreamer. "We are such stuff/ As dreams are made on" is written in the passive tense implying the presence of an anonymous dreamer or artisan.

Magnusson sees the above speech as a deconstruction of the art/life antithesis of the play. Spirit actors in the masque, people in the 'real life' of the play controlled by Prospero or even Prospero himself are unknowingly controlled by outside and inside circumstances. One of these controlling circumstances is language itself. Magnusson says:

For the dream-making faculty does not confine its activity to plays, masques, poems, literary fictions. To live is to live within fictions, as Alonso, Ferdinand, Miranda, Gonzalo, Sebastian, and Antonio unwittingly live within the plots Prospero makes, and as they unwittingly live within the prison or dream houses of their own languages.<sup>22</sup>

22) Magnusson: 63.

It can be argued, therefore, that a dependence upon language limits a person's mental construct of the world. I think this may be why Shakespeare used spectacle and non-articulate sound so frequently in The Tempest. They illustrate intuitional truths beyond the boundaries of words. The resulting detachment from a reliance upon words allows an examination of life from a different perspective.

In "From Tempest to Epilogue" James Walter records the play's preoccupation with signing and places it into the categories created by St. Augustine. According to these writings, there are two types of signs: one is inspirational, which would include such things as spectacle and subliminal suggestion, and the other is the more rational and logical in the form of everyday language. St. Augustine mentions that dangers are inherent in the use of the former in that the "waters of inspiration" have the potential for chaos as well as creation. It is this quality of inspirational dynamism which gives the play much of its mystery:

After erupting into violence in the first scene, the sea remains a haunting power, lying just under the play's language, imagery, and

action, at times swelling into visibility to remind us of change".<sup>23</sup>

One of the dangers of spectacle, according to Walter, is its ability to keep an audience totally enraptured without allowing the freedom for logical reflection.

It is therefore vital that characters and audience are released from the spell of the drama, if they are to take up life again having gained from the experience in the same way that Bottom and the lovers gain from their experiences in the Dream. This is the reason it is necessary for Prospero to abjure his "rough" magic; to finally reject the more primitive, yet sublime, inspirational mode of signification in favour of the more logical, if pedantic, system upon which to build a new society.

I think it is true that in the projected future of the play, the characters would always have to be aware of the weaknesses of language as communication, both in its propensities for misunderstanding and in its

23) Walter: 71.

availability for abuse. It must, indeed, be a "brave new world" in its confidence to forge ahead to build as near a perfect society as possible with fallible, yet useful, tools. The same may be said of Shakespeare's attempt to explore the very limits to which language can reach and still to continue writing in the hope that he would communicate effectively with his audience.

Prospero's last speech, the epilogue, surprises the audience by the way that it switches to rhyming couplets and enables Prospero to address the audience directly for the first time in the play. It comes immediately after he has released Ariel back into the purely spiritual world and given him his freedom. Now, he asks the audience to release him, but it is the audience itself which must be released from the spell of the play in order to resume life the wiser for the experience. This must be done by hands and breath: hands to break the bondage of the spell by clapping, and breath to resume the communication which is the basis of life. Additionally, both hands and breath may be used in prayer to prepare for an uncertain future. It is in this way that Shakespeare ends his last great work as sole author. In Prospero's last speech, there is the unmistakable note of finality which is the farewell of a great man.

The new style which breaks out from the third act of Measure for Measure culminates in the achievement of The Tempest. Ambiguity is used, not only for the quibbles and puns of witty dialogue as in the earlier stages, but also for a deeper more serious purpose. It is present verbally in the emergent sexual references of Measure for Measure, and structurally in the many different levels upon which each play can be viewed. Life is seen as metaphor by way of theatrical presentation. It is as though Shakespeare, convinced by now of the treacherous nature of words, must show what he means in action and metaphor rather than explain it directly through the speeches of his characters. It is not solely what is said that matters now, but how it is said and how it is shown.



### CONCLUSION

Central to my study of Shakespeare's plays has been the premise that they are all connected by an intricate tracery of reworkings. These can range from the recurrence of certain plot-lines or themes right down to the details of variations in rhetoric or imagery. Similarities in some respects show up differences in others, and illustrate the endless permutations of familiar material to the creative mind. Rather than belittling the achievement of the author, it highlights the process of creativity and the variations possible in the treatment of a particular theme.

A comparison of Romeo and Juliet and Much Ado reveals many similarities in plot elements. These must have been attractive to an author intent upon reworking familiar ground in order to make it yield something new. In like manner, the story of Antony and Cleopatra could have appealed through its similarity to Romeo and Juliet. Both plays involve a choice of loyalties from its lovers between love and society. Another group which shows this twisting of familiar ideas is Love's

Labour's Lost, the Dream and The Tempest. There is an evolution through the re-ordering of plot elements from Love's Labour's Lost to the Dream, further developed when the character groupings of the Dream undergo transformation in The Tempest. A character in one play will often reveal its origins in another. Who could deny the shadowy presence of Othello in Leontes, or of Lear in Prospero?

This technique of reworking extends even to the material of which the plays are made. Speech patterns themselves undergo variation as they are used in similar situations through different plays. The unscrupulous rhetoric of Richard III in wooing Lady Anne whom he had recently made a widow is softened considerably into prose when Henry V woos Katherine after vanquishing France. Shakespeare manipulates his audience's reactions by the structure of these persuasions in what could be seen as similar situations. Ophelia's mad lament in Hamlet where she gives out flowers and herbs becomes Perdita's welcome to country festivities in The Winter's Tale. Where Ophelia gives intimations of disaster in the clipped rhythms of prose, Perdita evokes spring and renewal in the cadences of verse.

Imagery, too, undergoes re-use within different plays. Characters echo each other through time and space. Macbeth cries in resignation "Out, out, brief candle!" as Othello murderously resolves to "Put out the light". Frequently groups of images occur together, although the effect obtained by these groups is different in each case.

It is clear from the variety and the consistent patterning of imagery which appears within individual plays that Shakespeare had a highly accessible creative sub-conscious. Images infuse his drama with emotional tone and a unifying atmosphere. What seems an inconceivable complexity of motifs running through a play can only have been achieved with great intensity, concentration and memory. Like Theseus's hounds in the Dream, each voice is different and yet together they effect a melodic harmony.

Both the Dream and Romeo and Juliet contain totally consistent imaginative worlds through Shakespeare's use of imagery. In the Dream, he provided a cornucopia of images taken from every aspect of the English countryside. The sheer variety and love of detail makes this an outstanding play, and builds up a complete

fictional world. On the other hand, in the imagery of Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare used the tension of opposites, creating the illusion that all things between the poles are included in the play.

Experimentation upon the conventional also occupied Shakespeare in the variety of verse forms in the Dream. He seems to have deliberately used it as a playground in which to try out the effects of as many rhythmical forms as possible, yet the speakers of all these variations are intertwined by their action upon each other. The result is a welter of variations in image, sound and interaction which combine to form the essentially ineffable experience of the play.

This experimentation with the conventional is also a feature of Romeo and Juliet where Shakespeare enjoyed using the sonnet form for the new purpose of drama. In basing especially the earlier part of his play upon the sonnet, he counterpointed the ideas and traditional expression of courtly love with the reality of Mercutio's lustful comments and the searching for an adequate language of love evident in the young lovers themselves. The play seems to intimate that if there is no true way to express love within society, then it

cannot exist as an integrated and accepted part of it.

Shakespeare examined further the concept of language use within society in Much Ado. As this play has many plot elements in common with the earlier play, Romeo and Juliet, it seems that Shakespeare's choice may have been influenced by a wish to go deeper into the related themes of love, language, and society, and how they interact. Rumour and gossip become fascinating in Much Ado as a shallow overlay upon real events. A fiction created by any of the characters can change events and even become fact. Although Shakespeare chose pre-existing sources for his plot, it is the way language can be shown to have influenced the events of the plot which clearly interested him enough to magnify his illustration of it in proportion to the sources.

The Merchant of Venice, too, shows how language can be used to influence and persuade. Portia's speeches in the court scene are a fine example of this as are Shylock's rebuttals of her pleas. Shakespeare's interest here lies in the interpretation of the written or spoken word and the way in which this imposed meaning will affect later events. Bassanio must decipher the riddle of the caskets, and only if he has the skill to

see correctly through the tricks of language is he deemed a fit husband for Portia. In the court scene, it is the law which must be interpreted, and Shakespeare deftly exposes the ambiguities inherent in even the most carefully formulated language.

After this masterly use of Renaissance punning and wordplay in an examination of the way language affects society, Shakespeare turned to a deeper examination of language in relation to the individual consciousness. As he became more aware of the lack of any direct connection between words and reality, he moved towards the isolation of the use of language from reality by a mind locked inside madness. Hamlet, as the first character created to illustrate this theme, does so almost by proxy. He stays just this side of madness and so his thought processes remain logical, yet he mimics the dream logic and related language of madness. The whole play stresses the difficulties and uncertainties surrounding any act of communication, but added to this are Hamlet's word games which illustrate the many ambiguities inherent in language itself. Words are used to confuse rather than to elucidate any meaning.

Shakespeare takes this view of language as the medium

of madness one step further in King Lear. Lear mistakes Cordelia's refusal to show her love by an insincere and exaggerated speech for the absence of love itself. The "nothing" with which she signifies that words cannot express her true feelings confronts Lear with his own churlish reliance upon empty words of flattery. It shows him that his own position is founded upon a fiction created by language.

From this point, fiction takes over totally in the form of madness. Here words are self-referential: they have no correspondence to outside reality. Lear is imprisoned within his own mind by his inability to make that leap of faith which correlates words with their external counterparts in the real world. He has lost his belief that words really mean anything.

Shakespeare's portrayal of this character shows considerable courage in his immersion into this swirling sea of emotion. He reaches the portrayal of an inner use of language: a mind expressing only itself rather than attempting to relate to things external. Language is stretched to its limit in order to illustrate the workings of Lear's mind in a way which will still be intelligible to an audience. This is an instance of

language replacing reality by a character's fiction and as such is an illustration of "the worst".

Opposed to this view is Shakespeare's experimentation in Measure for Measure. Here, fiction, as the projection of Vincentio's mind, is used to modify fact when he takes on the disguise of the friar. Events are stage-managed in an attempt to bring them to order and harmony. Imagery gives way to the possibilities created by ambiguity and theatrical presentation, especially in the second half of the play.

Shakespeare extended this, after Lear, to develop further the concept of art imitating life until the reality of events could be brought to order. In The Winter's Tale, for instance, Hermione is replaced in Leontes' mind by the concept of a statue until he is ready to accept her as she really is. Then art can be transformed to life and he can recover her reality. Similarly, those dearest to Cymbeline are restored to him as the riddle of the soothsayer is unlocked. Artificial forms are shown to be a way of preserving life or encapsulating it until those who have undervalued or abused it can recover their true sight.



So too, The Tempest, perhaps one of Shakespeare's greatest achievements, continues with this vision of art as a healing element. The constructs made by Prospero's spells and charms, which may be cast only when silence abounds, are frequently interrupted by the plots and schemes appertaining to life outside. Theatre is recognised as a fictional construct resting upon controlled wording as opposed to the disordered chatter of everyday life. What Shakespeare points out as vitally important is that fiction and life must be recognised for what they are: to mistake them is to invite disaster.

Shakespeare, it seems, had travelled a long way from the elaborate experience of the Dream to the theatrical construct of The Tempest. In between, he had tested the medium with which he built his fictional worlds to the uttermost point. It is as if he had questioned the fabric of his creation and found it melted "into air, into thin air", and yet realised that it contained a mirage of the human condition.

It is no wonder then, that like Prospero, Shakespeare drowned his books and broke his staff. His magic, however, can be recreated at any time and in any place

when actors embody his thoughts by the speaking of his words. His ideas are timeless, relying on, yet transcending the medium in which they are couched. They have merely to borrow the breath of life. Sonnet XVII, in describing how a loved one can be resurrected by a reader, also describes how life itself can be contained within artistic and linguistic form. Perhaps, too, the author himself appears within the words he wrote:

So long as men can breathe or eyes can see,  
So long lives this and this gives life to thee.

(13-14)

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