'AN ANCIENT TALE NEW TOLD'
SHAKESPEARE'S USE OF FOLK- AND FAIRY TALES AS SOURCES FOR HIS PLAYS

Submitted by

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BA (Hons)

This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of
The University of Western Australia

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August 2013

ABSTRACT

hakespeare drew inspiration for his plays from a wealth of different sources, but the ones usually discussed are in written, literary forms which are still accessible: the chronicles of Holinshed and Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans,* Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and popular romance, Italian *novelle* pre-eminently. What has long been neglected, however, is the abundance of traditional oral stories in circulation during Shakespeare's youth: folk- and fairy tales in particular. This thesis aims to identify and explore Shakespeare's reliance on this major, though largely unrecorded, well of inspiration, and argues that the playwright made frequent use of folktale plotlines, motifs, and figures in his plays, often superimposing several folk stories in one drama. This may partly explain why Shakespeare has so often been adapted for children, by writers from Charles and Mary Lamb to the present day. The thesis proposes, moreover, that Shakespeare not only drew on the narrative patterns and plots of folktales, but that he also utilised the powerful but latent emotional subtexts such tales encode. This is particularly evident in *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline,* the two plays discussed in detail, which have proved theatrically effective but have always puzzled critics, arguably because their links with folktales have not been investigated. In these works, which have been chosen to show that he drew on this material at different parts of his writing career, Shakespeare brings to the surface the dormant emotional subtexts of folktales – which are in turn based on some of the most frightening subconscious fears possible – and uses these skillfully to complicate and darken his apparently 'innocent' dramatic actions, creating new and disturbing affective responses in characters and audience alike. In utilising as sources common fairy tales, then, Shakespeare was also evoking their rich emotional and personal resonances, which allowed him to add layers of subtle meaning to his plays, and connect with his audience on an emotional, albeit largely subconscious level.

CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

nce upon a time, it was hard to imagine reaching the end of what seemed like such a lengthy and ambitious project. Thanks to a number of people, however, not only has the end arrived, but the journey was made infinitely more enjoyable. To my supervisor Bob White, I extend my humblest thanks; without his unrelenting support, encouraging advice, and keen insights this thesis would never have reached its happily-ever-after. Bob has been a constant source of inspiration throughout almost my entire university career, and for this I am truly grateful. I must also thank the staff in the School of Humanities at The University of Western Australia, in particular Van Ikin, for always being ready to offer a helping hand whenever obstacles obscured my path. I was fortunate enough to travel to Europe during my candidature to continue my research overseas, which would not have been possible without the generous financial support of the School of Humanities and the Graduate Research School at UWA, for which I am grateful.

Heartfelt thanks go to my family, for their unceasing faith in my abilities, gentle words of encouragement, and careful guidance. My parents, Kevin and Shirley, have supported me emotionally, financially, and even physically throughout my years of study, allowing me to pursue my passions and realise my scholarly dreams. It is to them I dedicate this work. I would also especially like to thank my sister, Alyssa, for listening endlessly to all my fears and desires, and helping to ward off the big, bad wolf whenever he got too close for comfort. Without her support, I would have been lost.

To my partner, Aidan, for remaining an unshakeable pillar of strength and love, reminding me that there is life outside of work, and accompanying me on the ups and downs of this adventure, I am genuinely grateful.

Finally, I would like to thank Sassy, for her unconditional companionship on early mornings, late nights, and long days, and her determination to get me to leave my desk every so often to entertain her.

NOTE ON TEXTS

All references to Shakespeare's plays are from: *The Norton Shakespeare,* gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, USA: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997.

Unless otherwise indicated, fairy tales referred to generally throughout this thesis may be found in either the *Complete Fairy Tales,* Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, London, New York: Routledge, 2002; or *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales*, ed. Maria Tatar, USA: W.W. Norton & Co, 2002.

INTRODUCTION

rson Welles' film *Citizen Kane* opens with a shot of an old, sick man lying alone in a bed. He whispers one word, 'Rosebud', and then dies. We soon learn that the man, Kane, was a wealthy and prominent newspaper publisher, whose death has become a matter of public interest. A journalist embarks on a mission to dig up all he can on Kane in an effort to portray accurately the man's life and career. The journalist quickly becomes fixated, however, on trying to solve the enigma of Kane's seemingly meaningless dying word. He explores every avenue and follows every lead he comes across, interviewing Kane's work associates, lovers, family, and so on; an investigation which takes up the duration of the film. But despite his best efforts, the journalist never discovers what 'Rosebud' means, and resignedly concedes that Kane's last word will forever remain a mystery. It is a very unsatisfying conclusion. Just before the film ends, however, after the journalist has relinquished his quest and left, the camera pans to a group of workers who are burning some of Kane's old and apparently worthless possessions. In the fire is a worn child's sled, on which Kane used to play in his youth. The camera slowly zooms in, focusing on the blazing sled, and it gradually becomes clear that there is a word painted on its back: Rosebud.

The journalist, then, was unsuccessful in discovering the meaning of Rosebud because he was looking in the wrong places: he assumed that Rosebud would be someone or something of significance from Kane's *adult* life. In reality, Rosebud was a commonplace yet powerful symbol of Kane's childhood. So, on one level, *Citizen Kane* explores the potent, often unrecognised effect that one's childhood can have on one's adult life.

Similarly, I would argue that previous investigation into Shakespeare's dramatic influences has been incomplete because we, too, have been looking in the wrong places. We have scoured the great classic works and contemporary literature which Shakespeare would have been exposed to in his adult life in an attempt to demystify his source material. In the meantime, we have neglected a major, though largely intangible, well of inspiration: the treasure trove of traditional oral stories in circulation during Shakespeare's youth. That Shakespeare seems to have preferred reworking established tales to inventing his own is well-known. It is no secret that that the chronicles of

Holinshed and Plutarch's *The Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* were the stimuli for Shakespeare's history and Roman plays; and that many of his romances and comedies drew on Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and popular romance; or that Italian *novelle* motivated several of his comedies and tragedies. All these renowned sources are in written, literary forms and are still accessible. What has been long overlooked, however, is the playwright's frequent use of folk- and fairy tales in his plays.

The general neglect of folk- and fairy tales by Shakespearean scholars of both literature and early modern popular culture is understandable: these old stories are elusive and difficult to trace. Created by anonymous oral storytellers and passed on by word of mouth for countless generations, fairy tales have obscure origins. Only when they make their way into the literary record can we sketch their history. The majority of the stories that we know today as folk- and fairy tales were recorded for the first time from the end of the eighteenth century, well after Shakespeare's era.[1] When it comes to sources, scholars generally prefer studying tangible, published evidence, and exploring the mostly unrecorded stories in oral transmission when Shakespeare was creating his plays involves a lot of speculation. Our ignorance of oral fairy tales before 1800 is compounded by the fact that the research done on these old stories is now itself getting old;[2] and most new scholarly work on the general subject of fairy stories necessarily uses written versions of the tales which appeared post-1800, because of the scarcity of earlier written versions. But, admitting the elusiveness of such unwritten sources should not deter us from examining the area: the evidence contained in Shakespeare's plays alone, especially *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline*, reveals their ubiquitous influence and importance.

While this hole in Shakespeare scholarship has generally gone unnoticed, recently it has come to the fore as an emerging issue needing consideration. Ann Thompson, in her introduction to *The Taming of the Shrew* (1984), asserts that critical discussion on the matter of sources for that play has been hampered by "the reluctance of literary scholars to deal with folktale and oral tradition".[3] *The Taming of the Shrew* has a three-part structure: a main plot, a sub plot, and what Thompson terms "the

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[1] D. L. Ashliman, *Folk and Fairy Tales: A Handbook* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 2004), p.12
[2] Katharine Briggs' renowned *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (1970), for instance, was published forty years ago – and it does not focus on fairy tales as stories, but is intended as a reference work. A book which focuses more on fairy tales as narratives, Stith Thompson's *The Folktale* (1946), was published 66 years ago.
[3] Anne Thompson, ed., *The Taming of The Shrew* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 9

frame".[4] The subplot has clear literary and dramatic origins in George Gascoigne's play *Supposes*, and as such any source analysis has occasioned little or no argument.[5] The sources for the main plot and the frame, however, have stimulated much confusion. Critics have tried to find precise sources in the literary sense, but the best that can be found – by combing through chapbooks, ballads, fabliaux and so on – are general analogues. And, according to Thompson, the few literary analogues that have been discovered have been more of a hindrance than a help since "they have been overemphasised by scholars unwilling to explore the less familiar terrain of folklore and oral tradition."[6]

Catherine Belsey echoes Thompson in her assertion that "[t]here has not been a great deal of critical interest in Shakespeare's links with...fireside tales."[7] Belsey's book *Why Shakespeare?* (2007) makes an original contribution to this relatively unexplored area of Shakespearean research. Belsey proposes that Shakespeare's continued popularity among modern audiences has to do with his use of fairy tale storylines, which show a parallel durability and appeal. She analyses seven plays, arguing that each retells a traditional tale with a difference. While the significance of Belsey's insightful book is unquestionable, it is short and is intended to be suggestive rather than in any way exhaustive. Her approach opens up further analyses and begs expansion, especially with regard to the plays she has not considered, such as *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline.*

Even more recently, Miriam Pollard has explored the links between Shakespeare and folktales in her unpublished thesis entitled "'Natural magic and dire property': Shakespeare's Use of Folktale Characteristics, and the Mediation of Religious Subversion" (2009).[8] Pollard's aim is twofold. First, she too points to the fact that the playwright's frequent use of folktales has largely been neglected, and she sets about proving that folktale threads are present in the plays *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Her principal purpose, however, is to illustrate that these folktale threads are bound with the religious beliefs of the time, and as such provided Shakespeare with an accessible and innocuous way of containing and transmitting all of the often controversial religious material in his plays.

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[4] Thompson, p.10. The 'frame' refers to the action centred on the framing of the tinker Christopher Sly; the main plot is the courtship and taming of Katherina by Petruchio; and the courtship of Katherina's sister, Bianca, forms the sub plot.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Catherine Belsey, *Why Shakespeare?* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), p. 17
[8] Miriam Pollard, "'Natural magic and dire property': Shakespeare's Use of Folktale Characteristics, and the Mediation of Religious Subversion", Unpublished Thesis, La Trobe University, Victoria, March 2009.

These three scholars point to the indisputable gap in research on the links between Shakespeare's plays and folk- and fairy tales. They also emphasise, by reason of their contemporaneousness, that this gap is beginning to be noticed and that further research into the area is indeed warranted.

In this thesis, I intend to identify and explore Shakespeare's reliance on folk- and fairy tales as sources for his plays. I aim to go further than existing scholarship by, firstly, explaining *why* Shakespeare may have drawn on humble oral stories, when he evidently had a wealth of respected and disciplined classical literature to choose from. Accordingly, Chapter 1 will assess the social place and importance of folk- and fairy tales in Elizabethan England. It suggests that these old stories were invaluable in Shakespeare's time, for a number of reasons. Briefly, in a world still dominated by oral forms of communication, folktales provided welcome entertainment, transmitted important cultural information, and served as a vehicle for discussing conscious and subconscious issues of concern – from explaining why things happen, to exploring secret fears and desires. As such, folk- and fairy tales were ubiquitous, and would have been well known to the broad range of social classes that constituted early modern England. Shakespeare, I propose, was too shrewd a dramatist to neglect such a rich resource, and regularly drew on old wives' tales, putting his audience's familiarity with them to work in new and surprising ways.

With this in mind, in chapters 2 and 3, I will suggest an original way of approaching *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline*, two plays whose links with folk material have not been adequately investigated, with an aim to providing tangible proof of the dramatist's familiarity with popular oral stories. In these works, which have been chosen to show that Shakespeare drew on this material at different parts of his writing career, I will demonstrate that the playwright makes frequent use of folktale plotlines, figures, and motifs, often superimposing several folk stories in one play. I propose, moreover, that Shakespeare also recognised the powerful but latent emotional subtexts embedded within traditional fairy tales, and used them to add layers of meaning to his works. Perhaps it is this dependence on folk material which explains why, among Shakespeare's plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline* have attracted comparatively little critical attention. By acknowledging Shakespeare's debt to folk- and fairy tales, and suggesting not only *why* but *how* Shakespeare used these stories as sources, I hope to offer an innovative perspective on the two plays, as well as the playwright's creative processes, which can be extended to analyses of other works by Shakespeare.

Folk- and Fairy Tales

Although in everyday usage folk- and fairy tales are often treated as two different kinds
of stories, fairy tales actually form a subcategory of folktales, not a separate genre. In
this thesis, therefore, I will be treating folk- and fairy tales as two manifestations of the
same well of oral sources. Folktales are stories of indeterminable origin that have been
orally transmitted from one person to another across countless generations, but have
eventually made their way into written form for us to know of them at all. These stories
follow a basic narrative structure, though one which allows for a great degree of
flexibility, and are easy to follow, recall, and repeat. As an oral culture, the telling of
folktales is usually associated with the popular or common people, and with women in
particular, hence the designation 'old wives' tales'. Folktales fall under the broader
category of folk narratives, where we also find myths and legends, but unlike these
latter stories, which supposedly have their roots in fact and history, folktales are
(predominantly) unashamedly fictitious.[9] This is particularly true of fairy tales, one type
of folktale. The term 'fairy tale' is problematic – most of the stories we think of today
as fairy tales (*Snow White*, *Little Red Ridinghood*, *Cinderella* etc.) do not feature any
fairies *per se*. But, as folklorist Katharine Briggs has pointed out, "the word 'faerie' was
originally used to describe a state of enchantment rather than a fairy person".[10]
Consequently, it is perhaps better to think of fairy tales as folktales that contain *fantasy*,
by which I mean the supernatural, impossible, magical, or unreal. Often metamorphosis,
some incredible transformation (from pumpkin to coach, maid to princess, prince to
frog), is a good indication of the presence of fantasy. The distinction between folk- and
fairy tale is, however, an artificial and unstable one, apt to collapse in on itself. For
instance, romantic folktales (*novelle*) typically contain no explicitly fantastic elements,
and yet many of these are so similar to certain fairy tales that they could arguably be
classified as alternate, 'naturalistic' versions: "The loutish simpleton of a hero gains the
hand of the Princess, but without the help of a golden goose; the constancy and truth of
the ill-used heroine win her happiness in the end but there is no fairy godmother to help
her".[11] The structuralist Vladimir Propp used the term 'wonder tale' to encompass both

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[9] I say predominantly because, as Ashliman points out, "there is evidence that at least some traditional
audiences and storytellers gave accepted many types of folktales as truth" (*Handbook,* p.34)
[10] Katharine Briggs, *A Dictionary of British Folk-Tales in the English Language* (London, Routledge and
Kegan Paul, 1970)*,* pt A, vol. 1, p.2
[11] Katharine Briggs, *British Folk-Tales and Legends*: *A Sampler* (London: Routledge, 2002), p.79

folk- and fairy tales, which seems fitting, as wonder is basic to the structure of these stories and the responses they evoke.[12]

Despite the unrealistic and wondrous backdrop of many folk- and fairy tales, however, these stories often deal with real-life beliefs:

> To take a well-known German Fairy Tale, "Hansel and Grethel" was conceived in a society which ardently believed in witches and was ready to believe stories of their ritual cannibalism, in which the power of witches to transform one thing into another, or at least to create an illusion of transformation, was taken for granted, but there is no doubt that the story is a fictional one, invested to delight an audience.[13]

Moreover, folktales centre on familiar and everyday concerns. The problems the protagonists face are real: their interests in leaving the home, proving themselves, finding a mate, a place in society, a stable family unit, and establishing a happy-ever-after mirror our own concerns, and hence connect with us on an individual and emotional level. Folktales are thus a powerful blend of the extraordinary and the *quotidian*, simultaneously enabling flights of fantasy while exploring deeply familiar issues. The importance of these stories to preliterate societies is slowly becoming appreciated, as will be illustrated in Chapter 1. In Shakespeare's day and well into the nineteenth century, a considerable part of the population had only basic reading skills, and limited access to reading matter. For these people, orally transmitted tales performed a variety of essential functions. Not only did they provide amusement, but they were a way of ensuring the diffusion of social customs, cultural perspectives, and the hard-won wisdom of past generations. Indeed, some of the earliest written records we have – for a diverse range of regions and cultures – mention folktales, signifying both their pre-existence and importance. In ancient Egypt, for example, where stories were preserved on papyri, there exists one particular collection of three folktales which dates from around 1700 B.C. The collection was believed to have been created for King Cheops, architect of the large pyramid of the same name, and well-respected ruler of a very advanced group.[14] Similarly, in ancient Greece, there are numerous literary references to 'old wives' tales', stories filled with supernatural events and characters which were, it seems, enjoyed by adults.[15]

Unfortunately, however, it was not until the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries that scholars began to take folktales seriously, and the collecting and recording of these

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[12] See Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale,* 2nd ed., rev. and ed. Loius A. Wagner, introd. Alan Dundes (Austin : University of Texas Press, 1968)
[13] Briggs, *British Folk-Tales and Legends*, p.5
[14] Stith Thompson, *The Folktale* (Berkley: University of California Press, 1946), pp.273-4.
[15] Ibid., p.278

stories began in earnest. Charles Perrault arguably began the process in the late seventeenth century with his *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralitez* (Stories or Tales of Times Passed, with Morals), a collection of oral stories printed in 1697 which initiated the genre of the literary fairy tale.[16] The Grimm brothers established the genre more firmly with their pioneering two volume work, *Kinder- und Hausmärchen* (Children's and Household Tales), first published in 1812. As the title of this collection makes clear, these stories were not intended solely for children, but for the whole household, which in those days could conceivably include extended family members spanning a number of generations. It has always been a misconception that fairy tales originated for or were enjoyed only by children; they existed orally for thousands of years as stories for all ages before they appeared as a literature for the young.

The Grimms' attempt to capture and preserve the oral tales of their country inspired other collectors, such as Joseph Jacobs and Andrew Lang, and soon scholars began to observe that folktales exhibited particular patterns, and could be organised into different groups. It was not until the twentieth century, though, that a serious move was made towards developing a formal classification system. Antti Aarne developed a method for organising folktales and published a preliminary catalogue in 1910, which was then substantially expanded and revised by Stith Thompson in 1928 and again in 1961, and then further updated and enlarged by Hans-Jörg Uther in 2004, who retitled the system *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*. The Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) index classifies folktales by dividing them into different groups according to their 'type', a term used by folklorists to describe a story's basic plotline or sequence of events. Stories with the same basic plotlines are put together as one type, having one ATU number. This system is still in the primary means of classifying folktales today, and has been influential for other folklorists such as D. L. Ashliman and Vladimir Propp. Along with the ATU index, Stith Thompson also developed a massive six-volume work entitled *The Motif-Index of Folk-Literature,* which identifies and catalogues some 40, 000 common folk motifs. A 'motif' is a basic narrative element, such as a tale's setting, characters, or unique objects, whose

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[16] Ashliman, *Handbook,* pp.24-5. As the title of Perrault's book makes clear, though, these stories were not yet known as 'fairy tales'. The term 'fairy tale' appears to have come from the translation of Madame d'Aulnoy's *Les contes de fees* (Tales of Fairies), published in 1697, a collection of invented literary stories with few folklore links which were intended for adults. It is not certain when we started applying this term to tales such as *Cinderella*, but it is clear that what we know think of as the original 'fairy-tale' collections were certainly not designated as such. Indeed, the world's best-known collection of 'fairy tales', the Grimm brothers' *Kinder- und Hausmärchen,* actually translates as "Children's and Household Tales".

"individual features lend life, vigor, and color" to a story.[17] Often, as Helen Cooper explains, a motif can prove

> so useful, so infectious, that it begins to take on a life of its own. There is a word for such things now: a 'meme', an idea that behaves like a gene in its ability to replicate faithfully and abundantly, but also on occasion to adapt, mutate, and therefore survive in different forms and cultures.[18]

Indeed, most scholars acknowledge that particular motifs are often much older than the stories they have become associated with.[19] A tale type is generally made up of a cluster of motifs: *Snow White*, for instance, classified as ATU 709, is made up of motifs such as the wicked stepmother [motif S31], the attempted murder by poison [S111], and the glass coffin [F852.1].[20] Both the ATU index and the motif index are important texts within this thesis, where I use them to identify folktale plotlines and patterns within Shakespeare's plays. However, I try to avoid the quasi-scientific terminology and the mode of analysis which isolates different story types because, as will become clear, Shakespeare's use of such motifs usually combines several in very fluid and integrated ways which should be reflected in critical analysis.

In Shakespeare's time, then, folktales had not yet progressed into a formalised literature and were still in their oral form. This makes it difficult to know what stories Shakespeare may have been exposed to, as unrecorded narratives don't tend to leave a concrete trail. Nevertheless, as we shall see, it is clear from literary references scattered throughout sixteenth- and seventeenth-century plays like Peele's *Old Wives Tale* (printed in 1595)*,* broadsides and chapbooks like *Tom Thumb* (circa 1621), and prose writings from authors like Reginald Scot and John Aubrey, there was a wealth of oral stories in circulation at the time.

However, the best evidence for Shakespeare's familiarity with folk- and fairy tales lies in the plays themselves. Even on a superficial level, Shakespeare's plays contain elements from this body of stories. His characters could have been lifted from any number of wonder tales: supernatural beings like ghosts, gods, fairies, witches, sprites, and eerie apparitions people plays such as *Hamlet, Macbeth, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Richard III, Julius Caesar, The Tempest,* and *Cymbeline*; while

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[17] Max Luthi, *The Fairytale as Art Form and Portrait of Man* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1984), p.115
[18] Helen Cooper, *The English Romance in Time* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), p.3
[19] Ashliman, *Handbook,* p.15
[20] Hans- Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: a classification and bibliography, based on the system of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson* (Helsinki: Suomalainen Tiedeakatemia, Academia Scientiarum Fennica, 2004), vol. 1, ATU 709; Stith Thompson, *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature,* rev. and enl. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-58), 6 vols

numerous other works feature stereotypical fairy-tale figures, from kings, queens, princes, and princesses, to persecuted heroines, wicked stepmothers, tyrannical fathers, jealous husbands, loyal servants, witty fools, foolish wits, evil villains, and wild men in the woods. Literary critics and historians often talk about Shakespeare's characters reflecting Elizabethan class differences or factionalism in early modern courts; but perhaps they are more satisfactorily seen as taking the plays into the world of fairy tales.

Similarly, many of the plays' plotlines and motifs seem to recall folk stories: jumped-up country girls and servants manage to find rich, handsome princes (*All's Well That Ends Well, Twelfth Night, The Winter's Tale*); love can be stimulated with a few drops of a fairy potion (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*); youngest children prove to be the most worthy (*King Lear, As You Like It*); slandered wives are forced to clear their reputations (*Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, All's Well, Measure for Measure, Othello*); put-upon protagonists flee to the forest and undergo emotional or bodily transformation (*King Lear, Titus Andronicus, Cymbeline, A Midsummer Night's Dream*); domineering fathers make their children's lives difficult (*The Tempest, King Lear, Cymbeline, As You Like It, The Winter's Tale*); the dead can come back to life (*Much Ado About Nothing, The Winter's Tale, Pericles, Cymbeline*); and the living can seem dead with the help of a magical breath-stilling tonic (*Romeo and Juliet, Cymbeline*).

Perhaps the dramatist's use of fairy tales, stories which have always held special appeal for young audiences, explains why his plays have so often been rewritten for children. Velma Bourgeois Richmond has demonstrated that children were introduced to Shakespeare as early as the 1790s, when individual plays were remodelled for children, such as the chapbook version of *The Merchant of Venice* from 1794, entitled *The History of Shylock the Jew, and Antonio The Merchant, with that of Portia and the Three Caskets… Adapted to the Minds of Young Children*; and *The History of King Lear and his Three Daughters,* another chapbook from the same year.[21] The choice of these two plays is telling, as both *The Merchant of Venice* and *King Lear* have clear folktale links, as Belsey has illustrated.[22] Three years earlier in 1791, a book of nursery rhymes entitled *Mother Goose's Melody* appeared, which included a whole section dedicated to songs from Shakespeare's plays.[23] Charles and Mary Lamb's landmark children's book

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[21] Velma Bourgeois Richmond, *Shakespeare as Children's Literature: Edwardian Retellings in Words and Pictures* (Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland & Co., 2008), p.9

[22] See Belsey, pp. 42-64 for an analysis of *King Lear*'s folk roots; and pp. 149-168 for *The Merchant of Venice*

[23] Georgianna Ziegler, "Alice Reads Shakespeare, Charles Dodgson and the Girl's Shakespeare Project", in *Reimagining Shakespeare for Children and Young Adults,* ed. Naomi J Miller (Great Britain; New York: Routledge, 2003). p.108

Tales from Shakespeare, which retells 20 plays, appeared in 1807, and is still available today in modern print; while the Bowdlers' *Family Shakespeare* (1807) became one of the most popular editions of Shakespeare in that century.[24] Two books make the connection between Shakespeare and fairy tales explicit: Adelaide Sim's *Phoebe's Shakespeare: Arranged for Children* (1894) opens with a note to her niece, Phoebe, which begins, like all good fairy tales, with "once upon a time", and introduces the book as containing "beautiful stories – stories about Kings and Queens, and battles ... about good, and noble, and brave, men and women, and wicked ones too".[25] Similarly, Edith Nesbit justifies her adaptation of 10 Shakespearean plays into a book of children's narratives by stating that they are like "fairy tale[s]".[26] More recently (1992-4), the BBC has created a television series entitled *Shakespeare*: *The Animated Tales* (also known as *The Animated Shakespeare*), comprising twelve successful episodes. Each episode is an half-hour adaptation of one of Shakespeare's plays into a fairy-tale-like animation for children. Throughout the ages, then, people have recognised that there is something within Shakespeare's plays – despite their complicated language and adult themes – that makes them particularly well suited to childhood consumption. In a way, such collections could be seen as returning the plays to their folk- and fairy tale roots.

Shakespeare was not the first writer to quarry the rich vein of traditional oral narratives for plotlines. D. L. Ashliman has shown that some of our most esteemed, classical authors regularly recycled folktales in their works. Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (1567), one of Shakespeare's favourite sources, is a positive storehouse of folk narratives, adapting myths and legends, as well as folktales such as the story of Chione (meaning 'snow girl', or 'daughter of the snow'), an ancient cousin of Snow White (ATU 709).[27] Writing in the mid-1300s, Giovanni Boccaccio, another of Shakespeare's well-thumbed sources, unashamedly relied on oral tradition to create his collection of 100 stories in *The Decameron.* At least thirty of Boccaccio's novellas are clearly derived from old folktales, and many more may have allusions to folk material now lost to us.[28] Similarly, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400)*,* Giovanni Straparola's *Le piacevole notti* (The Pleasant Nights; 1550-1553), and Giambattista

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[24] Ziegler, p.108

[25] Adelaide C. Gordon Sim, preface to *Phoebe's Shakespeare*: *Arranged for Children* (London: Bickers and Son, 1894), sigs A-A1

[26] Edith Nesbit, preface to *The Best of Shakespeare: Retellings of 10 Classic Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), p.8

[27] See *Ovid's Metamorphoses,* trans. Arthur Golding, ed. Madeline Forey (London: Penguin Books, 2002), book 11, lines 295-345. For an analysis of the links between *Snow White* and Ovid's story of Chione see Graham Anderson, *Fairytale in the Ancient World* (London: Routledge, 2000), pp.46-50

[28] Ashliman, *Handbook,* p.154

Basile's *The Pentamerone* (1634-1636) all draw heavily on oral narrative, using and transforming popular stories into unique and memorable creations.[29] These works are important cultural records, as they contain many of the earliest European references to some of our most well-known fairy tales. Furthermore, they reveal that fairy tales have always been enjoyed by adults.

Fairy tale plots and themes continue to exert a powerful hold on our cultural imaginations today. The famous story-book illustrator Arthur Rackham remarked that fairy tales have become "part of our everyday thought and expression, and help to shape our lives".[30] Our language has certainly been influenced by the genre: 'happily ever after', 'big bad wolf', 'once upon a time', 'ugly duckling', 'Prince Charming', and 'pound of flesh' are just some fairy-tale phrases which have flooded our everyday expressions. Fairy tales have also invaded our popular culture. These stories are constantly being retold and reinterpreted for adult audiences by cinema, opera, ballet, artists, writers, and advertisers. The last few years, especially, have seen a resurgence in the popularity of fairy tales, with an unprecedented number of adaptations for cinema and television. In 2011, three films with unmistakable fairy-tale roots were released: *Red Riding Hood,* directed by Catherine Hardwicke (of the *Twilight* series); *Beastly,* a contemporary adaptation of *Beauty and the Beast*; and *Sleeping Beauty*, an Australian film by Julia Leigh. 2012 saw three versions of *Snow White* adapted for the big screen: *Mirror Mirror*, directed by Tarsem Singh; *Snow White and the Huntsman*, starring Charlize Theron; and *Blancanieves*, a Spanish reinterpretation set in 1920s Seville. In the same year, *Once Upon a Time* and *Grimm*, two series based on elaborate fairy-tale premises, appeared on television. *Once Upon a Time* blithely reworks and interweaves a staggering number of fairy tale plots and characters, situating the narrative in the town of "Storybrooke". *Grimm* is darker in tone and follows a detective – the last living descendant of the Grimm brothers – who hunts down a different folktale beast every week. In 2013, the Hollywood production *Hansel and Gretel: Witch Hunters* opened to eager audiences, followed closely the by the box-office success *Jack the Giant Slayer.* It is also worth noting the current demand for stories which draw on related folk material such as magic, the supernatural, and fabled beings like werewolves and vampires. Films like *Harry Potter, The Lord of the Rings,* and *Twilight* as well as television series such as *True Blood* and *Game of Thrones* have attracted enormous followings, continuing a narrative trend likely to extend into the foreseeable future. Incidentally, the same trend

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[29] See Ashliman, *Handbook,* pp.22-4, 153-4.
[30] Quoted in Maria Tatar, ed., *The Annotated Classic Fairy Tales* (USA: W.W. Norton & Co, 2002), p.xii

can be seen with Shakespeare's plays. As Daniel Fischlin and Mark Fortier have observed: "As long as there have been plays by Shakespeare, there have been adaptations of those plays".[31] Julie Sanders notes, moreover, that Shakespeare's "*oeuvre* functions in a remarkably similar way to the communal, shared, transcultural, and transhistorical art forms of myth and fairy tale".[32] Perhaps the reason for this is that Shakespeare was drawing on stories which themselves have been adapted for eons.

These are just a few examples of conscious or deliberate uses of fairy tales in contemporary popular culture, but there are countless more indirect or perhaps unwitting reworkings of these familiar tales. F. Scott Fitzgerald once claimed that there are no more than "two basic stories": "Cinderella and Jack the Giant Killer – the charm of women and the courage of men".[33] Yet these subtexts and their remarkable influence and longevity are seldom acknowledged. Fairy tales have become so much a part of our collective unconscious that we use them sometimes without even realising it. Belsey sees Cinderella in the heroines of *Pride and Prejudice*, *Jane Eyre*, *Pretty Woman,* and *Bridget Jones*: "Each time a poor heroine marries someone whose status might be expected to put him beyond reach... the fairy tale pattern is reinvested with modern preoccupations".[34] Similarly, H. R. Ellis Davidson has traced the story *Patient Griselda* (ATU 887) throughout history, from the early writings of Boccaccio and Chaucer all the way to Dickens and Conrad, concluding that "the literary artist may seize on the framework of a folktale and erect a new structure upon it according to the manners and idiom of his own time."[35] G. F. Dalton has also isolated particular folktale storylines and motifs in the works of six contemporary authors, as well as a number of modern films, suggestively labelling them "unconscious plagiarisms".[36]

Once again, the same phenomenon can be seen with Shakespeare: his works have so thoroughly permeated our culture that we often use him without thinking about it. Phrases like 'fool's paradise', 'all's well that ends well', 'come what may', 'foul play', and 'in a pickle' – all of which are drawn from Shakespeare's plays – are used every day by people who often have no idea it is Shakespeare they are quoting. Many teenagers nowadays will confidently ascribe the story of Romeo and Juliet to Baz

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[31] Quoted in Julie Sanders, *Adaptation and Appropriation* (Hoboken: Taylor & Francis, 2005), p.46
[32] Sanders, p.45. See Sanders' Chapter 3 for an in-depth discussion of Shakespearean adaptations and appropriations.
[33] F. Scott Fitzgerald, *On Authorship*, ed. Matthew J. Bruccoli and Judith S. Baughman (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1996), p.181
[34] Belsey, p.11
[35] H. R. Ellis Davidson, "Folklore and Literature," *Folklore*, 86.2 (1975), p.80
[36] G. F. Dalton, "Unconscious Literary Use of Traditional Material," *Folklore*, 85.4 (1974), p. 270

Luhrmann, only secondarily aware that he adapted one of Shakespeare's plays for his 1996 film *Romeo + Juliet.*

Perhaps Shakespeare used fairy tales in the same way. If these old stories were pervasive in early modern society, then they would have been so deeply entrenched in the dramatist's consciousness that he may have used them without necessarily being aware of doing so. He may have committed 'unconscious plagiarisms'. There are, however, a good many reasons why Shakespeare may have *intentionally* evoked fairy tales in his plays, as will be analysed in Chapter 1. At the very least, they provided entertaining storylines which, if centuries of tellings are anything to go by, were guaranteed to have a ready audience.

Shakespeare's use (intentional or otherwise) of folktales may, as Belsey has convincingly argued, be the reason that audiences today still engage with Shakespeare's plays, hundreds of years after they were first performed. Because we recognise storylines we are already familiar with, we are drawn into the narratives, despite the difference in language and culture. Again, this may not be a conscious recognition; rather, I would suggest, it is akin to what happens when we hear a good song. Often, we do not hear the bass-line but are instead swept away by the melody, or even the lyrics. But we know the bass-line is there, somewhere in the background contributing to the song as a whole, even if we can't quite put our finger on it. Similarly, we may not consciously identify a specific fairy tale when watching one of Shakespeare's plays, but we can *sense* that something familiar is there, lingering suggestively below the surface of the narrative. And, just as in a song, if we attune ourselves to the underlying tone, if we consciously follow its rhythms, we can often be taken on a whole new journey, find new meanings, new levels of understanding – a new narrative.

This idea will be explored in more detail in the chapters to come. We begin with a general overview of the place and importance of folktales in the lives of those who lived in Elizabethan England.

CHAPTER 1

The Place and Importance of Folktales in Elizabethan England

he focus of this chapter will fall on elucidating *why* Elizabethans told stories, in an effort to reveal why Shakespeare may have been familiar with folktales and why he incorporated them into his plays. I will turn to the context in which the plays were produced, and seek to establish the place and importance of folktales in Elizabethan England, and to the dramatist himself. I will argue that folktales formed a significant part of early modern popular culture, and served a variety of important purposes, from offering entertainment, to providing a means for discussing social, cultural, personal, and emotional issues of concern. By demonstrating how ubiquitous and central these stories were in Elizabethan England, we may better credit the notion that Shakespeare used folktales as sources, even though the exact source tales he may have used cannot be provided, given their oral nature and the fact that they were no doubt constantly changing in their details over time, even as they kept their basic plots.

Why did People Tell Stories?

The sixteenth century in England saw more people reading than ever before, thanks to the increased number and accessibility of reasonable schools, and the advent of the printing press, which produced a wealth of reading material, both learned and low.[1] The period is widely known as one of educational reform, and it fuelled considerable developments in both the creative and learned fields of drama, poetry, prose, mathematics, science, history, and philology, among others.[2] Although literacy levels may have been relatively high, however, a substantial proportion of the population were unable to read: "more than two-thirds of the men and nine-tenths of the women were so illiterate at the time of the civil war that they could not even write their own names".[3] The greater majority of Elizabethans, then, inhabited a predominantly oral world. "The spoken word", Adam Fox notes, "necessarily remained the first and in many cases the

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[1] The impact of education and literacy will be discussed in greater detail below.
[2] Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth and Seventeenth Century* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1971), pp.4-5
[3] David Cressy, *Literacy and the Social Order: Reading and Writing in Tudor and Stuart England* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.2

only means by which the vast majority of people at all social levels exchanged ideas and acquired information".[4] In such a society, oral stories filled a compelling need.

I.   Entertainment

First and foremost, folktales were invaluable as a means of entertainment in this pre-industrial civilization, making "long nights seeme short, and heauy toyles easie", as the author of a popular seventeenth-century chapbook put it.[5] In Shakespeare's day, the majority of England was still a farming community and the year was organised around agricultural concerns. Working-hours were determined by the weather; and the northern climate could be harsh. In winter, farming was limited to a few hours a day, and it became largely impossible during the coldest months over Christmas. With no electricity to provide light or warmth, Elizabethans spent many long and dreary nights, Sundays, and Christmas holidays crowded around the fireside. This is the context that fostered storytelling.

Stories were an inveigling way of distracting people from the boredom of unoccupied hours. Henry Bourne, a cleric in Newcastle-upon-Tyne with an interest in the habits of the common people, wrote in 1725: "Nothing is commoner in Country Places than for a whole Family in a Winter's Evening, to sit around the Fire, and tell stories of Apparitions and Ghosts".[6] Robert Burton, writing in the early 1600s, expands on the point, listing the recreations available in winter to "busy our minds with": cards, chess and other such games; music, singing, dancing; jests, riddles, catches; and, importantly, "merry tales of errant Knights, Kings, Queenes, Lovers, Lords, Ladies, Giants, Dwarfes, Theeves, Cheaters, Witches, Fayries, Goblins, Friers, &c".[7] This list could conceivably belong to the *dramatis personae* of a number of Shakespeare's plays. Certainly, such figures feature in George Peele's play *The Old Wives Tale,* a melting pot of odds and ends from a variety of folk stories.[8] The comedy, first printed in 1595, begins in the rustic cottage of an old smith and his wife, who are playing host to three men from the city who lost their way in the woods. "Well Masters", the smith asks the

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[4] Adam Fox and Daniel Wolf, eds, *The Spoken Word: Oral Culture in Britain 1500-1800* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2002), p.13
[5] Richard Johnson, *The History of Tom Thumbe* (1621), ed. Curt F. Buhler (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 2
[6] Quoted in Margaret Spufford, *Small Books and Pleasant Histories: Popular Fiction and its Readership in Seventeenth-century England* (London: Methuen, 1981), p.5
[7] Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621), eds Nicolas K. Kiessling, Thomas C. Faulkner and Rhonda L. Blair (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), p.79
[8] George Peele, *The Old Wives Tale* (Menston: Scolar Press, 1969, facsimile of 1595 text)

men, "what doo we to passe away the time"? One requests a song, which they all sing, but it's over too soon, so the next asks the hostess for a story: "methinks Gammer, a merry winter's tale would drive away the time trimly, come I am sure you are not without a score". She indulges her eager audience, beginning "[o]nce uppon a time there was a King or a Lord, or a Duke that had a faire daughter, the fairest that ever there was; as white as snowe and as redd as bloud", setting the stage for the bizarre fantasy that follows.[9] Peele's play paints a typical picture of fairy tales' popular use. John Clare, a poet admittedly from the later, Romantic age, but one who nostalgically looked back to old ways, depicts a similar context when he describes "a cottage evening" in winter,

> The shutter closed and the lamp alight
> The faggot chopt and blazing bright
> The shepherd from his labour free
> Dancing children on his knee...
> The huswife busy night and day
> Cleareth the supper things away...
>   then down she sits
> And tells her tales by starts and fits...
> And from her memory oft repeats
> Witches dread powers and fairey feats[10]

Clare, who grew up in a remote village in Helpston, also reminisces about summers spent working in the fields as young boy, "a delightfull employment," he says, because "the old womens memorys never faild of tales to smoothen our labour, for as every day came new Jiants, Hobgobblins, and faireys was ready to pass it away".[11]

Even in the city, far from country cottages, folktales thrived. London was fast developing into a commercial and cultural hub, and the population soared over the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Approximately one sixth of England's total inhabitants are estimated to have lived in the city at some point in their lives, and there was a great deal of travel between rural and urban environments.[12] This would have contributed significantly to the circulation of oral tales, especially considering that people also had no choice but to be social in those days:

> privacy was not valued as it is today… people relished a world in which
> everyone was in sight of others, felt free to watch everyone else's doings, and

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[9] Peele, sig. A6. As we shall see in Chapter 3, the fairy tale motif 'as white as snow as red as blood' reappears in Shakespeare's *Cymbeline,* where the colours are used to describe Innogen, who evokes the character of Snow White.

[10] John Clare, *The Shepherd's Calendar* (1827), ed. Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Oxford University Press, 1964), pp.10-21

[11] Eric Robinson , ed., *John Clare's Autobiographical Writings* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), p.3, see also p.2 and p.8.

[12] Thomas, pp.3-4

talked readily to every stranger. Most people looked for face-to-face encounters, and in London that offered newcomers some memorable experiences.[13]

As Philippe Ariès notes, "private was cofounded with public... the community that defined the boundaries within which the individual moved – whether rural village, town or urban neighbourhood – was a familiar world in which everyone knew and kept an eye on everyone else."[14] London attracted a range of people; not only wealthy merchants and learned elite, but poor apprentices, lowly servants, butchers, tailors, traders, as well as swarms of travellers from exotic places. All sorts would congregate in taverns, inns, and playhouses, keen to share a mug of ale, swap gossip, or hear a good story. A popular chapbook from 1628 recreates just such a situation. *Robin Goodfellow, his Mad Prankes and Merry Jests* is set in a pub in Kent, where a weary traveller stops to rest: "The weather being wet, and my two-leg'd horse being almost tyred... I went dropping into an alehouse: there found I, first a kind wellcome, next good liquor, then kinde strangers (which made good company), then an honest hoast... an hoastesse I found there too."[15] After a few drinks, the traveller asks why the people in the region are known as "Long-tayles", to which the hostess replies, "by reason our tales are long, that we use to passe the time withal, and make our selves merry". She promises to tell him the "sweet" and "merry tale" of the roguish fairy Robin Goodfellow, and begins, in the tradition of all good stories: "Once upon a time, a great while agoe..."[16]

Fairy stories also flourished in more domestic spaces. The servants, maids, and nurses of the urban and elite would tell old wives' tales to divert themselves from the monotony of domestic chores, or to entertain a young lord in his nursery. "The fashion when I was a boy", John Aubrey reminisced in the seventeenth century, "[was] for the maydes to sitt-up late by the fire [and] tell old Romantique stories of the olde time, handed downe to them with a great deal of alteration".[17] Reginald Scot similarly attributed the spread of such tales to "old doting women" and "our mother's maids", as did Samuel Harsnet, who blamed women ("They that have their braines baited, and their fancies distempered with the imaginations, and apprehensions of Witches, Conjurers,

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[13] Joan Thirsk, "Daily life in town and country", in *Shakespeare: An Oxford Guide*, eds Stanley Wells and Lena Cowen Orlin (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p.105

[14] Philippe Ariès, "Introduction", in *A History of Private Life,* gen. eds Philippe Ariès and Georges Duby (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1989), vol.3, p.1.

[15] Reprinted in J. O. Halliwell-Phillips, *Illustrations of the Fairy Mythology of A Midsummer Night's Dream* (London: Printed for the Shakespeare Society, 1845), pp. 120-121

[16] Ibid., p.121-122

[17] John Aubrey, "Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme", in *Three Prose Works*, ed. J. Buchanan-Brown (Fontwell: Centaur Press, 1972), p.445

and Fayries") for all "frightful fancies, and fond gastful opinions".[18] The activities in which women were traditionally engaged certainly nurtured storytelling. Spinning, in particular, provided ideal conditions, occupying the hands but leaving the mind largely free. The German word for spinning even reflects this, meaning, in its secondary sense, to daydream or "build castles in the air".[19] Several of our favourite fairy tales, such as *Rumpelstiltskin* and *Sleeping Beauty*, feature spindles, distaffs or the act of spinning itself, perhaps hinting at the context in which the stories were created. Ovid makes literal this relationship in Book IV of his *Metamorphoses*. The tale begins with the daughters of Minyas coming together with "their baskets and their flax", where they "fall to spinning yarn or weaving in the frame". As one sister "with nimble hand did draw her slender thread and fine", she says

> Let us...find some talk
> To ease our labour while our hands about our profit walk.
> And for to make the time seem short, let each of us recite
> (As everybody's turn shall come) some tale that may delight[20]

She begins by reciting the story of "Pyramus and Thisbe", which Shakespeare parodies in *A Midsummer Night's Dream.* Shakespeare himself conjures a similar image in *Twelfth Night,* when Duke Orsino requests to hear a song popular among "spinsters" and "knitters":

> O, fellow, come, the song we had last night.
> Mark it, Cesario, it is old and plain.
> The spinsters, and the knitters in the sun,
> And the free maids that weave their thread with bones,
> Do use to chant it. It is silly sooth,
> And dallies with the innocence of love,
> Like the old age.   2.4.41-7

Child-minding also encouraged spinning stories. Indeed, fairy tales were shifted with such success into the nursery that we often nowadays forget that such narratives had their roots in a culture of adult storytelling. It is not surprising that children would have made up a large part of the audience for fairy tales, given that in early modern Britain, about "70 per cent of all English pre-industrial households contained children ... and there were between two-and-a-half and three children to every household with them":

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[18] Reginald Scot, *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), ed. B. Nicholson (London: Elliot Stock, 1886), book xvi, chap II, p.397; Samuel Harsnett, *A Declaration of Egregious Popish Impostures to With-draw the Harts of her Maiesties Subiects from their Allegeance, and from the Truth of Christian Religion Professed in England, Vnder the Pretence of Casting out Deuils* (London: James Roberts, 1603), p.137
[19] Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.99, note 7
[20] Ovid, book IV, lines 11; 3; 45-50.

there were children everywhere; playing in the village street and fields when they were very small, hanging round the farmyards and getting in the way, until they had grown enough to be given child-sized jobs to do; thronging the churches; forever clinging to the skirts of women in the house and wherever they went and above all crowding around the cottage fires ... The perpetual distraction of childish noise and talk must have affected everyone almost all of the time.[21]

Iona and Peter Opie have shown in their work with contemporary English children that the young are the loyal preservers of oral culture:

Like the savage, they are the respecters, even venerators, of custom; and in their self-contained community their basic lore and language seems scarcely to alter from generation to generation. Boys... ask riddles which were posed when Henry VIII was a boy. Young girls...rebuke one of their number who seeks back a gift with a couplet used in Shakespeare's day.[22]

A society filled with children, then, would undoubtedly have helped the spread and survival of folktales. But these stories were just as popular among Elizabethan adults. Philip Sidney admired the poet's ability to capture all imaginations with a simple tale: "with a tale forsooth he cometh unto you, a tale which holdeth children from play, and old men from the chimney corner".[23] It is adults to whom the hostess in *Robin Goodfellow* tells her stories; while in the earlier play *The Old Wives Tale,* Peele similarly portrays a group of grown-ups enjoying the highly improbable fictions which make up the plot of the comedy. Another of Shakespeare's contemporaries, Richard Johnson, used an old tale in his popular early seventeenth-century chapbook, maintaining it would appeal to all age groups: "The ancient Tales of *Tom Thumbe* in the olde time, haue beene the onely reuiuers of drouzy age at midnight; old and young ... Batchelors and Maides ...the old Shepheard and the young Plow boy ... haue carold out a Tale of *Tom Thumbe* to make merry with."[24]

Chapbooks like this one, as well as other printed texts like ballads and broadsides, often drew on oral traditions, and were very popular in Shakespeare's day, and well into the eighteenth century.[25] It was from these small pamphlets that George Crabbe, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William Wordsworth learned about folk heroes like Dick Whittington, Robin Hood, and Jack the Giant Killer.[26] John Clare admits he

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[21] Peter Laslett, *The World We Have Lost – Further Explored* (London: Methuen & Co., 1971), pp. 118 -9
[22] Iona and Peter Opie, *The Lore and Language of Schoolchildren* (USA: The New York Review of Books, 2001), p.2
[23] Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry: Or The Defence of Poesie,* ed. Geoffrey Shepherd (London: Nelson, 1965), p.113
[24] Johnson, p.2
[25] Ashliman, *Handbook,* p.22
[26] W. M. S. Russell, "Folktales and the Theatre", *Folklore*, 92.1 (1981), p.3

used to save every penny he could to buy the "sixpenny Romances, of 'Cinderella', 'Little Red Riding Hood', 'Jack and the Beanstalk', 'Zig-Zag', 'Prince Cherry', etc.", when "hawkers offerd them for sale at the door".[27] Aubrey's comment points up the close relationship between romance and fairy tales, two branches of the same vein of traditional stories drawn on for cheap entertainment. Such material would have reached both rural and urban audiences through pedlars or chapmen, as Shakespeare depicts in *The Winter's Tale* with the character of Autolycus. The pervasiveness of these ephemeral texts was such that they drew the attention of concerned puritans: David Cressy notes that ghost stories, ballads, romances, and "idle tales" kept "printers in business and preachers close to apoplexy".[28] The seventeenth-century Christian writer and preacher John Bunyan certainly condemned them as being sinful distractions, even while confessing they consumed his own youth: "give me a Ballad, a News-book, *George* on Horseback or *Bevis of Southampton*, give me some book that teaches curious Arts, that tells of old Fables; but for the Holy Scriptures, I cared not. And as it was with me then, so it is with my brethren now".[29] Another puritan similarly admitted he was once "extreamly bewitched with a Love of Romances, Fables and old Tales, which corrupted my Affections and lost my Time".[30] The huge demand for cheap reading matter may seem contradictory – how was there a reading public when most people lived in an oral world? But it is important to note what Barry Reay terms "the orality of popular print".[31] In many instances, the stories in these popular publications were taken from oral traditions, and retained their oral quality, being little more, in effect, than written speech. They made use of rhyming verse, alliteration, tags, and other verbal formulae that reveal their debt to oral culture, which relies on such mnemonic strategies for easy recollection and repetition. Popular literature also encouraged a verbal mode of transmission: "writing retained a performative quality", notes David Margolies, "which overlapped with dramatic construction".[32] Many popular texts were designed to be read aloud to a group of people, as the anonymous author of *The Cobler of Caunterburie* (1590) depicts in the introduction to his collection of tales:

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[27] Robinson, pp.5-6

[28] Cressy, p.8

[29] John Bunyan, *A Few Sighs from Hell,* ed. Roger Sharrock and T. L. Underwood (1980), in *The Miscellaneous Works of John Bunyan,* gen. ed. Roger Sharrock (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976-1994), vol. 1, p.333

[30] Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae, or, Mr. Richard Baxters narrative of the most memorable passages of his life and time* (London: Printed for T. Parkhurst, J. Robinson, F. Lawrence and F. Dunton, 1696), p.2

[31] Barry Reay, *Popular Cultures in England 1550-1750* (London; New York: Longman, 1998), p. 59

[32] David Margolies, "Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Fiction", in *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture*, eds Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2006), p. 114

> When the Farmer is set in his Chaire turning (in a winters euening) the crabbe in the fier, here hee may heare how his sonne can read, and when he hath done laugh while his belly akes. The old wiues that wedded themselves to the profound histories of Robin Hood, Clim of the / Clough, and worth syr Isembras: may here learne a tale to tell amongst their Gossipes. Thus haue I sought to feed all mens Fancies…[33]

Their manner of consumption was thus quite communal, meaning that illiterate people could participate, at least indirectly, in written forms of popular culture. The boundary between oral and literary forms of popular culture that existed in Shakespeare's day was consequently illusory, with many written texts reflecting an oral nature.

There is increasing evidence that chapbooks and other cheap reading material featuring popular folktales appealed to high as well as low audiences, though the elite and educated may have "regarded themselves as trespassers in the literary domain of their social inferiors" when they consumed such literature.[34] In a letter from 1575 by Robert Laneham, a mercer of London, we find the fortuitous description of the library of Captain Cox, an affluent Coventry mason.[35] The list, which includes diverse material such as ballads, jestbooks, almanacs, and plays, provides an excellent example of the type of reading matter catering to popular tastes, while also demonstrating the heterogeneousness of audiences consuming such literature. Cox appears to have had a particular liking for romances and folktales, such as *Huon of Bordeaux, Frederik of Gene, Bevis of Hampton, The Squire of Low Degree, The Nutbrown Maid, The King and the Tanner*, *Gargantua*, and *Robinhood*.[36] Cox belonged to what we would now term the prosperous middle-class, and yet his choice of reading material would, according to another 1615 source, have been shared by "your Countrey-Farmer": "Shewe mee *King Arthur*, *Beuis*, or *Syr Guye*,/ Those are the Bookes he onely loues to buye".[37]

In some form or other, then, popular fireside tales made their way into the homes of the prosperous and the humble. There is even reason to believe that folktales infiltrated royal life. According to Stith Thompson, in Europe folktales were "once as important in the life of the court as among the common peoples. Kings had their story-

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[33] Reprinted in Geoffrey Creigh and Jane Belfield, eds, *The Cobler of Caunterburie and Tarltons Newes out of Purgatorie* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1987), pp.20-21

[34] M. O. Grenby, "Before Children's Literature: Children, Chapbooks and Popular Culture in Early Modern Britain", in *Popular Children's Literature in Britain*, eds Julia Briggs, Dennis Butts, and M. O. Grenby (Aldershot, England; Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2008), p. 3. See also Peter Burke, *Popular Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Hants, England: Scolar Press, 1994), pp.23-29.

[35] Robert Laneham, *Laneham's Letter Describing the Magnificent Pageants Presented before Queen Elizabeth, at Kenilworth Castle In 1575* (London: J.H. Burn, 1821)

[36] Ibid., pp.36-7

[37] Henry Parrot, "Satyrs", in *The Mastiue, Or Young-Whelpe of the Old-Dogge, Epigrams and Satyrs* (London: Tho: Creede, 1615), sigs H4-I

tellers and gave them rewards and honour."[38] In Shakespeare's day, one could develop a career as a professional storyteller, acquiring and developing certain skills, such as rhetoric, facial expression, and voice modulation, in order to perfect the art. The best in the profession worked in large cities and could be summoned to court, but even those who didn't find favour with the king could earn a living entertaining wealthy nobles.[39] Belsey has noted that Queen Elizabeth I herself enjoyed a "folktale encounter" in 1591, when she met the Fairy Queen and a host of native fairies at Elvetham as part of a pageant in her honour.[40] If Shakespeare's plays are anything to go by, folktales were also enjoyed in more intimate, royal spaces. In *The Winter's Tale,* whose very title identifies itself as being part of this oral tradition, the Queen asks her young son to "tell's us tale" (2.1.24). "Merry or sad shall't be?" (25), he asks, before declaring that "A sad tale's best for winter. I have one/ Of sprites and goblins" (27-28). Hermione invites him to sit beside her, and praises his powers of storytelling, revealing that this activity is a common occurrence: "Come on, sit down, come on, and do your best/ To fright me with your sprites. You're powerful at it" (2.1.29-30). Richard II points up the popularity of storytelling among the older generations too when he bids his Queen:

> In winter's tedious nights sit by the fire
> With good old folks, and let them tell thee tales
> Of woeful ages, long ago betid …
> And send the hearers weeping to their beds.   5.1, 40-5

In Elizabethan England, then, folktales were ubiquitous, entertaining all ages and infiltrating all levels of society. Whether heard around the fireside at home, on a maid's knee, at a crowded inn, over chores, or from cheap printed texts, oral stories would have been familiar to most Elizabethans. Shakespeare's plays suggest a dramatist whose skills lie in the unearthing of old stories; surely he would not have neglected such a rich resource. I suggest he *used* these oral stories, both relying on and exploiting his audiences' familiarity with such tried and tested plotlines.

Folktales and Drama

Shakespeare would not have been the first playwright to draw on the deep well of oral narratives in his plays. W. M. S. Russell has traced some deliberate uses of folktales in plays dating from antiquity, believing that "all worthwhile works of drama, indeed of

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[38] Thompson, *The Folktale,* p.454
[39] Burke, pp. 96-7
[40] Belsey, pp.18-19

literature, have important points of contact with folktales".[41] In one of the most famous classical Indian plays, for example, Kalidasa's *Shankuntala,* written around the 5th century A.D, Russell identifies recognisable folktale plots and motifs:

> The heroine has married King Dushyanta and is waiting to be summoned to his capital when she is cursed by a bad-tempered hermit, who condemns her to be forgotten by her husband until he sees a ring he has given her. She then loses the ring. After much tribulation, all ends happily after the ring has been found in the belly of a fish and brought to the king. The finding of the ring in a fish is a well-known folklore theme (Type 736A, Motif N.211.1), here combined with the unrecognised wife or forgetful husband (Motif D.2003), an important component of the widespread tale-type concerning a search for a lost husband (Type 425).[42]

As we shall see in Chapter 2, the folk motif of the unrecognised wife and the tale type concerning a search for a lost husband both reappear hundreds of years later in Shakespeare's *All's Well That Ends Well,* where they are crucial to the action and overall effect of the drama. Russell also looks to ancient Chinese drama, taking as his starting point a quote by Liu Jung-en, who claimed that nearly all early Chinese playwrights "turned for their material to old stories from the country's long history".[43] Even classical Greek tragedy made use of native oral narratives, with folk legends and more 'naturalistic' folktales being particular favourites, because they tended to align more with the Greeks' strict regulations concerning time and place. "So the tragedies were transmitting folktales to the Athenian audiences", Russell notes, "[a]nd of course in their written form, the tragedies played their part, along with other Greek literary works and such Latin authors as Ovid and Seneca, in transmitting to later generations the Greek folktales which have had such enormous influence on the art, literature and theatre of medieval and modern Europe."[44]

There is also reason to suppose that Elizabethan dramatists regularly incorporated folktales into their plays. It is impossible to know this for certain, though, as most of this material has not survived. Indeed, if we look at the historical records, it appears that only a tiny proportion of the plays from around Shakespeare's time (probably only about five per cent.) actually survived in the form of a text.[45] The other

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[41] Russel, p.4

[42] Ibid., p.8

[43] Ibid., pp.8-9

[44] Ibid., p.11. This statement points up the long and mutually beneficent relationship between oral and literary/dramatic forms of folktales.

[45] Alfred Harbage, *Annals of English Drama, 975-1700: An Analytical Record of All Plats, Extant or Lost, Chronologically Arranged and Indexed by Authors, Titles, Dramatic Companies, & c.,* rev. S. Schoenbaum (London: Methuen, 1964); C. J. Sisson, *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1936); Martin Wiggins, *British Drama, 1533-1642: A Catalogue* (Oxford:

95 per cent. is said to be 'lost', a word which is not particularly helpful, as it describes plays that were most likely not recorded in the first place.[46] With rare exceptions, the Elizabethans appear to have neglected preserving contemporary drama. The writing of fiction in general, with the exception of poetry, did not have a particularly positive reputation, and was not considered part of the liberal arts.[47] This is probably because most contemporary fiction would have aimed to appeal to the masses. Shakespeare was writing for the stage at a time when the profession could not guarantee a stable income, and many writers, such as Robert Greene and Henry Chettle, consequently produced a variety of material (plays, chapbooks, romances, prose fiction) and were employed in different roles in order to try and make ends meet.[48] Chettle, for example, generated a mass of literature, and is believed to have had a hand in writing over fifty known plays between 1593-1607 – eleven more than Shakespeare, in six fewer years.[49] And yet, Chettle died a pauper. Even Ben Jonson complained to a friend that "half of his comedies were not in print".[50] In such a context, writers would certainly want to create material that would 'sell', that would attract as broad an audience as possible. What better way to do this than to base their stories on popular material, on the reservoir of traditional stories which were available to everyone? As a result, most contemporary fiction was deemed 'common', and refused serious status, reflecting the general "distrust of the popular" that existed in those times.[51]

It seems reasonable to assume, therefore, that the vast quantity of 'lost' Elizabethan plays were not recorded because they were seen as too popular and

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Oxford University Press, 2012), 2 vols; *Lost Plays Database,* eds Roslyn L. Knutson and David McInnis (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2009), www.lostplays.org (accessed 15/01/2013)

[46] As evidenced by C. J. Sisson's book on the subject *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* and the new internet catalogue *Lost Plays Database,* cit. above

[47] Margolies, p.112. Margolies does point out (p.113) that there were some exceptions – Sidney's *Arcadia,* for example, was not considered common, despite its being a contemporary work of fiction – however, such courtly works did not diminish the general suspicion of popular material.

[48] Andrew Hadfield, *Shakespeare and Republicanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), p.3

[49] Ibid., p.4

[50] Quoted in Sisson, p.1

[51] Margolies, p.113. Although much popular fiction was printed, despite its 'popular' reputation, it was printed for consumption rather than preservation. This is suggested by the fact that barely any of these cheap texts have survived today: most of our knowledge of them comes from secondary references in the writings of people like John Clare and John Bunyan, mentioned earlier. More importantly, as Margaret Spufford has shown, there are virtually no records of chapbooks in the probate inventories from the time: "The scarcity of these references implies," she says, "not that the books were not there, but that they were not worth listing. David Vaisey has well said that no-one has ever suggested that the sheepdog did not exist in seventeenth-century England, simply because none have yet been found recorded in an inventory" (pp.45-50). The fact that so few Elizabethan plays have survived would similarly suggest, not that they didn't exist, but that they were not seen as worth printing or recording. Unlike chapbooks, which depended on the written or printed word for their existence, plays did not *need* to be recorded to be performed. The only reason to print them, in other words, would be for preservation.

ephemeral, and thus considered unworthy of being preserved in the form of a text.[52]
And perhaps the reason such plays were rejected as popular and unworthy is because
they were based on demotic folk stories, as opposed to more 'serious' sources, such as
classical Greek works by Homer and Plutarch or Latin authors like Ovid and
Seneca.[53]Although we don't have the plays to confirm this, many of their titles have
survived, and scores have names such as *The Tinker of Totness* (1596)*, A Tale of a Tub*
(1596), *Long Meg of Westminster* (1595), *Crack Me This Nut* (1595)*, Singing Simpkin*
(1595)*, The Painter's Daughter* (1576), *The Three Sisters of Mantua* (1578), *Jack and
Jill* (1567-8)*, Six Fools* (1567), *The Two Angry Women of Abingdon* (1588), *The
Cobbler (of Queenhithe)* (1597), *The Wisdom of Doctor Dodypoll* (1599), *The Wit of a
Woman* (1604).[54] The titles seem to indicate such plays were mostly romances or
comedies about 'ordinary life' and 'folk' concerns, as opposed to learned dramas which
aimed to preserve and transmit the knowledge of classical antiquity. C. J. Sisson's
pioneering work *Lost Plays of Shakespeare's Age* (1936) supports this idea. Sisson
attempts to reconstruct a few of the 'lost' plays from the period by digging through
historical records of proceedings at law in the Court of Star Chamber, arguing that
everyday Elizabethan life and the "underworld of London" provided abundant material
for contemporary dramatists: "no dramatist worth his salt", he claims, "would have
missed certain opportunities of using ready-made drama".[55] I would suggest that
folktales similarly provided playwrights with 'ready-made dramas', given their long-
established storylines, and their concern with everyday issues which are deeply familiar,
both in the sense of being intensely personal, and in their focus on the family and its
controversies.

What this means is that plays like Peele's *The Old Wives Tale,* one of the few
contemporary dramas which was printed despite its clearly being based on frivolous
native tales, may have been more typical of the time than other plays by Marlowe and
Shakespeare, for example, which drew on more disciplined classical sources. *The Old
Wives Tale,* as its title suggests, makes entertaining comedy out of a story told by an old
wife to ease the dreariness of unoccupied hours. Her tale, which is taken up by the

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[52] There was also, however, a vested interest in not publishing as this would have given competitors
access to the work, due to the fact that copywriting did not exist in those days.
[53] It is interesting to note that while the Elizabethans (particularly the humanists) perceived many ancient
Latin and Greek texts to be 'classic' works worthy of serious study, many scholars (such as Russell, cit.
above) have since demonstrated the reliance of such works on folklore and native oral tales. Similarly, I
argue below that while we today have come to see Shakespeare as one of the great, classic dramatists, his
work has identifiable links with demotic oral tales and 'folk' concerns.
[54] Harbage, pp.44-88
[55] Sisson, p. P.76

players and enacted on stage, does not recount just one folktale, however, but intertwines a whole host of different traditional stories. One scholar has identified over ninety folk motifs, which F. S. Hook sees as irrefutable evidence that the play is saturated with native folklore.[56] John Crow also noted the play's folk links when he disparagingly commented,

> Peele could hardly have done better in the making of a strange jumble of folk stories if he had been a present-day scholar who had read all the folk stories of the world and written a play out of them in a dream.[57]

But what Crow considers a flaw may have been precisely what attracted early modern audiences to the play. Peele appears to be gently poking fun at the genre of fairy tales (and the old wife telling them) by interweaving and muddling together a plethora of stories to create a totally implausible and fantastic tale. Today, we are not familiar with many of these tales, and their resonances are lost; hence the play may appear to be a 'strange jumble'. But Elizabethans would have known these stories, and thus recognised the play as an *intentional* satire of its own plots and conventions. This is indicated at the very beginning of the story, when the wife warns her audience to say "hum and ha" to her story, so she can tell they're awake, and cuts off their interruptions with "either heare my tale, or kisse my taile", a phrase which introduces the satiric tone that develops with the storyline.[58] Perhaps *The Old Wives Tale* was to Elizabethan audiences what the 2001 *Dreamworks* film *Shrek* is to modern audiences. Set in the kingdom of Far Far Away, *Shrek* begins when the home of an unlikely hero (a smelly ogre) is invaded by the whole kingdom's population of fairy tale characters, who have been exiled by the evil king. In order to save his home, Shrek, along with his sidekick (an annoying, talking donkey) must rescue a princess who has been locked away in the highest room of the tallest tower in a castle guarded by a fire-breathing dragon. *Shrek* knits together scraps from a myriad of contemporary films based on popular fairy tales, with Disney adaptations particularly targeted, in an amusing parody of the genre. Its success relies on its audience's acquaintance with the stories it satirizes. Similarly, *The Old Wives Tale* both assumes and depends on its audience's being familiar with the tales it evokes and then parodies – revealing just how deep a part of Elizabethan culture these tales were.

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[56] F. S. Hook, ed., "The Old Wives' Tale" in *The Life and Works of George Peele,* gen. ed. Charles Tyler Prouty (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970)*,* vol. 3, p.339. But note Hook's reservations about the "overextended" catalogue of motifs (p.339, n. 35)

[57] John Crow, "Folklore in Elizabethan Drama", *Folklore,* 58.3 (1947), p.303

[58] Peele, sig. B1; Charles S. Adams, "The Tales in Peele's Old Wives' Tale", *Midwest Folklore,* 13.1 (1963), pp.13-20.

Julie Sanders notes that for an adaption to be successful, "[t]he spectator or reader must be able to participate in the play of similarity and difference perceived between the original, source, or inspiration to appreciate fully the reshaping or rewriting undertaken by the adaptive text." She believes, accordingly, that "myth, fairy tale, and folklore" lend themselves to being adapted and transformed because they depend "by their very nature... on a communality of understanding".[59] There may have been many more Elizabethan plays that incorporated folktales, whether sincerely or light-heartedly, but which have gone unacknowledged because the records from the time tend to overlook popular modern plays, or take their existence for granted, privileging classical adaptations or similarly serious subjects. Historians don't seem to have taken this fact seriously, which is understandable since it suggests that our view of Elizabethan drama is misleading.[60] In particular, it suggests that Shakespeare came as much out of a native popular tradition which has been 'lost' as classical drama which was written down and preserved.

Popular Culture

Shakespeare's familiarity with the native popular tradition would certainly account for his reputation as an 'upstart crow' among his more educated and elite contemporaries, and explain why Ben Jonson could say he wrote "mouldy tale(s)".[61] Today, we see Shakespeare as one of the great, classic dramatists. His plays have been revered by many as models of dramatic genius, acting as benchmarks of cultural esteem. Our tendency to focus on Shakespeare's use of literary sources like Ovid, Plutarch, and Holinshed only serves to confirm our belief that he belongs with the greats. This may, in part, account for why we have neglected to consider humble folktales as potential sources for his plays. Once, however, 'Shakespeare' and 'high culture' would not have been put in the same sentence. Early perceptions of Shakespeare's plays paint a picture of a gifted but crude playwright:

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[59] Sanders, p.45
[60] A new website developed in Melbourne, Australia in 2009 would suggest, however, that this hole in Elizabethan drama studies is coming to the fore as serious issue worthy of careful consideration. The *Lost Plays Database,* cit. above, focuses on lost English plays from 1570-1642, with the hope of providing new information on "playwrights, playing companies, venues in London and the provinces, repertory studies, and audiences".
[61] Robert Greene, *Greenes Groats-Worth of Witte, Bought With a Million of Repentance* (London: William Wright, 1592), sigs F-F2; Ben Jonson, "Ode (to himself)", in *The Oxford Book of Seventeenth Century Verse*, eds H. J. C. Grierson and G. Bullough (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1934), pp.179-180

Shakespeare was for a century and a half after his death reputed to be 'barbarous', 'vulgar', 'Gothic'. He was, of course, brilliant at some things – such as his representation of the passions – but his work as a whole was spoiled by lowness and spectacular failures of taste. From a neoclassical point of view Shakespeare's problem was that he remained too mired in the popular culture of his own age.[62]

A particularly offensive example of Shakespeare's supposed lack of taste appears to have been his neglect of the 'rules of the ancients' (the unities of action, time, and place), particularly evident in the playwright's co-mingling of the forms of comedy and tragedy. According to Samuel Johnson,

the ancient poets, according to the laws which custom had prescribed, selected some the crimes of men, and some their absurdities; some the momentous vicissitudes of life, and some the lighter occurrences; some the terrors of distress, and some the gaieties of prosperity. Thus rose the two modes of imitation, known by the names of tragedy and comedy, compositions intended to promote different ends by contrary means, and considered as so little allied, that I do not recollect among the Greeks or Romans a single writer who attempted both.[63]

Shakespeare, however, regularly fused comedy and tragedy in a single play – both *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline*, for example, contain elements of both genres, interweaving 'the crimes of men' with 'their absurdities'; 'the terrors of distress' with 'the gaieties of prosperity'. Phillip Sidney designated such plays which are "neither right tragedies nor right comedies" and which mingle "kings and clowns" as "gross absurdities".[64] Even John Milton believed that tragedy required defending against

the small esteem, or rather infamy, which in the account of many it undergoes at this day with other common Interludes; hap'ning through the Poets error of intermixing Comick stuff with Tragick sadness and gravity; or introducing trivial and vulgar persons, which by all judicious hath been counted absurd...[65]

Importantly, however, Shakespeare was not seen to be ignorant of the rules of the ancients; rather, his decision to mix comedy and tragedy was seen as a deliberate and indiscreet attempt to "gratifie the people".[66] "Trage-comedy was the common mistake of that age", said Nicholas Rowe in 1707.[67] Lewis Theobold agreed, claiming Shakespeare's "descending beneath himself, may have proceeded from a Deference paid to the then *reigning Barbarism*…We see Complaisance enough, in our Days, paid

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[62] Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes, "Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture", in Gillespie and Rhodes, p.2
[63] Samuel Johnson, "Preface to Edition of Shakespeare" (1765), in *Eighteenth Century Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. D. Nichol Smith (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1903), p.176
[64] Sidney, p.135
[65] John Milton, *Samson Agonistes a dramatick poem* (London: Randal Taylor, 1688), sig. A2
[66] Ibid.
[67] Nicholas Rowe, "Some Account of the Life &c. of Mr. William Shakespear" (1709), in Smith, p.68

to a *bad Taste*".[68] Samuel Johnson was not quite so forgiving, declaring Shakespeare "is so much more careful to please than to instruct, that he seems to write without any moral purpose... This fault the barbarity of his age cannot extenuate; for it is always a writer's duty to make the world better".[69] In the eyes of some of his contemporaries and near-contemporaries, in other words, Shakespeare's weakness lay in his being popular himself.

Perhaps it was more than Shakespeare's frequent neglect of the classical model that earned him a reputation as a talented but flawed playwright. I would argue it was his use of popular oral tales that contributed to this label. Folktales may even have inspired Shakespeare's blending of comedy and tragedy – these old stories regularly mingle 'kings and clowns', and although many stories end happily, the characters are often forced to endure great suffering before the joyous resolutions. Cinderella, for example, lives in near poverty and is worked to the bone before she finds her prince. Folktales also have little regard for the unities of time and place, another complaint frequently levelled at Shakespeare's plays, which show no hesitation in encompassing a time span that allows a baby to grow into a woman (*The Winter's Tale*) or a geographical reach that extends from Egypt to Rome (*Antony and Cleopatra*) within a single play. Folktales are often set in a faraway realm, once upon a time, where the characters can travel great distances in the blink of an eye, or sleep away hundreds of years in the space of one narrative.

As with his genre blurring, Shakespeare may have drawn on folktales in an attempt to 'gratify the people'. Given their ubiquitousness, these old stories would have provided the dramatist with a perfect means of appealing to the considerable part of his audience who couldn't necessarily read but had a good acquaintance with traditional story. Elizabethan audiences did not value originality as we do today. On the contrary, old tales were treated with respect, while anything new was met with wariness. 'Proper' writing, for example, was judged "by virtue of its proximity to classical models"[70] – authors were not only allowed but *encouraged* to imitate or copy the classical works of antiquity. Popular culture likewise valued imitation. Folk singers, for instance, would never admit to having invented a new song; they would always quote some other source, even making one up if need be.[71] Folktales similarly display what Stith Thompson termed a "disregard of originality of plot and of pride of authorship":

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[68] Lewis Theobald, "Preface to Edition of Shakespeare" (1733), in Smith, p. 132
[69] Smith, p.181
[70] Peter Thompson, "Conventions of Playwriting", in Wells and Orlin, p.49
[71] See Burke, pp.113-115

the teller of a folktale is proud of his ability to hand on that which he has received. He usually desires to impress his readers or hearers with the fact that he is bringing them something that has the stamp of good authority, that the tale was heard from some great story-teller or from some aged person who remembered it from the old days.... So it was until at least the end of the Middle Ages with writers like Chaucer, who carefully quoted authorities for their plots – and sometimes even invented originals so as to dispel the suspicion that some new and unwarranted story was being foisted on the public.[72]

By including what Ben Jonson scornfully labelled 'mouldy' and 'stale' tales in his plays, then, Shakespeare would have given his work the 'stamp of good authority', endearing his plays to audiences who looked to the stage to tell them stories they were already familiar with from nights around a winter's fire. As Samuel Johnson said, "[o]ur author's plots are generally borrowed… and it is reasonable to suppose, that he chose the most popular…for his audience could not have followed him through the intricacies of the drama, had they not held the thread of the story in their hands."[73]

Early Exposure

The same stories that attracted a substantial part of Shakespeare's audience to his plays may, however, have simultaneously alienated another. Although folktales seem to have infiltrated every rung of society, they did not have a particularly positive reputation outside of the popular sphere. Some in Shakespeare's society were of the opinion that these stories were trivial, simplistic, and effeminising. This attitude was particularly prevalent among clergymen, pedagogical authors, and in the classroom.

The public education system underwent huge reform in the sixteenth century. In the medieval period, schools were run by the Catholic Church, and their primary aim was to train aspiring clerics.[74] Education was therefore generally reserved for a small minority of prospective ecclesiastics who needed to be able to read and have a working knowledge of Latin. For the rest of the population, literacy did not hold much value, as day to day life did not require understanding of the written word.[75] Being unable to read or write did not mean people in the Middle Ages were uneducated, however:

[72] Thompson, *The Folktale,* pp.4-5
[73] Johnson, pp.190-1
[74] Stephen Greenblatt, "General Introduction", in *The Norton Shakespeare,* gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (USA: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1997), p.43
[75] Cressy, pp.1-2. For more on the value of literacy, see Adam Fox, *Oral and Literate Culture in Early Modern England 1500-1700* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2000); and Keith Thomas, "The Meaning of Literacy in Early Modern England", in *The Written Word: Literacy in Transition,* ed. Gerd Baumann (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), pp. 97-131.

>Education consisted not of book-learning acquired in school but of religious beliefs and moral values instilled in church, vocational skills learnt while following the plow or watching in the byre, of ancient customs or superstitions of the countryside heard in the firelight on winter nights.[76]

Medieval education thus centred on the passage of history, beliefs, and the wisdom of past generations through the spoken word. In "the old ignorant times," explained Aubrey, "before women were readers, the history was handed downe from mother to daughter."[77] Telling stories was fundamental; hearing them was the first, and typically only, stage in a child's education. With the rise of Protestantism, however, there was increasing significance placed on the lay person's ability to read (and thus become familiar with the Holy Bible), and a shift away from oral traditions, many of which were believed to have been invented by corrupt medieval clerics to reinforce their positions of authority over the unlettered laity.[78] The sixteenth-century astrologer and physician John Harvey, for example, believed popular tales about "*Hobgoblin, Robin Goodfellow ...*king *Arthur, Beuis of Southhampton...Guy of Warwike...Robin Hood* and little *Iohn, Frier Tuck* and maid *Marian*" were invented by "idle Cloistermen, mad merry Friers, and lustie Abbey-lubbers" in order to "busie the minds of the vulgar sort, or to set their heads aworke withal, and to auert their conceits from the consideration of serious, and grauer matters".[79] Accordingly, as Protestantism spread, the control of schools moved to secular authorities, and there was a shift in emphasis from purely religious and vocational training to a humanist curriculum, which focused on the betterment of man through the "acquisition of 'literature', in the sense both of literacy and of cultural knowledge".[80] Education also became, in large part, free, thanks to endowments from local benefactors.[81] This, combined with a proliferation in the number of new grammar schools, meant that a much broader population base than ever before had the option of attending school. Consequently, there was a surge in education, particularly between 1540 to1580, when Shakespeare would have attended school. [82]

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[76] John Lawson, *Mediaeval Education and the Reformation* (London: Routledge & K. Paul; New York: Humanities Press, 1967), p.3
[77] Ibid., p.289.
[78] Alexandra Walsham, "Reformed folklore? Cautionary tales and oral tradition in early modern England", in Fox and Woolf, p. 175
[79] John Harvey, *A discoursiue probleme concerning prophesies* (London: John Jackson, 1588), pp.68-9
[80] Greenblatt, "General Introduction", p.43. For a painstaking study in the change from ecclesiastical to secular endowed schooling, see Nicholas Orme, *English Schools in the Middle Ages* (London: Methuen & Co., 1973
[81] Orme, *English Schools,* p.150
[82] Cressy, p. 153; 165. See also chapter 7, "The dynamics of illiteracy". Cressy notes, however, that "despite an epoch of educational expansion", England was still "massively illiterate" in the seventeenth century: "People who were not unduly troubled by salvation, who were content with their horizons of

The humanist curriculum occasioned many changes. It instituted a revival of classical texts, extolling the works of Cicero, Horace, Martial, Ovid, Sallust, Terence, and Virgil, among others, as perfect vehicles for the teaching of grammar, rhetoric, virtue, and culture.[83] So as to get maximum benefit from such texts, boys were taught to write and speak Latin and occasionally Greek, via a model of learning which focused on the reading and imitation of the classical works under scrutiny. New schoolbooks created by humanist educators were also extremely influential in the pedagogical circles of the period – the *Colloquia* (1519) of Desiderius Erasmus were particularly popular, as were the dialogues of Juan Luis Vives, known as the *Linguae Latinae Exercitatio* (1539).[84] The exercises in these books taught boys how to reason abstractly and construct logical arguments, all the while strengthening their skills in Latin. Unfortunately, such exercises also taught boys to devalue the stories they were brought up on at their mother's knee, and to disassociate themselves from any feminine values, in order to become part of a superior, masculine culture.

According to Richard Helgerson , "the humanistic tradition, and particularly the tradition of Latin education, was aggressively hostile to women and their influence."[85] Girls did attend public schools, but generally only the elementary classes, which were taught in English. The curriculum was thus largely designed with boys in mind, and the values it espoused – such as logic and reason, which were not typically associated with women – along with its privileging of Latin over the mother tongue served to create new and reinforce old gender differences.[86] What's more, contemporary childrearing manuals and educational advice texts were often openly antagonistic to women, who were frequently blamed for their children's undoing.[87] In early modern culture, the first seven years of a child's life were usually spent in the care of women, so early influences were likely to be maternal.[88] Mary Ellen Lamb has suggestively noted that many early modern gentlemen would have been "culturally 'amphibious' – reared in a community of 'Country-people' and 'old woemen' before...education in the texts and values of a

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knowledge and experience, and whose daily or seasonal routine required no mastery of print or script, had no pressing need of literacy and could hardly be persuaded to seek it" (pp.1-2).

[83] Nicholas Orme, *Education and Society in Medieval and Renaissance England* (London; Roncenverte, WV, USA: The Hambledon Press, 1989), p.130

[84] Orme, *Education and Society*, p.114

[85] Richard Helgerson, *The Elizabethan Prodigals* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London: University of California Press, 1976), p.35.

[86] Mary Ellen Lamb, "Engendering the Narrative Act: Old Wives' Tales in *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*", *Criticism*, 40.4 (1998), p.530

[87] Orme, *Education and Society,* p.131

[88] Lamb, p.530

literate society".[89] Gender was especially distorted in these early years because boys were dressed in 'coats' with floor-length skirts, which they only removed when they were 'breeched' around age seven.[90] Humanists sought to oppose the potentially damaging effect of these years by minimising a mother's role in her son's education, and separating the boy from "the more spontaneous forms of popular learning" he would have been exposed to while surrounded by women.[91] Folktales were specifically singled out as a potentially harmful source of female influence, and the hostility towards children's exposure to these tales is extremely revealing, because it is based on the premise that children avidly heard such stories. Erasmus, for example, forcefully dismissed folktales, blaming them for the later anxieties experienced by adult humanists:

> Think of all the rubbish we can still remember now as grown men – dreams, inane riddles, silly nursery rhymes about phantoms, spectres, ghosts, screech-owls, vampires, bogeymen, fairies and demons; all those unedifying falsehoods taken from popular storybooks, and all those crazy tales and fantasies of a risqué sort – all those things we learned as children, sitting with our grandfathers or grandmothers, or with nurses and girls at their spinning, while they caressed us and played with us.[92]

Vives similarly stressed the dangers frivolous folktales pose to a child's progress:

> Plato commandeth that nurses shall not use to tell unto children vain and trifling fables. This same thing is to be charged unto the mother's tongue. For by reason of such bringing up, some after they be come to sadder age, have such childish and tender stomachs, that they cannot abide to hear anything of wisdom or sadness, but delight altogether in books of peevish fables, which neither be true nor likely. Therefore mothers shall have ready at hand pleasant histories and honest tales, of the commendation of virtue and rebukings of vice.[93]

Erasmus claimed that children could learn pretty stories from poets or memorable incidents from history "with no greater effort than that with which they pick up and absorb stupid, often vulgar ballads, ridiculous old wives' tales, and all sorts of tedious womanish gossip".[94]

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[89] Mary Ellen Lamb, "Taken By the Fairies: Fairy Practices and the Production of Popular Culture in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*", *Shakespeare Quarterly,* 51.3 (2000), p.281
[90] Catherine Belsey, "Little princes: Shakespeare's royal children", in *Shakespeare and Childhood,* eds Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Grennhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p.33
[91] Richard Halpern, *The Poetics of Primitive Accumulation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), p.25
[92] Desiderius Erasmus, *De pueris statim ac liberaliter instituendis declamation* (1529), trans. Beert C. Verstraete, in *Collected Works of Erasmus: Literary and Educational Writings 4*, ed. J. K. Sowards (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1985), vol. 26, p.338
[93] Juan Luis Vives, *De institutione christianae feminae* (1523), trans. Richard Hyrde (c.1540), in *Vives and the Renascence Education of Women,* ed. Foster Watson (London: Edward Arnold, 1912), p.125
[94] Ibid.

For these reasons, when boys were 'breeched' and shifted from their mothers' or nurses' care to the schoolroom with its paternal values and authority, they were urged to leave their androgynous pasts and any effeminising influences behind in the nursery, where they belonged. There was thus no room in the humanist pedagogy for the 'fairy rubbish' circulated by women around the fireside. I believe, however, that Shakespeare differed from Erasmus, Vives, and the pedants of his own day in that he *valued* old wives' tales. Rather than dismissing them as trivial, he put them to serious work in his plays, combining them with the learned and disciplined classic tales he would have been exposed to through his humanist education and as an adult, and thereby placing such stories on a par with 'high culture' sources. Shakespeare's plays, then, stage the impossibility of the separation between the 'spontaneous forms of popular culture' learned at home as a child and the great classical tales of the classroom.[95]

Embedded Traditions

Helen Cooper has argued a similar point in her research on Shakespeare and the medieval period. She claims, firstly, that although we like to think of Shakespeare as quintessentially belonging to the 'superior' English Renaissance, his world remained a largely a medieval one: "England's topography, infrastructure and rhythms of life were still essentially medieval."[96] This has mostly been ignored because history has generally focused on the *changes* instituted by the Reformation:

> the new is much more noticeable than the old or the accustomed: but that does not mean that what already existed ceased to matter... We have been told about the rediscovery of the Classics and early modern innovation to the point where the familiar, the customary, the already-there, have become invisible: things that are everywhere are very hard to see .[97]

Humanism and the renewed focus on the classics may, then, have initiated a shift away from supposedly 'barbaric' medieval customs, such as the dependence on oral traditions and love of popular tales, but changing centuries worth of convention was no quick or

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[95] Stuart Gillespie and Neil Rhodes (eds), in their book *Shakespeare and Elizabethan Popular Culture* (cit. above), the most recent (2006) and arguably comprehensive study on the topic, have convincingly demonstrated that behind Shakespeare's most apparently "literary" creations one can find the structures of popular culture, and vice versa: there exists "a dialogue between popular and sophisticated, domestic and exotic, homespun and 'literary' in Shakespeare" (p.12). The book investigates Shakespeare's debt to forms of popular culture such as the mystery plays, chapbooks and pamphlets, proverbs, folksongs, elements of popular festivity, and so on. However, conspicuously absent from this list are popular oral tales. The book therefore makes clear the reluctance of scholars of early modern popular culture to investigate Shakespeare's reliance on folk- and fairy tales.
[96] Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World* (London: Arden Shakespeare, 2010), p.1
[97] Ibid., p.2 and 3

easy feat: "Humanism was a development added on to strong and deeply embedded native cultural and literary traditions".[98] According to Cooper, the pervasiveness of those entrenched medieval traditions is nowhere more obvious than in Shakespeare's plays. Although the dramatist may have started his career with evident humanist ambitions, creating neoclassical works such as *Venus and Adonis* and *Titus Andronicus,* he soon moved away from the humanist towards the older, inherited traditions of his parents and grandparents. A substantial portion of his works, Cooper maintains, have direct or indirect medieval sources, and they play minor roles in many more, from the English histories, to plays such as *Hamlet, King Lear, Macbeth, The Merchant of Venice, Pericles, The Two Noble Kinsmen* and *As You Like It.*[99] Cooper's research reveals, in that case, just how much the long-established traditions of the Middle Ages gave Shakespeare to work with, despite the contemporary desire to suppress such vulgar customs.

Cooper also maintains, moreover, that the medieval stories which formed such an integral part of the embedded culture of Shakespeare's day "came to be most typically read, or heard, in childhood, with all the force of memory that accompanies that."[100] Not only did Shakespeare treasure the narrative traditions carried forward from generations earlier, in other words, but those carried forward from his childhood. Indeed, when the dramatist turned to his favourite medieval sources, he seems to have used not the new editions which would have been printed in his adult life, but the older versions he would have heard or read as a child. The popular tale *Bevis of Hamtoun,* for example, reappears in *King Lear*, when Edgar, disguised as a lowly beggar, complains that "Mice and rats, and such small deer,/ Have been Tom's food for seven long year" (3.4.135-6), echoing the description of Bevis' suffering: "Rattes and myse and suche small dere/ Was his meate that seven yere". In newer versions of *Bevis* from around 1565 onwards, however, "dere" was replaced with "chere", "making it likely", Cooper asserts, "that Shakespeare recalled the verse from his childhood reading or listening".[101] Similarly, Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* which Shakespeare used variously in *The Two Noble Kinsmen, Troilus and Cressida,* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* was reprinted in 1598 and 1602, but Shakespeare appears to have used an edition from 1561 (or earlier). Other favourite texts, like John Gower's *Confessio amantis* (1554), which Shakespeare drew on in *Pericles,* and John Lydgate's *Troy Book* (1555), which features

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[98] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time,* p.5
[99] Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, pp.176-7, see also chapters 5-7.
[100] Ibid., p.177
[101] Ibid., pp.168-9

in *Troilus and Cressida* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* were not reprinted in Shakespeare's adult years, suggesting he was probably exposed to such works as a boy.[102] Cooper demonstrates, then, the profound effect that Shakespeare's childhood exposure to medieval stories had on his adult life. This can be extended, I believe, to encompass the oral folktales he would have heard as a child, which similarly influenced his creations in later years. Rather than devaluing his early influences, in that case, Shakespeare allowed the structures and material of popular culture – whether old romances or 'trivial' fairy tales – to infuse and shape his adult writings.

Children's Literature

It makes sense that Shakespeare would have clung to these early stories, as there doesn't appear to have been a 'literature for children' as such in the period. Children's literature, as a category, has its origins in the mid- to late seventeenth century, when books started to recognise children as a potential market; but it was only in the middle of the eighteenth century that a literature for children was introduced and established as a distinct genre of print culture in England.[103] In the 1600s, a few isolated works appeared which were produced with children or youths in mind, such as *Youth's Treasury, or, A Storehouse of Wit and Mirth* (1688), a collection of "Pleasant Tales, Witty Jests and Merry Riddles".[104] More common, however, were texts which acknowledged a shared audience of adults and children, such as Robert Greene's *Alcida* (1617), which markets itself as containing "grave principles to content age" and "pleasant parlees, and witty answers, to satisfy youth".[105] Prior to this, there were a number of books designed especially for children, but they were chiefly didactic, instructional, or religious in nature. All of such works, however, whether educational or entertaining, were not yet considered a separate subset of literature, nor were they perceived as being suitable or numerous enough to satisfy young readers.[106] John Locke, for example, complained about the absence of appropriate literature for children in 1693, stating that aside from *Reynard the Fox* and Aesop's *Fables*, there were no

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[102] Helen Cooper, "Shakespeare's Medieval Reading", Unpublished Seminar Notes presented at the 9th World Shakespeare Congress, Prague, July 17-22, 2011.
[103] For a careful overview of current and needed studies in early modern children's literature, see Edel Lamb, "The Literature of Early Modern Childhoods", *Literature Compass,* 7.6 (2010): 412-423. See also Briggs, Butts, and Grenby, *Popular children's Literature in Britain* (cit. above), and M. O. Grenby, *The Child Reader* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011)
[104] Anon., *Youth's Treasury, or, A storehouse of Wit and Mirth* (London: J. Blare, 1688), title page
[105] Robert Greene, *Alcida* (London: George Purstowe, 1617), title page
[106] Grenby, *Child Reader,* p.3

"other *Books*... in *English*... fit *to engage* the liking of Children, and tempt them *to read*".[107] Locke was extremely influential in the way we think of children, convincing parents from all walks of life that "childhood education shaped both the moral and the economic man", and that the key to education lay in uniting amusement with instruction.[108] Consequently, in the 1730s and 1740s, after Locke's educational theories started to get around, a flood of texts specifically commissioned, written, and promoted for the use of the young exploded onto the market, and a recognisable children's literature was born.[109] Many of these new books were still didactic or religious to some extent, but there was an overall emphasis on engaging children through stories which they would find entertaining. It is not surprising that fairy tales were often the chosen narratives in these early books.[110]

When Shakespeare was growing up, then, aside from instructive or pious works, there were probably few printed stories for children *per se*. This would suggest that the majority of stories intended to engage children would have been orally transmitted. Of course, that is not to say that children were not reading: there was a mass of popular literature available at the time, in the form of chapbooks, ballads, and broadsides, featuring everything from romances, folktales, folksongs, riddles, jests, and fables to recipes and biographies.[111] Such texts were chiefly directed at adults, but it seems children were consuming them too. Cooper's research supports this, demonstrating that Shakespeare first encountered medieval romances in his early years. Nicholas Orme came to a similar conclusion after studying annotations on an early sixteenth-century copy of *Bevys of Southampton* which seem to have been made by schoolboys in the seventeenth century, inferring that popular romances were enjoyed by youths.[112] Even more convincing are the numerous complaints made against this kind of reading which implicate children as enthusiastic consumers. John Bunyan and Richard Baxter, as we have seen, both admitted their childhood dalliances with popular romances and folktales before condemning them as a sin. In 1603, Henry Crosse lamented that children were being exposed to "sweete songs and wanton tales", such as "the Court of *Venus*, the Pallace of Pleasure, *Guy of Warwicke, Libbius* and *Arthur, Bevis of Hampton,* the wise men of *Goatam, Scogins Jeasts*, *Fortunatus,* and those new delights that have succeeded

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[107] John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), eds Ruth W. Grant and Nathan Tarvoc (Indianapolis: Hacket Publishing, 1996), p. 117; Grenby, *Child Reader,* p.3
[108] Samuel F. Pickering, *John Locke and Children's Books in Eighteenth-Century England* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1981), pp.6-7
[109] Grenby, *Child Reader,* p.4
[110] See Grenby, *Child Reader,* pp.108-109.
[111] Grenby, "Before Children's Literature", pp.25-6
[112] Nicholas Orme, *Medieval Children* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 2001), pp.298-302

these, and are now extant, too tedious to recken up".[113] Jestbooks like *Scoggin's Jests* or *A Hundred Merry Tales* were filled with humorous but often fairly coarse anecdotes, practical jokes, and tales, and their suitability to children is dubious, but they found a ready audience in the young.[114] It is not hard to see why youths may have been drawn to popular literature, given that most fiction had progressed but a short distance from oral narrative. The stories children would have heard from their mothers or nurses, in other words, were likely the same as those being recounted in written form, and the language probably maintained an oral residue. The texts were also typically short and filled with eye-catching illustrations, much like contemporary children's books which attract young audiences with robust stories and brightly coloured pictures.

But one should not overemphasise the role of such works in the early life of many early modern children. Although chapbooks and other printed stories were cheap, they were probably considered an extravagance by many.[115] Even later, in the eighteenth century, when print became more established and texts for children were increasingly common, M. O . Grenby has shown "it is clear that, in the lives of many children, even in affluent families and even towards the end of the period, children's books did not feature prominently, nor even, in many cases, at all."[116] So, although people were starting to be intrigued by the possibilities of print and books when Shakespeare was growing up, this was still primarily an oral culture. Oral stories would have been the first, and sometimes only, means of entertaining and educating children.

It is difficult for us to grasp the importance of storytelling in early modern society. Not only do we have electricity to keep nights light and warm, but a plethora of entertaining gadgets and activities lie at our fingertips, from books and the internet to television and cinema. What's more, education, literacy, and access to reading material have become standard in civilised countries. In Shakespeare's day, however, there were no such luxuries. When night fell or bad weather prevailed, people were driven indoors and faced long, dreary hours with little to do. Even working hours were tedious, filled with repetitive and unengaging labour nowadays mostly done by machine. In such contexts, any story would have been welcome, no matter how frivolous. Stories were also relied on for sharing the knowledge and wisdom of the past, in a culture where

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[113] Henry Crosse, *Vertues common-wealth. Or The high-way to honour* (London: John Newberry, 1603), sigs O-O2

[114] Grenby, "Before Children's Literature", pp.26-7. See William C. Hazlitt, *Shakespeare's Jest Books* (USA, New York: Barnes and Noble, 2007), for an anthology of late medieval jokes and jest books, and an analysis of their appearance in several of Shakespeare's plays.

[115] Grenby, "Before Children's Literature", p.31

[116] Grenby, *Child Reader,* pp.93-99

literacy did not hold much value in day to day life, and few could read or write. Oral tales thus filled a void almost unimaginable to modern-day society, and would have been familiar to most in Shakespeare's audience from their earliest childhood memories. Shakespeare would not have thought twice, in that case, about including such stories in his plays.

II.   Explaining the Inexplicable

As well as providing welcome entertainment and transmitting the lessons of earlier generations, fairy tales served another important purpose in Shakespeare's day. With varying degrees of seriousness, they offered a means for discussing and explaining life's questions, both trivial and important.

The systems of belief current in early modern England were very different from our own. In those days, people believed in, or at least acknowledged the possibility of, myriad supernatural and magical things which we now dismiss as superstition or fantasy. Fairies, ghosts, and goblins, astrology and alchemy, witchcraft and magical healing were once all part of people's everyday realities, and were taken seriously by learned and common men alike. Today, these are no more than the ingredients of a good children's tale. We live in a sceptical and scientific age: logic and experiment have slowly but surely picked apart the witches and fairies of our imaginations. We no longer attribute the curdling of cream to mischievous sprites, or blame malaises like rheumatism, cramps, and bruising on the pinching fingers of displeased fairies. We can clarify why comets fall, and understand what causes eclipses. Science has, in most parts of the world, explained away magic, and fostered a concrete sense of realism.

This accounts for part of the reason why nowadays we generally dismiss fairy tales as 'childish'. Despite their pervasiveness in our popular culture, the overwhelming majority of people today see fairy tales as children's stories – tales which unquestionably lend themselves to be reinterpreted for adult audiences, but which are, at their core, intended for the young. This misconception may be due to the fact that fairy tales violate our sense of naturalistic realism. By definition, such stories are fantastic and improbable, and are not meant to replicate our world or stand up to logical interrogation. As adults in a modern and scientific age, we have little room for such unlikelihoods. Fairy tales have thus been consigned to the nursery, where logic and reason hold little sway.

Our tendency to associate fairy tales with our childhood imaginings further explains why they have been disregarded as possible sources for Shakespeare's plays. The idea of the dramatist juxtaposing Ovid's Latin poetry with *Cinderella* seems incongruous. But our reluctance to partner Shakespeare with these old oral tales is motivated by the mistaken assumption that our opinion of fairy tales and sense of 'realism' is the same as that which would have been prevalent in Shakespeare's time. In actuality, I will argue, in the early modern period, 'fact' and 'fiction' were not so easily distinguishable. Shakespeare's was a world in which fairies mingled with learned men, scientists dabbled in magic, and people were not yet unconcerned with the power of otherworldly beings. In such a context, fairy tales thrived.

Folk Reasoning

Despite some dramatic ideological, institutional, and political changes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, at grass-roots level, Shakespeare's England remained a society steeped in age-old tradition. As Keith Thomas explains, "it may be that social changes increased the volume of scepticism in sixteenth- and seventeenth century England. What is clear is that the hold of organized religion upon the people was never so complete as to leave no room for rival systems of belief."[117] Superstition infused people's lives, despite the best efforts of the reformers to suppress such 'heathen' customs, and the fundamental beliefs of the period remained those of medieval times.[118] This was a culture in which people held faith in charms, read omens and portents in everyday happenings, and turned to wise-women to cure their ills. The English bishop and philosopher Joseph Hall, writing in 1608, paints a vivid picture of the kind of man we could expect to meet in such times:

> This man dares not stir forth till his breast be crossed and his face sprinkled. If but an hare cross him the way, he returns; or if his journey began, unawares, on the dismal day; or, if he stumbled at the threshold…There is no dream of his without an interpretation, without a prediction; and if the event answer not his exposition, he expounds it according to the event…Old wives and stars are his counsellors: his nightspell is his guard; and charms, his physicians.[119]

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[117] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* p.206
[118] H. Littledale, "Folklore and Superstitions: Ghosts and Fairies, Witchcraft and Devils", in *Shakespeare's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of his Age* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), vol.1, p.529.
[119] Joseph Hall, *Characters of Vertves and Vices: in two bookes* (London: Melch. Bradwood, 1608), book II, pp.87-90

As well as being superstitious, Elizabethans also accommodated all the 'imaginary' creatures we now use to delight or terrorise our children. Reginald Scott provides us with a long list of the frightening creatures which peopled the imaginations of Shakespeare's society:

> But in our childhood our mothers maids have so terrified us with an oughlie divell having hornes on his head, fier in his mouth, and a taile in his breech, eies like a bason, fanges like a dog, clawes like a beare, a skin like a Niger, and a voice roaring like a lion, whereby we start and are afraid when we heare one cry Bough: and they have so fraied us with bull beggers, spirits, witches, urchens, elves, hags, fairies, satyrs, pans, faunes, sylens, kit with the cansticke, tritons, centaurs, dwarfes, giants, imps, calcars, conjurors, nymphes, changelings, Incubus, Robin goodfellowe, the spoorne, the mare, the man in the oke, the hellwaine, the firedrake, the puckle, Tom thombe, hob gobblin, Tom tumbler, boneless, and such other bugs, that we are afraid of our own shadowes.[120]

There was a very good reason for the belief in the supernatural. According to Thomas, magical beings "personified men's hopes and fears, making explicit a great deal which could not be said directly".[121] Science was still in its infancy during this period, and the mysterious unknown elicited a child-like fear in most people's minds. When religion could provide no answers, and concrete knowledge was absent, folk reasoning took over. People needed ways of accounting for the things that were beyond natural understanding. The supernatural or 'spirit world' was a means of explaining the inexplicable, because any answer is often better than no answer.

The weather, for instance, was a still a confusing and mysterious force to the early modern man. Rather than seeing it as a force of nature dependent on pressure and temperature changes, people looked to unnatural or otherworldly sources for climate irregularities. John Aubrey records instances of the belief that furious storms were caused by riled-up spirits, and could be quelled by ringing bells, because spirits were thought to dislike the sound: "At Paris when it begins to Thunder and Lighten, they do presently Ring out the great Bell at the Abbey of St. German, which they do believe makes it cease...The curious do say, that the ringing of bells exceedingly disturbs spirits."[122] Shakespeare perpetuates this idea in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* where a quarrel between the king and queen of the fairies causes all sorts of climate irregularities, which in turn cause the crops to ruin:

> the winds, piping to us in vain,
> As in revenge, have sucked up from the sea
> Contagious fogs which, falling in the land,

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[120] Scot, book vii, chapter xv, p.122
[121] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.717
[122] John Aubrey, "Miscellanies", in Buchanan-Brown, p.89.

Have every pelting river made so proud
That they have overborne their continents.
The ox hath therefore stretched his yoke in vain,
The ploughman lost his sweat, and the green corn
Hath rotted ere his youth attained a beard.   (2.1.88-95)

This is a fictional scene – though it does contain some fact and is often used to date the play – but it has its roots in real belief.[123]

Fairies were but one manifestation of "all these kindes of Spirites that troubles men or women", as King James I, a learned and highly influential figure who yet endorsed the existence of the occult, remarked.[124] But they often took the blame for life's various mysteries and misfortunes, and will therefore serve as an example of the reliance on the supernatural as a whole. Fairies were known to be mischievous, capricious creatures. It was common knowledge that if given half a chance they would spoil the butter or curdle the cream or bathe their babies in the beer.[125] Shakespeare's Puck is renowned for such tricks:

       Are not you he
That frights the maidens of the villag'ry,
Skim milk, and sometimes labour in the quern,
And bootless make the breathless housewife churn,
And sometime make the drink to bear no barm   (2.1.34-8)

To discourage their mischief, it was wise to treat the fairies with respect and discretion, and keep a tidy home, for they appreciated cleanliness, virtuousness, and industriousness, as a poem from 1627 by Michael Drayton illustrates:

[Fairies] make our Girles their sluttery rue,
By pinching them both blacke and blew,
And put a penny in their shue,
The house for cleanely sweeping [126]

Fairies were also notorious for misleading weary travellers and "laughing at their harm" (*AMND*, 2.1.39) – a belief which came in useful for servants running late to work.[127] Folklorist W. J. Thoms records a live instance of this belief from as late as 1865, provided to him by a little girl who confidently related that she once "knew a man, who one night could not find his way out of one of his own fields...until he recollected to

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[123] Greenblatt, "A Midsummer Night's Dream", p.805
[124] King James I, *Daemonologie* (Edinburgh: Robert Walde-graue, 1597), book 3, p.56
[125] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.728
[126] Michael Drayton, "Nymphidia" (1627), in *The Baron's Wars, Nymphidia and Other Poems* (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1887), p. 195. Keith Thomas has argued that, whether people believe in fairies or not, the perception of these creatures as agricultural and domestic helpers served to instil some of the behavioural and moral codes essential to a working society (*Religion and the Decline of Magic,* pp.730-1)
[127] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.732

turn his coat; and the moment he did so he heard the Pixies all *fly away up into the trees‚* and there they sate and laughed".[128] Fairies were also held responsible for causing the eerily perfect rings of yellow grass to form, "the green sour ringlets... Whereof the ewe not bites" (*The Tempest*, 5.1.37-8); and they often took the blame for creating the tangled knots (sometimes called 'elf-locks' or 'pixie seats') in horses' manes which mysteriously appeared overnight, one of Queen Mab's favourite activities in *Romeo and Juliet*.[129]

As well as being mischievous, however, fairies had a reputation for malice. There are numerous stories warning about the perils of fairy encounters: mortal men and women could be lured into fairyland and disappear forever, or escape to find that hundreds of years have passed in the human world.[130] Male fairies were known to have a fondness for human brides and pretty young girls. In the chapbook *Robin Goodfellow, his Mad Prankes and Merry Jests,* for example, the hostess tells the tale of Robin's mother, "a proper young wench", who was visited by a "hee fairy",

> every night would hee with other fayries come to the house, and there dance in her chamber; and oftentimes shee was forced to dance with him, and at his departure would hee leave her a silver and jewels, to express his love unto her. At last this mayde was with childe, and being asked who was the father of it, she answered a man that nightly came to visit her, but early in the morning would he go his way, wither she knew not, he went so suddainly.[131]

Whether people actually believed such tales or not, they served as reassuring ways of explaining difficult situations, like the pregnancy of an unmarried daughter or servant. A passage in Scot's *Discovery,* however, suggests that at least some people genuinely believed in fairies' ability to interfere in human lives:

> jocund and facetious Spirits are sayd to sport themselvs in the night by tumbling and fooling with Servants and Shepherds in Country houses… And many such have been taken away by the sayd Spirits, for a fortnight, or a month together, being carryed with them in Chariots through the Air, over Hills, and Dales, Rocks and Precipices, till at last they have been found lying in some Meddow or

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[128] W.J. Thoms, "The Folk Lore of Shakespeare", in *Three Notelets on Shakespeare* (London: J. R. Smith, 1865), p. 78

[129] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.728; Elizabeth M. Wright, *Rustic Speech and Folk-Lore* (Detroit: Gale Research Co., 1968), p.210

[130] See for example "Ethna the Bride", in Lady [Jane Francesca Elgee] Wilde and Sir [Robert William Robert] Wilde, *Ancient Legends, Mystic Charms, and Superstitions of Ireland* (Boston: Ticknor and Company, 1887), pp.77-82, where a young bride disappears after her wedding, having been stolen by the fairies; or "Thomas the Rhymer" in Francis James Child, ed., *The English and Scottish Popular Ballads* (New York: Folklore Press in association with Pageant Book, 1957), vol. 1, pp.323-4, where a thirteenth-century poet is enchanted by the queen of the fairies, who traps him with a kiss and takes him to fairyland.

[131] Halliwell-Phillips, p.123

Mountain bereaved of their sences, and commonly of one of their Members to boot.[132]

In his memoir *The Celtic Twilight,* W. B. Yeats explores the enduring connection between the people of Ireland and the fairies as late as the 1890s, writing with conviction of the existence of fairies, both from his own experience and in the everyday life of the Irish.[133] This would suggest that similar beliefs would probably have been prevalent in country Warwickshire a few centuries earlier when Shakespeare was writing his plays.

As in Scot's passage, where fairies are responsible for mutilating their victims, many unfortunate situations such as disease, illness, injury, and death were commonly explained with reference to the fairies. In fact, according to Thomas, the word 'fairy' was once regularly used to describe particularly nasty and perplexing ailments which were presumed to be of supernatural origin, and required a charm or exorcism to cure.[134] The blaming of otherworldly forces is understandable, given that in early modern England, medical science had little of substance to offer: "many diseases", said Robert Burton, "they cannot cure at all, as apoplexy, epilepsy, stone, strangury, gout… a common ague sometimes stumbles them all."[135] People suddenly seized with rheumatism, paralysis, or fits, for example, were supposed to have been shot at by wicked fairies.[136] Fairies were also known to occasionally swoop down and snatch healthy, unguarded babies and leave sick, weakly changelings in their place.[137] Any deformed or retarded babies, or children who looked nothing like their fathers, could therefore be rejected as changelings by parents. This sounds like the worst case of superstition to us, but it was once a common belief, even among the educated. Richard Willis, a noted scholar, born in the same year and of the same class as Shakespeare, provides us with a real-life illustration of the conviction that fairies carried away children:

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[132] Scot, appendix II, book II, chap. iv, pp.510-11

[133] In one section, for example, Yeats recounts the story of a girl who "suddenly disappeared one night about three years ago", which caused great excitement in her local village, "because it was rumoured that the faeries had taken her." The whole community rallied together to burn "all the *bucalauns* (ragweed) on the field she vanished from, because *bucalauns* are sacred to the faeries", while the village constable chanted spells. "In the morning the little girl was found," Yeats notes, "wandering in the field. She said the faeries had taken her away a great distance, riding on a faery horse." W. B. Yeats, *The Celtic Twilight: men and women, dhouls and faeries* (London: Lawrence and Bullen, 1893), pp.12-13

[134] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic,* p.724

[135] Burton, vol. 1, part II, sect. IV, mem. I, sub. I, vol.2, p.242

[136] Wright, p. 210. In some English towns, traces of this superstition still exist, with people referring to a sudden onset of illness as a "shot", harking back to the belief that fairies used to enchant people with a supernatural malady by shooting them with an "awf-shot" or fairy-dart (p.210)

[137] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.728

> …an accident…befell me within a few daies after my birth, whilst my mother lay in of me being her second child, when I was taken from her side, and by my suddain and fierce crying recovered again, being found sticking between the beds-head and the wall; and if I had not cryed in that manner as I did, our gossips had a conceit that I had been quite carried away by the Fairies they know not whither, and some elfe or changeling (as they call it) laid in my room.[138]

Shakespeare makes use of the popular belief in changelings in *The Winter's Tale,* among other plays.[139] The Old Shepherd who finds Perdita abandoned on the shore decides to explain her presence and the gold found on her person, not by referring to Perdita's illegitimate origins, which he suspects as the reason for her abandonment (3.3.69-73), but by saying Perdita is a changeling (107-114), thus sparing the girl the shame of questionable birth, and allowing him to keep the gold (as fairy gold was understood to be a gift).[140]

Whether fairies were seen to be mischievous or malicious, then, the belief in these creatures provided a means for explaining an otherwise unsatisfactory situation; for clarifying *why* things happen, benignly or malignly. There seems to have been a legitimate belief in a spirit or otherworld, populated by magical beings and responsible for all "things supernatural and causeless" (*All's Well That Ends Well,* 2.3.1-3) in the natural or everyday world. Shakespeare's was a society in which reality encompassed fantasy, where stories of magic and wonder would not have seemed out of place.

Fact or Fiction

A lack of concrete knowledge was only part of the reason for people's recourse to the supernatural, however. Sometimes it was the factual information itself which encouraged a belief in the spirit world. In Shakespeare's England, the conception of science was very different from that of the present day. According to Thomas, "the possibility of certain types of magic was a fundamental presupposition for most scientists and philosophers", and much that passed for scientific observation was drawn from folklore and superstitious belief.[141] Robert Kirk, for example, an educated, seventeenth-century clergyman, set out to conduct a scientific investigation into the existence of fairies in his *Secret Commonwealth of Elves, Fauns and Fairies,* written in 1691. But there is a conspicuous absence of the scepticism that would accompany a

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[138] R. Willis, *Mount Tabor or Private Exercises of a Penitent Sinner* (London: R. Badger, 1639), pp.92-93.
[139] In *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* for instance, Titania looks after a changeling child.
[140] Lamb, "Taken by the Fairies", p.284.
[141] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.264

modern day inquiry, or even a sixteenth-century one like Scot's. In fact, Kirk takes as his starting point the *existence* of fairies, treating fairyland as a fact of nature, which the many stories he collects only serve to prove.[142] Similarly, Burton's *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1621) is presented as a medical text, in which he applies his vast and varied learning to the subject of melancholy, but it is filled with information on contemporary folklore.[143] These works, then, are extraordinary amalgamations of scholarly and folk material, knowledge and empirical observation. J. A. Burrow observed the same practice in his analysis of medieval narrative, noting that "the main divisions of narrative recognized in modern times—fiction, history, biography, and the rest—can be made out only imperfectly in medieval writings. In particular, the distinction between fiction and non-fiction, so fundamental to the modern system of genres, was relatively little regarded".[144]

This practice can be seen throughout the 'scientific' world in Shakespeare's day. Most scientists dabbled in anything that came their way. Astrology, for example, enjoyed a prestigious reputation, especially among scholars and those of high rank. When a comet fell in London in 1557, Queen Elizabeth herself called in the astrologer John Dee to help explain its significance.[145] This hardly fits with our image of a respectable and level-headed ruler, yet "[f]rom the Dissolution of the Monasteries to the Revolution of 1688, there was scarcely any important public event which educated men did not believe to have been presaged by some occurrence in the natural world."[146] People sincerely believed that unusual or supernatural happenings in the natural world, like shooting stars, eclipses, comets, or earthquakes, were omens of future events, and that studying the celestial bodies and their movements might therefore provide insights into the future.

Along with astrology, Alchemy was also considered a genuine science in Shakespeare's time. John Dee, a man of considerable learning, was often "bent to deale with [his] alchimicall exercises".[147] His companion Edward Kelly, a more suspect

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[142] Robert Kirk, *The Secret Common-Wealth & A Short Treatise of Charms and Spells* (1815), ed. Stewart Sanderson (Cambridge: D.S. Brewer; Totowa, N.J : Rowman and Littlefield for the Folklore Society, 1976)

[143] See, for instance, a note on fairies which draws together many common beliefs about these creatures and points up the circumstances in which such knowledge was transmitted: Burton, vol. 1, part. I, sect. II, mem. I, sub.II, pp. 219-220

[144] J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work: Middle English Literature 1100-1500,* rev. ed. (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), pp.71-2

[145] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.343

[146] Ibid., p.105

[147] John Dee, *The Private Diary of Dr. John Dee,* ed. J. O. Halliwell-Phillips (London: Camden Society, 1842), p.35

character, was reported by a contemporary to have actually found the philosopher's stone.[148] The philosopher's stone was an alchemical elixir believed to be able to turn base metals into gold, a "multiplying medicine" (5.3.103), as Shakespeare refers to it in *All's Well That Ends Well*.[149] To us, the idea of a magical stone with miraculous properties sounds like something out of a children's tale – which of course it is: *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone* is the first in a sequence of hugely successful children's fantasy books by J. K. Rowling.[150]

Another practice common among contemporary intellectuals was the conjuring or raising of spirits. People genuinely believed that if one knew the appropriate rituals or spells then contact with the spirit world was possible.[151] The purpose of spirit-raising was the attainment of supernatural knowledge, for, as Dr Faustus says: "A sound magician is a mighty God". [152] William Lilly, a doctor/alchemist/astrologer/magician, was infamous for his attempts to conjure spirits, particularly the queen of fairies, whom he believed held the answers to life's questions. [153] One entry in his memoir tells us how he managed to raise the fairy queen for a friend, who was much alarmed by the sight:

> He went with a friend into my Hurst Wood: the Queen of Fairies was invocated, a gentle murmuring wind came first; after that, amongst the hedges, a smart whirlwind; by and by a strong blast of wind blew upon the face of the friend,—and the Queen appearing in a most illustrious glory, 'No more, I beseech you,' (quoth the friend:) 'My heart fails; I am not able to endure longer.' Nor was he: his black curling hair rose up, and I believe a bullrush would have beat him to the ground: he was soundly laughed at, &c. [154]

These may not strike us as the activities of a man who has a good grasp of reality, or who knows where to draw the line between science and science fiction. Yet, he is typical of his times. If the most academic men of early modern society believed in spirits and fairies, what the popular opinion must have been is not hard to imagine.

Indeed, there are many examples of tricksters who took advantage of people's credulity. Naive victims would be charged obscene amounts of money for a chance to meet with the queen of the fairies, or gain access to limitless amounts of fairy gold. They were then swiftly duped, and often ritually shamed, as is described in a 1595

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[148] William Lilly, *William Lilly's History of His Life and Times, From The Year 1602 to 1681, written by Himself* (1715), rev. ed. (London: Maurice, Penchurch-Street, 1812), pp.225-6
[149] Greenblatt, "All's Well That Ends Well", n.3, p.2238
[150] J. K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001)
[151] Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p.272
[152] Christopher Marlowe, *Dr. Faustus: The A-Text,* eds D. Ormerod and C. Wortham (London: A&C Black, 1989), 1.1.59
[153] See Lilly, especially pp. 229-32
[154] Ibid., pp.230-1

pamphlet *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding, of a rich Churle in Hampshire.* In this story, the con artist Judeth Philips pretends to be able to contact the fairy queen, and defrauds a rich churl of fourteen pounds, before publicly humiliating him and his wife while robbing them of their possessions:

> Then this Judith caused him and his wife to go into the yard, where she set the saddle on his back, and thereon girteth it fast with two new girths, and also put a bridle upon his head; all which being done, she got upon his back in the saddle, and so rid him three times betwixt the chamber and the holly tree. Then said this cozening quean, You must lie three hours one by another grovelling on your bellies under this tree, and stir not, I charge you, until I come back again; for I must go into the chamber to meet the Queen of Fairies and welcome her to that holy and unspotted place.[155]

This brings to mind Falstaff in *The Merry Wives of Windsor,* who also becomes a figure of fun at the hands of those 'playing' a fairy queen and the children dressed up as fairies who pinch him in the 'magical' Herne wood (Acts 4 and 5).

In Shakespeare's England, then, 'science' was really a mixture of superstitious beliefs, some factual knowledge, and a genuine credulity. Fairies, spirits, and occult forces bewitched the imaginations of the learned as well as the ignorant, queens as well as peasants, offering explanations for life's mysteries, and opportunities for supernatural advancement. This was a society in which there was a constant intermingling of knowledge and empirical observation, scholarly and folk material. As a result, there existed a 'grey' area, a space in between 'fact' and 'fairy', 'science' and 'magic'. And within this grey area, fairy tales flourished. We can dismiss such stories as unrealistic and childish, but our sense of reality is much more defined. For the Elizabethans, these wonder tales were more than entertaining fantasies; they were a platform for indulging and exploring all the uncertainties of life. It is not hard to see, then, why Shakespeare would have delighted in their dramatic possibilities. The playwright's blending of classic literary sources and homespun fairy stories mimics the unclear distinction between learned and folk material that existed in society as a whole. His portrayals of scholarly princes who talk to ghosts (*Hamlet*), kings who rely on oracles and put faith in the stars (*The Winter's Tale; King Lear*), and men of learning who are sometimes also wizards (*The Tempest*), may not have been that far removed from the truth.

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[155] *The Brideling, Sadling and Ryding, of a rich Churle in Hampshire, by the subtill practise of one Judeth Philips, a professed cunning woman, or Fortune teller,* reprinted in Barbara Rosen, *Witchcraft* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969), p.218

III. Emotional Support

Traditional folk- and fairy tales, then, provided Elizabethans with *more* than charming stories and simple distractions. In a society where disease, death, social injustice, and food shortages were rampant, they offered a vehicle for expressing issues of concern and explaining why things happen. In keeping with this, fairy tales served a third, related function, one which, in my opinion, explains most compellingly why Shakespeare would have drawn on these stories in his plays. As Bruno Bettelheim suggests, traditional fairy tales provide emotional support:

> Each fairy tale is a magic mirror which reflects some aspects of our inner world, and of the steps required by our evolution from immaturity to maturity. For those who immerse themselves in what the fairy tale has to communicate, it becomes a deep quiet pool which at first seems to reflect only our own image, but behind it we soon discover the inner turmoils of our soul – its depth, and ways to gain peace within ourselves and with the world, which is the reward of our struggles.[156]

Unfortunately, nowadays, this suggestive and psychologically complex aspect of fairy tales has largely been forgotten or eclipsed. This further accounts for why we have neglected fairy tales when considering Shakespeare's sources. Their perceived lack of a deeper meaning has led to a common dismissal of these stories as trivial and childish. Despite the dark, Jungian adaptations by Angela Carter, and the fact that great writers and artists have drawn inspiration from them for centuries, we still tend to disregard them as serious works in their own right.[157] Fairy tales, it is said, recount fantasies and dreams, not empirical truth; they're simple stories set in imaginary worlds "where wishing still does some good".[158] Great literature and drama should be about emotionally complex characters in believable contexts. Surely Shakespeare, then, one of the most influential dramatists of all time, would not have relied on far-fetched children's tales.

Disney has, of course, helped to instil the perception of fairy tales as naive children's stories. Most people today are exposed to such narratives only in the prettified and simplified versions made for the big screen. Unfortunately, these forms suppress fairy tales' traditional meaning and deprive them of any deeper significance. For thousands of years, fairy tales have been a resource for adults. But our popular culture has transformed them from products created 'of the people' (an earlier meaning

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[156] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1976), p.309

[157] See for instance Angela Carter, *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories* (London: Gollancz, 1979).

[158] Ashliman, *Handbook*, p.38

of the term 'popular') to empty-minded entertainment 'for the people'.[159] And in the process, fairy tales have lost much of what gave them their enduring appeal.

Beneath the Happily-Ever-After

Behind their simple and enchanting exteriors, traditional fairy tales satisfy a number of personal needs. Perhaps most importantly, they provide a means for us to explore our most secret dreams and desires. Here, youngest children always prove most successful; unnoticed little boys can prove themselves and win princesses; and lowly servant girls can advance from kitchen to castle. This fundamental element of hope is one of the most alluring features of such stories:

> Fantastic and wondrous as fairy tales seem, they are closer to humanity than we think or perhaps care to admit ... The basic domestic conflicts, deeply rooted in the psyche, the elements of social mobility, are real no matter what covert wishes accompany them; wishes themselves make man live, and move. Pessimism cannot destroy the truth that some men are better within than appearance makes them, or that some men can move beyond their childhood status no matter how hard the challenge from outmoded social structures and sibling hang-ups… the fairy tale aspires.[160]

Along with fantasy wish fulfilment, fairy tales provide a safe space in which to acknowledge and confront our deepest fears and most profound anxieties. Beautiful girls are forced to marry hideous beasts. Children are abandoned in dark forests. Husbands are tricked into believing their wives have been unfaithful. Fairy tales assure us that "a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable, is an intrinsic part of human existence – but...if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious."[161]

A chief purpose of fairy tales, then, is to express our conscious and subconscious fears and desires. The fictional characters and events externalise our overwhelming but often formless emotional turmoils, allowing us to give voice to and face such issues in a safe, imaginary realm, and come back to reality more reassured. Each story is an "enabling device", as Maria Tatar puts it.[162] Accordingly, fairy tales contain certain recurrent emotional situations: jealousy; hate; fear of death, rejection, and abandonment; anxiety over sex, courtship, and marriage; the desire to prove oneself, be recognised, be

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[159] Gillespie and Rhodes, p.1. Disney has even gone so far as to copyright these stories!
[160] Max Luthi, *Once Upon a Time: on the Nature of Fairy Tales*, trans. Lee Chadeayne and Paul Gottwald, introd. and notes Francis lee Utley (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1976), pp.18-19
[161] Bettelheim, p.9
[162] Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.xiv

loved; and so on. These recurrent emotional situations, or "terrifying truths of the inner life",[163] are distillations of universal human issues – they are the purest expression of our collective psyches.

For this reason, fairy tales have often been compared to dreams. Both forms seem to express or release deep-rooted and often taboo human emotions buried deep in the subconscious.[164] Sigmund Freud even suspected that fairy tales and dreams stem from the same place in the mind, that is, they are produced by the same creative processes.[165] Shakespeare himself appeared to recognise the connection between the two forms. A *Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, a veritable fairy tale from start to finish, repeatedly points up its relationship to dreams. The four leading characters are led to believe (by magical fairies) that the disordered and fantastic experiences of a night in the forest (a typical fairy tale setting) were but the events of a strange dream. And at the end of the play, Puck bids the audience to see the entire performance as the contents of a dream:

> If we shadows have offended
> Think but this, and all is mended,
> That you have but slumbered here
> While these visions did appear
> And this weak and idle theme,
> No more yielding but a dream   (*Epilogue,* 1-7)

As so often in dreams, the underlying emotional material at the heart of fairy tales is actually disturbingly primitive. Indeed, fairy tales have persuaded psychologists and folklorists to uncover just how violent, sexual, and potent their basic emotional subtexts are.[166] In some stories, little boys burn witches, husbands murder their wives, and fathers seek to wed their daughters. It is this murky side that makes these wonder

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[163] Stephen Orgel, *The Oxford Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale* (USA: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 17

[164] For a good psychological approach to fairy tales see Marie-Louise von Franz, *An Introduction to the Psychology of Fairy Tales,* rev. ed. (Boston: Shambhala, 1996)

[165] Ashliman, *Handbook,* p.140

[166] See, for example, Alan Dundes, "The Psychoanalytic Study of Folklore," in *Parsing Through Customs: Essays by a Freudian Folklorist* (Madison, Wis: University of Madison Press, 1987), pp.3-46. Dundes notes (p.20), for example, that Friedrich S. Krauss, an early expert in the folklore of Yuogoslavia, had to defend his journal, *Anthropophyteia,* from accusations that it contained "pornographic and obscene" matter. The journal contained psychoanalytic interpretations of folktales. Even more recently, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has created a website entitled "Re-Enchantment", which aims to demonstrate that "not all fairy tales are for children" by "leading you into the wonder, fascination and horror of well-known fairy tales and their not so well known meanings". At the bottom of the website's entry page, there is even a warning: "Users are advised that content on this site may include nudity, violence, language or sexual references which are not appropriate for children. This site deals with adult themes and issues that arise from an exploration of fairy tales. It is not intended for children". See *ABC Television: Re-Enchantment* (2011). http://www.abc.net.au/tv/re-enchantment/ (accessed 18/04/2011)

tales so important psychologically.[167] *Little Red Ridinghood* is a prime example. On the surface it seems a cautionary tale about listening to your mother and not straying from the path of obedience. But this surface simplicity hides an underlying complexity about a young woman's sexual curiosity and the danger of being seduced by, and falling into bed with, entirely the wrong sort of man – a predator.

This dark side perhaps also helps to explain why traditional fairy tales have become scarce in our society. A recent survey found that those few parents who were aware of traditional fairy tales were reluctant to read them to their children because they were seen to contain 'sensitive' material:

> some parents are ditching fairytales, believing they are politically incorrect or 'too dark' to read to children... One in four mothers has abandoned the likes of *Cinderella* and *Rapunzel* in favour of *The Gruffalo* or *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, written in 1969 by Eric Carle... [M]any feel that [traditional fairytales] are inappropriate to soothe youngsters before bed. [168]

Kimberly Reynolds has noted a similar reluctance among many parents in relation to the contemporary appetite for 'horror' stories in children's literature, the concern being that as a genre, horror "tends to be associated with kinds of knowledge and forms of experience regarded by many as unsuitable for children, notably those involving the occult or provoking high levels of fear or anxiety."[169] Perhaps early modern children were made of stronger stuff, but more likely the parents of today are missing an important fact about this 'sensitive' material, or responding inappropriately to the disturbing elements.

Significantly, the dark and complex emotional dramas which undergird and motivate the fairy tale narrative are *latent*. They linger suggestively *below* the surface of the story. This is possible because in these stories nothing is stated outright: "Even fairy tales, with their naive sense, their tenacious materialism, their reworking of familiar territory, and their sometimes narrow imaginative range, rarely send unambiguous

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[167] This dark side of fairy tales is what provided the material for Angela Carter's *The Bloody Chamber and Other Stories.* When her stories came to be analysed in universities, many students were apparently furious when they recognised their favourite childhood bedtime stories being reshaped as explicitly sexual and violent tales. But, according to Carter, she was not *adding* new material, merely creating stories from material already present: "I was taking ... the latent content of those traditional stories and using that; and the latent content is violently sexual." Quoted in an interview with Helen Simpson, "Femme Fatale," *The Guardian* (June 2006). http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2006/jun/24/classics.angelacarter (accessed 10/01/2011). Was Carter perhaps copying Shakespeare (albeit in a much more self-conscious and modern manner)?

[168] Clair Ellicott, "Politically correct parents ditch 'offensive' traditional fairy tales," *Daily Mail Online* (January 2009). http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1105662/Politically-correct-parents-ditch-offensive-traditional-fairy-tales.html (accessed 1/09/2011).

[169] Kimberley Reynolds, "Introduction", in *Frightening Fiction,* eds Kimberley Reynolds, Geraldine Brennan and Kevin McCarron (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), p.2

messages".[170] Fairy tales communicate to us via symbols and images which have various layers of meaning, some literal and some obscure. Part of their charm is that these symbols can be interpreted differently by different people. In *Rapunzel*, for example, a young woman lets down her hair to give her prince charming access to her secret chamber, and later discovers her clothes have become too tight.[171] No doubt adults would understand this quite differently from children.

The symbolic imagery of fairy tales allows the great majority of people to shrug them off as trivial escapist fantasies. It is often possible to take them at face value or to focus on their enchantments and happily-ever-afters, but their characteristic happy endings often follow a journey which is quite dark; a voyage through our deep inner anxieties, which stem from our primal drives. This material, upon closer examination, is in fact very 'adult' in nature. But, because it is usually subsumed beneath the more child-like narrative, it works at a sub- or unconscious level, and can therefore be overlooked (or, as in Disney's case, cut out altogether).

I propose that Shakespeare borrowed not only superficial elements – such as characters, plotlines, and motifs – from fairy tales, but he also recognised and utilised the potent emotional dramas embedded in such stories. This is particularly noticeable in the two plays under discussion, *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Cymbeline*, in which Shakespeare brings the latent content of his fairy tale sources to the surface, where it complicates and darkens the action, creating new and disturbing affective responses. Fairy tales may initially attract their audiences by being entertaining, but they *maintain* rapt listeners by connecting with each member on an individual and emotional level. In drawing on fairy tales, then, Shakespeare was also evoking their rich emotional and personal resonances. This allowed him to add layers of subtle meaning to his plays, and to connect with his audience on a private, perhaps subconscious level.

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There are a number of reasons why folktales have been overlooked as potential sources for Shakespeare's plays. The first of these, as we have seen, is that folktales are

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[170] Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.xv

[171] This version of the story appeared in the first edition of the Grimms' collection, but it was subsequently altered in the second and all further editions because it was thought to be too suggestive, even for adult audiences. In the first version, the wicked witch learns of the prince's visits to Rapunzel's chamber when the girl asks why her clothes have become too tight, signalling that the prince has impregnated her. In later versions, however, the girl asks why the witch is so much heavier than the prince, thus removing any sexual undertones (Ashliman, *Handbook,* p.6).

notoriously elusive: being primarily oral, these stories do not typically leave a paper trail, requiring scholars to move beyond the path of certainty into the realm of speculation. Compounded with that reluctance is the modern tendency to view fairy tales as crude, unrealistic, and childish, and therefore beneath the classic Shakespeare. But Shakespeare was once scorned by neo-classicists as being too 'common', perhaps because he was drawing on more native stories than others. Indeed, John Milton, in a poem depicting an idyllic, 'merry' day, suggests going to hear "sweetest *Shakespear* fancies child/ Warble his native Wood-notes wilde", a phrase which suggests Shakespeare was not merely 'unclassical' but distinctly native.[172]

Moreover, our contemporary tendency to undervalue fairy tales arguably stems from a lack of understanding of the place and importance of these stories in Shakespeare's day. Although unwritten traditions may have been disparaged by some in early modern England, like puritans and humanists, this was by and large an oral society, in which the spoken word remained the primary means of sharing and acquiring information. Oral tales therefore formed a vital part of early modern popular culture: they provided much-needed entertainment, making "long nights seeme short, and heauy toyles easie"; ensured the transmission of social customs, beliefs, and history; and offered a means of discussing issues of concern, from explaining otherwise unacceptable situations, such as the fluctuations of nature or the mysteries of disease, to expressing deep-rooted fears, dreams, and taboos, thereby allowing people to cope with the hardships of everyday life.

Although we cannot be certain precisely which folktales Shakespeare or his audience may have been familiar with, it is clear that storytelling was still a very popular pastime, and there was a great body of oral narrative in circulation, infiltrating all levels of society. These are the stories that Shakespeare and his audience would have been exposed to since their youth, which they wouldn't have needed to write down or preserve, because they would have been part of everyday life. It is precisely that familiarity that allowed Shakespeare to use these tales in his plays. He could rely on his audience's being acquainted and comfortable with the characters, plot threads, and emotional dramas he was evoking, allowing him to present a lot of material relatively quickly, while also involving the audience, who could use their own memories to supplement the gaps of story. On the other hand, that familiarity also provided Shakespeare with a framework from which he could break free, and exploit his

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[172] John Milton, "L'Allegro", in *The Poems of John Milton,* ed. Helen Darbishire (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p.23

audience's expectations of what might happen in order to produce original and surprising stories and affective responses. With this in mind, let us now turn to *All's Well That Ends Well,* in which Shakespeare at once evokes and reshapes a number of traditional fairy tales and their potent emotional subtexts.

CHAPTER 2

All's Well That Ends Well: a fairy tale for adults

mong Shakespeare's plays, *All's Well That Ends Well* has tended to receive lukewarm reception at best. It has, in fact, been almost entirely dismissed as an unsuccessful comedy, both on the stage and on the page. As a result, *All's Well* was categorised, along with other plays written about the same time in the early 1600s, as a 'problem play.[1] While this is considered a somewhat old-fashioned label now, and critics tend to approach the play with more of an open mind than in the past, *All's Well* is still generally regarded as having or presenting distinctive 'problems'.[2]

Perhaps the most baffling obstacle is why the beautiful, talented, and resourceful Helen wants to marry immature and callous Bertram. Much of the plot causes discomfort, not least the 'bedtrick', where Helen tricks the unwitting Bertram into sleeping with her. "Everyone who reads this play is at first shocked and perplexed by the revolting idea which underlies the plot. It is revolting; there is no doubt about it", said the first Arden editor in 1904.[3] Less prudish critics are still disturbed by the play's dark tone. Rather than charming us with the romantic optimism of comedies like *Love's Labour's Lost* or *As You Like It, All's Well* seems to present the "seamier side" of life, as Geoffrey Bullough put it.[4] We are not even certain, at the end of this supposed comedy, if all is indeed well.[5]

The play's characters do little to help the situation. Bertram has been overwhelmingly condemned, with most people content to follow Samuel Johnson's renowned estimation of him as

> a man noble without generosity, and young without truth; who marries Helen as a coward, and leaves her as a profligate: when she is dead by his unkindness,

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[1] The label was coined in 1896 by F. S. Boas for plays that posed particular social and psychological problems which required unusual and often unsatisfying solutions. He applied the term to *Troilus and Cressida*, *All's Well that Ends Well, Measure for Measure,* and *Hamlet.* Susan Snyder, ed., *All's Well That Ends Well* (Oxford [England]: Clarendon Press; New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), p.16

[2] See Gary Waller, ed., *All's Well, That Ends Well: New Critical Essays* (New York, London: Routledge, 2007) for a contemporary collection of essays on the play which are much more optimistic in spirit.

[3] W. Osborne Brigstocke, ed., "Introduction", in *All's Well That Ends Well* (London: Methuen & Co., 1904), p.xv

[4] Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *The Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* (London: Routledge and Paul; New York: Columbia University Press, 1957-75), v.2, p.380

[5] See J. G. Price, *The Unfortunate Comedy: A Study of "All's Well That Ends Well" and its Critics* (Toronto, Toronto University Press, 1968) to get a sense of the critical dissatisfaction with *All's Well* (especially with Bertram's callowness, Helen's deception, and the so-called reconciliation).

sneaks home to a second marriage, is accused by a woman whom he has wronged, defends himself by falsehood, and is dismissed to happiness.[6]

Helen is praised by the play's characters as virtuous, but most critics find her behaviour puzzling at best and downright repellent at worst: "I cannot reconcile my heart to Helen", says Susan Snyder, condensing general opinion of the heroine in the style of Dr Johnson, "a woman who pursues and captures, not once but twice, a man who doesn't want her; uses trickery in order to force herself on him sexually; and finally consolidates her hold on her husband to a chorus of universal approbation."[7] On the whole, as one critic aptly summarises, "*All's Well* perplexes more than it satisfies, and repels more than it attracts."[8]

The reason, I believe, for *All's Well's* unfortunate reputation is that the play draws deeply on fairy tales – but on the darker aspects of these stories.

Neglected sources

Most people admit that *All's Well* has a 'fairy-tale feel' to it, and this quality in particular has been emphasised by two recent productions of the play. In 2009, Britain's National Theatre put on a version of the play, directed by Marianne Elliott, which was conspicuously based on a fairy-tale atmosphere. It was even described as being "a fairy tale for adults" by the *Daily Telegraph*.[9] Similarly, the Royal Shakespeare Company advertised its mid-2013 production of *All's Well* by describing it as "Shakespeare's beguiling fairytale of love and war", which follows the story of "[a] girl hopelessly in love with a young man who yearns for freedom".[10] But the idea that *All's Well* may have actual fairy tale sources has largely been ignored.

As early as 1922, however, William Lawrence pointed out that the play is clearly based on two different fairy tale types, which he termed "the healing of the king" and "the fulfilment of the tasks".[11] The significance of Lawrence's identification of play's folk ties cannot be doubted; as G. K. Hunter noted, he brought about a "revolution in our attitude to *All's Well*" in terms of source material.[12] And whenever

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[6] Quoted in Snyder, p. 26
[7] Ibid. p.30
[8] W. W. Lawrence, "The Meaning of All's Well That Ends Well", *PMLA* 37.3 (1922), p.421
[9] "Productions: All's Well That Ends Well," *The National Theatre Live* (2009). http://www.nationaltheatre.org.uk/?lid=52899 (accessed 15/11/09).
[10] "All's Well That Ends Well", *The RSC* (2013). http://www.rsc.org.uk/whats-on/alls-well-that-ends-well/ (accessed 17/07/13).
[11] Lawrence, p.425, p.448
[12] G. K Hunter, ed., *All's Well That Ends Well* (London: Methuen, 1959), p.xxx

critics do mention *All's Well*'s fairy-tale links, Lawrence is cited as the authority. But Lawrence's work has had less impact than one would expect. Rather than picking up the clues he left almost a century ago, critics have instead shied away from examining or uncovering *All's Well*'s fairy-tale roots. The reason for this avoidance could lie in the fact that Lawrence's analysis of the fairy tale sources and their bearing on the play is lacking. He fails to perceive any deeper meaning to the traditional tales. Like Disney productions today, he divorces the stories from their potent emotional subtexts, particularly any potentially murky subtexts.[13] In his eyes, the tales are merely charming narratives about clever but simple folktale protagonists, who behave virtuously despite their testing, and are unreservedly rewarded with happily-ever-afters. Given that Shakespeare incorporated such tales into his play, Lawrence insists that *All's Well* should therefore be interpreted in the same light.[14]

This reductive interpretation of *All's Well*'s folk sources has helped to strengthen a general perception of the play as being poorly constructed. Various critics see *All's Well* as having two opposing threads: 'fairy tale', which encompasses the idealistic and magical elements of the play, as well as Lawrence's interpretation; and 'realism', which contains all the gritty problems (emotional, psychological, moral) of the play that Lawrence's optimistic reading could not quite satisfy. The darker 'realistic' thread of *All's Well* is perceived to undercut or fight against the romantic 'fairy tale' thread, leaving us with a play that lacks a distinct sense of unity – a 'problem play'. Hunter, for example, believes the main issue with *All's Well* is "the specific problem of reconciling a simple magical heroine derived from the source with a realistic background", and seems intent on showing that much of the play runs against the folk-narrative effects that Lawrence perceived.[15] Snyder claims that there is a "dramatic clash between romantic wish-fulfilment and brutal social fact".[16] But, perhaps it is possible to approach the play from a different angle, and in so doing get behind some of its problems.

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[13] As a result, Lawrence oversimplifies things which are actually quite complicated – like the moral status of Helen. Where Lawrence sees Helen's tricking Bertram into bed as a completely acceptable convention of storytelling, for instance, other critics deem her behaviour as tantamount to rape. See, for instance, Stanley Wells, *Shakespeare: Sex and Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 122

[14] Lawrence, p.463. It is worth noting that Lawrence was writing at a time when Shakespeare's comedies were seen to be optimistic and light-hearted; it was only later in the 1940s that darker readings of the comedies emerged, thanks to influential performances like Peter Brooks' *Love's Labour Lost*, and critics like Northrop Frye. So Lawrence's comments may have been appropriate in his period in some ways, but they beg fresh development now.

[15] Hunter, p.1

[16] Snyder, p.8

Arousing Emotions

In this chapter, I intend to expose and explore *All's Well*'s debt to folk- and fairy tales. I will suggest that the play relies on various folktale plotlines and motifs, which have either been overlooked or analysed from a different perspective. These will be identified by comparing the play to certain folktale 'types', as well as to particular narratives, and underlining shared patterns and motifs. Instead of analysing the whole play, I will be concentrating on Helen's journey and its embedded folktale strands, which I will trace throughout the drama, highlighting particular folk motifs as they appear.

I will also argue that *All's Well* draws on more than just the narrative patterns of folktales: it reiterates their emotional models, too. In *All's Well*, I propose that Shakespeare takes the usually dormant emotional content in his fairy tale sources, which is often quite disturbing, and he agitates and enhances it, so that it seethes dangerously close to the narrative surface, threatening to boil over and overwhelm the optimistic story line.[17] The dramatist gives voice to all the difficult emotional and moral tensions which fairy tales traditionally only symbolically represent. How would it feel to be the trophy blithely given away like an object? What's wrong with a woman lustily chasing after the man she desires, or choosing how she loses her virginity? How rigid is the line between determination and obsession, right and wrong? In this light, the perceived split in the play between the romantic fairy-tale elements and the grisly realistic elements is erroneous. The darker, emotionally complex elements of *All's Well* do not fight against the fairy-tale elements: they comment on them, because they are *part* of the fairy tale. Rather than oversimplifying the play, in other words, the folktale strains complicate it.

All's Well, then, is a play where extremely 'adult' subjects, like pursuing a sex object and losing one's virginity, are placed inside an envelope that seems to involve more child-like narrative expectations. The clash is not between realism and fairy tale, in that case, but as a fairy tale, between adult subjects and child-like narrative

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[17] Susan Snyder and David McCandless, who takes Snyder's work as his starting point, construed the play in a similar light. Snyder deems *All's Well* as a "deconstructed fairy tale", arguing that Shakespeare invests the simple folktale narrative with powerful and complicated sexual undertones. Unfortunately, she believes these undertones are *added* by Shakespeare: "the play keeps giving voice to ... aspects of life about which fairy-tale and folk-tale traditionally have nothing to say" (p.10).This leads to a perception of the play as having two threads, fairy tale and psychological realism, which clash, with the latter undermining the former. McCandless suggestively proposes that *All's Well* "pushes the folktale's subterranean psychic drama" to the surface. But this remark is made in a footnote, and he does not follow it up in the body of his text. His focus rather falls on what he deems 'the erotic subdrama' of *All's Well*, and how, rather than being pushed to the surface, this subdrama is actually suppressed in the play. David McCandless, "Helen's Bed-trick: Gender and Performance in *All's Well That Ends Well*", *Shakespeare Quarterly* 45.4 (1994): 449-468

expectations. It's as if Shakespeare is anticipating (as always) modern insights into the disturbingly primitive material of so-called children's stories. As Terry Eagleton observes, "though in many ways we appear to have left Shakespeare's age behind, there are other ways in which we have yet to catch up with him."[18]

Shakespeare's Literary Source

Shakespeare's acknowledged source for *All's Well* is Boccaccio's *The Decameron,* Day III, Story 9. The playwright probably knew the tale from William Painter's close translation of it in *The Palace of Pleasure* (1566, repr. 1569 and 1575). [19] Painter summarises the story as follows:

> Giletta, a physician's daughter of Narbonne, healed the French king of a fistula, for reward whereof she demanded Beltramo, Count of Roussillon, to husband. The Count, being married against his will, for despite fled to Florence, and loved another. Giletta, his wife, by policy found means to lie with her husband in place of his lover, and was begotten with child of two sons; which known to her husband, he received her again, and afterwards he lived in great honour and felicity.[20]

The *Decameron* is a fourteenth-century Italian collection of 100 novellas, told over 10 days. Although a written collection, the *Decameron* has an intimate relationship with oral stories, and this is reflected within its own text. The frame tale tells of a group of seven women and three men who, to flee from a plague epidemic, take shelter in a villa in the countryside near Florence where they pass their evenings by telling each other stories. These stories, recounted orally to the group, make up the 100 novellas. Many classical, medieval, and early modern texts, like Ovid's *Metamorphoses,* Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales,* or Peele's *Old Wives Tale,* present their stories as being told orally, reflecting the illusory boundary between oral and written forms that existed in those days. This is further evidenced if we consider the communal mode of transmission of many written stories like Boccaccio's: "there is no question that oral reading and recitation were common means by which medieval audiences received romances".[21]

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[18] Terry Eagleton, *William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1987), p.5
[19] The 1575 edition of Painter's story is printed in Bullough, pp.389-396, and it is to this version that I will be referring throughout the body of this chapter.
[20] Bullough, p.389
[21] Sylvia Huot, "The manuscript context of medieval romance", in *The Cambridge Companion to Medieval Romance*, ed. Roberta L. Krueger (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2000) p.73.

Tale III.9 of the *Decameron* has obvious roots in two folktale types: "The Dragon Slayer" (ATU 300) and "The Man Who Deserted His Wife" (ATU 891).[22] It would seem quite possible that Boccaccio heard these tales orally, for in no other literary work do these two stories appear together.[23] Both tale types have numerous variants, across many cultures, which were documented most recently by Hans-Jorg Uther in 2004.

The first half of Boccaccio's tale comprises Giletta's healing of the King to her marriage to Beltramo. For this part of his story, Boccaccio recycled an old type of folktale that has to be one of the genre's most well-known: ATU 300 (what Lawrence termed "the healing of the king"). Categorised as "The Dragon-Slayer", ATU 300 has a narrative tradition so extensive that I could not hope to expound all of its analogues, which have been collected the world over. Katharine Briggs, in her *Dictionary of British Folk-Tales,* lists ten versions gathered in Shakespeare's native country alone, so it is probable the dramatist would have encountered variants of this type in addition to Boccaccio's.[24] Stories of type 300 centre on an unpromising or unloved hero who is faced with a seemingly impossible task, which he must either overcome, typically with magical aid, or sacrifice his life in the attempt. His reward is usually marriage to someone far above his standing and a comfortable happily-ever-after. For instance:

> A princess was held captive by a seven-headed serpent, and the king promised her in marriage to the man who could free her. A fisherman's son killed the serpent, and cut out the seven tongues. But another man found the dead serpent, cut off its heads, and claimed the princess as a bride. At the celebration before the wedding, the real hero asked the king to examine the serpent's heads, and everyone saw that the tongues were missing. The hero then pulled them from his bag as proof that he had rescued the king's daughter. They threw the other man out of the palace, and the fisherman's son married the princess.[25]

The above story is emblematic of the type: the hero is an ordinary boy and comes from humble beginnings [motif L100]; the feat he must perform is of supernatural proportions; he is successful in his quest [L160, H1242.1]; his reward is quite naturally a princess [L160], who will be willingly handed over by a grateful king; and the ending is happy.[26] Although stylistic details may vary from version to version, depending on

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[22] Uther, vol. 1, ATU 300 and ATU 891
[23] Lawrence, p.448
[24] Briggs, *Dictionary*, part A, vol. I, type 300
[25] "The Castle of No Return", summary provided by D. L. Ashliman, *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language, Based on the Aarne-Thompson Classification System* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1987), p.51.
[26] Thompson, *Motif-Index*; all subsequent references to motifs are from this index, and will be made in text. For full titles of all motifs referred to in this chapter and the next, see the Motif Index provided at the end of this thesis.

the country of origin, the essence of this tale type remains consistent throughout the world. For many of us, this type is exactly what we picture when we think of 'fairy tale': a lowly hero, a difficult challenge, a reversal of fortune, and a royal mate, have come to seem the most characteristic – and clichéd – motifs of the fairy tale genre. This specific tale is also interesting because it involves identity tokens [motif H80]. In order to claim his prize from a rival contender, the hero must provide some proof that it was he who killed the serpent. This will have particular significance when it comes to looking at the function of the rings in *All's Well*.

A Scottish variant of type 300 entitled *Fearachur Leigh* is worth mentioning because it too shares interesting parallels with *All's Well*:

> Farquhar, a drover in the Reay country, gets supernatural wisdom. The king is sick, and no doctors can heal him. Farquhar knows that the doctors are keeping a black beetle in the wound, and himself undertakes the cure, which is successful. The doctors are hanged, and Farquhar is offered lands or gold or whatever he desires as a reward. He asks for the hand of the king's daughter, and a grant of land, to which the king assents.[27]

Here we have a commoner hero whose challenging task is to cure an apparently incurable king, using specialised knowledge he magically acquires. What's more, he is allowed to choose his reward, and even when that turns out to be the king's own daughter it is granted.[28] The similarities to Helen's story in the first part of the play are striking.

As a whole, this tale type is so popular that even some of our most recent and supposedly original stories are really no more than modern reworkings. Every time an improbable hero succeeds against the odds this ancient folktale pattern is evoked. J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is a prime example: a skinny, bespectacled orphan, detested by his adoptive family, discovers that he has magical powers, which he is forced to pit against a deadly enemy, who happens to be the most evil wizard of all time. Aided by a kind old man, Harry succeeds in defeating his nemesis, saving the whole world from evil in the process. He wins the girl, and lives happily ever after.[29] It is the same fireside story in contemporary dress. No wonder Shakespeare thought this type of narrative good material for a play – if it is still popular today, it evidently appeals to us on some basic, human level.

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[27] "Fearachur Leigh", in *Popular Tales of the West Highlands*, ed. J. F. Campbell (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edmonston and Douglas, 1860-62), vol.2, no. XLVII. Summary provided by Lawrence, p.451.
[28] Cf. Motif Q94. Reward for cure
[29] See, for instance *Harry Potter and the Philosopher's Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001)

The second half of Boccaccio's tale is based on a very popular type of folktale, ATU 891, "The Man Who Deserted His Wife" (Lawrence's "the fulfilment of the tasks"). In stories of this type, a man marries a clever woman, but then quickly deserts her, leaving her with a set of ostensibly impossible tasks (one of which is to bear him a child) to fulfil before he will accept her as wife. The wife follows her husband in disguise, and by some deception manages to sleep with him without being recognised. She goes home and gives birth to his child (or children). When the husband returns and sees the child, he acknowledges his wife's fulfilment of the tasks and the pair lives happily ever after. The following Arabian tale, *The Sultan's Camp Followers,* is a good example:

> A sultan is impressed with a poor saddlemaker's daughter's ability to pose riddles, and so he marries her. He abandons her untouched, however, setting out for war instead. She follows him to his camp, disguised as a man, and the pair plays a game of chess. She wins the first round, gaining her husband's dagger as a reward. She lets him win the second round, and as a prize offers to let him sleep with her slave woman. She then disguises herself as the slave woman, sleeps with her unwitting husband, and conceives a child by him. This happens twice more over the next two years, before the sultan finally hears of his wife's actions. On seeing the children and the dagger, he knows them to be true, and he praises the woman's cleverness before finally accepting her as wife.[30]

Although the above tale contains no impossible tasks, it displays many other defining narrative patterns, such as the wife's cleverness, the husband's desertion straight after marriage, the bedtrick [K1310], the use of identity tokens [H80], and the happy ending. Another version entitled *The Clever Vizier's Daughter,* of Turkish origin, follows the story above quite closely, except that before the husband abandons his new wife, he leaves her with two items and a set of commands [motif H922]. The first item is a chest sealed closed with his personal stamp, which he challenges his wife to fill with gold and silver without breaking the stamp; the second is a mare, which must give birth to a foal that looks like his black horse. Finally, he orders his wife to bear a child whose real father he is, and then send the child to him mounted on the black foal.[31]

Tales of type 891 have been enjoyed for generations. Not only Boccaccio, but Straparola (*Le Piacevoli notti*, VII.1) and Basile (*Pentamerone,* III.4 & V.6), as well as a number of early fabliaux and jestbooks, all make use of type 891.[32] The type can be traced back to as early as the eleventh century, where it appears in the *Kathā-*

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[30] My summary, from Inea Bushnaq, ed., *Arab Folktales* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1986), pp.339-343
[31] "Die Kluge Wesirs-Tochter" (The Clever Vizier's-Daughter), reproduced in Lawrence, pp.429-430
[32] Uther, ATU 891 and Thompson, *The Folktale*, pp.202-3

saritsāgara (Ocean of Story)*,* an Indian collection of folktales.[33] It would seem safe to assume, in that case, that Shakespeare was probably familiar with the broader narrative tradition. This is especially plausible if we consider that Shakespeare used the bedtrick, which lies at the heart of every type 891 story, in another of his plays, *Measure for Measure.*[34] Evidently he was certain it would appeal to his audiences. Indeed, according to Stith Thompson, tales which turn on seduction and adultery, "deceptions connected with sex-conduct" [motifs K1300-1399], were high favourites in the Middle Ages, among both oral and literary storytellers.[35] The popularity of stories featuring bedtricks makes sense, especially if we consider that folktales were often dismissively attributed to 'old wives', who would have derived a distinct pleasure from watching a mistreated young woman outsmart her disdainful husband to achieve an improbable victory. The bedtrick motif [K1340] itself has a long and far-reaching history. D. L. Ashliman has traced it to the Old Testament, *The Thousand and One Nights* (at least a thousand years old, based on Indian, Persian, and Arabic folklore), the *Rig Veda* (one of the oldest extant texts in any Indo-European language)*,* ancient Indian storytelling tradition, and Greek Myth.[36] At least two other tale types, ATU 1379 and 892, also hinge upon the bedtrick motif, and countless others feature some sort of similar ploy centred on getting into the bed or bedroom of an unsuspecting victim.[37] Poggio provides us with an early European example from 1470 in *An English Dyer who Had an Adventure with His Wife*, which goes as follows:

> A married man asked his pretty serving-maid to grant him certain favours. The maid told his wife, who advised her to agree to the man's wishes. At the arranged time, the wife went instead of the serving-maid to the secret meeting place, and so the man committed adultery with his own wife.[38]

As well as sexual deception, an important motif in stories of type 891 is the tasks assigned by the departing husband for his wife [motif H922]. In typical fairy-tale

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[33] Uther, ATU 891

[34] Shakespeare also uses the bedtrick in other plays, but in slightly different forms. See, for instance, *Cymbeline,* discussed in the next chapter, where Giachimo sneaks into Innogen's bedchamber and voyeuristically spies on the sleeping princess; and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, where the Wooer of the Jailer's Daughter pretends to be Palamon, whom the girl is infatuated with, in order to sleep with and marry her. Another 'deception connected with sex-conduct' occurs in *Much Ado About Nothing,* where Claudio believes he is to marry Hero's cousin, only to find he is marrying Hero herself.

[35] Thompson, *The Folktale,* pp.202-3

[36] D. L. Ashliman, "Entrance into Girl's (Man's) Room (Bed) by Trick", in *Archetypes and Motifs in Folklore and Literature: A Handbook,* eds Jane Garry and El-Shamy Hasan (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 2005), p.289

[37] See, for instance, ATU 900, 853, 881, 891B, and 882 (on which *Cymbeline* is based)

[38] My summary, from Bracciolini Poggio, "An English Dyer who Had an Adventure with His Wife" (1470), in *The Facetiae of Poggio and other Medieval Story-Tellers,* ed. trans. Edward Storer (London: George Routledge and Sons, 1928), no. 116, p. 143.

style, the tasks set for the wife seem at first to be impossible. But the heroine always succeeds in solving them, relying not on magical intervention but her own resourcefulness and patience. The primary task the heroine must face is to bear her absent husband's child, even though he refuses to be near her [motif H1187]. This involves somehow getting close to him and tricking him into sleeping with her. The secondary tasks all involve making or obtaining certain objects, which will later serve as tokens proving the wife's ingenuity and substantiating her exploits [motif H80]. In an Indian tale *The Clever Wench,* for instance, the wife builds a grand well, and acquires her unsuspecting husband's cap and picture, and the sight of these things later convinces the husband that his wife is speaking the truth.[39]

Boccaccio's tale III.9 is a fairly straightforward recapitulation of types 300 and 891. He makes, as we shall see, a few noteworthy changes, but on the whole his adaptation of these two popular folktale types is unproblematic. The same cannot be said of Shakespeare's *All's Well.* Reading Shakespeare's play alongside Boccaccio's simple narrative is like meeting the sophisticated older sibling of a young child. All the dormant potential of Boccaccio's story is developed into a rich and intricate drama, filled with unsettling emotional, moral, and sexual tensions. Some of these changes can be put down to Shakespeare's ingenuity. Others, however, suggest that the playwright may have had an external inspiration: the oral folktales at the heart of Boccaccio's narrative. In order to illustrate Shakespeare's ingenious use of folktales in *All's Well*, I will be focusing primarily on the characterisation of Helen, and her quest to win Bertram as husband.

The Ugly Duckling

All's Well That Ends Well opens with the Countess of Roussillon, her son Bertram, and the old Lord Lafeu standing together on stage and discussing Bertram's imminent departure to France to be at the ailing King's bedside. Off to the side, somewhat distanced from the discussion, is Helen. The orphaned child of a recently deceased physician, Helen is completely dependent on the Countess, having only her "honesty" and "virtue" to speak for her (1.1.34-40). She stands meekly, speaking only once when spoken to (47), and appears to be quietly weeping (41). Our first impression of the heroine is not a particularly encouraging one.

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[39] Maive Stokes, *Indian Fairy Tales* (London: Ellis & White, 1880), tale XXVIII, p.216

First impressions are rarely inspiring in fairy tales. In countless such stories, the protagonists are at first depicted as unpromising, weak, stupid, or degraded [motif L100]. They're either the youngest child (*Cinderella*), or very small (*Tom Thumb*), or disfigured so as to appear less than human (*The Girl Without Hands*). Despite their initial inadequacy, though, the unlikely heroes always come out on top, proving their worth to all those who doubted them [motifs L160, H1242.1]. In *the Golden Goose,* for example, the hero is tellingly named "Dummling" (little fool), and is naturally the youngest of three sons. Dummling is sneered at on every occasion, but in the end, it is he who manages to succeed where his brothers failed, winning himself a princess and a kingdom.[40] *The Ugly Duckling,* a story most of us know from our childhoods, translates this classic fairy-tale pattern into pictorial terms. It tells the story of a homely little bird, the last to hatch from his egg, who is despised and mocked by everyone around him. Eventually, the duckling transforms into a beautiful swan, earning the admiration of all those who once belittled him.[41] His transformation from duckling to swan metaphorically represents his metamorphosis from insecure child to confident adult, weakling to hero.

These stories have a strong idealistic impulse in them. They favour the underdog or the small person, and address some of our most profound anxieties – the need to be loved, the fear of being thought worthless, the desire to reveal what is hidden within – promising that there will be a metamorphoses or a change, and the unfortunate protagonist will emerge better off in the end. This intrinsic element of hope is one of the most alluring features of such stories.

By making his heroine appear at first weak and powerless, Shakespeare seems to be embodying what is only symbolised in fairy tales: the protagonist's initial perceived inadequacy. At root, I would suggest, Helen's story in *All's Well* is a quest to prove herself. She is the ugly duckling: unnoticed and then despised by her love, and afflicted with a poor sense of self-worth, Helen must prove her true merit to both Bertram and herself, and transform into a swan. Overarching and unifying all the distinct fairy-tale allusions, the "mingled yarn" (4.3.69) of *All's Well*, then, is Helen's magical journey to

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[40] In *Why Shakespeare?* Catherine Belsey has skilfully demonstrated that Shakespeare's *As You Like It* has many points of contact with the *The Golden Goose* (see pp.21-41), so it is not unreasonable to assume that the playwright drew on this old tale, or at least its narrative pattern, once more in *All's Well*.
[41] Shakespeare would not have known *The Ugly Duckling,* as it was written by Hans Christian Anderson after his time (1844). But the story itself is merely a reworking of an age-old fairy-tale pattern (loathed underdog, transformation, beloved hero) with which Shakespeare would most certainly have been familiar, through the countless other stories (like *The Golden Goose*) that follow the same pattern.

prove her worthiness and win her heart's desire. For, "Who ever strove/ To show her merit that did miss her love?" (1.1.209-10)

Quest One: A Cinderella Story

Our first impression of Helen as a submissive, dejected young woman is strengthened when she begins to speak. As soon as she is alone onstage, Helen's tearful silence gives way to an emotional confession of her sorrow: "I am undone. There is no living, none,/ If Bertram be away" (1.1.79-80). Helen is completely in love with the young count, but believes her love to be hopeless: "'Twere all one,/ That I should love a bright particular star/ And think to wed it, he is so above me" (80-82). She sees her affections as "idolatrous", believing herself unworthy of Bertram's attention: "The ambition in my love thus plagues itself" (85). Nevertheless, the count's departure for France leaves her heartsick: "now he's gone, and my idolatrous fancy/ Must sanctify his relics." (94)

Helen's opening monologue paints a picture of a vulnerable and self-effacing woman. She appears to be a typical romantic heroine, pining over an idealised love. In the next breath, however, we are exposed to a completely different side of her character. Paroles, Bertram's foolish companion, enters the scene and engages Helen in conversation, and her quick wit and lively spirit soon become apparent. "Are you meditating on virginity", Paroles shamelessly inquires, "Ay", says Helen , unperturbed (105-6). From there the dialogue takes a coarse turn, but Helen keeps up, proving to be just as sharp as the droll Paroles:

> *Par.* man, sitting down before you, will
> undermine you and blow you up.
> *Hel.* Bless our poor virginity from underminers and
> blowers up! Is there no military policy, how
> virgins might blow up men? (112-116)

Even her desire for Bertram manifests in a different light. "How might one do," she asks Paroles, "to lose [her virginity] to her own liking?" (140). Instead of romanticised courtly love, Helen reveals a tangible physical desire. What's more, she unapologetically wishes to satiate her lust "to her own liking". This confident, proactive woman seems at odds with the weeping one of a few lines earlier. Indeed, after talking to Paroles, Helen decides that she will not sit quietly in Roussillon and mourn Bertram's absence, but follow him to France instead, and embark on a dangerous quest to fulfil her deepest desire: "Our remedies oft in ourselves do lie,/ Which we ascribe to heaven" (199-200)

From the start, then, Shakespeare presents us with a character possessing a curious duality. Helen is both infatuated romantic and lustful predator, passive dreamer and scheming go-getter. Even at this early stage, she differentiates herself from Giletta. Boccaccio's heroine loves Beltramo "more than is meete for a maiden of her age" (p.389), but there is no explicit suggestion, as there is in *All's Well*, that this love involves physical desire. Additionally, Giletta is one-dimensional: she appears from the outset to be a confident and capable woman. She is rich, "diligently looked unto by her kinsfolke", and desirable – numerous suitors have sought her hand in marriage, and she has turned them all down (pp.389-90). There is no hint of the vulnerability or sense of inadequacy that seems to plague Helen.

The Dragon Slayer

Helen's decision to leave Roussillon in pursuit of Bertram sets in motion the archetypical fairy story, ATU 300, where a lowborn or unnoticed boy goes forth into the wide world, faces a perilous task, succeeds, and is rewarded with a princess by a thankful king. *All's Well* retells this popular story, but with a twist: the fairy-tale pattern is reversed. A lowborn *woman* is the courageous adventurer, and a noble man the reward. Unsurprisingly, this destabilising of gender norms has some interesting repercussions.[42]

Reversing the traditional narrative means that *All's Well* indulges in the improbable fantasy that a woman may not only choose and pursue a husband, but be successful in her desire to lose her virginity "to her own liking". This would have been quite subversive in Shakespeare's time, especially when, as Carolyn Asp notes, "Renaissance handbooks on marriage speak of the 'choice of a wife' but never the choice of a husband. It is the man – the suitor – who seeks, who chooses. He does not expect the woman to seek him or to take the initiative in declaring her love first."[43] At its core, then, this is a story of wish-fulfilment.

There are many fairy tales which privilege resourceful, active, and clever heroines. They get revenge for having their virtue questioned (*The Wager on the Wife's Chastity*), they outfox men who want only one thing (*A Woman's Trick*), and they

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[42] In fact, as Snyder notes: "This change alone, the replacement of the conventional risk-taking, conniving hero by a risk-taking, conniving heroine, is enough to call into question Lawrence's conclusions that the play calls only for a primitive, fairy-tale response" (p.9).
[43] Carolyn Asp, "Subjectivity, Desire and Female Friendship in *All's Well That Ends Well*," in *Shakespeare's Comedies,* ed. Gary Waller (USA, New York: Longman, 1991), p.179

escape potentially abusive relationships (*Bluebeard*).[44] Inevitably, most such stories are about wish-fulfilment. Women would have had little opportunity to display such virtuosity and power in traditional patriarchal societies.

Shakespeare appeals to such narratives by having a resourceful heroine, but he also heightens them. Helen is not an active heroine in a conventionally passive role, as most fairy tales depict, but an active heroine in a traditionally *masculine* role. She pushes the envelope of her generic type, testing the limits of appropriate feminine behaviour. Does she have the right to pursue the object of her desire, as a man would, or should she rather, as convention dictates, suffer in silence, and resign herself to a lifetime of unrequited love?

Shakespeare did not invent the fairy-tale reversal of having a female quester, he adapted it from Boccaccio; but he makes several important changes which serve to reinforce the implications of such a reversal. Firstly, although Giletta also adopts the typically masculine role of pursuer, Boccaccio does not problematise her position by adding sexual undertones to her pursuit. Giletta is simply a determined woman who knows what she wants; there is no suggestion that her behaviour is untoward.[45] Helen, however, adopts both masculine role and "male erotic obsession".[46] Her undisguised desire for Bertram comes out first in her discussion with Paroles, where she muses on virginity (1.1.140). Soon thereafter she laments that her "wishing well [for Bertram] had not a body in't / Which might be felt" (168-9); and hopes that "nature" will "join like likes" so they may "kiss like native things" (205-6). Later, she goes so far as to beg Bertram for a kiss (2.5.81).[47] Her behaviour thus confuses and upsets traditional gender boundaries.

Shakespeare further accentuates Helen's audacity by changing her social position. Where Giletta is prosperous and much desired, Helen is the orphaned child of a poor physician. She has no family, name, or wealth, and relies solely on the Countess for her education and upbringing. Her desire to wed Bertram is thus much more presumptuous, and socially scandalous. She herself questions the "ambition" of her love, prompting the audience to do the same.

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[44] *The Wager on the Wife's Chastity* lies at the heart of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline,* as we shall see in next chapter.

[45] Only later, when Giletta asks for Beltramo as a husband, do we get any hint that her behaviour is possibly unseemingly; and this derives not from her breaking gender conventions in pursuing a man, but rather disrupting social norms by pursuing a man above her station.

[46] Waller, *All's Well,* p.32

[47] See also 4.4.21-26, where she reflects on her night in bed with Bertram, his "sweet use" of her, how "lust doth play", and her sense of defilement.

Cinderella

Increasing the social distance between Bertram and Helen means that *All's Well* enacts another familiar fantasy: that a humble and misused maid can, if she perseveres through tribulation, jump over social barriers to a happy ending. This would have to be one of the richest and most popular expressions of human desire, and it immediately evokes the classic rags-to-riches story, *Cinderella* (ATU 510A). *Cinderella* is a tale of "wishes coming true, of the humble being elevated, of true merit being recognised even when hidden under rags, of virtue being rewarded".[48] This is not the first time Shakespeare has recycled this narrative: it resurfaces in the tales of Viola, Perdita, Rosalind, Cordelia, Innogen, and Marina.[49] When Shakespeare found a winning formula, he used it time and again, and clearly this one was particularly popular among his audiences. Indeed, Briggs has collected sixteen different English versions – the largest number for any individual fairy tale type. The difference in *All's Well's* retelling, however, is that Helen is not a noble-born woman who has simply fallen on hard times; she is as she first appears: a poor physician's daughter. Her story is therefore considerably more daring, but perhaps also more engaging. By amplifying the utopian element present in the traditional tales, Shakespeare arouses our sympathy for Helen, increasing our desire for her success.

Additionally, by aligning Helen with Cinderella, Shakespeare accounts for the down-trodden, modest woman we met in the opening soliloquy. Cinderella is the archetypal passive heroine; she's chaste, unassuming, and kind. In part, so is Helen – certainly, all the older characters in the play seem to see her in this light: "her dispositions she/ inherits, which makes fair gifts fairer... she derives her honesty and achieves her goodness" (1.1.36-40), says the Countess.

In this first section of the play, then, not one, but two fairy tale types infuse and inform the drama. The reversed folktale pattern (ATU 300), with its unsettling gender implications, runs parallel to the *Cinderella* story (ATU 510A), which batters against social norms. Both tale types have been heightened by Shakespeare, and the interplay between them accounts for Helen's vacillation between innocent vulnerability and erotic determination. The result is a Cinderella who doesn't so much charm the prince with her quiet beauty as trap him at the ball and announce their engagement.

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[48] Bettelheim, p.239
[49] Belsey, p.28; see her chapters 3 and 4 for a more detailed discussion of this pattern.

Now that Helen has decided to embark on a quest to win her prince charming, she needs to undertake some wondrous feat to prove she is worthy of him: "my project may deceive me," she admits, "But my intents are fixed and will not leave me." (1.1.210-11). As D. L. Ashliman outlines, the heroines of fairy tales are typically faced with formidable domestic challenges, such as picking peas and lentils from ashes (*Cinderella*), or spinning flax into gold (*Rumpelstiltskin*). Helen's task is to cure a seemingly incurable king. This, too, could be seen as a test of her domestic prowess: in Shakespeare's time, a certain level of domestic aptitude was expected of young ladies and housewives, and this extended beyond knowing how to cook and clean into having a working knowledge of domestic medicine, which was deemed "a necessary part of female education in the household arts."[50] The early modern period, as Keith Thomas explains, was "above all a time when medicine began at home. Every housewife had her repertoire of private remedies."[51] The ability to heal would therefore be seen as proof of domestic proficiency.

Unfortunately, the King is suffering from a fistula – a nasty affliction most often beyond remedy. Shakespeare never explicitly states where the King's fistula is. In Boccaccio's story, it occurs as "a swelling upon his breast" (390); but fistulas were most commonly found around the anus and were widely believed to be a sign of venereal disease.[52] Shakespeare seems to encourage this darker, more disturbing reading, suggestively alluding to the King's "notorious" (1.1.32) disease in Lavatch's lewd jesting about "buttocks" and his bawdry coupling of the "French crown" with a "taffety punk" (prostitute; 2.2.13-32).[53]

The serious nature of the King's infection is stressed from the very opening moments of the play: "What hope is there of his Majesty's amendment?", asks the Countess of Lafeu, "He hath abandoned his physicians, madam, under whose practices he hath persecuted time with hope, and finds no other advantage in the process but only the losing of hope by time" (1.1.11-15). Helen, however, has a magical secret weapon. In all *Cinderella* variants, the heroines receive supernatural assistance in completing

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[50] Catherine Field, "'Sweet Practicer, thy Physic I will try': Helen and her 'Good Receipt' in *All's Well That Ends Well*", in Waller, *All's Well,* p.197. See also Linda Pollock, "Medical Matters," in *With Faith and Physic: The Life of a Tudor Gentlewoman, Lady Grace Mildmay, 1552-1620* (London: Collins & Brown), pp. 92-109

[51] Thomas, p. 15

[52] Field, p.196

[53] See Field, pp.194-208 for a convincing argument for the sexual nature of the King's disease

their gruelling domestic chores. Often, this aid comes from a dead parent (typically a mother). In a Russian version entitled *Vasilisa the Fair*, for instance, the heroine is helped by a little doll, given to her by (and symbolically representing) her deceased mother. In the Grimms' *Aschenputtel,* small birds from a tree planted on her mother's grave come to the heroine's aid, while in modern versions a fairy godmother watches over Cinderella. Helen similarly receives magical help from beyond the grave: before his death, her father secretly entrusted her with his "receipts" (medical recipes) of "rare and proved effects"; "notes whose faculties inclusive were/ More than they were in note" (remedies of greater powers than were recognised) (1.3.206-26). When asked by the Countess if she thinks her father's remedy will work, Helen confidently replies, "There's something in't/ *More* than my father's skill" (228-9).[54]

Shakespeare's certainly plays up the idea of there being something "more" to Helen's healing powers. When the King asks her how long the cure will take to work, Helen utters what sounds like a magical spell:

> The great'st grace lending grace,
> Ere twice the horses of the sun shall bring
> Their fiery coacher his diurnal ring,
> Ere twice in murk and occidental damp
> Moist Hesperus hath quenched his sleepy lamp...
> What is infirm from your sound parts shall fly,
> Health shall live free, and sickness freely die.   (2.1.159-166)

Her words seem to have a spell-like effect on the King, whose initial scepticism at Helen's abilities melts into rapt wonder: "Methinks in thee some blessed spirit doth speak/ His powerful sound within an organ weak" (174-5). Helen is so confident of her powers that she places her life on the line should her remedy fail: "Not helping, death's my fee" (2.1.188). This is consistent with innumerable fairy tales, where the punishment for failing a challenge is almost always death [motif Q411].

Helen succeeds where numerous learned professions failed, making the impossible possible and healing the King. The miraculous nature of her cure is repeatedly emphasised: "'tis the rarest argument of wonder that hath shot out in our latter times" (2.3.6-7), Paroles exclaims; "A showing of heavenly effect in an earthly actor", agrees Lafeu (21). The element of wonder that characterises Helen's curing of the King would suggest that Shakespeare was drawing more on the oral folktales here than on his literary source. In tales of type 300, as in *Cinderella* stories, the heroes are only successful in their efforts because they have magical help – enchanted swords,

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[54] My italics. The idea of Helen's cure being a test of her ability to follow a magical recipe and cook up a healing potion adds weight to the suggestion that this is a test of her domestic skill.

supernatural wisdom, fairy godmothers, and so on. Boccaccio removes this fantastic element from his tale, favouring realism instead. Giletta's success is due solely to her intelligence and perseverance. There is nothing vague about her methods, and the whole process encourages no deeper probing: she administers "a pounder of certaine herbes, which she thought meete for that disease" (p.390), and the King recovers in a plausible eight days. Shakespeare, however, has characters like Lafeu and Paroles reflect on "things supernatural and causeless" (2.3.3) and highlight the marvel of the King's improved health: "I may truly say it is a novelty to the world" (2.3.19). The dramatist also reduces the King's recovery time from eight days to an astonishing two – a change consistent with fairy tales, where the laws of time do not apply. By re-introducing a mysterious, fantastic element to his story, Shakespeare seems to be pushing the audience into adopting a fairy-tale perspective on the action.

Cinderella's Ball

With her perilous task completed, Helen makes a glorious entrance before the court with the transformed King by her side. The pair dances for the King's stunned subjects in a display of Helen's triumph and his renewed vigour. The whole scene is reminiscent of Cinderella's ball, where the poor heroine enters the prince's hall bedecked in a beautiful gown and entrances all those around her with her beauty.[55] Certainly, Paroles and Lafeu seem unable to reconcile this miracle-worker with the poor physician's daughter: "*Mort du vinaigre,* is not this Helen?", "For God, I think so" (2.3.41-2). Helen's transformation from rags to riches, ugly duckling to swan, seems almost complete.

All that is lacking from this fairy-tale outcome is the reward for Helen's success. In Boccaccio's story, Giletta does not name a specific reward for curing the king. It is the king who suggests a husband, one of his choice, as repayment should she succeed. Only later does she ask if she may choose a husband for herself, and when it turns out that she desires Beltramo, "the king was very loth to graunt him unto her" (p.391). He does eventually accede to the match, but grudgingly. Helen, on the other hand, makes clear from the outset that her reward will be a husband of her own choosing, and ensures that that the King will follow through on her desire: "will you make it even?"

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[55] I am not the only one who finds this evocative of Cinderella's ball. The British National Theatre's recent production of *All's Well* deliberately echoed this popular tale, adorning Helen in a beautiful, princess-like wedding gown, complete with slippers, which she parades before the members of court. David McCandless also likens Helen's tale to that of *Cinderella,* pointing out that two other modern productions, directed by Tyrone Guthrie and Trevor Nunn, also transformed this scene into a fairy-tale ball, playing on the rags-to-riches motif (p.460).

(2.1.190). This was, as Asp points out, quite a "radical demand";[56] and yet, Shakespeare's King readily agrees to Helen's terms: "the premises observed,/ Thy will by my performance shall be served" (2.1.200-201). Only in fairy tales would such a socially- and sexually-transgressive desire be granted: most such stories have no qualms about marrying off princess to farmers, shepherds, or tailors [motif L161].[57] By aligning his play more with the folk tradition, Shakespeare nudges us towards anticipating a fairy-tale outcome: that Bertram will readily be given over to Helen in marriage, and the pair will live happily ever after.

The scene in which Helen selects her husband is entirely Shakespeare's creation.[58] In an elegantly ceremonial fashion, she moves from one lord to the next, rejecting each in turn, before finally stopping in front of Bertram. The whole scene is overtly theatrical: her waltz-like movements together with her lyrical rhyming couplets create a dream-like tableau. Rather than distancing us from the action, this theatricality serves to draw our attention to the importance of the moment. This is the crux of Helen's story of wish-fulfilment; all her dreams hang in the balance. When she stops before Bertram and professes "this is the man" (2.3.100), time seems to stop. With bated breath, we wait for Bertram to say yes; we *expect* him to say yes. "[T]ake her", the King prompts him, "she's thy wife" (101). Bertram, however, rejects Helen and her fairy tale in harsh blank verse: "A poor physician's daughter my wife! Disdain/ Rather corrupt me ever!" (111-112).[59]

It is a spectacular shock to the traditional pattern. In any fairy tale where the hero wins the hand of a princess as a reward for his efforts, the princess's feelings don't matter. She is more prize than person. Shakespeare, however, disrupts the usual model, and in so doing encourages us to consider the human significance behind the story. The child-like fairy-tale perspective we have been gently coerced into adopting is suddenly imbued with strong, adult emotions. Bertram doesn't want to marry Helen. He is angry at being so dismissively and high-handedly given away. This throws a shadow over the convention as a whole. Why should we expect fairy tale princesses to be pleased with being married off to unknown peasants? But why is Bertram, a man, allowed to voice

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[56] Asp continues: "a woman's right to love and marry according to her own desires could not be admitted without upsetting an established order which regarded women as inferior beings who needed to be governed by the sex for whose pleasure and convenience they had been created" (p.180).
[57] See, for instance, the tale of "Fearachur Leigh", cit. above, where the hero, a mere drover, is allowed to marry the king's own daughter as a reward for healing him.
[58] In Boccaccio's III.9, Beltramo is informed straight after the King is healed and in private that he will marry Giletta (see p.391)
[59] Alexander Legatt points out that Bertram's language "jars with the tone of the scene". Legatt, "*All's Well That Ends Well*: The Testing of Romance," *Modern Language Quarterly,* 32 (1971), p. 30

his feelings when women must remain silent when treated like chattel? Our desire for Helen's fairy tale to come true and Bertram to readily submit to the marriage conflicts with an uneasy feeling that the count's outrage may be justified.

Because Shakespeare has raised Helen so high, she has much farther to fall. Her fantasy comes crashing down before her eyes. The incredulous King reminds Bertram that Helen is no longer merely a physician's daughter, "If thou canst like this creature as a maid,/ I can create the rest"; but the young count still rejects her, "I cannot love her, nor will strive to do't" (2.3.138-141). It would be devastating to be told – in public – that the object of your affections does not reciprocate your feelings. Helen tries to back out, "That you are well restored, my lord, I'm glad,/ Let the rest go" (143-4), but the King is now offended by Bertram's disobedience and forces the matter: "obey our will...Or I will throw thee from my care forever" (154-58). So bullied, Bertram can do nothing but agree to the marriage, but it is clear he does not want Helen: "Take her by the hand/ And tell her she is thine", says the King; "I take her hand", is all Bertram can manage (169; 173)

The Loathly Lady

Bertram's reasons for rejecting and then deserting Helen are intriguing, and they reveal Shakespeare's familiarity with oral folktales of type 891. A clear pattern emerges in this narrative tradition. After the men have married the heroines, they quickly flee, leaving their new brides at home alone. Their explicit reasons for leaving range from war to hunting, but there are various clues which point to a subtler, more disturbing motivation behind their desertion. In *The Sultan's Camp Followers*, for example, the Sultan marries the clever saddlemaker's daughter by choice, but he will not consummate the union, instead fleeing to war. When he returns, he goes straight to his wife's chambers, but rather than finally bedding her, he quickly announces that he has to go to yet another war, promising that they will "be man and wife" on his return.[60] Similarly, in *The Clever Vizier's Daughter*, the prince eagerly marries the Vizier's daughter, who also wins him with her wits, but then refuses to live with her (read: sleep with her). Instead, he announces that he will be going hunting, where he remains for nine years.[61] The fact that the folktale husbands flee before consummating their marriages (and sometimes even insisting against it) hints at an underlying fear of female sexuality. This seems

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[60] Bushnaq, pp.339-343
[61] Reproduced in Lawrence, pp.429-430

especially true if we consider that the folktale men marry their wives willingly. They don't flee, in other words, out of hatred for their brides. Nor do they disdain their wives' low statuses: all the women are of lower birth than the men, and yet the men still happily marry them. The problem, then, seems to be what marriage entails: sex. It is telling that the men escape their wives' beds for activities like war or hunting. These typically male environments are far less threatening to their masculinity and control.

Boccaccio either doesn't see or chooses to overlook these sexual undercurrents. He ignores the hint that the folktale husbands' motivations for leaving their wives may have sexual roots, and instead bases Beltramo's rejection and desertion of Giletta on an *external* reason: her low status. The count is shocked when he learns Giletta is to be is wife: "Will you then (sir) give me a Phisition to wife?". He sees her as "not to be of a stocke convenable to his nobility", and so he leaves for Italy straight after the ceremony, where he is sure he will be received in a manner more befitting his noble status (pp.391-2).

Unlike Boccaccio, Shakespeare recognises the primitive subtext driving the folktale storylines, and he not only pushes it to the surface, but enhances and emphasises it too. When Bertram is informed he will be marrying Helen, his initial shocked response recalls Beltramo's: "A poor physician's daughter, my wife?" (2.3.111-12). However, the King quickly quashes this excuse, saying that he will build her status up (113-14). Bertram then reveals that he simply "cannot love" Helen "as a maid" (138-141). It is not her rank, in other words, that motivates Bertram's unwillingness to marry Helen, but some other, *internal* reason.[62] We get a hint as to what this may be after the wedding, which happens offstage. Bertram agrees to the ceremony on account of the King's bullying, but no amount of harassment could make him sleep with his new bride. He vehemently refuses to consummate the marriage: "Although before the solemn priest I have sworn, / I will not bed her"; and again, "I'll...never bed her" (2.3.253-4; 257). Indeed, on the very night "When [he] should take possession of the bride" (2.5.24), he decides to flee to Italy to join the army, and send Helen home to Roussillon, alone: "I'll send her straight away. Tomorrow/ I'll to the wars, she to her single sorrow" (276; 279-80). He will not so much as kiss his new wife (2.5.78-82).

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[62] This makes Helen's rejection much more heart-wrenching: Bertram rejects *her*, as a person, rather than her status. It is with small but significant changes like this that Shakespeare teases out the emotion behind the story.

Bertram, then, an "unbaked and doughy youth" (4.5.30), recoils from Helen because of deep-rooted sexual anxieties. This is further emphasised by Paroles, who articulates the count's dread: "He wears his honour in a box unseen," says Paroles ,

> That hugs his kicky-wicky here at home,
> Spending his manly marrow in her arms,
> Which should sustain the bound and high curvet
> Of Mars's fiery steed.   (2.3.263-9)

The count thus fears being sexually dominated by his wife and losing his (as yet untested) masculinity. Shakespeare further accentuates this fear by making Helen overtly sexual. After the marriage ceremony, for example, when Bertram is bidding Helen goodbye as he leaves for war, she implores him for a physical sign of his love before he departs: "Strangers and foes do sunder and not kiss" (2.5.81). But Bertram is repulsed: "I pray you, stay not, but in haste to horse" (82). It is no accident that he, like all the folktale husbands, flees to a very manly activity. War is much easier to navigate than the emotional and sexual intricacies of a relationship: "Wars no strife / To the dark house and detested wife" (2.3.275-6).

The theme of a young man's opposition to the pursuit of a sexually aware woman seems to have been a favourite of Shakespeare's. He first explores it in *Venus and Adonis*, which deals with a male's fear of a predatory female. Adonis is not interested in sexually voracious Venus, desiring only to go hunting. This is echoed in *I Henry IV,* written after that poem, in which the battle-hungry Hotspur frequently deserts his wife in favour of war, depriving her of her wifely rights: "For what offence have I this fortnight been/ A banished woman from my Harry's bed?' (2.4.31-33). Shakespeare picks up the theme once more in *All's Well,* where Bertram similarly fears his predatory wife, and plans to flee to the relative safety of war.

In part, then, *All's Well* is a story of sexual maturation. It traces Bertram's sexual development as he learns to deal with the opposite sex and his own sexual desires. This theme is very prominent in fairy tales as a genre, but, as Steven Swann Jones notes, "because fairy tales are popularly believed to be for very young children, and these children are thought to be sexually innocent, or at least naive, the idea that many of these tales focus on sexual maturation seems unlikely and troubling to some people".[63] But in one popular group of tales, the underlying sexual material is hard to ignore. Classed as "Beauty and the Beast" (ATU 425C), tales in this category follow a beautiful young woman who is forced to marry a hideous beast. At the end of the story, however,

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[63] Steven Swann Jones, *The Fairy Tale: The Magic Mirror of the Imagination* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p.22

typically after a kiss from the heroine, the beast magically transforms into a handsome prince. The groom appears repulsive and threating at first, then, because the young girl is scared of or struggling with his threatening sexuality. When she accepts and comes to terms with his sexuality, however, what was repulsive becomes beautiful, and he appears as a man once more. [64]

Numerous related tales similarly chart a young *man's* fear of the opposite sex. In these stories, the hero is coerced into marrying or kissing a "Loathly Lady" [motif D732, cf. ATU 402A*]. Sometimes she is a serpent, as in *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs,* but most commonly she is a hag, as Chaucer depicts in *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, which is probably the most famous handling of this popular motif.[65] In Chaucer's story, a knight in strife encounters a hideous hag who promises to help him if he in turn will grant her one request at a time of her choosing. When she later demands that he marry her, he is horrified and tries to renege on his word. He eventually relents, however, and when they are in bed together after the wedding, she miraculously metamorphoses into a beautiful woman, and the pair lives happily ever after.[66] As in "Beauty and the Beast" tales, then, the woman's physical loathliness is a symbol of her female sexuality, which the protagonist, in his immature state, finds repulsive and threatening. It is only when the hero kisses the Loathly Lady [motif D735] or goes to bed with her, in other words overcoming his sexual anxieties, that the spell of loathliness is lifted and her beauty revealed.[67]

To Bertram, Helen is a "Loathly Lady". Other characters can perceive her beauty, but young Bertram is still blinded by his sexual anxieties, and sees only a

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[64] Bettelheim, pp. 303-310. McCandless also found connections between *All's Well* and *Beauty and the Beast* stories (see pp.459-60). Unfortunately, he does not describe the relationship in any detail.

[65] "The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heughs", in Briggs, *Dictionary,* part A, vol I., pp.371-2; Geoffrey Chaucer, "The Wife of Bath's Tale", in *The Canterbury Tales*, trans. David Wright (Oxford: Oxford University Press, UK, 1986), pp.171-81

[66] Shakespeare would have been familiar with *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, but he may also have come across the Loathly Lady motif in other forms, as it was popular in various other stories, ballads, and of course the oral tradition. In an excellent essay, Russell A. Peck looks at John Gower's *Tale of Florent*, which set the narrative precedent for succeeding English Loathly Lady stories, like Chaucer's *The Wife of Bath's Tale*, and the balladic sections of the Arthurian romance *The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnelle*. He argues that Gower's tale was created by drawing on the folktale tradition: "Loathly Lady stories are as ancient as men and women. Every culture has them; every culture needs them... Stories of women falling into ugliness because of an enchantment that can only be broken by a kiss are the stock and trade of folktales, whether oral or written" (pp. 101; 102). Peck, "Folklore and Powerful Women in Gowers 'Tale of Florent'", in Elizabeth Passmore and Susan Carter, *The English "Loathly Lady" Tales: boundaries, traditions, motifs* (Michigan: Medieval Institute Publications, 2007), pp.100-145

[67] The Loathly Lady motif as symbolising male insecurity and fear of the sexuality of women is intricately tied to questions of power and gender. It is possible to see the woman's transformation from ugly hag to beautiful woman, for example, as being due to the knight's yielding personal or political (perhaps in addition to sexual) control to her, i.e. by giving the woman sovereignty. These issues are adeptly explored in the recent book edited by Passmore and Carter, cit. above

woman whose sexual awareness makes her appear intimidating and undesirable. In order to allay Bertram's sexual fears, and remove the enchantment of loathliness, Helen needs to get him into bed, or at least kiss him. But Bertram rejects her initial request for a kiss, and then flees to Italy before she gets another chance. Helen is going to have to employ more devious means if she hopes to get intimate with the young count.

So, Cinderella's domestic prowess was only successful in part: Helen has won the title of wife, but not the husband himself. Bertram remains blind to Helen's appeal. To him, she is not the beautiful princess the King, Lafeu, and Paroles see, but the dirty little peasant covered in cinders, the ugly duckling. She must therefore face another test. Given the sexual nature of Bertram's rejection, Helen's next hope of winning her husband is to prove that she is not a Loathly Lady, but a desirable Beauty. Her dream thus shifts from marrying Bertram to arousing his desire.

Quest Two: The Search for the Lost Husband

When Bertram departs for Italy, he sends Helen back to Roussillon alone, having "wedded her, not bedded her" (3.2.20-1). Hard upon this slight, he sends her a scathing letter, informing her that he will only accept her as wife if she can meet the following conditions:

> When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never
> shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that
> I am father to, then call me husband.   (3.2.55-58)

Helen is devastated: "Madam," she cries to the Countess, "my lord is gone, for ever gone" (44). Filled with hopelessness, she dwells on his spiteful words for the rest of the scene, oblivious to the Countess or the conversation being carried on around her. "This is a dreadful sentence" (59), she sobs, "'Tis bitter" (73); "'Til I have no wife I have nothing in France'./ Nothing in France until he has no wife..." (99-123). The Countess is similarly overwhelmed: "He was my son,/ But I do wash his name out of my blood,/ And thou art all my child" (64-66). Shakespeare noticeably heightens the suffering of his heroine: in Boccaccio's version, Giletta's sentence is not nearly so harshly delivered. When Giletta returns to Rossiglione, she busies herself managing Bertram's affairs: "through the Countes abscence all things were spoiled and out of order, [so] shee like a sage Ladye, with great diligence and care, disposed his thinges in order againe" (p.392). Unfortunately, her efforts do not draw Beltramo back home, so she sends him word that she will leave the country if he desires. It is in response to this that

Beltramo "chorlishly" replies: "Let her do what she liste. For I do purpose to dwell with her, when she shall have this ring...upon her finger, and a sonne in her armes begotten by mee" (p.392). Beltramo's letter seems to be no more than his bad-tempered response to Giletta's badgering. In contrast, Bertram sends Helen the letter of his own volition, as soon as Helen is home, and he deliberately seeks to make his contempt for her felt.

Not only has Bertram abandoned Helen, but he's put exceedingly difficult, if not impossible, conditions on their marriage, which will test both her devotion and merit. She is not the first heroine to suffer so at the hands of her beloved. Her story here echoes a well-worn narrative tradition in which romantic heroines are forced to endure numerous torments metered out by their husbands before they are accepted as wives. The renowned adventures of Griselda, for instance, follow a young, lower-class woman whose condescending husband desires to test her patience and obedience by taking her children away from her and pretending to marry another woman [motifs H461, H387]. She proves herself by tolerating his abuse without complaint, so in the end her children are returned to her and the pair is reconciled (ATU 887). Charles Perrault wrote a narrative based on this oral tradition in 1691, entitled *Patient Griselda*; and Briggs records another variant entitled *The Nut Brown Maid*.[68] Tales of this type were very popular in and around Shakespeare's period. Boccaccio recounted a version as early as the fourteenth century in Day X, Story 10 of his *Decameron*.[69] It resurfaces in Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale,* and was a favourite theme in Renaissance ballads and chapbooks: the ballad of *Child Waters,* for example, relates the story of a pregnant woman who is forced to follow her intended's horse on foot until he finally concedes her commitment.[70] There were also two Elizabethan plays on the subject, which Shakespeare may have known about. John Phillip's play *The Commodye of pacient and meeke Grissell* dates from around 1565, while another dramatic version, *The pleasant comodie of patient Grisill,* written by Thomas Dekker, was printed in 1603, though probably performed earlier.[71] Evidently the story was in the public sphere.

Typically, in Griselda stories, as well as in those of type 891, the wife's feelings about being cast aside or forced into trying conditions are not articulated. She simply endures. The difference in *All's Well* is that Helen is allowed to express her anguish. By

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[68] Charles Perrault, *The Complete Fairy Tales of Charles Perrault* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 1993), pp.96-107; Briggs, *Dictionary,* pt A, v.2, pp.450-1

[69] See *The Decameron of Boccaccio,* trans. J. M. Riggs (London: Bullen, 1903), vol. 2, pp. 387-400

[70] Chaucer, "The Clerk's Tale", pp.210-244; Child, "Child Waters", vol. 2, pp. 83-100.

[71] John Phillip, *The Play of Patient Grissell,* ed. Ronald Brunlees McKerrow (Printed for the Malone Society by C. Whittingham & co., 1909), facsimile of the original text; Thomas Dekker, *The pleasant comodie of patient Grisill As it hath beene sundrie times lately plaid by the right honorable the Earle of Nottingham (Lord high Admirall) his seruants* (London: imprinted for Henry Rocket, 1603)

having Helen openly convey her dismay, which is then reiterated by the Countess, Shakespeare humanises the situation, transforming the impossible tasks, which are essentially a plot device in the source stories, into a cause for heartfelt emotion. In so doing, Shakespeare points back to the source tales themselves, highlighting the dubiousness of a narrative tradition which encourages women to tolerate stoically the abuse of their cold-hearted husbands.

The Departing Husband Assigns his Wife Tasks

The tasks or conditions Bertram sets for Helen are themselves significant. Not only do they add weight to the idea that his anxieties over marriage have sexual roots, they expose the dramatist's awareness of the folktale tradition. Both tasks have noticeable sexual undertones. As in all stories of type 891, the primary task that Bertram imposes on his wife is that she must bear him a child whose real father he is, though he will not sleep with her [motif H1187]. This suggests that he (perhaps subconsciously) desires an heir, but fears the process of creating one. In other words, he challenges Helen to produce him a child without his having to bed her. The second impossible task involves obtaining a ring in Bertram's possession that he will never give up. The sexual connotations of this task are revealed with reference to the oral tradition. As Carol Neely has observed, all the objects that the clever folk heroines are forced to acquire from (or make for) their husbands are symbols of male and female sexuality.[72] The women steal daggers, swords, and stallions, which have recognisable phallic undertones; or they build wells and pilfer rings, which are common emblems of female sexuality. The implication is that while the husbands remain in control of these objects, they also remain in control sexually: they hold the power.

Shakespeare may have borrowed the two tasks from Boccaccio, but their symbolic significance appears to be inspired by the oral tradition. There is no hint in tale III.9 of any sexual motivations behind Beltramo's flight or the tasks he sets his wife. He refuses to live and sleep with Giletta because he sees her as being far beneath him socially, and hopes that not consummating the marriage will render it unofficial (p.392). The tasks he sets her are no more than tests of her ingenuity. He doesn't believe a gentlewoman like her would have the wits to outsmart a nobleman like himself. When she succeeds, he perceives "her constant minde and good witte" (p.396) and deems her worthy of him. The story thrives on action, not emotion.

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[72] C. T. Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), p.78

Perhaps Bertram similarly hopes that refusing to consummate his marriage or cohabit with Helen would invalidate their marriage, but Elizabethan marriage law would disagree. As B. J. and M. Sokol have shown, "some critics suppose that the non-consummation of their marriage could have supplied *prima facie* grounds to dissolve it, but this is not true...Helena and Bertram are indissolubly married by the 'contract' named in the play [2.3.174], which is sealed by public handfasting [2.3.172], and solemnised in an off-stage church 'ceremony' [2.3.174-8]."[73] The more likely explanation, then, is that Bertram, like his folktale counterparts, refuses to sleep with his wife because he fears the act itself. Accordingly, the tasks he sets her, as in the folktales, are tests of Helen's ability to assuage these sexual anxieties. If she can change from intimidating Loathly Lady to alluring Beauty, then she may call him husband.

Of course, Bertram doesn't believe Helen will attempt let alone succeed in the tasks. David McCandless notes that while "the tasks themselves present a fairy-tale challenge – do these things and 'then call me husband' – [Bertram's] decoding of them preclude a fairy-tale solution: 'but in such a 'then' I write a 'never' (3.2.55-8)'".[74] Although one fairy-tale framework may have been invalidated, however, another has been invoked. According to Maria Tatar, whenever a prohibition is issued in a fairy tale, the next scene will show its violation.[75] "[D]o not run off the path," insists Little Red Ridinghood's mother, which the girl promptly does.[76] Bluebeard warns his wife she may go into each and every room in the house, "But I absolutely forbid you to enter that little room".[77] As soon as he leaves, she opens the forbidden door. Similarly, by saying that Helen can never bear him a son nor ever get his ring, Bertram effectively ensures that both these things will come to pass. In fairy tales, "if we reflect on the ways in which an interdiction...comes perilously close to a tantalising proposal, then it quickly becomes clear just why the paired functions interdiction/violation and command/fulfilment are interchangeable."[78]

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[73] B. J. and Mary Sokol, *Shakespeare, Law, and Marriage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p.146
[74] McCandless, p.459
[75] Tatar, *Annotated Tales*, n. 12, p.191
[76] "Little Red-Cap", in Grimm, pp.114
[77] "Bluebeard", in Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.150
[78] Maria Tatar, *The Hard Facts of the Grimms' Fairy Tales* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1987), p.166

After reading Bertram's harsh conditions, Helen decides to leave Roussillon once more. While there is no textual or verbal hint that she intends (like Giletta) "to finde meanes to attaine the two things, that thereby she might recover her husbande" (p.392), the fairy-tale framework suggests that this is precisely what will happen. True to form, her next scene shows her in Italy, where Bertram is currently located.

When Helen leaves Roussillon, she effectively embarks on a quest to find her missing husband, harking back to another popular fireside tradition, "The Search for the Lost Husband" (ATU 425). This type refers to an unwieldy cycle of related folktales, which tend to be an amalgamation of two main types: "The Monster (Animal) as Bridegroom" (ATU 425A), sometimes referred to as "Cupid and Psyche" thanks to Apuleius' famous version of that story; and "Beauty and The Beast" (ATU 425C). Tales in this composite category centre on the marriage of a young woman to a beast or monster (hedgehog, frog, dwarf, bear, etc.). Sometimes, as in *Beauty and the Beast*, she disenchants her animal bridegroom with a kiss. In other stories, like *Cupid and Psyche*, the heroine has to undertake a quest for her animal bridegroom, who vanishes, and complete a series of tasks before the pair can live happily ever after. The Norwegian tale *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon,* which has elements of both 425A and 425C, is a good example of the type as a whole:

> A young girl is forced by her father to marry a big white bear against her will. At night, the bear changes into a man when he slips into bed. One night, acting on her mother's bad advice, the girl lights a candle to see what her husband looks like. She discovers he is very handsome, and has to give him a kiss straight away. As she does so, she drops tallow on him, which wakes him up and prompts him to flee to a castle that lies east of the sun and west of the moon, where he will have to wed a long-nosed woman. The heroine goes on a quest to find her missing husband, encountering three kind women along the way who give her magical aid. Eventually she finds the prince's castle, and manages to bribe the prince's false, long-nosed bride into letting her have access to his bedchamber. She finally reveals herself to him as his true bride, and the pair lives happily ever after.[79]

The resemblances between this type of story and *All's Well* are quite striking. We have already noted that Bertram's story brings to mind *Beauty and the Beast,* recounted in the beginning of the story above, in that he is forced by the King (a father substitute) to marry someone he perceives as loathly. But the "Cupid and Psyche" subtype may also be present. Like the heroine of *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon,*

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[79] My summary, "East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon", in Tatar, *Annotated Tales*, pp.186-200

Helen has to undertake a quest to find her vanished husband [motif H1385.4]; she is helped on her adventure by a group of kind women [H1233]; and she barters her way into her husband's bed [D2006.1.4]. The most interesting parallel is that the Norwegian heroine also seems to push her husband away by being too sexually forward. She desires her husband so much that she cannot restrain herself from kissing him, resulting in his running away. That her behaviour is unseemly is pointed up by stories like *Sleeping Beauty* (ATU 400), where the same scene occurs but with a reversal of gender. A young prince comes across a beautiful sleeping woman and cannot resist kissing her. When she awakens, however, she doesn't flee but rather returns his love. The divergence in conventional expectations for men and women is writ large. The prince's forwardness is permissible; the Norwegian heroine's is not is not. The similarities to Helen's tale seem inescapable.

Shakespeare and his audience would undoubtedly have been familiar with some version of the story *Cupid and Psyche*, as it was a firm favourite of the time. It is included in Apuleius' infinitely popular *The Golden Ass,* written as long ago as the second century AD*,* of which Shakespeare was almost certainly aware.[80] Indeed, so well-known was Apuleius' version that when Robert Burton lists "merry tales" as a winter pastime in the early seventeenth-century, he uses that precise story by way of example.[81] Other versions besides Apuleius' were also in circulation, though: Briggs has collected an oral English analogue in her *Dictionary of British Folktales,* entitled *The Black Bull of Norroway,* which can also be found in Andrew Lang's *Blue Fairy Book*; and Lang records another obviously related variant, *The Brown Bear of Norway (England)*, in his *Lilac Fairy Book.*[82]

Animal Bridegrooms

There is a further connection between *All's Well* and animal bridegroom stories. Just as Bertram sees Helen as a Loathly Lady, so he himself could be perceived as a beast. In the obvious sense, his poor treatment of Helen makes him seem a cruel monster; but his behaviour also likens him to an animal on a more subtle level. According to psychoanalysts like Freud, the human psyche consists of three levels: the id, the ego,

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[80] See Stuart Gillespie, *Shakespeare's Books: A Dictionary of Shakespeare's Sources* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2001), pp.21-23, for an analysis of Shakespeare's links with Apuleius' *The Golden Ass.*
[81] Burton, p.79.
[82] Cf. Type 425A in Ashliman, *Guide,* pp.87-88.

and the superego. To be normal, social, and responsible adults, we need all three aspects of our psyche to be integrated. The id comprises our basic, instinctual drives; the ego is responsible for dealing with reality; and the superego plays the moralising role, discerning between right and wrong. The id is driven by the 'pleasure principle', which seeks instant gratification of all desires, wants, and needs, and avoids pain or unpleasure.[83] Young children are solely id-dominated, thinking only about themselves and meeting their needs. As they mature, they learn that reality will sometimes conflict with what they want, and eventually they are able to discern the ethical and moral constraints which govern human behaviour. Without the ego and superego, we would become, in effect, like animals, driven solely by our primitive instincts.

In fairy tales, the id is quite naturally represented as an animal, symbolising our animal natures.[84] In *Beauty and the Beast,* the Beast is such because he is an incarnation of his bestial desires – lust. Similarly, Little Red Ridinghood is seduced into bed by a wolf, who then devours her. In *Little Brother and Little Sister* (ATU 450), the relationship is made even clearer. Two children are driven from home to wander alone in the forest. They both start out in human form, but before long the brother changes into a deer. The metamorphosis comes about from his inability to control his instinctual drives, in this case, his thirst. By giving into his primitive urgings and drinking from an enchanted pond, he becomes primitive himself. The sister, by contrast, can restrain herself – she is aware of the dangers of giving into immediate satisfaction, and so remains a human.[85]

Like the brother, Bertram is an id-dominated character who is driven by his basic needs. He inhabits only the present tense, acting selfishly, rashly, and without regard to future consequences. He wants to fight in a war, so he abandons his wife and disobeys his king. In Italy, he single-mindedly pursues another woman in the hope of satiating his "sick desires" (4.2.36). Bertram represents that animalistic side to our natures that seeks only pleasure and immediate satisfaction. He lacks the insight (provided by the ego and superego) that comes with maturity. Indeed, his youth is stressed repeatedly throughout the play. When he leaves home, he is referred to as "an unseasoned courtier" (1.1.64) by his mother, who also calls him a "rash and unbridled boy" (3.2.27). He is elsewhere labelled a "rude [boy]" (3.2.81), a "proud scornful boy"

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[83] Dino Felluga, "Modules on Freud: On the Unconscious," *Introductory Guide to Critical Theory* (January 2011). http://www.purdue.edu/guidetotheory/psychoanalysis/freud2.html (accessed 09/02/2012); and Bettelheim, p.33.
[84] Bettelheim, p.76
[85] See Bettelheim, pp.78-83

(2.3.147), a "lascivious boy" (4.3.208), and an "unbaked and doughy youth" (4.5.3). As a result, he is unable to perceive Helen's innate worth, and is blind to what it is to be a real man. "Thy father's moral parts/ Mayest thou inherit too!" (1.2.21-2), the King bids Bertram, revealing that the boy has not yet done so. Similarly, Bertram is unable to see through Paroles, the ultimate id-character who lacks substance of any sort, even though everyone else can perceive his pretences. His friendship with this lying braggart speaks volumes about his character.[86] "I would gladly have him see his own company anatomized", Bertram's friend the Lord Dumaine comments, "that he might take a measure of his own judgements, wherein so curiously he had set this counterfeit [Paroles]" (4.3.31-4)

Seeing Bertram as an id-dominated character may help to explain our fascination with him. He is disliked by most, and yet (if centuries of criticism are anything to go by) we can't stop analysing him. Perhaps, subconsciously, Bertram's behaviour inspires a level of jealousy – there is something appealing about being totally selfish. After all, as Bruno Bettelheim says: "If there were not something in us that likes the big bad wolf, he would have no power over us. Therefore, it is important to understand his nature, but even more important to understand what makes him attractive to us."[87]

In his own way, then, Bertram is a beast. As an "unbridled boy" (3.2.27), he needs to be tamed into his proper position (as count, husband, and man).[88] Helen, of course, has already come to terms with Bertram's beastliness: she sees him as a desirable, almost god-like figure, whom she desperately wants to kiss. It is only through her love, persistence, and commitment that Bertram has any hope of lifting the enchantment of beastliness, and revealing the man hidden beneath.

The Magical Helpers

With Helen's arrival in Italy, the second half of the play begins. Importantly, neither France, where the first half of the play is set, nor Italy is very realistically portrayed, leaving both in a world of imagination. The France scenes are cold, dominated by men,

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[86] Paroles is entirely Shakespeare's creation. The playwright seems to add this character to draw attention to the poorer qualities of Bertram's nature as mirrored and exaggerated in Paroles.

[87] Bettelheim, p.172

[88] This brings to mind Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* (which is widely accepted to have oral roots; see ATU 901, as well as 900 and 903A) except with the genders reversed. Karl Elze has interpreted the relationship between Helen and Bertram in this light: "Bertram, to a certain extent, is the reverse of Petruchio; just as the latter wins and tames Katherine against her will, so he is won against his; he is a wild colt caught and tamed by Helen." Elze, "All's Well That Ends Well", in *Essays on Shakespeare*, trans. L. Dora Schmitz (London: Macmillan & Co., 1874), p.133

and of a vague period where a fairy tale might be set, a land a long way away. There is an air of staleness, personified by the controlling older generation who preside over the action. The Italy scenes, by contrast, are warm, feminine, and youthful. The atmosphere is almost festive when compared to the bleakness of the King's court. The play includes broad sweeps of action between the two locations, with little concern for realism. This unclassical freedom of time and space could be perceived as one of the play's flaws, but perhaps, instead, it places the story in the realm of fairy stories, where such laws do not apply.

In Italy, Helen quickly manages to find lodging with a group of kind-hearted women, who happen to know of Bertram. Such fortuitous meetings are common in fairy tales, where the protagonists are often forced to depend on friendly helpers who enter the story when all seems lost [H1233]. Cinderella is aided by little birds or a fairy godmother; benevolent dwarves save Snow White from perishing; and the heroine of *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon* receives supernatural assistance from three sympathetic old women. Helen's magical helpers come in the form of a poor maid, Diana, and her widowed mother. As Helen's support group, these women are instrumental in helping her win back her husband.

As Helen talks to the Widow, Bertram and his troops coincidentally march past in their army finery. Helen soon learns that her husband has been tirelessly wooing Diana, and Shakespeare makes certain to draw our attention to how she might be feeling: "Alas, poor lady./ 'Tis hard bondage to become the wife of a detesting lord", notes Diana, as yet ignorant of Helen 's true identity; "I warr'nt, good creature, wheresoe'er she is/ Her heart weighs sadly," agrees the Widow (3.5.60-4). This is certainly the lowest point in Helen's fortunes. But, characteristically, help is at hand: the Widow gives Helen the key to solving her problems. Commenting on Bertram's desire for Diana, the Widow notes that the Florentine maid "might do [Bertram's wife]/ A shrewd turn if she pleased" (63-4). It is intriguing that the old Widow inspires the idea of the bedtrick; in Boccaccio, Giletta conceives of it entirely on her own (p.393). Perhaps Shakespeare was subtly hinting at the source of the idea: old wives' tales.

Helen swiftly conceives of a plan of attack. She reveals her identity to the women, and outlines her proposal, which relies entirely on the willing aid of Diana and her mother's assent. If Diana will agree to perform a "shrewd turn" on Bertram, then Helen will pay her dowry, offering a princely sum as a reward:

> Take this purse of gold,
> And let me buy your friendly help thus far,

        Which I will over-pay and pay again
        When I have found it.   3.7.14-17.

In turn, all Diana needs to do is pretend to give in to Bertram's courtship and agree to sleep with him, demanding his ring as a sign of good faith, which "his important blood" (importunate passion) "will naught deny" (3.7.21). Then, at the appointed meeting place, Helen will sneak in "to fill the time", while Diana is "most chastely absent" (33-4).

      In typical fairy tales, the support of the friendly helpers would be freely given, but Helen goes a step further and buys their allegiance. This doesn't reflect particularly well on her character – it has the effect of Cinderella buying off the fairy godmother. But there are some stories in which the heroine has to resort to bribery. In *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon,* the only way the heroine can gain access to her husband's bedchamber is by bribing the rival for her husband's attention (using objects given to her by the kind old women):

> the girl sat down under the castle window, and began to play with the golden apple. The first person she saw was the long-nosed princess who was to have the prince. "What do you want for your golden apple, girl?" said the long-nosed one, as she opened the window. "It's not for sale, for gold or money," said the girl. "If it's not for sale for gold or money, what is it that you will sell it for? You can name your own price," said the princess. "Well, you can have it if I can spend the night in the room where the prince sleeps," said the girl... Yes, that could be arranged.[89]

In most such stories, however, the bribery does not reflect poorly on the heroine, who is the 'true bride', but rather points up the immorality of the rival 'false' or 'substituted bride' [motif K1911], who is more interested in money or trinkets than the prince's wellbeing.[90] The wickedness of the substituted bride is pointed up by her ugliness – in *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon*, she has a nose three yards long – whereas the true bride is always described as being beautiful. There is no doubt in these stories that the true bride is justified in using whatever means possible to rescue her husband from the corrupt false bride.

      Shakespeare perhaps invokes this tradition with Helen's bribing Diana, the substituted bride, but he complicates the picture by muddying the distinction between

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[89] Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.197. Cf. Motif D2006.1.4, forgotten fiancée buys place in husband's bed and reawakens his memory.

[90] The 'false bride' is often a treacherous servant, who seeks to take the wife's place (in the marriage/bed) without the knowledge of the husband. Sometimes she can be the heroine's stepsister, who is helped in the deception by her stepmother. For examples of these types of tales see "The Black and the White Bride" (ATU 403) and "Little Brother, Little Sister" (ATU 450). This motif is discussed in more detail below.

the two brides, and casting a shadow over the true bride's moral status. Diana is not an ugly villain; on the contrary, she is beautiful and kind and Bertram desires her much more than he does his real wife. Helen's choosing to bribe Diana thus reveals more about her character than it does Diana's: rather than underlining the maid's dubious morality, it calls attention to Helen's. Who is the true bride and who is the false? The dramatist allows for no easy distinctions. Whether Helen has the right to use such unsavoury means to 'rescue' her husband from Diana is left wonderfully equivocal.

The Substituted Bride

The bedtrick is now set up. Diana's role in this "shrewd turn" is integral to its success. In the source folktales of type 891, the woman whom the husband courts and sleeps with while away is actually the wife herself in disguise [motif K1814]. Boccaccio diverges from this tradition and makes the Florentine mistress a distinct person, rather than Giletta in disguise. Perhaps this change was motivated by the desire for a more realistic story, or possibly Boccaccio was inspired by a closely related group of folktales, ATU 1379, in which the wife is always distinct from the mistress, who tends to be a maid serving in the husband's house, as in Poggio's story above. Despite Boccaccio's separating Giletta from the Florentine mistress, he fails to develop the latter's character. She is simply a device. We know nothing of her except that she is "a gentlewoman, very poore and of small substance", who is nevertheless "of right and honest life and good report" (p.393). Boccaccio does not even give her a name.

Like Boccaccio, Shakespeare makes the 'other' woman distinct from Helen, but he diverges from his literary source by building the character up considerably. His inspiration seems to have come from the oral stories at the heart of Boccaccio's narrative. With Diana, as we shall see, Shakespeare reveals his familiarity with the oral tradition, and his ability to see beneath the surface of the narrative and dramatise the hidden meaning contained therein.

In folktales of both type 891 and 1379, the husbands' intended mistresses are all of one sort: they are maids, slaves, servants, or virgins. They are, in other words, vulnerable, powerless, and submissive.[91] Significantly, the wives are shown to be the opposite. Each tale makes a point of noting the wife's cleverness [motif J1111]. Often, it is this cleverness that wins them the men in the first place, as in both *The Sultan's*

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[91] In the Indian tale *The Clever Wife* mentioned earlier, for example, the wife disguises herself as a cowherd's daughter in order to sleep with her husband.

Camp Followers and *The Clever Vizier's-Daughter*, where the heroine's skill at posing riddles attracts her husband.[92] The wives' cleverness seems to imply a certain level of assertiveness or competence. Indeed, it would appear that this same quality, which may have initially seemed attractive, is part of what scares the men off without consummating the marriage. A resourceful woman, whose wits are often more than a match for her husband, is also an intimidating woman. Any sexual anxieties the men may have had would have been exacerbated by the idea of submitting to a sharp-witted, capable woman.

Considering this, it is not surprising that when the folktale husbands do decide to sleep with a woman, she is meek and unintimidating. The wives, then, by disguising themselves as slaves or serving girls, are not merely hiding their features, but their personalities too. They transform themselves into what their husbands need in order to relieve their sexual anxieties: unthreatening and exploitable objects.

Boccaccio ignores these sexual undercurrents. Beltramo rejects and deserts Giletta solely on the basis of her low rank. Ironically, the woman Beltramo falls for in Italy is of even lower status than Giletta. While this accords with the folktale tradition, it seems inconsistent with Beltramo's earlier sentiment. This reveals that Boccaccio was less concerned with the psychological motivations behind the characters' actions than with the actions themselves. It doesn't particularly matter whom Beltramo chooses to sleep with, as long as it is not Giletta. Accordingly, the Florentine mistress remains a device. Shakespeare, on the other hand, recognises the primitive subtext driving the folktale storyline, and brings these sexual tensions to the surface, articulating them through the character of Diana.

Diana is a paragon of symbolic interpretation. She embodies precisely that which the folktale husbands desire, but which is only *implied* in the oral stories. She is beautiful, chaste, modest, honest – and powerless. As both a poor maid and the daughter of a widow, she is extremely vulnerable, especially in the patriarchal and hierarchical society of the day. Perhaps more important than all these aspects, however, is the fact that she chastely rebuffs Bertram's advances: "she is armed for him and keeps her guard / In honestest defence." (3.5.70-71). "I spoke with her", Bertram eagerly confides to a friend, "And found her wondrous cold" (3.6.103-4). The combination of Diana's blushing hesitancy and her vulnerability awakens and inflames Bertram's lust. "Stand

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[92] Sometimes the wives are simply stated as being clever, as in *The Clever Wife*. Often, though, they actively display their cleverness, as in *The Clever Vizier's-Daughter*, in which the heroine is very good at answering and posing riddles.

no more off", he begs her, "But give yourself unto my sick desires/ Who then recovers" (4.2.35-8).

Helen, by contrast, extinguishes Bertram's desire; she is Diana's foil. Although she begins the play as a self-effacing physician's daughter, pining over an idealised love for Bertram, by the time she is married to the young count she has wealth, power, and the King's backing (2.3.139-40). She has proven herself exceedingly resourceful (2.3.22-3), as well as determined and assertive (1.1.199-200), and has made her desire for Bertram plain (2.5.81). Where Diana plays 'hard to get', Helen unashamedly throws herself at Bertram. She not only mirrors the clever wives of the folktales, she exceeds them.

It is no wonder, then, that Bertram should fall for a poor Florentine maid. Unlike Helen, Diana presents no threat to Bertram's masculinity or his control. On the contrary, her vulnerability and sexual naivety are clear from the outset: "Beware/ of [men], Diana; their promises, enticements, oaths, tokens, and/ all their engines of lust, are not the things they go under" (3.5.16-18). As Bertram sees it, Diana can be manipulated, used, and then discarded, with no thought for the consequences. She is precisely what Bertram needs in order to overcome his sexual qualms. Through the character of Diana, Shakespeare reveals what Bertram both fears and desires and makes clear through contrast what Helen lacks.

A number of critics have postulated that Bertram's anxieties over marriage with Helen have sexual origins.[93] Stanley Wells notes that Bertram's "resistance to the advances of a woman who is more sexually aware than himself hints at psychological reasons which may lie beyond his conscious understanding".[94] I suggest that these "psychological reasons" Shakespeare found in the oral folktales, where the husbands' inner sexual anxieties are subtly implied. The dramatist merely brings them to the surface, and makes them more problematical.

The Bedtrick

The bedtrick itself happens offstage. Somewhere between 4.3 and 4.4, Bertram goes to Diana's bedroom, believing he is finally going to satiate his "sick desires" with the Florentine maid, only to commit adultery with his own wife instead [motifs K1340]. A

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[93] See, for instance, Snyder, p.11; Neely, p.71; McCandless, pp.456-7. While critics have identified Bertram's sexual anxieties, what has not been discussed is where Shakespeare got the idea for these psychological tensions: folktales.
[94] Wells, p.141

common complaint with the bedtrick is that is it improbable. How could Bertram not notice he is sleeping with someone other than Diana? But perhaps the bedtrick's unrealistic nature is a clue that we should be focusing here not on the action *per se*, but the emotion behind the action, the internal drama.

Bertram's inability to recognise Helen in bed may reflect his general failure to perceive her worth. Folktales featuring a substituted bride articulate in narrative form a number of related anxieties concerning a newly-wed young heroine. One such anxiety is the girl's fear of not being recognised by her husband. Typically, the substituted bride will enter the story just after the heroine has married her prince, and (through deceit) take the place of the true bride. The prince does not recognise that his true bride has been swapped for a false one, nor does he recognise his true bride when she spends the night with him. Only later, thanks to external proofs (a speaking horsehead, a talking stove, etc.), is the true bride's identity revealed, and the false bride banished or killed.[95] The fact that the prince does not recognise his true bride symbolises his inability to see the true bride's real self, her true value.[96] This seems particularly applicable to Helen, whose whole purpose seems to be to get Bertram to perceive her worth.

Another concern embedded in this popular motif is the heroine's anxiety over and ambivalence towards sex.[97] To a newly married girl, sex is both intriguing and terrifying, appealing and repellent. The true bride represents the chaste, modest side to the heroine, while the substituted bride, who is generally an ugly or cunning servant, symbolises her "dark and crass side", with whom she is in conflict.[98] The heroine needs to integrate both aspects of her character before her prince is able to recognise her. This seems to be echoed in the relationship between Helen and Diana, except in reverse: Diana represents the chaste, modest aspect of Helen's character that seems in tension with her predatory, assertive side. The fact that Bertram believes he is sleeping with Diana, not Helen, symbolises his inability to perceive that side of Helen – her submissive, alluring side – represented by Diana. Bertram sees only the crass, indomitable physician's daughter. It is only when Helen lets him see her submissive side (effectively by letting him "defile" her in bed) that both sides of her personality will be assimilated, and Bertram will finally perceive her as a whole: "both, both, O, pardon!" (5.3.306)

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[95] See for example, "The Speaking Horsehead" (ATU 533), "The Black and the White Bride" (ATU 403), and "Little Brother and Little Sister" (ATU 450).
[96] Jones, p.71
[97] Ibid., p.69
[98] Ibid.

Nowadays, the bedtrick would probably be considered by most as rape. Stanley Wells, for instance, claims the bedtrick "is the rape of the man by the woman as much as it would be if the woman had drugged the man into insensibility and then forced herself upon him".[99] This goes some way to explaining the anxiety surrounding the play as a whole, and its less than impressive critical history. Yet in Shakespeare's time, the bedtrick was a familiar and common device. It features in the classical tradition, with the myth surrounding Hercules' birth, and the biblical tradition, in the story of Jacob and Rachel.[100] Chaucer uses a bedtrick in *The Reeve's Tale,* while the motif appears at least four times in the Arthurian romance *Le Morte D'Arthur*.[101] Philip Sidney provides an explicit and quite comic version of the bedtrick in his popular prose romance, *The Countess of Pembroke's Arcadia,* written towards the end of the sixteenth century.[102] Boccaccio uses the motif eight times in his *Decameron,* and it recurs in other Italian novella.[103] The bedtrick was also a favourite device of playwrights: Marliss C. Desens cites forty-four plays of Shakespeare's period in which the bedtrick appears, claiming it was used by most of the major dramatists, from Middleton, Shirley, Marston, and Fletcher, to Dekker, Chapman, Heywood, and Massinger.[104] "Clearly", Desens concludes, "the substitution of one partner for another, particularly the sexual substitution of the bed-trick, served important dramatic purposes for the playwrights, and their continued use of the convention suggests that it had significant emotional resonances for their audiences as well."[105]

Despite Desens' astute observation, the bedtrick's emotional resonances tend to be overlooked. Because the bedtrick was ubiquitous in medieval and early modern popular culture, there seems to be a perception that it no longer had any affective power, and consequently Shakespeare's audiences would not have thought twice about its occurrence in *All's Well*. Bullough, for example, claims that "no Elizabethan audience would feel great repugnance at Helen's means of getting herself married or of getting her marriage consummated: The idea was too old and well-known to cause lifting of

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[99] Wells, p. 122

[100] Marliss C. Desens, *The Bed-trick in English Renaissance Drama: Explorations in Gender, Sexuality, and Power* (Newark: University of Delaware Press; London: Associated University Presses, c1994), pp. 19-22

[101] Ibid.

[102] Philip Sidney, *The Countess of Pembrokes Arcadia,* 13th ed. (London: printed for George Calvert, 1674). See Desens, chapter 1, for an analysis of Sidney's use of the bedtrick.

[103] See Straparola (*Le piacevoli notti*: VII, 1) and Basile (*Pentamerone:* III, 4 and V, 6), for example, as Desens notes (p. 24).

[104] Desens, p.11

[105] Ibid.

eyebrows".[106] Similarly, Lawrence argues that, "in the light of early analogs", the perception of the bedtrick as "immodest, unworthy of a refined woman" is "untenable."[107] Hunter likewise maintains that "[t]here was little sense among Shakespeare's contemporaries that this was a degrading and unsatisfactory way of getting a husband, either in real life or on the stage."[108] The most extreme view comes from M. C. Bradbook, who argues that "such old tricks as the substitution of one woman for another (which Shakespeare used twice) had no moral valency at all."[109]

I would argue, however, that it is precisely because the audience was so familiar with the bedtrick that its treatment in *All's Well* would have caused some discomfort. Shakespeare's handling of the bedtrick is unique. Firstly, he transforms what is conventionally a plot device into a visceral experience. When Helen appears on stage after having perpetrated the bedtrick, she pauses to reflect on the event:

> O, strange men,
> That can such sweet use make of what they hate,
> When saucy trusting of the cozened thoughts
> Defiles the pitchy night; so lust doth play
> With what it loathes for that which is away.   (4.4.21-25)

Words like "sweet use", "Defiles", and "lust doth play" infuse the episode with a tangible physicality completely foreign to traditional bedtricks. Helen conveys the curious sense of being simultaneously that which Bertram loathes and desires, and contemplates his tender "play" in bed, as well as her sense of defilement. Shakespeare purposely invests the episode with a physical and psychological reality that positively eschews an impassive response. The audience is *forced* to consider the bedtrick in an emotional light. This is especially noticeable when we compare it to Shakespeare's other treatment of the bedtrick in *Measure for Measure.* In this play, the virtuous heroine Isabella enlists the aid of Mariana, who willingly agrees to take Isabella's place in the corrupt lord Angelo's bed. The scheme is orchestrated by the noble Duke, and the whole event is dealt with in a very perfunctory manner (4.1). We are given little detail as to how it will be carried out, and the actual event happens offstage, as it does in *All's Well*. But unlike that play, the characters in *Measure for Measure* do not discuss the bedtrick afterwards, other than at the end where it serves to prove Isabella's innocence.

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[106] Bullough, p. 379
[107] Lawrence, p. 438
[108] Hunter, p. xliv
[109] M. C. Bradbook, *Themes and Conventions of Elizabethan Tragedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1935, repr. 1973), p. 60

The emotional and physical experience is never touched on; as such, we are nowhere prompted to consider the bedtrick as anything more than a means to an end.

The handling of bedtrick in *All's Well* is also remarkable because Shakespeare has his characters muse over the morality of their actions. From the outset, Helen is very aware of the moral implications of her plan,

> Which if it speed
> Is wicked meaning in a lawful deed
> And lawful meaning in a wicked act
> Where both not sin, and yet a sinful fact   (3.7. 44-7)

She acknowledges, in other words, that tricking Bertram is "wicked", but believes it "lawful" because she is within her rights as a wife to sleep with him, and justifiable because he has been deceptive too. Diana defends her actions in a similar manner: "in this disguise I think't no sin/ To cozen him that would unjustly win" (4.2.76-7). The Widow, too, sees the bedtrick as a "deceit so lawful" (3.7.38). Rather than reassuring us of the rightness of the women's actions, however, these moral deliberations have the opposite effect. The repetition of words like "wicked", "sin", "deceit", and "cozen" serves to draw our attention to the dubiousness of the bedtrick.

In Boccaccio's story, Giletta's bedtrick is described in nothing but positive terms, and the story emphasises that the bedtrick is justified by the marriage. "Peradventure God will give me the grace," Giletta explains to the widow, "that I may be with child, and so having this ring on my finger, and the childe in mine armes begotten by him, I maye recover him, and...continue with him, as a wife ought to do with her husband" (p.394). The widow deems her role to be "an honest parte...to be a meane, that the good Ladie might recover her husbande" (p.394). We are even told that "God...disposed the matter" (p.395), because Giletta conceives not one, but two children from the bedtrick. Shakespeare, by contrast, seems intent on highlighting the 'trick' part of the bedtrick. The women's repeated claims that the bedtrick is justified sound more like attempts to convince themselves into an action that may be lawful but probably *feels* wrong. This is reinforced in Helen's repeated assertions that the end will justify the means, implying that the means are not savoury to begin with: "All's well that ends well; still the fine's the crown./ Whate'er the course, the end is the renown" (4.4.35-6); "All's well that ends well yet/ Though time seem so adverse and means unfit" (5.1.27-28).

From Loathly Lady to Beauty

Regardless of the morality of the bedtrick, Helen has succeeded in her quest to arouse Bertram's desire. Like the countless fairy tale beasts, hags, and animals before her, Helen has proven that though she may appear loathsome by day, when she slips between the sheets at night she transforms into a beauty [motif D621.0.1].[110] Bertram, of course, is unaware that Helen was the one to stir his lust. He is similarly ignorant of the fact that his wife has completed the two impossible tasks. Accordingly, Helen's next objective is to make her husband aware of her cunning actions, and in so doing win Bertram's admiration and affection.

Quest Three: The Clever Wench

The third and final test Helen must face on her quest to win Bertram is to prove her cleverness [motif H506]. Stories of type 891 are, after all, tales of cunning: can a rejected wife solve the riddle of the impossible tasks and win her derisive husband [motif H373]? Helen exposes her ingenuity in an intricate and drawn-out series of revelations, which leave no doubt as to her resourcefulness and determination to get what she wants.

Magical Objects: Identity Tokens

Soon after the bedtrick, the Italian army disbands and Bertram returns home to Roussillon. He believes, along with everyone else, that Helen is dead, thanks to some clever scheming on her part behind the scenes (4.3.47-57). He is quickly informed that he is to remarry, this time to the lord Lafeu's daughter. The King has come to Roussillon to sanctify the marriage, a union which will go a long way to mollifying his anger at Bertram's treatment of Helen: "I have forgiven and forgotten all,/ though my revenges were high bent upon him/ And watched the time to shoot" (5.3.9-11). Lafeu asks Bertram to give him a "favour" or a token, "To sparkle in the spirits of my daughter,/ That she may quickly come" (5.3.75-77). Bertram agrees, and gives Lafeu his ring. As easily as that, Helen's plan takes effect.

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[110] Cf. also motif D732, man disenchants loathsome woman by embracing her; motifs D621.1 and B640.1, one shape by day, another by night

Prior to the bedtrick, after demanding Bertram's ring from him as a sign of good faith, Diana told Bertram that once he had "conquered" her "maiden bed", she would place a new ring on his finger "that, what in time proceeds,/ May token to the future of our past deeds" (4.2.58; 63-64). It was of course Helen who actually placed that ring on Bertram's finger, and Helen's ring is the one Bertram now gives to Lafeu, who recognises it straight away [motif H94]:

> By my old beard
> And ev'ry hair that's on't,
> Helen, that's dead
> Was a sweet creature. Such a ring as this,
> The last that e'er I took her at court,
> I saw upon her finger.   5.3.77-81

The King then demands to see it, and naturally recognises it too, for it was he who gave Helen the ring in the first place:

> This ring was mine, and when I gave it Helen
> I bade her, if her fortunes ever stood
> Necessitied to help, that by this token
> I would relieve her.   84-7

The King's next revelation makes public the extent of Helen's craftiness:

> She called the saints to surety
> That she would never put it from her finger
> Unless she gave it to [Bertram] in bed...   109-111

Helen's ring, then, plays a crucial role in this final scene, serving as a "token" of Helen and Bertram's "past deeds" [motif H80]. The addition of this second ring was entirely Shakespeare's invention. In neither Boccaccio's tale nor the oral tradition does the heroine *give* her husband anything. She rather obtains (steals, wins, is given) certain objects, like rings, swords, and daggers. Perhaps in this Shakespeare was once more echoing stories like *Cinderella,* where the heroine always leaves a shoe behind at the ball, and this later serves to prove that she was the prince's beautiful dance partner. In *Donkeyskin*, a close cousin to *Cinderella,* the heroine bakes a ring into the prince's cake, and it is by this token that he knows her as the woman he has been pining over (to the point of sickness).[111] Helen likewise leaves a ring on Bertram's finger, proving that she was the object of his "sick desires" at their secret bedtime rendezvous.

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[111] Indeed, the prince so desires Donkeyskin that he becomes sick: he is melancholy, will not eat, and can't get out of his bed. Only when he is able to marry Donkeyskin, the woman whose finger fits the ring, does he revive. In other words, Donkeyskin cures the prince's "sick desires". Perhaps this sort of tale is where Shakespeare got his inspiration from?

By introducing the ring as a means of proving that Bertram slept with Helen, Shakespeare also invents a neat way of confirming that the child Helen carries is Bertram's. In the folktales, the wives do not return home to their husbands until they have given birth to their child or children. The husbands then see the children, who resemble their fathers, and know their wives have fulfilled the second condition. Boccaccio follows the oral tradition: Giletta remains in Italy until her twin boys, "which were very like unto their father", are born and "carefully...noursed and brought up" (p.396). Only then does she go home to France. Interestingly, Giletta sleeps with Beltramo numerous times, carrying on the bedtrick deception until she is sure she is pregnant. This is in line with the oral stories, where the disguised wives often sleep with their unsuspecting husbands on at least three occasions. By contrast, Helen sleeps with Bertram only once, and yet she falls pregnant – a small detail that greatly increases the element of wonder and fantasy that infuses the final scene. Shakespeare also departs from both oral and literary sources by having Helen return home almost immediately after sleeping with Bertram; a change which helps to increase the sense of urgency and anticipation in the build-up to the finale. Because of this, however, Helen does not have a child who can prove that she was Bertram's bed partner, merely a bump indicating that someone impregnated her. But, her pregnancy *combined* with Bertram having her ring, which she swore she would not remove unless in bed with him, provides quite convincing evidence.

The addition of the second ring also points up the symbolic significance of the first. Bertram's ring, like Helen's, functions as a token of past deeds. It not only proves that Helen, through Diana, has fulfilled the first of Bertram's impossible tasks; it also serves as a truth token, verifying Diana's story. Here, Shakespeare was perhaps influenced by stories like *Mr. Fox*, an English version of *Bluebeard*, which similarly depends on truth tokens.[112] The heroine of *Mr. Fox* sees her betrothed commit a bloody crime, and takes a memento (a severed finger) from the scene, which she later uses to prove publicly that her fiancé is not all he seems [motif H57.2.1]. Diana likewise takes a keepsake, Bertram's ring, from the scene of Bertram's intended crime or "vain assault" (4.2.52), and uses it to prove the young count's dishonesty.[113]

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[112] Joseph Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales and More English Fairy Tales,* ed. Donald Haase (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2002), pp.109-12.

[113] Catharine Belsey has convincingly demonstrated that Shakespeare was familiar with *Mr. Fox* in her analysis of *Much Ado About Nothing*: "When Benedick mocks Claudio's reluctance to confess he is in love, 'Like the old tale, my lord: "It is not so, nor 'twas not so: but indeed, God forbid it should be so'" (1.1.205-6), his words include a blood-curdling allusion to marriage. Benedick is quoting Mr Fox, an

The rings, then, are integral to Helen's plan to prove her cleverness. They are, in a way, magical objects, for whoever controls them has the power.[114] Bertram gives up his ring – "My house, mine honour, yea, my life" (4.2.53) – to Diana, thus placing him under her (and by extension, Helen's) control. In its place, Helen puts her own ring, heavy with not only her power, but the King's too. Bertram is unaware of how tightly he has been bound to Helen, neatly trapped in her mingled yarn.

Riddles

After the King and Lafeu have discovered Helen's ring, Bertram quickly falls back into everyone's bad graces. His possession of the ring, combined with his inadequate explanation as to where he got it – "In Florence was it from a casement thrown me" (5.3.94) – casts sinister suspicions on his character: "Confess 'twas [Helen's]", says the King, "and by what rough enforcement/ You got it from her" (108-9). Unimpressed by Bertram's protestations, the distressed King sends him off stage. Moments later, a messenger arrives with a letter from Diana, which outlines Bertram's broken promise to wed her upon Helen's death (141-7). Incensed, the King calls for both Bertram and the "poor suppliant" (5.2.136) to be brought to him. With Diana's entrance, Bertram is rapidly pitched even further into disgrace. He lies about how well he knows Diana, calling her a "fond and desp'rate creature", and then slanders her reputation, naming her "a common gamester" or prostitute (166-190). It is at this point that Diana whips out Bertram's ring, which shines like a beacon of truth: "He does me wrong, my lord", she declares to the King,

> O behold this ring,
> Whose high respect and rich validity
> Did lack a parallel; yet for all that
> He gave it to a commoner o'th'camp,
> If I be one.   5.3.191; 193-196

Diana's evidence has the desired effect: "This is his wife," the Countess gasps, "That ring's a thousand proofs" (201).[115]

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early version of Bluebeard, the serial-killer husband of folk tale, who repeatedly denies his crimes with this refrain." (p.16)

[114] "Taking the Indo-European fairy-tale tradition as a whole," Ashliman observes, "it is difficult to isolate a single source of magic...There are magic lamps, rings, tables, sacks, cudgels, carpets, boots, and much more. Anyone who possesses them can control their power, if they only know the rules" (*Handbook*, p.39).

[115] Paroles is called upon to give further witness to Diana's claims, but his words don't add anything more to the evidence, and the King dismisses him: "thou art too fine [hairsplitting] in thy evidence, therefore stand aside" (5.2.265)

Diana has another blow to deliver. Appalled by Bertram's behaviour, she demands her ring back: "Send for your ring, I will return it home," she spits out, "And give me mine again" (225-6). Of course, Bertram no longer has 'her' ring – the King does: "What ring was yours, I pray you?" he asks,

> *Dia.*   Sir, much like the same upon your finger
> *Kin.*   Know you this ring? This ring was his of late.
> *Dia.*   And this was it I gave him, being abed.   (227-30)

Another of Bertram's excuses has just been deflated: the ring was not thrown to him from a window, but given to him in bed. The more Bertram struggles, the deeper he entangles himself in Helen's web: "you boggle shrewdly", growls the King, "every feather starts you" (235).

The maze of intrigue is almost complete. Bertram has Helen's ring, though he swears it's not hers; Diana has Bertram's ring, which he swore he'd never give up; and Diana says she gave the ring the King holds to Bertram in bed. With each revelation, the plot becomes more convoluted. Shakespeare seems to be deliberately complicating things so as to increase the emotional intensity of this last scene and inspire within us a desire for peace and a happy resolution.

But the playwright delays the climax a little longer. When the King demands an explanation as to how Diana came to possess Helen's ring, she gives him no easy answers:

> *Kin.*   Where did you buy it? Or who gave it you?
> *Dia.*   It was not given me, nor I did not buy it.
> *Kin.*   Who lent it you?
> *Dia.*   It was not lent me neither.
> *Kin.*   If it were yours by none of all these ways,
>   How could you give it him?
> *Dia.*   I never gave it him.   (267-273)

Diana's riddling responses are perhaps a nod to the oral tradition. Riddles lie at the heart of stories of type 891 [motif H530]. The impossible tasks the husbands set are essentially puzzles which the wives must attempt to solve [motif H373]. Often, it is the heroine's skill with riddles that wins her the marriage in the first place [motif H561.1].[116] Diana's riddles also underline the purpose or nature of the last scene as a whole: it is, in a way, one big riddle or test, set by Helen for the King and Bertram,

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[116] In *The Clever Vizier's-Daughter,* the man sets his wife the impossible tasks in revenge for her setting him a riddle he could not solve: "The girl demanded that before they were married, the prince should bring her a white elephant, and a man without sorrow. The elephant was procured, but the prince, after searching vainly for three years for a man without sorrow, returned home" (reproduced in Lawrence, p.429). It is in response to his failure that the impossible tasks are created.

much as how they have tested her. As the pair struggles to unlock the mystery of the rings and discern the truth, and Bertram falls ever deeper into dishonour, Helen bides her time, waiting until breaking-point.

That moment is fast approaching. The King is exasperated by Diana's perplexing non-answers and decides to be rid of her: "She does abuse our ears. To prison with her" (291). But before he can dismiss her offstage, Diana asks her mother to fetch her "bail", begging the King to await its arrival. In the meantime, Diana has one last riddle to deliver. The chaotic emotional pressure that has been steadily building throughout the final scene reaches a crescendo as the last piece of the puzzle is revealed:

> [Bertram] knows himself my bed he hath defiled,
> And at that time he got his wife with child.
> Dead though she be, she feels her young one kick.
> So there's my riddle; one that's dead is quick   (297-300)

"And now behold the meaning" (301), Diana adds, as Helen, the long-awaited answer to the riddle, walks on stage.

Happily Ever After?

The sense of wonder that washes over the scene at Helen's entrance would not be out of place in any fairy tale. Helen's appearance here recalls her earlier one, where she emerged before the court with the cured King by her side and amazed everyone around her. Just as the first entrance evoked Cinderella's ball, so her appearance has a fairy-tale feel to it, especially if we consider that for Bertram and company Helen is seemingly returning from the dead. There seems to be a collective intake of breath; a feeling of surrealness, given voice by the King: "Is't real that I see?" (5.3.303). Even Bertram appears to be affected: when Helen's claims that she is not real but merely "the shadow of a wife... The name and not the thing", Bertram declares "Both, both. O, pardon!" (303-305).

Yet again, Shakespeare has coaxed the audience into expecting a happy ending. All that remains is for Helen to reveal that she has completed Bertram's impossible tasks; an announcement which anyone familiar with Boccaccio's story or the oral folktales would have known is traditionally the happiest moment of the whole story. "There is your ring", Helen exclaims,

> And, look you, here's your letter. This it says:
> 'When from my finger you can get this ring
> And are by me with child,' et cetera. This is done.

<div align="center">Will you be mine now you are doubly won?　　　(307-11)</div>

We expect a resounding 'yes' from Bertram, just as we earlier anticipated him to agree to the marriage. Once more, however, Shakespeare toys with our expectations. Instead of unreserved assent, Bertram turns to the King and states, "If she, my liege, can make me know this clearly/ I'll love her dearly, ever ever dearly" (312-13).

Bertram's conditional response is a small but significant upset to the fairy-tale pattern, enough to jolt us out of our reverie. It feels inadequate, especially after the heightened emotional rollercoaster of the last scene. This feeling is enhanced by the fact that Helen does not explain to Bertram how she met his conditions *on stage*. Rather, a few more lines are spoken, and then the play ends. We don't see Helen "make [Bertram] know this clearly", therefore we can't be certain Bertram will approve and "love her dearly, ever ever dearly".

This is an important point of difference between Shakespeare's play and other versions of the story. In all the folktales of type 891 analysed, when the wives return to their husbands and reveal their exploits, the husbands always accept these actions as proof of the women's cleverness and commitment. Often, they openly praise their wives' behaviour as well. In *The Clever Vizier's-Daughter,* for instance, when the heroine reveals her adventures, we are told "the prince was exceedingly joyful over what the maiden had done", and "because she was exceedingly clever and well-instructed, he exalted her above all his other wives."[117] Boccaccio continues this narrative tradition. When Giletta returns to France, rather than the lengthy exposition scene in *All's Well*, she goes straight to see her husband, who is holding a "great feaste, and assembly of Ladies and Knightes". Giletta strides through the packed hall, with her twin sons in her arms, and kneels before her husband: "beholde", she intones, "not onely one sonne begotten by thee, but twayne, and likewise thy Ryng." Beltramo is "greatly astonned", and begs Giletta to tell him how this came to pass. She recounts all her actions, "to the great admiration of the Counte, and all those that were in presence". Having observed "her constant minde and good witte", Beltramo deems Giletta worthy despite her low status, and readily accepts her as wife, kissing her before all of his subjects. And, "from that time forth hee loved and honoured her as his dere spouse and wife" (p.396).

In these stories, then, the unambiguously happy resolutions bring with them a comforting sense that the end has justified the means. The heroines may have faced

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[117] Reproduced in Lawrence, p.430

trying tests and committed questionable deeds on their journeys to win their husbands, but because the ending is happy, their sufferings are worth it and their actions justified.

At the end of *All's Well*, the hero and heroine have been reunited, and the plot's riddles have been unravelled. In this sense, the play pleases, much as its folk and literacy sources do: our child-like narrative expectations have been fulfilled. But on a deeper level, *All's Well* leaves us wanting: the play defers the *emotional* resolution. Instead of applauding Helen's actions and explicitly accepting her as wife, Bertram offers the limp conditional '*if* she can prove these things, *then* I'll accept her', and the play ends before any proof is offered. "Whate'er the course, the end is the renown", Helen repeats in various forms, implying that the morally dubious and emotionally trying lengths, the "means unfit", she has gone to in an effort to win Bertram will be vindicated by the happy outcome. But the audience is never privy to that outcome: Helen's explanation happens later, offstage. Because we are never shown whether all ends well, we can't be sure whether all is well. We are deprived of that emotional release and reassurance that accompanies Boccaccio's story and the traditional folktales, and can only speculate as to whether Helen succeeds in her quest to prove herself to Bertram, or whether she remains forever the ugly duckling, the Loathly Lady Bertram rejected "with [his] own eyes" (1.1.103). As such, the intricate web of emotional, sexual, and moral tensions that Shakespeare went to such great lengths to weave throughout the play remains unresolved. Slowly but surely, this disturbingly 'adult' material begins to erode our child-like perception of the action. "All yet *seems* well," says the King hesitantly (5.3.329), and he's right: on the surface, the story does seem happy.[118] But below the surface, dark and unresolved emotions – the "bitter past" (330) – seethe like poison. *All's Well*, then, is a fairy tale that self-reflexively comments on the strangeness of its own conventions. Isn't it odd, Shakespeare seems to be saying, that these apparently trivial and childish stories contain distinctly adult and primitive material? Moreover, how is it that the endings are happy when the journeys are often extremely demanding, and filled with intense and disquieting emotions? *All's Well* at once retells and transforms the old tales at its core, both appealing to and unsettling audiences who are used to seeing fairy tales in a specific light.

Bullough characterised tale III.9 of the *Decameron* as a simple story "describing what people did and said rather than analysing what they felt and thought."[119] Shakespeare modifies his literary source by (re)introducing fairy tales. Perhaps

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[118] My italics
[119] Bullough, p. 378

influenced by the tales he heard orally, Shakespeare recognised the fairy-tale patterns within Boccaccio's story, and realised – despite Boccaccio's handling of them – that these stories mapped out compelling emotional situations. He brings these to the fore, emphasising and provoking the disturbing tensions present in the original tales but supressed or excised by Boccaccio. The dramatist also brings various new fairy tales and folk patterns to bear on the play, from stories like *Cinderella*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Griselda* and *East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon*, to motifs like the Loathly Lady, the substituted bride, the bedtrick, abandoned wives, identity tokens, magical rings, kind helpers, and riddles. These "mingled yarns" are woven together so seamlessly that we barely notice the complexity of the achievement. *All's Well* positively celebrates its affinity to old and familiar tales, conspicuously appealing to the potent personal and emotional resonances such material encodes. As a result, Shakespeare magically transforms Boccaccio's simple, child-like narrative 'describing what people did and said' into a rich drama of adult feelings and complicated ambiguities: "an ancient tale new told", as Pembroke says in *King John*, "And in the last repeating troublesome" (4.2.18-19). The dramatist had an uncanny ability to draw out the human significance in any story, no matter how well-worn.

CHAPTER 3

Cymbeline: the terrifying truths of the inner life

nce upon a time, in a land far away, there was a beautiful princess who lived in a great castle with her father, the king, and her stepmother, the queen. Her father loved her very much, but her stepmother was a wicked witch, and only pretended to love her. Driven from her home, the persecuted heroine fled into the deep, dark woods, accompanied only by one faithful servant. The servant had actually been sent to kill her, but he took pity on the girl, sparing her life and presenting his master with false, bloody evidence of her death. The poor princess was left to wander alone in the vast forest until she stumbled across a humble dwelling, where she found protection with a group of kind, rustic men, who loved her instantly and whose kindness she repaid by keeping house for them. One day, while her companions were away, the heroine drank a magic potion, which she believed to be a health tonic, but which was in actuality a poison sent by her wicked stepmother. The princess collapsed in a heap, appearing to all the world as if dead. Her forest friends were deeply saddened by her passing, and even the birds seemed to mourn. They laid her to rest in the woods, bedecked in flowers. Some time later, however, the princess miraculously awakened from her death-like slumber. Her forest friends were overwhelmed with happiness – and they weren't the only ones, for a handsome and valiant young man had also been pining over the presumed-dead princess. When he saw her alive and well, he was completely overjoyed, and the princess returned his tender feelings. The pair embraced lovingly, and everyone lived happily ever after.

Most of us are familiar with the tale of *Snow White*. I wasn't actually describing *Snow White*, however, but *Cymbeline*. Did Shakespeare consciously think of this traditional tale when sitting down to create his play? Perhaps not – *Snow White* may have been an indirect source, indirect in that the influence it had over Shakespeare may have been either through the oral tales he heard as a youngster or through the literary versions he encountered in his childhood (and perhaps even his adult) readings. Regardless of whether the dramatist intentionally echoed *Snow White* in his play, *Cymbeline* shares too many parallels with this old tale for it to be coincidental.

Shakespeare's use of fairy stories like *Snow White,* tales which have been passed on from generation to generation, would certainly explain Ben Jonson's dismissal of the late plays like *Cymbeline* as being "mouldy" tales:

and stale
As the Shrieve's crusts, and nasty as his fish—
Scraps out of every dish
Throwne forth, and rak't into the common tub[1]

Jonson took issue with what he saw as unoriginal and tired storylines, scraped together from a variety of diverse and 'common' (read: plebeian) sources. This implies that Shakespeare was adapting rather than inventing the plotlines for his late plays, and drawing on source stories which were both old and popular – like fairy tales. But, while Jonson perceived Shakespeare's ability to quarry second-hand stories from 'every dish' as contemptible, perhaps it rather points to the dramatist's consummate skill as a storyteller. After all, as Andrew Lang, the renowned fairy tale collector, once said: "Nobody can write a new fairy tale; you can only mix up and dress up the old, old stories".[2]

This would certainly seem to describe the dramatist's approach in *Cymbeline,* a play which is packed full of a lifetime of Shakespeare's favourite narrative material. It recycles familiar themes, like forbidden love, obsessive sexual jealousy, vengeance, loss and suffering, recovery and redemption. The cast features almost every stereotypical character Shakespeare had in his arsenal, including a beautiful princess, kidnapped children, a lowborn but noble hero, valiant country rustics, a loyal servant, a buffoonish troublemaker and a cunning one, a wicked stepmother, a tyrannical father, a jealous husband, ghosts, and gods. And the play is a positive compendium of Shakespearian plot devices, featuring a secret marriage, villainous deception, attempted murder, revenge, multiple disguises, sword fights, a minor war, the persecution of a virtuous princess, supernatural intervention, wild coincidences, and joyous reconciliations. Even the genre of the play scrapes from 'every dish': originally categorised as a tragedy, *Cymbeline* unapologetically blends elements of comedy, history, romance, and even fantasy. One exasperated critic dubbed the work an "'historical-pastoral' tragicomical romance".[3] *Cymbeline* also refuses to be defined by traditional boundaries of time and place. Ostensibly set in ancient Britain during the time of the Roman Empire, the story shamelessly meanders into Renaissance Italy, and then Wales, with characters moving from one location to another in almost no time at all. Philip Sidney would have objected fiercely to this, believing that "place and time [are] the two necessary companions of all

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[1] Ben Jonson, "Ode (to himself)", in Grierson and Bullough, pp.179-180.
[2] Andrew Lang, ed., *The Lilac Fairy Book,* il. H. J. Ford (New York: Longmans, Green and Co., 1910), p.viii
[3] Frank Kermode, *William Shakespeare: The Final Plays* (London: Longmans, Green and Co., 1963), p. 29

corporeal actions... the stage should always represent but one place, and the uttermost time presupposed in it should be, both by Aristotle's precept and common reason, but one day".[4] To confuse things further, the play interweaves *three* different plotlines, each of which draws on distinct source material. The main plot involves the heroine Innogen's marriage to Posthumus, and the bet Posthumus makes on his wife's chastity with the Italian rogue Giacomo, and has two acknowledged literary sources in Boccaccio's *The Decameron* and an anonymous prose tale entitled *Frederyke of Jennen.* A second plot concerns the souring relations between Britain and Rome, and is based loosely on a section from Holinshed's *Chronicles of England and Scotland.* A third plot strand revolves around the King's long-lost sons, Innogen's brothers, only a small portion of which seems to have an identifiable source in Holinshed's *Chronicles,* but in a widely separate section from that drawn on for the second plot.[5] It is no wonder the play has a reputation as being "overstuffed".[6]

Cymbeline's heterogeneous material has given many critics pause. Some believe that Shakespeare was simply spinning absurd tales in an effort to amuse himself at this late stage of his career.[7] Harold Bloom labelled *Cymbeline* "wayward", complaining "the plot is a chaos, and Shakespeare never bothers to be probable".[8] George Bernard Shaw rejected the play as "intellectually vulgar... foolish, offensive, indecent, and exasperating beyond all tolerance".[9] Samuel Johnson notoriously condemned *Cymbeline* as "unresisting imbecility", having "faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation".[10] His main grievances were directed at the plot: "the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names, and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life".[11]

The play has had a handful of admirers. Alfred Lord Tennyson and John Keats numbered it among their favourite, and the essayist William Hazlitt thought *Cymbeline* "one of the most delightful of Shakespear's [sic] historical plays":

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[4] Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*, p.134

[5] Bullough, vol. 8, pp.1-37.

[6] This label was used in a review of the Fiasco Theater's recent production of *Cymbeline* by Jennifer Farrar, who said: "It takes a clever theater company to turn an overstuffed, normally tragic Shakespearean romance into a lively comedy." Jennifer Farrar, "Simple, Merry Version of Shakespeare's 'Cymbeline'", *abc NEWS Entertainment* (January 2011). http://abcnews.go.com/Entertainment/wireStory?id=12642627 (accessed 10/03/2011).

[7] Lytton Strachey, *Books and Characters* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), p.64

[8] Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1998), p.596

[9] "Cymbeline," in *Shaw on Shakespeare: an Anthology of Bernard Shaw's Writings on the Play's and Production of Shakespeare,* ed. Edwin Wilson (London: Cassell, 1961), p. 54

[10] Quoted in J. M. Nosworthy, ed., *Cymbeline* (London: Methuen, 1969), p.xl

[11] Ibid.

The reading of this play is like going on a journey with some uncertain object at the end of it, and in which the suspense is kept up and heightened by the long intervals between each action. Though the events are scattered over such an extent of surface, and relate to such a variety of characters, yet the links which bind the different interests of the story together are never entirely broken.[12]

Hazlitt's compliment is somewhat back-handed, as it inadvertently draws attention to the more peculiar aspects of the play: the seemingly haphazard structure; the long intervals of time between different sections of the action; the scope of the action; and the assortment of characters. Indeed, while many people may not directly agree with critics like Johnson, the overwhelming majority of them still feel the need to excuse several elements of the play. *Cymbeline* is packed full of moments that defy easy or logical interpretation. Along with the extraordinary liberties it takes with time and place, the play relies heavily on coincidence, confusion, and twisted expectation, and it has moments of overt fantasy and erotic voyeurism, most evident in Giacomo's emerging from a trunk in the first Act, Innogen's waking next to a headless corpse in Act 4, Jupiter's descent from heaven in the last Act, and the final, happy ending in which everything works out miraculously. These elements have engendered much unease, and *Cymbeline* has long been sidelined by both critics and directors unsure of how to approach it. It remains one of the least renowned and most underperformed plays in Shakespeare's cannon.

Once, however, *Cymbeline* seems to have been both well-known and admired. The earliest record we have of a performance of the play is from 1611, when a contemporary, Simon Forman, described seeing it:

> Remember also the storri of Cymbalin king of England, in Lucius time, howe Lucius Cam from Octavus Cesar for Tribut, and being denied, after sent Lucius with a greate Arme of Souldiars who landed at Milford haven, and Affter wer vanquished by Cimbalin, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by means of 3 outlawes, of the which 2 of them were the sons of Cimbalim, stolen from him when they were but 2 yers old by an old man whom Cymbalin banished, and he kept them as his own sons 20 yers with him in A cave. And howe [one] of them slewe Clotan, that was the quens sonn, going to Milford haven to sek the love of Innogen the kinges daughter, whome he had banished also for loving his daughter, and howe the Italian that cam from her love conveied him selfe into A Cheste, and said yt was a chest of plate sent from her love & others, to be presented to the kinge. And in the depest of the night, she being aslepe, he opened the cheste, & cam forth of yt, And viewed her in her bed, and the markes of her body, & toke awai her braslet, & after Accused her of adultery to her love, &c. And in thend howe he came with the Romains into England & was taken prisoner, and after Reveled to Innogen, Who had turned her selfe into mans apparrell & fled to mete her love at Milford haven, & chanchsed to fall on the

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[12] William Hazlitt, *Characters of Shakespeare's Plays* (New York: Wiley and Putnam, 1845), p.1

> Cave in the wodes wher her 2 brothers were, & howe by eating a sleping Dram they thought she had bin deed, & laid her in the wodes, & the body of Cloten by her, in her loves apparrell that he left behind him, & howe she was found by Lucius, &c.[13]

Forman records his impressions in an almost breathless string of recollections, moving from one narrative incident to the next with evident enthusiasm. He seems unfazed by the play's reliance on fantasy and chance, and retained an impressive amount of detail for such an apparently convoluted drama.[14] The other early record we have of *Cymbeline* comes from a performance in early 1634 at court in front of King Charles 1. The fact that it was shown to the King is perhaps evidence enough of the play's high regard, but we also have a statement from the then Master of Revels, who said that *Cymbeline* was "well liked" by His Majesty.[15]

From the sparse but valuable contemporary evidence, then, *Cymbeline* seemed to be popular enough in Shakespeare's day, but it appears to have fallen out of favour as the years progressed. The reason for this, I propose, could be that the play makes conspicuous use of folk- and fairy tales; and perhaps more modern audiences are not quite as comfortable with these old stories as they were in Shakespeare's time.

Even at first glance, *Cymbeline* seems to recall fairy stories. It's filled with an assortment of classic fairy-tale characters, whose trials and exploits could have been lifted from any number of wonder stories. *Cymbeline* may be a compendium of Shakespearean narrative devices, but it could just as easily be classified as a collection of archetypal folktale material, a parallel I do not believe is accidental. Similarly, if we look at the play's most criticised aspects – the unlikely and absurd plot, the freedom with which time and place are handled – their folktale roots are obvious. Fairy tales thrive on the magical and improbable, and they take so many liberties with time and place that they transcend such boundaries altogether. So perhaps by highlighting these extraordinary elements of the play, critics like Johnson inadvertently give us a hint as to how *Cymbeline* should be interpreted: as a fairy tale.

Some critics have viewed the play as such. Northrop Frye saw *Cymbeline's* fairy-tale links as pivotal:

> *Cymbeline* is not, to put it mildly, a historical play: it is pure folk tale, featuring a cruel stepmother with her loutish son, a calumniated maiden, lost princes brought up in a cave by a foster father, a ring of recognition that works in reverse, villains displaying false trophies of adultery and faithful servants

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[13] Quoted in Greenblatt, p. 3337

[14] He does, however, briefly confuse Posthumus and Cloten – but then so does Innogen.

[15] E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare*: *A Study of Facts and Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1930), v.2, p. 352

displaying equally false trophies of murder, along with a firework display of dreams, prophecies, signs, portents, and wonders.[16]

Frye's comment is especially perceptive, as it isolates real folktale archetypes. Others have identified with *Cymbeline's* fairy-tale roots on a less specific level, and this is particularly evident in performance. At least five productions, ranging from 1962 to 1997, adopted the theme of 'storytelling' when approaching the play.[17] Situating the drama within the context of a stylised fable allowed the directors to streamline the play's haphazard events into a cohesive whole, as well as contextualise some of the more improbable elements.

The difficulty, however, with interpreting or staging the play as a wonder story is that it seems then to become trivial: "a fairy-tale world inhabited by unreal and unconvincing characters".[18] This appears to be the issue with *Cymbeline* as a whole: if its improbabilities and wild coincidences are celebrated, it is often at the expense of the characters' psychological reality and the play's overall gravity. The unrealistic nature of the play, in other words, is perceived to undermine its emotional power. Frank Kermode, for example, believes the play is experimental, as does A. C. Kirsch, who repeatedly comments on *Cymbeline's* "deliberate self-consciousness", claiming "its dramatic effect is to keep the audience at least partially disengaged from... the action and characters".[19] Similarly, R. A. Foakes maintains that the play's "deliberate emphasis on chance, accident, and the improbable" functions as a means of "preventing us from identifying ourselves with a character, or taking the action too seriously".[20] More recently, Susan Snyder has suggested that "the conscious fictionality of [the] action, its improbabilities and miraculous turns of event, including manifestations of the divine" serve to create "a certain distance between audience and stage action".[21]

This seems to me to miss the point of the fantasy or fairy tale in *Cymbeline,* and stems, I believe, from a mistaken perception of fairy tales as frivolous children's tales devoid of a deeper meaning or any emotional significance. Fairy tales may be fantastic and unrealistic, but they are not untrue: "[their] realities are not the facts of history but the terrifying truths of the inner life – the destructiveness of jealousy, the creations of

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[16] Northrop Frye, *A Natural Perspective* (United States: Columbia University Press, 1965), p.67 Unfortunately, Frye does not investigate these links further.

[17] See Jonathan Bate and Eric Rasmussen, eds., *The RSC Shakespeare: Cymbeline* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2007) pp. 163-172, (especially 171-2).

[18] Bate and Rasmussen, p.169.

[19] Kermode, pp. 21-2; A. C. Kirsch, "*Cymbeline* and Coterie Dramaturgy", *ELH*, 34.3 (1967): 285-306.

[20] R. A Foakes, *Shakespeare: the Dark Comedies and the Last Plays: from Satire to Celebration* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971), p.103.

[21] Susan Snyder, "The genres of Shakespeare's plays", in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, eds. Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2001), p. 95

sexual fear, the complexities of love, the imponderable unpredictability of family relationships."[22] And according to Bruno Bettelheim, the fantasy in fairy tales *should* function to draw our attention to these emotional truths:

> The unrealistic nature of these tales (which narrow-minded rationalists object to) is an important device, because it makes obvious that the fairy tales' concern is not useful information about the external world, but the inner processes taking place in an individual.[23]

To admit, then, with Dr Johnson that *Cymbeline* is "more improbable than a Fairy Tale" is not to say that the play is trivial or that we cannot engage with it emotionally.[24] The play may unashamedly declare itself an improbable fiction, but it implicitly asserts the truths underlying its fables – the *emotional* truths. I propose that the fantasy in *Cymbeline* does not distance us from the play's emotional reality; rather, it functions to draw our attention to it through contrast.[25] By making the play at times unrealistic, Shakespeare hints that our concern should not be with the action *per se*, but with the emotions stirred by the action – the internal journey.

In this chapter, I aim to identify and investigate *Cymbeline*'s reliance on folk- and fairy tales. I will argue that the play doesn't merely resemble a fairy tale but reproduces actual fairy-tale storylines and motifs, which have hitherto gone largely unexamined. These will be revealed by comparing the play to various fairy tale 'types', as well as to individual stories, and highlighting reiterated patterns and motifs. Rather than analysing the whole play, I will be focusing on specific folktale strands or patterns, which I will trace through the drama, pointing up particular folk motifs as they appear.

I will also argue that *Cymbeline* utilises more than just the narrative component of fairy tales; it exploits the emotional material contained at the heart of such stories too, which is often quite primal and disturbing. I propose that Shakespeare purposely darkens and agitates this material and then draws our attention to it by playing up the fairy-tale quality of the action, highlighting through contrast the authenticity of the emotion on display. While many critics have condemned the improbable and unrealistic nature of the play, I suggest it was an important device. It functions to reveal that *Cymbeline*'s concern is not with the action as such, or 'useful information about the

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[22] Orgel, p.17

[23] Bettelheim, p.25

[24] In Charlotte Lennox and Samuel Johnson, *Shakespear Illustrated: or The Novels and Histories, on which the Plays of Shakespear are Founded* (London: Printed for A. Millar, 1753), vol. 1, p. 166

[25] R. S. White, in his book *Let Wonder Seem Familiar: Shakespeare and the Romance Ending* (London: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2000), makes a similar observation, noting: "At some points, Shakespeare seems to have enhanced, rather than explained away, the intrinsic improbabilities in his romance material, but not to the extent that the play can be seen as in any way as a sustained parody" (p.130).

external world', but with the emotion *behind* the action, 'the inner processes taking place in an individual' or 'the terrifying truths of the inner life'. Throughout the play, Shakespeare's asserts the primacy of feelings over plotting, structural cohesion, and even characterisation. As with Helena and Bertram in *All's Well*, we find the dramatist apparently capriciously putting characters into the very kind of situation which their dominant passion makes impossible, and seeing how they will emotionally react, how they will *feel*.

The Wager on the Wife's Chastity

*Cymbeline'*s most obvious link with fairy tales lies in its main plot, which centres around the wager made between Posthumus and Giacomo on Innogen's chastity. It is widely accepted that the story of a husband who wagers on his wife's chastity is derived from old folktales. Yet, there seems to be a resistance to studying the story in oral tradition, and to the idea that Shakespeare may have drawn on oral versions of the wager narrative. Focus has instead fallen Shakespeare's use of literary versions of the tale. One very recent (2007) edition of the play, for example, states: "The wager story has its roots in popular folklore, narrated many times in the medieval period, though Shakespeare seems to have based his plot on a version in Boccaccio's *Decameron*."[26]

For a long time, Boccaccio's tale II.9 was the only recognised source for the wager plotline, and the idea that Shakespeare drew on another version of the story was met with strong resistance, revealing scholars' general reluctance to stray from published texts.[27] But there are major dissimilarities between Shakespeare's story and that found in Boccaccio, and most critics now acknowledge that Shakespeare probably didn't rely solely on the *novella*. It is generally assumed that the playwright must have had another *literary* source to hand. The anonymous prose tale, *Frederyke of Jennen,* has now come to be accepted as an additional source; but a number of other written stories have been and still are being put forward as potential influences.[28]

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[26] Bate and Rasmussen, p. xiv

[27] See W. F. Thrall, "'Cymbeline', Boccaccio, and the Wager Story in England", *Studies in Philology* 28.4 (1931): 639-65. Thrall outlines the overriding attitude of renowned scholars like E. K. Chambers, J. Q. Adams, and Tucker Brooke, who are all unwilling to speculate and therefore dismiss the possibility that Shakespeare may have used a non-Boccaccian source for the play. Thrall argues that Boccaccio is inadequate, and illustrates that that the play shares a number of similarities with another literary wager tale, *Frederyke of Jennen*.

[28] Bullough, for example, includes the anonymous dramatic romance *The Rare Triumphes of Love and Fortune* as a probable source in his analysis of the play. For a detailed and modern approach to the question of the play's literary sources, see Valerie Wayne, "Romancing the Wager, *Cymbeline's*

The wager story was extremely popular in the literary narrative tradition around Shakespeare's time. It occurs in at least forty-one different European texts, which range from romances, such as the late fifteenth-century *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*; to novellas, such as Boccaccio's *Decameron* and Christine de Pizan's *Le Livre de la Cite des Dames* (1405); to dramas, including Hans Sachs German comedy *Die unschuldig fraw Genura* (1548), and the Spanish play *Eufemia,* by Lope de Rueda (1567).[29] This material has been thoroughly analysed by Gaston Paris, in his article "Le Cycle de la *Gageure*" (The Wager Cycle), published in 1903. Paris' aim was to categorise the numerous literary wager stories, dividing the different versions into three main groups based on the actions of the lead characters. A number of other scholars have subsequently analysed the wager cycle in the written tradition, mostly (like Paris) with an eye to classification.[30] Some work, however, has been done on *Cymbeline's* links with these texts, the most recent and notable of which is Valerie Wayne's "Romancing the Wager"*,* written in 2009. Wayne looks beyond Boccaccio and *Frederyke* to the broader tradition of *Le cycle de la gageure,* arguing that several of the stories should be considered as significant 'intertexts' for the play, by which she means indirect influences as opposed to conventional sources.[31]

Wayne's article is particularly useful because it points to the fact that critics are still searching for an elusive published source that would account for certain details of the wager story in *Cymbeline* that cannot be explained by either Boccaccio's tale II.9 or *Frederyke.*[32] The fact that she once more turns to the *literary* tradition to find additional sources is also a clear indicator of the general scholarly approach. As Wayne points out, however, most of the literary wager tales were very "distant... in time from the play" and probably in large part inaccessible to the dramatist.[33] I would propose, therefore, that Shakespeare may have been influenced rather or additionally by *oral* forms of the wager tale when creating his version of the story. Indeed, the fact that the

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Intertexts", in *Staging Early Modern Romance: Prose Fiction, Dramatic Romance, and Shakespeare,* eds Mary Ellen Lamb and Valerie Wayne (New York: Routledge, 2009), pp.163-187.

[29] Wayne, p.162, pp.169-170

[30] See, for example, W. H. Hulme, "A Middle English Addition to the Wager Cycle", *Modern Language Notes* 24.7 (1909): 218–22; V. Frederic Koenig, "A New Perspective on the Wager Cycle", *Modern Philology* 44.2 (1946): 76–83; and W. W. Lawrence, "The Wager in Cymbeline", *PMLA* 35.4 (1920): 391–43

[31] Wayne, p.163.

[32] What's more, Wayne's approach is very similar to my own: she urges her readers to "move beyond the realm of certainty that has been maintained by a positivist approach to sources" (p.164) when considering wager texts, and explore the parallels between these texts and *Cymbeline* even though they cannot be proven verbally – just as we cannot use verbal parallels to prove Shakespeare's reliance on oral wager stories.

[33] Wayne, p.176. She does, however, point to a number of texts which she argues Shakespeare had reason to know about.

wager theme recurs in so many printed texts attests to its popularity in the oral tradition. Printing was not yet commonplace in Shakespeare's day, so only the most beloved stories made it into text. Furthermore, as mentioned in the previous chapters, the majority of these literary stories would have been transmitted orally, and probably to a group of people, as the ability to read was not yet standard and stories were a communal affair. This symbiotic relationship between oral and written versions is reflected in many of the texts, which present their stories as being told orally. Boccaccio's tale II.9, for instance, opens with a prologue in which we are introduced to the "Queene", who will be telling her story to a group of men and women gathered around her. She opens with a proverb, told "[m]any times among the vulgar people", perhaps hinting at where the story originated, which the rest of the tale bears out.[34] *Westward for Smelts*, a British wager story recorded ten years after Shakespeare wrote his play, still portrays the tale as being told orally, this time by a group of 'old wives' passing their time on a fishing trip.[35]

There has been very little investigation into *Cymbeline*'s links with oral wager stories. A short article on the subject appears in the renowned *Enzyklopädie des Märchens,* a German encyclopaedia of folktales; however, I cannot find an English translation of the work, which would suggest it has had little impact.[36] In a brief but suggestive three-page discussion, as part of a larger analysis of the relationship between folklore and literature, Bruce Rosenberg proposes that Boccaccio's tale II.9 is insufficient as a source for Shakespeare's wager story, given the dissimilarities between the two versions, and concludes that it "would seem safer to assume that *Cymbeline* is modelled on some now lost chapbook or play, possibly even on some oral version of type 882, rather than on the Decameron tale".[37] Unfortunately, however, he does not follow up on his idea or offer any potential folktale sources.

The wager folktale is classified by folklorists as ATU 882, "The Wager on the Wife's Chastity".[38] This tale type has many variants, which have been found across fifty-five different cultures, in languages such as Swedish, Indian, Chilean, Russian, Turkish, and Chinese, among others (ATU 882). Not only is it ubiquitous, it's extremely old: Graham Anderson has traced the tale type back to antiquity, in the story of

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[34] Bullough reprints (pp.50-63) an anonymous translation of Boccaccio's tale II.9 from 1620, and it is to this version that I will be referring in the body of this chapter, with page number provided in text.
[35] Wayne, p.175.
[36] Elfriede Moser-Rath, "Cymbeline", in *Enzyklopädie des Märchens*, ed. Kurt Ranke (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1981), vol. 3, pp. 190-97.
[37] Bruce A. Rosenberg, *Folklore and Literature: Rival Siblings* (USA: University of Tennessee Press, 1991), p.66.
[38] Uther, vol. 1, ATU 882

Chaereas and Callirhoe, from perhaps as early as the first century BC or AD.[39] The basic story goes as follows: a man praises the faithfulness of his wife, and makes a wager on her chastity with a friend (or business partner), who claims he will be able to seduce her. The friend tries to sleep with the woman but fails. He manages to sneak into her bedchamber hidden in a trunk, where he steals tokens associated with her, or sees an intimate mark on her body, or both, which he uses to convince the husband he has seduced the wife. The husband then tries to murder his wife, and leaves home. She survives, however, and wanders off alone disguised as a man. She gains a position of authority, often at a foreign court. At some point, the villain, husband, and wife all come together, and the wife manages to prove her innocence. The husband repents and the villain is punished (ATU 882). The primary motifs of wager tales include: the chastity wager [motif N15]; the faithfulness of the woman; the box or trunk [K1342]; the false tokens of the wife's infidelity [K2112.1]; the disguise of the woman in man's clothing [K1837]; the casting off of the woman and a plan to kill her; the gathering together of everyone who wronged the heroine; and the punishment of the slanderer.[40]

According to Bullough, "the wager-story basic to *Cymbeline* is almost as widespread in folk-lore and literature as the 'terrible bargain' of *Measure for Measure*".[41] The 'terrible bargain' is the bedtrick, which also occurs in *All's Well*, as we saw in the preceding chapter. Bullough's comment is perhaps truer than he realised, for many wager stories actually feature bedtricks, and the two types (ATU 882 and 891) often overlap. In the popular folk story *The Twa Knights,* for example, a poor hedge knight bets that he can seduce a rich knight's wife. The wife chastely rebuffs the hedge knight, but he manages to confine her to the castle, placing her under his power. She knows he will eventually have his way with her, and so she pretends to acquiesce to his wishes, but organises instead for her niece to take her place in bed. The hedge knight sleeps with the niece, and cuts off her finger, saving it as a token to demonstrate he has won the wager. The wife is later able to prove her chastity by showing her husband her unsevered finger.[42] The wager story also overlaps with another large group of interrelated tales, ATU 883A,"The Innocent Slandered Maiden". In this group of stories, the heroine is the victim of some sort of grand deception, where her chastity is

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[39] Anderson, p. 86. After studying the tale, Anderson concludes that the story of *Chaereas and Callirhoe* is probably itself an adaptation, meaning that the tale type is even older than this ancient story (p.89).
[40] Thompson, *Motif-Index,* 6 vols. All subsequent references to folk motifs will be from this index, and will occur in text. For full titles of all motifs referred to in this chapter see the Motif Index provided at the end of this thesis.
[41] Bullough, p.12
[42] "The Twa Knights" in Child, vol. 5, no. 268, pp.21-28.

threatened through rape, seduction, or slander, and she is forced to endure many hardships until her name can be cleared and the deception resolved. The interconnectedness between these three tale types reveals the popularity of stories centring on the question of women's sexuality (and men's insecurity and fear of women's sexuality). Shakespeare was certainly alive to the potential this material offered. He drew on it again and again: *All's Well That Ends Well* and *Measure for Measure* turn on a bedtrick [motif K1340]; a wager on a wife's chastity provides the main plot for *Cymbeline* [N15]*, while a bet on wives' obedience features at the end of *The Taming of the Shrew* [N12]; and *The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, Othello,* and *The Winter's Tale* all feature the motif of the falsely accused woman [K2112]. This would suggest that the dramatist was aware of and consciously working within the broader folktale tradition when he added to the wager story as he found it in Boccaccio and *Frederyke.*

It is unclear which version of Boccaccio's tale II.9 Shakespeare referred to when writing *Cymbeline.* The earliest English translation we have of the story is from 1620, a decade after Shakespeare wrote his play. He may have been familiar with another English translation now lost to us, or known enough Italian to read the original, or perhaps he had one of the many French translations to hand.[43] Boccaccio's tale may be summarised as follows:

> At an inn in Paris, a group of Italian merchants discuss their wives' chastity. Bernabo praises his wife Ginevra's virtue, but Ambrogiuolo claims he could seduce her, which incites a wager on her chastity. Ambrogiuolo leaves for Geneway, where he bribes a poor woman in Ginevra's service to smuggle a chest into the lady's chamber, in which he conceals himself. During the night, he climbs out and notes the details of Ginevra's chamber, spies a small mole with golden hairs under her left breast, and steals a ring, purse, gown, and girdle from her bedside. With this information, Ambrogiuolo convinces Bernabo of his wife's infidelity, who then orders a faithful servant to kill Ginevra. The servant takes pity on Ginevra and only pretends to carry out the order, presenting Bernabo with bloodied clothes as evidence. Ginevra disguises herself as a man and travels overseas, where she quickly finds work and rises to a position of authority. Eventually, Ginevra discovers Ambrogiuolo's misdeeds, which are then exposed before the sultan and Bernabo. Ginevra's honour is restored, husband and wife are reunited, and Ambrogiuolo is executed.[44]

Boccaccio's story incorporates all of the tale type's major motifs, as outlined above, and follows the oral tradition quite closely. The exception perhaps is Ginevra's protracted

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[43] The numerous versions of the story point to its popularity – the publisher of the 1620 English edition noted that many of Boccaccio's tales "have long since been published before" [quoted in Roger Warren, ed., *Cymbeline* (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1998), p.27]

[44] My summary from the 1620 version reprinted in Bullough, pp.50-63.

overseas stay, which makes up an uncharacteristically large part of the narrative. This is also the case in Shakespeare's other literary source for the wager narrative, *Frederyke of Jennen,* which is very similar to Boccaccio's tale II.9, though not derived from it, as some critics believe. [45] In this story, Ambrose of Jennen is the mistrusting husband, who wagers on his wife's chastity with Johan of Florence. Johan persuades Ambrose of his wife's unfaithfulness with a purse, girdle, and ring, as well as the details of a black wart on the wife's arm. The wife flees all the way to Cairo, dressed as a man, where she becomes lord defender of all the realm, serving for twelve years before the truth is revealed and she is reunited with her husband. [46] *Frederyke of Jennen* is a prime example of the extensive popularity of the wager story. The tale first appeared in print in Germany in 1478 under the title *Historie von vier Kaufmannern* (Tale of Four Merchants). It was printed four more times by 1510, and spread to the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Britain. An English translation appeared in 1518, under the title *Frederyke of Jennen,* the name taken by the heroine when disguised as a man, and another two editions soon followed.[47] The story was even listed among the books in Captain Cox's library, next to such tales as *Bevis of Hampton* and *Guy of Warwick,* under the title *Frederick of Gene.[48]*

While incidental details may differ between tale II.9 and *Frederyke,* the tone and spirit of the two stories is remarkably similar. Both are realistic and literal renditions of the wager narrative; they are tales of action, not emotion, and follow the lead characters changing fortunes over vast distances and across great time spans, as they confront and overcome the various external obstacles placed in their paths.[49] *Cymbeline,* by contrast, is both more fanciful and more emotional, and concerns how the characters think and feel. I propose that Shakespeare modifies his written sources by (re)introducing fairy tales; specifically, by reinserting and enhancing the powerful emotional situations contained within wager folktales, but quashed in these two written transcriptions, and embellishing the fantastic quality of the folktales, which is noticeably absent from their literary equivalents. The dramatist also makes the wager story far more complex, superimposing it with several other fairy tales, incorporating both their narratives and

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[45] Thrall, p. 641. See, for instance, Jean E. Howard, "Cymbeline", in Greenblatt, p.2957 who says the one is a translation of the other.
[46] From the 1560 edition of the story reprinted in Bullough pp. 63-78. All subsequent references to *Frederyke* will be from this version, and page numbers will be provided in text.
[47] Thrall, p.641
[48] Ibid., p.642 and Louis B. Wright, *Middle-class Culture in Elizabethan England* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina University Press, 1935), p.376. See my Chapter 1 for more on Captain Cox and his library.
[49] Katharine Briggs called novella "naturalistic fairy tales", which would certainly describe the approach taken in the two narratives above (*Dictionary*, pt. A, v.2, p.367)

emotional models, each of which comes with its own personal and emotional resonances, adding layers of meaning to the story. The wager story takes precedence and gets the action going, but the action is sustained by the numerous other fairy tale threads Shakespeare interweaves with the main plotline.

Once Upon a Time

That Shakespeare's treatment of the wager story is going to be different from his two literary sources is evident from the very beginning of the play. Instead of launching straight into the wager plotline, the dramatist spends the first three scenes of *Cymbeline* introducing us to a whole host of other fairy-tale strands, which he will deftly interlace with the main plot to help flesh out the narrative.

    Cymbeline opens with a classic 'once upon a time' exposition reminiscent of countless fairy tales. Instead of a narrator, two gentlemen discuss the recent events of the kingdom, and introduce us to the main characters. Straight away we are transported into the realm of fairy stories, as we listen to a tale about "the King" (1.1.3), "the Princess" (16), "a poor but worthy gentlemen" (7), and "the Queen" (11): the King is extremely angry with his daughter, the Princess, who secretly married a man far below her station, who happens to be an orphan. The King had promised the Princess to the son of his second wife, the Princess' stepmother, who much desired the match. In a fit of rage, the King banished the Princess' lover to a distant land and imprisoned his daughter in the castle. The court is quietly pleased with the Princess's decision, though, because the Queen's son is "a thing/ Too bad for bad report" (16-17), while the "poor but worthy gentleman" the Princess chose is "most praised, most loved" (47). However, the issue is that the Princess is the sole heir to kingdom: the King had three children, but some twenty years ago the two princes were stolen from their nursery, never to be seen again.

    In these brief seventy-odd lines, Shakespeare has started off an astonishing number of fairy-tale threads: we have an angry father-king; a stepmother who seeks to advance her own child; a princess promised to an undesirable suitor; forbidden love between a royal personage and poor one; an orphan boy deemed unworthy and cast out of his home; and child princes mysteriously abducted from their nursery. Not only are there a plethora of different fairy stories, but Shakespeare has unerringly chosen those which arouse the most alarming and 'adult' fears. "Howsoe'er 'tis strange", concludes the one gentleman at the end of his extraordinary story, "Yet 'tis true" (66-7). From the

outset, then, the play establishes its links with tall tales, disturbing ones at that, and its estrangement from ordinary expectations. This is a quality shared by Shakespeare's late plays: *Pericles*, for instance, begins with the poet Gower who enters "To sing a song that old was sung" (1.1), assuring us that "*bonum quo antiquius eo melius*" (the older something is the better; 10). Throughout the play, he acts as a narrator, framing and commenting on the action, which he presents as an old tale to be guided by the imagination, not by reality: "In your imagination hold/ This stage the ship, upon whose deck/ The sea-tossed Pericles appears to speke" (10.58-60). Similarly, the very title of *The Winter's Tale* declares its affiliations with improbable stories such as might be told around a winter's fire, and this is reinforced in the plot, which is "so like an old tale, that/ the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (5.2.25-6). The late plays invite us not to look for what is probable, but rather to accept the most extraordinary coincidences and accidents as strange but true. From the very beginning, then, *Cymbeline* hints that we are in a fairy-tale realm where our concern is not going to be with 'useful information about the external world', but perhaps instead with 'the inner processes taking place in an individual'.

It is also clear from the outset of the play that Shakespeare has changed the setting of his two literary wager sources. Where Boccaccio and *Frederyke* take place in a contemporary bourgeois context, *Cymbeline* is set in ancient Britain, in the age of the early Roman Empire. It seems plausible that Shakespeare chose such a remote piece of history in order to evoke a long-ago, mythical realm evocative of fairy tales.[50] In fact, he may actually have been drawing on the oral wager tradition when deciding on the setting for his play. Folktales of type 882 seem to fall into two different groups, depending on their social contexts.[51] The first is mercantile in focus, and concerns merchants and sea-captains. These are stories like *De 'Piniated Englishman and Hellfire Jack,* a British folktale collected by Katharine Briggs; *The Falsely Accused Wife,* a story found throughout Europe; the Chilean *The Wager on the Wife's Chastity;* a German folktale entitled *The Innkeeper of Moscow;* and a Gaelic story collected on the Aran Islands by J. M. Synge.[52] Boccaccio's tale II.9 and *Frederyke of Jennen* fall into

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[50] Some critics postulate that Shakespeare chose this period of history because King Cymbeline supposedly ruled Britain during a period of peace when Christ was born, which may have appealed to King James I, who liked to see himself as a peacemaker. However, given that Christ's birth is never mentioned in the play, what seems more suggestive to me is the period's remoteness from contemporary Britain, implying a time long ago: a fairy-tale realm somewhere in Britain's mythical past.
[51] This divide is also present in the literary tradition (Wayne, p. 172; Lawrence, pp.400-1), which makes sense, given the mutual relationship between oral and literary wager stories.
[52] "De 'Piniated Englishman and Hellfire Jack", in Briggs, *Dictionary,* pt. A, vol. 2, pp.451-452; "The Falsely Accused Wife", ed. D. L. Ashliman for his online database, *Folklore and Mythology Electronic*

this category, and were probably based on oral folktales from this group. Another strain of wager folktales, however, centres on aristocratic characters and pursuits, and is set in ancient and far-away realms, resembling the setting and primary figures of *Cymbeline* more closely. The Italian folktale *Wormwood,* for example, is set in a great castle, and stars a king who makes a wager with a knight, in the company of princes, on the chastity of his wife, who is herself the daughter of a king.[53] Similarly, *The Great Narbone,* another oral Italian tale, *The Northern Lord,* an old black-letter ballad, and *The Twa Knights*, all feature kings and queens, knights and lords, and are set in castles, at court, or on large estates.[54]

The change in context means that Shakespeare will need to contrive some other reason for husband and wife to be apart so that the wager can ensue. All chastity wagers occur when the husband is away from home and in the company of another man or men. In tale II.9 and *Frederyke,* as in the mercantile folktales, the husbands are merchants, and leave their wives at home while selling their wares abroad. In the aristocratic folktales, it is often simply stated that the husband "had to go away"; there is seldom a reason given for his leaving.[55] This reveals that it is not really important where the husband goes, but rather that he leaves his wife alone, out of his control, and vulnerable to the would-be seducer. In the interests of good drama, Shakespeare does need a reason for Posthumus' departure, and engineers to have him banished by his wife's father. While at first glance this seems to be a random thread, it is conceivable that Shakespeare developed the idea from the oral tradition. A few of the wager stories feature controlling fathers who initially reject the would-be husbands as suitors for their daughters. In the Chilean folktale *The Wager on the Wife's Chastity,* for example, the father is described as a "gruff old man", whom his daughter is terrified of, and when the potential husband asks for the girl's hand in marriage, the father "turned purple with rage" and proceeded to take "a swing at the suitor with his hatchet".[56] In another version, the suitor is rejected by the father because he is poor and is deemed unworthy

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Texts (1996-2013). Available at: http://www.pitt.edu/~dash/folktexts.html [accessed 02/02/2012]; "The Wager on the Wife's Chastity", Pino-Saavedra, *Folktales of Chile* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967), no. 37, pp.189-194; "The Innkeeper of Moscow", Kurt Ranke, *Folktales of Germany* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1996), no.38, pp.90-94; J. M. Synge, *The Aran Islands* (Boston: J. W. Luce & Company, 1911), pp.40-46.

[53] "Wormwood", in Italo Calvino, *Italian Folktales* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), no.157, pp. 563-568

[54] "The Great Narbone", in Calvino, no. 176, pp. 636-638; "The Northern Lord", J. P. Collier, *Broadside Black-Letter Ballads* (New York: B. Franklin, 1868), pp. 48-5; Child, no. 268.

[55] See Calvino no. 157, for example, p.564

[56] Pino-Saavedra, p.190

of the daughter (much as Cymbeline rejects the commoner Posthumus as a mate for his royal daughter).[57]

Tyrannical Father-King

It is not hard to imagine Shakespeare hearing stories like this and being reminded of other folktales featuring angry or tyrannical fathers. A prolific story tradition revolves around a virtuous heroine who is persecuted by her overbearing father. The persecution can take a variety of forms. In stories like *Catskin* (ATU 510B), the father incestuously desires his daughter, forcing her to flee from the castle and into the great unknown, disguised in rags, where she has many Cinderella-like adventures.[58] In *The Bear* (ATU 510B)*,* an English story collected by Andrew Lang, a king loves his daughter so much he cannot bear losing her, and so imprisons her in her rooms, which she similarly escapes by disguising herself.[59] The Scottish heroine "Rashie Coat" leaves her home because her father, the king, wants her "to marry a man whom she did not love".[60] A related group of stories combines forbidden love with imprisonment: a princess desires one man but her father prefers another, and as a result of her faithfulness to her betrothed, she is confined by her father in a dark tower or underground prison, which she eventually escapes in order to be with her lover (cf. ATU 870, "The Princess Confined in the Mound"). These stories resonate quite strongly with *Cymbeline*, where Innogen is imprisoned in the castle by her father because she desires one man (Posthumus) while her father prefers another (Cloten), which eventually leads to her leaving home and disguising herself in order to find her beloved.

Shakespeare was certainly familiar with at least one group of stories about persecuted heroines and their domineering fathers. Belsey has demonstrated how Cordelia's plight in *King Lear* echoes the popular folktale type "Love Like Salt" (ATU 923), where a young girl is cast out of her home and deprived of her inheritance by her father after she tells him she loves him "as fresh meat loves salt", which he interprets as an insult.[61] In the opening of *Pericles,* moreover, we are told that King Antiochus has kept potential suitors from marrying his daughter by requiring that they answer a riddle or die. We soon learn that the reason for this ridiculous condition is because the King is

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[57] Synge, pp.40-1.
[58] "Catskin" in Jacobs, *English Fairy Tales*, pp.314-318
[59] "The Bear", in Andrew Lang, *The Grey Fairy-Book* (New York: Dover, 1967), p.269
[60] "Rashie Coat" in Briggs, *Dictionary,* pt. A, vol.1, p.455
[61] See Belsey, pp. 42-64

actually engaged in an incestuous relationship with his daughter. This harks back to tales like *Catskin,* and may have been Shakespeare's way of pointing out the deeper psychological drive behind the popular motif of overprotective fathers. Indeed, the dramatist seems to have been preoccupied with the relationship between fathers and daughters in his late plays: he explores it not only with Lear and Cordelia, Antiochus and his daughter, and Cymbeline and Innogen, but also Prospero and Miranda in *The Tempest,* and Leontes and Perdita in *The Winter's Tale.* This led B. J. Sokol to argue that a "shadowy incest motif" lurks behind all the late plays:

> Prospero suffers from a problem found in all four of Shakespeare's last plays: the problem of imagining any man worthy of the marvellous young heroines of these plays. So the future son-in-law Lysimachus in *Pericles* is caught creeping in a brothel, Posthumus in *Cymbeline* is incredibly boastful, gullible and mistrusting, and Florizel in *The Winter's Tale* when fleeing paternal wrath becomes uselessly seasick. Ferdinand arrives on Prospero's island literally wet, being the unheroic first to jump overboard from the wreck... [The Romance plays] tend to belittle son-in-law figures, and to adore daughters. [62]

Considering this, it is plausible that Shakespeare may have been familiar with the wider folktale tradition, and have drawn on it here in *Cymbeline,* linking it to the wager tradition by the motif of the jealously possessive father.

When we first meet King Cymbeline, he certainly lives up to the domineering father-king archetype. After the gentlemen's opening prologue, the "poor but worthy" Posthumus and Princess Innogen enter the scene with the Queen, who warns the young couple to speak quickly as "the fire of rage" is in the King (1.1.78). As the pair is saying their farewells, preparing for Posthumus' imminent departure to his place of exile, the King bursts in, and his rage is indeed formidable. "Thou basest thing", he yells at Posthumus, who quickly disappears, "Thou'rt poison to my blood" (126; 129). Innogen is left to bear her father's anger alone. He hurls abuse at her – "O disloyal thing" (133), "Past grace, obedience" (137), "O thou vile one" (144), "Thou foolish thing" (152) – and inveighs against her in terms reminiscent of *King Lear*: "let her anguish/ A drop of blood a day, and being aged/ Die of this folly" (167-8).

This quick glimpse of the couple before Posthumus departs is Shakespeare's addition to his literary sources, both of which begin with the husband already separated from his wife. In many of the wager folktales, however, we are shown the husband and wife together prior to the wager. In following the oral tradition, Shakespeare allows us to get a sense of the relationship between Innogen and Posthumus, which will later

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[62] B. J. Sokol, *The undiscover'd country: New Essays on Psychoanalysis and Shakespeare* (London: Free Association Books, 1993), p.198

influence how we interpret Posthumus' treatment of his wife. What stands out from the couple's brief encounter is their devotion to each other, and their pain at having to be separated. Innogen is crying and Posthumus is on the brink of tears: "O lady, weep no more, lest I give cause/ To be suspected of more tenderness/ Than doth become a man" (94-96). Both promise to be eternally loyal to each other, and exchange tokens to seal their love. Innogen gives Posthumus her mother's ring, telling him to keep it until he woos another wife, "When Innogen is dead" (114). Posthumus in return gives her a bracelet, naming it "a manacle of love", and her his "fairest prisoner" (123-4). The objects the lovers exchange here prove crucial in later scenes, serving as identity or recognition tokens [motif H80]. Shakespeare has used such talismans before, as we saw in *All's Well*, where they served as proof that Helena slept with the unwitting Bertram. Identity tokens are a common feature of countless folktales, and they appear once more in stories of type 882, although we do not hear of them before they are stolen from the heroine's bedside by the villain, and later used as false evidence of her infidelity. Shakespeare introduces the tokens earlier and makes them positive symbols of the couple's love for each other, attaching to them a greater weight of personal and emotional significance.

After the couple have exchanged their love tokens, the King enters and Posthumus hurriedly exits. When we next see Innogen's husband, he is in his place of banishment. In 1.4, the scene changes from Cymbeline's castle in ancient Britain to what appears to be contemporary sixteenth-century Italy. This utter disregard for temporal cohesion has been perceived as one of the play's greatest flaws, but perhaps it functions much in the same way as the gentleman's opening comment: to alert us early on that we are in a fairy tale realm, where ordinary expectations of probability and consistency do not apply. Fairy tales begin with 'once upon a time' or some equivalent, which immediately sets the story in any time, or no time. And they are often situated in a never-never land – consider, for example, the Norwegian story where the heroine has to travel to a castle that is "east of the sun and west of the moon", a geographical location that suggests an otherworldly realm, given that the sun rises in the east.[63] Time and place is not what is important in these stories; the focus is on the journey itself, on overcoming the obstacles in one's path. The same could be said of *Cymbeline*: there is a fairy-tale quality to the play that transcends time and place, indicating that our focus should not be on external realities, but on the characters and their emotional journeys.

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[63] "East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon", in Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* pp.186-200

The Chastity Wager

With the move to present-day Italy and the house of Filario, the play aligns itself more
closely with its literary wager sources. While the group of men gathered at Filario's
house are not merchants, as in Boccaccio or *Frederyke,* the scene is otherwise very
similar in style to these stories. In both literary tales, the wager arises at an inn, where a
group of men are gathered companionably around a table eating, drinking, and
discussing diverse matters. There is also a cosmopolitan air to the gathering, especially
in *Frederyke,* where the men hail from diverse regions (France, Spain and the Italian
provinces of Florence and Genoa).[64] Similarly, in *Cymbeline,* a diverse group of men (a
Frenchman, Spaniard, Dutchman, Englishman and two Italians), most of whom are
guests, are gathered around the dinner table, amicably chatting, when the discussion
turns to the virtue of "our country mistresses" (1.4.49). Perhaps, as well as establishing
the play's fairy-tale rules, Shakespeare's extraordinary union of aristocratic characters
in ancient Britain and foreigners in Renaissance Italy was a nod to the two strains of
wager folktales. There is, in fact, one folktale which similarly merges the two traditions:
The Chest, an old Scottish story collected by Joseph Campbell, tells the tale of a king
who makes a wager with a sea-captain, betting his heirship against bolts of silk that his
wife cannot be seduced.[65]

While Shakespeare's set-up of the wager scene may follow his literary sources,
he makes a few noteworthy changes to the handling of the wager itself [motif N15].
These changes reveal the dramatist's ability to read between the lines of his source
material, and dramatise the unstated emotional material contained therein.

In Boccaccio and *Frederyke,* Bernabo and Ambrose openly praise their wives as
being infinitely virtuous: Bernabo "boldly avouch[es]...that he has a wife so perfectly
complete in all graces and vertues, as any Lady in the world could possibly be" (p.51),
while Ambrose declares that he "has at home a good wife and a virtuous woman...
[who] will have none other man but me alone" (p.65). Furthermore, both men agree to
the wagers on their wives' chastity without hesitation. These qualities are typical of

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[64] In Boccaccio, the men are all Italian, however they are well-travelled and are meeting at a French inn.
Valerie Wayne has proposed that the inclusion of characters from France, Italy, and Spain in *Frederyke*
may have been a way of acknowledging the different countries in which wager stories were commonly
told: "The merchants present for the wager in *Frederyke* appear to serve as traces of its earlier retellings".
She adds that given that Shakespeare included another nationality in his gathering with the addition of a
Dutchman, perhaps he was also noting the tale's Dutch associations (pp.173-4). I believe her theory has
merit: the old ballad *The Northern Lord* stars a Dutchman, who slanders the wife of an Englishman, while
at a German court.
[65] "The Chest", in Campbell, vol.2, no. XVIII, pp. 9-16.

stories of type 882, in which the husband often boasts of his wife's faithfulness and unfailingly agrees to the wager. [66] On the surface, then, the wager would suggest the husband's confidence in his wife's fidelity. But, if fairy tales typically embody some powerful emotional drama, perhaps it is possible to approach the story from another angle. If the husband were so sure of his wife's loyalty, why would he feel the need to test it by having another man attempt to seduce her? Perhaps, then, the wager doesn't really express the husband's proclaimed confidence but rather his insecurity and deep-seated suspicion of his wife. Her chastity and fidelity are, in effect, being put on trial.

Shakespeare appears to have recognised the underlying anxiety motivating the wager narrative, and he brings it to the surface and emphasises it through the character of Posthumus. In the beginning of the wager scene, we learn that Posthumus has already got into trouble in the past for making bold claims about Innogen's virtue. In France, he was involved in a public argument with some local men, when he claimed "upon warrant of bloody affirmation" that his wife was "more fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant, qualified, and less/ attemptable than any the rarest...ladies in France" (1.4.50-1). This argument, which is Shakespeare's addition to his literary sources, hints at Posthumus' rashness and his exaggerated confidence in his wife. These qualities are then underscored when the Italian Giacomo begins teasing Posthumus about Innogen, and Posthumus once more rises to the occasion: "Being so far provoked as I was in France I would/ abate her nothing" (57-9); "Your Italy contains none so accomplished a courtier/ to convince the honour of my mistress" (83-4).

It is in response to this that Giacomo proposes the wager, betting Posthumus that he will be able to seduce Innogen "with no more advantage/ than the opportunity of a second conference" (111-113). The Italian is clear about his incentive: "I/ make my wager rather against your confidence," he says to Posthumus, "than her reputation" (95-6). At two points in the discussion, the host Filario interjects, sensing the conversation is getting out of hand: "Let us leave here, gentlemen" (87), he says first, and later "enough of this. It came in too suddenly./ Let it die as it were born" (105-6). Filario's level-headed objections, which are also Shakespeare's invention, serve to point out through contrast that Posthumus is behaving impetuously, and responding emotionally rather than rationally. Evidently Giacomo's taunting has hit a nerve. When the Italian proposes the wager, Posthumus eagerly agrees: "My mistress/ Exceeds in goodness the hugeness of your unworthy thinking. I dare you to this match" (127-9). Filario tries to declare it

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[66] In "The Chest", for instance, the husband claims he has "a wife many of whose equals are not to be got" (p.11), while in "The Falsely Accused Wife", the wife's virtue is "without question" (no pagination).

"no lay" (130), but it's no good: "I embrace these conditions", declares Posthumus, "let us have articles betwixt us" (137). Ruth Nevo points out that Posthumus' response to the wager conflicts with "the expected knightly procedure": "Surely in such circumstances a man would challenge the slanderer, even the mere doubter of his mistress's honour, to a duel without further ado. It is himself, against his adversary, that he would put to the test, not his inviolate lady".[67]

By having Posthumus excessively boast about Innogen not once, as in all other wager tales, but on two separate occasions, and then readily agree to the wager on her chastity despite the sensible and repeated objections of Filario, Shakespeare increases the rash, foolish, and farfetched behaviour of his protagonist in accepting a wager on his wife's purity. At the same time, though, the dramatist hints that it is perhaps not confidence motivating Posthumus' wild behaviour but an innate insecurity. This will be confirmed later, when Giacomo returns with 'proof' of Innogen's infidelity.

Entrance into Girl's Room (Bed) by Trick

Meanwhile, Giacomo heads to Britain to make his attempt on Innogen's chastity. Shakespeare drastically reduces the time in which Giacomo has to seduce Innogen: typically, the villains are given long and realistic time limits in which they may use whatever means possible to entice the wives. Ambrogiuolo is given three months (p.54); the folktale trickster from *Wormwood* is allowed one month; and the villain from *The Twa Knights* has a whole nine months. Giacomo, however, must seduce Innogen "with no more advantage/ than the opportunity of a second conference" (1.4.112-3). Changing this small detail increases the fantasy element of the play, and pushes us to adopt a fairy-tale perspective on the action.

In 1.6, Giacomo arrives at Innogen's home, bearing a letter of introduction from Posthumus. He is immediately struck by the Princess' beauty and acknowledges he may have a hard task ahead of him (15-18), but is determined nonetheless: "Boldness be my friend;/ Arm me audacity from head to foot" (18-9). He starts working on her at once, flattering her outrageously while simultaneously suggesting Posthumus has been playing her false: "What, are men mad?", he begins, referring to Posthumus' supposed choice of another woman over Innogen, "for apes and monkeys,/ 'Twixt two such shes, would chatter this way and/ Contemn with mows the other" (33; 40-2). The Italian

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[67] Ruth Nevo, "*Cymbeline:* The Rescue of the King", in *Shakespeare's Romances,* ed. Alison Thorne (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), p.98

proceeds to paint an unfavourable picture of Posthumus as "the jolly Briton" (68), and Innogen eventually catches on: "My lord, I fear,/ Has forgot Britain" (113-4). "And himself" (115), Giacomo responds, seizing his chance: "Be revenged," (127) he suggests, and offers himself up for her use, "I dedicate myself to your sweet pleasure" (137). The moment her fidelity is threatened, Innogen sees through Giacomo, and responds with outrage: "Away, I do condemn mine ears that have/ So long attended thee" (142-3). She denounces him, and refuses to doubt Posthumus: "Thou wrong'st a gentleman who is as far/ From thy report as thou from honour" (146-7).

In both tale II.9 and *Frederyke*, the villains Ambrogiuolo and Johan do not actually meet the heroine, but decide on her reputation alone that they will not be able to deceive her. In neither story, therefore, are we given the chance to see the heroine actually rebuff the man who would attempt to seduce her. Shakespeare deviates from his literary sources and brings the story in line with the oral tradition, where the lady and the trickster often come together in a superb scene. In *The Great Narbone,* for example, the husband's minister attempts to seduce his wife, a princess, and she is so affronted she slaps him. The heroine from the *Twa Knights* responds just as violently when the villain suggests she cheat on her husband:

> If ye warna my lord's brother,
> And him sae far frae hame,
> Even before my ain bower-door
> I'd gar hang you on a pin.[68]

Innogen displays a similar strength of character in her conversation with Giacomo, promising to tell the King of Giacomo's "assault" (151). This is important since Innogen's refusal here to be unfaithful to her Posthumus or to doubt his constancy will make a sharp contrast with her husband's ready jealousy later on.

Giacomo manages to save himself from punishment by pretending he was merely testing the Princess: "O happy Leonatus! I may say/ The credit that thy lady hath of thee/ Deserves thy trust (157-9). He begs Innogen's pardon, which she grants, and then asks her to guard a trunk overnight, which he claims is filled with "plate of rare device, and jewels/ Of rich and exquisite form" (190-1). Unsuspecting, Innogen agrees, and offers to keep it in her own bedchamber. [69] Giacomo gives us no hint that he intends

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[68] Child, no. 268, p.26

[69] In nearly all wager tales, there is a female go-between who helps the trickster get into the lady's bedroom. Sometimes she is a servant, and sometimes she is (or pretends to be) a relative of the heroine's. Regardless, she is always in a position of trust but nonetheless betrays the heroine. Shakespeare omits the middle-woman, but he retains the motif of the treacherous female who seeks to manipulate the heroine for her own ends in the form of Innogen's wicked stepmother.

to hide himself in the trunk and thereby gain access to Innogen's chamber in order to win the wager [motif K1340]. Many of Shakespeare's audience, however, would have been familiar with the storyline, and may have anticipated what happens next. But the dramatist used this to his advantage, relying on his audience's familiarity with the storyline and toying with their expectations.

When we next see Innogen, she is lying in bed, and Giacomo's trunk is dangerously close to her person. "Who's there?" (2.2.1), the scene begins, which immediately sets us on edge, but she is only calling for her serving woman. It is almost midnight, so the Princess marks her place in her book, and says a quick prayer to the gods to protect her from "fairies and tempters of the night" (9), before going to sleep.[70] Then, as she lies quietly dreaming, the lid of the trunk gradually creaks open, and out comes Giacomo [motif K1342], who tip-toes towards Innogen's bed, and stares intently at the unsuspecting Princess. It is the stuff nightmares are made of, and dramatises a common fear: a stranger hiding somewhere in your room, waiting for the deepest, darkest part of the night to sneak up on you while you lie helpless. The sense of danger is palpable, especially given the high stakes of the wager. When Giacomo then compares himself to Tarquin, who "thus/ Did softly press the rushes ere" he savagely raped Lucrece (12-13), we expect the worst, and this is reinforced when, unable to resist the beauty of the naked Princess, he reaches down to kiss Innogen.[71] But, instead of raping her, he delivers a poetic tribute to her beauty, describing her lips, skin, eyes, and the sweet smell of her breath in exquisite detail. "And all the time, while we listen and look," Caroline Spurgeon remarks, "the strange, mysterious, baffling contrast is ever being pressed upon us, between the freshness and delicacy of the senses which enable a man thus to enjoy and describe beauty, and the murkiness and foulness of his mind and intentions."[72] Recalling his purpose, Giacomo coolly moves about the room gathering the evidence that will make it *seem* like he slept with the Princess. He notes the details of her bedchamber, steals a bracelet off her arm, and then spies a "mole, cinque spotted, like the crimson drops/ I'th'bottom of a cowslip" (38-39) on her left breast. "This

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[70] Shakespeare may be alluding here to the popular belief that male fairies sexually preyed on chaste young women (discussed in chapter 1), which would have had particular significance for the audience, who know that the villainous Giacomo is currently hidden in a trunk, planning some foul means of violating Innogen's chastity.

[71] This moment is distinctly reminiscent of stories belonging to ATU 425A "The Animal Bridegroom" (discussed in chapter 2), including stories like *Cupid and Psyche*, where one character voyeuristically stares at the other who lies asleep. Often, as in the play, the character cannot resist the beauty of the sleeping victim and has to kiss him straight away. See for instance "East O'the Sun and West O'the Moon", in Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* pp.186-200.

[72] Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What it Tells us* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p.68

secret", he happily declares, "Will force [Posthumus] think I have picked the lock and ta'en/ The treasure of her honour" (40-2). Satisfied, he moves back towards the trunk; but before we can relax, the threat of rape reappears: Giacomo notes the book Innogen had been reading before bed is opened to the story of Tereus, who raped Philomela, and the page is folded at the very point where the heroine "gave up" (45). We hold our breath, but once again nothing happens, and Giacomo gets back into the trunk, closing the lid behind him.

This scene is a model example of how Shakespeare uses his folktale sources. Firstly, it reveals the dramatist's ability to draw out the underlying emotion, the human significance, behind the action. In most wager stories, the villain simply gets out of the trunk and looks at the woman, sometimes stealing an item or two as well, before returning to his hiding spot. The emphasis is on the evidence he gathers. There is no overt suggestion of rape; however, the threat *is* present, and on some level the audience recognises this. This was made clear in a rare, eyewitness-account of an audience's reaction to this moment as they listened to a typical folktale of type 882. The narrator, an old Irish man, described the scene simply:

> As soon as she was asleep, the Captain came out of his box, and he had some means of making a light, for he lit the candle. He went over to the bed where she was sleeping without disturbing her at all, or doing any bad thing, and he took the two rings off the board, and blew out the light, and went down again into the box.

Despite the narrator's assurance that the villain did not disturb the heroine or do 'any bad thing', the audience still sensed the threat: when the narrator paused after delivering these lines,

> a deep sigh of relief rose from the men and women who had crowded in while the story was going on, till the kitchen was filled with people. As the Captain was coming out of his box the girls, who had appeared to know no English, stopped their spinning and held their breath with expectation.[73]

Both Boccaccio and the author of *Frederyke* gloss over this moment, suppressing the dark undercurrents of the folktale versions. Boccaccio, for example, adds a daughter to the scenario, so that Ambrogiuolo finds Ginevra in bed with her young child, both of whom are "sweetly sleeping", thus repressing any sexual implications to his looking at the pair (p.55).[74] Shakespeare, however, perhaps influenced by oral versions of the story, brings to the surface and reinforces the dark

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[73] Synge, p.43. Synge recorded this story (and his experience of hearing it told) while travelling around the Aran Islands in Ireland, where he collected much local folklore over a number of years.
[74] In *Frederyke*, the mark the villain spies is not on the lady's breast, but on her arm. This significantly less private space lessens the sense of defilement (p.69).

potential underlying the villain's spying on the heroine. By framing the action with two famous instances to rape, and having Giacomo actually kiss the heroine, the dramatist makes the physical threat to Innogen's chastity explicit. In so doing, Shakespeare raises our expectations of violence, which in turn heightens our sense of relief when that threatened violence does not occur. At the same time, however, Shakespeare undercuts that relief by building up the second sense of violation underpinning the scene: Giacomo may not literally rape Innogen, but he metaphorically violates her. He penetrates her chamber, invading her privacy with his peering eyes, and steals the bracelet off her arm. The bracelet was the love token given to her by Posthumus, and its removal has sexual implications: Giacomo is meddling with the bond or "manacle" that binds Innogen and Posthumus together. Moreover, by successfully lying to Posthumus about her fidelity, Giacomo effectively rapes Innogen's honour.

The scene is also important because it is on one level completely improbable: as Granville-Barker says, "from the first there is something fantastic about the fellow...no tragically-potent scoundrel, we should be sure, will ever come out of a trunk".[75] Shakespeare certainly seems to play-up the fictionality of the scene: Giacomo's slow creeping from the trunk, combined with his lyrical tribute to Innogen's beauty and exaggerated movements as he sneaks around the bedroom, taking notes of what he sees, makes for a "carefully prepared set-piece".[76] What's more, in the background, a clock strikes three times, marking the passage of three hours, and yet Giacomo has only spoken fifty lines. Clearly, we are watching something out of an old tale. And yet, as numerous productions have verified, this scene is one of the most powerful in the whole play; indeed, it was this moment that seems to have stuck most in Simon Forman's mind. Evidently, the fantastic nature of the scene does not undermine its emotional power. Rather, it accentuates it: just as Giacomo's beautiful description of Innogen serves to highlight through contrast the 'murkiness and foulness of his mind and intentions', so the fairy-tale quality of the action serves to intensify the real and sordid human situation at its core, and the threat to Innogen's chastity.

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[75] Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1927-1947), v.2, pp.305-6.
[76] Kermode, p.24

Snow-White and Rose-Red

Giacomo's description of Innogen as she lies sleeping is intriguing for another reason. It is rich in colour imagery, and two particular colours seem to dominate his account: white and red. Innogen is a "fresh lily,/ And whiter than the sheets!" (15-16); her lips are "Rubies unparagoned" (17). The mole Giacomo spies on her left breast, which is presumably as white as the rest of her, is "cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops/ I'th' bottom of a cowslip" (38-9).[77] This colour pattern has clear fairy tale associations, and evokes in particular the story of Snow White, who has skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood [motif Z65.1].[78] Shakespeare develops this storyline in detail later on, as we shall see, and so perhaps by alluding to these colours here, he is foreshadowing Innogen as a Snow White-figure.[79]

The False Tokens of the Wife's Unfaithfulness

While Ambrogiuolo and Johan have to remain in their trunks for three whole nights before the chests are removed from the virtuous woman's bedchamber, Giacomo is free from his hiding place after just one night, a change which increases the sense of pace. He arrives back in Italy in record time: after one brief scene, which supposedly shows the morning after Giacomo has spied on Innogen, we see Giacomo back at Filario's house. This is consistent with fairy tales, where characters often travel great distances very quickly.

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[77] In Boccaccio it is a small mole with golden hairs, while in *Frederyke* it is a black wart. Shakespeare's changing it to a red-spotted mole may have with the intention of evoking the fairy-tale pattern of snow-white and rose-red.

[78] Interestingly, in some ancient versions of *Snow White*, the heroine is raped. Shakespeare may have been familiar with such stories as Ovid records a version in his *Metamorphoses* (book 11, lines 295-345). In Ovid's rendition, the heroine is called Chione ('Snow girl' or 'Snowey'), and when she is seen by two men they fall instantly in love with her. The first one waits until she is in a deep sleep (much as Innogen is) and then rapes her, while the second disguises himself as an old woman, gaining access to her chamber and then raping her (much how the villain in the wager tales often uses an old woman to gain access to the virtuous wife's chambers). These means of carrying out the rape – putting the victim to sleep and disguising as an old woman – are still present in modern versions of *Snow White,* even though the actual rape has been dropped: the wicked stepmother dresses up as an old woman in order to harm the heroine, and puts her into a deathlike sleep (Anderson, pp.46-49).

[79] Shakespeare may have developed this idea from the oral wager tradition: "The Twa Knights" similarly seems to embed a *Snow White*-like colour pattern. The villain tries to bribe the wife to sleep with him with red and white money: "I hae a coffer o gude red gowd,/ Another o white monie; I woud gie you 't a', my gay lady, /To lye this night wi me" (p.26). And he describes the heroine with a phrase distinctly reminiscent of that used by Giacomo, calling her "my lady white like flowers" (p.28). In "The Northern Lord", too, there is a similar emphasis on the whiteness of the heroine: where her older sister is described as "browne", she is "beautiful and faire" (p.48).

Giacomo wastes no time in revealing the proof of his 'success' to Posthumus. In most wager stories, the evidence produced by the villain is a combination of tokens stolen from the heroine's bedside [motif K2112.1] and knowledge of an intimate mark on her body [motif H50]. In such cases, the tokens appear superfluous, because the husband is only convinced of his wife's infidelity by the villain's familiarity with the intimate mark. Ambrose, for example, does not believe any of Johan's evidence, until the black wart is mentioned, at which point "fel he in a sownde" (p.70). Similarly, Bernabo dismisses his wife's jewels and Ambrogiuolo's knowledge of Ginevra's chambers as insufficient proof, declaring Ambrogiuolo needs "some other more apparent and pregnant token" (p.56). When Ambrogiuolo mentions the wart, however, Bernabo feels as if he has been stabbed, and "by the changing of his colour, it was noted manifestly, (being unable to utter one word) that Ambrogiuolo had spoken nothing but the truth" (p.56). In *Cymbeline,* however, the situation is quite different.

Giacomo reveals his evidence one piece at a time, in an effort to toy with Posthumus. His virtuosity is wasted, however, because Posthumus is oddly eager to believe in his wife's unfaithfulness. Consistent with the wager tradition, Posthumus rejects Giacomo's descriptions of Innogen's chamber as proof the Italian was there: "this you might have heard of here, by me/ Or by some other" (2.4.77-8). But when Giacomo reveals the next piece of evidence, which is equally circumstantial, Posthumus is already convinced. On seeing Innogen's bracelet, Posthumus declares: "O, no, no, no – 'tis true!" (2.4.106). Filario, once more acting as the voice of reason, is so shocked by Posthumus' capitulation that he intervenes: "Have patience, sir" (113), he pleads, and offers an alternate explanation as to how Giacomo may have come by the bracelet. In stories of type 882, whether literary or oral, it is the husband who typically offers such counter-evidence. Filario's comment briefly mollifies Posthumus, until Giacomo simply swears he took the bracelet off Innogen's arm. Without needing any further evidence, Posthumus is ready to declare definitively:

> 'Tis true, nay, keep the ring, 'tis true...
> ... he hath enjoyed her.
> The cognizance of her incontinency
> Is this.   123-128

Filario once more interjects – "This is not strong enough to be believed/ Of one persuaded well of" (131-2) – but to no avail: "Never talk on't", says Posthumus, "she hath been colted by him" (133-4).

Giacomo hasn't even mentioned the mole yet, which he assumed would be the 'voucher' or token that would convince Posthumus of Innogen's unfaithfulness. Rather than being the crucial piece of evidence that *establishes* the heroine's guilt, as it is in the source tales, then, the mole in *Cymbeline* merely serves to *confirm* Innogen's disloyalty:

> *Gia:*   If you seek
> For further satisfying, under her breast –
> Worthy the pressing – lies a mole...
>   You do remember
> This stain upon her?
> *Post:*   Ay, and it doth confirm
> Another stain as big as hell can hold   133-140

Shakespeare, then, deviates from his source material and has Posthumus accept Innogen's guilt on insufficient secondary evidence. This small but significant change emphasises the absurdity of Posthumus' actions. The fact that he wagered on his wife's fidelity in the first place is hard enough to credit, but his ready belief in her guilt is ridiculous. This is reinforced by Filario, who represents a logical, unbiased opinion, and is openly astonished at Posthumus' bizarre willingness to accept Giacomo's 'proof'. At the same time, however, by having Posthumus accept Innogen's guilt on inadequate evidence, Shakespeare points up that on some level Posthumus already doubted her loyalty. Posthumus was not looking to prove his wife's innocence but to confirm her guilt.[80] It was not, then, confidence that inspired his wager on her chastity, but an overwhelming sexual anxiety. The climax of this anxiety occurs in Posthumus' hysterical soliloquy in which he launches into a vitriolic rant about the whole female gender. In 2.5., Posthumus moves from denouncing Innogen to a general condemnation of all women as vice-ridden 'devils': 'there's no motion/ That tends to vice in man but I affirm/ It is the woman's part' (13; 20-22). This leap in logic highlights his irrationality and intense insecurity: this is precisely the man who would not only wager on his wife's chastity, and then accept her guilt on insufficient evidence, but go on to organise to have Innogen murdered, as he does next in 3.1. So, by making Posthumus' actions extreme and far-fetched, Shakespeare doesn't distance us from the character's emotional reality, rather he draws our attention to it, underscoring the basic human emotion underlying the wager narrative: sexual anxiety. Through emphasising and enhancing Posthumus' sexual anxiety, which was hinted at in the wager scene (1.4) and is developed in full in

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[80] This brings to mind John Donne's cynical song about the falsehood of women, *Go, and Catch a Falling Star,* in which he asserts that the possibility of finding a "woman true and fair" is about as probable as catching a falling star, reciting all of history perfectly, or finding singing mermaids, and so on. See A. J. Smith, ed., *The Complete English Poems [of] John Donne* (Harmondsworth, England: Penguin, 1971), pp.77-8

the revelation scene (2.4), Shakespeare grounds the character's outwardly incredible actions in an accessible internal psychology, and lays the groundwork for the elaborate set of repentances at the end of the play.

The Compassionate Executioner

Once the husbands in wager narratives have been convinced of their wives' infidelity, they always attempt to murder the maligned women. Sometimes, the husband himself will commit the deed, by flinging his wife into a pond, throwing her from a castle window, or beating her up and leaving her for dead in the woods.[81] Most often, though, the husband enlists the aid of a faithful servant to do his dirty work for him. On some pretence, the servant takes the heroine into the woods or some other isolated, wild place, but instead of murdering the woman, he takes pity on her, and sets her free to wander alone through the wilds [motif K512]. The servant then returns to his master and pretends he has carried out the deed, offering some bloody token(s) as false evidence of the girl's death.

When Posthumus' servant Pisanio receives a letter from his master commanding him to take Innogen into the woods and kill her, he is horrified. He knows at once that the accusation of adultery against Innogen is false: "O master, what a strange infection/ Is fall'n into thy ear!" (3.2.3-4); and he is loath to harm her:

> How? That I should murder her,
> Upon the love and truth and vows which I
> Have made to thy command? I her? Her blood?
> If it be so to do good service, never
> Let me be counted serviceable.   11-14

Pisanio's reaction is typical of the wager tradition: the faithful servants are always reluctant to carry out their masters' orders. In *Frederyke,* Ambrose has to threaten his servant on pain of death to carry out the deed (pp.70-71); and the servant from the folktale *The Falsely Accused Wife* leads his mistress into the forest "with a heavy heart".[82] The servants, then, are easily able to perceive the heroines' purity, and are averse to hurting the women. Their behaviour thus serves as a strong counterpoint to that of the husbands, who have been blinded by their emotional anxieties and seem unable to perceive the virtue of their wives and the folly of their actions.

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[81] Briggs, *Dictionary,* p.452; Synge, p. 44; Calvino no.157, p.565. This is certainly dark and violent material for a supposedly light-hearted 'comedy'.
[82] Ashliman, "The Falsely Accused Wife", *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts,* no pagination

Despite Pisanio's hesitations, however, he begins to carry out his master's orders, giving Innogen a letter from Posthumus which requests that she meet her husband at Milford Haven, a remote spot on the coast of Wales. Innogen is overjoyed at the thought of seeing Posthumus again – "O for a horse with wings!" (48) – and makes preparations to leave immediately.

Into the Woods

Innogen's departure from home and into the woods echoes the structure of innumerable fairy tales.[83] Myriad folk protagonists begin their journeys by leaving the safety of the familiar, civilised world and entering into the unknown:

> Inevitably they find their way into the forest. It is there that they lose and find themselves. It is there that they gain a sense of what is to be done. The forest is always large, immense, great and mysterious. ... It is not only Hansel and Gretel who get lost in the forest and return the wiser and fulfilled.[84]

The forest (or a similarly wild space) is a mysterious realm. It represents the "dark, hidden, near impenetrable world of our unconscious", which we enter when "we have lost the framework which gave structure to our past life and must now find our own way to become ourselves".[85] Characters often get lost in the woods, just as we often get emotionally overwhelmed by our fears and anxieties. The forest can be a place of refuge and offer the opportunity for growth, but it can also be a perilous place, fraught with danger and the possibility for destruction.[86] For Innogen, the woods are primarily a place of refuge; but for Posthumus, who leaves home for Italy, a metaphorical forest renowned for leading young men astray, the woods are perilous and he nearly loses himself. Whether for good or evil, the forest is a transformative space, a place of

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[83] Fairy tales follow a reasonably predictable structure, which has been the focus of numerous scholars' work, such as Vladimir Propp's *The Morphology of the Folktale*, Claude Lévi-Strauss' "The Structural Study of Myth", and Joseph Campbell's *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*. However, fairy-tale patterns are usually not as rigid as some of these structuralists would believe; but D. L. Ashliman has proposed a simple, three-part formula which does seem to hold for the majority of wonder stories. See Ashliman, *Handbook,* pp.41-2.

[84] Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1989), p.43.

[85] Bettelheim, p. 94

[86] In Shakespeare's day, the threat of danger in a forest would have been real – the forest represented the boundary of civilisation, and provided refuge and a hiding place for robbers and those whom society had outcast.

change.[87] Learning to successfully navigate one's way through the vast unknown is a crucial stage on the path from immaturity to maturity.

Not long on their journey through the woods, Innogen perceives something is amiss: "Wherefore breaks that sigh/ From th'inward of thee?", she asks Pisanio (3.4.6). When Pisanio hands over his letter from Posthumus, Innogen immediately concludes "That drug-damned Italy hath out-crafted him" (15) – perhaps on some level she was aware of her husband's vulnerability. As Innogen reads of Posthumus' accusations against her, Shakespeare makes sure to draw our attention to how she is feeling: "What shall I need to draw my sword?", says Pisanio, "The paper/ Hath cut her throat already" (31-2). Innogen's anguish is palpable: "False to his bed? What is it to be false?/ To lie in watch there and to think on him?/ To weep 'twixt clock and clock?" (39-41). Such is her despair that she begs Pisanio to kill her:

> Come, fellow, be thou honest,
> Do thou thy master's bidding...
>   Look,
> I draw the sword myself. Take it, and hit
> The innocent mansion of my love, my heart.
> Fear not, 'tis empty of all things but grief.   63-68

This is a significant point of difference between the wager tradition and Shakespeare's play. When the servant in tale II.9 informs Ginevra that he has been ordered to kill her, she begs him to spare her, and immediately begins planning a way out:

> But flying from mine owne justification, and appealing to thy manly mercy, thou mayest (wert thou but so well pleased) in a moment satisfie both thy Master and me, in such manner as I will make plaine and apparent to thee. Take thou my garments, spare me onely thy doublet, and such a Bonnet as is fitting for a man, so returne with my habite to thy Master, assuring him, that the deede is done.... I will so strangely disguise my selfe, and wander so far off from these Countries, as neither he nor thou, nor any person belonging to these parts, shall ever heare any tidings of me.   (p.57)

The heroine in *Frederyke* similarly desires life, and quickly conceives of the scheme to present her husband with false tokens signifying her death (p.71). Shakespeare's heroine, by contrast, actively seeks *death*: "Prithee, dispatch./ The lamb entreats the butcher" (94-5). Innogen is unable to see a way forward. It is up to Pisanio not only to convince her to live, but to come up with the scheme that will allow her to survive. He proposes that she disguise herself as a man [motif K1837] and enlist as a page under the service of Caius Lucius, a Roman general. Innogen is visibly despondent until Pisanio

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[87] Shakespeare often represents forests or natural spaces as places of change in his plays: in *A Midsummer Night's Dream,* for example, the four lovers enter the forest in one state and leave in another. The heath in *King Lear* and the woods in *Titus Andronicus* are similarly transformative.

mentions that as a Roman page Innogen might have a chance of getting close to Posthumus, who still resides in Italy. So, by removing Innogen's will to live and placing her survival in the servant's hands, Shakespeare underscores and heightens his heroine's pain. He shows us how it would *feel* to have your husband falsely accuse you of adultery and then order your death. It is with small changes like this that Shakespeare signals the emotional import behind the narrative.

Accentuating Innogen's suffering at the hands of her beloved opens up the play to echoes of other stories, notably those popular tales of ill-used heroines who endure many hardships on their search for husbands who have abandoned and abused them. The renowned adventures of patient Griselda (ATU 887), discussed in the previous chapter, would have been familiar to many in Shakespeare's audience, and may have sprung to mind during this section of the play.[88] This is particularly plausible if we consider the name Innogen goes under in her male disguise is "Fidele", meaning "faithful one". The wife's unending faithfulness to her husband despite everything he puts her through is a defining characteristic of Griselda folktales.[89]

Snow White

In the wager tradition, once the heroines have been spared by the faithful servants and set free into the woods they do not remain helpless wanderers for long. They actively seek out employment in their male disguises and soon successfully work their way up to positions of power. Ginevra travels to the eastern Mediterranean, where she works for the Sultan as the "Lord and Captaine of the Guard for the Merchants" (p.58). Similarly, the heroine of *Frederyke* travels to Cairo, where she is promoted to "lord and defender of the kynges realme" and leads a victorious war against the king's enemies, fighting "lyke a lyon" (pp.72-3).

Shakespeare does not give Innogen the independence and agency that she has in other versions of the tale. The adventures of the wager heroines here are not in accordance with the idea of Innogen as patient Griselda. Indeed, Innogen's adventures once she is abandoned in the woods do not follow the typical plotline of the wager narrative at all. Shakespeare seems to depart from his literary sources and follow instead a different storyline – one which bears striking similarities to *Snow White.*

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[88] Indeed, the Victorians worshipped this Griselda-like aspect about Innogen, idealising her "a paragon of selfless and long suffering womanhood" (Greenblatt, p.2962). William Hazlitt said of Innogen: "Of all of Shakespeare's women she is perhaps the most tender and most artless" (p.28).
[89] Cf. the related tale type, ATU 888, "The Faithful Wife".

To anyone familiar with the tale of *Snow White*, the section of the wager narrative in which the heroine is taken to the woods to be murdered by a faithful servant should strike a resounding chord. Snow White, similarly, is led unsuspectingly into the woods by a servant commanded to kill her, but who instead takes pity on and frees the girl. Even the false tokens of the heroines' death are similar: Snow White's executioner is commanded to bring back the girl's liver, lungs, or heart, and sometimes a blood-soaked dress, as proof of her demise, which he provides by substituting an animal in her place.[90] Compare this to *Frederyke of Jennen,* where the servant kills the heroine's pet lamb instead of her, and produces its tongue along with a lock of the girl's hair and some of her bloodied clothing to the unsuspecting husband (p.71).[91] Similarly, in the wager folktale *The Falsely Accused Wife,* the husband demands the girl's "liver and lungs" as proof revenge has been served, which the servant substitutes with a doe's.

I propose that this part of the wager narrative called up in Shakespeare a memory of *Snow White,* inspiring the dramatist to weave these two tale types together. This subplot, then, is not a random story which Shakespeare haphazardly splices with the wager narrative: it is embedded within and inspired by that narrative. The two tale types intersect at the point of the heroine's exposure in the woods and the motif of the compassionate executioner [motif K512]. Rather than continuing on with wager tradition, Shakespeare appears to have diverted to the tale of *Snow White*. This allowed the dramatist to continue with the image of Innogen as a passive, Griselda-like figure. Both Griselda and Snow White are innocent, persecuted heroines who do not aggressively shape their own destinies, but rather endure their sufferings with good grace.

To the best of my knowledge, there has been no in-depth study of *Cymbeline'*s relationship to *Snow White.* A brief, two-page article written by the scholar Karl Schenkl appeared in a German journal as long ago as 1864, but no English translation seems to exist, and the clues he left over a century ago have lain dormant.[92] About fifty years ago, the editor of the second Arden edition of *Cymbeline* remarked scornfully that *Snow White* had been "unconvincingly cited as a source" of the play.[93] This reveals the historical unwillingness to partner Shakespeare with humble fairy tales. Other critics

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[90] ATU 709, "Snow White"; and Steven Swann Jones, "The Structure of 'Snow White': An Analysis of its Structure and Themes", *Fabula*, 24:1/2 (1983): 60

[91] In an Italian version of *Snow White* entitled *Bella Venezia,* the master demands the girl's eyes and a bottle of her blood, which the servant similarly obtains by killing a lamb. "Bella Venezia" in Calvino, no. 109, pp. 395-398

[92] Karl Schenkl, "Das Marchen von Sneewittchen und Shakespeare's *Cymbeline,*" *Germania*, 9 (1864): 458-460

[93] Nosworthy, p. 189

have acknowledged that the play bears similarities to this old tale, but have not investigated the links in any detail. Barbara Mowatt, for instance, suggestively notes that *Cymbeline* contains a "Snow White tale of a princess, her evil stepmother, a home in the woods and a deathlike sleep".[94] The reluctance to explore these links further probably stems from the fact that no written version of *Snow White* survives from Shakespeare's day. Indeed, the lack of a contemporary literary version led Bullough to claim that the story of *Snow White* "was probably not known in Elizabethan England".[95] But this discounts oral versions of the tale, which were almost certainly in circulation.

Snow White is classified as ATU 709, and is most familiar to us from the Grimm brothers' version, which goes as follows:

> Snow White has skin as white as snow and lips as red as blood. Her stepmother is told by a magic mirror that Snow White is more beautiful than she. Jealous, the wicked stepmother orders a huntsman to kill the girl and bring back her lungs and liver as a token. The huntsman instead takes pity on the girl and abandons her, substituting an animal in her place. Snow White finds her way to a house of dwarfs who welcome her. The wicked queen finds the girl and attempts to kill her three times by means of poison [poisoned lace, a poisoned comb, a poisoned apple]. The dwarfs succeed in reviving the maiden from the first two poisonings but fail with the third. They lay her to rest in a glass coffin. A prince resuscitates her and then marries her. The stepmother is made to dance herself to death in red hot shoes.[96]

Although the Grimms' version is usually recognised as the classic form, the tale-type is actually much older. Anderson has traced the story back to antiquity, with stories about mythical heroines called 'Chione' ('Snow girl'): "the evidence is... clear that [*Snow White*] and some of its close relatives have an ancient pedigree as distinguished as that of *Cinderella*".[97] The story tradition encompasses over four hundred different versions, which extend to folktales in Italian, French, Spanish, Flemish, Indian, Iranian, Mexican, and many other languages.[98] Briggs has collected a variant which she believes is not merely "a retelling of a chapbook version of Grimm", but a distinct version peculiar to England.[99] Basile includes two versions of the story in his *Pentamerone,* which proves

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[94] Barbara A. Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1976), p. 55. See also Rosenberg, pp.67-69, who takes *Cymbeline's* links with Snow White seriously, and in a brief but suggestive two page review lists the similarities and differences between the two stories, but only on the basic level of the narrative.

[95] Bullough p. 24. He does admit that certain elements of the story appear in many ballads and romances, which to me is even stronger evidence that the story must have been in oral circulation currency, and seems to contradict the idea that the tale was not known in Elizabethan England.

[96] My summary, from "Little Snow White", in Grimm, pp.213-222

[97] See Anderson, pp. 46-50.

[98] ATU 709; Jones, *The Fairy Tale*, p.4

[99] "Snow-White", in Briggs, *Dictionary*, pt. A, vol. 1, p.495. For a different English version, see "Gold-Tree and Silver-Tree", Joseph Jacobs, *Celtic Fairy Tales* (London: David Nutt, 1892), no.11, pp.88-92.

that the type was roughly contemporary with Shakespeare.[100] Given the ubiquitousness and age of the tale type, then, it seems safe to assume that Shakespeare would probably have been familiar with some version of *Snow White*. Of course, the best evidence for this lies in *Cymbeline* itself, which shares too many similarities with this popular fairy story for coincidence.

The *Snow White* thread is no small subplot in *Cymbeline*; its influence can be felt throughout the play. We are introduced to one of the type's most distinctive motifs in the very beginning of the drama: the wicked stepmother [motif S31]. In 1.1 the First Gentlemen tells us that the King has recently remarried. The first time we see the Queen she is trying to convince Innogen that she is *not* the typical fairy-tale stepmother: "No, be assured you shall not find me, daughter,/ After the slander of most stepmothers,/ Evil-eyed unto you" (71-2). Her comment points up just how prevalent the wicked-stepmother archetype was in Elizabethan England. And the Queen quickly lives up to the stereotype. She pretends to be on Innogen and Posthumus' side, warning them of the King's anger and promising to keep watch while they say their goodbyes, but the Princess is not fooled: "O dissembling courtesy! How fine this tyrant/ Can tickle where she wounds!" (85-6). In an aside, the Queen then reveals she intends to move the King "To walk this way" (105), to ensure he sees his daughter with the banished Posthumus.

Already, the Queen has proven a malicious (albeit obvious) schemer, but she shares other similarities with her folktale counterparts, notably her penchant for poison. Snow White is typically poisoned three times by her wicked stepmother, only the last attempt of which is successful. In 1.5, we see the Queen industriously gathering herbs and learn that she too dabbles in "confections" (15). She has recently ordered a particularly deadly drug from the royal doctor, Cornelius, who reveals to the audience that he suspects the Queen and has swapped the poison for one which only gives the *appearance* of death. The Queen soon confirms his suspicions by giving the potion to Pisanio, in the hope that by removing the remaining link to Posthumus, Innogen will more quickly forget her husband and move on to Cloten, the Queen's son. But if this doesn't work, the Queen is quite happy to give Innogen a "taste" (82) of the poison too, thereby eliminating the obstacle that stands in her son's way to the throne. Thus we come to the heart of the Queen's malevolent scheming: jealousy.

Jacobs has also collected another English version entitled "Snowwhite" in his *European Folk and Fairy Tales* - evidently the tale was very popular in England.
[100] Thompson, *The Folktale*, p.124. This seems evidence enough to disprove Bullough's theory that *Snow White* "was probably not known in Elizabethan England".

In *Snow White,* "jealousy is the root of evil".[101] This is another point of contact between types 882 and 709. In *Snow White*, it is her stepmother's extreme jealousy that forces the heroine to leave her home, and in the wager narratives the heroine's flight into the woods is prompted by her husband's possessive sexual jealousy. One could imagine Shakespeare further linking the two types together through this powerful emotion which they both embody. Typically, the stepmother's jealousy in *Snow White* is motivated by the girl's beauty; but it can have other sources. Sometimes the stepmother feels the father prefers the daughter, for instance, and forces the father to choose between herself and the daughter.[102] In the Scottish folktale *Lasair Gheug, the King of Ireland's Daughter*, the stepmother suggestively envies the girl's position at court. [103] The Queen in *Cymbeline* similarly appears to be jealous of Innogen's inheritance: she desires to see her own son on the throne, and Innogen, as heir to the kingdom, is thus her rival. By evoking this cause for the Queen's jealousy, Shakespeare also recalls those numerous other fairy tales which feature wicked stepmothers who seek to promote their own child (or children) at the expense of their stepchild. The tale of *Cinderella* (ATU 510A)*,* whose cruel stepmother treats her very roughly and forbids her from going to the ball so that her stepsisters have more of a chance at winning the prince, is a model example, but there are plenty more.[104] As in all such stories, Innogen's stepsibling is her antithesis. While the heroine in stories like *Cinderella* is always fair, beautiful, and kind, her stepsiblings are the opposite: dark, ugly, and selfish. Cloten is "a thing too bad for bad report" (1.1.17); he is stupid, vain, and smelly: "Sir," says one of his flatterers, "I would advise you to shift a shirt" (1.2.1). He is also cruel, another defining trait of fairy-tale stepsiblings, who physically and mentally abuse their virtuous stepsisters [motifs S33, S34]. When Innogen rebuffs Cloten's clumsy attempts at seducing her, asserting that she has more love for Posthumus' "meanest garment" than she does for him (2.3.128-131), he responds with violence: "I'll be revenged" (2.3.151), he swears, and plans to kill Posthumus in front of Innogen and then rape her wearing her husband's clothes (3.5.134-141). There are some versions of *Snow White,* in fact, where the heroine is persecuted by mean stepsiblings (rather or in addition to a wicked

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[101] Luthi, *Once Upon a Time,* p.70.
[102] Jones, "The Structure of Snow White", p.60.
[103] See Maria Tatar, ed., *The Classic Fairy Tales* (USA: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1999), pp.90-5
[104] In "The Juniper Tree" (ATU 720), Grimm no.47, pp.187-197, the stepmother is so jealous of her stepchild she cuts off his head and then feeds his corpse to his father in a stew. Intriguingly, the boy in this tale is a male Snow White – he is "a child white as snow and red as blood" (p.188), and when his mother sees how beautiful he is she dies, so his father has to remarry, introducing the jealous stepmother to the scene. Cf. also ATU 480, "Tales of Kind and Unkind Girls", which are filled with jealous stepmothers who seek to alleviate their own children over their stepchildren.

stepmother), who also seem to be motivated jealousy.[105] Shakespeare seems to combine the different traditions of *Snow White* in his play and evoke various other folktales featuring cruel step-relatives by including a jealous queen who seeks to get rid of her young rival by poison, and a mean, stupid, step-sibling who also seeks to harm the virtuous heroine out of jealousy – in this case for the love she bears for another man.

The Friendly Helpers

*Cymbeline'*s strongest parallels with *Snow White* occur in the pivotal third act of the play. Not only does Innogen's planned murder in the woods – complete with compassionate executioner and false tokens of the heroine's death – echo that of Snow White, her adventures in the wild following her escape are distinctly reminiscent of that fireside tale. After Snow White is spared by the Queen's faithful servant, she wanders helplessly: "But now the poor child was alone in a great forest".[106] Eventually, she chances upon a humble little house, which she enters, despite her fear, driven by hunger and exhaustion. While she is inside, consuming some of the provisions she finds therein, the occupants return home. Upon discovering Snow White, the seven dwarfs are amazed by the girl's beauty ("Oh heavens! oh heavens!"), and like her immediately.[107] She is initially frightened of the dwarfs, but they are friendly and welcoming, and she repays their kindness by keeping house for them, delighting them with her neat housewifery.

Similarly, Innogen has been wandering alone for two nights before she stumbles across a cave in the forest. Shakespeare plays up the fantasy of the scene by enhancing the element of chance: the "savage hold" (3.6.18) Innogen discovers is actually the home of her two long-lost brothers, Guiderius and Arviragus (now known as Polydore and Cadwal), who were stolen from their cribs some twenty years earlier by the bitter ex-soldier Belarius (now called Morgan). Fairy tale characters often encounter the manifestation of their wishes or anxieties in the dark forests in which they get lost.[108] Innogen will meet both: first her brothers, whose existence fulfils her deepest wish, as it means she will no longer be heir to the throne and thus free to wed Posthumus: "Would it had been so that they/ Had been my father's sons", she says after meeting the two

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[105] See "Giricoccola" in Calvino, no. 50, pp. 154-156, where two ugly stepsisters are so jealous of their beautiful younger sister that they try to kill her three times.
[106] Grimm no.53, p.215
[107] Ibid., p.216
[108] Bettelheim, p.94

boys, "Then had my price/ Been less, and so more equal to [Posthumus']" (3.6. 73-6).[109]
Later she will encounter her worst nightmare: the headless corpse of her beloved
husband (or so she thinks). While we are marvelling at this extraordinary turn of events,
Innogen makes sure to remind us of the human realities of the scene: she is weary and
starving: "I see a man's life is a tedious one" (3.6.1). When she complains of
misdirections given to her by spiteful strangers she sounds so much like an ordinary
human that we can't help but engage with her. It is then that she stumbles across the
cave. Like Snow White, she is initially reluctant to enter, but her hunger gets the better
of her: "famine,/ Ere clean it o'erthrow nature, makes it valiant" (20). While she is
inside, the inhabitants return home. Just as Snow White's protectors see her as being of
unearthly beauty, so Belarius perceives Innogen, now dressed in her male garb: "But
that it eats our victuals I should think/ Here were a fairy", says Belarius, "By Jupiter, an
angel – or, if not,/ An earthly paragon" (40-1; 43-4). Innogen is terrified when she first
sees the men – "Good masters, harm me not" (45) – but she is in no danger: they like
her instantly and warmly invite her to share their food and lodging. Innogen accepts,
and, like Snow White, repays her protectors with her domestic skills:

> *Arvi.* How angel-like he sings!
> *Guid.* But his neat cookery!
> *Bela.* He cuts our roots in characters,
> And sauced our broths as Juno had been sick
> And he her dieter.   4.2.49-53

There are two main points of difference between Shakespeare's version of
events and those in the Grimms' tale described above. Firstly, Innogen's forest friends
happen to be related to her. While this may seem like a disparate and highly improbable
thread introduced by Shakespeare, it may have been inspired by the oral tradition: in
numerous versions of *Snow White*, the heroine's protectors do not merely welcome the
girl into their home; they adopt her as a sister [motif F451.5.1.2]. "You don't have to be
afraid of us," an Italian folktale goes, "Stay here with us and be our sister, and cook,
sew, and wash for us."[110] Both Arviragus and Guiderius echo this sentiment: unaware

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[109] Cf. also 1.6.5-9, where Innogen wishes that she had been stolen instead of her brothers so that she
could have been a commoner and thus free to marry Posthumus. Some critics see the play as anti-
feminist, because (among other things) at the end of the story Innogen has been displaced from succession
by her two brothers [see, for instance, Janet Adelman, "Masculine Authority and the Maternal Body: The
Return to Origins in the Romances", in *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in
Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to the Tempest* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 200-220] But this seems
to go against what Innogen actually desires throughout the play, which is to be of an equal status with
Posthumus. She never wishes that Posthumus were of a higher birth, but that she were of lower birth. The
ending of the play, then, like all good fairy tales, actually satisfies her deepest desire.
[110] "Maria, the Wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers", trans. D. L Ashliman for his online
database, *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts*, no pagination. See also Calvino, no. 109, where the

that Fidele is actually their sister, they nonetheless feel a strange kinship with the youth within moments of meeting him. Arviragus promises to "love him as my brother" (3.6.69), and before long Guiderius declares "I love thee...as much/ As I do love my father" (4.2.16-18). This is a significant detail of *Snow White* because it reveals the nature of the relationship between the heroine and her protectors. Although her protectors are always male, they help the heroine rather than pose a sexual threat – this is why the protectors are often represented as dwarfs: dwarfs are perceived as undeveloped and therefore unthreatening sexually.[111] Snow White's guardians love her as a sister, that is, platonically. Her time in the forest can thus be interpreted as a period of sexual dormancy. The issue of her sexual desirability, raised by her stepmother's jealousy, is put on hold for a time, and she finds some solace. By making Innogen's protectors her actual brothers, Shakespeare may have been emphasising that her spell in the woods is similarly a period of repressed sexuality. This is already implied by the fact that Innogen comes to the cave disguised as a man. "You must forget to be a woman" (3.4.154), Pisanio commands her before releasing her into the wild. Like all wager heroines, in order to find refuge and protection Innogen will need to set aside the question of her sexuality, which was brought into the spotlight by the wager on her chastity and her husband's insecure jealousy. What better way to do this than to live as a man, amongst those who pose no sexual threat.

The second point of difference is that Innogen's forest friends are not dwarfs but outlaws. Belarius is an exile who robbed the king of his two sons, and the three men have since been living in the woods as "runagates" (4.2.65). Once again, however, this change reveals Shakespeare's familiarity with the oral tradition. In traditional versions of *Snow White*, there is a great deal of flexibility in the nature of the girl's protectors. The dwarfs can just as readily be giants, supernatural beings, peasants, or (most commonly) outlaws.[112] The heroine from *Bella Venezia* stays in a mountain cave with seven thieves (who promise to "treat [her] as [their] little sister"); while in another version she resides in a forest house with seven robbers.[113] The variant of *Snow White*

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robbers say "Don't be afraid. Now that you are here you can stay, and we will treat you as our little sister" (p.397)
[111] "Snow White", in Tatar, *Annotated Tales*, note 10, p.85
[112] Anderson, pp.44-5
[113] Calvino, no.109, p.397; Ashliman, "Maria, the Wicked Stepmother, and the Seven Robbers", *Folklore and Mythology Electronic Texts*, no pagination

known in England is even more suggestive: the heroine is found fainting in the woods by three robbers, who then take her to their cave to recover.[114]

The Wild Man of the Woods

The motif of outlaws living in a forest is by no means unique to *Snow White*. The forest was a natural haunt for those whom society has no place for. Lying beyond the boundary of civilisation, the forest was literally a wild place. To many, it was therefore a dark, mysterious, and foreboding realm. But it was also a perfect refuge for those who were considered outsiders to the status quo – 'wild men'.

The 'wild man of the woods', also referred to as the 'wodewose' or 'woodehouse', and ultimately related to the primordial 'green man', was a primal figure who haunted medieval and Elizabethan folklore and literature.[115] He was particularly popular in drama, too, featuring in folk plays, where he was typically hunted, caught, and either tamed or killed, as well as courtly dramas: twelve wild men performed for Edward III as early as 1348, while centuries later, Queen Elizabeth was entertained by wild men on at least three occasions.[116] A particularly fearsome, club-wielding wild man named Bremo, who has mastery over all plants and animals and happens to be a cannibal, stars in the 1598 comedy *Mucedorus,* which was one of the most popular plays of the period, reprinted at least sixteen times over the next seventy years.[117] Some wild men were clearly human, though often covered in hair or dressed in animal skins, while others were more mysterious, fairy tale-like figures, such as dwarfs or giants.[118] The wild man was an outsider, someone isolated from conventional society; in this sense, he was enigmatic and potentially dangerous. Shakespeare's Caliban, who is abandoned on a deserted island from a young age and bereft of civilising influences, is clearly drawn on from this tradition. Most often, the wild man was presented as having

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[114] There is, interestingly, one variant of the wager story in which the heroine similarly encounters a group of outlaws as she is wandering through the woods, and she stays with them and soon becomes their leader (Calvino, no.176)

[115] Richard Bernheimer, *Wild Men in the Middle Ages: A Study in Art, Sentiment, and Demonology* (New York: Octagon Books, 1970), p.2, 21. For a detailed overview of the Wild Man tradition, particularly its appearance in the drama of Shakespeare's time, see Anne Barton, "The wild man in the forest", *Comparative Criticism*, 18 (1996): 21-54

[116] Barton, pp.34-6. According to Barton, "the last decade of Elizabeth's reign seems to have been the period of [wild men's] greatest popularity on the public stage" (p.44)

[117] Richard Marienstras, *New Perspectives on the Shakespearean World* (Great Britain: University of Cambridge Press, 1985), pp.11-15

[118] Bernheimer, p.2, 19; Barton, p.33

something positive to offer civilisation [cf. motif D1719.2].[119] Robin Hood, the heroic English outlaw who lives in Sherwood Forest with his 'merry men', robbing from the rich and giving to the poor, could fall into this category, as perhaps would Timon, from Shakespeare's *Timon of Athens.* Both characters shun normal civilisation and its corruptions in favour of the wild woods and a more 'natural' existence. Intriguingly, in one version of a wager folktale, the husband becomes a wild man after casting off his wife: he goes to live in the woods, and the locals sometimes see "a herd of wild beasts" with "a wild man after them, and his face covered with beard".[120] According to Anne Barton, this was not uncommon: "Sexual jealousy, or at least a serious misunderstanding between lovers, was responsible for a number of mediaeval and Renaissance wild men: Launcelot, Chrétien de Troyes' Yvain, or Ariosto's Orlando".[121]

As well as echoing *Snow White*, Shakespeare's depiction of the three outlaws and their forest home seems to evoke the 'wild man of the woods' tradition. [122] Like Timon before him, Belarius rejects the court and its trappings, preferring a simple country existence, which "Is nobler than attending for a check,/ Richer than doing nothing for a bauble;/ Prouder than rustling in unpaid for silk" (3.3.22-4). He and the two boys lead an existence on the social periphery and have little contact with other humans, and they're closely associated with nature, being huntsmen who live in a cave. Despite their wild existence, however, or perhaps because of it, Guiderius and Arviragus have kind and honourable natures, a sort of 'natural virtue' which has been nurtured by Belarius, and are presented as having a thing or two to teach those who are supposedly refined.[123] Where Innogen's loved ones drive her from home, for example, these 'savages' take her in and protect her. Belarius repeatedly muses over the contrast between the boys' rough upbringing and their royal natures:

> O thou goddess,
> Thou divine Nature, how thyself thou blazon'st
> In these two princely boys! They are as gentle

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[119] Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (London; New York: Routledge, 1989), p.88. Cf. Motif D1719.2 Magic wisdom possessed by wild man

[120] Campbell , no. XVII, pp.12-13. Hairiness is a common trait of the wild man (Bernheimer, p.1).

[121] Barton, p.34

[122] The wild man tradition seems to embedded in (or perhaps derived from) fairy tales like *Snow White*, where the protagonist enters the deep, dark woods and encounters beings (dwarfs, giants, fairies, wild men) who can be dangerous but can also offer refuge, guidance, or magical tokens to the protagonist, which will ensure the journey is successful.

[123] According to Bernheimer: "It would indeed appear as if a wild upbringing in the woods could at times be regarded as an advantage for persons aspiring to highest honours of chivalry... the very fact that a man was brought up in the woods may confer on him a certain incorruptible quality which alone enables him to resist temptations to which others succumb, and thus to attain aims inaccessible to them" (p.19)

>As zephyrs blowing below the violet,
>Not wagging his sweet head; and yet as rough,
>Their royal blood enchafed, as the rud'st wind
>That by the top doth take the mountain pine
>And make him stoop to th'vale.   4.2.170-7

This in itself is a very fairy tale-like notion: the idea that a royal nature cannot be concealed by rags or hardship is the backbone of stories like *Cinderella*. Innogen similarly comments on the civility of these so-called savages: "These are kind creatures. Gods, what lies I have heard!/ Our courtiers say all's savage but at court./ Experience, O thou disprov'st report!" (4.2.32-4). But, like all wild creatures, the men also possess a dangerous side which should not be underestimated: Guiderius kills Cloten virtually on sight. They embody a delicate balance between tame and savage, protective and dangerous. This duality is also reflected in their landscape. The wilds of Wales possess a certain innocence reminiscent of the pastoral landscapes in *As You Like It* or *The Winter's Tale*, and they offer a sense of escape from the falseness of city life.[124] But the countryside is no utopia. Arviragus paints a vivid picture of the cruel winter weather in the "freezing hours" of "dark December", when the "rain and wind beat" against their "pinching cave" (3.3.37-9). And it can be lonely and isolating, as the boys repeatedly complain (cf. 3.3.27-44). Shakespeare's choice of Wales as a setting is often explained as being influenced by the investiture of Henry as Prince of Wales in June of 1610.[125] While this may have played a part, what seems more suggestive to me is the contemporary opinion of Wales as being a wild and harsh place.[126] This is evocative not only of the wild man's domain, who is said to prefer a rugged landscape and bad weather, but accords with both the wager tradition and *Snow White,* where the place in which the heroine is abandoned is always described as being an isolated, untamed region.[127] In Boccaccio's II.9, it is a "deepe solitary valey, very thickly beset with high and huge spreading Trees" (p.56); elsewhere it is the foot of a mountain, or a lonely lake, or an overgrown wood.[128] This may have reminded Shakespeare of Wales, which he has painted in such a light before: in *1 Henry IV,* the King refuses to ransom Mortimer from Wales, saying "No, on the barren mountains let him starve" (1.3.88).

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[124] This recalls plays like *The Tempest, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Two Gentlemen of Verona, Timon Of Athens,* and *King Lear*, where characters escape to the wilderness in order to regain perspective and sort out their lives.
[125] Bullough, pp.6-7
[126] Greenblatt, p.2959
[127] Bernheimer, pp.31-3
[128] Calvino, no.157; Pino-Saavedra, no.37; Grimm, no.53

The welsh forest is also a place where magic happens, at least according to Glendower (cf. *1 Henry IV,* 1.1 and 3.1)

The Deathlike Sleep

Although Innogen finds warmth and shelter with Guiderius, Arviragus, and Belarius, she is still suffering from a broken heart. So, when the men prepare to go hunting, she decides to remain in the cave. The boys depart reluctantly, "Brother, farewell" (4.2.30), and Belarius bids Innogen a speedy recovery: "Pray be not sick./ For you must be our housewife" (43-4). As in *Snow White*, it is while her protectors are away that Innogen succumbs to poison. Before Pisanio left her in the woods, he gave Innogen a potion, which he believed to be a health elixir, but which was in actuality a poison, given to him by the wicked Queen. As soon as she is left alone, Innogen remembers the potion, and decides to use it: "I am sick still, heart-sick. Pisanio/ I'll now taste of thy drug" (4.2.37-38). "But hardly had she a bit of it in her mouth than she fell down dead", as *Snow White* goes.[129] Similarly, after consuming the potion, Innogen falls into a deathlike sleep [motif D1960.4].

Meanwhile, in the woods, the three men come across an unwelcome visitor. Cloten has attempted to follow Innogen to Milford Haven, but has also lost his way in the woods. Miraculously, he too ends up outside Belarius' cave, where he encounters Guiderius. Where Innogen was polite to and had a healthy fear of the forest men, Cloten is rude and disrespectful.[130] He makes a fatal error and assumes that his status will protect him from the "villain mountaineers" (4.2.73); but he is in the woods now, where different laws operate and the court holds no sway. When he insults Guiderius, calling him a "robber/ A law-breaker, a villain" (4.2.77-8), and then pulls out his sword, Guiderius has no qualms about cutting off his head. "What hast thou done" (118), Belarius exclaims on seeing Cloten's "clotpoll" (185); "I am perfect what: cut off one Cloten's head" (119-20), Guiderius replies without remorse. Here is the hostile, reckless side to the wild man that so troubled the medieval imagination, but yoked with natural virtue which sees evil instinctively.

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[129] Grimm, no. 53, p.220

[130] This accords with traditional fairy tales featuring one good/kind and one bad/unkind child. The good child will be considerate to those she meets on her travels and do whatever is asked of her, while the bad child will be obnoxious and be punished accordingly. See for example: "The Fairy", in Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales* (London; New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp.100-102.

While Guiderius is disposing of Cloten's head, Arviragus goes to fetch Innogen from inside the cave. He soon returns bearing her limp body: "The bird is dead/ That we have made so much on" (198-9). When Snow White's protectors discover the seemingly deceased heroine, they are overwhelmed with sadness: the dwarfs in the Grimms' version gather around her body and cry for three days; the Italian outlaws "all burst into tears, tough as they were".[131] The heroine always looks beautiful and fresh in death, as if she were merely sleeping, and her protectors cannot bring themselves to bury her underground. Instead, they place her in a glass or crystal coffin and leave it exposed on a mountainside or some similar location, "and one of them always stayed by it and watched it."[132] Even the birds gather to mourn the heroine, "first an owl, then a raven, and last a dove."[133] Similarly, Innogen's forest friends gather around her and bewail her passing. Their evident sadness and the sweet gentleness with which they tend to her body contrasts strikingly with the violence shown toward Cloten. Both Guiderius and Arviragus comment on Innogen's appearance, saying she looks as if she were asleep as opposed to dead (214-7). Instead of burying her, they strew her with flowers and lay her on the forest floor, and Arviragus promises to keep tending to her grave: "With fairest flowers/ Whilst summer lasts and I live here, Fidele,/ I'll sweeten thy sad grave" (119-121). Shakespeare even seems to echo the birds' sadness in Arviragus' allusion to the "charitable" robin, which was believed to cover dead bodies with flowers and moss (225-230).[134]

   Cymbeline is, in fact, packed full of bird imagery, so much so that it seems "alive with the movement and sound of birds".[135] Posthumus is referred to as an "eagle" (1.1.40), Innogen an "Arabian bird" (1.6.17), Cloten a "puttock" (1.1.41), and Belarius a "crow" (3.3.12). Bird similes are used as indications of size, "but if there be/ Yet left in heaven as small a drop of pity/ As a wren's eye" (3.3.305-7); and to symbolise fleetness of movement, "winged with the fervour of her love," the Queen says of Innogen, "she's flown/ To her desired Posthumus" (3.5.61-2).[136] Shakespeare's fascination with birds is evident not just in *Cymbeline* but in many of his works, such as *Macbeth,* a play which Miriam Pollard has shown to have strong folktale links through its use of witches,

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[131] Grimm, no.53, p. 220; Calvino no. 109, p.397.

[132] Grimms, no.53, p.220. Sometimes it is the finder of the glass coffin (i.e. the prince) who applies unending devotion to it, as opposed to one of the dwarfs or robbers. It also need not be a glass coffin that the heroine is petrified in – sometimes she is turned into a statue, for example – the point is that she is displayed rather than buried.

[133] Grimm, no.53, p.220.

[134] Greenblatt, "Cymbeline", n. 7, p. 3018

[135] Spurgeon, p.294

[136] For a more in-depth look at the occurrence and use of bird imagery in *Cymbeline*, see Spurgeon, pp. 294-296

ghosts, and prophecy.[137] This preoccupation with birds may in part have been influenced by Shakespeare's childhood exposure to fairy tales, where birds often play vital roles. In *Hansel and Grete*l, for instance, birds figure prominently, first eating the bread crumbs sprinkled on the path by Hansel, then leading the children to the witch's house, and finally carrying the two across a lake. [138] Cinderella takes refuge in a pigeons' roost, is helped with her chores by birds, and sees her sisters blinded by doves.[139] In *Snow White,* birds not only gather to mourn the heroine, but often lead her to the house in the woods where she finds refuge.[140]

Once the three outlaws have laid Innogen to rest, in a manner distinctly reminiscent of *Snow White,* they say a beautiful prayer over her body. The power of the celebrated lyric "fear no more the heat o'th'sun" (4.2.259-281) derives in part, I would argue, from its message, which is remarkably similar to that of fairy tales as a whole. Fairy tales aim to express our fears and anxieties and acknowledge that life is difficult, while simultaneously reassuring us that this struggle is necessary in order to achieve a happy ending.[141] Similarly, the boys' speech draws attention to the fact that life is hard, not only for Innogen – who has felt "the tyrant's stroke" (266) in her father's treatment of her, and experienced "slander" from Giacomo and "censure rash" (273) from Posthumus – but also for the early modern audience, who may have more general fears, like the weather (259-60; 271-2), supernatural ills (277-9), or earning a living and obtaining food and clothing (262; 267). At the same time, however, the prayer also reassures us that there will be an end to our sufferings, for in death we are beyond harm: "Golden lads and girls all must,/ As chimney-sweepers, come to dust" (263-4). Like fairy tales, then, the speech simultaneously acknowledges and expresses our fears while reassuring us that they will not last forever – death is its own happy ending.

The funeral scene is also powerful because it allows the audience to experience Innogen's 'death' as if it were real, but from the safety of the fairy-tale atmosphere. While we know the Princess is merely in a deep sleep, her brothers do not. There is nothing funny or ironic about their farewelling Innogen; their grief is real and poignant. As such, we are encouraged to engage with the potent affective responses being so

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[137] See Pollard, Chapter 1. For an analysis of the bird imagery in *Macbeth*, see Spurgeon, p. 157 and 334, who also looks at bird imagery in *Henry V* (pp.243-4); *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.(p.262); and *Romeo and *Juliet* (p.365)
[138] Grimm, no.15, pp. 66-72
[139] Grimm, no.21, pp.97-104
[140] See, for instance, the Italian version "The Crystal Casket", in Thomas Frederick Crane, *Italian Popular Tales* (London: Macmillan and Company, 1885), no. 21, pp. 326-31. Disney recognised the importance of birds: their version of Snow White and is positively overflowing with helpful bird companions.
[141] Bettelheim, p.8

openly paraded before us. In this moment, it is the boys' feelings, their emotional reactions, that matter more than plot or plausibility.

Prince Charming

Snow White lies 'dead' in her coffin for an indeterminable time before she miraculously awakens. When she does, it is typically to find her handsome prince charming beside her, ready to whisk her away to a happy ever after. The apparently dead Innogen similarly revives after some time on the forest floor, and she too finds someone beside her. But there is nothing charming about her discovery. In a fit of compassion, Belarius and the two boys decide to bury Cloten's headless corpse, placing it next to Innogen's body on the forest floor. When Innogen first wakes up, she is groggy from the effects of the potion, and thinks she is still dreaming. She moves to lie down again, but realises there is someone next to her. She discovers it is a man, and then notices that he is covered in blood. "I hope I dream", she says desperately, "If there be,/ Yet left in heaven as small a drop of pity/ As a wren's eye, feared gods, a part of it!" (299; 305-7). But, as she becomes more alert, the dream does not fade – in fact, it becomes so real she can *feel* it: "The dream's here still. Even when I wake it is/ Without me as within me; *not imagined, felt*" (my italics; 308-9). Next, she grasps that the bloody man has no head, and almost simultaneously she recognises Posthumus' garments. "I know the shape of's leg", she exclaims with horror, "this is his hand,/ His foot Mercurial, his Martial thigh,/ The brawns of Hercules" (311-13). Her horror turns to rage as she concludes that Posthumus has been murdered, and assumes that "damned" (320) Pisanio is the murder. Rage quickly gives way to despair, however, and in a frenzy of grief, she smears her face with what she thinks is Posthumus' blood. Finally, overcome with emotion, she collapses on the body.

This scene is one of the most arresting and bizarre of the play as a whole. We don't know whether to laugh or cry or recoil in disgust. The action is openly sensational, blatantly grotesque, and violates any notion of verisimilitude: how could Innogen confuse Cloten's body for Posthumus'? Because we are safely contained in the fairy-tale formula, and know the truth of the corpse's identity, the scene may be oddly comic. On the other hand, though, by exploiting the intrinsic improbabilities of the scene, Shakespeare signals that he may not be primarily concerned here with narrative plausibility, but focused rather on the emotional states generated by the narrative. Innogen does not know what we do, and her rapidly fluctuating emotions upon viewing

what she believes to be her dead husband are wholly genuine. Shakespeare thus uses the fantastic nature of the scene as a backdrop against which to display her shock, horror, rage, despair, and finally grief. As such, we gradually move with Innogen from disbelief to total emotional engagement – "imagined" to "felt".

Some critics have deemed this scene gratuitous and unShakespearean.[142] I would argue, however, that it serves a very important purpose: it puts Innogen through one of the most harrowing experiences possible. This is her worst nightmare come true. When Juliet finds herself in a similar situation and discovers Romeo's body beside her, she kills herself. Innogen is similarly made to experience an array of powerful, tragic emotions. We expect, therefore, that the situation will also end tragically, with Innogen's suicide. After all, we have already seen her wish for death once (3.5). As in the trunk scene, however, Shakespeare toys with our expectations.

As Innogen lies unconscious on Cloten's headless body, the Roman general Caius Lucius and his attendants chance across the gruesome pair. It is an extraordinary twist of fate that allows first Innogen, then Cloten, and now Lucius to stumble into the exact same spot where Belarius has managed to stay hidden for twenty years. The Romans at first believe the unmoving Innogen, still dressed as a page, is dead. When she stirs, however, Lucius is quick to demand who she is. The simple pathos of her answer underscores her grief at having lost Posthumus: "I am nothing; or if not,/ Nothing to be were better" (369-70). She pretends the headless body belonged to her master, and delivers a moving tribute to him:

> There is no more such masters. I may wander
> From east to occident, cry out for service,
> Try many, all good; serve truly, never
> Find such another master.   372-6

Evidently Posthumus' 'death' has restored Innogen's love for and faith in her husband.[143] Lucius is so touched by Innogen's loyalty to her previous master that he asks her to join him and serve as his page. Astonishingly, Innogen agrees: "I'll follow, sir" (389). This is a decisive moment in the play. Instead of refusing Lucius and remaining in the woods to die, Innogen chooses to walk away from despair, "And leaving so his service, follow you" (395). Herein lies the point of the headless corpse scene: Innogen is brought as low as possible so that her decision to continue living stands out all the more strongly. Shakespeare is, I believe, emphasising the central

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[142] See, for example, Granville-Barker, pp.340-3
[143] For an interesting discussion on how Posthumus' metaphorical death purges the Cloten-like aspects from his character (at least in Innogen's eyes) see Joan Carr, "'Cymbeline' and the Validity of Myth", *Studies in Philology,* 75.3 (1978):316-330. Warren also briefly discusses this idea (see pp.50-1).

quality of those countless fairy-tale heroines who are used and abused: although they may suffer horrible ordeals, often at the hands of those who supposedly love them, they do not succumb to their pain and grief. Instead, they continue forward, and in so doing pave the way for a happy ending. Innogen is made to suffer acutely, and she very nearly succumbs to her misery, investing the fairy-tale stereotype with stark human feeling. Perhaps, as a result, her eventual reward will be all the more emotionally satisfying.

Tests of Valour

With the fortuitous arrival of Lucius, Shakespeare picks up the wager storyline once more, setting *Snow White* aside for a time. It is important to note that Innogen's new employer finds her, and not the other way around. In typical tales of type 882, the heroine actively carves out a new future for herself, and rapidly rises to a position of authority. By contrast, work finds Innogen, and she remains a simple page until the end of the play. This accords with Shakespeare's depiction of Innogen as a passive, Griselda-like heroine. When Lucius stumbles upon Innogen, he is on his way (naturally) to Milford Haven, where his army has amassed to make war on Britain. The battle between Britain and Rome in *Cymbeline* is often seen as a disparate plot thread, at odds with a tale of jealousy and feminine endurance.[144] But war or combat of some sort was a staple of many wager tales. In some versions, it is the heroine who engages in conflict. Here it serves to prove the heroine's worth and prowess in her new masculine role: in *Frederyke,* for example, a war breaks out between the heroine's adopted country and a foreign enemy, and she rises to the occasion and leads a victorious counterattack, earning herself the title of "lorde protectoure and defender" of all the land (p.73). In a German folktale, both husband and wife join the army after the wager, and the heroine quickly rises to the position of colonel.[145] An Italian folktale sees the heroine become an outlaw, who distinguishes herself through her fighting and raiding skills.[146] In other wager tales, though, it is the heroine's husband who engages in conflict, which would have been more suited to Shakespeare's design, given his casting of Innogen in a passive role. The majority of the old French stories in *le cycle de la gaguere,* for example, feature a scene of combat between the husband and the villainous slanderer.

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[144] Wayne, for example, says: "Shakespeare introduces very different material into the wager story through the plot that begins in Act 3" (p.178).
[145] Ranke, no.38
[146] Calvino, no.176. Again we see a cross-over between the wager tradition and *Snow White*, where the heroine similarly encounters a group of outlaws living in a forest.

Here, the combat functions both to punish the villain, who is typically defeated by the husband, and to suggest that the husband is now worthy of reuniting with his wife [motif H1561.2].[147] In the English folk story *De 'Piniated Englishman and Hellfire Jack*, this is conveyed symbolically: the battle takes place not between the husband and the slanderer, but between their two nations. After trying to murder his wife, the husband joins the English army and fights in a furious war against the French, the slanderer's home country, and the outcome determines the husband's eligibility to reunite with his woman.[148]

Conflict in the wager tales, then, serves as a test; it is a means for the male characters (whether the husband, the villain, or the wife disguised as a man) to prove their valour. This accords with fairy tales at large. Where female characters are often faced with daunting domestic tasks or tests of endurance on their journeys to prove themselves, fairy-tale heroes need to display strength, bravery, and fortitude in order to win happy endings.[149] Familiar challenges include slaying a dragon, rescuing a princess from danger, or killing an ogre. Conflict, in other words, is the primary means by which fairy-tale men display their worth.

Shakespeare, I would suggest, uses conflict similarly in his play. Perhaps inspired by folktales like *De 'Piniated Englishman and Hellfire Jack*, he develops the combat thread present in wager tales into an all-out war between Britain and Rome, which he prepares us for much earlier on in his story, with Lucius' arrival at Cymbeline's castle in 2.3 to demand payment of a tribute to Rome, and Cymbeline's declaration of Britain's independence and refusal to pay that tribute in 3.2. As such, Shakespeare enlarges the war plot to engage with British history and contemporary political concerns, such as the question of British nationhood.[150] However, I would propose that the dramatist primarily uses the war as a means of bringing the male

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[147] Wayne, p.173.

[148] However, in Briggs' version, the husband dies – he is cut to pieces in the battle. This signifies that he is not, after all, worthy of reuniting with his wife – reinforced by the fact that she goes on to remarry. But this is the exception rather than the rule; in general, the husband and wife get back together at the end of wager tales.

[149] Ashliman, *Handbook*, pp. 40-1

[150] These matters are too large to discuss here, however there are outlined by Martin Butler, ed., in *Cymbeline* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), pp.36-54. It seems to me, however, that many critics have placed undue attention on the play's historical and chronicle aspects, and as such have been sidelined into treating the play as a History rather than a folktale or romance. Emrys Jones seems to have played a key role in this movement, with his "Stuart Cymbeline", *Essays in Criticism*, xi (1961): 84-99. See also J. P. Brockbank, "History and Histrionics in Cymbeline", *Shakespeare Survey*, xi (1958): 42-9; David M. Bergeron, "*Cymbeline*: Shakespeare's Last Roman Play", *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 31.1 (1980): 31-41; and Willy Maley, "Postcolonial Shakespeare: British identity formation and *Cymbeline*", in *Shakespeare's Late Plays: New Readings,* eds Jennifer Richards and James Knowles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1999), pp.145-157

characters of the play, particularly Posthumus, into the spotlight and putting them through an initiation of sorts, a fairy-tale challenge to test their merit. Innogen has already undergone her testing and survived: she has proven her loyalty to her husband, by refusing Giacomo and remaining faithful to her 'master' even after death; demonstrated her domestic capability, by keeping house for her forest friends and then serving as Lucius' page; and shown her endurance, by deciding to turn away from grief and follow the Roman captain instead. Posthumus, however, is as yet untried, as are Guiderius and Arviragus.

The war between Britain and Rome, then, is a symbolic one. This is pointed up by its unrealistic presentation. The battle occurs in a scene heavy with stage directions and remarkably thin on dialogue compared with other Shakespearean battles. Scant too are the "alarums, drums, and trumpets" that usually accompany such scenes.[151] It is messy and very difficult to follow, with several characters changing sides, and rapid switching between the different factions of the fighting. For many directors, this is one of the most difficult parts of the play to stage convincingly. Most have recognised that the battle is not meant to be true to life, and have eschewed realism for symbolism: one production staged the battle as a balletic fight; another played it out as a board-game; a third had a narrator read an account of the battle as if it were a story.[152] Shakespeare can create breath-taking and lifelike wars, as numerous of his history plays have demonstrated;[153] the fact that this battle is so unworkable suggests that perhaps the focus is not the war itself, but what is happening to the characters as they go through the process of war.

Slaying the Demon

When Posthumus enters the scene at the beginning of the battle, having been absent from the action for almost two acts, he is dressed in Italian garb, having conveniently been drafted to the Roman army, and is carrying a bloody cloth, the morbid token given to him by Pisanio to 'prove' the servant murdered Innogen.[154] It has become a symbol of Posthumus' guilt: "Yea, bloody cloth, I'll keep thee, for I once wished/ Thou

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[151] Granville-Barker, p.258

[152] Bate and Rasmussen, pp.184-185.

[153] *Antony and Cleopatra, Coriolanus* and *King Lear* all involve battles of different sorts but in each an attempt at realism is made

[154] Posthumus' long absence from the action is often seen as poor construction on Shakespeare part, but it accords with the wager tradition, where the husbands generally disappear from the action after trying to murder their wives and only reappear at the very end of the story (ATU 882).

shouldest be coloured thus" (5.1.1-2). As the mistrusting husband, he is now plagued by regret and remorse, and appears to have forgiven his wife, despite still believing Innogen was unfaithful to him:

> You married ones,
> If each of you should take this course, how many
> Must murder wives much better than themselves
> For wrying but a little!   2-5

However, he feels so guilty about his actions in ordering her death that he is hoping he will be killed in the upcoming battle between Britain and Rome. This recalls Innogen's earlier death-wish, and hints that Posthumus is undergoing a similar process to that just experienced by his wife. Moments before the battle begins, Posthumus decides to change out of his Italian apparel and patriotically fight for Britain instead, declaring: "'Tis enough/ That, Britain, I have killed thy mistress-piece;/ I'll give no wound to thee" (19-21).

Posthumus' regret and pain is a significant addition to the wager tradition. In tales of type 882, we are not given much information about the husbands after they abandon their wives – typically they only resurface at the very end of the story, to bring narrative rather than emotional closure.[155] There is, in other words, no suggestion that they regret their actions or miss their wives. Only in the final moments of the story, when the husbands learn of their wives' innocence, do they show any sign of remorse.

By contrast, Shakespeare dedicates a long section of the narrative (almost all of act 5) to Posthumus, and makes him suffer for his actions. In this, Posthumus echoes Leontes in *The Winter's Tale,* who is similarly punished for his morally reprehensible behaviour. Shakespeare's presentation points back to the folktales themselves, and highlights the questionability of a narrative tradition in which men may treat their wives dreadfully and suffer little to no consequences for their actions. Also unusually, Shakespeare shows Posthumus forgiving his wife *before* learning she is innocent, which once again underscores his remorse, and paves the way for a more satisfying, emotionally touching reunion between husband and wife later on. Helen Cooper has pointed out how unique this is in Shakespeare, and almost unprecedented in romances: "*Cymbeline* takes one extraordinary further step, beyond any other of these plays, in

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[155] There are some stories in which the wife either follows or encounters her husband while she is dressed in her male disguise. But we are given no sense as to how the husband is feeling about his decision to murder his wife: the only emotion he gives off is anger at his perceived betrayal.

having Posthumous forgive his wife and accept her sexuality even while he still believes she is guilty."[156]

While Posthumus' evident misery goes some way to endearing him to the audience, it is not enough to excuse his behaviour, and his misguided belief in Innogen's guilt indicates that he still has room to grow. The next step in his redemption comes when he defeats Giacomo in a brief skirmish. In fairy tales, whenever a hero battles against a dragon or a giant, he is really battling against his own inner demons, his powerful emotions which are at times so daunting they appear monstrous.[157] Slaying the demon represents a crucial stage on the path from immaturity to maturity, signifying that the hero has overcome his emotional anxieties. Similarly, Posthumus' physical triumph over Giacomo symbolises a newfound capacity to overcome the emotional demons exploited by the Italian, namely his sexual insecurity and jealousy. However, in Shakespeare's emotional scheme it's important that Posthumus leaves Giacomo alive, so that the Italian may later disclose his villainy and bring about the happy ending.

Posthumus may have won this battle, but there is still a larger war raging between Rome and Britain, which he cannot hope to win alone. As in all good fairy tales, however, help arrives in the nick of time, in the form of Belarius and the two young princes. The two "unfledged" boys, who have "never winged from view o'th'nest" (3.3.27-8), see the war is the perfect opportunity to escape their sheltered lives and test their mettle: "What pleasure," says Arviragus, "find we in life to lock it/ From action and adventure?" (4.4.2-3?). So, like innumerable fairy-tale heroes before them, they decide to leave the safety of familiar, known world and embark on a dangerous quest into the unknown in order to prove themselves, followed by a resigned Belarius.

Their unexpected arrival turns the tide of the battle. Although we witness the fight onstage, it is confusing at times, and is staged in a stylised, 'mock-battle' fashion. The experience is made real, however, in Posthumus' detailed rundown for a British lord. Posthumus relates how "all was lost" for the English until "an ancient soldier" (5.5.15) appeared with "two young striplings" (19), and together they managed to transform what was to be a crushing defeat into a miraculous victory for the Britons: "these three/Three thousand confident, in act as many" (28-9). Although this section of the action is based on 'fact', adapted from a section of Holinshed's *Chronicles* that recounts the story of an old farmer and his two sons who prevented the Danes from

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[156] Cooper, *The English Romance in Time*, p. 290.
[157] Jones, *The Fairy Tale,* p.91

routing the Scots in the Battle of Luncarty in AD 976, it has a distinct fantasy quality to it.[158] Three lowly peasants who throw down their farm tools for swords and mange to defeat mighty odds, winning a decisive victory for the underdogs reads like an archetypal fairy tale. This may have motivated Shakespeare's choice of this passage, which is taken from an entirely separate section of Holinshed from that drawn on for the other pseudo-historical material in the play. Shakespeare certainly seems to play up the improbability of the victory: "This was strange chance", the lord says after hearing Posthumus' account, "A narrow lane, an old man, and two boys" (51-2). But again, we are told to accept it as strange but true: "Nay," says Posthumus, "do not wonder at it. Yet you are made/ Rather to wonder at the things you hear/ Than to work any".

Posthumus' account of the battle points up the decisive roles played by Belarius and the two princes, who have certainly passed their testing and proven their valour and worth. Nowhere, however, does Posthumus mention his own contribution to the victory. The audience, who have just seen the battle, can pick up this inconsistency, but in case we missed it, moments after Posthumus' speech, a group of British soldiers enter the scene and stress that the three outlaws were not alone in their efforts: "There was a fourth man, in a seely habit/ That gave th'affront with them" (86-7). Posthumus' omission points up his chastised state and is a measure of how far the Englishman has come from the boastful youth he was in the beginning of the play.

Despite his heroic part in the battle, Posthumus is still plagued by a guilty conscience. He decides to externalise his inner self-destructive state by changing back into his Roman attire, in the hopes that he will be captured by the victorious Britons and executed: "Most welcome, bondage, for thou art a way,/ I think, to liberty" (97-8). He gets his wish with the entrance of the group of British soldiers, who arrest him on sight. Given his continuing suspicion of Innogen, his imprisonment accords with the evolving emotional movement towards redeeming himself fully and finally being worthy of reconciling with Innogen.

Ghosts and Gods

While Posthumus is in prison, he falls asleep, and in this critically much maligned scene, the ghosts of his parents and brothers enter the stage and circle around him while he dreams. Then, the god Jupiter descends on the back of an eagle, accompanied by lightning and thunder. For years, eminent scholars rejected Posthumus' vision as not

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[158] See Bullough, pp.46-50

being Shakespeare's work, deeming it crude and unnecessary: "the apparitions and their rubbish... are not only, one swears, not Shakespeare's, but could hardly have been perpetrated even by the perpetrator of the worst of the rest of the play".[159] Some directors manage this tricky section by simply excising all or part of the vision from their productions. But perhaps we have been approaching the scene from the wrong direction. I would argue that, far from being meretriciously fantastic, the vision is crucial to the play's developing emotional pattern, and also establishes *Cymbeline's* preoccupation with portraying not rational logic, but rather the logic of dreams, in which the everyday and the fantastic merge without issue.[160]

As mentioned, a chief function of fairy tales is to express our fears and anxieties and then reassure us that happy endings do not come without a struggle: "Fairy tales tell children what they unconsciously know – that human nature is not innately good, that conflict is real, that life is harsh before it is happy – and thereby reassure them about their own fears and their own sense of self".[161] This is, I propose, precisely the message communicated within this strange vision: that 'life is harsh before it is happy'.

From the moment the ghosts of Posthumus' family come on stage, they complain about Posthumus' circumstances, and reproach the god Jupiter for seemingly forsaking him. Jupiter is meant to watch over orphans, so why did he not shield Posthumus from "this earth-vexing smart" (136)? If no man in Britain "could stand up [Posthumus'] parallel" (148), then why was he deemed unworthy of marrying Innogen and banished from Cymbeline's court? Why did Jupiter allow Giacomo to "taint [Posthumus'] noble heart and brain/ With needless jealousy" (159-60)? And why was Posthumus put through the ordeal of war only to have his successes "all to dolours turned" (174)? The ghosts, then, function to call attention to Posthumus' sufferings, and articulate his emotional turmoils. This is typical of ghosts in folktales: deceased family members often appear to offer help and advice from beyond the grave or intercede on the protagonist's behalf [motifs E320, E363, E366].[162] At the same time, they raise the question of *why* Posthumus has been made to suffer so. They can see no purpose behind Jupiter's design, and rail against its perceived injustice: "Since, Jupiter, our son is good/ Take off his miseries" (179-180).

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[159] Granville-Barker, p.236. For a more recent discussion see Warren, pp.54-5
[160] See Ruth Nevo, pp.91-116, for a psychoanalytic discussion of the play's dream logic.
[161] Quoted in Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.xi.
[162] See, for instance, tales in ATU 510 A, "Cinderella", where the mother often comes back in some form or another (fairy godmother, doll, etc.) to give her persecuted daughter advice and aid.

When Jupiter descends, he does not apologise for Posthumus' miseries or admit any flaw in his design, but reprimands the ghosts for presuming that "petty spirits of region low" (186) could understand his methods. Nonetheless, he goes on to explain that there *is* a reason behind his actions, and asserts that Posthumus' sufferings are not needless, reminding the audience that Posthumus is not yet ready for forgiveness: "Whom I love best, I cross, to make my gift,/ The more delayed delighted" (195-6). Posthumus, in other words, shall be "happier much by his affliction made" (202).

Jupiter's words are thus deeply reassuring. He suggests, much as fairy tales do, that suffering is necessary for happiness, and that experiencing hardship actually serves to deepen the pleasure of that final happiness. It is fitting that this scene, the most far-fetched of the play, also contains the most important message of the play, not only for the moral purpose but also the emotional. Jupiter's suggestion that Posthumus will be "happier much by his affliction made" in some ways describes Shakespeare's overall approach in *Cymbeline*. The play is remarkably complicated and it insists on suffering: both Innogen and Posthumus are made to endure much more than their fairy-tale counterparts. But, as Jupiter reassures us, their (and our) suffering and confusion is not gratuitous. Shakespeare is intentionally making things worse for his characters (and his audience) in order to intensify the happiness of the final resolution. There is, in other words, a larger pattern at work in the play. But, just as the ghosts fail to comprehend Jupiter's design, so we find the play at times puzzling and lacking in transparency.

Before Jupiter ascends back into the heavens, he leaves a cryptic tablet on Posthumus' chest which foretells Posthumus' future. This is characteristic of supernatural figures in fairy tales, who descend from some magical realm to grant the hero supernatural wisdom [motif D1811.2]. However, Posthumus is unable to decipher the prophecy's meaning: "'Tis still a dream, or else such stuff as madmen/ Tongue, and brain not; either both, or nothing" (238-9). "Be what it is", he concludes, "The action of my life is like it" (241-2). Posthumus' confusion over Jupiter's will in events to come resembles our own limited understanding of the dramatist's larger pattern in *Cymbeline*; as Elijah Moshinsky, the director of the BBC's televised version of *Cymbeline* said, "the confusion of the play is life like: it's bizarre and emotionally penetrating, and psychologically intense. And very lifelike".[163]

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[163] Quoted in Warren, p.56

The Transformation of Suffering into Joy

On his way to the gallows, Posthumus is fortuitously summoned by the King, which leads into the final scene of the play, in which all the characters come together and the tangled strands of the plot unravel in a series of astonishing revelations and reconciliations. Each is "a mark of wonder" (5.6.366), steadily building towards a miraculous, happy ending. Lytton Strachey said this scene dragged "wretchedly", and Bernard Shaw deemed it "a tedious string of unsurprising denouements sugared with insincere sentimentality after a ludicrous stage-battle".[164] Robert Adams found it "cramped", claiming "so many complications accumulate that by the end of the play only strenuous efforts by a contortion artist can get us out of them".[165] Meanwhile Richard Meek described it as a "remarkable" and "radical experiment", yet ultimately an "*un*satisfactory" one.[166] I would argue, however, that while the action is complicated, it is intentionally so: it creates within us a desire for transparency and order. Similarly, the wild improbabilities are not 'insincere', but serve to heighten the sense of wonder and highlight the extraordinary range of rapidly shifting emotions on display.

Each character is touched emotionally by the stream of revelations. The final scene opens with the victorious Britons grouped together, among them Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, Pisanio, and Cymbeline. The King knights the three outlaws for their valiant service in battle, not yet aware that they are his own sons, and regrets that the fourth "poor soldier that so richly fought,/ Whose rags shamed gilded arms" (5.6.3-4) could not be found and likewise rewarded, again not knowing his identity as his son-in-law. The doctor Cornelius then enters with the first revelation: "The Queen is dead" (27), and reports that before dying she confessed to hating both Innogen and Cymbeline and planning to poison them. Earlier in the play, we were informed that she was ill, suffering a "fever with the absence of her son" (4.3.2), so her death is not surprising as an event, though it is in the manner. "How ended she," Cymbeline asks, "With horror," replies Cornelius, "madly dying, like her life,/ Which being cruel to the world, concluded/ Most cruel to herself" (30-3). The violence of her passing, which might strike the modern reader as incongruous with a happy ending, is perfectly in line with traditional versions of *Snow White*. The wicked stepmother is always graphically punished for her villainy: she is roasted in a brick-kiln, or forced to dance in red-hot

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[164] Strachey, p.64; Wilson, p.63.
[165] Robert M. Adams, *Shakespeare: The Four Romances* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1989), p.62
[166] Richard Meek, *Narrating the Visual in Shakespeare* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), p. 192

shoes until she dies.[167] The news of the Queen's treachery acts as an emotional catalyst for the King who had no idea of his wife's wickedness: "O most delicate fiend! / Who is't can read a woman?' (47-8). He is genuinely perplexed and hurt, and galvanised into revaluation: "Mine eyes/ Were not in fault, for she was beautiful... nor my heart/ That thought her like her seeming." (62-65).[168] It is the first in a steady sequence of moments of emotional *anagnorisis*, though the revelation of facts is less significant to the design than the affective changes they cause. Indeed, if the ending is judged purely in structural terms it might be seen as inadequate because, as Meek has carefully argued, the revelation of facts "seem[s] to overwhelm the story rather than clarify it'. [169] This may be a sign that Shakespeare is aiming not at structural cohesion here or the plot details *per se,* but rather focusing on the emotional states they engender.

Next, the Roman prisoners are ushered on stage, and with them the remaining characters: Lucius, Giacomo, Posthumus, and Innogen (Fidele), the last two of whom are still disguised and unrecognisable to each other or anyone else. Lucius begs Cymbeline to spare his page, Fidele. "I have surely seen him," (92) says Cymbeline upon regarding his disguised daughter. Like his sons earlier and Lucius after them, Cymbeline takes an instant liking to Fidele – "Thou has looked thyself into my grace" (94) – reinforcing the fairy-tale notion that inherent goodness cannot be hidden, only camouflaged. Cymbeline's unconscious recognition of his daughter leads him to offer 'Fidele' any boon in his power to grant, which he assumes will be used to spare Lucius from the fate awaiting the rest of the defeated Roman army. In the next surprising twist, however, Innogen turns away from her master: "No, no. Alack/ There's other work at hand" (102-3). She has just spotted something "Bitter to [her] as death" (104), and appears to be staring at Giacomo: "Wherefore ey'st him so?" (114), inquires Cymbeline, and the tension starts to build. Innogen requests to talk to the King "in private" (115), and the pair move off to the side. This brief pause helps to heighten the suspense and it also provides the opportunity for Belarius and the boys to express amazement that Fidele is alive – "but we see him dead" (127) – and for Pisanio to recognise his mistress, "she is living" (128). It is "artifice unashamed", as Granville-Barker puts it,

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[167] Briggs, *Dictionary,* "Snow-White"; Grimm, no.53

[168] The relationship between the King and the Queen seems like a play on that between Posthumus and Innogen. Where the King is the only one who cannot see through the Queen's false facade and is blinded by her beauty, Posthumus is the only one who cannot see Innogen's true beauty and is blinded by his anxiety. Both characters may reasonably ask "Who is't can read a woman?"

[169] Meek, pp. 192-6.

but it allows us to experience the thrill of recognition with the characters, who themselves become "livelier lookers-on".[170]

When Innogen and Cymbeline return, the King tells Giacomo to step forward, and Innogen makes her demand: "My boon", she declares to the startled spectators, "is that this gentlemen may render/ Of whom he had this ring" (135-6). This is distinctly reminiscent of the last scene in *All's Well*, where the King and Diana make similar demands. In line with the wager tradition, Innogen has fortuitously spotted an item belonging to her in the villain Giacomo's possession, but unlike the typical folktale tricksters, who are reluctant to explain how they came by the token(s), Giacomo is "glad to be constrained to utter that/ Torments me to conceal" (138-9), thus preparing the ground for his exoneration later on.

He proceeds to provide a lengthy explanation, to Cymbeline's mounting frustration: "I stand on fire" (168); "Nay, nay, to th'purpose" (179). Drawing out Giacomo's account functions to keep the suspense up – we too are anxious for the Italian to "Come to the matter" (169) – but it also foregrounds Giacomo's remorse. His tale becomes a protracted confession, beginning with a "Upon a time" (153), and coloured with emotional expressions like, "O, would our viands had been poisoned, or at least/ Those which I heaved to head!" (156-7). He paints himself to be alone the villain, the "wretch" (181) who acted "Most vilely" (198), while Posthumus becomes "the best of all/ Amongst the rar'st of good ones" (159-6), "A true knight" (186), and Innogen a "paragon... For whom [his] heart drops blood" (147-8). Perhaps by turning what is conventionally a simple description of the wager plot into a romantic tale which Giacomo tells orally to an entranced audience, Shakespeare was also hinting at the generic source for the wager story.

Traditionally, after the villain's confession, the heroine typically comes forward and removes her disguise, having finally had her honour restored and chastity confirmed before all those who wronged her. But Shakespeare delays the climax a little longer, focusing on unravelling and clarifying the array of emotional responses. It is not Innogen who reveals herself after Giacomo's speech, but Posthumus, who curses the "Italian fiend" (210) before descending into a fury of self-reproach, which culminates in the pitiful "O Innogen!/ My queen, my life, my wife, O Innogen,/ Innogen, Innogen!" (225-7). His speech further restores our sympathy for him, since he acknowledges publicly the faithfulness of his wife, which is essential for the happy ending: "The

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[170] Granville-Barker, p.279

temple/ Of virtue was she" (220-1).[171] Only now does Innogen come forward: "Peace, my lord. Hear, hear" (227). She is still disguised, however, so Posthumus does not recognise her, and in his hysterical remorse he strikes the "scornful page" (228) to the ground. Such surprising twists to the traditional pattern serve to defer revelations which we know will happen. Shakespeare seems to be toying with his material and audience, flirting with tedium in order to exploit the relentlessly fluctuating emotions. Posthumus' hitting Innogen is also a stark reminder of the violence she has suffered at her husband's hands, and may be a nod to the oral tradition, in which the husbands often physically abuse their wives.[172] Innogen's fall encourages Pisanio, until now a spectator, to come forward in dismay and reveal her true identity: "O my lord Posthumus,/ You ne'er killed Innogen till now. Help, Help!" (230-1). Shakespeare emphasises the wonder of the moment through Cymbeline and Posthumus' baffled reactions to the news that Innogen is alive:

> *Cymb*: Does the world go round?
> *Post*: How come these staggers on me? ...
> *Cymb*: If this be so, the gods do mean to strike me
> To death with mortal joy   232-5

Still the dramatist tantalisingly defers the reunion of husband and wife. When Innogen awakes to see gentle Pisanio before her, she repulses the servant and accuses him of poisoning her: "O, get thee from my sight!" (237). This compels Cornelius to explain about the Queen's sleeping potion, which in turn clarifies Fidele's miraculous return from the dead for Belarius and the boys. Only then do Innogen and Posthumus finally come together. She wraps her arms about his neck in love and forgiveness, and he utters one of the most powerful lines of the play: "Hang there like fruit, my soul,/ Till the tree die" (262-3). After the chaos of the last few minutes, the moving simplicity of this sentiment makes it stand out like a beacon, highlighting Posthumus' remorse and devotion.[173]

The remaining revelations occur quickly, but without haste. Simply listing these events draws attention to the fact that they are, as critics have complained, plentiful to the point of apparent redundancy. Shakespeare could have wrapped it all up much more

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[171] In *All's Well That Ends Well*, as we have seen, Bertram never publicly acknowledges the virtue or cleverness of his wife, so we are never really certain whether everything Helena has gone through is worth it, whether the end justifies the questionable means employed throughout the play

[172] It also recalls the way Orsino berates Cesario/Viola at the end of *Twelfth Night*

[173] For Caroline Spurgeon, who analyses the use of tree imagery throughout *Cymbeline*, this phrase sums up "all we long to know of the remorse and real feeling and...passionate devotion of Posthumus, ten words which do more than anything else in the whole play to bring him in weight and value a little nearer to Imogen" (p.293)

quickly, as he did in the *dénouement* of *The Winter's Tale*, where economy of action was a priority. But for an experienced playwright to create his ending in the way he does suggests that he had other dramatic and emotional concerns beyond narrative thoroughness. Cymbeline tearfully embraces his estranged daughter, "How now, my flesh, my child?" (264), and finally gives her his blessing (267-8). He informs Innogen of her stepmother's death and Cloten's disappearance, which prompts Guiderius to come forward and admit to killing the Prince. Cymbeline feels reluctantly forced to condemn Guiderius to death, which motivates Belarius to intercede: "This boy is better than the man he slew" (303). The old soldier relates the story of the kidnapping, confessing that his name is not Morgan but Belarius, and that the two boys Polydore and Cadwal are really the princes Guiderius and Arviragus. Cymbeline is at first incredulous, but remembers that Guiderius had a red, star-shaped mole on his neck, "a mark of wonder" (366), which Belarius can verify. Guiderius' mole, in a gesture towards the folk sources, pleasingly echoes the mark used to identify Innogen earlier, although with happy rather than tragic results [motif H51.1]. Cymbeline's astonishment at finding his lost sons quickly gives way to overwhelming joy, "O, what am I?/ A mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother/ Rejoiced deliverance more" (369-371), which in turn opens the way for the reunion between Innogen and her brothers: "O my gentle brothers... You called me brother,/ When I was but your sister" (375-8).

With the reunions complete, all that remains is the uncovering of Posthumus as the "forlorn soldier that so nobly fought" (406), which finally proves him worthy of Innogen in Cymbeline's eyes. His admission is backed up by Giacomo, who prostrates himself before Posthumus, expecting that his life will now be forfeit as punishment for slandering Innogen. Instead, in a move which defies all traditional wager stories, Posthumus decides to pardon Giacomo, bidding him: "Live,/ And deal with others better" (420-1).[174] Caught up in the spirit of forgiveness, Cymbeline then decides to free all the Roman prisoners, magnanimously declaring: "Pardon's the word to all" (423).

But before the play ends, Posthumus produces the coded tablet and calls upon the Roman soothsayer to interpret it. Through much manipulating of the material, the soothsayer manages to coax a reading out of the riddle that fits the events that have just occurred, allowing him to conclude that Jupiter foretold "peace and plenty" (458). Shakespeare seems to be gently poking fun at our desire to make sense of life, when life

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[174] We have been prepared for this throughout the last scenes of the play, particularly 5.2.1-10 and 5.6.138-208, in which Shakespeare emphasises the Italian's sense of guilt and remorse, feelings which are conspicuously absent from traditional versions of the wager story.

is a senseless riddle best left to the gods. Regardless, Cymbeline is inspired by the soothsayer's words, and decides to continue paying the tribute to Rome as a sign of mutual respect. The play ends on a note of overwhelming joy and unity on an emotional plane, but also in a vision of national reconciliation: "Never was a war did cease,/ Ere bloody hands were washed, with such a peace" (484-5).

It is a happy ending worthy of the best 'wonder' tale (the word occurs ten times in the play). On the narrative level, the ending is pleasing because it ties up all loose threads and straightens out all complications. *Cymbeline* is filled with twisted expectations, disguises, wild improbabilities, and multiple confusions, and it adroitly interweaves a whole host of different fairy-tale threads: the narrative of a wager on a wife's chastity, the tale of *Snow White*, a story of a persecuted daughter and her tyrannical father-king, a Patient Griselda plot, a plot involving children abducted from their nursery and brought up as wild men in the woods, and the basic story of the lowly peasant who must prove himself worthy of a princess. In the end, however, the various plot threads coalesce into one unified story, the knots are untangled, identities are revealed, everyone receives their just reward, and peace descends. Shakespeare seems to have purposely complicated the action throughout the play so as to inspire in the audience a desire for order and simplicity. When, therefore, this is finally granted in the last scene and peace is restored to a world long engulfed in chaos, it evokes a dizzying sense of relief and wonder.

At the same time, however, the ending also satisfies on a deeper, emotional level because there is a transformation of different states of individual suffering into a collective and cathartic joy, a "sudden joyous 'turn'".[175] "The real magic of the fairy tale", says Maria Tatar, "lies in its ability to extract pleasure from pain".[176] This seems to embody the ethos of *Cymbeline* perfectly. Throughout, the action hovers dangerously close to tragedy, but actual disaster strikes nobody but the villainous Queen and her dispensable son. The King blundered in his marriage and his dealings with Rome, but Britain survives; a father loses his children, but they are restored to him unharmed; Posthumus and Innogen both believe each other dead, but they do not kill themselves as they grieve, and are reunited in marriage; Giacomo has caused disharmony by his actions, but his life is spared because of his penitence; and the Romans are conquered,

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[175] J. R. R. Tolkien, *Tolkien on Fairy-Stories,* eds Verlyn Flieger and Douglas A. Anderson (London: HarperCollins, 2008), p.75. According to Tolkien: "It is the mark of a good fairy-story, of the higher or more complete kind, that however wild its events, however fantastic or terrible the adventures, it can give to child or man that hears it, when the 'turn' comes, a catch of the breath, a beat and lifting of the heart, near to (or indeed accompanied by) tears, as keen as that given by any form of literary art" (pp.75-6)
[176] Tatar, *Annotated Tales,* p.xiv

but in the end they are set free. Again, Shakespeare seems to have purposely prolonged his characters' sufferings and courted the potential for disaster so as to generate in the audience a longing for a happy ending, which, when it finally arrives, "The more delayed delighted". This bears out Giovanni Battista Guarani's sixteenth-century description of tragi-comedy as a form which takes from tragedy "il pericolo, non la morte" (the danger, not the death).[177] John Fletcher, who shared Shakespeare's love of romances, similarly explained that tragi-comedy "wants deaths, which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neere it, which is inough to make it no comedie".[178]

The ending is also emotionally effective because it does not attempt to negate all the suffering and turmoil the characters (and audience) have endured in the play:

> The consolation of fairy-stories, the joy of the happy ending... is not essentially "escapist", nor "fugitive". In its fairy-tale – or otherworld – setting, it is a sudden and miraculous grace: never to be counted on to recur. It does not deny the existence of *dyscatastrophe*, of sorrow and failure: the possibility of these is necessary to the joy of deliverance; it denies ... universal final defeat and in so far is *evangelium*, giving a fleeting glimpse of Joy, Joy beyond the walls of the world, poignant as grief.[179]

Shakespeare has gone to great lengths to point up the dark, grittily realistic emotions and themes at the heart of the supposedly trivial and improbable stories dramatised in *Cymbeline*: Posthumus' irrational and overwhelming sexual anxiety; the murky violation of Giacomo's voyeurism; Innogen's psychological and physical suffering at the hands of her husband, father, and stepmother. The happy ending does not cancel out these sinister emotions, nor does it deny the existence of sorrow and failure; it provides a miraculous contrast to these 'adult' undercurrents, offering hope that the characters may in the future be "happier much by [their] affliction made". In this sense, the method employed by Shakespeare in the last scene mimics that employed in the play as a whole: the fantasy (the coincidences, unlikelihoods, incredible happy ending) does not undercut the play's emotional reality, but provides a miraculous contrast to it, making it stand out all the stronger.

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[177] "it takes from the one [tragedy] the great personages, but not the action; the verisimilar plot, but which is not true; the passions moved, but blunted; pleasure, not sadness; danger, but not death. From the other [comedy], controlled laughter, modest jests, the contrived knot, the happy reversal, and above all the comic order", Giovanni Battista Guarani, *Il Verrato* (1588), trans. by Bernard Weinberg, in *A History of Literary Criticism in the Italian Renaissance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), vol.2, pp.659-60.
[178] John Fletcher, "To the Reader", *The Faithfull Shepheardesse* (London: Printed by Edward Allde for for R. Bonian and H. Walley, circa. 1610)
[179] Tolkien, p.75

Cymbeline is a difficult play, filled with moments which defy logical interpretation. But rather than dismissing the play as trivial and 'more improbable than a fairy tale', we should use the fairy-tale links and dream-logic as a guideline, a clue that Shakespeare's concern in this play is not with 'useful information about the external world', but 'the terrifying truths of the inner life', such as the insecurity, jealousy, uncertainty, and (sexual) fear involved in relationships, whether between lovers, friends, or families. On one level, *Cymbeline* may be one of Shakespeare's most unrealistic plays, but on another, emotional level, it is one of his most true to life.

CONCLUSION

t least seven years and as many plays separated *All's Well That Ends Well* from *Cymbeline,* but there is more in common between the works than one might think. Both plays weave together a plethora of different fairy tales to make of them a story that is larger than the sum of its parts. Abandoned and abused wives set out in pursuit of wayward husbands, who disastrously misjudge and underestimate their betrothed. Vilified orphans have to prove themselves worthy of marrying well above their stations. Weak kings need to be made strong again, and minor wars between kingdoms serve as tests of character. Downtrodden protagonists are forced to rely on friendly helpers, who fortuitously enter the action when all seems lost. Objects or tokens like rings and bracelets become almost magical in their ability to change the course of lives. Disguises, deceptions, fake deaths, and identity confusion pervade and complicate the action of both narratives. And each play ends with joyous reunions and wondrous revelations; though arguably only in *Cymbeline* does this final happiness extend beyond the narrative level to the complex web of underlying emotions.

Both plays, moreover, reveal that Shakespeare utilised not only the narrative patterns and plots of folktales, but also their powerful yet latent emotional subtexts, which are in turn based on some of the most frightening subconscious fears possible, held by adults let alone children: rape, jealousy, violation, abduction, losing virginity, lust, rejection, identity confusion, murder, inter-generational conflict, violence, deceit, the experience of being orphaned, and so on – material which might elsewhere be seen as the stuff of dreams or nightmares. Shakespeare brings these dormant emotional subtexts to the surface of each play, and uses them artfully to complicate and darken his apparently 'innocent' dramatic actions, creating new and disturbing affective responses in characters and audience alike. The playwright is anticipating modern insights into the emotionally disturbing, primitive material of so-called children's stories. In utilising common fairy tales as sources, then, Shakespeare was also evoking their powerful emotional and personal resonances, which allowed him to weave layer upon layer of meaning into the plays, and connect with his audience on an emotional, albeit largely subconscious level.

All's Well That Ends Well and *Cymbeline* are far from alone in the Shakespeare canon in their utilisation of troubling material plundered from the dramatist's childhood experience of folk- and fairy tales. Motifs like the ghost in *Hamlet* and the witches and eerie apparitions in *Macbeth* raise spectres of familial and social violence. In plays like *King Lear, The Tempest* and *The Merchant of Venice,* overbearing fathers jealously control their daughters' futures, suggestively pointing to deeper psychological drives behind this popular motif, drives which Shakespeare actually dramatises in *Pericles* with the incestuous relationship between King Antiochus and his daughter. The kinds of plots we encounter in orally transmitted stories also lie close to the surface in plays like *Measure for Measure* and *The Taming of the Shrew,* where they raise disquieting questions about the creations of sexual fear and the intricacies of love and trust, which also arise in other works such as *Othello, Much Ado About Nothing,* and *The Winter's Tale.* Perhaps the dramatist's use of fairy tales accounts in part for why his plays have so often been adapted for children, by writers from Charles and Mary Lamb in the early 1800s to the present day and the BBC's televised series *Shakespeare*: *The Animated Tales.*

Although we may not be able to provide the exact folktales Shakespeare and his audience were familiar with, due to their oral and elusive natures, the evidence contained in Shakespeare's plays, particularly *All's Well* and *Cymbeline,* makes clear that there was a great body of oral stories in circulation at the time. This becomes especially plausible when combined with the secondary literary references scattered throughout early modern plays such as *The Old Wives Tale*, chapbooks and other ephemeral printed matter, and prose writings by Reginald Scott and John Aubrey. Folktales held a place and importance in early modern society almost beyond recovery in our modern and industrial age, where oral traditions have largely given way to written forms of communication and technological innovations. These 'mouldy' tales were once ubiquitous, and provided Shakespeare with a deep well of familiar storylines, reference points, and expectations which he could rely on as instructive shorthand, and use to establish a sense of common culture or shared memory, thereby implicating his audience in the fictional world of the play. At the same time, however, that familiarity also allowed Shakespeare to differentiate his plays from the tales they reproduce, exploiting, twisting, and shifting his audience's expectations in freshly creative ways to produce surprising and often unsettling emotional reactions.

It is not difficult for us, after having analysed *All's Well* and *Cymbeline* in depth, to single out a number of folk motifs and plotlines infusing both dramas, but

Shakespeare's audiences may not have necessarily so specifically recognised particular folktales when watching a play. Perhaps, however, they could *sense* something familiar and well-worn lingering just below the surface of the narrative, and were thereby drawn in. In a deliberation on the art of imitation, Petrarch observed: "we writers...must see to it that along with the similarity there is a large measure of dissimilarity; and furthermore such likeness as there is must be elusive, something that it is impossible to seize except by a sort of still-hunt, a quality to be felt rather than defined."[1] In the end, then, perhaps Shakespeare's use of fairy tales is a quality to be 'felt' by audiences, rather than defined.

And so the plays live happily ever after.

THE END

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[1] Francis Petrarch, "To Giovanni Andrea di Bologna", in *The First Modern Scholar and Man of Letters,* ed. and trans. James Harvey Robinson and Henry Winchester Rolfe (New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1970), pp.290-1

MOTIF INDEX*

H1187	Task left by departing husband for virgin wife to accomplish: have a son whose real mother she is and whose real father he is
H1233	Helpers on quest
H1242.1	Unpromising hero succeeds in quest
H1385.4	Quest for vanished husband
H1561.2	Single combat to prove valour
J1111	Clever girl
K512	Compassionate executioner
K1300-1399	Seduction or deceptive marriage
K1310	Seduction by disguise or substitution
K1340	Entrance into girl's (man's) room (bed) by trick
K1342	Entrance into woman's (man's) room by hiding in chest
K1814	Woman in disguise wooed by her faithless husband
K1837	Disguise of woman in man's clothes
K1843.2	Wife takes mistress's place in husband's bed
K1911	The false bride (substituted bride)
K2112	Woman slandered as adulteress (prostitute)
K2112.1	False tokens of woman's unfaithfulness
L100	Unpromising hero (heroine)
L160	Success of the unpromising hero (heroine)
L161	Lowly hero marries princess
N12	Wager on the most obedient wife
N15	Chastity wager
S31	Cruel stepmother
S33	Cruel stepbrother
S34	Cruel stepsister(s)
S111	Murder by poisoning
Q94	Reward for cure
Q411	Death as punishment

Z65.1   Red as blood, white as snow

* As categorised by Stith Thompson, in the *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature,* rev. and enl. ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955-58), 6 vols

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