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Claude Fretz

“Not wond’ring at the present, nor the past”: Dreaming through Time and Space in Shakespeare

In Shakespeare’s *Sonnet 123*, the poet defies personified Time by stressing the ever-constant nature of his love for the fair youth: “Thy registers and thee I both defy, / Not wond’ring at the present, nor the past” (lines 9–10).¹ According to the poetic persona, the passing of time is of no consequence to his love, because his feelings never change: “I will be true despite thy scythe and thee” (line 14). The poet’s confidence in the future of his love leads him to dismiss any concern with past and present points of reference, which to him are equivalent to lies: “thy records and what we see doth lie” (line 11). It is as if love has suspended the poet’s awareness of the passing of time (or his willingness to contemplate the passing of time) and has locked him, his feelings, and his beloved into a dream-like timelessness.

The image of the lover who defies time (a conventional trope in early modern sonnets) was not the only motif used by Shakespeare and other early modern poets and playwrights in their pursuit of creative and imaginative treatments of time.² In Act 4 of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* (1609), for example, the personified figure of Time appears onstage to inform the audience that sixteen years have passed since Leontes’ daughter was abandoned in Bohemia, and that the play’s setting has now moved from the Sicilian court to the Bohemian desert.³ In this play, the passage of time assists the transition from tragedy (Acts 1 to 3) to romantic comedy (Acts 4 and 5). In addition to using personified representations of time in their works, Shakespeare and his contemporaries were also fascinated by the exploration of temporal spaces other than their own: the study and imitation of classical art, literature, and philosophy (in other words, the imitation and revival of past cultures) was encouraged and commended as part of what we now refer to as the humanist movement; and the past was examined

¹ References are to William Shakespeare: *The Sonnets*. Ed. by G. Blakemore Evans. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2006.

² For representations of time in Shakespeare’s sonnets, see Dympna Callaghan: “Confounded by Winter: Speeding Time in Shakespeare’s Sonnets”. In: Michael Schoenfeldt (ed.): *A Companion to Shakespeare’s Sonnets*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2007, pp. 104–118.

³ William Shakespeare: *The Winter’s Tale*. Ed. by Stephen Orgel. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

via chronicles such as those of Plutarch (translated by Thomas North in 1579) and Raphael Holinshed in order to derive lessons for the present.⁴

When composing his history plays and historical tragedies, Shakespeare himself turned to the past as a way of commenting on the present. He deftly accomplished this in the witches' show of the Stuart kings of Scotland in 4.1 of *Macbeth* (1606), which displays Banquo's line of succession up until the reign of James VI and I, who was king of England, Scotland, and Ireland at the time *Macbeth* was composed and first performed; as Lukas Lammers comments, "the play uses a mirror to show a past its future and allows spectators to look back as well as ahead".⁵ In his Roman tragedies, Shakespeare similarly staged past clashes while evoking contemporary political and geopolitical concerns (including around nationhood and monarchical government). Not unlike *Sonnet 123*, where the poetic persona speaks in the present and mentions the past only in order to look to the future, Shakespeare's historical plays fuse different temporal spaces; according to Marjorie Garber, they are "lodged in the paradoxical temporality of what the French call the *futur antérieur*, the prior future, the tense of what 'will have occurred'".⁶ Emblematic of Shakespeare's interest in the playful conflation of past, present, and future is the Fool's anachronistic prophecy in 3.2 of the folio version of *King Lear* (1605–1606). Parodying a prophecy made by Merlin in George Puttenham's *The Arte of English Poesie* (1588), the Fool proclaims:

When priests are more in word than matter;
 When brewers mar their malt with water;
 When nobles are their tailors' tutors,
 No heretics burned, but wenches' suitors.
 Then shall the realm of Albion
 Come to great confusion [...]
 This prophecy Merlin shall make; for I live before his time (3.2.80–85, 94).⁷

⁴ On Renaissance humanism, see Sarah Hutton: "Platonism, Stoicism, Scepticism and Classical Imitation". In: Michael Hattaway (ed.): *A Companion to English Renaissance Literature and Culture*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2003, pp. 44–57; and Jill Kraye (ed.): *The Cambridge Companion to Renaissance Humanism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1996. For Shakespeare's use of classical sources, see Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (ed.): *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004; and Colin Burrow: *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2013.

⁵ William Shakespeare: *Macbeth*. Ed. by Nicholas Brooke. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008; Lukas Lammers: *Shakespearean Temporalities: History on the Early Modern Stage*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2018, p. 204.

⁶ Marjorie Garber: "'What's Past Is Prologue': Temporality and Prophecy in Shakespeare's History Plays". In: Barbara Kiefer Lewalski (ed.): *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1986, pp. 301–331, pp. 306–307.

⁷ For the folio's *The Tragedy of King Lear*, I quote from Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katharine Eisaman Maus (ed.): *The Norton Shakespeare*. New York: Norton, 2008.

Since the reign of the legendary Leir predates Merlin, the Fool here echoes a prophecy that is only going to be made in the future. Even so, the Fool’s words are not really prophetic at all, but rather describe the realm’s present decay; after all, if the frenetic plotting and scheming that follows Lear’s division of the kingdom into three parts teaches us anything, it is that the realm has already “[c]ome to great confusion”.

Shakespeare, though, did not just explore the dramatic possibilities of anachronism, timelessness, personified time, and temporal non-specificity, but developed a highly imaginative approach to geographic spaces: settings like Illyria (*Twelfth Night*), Bohemia (*The Winter’s Tale*), and the forest of Arden (*As You Like It*) are ancient, otherworldly, or non-specific locations with multiple cultural and temporal resonances; the Venetian settings of *The Merchant of Venice* (1596–1597) and *Othello* (1604) are connected to Elizabethan London; and *The Tempest* (1611), set on a strange, foreign, and unnamed island, capitalises on the early modern fascination with exoticism that had already given rise to the flourishing genre of travel writing.⁸ On a fundamental level, these different themes or trends – exoticism, travel writing, and the imitation or study of the past in order to enrich or better understand the present – all share a notable characteristic: namely, the juxtaposition or conflation of different temporal and geographical spaces.

While the topics of time, space (including geography), and dreams in Shakespeare’s works have been examined individually by critics of different theoretical persuasions, the present paper moves beyond these studies by linking some of Shakespeare’s dizzying conceptions of time and space directly to his interest in dreams.⁹ I set out to show in this chapter that, in the plays of *A Mid-*

⁸ According to Leo Salinger, Venice in the plays of Shakespeare and Jonson is “a refracted projection of London.” See Leo Salinger: “Venice in Shakespeare and Ben Jonson”. In: Michele Marra-podi, A. J. Hoenselaars, Marcello Cappuzzo, and L. Falzon Stantucci (ed.): *Shakespeare’s Italy: Functions of Italian Locations in Renaissance Drama*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1993, pp. 171–182, p. 173. More recently, this metaphorical view has been qualified by more nuanced studies of the relationship between Shakespeare and Italy. See, for example, Laura Tosi and Shaul Bassi (ed.): *Visions of Venice in Shakespeare*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011; and Graham Holderness: *Shakespeare and Venice*. London: Routledge, 2016. Scholarship on early modern travel writing includes Andrew Hadfield: *Literature, Travel and Colonial Writing in the English Renaissance 1545–1625*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998; Jonathan P. A. Sell: *Rhetoric and Wonder in English Travel Writing, 1560–1613*. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2013; and Jeffrey Knapp: *An Empire Nowhere: England, America, and Literature from Utopia to The Tempest*. Berkeley: California UP, 1992. The early modern body of travel literature includes, for example, Richard Hakluyt’s compilations *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582) and *The Principall Navigations, Voiages, and Discoveries of the English Nation* (1589), Edward Webbe’s *Troublesome Travails* (1590), and Thomas Nashe’s picaresque prose fiction *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594).

⁹ Callaghan: “Confounded by Winter”; Ricardo J. Quinones: “Views of Time in Shakespeare”. In: *Journal of the History of Ideas* 26 (1965), pp. 327–352; Ina Habermann and Michelle Witen (ed.): *Shakespeare and Space: Theatrical Explorations of the Spatial Paradigm*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016; Marra-podi, Hoenselaars, Cappuzzo, and Stantucci (ed.): *Shakespeare’s*

summer Night's Dream (1595), *The Taming of the Shrew* (c. 1591), *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline* (1610), Shakespeare uses dreams and their topsy-turvy temporal and spatial logic to create moments of comic or tragic confusion for his characters. I will also show that, in these plays, the characters' experiences of upside-down spatial and temporal structures as part of (or as a result of) their dreams are not simply tied to dramatic traditions like the comedic convention of misunderstanding and deception (which goes back to classical comedy) but rather reflect a broader cultural understanding of dreams.¹⁰ In fact, putting aside the Renaissance debates about the meanings of dreams (to which an abundance of scholarship has been devoted), the early modern experience of dreams was fundamentally one of temporal and spatial confusion.¹¹ For example, prophetic dreams and dreams of visitations by the dead, by angels, or by gods – accounts of which abound in the Renaissance – constitute temporal derangements, because they bring the future or the past into the present. Such dreams are mostly found in texts influenced by classical culture or by scriptural passages in which God or an angel speaks directly to the dreamer (e. g. Genesis 20:2, Matthew 1:20–23, Matthew 2:13, Matthew 2:19, Numbers 12:6, Job 33:14–18). Shakespeare's plays themselves contain numerous instances of prophetic or seemingly prophetic dreams: Richard III has a dream in which his victims' ghosts condemn him to "despair and die"; Calphurnia dreams of Caesar's murder; Duke Humphrey has a dream that predicts the deaths of the dukes of Somerset and Suffolk; and Brabantio dreams of his daughter Desdemona's elopement with Othello.¹² While it is of course true that dreams in Shakespeare's plays come in many forms – they can be not just prophetic or god-sent but also cautionary, demonic, psychophy-

Italy; Holderness: Shakespeare and Venice; Joseph Rosenblum: *All the World's a Stage: A Guide to Shakespearean Sites*. London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019; Jane Hwang Degenhardt: "Foreign Worlds". In: Arthur Kinney (ed.): *The Oxford Handbook of Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 433–457; Marjorie Garber: *Dream in Shakespeare: From Metaphor to Metamorphosis*. New Haven: Yale UP, 1974; and Claude Fretz: *Dreams, Sleep, and Shakespeare's Genres*. London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020.

¹⁰ For devices of deception in classical comedy, see Burrow: *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity*, pp. 133–161.

¹¹ For studies of early modern dreams and their contexts and meanings, see Carole Levin: *Dreaming the English Renaissance: Politics and Desire in Court and Culture*. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008; Sue Wiseman, Katharine Hodgkin, and Michelle O'Callaghan (ed.): *Reading the Early Modern Dream: The Terrors of the Night*. New York: Routledge, 2008; Peter Brown (ed.): *Reading Dreams: The Interpretation of Dreams from Chaucer to Shakespeare*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 1999; and Ita Mac Carthy, Kirsti Sellevold and Olivia Smith (ed.): *Cognitive Confusions: Dreams, Delusions and Illusions in Early Modern Culture*. Cambridge: Legenda, 2016.

¹² William Shakespeare: *Richard III*. Ed. by John Jowett. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008, 5.4.105; William Shakespeare: *Julius Caesar*. Ed. by David Daniell. London: Thomson Learning/Arden Shakespeare, 2006, 2.2.75–79; William Shakespeare: *Henry VI Part Two*. Ed. by Roger Warren. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008, 1.2.25–30; William Shakespeare: *Othello*. Ed. by Michael Neill. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008, 1.1.141.

siological, fictional, or metaphorical – I will suggest in this chapter that Shakespeare repeatedly and consistently depicts the dream state as a condition of temporal and spatial derangement.¹³

Temporal and Spatial Transformations in Comedy

It has been contended that there is a narratological analogy between dreams and anachrony. Jeremy Tambling writes that “[a]nachronism counters a reading where events happen within a definable historical framework, with ‘before’ and ‘after’, cause and effect”.¹⁴ In dreams, too, there is often no clear cause-and-effect relationship between events or images, and Tambling intriguingly goes on to compare anachrony to the dream state: “dreams, as anachronistic and anachoristic, disallow narrative causality”.¹⁵ But there is a problem with this analogy, because the perception that something is anachronistic is only possible within a definable temporal structure: the pastness of the past, the presentness of the present, and the futurity of the future have to be evident (either instantaneously or retrospectively) in order for anachrony to become observable. Dreams simply do not provide that kind of clarity. Not only does the state of sleep – often the prerequisite for having a dream – entail an oblivion or ignorance of the passage of time, but dreams also merge different temporal spaces into one, thereby frustrating any sense of time.¹⁶ Even a cursory look at dreams reveals that prophetic dreams can meld the future and the present, and that the memory fragments displayed in dreams can blend the past and the present, often without the dreaming subject being aware of the pastness or futurity of these events while the given dream is happening; sometimes, the subject remains confused even after waking up.¹⁷ Sigmund Freud captured this aspect of dreams in *The Interpretation of Dreams* (1899; post-dated 1900 by the publisher) when he argued that dream thoughts are the products of condensation (or compression), displacement, and

¹³ For the different types of dreams in Shakespeare (and their functions), see Garber: *Dream in Shakespeare*; and Fretz: *Dreams, Sleep, and Shakespeare’s Genres*.

¹⁴ Jeremy Tambling: *On Anachronism*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2010, p. 4.

¹⁵ Tambling: *On Anachronism*, p. 6.

¹⁶ For a psychological perspective on the relationship between dreams and the passage of time, see Michael Schredl’s chapter on *Zeiterfahrung im Traum. Empirische Befunde* in this volume.

¹⁷ Subjects tend to become aware of the prophetic nature of a past dream only after the predicted event has occurred. This is also dramatised by Shakespeare. In *Richard III*, Lord Stanley sends a messenger to Lord Hastings to warn him that he “dreamt tonight the boar [Richard’s heraldic badge] had razed his [Stanley’s] helm“ (3.2.9); Hastings at first dismisses the dream but later declares it veridical when Richard orders his decapitation (3.4.81–88).

representation (including symbolism).¹⁸ The implication of Freud's observation is that, in dreams, temporal and geographical spaces can become combined (condensation), they can become substituted by other spaces (displacement), or they can be symbolic/figurative of something altogether different (representation).

While it would seem anachronistic (no pun intended) to seek to apply Freud's concepts to Shakespeare's dream images, it is productive to examine how the phenomena theorised by Freud were described in the language and in the intellectual cultures of early modern England. In *A Treatise of Melancholie* (1586), Timothy Bright stressed the dream's potential to subvert standard notions of time and space when he wrote: "[the mind] seeth in dreames things past as present: for so it doth also future things sometimes: which rather may argue, that both past, and to come are both present vnto the mind, of such things as fall into the capacite of her consideration".¹⁹ Bright here points to the ability of dreams to confound any sense of temporal sequentiality and to combine past, present, and future into one single moment: that of the oneiric "now". A similar observation to that by Bright was made by Thomas Nashe. In *The Terrors of the Night* (1594), Nashe compared dreams to the timeless chaos that preceded the creation of the universe: "No such figure of the first Chaos whereout the world was extraught, as our dreames in the night. In them all states, all sexes, all places are confounded and meete together".²⁰ Nashe here draws attention to the temporal condensation and displacement that defines the experience of dreaming. Like Tambling, moreover, Nashe defines the dream state as anachoristic ("all places are confounded").²¹

¹⁸ Sigmund Freud: *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Trans. by A. A. Brill. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1997, pp. 170–173, 190–220.

¹⁹ Timothy Bright: *A Treatise of Melancholie*. London, 1586, p. 119.

²⁰ Thomas Nashe: *The Terrors of the Night*. London, 1594, sig. C4r. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (a major influence on Shakespeare), the chaos is described as follows:

No sun was lighted up, the world to view;
 No moon did yet her blunted horns renew:
 Nor yet was Earth suspended in the sky,
 Nor pois'd, did on her own foundations lye:
 Nor seas about the shores their arms had thrown;
 But earth, and air, and water, were in one.
 Thus air was void of light, and earth unstable,
 And water's dark abyss unnavigable.
 No certain form on any was imprest;
 All were confus'd, and each disturb'd the rest.
 For hot and cold were in one body fixt;
 And soft with hard, and light with heavy mixt.

Ovid: *Metamorphoses*. Translated by John Dryden and edited by Samuel Garth. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth, 1998, p. 3.

²¹ Tambling: *On Anachronism*, p. 6.

Within months of the publication of Nashe's *Terrors*, Shakespeare produced his most famous exploration of the theme of dreams: the comedy of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Commenting on this play, Samuel Taylor Coleridge voiced his conviction that "Shakespeare availed himself of the title of this play in his own mind, and worked upon it as a dream throughout".²² Indeed, Shakespeare's play explicitly frames itself as a dream. This is apparent not just from its title but also from its epilogue, which is spoken by the fairy Puck:

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,
 Gentles, do not reprehend (5.1.414–420).²³

Like Nashe's treatment of the topic of dreams, intriguingly, Shakespeare's play also interweaves the idea of a dream with distorted perceptions of time. At the very start of the play, Hippolyta declares that "[f]our days will quickly steep themselves in night; / Four nights will quickly dream away the time" (1.1.7–8). In a self-styled dream play that has a running time of something under three hours, audiences indeed come to feel as though four days and four nights (the time that ostensibly passes between the start of the play and Theseus and Hippolyta's wedding day) have been condensed, combined, and dreamt away.²⁴

Shakespeare's emphasis on dreamlike perceptions of time continues in Act 2. Here, Demetrius accuses Helena of abandoning the city and trusting the "opportunity of night" (2.1.217) in the pursuit of someone who does not even reciprocate her love (Demetrius has no feelings for her). Helena responds with a series of inferences that lead to the conflation of day and night, and of solitude and company:

It is not night when I do see your face.
 Therefore I think I am not in the night,
 Nor doth this wood lack worlds of company,
 For you in my respect are all the world.
 Then how can it be said I am alone,
 When all the world is here to look on me? (2.1.221–226)

²² Samuel Taylor Coleridge: *Lectures and Notes on Shakespeare and Other English Poets*. London: G. Bell and sons, 1883, p. 290.

²³ All references are to William Shakespeare: *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Ed. by Peter Holland. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

²⁴ Critics have also pointed out that the four days and nights are not fully spanned in the play. This discrepancy has been ascribed to the play's magical quality. See Anne Paolucci: "The Lost Days in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*". In: *Shakespeare Quarterly* 28 (1977), pp. 317–326.

Echoing the typical Petrarchan rhetoric of the period's love sonnets, Helena here uses argument and inference to assert that it is not night (because she can see Demetrius) and that she is not alone (because he represents the whole world to her). Putting aside her romantic rhetoric, Helena is of course wrong on both counts: it is night; and the characters are in a dark forest, away from the city of Athens. But not unlike Nashe's description of dreams as phenomena that confound "all states, all sexes, all places", Helena's speech does capture the characteristic conflation or substitution of states that is found in dreams (and in Shakespeare's dramatic imitation of the dream state).²⁵

Shakespeare's design of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as a dream narrative with unusual conceptions of time and space is again brought into relief in Act 3. Here, the fairy king Oberon intimates that the lovers' adventures will seem to them nothing more than "a dream and fruitless vision" (3.2.371), because the magical potion that the fairies will administer to them will render them oblivious of what has happened in the forest. At the end of the play, indeed, part of the lovers' past has been erased. When they wake up in 4.1, they cannot fully remember any of their adventures in the forest thanks to the fairies' magic, and they are unable even to differentiate between sleep and wakefulness; for them, their adventures in the forest become an oneiric parenthesis, both true and untrue, both real and unreal. This becomes clear, for example, when Lysander claims that he is "[h]alf sleep, half waking" (4.1.146) and "cannot truly say how [he] came here" (147). Meanwhile, Demetrius, whose love for Hermia the fairies have had to redirect towards Helena in order to restore harmony in Athens (Hermia was already in love with Lysander), claims that "[his] love to Hermia, / Melted as the snow, seems to [him] now / As the remembrance of an idle gaud / Which in [his] childhood [he] did dote upon" (4.1.164–167). It seems that, in the oneiric forest of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Demetrius's affections for Hermia have been reduced to a distant and vague memory fragment from his childhood, not unlike his adventures in the forest which he now cannot properly remember. It is as though part of the past has been undone.

Shakespeare's play again subverts temporal norms when Puck cautions Oberon that the fairies' work must be completed quickly, "[f]or night's swift dragons cut the clouds full fast, / And yonder shines Aurora's harbinger" (3.2.379–380), and the fairy king responds: "But we are spirits of another sort. / I with the morning's love have oft made sport" (388–389). Oberon's words suggest that, unbeknownst even to Puck, the ordinarily nocturnal fairies can in Shakespeare's play be active during the day, as well. Nocturnal existence and diurnal existence are not the only states that are turned on their heads. In Act 5, Puck further highlights the play's topsy-turvy temporality when he proclaims that it is now the time when even death can be reversed:

²⁵ Nashe: *The Terrors of the Night*, sig. C4r.

Now it is the time of night
 That the graves, all gaping wide,
 Every one lets forth his sprite
 In the churchway paths to glide (5.1.370–373).

Shakespeare, it seems, agrees with Nashe’s assertion that the dream state reflects the chaos that preceded the creation of the world, because his design of this play as a dream brings with it a destabilisation of conventional norms of time and space. Theseus (unwittingly) captures the play’s temporal confusion and indeterminacy when he voices his fear that, since the mechanicals’ performance of *Pyramus and Thisbe* has run until midnight, “we shall outsleep the coming morn / As much as we this night have overwatched” (5.1.356–357). Theseus in these lines echoes Hippolyta’s claim at the start of the play that “[f]our days will quickly steep themselves in night” (1.1.7): not only do daytime and nighttime morph into each other so rapidly that any distinction between the two collapses, but the play’s temporal muddle also prompts the characters to abandon their normal sleep-wake cycles.

Shakespeare first turned to the dream device when he wrote the comedy of *The Taming of the Shrew*, more or less four years before *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* was written and performed. When he did so, he already showed interest in the temporally disorienting quality of dreams. At the start of *The Taming of the Shrew*, the tinker Christopher Sly is found asleep by a lord. The lord decides to trick Sly into believing that he is in reality an aristocrat and that his previous life has been a dream. In order to persuade Sly, the lord arranges for him to be dressed in “sweet clothes” (Induction 1, 35), served a “delicious banquet” (36), and carried to his “fairest chamber” (43), which is perfumed with the smell of “sweet wood” (46).²⁶ When Sly wakes up in the bedchamber in the lord’s house, he is even told that he has “a lady far more beautiful / Than any woman in this waning age” (Induction 2, 60–61). Confused by what he has been told, Sly examines the state of his senses:

Am I a lord, and have I such a lady?
 Or do I dream? Or have I dreamed till now?
 I do not sleep: I see, I hear, I speak,
 I smell sweet savours and I feel soft things.
 Upon my life, I am a lord indeed (Induction 2, 66–70).

Due to the olfactory effects of the lord’s perfumes and the soft texture of the clothes given to him, Sly becomes persuaded that he is not dreaming – his senses are active – and that he is indeed a lord: he can see, hear, speak, smell, and feel, and therefore what he is experiencing must be real and he must have

²⁶ All references are to William Shakespeare: *The Taming of the Shrew*. Ed. by H. J. Oliver. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008.

dreamt until now. But contrary to what Sly believes – namely, that his active sensory perception validates the lord’s argument that he is an aristocrat – his sensory perception seals his deception, because it leads him to take the lord’s illusion for his reality and his reality for a dream. Sly’s acceptance of the lord’s sophism that his life as a tinker has been a dream amounts to a rewriting of the character’s past, because it replaces his real past and his real condition with a spurious aristocratic identity propped up by a dream ploy. Like *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, *The Taming of the Shrew* thus does not just dramatise the spatial and temporal transformations that can happen within a dream, but also those that arise from the ontological confusion upon waking. When Sly wakes up, his social space has changed from that of the tinker to that of the lord, with the former having turned into a (bogus) dream world; and the character’s past has been displaced entirely by the illusion of a dream.

The comedies of *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* demonstrate that Shakespeare was from early on in his playwriting career interested in using dreams to give parts of his drama a peculiar temporal and spatial logic. In these two plays, much of that happens for comical effect or (as in the case of the lovers’ adventures in the forest of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*) to emphasise the suspension of physical and social norms. While Shakespeare used dream devices throughout his career, he did not give ideas of dreamlike temporality and spatiality the same sustained focus again until later on in his life.²⁷ When he eventually returned to the subject, though, he did so with renewed force and ingenuity. Indeed, it is in Shakespeare’s so-called late plays or romances, and in a couple of late tragedies such as *King Lear* (which predates the late plays by two to three years and has been described as a “Proto-Romance” by critics), that his emulation of the dream state finds its fullest expression.²⁸ These later plays tend to possess a tragicomic and dreamlike quality that turns conventional notions (and perceptions) of time, space, genre, and narrative on their heads. As I will show next, the plays of *King Lear* and *Cymbeline* epitomise how Shakespeare at this stage of his career used dream logic as a structuring principle for various confluences and derangements of times and places.

²⁷ For a discussion of Shakespeare’s various dream devices, see Fretz: *Dreams, Sleep, and Shakespeare’s Genres*; and Garber: *Dream in Shakespeare*.

²⁸ Gordon McMullan: *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing: Authorship in the Proximity of Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007, p. 312; Robert Henke: *Pastoral Transformations: Italian Tragicomedies and Shakespeare’s Last Plays*. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997, p. 26.

Dream, Time, and Tragedy in *King Lear*

When Shakespeare turned to the tragedy of *King Lear*, he drew on ideas of oneiric temporality to help articulate Lear's alternately tragic and tragicomic story. Lear evokes the idea of a dream in Scene 4 after his daughter Gonoril censures him and demands that he dispose of his "insolent retinue" (4.193).²⁹ In response to Gonoril's harsh treatment of him, the king questions his perception of reality:

Doth any here know me? Why, this is not Lear.
 Doth Lear walk thus, speak thus? Where are his eyes?
 Either his notion weakens, or his discernings
 Are lethargied. Sleeping or waking, ha?
 Sure, 'tis not so.
 Who is it that can tell me who I am?
 Lear's shadow? I would learn that, for by the marks
 Of sovereignty, knowledge, and reason
 I should be false persuaded I had daughters (4.217–225).

In this speech, the despairing Lear reasons that his abandonment by his wicked daughters Gonoril and Regan (a major factor in his descent into madness) is so intolerable and unthinkable that it must be a dream (220–221). Like Sly in *The Shrew*, Lear tries to understand his ostensible dream experience by examining the state of his senses. Lear raises doubts about his motility, speech, and sight (218), before wondering whether his "discernings" (i. e. his understanding and intellect) are "lethargied" (219–220) – that is, whether they are inactive and he is asleep. While this is the first instance of the variant "lethargied" that is recorded by the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Shakespeare's use of it makes perfect sense when we consider that the early modern physician Philip Barrough had included "lethargy" in his taxonomy of different states of consciousness and defined it as a "disease" or "dull obliuion" that causes "sluggishnesse and an inexpugnable desyre of sleeping": not only does the term describe what Lear believes to be the present impotence of his senses, but it also dovetails with the motif of a king who refuses to accept his new (waking) reality and escapes into illusory dream worlds.³⁰

Like a lethargy that can be cured, Lear's "dream" does not last forever. In Scene 21, the king is seen sleeping in the presence of his other daughter Cordelia (whom he had wrongfully banished at the start of the play), the doctor, and Kent. When he is woken by Cordelia, Lear at first believes that she is a heavenly spirit and that he is in hell (21.44–46), before responding:

²⁹ Unless otherwise stated, all references are to William Shakespeare: *King Lear*. Ed. by Stanley Wells. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2008. Wells's edition is based on the play's quarto text and divides the play into scenes only, with no interpolation of act divisions.

³⁰ Philip Barrough: *The Methode of Phisicke*. London, 1583, p. 19.

Where have I been? Where am I? Fair daylight?
 I am mightily abused. I should e'en die with pity
 To see another thus. I know not what to say.
 I will not swear these are my hands. Let's see:
 I feel this pin prick. Would I were assured
 Of my condition (21.50–55).

Lear's awakening here is a physical one from sleep, but it is also a metaphorical one from the tragic dream that he enters in Scene 4. As in Scene 4, Lear here turns to his senses in an attempt to comprehend his circumstances: uncertain of whether he is waking or still sleeping and dreaming, he notes his visual perception of "daylight" (21.50) and checks whether he is able to feel the prick of a pin (21.54). But unlike in Scene 4, where the king examines the state of his senses because his tragedy is so intolerable to him that (so he reasons) it must be a dream, his examination of his senses in Scene 21 is prompted by the unexpected bliss of his reunion with Cordelia, which metaphorically wakes him from his tragic dream. It is as if Lear's tragic desolation has been confined to a dream and, now that he has woken up, has (momentarily) vanished. From Lear's perspective, this framing of part of the tragedy as a dream causes spatial and temporal confusion on various levels: Lear does not know how and by what means he has become reunited with Cordelia (21.50); and what he believed to be his permanent separation from her has been reversed. In that regard, Lear's confusion somewhat mirrors that experienced by the awakening lovers in 4.1 of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

In Scene 21 of *King Lear*, natural law and temporality are also turned upside down in a broader sense. In terms of genre, the reunion of Lear and Cordelia marks a sudden, unexpected, and quasi-tragicomic respite from the relentlessly tragic progression that the play has offered up until this point – a tragic movement that soon resumes and culminates in the deaths of Lear and Cordelia.³¹ It is also not just the play's normative genre that becomes disrupted. The natural cycle of sleeping and waking, too, is upset as Lear is seen asleep during "daylight" (21.50) and was earlier shown awake during a nightly tempest (Scene 11). Lear's upside-down sense of time continues when he wakes up and begs Cordelia to "forget and forgive" (21.83). This is a curious phrasing given that one should really forgive first and forget afterwards; one cannot forgive that which one does not remember. When considered together, these different devices and ideas – Lear's *hysteron proteron*, the hybridity of genre, the inversion of normal sleep practices, and the temporal and spatial confusion caused by Lear's tragic "dream"

³¹ Repeatedly, the play of *King Lear* gives us hope of resolution or respite only to dash it with ever higher levels of cruelty and injustice. This dynamic is remarked upon by Edgar when he encounters his blinded father: "The worst is not / As long as we can say "This is the worst" (15.25–26).

and by his later awakening to the sight of Cordelia – are reminiscent of Nashe’s comparison of the dream state to the chaos preceding the creation of the universe. While Nashe writes of “states”, “sexes”, and “places” being “confounded”, Shakespeare in Scene 21 of *King Lear* extends the scope of the dream logic to include not just time, space, and states (like those of sleep and wakefulness) but also – this being a play after all – dramatic genre and rhetoric.³²

When Lear awakes, another interesting thing has happened with time – or with the perception of time. After Lear and Cordelia have had their initial exchange of words, the doctor warns Cordelia not to “make [Lear] even o’er the time he has lost” (21.78). Here, the doctor presents Lear’s tragedy as something that ought to be forgotten or remain forgotten. The scene’s concern with forgetting (also shown by Lear’s ontological uncertainty when he wakes up) owes much to the influence of Seneca. In Seneca’s *Hercules Furens*, Hercules falls asleep after having killed his own children in a fit of madness. When Hercules awakes, he has overcome his insanity but cannot remember any of his actions. Like Seneca’s Hercules, Lear is at first unable to remember past events when he awakes with his sanity restored, asking: “Where have I been? Where am I?” (21.50). This Senecan theme of a reawakening out of madness and into uncertainty or forgetfulness was frequently adapted in early modern drama, sometimes metaphorically. In John Marston’s *The Malcontent* (1602–1604), for example, Mendoza, who has been plotting to usurp the Dukedom of Genoa, draws on the trope of reawakening and forgetting to express his incredulity after his villainies have been exposed by characters whom he believed to have murdered: “Are we surprised? What strange delusions mock / Our senses? Do I dream? Or have I dreamt / This two days’ space? Where am I?”³³ Intriguingly, these lines from Marston’s play are very overtly concerned with the temporal logic (or illogic) of dreams. Mendoza essentially considers three possible explanations for his defeat: he has been “surprised”; he is dreaming now; or he has dreamt “[t]his two days’ space”. In doing so, Mendoza imagines three different modes of time. If Mendoza has simply been “surprised”, then time has been passing normally. But if he has been dreaming for the past two days, he has until now been subject to an alternative reality and an alternative passage of time. And if he is dreaming now, then he is experiencing an altogether different reality even as he speaks his lines. In wondering whether he has dreamt “[t]his two days’ space”, Mendoza also equals oneiric temporality to oblivion and nothingness, because he evokes the idea of a dream to describe his ignorance or inattentiveness while the other characters were plotting against him; as soon as Mendoza wakes up to the reality of their subterfuge, his “dream” of triumph collapses into nothing. In *King Lear*,

³² Nashe: *Terrors of the Night*, sig. C4r.

³³ John Marston: *The Malcontent*. Ed. by George K. Hunter. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2000, 5.6.117–119.

too, the idea of a dream articulates contrasts between consciousness and oblivion, and between the normal passage of time and the dreamer's subjection to an alternative temporality and reality. When the doctor warns Cordelia against "mak[ing] [Lear] even o'er the time he has lost" (21.78), he stresses that the time Lear has "lost" must not be recovered or revisited. Since Lear has (by his own account) been in a state akin to a tragic dream, his past experiences must indeed not be recovered: the process of forgetting them, and of separating the time of Lear's tragic dream from that of his current reality, is as essential to the restoration of Lear's senses as it is to the momentary respite in this scene. The various ideas of dreams and sleep in *King Lear*, and the characters' responses to them, demonstrate that in this play, as in *The Taming of the Shrew* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Shakespeare's depiction of the dream state revolves around the characters' experience of time and space during, and after, their literal or metaphorical dreams.

Dreaming, Forgetting, and Remembering in *Cymbeline*

King Lear was written two to three years before Shakespeare's acting company, the King's Men, acquired the indoor Blackfriars Theatre in 1608. The King's Men's move indoors coincided with Shakespeare's embrace of the genres of tragicomedy and romance – a development that is prefigured in Shakespeare's adaptation of the tale of King Lear, which in its original form ends happily (tragically) with Lear's restoration to the throne. In one of his post-1608 plays, the tragicomic *Cymbeline*, Shakespeare uses the idea of a dream to play havoc with concepts of time and space in a way similar to what we see in *King Lear*. In 4.2, Imogen, here disguised as the male servant Fidele while searching for her husband Posthumus, consumes a soporific drug and falls asleep in the cave of Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius.³⁴ Believing that Imogen has died, Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius place her body next to Cloten's beheaded corpse (which is dressed in Posthumus's clothes). As Imogen slowly wakes up, she briefly continues to sleep-talk and carries on with a conversation that she has been having in her dream:

Yes, sir, to Milford Haven, which is the way?
 I thank you. By yon' bush? Pray, how far thither?
 'Od's pitikins, can it be six mile yet?
 I have gone all night. Faith, I'll lie down and sleep (4.2.290–293).

³⁴ All references are to William Shakespeare: *Cymbeline*. Ed. by Martin Butler. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2005.

Imogen's lines reveal the alternate spatial and temporal reality of her dream. Whereas Imogen has this dream while she is sleeping in the cave, the dream transports her back to something that happens in the previous act: her lines suggest that her dream has been replaying a conversation from 3.6, where she is on her way to Milford Haven and asks two beggars for directions (see 3.6.8). What is more, the dream continues to distort Imogen's sense of time even after she has woken up. Once she is fully awake, in fact, her retelling of the dream is very different from what her earlier somniloquising suggests: "I thought I was a cave-keeper, / And cook to honest creatures. But 'tis not so", Imogen muses (4.2.297–298). Having woken up, Imogen now erroneously believes that the real events between 3.6 and 4.2 (her time spent with Arviragus, Belarius, and Guiderius) constituted her dream, and that her dream (a recapitulation of her journey to Milford Haven) constitutes her current waking reality: "I have gone all night. Faith, I'll lie down and sleep", she says (4.2.293). It thus seems that the dream has absorbed or replaced her waking reality. Amid her loss of temporal and spatial awareness, Imogen even tries to persuade herself that the sight of Cloten's decapitated body, too, is a dream, just like the time spent with Arviragus, Belarius, and Guiderius, which she now believes to be "a bolt of nothing, shot at nothing, / Which the brain makes of fumes" (299–300). When Imogen describes the corpse, she muses "I hope I dream" (296), before later observing that "[t]he dream's here still" (305). But despite her mistaken perception amid the cognitive confusion caused by her dream, Imogen (unwittingly) utters something true when she remarks: "The dream's here still; even when I wake, it is / Without me, as within me; not imagined, felt" (305–306). Imogen's dream is indeed still present, because both its content and its derangement of time and space have reached over into her waking reality, transforming it into an oneiric world of spatial and temporal disorientation where "without" and "within" become interchanged or conflated, and where raw sense images, unprocessed by reason and "not imagined, [but] felt", are the sole source of knowledge (whether true or false).

As in *King Lear*, Shakespeare in *Cymbeline* does not just explore how spatial and temporal distortions manifest themselves within the dream state, but also shows how dreams can overpower the logic of waking reality and disorient a character upon awakening. Not unlike the moment when Lear awakes to the sight of Cordelia and can momentarily forget or ignore his tragedy, Imogen's dream dissolves an entire section of the play into oblivion and nothingness. The dramatic effects achieved by this device in *Lear* and *Cymbeline* reflect the plays' respective genres. Whereas in the tragicomic *Cymbeline* Imogen's cognitive disorientation – a traditional theme in comedy – is counterbalanced by the quasi-tragic discovery of a headless body that she believes to be her lover Posthumus, in the tragic *Lear* the king's post-oneiric uncertainty provokes pathos by stressing his (not wholly deserved) suffering and instilling him with an intense mood of regret.

While Imogen's dream takes her back in time and momentarily erases part of her waking-life experience, Posthumus's dream later in the same play affords him an experience he always lacked: namely, an encounter with his deceased parents and brothers, whom he never got to know. Posthumus's dream in 5.3 consists of a masque-like sequence described by a stage direction as follows:

Enter, as in an apparition, Sicilius Leonatus, father to Posthumus, an old man attired like a warrior, leading in his hand an ancient matron, his wife and mother to Posthumus, with music before them. Then after other music, follows the two young Leonati, brothers to Posthumus, with wounds as they died in the wars (5.3.123.1–5).

In the tragicomic *Cymbeline*, 5.3 marks the point at which the play moves from tragedy into romance or romantic comedy. This becomes clear when the god Jupiter appears in the dream sequence to proclaim a change in Posthumus's fortunes and validate the marriage between him and Imogen: "Whom best I love, I cross; to make my gift, / The more delayed, delighted", Jupiter announces (5.3.165–166). For Posthumus, who has been exiled from his home and deprived not just of his family but also of his beloved Imogen (Imogen's father Cymbeline objects to their relationship), the oneiric reunion with his deceased family (like the validation of his marriage with Imogen) is integral to the gradual assuaging of his pain. As with Imogen's dream, Shakespeare's rendition of Posthumus's dream bears as its hallmark the introduction of an alternate temporal (and spatial) layer. While Imogen and Posthumus are dreaming onstage, their past and their present collide and meld, thereby disrupting the linear flow of the play's time and reshaping the characters' states of mind and consciousness. Since Imogen's and Posthumus's dreams are shared with the audience through a somniloquy and a staged masque, respectively, the audience fully partakes in the characters' distinctly temporal experiences of the dream state.

At a time in the history of theatre when, in the absence of elaborate stage devices or special effects, the success of a play depended heavily on engaging an audience's imagination, the dream state must have seemed an attractive dramatic tool to Shakespeare. Since dreams transcend the rules of natural law, they are quintessential states (and devices) of creativity and imagination. An important part of the oneiric realm of unrestrained creativity and imagination is its derangement of time and space. Shakespeare's plays and Nashe's and Bright's treatises suggest that dreams were in early modern England recognised as states of spatial and temporal implausibility and confusion. In Shakespeare's drama, as this chapter has shown, dreams nurture dizzying conceptions, conflations, and collocations of time and space, thereby achieving comic or tragic, assuaging or disconcerting, effects. In altering the chronological flow of time and expanding the spatial possibilities of the stage, the use of dreams in *The Shrew*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *King Lear*, and *Cymbeline* resembles *Sonnet 123's* imaginative effort

of using poetry to immortalise love and overcome the tediously inevitable fading or dying brought on by the passage of time. In drama as in poetry, in fact, Shakespeare strives to escape constraints of time and space. Shakespeare's conception of dream worlds is often integral to this endeavour, especially in drama, and its ingenuity can even be said to pioneer the analeptic and proleptic techniques that were going to become commonplace centuries later in modern cinema.

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