Reconsidering Shakespeare's 'Lateness'

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Studies in the Last Plays

By

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For my parents

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of his career, Shakespeare wrote a series of plays which modern scholarship tends to consider as a distinctive group. C. L. Barber and Richard Wheeler, surveying his career, observe that

> [i]n all of Shakespeare's development, there is no change in dramatic style so striking as that between the final tragedies and the late romances. (298)

This striking change in dramatic style is manifested in noticeable differences in the plays' generic affiliation, thematic concerns and dramatic style from those of the playwright's previous works. These last plays apparently share a thematic interest in separation and reunion, loss and restoration, and repentance and forgiveness. Their plots all head towards tragedy but end, at least in form, happily. Yet their characterisation seems to show "not greater artistic maturity, but less" (Edwards 1). Their verse style is often considered "too difficult, too knotty, and for some too self-indulgent on Shakespeare's part" (Shapiro 286). That these manifestly different plays were produced in succession during Shakespeare's last active years as a playwright adds to the sense of their standing apart from the other works in the canon.

This striking degree of apparent homogeneity in composition, especially when taken in conjunction with the plays' seemingly sudden departure from the mode and style of the great tragedies, has long aroused scholarly interest in how these works came about. Speculation and theories are many and varied on why Shakespeare switched from tragedy to a genre which, for want of a better tag, is now vaguely referred to as "romance" or "tragicomedy"; why he concentrated in these plays on the idea of family, with an emphasis on the qualities of forgiveness and reconciliation; why he returned to the "archaic" sources of his earliest comedies to produce these, in Ben Jonson's words, "mouldy tales"; and why he developed a style that is marked by its "verbal obscurity" and "poetic difficulty" (McDonald, *Late* 32). In short, considerable research has gone into unravelling why, late in his career, Shakespeare wrote these plays, a question, as Philip Edwards has pointed out, "inextricably intertwined with the question, 'What is the significance of these plays?'"(1).

Because the plays were written at the very end of Shakespeare's career, attempts to answer these questions are often underlined by theories about his "lateness". In other words, analyses are frequently built on assumptions about the relationship between Shakespeare's last years and the plays' distinct differentness. It is usually assumed that the two are cause and effect. But exactly which aspects of the former were the "cause", or how that cause brought about the effect, is not, and probably will not be, agreed on. It has been suggested that the plays are a reflection of the playwright's personal experience and emotional struggle in his last years; or that they reveal his boredom, depression, or deterioration of dramatic technique; or that they demonstrate, as many late works of great artists are believed to, a serene reconciliation with life and reality, or an irreconcilable struggle against them; or that they are the crowning glory in the development of his dramaturgy—his last bow, as it were.

This book attempts to come up with its own answers to some of the puzzles surrounding the composition of these plays: the possible causes for the playwright's turn from the tragic mode to the form and subject of the last plays, the relationship between their linguistic style and their thematic concerns, the extent to which considerations other than literary or artistic ones were involved in their making, the connection between Shakespeare's last period and his last plays, and the influence—if any—of collaboration on the playwright. In short, this book hopes to come to terms with the idea of Shakespeare's lateness through exploring in detail the last plays and the circumstances under which they were produced.

By the end of this book, I hope to have convincingly demonstrated that Shakespeare's lateness is marked by sustained professional energy and continuing artistic development. The apparent significant changes in the style, dramaturgy, theme, and genre of the last plays are, at the same time, manifestations of the playwright's unchanging professional approach to his art. Shakespeare in his lateness, as he had been in his youth and maturity, was exploring the possibilities of language and theatricality, reacting to his own previous achievements, absorbing and responding to influences from other playwrights and literary sources, and trying to maximise dramatic effect with the company resources available to him. Thus, in a manner of speaking, this "lateness", rather than the fulfilment or the dwindling-off of a career, was part of Shakespeare's ongoing exploration of the power, effect and possibilities of the medium of his livelihood.

To support this argument, I shall offer my readings of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*, *Henry VIII (All Is True)* and

The Two Noble Kinsmen.[1] A major point of inquiry which runs through the chapters—and strings them together—is art and language in the plays, not only in terms of the works' linguistic and dramatic style, but, more importantly, of their treatment and presentation of art and language as a topic of discussion. As we shall see, Shakespeare in the last plays engages himself in the examination and exploration of the effect of language and the power of dramatic art, developing his argument from play to play. His presentation of the power and possibilities of language and theatrical performance changes from the negative portrayal in the tragedies to positive dramatisation in the first three of the last plays and eventually to a more sceptical approach in the final three. In charting his concern with language and performance, I will also be examining the relationship between Shakespeare's distinctive late verse style, the thematic emphases of the plays, and the audience's and readers' linguistic, dramatic and metadramatic experience in watching and reading them.

The reading of each play will be given a separate chapter, in which, in addition to the underlying concern with language and art, the play's individual features and the special circumstances surrounding its composition will be analysed. The chapter on *Pericles* examines its relationship to previous tragedies and how the personal experience of the co-author may have influenced Shakespeare's style and interest. *Cymbeline* is approached through its peculiar resistance to generic classification, which leads to an analysis of its exactingly balanced treatment of contemporary political topics and generic elements, which results from (and reinforces) the play's interest in the process of communication and interpretation. Cued by Polixenes and Perdita's debate, the chapter on *The Winter's Tale* focuses on the play's treatment of the relationship between art and nature, and on how its "realistic" language reveals about its dramatic structure. Analysis of *The Tempest* starts from an examination of the method and effect of Prospero's project and ends on the playwright's "double perspective" in the play, his transcendence of fiction and reality, and the play's endeavours at presenting "the whole picture". The chapter on *Henry VIII* discusses its presentation of the workings and the re-presentation of history, while that on *The Two Noble Kinsmen* concentrates on the characters' bondage by established form and the playwrights' attempts at breaking it. These two chapters also take up once more the subject of collaboration, but rather than approaching it from

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[1] Unless stated otherwise, all quotations from Shakespeare's plays are drawn from the Norton edition of the complete plays of Shakespeare (Greenblatt, Stephen et al., eds. *The Norton Shakespeare*. 2nd ed. London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2008. Print).

the co-author's special knowledge in one subject or genre, they look at how John Fletcher's characteristic linguistic style is incorporated in the scenes to complement the theme of the plays.

PERICLES

George Wilkins

Pericles, frequently considered to be Shakespeare's first late play, is probably a collaboration; and the collaborator was probably George Wilkins.

It is on grounds of stylistic disparity between the first two acts (or the first nine scenes in editions that follow the First Quarto in not dividing the play into acts) and the last three (or the last thirteen scenes) that the theory of collaboration is put forward, despite the fact that only Shakespeare's name appeared on the title page of the First Quarto. The differences between the two parts are clearly noticeable, even to untrained ears. In an often-quoted passage, Jonathan Bate recalls his first encounter with the play:

> I remember when I first read *Pericles* as a teenager, ignorant of authenticity disputes and putative collaborations. I couldn't put my finger on what it was, but something wasn't quite right about the language of the first two acts. Then the storm broke at the beginning of Act Three—"The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges, / Which wash both heaven and hell"—and suddenly the verse was humming, and I knew I was reading Shakespeare. By the time I reached the reunion of Pericles and his daughter in Act Five, I knew that it was not just Shakespeare, but Shakespeare at his greatest. ("Writ" 3)

A series of linguistic and stylistic tests have substantiated this impression and lent support to the theory of collaboration. These tests, while confirming that Acts 1 and 2 of *Pericles* demonstrate little kinship to Shakespeare's own writings at any period of his career, have also revealed that the un-Shakespearean features tend to link them with the surviving works of George Wilkins.[1]

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[1] For a detailed survey of these tests, of the evidences and arguments for and against the theory of collaboration, and of the case for and against Wilkins's

Although the theory of collaboration is by no means accepted by all, before any irrefutable evidence of Shakespeare's single authorship surfaces, I will consider *Pericles* as a collaboration between Shakespeare and Wilkins, for it seems hard to overturn internal evidence accumulated by a century's rigorous attributive studies. Besides, there seems to be circumstantial evidence that may suggest why Shakespeare chose to collaborate at this point. He collaborated with Wilkins because as the chief dramatist of the King's Men and a share-holder of the company, he had a professional as well as financial interest in identifying new playwrights. Meanwhile 1607 had been a particularly trying year for Shakespeare. The marriage of a daughter and the funerals of a brother and a nephew, all occurring within close proximity to one another, must have demanded a good deal of his time, not to mention whatever unknown psychological effects they might have had on him. It would, then, not be too surprising that he should have opted for a collaboration at this point—and Wilkins, whose *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* had recently been produced by the King's Men, seemed to be an adequate choice. On the other hand, it is also possible that the initiator of the collaboration was Wilkins himself. Suzanne Gossett, for example, envisions a scenario in which Wilkins, having enjoyed a taste of the theatre business, "prodd[ed] Shakespeare to consider a collaboration" (57). Wilkins's poetic talents were certainly well below Shakespeare's, but his "recent success for the King's Men and his collaborations for other companies" (59) seemed to indicate that his prose and poetry at least passed muster with the Jacobean audiences, which appeared to be enough reason to induce Shakespeare into collaboration, for, as Northrop Frye reminds us: "[Shakespeare's] chief motive in writing…was to make money, which is the best motive for writing yet discovered" (*Natural* 38).

Doreen DelVecchio and Antony Hammond, editors of the New Cambridge edition of *Pericles*, dismiss the whole authorship debate as "something that wrongfully and frivolously turns the reader's attention away from the text to non-textual side issues" and declare that

> [w]e as editors don't really care who wrote *Pericles* (though we do believe it to be the product of a single creative imagination): we really care that it is, in the Oxford editors' words, "a masterpiece". (15)

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involvement in the composition of *Pericles*, see Vickers, Brian. *Shakespeare, Co-Author: A Historical Study of Five Collaborative Plays*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004. 291-332. Print., and/or Jackson, MacDonald P. *Defining Shakespeare: Pericles as Test Case*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003. Print.

Insofar as the value of *Pericles* as a text for literary comprehension and appreciation should not be and is not affected by knowledge of single or dual or even multiple authorship, DelVecchio and Hammond are right in treating authorship as a side issue. However, when standing from the viewpoint of understanding Shakespeare's lateness, knowledge of authorship, instead of being a dismissible triviality, can be one vital as well as interesting clue to his development as a dramatist and poet. Individual studies accumulated over the years on why Shakespeare took his "sudden" switch from tragedy to the genre of romance suggest that this was not simply the result of his internal artistic development as a playwright, but that external factors such as the trend of popular taste, the prospect of the acquisition of the Blackfriars theatre, and events in his personal life must also have had their influence on the playwright in his choice of source stories for the last plays. The knowledge that *Pericles* may have been a collaboration now adds another possible source of influence, however slight, to that list of external factors: the man George Wilkins.

Wilkins had a brief but prolific literary career. Most of the literary output that can be associated with him was produced between the years 1606 and 1608: a translation from Latin *The History of Justine* (c.1606), a single-authored pamphlet *Three Miseries of Barbary* (c.1607) and a co-authored one with Thomas Dekker *Jests to Make You Merry* (1607), an independent play *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* (1607) and some scenes in *The Travels of Three English Brothers* (1607), the first two acts of *Pericles* (c.1607) and a pamphlet *The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre* (1608). After 1608 his literary career suddenly ended. The cause of this abrupt termination remains to be determined.

Compared with his brief appearance on the London literary scene, Wilkins's presence in the records of the Middlesex Sessions of the Peace was more "enduring". From 1610 to 1618 there was a steady stream of cases in which Wilkins was accused of committing theft, felony or violence against women. The session records also frequently connect him with bawds, prostitutes and men who had "unlawfullye begotton" girls "with child" (qtd. in Nicholl 201). This and the fact that Wilkins, who was most often specified as a "victualler", appeared to have set his establishment at the junction of Cow Cross Street and Turnbull Street, the latter an "area…notorious as the haunt of whores and thieves" (Prior 141), seem to point to his being a "pimp", a brothel-keeper, the kind into whose hands Marina falls in Mytilene.

This knowledge, though hardly a boost for Wilkins's reputation, might be helpful in disclosing what initially drew Shakespeare or the King's Men's attention to him. Between the years 1604 and 1605 there was a "particular concentration of interest in prostitution on the stage" (Nicholl 214), exemplified by John Marston's *The Dutch Courtesan* and Thomas Dekker's *The Honest Whore*. Shakespeare's own *Measure for Measure* of 1604 may partly have been an attempt at accommodating the popular taste for "city comedies". *Measure for Measure*, however, though no doubt a masterpiece of subtlety and intellectual power, was probably not a business success, for before the publication of the First Folio no one appeared to have thought it worthwhile to have the script published in any form. Thus the *louche* Wilkins, who had "intimations of literary talent" and, more importantly, "[knew] this seedy brothel world from the inside" and "live[d] this world which the other writers only look[ed] on" (220), may have struck Shakespeare and/or the company's other shareholders as a solution to their problem. If what the theatre-going public wanted at the moment was more "honest whores" and "Dutch courtesans", this could be the man to satisfy them and bring in the money. That there is an extended brothel scene in *Pericles* and that the events in the brothel are directly presented on stage (their counterparts in *Measure for Measure* are only reported) seem a further indicator that Wilkins was involved in the composition, though one cannot be sure whether it is because there is a brothel episode in the story of Apollonius of Tyre that Wilkins was called on to join in the production, or because Wilkins joined the production that the play ended up with an extended brothel scene.

Wilkins's only unaided play, *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage*, is a "tragicomedy" of some sort in that it has, appended to an otherwise unhappy story, a rather awkward happy ending, in which the main character, William Scarborrow, sufferer as well as contributor to the "miseries" of the "enforced marriage" in the title, all of a sudden acknowledges the wrongs he has done. Scarcely twenty lines before his sudden repentance, however, he was reacting to his wife's plea of "Husband" and children's "Father" by vehemently calling the former "a strumpet" and the latter "bastards" and cursing the world in general. The entry of his uncle, brothers, and sister and her husband is greeted by Scarborrow's "Iniurious villen that preuentst me still" (2805). His sudden conversion is thus rendered almost inconceivable.

Part of the reason for the awkwardness of this dénouement lies in the fact that the original story on which it is based is a thorough tragedy, which Wilkins's limited dramatic skills have failed to twist into a convincing comedy. The source story is the Calverley case: Walter

Calverley of Yorkshire murdered two of his three sons and brutally wounded his wife. Calverley himself was executed on 5 August 1605. The case was something of a national topic in 1605 and inspired not only Wilkins's "tragicomic" adaptation, but also *A Yorkshire Tragedy*, which, as the title demonstrates, has kept the tragic ending. The title page of the 1608 published version of *A Yorkshire Tragedy* refers to it as "All's one, or, one of the four plaies in one, called A York-shire Tragedy as it was plaid by the Kings Maiesties Plaiers" and attributes its authorship to "W. Shakspeare". The last part of the attribution has since been proven false. The former claim that the play was staged by the King's Men, however, "may well be correct" (Jackson 33). In that case it would mean that during the short period between 1606 and 1607 when the theatre was not closed down by plague, Shakespeare's company staged two versions—one tragic and one "tragicomic"—of essentially the same story, possibly in close succession so as to "lure in" potential theatregoers when the murder was still a topic.

Whether Shakespeare was directly involved in the composition of *A Yorkshire Tragedy* or whether his company produced the play, he must have been aware that in the London theatres there were two productions based on the Calverley case going on, one with a tragic ending and the other a happy one. Thus, at least two years before Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster* (c.1608-10), considered by some to be the herald of Jacobean tragicomedies, Wilkins's alternative rendition in 1606 of the tragic story of the Calverley case in a "comic" form and the audience's apparent acceptance of it[2] may have first directed Shakespeare's serious attention, up to this point wholly immersed in the world of tragedy, to the dramatic possibilities of this hybrid genre, still more or less in its primitive form. It could have been Wilkins who, at the outset of their collaboration, persuaded Shakespeare to give their new play a happy ending. Or it might even be possible that the younger playwright's crude attempt in *The Miseries of Enforced Marriage* at twisting a tragedy into a comedy reminded Shakespeare of his former failure—in terms of popularity with theatregoers—with *Measure for Measure* and thus provoked in him an urge to "re-test" his own skills, so that when he started to draft a new play in late 1607, he decided to make it a "tragicomedy". It may have been during the composition process that Shakespeare realised that this new form of "romance/tragicomedy" could be the ideal medium to present his "conflicted and developing opinions about the stage and about his own professional status" (McDonald, *Late* 42). And the resulting production,

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[2] "It was popular enough to merit three quartos, the second shortly after the first" (Gossett 57).

Pericles, turned out to be such a success[3] that he was encouraged to go on pursuing this new genre in three more successive plays before "changing his mind again" (254) by the time of his collaboration with Fletcher on *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*.

It is in the company of Wilkins that one finds Shakespeare at the outset of his last phase, and in the company of Wilkins that he started his voyage into the world of romance/tragicomedy. Although obviously one should not over-read into this collaboration and magnify the impact Wilkins had on him, there is little doubt that Shakespeare, who could "pick up stylistic hints from any source and work them into major techniques" (Wright 184), was to a certain degree influenced by his collaborator. Although Wilkins himself soon afterwards deteriorated into a thief and abuser of women, he had nevertheless left his mark on the London literary scene with his one unaided play, two pamphlets and a number of collaborative works. But the more significant mark he left was probably on London's leading playwright. His contribution to the composition of *Pericles* has made Wilkins, in MacDonald Jackson's words, the "part-author of a masterpiece" (9) and one who "deserves credit for stimulating the far greater dramatist to undertake" (xii) scenes which eventually display great theatrical power. Moreover, more than a contributor to the making of one masterpiece, the possible influence he may have unconsciously had over Shakespeare's artistic development might mean that Wilkins, poet, victualler, brothel-keeper, thief and abuser of women as he was, could be seen, albeit in an indirect way, as a contributor to five or six more masterpieces.

Late Style

Pericles demonstrates an unmistakable kinship to Shakespeare's last plays not only in its genre and preoccupation with the themes of familial loss and return, but also by the verse style in the Shakespearean half of the play. The "humming" verse in Acts 3 to 5 that finally pacifies Bate's anxiety that "something wasn't quite right" with the first two acts is marked by a style that is obscure and difficult, but at the same time rich and melodious, creating a kind of "jagged music" peculiar to the last plays.

Certain adjectives recur in discussions of Shakespeare's late linguistic style: elliptical, convoluted, repetitive, irregular, abrupt, digressive. "Elliptical"

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[3] "Certainly it [*Pericles*] was successful. All the quartos—there were six from the first publication in 1609 to its adoption into the second issue of the Third Folio in 1664—call it a 'much-admired play'; it crowded the Globe; it was carried to court more than once, and lived on into the Restoration" (Tompkins 315).

summarises his late habit of omitting standard components of word or sentence structure from his lines. Syllables and phonetic units are frequently elided. Connectives between clauses of a sentence are often left out. Yet economy of utterance is not what he is striving for. Having made room, as it were, in his lines, he crams the space with repetitive units of sounds, words, phrases and rhythms. Alliteration and assonance, which somewhat faded out from his mature verse, now return. Also present in the verses are metaphors which "[gleam] momentarily, and [are] rarely extensive enough to be catalogued and analysed" (Kermode, Introduction lxxix); ideas closed in dashes, commas and brackets[4] that digress from the main argument at hand; and streams of prepositional phrases tagged to the main body of the sentence. Partly as a result of this almost fevered unleashing of poetic talent into the limited space of his lines, Shakespeare in his last plays has produced an abundance of "aggressively irregular" (McDonald, *Late* 33) blank verse in which "enjambments, light or weak endings, frequent stops or shifts of direction, and other threats to the integrity of the line" (ibid.) consistently appear. These elements of irregularity also contribute greatly to the "convoluted syntax" characteristic of his late style, where he takes liberty in writing deformed phrases, abruptly changing the drift of his argument and altogether forming intricately structured sentences that present quite a challenge to the audience's process of comprehension.

A look at a passage chosen at random from his last plays can yield ample examples of features of the late Shakespearean verse mentioned above. Here, for instance, is Pericles' greeting to his new-born daughter in the first scene of Act 3:

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[4] It has often been noted that it was probably not Shakespeare himself who was responsible for the sudden increase in the numbers of hyphens and parentheses in the texts of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Rather, it was probably the scribe Ralph Crane, whose fair copies of the three plays were used in the preparation of the First Folio, who first introduced these punctuation marks into the plays. Jackson remarks that Crane is known to have had a "passion for parentheses, apostrophes and hyphens" (qtd. in McDonald, *Late* 110). Nevertheless, that Crane could indulge his passion for inserting phrases and sentences in round brackets or between dashes when preparing the texts seems a fair indicator of the abrupt and digressive style of Shakespeare's last plays. In other words, Crane's can be looked upon as a typical reader response to the frequent abrupt changes of direction or introductions of less-than-relevant information apparent in the verse of the last plays. But whereas the ordinary reader could only add in the parentheses, apostrophes and hyphens in their mind's eye, Crane had the opportunity to record and publish his impression/interpretation in print.

27   Now, mild may be thy life!
28 For a more blusterous birth had never babe;
29 Quiet and gentle thy conditions, for
30 Thou art the rudeliest welcome to this world
31 That ever was prince's child. Happy what follows!
32 Thou hast as chiding a nativity
33 As fire, air, water, earth and heaven can make
34 To herald thee from the womb.
35 Even at the first thy loss is more than can
36 Thy portage quit, with all thou canst find here.
37 Now the good gods throw their best eyes upon't!

(3.1.27-37)[5]

Examining the passage from the level of sound and words, one is first struck by a noticeable repetition of sound in the first five lines, /ai/ in line 27, /b/ in 28, and /w/ in 30 to 31. Such repetition of sound units will eventually become one of the dominant linguistic features of the recognition scene in Act 5, where even a single line like "**M**y **n**a**m**e is **M**ari**n**a / O, I a**m m**ocked" (5.1.133) is packed with echoes of the same sound, giving an uncanny musicality to the scene, even before Pericles himself becomes aware of the "music of the spheres".

Accompanying this sound repetition are instances of elided syllables, one of which can be found in the "upon't" in line 37. Depending on the edition one is consulting, there might be more examples of syllabic elision in this passage. The Norton edition, for example, shows that the "blusterous" in line 28 is elided into "blust'rous", "ever" in 31 "e'er", "heaven" in 33 "heav'n", "the womb" in 34 "th'womb", and "even" in 35 "ev'n". The editor of the latest Arden edition, whose version is quoted above, has chosen not to elide the syllables in these words, thus resulting in a display of pentameter lines with extra syllables. It is an arrangement also consistent with Shakespeare's stylistic habits in the last plays.

Which brings one to the examination on the level of sentences. What is immediately noticeable is that of these eleven lines, lines 29, 30, 32, 33 and 35 are enjambed, their full intention not revealed until at least the next line. Indeed, line 32 goes so far as to run on to line 34 before yielding its full meaning. Closer examination reveals that line 34 is only half a pentameter. Line 31 has a feminine ending.[6] Apart from the elision of

[5] As the Norton *Pericles* follows the First Quarto in not dividing the play into acts, for ease of reference, I am using instead the Arden Third Series edition.
[6] The Norton *Pericles* elides the word "even" in line 31, in which case the line becomes a pentameter with a weak ending rather than one ending with an extra unstressed syllable (a feminine ending). Norton editors have also chosen to restore

syllables, there are also instances of omission of larger linguistic units in the ten lines. Line 29 and 31 are elliptical sentences where the verb "be" is missing—"Quiet and gentle [be] thy conditions" and "Happy [be] what follows". Although technically such ellipsis is perfectly grammatical (its syntactic principle the same as the one guiding the sentence "I love you and you me"), the fact that "Quiet and gentle thy conditions" and "Happy what follows" are separated from where the important verb first appears ("Now, mild may be thy life") by one line and three and a half respectively means that extra effort at comprehension is required of the audience and even readers. The line that stands between "Now, mild may be thy life" and "Quiet and gentle thy conditions", line 28, is itself rather syntactically convoluted, presenting a case of late Shakespeare's freedom with handling mobile grammatical components, in this case a reversal of subject and verb order, the much more accepted sequence being "For a babe never had a more blusterous birth" or possibly "For a more blusterous birth a babe never had". The preceding line, line 27, can also be said to be an instance of inverted word order. "May thy life be mild" or "Mild may thy life be" might be the more normal versions, though it should be noted that Shakespeare's choice of word order here could in fact have been deliberate, using the sound of "may be" to cast a shadow of doubt over the child's future and hint at the trials and tribulations that Marina is going to face when she grows up.

On the level of comprehensibility, the much-observed obscurity of meaning of Shakespeare's late verse is also manifested in this eleven-line greeting to baby Marina. As we have seen, a portion of the interpretive difficulty in this short speech is caused by ellipsis and inverted sentence structure. Another factor that makes the meaning of the late verse uncertain is ambiguity of reference. Lines 35 to 36 present such a case: "Even at the first thy loss is more than can / Thy portage quit, with all thou canst find here". The key to the interpretation of these two lines hinges on the reference of "thy portage". The primary meaning of "portage" in *The Oxford English Dictionary* is

> [a]n amount of space or weight on board a ship allowed to a mariner for his own cargo in lieu of wages, enabling him to make a personal profit through

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the pentameter of line 34 by adding in the phrase "poor inch of nature"—taken from Wilkins's account of the same scene in the pamphlet *The Painful Adventures of Pericles Prince of Tyre*—after "To herald thee from the womb". The editor of the Arden Third edition, however, claims that "there is no evidence that it was originally present" (Gossett, qtd. in *Pericles* 281, note to l.34).

trade; cargo carried under these terms…Hence in later use: a mariner's wages. ("Portage n.1", Def. 1)

3.1.35-6 from *Pericles* is in fact quoted in the *OED* as an example illustrating this definition. Viewed in this light, "thy portage" is a metaphor referring to Marina's hereditary felicity—as opposed to worldly prosperity, reflected by the phrase "all thou canst find here" in the same line—the idea being that all the natural endowments which Marina has brought (or "carried") with her from birth and worldly comfort that she will gain cannot make up for the child's initial loss of her mother. Considering that Pericles' daughter is born at sea and will be named Marina, the association of portage—"a mariner's wages/cargo"—with the new-born babe is rather a neat one. However, "portage" can also suggest the "action or work of carrying or transporting goods, letters" ("Portage n.1", Def. 2a), in which case "thy portage" could be referring to the act of "carrying" and "transporting" the infant, in other words Thaisa's pregnancy and Marina's birth. Interpretation of lines 35-6 thus becomes "The fact that you were nurtured in your mother's womb and born (i.e. you have gained life) cannot compensate for your losing your mother." That Pericles' emphasis here should fall on Thaisa and the act of child-bearing is not inappropriate when one takes into account the larger context of the speech: the news of Marina's birth is accompanied by that of the "death" of Thaisa, whose travails arrested the whole of Pericles' attention only moments ago. In accordance with this interpretation, the reference of "all that thou canst find here" becomes "your experience in life/your future prospects". The whole meaning of the two lines thus becomes something along the lines of "Your gaining life, with all your future prospects before you, cannot make up for your loss of your mother", which seems equally appropriate in the context of the speech.

Apart from lines 35 and 36, this speech also contains another instance of lines that may cause confusion of comprehension, in lines 30 to 31: "Thou art the rudeliest welcome to the world / That ever was prince's child". Upon first glance, what Pericles seems to be saying is that Marina is the rudest welcome to the world, which is strange, for it seems illogical that a babe should be compared to an act of welcome. An alternative interpretation could be that the "welcome" here, rather than implying its modern meaning of "greeting", takes on its original meaning of "one whose coming is pleasing or desirable; an acceptable person or thing" ("Welcome, n.1, adj., and int.", Def. A). Thus "rudeliest welcome" becomes a powerfully oxymoronic reference, presenting a paradoxical situation in which the birth of Marina is at once pleasing and desirable and "rude", for in a way it is her birth that has brought about Thaisa's death.

This interpretation appears to be supported by the previous line "Quiet and gentle thy conditions", which is connected to line 30 with the word "for", signalling a loose cause and effect relationship between them. The "conditions" in line 29 may be interpreted to mean "[p]ersonal qualities; manners, morals, ways; behaviour, temper" ("Condition, n.", Def. 11b). And Pericles' logic here appears to be that, "because with your birth you have displayed a 'rude' disposition, my wish for you is that you will grow up to be someone gentle and quiet". The main problem with this interpretation, however, is that according to the *OED*, it is only in Old English around the ninth century that this usage of the word "welcome" is employed. Even if Shakespeare himself was capable of looking a long way back to Old English to, as it were, dig out the original meaning of "welcome", it is doubtful whether his early-seventeenth century audience could all catch the reference. Moreover, if the meaning of "conditions" here, instead of referring to personal qualities, implies, as the note in the Third Arden edition points out, "circumstances" and "mode of life" (Gossett, qtd. in *Pericles* 281, note to l.29), then Pericles' logic would instead be that because immediately at birth Marina has been accosted by "unquiet and ungentle conditions", he is hoping that her future circumstances shall henceforth be quiet and gentle. This interpretation seems equally possible and applicable. Considered in this context, the "the rudeliest welcome to the world" in line 30 seems no longer to refer to Marina, but rather to the kind of welcome that the infant has received upon birth: the loss of her mother, the roaring tempest and the tossing "great vast" (3.1.1). The adjective "blusterous" in line 28 describing the circumstances of Marina's birth seems to lend support to this interpretation. Lines 30-31 thus come to mean that, greeted by the storm at sea, Marina has met with the rudest welcome to the world that has ever been presented to a prince's child. Yet this interpretation would imply that the "thou" in line 30 has temporarily shifted from referring to baby Marina, whom Pericles has been addressing, to the surging waves and thunderous storm. If so, this would be a particularly confusing move, for not only is the change of addressee sudden and abrupt, it is also incompatible with the clause "that ever was prince's child", unless one assumes that the playwright has omitted an important verb here—"that ever was [presented to][a] prince's child"—which seems a bit extreme even for the elliptical Shakespeare of the last plays. "Thou art the rudeliest welcome to the world / That ever was prince's child" thus turn out to be among those late Shakespearean lines that seem to resist close grammatical analysis and only yield a vague sense of what is being said.

The uncertainty of interpretation of lines 35-36 and 30-31 presents a typical instance of one's experience with the late Shakespearean verse, where although one is able to grasp the drift or gist of a character's utterance—in the first case "the birth of Marina cannot make up for the death of Thaisa" and the second "the circumstances of Marin's birth are rough"—one either fails to locate the exact references of unexplained metaphors or has trouble discerning the precise connections between parts of the sentence. As a result, there is a prevailing feeling of uncertainty accompanying the reading/listening of the last plays as well as an impression that an utterance in fact contains more than it actually says, which is intensified not only by the quick succession of multi-layered metaphors, but also by the almost incantatory repetition of syllables and words.

Certain other linguistic features of Shakespeare's late verse, though not apparent in this particular speech, are to be frequently met with in other parts of the play. Lines like "'Tis most strange / Nature should be so conversant with pain" (3.2.24-5) and, immediately following it, "I hold it ever / Virtue and cunning were endowments greater" (3.2.26-7), where the relative pronoun "that" ("most strange [that] nature…"; "hold it ever [that] virtue…") is omitted, are instances of Shakespeare's removal of grammatical elements that normally tighten the relationship between parts of a sentence. A further manifestation of this late practice of omission is the increased usage of asyndetic structure, an example of which can be found in Pericles' "O Helicanus, strike me, honoured sir, / Give me a gash, put me to present pain" (5.1.180-1). This dropping out of conjunctions between parts of the sentence is a feature that will become even more frequent in plays produced after *Pericles*. *Cymbeline*, for example, contains

> seventy-eight instances of asyndetic construction, nearly twice as many as *King Lear* and *Antony and Cleopatra*, which themselves have more than the earlier tragedies. (McDonald, *Late* 90)

At the opposite end of the practice of omission is his late habit of piling up appositional or elaborative phrases in the space of a single sentence. In *Pericles*, Lord Cerimon's speech about his medical knowledge, for instance, offers a glimpse of this "additive impulse":

> 'Tis known I ever
> Have studied physic, through which secret art,
> By turning o'er authorities, I have,
> Together with my practice, made familiar

> To me and to my aid the blest infusions
> That dwells in vegetives, in metals, in stones,
> And I can speak of the disturbances
> That nature works and of her cures, which doth give me
> A more content and cause of true delight
> Than to be thirsty after tottering honour,
> Or tie my pleasure up in silken bags
> To please the fool and death. (3.2.31-42)

Grammatically, this long speech amounts to only a single sentence built up gradually by relative clauses ("through which…", "that dwells…", "that", "which"), prepositional phrases ("together with…"), infinitives ("to please…"), alternatives ("or tie…") and predicates introduced in mid-sentence ("and I can…").

Even in shorter exchanges Shakespeare seems frequently unable to shake off the impulse to insert a bit of elaboration into the main sentence, as is the case with Dionyza's instruction to the hired assassin Leonine that he should not hesitate about killing Marina:

> Let not conscience,
> Which is but cold, inflame love in thy bosom,
> Nor let pity, which even women have cast off,
> Melt thee, but be a soldier to thy purpose. (4.1.4-7)

The "which is but cold" tagged on after the imperative "let not conscience" prevents, for a fleeting second, the movement of the sentence from reaching its main verbal phrase "inflame love in thy bosom". And "which even women have cast off" does the same for the second imperative sentence. Together these two inserted relative clauses postpone the main point in the instruction: "be a soldier to thy purpose". In later plays the manifestation of this digressive style will become more obvious in a visual way, where the speaker's abrupt change of direction in speech is often marked out by the presence of (possibly Crane's) colons, semi-colons, commas, dashes, hyphens or parentheses. The style contributes to the sense that speakers in the last plays often wander off, however briefly, from the main course of their argument, though in the end they manage to return to their initial point. The presence of piled-up elaborative clauses, however, delays both the speakers' and the listeners' arrival at the designated conclusion of their argument, thus holding the latter in no little suspense.

This, then, is the linguistic style in which Shakespeare composed the last plays: elliptical, additive, rich and obscure. One of its major effects on readers and audience, as the above analyses of sample speeches have hopefully revealed, is instilling in them a sense of uncertainty. Complex or convoluted syntax, ambiguous references and rich metaphors (multi-layered but not fully articulated) in quick succession bring about an uncertainty about the exact meaning of a line or lines as well as about the speaker's true intention in employing such expressions. The absence of certain conventional connectives between parts of speech or clauses of a sentence generates uncertainty about the relationship between the components of a sentence or argument. The piling up of appositional or elaborative phrases creates uncertainty about where a sentence or speech is going, when it is going to end, and whether its argument can be brought around to the designated point of conclusion.

To comprehend and enjoy this poetry, a certain amount of patience as well as faith is thus helpful. It helps if one believes that the knotty sentences are in the playwright's control and will eventually be sorted out and that patience will be rewarded with a final explanation. And indeed, quite paradoxically it would seem, hidden in the "uncertain" language itself are signs of assurance that all will in time become clear. The repetition of vowels or consonances, syllables, words and images, apart from contributing to the musicality of the plays, also helps to establish a sense of familiarity with the surrounding linguistic "environment". Ambiguous references may result in confusion of comprehension on matters of detail, but the general gist of the sentence can always more or less be grasped, especially when one gives up "fussing about" details of grammatical connections between parts of speech. Although arguments digress as a result of accumulating elaborations, at the same time the ellipses within the sentences or phrases that make up the argument quicken the pace of the speech towards its final conclusion.

"A sense of uncertainty", "loss of logical connections", "the importance of patience and faith", "all in control"—these are also descriptions of qualities, features or morals frequently found in analyses of the drama of the last plays. The experience the audience have with the language of these plays appears to be strikingly similar to that of witnessing plot events. It would seem that towards the end of his career, the playwright who earlier in his career had recommended that an actor should "suit the action to the word, the word to the action" (*Hamlet* 3.2.16-7) had himself achieved a unity between the words and the dramatic actions in his plays. Indeed, one of the main arguments Russ McDonald has put forward in his *Shakespeare's Late Style*, to which study this

present analysis is greatly indebted, is that Shakespeare's late language style is a linguistic echo of the larger dramatic structure of the last plays:

> As Shakespeare adapts his source materials to the task of telling stories on stage, his arrangement of his dramatic materials corresponds, in shape and effect, to his ordering of the poetic constituents. (38)

As a result, "[t]hroughout the late verse, particularly in the most difficult passages, the sentence itself becomes a kind of miniature romance narrative" (169).

Another manifestation of how Shakespeare's late style in the last plays reinforces concerns of the larger dramatic unit can be seen from his severing, or at least weakening, of the relationship between speaker and style. According to Northrop Frye, the genre of romance, as one form of New Comedy, is "a structure [in which] the characters are essentially functions of the plot" ("Masque" 11). Thus, in signalling the centrality of plot in his new working genre, Shakespeare

> has adjusted his language and dramatic art to the demands of a new mode, one in which plot, on the whole, has become more vivid and emotionally charged than character. (Barton, "Leontes" 149)

From the Shakespearean part of *Pericles* onwards, the connection between character individuality and linguistic style is gradually weakened. Although in certain speeches the language still seems to adhere to the specific mood of the character at the moment of speaking—Leontes' lexical repetition after he begins to suspect Hermione of infidelity, for example, serves to illustrate his brooding madness—most of the time in the last plays, it is difficult to discern the traits of a character through his or her language. The innocent and sweet Miranda is capable of bitter harshness when addressing Caliban, while the latter, though a born savage, is allotted possibly one of the most beautifully musical and moving speeches in *The Tempest* (3.2.130-8 "The isle is full of noises…"). The buffoon Cloten in *Cymbeline* has his moments of eloquence. And his mother the degenerate Queen, when refusing the continuation of Britain's annual tribute to Rome, describes the kingdom in a way that reminds one of John of Gaunt and his "This England" speech. In other words, specific linguistic features are no longer to be considered as markers of Pericles' or Innogen's or Prospero's personal style, but rather as manifestations of Shakespeare's own late style.

The separation of speaker and speech demonstrates a reversal in artistic development in late Shakespeare. Before the romances, Shakespeare's artistry with his language was usually exerted with the aim of suiting a character's speech to his or her personality or specific state of mind. In other words, not every character speaks in roughly the same style:

> [t]hat Shakespeare learned, as he reached professional maturity in the mid-1590s, to make his speakers sound like themselves is one of the triumphs of his craft, one of the talents for which he is celebrated and by which he is differentiated from lesser dramatists. (McDonald, *Late* 34)

Now, however, he weakens the link between language and their speaker as well as between utterances and the context of their utterance, replacing individual character style with an overriding style that is unmistakably the playwright's.

This appears to suggest that in the last plays, one of Shakespeare's concerns seems to have been to introduce the figure of the playwright into the narrative. Indeed, both on a linguistic and dramatic level, the audience are being made continually aware of the presence of the playwright. Linguistically, the flurry of repeated vowels, consonances and syllables, rapid outbursts of multi-layered metaphors which frequently result in wordplays and double ironies, complex syntax caused by reversal of word order, insertion of digressive information and the piling up of additional clauses all disclose a poet aware of his own virtuosity and taking a self-conscious delight in his performance. Moreover, because this language is often clotted, jaggedly musical and difficult to understand, it calls attention to itself and consequently to its creator by diverting part of the audience's mental focus from the task of keeping up with the plot to the task of comprehending what is really being said. The poet's own voice is further enhanced by the separation of speech from character, for, naturally, when all the characters speak in roughly the same linguistic style, that style will more readily be associated with the playwright who writes in it than with the individual who speaks in it. Dramatically, solution to problems through divine intervention and suppression of logical motives for behaviours—in short, the choice of the genre of romance itself—mean that the plays are patently unrealistic. The hands of the playwright, previously hidden behind the dramatisation of events which are brought about by human agency and more or less conform to the logic of cause and effect and the laws of nature, are now unashamedly evident.

Indeed, in the last plays, Shakespeare goes a step further to impress upon the audience how much a poet or artist figure is in control of the actions on stage. In *Pericles*, episodes are stitched together by the poet