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Date: 5/10/21

Shakespeare's Simple Forms

A dissertation presented

by

David Nee

to

The Department of English

in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy
in the subject of
English

Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

May, 2021

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Shakespeare's Simple Forms

Abstract

While critics have long recognized the presence of folklore in Shakespeare's sources, Shakespeare's relationship to folkloric forms has remained an underexplored aspect of his work. This is in part because forms such as the folktale, proverb, and riddle have been kept at the outskirts of literary theory, relegated to neighboring disciplines such as folkloristics and ethnography. In particular, we have lacked a sustained account of what happens in the convergence between folkloric forms and the major genres central to literary theory since Aristotle, such as comedy, tragedy, and epic. Absent such an account, analysis of folkloric form in Shakespeare's plays has stalled at the level of source study and thematic criticism.

My dissertation seeks to remedy this lack by examining four convergences between Shakespeare's drama and folkloric form. To do so, I draw on the theoretical model supplied by André Jolles, whose *Simple Forms* (1929) I view as an important but underappreciated milestone in literary theory. Focusing on four narrative forms theorized by Jolles—the fairy tale, the case, the *memorabile*, and the saga—I show how Shakespeare's drama grows out of a productive symbiosis with simple form, and in addition, how latent response to simple form has structured our interpretation of the plays. For example, I connect the simple form of the case, in which a conflict arises between competing values, to perennial critical debates over the character of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*. The difficulty of making our minds up about Shylock reflects the built-in undecidability of the case, a narrative structure whose primary function is to afford debate. Shakespeare, in turn, wreathes the poetic language, thematic patterning, and

characterization of his play around this simple form, constructing a drama that constantly invites us to weigh one value against another.

What emerges from this study is a new picture of Shakespeare's plays as grounded in the reciprocal enrichment of poetic drama and simple form. From the family tree that structures the simple form of the saga, and leaves its mark on *Hamlet*, to the fairy tale, whose naïve morality underwrites our sense of the tragic in *Romeo and Juliet*, simple form provides the trellis upon which Shakespeare cultivates the full richness of his dramatic genres.

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Acknowledgements

I owe immense debts to three exemplary advisors, without whose continued support over many years I could not have completed this project.

Back when this dissertation was about Shakespeare and the novella collection, Stephen Greenblatt made it possible for me to spend three unforgettable summers in Venice. That time in Italy now seems like a necessary precondition for the course this dissertation eventually took. I am grateful to Stephen for directing his endless supply of intellectual curiosity towards this project, and for encouraging me to give the rein to my interests, even when they seemed to be carrying me far away from Shakespeare (into the Icelandic sagas, for instance).

I do not know how Leah Whittington found the time to give as generously to this project as she did. In meeting after meeting, ten-page draft after ten-page draft, Leah provided the supportive, eager audience (and expert scholarly and editorial eye) I needed to bring this dissertation into existence. Her willingness to think out loud with me made for some of the most exciting hours of my graduate career. (A special place in my memory will be reserved for a conversation we once had about Cassius's swimming anecdote in *Julius Caesar*. Our invigorating back-and-forth felt like the intellectual equivalent of jumping in the torrent Tiber, and I will be forever grateful to Leah for dragging me out in one piece.)

Marjorie Garber's comments on these chapters made me a better writer and a better thinker. I won't get close to the standard she sets anytime soon, but I have her to thank for knowing how high to set the bar. Her incisive responses to these pages helped me absorb some of the scholarly rigor and probity I so much admire in her work. She has, moreover, been a great teacher of how to teach, and the courses we have worked on together have (in addition to being incredibly good fun) greatly broadened my range as a Shakespearean.

I owe much to my fellow graduate students at Harvard, an exceptional group of scholars and critics, of whom I particularly wish to mention Misha Teramura, Elizabeth Weckhurst, Nick Rinehart, and Michael Weinstein, dear friends who have done much to support and encourage me over the years. Though I'm a little rusty now, I learned much about writing (and reading) poems from Jorie Graham and the members of her workshop, who over several years helped me maintain my sense of literature as a living thing. Whatever craft or art I've picked up from them I hope to employ in my scholarly writing (since after all we critics, too, must use words).

Although this dissertation did not, in the end, involve much archival research, I learned some fantastically useful research methods, and received generous feedback on my work, from Keith Wrightson, Jim Siemon, and the wonderful members of a "Researching the Archive" seminar held at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 2016-17. I am particularly grateful to Jim for his warm and generous support even after the conclusion of the seminar. Alina Payne and the Villa I Tatti Center for Italian Renaissance Studies made possible a six-month stay in Florence during which I learned a great deal about the Italian novella, Renaissance art and architecture, and much else. Among my many kind and brilliant colleagues at I Tatti, I particularly wish to thank Tom Cohen for the generous interest he took in my work. Thanks also go to Justin Steinberg for leads on novella criticism, and to Mayu Fujikawa for giving me the chance to lecture about Shakespeare to her students in Japan.

András Kiséry gave me vital encouragement early on to keep going with this project, and has since become both a collaborator and a valued source of professional and scholarly advice, for whose many generous acts of assistance I am deeply grateful. I am also grateful to Jane O. Newman, who counts as an old friend now, for important encouragement and advice early on in

graduate school. Charlotte Artese, whose scholarship on Shakespeare and the folktale greatly encouraged my own work, kindly corresponded with me about our shared interests. For taking an interest in my work, I also wish to thank Kent Cartwright, Carla Mazzio, and Adam Smyth.

At Harvard, for gestures of kindness and collegiality which have made a tremendous difference to me, I wish to thank Ann Blair, Emma Dench, Jim Engell, Phil Fisher, Deidre Lynch, Peter Sacks, James Simpson, and Helen Vendler. Deidre Lynch and James Simpson both provided advice and support at crucial moments during my time here, and for this I am grateful to both of them. To Phil Fisher (perhaps unbeknownst to him) I owe the topic of this dissertation, since his fleeting mention of *Simple Forms* in a graduate seminar many years ago first directed my attention to that text. Jan Ziolkowski, Michael Witzel, and Stephen Mitchell gave generously of their time, graciously entertaining my amateur questions about their fields of specialty. Joe Harris gave me incredibly helpful and generous comments on chapter 4, and I am deeply grateful for his encouragement and for the example of his scholarship. At Columbia (a long time ago now), Teodolinda Barolini, Kathy Eden, Molly Murray, and Jim Shapiro taught me much and gave me vital encouragement, support, and advice. I would not be the scholar or the person I am now without the late Edward Tayler, the teacher to whom I owe the most. I miss him more than I can say.

My parents, Brett de Bary and Victor Nee, brilliant scholars both, have given me so much love and support over the years. They know well both the challenges and the pleasures of this line of work. I could not have done it without them, and I am very moved by the pride they take in my modest accomplishments. This dissertation is dedicated to them.

My brother, William Nee, has been a constant presence in my life in spite of living on the other side of the country. I've always been incredibly proud to have such an amazing older brother. Thank you, Will, for your wisdom, strength, and compassion.

Heinz Ludwig Arnold, Christiane Freudenstein-Arnold, and Hannah Arnold "adopted" me into their home, and into the German language and its literature, when I was eighteen. They have been an incredible second family to me, and have supported and encouraged me in many ways throughout the years. I cherish Lutz's memory, and wish he were still with us.

I have been lucky in my friends, who form a small but select bunch. Adam Bisogni, Harvey Lederman, Tiankai Liu, Eli Lichter-Marck, Matthew Shapero, and Julian Smith-Newman have accompanied me for the whole journey into early middle age, which they have made tolerable by sharing in its inevitable disappointments as well as in its unexpected joys. Ali Madani's camaraderie helped keep me afloat during the last several years, and I am profoundly fortunate to have a brilliant colleague who is also such a good friend.

Last, but certainly not least, Tara Loeper has been both center and circumference of my world for a few years now. Her love and acceptance have made so much possible, and I hope she knows how important her presence in my life is to me.

Introduction

This dissertation brings André Jolles's ideas about "simple form" to bear on the study of Shakespeare's sources. There has been little engagement with Jolles's work to date in Anglophone scholarship, and *Simple Forms* [*Einfache Formen*], Jolles's 1929 study, has only recently been translated into English for the first time, in 2017 by Peter J. Schwartz.[1] To my knowledge, this dissertation is the first sustained attempt to bring Jolles's ideas into conversation with Shakespeare criticism. Because the application of Jolles's theory to Shakespeare may require some special points of emphasis, this introduction begins by offering some commentary concerning how, in my view, Jolles's work should be interpreted and extended.

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[1] Most of the secondary literature on Jolles has been produced by scholars in Europe. For a helpful selected bibliography of work on Jolles, see the one compiled by Silvia Contarini and Filippo Fonio in "Intuizione e forma. André Jolles: vita, opere, posterità," ed. Silvia Contarini, Filippo Fonio, and Maurizio Ghelardi, special issue, *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 23 (2016): pp. 237-243, https://doi.org/10.4000/cei.3270. André Jolles, *I travestimenti della letteratura: Saggi critici e teorici* (1897-1932), ed. Silvia Contarini (Bruno Mondadori, 2003), publishes a wide range of critical texts by Jolles which have not otherwise been reprinted or translated. An exhaustive collection of letters and documents pertaining to Jolles's life and work is gathered together in Walter Thys, ed., *André Jolles (1874-1946): "Gebildeter Vagant"; Brieven en Documenten* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2000), which includes a comprehensive bibliography of works by and about Jolles. For introductory overviews and commentary, in English, on *Simple Forms*, see the foreword, by Frederic Jameson, and the translator's introduction (the notes to which provide much helpful bibliography on Jolles), by Peter J. Schwartz, to André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (London: Verso, 2017), as well as Marta Figlerowicz, "How to Do Things with Genres," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, March 30, 2017, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/how-to-do-things-with-genres. The brief overview of Jolles's theory provided by Robert Scholes in *Structuralism in Literature: An Introduction* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974), pp. 41-50, is one of the few earlier discussions of Jolles in English, and, though useful, is an instance of the somewhat misleading structuralist context in which Jolles's work was received when the first French translation of *Simple Forms* appeared in 1972 (in a series on poetics edited by Hélène Cixous, Gérard Genette, and Tzvetan Todorov). Douglas Gray, *Simple Forms: Essays on Medieval English Popular Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), despite its prominent invocation of Jolles in its title, and its chapters on the *Sage*, proverb, and riddle, in fact makes almost no use of Jolles's theory or his definitions of the simple forms.

I. *The theory of simple forms and Goethean morphology*

There is no easy way to concisely and accurately summarize what Jolles's *Simple Forms* is about. Merely presenting the list of "simple forms" at the center of Jolles's study—the forms which Jolles, following his own very specific definitions, which are often at variance with popular usage, calls legend, saga, myth, riddle, saying, case, *memorabile*, fairy tale [*Märchen*], and joke—leaves the theoretical framework which would justify grouping these forms together in a single study unclear. Attempts to briefly summarize the general contents of *Simple Forms* thus typically fall back on invoking more familiar points of reference, for instance by introducing Jolles as a forerunner of structuralism or narratology, by making a comparison with Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*, by calling Jolles's work a contribution to genre theory, or by relating Jolles's simple forms to the objects of folkloristics. Although these comparisons do help situate Jolles within the history of literary theory, the differences between Jolles's approach and those of more familiar schools such as structuralism are at least as important as the similarities.[2] The fact is that Jolles's contribution, though its importance has long been recognized, has never been absorbed into the main stream of literary studies, and as a result, Jolles's framework remains difficult to classify. Jolles deliberately situated his theory between the dividing lines of existing disciplines, and because in some important respects those lines have remained unmoved, introducing Jolles's theory requires a certain amount of explanation and contextualization.

[2] For criticism of the view of Jolles as a proto-structuralist, see Silvia Contarini and Filippo Fonio, "Intuizione e Forma," *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 23 (2016), pp. 9-10.

This is true even of the one existing term which does concisely characterize Jolles's approach, namely, "morphology," which Jolles himself uses to classify his project.[3] Even here, some explanation will probably be necessary, for an awareness of the philosophical tradition which informs not only Jolles's idea of the morphological method, but the morphological projects undertaken by such thinkers as Georg Simmel, Aby Warburg, and Walter Benjamin, does not seem to be very common within Anglophone literary studies.

Definitions of "morphology" found in English-language handbooks to literary studies—I take such standard reference works to be at least somewhat indicative of general levels of awareness—do not supply an adequate sense of the intellectual historical origins of the term. As a representative example, here is the entry for "morphology" in William Harmon's *A Handbook to Literature*, twelfth edition:

> A word coined by Goethe for the study of forms at any level. Brooks Adams and Leo Frobenius studied culture-morphology (*Kulturmorphologie*); Vladimir Propp wrote a book called *Morphology of the Folktale*. Linguistic *morphology* is the study of MORPHEMES.[4]

The attribution of the coinage to Goethe here is helpful, indeed essential; yet the bare definition, "the study of forms at any level," does nothing to explain the peculiar importance which Goethe

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[3] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 5-6.

[4] William Harmon, *A Handbook to Literature*, 12th ed. (Boston: Longman, 2012), p. 308. *The Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 4th ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012) lacks an entry for "morphology"; and while Goethean and Romantic notions about the analogy between literature and nature are discussed in the *PEP* entry on "Organicism" (p. 981), the afterlife of Romantic ideas of organic form and organic unity in Anglo-American literary criticism follows a very different trajectory from the morphological projects of thinkers like Jolles or Warburg, who adopted an implicitly anthropological approach and took the entire field of culture as their object, by contrast with the much more exclusively literary focus of, for instance, a critic like Cleanth Brooks.

and subsequent thinkers influenced by him attached to the morphological method. Users of Harmon's *Handbook* are unlikely, I would guess, to have more than a passing familiarity with Leo Frobenius's *Kulturmorphologie* (even less with Brooks Adams's 1895 *The Law of Civilization and Decay*). Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* may be more familiar. And yet Propp's work, as readers of English have encountered it, likewise does little to supply a sense of the Goethean tradition of morphology that is most relevant to understanding Jolles's theoretical project.

The opening paragraph of Propp's foreword to *Morphology of the Folktale* offers the following definition of "morphology" (which Harmon has quite possibly taken as authority for his own definition in his *Handbook*). Here is Propp:

> The word "morphology" means the study of forms. In botany, the term "morphology" means the study of the component parts of a plant, of their relationship to each other and to the whole—in other words, the study of the plant's structure.
>
> But what about a "morphology of the folktale"? Scarcely anyone has thought about the possibility of such a concept.
>
> Nevertheless, it is possible to make an examination of the forms of the tale which will be as exact as the morphology of organic formations.[5]

No mention is made here of Goethe, nor does any such mention appear in the main text of Propp's study. This absence of reference to Goethe is, however, a peculiar feature of the English translation of Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale*. As the English translator of Propp's study informs us, several chapters in Propp's original Russian text were preceded by quotations from Goethe, quotations which the translator, deeming them "nonessential,"[6] dropped from the

[5] Vladimir Propp, *Morphology of the Folktale*, trans. Laurence Scott, 2nd rev. ed. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), p. xxv.

[6] Ibid., p. x.

English translation. As a result, what for many probably remains the most familiar representative of the morphological method has come to readers of English shorn of the markings of the specifically Goethean tradition out of which it springs.

Other indices similarly suggest that awareness of Goethean morphology as a historically significant mode of humanities research is minimal within Anglophone literary studies. If "morphology," as Harmon tells us, designates the "study of forms at any level," the term might, one would think, appear as an important one within the various calls which have appeared in the last twenty years or so for a return to "form" or "formalism" in literary studies. Yet a book-length study which counts as one of the most frequently cited of these recent calls does not contain a single reference to Goethe or a single use of the word "morphology"—aside from a lone citation of Propp's study.[7] Nor does awareness of the Goethean morphological approach seem to me to be much in evidence in other recent writings on "formalism" and "new formalism" in English which I have consulted.

What, then, is "morphology" as Goethe conceived it, and as this Goethean project was carried forward in humanistic and cultural disciplines in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries? This question has been extensively discussed in a 2014 collection of essays edited by Jonas Maatsch, part of a recent increase in interest, among Goethe scholars, in the afterlife of Goethe's morphological thinking.[8] As Maatsch explains, morphological thinking, as Goethe developed it

[7] Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). The citation of Propp occurs on p. 152n8, and tellingly cites Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* as the *beginning* of "a century of interesting work in theories of narrative form"—rather than as a text with its own intellectual-historical genealogy.

[8] Jonas Maatsch, ed., *Morphologie und Moderne: Goethes 'anschauliches denken' in den Geistes- und Kulturwissenschaften seit 1800* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014). See pp. 13-14 of Maatsch's volume for references to recent work in this area.

in the course of close observational studies of plant life, was intended to counter the abstraction of more purely conceptual modes of thought, both philosophical and scientific. In his studies of nature, Goethe conceived the full variety of natural forms as expressions of a single unitary force, always active across the entire continuum of natural phenomena. Later thinkers who took inspiration from Goethe's project, for instance the poet Novalis, sought to apply this same principle to the entire field of human knowledge. Where Goethe's morphology of nature could be understood as a critical reaction to Linnaeus's classificational schemes, Novalis's *Das allgemeine Brouillon*, a collection of fragments drawn from the full range of the sciences, in effect mounted a similar critique of the classification of knowledge presented by Diderot's *Encyclopédie*. The idea behind Novalis's project was, as opposed to presupposing an abstract unity and then articulating this idea into criteria for the ordering of knowledge, to gradually arrive, through the collection and comparison of fragments of actual scientific knowledge, at an inductive conception of a unitary principle shaping all forms of knowledge.[9]

As Maatsch writes, Goethe strove to give perceptual experience, as it was given in the intensive, first-hand observation of plant life, a conceptual value which it could not accrue within a Kantian epistemology, which, for reasons I will not attempt to summarize, could not accommodate Goethe's interest in grasping the regularities underlying a single natural object as it moves through the entire temporal and processual course of its development, as for instance in the growth of a flower from seed to blossom.[10] In contrast to the Kantian *Begriff*, Goethe developed what he called on multiple occassions, in a distinctive formulation of his own,

[9] I am summarizing Maatsch's account of these matters. See Maatsch, *Morphologie*, pp. 1-3.

[10] For a more detailed discussion of the tension between Goethe's thinking and Kantian epistemology see Maatsch, *Morphologie*, pp. 4-6, which I am summarizing in condensed form here.

"anschauende Begriffe," which one might very loosely translate as "intuitional concepts."[11] Goethe here envisioned a kind of thinking which would be completely merged with the direct observation of concrete, sensuous particulars, such that, as Goethe put it, "my intuition itself might be a thinking, and my thinking an intuition" (*daß mein Anschauen selbst ein Denken, mein Denken ein Anschauen sei*).[12] As Maatsch writes, Goethe's "anschauende Begriffe" stand

> not for an intellectual intuition [*Anschauung*] of pure ideas; rather, what is intended [by Goethe] is a mediation of thought and object, of concept and perception, whose point of departure lies in an intensive grappling [*Auseinandersetzung*] with real objects.[13]

Maatsch and his co-contributors trace the legacy of this Goethean approach within humanistic and cultural disciplines since 1800, covering a very wide field including—to speak only of the reception of Goethe in the work of individual authors—such thinkers as Dilthey, Simmel, Cassirer, Jung, Kracauer, Wittgenstein, Benjamin, and Adorno. It is within this nineteenth and twentieth-century tradition of morphological thinking inherited from Goethe that Jolles's study of simple forms is best understood.

Seen in relation to the particular attraction which the morphological approach held for certain thinkers of modernity, both the similarities and the differences between Jolles's methods

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[11] For Goethe's usages of this phrase, see Maatsch, *Morphologie*, p. 5n7. The words "*anschauen*" and "*Anschauung,*" as used by Kant and in German philosophical contexts after Kant, are notoriously problematic to translate, but "intuition"—though very inadequate to the sense of viewing and perceiving, of "looking-at," given by the German *anschauen*—seems to be the most commonly used English equivalent.

[12] Quoted in Maatsch, *Morphologie*, p. 5.

[13] In the original: "nicht für eine intellektuelle Anschauung reiner Ideen; vielmehr ist eine Vermittlung von Denken und Gegenstand, von Begriff und Anschauung gemeint, deren Ausgangspunkt in der intensiven Auseinandersetzung mit den realen Gegenständen liegt" (Maatsch, *Morphologie*, p. 6).

and those of some of his close contemporaries emerge in sharper relief. Maatsch's claim that the morphological method promised a solution to both sides of modernity's own self-critique—to both the problem of the fragmentation of knowledge into increasingly specialized subdisciplines, and hence the impossibility of grasping knowledge as a coherent whole, and on the other hand the fear of the deadening stasis that would result from any completely systematic philosophical order—seems to me a persuasive account of the appeal of such a method to modern thinkers.[14]

Aby Warburg and Walter Benjamin provide particularly striking illustrations of a morphological method which holds so fast to particulars that it always resists the unifying synthesis towards which it is at the same time pointing the way. Warburg's famous image atlas, the *Mnemosyne*, and his so-called "Kriegskarthotek," a collection of citations of newspaper and magazine articles illustrating the modern survival of superstitious and astrological modes of thinking, which Warburg assembled during World War I and which apparently contained more than ninety thousand items by 1918,[15] provide vivid illustrations of a research method in which the collection and organization of concrete examples always outpaced any attempt to reduce the examples themselves to conceptual schemata. Benjamin's *Arcades Project*, which has often been discussed in parallel with Warburg's *Mnemosyne Atlas*, provides a similarly vivid illustration of

[14] See Maatsch, *Morphologie*, pp. 10-11. Maatsch draws this account of modernity's self-critique from Wolfgang Welsch, *Unsere postmoderne Moderne* (Weinheim: VCH, 1988).

[15] This figure is based on a document in the hand of Gertrud Bing, who began working as a librarian at the Kulturwissenschaftlichen Bibliothek Warburg in 1922. See Peter J. Schwartz, "Aby Warburgs Kriegskarthotek. Vorbericht einer Rekonstruktion," p. 50, in *Kasten 117: Aby Warburg und der Aberglaube im Ersten Weltkrieg*, ed. Gottfried Korff (Tübingen: Tübinger Vereinigung für Volkskunde, 2007), pp. 39-70. For further discussion of Warburg's "Kriegskarthotek," see Jane O. Newman, "Enchantment in Times of War: Aby Warburg, Walter Benjamin, and the Secularization Thesis," *Representations* 105 (Winter 2009): p. 146.

a project which insists on the irreducible singularity of fragments which have nevertheless been assembled into a conceptually-suggestive whole.[16]

By contrast to the modernist collages which Warburg's image atlas and Benjamin's *Arcades Project* present to us, Jolles's *Simple Forms*, with its clear, accessible prose and systematic presentation, seems a far less radical undertaking. Yet the differences in mode of presentation belie an underlying similarity of method. The text of Jolles's *Simple Forms* was assembled with the help of two students, Otto Görner and Elisabeth Kutzer, who drew on extensive notes from Jolles's lectures at the University of Leipzig; and Jolles himself describes the book, in terms that suggest the pedagogical mode of presentation proper to a textbook, as "the first chapter of our [i.e. the morphological] approach to literary criticism [*Litteraturwissenschaft*]."[17] The simplicity of Jolles's mode of presentation, in which he illustrates his accounts of each simple form with a very small number of carefully chosen examples, belies considerable labor, undertaken over many years, devoted to sifting, organizing, and examining a mass of concrete examples of the various simple forms—labor which is deliberately presupposed by, rather than on display in, the text of *Simple Forms* itself.

In my opinion it is to the insistence on the value of intensive first-hand observation, collection, and ordering of real objects that we owe the lasting value of a morphological inquiry such as Jolles's. Whatever one thinks of the philosophical frameworks advanced by Goethe and

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[16] For comparisons of Benjamin and Warburg, see (in addition to Jane O. Newman, "Enchantment in Times of War," cited above) Matthew Rampley, *The Remembrance of Things Past: On Aby M. Warburg and Walter Benjamin* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), and Christopher D. Johnson, "Configuring the Baroque: Warburg and Benjamin," *Culture, Theory, and Critique* 57, no. 2 (2016): pp. 142-165.

[17] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 8; André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1999), p. 10.

later thinkers such as Novalis who took inspiration from him, it is clear that in practice, the Goethean morphological approach encouraged and privileged habits of close observation and of the rigorous analysis of actual objects. The first-hand perceptual analysis which, along with extensive collecting and inductive ordering of specific cultural and literary artifacts, lies behind a work like *Simple Forms*, give Jolles's study its value for contemporary scholarship, a value which persists in spite of the changes in philosophical and critical points of view that have seemingly rendered much of Jolles's framework obsolete.

II. *The system of "Simple Forms"*

Having presented, in this admittedly cursory way, a rudimentary account of the intellectual tradition informing Jolles's self-avowedly morphological approach to literature, I want now to say something about the uncompleted nature of Jolles's morphological project. In so doing, I wish to lay particular emphasis on the systematic character of Jolles's theoretical undertaking. On the one hand, Jolles's aspirations to systematicity in *Simple Forms* encounter many obvious difficulties and involve the theory in some hard-to-reconcile contradictions. To take the most central example (it is one to which I will return), Jolles's opposition between the so-called simple forms and what Jolles terms *Kunstformen* ("art forms")[18] draw him into contortions—such as the very involved attempt to distinguish between the "winged word" and

[18] This term, which as Jolles employs it must count as a technical one, is translated in varying ways by Schwartz in his English translation of *Simple Forms*. In this dissertation, I try as much as possible to translate *Kunstform* consistently as "art form." Although there is a certain awkwardness in describing what in English we would normally term "literary forms" as "art forms," as my preferred translation of Jolles's term will often oblige me to do, I have decided that this awkwardness is an apt enough way to preserve the special force of Jolles's usage, since after all Jolles's thinking was profoundly shaped by his reflections on those visual arts to which in English we more naturally apply the term.

the proverb in chapter 5 of *Simple Forms*—which may well leave some readers unpersuaded by the distinction as Jolles draws it in specific instances. In fact, as Jolles himself makes quite explicit in his discussion of Jacob Grimm's concept of *Naturpoesie*,[19] the coherence of the theory of simple forms depends absolutely on the distinction between *einfache Form* and *Kunstform*; without this distinction, the entire framework crumbles.[20] Any difficulty Jolles encounters persuading readers of this key distinction thus presents a major problem for the theory.

Because of these evident difficulties, it might appear that the best way to make use of Jolles's theory is to treat it as a heuristic,[21] lifting whatever local insights the study contains and discarding those parts of the theory which seem obviously inadequate. This is, in fact, the approach I myself would for the most part recommend. However, it is also the case that Jolles's conceptual machinery—which does have the advantage of being, in terms of the number of key concepts, fairly minimal, and thus in some ways quite flexible and adaptable—has been arranged so as to point the way towards a series of inquiries which Jolles himself never carried out. It is these incomplete areas of Jolles's project which I think are worth exploring further. And in order

[19] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 175-192.

[20] As Filippo Fonio writes, the distinction between simple form and art form is "il nucleo del sistema concettuale di Jolles." See Filippo Fonio, "Le *Einfache Formen* di André Jolles: struttura, problematicità, applicabilità della 'forma' della Legenda," *Cahiers d'études italiennes* 23 (2016), pp. 152. As Fonio notes, Jolles's distinction between simple form and *Kunstform* is a variation on a long line of parallel distinctions made by neoclassical and Romantic thinkers concerning different stages of cultural development and the differences between pre-literary and literary expression, of which Vico's idea of the "three ages" and Schiller's distinction between naive and sentimental poetry are some of the best known.

[21] For a forceful defense of the value of Jolles's theory which nevertheless insists on the need to treat the theory as a heuristic, see Hans Robert Jauss, "The Alterity and Modernity of Medieval Literature," trans. Timothy Bahti, *New Literary History* 10, no. 2 (Winter, 1979): pp. 211-229, esp. p. 215, where Jauss addresses the lack of fit between Jolles's system of nine simple forms and the system of medieval literary genres.

to see clearly the avenues Jolles saw for further research using his paradigm, it helps to stick to the details of his conceptual apparatus, no matter how fussy, antiquated, or unworkable they may seem.

The first point I wish to emphasize is what in my opinion should be seen as Jolles's primary methodological intervention in *Simple Forms*: namely, to break away from the centrality of the author within the then-dominant paradigms of *Literaturwissenschaft*. It has long been conventional to associate "the death of the author" with anthologized extracts from Barthes and Foucault, but the moves taken by these thinkers in their now emblematic essays are prefigured in Jolles's work, where this paradigm shift appears as the outgrowth of a different philosophical tradition and receives a very different valence. Both Barthes and Foucault—in short essays whose limits are quite circumscribed by their occasions, and which very obviously demand to be viewed in historical context—acknowledge that the effort to escape an author-centric understanding of literature was by no means a new phenomenon at their own time of writing. But the genealogy Jolles provides of the turn away from the author in the study of literature, and towards language itself instead, as well as the larger purpose on behalf of which Jolles resumes and extends this trajectory, differ markedly from what we see in the more influential and familiar projects of Barthes and Foucault.

Jolles's study opens with a schematic, deliberately simplified survey of the dominant paradigms governing literary study since the eighteenth century, which he terms the "aesthetic," the "historical," and the "morphological." By the "aesthetic" Jolles means the tradition of philosophical aesthetics developed by Enlightenment thinkers from Christian Wolff to Kant, whose main undertaking was an attempt to understand the laws of beauty. Jolles sees the establishment of a set of teachings concerning the distinct natures of the different literary genres

[*Gattungen*], and the regular rules governing their composition, to be the principle achievement of this "aesthetic" school of literary study. Aesthetic critics clarified the definitions and the distinctive aesthetic effects of both the primary genres of the lyric, the epic, the dramatic, and the didactic, as well as of the subgenres of the elegy and the ode, the epic and the novel, comedy and tragedy, the didactic poem and the epigram.[22]

Next to the "aesthetic" approach to literary theory, Jolles places what he calls the "historical" approach. According to Jolles, the "historical" school aims at interpreting the meaning (*Sinn*) of works of literature, and is from its very beginnings deeply entangled with Romantic conceptions of literary genius. In this approach to literature, literary works are treated as creations in what is ultimately a theological sense, and the locus of the meaning of the literary work is accordingly taken to lie, by analogy with the creator, in the figure of the poet or author. Jolles traces the divagations of this "historical" school of *Literaturwissenschaft* up through the end of the nineteenth century. Although what for Jolles remains a visibly consistent interpretive approach in fact undergoes, as Jolles acknowledges, some massive changes during this period—for instance when, in the work of critics such as Taine, the author comes to be seen not as a unique genius but as the product of a milieu, of the economic, social, and political forces of a certain historical period—Jolles insists that the fundamental orientation of the "historical" approach remains constant. Whether the poet is viewed as a genius, or as a person among people (*ein Mensch unter Menschen*), interpretation of the literary work always passes through the author, and the basic object of literary study remains the dyad of poet and poem, author and work.[23] Because, as Jolles notes, the aesthetic approach too, for good reasons, begins with the

[22] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 1-2.

[23] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 2-5.

finished work of art as its object—and because in Jolles's view the completed artwork always asks to be understood in the first instance in relation to the shaping force of the artist—both the aesthetic and the historical approaches preserve as their central object of analysis this dyad of poet and poem, author and work.[24]

Alongside the "aesthetic" and "historical" schools of literary analysis Jolles ranges the "morphological" school, whose origins Jolles also locates in the eighteenth century, in a line of thinkers represented most prominently by Hamann, Herder, Goethe, and Jacob Grimm. This is a school of thought which seeks to understand not beauty or meaning, but *form* [*Gestalt*], which, in Jolles's vision, operates by analogy to Nature as conceived in Goethe's morphological writings: as a shaping force active everywhere in language, operating differently at different "levels" but always constituting the same unitary principle. Hamann's dictum that "poetry is the mother tongue of the human race," Herder's essay on the origins of language and his collection of folk songs, and the Grimm brothers' researches into language and folktales are the exemplary instances of the morphological tradition which Jolles constructs in order to situate his own undertaking within it.[25]

In the morphological approach to literature, as Jolles construes it, the completed work of literature is not the central object of study, but is rather the apex of a continuum which must be analyzed in its entirety. Hence, the first chapter of Jolles's *Literaturwissenschaft* begins not with poets and poems, but with a much earlier stage in the emergence of literary form along what

[24] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 6.

[25] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 5-7.

Jolles calls "the path that leads from language to literature" [*den Weg . . . der von Sprache zu Litteratur führt*].[26] Following the definition of form which Jolles quotes from Goethe,

> The Germans have a word for the complex of existence presented by a physical organism: *Gestalt* [structured form]. With this expression they exclude what is changeable and assume that an interrelated whole is identified, defined, and fixed in character.[27]
>
> Der Deutsche hat für den Komplex des Daseins eines wirklichen Wesens das Wort *Gestalt*. Er abstrahiert bei diesem Ausdruck von dem Beweglichen, er nimmt an, daß ein Zusammengehöriges festgestellt, abgeschlossen und in seinem Charackter fixiert sei.[28]

Jolles defines literary form in terms of the qualities of fixity, definiteness, and hardness. The path from language to literature shows literary form manifesting itself with ever-greater solidity [*fest und immer fester*] "until it appears to us in a final, finished state as a definite individual unity" [*bis es in einer letzten Vollzogenheit als endgültige individuelle Einheit uns erscheint*] in the completed work of literature.[29]

However, Jolles's intention in *Simple Forms* is to study a different, prior stage of the emergence of literary form, one in which form, while still recognizable *as* form, does not yet possess the qualities of fixity and solidity, but exists rather in a state of mobility and fluidity. This level of form is what Jolles terms "simple form," and he finds it manifested in the forms at

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[26] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 7; *Einfache Formen*, p. 9.

[27] Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, "The Purpose Set Forth (from *On Morphology*)," in *Scientific Studies*, ed. and transl. Douglas Miller (New York: Suhrkamp, 1988), p. 63; as quoted in Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 5.

[28] As quoted in *Einfache Formen*, p. 6.

[29] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 8; *Einfache Formen*, p. 9.

the center of his study: the legend, the saga, the myth, the riddle, the saying, the case, the *memorabile*, the fairy tale, and the joke.

I am rehearsing Jolles's methodological introduction at such length because I want make clear that the systematic approach to *Literaturwissenschaft* which Jolles there lays out does in fact reserve a place for the "author" as, in fact, the endpoint of literary analysis. Jolles is, in this respect, less radical than the Barthes of "The death of the author." Jolles seeks not so much to displace or reject the author-centric modes of interpretation still dominant in his own day, as to complement them. He speaks of the forms he terms "simple" as having been neglected by the "aesthetic" and "historical" approaches to literature, which, though sensing that such simple forms "might somehow be present in works of literary art—that, for example, one cannot speak of the *Nibelungenlied* without also discussing the Nibelung saga," nevertheless have left these forms to be studied by "ethnography or . . . other not entirely literary disciplines."[30] To rectify this situation, Jolles introduces what *is* a radically new and innovative paradigm, premised on the idea that there is such a thing as *form in the absence of an author.* This kind of form, as Jolles understands it, emerges from language itself. Simple forms are "those that arise, so to speak, within language itself, developing themselves in language, without the aid of a poet."[31]

III. *Simple forms and "art forms" [Kunstformen]*

I hope the above has begun to suggest how what is most radical in Jolles's theory of simple forms, his break away from the centrality of the author in literary analysis and from the dyad of poet and poem in order to study literary forms that arise in language itself "without the

[30] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 8.

[31] Jolles, *Simple Forms,* p. 8.

aid of a poet," does not in fact do away with the figure of the author, but rather reserves a place of importance for the individual author and the "completed individual unity" of the literary work. When Jolles writes in the introduction to *Simple Forms* that the book represents "the first chapter of our *Literaturwissenschaft*," it is worth remembering that what Jolles is presenting is *only* the first chapter of a larger theory of literature. *Simple Forms* points the way to the later stages of a systematic theory which Jolles projected but never completed.

In his introduction to his translation of *Simple Forms*, Peter J. Schwartz raises the question of how the reader of Jolles's study ought "to understand the relationship of the simple forms to the 'literary' forms that develop out of them." Noting that Jolles projected but never brought to completion a book on the so-called *Kunstformen*, Schwartz concludes, "We are left to extrapolate."[32] However, I think that Schwartz, who quickly moves from this comment to an extrapolation based on comparisons with Sausurrean linguistics and structuralist theory which he himself acknowledges may be "misleading,"[33] perhaps underestimates here the sources we have at our disposal on which to base our extrapolations of Jolles's thinking. I want here to briefly introduce some primary materials—some written by Jolles himself, some by authors closely connected with him—which, in the scholarship on Jolles which I have so far consulted, do not seem to have been used to aid in reconstructing Jolles's ideas about *Kunstformen* and their relationship to the so-called simple forms.

Silvia Contarini has argued against the tendency to treat Jolles's most well-known book, *Simple Forms*, as an adequate representation of Jolles's research program, which, writes Contarini, comes into clearer focus when one instead follows the changing and recursive path of

[32] Schwartz, introduction to Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. xxxv.

[33] Schwartz, introduction to Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. xxxv.

Jolles's thinking as it develops over the entire course of his writings and reflections, on a huge range of subjects, during the several decades of his career.[34] As Contarini points out, Jolles developed his thinking about simple forms over a long period of time, and published this thinking in preliminary studies, many of which appeared in the Dutch journal *De Gids*, one of whose editors was Jolles's close friend Johann Huizinga. Jolles's published work prior to *Simple Forms* also contains some important reflections on his thinking about the various *Kunstformen* or "art forms." Some of this earlier work has been discussed in the scholarship on Jolles, particularly in the work that has been done in Italy on Jolles's thinking about the *Kunstform* of the novella.[35]

Jolles's writings on the novel (as distinct from the novella) also contain some important material for our understanding of Jolles's thinking about the *Kunstformen* and their relationship to the so-called simple forms. In "Een oude roman" ("An old novel"), an essay from 1925, not included in Contarini's collection and still unavailable except in the original Dutch, Jolles advances a definition of the *Kunstform* of the novel by way of a close formal examination of the Hellenistic novel as exemplified by Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*.[36] Jolles's discussion of the novel in "Een oude roman" is one of the most extensive and revealing explanations of which I am aware of Jolles's concept of the *Kunstform*, and as such complements Jolles's discussion of the *Kunstform* of the Tuscan novella in chapter 8 of *Simple Forms.* A partial summary of some of

[34] See Silvia Contarini's introduction to Jolles, *I travestimenti della letteratura*.

[35] See, among others, Silvia Contarini, "*Forme artistiche*: Jolles e la teoria della novella," in *Boccaccio e i suoi lettori*, ed. Gian Mario Anselmi, et al. (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2013), pp. 129-147.

[36] André Jolles, "Een oude roman," published in two parts, in *De Gids* 89, no. 2 (1925): pp. 377-393, and *De Gids* 89, no. 3 (1925): pp. 83-98.

Jolles's claims in "Een oude roman" may therefore be of use in introducing my own attempt in this dissertation to analyze the relationship between certain simple forms and the *Kunstformen* of comedy and tragedy as manifested in Shakespeare's drama.

"Een oude roman" is a remarkable attempt to derive a valid definition of the novel as a literary form from an internal analysis of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*. The rediscovery of the Hellenistic novel during the Renaissance plays a pivotal role in Jolles's argument: for Jolles, the many different things which "*roman*" has come to signify in the postclassical and medieval period suddenly snap into focus again when Renaissance humanists rediscover the work of Longus and, especially, Heliodorus. It is a moment, in Jolles's telling, which manifests the double aspect of any cultural "renaissance": both a continuation of a tradition that has in fact never broken off and therefore does not need to be rediscovered, for it must already be present in a culture or that culture could not recognize and respond to this aspect of the past; and at the same time a sudden return to and renewed engagement with the roots of that tradition, the effect of which is, by establishing as it were the connection of a new aqueduct, to suddenly double the stream which flows from antiquity into the present—hence the impression of heightened energy and efflorescence which such moments in the history of a culture produce.

"Een oude roman" places particular emphasis on a key feature of Jolles's definition of "art forms," namely, that in their most characteristic instantiations, their unity consists entirely in the way they are governed by certain conscious rules of art. In a sense, Jolles's theory of the *Kunstformen* is where he pays homage to, and incorporates into his own system, the "aesthetic" school, with its definitions of the major genres and their regular rules.

In analyzing the form of Heliodorus's *Aethiopica*, Jolles is in fact much closer to the procedures of structuralist narratology than he is when he undertakes his analysis of the simple

forms. Jolles proceeds by carefully breaking down the structure of the *Aethiopica* into episodes, analyzing the movements of each subsection of the novel. He provides a definition of the form of the novel as one in which two lovers are separated and then brought back together again, such that the entire novel is unified as a pattern of movement between A and B, with the structure of a "bridge" or "journey." Jolles shows the elaborate care taken in arranging the symmetrical interlacing of the different movements or episodes, as well as in the use of the formal elements of rhetoric and style—of description, deliberation, dialogue, and maxims—to construct a unified whole providing great variety of content but always rigorously and carefully structured *by the writer* according to certain rules.

In addition to this emphasis on the distinctiveness of the *Kunstformen* lying in the conscious use of rules of art to create a formally-bounded, self-sufficient, and unified whole, "Een oude roman" includes an important discussion of the ways in which simple forms shape and affect art forms when the two converge. Because "Een oude roman" is not available in translation, I want here to provide a somewhat lengthy excerpt of one of the relevant discussions of this kind, which, in part because of its explicit reference to Shakespeare, will help to set up the framing premise of my dissertation:

> Whenever we read an epic such as the Iliad or the Song of Roland, or a tragedy such as the Oresteia or Hamlet, we know that here two things are coming together. We know the history of the Trojan War or of Charlemagne's battle with the infidels, the history of Agamemnon, Clytemnestra and Orestes or of Claudius, Gertrude and Hamlet, through still other forms than through the poems of Homer, Turold, Aeschylus or Shakespeare. We have names for those [other] forms, and can say that a saga, a legend or something else lies at the basis of the works of art [i.e. the epics and tragedies]. The epics and the tragedies rest therefore on the crossing in each case of two forms that are heterogeneous in both nature and origin, of which one—the one we call *simple form*—appears to have originated as it were out of the whole community, while the other—the *art form* [*kunstvorm*]—to be sure rests on something which is present in the community, and in which the community is reflected back to itself, but nevertheless first receives its proper and definitive form within a singular and unrepeatable circumstance [*toedracht*].

Because we are here concerning ourselves with literature, we can best grasp the difference between simple forms and art forms [*kunstvormen*] when we commence from *phrasing* [*bewoording*]. Phrasing in the simple form is mobile, changeable, and schematic; by contrast, in the art form it is solid, singular, and unique. Anyone can narrate a saga, a legend, or a fairy tale "in his own words" without it ceasing to be the valid expression of a mental disposition [*geestelijke occupatie*] and of a train of thought [*gedachtengang*] that follows from the disposition. By contrast, one can neither add nor remove a single word from an epic or tragedy without changing the form, meaning, and value of the work. Whenever we, as sometimes happens, recount the "content" of the Iliad, it ceases to be an epic, and becomes something that stands closer to the simple form than to the art form with which the simple form has come together. Whenever, on the other hand, a saga or legend is put into words in a definitive way by a poet, it ceases in a certain sense to be a saga or a legend.

What is true of the phrasing, is likewise true of circumstances, events, and persons, which originate in a simple form out of a certain occupation and a train of thought which follows it, and are objectified [*geobjectiveerd worden*]. They too remain—though they have taken their character from the form in which they originated, and though they are determined by this form—mobile, changeable, and schematic. It is as though they are bound to the community with numerous threads and [likewise] bind the community to the [mental] disposition [*occupatie*] in question. They have, if one likes, a representative rather than an individual character.

Now when we find the same circumstances, events, and persons within the art form which has crossed itself with the simple form, then it is as if the threads have been loosened and drawn up; they possess a new, individual independence; out of the many-sided thing something singular has developed. In short, they [the circumstances, events, and persons] have been objectified in a different sense. That in their new objectification they no longer fully meet the requirements of the earlier objectification goes without saying. When an art form comes together with a simple form, when a saga or a legend comes together with an epic, something is absorbed, and at the same time something is destroyed.

That it is not always entirely easy to accurately distinguish this difference in nature [between the simple form and the art form] is due to the fact that—to stay for the moment with persons [i.e. characters]—there are a mass of figures which we only know through combinations of simple form and art form. Agamemnon, Menelaus, Helen and Paris have been given form for us first of all by the Iliad. How these figures may have appeared in the Greek saga is something of which we can only with difficulty give an account, though we can be certain that there [in the saga] they were creatures of a different kind.

For the sake of completeness we can here add, that after this second stage a third follows. When circumstances, events, and persons are, as it were, *withdrawn* from a community by a work of art, they are subsequently, through the general influence exercised by the work of art, once more brought *back* to the community. The connecting bands that have

> been withdrawn are re-established elsewhere. Incidents and figures from the epic are for the third time objectified, and in this way possess among the populace a life and existence which, up to a certain level, depends as much on the simple form as on the art form. We know an Agamemnon, a Menelaus, a Helen, and a Paris, which have faded away as much from the Greek saga as from Homer; and how can we fail to acknowledge that, in addition to a Hamlet from the saga—approximately, the one which Saxo Grammaticus described—and a Hamlet from Shakespeare's tragedy, yet a third Hamlet exists![37]

Although the question of what happens in the convergence between a simple form and an art form recurs on multiple occasions in *Simple Forms*, Jolles's discussions of this theme there are relatively brief, often mere indications of questions for further research to be taken up by others or by Jolles himself at a later time. By contrast, in "Een oude roman," including in the above-quoted passage, Jolles provides a more extensive—if admittedly rather general, in the case of this particular passage—discussion of the convergence of simple form and art form. And he makes clear that an awareness of what happens in this convergence could affect our interpretation of certain major works of literature—among them Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

In addition to Jolles's uncollected published writings, we can reconstruct his ideas about the interrelationship between simple forms and *Kunstformen* from the published dissertations of two of his students, Elisabeth Kutzer and Otto Görner—the same students, mentioned earlier, who helped Jolles assemble the manuscript of *Simple Forms*. Kutzer and Görner both wrote studies in which the question of the relationship of simple forms to *Kunstformen* is a central topic, and while these studies have been listed in bibliographies of works pertaining to Jolles, I have not found them discussed in any detail in recent critical literature on Jolles. Görner's *Vom Memorabile zu Schicksalstragödie* contains a chapter on "Memorabile als Kunstform," and proceeds from examinations of the structure of the *memorabile* in instantiations of the simple

[37] Jolles, "Een oude roman," *De Gids* 89, no. 2 (1925): pp. 386-388.

form up to an analysis of Schiller's *The Bride of Messina*, Schiller's controversial attempt to combine elements of ancient Greek theater with those of modern theater.[38] Kutzer's dissertation, *Zum Stammbaumroman in der neueren Literatur*, is a study of three "family tree" novels (one of which is in fact a novel cycle, Emile Zola's Rougon-Macquart novels).[39] In this work, Kutzer addresses the relationship between the simple form of the saga and the family tree novel. The dissertation bears evidence of having been written in close consultation with Jolles: Kutzer adopts the definition of *Sage* and of the opposition between simple form and *Kunstform* exactly as these concepts are presented in *Simple Forms*; and she studies three novels about which Jolles had published articles in the preceding years. Kutzer's dissertation gives an illuminating picture of the payoff which, as Jolles might have imagined it, would result from bringing the theory of simple forms into conversation with the study of major works by individual authors.

A brief synopsis of the arc of Kutzer's argument in her dissertation may help to suggest the direction in which Jolles and Kutzer envisioned the application of the theory of simple forms to the study of major works of literature. Kutzer's dissertation looks at E. T. A. Hoffman's *Die Elixiere des Teufels*, Émile Zola's Rougon-Macquart novel cyle, and John Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga*. Kutzer's introduction summarizes, first, Jolles's concept of the *Sage* as a simple form, according to which the *Sage* is built up out of the *Geistesbeschäftigung* ("mental disposition") of the family, and centered in the concept of the family, inheritance, and the family tree; next, Jolles's definition of the *Kunstform* of the novel (*Roman*), drawn from Jolles's article on "Een oude roman"; and finally, a definition of the "family tree novel" as a convergence of the

[38] Otto Görner, *Vom Memorabile zur Schicksalstragödie* (Berlin: Junker und Dünnhaupt Verlag, 1931).

[39] Elisabeth Kutzer, "Zum Stammbaumroman in der neueren Literatur," Inaugural-Dissertation, Universität Leipzig (Leipzig: Gebr. Gerhardt, 1929).

simple form of the *Sage* and the *Kunstform* of the novel. A central claim in Kutzer's overall argument is that Hoffman's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and Galsworthy's *The Forsyte Saga* are closer to each other in form and nature than either is to Zola's novel cycle, in spite of the fact that Galsworthy read, admired, and to a certain extent imitated Zola, but did not read Hoffman's *Elixiere des Teufels*.

Even this very perfunctory summary of Kutzer's dissertation begins to suggest one of the possibilities opened up for literary studies by the theory simple forms. The simple form of the saga, in Kutzer's account, becomes a means of accounting for close relationships, including formal homologies, between literary works even in the absence of a direct chain of literary influence. Further, the theory of simple forms becomes a way for accounting for formal and structural qualities of a work without recourse to an analysis centered on the relationship between the work and its author. Thus, Kutzer's account of Hoffmann's *Die Elixiere des Teufels* and its close relationship to the simple form of the *Sage* emphasizes that this novel is in fact not characteristic of Hoffmann's *oeuvre*—Hoffmann himself distanced himself from the work after composing it—and that previous attempts by critics to analyze *Die Elixiere* with reference to the biography and psychology of Hoffmann were inadequate to explaining the peculiar formal features of the work. It is as if the simple form of the *Sage* speaks through Hoffman, drawing him into its orbit and causing him to compose a work in some respects alien to his own temperament and intentions.

This summary of Jolles's "Een oude roman" and of studies by two of his students begins to suggest the value of Jolles's theory of simple forms for the study of Shakespeare's relationship to his sources, as I will now attempt to explain in more detail.

IV. *Shakespeare source study and the theory of simple forms*

Several recently published works have argued that a resurgence of interest in Shakespeare source study is currently underway.[40] This dissertation proposes adding Jolles's theory of simple forms to the various paradigms and directions advocated in recent scholarship on Shakespeare's sources.

Of recently published works on Shakespeare's sources, there are two in particular with which this dissertation shares overlapping concerns: Charlotte Artese's *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources*,[41] and Melissa E. Walter's *The Italian Novella and Shakespeare's Comic Heroines*.[42] These two studies complement each other, since the Italian novella and its offshoots often contain "literary" versions of the stories which folkloristics will later classify as "folktales," and, in consequence, Artese and Walter discuss many of the same plays and many of the same source texts.[43] My dissertation, in turn, affords a third complementary perspective on the subject matter

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[40] For bibliography of recent work in this area, see *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study: Audiences, Authors, and Digital Technologies*, ed. Dennis Austin Britton and Melissa Walter (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 10n2, and Melissa Walter and Sarah Klann, "Shakespeare source study in the early twenty-first century: A resurrection?" *Literature Compass* 15, no. 9 (2018), pp. 1-9. See also John Kerrigan, *Shakespeare's Originality* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), pp. 13-14. Renewed attention to Shakespeare source study will be further encouraged by the fact that a new edition of *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare* is forthcoming, under the general editorship of John Drakakis. See John Drakakis, "Inside the Elephant's Graveyard: Revising Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*," in *Shakespeare and Authority: Citations, Conceptions and Constructions*, ed. Katie Halsey and Angus Vine (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018), pp. 55-78.

[41] Charlotte Artese, *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015). See also *Shakespeare and the Folktale: An Anthology of Stories*, ed. Charlotte Artese (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019).

[42] Melissa Emerson Walter, *The Italian Novella and Shakespeare's Comic Heroines* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

[43] Both Artese and Walter have chapters on *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *The Merchant of Venice, All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, and *Cymbeline*—all plays with sources

explored by Artese and Walter. For both the Italian novella and the folk (or "fairy") tale are central, abiding concerns for Jolles. In fact, as I have mentioned earlier, the convergence during the early modern period of the Italian novella with stories that subsequently became known as "fairy tales" (*Märchen*) is a chapter of literary history explicitly discussed by Jolles in a methodologically crucial section of *Simple Forms*.[44]

Jolles's long engagement with both folklore and the Italian novella can be traced back to his intense, generative, and combative friendship with the art historian Aby Warburg.[45] As Silvia Contarini has noted, the beginnings of Jolles's interest in folklore are exactly contemporaneous with Aby Warburg's much-discussed trip to America to study the ritual ceremonies of the Hopi. Contarini situates an 1897 lecture Jolles delivered, titled "Folklore and Art History" ["Folklore en Kunstwetenschap"], alongside Warburg's trip to America, within a tight overlapping chronology:

> The date itself of Jolles's lecture, which appeared in parts between July and August of 1897 in the Dutch review "De Kroniek," appears significant, given that Jolles's reflections can be arranged close to Warburg's trip to America and the three lectures on the Pueblo people which Warburg delivered in Hamburg and Berlin at the beginning of

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and analogues that include both "novella" and "folktale" versions of the same or closely similar narratives.

[44] See, in the chapter on *Märchen* in Jolles, *Simple Forms*, Jolles's discussion of Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti*, and the distinction Jolles draws between the simple form of the fairy tale and the *Kunstform* of the Tuscan novella, pp. 183-199. For recent discussions of the question of medieval and early modern versions of the fairy tale, see Ruth B. Bottigheimer, *Fairy Godfather: Straparola, Venice, and the Fairy Tale Tradition* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), Jan M. Ziolkowski, *Fairy Tales From Before Fairy Tales: The Medieval Latin Past of Wonderful Lies* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2009), and the critique of Bottigheimer in Jan M. Ziolkowski, "Straparola and the Fairy Tale: Between Literary and Oral Traditions," *Journal of American Folklore* 123, no. 490 (Fall 2010): pp. 377-397, which briefly mentions, on p. 378, Jolles's influence on antecedent versions of the same debate.

[45] On Warburg and Jolles, see Antoine Bodar, "Aby Warburg en André Jolles, een Florentijnse vriendschap," *Nexus*, 1 (1991): pp. 5-18.

> 1897. If in addition one considers that during his travels in America Warburg maintained a regular correspondence with Jolles, who in the meantime had returned to Holland and immersed himself in research on folklore; and that the two saw each other again in Berlin in January of 1897, and then again in the autumn of 1898 in Amsterdam, where Warburg took part in the Congress of Art Historians (which Jolles reviewed in "De Kroniek,") Jolles's study [the lecture on folklore and art history] can be read as an unedited fragment of a constellation of ideas, reflections, and intuitions which, in an as it were archaeological manner, give substance to [Warburg's] "A Lecture on Serpent Ritual," helping to resituate Warburg's text, beyond the complex circumstances of its gestation, in a biographical and cultural moment different from the one in which, many years later, [Warburg's] Kreuzlingen lecture took form.[46]

Jolles's long occupation with the Italian novella and, in particular, with Boccaccio's *Decameron*, can also be traced back to the intellectual-biographical nexus of his friendship with Warburg.[47] Among other things, then, Jolles's theory of simple forms can be construed as providing a new way to bring the complex insights of Warburg, so widely influential in the discipline of art history, to bear on the study of early modern literature.[48] The constellation of ideas developed by

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[46] Silvia Contarini, introduction to Jolles, *I travestimenti della letteratura*. On Jolles's lecture on folklore and art history, see also Silvia Contarini, "Tra folklore e scienza dell'arte: le forme del mito in André Jolles," in *Aby Warburg e le metamorfosi degli antichi dèi*, ed. Marco Bertozzi (Ferrara: Franco Cosimo Panini, 2002), pp. 153-172. Contarini also notes Jolles's letter to Warburg, dated June 12, 1896, in which Jolles writes: "Last winter I remained in Holland and busied myself for a while with Folk-lore, though only superficially, as is usual [with me]. I was too lazy to do any writing. The news that you had studied "Primitive Art" among the Indians was therefore of the greatest interest to me, and I long to formally examine the conclusions [you have] drawn" [*ich sehne mich förmlich danach, die gezogenen Konklusionen zu vernehmen*]. For the letter, see Thys, *Gebildeter Vagant*, p. 174.

[47] See Silvia Contarini, "Gesti Verbali: Jolles Lettore di Decameron, *VI, 9*," in *Giovanni Boccaccio: tradizione, interpretazione e fortuna*, ed. Antonio Ferracin and Matteo Venier (Udine: Forum, 2014), pp. 229-241, and Peter J. Schwartz, introduction to Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. xxxii-xxxiv.

[48] Scholars of early modern drama have referred to Warburg's studies of the Florentine *intermezzi* with which the marriage of Ferdinando de' Medici was celebrated in 1589, which they have adduced in relation to Jacobean masques and spectacles. See for example D. J. Gordon, *The Renaissance Imagination*, ed. Stephen Orgel (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), p. 11, and Stephen Orgel, "The Poetics of Incomprehensibility," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42, no. 4 (Winter, 1991): p. 437. The confluence of Warburg's thinking with that of Jolles opens up a different perspective, focused less on ritual and performance and more on the morphology of

Warburg and Jolles around the turn of the twentieth century, as we see these ideas evolve in the more intensively literary (as opposed to art historical) research interests of Jolles, can be brought into alignment with one of the more substantial cross-sections of Shakespeare source study: Shakespeare's use of folktale and novella sources.

In fact, the "morphological" tradition of literary study, in Jolles's sense, already intersected with Shakespeare source study a little less than two centuries ago. The year 1831 saw the publication, in Berlin, of *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, edited, according to the title page, by Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock.[49] In fact, most of the work on this volume had been done by Karl Simrock, and when reprinted in a second edition in 1872, the volume was credited to Simrock alone.[50] In the meantime, a partial English translation of the volume, which reproduced Simrock's commentary but not the source texts themselves, was commissioned by James Halliwell-Phillipps on behalf of The Shakespeare

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those literary forms which served as sources for Shakespeare's drama. For Warburg's 1895 study of the Florentine *intermezzi*, see "The Theatrical Costumes for the Intermedi of 1589: Bernardo Buontalenti's Designs and the Ledger of Emilio de' Cavalieri," in Aby Warburg, *The Renewal of Pagan Antiquity: Contributions to the Cultural History of the European Renaissance*, trans. David Britt (Los Angeles: Getty Research Institute, 1999), pp. 349-401.

[49] *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock (Berlin: 1831). Theodor Echtermeyer, Simrock's erstwhile collaborator, is an interesting figure in his own right. He was a student of Hegel in Berlin, and went on to edit the *Hallische Jahrbücher für Wissenschaft und Kunst*, a prominent mouthpiece for the Young Hegelians in the 1840s. Echtermeyer's anthology of German poetry became a standard text in German schools, where it was used up through the end of the twentieth century. See Elisabeth Katharina Paefgen, *Der "Echtermeyer" (1836-1981), eine Gedichtanthologie für den Gebrauch in höheren Schulen* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1990).

[50] *Die Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Karl Simrock, 2nd ed. (Bonn: 1872).

Society, and published with Halliwell-Phillipps's notes and additions in 1850, with the title *The Remarks of M. Karl Simrock, on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays*.[51]

Simrock's volume was noted by Geoffrey Bullough in the very brief history of Shakespeare source study appended to the final volume of *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, where Simrock receives one sentence, at the head of a paragraph on German contributions to source study in the nineteenth century: "Meanwhile in Germany the widespread interest in folktales associated with the brothers Grimm and their school bore fruit in Karl Simrock's *Remarks on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays* . . . ."[52] More recently, John Kerrigan and Lori Humphrey Newcomb each devote a paragraph to Simrock in the course of providing their own histories of Shakespeare source study. Both Kerrigan and Newcomb associate Simrock with the nineteenth-century mode of German philological criticism which has come to be known as *Quellenforschung*.[53] Thus Newcomb, noting that Bullough connected Simrock with the Brothers Grimm "and the revival of the fairy tale," writes that "the larger context must be Biblical and classical philology's pursuit of early, potentially purer texts." For Newcomb, Simrock's *Quellenforschung* carries unavoidably imperialist and colonialist connotations. She continues: "German, American, and British scholars raced for the source, a struggle for spheres

[51] *The Remarks of M. Karl Simrock, on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (London: 1850).

[52] Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 8 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1975), p. 342.

[53] On the history of *Quellenforschung*, see Glenn W. Most, "The Rise and Fall of *Quellenforschung*," in *For the Sake of Learning: Essays in Honor of Anthony Grafton*, ed. Ann Blair and Anja-Silvia Goering, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 2016), pp. 933-954.

of influence in reverse."[54] For Kerrigan, the association between Simrock and *Quellenforschung* likewise carries certain negative connotations, and implies a criticism of of Simrock's method:

> During a century much given, in England and America, to evolutionary interpretations of words and texts (etymology, stemmata), and increasingly systematic in its tabulation and reproduction of Shakespeare's sources, the influence of Simrock was considerable. Perceptive and culturally attuned, he [Simrock] was more interested in Shakespeare's development than in breaking up the plays into modules; yet the reputation of *Quellenforschung* for ignoring the integrity of literary works in its desire to isolate pieces in the jigsaw was not entirely undeserved. The condenscension of such critics as Saintsbury echoes as late as Bullough.[55]

While Simrock's source study certainly is an instance of *Quellenforschung,* and demonstrably shares features with that mode of scholarship, with all its well-known flaws; and while I have no wish to quarrel with the sense which both Kerrigan and Newcomb give of the limitations of Simrock's study, I think that to view Simrock's volume primarily as an instance of *Quellenforschung*, a term which Kerrigan and Newcomb both associate primarily with Biblical and classical scholarship, somewhat obscures the degree to which Simrock's volume can also be seen as part of what Jolles terms the "morphological" tradition of literary study. Bullough's earlier linking of Simrock with the Brothers Grimm points in this direction more than do the recent comments of Kerrigan and Newcomb.

A closer look at *Quellen des Shakespeare* reveals what Simrock's approach has in common with Jolles's. Simrock's intellectual debts to the Grimm brothers are obvious from beginning to end of *Quellen des Shakespeare*, which frequently refers to the Grimm brothers' researches. Simrock's work of *Quellenforschung* needs to be seen more clearly in its historical

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[54] Lori Humphrey Newcomb, "Toward a Sustainable Source Study," in *Rethinking Shakespeare Source Study*, p. 21.

[55] Kerrigan, *Shakespeare's Originality*, p. 9.

context, not only as part of the intensified interest in "folk literature" that develops from Herder to the Grimm brothers (both Bullough and Newcomb recognize this link), but with a more fine-grained sense of the significance this larger undertaking seemed to hold for its participants at the time. The 1831 first edition of *Quellen des Shakespeare* was in fact intended to be the first publication in a larger series, as is evident from the volume's dual title pages, the first of which contains no mention of Shakespeare, but rather identifies the volume at hand as Part One of what it calls the *Bibliothek der Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*. The foreword by the editors explains their intention in launching this series:

> With the two little books that follow [i.e. the two parts of *Quellen des Shakespeare*] we open a larger collection of legendary stories [*sagenhafter Erzählungen*] of occidental origin [*abendländischen Ursprungs*] or at least of occidental formation [*Gestaltung*], which is intended as a counterpart to the beloved collection of oriental tales and stories [*Märchen und Erzählungen*] known by the name of *One Thousand and One Nights*.[56]

Shakespeare's sources were, in other words, intended to double as a representative anthology of "occidental" (with qualification) folktales, which would subsequently be complemented by yet further anthologies. The editors distinguish their collection from those already on offer by means of a distinction that comes remarkably close to the one Jolles makes between simple form and art form [*Kunstform*]:

> We distinguish our collection of *Märchen* and novellas from all those that have so far appeared or been announced in Germany by the fact we treat all the stories we have gathered as essentially determined by, on the hand, their *legendary* content [*sagenmäßigen Gehalt*], and on the other their artistic formation [*künstlerische Gestaltung*], which has not been first added by us, but which we found in the sources

[56] *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock (Berlin: 1831), p. v.

> from which we worked [i.e. the original source texts which the editors translated into German].[57]

This emphasis on the artistic form imposed on "legendary content" by the authors of the texts included in Simrock's collection—authors such as the *novellieri* Boccaccio, Fiorentino, da Porto, Bandello, Cinthio, and Straparola, or the chroniclers Saxo Grammaticus and Holinshed—stops short of the further distinction made by Jolles, according to whom what the editors of *Quellen des Shakespeare* here call "legendary content" in fact already possesses form, but of a kind distinct from the artistic or *künstlerische*. Nevertheless, one can recognize here the interest in the dialectic, so central to Jolles's paradigm, between narrative material shaped or created in some sense by a collective or *Volk*, and the distinctive impress imposed on that material by individual artists. The binary opposition between the poetic activity of the *Volk* and that of the individual writer is carried forward into the succeeding paragraph of the editors' foreword:

> There is a tradition [*Ueberliferung*] passed from generation to generation, says Uhland somewhere, and there is a free invention [*Dichtung*] of gifted spirits. Of such narratives as the phantasy of the individual calls forth out of the void, many anthologies are already available, others have been announced; the present volume intends, however, to gather other [narratives], namely those which owe their first development to the poetic activity of an entire folk, or to tradition passed down from folk to folk, and which only at the end have been recorded [*aufgezeichnet worden sind*] by means of the greater or lesser self-activity of the individual [*Selbsttätigkeit des Einzelnen*].[58]

It is to the internal coherence of this "tradition passed down from folk to folk" that the editors of *Quellen des Shakespeare* mean to devote their attention in the analytic portion of their work (the

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[57] *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock (Berlin: 1831), pp. v-vi.

[58] *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock (Berlin: 1831), p. vi.

commentary), and their foreword describes the importance of this task for *Wissenschaft* in the following words:

> To investigate the grand coherence [*großen Zusammenhang*] of mythic traditions [*mythischen Ueberlieferungen*], to recognize in its common, always-repeating characteristics something universal and necessary, and to unearth the treasure which the poetic intuition of peoples [*der Völker*] has set down in legends, tales, and songs [*Sagen, Märchen und Liedern*], as well as in mythologies and cosmogonies, is one of the most beautiful, but also one of the hardest, tasks which our time has laid before the scientific spirit [*dem wissenschaftlichen Geiste*]. The study of language must go hand in hand with the study of legend [*Sage*], in order to solve the great riddle of the ancient history [*Urgeschichte*] of mankind and of the relatedness of peoples [*Verwandtschaft der Völker*] . . .[59]

I will not dwell much longer here on *Quellen des Shakespeare*, though an examination of Simrock's commentary would reveal how strikingly he anticipates, in his sense that the activity of certain literary archetypes rather than direct chains of textual influence or tradition must finally explain the resemblances between the families of analogous myths and stories unearthed in his research, the ideas of later thinkers such as Jung, Jolles, or Northrop Frye.[60]

It may, finally, be worth noting the skepticism and irritation with which Halliwell-Phillipps frequently views Simrock's gathering together of analogues, as when Halliwell-Phillipps writes, of Simrock's attempt to connect the Romeo and Juliet story with the Tristan and

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[59] *Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen, Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Theodor Echtermeyer, Ludwig Henschel, and Karl Simrock (Berlin: 1831), pp. vi-vii.

[60] But see, for instance, Simrock's remarks on analogues to the Romeo and Juliet story, on *The Remarks of M. Karl Simrock, on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (London: 1850), p. 18; or, in the same edition, p. 32, Simrock's remarks on the resemblance between the Amleth story and that of Brutus. On p. 35 of the same edition, Simrock's comment on Saxo Grammaticus' handling of the Amleth story suggests that Simrock is thinking in terms of Schiller's distinction between naive and sentimental poetry: "It may not be uninteresting to remark how the ancient *naïve* tale looks under the treatment of a writer of the middle ages, who prided himself no little on his acquired classical cultivation and learning."

Isolde story and other analogues, that "English readers will, in general, fail to see the utility of tracing out these very remote resemblances."[61] Simrock himself, in the second edition of *Quellen des Shakespeare*, takes note of Halliwell-Phillipps's objections, but seems confident that his German audience will have a better understanding of his rationale:

> The English have not yet participated in the investigation into the origins of the legends at the basis [of Shakespeare's plays]; indeed, Halliwell appears to find it necessary, in the translation of my treatise, to beg the patience of his English readers for such researches. But in Germany the comparison of legends [*die Sagenvergleichung*] has other goals than that of understanding the poet [*das Verständniss des Dichters*] who has provided the immediate occasion for the comparison.[62]

I would suggest that the methodological divide which both Simrock and Halliwell-Phillipps register has left a lasting mark on research into Shakespeare's sources. In proposing to employ Jolles's "morphological" theory of simple forms in an analysis of Shakespeare's sources, this dissertation returns to Simrock's project from a contemporary point of vantage, from within which we can historicize Simrock's Romantic notion of the *Volk* while nevertheless recognizing a methodological orientation—the attempt to grasp an underlying coherence behind the repeated, common elements of "folktales" and mythology—which still has valid applications in the present.

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[61] *The Remarks of M. Karl Simrock, on the Plots of Shakespeare's Plays*, ed. J. O. Halliwell (London: 1850), p. 17n1. See also p. 31n1, where Halliwell-Phillipps observes: "The primary sources of this incident may illustrate Saxo-Grammaticus, but the wildest commentator would not introduce them into an essay on Shakespeare's play."

[62] *Die Quellen des Shakespeare in Novellen Märchen und Sagen*, ed. Karl Simrock, 2nd ed. (Bonn: 1872), p. viii.

Simple Form and Tragic Affect: Romeo and Juliet, 1475-1599

In the following chapter, I argue that Shakespeare uses the simple form which André Jolles terms the "anti-fairy tale" or "tragic fairy tale"[1] [*Antimärchen* or *tragische Märchen*] as a kind of conductor, a means of charging *Romeo and Juliet* with tragic affect. I argue that the tragic fairy tale carries this affective charge because it engages what Jolles terms our "naive morality." This naive morality precedes philosophical or religious ethics, and is based, according to Jolles, not on a religious, aesthetic, utilitarian, or hedonistic standard, but on a "form" which orders events in the world in such a way that these events are "good" or "just" on the sole basis of an "undogmatic, ""purely ethical," and "absolute judgment of feeling." [2] In what follows, I focus on how Shakespeare elaborates the simple form of the tragic fairy tale within the "art form" [*Kunstform*] of drama, channeling the tragic affect generated by the simple form into an articulated dramatic structure characterized by symmetry and proportion. Finally, I examine how Shakespeare manages certain tensions attendant on the convergence of simple form with art form, tensions which I analyze by looking at earlier novella versions of the Romeo and Juliet story, and considering them in the light of Jolles's comments on the Italian novella as an art form. I suggest, in conclusion, that a full resolution of the tension between simple form and art form is not accomplished within *Romeo and Juliet* itself, but instead carries over into a different

[1] On the "anti-fairy tale," discussed at more length below, see André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 195-6.

[2] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 194. Jolles here writes that he employs the word "naive" in "naive morality" in "the same sense as Schiller when he speaks of naive poetry"—another instance of the alignment between Schiller's distinction and Jolles's own binary opposition between simple form and "art form."

play by Shakespeare. The Pyramus and Thisbe playlet in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* dramatizes the difficulty of managing simple form within sophisticated "art forms" such as verse drama. By means of parody, the Pyramus and Thisbe playlet purges, as it were, a certain anxiety attendant on the project of bringing simple form and art form together.

I. The simple form of the fairy tale and the "art form" of the novella

Jolles's account of the fairy tale [*Märchen*] in *Simple Forms* contains a methodologically central discussion of the distinction between simple form and what Jolles calls "art form" [*Kunstform*].[3] Jolles traces this distinction back to an earlier set of opposed concepts employed by Jacob Grimm, one of the key figures in the tradition of "morphological" literary study within which Jolles situated his own theoretical undertaking. Jacob Grimm discussed his concepts of *Naturpoesie* and *Kunstpoesie* in a series of letters he exchanged with the Romantic poet Achim von Arnim, in which these two pioneering collectors of "folk literature" debated the legitimacy of so-called "literary" versions of the fairy tale.[4] Revisiting this debate, Jolles claims that Jacob Grimm's insistence on the importance of the distinction between *Naturpoesie* and *Kunstpoesie* show that Grimm recognized the existence of what Jolles terms "simple form."

Jolles then proceeds to a demonstration of the validity of the distinction between simple form and art form, *Naturpoesie* and *Kunstpoesie*. His demonstration proceeds by a formal analysis of, on the one hand, a simple form, the fairy tale [*Märchen*], and, on the other, an "art

[3] For the chapter on the fairy tale, see Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 175-199. For Jolles's discussion of Jacob Grimm, see Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp.

[4] On the Grimm brothers, Achim von Arnim, and the making "literary" of the fairy tale, see Jack Zipes, *The Brothers Grimm: From Enchanted Forests to the Modern World* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 10, 32-35.

form," the Italian novella. Jolles's analysis focuses on a specific moment in literary history when these two forms converged: the publication in Venice in 1550 of Giovanni Francesco Straparola's *Piacevoli notti*, a novella collection with a Boccaccesque frame narrative. Straparola's collection includes certain stories which were later included in the Grimm brothers' collections and which have come to be regarded as fairy tales.[5] Through a formal analysis and definition of the simple form of the fairy tale and of the art form of the Italian novella, Jolles attempts to show that when—in Straparola's collection as well as in later collections such as Giambattista Basile's—an author imposes the art form of the novella on the simple form of the fairy tale, the simple form "baulks at the convergence: it resists being remodelled in this way; it remains itself."[6]

In this chapter, I will argue that the resistance of simple form to combination with art form also affects Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, as well as the line of novella versions of the story preceding Shakespeare's play. Before moving on to those arguments, however, I want to summarize Jolles's definitions of the fairy tale and the novella; his account of the incompatibility of the two forms; and his definition of a special sub-type of the fairy tale, which he terms the "tragic fairy tale."

In Jolles's theory, each simple form corresponds to a different "mental disposition" [*Geistesbeschäftigung*] associated with a specific sphere of human activity or thought.[7] Jolles matches the fairy tale with a mental disposition he terms "*naive morality*," which Jolles contrasts

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[5] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 184. For citations of recent scholarship on Straparola and the fairy tale, see the introduction to this dissertation, p. 26n44.

[6] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 191.

[7] For Jolles's introduction of the concept of "mental disposition," which occurs in his account of the simple form of the legend, see Jolles, *Simple* Forms, pp. 27-30.

with ethics in the philosophical sense. Whereas ethics seeks to provide answers to the Kantian question, "What should I do?", naive morality answers the question, "How should things happen in the world?"[8] Whereas philosophical ethics is an ethics of action [*Ethik des Handelns*], naive morality is an ethics of event [*Ethik des Geschehens*].

The simple form of the fairy tale addresses itself to what Jolles terms "judgment of feeling" [*Gefühlsurteil*],[9] to how people *feel* about events in terms of their rightness and wrongness. The basic narrative unit of the fairy tale—which Jolles calls a "speech gesture" [*Sprachgebärde*], and which folklore studies terms a motif—activates emotional judgements of right and wrong. In "Puss and Boots," a miller has three sons. Two of the sons each inherit something valuable from their father—the mill and the donkey—while the third son inherits something worthless—the cat. But in the course of the narrative it emerges that the worthless thing, the cat, becomes the means whereby the disadvantaged brother achieves good fortune far greater than that of his brothers.[10] In the fairy tale, then, we find that "our sense of justice has been troubled by a state of affairs or by given incidents, and that a series of incidents, an event complex of a special kind, has satisfied it and resotred it to equilibrium."[11] The satisfaction that a story like "Puss and Boots" provides has nothing to do with morality, in the sense that the poor brother does nothing to deserve either his initial impoverishment or his later good fortune.

[8] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 194.

[9] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 194.

[10] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 193-94.

[11] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 194.

Instead, the satisfaction the story provides results from the fact that "in these stories things happen as we feel they *should* happen in the world."[12]

As for the novella, Jolles defines this "art form" as one that "strives to narrate an incident or an event of urgent importance in such a way as to give us the impression of an actual event, and such that the event appears more significant than the persons experiencing it."[13] Jolles observes that though the novella has an infinitely various subject matter, the form is unified by its consistent manner of presentation. Any event, as long as it possesses "strikingness" (*Eindringlichkeit*), can be fashioned into a novella. It is possible to take stories from literary or folk tradition and make them into novellas, as Boccaccio frequently did, but "we know, however, that it is equally possible to make choices freely: one can apply the form 'novella' to any part of the world, and each time we do so this part of the world will appear as a novella."[14]

As in his accounts of other "art forms" [*Kunstformen*], Jolles in his account of the novella places emphasis on the regular, consciously-employed rules governing the construction of the form: "the laws informing the novella are such that we can use this form to construct every incident in a definite manner . . . as long as it has the common characteristic of intensity [*Eindringlichkeit*]."[15]

By contrast, the fairy tale, unlike the novella, does not attempt to tell a story with a "urgent importance," for instead the fairy tale "[jumps] from one event to another . . . [to] convey an entire chain of events"; nor does the fairy tale strive to give "the impression of an actual

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[12] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 193.

[13] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 186.

[14] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 188.

[15] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 188.

occurrence," but instead "continually works with the marvelous."[16] The fairy tale, though it also presents "a wealth of incidents of all kinds, which equally seem to owe their coherence to a certain mode of representation," cannot be brought up against the world in the same way as the novella can. This is because "incidents such as the ones that we find in fairy tales are conceivable only in fairy tales . . . we can bring the world up to the fairy tale, but we cannot bring the fairy tale to the world."[17] The "laws informing the fairy tale . . . are such that wherever we insert this form into the world, the world transforms itself *acccording to a principle reigning only wihtin this form and defining only this form*."[18]

Jolles characterizes the difference between fairy tale and novella in terms borrowed from Grimm's account of *Natur-* and *Kunstpoesie.* The activity of grasping a part of the world and making it clear and determinate [*bündig*] using the form of the novella is, following Grimm, a *preparation* [*Zubereitung*]. Allowing the world to enter into a form [*die Welt in eine Form eingehen lassen*], such that the world is reshaped according to a principal internal and specific to *that* form alone, Grimm would call a fashioning-of-itself [*Sichvonselbstmachen*]. Where the novella encloses a part of the world in a fixed, unique, and singular shape [*fest, besonders, einmalig*], the fairy tale retains the world, in its transformed state, in all of its mobility, universality, and *every-time-ness* or *repeatability* [*ihre Beweglichkeit, ihre Allgemeinheit, und . . . ihre Jedesmaligkeit*].[19]

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[16] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 187.

[17] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 187.

[18] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 187.

[19] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 189.

The language of the two forms can be contrasted in similar terms. In the novella, language strives so much to be fixed, unique, and singular that it can only be conceived of as the language of an individual, a poet. By contrast, we commonly speak of someone telling a folk or fairy tale "in his own words" [*mit seinen eigenen Worten*], a phrase that points towards the mobility, universality, and repeatability of the fairy tale. Although certain elements of the fairy tale—its speech gestures [*Sprachgebärde*]—cannot be altered, the wording of the story accommodates variation and change. We can speak of the "own words" of both the artificial and simple form, but with the former, we mean the "own words" of the poet [*die eigenen Worte des Dichters*], whereas with the latter we mean the "own words" of the form itself [*die eigenen Worte der Form selbst*].[20]

Jolles uses these observations about the fairy tale to argue that its formal tendency is opposed to that of the novella. According to Jolles, the contrast between the language of the two forms can be extended to their handling of persons, places, and events. Jolles takes the example of the prince in a fairy tale, writing that if one gives the prince a historical name, as the novella would do in the interests of heightening the impression of historical actuality, one changes the nature of the story, making it about an ethics of action rather than an ethics of occurrence. About the historical prince we ask the question, "What did the prince do?" [*was tat der Prinz?*]. About the prince in a fairy tale, by contrast, we ask the question, "And what happened with the prince then?" [*und was geschah da mit dem Prinzen?*].[21] Whereas the fairy tale takes place "a long, long time ago" [*lange lange her*] "in a distant land, far, far away" [*in einen fernen Lande, weit, weit von hier*], the novella tends to specify, as I will point out shortly in my discussion of the novella

[20] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 190.

[21] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 197.

"Julia et Pruneo," a precise geographical and often historical setting. For Jolles, the imposition of the form of the novella onto the fairy tale thus results in a noticeable loss of aesthetic force: "As soon as the fairy tale acquires historical traits—which sometimes happens when it overlaps with the novella—it loses some of its force."[22]

In this chapter, I provisionally adopt Jolles's theorem that simple form resists art form as a way of bringing out the interaction of the fairy tale with the novella in novella versions of the Romeo and Juliet story and in Shakespeare's play. In order to set up this argument, I first need to explain Jolles's idea of the "tragic fairy tale," a subspecies of the simple form of the fairy tale.

Jolles posits that certain simple forms have corresponding inverted versions. The simple form of the legend, which Jolles finds "actualized" in the genre of the saint's life, possesses such an inverted version in what Jolles terms the "antilegend:" stories not about saints who exemplify active moral virtue, but about great sinners who exemplify active evil, as in the Don Juan or Faust legends.[23] Jolles finds that the fairy tale too has an inverted form. Jolles points out that the real world only very rarely conforms to naive morality's feeling for right and wrong. Accordingly, the world that the fairy tale presents, a world that satisfies the demands of naive morality, is precisely *not* our world, and this is signaled by the quality of the *marvelous* included in almost every definition of the fairy tale. It is not only the presence of the marvelous that marks out the world of the fairy tale as fundamentally opposed to our own, but the fact that within the fairy tale, the marvelous is presented as normal, as ordinary.[24] Jolles then points out that we might expect a "one-sided" version of the form of the fairy tale, a version of this form which

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[22] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 197.

[23] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 39-43.

[24] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 196.

presents the *real* world, but colored by naive morality's emotional judgements. In fact, Jolles writes, such a form does exist. He gives as an example the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, calling such stories "anti fairy tales" or "tragic fairy tales" [*Antimärchen*, *tragische Märchen*].[25] The tragic fairy tale is a one-sided form, whereas the fairy tale is a two-sided form. The fairy tale is the form "in which the mental disposition [of naive morality] appears in its double effect—the form in which the tragic is both established and dissolved."[26] In the fairy tale, the tragic is cancelled out [*aufgehoben*] and overcome by means of the marvelous. In the tragic fairy tale, the tragic is not cancelled out. Jolles claims that such tragic fairy tales are common in antiquity and in Celtic folklore, and claims that we do not have a name for the form in part because it usually appears in combination with art forms, and in part because the two-sided version of the form, the fairy tale, has crowded the tragic fairy tale out.[27]

Given the well-known resemblance between the Romeo and Juliet story and the Pyramus and Thisbe story, which Jolles explicitly singles out as an instance of the tragic fairy tale, Jolles's idea of the close relationship between the fairy tale and tragic fairy tale opens a perspective within which the Romeo and Juliet story's emergence in early modern novella collections can be viewed as part of the same historical phenomenon Jolles highlights in the case of Straparola's *Piacevoli Notti*: as part of the convergence, beginning in the early modern period, of a specific simple form, the fairy tale, with a specific art form, the novella. In this way, Jolles's theorem that simple form resists art form can be brough to bear on an analysis of the chain of Italian novellas through which the story of Romeo and Juliet arrived in Shakespeare's hands.

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[25] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 195.

[26] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 196.

[27] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 195-6.

However, recognizing a tension between simple form and art form in version of the Romeo and Juliet story requires an adjustment to Jolles's theorem. For Jolles's claim that the imposition of historical detail weakens the force of the fairy tale does not obviously apply to the convergence of the *tragic* fairy tale with the novella. If the tragic fairy tale is a one-sided form that shows the world *as it is*, it is not clear that the realism of the novella conflicts with the formal tendency of the tragic fairy tale. The readiness with which the Romeo and Juliet story has been adapted to different historical and geographical settings might suggest that, if anything, the tragic fairy tale combines *easily* with the novella and its formal techniques for creating an impression of historical actuality.

Does Jolles's theorem that simple form resists artificial form still hold true for the case of the convergence of *tragic* fairy tale and the novella? In this chapter, I propose that in the case of the Romeo and Juliet novellas, the tension between simple form and art form can instead be reecognized in a certain *tonal instability*, a tendency of the fairy tale's tragic affect to veer over into bathos. To illustrate this tendency, I want briefly to consider the history of the story of Pyramus and Thisbe, from Ovid to Shakespeare. Attention to this history will show a constant tension between the tragic fairy tale as a mobile, fluid, changeable simple form, and the distinctive impress imposed on this story by individual poets employing the resources of "art form."

II. From Pyramus and Thisbe to Romeo and Juliet

In 1535 at Basle, the German humanist Jacob Micyllus published the editio princeps of Hyginus' *Fabulae*, working from a single manuscript of the ninth or tenth century that is now

lost.[28] Hyginus' *Fabulae*, a mythological compendium dating to the second century A.D., contains prose summaries of classical myths. The final portion of the volume, however, consists of mythological lists arranged by type of action—an early version of what folkloristics now calls a motif-index. Under the heading, "CCXLII. *Qui se ipsi interfecerunt*," one finds, as the second to last entry in the list (just before Oedipus), "Pyramus in Babylonia ab amorem Thysbes ipse se occidit."[29] And under the next heading, "CCLIII. *Quae se ipsae interfecerunt*," one finds, as the second to last entry (just before Semiramis), "Thisbe Babylonia propter Pyramum, quod ipse se inferfecerat."[30] From the symmetry of these two entries we can deduce, if not the full narrative of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, its species as an instantiation of the simple form of the "tragic fairy tale": the double love suicide, or, as Wagner called it, *Liebestod*.

In their radical compression of the Pyramus and Thisbe story, Hyginus' catalog entries rival the shortest version of the story known to me, Donne's "Pyramus and Thisbe":

> Two, by themselves, each other, love and fear,
> Slain, cruel friends, by parting have join'd here.[31]

Hyginus' catalog entries also exemplify an extreme version of one of the two states in which, in a general survey of the many versions and adaptations of the Pyramus and Thisbe story from Ovid to Shakespeare, we find the story: simple prose paraphrases, and more complex, literary

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[28] See *The Myths of Hyginus*, trans. and ed. by Mary Grant, (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1960), p. 1.

[29] *C. Iulii Hygini Augusti Liberti Fabularum Liber, ad omnium poetarum lectionem mirè necessarius, & nunc denuò excusus* (Basileae, per Ioannem Heruagium, 1549), pp. 49-50.

[30] Ibid.

[31] John Donne, *The Complete English Poems*, ed. C.A. Patrides (London: Everyman's Library, 1991), p. 127.

elaborations. It is on the relationship between "simple" and "literary" versions of the story that I want to focus here, for it parallels Jolles's distinction between simple form and "art form."

At a climactic moment in the *Purgatorio*, Dante finds himself paralyzed with fear as he gazes on the purifying fire he must pass through in order to reach the earthly paradise. Vergil successfully restores Dante's courage by reminding him that Beatrice is on the other side:

> As at the name of Thisbe, though on the point of death,
> Pyramus raised his lids and gazed at her,
> that time the mulberry turned red,
> just so, my stubbornness made pliant, I turned
> to my wise leader when I heard the name
> that ever blossoms in my mind . . .[32]

Dante's allusion to Pyramus' moment of tragic recognition as recounted by Ovid in the *Metamorphoses* ("He heard her name; and lifting up his eyes / weighed down by death, he saw her face—and then / he closed his eyes again")[33] employs the strategy of appropriation and overgoing that characterizes Christian use of classical mythology all the way up to Milton's famous line break, "thus they relate / Erring."[34] As Robert Hollander observes, Dante in this moment is *like* Pyramus in the intensity of his love for Beatrice, but *un*like Pyramus in that Dante's love, once purged of earthly lust, will ultimately lead to salvation rather than death. Yet Dante's appropriative gesture, which reduces the Pyramus and Thisbe story to a single moment,

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[32] Dante, *Purgatorio*, trans. Robert Hollander and Jean Hollander (New York: Doubleday/Anchor 2000), 27.37-42.

[33] Ovid, *The Metamorphoses*, trans. Allen Mandelbaum (San Diego: Harcourt, 1993), pp. 114-115 (*Met.* 4.145-6).

[34] This strategy is described by Ralph Hexter in his "Ovid in the Middle Ages: Exile, Mythographer, and Lover," in *Brill's Companion to Ovid*, ed. Barbara Weiden Boyd (Boston: Brill, 2002), pp. 413-442.

also produces a proliferation of full prose summaries of the story, generated by commentators providing glosses on Dante's allusion: beginning with Jacobo della Lana in 1324-28 and continuing right up to Robert Hollander, a long string of commentaries on the *Commedia* provide prose paraphrases of the Pyramus and Thisbe story.[35]

The process by which Dante's allusion to the Pyramus and Thisbe story results in the replication of the story in the form of scholarly glosses mirrors the survival of classical mythology more generally. As Ralph Hexter observes in an essay on the medieval transmission of Ovid, the continued relevance of the knowledge of classical mythology during the middle ages resulted from the conservative nature of education, from the fact that rhetoric and grammar were taught primarily by focusing on the writings of a small number of classical authors.[36] Familiarity with classical mythology was essential to understanding these classical texts, hence the perpetuation of classical mythology in the glosses and commentaries of the medieval schoolroom. Ovid's overwhelming popularity in the middle ages was a result both of the rhetorical and poetic brilliance of his writing, which made his texts pedagogically useful, and, as Hexter argues, the appeal to medieval writers of Ovid's vividly singular authorial persona as both a lover and an exile from Rome.[37] Ovid's myths—overwhelmingly determinative of the very concept of mythology in the West—survive in Christian culture because of the brilliance and singularity of his telling of them.

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[35] An overview of the many glosses can be obtained by accessing the Dartmouth Dante Project database of commentaries on the *Commedia* (dante.dartmouth.edu) and searching for commentaries on *Purgatorio* 27.37.

[36] See Hexter in "Ovid in the Middle Ages," p. 425.

[37] See Hexter in "Ovid in the Middle Ages," pp. 416-424 and 432-439.

Yet the forms in which Ovid's myths survive do not always retain the distinctive impress of his telling of them, as Dante's allusion to Pyramus and Thisbe shows. In Ovid's original narration of the Pyramus and Thisbe story in the *Metamorphoses*, the detail of Pyramus' tragic recognition, which Dante quotes *as tragic*, is one of a number of details that destablizes the tonality of Ovid's tragic tale, causing it to veer over into parody and melodrama. (Other moments include the lovers' apostrophes to the wall—riffed on by Shakespeare in the playlet in *Midsummer Night's Dream*—and the conceit within which Pyramus' upward-spouting blood is compared to a lead pipe with a leak—lifted by Shakespeare and inserted into the "savage farce" that is his deeply Ovidian, tonally unstable play, *Titus Andronicus*.)[38] As Karl Galinsky has argued, this kind of tonal instability is the unifying, *metamorphic* formal principle of Ovid's poem. It was precisely by emptying out classical mythology of its seriousness in order to place all attention on the virtuosity, brilliance, and singularity of his *telling* of those myths that Ovid succeeded in revitalizing classical mythology when it was exhausted and on the brink of losing its cultural relevance.[39] Yet in moving into Dante's poem, Ovid's tale loses its complex self-consciousness and retains only the tragic sentimentality of the story as simple form.

Dante's allusion to Pyramus and Thisbe may have lodged in the mind of Boccaccio, who included another prose paraphrase of the story in his hugely popular *De mulieribus claris*, which, printed in many languages and editions, was one of the central strands through which the Pyramus and Thisbe story circulated in the middle ages and the early modern period. But *De mulieribus claris* was not the only place where Boccaccio made reference to the Pyramus and

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[38] *Titus Andronicus*, ed. Jonathan Bate (London: Arden, 1995), 2.3.30.

[39] See G. Karl Galinsky, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: An Introduction to the Basic Aspects* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975), pp. 1-14. "Savage farce" is the phrase T. S. Eliot uses to describe Marlowe's *The Jew of Malta*.

Thisbe story. For in Boccaccio's *Decameron* we find the first step in the metamorphosis of the Pyramus and Thisbe story into the Romeo and Juliet story. *Decameron* Day 4 is devoted to stories of lovers who meet tragic fates. Its first story, which sets the norm against which the later stories are defined, is the story of Tancredi, Prince of Salerno, and his daughter Ghismonda. The story concludes with a particularly gruesome love suicide, but the beginning of the novella tells how Ghismonda and her lover enjoy their forbidden love by means of a secret passageway connecting her bedchamber to a mountainside cavern. Describing the secret passageway, Boccaccio writes:

> So many years had passed since the staircase had last been used, that hardly anybody remembered it was still there; but Love, to whose eyes nothing remains concealed, had reminded the enamoured lady of its existence.[40]

The passage echoes an interjection in Ovid's narration of Pyramus and Thisbe's discovery of the crucial crack in the wall that separates them—*Quid non sentit amor?* (*Met.* 68)—a tag by which Boccaccio in effect marks the derivation of his novella from Ovid's tale.

Boccaccio's novella, *pace* Auerbach, who denigrated it as characteristic of Boccaccio's failure to achieve a full expression of the tragic,[41] is a tiny masterpiece of sentimental narration. In metamorphosing Ovid's tale into one with a medieval setting, Boccaccio manages to create a serious version of the Pyramus and Thisbe story written in the exquisitely wrought vernacular prose for which he became famous. And Boccaccio's new story, like its Ovidian original, proves remarkably mobile: Branca describes it as "una delle più imitate e fortunate del *D[ecamerone]*

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[40] Giovanni Boccaccio, *The Decameron*, trans. G. H. McWilliam, 2nd ed. (London: Penguin, 1995), p. 293.

[41] See Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Thought*, trans. Willard Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2003), pp. 230-31.

(anche nel teatro) fin dalle diffusissime versioni in latino di Leonardo Bruni e di Filippo Beroaldo."[42] Further, Boccaccio's paradigmatic story of lovers who meet a tragic end shapes the emergent genre of the "tragical history," in a process I can only briefly sketch here by pointing to a few key texts.[43] George Turberville's *Tragicall Tales* (1587) is a series of verse translations of tales from the *Decameron*, principally drawn from Day 4. Geoffrey Fenton's *Certain Tragical Discourses* (1567) is a set of translations from the *Histoires Tragiques* of Boiastuau and Belleforest, a series which begins as translations of novellas by Matteo Bandello—particularly the ones in the genre of bloody tragic stories established by Decameron Day 4.

This, of course, is also the process that brings us Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. Among the novellas translated by Boiastuau is Bandello's novella of Romeo and Giulietta. Boaistuau's translation was, in turn, rendered into English verse by Arthur Brooke as *The Tragical History of Romeus and Juliet* (1562). By the time Shakespeare receives the story of Romeo and Juliet at the hands of Brooke, it has become completely sentimental, shorn of Ovid's complex irony. Yet Shakespeare restores the association of the Romeo and Juliet story with Ovid's tale by means of the playlet in *Midsummer Night's Dream*, an elegant and witty commentary on the tonal instabilities resulting from the convergence of simple form and art form.

III. "The Refugio de' Miseri"

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[42] Giovanni Boccaccio, *Decameron*, ed. Vittore Branca (Torino: Einaudi, 1980), 471, n. 1. Among the many adaptations of the story is the English tragedy, *Tancred and Gismund*.

[43] On the Elizabethan "tragical history" genre, see Jonathan Gibson, "Tragical Histories, Tragical Tales," in *The Oxford Handbook of Tudor Literature, 1485-1603*, ed. Mike Pincombe and Cathy Shrank (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 521-536.

I would now like to look in somewhat more detail at one portion of the literary history I have just sketched, focusing on the life of a set of variants on the Pyramus and Thisbe story, as found in a set of manuscripts which form the bridge between Dante's and Boccaccio's allusions to Pyramus and Thisbe and the Italian novellas most commonly treated as the direct antecedents of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In examining these understudied mansucripts, I hope to suggest how Jolles's paradigm of simple form, and his theorem of the tension between simple form and art form, could be used construct a more Warburgian mode of source study, one which traces what Aby Warburg termed the *Wanderstrassen* or migratory path of what I believe could count as a literary equivalent of one of Warburg's *Pathosformeln*.[44]

Ms. Ital. VI, 218 (6351) in the Marciana National Library in Venice is a manuscript collection of four novellas, all of them tragic love stories which are set in the Veneto region, and which conclude with the deaths of two young lovers, either from suicide, broken-heartedness, or tragic accident. Known as the *Refugio de' Miseri* from the title with which the collection concludes ("*Qui finise il libro chiamato Refugio de mixeri*"),[45] the manuscript, dated by Pietro Zorzanello's catalog to the fifteenth century,[46] is closely related to three other extant manuscripts. While at least one of the novellas from the Marciana manuscript appears in each of the other manuscripts, each manuscript is unique and contains different material.

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[44] On Warburg's concept of the "Wanderstrassen," see Dorothea McEwan, "*Wanderstrassen der Kultur": Die Aby Warburg-Fritz Saxl Korrespondenz 1920 bis 1929* (Munich, 2004).

[45] Ms. Ital. VI, 218 (6351), fol. 73r.

[46] Pietro Zorzanello, ed., *Catalogo dei manoscritti italiani della Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana Di Venezia*, Inventari dei manoscritti delle biblioteche d'Italia, vol. 77 (Firenze: Olschki, 1950), p. 79.

Ms Typ 24 in Houghton Library at Harvard University is a codex that has been attributed to the hand of Felice Feliciano, the fifteenth-century Veronese antiquarian and writer, a friend of Andrea Mantegna and Giovanni Bellini, and the author of the *Alphabetum Romanum* (c. 1460), an influential work in which Feliciano presented the mathematical proportions that formed the basis for Roman capital letters in ancient inscriptions. Ms Typ 24, which likely dates to the last third of the fifteenth century, contains a variety of prose and verse, including the anonymous novella "Hippolyto e Lionora," a sonnet by Leon Battista Alberti, a novella by Leonardo Bruni, several eclogues, and three anonymous novellas that also appear in the *Refugio de' Miseri*.[47]

Ms 412 in the Beinecke Library at Yale University contains three of the novellas from the *Refugio*, in addition to another anonymous novella ("Anzollo e Valeria") similar to those in the *Refugio*, a novella by Felice Feliciano, two sonnets, and some commonplaces on love.[48]

Ms Canonici, Ital. 39 in the Bodleian Library contains a single tale from the *Refugio*, "Julia et Pruneo," bound together with Boccaccio's *Filostrato*.[49]

Lastly, a fourth manuscript, now lost, originally number 131 in the collection of the eighteenth-century Venetian senator Jacopo Soranzo, appears to have contained the same four stories as the Marciana manuscript.[50]

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[47] The Harvard Library has made a full digital facsimile of Ms Typ 24 available online. https://iiif.lib.harvard.edu/manifests/view/drs:15966652$1i.

[48] On Beinecke Ms 412, see George H. Bumgardner, Jr., "An Antecedent of Romeo and Juliet," *The Yale University Library Gazette* 49, no. 3 (January 1975): pp. 268-276, and the introduction to George H Bumgardner, trans. and ed., *Novelle Cinque: Tales from the Veneto* (Barre: Imprint Society, 1974). The latter also includes a (heavily edited) translation of the novellas in Beinecke Ms 412.

[49] See Bumgardner, "An Antecedent," p. 270, and Stefano Cracolici, "All'ombra di Giulietta: Il *Refugio de' mixeri* e il giallo dell'acronimo F. P." *Italica* 84, no. 2/3 (2007): pp. 580-581.

[50] See Bumgardner, "An Antecedent," p. 270, and Cracolici, "All'ombra," pp. 578-580, who

Although (as Bumgardner, Monga, and Cracolici have discussed) some of these manuscript witnesses of the *Refugio* had drawn the attention of librarians and scholars as early as the eighteenth century,[51] Ernest Wilkins, in a 1954 article, appears to be the first scholar to discuss the relationship between the stories in the *Refugio*—particularly the one titled "Julia et Pruneo"—and the Romeo and Juliet story.[52] The *Refugio* and the Romeo and Juliet story were compared in more detail by George H. Bumgardner in a 1975 article and in the foreword to a 1974 English translation of the five stories in Beinecke Ms 412.[53] Beginning in 1986, Luigi Monga, who did not know Bumgardner's work, published a series of articles on the *Refugio*, including transcriptions of the "Julia et Pruneo" novella and the "Hieronimo e Lucretia" novella, as well as discussions of the history of the *Refugio* manuscripts, their relevance to the topos of love-suicide in fifteenth-century Italian literature, and their importance as precursors to Luigi da Porto's story of Romeo and Giulietta. Most recently, Monga's work on the *Refugio* has been revisited in a 2007 article by Stefano Cracolici.[54]

Although the scholars of Italian literature who have written on the *Refugio* briefly discuss the connection between its stories and the Romeo and Juliet story, to date no scholar of

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refers to the discussions of Soranzo 131 in the articles by Luigi Monga mentioned below.

[51] See Bumgardner, "An Antecedent," p. 270, Luigi Monga, "Il 'Refugio de' Mixeri': vicissitudini dei manoscritti di quattro novelle del Quattrocento veneziano," *Esperienze Letterarie* 11 (1986): pp. 27-42, and Cracolici, "All'ombra."

[52] Wilkins, "An Antecedent." However, the "Julia and Pruneo" novella had also been connected to the Romeo and Juliet story in the brief description of Houghton Ms Typ 24 (printed prior to its acquisition by Harvard) in an E.P. Goldschmidt catalogue. See *Sources of English Literature Before 1640*, Catalogue 50 (London, 1939), lot 310.

[53] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, and Bumgardner, "An Antecedent."

[54] Cracolici, "All'ombra."

Shakespeare has examined the *Refugio* in relation to *Romeo and Juliet*. Jill Levenson, in the introduction to her Oxford edition of *Romeo and Juliet*, cites in a footnote Bumgardner's "An Antecedent" and Monga's "Romeo and Juliet Revisited" as references dealing with "da Porto's sources," but does not mention the *Refugio*, noting only that da Porto "probably" drew on, among other sources, the anonymous novella "Ippolito e Lionora."[55]

A traditional source study approach to the *Refugio* might focus on its status as a probable source employed by da Porto, whose two versions of the Romeo and Juliet story are usually considered the first to contain all the elements of the story as dramatized by Shakespeare. The last major study of the development of the Romeo and Juliet story was published by Olin Moore in 1950.[56] One can imagine Moore devoting a chapter of his patient influence study—which ventures hardly a single word of "interpretation"—to the *Refugio*, placing it between Masuccio Salernitano's novella "Mariotto e Ganozza" and da Porto's novellas. But what would the mere addition of the *Refugio* stories to Moore's balance sheet of originality and indebtedness really add to our understanding of Shakespeare's play? What would even the more nuanced studies that compare the Romeo and Juliet novellas with Shakespeare's play really gain from the addition of the *Refugio* stories to their analysis?[57]

Rather than focus on indebtedness and originality, or on tracking differences between novella versions and Shakespeare's play in order to glimpse Shakespeare "at work," I hope, by analyzing in some detail a single story from the *Refugio*—"Julia et Pruneo," the story with the

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[55] See Jill Levenson, ed., *Romeo and Juliet* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 4.

[56] Olin H. Moore, *The Legend of Romeo and Juliet* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1950).

[57] See in particular Jill T. Levenson, "Romeo and Juliet before Shakespeare," *Studies in Philology* 81, No. 3 (Summer, 1984): pp. 325-347.

most striking resemblances to the Romeo and Juliet story—to better understand the relationship between the simple form of the tragic fairy tale and the "art form" of the novella. In what follows, I suggest that the stories of the *Refugio* represent a series of attempts at integrating the tragic fairy tale with the form of the Renaissance novella which can be seen as direct precursors of the more well-known and successful such integratory attempts of more sophisticated *novellieri* such as Matteo Bandello. This earlier moment in the story's history more clearly manifests certain tensions that emerge from the convergence of simple form and art form.

The scribes who copied and compiled the manuscripts that contain stories from the *Refugio* varied the language of the texts they were transcribing, resuting in many small and large changes in wording and phrasing across the different extant manuscripts of the *Refugio*. While the uniqueness of each manuscript undermines notions of the book as a self-enclosed, unified object, the presence of the *Refugio* stories together in several of these manuscripts suggests that early modern authors and readers felt the stories shared a common core. As such, studying these collections as *collections* can help us think about the relationship between simple form and novella in the transmission of the Romeo and Juliet story, as well as the impact of the transition between manuscript and print culture on the development of the novella.

IV. "Julia et Pruneo"

The argument of "Julia et Pruneo" in the *Refugio* provides a concise plot summary of this tragic tale:

> IVLIA, unica figliola de misier Giovane de Castelli, da l'amore di uno giovane presa e dal padre cautelosamente maritata, se uccidete con la medesima spada de l'amato

> giovane, il quale saputa la morte de la sua amante cautamente la note aperta la sua sepoltura sopra del morto corpo con la propria mano si uccidete.[58]
>
> Julia, the only daughter of Messer Zuane de' Chastegli, becomes enamoured of a young man. Her father secretly engages her to marry another, but she kills herself with her young lover's sword.[59]

This argument is followed by a prologue which, because it appears at the beginning of the Marciana manuscript, serves there as an introduction to the entire *Refugio*. In this prologue, the author-compiler of the *Refugio* explains that the origins of the collection lie in his desire to supplement the exemplary stories of antiquity with true stories from more recent history, which will be more plausible and therefore satisfying to modern readers:

> PIU' delle fiate vediamo seguire che gli antiqui exempli in noi soleno essere cagione di perfectissime et bone operatione, ma perché la longheza dil tempo (h)a poca credenza degli moderni homini, quegli et ogni altra cosa par che habii riduto; però non gli togliendo alchuna lor verità, anci certissimo rendendomi quegli essere verissimi rispecto agli elegantissimi et veridici amori che quegli scrivendo hano in [sì] publica forma riduti, che certo el si può dire essere stata una luce che a molti cechi per memoria et exemplo di quegli hano ristaurata la luce di la salutifera lor via, non satisfacendo però al mio credere la volentade di quegli et per gli molti anni essendoli ciò ingognito poco fructo in loro par che si renda. Et però havendomi sforzato con non poca mia faticha di cerchare se agli nostri presenti giorni cosa digna et cussi potesse a le orechie di tali increduli far pervenire, ma dopo molte fatiche certi ne hebi gli quali con disposto animo me ho deliberato a voi de scriverli, sì che le persone affectionade in quegli sono degni di laude e sì per la verità in loro contenuta, come etiam le cità famosissime, i luochi digni, insieme con la pietà che sentendoli hano hauto forza di spingermi de gli ochi pietossime lachrime, certissimo rendendomi che se in questo spechio di miserie riguardarete in [suspiri] e lachrime vi converrà in quantità habundare. (A me), che altro non cercho, fia per certo

[58] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 52. Monga's transcription of "La storia di Iulia et Pruneo" uses the text of Houghton Ms Typ 24. Square brackets in the transcription contain passages from the Marciana manuscript, integrated with the text of Ms Typ 24. Passages in parentheses are interpolations introduced by Monga in order to improve comprehension of the text.

[59] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 57. Bumgardner translates the text of Beinecke Ms 412, and while his translation is fairly literal, he heavily edits and redacts the text, removing many of the narrator's interjections, and other features of the manuscript in which I am interested. Quotations from Bumgardner's translation are provided here as only a rough approximation to the passages I quote from Monga's transcription of the Marciana manuscript.

> cagione de infinito rimedio, però che cui in le sue miserie e pene è acompagnato la quantità di quelle molto alenta et munuisse. Ma prima che a tanto exercicio pietoso io proceda invocho voi in la cui libertà consiste del mio cuore equalmente ogni intiera parte, pregandovi che per gratia mi concedete tanto delo ad voi donato sentimento che sufficiente mi atrova potervi narrare quanto sia commendabile e di riverentia digni [coloro] cui vivendo l'uno di l'altro contenti, per non interporre tempo al morire l'uno da poi l'altro con novi modi, sono avanti li soi signati giorni pervenuti a morte, come nelle cose di questo libro per gli effecti pietosissimi aparerà.[60]

> Very often it happens that the stories we read in the works of the Ancients can be the inspiration for good and perfect moral actions in ourselves. Yet the reader of the present time finds these remote examples difficult to believe. I do not say this to detract from the Ancients, for I respect very much how they have elegantly and judiciously put truth in such an accessible form in their writing. We may certainly say that they have brought light to the eyes of many who were lost and blind. However, their antiquity and their severity make them unfamiliar and unsatisfying to me, and so they yield but little fruit. I have therefore tried to discover whether there are true stories of the present day which merit being told for the morality they contain.
>
> In pursuing this intent, I came across many tales which not only portray praiseworthy characters but speak of famous cities and places. They are undoubtedly sad and the many readers who have gazed into this mirror have wept abundantly. Alas, I can offer no more than these tales and the consolation that misery is often more gentle and less apparent when one is not alone. I implore those open-minded persons among you to grant me the strength I need to relate how commendable and beautiful it is that two lovers can hasten the approach of their final hour and end their ardent love and mortal life on the same day.[61]

This insistence that "the present day" is not barren of examples of virtuous (or vicious) conduct is sometimes found in other novella collections from the period. The author-compiler explains the common theme uniting the stories he has gathered in a manner similar to how the storytellers in the *Decameron* append brief "morals" to their stories: he has chosen to transcribe stories that show how "commendabile e di riverentia digni" are those who, "vivendo l'uno di l'altro contenti, per non interporre tempo al morire l'uno da poi l'altro con novi modi, sono avanti li soi signati

[60] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," pp. 52-53.

[61] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, pp. 57-58.

giorni pervenuti a morte." The author-compiler nods to the elegance and authority of ancient literature, yet finds it inadequate to contemporary needs. He implies that the exemplary force of a story depends on its plausibility to readers, which depends in turn on the modernity of the story; and that readers may identify with the painful experiences of passionate love that the stories describe, and find consolation in the knowledge that others have experienced the same sufferings. Finally, he places emphasis on weeping as the appropriate affective response to such stories.

All of the concerns announced in the prologue are noticeably at work throughout the story of Julia and Pruneo. There is, most obviously, ample evidence of the author's efforts to give the story a verisimilar modern setting with an aura of historical actuality. The author renders his stories modern and plausible by setting them in locations that would be familiar to his readers. "Julia et Pruneo" is set in the city of Venice, and the other stories in the collection are set elsewhere in the Veneto region. The story opens with a short encomium of Venice addressed specifically to Venetians:

> Questa di nobelissimi veneti in tanta quantità è ripiena che non tanto nella Italia ma per tutto el mondo vi sona le virtù e possanza di quegli, e gran parte di quello sotto il dominio nostro con considerato guberno è dominato.[62]
>
> In an endless span of years so many noble Venetians have lived here that it is not surprising that the power and virtues of Venice resound throughout Italy and the world. Already a great part of Italy is under our dominion, carefully governed by our illustrious mistress of the salt sea, this ordained queen of nations against whose forces no one has ever been able to glory in victory.[63]

[62] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 53.

[63] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 58.

This Venetian setting is fleshed out with local color and authenticating detail. Julia's family home is identified as in the Sant'Antonio quarter of Venice, possibly referring to the church of that name, originally erected in the seventh century, in what is now the Castello quarter of Venice. The house, according to the author, can still be seen: Julia lived "ne l'uno di quali habitante costei [si ritrova] che fino al presente giorno è anchor sigillato de le arme sue."[64] Julia is described as spending the day, in conformance with local custom, at various windows fitted out with Venetian blinds:

> E secondo la consuetudine nostra aliquando hora ad una finestra et hora ad un'altra costei si appogiava, a rimpeto de la quale vi erano certe tavollete o vero cantinelle insieme composte che nui zilosie chiamamo, le quale non che la vista de riguardanti togliesseno da le bellece di Iulia, ma pocho mostrandoli per alchuni pertugieti che era fra l'una e l'altra la facia magiore.[65]

> As I have said, Julia remained indoors and, sometimes at one window, sometimes at another, she passed the hours gazing through those wooden strips that we call jalousies. These blinds did not hide her completely from the sight of people passing by. Rather, by revealing glimpses of her through the slats, they made her even more attractive.[66]

When Julia's father goes looking for a husband for his daughter, he goes "nel Realto a praticare con coloro che golli over sensali chiamano,"[67] calling attention to a bit of local dialect (Venetian for "bachelors") in a text already heavily inflected by Venetian spellings and dialect.[68]

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[64] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 54. "The one belonging to Messer Zuane still bears the family's coat of arms to this very day" (Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 59).

[65] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 54.

[66] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 59.

[67] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 57.

[68] "He mingled among the youths on the Rialto whom we call 'cocks' or 'bachelors,' that being their station in life." Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 62.

The sword belonging to Pruneo that Julia uses to kill herself has already been mentioned in the argument to the story, suggesting its importance as a narrative device. The lovers have their final meeting when Pruneo, having heard of Julia's marriage to another man, and thinking himself betrayed by her, goes to see her. Julia assures him that all will be well, and that she will always consider herself his alone. In fact, she has already resolved to kill herself. In parting, she asks Pruneo if she can borrow his sword. She then goes home and, fondling the blade, kills herself using it. The subsequent description of the discovery of Julia's dead body resembles the scene in *Romeo and Juliet* when the Capulet family find Juliet apparently dead on the morning of her wedding to Paris. Julia's father knocks on her door, anxious to have her prepare to meet her husband, chiding her and asking if she wants her husband to see her in her sleepy and disheveled state. When she doesn't answer, her father grows worried, and together with the servants of the house breaks down the door. First the father, then the mother, throw themselves on Julia's dead body and faint. The neighbors, hearing the parents' shrieks, arrive on the scene, and carry the mother and father off to separate houses. Afraid to remove the sword from Julia's breast, the neighbors wait for the night watchmen, who, on arriving, remove the sword from Julia's body and ask whether anyone recognizes it. Eventually concluding that the sword, which no one recognizes, must belong to a stranger who killed Julia, they carefully write up a description of it:

> di che iudicarono costei da straniera persona esser stata morta, dil come ignorando, tolsero per scriptura la forma e conditione di tale spada quale per il processo che ne l'officio dei diti signori apare fino al presente giorno.[69]

[69] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 62.

> At a loss to explain its presence, the servants concluded that it must have been a stranger's. Not knowing how Julia had died, the magistrates wrote down a description of the sword, which is still shown to the present day in their offices.[70]

The claim that the description of the sword can still be found in the office of the night watchmen is another example of authenticating detail, this time tied to a notion of the *document* as a physical object that verifies historical events. The "document" in this sense correspond to the "object" which, in Jolles's system, corresponds to the simple form of the *memorabile*, which arises out of the mental disposition of "history."[71] Jolles posits a close relationship between the simple form of the *memorabile* and the "art form" of the novella, which borrows the verbal gestures of the *memorabile* in order to produce a similar effect of the historically "real" or versimilar.[72] In addition, the sword plays a further narrative function in catalyzing Pruneo's discovery that Julia has died: he overhears Franciscan friars talking about Julia's death, and realizes she has used his sword when the friars repeat a detailed description of it. Pruneo then decides he is responsible for Julia's death, and therefore ought to kill himself. In addition to authenticating the story, then, the sword increases its narrative coherence and economy: it functions as the clue will function in detective fiction.

The night watchmen's careful, *written* description of the sword is not itself reproduced within the story: its existence is affirmed, but the description itself is not made available to the reader. The story as a whole has a similar relationship to description. The author-compiler often appeals to the experience of readers, saying, for example, that the reader who has experienced

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[70] Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 68.

[71] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 170-171.

[72] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 166-167, and p. 174.

love will understand what Julia and Pruneo felt at having to part from each other. To an extent, these appeals replace direct description in the story. Similarly, the Venetian setting is evoked less through description than by simply *referring* to, for example, the Rialto. In this way, the realism of the story seems to depend in part on the proximity of the reading experience to the setting that the story invokes. Written for Venetians or those familiar with Venice, the story is in a peculiar way tied to the place in which it is set. This feature of the story might explain the limited circulation of the novellas of the *Refugio*, the fact that its stories, set in the Veneto, seem to have been popular in the Veneto.

In addition to these historical details, which function at the level of the narrative, the prologue's insistence on the didactic or exemplary value of the story, and on its affective force, come through in frequent authorial interjections. The story is presented as a series of tableaux, like the expressive groupings of figures in a painting or sculpture—Juliet's dead body in her mother's arms, the lovers' final embrace in death. Each tableau is followed by a rhetorical interjection, imploring the reader to feel pity and to acknowledge the lovers as models of constancy and victims of misfortune. The story thus alternates between a narrative mode, in which events are related tersely, and a rhetorical mode, in which the author-compiler comments on the story's moral significance and emotional effect.

The ending of the story presents a particularly clear example of the alternation between these two modes and the contradictory effects this alternation produces. The story ends with Pruneo, having opened Julia's tomb and thrown himself inside, addressing a final speech to Julia before stabbing himself with a knife. The description of Pruneo's suicide is terse: "E dite queste parole, uno pongiente cortello si cazoe nel pecto; Iulia abrazando morta, insieme rimase gli morti

corpi."[73] On its own, this abrupt ending is emotionally forceful—this at least seems to be what Bumgardner, in his English translation, has decided, for he simply ends the story here.[74] However, the story does not end here in the original manuscripts. Instead, the author inserts at this point an extremely long exclamation (it takes up nearly two full pages in Houghton Ms Typ 24), from which I will quote only the beginning: "O morte, miserabile fine di poco contenti giovani . . . ."[75]

Moments in "Julia et Pruneo" like this one suggest a tension between the affective force of the narrative and the narrator's conception of its didactic value. The author-compiler does not allow the story to conclude on the description of the lovers' entwined bodies, but intervenes, as if nervous to harness the description's emotional force to properly didactic ends. Walter Ong notes how nineteenth-century novelists insert "Dear reader" as a constant reminder to themselves that they are addressing the reader of a book rather than the audience of an oral performance.[76] Ong's comment is an example of how scholars writing on the relationship between orality and literacy have argued that, in earlier stages in the development of literary genres, authors still retain the oral storyteller's sense of immediate connection to an audience. Along with the manuscript writer's pleasure in rhetorical display, these interjections in the *Refugio* suggest that the affective energies of the story are not fully in line with the author-compiler's avowed didactic intentions.

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[73] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 64.

[74] Bumgardner's translation includes neither the description of Pruneo stabbing himself, nor the long final interjection by the narrator, instead simply ending with the blunt, "The two bodies lay locked together, arm in arm" (Bumgardner, *Novelle Cinque*, p. 72).

[75] Monga, "Amore e Suicidio," p. 64.

[76] See Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, 3rd ed., (London: Routledge, 2012), p. 101, pp. 154-55.

In a study that seeks to bring an analysis of the Romeo and Juliet novellas preceding Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* to bear on our understanding of Shakespeare's play, Jill Levenson draws attention to the "peculiar tension" produced by the strange mixture of exaggeratedly rational thinking and strong emotion found in the sixteenth-century novella.[77] Levenson notes the habit the *novellieri* have of interrupting their stories to "comment on the action, instructing the reader how to understand the story," a habit she sees as heightening "the sense of inflexibility" we find in the novellas. Levenson also notes that the narrators "coerce the reader to appreciate the remarkable strength of feeling displayed," and lists examples of standard phrases novella writers use at such moments, identifying these interjections with "the authority assumed by the Renaissance *histor*."[78]

Levenson's article, citing earlier work on the psychological novella and on the expression of pathos in early English theater, sees this tension as part of a much broader tradition of psychological writers from Ovid to Lyly employing rhetoric in order to represent powerful emotion.[79] I believe there is a further conclusion to draw from these considerations. The peculiar tension arising from the use of expository, logically-ordered argument to represent intense emotion can also be understood as arising from the convergence of simple form—in this case, the tragic fairy tale of Romeo and Juliet—with the more self-consciously literary, versimilar conventions of the "art form" of the Italian novella.

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[77] See Levenson, "Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare," p. 333.

[78] Levenson, "Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare," pp. 338-9.

[79] See Levenson, "Romeo and Juliet Before Shakespeare," pp. 343-44.

IV. "Romeo and Juliet"

While Jolles briefly suggests the importance of studying the interaction of simple and artificial form, he does not concern himself in *Simple Forms* in detail with how individual works of literature integrate simple form with "art form." That is the question I want now to address through a reading of Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. In so doing, I want to consider how simple form interacts with what I view as important aspect of the "art form" of Shakespearean drama, namely, the conscious employment of rules of scenic construction and disposition which Mark Rose has called, in its specifically Shakespearean, early modern guise, "design."[80] Design, in Rose's sense, refers to Shakespeare's habit of constructing plays whose shapes express a deeply internalized sense of proportion, an expression of the highly spatial imagination that Shakespeare shares with other poets and artists of the Renaissance, and through which Shakespeare's consciously shaped works of art construct meaningful relationships between parts of a unified whole.

In remarks that use *Romeo and Juliet* to draw out some general features of Shakespearean design, Rose notes that Shakespeare compresses the narrative, which in Brooke takes up nine months, into a span of three days (Shakespeare marks the passage of time in the play very clearly), producing a much greater sense of the rapidity of events.[81] Shakespeare, furthermore, fits the timeline of the narrative into a symmetrical structure. Prince Escalus appears three times in the play: in the first scene, the final scene, and in 3.1. Rose shows that in terms of the play's

[80] Mark Rose, *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).

[81] This paragraph draws heavily on Rose's comments on the play. See Rose, *Shakespearean Design*, pp. 69-72 and pp. 146-147.

overall proportions, 3.1 is at the center, flanked on either side by the play's opening comic movement, and its concluding tragic movement, as Roses's line count demonstrates:

Comic movement (1346) Central Scene (195) Tragic movement (1423)[82]

Balanced across this symmetrical structure, we find scenes which correspond with each other and which can be seen as pairs and compared with one another. Most notably, the "balcony" scene and the dawn scene—the only two scenes, aside from the finale in the Capulet tomb, in which the lovers are alone together—are equidistant from the central scene, as Rose also demonstrates:

Balcony scene <—- (413) —-> Central scene <———-(354)———> Dawn scene[83]

Rose uses Hamlet's lines to Gertrude to capture this basic principle of the juxtaposition of two related scenes (a characteristic feature of Shakespearean design, in which the scene is the fundamental unit): "Look here upon this picture and on this."

Among its other effects, design suggests a comparison between the tempo of the two movements. Haste is a key word in the play, appearing sixteen times. In the first, comic movement, it is the lovers of the younger generation who are impatient, while members of the older generation advise slowness and moderation. Friar Laurence, who delivers his proverb-laden speeches in end-stopped couplets, creating an impression of measure and deliberation,

[82] Rose, *Shakespearean Design*, p. 146. As Julia Lupton notes, "It is a commonplace in criticism to note that *Romeo and Juliet* begins as a comedy" (Julia Reinhard, Lupton, ed., *Romeo and Juliet: A Critical Reader* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), p. 13). For a classic account of the turn from comedy to tragedy in the play, see Susan Snyder, "*Romeo and Juliet*: Comedy into Tragedy," *Essays in Criticism* 20, no. 4 (1970): pp. 391-402.

[83] Rose, *Shakespearean Design,* p. 147.

attempts to contain Romeo's impetuousness by rounding it off into a couplet and a commonplace:

> ROMEO Oh, let us hence, I stand on sudden haste.
> FRIAR LAURENCE Wisely and slow, they stumble that run fast.[84] (2.3.93-4)

A similar exchange occurs when Capulet tells Paris to wait two years, until Juliet is sixteen, before marrying her:

> PARIS Younger than she are happy mothers made.
> CAPULET And too soon marred are those so early made. (1.2.12-13)

The older generation's counsel of caution and moderation is most famously encapsulated in Friar Laurence's lines before he performs the marriage ceremony for Romeo and Juliet:

> These violent delights have violent ends . . .
> Therefore love moderately: long love doth so;
> Too swift arrives as tardy as too slow. (2.6.9-15)

But in the second, tragic half of the play, members of the older generation ignore their own advice, and unwittingly bring on catastrophe. Capulet, responding to Paris's eagerness to get on with things, decides to skip the planned courtship between Paris and Juliet. He schedules the marriage first for Wednesday, two days away, then for Thursday, three days away, only to eventually reverse course and move the wedding up to Wednesday after all, in spite of his wife's complaints that they won't have time to prepare the feast. "Will you be ready? do you like this

[84] *Romeo and Juliet*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans, updated ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 5.3.168. All subsequente citations refer to this edition.

haste?" (3.5.22) Capulet says to Paris. Juliet pleads for a delay but meets with her father's immoderate wrath.

When Friar Laurence learns that his letter never reached Romeo in Mantua, he hurries off to the graveyard to rescue Juliet: "Within this three hours will fair Juliet awake" (5.2.25). He enters the graveyard scene speaking lines that echo, with dramatic irony, his earlier admonitions to Romeo:

> Saint Francis be my speed! how oft tonight
> Have my old feet stumbled at graves! (5.3.121-2)

This role reversal, through which haste transfers to the older generation in the second half of the play, underscores not only the ultimate irrelevance of the "counsel" the lovers receive, but their imperviousness to outside aid generally: the Friar, despite his haste, arrives moments too late, just after Romeo drinks the poison.[85] To the extent that the audience's desires align with those of the lovers, the audience wants things to go faster in the first half of the play, and slower in the second half. This tension between delay and acceleration gives the play its taut pacing.

The character of the Nurse, insofar as she counsels Juliet and helps arrange her marriage with Romeo, is counterpoised by the character of Friar Laurence, Romeo's confidant and go-between. However, insofar as the Nurse is a comic character whose dramatic function is to make stage matter from nothing, her true counterpart in the play is Mercutio.[86] Mercutio is, of course,

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[85] That the Friar ignores his own advice of "They stumble that run fast" is noted by Harry Levin in "Form and Formality in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (Winter 1960): p. 9.

[86] The parallel between the Nurse and Mercutio is further highlighted by the juxtaposition of the Nurse's anecdotes about Juliet's childhood in 1.3 with Mercutio's Queen Mab speech in 1.4—both unrestrained outbursts that threatens to derail the narrative.

Shakespeare's most notable expansion upon the story he found in his sources.[87] Mercutio embodies a skeptical perspective on both the ideology of Petrarchan love espoused by Romeo in the first act, and on the supposed wisdom of moderation and restraint associated with Friar Laurence (as Mercutio's willingness to risk his life over a meaningless feud demonstrates).[88]

Mercutio is also a skeptic of fairy tale endings, as several moments in the play when he alludes to popular ballads that tell fairy tale stories suggest. Mercutio's "conjuring" of Romeo in 2.1 combines his parody of Petrarchan love with a reference to the story of King Cophetua and the beggar maid (2.1.14), a popular ballad which, in its basic outlines (a king falling in love with a beggar and making her a queen), is a fairy tale. In this moment, Mercutio aligns Petrarchan posturing with the fairy tale, implicitly associating both with an indolent and self-regarding surrender to fantasy (this is Mercutio's differently-tuned, bitingly satirical take on what Friar Laurence calls Romeo's "doting" on Rosaline).

It is an association which has been worked out at great length in Mercutio's Queen Mab speech. Here Mercutio associates dreams with a fairy queen, a figure that, in the English language, is closely associated with the simple form of the fairy tale. Yet Mercutio abruptly pivots from a miniaturized, fantastical description of Queen Mab's carriage to a series of descriptions of men and women in the grip of wish-fulfilment dreams. Human beings here appear as the mere puppets of their desires, punished ("Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues" [1.4.75]) by a malevolent force embodying the principle of fantasy.

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[87] On the character of Mercutio in relation to Shakespeare's sources and the mythological tradition associated with Mercury, see Joseph A. Porter, *Shakespeare's Mercutio: His History and Drama* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

[88] On the duel and its relationship to the struggle for individuality as theorized by Hegel, see Paul A. Kottman, "Defying the Stars: Tragic Love as the Struggle for Freedom in *Romeo and Juliet*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 63, no. 1 (Spring 2012): pp. 6-9.

The speech itself enacts its vision of a world in which the compulsions of desire crowd out free will: as his tirade grows increasingly disturbing, as it becomes more and more apparent that he isn't able to stop himself, Mercutio's propulsive refrain "This is she" comes to resemble mindless thrusting, as language parodies a sexuality rendered wholly meaningless. (Romeo's acerbic and bawdy reference to Mercutio as a "gentleman . . . that loves to hear himself talk, and will speak more in a minute than he will stand to in a month" (2.4.123-4) takes aim at how, for Mercutio, language substitutes for sex.)

This out-of-control fantasia erupts in the middle of a comic scene, shattering the atmosphere of the first movement. It does so, significantly, at just the moment when Romeo is about to announce a dream that he has had ("I dreamt a dream tonight" [1.4.49]). Mercutio interrupts Romeo with the Queen Mab speech, and we never learn what Romeo's dream was. But Romeo has another dream in the play, on the night before the final day of the play's action. Waking in Mantua just before he receives the news of Juliet's supposed death, he describes a dream that has left him light of heart:

> If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,
> My dreams presage some joyful news at hand . . .
> I dreamt my lady came and found me dead
> (Strange dream that gives a dead man leave to think!),
> And breathed such life with kisses in my lips
> That I revived and was an emperor. (5.1.1-9)

If Romeo's dream in the first movement was a tragic premonition (it is prefaced by Romeo saying that it is "no wit to go" to the Capulet masque) overwritten by Mercutio's Queen Mab speech, in the second movement of the play, Romeo's dream is of a fairy tale ending in which a sleeping prince comes back to life at the kiss of his lover, and awakens as an emperor.

Mercutio, having died in the central scene of the play, is no longer present to undermine, overwrite, or parody Romeo's fairy tale dream. That dream is both a premonition of the real ending of the play—Juliet will kiss his dead lips, and will find them "warm," as though he were still alive—and a shadowing or alternate version of that ending: Romeo will *not* wake up an emperor. The dream overlays a fairy tale ending on the tragic folk tale ending, supporting the close relationship Jolles posits between the fairy tale and tragic folk tale. Mercutio, the embodiment of the comic principle which Shakespeare employs to dilate the tragic plot, vanishes from the second half of the play, in which the tragic folk tale ending is allowed to run its course.[89] The sleeping potion, the motif in the play that most belongs to the world of the fairy tale, only appears after Mercutio's death.

Mercutio, as the embodiment of speed and impulse, relates to an image that the play repeats: lightning. This image repeats three times in the play, and furnishes an example of how Shakespeare uses design to integrate and resolve tensions between the simple form of the tragic folk tale and the artificial form of tragedy.

During the "balcony" scene, Juliet (moved by a sudden change of mood not unlike the sense of foreboding that overtakes Romeo on his way to the Capulet masque) grows anxious about the suddenness of Romeo's arrival at her window:

> Well, do not swear. Although I joy in thee,
> I have no joy of this contract tonight,
> It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden,
> Too like the lightning which doth cease to be
> Ere one can say 'It lightens.' (2.2.116-120)

[89] In this the play resembles *King Lear*, where the alternate endings—happy in Shakespeare's source and in later adaptations of the play, tragic in Shakespeare's play—clearly both *work*, testifying to the close relationship between the tragic and "happy" versions of the story.

Implicit in her lines is a sense of something that happens too fast to be registered—or controlled—by language. This idea of a suddenness that evades capture by language recurs in the second appearance of the lightning image, this time in the central scene of the play. In this scene, Mercutio, quick with both words and blows, sparks an outburst of fighting that will take two lives before any of the characters have time to reflect on what is happening. Benvolio, recapitulating the tragic events for the benefit of the Prince, foregrounds the parallel between speech and action:

> Tybalt, here slain, whom Romeo's hand did slay.
> Romeo, that spoke him fair, bid him bethink
> How nice the quarrel was, and urged withal
> Your high displeasure; all this, utterèd
> With gentle breath, calm look, knees humbly bowed,
> Could not take truce with the unruly spleen
> Of Tybalt deaf to peace, but that he tilts
> With piercing steel at bold Mercutio's breast,
> Who, all as hot, turns deadly point to point,
> And with a martial scorn, with one hand beats
> Cold death aside, and with the other sends
> It back to Tybalt, whose dexterity
> Retorts it. Romeo he cries aloud,
> 'Hold, friends! friends, part!' and swifter than his tongue,
> His agile arm beats down their fatal points,
> And 'twixt them rushes; underneath whose arm
> An envious thrust from Tybalt hit the life
> Of stout Mercutio, and then Tybalt fled;
> But by and by comes back to Romeo,
> Who had but newly entertained revenge,
> And to't they go like lightning, for, ere I
> Could draw to part them, was stout Tybalt slain;
> And as he fell, did Romeo turn and fly.
> This is the truth, or let Benvolio die. (3.1.143-166)

Romeo's fair-speaking is powerless to halt the fight, as the "deaf" Tybalt and Mercutio exchange wordless "retorts." Giving up on words, Romeo's arm is "swifter than his tongue," as he rushes between the duelers—with disastrous consequences. Benvolio's description of Romeo and

Tybalt's duel, "And to't they go like lightning," coming in a passage that represents language as too slow to rein in "unruly spleen," recalls Juliet's earlier comment about dangerous lightning that outstrips speech. Juliet's uneasy premonitions here come true. This is the turning point of the tragedy, the moment when Fortune's wheel begins to turn, as Romeo declaration underlines: "O, I am Fortune's fool."

Romeo sees this moment as the beginning of a fate which will need more time to fully unfold itself:

> This day's black fate on moe days doth depend,
> This but begins the woe others must end. (3.1.110-12)

Each appearance of the image of lightning takes place on a different one of the three days of the play's action, and the ultimate significance of each appearance depends on the other appearances. Beginning, middle and end ask to be compared.

The final appearance of lightning rings a change on the image. In the final scene of the play, Romeo, after killing Paris, peruses his face and recognizes him for the first time:

> Let me peruse this face.[90]
> Mercutio's kinsman, noble County Paris! (5.2.74-5)

Although this mention of Mercutio (the only one in the play after 3.1) establishes an important fact—that Mercutio and Paris are related, which sets up the Prince's declaration that he, "for winking at your discords, too / Have lost a brace of kinsmen" (5.3.294-5), and thus our sense that the entire society of Verona is affected by the tragic events of the play ("All are punished"

[90] A distant recollection of Lady Capulet's talk of Paris as a goodly book.

(5.3.295))—yet this flashing reminiscence of Mercutio also prepares us for the return of the lightning image that the play has associated with him:

> A grave? O no, a lantern, slaughtered youth;
> For here lies Juliet, and her beauty makes
> This vault a feasting presence full of light.
> Death, lie thou there, by a dead man interred.
> How oft, when men are at the point of death
> Have they been merry, which their keepers call
> A light'ning before death! O, how may I
> Call this a light'ning? (5.3.84-91)

Lightning changes to "lightening." The moment recalls the dawn scene, in which the lovers' language could briefly transform reality. Romeo searches for a conceit that will remake the tragic ending into something merry. As his subsequent lines show, his solution is to read Juliet's body in a final blazon, viewing her face as a battlefield on which death and beauty have encamped, and beauty yet holds the field, "crimson in thy lips and in thy cheeks." This final "lightening" is a marriage of dream and action, a kind of earned fantasy: Romeo makes, for himself, the fairy tale ending of his earlier dream. And his closing lines are animated with a mordant wit akin to Mercutio's pun on being a "grave man," as though Romeo had absorbed some element of his departed friend. Romeo envisions worms as chambermaids, death as a lover, and suicide as the desperate action of a wearied, seasick sailor dashing his ship upon the rocks. In a final dark joke, Romeo praises the Apothecary's poison as "quick": effective, fast and, paradoxically, "alive."[91]

Design allows us to read the play in this way, to see lightning first as tragic premonition, then as tragic fulfilment, and finally, by means of a punning conceit, as acceptance and even transcendence of tragic fate. Read with attention to design, the play's finale completes a pattern

[91] The pun is repeated by Juliet, who, echoing Romeo's association of kissing with dying, tries to gather poison from his lips, that she might "die with a restorative."

as well as ending a story, and satisfies a desire for meaning that the "mere plot," perhaps, could not.

Reading the play for design in this way also makes possible an answer to a long-standing criticism of the play's ending, one which dates to the earliest work on Shakespeare's sources. In Charlotte Lennox's *Shakespeare Illustrated* (1753), the first major work of Shakespeare source study, Lennox translated the story of "Romeo and Giulietta" from the *Novelle* of Matteo Bandello. Comparing Bandello's story to the plot of Shakespeare's play, Lennox points out that in Bandello, Juliet awakens in time to share a final moment with Romeo before his death, while Shakespeare forgoes such a dramatically potent moment, and has Romeo's death precede Juliet's awakening.[92] Observing that Pierre Boiastuau's French translation of Bandello's story departs from its source in also having Romeo die before Juliet awakens, Lennox concludes that Shakespeare relied on Boiastuau, or one of the English translations based on Boiastuau, and laments Shakespeare's failure to consult the "original" version of the story:

> Had *Shakespear* ever seen the *Italian* Author, these striking Beauties would not have escaped him; and, if by copying the Translation only, he has given us a very affecting Tragedy, what might we not have expected, had he drawn his Hints from the beautiful Original.[93]

It is not surprising that Lennox, whose critical views, though at times in striking opposition to those of her close friend Samuel Johnson, were nevertheless powerfully influenced by him, should miss the more classical, Aristotelian conclusion that a final recognition scene between the two lovers might have provided.

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[92] See Charlotte Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated* (London, 1753-4), vol. 1, pp. 97-100.

[93] Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated*, vol. 1, p. 99.

What seems particularly problematic about Shakespeare's ending is that neither of the two lovers is fully informed about the circumstances that have brought about their catastrophe. They die with a different understanding of their fate that the one that we, the audience, end the play with. In classical tragedy, to take *Oedipus Rex* as an example, the audience's advance knowledge of Oedipus' tragic fate finally converges with Oedipus' own recognition of his deed and its significance. This recognition, and the convergence it produces between audience and protagonist, is the climax of the play. Romeo and Juliet, by contrast, die without a full awareness of the degree to which their love was thwarted by mere chance, by the sheer accident of Friar Laurence's letter not reaching Romeo in time.

If Romeo and Juliet do any kind of reflection on their tragic fate at all, they do it in the *beginning* of the play: recognition comes immediately, at the moment when Juliet and Romeo learn each other's names at the Capulet masque, and Juliet says to herself:

> My only love sprung from my only hate!
> Too early seen unknown, and known too late! (1.5.137-8)

But far from dwelling on this recognition, the play brushes it aside as the Nurse interrupts Juliet's momentary reflection. Romeo's few moments of more protracted self-reflection show how remarkably little insight he has into the relationship between his fate and his actions. His long speeches in 3.3, when he is reacting to the Prince's sentence of exile with despair and threats of suicide, are swiftly cancelled out by Friar Laurence's reasonable counsel—to which Romeo meekly acquiesces.

At the end of the play, Romeo and Juliet simply don't reflect on their tragic fate or the significance of their actions at all. Romeo, when he gets the news of Juliet's death from his servant Balthazar in 5.1, gives us almost no opportunity to see him respond to, let alone reflect

upon, this catastrophic news. Only his brief, “Is it e’en so? then I defy you, stars! (5.1.24) precede Romeo’s passing on to two pieces of practical business: giving Balthasar instructions for preparing for the trip back to Verona, and thinking about a means for suicide. Nothing that Romeo says in this scene gives any indication that he thinking about the significance of what has happened. Instead, he is, in his own words, “desperate.” Rather than reflect, he *acts*—impulsively and immediately. Nor does he do much introspection in the final scene.

Interestingly, Romeo, in the play’s final act, never blames himself for Juliet’s death, nor does he ever present his own death as an atonement for hers—somewhat surprisingly, he offers his death as an atonement for Tybalt’s, but never for Juliet’s, and the gesture toward Tybalt is fleeting. This contrasts with “Julia et Pruneo,” where the sword motif sets up an ending that echoes the ending of the Pyramus and Thisbe story in Ovid, with Pruneo blaming himself for Julia’s death, and offering himself as compensatory sacrifice.

Ovid’s version of the Pyramus and Thisbe story includes a moment—which, in keeping with Ovid’s constantly shifting tone, probably crosses the line intentionally into melodrama—when Pyramus, as Thisbe is cradling him in her arms, hears Thisbe’s name and briefly opens his eyes, looking at her for a moment before he expires. Although Pyramus says nothing, it seems clear that in this moment, some degree of recognition of what has really happened is allowed to him, so that he does not die with a wholly false idea of the significance of his death.

Shakespeare’s version keeps, in an altered but nevertheless briefly emphasized form, the idea that the female lover kills herself with her lover’s blade: as Capulet exclaims, viewing Juliet’s body for the second time,

> O heavens! O wife, look how our daughter bleeds!
> This dagger hath mistane, for lo his house
> Is empty on the back of Montague,

> And it mis-sheathèd in my daughter's bosom! (5.3.202-205)

Capulet's sense of a mistake here, a mystery or ambiguity, something unexplained that needs to be cleared up, echoes the words of the night watchman who is the first to discover the bodies of the lovers:

> We see the ground whereon these woes do lie,
> But the true ground of all these piteous woes
> We cannot without circumstance descry. (5.3.179-181)

The remainder of the scene is given over to circumstance, to establishing the facts of what has happened. The Prince, once he arrives, takes over the investigation, ordering the watchmen to "Search, seek, and know how this foul murder comes" (5.3.198), and telling the assembled crowd to

> Seal up the mouth of outrage for a while,
> Till we can clear these ambiguities,
> And know their spring, their head, their true descent,
> And then will I be general of your woes,
> And lead you even to death. (5.3.216-220)

The prince then directs questioning of the "parties of suspicion"—first Friar Laurence, then Balthasar, then Paris's page—before finally examining Romeo's letter. For the Prince, full knowledge of the circumstances of the disaster must be established before the community can give way to grief. The emphasis is on clarity and understanding.

Is the audience meant to feel that this ending has something false about it? Is it intentionally unsuccessful? Is the point, indeed, that there is no understanding, no insight gained from our affective response to the lovers' fate? Or is this simply the limit point of the integration of simple form with complex form and design? Are the various interpretations enacted by the

surviving characters of the "moral" of the tragedy, which, as critics often note, seem to ring hollow, ironically offered as concessions to our desire for closure, significance, and understanding?

The characters at the close of the play make of the events what they can: Juliet and Romeo as exemplars of faithfulness; their deaths as punishment for the enmity between Capulet and Romeo; the deaths of Paris and Mercutio as punishment for the Prince's excessive lenience. But the play closes with the Prince's words, "Go hence to have more talk of these sad things"—as though the play were acknowledging that it cannot really fit the audience's emotional response to the tragedy with a fully satisfying significance. The play does not foreclose the horizon of interpretation: instead, it leaves the audience in a "glooming peace," a morning with no sun. We have to continue to tell and retell the story.

The Case of Shylock: Complex Character and Simple Form

In the last chapter, I argued that Shakespeare uses a certain simple form, the tragic fairy tale, as a kind of conductor, a means of charging *Romeo and Juliet* with the emotion of pity. In the present chapter, my focus shifts from tragic affect to complex character, from naïve morality to the formalized judgements of the law. I will be discussing *The Merchant of Venice*, and Shakespeare's use in that play of the simple form Jolles calls *the case*.

I. *The case in "Simple Forms"*

Because the case is one of the simple forms in Jolles's series that is not already widely familiar, I want to begin this chapter with a basic introduction to Jolles's definition of this form.

Jolles introduces the simple form of the case with a contemporary instance: a legal puzzle drawn from a column in a 1928 issue of the *Berliner Illustrirte Zeitung*, Germany's first mass market newspaper.[1] This legal puzzle presents two slightly different narratives in which a thief steals a wallet and shares the money he has stolen with his girlfriend. The two versions of the story are juxtaposed with a paragraph from the German legal code defining the crime of being a fence. In the first version of the story, the thief immediately shares the stolen money with his girlfriend, who is now punishable as a fence according to the penal code. In the second version of the story, the thief, before dividing the stolen money with his girlfriend, first has the large bank note from the stolen wallet changed for smaller bills. In this second scenario, the girlfriend, according to a literal interpretation of the legal code, which defines a fence as someone who

[1] See André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (London: Verso, 2017), pp. 138-147.

immediately receives stolen goods, is no longer culpable. The second version of the story reveals a legal paradox: someone who ought to be punishable for a crime is, according to the letter of the law, innocent.

According to Jolles's analysis, both the first and second versions of the story about the thief and his girlfriend are cases. The form of the case makes a legal norm explicit—in this example, the norm defining the crime of being a fence. The case then weighs a given action—the actions of the girlfriend, in Jolles's example—against the relevant legal norm, to determine whether that action falls within the norm or not. Jolles uses the image of scales to define the distinctive mental disposition corresponding to the case: that of *weighing*.[2]

Furthermore, Jolles's newspaper example reveals another way in which the case can function. Placing these two cases, side by side generates another, third, case. In the third case, we weigh one narrative against the other. In so doing, we weigh the law against itself. The mental activity distinctive to this simple form, of placing values, norms, and actions on the "scales," extends to evaluations of the law itself.

Jolles draws his other example of the case from a very different source: an eleventh-century Indian story collection, the *Kathasaritsagara*. This collection includes a subset of tales, with their own frame narrative, known as the *Vetala Tales*.[3]

The *Vetālapañcaviṃśati*, or *Vetala Tales*, is a collection of twenty-five stories, all contained within a single continuous frame narrative, that is found in several different Sanskrit recensions of the eleventh century. The frame narrative revolves around the figure of a king,

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[2] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 144.

[3] These tales have been translated, from the eleventh century recension known as the *Kathasaritsagara* or *Ocean of the Sea of Stories* by Somadeva, into English as *Tales from the Kathasaritsagara*, trans. Arshia Sattar (New Delhi: Penguin, 1994), pp. 190ff.

Vikramaditya, upon whom has been imposed the task of carrying a corpse possessed by a *vetala* (a kind of demon) from the tree where it hangs to the other side of a cemetery, maintaining silence the entire time. While Vikramaditya is carrying the corpse, the *vetala* begins to tell him a story, a kind of riddle tale. At the end of the story, the *vetala* demands that Vikramaditya pass judgement on the question posed by the story. When Vikramaditya gives the correct answer (his duty as king obliges him to pass judgement when asked), the corpse suddenly vanishes from his shoulders and returns to the tree: Vikramaditya has broken the silence he was to maintain. This process repeats itself twenty-three more times, with a new story each time, until finally the *vetala* tells a riddle tale that Vikramaditya cannot solve. Vikramaditya is thus able to maintain his silence, the corpse is purged of the *vetala*, and the frame narrative concludes.

A brief summary of the second of the *Vetala Tales* will provide a sense of the kind of story this collection contains. The second tale tells the story of a young girl with three suitors, each of such equal virtues that the girl's father cannot decide to which of them he ought to marry his daughter. One day the girl unexpectedly dies. The grief-stricken suitors each mourn her death in a different way. The first suitor builds a cottage over her ashes and takes up residence there. The second carries her bones across the holy river of Ganges. The third departs on an ascetic pilgrimage. During his wanderings, the third suitor discovers, by chance, a charm with the power to revive the dead. He returns home and brings the beautiful girl back to life. The story concludes with the *vetala*'s question: to which of the three suitors should her father give the resurrected girl in marriage? Which of the three honored her best after her death?

In a study from 1920, W. H. Farnham (also, incidentally, a Shakespeare scholar, author of an influential 1950 study, *Shakespeare's Tragic Frontier*), named this story from the *Vetala Tales* "The Contending Lovers," identifying the tale as what he called a "problem story," and

tracing its subsequent diffusion across many literatures and languages.[4] The point of Farnham's study was to cast light on the version of the story instantiated in Chaucer's *The Parlement of Fowles*, which, Farnham wrote, "should be viewed as a poetical and highly sophisticated version of the folk tale."[5] In addition to multiple African, Cambodian, Greek, and Icelandic versions of the story, Farnham focused his survey of the vast geographical sweep of this story's migrations on its entrance into western European literature, primarily through Persian and Arabic intermediaries and their subsequent adaptations in Italy. Analyzing "The Contending Lovers" and other stories of the same type, Farnham emphasized that the original versions of "The Contending Lovers" "were very early problem stories pure and simple. The problems they offered were never meant to be fully settled. Room for discussion was to be left open."[6] The fundamental similarity of the three lovers and the equality of their claims on the maiden precluded any obvious judgement on the winner of the suit. The point of the story was to stimulate debate among its listeners. Indeed, Chaucer's *Parlement of Fowles* famously ends with the postponement of conclusive judgement in the contest between its "three suitors."

Farnham's study of "The Contending Lovers" is cited by Jolles in Jolles's chapter on the case in *Simple Forms*,[7] where Jolles makes prominent use of Farnham's idea that the purpose of folkloric "problem stories" is, precisely, to be undecidable, and thereby provoke debate. For one of the central claims Jolles advances through his own analysis of the *Vetala Tales* is that the case,

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[4] W. H. Farnham, "The Contending Lovers," *PMLA* 35, no. 3 (1920): pp. 247-323.

[5] W. H. Farnham, "The Contending Lovers," *PMLA* 35, no. 3 (1920): p. 248.

[6] W. H. Farnham, "The Contending Lovers," *PMLA* 35, no. 3 (1920): p. 250.

[7] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 152.

in its ideal or true form, presents no internal evidence pointing to a single correct judgement. As Jolles writes:

> The special character of the case lies in the fact that it asks the question, but cannot give the answer; that it imposes the duty of judgment upon us, but does not itself contain the judgment—what becomes manifest in it is the act of weighing, but not the result of the weighing.[8]

As Jolles notes, the frame narrative of the *Vetala Tales* concludes when the *vetala*, tiring of the exercise he has imposed, finally tells the king, who has so far correctly answered all of the riddle tales, an unsolvable case. Jolles claims that when a case is given a conclusion, a correct judgement, it has begun to tilt towards an art form [*Kunstform*], the novella.[9]

II. The case in classical antiquity

For the purposes of this chapter, it is necessary to complement Jolles's discussion of the Indian case with a discussion of the case as it appears in a classical literary genre with which Shakespeare was directly familiar. That literary genre is the *controversia*—or as it was also known in Shakespeare's day, the *declamation*.[10]

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[8] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 153.

[9] See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 145-6, 153-4.

[10] For the most extensive recent discussion of Shakespeare's use of *controversiae*, see Neil Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), pp. 85-117. Rhodes provides an overview of the use of *controversiae* and *suasoriae* as school exercises in the sixteenth century, then connects the *controversia*, and the habit of viewing a matter from two opposing sides, with the "problem plays" of *Merchant of Venice* and *Measure for Measure*. Rhodes also discusses, as do I, Alexandre Le Silvayn's *The Orator*. My main addition to what Rhodes has argued—and I am in broad agreement with Rhodes's claims—is to introduce Jolles's notion of the case as a simple form, and with it the idea of a tension between simple form and "art form," whether that of the novella or of drama. Rhodes, as he acknowledges, is developing the view of the importance to Elizabethan drama of argument *in utramque partem* which was first and most influentially developed by Joel Altman in *The Tudor*

The classical declamation has an essential tie to education, and specifically to training in rhetoric. The declamation originated in the schools of rhetoric of ancient Greece, but reached the peak of its popularity during the Roman Empire. (Most of our knowledge of the classical declamation derives from four texts written during the Roman Empire.) The declamation functioned essentially as a mock trial, in which teachers of rhetoric and their students practiced the elements of rhetoric by arguing both sides of an imaginary trial. While for declaimers and their audiences most of the interest of declamations lay in the oratorical skill and ingenuity of the declaimers, I will focus here on the short narratives which, by presenting imaginary legal cases, served as themes for declamations. These themes furnish particularly clear examples of the simple form of the case.

Before pursuing a formal analysis of declamatory themes, it will be useful to have a basic understanding of the classical declamation as a genre and the form in which it has survived. A brief description of Elder Seneca's *Controversiae*, the compilation on which I will focus in this chapter, will help introduce the genre's basic outlines.

The Elder Seneca's *Controversiae* was compiled by Seneca at the behest of his children, who wanted him to compose a record of the orators he had seen in his long life.[11] The book consists of a collection of *controversiae* organized around a series of themes. Each *controversia* begins with a theme: a short skeletal narrative of a series of events leading to a trial. This narrative is often preceded by one or more laws which apply to the case. Following the theme, epigrams (*sententiae*) are presented, and attributed to different orators. Rather than entire

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Play of Mind: Rhetorical Inquiry and the Development of Elizabethan Drama (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[11] See Seneca the Elder, *Declamations*, trans. M. Winterbottom, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 1-7.

orations, Seneca explains that he gives only those orators' most memorable lines—because these memorable lines are what he remembers. The epigrams are followed by the "division" (*divisio*), in which he discusses how the different orators analyzed the themes in terms of legal logic, breaking each case down into a hierarchically ordered series of "questions" (*quaestiones*). Finally, Seneca lists the different "colors" (*colores*) employed by each orator: in effect, the way each orator elaborated on the bare bones of the narrative theme, adding details of narrative and character in order to produce an emotional appeal that would alter the judgement of the case.

I will now turn to the themes of the *controversiae*, which correspond to the narrative examples of the case which Jolles provides. Many of the extant themes are extremely short. I want to begin with a short theme that clearly encapsulates one aspect of the case as it appears in the declamatory tradition. Here is the theme of the fifth *controversia* in Book 1 of Elder Seneca's compilation:

> A girl who has been raped may choose either marriage to her ravisher without a dowry or his death.
>
> On a single night a man raped two girls. One demands his death, the other marriage.[12]

This is the case in an extremely minimal form. Its elements are (1) the relevant law (2) the crime (the double rape) (3) the mutually exclusive punishments chosen by the victims. As in Jolles's newspaper example, which presented two slightly different narratives of the same crime, this is a case in which the law is set against the law, thereby revealing a gap in the law. Several themes in Seneca's collection fit in the category of "contrary law" cases, in which a strictly literal

[12] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 121.

interpretation of the law results either in an outcome that is impossible to fulfill, or an outcome that seems to run contrary to the spirit of the law.[13] In the *divisio* of this *controversia*, Seneca reports that there was among the declaimers "no agreement on the first question"[14] to be considered in this theme, and the *divisio* lists several quite different attempts to break this theme down into the essential legal questions. Seneca's collection of epigrams for this theme is relatively brief. Handling this theme seems mostly to have involved argumentation. Themes like this one thus seem to address themselves primarily to the legal side of the declamation.

However, many of the themes seem to have a more markedly narrative character than does the minimalist example of a *controversia* theme which I have just considered. (That the themes of declamations were implausible, absurd, or sensational was a common complaint among detractors of declamation.) Consider, for instance, *Contr*. 2.7, "The Foreign Merchant":

> A man with a beautiful wife went off abroad. A foreign trader moved into the woman's neighbourhood. He three times made her propositions of a sexual nature, offering sums of money. She said no. The trader died, leaving her all his wealth in his will, to which he added the clause: "I found her chaste." She took the bequest. The husband returned and accuses her of adultery on suspicion.[15]

Several features of this story suggest that it has been taken over from a literary text in order to function as a declamatory theme. Contrary to what the title of the theme suggests, the center of interest in the narrative is not the foreign merchant, but the foreign merchant's wife, who, in a common folktale and novella motif, is subjected to a test of fidelity. If this were a folktale or

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[13] Winterbottom points out that *Rhetores Latini Minores*, ed. K. Halm (Leipzig, 1863, rpt. 1964), p. 383.32, classifies this theme as an instance of the "contrary laws" *status*. See Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 121n4.

[14] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 127.

[15] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 363.

novella, one might expect the husband's accusation to be ultimately refuted—perhaps by the discovery of the clause "I found her chaste" in the trader's will—leading to the chaste wife's vindication and a happy ending to the story. In the absence of such a conclusion, the foreign merchant's role in the story is oddly truncated, with appearances only at the very beginning and the very end. In addition, the story contains embellishments not strictly necessary to its functioning as a declamatory theme: the detail of the foreign trader's thrice-repeated sexual proposition is strongly reminiscent of folktale motifs, but for this story to function as a declamation, one refused proposition would have been enough.

Our fragmentary text of this *controversia* breaks off in the midst of a long excerpt from Latro's declamation for the husband (the longest declamation in what survives of Seneca's compilation), and thus lacks both Seneca's *divisio* and also *sententiae* from any other orators. However, Latro's declamation confirms that this is a *controversia* belonging to the second of the two main categories into which the rhetoricians divided *causae*.[16]

Cases were subdivided according to the nature of the *quaestio* around which they fundamentally turned. There were two major kinds of *causae*, those involving *definite* questions, and those involving *indefinite* questions. Definite questions were those in which what was at issue was clarifying what had happened, whereas indefinite questions were those in which what was at stake was deciding whether a given action violated the law or not. Definite questions were thus *circumstantial*—Bonner draws an analogy to the detective story, in which the issue is determining who committed the crime—whereas indefinite questions involved considering the *law* and *equity*, rather than establishing probabilities concerning what actually happened.

[16] For an overview of the categories of *causae* see S. F. Bonner, *Roman Declamation in the Late Republic and Early Empire* (Liverpool: University Press of Liverpool, 1949), pp. 5-6. The system of classification was devised by Hermagoras.

Such circumstantial cases seem,[17] at first glance, not to involve the kind of conflict of values and norms that is central to the case in Jolles's account. Such cases involve little argumentation or analysis into *quaestiones*, and turn almost entirely on *colores*, on the narrative that the declaimers elaborate from the bare bones of the theme. (Seneca sometimes refers to this aspect of the declaimer's task as "development" [*tractatio*].) Yet such cases still involve a kind of *weighing*—but a weighing of motive, character, circumstance, and probability instead of values and norms. Such cases bring out the psychological, the rhetorical, and the dramatic aspects of the declaimer's art. These cases require the depiction of character and the construction of dramatic scenes which will sway the audience emotionally.

The "The Foreign Merchant" was turned into a *controversia* theme, then, because the husband's accusation of adultery posed a definite question. The story could be treated as a circumstantial case. Other themes remain more minimal, lacking the strong folktale flavor of "The Foreign Merchant," yet also do not pose a clear legal paradox as in the first theme we considered. Take, for example, *Contr.* 2.3, "The Ravisher Who Failed to Win Over His Father":

> A ravisher shall die unless he wins over his own father and the girl's within thirty days. A ravisher won over the father of the girl he had raped; he is unable to win over his own, and accuses him of insanity.[18]

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[17] Another example of a circumstantial case which gives a strong impression of folktale origins—and which possesses certain resemblances to the *Pericles* story—is *Contr.* 1.2, in which a woman is abducted by pirates and sold into a brothel. She resists the advances of men by asking them for alms, but ultimately murders a soldier who refuses the request for alms and tries to force himself on her instead. She is acquitted of her crime, sent back to her family, and now seeks a priesthood. The case turns on whether she is chaste and pure, as admission to the priesthood requires. See Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 59. A classic example of a circumstantial case, discussed by Quintilian, is a theme in which Ulysses is found next to the dead body of Ajax. The definite question is whether Ulysses murdered Ajax or not, and the case turns on questions of character and motive.

[18] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 267.

As the theme of a *controversia*, this narrative might seem to ask us to weigh whether or not the father of the rapist is insane, but most of the questions presented in the *divisio* have to do with whether the son's accusation has legal standing or not.[19] But this is a case in which the legal reasoning of the *divisio* obscures a more basic contest between two values which the narrative presents. This basic contest comes across most clearly in the *sententiae* of Junius Gallio on behalf of the father:

> . . . different emotions divide me, I am split between my roles of defendant and father. On one side is the wrong you did, on the other nature.[20]

In many of the themes, their use in *controversiae* actually obscures, to a degree, the basic contest of values they present—obscures, that is, their nature as *cases*. The theme of "The Ravisher Who Failed to Win Over His Father" does not really ask us to weigh the father's arguments against the sons. Rather, it is the *father's* choice that presents the necessity of deciding between two nearly equal "weights," the claims of justice and the claims of "nature." The story's nature as a case is slightly distorted by the need to make a legal trial out of it for the purposes of declamation.

The notion that *controversia* themes typically include at least one basic contest of values clarifies why these stories and not others were selected or invented as themes. (The exact origins of declamatory themes are unclear, but the majority of themes in Roman declamation were Greek themes. It has been suggested that the Greek themes themselves often derive their plots

[19] For instance: "Can a ravisher, within the thirty days, go to law with another . . .? Even if he can, can he with his father, who has powers of life and death over him?" Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 281.

[20] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 275.

from New Comedy and other "literary" sources—hence their frequent deployment of "type" characters such as blocking fathers, amorous youths, and so on.) Within the subgenre of the case that is the declamatory theme, there is a set of motifs used to adapt a given story for use in a *controversia*: the frequent endings involving a father disinheriting a son would be one example. These endings can be stapled on to a story to turn it into a legal trial. The frequency of cases involving disinheritance is evidence of how central family relationships and familial duties are as thematic material in the *controversiae*.

I want to conclude this examination of the Roman declamation by briefly considering another theme which seems to have more narrative than legal interest. *Contr.* 2.2 bears the title, "The Oath Sworn by Husband and Wife":

> A husband and wife took an oath that if anything should happen to either of them the other would die. The husband went off on a trip abroad, and sent a message to his wife to say that he had died. The wife threw herself off a cliff. Revived, she is told by her father to leave her husband. She does not want to, and is disinherited.[21]

Again, we have a narrative which seems to have been modified to serve as a *controversia* theme: the appearance of the wife's father, and his threat of disinheritance, are extraneous to the central interest of the narrative. Again we have a test of fidelity, and a romance device—the revival of the wife—of the kind frequent in folktale and novella. (The frequency of themes in which a woman's chastity or fidelity is the central question suggests that the Greek and Roman men who practiced delcamation were particularly interested in cases exploring this question.) In the *divisio*, Seneca again notes that this theme does not in fact require a division, for "apart from the question, Can a father disinherit because of a marriage, everything else, being concerned with

[21] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 251.

equity, is a matter of development [*tractationis*]."[22] This is another case where the *legal* aspect is insignificant, and the case mostly turns on *colores*, on the portrayal of character, the elaboration of narrative, and the stylistic brilliance of the *sententiae* employed by the declaimers.

That the handling of this theme primarily required rhetorical rather than legal or argumentative facility is further attested by a recollection with which Seneca concludes his account of this *controversia*: his memory of hearing the future poet Ovid declaim this *controversia* in the school of the rhetor Arellius Fuscus, whose pupil Ovid had been. "Even in those days," Seneca recalls of Ovid, "his speech could be regarded as simply poetry put into prose."[23] Seneca recalls that Ovid admired the great declaimer Latro, even transferring some of Latro's declamatory epigrams to some verses of the *Metamorphoses*. Recalling that Ovid was "held to be a good declaimer" while a student, Seneca records a long set of *sententiae* which Ovid had declaimed on this particular theme, many of which involved commonplaces having to do with passionate love. Seneca concludes by noting:

> However, Ovid rarely declaimed *controversiae*, and only ones involving portrayal of character. He preferred *suasoriae*, finding all argumentation tiresome. He used language by no means over-freely except in his poetry, where he was well aware of his faults—and enjoyed them. . . . He used sometimes to say that a face is the more beautiful for some mole.[24]

What these recollections suggest is that for a poet such as Ovid, the interest of *controversiae* lay primarily in the opportunities its themes—its *cases*—afforded for the portrayal of character. Nor is the juxtaposition of what Seneca clearly thinks of as Ovid's peculiar aesthetics wholly devoid

[22] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 255.

[23] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 259.

[24] Elder Seneca, *Declamations*, vol. 1, p. 265.

of relevance for the discussion of the relationship between complex character and the simple form of the case. For the notion that an imperfection such as a mole heightens rather than spoils the beauty of a face—and that certain "faults" in poetry can have a similar effect—resonates with the way in which, as I will suggest in my discussion of *The Merchant of Venice*, the simple form of the case, translated into the realm of dramatic character, generates *interest* in character precisely by a balancing of attraction and aversion.

III. *The early modern case: Silvayn's "The Orator"*

The classical genre of the *controversia* proved popular with the humanists of the Renaissance. Erasmus included *controversiae* in his sketch of the key elements of a humanist education; Sir Thomas More's family practiced declamations at home; and the four main texts of Roman declamation were available in early modern editions. (Elder Seneca's *Controversiae* was bound together with the hugely popular works of his son, Seneca, to whom the *Controversiae* were attributed during the early modern period.) *Controversiae*, for obvious reasons, proved especially congenial to the habit of thinking *in utramque partem* that was so central to Renaissance humanism.[25]

Early modern dramatists, including Shakespeare, would very likely have encountered classical *controversiae* in the original Latin at some point during their schooling. As early as 1954, Eugene Waith, in a study of Beaumont and Fletcher's tragicomedies, made the case that early modern dramatists were indebted to the declamatory tradition not just for the many

[25] On this subject, see Joel Altman, *The Tudor Play of Mind*, cited above.

declamatory themes they adapted into the plots for their dramas, but for their conception of drama itself as a fundamentally oratorical art.[26]

In addition to early modern editions of such texts as the *Controversiae*, the sixteenth century also produced at least one collection of classical declamations written in the vernacular. Alexandre Le Silvayn's *Epitomes de cent histoires tragicques* (1581) is one such text. Translated into English as *The Orator* in 1596, Silvayn's collection has long been linked to Shakespeare's *The Merchant of Venice*.[27] Declamation 95 of *The Orator* bears the title, "Of a Jew, who would for his debt haue a pound of the flesh of a Christian." The short narrative that serves as the theme of this declamation is a version of the pound of flesh story also used by Shakespeare in *Merchant*.

In Silvayn's text, each theme is followed by an entire speech on either side of the case (*The Orator* thus resembles the *Major Declamations* of Pseudo-Quintilian in giving full orations rather than the excerpts given in the other surviving compilations of Roman *controversiae*.) Beacuse the majority of Silvayn's themes, as Waith showed, come straight from Elder Seneca's *Controversiae*, Silvayn's main work in these declamations was composing not the themes, but the speeches: the "declamations" proper.[28] However, gathering the themes for these declamations did require some legwork, for more than half of Silvayn's themes are *not* from the *Controversiae*—among these the pound of flesh theme of Declamation 95.

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[26] Eugene Waith, *The Pattern of Tragicomedy in Beaumont and Fletcher* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952).

[27] Alexander Silvayn, *The Orator* (London, 1596). For a detailed discussion of the volume by Sylvayn (also known as Alexander van den Busche), see Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, pp. 102-113.

[28] See the appendix to Waith, *The Pattern of Tragicomedy*, which includes a table listing which of Silvayn's declamations come from Elder Seneca's *Controversiae*.

Where do Silvayn's other themes come from? The answer to this question is significant for any attempt to understand the life of the case during the early modern period. For in selecting, excerpting, and possibly inventing brief narratives to serve as themes for declamations, Silvayn leaves a record of one early modern writer's sense of the genre of the declamatory theme—which is to say, his sense of the simple form of the case.

A closer look at the print history of Silvayn's volume sheds light on Silvayn's method in gathering declamatory themes for his volume. Silvayn's *Epitomes de cent histoires tragicques* is in fact an expansion of an earlier edition containing fifty-five themes, printed for Nicolas Bonson in 1575 with the title *Le premier livre, des proces tragiques, contenant cinquantecinq histoires, auec les accusations, demandes, & deffences d'icelles*.[29] In this earlier edition, declamations 1-39, 41-42, 48-50, 52 are taken from Seneca's *Controversiae* (and Proces 51 shares its theme with the third of Seneca's *Suasoriae*). Then, among the last sixteen themes in the volume, ten of which come from Seneca (one of these from the *Suasoriae* rather than the *Controversiae*), he intersperses six themes that do not come from Seneca. To sum up: the bulk of *Proces Tragiques* consists of declamations on themes drawn from Seneca, but six themes from elsewhere are scattered at the very end of the volume.

Six years after the publication of *Le premier livre des proces tragiques*, Silvayn published the *Epitomes de cent histoires tragiques* in 1581. The fact that the title of the 1575 volume designates it as "*Le premier livre*" may indicate that the expansion into the hundred declamations of the *Epitomes* was part of a deliberate publishing strategy. George Hoffman has studied how the privilege system governing French publication in the sixteenth century

[29] Discussions of Silvayn's compilation mostly fail to note this earlier edition, but it is mentioned by Neil Rhodes, *Shakespeare and the Origins of English*, p. 103.

encouraged authors and publishers to issue expanded and revised editions of popular works in order to extend the period of their exclusive publication rights.[30] Silvayn and his publisher may have been employing a similar strategy to the one that led, according to Hoffman's account, to Montaigne's extensive revisions and expansions of the three reeditions of the *Essais*. The surviving text of Seneca's *Controversiae* contains, in total, seventy-four *controversiae* (seventy-four different themes). If Silvayn had planned, either from the beginning of the process of compilation, or at some stage during the compilation of *Le premier livre des proces tragiques*, to compile one hundred declamations (imitating the round-number-titles of such popular collections as the *Decameron* and *A Hundred Mery Tales*), then he would have known that even if he used all of Seneca's themes, he would eventually need to supplement them to reach a hundred declamations.

For the *Epitomes*, Silvain adds thirty-four new themes at the beginning of the volume, followed by the fifty-five themes that composed the original. The volume then concludes with another eleven new themes. So where did these supplementary themes (including the six non-Senecan themes in *Le premier livre*) come from? While an exhaustive study of Silvayn's sources for *Epitomes* has not to my knowledge been attempted, a cursory overview of the additional themes suffices to suggest certain patterns in Silvain's choice of materials.

The full title of the 1581 volume gives some indication as to the origins of its contents: "Epitomes de cent histoires tragicques, partie extraittes des Actes des Romains & autres, De l'inuention de l'Autheur, auecq' les demandes, accusations & deffences sur la matiere d'icelles." The title of the English translation of *Epitomes* provides more specificity: "The Orator: Handling

[30] See George Hoffman, "The Montaigne Monopoly: Revising the Essais under the French Privilege System," *PMLA* 108, no. 2 (1993): p. 311.

a hundred seuerall Discourses, in forme of Declamations: Some of the Arguments being drawne from *Titus Liuius* and other ancient Writers, the rest of the Authors owne inuention: Part of which are of matters happened in our Age."

As the English title suggests, Silvayn draws several of his themes from Livy.[31] Similar to the excerpts from Livy and other Roman historians that furnish the material for the first part of William Painter's *Palace of Pleasure*, the remainder of which consists of *novelle* drawn from Italian collections, Silvayn's excerpts from Livy set a high-cultural, classicizing tone for his volume as a whole. Furthermore, Silvayn selects moments from Livy in which Livy reports on trials or other prominent public deliberations in which orations were given. Declamation 10 uses as its theme a episode recounted in Livy 4.13:

> *Of* Caius Seruilius*, who is accused to have slaine* Spurius Melius*, that had releiued the people during the famine.*
> *At Rome during the time of the sixtie eight Consulship, the famine was so exceeding great, that many of the common people did throw themselues into the Tiber: then* Spurius Melius*, one of the order of the knights, a verie rich man, hauing great acquaintaince in Tuscane, caused a great quantitie of corne to bee brought from thence, the which he did freely distribut among the people for a gift, so that by this meanes hauing gained the peoples loue, he aspired to the kingdome, whereupon being warned before the Dictator, he not only refusing to come, but also moouing the people to sedition, was slaine by* Caius Seuilius Hala, *maister of the nights, who shortly after was for this fact accused as an offender, by one of the Tribuns of the people, who said: . . .*[32]

That is, Silvayn chooses episodes in Livy's history that function, like the *controversia* themes, as "cases" occasioning public debate. Although Roman declamation rarely took historical

[31] I have so far been able to identify *Epitomes* 8, 10, 18 as narratives probably drawn from Livy—the events narrated by the declamatory themes in question are at any rate narrated by Livy (in Livy 4.23-24, 4.13, and 5.11 respectively). Silvayn himself identifies the hundredth declamation as having been taken from Livy—and indeed the theme derives from Livy bk. 34, ch. 30-32.

[32] Silvayn, *The Orator* (London, 1596), p. 65.

examples for themes, vague reference, on the title-page of *Epitomes*, to "Actes des Romains & autres," and of the *Orator* title page to "other ancient writers," may indicate that early modern readers did not necessarily think of classical *controversia* themes as fictional rather than historical—or at least that a certain ambiguity affected this distinction.[33]

Many other shorter themes in *The Orator* lack specific historical settings and closely resemble the kinds of "contrary laws" themes I examined in the previous section. Declamation 6 is an example of one such theme in Silvayn:

> *Of a maimed man, who for smiting an officer, is condemned to lose his hand, but it cannot be prooued with which hand he did strike him.*
> *A Man that was maimed of one of his hands, did strike an officer of the Magistrates, for the which he was to lose his hand: it could not bee proued with which hand he did strike him, he said that it was with his left hand, which was the same that was maimed: notwithstanding, the iudge would the sound hand to be ceut off, alleaging these reasons following: . . .*[34]

Themes like Declamation 6 may come from one of the three non-Senecan surviving collections of Roman declamations other than Seneca's: the Major or Minor Declamations of Pseudo-Quintilian, or the *controversiae* of Calpurnius Flaccus. They may also be inventions of the author, making good on the claim of the title page.

In addition to excerpts from classical history and close imitations of the legal paradoxes of the Roman *controversiae* themes, Silvayn includes a variety of material that must have been

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[33] Silvayn includes a few other themes that appear to be drawn from ancient historians besides Livy. Declamation 74 takes Romulus killing his brother Remus as its theme, a possible cause of Remus' death mentioned by Dionysius of Halicarnassus. Declamation 77, about a certain Lucullus, is based on Plutarch's life of Lucullus in *Parellel Lives*.

[34] Silvayn, *The Orator* (London, 1596), p. 42.

drawn from medieval and early modern sources—though it is often hard to tell which sources. Declamation 2, "*Of the first Earle of Flaunders, who was accused to the French King for hanging his eldest son*," is a long and convoluted excerpt from a Flemish chronicle (as Silvayn announces in the theme itself)—evidently a bit of medieval romance of the kind that was frequently included in early modern novella collections and that was popular on the early English stage.[35] Other themes Silvayn includes belong in the category of sensational recent occurrences, the bloody crimes reported in early modern news pamphlets, ballads, and novella collections. An example of this kind of theme is Declamation 78:

> *Of a woman who slew hir daughter, that had through childishnesse killed her little brother.*
> *The law appointeth, that euery woman which killeth her child should bee burned. Whereupon it chanced in Orleans, that a poor woman which got her liuing partly by washing of bucks, and somtime with carrying of fagots about the cittie to sell, had one daughter about the age of foure yeares, and a sonne about one yeare old, with the which children she was left a widdow by her husband. So that shee oftentimes being forced to shift the little child, she said unto him as the most part of mothers nad nources use to say, that if hee pissed his clothes any more, she would cut off his prick; the which the little girle hearing many times, shee forgot it not: but one day when her mother was gone unto the wood, she began to unswaddle her brother, and seeing that hee had pissed his clothes, she tooke a knife and cut off his yard, wherewith he lost so much bloud that he died, afterwards shee told her mother at her returne home what she had done, who seeing her child dead, shee was so surprised with anger, that she took up a little stoole, and strooke so great a blow therewithall vpon the girles head, that she presently died. For the which she was caried to prison, & hir husbands brother suing her to death, accused her saying: . . .*[36]

For this theme, Silvayn employs a convention of the classical declamation theme—the law prefacing the theme—to introduce a clear example of the *histoires tragiques* genre popularized

[35] The story appears to come from ch. 11-12 of Pierre d'Oudegherst's *Les chroniques et annales de Flandres* (1571).

[36] Silvayn, *The Orator* (London, 1596), p. 313.

by Pierre Boiastuau. From the legal, argumentative point of view, the most interesting question the case presents is whether the mother can be held accountable for the unintended consequences of the utterance ("*that if hee pissed his clothes any more, she would cut off his prick*") which, interpreted literally by her daughter, led to the death of her son. The added detail of the mother's subsequent murder of her daughter in a fit of anger obscures this central legal question in order to produce a bloodier, more sensational conclusion to the story. There is, in other words, tension between, on the one hand, the story's novella-like narrative impulse toward sensational violence, and on the other, its impulse towards producing a legal paradox.

Finally, there are certain declamatory themes in *The Orator* in which characteristic motifs of the Roman *controversiae* are updated to feature characters who represent, for Silvayn's European readership, figures of the non-English, non-Christian "other." One such theme is Declamation 79, "*Of a Turke who bought a child with a red head to make poyson of him*." Another is the pound of flesh story given in Declamation 95.

Silvayn's fashioning of the pound of flesh story into a classical *controversia*, with a theme and speeches on both side of the case, but without a conclusion or judgment, shows us the pound of flesh story in what for Jolles is the ideal state of the simple form of the case: undecidability. For this chapter, the further relevance of Silvayn's treatment of this story is the fact that Silvayn's text, by creating a declamation spoken in the voice of a Jewish moneylender—who is given strong arguments which compellingly counter those presented by the Christian merchant—begins the process of constructing a distinctively individual *character* out of this case. The force of the arguments given to the Jewish moneylender lend a certain energy to the speaking voice, the "I" that articulates this side of the controversy.

I will eventually turn, in the final sections of this chapter, to Shakespeare and *The Merchant of Venice*, in order to trace the culmination of this process whereby the simple form of the case—as elaborated in the "art form" of Shakespearean comedy—generates complex character. In so doing, I am attempting to develop a hypothesis thrown out by Jolles at the conclusion of his chapter on the case in *Simple Forms*. In the final pages of his chapter on the case, Jolles addresses the "mode of expression" characteristic of the case, a mode of expression which "can unify domains in which the mental disposition of evaluation, of weighing and judging, of norms and standards, is established." The distinctive expressions found in instantiations of the simple form of the case present the "*special language of the evaluative world*."[37] According to Jolles, a particularly important such "special language" is the language of theology, and, in particular, of moral theology, which, in the particular instantiation which evolved in the Catholic Church, is often known as *casuistry*.[38] Although the specific cases developed and considered with the discourse of casuistry only circulated, Jolles writes, within a relatively small circle, Jolles nevertheless feels that the influence of these cases on literature was important. Jolles's chapter on the case concludes with a hypothesis substantiating this point—and then abruptly breaks off, as Jolles feels he has reached, with this final hypothesis, the limit of his methodological brief in this particular study:

> Or perhaps we should say that what occurred in the Catholic Church within the limited sphere of moral theology also had an effect on literature as a whole. What we tend to call the *psychology* of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century literature—the weighing and measuring of motivations of actions according to inward and outward norms, this mobile crtierion of the judgment of characters in literary works and of the literary work of art as

[37] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 157.

[38] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 158.

> such—to me seems very similar to what we perceive in Catholic casuistics. But neither does this belong to a morphology of the simple forms.[39]

I want to suggest that Jolles's perception that the case, as instantiated in casuistry, contributed to the psychology of character in eighteenth- and nineteenth century literature, could in fact be traced back into the early modern period (and possibly, as the discussion of Ovid's interest in declamations suggests, earlier as well), via the "contribution" of the case, as found in the classical declamatory tradition and the *controversia*, to the representation of character in early modern drama.

In making this claim, I wish to argue on behalf of bringing the theory of simple form to bear on recent critical conversations about literary character. In a study which participates in the recent revival of character as a center of critical interest, Aaron Kunin argues for understanding character as a specific literary form, quasi-logical in nature, distinguished by its "portability," and defined as a category, a collection of instances of the same type (e.g. the character of Batman, a class including the performances of every actor who has ever played the role).[40] In another recent study, Lorna Hutson specifically focuses on Shakespeare, and presents a strong claim concerning the contribution of classical rhetoric to Shakespearean character.[41] The simple form of the case mediates, as it were, between the character as "type" (essentially the meaning Aaron Kunin gives to "character as form") and the techniques of classical rhetoric discussed by

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[39] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 159.

[40] See Aaron Kunin, *Character as Form* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019).

[41] See Lorna Hutson, *Circumstantial Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015). Other recent discussions of character in literature and culture include Amanda Anderson, Rita Felsi, and Toril Moi, *Character: Three Inquiries in Literary Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019) and Marjorie Garber, *Character: The History of a Cultural Obsession* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2020).

Lorna Hutson. For as the examination of the declamatory tradition shows, the highly portable simple form of the case affords debate, which, by channeling of the competitive energies of legal drama and oratorical contest, and drawing on all the resources of rhetoric including the *colores* and *circumstantiae* discussed by Hutson, produces the animated charaterization of speaking roles which, while they may be "types" in Kunin's sense—or even stereotypes—must also be viewed, —if the case is to remain "undecidable"—from a perfectly double perspective, *in utramque partem*. It is out of this dynamic tension between the liveliness of the rhetorical energies deployed on both sides of the case, and the ultimately undecidable nature of the case as simple form, that, I will argue, one of Shakespeare's most famously complex dramatic characters emerges: Shylock.

IV. *The pound of flesh story; the case in the Italian novella collection*

Before turning to Shylock and *The Merchant of Venice*, I want to briefly address the other route through which the pound of flesh story passes on its way to Shakespeare. For in its other appearances, the pound of flesh case, rather than remaining undecidable, is integrated into narratives with apparently definitive conclusions. That is the state of the story in Shakespeare's main source, a fourteenth-century Italian novella from Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*. I want to ask, then, as a first step to addressing how Shakespeare's *Merchant of Venice,* how the case functions in other literary contexts in which the "caseness" of the pound of flesh story has been subordinated to the imperatives of an "art form."

While it is possible that Silvayn encountered the pound of flesh story in Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*, the same text that Shakespeare used as the primary source for *Merchant*, the wide circulation of versions of the pound of flesh story has been sufficiently documented by folklorists

and scholars of Shakespeare's sources to conclude that the story had general currency in early modern culture—Silvayn, Shakespeare, and those they wrote for may well already have known several versions of the story.[42]

Bullough begins his survey of antecedents in the middle ages, writing that the story "began to take its modern shape" by the twelfth century in such texts as Johannes de Alta Sylva's *The King and the Seven Sages*.[43] Bullough includes the combination of the bond story with a "romantic love-story" in some manuscripts of the *Gesta Romanorum* as among the "many variations in the later Middle Ages" of the story of a wicked merchant who makes a bond involving loss of flesh with a trusting debtor. Bullough cites the appearance of the pound of flesh story in the late thirteenth-century poem *Cursor Mundi* as the first appearance of the story in English, and discusses the version of the story in Anthony Munday's *Zelauto or the Fountaine of Fame* (1580).[44]

Folklorists have cast a wider net and gathered many further versions of the story. The story's wide distribution over the entire world (Charlotte Artese discusses Chilean and Korean

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[42] Charlotte Artese gives a helpful overview of folktale versions of the pound of flesh story in her discussion of *Merchant* in *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2015), pp. 99-100. Tale type 890 in Hans-Jörg Uther, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, 3 vols, (Helsinki: Folklore Fellows, 2004), gives an up-to-date bibliography of all attested versions of the story. Eleonore Antonie Schamschula, *"A Pound of Flesh", A Study of Motif J 1161.2 in Folklore and Literature*, (MA Thesis, University of California, Berkeley, 1981), reproduces an array of difficult-to-obtain versions of the story.

[43] Geoffrey Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 1 (London: Routledge and Paul, 1957), p. 447.

[44] Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 1, pp. 448-454.

versions)[45] suggests that the story probably enjoyed an oral circulation during the early modern period in addition to circulating by means of such textual versions as have survived.

While it would be interesting to study the way the pound of flesh story operates in its medieval versions and in the versions collected by folklorists, I want, in this section, to focus on two versions of the pound of flesh story: the novella by Fiorentino that served as Shakespeare's primary source, and a story from the *Mahabharata* that is sometimes referred to (by Bullough, for example)[46] as the earliest extant version of the story. The comparison of these two versions will bring out certain similarities in how the story functions even in two widely divergent cultural contexts.

The story of King Sibi and the dove appears in a section of the *Mahabharata* known as the Forest Assembly, in which a sage tells a series of stories meant to transmit wisdom to the princes who are the heroes of the epic during their long exile in the forest. The story runs as follows.[47] One day the gods Indra and Agni decide to test the great King Sibi. Indra takes the form of a hawk, and Agni takes the form of a dove. The hawk pursues the dove into King Sibi's court, where the dove takes shelter with King Sibi. The hawk then demands that King Sibi give the dove to the hawk as its rightful prey. Divided between two claims on his duties as a ruler—on the one hand, his duty to protect a member of his realm who has requested shelter from him, on the other, his duty not to withhold from the hawk the hawk's only source of sustenance—King Sibi offers, in place of the dove, to give the hawk a weight of his own flesh equal to that of

[45] Artese, *Shakespeare's Folktale Sources*, p. 100.

[46] Bullough, *Narrative and Dramatic Sources*, vol. 1, p. 446.

[47] The story can be read in its entirety in *The Mahabharata*, bks. 2 and 3, trans. and ed. J. A. B. van Buitenen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), pp. 470-72.

the dove. King Sibi begins to carve off flesh from his thigh and place it on a pair of scales. But no matter how much flesh King Sibi places on the scales, the dove continues to outweigh the flesh. Finally, King Sibi decides to place his own body on the scales, sacrificing himself in order to fulfil both duties. At this point, the gods relent, revealing themselves to King Sibi and rewarding him for his virtue.[48]

This story shows clear formal resemblances with the simple form of the case as defined by Jolles and as instantiated in the classical *controversiae* themes discussed earlier in this chapter. Indra, in the guise of the hawk, articulates the reasons why Sibi should give him the dove in a kind of courtroom speech. But Sibi, when confronted with a choice of *either* protecting the dove or allowing the hawk its prey, finds the case undecidable: the weight of both claims is absolutely equal. The only solution—the case requires a solution if the narrative is to have a conclusion—is for Sibi to sacrifice himself. This symbolizes, perhaps, a moral lesson, part of the education in rulership that, within the frame narrative of the Forest Assembly, the story serves to deliver to the princes. That lesson is that the good ruler must feel the claim of his duties so intensely that he is willing to sacrifice himself if that is what the resolution of an apparent contradiction in the law requires. He must place himself on the scales of justice in order to restore their equilibrium. The case thus serves the purpose, within this narrative, of a *test* of the internal disposition and inner worth of King Sibi. The story's moral seems to be that the king who passes such a test will receive divine favor.[49]

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[48] For Jolles's discussion of *reward* as one of the key "speech gestures" of the case, see Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 157.

[49] The story of King Sibi also exists in Buddhist versions. I am grateful to Professor Michael Witzel for directing my attention to an interesting variation on this story type, featuring a tigress, in the Vyaghri Jataka (*Jatakamala* No. 1).

The pound of flesh story, in its manifestation in Fiorentino's novella and in Shakespeare's play, shares general resemblances with the story of Sibi and the dove: certain shared themes that are articulated through a different arrangement of characters. Above all, the theme of the generosity and self-sacrifice of a noble individual (Sibi in *The Mahabharata*, Ansaldo in *Il Pecorone*, Antonio in *Merchant*) in order to resolve a contradiction between two opposed moral duties: in Fiorentino and *Merchant*, the duty to uphold the the letter of the law and the duty to be merciful. Portia (in *Merchant*) and the Lady of Belmont (in Fiorentino) fulfill the role of Indra and Agni: both figures employ the pound of flesh case as a test, a heuristic. Portia's clever interpretation of the bond is—in line with the realism Jolles attributes to the novella as an art form—a realistic equivalent of the divine power of Indra, and integrates the case into a narrative with a happy resolution.

This integration of the simple form of the case within the novella in order to foreground the theme of generosity or mercy has, in fact, a central role in the tradition of the Tuscan novella. Several scholars have investigated the derivation of the Italian novella from the *controversia* and the simple form of the case.[50] Jolles pointed out that in the Indian instantiations of the case in the *Vetala Tales*, the simple form of the case appeared in aggregate form as part of a frame narrative, in which the device for linking successive stories was precisely the undecidability of the case. In *Il Filocolo*, an early work by Boccaccio sometimes considered the first prose novel written in

[50] See Paolo Cherchi, "From *controversia* to *novella*," in *La Nouvelle: Formation, Codification et Rayonnement d'un Genre Médiéval*, ed. Michelangelo Picone, et al. (Montréal: Plato Academic Press, 1983) pp. 89-99, who centers his inquiry in Jolles's account of the case as a simple form, and goes on to compare the different influence of classical and courtly controversies on the Italian novella, before concluding that drama may in fact provide the best adaptations of the *controversiae*; as well as Lucia Battaglia Ricci, "'Una novella per esempio': novellistica, omiletica e trattatistica nel primo Trecento," in *Favole parabole istorie: le forme della scrittura novellistica dal medioevo al rinascimento*, ed. Gabriella Albanese, et al. (Roma: Salerno Editrice, 2000), pp. 31-54.

Italian, Florio, the protagonist, is sojourning in Naples when he encounters a band of courtiers who invite him to join their party. These courtiers are taking turns debating *questioni d'amore*. Each question of love is preceded by a story to which the question refers. This moment in the *Filocolo* thus famously anticipates Boccaccio's use of a frame narrative in the *Decameron*.[51]

Among the thirteen stories narrated in this section of the *Filocolo* appears one which will reappear years later, with slight modifications, in Book X of the *Decameron*. As it appears as *Decameron* X, 4, the story is set in Bologna, where one Gentil de Carisendi is enamored of a lady, Catalina, the wife of Niccoluccio Caccianimico. Catalina, an honorable woman, refuses Gentil's advances. One day Catalina is taken ill. Within a short space, she wastes away and dies. Her husband and family place her body in the family crypt. Gentil, overcome with grief, breaks into the tomb to take his farewell of his lady. He embraces her body and notices she is, in fact, just barely alive. He takes the body home in secrecy and, with the help of restoratives, nurses Catalina back to life. Once she has fully recovered, he promises to return her to her husband with her honor intact as long as she will do exactly as she tells him. Gentil holds an enormous feast, to which he invites Niccoluccio and Catalina's other family members, including her young son. He announces to his guests that he is going to follow a Persian custom and show them his most valuable possession. But first, he wants to tell them a story and hear their judgement on it.

Gentil's story is as follows. A family has a loyal, trusted servant who has always served them faithfully. One day the servant falls ill. Although the servant is still alive, the family

[51] Jolles claims that the simple form of the case has a special prominence in Indian culture, but writes that the form also emerges in Western culture during certain periods in which complex social rules have acquired prominence. One such cultural moment, according to Jolles, is on display in the literature of courtly love, with its debates and *questioni d'amore*. On this famous moment in the *Filocolo*, see Victoria Kirkham, "Reckoning with Boccaccio's Questioni D'Amore," *MLN* 89, no. 1 (1974): pp. 47-59.

mistakes him for dead, and throws his body out into the street. There, another man finds the servant, notices he is alive, and nurses him back to health. Now the servant's original family, having learned that their servant is still alive, demands that the man return the servant to them. Having finished narrating this story, Gentil demands of Niccoluccio what his judgement on the case is: who should get to keep the loyal servant?

Niccoluccio confidently responds that since the first family treated their servant as no better than garbage, the man who restored the servant to life should be allowed to retain the servant. Gentil says he is satisfied with this answer, and will now show his guests his prized possession. Catalina, dressed in the most costly apparel, now emerges. Niccoluccio is astonished by how like his late wife this beautiful stranger is—in combination with his wonder, Niccoluccio feels anew grief at her death, as if for the first time. Gentil now explains the situation, how he recovered Catalina when her family had given her up for dead. Gentil says that, according to Niccoluccio's own judgement on the case of the servant, Gentil, and not Niccoluccio, ought to keep Catalina. But in an act of magnificent generosity, Gentil is going to restore Catalina to her husband and family. He does so, and everyone lives happily ever after, with Gentil and Niccoluccio becoming fast friends.

Book X of the *Decameron*, in which this novella appears, is devoted to stories on the theme of magnificence. In the complex structure of the frame narrative of the *Decameron*, magnificence is the culminating theme; if one conceives of the organizing topics of each day as an ascent through ethical stages, magnificance is construed by the larger structure of the volume as the highest virtue. Magnificence in the novellas of Book X is, in the Gentil's subordination of his own desire to Catalina to the imperatives of honor and generosity, understood as a subduing and mastering of fleshly desire. But the novellas of Book X do not all present equally great acts

of magnificence. The frame narrative repeatedly invites readers to compare the different acts of magnificence these novellas present, to weigh them against each other and decide which act was greater (as the storytellers compete to tell a story of the greatest act of generosity). The frame narrative, that is, presents the novellas of Book X as, in a certain sense, *cases*—just as the thirteen stories in the *Filocolo* were treated as occasions to debate *questioni d'amore*.

In addition, as we have seen in the story of Gentil de' Carisendi, characters within Boccaccio's novellas employ the simple form of the case to their own ends.[52] For Gentil, the case ultimately is a tool in a highly theatrical, stage-managed act of magnificence. At the beginning of the trial scene in *Merchant of Venice*, the Duke of Venice, in a somewhat puzzling moment, tells Shylock he thinks that Shylock's stated desire for revenge is all part of a theatrical ruse:

> Shylock, the world thinks, and I think so too,
> That thou but leadest this fashion of thy malice
> To the last hour of act, and then 'tis thought
> Thou'lt show thy mercy and remorse more strange
> Than is thy strange apparent cruelty.[53]

In the story of King Sibi and the dove, in the novella of Gentil de' Carisendi, in Fiorentino's novella of Gianetto, and in Shakespeare's *Merchant*, the simple form of the case is integrated into a larger narrative in which it functions to produce first suspense, then wonder—making the act of mercy strange. Boccaccio, in his handling of the case in a tale like *Decameron* X, 4,

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[52] The same strategy of telling someone a story which in fact applies directly to that person and then binding them to the judgement they offer is also employed by, among other characters in the *Decameron*, Salvestra in IV, 8.

[53] *The Merchant of Venice*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York: Norton, 2016), 4.1.17-21. All subsequent citations of Shakespeare's plays refer to this edition.

showed how the case, brought within the realist frame of a story and narrated by the characters itself *as* a case, could be employed as an instrument of drama.[54] It is worth dwelling on why Shakespeare chooses to put in the minds of the play's audience the notion that it could be Shylock who is stage-managing an act of mercy which, in an unexpected reversal, the play will conclude. Although Shakespeare's play in the end forecloses this alternative ending envisioned by the Duke, the Duke's lines afford us a glimpse of a different life for Shylock, one in which he is briefly imagined as the protagonist of a novella like *Decameron* X, 4, arranging an elegant and consummately theatrical act of *magnificenza*. This different life for Shylock is part of what we might, following Jolles's discussion of the "third Hamlet" in "Een oude roman," call the "third Shylock," the one which, equally indebted to the simple form of the case and to Shakespeare's drama, yet enjoys a life in our cultural imagination which is to a certain degree separate from both the simple form and the art form.[55] Shakespeare's Duke was thus the first of many to desire and imagine a different role for Shylock than the one which Shakespeare in fact wrote for him.

V. The art form of comedy and the simple form of the case in "The Merchant of Venice"

Since the eighteenth century, critics, theater professionals, and writers have all found a major resource in the character of Shylock. In the theater, as documented by John Gross, star-making performances in the part of Shylock made for successful revivals of *Merchant* from the

[54] As has become best known through the work of Louise George Clubb, Boccaccio's *novelle* and those of other Italian *novellieri* served as a source for "theatergrams" in Italian and international early modern drama. See Louise George Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

[55] See the introduction to this dissertation, pp. 20-22.

eighteenth century onward.[56] For critics, the character of Shylock has long played a central role in debates about the play. Shylock has also often been at the center of later adaptations of Shakespeare's play, as for example in the work of writers who reimagine the *Merchant* story from Shylock's perspective.[57]

In addition to figuring prominently in critical debates about *Merchant*, Shylock has served as the basis for thinking about Shakespeare's drama more generally. Kenneth Gross's extended critical meditation on Shylock addresses the disturbing, undismissable lifelikeness of this character, its power to haunt readers and audiences.[58] Gross is in earnest about the paradoxical thesis his title proposes: Shylock is Shakespeare. For Gross, Shylock's theatrical vitality springs from a personal, even confessional impulse recorded in this very particular dramatic part. Shylock's power on the stage comes from his terrible vulnerability; for Gross, Shakespeare's dramatic power, too, results from Shakespeare's willingness to leave himself exposed, to put himself at stake in his plays.

One effect of Gross's account of Shylock is to separate Shylock, to a degree, from the play *The Merchant of Venice*, a separation effect which, as I have noted, is hardly peculiar to Gross. The centrality of Shylock to theatrical revivals, critical accounts, and adaptations of *Merchant* suggests that, perhaps because of the unresolvable tension of the convergence of simple form and the poetic rendering of this character in Shakespeare's play, this particular

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[56] See John Gross, *Shylock: Four Hundred Years in the Life of a Legend* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1992).

[57] See, among many others, Clive Sinclair, *Shylock Must Die* (London: Halban, 2018), and Howard Jacobson, *Shylock Is My Name* (London: Hogarth Shakespeare, 2016). I am grateful to Professor Shaul Bassi for introducing me to Clive Sinclair's work.

[58] See Kenneth Gross, *Shylock is Shakespeare* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

character is repeatedly drawn outside the orbit of its play of origin. In what remains of this chapter, I will try to understand the separation of Shylock from *Merchant* as another symptom of simple form's resistance to art form, its tendency, in Jolles's words, to "resist combination and remain itself."

My view of *Merchant* as a play animated by tension between simple form and art form has been influenced by C. L. Barber's reading of the play in *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*. In Barber's timeline of Shakespeare's experimentation with festive drama, *Merchant* is a turning point, in which social and festive ritual combine with a new mastery of comedic and dramatic form.[59] Barber's anthropological interest in festivity rituals reveals an affinity between his theory of festive comedy and Jolles's theory of simple forms. Both theories have a pronounced anthropological component: for Barber, festivity rites and their function as a release valve for social pressures; for Jolles, the notion of the "mental dispositions" uniquely associated with different spheres of life and their corresponding simple forms. More specifically, Barber's understanding of festivity rites as release, and of their translation into art forms as realizing a movement "through release to clarification," resembles Jolles's account of the simple form of the joke, which Jolles understands as essentially about the release of tension. Finally, Barber's idea that in *Merchant* Shakespeare is "developing a style of comedy that makes a festive form for feeling and awareness"[60] out of all the elements of drama fits with my own sense that, in this play, Shakespeare invents ways to integrate the mental dispositions peculiar to simple forms—

[59] See C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011, first pub. 1959), pp. 188-189.

[60] Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy*, p. 189.

the distinctive modes of "feeling and awareness" these forms engage—with highly developed conventions of the "art forms" provoided by theatrical comic traditions.

However, because both the play and its main source, Fiorentino's novella, combine multiple kinds of simple forms with distinctive "art forms," I want first to address the more general process of combination through which Shakespeare and Fiorentino constructed their plots. Jolles writes that simple forms can be superimposed on each other while yet remaining clearly distinguishable. The same is also true, as I have tried to show, of the superimposition of art form upon simple form. In Fiorentino's novella and in *Merchant*, both kinds of superimposition are taking place at once. Before restricting my attention to the way Shakespeare elaborates the simple form of the case in *Merchant*, I will briefly comment on the dynamics and rationale of these superimpositions and combinations.

The Merchant of Venice has seemed to many critics to have a strong connection to the fairy tale. There is good evidence for this connection, and in exploring Shakespeare's use of the simple form of the case in this play, it is important also to address the play's relationship to the simple form of the fairy tale.

For most critics, the play's fairy tale aspects are primarily associated with Belmont and the casket choice plot. The "green world" of wish-fulfillment and limitless riches represented by Belmont contrasts with the grittier mercantile world of Venice, and the threat posed to the Christian characters by Shylock and his bond. A sense that the play attempts to marry a fairy tale world with a realistic, verisimilar world parallels Jolles's account of the convergence of the fairy tale and the Tuscan novella, in which the different formal tendencies of each form pull in different directions. *Merchant* reveals a similarly tense convergence, in which the social realism

and particularity of the Venice plot and the wish-fulfillment fantasy world of the fairy tale pull in two different directions, set together in an uneasy formal alliance.[61]

It might at first seem, then, that one could add, to the binary oppositions upon which the play is structured—Belmont vs. Venice, mercy vs. justice, festive generosity vs. selfish calculation, and so on—an opposition between simple form and art form. However, the play's source, a novella from Giovanni Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone*, suggests a more complicated picture. Fiorentino's novella tries to hold together, within the "art form" of the novella, not one but two *simple* forms: the fairy tale and the case. It will be easier to understand the relationship between these two simple forms and Shakespeare's own (rather complex) "art form," romantic comedy, if we first examine the corresponding constellation of forms in Fiorentino's novella.

Fiorentino's *Il Pecorone* is a novella collection composed in the late fourteenth century by a Florentine imitator of Boccaccio.[62] The collection reveals much about the manner in which simple forms converged with the literary tradition of the Tuscan novella. Fiorentino—assuming that a single writer was in fact responsible for the novellas in the collection—is an imitator of Boccaccio. Several of the novellas in the collection retell novellas from the *Decameron* with slightly varied settings and details. Others appear to be "original," in the sense that their author

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[61] Many critics have explored how Shakespeare manages, formally, the combination of the Belmont plot with the pound of flesh plot, and at the same time the fairy tale atmosphere of Belmont with the hard realism of the Venetian world; but see, in particular, Harley Granville-Barker, *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1946), pp. 335-347.

[62] I have not succeeded in finding much secondary literature on Fiorentino, but see Christopher Nissen, *Ethics of Retribution in the "Decameron" and the Late Medieval Italian Novella* (Lewisten: Mellen University Press, 1993), pp. 76-86, and Christopher Nissen, "In Search of a Moral Voice in Ser Giovanni's *Il Pecorone*," *Romance Languages Annual* 3 (1991): pp. 282-288, which includes a bibliography covering earlier work in Italian on *Il Pecorone*. See also, Piotr Salwa, *La narrativa tardogotica toscana* (Fiesole [Firenze]: Cadmo, 2004), and the critical edition of *Il Pecorone* edited by Enzo Esposito (Ravenna: Longo, 1974).

has attempted to imitate genres established by Boccaccio by selecting his own narrative material and then shaping it according to the general formal characteristics of Boccaccio's novellas.

Fiorentino's novella begins with a classic fairy tale motif: the disinherited third son. Giannetto, the Bassanio character, is told by his father that he will receive no inheritance, but must go instead to Venice, where his father's wealthy friend will adopt him. (Ansaldo, the wealthy adoptive father, is the figure corresponding to Antonio in Shakespeare's *Merchant*). Another familiar fairy tale motif, that of the child who must leave the comfort and security of home, is doubly present in Fiorentino's novella: Giannetto must first leave home for Venice; then he decides to set sail from Venice in order to see the world. Finally, the customary trial Giannetto must undergo in order to win the hand of the lady of Belmont[63] is a typical fairy tale motif, in which the ability to stay awake symbolizes the self-control that comes with maturity.[64]

The second half of Fiorentino's novella, the part focused on the bond plot, also in fact bears strong generic affinities to the fairy tale. Many fairy tales teach children that if they successfully reach adulthood, they will be able to care for their parents. In Fiorentino's story, Ansaldo sells everything he has in order to fund Giannetto's expeditions, and finally, when his wealth is exhausted, signs the pound of flesh bond with the Jew of Mestri. Giannetto has

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[63] He must go to bed with her and make love to her, but she tricks him by giving him a sleeping potion; only on the third attempt, when her maid takes pity on Giannetto and tells him about the potion, does Giannetto succeed in remaining awake.

[64] See Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment* (New York: Knopf, 1976). Bettelheim would read these motifs in terms of the reassurances fairy tales offer children in the face of the emotional challenges of maturation and development. Giannetto's persistence in attempting to wed the lady of Belmont pays off, teaching the lesson that the child will eventually overcome his or her inadequacies and ought not to be discouraged by them. That the lady of Belmont's maid takes pity on Giannetto and helps him figure out how to successfully pass the trial teaches children that they do not need to solve all their problems on our own, but can count on receiving help from others during the difficult transition to maturity.

exhausted the resources of his (adoptive) father, and in doing so has exposed Ansaldo to the threat of death.[65] But once Giannetto succeeds in marrying the lady of Belmont (a symbol of achieved maturity) he is able to return and, through the assistance of his wife, save Ansaldo.

The manner in which the lady of Belmont contrives to release Ansaldo from the bond also has analogues in fairy tales. Several of the Grimms' fairy tales, for example, feature contracts signed with the devil. In "The Devil and His Grandmother," three soldiers have signed their souls away to the devil in exchange for the use of a magic whip that produces gold.[66] At the end of a seven year term, the soldiers must relinquish the whip and go to hell—unless they can answer a riddle the devil will put to them. In the end, the soldiers outsmart the devil with the help of the devil's grandmother, who tricks the devil into revealing the answer to the riddle while the soldiers are eavesdropping on him. Like Fiorentino's Jew of Mestri, the devil in "The Devil and His Grandmother," upon being outsmarted, becomes enraged and storms away. (Fiorentino's Jew of Mestri tears up the bond and disappears.) In this fairy tale, as in Fiorentino's novella, a clever solution (provided by a sympathetic outsider) to a riddle (in Fiorentino, the bond) helps someone escape a contract with a "devil." Fiorentino's novella renders the motif more realistic and particular—the Jew of Mestri instead of a dragon who is really the devil; the threat of death rather than enslavement in the underworld—but the underlying motif and the way it is handled remains recognizably similar.

In fairy tales, rather than complex characters with multiple aspects, different aspects of, for example, a parental figure, are often split up into different characters within the story, or one

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[65] This anxiety of eating the parent out of house and home is characteristic of the fairy tale, as in the theme of consuming the gingerbread house in Hansel and Gretel.

[66] See *The Original Folk and Fairy Tales of the Brothers Grimm*, trans. and ed. Jack Zipes (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014), pp. 405-408.

and the same character can represent quite opposed and incompatible figures. The lady of Belmont, in Fiorentino's story, plays a variety of different roles, not integrated with each other with anything like "psychological" consistency. (For instance, the lady of Belmont at first wants to trick Giannetto and take his wealth, but is subsequently delighted when he evades her trick and the two have sexual intercourse.) This tension between these split, unintegrated roles is in part finessed in the story by means of the lady of Belmont's disguise: she becomes a different person to fulfill her role in the pound of flesh portion of the story.

The split personality of the lady of Belmont suggests an important difference between Fiorentino's novella and folktale versions of the pound of flesh story in which multiple story types are combined. Fiorentino creates a double plot which weaves two narrative strands together, something rarely found in folktales. While folktales often combine many motifs and story types, this process is usually accretive and paratactic. In Fiorentino, the two plots have been interwoven and tied together, not simply added, and in this the story resembles the double-plottedness of Shakespeare's dramas.

This privileging of complex plotting is a feature of the novella tradition in its self-consciously literary mode. Boccaccio has many stories which are long and complex, many of which derive from the tradition of medieval romance. Fiorentino imitates Boccaccio's complex plots by weaving together multiple folktale materials. Furthermore, the motifs and devices by which Fiorentino effects this interweaving belong to that repertoire of narrative and dramatic building blocks that Louise Clubb has termed "theatergrams" and "narremes."[67] This overlapping vocabulary of theatergrams and narremes that Italian theater and *commedia dell'arte* draw from novella collections is part of an Italian (and ultimately international) literary and theatrical

[67] See Clubb, *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time*, cited above.

tradition which, while it draws on elements from folktale, can be meaningfully distinguished from it as well. In its complex interweaving of plots, Fiorentino's novella belongs to an international literary and dramatic culture that Shakespeare shares with Italian dramatists. (The printing of Fiorentino's collection from manuscript in 1558, at the height of the *commedia dell'arte* and its interchange with the so-called "learned" drama, bears this out.) In short, in dealing with the formal difficulty of interweaving two plots of fundamentally different types, Shakespeare is not original, but is working within a tradition that already has conventional ways of dealing with this formal problem.

In taking over the fairy tale portion of Fiorentino's novella, Shakespeare makes considerable changes. To understand these changes, I wish to consider a key aspect of Shakespeare's adaptation of Fiorentino's novella: Shakespeare's substitution of the casket choice for the different test that the lady of Belmont in Fiorentino's novella imposes.

The similarity Freud observed between the casket choice in *Merchant* and the opening of *Lear* highlights the primary significance of Shakespeare's substitution: Shakespeare makes the test which Bassanio must undergo in order to win the lady of Belmont *a test of judgement*. Instead of Giannetto making three attempts to woo the lady of Belmont, Shakespeare presents three different suitors make attempts to woo the lady; and each of these three suitors must choose between three caskets. In Freud's reading, the caskets represent women, and the suitors are, in effect, asked to make a choice between three "women."[68] At the same time, through the casket choice, Portia is, in effect, choosing among suitors: she "chooses" between three men. In this

[68] But see also Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 74-86, for a reading of Freud's essay that explores what Freud himself represses in his reading of the casket choice motif: most obviously, the fact that Freud reconstrues the casket choice so that it concerns a man's choice of women (as in *Lear*), when in fact, the casket choice in *Merchant* is primarily about which *man* Portia will end up with.

way, Bassanio and Portia choose each other, each one proving that they recognize the true value or worth of the other.

What this device introduces into the fairy tale is the notion that one must not only choose the person one will love, but that this choice must be based on an exercise of judgment, and must be preceded by an act of weighing the inner worth of the prospective lover. If one adopts the psychoanalytic viewpoint of a critic like Bettelheim, it makes sense to view such a device as an interpolation alien to the formal outlook of the fairy tale: to the child, the primary audience of fairy tales, the value of the love-object—mother or father—is simply self-evident: it is as much a given as the notion that the lady of Belmont's infinite wealth makes her desirable. But in Shakespeare's play (in line with Wilson Knight's observation that Portia's "riches hold, dramatically, an almost spiritual quality"),[69] the casket choice distinguishes between Portia's external qualities—wealth, beauty—and her *internal* value, explicitly defined (though with considerable ambiguity, in the end) as her obedience and willing submission to her "lord." (This is one main point of the speech of Portia which concludes with her giving the ring to Bassanio, in which Portia says to Bassanio that she is "happiest" in that her "gentle spirit / Commits itself to yours to be directed" [3.2.163-4].)[70] The necessity of making a love *choice,* and therefore of judging the person one loves, brings about the (adult) psychological problems taken up by both

[69] G. Wilson Knight, *Principles of Shakesperian Production* (London: Faber and Faber, 1936), p. 187.

[70] But for a feminist reading of the ring-giving gesture which emphasizes Portia's agency, see Karen Newman, "Portia's Ring: Unruly Women and Structures of Exchange in *The Merchant of Venice*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Spring, 1987): pp. 19-33.

Merchant and the so-called "problem" comedies, in which questions of merit and value, of the nexus of economic and personal worth, are subjected to particularly searching attention.[71]

The casket choice is not a "true" case in Jolles' sense: the right answer is clear enough, and familiar to the audiences and readers of Shakespeare's play. This case has been assimilated to another narrative form and to a degree denatured. But the basic form of this story has ancient antecedents, as Freud's gesture toward the Judgement of Paris indicates. In fact, we can connect this story form directly to the genre of the Indian case discussed by Jolles, via the story of "The Contending Lovers," found in the *Vetala Tales* and discussed by both Jolles and W. H. Farnham. The question is these earlier versions of the story is same one that Shakespeare's casket choice poses: which of three suitors is most worthy of the woman he is attempting to woo?

The fact that a version of the story motif Shakespeare interpolates into Fiorentino's fairy tale can be traced back to the Indian story collection that furnishes Jolles with his paradigmatic example of the case suggests that, in adding the casket choice to the fairy tale, Shakespeare is, in a sense, heightening the "caseness" of his play, and specifically, emphasizing, within the fairy tale plot, the problem of judgment, of making a choice of love object based on measuring the "true," i.e. "inner" worth of another person. In supplementing the fairy tale in this way, Shakespeare is simply following the track already set down by Fiorentino, who combines his fairy tale plot with the pound of flesh story, a "case" in which the question of the value of a human life is vividly raised.

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[71] *Troilus and Cressida* and *All's Well That Ends Well* both revolve around the question of merit and value: around whether Helen is worth fighting for, a question which leads to Troilus's cynically skeptical questioning, "What's aught but as 'tis valued?" (2.2.53); around, in *AWW*, the question of whether Helena is worthy of Bertram and he of her. On problems of worth, price, and value in Shakespeare's plays, including in *Troilus and Cressida*, see Lars Engle, *Shakespearean Pragmatism: Market of His Time* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993).

I want now to finally turn in a more pressured way to *Merchant of Venice*, to examine, in terms of the text and its imaginative particulars, how this play elaborates the simple form of the case. I will advance two main claims in the course of my analysis. My first is that *Merchant* is fundamentally a comedy of *equilibrium*, of constant minute disturbances and shifts in balance. This play takes the mental disposition of weighing, of placing different values on set on mental "scales," and makes it the primary emotional-intellectual activity required of the dramatic spectator. However, the "ideal" state of perfect equilibrium or undecidability towards which the simple form of the case tends is in obvious tension with the foward momentum and strong drive toward closure of romantic comedy with its ostensibly happy endings. Here, then, is a first locus of tension between simple form and "art form."

My second claim involves character. In translating the case into drama, Shakespeare adapts the simple form of the case to the central interest which the "art form" of drama invests in *persons*. Not only do spectators weigh the different reasons and arguments on both sides of the cases which are presented in *Merchant*; but in addition, spectators *weigh the characters themselves*, in terms of the sympathy or antipathy towards these characters which both characterization and dramatic action generate. And yet the caseness of the play, its tendency always to return to a state of equilibrium, results in something peculiar: one of the characters in this play becomes, in effect, *himself* a case: the "case" of Shylock. It is as if simple form, which according to Jolles always "baulks at the convergence" with art form, "resists being remodelled in this way" and "remains itself,"[72] concentrates itself in the character of Shylock, lending him an energy that propels him outwards beyond the boundaries of Shakespeare's play. Here then is the second main locus of tension between simple form and "art form."

[72] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 191.

A chapter on *Merchant of Venice* in Norman Rabkin's *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* already presents the basic idea of equilibrium as the fundamental dramatic principle of this play. For Rabkin, critical debates over whether Shylock or Bassanio or Portia or Jessica are presented by the play in a sympathetic or hostile light are ultimately futile, since they are merely a symptom of "ambivalent signals built into the play."[73] These signals, "countless" in number, are "part of an entire system," an *equilibrium* or pair of balanced scales, organized in such a way that what we take away from one "side" we necessarily give to the other: any sympathetic response to Shylock "necessarily" leads us to "respond with less sympathy to Jessica or Portia, and vice versa."[74] For Rabkin, the "potential fullness of a reading in which one element or another in the play can come to seem like the center of the play's values" is "paradoxically the source of both its inexhaustible complexity and its vulnerability to powerful productions in which the play seems to belong completely to Shylock or to Belmont."[75]

I want to briefly summarize one key example Rabkin gives of this dramatic principle of equilibrium. In 3.1, Shylock has a discussion with Tubal in which Tubal alternately gives Shylock painful news about Jessica's prodigal expenditures, and welcome tidings about Antonio's misfortunes. Shylock swings back and forth between extremes of response with comic rapidity. Discussing critical reactions to this scene, Rabkin writes that "critic after critic, rather than acknowledging the welter of our responses, insists that this scene reveals a clear and simple

[73] Norman Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 28.

[74] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 28.

[75] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 28.

truth about Shylock's martyred humanity or his comic villainy."[76] Shylock's revelation that the ring Jessica sold was given him by his dead wife inspires sympathy towards him; Shylock saying he wants to see Jessica dead at his feet inspires aversion. It is impossible to make Shylock simply a martyr or simply a comic butt: in this play, "At every point at which we want simplicity we get complexity."[77] Any univocal reading of the play is ultimately a suppression of this complexity:

> If on reflection, through the contemplation of thematic patterns, we manage to be satisfied by an understanding that seems to resolve the constant inner conflict which the process of *The Merchant of Venice* sets going in us, we do so by treating as accidental rather than substantive the doubts with which we are left by the end.[78]

Or, as Rabkin succinctly puts it, "The essence of our experience is our haunting sense of what doesn't fit the thesis we are tempted at every moment to derive."[79]

As Rabkin suggests, the most distinctive dramatic strategy this play employs is to create constant shifts and reversals of moral and emotional equilibrium. As the wheel of fortune provides the basic template for the structure of tragedy, so the structuring dynamic of comedy, in *The Merchant of Venice*, can be metaphorically described as a pair of scales in constantly shifting balance. The play's climactic use of this technique comes in 4.1, the trial scene. The scene opens in a deadlock. Antonio has convinced himself that he must die. The Duke's attempt to manipulate Shylock into relenting ("We all expect a gentle answer, Jew" [4.1.34]) lacks conviction (the Duke has just said to Antonio that Shylock is utterly immovable). The Christian

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[76] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 7.

[77] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 29.

[78] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 13.

[79] Rabkin, *Shakespeare and the Problem of Meaning*, p. 23.

characters are continually drawn up short by Shylock's retorts. When Antonio, manifestly weary, finally reminds his friends of the futility of arguing with Shylock—"I pray you think you question with the Jew" (4.1.70)—the audience to the play has little grounds for disagreeing with the sense of the futility of attempts at persuasion at this point in the drama. There appears to be no escape from the irrefutable legal logic compelling the state to honor Shylock's bond.

Although from a legal point of view the scales tilt decisively in Shylock's favor at this moment, from the dramatic point of view—the audience's point of view, that is—the scales are perfectly balanced. On one side is law. The audience is repeatedly reminded (not only by Shylock but by Antonio and later Portia) that the health of the state depends on the law being upheld without exceptions. The play insists on this point, and lest the audience should waver in its fidelity to justice, Shakespeare has Portia, the voice of authority in this scene, decisively reject Bassanio's plea that Balthazar, in order to "do a great right," should "do a little wrong" (4.1.214). Bassanio here reveals a certain lack of moral uprightness, a revelation calculated to make the audience withdraw some small degree of sympathy from Bassanio's side of the case, at the same time as the value of moral uprightness and adherence to law weighs down favorably on Shylock's side.

Counterposing the weight on Shylock's side of the case is whatever desire the audience, conditioned by comic convention, may have for a happy ending in which Antonio lives, Shylock is defeated, and the Christian characters depart to guiltlessly enjoy their marriages. But the audience cannot have the fulfilment of comic convention without losing moral and legal uprightness. The play creates this scene's powerful dramatic tension by refusing to give the audience all of what it wants, and it does this not simply by blocking the happy ending of the

comedy, but by maneuvering the audience into a position where it desires mutually exclusive outcomes. Justice and a happy ending will not coincide.

Until Portia arrives, that is. Shylock, with his unflinching self-assurance, dominates the scene up to this point, but Portia immediately begins to unsettle Shylock's composure, and with it the scene begins, in somewhat queasy-making fashion, to sway. It all starts, as so often in Shakespeare, with a quibble:

> PORTIA Then must the Jew be merciful.
> SHYLOCK On what compulsion must I? Tell me that.
> PORTIA The quality of mercy is not strained . . . (4.1.180-182)

Portia's "must" expresses the assumption that comedies "must" end happily. So far, however, this happy ending has seemed to depend on Shylock *deciding* to be merciful—and the desire for a happy ending is not recognized by Shylock as a valid constraint on his actions. Neither is Portia ready to release the audience from the bind it is in. She affirms that there is no way to *force* Shylock to be merciful: the quality of mercy is not strained. And yet a certain hesitance enters Shylock's voice along with the question he here poses in response to Portia's statement. The fact that it *is* a question with which Shylock responds is crucial: Shylock guardedly acknowledges Portia/Bellario's authority as spokesman for the law. Shylock is not entirely sure that there *isn't* in fact some "compulsion" forcing him to be merciful.

Whereas in the declamations in Silvayn's collection we find structured and unified orations, which respond to each other, in Shakespeare's dramatic realization of a case at trial we find a far more dynamic give and take between the opposing sides, a dynamic that exploits the

"art form" of dialogue.[80] Shakespeare repeatedly constructs stichomythic exchanges in which Shylock and one of his adversaries trade *sententiae*:

> BASSANIO Do all men kill the things they do not love?
> SHYLOCK Hates any man the thing he would not kill?
> BASSANIO Every offence is not a hate at first.
> SHYLOCK What, wouldst thou have a serpent sting thee twice? (4.1.66-69)
>
> DUKE How shalt thou hope for mercy, rendering none?
> SHYLOCK What judgment shall I dread, doing no wrong? (4.1.88-89)

The effect of Shylock's retorts is to establish a perfect balance: each retort cancels out the effect of the *sententiae* of his adversary. Blank verse is important to this effect: the metrical equivalence between these lines heightens the impression of evenly weighted balance; and the line as a unit, which we clearly perceive in these exchanges, lends its unifying self-enclosure as a reinforcement of the enclosure of the summative statements themselves.[81]

I want, in concluding, to turn briefly to the end of this scene and to Shylock's final lines in the play. In a contribution to a volume on Shakespeare and the law, Stanley Cavell offers reasons for what he sees as the "instant collapse" which takes place within Shylock prior to Shylock's final lines.[82] Cavell's essay brings together several concerns which I want to attempt

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[80] Dialogue was one of the *Kunstformen* Jolles had proposed to investigate in his uncompleted manuscript.

[81] On the self-enclosed character of *sententiae*, cf. Jolles's chapter on the simple form of the saying, in *Simple Forms*, pp. 119-135. Laura Kolb, who makes use of Jolles's account of the saying, shows how *Merchant* is structured by commonplaces about borrowing and lending, proverbs with which the play is at the same time in tension (another axis then, I would argue, of the tension between simple form and "art form"). See Kolb, *Fictions of Credit in the Age of Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), pp. 77-110; citation of Jolles on p. 86.

[82] Stanley Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," in *Shakespeare and the Law*, ed. Bradin Cormack, et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), pp. 224. A fine undergraduate essay by Yash Kumbhat drew my attention to Cavell's piece.

to relate, in closing, to what I have said about the presence of the simple form of the case in *Merchant*. Cavell's essay centers on questions of language, and Cavell presents his reading as a continuation of earlier attempts to describe how Shakespeare, in *Merchant*,

> is portraying his command of, or his service to, language as such—to the fact of speech as such, as ineluctably claiming or denying, or, say, establishing or modifying or rejecting, in every breath, the right to, the standing deserving of, human exchange.[83]

Cavell's essay, in its probing of the psychological possibilities which might explain Shylock's withdrawal from speech into silence at the end of 4.1, arguably also participates in the tradition of character criticism associated with A. C. Bradley; and Bradley's mode of character criticism has, in turn, often been connected to the "psychology" of the eighteenth and nineteenth-century novel, which, as I noted earlier, Jolles connects to the "case" as instantiated in the discourse of casuistry.[84]

Cavell understands Shylock's sudden inner collapse as having been caused by Portia's interpretation of the "pound of flesh" clause in Shylock's bond. In Cavell's reading, the wording of Portia's interpretation of the clause confronts Shylock for the first time with the "horror of his wish," with the fact that he has been seeking Antonio's blood.[85] Cavell writes:

> At this point . . . with the knife in hand . . . Shylock perceives the madness in his fantastic fury; he has no quarrel with this man. Disfiguring him, or perhaps anyone, is no recompense for the injustices Jews learn to live with and perhaps become disfigured by. I imagine the knife to fall, as Shylock's mind and body fall slack, going through now irrelevant and diminishing memories of motion and interest. He cannot, even if he had

[83] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," p. 221.

[84] See above, p. 101.

[85] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," p. 225.

> thought to say it, claim that blood was irrelevant to his invented bond, because he now sees that Christian blood is what he wanted.[86]

The psychological depth of Cavell's reading of Shylock emerges not only out of a weighing both of Shylock's speech and of his subsequent silence, but also from Cavell's account of the consequences of the legalistic quibbling which takes place between Portia and Shylock over the exact terms of Shylock's bond.[87] Cavell's discussion points to the sense in which law is but a special instance of "language as such"; and Cavell conceives of language as such as the medium in which the "right to . . . human exchange" is constantly being negotiated. For Cavell, *Merchant* "precisely presents the fate of humans and their capacity for speech as incessantly demanding attention and calling for pertinent response from one another. As if we are the law for one another."[88] It is in presenting "the fate of humans" as being subject to the demand for response constantly placed on us by language itself—and subject to the demand to grant or deny recognition and "human exchange" to each other through speech or silence—that, for Cavell, the special force of *Merchant* lies.

I want to suggest that Cavell's account of how the capacity for "language as such" fates human beings to both control and be controlled by words and their speakers, and his account of the responsibility that this circumstance imposes, could be brought into alignment—uncomfortable alignment, to be sure, given the subject matter of *Merchant* and the political and ethical choices made by Jolles in 1933 and after—with Jolles's idea of the simple form of the case, and specifically, with Jolles's account of the case as a form which imposes a duty of

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[86] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," pp. 225-26.

[87] See Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," pp. 224-226.

[88] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," p. 224.

judgment and response; imposes the responsibility for a decision that is not given within the case itself. For the theory of simple forms, which posits that these forms are shaped "by language itself, without the aid of the poet," places emphasis on, precisely, the dynamic push-and-pull within language between those elements that *are* shaped by the poet (or person), and those that are always already shaped (or in the process of being shaped) by the community of language users, in ways that partially but never entirely come under the control of individual speakers. Cavell concludes his essay by offering autobiographical reflections prefaced by a critique of the familiar way of framing discussion of anti-Semitism in relation to *Merchant*. Cavell writes:

> The problem for me in understanding the play's conversation along this line [as "a question whether the play is anti-Semitic or whether it is about what it is to be anti-Semitic"] is that it seems to take too much for granted that we are apt or deft in recognizing expressions of anti-Semitism and feeling confident in the justice, or perhaps the mercy, in our responding to it, or in resisting response to it, in its conventional or in novel forms.[89]

The personal recollections Cavell goes on to relate each dramatize the surprise, bafflement, and subsequent fumbling of non-Jewish friends of Cavell's youth, when these friends were confronted with (by them) unexpected expressions of anti-Semitism directed towards Cavell or expressed in his presence. These incidents ("common as dirt, certainly not lethal, hardly even consequential") dramatize, in Cavell's telling, "the unfathomable reach and spread of lethal radiation in racial distortion and fumbling," a perception which, for Cavell, also lies at the core of Shakespeare's play.[90] I would suggest that *Merchant*'s relation to the simple form of the case

[89] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," p. 227.

[90] Cavell, "Saying in *The Merchant of Venice*," p. 228.

plays a part in making this perception available, to audiences as well as to Shakespeare; and plays a part, too, in the existence of a Shylock who is never fully Shakespeare's nor ever fully "ours," but who, emerging as he does from the world of the case, imposes on us a duty of response which we can never shift off onto the "text itself" of Shakespeare's play, but must bear ourselves, as best we can, in our ceaseless negotiations with language and with each other.

3

Plutarch, Shakespeare, and the Anecdote:

The Simple Form of the *Memorabile*

Antony's funeral oration is the most famous set-piece in *Julius Caesar*, but one of the play's longest speeches comes early on, in 1.2. During his "seduction" of Brutus, Cassius delivers a speech of forty-two lines, the primary focus of which is a brief, vivid story about Caesar:

> For once, upon a raw and gusty day,
> The troubled Tiber chafing with her shores,
> Caesar said to me, 'Dar'st thou, Cassius, now
> Leap in with me into this angry flood
> And swim to yonder point?' Upon the word,
> Accoutred as I was, I plunged in
> And bade him follow; so indeed he did.
> The torrent roared, and we did buffet it
> With lusty sinews, throwing it aside,
> And stemming it with hearts of controversy.
> But ere we could arrive the point proposed
> Caesar cried, 'Help me, Cassius, or I sink!'
> I, as Aeneas, our great ancestor,
> Did from the flames of Troy upon his shoulder
> The old Anchises bear, so from the waves of Tiber
> Did I the tired Caesar: and this man
> Is now become a god, and Cassius is
> A wretched creature, and must bend his body
> If Caesar carelessly but nod on him.[1]

Critics make much of this passage, noting how the swimming match between Caesar and Cassius exemplifies the emulous competition between men in Shakespeare's Rome; how Cassius'

[1] *Julius Caesar*, ed. David Daniell, Arden3 Series (Walton-on-Thames, UK: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1998), 1.2.100-118.

diction, with its high and chafing terms, amplifies the heroic register of Thomas North's Englished Plutarch; and how Cassius fashions himself Aeneas-like as Rome's latest founder.[2] We should also note that what Cassius presents in this speech is precisely *a brief, vivid narrative*—a short, self-contained retelling of a striking incident.

If we were searching for a more technical term than "story" to describe this brief narrative, we might reach for "exemplum," a term which Cassius and Shakespeare alike would have used to name the reference to Aeneas bearing Anchises which Cassius superimposes on his story. Within the classical rhetorical tradition the exemplum (Greek *paradeigma*) was primarily understood as an instrument of persuasion, a way of mobilizing past precedent in support of present argument. "Exemplum" in this rhetorical sense fits well with the calculating, insinuating manner of Cassius' attempts to manipulate Brutus, and with what critics have long observed to be the overwhelmingly public, rhetorical nature of this play. Exempla, and the wider concept of exemplarity, were of tremendous importance to early modern culture, and the idea of the exemplum as a model for and stimulus to ethical conduct has considerable if ambiguous relevance to *Julius Caesar*.

However, though much scholarship has addressed early modern exemplarity in relationship to literature, such accounts have rarely singled out the form of the exemplum itself for attention. What is the relationship between exemplarity as such and the exemplum as form? Timothy Hampton, in *Writing from History*, takes the "life" or the "figure" (i.e. historical

[2] On emulous competition between men as essential to republican ideology in Shakespeare's Rome, see Coppélia Kahn, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (London: Routledge, 1997), pp. 88-96. On how the heroic diction of this passage hearkens back to epic poetry, see Reuben A. Brower, *Hero and Saint: Shakespeare and the Graeco-Roman Heroic Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 219. On how Cassius fashions himself as Aeneas in this passage and elsewhere in the play, see Robert S. Miola, *Shakespeare's Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), pp. 82-89.

person), as opposed to the individual short narrative, as the most salient unit of exemplarity. While acknowledging that Renaissance humanists were much preoccupied with collecting and disseminating brief anecdotes, and that this preoccupation was an expression of their concern with exemplarity, Hampton focuses his analysis on larger-scale literary forms: Tasso's epic, Shakespeare's tragedy, Cervantes's novel.[3] In *Scenes of Instruction*, Jeff Dolven explores how "example" functions as a literary form in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*. After noting the signposts that Spenser uses to frame Redcrosse's experience in the House of Pride as an "ensample," Dolven poses the vertiginous question of precisely what, in an episode of roughly a hundred stanzas, even *is* the "ensample" Spenser has in mind. "Is *all* of this example? Can a narrative be an example? There is the complex, emblematic tableau of the sins, too. Are they examples? Can an allegory be an example?"[4] Dolven's disentangling of these questions points helpfully to a gap between Spenser's practice and the more basic formally-circumscribed linguistic shape that early modern exempla usually take—the kind of short brief narratives, often including quoted utterances, that early modern writers found in abundance in compilations like Valerius

[3] See Hampton's *Writing From History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1990). Hampton's avoidance of the exemplum is characteristic of the longstanding neglect of short and "simple" forms within literary theory. This neglect is beginning to be redressed, at least as regards short forms (which are more easily defined and less elusive than "simple" form). For some examples of recent work in this area (more could be cited, including notable recent work by early modernists on aphorisms, jests, and *sententiae*), see Alain Montandon, *Les formes brèves* (Paris: Hachette, 1982), Ben Grant, *The Aphorism and Other Short Forms* (London: Routledge, 2016), Andrew Hui, *A Theory of the Aphorism: From Confucius to Twitter* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), the "*Kleine Formen*" research program at the Humboldt University of Berlin (kleine-formen.de), and John H. Muse, *Microdramas: Crucibles for Theater and Time* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2017). For a study of the transmission of short classical quotations from antiquity to *Astérix*, see Ann Blair, "Les Locution Latines Dans Astérix," in *La Renaissance au Grand Large: Mélanges en l'honneur de Frank Lestringant*, ed. Véronique Ferrer et al., pp. 817-827 (Geneva: Droz, 2019).

[4] Jeff Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction in Renaissance Romance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), p. 145.

Maximus's *Memorable Doings and Sayings* or the collections of apophthegms attributed to Plutarch. These exempla collections gather easily identifiable specimens of the short literary form which I will be referring to in this chapter as *the anecdote.*

Shakespeare was evidently drawn to the formal affordances of anecdotes like the ones that appear in North's translation of Plutarch's *Lives*, the main source for *Julius Caesar*. Shakespeare invented Cassius' anecdote of the swimming match, but it resembles, in its brevity, vividness, and intimacy, other anecdotes recounted by Plutarch. Plutarch's *Life of Caesar* includes a memorable anecdote that also involves Caesar swimming (he is fleeing from the enemy during an skirmish in Alexandria):

> It is sayd, that then holding divers bookes in his hand, he did never let them go, but kept them alwayes upon his head above water, and swamme with the other hand, notwithstanding that they shot marvelously at him, and was driven somtime to ducke into the water: howbeit the boate was drowned presently.[5]

If the point of Plutarch's anecdote is the reverse of the one Cassius recounts—Plutarch emphasizes Caesar's valor rather than his frailty—yet the similarity is a reminder of how frequent anecdotes of this kind are in Plutarch's *Lives*. Cassius, though he does so for rhetorical and political rather than biographical reasons, is participating in the circulation of anecdotes, those nuggets of historical and biographical incident which Plutarch's *Lives* gathers in such ample supply.

Critics have occasionally recognized the strongly anecdotal character of Plutarchan biography as an important factor shaping Shakespeare's interaction with his source material, but work on Shakespeare's relationship to Plutarch has never been informed by a theory of the

[5] Thomas North, *Plutarch's Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, ed. G. Wyndham (London: D. Nutt, 1895), vol. 5, p. 51.

anecdote as a distinctive literary form.[6] A deeper understanding of the form and function of the anecdote shows how thoroughly permeated *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra* are by the aesthetic effects peculiar to this form. By reframing our understanding of these two plays in terms of their engagement with the anecdote, we can see how they participate in the changing status of history—not only historiography proper, but the role of historical habits of thought in everyday life—during the early modern period.

I begin this chapter by outlining a theory of the anecdote that departs in certain important respects from prevailing current thinking about early modern exemplarity, as well as from some common assumptions about the function of the anecdote within Plutarchan biography. I suggest that accounts of the Plutarchan anecdote which focus on its moral, didactic, or biographical value as an exemplum fail to place adequate emphasis on the effect of *facticity* or *concreteness* that is also a crucial component of the form. The distinctive effect of the anecdote, I argue, is to convey a sense of the *actuality* of historical events and persons. The anecdote produces this effect through its form, which works to index the presence of historical forces in a specifically formal way. Through this formal operation, the anecdote comes to function as, in effect, a deposit within language of collective acts of witnessing that originate in real historical events. It is in this sense

[6] Among more recent critics, Judith Mossman finds that "with its focus on the use of anecdote," the biographical method Plutarch outlines in the preface to the *Life of Alexander* "is particularly suitable for a dramatist to use" ("Plutarch and Shakespeare's *Henry IV parts 1 and 2*," *Poetica* 48 [1997], p. 109). Where Mossman and others such as Christopher Pelling are interested in how Shakespeare learned from *Plutarch's* narrative and dramatic techniques, I examine what Shakespeare takes from the *form* of the anecdote, rather than from the *author* Plutarch.

that I consider the anecdote to be, to borrow Joel Fineman's formulation, "the literary form or genre that uniquely refers to the real."[7]

Thus, despite the obvious importance, during the Renaissance, of the readerly and writerly tendency to conceive of the anecdote as an exemplum, I want to suggest that this moral or didactic way of grasping the anecdote does not exhaust the potential of the form. Instead, I view the anecdote as poised between competing regimes of the *exemplary* and the *factual*. These two tendencies of the anecdote are not always, in my view, wholly reconcilable, and the tension that can arise between them is an important force in *Julius Caesar* and *Antony and Cleopatra*. In *Julius Caesar*, the moral, exemplary tragic pattern suggested by the parallel between Brutus and Macbeth is ultimately subordinated to what I take to be the play's dominant aesthetic effect: the captivating vividness of Caesar's assassination, an event which the play, by translating anecdotal into dramatic form, makes us experience as eminently *real*—but as ambiguous in its moral significance. In *Antony and Cleopatra*, the factuality of the anecdote contributes to an effect of the historical in the play, an experience of living through the open-endedness of history. Yet this effect of factuality is ultimately subordinated to the force exerted within this play of the example. Shakespeare repeatedly frames Antony and others as examples, both through the choric commentary of minor characters and through the structure of the play itself. The play, despite the moral ambiguity so often attributed to it, and despite its preservation of anecdotal, particularized historical details, thus represents a notable assertion by Shakespeare of the exemplary and the idealizing, as opposed to the historical and particular, as the proper aim of drama.

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[7] Joel Fineman, "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction," in *The Subjectivity Effect in Western Literary Tradition: Essays Toward the Release of Shakespeare's Will* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 59-87.

I. Literary theories of the anecdote, memorabile, *and* fait-divers

The anecdote, like other small forms, has distinctive properties and affordances.[8] In defining the anecdote, I draw on three important contributions to a theory of the form: André Jolles's chapter on the "*memorabile*" in his *Simple Forms*; Roland Barthes' essay on the "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*"; and Joel Fineman's "The History of the Anecdote: Fiction and Fiction."[9] Of these writers, only Fineman uses the term "anecdote," but all three critics, despite their different terminology, address what I take to be the same underlying form. The convergences I observe between these three theorists suggest that the anecdote is best understood as a family of similar forms, which have historically appeared in different varieties and under different names. In addition to "anecdote," *fait-divers*, and *memorabile*, other important terms and forms include the *apophthegm* or *chreia* and "exemplum." The common element in all of these forms is that they are brief, self-contained, and drawn from historical fact (or at least presented as historical). "Anecdote," as I will use the word, is an umbrella term for this family of short forms with a special association with history.

[8] On how the concept of "affordance" can be used to analyze literary form, see the introduction to Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2015).

[9] See André Jolles, *Simple Forms*, trans. Peter J. Schwartz (New York: Verso, 2017), pp. 161-174; Roland Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," in *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 185-195, and Fineman, *op. cit*. There is also a larger body of secondary literature—mostly in German on mostly focused on modern literature—on the anecdote and forms closely related to it such as the apophthegm. See especially Rudolf Schäfer*, Die Anekdote: Theorie-Analyse-Didaktik* (Munich: R. Oldenbourg, 1982), Heinz Grothe, *Anekdote*, 2nd ed. (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1984), and *L'Anecdote: Actes du colloque de Clermont-Ferrand (1988) présentés par Alain Montandon* (Clermont-Ferrand, Association des publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Clermont-Ferrand, 1990), which includes a bibliographical orientation to this literature.

Barthes and Jolles emphasize the self-contained, enclosed quality of the anecdote. Barthes defines the *fait-divers* in terms of its being "immanent; it contains all its knowledge in itself; no need to know anything about the world in order to consume a *fait-divers*; it refers formally to nothing but itself."[10] Jolles says similarly that the *memorabile* "cuts itself out"—whether from the flow of events in the news or the flow of events in history—"detaches itself and becomes autonomous . . . takes on form."[11] Both critics see the anecdote as capable of achieving a certain degree of extension, but their emphasis on the self-contained, autonomous nature of the form suggests that, in the first instance, the anecdote is recognizable by its brevity and by the ease with which it can be excerpted and circulated.

Jolles and Fineman posit a special relationship between the anecdote and history. For Jolles, the *memorabile* is the "simple form" produced by the "mental disposition" of history: it is the literary form that is distinctive to the mental world we inhabit when we think in terms of the historical or the "actual." Jolles calls the aesthetic quality corresponding to this historical disposition the "concrete." When we follow the course of history, we discover that at certain moments, concrete details accumulate around a memorable event (Latin *concresco*, the root of "concrete," means "to coalesce"). Independent, short narratives that cut themselves out from the flow of history in this way are *memorabilia*. For Fineman, the anecdote is the "*historeme*; i.e., the smallest unit of history," and it is in a productive dialectic with the larger structures of historiographical thought. Fineman views historiography as wedded, from its beginnings in Thucydides up to Hegel and beyond, to an explanatory, teleological structure. Yet in order for history to remain truly historical, there must be room in it for contingency, for the

[10] Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," p. 186.

[11] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 169.

unpredetermined. The anecdote is for Fineman the form through which chance and contingency are inserted into the larger teleological structure of history.

Jolles and Barthes identify contrast and aberrant causality as part of the fundamental structure of the anecdote. For Jolles, the details included in the *memorabile* are selected and ordered in such a way—"through explanation, comparison, and contrast"—as to bring out a governing meaning in the *memorabile*, a sense in which the *memorabile* can be understood as "a sign of the times."[12] Thus, in the newspaper report of a suicide that Jolles analyzes as an instance of the *memorabile*, the report includes the detail that the wife of the man who killed himself was *attending a concert* on the evening of the suicide, a detail which a causally complete account of the event does not require (we only need to know that the wife was not at home). The sharp contrast between, on the one hand, the lively scene that "*attending a concert*" makes us imagine and, on the other, the loneliness of the bankrupt man brooding at home, heightens the concreteness of the suicide, deepens our apprehension of the meaning of this "fact." This juxtaposition of contrasting details that lack a clear causal connection to each other gives "an autonomous value to the governing fact" of the events narrated. Similarly, for Barthes, the *fait-divers* always acquires its autonomous, immanent significance through a relation between, at minimum, two elements. Thus, for Barthes, the sentence *The Palais de Justice has just been cleaned* is, by itself, "insignificant," but becomes a *fait-divers* with the addition of . . . *for the first time in over a century*.[13] For Barthes, relationships between elements in the *fait-divers* can take either the form of a "disturbance in causality" (i.e. an unexpected causal relationship between two terms) or of a striking "coincidence." For both Jolles and Barthes, the presence of

[12] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 164.

[13] Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," p. 187.

contrasting elements whose presence in the narrative is not justified by normal causal or explanatory relationships is thus a hallmark of the anecdote.

Finally, both Jolles and Barthes connect the anecdote with modern news. This is explicitly the case in Barthes' essay on the *fait-divers*, since the *fait-divers* is by definition a subgenre within modern news. As for Jolles, not only is the contemporary newspaper report of a suicide the first instance he gives of a *memorabile*, but his second is the assassination of William of Orange in 1584, a sensational historical event which was widely reported in pamphlets and other proto-news publications at the time of its occurrence.[14] It is partly through this connection between the anecdote and the news that I want to situate the significance of Shakespeare's use of the anecdote in drama.

To do so, I want to call to mind the claims about historical periods that stand in the background of Jolles's account of the *memorabile*. In *Simple Forms*, Jolles frequently suggests that certain simple forms will possess greater prominence within certain cultures and periods. Jolles suggests that precisely because the *memorabile* is so dominant in modernity, we have generally failed to recognize it as a distinctive form: its ubiquity has rendered it invisible. This dominance within modernity of the "mental disposition" of the historical leads, in Jolles's view, to a crowding out of other simple forms, which are perceived as invalid from the point of view of historical thinking. Hence, for example, the pejorative connotations within modernity of such

[14] On William of Orange's assassination, see *Simple Forms*, pp. 164-171. Jolles's analysis of an account of the assassination brings out many narrative elements that strikingly parallel Plutarch's account of Caesar's death. The parallel between the two figures was not lost on early modern writers, who compared William of Orange's assassination to Caesar's. On the assassination of William of Orange, with detailed attention to how the event was reported in pamphlets and letters both in Europe and England, see Lisa Jardine, *The Awful End of Prince William the Silent: The First Assassination of a Head of State with a Handgun* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

terms as "legend" and "saga," which come to be defined negatively as "untrue" or "not historical."

If Jolles speaks of the *memorabile* as a dominant form within modernity, earlier in *Simple Forms* he has spoken of the form he calls "legend" as dominant during the middle ages.[15] For Jolles, the paradigmatic instantiation of the legend is the saint's life, a form that emerges where the mental disposition of *imitation* is dominant. The saint's life furnished the middle ages, during which *Imitatio Christi* reigned as the dominant moral imperative, with images of active virtue that could be imitated or followed.

A curious feature of Jolles's theoretical framework is that he posits, for each simple form, a special kind of object to which the mental disposition characteristic of the form corrersponds. For the legend, this object is the *relic*. The relic is the thingly equivalent of the saint's life: the relic, too, exudes active virtue by the positive effects it causes even after the death of the saint. Towards the end of his chapter on the *memorabile*, Jolles compares the *relic* with the object he posits as characteristic of the *memorabile*, namely, the *document*. The cloak which William of Orange wore on the day of his assassination, and the bullet holes still visible in the wall of his palace at Delft, would, grasped from the mental disposition of imitation, be *relics*. Grasped from the mental disposition of history characteristic of the *memorabile*, they are instead *documents*. For as much as Jolles wants to draw a contrast here between the relic and the document, I find that the ease with which one and the same object can be grasped in these two ways quite suggestive. I will argue that the oscillation we see here between the mental disposition of *imitation* and that of *factuality* is in fact built into the literary forms in question. For the classical exemplum is also, like the saint's life, a literary form that grasps actions from the point of view

[15] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, pp. 29-30 and 42-44.

of imitation.[16] As I will try to show, the anecdotes which one finds in Plutarch can, to varying degrees in varying instances, be grasped as moral exempla *or* as *facts*. Exemplarity and factuality are at times superimposed, but still distinguishable. The oscillation and changing balance between these tendencies will be a major focus of this chapter.

I want to suggest that in the transitional early modern period, we see an unstable, oscillating coexistence of these two mental dispositions. Alongside the saint's life, which remains quite popular during the early modern period, classical history emerges as a newly attractive reservoir of imitable actions, lifted into prominence by humanists, who begin to prefer these classical models of virtue to the saint's life. This historical subject matter is still predominantly grasped by the "old" mental disposition of imitation; but it can also, increasingly, be grasped in a "factual" manner.[17] Thus it is that classical anecdotes are often combined with sensational contemporary events in the novella collections of the early modern period, in which a prototypical form of the "news" is beginning to emerge.[18]

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[16] Jolles briefly notes that Vergil's Aeneas—the exemplary figure in Cassius' anecdote—is an instance of "legend" (*Simple Forms*, p. 46).

[17] On the older modes of history, focused on exemplarity and the idea of *historia magistra vitae*, see George Nadel, "Philosophy of History Before Historicism," *History and Theory* 3 (1964): pp. 291-31, and Rüdiger Landfester*, Historia Magistra Vitae* (Geneva: Droz, 1972). For an investigation of the sixteenth-century emergence of rules for historiography that began to privilege facts and objectivity, see Anthony Grafton, *What Was History?* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). In raising the relationship between literary form and historiography, I am working a similar vein as Hayden White, *Metahistory* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1973), but with a focus on the non-authorial, "simple" form of the anecdote, as opposed to the "modes of emplotment" White derives from Northrop Frye, and which White applies to the major nineteenth-century historians he takes as his subjects.

[18] On the Renaissance novella as a precursor of modern news, see Peter Sloterdijk, "The Persistent Renaissance: The Italian Novella and News of Modernity," in his *What Happened in the 20th Century?*, trans. Christopher Turner (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018), pp. 111-126.

Especially when it comes to *Antony and Cleopatra*, attention to this criss-crossing of ancient anecdote with modern news opens up a novel way to construe Shakespeare's status as an author at the threshold of modernity. As I hope to show, the Plutarchan anecdote in *Antony and Cleopatra* strikingly performs the world-connecting function which recent scholarship associates with emergent modern news. Yet even as news and the anecdote appear in *Antony and Cleopatra* as both stimulating novelty and as information to be acted upon, the factuality of the anecdote is ultimately subordinated by Shakespeare to the moral imperative of the example. If Shakespeare in this play has one foot in an emerging modern world of facts, information, and global consciousness, he keeps the other firmly planted in a didactic, exemplary conception of the purpose of drama.

II. Plutarch and the anecdote

Plutarch's use of the anecdote has always been seen as a crucial aspect of his life-writing. Prompted by Plutarch's own programmatic statements about his biographical method, scholars have highlighted the special role played by anecdotes in creating the literary form of the "life." In the preface to the paired lives of Alexander and Caesar, Plutarch makes a distinction between writing history and writing lives:

> As we begin in this book to write the life of Alexander the King and the life of that Caesar by whom Pompey was overthrown, we shall, because of the number of deeds which are in prospect, make no other preface than to beg our readers not to complain, if we do not report all of their famous deeds and do not even report exhaustively on any of them, but do the majority in summary. For it is not so much histories that we are writing but lives, and there is not always in the most outstanding deeds a revelation of virtue or vice, but often a little matter like a saying or a joke hints at character more than battles where thousands die, huge troop deployments, or the sieges of cities. So, just as painters get likenesses from the face and the appearance of the eyes, by which character is hinted at, paying very little attention to the other parts of the body, so we must be allowed to

> penetrate rather the signs of the soul, and through these to shape the life of each man, leaving to others the magnitudes and battles.[19]

In deciding to follow the idea, articulated earlier by Xenophon, that men reveal themselves most in "off-duty" moments,[20] and in focusing his life of Alexander not on the conqueror's most famous actions (*praxein*), but on "little matter[s]" (*pragma brakhu*) like a "saying" (*rhema*) or a "joke" (*paidia*), Plutarch announces himself as the pre-eminent biographer of the short form.[21] He aims to tell not an "authoritative history" but "anecdotes which [reveal] character."[22] In the

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[19] I am quoting the translation Timothy Duff provides in his *Plutarch's* Lives*: Exploring Virtue and Vice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 14, since Duff's rendering of *pragma brakhu* as "little matters" nicely captures the importance Plutarch here attributes to short literary forms. Duff provides (pp. 14-22) a helpful discussion of the passage, which he analyzes as one of several "programmatic statements" of Plutarch's biographical method. Mark Beck also refers to this passage as "programmatic" in "Plutarch's Use of Anecdotes in the *Lives*" (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1998), p. 3. Beck's dissertation remains the only extensive study of the subject, but see also Philip A. Stadter, "Plutarch's Compositional Technique: The Anecdote Collections and the Parallel Lives," *Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies* 54 (2014): pp. 665-686, and "Anecdotes and the Thematic Structure of Plutarchean Biography," in *Estudios sobre Plutarco: aspectos formales*, ed. José Antonio Fernández Delgado and Francisca Pordomingo Pardo (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 1996), pp. 291-303. I have found Beck's introduction, which surveys modern theories of the anecdote and examines how well these theories apply to what we find in Plutarch, particularly helpful.

[20] Xenophon opens his *Symposium* by stating, "To my mind it is worthwhile to relate not only the serious acts of gentlemen but also what they do in their lighter moments [*paidiais*]" (*Symposium*, trans. O. J. Todd [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013], p. 565).

[21] Duff wisely insists that the distinction Plutarch makes here between biography and history should not be taken as an instance of generic definitions widely current in ancient thought, or as equally applicable to all of Plutarch's *Lives* (see Duff pp. 17, 20-21). Duff is right to be cautious here; however, the frequency with which scholars adduce this passage attests to the peculiarly compelling force of Plutarch's statement, which I would argue stems from its validity as a proposition about literary form: namely, that the anecdote has a privileged relationship with biography and history.

[22] Colin Burrow, *Shakespeare and Classical Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), p. 210. Burrow's book provides the most up-to-date overview of the influence of Plutarch on Shakespeare (pp. 202-239).

analogy Plutarch makes between his own art and that of the portraitist, these short narratives of private moments show us, in a way that major public events do not, the faces of Plutarch's subjects in intimate, lively detail.

Plutarch does not use the Greek *anekdota* in this passage, for the word had not yet acquired its modern sense. But our "anecdote," with its connotations of the private and the intimate, is well suited to the widespread notion of Plutarch as the paradigmatic anecdotal biographer. The term derives from the Greek *anekdota*, first used to refer to the unpublished writings of Procopius, and specifically to his written record of the scandalous occurrences that took place in private in the court of the emperor Justinian I. Procopius had also composed an official history of Justinian's reign. "Anecdote" thus carries associations with secret history, and with the private (and often the scandalous or lurid) as opposed to the public.[23] It is not surprising that in the modern era, the brief, self-contained narratives sprinkled throughout Plutarch's *Lives* have often been referred to by readers and scholars, in a non-technical but still revealing sense, as "anecdotes."

Yet while the idea of Plutarch as an anecdotal biographer is familiar in existing scholarship, I want to suggest in what follows that closer attention to the formal properties of the anecdote will alter our understanding of the significance of Plutarch's "anecdotal technique."[24] The anecdote, I will argue, is best understood in terms of Jolles's notion of "simple form," as an

[23] For an overview of the genre of the "secret history," spun off from the title *Anekdota* that had been given to Procopius unpublished memoirs, see *The Secret History in Literature, 1660-1820*, ed. Rebecca Bullard and Rachel Carnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017).

[24] The phrase is Philip A. Stadter's. See his "Anecdotes and the Thematic Structure of Plutarchean Biography," p. 291.

instance of a formal possibility inherent in language.[25] What many have taken to be a distinctive aspect of Plutarch's biographical method—the intimate, concrete way his anecdotes capture the character of his subjects—thus turns out to have its origins in something that is not distinctive to Plutarch at all, but is rather a feature of language more broadly.

The classical term for "anecdote" most readily associated with Plutarch is *apophthegm*. Two collections that have survived from antiquity with attributions to Plutarch bear this term in their titles: the *Apophthegmata Basileon kai strategon* (*Ap. reg.*) and the *Apophthegmata lakonika* (*Ap. Lac.*). These collections contain brief biographical anecdotes, many of which also appear in Plutarch's *Lives*.[26] The Greek *apophthegma* is derived from the combination of *phtheggomai,* "a *verbum dicendi* denoting a sharp or loud vocalization or utterance of some sort," and the prefix *apo*, which "acts as an intensifier laying stress on the clarity or sharpness of the utterance."[27] The etymology of the term thus emphasizes the pithy saying with which the

[25] For Jolles's definition of simple forms as "those that arise, so to speak, within language itself, developing themselves in language, without the aid of a poet," see *Simple Forms*, p .8.

[26] Whether or not the attribution of these collections to Plutarch is authentic is still under debate. Scholars have conjectured that these collections may derive from notes Plutarch created to aid the composition of the *Lives*; or that, alternatively, the collections were extracted from the *Lives* after the latter had already been completed. See Christopher Pelling, "The *Apophthegmata Regum et Imperatorum* and Plutarch's Roman Lives," in his *Plutarch and History* (London: Duckworth, 2002), pp. 65-90, and Philip A. Stadter, "Plutarch's Compositional Technique: The Anecdote Collections and the *Parallel Lives.*" Stadter's essay, which responds in detail to Pelling's, argues that the *Apophthegmata Laconica* represent an intermediate, more selective collection of apophthegms that Plutarch drew from a larger collection while he was preparing to write individual lives.

[27] Beck, "Plutarch's Use of Anecdotes in the *Lives*," p. 17, citing Wilhelm Gemoll, *Das Apophthegma: Literarhistorische Studien* (Vienna: Hölder-Pichler-Tempsky, 1924), p. 1. On the apophthegm, see also Th. Klauser and P. de Labriolle, "Apophthegma," in *Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum*, vol. 1, Stuttgart (1950) pp. 545-550, O. Gigon, "Apophthegma," in *Lexikon der Alten Welt*, ed. Carl Andresen et. al., Stuttgart (1965), 222f, F. H. Robbing and C. Strosetzki, "Apophthegma," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Rhetorik*, ed. Gert Ueding, vol. 1: A-Bib,

apophthegm typically concludes, and which consitutes the core of the apophthegm. The prefix also emphasizes a sense of something extracted, of speech that emerges clearly and loudly, that remains in the memory and is transmitted clearly in the historical record.[28] The notion of the *apophthegm* as a pithy utterance remains current in modern usage of the term, probably owing to the influence of the Plutarchan collections and the *Apophthegmata* of Erasmus in shaping modern associations.[29] Caesar's *Veni, vidi, vici* and *Et tu, Brute* are famous examples of pithy sayings often classed as apophthegms.

No formal definition of the *apophthegm* survives from antiquity. This may be because classical rhetoric had already provided a definition of the *chreia*, a form which, at least as it is defined in the rhetorical handbooks known as the *progymnasmata*, is more or less identical to the apophthegm.[30] The *chreia*, defined as a concise anecdote consisting either of a notable action, a saying, or a combination of the two, features prominently in the *progymnasmata*, where it provides material for rhetorical and grammatical exercises. Most scholars have accepted the etymology of *chreia* offered in the *progymnasmata*, where the meaning "use" is taken to describe the moral or didactic utility of the short sayings captured in *chreiai*. However, Denis Michael Searby has recently offered a detailed reconsideration of the plausibility of this

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(Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1992), pp. 823-825, Jan Stenger, "Apophthegma, Gnome und Chrie. Zum Verhältnis dreier literarischer Kleinformen," *Philologus* 150 (2006): pp. 203-221.

[28] As Beck notes, the earliest usage of *apophthegma* occurs in Xenophon (*Hell.* 2.3.56). The context of Xenophon's usage strongly suggests that Xenophon thinks the value of the apophthegm lies in its ability to capture the character of an individual. See Beck, "Plutarch's Use," pp. 17-18.

[29] On Erasmus and the apophthegm, see Louis Lobbes, *Des* Apothegmes *à la* Polyanthée*: Erasme et le genre des dits mémorables* (Paris: Honoré Champion, 2013).

[30] This observation is made by Vicente Ramon, "Morfología del apotegma en la obra biográfica de Plutarco: propeustas y perspectivas de estudio," in *Estudios sobre Plutarco*, p. 282.

etymology, placing emphasis on how little we know about the origins of the term *chreia* as used to describe a concise anecdote, and offering an alternative hypothesis as to the development of this meaning of the word.[31]

In addition to *chreia*, *apophthegm* is also closely related to several other terms also current in ancient literature and rhetoric, the most significant of which are *apomnemoneuma* (Lat. *memorabile*), and *paradeigma* (Lat. *exemplum*). *Apomneumoneuma* (or its Latin equivalent, *memorabile*) is most familiar from the title of Xenophon's biography of Socrates, which takes the form of a collection of anecdotes, or "recollections," as *apomnemoneumata* is sometimes translated. The *progymnasmata* distinguish the *apomnemoneuma* from the *chreia* in that the latter is brief, the former extended. The *apo* prefix, shared with *apophthegma*, may similarly suggest a sense of something cutting itself out from the flow of history or of speech. A *paradeigma* (Lat. *exemplum*) is a pattern, sample, or comparison. In rhetoric, beginning with Aristotle, the term acquires a technical meaning.[32] It is used to refer to a historical example or precedent introduced into speech for the purposes of persuasion. The term continues to evolve, receiving gradually more and more elaborate definition, in the rhetorical writings of such authors as Quintilian. Like *apophthegm* and *apomnemoneuma*, the root meaning of *exemplum* conveys

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[31] Searby speculates that the meaning of *chreia* as anecdote develops out of the sense of "familiar dealings" rather than "use," and that this usage develops into a use of the term to refer to "verbal conversation." Searby views the usage of *chreia* in the *progymnasmata* as a specialized one that was more or less limited to rhetorical, classroom contexts; in ordinary conversation and non-classroom contexts, *apophthegma* remained the more popular term. Searby's article is probably now the best starting point for a consideration of the fluid and not strictly defined borders between the terms *chreia*, *apomnemoneuma*, and *apophthegma*. See his "The Fossilized Meaning of *chreia* as Anecdote," *Mnemosyne* 72 (2019): pp. 197-228.

[32] Karl Alewell, *Über das rhetorische paradeigma: Theorie, Beispielsammlungen, Verwendung in der römischen Literatur der Kaiserzeit* (Leipzig: August Hoffmann, 1913), remains the most authoritative handling.

the sense of something being removed or cut out.[33] Like *chreia*, *exemplum* carried strong connotations of moral and didactic usefulness.

By the time of Cicero, whose statements about the proper use of exempla and whose model rhetorical practice were extremely influential, the exemplum had become such an oratorical staple that exempla were gathered together in collections. Valerius Maximus' *Facta et dicta memorabilia* is such a collection, though there were almost certainly others.[34] Such collections served the need of orators for a ready supply of exempla; and it is likely that collections such as Valerius Maximus' were also read simply for the inherent interest and entertainment value of the subject matter they contained.[35] What the *apophthegm*, the *chreia*, the *apomnemoneuma*, the *memorabile*, the *paradeigma*, and the *exemplum* all share is a special association with the historical. This association has its basis in the operation of a common formal structure, which, in its various aspects, is clearly on display in Plutarch's *Lives*.

Scholars of ancient biography often identify a tripartite structure as typical for the anecdote, breaking the form down into parts termed *occasio*, *provocatio*, and *dictum*.[36] A

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[33] See Hildegard Kornhardt, *Exemplum: Eine bedeutungsgeschichtliche Studie* (Borna-Leipzig: Robert Noske, 1936), for an exploration of the semantic development of the term, which she suggests originates in the context of the marketplace, in which an *exemplum* (in a sense preserved in English "sample") is a piece of a product (e.g. a textile) which can be examined by a potential buyer who is evaluating its quality. This derivation resonates with the idea of the exemplum as a cutting from history that gives a tactile sense of the quality or feeling of the historical period in question.

[34] On Valerius Maximus and the exemplum tradition, see especially W. Martin Bloomer, *Valerius Maximus and the Rhetoric of the New Nobility* (Chapel Hill, University of North Carolina Press, 1992), and Roberto Guerrini, "Tipologia di «Fatti e Detti Memorabili»: Dalla Storia all'Exemplum," in *Studi su Valerio Massimo* (Pisa: Giardini, 1981), pp. 11-28.

[35] Bloomer writes that "The peculiar and unseasonable charm of Valerius Maximus should be apparent throughout, for the anecdote has an unmistakable, universal fascination" (p. 9).

[36] See Beck, "Plutarch's Use," p. 12, citing Neureuter, Schäfer, and Rohmer.

situation is sketched (the *occasio*) in which the protagonist of the apophthegm is provoked or questioned in some way (the *provocatio*); his or her subsequent response, which can be an action or an utterance or a combination of the two, constitutes the *dictum*, the core of the apophthegm. We can see this structure at work in an anecdote from early in Plutarch's *Life of Caesar*, during Caesar's military campaign in Spain:

> An other time also when he was in Spayne, reading the history of Alexanders actes, when he had red it, he was sorowfull a good while after, and then burst out in weeping. His frends seeing that, marveled what should be the cause of his sorow. He aunswered them, Doe ye not thinke sayd he, that I have good cause to be heavie, when king Alexander being no older than my selfe is now, had in old time wonne so many nations and contries: and that I hitherunto have done nothing worhty of my selfe?[37]

Here, the *occasio* is Caesar weeping while reading a life of Alexander; the *provocatio* is his friends' wonder-struck request that he explain the cause of his sorrow; the *dictum* is Caesar's answer. Although not all of the apophthegms in Plutarch's *Ap. reg.* and *Ap. Lac.* can be made to fit this schema, the majority can, as Mark Beck observes; this basic structure can thus be viewed as normative for the *apophthegm*. For Beck, the significance of this normative structure lies in the "dynamism" which he identifies as "the main characteristic of the developed anecdote."[38] Beck makes no explicit connection between this tripartite structure and the other defining features he derives from modern theories of the anecdote, namely that the form provokes an "attitude of reflection," that it lays claim to historicity or factuality, and that it is "representative" (i.e. represents the great by means of the small).[39] Yet if we look more closely at the

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[37] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 5, p. 11-12.

[38] Beck, "Plutarch's Use," p. 33.

[39] See Beck, "Plutarch's Use," p. 36.

apophthegms in the *Life of Caesar*, these features of the anecdote, along with others observed by Barthes, Jolles, and Fineman, reveal themselves as common products of a unified formal mechanism.

Consider the apophthegm in which Caesar weeps after reading the life of Alexander. We find here what Barthes, in his analysis of the *fait-divers*, calls a *disturbance in ordinary causality*.[40] Something unusual, something wonderful, thrusts itself out from the stream of everyday life. Caesar, weeping—this strange, notable occurrence seems inexplicable to those looking on. But Caesar's explanation connects his weeping to a hidden cause: his enormous ambition, which rivals that of another world historical figure, Alexander.[41] The event recounted in this apophthegm has no direct impact on the outcome of Caesar's Spanish campaign. The apophthegm links a cause with an effect, but not in order to explain the subsequent course of historical events. Rather, the dyad of cause and effect crystallized in this apophthegm captures, in concrete form, a single fact: *Caesar's enormous ambition*. An event accompanied by certain concrete details cuts itself out from the flow of history and acquires an autonomous value (in Barthes's language: the event is *immanent*, self-contained). The basic structure of the apophthegm uses a minimal number of elements (concrete details: Caesar weeping after reading the life of Alexander) to capture a disturbance in ordinary causality. This disturbance turns out to index an extraordinary, otherwise invisible causal agent.[42] That causal agent is the *fact* which the

[40] See Barthes, p. 188.

[41] Because of this cognitive process—a moment of wonder which leads to inquiry and then to the discovery of an invisible cause—Philip Fisher's analysis of the aesthetics of wonder can be helpfully applied to the form of the anecdote. See his *Wonder, the Rainbow, and the Aesthetics of Rare Experiences* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[42] This indexical function of the anecdote has some points of contact with the theory outlined by Alfred Gell in *Art and Agency: An Anthropological Theory* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998). Adapting Gell's terminology, anecdotes about Caesar could be considered as part of the

structure or form of the anecdote renders concrete. In this apophthegm, that *fact* can be described with the phrase (Jolles would call this the "governing meaning" controlling the elements in the anecdote): *Caesar's enormous ambition*.

The significance of the tripartite structure of the apophthegm is thus that it functions to make a fact concrete. In this way, a crucial defining feature of the anecdote—its claim to historicity or facticity—emerges as an effect of form. Caesar's enormous ambition actually *existed*: it altered the course of world history, as a wake of documentary evidence confirms. And yet, as Plutarch intuits in his preface to the *Life of Alexander*, the narration of Caesar's major accomplishments does not capture the reality of his ambition in a specifically formal way, does not sufficiently render, in language, the facticity of that ambition. Paradoxically, it is only through the "little matter" of the anecdote that the enormous force of Caesar's personality becomes concrete in language, as the small comes to represent the great. It is through this specifically formal, literary process that the anecdote acquires its privileged relationship with the real and the historical.

A different apophthegm, also focused on Caesar's enormous ambition, reveals another typical formal structure of the anecdote. Early in the *Life*, we hear how, after the death of Metellus, the ambitious young Caesar made suit to the Roman people to be elected as pontifex maximus. Right before we learn that Caesar won the election, Plutarch tells us:

> On the election day, his mother came to the front door of the house, with tears in her eyes, to see him on his way. As he took his leave of her he said, 'Today, mother, you'll

"extended mind" of Caesar, i.e. as simulacra, verbal relics stemming from the actual presence of Caesar himself and continuing to transmit his agency—as evidenced by their animating effect on readers.

> see your son either pontifex maximus or an exile.' The votes were cast, and it was a close-run thing, but Caesar won.[43]

Here, another moment of unusual intimacy—a tearful parting between mother and son—is inserted into the chronicle of Caesar's political career. This brief scene coalesces around a moment of crisis. Two possible outcomes, standing in stark contrast, branch out from this moment: Caesar will be either *pontifex maximus* or *an exile*. One could argue that this apophthegm, like the previous example, works to bring out Caesar's ambition, by showing how much he is willing to risk in service of it. Yet we also see Caesar having surrendered his fate to Fortune. The extreme divergence between *pontifex maximus* and *exile* brings out the uncertainty and fear inspired by one who hazards all on a single throw of the dice.

Barthes observes a paradoxical relationship between coincidence and predestination in the *fait-divers* which illuminates this facet of Plutarch's use of the anecdote. Robbers use a blowtorch to crack the safe of a blowtorch manufacturer: the coincidence is so striking that it suggests not chance but fate. Or, as Barthes puts it, human beings themselves possess the blindness they attribute to Fortune, who far from being sightless is a cunning artificer, a maker of signs.[44] The antithesis created by placing *pontifex maximus* next to *exile* is one such sign. Just as Caesar's weeping functioned as an index of Caesar's ambition, so here a striking antithesis

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[43] Plutarch, *Roman Lives*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 306-7. North's translation substitutes, in the quotation from Caesar, the paired phrase "Bishoppe of Rome, or banished from Rome," emphasizing the antithesis through alliteration (North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 5, p. 7).

[44] Barthes, very suggestively in the context of my attempt to relate the *fait-divers*/anecdote to drama, connects such fated coincidences to the formal device of the *acme* in tragedy. See Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," p. 193.

indicates the guiding hand of Fate or Fortune. The striking antithesis is a disturbance of ordinary causality, an inexplicable event forcing us to infer a hidden agent at work behind the scenes.

These two examples show two sides of the anecdote, both working through a common formal operation. The first example crystallizes Caesar's enormous ambition, an extraordinary force that will affect world history. The second example crystallizes the agency of Fate or Fortune (in more modern, secular terms: the complex, unpredictable interplay of forces that we consolidate under terms such as "chance"). These two sides of the anecdote make clear why the anecdote has a privileged relationship to history, since history is precisely the unpredictable, unpredetermined unfolding of events that results from the interplay of human agency with chance.

Recognition of these two sides of the anecdote allows us to expand our definition of the anecdote beyond the apophthegm. Valerius Maximus' *Memorable Doings and Sayings* is perhaps the most important collection of anecdotes that has come down to us from antiquity. Book I of this compilation concerns religion, and the bulk of the exempla contained therein fall under the following categories: "Of Augury," "Of Omens," "Of Prodigies," "Of Dreams," "Of Wonders." These kinds of exempla (which illustrate why the didactic concept of exemplarity fails to explain the full range of what appears in the exempla collections) appear frequently in Plutarch, and in much the same manner as the apophthegm. Omens and portents are self-enclosed, extractable, and memorable; and they are often introduced with the same formulae Plutarch uses to introduce apophthegms (e.g. "it is reported that," "for proof of which"). These forms also utilize the same formal mechanism that one finds in the apophthegm: a disturbance in ordinary causality which indexes the agency of an unseen power.

The *Life of Caesar* is full of such portents, dreams, and omens, many of which reappear in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*. As Casca recounts with breathless wonder,

> A common slave—you know him well by sight—
> Held up his left hand, which did flame and burn
> Like twenty torches joined; and yet his hand,
> Not sensible of fire, remained unscorched.
>
> (1.3.15-18)

While the apophthegm recounting the day of Caesar's election as pontifex maximus showed, in a sense, both sides of the anecdote—Caesar's enormous ambition is shown in his willingness to hazard all; having done so, he appears as the plaything of Fortune—the above portent would seem to point exclusively toward the agency of the gods. A disturbance in ordinary causality—the hand that burns yet remains unscorched—points toward the predetermined event to come: the assassination of Caesar.

During the build-up to the assassination of Caesar and during Plutarch's description of the murder itself, continuous narration ceases almost entirely. We find instead an increasingly dense accumulation of fragmentary facts, a mosaic that reflects the event back at us through clustered, individual tesserae. Plutarch never attributes these *memorabilia* to specific authors, texts, or witnesses. The authority of these *memorabilia* is instead an internal function of their form: as indices, they bear witness to their own actuality. These anecdotes, which must have circulated widely, present themselves as having originated in the event itself. Thus, though this final portion of the *Life* does reveal deliberate crafting on the part of Plutarch—the order in which he arranges the *memorabilia*, the specific words he uses to recount them—yet the account of Caesar's assassination amounts, in a more profound sense, to an act of collective witnessing deposited in the common fund of language itself.

Portents and dreams are a prominent element of this aggregate construction, as are striking coincidences, such as the fact that Caesar's assassination chances to take place before the statue of Pompey. In several apophthegms, the faces of key actors in the conspiracy emerge in vivid, concrete detail, such as when Caesar says he fears "these pale visaged and carian leane people," meaning Brutus and Cassius.[45] A series of anecdotes about how close the assassination came to missing its mark creates suspense and delay, thereby bringing the assassination into heightened relief.[46] Finally, we have the apophthegms and details that cluster around the climactic moment of the murder itself: the first blows, the words spoken by Caesar and the conspirators, Caesar's recognition of Brutus. These are, as it were, the kernels at the core of the larger, extended anecdote that is constituted by the entire event of Caesar's assassination.

The *memorabile* at the absolute core of this larger structure takes different forms in different texts, yet these different versions of the central moment are, I think, recognizably similar, even interchangeable. Shakespeare's version is "*Et tu, Brute?*—Then fall, Caesar" (3.1.77). This is close to the Greek phrase recorded by Appian, "*Kai su, teknon?*," which explicitly includes the idea that Brutus was Caesar's illegitimate son. (In Plutarch, the idea of Brutus as Caesar's son crystallizes in a different detail: the fact that Brutus *stabs Caesar in the groin*.) In Plutarch, in place of "*Kai su, teknon?*," we have a non-verbal detail that produces a similar effect:

> So divers running on a heape together to flie uppon Caesar, he looking about him to have fledde, sawe Brutus with a sworde drawen in his hande readie to strike at him: then he let

[45] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 5, p. 64.

[46] For instance, Artemidorus's attempt to inform Caesar of the conspiracy (North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 5, p. 66).

> Cascaes hand goe, and casting his gowne over his face, suffered everie man to strike at him that woulde.[47]

In the terminology of the *progymnasmata*, we could say that Plutarch subsitutes an actional apophthegm for the verbal or "mixed" apophthegms of Appian and Shakespeare. What is common to both Plutarch and Shakespeare, however, is the moment of recognition, followed by resignation: when Caesar sees Brutus among the conspirators, he gives up. When Caesar sees that Brutus is among the conspirators, he recognizes that a power greater than himself has willed his death, and he resigns himself to his fate. (In Shakespeare's version, Caesar fittingly converts acquiescence to command: "Then fall, Caesar.") Embedded in this apophthegm is a contest of forces: the force of fate is here indexed in part by its capacity to overcome the force of Caesar.

III. The anecdote in "Julius Caesar"

Already in the opening scenes of *Julius Caesar*, Shakespeare weaves together memorable anecdotes from Plutarch. The whole brief narrative of Antony's attempt to crown Caesar at the Lupercal is an extended anecdote in Plutarch. Shakespeare threads both the apophthegm of the soothsayer and Caesar's apophthegm about Cassius' pale and lean appearance into the Lupercal anecdote. The actual crowning at the Lupercal takes place offstage: we hear the shouts of the crowd as an ambient effect, enveloping us in the event as it unfolds. While the attempted crowning is taking place, we hear Cassius' seduction of Brutus, which reaches its climax in the anecdote about Caesar swimming. Then, after Caesar and his train return to the stage with angered faces and then leave, Casca reports a highly stylized, satirical version of the offstage events. The anecdote, and the force of the actual that it possesses, are thus both directly

[47] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 6, pp. 197-8.

harnessed (in the apophthegm of the soothsayer and Caesar's apophthegm about Cassius' pale and lean appearance) and subjected to ironic, cynical pressure (Cassius' anecdote about Caesar, with its obvious ulterior motives; Casca's satirical rendition of the Lupercal crowning).[48]

If Shakespeare submits the anecdote's formal claim to veracity to a certain amount of cynicism, the strongest aesthetic effect of the play remains the facticity of the assassination itself. The theater, unlike the other literary arts, already possesses the concreteness and actuality of its actors, with their bodies, gestures, and faces. The distinguishing mark of the anecdote, as a literary form, is that it shows us its subjects in concrete, intimate detail: we see their faces, their clothing, their manner of walking. As Plutarch implies in the preface to the *Life of Alexander*, the anecdote is the literary equivalent of the portrait, concentrating attention on the face and the eyes, the external signs of the soul. The special accomplishment of *Julius Caesar* is its marriage of literary with theatrical concreteness. This animating, revivifying technique brings the audience *within* the anecdote, *within* history. It brings history back to life. In the climax at the center of *Julius Caesar*, we hear the famous words, with their frisson of Latin authenticity, the satisfaction of their elegant balance and conclusiveness: "*Et tu, Brute?* Then fall, Caesar." Whatever we see at this moment on the faces of the actor playing Caesar, the actor playing Brutus, is no longer mere acting but becomes, for a moment, something real, something historical.

The comparison often drawn between the soliloquies of Brutus and those of Macbeth can help to clarify the historical effect that the anecdote produces in *Julius Caesar*. For the similarity between Brutus and Macbeth extends from the see-saw language of their premeditations to the way their single decision catalyzes a chain of terrible events. The sense that the protagonists of

[48] Timothy Hampton sees in the play an "emphasis on the power of rhetoric to transform and manipulate the significance of events in history" (see *Writing from History*, p. 221.)

Shakespeare's tragedies bear only partial responsibility for the destruction they unleash is an important part of the overall emotional effect these plays create. This tragic nexus between the single choice of the protagonist and an unseen web of larger forces exists in miniature in the *memorabile*, when it takes the form of an apophthegm like *Et tu, Brute*? The *memorabile* captures *man playing with the higher powers that play with him* (the gods, Fortune, etc.). For this reason, it is history writ small.

The famous moral ambiguity of the play, the way it seems to balance the volatile question of tyrannicide on a knife-edge, can thus be understood in terms of a tension built into the form of anecdote between the exemplary and the factual. The assassination of Caesar is above all grasped in this play as a *fact*, one that produces wonder, terror, and excitement, but whose moral significance remains ambiguous. Barthes writes that the *fait-divers* places us in "a world not of meaning but of signification, which is probably the status of literature, a formal order in which meaning is both posited and frustrated."[49] Shakespeare's juxtaposition of the funeral orations of Brutus and Antony calls attention to the quantum of purely potential significance that arises from the assassination of Caesar. This evidently major event causes great animation in the assembled mob of Roman citizens, but the direction in which this animation will be channelled is unpredetermined, and is ultimately left to be guided by the rhetorical manipulations of first Brutus and then, much more decisively, Antony. The murder of Caesar is thus never completely grasped in exemplary terms (much as the conspirators themselves imagine that their action will be restaged to future generations who will envision them as heroes). Instead, as with Cassius' anecdote about Caesar swimming, anecdotes function in this play to release quanta of rhetorical energy, which are then deployed and manipulated for political ends. And as the characters in the

[49] Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," p. 194.

play manipulate the anecdote for political ends, so the play itself manipulates the anecdote for theatrical ones: ultimately, those of animating and entertaining.

IV. *The anecdote in Antony and Cleopatra*

As in *Julius Caesar*, the anecdote in *Antony and Cleopatra* oscillates between the exemplary and the factual. When we follow the dictum of *historia magistra vitae* and turn to history in search of lessons for life, we evaluate the actions of historical figures in moral terms. But history as it appears to us in the short form of the anecdote does not always possess an unambiguous moral, as the theorists I have drawn on for my account of the anecdote suggest. Barthes, for one, describes the *fait-divers* as something like a fact without a moral. He writes that the function of the *fait-divers* as a mass art is to "reassure" modern human beings by fulfilling their ancient need for signs, while at the same time freeing them from "responsibility" by leaving the content or meaning of these signs "uncertain."[50] Similarly, Jolles defines the *memorabile* in part by distinguishing its distinctive "factuality" from the moral imperative inherent in such forms as the saint's life and the exemplum.[51] *Antony and Cleopatra*, like *Julius Caesar*, straddles the two "mental dispositions" of factuality and imitation which Jolles associates respectively with the *memorabile* and the "legend." In this play, we see an oscillation between the moralized exemplum and the anecdote as fact.

The anecdote as fact in *Antony and Cleopatra* contributes to the distinctive experience this play gives us of living through history. Blair Hoxby has recently argued that *Antony and Cleopatra* shows us Shakespeare writing as a "historian" rather than a "poet." If the play is, as

[50] Barthes, "Structure of the *Fait-Divers*," p. 194.

[51] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 169.

Coleridge believed, "by far the most wonderful" of Shakespeare's historical plays, for Hoxby this is "because it achieves a tragic sublimity by means of, rather than in spite of, its fidelity to the historian's particulars and the life-writer's anecdotes."[52] Hoxby zeroes in on the anecdotal method of Plutarch's *Lives* as a key influence on Shakespeare's emphatically non-Aristotelean conception of tragedy in *Antony and Cleopatra*. Like Plutarch, Shakespeare preserves in *Antony and Cleopatra* the "particulars and the occlusions of history," thereby placing us "in the position of the historian, faced with a record of words and deeds that resists perspicuous analysis."[53] Moreover, by piling up events and anecdotes spanning a decade of historical time and imbuing the play with still more temporal depth through the many reminiscences voiced by its main characters (reminiscences—or *memorabilia*—that are, I would add, themselves worked up from Plutarchan anecdotes), Shakespeare "makes the experience of duration intensely personal," and "subjects us to the theatrical experience of enduring being through time."[54]

Yet the anecdote does more than reveal character, and while "occlusions" in the historical record may leave the motives of Antony and Cleopatra opaque, that kind of opacity has nothing to do with the specifically formal reality effect of the anecdote. In *Antony and Cleopatra* the course of world history is on several occasions seen to pivot on a single decision or action. These singular occasions are crystallized in anecdotes from Plutarch. Like the anecdote of Caesar before his election as pontifex maximus, or the anecdotes in which the assassination of Caesar is

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[52] Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy?: Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), p. 269.

[53] Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy?*, pp. 261, 268-9. Hoxby has in mind the way Shakespeare, like Plutarch, leaves questions of motive and interior psychology unresolved, as for instance the issue of whether or not Cleopatra betrayed Antony. "Shakespeare, if anything, mutiplies the reality effects that he finds in the historian" (p. 268).

[54] Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy?*, pp. 264, 261.

nearly diverted by a chance occurrence, these anecdotes of crisis insert moments of radical contingency into the flow of historical events, making us alive to the open-endedness of history, to the fact that not providence or Fortune alone, but human beings and their actions can determine its course.

The importance of this kind of anecdote for *Antony and Cleopatra* is most evident in the anecdote of Pompey's refusal, during the scene of the feast that takes place aboard his ship, of Menas's offer to cut the throats of the triumvirs and make Pompey "lord of the whole world."[55] In Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius*, the episode of Sextus Pompeius's inroads in Italy and of the peace Marcus Antonius and Caesar make with him is relatively brief. This brief episode is punctuated by two apophthegms, both of which appear in multiple other ancient sources. The first of these apophthegms is a jest that Pompey makes to Antonius, a play on words which cannot fully be translated out of Latin but which Shakespeare nevertheless pointedly includes in *Antony and Cleopatra*.[56] The second apophthegm is Menas's offer to Pompey. Here it is in North's rendition:

> Now in the middest of the feast, when they fell to be merie with Antonius love unto Cleopatra: Menas the pirate came to Pompey, and whispering in his eare, said unto him: Shall I cut the gables of the ankers, and make thee Lord not only of Sicile and Sardinia, but of the whole Empire of Rome besides? Pompey having pawsed a while upon it, at length aunswered him: Thou shouldest have done it, and never have told it me, but now we must content us with that we have. As for my selfe, I was never taught to breake my faith, nor to be counted a traitor.[57]

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[55] *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. John Wilders, Arden3 Series (London: Cengage Learning, 1995), 2.7.63. Subsequent references to the play are to this edition.

[56] Pelling notes that Pompey's jest is also found in Cassius Dio and in Velleius Paterculus; in addition, it is recounted in the *De Viris Illustribus* attributed during the Renaissance to Aurelius Victor. See Plutarch, *Life of Antony*, ed. C. B. R. Pelling (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 205.

[57] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 6, p. 32.

We see here the dialectic between exemplarity and factuality that the anecdote crystallizes. Pompey's refusal on the grounds of personal honor ("I was never taught to break my faith") is a memorable example of integrity; at the same time, the weight of this anecdote derives from the sense it gives of a moment in which, were it not for the decision of a man whose character this anecdote clearly and concretely reveals, history could have taken a radically different course. The form of the anecdote thus provides a hinge between biography, considered as analogous with portraiture, and history. The anecdote shows us, in intimate detail, the faces of the actors in history, in moments where the soul we see through that face determines the course of history. This kind of anecdote makes us feel the truth of Pascal's dictum: *Le nez de Cléopâtre, s'il eût été plus court, toute la face de la terre aurait changé* (*Pensées* n. 162).

Fineman suggests that this reality effect is the defining effect of the anecdote more generally. The contingency captured in the anecdote inserts a gap into the teleological narration that characterizes historiography from its beginnings in Thucydides. The anecdote of Pompey's refusal is one such gap. It holds history open, making us feel history *as* history, as an unpredetermined unfolding of events in time. This effect of historicity or factuality is distinct from the exemplarity we also see in this anecdote, and it is crucial to the experience Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra* gives us of living through world history.

"World history," because the experience of history that *Antony and Cleopatra* gives us is marked by a sense of the global. As many critics have observed, the language of *Antony and Cleopatra* constantly reminds us of the global stakes of the play's events.[58] The weight of

[58] See Frank Kermode, *Shakespeare's Language* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, Giroux, 2000), p. 218, and Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy?*, p. 263.

Pompey's refusal stems from the fact that it is lordship of "the whole world" (2.7.63) that Menas offers him. When a servant carries the drunken Lepidus away from the feast in this same scene, Enobarbus jests that the servant is "a strong fellow . . . 'A bears the third part of the world" (2.7.89-91). Shakespeare's remarkable conceit in this play is to yoke the global stakes of the central action with the tiny accidents of chance and whim, the trivial, banal, even vulgar anecdotal incidents with which so much of the rest of the play concerns itself.[59] This conceit grows out of the anecdote, where memorable single actions and world history collide.

The anecdote brings the decisive actors in world history before us in intimate, lively detail. The sense of contact with the real we get from seeing Pompey up close shrinks and unifies our world. Pompey's refusal has affected world history, hence affected us: the anecdote makes that line of force tangible in language. This is the connection between the anecdote and *news*. The modern idea of news, writes Stephen Wittek in an important recent study, "operates according to the logic of a modern epistemology, a way of knowing rooted in an assumption of one's place within a vast, interconnected world."[60] Modern news generates a shared present and a shared space, a simultaneous public, a world stage on which events "in" the news take place. *Antony and Cleopatra* gives us the sense of a being in a world whose interconnectedness is both evoked and created by the circulation of news. The play crosses two historical moments in which

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[59] As Anna Jameson put it: "But to make the extreme of littleness produce an effect like granduer—to make the excess of frailty produce an effect like power—to heap up together all that is most unsubstantial, frivolous, vain, contemptible, and variable, till the worthlessness be lost in the magnitude, and a sense of the sublime spring from the very elements of littleness—to do this belonged only to Shakespeare, that worker of miracles." See the passage from her *Shakespeare's Heroines: Characteristics of Women, Moral, Poetical, and Historical* (1832) reprinted in *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages: Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Bloom's Literary Criticism, 2008), pp. 67-9.

[60] Stephen Wittek, *The Media Players: Shakespeare, Middleton, Jonson, and the Idea of News* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015), p. 8.

global consciousness attained prominence: the moment of the Roman empire with its plausible aspirations to world dominance, and the Renaissance, a moment of global expansion, the age whose most famous theater was called The Globe. Plutarch's *Life of Marcus Antonius* constantly shows news circulating across the global Roman empire, and so does Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*. This news, these "reports," often take the form of the anecdote.[61]

To see how the crossing of the Plutarchan anecdote with an emergent idea of modern news makes us feel the *historical,* the *factual*, as the *global*, briefly consider two anecdotes from the *Life of Marcus Antonius*. Plutarch attributes three anecdotes in this text to specific eyewitness sources with personal connections to Plutarch. One Philotas, a physician and a friend of Plutarch's grandfather Lampyras, is the source of two luminous anecdotes about the lavish style of life of Antony in Alexandria. Once, Philotas being "a young man desirous to see things," and knowing one of Mark Antony's cooks, he was taken to see "the wonderfull sumptuous charge and preparation of one only supper" at Antony's palace:

> When he was in the kitchin, and saw a world of diversities of meates, and amongst others, eight wilde boares rosted whole: he began to wonder at it, and sayd, Sure you have a great number of ghests to supper. The cooke fell a laughing, and answered him,

[61] On the significance of messengers in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see first of all Janet Adelman's seminal discussion in *The Common Liar: An Essay on* Antony and Cleopatra (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), pp. 34-39, then see C. C. Barfoot, "News of the Roman Empire: Hearsay, Soothsay, Myth and History in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Reclamations of Shakespeare*, ed. A. J. Hoenselaars (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1994), pp. 105-28, Linda Charnes, "Spies and Whispers: Exceeding Reputation in *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Notorious Identities: Materializing the Subject in Shakespeare* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1993), pp. 103-147, Ray L. Heffner, Jr., "The Messengers in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *ELH* 43.2 (1976): pp. 154-162, David Lucking, "Bad News: Medium as Message in Antony and Cleopatra," *English Studies* 96, no. 6 (2015): pp. 619-35, Marion D. Perret, "Shakespeare's Use of Messengers in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Drama Survey* 5 (1966): pp. 67-72, Laura Quinney, "Enter a Messenger," in *William Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra*," Modern Critical Interpretations, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988), pp. 151-67, and Alan Stewart, "Lives and Letters in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Studies* 35 (2007): pp. 77-104.

> No (quoth he) not many ghestes, nor above twelve in all: but yet all that is boyled or roasted must be served in whole, or else it would be marred straight. For Antonius peradventure will sup presently, or it may be a pretie while hence, or likely enough he will deferre it longer, for that he hath dronke well today or else hath had some other great matters in hand: and therefore we do not dresse one supper only, but many suppers, bicause we are uncerteine of the houre he will suppe in.[62]

The embedding of this eyewitness account of Antony's wondrous extravagance within the lifeworld of Plutarch tells us something about the fascination these anecdotes held for those who lived during or shortly after the events themselves. The vivid, concrete fact of eight boars roasted whole for a single supper provokes wonder. To share that wonder is the motive of telling and retelling the anecdote (after sharing another of Philotas's anecdotes, Plutarch notes, "This I have heard my grandfather tell oftentimes"). Part of the force of the anecdote is the chain of contact it establishes with an actual event, with Antony himself. The sensational aura given off by Antony gathers together the teller of the anecdote and his audience in a shared world.

The case is similar with the third anecdote Plutarch attributes to a specific eyewitness, this time an anecdote that he was told by his other grandfather, Nicarchus. Plutarch has just been narrating Antony's defeat at Actium, which could also be framed as an anecdote of crisis. The battle could have gone either way—Shakespeare has Scarus describe the moment at which Antony takes flight as one in which "vantage like a pair of twins appeared" (3.10.12)—but Antony loses because of a scandalously trivial (i.e. anecdotal) action. He follows Cleopatra as she flees the battle, placing private, erotic concerns above public, momentous ones. After narrating Antony's defeat at Actium, Plutarch recounts a story he has heard from his grandfather Nicarchus: Nicarchus tells how Antonius had exacted a tribute of corn from the provinces under his control in order to feed his army. Citizens in Nicarchus' town of Chaeronea had been driven,

[62] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol.6, pp. 27-8.

"with whippes," to the sea side carrying a prescribed measure of corn "on their shoulders." But the second time they were thus driven to carry their tribute of corn, "all the corne being ready to be caried, news came that Antonius had lost the battel, and so scaped our poore city. For Antonius souldiers and deputies fled immediately, and the citizens devided the corne amongst them."[63] This anecdote captures how the battle of Actium affected life in a small, provincial town in Greece, evidence that Antony's trivial action reverberated through the entirety of the Mediterannean world. Nicharchus's anecdote puts Plutarch in contact with Antony as a real force in world history.

In *Antony and Cleopatra*, Shakespeare draws attention to the way sensational anecdotes like the ones recounted by Plutarch's grandfather circulate as news. Shakespeare puts Philotas's anecdote about the eight roasted boars in the mouth of a marveling, news-hungry Maecenas who is eager to hear Enobarbus share reports of the "rare" Cleopatra: "Eight wild boars roasted whole at a breakfast, and but twelve persons there. Is this true?" (2.2.189-90). This notable fact, a surprising conjunction of two elements, perfectly fits Barthes's definition of the *fait-divers*; and Shakespeare's condensation of the Plutarchan anecdote to this minimal notation suggests his awareness of novel modes of circulation for such animating bits of sensational news.

News that is diverting, pleasurable, and wonderful is strongly associated in the play with Egypt and Cleopatra. To Maecenas's request that he verify the report of the eight wild boars, Enobarbus responds that in fact they had in Egypt "much more monstrous matter of feast, which worthily deserved noting" (2.2.192-3), and goes on to confirm, and go beyond, the reports Maecenas and Agrippa have received of Cleopatra, describing in numinous detail her appearance on the barge at Cydnus. This animated, animating description provokes repeated exclamations of

[63] North, *Plutarch's Lives*, ed. Wyndham, vol. 6, p. 71.

"O, rare for Antony!" (2.2.215) and "Rare Egyptian!" (2.2.228) from Agrippa. Lepidus's curiosity in 2.7 about the rare, notable marvels of Egypt—the crocodile and the pyramids—evinces the same thirst for animating novelty.

Pleasurable, entertaining news of this sort is what animates the distinctive, separate world of Egypt that Cleopatra presides over in the play. It is a world of sport, jest, novelty, and erotic pleasure: a world of anecdote. Its existence is premised on a denial, a screening-out, of a different kind of news that also circulates in the play: news of pressing, urgent events. Octavius is presented as the paradigmatic figure of a man who stays on top of this kind of news. For Octavius, news is instrumentalized: he grasps and scrutinizes each new piece of information as a sign of the latest shape taken on by history amid the constant fluctuations of fortune and human action—and responds accordingly. Antony and Cleopatra, by contrast, insulate themselves from news of the world and from the demand that they adjust themselves to the exigencies of reality. The lovers instead create a world of their own—"new heaven, new earth" (1.1.17) as Antony puts it—in which Antony will accept "no messenger" (1.1.53) but Cleopatra's.
Shakespeare contrasts the Octavian attitude to news in the play with the attitude of Pompey that the anecdote of his refusal exemplifies. When Pompey refuses Menas's offer in *Antony and Cleopatra*, Menas delivers, in an aside, the following moralizing comment on Pompey's decisive refusal:

> For this,
> I'll never follow thy palled fortunes more.
> Who seeks and will not take, when once 'tis offered,
> Shall never find it more.
>
> (2.7.82-5)

Menas's *sententia* is a Renaissance maxim about the necessity of grasping opportunity by the forelock. The Renaissance regularly represented a variety of associated personifications as a bald figure with a lock of hair on its forehead. Allegorical personifications represented this way include Fortune, *Opportunitas*, *Kairos*, and *Occasio*; often, these figures are additionally represented as standing on a globe. The forelock symbolizes the fleetingness of opportunity, which cannot be grasped again once it has passed one by. The globe represents the mutability and instability of Fortune, as well as, perhaps, Fortune's dominion over the globe of the world. *Opportunitas*, *kairos*, *occasio*, and sometimes the English "advantage," refer to certain decisive moments that briefly surface amid the fluctuations of Fortune, and which must be grasped before they vanish. Menas's offer to Pompey is construed by Shakespeare as a fleeting moment of *opportunitas*, when Pompey could have seized hold of the chance to rule the world. In contrast to Pompey, Caesar, in the scene of the feast on Pompey's galley, announces his intention to always occupy an active relationship to time. When Antony says, "Be a child o'th' time," Caesar responds, "'Possess it,' I'll make answer" (2.7.100-1). The Roman attitude toward time, exemplified by Caesar, and the Egyptian attitude toward time, exemplified by Antony, are here set in sharp relief; the opposition hardens into a verbal emblem, in which opposing views are summarized in sententiae that balance each other out.

The language of the play is thoroughly permeated by the notion of decisive moments, of the kind captured in anecdotes of crisis like the one of Pompey's refusal. (Such anecdotes are moments of *kairos*, "time with content" as opposed to merely chronological "clock time.")[64] Take, for instance, Antony's "The strong necessity of time commands / Our services awhile . . ."

[64] For this distinction, see Frank Kermode, *The Sense of an Ending: Studies in the Theory of Fiction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), pp. 46-50.

(1.3.43-4); or Caesar's "The time of universal peace is near."[65] "Time" in the sense of opportunity is also present in the play, as when in the triumvirs first encounter with Pompey, Caesar says "Take your time" (2.6.23) to Pompey—not encouragement to proceed at leisure, but rather a challenge thrown down, as Caesar dares Pompey to possess the time, to grasp opportunity by the forelock and challenge the triumvirs to battle. Similarly, the term "advantage," which translates the sense of *opportunitas* as "A fit, opportune, or favorable time" (Lewis and Short) crops up around the battle scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*: "But these offers, / *Which serve not for his vantage*, he shakes off . . ." (3.7.32-3); ". . . i' the midst o' the fight, / *When vantage like a pair of twins appeared*," (3.10.11-11).[66] "Advantage" is here associated with the fleeting opportunities presented by time as fortune fluctuates on the battlefield. "Occasion" is similarly married to a sense of *realpolitik*: Enobarbus tells Menas that Antony was acting opportunistically in marrying Octavia: "Antony will use his affection where it is. He married but his occasion here" (2.6.132-3). Through this language, the characters of the play register their constant sense of the fluctuations of Fortune, of shifting balances of advantage and opportunity on the battlefield and in the arena of global politics.

This sense of being on what Brutus in *Julius Caesar* calls the "tide in the affairs of men," the constantly shifting fluctations of fortune, is a part of the feeling of history in the play, which many critics have observed possesses a tidal rhythm. As David Kaula writes, the play "gives the impression of rapid, continuous movement," and, during the first three acts, "the complexion of affairs in the political realm is constantly shifting as one development follows another with

[65] See also 1.4.28-30, 2.2.8-10, 2.2.166, 3.6.84-5, 3.7.80-1, 4.6.5, 4.14.

[66] See also 4.8.11-12 and 4.11.3-4.

almost confusing speed."[67] Critics have long perceived "something deliquescent in the reality behind the play."[68] Instead of coalescing around a single great occurrence as *Julius Caesar* does, *Antony and Cleopatra* draws us within the continuing flow of history, setting itself up at the juncture where fluid, changing events have not yet calcified into accomplished fact. A sense of the open-endedness of history lingers even after the inevitable arrival of determined things. This impression of constantly developing events is linked to news, which circulates in the play via a network of messengers in constant motion. As one of the play's minor characters puts it, "With news the time's in labour, and throws forth / Each minute some" (3.7.81-2). The time is pregnant with its content, and gives constant birth to news.

Yet over against this emphasis in the play on news and on the factual, we see a clear insistence on the *exemplary*, and we see, further, how Shakespeare subordinates the anecdote to the example.

Many critics have remarked upon the way the opening scene of the play frames Antony as an example. The scene is bookended by the moralizing commentary of two Roman onlookers, Philo and Demetrius. Philo greets the approach of Antony and Cleopatra in the following terms:

> Look where they come!
> Take but good note, and you shall see in him
> The triple pillar of the world transformed
> Into a strumpet's fool. Behold and see.
>
> (1.1.10-13)

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[67] David Kaula, "The Time Sense of *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 15, no. 3 (1964): p. 212.

[68] John F. Danby, "*Antony and Cleopatra*: A Shakespearian Adjustment," in *Twentieth Century Interpretations of* Antony and Cleopatra, ed. Mark Rose (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1977), p. 42. For an interpretation connecting liquefaction and "discandying" in the play to the notion of queer futurity, see Colby Gordon, "Shakespearean futurity: Soft cities in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *postmedieval* 6 (2015): pp. 429-438.

As Jeff Dolven has shown, the idea of example, for those trained in the Renaissance schoolroom, had inescapably instructional connotations.[69] Philo points at Antony as if the latter were an exhibit in the classroom; he draws a frame around Antony as an example worth noting down for its didactic value. It is true that what we actually see and hear of the lovers themselves immediately calls into question the validity of this Roman perspective that sees Antony's love as "dotage."[70] Nevertheless, the framing gesture is made unmistakable not only by Philo's comments but by the emblematic structure of the bookended scene itself.

This framing language of example returns with Antony's disgraceful retreat at the battle of Actium. However, the scene in which we hear Antony's flight from battle described presents by contrast an *empty* frame: Enobarbus, Scarus, and Canidius provide a chorus of Roman commentary, describing and reacting to Antony's shameful action, but we do not see Antony himself on stage. Instead, where Philo at the play's beginning instructs us to "Behold and see" Antony, Enobarbus opens this later, more decidedly catastrophic scene by declaring his inability to endure the sight of Antony's failure. Enobarbus' lines, with their intimations of the monstrousness of Antony's action, echo Cleopatra's earlier statement that Antony is "painted one way like a Gorgon" (2.5.116):

> I can behold no longer!
> Th'Antoniad, the Egyptian admiral,
> With all their sixty, fly and turn the rudder.
> To see't mine eyes are blasted.

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[69] See Dolven, *Scenes of Instruction*.

[70] This point is made by, among others, Mark Rose, *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), p. 163.

(3.10.1-4)

The example that Enobarbus finds too monstrous to behold is for others an example that guides their subsequent behavior. Canidius laments that Antony "has given example for our flight / Most grossly by his own!" (3.10.28-9), and proceeds to abandon Antony and offer up his troops to Caesar. Antony himself repeats the sentiment in the subsequent scene, in lines that again emphasize the instructional connotations of example: "I have fled myself and have instructed cowards / To run and show their shoulders" (3.11.7-8). Antony, in his lack of self-knowledge ("Had our general / Been what he knew—himself—it had gone well," Canidius tells us [3.10.26-7]), in his flight from himself in order to follow Cleopatra, has turned himself into an instructive negative example, one that his closest friends, and indeed he himself, can scarcely bear to look at.

In between the play's opening scene and Antony's shameful failure at Actium—indeed, throughout the play, from beginning to end—Antony is repeatedly turned into an example, and this process of exemplification takes place in part through an absorption and subordination of the anecdote. In the first scene in which we see Octavius, Antony's rival appears as the central nervous system in a network of news relays. Caesar walks on stage reading a letter containing "news" from Alexandria concerning Antony: "he fishes, drinks, and wastes / The lamps of night in revel" (1.4.4-5). In Caesar's reports, Antony appears as the ultimate example of vice, "the abstract of all faults / That all men follow" (1.4.9-10). Lepidus demurs from this harsh judgement, but Caesar has yet more blemishes in reserve with which to darken Antony's goodness:

Let's grant it is not
Amiss to tumble on the bed of Ptolemy,

To give a kingdom for a mirth, to sit
And keep the turn of tippling with a slave,
To reel the streets at noon, and stand the buffet
With knaves that smells of sweat . . .
(1.4.16-21)

Caesar's speech interweaves anecdotal material that Plutarch has scattered throughout the *Life of Marcus Antonius*, which is full of the "light occasions" and the "sporte" that make up such a prominent part of the Egyptian world Shakespeare conjures in *Antony and Cleopatra*.

Anecdotal reports also capture the virtue that is mixed with vice in Antony's nature. Caesar in 1.4 invokes the fortitude Antony displayed after suffering defeat at Modena, in a reminiscence that closely follows a passage in Plutarch. Caesar's exhortation climaxes in a memorable detail that has circulated as report:

On the Alps,
It is reported, thou didst eat strange flesh
Which some did die to look on.
(1.4.67-9)

Shakespeare's rendition heightens the sense of wonder that already attends this example in Plutarch,[71] but while this report is another novel *fait-divers*, Caesar evokes it as a moral example, channeling its animating force in the direction of virtue.

[71] "And therefore it was *a wonderful example* to the soldiers to see Antonius, that was brought up in all fineness and superfluity, so easily to drink puddle water and to eat wild fruits and roots. And moreover *it is reported* that, even as they passed the Alps, they did eat the barks of trees and such beasts as never man tasted of their flesh before" (*Shakespeare's Plutarch*, p. 192; italics mine). Janet Adelman calls attention to how Shakespeare's apparently slight alteration of this passage drawn from Plutarch in fact works a striking transformation: it is not hard to perceive sexual undercurrents in the idea of "strange flesh" that can be deadly to look upon. See her "Making Defect Perfection: Imagining Male Bounty in *Timon of Athens* and *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Suffocating Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 165-192.

In between the extremes of Antony's austere virtue in the Alps and his vicious dissipation in Egypt, Shakespeare provides images of Antony as an ideal of temperance, from whom pleasure and duty each receive their due.[72] Cleopatra is the recipient of the first of these images, which reaches her, characteristically for this play, via the report of a messenger. In 1.5, Alexas brings Cleopatra tidings from Antony. Alexas reports both a brief message, quoted verbatim from Antony's lips, and a brief description of Antony's appearance atop his horse. (The report is thus close to being a versified apophthegm, combining memorable speech and action.) Cleopatra questions Alexas for a closer description of Antony's disposition, asking, "was he sad or merry?" (1.5.53).[73] Alexas responds that Antony was "Like to the time o'th' year between the extremes / Of hot and cold, he was nor sad nor merry" (1.5.54-5), and Cleopatra is exultant:

> O well-divided disposition! Note him,
> Note him, good Charmian, 'tis the man; but note him!
> (1.5.56-7)

[72] On temperance in the play, see Christopher Wortham, "Temperance and the End of Time: Emblematic *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Comparative Drama* 29, no. 1 (1995): pp. 1-37.

[73] Linda Woodbridge notes how the play's preoccupation with fortune-telling and games of chance is linked to a heightened scrutiny of faces in the play, of which Cleopatra's questioning of her messenger here is one example. See Linda Woodbridge, "'He beats thee 'gainst the odds': Gambling, Risk Management, and *Antony and Cleopatra*," in *Antony and Cleopatra: New Critical Essays*, ed. Sara Munson Deats (New York: Routledge, 2005), pp. 193-212. For more on fortune and games of chance in *Antony and Cleopatra*, see Michael Lloyd, "Antony and the Game of Chance," *JEGP* 61, no. 3 (1962): pp. 548-554, Marilyn L. Williamson, "Fortune in *Antony and Cleopatra*." *JEGP* 67, no. 3 (1968): pp. 423-429, Charles A. Hallett, "Change, Fortune, and Time: Aspects of the Sublunar World in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *JEGP* 75 (1976): pp. 75-80, Rick Bowers, "'The Luck of Caesar': Winning and Losing in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *English Studies* 79, no. 6 (1998): pp. 522-35, and Caroline Baird, "Board Game Squares, Face Cards, and Chess in *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Notes and Queries* 64, no. 2 (2017): pp. 297-300. I have found the essays by Lloyd and, especially, Woodbridge to be the most valuable of this group.

The "heavenly mingle" (1.5.62) of Antony's well-divided disposition is another valuable didactic example, and must be "noted," recalling how Philo instructs Demetrius to "take good note" of Antony's dotage at the opening of the play. Later, Antony will angrily tell Cleopatra, "Though you can guess what temperance should be, / You know not what it is" (3.13.126-7). Here, though it happens through a complicating veil of self-flattery and manipulation, Cleopatra successfully recognizes a notable image of Temperance in Antony himself. This picks up on the play's intimations of allegory: in 1.3 Antony tells Cleopatra "But that your royalty / Holds idleness your subject, I should take you / For idleness itself" (1.3.93-5). The characters are not personifications, but they seem frequently to edge towards an abstract, exemplary existence as vice or virtue itself.

Shakespeare gives this image of Antony as an exemplar of temperance a symmetrical parallel in the second half of the play. This second image arises through what critics and commentators have long recognized as an emblematic set of stage actions. In 4.4, as Antony prepares for the battle that will briefly appear to reverse the tide of fortune favoring Caesar at Actium and before, Antony summons a servant named Eros to help him don his armor. Eros is joined in fastening Antony's buckles by Cleopatra, thus generating a tableau which, as Michael Neill observes, both evokes and reverses the popular Renaissance image of Venus and her cupids disarming Mars.[74] As several critics have noted, this image of Antony suggests an integration of erotic love and pleasure with the duties of soldiership, one that issues in a reformed ideal of masculinity of which Antony, at this moment, could be said to be the exemplar.[75]

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[74] *The Tragedy of Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), p. 266.

[75] See Adelman's discussion, "Making Defect Perfection," p. 189, as well as Anne Barton, "'Nature's Piece 'Gainst Fancy": The Divided Catastrophe in *Antony and Cleopatra*, in *William*

Attention to this tableau needs to be coupled with attention to the moment, ten scenes later in 4.14, in which Antony, believing Mardian's lie that Cleopatra has committed suicide, calls for Eros to help him finally remove his armor. Kissing Cleopatra with his armor on in 4.4 as he departs for battle, Antony tells her, "Whate'er becomes of me, / This is a soldier's kiss" (4.4.29-30); removing his armor in 4.14, Antony says, "No more a soldier; bruised pieces go; / You have been nobly borne" (4.14.43-4). Together, these two moments bookend an image of Antony as an ideal soldier, an "example" like the one framed by Philo and Demetrius in the play's opening scene.

Between donning and removing his armor, we see Antony's success on the battlefield against Caesar, and his return in triumph in 4.8; and we also see Antony's generosity towards Enobarbus, sending the latter's treasure after him, and Enobarbus' reversal of his negative judgement of Antony. Together these two events construct an ideal Antony who exists between the bookends of donning and removing his armor in this final sequence.

The first moment, the triumph, like the moment of Othello's arrival on Cyprus which it resembles, suggests an ideal marriage of soldiership and love. Greeting Cleopatra, Antony asks her to

> Chain mine armed neck! Leap thou, attire and all,
> Through proof of harness to my heart, and there
> Ride on the pants triumphing!
>
> (4.8.14-6)

Shakespeare's "Antony and Cleopatra," Modern Critical Interpretations, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1988) pp. 39-40.

Antony invites Cleopatra to leap through his armor ("proof of harness" is glossed by John Wilders as "armour which has been 'proved' or tested and found impenetrable")[76] in order to mount and ride his heart, envisioned metaphorically as a steed. This is a metaphysical conceit in which the soldier's armor is simultaneously impervious to enemy blows and penetrable to love. Cleopatra responds by calling Antony "Lord of lords! / O infinite virtue!" (4.8.16-17)—a kind of inexhaustible exemplar.

The episode of Antony's generosity toward Enobarbus after the latter's desertion—based on a sentence-long anecdote in Plutarch—is also worked by Shakespeare into a pattern of reestablishing Antony's status as a positive exemplar in the course of the armor sequence. Enobarbus, judging Antony to have lost his judgement as well as his fortunes, has earlier decided to leave him; yet when Enobarbus is informed that Antony has sent his treasure after him (the soldier delivering this news tells him that "Your emperor / Continues still a Jove" [4.6.29-30]), Enobarbus decides he no longer wants to live; and his dying speeches emphasize Enobarbus' stake in "record" (4.9.10) and "memory" (4.9.11), the collective memory that history will have of him and Antony as examples.

The armor sequence also contains a final, double reversal, when Antony's troops desert him at the final battle, and he believes Cleopatra has betrayed him. This moment is Antony's final defeat at the hands of Fortune, who, as Peggy Muñoz Simonds suggests, has intermittently been identified with Cleopatra herself in the play.[77] Antony, the soldier making wars on Caesar, now declares that "my heart / Makes only wars on thee" (4.12.14-5), i.e. Cleopatra, and

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[76] *Antony and Cleopatra*, ed. Wilders, p. 243.

[77] See Simonds's detailed and informative overview of Renaissance iconography of Fortune placed in relation to the play, "'To the Very Heart of Loss': Renaissance Iconography in Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*," *Shakespeare Studies* 22 (1994), pp. 220-276.

announces a definitive parting of ways with Fortune: “Fortune and Antony part here” (4.12.19). Antony’s final defeat is here attributed to a cheating Cleopatra, repeating the images of games of fortune and chance that have been repeated throughout the play. “This grave charm” Cleopatra, Antony tells us,

> Like a right gipsy hath at fast and loose
> Beguiled me to the very heart of loss.
>
> (4.12.28-9)

Continually calling for Eros, Antony gives himself to a final outburst of rage, calling on the example of his ancestor Hercules to instruct him (“Teach me, / Alcides, thou mine ancestor, thy rage” (4.12.43-4), as he declares his intention to kill Cleopatra. His armor, following out the allusion to Hercules, has metamorphosed into the poisonous garment given to Hercules by his wife, Deianira: “The shirt of Nessus is upon me” (4.12.43).

Antony’s famous lines delivered in the following scene, once Eros finally arrives, describe his inability to maintain a constant shape: he feels himself to be like a form momentarily appearing in the clouds which “The rack dislimns and makes it indistinct / As water is in water” (4.14.10-11). Antony links his inability to “hold this visible shape” (4.1.14) to the betrayal of Cleopatra, for whom he “made these wars” (4.14.15)—on whom his activity as a soldier had depended. Cleopatra’s cheating betrayal—described yet again in terms of a game of chance: she has “Packed cards with Caesar, and false-played my glory” (4.14.19)—has left him no other option but to end his own life: “There is left us / Ourselves to end ourselves” (4.14.22). When, shortly after these lines, Antony receives the false news from Mardian that Cleopatra was faithful and has killed herself, he responds by telling Eros to remove his armor at last: “Unarm, Eros. The

long day's task is done / And we must sleep" (4.14.36). Antony's physical armor is useless now to protect him from the grief he feels at losing Cleopatra:

> The sevenfold shield of Ajax cannot keep
> The battery from my heart. O, cleave, my sides!
> Heart, once be stronger than thy continent;
> Crack thy frail case!
>
> (4.14.39-42)

The emblematic significance of armor in this final sequence of the play is thus persistently linked to the relationship between virtue, soldiership, and love. Antony's real wars with Caesar have been subordinated to love: he has made war on Caesar *for* Cleopatra; when she seems to have played him false, he has made war *on* Cleopatra; when she seems again to have been loyal and to have died for him, he disarms, and, wishing for his own death, allows his heart to receive the "battery" of grief. Significantly, he envisions himself as replacing Aeneas in the underworld: not Aeneas as an emblem of soldierly virtue, but Aeneas as an exemplar of love: "Dido and her Aeneas shall want troops, / And all the haunt be ours" (4.14.54-5).

Antony's final catastrophe, in which he parts ways definitively with Fortune, introduces the final movement of the play, in which first Antony and then Cleopatra, by taking their own lives, refuse to submit themselves to be turned into "monstrous" shows trailing behind Caesar's triumphing Fortunes, and instead assert their rejection of the claims of Fortune. As Cleopatra asserts, "'Tis paltry to be Caesar. / Not being Fortune, he's but Fortune's knave" (5.2.2-3). This is the conclusion Shakespeare imposes on the central theme of Fortune that has recurred throughout the play, a theme which has been closely linked to the form of the anecdote.

By singling out passages of Antony's life and making them into examples through the dramatic patterning of the play, Shakespeare carries *Antony and Cleopatra*, in spite of all its

fidelity to the particularities of history, closer to Philip Sidney's conception of poetry in the *Defense of Poetry*, where Sidney praises the poet for showing what *should* be, as opposed to the historian who is bound to show what *is*. This is particularly clear with the emblematic tableau Shakespeare creates by having Eros help Antony don and then remove his armor. Onto the reversals of fortune of the final passages of Antony's life and that of Cleopatra, Shakespeare singles out a fixed exemplary form and lifts it up from the flow of history. If Shakespeare in this play has one foot in an emerging modern world of facts, information, and global consciousness, he keeps the other firmly planted in a didactic, exemplary conception of the purpose of drama. The anecdote is the form that spans these two impulses, and Shakespeare's status as a preeminent author on the threshold of modernity derives in part from the way he holds them together in such creative tension.

Hamlet and the Simple Form of the Saga

After many years of character analysis and psychological criticism, criticism of *Hamlet* turned to discuss issues of inheritance and material possession. Margreta de Grazia, in a major study, argues that modern psychological interpretations of *Hamlet* suppress the basic premise of its plot: that Claudius, by marrying Gertrude and getting himself elected king of Denmark, has deprived Hamlet of the inheritance he expected would pass to him from his father. She repeatedly drives home the point that what modern interpretations of *Hamlet* miss is the intensity of the play's focus on land, an insistent emphasis on the paired materiality of earth and man which belies modern efforts to construe Hamlet as the bearer of pure subjectivity.[1] Coming at the play from a very different angle, Paul Kottman highlights the theme of inheritance in *Hamlet* in order to clarify the emotional stakes the play holds for its audiences. For Kottman, Shakespeare's play stages a special kind of succession crisis, one in which the very possibility of inheriting an intelligible social world from our forebears is called into question. In spite of the common focus on the issue of inheritance, Kottman's project is diametrically opposed in spirit to de Grazia's. Kottman, who draws central ideas from Hegel and Vico, aims at affirming and continuing—rather than delegitimizing—the tradition of modern philosophical interpretations of the play.[2]

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[1] Margreta de Grazia, "*Hamlet" without Hamlet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[2] Paul A. Kottman, *Tragic Conditions in Shakespeare: Disinheriting the Globe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009). Michelle M. Dowd, building on earlier work by Louis Montrose which I discuss below, also explores inheritance in Shakespeare, studying the ways in which the theater shaped thinking about primogeniture in early modern England. See her *The Dynamics of Inheritance on the Shakespearean Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015). For an earlier exploration of inheritance in *Hamlet*, focused on the play's afterlives in contemporary American politics, see Linda Charnes, *Hamlet's Heirs: Shakespeare and the Politics of a New Milennium* (New York: Routledge, 2006). See also Lisa Jardine, "'No offence

Is it not striking that these two very different contributions to *Hamlet* criticism each focus so much attention on the issue of inheritance?[3] At its core, de Grazia's study is philological and historicist. Her characteristic procedure is to uncover latent meanings in Shakespeare's language which resonate with the themes she focuses on in the play. For example, she strikingly recuperates, in Hamlet's line, "My wit's diseased,"[4] the homonym *diseized*, i.e. illegitimately dispossessed of land—a resonant double meaning which was current and available to Shakespeare's early audiences, but which modern commentators have failed to note. Not so with many of the meanings modern interpreters have found in the character of Hamlet, as de Grazia forcefully demonstrates in the polemical portion of her book. Coleridge's novel description of Shakespeare's dramatic method as "psychological" required introducing readers to this unfamiliar word coined by Coleridge.[5] And psychological criticism of Hamlet after Coleridge has occasioned a never-ending sequence of ever more modern psychological theories claiming to have finally unlocked the mystery of Hamlet—that "mystery" generated when the character of Hamlet is disconnected from the plot of the play, and its motivating concerns with land and

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i' th' world': *Hamlet* and Unlawful Marriage," in *Critical Essays on Shakespeare's* Hamlet, ed. David Scott Kastan (New York: G. K. Hall, 1995), pp. 267-9.

[3] Important studies of *Hamlet* that have appeared more recently include András Kiséry, *Hamlet's Moment: Drama and Political Knowledge in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) and Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017). Although Kiséry and Lewis both find ways to move past de Grazia's polemic, the antithetical pairing of de Grazia and Kottman crystallizes, in what strikes me as a classic instance, the methodological impasse which occasions my formalist intervention.

[4] *Hamlet*, ed. Harold Jenkins (London: Thomson Learning, 2001; first pub. 1982), 3.2.313. Subsequent citations of *Hamlet* refer to this edition unless otherwise noted. Quotations of plays and poems by Shakespeare other than *Hamlet* refer to *The Norton Shakespeare*, 3rd ed., ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York: Norton, 2016).

[5] See de Grazia, "*Hamlet" without Hamlet*, p. 15.

inheritance. The terms "philological" and "historicist" are crude labels for the sophisticated positions de Grazia takes up, in the *Hamlet* book and elsewhere, but they do serve as rough indicators of certain historical borders de Grazia places around what *Hamlet* is allowed to mean.[6]

By contrast, Kottman asserts a critical imperative to approach *Hamlet* from the here and now. Kottman is interested not in what the play could have meant to its original audiences, but in whether and why the play continues to interest us today. Returning to first principles, he asks,

> Why do we care about Hamlet and his fate, if in fact we do? Does the play *move* us; and if so, *why* and *how*? What is the relation, if any, between Hamlet's fate and our collective self-conception?[7]

Kottman's reflections on these questions grow out of a philosophical tradition of interpretation which de Grazia, for her part, seeks to sideline. Kottman takes as a key starting point for his analysis Hegel's hypothesis that "The task of the family . . . is to care for the dead," a hypothesis which, Kottman asserts, "comprehends an entire field of subsequent anthropological inquiry."[8] Kottman's exploration of *Hamlet* draws its most vital energies from a recognition that *Hamlet* in some sense attempts to grapple with the full ramifications of this Hegelian hypothesis about the care of the dead. Kottman builds up an account of *Hamlet* as staging a disjuncture between two competing social formations, one based on kinship ties and matrilineal inheritance, in which the care of the dead is the fundamental way in which the community recognizes its members, and one based on individual property rights, in which the state and civil society together create the

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[6] de Grazia's stance on the charge of anachronism in contemporary scholarship is complex. See her "Anachronism," in *Cultural Reformations: Medieval and Renaissance in Literary History*, ed. Brian Cummings and James Simpson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 13-32.

[7] Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, p. 44.

[8] Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, p. 48.

sole system within which social and communal life is grounded.[9] Hamlet, because he is caught between these conflicting social systems, is "disinherited" from any social world in which his actions might have meaning. To the degree that *we*, here and now, find ourselves likewise disinherited from an intelligible social world, we stand to gain from the recreation of social ties which, for Kottman, *Hamlet* can help to effect, through the radically unscripted moments of performance which Shakespeare strategically leaves open for each new production of the play.[10] In this way, Kottman arrives via Hegel at an account of how the meaning of *Hamlet*—conceived of as our emotional stake in Hamlet's fate—inheres not in the historically-delimited context of meaning occupied by Shakespeare and his original audiences, but in the ever-moving deictic "now" of performance. This is Kottman's version of the claim for *Hamlet*'s perennial modernity, a kind of interpretation of the play fiercely rejected by de Grazia.

You will have guessed by now the desideratum towards which these comments of mine are tending: an account of *Hamlet* that is both philological and philosophical; which gathers together the insights offered by de Grazia and Kottman, rather than setting the approaches of the two critics in opposition. In this chapter, I suggest that one way to achieve such a reconciliation is by attending to something to which neither de Grazia nor Kottman gives much overt discussion: literary form. A specific kind of literary form which remains foreign to critical discussion of *Hamlet* holds, I will argue, a privileged connection to the thematics of inheritance so central to the accounts of the play given by de Grazia and Kottman. This form is simple form of the saga. Attending to the presence of the saga in *Hamlet* asks us to juxtapose two widely

[9] See Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, pp. 60-61.

[10] For Claudius's reaction to the play-within-the-play is the key moment of unscripted performance in *Hamlet*, see Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, pp. 72-77.

separated historical moments: the early modern moment of *Hamlet*, and the medieval Iceland which produced the paradigmatic instantiation of the saga as a simple form.

In what follows, I show how a comparison between the Icelandic saga and *Hamlet* can be made on the basis of a rigorous formal analysis. I focus on a specific element of feature of form which, I argue, is a key feature of both the Icelandic saga and *Hamlet*. This formal element is family resemblance, considered in the first instance as a movement of perception, a mental form, which places members of the same family in relation to each other by positing a similarity between them. The form of resemblance—and in what follows I give this abstract definition substance by way of specific literary examples—is a crucial part of how *Hamlet* both reinforces, and calls into question, the social principle of inheritance.

In turning to form as a way to understand how *Hamlet* engages with inheritance, I have one eye on an early model for what some have more recently called "historical formalism." In a classic essay, Louis Montrose proposed that the comic form of *As You Like It* could be understood as a response to the social process of primogeniture as practiced in Elizabethan society.[11] Drawing on social history as well as social anthropology, Montrose showed, first, that primogeniture is the cause of the dramatic conflicts that initiate *As You Like It*; second, that the scenario of the play was therefore a particularly emotionally resonant one for members of Elizabethan society, in which younger brothers in aristocratic families often nursed feelings of bitter resentment and dissatisfaction; and finally, that by staging a dramatic rite of passage in

[11] Louis Montrose, "'The Place of a Brother' in *As You Like It*: Social Process and Comic Form," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 32, no. 1 (1981): pp. 28-54. On Montrose as a historical formalist, see pp. 24-27 of Stephen Cohen, "Between Form and Culture: New Historicism and the Promise of a Historical Formalism," in *Renaissance Literature and Its Formal Engagements*, ed. Mark David Rasmussen (New York: Palgrave, 2002), pp. 17-41. For a revisitation of Montrose's essay and its themes, highlighting relations between women in the play, see Julie Crawford, "The Place of a Cousin in *As You Like It*," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 69, no. 2 (2018): pp. 101-127.

which a dispossessed younger brother is successfully and happily re-integrated into society, Shakespeare's *As You Like It* provided a symbolic experience which may have had a therapeutic, reconciliatory effect on Shakespeare's socially-mixed audiences, easing, through symbolic integration and ritual release, the social tensions and discordance caused by primogeniture. In providing this account of Shakespeare's play, Montrose modeled a way to pull together an analysis of Elizabethan social structure, the experiential and historical texture of life within that social structure, and the dramatic form of Shakespeare's play, with its distinctive verbal and emotional resonances.

The approach I adopt here works, in effect, as a doubling of Montrose's procedure. I start with a brief account of the interrelations between social form and literary form in medieval Iceland and that culture's foremost literary product, the Icelandic family sagas. I argue that Jolles's early attempt to define saga as a simple form can be made consonant with the last hundred years of scholarship on the Icelandic saga, and that, in particular, insights derived from the structuralist tradition of saga criticism, which began in the late 1960s, lend vigor and robustness to Jolles's definition of the form of the saga. I then place the Icelandic saga alongside *Hamlet*, attending to how the social logic of inheritance plays out in each in terms of both form and literary structure.

If the formal analogy I draw between the Icelandic saga and *Hamlet* is persuasive—and if it generates new insights into *Hamlet*—then the paradigm of simple form should receive broader acceptance. This chapter thus provides, I hope, both the local payoff of new insights into Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, and a broader, methodological gain, to be realized in the possibilities opened up for future research in the literary field constituted by the saga considered as a transcultural, transhistorical form.

I. The saga and the sources of "Hamlet"

While both the theme of inheritance and the observation of family resemblances are prominent features of several plays by Shakespeare, I have chosen to focus on *Hamlet* because the association of that play with saga already has a certain weight of scholarly tradition behind it. Although he was not the first to make the link, Israel Gollancz, in *Hamlet in Iceland*, published in 1898, and *The Sources of Hamlet*, first published in 1926, fixed the association between *Hamlet* and the saga in the minds of subsequent scholars of Shakespeare's sources.[12] Gollancz had trained as a medievalist at Cambridge University, where he learned Old Icelandic from Eiríkr Magnússon, a central figure in nineteenth-century Anglo-Icelandic literary relations.[13] In his enthusiasm for Norse mythology and literature, Gollancz traveled with a strong current in Victorian culture, a surging interest in all things Viking which for the first time turned the Old Norse sagas and myths into objects of interest for a general reading public.[14] In Gollancz,

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[12] The two studies by Gollancz are *Hamlet in Iceland* (London: D. Nutt, 1898) and *The Sources of* Hamlet (London: Oxford University Press, 1926). Charlotte Lennox furnishes a translation of the Amleth story as found in Saxo Grammaticus in the second volume of her *Shakespear Illustrated*, but expresses uncertainty as to whether Shakespeare consulted Saxo in the original or in some other version or translation; see Lennox, *Shakespear Illustrated* (London, 1753-4), vol. 2, pp. 267-8. German-language scholarship, preceding Gollancz and cited by him, existed, such as Adolf Zinzow, *Die Hamletsage, an und mit verwandten Sagen erläutert* (Halle, 1877); as did R.G. Latham, *Two Dissertations on the Hamlet of Saxo-Grammaticus and of Shakespear* (London, 1872); and a translation of the Amleth story from Saxo Grammaticus, given the not-wholly-accurate title "The Story of Hamlet: From the Swedish [!] Saga," and published in *Reynold's Miscellany* in 1847.

[13] Magnusson helped William Morris to produce the some of the first major English translations of the Icelandic sagas. See Ian Felce, *William Morris and the Icelandic Sagas* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2018).

[14] See Andrew Wawn, *The Vikings and the Victorians: Inventing the Old North in Nineteenth-century Britain* (Cambridge: D. S. Brewer, 2000). On Gollancz's enthusiasm for Nordic legend, see also H. L. Spencer, "The Mystical Philology of J. R. R. Tolkien and Sir Israel Gollancz: Monsters and Critics," *Tolkien Studies* 14 (2017), pp. 9-32.

Victorian fascination with the Old North converged with the Shakespearean preoccupations of a man who would become one of the foremost scholars and promoters of Shakespeare in early twentieth century England.[15]

In retrospect, the fact of Gollancz's twin academic passions make his desire to forge a connection between *Hamlet* and Old Icelandic literature seem almost inevitable. Yet Gollancz, whose approach to the question of *Hamlet*'s connection to Iceland was shaped by his thorough philological training, encountered frustration and disappointment in his effort to trace Hamlet back to an Old Icelandic original. The idea of an Icelandic Hamlet is permanently attached to a fragment of older poetry preserved in Snorri Sturluson's *Prose Edda*, compiled sometime in the early thirteenth century.[16] Certain verses attributed to the poet Snaebjörn allude to "Amlóða's meal," indicating the existence of an story or myth of Hamlet that predated tenth or eleventh-century Iceland, when the myth must still have been current.[17] Yet aside from this fragment, no other text clearly alluding to a Hamlet figure exists earlier than Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta*

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[15] On Gollancz's importance to the development of Shakespeare commemoration in the early twentieth century, see three essays by Gordon McMullan: "Goblin's Market: commemoration, anti-semitism and the invention of 'global Shakespeare' in 1916," in *Celebrating Shakespeare: commemoration and cultural memory*, ed. Clara Calvo and Coppélia Kahn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), pp. 182-201; *A Book of Homage to Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), pp. v-xxxiii; and "Remembering and Forgetting in 1916: Israel Gollancz, the Shakespeare Tercentenary and the National Theatre," *Shakespeare Survey* 70 (2017): pp. 40-49.

[16] Gollancz, *Hamlet in Iceland*, xi.

[17] The most extensive modern treatment of the Hamlet legend in the context of Scandinavian literature and folklore is William F. Hansen, *Saxo Grammaticus and the Life of Hamlet* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983). For a recent revisitation of the question of an early Icelandic Hamlet saga, see two essays by Ian Felce: "In Search of *Amlóða saga*: The Saga of Hamlet the Icelander," in *Studies in the Transmission and Reception of Old Norse Literature: The Hyperborean Muse in European Culture*, ed. Judy Quinn and Adele Cipolla (Turnhout: Brepols, 2016), pp. 101-122; and "Riddling Q1: Hamlet's Mill and the Trickster," *Shakespeare Survey* 61 (2008), pp. 269-80.

Danorum, written in Latin in Denmark in the early thirteenth century. Hence the Old Icelandic Hamlet saga ends up being, for Gollancz, a kind of ghost, the only remaining testimonial to its prior existence as full-blooded legend being a fleeting allusion in a fragment of a lost poem.[18]

The nebulous origins of the Hamlet legend in Old Norse mythology and legend became, after Gollancz, a standard feature of scholarly accounts of the sources of *Hamlet*, in which the Old Norse origins of the Hamlet story came to be associated with a primitive type of revenge narrative underlying Shakespeare's play. Geoffrey Bullough, in *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, reviews the question of the origins of the name Amlotha, writing that it "appears out of the mists of Icelandic antiquity," and noting the appearance of the name in the *Prose Edda*.[19] When discussing the version of the Amleth story found in Saxo and contrasting it with later versions, above all Shakespeare's, Bullough repeatedly speaks of the Amleth story as a "saga" or as "the old saga," writing, for instance, that "[t]he Amleth saga belongs to a common type of revenge-story in which the hero feigns insanity or stupidity to save his life and gain an

[18] There is an additional layer of complexity in the form of another set of Icelandic Hamlet texts with ambiguous relationships to a putative Old Icelandic original story. A set of ballads belonging to the genre of the *rímur*, and known by the title of *Ambales saga*, exist in textual versions dating from the middle of the seventeenth century and later. The *rímur* of *Ambales saga* was first collected by the antiquarian Icelandic scholar Torfaeus (1636-1719), who recorded that he recalled hearing an oral version of the Hamlet story being told to him by old men and women when he was a child, thus suggesting that this oral version of the story was in circulation as early as the end of the sixteenth century. Various theories of the origins of *Ambales saga* exist, most including the hypothesis that *Ambales saga* was heavily influenced by Saxo Grammaticus's version of the Hamlet story (probably through a Low German printed translation). Yet the notion that *Ambales saga* could preserve traces of an independently existing oral version of the Hamlet story, more or less continuous with the one alluded to by Snaebjörn, is also in play, including in Gollancz's explorations. Hence the *Ambales saga* represents, in a form that scholars such as Gollancz view as mongrelized, another possible ghostly trace of an original Icelandic Hamlet myth.

[19] Geoffrey Bullough, ed., *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, vol. 7 (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1973), p. 5.

opportunity for a coup."[20] Modern editors of *Hamlet*, recapping Bullough's treatment of the sources in their scholarly introductions to the play, preserve the association between Old Norse origins and a primitive narrative type of revenge story. Thus Harold Jenkins marvels that the germ of so many details and elements in Shakespeare's play can be recognized in Saxo's story:

> In this primitive and sometimes brutal story the essentials of Shakespeare's plot—fratricide, an incestuous marriage, feigned madness, and the ultimate achievement of long-delayed revenge—are already present.[21]

Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor range the "Amleth legend" among "archaic Nordic myths" and other "old stories about clever avenging sons who pretended to be stupid in order to outwit their enemies"[22]; G. R. Hibbard writes that "The tale Saxo tells conforms to the pattern of blood revenge so common in Norse saga"[23]; and Philip Edwards echoes the by-now-familiar sentiment when he writes that "It is remarkable how much of the primitive legend [recounted by Saxo] survives through the successive redactions into Shakespeare's masterpiece."[24] In all of these discussions, the Old Norse origins of the Amleth story are linked with a notion that the story exemplifies a primitive, archaic, archetypal kind of revenge plot.

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[20] Bullough, p. 6. Bullough again refers to the Hamlet story as a "saga" on pp. 11, 28, 38 ("the old saga"), and 45.

[21] *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, p. 88.

[22] *Hamlet*, ed. Ann Thompson and Neil Taylor (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), pp. 68, 75, 65.

[23] *Hamlet*, ed. G. R. Hibbard (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), p. 6. Hibbard goes on to note that the important point about what Shakespeare inherits from Saxo is that "It is the revenge story that matters, and that story is all of a piece, a heroic tale of the heroic age in Northern Europe." See Hibbard, p. 9.

[24] *Hamlet*, ed. Philip Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), p. 1.

Criticism of the play often invokes this basic association between saga and revenge made by Bullough and by editors of *Hamlet*. For example, Stephen Greenblatt uses the association when he points out the *absence* of a ghost in the versions of the story found in Saxo and Belleforest. Greenblatt observes that Saxo's version of the story needs no ghost, since the fratricide is public knowledge. Reminding us that "Saxo's narrative is closely related to the great Norse sagas of violence, cunning, and revenge," Greenblatt explains that in Saxo, Amleth delays simply because he is "too young and weak to attempt the revenge that the social code manifestly demands." By contrast, the introduction of a ghost clamoring for revenge in Elizabethan dramatic versions of the Hamlet story "chang[ed] the whole nature of the tale."[25] Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, compared to the *Ur-Hamlet* which presumably introduced the ghost into the story for the first time, represents a yet more interesting change, for in *Hamlet* the ghost's most salient imperative to his son is not to revenge, but to remember. In this series of critical maneuvers, Greenblatt invokes Saxo's Amleth story, with its close relation to "the great Norse sagas," as the primitive archetype of a revenge tale, a foil which sets up the strangeness and interest of Shakespeare's deviation from this more straightforward pattern. The concept of saga invoked here, whose content the words "violence, cunning, and revenge" summarize, is perfectly adequate to Greenblatt's purposes. Yet it is worth observing that the concept remains the relatively thin one provided by Bullough and the editors quoted above.

By contrast to the thin concept of saga that still forms the basis of most discussions of the the Amleth story, the field of Old Norse-Icelandic saga scholarship has, particularly in the last fifty years, developed a rich and nuanced account of the saga as a literary form. Literary analysis

[25] Stephen Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), pp. 205, 206.

of the saga was slow to emerge, as Theodore Andersson documents in his overview of the history of saga scholarship.[26] In 1967, when Andersson's second monograph, a narratological analysis of the Icelandic family saga, appeared, Andersson could write that hardly any work in this vein yet existed, and could point to W. P. Ker's classic 1897 *Epic and Romance* as still the best introduction to the Icelandic sagas and the most extended treatment of them from a literary point of view.[27] In the years that followed, a series of major studies, largely inspired by structuralism, built on the tradition of narratological analysis initiated by Andersson.[28] These studies have built up a rigorous account of the interrelation between the social form of medieval Icelandic society and the literary form of the Icelandic sagas.

What has inhibited an attempt to put our improved understanding of the Icelandic saga as a literary form to use in our interpretations of *Hamlet*? "Traditional source study," that familiar object of denigration among Shakespeareans, could certainly be one culprit. Traditional source study, represented by Geoffrey Bullough and others, declared that no evidence pointed to any

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[26] Theodore M. Andersson, *The Problem of Icelandic Saga Origins: A Historical Survey* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964).

[27] See Theodore M. Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga: An Analytic Reading* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) and W. P. Ker, *Epic and Romance* (London: Macmillan, 1897). Ker and Gollancz were close contemporaries; Ker obtained a professorship in medieval literature at the University College London for which Gollancz had also applied. See Spencer, "Mystical Philology," pp. 17, 27.

[28] See the overview provided by Lars Lönnroth in his "Structuralist Approaches to Saga Literature," in *Learning and Understanding in the Old Norse World*, ed. Judy Quinn et al. (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), pp. 63-73. The key works in this line of scholarship are Andersson, *The Icelandic Family Saga*; Joseph Harris, "Genre and Narrative Structure in Some *Íslendinga Þættir*," *Scandinavian Studies* 44:1 (1972), pp. 1-27; Carol J. Clover, "Scene in Saga Composition," *Arkiv för nordisk filologi* 89 (1974), pp. 57–83 and *The Medieval Saga* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982); Lars Lönnroth, *Njáls Saga: A Critical Introduction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976); Jesse Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982); and William Ian Miller, *Bloodtaking and Peacemaking: Feud, Law, and Society in Saga Iceland* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990).

first-hand acquaintance on Shakespeare's part with Saxo Grammaticus' *Gesta Danorum*. Traditional source study, represented by Israel Gollancz, admitted that no Old Icelandic version of the Amleth story could be located. Since Shakespeare very probably did not read Saxo Grammaticus,[29] and certainly did not read any of the texts we now refer to as the Icelandic family sagas, Old Norse literature and the saga in particular cannot be shown to have "influenced" Shakespeare, and can therefore have only the most attenuated relevance to our understanding of *Hamlet*.

However, traditional source study has not been the only obstacle to placing the form of the saga in relation to Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. More importantly, literary theory has never accepted a general concept of the saga as a literary form. While we are frequently willing to apply concepts such as tragedy, comedy, epic, lyric, and romance to the literary products of vastly separated periods and cultures, the form of the saga does not enjoy this privilege in literary scholarship.[30] To some extent, popular usage of the term "saga" from the early twentieth-century up to today—both in everyday parlance and as a genre-marker within popular culture, from sci-fi novels to prestige television—reveals an inchoate theoretical concept of the saga, though I will not dwell on the suggestiveness of these vernacular usages here. Yet to become a useful tool for criticism, such vernacular usages need to be exfoliated into a more developed and articulated concept.

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[29] But for a revisitation of this question, see p. 519 of Julie Maxwell, "Counter-Reformation Versions of Saxo: A New Source for *Hamlet*?," *Renaissance Quarterly* 57:2 (Summer 2004): 518-160.

[30] That concepts such as tragedy and lyric can be applied transhistorically with anything less than extreme caution is of course contested. See, for instance, Blair Hoxby, *What Was Tragedy? Theory and the Early Modern Canon* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), and *The Lyric Theory Reader: A Critical Anthology*, ed. Virginia Jackson and Yopie Prins (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014), pp. 1-8.

II. Jolles on the saga as a simple form

Jolles's notion of the saga as a simple form provides the way out of this impasse. Taking the Icelandic family saga as the paradigmatic instance of a form with more attenuated manifestations in other cultures and periods, Jolles defines the saga as a literary form determined by the concept of family.[31] The following passage condenses the essential aspects of Jolles's definition of the saga:

> Developing out of the mental disposition of family, clan, consanguinity, from a family tree it [i.e. the form of the saga] built a world that would remain constant in a hundred shimmering variations, a world of ancestral pride and paternal curses, of family property and family feud, of *raptio* and adultery, of blood vengeance and incest, of family loyalty and family hatred, of fathers and sons and brothers and sisters, a world of heritability. And a world in which good and evil, bravery and cowardice, are as little understood as individual traits as property is something thought to be subject to individual ownership—a world where everything matters solely from the perspective of family, where the fate of persons always reflects on the clan.[32]

What Jolles provides here is a concept of saga that is built up out of an analysis of the Icelandic family saga, but which also finds other applications in literary history. Jolles's criteria for identifying instances of the saga relies on two key concepts central to his larger theory of simple

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[31] Jolles's account of the saga depends on an untranslatable distinction between the (Icelandic) "saga," and the simple form of the "*Sage*." The distinction Jolles makes here is crucial to his theoretical paradigm, for it marks the distinction between the simple form (*Sage*) and one of its historical instantiations (the Icelandic saga), and thereby provides the enabling premise of this chapter, in which I argue that Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is not so much directly influenced by the Icelandic saga (though some chain of influence exists via Saxo Grammaticus), as it is shaped by the same simple form which we find powerfully instantiated in the Icelandic saga. Nevertheless, while in the case of translating *Kunstform* into "art form" I found preserving a certain awkwardness potentially helpful, in the case of Jolles's use of the German *Sage*, which has no real English equivalent, I have opted to employ "saga" instead. Where it has seemed necessary, I mark the difference between "the saga as a simple form" and "the Icelandic saga" (an "instantiated simple form," in Jolles's terminology) by fully spelling out those phrases.

[32] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 65.

form: the concept of "mental disposition" (essentially, a sphere of human activity out of which the world of a given simple form emerges); and the concept of "speech gesture," a reformulation of the concept of "motif" which posits that certain repeated narrative and verbal elements have special force and validity within specific mental dispositions. These two criteria together provide a rudimentary and yet valuable morphology of the saga, a formalist method for identification and classification.

I want now to more carefully examine how, in Jolles's account, mental disposition and speech gesture work in tandem to help discriminate between instances where the form of saga is present and instances where it is not. The speech gestures Jolles identifies with the saga—*illegitimate child*, *bastard, inheritor, inheritance (scepter, throne, golden lamb), parricide, paternal curse, incest, family property, family feud, raptio, adultery, blood vengeance, family loyalty, family hatred, fathers, sons, brothers, sisters, ostracism*, *family ownership*—all intrinsically involve the concept of family: inheritance as a concept—except in the corporate terminology of individual property derived from Roman law, discussed later in this chapter—logically requires the concept of family. Yet, as Jolles acknowledges, many of these speech gestures can become detached from the governing mental disposition, or point of view, of family.

Take the counterexample Jolles introduces: the story of the House of Tudor.[33] While Jolles acknowledges that the history of the Tudor dynasty in the sixteenth century involves extremely convoluted family relationships, he argues that it would be a mistake to class this as an instance of the simple form of the saga. For the events in question, Jolles argues, were not

[33] Discussed by Jolles on pp. 60-62 of *Simple Forms*.

experienced by participants or onlookers as primarily a family affair, as evidenced by the fact that

> . . . neither Henry VIII nor Edward VI nor Mary nor Elizabeth consider themselves primarily as a descendant of Henry VII, as a member of the Tudor family or clan, because neither at the execution of Jane Grey nor at the execution of Mary Stuart is the feeling dominant that here a blood relation, a member of the clan, is being killed; because the distance between Mary the Catholic and Elizabeth the Protestant is seen not as a question of Catholicism and Protestantism being things that divide two sisters who should be bound by bonds of kinship, but instead the two women are understood as representatives of two religions at odds with one another. Because, finally, the English people does not observe all this, experience it, intervene in it and ally itself with one side or the other as participants in a family quarrel, but rather interprets this all from a political or a religious perspective. The mental disposition that we find realized in the form *Sage* is lacking.[34]

Jolles goes on to acknowledge that the mental disposition proper to the saga is not *completely* lacking in the story of the Tudors, as is evidenced by the verbal gesture, "*the throne is heritable*." Yet, Jolles argues, even this verbal gesture has been wrenched away from the mental disposition of clan and consanguinity, for the throne represents not the might and power of a clan or family, but the state of England, which, "in the eyes of the English, . . . is . . . not the family property of the Tudors, not their inheritance."[35] As Jolles succinctly puts it: "The throne does not belong to the House of Tudor; rather, the House of Tudor belongs to the throne."[36]

In Jolles's account, then, verbal gestures are not sufficient to establish the full presence of the saga as simple form. We also need a corresponding centering perspective in the mental disposition of the family. The concept of mental disposition here moves into close relation with a term which, in later narrative theory, will assume central importance: point of view or

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[34] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 61.

[35] Ibid., p. 62.

[36] Ibid., p. 61.

perspective. A crucial hallmark of the saga is that its point of view centers in the family. The term "perspective" in the English translation is not Jolles's—"everything matters solely from the perspective of the family" translates *wo alles nur von der Familie aus gilt*[37]—but the slippage in terminology is natural enough. By correlating mental disposition or point of view with a specific set of speech gestures, Jolles builds a transhistorical, transcultural catalog of instances of the saga, from Greek myths about the House of Atreus up to the novels of Émile Zola.

III. The saga mentality: land, feud, and inheritance

If Jolles's concept of the saga is to be made viable, the rudimentary morphological criterion he provides of a correlation between *mental disposition* and *speech gesture* needs to be supplemented with more complex, detailed analyses. In this chapter, I make an essay in that direction by concentrating on the speech gestures of *inheritance* and *family resemblance*, and attempting to show how these formal elements function in both the Icelandic saga and in *Hamlet*.

I want to begin by discussing inheritance, and the connection of family to land in the sagas. For if, prompted by Margreta de Grazia's rediscovery of inheritance and the connection between man and earth as central themes in *Hamlet*, we asked ourselves whether a literary form exists in which these two themes are a paramount, central concern, we could find no better instance than the Icelandic family saga.

The place to begin, I believe, is by aligning what Jolles calls a *mental disposition* with a concept that became centrally important in the work of twentieth-century historians: *mentality*. In two essays, the medieval historian Aaron Gurevich explores the presence in ancient Scandinavian culture of something very like the mental disposition of family and clan which

[37] See André Jolles, *Einfache Formen* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1999), p. 82.

Jolles associates with the saga. Crucially, Gurevich's analyses each begin with a focus on *land*, and, specifically, the Norwegian concept of *óðal*, according to which "Land was not something which could be freely used and transferred—it belonged inalienably to its owners."[38] Gurevich's concern here is to demonstrate the inaccuracies that arise when historians uncritically apply the concept of private property to medieval practices of landownership. Here is how Gurevich explains *óðal*:

> Even when the land was given to an outsider, the right to *óðal* was retained by the *óðalmen*. There were close and unbreakable ties between a family and its possession. *Óðal* was conceived of as a family possession from time immemorial, or from the 'time of heathen barrows' (*haugóðal*). *Óðal* meant not only 'family estate', but also 'patrimony', 'birth-place', 'fatherland', 'native land'.[39]

Furthermore, the notion of *óðal* was related to the idea of nobility, *ethel* (Anglo-Saxon *éðel*, German *edel*):

> The categories of possession, nobility and inherited qualities were closely connected, undivided in the minds of ancient Scandinavians. There was no pure economic category of possession, irrespective of the dignity of persons who possessed it. It was as if the land and its owner were one, and the land acquired its qualities from the latter and vice versa. . . . So beneath relationships of a juridical and economic character there existed a definite social and psychological system of emotions and concepts. A man was closely and indissolubly linked with the land he cultivated; he saw in that land a prolongation of his own nature. And the fact that a man was thus personally linked with his possessions found reflection in a general awareness of the indivisibility of the world of men and the world of nature.[40]

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[38] See p. 178 of Aaron Gurevich, "Wealth and gift-bestowal among the ancient Scandinavians," in *Historical Anthropology of the Middle Ages*, ed. Jana Howlett (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), pp. 177-189. Gurevich's other essay in the same volume on "Semantics of the medieval community: 'farmstead', 'land', 'world'" (pp. 200-209) provides further exposition of the same themes.

[39] Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, p. 178.

[40] Ibid.

Importantly, Gurevich stresses that *óðal* was the basis of an entire world-picture, a cosmology:

> It is very significant that *óðal*-possession, family homestead-*garðr*, served as a model for the idea of cosmos. According to the Scandinavian cosmology, the world of human beings was *Miðgarðr* (Middle-yard); the outer world, the abode of giants, *Utgarðr* (Out-yard); and the burgh of the gods *Ásgarð*. The pair of cosmic conceptions, *Miðgarðr* and *Utgarðr*, was in conformity with another pair of notions, *Innangarðs* and *Utangarðs* (within and beyond the fence), which denoted two main parts of the estate.[41]

This is the world that Jolles describes when he writes of the saga that "Developing out of the mental disposition of family, clan, consanguinity, from a family tree it built a world that would remain constant in a hundred shimmering variations." Gurevich's exposition anchors Jolles's theory in a rigorous account of the mentality which medieval Iceland inherited from Scandinavian culture.

Turning now to the Icelandic family sagas, it is not difficult to find literary evidence of the mentality analyzed by Gurevich.

Egil's Saga (*Egils saga Skallagrímssonar*), one of the most famous of the Icelandic family sagas, follows the history of the clan of Icelandic settlers descended from Kveldulf, a viking farmer who, with his son Skallagrim, flees Norway because of the persecutions of King Harald Fairhair, the first king to consolidate power over all of Norway. Kveldulf, however, does not survive the passage from Norway to Iceland, instead falling sick and dying during the voyage by ship. As Kveldulf is dying, he makes the following request of his crewmates (Kveldulf and his son, Skallagrim, are traveling in different ships):

> 'I have not been prone to illness,' he [Kveldulf] said, 'but if it happens, as I think it probably will, that I die, make a coffin for me and put me overboard. Things will not turn

[41] Ibid.

> out as I imagined, if I do not reach Iceland and settle there. Give my greetings to my son Grim [a.k.a. Skallagrim], when you see him, and tell him too that if he reaches Iceland and, unlikely as it seems, I am there already, to make himself a home as close as possible to the place where I have come ashore.'[42]

The predictions of Kveldulf come true. He dies and is cast overboard in a coffin, which washes ashore in a bay in eastern Iceland and is later found by his crewmates. When Kveldulf's son, Skallagrim, reunites with these crewmates in Iceland, they show Skallagrim where they have buried Kveldulf's coffin, and Skallagrim builds a farmstead nearby and calls it Borg. Borg becomes the family seat of the powerful Icelandic clan which claimed descent from Kveldulf, the Myrar clan.

Gurevich cites a story from another saga about precisely this clan descended from Kveldulf, a story which provides evidence that for medieval Scandinavians

> A man and his family group were inseparable from their ancestral estate. The *Sturlunga saga* says that when Snorri Sturluson, the famous Icelandic chieftain, skald and historian, [conjectured to be the author of *Egil's Saga*] decided to move from Borg, his patrimonial estate, to a new place, one of his relatives had a dream: the great skald Egill Skallagrimsson, who had lived over two centuries earlier, expressed his displeasure with his descendant Snorri abandoning his old family property. By this action, he said, Snorri showed scorn for their land; living in Borg, he and all his kin had prospered and dominated the surrounding district (*Sturlunga saga*, I, 131). Scorn for the ancestral land! It is a highly meaningful expression: patrimony was not inert matter, or a lifeless object. Men have lived on the estate from the epoch of heathen burial mounds, and the *jarðar megin*, the 'earth's might', enters them, giving them power and prosperity.[43]

By invoking the epoch of the heathen burial mounds, Gurevich points to the importance of the episode from *Egil's Saga* in which Skallagrim founds a new family seat at the spot where his

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[42] I quote from Bernard Scudder's translation in *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection* (New York: Penguin, 2001), p. 46.

[43] Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, p. 206.

father's body washes ashore. This ritual act allows immigrants who have abandoned their ancestral lands in Norway to reestablish a connection to the land in their newly adopted country. The crucial feature of the ritual is that the body of the patriarch is buried in the land on which the family seat rests.

For more evidence of the tight association between the spirit of the father and the earth in which he is buried, we can look to an episode from *The Saga of the People of Laxardal* (*Laxdæla saga*). In chapter 10 of this saga, we are introduced to a man named Hrapp, a settler who has arrived in Iceland from the Hebrides, and whose violent behavior has earned him the nickname "Killer-Hrapp." Hrapp is an instance of the kind of man often referred to in the sagas as an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, meaning a man who is "uneven," unjust, or overbearing.[44] Hrapp pushes around and threatens the neighboring farmers in his area, who respond by grouping together to request protection from a powerful local chieftain named Hoskuld, a second-generation Icelander and one of the protagonists of the first half of *Laxdæla saga*.

The presence of the minor character Hrapp in *Laxdæla saga* affords a good opportunity to observe how the compositional structure of the saga is governed by the logic of family and inheritance. Narratological work on the sagas in the structuralist tradition gave pride of place to the *feud*, which scholars such as Theodore Andersson, Joseph Harris, and Jesse Byock viewed as supplying the underlying structure governing the compositional arrangement of the sagas. For example, Byock provided, in *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*, an analysis of the narrative syntax of the feud, articulated in terms of various "feudemes": the feudeme of conflict, the feudeme of advocacy, the feudeme of resolution. Byock showed how these feudemes provided the sagaman with a flexible compositional method, allowing the sagaman to develop intricate chains of feuds

[44] See Byock, *Feud in the Icelandic Saga*, p. 30.

and feud clusters by stringing together feudemes in a flexible, changeable order which nevertheless provided an organizing logic which assisted the sagaman in keeping track of his place in the developing narrative.[45] Byock's pathbreaking study, with its central insight into the importance of what Byock calls "brokerage" to the practice of feud in Iceland, provided the most compelling account then available of the social form of feud in Icelandic society, a social form which Byock saw as providing both the basic structural fabric and the compelling interest of the Icelandic family sagas for their original audiences.

The narrative syntax of feud does indeed provide the governing logic of the compositional structure governing Hrapp's inclusion in *Laxdæla saga*. As an *ójafnaðarmaðr*, Hrapp provides the disturbance of social equilibrium which, in the sagas, is always the first step in the development of a feud. As we have already seen, Hrapp's aggressive behavior towards his neighbors triggers a feudeme of conflict which is immediately followed by a feudeme of advocacy, as Hrapp's neighbors turn to Hoskuld for protection. However, it is also important to note that the inclusion in *Laxdæla saga* of Hrapp and the various feud chains in which he is involved has its primary justification in the fact that Hrapp's fate intersects with the story of the family at the center of the saga. It is insofar as Hrapp's fate is necessary to a complete picture of the history of this family, *and of the history of this family's connection to its ancestral lands,* that Hrapp enters into the dominant focus, the point of view, of *Laxdæla saga*.

I will not take the time to follow out this process in detail, for the narrative chains involved are somewhat complicated, but the crucial point about Hrapp's presence in *Laxdæla saga* is that his land in Laxardal ultimately goes to one of Hoskuld's sons, Olaf Peacock. Olaf Peacock is, importantly, Hoskuld's *illegitimate* son: the son of a slave woman purchased by

[45] Ibid., pp. 56-62.

Hoskuld. A central focus of *Laxdæla saga* is the inheritance dispute that arises between Olaf and his two half-brothers, Hoskuld's legitimate sons. Before this inheritance dispute arises, however, the problem of providing land on which Olaf can build a farmstead of his own must be solved. First, a different feud, which intersects the story of Hrapp, results in Olaf being adopted as the foster-son of another man who has sought Hoskuld's protection. Because Olaf will now inherit the lands of his foster-father, he has been provided with a patrimony that does not impinge on that of his brothers. Then, some time after Hrapp's eventual death, Olaf purchases Hrapp's land, Hrappsstadir, which borders the lands Olaf has inherited from his foster-father. It is this absorption of Hrappsstadir into the patrimony of Olaf Peacock which justifies the presence of Hrapp in *Laxdæla saga*.

Before Olaf can fully occupy Hrappsstadir, however, he has to deal with a problem: the land is haunted by the spirit of Hrapp. In the years preceding his death, the aging Hrapp has grown more and more aggressive. Before he dies, Hrapp instructs his wife to bury him standing upright in front of his kitchen, so that, as Hrapp menacingly tells her, "I'll be able to keep a watchful eye over my home." After Hrapp dies, his wife follows his instructions, and, we are told, "if it had been difficult to deal with him [Hrapp] when he was alive, he was much worse dead, for he haunted the area relentlessly."[46] Hrapp's ghost is thought to be responsible for the ensuing deaths of most of his servants. The ghost constantly troubles the other farmers living in the area. Eventually, Hrapp's terrified wife flees to the protection of her brother, leaving Hrappsstadir deserted.

[46] *The Saga of the People of Laxardal*, trans. Keneva Kunz, p. 297, in *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*.

Later on, Hrapp's body is disinterred and moved, and the haunting lessens in intensity, enough so that Hrapp's son, who has inherited the farm, decides to move in. However, Hrapp's son, once living in Hrappstadir, goes mad and dies. The farm is then inherited, after further misadventures and feuds, by a relative of Hrapp's wife, but it remains deserted until, finally, Olaf Peacock purchases the land. A complaint from one of Olaf's farmhands reveals to Olaf that the land is still haunted by Hrapp's ghost. Olaf encounters the ghost of Hrapp standing in the doorway of a cowshed, and attempts to stab Hrapp with a spear, but Hrapp grasps the spear and wrenches it, breaking the shaft, before disappearing. In the morning, Olaf has the body of Hrapp dug up from where it has been buried. The body is perfectly preserved, and Olaf also finds his spear blade there. Olaf prepares a large bonfire, has Hrapp's body burned, and has the ashes taken out to sea. This finally ends the haunting of Hrappstadir (*Laxdæla saga*, ch. 24).

We thus see, in this episode, that in order for a member of the clan at the center of *Laxdæla saga* to incorporate a piece of land into his patrimony, he must first exorcise a curse imposed by a hostile spirit, *by removing the buried body of the man who originally possessed the land*. Equally importantly, we see that the compositional structure which organizes the presence of Hrapp in the narrative of *Laxdæla saga*, namely the *feud*, is ultimately *subordinated to the mental disposition of family*, which dictates the inclusion of Hrapp within the purview of the saga only by virtue of the fact that Hrapp's land becomes part of the ancestral seat of the clan at the center of the saga.

IV. Family names, family resemblances, and fylgjur in the Icelandic sagas

In order for the connection between a family and its ancestral lands to maintain itself, the family needs to survive over time, reconstituting itself in each generation. One can say with a

certain degree of truth that there are no individuals in the family sagas, for the sagas are narratives in which the protagonist is *the family*, and the family is by definition divisible. From the point of view of the family, persons are not irreplaceably unique. In order for the family to survive across multiple generations, substitutes must be provided for members lost to death.

Gisli Sursson's Saga provides, in its first pages, a clear example of how, in the sagas, the family unit reconstitutes itself by replacing deceased family members with new progeny. Naming plays a crucial role in this process. The saga begins with a man named Thorkel, who has three sons, Ari, Gisli, and Thorbjorn. By the end of the first chapter, the father, Thorkel, and the two eldest sons, Ari and Gisli, have all died, and the youngest son, Thorbjorn, inherits all the wealth that previously belonged to his father and two brothers. When this youngest son, Thorbjorn, marries and has children of his own, he names his three sons after his deceased father, Thorkel, and his deceased elder brothers, Gisli, and Ari. The family unit with which we began the saga has been reconstituted: four men with the exactly the same names.[47]

Such naming practices, in which newborn children are named after deceased ancestors, are common in the sagas. It is also frequently the case that sons are named after their fathers. The patronymic already identifies sons with their fathers—e.g. Gisli Sursson, which means "Gisli son of Sur"—but many sons also receive the *given* names of their fathers, for instance the son of the poet Hallfreðr in *Hallfreðar saga*, who is also named Hallfreðr, after his father. This kind of naming symbolically reinforces the most straightforward, "natural" kind of replacement in the family unit: the son will substitute for the father after the father's death, taking over the role and responsibilities of the father.

[47] *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, pp. 500-501.

This process of subsitution is facilitated by resemblance—like father, like son. Naming is itself a way of *creating* resemblance: two persons with the same name will resemble each other in that respect, if in no other. But in the sagas we frequently also see persons who grow up to resemble the family member who is their namesake.

One can observe this process at work in *Egil's Saga*. Kveldulf, the patriarch of the clan at the center of the saga, has two sons, Thorolf and Skallagrim. The two sons have contrasting temperaments, which the saga explains as the expression of traits belonging to two different sides of the family, the father's and the mother's:

> Kveldulf and his wife had two sons. The elder one was named Thorolf and the younger one Grim [a.k.a Skallagrim], and they both grew up to be big, strong men like their father. Thorolf was an attractive and highly accomplished man. *He took after his mother's side of the family*, a cheerful, generous man, energetic and very eager to prove his worth. He was popular with everyone. Grim was swarthy and ugly, *resembling his father in both appearance and character*. He turned out to be an active man; he was gifted at working in wood and iron, and grew to be a great craftsman.[48]

In the course of the saga, the older brother, Thorolf, meets a tragic death at the hands of the first king of Norway, Harald Fairhair. Later in the saga, the younger brother, Skallagrim, has children of his own in Iceland. Skallagrim and his wife

> had a son who was sprinkled with water and given the name Thorolf. He was big and handsome from an early age, and *everyone said he closely resembled Kveldulf's son Thorolf, after whom he had been named*. Thorolf far excelled boys of his age in strength, and when he grew up he became accomplished in most of the skills that it was customary for gifted men to practise. He was a cheerful character and so powerful in his youth that he was considered just as able-bodied as any grown man. He was popular with everyone, and his father and mother were very fond of him.[49]

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[48] *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, p. 8.

[49] *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, p. 51.

Of the couple's second son, Egil, who will become the central protagonist of *Egil's Saga*, we are told:

> Skallagrim and his wife had another son who was sprinkled with water and named Egil. As he grew up, *it soon became clear he would turn out very ugly and resemble his father, with black hair.* When he was three years old, he was as big and strong as a boy of six or seven. He became talkative at an early age and had a gift for words, but tended to be difficult to deal with in his games with other children.[50]

Skallagrim's sons thus reproduce the contrast between Skallagrim and his brother, Thorolf. The family reconstitutes itself, producing, in two successive generations, a pair of contrasting brothers who carry forward an original contrast between the mother and father who together initiated the bloodline of this clan. Each generation thus issues persons whose character is not so much individual as it is the expression of family traits. In the world that the saga unfolds, persons possess traits of character not as individuals, but as members of a clan.

I want to return, here, to Jolles's definition of the saga as a form that creates

> a world in which good and evil, bravery and cowardice, are as little understood as individual traits as property is something thought to be subject to individual ownership—a world where everything matters solely from the perspective of family, where the fate of persons always reflects on the clan.[51]

For in point of fact, in *Egil's Saga*, as elsewhere in the sagas, family resemblances provide an indicator both of the course of inheritance disputes (disputes over family property), the personalities of characters, and the fate of characters.[52]

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[50] Ibid.

[51] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 65.

[52] The dispute over inheritance between Brynjolf and the sons of Hildirid, which begins in chapter 7 of *Egil's Saga*, is an example of family resemblances indicating the lines of conflicting inheritance claims. The sons of Hildirid (the second wife of Brynjolf's father) are half-brothers

As I have shown, the contrasting brothers Thorolf and Skallagrim in *Egil's Saga* differ in personality, a fact explained by the saga in terms of divergent family resemblances to the mother and the father. The brothers also meet divergent fates. While Skallagrim emigrates to Iceland, where he prospers, the older brother, Thorolf, meets a tragic end at the hands of King Harald Fairhair, whom Thorolf has decided to serve in spite of the misgivings of his father, Kveldulf. During King Harald's rise to power, Kveldulf, has refused to get involved in conflict with Harald, saying, "I have a feeling Harald has plenty of good fortune in store for him," a premonition repeated multiple times in the saga.[53] The word translated as "fortune" here is *hamingju*.[54] As Gurevich explains, the notion of fate in early Scandinavia was expressed in terms of luck and fortune, and *hamingja* was the most important term used to express this idea:

> The terms employed in this connection [i.e. with luck and fortune], such as *hamingja*, *gæfa, heill, auðna*, have a more or less clearly expressed personal character. In this respect *hamingja* is the most significative term. It is personal luck, good fortune and the guardian spirit of a person as well. It leaves the man after his death and is inherited by his offspring or close relative; or it dies together with him.[55]

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to Brynjolf, with whom they fight over an inheritance from their father Bjorgolf. We are told that the Hildaridarssons (whom everyone tellingly refers to with the *matronym*) "grew up to be handsome men, small but clever, *like their mother's side of the family*. Everyone called them Hildirid's sons" (*The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, pp. 14-15).

[53] *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, p. 10.

[54] *Egils saga Skalla-grímssonar*, ed. Sigurður Nordal (Reykjavik: Íslenzka Fornritafélga, 1933), p. 9.

[55] Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, p. 104.

Hamingja, the personal luck or guardian spirit of a person, is closely related to a nearly synonymous term, *fylgja*.[56] Jolles concludes his account of the saga by discussing this figure, supplying the following example of a fylgja from *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*:

> A young boy is abandoned and raised in another family. Unwittingly, he enters a room occupied by his own grandfather—he stumbles, and the grandfather laughs and says: I have seen what you did not see. When you came in, there was a young polar bear running before you, but when it saw me it stopped and stood still; you, however, were too quick and tripped over it. Now, I believe that you are not the son of Krumm, but belong to a more noble line.[57]

Jolles explains the significance of this excerpt for his account of the saga as follows:

> Effectively, every figure in *Sage* carries such a fylgja with him—a young polar bear that invisibly accompanies him, but in which, when a relative approaches, the relative recognizes his membership in the clan.[58]

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[56] The most helpful and accessible account I have found of *fylgja* and *hamingja* is in Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), pp. 221-235. See also the encyclopedia entry by Else Mundal in *Medieval Scandinavia: An Encyclopedia*, ed. Phillip Pulsiano (New York: Garland, 1993), pp. 624-625. Mundal's *Fylgjemotiva I Norrøn Litteratur* (Oslo, Universitetsforlaget, 1974), unfortunately not available in English translation, but useful for its index of instances of the *fylgja* motif in Old Norse texts, remains the most authoritative full-length treatment of the subject. For more recent considerations, see also Else Mundal, "Remnants of Old Norse Heathendom in Popular Religion in Christian Times," in *Medieval Christianity in the North* (Brepols Publishers, 2013), pp. 7-22; William Friesen, "Family Resemblances: Textual Sources of Animal Fylgjur in Icelandic Saga," *Scandinavian Studies* 87:2 (2015): pp. 255-280; and Zuzana Stankovitsova, "Following up on Female Fylgjur: A Re-Examination of the Concept of Female Fylgjur in Old Icelandic Literature," in *Paranormal Encounters in Iceland 1150–1400*, ed. Armann Jakobsson (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020), pp. 245-62. On *fylgja* and *hamingja* as personifications of fate and luck see also Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, p. 105.

[57] Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 71.

[58] Ibid.

The fylgja is thus a family spirit, one that serves to identify one's membership in the clan. It is one of the features of the saga in which we can recognize the convergence of the speech gesture of *inheritance* with that of *resemblance*.

As William Friesen notes, the fylgja commonly "takes on a form that directly communicates core aspects of the person's character."[59] Friesen's survey of instances of the fylgja motif in both *fornaldarsögur* (the so-called "legendary" sagas) and the Icelandic family sagas repeatedly shows that the identification of an animal fylgja with the man to whom the fylgja belongs or whom the fylgja represents in a dream vision is based on *resemblances* between the animal and the character and fate of the man in question. At the same time, it is important to note that the fylgja, like the traits of appearance and character that establish family resemblances, is *inherited* from generation to generation within a single family, and is sometimes portrayed as passing from one member of the family to another at the moment of death. As Gabriel Turville-Petre explains, the fylgja

> is not necessarily the companion of one man. It may accompany a family, or pass from one member of it to another through succeeding generations. In such cases its most usual form is that of a woman. [60]

Turville-Petre supplies the following illustration, from *Hallfredar Saga*, of a fetch passing from one member of a family to another:

> Hallfred, the favourite poet of Olaf Tryggvason, fell ill at sea, and just before he died he and his companions beheld a great, armoured woman walking on the waves, as if on land. Recognizing the woman as his fetch (*fylgjukona*), the poet exclaimed: 'I declare that all is now over between us.' The woman now turned to the poet's brother, asking [him] to

[59] Friesen, "Family Resemblances," p. 256.

[60] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 228.

> receive [her], but he rejected her curtly. She passed on to the poet's son, who shared his father's name, Hallfred, and when he welcomed her she vanished.[61]

It is significant that the fylgja passes not to the brother of Hallfred, but to his son, who bears the same name. As we have seen, in the sagas, identical names often go with the passing on of family resemblances and traits.

In this way, the fylgja can be seen as fulfilling the same function as physical family resemblances do elsewhere in the sagas: cementing the bonds of kinship by testifying to membership in the clan. I mentioned earlier that Olaf Peacock in *Laxdæla saga* is an illegitimate son. His mother, who had been purchased as a slave by Olaf's father, later reveals herself to be the daughter of an Irish king. When Olaf reaches maturity, he decides to travel to Ireland to meet his grandfather and publically establish his own genealogy as the descendant of a king. When Olaf eventually meets his grandfather, he comes carrying tokens given him by his mother; but his *resemblance* to his mother further cements his grandfather's recognition of Olaf as a legitimate decsendant. The grandfather tells Olaf:

> These tokens are irrefutable, and are even more convincing *because you resemble your mother so much that you could be recognized by that alone*. Such being the case, I do not hesitate to acknowledge you as my kinsman.[62]

Family resemblance thus serves to establish the bonds of kinship, just as the fylgja does. And it is through the figure of the fylgja, and the form of family resemblance, that I at last wish to make the connection between the sagas and Shakespeare's *Hamlet*.

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[61] Ibid.

[62] *The Sagas of the Icelanders: A Selection*, p. 309.

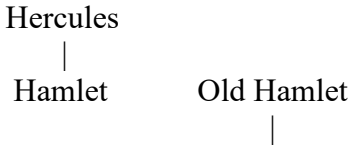
V. "Hamlet" and the saga

In *Hamlet*, royal sons are named after their fathers, whom they resemble and in time come to replace. At least this is the case with young Fortinbras, who when he comes of age seeks to revive the old feud with Denmark initiated by his father, and to recover the ancestral lands his father lost in battle with Old Hamlet. Fortinbras, like his father, is warlike and resolute, full of emulate pride.

What about Hamlet? Is he like his father, as his name promises? Hamlet's first soliloquy presents a paired comparison which leaves room for doubt upon this question. Here are the vehement terms in which Hamlet states Claudius's inferiority to Old Hamlet:

> . . . my uncle,
> My father's brother—but no more like my father
> Than I to Hercules. (1.2.151-3)

We have here *un*likeness rather than likeness: Claudius, unlike Old Hamlet; Hamlet, unlike Hercules. Their positions in the comparisons might implicitly render Claudius and Hamlet equivalent to each other, thereby implying that Hamlet is just as inferior to Old Hamlet as Claudius is. But this is only a possible implication. The strict logic of the double comparison in fact says nothing unequivocal about whether Hamlet resembles his father or not. As the following diagram indicates, one could equally well presume equality between Hamlet and Old Hamlet, constructing the following hierarchy, in which Hercules is at the top, Claudius at the bottom, and Hamlet and Old Hamlet, as middle terms, meet as equals:



But the point is we don't know precisely where to situate Hamlet in relation to Old Hamlet. A resemblance linking each of the doubled comparisons is stated, but the exact nature and degree of the correlation is left unclear.

The unclear relation between Hamlet's doubled comparisons could itself be compared to the relation between the two terms in the rhetorical figure which, ever since George Wright's essay on the subject, has been widely recognized as the most distinctive stylistic feature of this particular play by Shakespeare: hendiadys.[63] Just as hendiadys functions, as Wright puts it, as a "miniature stylistic play within the play,"[64] so too we could recognize in hendiadys a linguistic microcosm in which we witness, in miniature, the drama of individuation within family relationships. The English language is, as Logan Pearsall Smith observes, filled with "phrasal collocations or doublets, in which two words are habitually used together for the sake of emphasis."[65] Constant repetition has rendered us so familiar with the general meaning of such collocations as *fits and starts*, *high and mighty*, *rack and ruin* that we almost never pause to consider the precise relation between the two terms in the doublet. Because we expect linguistic units joined together by the conjunction *and* to be "not only grammatically but conceptually assimilable,"[66] instances of hendiadys such as *perfume and suppliance*, *ponderous and marble*, *law and heraldry*, and the sixty-three other examples Wright locates in *Hamlet*, produce an effect

[63] George T. Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," *PMLA* 96:2 (1981), pp. 168-193.

[64] Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," p. 181.

[65] Logan Pearsall Smith, *Words and Idioms: Studies in the English Language*, (Boston: Houghton, 1925), p. 173, quoted in Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," p. 171.

[66] Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," p. 170.

on us which is estranging and unsettling, as two terms which we expect to co-exist in unproblematic conjunction instead appear joined in an unstable relation whose exact nature remains obscure and confused. In this way, hendiadys, which creates estrangement and distance where we expect conjunction verging on interchangeability (*is* there a meaningful difference between *handy* and *dandy*?), can be understood as a stylistic allegory of the play of likeness and unlikeness in kinship relations—specifically, those relations of resemblance and substitution which are so central to the functioning of the family in the world of the saga. If man and wife are one flesh, hendiadys forces us to acknowledge that man and wife cleave together only in the primal antithetical sense of that word "cleave": which is to say, not only together, but also asunder. The same goes for father and son, mother and daughter. Son may resemble father, perhaps enough to function as a substitute for him. But son is also unlike father. This unstable play of likeness and unlikeness seems to me essential to the way hendiadys functions. The two affined terms of a hendiadys are in a condition which is quite other than that of the Phoenix and the Turtle, "Two distincts, division none." Instead, the two terms of a hendiadys are imperfectly distinguished, straining toward dissolution and division while remaining obscurely but insistently linked. Rather than being identified in their essences, the two terms are but partially unified, via the shifting, overlapping, imprecisely demarcated similarities which Wittgenstein designated with the term "family resemblances."[67]

While it is true that Hamlet himself initially focuses on family *contrasts* rather than resemblances, on what he insists is the *un*likeness of Claudius and Old Hamlet, it is also the case that the play insists, from the very outset, on an important relation of likeness. This relation of

[67] *Philosophical Investigations*, §65-71.

likeness centers not in the first instance on the relation between parent and child, but on the relation between a man and his spirit, between Old Hamlet and the Ghost.

The dialogue between Barnardo, Marcellus, and Horatio in the play's opening scene repeatedly returns to the question of the Ghost's uncanny likeness to the departed king.[68] Crucially, this uncanny likeness is, on repeated occasions, figured as a *mirroring*, a likeness which is a self-likeness, as in this first exchange between Marcellus and Horatio:

> *Mar.* Is it not like the King?
> *Hor.* As thou art to thyself. (1.1.61-2)

The same emphasis on mirroring recurs in 1.2. When Hamlet interrogates the accuracy of Horatio's account of the Ghost, Horatio insists on the certitude of his recognition of Old Hamlet, in terms that again conjure a mirror image: "I knew your father. / These hands are not more like" (1.2.211-12).[69] Since Shakespeare elsewhere imagines the child as both a "copy" of the parent and as a mirror-image or "glass" of the parent,[70] it is possible to understand *mirroring* as a characteristically Shakespearean twist on the verbal gesture of family resemblance.

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[68] On the repetitions of the word "like" and the insistent emphasis on the uncanny likeness of the Ghost to Old Hamlet, see Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pp. 210-216.

[69] For an exploration of mirroring in *Hamlet*, see the essay by Marjorie Garber entitled "As 'Twere; or, Misrecognition," forthcoming in *Raritan: A Quarterly Review*.

[70] Among the numerous examples are Sonnet 3, "Thou art thy mother's glass" (l. 9), and *Richard III*, where the Duchess of York refers to Clarence and Edward as "two mirrors" of the "princely semblance" (2.2.50) of her late husband, before going on to complain, speaking of her son Richard, "And I for comfort have but one false glass, / Which grieves me when I see my shame in him" (2.2.52-3). Another instance is *The Winter's Tale*, where the paranoid Leontes, convinced that he has been cuckolded, obsessively returns to the question of whether or not his son resembles him, and where the inheritance of a kingdom and the inheritance of family traits are thus central, paired concerns. For an exploration of the "rules of resemblance" that govern ideas of breeding in *The Winter's Tale*, see Jenny Davidson, *Breeding: A Partial History of the Eighteenth Century* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 14-38.

Understood in this way, family resemblance functions in a strangely displaced manner in *Hamlet*, as compared to how it functions in the sagas. Reconceiving family resemblance in terms of mirroring is one of the ways in which *Hamlet*, as I intend to argue, both instantiates and problematizes the form of the saga.

In *Hamlet*, we see a certain abstraction of the concept of family resemblance, an abstraction which makes possible an interiorization and intensification of the function of likeness in one of its primordial forms: family likeness, i.e. the likeness of parent to child, sibling to sibling, and so on. In Shakespeare's distinctive dramatic idiom, family likeness is conceived as *mirroring*, a metaphorical transformation of the concept which extends its reach beyond the family: to the relation of the "foils" Hamlet and Laertes ("For by the image of my cause I see / The portraiture of his" [5.2.67.10-11]); to the doubling of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern; to the play-within-the-play as mirror or double of the action of *Hamlet*; to the language Hamlet sets up as a "glass" within which Gertrude will see herself; to the likeness between Old Hamlet and the Ghost; and, finally, to the relation of self to self.[71]

The effect of this proliferation of mirrors and doubles is, I would suggest, to take certain feelings whose primordial locus is in family relationships, and to generalize them beyond the family, while at the same time preserving their primordial intensity by the incessant reduplication which accompanies this movement towards generalization. This constant movement from the familiar or "particular" to the general or "common" is, after all, a central characteristic of the play as a whole, in which Hamlet ceaselessly uses his most intimate feelings as a springboard to launch the discussion of general questions like "To be, or not to be." But most importantly, the

[71] To cite just a few of the mirror-relationships around which the play is constructed. George Wright's discussion of mirroring in his essay on hendiadys is particularly helpful. See Wright, "Hendiadys and *Hamlet*," pp. 178-180.

abstraction of family resemblance into relations of mirroring opens up the form of the saga to a whole set of relationships extending beyond those of blood kinship.

For it is worth noting that Hamlet's strongest relationship ends up being not with a family member, but with a friend, Horatio, who at the end of the play will inherit from Hamlet not the kingdom of Denmark, but Hamlet's *story*; and that the ideal friend has classically been imagined as a mirror of the self.[72] As Kottman and others have argued, the play stages a conflict between a social system based on blood relationships, and one based on the regime of individual property ownership and legal personhood which underwrites the modern state.[73] Hamlet's friendship with Horatio, I would suggest, stands somewhere between these conflicting social formations. Hamlet's friendship with Horatio is an elective affinity, sealed by the "election" (3.2.64) of Hamlet's soul. Claudius, of course, has also been *elected*, by the people of Denmark. The unclear relationship between elective monarchy and familial inheritance is the core site of disjuncture of the conflicting social systems represented in the play. Elective kinship relationships, exemplified by friendship, were enormously important in ancient Scandinavian society. Characters in the sagas are on occasion willing to sacrifice far more to defend such elective kinship bonds and alliances than they are to defend members of their own family, as if there were an existential urgency to asserting the legitimacy of artificial, created kinship bonds. Mirroring becomes, in *Hamlet*, the problematic site where the play of likeness and unlikeness, kinship as natural and as artificial, converge.

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[72] Fortinbras's "rights of memory in this kingdom" (5.2.394) are a survival of the rights of *óðal*, or allodial landownership, which I discussed earlier in the chapter. On the friend as a mirror of the self, see Marjorie Garber, "As 'Twere."

[73] See Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, pp. 60-61.

The play's emphasis on the mirroring likeness between Old Hamlet and the Ghost also has, of course, a naturalistic justification in terms of the plot. The Ghost must be identified, we must know *whose* ghost it is. The fact that the Ghost is the ghost of Hamlet's father is significant, if ambiguously so, for the plot: it implies that something is amiss, that there has been foul play, that strange eruptions to the state are imminent. Over and above the plot, however, the emphasis on the Ghost's *uncanny* likeness to Old Hamlet brings us back to the play of likeness and unlikeness acted out in the figure of hendiadys. For the uncanny is the familiar-unfamiliar, the already-known rendered strange. The *unheimlich*, as Freud insisted, retains the association with the home (*heim*) borne by the word *heimlich*.[74] The Ghost embodies this paradox: on the one hand, Hamlet insists that the Ghost is a stranger, to whom the rights of hospitality must be extended ("And therefore as a stranger bid it welcome" [1.5.173]); on the other (mirrored?) hand, the Ghost is a familiar spirit, already *of* the family and *of* the home. This brings us back to the figure of the fylgja from the sagas, the ancestral spirit or animal spirit which accompanies a person and announces his or her membership in the clan.

The Ghost in *Hamlet* is a Shakespearean fylgja. The fylgja is a kind of "fetch," and cultures which think of the fetch as a twin brother have something in common with Shakespeare, who at key moments envisions the twin as a spirit and the spirit as a twin.[75] Turville-Petre notes that the etymological origin of *fylgja* in the sense of fetch or familiar spirit

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[74] On the uncanniness of the Ghost in relation to Freud's essay on the uncanny, see Marjorie Garber, *Shakespeare's Ghost Writers: Literature as Uncanny Causality* (New York: Methuen, 1987), pp. 124-176.

[75] Stephen Greenblatt notes such an instance in *The Comedy of Errors*, 5.1.333-35, where Adriana wonders whether one of the identical twins is the "spirit" or "genius" of the other, as well as the similar one in *Twelfth Night*, 5.1.222-26, where Viola wonders whether Sebastian is a spirit. See Greenblatt, *Hamlet in Purgatory*, pp. 159-161.

> could be nom. agentis of the verb *fylgja* (to accompany), and that was how some medieval writers understood it. But whether this is correct or not, the word cannot be dissociated from its homonym *fylgja*, which means 'afterbirth, caul'. This noun could also be derived from the verb, but it is more likely to be related to Icelandic *fulga* (thin covering of hay) and Norwegian dialect *folga* (skin, covering), and with the ferb *fela* (to hide).[76]

Turville-Petre then goes on to note that

> the superstitious practices recorded in Iceland in recent times show how intimately the beliefs in the afterbirth were associated with those in the fetch . . . The afterbirth was believed to contain a part of the infant's 'soul', which was incomplete until it had been released. It must, therefore, be tended carefully, and not thrown out into the open, where animals might devour it, for then the child will be deprived of its fetch. Beliefs of this kind are not confined to Iceland, but have been noticed among many peoples. For some of them, the afterbirth is not merely associated with the fetch; it is the fetch, or a twin brother who accompanies a man throughout his life and defends him against danger.[77]

While the belief that the afterbirth is a twin brother stems from Indonesia,[78] a culture very distant from Iceland and of course from Shakespeare, the analogy suggested between a fylgja and a brother is suggestive for any discussion of *Hamlet*. By so emphatically presenting the Ghost as an identical double of Old Hamlet, Shakespeare puts the Ghost in the place of a brother, introducing yet another frightening sibling into a play about the aftermath of fratricide.

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[76] Gabriel Turville-Petre, *Myth and Religion of the North: The Religion of Ancient Scandinavia* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1964), p. 228.

[77] Ibid.

[78] See the article on "Indonesians" in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (Scribners: 1922), vol. [7], p. 271; and the article on "Tutelary Gods and Spirits" in vol. XII, p. 489 of the same. The collocation, during a discussion of beliefs of connections between the afterbirth and tutelary or protective spirits, of the Indonesian example with the Icelandic superstition had already been made by James Frazer in *The Golden Bough*, pt. i *The Magic Art* (London, 1911), i. 199f. Frazer drew the account of Icelandic superstitions concerning the placenta from J. Grimm, *Deutsche Mythologie*, ii. p. 728 *sq*, iii. 266 *sq*.; and M. Bartels, p. 70.

Although Hamlet compulsively returns to what for him is the polar contrast between his father and his uncle, critics of this play interested in the ritual origins of myth emphasize that fratricide imposes an arbitrary difference between two brothers where none obtained before.[79] Hamlet's need to differentiate Claudius from Old Hamlet expresses, in this reading, a need common to all societies, including Shakespeare's, to institute and maintain through ritual violence the principle of difference upon which social order rests. The arbitrariness of this difference, the fact that its only source is an originating act of violence, is the disturbing knowledge which, in order to be repressed, requires perpetually renewed acts of ritual violence.

From this point of view, one could suggest that the Ghost's uncanny likeness to Old Hamlet is a symptom of the repressed knowledge that Old Hamlet and Claudius are in fact *uncannily alike* rather than—or as well as—dramatically contrasted. The Shakespearean fylgja announces the return of this repressed knowledge of a profound family resemblance between the two brothers. If, as psychoanalytic critics of the play have long suggested, the contrasting figures of Claudius and Old Hamlet should be understood as a splitting of the figure of the father,[80] the Ghost as fylgja is the ineradicable trace of the connection between these two supposedly disjunct halves, a sign of the indissoluble bond of kinship linking them together.

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[79] The crucial essay here is Joel Fineman, "Fratricide and Cuckoldry: Shakespeare's Doubles," reprinted in *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays*, ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 70-109. Fineman is employing René Girard's ideas about the relation between fratricide myths and ritual sacrifice, ideas which Girard developed further in his later expositions of the theory of mimetic desire as well as the series of essays on Shakespeare gathered together in Girard, *A Theater of Envy: William Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

[80] See for instance Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers* (New York: Routledge, 1992), pp. 19-22, who gives on overview (p. 251, n. 19) of the earlier psychoanalytic critics who noted this splitting. Adelman, too, contends that Hamlet's excessive insistence on the difference between Claudius and Old Hamlet betrays the fact of their actual similarity: "But in fact the strenuousness of the opposition between them has indicated their resemblance all along." See Adelman, p. 21.

The etymological association of the fylgja with the afterbirth imagined as a kind of brother is also suggestive in that it raises the issue of succession. The afterbirth, conceived as twin brother, follows just after the baby in the order of birth, thus evoking the line of succession. Through these associations, the fact that the word *fylgja* is an ancestor of our modern English "to follow" takes on special significance for *Hamlet*.[81] For Shakespeare, as though unearthing this archaic strata of the language, places many suggestive instances of the word "follow" in *Hamlet*, persistently linking the idea of following to funeral rites (cf. Latin *obsequium*, funeral rite, from *obsequī*, to follow), genealogies, the order of death, surveillance, and, most importantly, the Ghost.

The word "follow" is paired most insistently and most interestingly with the figure of the Ghost. The word is repeated six times in less than thirty lines in the scene of Hamlet's first encounter with the Ghost. The Ghost beckons Hamlet to follow it to more removed ground, and Hamlet, desperate to know what the Ghost's silence portends, insists,

> It will not speak. Then *I will follow it*. (1.4.63)

The alarmed objections of Horatio and Marcellus have no hold on Hamlet:

> It waves me forth again, *I'll follow it*. (1.4.68)

> It waves me still.
> Go on, *I'll follow thee*. (1.4.78-79)

Until finally:

> By heaven, I'll make a ghost of him that lets me.

[81] See the etymology the OED provides for "follow, *v*.," which notes Old Icelandic *fylgja* as a cognate of Old English *fylgan*.

I say away.—Go on, *I'll follow thee*. (1.4.85-86)

This sequence is concluded by an exchange between Marcellus and Horatio in which the two men decide it is "not fit thus to obey" Hamlet, and that they will "follow" (1.4.88, 91) after him. The delicate suggestion here of usurpation on the normal hierarchies of the social order (Marcellus and Horatio deciding they must disobey their prince in order to surveil him for his own good) receives further connection to the theme of succession through the double meaning in Horatio's wondering question: "To what *issue* will this come?" (1.4.89).

If Hamlet must first follow the Ghost in order to question it, in the conclusion of the subsequent scene the Ghost appears to follow Hamlet, moving mole-like under the stage beneath the feet of Hamlet and his friends each time they shift their ground ("Well said, old mole. Canst work i'th' earth so fast?" [1.5.170]). Like the polar bear running before young Thorstein in *Þorsteins þáttur uxafóts*, the Ghost, imagined as a fylgja-like animal, accompanies Hamlet in form now visible, now invisible. Further, it follows from de Grazia's observation that the homonyms "mole" (animal) and "mole" (excrescence on the skin) are semantically linked through another homonym, "mould" (a word for soil),[82] that the "vicious mole of nature" (1.4.24) Hamlet is discussing precisely at the moment when he is interrupted by the arrival of the Ghost is itself, like the fylgja, an identifying mark. The "vicious mole of nature" is "the stamp of one defect, / Being nature's livery or Fortune's star" (1.4.31-32), a "particular fault" (1.4.36) that serves to mark out "particular men" (1.4.23). Harold Jenkins links the phrase "Fortune's scar" with Guiderius's mole in *Cymbeline*, described there as "a sanguine star" (5.5.363) or "natural

[82] See de Grazia, *"Hamlet" Without Hamlet*, pp. 29-31.

stamp" (5.5.365)—a birthmark which serves to identify Guiderius as Cymbeline's long lost eldest son, next in the line of succession.[83]

This association between the Ghost as "mole" (accompanying animal spirit, fylgja) and the "vicious mole of nature" suggests that the repressed family resemblance in *Hamlet*, the return of which is announced by the Ghost, can finally be understood as original sin.[84] This inherited curse, the "mould," soil, or sullying that marks all flesh in the play, is the touch of nature that makes the whole world kin. The mark common to all mankind is the mark of Cain, which, because this play repeatedly collapses together Cain's murder of Abel with the eating of the forbidden fruit,[85] treating now one, now the other, as the source of original sin and the "primal eldest curse" (3.3.37), serves to indicate our collective membership in fallen humanity, in the common mortal condition. As a mark common to all mankind, the vicious mole of nature thus loses its function as a mark of *particular* men, or of membership in a *particular* clan. It is the mark that dissolves all distinctions of clan in order to establish a single, universal community.

Paradoxically, then, the Ghost, the distinctively Shakespearean fylgja, ultimately works to *erase* the boundaries between distinct families and clans, by establishing the repressed fact of

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[83] See *Hamlet*, ed. Jenkins, p. 210 n. 32.

[84] Jolles describes the concept of original sin as the point at which "Christianity—however much it may have fought *Sage* in its very essence—nonetheless reabsorbed it . . . In the great community constituted by Christianity, something was again heritable—something that had originated in the first parents, in the earliest ancestors; something that had instantiated itself; something that retained power from generation to generation, like the paternal curse in a clan, and which could be cancelled only in a particular sense by the deity's splitting itself into father and son, as in a *Sage*." See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 70. For Jolles's view that Christianity, by commandeering the verbal gestures of the saga, destroys the true form of the saga, see *Simple Forms*, p. 62. For Jolles's view that the form of the saga is active in the Old Testament stories of the family of Abraham, see *Simple Forms*, p. 68.

[85] See Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers*, p. 24.

our membership in the encompassing, common kinship of fallen mortality. As de Grazia has shown by emphasizing the play's insistence on the links between "man and clay, human and humus,"[86] this common kinship is signified in the play by the family resemblance of dust to dust, by the fact that all the stamps that mark us out as particular crumble with death, leaving us to mingle, indistinguishable, in common earth.

The fallen world of the play, in which the marks of kinship which serve to distinguish clan from clan instead work to establish a resemblance that overwhelms and swallows up any particularity of persons based on distinctness of families, is a world in which the logic of succession, the sequence by which one generation follows the next, becomes the subject of Hamlet's grotesque parody:

> *Ham*. To what base uses we may return, Horatio! Why may not the imagination trace the noble dust of Alexander till he find it stopping a bunghole?
>
> *Hor.* 'Twere to consider too curiously to consider so.
>
> *Ham.* No, faith, not a jot; but to follow him thither, with modesty enough and likelihood to lead it, as thus: Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth to dust, the dust is earth, of earth we make loam, and why of that loam whereto he was converted might they not stop a beer barrel?
>
> (5.1.196-205)

The verb "follow" here describes the tracing of a viciously satirical genealogy, a line of descent that declines from Alexander at the height of his achievements to the point at which, stripped of the pith and marrow of his attribute, he returns to the basest of base uses, the "bunghole"

[86] de Grazia, *"Hamlet" Without Hamlet*, p. 31. de Grazia's extensive discussion of genealogies, heraldry, and family trees is also very suggestive when juxtaposed to the thematics of the saga. See *"Hamlet" Without Hamlet*, pp. 81-128.

which—another focus for the physical revulsion which the earthiness of human remains prompts in Hamlet—also contains the scurrilous secondary meaning of anus. Characteristically, Hamlet is revulsed by the thought of how the commonness of death brings about the erosion of principles of social distinction: he calls attention to the "base uses" to which the "noble dust" of Alexander returns. Hamlet's disgust manifests the strong current of revulsion running through all of Shakespeare's plays on the part of the noble towards the base. The difficulty of Hamlet's situation (which is quite similar to that of Richard II or Lear) is his recognition that this disgust is finally unjustified, for Hamlet himself is all too human and is finally no different from the lower orders who so disgust him. The disgust for the base which defines the sense of self of the prince thus has to be reacknowledged, if it is to be preserved, as self-disgust, self-loathing.

Hamlet's melancholy self-loathing thus emerges from the tensions and contradictions resulting from the unstable fusion of aristocratic principles of social distinction—which, as we have seen, in the mental disposition of the saga have their basis in an identification of persons with land, such that the characteristics of nobility are felt to inhere in the inseparable relation between man and earth—and the Christian principle of universal brotherhood in common, fallen mortality. In the context of Hamlet's obsessive fixation with sullied flesh, and Hamlet's aversive sense of contamination spreading outward from the kingly body, I think it is not completely far-fetched here to produce for comparison an example of the logic of taboo cited by Freud:

> A Maori chief would not blow a fire with his mouth; for his sacred breath would communicate its sanctity to the fire, which would pass it on to the pot on the fire, which would pass it on to the meat in the pot, which would pass it on to the man who ate the meat, which was in the pot, which stood on the fire, which was breathed on by the chief; so that the eater, infected by the chief's breath conveyed through these intermediaries, would surely die.[87]

[87] Sigmund Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1989), p. 36. Freud is quoting from Frazer, who is in turn quoting from Tayler.

Hamlet's fear of contamination attaches to the same sense of the taboo nature of sacred kingship, a taboo which Hamlet as it were compulsively violates in public in the most obscene manner, most memorably captured in his image, "Nothing but to show you how a king may go a progress through the guts of a beggar" (4.3.31-31). It is thus no accident that Hamlet, as many have observed, fixates on the paradox of the king's two bodies: "The body is with the King, but the King is not with the body" (4.3.26-7).[88] The concept of kingship is ultimately seen to require a fictional, paradoxical separation of the king from his own body. This separation of the idealized self from the body, because it is only ever fictional and never absolute, results in self-loathing whenever awareness of one's own fleshly being returns insistently to consciousness, as it inevitably must.

The play thus sets itself up at the unstable juncture between the world of blood kinship established by the saga, and the rival world established by a Christian conception of universal community—which is itself in alliance, through the doctrine of divine sovereignty which Claudius invokes at 4.5.123 ("There's such divinity doth hedge a king"), with the social form of the modern state.[89] In this way, the saga provides a crucial *formal corollary*, tethered to *specific*

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[88] See, for instance, Jacques Lacan, "Desire and the Interpretation of Desire in *Hamlet*," trans. James Hulbert, *Yale French Studies* no. 55/56 (1977), p. 52.

[89] Jolles claims that the form of the saga is "attacked, diluted, baffled" by the mindset of the state. Speaking of the counterexample of the story of the House of Tudor, Jolles writes, "In the English case, a state idea or a national consciousness suppresses a world built up according to the mental disposition 'family.'" Jolles also identifies a tension between the saga and the Christian church, linking the demise of the Icelandic saga as a form with the arrival of the Christian church in Iceland. (The end of the saga age is also linked to the end of the Free State in Iceland, which occurred upon Iceland's submission to the sovereignty of the Norwegian king.) Jolles writes: "The Christian church binds its members to a community; it introduces another sort of relationship, the relationship of man to man; thus it even adopts the language of the Sage: it commandeers the verbal gesture of the *Sage*, it calls its priests 'father,' its members 'brothers' and sisters,' those living in its spiritual communities *fratres*—but with its analogy it destroys the true form of the *Sage*, which knows only blood and blood relationship. What was meaningful in

features of literary form, to the "different configurations of sociality" which, as analyzed by Hegel, inform Kottman's account of the "dialectical relation to historical principles of social organization" out of which, according to Kottman, Hamlet's "self-alienation/subjectivity" develops.[90] I now want to ask whether and how the subjectivity which modern psychological criticism locates in Hamlet emerges in "dialectical relation" *to the form of the saga*, with its specific speech gestures and mental disposition.

The speech gestures of saga which are central to the Hamlet story are *fratricide* (Claudius killing Old Hamlet), *feud* (between Old Fortinbras and Old Hamlet; between Hamlet and Laertes), *inheritance* (the throne of Denmark; the patrimony young Fortinbras seeks to recover at the beginning of the play; the story Hamlet passes on to Horatio), *incest* (between Claudius and Gertrude), *family resemblance* (between Hamlet and his father; between Laertes and Polonius), *ancestral spirit* (the Ghost), and *paternal curse* (original sin; the "primal eldest curse"). As for the mental disposition of family, it exists, I think, in a constant tension with other conceptual orderings of the world, of which the most important are those centering on the state and on religion.

In many ways, the conflicts in the play between these competing mental dispositions have always provided critics of the play with their central themes: for instance, the conflict between the familial duty to revenge and the Christian imperative to forgive.[91] There are thus any number of familiar passages in the play—and already existing readings of those passages—which we can

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the *Sage*, in the family—birth, marriage, death—the church carries over via a sacrament into a new mental disposition, and thus wrests it from the *Sage*." See Jolles, *Simple Forms*, p. 62.

[90] Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, p. 177.

[91] See for example Eleanor Prosser, *Hamlet and Revenge* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1971).

look to for evidence of the interplay of these conflicting mental dispositions. Rather than surveying several of these passages, I want to pause to give more detailed attention to one of them.

Take, then, as a central instance, the scene of Claudius at prayer in the exact middle of the play. This is a crucial juncture, a moment of climactic anticlimax, where Hamlet unsheathes his sword to take revenge only to ultimately defer the act itself. The whole scene is a densely interwoven tissue in which state concerns, religious concerns, and the familial obligation to revenge push and pull against each other.

The scene opens with Claudius in conversation with Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, who, in language the sublimity and grand style of which are evidently employed as instruments of courtly and insinuating flattery—though on the surface their speeches do not obviously betray them as insincere—invoke doctrinal views of kingship according to which the king is more than a private and single person, because at a metaphysical level he contains within his body the body of the commonwealth and its constituents. Rosencrantz and Guildenstern thus transform what might appear to be a private feud between Claudius and Hamlet into a matter of general concern to the commonwealth. (The threat which the imperatives of private feud pose to the stability of the state will return as a prominent theme in Claudius's confrontations with Laertes in Act 4, where Claudius, through careful and cunning manipulation, redirects Laertes's impulse to revenge so that it no longer threatens the person of the sovereign, invoking, apparently effectively, the doctrine of the divinity hedging the king.) The state-centered language of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern in this exchange is shot through with religious awe and reverence:

> Most holy and religious fear it is
> To keep those many many bodies safe
> That live and feed upon your Majesty. (3.3.8-10)

Next appears Polonius, who, as agent of the state, plans to interpose himself between Hamlet and Gertrude in the closet scene, in order to place under state surveillance the natural affection between mother and son which might, in this instance, threaten the stability of the state:

> And as you said—and wisely was it said—
> 'Tis meet that some more audience than a mother,
> Since nature makes them partial, should o'erhear
> The speech of vantage. Fare you well, my liege. (3.3.30-33)

Claudius's subsequent attempt at prayer unfolds in its full complexity and internal contradiction the relationship between Christianity and the simple form of the saga. The speech begins with the speech gesture of fratricide, juxtaposed, however, with the idea of heaven:

> O, my offence is rank, it smells to heaven;
> It hath the primal eldest curse upon't—
> A brother's murder. (1.3.36-38)

We are in a world of *guilt*, a very different world from that of the sagas. The *brother's murder* no longer faces laterally toward a this-worldly compensation or retaliation coming from *within* the social world constellated around the family. Instead, the brother's murder invites a response from above, from heaven. This turning upwards occurs via a social form, mediation or brokerage, which has been reconceived as a religious form: the form of prayer. Claudius senses the immense burden which precisely the *form* of prayer needs to sustain in this moment: ". . . but O, what form of prayer / Can serve my turn?" (3.3.51-52).[92] Whereas in the sagas, feuds are often brought

[92] On Claudius's prayer in relation to early modern debates over devotional practice, see Ramie Targoff, "The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England," *Representations*, 60 (1997), pp. 49-69, and her *Common Prayer: The Language of Public Devotion in Early Modern England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 1-13.

to resolution via the brokerage of a third party,[93] here the mediating third party is God, whose mercy is envisioned as quite literally erasing the speech gesture of fratricide:

> What if this cursed hand
> Were thicker than itself with brother's blood,
> Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
> To wash it white as snow? (3.3.43-6)

Conciliation is reconceived as absolution. And it is the possibility of such spiritual absolution which renders Hamlet's intended retaliation inert:

> And now I'll do it. And so a goes to heaven;
> And so I am reveng'd. That would be scann'd:
> A villain kills my father, and for that
> I, his sole son, do this same villain send
> To heaven.
> Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge. (3.3.4-79)

Hamlet, upon consideration, must reconceptualize the act of revenge to take account of the very different world of sin and salvation which he, unlike his predecessor Amleth in Saxo's version of the story, has one foot within.[94]

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[93] The social form of "brokerage" which Byock analyzes in *Feud in the Icelandic Saga* corresponds to the form of the *tertius gaudens* theorized by Georg Simmel. See Simmel's seminal essay on "The Triad," in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, trans. and ed. Kurt H. Wolff (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 145-169.

[94] de Grazia construes Hamlet's newfound plan of killing Claudius while Claudius is in the act of sinning as "incommensurability" going beyond the *lex talionis*, calling it "overkill, not retaliation" (de Grazia, Hamlet *Without Hamlet*, p. 192). This is fair enough, but arguably also describes most acts of revenge; the *lex talionis*, after all, was intended to *halt* the cycle of vendetta by imposing a *limit* on retaliation: *only* one eye for an eye. For a study of the *lex talionis* by a legal scholar who is also an expert on the Icelandic saga, see William Ian Miller, *Eye for an Eye* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

By contrast, Laertes, later in the play, manifests a far less complex response. Too impatient to *reflect* upon his course of action, Laertes's impulse is simply to sacrifice himself to revenge, without bothering to find, first, a way to address how revenge might fit into the metaphysical framework of heaven and hell which, as Hamlet recognizes, complicates or even renders incoherent the entire concept of revenge. Laertes disclaims, but does not annul, the world of sin and salvation, passively giving himself up to the imperatives of the family and, at the same time, to spiritual negligence:

> Conscience and grace, to the profoundest pit!
> I dare damnation. To this point I stand,
> That both the worlds I give to negligence,
> Let come what comes, only I'll be reveng'd
> Most throughly for my father. (4.5.132-36)

"Negligence" is here the truer word than the blustering "dare," and Laertes's "Let come what comes" is a far less resonant phrase than Hamlet's "if it be not now, yet it will come" (5.2.217-18). Laertes, lacking the strength of intellect and feeling which allow Hamlet to hold open the full moral complexity of the modern situation, proves incapable of straddling the conflicting, partially disjunct worlds of the saga on one hand, and the world of sin and salvation on the other.

It is thus apparent how the two speech gestures of the saga, *fratricide* and *revenge*, are viewed in *Hamlet* not solely from the mental disposition of the family, but through a tangled, prismatic array of rival viewpoints. Importantly, in the juxtaposed soliloquies of 3.3, Claudius's attempt at prayer and Hamlet's deliberation on revenge, the dramatic form of the soliloquy becomes a means for probing the darkened passages running back and forth between disjunct but overlapping worlds. The world of the Icelandic sagas, famous for the laconic utterances of its protagonists, is not a world of extended monologic speech or interiorized reflection. In *Hamlet*,

by contrast, interiority emerges as the medium through which thinking moves between rival worlds and their different constructions of the person.

de Grazia is surely right that the question of Hamlet's delay, if considered in terms of character and psychology, is a false one, and that the correct answer to this famous interpretive crux was supplied by William Empson, who recognized in Hamlet's exaggeratedly extended delay an intentional solution to a specific dramaturgical problem.[95] However, if it is possible to add anything to the virtuosic explication de Grazia provides of the theological and metadramatic resonances of Hamlet's dilatory behavior, one might add the simple rejoinder that by holding open the interval between the imperative to revenge and its fulfillment, *Hamlet* provides an extraordinary opportunity to meditate on certain facts of experience so painful that under normal circumstances we cannot bear subjecting them to prolonged examination.

By way of concluding this chapter, I want to suggest that some of these painful facts of experience can be seen to emerge from the logic of resemblance and substitution I have been tracing in this account of the form of the saga and its presence in *Hamlet*.

From the point of view of the family, the social principle of substitution based on resemblance is a vital one, for it makes possible the continued survival of the family, which reconstitutes itself across successive generations through precisely such substitutions. The logic of resemblance and substitution, however, governs more than just succession, more than just the "natural" process through which the grown child comes to replace the deceased parent. In addition, the logic of resemblance and substitution also governs this cultural formation's response to *premature death*, to losses that cannot immediately be made good by the substitution

[95] See de Grazia, Hamlet *Without Hamlet*, p. 173-74, and William Empson, *Essays on Shakespeare*, ed. David B. Pirie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 79-136.

of a successor from within the family. Making good such losses is the function of the *wergild*, the price offered to a family to compensate them for the death of one of its members. The *wergild*, premised on the substitutability of persons and things which is fundamental to a gift society,[96] repairs the breach made by this death in the *frændgarðr*, the metaphorical fence or "kinsmen's yard" encircling the homestead, which is "likened to the circle of sib, for *garðr* is the family."[97] Revenge, in turn, is the negative image of compensation. When compensation is deemed unacceptable, the family, instead of repairing the breach in the circle of sib through positive substitution, i.e. compensation, makes a corresponding, retaliatory, *similar or substitutable* breach in the *frændgarðr* of the offenders.

I would argue that, from a psychoanalytic perspective, this social principle of substitution functions *as a defense against mourning*. The deceased matriarch is not really lost, for she lives on in the grandson whom she has designated her successor. (I am thinking of the death of Unn in *Laxdæla saga*, ch. 7.) The grief experienced after the loss of a brother lessens when the king whom that brother died defending offers treasure as a compensation for the brother's death.[98] Revenge, though it presents a slightly more complicated case, can nevertheless be explained in much the same way. As M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij notes at the beginning of an illuminating discussion,

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[96] That the logic of the gift was an essential part of ancient Scandinavian society was recognized by none other than Marcel Mauss himself, who prefaces his famous *Essai sur le don* with a quotation from the *Hávamál*, an Eddaic poem. See *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison (New York: Norton, 1967), pp. xiv and 1.

[97] Gurevich, *Historical Anthropology*, p. 206.

[98] For a striking example, see Egil's performative melancholy after the death of his brother, Thorolf, in *Egil's Saga*, ch. 55.

> The peculiar character of the limits set to human personality within the Icelandic society described in the family sagas is manifested most distinctly in the identification of oneself with one's kinsmen. This follows from the duty of avenging them: from the unconquerable, elemental power with which this duty imposed itself on the individual, overcoming in him all egoistic feelings, including the fear of death.[99]

Revenge is to be understood as *an act of identification with the murdered kinsman*. The person who takes revenge in effect *substitutes* for the murdered kinsman, responding to an act of aggression as though it had been directed towards himself. It thus comes as no surprise that avenging a murdered father, often after a span of many years, is regularly understood as a rite of passage in the sagas, as something necessary for a young man to undertake in order to assume full maturity.[100] By avenging the father, the son steps into the place of the father, repairing the breach in the circle of sib.

Hamlet, for its part, appears to dwell on a ramification of the principle of familial inheritance—which I have here described in terms of a logic of resemblance and substitution—which the *individual* or *particular* person experiences as intensely, indeed unbearably painful. To use Hamlet as an example, this ramification is the one Hamlet recognizes when he realizes that he himself is substitutable, replaceable—which is also to say, when he realizes that he is *not an individual*, or that his individuality depends on a structure of recognition over which he himself cannot exercise complete control. Hamlet makes this realization not in the first instance as a realization about himself—that would be too painful to directly confront—but as a realization *about his father*, which realization is catalyzed—is indeed forced upon Hamlet—by his mother's hasty second marriage. This is one of the functions of the mirror in this play. Hamlet sees in the

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[99] M. I. Steblin-Kamenskij, *The Saga Mind*, trans. Kenneth H. Ober (Odense: Odense University Press, 1973), p. 49.

[100] A classic example is the revenge taken by Bolli's sons in *Laxdæla saga*.

mirror of his father a truth about himself which would be too painful to confront directly. His horrified fascination with his father's fate is a displacement of his own terrifying and therefore not fully conscious knowledge that he himself is likewise vulnerable to usurpation and replacement.

Hamlet's metaphysical disgust thus emerges from a point of tension between the family and the state. As Kottman writes, the fact that the Denmark of the play is an elective monarchy

> does nothing more than make explicit—at the level of "state" organization—what is structurally implicit in modern forms of civil society. As the notion of private property first surfaces most fully in Roman law, for example, it presents a configuration of social life wherein that society's coherence is rooted in the relative self-sufficiency of the individual citizen—and where living as an "individual," as a legal persona, means to be entitled to property, to what is one's own, to a sphere of possession.[101]

To be an individual in the state means "holding property . . . without regard to 'natural' bonds," i.e. bonds of blood kinship. The role of the state is to be "the means through which this legitimacy is bestowed or recognized . . . the state here functions as that which enforces and protects the rights of certain individuals to acquire and hold property."[102] The system of property rights thus "effectively seeks to strip 'natural' kinship of its power to determine social bonds and generational devolution."[103] Kottman thus points us to the increasing irrelevance of the "natural" family within a state-centered regime of property ownership, an irrelevance which precipitates the play's crisis, i.e. the emerging unintelligibility of the social world which Hamlet inherits.

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[101] Kottman, *Tragic Conditions*, p. 60.

[102] Ibid.

[103] Ibid., p. 61.

A twofold dispossession thus afflicts Hamlet as a result of Claudius's marriage to Gertrude and ascension to the throne of Denmark. First, Hamlet is deprived of the material, landed inheritance he expected to receive from his father at the latter's death. At the same time, the coherence of Hamlet's family-centered sense of self is fundamentally called into question. The idealized inevitability he has attributed to the pairing of his mother and his father is fractured by Gertrude's willingness to remarry, which ostentatiously asserts the replaceability of Old Hamlet. This in turn calls into question Hamlet's own relationship to his mother, itself the symbolic basis for so many other relationships: for if the father is replaceable, then surely the son is as well. From there proceeds the familiar disintegratory spiral that calls into question the sincerity or reality of *all* relationships in the play—except that of the true friend, Horatio, who stands outside both kinship relations, sexual relations, and the culture of personal advancement at the court, a performative culture which is centered on *fawning*, on the flattery of the king.

For Hamlet's disgust—the expression of this disgust being part of the fundamentally satirical impulse of the play, for mirrors and glasses are also traditionally associated with satire and its didactic, reforming function—attaches with particular intensity and vehemence to the culture of insincerity and flattery that characterizes the Danish court under Claudius's rule, insincerity exemplified, for Hamlet, by the doddering, tendentious Polonius, the "sponge[s]" (4.3.11) Rosencrantz and Guildenstern, and the dandified Osric. Hamlet explicitly sets Horatio outside of this circle of fawning flatterers:

> Horatio, thou art e'en as just a man
> As e'er my conversation cop'd withal.
> . . . Nay, do not think I flatter,
> For what advancement may I hope from thee
> That no revenue has but thy good spirits
> To feed and clothe thee? Why should the poor be flatter'd?
> No, let the candied tongue lick absurd pomp,

> And crook the pregnant hinges of the knee
> Where thrift may follow fawning. (3.2.54-55, 56-62)

To be precise, Hamlet insists not, as one might expect, that *Horatio* is not a flatterer, but rather that Horatio *is not a king*, *is not himself in a position to provoke flattery*; that because of Horatio's poverty, there is no point in flattering him, no "advancement" to be gained thereby. Horatio thus opens up the possibility of strong lateral relationship within a court world where the hierarchical relation of king and subject has subverted language itself, making it increasingly difficult to establish authentic relationships with others.

It is Claudius who first and most conspicuously announces the debasement of language in the play:

> 'Tis sweet and commendable in your nature, Hamlet,
> To give these mourning duties to your father,
> But you must know your father lost a father,
> That father lost, lost his—and the survivor bound
> In filial obligation for some term
> To do obsequious sorrow. (1.2.87-92)

Claudius here debases the language of duty—so important to the Elizabethans—as well as that of ritual mourning, transforming both, in a telling slip (Fineman describes this speech as "a kind of continuous stumbling of the tongue that reveals Claudius' character"),[104] into *obsequiousness*. Claudius's courtiers cultivate, precisely, an *obsequiousness* of manner and of language. Hamlet insists that while he himself is "constant to [his] purposes," courtiers such as Osric merely "follow the King's pleasure" (5.2.197-98). "Pleasure" cues us to the way the play figures *obsequiousness* and *fawning* as on the same spectrum as sexual promiscuity, an extension, into

[104] Fineman, "Fratricide and Cuckoldry," p. 78.

the hyperperformative social setting of the court, of intimacies whose proper locus is in the private sphere of the family. As Hamlet says of the ceaseless commendations and flourishes of Osric, "A did comply with his dug before a sucked it" (5.2.184), an image that replays the primordial scene of matrilineal blood relations as an absurd parody of courtly obeisance. The excrescent language of an Osric or Polonius reveals no fixed and therefore knowable purpose of the speaker's own, but merely the naked willingness to say anything to ingratiate oneself with royalty ("like a camel indeed," "like a weasel," "like a whale" [3.3.369, 371, 373]). Obedience, and the ritual obsequies which symbolize it, have devolved into *obsequiousness* in the bad sense.

In such a world, the *following* originally connoted by *obsequy* gives way to a different kind of following: the spying and surveillance so pervasive in the play. The images of mourning as following after the body of the deceased, as in Hamlet's memory of how his mother

> follow'd my poor father's body,
> Like Niobe, all tears . . . (1.2.148-9)

or the moment in the graveyard scene when Hamlet sees Ophelia's funeral train,

> Who is this they follow?
> And with such maimed rites? (5.1.251-2)

are shadowed by all of the many moments in which someone is sent to follow after someone else in order to spy upon or keep watch over them—for instance, Claudius's command that the mad Ophelia be watched: "Follow her close; give her good watch" (4.5.74). These images of following as surveillance are themselves worked into the larger network of hunting metaphors

which the play persistently employs.[105] And because Hamlet himself is hunting the King, the play comes to resemble a kind of dangerous game of reciprocal following which comes to a climax with the play-within-the-play, aptly referred to as the Mousetrap, where Hamlet finally succeeds in his plan to "catch the conscience of the King" (2.2.601). In the imagination of the play, the obedience which upholds the stability of family relationships has been utterly eroded, throwing family life back into a state of nature in which everyone hunts everyone else.

In the conclusion of the play, where death rather than birth is the explicit focus, Hamlet twice uses the word "follow" in close succession. Although unable to affect the succession to the Danish throne after his father's death, at the play's end Hamlet wrests a certain control over another kind of succession, the sequence of deaths in the Danish royal family:

> Here, thou incestuous, murderous, damned Dane,
> Drink off this potion. Is thy union here?
> Follow my mother. (5.2.330-32)

Hamlet's next line after the above is addressed to Laertes, who has just died. Hamlet forgives Laertes, and then declares, "I follow thee" (5.2.337).

Hamlet's death is itself followed, on the orders of Fortinbras, by a funeral march, a "passage" to the stage accompanied by "The soldier's music and the rite of war" (5.2.403-4). A peal of ordnance—also at Fortinbras's command—closes the play as its final sound, calling us back to the beginning of the play where peals of ordnance sounded at Claudius' command, sounding the King's rouse, the Danish custom which prompted Hamlet's "mole of nature" speech. Hamlet, in death, receives the honor of a rite whose dignity has been restored, for it now

[105] On the language of hunting in the play, see Rhodri Lewis, *Hamlet and the Vision of Darkness*, pp. 43-111.

marks soldiership and martial prowess (the virtues of Old Hamlet), whereas under Claudius the peals of ordnance marked debased wassailing (see 1.4.8-12). Claudius had replaced sober mourning with drunken revelry; Fortinbras's commands at the end of the play restore dignity to a Danish custom. That this restores unity to the world of the play, to the time that was out of joint, may be alluded to by the fact that one peal of ordnance sounds at the end of the play, whereas two pieces of ordnance go off in the scene in Act 1. That Hamlet's body is accompanied offstage by a funeral march is a final instance of how this play associates its various strata of the meanings of "follow" with funeral rituals.

In the sagas, the second marriage of a mother or father can lead to inheritance disputes between half-siblings.[106] But Hamlet's radical dispossession not only by a rival kinsman (his uncle) but *by an entire social formation* (elective monarchy and the state) produces a correspondingly more radical, internal crisis. It as though the pain of the realization that one is replaceable and substitutable—which, whatever account, psychoanalytic or other, one finds most persuasive, surely has a primary psychological reality that is prior to its subsumption into subsequent cultural constructions and social formations—take on *dramatic value and interest* in *Hamlet* because of the interpenetration of multiple contradictory social formations in Shakespeare's world and, by extension, our own. For the Icelandic family saga, centered as it is within the world of the family and blood relations, a literary form developed by a stateless, pre-Christian society, the problem of maternal and marital infidelity and the painful, destabilizing realization of the replaceability of the self which they entail, cannot or do not have to assume the central narrative and dramatic interest they possess in Shakespeare's drama.

[106] As in the example from *Egil's Saga* of the Hildaridarssons, mentioned above, or in the example of Hrut and Hoskuld in *Laxdœla saga*.

As I have noted earlier in discussing Horatio's role in the play, *Hamlet* contains two parallel kinds of inheritance. On the one hand, there is the kingdom of Denmark and the lands that appertain to it. On the other, there is the story which Horatio inherits from Hamlet at the close of the play, when Hamlet declares:

> Horatio, I am dead.
> Thou livest: report me and my cause aright
> To the unsatisfied.
> (5.2.316-8)

The unmistakable echoes of the Ghost in Hamlet's final lines,

> If thou didst ever thy dear father love . . . (1.5.23)

> If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart . . . (5.2.324)

show that when Hamlet bequeaths his story to Horatio, he continues a process that began at the opening of the play, when the Ghost shared his horrifying story of fratricide to Hamlet. As this inheritance-as-story passes from the Ghost to Hamlet to Horatio, it goes from being a secret—something divulged to Hamlet alone—to being a public performance, a story which Horatio will deliver to an assembly gathered in something very like a theater. Horatio commands that the bodies of the slain "High on a stage be placéd to the view" (5.2.355-6), and promises that he will "Truly deliver" (5.2.364) to the "yet unknowing world / How these things came about" (5.2.567-8). The performance promised by Horatio thus closely resembles the performance of the play *Hamlet* which is concluding at this very moment. The implication of this metadramatic scaffolding is that the audience of *Hamlet* is, in a sense, the final recipient of the story-inheritance which originated with the Ghost.

In *Hamlet*, then, Shakespeare turns the theater itself into a site of bequeathal, and the play of *Hamlet* into a kind of inheritance. The form of the play reflects an action which the performance of the play really does accomplish: the passing of a story from one "generation" to the next. There is a closeness here, verging on identity, between a social form—the concept and practice of inheritance—and a literary one. In *Hamlet*, however, the family resemblance that grounds the passing on of a family inheritance is construed as *mirroring*, and since the purpose of playing is to hold the mirror up to nature, family resemblance as mirroring implicitly includes the audience to *Hamlet*. I see myself mirrored, imperfectly, in Shakespeare's drama, and register a play of likeness and unlikeness. To the extent that, as reader response critics once held, I imaginatively become the reader implied by the book, or the audience member implied by the play, the play creates a second self within me. Viewing this reflection as, now, a part of myself, I stand back and admire that which connects me to Shakespeare and that which separates me from him.

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