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SHAKESPEARE'S HYBRID STYLE

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Abstract – Starting from the critical commonplace that Shakespeare was not an original writer, this chapter provocatively discusses his working practice characteristic of the theatre industry of his time and aims at showing how his borrowing contributes to his distinctive hybrid style. Shakespeare's technical virtuosity in mixing dramatic modes and emotional responses is discussed in relation to classical comedy (*A Comedy of Errors*), romantic comedy (*Twelfth Night*, *The Merchant of Venice*) and tragedy (*Hamlet*, *King Lear*) to show that it is in this unprecedented blending of generic qualities that his innovation and originality lie.

Keywords: Shakespeare; borrowing; hybridization; dramatic genres; emotional response.

1. Introduction

This paper begins with what might seem a critical commonplace that Shakespeare was not an original writer. In itself this is hardly controversial. As is well known, in the Renaissance imitation and borrowing were the norm. Writers freely borrowed from ancient or contemporary writers and imitated their style and genre, re-weaving stories to constitute originality.[1] The materials Shakespeare wove into his plays were diverse, including chronicle history, classical history, Italian novellas, old stories from legend and folklore; in line with Renaissance ideals of imitation, he re-presents and re-constitutes them offering a new perspective on character and event, that is, he lends them his own colours. We could say that there was a magpie quality about Shakespeare as he collected bits and pieces from stories he had read or seen on the stage and re-worked characters, plots and scenarios that had successfully entered the dramatic tradition. His plays were part of what I have described elsewhere as theatre traffic, the give and take of cultural goods (Clare 2014).

Such a view of Shakespeare's working practice appears provocative when set against a powerful tradition that sees Shakespeare as an originator,

[1] According to Tasso (1964), an old subject is made new by a distinctive weaving of elements. The classic study of Renaissance imitation remains Thomas Greene's *The Light in Troy*: *Imitation and Discovery in Renaissance Poetry* (1982).

transcending the commercial demands of the theatre of his time. Shakespeare has been more often seen as alone rather than as part of the theatre industry of his time.[2] In this context, to stress that Shakespeare adapts the material of others is heretical and a slur on his artistic reputation. To see how much is at stake, we have only to examine the assertions of later twentieth-century editors who have gone to considerable lengths to argue that when there are two plays presenting the same subject, one of Shakespearean authorship, Shakespeare's play came first. In the cases of the anonymous *The Taming of a Shrew* and Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew,* for example, editors have suggested that the story must have originated with Shakespeare.[3] This runs counter to the available evidence. *The Taming of the Shrew* was not published in Shakespeare's lifetime whereas the anonymous play, which bears no verbal congruence with Shakespeare's version of the story, was published in 1594. A similar critical pattern can be discerned in the treatment of the two plays depicting the reign of King John: one published anonymously in 1596 as *The Troublesome Reign of King John;* the other included in the 1623 Folio. Again, editors have produced convoluted arguments to support the idea that Shakespeare's play came first or that *The Troublesome Reign* is a botched version of Shakespeare's *King John*.[4] The implication in these bibliographical exercises is that Shakespeare so surpassed his contemporaries that only he could have been the originator of the drama.

The focus here is not so much on Shakespeare's borrowing, but in the eclecticism of his borrowing which contributes to his distinctive hybrid style. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, for example, there are elements taken from the late medieval writer, Geoffrey Chaucer, aspects of English folklore in the figure of the mischievous sprite hobgoblin, Puck, Bottom and his companions represent English rural life, combined with myths of the East in the shape of Theseus and Hippolita. Gods, fairies, artisans (Bottom is a weaver, one of his companions, Snug, is a joiner) are all mingled together, just as scenes played in jest are interspersed with scenes played in earnest. The technique of mixing stories and emotional response warrants calling his plays 'hybrid'. The term conveys the notion of different dramatic species brought together in the one text. This technique of weaving disparate sources can produce generic complexity and, as a consequence, a mixed emotional response. The imaginative and intellectual reworking of genre elicits a volatile emotional response from an audience. What I want to explore, then, is how Shakespeare

[2] A recent example of this critical position is that of Jeffrey Knapp in *Shakespeare Only* (2009).

[3] For examples of bias towards Shakespeare's authorship of the shrew baiting plot, see Thompson (ed.) 2003, pp. 9 and 182; Hosley (1963-64), pp. 289-308; Hibberd (ed.) 2006, p. 113; Oliver (ed.) 1982, p. 14.

[4] See, for example, Beaurline (ed.) 2002 and Honigmann (ed.) 1954.

uses composite dramatic modes. Comedy contains scenes of disorder, violence, menace and evokes emotions of apprehension and grief; tragedy contains comic interludes, a release perhaps from the build-up of tension. For the characters in a tragedy, as in *Titus Andronicus*, laughter might provide the only way of coping with a desperate situation. Titus hears that his sons, whom he thinks he has saved by the lopping off of his hand, have been executed. He can only laugh: "Why, I have not another tear to shed" (3.i. 263).[5] I will argue that where in Shakespeare's plays the different styles are intertwined, interfused, entangled with one another, the drama is at its most powerful and affective. As with plants, a hybrid is often more robust than its parents.

2. Hybridities

Such an assorted technique is evident in an early work, Shakespeare's only comedy modelled on Roman classical comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*. Shakespeare borrows aspects of his plot from Plautus's *Brothers Menaechmus* in which two brothers parted as children – now grown up – both known as Menaechmus after much comic confusion are reunited in Epidamnus. The play concludes with the slave of Menaechmus of Syracuse offering to be the auctioneer of the goods, slaves and wife, should there be a purchaser, of Menaechmus of Epidamnus before the brothers depart for Syracuse. Plautus's plot is slick but not sophisticated. The background to the story is explained in the Prologue which then leads directly to the entry of Menaechmus of Epidamnus, in the process of stealing his wife's dress to give it to his mistress who conveniently lives next door. The constant attentions of a parasite hamper his scheming. Meanwhile, the other brother has arrived at Epidamnus from Syracuse and is mistaken for the local Menaechmus by everyone in the play who knows him, the parasite, the mistress, the wife.[6] One of the most common tropes of comedy – mistaken identity – is exploited to maximize the perplexity of the characters. Commotion is caused when the brothers are mistaken for one another; but however confused the characters are the audience is always one step ahead.

It is evident that in *Comedy of Errors* Shakespeare is using the building blocks of classical comedy. Yet, Shakespeare makes significant changes to both the plot and to the location and invests some scenes with an emotion entirely absent in Plautus's materialist world. He complicates the plot by

[5] All references from Shakespeare, unless otherwise stated, are from Wells, Taylor (1998).

[6] *Menaecmi. A pleasant and fine conceited comaedie, taken out of the most excellent wittie Poet Plautus* (Warner 1595).

introducing another set of identical twins – the Dromios – as servants to the twin brothers, both named Antipholus, offering more potential for comic confusion over mistaken identity, and enhances the pleasure of the final touching reunion, encapsulated in Dromio of Ephesus's couplet: "We came into the world like brother and brother. /And now let's go hand in hand, not one before another" (5.1.425-6). The substitution of Plautus's Epidamnus with Ephesus is again telling, the latter location had Biblical associations of sorcery and witchcraft.[7] For the bewildered foreigner in Ephesus, Antipholus of Syracuse, sorcery is the only way of accounting for why he is being instructed by a man he takes to be his servant to return for dinner to a home and wife he does not have.

But more than structural change, it is the modulation in *The Comedy of Errors* in style and tone which differentiates it from Plautus's farcical comedy. The play opens with Egeon, a merchant from Syracuse, who has been condemned to death for entering Ephesus, and Egeon's story serves as a framing device to the plot of mistaken identity. He is given a long speech of exposition full of grief and despair, centred on his hopeless hope of finding his lost wife and children and awakening instant sympathy in an audience. "Hopeless to find", he says, "yet loath to leave unsought / Or that or any place that harbours men. / But here must end the story of my life, /And happy were I in my timely death / Could all my travels warrant me they live" (1.1.135-39). He is given a twenty-four-hour reprieve in which to obtain a ransom of a thousand marks and this threat hangs over the play until the final and surprise denouement which includes union with his sons and the unanticipated reunion with his wife. This is the stuff of the romance genre not farce.

The Comedy of Errors contains comic scenes caused by confusion over identity; at the same time such bewilderment is a source of anxiety and fear. Nothing is likely to cause greater disruption to a household or community than the mistaken conviction that someone is actually someone else, and for the individual concerned this is a potential crisis of identity. The brothers variously come to believe that either they are mad or insane or the only sane individual in a hostile and crazy environment. It is hardly surprising that Antipholus of Syracuse wants to leave Ephesus as soon as he can. Interfused with farce and comic anxiety, there are moments of pathos, quite alien to the comic world of Plautus. A merchant in Ephesus casually commends Antipholus of Syracuse to his own content which provokes a sense of discontent and incompletion:

[7] Act 19. Paul preached in Ephesus and as a result of his preaching inhabitants who became Christian burned their books on magic and sorcery.

He that commends me to mine own content
Commends me to the thing I cannot get,
I to the world am like a drop of water
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, failing there to find his fellow forth,
Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself,
So I, to find a mother and a brother,
In quest of them, unhappy, lose myself.

(I.2. 33-40)

He is not truly himself, not whole without his family. In a striking metaphor Antipholus compares himself to a drop of water in the ocean; amid the anonymous mass of humanity he is insignificant as a random, unrelated individual. His identity is rooted in his family relationships.

The Comedy of Errors may be the closest of Shakespeare's comedies to Roman classical comedy: but, despite its classical form, it is not purely classical in tone or conception. Plautus's comedies tend to be cynical about marriage, unsentimental about love and passion. Men cheat their wives with impunity and would sell them if they could. Into Plautus's unsentimental world Shakespeare has infused some of the feeling, wonder and marvel of romance. Just when the play is at its most farcically chaotic on the streets of Ephesus, an Abbess emerges from a nearby convent where Antipholus of Syracuse has taken sanctuary (a strangely Christian element in a pagan world). Wonder strikes as the Abbess recognizes in Egeon her long believed dead husband, a theatrical sleight of hand which startles beholders on and off stage.

The hybridization of classical comedy is peculiar to *The Comedy of Errors*. Other Elizabethan comedies have been labelled romantic or festive but, again, the designation is only partially apt. We find in *Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice*, and *Twelfth Night* a heterogeneity of materials which produces a range of emotional responses. Young people struggle with unruly feelings and emotions. Though *Twelfth Night* and *Midsummer Night's Dream* are termed romantic comedies, these plays are not simply joyful celebrations of youthful love. From the start the youthful characters are often thwarted in their desires. Parents, particularly fathers, forbid the children, particularly daughters, to marry whom they want. Love is not always reciprocated, leading to inner turmoil or torment. The comedies mostly conclude with marriage. Yet as the plays close, we are left with 'outsiders' who are not included in the nuptial celebrations and cast a shadow over the happy ending of comedy. The steward, Malvolio, in *Twelfth Night*, for example, has been tricked and mocked and locked up because his adversaries want to have revenge on him by making him believe that he is mad. Even while she celebrates her own happiness, Olivia recognizes that her

steward has been "notoriously abused" (5.1.375). Indeed, Malvolio has been mentally abused. When he is released from his prison at the end of the play he is faced by two happy couples, increasing his torment. His exit line – "I'll be avenged on the whole pack of you" (5.1. 374) – is directed at them, this intrusion of revenge problematizing the traditional comic ending.

The Merchant of Venice is superficially a romantic comedy. Bassanio is a suitor to Portia, who following her father's death is an immensely rich young woman. In courting Portia, Bassanio is compared to Jason of the Argonauts adventuring after the Golden Fleece. Bassanio is undertaking a risky adventure to win a wealthy wife. He cannot do this without finance from his friend the merchant, Antonio. But his friend has borrowed money from a Jew to enable him to make that journey. The source for this particular variation on a familiar story is a collection of stories, *Il Pecorone*, structured along the lines of Boccaccio's *Il Decamerone*. Composed by Ser Giovanni Fiorentino, supposedly c.1378, *Il Pecorone* was published in 1558 in an edition which updated the language and style.[8] Since there is no early modern translation into English, the question arises as to whether Shakespeare read the original Italian or whether the outline of the story was mediated to him. What is important is that he made theatre from one of the stories and in so doing transmuted a romance tale of quest into one where there is a strong sense of victimhood on the part of the character removed from but integral to the quest narrative.

The changes Shakespeare makes are significant. *Il Pecorone* has a framing device: a nun and a friar who rather like each other and meet daily to tell each other a story. One of the stories is that of Giannetto, godson of Ansaldo, who sails to Alexandria from Venice on an expedition financed by his godfather. Three times Giannetto sets sail and is waylaid at Belmonte by the attractions of a widow. Whoever can sleep with this widow wins her and her fortune. But each night suitors are served with food and wine containing a sleeping draught, and sleep soundly. On Giannetto's third visit, one of the widow's ladies in waiting takes pity on him and advises him not to drink. He stays awake, sleeps with the widow and subsequently marries her. So wrapped up is he in his own good fortune that Giannetto almost forgets the loan taken on his behalf by Ansaldo and returns to Venice at the point when the Jew is demanding his pound of flesh. Ansaldo is saved by the intervention of his wife, who assumes the role of a lawyer.

In the novella and in *The Merchant of Venice* the vengeful Jew is essential to the narrative and its resolution. In the story the wife and the Jew remain unnamed. In the trial scene and in the Jew's desire for revenge against

[8] *Il Pecorone . . . nel quale si contengono cinquanta novelle antiche* (Milan: G. Antonio de gli Antonii, 1558). The work was first translated into English in 1897.

the Christian merchants before being defeated by the disguised 'lawyer' *The Merchant of Venice* follows Ser Giovanni's story. However, Shakespeare gives the Jew a name, Shylock, and he gives him a history in Venice. The hatred expressed against the Jew is sharply focused. Shylock reminds Antonio when he comes to him to borrow money that in the past Antonio has often spat upon him: "You call me misbeliever, cut-throat, dog, /And spit upon my Jewish gabardine" (1.3.110-11). The Jew's revenge is psychologically motivated throughout by the unrelenting contempt and hostility directed at him by the gentile community. His mistreatment is presented amply enough to make his murderous intention of demanding a pound of Antonio's flesh and inflexible attitude in court comprehensible, not as some peculiar Jewish perversion but as a well-known and often dramatized urge to avenge wrongs suffered. The antagonism reaches its culmination in the court scene. Within this focal scene – the theatre where Shylock plans to exact public revenge ─ there are remarkable shifts in tone and emphasis as the Jew begins as bloody avenger and ends as victim. The stage-direction presents the blood-thirsty Jew: he whets his knife, and Graziano's description of his desires as "wolvish, bloody, starved, and ravenous" (4.1.137) reinforces the stage image. It should be noted, however, that these gross, animalistic words are uttered by a character presented as a noisy anti-Semite. In the end, Shylock is disarmed not by Portia's eloquent plea for mercy but by her forensic skill as a lawyer as she applies the law with the same literal rigour with which Shylock invoked it. The Christians demand revenge, epitomized in Graziano's desire to bring Shylock to the gallows rather than the font; his life is spared, but only to subject him to conditions which are deeply degrading and humiliating. Shylock is deprived of selfhood: his penultimate speech, "I am content" (4.1. 391), as he leaves the court, is a potent expression of defeat and despair, far removed from the exposure of the villainous stage Jew. In the play he is stripped of everything: daughter, religion, and wealth. We experience Shylock as a tragic figure dominating a so-called comedy, a play whose full title is *The Comical History of the Merchant of Venice, or otherwise called The Jew of Venice.* His defeat has to be integrated into the celebratory finale: Antonio's life is not forfeited, sustaining the genre character but with a difference. Shylock's utter degradation is the price the play pays to satisfy the expectations of a romantic comedy, though it is a trajectory of grief and frustration that potentially has nothing to do with comedy.

Turning to tragedy, we find a similar hybridity as experiences of loss, pain, suffering interfuse and interact with moments of levity and absurdity. *Hamlet* is a tragedy of revenge and, like a number of Shakespeare's plays, the story is archetypal: Hamlet is traumatized by the death of his father, all the more so when he learns from his father's ghost that his father has been

murdered by his uncle who is now married to Hamlet's mother. The ghost urges Hamlet to avenge his death. As well as a story of murder, it is a story of betrayal. Hamlet thinks his mother betrayed his father and later thinks he has been betrayed by Ophelia and later still by his university friends, Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. Hamlet deals with all this by displays of sardonic, black humour embedded in his quips and puns. Juxtaposed to scenes of pathos are arresting moments when distinctive comic voices are heard. Following her father's accidental death at the hands of Hamlet, Ophelia appears to lose her mind and drowns herself. The scene is imagined in exquisite detail, but recounted as if witnessed by Hamlet's mother. In bold and stark contrast to Gertrude's poignant description of Ophelia's death the following scene depicts the gravediggers come to dig Ophelia's grave. Here, we encounter a different kind of dramaturgy. The 'gravediggers' – designated 'clowns' in the speech prefixes[9] – are the only popular voices in the play. I quote from the first published edition of the play as they are presented in *medias res* debating whether Ofelia (as she is named in this text) should be allowed a Christian burial or not. The first clown is definite that she should not:

> *Enter Clowne and another*
> *Clowne* I say no, she ought not to be buried
> In Christian buriall
> *2* Why sir?
> *Clowne* Mary because shee's drownd.
> 2 But she did not drowne her selfe.
> *Clown* No, that's certaine, the water drown'd her.
> *2* Yea but it was against her will
> *Clowne* No, I deny that, for looke you sir, I stand here,
> If the water come to me, I drowne not my selfe:
> But if I goe to the water, and am there drown'd,
> *Ergo* I am guiltie of my owne death:
> Y'are gone, goe y'are gone sir.
> 2 I but see, she hath christian burial,
> Because she is a great woman
> *Clowne* Mary more's the pitty, that great folke
> Should have more authoritie to hang or drowne
> Themselves, more than other people.[10]

The clown's mock syllogism ("if I go to the water… *ergo* I am guiltie of my own death") also suggests some kind of stage business. There would seem an implicit stage direction here: an imitation of Ofelia's putative steps, earlier described with such pathos by the Queen, concluding with the bathos of

[9] By normalizing the speech prefixes to gravediggers, editors lose a sense of the scene as a comic interlude, almost a moment of quiescence, before the tragedy gathers momentum.
[10] See Kliman, Bertram (2003, pp. 214-215).

'y'are gone'. Beneath the physical clowning, there is a clear enough message. There is one law for the powerful and another for the rest put in a way that evokes popular wit. Great folk have more authority to hang or drown themselves than 'other people'. There is a vein of gallow's humour here, palpable in their detached attitude; digging a grave is a trade like anything else.

The final play that I want to discuss is Shakespeare's tragedy *King Lear*. I say Shakespeare's tragedy because at the time when Shakespeare was writing his play on King Lear there were other versions of the story and not all of them were tragic. Shakespeare took the story of Lear from another play, an anonymous play *The True Chronicle History of King Leir and his three daughters, Gonerill, Ragan and Cordella* published in 1605, the year before Shakespeare wrote his play. As I said initially, in his borrowing of non-dramatic material, Shakespeare was highly eclectic as he took from English chronicles, French sources, the work of Livy and Plutarch amongst other literary sources. Scholars have tended to underestimate his dramatic debts drawn largely from one source, the plays of the Queen's Men, amongst the first plays of the professional theatre to reach the publication industry.[11] Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, *King Lear*, could not have existed without the old Queen's Men's play, *The True Chronicle History of King Leir*.

Shakespeare begins with the narrative familiar from the old Leir play, presenting an archetypal situation. There, a foolish old man disowns his loving daughter, Cordella, and divides his kingdom between his other two daughters who hypocritically profess great love for him. The two oldest daughters grow more hateful towards their father. The oldest daughter, Gonorill, takes her father in, but resents his presence and his modest needs and begins to plot against him. But then Shakespeare's play begins to part company with the old Leir play. In the old Leir play, Gonorill hires an assassin to kill her father and his companion, Perillus, but the plot misfires as the two old men talk the assassin round and, on the point of succumbing to cold and hunger, they are saved by Cordella. She is now the wife of the King of France, and with him launches an invasion against her two sisters. With the help of her husband and the French army, she drives the sisters and their husbands back into their respective realms, restoring Leir to the kingdom he had so foolishly parted with. Justice is done. Gonerill and Ragan are frustrated and defeated, but no-one dies. The anonymous play has a happy ending. Leir is restored to his throne and the two elder daughters are driven back to their respective kingdoms by Cordella and the French army.

To this story Shakespeare adds great emotional depth. Lear's treatment at the hands of his two elder daughters brings him psychological torment and

[11] See Clare (2014); McMillin, MacLean (1998); Walsh (2009).

derangement. The metamorphosis of Lear on the heath, the realization that he has neglected his subjects, his descent into madness, these are entirely Shakespeare's creation. The tragedy of Lear – that he grows in self-knowledge, as king and father, only to die – is Shakespeare's human perspective on the story. Typically, Shakespeare complicates the story. He adds another family. He gives the Duke of Gloucester two sons – one legitimate, the other illegitimate; and Gloucester makes the same mistake as Lear. He misjudges the good son and trusts the son who is deceiving him for his own advantage, creating a parallel situation with gullible old man and deceitful, cruel offspring.

In Shakespeare's *King Lear* what happens to Lear and Gloucester is indeed terrible: they are physically and mentally tormented by their children. Gloucester is brutally maimed, Lear loses his mind at what he sees as the monstrous ingratitude of his two elder daughters and is haunted by his rejection of Cordelia. Yet interfused with this experience of suffering there are moments of absurdity. As an outcast on the heath, Lear has lost all the trappings of a king; he is, as he says, a bare unaccommodated man. He is accompanied by those who have remained loyal to him and consequently have become a ragged band of social outcasts: his Fool; Edgar, Gloucester's good son, now in the guise of 'Poor Tom', a beggar escaped from the madhouse, Bedlam; and his loyal retainer, Kent, also in humble disguise. Lear is forced to take shelter in a hovel, a hut, on the heath and here, in his madness, he sets up a mock trial of his daughters. Kent urges Lear to rest, but Lear, obsessed with the ingratitude of his daughters, insists on satisfying justice:

> *Lear* I'll see their trial first. Bring in the evidence.
> Thou robed man of justice, take thy place
> And thou, his yoke-fellow of equity,
> Bench by his side. You are o'th' commission,
> Sit you too.
>
> *Edga*r Let us deal justly.
>
> (3.5.30-7)

The robed man of justice is a near naked beggar; his partner in Court, a Fool. Lear imagines or hallucinates his daughters arrayed before him, ordering the bewildered onlookers of his ragged entourage to arraign Goneril, declaring, "she kick'd the poor King her father" (3.5. 43-44). The Fool enters into the charade:

> *Fool* Come hither, mistress. Is your name Goneril?
> *Lear* She cannot deny it.

Fool Cry you mercy, I took you for a joint-stool
Lear And here's another, whose warp'd looks proclaim
What store her heart is made on. Stop her there!
Arms, arms, sword, fire! Corruption in the place!
False justicer, why hast thou let her 'scape.

(3.5.45-51)

The mock trial spirals into chaos as Lear regards a stool as one daughter and hallucinates the escape of another. He is clearly deranged and, as with all scenes of madness, his behaviour elicits an edgy response. There is pathos and humour in the absurdity of this mock trial on the heath, presided over by a mad king, his Fool and Edgar in the guise of Poor Tom and, at the same time, this scene is also extraordinary experimental theatre. Through a mock enactment of justice Lear's mental turmoil is externalized, and there is sharp social criticism in this absurdist stage business. Lear projects a belated desire for justice just as earlier he realizes his deficiencies as a king (3.4). The scene may have been too experimental for its original audience since it appears in only one of the two texts of *King Lear*.[12]

Another scene which interfuses the tragic with the absurdly comic concerns Gloucester. Gloucester, blinded by Cornwall, his son in law, for his loyalty to Lear, unaware, is now being led by his good son, Edgar, whom he takes to be a simple country figure. He is in a state of despair, suffering physically and mentally for his misjudgement of his sons, and sees suicide as release from his torment. He determines to throw himself off from a cliff and Edgar plays along with this. We watch the two figures on a bare stage one leading the other. Edgar conjures up a vision of what he can see below from an imaginary vantage point of the cliff, down to the minute detail:

Come on, sir, here's the place. Stand still. How fearful
And dizzy 'tis to cast one's eyes so low!...
Half way down
Hangs one that gathers samphire, dreadful trade!
Methinks he seems no bigger than his head.
The fishermen that walk upon the beach
Appear like mice, and yon tall anchoring barque
Diminished to her cock, her cock a buoy
Almost too small for sight.

(4.5.11-20)

[12] Shakespeare's *King Lear* was published in two different versions: *The History of King Lear* (1608) and *The Tragedy of King Lear* (1623). The mock trial does not appear in the later text.

It is an act of imaginary ekphrasis and pathetic comedy. Edgar takes Gloucester's hand, lets it go, Gloucester jumps and falls flat on the stage. It is a piece of pure pantomime but used to draw a moralizing conclusion. Edgar assumes yet another role, relaying to Gloucester, who thinks himself miraculously saved from his fall, that he has been tricked by the devil to take his own life.

> *Gloucester:* Henceforth I'll bear
> Affliction till it do cry out itself
> 'Enough, enough,' and die. That thing you speak of
> I took it for a man. Often would it say
> 'The fiend, the fiend'
> (4.5.75-79)

For all its comic stage business and deception, the scene is riddled with pathos as the blinded man struggles with the knowledge of betrayal, unaware that it is his loyal son, Edgar, who is his guide and protector, and responds stoically to his predicament.

3. Conclusion

In conclusion, what in this article I have termed the hybridity of Shakespeare's plays has long been recognized. Well known is Samuel Johnson's eloquent comment on Shakespeare's ability to bring together discordant experiences, even parallel universes:

> Shakespeare's plays are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world, in which the loss of one is the gain of another; in which, at the same time the reveller is hasting to his wine, and the mourner burying his friend; in which the malignity of one is sometimes defeated by the frolick of another; and many mischiefs and many benefits are done and hindered without design. (Johnson 1825, pp. 109-110)

In exhibiting 'the real state of sublunary nature' Shakespeare's plays are essentially true to life. My emphasis has been on the hybridity of Shakespeare's style more than his subject matter, the ability to arouse emotions which might seem to conflict with the ostensible nature of the genre. Victor Hugo, exemplifying a Romantic view of Shakespeare's uniqueness, moves the argument to the emotional and psychological implications of Shakespeare's hybridity:

> Shakespeare is the Drama, and the drama, which combines in one breath the grotesque and the sublime, the terrible and the absurd, tragedy and comedy. (1827, p. 17)

Hugo is introducing new terms: grotesque, sublime, terrible, absurd, and departing from the classical definitions of comedy and tragedy. This moves us away from form and endings – a comic resolution or tragic catastrophe – towards a consideration of the tone, the mood and the feeling of the play. It is not difficult to illustrate Hugo's statement about Shakespeare. As has been argued here, the hybridity of Shakespeare's plays, their expansion of genre, translates into the interfusing and entangling of jest and solemnity, suffering and absurdity, farce and pathos. In the drama of the Renaissance, Shakespeare exhibits a remarkable technical virtuosity in weaving elements at home in one genre into another, startling and complicating our emotional and intellectual responses. It is in this unprecedented blending of generic qualities that Shakespeare's innovation and originality lie.

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