

## Shakespearean Thinking

### 1. Fast and Slow Thinking

Reference points... Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (2011); Philip Davis, *Shakespeare Thinking* (2007); A.D. Nuttall, *Shakespeare The Thinker* (2007); Graham Bradshaw, *Shakespeare's Scepticism* (1989); Raphael Lyne, *Shakespeare, Rhetoric and Cognition* (2011).

#### A. Catching Shakespeare Thinking

In the final lecture of the course we'll spend some time trying to identify moments where Shakespeare's own habits of thought / ideas about things emerge amid the voices of characters and narrators and others. This is not easy. I would like you to keep an eye out for possible examples, and then send them in to the 'Shakespearean Thinking Lectures' page (see menu across the top) on my blog, 'What Literature Knows About Your Brain', <http://www.english.cam.ac.uk/research/cogblog/>. An example of what I mean: Miranda and Prospero. Is Prospero's rejoinder (whether it is the voice of undercutting experience, or an amazed appreciation of innocence, or both) something we might attribute to 'Shakespeare's way of thinking about things'?

MIRANDA	O, wonder! How many goodly creatures are there here! How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world, That has such people in't!
PROSPERO	'Tis new to thee. ( <i>Tempest</i> , 5.1)

#### B. How Fast Or Slow Is Thought?

In Shakespeare we see thought's capacity for speed and its tendency to dilate in time. Sometimes he seems to alert us to the problem that 'thought-time' is a strange thing, hard to measure, possibly with a sharp threshold between 'fast' and 'slow'.

HAMLET	Haste me to know't, that I, with wings as swift As meditation or the thoughts of love, May sweep to my revenge. (Hamlet, 1.5)
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When to the sessions of sweet silent thought  
I summon up remembrance of things past,  
I sigh the lack of many a thing I sought,  
And with old woes new wail my dear time's waste:  
Then can I drown an eye, unused to flow,  
For precious friends hid in death's dateless night,  
And weep afresh love's long since cancell'd woe,  
And moan the expense of many a vanish'd sight:  
Then can I grieve at grievances foregone,  
And heavily from woe to woe tell o'er  
The sad account of fore-bemoaned moan,  
Which I new pay as if not paid before.  
But if the while I think on thee, dear friend,  
All losses are restored and sorrows end. (Sonnet 30)

When I consider every thing that grows  
 Holds in perfection but a little moment,  
 That this huge stage presenteth nought but shows  
 Whereon the stars in secret influence comment;  
 When I perceive that men as plants increase,  
 Cheered and checked even by the self-same sky,  
 Vaunt in their youthful sap, at height decrease,  
 And wear their brave state out of memory;  
 Then the conceit of this inconstant stay  
 Sets you most rich in youth before my sight,  
 Where wasteful Time debateth with Decay,  
 To change your day of youth to sullied night;  
     And all in war with Time for love of you,  
     As he takes from you, I engraft you new.

### C. Interrupting Thought's Session: Apprehension and Consideration

In *Troilus and Cressida*, Ulysses manipulates the speed of Achilles' thinking, luring him into a kind of consideration to which he isn't all that well suited.

ACHILLES	What are you reading?
ULYSSES	<p style="text-align: center;">A strange fellow here</p> Writes me: 'That man, how dearly ever parted, How much in having, or without or in, Cannot make boast to have that which he hath, Nor feels not what he owes, but by reflection; As when his virtues shining upon others Heat them and they retort that heat again To the first giver.'
ACHILLES	<p style="text-align: center;">This is not strange, Ulysses.</p> The beauty that is borne here in the face The bearer knows not, but commends itself To others' eyes; nor doth the eye itself, That most pure spirit of sense, behold itself, Not going from itself; but eye to eye opposed Salutes each other with each other's form; For speculation turns not to itself, Till it hath travell'd and is mirror'd there Where it may see itself. This is not strange at all.
ULYSSES	I do not strain at the position, -- It is familiar, -- but at the author's drift; Who, in his circumstance, expressly proves That no man is the lord of any thing, Though in and of him there be much consisting, Till he communicate his parts to others: Nor doth he of himself know them for aught Till he behold them form'd in the applause [...]         I was much wrapt in this... ( <i>Troilus and Cressida</i> , 3.3)

#### D. Leisure and Urgency: Twelfth Night

What does Orsino do with time to think? What does Viola do with none?

ORSINO

If music be the food of love, play on;  
Give me excess of it, that, surfeiting,  
The appetite may sicken, and so die.  
That strain again! it had a dying fall:  
O, it came o'er my ear like the sweet sound,  
That breathes upon a bank of violets,  
Stealing and giving odour! Enough; no more:  
'Tis not so sweet now as it was before.  
O spirit of love! How quick and fresh art thou,  
That, notwithstanding thy capacity  
Receiveth as the sea, nought enters there,  
Of what validity and pitch soe'er,  
But falls into abatement and low price,  
Even in a minute: so full of shapes is fancy  
That it alone is high fantastical.

CURIO Will you go hunt, my lord?

ORSINO What, Curio?

CURIO The hart.

ORSINO      Why, so I do, the noblest that I have:  
O, when mine eyes did see Olivia first,  
Methought she purged the air of pestilence!  
That instant was I turn'd into a hart... (*TN*, 1.1)

VIOLA      What country, friends, is this?

CAPTAIN      This is Illyria, lady.

VIOLA            And what should I do in Illyria?

My brother he is in Elysium.

Perchance he is not drown'd: what think you, sailors?

CAPTAIN It is perchance that you yourself were saved.

VIOLA O my poor brother! and so perchance may he be. (TN, 1.2)

VIOLA            Who governs here?

CAPTAIN      A noble duke, in nature as in name.

VIOLA            What is the name?

CAPTAIN Orsino.

VIOLA Orsino! I have heard my father name him:  
He was a bachelor then.

CAPTAIN      And so is now, or was so very late;  
For but a month ago I went from hence,  
And then 'twas fresh in murmur, -- as, you know,  
What great ones do the less will prattle of, --  
That he did seek the love of fair Olivia.

VIOLA            What's she? [...]

VIOLA            For such disguise as haply shall become  
The form of my intent. I'll serve this duke:  
Thou shalt present me as an eunuch to him:  
It may be worth thy pains; for I can sing  
And speak to him in many sorts of music  
That will allow me very worth his service.  
What else may hap to time I will commit;  
Only shape thou thy silence to my wit. (TN, 1.2)

### E. History and Time Pressure

History plays depict human thinking pressed between long timescales (e.g. of succession) and moments of crisis. Shakespeare seems acutely aware of how it struggles with that pressure.

PRINCE                      My gracious lord! my father!

This sleep is sound indeed, this is a sleep  
That from this golden rigol hath divorced  
So many English kings. Thy due from me  
Is tears and heavy sorrows of the blood,  
Which nature, love, and filial tenderness,  
Shall, O dear father, pay thee plenteously:  
My due from thee is this imperial crown,  
Which, as immediate as thy place and blood,  
Derives itself to me. Lo, here it sits,  
Which God shall guard: and put the world's whole strength  
Into one giant arm, it shall not force  
This lineal honour from me: this from thee  
Will I to mine leave, as 'tis left to me. (2 H4, 4.5)

CANT. ... There is no bar  
To make against your highness' claim to France  
But this, which they produce from Pharamond,  
'In terram Salicam mulieres ne succedant:'  
'No woman shall succeed in Salic land:'  
Which Salic land the French unjustly gloze  
To be the realm of France, and Pharamond  
The founder of this law and female bar ... (H5, 1.2)

CRANMER Let me speak, sir,  
For heaven now bids me; and the words I utter  
Let none think flattery, for they'll find 'em truth.  
This royal infant -- heaven still move about her! --  
Though in her cradle, yet now promises  
Upon this land a thousand thousand blessings,  
Which time shall bring to ripeness: she shall be--  
But few now living can behold that goodness--  
A pattern to all princes living with her... (*H8*, 5.5)