

Shakespearean Thinking

3. Atypical Minds

A. Away With The Fairies Again

Underlying this lecture, at a distance: Thomas Nagel, 'What Is It Like To Be A Bat?', *Philosophical Review*, 1974; and perhaps Peter Hacker, 'Is There Anything It Is Like To Be A Bat?', *Philosophy*, 1977. Shakespeare represents modes of thinking that are hard to imagine. Can we detect and/or take the particular perspective of a fairy?

OBERON My gentle Puck, come hither. Thou rememberest
Since once I sat upon a promontory,
And heard a mermaid on a dolphin's back
Uttering such dulcet and harmonious breath
That the rude sea grew civil at her song
And certain stars shot madly from their spheres,
To hear the sea-maid's music.

PUCK I remember.

OBERON That very time I saw, but thou couldst not,
Flying between the cold moon and the earth,
Cupid all arm'd: a certain aim he took
At a fair vestal throned by the west,
And loosed his love-shaft smartly from his bow,
As it should pierce a hundred thousand hearts;
But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quench'd in the chaste beams of the watery moon,
And the imperial votaress passed on,
In maiden meditation, fancy-free.
Yet mark'd I where the bolt of Cupid fell:
It fell upon a little western flower,
Before milk-white, now purple with love's wound,
And maidens call it love-in-idleness.
Fetch me that flower; the herb I shew'd thee once:
The juice of it on sleeping eye-lids laid
Will make or man or woman madly dote
Upon the next live creature that it sees.
Fetch me this herb; and be thou here again
Ere the leviathan can swim a league.

PUCK I'll put a girdle round about the earth
In forty minutes.

Exit

OBERON Having once this juice,
I'll watch Titania when she is asleep,
And drop the liquor of it in her eyes.
The next thing then she waking looks upon,
Be it on lion, bear, or wolf, or bull,
On meddling monkey, or on busy ape [...]
But who comes here? I am invisible;
And I will overhear their conference. (*MND*, 1.7)

B. How Do The Jealous Think?

Jealous minds are more of a staple of the literary tradition; alongside the paranoia, which we might expect, Shakespeare portrays creativity / imagination: in metaphor, even perhaps in the whole story of the handkerchief.

LEONTES Go to, go to!
 How she holds up the neb, the bill to him!
 And arms her with the boldness of a wife
 To her allowing husband!

Exeunt Polixenes, Hermione, and Attendants

Gone already!

Inch-thick, knee-deep, o'er head and ears a fork'd one!
Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I
Play too, but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play.
There have been,
Or I am much deceived, cuckolds ere now;
And many a man there is, even at this present,
Now while I speak this, holds his wife by the arm,
That little thinks she has been sluiced in's absence
And his pond fish'd by his next neighbour, by
Sir Smile, his neighbour... (*Winter's Tale*, 1.2)

OTHELLO That is a fault. That handkerchief
 Did an Egyptian to my mother give;
 She was a charmer, and could almost read
 The thoughts of people: she told her, while she kept it,
 'Twould make her amiable and subdue my father
 Entirely to her love, but if she lost it
 Or made gift of it, my father's eye
 Should hold her loathed and his spirits should hunt
 After new fancies: she, dying, gave it me;
 And bid me, when my fate would have me wive,
 To give it her. I did so: and take heed on't;
 Make it a darling like your precious eye;
 To lose't or give't away were such perdition
 As nothing else could match.

DESD. Is't possible?

OTHELLO 'Tis true: there's magic in the web of it:
 A sibyl, that had number'd in the world
 The sun to course two hundred compasses,
 In her prophetic fury sew'd the work;
 The worms were hallow'd that did breed the silk;
 And it was dyed in mummy which the skilful
 Conserved of maidens' hearts.

DESD. Indeed! Is't true? (*Othello*, 3.4)

C. Thinking At The Edge Of Life

A different, interesting category: those who are between death and life, like Desdemona. What is the status of the things she says / thinks in her final desperation, and then in her strange apparent revival. And then Hermione: the difficulty of imagining her thoughts, whether or not we think she spent sixteen years as a statue. See Guillemette Bolens, *The Style of Gestures*.

DESD. Kill me to-morrow: let me live to-night!

OTHELLO Nay, if you strive--

DESD. But half an hour!

OTHELLO Being done, there is no pause.

DESD. But while I say one prayer!

OTHELLO It is too late.

Smothers her.

Emilia at the door.

EMILIA My lord , my lord! What, ho! My lord, my lord!

OTHELLO What noise is this? Not dead? not yet quite dead?

I that am cruel am yet merciful;

I would not have thee linger in thy pain: So, so. [...]

Still as the grave. Shall she come in? were't good?--

I think she stirs again: -- no. What's best to do?

If she come in, she'll sure speak to my wife:

My wife! my wife! what wife? I have no wife.

[...]

DESD, O, falsely, falsely murder'd!

EMILIA Alas, what cry is that?

OTHELLO That! what?

EMILIA Out, and alas! that was my lady's voice.

Help! help, ho! help! O lady, speak again!

Sweet Desdemona! O sweet mistress, speak!

DESD. A guiltless death I die.

EMILIA O, who hath done this deed?

DESD. Nobody; I myself. Farewell

Commend me to my kind lord: O, farewell! *Dies (Othello, 5.2)*

PAULINA Music, awake her; strike! *Music*

'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;

Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,

I'll fill your grave up: stir, nay, come away,

Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him

Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs:

Hermione comes down

Start not; her actions shall be holy as

You hear my spell is lawful: do not shun her

Until you see her die again; for then

You kill her double. Nay, present your hand:

When she was young you woo'd her; now in age

Is she become the suitor? [...]

PAULINA That she is living,
 Were it but told you, should be hooted at
 Like an old tale: but it appears she lives,
 Though yet she speak not. Mark a little while.
 Please you to interpose, fair madam: kneel
 And pray your mother's blessing. Turn, good lady;
 Our Perdita is found.

HERMIONE You gods, look down
 And from your sacred vials pour your graces
 Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own.
 Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How found
 Thy father's court? For thou shalt hear that I,
 Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
 Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
 Myself to see the issue. (*Winter's Tale*, 5.2)

D. What Is It Like To Be A Hare?

In *Venus and Adonis* there are encounters with the differences between us and (at least) a hare, a horse, a boar, and a goddess. On animals in Shakespeare / renaissance culture more generally, see the work of Erica Fudge.

'And when thou hast on foot the purblind hare,
 Mark the poor wretch, to overshoot his troubles
 How he outruns the wind and with what care
 He cranks and crosses with a thousand doubles:
 The many musets through the which he goes
 Are like a labyrinth to amaze his foes.

'Sometime he runs among a flock of sheep,
 To make the cunning hounds mistake their smell,
 And sometime where earth-delving conies keep,
 To stop the loud pursuers in their yell,
 And sometime sorteth with a herd of deer:
 Danger deviseth shifts; wit waits on fear:

'For there his smell with others being mingled,
 The hot scent-snuffing hounds are driven to doubt,
 Ceasing their clamorous cry till they have singled
 With much ado the cold fault cleanly out;
 Then do they spend their mouths: Echo replies,
 As if another chase were in the skies.' (*Venus and Adonis*, 679-96)