INTRODUCTION

Cymbeline is one of Shakespeare's longest and richest plays. Its capaciousness is its great virtue. It ranges from the nightmare claustrophobia of Innogen's bedroom to the epic violence of Romano-British battle; it juxtaposes the innocent prude Posthumus, the refined brute Cloten, and the nonchalant hero Guiderius; it accommodates Iachimo's corrosive cynicism and Jupiter's transcendental affirmations. Its stagecraft is multi-levelled, and its texture is densely allusive, reflecting the bewildering array of sources on which it draws; its generic affinities link it with all parts of the canon. Yet despite this astonishing variety, its narrative grips and compels, rising inexorably from a naive tale of sundered lovers to a peripeteia of dazzling artfulness. The Victorian critics who supposed the ageing Shakespeare was writing in a mood of philosophic calm or catatonic boredom could scarcely have been more mistaken. *Cymbeline* was produced by a dramatist working at the height of his powers.[1]

These days *Cymbeline* has no shortage of able advocates, but it remains a difficult play to see whole, and has frequently been dismissed as muddled and overcomplicated. The most disparaging appraisal came, famously, from Dr Johnson:[2]

> This play has many just sentiments, some natural dialogues, and some pleasing scenes, but they are obtained at the expense of much incongruity. To remark the folly of the fiction, the absurdity of the conduct, the confusion of the names and manners of different times, and the impossibility of the events in any system of life, were to waste criticism upon unresisting imbecility, upon faults too evident for detection, and too gross for aggravation.

Johnson's formidable censure shows the problems that rationalism has with romance, but his objection was less to *Cymbeline*'s implausibility than to its disunity – the feeling that while good in parts, as an entity it fails. Other critics echoed this charge of incoherence: notably F. R. Leavis, who complained that it lacked 'unifying significance such as might organize it into a profound work of art',[3] and George Bernard Shaw who, though admiring Innogen, Cloten and the princes, thought the play as a whole 'exasperating beyond all tolerance'. Shaw even suggested that Innogen's role should be altered, to disentangle the 'real woman divined by Shakespeare without his knowing it clearly' from the 'idiotic paragon of virtue' clad in the bombazine of a bishop's wife.[4]

[1] For Shakespeare 'on the heights', see Edmund Dowden, *Shakspere* (1877); for catatonia, see Lytton Strachey, 'Shakespeare's final period', in *Books and Characters* (1922; originally written 1904). William Archer thought Shakespeare wrote *Cymbeline* in a fit of 'morbid ingenuity': *The Theatrical World of 1896* (1897), p. 263.

[2] *Dr Johnson on Shakespeare*, ed. W. K. Wimsatt (1969), p. 136.

[3] Leavis, *The Common Pursuit* (1952; originally published 1942), p. 178. For a positive Leavisite reading, see Derick Marsh, *The Recurring Miracle* (1962).

[4] Shaw, *Plays and Players*, ed. A. C. Ward (1952), p. 115; and C. St John, ed., *Ellen Terry and Bernard Shaw: A Correspondence* (3rd edn, 1949), pp. 42, 45.

This sounds like typical Shavian bravado, but comparable sentiments go back to Charles Gildon in the early eighteenth century: 'Though the usual absurdities of irregular plots abound . . . yet there is something in the discovery that is very touching.'[1] Such praise of *Cymbeline*'s isolated beauties suggests that the problem is not implausibility so much as the difficulty of identifying the play's inner dynamic.

Cymbeline's pleasures differ from those anticipated by readers trained to admire singularity of effect. Its structure is a series of narratives that seem to stand apart from each other but which ultimately prove to be interconnected, although the exact nature of those connections often remains elusive. Actions at one level are affected by events at another, each sequence nesting within patterns of which the characters are unconscious but in which they need to find their places, so that the more local difficulties that preoccupy them can be resolved. The seemingly self-sufficient story of marital fidelity with which events open is absorbed into larger narratives that pull the simpler tale into their orbit, a design that is fully apparent only from the retrospect of the final scene. What makes the structure seem diffuse is the absence of a hero, and the consequent uncertainty about what is driving the action. Although the king is structurally central (he alone links the three plots: the wager, the Romans, and the lost princes), theatrically he is a blank; and while Posthumus, Innogen and Iachimo have, at different times, each been taken for the star part, none of them exactly dominates, and all disappear for long periods, even including Innogen, who after 4.2 is virtually silent. This makes the play's design remarkably decentred, and although the resolution is powerful when it comes, it arrives almost by accident, after coincidences that seem mysterious, if not frankly arbitrary. This dynamic opens out the play by counteracting its drive towards closure, creating sudden shifts of gear between its various levels and strong tensions that pull it in different directions. Modern readers and directors have shown more relish than did Dr Johnson for the play's outrageous crossovers between ancient Rome and modern Italy, its ostentatious disguises, confusions and chances. Such fractures appeal to post-modern tastes for fictions that reveal their engineering and question the terms of their own mimesis.

The other critical stumbling-block has been the play's politics. Although all Shakespeare's writing after 1603 registers the impact of the new cultural dispensation that arrived with James I, *Cymbeline*'s kingly families, masque-like revelations and praise of imperial peace make it seem more directly engaged with the circumstances of the new reign than any other play. Inevitably, this has caused difficulties, since *Cymbeline*'s Jacobean dimensions cannot easily be generalized: its allusions to half-forgotten issues get in the way of the usual appeals to Shakespeare's timelessness. At worst, its topicalities have been seen as a puzzle to be cracked, a code that could be broken were the right cryptographic key found. In general, allegorical readings have been a distraction, for they freeze the play into a deadly antiquarian past. But approaches that neglect its Jacobean contexts are just as problematic, since they risk seeming historically impoverished. The most remarkable instance of inattention to history was the Victorians'

[1] B. Vickers, ed., *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage 1623–1801* (6 vols., 1974–81), VI, p. 261. Arthur Murphy, in 1771, called the play 'a wild chase of heterogeneous matter', yet 'amidst all its imperfections, a number of detached beauties would occur to surprise and charm the imagination' (Vickers, II, p. 359).

overindulgent attitude to Innogen (see pp. 58–9 below): only readers completely indifferent to anachronism could take her for Shakespeare's ideal woman and the play's only important character. But even in later times, more historically sensitized approaches have been inhibited by the assumption that too much politics damages the play's roots in myth. As the archetypal critic Northrop Frye put it, '*Cymbeline* is not, to put it mildly, a historical play: it is pure folktale'.[1] Yet politics and folktale are not incompatible, and in many ways the play inhabits the rich border zone where they meet. One aim of this Introduction will be to explore *Cymbeline*'s unique interplay between politics and aesthetics, history and myth.

DATE

Cymbeline is first mentioned in 'The Book of Plays and Notes Thereof', a small manuscript volume kept by the astrologer and quack doctor Simon Forman (1552–1611). Forman apparently began this as a collection of memoranda based on plays he had seen, but he abandoned it after listing only four: *Cymbeline*, *Macbeth*, *The Winter's Tale* and a play of Richard II that, from his account, was written by someone other than Shakespeare. The summary of *Cymbeline* runs as follows:[2]

Of Cymbeline, King of England

Remember also the story of Cymbeline, King of England in Lucius' time. How Lucius came from Octavius Caesar for tribute, and, being denied, after sent Lucius with a great army of soldiers; who landed at Milford Haven, and after were vanquished by Cymbeline, and Lucius taken prisoner, and all by means of three outlaws; of the which two of them were the sons of Cymbeline, taken from him when they were but two years old by an old man whom Cymbeline banished, and he kept them as his own sons twenty years with him in a cave. And how one of[3] them slew Cloten, that was the queen's son, going to Milford Haven to seek the love of Innogen the King's daughter. And how the Italian that came from her love conveyed himself into a chest, and said it was a chest of plate sent from her love and others to be presented to the King. And in the deepest of the night, she being asleep, he opened the chest and came forth of it. And viewed her in her bed and the marks of her body and took away her bracelet, and after accused her of adultery to her love, etc. And in the end how he came with the Romans into England and was taken prisoner, and after revealed to Innogen, who had turned herself into man's apparel and fled to meet her love at Milford Haven, and chanced to fall on the cave in the woods where her two brothers were; and how by eating a sleeping dram they thought she had been dead, and laid

[1] Frye, *A Natural Perspective: The Development of Shakespearean Comedy and Romance* (1965), p. 67. The seminal essays in recovering the play's politics were J. P. Brockbank's 'History and histrionics in *Cymbeline*', *S. Sur.*, 11 (1958), 42–8; and Emrys Jones's 'Stuart *Cymbeline*', *Essays in Criticism*, 11 (1961), 84–99. The first person to perceive that it could be read as a play about nationhood – albeit without much concern for the minutiae of Jacobean politics – was G. Wilson Knight, in *The Crown of Life* (1947).

[2] Bodleian Library, MS Ashmole 208, fo. 206r; reproduced in facsimile in S. Schoenbaum, *William Shakespeare: Images and Documents* (1981), pp. 3–20. I have modernized Forman's idiosyncratic spelling and added some punctuation. There is a slightly inaccurate literal transcription in E. K. Chambers, *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems* (1930), II, pp. 337–40. The authenticity of Forman's 'Book' has sometimes been questioned, but its genuineness is proved by R. W. Hunt and J. D. Wilson in *Review of English Studies*, 23 (1947), 193–200.

[3] Most transcriptions read 'of of' and assume that Forman omitted 'one'; but what looks like the first 'of' is in fact the numeral '1'.

her in the woods and the body of Cloten by her, in her love's apparel that he left behind him, and how she was found by Lucius, etc.

Tantalizingly, Forman mentions neither the date of the performance nor the name of the playhouse at which he saw it. He did, though, date all the other plays between 20 April and 15 May 1611, and saw them 'at the Globe'. It seems plausible that *Cymbeline* was also staged at the Globe, and around the same time; it could not have been later than 8 September, which was when Forman died. If *Cymbeline* was current in the Globe repertory in spring 1611, it might have been written at any point in the previous two years. Company practice was to keep around twenty plays in the repertory and to alternate them daily. Plays continued to be performed until they ceased to attract spectators, at which point they were replaced: a successful play might have (say) thirty performances over two years.[1] So in spring 1611 *Cymbeline* must still have been new and popular enough to be making a profit.

Establishing a *terminus a quo* is complicated, for it is affected by the play's relationship with three other texts – Beaumont and Fletcher's *Philaster*, *The Winter's Tale* and Thomas Heywood's *The Golden Age* – and the nature of the debts and the dates involved are all disputed. To begin with *Philaster*, verbal resonances and situational similarities with *Cymbeline* indicate a significant genetic link between the two plays. Scholars have disagreed which way the debt runs: it is the view of this edition (argued below, p. 19) that *Philaster* preceded *Cymbeline* chronologically.[2] Unfortunately, the date of *Philaster* cannot be conclusively fixed. It was certainly written by October 1610, which was when a volume containing a poem praising it, by John Davies of Hereford, was licensed for the press. It was probably written much earlier than this: the Revels editor, Andrew Gurr, favours May 1609, on the basis of the Beaumont and Fletcher chronology, and because of an apparent allusion to a naval project then current.[3] This date may be near the truth, but without firmer evidence it is impossible to be absolutely certain.

The Winter's Tale raises similar questions of priority. It has clear links to *Cymbeline* through their shared romance motifs, jealousy theme and court setting, and there is one specific verbal borrowing: a detail that *The Winter's Tale* repeats from the story by Boccaccio that was one of *Cymbeline*'s sources (see p. 25 below). But again the dating is contested. Stephen Orgel believes that *The Winter's Tale* was brand new in 1611, on the basis of Forman's notebook and incorporation into the text of a dance of satyrs from Ben Jonson's court masque *Oberon* (staged 1 January 1611).[4] Against this is Stanley Wells's and Gary Taylor's case for 1609, based on the view that the borrowing from *Oberon* was a later interpolation, and that the Boccaccio allusion (which comes near the end of the play) shows that Shakespeare was beginning to explore the sources for

[1] See A. Gurr, *The Shakespearean Playing Companies* (1996), p. 101.

[2] Not all critics would agree with this, but the arguments boil down to little more than value judgements about the two plays' aesthetic merits (see p. 19, n. 1 below). The belief that *Cymbeline* must have preceded *Philaster* is the main sticking-point for those who assume it was written very early (1608, or early 1609): but as I argue here, all the other evidence points to a later date.

[3] Gurr, ed., *Philaster* (1969), pp. xxvi–xxix. The case is complicated by the fact that Gurr thinks *Cymbeline* came first: hence our combined arguments are circular, since his date for *Philaster* depends on locating *Cymbeline* early in 1609. However, if (as I believe) *Philaster* came first, the difference between our views disappears.

[4] Orgel, ed., *The Winter's Tale* (1996), pp. 79–80.

Cymbeline before he finished his previous project – a practice that can be paralleled in his working practices on other plays.[1] Wells's and Taylor's argument is the more persuasive; but once again complete certainty is elusive.

It has also been claimed that some of the details of Thomas Heywood's spectacular mythological play *The Golden Age* were imitated from *Cymbeline*. *The Golden Age* has scenes in which Jupiter descends on an eagle, and Roger Warren argues that there are verbal reminiscences of Iachimo's monologue in Innogen's bedchamber.[2] If there is a debt here – and it is far from obvious – the borrower must have been Heywood, but his play, too, is hard to date. It was registered for the press in October 1611, but this was some time after it was written, for there had already been two sequels, *The Silver Age* and *The Bronze Age*. Conceivably *The Golden Age* might have been staged as early as mid-1610, though Heywood was such an extraordinarily prolific writer that he may have produced sequels quicker than other, less industrious dramatists. This would push the date of his play back into early 1611.

To summarize: *Cymbeline* was probably written after *Philaster* (1609?) and before *The Golden Age* (late 1610 or 1611). The uncertainty over *The Winter's Tale* puts the sequence of Shakespeare's canon in doubt, but whichever way one comes at it, the result looks the same for *Cymbeline*: if Wells and Taylor are right, *Cymbeline* belongs to late 1609 or 1610; if Orgel is right, it could not be later than 1610, for with *The Winter's Tale* dated to Christmas 1610–11 there would scarcely be time to get *Cymbeline* into the Globe repertoire by the spring. Of course, these arguments are all circular. Since none of the plays is independently datable, assumptions that we make about each one depend on assumptions being made about the other two. But taken together, they do suggest the likeliest window for *Cymbeline* falls in 1610.

More helpful is the internal evidence that can be garnered from the play, for *Cymbeline* makes possible allusions to two events that happened in summer 1610. One was the investiture of Prince Henry as Prince of Wales (5 June 1610). This was the major ceremonial event of the year, and had been in preparation since Christmas. Since Henry was the first crown prince to be invested for nearly a century, and was given his own household and income, his coming of age put the political symbolism of Wales at a premium; and in one centrepiece of the celebrations, Samuel Daniel's masque *Tethys' Festival*, special attention was paid to Milford Haven as the 'port of union' at which Henry's ancestor, Henry Tudor, had landed on his journey to challenge Richard III at Bosworth (discussed on p. 41 below). Milford has similar prominence in *Cymbeline*, and the scenes set in Wales suggest that Shakespeare, too, had suddenly become preoccupied with the iconography and cultural significance of Welshness. It cannot be claimed that Shakespeare was reacting to Henry's investiture, nor that the play would necessarily have been any different had it not taken place. Nonetheless, the coincidence between the play's geography and the summer's political symbolism is very striking.

The other event was the assassination of Henri IV of France on 4 May 1610. This created an atmosphere of panic at Whitehall, especially in view of the impending

[1] Wells and Taylor, *A Textual Companion* (1987), p. 131.
[2] Warren, ed., *Cymbeline* (1998), pp. 66–7.

investiture, which would put the royal family in proximity to large crowds. On 8 and 21 May James asked parliament for new safety measures against fanatics, and parliament advised that Catholics not normally resident in London should be commanded to leave the city. The Privy Council ordered a close guard on recusants, and on 2 June James issued a proclamation that revoked licences permitting nonresident Catholics to come to London, required magistrates to disarm recusants, and commanded that the Oath of Allegiance, first instituted in 1606 in the wake of the Gunpowder Plot, be readministered.[1] There may be an echo of this last provision in Iachimo's claim that every touch of Innogen's hand would 'force the feeler's soul / To th'oath of loyalty' (1.6.100–1) – which is innocent enough in context but would have seemed more significant after the proclamation. More strikingly, these events (I suggest) colour Innogen's words at the reunion with her father when, having been knocked down by Posthumus, she resists the attempts of her servant, Pisanio, to revive her: 'O, get thee from my sight, / Thou gav'st me poison. Dangerous fellow, hence, / Breathe not where princes are' (5.4.236–8). Innogen reacts violently because she believes that Pisanio has tried to kill her with a feigned drug: still, one might have expected her first words on reviving would be to greet her father or husband, not to berate the treacherous servant and demand that he be kept from other vulnerable royal personages. Although Innogen makes no direct reference to Henri IV's assassination, one wonders whether her reason for reacting in this surprising way is because the news from France was still such a hot and shocking topic.

In short, *Cymbeline*'s possible topical allusions, plus Forman's notebook and the links to *Philaster*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Golden Age*, suggest it was being written either in May/June 1610 or shortly after. And if, as Leeds Barroll argues, the playhouses were closed because of plague between June and November, then it seems likeliest that the first performances came in December 1610, followed by a court performance in the Christmas season 1610–11.[2]

FOLKTALE AND ROMANCE

In the 1870s Edward Dowden was the first to suggest that Shakespeare's life ended in a mood of philosophical calm and otherworldliness. This mood he detected in *Pericles*, *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, plays he termed 'the romances':[3]

> There is a romantic element about these plays. In all there is the same romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear – the daughters of Pericles and Leontes, the sons of Cymbeline and Alonso. In all there is a beautiful romantic background of sea or mountain.

[1] J. F. Larkin and P. L. Hughes, eds., *Stuart Royal Proclamations*, I, *James I* (1973), pp. 245–50. In summer 1610 there was a rash of prosecutions against Catholics who refused to swear the Oath of Allegiance.

[2] L. Barroll, *Politics, Plague, and Shakespeare's Theater* (1991), pp. 245–50. Barroll points out that the play was not staged at court in the 1611–12 season, full details of which are known to us (unlike the 1610–11 season, information about which is lost). He himself favours a date early in 1610.

[3] Dowden, *Shakspere* (1877), p. 32; developed from the less schematic discussion in his *Shakspere: A Critical Study of his Mind and Art* (1875). The term 'romance' had previously been used of *The Tempest* by Coleridge (*Lectures on Shakespeare*, 1818), and of *Cymbeline* by John Potter in 1772 and William Hazlitt in 1817 (Vickers, *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, V, p. 432).

The dramas have a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to render the name 'comedies' inappropriate; we may smile tenderly, but we never laugh loudly as we read them. Let us, then, name this group consisting of four plays, Romances.

Today it is difficult to endorse Dowden's biographical fantasy, or the casualness with which he used that complex term 'romance'. Nonetheless, his label has been influential, for modern criticism still sees *Cymbeline*'s closest generic affinities as lying with the 'romances'. All four plays have similar motifs: families reunited after extremes of suffering and separation; recognition scenes in which characters reencounter each other in an atmosphere of amazement; oracles, dreams, revelations and deities; identities lost and marvellously restored; fathers weakened by a lack of male heirs and perilously dependent on the chastity of their daughters. And from such scenarios it is a short step to the openly miraculous events of wonder-story and folktale. The wager on a wife's chastity was a theme that reverberated through the literatures of medieval Europe,[1] while Innogen's story has parallels with Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty and, especially, Snow White. Like Snow White, she is forced from home by a stepmother, takes refuge with mysterious strangers and becomes their housekeeper, endures seeming death through a magic potion, and is finally reunited with a handsome lover. 'Snow White' was not written down until the eighteenth century, but its resemblances to *Cymbeline* tempt one to speculate that it must have been in oral circulation much earlier.

Modern anthropological and psychological criticism understands narratives like these as performing complex symbolic work. They stage collective desires and anxieties, and frequently invoke the politics of family life: the traumas of growing up, the difficult transition from childhood to adulthood, and the realization of the self as an entity separate from the family. With their orphaned children, domineering fathers and hostile stepmothers, they voice the pains of separation from one's past, and play out the conflict between the individual's inherited identity as a member of a group and their emerging self-definition as a personality in their own right. In *Cymbeline* Innogen's and Posthumus's problems are defined by Oedipal concerns. Innogen needs to establish herself as an autonomous adult, but her family exerts too tight a hold over her. She is resentful towards her parents, and the proposed marriage with her stepbrother has a whiff of incest that signals the dangers of endogamy and the need to marry beyond the tribe. By contrast, Posthumus lacks a family entirely and seems correspondingly insecure. He will not find himself as an individual until Jupiter provides him with his own kin.[2] More generally, with its nightmares and fantasies, its dismembered body, doubled husbands (Posthumus-Iachimo-Cloten), surrogate fathers (Belarius, Lucius,

[1] See Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson, *The Types of the Folktale* (2nd revision, 1961), Type 882. G. K. Hunter links Cloten to the witch's uncouth son of folktale, like the 'losel' in Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, 3.7 (*English Drama 1586–1642*, 1996, p. 509). See also W. B. Thorne, '*Cymbeline*: "Lopp'd branches" and the concept of regeneration', *SQ*, 20 (1969), 143–59; and J. Carr, '*Cymbeline* and the validity of myth', *SP*, 75 (1978), 316–30. A later, famous version of the motif comes in Mozart's *Cosi fan Tutte*.

[2] See M. M. Schwartz, 'Between fantasy and imagination: a psychological exploration of *Cymbeline*', in F. Crews, ed., *Psychoanalysis and Literature* (1970), pp. 249–83; D. S. Brewer, *Symbolic Stories: Traditional Narratives of the Family Drama in English Literature* (1980), pp. 133–46; and M. Skura, 'Interpreting Posthumus' dream from above and below: families, psychoanalysts and literary critics', in M. M. Schwartz and C. Kahn, eds., *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* (1980), pp. 203–16.

Jupiter), unpredictable transitions and punning condensations (from Iachimo's false trunk to Cloten's headless trunk), the story has the unsettling logic of a dream. Ruth Nevo suggests that although Cymbeline takes only a small part in the play named after him, he is the presiding ego whose psychic drama is enacted in his children's lives.[1]

Although such modern perspectives go a long way to explaining the story's mysterious power, the term 'romance' remains a problem. It does not denote a specific genre but a literary mode, and one that Renaissance readers did not yet recognize as a separate genre: when Shakespeare's friends assembled the Folio, they divided it into Comedies, Histories and Tragedies, and placed *Cymbeline* with the latter.[2] Moreover, Shakespeare's later 'period' was not confined to romance, but included *Antony and Cleopatra*, *Coriolanus*, *Henry VIII* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, as well as the revised *King Lear* and, perhaps, some of the sonnets.[3] With its Roman setting, sexual anxieties and historical theme, *Cymbeline* connects closely with these texts, too, and in many ways it unsettles romance assumptions, pulling against the conventions of the mode. It is important, then, to avoid homogenizing its genre, and to acknowledge the varieties of forms in which romance was available to Shakespeare.

HELLENISTIC ROMANCE

Cymbeline's ultimate literary prototypes are Greek romances such as Chariton's *Chaereas and Callirhoe*, Tatius's *Clitophon and Leucippe*, Xenophon of Ephesus's *Ephesiaca*, Longus's *Daphnis and Chloe*, and Heliodorus's *Ethiopica*. These long, rambling narratives were written in the first to third centuries AD for Hellenistic communities living under Roman rule, but came into vogue in sixteenth-century Europe and contributed indirectly to the rise of the novel. They present an ensemble of frequently reiterated motifs: Mediterranean settings; heroes raised by foster parents; lovers enduring hair-raising adventures after being separated by shipwreck or bandits; heroines threatened by rape; identities revealed in dreams and oracles; miraculous reunions of long-sundered partners. In *Chaereas and Callirhoe* the Syracusan Chaereas, persuaded that his wife has betrayed him, spurns her and seemingly causes her death. After her 'funeral' she wakes, is abducted, sold into slavery, and nearly raped. Meanwhile Chaereas learns the truth and pursues her, but he, too, is enslaved and presumed dead in a shipwreck; after many adversities they are eventually reunited. Similar misfortunes, with pastoral interludes and miraculous divine interference, afflict the heroes of the other romances. Such 'mouldy tales' (in Ben Jonson's disparaging phrase) were well known to the Elizabethans, who had translations of Heliodorus (1569), Longus (1587) and Tatius (1597). Shakespeare turned a related story, *Apollonius of Tyre*, into *Pericles*, having previously raided it for the reunion of Egeus's family in *The Comedy of Errors*.

[1] Nevo, *Shakespeare's Other Language* (1987), pp. 93–4.

[2] As Stanley Wells says, definitions tend to be circular, labelling as 'romantic' the sorts of motifs that appear in 'romances'; see his 'Shakespeare and romance', in J. R. Brown and B. Harris, eds., *Later Shakespeare* (1966), pp. 49–79.

[3] The New Arden editor of the sonnets, Katherine Duncan-Jones, argues that Shakespeare was still revising them down to their publication in 1609. For links with *Cym.*, see p. 25 below.

He also knew Heliodorus: in *Twelfth Night* Orsino compares himself to the *Ethiopica*'s 'Egyptian thief' (*TN* 5.1.107) who, in a tight corner, chooses to kill his lover.[1]

From Hellenistic romance Shakespeare inherited a structural combination of delay followed by epiphanic closure. In its labyrinthine plots narrative completion seems to be deferred by apparently endless complications; progress towards a goal is denied until a recognition scene (*anagnorisis*) eventually arrives and the proliferating digressions are triumphantly reined in. In *Cymbeline* the crucial deferrals come in Act 3. In 2.5 Posthumus's plot seems heading for tragedy, but is unexpectedly diverted: Posthumus disappears for two acts, and 3.1 and 3.3 introduce new characters with seemingly unrelated stories. This is less a 'slackening' of the design[2] than a subordination of the action to new trains of event, whose directions do not clarify until the final moments. The *anagnorisis* must absorb the apparently diverging plots and their possible endings, establishing an authoritative closure towards which everything turns out to have been working all along. However, the looseness of such narratives makes them prone to generic crossovers: as R. S. White observes, romance is 'a synthesizing genre, able to include in its structure a whole range of literary experiences which we normally try to isolate into other categories'.[3] In *Cymbeline* this undecidability is, until the final scene, unusually acute.

The *Ethiopica* has the combination of incidents closest to *Cymbeline*. Here Shakespeare would have found intertwined narratives, lost children, a wicked stepmother, an imprisoned hero, a sexually threatened heroine, and identities recovered through oracles and tokens. There is one suggestively parallel moment (though not in the same structural position), a pre-echo of Posthumus's reunion with Innogen, when Theagenes strikes Chariclea without realizing who she is:[4]

> [Chariclea] ran to him like a mad woman, and, hanging by her arms about his neck, said nothing, but saluted him with certain pitiful lamentations. He, seeing her foul face (belike of purpose beblacked) and her apparel vile and all torn, supposing her to be one of the makeshifts of the city, and a vagabond, cast her off and put her away, and at length gave her a blow on the ear for that she troubled him in seeing Calasiris. Then she spake to him softly: 'Pithius, have you quite forgotten this taper?' Theagenes was stricken with that word as if he had been pierced with a dart, and by tokens agreed on between them knew the taper and, looking steadfastly upon her, espied her beauty shining like the sun appearing through the clouds, cast his arms about her neck.

Perhaps the *Ethiopica* also suggested *Cymbeline*'s most far-fetched incident, Innogen's mistaking of Cloten's corpse for Posthumus. This resembles the episode in which Theagenes, in a dark cave, confuses a corpse for Chariclea's body, falling on it 'and [holding] the same in his arms a great while without moving' – though comparable moments also occur in *Clitophon and Leucippe* and the *Ephesiaca*. Perilous and pathetic situations are the hallmark of these romances: sentimental and sensational by turns, they

[1] The *Ethiopica* was the source for several Elizabethan plays, now lost: *Cariclea* (1572), *The Queen of Ethiopia* (1578) and *The White Moor*.
[2] B. A. Mowat, *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* (1976), p. 72.
[3] R. S. White, *Let Wonder Seem Familiar: Endings in Shakespeare's Romance Vision* (2nd edn, 1985), p. 143.
[4] Quoted in S. Wells, 'Shakespeare and romance', p. 51.

manoeuvre their protagonists into extreme and emotionally charged situations, from which they are saved only by sudden revelation, coincidence or sheer happenstance.

In its own time Hellenistic romance reflected the preoccupations of a large-scale open society comfortable with its values but prone to anxiety about the individual's insignificance.[1] Their protagonists are noble but far from heroic. Helplessly driven by misfortune, they are dwarfed by the complex world and keep going only by faith that their sufferings will eventually be relieved. By contrast, *Cymbeline* is less permissive: its characters are on trial, and the happy ending is conditional on them showing evidence of virtue. This creates difficulties in the working out of plot. For example, Posthumus's conviction of his own worthlessness and his need to validate his status as a member of the Leonati are contradicted by the ghosts' complaints that he was unfairly treated and by Iachimo's frankly misleading recollections of how noble he had seemed at Rome. Such structural tensions show the play manoeuvring to square romance's miraculous consolations with the demands of a more ethically centred narrative. They introduce a moral accountancy which reflects the adjustments that romance received in the hands of Shakespeare's contemporaries.

SIDNEY AND SPENSER

Even had Shakespeare not known the *Ethiopica*, he would have encountered a narrative in the Heliodoran manner in Philip Sidney's *The Arcadia*. Shakespeare knew *The Arcadia* well, for he used it for the Gloucester plot in *King Lear*, in the process absorbing into his tragedy Sidney's romance motifs and interest in human suffering and the inscrutability of providence. J. F. Danby long ago suggested that *The Arcadia*'s lofty and philosophical narrative was the main English precursor of Shakespearean romance.[2] Although Danby's case is weakened by the idealizing aristocratic gloss that he puts on *The Arcadia*, it is true that *Cymbeline*'s weak king, power-hungry queen, cynical villain and high-minded heroes – enduring fortune's misprisions in the hope that their sufferings will some day be justified – could have stepped straight from Sidney's pages. It is hardly coincidental that *The Arcadia*'s equivalent character to *King Lear*'s Edgar is called Leonatus.

Cymbeline's clearest Sidneian allusion is to the wicked queen Cecropia.[3] Sister-in-law to the weak king Basilius, Cecropia wants to seize power by wedding her son to one of the two princesses and imprisons them in an attempt to force a marriage. Her son is no Cloten, but she has exactly the same hypocritical radiance as Cymbeline's consort. She treats her nieces with a teasing veneer of kindness, making 'courtesy the outside of mischief' (p. 444) and offering them 'such a smiling as showed no love and yet could not but be lovely' (p. 553).[4] An atheist and materialist, she holds the world to be ruled entirely by natural causes – an attitude perhaps echoed in the cruel scientific experiments of Shakespeare's queen. Her end, too, is similar: she dies in agony,

[1] See the excellent discussion by B. P. Reardon, *The Form of Greek Romance* (1991).
[2] *Poets on Fortune's Hill* (1952), pp. 74–107.
[3] Danby, *Poets on Fortune's Hill*, p. 61; White, *Let Wonder Seem Familiar*, pp. 139–41. Another possible literary source for Cecropia is the wicked queen Amata in Virgil's *Aeneid*.
[4] *Arcadia*, ed. M. Evans (1977).