Chapter 5

Structure

Finding the heart of the play

Try a trick. Gather together the pages of the text of your chosen play – not including any introduction or prefatory material – and try, as accurately as you can, to open the play in the middle. Look at where you are. Who is on stage? What is going on? What is the effect of the scene to the development of the plot? It doesn't always work, but often the chronological mid-point in a play gives us something central: an event, a tableau, an encounter, which we might construct as in some way pivotal.

Here are some examples. In *Romeo and Juliet*, for example, the centre-point of the play is the death of Mercutio, brawling with Tybalt. We might see this first death in the tragedy as a signal that things cannot now go well; the death of this jesting character who dies on a joke – 'ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man' (3.1.89–90) – marks the end of the lightness with which the Montague/Capulet feud has been temporarily leavened. Chapter 6 considers Shakespeare's use of his sources in more detail, but it is interesting to note here that Mercutio is one of Shakespeare's most substantial additions

to his sources: what would the play be like without him, and why, having invented him, does Shakespeare have to kill him off at this point? Another death marks the midpoint of *Julius Caesar*, round about the point in 3.2 where Mark Antony brings in the body of the assassinated Caesar, while Brutus, one of the conspirators responsible for Caesar's death, explains why this has happened. We could see this moment as a crucial fulcrum as power, authority, and the ability to shape events shifts from Brutus to Mark Antony, thus presaging the eventual defeat of Brutus and encapsulating in miniature the play's unsettling ability to shift perspectives and sympathies, so it is hard to know with whom we should ally our own view. In the middle of *Measure for Measure* is a curiously unsettling – unsettling because it raises vast issues to which the play never returns – encounter in prison between Claudio and his sister Isabella. Claudio is awaiting his execution; Isabella tells him the price of his freedom, her virginity, is too high. He accepts this initially, then the realisation of his imminent death hits him:

CLAUDIO Death is a fearful thing.
ISABELLA And shamèd life a hateful.
CLAUDIO Ay, but to die, and go we know not where,
To lie in cold obstruction, and to rot,
This sensible warm motion to become
A kneaded clod, and the delighted spirit
To bathe in fiery floods or to reside
In thrilling region of thick ribbed ice,
To be imprisoned in the viewless winds,
And blown with restless violence round about
The pendent world or to be worse than worst
Of those that lawless and incertain thought
Imagine howling; 'tis too horrible.
The weariest and most loathèd worldly life
That age, ache, penury, and imprisonment
Can lay on nature, is a paradise
To what we fear of death. (3.1.116–32)

This little kernel at the heart of the play is a bit of the almost contemporaneous play *Hamlet*; Claudio, isolated from a comic social world in his prison cell (remember Hamlet's 'Denmark's a prison' (2.2.234)?), stares into the abyss of tragedy. The effort of being so tragic – he is a Hamlet without the stamina – seems to exhaust Claudio's character, though, and we never hear him speak again during the play. The awareness of death – and an uncomfortable, thoroughly unChristian concept of death – can't, however, be taken back: the play, like Claudio, never recovers from this terrible knowledge, and

this may be seen as one of the reasons it has often been allocated out of the category of comedy to which the Folio attributes it, into a new designation called 'problem play'. Comedies seem not to know about death, and comic characters who come close to it – Sebastian in *Twelfth Night*, Egeon in *The Comedy of Errors*, Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* – tend to get the better of it.

In the middle of *The Merchant of Venice*, in 3.1, we hear that the eponymous merchant Antonio's ships have been wrecked and that therefore he will not be able to repay his bond to the Jewish moneylender Shylock. It is also the point at which Shylock hears of his daughter's spending spree with her Christian husband, and these two pieces of news come together to fuel Shylock's savage covenant of revenge. Shylock is at his most human – recognising sentimental, rather than monetary, value in a turquoise 'I had [. . .] of Leah when I was a bachelor. I would not have given it for a wilderness of monkeys' (3.1.96–7) – and his most vengeful: 'If you tickle us, do we not laugh? If you poison us, do we not die? And if you wrong us, shall we not revenge?' (3.1.50–2). The litany of similarities between Jew and Christian in Shylock's famous 'hath not a Jew eyes?' speech comes down to endorsing not love or commonality but mutual hatred and destruction. As such this central scene poses Shylock as the challenge to the romantic comedy of the play.

The point of this analysis of the middles of plays is that here we can often see a moment of generic struggle. Shakespeare's plays were allocated by his first editors into three categories or *genres*: comedies, tragedies and histories. In fact, the title of the first collected edition, the Folio of 1623, is *Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, & Tragedies*. Since then we have been exercising much critical energy on defining these genres, on deducing from the plays included in each category what is essential to comedy, tragedy or history. Many templates have been offered; most carry with them a long list of exceptions or shoehornings which undermine rather than consolidate the definition. When the playwright Thomas Heywood wrote in 1612 that 'Tragedies and comedies . . . differ thus: in comedies, *turbulenta prima, tranquilla ultima*; in tragedies, *tranquilla prima turbulenta ultima*: comedies begin in trouble and end in peace; tragedies begin in calms and end in tempest' he may have made the only tenable distinction. If things end up better than when you started out, at least for the central characters, the world is a comic one; it's a tragedy where they are getting worse. The middle point of the play, according to these chiastic (*chiasmus* – a rhetorical figure of balance in which repeated terms are reversed) definitions, might be thought to be crucial in establishing which way things are going. Instead of looking, then, at the endings, when genre seems to be fixed through marriages or deaths, it's interesting to look at the moments in

the middle when genre is being negotiated, when it is in the process of being made.

Shakespeare's genres: dynamic, not static

In many of these mid-points, that is to say, what we see is a battle over the genre of the play: a tussle about how things are going to work out. Most introductions to genre begin with definitions from notable theorists from Aristotle onwards; most are subsequently discomforted by their apparent misfit with Shakespeare's own employment of those genres. (See 'Where next' for some early modern definitions of genre.) I'd prefer to emphasise the ways in which Shakespeare seems to use his plays to comment on, rather than merely to occupy, generic categories and generic expectations.

Thus, Mercutio is the comic hope for an alternative to the hatreds of *Romeo and Juliet*: it's symbolically significant, therefore, that he's killed by Romeo's clumsy attempt to intervene in the fight. Shylock, a minor character in *The Merchant of Venice* who appears in only five scenes, is, nevertheless, always threatening to take it over. When Portia arrives at the Venetian courtroom disguised as the lawyer Balthazar, she is fighting for the play as comedy; Shylock, whetting his knife on the sole of his shoe, is trying to wrest it from the comic. When, as in Jonathan Miller's stage production (available on video directed by John Sichel (1974): see chapter 2 for more discussion of Shakespeare in performance), the part of Shylock is taken by a tragic actor – Miller cast Laurence Olivier – this generic uncertainty is even more pronounced. Portia's got to get rid of Shylock by the end of Act 4 because Act 5 belongs to the tragic hero. She does so, but Act 5 of *The Merchant of Venice* is a curious and uncomfortable affair, with a distended charade about the rings, and Shylock's spendthrift daughter Jessica and her new husband Lorenzo ominously trading abused-wives-in-mythology stories, all overshadowed by Shylock's unmentioned fate. We could see, therefore, both *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Merchant of Venice*, as negotiating potential generic conflict, personifying a literary-critical discussion into an encounter between different protagonists on the stage. The same might be true of history plays: take *1 Henry IV*, for example, Hotspur is a character from a chivalric chronicle history, Falstaff from a London comedy, Prince Hal from something approaching the modern *bildungsroman*, or narrative of maturation. Their encounters are thus points at which different generic possibilities rub up against each other as the play dramatises its own negotiation of generic markers.

Table 5.1. *Aspects of comedy and tragedy*

Comedy	Tragedy
Titles suggest a mood, a time, or something flippant	Titles focus on an individual – or, less often, two individuals
Movement is towards marriage and social cohesion	Movement is towards isolation and social breakdown
Ends in marriages	Ends in deaths
Suggests a future beyond the play in renewed social bonds	Little sense of a future beyond the end of the play
Tendency to dialogue	Tendency to soliloquy
Female characters prominent and active	Male characters prominent and active
Transfer to a different location is full of possibility for change	Transfer to a different location intensifies old problems
Puns tend towards fecundity and sexual innuendo	Puns tend towards nihilism and the impossibility of communication
Choices are maintained, events are less predestined (what Susan Snyder calls 'evitability')	Sense of inevitability or inescapability about the sequence of events

Tragedy and comedy

I have tried to suggest so far that genre is produced dynamically in Shakespeare's plays, and that it is a topic for negotiation rather than for slavish conformity. When Desdemona momentarily revives at the end of *Othello* there is a tiny window of generic opportunity: perhaps she is not dead, perhaps the tragedy can be averted (it can't). When a 'green and gilded snake' (4.3.103) and a 'lioness, with udders all drawn dry' (4.3.109) converge dangerously on a sleeping man in the Forest of Arden in *As You Like It*, there's a sudden sense that this wood may not be so hospitable and comically transformative as it had seemed (perhaps it's time to go home). That is to say, therefore, that all plays combine elements we might want to consider as 'tragic' or 'comic', and it is the effect and the style of these combinations that is important, rather than some external definition of Shakespearean genre.

Because comedy and tragedy have often been seen to be at opposite ends of the generic spectrum, it can be useful to identify how the plays negotiate our expectations of these definitive forms (we will return to history below). Table 5.1 gives a template for the ways in which comedy and tragedy have tended to be distinguished.

While it's interesting to set out these generic differences, it's also clear that all of Shakespeare's plays partake of elements from both columns. We could trace in *Measure for Measure*, for example, the shift between the comic dominance of a female character – Isabella – and that of a male character – the Duke, even as the play negotiates the marital conclusion of comedy and the threat of the tragic conclusion of death. We could identify moments of soliloquy in comedy – Viola's in *Twelfth Night* – or their absence in a tragedy such as *Timon of Athens*. From this list, we can see that tragedy and comedy tug on the same rope and make use of the same tropes, to different effect. The interplay between these elements and these expectations is what makes Shakespeare's plays work.

At the end of his career, Shakespeare works on a number of plays – including *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest* – tended to be seen by recent scholars as a group, sometimes dubbed 'late romances', in which comic and tragic elements are intermingled. Thus *The Winter's Tale* gives us a jealous husband, rather like Othello, who accuses his wife Hermione of infidelity with his best friend Polixenes, banishes his infant daughter, and repents of his rashness only on hearing his wife has died, at the end of Act 3. The next act is set after the passage of sixteen years: in a pastoral landscape the alienated princess is approaching marriage, and this comic coda to the tragedy brings about resolution and restitution at the end of the play. It is clear that this structure juxtaposes tragedy and comedy in an explicit way, but what should also be clear to us is that this is a typical technique throughout Shakespeare's works, rather than one confined to this later period.

Tragedy – expanding the genre

Let's return to tragedy to examine this characteristic juxtaposition of generic expectations. The Folio catalogue lists eleven plays in its category 'Tragedies': *Coriolanus*, *Titus Andronicus*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Timon of Athens*, *Julius Caesar*, *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, *Antony and Cleopatra* and *Cymbeline*. *Troilus and Cressida*, which comes immediately before *Coriolanus* in the body of the book, may also have been intended as a tragedy, but it is not listed in the catalogue. Since at least A. C. Bradley's *Shakespearean Tragedy*, first published in 1904, however, critical discussion has tended to focus on *Macbeth*, *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, and *Othello* as if these are the 'real' or 'true' or 'tragic' tragedies, and thereby suggesting that the remaining plays are insufficiently tragic to be worthy of the designation. But since the compilers of the Folio seem not to have been troubled by this kind of comparative evaluation, and to have preferred the inclusive plural 'tragedies' to the offputtingly formal 'tragedy' – sometimes

critics even give it a capital letter, as if it's a proper noun – it is useful to remind ourselves of the challenges to our assumptions about tragedy that this broad definition offers.

Perhaps here we could begin with a tragedy which has caused critics the most aesthetic difficulty until very recently: *Titus Andronicus*. First published in 1594, *The Most Lamentable Roman Tragedy of Titus Andronicus* takes place in ancient Rome during the fourth century BC. Tamora, captive Queen of the Goths, pleads with the Romans for the life of her son Alarbus, but he is sacrificed and she plans a deadly revenge against her captor, the renowned Roman warrior Titus. Tamora's other two sons, Chiron and Demetrius, rape Titus' daughter Lavinia and mutilate her, cutting off her hands and tongue so that she cannot reveal the names of her attackers. Aaron, Tamora's Moorish (black African/Muslim – the word could suggest either or both) lover, kills two of Titus' sons and tricks Titus into chopping off his own hand, and driven mad by his suffering, Titus plans revenge on Tamora, her husband Saturninus the emperor, and Aaron, and devises a horrific plot with his brother Marcus and son Lucius. Titus kills Chiron and Demetrius, and serves their bodies in a pie to their unwitting mother, then kills Tamora and then Lavinia. Saturninus kills Titus, then is killed by Lucius who becomes the new emperor. Aaron is sentenced to death, but the fate of the baby born of his adulterous affair with Tamora is uncertain.

As this brief synopsis of events suggests, *Titus* is undoubtedly a tragedy of sensation, and of serial sensation, rather than a tragedy of introspection. It begins with solemn ritual – the crowning of the emperor, the welcoming of the triumphant Titus 'laden with honour's spoils' (1.1.36), the burial of his 'valiant sons' – and degenerates into muddle and irascible murder. Within the course of the long opening scene, then, which lasts for the whole of the first act, the horror and barbarity which lies below the surface of Rome's civilised rites is exposed. (Julie Taymor's excellent, disturbing film of the play, *Titus* (1999) is highly recommended: it begins strikingly by juxtaposing the random juvenile violence of a modern child playing with toy soldiers and a menacingly closely choreographed and stylised march of the Roman legions marching through the ruined Coliseum on their return from battle.) No one in the play is untainted by the prevailing atmosphere of corruption and violence. There is no hero. Titus may be the play's eponymous character, and he has been a heroic Roman soldier, but when we see him in the play he has no shred of this greatness. Taymor casts a post-Hannibal Lector (*Silence of the Lambs* dir. Jonathan Demme, 1991) Antony Hopkins as Titus, drawing on a mixed legacy of classical acting and Hollywood sociopath to characterise the central character as an opaque, dangerous and unpredictable figure.

Related to Titus' lack of moral or personal greatness is the lack of sympathy the play generates. The insistent use of alienating devices, particularly laughter, keeps us from identifying with the characters, and its proximity to a kind of black comedy is one of the play's most generically unsettling features. Its gruesome insistence on dismemberment, both actual and metaphorical, brings it close to self-parody. Seeing his mutilated daughter, Titus asks 'What accursèd hand / Hath made thee handless in thy father's sight?' (3.1.66–7), and the joke is yet young. Images of dissection come thick and fast in this central scene. 'I'll chop off my hands too' (72), ''tis well Lavinia, that thou hast no hands; / For hands to do Rome service is but vain' (79–80). Father and son argue over who will sacrifice a hand to Aaron as ransom for the other Andronici. 'Lend me thy hand' (186), Titus asks Aaron, who responds by cutting off Titus's. Titus instructs his daughter 'Bear thou my hand, sweet wench, between thy teeth' (281). Figures of speech which use parts of the body seem to continue the litany of vivisection, as the play's very language enacts its characters' self-destructive fantasies of revenge on the human body. Bowels, stomachs, tongues, heads: all become grotesquely animated as testaments to violence and destruction. Such wordplay disturbingly mocks any impulse towards empathy: the only possible audience response is, like Titus's 'ha ha ha' (263) – a queasy or disconcerted laughter.

Writing of his performance of Titus with the Royal Shakespeare Company under the direction of Deborah Warner in 1987–8, Brian Cox emphasises the play as a 'tightrope between comedy and tragedy' which is, above all, 'ludicrous'. This element of the ludicrous is what is exiled from most tragedies – and what brings *Titus Andronicus* into the absurdist style of twentieth-century dramatists such as Beckett or Pinter. Far from prompting empathy, catharsis – those noble tragic emotions – what *Titus* seems to offer its audience is a disturbing kind of mirror, not to its spiritual or emotional side, but to its visceral one. This tragedy challenges the automatic association between Shakespearean tragedy and such related and valorised cultural forms as soliloquy, humanity, and poetry: Titus is not an interior tragic protagonist who struggles with his finer feelings, and indeed he is always being jostled from the central role in his own play by the diabolic energies of Aaron. Rather, *Titus Andronicus* suggests that what we enjoy about tragedy is the perverse pleasure of seeing other people suffering, and that this tragedy, far from bringing empathy and final catharsis, dramatises alienation, distance, and the cruelty of the onlooker. We do nothing to stop Lavinia being raped, mutilated and ultimately murdered. In fact, we pay to watch.

For centuries, critics were so disgusted by this savagery and meaningless brutality that they comforted themselves with the idea that it was not, in fact,

by Shakespeare – the opposite of the desire to attribute to him those liberal sentiments of *The Book of Sir Thomas More* (see chapter 3, 'Texts', for this discussion). The man who could write the sublime, humane tragedies of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* could not, surely, even as a young man, have written this gruesomely unwholesome cocktail of sex, mutilation, and madness. More recent critics, however, have returned to the play to find in it the troubling aesthetics of violence as envisioned by a film director such as Quentin Tarentino (*Reservoir Dogs*, 1992, *Pulp Fiction*, 1994, *Kill Bill 1*, 2003), a triumphantly modern, camply excessive, darkly ironic representation of unpalatable truths about human violence, suffering, and inherent barbarism. So it's a play which makes blanket statements about Shakespeare's tragedies being elevated or noble or psychological impossible to sustain, and which may encourage us to look at brutal aspects of other plays – the blinding of Gloucester in *King Lear*, Hamlet's casual attitude to Polonius' body, the final Folio stage direction in *Coriolanus* in which the chant 'Kill, kill, kill, kill, kill him' is followed by '*Draw both the Conspirators, and kils Martius, who falles, Auffidius stands on him*' – as central rather than marginal to their metaphysical concerns. Tragedy's savage affiliation with bloodsports – the spectacle of bear-baiting which was one of the Shakespearean theatre's closest commercial rivals – here challenges more cerebral assumptions. By taking a wider view of what plays were included as tragedies, we start to push at the generic boundary and to approach some sense of the range of what was considered tragic by the plays' first audiences.

Comedy – expanding the genre

There are fourteen plays designated 'Comedies' in the Folio catalogue: *The Tempest*, *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, *Measure for Measure*, *The Comedy of Errors*, *Much Ado About Nothing*, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, *The Merchant of Venice*, *As You Like It*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Twelfth Night*, and *The Winter's Tale*. As in the 'tragedies' category, however, discussion of comedy has tended to elevate a few central plays as supreme generic examples and to have difficulties with the others, or has tended to subdivide the genre into 'happy' or 'dark' or 'problem' or 'early' comedies or 'romances'. Just as *Titus Andronicus* pushes at our associations of tragedy, so too *All's Well That Ends Well* pushes at the definition of comedy in some usefully expansive ways.

All's Well That Ends Well, often categorised as a problem play along with *Measure for Measure* and *Troilus and Cressida*, written about the same time at

the beginning of the seventeenth century, throws down a challenge to comic assumptions in its very title. Is indeed 'all's well that ends well'? Is anything which looks like a comedy at its conclusion a comedy, no matter what has gone before? In *All's Well* we have a device common to many of Shakespeare's comedies: a woman actively pursuing her own desires in choosing a partner. We see this when Hermia prefers Lysander over Demetrius at the beginning of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*; when Julia dresses in male clothing to secure her errant lover Proteus' affections in *Two Gentleman of Verona*; and when Rosalind in *As You Like It* and Viola in *Twelfth Night* take similar sartorial steps to pursue their relationships with Orlando and Orsino respectively.

In *All's Well* the woman is Helena, but what is different about this play from the other comic narratives of female romantic agency is the extent of the putative groom's resistance. Helped by her late father's ointments, Helena, a woman of modest background, has cured the king of a singularly unpleasant and long-standing medical complaint which has foxed all his physicians. She replies to his expansive offer of reward: 'then shalt thou give me with thy kingly hand / What husband in thy power I will command' (2.1.189–90). Helena has already chosen her partner: Bertram, the Count of Rousillon. But Bertram is not amenable to this, notwithstanding her miracle-working with the king: 'I cannot love her, nor will strive to do't' (2.1.137). He is forced to go through the wedding ceremony, but vows 'I'll to the Tuscan wars, and never bed her' (2.3.250). Bertram sends a message to Helena: 'When thou canst get the ring upon my finger, which never shall come off, and show me a child begotten of thy body that I am father to, then call me husband; but in such a "then" I write a "never"' (3.2.50–3). The rest of the play shows us Helena's drive to meet this riddling challenge. She interposes herself between her husband and Diana, a woman he urges 'give thyself unto my sick desires' (4.2.35), and in a version of the bed-trick we also find in *Measure for Measure*, substitutes herself for Diana in the sexual encounter he arranges, garnering his ring into the bargain. Bertram is made to see that he has been bested and that the terms of his bargain have been fulfilled, and he accepts Helena as his wife.

Part of the generic difficulty here is with tone. *All's Well* shares with other so-called 'problem plays' a register steeped in the satiric imagery of commerce and disease. The king's own condition only literalises a predominant tone of sexualised sickness, and Helena cannot heal the play's debased linguistic world as she does its ruler. While all comedies work to regulate and sublimate sexual desire into socially acceptable marital unions – perhaps the neatest summation of this equation is Touchstone's quaintly rhyming proposal 'Come sweet Audrey,

we must be married or we must live in bawdry' (*As You Like It*, 3.4.73–4) – *All's Well* is disturbingly frank about this process, as it transforms Bertram's adulterous lust for Diana into the means by which his unwelcome marriage is ratified. And while other comedies tend to pair a feisty woman with a man who may not be her equal – witness Orlando's daft sonnets in *As You Like It*, Orsino's self-indulgent love-melancholy in *Twelfth Night*, the insipid interchangeability of Lysander and Demetrius in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Proteus' unreliability in *Two Gentlemen of Verona*, the fortune-hunter Bassanio in *The Merchant of Venice* – the incompatibility between the principals in *All's Well* is of a different order of magnitude. In fact, the critical quarrel over this rebarbative play has tended to coalesce around whether Helena or Bertram is the more disagreeable. Audiences and readers have found it difficult to endorse Helena's quest since Bertram's evident unwillingness – and unworthiness – mean that, unlike her comic predecessors, her desires forfeit their narrative sympathy. *All's Well* isn't one of the much-enjoyed 'festive' comedies associated with the rhythms and rituals of the carnival calendar; it isn't a 'feel-good' romance; its final moments can offer us only a provisional version of its apparently certain title, as both Bertram and Helena begin their final speeches with 'If' and the King offers, tentatively, 'all yet seems well, and if it end so meet, / The bitter past, more welcome is the sweet' (5.3.322–4).

The Folio's inclusion among the comedies of *All's Well*, a play ending in marriage or at least marital acknowledgement, works to unsettle certain expectations about comic mood or tone. Or perhaps it gives us retrospective warrant to unearth some of the suppressed darkness which is intrinsic to many of the comedies – and to the genre of comedy itself. Perhaps *All's Well* legitimates and refocuses our attention on what's potentially terrifying about comedy, a borderline insane world in which isolation or incompleteness – what Antipholus of Syracuse fears in *The Comedy of Errors* with 'I to the world am like a drop of water / That in the ocean seeks another drop, / Who, falling there to find his fellow forth, / Unseen, inquisitive, confounds himself' (1.2.35–8) – is the threat from which all are desperately running. Twins search maniacally for their missing half, unlikely couples prefer the uncertain yoke of marriage to the lonely alternative, characters lose themselves and their familiar world, entering into a strange landscape where men grow asses' heads and the greenwood births hungry lionesses, and where, as Feste notes melancholically at the end of *Twelfth Night*, 'the rain it raineth every day' (5.1.369). When Puck encourages us to think, as *A Midsummer Night's Dream* concludes, 'you have but slumbered here' (5.1.403), we might briefly recognise the playworld as a nightmare from which it is a relief to awake, but from which lurid fragments continue to flash into our waking consciousness.

History: is this a fixed genre?

The genre of 'histories' is a distinctive aspect of the Folio's categorisation. Although the title 'history' appears on a number of quarto title-pages, it seems to be used with its earlier sense of 'story' – not necessarily factual – alongside the more modern meaning of 'record' or 'chronicle' in examples such as *The most Excellent Historie of the Merchant of Venice* (1600) and *The History of Henrie the Fourth* (1598). Plays the Folio lists under 'Histories' were first published as tragedies, as, for example, *The true Tragedie of Richard Duke of Yorke* (1595, printed as *The Third Part of King Henry VI* in the Folio) or *The Tragedy of King Richard the third* (1597). By 1623, however, the genre had settled around the plays of medieval English history printed in chronological order: plays based on Roman history, or, like *Macbeth*, on the history of other countries, were not included in the category.

As this suggests, 'histories' seem to be generically derived from their source material: they are histories primarily because of their relation their external sources, rather than because of their internal shape or narrative form. And out of this relation to an ongoing narrative of English history we can see some quite specific structural decisions being made. Thus perhaps *Richard II* and *Richard III* might be seen as what *Hamlet*'s Polonius pedantically called 'tragical-historical'; the chorus structure of *Henry V* gives it an epic quality and, in the last act, the play works overtime to re-invent itself as a romantic comedy with a long wooing scene between the victorious Henry and the vanquished French princess Katherine; both parts of *Henry IV* employ comic devices and episodes, in particular the character of Falstaff who does indeed reappear in his own comedy, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.

If genres are settled by a play's conclusion, then Shakespeare's decisions about how to cut the material he found in Raphael Holinshed's prose *Chronicles of England*, his major source for the history plays, are illuminating. In *Richard II*, for example, there are presentiments of the civil war – the Wars of the Roses – which followed Richard's deposition. The Bishop of Carlisle, for instance, prophesies that if the lawful king Richard is dethroned 'The blood of English shall manure the ground / And future ages groan for this foul act' (4.1.137–8); and, indeed, reading across the history plays as if they were a serial that grim forecast comes true. (Of course, what within the world of the *play* is a prediction, that unrest will follow Bullingbrook's coronation, is for the *audience* an already known sequence of past events: the Bishop prophesies what has already happened.) But there is no hint of the prophecy coming immediately true in the play itself. When Macbeth kills Duncan, another

lawful king, the ramifications are instantly felt: 'the night has been unruly . . . Lamentings heard i'th'air, strange screams of death' (2.3.46–8). *Macbeth*'s depiction of the overthrow of a sovereign places the transfer of power at the beginning of the play and anatomises its political and psychological consequences; *Richard II*'s places the transfer at the end of the play and has therefore little interest, or little time, for the repercussions. Comparing these two structures with that of *Julius Caesar* – where, as we saw above, the transfer of power occurs at the play's midpoint – shows Shakespeare's differing emphases.

But by not showing any retribution falling on Bullingbrook within the play, Shakespeare may be subtly radicalising his depiction of political and monarchical succession. Contrary to contemporary orthodox opinion – one sermon 'against rebellion' appointed by the authorities to be preached in every church reminded congregations how God had punished 'Lucifer [. . .] who by rebelling against the majesty of God, of the brightest and most glorious angel is become the blackest and most foulest fiend and devil' – *Richard II* seems to show that there is no immediate punishment for overthrowing the king, 'the figure of God's majesty, / His captain, steward, deputy, elect' (4.1.125–6). We have to wait until *1 Henry IV*, the play in which Bullingbrook's own compromised authority is explored, for that. And while the Folio catalogue, and the modern tradition of performing multiple history plays in sequence, may suggest that's not a long time to wait, the evidence for the first audiences seems to be different: some months, as a minimum, separated performances of *Richard II* and *1 Henry IV*.

By ending *Richard II* when he does, therefore, Shakespeare's formal shaping of the play has thematic and interpretative implications. So too does the structuring of *1 Henry IV* by means of a series of parallels – between court and tavern, verse and prose, Prince Harry and Hotspur, Falstaff and King Henry, past and future, or that remarkable shift from martial to marital at the end of *Henry V*, or the sequence of repetitions and recapitulations which mark the *Henry VI* plays. We might imagine that the narrative material from which the history plays are drawn would limit Shakespeare's imaginative freedom; what we see instead is that it is how he structures these plays, what shapes he chooses to cut from a long narrative sweep, that is of particular interest. If history is a genre curiously bolstered from texts outside itself – its relation to its particular source material – it also has a special narrative freedom. The way in which Shakespeare structures his history plays draws attention both to larger generic forms and to the specific interaction of the building blocks of individual scenes.

Structuring scenes: *Much Ado About Nothing*

The most shocking scene in *Much Ado About Nothing* comes in Act 4. The callow, inexperienced Claudio has been tricked by the malevolent Don John into believing that his bride Hero has been unfaithful to him. He denounces her at the altar; she swoons in an apparently mortal fit. What's more terrifying is that her father Leonato immediately sides with Claudio, responding to the shame of his daughter's 'foul tainted flesh' (4.1.136) with the wish 'Do not live, Hero' (116). The friar who was to officiate at the marriage steps forward, and, with Hero's cousin Beatrice, proposes a plan: 'Your daughter here the princes left for dead, / Let her awhile be secretly kept in, / And publish it, that she is dead indeed.' (195–7). This, the friar asserts, will 'quench the wonder of her infamy' (232). Being brought to a realisation of what he has lost will make Claudio repent his harsh treatment.

Wait a minute! Problems in love, a friar, a young bride pretending to be dead . . . haven't these people ever seen *Romeo and Juliet*? (*c.* 1594; printed in 1597, and by 1599 widely known). How can this romantic comedy manage a fistful of elements previously associated with tragedy, and simultaneously reassure its audience that Hero's disgrace is a temporary setback, rather than a complete reversal of the play's comic mood?

The answers to this question take us to Shakespeare's handling of structure: the ways in which he deploys existing narrative patterns or genres, and the effective internal architecture of these larger compositions. In the first place, Shakespeare generates a false or premature conclusion to *Much Ado About Nothing* which, precisely because we know has come too soon, we know cannot be final. There's time for things to be put right. Comedies always dramatise impediments to coupledom – 'the course of true love never did run smooth' (1.1.134), as Lysander observes at the opening of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* – due to the opposition of families, or the apparent incompatability of social status, or the fact that the female partner passes unrecognised in male clothing; Claudio's rejection of Hero is just a rather pointed version of this generic trope of deferral. We might compare this to the death of King Lear (discussed in chapter 3, 'Texts'), when the internal clock of the playgoer or reader knows that there is no going beyond this point; there is no time left. Or a different point of comparison with *Much Ado About Nothing* might be its tragic counterpart in *Othello* – another play in which male jealousy disrupts, this time fatally, heterosexual union – where the couple's happiness, expressed so beautifully in Othello's 'it is too much of joy' comes too early, at 2.1.189. There is time for Iago's mischief to take hold; the miniature comedy of the first scenes of the play has spent itself

too quickly. The reunion of the couple after the storm in Cyprus should be the play's triumphant conclusion, rather than this tempting-fate provisionality.

So there is time for Hero's broken marriage to be put right. And Shakespeare also cauterises this misogynistic scene of sexual jealousy – a dark complement to the play's valorisation of male bonding – by the way in which he places it amid other scenes. In chapter 1, on 'Character', we saw how Shakespeare writes for particular actors, and one example was the comic player Will Kemp whose name appears in the early texts of *Much Ado About Nothing* as the speech prefix for the character of Dogberry. Dogberry is a good-natured but pompous constable charged with the security of Messina's streets, and, like many of Shakespeare's comic characters, he has a tendency to mix up his words, in, for example, his attempt at proverbial wisdom: 'comparisons are odorous [odious]' (3.5.13). This form of verbal humour associated with the lower classes – we seem to be laughing *at*, rather than *with*, Dogberry – offers us the unintended obverse of the punning with which Beatrice and Benedick's exchanges sparkle: if we look at Kenneth Branagh's sunny 1993 film of the play, we can see that Dogberry, played by Michael Keaton, seems to be acting in a different style, even a different play, from the other characters. Shakespeare uses this tonal difference to inoculate the scene of Hero's disgrace. The most serious and potentially tragic scene in the play is bracketed off by two scenes with Dogberry and his associates and their terrible puns. The tension is managed; we have a reason to laugh after the stress of the interrupted wedding scene; but more importantly, there is a sense that the dark elements of the play are contained in a reassuringly comic envelope, unable to seep out and taint its overall mood. Dogberry and his fellow watchmen are the means, unwittingly, by which Don John's calumnies come to light, but they are also the guarantors that his spitefully uncomic view of the world cannot prevail. Dogberry, perhaps, is the Mercutio who does not die, just as Hero is the Juliet who survives the pretence of death to be reunited with her husband.

Juxtaposing scenes, activating ironies: *Henry V*

Much Ado About Nothing, then, works by juxtaposing scenes so that their meaning is mutually constituted. We can see a different example of this in Act 4 of *Henry V*. Here, Shakespeare employs the device of a chorus whose descriptive, rhetorical, exhortatory speeches preface each of the five acts. The Chorus to Act 4 is charged with describing the French and English military encampments the night before the battle of Agincourt, and a long speech invokes the difference between the two sides. The French, confident of victory, are eager for morning's light; the 'poor condemnèd English, / Like sacrifices, by their watchful fires /

Sit patiently and inly ruminate / The morning's danger.' (4.0.22–5). Amid this demoralised army moves King Henry, full of comfort to his men. He 'bids them good morrow with a modest smile, / And calls them brothers, friends, and countrymen' (33–4). Everyone 'plucks comfort from his looks' (42); that 'little touch of Harry in the night' (47) is the English secret weapon; an ethics of companionship and solidarity morally as well as militarily opposed to the presentation of the foppish French.

So the Chorus – who might be seen as a kind of spin-doctor or propagandist for Henry – presents an image of his selfless devotion to his men as they keep watch through the night. But Shakespeare compromises, or allows us to compromise, that initial presentation by the way he structures the ensuing scenes. Having *told* us about Henry moving among his troops, the scene now *shows* us. First Henry encounters Pistol, and, in disguise, tells him his name is 'Harry *le roi*'. Then he meets a group of three soldiers, John Bates, Michael Williams and Alexander Court. In chapter 1, on 'Character', we saw that often Shakespeare's characters are not so carefully or consistently named as are these three soldiers. Something about the detail of their names seems to suggest that they are not merely examples or mouthpieces – not like, for example, Plebeians 1, 2, and 3 in 3.2 of *Julius Caesar*. Rather their names give them a kind of individual dignity, and thereby serve to magnify their role in the play.

So the scene is set up for the King to show off his comforting looks, to give good cheer to his men. But that is not what happens. In fact Henry gets into an unseemly row with these stoic English soldiers whose sense of their imminent death transcends the propaganda of the Chorus. What, they ask the newcomer, might the King think of their chances in the battle? The disguised King pleads for the essential humanity of the King in a wonderfully circular argument: 'I think the King is but a man as I am' (4.1.97); the soldiers are unmoved by this, and continue to articulate the question the play can neither suppress nor answer. Is Henry's campaign in France just? Henry's long speeches argue that 'Every subject's duty is the king's, but every subject's soul is his own' (4.1.159–60): the king cannot be held responsible for the immortal souls of soldiers killed in his wars, any more than the father is responsible for a son who is killed on his errand, or a master responsible for a servant murdered on business. Henry and Williams cannot agree on this, and their quarrel turns to deferred violence as they vow to fight each other after the battle. Bates' 'Be friends, you English fools, be friends! We have French quarrels enough' (197–8) highlights the inappropriateness of this behaviour – and implicitly contrasts it with the idealised solidarity conjured up by the Chorus' speech only minutes ago. What Henry notably does not do here is to answer the question 'if the cause be not good' (4.1.123); instead of reassuring the men by arguing for the rightness

of his cause, he instead challenges the assumption that their deaths are the responsibility of the king.

Henry then withdraws into a soliloquy – his only soliloquy of the play – and it is a lament about the burden and loneliness of office familiar from the history plays (and familiar to more recent leaders, too: Prince Charles cites it in his collection of favourite bits from Shakespeare published as *The Prince's Choice*, marvelling at the dramatist's 'insight into the mind of someone born into this kind of position'). Kingship is but 'ceremony', Henry rehearses, but in a comparison between the king and the commoners he seems entirely to forget the worries of the unsleeping soldiers he has just left:

> No, not all these, thrice-gorgeous ceremony,
> Not all these, laid in bed majestical,
> Can sleep so soundly as the wretched slave
> Who, with a body filled and vacant mind,
> Gets him to rest, crammed with distressful bread;
> Never sees horrid night, the child of hell,
> But like a lackey from the rise to set
> Sweats in the eye of Phoebus, and all night
> Sleeps in Elysium. (4.1.239–47)

That Henry identifies the untroubled lives of those not burdened with office with sleep must surely be connected to his night-time encounter with Bates, Williams and the silent Court. Far from sleeping, these ordinary men are frightened, worried for their own lives in a desperately unequal conflict far from home and beyond their understanding or control. But it seems that Shakespeare wants those men and their ongoing challenge to Henry's moral authority to echo in Henry's own soliloquy here. As Henry thinks about himself, he caricatures the 'wretched slave' in a manner rather different from his gestures of brotherhood. If we read it alongside the preceding dialogue, that is to say, it has a different implication from when read extracted from its careful position in the play. There are lots of other great juxtapositional ironies in this act – there are some suggestions for taking it further in 'Where next?' at the end of this chapter.

Showing v. telling

One aspect of the sophistication of Shakespeare's construction of Act 4 of *Henry V* is the friction between the two modes of showing and telling, or, as theories of narrative would put it, between *mimesis* and *diegesis*. Why doesn't Shakespeare show us what Claudio sees at the window and interprets as Hero's

infidelity in *Much Ado About Nothing* (and why *do* we see what Claudio does in Branagh's 1993 film)? Why do we hear from Gertrude about the death of Ophelia in such lyrical detail (and, similarly, why do such different films as Olivier's 1948 version and Almereyda's 2000 one show it to us)? Why does Shakespeare withhold the wonderful scene of Perdita's reconciliation with her father in *The Winter's Tale* (discussed in chapter 6, 'Sources'), or Petruchio's outlandish arrival at the church in *The Taming of the Shrew*, or the way in which Isabella persuades Mariana to the friar-Duke's bed-trick plan in *Measure for Measure*, or the meeting between Oberon and Titania in which the changeling boy is surrendered so that Bottom can be returned to his proper form in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*? Why aren't we allowed to see for ourselves whether Caesar rejects the public's proffered crown with regret or conviction at the opening of *Julius Caesar*, when offstage cheers tantalise us with what is being withheld from our view? Although there may on occasions be practical reasons why it is difficult to show a particular scene, for the main part actions are withheld for a thematic purpose: it serves to characterise the tellers, or to submit unseen events to different interpretations, or to pace events for us. Thus, that we hear from the Duke of York about the entry of Richard and Bullingbrook into London towards the end of *Richard II* rather than seeing it for ourselves, is a response to the practical difficulty of representing horses on stage, a development of the Yorks as barometers of changing opinion in the play, and a representation of the ethical difficulty of judging the relative merits of Richard and Bullingbrook as king. It's a moot point whether any Shakespeare play depends on a specifically *visual* denouement, despite the increasing popularity and theatrical possibility of visual spectacle during his career.

The management of showing and telling might stand as a literal version of Shakespeare's management of structure more generally. By highlighting certain generic expectations and pushing others into the background, making visible certain connections and obscuring others, the plays engage their audiences in several active matrices: between this play and others, between this play and expectations about the kind of play, between this scene and the ones which precede or follow it, between the shown and the hidden. Shakespeare's structure is therefore always dynamic rather than inert, actively produced from moment to moment.

Structure: where next?

- Other middles to look at might be *Othello* (the so-called 'temptation scene' in which Iago persuades Othello of his wife's infidelity); *Hamlet*

(the performance of the 'Murder of Gonzago'); *King Lear* (the scene on the heath in the storm); *The Winter's Tale* (the fateful trial of Queen Hermione). How might this structure be affected by the placing of the interval in a modern theatrical performance? And what, too, about plays where this trick doesn't really work? Might they be presenting an alternative structure?

- On that negative relation between comedy and death, writing of the newly fashionable genre of 'tragicomedy' in the preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess*, John Fletcher proposes that 'A tragic-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people, with such kind of trouble as no life be questioned.' Some critics have suggested that *Measure for Measure* and *All's Well That Ends Well* – and perhaps *The Winter's Tale* – should be included in this genre. But it's not entirely true that comedies cannot encompass death: *Love's Labour's Lost* ends with the promised marriages deferred because of the death of the Princess's father. The conclusion is self-conscious about its relation to comic protocols. The witty Berowne is commissioned to charitable works 'With all the fierce endeavour of your wit / To enforce the painèd impotent to smile' (5.2.839–40) to which he replies 'To move wild laughter in the throat of death? – / It cannot be, it is impossible' (841–2). In a final exchange we have Berowne's rueful 'Our wooing doth not end like an old play; / Jack hath not Jill. These ladies' courtesy / Might well have made our sport a comedy' (860–2). What is the effect of this deferred comic ending?
- One way to write about Shakespeare and structure would have been to set the plays against definitions of tragedy and comedy: I chose not to do that, but here are some excerpts from contemporaneous discussion of genre so that you can if you want:

Tragedy:

(1) 'The high and excellent Tragedy, that openeth the greatest wounds and showeth forth the ulcers that are covered with tissue; that maketh kings fear to be tyrants, and tyrants manifest their tyrannical humours; that, with stirring the affects of admiration and commiseration, teacheth the uncertainty of this world, and upon what weak foundations gilden roofs are builded.' Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (*c.* 1581)

(2) Classical tragedy shows 'the disastrous miseries of man's life and so out of that melancholic vision, stir horror, or murmur, against Divine

Providence'; contemporary tragedies show 'God's revenging aspect upon every particular sin, to the despair, or confusion, of mortality.' Fulke Greville, *The Life of Sir Philip Sidney* (*c.* 1611)

(3) 'If we present a tragedy, we include the fatal and abortive ends of such as commit notorious murders, which is aggravated and acted with all the art that may be, to terrify men from the like abhorred practices.' Thomas Heywood, *An Apology for Actors* (1612)

Comedy

(1) . . . persons, such as Comedy would choose,
When she would show an image of the times
And sport with human follies, not with crimes.
Except, we make 'em such by loving still
Our popular errors, when we know th'are ill.
I mean such errors, as you'll all confess
By laughing at them, they deserve no less.
Ben Jonson, Prologue to *Every Man in his Humour* (1600)

(2) 'the moving of laughter is a fault in comedy, a kind of turpitude, that depraves some part of man's nature, without a disease. As a wry face without pain moves laughter, or a deformed vizard, or a rude clown dressed in a ladies habit and using her actions, we dislike and scorn such representations which made the ancient Philosophers ever think laughter unfitting in a wise man.' Ben Jonson, *Timber, or Discoveries* (1640)

(3) comedy serves 'to recreate such as of themselves are wholly devoted to melancholy, which corrupts the blood; or to refresh such weary spirits as are tired with labour, or study, to moderate the cares and heaviness of the mind, that they may return to their trades and faculties with more zeal and earnestness, after some small soft and pleasant retirement.' Thomas Heywood, *Apology for Actors* (1612)

For more definitions and discussions of Renaissance genres, see Barbara K. Lewalski (ed.), *Renaissance Genres: Essays on Theory, History, and Interpretation* (Harvard University Press, 1986), and Brian Vickers (ed.), *English Renaissance Literary Criticism* (Oxford University Press, 1999). More specifically on Shakespeare are Lawrence Danson's excellent *Shakespeare's Dramatic Genres* (Oxford University Press, 2000) and Susan Snyder's 'The Genres of Shakespeare's Plays' in Margreta de Grazia and Stanley Wells (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare*, in part a distillation of her *The Comic Matrix of Shakespeare's*

Tragedies (Princeton University Press, 1979). Also recommended are the three volumes of Cambridge Introductions to Shakespeare's Tragedies, Comedies and Histories (Janette Dillon, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Tragedies* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); Penny Gay, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's Comedies* (Cambridge University Press, 2007); and Waren Chernaik, *The Cambridge Introduction to Shakespeare's History Plays* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

- Jonathan Bate's Arden 3 edition of *Titus Andronicus* (1995) is a landmark in the critical rehabilitation of the play, and his Introduction discusses its tarnished reputation. Brian Cox describes his performance as Titus in Deborah Warner's production in *Players of Shakespeare* (eds. Russell Jackson and Robert Smallwood, Cambridge University Press, 1993). Indicative recent essays on the play include Gillian Kendall, 'Lend Me Thy Hand': Metaphor and Mayhem in Titus Andronicus', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 40 (1989); Albert H. Tricomi, 'The Aesthetics of Mutilation in *Titus Andronicus*' in Catherine Alexander (ed.), *Shakespeare and Language* (Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Deborah Willis, 'The Gnawing Vulture': Revenge, Trauma Theory, and *Titus Andronicus*', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 53 (2002). There are stimulating chapters on the play in Cora Kaplan's *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (Routledge, 1997), Cynthia Marshall's *The Shattering of the Self: Violence, Subjectivity and Early Modern Texts* (Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002) and Pascale Aebischer's *Shakespeare's Violated Bodies: Stage and Screen Performance* (Cambridge University Press, 2004). Julie Taymor's film *Titus* (advertising taglines: 'The fall of an empire is nothing compared to the descent of man'; 'if you think revenge is sweet. . . . taste this') is available on DVD; Peter Brook's darkly violent *King Lear* (1971) is a good comparison in its stress on brutality (rather than, or as well as, say, nobility or philosophy or self-discovery) as a constituent of tragedy, as is Roman Polanski's *Macbeth* (also 1971).
- On *All's Well That Ends Well*, Susan Snyder's Oxford University Press edition (1993) has a great introduction on the play's generic affiliations. Other indicative recent criticism includes David Scott Kastan, '*All's Well That Ends Well* and the Limits of Comedy', *English Literary History* 52 (1985); Alexander Leggatt, 'In the Shadow of *Hamlet*: Comedy and Death in *All's Well That Ends Well*' in *Re-Visions of Shakespeare: Essays in Honor of Robert Ornstein* (ed. Evelyn Gajowski, University of Delaware Press, 2004); and Susan Snyder, 'The King's Not Here': Displacement and Deferral in *All's*

Well That Ends Well', *Shakespeare Quarterly* 43 (1992). One way to trace the increased interest in the darkness within Shakespeare's comedies is through performance: recent productions of *Twelfth Night* have been more sensitive to Malvolio's treatment, for example – Trevor Nunn's 1996 film is a good example. Kate Chedgzoy's *Measure for Measure* (Northcote House, 2000) is good on that play's contemporary relevance. I discuss some of the issues of genre and their critical history in the volume *Blackwell Guides to Criticism: Shakespeare's Comedies* (Blackwell, 2004).

- On the way Shakespeare juxtaposes scenes, you might consider the construction of Act 1 of *1 Henry IV*. How are the two worlds of court and tavern characterised, and why does Prince Henry's soliloquy come so early in the play (also discussed in chapter 4, 'Language')? What's happening in *Titus Andronicus* when Lavinia is dragged offstage by her rapists Chiron and Demetrius, and the next scene sees her brothers Quintus and Martius falling into a pit described as a 'subtle hole . . . Whose mouth is covered with rude-growing briers / Upon whose leaves are drops of new-shed blood . . . A very fatal place it seems to me' (2.3.198–202): could we see Lavinia's violation being literalised here, and what are the gender/familial implications of this displacement? Or have a look at the interplay between Roman and Egyptian scenes in *Antony and Cleopatra*, and the close, almost cinematic cutting in Acts 3 and 4 (particularly when compared with battle sequences in the earlier English history plays). The example of *Henry V* discussed in this chapter could be taken further: how does Henry's promise that 'he today that sheds his blood with me / Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile / This day shall gentle his condition' (4.3.61–3) fit with his description of the English casualties 'none else of name, and of all other men / But five and twenty' (4.8.97–8)? When does Henry give the order for the French prisoners to be killed? Why, precisely at the moment of Henry's triumph in France, does Fluellen remind us that the king, like Alexander, killed his best friend Falstaff?
- If you are interested in narrative theory and on the elaboration of the distinction between 'showing' and 'telling', Paul Cobley's *Narrative* in Routledge's New Critical Idiom series (2001) is a lucid place to start. Other fruitful showing/telling points might be the murder of Duncan in *Macbeth* – compared, perhaps, with the onstage killing of Julius Caesar or Richard II. Is it unshowable? How does Macbeth's description of the body work? Or the role of Gower, a 'teller', in *Pericles* – which bits of his story are shown, and which related? Or the conversion of Duke Frederick at the end of *As You Like It*: is it more, or less, convincing by being told rather than shown? How might

we compare Shakespeare's structuring of *The Tempest* – where the history of Prospero's exile and arrival on the island some twelve years previously is told in the lengthy second scene, with that of the contemporaneous play *The Winter's Tale*, in which the first three acts are separated from the last two by the figure of Time indicating the passage of sixteen years, thus establishing a structure based on showing rather than telling?