THE PROPHETIC USE OF DREAMS IN SHAKESPEARE

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THE PROPHETIC USE OF DREAMS IN SHAKESPEARE

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare scholars affirm with only slight equivocation that the great English bard turned all parts of his dramas to consummate advantage. His minor characters, for example, either in contrasting or complementary roles, focused on the major characters. His minor plots, sometimes ostensibly disparate and detractive, actually paralleled and buttressed the major plot. His treatment of common beliefs and superstitions, such as ghost-lore, fairy-lore, witch-lore, and dream-lore, was not a cheap device to truckle to the tastes of the groundlings but a resolute effort to enrich the drama and to lead it forward to its fullest development. Harold Goddard, particularly, sees integrity and consistency in Shakespeare's whole corpus of dramas, but more important for this thesis, in each individual play. He illustrates this point repeatedly with comments such as this: "... the two parts of Henry IV are not an alternation of historical scenes and comic relief. The history and the comedy are concerned with the same thing ... . The poet was beginning to perceive that history has no significance until it is
seen as comedy--and tragedy."¹ When commenting on *Henry V* he says, "Shakespeare can never be trusted not to comment on his main plot in his underplot."² Of *Troilus and Cressida* he says,

> There is the love story of Troilus and Cressida ... and there is the story of the siege of Troy ... And the two stories are only loosely interwoven ... What the author is saying is that the problem of lust and the problem of violence, and so of war, are the same problem seen from different angles. ³

Shakespeare's use of the supernatural fits into this total pattern of integrity. This very difficult topic, which could have enticed him, as it has other authors, into irrational occultism and incredible coincidentalism, looks like pliable putty in the hands of this superb, self-confident artisan.

He uses supernaturalism to the fullest advantage, not as a desperate measure to perform heavenly rescues for boxed-in characters, but as an aid to thematic progression. His supernatural beings were not primarily rescue agents but rather prophesying agents for men right in the middle of the human milieu—in conflict with nature, society, and fate.

Shakespeare's use of dreams particularly presents an interesting study. Obviously such a study must be undertaken as a subtopic of the larger genus of supernatural elements.

²Ibid., p. 227.
³Ibid., p. 391.
But in order to maintain a degree of tractability this thesis must be confined to Shakespeare's use of dreams—and then more specifically to his use of dreams as prophecy.

The scant treatment that scholars have given to Shakespeare's dreams disproves the glib assertion that "Shakespeare is written out." The great challenge of writing on Shakespeare's dreams is not one of selectivity but one of exploration. Very few scholars have written about Shakespeare's dreams as such; generally they seem to have treated the subject as a minor subpoint or afterthought. Elmer Edgar Stoll, for example, discusses dreams very briefly in his chapter on "Ghosts."¹ T. F. Thiselton Dyer, in his *Folk-Lore of Shakespeare*, also gives them minimal treatment under the chapter heading "Sundry Superstitions." There he classifies dreams with charms, fortune-tellers, giants, lucky days, magic, portents and prodigies.² Gordon Ross Smith, in his *Classified Shakespeare Bibliography*, lists dreams under the heading "Shakespeare and the Supernatural."³ This dearth of secondary source material necessitates considerable concentration on primary sources.

Yet the very nature of the topic must preclude any discussion of the Freudian interpretation of dreams. No attempt will be made to give a thorough analysis of dream psychology, for such a study would not only be superfluous but even detrimental to a balanced understanding of Shakespeare's prophetic use of dreams.

The topic, however, does demand some elucidation of the Medieval and Renaissance understanding of dreams. Chapter II will develop the Elizabethan concept of dreams; Chapters III and IV will discuss Shakespeare's dreams of impending evil and impending good respectively and will show how closely they adhered to or how far they digressed from the Elizabethan norm.

Since the specific subject of dreams and the general subject of supernaturalism were intensely debated in Shakespeare's day as to whether they were effects of melancholy or direct manifestations of the supernatural, some space will be devoted to a description of the Elizabethan understanding of "man as microcosm" with his four humours: blood, choler, phlegm, and melancholy. Shakespeare gave expression to both the melancholic and supernatural interpretations of dreams. This thesis will document the idea that he generally tended toward supernatural expositions, "unsusceptible

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7Lily B. Campbell, Shakespeare's Tragic Heroes (New York, 1952), p. 34.
of psychological explanation." This theory is the only adequate explanation of the strongly prophetic element in Shakespeare's dream scenes.

This thesis will not be an exhaustive study of Shakespeare's prophetic use of dreams, for that would make it too lengthy. Most of Shakespeare's plays—comedies, tragedies, and histories alike—include dreams that presage the future. There are dreams of impending evil, dreams of impending good, dreams of revelation, and dreams of haunting, revengeful, evil spirits. All of them serve directly or indirectly as prognosticators of the future.

Shakespeare, perhaps the greatest of all creative geniuses, made every detail relevant to the main theme. Every allusion, every speech, every action, every subplot contributed to thematic progression. Shakespeare "was profoundly impressed by the truth that everything contains the seeds of its future," and he made capital use of every part of his drama first to predict and later to actualize the paramount theme. He did not trifle with his audience, but "every character in a Shakespearean play is engaged in saying exactly what Shakespeare wanted the audience to know and in saying it over and over again." So also with Shakespeare's dreams. They were not deliberate, vague

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8 Stoll, p. 218.  
9 Goddard, p. 17.  
10 Campbell, p. 112.
ambiguities but rather transparent predictions of what was to come.
CHAPTER II

THE ELIZABETHAN CONCEPT OF DREAMS

The Elizabethan age fostered two conflicting views of dreams—supernaturalism and skepticism. Supernaturalists, understandably, considered dreams as direct manifestations of the supernatural, while skeptics regarded dreams as the undesirable effects of melancholy.

As for supernaturalism a brief tangential explanation must be made. Dream-lore must always be studied in relation to fairy-lore, witch-lore, ghost-lore, and devil-lore. E. E. Stoll, the eminent Shakespeare scholar, says that for the Elizabethan mind "appearing in a dream does not . . . rob the ghost of reality; it is the same spirit that appears to the waking."¹ In other words, dreams are merely the night-side of ghosts; dreams are the appearances of ghosts, witches, fairies, angels, God, or devil to men while asleep. Any discussion of dreams, therefore, must be a circumscription of supernaturalism as a whole. What one says of dreams is pertinent to supernaturalism, and what one says of supernaturalism is applicable to one of its parts—dreams.

As for skepticism a detailed explanation is needed of "man as microcosm" with his four humours. Persons in the

¹Stoll, p. 219.
Elizabethan period who had skeptical propensities endeavored to explain away the occurrence and prophetic qualities of dreams, and they generally did so by attributing them to effects of melancholy. This was not just a synonymous term for gloominess or pensiveness, but it was, instead, one phase of a highly developed physiological-psychological theory of man as microcosmos. Sir Francis Bacon's comment serves as a helpful introduction into this relatively complex, sometimes nebulous theory:

The ancient opinion that man was Microcosmus, an abstract or model of the world, hath been fantastically strained by Paracelsus and the alchemists, as if there were to be found in man's body certain correspondences and parallels, which should have respect to all varieties of things, as stars, planets, minerals, which are extant in the great world. But thus much is evidently true that of all substances which nature hath produced, man's body is the most extremely compounded. For we see herbs and plants are nourished by earth and water; beasts for the most part by herbs and fruits, man by the flesh of beasts, birds, fishes, herbs, grains, fruits, water, and the manifold alterations, dressings, and preparations of these several bodies, before they come to be his food and aliment. Add hereunto that beasts have a more simple order of life, and less change of affections to work upon their bodies; whereas man in his mansion, sleep, exercise, passions, hath infinite variations; and it cannot be denied but that the Body of man of all other things is of the most compounded mass.\(^2\)

The word microcosmos literally means "little world."

Man, therefore, is regarded as a little world, embodying all the elements that go into the making of the great world.

\(^2\)Campbell, p. 51 (quoting from Sir Francis Bacon's Advancement of Learning).
"These elements are four: fire, air, water, earth. Four qualities inhere in these elements: hot, cold, moist, dry. Fire is hot and dry, air is hot and moist, water is cold and moist, earth is cold and dry."³

In every man there are also four humours, all existing in the blood: blood, choler, phlegm, and melancholy. Blood, like air, is hot and moist; it is also sweet to the taste. Choler, like fire, is hot and dry; it is bitter to the taste. Phlegm, like water, is cold and moist; it is unsavoury and tasteless like water also. Melancholy, like earth, is cold and dry; it is sharp, "eigre," or tart to the taste.⁴

The four humours are "engendered" of food and drink and thus are related to the four elements. Lily Campbell quotes this definition from The French Academie:

We understand by a Humor, a liquide and running body into which the food is converted in the liver, to this ende that bodies might be nourished and preserved by them. And as there are foure elements of which our bodies are compounded, so there are foure sorts of humors answerable to their natures, being al mingled together with the blood.⁵

Although the humours are related to the elements, they have their special seats in the human body—choler retires to the gall, melancholy to the spleen, and phlegm to the kidneys. When any of the humours overflow their special seats and spill over in excess into other parts of the body, illnesses and emotional imbalances ensue. When phlegm rises unnaturally to the brain, for example, catarrh or apoplexy results. When melancholy juice overflows the spleen (which

³ Ibid., p. 52. ⁴ Ibid., pp. 52-53. ⁵ Ibid., p. 51 (quoting from The French Academie).
is like a sponge) because it is obstructed or weak, the juice gets into every other part of the body and often precipitates visions or dreams. When choler overflows the bladder of the gall, jaundice results.  

The great conflict in Shakespeare's day was whether temperaments were determined by "humours or by qualities inherent in the elements; that is to say, whether men must be classed as of hot, cold, moist, and dry temperaments or as of sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic, and melancholy humours." Men were judged by their complexions or their peculiar dominance of humour. Generalizations were frequently made regarding complexions. Men of hot complexion (red, brown, tawny) are nimble and active, for the most part strong and courageous, yet are often carried by willful affection and unruliness of mind to do things forbidden or dishonest. Men of cold complexion (light in skin and hair) are slothful, sluggish, and inactive generally. Men of dry complexion tend to be thin and shrunken, to have poor memories, to doubt and waver. Men of moist complexion (white, bright, yellow, or red hair, and gray eyes) are short and stout, slow in mind and speech.

Men were also judged by their peculiar dominance of humour. The sanguine man was considered the nearest to perfection. Newton described him as having promptness of

6 Ibid., pp. 54-55.  
7 Ibid., pp. 56-57.  
8 Ibid., p. 57.
mind, quickness in device, and sharpness in practice. The choleric man was regarded as inferior to the sanguine man in readiness of tongue or control of affections. Besides, Newton said, the choleric man was a taunter and mocker, while the sanguine man was pleasant and courteous. The phlegmatic man lacked quickness of wit and was apt to be lethargic in tendency, but he did have a good memory. The melancholy man, who aroused more interest in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries than any other, was described as sorrowful, lumpish, sour, and dark. It was to this melancholy humour that many apparitions and dreams were ascribed.

People in the Elizabethan age were for the most part divided into these two camps—those who interpreted dreams as manifestations of the supernatural and those who passed them off as effects of melancholy humour. It seems that most people held a supernatural view of dreams, while a much smaller group posited natural explanations. The supernaturalists were subdivided again into those who believed that dreams were the appearances of spirits from the dead and those who regarded dreams as manifestations of God and good angels or the devil and evil angels. Thus, in actuality, there were three views of dreams: (1) the Catholic view, which saw in dreams a return to earth of the spirits of the dead; (2) the Protestant view, which envisioned God or the

9 Ibid., pp. 58-59.
devil, good angels or evil angels, appearing in the likeness of people to entice the dreaming victims to their destruction; and (3) the skeptical view, which attempted to give rational explanations to dreams by tracing them back to excessive melancholy.

Lily Campbell tersely summarizes these three views:

According to the "Papists" ghosts might be accepted as spirits of the dead permitted to return at times to earth while they were enduring purifying fires of purgatory. Or, according to King James and his fellow-believers, ghosts might be the feignings of the Devil (or even of the good angels), appearing especially to those already prepared in their souls by their desire for revenge or the fulfillment of ambition, in which case the Devil would most frequently choose the likeness of friends who had been dearest in order the more surely to entice his victims to their destruction. Or, according to the third group, of physicians and seekers for natural causes of supernatural appearances, the cause of such ghostly appearances could be traced to the melancholy that was akin to madness.  

A substitution of the word dream for the word ghost is entirely legitimate and would accomplish the task of bringing this quote into the proper framework of this thesis.

E. E. Stoll makes a sweeping statement that "everybody believed in ghosts" in Shakespeare's day. His assertion is extenuated somewhat when he goes on to say that even "skeptics like Reginald Scot, in his Discoverie of Witchcraft, in 1584, Samuel Harsnett, in his Declaration of Popish Impostures, in 1603, and John Webster, in The Displaying of Supposed Witchcraft, in 1677, all were careful not to deny

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10 Ibid., p. 121.  
11 Stoll, p. 236.
the existence of witches in toto." These skeptics did not condemn witchcraft or supernaturalism itself but the silly notions, preposterous practices, and over-extended claims of the powers of supernaturalism. As documentation for his theory E. F. Stoll names a list of men whose belief in supernatural phenomena was open and avowed:

Thomas Nashe, King James I, Bacon, Raleigh, Coke, Thomas Heywood, Edward Fairfax, Robert Burton, Sir Thomas Browne, James Howell, Sir Kenelm Digby, Jeremy Taylor, Thomas Fuller, Sir Matthew Hale, John Aubrey, Henry More, Meric Casaubon, Glanvil, Dr. George Hickes, Isaac Barrow, Richard Baxter, and, bringing up the rear, half a century behind his time, in words of solemn protest against its innovation and error, John Wesley.

Although some of them, like Bacon, were skeptical and constantly tended to give natural explanations of supernatural events, they still clung to vestiges of the superstition or else did not tell all that they knew or thought.

Suffice it to say that the majority of writers in Shakespeare's day, including Shakespeare himself, subscribed to the supernatural interpretation of witches, fairies, ghosts, and dreams. The two prevalent subdivisions of supernaturalism, Catholic and Protestant, both believed in supernatural beings, although they were at odds about the nature of these beings. Catholics regarded them as spirits of the dead, while Protestants insisted that they could only be living spirits.

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12 Ibid., p. 237.  
13 Ibid.  
14 Ibid., pp. 237-238.
This whole dispute obviously arose out of the Catholic-Protestant polemics on purgatory. The Catholic view was that supernatural beings were spirits of the dead released temporarily from purgatory. But the whole idea of purgatory and the concomitant doctrine of mortal and venial sins was thoroughly repugnant to Protestants with the result that they rejected it categorically. Protestants regarded supernatural beings as feignings of the devil or evil angels who would seek to destroy proud, revengeful, ambitious men who had already been predisposed to such attacks by excessive melancholic or choleric humours. God and the good angels, by the same token, also manifested themselves in visions and dreams to help steel a man against the temptations of the devil and his angels. King James, in his Daemonologie in the Forme of Dialogue, showed himself to be the most distinguished exponent of the Protestant view. Special treatment will be devoted to this work a little later in this chapter.

There was also the minority view of the skeptical physicians and realists who insisted that "the supernatural manifestations variously reported were most often, if not the result of actual fraud, the result of the effect of melancholic humours . . . ." Although Shakespeare himself did not endorse the skeptical interpretation of dreams, he saw enough plausibility in it to allow two of his characters,
Mercutio in *Romeo and Juliet* and Bottom in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, to give voice to the skeptical view.

Mercutio depicts dreams as

> the children of an idle brain,  
> Begot of nothing but vain fantasy.

After Romeo had asserted that dreamers "dream things true," Mercutio launched into his playful Queen Mab speech. This speech, it would seem, not only provided the Elizabethan audience with amusement but also called forth the whole concept of skepticism, with its traditional debunking of ghosts, witches, fairies, and dreams. The probability is great that Shakespeare inserted Mercutio's Queen Mab speech to exemplify the skeptical view of the day so that he could refute it by the subsequent action of the drama. The speech is quoted in full because it is entertaining as well as enlightening for the main idea of this thesis:

> O, then, I see Queen Mab hath been with you.  
> She is the fairies' midwife, and she comes  
> In shape no bigger than an agate-stone  
> On the fore-finger of an alderman,  
> Drawn with a team of little atomies  
> Athwart men's noses as they lie asleep;  
> Her waggon-spokes made of long spinners' legs,  
> The cover of the wings of grasshoppers,  
> The traces of the smallest spider's web,  
> The collars of the moonshine's watery beams,  
> Her whip of cricket's bone, the lash of film,  
> Her waggoner a small grey-coated gnat,

16William Shakespeare, "Romeo and Juliet," The Complete Works of Shakespeare, edited by Hardin Craig (Chicago, 1961), I, iv, 96-97. All subsequent citations will be from this edition of Shakespeare unless otherwise specified.
Not half so big as a round little worm
Prick'd from the lazy finger of a maid;
Her chariot is an empty hazel-nut
Made by the joiner squirrel or old grub,
Time out o' mind the fairies' coachmakers.
And in this state she gallops night by night
Through lovers' brains, and then they dream of love;
O'er courtiers' knees, that dream on court'sies straight,
O'er lawyers' fingers, who straight dream on fees,
O'er ladies' lips, who straight on kisses dream,
Which oft the angry Mab with blisters plagues,
Because their breaths with sweetmeats tainted are:
Sometime she gallops o'er a courtier's nose,
And then dreams he of smelling out a suit;
And sometime comes she with a tithe-pig's tail
Tickling a parson's nose as he lies asleep,
Then dreams he of another benefice:
Sometime she driveth o'er a soldier's neck,
And then dreams he of cutting foreign throats,
Of breaches, ambuscadoes, Spanish blades,
Of healths five-fathom deep; and then anon
Drums in his ear, at which he starts and wakes,
And being thus frightened swears a prayer or two
And sleeps again. This is that very Mab
That plats the manes of horses in the night,
And bakes the elf-locks in foul slutish hairs,
Which once untangled much misfortune bodes:
This is the hag, when maids lie on their backs,
That presses them and learns them first to bear,
Making them women of good carriage:
This is she—

Shakespeare also puts a speech about dreams in the mouth of Bottom in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*. The humor of this speech probably served the dual function of amusing the audience and poking a little fun at the superstitious, supernatural interpreters of dreams. The *Royal Dream Book*, which will be cited later, shows the absurd extremities to which these superstitions were carried. Bottom's speech on dreams reads as follows:

17*Romeo and Juliet*, I, iv, 53-95.
I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what
dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to
expound this dream. Methought I was—there is no
man can tell what. Methought I was,—and me-
thought I had,—but man is but a patched fool, if he
will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of
man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen,
man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to con-
ceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was. I
will get Peter Quince to write a ballad of this dream:
it shall be called Bottom's Dream, because it hath no
bottom; . . . 18

Although these two speeches were vocal expressions of the
skeptical approach to dreams, Shakespeare maneuvered his
characters, actions, and general tone of the plays in such a
way that a reader discounts the skepticism embodied in the
speeches and concentrates on the humor. The reader laughs
with Bottom, smiles with Mercutio, but ends up agreeing with
Romeo that dreamers "dream things true."

The following three sources are especially helpful in
developing the Elizabethan concept of dreams: King James I,
*Daemonologie in the Forme of a Dialogue*; Reginald Scot, *The
Discoverie of Witchcraft*; John Brand, *Popular Antiquities of
Great Britain*. These three sources are revealing
representations of the various Elizabethan dream theories.

King James' *Daemonologie*, representing the Protestant
view of dreams, uses the structural device of dialogue in the
manner of Plato's *Dialogues* and *Republic*. The two disputants
are Philomathes and Epistemon. Philomathes, whose name

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18 *A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, IV, i, 208-220.
derives from Greek and means "fond of learning," asks if there is such a thing as witches or witchcrafts. Epistemon, whose name significantly means "wise" or "prudent," answers that both Scripture and daily experience attest to the actuality of witches. King James, through his disputants, distinguishes between Magie or Necromancie and Sorcerie or Witchcraft. Book One of Daemonologie is devoted to Magie or Necromancie, Book Two to Sorcerie or Witchcraft, and Book Three to the four kinds of spirits.

In Book One King James describes witches as "servantes onelie, and slaues to the Devil; but the Necromanciers are his maisters and commanders." Using Saul and the Witch of Endor as well as other Biblical references as a touchstone, the author proceeds to expatiate on the contract that the devil makes with magicians. To some magicians he will appear "either in likeness of a dog, a Catte, an Ape, or such-like other beast; or else to answere by a voyce onlie." At other times he will oblish himselfe, to enter in a dead bodie, and there out of to glue such answers, of the euent of battels, of maters concerning the estate of commonwelths, and such like other great questions: yea, to some he will be a continuall attender, in forme of a Page: He will permit himselfe to be conjured, for the space of so many yeres, ether in a tablet or a ring, or such like thing, which they may easelye carrie about with them.


20Ibid., p. 19.

21Ibid., p. 20.
A little later Epistemon says: "For it is no wonder, that the Deuill may delude our senses, since we see by common prooфе, that simple jugłars will make an hundreth thines seeme both to our oyes and ears otherwaiſes then they are."\(^{22}\)

In Book Two Epistemon, as spokesman for King James, cites three reasons for belief in witches. (1) Since the Bible prohibits and threatens against Magicians, Divines, Enchanters, Sorcerers, Witches or anyone consulting with the Devil, it follows that all these things must exist. (2) Anyone suffering from an excess of melancholy humour will be subject to "leannes, palenes, desire of solitude: and if they come to the highest degree thereof, mere folie and Manie."\(^{23}\) Practiceres of witchcraft, however, may be rich, corpulent, worldly-wise, and merry, all of which are directly contrary to the symptoms of melancholy. (3) There is evidence in the daily experience of men of the many "harmes that they do, both to men, and whatsoeuer thing men possesses."\(^{24}\)

In Book Three Epistemon asseverates the four kinds of spirits. "The first is, where spirites troubles some houses or solitarie places: The second, where spirites followes upon certaine persones, and at diuers houreſes troubles them: The thirde, when they enter within them and possesse them: The fourth is these kinde of spirites that are called

\(^{22}\)Ibid., p. 23.  \(^{23}\)Ibid., p. 30.  \(^{24}\)Ibid., p. 31.
vulgarlie the Fayrie.25 In this book, particularly, King James denounces the Papists, on one occasion referring to them with the quaint-sounding epithet "Hereticques."26

Although the book Daemonologie does not confine itself to dream-lore but encompasses a wide scope of ideas on supernatural beings, some helpful conclusions can be made on the basis of it. For one, King James gives a typical Protestant view of supernatural apparitions as feignings of the devil or his evil spirits. Besides, he gives us a very helpful insight into the dialectic which existed between Protestants, Papists, and skeptics. He also gives us an insight into the extremely superstitious spirit of the times. If Shakespeare read Daemonologie, as we might logically assume since it was published in 1597, he certainly must have been influenced by it in relation to supernatural beings in general and dream-lore in particular.

Reginald Scot, the very capable spokesman of the skeptical camp, published The Discoverie of Witchcraft in 1584. This, by the way, was one of the works that King James attacked so vigorously in his Daemonologie. It is somewhat difficult to establish with any finality what Scot's view of dreams actually was. He simultaneously believed and disbelieved their validity. For example, he admitted that physicians had herbs and stones which caused dreams, but he

25Ibid., p. 57.  
26Ibid., p. 70.
denied that magicians could make men dream what they wanted them to dream. He also conceded the existence of divine, physical, and casual dreams, but he opposed the interpretation of dreams. Of dream interpreters he said: "And therefore those witches, that make men believe they can prophesie upon dreams, as knowing the interpretation of them, and either for monie or glorie abuse men & women therby, are meere couseners [frauds], and worthie of great punishment." Yet at the same time Scot seriously discusses divine dreams (in which God and his angels appeared unto the prophets and holy fathers in Biblical days), physical dreams (which enabled physicians to understand patients' illnesses), and casual dreams (which gave answers to perplexing questions that haunt the outward sense).

On the basis of Scot's strong words of denunciation one may wisely conclude that dream interpreters and dream books were proliferating in the last decades of the sixteenth century. This author, who combined a skeptical propensity with a thorough Biblical orientation, directed his antagonism toward these self-styled dream interpreters and their inane books of prophecy. Dreams, he said, had very ordinary causes:

Certeinlie men never lighlilie fails to dreame by night, of that which they meditate by daie: and by daie they see divers and sundrie things, and conceive them severallie in their minds. Then those mixed conceits being laid up in the closet of the

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memorie, strive togethertogether; which, because the
phantasie cannot discerne nor discusse, some
certaine thing gathered of manie conceits is
bred and contrived in one togethertogether. And there-
fore in mine opinion, it is time vainelie
emploied, to studie about the interpretation of
dreames.28

The exposition of dreams, Scot said, is not only futile; it
is also presumptuous, for only the Lord knows such secrets.

Toward the end of his section on dreams Scot once again
granted the validity of divine, physical, and casual dreams,
but he insisted that magical or diabolical dreams should
instead be called melancholic: "For out of that blacke
vapor in sleepe, through dreames, appeareth (as Aristotle
saith) some horrible thing; and as it were the image of an
ouglie divell: sometimes also other terrible visions,
imaginations, counsels, and practises."29 After citing the
example of a man who killed himself because the devil
demanded in a dream that he throw himself into a pit, Scot
concludes: "Now I confesse, that the interpretation or
execution of that dreame was indeed diabolicall: but the
dreame was casuall, derived from the heavie and blacke humor
of melancholie."30 The author of this sometimes traditional,
sometimes skeptical treatment of dreams makes one final,
exceedingly significant comment: ". . . dreames in the dead
of the night are commonlie preposterous and monstrous; and in

28Ibid., pp. 102-103.  29Ibid., p. 103.
30Ibid., p. 104.
the morning when the grosse humors be spent, there happen more pleasant and certeine dreames, the bloud being more pure than at other times: the reason whereof is there expressed."31

Judging by the standards of our present age of incredulity, Scot sounds very credulous and very traditional. If he is the purest devotee of skepticism in the Elizabethan age, then Stoll's observation that "everybody believed in ghosts" is thoroughly accurate.

Scot was apparently trying to locate a simple criterion whereby authentic dreams could be distinguished from deceptive ones. He was trying to isolate those susceptible of supernatural interpretation (divine, physical, casual) from those that warranted natural explanations (magical, diabolical). He fails to find the happy elixir of dream interpretation, but he is invaluable for a study of this kind because of his articulation of the melancholic interpretation. He did not consistently hold to it, but he did expostulate it well, and it is certain that it had a noticeable influence on Shakespeare's treatment of dreams.

The third chief source for understanding the Elizabethan concept of dreams is John Brand's Popular Antiquities of Great Britain. Brand significantly treats dreams under Omens. To introduce his subject he says: "Homer has told us that the dream comes from Jupiter, and in all ages and every kingdom

31Ibid.
the idea that some knowledge of the future is to be derived from them has always composed a very striking article in the creed of popular superstitions."  

He proceeds to say that Aristotle, Plato, Democritus, and the whole gamut of ancient philosophers held very divergent opinions as to the causes of dreams. Plato and his followers, for example, conceived of dreams as specific and concrete notions of the soul. Aristotle avers that dreams are caused by "common sense, but placed in the fancy." Democritus regards dreams as the "little images or representatives separated from the things themselves." Others attributed dreams to vapours and humours, powers of the soul, celestial influences. Brand thereby gives helpful insights into ancient attitudes of dreams, all of which were relatively superstitious, but he proceeds to show that the English reached the zenith of dream superstition. He quotes from a group of English Renaissance writers and/or chapbooks which describe the dream superstition of the day. Some are more perspicuous than others. Melton, in his *Astrologaster*, says "that if a man be drowsie it is a signe of ill lucke ... if a man dreame of egs or fire, he shall heare of anger ... to dreame of the devil is good lucke ... to dreame of gold is

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33Ibid., p. 128.

34Ibid.
good lucke, but of silver ill." The Country-mans Counsellor says: "To dreame of eagles flying over our heads, to dreame of marriages, dancing, and banquetting, foretells some of our kinsfolkes are departed; to dreame of silver, if thou hast it given to thyselfe, sorrow; of gold, good fortune; to lose an axle toth or an eye, the death of some friend . . . ."36

The absolute acme of dream superstition, however, is the Dictionary of Dreams which Brand extracted from a North Country chap-book, entitled the Royal Dream Book. Here is an excerpt from this Dictionary of Dreams:

Acorns.—To dream of acorns, and that you eat one, denotes you will rise gradually to riches and honour.

Acquaintance.—To dream that you fight with them, signifies distraction.

Altar.—To dream you are at the altar kneeling is bad.

Anchor.—To dream of an anchor, part in the water, the other part on land, and that a male or female stumbles over it, is a sure sign that the male will in time become a sailor, and the female will be married to one.

Ants or Bees.—To dream of ants denotes that you will live in a great town or city, or in a large family, and that you will be industrious, happy, well married, and have a large family.

Angel.—To dream you see an angel or angels is good, to dream you are one is better; but to speak with, or call upon them, is of evil signification.

Anger.—To dream you have been provoked to anger, shows that you have many powerful enemies.37

Brand's concluding comments are also worthy of quotation:

35Ibid., p. 132.  
36Ibid.  
37Ibid., p. 134.
'Tis a custom among country girls to put the Bible under their pillows at night, with sixpence clapt in the book of Ruth, in order to dream of the men destined to be their husbands.

Various are the popular superstitions, or at least the faint traces of them, that still are made use of to procure dreams of divination, such as fasting St. Agnes' Fast; laying a piece of the first cut of a cheese at a lying-in, called vulgarly in the North the groaning cheese, under the pillow, to cause young persons to dream of their lovers; and putting a Bible in the like situation, with a six-pence clapped in the book of Ruth . . . . If you would wish to be revenged on a lover by tormenting him with hideous dreams, take a bird's heart and at twelve o'clock at night stick it full of pins, and a semblance of him will appear before you in great agony. 38

Although some of Brand's references to dream superstition postdate Shakespeare's death, they reveal the limits to which dream superstition had gone in the Elizabethan age. Judging by these standards rather than modern standards of thoroughgoing incredulity, one is compelled to agree that some men in Shakespeare's day were bona fide skeptics. By such standards one might even evaluate Shakespeare himself, although he lent full credence to supernatural dream interpretations, as a relative skeptic, for he certainly toned down many excesses of superstition. Without a doubt Shakespeare was influenced by the spirit of his age, and particularly by the seminal works of Scot and King James I, in the matter of dream interpretation, but he characteristically played down the sensational, irrational aspects of traditional dream-lore and utilized the more

38 Ibid., p. 141.
credible phases to enrich his dramas. Shakespeare was unquestionably influenced by his age, but he helped turn the spirit of his age to new directions.
CHAPTER III

SHAKESPEARE'S DREAMS OF IMPENDING EVIL

Shakespeare, like the Greeks before him, did not keep secrets from his audience; nor did he rely on the element of surprise to intrigue his audience. Instead, he used a very direct approach—anticipation. He told old and familiar stories in a straightforward manner, preparing his audience gradually for the climactic action. He assumed the responsibility not only of tipping off his audience about future actions but also of clearly labelling his characters as heroes or villains.

Wolfgang Clemen, in his article "Anticipation and Foreboding in Shakespeare's Early Histories," tells how prevalent the anticipatory or prophetic element is in Shakespeare. He says that

the peculiar function of anticipation and foreboding often consists in establishing subtle correspondences between earlier and later utterances or situations in the drama, or in binding together the various threads of action . . . . For although we find anticipation and foreboding in all great dramatists, in Sophocles and Euripides as well as Calderón and Ibsen, it can safely be said that with no other dramatist has this feature been turned to so manifold use and developed into such a refined and

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\textsuperscript{1}Elmer Edgar Stoll, \textit{Shakespeare and Other Masters} (Cambridge, 1910), p. 11.
subtle instrument of dramatic art as with Shakespeare.\(^2\)

In addition to describing the function of anticipation, as he does in this quote, Clemen also performs the gratuitous service in the article of calling the reader's attention to the very frequent occurrence of anticipatory elements in Shakespeare's dreams, portents, and omens.

Clemen's comments are very pertinent to this thesis, since this thesis purports to show how Shakespeare used dreams, particularly, as an anticipatory device. Shakespeare used dreams to prophesy both evil and good. This chapter will devote itself to the more numerous dreams of impending evil, and the following chapter will discuss dreams of impending good.

A whole series of Shakespeare's histories and tragedies include dreams which are prophetic of evil. *Troilus and Cressida* provides a good starting point. This play keeps two plots, Troilus and Cressida, and the Greek-Trojan battle, moving along simultaneously. The title seems to emphasize the Troilus and Cressida plot, particularly Cressida's perfidy and Troilus' consequent disillusionment, but the dialogue and action elevate the Greek-Trojan contest and the underlying themes of the futility of war and the emptiness of honor. The play is pertinent to this thesis because it

incorporates dream scenes which portend the defeat and demise of the Trojan warrior Hector.

Hector is about to leave for what will be his last battle when his faithful wife Andromache, who had ominous dreams during the night, tries to dissuade him. She pleads:

Unarm, unarm, and do not fight today.\(^3\)

After Hector refuses to listen and rebukes her instead, she makes this prophetic comment:

My dreams will, sure, prove ominous to the day.\(^4\)

A moment later Hector's sister Cassandra, a shrewd prophetess who is disregarded by everyone in the play, enters. Andromache then describes her dream to Cassandra:

... for I have dream'd
Of bloody turbulence, and this whole night
Hath nothing been but shapes and forms of slaughter.\(^5\)

Andromache, together with Romeo, Calpurnia, Stanley, Humphrey, and Cinna the poet all "dream more wisely than they can know or think."\(^6\) Hector, together with Troilus, Caesar, Clarence, and Hastings, disregard and debunk such prophetic dreams and thereby bring about their own destruction.

King Priam, after being beckoned by Cassandra at Andromache's instigation, makes one final, emotional appeal to his son:

\(^3\)Troilus and Cressida, V, iii, 3.  
\(^4\)Ibid., V, iii, 6. 
\(^5\)Ibid., V, iii, 10-12.  
\(^6\)Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, p. 218.
Come, Hector, come, go back:
Thy wife hath dream'd; thy mother [Hecuba] hath had visions;
Cassandra doth foresee; and I myself
Am like a prophet suddenly enrapt
To tell thee that this day is ominous:
Therefore, come back.

Harold Goddard lauds this passage as superb recapitulation, a
one-sentence condensation of the character traits that Shake-
speare has taken pages to unfold. As evidence of this point
he comments:

Andromache is Love and Womanly Intuition.
Hecuba is Motherhood. Cassandra is Divine Prophecy.
Priam is Age, Experience, Wisdom--earthly Prophecy.
The dreams, visions, and divinations are the Gods,
or from the Gods, themselves. And they are arrayed
unanimously against war.

Goddard's comment is pulsating with the very heart of
Shakespeare's view of dreams. He has isolated and articulated
two basic tenets of Shakespeare's view: the grouping of
dreams with visions and divinations as prognosticators of the
future and the identification of all these supernatural
elements with God or the gods. Shakespeare did not regard
dreams as enigmas of fate but as instruments of the gods to
shed light on the future. The combination of Andromache's
dream, Hecuba's vision, and Cassandra's divinations, all of
which represent divine prophecy, coupled with Priam's age,
experience, and wisdom, which represent human prophecy,
provide incontrovertible proof that the day is ominous.

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7 Troilus and Cressida, V, iii, 62-67.
8 Goddard, p. 119.
9 Ibid.
Despite all this prophecy to the contrary, Troilus presents the skeptical view of dreams when he says of Andromache:

This foolish, dreaming, superstitious girl
Makes all these bodements.\(^{10}\)

The conclusion of the play obviously discredits the skeptical theory of Troilus and Hector and corroborates the supernatural view of dreams as held by Andromache, Cassandra, and Priam. Toward the end of the play Achilles slays Hector, after his treacherous Myrmidons have "empaled" the unarmed Trojan with their weapons. The treachery, however, does not alter or palliate the fact that Hector is dead and the tragic dream prophecy is fulfilled. Achilles, the Greek warrior-egomaniac, ironically voices Shakespeare's supernatural conclusion:

It is decreed Hector the great must die.\(^{11}\)

Obviously Shakespeare fashioned his dream scene to lead up to this inevitable conclusion of Hector's death, for The Iliad had ended with his death centuries earlier. But the connection between the prophetic dreams and the death scene is inescapable; the gods decreed Hector's death, and dreams and visions prepared men for it.

Romeo and Juliet also includes a dream of impending evil. Although this play contains the skeptical Queen Mab speech of

\(^{10}\)Troilus and Cressida, V, iii, 79-80.

\(^{11}\)Ibid., V, vii, 8.
Mercutio, it is dominated by Romeo's attitude that dreamers actually "dream things true." Shakespeare thus provides a certain amount of tension between the conflicting supernatural and skeptical views, but the whole tenor of the play weights the scales toward the former. It is significant that Romeo had an ominous dream early in the play. After having discussed his dream with Mercutio for more than fifty lines (most of which is taken up by Mercutio's Queen Mab speech), Romeo described his dream in these words:

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. . . for my mind misgives
Some consequence yet hanging in the stars
Shall bitterly begin his fearful date
With this night's revels and expire the term
Of a despised life closed in my breast
By some vile forfeit of untimely death.  
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This grim foreboding runs like an underground stream throughout the play, bubbling up first in one place and then another. E. K. Chambers sees evidence of it in Juliet's words to Romeo:

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. . . although I joy in thee,
I have no joy of this contract to-night:
It is too rash, too unadvised, too sudden;
Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be
 Ere one can say "It lightens." 
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Expressions like "star-crossed lovers," "despised life," "the place death" cause a pallor of doom to hang over the scenes

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12 Romeo and Juliet, I, iv, 106-111.


14 Romeo and Juliet, II, ii, 116-120.
of the play. There is hardly a doubt in the reader's mind that this love affair is star-crossed. Yet Romeo waxes optimistic about his dreams and prospects in the fifth act, a fact which has caused hasty readers like T. F. Thiselton Dyer to mistake it for a prognostication of good. Romeo says, as if trying to whip himself into a state of self-deluding hopefulness:

If I may trust the flattering truth of sleep,  
My dreams presage some joyful news at hand;  
My bosom’s lord sits lightly in his throne;  
And all this day an unaccustomed spirit  
Lifts me above the ground with cheerful thoughts.  
I dreamt my lady came and found me dead—  
Strange dream, that gives a dead man leave to think!—  
And breathed such life with kisses on my lips,  
That I revived, and was an emperor.  
Ah me! how sweet is love itself possess’d,  
When but love’s shadows are so rich in joy!

No serious reader can solemnly say that this dream actually presages good. Hardin Craig says unequivocally in his notes on the Shakespeare text that "the premonition here is ironical." As Shakespeare employs tension between supernaturalism and skepticism in Romeo and Juliet, so he also develops tension between dreams which prophesy evil and those which prophesy good. But with Shakespeare it is always a modified tension, because he handles his material in such a way that his views are crystallized.

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15 Dyer, p. 508.

16 Romeo and Juliet, V, i, 1-11.

17 Craig, Complete Works of Shakespeare, footnote, p. 421.
Expressions like "flattering truth," "strange dream," "bosom's lord [heart] sits lightly in his throne," "unaccustomed spirit lifts me above the ground" absolutely demand that the reader discount the hopefulness of this dream. One is reminded of a terminal cancer case who dreams of restored health and vigor but who then awakes to the harsh prospect of a creeping death. Or one is reminded of the unusual manic state of the manic-depressive or of the uneducated peasant's dream of being emperor. This was not a dream prophesying future reality; it was a temporary basking in flattery and "love's shadows." Romeo knew that the dream was not a presage of good and so does the reader of the play.

The conclusion of the play, in which Romeo drinks poison and Juliet stabs herself, validates the whole prophetic dream theory. This time Friar Laurence voices Shakespeare's supernatural view:

A greater power than we can contradict
Hath thwarted our intents.  

The tension between the supernatural and the skeptical theory of dreams is therefore resolved. The theory that dreamers "dream things true" holds the day, for all of the dreams and premonitions of both Romeo and Juliet throughout the play come from a fountain of wisdom somewhere beyond time. Primitives

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13 Romeo and Juliet, V, iii, 153-154.
distinguish between "big" and "little" dreams. (Aeschylus makes the same distinction in Prometheus Bound.) Mercutio, with his alderman and gnats and coachmakers and sweetmeats and parsons and drums and ambuscadoes, may tell us a little about the littlest of little dreams. He thinks that dreamers are still in their day world at night. Both Romeo and Juliet know that there are dreams that come from as far below the surface of that world as was that prophetic tomb at the bottom of which she saw him "as one dead" at their last parting. 19

Another play that incorporates a dream prophetic of evil is one of Shakespeare's earliest plays—II Henry VI—probably written no later than 1591. The play begins with the presentation to King Henry VI of his new bride, Princess Margaret. Duke Humphrey of Gloucester, the king's uncle, is reading the terms of peace between England and France that accompanied the marriage agreement, but he drops the paper when he reads of the transfer of Anjou and Maine to Margaret's father, King Reignier, in exchange for Margaret's hand. Upon the royal couple's departure Gloucester passionately attacks this concession and finds supporters in Warwick and York. But after Gloucester's departure Cardinal Beaufort attacks him, and the reader observes for the first time the birth of a plot to unseat the Duke "through the folly and pride of his Duchess. It is a concerted attack by a wolf-pack of political enemies, all of whom are actuated by their own private ambitions." 20

19 Goddard, p. 123.

Once the plot is revealed, Shakespeare shifts to the personal lives of Duke Humphrey of Gloucester and his wife, Duchess Eleanor. The Duchess is berating her husband for his pensive, dejected mood and is attempting to incite him to a usurpation of his nephew's throne. Gloucester's answer is a masterpiece of character revelation:

O Neill, sweet Neill, if thou dost love thy lord, Banish the canker of ambitious thoughts. And may that thought, when I imagine ill Against my king and nephew, virtuous Henry, Be my last breathing in this mortal world! My troubous dream this night doth make me sad.  

The mention of Humphrey's "troubous" dream intrigued Eleanor, for, as coincidence would have it, that very morning she also had a dream. She encouraged him to reveal his dream first. It went like this:

Methought this staff, mine office-badge in court, Was broke in twain; by whom I have forgot, But, as I think, it was by the cardinal; And on the pieces of the broken wand Were placed the heads of Edmund Duke of Somerset, And William de la Pole, first duke of Suffolk. This was my dream: what it doth bode, God knows.  

Her answer was one that the reader would expect from ambitious Eleanor:

Tut, this was nothing but an argument That he that breaks a stick of Gloucester's grove Shall lose his head for his presumption.  

21 II Henry VI, I, ii, 17-22.  
23 Ibid., I, ii, 32-34.
She then proceeds to describe her own dream:

But list to me, my Humphrey, my sweet duke:
Methought I sat in seat of majesty
In the cathedral church of Westminster,
And in that chair where kings and queens are crown'd;
Where Henry and dame Margaret kneel'd to me
And on my head did set the diadem.24

After hearing his wife's dream Humphrey again rebuked her for her ambition and treachery, both of which were sins that the Elizabethan mind could not tolerate. The Elizabethans were understanding of many human flaws and foibles, but they regarded sedition and the pursuit of personal ambition to the detriment of the realm as despicable and inexcusable. It is no coincidence that Duchess Eleanor was portrayed as both ambitious and seditious. Or to state it otherwise, since Shakespeare was compelled by his sources, particularly Holinshead,25 to depict Eleanor as a practitioner of sorcery and black magic, as a totally despicable person, it is no coincidence that Shakespeare made her, rather than Humphrey, dream of a "seat of majesty." In typical fashion Shakespeare hinted to his audience that the venerable Humphrey's dream was prophetic, while the ambitious Eleanor's dream was empty and false.

Humphrey's prophetic dream was fulfilled to the last detail. The good Duke of Gloucester was slain by Cardinal

24Ibid., I, ii, 35-40.
25Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 59.
Beaufort in complicity with Queen Margaret, Suffolk, and York. Thus Gloucester's staff was actually broken in two by the cardinal, as the dream presaged.

The part of the dream about the heads of Suffolk and Somerset being placed on the pieces of the broken staff was also fulfilled. Queen Margaret had the dubious privilege of carrying in her lover Suffolk's head, after he had been slain in a seafight. Somerset was killed by Richard, the son of Richard Plantagenet, Duke of York, near the Castle Alehouse in St. Albans and thus "made the wizard famous in his death." Eleanor's dream was understandably foiled. Instead of becoming queen she was banished for witchcraft, for it was thought that she had power to conjure spirits.

Humphrey's assertion, "This was my dream: what it doth bode, God knows," cited earlier, gives an additional insight into Shakespeare's view of dreams. Different characters may have diametrically opposite dreams, but since God alone holds their secrets, they do not know which dream is authentic and which one is deceptive. Men's interpretations of dreams will always remain partial and defective. There is, however, a helpful guiding principle: The righteous (in this case, Humphrey) are more prone to have authentic dreams of prophecy, while human beings who are insensitive to God's laws and man's needs (in this case, Eleanor) generally have dreams that flatter them in their folly. There is a strong

26II Henry VI, V, i, 69.
similarity between Shakespeare's view of dreams and Reginald Scot's distinction between divine and diabolical dreams.

Neither Shakespeare nor Scot spelled out how men could recognize divine dreams or ascertain God's interpretation. Perhaps the appeal of Shakespeare's dream scenes stems from this very factor—that men do not grasp what their dreams signify until it is too late.

Richard III, which also includes dreams of impending evil, provides one exception to Shakespeare's dream pattern in that the character Stanley has a dream that goes unfulfilled. The patent explanation is that Stanley paid heed to his dream and thereby diverted the tragic consequences. Clarence and Hastings, on the other hand, out of impotency or obstinacy, did not heed their dreams and were therefore slain by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, who afterward became Richard III.

Richard ranks with Iago and Iachimo as Shakespeare's supreme villains. This physically-deformed, psychologically and emotionally-warped man "was working his way to the throne over the foulest trail of slander, duplicity, treachery and murder known to human experience."²⁷ Having already murdered King Henry with his own hands, he was now devoting himself to the destruction of his unsuspecting brother Clarence by accusing him of disloyalty before King Edward. As a result

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of this treachery Clarence was imprisoned in London Tower, where he had the following dream:

Methoughts that I had broken from the Tower,
And was embark'd to cross to Burgundy;
And, in my company, my brother Gloucester;

Methought that Gloucester stumbled; and, in falling,
Struck me, that thought to stay him, overboard,
Into the tumbling billows of the main.23

Yet even when the hired assassins came to murder Clarence, he still refused to believe their word that his own brother Richard of Gloucester had instigated the murder. He certainly dreamed more wisely than he was able to comprehend, and this very lack of comprehension led to his own demise.

Another pertinent dream episode in Richard III involves Hastings and Stanley. Richard had already vowed to chop off Hastings' head, if the latter did not support his aspirations to be king. In the very next scene Stanley's messenger came to Hastings at four o'clock in the morning with this report from his master:

He dreamt to-night the boar [Richard] had razed his helm:
Therefore he sends to know your lordship's pleasure,
If presently you will take horse with him,
And with all speed post with him toward the north . . . .29

Hastings controverted Stanley's pessimistic outlook with his own jocular, skeptical view of dreams:

29Ibid., III, ii, 11-17.
Tell him his fears are shallow, wanting instance:  
And for his dreams, I wonder he is so fond  
To trust the mockery of unquiet slumbers:  

Go, bid thy master rise and come to me;  
And we will both together to the Tower,  
Where, he shall see, the boar will use us kindly.  

Later, when Stanley himself arrived, Hastings jested with him:  

Come on, come on; where is your boar-spear, man?  
Fear you the boar, and go so unprovided?  

Shakespeare utilizes this ironical situation to its fullest advantage. With the audience fully aware of Hastings' imminent death, Shakespeare has Hastings utter one speech after another to show the extremity of his folly in trusting Richard. Hastings' comment to a Pursuivant shows how completely he rejected Stanley's dream and how implicitly he trusted in his own hopeful prospects:  

... 'tis better with me now  
Than when I met thee last where now we meet:  
Then was I going prisoner to the Tower,  
By the suggestion of the queen's allies;  
But now, I tell thee--keep it to thyself--  
This day those enemies are put to death;  
And I in better state than e'er I was.  

Hastings lived only long enough to regret his skepticism. After Richard had ordered his execution, he tragically confessed:  

Woe, woe for England! not a whit for me;  
For I, too fond, might have prevented this.  

31Ibid., III, 11, 74-75.  
32Ibid., III, 11, 100-106.
Stanley did dream the boar did raze his helm;  
But I disdain'd it, and did scorn to fly.  

Stanley and Hastings had come to London Tower together, but as soon as Stanley saw his friend arrested in preparation for execution, he fled and thereby escaped the consequences of his dream. Thus he earned the unique and fortunate honor in Shakespeare's plays of dreaming a dream of impending evil which was not fulfilled. Richard's dream, by the way, in which the ghosts of all his murdered victims appeared to him, will be considered later in this chapter.

Calpurnia's dream in *Julius Caesar* is probably the most widely celebrated instance of a prophetic dream in all of Shakespeare's works. Since high school students are universally required to read *Julius Caesar* and to memorize large portions of it, particularly the grandly rhetorical speeches, this is undoubtedly one of Shakespeare's best-known plays. Calpurnia's dream, as a result, is a familiar subject to readers of Shakespeare.

The night before Caesar's assassination was one of fearful storm and strange omens. Toward morning Caesar awoke, and coming on the stage in his nightgown, began to speak:

"Nor heaven nor earth have been at peace to-night
Thrice hath Calpurnia in her sleep cried out, "Help, ho! they murder Caesar!" Who's within?"  

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34*Julius Caesar*, II, ii, 1-3.
A moment later Calpurnia entered and began describing what she had heard from an early-morning visitor:

There is one within,
Besides the things that we have heard and seen,
Recounts most horrid sights seen by the watch.
A lioness hath whelped in the streets;
And graves have yawn'd, and yielded up their dead;
O Caesar! these things are beyond all use,
And I do fear them. 35

Then a servant entered and, in answer to Caesar's question—
"What say the augurers?"—replied:

They would not have you to stir forth to-day. 36

Shakespeare uses the same device here as in Troilus and Cressida of categorizing dreams with omens, soothsayers, and augurers in that all of them contain supernatural insights and provide accurate prophecies. By the special emphasis that Shakespeare affords dreams, the reader is constrained to put them on the very top rung of the ladder of importance. Omens, soothsayers, augurers all dictated that Caesar should not go out that day, but Caesar was still not convinced. Calpurnia's dream, however, won Caesar over when everything else failed. Thus Caesar confided to Decius:

CalpurniuA here, my wife, stays me at home:
She dreamt to-night she saw my statue,
Which, like a fountain with an hundred spouts,
Did run pure blood; and many lusty Romans
Came smiling, and did bathe their hands in it:
And these does she apply for warnings, and portents,

36Ibid., II, ii, 38.
Decius, who had been sent by the conspirators to insure Caesar's coming to the Senate that day so as not to foil the assassination plot, gave the dream an interpretation contrary to Calpurnia's. The fountain with a hundred spouts, he said, signified that Romans would come to Caesar to be transfused with reviving blood. Besides, Decius averred, Caesar would never want the crowd to hear that the great ruler was afraid of a woman's dream. The audience was keenly aware of the deception of this interpretation, for Decius was pre-committed to the conspirators to bring Caesar out at all costs. Caesar, however, ignorant of such treachery, was touched by the words of Decius in his weakest spot—his vanity. He therefore chided Calpurnia for her foolish fears, called for his robe, and went out—to his death.

Calpurnia's prophetic dream, like all the prophetic dreams of Shakespeare except one, was fulfilled to the last detail when Brutus addressed the crowd after Caesar's murder:

> Stoop, Romans, stoop,
> And let us bathe our hands in Caesar's blood
> Up to the elbows, and besmear our swords:
> Then walk we forth, even to the market-place,
> And, waving our red weapons o'er our heads,
> Let's all cry, "Peace, freedom and liberty!"

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37Ibid., II, 11, 75-82.
38Rogers, p. 22.
39Julius Caesar, III, 1, 105-110.
Caesar was not only murdered as Calpurnia had dreamed; the Romans also bathed their hands in his blood, as she had dreamed, and thereby lent significance to the details of dreams.

The dream of Cinna the poet serves as an interesting adjunct to Calpurnia's dream. Cinna reveals in soliloquy:

I dreamt to-night that I did feast with Caesar,
And things unluckily charge my fantasy;
I have no will to wander forth of doors,
Yet something leads me forth.\(^0\)

This minor, foreboding dream was also fulfilled when the poet was abused by the mob because they confused him with Cinna the conspirator who had helped slay Caesar.

The dream of Calpurnia is probably the most specific dream scene in Shakespeare and the one which bears the greatest import for this thesis. Overwhelming significance can again be attached to a single sentence. This time Caesar vocalizes it. He has been describing Calpurnia's dream about a fountain spouting blood and Romans coming to bathe their hands in it, when he goes on to say:

And these does she apply for warnings, and portents, and evils imminent.\(^1\)

Nowhere in all the Shakespeare canon can a better summary be found of Shakespeare's view of dreams. Dreams have an objective reality for Shakespeare, and whether one believes or

\(^0\)Ibid., III, iii, 1-4.
\(^1\)Ibid., II, ii, 80-81.
disbelieves them, they impinge upon the natural, logical world in a supra-natural, supra-logical way. E. E. Stoll makes the enlightening comment that "... dreams are a state in which the soul is out of the body, roaming about, collecting information, communicating or being communicated with; and the question of subjectivity is here simply not in point." Shakespeare never thinks of questioning the validity of dreams or their prophetic qualities. He seems to intimate that this is an article of faith. The only thing that he questions is man's ability to fathom dreams and their prophetic significance. Hector, Hastings, and Caesar failed to learn from their dreams because of perversity or pride. The choice was not quite so clear for the "fated" characters, Romeo, Humphrey, and Clarence, but there was still a measure of free choice and they chose, because of thoughtlessness or weakness, to ignore their prophetic dreams. All of them, as a result, except Stanley, came to destruction.

There is yet another mode of dreaming similar enough to be discussed in this chapter but divergent enough to deserve a separate classification. These are the dreams in which evil spirits or ghosts of the dead return to haunt guilty people. These dreams are not so much media of prophecy as media of retribution for past evil. Any student of

\[ h^2 \text{Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, footnote, p. 218.} \]
Shakespeare will immediately recall the dreams of Richard III and Macbeth as instances of this mode of dream.

Richard III, as this thesis discussed earlier, was a supreme villain who slew anyone who obstructed his aspirations to the throne. Toward the end of the play the ghosts of all these murdered victims returned to haunt him. E. K. Chambers feels that this retaliation or revenge motive is so strong in Richard III that it resembles a Medieval Nemesis play.\(^3\)

A reader is forced to admit that Richard's villainy is so despicable and the revenge theme so pervasive in the play that one is actually filled with glee when Richmond announces the villain's death:

> The day is ours, the bloody dog is dead.\(^4\)

This revenge instinct on the part of readers sometimes, unfortunately, eclipses the powerful dream scene that Shakespeare incorporates in the fifth act. The ghosts of Prince Edward, Henry VI, Clarence, Rivers, Gray, Vaughan, Hastings, two young Princes, Lady Anne, and Buckingham come sequentially onto the stage of his mind during a dream to torment him. After they vanish, Richard starts out of his dream and cries out:

> Give me another horse: bind up my wounds.  
> Have mercy, Jesu--Soft! I did but dream.  
> O coward conscience, how dost thou afflict me!

\(^3\)Chambers, p. 13.  
\(^4\)Richard III, V, v, 2.
My conscience hath a thousand several tongues,
And every tongue brings in a several tale.
And every tale condemns me for a villain.\(^{45}\)

These very same ghosts appear simultaneously to Richmond but bring courage and blessing to him rather than guilt and torment. The ghost of Buckingham, for example, the last ghost to appear in the dream, says to Richmond:

But cheer thy heart, and be thou not dismay'd:
God and good angels fight on Richmond's side;
And Richard falls in height of all his pride.\(^{46}\)

The intensity of agony that this dream brought Richard is revealed in a brief dialogue with Ratcliff immediately prior to the battle in which Richard was killed by Richmond.

Richard begins by saying:

\begin{verbatim}
K. Rich.  O Ratcliff, I have dream'd a fearful dream:
What thinkest thou, will our friends prove all true?
Rat.  No doubt, my Lord.
K. Rich.  O Ratcliff, I fear, I fear,--
Rat.  Nay, good my Lord, be not afraid of shadows.
K. Rich.  By the apostle Paul, shadows to-night
Have struck more terror to the soul of Richard
Than can the substance of ten thousand soldiers
Armed in proof, and led by shallow Richmond.\(^{47}\)
\end{verbatim}

The terrors of the soul that Richard felt in the dream were intensified in the battle itself. Richard reached the point where he would have given up his kingdom for a horse. This, of course, was a direct fulfillment of that part of his dream when he cried out: "Give me another horse . . . ." Here the

\begin{footnotes}
\footnote{Ibid., V, i11, 177-195.}
\footnote{Ibid., V, i11, 17h-176.}
\footnote{Ibid., V, i11, 212-219.}
\end{footnotes}
reader sees an especially interesting case of anticipation, of what Clemen calls "subtle correspondences between earlier and later utterances or situations in the drama ... ."

Shakespeare was apparently pursuing the theme of revenge so doggedly in Richard III that it had a restrictive effect on the character of Richard. The more plausible the theme of revenge became, the more implausible Richard became. No man, for example, seriously determines "to prove a villain," unless he has completely lost self-respect. Every self-respecting man tries to justify his very basest actions and prejudices. Richard's extreme villainy has led Hazelton-Spencer to conclude: "In substance, then, Richard the Third is chronicle history; in form it is tragedy; but in tone it is hardly more than melodrama. The hero is not merely not a good man, he is not a good hero." In substance, then, Richard the Third is chronicle history; in form it is tragedy; but in tone it is hardly more than melodrama. The hero is not merely not a good man, he is not a good hero."

One is not surprised, therefore, that Shakespeare uses a dream to bring retribution to this abject villain. When any man becomes so insensitive to the laws of God and the needs of men, only heavenly intervention will even dent the hard shell of his egocentricity. E. E. Stoll says that it was inevitable by Elizabethan standards that these ghosts appear to torment Richard in a dream. It was a logical

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18 Clemen, p. 25.


50 Stoll, Shakespeare Studies, p. 218.
consequence of the belief that God controls all things. If earthly laws of retribution cannot curtail consummate villainy, heavenly retribution must vicariously accomplish it. Shakespeare, perhaps, gets closer to an inverted form of the ancient deus ex machina theory of divine intervention in Richard III than in any other dream scene in his entire canon.

The last play under consideration in which evil dreams assume an important role is Macbeth. The view of dreams in Macbeth is that they plunge "the murderer back into the tragedy he foolishly believes to be a closed chapter . . . ." 51 Neither Macbeth nor Lady Macbeth slept soundly after their regicide because of what he described as 

. . . the affliction of these terrible dreams That shake us nightly. 52

Immediately before slaying King Duncan, Macbeth had soliloquized:

Now o'er the one half-world
Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
The curtain'd sleep. 53

Immediately after slaying the king he expressed the same concern about retributive insomnia:

Wmethought I heard a voice cry "Sleep no more!
Macbeth does murder sleep," the innocent sleep,

52 Macbeth, III, ii, 18-19.
53 Ibid., II, i, 49-51.
Sleep that knits up the ravel'd sleave of care,
Macbeth shall sleep no more."

The bold, masculine Lady Macbeth, like Duchess Eleanor, rebuked her debilitated husband for his lack of courage. When he refused to take the daggers and smear the sleepy grooms with blood, she reproached him:

Infirm of purpose!
Give me the daggers: the sleeping and the dead Are but as pictures; 'tis the eye of childhood That fears a painted devil.

Yet even the proud, courageous Lady Macbeth could not escape the consequences of crime. Her self-styled immunity to guilt proved false, for she, even more than her husband, bowed under the weight of guilt.

Awake or dreaming she could think of nothing but that dreadful night of murder and the awful stain left upon her hand. The sight of her walking in her sleep and continuously rubbing her hands as if to wash them is a moving sight. More than this, the sound of her crying aloud in her sleep moves the reader to the deepest pathos possible:

Out, damned spot! out, I say!
A little later she confesses:

Here's the smell of the blood still: all the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this little hand.
Harold Goddard says very perceptively that not only the plot and characters of Macbeth, but even its very music, imagery, and atmosphere "unite in giving the impression of mighty and inscrutable forces behind human life." E. K. Chambers narrows and particularizes this analysis even more when he talks about sin and retribution in Macbeth:

"Temptation begets crime, and crime yet further crimes, and these again punishment sure and inexorable." The dreams of Macbeth and the sleepwalking of Lady Macbeth evince the laws of sin and retribution as they are brought to bear upon men in unscrutable ways. Here Shakespeare proves that life often defies analysis. Evil may come back to haunt men in lacerating dreams as well as in natural phenomena. In Macbeth, especially, Shakespeare adroitly bridges the gulf between the supernatural and the natural and shows very plausibly how the former impinges upon the latter.

Most of Shakespeare's dreams were connected with evil—either in a prophetic or retributive way. But even when the dreams were predominantly punitive, as in Richard III and Macbeth, they always had an adjunct prophetic element which indicated that even more tragic results were to ensue. The dreams of Macbeth, Lady Macbeth, and Richard III, for example, as terrifying as they were, were anticipatory of a greater evil to follow—gruesome death.

58 Goddard, p. 504.

59 Chambers, p. 237.
Shakespeare, with his typical supersensitivity to dramatic devices, apparently gave preponderance to dreams of evil for a purpose—they were more moving and suspenseful. Anticipation of evil is always more dynamic and emotive than anticipation of good. One might conclude, therefore, that Shakespeare reached his zenith in portraying prophetic dreams of evil. If the following chapter on dreams of impending good appears a shade anticlimactic, the reader must be reminded that dreams of good represent an integral part of Shakespeare's total view and are therefore helpful in rounding out the total theme as well as enhancing the more suspenseful dreams of evil.
CHAPTER IV

SHAKESPEARE'S DREAMS OF IMPENDING GOOD

Shakespeare made only limited use of dreams of impending good, and even when he did use them, they were often nullified by the subsequent action of the play. Duchess Eleanor in II Henry VI, for example, dreamed of becoming queen but was banished for black magic instead. Romeo dreamed of being dead and of being revived by the kiss of Juliet; as the play actually developed, however, both he and Juliet perished, he by poison, she by stabbing herself. Both of these dream scenes were considered in the previous chapter because the beneficent results prophesied in the dreams did not come about. The dreams of good were countermanded by the antithetic dreams of evil in both II Henry VI and Romeo and Juliet.

In Cymbeline, however, there are dreams of impending good that are actualized. The whole discussion of dreams of good seems to be inextricably bound up with the problem of correct or incorrect interpretation, much more palpably than the dreams of impending evil. The dream of the soothsayer in Cymbeline is a good case in point. Lucius, the Roman general, asks the soothsayer on the eve of battle if he has had any dreams regarding the outcome of the battle. The soothsayer answers:
Last night the very gods show’d me a vision—
I fast and pray’d for their intelligence—thus:
I saw Jove’s bird, the Roman eagle, wing’d
From the spongy south to this part of the west,
There vanish’d in the sunbeams: which portends—
Success to the Roman host.1

The dream sounded simple enough—the Roman eagle winged to
the west and vanished in the sunbeams. The burden of
interpretation, however, lay on the soothsayer to determine
whether this dream prophesied success or defeat for the
Roman army. He decided that it portended success, but he
added the interesting reservation, "Unless my sins abuse
my divination."

Harold Goddard feels that Shakespeare inserted this
intriguing comment because the British victory proved that
the soothsayer’s sins did abuse his divination. Goddard
satirically describes the soothsayer as a "diplomatist and
not a diviner, a gross licker of the royal boots."2 In
broader terms, one might justifiably conclude that Shake-
speare associated valid dream interpretation with the
interpreter’s morality. Here, as in II Henry VI, sin is
capable of benumbing a person’s thought processes and of
leading him to extremities of absurdity in dream
interpretation. Righteousness, on the other hand, seems to
be a prerequisite first for having authentic dreams and then
for having a relatively sound understanding of them, as in
the case of Andromache, Calpurnia, and Humphrey.

1Cymbeline, IV, ii, 346-352. 2Goddard, p. 644.
As the play progressed, the Roman army was utterly routed by the British forces. Posthumus gave this description of the battle:

Then began

A stop i' the chaser, a retire, anon
A rout, confusion thick; forthwith they fly
Chickens, the way which they stoop'd eagles; slaves,
The strides they victors made: and now our cowards,
Like fragments in hard voyages, became
The life o' the need: having found the back-door open
Of the unguarded hearts, heavens, how they wound!
Some slain before; some dying; some their friends
O'er-borne i' the former wave: ten, chased by one,
Are now each one the slaughter-man of twenty: 3

The tide had reversed. The Roman eagles fled like chickens; the British soldiers, although fighting against the great odds of one to twenty, triumphed and routed the Romans. In the final scene the soothsayer repudiated his former interpretation and gave this one in its place to coincide with the actual events:

The vision
Which I made known to Lucius, ere the stroke
Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant
Is full accomplish'd; for the Roman eagle,
From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
Lessen'd herself, and in the beams o' the sun
So vanish'd: which foreshow'd our princely eagle,
The imperial Caesar, should again unite
His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
Which shines here in the west. 4

The fulfillment of the dream was good for the English and was turned to good for the Romans through mutual capitulation and treaty. Caesar was still the imperial Roman emperor;

3Cymbeline, v, iii, 39-49.
4Ibid., v, iv, 467-476.
Cymbeline was still the sun that shone in the west, but he continued to pay tribute to Rome. The dream, although originally misinterpreted by the soothsayer in predicting a Roman victory, was eventually fulfilled to the advantage of both Romans and British.

The dream of Posthumus is the other one in Cymbeline that prophesies good. The fortunes of this young man had plummeted to their lowest possible level. Assuming that his sweet wife Imogen was dead because of his folly, he lay in prison, longing for death. While in this despairing state, his father, mother, and two brothers who had been slain in war appeared to him in a dream and in a sequence of speeches began to reproach and extol Posthumus and to petition Jupiter for divine aid. Sicilius Leonatus first reproached his son Posthumus for believing Iachimo:

Why did you suffer Iachimo,  
Slight thing of Italy,  
To taint his nobler heart and brain  
With needless jealousy;  
And to become the gage and scorn  
O' th' other's villany?  

Then his mother petitioned Jupiter:

Since, Jupiter, our son is good,  
Take off his miseries.  

Jupiter answered her petition in these words:

Be content;  
Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift:

5Ibid., V, iv, 63-68.  
6Ibid., V, iv, 85-86.
His comforts thrive, his trials well are spent.
Our Jovial star reign'd at his birth, and in
Our temple was he married. Rise, and fade.
He shall be lord of lady Imogen,
And happier much by his affliction made. 7

After the ghosts vanished, Posthumus awoke and found a book which was left during his dream. In it he read the following prophecy:

"When as a lion's whelp shall, to himself unknown, without seeking find, and be embraced by a piece of tender air; and when from a stately cedar shall be lopped branches, which, being dead many years, shall after revive, be jointed to the old stock and freshly grow; then shall Posthumus end his miseries, Britain be fortunate and flourish in peace and plenty." 9

Every prophetic detail of this long dream scene was fulfilled beneficently for the heroic characters in Cymbeline. After Iachimo's deception had been uncovered, Posthumus was again convinced of Imogen's purity. The "lion's whelp" mentioned in the prophetic book was interpreted thus by the soothsayer:

Thou, Leonatus, art the lion's whelp; 9

The "piece of tender air" was Imogen. The soothsayer describes this happy fulfillment of the dream in the following manner:

[To Cymbeline] The piece of tender air, thy virtuous daughter,
which we call "mollis aer;" and "mollis aer"

7 Ibid., V, iv, 102-108.
8 Ibid., V, iv, 138-145.
9 Ibid., V, v, 443.
We term it "mulier:" which "mulier" I divine
Is this most constant wife; who, even now,
Answering the letter of the oracle,
Unknown to you, unsought, were clipp'd about
With this most tender air.10

The lopped-off cedar branches were Guiderius and Arviragus,
the two sons of Cymbeline, who were happily reunited with
their father.

There are some twenty-three points or phases
of revelation in the great fifth scene of the fifth
act. The scene, a model of dramatic suspense, is
managed firmly and naturally, each feature of the
whole held back until the time when it will
properly fill up its part in the canvass Shake-
speare is painting.11

Cymbeline, like Shakespeare's other late comedies, is a
masterpiece of plot, but poetry and characterization often
suffer as a result. Not only the many revelations, reunions,
and acquittals of the final scene tax our credulity, but even
the major dream scene itself is far from convincing.

E. K. Chambers regards it as a "spectacular theatrical
interpolation."12 The dream scenes in Cymbeline, important
as they are in any treatment of Shakespeare's dreams, are
far inferior to the dreams considered earlier in this thesis.
They lack both suspense and emotive power. They do not
seriously challenge the reader to consider supernatural
forces and laws but rather leave the impression of playful
burlesque. These dream scenes seem less real than actual

10Ibid., V, v, ll6-452.
11Craig, An Interpretation of Shakespeare, p. 326.
dreams and therefore evoke laughter rather than serious consideration of their prophetic elements.

Although Bottom's dream in *A Midsummer-Night's Dream* is an intentional comic device, which Shakespeare might well have used to ridicule dream skeptics, it also bears an element of prophecy and fulfillment. For humorous effect the fulfillment precedes the prophecy. Bottom's dream, although cited in Chapter II, bears repeating.

Bottom was already wearing an ass's head, placed on him by Puck the fairy; he had already spent a night of love with Titania, the queen of the fairies, who had been given a love potion by Puck. But now Bottom awoke and said:

I have had a most rare vision. I have had a dream, past the wit of man to say what dream it was: man is but an ass, if he go about to expound this dream. Methought I was--there is no man can tell what. Methought I was,--and methought I had,--but man is but a patched fool, if he will offer to say what methought I had. The eye of man hath not heard, the ear of man hath not seen, man's hand is not able to taste, his tongue to conceive, nor his heart to report, what my dream was.13

The prophecy and fulfillment of Bottom's dream came so close together, and the substance of the dream seemed so incredible to him that he could no longer distinguish between dreams and actuality. Shakespeare thereby gave substantiation to man's proclivity to confuse reality and dreams. But more important for this thesis, he showed a dream being fulfilled simultaneously with the dream.

13* A Midsummer-Night's Dream*, IV, 1, 208-217.
Here again, as in the preceding chapter, there is a subtopic similar enough to be considered with dreams of impending good but disparate enough to receive a separate classification. These are the dreams of direct revelation. Whereas all other dreams under consideration in this thesis demand interpretation by the dreamer, this group of dreams does not. These are the dreams that explicitly reveal future events and designate future actions to be taken by the dreamer. No interpretation is required. The two examples of this type of dream to be considered are Pericles and The Winter's Tale.

Pericles, like the other dramatic romances of Shakespeare, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest, is a very fast-moving play with incredible adventures, captivities, and rescues. Pericles, Prince of Tyre, was married to Thaisa, who died and was buried in a pitched casket at sea. Marina, Pericles' daughter who was born at sea, was raised by her father's friends, Cleon and Dionyza of Tarsus. Because of jealousy Dionyza plotted Marina's death and thought that it had been accomplished, with the result that, when Pericles arrived at Tarsus to take home his daughter, Dionyza led him to her tomb. This double-tragedy, loss of both wife and daughter, brought Pericles close to death. In fact, his grief was so great that he dressed himself in sackcloth, refused to talk, and ate only enough to sustain life. The beautiful and charming Marina,
who escaped death by being whisked away by pirates, was then brought on board Pericles' ship to help this languishing man recover some hope for life. An emotion-packed recognition scene followed, after which Pericles fell into a deep sleep. During the sleep the goddess Diana appeared to Pericles and said:

My temple stands in Ephesus: hie thee thither,
And do upon mine altar sacrifice.
There, when my maiden priests are met together,
Before the people all,
Reveal how thou at sea didst lose thy wife:
To mourn thy crosses, with thy daughter's, call
And give them repetition to the life.
Or perform my bidding, or thou livest in woe;
Do it, and happy: by my silver bowl
Awake, and tell thy dream.\[1\]

Pericles, of course, went obediently to Diana's temple at Ephesus, where he discovered that the high priestess was none other than his wife Thaisa. Pericles began the dialogue:


\[
\text{Per.} \quad \text{Hail, Diana! to perform thy just command,}
\]
\[
\text{I here confess myself the king of Tyre;}
\text{Who, frighted from my country, did wed}
\text{At Pentapolis the fair Thaisa.}
\text{At sea in childbed died she, but brought forth}
\text{A maid-child call'd Marina; who, O goddess,}
\text{Wears yet thy silver livery. She at Tarsus}
\text{Was nursed with Cleon; who at fourteen years}
\text{He sought to murder: but her better stars}
\text{Brought her to Mytilene; 'gainst whose shore}
\text{Riding, her fortunes brought the maid aboard us,}
\text{Where, by her own most clear remembrance, she}
\text{Made known herself my daughter.}
\]

\[
\text{Thaisa.} \quad \text{Voice and favour! You are, you are--O royal Pericles!} \quad \text{\[Faints.}\]
\]

\[
\text{Per.} \quad \text{The voice of dead Thaisa!}
\]

\[1\] Pericles, v, 1, 251-260.
Thai. That Thais am I, supposed dead
And drown'd.
Per. Immortal Diana\textsuperscript{15}

Although this dream scene, like that of Posthumus, approaches "theatrics for theatrics' sake," it helpfully reemphasizes one recurring theme and introduces one new idea. Immortal Diana is the goddess who appears to Pericles in the dream, which provides one more instance of the supernatural view of dreams. Every fulfilled dream under consideration thus far has been a manifestation of the supernatural rather than an effect of melancholy humours.

The other idea is new. The goddess Diana steps out from behind the veil of mystery and palpably manifests herself and her wisdom to Pericles. The vision is clear and unequivocal, with no interpretation required. Pericles has only one path to follow, and that is toward the temple of Diana at Ephesus. There, although Diana has not revealed the nature of his good fortune, he will be blessed with happiness.

The dream of Antigonus in \textit{The Winter's Tale} is very similar. Leontes, the insanely jealous king of Sicily, had ordered his innocent wife Hermione, whom he suspected of adultery, to be placed in prison and had commanded the child Perdita, whom he regarded as illegitimate, to be left on some remote desert shore. Antigonus, one of the Sicilian lords

\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., V, iii, 1-37.
who was given the responsibility of disposing of the child, describes the following dream that he had the night before he was to dispose of the little girl:

Come, poor babei
I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o' the dead
May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother
Appear'd to me last night, for ne'er was dream
So like a waking. To me comes a creature,
Sometimes her head on one side, some another;
I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
So fill'd and so becoming: in pure white robes,
Like very sanctity, she did approach
My cabin where I lay: thrice bow'd before me,
And gasping to begin some speech, her eyes
Became two spouts: the fury spent, anon
Did this break from her: "Good Antigonus,
Since fate, against thy better disposition,
Hath made thy person for the thrower-out
Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,
Places remote enough are in Bohemia,
There weep and leave it crying; and, for the babe
Is counted lost for ever, Perdita,
I prithee, call 't. For this ungentle business,
Put on thee by my lord, thou ne'er shalt see
Thy wife Paulina more." And so, with shrieks,
She melted into air. Affrighted much,
I did in time collect myself and thought
This was so and no slumber. Dreams are toys:
Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously,
I will be squared by this. I do believe
Hermione hath suffer'd death, and that
Apollo would, this being indeed the issue
Of King Polixenes, it should here be laid,
Either for life or death, upon the earth
Of its right father. Blossom, speed thee well.  

This dream, like that of Pericles, was one of explicit revelation. There was no need of interpretation; the intent of the message was unequivocally clear. The only choice Antigonus had was between compliance and refusal. Since he chose to comply, the results were happy for Perdita. She was

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16 The Winter's Tale, III, iii, 15-46.
raised as a shepherd's daughter and fell in love with Florizel, the Prince of Bohemia. A tragic note of prophecy incorporated in the dream also found fulfillment in the case of Antigonus. Hermione had prophesied in the dream that, in punishment for disposing of the child, Antigonus would never again see his wife Paulina. This aspect of the dream was fulfilled when he was killed by a bear in the latter part of the same scene.

This dream of Antigonus, the last to be considered in this thesis, is especially significant on several counts: it induced Antigonus to do something different from what he had intended to do--leave the child on the Bohemian shore. It also discussed the credibility or incredibility of "spirits o' the dead" returning in dreams; this topic evoked the familiar Catholic-Protestant debate on dreams, which was discussed in Chapter II of this thesis.

Shakespeare's dreams of good--either prophetic or revelatory--are not nearly so powerful as his dreams of evil, but in the interest of completeness they are a vital part of this thesis.

\[17\text{Rogers, Ghosts, p. 107.}\]
A study of Shakespeare's prophetic use of dreams reveals one facet of his multiform dramatic genius. He uses dreams, like other anticipatory devices, to prophesy the future, but he always reserves the right to nullify the prophetic element by discrediting the character of the dreamer, as in the case of Duchess Eleanor, or by insinuating that the dreamer is in a temporary state of irrationality, as in the case of Romeo. Yet the prophetic element is so strong that even the predominantly punitive dreams in Macbeth and Richard III bear a prophetic element. Although the Macbeths and Richard are already suffering terrors of the soul in their dreams for their inhumane murders, the future holds still grimmer prospects. Their deaths will be even more terrifying than the dreams.

As overwhelming as the prophetic element is in Shakespeare's dream scenes, it is surprising that more study has not been devoted to the subject in books and periodicals. Whenever it is treated, it is generally within the larger category of supernaturalism or as an editorial comment on one of Shakespeare's plays.
It is a truism among all Shakespeare critics and scholars considered in this thesis that Shakespeare's dreams are supernatural manifestations rather than effects of excessive melancholy. This thesis attempts to show, in spite of several skeptical speeches to the contrary, that in the dream scenes, as Shakespeare created them, supernatural causation is the only force adequate to explain the prophetic element integral in the various dreams. The following one-sentence comments, all cited in the body of this thesis, provide irrefutable evidence to support this thesis:

Romeo. . . . while they do dream things true.

Andromache. My dreams will, sure, prove ominous to the day.

Priam. Come, Hector, come, go back; Thy wife hath dream'd; thy mother hath had visions; Cassandra doth foresee; and I myself Am like a prophet suddenly enrapt To tell thee that this day is ominous:

Achilles. It is decreed Hector the great must die.

Humphrey. This was my dream; what it doth bode, God knows.

Caesar. And these does she apply for warnings, and portents, And evils imminent.

Dreams have an objective reality for Shakespeare; he never thinks of questioning their validity or their prophetic qualities. The thing that he does question is man's ability to fathom dreams and their prophetic significance. The dreams
themselves, which come from the gods,\textsuperscript{1} impinge upon the natural world in such a way that the gulf between the supernatural and natural is traversed. Thus man dreams things that he cannot deduce by rational thought. Shakespeare seems to be saying in effect: If only man would have the insight to let himself be instructed by his dreams! Hector, Hastings, and Caesar were too proud and perverse to pay heed to dreams; Romeo, Humphrey, and Clarence showed some concern for their ominous dreams but not enough concern to reverse their present attitudes or course of action. Dreams in Shakespeare offered supra-natural, supra-logical wisdom to men; the men, however, in undaunted self-confidence and unrealistic self-sufficiency, chose not to learn.

In the Elizabethan age there were dipolar views among the supernaturalists regarding the nature of dreams. The Catholics insisted that the supernatural beings in dreams were spirits of the dead released temporarily from purgatory. The Protestants maintained that these supernatural beings could not be spirits of the dead but had to be the feignings of the devil and evil angels or God and good angels. In Richard III Shakespeare seems to give credence to both views without endorsing or explicitly identifying either view. Ghosts of the dead, of Prince Edward, Henry VI, Clarence, Hastings, two young Princes, Lady Anne, for instance, appear

\textsuperscript{1}Goddard, p. 419.
to Richard and Richmond in the dream; yet no mention is made of their habitat, whether purgatory, hell, or heaven. In the very same dream the ghost of Buckingham says to Richmond:

But cheer thy heart, and be thou not dismay’d: God and good angels fight on Richmond’s side;  

Obviously Shakespeare was well acquainted with both Catholic and Protestant views of dreams, but the very fact that he could utilize both views in the same dream scene negates any possibility of partisanship. He apparently saw a shade of probability in both views, for his dreams manifested both spirits of the dead and angels.

The speech of Antigonus in The Winter’s Tale seems to indicate that Shakespeare was disinclined to believe the "spirits of the dead" theory but that he allowed for its possibility anyway. As unbelievable as it may have been for the ghost of a dead person to return in a dream, the ghost of "dead" Hermione actually appears to Antigonus in a dream. Antigonus says:

I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o’ the dead May walk again: if such thing be, thy mother Appear’d to me last night, for ne’er was dream So like a waking.  

Shakespeare does not get involved in the Catholic-Protestant polemic, even though he does express both views in his plays. He rather upholds supernaturalism as a whole

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2Richard III, V, iii, 174-175.
3The Winter’s Tale, III, iii, 16-19.
against skepticism. In all plays cited in this thesis, Troilus and Cressida, Romeo and Juliet, II Henry VI, Richard III, Julius Caesar, Macbeth, Cymbeline, A Midsummer Night's Dream, Pericles, and The Winter's Tale, the prophetic dream theory is validated and the supernatural explanation is upheld.

There can be little doubt that Shakespeare read King James' Daemonologie and Reginald Scot's Discoverie of Witchcraft. Scot, understandably, seemed to have exerted a much greater influence on Shakespeare than King James. The latter's work was probably too occultic and implausible for Shakespeare to have been influenced by it to any degree; it may have been valuable, however, in a negative way--helping Shakespeare to steer away from the grotesque superstitions of the day. Strong resemblances can be seen, however, between Shakespeare and Reginald Scot in what appears to be a half-supernatural, half-skeptical view of dreams. One exception is the disagreement over dream interpretation. Scot felt it was futile and presumptuous; Shakespeare considered it necessary and challenging. But even here there may be partial unity of spirit, for Scot was writing more against the abuses of dream interpretation than the actual use of it.

It is a moot question whether Scot was a skeptic at all. He seemed very skeptical about the foolish dream superstitions of his day, but he simultaneously showed deep reverence for supernaturalism. His belief in divine, physical, and
casual dreams evinces this. Scot was probably looking for a logical criterion, as Shakespeare seemed to do several decades later, whereby a person can distinguish an authentically prophetic dream from a deceptive and misleading one. Neither writer found the solution. This, of course, is much more evident in the factual, logical prose of Scot than it is in the figurative, polished poetry of Shakespeare. This is not to mention the fact that Shakespeare had a unique, imaginative genius that critics have tried unsuccessfully for four centuries to decipher.

Shakespeare seemed to hold the opinion that man's interpretation of dreams always remains partial and defective; God alone holds their secrets, and men seldom comprehend their meaning. Stanley is the only character of all those considered in this thesis who had the good fortune to understand his dream. Shakespeare seemed to indicate, however, especially in the cases of Duke Humphrey and Andromache, that the righteous have a stronger propensity for authentic dreams and valid dream interpretation than the unrighteous. The latter, as in the situation of Duchess Eleanor, generally have dreams that flatter them in their folly. Here, especially, lies a strong resemblance between Shakespeare and Scot. They both avowed divine activity and intervention in dreams, but neither one chanced to offer a suggestion as to how one recognizes divine dreams or ascertains God's interpretation.
Two of Shakespeare's characters give voice to these ideas. Humphrey describes the inscrutability of dreams when he says, "This was my dream; what it doth bode God knows." The soothsayer affirms the numbing effect of immorality upon one's ability to interpret dreams correctly when he says, "Unless my sins abuse my divination." It therefore seems that Shakespeare associated valid dream interpretation with the dreamer's moral life.

Through all of Shakespeare's dream scenes he maintains an almost unbelievable integrity of judgment by rescuing supernaturalism from superstition and occultism. L. W. Rogers, in his book The Ghosts in Shakespeare, unintentionally shows what pitfalls Shakespeare has artfully sidestepped in his treatment of supernatural dreams. Rogers uses Shakespeare's dreams to document his personal belief in occultism. He consequently talks about "astral experiences," "help from the invisibles," "premonitory dreams"\(^4\) in relation to Shakespeare's dream scenes, but in so doing, goes very much farther than Shakespeare himself would have gone.

John Brand's Popular Antiquities, in a similar way, shows to what ludicrous limits dream superstition had gone in the Elizabethan age. Shakespeare, with an almost uncanny sense of propriety and balance, was able to portray

\(^4\)Rogers, Ghosts, passim.
supernaturalism without letting it deteriorate into those incredible Elizabethan superstitions, to which the modern reader is so very un receptive. Yet he also made occasional use of bits of superstition, but when he did, he subtly weaved them into the pattern of his plot. These words of Shylock, for example, are actually a verbal formulation of a crude superstition:

Jessica, my girl,  
Look to my house. I am right loath to go:  
There is some ill a-brewing towards my rest,  
For I did dream of money-bags to-night.5

Yet the superstition seems to escape the reader since he is so fascinated by Shylock's greed, miserliness, and antipathy toward the Christians Bassanio and Antonio. This bit of superstition is thereby lost in the plot.

On another occasion Shakespeare used the word "superstitiously" rather than citing an example of it. Antigonus said in The Winter's Tale:

Dreams are toys:  
Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously,  
I will be squared by this.6

This is the one time that Shakespeare seems to use the word "superstitiously" interchangeably with the word "supernaturally." Yet he uses the word so subtly in this captivating dream scene that the reader either misses it altogether or gives it an elevated meaning. The reader's

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5The Merchant of Venice, II, v, 15-18.  
6The Winter's Tale, III, iii, 39-41.
thoughts are fixed on the beautiful Hermione, the prospect of the child Perdita's death, and the compulsion laid on Antigonus to believe this vision even though he was disinclined to do so. The vision strikes the reader as reality, but Antigonus' skepticism seems unreal. The word "superstitiously," as a result, simply serves as the character description of an incredulous man.

There is just a shade of difference separating the supernatural from the superstitious. Supernaturalism denotes man's relationship to a higher being, God, demigod, spirit, or infernal being. Superstition denotes the beliefs and conceptions that man, when he is unable to contemplate any being higher than himself, develops out of unreasoning fear of the unknown or mysterious. Supernaturalism denotes faith that rises higher than reason; superstition is ignorance and irrationality in the place of reason.

Shakespeare never allowed his supernatural view of dreams to degrade itself into superstition, and even when he used a popular superstition, he first put it through the purifying fires of his imagination so that it was transformed into a credible event or character trait.

Thus Shakespeare depicted supernatural rather than superstitious dreams. To paraphrase Harold Goddard, Shakespeare's dreams come from a fountain of wisdom beyond time, from as far below the surface of the earth as the tomb was in which Romeo and Juliet perished. They cannot be

7Goddard, p. 123.
psychologically analyzed, for they come from a source of wisdom above man that he would not otherwise receive. Tragedies and joys are prophesied; future courses of action are revealed. A direct line of supra-natural, supra-logical communication is thus kept open between the gods and men.

Dreams also serve as a supernatural instrument of retribution. When earthly restrictions and censures are not strong enough to check abject villainy such as that of Richard III or the Macbeths, heavenly intervention becomes necessary. Thus these three despicable characters suffered extreme torments of soul through dreams. Shakespeare thereby demonstrates a finite-infinite relationship that transcends all natural, mechanical explanation. He insinuates that dreams are heavenly enforcers of the laws of retribution whenever man contemptuously disregards the laws of morality.

Every reader of Shakespeare has a direct point of contact with Shakespeare's prophetic or retributive dreams, for every man at some time in his life has had somewhat similar dreams--dreams that seem to forebode evil or anticipate good, dreams of enlightenment or punitive guilt. A whole new field of dream psychology has developed since Freud, but even in modern times the credulous sometimes attach supernatural significance to their dreams. All men, skeptical or credulous, occasionally have dreams that make them think seriously of the possible prophetic element. Hence Shakespeare's dream scenes will undoubtedly hold a fascination also for future ages.
Another source of pleasure in Shakespeare's dreams inheres in the feeling that the reader or viewer has absolute prescience of the future while the characters in the play remain in ignorance. This, of course, is one of the basic appeals of drama, but it is enhanced considerably by prophetic dream scenes that continuously drop unnoticed hints. The reader's or viewer's feeling of superiority seems to increase in inverse ratio to the characters' inability to comprehend repeated anticipatory hints.

Shakespeare's prophetic use of dreams may be only one of many anticipatory devices, but it is an intriguing one that shows another facet of a creative imagination that has caused scholars, critics, and novices alike to observe with wonderment.
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