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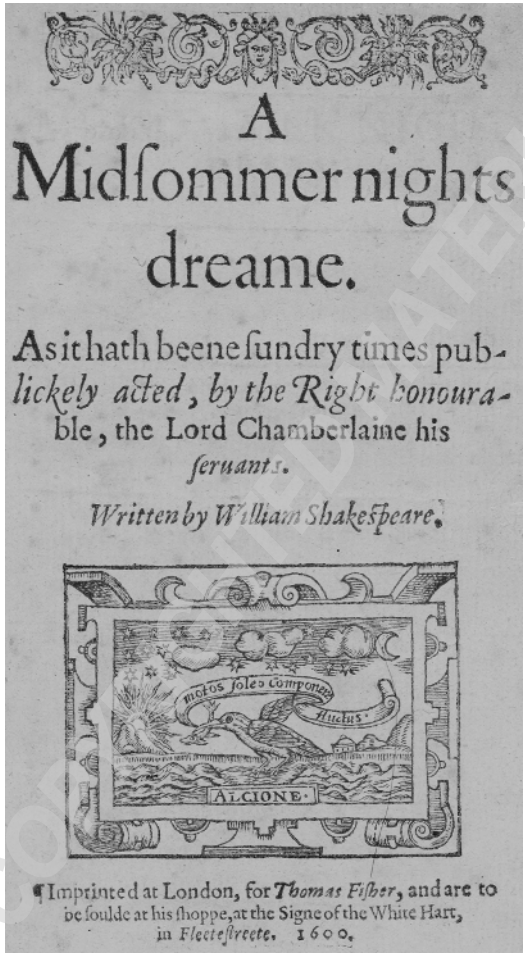
Fiction as Dream


A
Midſommer nights
dreame.

As it hath beene ſundry times pub-
lickely acted, by the Right honoura-
ble, the Lord Chamberlaine his
ſeruants.

Written by William Shakeſpeare.

Imprinted at London, for Thomas Fiſher, and are to
be ſoulde at his ſhoppe, at the Signe of the White Hart,
in Flecteſtreete. 1600.

Figure 1.1 Frontispiece of the 1600 edition of *A midsummer night's dream*. Source: The Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction, First Edition. K. Oatley.

Fiction as Dream: Models, World-Building, Simulation

Shakespeare and dream

"Dream" was an important word for William Shakespeare. In his earliest plays he used it with its most common meaning, of a sequence of actions, visual scenes, and emotions that we imagine during sleep and that we sometimes remember when we awake, as well as with its second most common meaning of a waking fantasy (day-dream) of a wishful kind. Two or three years into his playwriting career, he started to use it in a subtly new way, to mean an alternative view of the world, with some aspects like those of the ordinary world, but with others unlike.[1] In the dream view, things look different from usual.

In or about December 1594, something changed for Shakespeare.[2] What changed was his conception of fiction. He started to believe, I think, that fiction should contain both visible human action and a view of what goes on beneath the surface. His plays moved beyond dramatizations of history as in the three *Henry VI* plays, beyond entertainments such as *The taming of the shrew.*[3] They came to include aspects of dreams. Just as two eyes, one beside the other, help us to see in three dimensions so, with our ordinary view of the world and an extra view (a dream view), Shakespeare allows us to see our world with another dimension. The plays that he first wrote when he had achieved his idea were *A midsummer night's dream* and *Romeo and Juliet.*

In *A midsummer night's dream* it is as if Shakespeare says: imagine a world a bit different from our own, a model world, in which, while we are asleep, some mischievous being might drip into our eyes the juice of "a little western flower" so that, when we awake, we fall in love with the person we first see. This is what happens to Titania, Queen of the Fairies. Puck drips the juice into her eyes. When she wakes, she sees Bottom the weaver, who – in the dream world – has been turned into an ass, and has been singing.

Titania: I pray thee, gentle mortal, sing again:
Mine ear is much enamour'd of thy note;
So is mine eye enthralled to thy shape;
And thy fair virtue's force perforce doth move me
On the first view to say, to swear, I love thee (1, 3, 959)

Could it be that, rather than considering what kind of person we could commit ourselves to, we first love and then discover in ourselves the words and thoughts and actions that derive from our love?[4]

A midsummer night's dream helped Shakespeare, I think, to articulate his idea of theater as model-of-the-world. Although perhaps not as obviously, *Romeo and Juliet,* which was written at about the same time, comes from the same idea. It starts with a Prologue, which begins like this.

> Two households, both alike in dignity,
> In fair Verona, where we lay our scene,
> From ancient grudge break to new mutiny,
> Where civil blood makes civil hands unclean.
> From forth the fatal loins of these two foes
> A pair of star-cross'd lovers take their life;
> Whose misadventured piteous overthrows
> Do with their death bury their parents' strife (Prologue, 1).

A model is an artificial thing.[5] So Shakespeare doesn't start *Romeo and Juliet* with anything you might see in ordinary life. He starts it with someone who is clearly an actor coming on to the stage and addressing the audience in a sonnet. The sonnet form has 14 lines, each having ten syllables with the emphasis on the second syllable of each pair. So this sonnet reads: "Two **house**-holds **both** a-**like** . . ." This makes for a certain attention-attracting difference, because if you pronounce the verse in this iambic way, and make sure also to emphasize slightly the rhymes at the end of each line, it sounds different from colloquial English.[6] The iambic meter seems almost to echo the human heart-beat: te-tum, te-tum, te-tum.

The sonnet at the beginning of *Romeo and Juliet* tells us the play's theme. As with *A midsummer night's dream,* the play is about the effects of an emotion, once again love. In the what-if world of this play, the threat by the civil authority of punishing public fighting by death is futile. The only thing that will temper hatred is love: in this case the love between the children of the two households, and the love of the parents for their children. This, says the actor who recites the prologue-sonnet, "Is now the two-hour's traffic of our stage." Once a different view than usual has been suggested by means of the model world of what-if, each of us in the audience can wonder: "What do we think?"

Shakespeare's idea of dream had at its center the idea of model, or imagination, that could be compared with the visible aspects of the world.

It was extended to include two features that he continued to develop throughout his writing.

One of these features was the relation of surface actions to that which is within. Shakespeare uses a range of words that include: "shadow," "action," "show," "form," and "play," to indicate outwardly visible behavior. (Shadow meant what it does today, as well as reflection as in a mirror.)[7] To indicate what is deeper and externally invisible in a person, Shakespeare uses another range of words that include: "substance," "heart," "mettle," and "that within." It's not that outer behavior is deceptive as compared with that within which is real. That would be banal. Shakespeare typically depicts relations between shadow and substance. This idea of shadow and substance – of actions that are easily visible accompanied by glimpses of what goes on beneath the surface – enables us to compare actions and their meanings.

The second further feature in Shakespeare's idea of dream is recognition. One form it takes is of a character thinking someone to be whom he or she seems to be on the surface, and then finding this person to be someone else. It's an extension of the idea of shadow and substance, but with emphasis coming to fall on implications of the recognition. It is the story-outcome of the idea that some aspects of others (and ourselves) are hidden.

Rather than offering quotations that can be tantalizingly insufficient, let me offer a whole piece by Shakespeare that is quite brief. With it we shall be able to see, I hope, how the idea of dream (with its idea of model-in-the imagination, and its features of substance-and-shadow and of recognition) can work together. This piece is Shakespeare's Sonnet 27, which is as follows.

Sonnet 27: A story in sonnet form

Weary with toil I haste me to my bed,
The dear repose for limbs with travel tired;
But then begins a journey in my head
To work my mind when body's work's expired;
For then my thoughts, from far where I abide,
Intend a zealous pilgrimage to thee,
And keep my drooping eyelids open wide
Looking on darkness which the blind do see:
Save that my soul's imaginary sight
Presents thy shadow to my sightless view,
Which like a jewel hung in ghastly night

Makes black night beauteous and her old face new.
Lo! thus by day my limbs, by night my mind,
For thee, and for myself, no quietness find.

The poet is away. Tired with his work and his travel, he goes to bed. In line 3, there is a metaphor, "journey in my head." Just as on a journey one visits a series of places so, in one's mind, one visits a series of thoughts. At the same time, the whole sonnet is a model, a metaphor in the large, and a wide-awake dream, in which the poet thinks of his loved one with urgent feelings.

Although it has only 14 lines, a sonnet is often a story. Or one can think of it as a compression of a story into its turning point. The sonnet form includes an expectation that there will be at least one such turning point. There is also the expectation that the sonnet will reach a conclusion.[8]

In the sonnet form, the first turning point is expected between lines 8 and 9. This kind of change derives from the earliest kind of sonnet, which is called Petrarchan, after the Italian poet Petrarch. In this form, the first eight lines comprise what is known as the octave. It's followed at line 9 by the last six lines or sestet – in a way that is like a change of key in music – in which the skilled poet takes us through an important juncture in the story, or enables us to see first part of the poem in a different way. In the slightly different, Elizabethan, form of the sonnet, the change occurs at line 13. In his Sonnet 27, Shakespeare arranges two changes: at line 9 and at line 13.

The octave of Sonnet 27 is a description, as if in a letter: "Weary with toil I haste me to my bed . . ." Once a reader has worked out that the poet is away from home and that the poem is addressed to the poet's beloved, the meaning seems clear. The poet goes to bed tired, wanting to sleep and, as he lies in bed, he thinks of his loved one, far away. Perhaps the journey in his head retraces the physical journey away from his loved one. But as the reader starts to think about it, this idea doesn't quite make sense. If the poet were merely missing his beloved, there would be longing, perhaps memories of being together. There's nothing of the sort. So the reader has to think harder. The poet has already complained that his daytime work is wearying. Now, in bed, the act of thinking about his beloved is work (another metaphor). These are not fond thoughts of the loved one. The metaphor implies that these thoughts, too, are wearying.

Shakespeare chooses words carefully. He doesn't write "eager pilgrimage to thee." He writes "zealous pilgrimage to thee" with "zealous" perhaps having the word "jealous" hiding behind it.[9] We might also think that a connotation of "zealous" is "slightly crazy." Why is the poet lying with

"eyelids open wide," although they are "drooping?" He stares into the darkness, unable to see. "Looking on darkness which the blind do see." He's like a blind person, a person blinded by – what?

When line 9 is reached a change, or turning point, occurs to the last six lines, the sestet. It offers a different view:[10] "Save that my soul's imaginary sight." In other words, the poet says: "What has gone before is right, it's dark and I can't see, except that . . ." suddenly the poet can see his loved one – all too clearly – in his imagination. That's what's keeping him awake. In the poet's imaginary sight comes Shakespeare's use of "shadow" (meaning externally visible actions), with its implicit contrast with substance (meaning who the loved one really is).

The beloved is beautiful, and therefore "like a jewel." But what a juxtaposition: "hung in ghastly night." The poet lies in bed, and imagines what his beautiful beloved might be up to. It's ghastly! The poet imagines that his beloved is not lying quietly in bed, not asleep. The beloved is doing something else. What?

The poet tries to wrench his mind around, to counter this distressing idea. In the twelfth line he offers the poem's only positive thought of the loved one, who makes the "night beauteous," and makes ancient darkness new.

But the moment is fleeting, because now comes a further turning point. In the Elizabethan sonnet form the rhyming couplet of the last two lines sometimes provide a pithy summary of what has gone before. There is some of this here, with: "Lo! thus by day my limbs, by night my mind." But now we see the final couplet is not just a summary. It holds a shocking conclusion. "For thee, and for myself, no quietness find." Despite thinking of the beloved as a jewel that makes night beautiful and renews it, the poet can't reach quiet contentment with the night-time journey of his thoughts. Why? "For thee" is ambiguous. It can be joined to the previous line to make: "by night my mind, for thee," which would be a more-or-less simple summary of a mental journey. But the last line is stark. "For thee, and for myself, no quietness find." There is no quietness for the beloved, nor for the poet, nor between them.

We know – not just from this sonnet but from others that follow it in the sequence – that the poet fears his love is not fully reciprocated. The lack of quiet is because the beloved may perhaps be in bed, though not quietly asleep but with someone else. Or perhaps the beloved is out, being a jewel to another admirer. That is why the night in which the jewel hangs would be ghastly.

We can regard fiction as a description of people's actions and interactions. So, in this sonnet, Shakespeare offers the octave in terms of actions. At the same time the best fiction is, or includes, something like a dream-model, which enables us to see the substance beneath the surface. In this sonnet the sestet shows the poet, in the dream of his imagination, wondering what the loved one may be up to.

This is a poem about the actions of a journey and an accompanying model world of the imagination, a poem of shadow and substance, a poem of recognition of whom the beloved might be. In this miniature form, with an extraordinary density of thought, Shakespeare offers us a moving and recognizable dream of a world we can understand, of being in love but of being sleeplessly anxious about whether the love is recognized or reciprocated.

This is one possible meaning for the poet in his relationship with his beloved, and it's also one meaning for us, the readers of this sonnet-story. This is my suggestion. I wonder what you think.

Approach by the dream

In this book, I propose that Shakespeare's idea of dream (model with its aspects of shadow-and-substance and of recognition) allows us to understand important aspects of the psychology of fiction. I have presented Sonnet 27, because, in miniature it shows how this approach can work. In the rest of the book, I hope to show further aspects, how fiction enters the mind, how it prompts us towards emotions, how it affords insights into ourselves and others, how it is enjoyable, how it has been shown to have worthwhile effects on readers.

People often think the word "fiction" means untrue, but this is not true. The word derives from the Latin *fingere*, which means "to make." In the same way the word "poetry" comes from the Greek word *poesis,* which also means "to make." Fiction and poetry are constructed in the imagination, and are different from something discovered as in physics, or from something that happened as in the news. Fiction and poetry are not false; they are about what could happen.[11]

I take fiction to be theater, narrative poetry, novels, short stories, and fiction films. It's about selves, about intentions and the vicissitudes they meet, about the social world.[12] I take it, too, that fiction is based in narrative, which is a distinct mode of thought and feeling about us human beings.

Victorian views

Shakespeare's idea of fiction-as-dream is not the only one that circulates about the nature of fiction. It is not even the most popular. Indeed, I think, it is not widely known.

Let us look at how things stood in 1884, when Henry James published an article in *Longman's Magazine* called "The art of fiction." He put a theory that was very different from Shakespeare's. He said that a novel is "a direct impression of life." Robert Louis Stevenson disagreed. He was for something more like Shakespeare's view and, a few months after he read James's article, he published a reply in the same magazine. He called his reply "A humble remonstrance." His title makes one think that he was apologizing. Perhaps he needed to, because he (known mainly for his children's stories like *Treasure Island*) was right, and Henry James (one of the world's great novelists) was wrong. Despite this, James's essay has remained famous, and Stevenson's reply relatively obscure. It's by grasping Shakespeare's and Stevenson's idea that we can come closer to understanding the psychology of fiction.

A novel, says Stevenson, is not a direct impression of life. It's a work of art.

> Life is monstrous, infinite, illogical, abrupt and poignant; a work of art in comparison is neat, finite, self-contained, rational, flowing, and emasculate. Life imposes by brute energy, like inarticulate thunder; art catches the ear, among the far louder noises of experience, like an air artificially made by a discreet musician (p. 182).

Life, says Stevenson, includes huge forces "whose sun we cannot look upon, whose passions and diseases waste and slay us" (p. 181). Art is different.[13] It is abstract, like mathematics. Straight lines and circles do not exist in the physical world, but now they have been invented we cannot do without them. They are abstract. They exist in model worlds. But in the practical activities of engineering in which bridges are designed and cars are constructed, they are essential. Straightish tracks and serviceable wheels were, of course, invented before straight lines and circles. The purpose of lines and circles in mathematics is to allow us to understand the deeper properties, the essence of straightness and the way in which wheels take their being from circularity, to allow calculations that are essential in the design of technologies. Similarly, and perhaps for millions of years, everyone could understand certain aspects of other people's behavior. They saw that

sometimes individuals behaved with their own kind of consistency but that, at other times, something from outside them seemed to affect them, when they became fond of someone, or were angry. We now talk of character and emotion. The deepest developments of our ideas about character and emotion – abstract ideas – occur in fiction. Or, rather, the ideas are depicted in fiction so that we can develop them in ourselves and in our lives.

Why do we need models? Why don't we just observe what goes on in the real world, perhaps notice some regularities? A good deal of narrative fiction is of this kind. In the *Iliad,* Homer offers something like the following: this is how it was in the Trojan War, Achilles had an argument with Agamemnon, and then went into a sulk, because of it the Greeks were nearly defeated by the Trojans. Among the first plays Shakespeare wrote were histories. He implies something similar. If we had been there, we would have seen something like this. After he had his idea of theater-as-a-model-of-the world, Shakespeare offers something different. He says: could this be what goes on beneath the surface of things?

The idea of dream

From around 1594 onwards, Shakespeare moves towards making the more abstract aspect the center of what he writes. The something-beneath-the surface that he depicts is an underlying pattern of how people are and what they're up to. It's a reaching towards understandings of people's inner being. One can't always achieve these understandings from surface actions, but if you start to see the deeper kind of movement, glimpsed by means of models, you can start to understand better how things work.

Shakespeare did not invent the idea of theater-as-a-model-of-the-world, but when he saw its significance, it became strong for him. He may have been prompted towards it by Erasmus, whose influence on him was considerable. In Erasmus's most famous book, *Praise of Folly*, Folly, a woman, stands up and gives a speech in praise of herself, a very foolish thing to do. Folly is emotion. In her speech she explains how, although on the surface many serious people such as politicians, teachers, and the learned, present themselves as guided only by reason, really they often act from emotion, sometimes emotion that is rather self-interested, for instance the prideful urge to make themselves superior by being right in comparison to other people who are wrong, or the needy insistence on being the center of attention. Such emotions don't seem very creditable. People often think they are best kept beneath the surface. Folly says:

> It's confessed on all sides that the emotions are the province of folly. Indeed, this is the way we distinguish the wise man from the fool, that the one is governed by his reason, the other by his emotions . . . Yet these emotions not only serve as guides to those who press towards the gates of wisdom, they also act as spurs and incitements to the practice of every virtue (p. 29).

In part, Folly satirizes Erasmus's own scholarly pursuits. But Erasmus also writes his satire as a way of pursuing the deeper idea that people who recognize their own emotions, and understand them, enable themselves to avoid being puffed up with the self-importance of their learning, with the self-confirming logic of their opinion about how things ought to be. Such people have often been able to live lives of kindness or piety. In an echo of this, George Eliot wrote in *Middlemarch:* "Our good depends on the quality and breadth of our emotion" (p. 510).

In his reading of *Praise of folly,* Shakespeare may have seen the idea that something artificial – a satire – could be a pointer to what is real, beneath the surface.

Four years after his reply to Henry James, Robert Louis Stevenson was still thinking about the nature of fiction, and wrote an essay on dreams. In it he says this:

> The past is all of one texture – whether feigned or suffered – whether acted out in three dimensions, or only witnessed in that small theater of the brain which we keep brightly lighted all night long, after the jets are down, and darkness and sleep reign undisturbed in the remainder of the body (p. 189).

Stevenson went on to say that he had always been a dreamer, and that all his best ideas for stories came to him as dreams.[14] So rather than a direct impression, this was what literary art was, a kind of dream.

Not far into *Romeo and Juliet*, Shakespeare depicts Romeo as seeing, across a room, a girl about whom he knows nothing, Juliet. Romeo crosses the room and – rather forwardly, one might think – he touches her. Then he speaks. The lines Romeo and Juliet speak between them take the form of the play's second sonnet, this time using the sonnet form for its traditional purpose, to depict love. It begins like this.

> *Romeo:* If I profane with my unworthiest hand
> This holy shrine, the gentler sin is this:
> My lips, two blushing pilgrims, ready stand
> To smooth that rough touch with a tender kiss (I, 5, 719).

Romeo tells Juliet that he sees her as a statue of a saint, to which he can come as a pilgrim, to worship, and be allowed to touch, and to kiss.

As in *A midsummer night's dream,* here is the idea that an emotion works by prompting us towards a certain kind of relationship with a certain person. In Romeo's case, the emotion is adoration. Might model worlds enable us to see beneath the surface to how emotions work? And might not this idea allow us to understand how fiction works, how it really works?

Shakespeare often also lets us know something of the way in which he is thinking. In *A midsummer night's dream,* he has Theseus use the term "fantasies" (that is to say "dreams"), and then to say:

> The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
> Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
> And as imagination bodies forth
> The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
> Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
> A local habitation and a name (5, 1, 1843).

The idea of theater-as-a-model-of-the-world prompted the name of the playhouse of which Shakespeare was co-owner, The Globe. Its Latin motto was *Totus mundus agit histrionem,* which can be translated as "All the world's a stage" (*As you like it,* 2, 7, 1037).

These ideas – theater-as-a-model-of-the-world, with its features of shadow-and-substance and of recognition – continue throughout Shakespeare's career. They give structure, for instance to *Hamlet,* which was written around 1600 and performed at The Globe not long after it was built. Not only is the play itself a model but, perhaps by way of explaining to us how it works, Shakespeare embeds within it a play-within-the-play, the dramatic purpose of which is for Hamlet to show publicly for himself and for others, and for Claudius, what has been going on beneath the surface.[15]

The feature of shadow and substance is the key to the first extended speech of Hamlet, in which he replies to his mother who has asked him why he "seems" so sad, and why he continues so obdurately in mourning for his dead father. Hamlet replies that he knows not "seems." Wearing black, sighing, and weeping are mere outward forms. These he says are:

> . . . actions that a man can play;
> But I have that within which passeth show –
> These but the trappings and the suits of woe (1, 2, 279).

Figure 1.2 Shakespeare's company's theatre The Globe, from an engraving by Visscher. Source: British Library, London, UK/© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved/The Bridgeman Art Library.

Recognition pervades *Hamlet*. Hamlet comes to recognize who Claudius is, and then more movingly who his mother is, who his friends are, who he is. Most importantly, by means of the counterpoint between Hamlet's actions and his inwardness we in the audience come to recognize something of who we are, ourselves.

Mimesis

The idea of fiction as involving models started long before Shakespeare. The core idea is already present in the book that is seen, in the West, as the foundation of both the theory and psychology of imaginative literature: Aristotle's *Poetics.* The term around which Aristotle's book revolves is *mimesis:* the relation of a piece of literature to the world. Aristotle took up

the issue of *mimesis* from his teacher Plato, who discusses it extensively in *The Republic.* Nearly always, in English, the Greek *mimesis* is translated as imitation, copying, representation, and the like. This is the sense that Henry James had in mind in his essay "The art of fiction," with his term, "direct impression." This is the aspect of narrative that Homer employed to depict what happened in the Trojan War, and Shakespeare used to depict political events in his early history plays in the *Henry VI* series.

There is a whole category of representational art. Fiction can imitate, or represent, somewhat as a mirror can. Perhaps Hamlet had this idea in mind when he enjoined the travelling players who visited the court at Elsinore to "hold the mirror up to nature" (3, 3, 1896). Perhaps, at the same time, he was interested in holding up the mirror so that Claudius could see himself as others saw him.

More recently, of course, photographs and video recordings have become emblematic of accurate copying and representation of events. A writer of realist fiction, too, can offer correspondences of things, events, and people in the fictional world with things, events, and people in the real world, just as a scientist can study correspondences or absences of correspondence with predictions made from a theory and careful observations of the real world. And when we see a film adapted from one of Jane Austen's novels we may ask: "Did people really dress like that 200 years ago?"

There is nothing wrong with the idea that poetry or fiction can be representational or imitative – well, nothing very wrong with it. It's just that it's only half the issue, maybe less than half. As Stephen Halliwell has shown, the Greek word, *mimesis* also had a second family of meanings that are less widely discussed, and sometimes even ignored. We might imagine that it was this second set in which William Shakespeare and Robert Louis Stevenson were most interested. They were right to be so, because this second idea is more far-reaching. This second set of meanings – of *mimesis*-as-dream – has to do with world-making, with model-building, with imagination, with recognizing what goes on beneath the surface. As Halliwell puts it:

> Reduced to a schematic but nonetheless instructive dichotomy, these varieties of mimetic theory and attitude can be described as encapsulating a difference between a "world-reflecting" [conception] (for which the mirror has been a common though far from straightforward metaphorical emblem), and, on the other side, a "world simulating" or "world creating" conception of artistic representation (p. 22).

The book you are reading now, like many on the theory of literature, has Aristotle's idea of *mimesis* at its center. I concentrate on the "world-simulating" or "world-creating" aspect[16] because I think it needs to be considered first, and because I think it offers the deeper insights into the psychology of fiction.

The world-reflecting idea of art is that there is correspondence between elements of a work of art and elements of the ordinary world. To an extent this is true, so people in a play might correspond to people you know. But in *A midsummer night's dream,* there is no correspondence between the juice of the little western flower and any pharmacological agent of Shakespeare's time or ours. You will not read in the newspapers about anyone like Titania, Queen of the Fairies. Nor is there any possibility for any of us to be turned, suddenly, into an ass. The dream world does not depend on detailed correspondences between a thing in the model and a thing in the ordinary world. The second idea of *mimesis* – the idea of "world-simulating" or "world-creating" – works with larger structures. It depends more on coherence among its elements than on correspondences between specific elements of the model and elements of the ordinary world. It works because certain relationships among things in the model world correspond to certain relationships among things in the ordinary world (world-creating is perhaps not exactly the right term for this). It works because a certain relational structure is made salient in the model world so that we can see its correspondence to a relational structure of the real world. The relation between people when they are in love in the dream world points to a possible relation between people in love in the ordinary world.

Well, you may say, the idea of a theatrical play as a model is all very well, but in what way does the juice of a little western flower dropped into someone's eyes differ from cupid's arrow? One difference, I think, is that in Shakespeare's time, Cupid's arrow was already a cliché. The flower-juice and the idea of falling in love with whom you first see when you awake, in *A midsummer-night's dream,* makes the involuntariness of love surprising and striking all over again. It draws the attention. It makes the idea strange.[17]

In *Romeo and Juliet* Shakespeare continues to press unfamiliar ideas about emotions. It will have occurred to us that when we experience a strong emotion, we cannot stop ourselves. Shakespeare shows in *Romeo and Juliet* how not even an explicit command, on pain of death, by the ruler of Verona can enable the Capulets and Montagues and their retainers to stop hating each other. What Shakespeare makes of this is surprising and new. It remains still striking and new in psychotherapy. It is the suggestion that when one is in the grip of a strong emotion, it can be changed only by

another emotion.[18] The hatred that the two families bear each other is only changed by something stronger, the love that parents bear towards their children. This is a profound idea, a surprising idea, which emerges as we tunnel down to what lies beneath the surface of external action.

You might also say that if theater is a dream, does this mean that it is merely fantasy? The answer is no. We live, now, in a period when a great deal of narrative art is in the mode of realism. When we go to the movies, most dramas and comedies depict people whose actions (on the surface) are much as we might recognize them in the lives of ourselves and those we know. There is, in them, a strong aspect of *mimesis*-as-imitation. *Romeo and Juliet*, also, is explicitly a depiction of the world of two families in Verona, not unlike the realism of modern film dramas. By comparison, *A midsummer night's dream* is explicitly a fantasy. The issue is one of emphasis. Every true artistic expression, I think, is not just about the surface of things. It always has some aspect of the abstract. The issue is whether, by a change of perspective or by a making the familiar strange, by means of an artistically depicted world, we can see our everyday world in a deeper way.

In *The winter's tale,* Shakespeare replays ideas of love and death that he treated in *Romeo and Juliet,* but with a happy ending: a scene of recognition in which a statue (a work of art) of Hermione (for whom King Leontes has spent 16 years in repentance that he condemned her to death), turns out to be the real Hermione, alive.

Once Shakespeare has had his idea about dreams (or models) with their workings in shadow-and-substance, and their outcomes in recognition, he visits them again and again, not just repeating them, but exploring them each time further than before.[19] In *The tempest,* a play he wrote towards the end of his literary career, Shakespeare was still extending these ideas.

Prospero: . . . These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits, and
Are melted into air, into thin air:
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capp'd towers, the gorgeous palaces,
The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
As dreams are made on, and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep (4, 1, 1877).[20]

The idea of dream (model, shadow-and-substance, and recognition) that Shakespeare conceived is so good that it applies to fiction of every kind: poetry, plays, novels, short stories, films. Two hundred years after Shakespeare died, Samuel Taylor Coleridge reflected on the idea during a voyage to Malta. "Poetry" he wrote in his notebook is, "a rationalized Dream dealing . . . to manifold Forms our own Feelings" (p. 66).[21]

When Shakespeare had conceived his idea of drama as dream, he saw that he could create worlds on the stage which were interestingly different from the quotidian world, but which could parallel it in imagination. By transforming certain human matters, such as the emotion of love, into those of an imagined world that was somewhat unfamiliar, we the audience members are able to compare the dream world with the ordinary world. From such comparisons, we can focus on matters to which habit usually blinds us. Though some matters in the dream world, such as sonnets, fairies, and magic potions, are far from anything that occurs in the everyday world, other matters such as character and emotions pass readily through the membrane between the model world and the everyday world. As they pass, they undergo certain kinds of transformation of a kind that can afford us insight.

Language has many words for the imaginative function: dream, model, simulation, metaphor, simile, analogy, theory, allegory, fable, schema, game. All involve not just one-to-one correspondences, in the way indicated by the idea of copying and imitation, but whole imagined worlds.

Fiction and simulation

"Dream" is a good metaphor for fiction because most of us have experience of dreaming and know that dreams are somewhat apart from the ordinary world. We know, too, that they are constructed by ourselves. They are not direct impressions of the world, and they may be meaningful.

Shakespeare's principle of dream had forerunners in medieval times, when allegory was central to literature. Here is a medieval Latin verse that describes four aspects of a text:

Littera gesta docet;
Quid credas allegoria;
Moralia quid agas;
Quo tendas anagogia.

(The literal teaches what happened; The allegorical what to believe; The moral what to do; The anagogical where to go.)

Dante expounded this idea in his *Il convivio* (The banquet). In Dante's poetry, the love between a man and a woman is offered as an allegory of the love of God for his creation. By means of it we can understand a tiny bit of God's love for us his creatures from our own limited experience of human love in the day-to-day world.

Shakespeare's idea of dream was close to the medieval idea of allegory, which he would have known. But, whereas the medieval idea was typically used in the way Dante used it, to create a meditative system of religious and moral symbolism,[22] in his idea, Shakespeare turned towards explorations of shadow-and-substance, that lead to recognitions of others and oneself in this world.

If we want to talk about the dream idea in linguistic terms we might say "metaphor-in-the-large" or "extended metaphor." Or we might use a term that one sees often in literary theory: "imagination."

We can trace the idea from the world-making aspect of *mimesis,* through the medieval idea of allegory, to Shakespeare's idea of dream, to the present. For psychologists two suggestive metaphors for this function are "model" and "simulation." I have already used the idea of model, but simulation takes it further. Narrative stories are simulations that run not on computers but on minds. Simulation is a good metaphor in its sense of construction from parts. For complex matters we may know how each part works, but we may need something like a simulation to see how the parts fit together in combination.[23]

I know simulation is not such a good metaphor for people who are suspicious of computers. With apologies to these people, I am, however, going to use this metaphor in places because it enables us to see a continuity of concerns and intuitions from Aristotle, through Shakespeare, to modern psychology and brain research.

Often, we want to take both aspects of *mimesis* together, representational and world-creating. For this conjoined sense, we might need yet further metaphors. Or perhaps we might not do any better than Ingmar Bergman in his film, *Fanny and Alexander*, who has his character Oscar Ekdahl, manager of a theater company in a small town, give a speech at the company's Christmas party, to the inhabitants of the little world inside the playhouse walls. "Outside," he says, "is the big world, and sometimes the little world succeeds in reflecting the big one so that we can see it better."

I shall therefore use terms and phrases such as dream, fantasy, imagination, metaphor-in-the-large, allegory, simulation, and so on, appropriately to what I am saying.

With the idea of fiction as world-creating, and also world-reflecting, we can understand something of what happens psychologically when we engage with fiction as readers or audience members, and of what we are doing as writers and performers.

Fiction: one's own version

If we take on the idea of *mimesis* as world-creating alongside its meaning as world reflecting, our idea of what we do as readers and audience members can change. In this case, we don't just respond to fiction (as might be implied by the idea of reader response), or receive it (as might be implied by reception studies), or appreciate it (as in art appreciation), or seek its correct interpretation (as seems sometimes to be suggested by the New Critics). We create our own version of the piece of fiction, our own dream, our own enactment.[24] We run a simulation on our own minds. As partners with the writer, we create a version based on our own experience of how the world appears on the surface and of how we might understand its deeper properties.

Art does not generally drive people towards a particular conclusion. It enables thoughts and feelings around a shared object – the work of art – in a way that offers multiple possibilities of understanding.[25] Most of Shakespeare's plays put to the audience some circumstances, and ask what do *you* think?

An apt and elegant instantiation of the idea of literary simulation is by David Lodge who has offered twin pieces of writing: an academic one tending towards a conclusion, an essay called *Consciousness and the novel,* and one that is more open ended, a novel called *Thinks.* Both are about the relation of psychology and fiction. The essay allows a scholarly exposition of the issues while the novel allows the reader to identify with a cognitive psychologist in a simulation of conducting research on consciousness. What could be better?

For writers and performers the task is not only to be true to nature, or to imitate life, or to mirror the world accurately, although these aspects are nearly always important. It is to invite the reader or audience member to start up a dream. It is to offer the cues to the reader to consider an allegory, to offer the instructions to world-making that will help make the simulation run and sustain itself.

The dream model when it is externalized into text, or when it is realized in performance of actors on a stage, exists in an intermediate place, halfway between the world and the mind. When we as readers or as audience members take up this intermediate object we construct from it our own mental performance, based on our own mental models. We connect what goes in the model to aspects of our own selves, to our own memories, to our own concerns.

Representation of models in the brain

In 1996 a group of researchers led by Giacomo Rizzolatti made a discovery that set the world of neuroscience abuzz. It was of neurons that fired either when a monkey saw a particular intended action – picking up a small piece of food – or when the monkey itself performed the same action. The researchers called these mirror neurons. They provided evidence for a principle that had long been considered in the psychology of perception, called analysis by synthesis. The idea was that when we perceive some human-produced action, we do so by being able to synthesize the same action ourselves. The importance for reading and understanding of stories is that, perhaps, when we understand an action as we read about it in a novel, our understanding depends on making a version of the action ourselves, inwardly.

One cannot directly record the activity of mirror neurons in human participants; it would be totally inappropriate to implant electrodes in people's brains. So, to study this possibility in humans, researchers have created what computer people call work-arounds. One work-around is to use functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI), with which it has been found that when participants observed or read phrases relating to foot, hand, or mouth actions, there was activation of the regions of the brain that are used in making these same actions:[26] A different kind of work-around has been to use a method called transcranial magnetic stimulation.[27] Here, parts of the brain known to be directly responsible for initiating actions are stimulated briefly and gently (from outside the skulls of humans). For instance, the researchers stimulated the part of the brain responsible for making hand movements and when they did so they could record electrical activity of the muscles of the hand. They did the same for foot movements. What would happen now, the researchers asked, if the human participants were stimulated in this way and at the same time were asked to listen to a brief sentence that concerned making either a movement of the hand such as "He played the piano" or of the foot such as "He

kicked the ball?" They found that when participants listened to sentences concerning hand movements, the electrical activity recorded in the hand muscles in response to the transcranial stimulation was reduced. This reduction did not occur when participants listened to sentences about foot movements or sentences that did not indicate movement. Similarly, when listening to sentences about foot movements, the stimulation-elicited electrical activity in the foot muscles was reduced as compared to the activity that occurred when listening to sentences about the hand or to sentences that were not about movement. The explanation of the reduction of electrical activity in the hand or foot muscles in response to the stimulation was that the parts of the brain concerned with initiating hand or foot movements were already occupied with understanding the sentences that concerned those movements.

Putting this another way, what these researchers found was that when we understand a sentence, as well as activation of the areas of the brain concerned with hearing and language there is also activation in the areas concerned with making the same actions ourselves.[28]

The researchers interpret their findings in terms of mirror neurons. Recognition of an action in the imagination when we hear or read about it involves brain systems responsible for initiating that action.

In recent experiments, Nicole Speer and her colleagues had participants read whole short stories while they were in an fMRI scanner. When readers were engaged in a story, the researchers found that, at the points in which the story said a protagonist undertook an action, activation of the brain occurred in the part which the reader himself or herself would use to undertake the action. So, when the story-protagonist pulled a light cord, a region in the frontal lobes of the reader's brain associated with grasping things was activated. When the protagonist "went through the front door into the kitchen," there was increased activity in a region that is activated when the reader views spatial scenes. The writer gives the cues, and the reader imagines a door, or imagines entering a room and seeing what it might be like. As I do, in this book, the researchers in this study describe reading as a process of simulation, based in experience, and involving being able to think of possible futures. These experiments indicate that, based on their experience, readers construct an active mental model of what is going on in the story, and can also imagine what might happen next.

Nathan Spreng, Raymond Mar, and Alice Kim, have analyzed fMRI data and confirmed that there is a set of brain regions that constitute a core network[29] supports the psychological processes of autobiographical

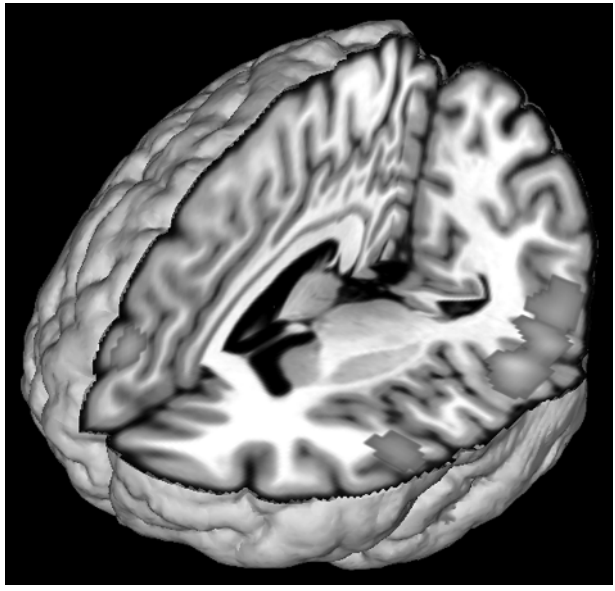


Figure 1.3 In a meta-analysis, Raymond Mar (2011) found reliable activation in the medial prefrontal cortex, left inferior frontal gyrus, and left temporal lobe, associated with studies of story comprehension. Mar, R. A. (2011). The neural bases of social cognition and story comprehension. *Annual Review of Psychology, 62,* in press.

memory, finding one's way around in the world, imaginative thinking about the future, knowing the perspectives of other people, and appear similar to the activity observed in the brain during undirected thought (e.g. daydreaming). As Raymond Mar has also shown in a recent review, this network has similarities to brain regions involved in story comprehension, which also overlap with those involved in perspective-taking. It may be that the various functions associated with the core network are drawn on in creating and sustaining mental simulations of the social world that are concerned both in the understanding of others and in engaging with narrative fiction.

In offering a piece of fiction to readers or viewers a writer needs to indicate characters' actions in a way that the reader imagines these actions into being. Imagination begins in childhood, and is expressed in play. It is to this activity that we now turn.