

Shakespeare Did Not Write Cymbeline

You Cannot Unlearn Craft

by Carol Wolf

When a play begins, and the actor steps onto the stage, he is met by the attention and expectation of the audience. The actor surfs this energy all the time he is onstage. He needs this energy to be sustained, so that his every word, his every gesture, is received and understood. He wants this energy strengthened over the course of the story, so that the audience is held spellbound and breathes as one. What the actor does not want is for the audience's attention to falter. He does not want them looking away, shuffling their feet, rattling their program, or thinking of something else.

Shakespeare was a professional actor, and was on stage in performance several times a week for the whole of his 25-year working life. He was a shareholder in the Chamberlain's Men together with William Kempe, the principal comic actor of his time, and Richard Burbage, the principal leading man of his time. As Shakespeare was a principal shareholder in the company with these men, it can be assumed that he was a very good actor in his own right. What little evidence there is for the parts he played, the Ghost in *Hamlet*, and old Adam in *As You Like It*, indicates it is likely that he was an excellent character actor.

Shakespeare must have been very aware of the energy of the audience's attention. In the Globe, performing during daylight, or at Blackfriars, or Court, performing by candlelight, he could not only hear the audience catching a laugh all together, or taking in a breath, he could see them.

An actor's presence on stage alone does not rivet the audience's attention for very long. The events of the story are the means by which audiences are enchanted every moment for the two or three hours' passage of the play. Holding the audience's attention is primarily the job of the playwright.

Shakespeare's first known play production was by the Lord Admiral's men. The surviving account book for that theater details 26 plays produced that year. Shakespeare's *Henry VI part 1* took in the largest box office of any of the plays, and more than twice the average. It was a huge success. Over twenty-five years later, seven years after his death, his surviving fellow actors collected his plays so that they would not be lost. This, and the fact that his plays are performed to this day, tells us that Shakespeare was a very effective playwright. His plays work in the theater.

Shakespeare's earliest plays engage the audience's attention right from the start with a character or characters doing something, while a major event is about to cross their paths. Just to name a few:

Henry VI part 1 opens with the funeral of the hero King Henry V, with his brothers and attending lords mourning his death. The astrological signs are dire. Did the French use sorcerers to kill him? Did the church fail to pray? Henry's brother the Duke of Gloucester is regent, Henry VI is a child. A messenger comes to tell them half of France is lost. Another messenger arrives to tell them that all France has revolted and the Dauphin is crowned king. A third messenger arrives to tell them the great general

Talbot has been taken. Bedford goes to prepare his forces. Gloucester goes to proclaim Henry VI king. The Bishop of Winchester tells us he plans to steal the boy king.

The characters in action are archetypal: King Henry's brothers the Dukes of Bedford, Cambridge, and Gloucester, and the heroic general, Lord Talbot. The event crossing them in the very first scene is the loss of all that Henry V won for England at such cost, and by the end of the scene, the possible loss of the boy king. What is going to happen next? The play is underway!

Comedy of Errors: Aegean, in search of his lost son, is about to be executed by the Duke of Ephesus. He is granted a stay of execution for 24 hours, to find someone in the town to pay his fine.

Love's Labours Lost: The King of Navarre plans to win eternal fame for his court by creating a modern academe where he and his friends will study, and women are barred from court by a distance of three miles, but the daughter of the King of France is coming for a visit.

In Shakespeare's middle plays, this beginning mechanism for seizing the audience's attention receives additional refinement. Instead of launching a single plot-line, Shakespeare launches two; one, a dynastic story line, having to do with the political world of the story, and the second, a personal one with significant consequences for a principal character. By launching two significant events within the first few pages, the audience's attention is held securely, because even if one plot line fails to hold someone's attention every moment, the second one is still in motion to do the job.

In the first minutes of *Henry IV part 1*, King Henry, tired of fighting, extols the peace that he has now earned for his kingdom, and plans to make a long-desired crusade to the Holy Land. His friend Westmoreland gives him the news that the noble Mortimer has been taken prisoner in Wales by Glendower, and his men butchered, and that the "gallant Hotspur" is in battle in Scotland, the issue not yet known. King Henry agrees that his crusade must be postponed, and mourns that his son Harry is riotous and dishonorable, compared to the energetic, able, and noble Harry Percy.

So, the movement of armies and the fate of a kingdom is in play in the two wars that have broken out, and King Henry's heart is being broken by his son. Both of these plot-lines drive the story to the end of the play.

In the first minutes of *Twelfth Night*, the Duke Orsino is mooning with love over Olivia, but she has refused to admit his messenger because she is in mourning for her brother. Viola is shipwrecked on this shore, and believes her brother is drowned. She gets the captain to introduce her to the Duke, planning to disguise herself as a man, and serve him as a eunuch.

Here, the fate of the prince's suit is the dynastic plot line, and Viola, shipwrecked and alone, but planning to make her way as a man in the duke's service, is the personal plot line. The dynastic plot-line is made more interesting by the love-lorn behavior of the duke.

In *Julius Caesar*, Tribunes Flavius and Marullus confront the townspeople who are making holiday as they are going out to see Caesar come in triumph. Flavius tells them off because Caesar's victory was over Pompey, the great man, whom they used to spend all day waiting to see when he came home. Flavius and Marullus go off to rip down any decorations for Caesar's homecoming, and disperse the people. Caesar enters to celebrate the festival of Lupercalli, and tells his wife to stand in Anthony's way

when he runs the race, and tells Anthony to be sure and touch Calphurnia, to cure her barrenness. He is called to by a soothsayer, who tells him to beware the ides of March.

Here, three plot lines are set in play in the first few minutes: the over-arching political plot is the civil war of Rome, at the point of Caesar's defeat of Pompey. Caesar's relationship with Calphurnia and Anthony, closer and more personal, is shown, and even more personally, Caesar is threatened with death.

In *Hamlet*, the ghost of the dead king has been appearing to the watchmen on the castle battlements. Marcellus, the soldier on watch, invites Horatio to witness. The ghost appears and vanishes again. Marcellus asks why this watch is being kept, and what the preparations are for war. Horatio tells them that the previous king of Norway lost his lands to the previous king of Denmark, and the new king, young Fortinbras, is planning to get them back; Denmark is defending itself. The ghost comes again, Horatio tries to speak to it, but the cock crows. Horatio suggests that they tell young Hamlet, the dead king's son, about the ghost, and they agree.

As Shakespeare refines his craft, even his dynastic plot lines become more character-driven. While a story line can hold the audience's attention for two hours, it is character behavior that allows an actor to rivet the audience's attention from moment to moment. Thus, early plays have archetypal characters, Earls and Dukes, setting the story into motion without any unique personal behavior to characterize them. In later plays, even the dynastic element of the plot is driven by character behavior. Othello has fallen in love with and stolen Desdemona, while Iago plots his destruction. Lear chooses to divide up his kingdom among his three daughters, the youngest and best-beloved of which will not cooperate with his conditions.

So, if you are an actor in one of Shakespeare's plays, you step out onto the stage with something to do, something about to happen, and behavior to express it that will seize and hold the attention of an audience, whether at the Globe, at Blackfriars, at Court, or touring the countryside. The mechanism, a character in an action, with something significant about to happen, is *always* present in the first page of the play, and in later plays you also have fascinating character behavior to play, and a second, a third, or even a fourth plot line in play in a very short time, with which to hold the audience's attention.

Shakespeare by this time can judge exactly how long to play out the fallout of one plot point before starting another, and exactly how long an actor can speak on one subject before something else needs to happen.

And then we come to *Cymbeline*. *Cymbeline* was written after Shakespeare wrote *Othello*, *Lear*, *Macbeth*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, four of the greatest tragedies ever written for the stage. It was written before *The Tempest*, and *The Winter's Tale*. So Shakespeare was at the height of his craft at this time, and had been for a decade.

At the beginning of *Cymbeline*, First Gentleman and Second Gentlemen enter. First Gentleman tells Second Gentlemen that people at court are unhappy. Second Gentleman asks leading questions while First Gentleman tells the audience that the king's daughter, who is his heir, who was supposed to marry his second wife's son, has instead married "a poor but worthy gentleman." As a result, she has been imprisoned, and her new husband has been banished. The queen is especially upset, as she very much wanted her son married to the princess. First Gentleman goes on to say that the courtiers are only

pretending to be unhappy about the marriage, because the queen's son is "too bad for bad report," while the new husband is exceptional.

We are thirty-one lines into the play, and we have seen no character behavior which is by this time a hallmark of Shakespeare's work. Also, all the story information is off-stage and in the past, and nothing is in play, nothing is about to happen.

So, just at this point an event needs to cross these characters, or the audience is going to start shuffling. Any competent playwright would know this. Any actor imagining playing either of these parts would know this. Something needs to happen right now. Instead, Second Gentleman asks First Gentlemen about the background of the exceptional man that the princess has gone and married. For the next 44 lines, we are told about Posthumus's father, and how he gained fame as a soldier, and how he and his sons died in the wars, and how Posthumus was born after their death, to his mother who died, but that the king raised him, and how very well he turned out. The First Gentleman goes on to tell the Second Gentleman how the king once had two other sons, but they were stolen some twenty years ago. At this point, something happens. The First Gentleman notices that the queen and other people are coming, and they depart.

So, we are eighty-one lines into the play, and nothing is happening. We have had a lot of backstory handed us, but exposition is not action, and nothing is about to happen except the queen and the princess and the gentleman she married, are coming onto the stage.

Eighty lines into *Othello*, Iago has told Roderigo that Othello has given the promotion he deserved to someone less able, and that he means to get back at him. He then enjoins Roderigo to "raise the house." Iago is in motion to get back at Othello, and Roderigo is helping him to perform some mischief.

Eighty lines into *The Tempest*, the ship is going down in the storm, and the Prince, the King, and the Duke are doomed to drown, along with the crew.

Eighty lines into *Lear*, Gloucester has introduced his bastard son to Kent, and King Lear is in the process of dividing up his kingdom among his daughters, based on which one flatters him the most, and Cordelia regrets that she cannot.

All of Shakespeare's plays launch themselves forward in the first eighty lines, and then continue on with the same momentum. In *Cymbeline*, when the queen enters, with Posthumus, the much-lauded new husband, and Imogen, the princess, we have actually gone backward at this point. First Gentleman said that Imogen is imprisoned and Posthumus has been banished. But Posthumus has not yet gone, and now the queen tells Imogen that she will allow them to say good-bye, even though the king has forbidden it. The queen steps out, and Imogen reveals that she does not trust her. She tells Posthumus to go, and that she will wait for him. He tells her he is going to Rome, and swears his fidelity.

The queen returns, reminding them to hurry up because if the king shows up, she will incur his displeasure. She then tells us in an aside that she is going to tell the king herself that they are here.

NOW something is about to happen. The king is coming. The problem of the king's wrath, however, has been aimed at the wrong person: the queen says *she* will incur the king's displeasure. That is not a problem for our heroes. We are 126 lines into the play, and that is the only thing that is in motion. In

other plays of this period, Shakespeare had by this time set three or six plot lines into motion, and given his fellow actors strong, specific characterizations to play. He could not have written a play beginning in which nothing happens. He would never have stranded his fellow actors on stage with no means of seizing the audience's attention. In all the plays he wrote, he never did this. He did not write *Cymbeline*.

The engine of a play, the mechanism by which the audience's attention is held, is the action underway that is about to intersect the impending significant event. Not only did Shakespeare set this mechanism into motion in every play beginning he wrote, he also did so *in every scene* in every play he wrote. You will not find a scene in any of Shakespeare's plays that doesn't have a character or characters doing something, and something significant about to happen.

The scene continues. Imogen gives Posthumus a diamond ring she had from her mother, and he promises to wear it until he dies. Posthumus gives Imogen a bracelet as a "manacle of love."

The king, Cymbeline, enters, orders Posthumus to go, which he does, and then the king argues with Imogen that she should have married his queen's son. He orders the queen to imprison her, and the queen counsels patience. He goes. So now, the only impending event in this play has come and gone, with no consequences, and at this point, once again there is nothing about to happen in this play.

But the scene is not over yet. The queen notes that Imogen's servant Pisanio has arrived. Pisanio tells them that the queen's son drew his sword on Posthumus, but they were parted and neither were hurt.

Cloten, the queen's son, is one of the villains of the story. The playwright has missed the opportunity to introduce him to the audience by entering and drawing on Posthumus, as Posthumus is on his way out. That would be dramatic. That would be an action that would show by his behavior that Cloten is a villain, and Posthumus (by not reacting or fighting) is a noble, patient gentleman. But the playwright chooses to have a secondary character tell about this meeting offstage and in the past. Pisanio then reports that Posthumus has told him to remain to serve Imogen. Imogen tells Pisanio to come and speak with her in half an hour. That's the end of the scene.

Shakespeare's scenes do not peter out. They often end with a rhyming couplet as punctuation. They launch the departing characters into a new action, and continue the momentum of the play. This one just ends.

It is not until Scene 4 of Act 1 that we come to the event that launches this story at last. In Rome, in Philario's house, where Posthumus is staying during his exile, Philario the Roman, a Frenchman with no name, and a Spaniard with no name, are listening to an Italian friend of Philario's, called Iachomo, tell them what a notable, excellent man Posthumus is. Iachomo says he met Posthumus in Britain, but this is the first time Iachomo comes into the story of this play.

Posthumus enters, is introduced by Philario, and the Frenchman reminds him of when they last met, in France, when Posthumus was involved in a duel. Iachomo asks what the duel was about. In France, Posthumus asserted that his lady in Britain was more "fair, virtuous, wise, chaste, constant-qualified and less attemptible," to the degree where he was challenged to a duel to defend his opinion. Iachomo engages with Posthumus over the event, until by stages he bets that he can seduce Posthumus's lady, on the condition that he is given an introduction to her. Posthumus, with very little resistance, ends up betting, as Iachomo insists, the diamond ring on his finger against ten thousand ducats, that Iachomo

will not be able to seduce his wife. Posthumous then also gives Iachomo a letter that will get him in to see Imogen. Not only do Posthumous and Iachomo shake hands on this agreement, Iachomo insists that they draw up a contract. And not for a moment does Posthumous hesitate. So much for his vaunted virtue and nobility.

Two scenes later, Iachomo arrives in Briton, and having failed in short order to charm Imogen, Iachomo gets her to promise to guard the expensive presents he has bought for the Emperor. Imogen, in light of Posthumous's effusive letter of introduction, undertakes to do so, by having his trunk brought to her room. That night, Iachomo gets out of the trunk, and, alone with her in her room while she sleeps, assembles the proofs he will need to convince Posthumous that he slept with Imogen: a description of her room, a description of a mole under her breast, and by stealing the bracelet that Posthumous gave her.

Let us examine this plot line more closely.

The main character in a play is the one who has the greatest move, and the one who changes the most. The most important characters are introduced early, or set up early, so that when they appear on stage the audience is already engaged with them; they already have the audience's attention. When someone who is not set up in this way starts talking a lot, and driving a scene, it feels to the audience as though a stranger has crashed an important event and broken into the conversation.

Iachomo comes out of nowhere. Never before seen or heard of in this play, he rudely presses our hero, the noble Posthumous, the man of such excellent reputation, to commit a deed so vile as to negate all the prior praise of him. Posthumous allows a man, who has stated his intention to sleep with his wife, the means of access to her. The result is that Iachomo ends up standing alone in Imogen's room while she is sleeping. He does not rape her, but he engages in a symbolic rape, to make Posthumous think that Imogen was willing.

Why does he do this? He does not have "the motive and the cue" for his action, as Hamlet says, proving that Shakespeare knew perfectly well that a character has to have a reason for any major move he makes. In a play, you must always set up an event, especially one so huge that it sets in motion most of the major character actions that follow. Otherwise it doesn't make sense, and you lose the audience's suspension of disbelief.

Posthumous, who has been described over and over again as the pattern of nobility, did have "the motive and the cue" to challenge Iachomo to a duel on the spot for impugning his wife's fidelity, and for offering to prove her unfaithful by sleeping with her. Instead, he not only makes the bet, he forces Imogen to give Iachomo the benefit of the doubt for any wile he chooses to play on her, by sending Iachomo to his new-married bride this letter:

He is one of the noblest men, to whose kindnesses I am most infinitely tied. Reflect upon him accordingly, as you value your trust--
LEONATUS. [Known as Posthumous in the play.]

This is playwriting so poor and so amateurish that even a journeyman playwright would know better. And Shakespeare is the Master. The fix is ridiculously easy. Put Iachomo into the play back in Britain.

Have him in league with Cloten, the bad prince, or give him a couple of lines where he recounts some slight that Posthumous laid on him. Have him vow to destroy Posthumous, and the marriage, or have Cloten set him on to it. Giving the audience an early introduction to the villain, and revealing the plan that he is going to work over the course of the play is plotting that Shakespeare has done in *Richard III*, and in *Othello*. It would have served to set the play into motion! For the playwright to introduce the key villain out of nowhere, and give him an action without cause that turns the whole course of the rest of the play, is bad playwriting. Shakespeare is not a bad playwright. He could not have written this.

Back in Briton, the queen has a long interchange with her doctor, the gist of which is that she has asked him to procure poisons for her, and not for the first time. He gives her the potion she asked for, and then in an aside tells us in a dozen lines that he does not trust the queen, and has therefore made up a potion that will cause anyone who takes it to fall down in a stupor that appears like death, but they will later revive. The doctor, Cornelius, is yet another character who comes out of nowhere to effect a major move in the plot.

The queen then has a thirty-eight line speech to Posthumous's servant Pisanio in which she offers him a bribe to get Imogen to change her mind about her son Cloten. She drops the box with the poison in it, he picks it up, and she tells him it is a cordial she made herself that has saved the king's life five times. She tells him to keep it as a token of her good will. She tells him to send for her women.

In all of this speech, Pisanio has no reaction. There is none given him in the text. This is another indication that this play was obviously not written by someone who knows how to write good theater. Characters in *Cymbeline* often do not listen and react to one another. But in the theater, when one character speaks, the audience is waiting to see the effect of the speech on the character to whom it is addressed. The actor will feel that need to respond and the playwright, if present, will hear about it! But no response is provided for Pisanio.

Shakespeare's monologues are little scenes in and of themselves. One key element of an effective scene is that it starts in one place, and ends in another. At the end of the speech, we, and the character, are in a new place.

In *Cymbeline*, there are many long monologues simply because the character goes on talking. These monologues have no dramatic shape, and do not bring the character to a new mindset, or the audience to a new understanding.

Another key element of Shakespeare's monologues is one so obvious it should not need to be mentioned. Shakespeare's language is beautiful. It is powerful, profound, joyful, humorous, moving. It resonates truth and integrity across four hundred years. There is not a single line in *Cymbeline* that can be described in that way. Shakespeare did not write this play.

Here is the test: get a copy of *Cymbeline*, and a copy of Shakespeare's collected works. Open *Cymbeline* at random and run your finger down the page until you come to the next character. Speak the line he or she says aloud. Then open Shakespeare at random. Do the same thing. It will not take you many comparisons to come to the same conclusion.

Shakespeare's lines have an arc to them. They are written to be spoken. They roll off the tongue with a form and a percussion that is built into the syllables. The spoken line evokes the character speaking it

so that uttering the words aloud causes the speaker to take on the characterization, even if the speaker has no experience of acting. In addition, Shakespeare blocked his plays with his lines. When you speak one of Shakespeare's lines, you know how far you are standing from the person to whom you are speaking.

In *Cymbeline*, the lines are awkward, difficult to say, and often have an unintended humorous content.

After the queen goes, Pisanio tells us he does not trust her. And yet he keeps the medicine that she told him she made.

Aside from the medicine changing hands, nothing has changed by the end of the scene.

At the end of Act I, what is in play?

The main character, **Posthumous**, has no move in play. Instead, he is being passive while allowing someone he doesn't know, for no apparent reason, to make an attempt to seduce his newly-married wife.

Imogen has no move, except to go on missing Posthumus.

Cymbeline, the titular character, has no move in play.

The queen has an objective. She wants her son Cloten to marry Imogen. Her move was to give a poisonous (she thinks) drug to Pisanio, who was Posthumous's servant, but was left behind in Briton to serve Imogen. But there is no indication of what this move is supposed to accomplish.

Cloten, the queen's son, goes on wooing Imogen, even though she is married to another man.

Iachomo, who wasn't in this play until he pressed a bet on Posthumus in Scene 4, has the only move in play. This is a tertiary character (not a primary character, not a character seconded to a primary character and important by relation, but a character who doesn't connect anywhere) behaving like a primary character, but without connection or motive. He is going to pretend to Posthumus that he has seduced Imogen, and win his bet.

Compare this to the end of Act I of *Lear*. In five scenes, Lear has divided his kingdom between his two elder daughters, Goneril and Regan, thrown out the third daughter because she would not flatter him, banished the Earl of Kent for remonstrating with him, and planned to divide his time between his older daughters. Gloucester's bastard son Edmund has tricked his father into believing his noble, legitimate brother Edgar is planning to kill him; he then tricks Edgar into running away. Regan and Goneril plot against their father, to reduce his train and diminish him. Kent returns in disguise to serve Lear. Goneril has succeeded in getting Lear to leave her house and head for Regan's. Every principal character has a move. Half a dozen moves are in play by the end of the act. Shakespeare, who wrote this just prior to his supposedly writing *Cymbeline*, could not suddenly have forgotten everything he knew about plotting a play.

It is not until Act 2 Scene 3 that there is a scene in *Cymbeline* that creates momentum in the play. In this scene, Cloten, the queen's son, who intends to marry Imogen, arrives outside her room after carousing all night, in order to woo her with music. He says to the musician, "Come on; tune; if you can penetrate her with your fingering, so; we'll try with tongue, too." This is not the familiar Shakespearean humorous sexual wordplay. This is just gross.

The king and queen arrive and approve Cloten's wooing of Imogen, with no reference to the fact that

she is married to another man. They are called away by a messenger bringing word of the arrival of Caius Lucius, an ambassador from Rome. Cymbeline and the queen go to greet him. (Keep this in mind: the king and queen have just left the queen's son outside Imogen's rooms, and have gone to the throne room to greet the ambassador from Rome.)

Cloten then has a long interplay with Imogen, in which she says Posthumous's meanest clothing, having touched his body, is more dear to her than Cloten. Cloten is infuriated by this. Imogen goes inside to help Pisanio and her ladies search for her lost bracelet. Cloten vows revenge.

Two acts and three scenes into the play, a principal character is finally going to do something!

Then in the next scene, Scene 4, in Rome, Iachomo confronts Posthumous, and spills all the details he memorized in Imogen's chamber, and Posthumous goes nuts. He takes Iachomo's word, against all the evidence of his life-long knowledge of Imogen's character. He does not attack Iachomo for sleeping with his wife. He instead declares his desire to tear Imogen limb from limb, and runs out of the room. His friend Philario determines to go after him so that he doesn't harm himself, and asks Iachomo to come with him. Iachomo, who has just, for no reason whatsoever, delivered this blow, replies, "With all my heart." What is the actor to make of that, having just played a scene of the most willful malevolence?

In Scene 5, Posthumous is in another room, ranting against women for 35 lines. But at the end of it, the scene is over, and nothing has changed. He has determined no course of action. He has made no plan. Why isn't he angry with Iachomo? Why doesn't he challenge and kill the man who slept with his wife? Why doesn't he plan to return to Briton and question Imogen? A playwright would have chosen one of these actions for his character, or thought of an even better one. The writer of *Cymbeline* chooses none.

At the end of Act II:

Cymbeline and the queen are on their way to another room in the palace to meet with the ambassador from Rome.

Queen still wants Imogen for Cloten

Posthumous now hates Imogen

Imogen has lost her bracelet

Cloten wants revenge on Imogen for preferring Posthumous's clothing to him.

Pisanio still has that potion

Iachomo has convinced Posthumous that he slept with Imogen. He has nothing in play now.

Now it's Act III. Here we have the first major indication that not only was this play not written by Shakespeare, but it was never produced. Two scenes ago, in Act II, Scene 3, it was the morning after Imogen lost her bracelet, and the king and queen were on their way to greet the Ambassador from Rome. Now they are sitting in state to greet Caius Lucius. In between these two scenes, Iachomo spent weeks traveling back to Rome, arrived at Rome and told Posthumous that he has won his bet. But now, in the next scene, Cymbeline and his queen (she has no name), are sitting in state to greet the ambassador. Iachomo's weeks of travel back to Rome to tell Posthumous that he has won his bet are out of place. Either that, or it's a *really* long walk from Imogen's room to the Room of State in Cymbeline's Palace. This is the kind of major plotting error that gets fixed when a play is in rehearsal, and every aspect of the story, every word and action, are examined by those who are putting it on its feet.

Now, in Act III, Scene 1, the dynastic plot line that Shakespeare would have set in motion in Act I, Scene 1, is finally brought into play. Caius Lucius, the noble Roman, tells Cymbeline that Augustus Caesar demands the tribute that Britain owes since Julius Caesar conquered it. The queen and Cloten argue against paying. Cymbeline chimes in that no tribute will be paid. Caius pronounces Caesar's intention to make war. It is not imminent, however. He has to report back to Rome first. The ambassador's pronouncement does not have the same power to create momentum in the plot as a messenger arriving to say all of France has risen, the Dauphin is crowned, and noble Talbot is taken, or Exeter's line to the King of France that Henry V "is footed in this land already." But at least the dynastic plot line is now in play.

In Act III, Scene 2, Pisanio has received a letter from Posthumous, describing Imogen's disloyalty and adultery with Iachomo, and ordering Pisanio to murder her, saying that a letter he has sent to Imogen will give Pisanio the means. (What has happened to Posthumous's nobility and virtue? What kind of man orders his servant to murder his wife?) Imogen enters. Pisanio gives her a letter from Posthumous telling her he is in Cambria (Wales), at Milford Haven, and she immediately plans to ride there with Pisanio.

This is the first scene in the play that has forward motion and a significant tension level from beginning to end: Pisanio is supposed to kill Imogen, and Pisanio's letter succeeds in getting her to plan to escape from the palace. We've only had to wait until Act III for this play to assume the tension level and forward momentum that every other play by Shakespeare has from the beginning.

This playwright has committed the error so many journeyman playwrights do when they write their first full-length play. They spend the first half of the play on backstory, explaining everything to the audience, and only then, in the second half, do they start the play going. One of the most frequent notes given to playwrights writing their first full-length play, is, "Cut the whole first act, start with the second act, and go from there."

The playwright could easily have begun the play with Cymbeline receiving the Roman ambassador and being threatened with war, and then learning that his daughter has married beneath her, while Iachomo, a friend of Cloten's and despiser of Posthumus, swears he will destroy their marriage. There: both a dynastic and a personal plotline in play. The playwright who wrote *Cymbeline* does not think in terms of dramatic scenes telling a story. To this playwright, a play is all about the speeches, and the more speeches the better. Thus, one character after another talks and talks and talks, and there is next to no significant action on the stage. This is another clue that the writer of *Cymbeline* was not a theater professional. He was a fan of the theater, and a lover of theatrical language. But he had no idea how a play should be shaped.

Now, just as we have some momentum going, it stops. In Act III, Scene 3., we are before a cave in Wales, and we meet some new characters. Belarius and his two sons, Guiderius (actually Polydore), and Arviragus (Cadwal) are here living a simple and virtuous life. Guiderius and Arviragus chafe because they've never known anything else but this rustic simplicity. Belarius tells them that he was once Cymbeline's favorite soldier, but two people lied about him to Cymbeline, saying he was in league with the Romans, and he was banished. So now he lives here, and this is better.

He sends them off to hunt and then tells the audience that these are the sons of the king. He stole them

when they were three and two, in return for Cymbeline stealing his lands; they think he is their father, and that their nurse was their mother.

That's all that happens in this scene: we meet Belarius and the two young men, and are told who they really are. It is a point of information rather than a scene; it comes out of nowhere, it has no momentum, and nothing is in play at the end of it.

Act III Sc 4

Wales, near Milford-Haven

In 18 lines Imogen wants to know where they are to meet Posthumus, and why Pisanio is looking and acting so strangely. This is another monologue where Pisanio isn't given any responding lines. Instead of replying to her questions, he tells her to read the letter he got from Posthumous, and that will explain why he looks so unhappy.

Imogen reads the letter out: Imogen is a strumpet, Pisanio has to kill her or else he's just as disloyal. Posthumous gives him opportunity by getting her to go to Milford Haven.

Pisanio has decided that the letter is slander upon Imogen. But he still dragged her all the way to Milford Haven, 250 miles from London.

Imogen comments on the inconstancy of men and then tells Pisanio to go ahead and kill her, and offers him the sword. He won't do it, but she insists; she must die, and she can't kill herself. She goes on for 26 lines and asks again to be killed.

Pisanio says he can't do it, and that he hasn't slept a wink since he got the order (250 miles ago).

She asks him (thank you!) why he dragged her all this way if he wasn't going to do it. He says, to gain time to think about it. (He couldn't have done this back at court?) He guesses that Posthumous has been lied to. (You think?) He says he will send some bloody sign that he has murdered her. She doesn't want to go back to the court because she's afraid of Cloten's siege upon her. He suggests she go to Rome with the ambassador, who is coming to Milford Haven tomorrow. She could disguise herself and live near Posthumous, and at least get word of him. (Why not escort her to Rome himself, to live with her husband?)

Pisanio tells her to disguise herself as a man. He just happens to have brought men's clothes for her. (Why didn't she change for the trip?) She is to put herself in Caius Lucius's service (he likes music). Pisanio has to go back to court before he is missed at the same time as she is, and suspected of carrying her off. (So, he will ride back 250 miles and arrive before Imogen has been missed?)

Then, he gives her the medicine he had from the queen, in case she is ever sick.

At this point in the play, things are finally in motion!

Cymbeline is under threat by the Romans.

Posthumous has ordered his beloved Imogen killed for her supposed adultery.

Imogen has run away to find Posthumous in Milford Haven, only to learn she is to be murdered there. She is going to disguise herself as a male, go into service with the Roman ambassador, and make her way to Rome to at least be near Pisanio.

Pisanio is defying Posthumous's orders to kill Imogen.

At last, events are in train, just as in every other Shakespeare play. But in *Cymbeline*, we are in the fourth scene of Act III before the playwright gets things going. In every other play, he gets things going in Scene 1.

Act III Sc 5

A room in Cymbeline's palace

The King and Queen say good-bye to Caius Lucius, who is departing to tell the Emperor of Rome that Britain is now their enemy. He asks for a conduct to Milford Haven. Cymbeline orders him attended to the Welsh border. He goes.

This is the second time the king and queen have met with the Roman ambassador. If this scene were cut, it would not change the plot line set in motion during their previous meeting, that Caesar is going to send troops to collect his tribute. Spending an extra move to put an external plot line (something coming into the play from the outside) into motion is not something a capable playwright would do.

In the remainder of this scene characters discuss things that the audience already knows. Cymbeline asks after his daughter, who hasn't been seen in awhile. After some back and forth, Cloten comes in to announce Imogen is gone. Pisanio is suspected, but he shows up, proving he isn't with Imogen. When Cloten demands to know if she is with Posthumous, Pisanio gives him the letter Posthumous wrote, saying he was at Milford Haven.

Cloten offers to employ Pisanio, giving him his first task, which is to get him one of Posthumous's suits. Cloten, very upset by Imogen's preferring Posthumous's meanest garment to him, has made a plan. He is going to Milford Haven to kill Posthumous and rape Imogen while wearing Posthumous's clothes. Pisanio, meanwhile, plans to write to Posthumous and send him a bloody piece of clothing to prove he has killed Imogen.

At this point in the play there is nothing to anticipate that will bring any satisfaction from the outcome: Posthumous has conspired to murder Imogen. Cloten is planning to rape her. The Romans are going to attack, eventually. The queen is still hoping that drug of hers will at some point have some effect on one of her enemies. In Shakespeare's plays, by the middle of Act III, plot lines are all conjoining to a climax. In this play, the story has at last begun to judder along, albeit in several unpleasant directions. And there's still over an hour to go.

Act III Sc 6

Wales, before the cave of Belarius

Imogen enters. In twenty-seven lines she tells us that she has been misdirected and lost her way. She narrates her discovery of the cave, draws her sword, and goes in. Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus return from hunting. Belarius finds Imogen eating their food inside the cave. They welcome her and the boys vie in befriending her. They invite her to stay and eat with them.

This is another of those non-Shakespearean scenes. It begins well, with a character in an action, but by the end, it stops, and nothing new is in play. There is the promise that at some point Imogen is going to discover that these two young men are her brothers, but that's not going to happen now. Now, they are going to eat together, which has no dramatic value.

Act III Sc 7

Rome

Two senators and two tribunes enter. 1 Senator explains the emperor's orders. Since the armies are already fighting the Dalmatians, the Pallanonians, and in Gallia, the Emperor has made Caius Lucius (who is not on stage) proconsul, and orders the tribunes to raise him an army to attack Britain. The scene ends.

Here, at the end of the third act, the playwright has brought in four characters that have never been seen before. When tertiary characters drive scenes, it drops the tension level of the play. This plot point could much more easily have been carried out by a messenger bringing the Emperor's orders to Caius Lucius, a secondary character whom we've seen twice before, and who is going to continue to have an important part in this story in future.

Act IV, Scene 1. Wales, the forest near Belarius's cave. Cloten enters and tell the audience that this is the place that Pisanio told him that Posthumous and Imogen are going to meet. He is now wearing Posthumous's clothes, and repeats his plan to cut off Posthumous's head and rape Imogen. He will then “spurn her home to her father,” and his mother will make it all right. He repeats that this is the meeting place, and then – leaves it, sword drawn.

Imogen left London to meet Posthumous in Milford Haven, 250 miles from London. She changed clothes, and walked for two days. Meanwhile Pisanio returned to London, and told Cloten where Imogen and Posthumous planned to meet. Why in the world would Cloten think that Posthumous and Imogen are still in the place where they were supposed to meet a week ago? Two weeks ago? (Obviously in this Britain, Milford Haven, or even Wales, is not that far from London.) Still, Cloten's assumption that they would be there is an oversight by the playwright.

The constant repetition of “Milford Haven” is one example of this writer's unintended humor. It has become a running joke by this time. Imogen says at one point, “How far it is/To this same blessed Milford: /and by the way Tell me how Wales was made so happy as /To inherit such a haven:” Shakespeare this is NOT. This kind of writing makes the playwright seem not only theatrically ignorant, but very young.

Act IV Sc 2

Before the cave

By this point in a play, the events should be accelerating, and the elements that will make up the climax should all be coming into focus.

In Act IV Scene 2 of *Romeo and Juliet*, Juliet returns from Friar Lawrence's cell with the potion he has given her, which will put her into a sleep like unto death. She kneels before her father and promises to

marry the count he has chosen for her. Her parents are pleased and relieved, and Juliet goes off to her room to prepare for a kind of death.

In Hamlet, Act IV Scene 2, Hamlet has just finished hiding Polonius's body when he is discovered by Rosencrantz and Guildenstern. They take him to King Claudius where Hamlet confesses what he has done, and Claudius orders him to go to England, where he plans that Hamlet will die.

In Act IV Scene 2, of *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia having just saved her husband's friend's life, while disguised as a lawyer, succeeds in tricking her husband into giving her (still in disguise) the ring he promised he would never take off his finger, for her sake.

In Act IV Scene 2, of *Richard III*, Richard tries to get Buckingham to murder the princes in the tower, and when he refuses orders the malcontent Tyrell to do it. He orders that word should be given out that his wife is ill and may soon die, so that he can marry the princes' sister. He turns down Buckingham's request for reward, and Buckingham turns on him.

Act IV, Scene 2 of *Cymbeline* has numerous plot points, but it has no momentum. We are before Belarius's cave in Wales. Belarius and his sons are going hunting. Imogen is sick (which she mentions several times) and wants to stay in the cave. Each of the sons declares how much they love "him," though they don't know why. Imogen wishes them good sport. She mentions for the fourth time that she is ill, and then she takes some of the medicine that the queen gave Pisanio, and Pisanio gave her. She goes into the cave. All that takes 60 lines.

Belarius and sons then praise him, his singing, his cookery, his housewifery, for another twenty lines. Then, just as they are about to depart, Cloten enters.

Here, there seems to be a missing scene. Cloten wandered away from the meeting place where he (absurdly) expected to find Posthumous and Imogen, and has now wandered back, saying, "I cannot find those runagates; that villain hath mocked me. I am faint." He, like Imogen, seems to have been misdirected, but off-stage.

Belarius, overhearing this, assumes "those runagates" refers to him and his sons. He recognizes Cloten (even though he has not been at court for twenty years, and Cloten is a young man). Belarius declares that since the court regards them as outlaws, and Cloten couldn't possibly have come here unattended, they must get out of there.

Guidarius tells him and Avigdurus to scout for the other men, and goes to talk to Cloten. They then bandy insults for 44 lines and then exeunt fighting. Yes, they go to fight, the most exciting thing that has happened yet in this play, and they take it off-stage.

Arviragus and Bellarius return, having found no attendants. Bellarius repeats that he knows Cloten from the court. Guidarius re-enters, carrying Cloten's head.

They discuss what he has done for 48 lines. Then Guidarius goes to throw the head in the stream where it will be carried out to sea. Bellarius and Avigurus discuss this for 16 more lines, then Avigurus decides to go see how Imogen is doing.

Bellarius passes the time with a 15-line monologue praising his two boys. Then Guidarius return and asks where Arviragus has gone. They hear solemn music and explain that this instrument has not sounded since their mother died. (A pay-off without a set-up.) Then Arviragus returns carrying Imogen in his arms, declaring her dead. They bemoan “his” loss for 46 lines, and then decide he should be buried beside their mother. Then they remember Cloten and decide that he should lie in the same grave. They prepare to do this for 30 more lines. Then, they sing the very beautiful song which is often transposed to Hero's funeral in *Much Ado About Nothing*, “Fear no more the heat o' the sun . . . for golden lads and girls all must like chimney sweepers come to dust.”

They sing four verses, Belarius brings flowers and adds another eight lines. Then they go, without burying the two after all. Why they would bury Cloten, whom they disliked, with Imogen and their mother, is not explained.

Imogen then wakes up. She discovers herself lying beside a headless body dressed in Posthumus's clothes, and bemoans it for 43 lines, deciding that Pisanio must have poisoned her and killed Posthumus. Then, she faints.

Then – and this is still Act IV, Scene 3, Caius Lucius the Roman general enters, discussing how he expects his troops to arrive with the next fair wind. He then calls upon his soothsayer to foretell what is going to happen, and the soothsayer describes how he dreamed of a Roman victory.

All of this time they are being upstaged by the headless corpse with Imogen in a faint upon it.

Then, Caius Lucius sees Imogen lying on the dead trunk of Cloten. Caius Lucius asks for an explanation, Imogen gives one, and after another 25 lines, Caius Lucius takes her into his service. And with this, the 405-line scene finally ends.

So, at the end of the scene, what is in play? The only imminent event is the arrival of the Roman troops, which is an external plot point.

We are four acts and two scenes into this play. So far, only a few major events have happened. The number of major plot points that are going to unfold in the remaining hour, puts one in mind of a kid who's been lagging along with his homework, and all of a sudden tries to get everything together before the time limit.

In Act IV, Scene 3, we are back at Cymbeline's palace, and for the first time, Cymbeline, the title character, drives a scene on his own. He spends the eight lines narrating to the audience what has gone wrong: his queen is sick, she is sick because her son, Cloten, is missing. He is also upset because Imogen is still missing. Cymbeline tells Pisanio to tell him where Imogen is, or suffer torture. A Lord (yet another nameless and unmotivated character) intercedes, saying Pisanio has to be innocent of this knowledge because he was at court when Imogen disappeared. (If Pisanio went to Wales with Imogen and then came back, he was not at court when Imogen disappeared.)

A Lord tells Cymbeline that Roman troops have landed, and suggests that Cymbeline go deal with them, since neither the queen nor Cloten would change what needs to be done. Cymbeline agrees and goes.

Pisano worries that he has not heard from Posthumous since he told him Imogen was dead, nor from Imogen. He plans to be noticed by the king by fighting hard in the wars, or die in them.

This is one of the better scenes in this play: something is wrong right at the start, there is a tension level on stage, and it ends in a different place than it begins. However, it is not fun, it is not theatrical, and the language does not frame the important moment of the scene. The Romans have landed. What would Harry V say at this news? Probably not, "Let's withdraw, and meet the time as it seeks us. We fear not what can from Italy annoy us, but we grieve at chances here. Away."

One might argue that the playwright is simply designing Cymbeline as a weak character. But if Shakespeare were designing a weak character, the character would be exhibiting his behavior in a strongly theatrical matter, as when Richard II arrives back from Ireland to find his throne in danger and says, "For god's sake let's sit upon the ground and tell sad tales of the death of kings . . ."

Act IV Sc 4

Wales, before the cave

Guiderius hears the sound of battle. Belarius suggests that they get away from it by going higher into the mountains. Guiderius and Avigorus want to go and join the fighting. They discuss this for 50 lines. Belarius says he'll be recognized; the boys say they won't so they're going. Belarius says he'll go too, and die if they do. The boys go, Belarius adds that their royal blood will now be seen.

In Act V, Scene 1, Posthumous, arriving with the Roman troops, enters with the bloody cloth that Pisano sent him. In his 33-line monologue, he promises to keep the cloth, and expresses his upset with Pisano for actually doing what he told him to do. He further explains that he plans to take off his Italian clothes and put on British peasant clothes, and fight for his country, not against it.

This monologue too actually has shape. The scene begins with Posthumous dressed as an Italian gentleman, and ends with him disrobing to fight as a peasant.

Then, in **Act 5, Scene 2** there is an event so ham-handed that no theater professional will be able to believe that a competent playwright is supposed to have written it.

Enter Lucius, Iachomo, and the Roman Army at one door; and the Briton army at another; Leonatus Posthumus following like a poor soldier. They march over and go out. Then enter again in skirmish Iachomo and Posthumus: he vanquisheth and disarmeth Iachimo and then leaves him.

No, really, imagine this. A group of actors enter from one side, another group of actors enter from another. They have arms, so they are soldiers. They cross the stage, ignoring each other, and go out the opposite doors. Then, leaving out the theatrically all-important moment when Iachomo and Posthumous *see* each other and engage, these two enter, already fighting. Without a word, Posthumous vanquishes him – that probably means Iachomo is on the ground and Posthumous is standing – and disarms him, and goes.

This is the most inept staging of a major event imaginable. If nothing else in this play has convinced the reader, this stage direction must make it clear that no theater professional wrote this play. When you bring a group of people onto the stage, the most important thing you need to do is identify who they

are. The Roman army can be identified by Lucius leading them, but who is the other group if Cymbeline isn't leading them? But the best possible way to make certain that the audience knows exactly what is going on, is to give someone a line that tells them this.

In *Macbeth*, Act 5, Scene 2, a group of soldiers enter:

Enter Menteith, Caithness, Angus, Lennox, soldiers, with a drummer and colours.

The most important person speaks:

Menteith: The English power is near, led on by Malcolm
His uncle Siward, and the good Macduff.
Revenge burn in them, for their dear causes
Would to the bleeding and the grim alarm
Excite the mortified man.

There. You know exactly what is happening.

It can be done without the defining line. Here is what it looks like when a competent playwright does it without words.

King Henry IV, part 1, Act 5, Scene 3

King Henry enters with his power. Alarum, and exeunt to the battle.

In King Henry IV part 1, Act 5 Scene 4:

Alarum. Excursions. Enter King Henry, Prince Harry, wounded, Lord John of Lancaster, and the Earl of Westmoreland.

Again, the most important person speaks:

King Henry: I prithee, Harry, withdraw thyself, thou bleedst too much.

That tells you exactly what has been going on.

King Henry V, Act 2, Scene 4

Flourish. Enter King Charles the Sixth of France, the Dauphin, the Constable, and the Dukes of Berri and Bourbon.

King Charles:
Thus comes the English with full power upon us
And more than carefully it us concerns
To answer royally in our defenses

King Henry V, Act 3, Scene 1

Alarum. Enter King Harry and the English Army with scaling ladders.

King Henry:

Once more into the breach, dear friends, once more
Or close the wall up with out English dead.

Go to any battle scene in Shakespeare. Read the stage direction and the first line. It will leave you in no doubt what is happening. This is not true in *Cymbeline*.

On another note, imagine Iachimo and Posthumous, who know each other, meeting and fighting, without a word. Iachomo may not recognize Posthumous, (because putting on the garb of a peasant of course makes him unrecognizable), but there is no reason Posthumous would not recognize the Italian who slept with his wife. For him to fight without this fuel feeding the engagement is not theatrically satisfying. In fact, Iachomo has the only speech in this whole scene. After Posthumous, disguised as a British peasant, leaves him defeated, Iachomo says he feels so guilty about what he did to Imogen that he has lost his skill at arms, whereby a peasant can beat him. He exits, and then, it gets worse. Here is the next stage direction.

The battle continues; the Britons fly; CYMBELINE is taken: then enter, to his rescue, BELARIUS, GUIDERIUS, and ARVIRAGUS

Okay, Romans lay hands on Cymbeline, Belarius and sons enter and grab him back. What you need then is a line defining that this has happened, a word from a soldier to the king he has saved, or a word from the king to the soldier. Instead, the next lines are:

BELARIUS

Stand, stand! We have the advantage of the ground;
The lane is guarded: nothing routs us but
The villainy of our fears.

GUIDERIUS/ARVIRAGUS

Stand, stand, and fight!

Re-enter POSTHUMUS LEONATUS, and seconds the Britons: they rescue CYMBELINE, and exeunt.

This makes no sense since Belarius & sons have already seized back the king. The ground that Belarius is referring to is a narrow lane, almost a defile, that allows four men (Belarius, the two disguised princes, and Posthumus), to hold it against the whole Roman force. But there is no way to tell this at this point. It is explained later in the play, through exposition, but it is not explained now, so when the lines are above spoken, they are only confusing. What is also not explained is the rescue of the king.

With the focus on Belarius & sons, Caius Lucius tells Imogen to run away, since the Romans are now routed, so that he won't get hurt. They go.

In a Shakespearean battle, one group after another enters and exits fluidly, without stopping the action. How do Belarius & sons, and Posthumus, get off stage, in order for the next scene to begin? This playwright could have written it so that the four exeunt at the end of the scene, but he did not. Posthumus will exit and reenter in another part of the field, leaving the stage empty for a moment in the middle of what should be the climax.

Act V Sc 3

Another part of the field

Posthumus enters with “a Britain Lord,” yet another speaking part entering for the first time – in Act 5. Lord asks Posthumus if he came from the fight. Posthumus says he has, but that he sees the Lord must have come from the “fliers,” and Lord admits it was so. Posthumus exonerates him, and Lord acts as his foil while Posthumus describes the battle that just occurred for 50 lines, and this is when we hear a description of the lane, and the defile, and how an old man and two young men defended it and turned the tide of battle. He then accuses the Lord of making a mockery of it with a rhyme, and the Lord goes off. Posthumus has another 20 lines of monologue about war, during which he says he will change back to being a Roman, so that he'll be killed.

And now, once again, two totally unknown characters enter to tell us what has happened off stage – two captains and some soldiers come in and the captains tell each other (as you know, Bob), that the Roman leader Caius Lucius has been captured, and that the tide was turned by that old man and his two boys, and by a peasant, but none of them can now be found.

Posthumus has been standing on stage all this time, another instance of the playwright hanging up an actor. They spy Posthumus and capture him. And we have another of these dumb shows:

Enter CYMBELINE, BELARIUS, GUIDERIUS, ARVIRAGUS, PISANIO, Soldiers, Attendants, and Roman Captives. The Captains present POSTHUMUS LEONATUS to CYMBELINE, who delivers him over to a Gaoler: then exeunt omnes

Huh? Cymbeline has just won an impossible battle, he's been captured and rescued, and he doesn't get a line? He is given a prisoner, whom he thinks is one of his enemies, and he has to pantomime sending him to gaol? Shakespeare never wrote so completely incompetent and untheatrical a scene.

Act V Sc 4

A prison

Two Gaolers bring in Posthumus, in chains. Posthumus has a 28-line monologue in which he says how very sorry he is for having Imogen killed, and that he looks forward to dying. Then he goes to sleep.

And here is another of those incompetent stage directions:

He sleeps. Solemn music. Enter, as in an apparition, Sicilius Leonatus (father to Posthumus, an old man), attired like a warrior, leading in his hand an ancient matron, his wife, and mother to Posthumus, with music before them. Then, after other music, follows the two young Leonati, brothers to Posthumus, with wounds as they died in the war. They circle Posthumus round as he lies sleeping.

Sicilius Leonatus speaks for five lines before he identifies himself as Posthumus's father. So, for the time it takes for these four people to come onto the stage, and walk around Posthumus, and begin to speak, the audience is not going to have a clue who they are. When the audience gets lost, they come out of the play. If this play had been produced in Shakespeare's time, they'd be throwing oranges.

Sicilius, Mother, First Brother, and Second Brother take turns chiding Jupiter for not protecting their son/brother, because he is so very, very good. This goes on for twelve stanzas, (62 lines). And many of the lines don't scan.

And then Jupiter descends in thunder and lightning, sitting upon an eagle. He throws a thunderbolt. The ghosts fall on their knees.

This is ludicrous.

Hymen arrives at the end of *As You Like It*, to bless the four weddings that are going on. But *As You Like It* is a frivolous comedy, a romance of not one but two clowns. Hymen keeps the tone, and adds an unexpected surprise to the ending. We are not at the ending yet. Jupiter doesn't do anything to solve this problem. He reproves the ghosts, tells them he oppresses those most whom he loves best, tells them it will be all right, and to prove it, he gives them a stone tablet, which they lay on Posthumus's chest, "wherein our pleasure his full fortune does confine" (and if you can untangle that while the line is being spoken, most of any audience will not). After a speech of 20 lines, Jupiter ascends back into the rafters. Sicilius then describes the event that we just saw for nine lines, and the ghosts "vanish."

Posthumus wakes up. He describes the dream he just had, which is the event that we just saw. He discovers the tablet, and reads out a prophecy so winding and cryptic, that in the end it will take a translator to explain it. That is not fun. It is not satisfying. And it is not what this play has been about up until this point. It is adding yet another set-up at the time when the arc of the play should be reaching satisfying climaxes and conclusions. It makes the play feel exhausting, as though it will never end. And then it goes on.

Despite the dream, and the prophecy, when the jailer comes, Posthumus tells him he is ready to go be hanged. They then engage in heavy-handed word-play where the Jailer philosophizes about death for 26 lines, while Posthumus keeps assuring him that he is ready for it. This is an attempt at a humorously wise mechanical whom we often find in Shakespeare's plays. But it is tedious, repetitive, unremarkable, and goes on for a long time. A messenger enters and tells the Jailer to unchain the prisoner and bring him to the King. Posthumus and the Jailer quip about this, and then the Jailer has another nine-line monologue before they exeunt.

Now we are at Act 5, Scene 6, the last scene in this play. It is 487 lines long.

Enter Cymbeline, with Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, Pisanio, and lords.

Cymbeline already came on with these guys in the last scene, when the captain who captured Posthumus presented him in dumb show, so this is a repeated action, the same stage picture and event happening again, but this time Cymbeline says what he should have said last time. He says to Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius, "Stand by my side, you whom the gods have made preservers of my throne."

This is possibly the most Shakespearean line in the play. He then asks whether the fourth fighter, the one they think was a peasant, has been found. Pisanio says he has not.

Cymbeline then calls Belarius, Arviragus, and Guiderius “the liver, heart, and brain of Britain,” another instance of ham-handed writing undermining the power of the moment. Then he knights them, one after the other and promises them more rewards. (A director would cut this. One knighting is theatrical. Three knightings is the same action repeated two more times with ever-lessening effect.) As they rise, Cornelius, the doctor from Act I, Scene 2, enters, to tell the king that the queen is dead, and not only that, she confessed before she died that she never loved the king, but only married him for the position, and that she attempted to murder Imogen with poison, but that Imogen fled.

The writer had two entire acts at the beginning of the play in which to place a scene where the queen attempts to poison Imogen but is somehow thwarted. Instead, there was that long, long interchange with the doctor where she acquired what she thought was poison. Later, there was the scene where she gave what she thought was poison to Pisanio, who was Posthumus's servant. She had no reason to think that would get it to Imogen. When Imogen pretends to be sick, the queen might well have sent the poison to her ladies to give her, or gone to her bedside and delivered the dose herself, but this never happened. So during the continuing unresolved climax, the queen, offstage, confesses to a crime that wasn't committed during the play.

The queen then also confessed, Cornelius tells us, that she planned to apply a slow poison to the king, and while nursing him work on him to adopt her son as his heir. But since that failed, she despaired and died. This confession has happened off-stage and in the past, and is reported by a tertiary character, about a crime that was never committed.

Then Caius Lucius is brought in, together with Iachomo, the soothsayer, other Roman prisoners including Posthumus at the back, and Imogen, dressed as a boy, all attended by British soldiers. The stage is full.

In an echo of the victorious Henry V in the eponymous play, Cymbeline says to Caius Lucius, “Thou com'st not, Caius, now for tribute.” He goes on to tell him that the kinsmen of the dead have asked that the prisoners be killed, which request he has granted.

Caius Lucius accepts this like a Roman, but presents his boy, his servant Imogen, to the king, and asks that his life be spared because “Never master had a page so kind, so duteous, diligent, so tender over his occasions, true, so feat, so nurse-like; let his virtue join with my request, which I'll make bold your highness cannot deny.” Pages in Rome must be terrible slackers; Caius Lucius has reached this assessment after only about 24 hours' acquaintance. Caius Lucius asks Cymbeline to, “Save him, sir, and spare no blood beside.”

Cymbeline is immediately charmed by the look of the boy, so much so that he offers him a boon, even to the life of one of the prisoners. Caius Lucius tells Imogen (whose life he just saved) that he doesn't ask her to ask his life, but that he knows (s)he will.

With another ham-handed line, Imogen says, “Your life, good master, must shuffle for itself.”

She tells Cymbeline her name is Fidele, and asks to speak with him apart about what she wants.

It has been 35 lines since Imogen was presented to Cymbeline and the court. But it is not until now that Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus respond to the fact that they have seen their beloved Fidele “revived from death.”

Once again, the writer has hung up his actors. When Imogen comes forward to be presented, right then, those three will recognize her. But for 35 lines the actors have to hold back their reaction. And they cannot do this and stay in character. If they saw the boy they loved, whom they last saw dead, they would react. If he was in danger of being killed by the king, they would plead for him. And yet they have to stand there watching for 35 lines and not react, because reacting would upstage the scene, which professional actors don't do.

Shakespeare, a consummate professional himself, would know that once these three saw their beloved boy, they would have to respond. He would build it into the scene, to the delight of the audience. This writer hangs up his actors for 35 lines, and then has them discuss whether this is their boy, or someone who has the same name and looks exactly like him, but is not him.

And after the three new knights discuss this for ten more lines, then Pisanio, who has been hung up now for 45 lines, says, “Tis my mistress.”

This is bad, bad playwriting. This is the kind of scene that the director would attempt to stage, the actors would start explaining the problem, and everyone would turn to the playwright, and there would be one of those *discussions* that result in the playwright putting the script under his arm and heading off with his head down to fix it, and not come back until he did.

The elements of a fantastic scene, with one revelation after another, are here, but this incompetent has failed to unfold each element in a way that is either theatrical or satisfying.

What does Imogen say to Cymbeline? When she comes back with the king, he tells her to stand by him, and calls up Iachomo. Imogen asks Iachomo to tell everyone where he got the ring he is wearing.

In the last scene, Posthumus was called forth to be hung. The scene began with rewards to heroes, and then the parade of the prisoners about to be executed, then the miraculous sparing of one prisoner, and now we are talking about a ring. The tension level of this scene has descended to nearly nothing. We already know where he got the ring. We are about to hear it again. At length.

When Iachomo mentions Imogen, Cymbeline's excitement to hear of her raises the tension level again. Here is another occasion where the writer mires himself on the slopes of comedy, while writing something that should be drama as Iachomo tells the story:

Iachomo

Upon a time – unhappy was the clock
That struck the hour – it was in Rome – accursed
The mansion where – 'twas at a feast – O, would
Our viands have been poisoned, or at least
Those which I heaved to head!”

It takes him sixty lines to tell the story of the event that we have already sat through once, and listened to a second time when he told it at length to Posthumus when he got back to Rome. During this telling, he once again praises Posthumus for being such a great guy, the best guy anybody ever met. Over the course of the play there is not one instance where Posthumus shows himself in his behavior to be even a moderately good guy, up until the battle.

Iachomo takes his own time in telling of his crime, despite Cymbeline's urgings to get to the matter. When he describes Posthumus's reaction in Rome, Posthumus himself steps out, reveals himself, and abuses himself for nineteen lines, and confesses to having set his servant to kill Imogen. As he calls on her, Imogen herself, still disguised as a boy, steps out to calm and reassure him.

Imogen (approaching him)
Peace my lord. Hear, hear.

Posthumus for some reason, interprets this as mocking him,

Posthumus
Shall's have a play of this? Thou scornful page
There lie thy part.

Posthumus strikes Imogen to the ground, knocking her unconscious.

Here is another indication that Shakespeare did not write this play. There are several reasons why no competent playwright would put this action in his play. First, striking Imogen is a despicable act, especially striking her hard enough so that she is rendered unconscious for ten lines. This action will cause anyone in the audience who might have an iota of sympathy left for Posthumus to stop empathizing with him. Second, we are at the climax of the play. The lovers are about to be reunited. For Posthumus to strike her down is dramatically, not only unsatisfying, but repulsive. Shakespeare was always aware of how every moment of his plays worked on the audience. He would not have made such a howling error.

Pisanio reveals Imogen's identity. She wakes and accuses him of poisoning her.

This, again, is dramatically unsatisfying. Cymbeline is standing by, waiting to embrace his lost and found daughter. Posthumus is writhing in double guilt for killing and then assaulting her. She was not poisoned. She was given a drug that made her sleep. Her accusation of Pisanio is the least dramatic – and therefore least satisfying – choice of action for the playwright to make at this moment.

Pisanio tells Imogen that he thought the drug was precious, and that he had it from the queen. (Pisanio perfectly understood the evil of the queen. It is out of character for him to trust anything that came from her hand.)

And now we fall further down the ladder of who should be driving this scene, as Cornelius, remember, he's the doctor, interrupts, because he has been reminded of yet *another* confession that the queen made before her death, that the drug she gave Pisanio was a poison. This scene should be a series of revelations between the principals. For Cornelius to insert himself into it (again) to repeat (once again)

something the audience has already heard three times, drops the tension level to a stultifying level. And then he goes on about it for ten more lines.

It is learning that the medicine, which they knew nothing about and did not see her take, was poisonous, that allows Belarius and his two sons to realize *for certain* that this is their beloved Fidele. Their inability to recognize her before this makes them appear foolish.

Now, at last, Imogen goes to Posthumus and embraces him, and he recognizes her. And if anyone still has the slightest doubt that Shakespeare did not write this play, this is what they say:

IMOGEN

Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?
Think that you are upon a rock; and now
Throw me again.

Embracing him

POSTHUMUS LEONATUS

Hang there like a fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die!

This would be a laugh line, except any audience at this point is going to be too exhausted taking in all these unending, unnecessary plot points, to respond.

And you may think that the play is over, or close to over, but no. There's more.

Cymbeline tells Imogen that the queen is dead. Imogen should already have gathered that, had she been listening. Cymbeline has already gotten over the death of his once-beloved queen, and wonders what happened to her son. Pisanio steps in and takes 14 lines to tell how Cloten put on Posthumus's clothes and headed off for Milford Haven "with unchaste purpose."

Guiderius bluntly tells the king that he killed him. Cymbeline tells him to take it back, as Cloten was a prince. Cymbeline, sorry though he is to condemn one of his recent saviors, orders him to be bound and taken away. Belarius steps in and tells him that Guiderius is a better man than the one he killed, and in fact is as well-born as the king. Upon this, the king threatens to execute him, too. But the play is almost over, so we know this is not going to happen, so these threats are simply tedious, not dramatic, as they are getting in the way of the closure that the audience has been waiting for now for three hours. And then, Belarius, in a mere 38 lines, tells the king what we already know, that he is the one that stole the king's boys and raised them as his own.

Fortunately, Guiderius has a birthmark, and Cymbeline is convinced that his sons are back again. No more is said about Guiderius killing Cloten. Obviously, in this world it is perfectly all right to kill someone whom you outrank. This is what the King says when he realizes these really are his sons:

Cymbeline

O, what am I?

A mother to the birth of three? Ne'er mother
Rejoiced deliverance more. Blest pray you be,
That, after this strange starting from your orbs,
You may reign in them now!

What he should be doing, what the moment begs him to do, is embrace each of his sons and call him by name. Instead, he turns to Imogen and tells her she has lost her kingdom.

And then we are told again – what we've already seen – that the three of them already know each other, and loved each other, and isn't it perspicacious that Guiderius and Arviragus called her “brother,” and loved her, right from the start?

Cymbeline then has a speech in which he asks rhetorically about each instance of the story of how these siblings met, while the audience groans in hope that no one answers him. But Cymbeline fortunately admits this is not the time and place. He spends five lines describing how Posthumus and Imogen are looking at each other, which we can see. He then declares that they will go to the temple and make sacrifices.

And then he turns to Belarius and tells him, “Thou art my brother; so we'll hold thee ever,” by which we are to know that Belarius is not going to be executed, and that his earlier treason and banishment, and his crime of kidnapping the princes, have all been forgiven. Once again, this is done off-handedly, instead of dramatically, and in an unsatisfying way.

Cymbeline goes on to say that since everyone is so happy, the prisoners will “taste our comfort.” He then brings up again that peasant-soldier who fought for him, and now Posthumus reveals that it was he. He turns to Iachomo and tells him to admit that it was he who beat him during the fight. Iachomo now is able to recognize Posthumus as that peasant even though none of the others who were there have done so. Iachomo kneels and offers his life, and gives back the ring, and the bracelet.

When a playwright has two dramatic events to play out, the one thing you do not do is play them at the same time. Every dramatic event that you have set up is the material, the ammunition, that you use to effect your audience. You play the less powerful, and then the more powerful, to get the full effect of each one. To play out two at the same time is to waste one. I don't know of another instance in Shakespeare's lexicon when he makes such a beginner's mistake.

The events of this long, long ending have been bungled from first to last, requiring endless, tedious talking about events that the audience has already experienced. And it's not over!

Posthumus forgives Iachomo and spares him. Imogen, whom Iachomo almost got killed twice, is not asked whether she forgives him, or wants him spared, even though she is the princess of Britain. And now Cymbeline pardons all the prisoners, in keeping with Posthumus's generosity.

We could examine at this point whether Posthumus, a subject of Cymbeline, has it in his power to spare Iachomo's life, when he is under Cymbeline's sentence of death along with the rest of the Roman army, but let that go. This has gone on far too long already.

And it's still not over!

Of all the events of this play, what should be the climax is the reunion of the lovers, the reunion of the king and his sons, and the pardon of everyone. But it's not. The play goes on. Posthumus asks Caius Lucius to summon the soothsayer. He then explains to everyone – and to the audience again, who already saw it – how in a dream Jupiter descended on an eagle, and left a stone tablet on his chest. Turns out he's been carrying this around the whole time, because he hands it over to the soothsayer to read and explain.

We have heard it already, but we get to hear it again. The soothsayer, here at the end of the play, who isn't even a tertiary character, now has a 41- line speech in which he explains what Jupiter, several scenes ago, meant by the tablet he left. He reads the cryptic writing aloud, and then here are the first ten lines of the explanation:

Soothsayer

Thou, Leonatus, art the lion's whelp
The fit and apt construction of thy name,
Being leo-natus, doth import so much
(To Cymbeline) The piece of tender air thy virtuous daughter
Which we call "mollis aer" and 'mollis air'
We term it 'mulier', (to Posthumus) which 'mulier' I divine
Is this most constant wife, who even now
Answering the letter of the oracle,
Unknown to you, unsought, were clipped about
With this most tender air.

No competent playwright would put a speech like this between the climax and the ending of a play. It is not simply incompetent, it is stupid. And there are sixteen more lines of this to go, with Cymbeline commenting on it in the middle for another seven lines.

As it turns out, Jupiter wants Britain to pay tribute to Caesar, and Cymbeline decides to do so, and THAT is the end of the play.

Whether one imagines this playing to King James's Protestant court, or to the red-blooded English people in the Globe, this is NOT a satisfying ending. Though it is likely that by this time, there would be no one left in the theater to hear it.

It is not likely, however, that this play was ever produced. The howling production errors built into it would have had to be fixed before the play could be performed, and the resulting script would be very different.

There are several things we can deduce from this play about the playwright. He loves the speeches. He writes long, long speeches at every opportunity, coming out of the mouths of the most unlikely characters. He has no sense of telling a story through scenes of dramatic action. In all this play, there is not one satisfying scene. He has no sense of dramatic structure. He did not structure this play in his mind before he wrote it. Just as his scenes do not, the play as a whole has no external shape, no arc, no gathering momentum, and no proper climax.

The playwright has no sense of where the power to hold the audience's attention comes from. This play is called *Cymbeline*, but it is not Cymbeline's play. It is not Posthumus's play, it is not Imogen's play, it is just a series of events described over and over again with bloviating verbiage, and so it is certainly not Shakespeare's play.

Cymbeline has no other provenance as Shakespeare's work except for the fact that it was included by Shakespeare's friends and fellow-actors, in the First Folio when it was published in 1623. Shakespeare by then had been dead for eight years. The play was never registered with the Master of Revels, or published before that time, and there is no record of any performance. It is mentioned in Simon Foreman's journal, in 1611, together with three other plays. Foreman was an astrologer and a quack, who made his living selling magical potions, remedies, and readings to people in his neighborhood, and having sex a lot with the local woman (according to the journal). One page in his papers is titled *The Book of Plays and notes thereof*, but this "book" lists only four plays, *Richard II*, which he saw at the Globe on Tuesday, April 30, *The Winter's Tale* which he saw at the Globe on Wednesday, the 15th of May, *Macbeth*, which he saw at the Globe on the 20th of May, and *Cymbeline*.

In each of the first three plays he describes the plays using the words "observed," and "saw." For *Cymbeline*, his note begins, "Remember also the story of Cymbeline." He gives no date or location where he saw it, and does not refer to what he saw or observed in the play. He does not mention that any of these were written by Shakespeare. In fact, from his description, this version of *Richard II* was probably someone else's play.

How did *Cymbeline* come to be included in the First Folio? It could have been simple mischance. The Globe burned down in 1613. Piles of scripts may have been pulled out and stored, and *Cymbeline* may have been a submission to the theater that ended up in a pile where it did not deserve to be. After 25 years of working with him, and in the years following his death, Shakespeare's fellows, John Heminge and Henry Condell, may have lost track of all the plays he wrote. Or the editor, Edward Knight, could have slipped it in for reasons of his own during the printing.

Let us identify *Cymbeline* now for what it is, a cuckoo in the nest, and delete it from the list of plays we know were written by the greatest of playwrights, William Shakespeare.