

The Darling Buds of May" -

A Study of Shakespeare's exploitation of the verb "to wander" and its manifold powers of evocation and season-related associations (also shared by the German verb "wandern").

The "contextualist" school of critics holds that each element in a poetic work is so inextricably and uniquely bound up with the work to which it belongs that it no longer bears comparison to similar-looking elements in other works. I begin therefore by attempting to justify why an intertextual comparison of poetic works or passages on the basis of a common word choice may be deemed valid in the first place.

As M. H. Abrams points out in the introduction of his monograph *The Mirror and the Lamp*,¹ a powerful consensus of critical opinion in the twentieth century has moved to a position that stresses the objective nature of poetic works. In this connection he cites opinions put forward by the Chicago neoAristotelian school, whose adherents, such as John Crowe Ransom, called for recognition of the autonomy of the work itself. The approach adopted by Ransom, W.K. Wimsatt, Cleanth Brooks and others encourages a close attention to the structures and imagery of poetic works and an attempt to exclude as far as possible any consideration of extrinsic factors such as those relating to a poet's intentions, personal situation, etc. We note an extreme case of this approach to poetry in Calvin S. Brown's essay on Walt Whitman's *When Lilacs first in the Door-Yard Bloom'd*.²

One argument supporting the objective approach to poetic criticism states that the poet's mind is unknowable and therefore any assertion based on a claim to know a poet's mind must prove fallacious. However, one may argue with equal authority that "the work" cannot be directly apprehended by a reader's mind. It must be assimilated and appropriated, and the consequent processes generate what M. M. Bakhtin understands as a "dialogue" between the work and the reader's mind and imagination. In recognition of this fact, objective criticism demands of a reader's capacity to interpret texts "objectively." In his article "Objective Interpretation,"³ E.D. Hirsch Jr. warns of the danger of making subjective interpretations of a text, admitting that texts inevitably contain indeterminate and often ambiguous utterances. The "objective" approach effectively offers what one might see as an academically correct mode of textual analysis. He concedes that, when considering a difficult passage, one is entitled to base certain interpretative judgments on a knowledge of a poet's typical use of words, at least to the extent that this is inferable from readings in other works by the author. Here objective critics must tread warily if they are not to shift their terms of reference from 'the work' to the author's mind, which in turn may cause the reader to stray into the quagmire of intertextual inquiries and consequently forsake a close study of the work.

The logocentric textual approach is not subject to the constraints imposed by an isolation of the work from all that surrounds it in the external world, for the word is both a specific element in the work and yet a part of general language, and therefore capable of being "colored" by various contextual planes that extend beyond the narrow confines of the work itself. A knowledge of the world is the basis for a reader's ability to perceive the internal structures and associations of the work, and a recognition of internal features enhances a reader's awareness of the work's allusive and evocative powers. This principle of reciprocal enhancement is better demonstrated by practice rather than by theory and abstract discourse. In the following case studies we will consider the implications of words in the light of their settings in poetic works and literary tradition, paying attention to phenomena such as lexical coloration and suppression."

In the immediately following studies of texts revealing aspects of "intertextuality," the cases to be investigated belong to one of the three following categories (space allows only a consideration of the first category in this part of the study):

(a) Passages containing the verb "wander" and its derivatives in Shakespeare's works. I hope to show that the unity underlying the various semantic and context- related implications of the word must reflect powers of cohesion and harmonisation that can hardly be explained as the product of conscious design, so diffuse and formally unconnected are the texts under consideration. Like Professor Willoughby in his study of the "Wanderer" image in Goethe's works,⁴ I find a sound foundation for an overall classification of intertextual phenomena in the supposition that all utterances that flow from an individual's mind reflect the coordinating powers of the subconscious strata of that mind.

(b) In subsequent studies we consider in comparisons between passages in works by different authors. In such cases the principle producing coherence must be attributed to powers transcending the bounds of any one individual author's mind.

(c) I also hope to make textual comparisons combining both comparative approaches designated above.

CASE 1: The following citations, with the exception of the final one, are from the works of Shakespeare. In them the word "to wander" ranges in meaning and connotation from the negative to the positive for reasons to be discussed shortly.

But thy eternal summer shall not fade,
Nor lose possession of that fair thou ow'st,
Nor shall Death brag thou wander'st in his shade,
When in eternal lines to time thou growest;

(Shakespeare, Sonnet 18)

'T may be, again to make me wander thither:
'Wander', a word for shadows like myself,

(Shakespeare, *The Passionate Pilgrim*, XIV)
Cin. I dreamt to-night that I did feast with Caesar,
And things unluckily charge my fantasy:
I have no will to wander forth of doors,
Yet something leads me forth.

(Shakespeare, *Julius Caesar*, 3.3.)
Fai. Over hill, over dale,
Thorough bush, thorough briar,
Over park, over pale,
Thorough flood, thorough fire,
I do wander everywhere,

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, 2.1.)
[Puck]. I am that merry wanderer of the night

(Shakespeare, *A Midsummer Nights Dream*, 2.1.)
Der, welcher wandert diese Strasse voll Beschwerden,
wird rein durch Feuer, Wasser, Luft und Erden:

Whoever wanders this path full of woes
becomes pure through fire, water, air and earth

(Die Zauberflöte/The Magic Flute)

How is it possible that the manifold associations of the verb "to wander" do not pose contradictions but rather reflect the essential "lexical unity" of that word? One might suppose from the first two citations that the word had a predominantly negative range of meanings for Shakespeare, for it refers to the lost condition of dead souls or implies that human life is transitory and futile. The citations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, on the other hand, show that the verb "to wander" can convey very positive associations.

The implications of the verb "to wander" in the passage cited from *Julius Caesar* pose a highly ambivalent mixture of positive and negative suggestions, which I now compare in the light of the word's contextual setting in this drama and of Tynjanov's theories concerning the effect of words found in poetry and literary passages.⁶ We begin with the word understood at the primary level of significance, that is: according to its immediately recognisable sense in terms of its context as it might be ascertained when one reads a text in standard language.

(1) When "wandering" from his house, Cinna exposes himself to great physical danger and consequently succumbs to the fate of death. We have noted the association of "wandering" and death in Shakespeare's 18th sonnet.

(2) His death results from an absurd confusion of identity stemming from the fact that he is a namesake of Cinna the conspirator. Among other negative implications of "to wander" is that of becoming disoriented, confused and subject to error.

(3) Through its association with Cain, "wandering" evokes thoughts about violence and war.

(4) The import of "to wander" in the dramatic context of the Third Act of *Julius Caesar* is not entirely negative. Cinna's dream conveys a promise that Cinna and Caesar should "feast" with each other, which implies that they will be united in death. Death then opens the door to possibilities never realised on earth. It is the path leading to a spiritual dimension where ideal relationships thwarted by the exigencies of physical limitations, are fulfilled. This pertains, whether we consider the ideal love of Romeo and Juliet or the ideal harmony of ruler and poet to which Petrarch and later artists and poets during the Renaissance aspired. This harmony is symbolised by the laurel crown, the honour bestowed on emperors and poets. Cinna's choice of the word "fantasy" has implications that transcend the sense of the word that accords with the overt meaning of Cinna's utterance. "Fantasy" bespeaks the poet's powers of creativity and his mental freedom. Irony attaches to the sarcastic utterance that Cinna should die on account of his bad verses. Cinna poses the only dramatic representation of a poet in Shakespearean drama of which I am aware. The Romantic poets, by contrast, were much hampered in their attempts at drama by their inability to depict much other than a dramatic self-representation of the Poet. Cinna experiences a dream. The affinity between dreaming and "wandering" most clearly manifested in a play which is defined as a dream by its very title, a play in which the verb to "wander" acquires an entirely felicitous significance.

(5) Let us now consider the positive associations of the verb "to wander" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. In this drama "wandering" assumes the most general and inclusive range of associations and implications, allowing all that is meant by "wandering"--in a lower or partial sense--to be subsumed and brought into harmony within the ambit of its highest or universal sense. In one of the citations from *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, Puck refers to himself as "that merry wanderer of the night." In the other one, however, a spirit speaks of its ability to "wander everywhere" in sympathy with the elements of fire, water and air. In the context of the play "wandering" takes on the significance of the power of the imagination to overcome all physical limitations. With this sense in mind, Goethe called Shakespeare the greatest "Wanderer" in his "Speech on Shakespeare's Day." The association of "Wanderer" and "night" is a feature in Goethe's poetry as it is in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. A coincidence? I do not believe so, but before entering into a discussion of this question, let us try to find some common denominators in the ranges of associations aroused by the verb "to wander."

In the first citations the verb absorbs from its context a negative sense to do with shadows and the absence of the sun's presence or some diminution of sunlight. In view of the contrast between winter and summer informing the 18th Sonnet and *The Passionate Pilgrim*, "wandering" is relegated to the negative pole in oppositions between light, summer, youth and life, on the one side, and shadows, winter, old age and death, on the other. *A Midsummer Night's Dream* reveals "wandering" in its most positive aspect.

The play's very title hints at the fundamental reason for this positive range of associations. In terms of ancient mythology, midsummer marks the sun's fullest possible incursion into the realm of night. If we agree with Jung that the sun in ancient mythology symbolises the libido's quest for union with its source, midsummer symbolically represents the greatest intrusion of the sun into the realm of night, betokening at least a partial attainment of the libido's quest for union with "the night," the anima. In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the negative aspects of wandering, though hinted at, undergo a process of sublimation. Where confusions occur, they are the source of fun and playfulness, as when magic induces amorous feelings for the most unlikely object of affection. Even the spectre of death becomes ludic in the tragi-comedy enacted by the amateur troupe composed of Athenian artisans.

The action of *Julius Caesar* is set just before the vernal equinox, which in ancient mythology marks the symbolic death of the solar hero preceding his victory over death and winter. This victory is foretold by Cinna's dream. The unity underlying the apparently contradictory senses of "to wander" springs from what Jung referred to as "the collective unconscious," allowing us to infer that the scope of this unifying influence extends beyond what is attributable to imaginative powers of William Shakespeare, Goethe, or any other genii, a conclusion drawn by Professor Willoughby, in principle at least, in his article "The Image of the 'Wanderer' and the 'Hut' in Goethe's poetry."⁴

There is an uncanny resemblance between the use of "to wander" in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and that of "wandern" in the libretto of Mozart's *Magic Flute*. Schikaneder, who wrote the score, was a Shakespearean actor and may have been influenced by his knowledge of the play. There is evidence that the Queen of Night was originally cast in an essentially positive role belied by the evil intentions later ascribed to her. The ambivalence of the figure suggests to my mind that Mozart and Schikaneder teetered on the edge separating the classical high evaluation of the sun and the romantic fascination with the night.⁵

Annotations

1. M. H. Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp, Romantic Theory and Romantic Tradition* (London/Oxford/New York, 1953).
2. Calvin S. Brown, "The Musical Development of Symbols: Whitman," in *Music and Literature*, Athens, 1948).
3. E.D. Hirsch, Jr., "Objective Interpretation," *PLMA* 75 (1960).
4. *Etudes Germaniques*, July-Dec 1951.
5. Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, *Die Zauberflöte*, published by Kurt Pahlen (Goldmann Schott: Munich, 1978; 4th ed. 1982), pp.154-158. Kurt Pahlen assesses the evidence for the theory that Mozart at Schikaneder's instigation reversed the roles of the Queen of the Night and Sarastro making the former good fairy a power for evil and the former sorcerer the wise and noble priest of the Sun. Evidently a rival theatre company pipped *Die Zauberflöte* to the post by staging an opera that bore striking similarities to Mozart's opera. The opera in question was entitled *Die Zauberzither oder Kaspar der Fagottist* with music by Wenzel Müller, a popular composer of melodies. In Kurt Pahlen's view the Queen of Night's first aria--composed before the alleged change--conveys profound and noble sentiments that do not accord with the supposedly evil character of the Queen of Night.
6. Jurij Tynjanov, "The Meaning of the Word in Verse," in *Readings in Russian Poetics / Formalist and Structuralist Views*, ed. by Ladislav Matejka and Krystina Pomorska (Michigan Slavic Publications, Ann Arbor, 1978), pp. 136-145.

Editor's note For all quotations from Shakespeare, the Editor referred to *The Complete Works of William Shakespeare*,

edited by W. J. Craig and published from Oxford University Press in 1947.