

REUNIONS IN EPHEBUS:

The Comedy of Errors and Pericles

This paper was first presented at the Shakespeare-Neville Symposium in June 2008 in London. What follows is an amended and extended version.

I am a psychotherapist. I look for patterns in the lives of the people who come to see me: such patterning reveals the constellations of their problems and the sources of these, making meaning and sense out of the apparent chaos and confusion. Often there is grief, trauma, injustice, separation, shame, and a wish for atonement, a reintegration of the fragmented self, an improvement or resolution in relationships with others.

I look then at Shakespeare's plays for patterns and I find them in abundance. I also look at Neville's life and wonder what patterning there is in his life that, as Brenda James has discovered, matches the patterns in the plays. What especially is it about Neville's psychological make-up that fits the writer of the works of Shakespeare? I will for this paper highlight five fundamental interlocking patterns and show their connection with the plays: especially with *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles*: the first at the start of his career and the other towards the end. Both plays end in reunions in Ephesus. These plays are linked because underlying the plot of both is the story of Apollonius of Tyre. This tale may also be a source for *Twelfth Night*, another play about shipwrecked twins written in the middle of his career so this mythic pattern may be seen as axiomatic.

The fundamentals are:

- 1) The execution of Neville's grandfather for treason.
- 2) Neville's illegitimacy.
- 3) His mother's death.
- 4) The Trauma of his imprisonment (with the threat of execution and consequent terror) and his eventual release: the shame and separation from his family, and eventual joyous reunion.

Can we see these fundamentals in the plays? The answer is yes, over and over again. As a therapist I witness the mechanism of projection: the mental habit of seeing in complex, vague material (such as clouds, lichen

or oil on puddles) patterns, pictures and faces that have some meaning to the viewer: Hamlet teases Polonius about this very phenomenon.

Hamlet: Do you see yonder cloud that's almost in shape of a camel?

Polonius: By th' mass and 'tis – like a camel indeed.

Hamlet: Methinks it is like a weasel.

Polonius: It is backed like a weasel.

Hamlet: Or like a whale.

Polonius: Very like a whale.

All artists project aspects of themselves and their experience into the images of their art. Shakespeare does this in ways we have been unable to fathom because we have been looking at the wrong man: with Henry Neville now identified as the real author we can see exactly what he was projecting into his plays.

1) **Transgenerational Issues:** The execution of Neville's grandfather for treason.

The Comedy of Errors starts with the threat of an innocent man's execution. Of course we see many executions in the history plays, in the Roman plays, in the romances and even here in a comedy the threat is never far away: indeed it hangs over the whole play until the very end. *Pericles* likewise begins with the heads of the executed princes who could not solve the riddle posed by Antiochus and the threat that Pericles himself will be executed or assassinated for resolving the riddle: here we see the connection between the two plays in the very first scene.

Sir Edward Neville (1485-1538/9) was executed in the Tower of London in 1538, aged **56**. Our Sir Henry was in the Tower of London under threat of execution in 1601 when he was aged 39. He survived this however and died in his fifties, aged about **53-5**. Both grandfather and grandson then had suffered periods in the Tower and died in their fifties. This suggests a pattern of death that Anne Schutzenberger writes about in *The Ancestor Syndrome*, a book that describes the mechanisms of transgenerational processes that can mould people's lives. Edward Neville was a masquer, a poet who improvised songs and verses, and took part in embassies to France and used disguise. Neville might then be seen to have what Shutzenberger would call "an invisible loyalty" to his grandfather, probably expressive of his own father's grief and anger at the loss of his father (he was 18 years old when Sir Edward was executed and lived until he was 73).

An example of this is how in *Henry VI* part 1 a theme of transgenerational retribution on Henry VI for the original sin of his grandfather, Henry IV

in taking the throne from Richard II (and his murder), is developed. The Duke of Somerset, speaking to Richard Plantagenet (Richard **Neville**), shaming him, says:

Was not thy father, Richard Earl of Cambridge,
For treason executed in our late king's days?
And, by his treason, stand'st not thou attainted,
Corrupted, and exempt from ancient gentry?
His trespass yet lives guilty in thy blood;
And, till thou be restored, thou art a yeoman. (2.4.90)

To which Richard replies:

My father was attached, not attainted,
Condemn'd to die for treason, but no traitor. (2.4.96)

Later (2.5.54) referring to this incident Richard asks the Mortimer to explain to him the “cause My father... lost his head”. Mortimer links it to the disputed succession to the throne and his own imprisonment as a rival claimant to the throne. He says, “Methinks my father's execution Was nothing less than bloody tyranny.” Mortimer warns Richard, “With silence, nephew, be thou politic.” (2.5.99) If Neville felt angry and politically critical of the execution of his grandfather as an act of tyranny he knew he had to be politic and secret about his anger: he channelled it into his plays.

Sometimes there are several severed heads on stage at the same time in the *Henry VI* trilogy: *Henry VI* part 3 starts with Richard throwing down the head of the Duke of Somerset and the early plays are full of lopped limbs and mutilations.

In *Titus Andronicus* Titus' grandson mourns his death:

O grandsire, grandsire, e'en with all my heart
Would I were dead, so thou did live again.
O Lord, I cannot speak to him for weeping,
My tears will choke me if I ope my mouth. (5.3.171)

Both *The Comedy of Errors* and *Pericles* end happily but they begin with the threat of execution which hung over Neville's own life and haunted his family history.

There are positive forces in play in transgenerational processes: for example Neville's father and grandfather both took part in theatrical performances. His grandfather improvised verses and his father composed masques: they were creative men. Neville's uncle, also called

Henry Neville, who became the 4th Lord Abergavenny, had a theatre company, Lord Abergavenny's Men, who were active 1571-76: when our Henry was aged between 10-15.

Father, grandfather, uncle were all close to the centre of power and involved politically in domestic and foreign affairs. This closeness to Kings meant privilege and vulnerability. It also meant a need for secrecy, for intelligence work, diplomacy and spying, and for self protection.

2) His illegitimacy

The word 'shame' is used 346 times in the canon. This is much higher than the usage of the emotion words grief, anger, guilt, jealousy, envy, hurt or hate: only love has a higher occurrence. The highest number of uses of the word 'shame', in a single work, is 31 in the *Rape of Lucrece*. The highest number in any play is *King John*: 18. Many of these are to do with the illegitimacy of the Philip **Falconbridge** (a Neville family name: Thomas, the Bastard of Fauconberg, was the illegitimate son of William Neville, Lord Fauconberg and Earl of Kent. He was beheaded in 1471. He is mentioned in Shakespeare's *Henry VI* part 3). The word 'shame' is spread throughout *King John*: the conduct of King John, political betrayals, the plan to kill the innocent Arthur all being shameful. In other words shame is connected to illegitimacy, political betrayal and kings killing innocents: the constellation of Henry Neville, his illegitimacy and his grandfather's execution. Shakespeare uses the word 'shame' more in early works than later, though in three connected works there is a sudden upward spike in the graph: *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida* and *Measure for Measure*, namely the three plays probably written in, or just after he left, the Tower of London, when Neville had been shamed by his trial and imprisonment.

There are of course many bastards in the plays. They are often angry characters, powerful and dangerous. In *The Comedy of Errors* Luciana says, "Shame hath a bastard fame." (3.2.19) In *Pericles* the Bawd in the brothel has brought up eleven bastards (4.2.13). Henry Neville mentioned in a letter that he had 11 male siblings (James & Rubinstein, 2005, 64). Furthermore Neville had 11 children (James, 2008, 49).

In *Cymbeline* Posthumus bitterly complains:

Is there no way for men to be but women
Must be half-workers? We are all bastards;
And that most venerable man which I
Did call my father, was I know not where
When I was stamp'd; some coiner with his tools

Made me a counterfeit: yet **my mother seem'd**
The Dian of that time so doth my wife
The nonpareil of this. (2.4.158)

Neville had to accept the fact that his mother had had him outside marriage. This perhaps explains the insistence on chastity before marriage that Prospero reiterates: indeed *The Tempest* is the **only** play in which there is no shame word. Lucrece kills herself to avoid visiting shame on future generations:

bequeath not to their lot
The shame that from them no device can take,
The **blemish** that will never be forgot;
Worse than a slavish wipe or **birth-hour's blot**:
For marks descried in men's nativity
Are nature's faults, not their own infamy. (Stanza 77)

A number of scholars have identified a blot image cluster in expressing shame in Shakespeare's works. This image cluster places the word '**blot**' in relation to 'heaven/sky', 'night', 'moon', 'constancy/inconstant', 'disguise' (mask), 'winter/coldness', 'frost', 'sovereign', 'eye', 'sun' and 'cheeks' (face/complexion) (Muir, 1960, 22). The words '**stain**', '**spot**' and '**blemish**' are also used with these images. The imagery contrasts the wish to hide the shame of a blot/stain/disgrace (by disguising, darkness, night, cloud) and the revealing of a shamed face to the eye of day (= sun = sovereign): the resulting blush is also seen as sun burn (Casson, 2010, 142; 2009, 198). In *Love's Labour's Lost* Biron uses the words 'eye', 'complexions', 'sovereignty', 'cheek', 'blot', 'winters', 'eye', 'sun' in one speech (4.3.228 - 242). Sonnet 95 combines the word 'shame' with images of 'canker', 'spot', 'blot', 'veil', 'cover' and 'eyes'. Another example is to be found in *Venus and Adonis*:

And now Adonis, with a lazy spright,
And with a heavy, **dark**, disliking eye,
His louring brows o'erwhelming his fair sight,
Like **misty vapours** when they **blot** the sky,
Souring his **cheeks** cries 'Fie, no more of love!
The **sun doth burn my face**: I must remove.'

Here we can see a fuller example of the cluster including 'dark', 'eye', "misty vapours" (instead of clouds), 'sky', 'cheeks', 'sun', 'burn', 'face'. Professor Kenneth Muir, in *Shakespeare as Collaborator* (1960) remarked: "the presence of image clusters is one of the strongest

arguments for Shakespeare's authorship" (Armstrong, 1979, 203). Furthermore, "As no two poets employ the same image clusters, therefore work of doubtful provenance can be assigned to a poet with certainty if it contains clusters, or exhibits principles of cluster formation, characteristic of writings known to be authentic" (Armstrong, 1979, 198). It therefore was startling to find elements of this cluster in two of Neville's letters written in 1602 when, deeply shamed, he wrote to Cecil from his prison in the Tower. On May 11th 1602 Neville wrote:

"My state is wholly decayed and my health of late much impaired. There is little left but my life, which if it please God and her Majesty I am willing to preserve, chiefly in hope to **wipe** and **wear out** this **blemish** and **blot** that lies now upon me in **her eye**..."

(Salisbury MSS, 1910, 151)

Here we have 'blemish', 'blot', and the Queen's 'eye'. 'Blemish', 'blot' and 'wipe' occur together in *The Rape of Lucrece* (see above). This letter might also be compared with Sonnet 55 which uses the words "wear out" and 'eyes'. On July 31st 1602 Neville also wrote:

"And yf there be no other means to **wipe away** this **blot** wherewith I am **soiled** yet yt is possible, that yf I were at liberty, I might shed so much of my bloud in som place where she hath occasion to use me as might serve for a laver for the crime which hath made me so ugly in **her eye**."

(Transcribed from a copy of the letter at Hatfield House, see Salisbury MSS, 1910, 268)

Here again we have 'blot' and the Queen's 'eye'. In two plays of this period the word 'soil'd' appears. In *Hamlet* (written 1600-1601) Polonius uses the words 'soil'd' and 'crimes' within three lines (2.1.41 - 44). Furthermore Hamlet says, "I'll **wipe away** all trivial fond records". The words 'liberty', 'occasion', 'serve', 'ugly' and 'crimes' are also in the play. In *Troilus and Cressida*, which dates from 1602, the very year of these letters, the words 'soil'd', 'occasion', 'serve' and 'ugly' are used.

Shakespeare does not use the word 'laver' but does use 'lave' three times. Having searched these words in the LION database I can confirm that whilst a number of writers during the period 1599-1604 associate 'blot' with shame, none use the words 'blot' or 'blemish' in association with the Queen's eye. No other writer during this time uses the words "wear out", "wear away" or 'laver'. I have elsewhere examined Neville's vocabulary

is his letters and shown how it matches Shakespeare's, including other letters of 1600 containing rare vocabulary from *Hamlet* (Casson, 2010b).

Ewan Fernie in *Shame in Shakespeare* seems to describe Neville's situation without realising it:

"For Shakespeare, shame is explicitly a form of not being, not being one's ideal self; or else it is an experience of hideous deformity, of being something horrifically other, somebody else" (Fernie, 2002, 173).

He quotes William Zak's book *Sovereign Shame*: "King Lear is a man in hiding" (Fernie, 2002, 175).

"Shame is connected with the established Shakespearean motif of concealment and disguise..." (Fernie, 2002, 228).

Neville was not his ideal self: he was not legitimate; he was unable successfully to play the role of ambassador; he was unable to become secretary of state; he was unable to be acknowledged as a poet. He was a man in hiding who used disguise and hid his true identity.

3) His mother's death

Neville's mother died on 7th November 1573, (James & Rubinstein, 2005, 315) when he was **10** years old: a terrible loss for the boy. Shakespeare-Neville shows great knowledge of grief and loss: there are scenes of mothers saying goodbye to sons, scenes where mothers die, are missing, turned into statues, grieving. In *The Comedy of Errors* the mother is lost until the very end; in *Pericles* the mother dies in the storm. But a child may have a fantasy of eventual reunion with the lost mother: the aching hope of once more being re-united. The mother is idealised into a sainted figure: a nun in a temple/abbey at Ephesus in both plays. Ephesus was the centre of the Mother Goddess cult, Artemis/Diana, and it was also where the Virgin Mary was believed to have settled and died. Both these figures were idealised virgin goddesses. Indeed boys who lose their mothers tend to idealise them. Posthumus in *Cymbeline* says that his "mother seem'd The **Dian** of that time" (2.4.158).

Diana was the Roman name of the Greek goddess Artemis who had a spear and to whom the bear was sacred! The bear not only appears in *The Winter's Tale* but was a symbol for the Earls of Warwick: Neville's ancestors. In *Henry VI* part 2, Warwick says:

Now, by my father's badge, old **Nevil's** crest,
The rampant bear chain'd to the ragged staff... (5.1.202)

Artemis/Diana was also goddess of forests: Neville was a forester.

The bard knows a great deal about grief and its healing release. In *Henry VI* part 3 King Lewis tells Margaret to “tell thy grief it shall be eased” (3.3.19) In *Macbeth* Malcolm says:

Give **sorrow words**: the grief that does not speak
Whispers the o’er-fraught heart and bids it break. (4.3.209)

So vast is the material on grief in the works I will not list more examples. The word grief occurs 248 times in the canon; tears 320 times; sorrow 222; for comparison, rage occurs 135 times; angry 103; anger 59; guilty 84; guilt only 34. Furthermore I find the word melancholy occurs 72 times in the plays and often men are melancholic: sad without knowing why. Pericles asks:

Why should this change of thoughts,
The sad companion, dull-eyed melancholy,
Be my so used a guest as not an hour,
In the day’s glorious walk, or peaceful night,
The **tomb** where grief should sleep, can breed me quiet? (1.2.1)

I note here the occurrence of the word ‘tomb’ as if the writer knew the grief was due to a death. To have lost a mother at age 10 might predispose someone to bouts of depression especially round the anniversary of her death: the adult, not realising the anniversary was coming up, might feel low and not know why. Perhaps Neville’s father sought to cheer his young son up with comedic fun. Antipholus of Syracuse describes his servant Dromio as:

A trusty villain, sir, that very oft,
When I am dull with care and melancholy,
Lightens my humour with his merry jests. (1.2.19)

Reading Brenda James latest book (2008, 86), I realised a reason for the special bond between Neville and Southampton. The young Earl lost his father when he was **9** years old: the compassion Neville would have felt for this boy, losing a parent at approximately the same age as he had done would have made him especially close. He was of course imprisoned in the Tower with that boy-friend.

Neville soon found himself with a step mother. She was a formidable woman. Perhaps a hint of Neville’s feelings about her are revealed in *The Troublesome Raigne of John* (the first version of *King John*):

A Mother though she were unnaturall,
Is better than the kindest Stepdame is... (10.141)

4) His imprisonment (and the threat of execution) and eventual release: the shame and separation from his family and eventual joyous reunion.

Neville's own arrest was a repeat of family history: as he got caught up in the Essex rebellion he narrowly escaped from repeating his grandfather's fate: indeed a number of Nevilles had spent time in the Tower, dating back to Sir Thomas Faucomberge in 1378; Thomas Neville spent time in the Tower in 1415; Sir Humphrey Neville in 1463 was released but then beheaded after a rebellion in 1469; George Neville Archbishop of York was in the Tower in 1471; another George Neville, 3rd Baron of Bergavenny in 1506; and Edmund Neville was committed to the Tower for 12 years from 1585-1597. This transgenerational pattern of imprisonment explains the repeatedly foreboding presence of the Tower of London in the history plays.

Caroline Spurgeon in her classic analysis of Shakespeare's imagery wrote that *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida* show signs of having been written at the same time "when the author was suffering from a disillusionment, revulsion and perturbation of nature, such as we feel nowhere else with such intensity" (Spurgeon, 1958, 320). Furthermore she pointed out the distaste for poor quality food in *Troilus and Cressida*. At the time of writing this play Neville was in the Tower of London following his part in the Essex rebellion, hardly a place where one would expect a gourmet menu. Such an experience, the ruin of his career, the execution of his admired friend Essex, indeed the threat of his own execution and the separation from his family, was indeed traumatic for Henry Neville, as is evident in his letters of the time preserved in the Cecil papers at Hatfield House. Whilst many of his relatives and ancestors had been in the Tower this would have been little comfort as his own survival was now at risk: this was where his grandfather had been executed. Furthermore Spurgeon (1958, 131) pointed out that it is from this time that Shakespeare's references to the plague cease to be comic and take on a real sense of horror and disgust. Neville was trapped in a state prison where torture was routinely used. It is therefore no surprise that following his release in 1603 the next plays are the great tragedies of *Othello* and *King Lear* which include many images of torture. There follows the bitterness and contempt of *Coriolanus* and *Timon of Athens*. After the catharsis of writing these a happier period ensues: there appear the romances in which shamed men are forgiven and reunited with their surviving families:

humility, joy and wonder, reconciliation and love bring us back to Ephesus with Pericles and a family re-union, reminding us of the final scene in the *Comedy of Errors*. This story of family reunion, forgiveness of shameful transgression, is the story of *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, *The Tempest*. Furthermore there is greater acceptance and patience: in *Pericles* the suffering king must go through the suffering, submit and accept. Looking at Marina he says, "thou dost look like Patience gazing on kings' graves and smiling extremity out of act" (5.1.128). Patience is used 184 times across the canon: 8 times in *Pericles* (At 14 times, only *Othello* uses the word more often whilst it is used 8 times in *As You Like It* [when Neville was frustrated in France] and in *Cymbeline*.) Neville in a letter dated 21/6/1608, declares, "Patience is a great Virtue and hath great efficacy. I confess I want it often times both for myself and my Friends" (Winwood, 1725, Vol 2, 411). *Pericles* was registered on 20th May 1608, just a month before this letter. The play was probably being performed at the time of Neville's letter which shows he was in London at the time. The image of Patience in *Pericles* of course recalls Viola in *Twelfth Night* who says:

She sat like patience on a monument,
Smiling at grief. (2.4.115)

Viola is the girl of boy-girl twins: Sebastian is the boy. James (2008, 335) suggested that Neville may have been born a twin with his sister Elizabeth. *Pericles* ends in Ephesus at the temple of Diana: she was the twin sister of Apollo, the god of poetry. *The Comedy of Errors* also ends in a joyous reunion in Ephesus. We can identify the abbess in *The Comedy of Errors* with Neville's mother, because she says it is "Thirty-three years" since she was pregnant with the twins. The play was premiered in 1594: 33 years before that would be 1561: Neville's mother would have been pregnant then, perhaps with twins, certainly with Neville.

Conclusion

One reason why I find Neville such a convincing candidate for the authorship of the Shakespeare plays is that psychologically he clearly 'fits' the stories, characters, imagery and underlying processes.

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