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Murdering Sleep on the Early Modern English Stage

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Abstract

In early modern England, sleep enjoyed a special cultural status and was a frequent subject of both learned and popular discourse. As such, sleeping became a recurrent motif in popular culture, including theatre. The article discusses a distinct dramaturgical employment of sleeping – the victimisation of a sleeping character on the stage. It seems that this theatrical pattern, or theatergram, was especially popular in the 1590s, when plays such as *Henry VI, Part Two*, *Thomas of Woodstock*, *Edward II*, *The True Tragedy of Richard III* and Shakespeare's *Richard III* appeared, containing scenes of a murdered sleeping person with a number of dramatic and thematic similarities. Similarly, Jacobean plays such as *Othello*, *The Devil's Charter*, *The Maid's Tragedy*, *The Valliant Welshman*, *The Faithful Friends*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest*, all of which seem to have appeared within a decade and a half in the early seventeenth century, also employ this trope, whose dramaturgy seems to elaborate on the aforementioned Elizabethan histories. What is noteworthy is the fact that, although we do not know the authors or dates of composition of some of the works, they all revolve around William Shakespeare and his playing company. The present article traces the development of the theatergram of the victimised sleeper, arguing that its visual and thematic appeal, as well as dramatic versatility, made it a staple of late Tudor and early Stuart drama which contributed to the stylistic development of the early modern English theatre.

Keywords: *Early Modern English Theatre*, *Shakespeare, Sleep, Theatergram, Victimisation*

1. *Introduction*

The importance of sleep in early modern awareness and culture can hardly be overestimated. As one of the chief supports to human life (both mental and physical), a transitional space between the mundane and the spiritual and a route to the intricate world of dreaming, sleep as the Renaissance conceived it carried a number of thematic overtones. Sasha Handley (2016) has demonstrated that in early modern England, an entire culture developed around sleeping that pervaded virtually every sphere of daily human

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activity. A number of popular medical handbooks were published in Tudor England that offered advice regarding sleep patterns and conditions, including the preferred time, place and position of sleeping, as well as the material of the bed sheets and the blankets.[1] As Karl H. Dannenfeldt points out, the discussion of sleep was particularly widespread in early modern England, where 'more than in other countries, the views of the physicians were commonly written in English for the general public or continental works were available in French, a language widely-known, or in English translation' (1986, 420). Holy Scripture lent sleeping a deep spiritual subtext, as the Christian tradition often connected sleep with death and resurrection with awakening.[2] Lucy Worsley asserts that in the early modern era, sleep also had a significant political dimension, as the aristocratic bedroom was a semi-public place and one of the centres of power. Gaining access to the royal bedchamber was a privilege and a sign of status, but also an opportunity to manipulate the powerful person and his policies (2011, 88-94).[3]

Apart from its praised beneficial effects, however, sleep was also considered extremely dangerous. In the state of unconsciousness, a human being was believed to be prone to a number of evil agents who might wish to inflict both physical and spiritual harm on the sleeper. Shakespeare's contemporary Thomas Nashe called the night 'the nurse of cares', but also 'a time most fatall and unhallowed', referring to numerous supernatural creatures which were believed to be active by night (1958, 346). The imminent danger, however, most often came from other men. While A.R. Ekirch maintains that 'most nocturnal crime was relatively minor, consisting of nonviolent thefts' he also stresses that 'the threat of physical harm increased markedly after dark' and that 'Night witnessed the worst bloodletting' (2006, 33 and 43). Sasha Handley argues that, in order to protect themselves against dangers, early modern Christians keenly engaged in what she calls 'sleep-piety', begging 'for divine protection by repenting of their sins at bedtime, by offering prayers in and around their bedsteads, and by filling their minds with holy thoughts' (2016, 70). That way they both protected themselves from the possible perils at the time of sleep, and also prepared spiritually for the possibility of death in sleep. In a world shaped by difficult experience, by a Christian moral-religious framework, but also by superstitious beliefs, a sleeper could presumably fall a victim to a criminal, a daemonic being, as well as a witch or an evil sprite (for various nocturnal dangers to men in the pre-industrial era, see Ekirch 2006, especially 1-58 and 285-299).

This sense of 'dangerous sleep' seems to have been a particularly powerful cultural impulse. Mentioning the works of Elizabethan authors such as Thomas Deloney, Worsley maintains that Renaissance literature started the genre of the 'whodunit', in which death in the bed was a frequent commonplace (2011, 101). Besides these, there was also a strong mediaeval and early

[1] A good representative example is Thomas Elyot's *Castel of Helth* (1539), which by the end of the sixteenth century saw its fourteenth edition (Dannenfeldt 1986, 420). In his ironical pamphlet *The Gull's Hornbook* (1609), Shakespeare's younger contemporary Thomas Dekker parodies popular medical advice of the period concerning sleep, asserting that 'midday slumbers are golden: they make the body fat, the skin fair, the flesh plump, delicate, and tender: they set a russet colour on the cheeks of young women, and make lusty courage to rise up in men' (1905, 27). He also accuses physicians of lying to their patients when dissuading them from extensive sleeping, because 'they which want sleep … fall into the doctor's hands … whereas he that snorts profoundly … saves the charges of a groat's-worth of physics' (24).

[2] The original Koiné Greek version of the New Testament mentions the verb 'koimáo' (to sleep) in different forms twelve times: nine times as a designation of physical death and only three times to mean a literal sleep.

[3] A special chapter in the discussion of the political dimension of sleep in the early modern era would be dreams and visions. For the role of dreams in the political life in Renaissance England, see especially Levin 2008 and Hodgkin *et al.* 2008. For a more general discussion of dreams in early modern England, see Rivière 2017.

modern tradition of exposing a defenceless sleeping body on the theatre stage. David Bevington has traced the beginnings of this trope as a 'recognizable theatrical entity' back to the liturgical drama of the twelfth century (1995, 53-54), stressing the recurring motif of the fragility and victimisation of the sleeping figure, which can be observed in a vast range of European dramatic texts, from French high mediaeval biblical plays to English Renaissance drama of the seventeenth century. In the case of biblical drama, the roots of these motifs can be largely found in the original models which later authors strove to present in a dramatic form (for instance, the scene in the Christmas play *Ordo ad Representandum Herodem* from the French *Le Livre de Jeux de Fleury* in which angels warn the sleeping three kings to take a different journey on the way back from Bethlehem to avoid Herod is a faithful adaptation of Matthew 2:12); in the case of scenes such as Othello's bloody dilemma when watching sleeping Desdemona or Iachimo's voyeuristic inspection of Imogen's body in the middle of the night, however, we may talk about an independent approach on the part of the early modern playwright who, above all, had to take into consideration the cultural tropes of his own era and the tastes of his audiences: as David Roberts points out, the seventeenth century 'was the scopophilic century, the century in love with looking at and into things' (2006, 236).

Indeed, it appears that the Renaissance cultural sensitivity to the darker sides of sleep and the ubiquity of the discussion thereof was a powerful inspiration to early modern English dramatists and there seem to have been periods when the depiction of a sleeping body on the stage and its subsequent violation enjoyed special popularity both with the playwrights and their audiences.[4] A sleeping character in peril appeared on the English stage with a remarkable frequency already in the early 1590s within the young genre of Elizabethan historical drama. The plays falling into this group include the second part of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, his *Richard III*, Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*, the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*, which only survives in an incomplete manuscript and was once attributed to Shakespeare, and the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III*, which was probably one of Shakespeare's sources for his own rendition of King Richard's story. All these plays contain a very similar scene in which a couple of hired assassins approach their sleeping victim, whom they ultimately murder. Apart from this basic situation, which occurs in one form or another in a number of other early modern English plays,[5] the scenes also contain a number of motivic and verbal parallels which can hardly be coincidence, and which testify to some form of mutual influence between the works. Whatever this connection might be, it is noteworthy that these works seem to form a well-defined 'cluster' of dramatic pieces, in some way revolving around William Shakespeare.

In the early Jacobean period, this dramatic pattern enjoyed a form of revival. The aforementioned scenes from *Othello* (c. 1603) and *Cymbeline* (c. 1611), both centred on a

[4] Of course, sleep had a much broader dramaturgical potential, for instance, for the delineation of dramatic characters, as there was a strong belief in the relationship between the quality of sleep and the quality of the sleeper in the Renaissance. When on the 6th of May 1954, S.B. Chandler presented a paper on Shakespeare and sleep at the twenty-seventh annual meeting of the American Association of the History of Medicine in New Haven, he counted more than 60 significant mentions of sleep in Shakespeare's plays with an explicit focus on its nature and quality (1955, 255). In an early critical assessment of Shakespeare's dramatic and poetic works from the perspective of medicine, J.C. Bucknill asserted that 'There are few subjects that Shakespeare has treated with more pathetic truthfulness than the distress arising from want of sleep', adding that 'In no place, however, is the description of sleep's restorative power delineated with such exquisite pathos as where Macbeth feels that he has murdered sleep' (1860, 193).

[5] As Martin Wiggins (1991) has demonstrated, scenes containing contracted murders were a popular staple of Elizabethan, Jacobean and Caroline drama.

perpetrator looming over a sleeping body, could be understood in the wider context of a number of lesser-known Jacobean dramas. The anti-Catholic tragedy *The Devil's Charter* by Barnabe Barnes, produced by the King's Men at court in 1607, comes to mind, together with *The Maid's Tragedy* by Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, written between 1608 and 1611; the historical play *The Valiant Welshman*, written before 1615 and attributed to the King's Men's actor Robert Armin; and *The Faithful Friends*, a Beaumont and Fletcher apocryphal play, set in classical Rome, written at some point between 1604 and 1626. To this group, we may also tentatively add Shakespeare's *Macbeth*, written perhaps just a year or two after *Othello*, which also includes the murder of a sleeping character, albeit off-stage. Although all these plays share much with their parallels in the earlier Elizabethan histories, we will see that several significant shifts had taken place, especially towards the complexity of the (now single) criminal. The basic dramatic pattern, however, always remains discernible. It could be argued that the sleeping scenes we find in these plays formed one of the many fashionable waves of English Renaissance theatre (such as Machiavel plays, magician plays, dream plays, craftsman plays and others), which were pointed out by Pavel Drábek and which were typical of the drama of this era (2013, 248).

The present article will address both these waves of plays containing scenes with the victimisation of a sleeper on the stage, trying to elucidate the nature of their relationship to one another. It will argue that English playwrights at the end of the sixteenth and the beginning of the seventeenth centuries not only exploited the cultural connotations of sleep and its presentation on the stage, but also combined these early modern tenets with mediaeval dramatic conventions to produce a distinct theatergram which was especially popular in the 1590s and roughly the first decade and a half of the seventeenth century.[6] It will be shown how the theatergram was gradually developing, gaining new thematic and dramaturgical significance to become a frequent and important convention of late Tudor and early Stuart drama.

2. *Innocent Sleepers and Reluctant Villains in Elizabethan Histories (c. 1590-1595)*

From the perspective of textual criticism (and, consequently, the present discussion), the first of the aforementioned historical plays containing victimisation of a sleeping character is also the most complicated one. However, a consideration of the play's publication and, possibly, production history might be a useful aid in understanding the remaining plays of the group and the devices which they seem to employ in common. What we know nowadays under the simple title of *Henry VI, Part Two*, was published multiple times in both in Shakespeare's lifetime and after his death in several versions and under various titles. The first edition was printed anonymously for the London stationer Thomas Millington in 1594 as *The First part of the Contention betwixt the two famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the death of the good Duke Humphrey: And the banishment and death of the Duke of Suffolke, and the Tragicall end of the proud Cardinall of VVinchester, vvith the notable Rebellion of Iacke Cade: And the Duke of Yorkes first claime vnto the Crowne*. The opulent title, which foregrounded the key events of the plot and served mainly as an advertisement for the potential buyers, remained unchanged for the second edition of the piece, printed by Valentine Simmes for Thomas Millington in 1600. In 1619, the play was printed once again for Thomas Pavier, this time in a volume together with

[6] The term theatergram as a theatrical counterpart to the literary *locus* was suggested by Louise George Clubb in her monograph *Italian Drama in Shakespeare's Time* (1989) and in some later essays. A theatergram, that is, a structural theatrical unit that could be shared among the playwrights both within one national culture and across borders, can include such commonplaces as story patterns, plot situations, typology of characters, speech acts, scene locations, etc.

Henry VI, Part Three (the first Octavo of which had been previously published by Millington in 1595), under the general title *The Whole Contention betvveene the two Famous Houses, Lancaster and Yorke. With the Tragicall ends of the good Duke Humfrey, Richard Duke of Yorke, and King Henrie the sixt*. In this third edition, which was the first one to bear Shakespeare's name as the author, the text also had its own separate title *The first part of the Contention of the two Famous Houses of Yorke and Lancaster, with the death of the good Duke Humfrey*. Finally, the play was printed in Shakespeare's First Folio in 1623 as *The second Part of Henry the Sixt, with the death of the Good Duke Hvmfrey*.

As we can see, of all the plot highlights mentioned in the – sometimes more, sometimes less descriptive – titles, only one survived the play's almost thirty-year-long publication history: the death of Humphrey of Lancaster, the first Duke of Gloucester.[7] This event is crucial not only for the development of the play itself, but of the whole tetralogy as well (the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*), as the political and physical liquidation of the King's loyal chancellor leads to the further debilitation of the King's power and, consequently, the beginning of the Wars of the Roses.[8] Whether and how the murder of the Duke was staged in Shakespeare's times, however, remains uncertain as the scene survives in two very different versions. First let us consider the passage as it was printed in the first Quarto

Then the Curtaines being drawne, Duke *Humphrey* is discouered in his bed, and, two men lying on his brest and smothering himin his bed. And then enter the Duke of *Suffolke* to them.

Suffolk. How now sirs, what haue you dispatcht him?
One. I my Lord, hees dead I warrant you.
Suffolke. Then see the cloathes laid smooth about him still,
That when the King comes, he may perceiue
No other, but that he dide of his owne accord.
2. All things is handsome now my Lord.
Suffolke. Then draw the Curtaines againe and get you gone,
And you shall haue your firme reward anon.
Exet murtherers. (Shakespeare 1594, E2r)

Although the 1623 Folio version preserves the contours of the situation, its stage execution is markedly different:

Enter two or three running ouer the Stage, from the Murther of Duke Humfrey.

1. Runne to my Lord of Suffolke: let him know
We haue dispatcht the Duke, as he commanded.
2. Oh, that it were to doe: what haue we done?
Didſt euer heare a man ſo penitent? *Enter Suffolke.*
1. Here comes my Lord.
Suff. Now Sirs, haue you dispatcht this thing?
1. I, my good Lord, hee's dead.

[7] An early version of my discussion of the death of Duke Humphrey in Shakespeare's play and its various versions appeared in 2013 (Krajník 2013).

[8] In this context, it is important also to mention Duke Humphrey's and his wife Eleanor's dreams in Act 1, Scene 2 of *Henry VI, Part Two*, which seem to expose the tendencies of both of the characters and, at the same time, predict the Duke's fall (for a further discussion of the scene, see Drábek 2013, 249-250).

Suff. Why that's well said. Goe, get you to my House,
I will reward you for this venturous deed:
The King and all the Peeres are here at hand.
Haue you layd faire the Bed? Is all things well,
According as I gaue directions?
1. 'Tis, my good Lord.
Suff. Away, be gone. *Exeunt*. (Shakespeare 1623, n3r)

The most obvious difference between the two variants is the fact that, while in the Quarto version the murder takes place before the eyes of the audience, in the Folio text Shakespeare (or the unknown reviser) lets the act itself happen off the stage. The immediate visual effect of the Quarto version is in the Folio text replaced by the verbal account of the act, provided by one of the murderers ('what haue we done? / Didſt euer heare a man so penitent?'). This simple message functions on two levels: on the one hand, it gives the audience a testimony of an image so horrible that even a professional assassin is shaken; on the other, it expands the episodic, stereotypical character of the murderer, giving him a certain inner psychology and conscience.[9] It is beyond the scope of this article to determine which of the two versions is earlier or 'authentic' and there does not seem to be a unanimous critical consensus on this question. Arthur Freeman (1968), for instance, argues that the Folio version is a later revision, made for a playhouse without a discovery space, whereas Claire Saunders (1985) maintains that the Quarto version is a revision of the Folio text in the vein of similar scenes in several popular plays of the same period. The latest issues of the two most important compact editions of Shakespeare's works, the Arden Shakespeare (2011) and the Oxford Shakespeare (2016), both seem to prefer the Folio reading. Whichever of the two texts holds chronological primacy, both of them have a significant dramatic impact and testify to competent dramaturgy on the part of the author. The Quarto version invests the scene with strong irony: when, shortly after the Duke Humphrey's murder, Cardinal Beaufort, one of the chief enemies of the Duke and architects of his fall, dies in painful agony in his bed, it is almost certain that the actors for this scene (which is present in both textual variants) used the very same bed in which the Duke had been murdered not long before. In this way, the motif of cause and effect (or, crime and punishment) was visually underscored.

The effect of the Folio text, however, is substantial as well. Even in the merely verbal account of the dramatic situation, the murderers' dialogue with Suffolk contains enough details for the audience to create their own image of the act: they learn that the Duke was murdered in his bed and that the assassins subsequently arranged the bed to destroy evidence of the crime. The pangs of conscience of one of the murderers emphasises the gruesomeness of the situation. Moreover, the first murderer's observation, 'Didſt euer heare a man so penitent?' (Shakespeare 1623, n3r), lends the scene additional dramatic significance; by stressing Humphrey's penitence,

[9] Although the element of the murderers' conscience or moral dilemma is not present in older Elizabethan plays, a similar motif can be found in the Latin mediaeval play *Tres Clerici* (twelfth century). The story follows a journey of three students through a foreign land who find shelter at the house of an old and poor couple. Once the students fall asleep, the old man notices their moneybags, suggesting to his wife: 'let's put them to death, / so that we'll have the prize / of their treasure!' (ll. 113-115). The wife, however, argues that 'if such wickedness were done, / it would offend the Creator very greatly, / and if by chance anyone were to see it, / the whole world would get to know / our infamy' (ll. 116-120). The husband ultimately manages to persuade his wife to commit the crime, arguing that 'It'll be well concealed, / no one will know what will be carried out' (Anonymous 1994, ll. 121-122). It cannot, however, be assumed that Shakespeare or his contemporaries were aware of this work.

a marked contrast is created between his death and the already mentioned Cardinal Beaufort's, who in his final moments is not capable of turning to God and whose character is summarised by the Earl of Warwick's observation that 'So bad a death argues a monstrous life' (n3r). As we shall see, the emphasis of the victim's spiritual and moral purity is a motif that recurs in the majority of the plays under study.[10]

Of these, the closest to Shakespeare's *Henry VI, Part Two* in terms of both of the plays' plots, their major themes and, perhaps, the dates of their composition, is the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* (sometimes also called *Richard II, Part One*, since it only covers part of Richard II's reign and Shakespeare's *Richard II* may be seen as the former's loose continuation), perhaps the finest Elizabethan history not written by Shakespeare. The title character of the 'Plain Thomas' shares many inner and outer characteristics with the 'Good Duke' Humphrey (they both bear the title the Duke of Gloucester, are uncles and protectors of a weak and incompetent king, are of a pure character and are popular among common people) and it is significant that Duke Thomas is physically disposed of in a similar manner to Duke Humphrey in Shakespeare's play. Having been arrested and escorted to Calais by the King's orders, the mayor of the city, Lapoole, hires two assassins, who by means of murdering the Duke are to 'win King Richard's love with heaps of gold' (Anonymous 2002, 5.1.5). The murderers are given more space here than in both versions of the second part of *Henry VI*. At one point, one of them gives the mayor a detailed account of their unique 'art':

… See, my lord, here's first a towel with which we do intend to strangle him; but if he strive and this should chance to fail, I'll maul his old mazzard with this hammer, knock him down like an ox and after cut's throat. How like ye this? (5.1.7-11)

Similar to Suffolk, however, Lapoole insists that the murder be carried out 'so fair and cunningly / As if he died a common natural death' (5.1.12-13) and urges the murderers not to let the Duke's appearance unsettle them:

Believe me, sirs, his countenance is such,
So full of dread and lordly majesty,
Mixed with such mild and gentle behaviour
As will, except you be resolved at full,
Strike you with fear even with his princely looks. (5.1.19-23)

Upon the assassins' departure and still before the act, however, Lapoole himself in a longish soliloquy admits of his bad conscience, explicitly referring to Woodstock's innocence and God's revenge should the Duke die:

… now by my fairest hopes I swear
The boldness of these villains to this murder

[10] Besides the obvious cultural connotations of the motif of a sinner deprived of peaceful sleep, the origins of this trope in the theatre can be traced back to the aforementioned liturgical plays (for instance, the image of the sleeping three kings, visited by an angel). In Elizabethan drama, a similar characterisation device can be found in Thomas Preston's historical morality *Cambyses, King of Persia* (c. 1561). The play contains two episodes in which Cambyses hires two assassins, with the allegorical names Murder and Cruelty, to dispose of the King's brother and wife. When Murder and Cruelty approach the Queen, she asks them, 'Yet before I dye some Psalme to God let me sing' (Preston c. 1584, F3r). The murderers comply with her request and, in a short monologue, the Queen bids farewell to the court, turns to God and forgives her cruel husband.

Makes me abhor them and the deed for ever.
Horror of conscience with the King's command
Fights a fell combat in my fearful breast;
The King commands his uncle here must die
And my sad conscience bids the contrary
And tells me that his innocent blood thus spilt
Heaven will revenge; murder's a heinous guilt,
A seven times crying sin. Accursèd man,
The further that I wade in this foul act
My troubled senses are the more distract,
Confounded and tormented past my reason.
But there's no lingering: either he must die
Or great King Richard vows my tragedy;
Then 'twixt two evils 'tis good to choose the least.
Let danger fright faint fools, I'll save mine own
And let him fall to black destruction.

He draws the curtain [*and discovers*
Woodstock *in bed*].

He sleeps upon his bed. The time serves fitly,
I'll call the murderers in. Sound music there
To rock his senses in eternal slumbers. *Music* [*sounds*].
Sleep, Woodstock, sleep, thou never more shalt wake.
This town of Calais shall for ever tell
Within her castle walls Plain Thomas fell. (5.1.31-54, square brackets original)

Compared to the second part of Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, the dramatic impact of the scene is markedly strengthened by means of the image of the sleeping Duke who is, in a dream (enacted directly on the stage), visited by the ghosts of Edward the Black Prince, King Richard's father, and King Edward III, Richard's uncle, to warn Woodstock against the King's scheme. The scared Duke wakes up and starts praying to God and the angels, thus frustrating the murderers' plans to kill him easily in sleep. Lapoole subsequently manages to soothe the Duke, upon which the murderers return on the scene to finish their business. Similarly to Shakespeare's play, here, too, one of the murderers suddenly feels a prick of conscience and openly regrets the deed, praising Duke Thomas's character at the same time:

2 Murderer. … Pull, ye dog, and pull thy soul to hell in doing it, for thou hast killed the truest subject that ever breathed in England.
1 Murderer. Pull, rogue, pull! Think of the gold we shall have for it and then let him and thee go to'th' devil together. Bring in the feather bed and roll him up in that till he be smothered and stifled and life and soul pressed out together. Quickly, ye hell hound. (5.1.232-239)

Upon Lapoole's return on the stage, a quick dialogue between him and the murderers follows, in which the mayor, similarly to Suffolk, instructs the men how to arrange the crime scene properly:

Lapoole. What, is he dead?
2 Murderer. As a door-nail, my lord. What will ye do with his body?

Lapoole. Take it up gently; lay him in his bed.
Then shut the door as if he there had died.
1 Murderer. It cannot by perceived otherwise, my lord. Never was murder done with such rare skill. At our return we shall expect reward, my lord.
Lapoole. 'Tis ready told.
Bear in the body, then return and take it.

Exeunt [Murderers] *with the body.* (5.1.247-256, square brackets original)

Unlike the second part of *Henry VI*, however, the murderers do not receive their reward and are killed by Lapoole's orders, their bodies thrown into the sea. What the two plays have in common is the fact that both murderers trigger an immediate uprising against the King. Both the scenes, therefore, play a similar role in the overall design of their respective plays.

So far, we have demonstrated an employment of the theatergram of the murder of a sleeping figure on the stage in two early history plays of the Elizabethan era. The obvious similarities between the plays indicate a relationship between them, be it a direct (the common author or an authorial collaboration) or an indirect one (an inspiration of one author by the other or a common inspiration by another source). However, before we attempt to pronounce a more definite judgement about the nature of this relationship, let us examine another play written in the same period, namely Christopher Marlowe's *Edward II*.

After a successful rebellion against King Edward II, in order to keep his newly gained political power, Mortimer the younger summons the mysterious Lightborn (whose name might signify a low-born person, but also a 'light-bearer', that is, Lucifer) to murder the deposed and imprisoned King. Just as the anonymous murderers in *Thomas of Woodstock* boast their 'rare skill' in front of Lapoole, Lightborn, too, in front of Mortimer talks about his 'brave' ways of killing a man, even exotic ones (Marlowe 1955, 5.4.37). Note the focus on murdering the victim in his sleep:

I learn'd in Naples how to poison flowers;
To strangle with a lawn thrust through the throat;
To pierce the windpipe with a needle's point;
Or whilst one is asleep, to take a quill
And blow a little powder in his ears:
Or open his mouth and pour quicksilver down. (5.4.31-36)

Like Lapoole, Mortimer warns the murderer against irresolution in the face of the victim ('But at his looks, Lightborn, thou wilt relent', 5.4.26) and urges him, 'Well, do it bravely, and be secret' (5.4.28).

Although Marlowe has only one murderer in his play, the situation is enriched by two guards, Matrevis and Gurney, who assist Lightborn in the act, effectively becoming the co-murderers themselves. Upon requesting a hot spit, a table and a feather bed, Lightborn enters the King's cell. Once the King spots the assassin, he guesses at his commission and relies on God's spiritual support at his last moment:

These looks of thine can harbour nought but death:
I see my tragedy written in thy brows.
Yet stay awhile; forbear thy bloody hand,
And let me see the stroke before it comes,
That even then when I shall lose my life,
My mind may be more steadfast on my God. (5.5.72-77)

Lightborn assures the King of the innocence of his intentions and encourages him repeatedly to lie down and sleep. At last, Edward does fall asleep; however, before Lightborn manages to commit the crime, he wakes up again, terrified (similarly to Woodstock in the anonymous play), which postpones his death:

King Edward. [*waking*] O let me not die yet: stay, O stay a while!
Lightborn. How now, my lord?
King Edward. Something still buzzeth in mine ears,
And tells me if I sleep I never wake;
This fear is that which makes me tremble thus.
And therefore tell me, wherefore art thou come? (5.5.100-105, square brackets original)

Upon this exchange, Martevis and Gurney enter the scene and the King is murdered by being pressed on the bed by the table, on which the murderers stamp. Instead of receiving his reward, Lightborn is killed immediately after the act by Mortimer's secret order and his body, similarly to the bodies of the murderers in *Thomas of Woodstock*, is thrown into the moat. At the very beginning of the following scene, Matrevis gives a report of what happened to Baron Mortimer, which – in terms of both the overall situation and certain verbal details – is markedly similar to the conversation between the murderers of Duke Humphrey and Suffolk:

Young Mortimer. Is't done, Matrevis, and the murtherer dead?
Matrevis. Ay, my good lord; I would it were undone.
Young Mortimer. Matrevis, if thou now growest penitent
I'll be thy ghostly father; therefore choose,
Whether thou wilt be secret in this,
Or else die by the hand of Mortimer. (5.6.1-6)

As has been mentioned above, the numerous commonplaces between these plays can hardly be attributed to coincidence. Nor is it very possible that the similarities are simply the isolated borrowing of one author from another (a phenomenon which was otherwise quite common in English Renaissance theatre). The nature of the mutual dependence of the plays under study is not obvious at first sight: in a number of details, Marlowe's play is more similar to the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock* (the course of the murder itself, the subsequent killing of the perpetrator and the disposal of his body, the use of the feather bed as a tool for murder); in others, it is closer to Shakespeare's play (Matrevis' report to Mortimer). Rather than a straightforward influence of one text on another, a more complex connection within a group of related texts should be considered. This idea might be supported by the fact that *Thomas of Woodstock* and the Quarto version of the second part of *Henry VI* both call for a curtain, behind which the victim's bedroom is discovered. The Elizabethan edition of *Edward II* lacks a scenic direction that would announce the discovery of the King in his cell; however, from the immediate context, this scenic solution seems entirely possible and even probable.

Since the analysed plays were written around the same time and the order of their composition is uncertain, it cannot be determined which author was inspired by which or whether they collaborated in any manner. Irving Ribner, for instance, questions the traditional hypothesis that *Thomas of Woodstock* is based on *Edward II*, maintaining that 'there is a good reason to suppose that *Woodstock* may be an earlier play than *Edward II*' (2005, 133). Without further justification, however, he also assumes that *Thomas of Woodstock* draws from *Henry VI, Part Two*, which may or may not be the case (Shakespeare could as well draw from Marlowe or *Woodstock* or both).

The solid link between the texts could be the company who owned and produced them. On the title page of the 1594 Octavo of *Edward II*, we read that the play was 'sundrie times publiquely acted in the honourable citie of London, by the right honourable the Earle of Pembrooke his servants'. Although the title pages of the early editions of the second part of *Henry VI* do not mention the name of the company, Pembroke's Men are mentioned on the title page of the Octavo edition of *Henry VI, Part Three* (1595). It can, therefore, be assumed that even the previous part belonged to the same troupe.[11] The shared manner of the staging of the discovery of the victim's bed with Shakespeare and (possibly) Marlowe indicates that even *Thomas of Woodstock* might have been originally owned by the same company and staged in the same playhouse.[12] That might explain the numerous similarities between all the plays, not only in the design of one particular scene, but also in the delineation of some of the plays' characters and the design of their overall plots. It is therefore possible that the affinities between the works in question are not the result of a spontaneous creative process (or three processes); rather, their source might have been the demands of the theatre company which, by means of recycling popular tropes, wanted to appease the tastes of their audiences and raise the commercial success of its productions.

Of all the plays in the present group, Shakespeare's *Richard III* was probably written last and is the best demonstration of how Shakespeare treated the theatergram of the murder of a sleeping character for the purposes of his dramaturgy. Unlike the previous three cases, the murder scene takes place at the beginning of the play, which might be related the fact that the audience knows both the victim and the contractor of the murder from the previous parts of the tetralogy and there is no reason for any extensive exposition of the characters involved. Also, the murder scene plays a different role in the overall design of the play as the plot begins rather than culminates in it.

After Richard's brother George Clarence is, as a result of the former's intrigues, imprisoned in the Tower as an enemy of the King, Richard of Gloucester (the future King Richard III) sends for a pair of assassins to murder the Duke in his cell. Before these enter the scene, Clarence confides to his jailer Brackenbury the 'fearful dreams' and 'ugly sights' (*Richard III*, 1.4.3) that he saw the previous night, in which he met with the ghosts of the Earl of Warwick and Edward, Prince of Wales, for whose deaths he was responsible.[13] A parallel to the ghosts' visitation in *Thomas of Woodstock* is obvious, except that whereas the ghosts of the Black Prince and Edward III came to warn Duke Thomas, the ghosts of Clarence's dream condemn the dreamer, sending 'a legion of foul fiends' on him (1.4.58).[14] Affected by his nightmare, however, Clarence turns to God (similarly to Duke Thomas), whom he asks to 'execute Thy wrath in me alone; / O spare my guiltless wife and my poor children' (1.4.71-72).[15]

The characters of the assassins, albeit still remaining unnamed, are given most prominence of all the plays from the group. When the men enter the scene and Brackenbury leaves them

[11] Pembroke's Men also appear on the title pages of early editions of Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* and the (possibly) pre-Shakespearean comedy *The Taming of a Shrew*. It appears that Shakespeare collaborated with the company before his later engagement with the Lord Chamberlain's Men. See also George 1981 and Gurr 1996, 266-273.

[12] There are no witnesses of the stage history of *Thomas of Woodstock*. A connection with several theatre troupes was suggested in the past (Chambers 1923, 42-43). The first one to propose a relationship between *Thomas of Woodstock* and the Pembroke's Men was Wilhelmina P. Fijlinck (Anonymous 1929, xxv).

[13] Clarence's three-part account of his dream remains, in the words of Geoffrey Tillotson, one of 'the most telling in Elizabethan drama' (Tillotson 1933, 519). For a discussion of the possible sources of Clarence's dream, see Brooks 1979.

[14] With the exception of the Quarto and Folio versions of the second part of *Henry VI* (Shakespeare 1594 and Shakespeare 1623 respectively), all quotations from Shakespeare are taken from the latest Arden Shakespeare one-volume edition of his works (Shakespeare 2011).

[15] This prayer can only be found in the Folio version of the play. The Quarto text (1597) omits the entire appeal to God, perhaps because Clarence's real-life wife, Isabel Neville, was already dead at that point. With the correction of Shakespeare's historical error, the play loses the strongest moment of Clarence's piousness.

alone with the sleeping Clarence, the second murderer feels the prick of conscience and is resolved not to commit the crime:

2 Murderer. What, shall we stab him as he sleeps?
1 Murderer. No: he'll say 'twas done cowardly, when he wakes.
2 Murderer. Why, he shall never wake until the great Judgment Day.
1 Murderer. Why, then he'll say we stabbed him sleeping.
2 Murderer. The urging of that word, 'Judgment', hath bred a kind of remorse in me.
1 Murderer. What, art thou afraid?
2 Murderer. Not to kill him – having a warrant – but to be damned for killing him, from which no warrant can defend us.
1 Murderer. I thought thou hadst been resolute.
2 Murderer. So I am – to let him live. (1.4.99-113)

Similarly to the analogous situation in *Thomas of Woodstock*, the first murderer reminds the second of the generous reward which awaits them for the killing of Clarence, which makes the second man cast all doubts aside:

1 Murderer. Remember our reward, when the deed's done.
2 Murderer. Zounds, he dies! I had forgot the reward.
1 Murderer. Where's thy conscience now?
2 Murderer. Oh, in the Duke of Gloucester's purse. (1.4.122-126)

The second murderer's monologue on the issue of conscience shortly follows and, more than in any of the other plays, grants the audience a deeper insight into this otherwise stock figure. What is remarkable is the response of the first murderer since, this time, it is him who starts doubting the crime – something that we have not encountered in any of the plays before:

2 Murderer. I'll not meddle with it; it makes a man a coward. A man cannot steal but it accuseth him; a man cannot swear but it checks him; a man cannot lie with his neighbour's wife but it detects him. 'Tis a blushing, shamefaced spirit, that mutinies in a man's bosom. It fills one full of obstacles; it made me once restore a purse of gold that by chance I found. It beggars any man that keeps it; it is turned out of all towns and cities for a dangerous thing; and every man that means to live well endeavours to trust to himself, and live without it.
1 Murderer. Zounds, 'tis even now at my elbow, persuading me not to kill the Duke. (1.4.132-144)

The murderers ultimately wake Clarence up and hold a longish conversation with him, during which they rather surprisingly (and, perhaps, somewhat inappropriately) remind him of his previous sins and the betrayal of the Lancastrian cause. The murderers thus do not merely play the role of the executioners, but also the judges who decide on the guilt or innocence of the accused. Note how Clarence's words echo the response of King Edward II from Marlowe's play:

Clarence. How darkly, and how deadly dost thou speak.
Your eyes do menace me; why look you pale?
Who sent you hither? Wherefore do you come?
Both. To – to –to – (1.4.167-170)

Unlike Lightborn, who, in response to the King's question 'Wherefore art thou come?', presently says, 'To rid thee of thy life' (Marlowe 1955, 5.5.106), the murderers in *Richard III*, when

confronted with the victim, are not capable of giving an answer. It appears that Shakespeare, if he had not known *Edward II* when writing the second part of *Henry VI*, was almost certainly familiar with the play when working on his *Richard III* and did not just allude to it by means of direct citations, but also creatively expanded on, and modified, its details for his own purposes. The same can also be said about the anonymous *Thomas of Woodstock*, with which Shakespeare's play shares a number of elements as well (chiefly both of the victims' dreams), which are each time employed for a different purpose and with a different effect.

It is also interesting to observe how the strong element of piousness and humility, which can be observed even in the morally ambiguous Edward II, is in Shakespeare's *Richard III* partly transferred from the victim to the murderers: in this case, it is the assassins who urge the Duke to turn to God before his death:

2 Murderer. Make peace with God, for you must die, my lord.
Clarence. Hast thou that holy feeling in your souls
To counsel me to make my peace with God,
And are you yet to your own soul so blind
That you will war with God by murd'ring me? (1.4.246-250)

The question remains whether these attempts to expand on the originally episodic figures, who in other plays pronounce no more than a handful of lines and whose delineation is barely existent, do not lead to the characters' overdesign and a loss of their dramatic credibility. Even Marlowe, who let his murderer appear in more scenes and, by providing him with a name and background, lent him certain individuality, did not attempt to deepen the character in ethical or even philosophical terms and, during the performance of the crime itself, let him act in the same manner as other stock murderers on the Elizabethan stage. It appears that in *Richard III* Shakespeare found special interest in the murderers of the sleeping victim and their dramatic potential – an interest which years later took the form of fully developed dramatic characters such as Othello.

Just as in all the aforementioned plays, the scene ends with a murder, after which the second murderer again expresses remorse (the motif thus occurs for a third time) and, by means of an almost identical remark to that of the second murderer in the Folio version of *Henry VI, Part Two* and Matrevis in *Edward II*, wishes that the crime had not been committed:

2 Murderer. A bloody deed, and desperately dispatch'd.
How fain, like Pilate, would I wash my hands
Of this most grievous murder.

Enter First Murderer.

1 Murderer. How now! What mean'st thou that thou help'st me not?
By heavens, the Duke shall know how slack you have been.
2 Murderer. I would he knew that I had sav'd his brother. (1.4.268-273)

What is noteworthy about the scene of Duke Clarence's murder is, however, not merely its particular details, which testify to the development of the established dramatic pattern and Shakespeare's attempt to invest it with additional dramatic significance. An aspect of the scene also deserving our attention is its relation to the parallel situation in the anonymous *True Tragedy of Richard III*, whose author and exact date of composition remain unknown, but which appears

to be a direct model for *Richard III* and to which Shakespeare alluded even in his later works (Bullough 1960, 237-239). In the *True Tragedy*, Duke Clarence's murder is not presented on the stage at all and the model for Act 1, Scene 4 of Shakespeare's play was, in fact, the murder of the Princes in the Tower in Scene 12 of *The True Tragedy*.

The murder scene in *The True Tragedy* shares a number of elements with *Thomas of Woodstock* and *Edward II*, indicating that the play was in some way connected with *Henry VI*, *Woodstock* and *Edward II*, or was written somewhat later with these in mind. After Brackenbury hands over to Terrell (Tyrrel) the keys to the Tower where the Princes are, the latter brings a Myles Forest, who has upon Richard's request hired two assassins, named Will Slawter and Jack Denton. After their introduction, Terrell, similarly to Lapoole in *Thomas of Woodstock* or Mortimer in *Edward II*, instructs the men to remain firm and show no mercy:

Terrell. Come hither sirs, to make a long discourse were but a folly, you seeme to be resolute in this cause that Myles Forest hath delivered to you, therefore you must cast away pitie, & not so much as thinke upon favour, for the more stearne that you are, the more shall you please the King.
Will. Zowne sir, nere talke to us of favour, tis not the first that Jack and I have gone about. (12.1223-1229)[16]

A rather bizarre discussion follows about the way in which the murderers will assassinate the Princes: whether with a gun or by crushing their heads against the wall or cutting their throats. In comparison with the list of the murderers' abilities in *Thomas of Woodstock* and *Edward II* mentioned above, which are delivered in chilling seriousness, this exchange in *The True Tragedy* sounds almost parodic, resembling the ingenious, but vain efforts of the pair of murderers in one of the Shakespeare apocrypha, *Arden of Faversham* (1592), who repeatedly and in various ways attempt to murder the title character of Arden upon Arden's wife request.[17] Ultimately it is Terrell who decides about the method of the murder:

Terrell. Nay sirs, then heare me, I will have it done in this order, when they be both a bed and at rest, Myles Forest thou shalt bring them up both, and betweene two feather beds smother them both.
Forest. Why this is verie good … (*The True Tragedy*, 12.1245-1248)

Note the detail common with *Thomas of Woodstock* and *Edward II*, the feather bed which is used for smothering the victims. Another commonplace of all the plays is the pattern according to which one of the murderers, when facing the victim, regrets the act while the other castigates him harshly (in Marlowe's play, the murderers' roles are assigned to Matrevis and Mortimer; the effect, however, is similar):

Denton. I promise thee Will, it greeves mee to see what mone these yoong Princes make, I had rather then fortie pounds I had neere tane it in hand, tis a dangerous matter to kill innocent princes, I like it not.

[16] Quotations from *The True Tragedy* are drawn from Bullough 1960, 317-345.

[17] Although there is no murder of a sleeping victim in *Arden of Faversham*, a relationship between *Arden* and *True Tragedy* cannot be ruled out. They were both most probably written not more than a few years apart and one of the murderers in *The True Tragedy*, Will Slawter, is nicknamed Black Will, which is the name of one of Arden's murderers both according to the anonymous play and Holinshed's *Chronicles*, which gives an account of the real event on which the play was based.

Will. Why you base slave, are you faint hearted, a little thing would make me strike thee, I promise thee.
Denton. Nay go forward, for now I am resolute: but come, lets too it. (12.1295-1302)

The text of the Quarto edition of *The True Tragedy* is generally very sketchy and it is not obvious how exactly the murder was executed on the stage. During the act itself, the Princes are not assigned any spoken lines; similarly to Duke Humphrey in Shakespeare's *Henry VI*, the victims could thus remain silent during the performance. It is significant, however, that one of the murderers calls the princes 'innocent', which similarly to the word 'penitent' in the second part of *Henry VI* emphasises the moral purity of the victims, contrasting them with the viciousness of the real criminal (that is, the contractor of the murder, Richard of Gloucester, rather than the actual murderers). Like the second murderer in *Thomas of Woodstock*, immediately after the act, Denton asks how to deal with the dead bodies:

Jack [Denton]. Come presse them downe, it bootes not to cry againe, Jack upon them so lustily. But maister Forest now they are dead what shall we do with them?
Forest. Why goe and bury them at the heape of stones at the staire foote, while I goe and tell maister Terrell that the deed is done.
Will. Well we will, farewell maister Forest. (12.1311-1317)

There are several possible reasons why Shakespeare decided to utilise the murder of the Princes in the Tower for the murder of Clarence at the beginning of his play. Firstly, his *Richard III* – unlike *The True Tragedy* – is the culmination of a long dramatic saga in which George Clarence played an important part and his death needed to be physically represented or, at least, given an extensive account. At the same time, however, Shakespeare might have seen a dramatic potential in the confrontation of the murderers with the Duke – one that was not present in the murderers' encounter with the Princes, who could hardly become the murderers' interlocutors in the same manner as the adult and experienced Clarence. Similarly to Marlowe's Edward II, Clarence, too, is a highly ambiguous figure who, in the course of the conflict between the Lancasters and Yorks, did not hesitate to lie, murder and betray his close ones. His assassination can be simultaneously understood as a bloody crime at the beginning of Richard of Gloucester's path to the throne, but also as a punishment for Clarence's previous sins. This might be why his murderers play both the roles of judges and executioners, as has been mentioned above. The subsequent death of the Princes in the fourth act of Shakespeare's version of the story is, on the one hand, an important breaking point where Richard loses all the remaining sympathies of the audience and, as such, the situation deserves the emotional emphasis which a scenic realisation would provide; on the other hand, Shakespeare probably felt that Tyrrel's moving account of the off-stage murder ('Dighton and Forrest … / Albeit they were flesh'd villains, bloody dogs – / Melted with tenderness and compassion, / Wept like two children, in their deaths' sad story', *Richard III*, 4.3.4-8) would serve this purpose very well and the visualisation of the theatergram would be more effective at a different point in the story. It can be observed that, while other authors more or less adhered to convention and merely replicated the ready-made theatergram with a handful of small alternations, Shakespeare handled it in a more independent and creative fashion, as if sensing room for its further expansion and development.

3. *Sleeping Innocence and Murderous Lust on the Jacobean Stage (c. 1603-1615)*

Even after the wave of histories from the early 1590s had tapered off, Shakespeare did not lose interest in the theatergram and returned to it regularly in various forms throughout his

entire dramatic career. Although the death of King Richard II at the end of the play of the same title does not include a sleeping victim, the situation shares some key elements with the aforementioned histories, namely the King's murder by a group of assassins in his cell and the immediate notion of one of them that 'this deed is chronicled in hell' (*King Richard II*, 5.5.116). An echo of this scene can also be found in *King Lear*, when Edmund commissions a murderer to hang the imprisoned Cordelia and Lear and, at the very last minute, wishes to do 'Some good' and avert the tragedy (5.3.241). An assassination of an actual sleeper is reconstructed in a detective-like fashion in 'The Murder of Gonzago' in *Hamlet*. After all, when the ghost of old Hamlet informs the prince of the 'most foul, strange and unnatural' (1.5.28) murder of the late King, he might refer not only to the fact that he was killed by his own brother, but also that the crime happened in his sleep. Despite this unbroken popularity of the trope on the early modern stage, however, there seem to be several loosely related Jacobean plays which employ the motif in a distinct enough way to allow us to put them in one tentative group, similar to that from the early 1590s, to observe the growth of the theatergram and its influence on dramatic language at one specific point in the history of English theatre.

By the early Jacobean period, theatre had undergone marked changes, and new themes, forms and genres, such as musical drama, satires, sex comedies, chastity plays and violent revenge tragedies, were gaining prominence in the repertoires of London playhouses. Despite this shift in the taste of English audiences, the motif of an innocent sleeper who finds himself or herself defenceless against a violent perpetrator proved to be versatile and viable enough to retain its previous popularity. Although, just as in the case of the Elizabethan histories discussed above, it is difficult to determine the exact relationship between the plays from this period of time linked by the trope, it is interesting to observe that all of them are somehow connected with the King's Men and William Shakespeare, who, as we have seen, greatly contributed to the popularity of the motif in the previous decade and experimented with its dramaturgical possibilities.

A prime (and perhaps the earliest) example of an early Jacobean employment of the theatergram of the victimised sleeper is the infamous bedroom scene in Shakespeare's *Othello* (c. 1603). At its beginning, the audience watches the play's eponymous protagonist cautiously approaching his very own bed, with a lamp in his hand, and drawing back its curtain. Although he has expected to find there what he has just found, he stays petrified for a moment and the dramatic action of the play temporarily ceases as well. The image of the beautiful Desdemona fills Othello with almost sacred awe and makes him once more question the intention with which he came. The flow of dramatic time, as it were, stops and the audience is left to observe how Othello, having for a moment exchanged rage for scopophilic lust, observes his sleeping wife:

It is the cause, it is the cause, my soul!
Let me not name it to you, you chaste stars,
It is the cause. Yet I'll not shed her blood
Nor scar that whiter skin of hers than snow
And smooth as monumental alabaster:
Yet she must die, else she'll betray more men.
Put out the light, and then put out the light!
If I quench thee, thou flaming minister,
I can again thy former light restore
Should I repent me. But once put out thy light,
Thou cunning'st pattern of excelling nature,
I know not where is that Promethean heat
That can thy light relume: when I have plucked thy rose

I cannot give it vital growth again,
It must needs wither. I'll smell it on the tree;
O balmy breath, that dost almost persuade
Justice to break her sword! Once more, once more:
Be thus when thou art dead and I will kill thee
And love thee after. Once more, and that's the last.
[*He smells, then kisses her.*]
So sweet was ne'er so fatal. I must weep,
But they are cruel tears. This sorrow's heavenly,
It strikes where it doth love. She wakes. (5.2.1-22, square brackets original)

The phrase 'to observe how Othello observes' is a key one here, since, although the focal point of Othello's words is Desdemona, her role within the situation is merely structural. Indeed, Desdemona's radiant beauty, as praised by Othello, is no more real than the starry night on which the scene takes place and all the audience can 'see' is, in fact, a purely verbal, not visual, image delivered by Othello's soliloquy.[18] The way in which Othello describes what he sees, however, gives the viewers just enough information to create an entirely different image: that of his character and momentary mental disposition. In *Othello*, the depiction of sleep thus does not judge the sleeping victim, whose purity has already been proven by the previous dramatic narrative, but the potential perpetrator, whose deeds are yet to be determined.

We can see that, since the 1590s, the motif had undergone a number of important changes. Most obviously, the political animosities and machinations that were indispensable in Elizabethan histories are replaced by a highly personal, intimate conflict, which is one of the cornerstones of Jacobean chastity plays. The basic situation, however, remains largely unaltered. From the technical point of view, instead of two murderers, the play employs just one, who has to act out the moral dilemma of the earlier plays on his own. Indeed, whereas previously the audience witnessed an argument between two characters, one of whom feels pangs of conscience and decides not to commit the crime, here the fight between action and inaction takes place inside the protagonist. For Othello, the journey from 'Yet I'll not shed her blood' (5.2.3) to 'Yet she must die' (5.2 6) is just as arduous as the one from the affectionate 'Excellent wretch' (3.3.90) to the hateful 'lewd minx' (3.3.478), as he calls Desdemona at various stages of the 'temptation scene', the longest scene of the play. The image of the murderer over the sleeping body in *Othello* thus primarily becomes a means of re-enacting the whole conflict of the play before it can finally be resolved.

While Tobin and Carver are correct when identifying the ultimate source of the scene in the story of Cupid and Psyche from Apuleius's *Metamorphoses* (Tobin 1979, 38; Carver 2007, 432-433), perhaps even more important is the fact that Othello's soliloquy shares a number of verbal parallels with Tyrrel's report of the death of the young Princes in Shakespeare's *Richard III*. While Othello calls Desdemona the 'cunning'st pattern of excelling nature' (5.2.11), Dighton and Forrest call the Princes 'The most replenished sweet work of Nature' (*Richard III*, 4.3.18); Desdemona's 'whiter skin … than snow / And smooth as monumental alabaster' (*Othello*, 5.2.4-5) has a clear antecedent in the Princes' 'alabaster innocent arms' with which they held each other at the moment of death (*Richard III* 4.3.11); the Princes' lips were 'four red roses on a stalk, / And in their summer beauty kiss'd each other' (4.3.12-13), while Othello calls Desdemona herself a rose, wishing to kiss her for the last time ('Once more, once more' 5.2.17);

[18] In early seventeenth-century productions, 'Desdemona' was in fact a boy in costume, who in a large theatre would hardly have been visible to the majority of the audience in any case, while the 'night' was induced by the presence of lamps, torches or candles, since performances in public theatres took place in the early afternoon.

finally, while the murderers 'Wept like two children' at the sight of the sleeping Princes and the thought of the crime which they were about to commit (*Richard III* 4.3.8), Othello, at the sight of his sleeping wife, sheds 'cruel tears' (5.2.21), which ultimately wake Desdemona up. Although each of the scenes serves a different purpose within the structures of their respective plays, the shared vocabulary shows the continuity of a single dramatic pattern to which Shakespeare returned years later in order to employ it in the context of a different dramatic genre and style.

It appears that Shakespeare was not the only Jacobean playwright who liked to employ this situation for the sake of his dramaturgy (or, simply, for its sensational effect) and it is possible that it was Shakespeare's *Othello* that motivated other authors of the period to include a similar situation into their works. In terms of the scene's iconography, the same basic situation can be found in the Faustian tragedy *The Devil's Charter*, written by Barnabe Barnes and staged by the King's Men in 1607 at court in the presence of James I. In the play, the vicious and corrupt Alexander VI (who signed a pact with the devil to become Pope) murders a number of people for political or hegemonic reasons. Among his victims are his lover, the Italian Prince Astor, and the Prince's brother Philippo, whom the Pope decides to kill in order to get Astor's lands. When he approaches the bed with the sleeping men, he soliloquises in a similar manner to Othello, revealing his criminal intentions:

Sleepe both secure vpon your fatall bed,
Now that the God of silence *Morpheus*,
Hath with his signet of black horne seal'd vp,
Your langued eye lids loaden with pale death,
Sleepe vntill you draw your latest breath,
Poore harmeles boyes strangers to sinne and euill,
Oh were my soule as innocent as yours! (Barnes 1904, 4.5.2509-2515)

Before Alexander manages to commit the murder, however, both men stir in their bed and pray in their sleep, as if in an anticipation of their demise:

Ast. Faire gratious Angell of eternall light,
Which reachest out that hand of happines.
Hayling my spirit to that triumphant throne,
Of endles comfort I adore thy grace.
Phi. *In his sleepe.* Oh goulden light of neuer setting Sunne,
Harke brother *Astor* harke my soule is rapt,
Into the ioyes of heauen with harmony.
Alex. Doe they not sleepe? are they not yet a sleepe?
Be not their sences yet lockt vp in sleepe. (4.5.2532-2540)

Although Barnes's play lacks Shakespeare's language and sophistication, the similarity between the scene of Othello killing his wife and Pope Alexander killing his lover is obvious. While the motif of the murderer's dilemma is absent in *The Devil's Charter*, the moment of the innocent victims praying in their sleep is evocative of the murder of King Duncan in Shakespeare's *Macbeth* (c. 1604-1605), when the Scottish King's sleeping bodyguards in the adjacent room start praying and Macbeth finds himself unable to participate by pronouncing 'Amen' (2.2.28).[19] Another possible reference to Shakespeare is the rather bizarre method by which the Pope murders the Princes: he poisons them with asps, which he calls '*Cleopatraes* birds', telling the sleeping Princes, 'With *Cleopatra* share in death and fate' (Barnes 1904, 4.5.2547 and 2556). It might be assumed that *The Devil's Charter* was staged shortly after Shakespeare's *Antony and*

[19] For a detailed discussion of this scene and the theological implications of Macbeth's failure to pray, see Jochums 1969.

Cleopatra (c. 1606-1607), which would still have been clear in the memories of the audiences of the King's Men, and the murder capitalised on the former play's success.

With the roles of the villain and the victim switched, a scene resembling *Othello* and *The Devil's Charter* also appears in Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy*, which combines elements of Jacobean chastity plays and revenge tragedies and which also belonged to the King's Men's repertoire. In the scene in question, the unnamed King's mistress Evadne avenges the shame caused to her by her royal lover. When approaching the King's bed, she wonders how he can sleep so soundly and asks God, 'Why give you peace to this untemperate beast / That hath so long transgressed you?' (Beaumont and Fletcher 1988, 5.1.25-26). Then Evadne decides that she 'must not / Thus tamely do it [murder the King] as he sleeps' (5.1.28-29), but rather that 'my vengeance / Shall take him waking, and then lay before him / The number of his wrongs and punishments' (5.1.30-32). Ultimately, she ties the King to his bed, awakes him and stabs him to death, despite his begging for mercy.

In the rather obscure play *The Valiant Welshman* (before 1615), sometimes attributed to the King's Men's comic actor Robert Armin, the King of Britain's brother Gald hides, invisible with the help of magic, in the bedroom of his wife Voada, who has been abducted by the Roman Marcus Gallicus, and watches how Marcus, with a candle and a sword in his hands, 'like bloudy *Tarquin*' (Anonymous 1902, 5.1.14) lustfully approaches Voada's bed:

[Marcus]. … Behold the locall residence of loue,
Euen in the Rosie tincture of her cheeke.
I am all fire, and must needs be quencht,
Or the whole house of nature will be burnt.
Fayre *Voada*, awake: tis I, awake. (5.1.38-42)

Before Marcus Gallicus manages to touch the woman, however, Gald and his associate Bluso the magician burst forward, 'tumble Marcus ouer the bed' and take Voada off stage (SD after 5.1.72). In terms of its poetry, *The Valiant Welshman* can again hardly be compared to plays by Shakespeare or Beaumont and Fletcher, and the resolution of the situation, combined with the presence of magic, creates a markedly different atmosphere from those in the aforementioned plays. Since *The Valiant Welshman* was possibly written more than a decade after *Othello* and five to ten years after the rest of the other Jacobean plays discussed here, the author might have wanted to subvert the well-known situation. After all, Thomas Middleton's grotesque employment of the Hamletian skull in his 1606 *The Revenger's Tragedy* shows that this technique was not uncommon in English Renaissance theatre. The reference to Tarquin in *The Valiant Welshman* might, however, evoke a sense of imminent danger, and the sole physical detail describing Voada's 'Rosie tincture of her cheeke' echoes the physical description of Desdemona provided by Othello, as well as the language of Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*.[20]

In the Beaumont and Fletcher apocryphal play *The Faithful Friends* (1604-1626), which only survives in a manuscript, the Roman general Marcus Tullius, having been falsely persuaded that in his absence his friend Armanus served as a pander in his (Tullius') wife Philadelpha's affair with King Titus Martius, finds Armanus asleep in a forest, remarking that

he is so vsed to sin
nott the black furies that still houle about him

[20] In Shakespeare's *The Rape of Lucrece*, a full eleven stanzas are devoted to Tarquin's observation of the sleeping Lucrece, explicitly mentioning her 'rosy cheek' (l. 386).

nor his own guilt that euer calling him
can waken him. (Anonymous 1975, 4.1.2311-2314)

Although Tullius seems to be determined to take revenge at first, he ultimately finds himself overcome with very Othellian doubts:

my hand shakes
Reuenge and furie gard mee round about
and force calme pittie and compassion back
once more haue at thee, still my arme wants strength
and cannot hold my weapon. (4.1.2318-2322, square brackets original)

The basic situation, which revolves around a husband who is unjustly jealous of his wife and wants to avenge her infidelity and his humiliation, is similar to Othello's (although, in *The Faithful Friends*, the King indeed wants to seduce Philadelpha, who is moreover still a virgin as her and Tullius' marriage has not yet been consummated). Unlike Othello's Desdemona, however, when Armanus awakes, he assures Tullius of his innocence and Philadelpha's faithfulness and the friends are reconciled. Since the scene does not directly involve a female character, it lacks any physical description of the potential sleeping victim. What is, however, significant is the mention of the quality of Armanus's sleep – Marcus Tullius wonders how such a sinful person might sleep so calmly. While in *The Maid's Tragedy*, a similar remark ('Why give you peace to this untemperate beast / That hath so long transgressed you?', Beaumont and Fletcher 1988, 5.1.25-26) creates little tension since Evadne's assessment of the King's character is accurate, in *The Faithful Friends* (Anonymous 1975), the audience knows that Armanus is innocent and his undisturbed sleep serves, as it were, as an indicator of the quality of his character – a role similar to the piousness of the sleeping victims in Elizabethan tragedies discussed above.[21]

The recurrent motif of female chastity, which seems to be the crux and the common denominator of all the scenes from this group (with the exception of *The Devil's Charter*, where the lover is male and the reason for the murder is purely materialistic), is also strongly present in *Cymbeline*, a play which again shows Shakespeare's creative approach to the dramatic convention. While in many respects following the pattern of *Othello*, Shakespeare in *Cymbeline* decided to ascribe the theatergram a dramaturgical function different from the parallel situation in the older play. The scene does no longer mark the climax of the play's main conflict – instead, it plays a necessary role in its creation. Moreover, while in *Othello*, and all the plays we have mentioned so far, the sleeping character was in imminent physical peril, in *Cymbeline* the actual death is replaced by the assassination of the victim's character. The theme of chastity is thus emphasized even more, creating equivalence between the value of female virtue and the value of her life (especially if the supposed loss of the former ultimately leads to Imogen's husband Posthumus' demand for the latter).

The scene again takes place in the middle of the night, showing sleeping Imogen and Iachimo, hidden in her bedroom, attempting to secure false evidence which would incriminate Imogen in the eyes of her husband:

[21] As already mentioned, the belief in the correlation between the quality of sleep and the quality of the sleeper was an early-modern commonplace: 'For do but consider what an excellent thing sleep is: it is so inestimable a jewel, that, if a tyrant would give his crown for an hour's slumber, it cannot be bought' (Dekker 1905, 25). See also King Henry's soliloquy on sleep in Shakespeare's *Henry IV, Part Two* (3.1.4-31).

Iachimo. The crickets sing, and man's o'er-laboured sense
Repairs itself by rest. Our Tarquin thus
Did softly press the rushes, ere he waken'd
The chastity he wounded. Cytherea,
How bravely thou becom'st thy bed! fresh lily!
And whiter than the sheets! That I might touch!
But kiss, one kiss! Rubies unparagon'd,
How dearly they do't: 'tis her breathing that
Perfumes the chamber thus:
…
Such, and such pictures: there the window, such
Th'adornment of her bed; the arras, figures,
Why, such, and such; and the contents o'th' story.
Ah, but some natural notes about her body,
Above ten thousand meaner moveables
Would testify, t'enrich mine inventory.
O sleep, thou ape of death, lie dull upon her,
And be her sense but as a monument,
Thus in a chapel lying.
…
[*taking off her bracelet*]
…
'Tis mine, and this will witness outwardly,
As strongly as the conscience does within,
To th' madding of her lord. On her left breast
A mole, cinque-spotted: like the crimson drops
I'th' bottom of a cowslip. Here's a voucher,
Stronger than ever law could make; this secret
Will force him think I have pick'd the lock and ta'en
The treasure of her honour.
…
… She hath been reading late,
The tale of Tereus, here the leaf's turned down
Where Philomel gave up. I have enough: (*Cymbeline*, 2.2.11-46)

Despite the verbal similarities with the bedroom scene in *Othello* (especially in the description of the sleeping woman: 'fresh lily, / And whiter than the sheets', 'Rubies unparagon'd / How dearly they do't', 'her breathing that / Perfumes the chamber') and the common iconography of the situation, the scenes' overall mood and dramaturgical purpose are substantially different. Rather in the fashion of the theatergram in *Richard III*, Shakespeare decided to insert the scene at an earlier stage in the play, making it an impulse for the further development of the story and a source of future dramatic tension in the central plot of the play. As such, the roles of the characters involved are largely altered: while the character of the innocent sleeper remains (in this case, her virtue is even supported by the name Imogen, which is sometimes transcribed Innogen, and the pseudonym Fidele, which she adopts later on in the play), the perpetrator is not, and cannot be, charged with a dilemma similar to Othello's or Tullius'. This kind of emotion is attributed later on to Posthumus, who orders his wife to be murdered for her supposed crime; in the bedroom scene of *Cymbeline*, Iachimo assumes the role of Iago who, in like manner invented a false 'nocturnal story' of Cassio's talking in his sleep about his affair with Desdemona (3.3.421-428). Iachimo's taking Imogen's bracelet is the equivalent of Iago's obtaining of Desdemona's handkerchief, which becomes a tangible proof of his fabricated narrative.

The strength of the scene again lies in the visual representation of the criminal looming over the defenceless victim. The emotional effect on the audience, however, seems to differ from the aforementioned examples: although the spectators are not supposed to sympathise with Iachimo and his scheme,[22] the graphic detail of his language and his resourcefulness in the situation makes them share the villain's perspective and participate with him in his crime, if only for a brief moment. The suspense which the image generates is no longer based on the audience's hoping that the criminal will ultimately change his mind and spare the victim, or that the victim will wake up in time and manage to escape – rather, the theatregoers, while still dreading the outcome, are invited to adopt the violator's desire that the sleeper will *not* wake up ('O sleep, thou ape of death, lie dull upon her' 2.2.31) and that he will manage to execute his plan. We might say that Othello's inner fight in *Cymbeline* vicariously become the spectators', who, at the same time, lack any influence on Iachimo's decisions or the consequences of his actions. While deprived of some of its original functions, the theatergram thus gains a new structural and dramaturgical significance, testifying both to its versatility and ongoing popularity with Jacobean audiences, as well to Shakespeare's capability of constantly reframing the well-known convention in new dramatic and cultural contexts.

One more use of the motif of an endangered sleeping victim by Shakespeare can be found in his presumably last play, *The Tempest*. Although from the strictly chronological perspective, *The Tempest* might be considered a member of the same group as the aforementioned Jacobean plays, in terms of its dramatic language it rather resembles a bridge of a kind between the Elizabethan and Jacobean variants of the theatergram or, perhaps, an amalgamation of the two. In Act 2, Scene 1 of the play, Ariel puts to sleep Alonso, King of Naples, and his companions, who have just been shipwrecked on Prospero's enchanted island. The only ones remaining awake are Alonso's brother, Sebastian, and Antonio, usurper Duke of Milan. Antonio urges Sebastian to kill the sleeping King and assume the throne of Naples in a fashion similar to that in which Sebastian banished his own brother (whom he presumes dead) twelve years before and replaced him as Duke of Milan. The motif of the usurper's conscience, albeit briefly, surfaces:

Sebastian. But for your conscience?
Antonio. Ay, sir, where lies that? If 'twere a kibe
'Twould put me to my slipper, but I feel not
This deity in my bosom. Twenty consciences
That stand 'twixt me and Milan, candied be they
And melt ere they molest! Here lies your brother,
No better than the earth he lies upon.
…
Sebastian. Thy case, dear friend,
Shall be my precedent. As thou got'st Milan,
I'll come by Naples. Draw thy sword! One stroke
Shall free thee from the tribute which thou payest,
And I the king shall love thee. (2.1.277-296)

Structurally, the scene effectively mirrors the central conflict in the story, between the ousted Prospero and his brother Antonio. In the vein of Shakespeare's late romances, the action is

[22] The gravity of his crime is, again, emphasised at the beginning of the scene when Iachimo likens himself to Tarquin. This allusion, just as the later reference to the story of Tereus' rape of Philomela from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, can be understood as a kind of *mise en abyme* of the scene.

interrupted by magic when Ariel wakes Alonso up before the regicide can be committed, paving the way for the overall consolatory tone of the work. Although, just like in the other Jacobean plays under study, the scene is centred on the prospective perpetrators, their motivation and tendencies, the presence of magic controlling human behaviour and Prospero's ultimate forgiveness to his past wrongdoers weaken the moral overtones of the situation. It is interesting to observe how Shakespeare revises the older form of the theatergram, having two potential assassins rather than one, who encourage each other and spurn the possible pangs of conscience. The theme of chastity or revenge, which was the leitmotif of the plays from the later group of plays and sometimes even a source of voyeuristic pleasure for the audience, is absent here as well, being replaced by political machinations and expediency, as known from Elizabethan history plays. As such, the reiteration of the theatergram in *The Tempest* combines elements of both variants of the dramatic pattern, lending the trope a unique feel and yet new dramaturgical role – perhaps more mannerist than structurally effective, but definitely retaining much of its thematic value thanks to the cultural sensitivities of the period and the rich tradition that helped to establish the situation among the popular staples of the language of early modern English theatre.

4. *Conclusion*

Sleep in the early modern period enjoyed a special cultural status with a number of thematic connotations. The common idea of dangers which sleepers potentially face every night proved to be a particularly productive dramaturgical device, which was frequently employed in Renaissance plays for various technical purposes. We have seen that a distinct type of this device was the depiction of a defenceless sleeping character on the stage, who is to be either murdered or in another way victimised. Although the basic dramatic situation was in essence mediaeval, English Renaissance dramatists appear to have been especially fond of its iconography and strove to make use of its dramaturgical potential to the fullest.

While the two groups of plays discussed in the present article might seem to be separated from each other by roughly a decade and the end of one theatre epoch and beginning of another one, there appears to be a natural connection between them. Firstly, although the chronology of the works in question is uncertain, there is a continual tendency to shift in their focus from the sleeper to the criminal. This tendency is discernible even in earlier histories, such as Marlowe's *Edward II*, which introduces Lightborn with some features typical of Marlovian (anti) heroes, and Shakespeare's *Richard III*, where the characters of the anonymous murderers seem to be stretched to the very limit of their dramatic potential. The same focus can be observed in the Jacobean plays under study, where the role of the victim within the scene becomes largely structural and it is the perpetrator who dominates the scene.

Second, it can be seen that the scenes played an ever greater role within the structures of their respective plots. Even in the second part of *Henry VI*, Shakespeare obviously wanted the spectacle of Duke Humphrey's murder to have more significant consequences for the story; in his *Cymbeline* some two decades later, the crime against the sleeping figure directly influences the further development of the plot and creates a conflict that is only resolved at the very end of the play. Besides these examples, however, there were also authors who primarily utilised the scene for its attractive visual potential and its ability to generate immediate dramatic suspense, such as Barnabe Barnes in *The Devil's Charter* or Robert Armin (?) in his *The Valiant Welshman*. Even these, however, existed within the context of more complex employments of the same dramatic situation, which probably made the former highly evocative in the eyes of Jacobean theatregoers. This observation can also be applied to Shakespeare's late comedy *The Tempest*,

where the same dramatic situation is on the one hand employed somewhat to reduce the moral overtones while, on the other, it still remains recognisable.

Finally, all the plays in question revolve around William Shakespeare and his playing company, which might indicate that the company's shareholders wanted to recycle the trope because of its popularity among their audiences and its commercial potential. The early Elizabethan histories which we have discussed here seem to have been connected with Lord Pembroke's Men, with whom Shakespeare collaborated before his engagement with the Lord Chamberlain's (later the King's) Men.[23] Several years later, when Shakespeare was the principal playwright for the King's Men and one of the company's shareholders, he probably revived the theatergram with which he had extensively worked before, adapting it for the new tastes of London audiences. His example was possibly followed by other authors writing for the company, either on the shareholders' demand or because they themselves wanted to include the then fashionable dramatic device. Although this explanation remains speculative, the recurring dramaturgical patterns in the plays and their (albeit sketchy) stage history make it plausible.

The longevity of the 'murdering sleep' motif on the early modern English stages and its adaptability to the changing tastes and genres of early modern English theatre testify to the universal value of the theatergram and the cultural significance of the situation which it depicts. Especially thanks to authors such as William Shakespeare, the motif contributed to the artistic development of early modern English theatre and some of its most memorable scenes.

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[23] While the standard dating of *Richard III* remains the early 1590s, given the qualitative leap between the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*, it is not inconceivable that Shakespeare wrote the latter for the Lord Chamberlain's Men in 1594. The 1594 publication of the older *True Tragedy* could very well be the publisher's attempt to capitalise on the then new and popular play by Shakespeare, which saw print as late as 1597.

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