

Shakespeare's Manipulation of Songs and the Theory of Boethius

— *Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale and The Tempest.*

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1. Introduction

A huge number of music-related words can be found in Shakespeare's plays. Styan demonstrates that there are more than three hundred musical stage directions and five hundred passages in the dialogue in the Bard's thirty-two plays (12). Shakespeare's musical knowledge is symptomatic of the Elizabethan period when musical instruments and musical technique improved dramatically because of the development of the printing industry, the improvement in the way music sheets were written, and also the way of creating a chord by combining some tones. Along with these developments, a huge variety of music such as plain songs and ballads and masques at the court in the Jacobean period entertained people from all walks of life. Elizabeth I, for instance, was keen on music as is shown in the comment that she sang with her great voice.¹

In addition to its familiarity among various kinds of people, music has a long history. Although Western music and its theory start with Pythagoras who acknowledged harmony in the musical scale and astronomy, music in general was formulated by Augustine in the medieval period, and also Boethius² who developed the theory of music. The latter divided the theory of music into three categories: *musica mundana*, the music of the spheres or cosmic harmony; *musica humana*, which suggests the relationship between the human body and the soul or between individuals and society; and *musica instrumentalis*, the performative music, i.e. singing or musical instruments. In the Jacobean period, however, *musica instrumentalis* was more popular

amongst the general populace, as the more “theoretical” *musica mundana* and *musica humana* were regarded to be understood only among Jacobean wits.

Alongside the dramatic improvement in music-associated skills, Shakespeare and other dramatists started using music in their plays to enhance dramatic effects in a scene, including the psychological and moral effects. In comparison with other playwrights, Shakespeare makes more use of music to depict supernatural phenomena and the mental condition of characters. In terms of songs in the plays, although some of the ballads were written by professional ballad-writers such as William Elderton and Richard Johnson (Duffin 20), they were more commonly chosen from the repertoires of popular or traditional songs.

Shakespeare’s manipulation of songs can remarkably be seen in all of his plays. Shakespeare’s songs generally convey the mental state of people through verbal expressions and their wide range of voices. The tragedies, for example, include the songs of Desdemona, Ophelia, the gravediggers and Lear’s Fool. In spite of their greatness, their storylines are so dramatic that the existence of songs is rather overshadowed. On the other hand, the best use of songs as a dramatic device is fairly made in comedies.

Although Shakespeare made excellent use of music, some people consider that it is not incorporated into the plays well enough. As Knight admonishes, unhelpful music or sounds can “easily fill an ugly gap in the continuity of the action” (*Principles* 78). In addition, Dunn (405) mentions that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale* are “organic, but predominantly in the realm of practical music rather than theatrical” while in *The Tempest*, Shakespeare’s musical philosophy can be seen very clearly. Despite the fact that *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale* contain beautiful songs such as funeral songs or pastorals and ballads, it is not only Dunn who claims the songs of these two plays are inferior to those of *The Tempest*. Stevens also claims that “if *The Winter’s Tale* and *Cymbeline* lead one to think that Shakespeare has lost his feeling for the organic use of musical effect, *The Tempest* is reassuring” (45). Compared with *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* and *The Winter’s Tale* tend to be regarded as musically inferior plays.

Even so, from the point of the musical theory, if the songs in these plays

conform to the theory of Boethius, it can be said that Shakespeare created not only entertaining songs but also deeper sounds beyond the power of human beings. In this essay, in spite of the fact that it is not certain whether Shakespeare had known about the musical theory of Boethius or not, how and when Shakespeare's use of this theory can be recognised will be discussed in order to prove the distinctiveness of his acoustic effects through songs in Shakespeare's late comedies in the humanist way.³ *The Tempest*, generally regarded as the musically best play, and *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*, which are often deemed to have the fewer musical effects.

2. *Musica instrumentalis* and *The Winter's Tale*

Musica instrumentalis, to begin with, can be seen in *The Winter's Tale*. Act four witnesses the entrance of unsophisticated but amusing people in Bohemia. Their onstage presence changes the atmosphere, and they sing most of the songs in the play. In contrast to the first half of the play, which concerns the disorder of the court in Sicily due to the jealousy of Leontes, the scene of the latter half is moved to the countryside in Bohemia after an interval of sixteen years where the people are comically playful. Although the lifestyle in Bohemia is not as rich and luxurious as that of the court, their life in an organic and naturalistic setting produces pastorals. It is often said that directors tend to have difficulties in tackling the musical aspect of the play along with the shift of time and place (Tatspaugh 138) but the scene which contains songs and the scene of the carnival is a highly amusing one.

In act four, it is true that Autolycus plays the leading part as he is involved with almost all six songs in scene three which symbolise the carefree beauty of Bohemia. The role of Autolycus in the words of Overton is that of a "lovable rogue" and "theatrical counterpart to this literary whimsy" (70-1). Therefore, as Tillyard mentions, "the common praise of Autolycus as a character is well justified" (48). Although Autolycus is not a moral person, at least his songs are the reflection of natural beauty. He is regarded as a comic rather than wicked character because of his cheerful songs.

In the Elizabethan period, strolling musicians or minstrels providing

music in the taverns amused people in spite of being not employed to do so, although Queen Elizabeth issued a law that restricted those musicians in the end of her reign. Moncur-Sime therefore suggests that the reprobate Autolycus can be regarded as a “typical ancient minstrel” (54). The role of Autolycus as a minstrel can be suggested; however, as his songs just enteration and encourage people, he cannot be a professional minstrel. His personal characteristics and the content of the songs of the beauty of the countryside are in total contrast with what came before in the play and this amuses people.

Although the songs of Autolycus do not directly affect the happy ending of the play, both his personality and songs are also performative in that most people enjoy watching his trickery and listening to his singing. As his songs are enjoyable, the audience is deceived into thinking that he is a positively funny person. Also, because his songs are based on nature, the audience have an illusion that they meet country people who live actively and seem to enjoy life. Not only do his songs include musical distance and poetry, but also Autolycus' comic characteristics largely influence the quality of the whole performance of the play.

In fact, this entertaining scene by Autolycus changes the dark image of the first three acts. Despite of Autolycus being a thief, his songs are necessary in the performance to cheer up the gloomy characters that appear before and after him. The song of Autolycus, for example, “Will you buy any tape, or lace for your cape, / My dainty duck, my dear-a?” (4.4.313-14) contains efficient strong rhythm, expression and rhymes. At the same time, these factors help to reveal Autolycus as a merchant, even if he sells poor quality goods, as his song can attract and entertain people. Singing has an acoustic effect that contributes to both his business and laughter on the stage. A song with a good rhythm and good vocals connects with the people and helps him appear less dishonourable.

The songs of Autolycus not only reflect rural life, but also describe those people who live there vividly. In contrast to the dark life of the court, Bohemia is described as a vernal place, and the ballads and pastorals contribute to the happy life and contain the spirit and the sensibility of people. It can be seen

especially in *The Winter's Tale* that songs are composed naturally and beautifully by people who feel the harmony of nature and in nature, and hence the harmony of people is also maintained. This is the appeal of Autolycus who lives freely in nature. It is not too much to say that *musica instrumentalis* in *The Winter's Tale* is supported by performative Autolycus.

Act four is furthermore entertaining as the scene of pastorals. Notwithstanding the fact that the plot is rather complicated, pastorals are so exquisite. Pastorals are sung when people try to show their feelings of the beauty and the gentleness of nature; that is, it is necessary for people to feel at harmony with nature. In fact, pastorals can often be seen in Jacobean drama, which tend to suggest idealised rural life which avoids the corrupted life in the city. Along with pastorals of *As You Like It* and *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, those in *The Winter's Tale* by Autolycus can create a elegant, festive and free atmosphere.

As regards nature, the following song tells us that the long harsh winter nights have finished when daffodils start blooming in the early spring.

When daffodils begin to peer,
 With hey, the doxy over the dale,
 Why then comes in the sweet o' the year,
 For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale. (4.3.1-4)

The song symbolises spring when people grow light-hearted and are encouraged to sing, and also as a laughter which is necessary in comedies. In the words of Knight, Autolycus is "spring incarnate; carefree, unmoral, happy, and sets the note for a spring-like turn in our drama" (*Crown* 137). Autolycus therefore makes the stage cheerful and positively refreshes the atmosphere.

Broadly, act four is not described as representative of the ideal lifestyle of sophisticated people. However, the songs, the universal entertainment, help to conceal the uncivilised nature of people in the country and show animated life there. Although Autolycus is not always regarded as a popular character, he is an important person in the play who can entertain the audience, and the atmosphere of the stage is made lighter by his appearance. Also, his pastorals

have an effect as musical entertainment.

3. *Musica humana* and *Cymbeline*

Although *The Winter's Tale* is the play filled with the effects of *musica instrumentalis* through the songs of Autolycus, *Cymbeline* which was written soon after *The Winter's Tale* is the play in which one of the songs connects people and society, and in another, humans and souls, which means that the play covers the condition of *musica humana*. That characters go from the court to the countryside is in common to both *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline*; however, in terms of songs, those in *Cymbeline* take more importance in the invisible connections between people whereas those in *The Winter's Tale* are mainly sung by Autolycus whose role is just to entertain the audience.

Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings,
 And Phoebus gins arise,
 His steeds to water at those springs
 On chaliced flowers that lies,
 And winking Mary-buds begin to ope their golden eyes;
 With everything that pretty is, my lady sweet, arise,
 Arise, arise! (*Cym.* 2.3.19-25)

The aim of this first song in *Cymbeline* is to unify the minds of people in the palace although it does not work well for Imogen. Indeed, music helps to cheer people up or change their mood as Cloten mentions "I am advised to / give her music a-mornings, they say it will penetrate" (2.3.11-12). The song is chosen by musicians to help Cloten to grab the heart of Imogen and leading her into the circle of society, although for Imogen, the music is nothing else but a trouble. As Cloten finds it difficult to attract Imogen's attention, he decides to rely on music as a way of communicating. In fact, it is said that this song is "one of a handful of Shakespeare's formal songs that survive in what may be original settings" (Duffin 185).

When songs are used effectively, they keep the small community well. It seems that music fails to connect the characters on the stage; however, it connects Cloten and the audience, and also Imogen and the audience. The song gives the audience time to consider their relationship and to determine whether to sympathise with Imogen who is trying to escape from Cloten or to support his plot. It does not only entertain the audience but also works to establish a link between all the people in the theatre. Therefore, *musica humana* is notable in this song.

Also, another song in *Cymbeline* works as *musica humana* in spite of the fact that its effect is totally different.

Guiderius

Fear no more the heat o'th'sun,
 Nor the furious winter's ranges.
 Thou thy worldly task hast done,
 Home art gone and ta'en thy wages.
 Golden lads and girls all must,
 As chimney-sweepers, come to dust.

Ariragus

Fear no more the frown o'th'great,
 Thou art past the tyrant's stroke.
 Care no more to clothe and eat,
 To thee the reed is as the oak.
 The sceptre, learning, physic, must
 All follow this and come to dust. (4.2.259-270)

Moncur-Sime asserts that this is the most plaintive and moving dirge before the eighteenth-century (129). One of the reasons for this might be that the dirge sung by Imogen's brothers, Guiderius and Ariragus, establishes a connection between people and the soul. It naturally combines the feelings of the brothers who treated Imogen as a real sister and are trying to share their sadness about her death. Through singing, they believed that they could establish a good relationship with people and the soul of the dead. Although

the fact is that “song was required because Shakespeare’s company was lacking boy soprano voices at the time *Cymbeline* was produced” (Simonds 357), this song shows that music has a close relationship between human and soul.

Funeral songs contribute toward connecting the soul of the dead person in heaven and the people who are left behind. The duet is not meant to entertain people but to heal the sorrowful hearts of the singers and the audience. The brothers dedicated the song to Imogen from their heart and their bonds were tightened through singing. Their song was so touching that it made Belarius think that he needed to tell them the truth that they are not his real sons. Through mourning, people can establish closer relationships and think about their own life.

Judging only from songs, *Cymbeline* is definitely the play of *musica humana*. Music is suggested as one of the ways of linking people and enhances mournful feeling. That is, *Cymbeline*’s songs are reflected the essence of the play. Although musical instruments entertain during the performance, when songs are added, the feeling of characters can be conveyed to audiences more attractively and appealingly. In this respect, *Cymbeline* is the play of *musica humana* which harmonises people’s actions and souls.

4. *Musica mundana* and *The Tempest*

It is often said of *The Tempest*, written soon after *Cymbeline*, that it contains the best musical effects among all Shakespeare’s plays. Styan has indicated that by virtue of *The Tempest* having more songs than any other plays of Shakespeare, “the spirit of the comic action seems to be marked at key points by the style of the singing” (16). It can be said that Shakespeare tried to create the eternal musical aspect in the play from the beginning to the end. Here, how songs harmonise the spheres and the cosmos, and are beyond the essence of practical music will be analysed to address in what ways *The Tempest* fits *musica mundana*. Compared with the other two plays, being discussed here, the songs in *The Tempest* are associated with the spheres and

the cosmos so that it could be regarded as the best play with music.

Everything in *The Tempest's* universe has its own rhythm. In terms of people, although they are tiny creatures looking from the vast world, they also have their own rhythm, heart beats, for example. Medically, the link between pulse and music was considered in the Elizabethan period. In describing the rhythm of the pulse, "the terminology of musical proportion" and "metrical verse" was also used. Siraisi mentions that "specific musical proportions existed in pulse and that the practitioner could identify them by touch" (127). Music and the body, therefore, have a close connection.

From the view of the scale of the earth, there are seasons and tides, and in the sky, a regular cycle of stars, and eclipses of the sun and the moon can be observed. At the time of Shakespeare, astrology⁴ and astronomy were widely studied as is seen in *The Tempest*: Prospero's study of rough magic and the manipulation of "so potent art" (5.1.50). Edmund in *King Lear*, for another example, says that to read a fortune in stars is only a superstition. As the people in the Elizabethan period did not completely believe it, this is just reflected by the vagueness of the theory of astrology at that time; however, what can be said is that its basis is to harmonise people and nature.

Ariel manipulates the air by singing in order to harmonise people. The following song describes the need to avoid involvement in conflicts among countrymen.

While you here do snoring lie,
 Open-eyed conspiracy
 His time doth take.
 If of life you keep a care,
 Shake off slumber and beware.
 Awake, awake! (2.1.296-301)

Walls mentions that "the effects of music were such that, by playing in the right modes, skilled musicians could incite men to war, placate them once their anger was aroused, or cure a distempered body" (11). This song, as a result, contributes to keep the peace of the island.

As Miranda does not know the importance of harmony between people, growing up in the comfortable environment, she never sings, whereas Caliban, who knows the misery caused by the lack of affection and the ugliness of people, sings.

No more dams I' ll make for fish,
 Nor fetch in firing
 At requiring,
 Nor scrape trencher, nor wash dish,
 Ban, ban, Ca-caliban
 Has a new master: get a new man. (2.2.176-81)

Although this song ostensibly shows his delight at his separation from Prospero and having a new master, it contains the hope of concord between people. Caliban is so isolated on the island that he is delighted to find people who pay attention to him. He insinuates the importance of affection.

Caliban, however, says that the island is filled with music. Although the song of Caliban does not seem to have a relationship with *musica mundana*, as long as he mentions the workings of nature, fish and firing, the purpose of the song is not only to entertain the audience but contains the importance of natural elements. Also, those natural workings in the song suggest that they are not created by Caliban but result from the balance of nature.

Honor, riches, marriage-blessing,
 Long continuance, and increasing,
 Hourly joys be still upon you,
 Juno sings her blessings on you. (4.1.106-9)

As Dunn mentions, “the wedding hymn, this song could probably be accounted simply as *musica instrumentalis* were it not that it, too, at least suggests echoes of *musica mundana*” (401). The marriage song by Juno may have an effect of *musica instrumentalis* containing an entertaining point of masque as a performance but on the other hand, marriage is the symbol of

union and a cause for celebration—like the marriage of Henry V with Catherine and Richmond with Elizabeth which stopped the war and provided for a peace. Although Lindley claims that “we, like the spectators on stage, are frustrated and disappointed as harmonious visions end in discord” (59), this song is not just for entertainment for marriage but also for the importance of the bonds and affection. Therefore, it contains the essence of *musica mundana*.

Nature which presides over human destiny also possesses harmony. The song of Stephano, “I shall no more to sea, to sea, / Here shall I die ashore” (2.2.40-1) tells that the earth is supported by the balance of larger cosmos. Dunn mentions about this song that “the snatch and the bawdy song of Stephano in the second scene of act two are apparently rather typical examples of *musica instrumentalis*” (400). Also as Naylor states, Stephano is a good musician and leads the catch, appreciating Ariel’s tabor playing (91). Here, the concept of Stephano as a musician appears to be formulated.

On this account, this song does not seem to include *musica mundana* in its context. Judging from the scene where Trinculo decides to shelter with Caliban and Stephano appears with alcohol with his hand is comical and seemingly has nothing to do with serious universal factors. Nevertheless, he talks about the “sea” which people in the time of Shakespeare thought was the place where Neptune lives and associated it with gods. He moreover says “die ashore” which means that he is hoping to die on the ground, as it is believed that the land is the place where the first people, Adam and Eve were born. For Stephano, death is to go back to the soil, not to water. From this point of view, this song is not an entertainment but is rather a microcosmic-scale song about the creation and appeals to the workings of nature.

A huge number of harmonised small worlds support the balance of a cosmic world, the sphere.

Come unto these yellow sands,
 And then take hands.
 Curtsied when you have, and kissed,
 The wild waves whist.
 Foot it featly here and there,

And sweet sprites the burden bear.

Hark, hark

The watch-dogs bark

Bow-wow, bow-wow. (1.2.374-382)

Although yellow sands are not as hard as ground and are easily shifted, through describing some natural beauty, Ariel sings about the importance of keeping a peaceful world. It is people who destroy nature but when people are at peace, they will not disturb the environment. When natural disasters such as tempests happen, people could regard them as a divine punishment. This song emphasises the importance of having a good relationship with nature and even with gods. It seems that the songs of Ariel who is a symbol of nature are produced by the beauty of nature as in *The Winter's Tale*; however, his songs are not as hilarious as those in *The Winter's Tale*.

Full fathom five thy father lies,

Of his bones are coral made;

Those are pearls that were his eyes;

Nothing of him that doth fade,

But doth suffer a sea-change

Into something rich and strange. (1.2.395-99)

Ferdinand hears Ariel singing as stated above and says "Where should this music be? I' th' air or th' earth? / It sounds no more; and sure it waits upon / Some god o' th' island" (1.2.386-8). He moreover says "The ditty does remember my drowned father. / This is no mortal business, nor no sound / That the earth owes" (1.2.403-5). As verbal sound passes through the air, it echoes as if it were from heaven or the sphere. Shakespeare is succeeded in connecting the earth and sphere by creating a creature existing in the air. It is suggested that the songs of Ariel harmonise people who have their own rhythm and sphere.

Fain indicates that this song of Ariel is a "perfect work of art" and its contexture also shows its significance in literary art (330). It is similar to the

funeral song in *Cymbeline*; it however conveys the eternal existence of creatures drowned in the sea and the deity world after death. Although Stephano rejects going back to sea, people need to go back to nature and this song therefore implies the relationship between the sphere and the flesh and souls. Ariel's songs are beyond the connection between people and soul in implying the importance of the harmony of the universe.

One of the reasons for *The Tempest* being regarded as a better musical play than the others is that it is not a play like *The Winter's Tale* and *Cymbeline* whose songs arise from the nature of the island or tightly combine society and people, and people and the soul. Although the setting is an isolated island, there are special musical effects that involve the sphere whereas other songs in Shakespeare seem to show the feelings of the characters or make scenes more dramatic. Indeed, not only do the songs in *The Tempest* have entertaining aspects but they also fulfil the condition of *musica mundana*.

5. Conclusion

Shakespeare's manipulation of acoustic effect to tell the harmony of the spheres, cosmos, nature and people, is tremendous, and all of these consist of a certain sort of harmony. The states of concord provide stability in every respect. Although the fundamental purpose of music in Shakespeare's plays is *musica instrumentalis* which can usually be seen everywhere in the plays, especially in the stage directions, it can effectively be used in almost all the plays in order to mention love and peace, break the rhythm, create discord, show emotion, cure patients, or just proceed to the next scene.

Throughout the three late tragicomedy plays, it can be recognised the good balance of the theories of Boethius. Although the use of songs is different in each play, the common appeal is the importance of the well-balanced relationship of everything. Songs have a better effect to convey messages and they work to avoid or to recover the discord condition as they are the shortest way to help harmonisation from the personal level to the cosmic scale. They connect the heaven and the earth, people and the soul, and people and nature. The destruction of "harmony" means that not only is each

person in mentally and physically poor shape, but also conflicts might start in order to shift the responsibility of the root cause of troubles. The importance of maintaining a peaceful environment is sung in Shakespeare's late comedies.

Songs, as a result, manipulate all harmonies. There is a circular argument which is that the harmony of the spheres affects nature and nature affects people, and then people naturally compose music influenced by the nature. The invisible cord is created when people need to appeal how beautiful the condition of peacefulness is or how awful to live without harmony.

In *The Tempest*, *musica mundana* tells the significance of harmony with celestial bodies which controls terrestrial harmony and man-made disasters. *Musica humana* is shown in *Cymbeline* through human based songs about the concord and discord of people and death and life. The most enjoyable *musica instrumentalis* can be seen in *The Winter's Tale* as Bohemia has an environment that makes people happy. The verbal sound with tones and rhythm is different from the sound of musical instruments and that of ordinary conversational tone; therefore, it echoes effectively into the sky. They effectively provide "the beauty of mankind" and harmony of everything from the smallest scale to the largest scale.

In conclusion, although Shakespeare's plays were written for performance, they contain all the essence of musical theory by Boethius. What is mentioned here is limited; however, it can be said that Shakespeare's musical ability was attained in the late comedies. They are entertaining on the stage and in addition, they also are superb from the theoretical point of view.

Endnote

- ¹ This fact can be seen in one of the poems in *Cantiones Sacrae* published in 1575.
- ² The definition of the theory of Boethius in this essay is based on the article of Chamberlain, Schrade and Woodcock.
- ³ Fox-Good suggests that harmony or related musical metaphors such as "concord" are often used by "humanist readings" whereas "colonist readings" tend to regard the play as "complicity in the play's strategic effacement and euphemisation of Prospero's power" (242).
- ⁴ Although astrology means both practical astrology and judicial astrology, as the

former study area was applied astronomy, in the seventeenth century, "astrology" mainly suggests the latter which contains occult aspects.

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