

Liminality, Mobility, and Identity in Shakespeare's Late Romances*

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In the post-Columbian era from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, modernity emerges as travel becomes an increasingly common activity. Most of Shakespeare's late romances involve magical elements and traditional moral concepts. Most of the studies focus on the divinity, redemption, moral influence, narrative structure and moral functions, which belongs to a mode of established discussions. This paper argues that in early modern England as the key period of social transformation, Shakespeare's romances works through the liminality of the space, both presenting growing rituals on the fringe of the noble class, showing character's political concern in spatial change. The outline of an early modern British cultural landscape arises from it. For Shakespeare, the characters' travels are inevitable, and there is a sense of national spirituality in it. Shakespeare's romances take those travelling characters as the carrier through the growing rituals in the spatial change. As the solid construction of the identity of the characters is presented, and the reliability of the social change can be interpreted. This paper aims to explore the charm of Shakespeare's romance and the manifestation of early modern culture of mobility.

Keywords: Shakespeare, liminal space, mobility, identity, romance

Introduction

Pericles (1607-8), *Cymbeline* (1609-10), *The Winter's Tale* (1610-11), and *The Tempest* (1611) are four of Shakespeare's typical romances in his late plays. According to English Shakespearean scholar Alison Thorne: "All these features mark the plays out as among the most enigmatic, if also most beguiling, productions in the Shakespeare canon" (Thorne, 2003, p. 1). Romances can be understood as the integration and extension of tragedy and comedy, but are both different from the humorous realism of comedy, and also partially different from Shakespeare's core of tragedy—"for Shakespeare moves along deeper levels of the human spirit in his tragedies" (Rowse, 1988, p. 1544), and "after this period of productivity, there was a tailing off of dramatic energies that resulted in the strange, sometimes de-energized, and often disjointed plays of the later period" (Huston, 1981, p. 1), which makes the romances send out its unique charm. The mystery of Shakespeare's romances also lies in their novelty. Its "newness" was due to the development of those new theatres at that time, which greatly influenced the creation of dramatists. In early modern England, Shakespeare's late plays are based on the objective conditions of the theatre. The Blackfriars Theatre, which was licensed in 1608, was quite

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different from the Globe Theatre. In that the theatre is more private and equipped to produce spectacular dramatic effects, Shakespeare set out to write a number of plays suitable for this theatre. In addition, another “novelty” of Shakespeare’s romances is also influenced by the constantly changing social environment in England during that time. On the one hand, some scholars have pointed out that the writers’ creation at that time is to cater to and please the new social forces (Rowse, 1963, p. 409). On the other hand, some scholars have clarified that Shakespeare is “naturally conservative, for instance, the plays clearly demonstrate that he places a high value on the preservation of social order and distrusts the disorder that he sees in popular political assertiveness” (Boyce, 2005, p. 7). In addition, romances also have some typical “odd” characteristics: “characters on a larger-than-life, heroic scale, often exemplifying extremes of virtue or vice; a quest (trial, test)—erotic, chivalric, both or neither—which is almost always successful, and so (in keeping with the general heightening) leads to a state of ideal fulfillment in love, or of peace and justice in the social order” (Fuller, 2004, p. 161). Furthermore, the plot is often accompanied by “the loss and recovery of the royal children; flawed rulers who, after enduring many years of hardship, find redemption through the restitution of their families; miraculous twists of fate, reunions and resurrections of characters presumed dead engineered by some divine agency, providential force or mage-like figure” (Thorne, 2003, p. 1).

All the above researches have their merits as well as explore the characteristics of Shakespeare’s romances from different aspects. In fact, the classification of Shakespeare’s romances does not begin with Shakespeare, nor does it appear in *the First Folio*. For a long time, it is difficult for scholars and researchers to define the genre of Shakespeare’s romances (Stevenson, 1999, pp. 80-91). It is acknowledged that there are some common typical features that can be classified as romance. However, there are obvious differences within these features. It is not difficult to find that because of this particularity, it is rare and difficult for scholars to study Shakespeare’s romance as a whole. Researchers are more likely to contribute to the study of Shakespeare’s romance through the study and interpretation of each individual play. This paper attempts to explore the deeper interpretation behind the “novelty” of romances on the basis of these previous studies: the plot setting of romances often has a longspan structure, with frequent spatial changes, and the personal crisis in these changes is often closely related to the destiny of the country. In this case, early modern travel arises at the historic moment. The travels along by geographic space changes, trigger a new cognitive of characters and collision of the old order, causing resolution and reconstruction of personal identity during transitional space. It can be concluded that Shakespeare’s romance has significant characteristics of the complexity and mobility, and is closely related to background of the early modern England travel. This paper holds the view that the liminal space plays a key role in resolving the crisis and reconstructing the identity of Shakespeare’s romances. Meanwhile, the conservative political stand of Shakespeare’s early works is also softly changing with the progress of early modern England. Shakespeare’s romances are constructed through travels of characters, especially the commonly narrative technique of those noble characters, to simulate the external perspective of early modern England people showing the individual will and their national identity. It is not hard to see travel seemingly involves complicated changes on the external environment, but those changes contain some fusion, implicating one unified nation. In this paper, the four classic Shakespeare’s romances will be researched as a whole, from the perspective of the mobility of the liminal space to interpret this important genre.

The Instability of Identity

American scholar Percy G. Adams points out in the 1980s that the literature on travel is vast and has various forms of representation (Adams, 1983, p. 281). After that in *The Cambridge Companion to Literature of Travel*, which was first published in 2002, the British scholar William H. Sherman classified the authorship of early modern travel literature into ten categories: editors, pilgrims, errant knights, merchants, explorers, colonisers, captives and castaways, ambassadors, pirates and scientists (Sherman, 2002, pp. 21-31). From this we can see that the different types of travel in early modern Europe reveals different identities of travelers and their various travel intentions behind them. Take the author as an example. Shakespeare's decision to move from his hometown of Stratford to the metropolis of London is largely conditioned by the culture of touring which he has been exposed to for the past years. For one thing, there were at least two or three companies of players that came to Stratford every year on tour, and the fact that Richard Field, Shakespeare's fellow of hometown, long apprenticed to a London printer which provided a great opportunity for the young Shakespeare to establish himself in London (Halliday, 1956, p. 37). It is worth mentioning that London at that time was a city of worldwide immigrants, with many ambitious young people from the countryside all over England coming to London to pursue their personal value. At the same time, when England's famous sixteenth century explorers, politicians Francis Drake after three years of voyage back to England, he is travelling overseas greatly inspired the English people to the broader areas of the world to work, but also promotes the writer in literary creation to meet the domestic audience's desire for the New World.

There are many metaphors of travel in Shakespeare's romances, such as at the end of Act I, Scene IV in *Cymbeline*, in which Posthumus compares Iachimo's conquest of Imogen's virginity to a voyage to her. John Donne has said more than once that a ship is useless unless it has a purpose at sea (Carey, 1990, p. 80). Whether set out for money, fame, status, power, a nominally exploratory voyage, a trade voyage, a rival expedition, or a colonization expedition, there is a purpose in every voyage, and that purpose is an expression of desire. In fact, the desire for travel and the desire for possession are always inextricably linked in European society at the time. Ashcroft claims "the urge to see beyond the horizon, to discover that utopia of the not-yet-seen, the urge simply to realize that which can only be imagined..... that European societies, at least, have combined the urge to travel with the urge to possess" (Ashcroft, 2009, p. 229). It can be seen that mobility is accompanied by desire, and a better understanding of this desire requires a further analysis of the identity of the travelers in the space of mobility. An interesting discovery in this paper about the interpretation of character's identity in Shakespeare's romances is that the initial dissolving of character's identity during travel is caused by the unsatisfied desire of those characters, and the concrete manifestation of the dissolving of identity is the loss of character's identity and the mixed identities of characters.

According to Arnold van Gennep's "rite of passage" and the theory of rite and liminality further developed by Turner, all rites of passage and transitional stage have three phases: separation, liminality, and incorporation, as van Gennep described, "I propose to call the rites of separation from a previous world, *preliminal rites*, those executed during the transitional stage *liminal (or threshold) rites*, and the ceremonies of incorporation into the new world *postliminal rites*" (Gennep, 1977, p. 21). The first stage of separation includes the symbolic behavior of an individual or group leaving its stable state in the social structure, leaving its cultural state, or both (Turner,

1969, p. 94). The author of this paper aims to analyze the process of travelers' identity in Shakespeare's romance through relevant theories. *The Winter's Tale* focuses on the process of identity's dissolution between the foreign travelers and the destination which goes both ways. With the arrival of his best friend Polixenes, King of Bohemia, later his warm, loyal and wise old friend Leontes will be changed from a kind, loyal husband and wise king to a false friend, suspicious husband and tyrannical king. After Queen Hermione succeeded in persuading Polixenes to stay, Leontes not only immediately felt challenged being provoked, he snapped at his wife, "How she holds up the neb. The bill to him! And arms her with the boldness of a wife to her allowing husband" (1.2: 184-188). On the other hand, he had other doubts about his legitimate son, with whom he had been living all day: "How now, you wanton calf! Art thou my calf?" (1.2: 127). In the same scene, Leontes uses mixed words to describe his distress when he tries to testify to his minister Camillo that he has been betrayed. He says, "Dost think I am so muddy, so unsettled, to appoint myself in this vexation?" (1.2: 328). Leontes' doubts are like a gaping hole in his unflinching faith, and the fear of the unknown came pouring out like a horrified flood. Leontes, suffering from a triple identity crisis, feels that his patriarchal and monarchical rights are greatly challenged. All the above shows that, with the visit of Polixenes, Leontes is extremely dissatisfied with the lack of control of his power, as well as his worries about his separated identity.

For the visitor, Polixenes, his travel is a personal bonding and a national diplomatic effort to strengthen ties between Bohemia and Sicilia. In fact, Western Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries, monarchs of various countries sponsor diplomatic visits to discuss international affairs face to face, which is one of the manifestations of the modernization of Western European diplomacy. However, the longer Polixenes stays away from his territory, the longer he lives in other countries, the more the Bohemian king do not achieve what he has set out to do. On the contrary, he soon realizes that his friendship with Leontes begins to deteriorate, as "even now I met him with customary compliment, when he, wafting his eyes to the contrary, and falling a lip of much contempt, speeds from me and so leaves me to consider what is breeding that changes thus his manner" (1.2: 371-374). Then, he awares that his own life is also at risk, he soon confides to Camillo: "Fear o'ershades me: Good expedition be my friend, and comfort the gracious queen, part of his theme, but nothing of his ill-ta'en suspicion!" (1.2: 457-458). At this point the king, who had come from afar, was anxious to finish his journey in order to save his life and get out of trouble so that he could return safely to his own country, though he did not want to break the bond. After coming to Sicilia, Polixenes not only falls into a number of identity chaos, but also faces with a political crisis between the two countries. Leontes, on the other hand, angrily issues his eviction order: "that thou carry this female bastard hence; and that thou bear it to some remote and desert place quite out of our dominions; and that there thou leave it, without more mercy, to its own protection, and favour of the climate" (2.3: 173-177). Thus the infant Princess Perdita of Sicilia is affected by her mother Queen and ordered to be chased from her kingdom and banished to the wilderness beyond borders. After several times sent to the Bohemian coastal wasteland, Perdita is adopted by a kind-hearted shepherd. Hard-hearted King Leontes not only denies his own daughter, but also exiles her to a distant land. At this time, Perdita loses her multiple identities as a daughter, a princess of the kingdom, and also a subject of the kingdom. It can be said that the identity crisis of main characters in *The Winter's Tale* is rooted in the development of mobility. The identity crisis of the above act through the stripping of identity, from a stable state to a chaotic state.

Likewise, the identity crises of the other three romances have developed in a similar way. *Cymbeline* takes the love story between Imogen and Cymbeline as a secondary plot. At the beginning *Cymbeline* tells how Posthumus is exiled by King Cymbeline because of his love affair with the princess Imogen. As a matter of fact, the identity of this key figure, Posthumus, has been in a state of uncertainty since he was born. Two of his brothers died in the war, and their father and mother also died. The only child of his noble family was orphaned. Although the king adopted him in the palace, gave him the most complete education. But when Cymbeline learned that the only heir of the whole kingdom—the princess Imogen and the disloyal Posthumus were married to each other for life, he immediately decided that Imogen was not qualified to step into the inner circle of the royal power, therefore the current identity of Imogen and the existing identity of Imogen were not matched. Cymbeline exiled Posthumus from England to Rome. Before going into exile, Posthumus vowed to “I will remain the loyal'st husband that did e'er plight troth” (1.1: 95-96). At the same time, Posthumus gave Imogen his precious diamond, ring and bracelet which his mother had left him as a symbol of their unwaveringly faithful love. Posthumus even compares this bracelet to a handcuff, and Imogen is his prisoner in their prison of love. Then, in Act II, Scene two, Iachimo by cunning, enters Imogen's boudoir and steals her one and only valuable bracelet of token, which he immediately shows off to Posthumus as soon as he returns to Rome. Imogen kept his word and never crossed the line. But in the eyes of Posthumus, when he swears to be the most faithful husband, he also demands that Imogen be his faithful wife; When the third person takes away this crucial token, it announces the breakdown of their love and the dissolution of the marriage contract. If Posthumus' native identity is the time bomb of his identity crisis, then his misunderstanding of his wife Imogen's infidelity is the real trigger. With the development of the war, the complex identity of Posthumus has a rich presentation in the subsequent “liminal” stage, which is also the focus of the second part of this paper.

The families in *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*—Pericles, Thaisa and Marina are the main figures of this part of the study. Although they are depicted in a slightly different proportion in the play, these three characters in *Pericles* are like three parallel lines to promote the mobile construction of character's identity. First of all, as a prince, Pericles's monarch is not a stable. When he set sail for Antioch to seek marriage, it is largely for the purpose of confederating with foreign powers to consolidate his future monarchy. After discovering the incest of Antiochus and his daughter, the prince began his ill-fated and uproarious life after fleeing his homeland. The years of wandering, this suspenseful life is a process in which his identities are totally stripped. He successively has experienced the pain of the loss of his wife, the shame of his orphan, in order not to trigger the chaos of the country of Tyre, he decides to end a long time of wandering, and get back to the country to be a qualified monarch. “Imagine Pericles arriv'd at Tyre, welcom'd and settled to his own desire” (4 Chorus 1-2). “I am great with woe, and shall deliver weeping” (5.1: 107). Through such description in the original text, it can be imagined that King Pericles, who has been deeply loved by his people, feels frightened and helpless for the loss of identity in his heart. Daughter Marina who is entrusted to the couple Cleon, the governor of Tarsus, has grown into cardamom time, and her identity of princess is kept weakening all the time. After fleeing to Mitylene, Marina's life can be said to have been through earth-shaking changes, she completely divorced from the aristocratic living environment before. Pericles' wife, Thaisa, is in danger at sea. By chance, she goes to the temple of Diana in Ephesus to rest in her old age. “But since King Pericles, my wedded lord,” she said before leaving for the temple, “I ne'er shall see again, a vestal livery will I take me to, and never more have joy” (3.4: 8-11). Thaisa took the initiative to weaken

her identity by placing herself in a vacuum and isolating herself from the world. The dissolution process of those identities in *The Tempest* is relatively short, and the cause of the event can only be inferred through the description of the characters in the following text. Prospero explains to his daughter, "Twelve yearsince, Miranda, twelve yearsince, thy father was the Duke of Milan and a prince of power... and thy father was Duke of Milan, and his only heir a princess—no worse issued... by foul play, as thou say'st, were we heav'd thence; but blessedly help hither" (1.2: 53-54). It is here that Prospero reveals to Miranda who father and daughter are before they arrived on the island.

The Reconstruction of Identity

Based on the analysis of Victor Turner's "rite of passage" and the theory of liminality, the travel in Shakespeare's romances can be understood as a special "rite of growth" and an important form of breaking away from "liminal space" and reconstructing its identity. Turner proposes that in the "liminal" stage, one of the most important features of this rite is ambiguity, and such contradictions and fuzziness are important elements of the liminal space. Turner also believes that the occurrence of rituals is often related to crisis, and rituals can resolve crises under certain circumstances. For example, the crisis caused by contradictory social norms can be resolved through rituals with symbolic meanings and connotations (Turner, 1969, p. 23). In his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1969), Turner leaves the traditional static study of social structure and places ritual in the social process of movement. The essence of the so-called "structure and anti-structure" is a cyclical process of "differentiation, threshold and reintegration" which has the traditional circular structure of Shakespeare's drama with similar system.

Taking the travel outside England in *Cymbeline* as the research object, this paper tries to explain an important role of travels outside England in the construction of characters' identity, and regards the travel of mobile characters as a special and changing "ceremony". Travel can be seen as a construction of mobility as well as an important factor in the mobile process from liminal space to reintegration. Imogen's identity is also unified through travels. Imogen changes her distinctive identity in Act III, Scene II, when she goes to Milford disguised as a squire's wife. After arriving in Milford, Pisanio did not choose to follow Posthumus's command to kill Imogen. Instead, he decided to help her change her appearance and clothes in order to overcome the hardships of the journey. After knowing her husband's misunderstanding of her, Imogen feels depressed without hope. She does not want to return to the palace to face the persecution of her father, nor to face the emotional entanglement of her stepbrother. At this time, Imogen's identity as a wife is denied by her husband, she also abandons her identity as a princess and heir. Imogen dresses up as a man, alone sets foot on the journey to leave England. She travels to Wales and the English battlefields, and finally reveals herself to identify with her husband, father and brother, thus resuming her identity and ending her separation and displacement. At first, Posthumus is banished by King Cymbeline for being connubially unrecognized, and then mistakenly assures that his wife is unfaithful to him, but he never identifies his identity. Far away in Rome, Posthumus is the same as Perdita, their identities are full of contradictions, confusion and uncertainty. With Britain on the verge of war with Rome, the status of Posthumus becomes even more complicated. It can be seen from the first scene of Act V that after he mistakenly assumes he has been betrayed by his lover, he chooses to fight with the Italians against the British. He is not only psychologically and spatially far away from Imogen, but also affectionally far away from his own nation.

However, as the war ends, on his return to England, he cries to the heavens: "I'll disrobe me of these Italian weeds, and suit myself as does a Briton peasant; so I'll fight against the part I come with, so I'll die for thee, O Imogen!" (5.1: 22-26). After winning victory for England, he mutters to himself "no more a Briton, I have resum'd again the part I came in; fight I will no more" (5.3: 75). It seems that Posthumus' continuous psychological struggles stem from his inability to his own identity. It can be said that the construction of Posthumus' self-identity is constantly strengthened in the grown-up ceremony during the transitional space, and finally through breaking away from the space, he successfully obtains a unified, organised, and reconstructed identity.

In *The Winter's Tale*, the identity dilemma of Polixenes is similar to the identity crisis of Perdita. Polixenes, before returning to Bohemia successfully, is a typical liminal person, who is both the king of Bohemia and the prisoner of the Kingdom of Sicilia. In general, his monarchical status is constantly being weakened, and these two unstable forces are competing against each other in this liminal space. The young Perdita is adopted by a kind-hearted shepherd and is raised as a pure shepherdess, but her identity is in a state of chaos from the view of the audience of the play and the reader of the play. But Perdita's journey is not over. She happens to be in a liminal space before returning to Sicilia, where Perdita is "on the edge of statelessness. Perdita's identity in this remote and banished space is ambiguous, her original identity is stripped and has not yet integrated into a complete identity. She is adopted by a shepherd and brought up as an independent country girl, but she become famous but nothing like a shepherdess. In this period, Perdita has obvious liminal characteristics, and she has not yet acquired the new identity by anyone or anything. Liminal space is extremely unstable and full of possibilities, so it is easier to create conditions for breaking away from the uncertainty and getting rid of the identity crisis. Polixenes, for example, returns to Bohemia at the end of the first Act, thus solidifying his identity as king; Perdita also returns to Sicilia in the final Act, to bury the hatchet with the king and restore her identity as a princess. Through the "rite of growth" as Turner's phrase in the liminal space, Polixenes and Perdita's journey to find their own identity is satisfied, and the identity crisis is gradually solved.

Pericles, Prince of Tyre, contains six important locations: Antioch, Tyre, Tarsus, Pentapolis, Ephesus, and Mitylene. However, the liminal space of Shakespeare's romances does not specifically refer to one specific place. It can be said that the liminal space is more like a mobile space. Through those travelling characters' identity in this mobile space, the specific stage for these characters are destined. The growing ritual of Prince Pericles, Thaisa and Marina seems separate yet intersected, and they have completed their "growth rituals" respectively in this blending and complex liminal spaces. The liminal process of Prince Pericles is not coherent, but is divided into two stages by several important events. First of all, Prince Pericles' identity is contradictory after he married Princess Thaisa. As half an heir of Pentapolis, he has the responsibility to stay. At the same time, the political situation of Tyre is urgent and forces him to choose his "country". He has to choose between these two identities. Second, the prince is caught in a storm at sea, enduring the loss of his wife, facing a half of the choice of being a father. The prince deems that Marina can not bear poor condition at sea, he has to protect his one and only flesh and blood by abandoning Marina. Such contradictions stem from his anxiety about the inconsistency of his identity, and this state has lasted for decades until he met Marina again. Tarsus and Pantapolis are the two places where Marina and Thaisa born and raised, while Mitylene and Ephesus are the places where Marina and Thaisa grows up as brand new person. Here growth refers not only to the place of birth and growing, but to a state in which the identity of the character tends to be stable, while growth refers to a state in which the identity of the

character is relatively chaotic and transferable. Marina and Thaisa get rid of the uncertain and contradictory state in their respective liminal space and reaches a long-term relatively stable identity.

This paper holds the view that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's late romance that well embodies the spatial activities within the liminal space. The island in *Tempest* is a grand liminal space, and the characters entering this space are separated from their previous identities, and even have subversive imaginations of their own identities. Prospero, the Duke of Milan, admits that he has been betrayed by his younger brother due to his indulges of his studies and his abandon of politics. For such a weak duke, it is a significant change to be independently on such an isolated island. Prospero instructs Ariel, an airy Spirit, to use spells to evoke a storm that upsets the usurping Duke of Milan Antonio and his ships, deliberately scattering them all over the island. Prospero on the island is in this particular liminal space, trying to create an egalitarian society above all others. The root of Prospero's ideal construction is longer limited by the previous hierarchy, because he has a new identity, being a ruler within liminal island as the Creator.

Conclusion

The reconstruction of the identity of the travelling characters in Shakespeare's late romances is not defined by one single travel, but is gradually constructed in a series of travelling events. This paper explores that the identity of these characters and travel are closely related and complement each other. To be exact, the disintegration of characters' identity originates from mobility, which provides the premise and power for travel. In addition, travel indicates the direction of integration for those chaotic identities. Spatial changes in Shakespeare's romances are an unstoppable mobile construction, marking the status of character's identity in current change to solve the problem of reconstruction after instable state.

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