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I Am Prosper, I Am Ariel, I Am Caliban: A Metatheatrical Approach to Neil Gaiman's The Sandman

Leah E. Haydu

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I Am Prosper, I Am Ariel, I Am Caliban: A Metatheatrical Approach to Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*

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the Graduate College of
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In partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
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by

Leah E. Haydu

Dr. Mary Moore, Ph.D., Committee Chairperson
Dr. Timothy Burbery, Ph.D.
Dr. David Hatfield, Ph.D.

Marshall University

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ABSTRACT

I Am Prosper, I Am Ariel, I Am Caliban: A Metatheatrical Approach to Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman*

By Leah E. Haydu

In this paper, I use a primarily close-reading approach to examine the metatheatrical elements of William Shakespeare's representation in Neil Gaiman's comic book series *The Sandman*. This involves examinations of individual panels throughout three different issues of the series in order to uncover how Shakespeare is presented, as well as how he, in turn, affects the presentation of other characters, and how these both affect the view which the reader might form of not only Shakespeare, but of Gaiman himself. In doing so, I establish the existence of a new, related genre: metacomics. Similar to metatheatrics, this approach relates to the control Shakespeare and other characters within this comic exert on each other above and beyond that specifically dictated to them through Gaiman and his artists, and is carried out predominantly through the interplay between text and artwork which is the main focus of my discussion.

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Chapter One: An Introduction to Comics and Metacomics

Comic books have been around since quite early in the twentieth century, and while their status as a literary form has been hotly debated (and often outright dismissed), it cannot be denied that comics, especially in recent years, have been able to tackle material far more sophisticated than their detractors might expect. One particularly fertile area of emphasis has been the plays of William Shakespeare. Many writers of comic books have chosen Shakespeare, the man as well as the plays, as particularly deserving of attention, and have attempted, as a director handling one of his plays might, to use those nigh-universal words to tell countless different stories.

Shakespeare's involvement in these innovative books comes in many forms, ranging from passing comments and references by characters who may or may not even realize where their words originated to entire reproductions of the full texts of certain plays; these, too, are spread over a wide spectrum, in which an interested reader may find anything from traditionally faithful representations seemingly ripped straight from the Elizabethan stage to decidedly less conventional fare that shares little with the original idea of its parent play other than the words. An example of a comic which contains a smaller, more passing reference may be found in the current Vertigo series *Y: The Last Man*, whose title character is named Yorick; his sister's name is Hero. In Alan Moore's graphic novel *V For Vendetta* (recently made into a major motion picture), the title character quotes from *Macbeth*, *As You Like It*, and *King Henry VIII*, as well as clearly displaying books of Shakespeare on the shelves of his home. DC's collection, *Justice League: A Midsummer's Nightmare*, despite the obvious reference in its title and the Shakespeare-like figure on the cover, has little if anything to actually do

with the plays, but Marvel's current miniseries, *1602: Fantastick Four*, is one of the few to actually feature Shakespeare (as well as King James) as a character. The aforementioned full- or near full-text reproductions are somewhat rarer, but they do exist; a company called the Graphic Shakespeare Library has so far released both *King Lear* and *Macbeth* in full-text versions, each accompanied by some very interesting artwork; in perhaps the most eclectic version of graphic novel Shakespeare in existence, Puffin Graphics offers an adaptation of *Macbeth* that features space-faring characters and a robot dragon in the role of Hecate (Appendix 1). Clearly, the variety of usage that Shakespeare's life and work have found, for better or worse, in the medium of comics is quite impressive.

Before we may explore the specific case of Shakespeare in comics, however, a brief explanation of some of the facets of this particular art form is in order; given the seemingly near-constant tension between those who believe comics should be relegated to the rooms of young children (if, in fact, they are even permitted to be *there*) and those who defend them as staunchly as any literary scholar would defend his or her personal field of study, such an explanation will shed some light on the reasoning behind my choice to side with the latter camp, and at the same time, will give the casual reader of these works a better grasp of the intricacies displayed therein.

Perhaps the most comprehensive study of comic books in print today is Scott McCloud's *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*—a book which is, itself, written in the form of a comic book. Logically enough, McCloud begins this study by asking one very important question: what exactly is a comic book, anyway? He first cites this view: “When I was a little kid, I knew *exactly* what comics were. Comics were those bright,

colorful magazines filled with bad art, stupid stories, and guys in tights. I read *real* books, naturally. I was much too old for comics!” (2). However, he concedes, this dismissive attitude, shared by many more traditionalist scholars, was quickly overcome upon reading an older friend’s collection and realizing that while comic books often had the tendency to manifest as “crude, poorly-drawn, semiliterate, cheap, disposable kiddie fare[...]they don’t *have* to be!” (3). From here, McCloud posits many different possible answers to the above question, beginning with “sequential art” (5), or simply pictures placed in a sequence to form some sort of story, and expanding slowly until he ends up with the more wordy “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the viewer” (9). Even this, however, is not really the definitive answer, as he notes; many other factors can and do come into play, and many people have their own differing definitions which may or may not match up with what he has proposed. Perhaps the most important facet, however, is the lack of focus on content in this definition. As he states, “our definition says nothing about superheroes or funny animals. Nothing about fantasy/science fiction or reader age. No genres are listed in our definition, no types of subject matter, no styles of prose or poetry” (22). Comics, then, can be many different things, and should not be constrained by their popular portrayal; as McCloud suggests, they can and do successfully cover a much wider spectrum of roles than simply following the latest adventures of masked heroes and villains in bright spandex.

If we cannot satisfactorily nail down a concrete definition of a comic book, however, the next best thing is to be able to detail some of the typical characteristics utilized by their writers and artists, and McCloud accomplishes this admirably. The

most important visual aspects of comics, and the ones on which I will be focusing much of my discussion herein, are line, color, and transition. In a comics panel, the lines used carry a particularly important burden; not only do they set the whole tone of a panel by their quality and direction (Appendix 2), they also stand in as symbols for things that cannot normally be seen (for example, wavy lines above a boiling pot to symbolize steam) as well as forming the very words which comprise a significant part of the comic as a whole. The way in which words are depicted visually can change the entire meaning of a character's speech in a comics panel; for example, if words are presented in **boldface**, **like this**, they appear to be emphasized, and may give the impression of being spoken louder than those in normal lettering, whereas words presented in *italics*, *like this*, seem more urgent, perhaps even frantic. Color, similarly, can dramatically affect the presentation of a panel; not all comics, of course, are presented in color (except for the chapter on color, McCloud's book is solely in black-and-white), but particularly as the printing technology surrounding comics has grown more advanced and less expensive, more and more artists have chosen to use color to further communicate the ideas behind their work. Both color and the lack thereof have their places, however; as McCloud puts it,

The differences between black-and-white and color comics are vast and profound, affecting every level of the reading experience. In black and white, the ideas behind the art are communicated more directly. Meaning transcends form. Art approaches language. In flat colors [those with little or no shading, looking less realistic] forms themselves take on more significance. The world becomes a playground of shapes and space. And

through more expressive colors, comics can become an intoxicating environment of sensations that only color can give. (192)

Finally, the concept of transition, or “closure” (63), as McCloud refers to it in the third chapter of his book, is a topic with which every comic consisting of more than one panel must contend. Essentially, the main issue is that no comic can show every moment of every story that they tell; something must happen in the spaces between, which is where the reader must do his or her work. An artist does not have to illustrate every act, but may assume that certain scenarios will provoke certain responses, and thus may decide what he or she may leave out and still have the comic itself make logical sense. McCloud perfectly illustrates this by showing two panels that are set so as to take place one directly after the other; the first contains two men, one chasing the other with an axe, and the second shows only the outside of a building, with a terrified scream ringing through the air. Although the actual act of a murder taking place is never shown, he knows precisely what a reader will envision, given the connection implied between the two: “I’m not the one who let [the axe] drop or decided how hard the blow, or who screamed, or why. That, dear reader, was your special crime, each of you committing it in your own style. All of you participated in the murder. All of you held the axe and chose your spot” (68). Comics, then, are “as subtractive an art as [they are] additive” (85); the truly successful ones will rely on the reader’s mind as much as on their own pictures and words.

These definitions, while they have established perhaps not quite what a comic book definitively is, but at least what it might be composed of, still do not answer the big question that many people still have about comics: why are they important, and why

should they be taken seriously? “Traditional thinking,” notes McCloud, “has long held that truly great works of art and literature are only possible when the two are kept at arm’s length” (140). This statement, sadly, seems to be true even today, when the medium of comics has come to be taken more seriously by some. He contends, however, that this attitude is unfounded, citing as evidence the evolution of words and pictures in concert while noting their gradual separation from their earliest forms when words actually *were* pictures, or at least resembled them. This very interdependence is what has resurfaced in comics today; although some comics consist of primarily pictures or primarily words, most rely on the interactions between the two in order to truly reach their full potential. This leads into McCloud’s main argument, the reason why he believes that comics are worthy of study and respect, just as any other art or literature form; in essence, it involves the ability to communicate between reader and creator. Rather than relying on one medium, words or pictures only, “the whole world of visual iconography is at the disposal of comics creators! Including the full range of pictorial styles, from realistic representational art to the simplest cartoons—to the totally abstract—and the invisible world of symbols and language!” (202-3). Comics, then, are far more complex than a simple glance might reveal, and this complexity entitles them to a degree of respect in academic study that has been woefully absent until quite recently, and is under-represented even now.

Despite the vividness of comics as a whole and their undoubtable ability to handle subjects other than the stereotypically expected ones, many would still contend (probably correctly) that they were not really initially designed to handle such an intricate area as Gaiman deals with. Marion D. Perret, in her article, “And Suit the

Action to the Word'—How a Comics Panel Can Speak Shakespeare," explores the difficulties of translating Shakespeare's plays into this medium, beginning by positing that "[graphic] liveliness... does not come solely from physicality, but is intrinsic to the dialectic between word and image" (123); that is, one cannot simply rely on Shakespeare's words or the artist's conceptions to draw the reader in and create a compelling version of the play in question, but rather must take both into account. In the series I will discuss here, this interplay is particularly important, as will be shown in-depth throughout this paper. Perret continues to argue through the rest of her essay that the interpretation presented to the audience may be drastically altered according to which facet of the play the author (and artist) choose to emphasize. Neil Gaiman, author of the *Sandman* series of comic books, deals with two of Shakespeare's plays: *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. In the mythos of this series, the true reason for William Shakespeare's genius is that he has been gifted with otherworldly talent by Dream (one of the seven Endless) in exchange for the two plays referenced above.

Shakespeare appears in three different storylines throughout *The Sandman*, for two basic purposes: first of all, his appearances deal with him as a person and as an author, and second, they deal with the creative process and how his plays go from simple inspiration to paper to stage (and beyond). Although his general role as author and playwright remains essentially the same throughout, his character changes with each appearance; in order to give the reader a better understanding of how his character "evolves," I will provide a brief explanation of each of the places Gaiman includes Shakespeare in his pages.

Shakespeare's first appearance in *Sandman* is by far the shortest; rather than occupying the central space of an entire issue, he is shown on only five pages, and speaks on only four of those. However, given that this appearance precipitates the entire series of events between himself and the title character of the series, it may also be the most important. In this issue, titled "Men of Good Fortune," the main storyline revolves around a man who decides not to die; amused by his declaration, Dream asks his sister, Death, to allow the man's immortality, then approaches him and makes a deal: every hundred years, they will meet in the same tavern to, in Dream's words, "tell me what it's like" (119). Shakespeare's part enters in on the pair's second yearly meeting, in the year 1589, when he happens to be at a nearby table with his friend Kit Marlowe, discussing their recent work. Upon hearing Shakespeare's declaration to Marlowe, "I would give anything to have your gifts. Or more than anything to give men dreams, that would live on long after I am dead. I'd bargain, like your Faustus, for that boon" (126), Dream becomes interested, and offers him what he believes he wants. This deal leads to Shakespeare's two subsequent appearances in the series, as he fulfills the conditions Dream has set out; that is, he must compose two plays for Dream, and in exchange, he will "write great plays [and] create new dreams to spur the minds of men" (127).

The first of the two plays Shakespeare creates to hold up his end of the bargain is also the first issue that Gaiman devotes entirely to the Bard: "A Midsummer Night's Dream." This lavishly illustrated issue deals with two major groups of people; one is composed of Shakespeare and his players, while the other contains those that the players seek to imitate: the inhabitants of Faerie on which Shakespeare bases the play.

The players do not know in advance who their audience will be; Shakespeare knows only that Dream has requested they set up their stage seemingly in the middle of nowhere, and therefore the fairies' arrival is as much of a surprise to him as to any of the rest of his company. The main focus of this issue, then, is on the interplay between stage and (admittedly extremely unorthodox) patrons, with various threads of personal interaction woven throughout; particularly intriguing are Dream's conversations with Titania and Auberon (the unusual spelling of whose name Gaiman deliberately includes to indicate the difference between the character in Shakespeare's play and the "real" fairy watching the performance), and Shakespeare's interaction (or, really, lack thereof) with his son, Hamnet.

Shakespeare's final appearance in the series comes in its final issue, "The Tempest." Although many scenes are drawn out in richly colored artwork throughout, the play is never actually performed within the context of this issue, and therefore it shows a different stage of Shakespeare's creative process. Rather than focusing on a finished product, Gaiman gives his audience (and therefore, Shakespeare's as well) a work in progress. This play, too, is specifically for Dream, but it comes at the end of Shakespeare's career rather than at the beginning, as with the previous play; therefore, his outlook on writing as well as on life in general has changed, and various factors throughout the story show this. This issue also differs from the previous presentation of Shakespeare's work in that Shakespeare spends more time interacting directly with Dream; whereas before, the two spent most of their time separated by a stage, here they more actively discuss their respective situations, giving the reader a very different angle on both men than that with which they have previously been presented.

Shakespeare, then, appears as a character in the series, important above and beyond his status as the author of the plays. Gaiman uses this inclusion as a jumping-off point to what appears to be one of his major aims in “staging” these interpretations of Shakespeare’s work—to show how a playwright (as well as a comic book writer) must control both the real and the fictional world, and thus to draw a parallel between himself and the Bard. In her article, “‘No more yielding than a dream’: The Construction of Shakespeare in *The Sandman*,” Annalisa Castaldo proposes an intriguing reason for Gaiman’s inclusion of Shakespeare in this particular capacity (that is, as a writer who draws on his own life to create his work); she believes that Gaiman himself “[feels] kinship with Shakespeare and [believes] that the two of them share parallel paths” (107). Both Shakespeare and Gaiman draw inspiration from other sources than pure, simple imagination; Shakespeare works with his own experience, and Gaiman works with the expansive mythos surrounding Shakespeare’s work and life. In addition, however, both work with characters in whom they see themselves reflected, as Shakespeare expounds upon in one of his final speeches in the issue of *The Sandman* entitled “The Tempest”:

I am Prosper, certainly; and I trust I shall. But I am also Ariel—a flaming firing spirit, crackling like lightning in the sky. And I am dull Caliban. I am dark Antonio, brooding and planning, and old Gonzalo, counseling silly wisdom. And I am Trinculo, the jester, and Stephano the butler, for they are clowns and fools, and I am also a clown and a fool. And on occasion, drunkards. (175-6)

This particular speech is interesting in the light of the relationship between Dream and

Shakespeare; if the inspiration for the play comes directly from Dream, then can it be mere coincidence that the characters Shakespeare ends up creating resemble him so much, at least in his own personal opinion? If not, perhaps Gaiman is here presenting a reading of *The Tempest* which places its characters in the position of being universal templates for humanity; that is, while they resemble Shakespeare, as he believes, they would also resemble anyone else who cared to make the comparison. This allows for Dream's influence to hold while still having Shakespeare's comment here be true. Gaiman, then, like Shakespeare, displays his own personal tendencies in the character that he creates; his directorial decisions serve, among other things, to cement this tie and to clarify his own beliefs about the similarities between the two of them.

In his study entitled *Metatheater: The Example of Shakespeare*, Judd D. Hubert presents an approach which casts an extremely intriguing light on Gaiman's work; he explores how characters' dialogue within plays is often used by the author to embed his or her own stage directions and instructions for various aspects of "performance" which characters can direct to themselves as well as to others with whom they interact. By doing so the author ensures that even if a director chooses to ignore any specific stage directions written in the text of the play, the dialogue itself will preserve the general idea by suggesting or even demanding specific actions or methods of performance; in addition, the techniques used draw an audience's attention to the play itself, and to the realization that it *is* a play (and quite self-aware of what that suggests). This can function explicitly, as with Hamlet's scenes with the players (and the production of *The Mousetrap*) or more subtly, as in Hubert's example of Edmund's transformation into "Poor Tom" in *Lear* (2). The manner in which each character does or does not

effectively react to these directions affects how he or she is perceived by the audience and the other characters, and, as Hubert repeatedly notes, affects the success the character has in the play itself with regard to his or her goals and desires. For example, in *Othello*, the character of Iago is repeatedly referred to as “honest” by numerous other characters, despite the fact that he clearly does not adhere to this role at all. This lack of adherence to the directions that are so frequently given to him via these references is what gets him into trouble; he is not “honest” at all, and acting in a dishonest (to say the least) manner leads to his downfall at the end of the play. Given the abundance of both actual actors and people around Shakespeare and *Dream* who function as actors within the course of the series, this approach fits quite well; it is only when each one steps out of his or her prescribed role that problems occur.

In addition, while discussing *Twelfth Night*, a play which Gaiman does not treat, Hubert brings up an extremely interesting point; he notes that “*Frames, separations, and transgressions mark the relationships among the various characters as though the setting or shaping of the stage held sway over their emotions and programmed their performance*” (39, italics mine). This observation would immediately draw the attention of any scholar studying graphic novels; one of the largest distinguishing features of a typical comic format is the panels, or frames, into which the images and text are arranged. Even within each individual panel, the text is generally separated from the art by means of another border: a “speech balloon” which contains the words of each individual speaker, thus making it easier for the reader to distinguish who is speaking at any given time. Clearly, then, borders and divisions comprise an extremely important part of comics in general, which is a factor that will be explored in the course of the

following chapters; when these conventions are violated, as Gaiman does several times in his series, the impact is all the greater for its departure from the norm.

In presenting the Shakespeare-related stories the way he does, taking into account some of the characteristics that Hubert describes, Gaiman effectively creates a new genre: metacomics, which might be classified as a subset of metatheatrics. This new term might be loosely defined much as metatheatrics is; the form (here, the presentation by the “director” or writer in conjunction with the artist) displays a distinct self-awareness which most readers likely would not expect from a genre as overlooked as comics has a tendency to be. By breaking the “normative” rules of comics (such as the “normal” way speech bubbles are presented or the “normal” borders that frame a comics panel), Gaiman accomplishes two things; first, he draws attention to the fact that there *is* a norm, meaning that comics in general have enough of a recognizable structure to truly be classified as their own genre (possibly even their own art form), and second, he jolts the reader out of his or her comfort zone, drawing their attention to the form he uses by the very act of making it different enough from the expected to stand out. Thus, readers must question why the changes are made, and in the process, are likely to discover the significance of a particular panel, page, or scene as the author intends. As will be discussed in the specific examples from Gaiman’s work throughout this study, these breaks in the regular facets of comic presentation are not used lightly, nor are they used accidentally; every time a writer or artist chooses to fracture or overflow a traditional panel border, use a specific sort of line or color, or change the appearance of the traditional speech bubble in which a character’s words appear, the reader can be quite sure that the choice is intentional and has a meaning.

In addition, this genre utilizes more direct connections to its parent metatheatrics as well, notably in the way that their dialogue itself dictates action. Quite literally, the characters in Gaiman's story "A Midsummer Night's Dream" direct each other, as most of them are playing roles on a page; in "The Tempest," Shakespeare himself directs his characters, both through the words he writes which give instructions to his characters on the page and through the directions that he issues to real-life friends and relatives, such as his daughter, Judith. Therefore, one of the most intriguing things about Gaiman's presentation of Shakespeare overall, both the man and the works, is how this metacomical interaction takes place. If, as noted before, Gaiman truly wishes to draw a parallel between himself and Shakespeare, this approach seems like an ideal one, because it truly does put Gaiman in a similar position, calling the reader's attention to his role as director; he controls the same characters, but is able to "direct" them as he sees fit, while at the same time directing their director. In this way, he has even greater control than Shakespeare himself, thus giving Gaiman perhaps a bit of an edge from a metacomic/metatheater standpoint.

Therefore, it may be argued that constructing a comic version of one of these plays, or of any story, requires every bit as much decision-making and attention to metatheatrical detail as producing a play for stage (or film, or television, or any other media) would, and in fact, that graphic novels create their own language very similar to that which Hubert discusses. In the following chapters, I will utilize a primarily close-reading approach, with reference to Hubert's ideas, to explore the interplay between word and image that Gaiman works with in his creation of Shakespeare the man, Shakespeare the author, and Shakespeare the character.

Chapter Two: Character Introductions and “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”

On page 127 of *The Doll’s House*, the second volume of Neil Gaiman’s epic series *The Sandman*, the first panel presents a critical moment in the series as a whole as well as simply the parts of the series that deal with Shakespeare himself; here, Dream meets the budding playwright in the flesh for the first time (Appendix 3). Obviously, despite his efforts to clothe himself in the fashions of the era, Dream appears somewhat odd in comparison to those that surround him—he looks as he has in the rest of the series, with stark white skin and sharply contrasting black hair and eyes—but no one comments on this oddness; in fact, Shakespeare seems to recognize something familiar in him, as evidenced by his question, “Have we met?” (127). This may be nothing but a purely polite triviality, but given the already-established omnipresence of Dream, it seems more likely that Shakespeare simply recognizes something familiar in the dark figure, even if he cannot pinpoint exactly what that may be. Shakespeare’s posture in this panel even displays what may be unconscious deference; upon rising from the table, he remains lower in the panel than Dream, and is shown in what appears to be a bow. In this way, a basic relationship is already established, with Shakespeare immediately recognizing the entity who is to become his lord and constant patron through nearly his entire career.

This panel also foreshadows Shakespeare’s future greatness by placing him in a greater position of prominence than Kit Marlowe, who also appears in the panel, but who has previously been built up (by both other characters as well as Shakespeare himself) to be of much greater importance and worth than his friend; as Dream’s dinner companion notes on the previous page when asked of Shakespeare’s value as a

playwright, “No. He’s crap. Now, that chap there, with the broken leg, next to him.

Bent as a pewter ducat. *He’s a good playwright*” (126). In this panel, though, Marlowe appears in the foreground, indicating this prominence that he definitely possesses, but is not normally colored, instead appearing in a simplified pattern consisting only of light and shadow. Clearly, he is not intended as the focus of this scene. Dream obviously intends to make his young protege into a very famous man, and the panel subtly indicates that this would likely not take place without Dream’s interference; when Dream approaches Shakespeare, Gaiman uses a different spelling of the young playwright’s name than is generally currently referenced: Shaxberd. While not technically incorrect (as many different spellings of Shakespeare’s name have been uncovered and used), this is definitely not the most famous or common version used when discussing the Bard; therefore, by using it, Gaiman shows the true extent of Dream’s influence. Without Dream’s interference, would Shaxberd have survived to become Shakespeare, or would he simply have disappeared into the mists of history? We cannot know for certain, but Gaiman’s presentation in this story seems to indicate the latter, giving the credit to Dream for nourishing the emergence of the Shakespeare we know today.

Later on the page, the continuation of the meeting between Dream and Shakespeare in the third panel (Appendix 3) cements the deal between the two as Shakespeare gives himself over to the future of play writing that he has been promised. In the foreground, once again, sits Kit Marlowe, who has been returned to a normal color pattern after having been relegated to the background earlier on the page; however, he still does not share the same space or importance of Dream and Shakespeare, standing behind him in the panel. They seem to be in the background

now, but are still the focus of the panel, taking up most of the space and speaking the only dialogue present. In addition, Dream and Shakespeare now share a somewhat uniform appearance; rather than being individually colored, they share a uniform purplish shadow in this panel, indicating that Shakespeare has been taken over, at least to some extent, by Dream, as he does not have his own distinct appearance any longer, but has rather been brought into a version of the habitual deep, stormy coloring in which Dream is nearly always drawn. This simple change in coloring signifies that Shakespeare no longer truly controls his own destiny, but rather serves as an extension of his new master. Literally, he is “colored by” Dream; he stands in Dream’s “shadow.” The background which the pair faces is without any sort of detail whatsoever, in contrast to the panels before and after it, which depict the tavern in which the scene takes place. Since Shakespeare does not appear in this story after this particular panel, this lack of detail takes on a somewhat ominous aspect; Dream leads him off into a nondescript landscape that is clearly something other than the mortal, mundane surroundings in which they begin, which perfectly symbolizes the literally otherworldly aspect of their dealings.

Although one might expect to see a figure so universally renowned as Shakespeare represented in an imposing, or at least prominent manner, the panel which depicts his and Dream’s first meeting in the issue of *The Sandman* which represents the first play Shakespeare has been contracted to write for Dream, “A Midsummer Night’s Dream,” is constructed entirely differently (Appendix 4); Shakespeare (whose name has actually been mutated once more to read “Shekespear”) is very small and unobtrusive, relegated to the very bottom of the panel.

His back is turned so that we cannot see his face, and he does not speak; given that he is here without any sort of distinguishing features, he might be anyone. On the other hand, Dream takes up the entire upper half of the frame, and stands out from it in an extremely imposing manner; arms folded, face half in shadow, and jagged, dark-colored cape blotting out the majority of the sky, he is unquestionably the one in charge here, dominating the panel as he dominates Shakespeare's career. Even the colors used to depict Dream are chosen specifically to stand out from the rest of his surroundings; while Shakespeare's much smaller body is colored with the same mild, neutral tones which also comprise the background, Dream's vivid purple and black palette would seem more at home in the middle of a thunderstorm, which is in fact what his cape, replacing a large portion of the sky, calls to mind. If one has any doubt about Dream's dominance over Shakespeare, the final confirmation of his control lies in the word balloons used to show Dream's speech (as noted before, he is the only one to speak in this panel). As with all of Dream's other dialogue, the word balloons appear inverted from that of the other characters; that is, instead of being white with black lettering, they are black with white lettering. Along with emphasizing Dream's difference from all of those around him in general, here it also emphasizes the previously mentioned difference in the character's color palette. However, it is the placement of these balloons, rather than their coloring, which provides the most intriguing point. Whereas oftentimes such word balloons are drawn to the side or above the characters speaking them (as may be observed, for example, in all of the other balloons on this same page), here the placement is notably different; they actually drift *downward* from Dream's mouth, seeming to almost fall down on Shakespeare's head. This has the effect of

appearing as though Dream's words are almost pushing down to keep Shakespeare under control; the playwright is literally "under" the control of his unorthodox patron. The idea that inspiration can be divine, coming from Heaven above, also seems particularly appropriate here in an unusually literal way, as Dream's words do visually come down from above Shakespeare. Looked at in another way, however, the balloons might actually float up from Shakespeare's head to Dream's mouth; even in a panel which at first glance seems to establish Dream's total dominance, the artist still acknowledges that there is a definite two-way link between the two. While it is true that the inspiration for the plays comes from Dream, as established in their first appearance together, the inspiration would not become plays at all if not for Shakespeare. Thus, Shakespeare is, in his own way, just as much of a "shaper" as Dream himself. This echoes Sir Philip Sidney's *Defense of Poesy*, wherein he references the poet as "Maker" (ln. 213), who essentially takes the raw material of inspiration such as that provided by Dream and forms it into something of true artistic value, such as that eventually produced by Shakespeare. However, Sidney also lends great weight to the idea that the poet is the recipient of inspiration from a Muse; in Gaiman's work, Dream might certainly be said to fill this role for Shakespeare. The point Gaiman makes here, then, is that one could not truly exist without the other; a poet needs his or her Muse to function at the fullest, but the Muse's inspiration is nothing without a vessel to bring it to light.

The fourth panel on page 67 of this tale shows the reader an entirely different composition than any that has been discussed previously (Appendix 5); rather than being bounded by a strictly square frame, this panel spills over and around the rest of

the page, going right out to the edges and taking up any space which might have formerly been blank. Unlike the other panels, which are all rigidly set within borders, those which represent Shakespeare's imaginings of how his words might ideally look have no borders, sprawling across the pages they inhabit and going so far as to fill in the spaces between and below the panels which adhere to the standard bordered state. This setup is ideal for this particular scene, as the characters we see here for the first time are certainly larger-than-life, requiring different rules than the norm to fit themselves in. These are the fairies on which, as the reader soon learns, Shakespeare's play is based.

The most prominent figures among the mass are Auberon and Titania, the king and queen of Faerie. Auberon appears to be clad in some sort of faerie armor, perhaps indicating his wariness about the world he now enters, whereas Titania wears more traditionally noble garb; her cape is the most prominent feature of her dress, and it flows off the side of the page much as the panel itself flows out of its customary confines. This gives an even more otherworldly cast to the visitors, seeming to indicate that the panel, as well as the world depicted within it, is simply too limited a space to fully contain even the smallest part of the wonder that they bring with them. In the actual lines of Shakespeare's play, this particular difference between the two nobles is brought to the fore as well; in the beginning of the second act, before Oberon and Titania have even been seen on the stage, the audience already has a fair grasp on what to expect from the Faerie rulers. These contrasting portraits come from the description of an as-yet unidentified fairy (who is revealed several lines later to be Puck):

For Oberon is passing fell and wrath,

Because that she [Titania] as her attendant hath

A lovely boy, stolen from an Indian king;

She never had so sweet a changeling.

And jealous Oberon would have the child

Knight of his train, to trace the forests wild.

But she perforce withholds the loved boy,

Crowns him with flowers, and makes him all her joy. (II.i.20-27)

The very words Shakespeare uses to describe the two of them draw attention to their differences, and shed light on why the artists in this panel chose to portray them as they did. Oberon wears armor; since he is described by Shakespeare as “passing fell and wrath,” this would seem to be appropriate. Furthermore, his plans for the boy, should he ever come into his custody, are warlike as well; rather than simply being an “attendant,” as is the case with Titania, he wishes to make the child “Knight of his train,” a distinctly more militaristic post. Titania, on the other hand, is cast in a different light than her lord; she seems more inclined toward gentleness and naturalism, which meshes well with the more flowing lines and softer-looking clothing she wears in the panel. Rather than forcing the boy into a violent, warlike state, she adorns him with “flowers” and surrounds him with “joy.” The fact that she “crowns” him also gives the reader some important insight into the dynamic between her and Oberon; the *OED* notes that while a “crown” could denote simply blessings and honor, it could also refer to the actual mark of kingship that one might expect to see on the head of a ruler. This could hold a dangerous meaning for Oberon, as the latter definition would be symbolic of the boy literally taking his place as ruler at Titania’s side; thus, by the insecurity this

would likely cause in an already strained relationship, Oberon may have an even greater reason to tear his queen and the boy apart. In the few following panels that portray Oberon and Titania together, there is usually some person or object between them; here, although they hold hands, their faces betray a possible rift in their relationship, and Shakespeare's words may give an important clue as to why this would be.

The rulers are not alone, however; they also bring a full complement of other denizens of Faerie, most of which are indistinctly drawn and colored to emphasize that, although they are present, they are not the most important figures on the page. The one notable exception to this ambiguous portrayal is the figure directly in the center of the panel: Robin Goodfellow. He, like his royal masters, is more detailed and prominent than the rest of the general rabble, and his placement in the middle of the page, dividing the Faerie inhabitants from Dream, on the other side, indicates that he will play an important role later on in bridging the gap between the two worlds; his magic allows him to appear as though he belongs among the mortals, and to interact with them unquestioned, while at the same time retaining the perspective of the fairies with whom he arrives. His literal "acting" in the play as he takes the place of the actor who "personates" (72) him coupled with the real "act," that of pretending to be a human, forms perhaps the most complex and unique part of all those involved in the production on both sides of the curtain (although, as will be described later, the role he creates might not be strictly to the benefit of both sides).

The dividing line upon which Puck sits is also interesting because of how exactly it breaks up the figures in the panel; while all of the fairies are stuffed into the left side of

the panel, the right side is largely empty, save for the nearly completely shadowed figure of Dream standing to the far side of the page. The very fact that Dream is afforded as much space as the entire Faerie court gives the reader yet another scale by which to gauge his importance in the grand scheme of things, but at the same time, it emphasizes his solitude; whether it be by his choice or simply by his uniqueness, Dream is truly alone.

Across the bottom of the page, the artist has chosen to place the title of this issue (and, of course, of the play that forms its centerpiece): *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. This placement serves several purposes; by placing it here, rather than over a scene from the performance of the play itself, the artist indicates that this scene, with the actual fairies rather than those manufactured by the actors on stage, is the true dream. In addition, the word "Dream" in the title might also be read as a play on the name of the main character; this is, after all, the story of Dream on a midsummer's night, as evidenced not only by the repeated cuttings to his and the fairies' reactions to the on-stage scenes, but also by the fact that his appearance is the reason for the performance in the first place, and so the title and its placement are doubly appropriate.

On page 68 of the story, in the first four panels of the page (Appendix 6), Oberon and Titania, rulers of the Faerie realm, arrive in the "real" world at the invitation of Dream in order to view the first of two plays he has commissioned of Will Shakespeare, that being *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. The most interesting part of this particular passage seems to be the patterns of naming that occur throughout the exchanges of the various characters. When Dream greets his guests for the first time, he calls them by their names, "Oberon of Dom-Daniel" and "Lady Titania." Although

his body language in this panel suggests otherwise (he is shown much lower than they), his use of their actual names suggests that he has power over them, or at least believes he does. In contrast, Oberon does not call Dream by that name; rather, he uses one of Dream's alternate nicknames: "Shaper." This name is particularly appropriate to Dream given his importance in Shakespeare's life; not only does he give shape to the ideas and thoughts that Shakespeare has, molding them into plays that will endure for centuries, he also, by extension, "shapes" Shakespeare himself into what the playwright believes he wants to be. The absence of Dream's actual name in Oberon's address might indicate a certain amount of uncertainty on the Faeries' part; they are not comfortable enough to feel that they have power over the situation.

In the next panel, Robin Goodfellow displays a certain degree of audacity when he *does* call Dream by name. Perhaps he believes he has earned this privilege by his similarity to Dream; Puck, too, is a type of "shaper," although not precisely the same as Dream. Rather than shaping others, Goodfellow controls his own shape. In one of his initial speeches, he describes this ability:

I jest to Oberon and make him smile
When I a fat and bean-fed horse beguile,
Neighing in likeness of a filly foal;
And sometimes lurk I in a gossip's bowl
In very likeness of a roasted crab,
And when she drinks, against her lips I bob
And on her withered dewlap pour the ale.
The wisest aunt, telling the saddest tale,

Sometimes for three-foot stool mistaketh me;

Then slip I from her bum, down topples she... (II.i.44-53)

Goodfellow, then, may see himself as linked to or equal to Dream by virtue of the name Auberon has just used; this seems to be a key factor in his following impertinence. As Goodfellow addresses Dream, however, he undermines himself by also using two of Dream's aliases: one of "the seven endless," and "King of the Riddle-Realms." Both names hold great significance, but again, neither approaches the power of using Dream's actual name rather than his titles. By naming him a member of "the seven endless," Goodfellow acknowledges Dream's family, and also nods to the great power held by Dream given the fact that he always has been, and will always be, for all eternity; the title of "King of the Riddle Realms," conversely, points out the impermanence and ambiguity of Dream's actual world. He can never be fully fathomed, and the manner in which Goodfellow notes this definitely suggests impertinence. Auberon brings the hobgoblin sharply back into his place in the following panel, however, calling him by name as well as displaying body language that suggests superiority and disdain; that is, he turns his back on Goodfellow. In Puck's introduction in Shakespeare's play, the importance that something so seemingly small as a name would likely have on Goodfellow is made clear when, after detailing all of the mischievous and annoying things he is known for, the fairy who speaks to him concedes, "Those that 'Hobgoblin' call you, and 'Sweet Puck,' / You do their work, and they shall have good luck" (II.i.40-41). Those that name Goodfellow as he sees fit, then, are rewarded, while those who do him disrespect by naming him things which he deems inappropriate or disrespectful will be punished with the full naughty behavior of one who

can

...[fright] the maidens of the villagery,
 Skim milk, and sometimes labor in the quern,
 And bootless make the breathless huswife churn,
 And sometimes make the drink to bear no barm,
 Mislead night wanderers, laughing at their harm[.] (II.i.35-39)

Dream follows this by calling Auberon by name again, but pointedly (and, given Puck's established demand to be referred to with respect, significantly) refusing to do so for Goodfellow, referring to him only as "a fool." This, coupled with the content of his remark, "It is a fool's prerogative to utter truths that no one else will speak" (68) suggests that Goodfellow may not have actually been far off the mark in his apparent disrespect of Dream; it serves as a tacit acknowledgment that perhaps the Faerie representatives have more power over him than they realize. In addition, Dream's labeling of Goodfellow is particularly apt because of the general role that fools hold in Shakespeare's plays; in *King Lear*, for example, the fool is one of the only ones in the entire play to unabashedly speak the truth. In fact, as demonstrated in *Lear*, fools were often commanded on penalty of punishment not to lie, even when the truth might be uncomfortable to hear. Lear's fool bemoans this; when Lear chides him, "An you lie, sirrah, we'll have you whipped," he responds by saying, "I marvel what kin thou and thy daughters are. They'll have me whipped for speaking true, thou'lt have me whipped for lying, and sometimes I am whipped for holding my peace. I had rather be any kind o' thing than a fool" (I.iv.178-183) Goodfellow, then, may simply be the only one willing to stand up to Dream, regardless of the consequences; despite his apparent disrespect,

Dream appears to realize this, and on some level, to respect it a bit.

Following this, in the fifth panel, the presentation of Shakespeare himself picks up the theme of naming and power begun earlier on the page (Appendix 6); while Shakespeare calls each of his players by both first and last name when addressing instructions to them (“Will Kemp” and “Henry Condell,” for example, both of whom were actual players in Shakespeare’s company), the only person to address anything to him is his son, who calls him “Father.” In addition, he calls his players by their character names, suggesting that he controls them not only in their roles as his players, but also in the roles that he has created for them. Shakespeare does not speak to his son at all, but his posture, with his back turned toward the boy, mirrors Auberon’s former positioning away from Robin Goodfellow. This suggests he holds an attitude of superiority toward his own son, whereas no one faces away from Shakespeare, indicating that none feel or appear to be superior to him (at least not in this group). Not only does this give further evidence of Shakespeare’s somewhat indifferent attitude towards basically everyone around him, it also shows the person he is creating himself to be: the person Gaiman has made him.

Shakespeare continues to create his own identity as he plays the role of Theseus in his own production, and in doing so, is the first of the actors to actually have the experience of being on-stage in front of their unusual audience; from that perspective, his reaction seems perfectly reasonable: he freezes. This series of panels (Appendix 7), which takes the form of several smaller panels placed over one long continuous panel, gives the reader an idea of what the actors would be seeing and what it must have felt like to perform under this kind of pressure. The first panel on the page is not

part of the larger strip; it is drawn from the perspective of the audience, and shows the actors as tiny specks in comparison to the more robust figures of the fairies watching them. This has the visual effect of making the fairies seem more real than the actors portraying them, despite the fact that the reader would know perfectly well that the “real” characters are the ones on-stage. However, in this story, everything that we “know” has been turned on its head; we “know” that the fairies in the play are based on nothing more than Shakespeare’s imagination, we “know” that such creatures could never be watching a play in the first place, and perhaps most importantly, we “know” that Shakespeare wrote this and other plays completely under his own power. Given these uncertain truths, the unusual portrayal offered here is quite valid.

If the small slivers of Shakespeare/Theseus’s face were removed from the strip of images that follows, the reader has the impression that what remained would be, simply, an unbroken panoramic view of the audience. In this way, we are able to see the reactions that Shakespeare is having (utter terror first, followed by nervousness and perhaps even bashfulness) while seeing the audience’s reactions to him at the same time; put simply, they look impatient. Dream’s face is, as ever, in shadow, but all eyes are firmly fixed forward, awaiting the first line of the play. The intent here seems to be to show what an unnerving experience this would have been, and to understand the pressures Dream has brought upon the players. Needless to say, it is quite successful.

The power of naming mentioned earlier resurfaces shortly thereafter in panel 2 of page 71, backstage, when the actor portraying Helena breaks down upon discovering for whom (or, really, for *what*) he has been performing (Appendix 8). Up until this point, the young male actors playing the female roles have truly looked like women when on-

stage and in costume (see, for example, the same actor on-stage in the last panel of the previous page). Here, however, in a fit of terror, the actor looks like what he truly is: male. Interestingly, this coincides with what Shakespeare calls him in this panel; rather than calling him by his character name (which he seems to use almost interchangeably with the actors' names in other panels), he uses the actor's real name: "Tommy." By calling to mind the fact that he is not actually a woman, Shakespeare here enables the male facet of Tommy's personality to shine through, making him appear more male than female. In the aforementioned panel on the previous page, when he is being called "Helena," this is clearly not the case; he looks just as female as if he actually were a woman. What each actor is named, then, appears to directly affect how well he is able to pull off the woman's role in which he is cast. This particular facet of believability was crucial to Renaissance performances; since actual women on the stage were essentially non-existent, but female parts were still quite prevalent, audiences had to believe in the man or boy playing those parts; failure in this area would have meant failure of the play, and probably of the actor's career. Placing the power to facilitate this artificial femininity in the practice of naming, then, actually gives more power to Shakespeare; since he is the one naming Helena/Tommy in both cases (on-stage because he wrote the lines, off-stage by his direct speech to the boy), he exerts control over how well the actor will be believed, and thus, to a very large degree, controls how well the audience will receive this play.

Gaiman expands upon the distinction between on- and off-stage personas in the first panel of page 73 (Appendix 9). A clear division is drawn in this panel between two sets of actors; one set stands before the clearly visible scenery, and the other set

stands off to stage right, where the angle of the panel shows them as being away from the scenery—that is, against a “real” backdrop. This second group is the important one in this panel, and contains Shakespeare’s son, Hamnet, playing the Indian boy taken by Titania. It is very important that Hamnet’s section of the play takes place on “real” scenery, because it foreshadows what begins to happen in the later panels on this page, and develops even further several pages later; the real Titania in the audience takes quite an interest in the boy, and attempts to lure him away from his father and back into Faerie with her. The most direct example of her efforts takes place on the last panel of page 78 (Appendix 10), during the play’s intermission, when she entices Hamnet by painting a picture of a land where there are

[...] bonny dragons that will come when you do call them and fly you through the honeyed amber skies. There is no night in my land, pretty boy, and it is forever summer’s twilight.

In this latter panel, Titania and Hamnet fade into the background, perhaps foreshadowing the wishes she has with regard for the boy; that is, the desire to spirit him away into a different, shadowy realm. By contrast, Dream and Shakespeare appear in the foreground, and are colored normally. However, while Dream has at least some measure of knowledge about what is going on (he speaks to Titania to tell her that the play is about to begin again), Shakespeare appears to be completely oblivious to the situation, even though he should, by all rights, be more personally involved. He is blocked by Dream from actually seeing what is going on, but more importantly, he shows no interest; he looks off in the other direction, and in fact, is not even fully on the page, as his face is cut in half, one half on the page and the other half not depicted.

Quite literally, then, he's not all there.

Titania's interference regarding Hamnet Shakespeare seems, at first glance, quite at odds with the manner through which Shakespeare's version of her acquires the young Indian boy (whose part Hamnet plays in these panels). In the play, Titania's adoption of the child seems to come almost as a favor to the child's mother, who dies in childbirth; as Titania staunchly contends, "And for her sake do I rear up her boy, / And for her sake I will not part with him" (II.i.136-7). The queen paints the two of them as having been quite close, despite the woman's apparent status as her servant:

His mother was a vot'ress of my order,
 And in the spiced Indian air by night
 Full often hath she gossiped by my side
 And sat with me on Neptune's yellow sands,
 Marking th' embark'd traders on the flood,
 When we have laughed to see the sails conceive
 And grow big-bellied with the wanton wind[...] (II.i.123-9)

However, in the lines that follow these, the divide in status between the two women becomes clear; despite the apparently advanced pregnancy of the boy's mother, she was still required to serve Titania as the queen's whims dictated: "To fetch [her] trifles, and return again / As from a voyage, rich with merchandise" (II.i.133-4). Rather than allow the woman to rest in this state, Titania kept her moving on frivolous and menial tasks, indicating that their friendship was perhaps not as deep as she seems to believe. The boy's adoption, then, may have been what Titania sought all along; while she probably did not go so far as to cause the mother's death to expedite this process, she

very well may have taken the child simply because it struck her fancy rather than out of any sense of obligation to the mother. In this panel, the backhanded and beguiling side of Titania comes out as she attempts to lure Hamnet away from the mortal world without consulting his father at all; Shakespeare, unlike the mother of the Indian boy, is not even dead, although his total indifference to his own son hints at a gulf between the two of them which is no less unbridgeable.

This scene comes on the heels of Hamnet's dissatisfaction with his father, which has been a major theme in the story so far; such a land would seem attractive to any small boy, but even more so to one who feels neglected by his busy father. Therefore, the fact that the scene of the play involving the play-Titania's fascination with the boy takes place not before false scenery, but before the actual backdrop of nature, hints to the reader that perhaps this scenario is not as fantastical as it might seem at first.

As night falls on the performance, roles shift and things that might have previously seemed harmless now take on a decidedly more sinister aura. The first thing the reader might notice about the panel where this begins to occur (Appendix 11) is that all of the figures have a similar cast to them at a casual glance; as night falls, darkness overtakes both the stage and those watching it, so some distinctions between the two are blurred as both appear consumed by shadow, implying, along with Puck's intrusion into the midst of the actors, that perhaps the actual lines between the humans and the fairies are not as clear-cut as one might expect. However, the next thing that becomes apparent accords perfectly with Thesus's lines, which Shakespeare himself delivers in that role: "One sees more devils than vast hell can hold. That is the madman." Certainly, the audience that he looks out upon as he speaks these words seems to fit

the bill; it is composed of dark creatures which, no longer masked by the fanciful visages they wear earlier in the story, jeer evilly up at him with red eyes blazing from darkened faces. If they, then, are the “devils” alluded to by Theseus, who must be the madman? Shakespeare himself. The words hold a certain resonance as the reader realizes that his creations, much like the audience he currently surveys, seem to control him, rather than the other way around, as we might expect. This has the effect of reinforcing what we already know; since Shakespeare receives his inspirations from Dream as part of their agreement, he does not fully control his own destiny. While we might not expect this lack of control to extend as far as his audience, it clearly does, further emphasizing Shakespeare’s identity as a mere vessel.

If we examine the speech from which this line is taken, however, we find that in its construction, Shakespeare takes another small dig at Dream; the “madman” to which the line in this panel refers is only one of three roles that the character of Theseus describes, the other two being “lover” and “poet.” The role of “poet” seems to refer most directly to Shakespeare himself:

The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;
And as imagination bodies forth
The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing
A local habitation and a name. (V.i.12-17)

Here, while Shakespeare acknowledges that his ideas come from some sort of otherworldly source (imagination/Dream), they are nebulous and imperfect on their own,

and would be nothing without his own contribution. Without his own “pen” shaping them into concrete ideas, they are “nothing,” and thus his role in this unusual partnership, in his own mind, at least, is just as crucial as that of his mysterious benefactor.

The end of this story shows a very simple scene, played out among several panels (Appendix 12); Puck, now unmasked and revealed for what he truly is, delivers the final monologue of the play (beginning with “If we shadows have offended, / think but this and all is mended” (85)); however, some things are left unclear. He discards his mask, showing that he no longer plays the part Shakespeare has written, yet delivers the familiar ending to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. Are these, then, his own words, later adopted by Shakespeare into the version of the play which survives, making Puck the true author, or did Goodfellow read this monologue in the script when he studied it earlier, choosing that final moment to somewhat ironically deliver it to the bemused humans that surround him? He seems to have given up the pretense of acting, allowing himself to use his own appearance as well as faerie tricks such as slowly disappearing into the surrounding blackness; given his apparent aptitude for acting, as shown earlier in the story, this may be nothing more than a front, but in the world of Puck, identity is so wrapped up in performance that this “front” is really all there is.

This scene has the unexpected effect of decreasing Shakespeare’s perceived power over the situation; although he seems to exert perfect control over his work and his actors throughout the rest of the story, the idea that he might not have actually been the author of these well-known lines, but rather merely their recorder, ties into the basic idea upon which Gaiman bases his interpretation, namely that Shakespeare’s writings would not have been possible without the intervention of Dream. On the other hand, as

mentioned previously, the reverse is also true; Dream's ideas could not have become concrete without Shakespeare's hand and pen directing them into recognizable shapes.

This is called to mind by the words used in the first half of the monologue:

If we shadows have offended,
Think but this, and all is mended,
That you have but slumbered here
While these visions did appear.
And this weak and idle theme,
No more yielding than a dream,
Gentles, do not reprehend. (V.i.418-424)

Here, dreams are easily reversible; they are "weak and idle;" they are "yielding." Again, Shakespeare seeks to downplay Dream's influence by planting doubts in his audience's mind about the true nature of the work, while at the same time grasping at the control of his own, which seems to be slipping.

In contrast to Shakespeare's decreased control, as the author of this scene, Gaiman's own influence becomes even greater; only he can definitively answer the question of whether Shakespeare wrote or recorded these lines in his world, and in either case, he was the one who chose this somewhat ambiguous manner of presentation. By doing so, he may, in a sense, set himself above Shakespeare, or at least above *his* Shakespeare, whereas before he had made it a point to place himself on basically the same level.

Chapter Three: "The Tempest"

The opening of the issue "The Tempest," the last issue of *The Sandman* as a whole as well as the last appearance of Shakespeare, concentrates heavily on

Shakespeare's (and thus on Gaiman's) role as both author and director, sometimes at the expense of himself as a person. The first scene of the comic is the first scene of the play; it is painted in indistinct, watery colors, which match the tones of a storm: deep purples, reds, and greens (Appendix 13). There are few sharp outlines; rather, everything runs together like watercolors, with handwritten lines placed over the top of the scene. Unlike the other panels, which are all rigidly set within borders, those which represent Shakespeare's imaginings of how his words might ideally look have no borders, sprawling across the pages they inhabit and going so far as to fill in the spaces between and below the panels which adhere to the standard bordered state. This perfectly represents the way a beginning should be, because at this point, Shakespeare himself has likely not firmly formed his own play in his mind; things will change, directions, scenes, and characters will shift, and the course of the action itself may even veer away from what it originally was. By choosing to leave the beginning of Shakespeare's "new" play ambiguous, Gaiman draws upon and emphasizes the malleability of a writer's new efforts. The use of this technique here parallels its use near the end of the story, where Dream fades away, leaving only the vaguest impression of his face behind (183). Whereas in the beginning of the story this may signal the uncertainty of formation, at the end it seems to show how quickly memory fades; before Dream is even completely gone, he is no longer perfectly clear and visible. Gaiman also uses the introductory scene to establish Shakespeare's tendency to draw on his surroundings, which becomes quite prominent as this story progresses; he writes of a storm while, as the reader learns from his daughter Judith, "there is a storm brewing" (147) in the physical world as well.

On page 157, in panel 1, Gaiman follows along the lines he has already drawn as he presents a scene where Prospero and Miranda speak to each other (Appendix 14); in doing so, he reveals some of his own choices about how the scene might be directed if the choices were his (which of course, in this forum, they are). The colors used in this scene follow along the same lines as those in the first page of the story; they share some of the deep, rich tones of a storm, such as deep blues and purplish tones, along with some rich reds. In addition, Gaiman poses his characters much like a director might pose his actors; Miranda faces away from Prospero with her arms crossed, seeking to insulate herself while she deals with the shock of realizing that the life she has known these past years is not the life to which she was born, while Prospero throws his left arm out wide, displaying the staff he carries and the symbols adorning his robe, giving him an air of authority and control. In addition, this allows him to loom over his daughter, almost enveloping her much smaller, more compact form. This posture specifically serves as a possible symbol of his control over Miranda as well; as we see early in the play, Prospero has such power, both in general and in relation to his daughter, that he can casually manipulate her when he finds it necessary:

Here cease more questions.

Thou art inclined to sleep. 'Tis a good dullness,

And give it way. I know thou canst not choose. (I.ii.184-186)

Since Miranda “canst not choose,” who must then make her choices for her? Clearly, it is her father. Indeed, Miranda seems to be conditioned to accept commands and suggestions from Prospero; through the entire scene leading up to this point, he continually gives her orders, which she presumably obeys:

Be collected. (I.ii.13)

Lend thy hand[.] (I.ii.23)

Wipe thou thine eyes. Have comfort. (I.ii.25)

Sit down. (I.ii.32)

Obey, and be attentive. (I.ii.38)

I pray thee, mark me[.] (I.ii.67, repeated in line 88)

Hear a little further[...] (I.ii.135)

Sit still[...] (I.ii.170)

If this scene is any sort of indication of the manner in which the two of them normally interact, then it is no wonder that Miranda is so susceptible to her father's directions; commands are most of how he seems to speak to her. In any case, it cannot be disputed that Prospero's influence over his daughter is great, and that he is quite accustomed to being obeyed.

In addition to controlling Miranda, Prospero also exercises control over the creatures of the island, notably the spirit known as Ariel. Interestingly enough, although Gaiman heavily emphasizes the role of Robin Goodfellow in Shakespeare's previous appearance (during "A Midsummer Night's Dream"), the vivid, shape-changing fairy of this tale is largely ignored, save for a few depictions in the background of several panels and a single more detailed mention on page 163 (where Shakespeare composes the scene describing Ariel's confinement in a tree by Sycorax). However, even these limited mentions are worthy of comparison because of the importance of shaping in the previous storyline. Like Goodfellow, Ariel is a master of shaping; in his first appearance in *The Tempest*, he boasts of his deeds assisting the shipwreck planned by Prospero

that forms the basis for this story:

Now on the beak,
 Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin,
 I flamed amazement. Sometimes I'd divide
 And burn in many places; on the topmast,
 The yards, and bowsprit would I flame distinctly,
 Then meet and join. Jove's lightning, the precursors
 O' the dreadful thunderclaps, more momentary
 And sight-outrunning were not[...] (I.ii.196-203)

Ariel, then, not only shares Puck's aptitude for shape-shifting, but also his extreme confidence and even arrogance regarding his own abilities. Why, then, if one was so important in his respective story, did Gaiman choose to leave the other out? I believe that Ariel's continual strain for freedom against a master who has a very definite hold on him would have meshed perfectly with Shakespeare's own struggle with Dream, and therefore would have added a great deal to the story; his virtual exclusion, therefore, is something of a mystery. The difference might potentially be explained by the disparity in focus of these two storylines; whereas the first focuses more on Shakespeare as an author, this one focuses more on him as a man. Less of the actual play is shown, allowing Gaiman to focus more on the interactions between Shakespeare and his family and friends, as well as between Shakespeare and Dream. Therefore, to show too many other characters, especially ones with such strong presences as Ariel, could potentially detract from what Gaiman desired to have as the center of his tale.

Shakespeare's identity as a person is, in fact, pivotal to this storyline, as we learn

a few pages after the scene between Prospero and Miranda, on page 161, in panels 3-4 (Appendix 15). Since seeing him with Marlowe during his first appearance, the reader never really encounters Shakespeare interacting with anyone as a friend; he either rules over people in his role as playwright or defers to them, as in his interactions with Dream. Here, however, he spends time with a man who he seems to regard as a good friend: his fellow playwright Ben Jonson. They discuss life and their work, and finally, before the construction of a Guy Fawkes Day bonfire in panels three and four of page 161, speak of being remembered, a subject which seems to have sparked Shakespeare's deal with Dream to begin with. Together, the two of them compose a bit of "doggerel" regarding the holiday that is about to be celebrated:

"Remember, remember, the fifth of November, gunpowder, treason and plot..." there: Ben, can you complete the doggerel?

Um, let me see. Hmm. No, I have it. "I see no reason why gunpowder treason should ever be forgot." There. (161)

This small collaborative effort comes on the heels of a discussion on the previous page between the two writers wherein Jonson suggests a way to carry out the situation Shakespeare has gotten himself into in the writing of the central play of this story (i.e. *The Tempest*), and in fact, the solution that Jonson proposes is precisely what anyone familiar with the play will recognize as what actually happens; regarding Shakespeare's problem of how to bring on "the enchanter's sprite" (160) without alerting Miranda, Jonson suggests, "Perchance the enchanter could send the girl to sleep while he talks to the familiar," to which Shakespeare replies, "Aye, Ben... perhaps..." (160).

Why emphasize this collaboration, though? It has already been established that,

in this storyline, Shakespeare was not the sole creator of his own works; Dream had a large hand in at least the inspirations, if not the entire process, from the very beginning, so why draw another creator into it? Perhaps Gaiman is trying to emphasize here the relative unimportance of the help Dream gives; if Dream had not made his offer, in such a case, perhaps the plays would have been written anyway, with assistance from other sources. On the complete opposite end of the spectrum, he could be suggesting that Dream's interference was what made all the difference in Shakespeare's career.

Visually, Shakespeare and Jonson look very much the same in this panel, both being dressed in the same color clothing (which, incidentally, appears to be a paler version of the purple habitually worn by Dream himself), and both appearing to be approximately evenly matched in terms of wit and creativity; if anything, Jonson seems to be superior in this area, as indicated by Shakespeare's willingness, even eagerness, to take whatever advice he will give. However, today, while Jonson has certainly not been forgotten, no one could rightfully argue that he holds a place in the public eye as high as Shakespeare. The difference, then, could very well be Dream.

Shakespeare's weariness, as well as his indebtedness, shows very strongly in a pair of panels on page 162 (Appendix 16), but in addition, they give the reader a brief piece of insight into his relationship with his daughter, which is explored more thoroughly later. We have already met Judith at this point; she hangs over his shoulder at the beginning of the story when he is writing. Here, she hangs over his shoulder as well, but her role is quite different; whereas before she plays the dutiful daughter, in this panel, she is hiding from him as she is nearly discovered in the arms of a local boy, where she is not supposed to be. Shakespeare's back is turned to her, however, and

she seems barely part of the scene; her head appears almost to float in the background.

This mirrors his earlier neglect of his son, but at the same time, hints at a willingness to ignore her transgressions so that she can forever stay his little girl.

He has more difficult things on his mind at the moment, however; the following panel shows an extreme close-up of his face, which is thrown into deep shadow, calling to mind the shadows which continually surround Dream. The lines in Shakespeare's forehead and around his eyes speak of great weariness; the fact that his eyes are closed, on the surface, simply reinforces his need for rest, but in that rest, there is always the potential to meet with dreams. Therefore, he may simply be trying to plead with his master for his impending release. Either way, Shakespeare is clearly coming to the end of his rope here, and wants nothing so much as to simply rest, in all senses of the word.

On the fourth panel of page 164 (Appendix 17), we learn one of the potential sources for this weariness as Gaiman reveals a connection between Shakespeare's life and his work. Judith, his daughter, and Miranda, his creation, clearly show definite parallels, indicating that Shakespeare may have, consciously or not, drawn himself as well as his family into the construction of his last masterpiece. In this scene, Judith adopts precisely the same posture earlier held by Miranda; she holds her arms tightly crossed over her chest and keeps her back turned on the images of the past which float behind her, drawn without the normal level of detail and in faded, softer colors, like washed-out memories that, for her, never truly faded away. In this particular scene, Shakespeare does not actually stand behind Judith, as Prospero earlier does behind Miranda. In fact, he does not even look at her until she leaves the room and exits the

house, and then he looks only at her retreating back, much as Miranda earlier remains turned away from her father. Whereas Gaiman shows Prospero displaying his magical symbols and staff to indicate his show of power, however, Shakespeare does not have these particular tools available to him. Instead of magical symbols, the trappings of his craft are words, and so Gaiman uses the visual depiction of those words in the panel to represent the only way Shakespeare can think of to attempt to control his daughter. He cannot truly manipulate her, but he can manipulate his characters; therefore, the only way he appears to be even remotely comfortable dealing with his flesh-and-blood daughter is to transfer his dealings with her into dealings with Miranda, who exists only on paper. The panels on page 165, then, show Judith turned away from her father, with his words displayed at her back like Prospero's symbols and his quill pen clutched firmly in his hand like Prospero's staff; neither father has as much control as he thinks or would like, but both still make the attempt to at least appear as if they do.

On page 173, Gaiman continues to expand this connection between Shakespeare and Prospero (Appendix 18); in the first three panels of the page, the scene alternates between Shakespeare reading what he has written and Prospero speaking the same lines as though it were simply occurring naturally. The part that he reads is Prospero's familiar speech from the fourth act:

Our revels now are ended. These our actors,
As I foretold you, were all spirits and
Are melted into air, into thin air;
And, like the baseless fabric of this vision,
The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces,

The solemn temples, the great globe itself,
 Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve,
 And, like this insubstantial pageant faded,
 Leave not a rack behind. We are such stuff
 As dreams are made on, and our little life
 Is rounded with a sleep. (IV.i.148-158)

Two different sets of language dominate this passage. First, words such as “revels,” “actors,” “globe” (referring, perhaps, to the Globe Theater), and “pageant” draw attention to the fact that, primarily through Prospero’s manipulation, the other characters of this play have been forced to be just that: characters in a play. He has directed them as skillfully as any stage coach, and they have played their parts precisely as expected. The question remains as to whether that is all there is to life—whether all people are truly only playing parts, and whether Shakespeare himself believes that he is only playing a part as directed by Dream. The other dominant pattern in this passage, however, seems to indicate once more that he has greater importance (or at least believes he does) than simply following along with what Dream desires of him; this pattern deals with words indicating ephemerality and impermanence, such as “spirits,” “melted,” “air,” “baseless,” “dissolve,” “insubstantial,” “faded,” and of course, “dreams.”

As previously noted, Shakespeare and Prospero definitely share distinct characteristics, and this sequence confirms that; perhaps even more important, however, is the disdainful shot that these lines and this pattern of words allow both of them to jointly take at Dream. Clearly, the language Shakespeare uses that points to a sort of wispy nothingness downplays the importance of Dream significantly; since this

entire speech deals with Dream, if the language is so light and unable to be solidly grasped or dealt with, Dream must be that way too, or at least he would appear so to anyone reading these lines. Painting Dream in this light shows Shakespeare's underlying hostility, or at least rebellious attitude, towards his patron. Specifically, however, the main dig that they take is found in Prospero's familiar line of the second panel: "We are such stuff as dreams are made on." No matter where the inspiration came from, Shakespeare, not Dream, created Prospero, and this line lets the reader know that Shakespeare is perfectly aware of this. It may, in fact, serve as a small rebellion on Shakespeare's part; Dream does not make him, but rather, Dream is made by him. Dream's importance is therefore downplayed and Shakespeare himself is given a boost. At the same time, though, this speech actually does emphasize Dream's own importance, whether Shakespeare realizes it or not. In the lines "our little life / Is rounded with a sleep," Prospero acknowledges that the lives of mortals are, in fact, quite short and probably of little consequence when viewed as part of the big picture. Sleep, however, is presumably eternal, bounding as it does both sides of the lives of mortals, both before they live and after they die. By extension, Dream, as the main denizen of sleep, must then be eternal as well. While this line may not totally undermine Shakespeare's point in emphasizing his own importance in his interactions with Dream, it does indicate that Shakespeare does not dare discount Dream totally; even if he does have some degree of disdain for Dream, he recognizes the all-encompassing nature of the Endless being he is dealing with, and doesn't truly wish to make him angry.

The final interaction between Dream and Shakespeare takes place in a most

interesting place, as is shown on beginning on the first panel of page 179 (Appendix 19). The most significant part of this particular panel is not, in fact, the characters or even the words that they speak, but rather the background against which they are placed. They are in Dream's house, in a large hall, surrounded by stained-glass windows representing each of Dream's six brothers and sisters. Here, only two of those windows are visible: on the right is Despair, and on the left is Death. Shakespeare stands in the middle. This placement on its own is very telling; as the reader has become aware, Shakespeare, so near the completion of his deal with Dream, seems to despair of its ever being truly done, and of ever actually being able to lay down his pen and rest. This is emphasized several pages later (Appendix 20), when, in a panel showing him writing one of the final lines of *The Tempest*, "And my ending is despair unless I be relieved by prayer" (184), Shakespeare's own head is overlaid by the outline of the face of Despair from the window, filling the double role of emphasizing the line itself and mirroring Shakespeare's precarious mental state. However, given that this life is essentially all that he has ever known, giving it up would be a kind of death for him; also, his acute awareness of his own mortality makes the threat of physical death very real as well. Interestingly enough, however, the artist seems to have moved the windows in order to place Shakespeare thus; on the previous page, in a much wider view of the room they are in, the windows depicting Death and Despair are not adjacent, but are rather separated by Destiny. In the smaller panel, then, Shakespeare actually stands where Destiny would normally be. This placement shows the reader how Shakespeare's life has turned out under the tutelage of Dream, or rather, how the control that Dream has exerted over him has affected him; Destiny has consumed him,

and his life has not, nor will ever be, truly his own, until one or both of the two forces flanking him ultimately takes over.

Although not presented in Gaiman's version of the play, Prospero's epilogue further illustrates how the control Dream exerts over Shakespeare must be affecting the playwright. These lines would be most appropriate at the end of such a partnership, when the otherworldly inspiration that Dream has lent to Shakespeare is fading due to the ultimate fulfillment of their bargain. This becomes clear in the first lines of the epilogue: "Now my charms are all o'erthrown, / And what strength I have 's mine own, / Which is most faint" (Ep.1-3). Shakespeare no longer writes under the influence or with the sanction of Dream, as Prospero no longer does his magic with the assistance of his spirits. He protests that his skills are only "faint," but makes little effort to adhere to the style that he has utilized through the rest of the play, and by extension, through the rest of their partnership; the most direct example of this attempt to distinguish himself is the meter in which the epilogue is written. Unlike most of the rest of the play (as well as most of Shakespeare's other plays in general), the epilogue is not written in iambic pentameter; rather than having five feet in each line, there are only four. This switch in technique, which Shakespeare uses in epilogues to several of his other plays as well, gives this section a different sound and feel than that to which the readers of the rest of the play have become accustomed. Even though Prospero has definitely made this effort to break free, however, Shakespeare still seems, at least in his own mind, to be laboring under, and perhaps even imprisoned by, the accustomed conditions set down for him by Dream; again, Prospero's words confirm this, as he pleads with the audience for his release: "But release me from my bands / With the help of your good hands" (Ep.

9-10), later adding the request which forms the final lines of the play, "As you from crimes would pardoned be, / Let your indulgence set me free" (Ep. 19-20). Clearly, Prospero does not feel himself to be free yet; for this to become the case, he must rely on others to grant his release. Similarly, even though their bond is contractually no more, Shakespeare appears to believe that he cannot extract himself from Dream's influence, but must keep writing.

In summary, Gaiman's series may clearly be viewed not only as presenting differing aspects of Shakespeare's life and work, but also as presenting the reader with different ways to look at those aspects. Yes, Shakespeare is important as a man in his own right, but can he truly be considered a crucial part of his own family when, as we see, he neglects his own son in favor of work which may not even be fully his own, manipulates his daughter to the point where she essentially feels her only choice is to rebel, and is so flighty around the house that his wife must ignore his work for him to get anything done? Yes, he is important as the author of the plays discussed and portrayed throughout the series, but Gaiman leaves the question of *how* important he is a bit open; the whole basis of his story is that Dream gives him ideas which might otherwise have eluded him for his entire life, but small clues throughout the comic seem to indicate that Shakespeare's true importance exceeds the role of simple receptacle and conduit from Dream to final form. Finally, yes, Dream is the main character in the series, but Shakespeare is the only other main character to reoccur in as many non-connected main storylines as he does, indicating that Gaiman definitely finds him to be significant above and beyond some sort of mere plot device. Like Annalisa Castaldo, I too believe that the level of attention Gaiman uses in his exploration of Shakespeare

through these different stories indicates a possible belief in or desire for a connection between the two of them, and his elaborate construction throughout the series seems to indicate that a metatheatrical, or at least metacomical, connection does in fact exist.

Chapter Four: Conclusion

I have personally always believed that comics simply *had* to have a greater value than that which many others (first adults in my family, later my peers) tended to ascribe to them. After all, I reasoned, how could the *addition* of pictures somehow *detract* from

the value of the words? Surely it would add to them, as well. Through my study of *The Sandman*, I feel that I have confirmed my own beliefs; the frequently lavish, but just as often simple, art which accompanies the words Gaiman has written (and those which Shakespeare has written as well) produces a greater impact and more thorough picture than might be gleaned from the words alone, in much the same way as watching a production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* or *The Tempest* would likely impact an audience in a much different way than if those same patrons simply sat down and read the text. Metatheatrical theory tells us that these plays were meant to be performed and viewed rather than read, and even though the "performance" that they receive in comics is definitely different from that which they might get on an actual stage, the comics page is no less a stage for it.

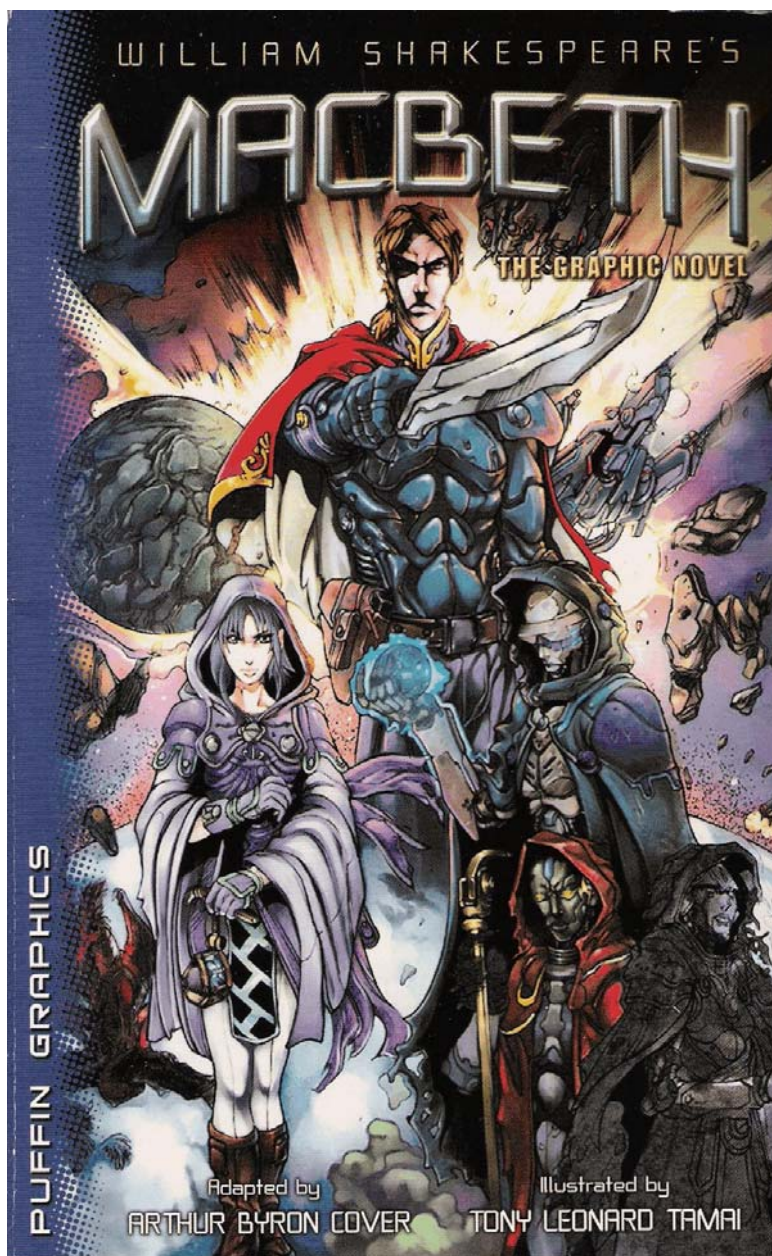
The value of comics, though, is nothing without the audience that reads them. The true question, then, is how do such presentations of Shakespeare's work and life affect the way he is viewed in popular culture? I believe that their overall impact has been and will likely continue to be quite positive, primarily because of the increase in accessibility that comics and other popular culture formats (such as movies) provide a typical modern audience. While Shakespeare's ideas and themes can be readily understood and enjoyed by a modern audience, his original words may seem daunting to the average person. I've experienced multiple instances of blank or even pitying looks upon telling friends or family members that I was studying Shakespeare, and have had even more experiences tutoring students who "just don't get this stuff" when working on similarly themed assignments. These are, in most cases, extremely intelligent people; they simply have not had as much experience with the language in

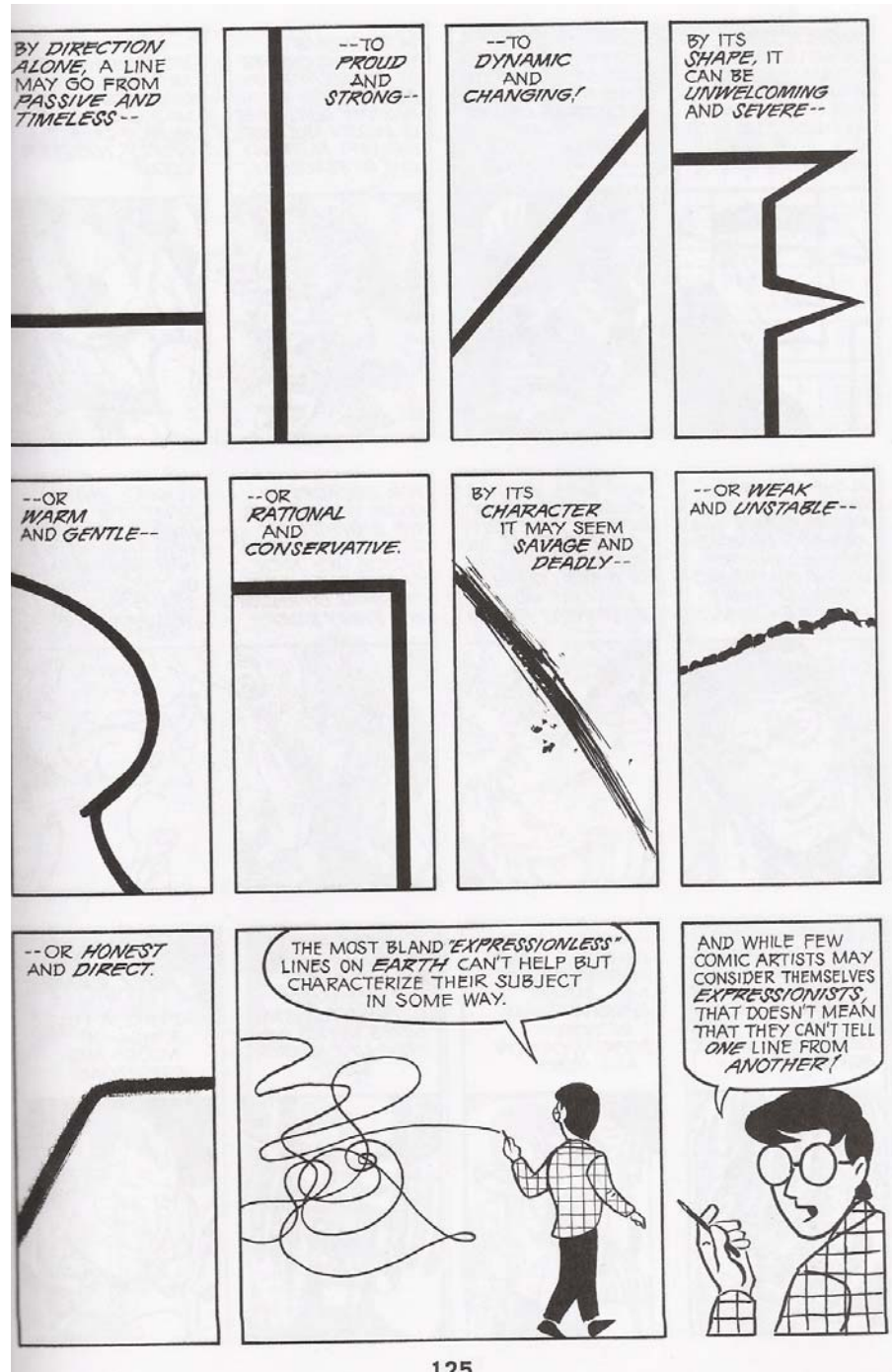
The Taming of the Shrew as they have with that in *10 Things I Hate About You*. Comics provide this same sort of modernized accessibility through both their format and their language, with the added bonus that they provide the same visual cues that assist in interpretation on a literal stage. Even in full-text comic versions of Shakespearean plays, people who might not normally sit down to read such a play could be drawn to the same words through the addition of metacomical visual scenery. Furthermore, if they end up enjoying what they read, it could spur them to seek out more, with the renewed confidence that Shakespeare is *not* out of their grasp.

This widening appeal works the other way as well; while comics make Shakespeare more accessible, Shakespeare also lends an air of legitimacy to comics. Therefore, work such as Gaiman's is a huge step in the right direction for comics' reputation; as mentioned previously, many academics still have difficulties taking comics seriously or seeing them as a field worthy of detailed, scholarly study. By showing that comics can, in fact, tackle more traditionally accepted subjects and themes, and in fact, expand upon them by metacomically revealing new aspects of the works which might not be as readily available through pure textual means, Gaiman and his peers counter these negative expectations and do a great deal to ensure that their work will be looked at with the attention it deserves.

The ultimate question, however, is why read these works at all? What exactly does a metatheatrical approach (and, by extension, a metacomical one) mean for the reader of Gaiman's work? What does he or she get out of this work that would not be readily available through another method of presentation? An answer, I believe, may be found through looking at the common thread that runs through the two main stories in

which Shakespeare appears. In both "A Midsummer Night's Dream" and "The Tempest," there is a split. In the latter, this split is between fantasy and reality, while in the former, the divide is actually between two different realities. This has an even greater impact when one considers that a further split already exists around the reader: the split between the fantasy of the comic itself and the reality which the reader inhabits. The medium of comics is perfectly suited for the presentation of such fractures by its very nature; boundaries exist around the panels to differentiate them from each other and from the background, but as noted, Gaiman often transgresses these borders, and in doing so, emphatically commands the reader's attention to the fact that the fantasy on the page may "spill over," as it were, into the world around him or her. When the fairy world meets the "real" world, for example, the panel borders are broken, and the two cross; from a metacomical standpoint, this is even more interesting because the crossing of fantasy onto the "real" white background of the page mirrors the aforementioned crossing into the reader's own reality as well. A reader, then, simply gets more from comics than he or she might gain from a different presentation style, and in Gaiman's work specifically, discovers that boundaries, whether within texts or outside of them, are often fragile, easily manipulated things.





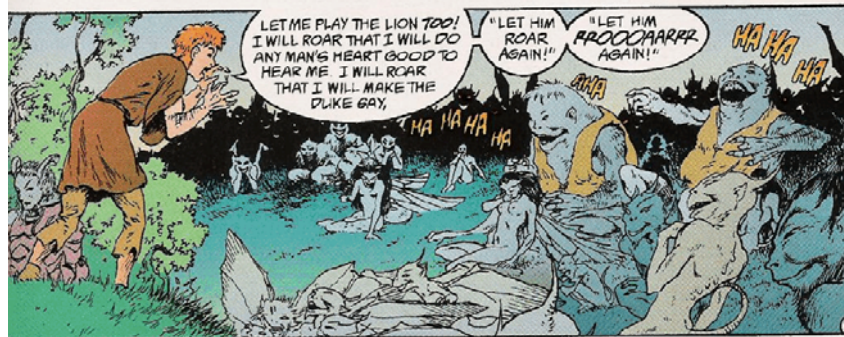












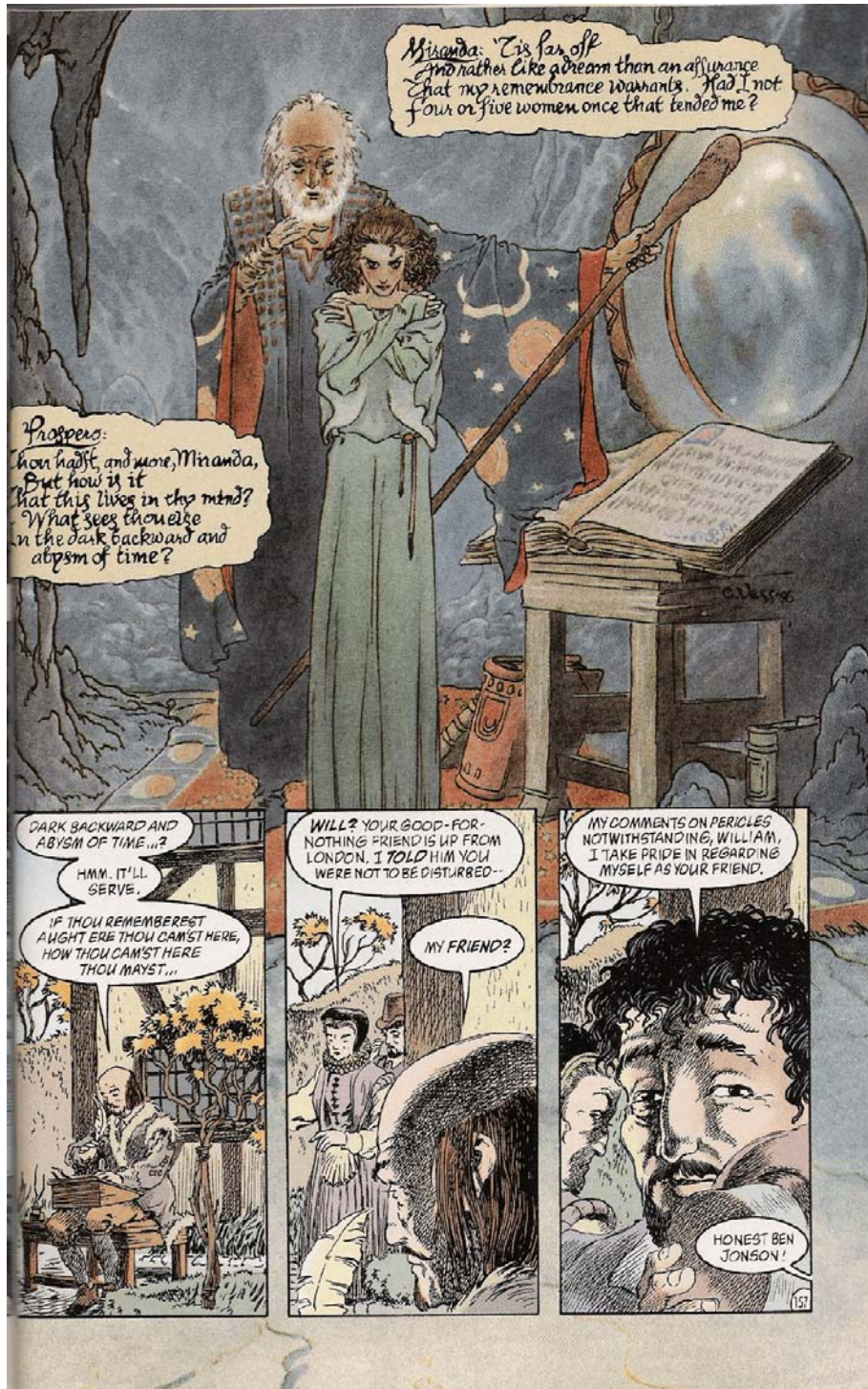






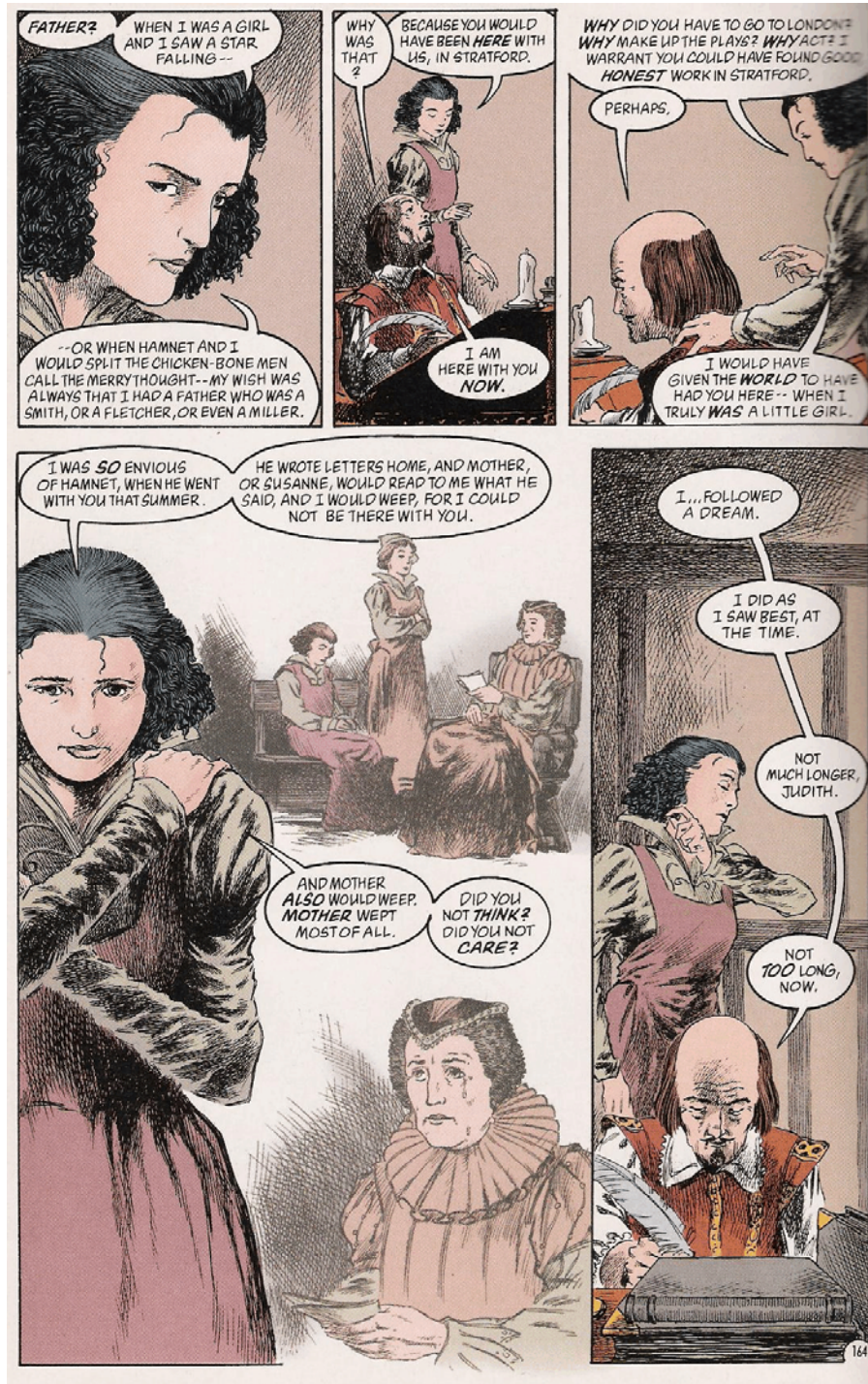




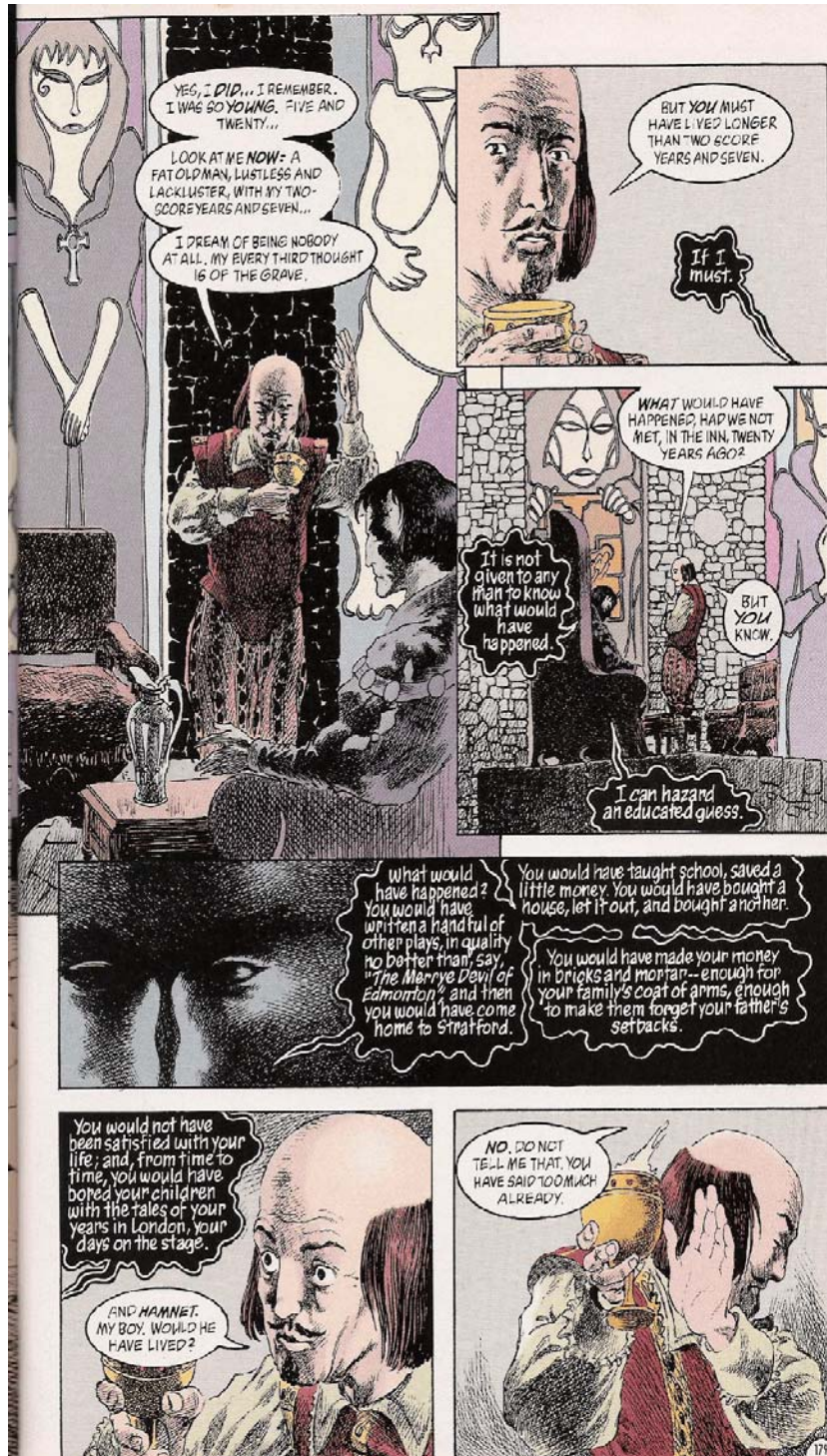


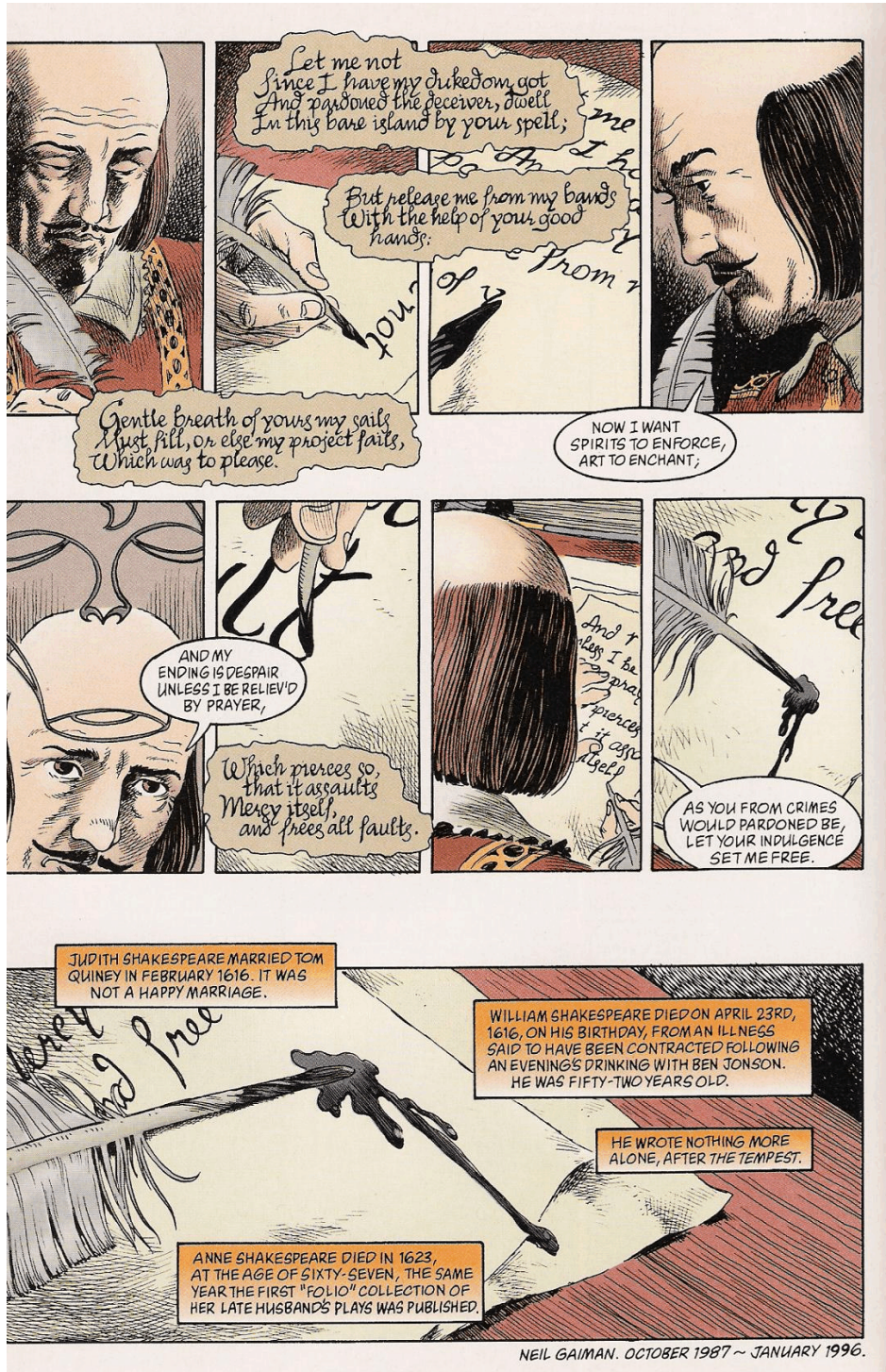












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