Cymbeline

INTRODUCTION

BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

Shakespeare's father was a glove-maker, and Shakespeare received no more than a grammar school education. He married Anne Hathaway in 1582, but left his family behind around 1590 and moved to London, where he became an actor and playwright. He was an immediate success: Shakespeare soon became the most popular playwright of the day, as well as a part-owner of the Globe Theater. His theater troupe was adopted by King James as the King's Men in 1603. Shakespeare retired as a rich and prominent man to Stratford-upon-Avon in 1613, and died three years later.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

While not remaining entirely faithful to actual events, *Cymbeline* does portray the historical King Cymbeline, whose reign in Britain began in 33 BCE. The Romans incorporated Britain into their ever-growing empire ten years prior, in 43 BCE. Cymbeline's rule was distinguished as a period of friendly relations between the Roman Empire and Britain. Given discrepancies between different historical sources, it remains unclear whether or not an actual conflict ever arose over the payment of tribute to the Roman Emperor, which is a central piece of the drama of *Cymbeline*. First performed as early as 1611, *Cymbeline* followed on the heels of early English colonialism. English colonists had established the first permanent settlement in the Americas at Jamestown, Virginia only a few years prior, in 1607. The Roman Empire, which quashes Britain's attempt at independence in *Cymbeline*, reflects England's burgeoning imperial interests.

RELATED LITERARY WORKS

Shakespeare makes use of Raphael Holinshed's 1587 *Chronicles* as an inspiration for some of the names of historical British characters, and the issue of tribute money paid to Rome. He also adapts a story from Giovanni Boccaccio's 14th-century work *The Decameron* (a collection of tales set in Italy during the time of the Black Death) in the subplot of Posthumus and Iachimo's bet over Imogen's chastity. Editors have suggested that Shakespeare takes the characters of the Queen and Cloten—along with Cloten's grisly death—from two late 16th-century plays called *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune* and *Sir Clyomon and Clamydes*, respectively. The play's treatment of jealousy in marriage in the face of innocence links it to other Shakespearean works, chiefly *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*. Like this latter play and *The Tempest*, *Cymbeline* displays a reversal of fortune through supernatural intervention, at the hands of the god Jupiter.

KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** *Cymbeline, King of Britain*
- **When Written:** c. 1610
- **Where Written:** London
- **When Published:** 1623
- **Literary Period:** The Renaissance
- **Genre:** Romance; Tragicomedy
- **Setting:** Ancient Britain
- **Climax:** After King Cymbeline refuses to pay tribute to the Roman Emperor, British forces under Cymbeline and Roman troops under Lucius prepare for war. Amid the chaos, Imogen, disguised as a serving-man named Fidele, looks for her husband Posthumus.
- **Antagonist:** The Queen, Cloten, Iachimo, the Roman invaders

EXTRA CREDIT

The Astrological Connection In ancient Rome (and even in Shakespeare's day), people looked to the stars and planets for answers to all of life's questions. Fittingly—since *Cymbeline* features a Soothsayer and even the god Jupiter, accompanied by thunder and lightning—a real-life astrologer, Simon Forman, provided the first written record of the play's performance in a 1611 diary entry.

The Indoor Theater The Globe Theatre and Shakespeare are bound together in cultural memory. While Shakespeare was part-owner of this outdoor theater, and had the majority of his plays staged there, *Cymbeline* was most likely performed at the Blackfriars Theatre. The Blackfriars was an indoor playhouse where Shakespeare's troupe also acted starting in 1609. The intimate space was illuminated by candlelight, and allowed for interesting special effects via trap doors and wires.

PLOT SUMMARY

In Britain during the time of Roman rule, gossip about King Cymbeline's family strife swirls around court. Princess Imogen has secretly married Posthumus, a wealthy Roman orphan brought up by Cymbeline. The King, however, wanted Imogen to marry his stepson, Cloten, who is the only son of his second wife, the Queen. Imogen is Cymbeline's sole heir because Cymbeline's two sons, Guiderius and Arviragus, were stolen

from their nursery as infants twenty years ago and never seen again. After discovering Imogen's clandestine marriage, Cymbeline banished Posthumus and imprisoned Imogen, placing her under the Queen's care.

Imogen and Posthumus (who has not yet left for his exile) pledge their fidelity to each other and exchange tokens of loyalty—Imogen gives Posthumus her mother's **ring**, and he gives her a **bracelet** in return. Cymbeline discovers the lovers and flies into a fury. After Posthumus leaves, his servant Pisanio promises he will remain loyal to Imogen and serve her in Posthumus' absence. The Queen has promised Imogen that she will be her ally, but Imogen suspects that she is up to no good. These suspicions prove true: the Queen has procured what she believes to be poison from the court doctor, Cornelius. She gives this to Pisanio, pretending that it is a restorative medicine. Nevertheless, the doctor reveals to the audience that he has given the Queen a strong sleeping medication instead of poison, since he doesn't trust her.

In Italy, Posthumus takes up his exile as a guest of his father's friend, Philario. At Philario's house, he encounters the nobleman Iachimo, who bets Posthumus that he can make Imogen unfaithful. Posthumus bets his ring and his wife's chastity against Iachimo's gold. Iachimo goes to Britain and attempts to seduce Imogen with flattery, but his overtures anger Imogen, and Iachimo lies, saying that he was only testing her loyalty. Iachimo asks if he can safely keep a trunk filled with jewels in Imogen's bedroom for safekeeping, and Imogen agrees. However, Iachimo hides himself in the trunk, popping out once Imogen is asleep. He notes details about the room—and the fact that Imogen has a mole on her left breast—and steals Posthumus' bracelet, which he will use as "proof" that Imogen yielded to his sexual advances.

Shortly thereafter, Cloten tries to woo Imogen with music, but she rebuffs him, saying that she would prefer Posthumus' "mean'st garment" to Cloten. Offended by her refusal, Cloten swears he will take revenge on Imogen. Meanwhile, Iachimo returns to Rome and delivers his "evidence" of Imogen's infidelity to Posthumus. Reluctant at first to believe Iachimo, Posthumus eventually takes Iachimo's "proof" as true. Posthumus gives up Imogen's diamond ring to Iachimo and, like Cloten, swears he will take revenge on Imogen, before delivering a misogynistic soliloquy on the faults of women.

Back at the British court, the Roman ambassador Lucius asks Cymbeline for his tribute (money paid to the Emperor Augustus to guarantee peace). The Queen and Cloten urge Cymbeline to withhold the tribute money, since they believe that Britain should become independent of the Roman empire. Eventually, they persuade Cymbeline to refuse to pay the tribute. As a result, Lucius reluctantly informs Cymbeline that he will have to report this act of rebellion to the Emperor, who will now consider Cymbeline an enemy. War between Britain and Rome looms large, and Roman officials gather troops for an invasion. While Lucius will command the whole Roman army as its general, Iachimo will lead troops of Italian gentlemen, recruited by the Roman Senate.

As political relationships grow stormy, so, too, do romantic ones. Posthumus has sent a letter to his servant Pisanio, asking him to kill Imogen for her infidelity. Posthumus has also provided a letter for Imogen, asking her to meet him at Milford Haven in Wales. The letter is a trick: Posthumus hopes that Pisanio will kill Imogen while she's away from court on her journey to supposedly meet him.

Meanwhile, in Wales, Belarius (under the alias Morgan) and his adopted sons Polydor and Cadwal live in a cave. The three men discuss the merits of living in nature versus living at court. The sons are eager to roam beyond the confines of their home in the wilderness, but Belarius warns them about the treachery of life at court. As an example, he explains that two scheming men lied to Cymbeline, saying that Belarius was allied with Rome instead of Britain, and Cymbeline banished him in turn. Belarius tells the boys to go ahead and hunt, and as soon as they are gone, he reveals the truth to the audience. Belarius was the one who stole the princes in their nursery twenty years ago as a way to get back at Cymbeline for his banishment—Polydor is actually Guiderius, and Cadwal is Arviragus. Despite the brothers' rustic upbringing, Belarius fears that the princes' noble nature is starting to reveal itself.

On the road to Milford Haven, Pisanio tells Imogen the truth: Posthumus wants her dead for her alleged infidelity. Heartbroken, Imogen asks Pisanio to kill her right then and there, but Pisanio refuses. He explains that he brought her on this journey to buy time and devise a plan: she can dress up in a man's clothing and join Lucius as a servant to save her own life. Imogen agrees, and he leaves her with the medicine the Queen gave him in case she feels unwell. Back at court, Cymbeline has learned of Imogen's absence, and Pisanio shows the King the letter from Posthumus asking Imogen to meet him at Milford Haven. After Cloten learns about Imogen's location, he swears to **disguise** himself in Posthumus' clothes. He plans to kill Posthumus, rape Imogen, and return her to court to make his revenge for her rejection complete.

In the meantime, Imogen has taken up male disguise, but, having lost her way, she is overcome with hunger and exhaustion. She stumbles upon Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus in the cave, and introduces herself as a boy, Fidele. They welcome Imogen and form a close bond. Feeling unwell, Imogen says she will rest and she takes the medicine Pisanio gave her while the men go off to hunt. While the men are hunting, they encounter Cloten in Posthumus' clothes. Cloten insults the men, and Guiderius fights him, killing and beheading Cloten. Back at the cave, Arviragus discovers Fidele in a death-like trance and pronounces him dead. They lay his body next to the grave of their supposed mother, Euriphile (who was the princes' nurse). They also lay Cloten's decapitated body in

Posthumus' clothes next to Fidele. After the men sing a mourning song and leave, Imogen wakes up, believing she has found her dead husband's body beside her.

Just then, Lucius and his troops stumble upon Imogen and the body. She presents herself as Fidele, the servant of the decapitated man, and she laments his death at the hands of murderous mountaineers. Lucius admires Fidele's devotion to his seeming master, and takes Fidele into his service.

After Cloten's death, Guiderius and Arviragus convince Belarius that they should take up arms against the Romans in defense of Britain. Meanwhile, Posthumus, who has heard rumors that Imogen has been murdered, feels remorseful and longs to be killed in the war as penance. He switches his uniform to belong to the side that is losing (currently the Romans). The Britons win the battle, thanks in part to the efforts of Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus (who saved Cymbeline's life during the fighting). British captains spy Posthumus in his Roman uniform and capture him. Not recognizing his son-in-law, Cymbeline sentences Posthumus to prison to await execution.

While in the jail, Posthumus falls asleep and has a dream vision of Jupiter descending on an **eagle**. The ghosts of his father (Sicilius Leonatus), his Mother, and his Brothers appear, giving him encouragement and pleading on his behalf to Jupiter. Jupiter assures Posthumus that everything will work out for the best and leaves a tablet inscribed with a puzzling prophecy on the sleeping Posthumus' chest. When Posthumus wakes up, he is taken before Cymbeline.

Cymbeline knights the men he believes are Morgan, Polydor, and Cadwal for their bravery in battle. The doctor reports that the Queen, sick with grief over her missing son, has died. Before succumbing to a fever, she made a deathbed confession of her treachery—that she attempted to poison Pisanio and that she truthfully hated (and tried to slowly kill) the King, wanting him dead so that she and Cloten could rule. Soon after Cymbeline learns this truth, Roman soldiers—including Iachimo, Lucius, and Fidele—are brought before him. Lucius begs for Fidele's life to be spared, and he expects Fidele to beg for his life, too. Instead, Fidele only requests to know where Iachimo got the diamond ring on his finger, which originally belonged to Imogen.

Iachimo confesses the truth about his bet, and Posthumus flies into a rage. Fidele tries to calm Posthumus, but Posthumus knocks Fidele down. At that moment, Pisanio tries to help his mistress and he reveals that Fidele is actually Imogen in disguise. The couple reunites, and Imogen asks for Cymbeline's blessing of their marriage, which he freely gives. When Guiderius confesses to killing Cloten, Belarius pleads for his son's life and reveals the truth about Guiderius and Arviragus' identity. Lucius' Soothsayer deciphers the tablet that Jupiter left on the sleeping Posthumus' chest during the dream vision: it predicts a reconciliation between Posthumus and Imogen, the recovery of Cymbeline's sons, and peace and prosperity in Britain. Overjoyed, Cymbeline pardons everyone and says he will resume paying the tribute to Rome. He orders that peace be proclaimed, and everyone leaves to go to London and give thanks at Jupiter's temple.

CHARACTERS

MAJOR CHARACTERS

Cymbeline – Cymbeline is the King of Britain, who was raised in Caesar's court. With his first wife, he had three children: his daughter Imogen, and sons Arviragus and Guiderius. The young princes were stolen from the nursery, so Cymbeline has staked his kingdom's fortunes on his sole heir, Imogen. After his wife's death, he married the Queen, whose son Cloten has become Cymbeline's stepson. Cymbeline wants to unify his kingdom and strengthen his rule by marrying Imogen to Cloten, a goal that is threatened when Imogen instead marries Posthumus. Though the play is named after Cymbeline, he actually doesn't feature very heavily in the plot, except for a few key moments. As a character, he expects obedience and is quick to anger when someone defies him. He's also easy to manipulate, which the Queen does constantly: it is she who pushes him not only to punish Posthumus and Imogen, but also to wage a war of independence against Rome. Cymbeline does undergo a transformation of sorts during the play. As he eventually learns of the Queen's treachery, he gives up his grudge against Imogen and Posthumus, and also ceases his war against Rome. The transformation does not seem so much to be a factor of Cymbeline becoming smarter or wiser, but of him escaping the bad influence of the Queen.

Imogen/Fidele – Imogen is the British princess. After her brothers were abducted from the nursery as infants, Imogen became Cymbeline's sole heir. To consolidate power, he wants her to marry his stepson Cloten, but headstrong Imogen is unwilling to be an instrument of her father's political machinations. She follows her own conscience, evidenced in her marrying the suitor of her choosing: the low-born but wealthy Posthumus. Imogen prizes loyalty, and she maintains her fidelity to her husband even amidst Iachimo's trickery. While Imogen is sleeping, Iachimo steals **jewelry** (which she received from her husband) and reports details about Imogen's bedchamber and her body to Posthumus to convince him of her infidelity. Even when Posthumus orders their servant Pisanio to kill Imogen for this alleged unfaithfulness, Imogen holds fast to her sense of loyalty, asking Pisanio to follow through with the order. Luckily, Pisanio talks her out of the idea, and offers her an alternative—to dress in **disguise** as a male servant named Fidele in order to find her husband among the Roman soldiers. Through her disguise and her pursuit of her husband, Imogen demonstrates her bravery, showing that she will stop at nothing to follow her heart. She is generous and courageous, navigating

the Welsh wilderness and developing a close friendship to Belarius and his adopted sons who are (unbeknownst to them) her brothers. Despite her streak of independence, Imogen is glad to ultimately reconcile with her father and reunite with Posthumus and her brothers once all their lies and misconceptions are unraveled.

Posthumus Leonatus – Posthumus received his name because he was born after the death of his father, the fierce soldier Sicilius Leonatus. He is a Roman with wealth, but not a royal. Cymbeline raised Posthumus in his court, and Posthumus and Imogen grew up together before falling in love and secretly marrying. After Cymbeline banishes Posthumus because of the marriage, Posthumus and his friend Iachimo bet over the strength of Imogen's fidelity. Less loyal and trusting than Imogen, Posthumus is quick to take Iachimo's evidence against his wife as true, and he asks his servant to kill Imogen—a decision which he comes to regret. Posthumus himself admits to the Frenchman that in his youth, he was liable to listen more closely to others' opinions than his own, but throughout the play, Posthumus grows to trust in his own conscience—even if that comes with the price of regret. He fights bravely in the battle between the Romans and Britons, but switches his uniform according to which side is losing, since he hopes to be captured and killed as penance for ordering Imogen's death. After a dream vision of Jupiter assures him that all will be well, Posthumus is relieved to reconcile with his wife, who survived the death sentence. He promises to always be by her side.

The Queen – The nameless Queen is Cymbeline's second wife and the mother of Cloten. She is a master of manipulation who has bad intentions. These are clearly evident in her desire to learn about poison—the court doctor Cornelius even expresses his fear that the Queen's experimenting with poison by killing small animals reflects her hardness of heart. Despite her apparent wickedness, the Queen tries to conceal her evil. For instance, she tells Imogen that she will help her, but secretly tries to marry Imogen to Cloten in order to secure her own proximity to the crown. She also manipulates Cymbeline into asserting independence from Rome and tries to poison Pisanio. After Cloten's disappearance, however, the Queen goes mad with grief. She makes a deathbed confession of her crimes, including her hatred for her husband. As such, this evil character's story ends on a note of repentance.

Cloten – Cloten is the Queen's son from her first marriage, and Cymbeline's stepson. He is hotheaded, always looking to pick a fight or gamble. Though Cloten has a high opinion of himself, the Second Lord is quick to label him a smelly fool. Cloten's ferocity manifests itself politically when he urges his stepfather to fight with Rome in pursuit of an independent Britain. Cloten deeply desires to marry Imogen, but only because of her social standing and her wealth. When Imogen refuses him, Cloten becomes singularly focused on revenge. His penchant for violence and his hubris lands him in trouble with Guiderius, who fights with him after Cloten insults his honor. Guiderius defeats Cloten in hand-to-hand combat, killing and beheading him.

Iachimo – Iachimo is a Roman lord and an acquaintance of Posthumus. He is sly and tricky, traits epitomized in his wager with Posthumus over Imogen's chastity. A womanizer, Iachimo bets Posthumus that he can seduce Imogen in exchange for **gold** and a **ring**. He goes to Britain and attempts to win Imogen over with flattery, but when she refuses vehemently, Iachimo pretends he was just testing her loyalty. This illustrates how quick witted Iachimo is in pursuit of what he wants. Iachimo ultimately wins the wager through deception, having snuck into the sleeping Imogen's bedchamber and observed details about the room and her body, and then stealing the **bracelet** Posthumus gave her. Despite his successful deception, Iachimo comes to regret his actions, particularly as he returns to Britain to fight with the Romans. By the play's end, Iachimo repents of his "villainy" and reveals all of his deeds to the British royal family. Like the Queen, he regrets his wickedness, but he lives to confess to those he wronged, and he receives forgiveness from Posthumus, who lets him live on the condition that Iachimo learn to treat people better.

Pisanio – Pisanio is Posthumus' loyal servant. After Cymbeline banishes Posthumus for his secret marriage to Imogen, Pisanio (under Posthumus' orders) pledges his loyalty to Imogen and promises to serve her faithfully. The Queen and Cloten try to use him in their schemes for power, and Pisanio pretends to go along with their plots in order to protect Imogen. It is through keeping up appearances with the evil characters, then, that Pisanio remains faithful to the deserving, good characters, which demonstrates his complex sense of morality. Pisanio develops a complicated scheme to help Imogen escape the death that her husband ordered, conducting her safely to Millford Haven to avoid Cloten and telling her to disguise herself as a male servant. Pisanio's efforts show his mental acuity and the lengths to which he goes to ensure the best for his master and mistress. Indeed, he is one of the most loyal characters in the play.

Belarius/Morgan – Belarius is a nobleman and soldier. Twenty years prior to the play's action, Cymbeline banished Belarius because of court gossip alleging Belarius' ties to Rome. In retaliation, Belarius kidnapped Cymbeline's sons Guiderius and Arviragus as infants, and has raised them under aliases in a Welsh cave. Going by the name Morgan, Belarius prizes the natural landscape and his simple life. He feels conflicted about that his adopted sons' nobility is beginning to show in their behavior; he doesn't think that their royal nature can be concealed, even in spite of their upbringing in the countryside. Even though he felt the sting of the King's banishment, Belarius works alongside Arviragus and Guiderius to save Cymbeline from Roman captivity during the battle, and they inspire the other British soldiers with their courage. After the battle, when

the King plans to execute Guiderius for killing Cloten, Belarius is willing to give up his own life to save his son's. He reveals the whole truth to Cymbeline in the hopes that he will spare Guiderius once he realizes Guiderius is his son. Thus, Belarius shows that he values telling the truth and the safety of his adoptive sons over his own life, ennobling a character with a checkered past. Cymbeline rewards Belarius with a pardon.

Guiderius/Polydor – One of Cymbeline's sons, stolen by Belarius from the nursery as a baby. Belarius raised Guiderius with the Welsh pseudonym "Polydor." Like his brother Arviragus, Guiderius is hearty and inherently noble. The two yearn to make contact with the wider world after growing up in the remote countryside of Wales. Belarius worries that Guiderius' will to fight and his desire for fame will reveal him for the royal that he is. Guiderius fights for honor, and does not stand Cloten's insults, killing and beheading Cloten to preserve his own reputation. Guiderius is a fierce warrior, and he helps save Cymbeline's life during the battle with the Romans. He freely admits to killing Cloten, not shying away from admitting to a crime committed for the sake of honor. Belarius' confession that Guiderius is the King's kidnapped son saves Guiderius from execution.

Arviragus/Cadwal – Cymbeline's other son, whom Belarius raised under the name of Cadwal. Like Guiderius, Arviragus is also a fierce fighter and he is eager to take up arms in the war with the Romans so that he can gain fame and glory. However, he is not entirely aggressive: Arviragus shows tenderness towards Imogen, who comes to the brothers disguised as a man named Fidele.

Caius Lucius – Most often referred to as Lucius throughout the play, he is the Roman ambassador to Britain who prizes honor and truth. Lucius is good friends with Cymbeline, and he is reluctant to start a war, lamenting the fact that he must inform the Emperor of Cymbeline's decision not to pay the tribute owed to Rome. He is kind-hearted, and he takes up Fidele as a servant in battle, even negotiating for Fidele's life after the Romans are defeated. Lucius has a symbolic dimension, since he's welcome at court and is long-term friends with Cymbeline, so he underscores the closeness between Rome and Britain. The play's conclusion suggests that a friendly relationship between Rome and Britain is preferable, and Lucius' honor and kindness, as well as his close ties to Britain, embody this point.

Cornelius – Cornelius is a doctor at Cymbeline's court. He has instructed the Queen in medicine and the healing properties of herbs. When she asks him for poison, he pretends to give it to her, but he reveals to the audience that his concoction isn't lethal—instead, it's a strong sleeping potion. He does not trust the Queen, and even though he uses deception, he does so for a good reason: to prevent the Queen's murderous tendencies. He is an upright physician who tries to prevent harm.

Philario – Philario is Posthumus' host in Rome and a friend of Posthumus' family, since he was a soldier with Posthumus' father, Sicilius Leonatus. Philario tries to make Posthumus feel welcome in his new home in exile, and doesn't expect any payment in return. He introduces Posthumus to his friend Iachimo, which turns disastrous when Iachimo goads Posthumus into making a wager over Imogen's chastity. While being friends with Iachimo doesn't reflect well on Philario, Philario does consistently discourage the bet, encouraging Posthumus to trust Imogen.

Jupiter – The king of the gods. Characters often pray to the gods throughout the play for protection and favor. Descending on an **eagle** and in a cloud of thunder, Jupiter visits Posthumus in a dream and assures him that everything will work out for the best, even leaving a tablet with a prophecy inscribed on it on the sleeping Posthumus' chest. Jupiter claims to favor Posthumus, and much of Posthumus' misfortune can be attributed to Jupiter's desire to make his favorite people suffer so that they will appreciate his favor even more when it comes.

Soothsayer (Philarmonus) –The Soothsayer Philarmonus is employed by Lucius to interpret signs from the gods. Before the battle, he has a vision of a Roman **eagle**, which signifies victory in the upcoming British invasion. He clarifies later, though, that he saw an eagle vanish in the sun's rays, which foretold the reconciliation between the Britons and the Romans. He also interprets the confusing prophecy which Jupiter leaves on the sleeping Posthumus' chest, reading it as a prediction that Posthumus and Imogen will reunite, the princes will return to Cymbeline, and that Britain will enjoy "peace and plenty."

The First Lord – One of the two Lords who attend Cloten and give crucial information about his character. The First Lord generally accepts what Cloten says, supports him, and obeys his orders. He echoes Cloten's remarks about Imogen and agrees with the ways Cloten claims he's been mistreated or misunderstood. The First Lord comes off as a sycophant.

The Second Lord – One of the two Lords who attend Cloten and give crucial information about his character. Unlike the First Lord, the Second Lord seems not to respect Cloten, making many snide remarks to the audience about Cloten and disputing Cloten's interpretations of events. This lord supports Imogen's decision not to marry Cloten and he comments on Cloten's foul odor and foolishness. However, he pretends to be a dutiful attendant to Cloten's face.

British Captains – In the battle, the British Captains establish that Lucius was taken captive, and they remark on the valor of Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus as fighters. They discover Posthumus in his Roman uniform and take him as a prisoner to Cymbeline, who does not recognize his son-in-law and sends him to jail.

Jailers – The Jailers imprison Posthumus, who was found in a Roman uniform after the battle and condemned for opposing the British. The First Jailer has a philosophical discussion with

Posthumus about death being an escape from the pain of the world. He marvels at the repentant Posthumus' willingness to die, wishing that the world were a peaceful place, even though that would put him out of a job.

Ghost of Sicilius Leonatus – Father of Posthumus. Sicilius Leonatus had an honorable reputation. He fought with Cassibelan (Cymbeline's uncle) against the Romans and gained the name "Leonatus"—meaning "lion-like"—for his valor in battle. Besides Posthumus, he had two other sons who died in battle. Sicilius Leonatus' war buddy Philario remembers him so fondly that he takes in the banished Posthumus as a way to honor Sicilius' memory. In Posthumus' dream vision, the Ghost of Siciulius Leonatus visits him, saying that Posthumus is a worthy heir, but chiding him for the wager with Iachimo. He pleads with Jupiter to be kind to Posthumus.

MINOR CHARACTERS

The Frenchman – The Frenchman is an acquaintance of Posthumus from their soldiering days in Orleans. He describes Posthumus' past, and says that the two fought over the merits of their respective countrywomen. He encounters Posthumus in Rome at Philario's house.

Gentlemen – The First and Second Gentlemen are members of Cymbeline's court. At the very beginning of the play, they introduce the strife in Cymbeline's family, caused by Imogen's secret marriage to Posthumus.

Roman Senators – The two Roman Senators establish the configuration of troops for the British invasion. They explain that, in addition to forces fighting in Gallia, soldiers will need to be recruited from among the Roman gentry for the upcoming war.

Roman Tribunes – The Tribunes (Roman officials elected by the plebeians, or lower social class) discuss the invasion with the Senators and receive a commission for the battle.

Ghost of Posthumus' Mother – The Ghost of Posthumus' mother visits him in the dream vision. She explains that she died while giving birth to Posthumus and begs Jupiter to relieve Posthumus of his misery.

Ghosts of the Brothers of Posthumus – The Ghosts of Posthumus' brothers also visit Posthumus in his dream vision. They explain how they died in battle and remained loyal to their country, and they say that Posthumus has been largely loyal to Cymbeline. For this, they ask Jupiter to restore Posthumus to favor.

Roman Captain – The Roman Captain keeps Lucius up to date about the latest military developments from Rome. He ensures that Fidele—swooning after finding Cloten's body—is, indeed, alive, which prompts Lucius to take Fidele on as a servant.

THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.

MORALITY AND LOYALTY

Cymbeline is a moral play that prizes good intentions and punishes cruelty: the evil Queen fails in her plots and then dies, while the loyal and moral princess is allowed to marry her true love. However, despite the play's resounding moral message, Shakespeare complicates traditional notions of morality and loyalty by showing that the value of both traits lies in intention alone: sometimes loyalty is immoral, while sometimes deception—when used with proper intentions—is necessary and good.

In *Cymbeline*, the nameless Queen is the embodiment of evil. She lies, schemes, and even attempts murder. The Queen's major deception is feigned loyalty: she attempts to uplift her blundering son Cloten by pretending to be loyal to many characters, including Cymbeline, Imogen, Posthumus, and Pisanio. For example, the Queen wants Imogen to marry Cloten, but she tries to manipulate Imogen by pretending to support Imogen's marriage to Posthumus. It makes sense that the Queen is so cynical about marriage: her own marriage to Cymbeline is, in itself, a deception—she never loved the King, she only wanted Cloten to be in line to succeed him.

Though the Queen does show tremendous loyalty to her son, Shakespeare presents this loyalty as morally wrong, since it comes at the expense of the loyalty that the Queen is expected to show to her husband, stepdaughter, and kingdom. By contrast, Imogen and Pisanio (Posthumus's servant) are unwaveringly loyal to Posthumus, which Shakespeare presents as appropriate loyalty. Indeed, a wife's devotion to her husband and a servant's devotion to his master were, according to the cultural norms of Shakespeare's day, expected and proper, which makes Imogen and Pisanio the most moral characters of the play. Their morality is particularly notable since their loyalty is thoroughly tested by the deceptions of other characters and neither shows any disloyalty in response.

While the Queen is the play's embodiment of immorality and Pisanio and Imogen are the moral center, it's notable that almost all of the characters—including the moral ones—engage in deception. This suggests that deception, like loyalty, is neither categorically good nor bad. Instead, the value of deception lies in its intention. Pisanio, for example, lies to Posthumus that Imogen is dead in order to make Posthumus remember his love for her. Importantly, Pisanio's deception is in

service of bringing a marriage back together. By contrast, Posthumus's friend Iachimo deceives Imogen and Posthumus to win a bet with Posthumous over whether Imogen would be a faithful wife. Iachimo's deception is purely evil in intent: it does nothing but make the couple suffer.

In addition to suggesting that even good people must sometimes deceive, the play's outcome suggests that good deception will always win over bad deception. Iachimo's trick is ultimately revealed, while Pisanio's ruse succeeds in bringing the lovers back together. Even the Queen's crafty, evil deceptions are overcome by better intentioned lies. For example, she attempts to poison Pisanio (thereby lessening Posthumus's influence over Imogen), but the doctor preparing the poison, who doesn't trust her intentions, thwarts her plan by substitution a sleeping potion. In one sense, then, *Cymbeline* is a morally rigid play—since good always wins over evil—but the play is also a morally complex portrait of loyalty and deception. Sometimes, Shakespeare suggests, a person must deceive others in order to show true loyalty.

GENDER ROLES

Cymbeline demonstrates an awareness that gender roles constrict the options of male and female characters alike. Ancient Rome—and, by extension, Roman Britain—was a patriarchal society. Men had absolute authority over their female family members, even holding over them the power of life and death. In Shakespeare's time, men still dominated the most powerful positions in society, and they were taught to be warlike, decisive, and bold. Women, on the other hand, were expected to be modest, chaste, and obedient, lacking in agency and self-determination. Shakespeare acknowledges these pervasive gender roles, but also challenges them by showing women subverting socially prescribed behavioral standards, as well as men falling short of masculine ideals.

The play's male characters scold, manipulate, and malign women, typically cruelly and without sufficient reason. Cymbeline expects his wife and daughter to be obedient to him. He scolds the Queen for going against his orders by allowing Imogen and the banished Posthumus to meet up, and he is angry with Imogen for choosing her own husband. As the Queen and Imogen face the King's displeasure, Imogen compares her father's authority to a harsh north wind—"the tyrannous breathing of the north." Though Posthumus doesn't wield the same power over women (due to his inferior position to the King), he is quick to blame women for all human faults, explaining that "there's no motion/ That tends to vice in man but I affirm/ It is the woman's part." For his part, Cloten is eager to fight, but he blames his mother's role as queen for discouraging his fighting partners—no one wants to fight the son of a royal. Women, then, are a convenient scapegoat for a broader problem in Cloten's life. For Iachimo, women are pawns to be won—he asserts that he could seduce any woman in the world, including Imogen. Women, then, are interchangeable to Iachimo, and he thinks that they are universally susceptible to sexual temptation, alleging that "If you buy ladies' flesh at a million a dram, you cannot preserve it from tainting."

Taken all together, the male characters' perspectives on women demean their agency. Cymbeline hopes for a submissive wife and daughter; Posthumus expects loyalty from women; Cloten is frustrated by the ways he thinks women interfere with his desires; and Iachimo finds women to be instruments in his tricks. In spite of all this, it's remarkable how much agency the Queen and Imogen manage to attain—and how they go against the stereotypical roles that society dictates for them.

The Queen's behind-the-scenes manipulation—from the way she deceives Imogen to her insistence that her husband rebel against Rome—shows that she is anything but a meek, modest, obedient wife. She uses her son as a means to obtain power, and maneuvers within a system whose odds are stacked against her. Further, Imogen's punishment at the beginning of the play for making her own choice in marriage shows that she isn't confined to the role of faithful daughter. Though the scene in the bed chamber where Iachimo violates the sleeping Imogen's privacy shows how a man can prey on a vulnerable woman, Imogen is unafraid to speak her mind and take action to repair a situation that others might find hopeless. She openly rejects Cloten, **disguises** herself as a man to save her life, and tracks down her husband, all of which challenge the sorts of behavior expected of women of her time.

While Shakespeare pushes the boundaries of gender roles for women, he also asks the question of what it means to be a man. Traditional masculine values are upheld throughout a good portion of the play, yet the male characters often fall short of these ideals. When bidding farewell to Imogen, Posthumus chides himself for being on the brink of tears, claiming that crying will make him unmanly. Cloten stakes his manly honor on his ability to fight, obtain power, and secure Imogen's hand in marriage—but he fails in each task. A repentant Iachimo exclaims that after slandering Imogen's reputation, he feels a guilt which "takes off my manhood." None of these men can, according to his own standard, be considered properly masculine. Further, it can be argued that each man fails *because* of masculine gender standards: Cloten is awful because he seeks the wealth and power that will make him seem a true man, Posthumus falls for Iachimo's tricks because he is so paranoid about Imogen's fidelity, and Iachimo pulls his tricks in order to seem more successful at seducing women than he is. So the play not only shows the men as failing to live up to impossible standards of manliness, but seems to suggest that the standards themselves are problematic and destructive.

It's notable, too, that these men seem to strive above all for strength and honor, though it is the women who most exemplify

these traits. The Queen, for example, is quite powerful in the kingdom and her manipulations (both successful and unsuccessful) show that she understands her strength. Imogen—who is faithful and brave—is the play's most honorable character, despite Shakespeare painting honor as a "male" virtue and Posthumus' rant about how women are the source of all vice. In fact, when Imogen masquerades as Fidele, Lucius applauds her for her manly virtue, claiming that Fidele has demonstrated loyalty that should teach the Roman troops their "manly duties." Perhaps, then, since a woman in men's clothes can obtain masculine ideals, Shakespeare questions the notion of gender roles entirely. As the women characters chafe against society's restrictions and defy the stereotypical roles available to them, and the men fall away from and scramble back towards masculine ideals, *Cymbeline* complicates the audience's understanding of the expectations for "feminine" and "masculine" behavior.

IMPERIALISM VS. INDEPENDENCE

At the beginning of the play, Britain owes Rome a tribute (money due to the Emperor to maintain peace). However, trouble is brewing—Posthumus notes that the Britons have a rebellious spirit, and they are better organized as fighters than when they first promised the annual tribute to Julius Caesar years before. Urged by the Queen and Cloten, Cymbeline announces to Augustus' ambassador Lucius that he will refuse to pay the tribute. In response, Roman troops gather and prepare to invade Britain. Through this conflict over the tribute, Shakespeare offers up the play's central political question: is it better to maintain peace by remaining a part of an empire, or is it better to assert independence, even if that means war?

The Queen and Cloten agitate for an independent Britain. They cite the isolating natural geography of the British Isles, as well as the nation's valorous history, as reasons to become an independent state. After the Queen mentions Cymbeline's forebears—his uncle Cassibelan and his forebear Mumultius, the first British king—Cymbeline begins to reflect on his legacy, prompting him to support British independence. As a result, the Roman troops invade, bringing war. However, even after the Britons triumph in battle, Cymbeline relents and agrees to pay Augustus the tribute money. Any burgeoning nationalism—inspired by the Queen and Cloten's pleas for independence—is quashed by the play's end. Those who once pled for independence are killed, and Cymbeline reconciles with Rome. Shakespeare has plenty of plays which glorify English patriotism (like *Henry V*), but the patriotism in *Cymbeline* is more complicated, since the evil characters are the ones who are most loyal to an independent Britain.

Shakespeare, in fact, seems committed to illustrating how Britain and Rome enjoy a level of mutual dependence, which implies that British independence is not the country's natural state. Cymbeline himself was raised in Caesar's court, and the Empire made possible the union between the Roman Posthumus and the British-born Imogen. Indeed, Posthumus himself embodies the complex relationship between Britain and Rome. During the battle, Posthumus exchanges the uniform of the Roman legion for that of a British peasant and then changes back to a Roman uniform again. The way Posthumus swaps war uniforms demonstrates that his allegiances are tied to both the Roman Empire and the British Isles.

To add historical context to the play's conclusion, it's worth remembering that, according to Shakespeare's source material, peace defined the historical Cymbeline's rule and his ties to the Roman Empire were strong. Shakespeare dramatizes an imagined conflict between the Britons and the Romans, but relies on the historical evidence that Britain remained a part of the Roman Empire during and after Cymbeline's reign. Shakespeare's contemporary circumstances reflect back on the play's culmination in imperial peace. In 1607, English colonists established first permanent settlement in the Americas at Jamestown, Virginia. *Cymbeline* premiered onstage just four years later. Throughout the course of the seventeenth century and beyond, the British Empire would expand across the world. With *Cymebline*'s pro-Roman conclusion, Shakespeare appears to align his play with an imperialist, rather than a nationalist, agenda. With the hindsight of history, readers of the play today can see how the British Empire left a complex, problematic, and fraught legacy, one which was only just beginning as a venture in Shakespeare's day.

FORGIVENESS AND RECONCILIATION

Throughout *Cymbeline*, characters make bold decisions that are not easily undone or forgiven, such as Cymbeline's banishment of his son-in-law, his punishment of his daughter, and his refusal to pay tribute to Rome. Despite many characters' seemingly irrevocable actions, moments of forgiveness and reconciliation guide the play to its happy conclusion. Identified alternately as tragicomedy or romance, *Cymbeline* operates within these genres' demands. Tragicomedies and romances tends towards the comic, and end in moments of regeneration or rebirth. Not unlike the "problem plays" *All's Well That Ends Well*, *Measure for Measure*, or *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* contains moments of violence and hopelessness, but ends in repair. Through this artistic choice, Shakespeare makes a bold claim that when all is lost, reconciliation proves to be, quite literally, the only way forward.

Shakespeare portrays so many irrevocable and unforgivable actions that it seems impossible that *Cymbeline* won't end in utter despair. Posthumus, for example, takes a bet that will end in violence regardless of the outcome: he promises to fight Iachimo if Iachimo fails to seduce Imogen, yet, if Iachimo succeeds in seducing Imogen, Posthumus will punish her.

Furthermore, when Posthumus takes Iachimo's "proof" of Imogen's infidelity as true, he calls for Imogen's death, which appears to be an irrevocable choice.

However, even after acts that seem final and unpardonable, the characters manage to overcome the choices they've made and move towards repairing the breach. Through tragic personal moments—such as the loss of a loved one's life, impending death, or a loss in status—characters experience a despair that leads them to repent and forgive. For example, once Posthumus believes that Imogen has been killed at his request, he regrets his brash punishment, even to the point that he yearns for death in battle. Even the Queen—the play's most evil character—ultimately repents and confesses her treacheries once she is mad from despair at the loss of her son. Furthermore, after Cymbeline nearly loses his royal status and kingdom, he regains a sense of gratitude and adopts a position of forgiveness when all is recovered—he resumes the tribute payments to Rome and pardons several characters who have crossed him. Personal losses, therefore, open the characters up to reconciliation of broken relationships, both interpersonal and political, and those who have been wronged (Rome, Imogen, etc.) are generous with forgiveness and love.

When considering the leaps the characters take in their journeys from revenge to reconciliation, it's important to recall the role of source material, both historical and fictional, in this play. Shakespeare's sources document a real King Cymbeline, who did keep peace with Rome, which shows that the play's resolution is historically determined. What's more, Cymebline's sons Guiderius and Arviragus (who were stolen from their nursery in the play and then returned as adults by play's end) survived him as heirs in real life, again showing the play's happy ending to be historically accurate. As for the fictional characters of Posthumus and Iachimo, Shakespeare lifts their storyline from a tale in Bocaccio's *Decameron*, which ends in the reconciliation of two friends after their wager over women's chastity. Thus, Shakespeare's fictional and historical sources account, in part, for the play's happy ending. By using extreme examples of actions that seem irrevocable—and tempering these into moments of forgiveness through the vehicle of loss or impending loss—Shakespeare dazzles the audience with highs and lows before giving the soothing reconciliation that the audience (based on history and Bocaccio) might expect.

THE GODS AND FATE

Ancient civilizations like Rome interpreted life's events, both big and small, as the will of the gods. From household gods called *lares* (who looked over quotidian matters) to the Olympian deities (who determined the course of history), the Romans believed that the gods directed all aspects of human life. In Shakespeare's time—when medicine was not advanced and government was dominated by the powerful few—life's chances and mischances, from birth to death, rested in the Judeo-Christian God's hands. Within the religious framework of Shakespeare's day, unrepentant sinners could expect to go to Hell, whereas the good would enjoy their afterlives in Heaven. With this perspective, it's easy to see how the gods play a central role in *Cymbeline*, mirroring their primacy in ancient as well as Elizabethan cultures, and providing a moral center to human life.

In the play, the characters who are pious and good—or at the least, misguided but repentant—are rewarded, and those who are evil and unrepentant are punished. Pious Imogen embodies goodness and loyalty, qualities which the gods reward by sustaining her through her journey to find Posthumus, despite the difficulties she encounters. Evil characters like Cloten, by contrast, meet brutal, unpleasant deaths. The fate of Posthumus, who is generally good but who errs grievously by mistrusting Imogen, shows the complexity of divine intervention. After doubting Imogen, ordering her death, and believing he has gotten her killed, Posthumus is deeply remorseful and he places his trust in divine will, particularly after his reassuring dream of his deceased family and the god Jupiter. Jupite reminds the ghosts of Posthumus' family that "whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,/ The more delay'd, delighted." Thus, Posthumus' misfortunes may have been as much a result of his poor morals as they were the gods toying with him, making him suffer so he would one day more fully appreciate their favor. In *Cymbeline*, then, the gods are ultimately in charge of human actions—even bad decisions—but those who are generally good tend to enjoy more benevolent fates.

Jupiter's reminder to Posthumus that the deities retain ultimate power over human lives echoes throughout the play, as a chaotic group of mistakes, deceptions, and betrayals come together to an elegant conclusion. For instance, Pisanio betrays his master's orders by sparing Imogen because he believes it is the right thing to do. Further, he gives Imogen what he believes to be the Queen's restorative medicine, which the Queen believes to be poison. In fact, the doctor Cornelius has given her a sleeping drug because he doesn't trust her. All of this mischance and human error can be dizzying to the audience or reader, but it's worth keeping in mind Jupiter's maxim about the gods "crossing," or throwing obstacles into, the paths of humans whom they best love. Imogen survives the medicine, which shows that she was protected all along. What seem like the complicated machinations of human free will are complications thrown in by the likes of Jupiter, according to a divine plan to benefit the worthy.

What applies to individual humans also applies to entire groups of people. For example, the Soothsayer—who is in touch with the gods—predicts victory for the Romans as a group. The Romans don't win in battle, but they do ultimately win a tribute. It may be tempting to interpret the loss of the battle as a decisive blow, but this, too, is one of Jupiter's "crosses." The

greater reward is the tribute money and the continued assurance of a cohesive Roman Empire. It's worth remembering that Jupiter was the chief *Roman* god—his support will be with the Roman people. Despite their defeat at the hands of the Britons, Jupiter's beloved Romans find that everything goes their way according to a divine plan. Once again, though human action seems contradictory to the gods' will, everything eventually works out the way the gods desire. The gods reward prayer and repentance, punish evil, and bestow favors on their preferred groups, mirroring ancient Roman and Elizabethan theological standards.

NOBILITY

Over the course of Shakespeare's lifetime, questions abounded in England over the definition of nobility and the legitimacy of monarchical power. With the rise of the middle class, common people began to own land and goods, including garments which would have been unattainable in feudal times. In response, sumptuary laws enacted in Shakespeare's day tried to delineate between who was noble and who was not—for instance, by limiting silks to the nobility and relegating wool to the poorer masses. Similarly, Kings James I and Charles I, who found their power under threat, propped up the monarchy by clinging to the theory of the divine right of kings, the idea that monarchs represent God on earth. As a playwright living at a time when social order was changing rapidly, Shakespeare used *Cymbeline* to ask questions about the nature of nobility, ultimately proposing that a noble title alone doesn't guarantee noble behavior, but that nobility is most innate in those who are noble by blood.

In discussing nobility, it's important to recognize the duality of the term in the context of *Cymbeline*. "Noble" can describe both a person with a high social rank and the innate quality of being honorable or virtuous. Shakespeare subverts expectations of nobility by showing that Cloten and the Queen—two characters with high social rank—behave dishonorably. Cloten constantly picks fights, insults Imogen, and plots harm to her and Posthumus. Similarly, the Queen manipulates Imogen and plans to poison Pisanio and Cymbeline, whom she loathes, in order to gain power. Though the Queen and Cloten's duplicitous, dishonorable behavior contrasts with their honorable position at court, it's worth noting that these characters have status largely through the Queen's marriage to Cymbeline. Their nobility—in the sense of status—is therefore somewhat tenuous, which may account for their bad behavior.

In contrast to Cloten and the Queen, some of the characters without noble or royal status nevertheless show inherent nobility, in the sense of good and brave behavior. For example, Posthumus grew up in Cymbeline's care but does not, by blood, have royal or noble status. Even though he may not have been born a noble, he is valiant in battle, and repentant when he realizes he has done wrong. Pisanio, as a servant, is even lower down on the social scale, but his relentless fidelity shows him to have good character. Both Posthumus and Pisanio, though "base," are more noble than Cloten in terms of virtue and honor.

While Posthumus and Pisanio are generally good, Imogen—who has royal blood—is the play's most noble character. She retains her dignity and integrity in the face of her father's anger, she is unimpressed by Cloten's maneuvering (despite his status), and she is entirely loyal to her husband, even under the threat of death. Likewise, Guiderius and Arviragus (Imogen's brothers who were raised under pseudonyms in the Welsh wilderness) are unwaveringly noble, even though they have no idea that they have royal blood. Belarius notes time and again that the brothers' noble qualities cannot be hidden. They are eager to defend their honor, valiant in battle, and good to a fault.

Thus, Imogen and her brothers—the three blood heirs to the British King—are shown to be unwaveringly noble, even though the brothers were raised outside of the influence of the court. Further suggesting that blood plays a part in nobility, Posthumus—who *was* raised by the British King—shows less loyalty and nobility than Imogen and her brothers, though more nobility than many other characters. In this way, Shakespeare seems to favor the divine right of kings, suggesting that nobility flows from the throne to those with royal blood, and next to those who are associated closely with the crown. It's impossible to know Shakespeare's personal perspective on the subject of nobility, but his take on nobility in *Cymbeline* reflects the play's general trend towards monarchical—and, ultimately imperial, order.

SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.

GOLD AND JEWELRY

Gold and jewelry have a double meaning in *Cymbeline*, representing virtue or corruption depending on how they're used. At the beginning of the play, before Posthumus goes into exile, he and Imogen exchange a bracelet and a ring as a pledge of fidelity. Posthumus says that he holds the ring "as dear as [his] finger," and Imogen treasures her bracelet. In this context, gold and jewelry symbolize virtue, loyalty, and love. However, this is a well-intentioned exchange of jewelry; later on, as characters seek gold or jewelry through force or trickery, gold and jewelry take on the meaning of corruption and greed. For example, Iachimo uses deception to win Posthumus' ring in his bet over Imogen's chastity. Further, Iachimo tries to convince Imogen that Posthumus is using her gold to pay for prostitutes while in exile. He even steals the bracelet Posthumus gave Imogen in order to "prove" her infidelity. Likewise, Cloten uses the language of gold to convey

his lust for power, claiming that when he wins Imogen (whom he desires for her status and wealth) he will "have gold enough." Though Imogen and Posthumus' exchange of jewelry is virtuous, when Imogen tries to give Guiderius and Arviragus gold as an honest payment for food, the brothers reject the gold, since they understand that gold corrupts. Arviragus says that "All gold and silver rather turn to dirt!/ As 'tis no better reckon'd, but of those/ Who worship dirty gods." Shakespeare therefore suggests that, while gold and jewelry *can* embody virtue, they also have corrupting potential and are perhaps best avoided altogether.

EAGLES

Since eagles are associated with Jupiter (the king of the Roman gods), Shakespeare frequently uses eagles to symbolize honor, victory, and the Roman Empire. In one of the more famous quotes from the play, Imogen explains that when she picked Posthumus for a husband over Cloten, she "chose an eagle/ And did avoid a puttock" (a predatory bird, whose nature is not unlike Cloten's). Imogen's deliberate use of the eagle to stand in for Posthumus reinforces her husband's nobility and the comparison also emphasizes that Posthumus, like an eagle, is associated with Rome, which is his place of origin. Furthermore, after having a vision of "Jove's bird," the Soothsayer predicts Roman victory, which foreshadows the play's ultimate outcome. The Soothsayer's vision of the eagle also affirms the fate of the play's nobler characters, who find peace and restoration by the play's end. Using an eagle to symbolize the restoration of honor and peace is particularly notable when Jupiter descends on an eagle in Posthumus' dream vision, assuring Posthumus that he will have a second chance at life. Thus, an eagle is associated with nobility and Rome, and the actual sight of an eagle suggests the restoration of harmony and virtue after troubling times.

DISGUISE

Throughout *Cymbeline*, disguises reveal a character's true personality, showing that a person's everyday appearance might not reflect the reality of who they are. In Cloten's case, disguising himself as Posthumus reveals his duplicity. Though he has pretended to court Imogen with sincerity, he dresses as her husband in order to rape her and kill Posthumus. It is through that disguise, therefore, that Cloten's violent, power-hungry, and deceitful nature reveals itself most fully. Disguises can also reveal a character's good traits, as when Imogen disguises herself as a male servant named Fidele in order to search for her husband at Milford Haven. Through living as Fidele, she proves her tenacity, courage, and independence. Posthumus, too, disguises himself as a British peasant in the battle between the Romans and the Britons. Cymbeline praises the disguised Posthumus for his valor in fighting, which demonstrates Posthumus' truly honorable qualities. Though characters in Cymbeline use disguises to obscure their true identity, the behavior they exhibit while in disguise reveals each of them for who they truly are.

QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Simon & Schuster edition of *Cymbeline* published in 2003.

Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

His daughter, and the heir of's kingdom, whom
He purposed to his wife's sole son—a widow
That late he married—hath referr'd herself
Unto a poor but worthy gentleman: she's wedded;
Her husband banish'd; she imprison'd: all
Is outward sorrow; though I think the king
Be touch'd at very heart.

Related Characters: Gentlemen (speaker), Imogen/Fidele , Cymbeline

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.1.5-11

Explanation and Analysis

At the very beginning of the play, two gentlemen discuss *Cymbeline*'s central personal and political conflicts. The British King's daughter, Imogen—his sole heir—has secretly married a low-born but worthy Roman gentleman, Posthumus, instead of her father's first choice, Cloten.

Here, the First Gentleman introduces a few of the play's key themes. First, he shows how shaky Cymbeline's power is: his legacy is insecure since he has no male children to succeed him (or so he thinks). This results in his desire to consolidate political power, both through his daughter's marriage and, later, by going to war with Rome. Second, this moment raises the persistent question of where Imogen's loyalty lies: with her father's wishes, or her own heart? Other characters (like Pisanio and Cornelius) will face similar choices between staying true to the orders of their superiors or staying true to their own consciences. Third and last, the First Gentleman gives an interesting hint about Cymbeline's personality, saying that the King is greatly troubled and emotionally affected by Imogen's marriage. In the first half of the play, Cymbeline acts with anger, issuing dire commands and using harsh language. However, the First Gentleman implies the King has a softer side, which

will develop as the play goes on. With each loss he suffers, Cymbeline behaves with greater temperance and sensitivity, leading him to forgive all by the play's end.

No, be assured you shall not find me, daughter,
After the slander of most stepmothers,
Evil-eyed unto you: you're my prisoner, but
Your gaoler shall deliver you the keys
That lock up your restraint.

Related Characters: The Queen (speaker), Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:  

Page Number: 1.1.82-86

Explanation and Analysis

After Cymbeline orders Imogen's imprisonment and Posthumus' banishment, the Queen makes a promise to treat Imogen kindly. Those familiar with the fairy tale *Cinderella* recognize the "evil stepmother" trope: a wicked second wife mistreating her husband's daughter, looking out instead for her own biological children. However, the Queen's evil stretches beyond mistreating Imogen. The Queen covets the crown, which Imogen will someday inherit. So, she hopes to isolate Imogen and she plots against Imogen's ally, Posthumus' servant Pisanio. This quote's significance rests in the way the Queen lies—brazenly, and to the faces of those she intends to harm. She repeats this manipulative tactic with Pisanio, offering him a supposed restorative medicine that she thinks is poison.

The Queen wears one face to the world and another to herself, which she reveals through asides to the audience that display the depth of her depravity. Beyond establishing the Queen's method of manipulation, the quote shows how the Queen angles for power. As the King's consort and a woman in the ancient world, the Queen doesn't have much political capital. However, she manipulates outward feminine sweetness in order to obtain the power she craves.

IMOGEN
...This diamond was my mother's: take it, heart;
But keep it till you woo another wife,
When Imogen is dead.

POSTHUMUS
How, how! another?
You gentle gods, give me but this I have,
And sear up my embracements from a next
With bonds of death!
...for my sake wear this;
It is a manacle of love; I'll place it
Upon this fairest prisoner.

Related Characters: Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen/Fidele (speaker)

Related Themes:  

Related Symbols: 

Page Number: 1.1.132-145

Explanation and Analysis

Before leaving for his exile in Italy, Posthumus and Imogen exchange tokens of their love: she gives him a ring that once belonged to her mother (the only time Imogen's mother is mentioned in the play), and he gives her a bracelet in turn. The ring and the bracelet—whose circular forms represent completeness, unity, and continuity—make concrete Imogen and Posthumus' love for one another. They are physical tokens of their love: the ring (not unlike a wedding band) symbolizes marriage, and the bracelet (which Posthumus likens to a handcuff) also symbolizes commitment. These objects will serve as the reminders for the couple not to cheat on one another during their separation.

While these items symbolize love, Imogen and Posthumus hint at more sinister meanings—Imogen hints at her eventual death, and Posthumus likens his bracelet to imprisoning chains. These lines, then, foreshadow some of the trials that the couple will undergo throughout the play. After Posthumus wagers Imogen's ring for her chastity in the bet with Iachimo, he will order her death as punishment for her supposed infidelity. Further, Posthumus is imprisoned after the battle between Rome and Britain. Thus, the ring and the bracelet gesture to the couple's eventual happy future together, but also to the specificities of the trials they will face beforehand.

Act 1, Scene 3 Quotes

I did not take my leave of him, but had
Most pretty things to say: ere I could tell him
How I would think on him at certain hours
Such thoughts and such, o I could make him swear
The shes of Italy should not betray
Mine interest and his honour…

Related Characters: Imogen/Fidele (speaker), Posthumus Leonatus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.3.31-36

Explanation and Analysis

Once Posthumus has set sail for Rome, Imogen asks the couple's servant, Pisanio, about her husband's departure. Pisanio describes how Posthumus clung to his handkerchief and watched the British shore disappear, calling out for Imogen. This prompts Imogen to worry about their rushed farewell, and doubts creep into her mind about his fidelity.

Here, Imogen falls prey to the power of imagination, and particularly its power to evoke emotions of sexual jealousy and fear. Shakespeare explores this theme in other works—including *Othello* and *The Winter's Tale*—and he certainly investigates it in the context of Imogen and Posthumus' storyline. Though the couple seems mutually devoted when they're together, when removed from one another's physical presence, both Imogen and Posthumus undergo moments of worry and uncertainty regarding the other's fidelity.

Generalizations about female sexuality—the woman as temptress, in this case, or female frailty and disloyalty (charges which Posthumus will later level at Imogen)—are a site of anxiety over loyalty in the play. Ironically, "the shes of Italy" will not "betray" Imogen, but rather an Italian *gentleman*, Iachimo, who makes a bet with Posthumus that threatens to tear the couple apart.

Act 1, Scene 4 Quotes

POSTHUMUS
What lady would you choose to assail?

IACHIMO
Yours; whom in constancy you think stands so safe.
I will lay you ten thousand ducats to your ring,
that, commend me to the court where your lady is,
with no more advantage than the opportunity of a
second conference, and I will bring from thence
that honour of hers which you imagine so reserved.

Related Characters: Iachimo, Posthumus Leonatus (speaker), Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 1.4.122-128

Explanation and Analysis

While staying at Philario's house in Rome, Posthumus meets Iachimo—an Italian nobleman who thinks himself quite the ladies' man. After a series of escalating jabs about Imogen, Iachimo bets money against Posthumus' diamond ring (which Imogen gave him) that he'd be able to seduce Imogen and bring proof of their tryst to Posthumus.

Iachimo's confidence rests on his misogynistic assumptions about women's lack of control over their sexuality and their weakness. He's a braggart who doesn't know when to stop—he even goes on to wish that he bet even more against Posthumus in the bet. However, Imogen will prove loyal to Posthumus even to the point of death, in spite of her occasional jealous thoughts. Imogen stands, then, as a warning against the danger of stereotyping.

The above quote also demonstrates the subtle ways that Iachimo manipulates. Whereas the Queen conceals her treachery, Iachimo deceives quite openly—sowing seeds of doubt in Posthumus' mind and using verbal dexterity to trick him and Imogen into thinking he's trustworthy. In this way, Iachimo is not unlike another of Shakespeare's villains—the talkative and blatantly-deceptive Iago from *Othello*. Like Iago, Iachimo latches onto objects precious to the couple he aims to deceive—the ring and, later, the bracelet—by manipulating the jewelry's emotional significance in his lies.

Act 1, Scene 5 Quotes

[Aside] I do not like her. She doth think she has
Strange lingering poisons: I do know her spirit,
And will not trust one of her malice with
A drug of such damn'd nature. Those she has
Will stupefy and dull the sense awhile;
Which first, perchance, she'll prove on cats and dogs,
Then afterward up higher: but there is
No danger in what show of death it makes,
More than the locking-up the spirits a time,
To be more fresh, reviving. She is fool'd
With a most false effect; and I the truer,
So to be false with her.

Related Characters: Cornelius (speaker), The Queen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 1.5.43-55

Explanation and Analysis

After the Queen asks the court doctor, Cornelius, for deadly poison to "experiment" with on animals, Cornelius appears to give it to her. When the Queen goes off to talk to Pisanio (whom she wishes to poison), Cornelius discloses to the audience his true feelings about the Queen, and explains that he gave her a strong sleeping drug, not poison, because he fears her motives.

Cornelius affirms the audience's suspicions about the Queen and introduces a paradoxical idea that will dominate Shakespeare's treatment of deception and loyalty throughout *Cymbeline*: sometimes, to stay true to one's conscience and strive for the greatest good, one must deceive others. Cornelius needs to act falsely with the Queen in order to stay true to what's right. Though Cymbeline's view on his daughter's marriage seemed to establish a mode of black-and-white thinking on issues like trust, justice, and punishment, the play does explore some gray areas, and this is the first instance of such an exploration.

Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

That such a crafty devil as is his mother
Should yield the world this ass! a woman that
Bears all down with her brain; and this her son
Cannot take two from twenty, for his heart
And leave eighteen. Alas, poor princess,
Thou divine Imogen, what thou endurest,
Betwixt a father by thy step-dame govern'd,
A mother hourly coining plots, a wooer
More hateful than the foul expulsion is
Of thy dear husband, than that horrid act
Of the divorce he'ld make! The heavens hold firm
The walls of thy dear honour, keep unshaked
That temple, thy fair mind, that thou mayst stand,
To enjoy thy banish'd lord and this great land!

Related Characters: The Second Lord (speaker), Imogen/Fidele , The Queen, Cloten

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.1.54-67

Explanation and Analysis

After Cloten complains about his ill luck in gambling, the First Lord tries to cheer him up. Meanwhile the Second Lord, through a series of asides to the audience, criticizes Cloten's behavior. Like the Queen, the Second Lord is two-faced: he shows deference to Cloten's face, but tells the audience that he loathes Cloten. That the Queen and the Second Lord alike engage in this kind of deceit deepens Shakespeare's exploration of deception—characters of all social ranks are capable of treachery, and outward displays of fidelity don't mean a character is trustworthy.

Furthermore, the Second Lord's assessment of Cloten demonstrates that noble social rank and the innate quality of *being* noble do not go hand-in-hand. Though Cloten is close to the British throne, he behaves abominably and lacks the wit required to be king. Lastly, like Posthumus, the Second Lord invokes the gods in hoping that Imogen will remain faithful and that the pair will be re-united.

Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

> As slippery as the Gordian knot was hard!
> 'Tis mine; and this will witness outwardly,
> As strongly as the conscience does within,
> To the madding of her lord. On her left
> A mole cinque-spotted, like the crimson drops
> I' the bottom of a cowslip: here's a voucher,
> Stronger than ever law could make: this secret
> Will force him think I have pick'd the lock and ta'en
> The treasure of her honour. No more. To what end?
> Why should I write this down, that's riveted,
> Screw'd to my memory? She hath been reading late
> The tale of Tereus; here the leaf's turn'd down
> Where Philomel gave up. I have enough:
> To the trunk again, and shut the spring of it.
> Swift, swift, you dragons of the night, that dawning
> May bare the raven's eye! I lodge in fear;
> Though this a heavenly angel, hell is here.

Related Characters: Iachimo (speaker), Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.2.36-52

Explanation and Analysis

Iachimo has used his powers of deception to sneak his way into Imogen's room by hiding himself in a trunk and springing out of it once she falls asleep. He observes details about her bedchamber, steals the bracelet Posthumus gave her from her wrist, and notices an intimate detail of her body—a mole beneath her breast. Iachimo does so to make Posthumus think that he has succeeded in seducing Imogen. Afterwards, he hides again in the trunk.

Though Iachimo has used his words to plant seeds of doubt in Posthumus and Imogen's minds about the other's fidelity, now Iachimo uses his actions to deceive Posthumus. The classical allusions contained within the quote reveal interesting details about the task at hand for Iachimo and how much he has violated Imogen. Likening the removal of the bracelet to the Gordian knot—a tough knot that Alexander the Great allegedly cut through with his sword—reflects not only the difficulty of the task, but also hints at the violence that could result from Iachimo's removing it.

Iachimo also notes how Imogen was reading the story of Philomela—a woman who turned into a sparrow after the evil Tereus raped her. It's significant that he centers the story on the rapist, Tereus, instead of the victim, Philomela. This literary reference heightens the sense of danger in the scene, and also causes the audience to acknowledge Iachimo's treachery as an act of violation.

Act 2, Scene 3 Quotes

> ...I am much sorry, sir,
> You put me to forget a lady's manners,
> By being so verbal: and learn now, for all,
> That I, which know my heart, do here pronounce,
> By the very truth of it, I care not for you,
> And am so near the lack of charity—
> To accuse myself—I hate you; which I had rather
> You felt than make't my boast.

Related Characters: Imogen/Fidele (speaker), Iachimo

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.3.124-131

Explanation and Analysis

Urged by the Queen and Cymbeline to keep pursuing Imogen, Cloten orders musicians to play for her and knocks on her door to talk, trying to woo her. However, Imogen is no pushover: she sticks by her marriage to Posthumus and tells Cloten exactly what she thinks of him.

Time and again, Imogen proves herself to be a good judge of character. Other members of the court have noted this quality: for instance, the Second Lord notes that Imogen "shines not upon fools" like Cloten. Others are happy that she married Posthumus, finding him a worthy choice. Once again, Imogen, in her assessment of Cloten, illustrates how noble status and innate nobility do not always match up.

Here, Imogen also hints at the play's preoccupation with masculine and feminine behavior. In Shakespeare's time—and in the ancient world—societal custom dictated that women remain obedient, chaste, and silent. Imogen defies all of these characteristics in her speech to Cloten—just as she resisted her father's wish to use her as a political pawn, she won't accept behavioral standards if they goes against following her heart. It's foreshadowing that she mentions "forget[ting] a lady's manners," since that is exactly what she'll have to do when adopting her male disguise as Fidele. Indeed, Pisanio *urges* her to forget her womanly behavior when he teaches her how to act manly.

Act 2, Scene 4 Quotes

...Let there be no honour
Where there is beauty; truth, where semblance; love
Where there's another man: the vows of women
Of no more bondage be, to where they are made,
Than they are to their virtues; which is nothing.
O, above measure false!

Related Characters: Posthumus Leonatus (speaker), Iachimo, Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.4.140-145

Explanation and Analysis

Iachimo returns quickly from Britain, offering his "proof" that he seduced Imogen, which Posthumus ultimately accepts. Whereas Posthumus had once felt secure in Imogen's loyalty to him, insecurity from Iachimo's "proof" has crept into his mind to the point that the language in some of Posthumus' speech starts to sound like Iachimo's. His points about women's vows meaning nothing and women's lack of virtue echo some of Iachimo's more misogynistic asides from his first meeting with Posthumus at Philario's house on the day the bet was made. However, it's ironic that Posthumus rails against women's treachery when, in point of fact, a man has deceived him. Not only that, but the treacherous fellow is standing right in front of him, lying to his face. This goes to show that sweeping gender generalizations don't hold water, and that deceit can be hard to detect.

Act 2, Scene 5 Quotes

...For there's no motion
That tends to vice in man, but I affirm
It is the woman's part: be it lying, note it,
The woman's; flattering, hers; deceiving, hers;
Lust and rank thoughts, hers, hers; revenge, hers;
Ambitions, covetings, change of prides, disdain,
Nice longing, slanders, mutability,
All faults that may be named, nay, that hell knows,
Why, hers, in part or all; but rather, all;
For even to vice
They are not constant but are changing still
One vice, but of a minute old, for one
Not half so old as that.

Related Characters: Posthumus Leonatus (speaker), Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Page Number: 2.5.20-32

Explanation and Analysis

Once Posthumus concedes the ring and Iachimo wins the bet, he stalks offstage, swearing revenge. When he returns, he delivers a soliloquy—from which the above quote is extracted—berating Imogen, and women more generally, for their sexual laxity and deceit.

As before, Posthumus seems to have internalized Iachimo's misogynistic viewpoints and language, spewing prejudiced, stereotyping speech. He attributes to women characteristics that also describe many of the *men* in this play. Though the Queen certainly displays vice, deceit, and covetousness, Imogen has none of those qualities. What's more, many of the *men* are the ones who inhabit these characteristics: including Cloten (disdain) and Iachimo (lying, deceiving, lust, slanders). This extreme, hyperbolic diatribe goes to show just how far into Iachimo's deceitful trap Posthumus has fallen, particularly given how highly he estimated Imogen's loyalty and her character.

Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

There be many Caesars,
Ere such another Julius. Britain is
A world by itself; and we will nothing pay
For wearing our own noses.

Related Characters: Cloten (speaker), Cymbeline

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.1.13-16

Explanation and Analysis

In this scene—the first to delve deeply into the conflict between Rome and Britain—Cloten and the Queen work to convince Cymbeline to break with the Empire. Cymbeline's uncle, the former king Cassibelan, began a tradition of paying tribute money on behalf of the British crown to the Roman Emperor, in order to maintain peace.

Cloten has demonstrated a certain level of ambition: he wants to woo Imogen in order to attain more power. He often remarks how much he wants to fight, in order to prove that he's brave and gain glory. Here, that personal ambition translates to a political, national scale. Cloten chafes at any sort of restriction—including the restrictions his status as a

member of the royal family place on him when he wants to freely fight whomever he pleases. Here, he chafes at Rome's power over Britain. With his and the Queen's persuasion, Cymbeline will refuse to pay the tribute, inviting a needless war.

> …Remember, sir, my liege,
> The kings your ancestors, together with
> The natural bravery of your isle, which stands
> As Neptune's park, ribbed and paled in
> With rocks unscalable and roaring waters,
> With sands that will not bear your enemies' boats,
> But suck them up to the topmast. A kind of conquest
> Caesar made here; but made not here his brag
> Of 'Came' and 'saw' and 'overcame:' with shame—
> That first that ever touch'd him—he was carried
> From off our coast, twice beaten; and his shipping—
> Poor ignorant baubles!—upon our terrible seas,
> Like egg-shells moved upon their surges, crack'd
> As easily 'gainst our rocks: for joy wherof
> The famed Cassibelan, who was once at point—
> O giglot fortune!—to master Caesar's sword,
> Made Lud's town with rejoicing fires bright
> And Britons strut with courage.

Related Characters: The Queen (speaker), Cymbeline

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.1.25-36

Explanation and Analysis

Like Cloten, the Queen works to convince Cymbeline that he should refuse to pay the tribute money to Rome and instead make Britain independent from the Empire. Just as hungry for power as her son, the Queen focuses more intensely on Britain's attributes and Cymbeline's ancestors to convince the King to do as she wishes. She reads meaning into the British landscape in order to support her point, using the fact that Britain is an island with a rocky coast (which destroyed Caesar's ships) to argue for independence. She also argues that the Britons are naturally brave, having beaten Caesar in battle twice, and so was Cymbeline's uncle, King Cassibelan. The audience has seen the same sort of eloquent manipulation from the Queen before: there are echoes of the kind of rhetoric she used with Cornelius here in her impassioned pleas to the king. Her personal skills at manipulation have consequences beyond the royal family. She proves that she can command the King, and his decision to not pay the tribute launches Britain into war.

Act 3, Scene 2 Quotes

> How? of adultery? Wherefore write you not
> What monster's her accuser? Leonatus,
> O master! what a strange infection
> Is fall'n into thy ear! What false Italian,
> As poisonous-tongued as handed, hath prevail'd
> On thy too ready hearing? Disloyal! No:
> She's punish'd for her truth, and undergoes,
> More goddess-like than wife-like, such assaults
> As would take in some virtue. O my master!
> Thy mind to her is now as low as were
> Thy fortunes. How! that I should murder her?
> Upon the love and truth and vows which I
> Have made to thy command? I, her? her blood?
> If it be so to do good service, never
> Let me be counted serviceable.

Related Characters: Pisanio (speaker), Imogen/Fidele , Posthumus Leonatus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.2.1-15

Explanation and Analysis

Believing that Iachimo's "proof" of his affair with Imogen is true, Posthumus swears revenge. He writes to Pisanio, telling him that Imogen was unfaithful and therefore she must be killed. After receiving the letter, Pisanio is dismayed. He has seen no evidence that Imogen has been disloyal to her husband, and deduces that someone in Italy has deceived Posthumus. It's noteworthy how quickly Pisanio can sniff out a trick—but, then again, his proximity to Imogen allows him to observe her righteous behavior, a luxury which Posthumus does not have. Just as Imogen proves loyal to her husband, so, too, does Pisanio prove loyal to Imogen. However, he doesn't take that loyalty lightly; he's in a complex situation, since he has orders from his master to do something that's unjust. Does he follow orders, remaining loyal to his master? Or does he remain loyal to what's right, sparing Imogen's life? By following his sense of what's right, Pisanio behaves similarity here to Cornelius. Like the court doctor, Pisanio sees through the agenda of others' and their deception, instead pursuing the greatest good and trying to spare lives instead of destroying them.

Act 3, Scene 3 Quotes

How hard it is to hide the sparks of nature!
These boys know little they are sons to the king;
Nor Cymbeline dreams that they are alive.
They think they are mine; and though train'd
up thus meanly
I' the cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit
The roofs of palaces, and nature prompts them
In simple and low things to prince it much
Beyond the trick of others.

Related Characters: Belarius/Morgan (speaker), Arviragus/Cadwal, Guiderius/Polydor

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.3.86-94

Explanation and Analysis

The action transfers from the British court to the wilderness of Wales. There, Belarius (under the pseudonym Morgan) prepares to hunt with his sons, Polydor and Cadwal. However, after the brothers leave, Belarius reveals to the audience that the boys are actually Cymbeline's sons—Guiderius and Arviragus. Belarius stole them from the nursery as infants to get back at Cymbeline for banishing him on account of political rumors. Belarius frets that it's hard to keep the secret from the boys.

Guiderius and Arviragus appear to be the total opposites of Cloten. Though Cloten is currently nearer to the throne, he is an ignoble, shallow, cowardly fool according to the Second Lord, Imogen, and other courtiers. Though his position outwardly seems more noble than that of Guiderius and Arviragus—who were raised in a Welsh cave to live off the land—he lacks all princely qualities. However, Guiderius and Arviragus display such qualities and they yearn to see the wider world beyond their cave. They have a vaulting sense of ambition, founded on their innate sense of honor and virtue and their hunger for glory. Belarius' thoughts on the brothers speak to a sense of innate character, an interior, deeply-rooted sense of self that circumstances cannot change. It's a comforting thought after witnessing the superficiality and deceit of other characters and the wicked consequences of their actions.

Act 3, Scene 4 Quotes

Why, I must die;
And if I do not by thy hand, thou art
No servant of thy master's...
Thus may poor fools
Believe false teachers: though those that
are betray'd
Do feel the treason sharply, yet the traitor
Stands in worse case of woe.
And thou, Posthumus, thou that didst set up
My disobedience 'gainst the king my father
And make me put into contempt the suits
Of princely fellows, shalt hereafter find
It is no act of common passage, but
A strain of rareness: and I grieve myself
To think, when thou shalt be disedged by her
That now thou tirest on, how thy memory
Will then be pang'd by me. Prithee, dispatch:
The lamb entreats the butcher: where's thy knife?
Thou art too slow to do thy master's bidding,
When I desire it too.

Related Characters: Imogen/Fidele (speaker), Posthumus Leonatus, Pisanio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.4.80-106

Explanation and Analysis

When Imogen and Pisanio arrive in Millford Haven, Pisanio reveals all to Imogen, showing her Posthumus' letter with the command to kill her. Imogen is deeply grieved as a result. When Imogen takes Pisanio's dagger and holds it out to him, asking Pisanio to kill her, the scene provides a shocking visual effect to the audience. His reluctance to take up the sword in the face of her total readiness to die demonstrates an extreme contrast. Pisanio's sense of loyalty is not literal—he doesn't follow commands to the letter, but instead he tries to follow what's best. Before, Imogen has defied her father's orders and Cloten's pursuit—her loyalty to her father has not been complete, which Cloten calls a "sin." Here, though, Imogen proves completely loyal to her husband's commands. It's upsetting to think how ready Posthumus was to condemn her and have her killed, when she displays such an unflinching acceptance of his order—as she puts it to Pisanio, what he wants, she wants, too. However, Imogen doesn't go down without a fight. She tears up his love letters and lists some grievances she has with her spouse, including the rift with her father.

❝ You must forget to be a woman; change
Command into obedience: fear and niceness—
The handmaids of all women, or, more truly,
Woman its pretty self—into a waggish courage:
Ready in gibes, quick-answer'd, saucy and
As quarrelous as the weasel; nay, you must
Forget that rarest treasure of your cheek,
Exposing it—but, O, the harder heart!
Alack, no remedy!—to the greedy touch
Of common-kissing Titan, and forget
Your laboursome and dainty trims, wherein
You made great Juno angry.

Related Characters: Pisanio (speaker), Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Page Number: 3.4.178-189

Explanation and Analysis

Telling Imogen that he brought her to Millford Haven to buy time, Pisanio comes up with a plan to save her. She can dress up like a man and meet Posthumus, arriving with Lucius and the Roman troops to prepare for battle with the Britons over the tribute money. Then, the lovers can make amends.

Over the course of the play, the characters have made much of societal expectations for women. Largely, characters have communicated these expectations through negative statements: for instance, Cloten criticizes Imogen for acting disobedient towards her father, when women were expected to obey without question. Imogen, too, remarks how her actions fly in the face of expectations for female silence when she speaks her mind with Cloten, saying openly how much she dislikes him. But little has been said about society's expectations of *manly* behavior. Here, Pisanio gives a primer on masculine standards and ideals—including courage, being argumentative, and even getting tan in the sun (a willingness to endure the elements). Pisanio's comments on masculine behavior cause the audience to reflect on whether or not the men of the play live up to these ideals, and many seem to fall short. For instance, Cloten may be "as quarrelous as the weasel," but he certainly lacks courage. Imogen will end up meeting the male expectations quite well, calling into question how "natural" those expectations are for men. If a woman can be a "better man" than most of the other men onstage, then what is the worth of gendered behavioral expectations?

Act 4, Scene 1 Quotes

❝ ...How fit his garments
serve me! Why should his mistress, who was made by
him that made the tailor, not be fit too? the
rather—saving reverence of the word—for 'tis said
a woman's fitness comes by fits. Therein I must
play the workman. I dare speak it to myself—for it
is not vain-glory for a man and his glass to confer
in his own chamber—I mean, the lines of my body are
as well drawn as his; no less young, more strong,
not beneath him in fortunes, beyond him in the
advantage of the time, above him in birth, alike
conversant in general services, and more remarkable
in single oppositions: yet this imperceiverant
thing loves him in my despite. What mortality is!
Posthumus, thy head, which now is growing upon thy
shoulders, shall within this hour be off; thy
mistress enforced; thy garments cut to pieces before
thy face: and all this done, spurn her home to her
father; who may haply be a little angry for my so
rough usage; but my mother, having power of his
testiness, shall turn all into my commendations.

Related Characters: Cloten (speaker), Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen/Fidele

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 4.1.2-22

Explanation and Analysis

Having pressured Pisanio into revealing where Imogen went, Cloten learns of her flight to Millford Haven and forces Pisanio to lend him some of Posthumus' clothes. Arriving in Wales, Cloten goes over the details of his plan to get revenge on Imogen for refusing him.

Up until this point, Cloten has—deservedly—been regarded as a foolish braggart. He is all talk and no action, as the Second Lord reminds the audience, describing how he would threaten to fight, but when push came to shove, Cloten would be the first to run from a skirmish. Here, though, Cloten gets serious with his plan for vengeance. He also shows the depth of his misogyny here, punning on women's "fitness"—or sexual availability—for his own gratification. However, he seems also to show some jealousy—his description of how much better he is than Posthumus makes it seem as though Cloten is trying to talk himself into a sense of superiority—his own sense of nobility appears lacking when juxtaposed with Posthumus' noble

nature, despite Posthumus' lower status.

What's more, Cloten seems to offer a self-fulfilling prophecy. Disguised in Posthumus' clothes, Cloten claims "Posthumus, thy head, which now is growing upon thy/ shoulders, shall within this hour be off." This is the fate that Cloten will meet at Guiderius' hands while disguised as Posthumus. It's a moment of stunning foreshadowing for Cloten's shocking end.

Act 4, Scene 2 Quotes

IMOGEN
I'll follow, sir. But first, an't please the gods,
I'll hide my master from the flies, as deep
As these poor pickaxes can dig; and when
With wild wood-leaves and weeds I ha' strew'd his grave,
And on it said a century of prayers,
Such as I can, twice o'er, I'll weep and sigh;
And leaving so his service, follow you,
So please you entertain me.

CAIUS LUCIUS
Ay, good youth!
And rather father thee than master thee.
My friends,
The boy hath taught us manly duties…

Related Characters: Caius Lucius, Imogen/Fidele (speaker), Posthumus Leonatus, Cloten

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.2.479-491

Explanation and Analysis

After Guiderius beheads Cloten in a fight over personal honor, he lays the body out next to Imogen (who is disguised as Fidele). Coming out of her slumber, Imogen sees the headless body next to her—in Posthumus' clothes. She mourns over her husband when Lucius enters with his troops, inviting Fidele into his service. When Pisanio instructed Imogen on how to "forget" to be a woman, he could hardly have expected her to disguise herself so well as to earn Lucius' praise for her manliness and honor. Lucius' notion of masculinity is bound up with piety and loyalty—both of which Imogen show when she grieves over the body she thinks belongs to her husband. While she demonstrates loyalty, she also simultaneously deceives Lucius—she claims to be a page boy for the knight lying dead beside her, calling him "Richard du Champ." Imogen proves that she is just as quick on her feet as Pisanio and she uses deception in the same way—to preserve her life.

Act 4, Scene 3 Quotes

I heard no letter from my master since
I wrote him Imogen was slain: 'tis strange:
Nor hear I from my mistress who did promise
To yield me often tidings: neither know I
What is betid to Cloten; but remain
Perplex'd in all. The heavens still must work.
Wherein I am false I am honest; not true, to be true.
These present wars shall find I love my country,
Even to the note o' the king, or I'll fall in them.
All other doubts, by time let them be clear'd:
Fortune brings in some boats that are not steer'd.

Related Characters: Pisanio (speaker), Cymbeline, Imogen/ Fidele , Posthumus Leonatus

Related Themes:

Page Number: 4.3.46-56

Explanation and Analysis

After Pisanio returns to court, he comments on the lack of communication he's had with his master and mistress, and he wonders what's happened to Cloten. Pisanio echoes audience sentiment at this point in the play: where has Posthumus been? After swearing his revenge, he's largely dropped out of the action. Pisanio brings him up, wondering why he hasn't heard from Posthumus after sending the bloody handkerchief as "proof" of Imogen's death. In such a way, Pisanio builds suspense. Will Posthumus emerge triumphant after his wife's "death"? In actuality, his silence evidences his remorse, which sets the play's forgiving end in motion.

Once again, Pisanio aligns himself with Cornelius when he exclaims, "Wherein I am false I am honest; not true, to be true." Pisanio demonstrates that to stay true to his values and ultimately to Imogen, he has had to lie. It was necessary to speak falsely in order to protect Imogen. However, not hearing from her, he has reason to feel concerned. Yet Pisanio's piety comes in here—he leaves everything up to the gods and to fate. While his notion of deception and loyalty is complex, Pisanio's view of the gods is unqualified. There's no room for doubt or nuances in his eyes: the gods are in control. This view supports the play's swift resolution for the better, only made possible by the workings of fate.

Act 5, Scene 1 Quotes

Yea, bloody cloth, I'll keep thee, for I wish'd
Thou shouldst be colour'd thus. You married ones,
If each of you should take this course, how many
Must murder wives much better than themselves
For wrying but a little! O Pisanio!
Every good servant does not all commands:
No bond but to do just ones. Gods! If you
Should have ta'en vengeance on my faults, I never
Had lived to put on this: so had you saved
The noble Imogen to repent, and struck
Me, wretch more worth your vengeance. But, alack,
You snatch some hence for little faults; that's love,
To have them fall no more: you some permit
To second ills with ills, each elder worse,
And make them dread it, to the doers' thrift.
But Imogen is your own: do your best wills,
And make me blest to obey!

Related Characters: Posthumus Leonatus (speaker), Imogen/Fidele , Pisanio

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.1.1-17

Explanation and Analysis

Arriving on British soil with the rest of the Roman troops, Posthumus addresses the bloody handkerchief. He laments having ordered Imogen's death and wishes that Pisanio would've disobeyed his unjust order. He asks the gods to take vengeance upon him. Posthumus' address to the absent Pisanio conveys dramatic irony. He scolds Pisanio for doing exactly what Pisanio did—Pisanio did not carry out "all commands," but rather did justly by sparing Imogen. Of course, Posthumus won't find this out until much later. Similar to Pisanio—who leaves the conclusion of events up to fate—Posthumus puts his trust in the gods, calling on them to smite him, as he finds himself "worth [their] vengeance." This echoes some of Posthumus' original piety—particularly his invocation of the gods to protect his marriage to Imogen. Posthumus' explanation of evildoers' increasing remorse after committing worse and worse sins reflects the sort of guilt both Iachimo and the Queen experience in this act.

Act 5, Scene 2 Quotes

The heaviness and guilt within my bosom
Takes off my manhood: I have belied a lady,
The princess of this country, and the air on't
Revengingly enfeebles me; or could this carl,
A very drudge of nature's, have subdued me
In my profession? Knighthoods and honours, borne
As I wear mine, are titles but of scorn.
If that thy gentry, Britain, go before
This lout as he exceeds our lords, the odds
Is that we scarce are men and you are gods.

Related Characters: Iachimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.2.1-10

Explanation and Analysis

Iachimo has returned to Britain to command a number of Roman soldiers. He has a skirmish onstage with Posthumus—who's disguised as a British peasant to show loyalty to Imogen's nation (and because he thinks that the Britons will lose, which means he may die in battle). Iachimo feels the weight of his remorse for his trick on Posthumus and Imogen, and wonders about the identity of the peasant with whom he fought.

Just as Posthumus shocked the audience with his speech at the top of Act 5, so, too, does Iachimo surprise the audience with his remorseful tone. Gone are the blustering and boasting of past scenes. It stands to reason that his separation from Imogen and the British court shielded Iachimo from his guilt—just as much as that separation, in combination with Iachimo's trickery, nourished Posthumus' jealous imagination. The Queen explained that the British landscape has a powerful affect on invaders, and that's certainly true for Iachimo—he cannot even breathe British air without feeling the sting of remorse.

After fighting with the disguised Posthumus, Iachimo muses on the meaning of "knighthoods and honours." Iachimo finds titles meaningless if this British peasant displayed such nobility in their fight. Thus, Iachimo echoes the split between noble title (or lack thereof) and nobility which other characters have expressed in the play. His comments also show that, though disguised, Posthumus' true nature cannot be hidden.

Act 5, Scene 4 Quotes

No more, you petty spirits of region low,
Offend our hearing; hush! How dare you ghosts
Accuse the thunderer, whose bolt, you know,
Sky-planted batters all rebelling coasts?
Poor shadows of Elysium, hence, and rest
Upon your never-withering banks of flowers:
Be not with mortal accidents oppress;
No care of yours it is; you know 'tis ours.
Whom best I love I cross; to make my gift,
The more delay'd, delighted. Be content;
Your low-laid son our godhead will uplift:
His comforts thrive, his trials well are spent.
Our Jovial star reign'd at his birth, and in
Our temple was he married. Rise, and fade.
He shall be lord of lady Imogen,
And happier much by his affliction made.
This tablet lay upon his breast, wherein
Our pleasure his full fortune doth confine:
and so, away: no further with your din
Express impatience, lest you stir up mine.
Mount, eagle, to my palace crystalline.

Related Characters: Jupiter (speaker), Ghosts of the Brothers of Posthumus, Ghost of Posthumus' Mother, Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen/Fidele , Ghost of Sicilius Leonatus

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.4.Lines 96-116

Explanation and Analysis

In jail, Posthumus longs for death and falls asleep. While sleeping, he has a dream vision of the ghosts of his family members, and Jupiter appears to deliver a comforting message. The characters invoke "Jove" (another name for Jupiter) throughout the play, and the god's appearance in this scene is noteworthy. Shakespeare here employs the ancient dramatic device of the *deus ex machina*—a god descending from theatrical machinery who neatly solves the play's problems—to help tie up loose ends in Act 5. Jupiter asserts his absolute control in confrontation with the ghosts of Posthumus' family—he brings up his thunderbolts as physical reminders of his supreme power. Despite his fierce demeanor, Jupiter also displays divine mercy by reassuring the ghosts. He also promises to reward Posthumus for the piety he's displayed through a good portion of the play. When Jupiter promises that all will end well for Posthumus and Imogen, it's not hard for the audience to believe him. He's spent the bulk of his speech asserting his command over the events on earth. It follows, then, that Jupiter will be true to his word, ensuring a happy ending.

Act 5, Scene 5 Quotes

CORNELIUS
...She did confess she had
For you a mortal mineral; which, being took,
Should by the minute feed on life and lingering
By inches waste you: in which time she purposed,
By watching, weeping, tendance, kissing, to
O'ercome you with her show, and in time,
When she had fitted you with her craft, to work
Her son into the adoption of the crown:
But, failing of her end by his strange absence,
Grew shameless-desperate; open'd, in despite
Of heaven and men, her purposes; repented
The evils she hatch'd were not effected; so
Despairing died...

CYMBELINE
Mine eyes
Were not in fault, for she was beautiful;
Mine ears, that heard her flattery; nor my heart,
That thought her like her seeming; it had
been vicious
To have mistrusted her: yet, O my daughter!
That it was folly in me, thou mayst say,
And prove it in thy feeling. Heaven mend all!

Related Characters: Cymbeline, Cornelius (speaker), Imogen/Fidele , Cloten, The Queen

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.5.62-84

Explanation and Analysis

Back at Cymbeline's court after the battle, Cornelius explains that the Queen—who had gone mad with grief at her son's disappearance and developed a fever—has died. Cornelius relays her deathbed confession, which Cymbeline regretfully accepts, feeling remorse for trusting the Queen instead of his daughter, though he had little choice in the matter.

Cornelius' revelation comes as a shock—the Queen, who seemed so all-powerful through her manipulative capabilities, turns out to be powerless in the face of death.

Yet what's more shocking is the Queen's end-of-life confession. She reveals how she tried to slowly kill Cymbeline so she could install Cloten on the throne. Yet with Cloten missing from court, all of her plans would unravel. Without the prospect of power—even achieved through evil means—the Queen had nothing for which to live. Her repentance may seem out of character, and yet, Posthumus and Iachimo's remorse have warmed up the audience to the play's trends towards reconciliation and healing.

Posthumus had no reason to believe that Imogen could be treacherous and yet he did so. On the other hand, Cymbeline had every reason to doubt the queen, yet he considered her loyal. Through these contrasting examples, Shakespeare highlights how difficult it is to discern treachery.

IMOGEN
Why did you throw your wedded lady from you?
Think that you are upon a rock; and now
Throw me again.

Embracing him

POSTHUMUS LEONATUS
Hang there like a fruit, my soul,
Till the tree die!

Related Characters: Posthumus Leonatus, Imogen/Fidele (speaker)

Related Themes:

Page Number: 5.5.315-320

Explanation and Analysis

Freed from prison and brought before the King, Posthumus—who hears Iachimo's confession and flies into a rage—strikes the page boy that he thinks is interrupting him. Pisanio comforts the fallen Fidele, addressing "him" as Imogen. At that point, Imogen's identity is revealed, and she and her husband reconcile. Jupiter's promise is fulfilled here with the reunion of Imogen and Posthumus. The audience gets the sense that *Cymbeline* has come full-circle: the play began with the couple's separation, and it will end with their reunion. This reflects the play's genre of tragicomedy: after struggles, the characters' stories will end on a happy note of reconciliation.

It's also noteworthy that Posthumus asks Imogen to "hang there like a fruit, my soul,/ Till the tree die!" When Imogen gave Posthumus her ring, she mentioned her own death. Posthumus was quick to ask that the gods preserve their marriage and never give him another wife. Now *he* is the one to pledge an everlasting love to Imogen—asking her to stay with him until his death. This suggests a reciprocity to the relationship, that both partners have pledged to stay together until death, and the audience truly believes they can stand the test of time—especially after all of the hardships they've endured.

IACHIMO
[Kneeling] I am down again:
But now my heavy conscience sinks my knee,
As then your force did. Take that life, beseech you,
Which I so often owe: but your ring first;
And here the bracelet of the truest princess
That ever swore her faith.

POSTHUMUS LEONATUS
Kneel not to me:
The power that I have on you is, to spare you;
The malice towards you to forgive you: live,
And deal with others better.

CYMBELINE
Nobly doom'd!
We'll learn our freeness of a son-in-law;
Pardon's the word to all.

Related Characters: Cymbeline, Posthumus Leonatus, Iachimo (speaker)

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.5.510-522

Explanation and Analysis

Once Iachimo has revealed his duplicity and Posthumus and Imogen reunite, Iachimo asks Posthumus to kill him in retribution for his falsehood. Instead of committing more violence, though, Posthumus says he will spare Iachimo. This inspires Cymbeline to extend pardon to all—including Belarius, who confesses to having kidnapped the princes, and the Romans.

When Iachimo and Posthumus were agreeing upon the

terms of their wager, Iachimo consistently wanted to add more to the bet—he even said he wanted to bet his neighbor's lands just to increase the stakes. This reflected Iachimo's greed and desire for thrills—now, however, Iachimo willingly rids himself of material goods that he won. This shows how much remorse has changed his character. Not only does he repent and ask Posthumus to "take that life, beseech you," but also by giving up the ring, Iachimo demonstrates that he values justice over his own life and his own winnings. Posthumus, too, has changed. His desire for vengeance after learning of his wife's "infidelity" was brutal and bloody—he yearned for death as retribution. Now, having a second chance with Imogen, Posthumus finds that the greatest revenge is to give life.

> The fingers of the powers above do tune
> The harmony of this peace. The vision
> Which I made known to Lucius, ere the stroke
> Of this yet scarce-cold battle, at this instant
> Is full acomplish'd; for the Roman eagle,
> From south to west on wing soaring aloft,
> Lessen'd herself, and in the beams o' the sun
> So vanish'd: which foreshow'd our princely eagle,
> The imperial Caesar, should again unite
> His favour with the radiant Cymbeline,
> Which shines here in the west.

Related Characters: Soothsayer (Philarmonus) (speaker), Cymbeline

Related Themes:

Related Symbols:

Page Number: 5.5.571-581

Explanation and Analysis

Having interpreted the prophetic tablet that Jupiter left on the sleeping Posthumus' chest—a tablet which foretold Posthumus and Imogen's reunion, Cymbeline's recovery of his sons, and peace between Rome and Britain—the Soothsayer reveals the deeper meaning behind his sighting of the eagle before the battle. He says this reflects the reconciliation between Rome and the British King.

The Soothsayer originally told Lucius that the eagle he saw before the fighting began represented impending Roman victory. Now, however, with a change in circumstances and a change in audience, the Soothsayer explains that the eagle's disappearance into the sun meant that "the imperial Caesar, should again unite/ His favour with the radiant Cymbeline." This changed meaning suggests the malleability of human interpretation, and yet the Soothsayer has, in a way, stayed true to his original message. While the Romans did not win the physical battle, they did win the tribute money—a greater victory in that it insures the continuance of the Empire. Thus, while the Soothsayer may offer different interpretations, the outcome of pro-Roman reconciliation remains consistent.

SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

ACT 1, SCENE 1

The play opens at the court of King Cymbeline, who rules over Britain—a dependent state within the Roman Empire. Two gentlemen discuss recent events at the court. Not long ago, the King married a second wife, some time after the death of his first. This new Queen had a son of her own, named Cloten, whom Cymbeline planned to marry to his own daughter Imogen. However, Imogen secretly married Posthumus, a "poor but worthy gentleman." Enraged at this disobedience, Cymbeline has just ordered that Posthumus be banished and Imogen imprisoned.

The play opens by stressing the complexity of Cymbeline's situation. Cymbeline wants to consolidate political power by marrying Imogen to Cloten, but Imogen has a mind of her own—she prefers to marry a man for his innate virtue rather than his social status. Thus, she tries to break out of a royal woman's prescribed role as a political tool who must forge political allegiances through marriage.

The First Gentleman adds, though, that everyone else around the court is secretly happy about the marriage because Cloten is so awful while Posthumus is incomparably virtuous. The gentlemen then discuss Posthumus's past: he is the son of a valiant soldier named Sicilius Leonatus, but was orphaned when both of his older brothers died in war, his father subsequently died of grief, and his mother died giving birth to him. Cymbeline took the orphaned Posthumus as his ward, and Posthumus grew up to be one of the King's closest attendants. The Second Gentleman asks if the King had any other children, to which the First Gentleman replies that the King had two infant sons, but they were stolen from their nursery twenty years ago.

The contrast between the noble Posthumus and the awful Cloten demonstrates how desperate Cymbeline is to solidify his power. Cymbeline is willing to marry his beloved daughter to Cloten solely because Cloten, as his stepson, is closer to the throne than Posthumus, even though Cymbeline raised Posthumus, too. Further, the revelation that the two princes were stolen as infants is yet another reason for Cymbeline's insecurity about his heirs and legacy.

The gentlemen exit when they notice the Queen, Posthumus, and Imogen approaching. As the Queen enters, she assures Imogen that she will take care of her. Though she has been tasked with imprisoning Imogen, the Queen promises to treat her well, and also to speak favorably of Posthumus to Cymbeline after he has calmed down about Imogen and Posthumus's secret marriage. Posthumus says he will leave Britain that day in compliance with Cymbeline's banishment, and the Queen replies that she will allow him to say goodbye to Imogen in private—even though the King commanded that the couple not be allowed to see each other.

The two-faced Queen presents herself as a loving, merciful stepmother—promising to take care of Imogen, and allowing her stepdaughter one final farewell with her husband. Even though Posthumus and Imogen defied the King's wishes by marrying, Posthumus does not try to fight the punishment Cymbeline gave him. In that sense, Posthumus demonstrates his deference to his father figure, a quality that was important in ancient Rome, where Posthumus grew up.

Once the Queen has left, Imogen exclaims that her stepmother's promises are nothing more than "dissembling courtesy." She then tells Posthumus that she will endure her father's wrath, but only in the hope that she might one day see Posthumus again. She bursts into tears, and Posthumus begs her to stop, or else he will act in an unmanly way and start crying, too. He promises to be faithful to her while in exile, and begs her to write to him in Rome, where he will be staying with his father's friend, Philario.

Imogen has a hunch that her stepmother is deceitful—a suspicion that proves to be true over the course of the play. This scene also suggests that Imogen and Posthumus' love is sincere and will endure. Posthumus' reluctance to cry "unmanly" tears demonstrates that men of his society were expected to be strong and hide emotion.

The Queen rushes in to tell the lovers to hurry up, because if Cymbeline finds them talking he will be furious at her. As the Queen hurries away, though, she comments to herself that she'll get the King to walk this way and find the couple talking. She notes that *she's* the one who causes all the problems that Cymbeline then asks her to solve.

This is the first instance of many throughout the play in which the Queen reveals her treachery to the audience. Because her power is limited as a woman and a consort (rather than a ruler), she uses duplicity to maneuver in court and control her husband.

Alone once again, Posthumus and Imogen can't make themselves say goodbye. Imogen gives Posthumus her mother's diamond **ring** to pledge her loyalty. In return, Posthumus gives Imogen a bracelet to symbolize their bond of love, and he begs to be burned to death if he ever kisses another woman.

Posthumus and Imogen exchange tokens of their love—valued pieces of jewelry—as tangible signs of their fidelity to each other. Even though they'll be apart, they pledge to remain true. Posthumus says he would want a painful death if he strays, showing how deeply he values loyalty and foreshadowing the death he orders for Imogen when he believes she has strayed.

Just as Imogen wonders aloud when they will meet again, Cymbeline enters in a rage, attended by several lords. Cymbeline insults Posthumus and commands him to leave at once. Posthumus wishes Cymbeline well, blesses everyone in the court, and exits.

Here, Cymbeline maintains his tough stance on Posthumus' exile, declining to show mercy to his son-in-law. In the face of that rage, Posthumus takes the high road, wishing the court well. He won't always take the high road during the play, however.

Imogen exclaims that death must hurt less than this forced separation. This only enrages Cymbeline more, and he lashes out at her for being disloyal and troubling him. Imogen responds that her father's anger can't hurt her because her pain at Posthumus' absence drowns out any other feeling. When Cymbeline laments that Imogen could have married Cloten instead of the "base" Posthumus, Imogen counters that Cloten is worthless next to Posthumus—a "puttock" next to an "**eagle**." She reminds Cymbeline that he himself raised Posthumus and Imogen together, and she weeps when she says she would rather be a poor farmer's daughter and marry for love than be a princess and have to marry for political reasons.

By confronting Cymbeline about Posthumus, Imogen shows that she's not afraid to speak her mind. While Imogen may not show loyalty to her father, she shows loyalty to her exiled husband, which will be true for the remainder of the play. This shows Shakespeare's complex treatment of loyalty—Imogen is virtuous by allying with her husband over her father, as traditional morality would have expected her to do in such a thorny situation. Her invocation of the eagle—a traditional symbol of Rome—reflects Posthumus' worth and nobility. Wishing that she were not royal, Imogen also defies her father's political machinations.

The Queen returns, and Cymbeline scolds her for allowing Imogen and Posthumus to be alone together. The Queen pleads for Cymbeline to leave her alone with Imogen and go calm down. He leaves, but not before stating his hope that Imogen suffer every day for her foolishness until she grows old and dies.

Cymbeline's interactions with the Queen and Imogen show how unrelenting he is. He chastises his wife for an act of mercy, and ends his interaction with Imogen on a note of harshness—even wishing her pain. He establishes himself as an unforgiving, absolute ruler.

Posthumus' servant Pisanio enters. He reports that Cloten drew his sword on Posthumus, but that no one was hurt because Posthumus merely played with Cloten rather than fighting back. Imogen mocks Cloten, then asks Pisanio why he didn't leave with Posthumus. Pisanio responds that Posthumus asked him to stay behind to serve Imogen; the Queen admires his loyalty. Before going on a walk with the Queen, Imogen asks Pisanio to come and speak with her later.

Imogen ridicules Cloten for picking a half-hearted fight with Posthumus, a man about to leave the country for good (thus making the fight inconsequential). To the same degree that Imogen scorns Cloten, the Queen praises Pisanio—he faithfully executes his master's orders, remaining loyal to Posthumus' wife. It's remarkable that the Queen—one of the more disloyal characters—so readily recognizes the virtue of loyalty.

ACT 1, SCENE 2

Two attendants follow Cloten after his encounter with Posthumus. The First Lord urges Cloten to change his shirt since he is sweaty and he smells, but Cloten says he would only change his shirt if it were bloody from fighting. Cloten complains that Posthumus wouldn't fight him. The First Lord tries to encourage Cloten. He says that Cloten certainly hurt Posthumus. Then he puns that Posthumus moved away from Cloten to put space in between them. The ground in between the fighters would only add to the vast lands that Cloten already owns. In a series of comments to the audience, the Second Lord gives his take on the fight: Cloten didn't strike Posthumus with his sword, and what's more, Cloten doesn't have as many lands as the First Lord claims. The Second Lord thinks Cloten is a fool.

The First Lord and the Second Lord establish themselves as foils of one another. While the First Lord is a flatterer, telling Cloten exactly what he wants to hear, the Second Lord ridicules Cloten behind his back. The two lords illustrate how disingenuous courtiers' words can be.

Cloten wishes that he and Posthumus hadn't been separated so that they could have fought in earnest, and he marvels that Imogen could ever chose Posthumus over him. The Second Lord interjects that if Cloten and Posthumus fought, Cloten would have ended up lying flat on the ground. Further, he thinks Imogen has made a good choice in marrying Posthumus. The First Lord tells Cloten that Imogen's choice of Posthumus demonstrates that she's not very smart, even though she's pretty. To the contrary, the Second Lord remarks in an aside that Imogen "shines not upon fools" like Cloten. Cloten plans to go back to his room, and the First and Second Lords dutifully follow him.

The Second Lord paints a portrait of Cloten that differs from Cloten's self-aggrandizing version. In so doing, he affirms Imogen's choice of the virtuous Posthumus for a husband. The Second Lord shows Cloten for who he is—a blustering, self-centered coward. However, it's interesting to note that despite the way the Second Lord loathes Cloten, he still attends him faithfully. Like the Queen, the Second Lord shows one face to the courtiers, but another to the audience in asides.

ACT 1, SCENE 3

At their arranged meeting, Imogen tells Pisanio that she misses her husband already. She asks Pisanio about Posthumus' last words before sailing to Italy, and he replies that Posthumus simply repeated "my queen, my queen!" in reference to her. He waved and kissed his handkerchief and stayed on deck to stare at the receding British shore. Imogen envies the handkerchief for receiving Posthumus' kisses, and she claims that she would have broken her eyes watching Posthumus until he was far enough away to be the size of her needlepoint or a gnat, and then afterwards she would have cried.

Shakespeare paints a beautiful, mournful picture of the lovers' strong, faithful bond in the face of separation. Like their jewelry, the handkerchief becomes a physical symbol of the lovers' connection—Posthumus clings to and kisses it, and Imogen envies the handkerchief for its proximity to Posthumus. They yearn for connection, even across the sea.

Imogen asks when they will hear from Posthumus, and Pisanio assures her that Posthumus will send word as soon as he is on land. She regrets not being able to say a proper goodbye to Posthumus, since Cymbeline interrupted their farewell before she could tell Posthumus how she often she would think about him and make him swear to not cheat on her with Italian women. She didn't even get the chance to ask him to pray for her, or to give him a goodbye kiss. Instead, Cymbeline entered "like the tyrannous breathing of the north."

Imogen reveals more deeply how she bristles at Cymbeline's uncompromising attempts to control the course of her life. Not only has the King exiled her husband, but he has prevented them from the sort of farewell a married couple can expect. Imogen likens Cymbeline's "tyranny" to a force of nature, to illustrate how harsh and unforgiving he is. Like the north wind, he freezes her attempts at self-determination.

One of the Queen's ladies arrives, and tells Imogen that the Queen wants to see her. Imogen asks Pisanio to do as she has instructed him, and tells the lady she will attend the Queen. Pisanio promises to do as she has said, though the audience doesn't know what she asked him to do.

While the audience doesn't quite know what Imogen has asked Pisanio to carry out, the fact that he promises, twice, to do as she tells him demonstrates Pisanio's firm loyalty to his mistress.

ACT 1, SCENE 4

In Rome, Iachimo—a Roman nobleman whose father was Duke of Siena, and a friend of Philario—describes Posthumus to Philario. According to Iachimo, people in Britain expected Posthumus to grow up to be virtuous, but Posthumus never impressed Iachimo. Philario insists that Iachimo is only considering what Posthumus was like in the past, and not what he's like now. However, another friend of theirs present at the gathering—the Frenchman—says that he once saw Posthumus, and that he was an ordinary person.

Though Cloten has denounced Posthumus' character, this is the first time the audience hears other characters disparaging Imogen's husband. While the two gentlemen at court sang Posthumus' praises, Iachimo and the Frenchman remain unconvinced. Perhaps this indicates how mutable the definition of virtue and nobility can be among different people.

Iachimo thinks that because Posthumus has married the princess Imogen, he will seem more worthy than he actually is; people will now judge him to be more noble because of his wife's rank. The Frenchman reminds Iachimo that despite his new social status, Posthumus has still been exiled. But Iachimo counters that the people who support Imogen are upset about the forced separation, and they do nothing but praise Posthumus. This praise in turn makes Imogen seem all the wiser: it would be easy to criticize her husband if he were a beggar with a bad reputation.

Again, Iachimo believes nobility isn't innate: Posthumus' nobility is a reflection of his wife's. However, he concedes that popular opinion can strengthen a person's position. Meanwhile, the Frenchman shows that noble social status doesn't make a person above the law of a King. These characters also demonstrate that while Imogen and Posthumus have lost the King's favor, they aren't without supporters.

Iachimo asks Philario why he's planning to host Posthumus. Philario explains that he fought alongside Posthumus' father Sicilius Leonatus, and that Sicilius saved his life several times. Philario sees Posthumus coming and he asks his companions to make an effort to get to know Posthumus. He says that Posthumus is noble and a friend, and that they shouldn't mention his character in front of him. Philario promises that Posthumus' good character will become clear with time.

By taking in Posthumus—the son of the soldier who saved his life on multiple occasions—Philario indicates that the honorable thing to do in Ancient Rome is to pay back one's debts. Since Sicilius Leonatus showed Philario kindness, Philario pays that kindness forward to Sicilius' son. That Philario claims Posthumus will reveal his true character in time is telling, given that this play deals with truth and honor overcoming disguise and treachery.

The Frenchman welcomes Posthumus, mentioning that they met previously in Orleans. Posthumus says that he owes the Frenchman a lot for his courtesy, insinuating that the Frenchman had once stopped him from engaging in a foolish fight. Posthumus alleges that he is less stubborn and contrarian now than he was in his younger years, but even so he doesn't think that the near-fight was about an unimportant matter. The Frenchman believes that, though the argument was important, it didn't need to be settled with a fight, which could've led to injury or death.

The Frenchman's revelation of Posthumus' pugnacious past casts new light on his encounter with Cloten. It shows that Posthumus has grown more virtuous with time, while Cloten is as foolhardy as Posthumus was in his younger years. The Frenchman's claims about violence raise questions about what issues are worth fighting over—questions echoed later in the war between Rome and Britain.

Curious, Iachimo asks what the fight was about, if it's not too rude to ask. The Frenchman assures him that it's fine, since the argument was public. The man from Orleans and Posthumus were talking about their girlfriends. Posthumus told the men that the woman he loved was better than even the best Frenchwoman, and he said he'd fight any man who disagreed. Iachimo says that this woman must be dead, or Posthumus has had a change of heart. Posthumus insists that Imogen is still the best, but Iachimo charges that Posthumus wouldn't say that his wife was better than Italian women.

In line with the play's patriarchal norms, Posthumus and Iachimo use women as pawns in their conflicts with other men—particularly conflicts over matters of national pride. Girlfriends and women stand in for generalized symbols of the men's country, reducing the women to nameless, faceless representatives of national honor.


While Posthumus holds firm in his opinion, Iachimo doesn't quite believe him, since he doesn't think British women are all that good or beautiful. Iachimo says he might believe Posthumus if he saw Imogen with his own eyes and she proved to be as lustrous as Posthumus' diamond **ring**. But Iachimo claims that, just as he himself hasn't seen the most precious diamond that exists, Posthumus has never seen the most precious woman that exists. When Posthumus holds firm about Imogen, Iachimo asks how much his diamond is worth, and Posthumus replies that it's priceless. This leads Iachimo to conclude that either Posthumus' beloved is dead, or she isn't worth a trinket.

After elevating his esteem for Italian women, Iachimo alleges that British women aren't all that great. This comparison is another expression of the tensions between Rome (the imperial seat) and Britain (the dependent state). Further, Iachimo's concern with the ring shows how materialistic he is. He turns what was a valuable symbol of Posthumus and Imogen's fidelity into a mere monetary commodity. For Iachimo, material wealth means more than love, and he'll go to great lengths to win money or expensive goods.


Posthumus tells Iachimo that he is mistaken in the way he looks at the diamond **ring** through a materialistic lens, rather than understanding its symbolic meaning. The diamond can be sold if anyone has enough money to buy it, or is worthy enough for him to give it away as a gift. His love, on the other hand, is not for sale, but rather a gift from the gods. With their grace, he will hold onto his love.

Just as Iachimo has shown that he prizes material wealth, Posthumus demonstrates what matters most to him: love, a virtuous thing to value. He recognizes how precious love is, so much so that it's a gift from the gods. Demonstrating piety by invoking the gods, Posthumus puts his trust in them.

Iachimo says that Posthumus may have his wife's love now, but he warns Posthumus that while he is away, another man may tempt Imogen. Just as a thief could steal Posthumus' **ring**, an "accomplished courtier" could steal his lover away from him. The ring is a temporary, material thing, Iachimo warns, and the woman Posthumus loves is weak.

Again, Iachimo makes a generalization about women—particularly Imogen. He subscribes to the old-fashioned stereotype that women are weak and give into sexual temptation. Clearly, he has not met the staunchly loyal Imogen.

Balking at Iachimo's suggestion, Posthumus says that Italy has no such suitor to tempt his wife, and while he is sure that there are plenty of thieves, he isn't worried about his ring. Philario suggests that the men stop talking about this subject. Posthumus is happy to oblige, but Iachimo claims that he could even win over Imogen, if only he had the opportunity to woo her in person.

Posthumus expresses his strong trust in Imogen—he doesn't doubt in her promises of fidelity at all (though Imogen has expressed some doubt that Posthumus may be tempted in Italy). Iachimo shows his true colors: he takes things too far, and is competitive.

Iachimo says he'll bet half of his belongings against Posthumus' **ring** that he can woo any woman in the world. According to Iachimo, it's Posthumus' confidence in his wife's fidelity—as opposed to her reputation—that eggs him on. Posthumus tells Iachimo that he's overconfident, and that when the woman he attempts to seduce refuses him, Iachimo will get what's coming to him.

Posthumus' assuredness in his wife's loyalty launches Iachimo into the bet. Again, this reflects Iachimo's chauvinist assertion that women are too weak-willed to be faithful. That he's willing to stake so many of his possessions shows how seriously he takes the wager, because to Iachimo, material wealth means the world.

Philario begs the gentlemen to cease their discussion of a wager, but this only emboldens Iachimo, who wishes he'd bet more. Posthumus asks him to specify which woman he wants to attempt to seduce; Iachimo says he will try to win Posthumus' wife. Iachimo requests that Posthumus send him to the British court with letters of recommendation that enable him to speak with Imogen. Iachimo bets ten thousand ducats against Posthumus' **ring** that he will win Imogen's honor.

By escalating his bet, Iachimo shows that he just doesn't know when to stop. What's more, he treats women as objects—Imogen is nothing more than a pawn to him to prove his own virility. He contrasts with Philario, who displays the virtues of moderation and caution when trying to discourage the bet.

Posthumus says he would rather bet **gold** than his **ring**, since the ring is as precious to him as his own finger. Iachimo takes this as a sign of Posthumus' fear, and mocks Posthumus being afraid of his wife as though she were a god. Posthumus hopes Iachimo is not being serious, but Iachimo promises that he's not joking and is willing to go ahead with the bet.

Posthumus shows how much the ring means to him: it's his last attachment to Imogen and their love. Though he's reluctant to part with the ring, Posthumus isn't above Iachimo's call to gamble.

Provoked, Posthumus says that he'll lend Iachimo his ring until Iachimo returns from Britain. He says they should draw up a contract with the terms of the bet, and that his wife is better than Iachimo's "unworthy thinking" can comprehend. Posthumus gives the **ring** over to Iachimo and dares him to make an attempt on Imogen.

Posthumus continues to assert Imogen's worth and fidelity, even as he gives into Iachimo's wager. This complicates the loyalty the audience has seen thus far in the play. Could it be that Posthumus is participating in the bet and giving over the ring in the ultimate act of fidelity: putting total trust in Imogen? At the same time, his use of her as a pawn without her consent demeans Imogen's agency.


Philario says that he won't allow the bet to happen, but it's too late. Iachimo swears to the gods that it's a bet, and that if he doesn't bring evidence that he's seduced Posthumus' beloved, then he will owe Posthumus ten thousand ducats and his ring back. If Iachimo does succeed, then Imogen, the ring, and the gold will all be his. Iachimo and Posthumus shake hands to formalize the wager, and the pair leave to get a lawyer to write down the terms. Incredulous, the Frenchman asks if the pair will actually go through with the bet, and Philario maintains that Iachimo won't back down.

By invoking the gods, Iachimo demonstrates how seriously he takes the bet, since the deities are central to Roman life. Philario confirms what Iachimo has already shown about his character: Iachimo is nothing if not determined.

ACT 1, SCENE 5

Back at Cymbeline's court, the Queen sends her ladies away to gather flowers. While they're gone, the Queen privately asks the court doctor, Cornelius, if he's brought the drugs she requested. He gives her a box containing them, then asks why she needs such a poisonous compound, which causes a slow, languishing death.

While the audience has seen evidence of the Queen's treachery in setting up Imogen and Posthumus to be found by Cymbeline, this is the first hint that the Queen's schemes are physically dangerous.

Cornelius' question surprises the Queen. She comments on how long she has studied with him, learning how to make perfumes, distilled liquids, and preserves. The Queen claims she's so skilled that even Cymbeline has asked her for some of her compounds. As an advanced student, she thinks that she should increase her learning in other areas. She promises to only test the poison on animals. Then she can determine the poison's strength and effects, and apply antidotes accordingly. The Doctor fears that the experiments will make her hard-hearted.

Through her eloquent defense of her request for the poison, the Queen shows herself as a master manipulator. Because Cymbeline showed his force so strongly with Imogen, it could be hard to believe that the Queen was commanding him. However, in her interaction with the Doctor here, the Queen shows how she uses her verbal dexterity to take control of events, even if her words are lies.

As the Queen assures Cornelius not to worry, she sees Pisanio entering. In an aside, she calls Pisanio a "flattering rascal" and reveals that she plans to use the poison on him because he serves Posthumus, and he is therefore an enemy to Cloten. She calls for Pisanio because she has something to tell him, and asks Cornelius to leave them alone.

Once again, the Queen makes use of an aside to the audience to reveal her treachery. That she can go so easily from lying to the doctor about her innocent plans to revealing her true, murderous intentions underscores just how startlingly duplicitous she is, and how little her conscience affects her.

Before he leaves, Cornelius reveals in an aside that he feels suspicious of the Queen's motives and that he doesn't like her. He fears that the Queen's experiments on animals will lead her to harm humans, so he's only pretended to give poison to her—it's actually a sleeping potion. Anyone who takes the medicine may seem dead, but he asserts that the compound isn't dangerous. He thinks that the medicine's effect will fool the Queen, and that he will be "the truer,/ So to be false with her."

In explaining that he will trick the Queen by giving her a strong sleeping drug instead of poison, Cornelius complicates the notion of deception that Shakespeare has established in the figure of the Queen. In this case, Cornelius uses deception not to grab power or hurt others, but to actually prevent harm. Deception isn't necessarily a bad thing here.

Cornelius leaves on the Queen's urging. She then asks Pisanio if Imogen is still crying over Posthumus, wondering if, in time, Imogen will get over her foolishness and pick Cloten. The Queen asks Pisanio's help: if Pisanio can persuade Imogen to marry Cloten, she will elevate Pisanio's status as a reward. To drive home the wisdom of this, the Queen paints Posthumus' future as doomed by his exile.

Re-emphasizing how two-faced the Queen is, she pretends to care about Imogen's welfare—even if only for a moment before calling Imogen a fool. By asking Pisanio to set aside his loyalties and help her in exchange for money, the Queen reveals how little trust and value she places in people's loyalty.

The Queen drops the box containing Cornelius' compound, and Pisanio picks it up. The Queen tells Pisanio that he doesn't know what he's holding, but that he should keep it in exchange for his efforts. She explains that the box contains a medicine that's saved Cymbeline from death five times. Pisanio tries to give it back, but the Queen insists he take it. It's just the first of many good deeds she promises to do for his sake if he helps her.

Pisanio is right to try to give the box back to the Queen. This gesture makes physical Pisanio's innate distrust of the Queen. Yet again, through the power of her words, she pretends to be an ally to Posthumus when she's actually plotting treachery—just as she pretended to be on Imogen's side before setting her up.

The Queen asks Pisanio to give Imogen an accurate picture of how bad her situation is with Posthumus in exile, as though it that were Pisanio's own opinion. She asks him to think of this opportunity as a stroke of good luck: he'll still has an employer, and Cloten will look favorably on him in the future. The Queen promises that she'll obtain any promotion Pisanio desires from Cymbeline, and she even says that she will personally reimburse him for his service.

The Queen tries to teach Pisanio her own tactics. She asks him to manipulate words to achieve a certain end, even if those words don't reflect Pisanio's own opinion. Though she thinks Pisanio will take the bait, she ends up revealing her method of lying so she can get what she wants.

Pisanio exits to fetch the Queen's ladies, and alone onstage, the Queen remarks that Pisanio is sneaky, and his loyalty to Posthumus and Imogen is hard to shake. She thinks that Pisanio is spying for his banished master and encouraging Imogen to remain faithful to Posthumus. But the Queen feels reassured that he has the potion, which she believes is a poison that will kill him. Once Pisanio dies, Imogen will be left without allies; if she doesn't change her mind about Cloten then, she'll be sorry.

It's interesting that the Queen should entrust Pisanio with the mission to convince Imogen to prefer Cloten; she notes that Pisanio's loyalty to Imogen is staunch, and suspects that he's a spy. Why should she trust him with the mission she outlined? It seems that the Queen feels confident in her assessment that people's loyalty can be bought and sold. If not, she has poison to fall back on. Besides, Pisanio is only a pawn in her larger scheme to get the crown.


Pisanio returns with the Queen's ladies. She instructs her servants to bring the flowers they've gathered to her room, and she asks Pisanio to carefully consider her offer. Once he's alone, Pisanio says that he will remember what she said, but that he would choke himself if he ever betrayed his master, and that would be all he could do for the Queen.

Like Posthumus, who claims that he'd rather be burned alive than kiss a woman who is not his wife, Pisanio also wishes for death if he betrays his master and mistress. Pisanio therefore proves that he is noble, showing that some people are loyal to the death, which defies the Queen's views of mutable fidelity.


ACT 1, SCENE 6

Imogen laments that she has a cruel father, a lying stepmother, a foolish suitor in Cloten (who wants to marry an already married woman), and a banished husband. Posthumus is the greatest reason for her sadness, whereas the others just add to her annoyance. Imogen wishes that she could have been stolen like her two brothers. Noble people who can't get what they want are the most unfortunate, whereas others are lucky, even if they're poor, to live as they please and gain comfort from that.

Imogen keenly feels her lack of agency. Even though she tried to make her own path, her father, stepmother, and Cloten have diminished her self-determination with their plans. Once again, Imogen expresses that having a noble status isn't all it's cracked up to be—she is a princess, but because of that, she has no freedom to choose.

Imogen sees Pisanio coming in with Iachimo, and asks who the stranger is. Pisanio tells her that Iachimo is a Roman gentleman with letters from Posthumus. Imogen goes pale, and Iachimo reassures her that Posthumus is safe and sends her warm greetings. Iachimo hands Imogen a letter. She thanks him and welcomes him to court.

Here, Iachimo attempts to get into Imogen's good graces as her husband's messenger. Not betraying any hint of the wager, Iachimo shows how deft he is in his abilities to deceive.

Iachimo says to himself that Imogen is, on the outside, quite beautiful. If her mind is as great as her beauty, then she is rarer among women than a phoenix among birds. He fears that he will lose his bet because she's such an incredible woman. Iachimo prays for boldness, not wanting to run away altogether.

Up until this point, Iachimo has been quick to generalize about women. However, when he encounters Imogen, she challenges his expectations. She is not the frail woman he was expecting, but rather beautiful, smart, and strong. That he prays for boldness shows his fear—quite unlike his earlier displays of confidence.


Imogen reads aloud Posthumus' letter praising Iachimo; he writes that Iachimo has a wonderful reputation, and that Posthumus owes Iachimo for his kindness, so Imogen should treat Iachimo kindly in return. Imogen tells Iachimo that she'll only read that part aloud, but that the rest of the letter has comforted her, body and soul. She offers Iachimo another, more enthusiastic welcome, and promises that her actions will reflect that welcome.

This is the first letter in which Posthumus conceals his motives from Imogen, and certainly not the last. The fact that Imogen takes such heart from a mere letter of introduction from her husband shows how much she has pined for him. And since her husband has approved of Iachimo, her enthusiastic reception of the Italian nobleman displays her absolute loyalty to Posthumus' stated opinion.

Offering Imogen thanks, Iachimo asks if men are crazy. He wonders if nature has given them eyes to tell the stars apart from the sands of beaches. Likewise, he asks if man can use his eyes to tell the difference between what's beautiful and what's ugly. Imogen asks him what causes this sense of wonder.

Iachimo begins to speak his lines as if he's talking to himself, but he wants Imogen to overhear what he says—it's part of his ploy to attract her attention in his attempt to woo her. His discussion of what's beautiful and ugly is a common preoccupation for Shakespeare—he discusses how "fair and foul" mix in Macbeth. Here, he's setting up an argument about the nature of male desire.

Iachimo says that sight can't be faulty, because even monkeys can distinguish beauty between two women. Similarly, common sense can't be flawed, because even idiots—who have little common sense—can still express their preference over which woman was better. And even desire distinguishes between good and bad: men are more likely to feel attracted to "neat excellence" instead of wasting their desire on sluttishness. Imogen remains confused, and asks Iachimo what he means. Iachimo says that lust can never be satisfied—it is an overflowing tub, desiring garbage after devouring the lamb. Imogen asks if something is wrong with Iachimo: is he well?

Iachimo expresses common patriarchal views of female sexuality. He claims that men desire women who are clean and excellent over dirty women—the word "sluttery" in the original text ("sluttishness" in translation) can refer to a woman who is unkempt, or has many sexual partners. His choice of words implies that for a woman to have casual sex is dirty and undesirable. But a man's lust doesn't distinguish between the two in Iachimo's opinion, meaning that men will go after loose women—"garbage"—to satisfy themselves. All in all, Iachimo presents a grim portrait of sexuality.

After reassuring Imogen that he's fine, Iachimo asks Pisanio to leave and find Iachimo's servant. Pisanio leaves, saying he was just on his way to welcome the man, a foreigner in a new land.

Just as the Queen hopes to isolate Imogen by killing off Pisanio, Iachimo tries to isolate Imogen by sending Pisanio on a needless errand. Once he has Imogen alone, Iachimo hopes it will be easier to make his attempt on her. He deceives Pisanio in order to seduce Imogen.


Imogen asks Iachimo if Posthumus is well, and Iachimo assures her he is. She asks if he's happy, and Iachimo tells her that he is happy and gaining a reputation for his partying. Imogen comments that when he was in Britain, Posthumus was more inclined towards sadness, though he couldn't explain why. Iachimo says he's never seen Posthumus acting sad. In fact, one of Posthumus' Roman acquaintances, a Frenchman, always acts sad, longing for his lover back in France. But Iachimo reports that Posthumus just laughs at him and says that women can't help but ensnare men. Imogen finds this hard to believe. Iachimo asserts that it's true, and that some men do terrible things.

The contrast between Imogen's understanding of Posthumus' character and Iachimo's assertions that Posthumus is partying could show the cracks in Iachimo's deception, or could simply show Iachimo setting up his lie about Posthumus' infidelity. Either way, there's dissonance between Imogen's understanding of her husband and Iachimo's deceptive portrait of a misogynistic Posthumus whose opinions on women's wiles more closely mirror Iachimo's own evaluation of women.


Imogen replies that she hopes her husband isn't one such man, but Iachimo says that Posthumus isn't using the gifts the gods gave him well. He says he pities two people, and Imogen feels she's one of them from the way Iachimo is looking at her. Iachimo starts to say that he pities her because other women are enjoying her husband's company, but stops himself. It's the gods' job to take revenge, Iachimo says, so it's not his job to talk about Posthumus' indiscretions.

Again, Iachimo's double mention of the gods inserts a degree of seriousness to the conversation—the vengeance of the gods is no laughing matter. What's more, he injects doubt into Imogen's mind by beginning to mention Posthumus' infidelity, but then dropping it. This deceptive technique is similar to Iago's in Othello, who drops untrue hints to Othello to spur on his jealousy.


Iachimo reveals the depths of his deception: he praises Imogen and chides Posthumus for not valuing her. In such a way, he establishes himself as Imogen's admirer and protector, and Posthumus as a cheater. Iachimo uses flattery as a tool to earn Imogen's trust and make his seduction complete.

Imogen believes Iachimo knows more than he lets on. She asks him to tell her plainly what he wanted to say and why he stopped himself. Iachimo says that if he had Imogen but went around telling lies and seeking other women's company, he should be punished in hell. Imogen fears that her husband has forgotten Britain, and Iachimo adds that Posthumus has forgotten himself. But he says he must tell Imogen the truth because she is so good.

As before, when Iachimo went too far in making the wager, Iachimo goes too far in his attempt on Imogen. He doesn't respect the boundaries she sets on the conversation, and continues his flattery. He assigns extra vices to Posthumus, using that lie as a platform to propose adulterous revenge to Imogen.

Imogen asks Iachimo to cut off the conversation, but Iachimo insists that he is heartbroken for her sake. He marvels that such a beautiful woman, a princess no less, should have her ungrateful husband waste the money she gave him on prostitutes and gambling. Iachimo urges Imogen to get revenge by sleeping with him. He says he'll treat her better than her unfaithful husband.

Imogen finds herself vulnerable now that her seducer, Iachimo, has isolated her from others. However, she resists his physical advances and calls him out for his untruths. Other characters have noted that Imogen is a good judge of character—she chose Posthumus over the awful Cloten. Here, she lives up to that assessment by seeing through Posthumus' lie. By bringing her father into it, Imogen leverages the little political capital she has as a princess for her protection.

Alarmed, Imogen calls for Pisanio. Iachimo tries to kiss Imogen, but she tells him to go away. She is angry at herself, chastising her ears for even listening to his proposition. Imogen thinks Iachimo told her his story about Posthumus just so he can have sex with her—an effort she finds "as base as strange." She tells Iachimo that he has wronged Posthumus, and that she'll tell Cymbeline all about Iachimo's indecent proposal. If the King won't take action against a foreigner who's bargained for Imogen as if she were a Roman prostitute—and who's made beastly accusations about Posthumus—then Cymbeline doesn't care for his daughter or his court.

By claiming that his attempt to seduce Imogen was merely a "test" of her fidelity and virtue, Iachimo shows just how tricky he is. He is quick on his feet in conversation, and he tries to win Imogen's trust with his apology. If Iachimo can't seduce her, he can use trickery to get proof of their affair. That Imogen readily forgives Iachimo shows her inclination towards mercy, quite unlike her father at the start of the play.

Mentioning how lucky Posthumus is to have such a wife, Iachimo swears that Imogen is trustworthy and perfectly good. He prays for blessings on Posthumus, and praises his virtue. Iachimo asks Imogen's forgiveness: his attempted seduction was just a test of her loyalty to Posthumus. He promises that the news of her faithfulness will be welcome to Posthumus, and Imogen says that by praising her husband, Iachimo has atoned for his affront.

It's almost as if the audience can see the wheels turning in Iachimo's head. His attempt to seduce Imogen failed, so he must rely on a contingency plan. Since he's back in Imogen's good graces, Iachimo makes a request that sounds innocent to her, but prompts the audience to have doubts. Further, since he shows deference when she asks him to stay, he doesn't behave with his usual swagger, which is suspicious in itself.

Then, Iachimo asks Imogen for one small favor. He, Posthumus, and other friends brought a present of silver and **jewels** for the Emperor, and Iachimo asks Imogen if she can store them safely. She promises to keep them secure in her bedroom until tomorrow when he'll sail back to France. Imogen asks him to stay longer, but Iachimo insists he must go. He begs her to write to her husband that night so he can bring the letter back tomorrow. Imogen reassures him that she'll keep the present safe, and will write to her husband.

ACT 2, SCENE 1

Cloten complains about his bad luck—he bet 100 pounds at a lawn game but lost, and then he was reprimanded for swearing by a man of lower social rank. The First Lord says that Cloten paid the man back by cracking his head with his bowl. In an aside, the Second Lord says that if the injured man had a mind like Cloten's, he would have run away, implying that Cloten is cowardly.

Cloten is a sore loser not just in love, but also in sports. He can't let Imogen go, and he can't let the bad result of his game go. Further, he seems to think his noble status makes him above social customs and norms of behavior. Both of these factors show how self-absorbed Cloten is. The Second Lord reasserts Cloten's cowardice—he's no match for the courageous Imogen.

Cloten says he could have fought with the man who insulted him if they had been of the same rank, and he exclaims that the thing that annoys him most is his nobility: men don't want to fight him because he's the Queen's son, whereas men with lower social status can fight as much as they like. In an aside, the Second Lord calls Cloten a chicken who's all talk. Cloten asks him what he said, and the Second Lord tells him it's not right to fight every companion who offends him. Cloten agrees, but says it's okay for him to offend his social inferiors.

One point of similarity between Cloten and Imogen is their desire to shed their royal status so that they can freely obtain what they desire—for Cloten, that's violent conflict, and for Imogen, it's Posthumus. However, Cloten wants to have his cake and eat it too—he wishes his nobility would make him above the law, but he doesn't want his nobility to restrict him.

The First Lord asks Cloten if he's heard of the stranger who's arrived at court from Italy, a friend of Posthumus. Cloten calls Posthumus a "banished rascal," and asks if it would be proper to go see the new arrival, or if people would think less of him for doing so. The Second Lord answers that he couldn't possibly lower people's opinions of him, whispering that that they're low enough already.

Ignoble Cloten's insecurity is on full display here—he doesn't want others at court to think ill of him. Like a schoolyard bully, Cloten calls the virtuous Posthumus a name. Though Cloten often boasts, his words show that he is self-conscious.

Cloten plans to meet the Italian gentleman in hopes of gambling with him and perhaps recovering what he lost betting on the bowls match. As soon as Cloten and the First Lord have left, the Second Lord berates Cloten, calling him an "ass." He expresses his sorrow for Imogen, bemoaning how her father and stepmother undermine her. He prays that her honor remains intact until she reunites with Posthumus.

Cloten demonstrates his duplicity here—he goes to ostensibly welcome Iachimo to court, but really with the motive of winning money off of him. He tries to use people for his own ends—base behavior for which the Second Lord calls him an "ass." His prayer to the gods shows how fervently the Second Lord supports Imogen.

ACT 2, SCENE 2

After reading in bed, Imogen starts to nod off, so she asks her lady to mark her page and leave the candle burning. Imogen says her prayers, but once she falls asleep, Iachimo emerges from the trunk that he had said contained **jewels** for the Emperor.

Before falling asleep, Imogen makes sure to recite her nightly prayers—a show of her piety to the gods, who control human destiny in this play. The visual effect of Iachimo emerging from the trunk creates a shock for the audience, who understand the treachery in Iachimo's seemingly innocuous request about the jewels.

Iachimo comments that all other people are sleeping and he likens himself to Tarquin (the infamous prince who raped Lucretia in Roman legend) in the way he sneaks quietly across the floor. Iachimo compares Imogen to Aphrodite, and praises her fair skin, red lips, and sweet-smelling breath. He wishes he could kiss and touch her, but instead he takes notes on the room.

By comparing himself to Tarquin, Iachimo adds suspense to the scene. That allusion prompts the audience to fear that Iachimo will violate Imogen—a woman vulnerable and alone. It's a step further than Iachimo's attempts to kiss her when she was alone. However, the audience experiences momentary relief when Iachimo announces he'll take details about the room—the start of the "proof" he'll bring back to Posthumus.

Iachimo observes the bedchamber's physical layout and prays that Imogen will stay asleep. He steals the bracelet Posthumus gave her, noting that showing it to Posthumus will drive him crazy. For even stronger "proof," he takes stock of a mole that looks like a cowslip on Imogen's left breast. He concludes that this will be the strongest evidence of seducing Imogen that he could offer Posthumus.

Once again, Iachimo prays to the gods as he did when he first saw Imogen. When he fears that he'll be no match for Imogen (who, if awakened, would cause a stir—unlike the frailty and submission he expects of women), he prays. Stealing Posthumus' love token makes concrete Iachimo's theft of the lovers' trust and happiness. Similarly, Iachimo's observance of intimate details of Imogen's body are a violation—he's not so unlike Tarquin after all.

Having obtained all his proof, Iachimo observes Imogen's book: she was reading the story of Tereus and the rape of Philomela. Iachimo asks the night to pass quickly, because he is scared of staying in the room—even though Imogen is an angel from heaven, he finds his situation hellish. The clock strikes, and he hides in the trunk once more.

Once again, the allusion to the story of Philomela, who was raped, mirrors the way that Iachimo violates Imogen's privacy and sense of trust with her husband. Iachimo's fear may also indicate a pang of guilt. Here, Shakespeare hints that the treacherous Iachimo may be a redeemable character.

ACT 2, SCENE 3

In the ante-chamber outside of Imogen's rooms, the First Lord compliments Cloten on how well he bears losses—he keeps his cool and is patient when he loses, but he's energetic when he wins. Cloten wishes he "could get this foolish Imogen." Then, he insists, he "should have gold enough." Cloten awaits the arrival of musicians with impatience, since he's been told to have music played for Imogen in the mornings, and it's finally day.

The First Lord continues to flatter Cloten, to the point that he tells blatant lies. Based on Cloten's behavior thus far, he is far from cool and patient. In this way, the First Lord deceives Cloten—perhaps to maintain favor with the King's stepson. Cloten lashes out at Imogen and equates marrying her to material wealth, showing that he doesn't love Imogen for who she is, but rather he simply craves power, like the scheming Queen.

The musicians arrive, and Cloten hopes that they can "penetrate" Imogen with their song. If not, he swears to never give up. He instructs the musicians about the type of songs to play, and they sing about the dawn and a pretty lady awakening. Cloten likes the music: he says that if it convinces Imogen to accept him, he'll like the music better than he already does. If not, something must be wrong with Imogen's ears.

Cloten makes crass allusions to having sex with Imogen—he sees her as an object for his gratification and as a prize to be won, not a person. He expresses the patriarchal views of his time, objectifying women as instruments for male pleasure and symbols of male status.

The Second Lord spots Cymbeline and the Queen coming their way. Cymbeline asks if Cloten is still waiting on Imogen, and if she refuses to see him. Cloten tells him that he tried to woo her with music, but she hasn't responded. Cymbeline explains that Imogen hasn't forgotten Posthumus, and he tells Cloten to give it time—before long, she'll forget about Posthumus and will accept Cloten.

Just as the Queen puts little stock in Pisanio's loyalty to Posthumus, Cymbeline underestimates Imogen's loyalty to her husband. He thinks that Cloten's repeated attempts to woo his daughter will wear her resistance down. Yet he doesn't realize how deep Imogen's loyalty to her husband is.

The Queen tells Cloten that he owes a lot to Cymbeline for attempting to get Imogen to look favorably on him. She encourages Cloten to try hard, to not take no for an answer, and to act as though he loves Imogen by obeying her in everything besides her orders to leave her alone.

Like Cymbeline, the Queen also encourages Cloten not to give up on Imogen. As she did with Pisanio, she tries to instruct Cloten in deceiving Imogen through flattery and obedience—behavior not in keeping with Cloten's character.

A messenger enters with word that the Roman ambassador, Caius Lucius, has arrived at court. Cymbeline says that Lucius is a good man, even though he is coming with an angry message—an allusion to Lucius' request for money from the King. Yet Cymbeline says that Lucius is just following Augustus' instructions. Cymbeline says he himself must treat Lucius well because the Emperor deserves it, and because Cymbeline and Lucius have had a good relationship thus far. Before leaving, Cymbeline asks Cloten to come find him and the Queen as soon as he's greeted Imogen, because they'll need his help in their meeting with Lucius.

At this point, the play's political realities take center stage. Though Cymbeline is a king, he must always answer to the Emperor, by way of the ambassador. Cymbeline is not entirely free to reign on his own, as he owes the Emperor his time and his money. He even calls on the Queen and Cloten to help navigate the difficult meeting. In such a way, Cymbeline's royal authority appears compromised under the structure of the Empire.

Cloten knocks on Imogen's door. He knows that her ladies are attending her, and he plans to bribe one of them with gold to give a good report of him to Imogen. A gentlewoman answers and asks what Cloten wants. He replies that he wants Imogen. The lady says Imogen will stay in her room, so Cloten offers the lady **gold** to say good things about him. The serving-lady responds with shock—to take the bribe would be to sell her reputation short. Besides, she would be lying if she praised him.

Like Pisanio, Imogen's serving-woman shows loyalty to her mistress. Taking a cue from his duplicitous mother, Cloten tries to use deception to win Imogen's good opinion. However, Cloten underappreciates the serving-woman's loyalty to Imogen, and she's not afraid to let Cloten know her low opinion of him.

Imogen arrives, and Cloten tries to kiss her hand, but she tells him that he's trying too hard. Cloten swears that he loves Imogen, but Imogen says she doesn't care. Imogen asks him to leave her alone, because she will only be rude to him, and she says he's too smart to keep pursuing her when she refuses him.

Imogen is unmoving in her loyalty to Posthumus. Despite Cloten's physical advances and his claims that he loves her, Imogen stands her ground, unafraid to tell him plainly that she refuses him.

Cloten says he can't leave Imogen in her madness, and Imogen, in reply, calls Cloten a fool. Imogen says she's sorry that Cloten has made her forget her ladylike manners, but she proclaims that she doesn't care for him at all. Cloten counters that Imogen sinfully disobeys her father's wishes, saying that her marriage to Posthumus isn't legally binding, and that Posthumus is a lowlife raised on charity. He reminds Imogen of her rank: lower-class people can marry whomever they please, but she is a princess who will inherit the crown. She sullies it by marrying a lower-class man.

Using an age-old gender stereotype that a woman who refuses a "worthy" man's advances must be crazy, Cloten insists that Imogen has gone mad. He also chides her for disobeying her father, since women were supposed to be obedient in antiquity and in Shakespeare's time alike. To add an extra sting, Cloten reminds Imogen of the restrictions of nobility—which, ironically, the two of them both dislike.

Imogen calls Cloten rude, and says he is lowlier than Posthumus because of his behavior. Cloten wishes that Posthumus would rot in Italy, and Imogen says that Posthumus' "mean'st garment…is dearer" to her than Cloten.

After Cloten has derided Posthumus for his low status, Imogen adds nuance to the meaning of nobility. Though Cloten may have a more noble position, his ignoble behavior is no match for the low-born but virtuous Posthumus.

As Cloten reels from Imogen's comparison, Pisanio arrives, and Imogen asks him to fetch her serving-woman since Cloten is pestering her. She also asks Pisanio to tell her lady to look for Posthumus' **bracelet**, which she seems to have lost in the night. Pisanio vows that it will be found.

Since Cloten values the material over the spiritual, Imogen's barb that he's less worthy than Posthumus' "mean'st garment" wounds him, as he believes he's a noble, upright man. Imogen is also preoccupied by a material item, but one with spiritual significance—her missing bracelet, the symbol of her loyalty to Posthumus.

Cloten complains that Imogen was rude to him by comparing him to Posthumus' "mean'st garment," but Imogen doesn't take back the insult. Cloten says he will tell Cymbeline, but Imogen ups the ante, asking him to tell his mother, too. The Queen is supposed to be in charge of Imogen, and Imogen doesn't care if she thinks worse of her for her comment. She leaves, and Cloten swears vengeance on Imogen for her words.

Imogen's confrontation with Cloten is yet another example of the princess refusing to back down. Cymbeline's show of force didn't scare her, and Cloten doesn't intimidate her. At this point, Cloten commits himself to a path of violent revenge, hoping to ruin Imogen's life. He's unable to forgive her insult.

ACT 2, SCENE 4

Back in Italy, Posthumus feels sure that the King will come around to him, just as he feels sure of Imogen's staunch fidelity. Philario asks Posthumus how he will repair his relationship with Cymbeline, and Posthumus says that he plans to let time pass, and that Cymbeline will eventually change his mind. If not, then he'll die in debt to Philario's hospitality. Philario says that he's happy to have Posthumus' company.

Posthumus here subscribes to the age-old adage "time heals all wounds." Posthumus hopes for forgiveness over time, though he recognizes there's a chance that Cymbeline—who's been harsh thus far in the play—won't reconcile with him. Philario's kindness to Posthumus contrasts with Cymbeline's severe punishment.

Philario thinks that Lucius must have reached Cymbeline by now, and that Cymbeline will prove faithful to the Roman Empire and pay the tribute. Otherwise, the Romans will invade again, and Cymbeline will regret it. Posthumus, on the other hand, thinks that the Britons will rebel against Roman rule, since they are more prepared for war than they were when Julius Caesar first invaded years before.

Philario and Posthumus add further context to the tensions between Britain and Rome. The historical Julius Caesar invaded Britain in 55 and in 54 BCE, installing a king whose rival (Cassibelan) was Cymbeline's uncle. Ever since, the British king paid a tribute (money to guarantee peace) to the Roman Emperor. Philario and Posthumus express that tensions are bubbling up between Britain and Rome.

Philario spots Iachimo entering and welcomes him. Posthumus marvels at the speed with which Iachimo returned, and hopes that he came back so quickly because Imogen refused him swiftly. Iachimo claims that Imogen is one of the most beautiful women he's ever seen. Posthumus then lauds her character and fidelity. Iachimo hands over letters to Posthumus, and he hopes they contain good news.

For the time being, Posthumus' trust in Imogen's loyalty remains absolute. Iachimo enjoys stringing Posthumus along, not saying anything about the alleged "proof" that he has of an affair with Imogen. That he takes his time in revealing his proof demonstrates how Iachimo takes pleasure in the art of deception.

Philario asks Iachimo if Lucius arrived at the British court. Iachimo informs Philario that Cymbeline was still waiting for Lucius. Posthumus says that there can't be trouble, in that case.

Philario expects that once Cymbeline and Lucius have their meeting, a conflict will result. This is the calm before the storm of the diplomatic meeting.

Posthumus asks Iachimo where the **ring** is. Iachimo replies that he would travel a long way to enjoy another night with Imogen. Posthumus is incredulous: it would be too hard to win the ring he wagered, since Imogen wouldn't be unfaithful to her husband. Iachimo insists that Imogen was easy, and Posthumus asks Iachimo not to tease him like that. Yet Iachimo stresses that they must keep their promises: they entered into the bet willingly, and since he won Imogen and the ring, Posthumus has to be friendly with him. (Posthumus had promised to fight Iachimo if his attempts on Imogen were unsuccessful.)

Iachimo continues to bluster and boast—he showed off his verbal dexterity in conversation with Imogen, and now he's up to the same tricks with Posthumus. Just as Imogen resisted Iachimo's lies, Posthumus isn't convinced by them either—for now, at least. Once again, Iachimo's mode of deception rests on sowing seeds of doubt and continually insisting that his lies are true.

Posthumus needs proof before he concedes defeat. If he doesn't get that proof, then he'll fight Iachimo to the death. Iachimo says that his story will confirm the truth of his report.

Posthumus wants to hold fast to Imogen's fidelity, to the point that he threatens Iachimo.

First, Iachimo details Imogen's bedchamber. He describes the tapestries which illustrate Cleopatra meeting her Roman lover Antony. Posthumus allows that the description is true, but Iachimo could have just heard about it. Iachimo includes further details: where the chimney stood, and the fireplace carving of a nude Diana bathing. Again, Posthumus is unconvinced. So Iachimo describes the ceiling, decorated with angels, and andirons in the fireplace, with a design featuring Cupid. Posthumus doesn't think these details are convincing.

Iachimo sets up his argument by laying out his weakest evidence first and saving the most important pieces of proof—the bracelet and the description of Imogen's mole—for later. Thus, he manipulates the effect of his words, causing them to have maximum impact on Posthumus. He shows himself as a master manipulator. It's worth noting, too, how sensuous the décor of Imogen's bedroom is. Even if the "proof" doesn't convince Posthumus, it gets him thinking about romance and physical love.

Again, Iachimo shows Posthumus the **bracelet**, and asks him to go pale with shock. Posthumus asks if that is the bracelet he left with Imogen, and Iachimo confirms it, saying that Imogen gave it to him freely—which made it all the more valuable. Posthumus guesses that maybe she gave it to Iachimo to give to Posthumus, but when Iachimo asks if she wrote that in her letter, Posthumus concedes she didn't. He hands Iachimo the **ring**.

Posthumus is really straining here to give Imogen the benefit of the doubt in the face of Iachimo's increasingly damning "proof." This shows how much stock he puts in Imogen's promise of fidelity. (Interestingly, he holds her to a different standard than he holds himself—Posthumus gave Iachimo Imogen's ring, but he considers it much worse for Imogen to give up her bracelet.)

Posthumus looks at the ring and meditates that beauty and honor don't go together, nor do truth and outward appearances. He says women's vows can't be trusted, as their virtue means nothing. But Philario still clings to hope: he tells Posthumus to take the **ring** back. Imogen probably lost her bracelet, or maybe one of her women stole it. Posthumus thinks that's sound reasoning, and asks for the ring back. He wants proof of some mark on Imogen's body as a sign of infidelity.

Here, Posthumus leans on patriarchal, stereotypical views of women as manipulators and liars who are not to be trusted. Ironically, the person he shouldn't trust—Iachimo—is a man. Noticeably, Philario has greater faith in Imogen's loyalty to Posthumus than even Posthumus has.

Iachimo swears he got the **bracelet** from Imogen, which makes Posthumus believe that his story is true. Imogen wouldn't have lost the bracelet that he thought meant so much to her. Philario tells Posthumus to be cautious, that the evidence isn't good enough, but Posthumus seems convinced. The nail in the coffin is Iachimo's physical evidence: he describes the mole under Imogen's breast, and describes how he kissed it, which inflamed his desire.

It's almost as if Philario and Iachimo personify Posthumus' interior debate about his wife's honor. Will Posthumus give into jealous thoughts, represented by Iachimo, or maintain faith in his wife's loyalty, as Philario embodies? The "evidence" about the mole tips the scales in Iachimo's favor.

Posthumus takes this as final confirmation that Iachimo has stained Imogen's honor, and exclaims that Imogen's sins are as big as any hell could contain. Iachimo asks if Posthumus wants to hear more, but Posthumus says it's enough. Posthumus says he'll kill Iachimo if he denies sleeping with Imogen, because Posthumus feels just that convinced that Iachimo slept with her. Iachimo says he won't deny anything. Posthumus wishes Imogen were here so he could tear her to shreds. He swears to go to Britain to kill her in front of Cymbeline, and he exits. Philario marvels at Posthumus' anger, and suggests that he and Iachimo follow Posthumus so he won't harm himself.

Posthumus fails to recognize that behind Iachimo's boastful talk about sleeping with Imogen, Imogen could have been raped or her person otherwise violated. Posthumus is quick to blame his wife. Iachimo has Posthumus right where he wants him—wholly believing in the lie. Posthumus' deep anger and violent threats are in keeping with the Roman patriarchal role—husbands, like fathers, had the power of life and death over wives and other women family members, particularly over crimes like adultery.

ACT 2, SCENE 5

Alone, Posthumus rails against women. He claims that due to their frailty and sexual infidelity, women only give birth to illegitimate children. He thinks that his mother appeared to his father like the chaste Diana, and so too did Imogen appear chaste to him. He swears revenge. He comments that Imogen would often prevent Posthumus from having sex with her (presumably before marriage), and she asked him to refrain from lust. He claims she asked so sweetly that even a god would have found it attractive. Posthumus says he was sure she was as pure as unmelted snow.

Iachimo has twisted Posthumus' mind to such an extent that what Posthumus had once considered to be a virtue of Imogen—her chastity, putting off Posthumus' sexual advances (most likely before marrying)—has become a vice, since he thinks she was sexually loose with Iachimo. In this infamous misogynistic speech, Posthumus generalizes that women are adulterous liars.

Posthumus wonders how long it took for Imogen and Iachimo to go from just meeting to having sex—was it an hour, or less? He imagines that Iachimo barely spoke to Imogen before they went headlong into the act, and that she put up no resistance. He lists all of women's flaws, including lying, flattery, deceit, lust, revenge, ambition, jealousy, and more. He claims that the only thing women are "constant" to is "vice." Posthumus swears vengeance and promises to further meditate on the evil of women.

Reminiscent of speeches from Othello, Posthumus' speech is poisoned by jealousy. He has gone beyond Iachimo's "proof" to obsessively imagine Iachimo and Imogen's sexual encounter, which troubles Posthumus all the more. Again, he makes striking generalizations about women, and his vows of revenge have Posthumus sounding more like Cloten—an inherently bad, ignoble example to follow.

ACT 3, SCENE 1

At court, Cymbeline asks the Roman ambassador Lucius what Emperor Augustus wants. Lucius reminds the Cymbeline that Cassibelan (Cymbeline's uncle and a former king) promised Rome a yearly tribute of £3000 to maintain peace, but Cymbeline hasn't paid it. The Queen tells Lucius that he'll get used to not receiving the money, since they won't pay it anymore. Echoing his mother, Cloten says they won't see another ruler as worthy as Julius Caesar for a long time, and that Britain is a world into itself—as such, Britons "will nothing pay/ For wearing our own noses."

The tensions that have been bubbling over the relationship between Rome and Britain reach a boiling point here. £3000 is no insubstantial sum—and Augustus is bound to feel anger from Cymbeline's refusal to pay. It's noteworthy, too, how comfortable the Queen and Cloten feel in speaking on behalf of Cymbeline—their attempts to grab power aren't so well concealed when they speak for the King himself.

The Queen directly appeals to her husband: during Julius Caesar's invasions, the Romans had to use force to win Britain. But now Britons have an opportunity to win their freedom again. She reminds Cymbeline of his noble ancestors, and talks about the British landscape—an island guarded by sea—as well-fortified. Caesar's ships crashed against the coastal rocks, and Cassibelan almost defeated Caesar, except that he had a stroke of ill luck. Cloten interrupts that the British troops are stronger now than they were during the invasion, and Cymbeline asks his stepson to let the Queen finish, but Cloten, energized, continues on. He says that others may merely complain about Roman rule, but he is ready and able to fight. Cloten thinks Julius Caesar was overly ambitious in subduing the Britons, which goes against their warlike nature. The attendant lords agree that the Britons are bellicose.

The Queen once again puts her powers of persuasion to use, as she attempted to do in convincing Cornelius to hand over the poison. She makes strong points about Britain's very geography as a concrete sign of the island nation's independence. By reminding Cymbeline of his ancestors, she brings to the fore the ever-present question which guides Cymbeline's actions—concerns over the legacy he will leave as King. Cloten's constant interjections reveal his passion for independence—it's in keeping with his character, as Cloten is always looking for a fight (even if, in the act of fighting itself, he can be cowardly).

With the lords, Cloten, and the Queen rallying behind the cause of independence, Cymbeline feels emboldened. Citing the first British King Mumultius and the freedom of Britain before Julius Caesar came to the island, the King tells Lucius that he will not pay the tribute.

Yet again, Cymbeline takes an action that will be hard to reconcile later on. The Queen's reference to Cymbeline's ancestors seems to have taken hold with the King, who calls on Mumultius' memory as an inspiration for this move.

Lucius regrets that he will have to break the news of Cymbeline's refusal to the Emperor, and that he must declare Britain an enemy state. He explains that "war and confusion" will result from Cymbeline's decision. Nevertheless, Lucius thanks Cymbeline for his hospitality. Likewise, Cymbeline fondly remembers his childhood under Caesar's guidance. He was raised in Caesar's court, and received a knighthood and honors from him. But, even though Caesar honored Cymbeline in his youth, Cymbeline now feels dishonored over the matter of the tribute. He must seek freedom for his country from the Romans, just as the rebelling Pannonians and Dalmatians are doing.

Lucius highlights that the consequences of Cymbeline's action will be dire, if not absolutely deadly. However, Lucius remains somewhat friendly to Cymbeline, saying he regrets the breach in international relations. This in turn highlights the complex interdependence between Rome and Britain, which is bolstered by Cymbeline's fond memories of Caesar's court. However, the mention of the Pannonians and Dalmatians' revolt puts Britain's quest for independence in a wider global context—it's a push for national freedom among other similar movements.

Cloten tells Lucius that Cymbeline still welcomes him at court, and asks him to spend a few more days of leisure there before the tensions rise further and war becomes inevitable. Lucius agrees.

This is one of the rare moments in which Cloten shows hospitality—he can't act nobly unless he gets what he wants. His friendly invitation to Lucius further demonstrates the close ties between Rome and Britain.

ACT 3, SCENE 2

Reading a letter from his master, Pisanio feels dismayed by its contents. Posthumus has asserted that Imogen was unfaithful to him, and has ordered Pisanio to kill Imogen for her transgression. But Pisanio is convinced someone in Italy must have played a trick on Posthumus. Pisanio knows that Imogen is chaste, and believes that Imogen is being unfairly punished for remaining loyal to her husband. According to Pisanio, Posthumus' opinion of his wife has sunk as low as his fortunes before their marriage.

Pisanio sees through Iachimo's tricks better than Posthumus—he knows Imogen to be chaste and honorable, and so the thought that she would cheat on her husband is ludicrous in Pisanio's eyes. Iachimo's tricks have produced dire, lethal consequences. Posthumus prizes loyalty so highly that infidelity warrants death.

Pisanio can hardly believe that Posthumus is ordering him to kill Imogen, which leaves Pisanio is in a quandary: should he remain loyal to his master, or go against Posthumus' wishes to save innocent Imogen? Pisanio doesn't want to follow the command. He reads Posthumus' letter aloud: Posthumus instructs Pisanio to give a separate letter to Imogen. The instructions contained therein will give Pisanio an opportunity to kill her. Pisanio condemns his own letter for looking so innocent on the outside but containing such a foul order. He sees Imogen coming towards him, and tells the audience he won't let on about the letter's contents.

Whereas Posthumus' views on loyalty seem to be black-and-white, Pisanio's understanding of loyalty is more complex—made so by the fact that he serves a couple, rather than a single individual. Posthumus asked Pisanio to serve Imogen faithfully—but should he remain loyal to Posthumus, his master, by killing the woman he was asked to be faithful to? That Pisanio doesn't act right away—but will keep the letter secret to gain time—shows that he is a deliberative, discerning character.

Pisanio hands Posthumus' second letter to Imogen. She recognizes the handwriting, and asks the gods for her husband to write that he's well and happy about everything besides their separation. Unsealing the letter, Imogen reads it aloud. Posthumus writes that he'll risk Cymbeline's wrath and justice just to see Imogen. He instructs her to meet him in Wales, at Milford Haven. Overjoyed, Imogen wishes she could speed off to meet her husband on a winged horse. She asks Pisanio how far the journey is, and he estimates she can ride twenty miles a day.

The dramatic irony in this exchange is intense. Imogen unwittingly opens a letter designed to lead to her death, and she prays for the good health and happiness of her husband, who has just ordered her to be killed. Shakespeare uses this device to increase the tension onstage and to cause the audience to feel the pain of Posthumus' betrayal.

Imogen finds this a slow speed, and feels impatient to go. She bids Pisanio to have her serving-woman obtain a disguise for her: a riding habit that a simple housewife might wear. Pisanio urges Imogen to think her decision through, but she is single-minded. Imogen vows to find her husband.

Pisanio's attempts to remain composed and cool-headed in the face of Imogen's enthusiasm further prove his careful discernment. Imogen's steadfast loyalty stands in stark contrast to Posthumus' deception.

ACT 3, SCENE 3

Meanwhile, in Wales, Belarius (under the pseudonym of Morgan) leaves the cave he calls home with his adoptive sons Guiderius (known as Polydor) and Arviragus (known as Cadwal). The trio greet the nature around them, and Belarius praises their life in the wilderness—he thinks it's nobler than life at court.However, Guiderius says that since they've only ever known nature, they can't know if what Belarius says is true. Guiderius argues that living apart from the court and excitement of cities may suit Belarius, but he himself chafes against the limitations of their rustic existence as if it were a prison. Arviragus echoes his brother's sentiments, saying that "we have seen nothing./ We are beastly."

This is the audience's first glimpse of Cymbeline's kidnapped sons living with their adoptive father. Their upbringing could not have been further from the court, which is apparent from the rugged, isolated landscape. Guiderius and Arviragus agitate for independence from their father, much as Cymbeline, the Queen, and Cloten have agitated for independence from Rome.

Belarius insists that the brothers aren't missing out on much. He describes the city as corrupt, and says that courtiers are plagued by fear. He also points out the injuries he sustained in war, and how his fortunes suddenly fell with Cymbeline, who used to consider him a friend. Two men convinced Cymbeline that Belarius was an ally of the Romans, even though he always remained faithful to the British King. That treachery resulted in Belarius' banishment over the past twenty years. Belarius uses this as the ultimate illustration of why their life in nature is less dangerous and harmful than life at court. He asks the boys to go ahead on their hunt, and says that he will join them a little later on.

Belarius' existence in the Welsh wilderness is another reminder of the dire consequences of deception. Because of rumors and gossip about where his loyalties lay, Belarius was banished at the hands of the King. That he's spent twenty years in exile in nature shows the long-ranging consequences of lies told to people in positions of power. Juxtaposed with the letter ordering Imogen's death, this scene confirms that deception can drastically alter the course of lives, if not end them entirely.

After the brothers have left, Belarius delivers a monologue about Guiderius and Arviragus' true identities. He explains that their royal nature is hard to hide. Even though Guiderius and Arviragus don't know it, they are Cymebline's two sons, stolen from their nursery decades ago. Belarius reveals that he and the boys' nurse, Euriphile, stole them. Belarius hoped that by taking the boys away from Cymbeline, he could threaten the royal line of succession, in revenge for the King taking Belarius' lands away.

Belarius makes an argument for the innate nobility of his adopted sons. Nobility is not merely a social status, but a set of qualities which Guiderius and Arviragus demonstrate unwittingly. Belarius' thirst for revenge parallels Cloten's and Posthumus', but Belarius did spare the boys' lives, which shows his mercy. This is in keeping with more comedic plot conventions (affirming life) rather than the sorts of revenge tragedies evoked by Cloten and Posthumus' decisions. This tension between genres makes Cymbeline *a tragicomedy.*

Despite the fact that Guiderius and Arviragus don't know that they are really royals, Belarius thinks that they exhibit warrior-like, noble qualities. The brothers are ambitious, carry themselves well, and yearn to fight in battle. As Belarius hears that the brothers have found a deer, he goes to join them.

Even though they were raised far from the court, the brothers demonstrate characteristics befitting royalty, which Belarius fears will inevitably reveal them as the King's sons. These qualities are ones to which Cloten aspires but fails to attain.

ACT 3, SCENE 4

Having arrived at Milford Haven, Imogen asks Pisanio why she doesn't see Posthumus there. She thinks that Pisanio looks confused and scared, and when she asks him what's wrong, Pisanio hands her the letter which Posthumus addressed to him. Imogen recognizes Posthumus' handwriting, and worries that he is in trouble. Pisanio asks her to read the letter, and says that he's an unfortunate man.

Imogen's description of Pisanio's worried looks confirms how much Posthumus' orders have disturbed Pisanio, having shaken the foundation upon which his understanding of loyalty rested.

Imogen reads the letter aloud. Posthumus writes that Imogen has been unfaithful, and that he has proof of her infidelity. He feels grief, but he also thirsts for revenge. Instructing Pisanio to take Imogen to Milford Haven, Posthumus orders him to kill her with his own hands. Twice Posthumus warns Pisanio about being unfaithful to the order: if Pisanio doesn't carry out the command, Posthumus will consider him as treacherous as Imogen. In an aside, Pisanio calls the claims against Imogen's fidelity nothing more than slander. He says that the effect of the letter has done her more harm than his sword ever could.

In his letter, Posthumus equates any disobedience on Pisanio's part with the behavior that warranted Imogen's death. This goes to show how sharp a line Posthumus has drawn between loyalty and treachery, placing himself as the judge of what is acceptable and what is not. Pisanio implies that he'll ultimately take Imogen's side by referring to the allegations against her as slander.

Posthumus' accusations shock Imogen. If being unfaithful means weeping for her husband and lying awake missing him, then she admits she's unfaithful. Imogen recalls Iachimo's description of her husband's infidelity, and thinks that the Italian nobleman isn't so bad after all—it appears as if he was telling the truth. She imagines that another woman in Italy has seduced Posthumus. Imogen has a hard time imagining why else he would order her death.

Though other characters have referred to Imogen's sorrow, she gives a more intimate picture of her day-to-day sadness over her husband's departure. Thus wracked with grief and missing him sorely, Imogen has proved herself to be faithful. It's interesting, too, that Imogen, like Posthumus, has come to believe Iachimo—and she, too, feels unsettled from simply imagining her spouse's infidelity.

Pisanio tries to interject, but Imogen continues her speech, citing examples of famous men who betrayed their lovers. She recalls Aeneas who left Dido, and Sinon, who allowed the Trojan Horse to enter within his city's walls. Imogen claims Posthumus will join their ranks, setting a bad example for good men.

Imogen reconfigures Posthumus as one in a long line of treacherous men. Aeneas, a soldier fleeing Troy, seduced Carthage's queen, Dido. After he left her, Dido committed suicide. Sidon allowed the Trojan Horse into his city, which led to utter destruction. Not only does Imogen allege that her husband is just as treacherous, but the ends of these stories imply similarly ruinous outcomes for the betrayed Imogen.

Despite her distress with Posthumus, Imogen intends to die according to his order. She takes out Pisanio's sword, hands it to him, and tells him, "Do thou thy master's bidding." Imogen asks him to stab her in the heart, the source of her love and grief. Pisanio knocks the sword away, and refuses to kill Imogen. She begs him to do so, for suicide is considered a mortal sin. On the subject of sin, she pulls out Posthumus' love letters, which she has stored in her bodice. She calls the letters "heresy" before ripping them apart. Imogen laments how Posthumus drove a wedge between her and Cymbeline. She asks once again for Pisanio to kill her, and complains that he's slow in executing Posthumus' order.

Despite her own doubts about her husband's sexual fidelity, Imogen means to follow his demands—even if it means her death. In so doing, she proves that she takes her loyalty to Posthumus so seriously that she would be willing to give up her life for him. The stage business with Pisanio's sword presents an astonishing image to the audience and calls to mind another Roman heroine already referred to in this play: Lucretia, who killed herself after being raped by Tarquin so her husband wouldn't suffer shame. However, Imogen won't go down without protesting. Ever headstrong, she tears up love letters—the physical remains of her relationship with Posthumus.

Pisanio tells Imogen that Posthumus' command disturbed him so much that he hasn't slept since receiving it. Imogen asks him why he brought her to Milford Haven, then, if it caused him such distress. He explains that he used the trip to buy time, to come up with a plan to save her. He believes that someone has tricked Posthumus into thinking Imogen committed adultery, and he cannot let Imogen die because of a rumor. Pisanio explains that he'll simply tell Posthumus that Imogen is dead, and send a piece of cloth with blood on it as "proof." In the meantime, he suggests that Imogen go back to court.

Since Pisanio has refused to kill Imogen and she won't kill herself, the audience can breathe easy—the princess' life is safe, for now. Pisanio reveals his decision-making process—he remains loyal to Imogen, despite what her husband says. The audience can see a parallel between Imogen's case and Belarius'. While Cymbeline exiled Belarius due to a rumor, Pisanio can't in good conscience act on a rumor to kill Imogen. Cymbeline's rash and unforgiving decision is in keeping with his tough character, unlike fair-minded Pisanio's carefully-considered decision.


Imogen does not like the idea of going back to court, because she doesn't want to encounter her father or the awful Cloten. Pisanio suggests there is nowhere else in Britain for her. Imogen considers that the world is wide, and that she could make a life outside of Britain. This gives Pisanio an idea: Lucius is on his way to Millford Haven with the Roman troops. Imogen can **disguise** herself in a man's clothing and find Posthumus among the invading Roman troops.

Imogen continues to demonstrate her boldness here—she refuses to put herself into a bad situation at court, and the prospect of having to go abroad to seek her fortunes does not daunt her. Pisanio also shows his bold thinking in his plan for Imogen—his idea for Imogen to dress as a man amid a military engagement defies expectations for a princess.

He instructs her how to act manly: she should command, not obey; be brave instead of fearful or sensitive; insult and contradict others; and let the sun tan her fair skin. Pisanio has even brought male clothing with him, and he suggests that Imogen enter into Lucius' service. Imogen agrees to the plan, saying that Pisanio is "all the comfort/ The gods will diet me with."

Pisanio's instructions to Imogen on how to present herself as a man tell the audience a lot about gender expectations in the play. Patriarchal conventions inform male behavior as Pisanio describes it—confidence, aggression, and courage dominate. Women's sensitivity is even made physical in cultural expectations for untanned skin. Imogen, however, is quick to defy those feminine expectations, demonstrating bravery worthy of Pisanio's masculine ideal.

Pisanio explains that he must return to court to avoid the charge of abducting Imogen. Before he goes, he hands Imogen the medicine which the Queen has given him; Pisanio hopes that the supposedly restorative medicine will help Imogen, in case she feels unwell. He leaves her to assume her disguise and prays that the gods protect her.

By handing over what he thinks is medicine, Pisanio adds dramatic tension—the audience knows that it could put Imogen into a deep sleep, which could leave her vulnerable to others.

ACT 3, SCENE 5

Back at Cymbeline's court, Lucius says goodbye to Cymbeline. The Emperor has ordered Lucius to leave his new enemy's presence. Cymbeline counters that his subjects can no longer withstand Roman tyranny, and if it seemed like Cymbeline couldn't be Britain's sole sovereign, he fears that would make him seem "unkinglike."

Once again, Cymbeline reveals his anxieties over his kingly authority and legacy. These fears partly motivate his attempt to gain British independence, but by expressing his desire to appear kingly to his subjects, Cymbeline shows that he is also anxious about asserting his own worth as a monarch.

Lucius asks for safe conduct to Milford Haven, and wishes the Queen well. Cymbeline orders men to accompany Lucius. The ambassador asks to shake Cloten's hand. Cloten agrees, saying that though they part on friendly terms, they will be enemies from here on out. Lucius warns him to not speak too soon—they don't know how the conflict will end. Cymbeline wishes Lucius happiness.

For two supposed enemies, Cymbeline and Lucius part on friendly terms. Though there are hints of tension about the coming conflict, the fact that the British royals and Lucius don't all-out argue or fight shows again the mutual interdependence that Britain and Rome have enjoyed, even at the personal level.

The Queen notes that Lucius left frowning—she feels that making Lucius upset reflects well on their cause. Cymbeline gives an update on the looming battle: Lucius has written to the Emperor, so the Britons will need to prepare chariots and horsemen. Augustus will order Roman troops stationed in Gallia (modern-day France) to attack Britain from there. The Queen urges Cymbeline to act quickly. Cymbeline says he will, but wonders where Imogen is. She failed to fulfill her royal duties and meet with Lucius. Cymbeline asks an attendant to find Imogen.

While the Queen has argued that the island geography of Britain means that, as an isolated place, Britain is deserving of independence, Cymbeline's analysis of the Roman troops' movements highlights that isolation can sometimes translate into vulnerability. That the Roman Empire is so far-reaching as to control France means that Britain can face attack. Perhaps this retroactively asserts the benefits of sticking with the Roman Empire for protection and peace.

The Queen describes how Imogen has isolated herself since Posthumus left, and that she needs time to get over him. She begs Cymbeline to go easy on Imogen. The attendant returns and reveals that Imogen's bedroom door is locked, and no one answered when he knocked. The Queen tells Cymbeline that Imogen had asked her to leave her alone earlier because she didn't feel well, but the Queen had forgotten to tell Cymbeline until now. The King starts to worry that Imogen has fled. As he leaves with the attendant to investigate, the Queen orders Cloten to follow him. Before Cloten goes, he says that Pisanio has been missing for the past two days.

Given that the audience knows of the Queen's dislike for Imogen—which Imogen herself even suspects—there's a palpable irony when the Queen asks the King to treat his daughter kindly. Her feigned concern reveals yet again how two-faced the Queen really is.

Alone at last, the Queen prays that Pisanio is absent because he swallowed the poison she gave him. She wonders where Imogen went, but hopes that Imogen, in despair, has fled to find Posthumus, or to meet her death. Since Cymbeline's sons disappeared long ago, if Imogen were out of the picture, then Cloten would become the likely heir to the King, giving the Queen a clear path to greater power. Cloten returns and asks his mother to go comfort Cymbeline because Imogen has certainly run away. In an aside that shocks the audience, the Queen hopes that Cymbeline will die that night. (She will later reveal that she's been slowly poisoning the King.)

Juxtaposed with a moment of insincere concern for her stepdaughter, the Queen's aside to the audience about her hopes to destroy Pisanio and Imogen is striking. Her dishonesty to her husband is remarkable. She makes clear that her ambition for the throne and her hunger for political power motivate her acts of violence and deception—not unlike other Shakespeare villains, such as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth.

By himself onstage, Cloten explains that he admires Imogen's beauty, but he hates how she disdains him in favor of Posthumus. Pisanio enters, and Cloten demands to know if Imogen is with Posthumus. If Pisanio doesn't tell him, Cloten swears he'll kill him. Pisanio answers that Posthumus is in Rome, and thus Imogen can't be with him, but Cloten threatens Pisanio, and he relents, handing Cloten the letter from Posthumus asking Imogen to go to Milford Haven. Pisanio comments to the audience that he had no choice but to give Cloten the letter. Besides, Imogen is far enough away from court to be out of danger. Still speaking to the audience, Pisanio says he'll write to Posthumus that Imogen is dead according to his order.

Pisanio shows that he is just as quick on his feet as Iachimo. When Cloten threatens him suddenly, Pisanio gives up the letter—he has no choice but to react immediately in this way, yet he has laid the groundwork to keep Imogen safe by getting her far away from Cloten's clutches. His decision to write to Posthumus that Imogen is dead protects the integrity of her male disguise. Though they might seem to the contrary, Pisanio's actions show how dedicated he is to remaining faithful to Imogen.

Cloten asks Pisanio to serve him, saying he will reward Pisanio with status and money. Pisanio agrees, and Cloten asks him to fetch some of Posthumus' clothes. When Pisanio leaves to retrieve the clothing, Cloten reveals his plan to the audience: **disguised** as Posthumus, Cloten will go to Milford Haven, rape Imogen, and kill Posthumus. He explains, "I'll be merry in my revenge."

Cloten proves himself to be his mother's son when he tries to bribe Pisanio. The Queen, too, tried to win Pisanio through the promise of money and power. It appears that Pisanio is following Cloten's program, though only under duress. When he threatens to rape Imogen and kill her husband, Cloten displays aggression and a lack of mercy, though that takes a dangerous turn here.

Once Pisanio returns with the clothes, Cloten asks him to bring the outfit to his bedroom, and to remain silent about serving him. Afterwards, Cloten leaves, and Pisanio tells the audience that he will only pretend to be loyal to Cloten, but will really stay true to Posthumus and Imogen. He explains that since Imogen will by now be under Lucius' command, Cloten won't be able to find her in Milford Haven. Pisanio prays that the gods protect Imogen.

Now Pisanio reveals his intentions to the audience, explaining his apparent willingness to follow Cloten's orders. Making the distinction between deception and loyalty somewhat blurry, Pisanio must use deceit with Cloten in order to prove ultimately loyal to his master and mistress. He does the same by deceiving Posthumus in order to save Imogen's life. While other characters' deception is harmful, Pisanio's is benign. Indeed, his invocation of the gods shows his piety and goodness, even if his means aren't entirely honest.

ACT 3, SCENE 6

Disguised as a boy, Imogen stumbles onstage, exhausted, lost, and very hungry. She laments how everyone lies—rich and poor alike. Her husband is one such liar, Imogen says, but the thought of him revives her for a moment. Imogen comes across Belarius and his sons' cave dwelling. When she calls out and receives no reply, she draws her sword and goes into the cave.

In describing the male behavior Imogen must imitate, Pisanio warned Imogen against feminine sensitivity and delicacy. Even though travel and hunger wear on her body, she remains intrepid—unafraid to enter unfamiliar places. Imogen claims that deception is universal across lines of social class, which seems true since nobles like Iachimo and the Queen lie and deceive, and servants like Posthumus do, too. However, Imogen doesn't realize that the reasons behind deception are inconsistent—sometimes deception is used for good ends.

Returning to the cave, Belarius praises Guiderius' abilities as a hunter. Tired and hungry, Guiderius and Arviragus feel eager to go back into the cave, but Belarius stops them: he senses that someone is inside. Imogen emerges from the cave, asking them not to hurt her. She tells them that she ate their food, and hands Belarius **gold** as repayment. The brothers scoff at the money—they think gold is corrupt.

The intruder in Belarius and the brothers' cave adds an element of danger that they haven't known in their idyllic home. Imogen's entrance, and her attempts to pay the men, come as a shock—the world of court comes into direct confrontation with the world of the countryside. The brothers consider the use of money—the common stock of the nobility—as, ironically, ignoble and corrupt.

Falling for Imogen's disguise as a boy, Belarius asks Imogen about "his" identity. She tells him that her name is Fidele, and that she is going to meet a kinsman at Milford Haven, but felt too hungry and tired to carry on. Belarius welcomes Fidele to rest for the night at the cave. Guiderius says he might be attracted to Fidele if Fidele were a woman. For his part, Arviragus says he'll treat Fidele like a brother. Imogen, in an address to the audience, wishes that the two men were really her brothers, because then she wouldn't be heir to the kingdom, and Posthumus might have seemed her social equal.

As in other so-called "transvestite comedies" (Shakespeare plays in which the heroine dresses in male disguise), other characters are quick to comment on the heroine-in-drag's androgyny. In Shakespeare's time, the stage was all-male—so puns about boys who played women who played men abound, adding layers of irony to Guiderius' comment. Imogen's comment wishing that the brothers were her own family members contributes to the sense of dramatic irony in this scene.

Belarius and the brothers notice how sad Fidele looks. Imogen comments on the men's honest living in the cave, so unlike the court, and wishes she could be friends with these men, because Posthumus isn't trustworthy. Belarius invites Fidele to rest while the men prepare dinner, and then they'll hear Fidele's full story.

Imogen highlights the contrast between court and countryside, which Belarius has remarked upon previously. Cracks are beginning to show in Imogen's steadfast loyalty to her husband. Before, when she maligned him, she still couldn't help but find relief at the mere thought of him. Here, she doesn't take back or qualify her statement about his disloyalty and untrustworthiness.

ACT 3, SCENE 7

Meanwhile, in Rome, two Senators and Tribunes discuss the upcoming war. The commoners in the Emperor's army are fighting against the rebelling Pannonians and the Dalmatians. What's more, there are a few legions in Gallia unable to undertake fighting in Britain. As things stand, the gentry must be recruited to fight the war against Cymbeline. The Second Senator confirms that Lucius will be the invading army's general. He also says that the Emperor has given the Tribunes the authority to recruit the gentlemen soldiers, and will provide further information about when and where to send the army. The Tribune promises to follow through with the order.

This brief scene adds historical context to the Roman invasion. It provides a glimpse at governmental structure in the Roman capital, showing how Senators and Tribunes—elected officials who represented the lower classes—collaborated to make military decisions in support of the Emperor's agenda. This scene also demonstrates how personal the armed conflict will be for Lucius, since he has to lead Roman troops into Britain to fight his friend Cymbeline. The audience sees here firsthand how organized and precise the Romans are in executing their strategy, raising questions about how the Britons will fare against their imperial foe.

ACT 4, SCENE 1

Back in Britain, Cloten has reached Wales, near the spot where Imogen and Posthumus were supposed to meet, according to Pisanio. Alone, Cloten rages against Imogen's choice of Posthumus over him, because he's just as good if not better than Posthumus. Cloten is just as handsome and young—plus he's stronger, richer, and more noble. Posthumus envisions the rape and murder he has planned. He reasons that his mother will protect him from the King once he has raped Imogen and sent her back to court; the Queen holds all power over Cymbeline. Cloten resolves to draw his sword and find Posthumus. He prays that fortune will deliver Posthumus and Imogen to him so that he can execute his "sore purpose."

In his self-assessment, Cloten mistakes his higher rank than Posthumus for greater nobility. Social status does not necessarily guarantee a better disposition. In typical fashion, Cloten overestimates himself, though the Second Lord isn't here to check his words with asides to the audience. As before, the power of imagination in Cymbeline *is evocative here. Just as imagining Imogen's infidelity drove Posthumus over the edge, imagining the rape and murder spurs Cloten to seek out his victims.*

ACT 4, SCENE 2

Fidele feels unwell, so Belarius and Arviragus urge him to rest in the cave while they hunt. Guiderius says he will stay behind, but Fidele tells him to go since he'll be all right by himself. Guiderius says he loves Fidele as much as he loves his father. Arviragus doesn't know why, but he, too, cares deeply for Fidele. Belarius comments to himself that the brothers are saying noble and virtuous things. Arviragus says goodbye, calling Fidele his brother. Imogen remarks to the audience how kind the men are, and how remarkable their good manners are in the country, compared to the vile behavior of courtiers. She says that she's heartsick and will try the medicine that Pisanio gave her to feel better. She swallows the concoction.

Once again, the exchange between Fidele and the brothers is rich with dramatic irony. The brothers feel an almost familial love for Fidele, when, unbeknownst to the trio, they are actual siblings. Belarius finds that the boys' kind words bespeak their nobility—courtesy and virtue were important ideals of nobility in Shakespeare's day. The dramatic irony continues with Fidele swallowing the sleeping concoction in a twist of fate.


Guiderius says that he couldn't get Fidele to open up about his identity: he just said that he was a poor, honest gentleman in a bad situation. Arviragus says Fidele told him the same thing, and that he might reveal more later on. Belarius tells Fidele that he hopes he'll get better soon, since he'll have to act as the trio's housewife. Imogen says she's bound to them, and goes into he cave.

Imogen seems to project Posthumus' identity onto her disguise: Posthumus, too, is a poor, honest gentleman in a bad situation (exile). Again, Belarius uses an evocative word—"housewife"—as Shakespeare plays with gender conventions. Fidele (presumably a boy) will have to undertake a woman's role, though Fidele is really Imogen, a biological woman.

Belarius says he finds Fidele noble, and Arviragus adds that he has a good singing voice. Guiderius praises Fidele's excellent cooking. The trio notice that Fidele seems sad but also patient, enduring his sorrow with both sighs and smiles. As Belarius encourages the brothers to get going, Cloten arrives, complaining that he can't find "those runagates" (Imogen and Posthumus).

Though Belarius and the brothers think that Fidele is a boy, he has a skillset that women in Shakespeare's time aspired to—virtue, good cooking skills, musicality, and patience in suffering. Their assessment of Fidele's character heightens dramatic irony as the audience recognizes the cross-dressing character.

Belarius interprets Cloten's remark to mean that he knows that the boys are the kidnapped princes—and thus Cloten must know Belarius' true identity. He recognizes Cloten as the Queen's son, and urges the brothers to hurry away since they're outlaws. Guiderius tells Belarius and Arviragus to scout for any men accompanying Cloten.

Belarius' situation as a political exile is dangerous—he fears recognition, and the consequences that could result. Though the Second Lord found Cloten a coward, here Cloten's presence is commanding—the sort of presence that Pisanio advised Imogen to adopt in her manly disguise.

Cloten asks who Guiderius is, calling him and the other men "villain mountaineers." He insults Guiderius, calling him a "robber/ A law-breaker, a villain." Guiderius doesn't withstand the insults: he asks who Cloten thinks he is to call him such names. Cloten asks Guiderius if he knows who he is from his fancy clothes, but Guiderius says that his clothes make him look low-born. Cloten reveals his name, and Guiderius says that it doesn't make him afraid. Then Cloten says he's the Queen's son, and Guiderius tells him that he doesn't live up to his noble birth. Cloten asks if Guiderius is afraid of him, but Guiderius says he doesn't fear fools. Cloten draws his sword, saying he'll kill Guiderius. They exit, fighting.

Cloten's prejudice is on full display. He derided Posthumus for his low social status, and now turns his insults towards Guiderius, who is, ironically, the King's son, and therefore of nobler birth than even Cloten. Guiderius stands up to Cloten in ways others haven't—the Second Lord hates him, but doesn't tell it to his face. Even Pisanio felt threatened by Cloten. But Guiderius is fearless, and unafraid to call Cloten what he truly is—a fool. Freed from the restrictions of court, Cloten is finally successful in picking a fight—though his opponent, Guiderius, is a formidable one.

Belarius and Arviragus return, having found no other men around their cave. Arviragus wonders if Belarius is confused about who he saw, but Belarius is adamant that it was Cloten. Arviragus hopes that Guiderius deals with Cloten before too long, since Belarius says he's dangerous and reckless.

Arviragus provides further commentary on Cloten, affirming what other characters have learned about him—he is foolhardy and dangerous, qualities unbecoming of an heir to the throne.

Carrying Cloten's head and calling him a brainless fool, Guiderius comes back. Belarius asks him what he's done; Guiderius tells him how Cloten insulted him and threatened to kill the three men. They fought, and Guiderius killed Cloten. Belarius fears that they're "undone." Yet Guiderius asserts the killing was done in self-defense. Besides, they live beyond the law, and there were no witnesses. Belarius, nevertheless, fears that Cloten had attendants who will find them. Arviragus sides with his brother and praises him for protecting his honor and killing Cloten.

Guiderius provides a visual shock for the audience by carrying Cloten's head onstage. By killing Cloten, Guiderius has taken a final, decisive action that can't be taken back later on in the play. However, not only did he save his own life and that of his brother and adoptive father, Guiderius also spared Imogen from the fate Cloten had in store for her. In such a way, Guiderius has done something noble according to the standards of Shakespeare's time—he has prevented further violence, though his means were deadly.

Belarius no longer feels like hunting, and he worries about Fidele. While Guiderius goes to a creek to dispose of Cloten's head, Belarius encourages Arviragus to return to the cave and cook dinner with Fidele. Alone, Belarius marvels how the princes' natural nobility makes itself clear. Even though nobody taught them how to behave as royals, the brothers act with honor, civility, and bravery.

Continuing on an established theme, Guiderius and Arviragus display qualities of innate nobility which belie their humble station in the Welsh cave. Shakespeare demonstrates that true nobility comes from within, particularly for those in Cymbeline's direct bloodline, as each of his biological children display noble characteristics.

Guiderius comes back from the creek. Suddenly, Belarius hears music playing from his instrument back at the cave. Guiderius notes they haven't heard it played since Belarius' wife Euriphile's death, and he fears it's a bad omen. Arviragus then enters, carrying a limp Fidele in his arms.

This play makes frequent use of visual effects, but here the music provides an arresting affect on the action, causing the audience to pay close attention. Belarius pays heed to superstition and omens—popular means of divining life's meaning and the gods' fate for human beings in ancient times. His hunch is confirmed as Arviragus enters with a supposedly lifeless Fidele.

Arviragus explains that he found Fidele lying dead in the cave, and says he would give up his youth to avoid seeing this sight. Guiderius praises Fidele's beauty, and Belarius calls his melancholy bottomless upon seeing Fidele dead. Belarius asks how Arviragus found Fidele; he reports that Fidele looked as though he were smiling in his sleep, lying on the floor.

The play seems to veer into a tragic direction here. Fidele doesn't deserve to die, and the evil Queen appears to have won the day. While Cloten's fate seems like divine retribution, Fidele's death looks senseless in comparison—a sad twist of fate.

The men plan to prepare a grave for Fidele, and decorate it with flowers as beautiful as his appearance and as sweet-smelling as his breath. Arviragus wants to reprise the mourning tune they sang when Euriphile died, but Guiderius fears he'll cry if he tries to sing. They vow to recite it, but Belarius reminds them that they've forgotten all about Cloten's body—even though he was their enemy, he was still a royal, and he deserves respect for his status. Belarius goes to fetch Cloten's corpse, and the brothers arrange Fidele's body and sing their song about the painlessness of death.

Like Posthumus when he took his leave of Imogen, Belarius, too, worries about expressing emotion through tears. This abiding fear shows how deeply entrenched masculine gender norms are in the play, and by extension, Shakespeare's world. To show emotion is considered feminine. Belarius also subscribes to the norms of social hierarchy, planning to give Cloten a noble burial, even though his ignoble behavior does not match his status.

Belarius returns and lays Cloten's body next to Fidele's. He tells the brothers to strew some flowers on the corpses and they leave to pray.

Completing the funeral rites, Belarius and the brothers show piety towards the dead and the gods—an important part of life in ancient and early modern times, when medicine was underdeveloped and death was an ever-present reminder of the gods' power over human life.

Imogen wakes up from a deep sleep babbling about finding the way to Milford Haven. Reviving, she notices the headless body of Cloten next to her. Since the headless body is dressed in Posthumus' clothes, she thinks it's her husband—even claiming that she recognizes his figure. She compares his body to that of the gods.

Cloten's act of deceit has unintended consequences—even after his death. Dressed up as Posthumus, Cloten's corpse causes Imogen distress. It's notable that Imogen, wracked with grief, takes the headless body for her husband's. Death and disguise has equalized two men who seemed different in life.

Imogen curses Pisanio. She's sure that the servant must have plotted with Cloten to kill Posthumus out of resentment and greed. She calls Pisanio's letters fake and thinks that he gave her the potion to knock her out while he killed her husband. She says she'll put the corpse's blood on her cheeks to scare anyone who comes their way.

After the lengths that Pisanio has gone to in order to remain loyal to Imogen, she questions his service. Even though she's had proof of her husband's deception, with his supposed death, Imogen sets her sights on Pisanio as the deceiver. Interestingly, Pisanio is indeed a deceiver—though for just, loyal ends.

While Imogen grieves, prostrate on the ground, Lucius and his troops enter. A captain says that the Roman recruitment effort was a success, and Iachimo will lead the Italian troops to Britain shortly. Lucius takes this as a good sign.

The captain's announcement to Lucius sets the stage for the impending battle—the Roman troops are in a strong position against their British foes. Iachimo's return to Britain will allow for a reckoning with Imogen and Posthumus.

Lucius asks his Soothsayer for his prediction on the battle's outcome. The Soothsayer reports having a vision of Jove's **eagle** flying and vanishing into the sun—a sign of impending Roman success. Lucius thanks him, but then spots the headless corpse and the "boy" lying beside it. Lucius asks the captain if the boy is dead, but he reports that the boy is alive.

In ancient Rome, people often looked to birds to deliver signs about the future, another reminder that ancient peoples found the gods to be in charge of human life. The prediction of victory from the bird representing Rome's chief god certainly adds another reason to believe in their success, in addition to their robust number of troops.

Lucius asks Fidele what happened to the dead man, and Fidele responds that the dead man was his master, Richard du Champ, who was killed by mountaineers. In an aside, Imogen insists that lies like this—told for good reasons—can't be bad. Fidele claims he'll never find so good a master as this one, and Lucius praises him for his loyalty, inviting Fidele to join him as a servant. Fidele takes the offer, but insists that he must say prayers for his dead master first. Lucius tells his troops that Fidele is the portrait of proper manly honor. Then, he tells Fidele to cheer up—the men can bury "Richard" before they leave for battle.

Iachimo and Pisanio aren't the only characters who successfully think on their feet—Imogen quickly comes up with a backstory to ensure that she conceals her identity and remains out of danger. Notably, Lucius praises Imogen—a woman—for demonstrating to his troops "manly" virtues. That a woman can exhibit such "manly" behavior calls into question whether or not gender roles hold water.

ACT 4, SCENE 3

At his court, Cymbeline asks a servant for news of the Queen's health. With her son Cloten missing, she has developed a fever, and shows signs of madness. Cymbeline wishes Imogen were there to give him comfort. He threatens to torture Pisanio for information about Imogen's whereabouts, and, under duress, Pisanio says he will faithfully serve the King. A lord points out that Pisanio was at court the day when Imogen went missing, and that they'll continue looking for Cloten. Cymbeline promises to let Pisanio go, even though he still suspects him.

It appears as though the evil Queen may get her just desserts after all. After all of his harsh treatment of Imogen, it's noteworthy that Cymbeline is acting less harsh. Facing the loss of his Queen as well as loss of the battle, the King seems to realize how much he needs his daughter at court. This is the beginning of the character's softening, even though he does dole out threats to Pisanio. He's nevertheless moving towards reconciliation, or would choose it if given the opportunity to see Imogen.

The lord informs Cymbeline that the Gallic forces have arrived on British shores, along with the Roman gentlemen recruited by the Senate. The news overwhelms Cymbeline, who wishes the Queen and Cloten were there to advise him. The lord encourages Cymbeline to take action immediately to set the battle in motion, and urges him not to fear the Romans.

Cymbeline's panic in the face of the highly organized Roman invasion shows what a risk the King took in refusing the tribute. Rome has manpower and resources that make it likelier to win the battle, threatening Cymbeline's push for independence. Without the Queen and Cloten urging him on, Cymbeline's confidence seems to plummet.

The King and lord leave to prepare for war, and Pisanio addresses the audience. He has not heard from Posthumus since he sent the bloody handkerchief as "proof" that he killed Imogen. Further, he's unsure about what happened to Cloten, but he knows the gods will work everything out. He says that through his trickery, he has remained loyal to his master. Pisanio also expresses his loyalty to king and country, even to the point of death in the battle.

Posthumus has been noticeably absent throughout the past few scenes, and Pisanio remains in the dark about the result of his deception—and about Cloten's death. However, in a moment of piety, Pisanio surrenders everything to the will of the gods, who will ultimately control the outcome of events. Here, Pisanio expresses his philosophy on loyalty—that he must use deception to remain loyal—and shows how important loyalty is to him. He's willing to sacrifice his life for his country in a battle they could very well lose.

ACT 4, SCENE 4

Near the Welsh cave, Guiderius notes that the noise of battle now surrounds their formerly quiet home. Belarius wants to flee, but Arviragus urges him to find pleasure in "action and adventure." Guiderius agrees, saying that going into hiding won't prevent the Britons or Romans from finding them and killing them in the heat of battle. Belarius, nevertheless, insists that they go higher up into the mountains to hide. He fears that the news of Cloten's death will arouse the suspicions of the British troops and result in their torture.

Belarius' fear is no match for Guiderius and Arviragus' innate sense of adventure and bravery. These noble characteristics, which Belarius once praised the boys for, now threaten his sense of safety.

Arviragus counters that the Britons will be preoccupied with the Roman troops, and not with finding the missing Cloten. Belarius insists, though, that many soldiers in the British army will recognize Belarius from his fighting days. He's scared that their peaceful rural existence has left him and his adopted sons unprepared for war.

Belarius stole the King's children and faced no retribution. That he fears repercussions for this latest infringement on the royal family—Cloten's murder—shows a different level of discernment in Belarius, who's had twenty years to grow and change from his reckless younger years. He worries that there will be a reckoning for his actions, and, even though the boys display courage, Belarius fears that he hasn't properly raised them for the types of fighting they'll encounter—an education they would have had at court.

Arviragus says that he wants to go to war to find honor and fame in battle. Guiderius agrees, and the brothers ask for Belarius' blessing so that they won't go into battle as disobedient sons. Finally, Belarius relents, saying that if they are willing to die for their country, he will be, too. To the audience, he reveals his fear that their noble blood will be spilled and their true identities revealed.

Arviragus and Guiderius once again prove themselves worthy of their noble titles, through the virtue of their bravery and the way they prize honor. Belarius seems to focus primarily on saving his own skin—he's worried not about losing his sons in battle, but that in injury or death their revealed identities would mean punishment for Belarius for abducting the princes.

ACT 5, SCENE 1

Posthumus enters alone, holding a bloody handkerchief—the "proof" that Pisanio followed through with the order to kill Imogen. Posthumus promises to hold onto it because he once wanted Imogen dead, but now he regrets it. He exclaims that all the husbands who have their wives killed for "wrying but a little" are holding the women up to an impossible standard. These wives, he concludes, have better characters than their murderous husbands.

Posthumus' behavior at the top of the play's last act contrasts starkly with his behavior when he was last seen onstage, calling for Imogen's death. His mood is absolutely repentant, and he gives women the benefit of the doubt, which is surprising in light of his misogynistic ranting. Posthumus' speech will set the tone of repentance and reconciliation that dominates this act.

Posthumus then addresses Pisanio (who's not onstage), laying some of the blame on him, since servants should know better than to follow unjust orders. He derides servants who blindly follow all their master's commands, because their duty should be to comply with only the "just" orders.

Ironically, Posthumus criticizes Pisanio for following unjust orders. In fact, Pisanio disobeyed his master's unjust orders, refusing to kill Imogen as Posthumus commanded. He has proved loyal through that deception, though he has also tricked Posthumus by sending the bloody handkerchief, which he'll have to answer for.

Next, Posthumus calls out to the gods. He claims that he is such a terrible sinner that if the gods had really avenged all of his misdeeds, then he would never have lived long enough to have Imogen killed. In addition, since the murder he ordered was unexpected, he wishes that Imogen would have had time to repent. He hopes that he will be killed, because he thinks he deserves it more than Imogen.

Posthumus demonstrates considerable piety at this point. He asks for divine retribution for his crimes and puts stock in the power of repentance before death—a practice particularly important in Shakespeare's time (allowing the soul of the dying the chance to get to heaven).

Posthumus comforts himself with the fact that Imogen is with the gods in peace, away from the cruel world. He asks the gods to do what they will with him, and promises to obey them.

Though he's called on the gods before in this play, Posthumus' tone is absolutely remorseful—a stark contrast to how he's acted previously.

Posthumus explains how he has come back to Britain. Italian nobles brought him to fight on the side of the Roman Empire against Britain—his wife's homeland and the place where he grew up. But Posthumus feels like he has done enough violence to Britain by ordering the murder of its sole heir and future ruler, Imogen. Therefore, he decides to discard his Italian clothes and **disguise** himself as a British peasant instead. All signs point to a Roman victory, and Posthumus vows to die fighting for Imogen's country, begging the gods to give him strength. As for the peasant's clothes, Posthumus will subvert expectations: he won't seem noble by his appearance, but instead his actions will be noble. Posthumus leaves for battle.

Posthumus hopes to right his wrongs by fighting on behalf of the British. In so doing, he hopes to rectify a dire situation—leaning, of course, on the gods for their help. After asking for divine justice, he plans to execute justice on the earthly plane through his efforts in the battle. He also confirms a key point in the play—that noble behavior doesn't necessarily align with social status or a high-born appearance.

ACT 5, SCENE 2

Led by Lucius, the Roman Army faces the British Army. The two sides march across the stage and exit, as a way to mimic the movement of troops in battle. Dressed up as a poor British soldier, Posthumus enters the stage again, fighting with Iachimo. Posthumus wins the fight, disarms Iachimo, and leaves.

The battle begins with pure stage business and does not include any dialogue. This part of the scene is not unlike the dumb show—an Elizabethan device where actors would mime dramatic events—and conveys the violence of the battle in a time before advanced special effects. That the disguised Posthumus defeats Iachimo sets the tone for an ultimate reckoning between the two, and hints that Iachimo will have to reconcile his treachery.

Now that he is back in Britain, Iachimo feels overcome with sadness and guilt for lying about the British princess. He swears that even the harsh British climate is trying to take revenge on him for betraying Imogen. If the air hadn't made him weak, he would have been able to defeat the British peasant he just fought with (who, as it turns out, was Posthumus in disguise). Iachimo concludes that noble titles and knighthood must not have any real value, because a peasant with no title fought so well against him. What's more, if a peasant can fight that well, then the British nobility must be god-like in their fighting abilities. On that note, Iachimo exits.

Iachimo vocalizes his guilt—a guilt so overwhelming that he even projects it onto the British environment. Much like Posthumus returning to Britain with a repentant heart, Iachimo—formerly a swaggering, braggadocious character—feels the weight of his immoral actions. These two characters' remorse—in addition to Cymbeline's softening at the end of Act 4—gestures towards an ultimate reconciliation befitting the play's genre as a tragicomedy. Iachimo also echoes Posthumus' comments on nobility—that appearances and innate nobility don't always match.

The battle rages on. The British soldiers retreat, and the Romans capture Cymbeline. All seems lost when suddenly Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus enter to rescue the British King. Belarius encourages his sons to fight—they have the advantage of knowing the terrain, and they can hide themselves in a lane carved out of the landscape—a sort of trench—so that the Romans can't ambush them. The only thing that can stop the brothers from successfully freeing Cymbeline is their own fear. Posthumus re-enters and joins Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus—they rescue Cymbeline, and leave the battle.

Though he was initially reluctant to even enter into the battle, Belarius feels emboldened. He is the one to encourage his adopted sons to stand their ground, when they had previously been the ones to encourage him to fight at all. Their display of courage is the last-ditch effort needed to defeat the Romans—and the Britons succeed. The outcome of the battle is another reversal of audience expectations, like Posthumus and Iachimo's repentance. The defeat is a major blow to the warlike and organized Romans, who are taken down by a ragtag bunch of British soldiers, and whose Empire's future now hangs in the balance.

Lucius, Iachimo, and Imogen (still **disguised** as Fidele) enter. Lucius urges Fidele to run away from the fighting to save himself, because the battlefield has descended into chaos. Soldiers are turning against comrades on their own side, and the fighters are stumbling into disorder as if they were blindfolded. Iachimo insists that the new troops are causing the trouble. Lucius remarks that the day took a strange turn: even though it seemed like the Romans would win the fight, the Britons have proved victorious. Lucius tells Iachimo that they should help their fellow soldiers or else retreat.

Lucius confirms that the battle has taken an unexpected turn. Troops who had been solidly trained have turned on their own comrades-in-arms, and are fighting poorly. With such extensive preparations and the Soothsayer's prediction of victory, Lucius is right to be stunned by the Romans' loss—an unexpected twist of fate that could see a part of the Empire successfully winning its independence.

ACT 5, SCENE 3

Posthumus encounters a British lord who ran away from the battle. He doesn't blame the lord for retreating: when the man ran away, it seemed like the British would lose the battle, and that the only way they could win was through divine intervention. Posthumus explains that the Romans captured Cymbeline, isolating the King and decimating the British troops.

Posthumus' encounter with the lord running away confirms that the result of the battle was so unexpected as to be guided by the hand of the gods. Further, that the British nobleman lacked courage and ran away serves as further proof that nobility and noble behavior do not always align.

Posthumus marvels at the old man and the two young men he worked with to free the King. The older man had a white beard, and Posthumus guesses that he was noble and brave. He comments that the younger men were attractive—so attractive, in fact, that if people wanted to make a mask to represent virtue, they should use the young men's faces as models.

Belarius has come a long way from being fearful of battle to having a hand in the Britons' success. Posthumus' comments on Guiderius and Arviragus echo Belarius' assessment of the brothers—there's simply something about them which bespeaks their nobility.

The trio had encouraged the British soldiers, and when nobody else was taking charge, these three displayed the courage of three thousand fighters. Because of their example, the British soldiers either gained courage or were ashamed by their cowardice and the tides turned, allowing Britain to defeat the Romans. The Romans, who once acted bravely like **eagles**, looked more like frightened chickens.

Posthumus' retelling of the battle exposes cracks in the mighty Roman Empire, previewing its historical end. Having grown to cover vast amounts of territory and experiencing internal fracturing and invasions from northern tribes like the Vandals, the Roman Empire fell in 476 CE. Posthumus adds insult to injury by comparing the Romans to chickens (a lowly bird) rather than their noble symbol, the eagle.

The lord is amazed at this strange twist of fate. Posthumus insists that the lord is only amazed because he just heard about the battle, instead of experiencing it firsthand by fighting bravely. Posthumus teases the lord, reciting a poem about the day's events. The lord senses that Posthumus is unhappy with him. He asks if Posthumus is angry, but Posthumus sarcastically insists that he's not. Sardonically, Posthumus assures the lord that he'll only be friends with soldiers who run away. The lord takes the hint, insisting that Posthumus is angry and leaving thereafter.

Pothumus' sarcastic conversation with the lord highlights how passionately he feels about the need for bravery and courage—noble traits which inspired others to think highly of Posthumus before his exile, in spite of his low birth.

Posthumus can't believe that the lord who is retreating is noble. He thinks aloud about the nature of nobility: during the battle, lots of soldiers ran away, giving up their honor to save their lives. But it was an impossible situation: the soldiers who faced the battle head-on were killed, too. Posthumus was actively seeking death to end his remorseful suffering for Imogen's murder, but even though he was surrounded by death, Posthumus survived. He is amazed how death lurks in apparently innocent places—in drinks, in soft beds, and in kind words—and isn't confined to battlefields.

Posthumus' softening on his stance about the lord who ran away reflects the play's theme of forgiveness and reconciliation. Departing from binary thinking, Posthumus begins to recognize the complexity of battle and empathize further with soldiers who are fearful of death. His introspective conclusions about death—and his marveling at its inevitability—echo Imogen's description of her husband as a melancholic, thoughtful man.

Since the British have won, Posthumus decides to change out of his British **disguise** back into his Roman uniform. He won't fight, but instead will surrender to even the lowliest British soldier who should tap him on the soldier. Posthumus reasons that the Britons will punish the surviving Romans because the Romans killed so many of their soldiers in battle. So, Posthumus will go back to his Roman attire to seek out the prize of death. He's fought on both sides, but doesn't feel so loyal to one or the other—he now only feels loyal to Imogen, and wants nothing but to die, atoning for ordering her death.

Still resolved to meet the death he thinks he deserves for ordering Imogen's murder, Posthumus changes his uniform to the losing side's. His connection to both sides in the battle—made concrete in his two uniforms—mirrors the interdependence of Rome and Britain. However, Posthumus puts politics aside in favor of love: he wants to be true only to Imogen, not to country, and he believes the ultimate act of loyalty is his death.

As Posthumus muses on the battle, British captains and soldiers enter. The first captain praises the gods that the Roman commander, Lucius, was taken captive. He repeats the rumor that the old man and his sons who protected the alleyway were angels. The second captain reminds him that there was a fourth man who joined these three—dressed in peasant's clothes. But the first lord says that none of them can be found.

The news of Lucius' capture makes complete the battle's reversal of expectations. The ambassador once had the upper hand, and he now finds himself captive. That the captain describes Belarius and the brothers' impactful fighting as nothing short of miraculous demonstrates how the ancient Britons relied on the divine to explain events of both good and ill fortune.

The first captain notices Posthumus, and asks him for his identity. Posthumus answers that he is a Roman, abandoned by his fellow soldiers. The second captain orders the soldiers to seize Posthumus, calling him a dog. He swears that not even the Roman bodies should be sent back to testify to the scavenging birds who picked at them. The second captain interprets Posthumus' remarks as bragging about his valor in battle, and he orders that Posthumus be brought before King Cymbeline.

The British captains display aggression in their insults hurled at Posthumus. They swear total revenge on the Romans—not even letting one Roman back home alive. The extreme portrait they paint shows the cruelty of war, and also Rome's worst nightmare—the destruction of its troops at the hands of a rogue state.

Cymbeline, Belarius, Guiderius, Arviragus, Pisanio, soldiers and attendants enter with Roman captives. The British captains present Posthumus to Cymbeline. The King passes Posthumus off to a jailer, and the whole group leaves.

As the scene began with a wordless encounter, so too does it end without dialogue, making Cymbeline's delivery of Posthumus to the jailer all the less personal. Forgiveness between the King and his son-in-law seems a far way off.

ACT 5, SCENE 4

Posthumus is locked up in his cell. The jailers invite him to eat whatever he can scavenge within the prison walls. They leave, and Posthumus rejoices that he is in bondage: paradoxically, it will give him his freedom. He thinks that he is in a better situation than a sick man who fears death. Posthumus, on the other hand, longs for death as pay-back for his crime against Imogen. He feels that his guilty conscience locks him up more than his chains, and asks the gods to free him of his misery forever by striking him dead.

From Cymbeline's court to exile in Italy to a jail cell, Posthumus' fall from grace is made complete. However, he feels at peace in captivity—Posthumus sees it as the retribution he deserves for ordering his wife's death. Posthumus accepts full responsibility for his actions and he channels his piety to ask for the ultimate reckoning from the gods: death.

Posthumus wonders if simply feeling sorry for his misdeed is enough to gain forgiveness. He explains how much he wants to repent, and asks the gods to take everything he has away from him. The gods, he believes, are merciful because they take everything; humans, however, only take a part of what a debtor owes so the debtor can go on and earn money again. Posthumus doesn't want that sort of opportunity. He wants a fair exchange: his own life for Imogen's. Posthumus thinks that her life was more precious than his, but his is still a life—the gods should accept it as it is, just like human beings accept forged coins. Once again, Posthumus urges the gods to bring death upon him, and he falls asleep.

Posthumus has shown a more nuanced, complex thought process about topics like loyalty and justice within his recent discussion of Pisanio's actions. Here, though, he approaches death and reconciliation as black-and-white: his life in exchange for Imogen's life. He relies fully on the gods, asking for their divine intervention in striking him dead. Such retribution would be in keeping with tragedy: however, moving towards a comic resolution means moving towards a life-affirming ending, which the gods will deliver.

In a dream, Posthumus has a vision. Accompanied by a sad song, the ghost of Posthumus' father, Sicilius Leonatus, enters onstage in his warrior's attire. He leads the ghost of Posthumus' mother by the hand. The music changes and the ghosts of Posthumus' brothers enter, still bearing the wounds from when they died in battle. They surround the sleeping Posthumus.

Posthumus—whose existence as an orphan has been described with sadness from the play's beginning—finds himself surrounded by the supportive ghosts of his family. This vision suggests a sort of reconciliation or mending; a comfort to a man who has lost everything, including the will to live.

Sicilius Leonatus calls on Jupiter. He asks the god to stop punishing lowly mortals, and instead focus on conflicts in the heavens. Sicilius implores Jupiter to consider his role as father to the orphaned, and says that he should have looked after Posthumus and protected him from harm as only a father can.

Sicilius lays the blame for Posthumus' wayward behavior at the chief god Jupiter's feet—a bold claim that no mortal could make without retribution.

Next, the ghost of Posthumus' mother explains that she died in childbirth after having a caesarean section to save Posthumus' life. Posthumus was born into a hostile world: vulnerable to enemies, crying, and pitiful. Despite the boy's precarious beginning, Sicilius declares that nature molded Posthumus into a handsome man, like his ancestors, so much so that he's worthy of the world's admiration as Sicilius' heir.

The ghost of Posthumus' mother echoes Sicilius' claim about Posthumus' vulnerability as an orphan in an appeal to the god's sense of mercy. It's noteworthy that Sicilius has a high degree of pride in his son—this contrasts with Cymbeline's anger with Imogen over her marriage to Posthumus.

Because Posthumus is without equal, the First Brother asks who else could have caught Imogen's eye—especially since she knew his worth better than anyone. On the subject of his and Imogen's love, Posthumus' mother asks why he should be punished with exile for marrying Imogen, losing his family home and facing separation from his beloved wife.

The First Brother repeats claims from mortals about Posthumus' worth—even though his status wasn't as noble as Cloten's, Posthumus is a noble man of good quality. Posthumus' mother appeals to a divine sense of justice, rather than misguided mortal acts of punishment like Cymbeline's.

Sicilius turns the criticism from others to Posthumus himself. He asks Posthumus why he would allow Iachimo to spoil his noble heart and mind with "needless jealousy," only to be a foolish pawn in Iachimo's trick?

Sicilius asks the question that's been on the audience's mind: how could Posthumus let jealousy take such a strong hold on him? The power of imagination is one answer, as the audience has seen throughout the course of the play. The question seems to be more important to Sicilius than the answer: his son's noble sense of self and virtue should have prevented him from entertaining the thought of Imogen's disloyalty.


The Second Brother shifts gears to explain his success in battle. He says that he and the First Brother grew up in a peaceful place. They died fighting bravely for the sake of Tenantius, Cymbeline's father, showing loyalty and honor. The First Brother comments that Posthumus has been just as loyal and helpful to Cymbeline, and asks Jupiter why the god hasn't rewarded Posthumus with what he deserves for his service—especially now, when he's in such pain.

The Second Brother shifts the conversation about Posthumus' nobility to another one of his virtues: soldiering. He also shifts the weight of the quid pro quo argument Posthumus used: Posthumus thought he owed his life for Imogen's. Imogen is alive, and in fact, it appears that Cymbeline owes Posthumus his life because Posthumus saved the King's life.


Sicilius echoes his son, asking Jupiter not to punish the brave Britons. Posthumus' mother implores the god to take away Posthumus' pain, since he is a good person. Sicilius threatens that if Jupiter doesn't comply with their wishes, he and the other ghosts will complain to the other gods about Jupiter. The Second Brother insists that if push comes to shove, they will give up on Jupiter's justice, and ask the other gods for help.

Sicilius' threat to Jupiter reflects how the Romans portrayed their gods—almost like humans, subject to the throes of petty jealousy, conflict, and resentment. Such a portrayal is certainly in keeping with classical legends about the Olympian gods.

Suddenly, Jupiter himself descends amid thunder and lighting. He sits on top of an **eagle** and throws a thunderbolt down. The ghosts all fall on their knees, and Jupiter commands them to stop their chatter. He asks how the ghosts can accuse him of causing trouble when he sends his thunder to any country that rebels.

The special effects of Jupiter's descent would have been marvelous in the Blackfriars Theatre, where Cymbeline *premiered. But Jupiter's descent also demonstrates his omnipotence. If Sicilius highlighted Jupiter's almost human characteristics, Jupiter's appearance demonstrates his absolute divine power. The gods are in charge in this play.*

Jupiter asks the ghosts to rest in peace and not to worry about what happens on earth, since that's his business. He explains that he causes difficulty for the people he loves the most, so that they appreciate his favor all the more once it comes. Jupiter assures the ghosts that he will save Posthumus, explaining that the trials he is enduring are good for him.

Jupiter's comment about throwing obstacles in the paths of those he loves most is the defining statement about the role of gods and fate in Cymbeline. *All of the good, pious characters encounter difficulties—but with the impending comic ending, these troubles will soon end with the grace of the gods.*

Jupiter has always had a special connection to Posthumus. Posthumus was born under Jupiter's star and he married Imogen in Jupiter's temple. Promising that Posthumus will be better off having suffered now, and that he and Imogen will reunite, Jupiter tells the spirits to go away. But before they go anywhere, he asks them to set down a tablet on Posthumus' chest: it contains a prophecy about Posthumus' fortune. Jupiter then ascends to his crystal palace in heaven.

As in Shakespeare's own time, people in the ancient world aligned the planets with divine influence, which ruled over human life. Jupiter explains to the ghosts how he will spare Posthumus—by reuniting him with his wife—and why. Because Posthumus has shown him piety, Jupiter will show him favor. The prophecy adds another layer of ancient religious belief to the play: like omens, prophecies had an important role in determining the future.

Sicilius marvels at Jupiter's ascent on an **eagle** that almost threatened to kick them. He interprets that the god was pleased, because the eagle was cleaning its feathers and kept its beak shut—behaviors that mean Jupiter is satisfied. The ghosts all thank Jupiter, and Sicilius insists that they should go back to Elysium after putting the tablet on Posthumus' chest.

Once again, the behavior of an eagle acts as a way to interpret the gods' will. The eagle seems docile and not aggressive—hinting towards the peace that will return thanks to Jupiter.

With the ghosts gone, Posthumus wakes up and exclaims that he saw his father, mother, and two brothers. He laments that they are gone and that sleep has played a cruel trick on him, but Posthumus knows he was lucky to see his long-dead family in the dream: he says he doesn't deserve such a wonderful vision.

Though Posthumus has put his fate in the gods' hands, he doesn't believe that he's had direct communication from Jupiter—he thinks that his dream was just a dream, and not a message about his future.

Posthumus discovers the tablet and remarks how beautiful it is. He hopes that its content is as lovely as its cover, unlike dissembling courtiers whose nice looks contradict their inner evil. Posthumus reads the prophecy, finding it difficult to understand. However, since his life is also difficult, he decides to keep the tablet.

The prophetic contents of the tablet read almost like a riddle—the gods communicate in a way that may seem at first confusing. Prophecy formed an important part of ancient Roman religious life, and it warranted the interpretation of oracles (individuals who could communicate with the divine) or soothsayers.

The First Jailer returns and asks if Posthumus is ready for death. Posthumus answers that he has long awaited it. The First Jailer explains that he will be hanged, and Posthumus hopes that at least the spectators will feast on the scene. The First Jailer highlights the benefits of death—like not having to pay bills or worry about paying at the tavern. He also says that death isn't necessarily an end to pain, because it can lead to hell. Posthumus implies that he is hell-bound.

More than any other scene in this play, this scene tackles questions of mortality and the afterlife, implying that there is a spiritual world beyond the earthly plane. The First Jailer tries to look on the bright side of an impossibly grim situation, but Posthumus is singularly focused on his own damnation. That singularity goes to show his total remorse for what he thinks he has done to Imogen, and how he doesn't shy away from the upcoming reckoning.

Just then, a messenger enters, telling the First Jailer to remove Posthumus' shackles and bring him to Cymbeline. Posthumus says that this is good news and that he'll gain his freedom, but the Jailer worries about his own future for having imprisoned someone to whom the King now shows favor. After the messenger and Posthumus leave, the First Jailer remarks on how ready Posthumus seemed to be hanged, when the Jailer's seen worse criminals wanting to live.

Posthumus' reversal of opinion on gaining his freedom comes as a bit of a surprise. Like the First Jailer says, he seemed committed to death just moments before. Perhaps Posthumus' gratitude shows the comfort he's taken from the dream vision, or his hopes to reconcile with the King. Either way, such a sudden change in fortune is indicative of divine aid at work.


ACT 5, SCENE 5

At Cymbeline's court, the King asks Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus to stand next to his throne. He only wishes that the British peasant who fought alongside them were there as well, and says that anyone who finds that fighter will please him. Belarius is astounded that someone with such a beggarly appearance could be so noble. Cymbeline asks if anyone's seen that man, but Pisanio says that he vanished without a trace. Cymbeline laments that he can't reward the man, but is glad to transfer that reward to the trio of soldiers, thanking them for their service.

The audience knows that the peasant soldier to whom the King refers is none other than Posthumus. Even through his disguise, Posthumus' noble nature could not remain hidden—much like Guiderius and Arviragus' nobility could not be concealed despite their lack of knowledge about their true identity. It's ironic that Cymbeline—who has felt furious about Imogen and Posthumus' marriage—should now be glad to reward his son-in-law.

Cymbeline asks about Belarius and his sons' origins. Belarius says that they're gentlemen from Cambria, nothing more. Cymbeline asks them to kneel so that he can knight them and give them titles worthy of their honorable deeds.

Belarius conceals the truth about the brothers' identity, avoiding any consequences for kidnapping them. He has the chance to come clean, but doesn't take it. The irony continues in this scene as Cymbeline looks to knight men who are actually his sons and princes—a status more noble than that of knights.

All at once, the doctor Cornelius and several ladies enter. Cymbeline can tell something is wrong by their sullen expressions. Cornelius reveals that the Queen has died. Cymbeline asks for the manner of death, and Cornelius reports that her life ended painfully—reflective of the pain she caused others. He relays the Queen's deathbed confession: she never loved Cymbeline, and only wanted his power. Cymbeline said he wouldn't have believed it in any context outside the deathbed confession.

Like her son Cloten, the Queen dies suddenly and painfully. Affirming the play's overall, cosmic sense of justice, the Queen—who has done nothing but evil—receives her just desserts.

Cornelius continues, saying that the Queen hated Imogen, and would've poisoned Imogen if she hadn't run away. Further, she had prepared a poison to slowly kill Cymbeline so that she could put her son on the throne. Once her plan failed and Cloten disappeared, she died of despair. Her ladies back up Cornelius' account. Cymbeline says his senses didn't fault him—she looked pretty, spoke sweetly, and that his heart loved her. Though to mistrust the Queen would have been cruel, Cymbeline regrets not treating Imogen more kindly and he asks the gods' forgiveness.

That the Queen makes a deathbed confession of her crimes comes as a shock—it's a redeeming moment for a character who has seemed unredeemable, and it signals the final scene's trend towards repentance, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The theme of noble appearances or status contrasting with inward wretchedness is apparent in the way the Queen fooled the King. Cymbeline expressing regret for his treatment of Imogen is a huge step forward—wholly unlike his unilateral wrath from the play's beginning.

Lucius, Iachimo, the Soothsayer, and other Romans enter, along with Posthumus and Imogen (still **disguised** as Fidele). Cymbeline takes a jab at Lucius, saying he and his army should worry more about their own wills than the tribute money. Lucius explains that the British victory was by chance, and that the Romans would not have threatened to kill their prisoners as Cymbeline does. He hints that Augustus may retaliate, but then asks one request of the King. He begs Cymbeline to save the life of his servant Fidele, who has proved himself virtuous.

Even though the outcome of the battle is decided, Cymbeline still pokes fun at the Romans—much to Lucius' chagrin. Lucius' announcement about the Emperor's possible retaliation shows that tensions remain between the Empire and Britain, despite British victory on the battlefield. Cymebline has praised Lucius's character previously, and Lucius proves worthy of it: he is loyal to the servant who stayed true to him in battle.

Cymbeline agrees to Lucius' request, and swears he's seen Fidele before, telling Fidele that he will grant him one favor. Lucius asks Fidele to beg for his life, but Fidele refuses, instead setting his sights on Iachimo. Fidele asks the King to speak privately about Iachimo. While Fidele and Cymbeline confer, Belarius and his sons marvel that Fidele has come back to life. They hang back to watch what Fidele will do and say. Meanwhile, Pisanio expresses his relief that Imogen is alive, still disguised as Fidele.

Fidele defies the expectations of Lucius, who hoped Fidele would plead for his master's life in return. Wearing Imogen's ring, Iachimo distracts Imogen from displaying loyalty to Lucius. While she and Cymbeline speak, Belarius, the brothers, and Pisanio all express relief that she's lived. This relief demonstrates how readily they accept twists of fate, and their ultimate loyalty to Fidele/Imogen—she's made an impact on the men.

Cymbeline invites Fidele to make his demands, and asks Iachimo to step forward. Fidele asks Iachimo where he obtained his **ring**. The boy's request puzzles Posthumus. Cymbeline repeats Fidele's question, and Iachimo is relieved to reveal the truth. He explains that the ring belonged to Posthumus, and he fooled Posthumus into thinking Imogen was unfaithful. Rattled by Iachimo's admission, Posthumus reveals his identity, and that he ordered Imogen's death. Posthumus thinks he deserves to die for commanding Pisanio to kill Imogen.

Iachimo continues to prove how much remorse has transformed him. His character has undergone a transformation; once a braggart who lied and tricked his way into obtaining material wealth, he feels the weight of his transgressions. Posthumus, too, has come around: gone is his thirst for vengeance, replaced with an urgent need for just punishment for his actions.

Imogen steps forward to calm Posthumus, but Posthumus hits her, thinking that she is just a page boy talking out of turn. Pisanio leaps into action, explaining that Fidele is actually Imogen. He revives Imogen as the men stand in awe, and when Imogen comes to, she accuses Pisanio of trying to poison her. Pisanio defends himself, saying that he thought the Queen gave him medicine, not poison. Cornelius verifies this from the Queen's confession.

Another misunderstanding puts Imogen in danger—much like the sleeping drug—when Posthumus strikes her, believing she's a page boy. Pisanio demonstrates continued care for Imogen by leaping into action, despite her accusations of disloyalty.

Reunited at last, Imogen and Posthumus embrace and swear never to go apart from each other. Cymbeline asks Imogen to pay attention to him, and she in turn asks him to bless her, as a means of reconciliation. Crying, Cymbeline freely blesses her, saying that his tears are like holy water, and announces the Queen's death. Imogen offers her sympathy, but Cymbeline says the Queen was worth nothing. He wonders, though, what happened to Cloten.

The play began with the summary of interpersonal conflict between Cymbeline and Imogen and now has come full circle, featuring not only the father and daughter reconciling, but Imogen and Posthumus making amends.

Pisanio explains how he used one of Posthumus' letters to send Cloten toward Milford Haven, and how Cloten demanded to **disguise** himself in Posthumus' clothes so that he could rape Imogen and kill her husband. Guiderius steps in to finish the story; he confesses to killing Cloten. Cymbeline asks Guiderius to deny it, otherwise he'll have to send him to jail. Guiderius stands firm, and Cymbeline brings up the fact that Cloten was a royal. But Guiderius insists that Cloten was an awful person who didn't behave in a princely way. For treating him so rudely, Guiderius cut off his head, and he has no regrets. Imogen realizes then that the headless body was not Posthumus', and Cymbeline orders Guiderius' arrest.

Pisanio reveals the depth of Cloten's treachery to the members of court. They may have simply thought that Cloten was unworthy, but Pisanio's summary of Cloten's plans shows that Cloten was not just awful, but also downright evil. This is the line of self-defense that Guiderius uses. He also explains that the nobility has an obligation to behave nobly, but for Cloten, his status and behavior were out of alignment.

Belarius intervenes, stopping the guard from tying up Guiderius and hinting at Guiderius' nobility. He tells Cymbeline he will prove his sons' worth, even though it may be dangerous for him, and he reveals his identity: he was the one, along with Euriphile, who stole the princes away. He gives back Cymbeline's sons and tearfully wishes them well, offering proof of their identity by recalling what Arviragus wore in the nursery, and how Guiderius had a distinctive mole on his neck.

By lying about his and the brothers' identity earlier in this scene, it looked as though Belarius was just trying to save his own skin. However, faced with the threat of losing Guiderius, Belarius looks outside of himself to spare his adopted son.

Cymbeline is overjoyed to have his three children together, but he is sad to inform Imogen that she has lost her place as sole heir now that her brothers have returned. Imogen replies that she is just happy to have her brothers back.

Belarius finally rights the wrong he committed twenty years ago, leading to a family reunion. While Imogen may have lost the power her status as heir conferred, her brothers' return takes off the pressure on her marriage to Posthumus and means she can finally live freely and happily with her husband.

The King is amazed at the turn of events and he asks for the long version of the story. Instead of punishing Belarius, Cymbeline says he will consider him a brother for raising his sons, and Imogen says she will think of Belarius as a father for helping her survive as Fidele. In his joy, Cymbeline orders Lucius' release and wishes once again that he could reward the peasant soldier. Posthumus reveals that he himself was that soldier, asking Iachimo to back him up, as they confronted each other on the battlefield. Iachimo kneels and begs for death for his treachery. Posthumus promises to let Iachimo live to show his power over him, and only asks him to treat people better. Cymbeline echoes Posthumus, and pardons all.

Cymbeline appears to have truly learned his lesson—bent on punishing others at the beginning of the play, the King unquestionably forgives Belarius, who committed a graver offense than Imogen did by stealing the princes away. Cymbeline continues to show generosity of spirit towards Lucius, and even Posthumus (who had been vengeful towards Imogen for perceived infidelity) forgives Iachimo, who shows himself to be wholly repentant. Cymbeline's line "pardon's the word to all" sums up the play's ultimate outlook on forgiveness, which all who deserve it will receive.

Posthumus asks Lucius to call his Soothsayer to decipher the tablet. Philarmonus enters, and reads the prophecy. He explains that Posthumus is the lion's cub (a reference to his surname, Leonatus). Furthermore, that the piece of soft air is Imogen (based on the similarity between the words "soft air" and "wife" in Latin). The limbs of the tree trunk are the sons reunited with their royal father. The restoration will mean peace and prosperity for Britain. Cymbeline declares that peace will start now: he tells Lucius that he will, after all, pay the tribute—especially since the instigators of the war, the Queen and Cloten, received a terrible fate at the gods' hands.

The Soothsayer's ability to decipher the words of the gods makes clear what was inscrutable to the other characters. Relaying Jupiter's meaning to the others, the Soothsayer shows that the will of the gods has dictated the play's resolution. Cymbeline's reversal of opinion on the tribute comes as a bit of a surprise, but it is an ending reflective of the historical Cymbeline's peaceful relationship with Rome.

The Soothsayer reiterates Cymbeline's call for harmony, saying that the gods are orchestrating this peace. He explains that seeing the **eagle** fly and vanish into the sun before battle indicated a reunion between Britain and Rome. Cymbeline exhorts everyone to go with him to London to thank the gods at Jupiter's temple. On the road, the Roman and British flags will fly together, and Cymbeline remarks that no war has ever ended with such a firm commitment to peace.

It's interesting that the Soothsayer reinterprets his former reading of the omen of the eagle to suit the strange turn of events. The pro-Roman conclusion may seem abrupt, but it's the only way that the play can end in true tragicomic fashion—with resolution instead of further violence. Ending on a note of piety, Cymbeline's wish to praise the gods for peace shows how he deserves to rule in tranquility.

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