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Winter's Tale

STEPHEN J. MIKO

In recent years Shakespeare's last plays, now usually called romances, have received new critical energy, including attempts to view them through both the traditional genres of tragedy and comedy,[1] the looser modes of pastoral and romance,[2] religious models of fall and redemption,[3] psychological modes of engagement and detachment,[4] and of course the usual categories common to drama in general, including studies of character types (and types of characterization), moral patterns, notions of probability and verisimilitude, and notions of dramatic structure going back to Aristotle. Most of these efforts attempt to rescue the plays from the condescension of the last century, especially from the view that Shakespeare was tired, mellow, or even in his dotage when he wrote them.[5] Our century has discovered that Shakespeare, probably in every play he wrote, was sophisticated. Now the late plays fairly universally attract serious criticism—indeed, so serious as at times to want to rescue everything, including the bear in *The Winter's Tale*.[6]

This seriousness still seems a live issue—that is, the seriousness both of the critic and of Shakespeare the author. For example, how seriously can we take (and therefore treat) Leontes' jealousy? Or, for that matter, the statue scene? Or, again, the notorious bear? Do the packages of ideas (and rules) that come with "tragicomedy," "romance," or "pastoral" really help us when we find the play incoherent, or embarrassing, or perhaps even incomprehensible? Obviously they help somewhat; but only, again obviously, up to definable limits. It is these limits which interest me. In what follows I shall try to locate some of them and speculate about what they themselves mean for understanding the plays. I choose *The Winter's Tale* because I think it the best and most interesting of the romances. Perhaps by shuffling some of the conventional apparatus

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around, especially the approaches through genre and mode, we can increase the flexibility of our reading and response. My general thesis is that Shakespeare is in these last plays enjoying a freedom of experimentation, both with "new" material and with dramatic form, that presupposes most of his previous work. I take his attitude to be not merely experimental but playful, especially playful with the extremes which literary conventions exist to control: death, obsession, contrary or excessive emotional attitudes, and at bottom our ineradicable wish to make the world fit our desires.

I. The Trouble With The Bear

Even the most naive reader has to face up, somehow, to that bear. Pursued offstage, Antigonus has his shoulder ripped out, and then the rest of him eaten. Our probable response is, first, that this is ludicrous (in the manner of black comedy); second, that it's symbolic (the thing dying next to the thing newborn); third, that Antigonus didn't deserve it (we have some reason to expect poetic justice);[7] fourth, that we had better not get too upset in any case because bumpkins are doing the describing, and Shakespeare may be up to something we haven't caught on to yet. Even at the end of the play, we very likely feel some of this last tentativeness. The common terms for it are "distance" and "detachment"—the opposites of "involvement" or "identifying." I want to argue that the tentativeness is in some sense Shakespeare's point. It includes the other responses, generalizes them somehow, requires no dismissal, but does require some uneasiness or discomfort. Our need for order, at least, wants the death not to count or to count more (in a tragedy, of course, Leontes' sin would lie behind such a death, as it lies behind Mamilius's). Moreover, the play obviously divides here; Time comes in, as Shakespeare leaps into a new (predominantly pastoral) world, and Antigonus recedes into the distance. Perhaps we had best treat him as a bad joke, one at which no one laughs, or at which people laugh uncomfortably, out of politeness and embarrassment. Indeed, Shakespeare may have intended both politeness and embarrassment: the politeness would be a sophisticated social kind, like that of Theseus at the artisan's play, and the embarrassment would be over our own conventional expectations—we don't quite dare be embarrassed for Shakespeare. We can remind ourselves (less naive every moment) that romance, the source material here, always contains scenes of violence.[8] At this point we can pick a sophisticated Shakespeare, who wants to direct our attention to literary conventions (assumedly so we can

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feel satisfaction in knowing about such things), or a sloppy (yet still sophisticated) Shakespeare who thought—indeed knew—he could get by with this awkwardness. In any case the rest of the play redeems our momentary discomfort, even if it does not conform to any single set of expectations. I think that the audience is, by the very embarrassments, seduced into willing complicity. And there is even more "multiconsciousness" than Bethell noticed.[9]

Another way to put my ideas about Antigonus and the bear is to say simply that the death is a calculated comic scene that throws us out of the dismal progress Leontes' jealousy has initiated. It must shock a little, not just to prepare for a transition but to throw us back on ourselves. Leontes has pulled us into an insane world and disgusted us, narrowed us, forced us to back off in distaste and in some—not very much—pity. All that has followed from his jealousy has reached a dead end; if the play is to go on it needs a new start. More importantly, so do we. The conventional violence from the world of romance enters specially, with the usual (but here odd, as the oracle feels odd) magical overtones, which the rebirth symbolism underlines. The death is "caused" by Leontes, by Nature, by Fortune, by accident, by Shakespeare and, trying to grasp any or all of this, we and the shepherds enjoy a ghastly joke. Uneasiness makes us remember that plays wonderfully contain such jokes, that death is *not* real here, even if a bear actually crosses the stage. We are forced to look, then, both at the action and the play's acting and to feel, irresolvably but functionally, both inside it (with genuine distress over Antigonus and the baby) and, in several ways, at a distance, above or oblique to it (the action is funny as well as awful, this is a play, the source is a book, Shakespeare is up to games we have not anticipated or quite grasped).

II. Leontes the Tragedian

An oblique response is also fostered by the strongest emotion of the first act, Leontes' intellectualized, obsessively articulated jealousy.[10]

> Affection! Thy intention stabs the center.
> Thou dost make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with dreams—how can this be?
> With what's unreal thou coactive art,
> And fellow'st nothing.
>
> (I.ii.137-41)

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Here Leontes launches into abandoned dreaming, even as he recognizes that the dreams may be (as we are sure) wholly his own. Dreams make the unreal real, so the recognition quickly disappears. "Affection" (passion, here jealousy) provides the energy for both dream and conviction. The result, less obviously with the bear but to similar effect, makes for us a possibility in things not usually held. A king can make his dreams real by his powers over others, a play can show him doing this to insanity. We can accept the insanity only with discomfort and embarrassment, and finally something close to laughter.[11] Obsession is indeed real, and like many other extreme states in Shakespeare, desperately convinces itself by overarticulation. To Leontes this language is, presumably, necessary to dispel doubt; to us it is usually absurd; and Shakespeare makes it go on long enough to push us beyond our initial judgment (the man is crazy) to consciousness that this is a psychological study, a symbolic game, and finally a kind of black joke.

Leontes enforces what at first appears a tragedy. By the time the bear comes in, we are closer to melodrama.[12] Various deflections of conventional expectation occur, as the arbitrary illusions of Leontes seem to control not only the play's action but its form. Leontes' phrase, "All's true that is mistrusted," provides a handy label for the major operating principle of this control. We, of course, take the phrase in its opposite sense: Leontes' truths are all lies to us, his decisions all wrong, the play's movement is against enlightenment, tragic complication evolves as mere melodramatic relentlessness. This relentlessness is basically linear, a dramatization of obsession. Even when Leontes plays philosopher on the endlessly fertile theme of an illusory world, the rhetoric fizzles:

> The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
> My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
> If this be nothing.
>
> (I.ii.294-96)

> You smell this business with a sense as cold
> As is a dead man's nose; but I do see't, and feel't,
> As you feel doing thus;[13] and see withal
> The instruments that feel.
>
> (II.i.151-54)

Of course, Leontes makes himself the touchstone of reality, but these repeated words reduce rather than extend meaning, trivializing the emotions to which they seek reference. From this

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triviality we pull back, only to encounter a neat series of one birth and then three deaths (one a fake, as it turns out). By this time Leontes is sane again, but sanity comes through a conversion more violent and rapid than his fall into mad jealousy. Right after he becomes properly guilt-stricken, Paulina, who complains that vengeance for Hermione's death has "not dropped down yet," falls in twenty lines from violent castigation ("O thou tyrant") to geniality ("Alas I have showed too much / The rashness of a woman"). Then to Bohemia's doubly fictitious seacoast, and the bear—a pretty willful piece of dramaturgy, it seems. One conventional answer to this willfulness, our sense that Shakespeare is not properly serious or is playing half-parodic games, is to emphasize symbolic patterns. After all, Lear's behavior and certain tricks in that play (like Gloucester's pretended fall) seem to put a similar strain on audiences. What right have we to expect Shakespeare to worry here about—what, exactly? Verisimilitude? Probability? Characterization? The birth is obviously set up for later revelations; both prose romance and stage comedy do this all the time. The deaths all act out Leontes' madness, invoke the familiar principle that improper (it doesn't have to be mad) behavior by heroes in plays infects the entire world, snowballs. The deaths symbolize and enact mistake, overreaching, sin. Yet of course in comedy we have no deaths, and in tragedy they feel and appear much more ominous.

The play seems to force us to think what I have outlined (obvious enough thoughts) about comedy and tragedy. Perhaps Shakespeare wanted that; perhaps he even wanted the irritation. No doubt he wanted, in any case, some consciousness of artifice. That very consciousness, if it stays short of belief that the playwright is incompetent, helps qualify the irritation. The deaths are too much; the bear is too much; our feeling of too much may be just right. We feel we know something analogous to what Shakespeare knows, and we are therefore in not-quite-comfortable (but not painful either) complicity. The knowledge would be something like this: we know that all conventions leave important things out, but that they are necessary for the order art makes. The feelings and events (especially death) that they reduce to their coherent patterns need such reduction to be understood, or at least placed—it helps against fear. But we can't dismiss our knowledge that these are merely conventions or merely plays. And sophisticated playwrights do not expect us to. So this time a sophisticated playwright shows us the conventions both inside and outside, very cleverly involves us and then (sometimes simultaneously) mocks

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our involvement. The larger effect is that he mocks his own creation—only not so that we want to dismiss it. Not only are we in some sense hooked by our uneasiness, our feeling of complicity amounts to expectation that these problems are going into a new phase, even that they may be "solved." I don't mean, now, the conventional need to take care of the plot, or even to answer for the deaths. I mean that, if we look forward to the second half of the play at all, we expect Shakespeare to appeal to our intelligence;[14] we expect to see the whole thing as an author would and to become unusually conscious of the relation of plays to life.

III. The Shift to Pastoral

After putting stress on patterns from both comedy and tragedy, Shakespeare undertakes what at first appears to be a pastoral-romantic rescue. The rescue seems largely a success. That mess in Acts I-III was, after all, just Leontes' bad dream. The real world (Nature, now) also exists, Leontes' mistakes need not be so important as they initially seemed. We have a change in perspective, to put it mildly, ushered in by "Time—a chorus." Time reminds us of his power (as he apologizes for making plays leap about this way), which overthrows law and both plants and overwhelms custom. I am trying to argue that Shakespeare is doing just these things.

Laws and customs govern plays, and more fundamentally, govern our segmentation of the world so it will fit plays. We become conscious of them, usually, when they are overthrown or overwhelmed; to discover a limit is to discover something about what is inside it and what is outside it. The new material so lovingly developed through the long fourth act comes from the same place (*Pandosto*) as the first three, but it is transformed into a more comfortable, and also more comfortably sophisticated, offering. We soon feel that death will not enter here, and the tricks of stage pastoral (especially Shakespeare's own in his late comedies) enter easily to keep at bay the more violent (or primitive) elements of prose romance. The closest analogue to the pastoral doings here is probably the Forest of Arden; there, as here, death enters in name and nearly threatens seriously. A foiled assassin and a foiled lion are comparable in effect to the threats of capital punishment from Polixenes. Autolycus's terrible pictures of flaying alive, matched in violence only by the description of the killing bear, are not capable of shocking us into fear for the safety of the innocent bumpkins. There is an obvious parallel between Polixenes' disapproval of his son's intent to marry and Leontes' rigid insistence

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that the world bow to his dream—only Polixenes remains just a huffy father. He stays well this side of madness and obsession. Part of what keeps us safe is recognition of very familiar pastoral conventions, especially the descent of royalty to the level of shepherds, with the usual sophisticated play through disguises. The disguises emphasize what Empson points out as a central pastoral device, the coupling of intellectual sophistication (both literary and social) with more elemental (primitive) material—a reminder, in fact, where sophistication comes from. True love is natural, so a prince can find it in a shepherd lass—who is, of course, really a princess. Both filial obligations and the accompanying rigid authority figure must give way before the power of love; the conflict focuses here in an amusing moment when Polixenes demonstrates, removing his disguise, that his rational moderate manner (truly befitting royalty) was also a mere disguise. The pastoral toys, as usual, with these inversions of high and low without threatening much. All this appeals more to the mind than to the emotions, especially as the court figures carry on fancy arguments about art and moral obligations, hedged by courtly compliment (again, ironically, the best ones are by Polixenes in disguise, paid to Perdita). Communal festivities allow significant mingling of the low and natural population with the court, as we are unsentimentally reminded that the true breeding of the real princess was preserved (possibly even fostered) by real shepherds, whom of course she outshines.[15] The most striking figure in this lower grouping is a thief who specializes in disguises and songs, gulling only gulls and becoming the prince's servant and a "gentleman" by his own choice—for money and position, but not merely for that.

These patterns are very familiar and comforting. They encourage us, as does most pastoral literature, both to admire the dreams acted out (low and high may come together, true virtue may emerge, one's true place may be secured or found) and to consider that they *are* dreams. Eden is neither lost nor put to a severe test against actuality. Our feeling, in fact, is that Eden is here recovered. This is particularly evident in the emphasis on renewed innocence, again a central theme in pastoral literature. Leontes' sharp regret for the lost innocence of his lost childhood is replayed here with its distortions largely corrected. Where adult sexuality, the "strong blood," constituted a fall in Act I, natural sexuality is celebrated by Perdita, properly conscious of its place in the moral order, in Act IV. Natural impulses are never free in the sense of unbridled; true love is "naturally" honorable. This is just one of

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several variations on the art that nature makes. Both moralists and playwrights understand that meanings are created only by contexts; a raw emotion is either inconceivable or, attempting to avoid context, a force for evil.

What Shakespeare particularly does here is draw attention to the flexibility of these categories, at the same time reminding us that only art has room for them, for only in art can we reduce them to comfortable patterns—comfortable partly because we know we are contributing to the reduction. Polixenes' argument with Perdita points out what is implicit in the whole pastoral landscape, a perspective which encourages connections between dreams and art through the imagination, which is finally capable of subjecting anything to metamorphosis and even fostering belief in the result. Leontes' madness, the pastoral world, and Hermione's rebirth through art (or stage management, if you prefer) all have in common transformation and belief. Nature is in both processes naturally augmented, especially in the sense that the actors—and we, to an important extent with them—choose or will the augmentation. What is more, the play calls attention to the inevitable roots of our capacity to transform and believe: the energy of desire, especially erotic desire, but more generally our most fundamental need to accommodate ourselves to a world with death in it or, to use a more specialized modern formula, to create ourselves in the face of contingency. The oldest, simplest answer is just to couple and produce a new generation. This answer is in the play, but only as part of a much larger package.

IV. Art, Magic, and Plays

The specialties of romance come through in the last act. We turn again to face, it appears, the evil acts of Leontes, who has repented these sixteen years. The return of life to Hermione in the famous last scene harks back obviously to myths of reborn gods (often, in our movies, statues which come to life)[16] as well as of fairy tales with "sleeping" maidens. Only in none of these, as far as I know, has the woman been stashed, keeping house, at the bottom of the garden. This play has been so persistent in considering itself that real magic is hardly expected. It may even be argued that we get a stronger effect from the simple trick, unique in Shakespeare, of not being told of Hermione's survival. But if so, what kind of play are we finally in? We return again to the play's reflexive nature, its playful questioning of itself, and our tendencies to approve, ratify, or even immerse ourselves in the various conventional worlds which constitute its matter.

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I think this last act is very sly and, since there are strong arguments emphasizing its true (even mystical) regenerative power,[17] I want to look closely at it. It begins with Leontes sandwiched between Paulina on the one side and Cleomenes and Dion on the other. The issue is Leontes' possible remarriage, although there is no female candidate in sight. Nothing anyone says is without a contrary position, or at least a strong qualification. Paulina, who is very tough here, wins by riding Leontes' guilt, which Cleomenes has been trying to talk out of existence by insisting on the length and quality of Leontes' "saintlike sorrow." Really Paulina wins by willpower, since her arguments are certainly no better than the opposition's: she says first that no one can match Hermione. Second, the oracle says that the lost child must be found before heirs are possible; it can't be found, therefore Leontes can't remarry. Indeed, she says more still, rather strikingly not to the point—if the point is marriage. That the child shall be found

> Is all as monstrous to our human reason
> As my Antigonus to break his grave,
> And come again to me; who, on my life,
> Did perish with the infant. 'Tis your counsel
> My lord should to the heavens be contrary,
> Oppose against their wills.
>
> (V.i.40-46)

Paulina doesn't know anything about Antigonus's death or the fate of Perdita, oracles are notoriously ambiguous,[18] and the heavens' will is hardly obvious to anyone. Her human reason isn't, in itself, much more impressive than Leontes' in Act I. Of course, she has other (real) reasons to talk this way, as she soon begins to hint—once she has got Leontes to swear not to remarry.

Shakespeare is teasing us about his central themes (natural regeneration, finding both lost virtues and lost children) and reminding us—through Paulina's very insistence, not reasonable to us—that there is something importantly unresolved not just about Leontes' moral or social position, but about the things we have to assume in order to call him, as Paulina does, a killer, or as Cleomenes does, a saint. We have "too much" again—melodramatic extremes without a satisfactory middle—as it was in the first act, but without the anxiety we may have had then. We have been pastoralized, after all, into relative complacency. Too much here again means consciousness of setup, not only for a twist in the plot, but more fundamentally for twists in perspective. Paulina's

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hints point both into and beyond the statue scene. The king must be celibate

> unless another,
> As like Hermione as is her picture,
> Affront his eye.
>
> (V.i.74-76)

> That
> Shall be when your first queen's again in breath;
> Never till then.
>
> (V.i. 83-84)

A breathing picture is a living statue is an art that simulates life is a play that plays with the art of simulation. But this leaps ahead; first we have a beauty contest. A princess, a "peerless piece of earth," arrives, and the mere report of her, daring to use such language, gets Paulina lecturing on meaning what you say. If you are a poet who said Hermione is "not to be equaled," you ought not to say later, of another, that she is peerless. (Especially not "most peerless," as this unnamed servant put it.) You only do it because "every present time doth boast itself / Above a better." Of course, Paulina again says more than she knows; her unsuccessful attempt to shut up the servant reminds us that time is responsible for the present situation as much as people are, and further, that this hyperbolic language must itself give way to larger patterns, most of them increasingly ironic.

Relativity of values leaves us open, once again, to relativity of literary convention, here a joke on plotting which is itself trivial, but which appears emblematic of the play's procedures: Florizel arrives, and Leontes says, "'tis strange, / He should thus steal upon us." Florizel is another Mamillius; they were born within a month of each other. But sensitive Leontes doesn't want to be told this fact because Mamillius "dies to him again, when talked of." How shall we respond to this? With pity? There is hardly room, since Florizel comes in immediately, becomes in Leontes' welcoming speech identified with Polixenes ("His very air, that I should call you brother"), while the princess ("goddess!") is a *representative* of what she really is. Leontes rejoices at finding, in a nice package both genetically and symbolically attached to the past, his lost friend, lost son, and lost daughter. The wonderful new son-brother, however, immediately manufactures a pack of lies, especially about his princess, complete with weeping from her fictitious father, "the warlike Smalus," king of Libya. A real

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princess, who doesn't know it yet, is pretend-married (though actually contracted) to a real prince, who pretends she is some other princess because he believes she is a shepherd lass, although we know better. This is much closer to comedy than to patterns of regeneration from romance (during this stretch even the word "wonder" undergoes some erosion). Leontes, moreover, hasn't altogether given up his readiness to be obsessed with himself, as he alternates between praise for the new couple and bursts of remorse for his sin, this time the one against Polixenes. Our lying prince has hardly got out his lies when a "lord" enters and exposes them. Then Florizel says,

> Camillo has betrayed me;
> Whose honor and whose honesty till now
> Endured all weathers.
>
> (V.i.193-95)

And Camillo has. Apparently honor and honesty don't mean just one thing, as the naive Florizel thinks.

I list all this because I think it shows that Shakespeare is having fun with his play and with us. The whole business seems delightful, but only if we smile at it and admire the cleverness with which Shakespeare fondles potentially serious matters, subjecting them all to views from more than one position. He is indeed tying loose ends, but with a certain meretriciousness. Even the plotting used to get us to this scene goes into a pattern as artificial as those of his early comedies. Shakespeare put the shepherds and their secret things on the boat with both the subject of the revelation (the princess), the object of it (the prince), and a professional ferreter-out of secrets (Autolycus), yet kept them from talking together by making them (or at least some of them) seasick. When the shepherds arrive, they are apparently left to themselves, secrets or not, so that Polixenes and company can catch them—by chance—on the road. Then, apparently remembering Autolycus's speech on flaying, the shepherds are terrified. While Florizel complains of betrayal, we have this fear described:

> Never saw I
> Wretches so quake; they kneel, they kiss the earth,
> Forswear themselves as often as they speak.
> Bohemia stops his ears, and threatens them
> With divers deaths in death.
>
> (V.i.198-203)

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Here in a nice picture we have oaths (swear anything to save your life) and authority with deaf ears threatening death—which we, the audience, haven't the slightest tendency to credit.

Should we, because of all this playing, have some worry or confusion about what really matters, we can take comfort in this packed scene's resolution. Leontes champions our lovers despite their lies and disobedience, and as they define their positions we can note the play's simple and stable values. The lovers stand on this:

> Though Fortune, visible an enemy,
> Should chase us, with my father, power no jot
> Hath she to change our lives.
>
> (V.i.216-18)

Romance, comedy, and even tragedy usually say this. Otherwise it's not true love. And Leontes notes the one essential condition for his support: "Your honor not o'erthrown by your desires, / I am a friend to them and you" (V.i.230-31). Florizel has been a better man than Leontes. Both this love and this honor are rewarded because choices were possible all along. If they are natural, they are also peculiarly human, choices enforced by will—as, by extension, morality is itself. This is one important answer to the supremacy and relativity of Time and Fortune. Another sort of answer lies in art, to which the play now directs increasing attention.

Scene ii gives us all the revelations left except Hermione the living statue. They all take place offstage. The king's reunion is so laden with emotion, especially wonder, it beggars description—as two gentlemen repeatedly tell us, as they describe it very adequately. Again Shakespeare calls attention to emotion and action as seen by the audience, or as subjects for tales or plays: "There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture. . . . Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that balladmakers cannot be able to express it. . . . The dignity of this act was worth the audience of kings and princes, for by such it was acted" (V.ii.14-87).

Poor Paulina, who has to cope with the certainty (at last) that Antigonus died, falls into a bathetic expression. "She had one eye declined for the loss of her husband, another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled" (V.ii.79-81). Can Shakespeare be slipping? As the gentlemen leave they tease us with a question that our minds will already have conceived: "Who would thence that has the benefit of access? Every wink of an eye some new grace will be born" (V.ii.117-19).

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Obviously all this erupting emotion was very deliberately set at a distance, and we are (less obviously) teased into wondering why. Well, to ready us for the climax that matters most, to remind us that emotions can be seen as acts, to keep us aware that this play plays its emotions out instead of hitting us with them. There is always more than one perspective on any act, and even Paulina's ridiculous eyes can be seen as a metaphor for the strain contrary emotions might put on us if we had no outside views. (If it was meant as ridiculous it, like the bear, would invite us to laugh *at the play*.) The clown, shepherd, and Autolycus cap the scene with a comic bit that plays with the idea of a gentleman—one may swear oneself into any reality, refuting even Time (a gentleman born these four hours) and remaking low into high. Autolycus can be given courage by the clown's mere assertion. This is a joke, of course, yet it emphasizes the relativity and illusion once more. Autolycus says he will cooperate "to his power"—as we are being asked to do, without being asked to give up skepticism of that and of most assertions of human power, even (or especially) those that lead to plays.

The last scene, whose stage history seems to testify to a real emotional bang at the statue's descent from the pedestal, also caps our play with multiple perspectives. I do not think this state of affairs contradictory, although one sort of logic can make it seem that real joy, shared by the audience, at Hermione's survival is incompatible with consciousness that the whole scene is a setup by Shakespeare through Paulina, a sophisticated joke (or series of jokes) about art, a game in which we are both players and watchers. The play itself answers such objections.

> What you can make her do,
> I am content to look on; what to speak,
> I am content to hear; for 'tis as easy
> To make her speak, as move.
>
> (V.iii.92-95)

Samuel Johnson is adumbrated here; if the imagination can create one setting, why not another? If space, why not time? If Paulina has godlike power, why should it stop at one expression of life? But we do not believe that Paulina has such power, nor that Shakespeare is here, after dropping a series of pretty broad hints and keeping Paulina very much a *psychological* manipulator, about to slip her a magic wand. As Johnson went on to say, the

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audience is always in its senses, even though an actor may lose, or pretend to lose, his.

> No settled senses of the world can match
> The pleasure of that madness.
> . . . .
> If this be magic, let it be an art
> Lawful as eating.
> . . . .
> That she is living
> Were it but told you, should be hooted at
> Like an old tale.
>
> (V.iii.72-117)

This last is Paulina again, now encouraging our tolerance, and more importantly, our complicity. Of course it's implausible that Hermione could have lived for sixteen years in that separate house the gentlemen mention. But so, as we have been noting, is most of the play's causality implausible. We are not asked here for a *new* complicity, just more of the old. Only here we eat the cake at last, knowing that we can go home still having it. Shakespeare has among other things made us extraordinarily conscious that the flexibility and artificiality of art are, or can be, functions of each other, that both are natural and as lawful as eating, and finally that conventions can be manipulated freely as long as the manipulation itself follows coherent patterns. These patterns exist "in" the play in its devices for throwing us "out" of the play. Not to be too paradoxical, I would insist that almost all plays do this, often inadvertently, whenever they make us conscious that we are in our senses.[19] *The Winter's Tale* is unusual in its persistence at this game, to the extent that the game is an important part of the play's meaning. It is also an assertion by the playwright of his freedom. The references to art contained in the dialogue help summarize my argument.

Obviously this last scene harks back to the argument between Perdita and Polixenes in Act IV. We can recall that although Polixenes seemed to win by his formula that the artificial is an extension of the natural, Perdita held on for purity, as a pure princess should. Nature, to her, should not be meddled with. Shakespeare's view seems to be that Polixenes is right but that Perdita's resistance is admirable. It is admirable not merely because it is in character (and shows strength of character) but because it indicates a limit. You can change nature, and thereby create

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something, but not from nothing; you need nature's help. No one could have made Perdita a princess, and no one can make a play insisting on change that has no natural roots. Our need for dreams of love, social and natural harmony, and satisfying endings for plays are all natural enough. They may be toyed with, even shocked temporarily, but not without respecting certain limits. There are no safe predictions about where these limits must be. But plays can be written teasing them and making us unusually conscious of them, hence of our relation to plays, and finally to the needs and impulses which produce plays. The art of Shakespeare is neither that of a Romano (I think he's another joke in the play, an ape of surface realities) nor a Paulina (a clever plotter), but it certainly includes them both, and asks us to witness and approve of both. The last scene indeed shows us art under the aspect of regeneration, and that regeneration is a function of Time and Nature, beyond human manipulation, but no happy endings would be possible without a series of deliberate choices by people.[20] In the last scene we are invited to delight in these choices (Hermione's, Paulina's, the lovers', Leontes' to help them, and even, ironically, Camillo's to betray them) and in their good luck (no madness, no disastrous storm, good shepherds, a healthy child). And all along Shakespeare has kept us conscious that he is choosing to present these choices as he pleases, for his own reasons, toying with our confidence that he is in control, but I think finally affirming it with a power partially derived from our sense of his conquering the arbitrary. This play is transparently made of the stuff other kinds of plays are made of, and we can watch the making while we are dared to cast our lots with one set of conventions over another. It is finally not one conventional art but art itself (or at least the art of playwriting) that pulls everything together. An acting out of rebirth is really a rebirth (she *was not*— to us all—now she *is*) and really an act (Paulina's, with a natural explanation, Shakespeare's, as a stage trick). The audience for the act is the actors themselves and us. Our last comments are very much in accord with Leontes.

> Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
> Each one demand and answer to his part
> Performed in this wide gap of time since first
> We were dissevered. Hastily lead away.
>
> (V.ii.152-53)

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NOTES

[1]E.M.W. Tillyard, *Shakespeare's Last Plays* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1938, rpt. 1951). Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966). These notes have been kept minimal. For a recent survey of criticism on *The Winter's Tale* see Charles Frey, "Interpreting *The Winter's Tale*," *SEL* 18 (1978):307-29.

[2]Howard Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972); David Young, *The Heart's Forest* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972); Northrop Frye, "Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*," *Fables of Identity* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1963), pp. 107-18, and *A Natural Perspective* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1965).

[3]G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life* (London: Methuen, 1947, rpt. 1958); Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Last Phase* (Stanford: Stanford Univ. Press, 1965).

[4]S.L. Bethell, *The Winter's Tale: A Study* (London: Staples Press, 1947).

[5]Lytton Strachey apparently began this trend toward revaluation by attacking the image of Shakespeare the sweet old man in 1906. (*Books and Characters, French and English*, new edition, London: Chatto & Windus, 1924.)

[6]Neville Coghill, "Six Points of Stage-Craft in *The Winter's Tale*," in *The Winter's Tale: A Case Book*, ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Macmillan, 1958, rpt. 1968). For more recent bear lore see Dennis Biggins, "'Exit Pursued by a Beare,' A Problem in *The Winter's Tale*," *SQ* 13 (1962):1-13, and Louise G. Clubb, "The Tragicomic Bear," *CLS* 9 (1972):17-30.

[7]Joan Hartwig, in *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Univ. Press, 1972), p. 36, notes that poetic justice might mean that Antigonus gets eaten for carrying out his mission believing in Hermione's adultery. It seems to me rather that the good and faithful servant is on a salvage operation which does *not* deserve death.

[8]Yes, romance does, but *Pandosto* has no Antigonus.

[9]In what follows I owe obvious debts to the works already cited by Young, Bethell, and Hartwig. Of the three, Young treats notions of genre and mode with the greatest flexibility, and so seems closest to my own attempt here. But he gives up as hopelessly complex an important part of the play: "The interpenetrating levels of art and nature are too much for us to sort out. We must simply acquiesce, with Leontes" (p. 133). He is discussing the statue scene. Young concludes by putting Time in a position like the one in which I put Shakespeare.

[10]I quote from the Signet paperback edition edited by Frank Kermode (New York: New American Library, 1963). See his remarks in the introduction on Leontes' state of mind.

[11]Leontes has been laughed at by audiences. Shakespeare seems aware that this might happen.

> *Leontes:* Come, follow us,
> We are to speak in public: for this business
> Will raise us all.
> *Antigonus:* (Aside)
> To laughter, as I take it,
> If the good truth were known.
>
> (II.i.196-99)

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[12]Tragicomedy" won't quite do, at least if Beaumont and Fletcher's theories and plays provide the models. Joan Hartwig's attempt to define the genre comes much closer than Beaumont and Fletcher to my argument here. She emphasizes that tragicomedy dislocates settled perceptions through adversity (p. 32), and sometimes she means, as I do, both the perceptions of the actors and of the audience. But her very intelligent account repeatedly assumes a degree and kind of involvement different from what I believe the play invites. I don't, for example, think Shakespeare anywhere offers a "final vision of cosmic harmony." And I don't think audiences of plays so obviously concerned with artifice (of which Hartwig is fully aware) ever give up their consciousness of it, even at moments of climax. Stanley Cavell's essay on *King Lear* in *Must We Mean What We Say* (New York: Scribner's, 1969), pp. 267-353, offers a fascinating discussion of the aesthetic distance implicit in the presentation of any stage play. It influenced my reading here.

[13]Something physical, I take it; probably with his hands.

[14]That the bear can be a joke encourages this expectation.

[15]See Molly Mahood, *Shakespeare's Wordplay* (London: Methuen, 1957, rpt. 1965), pp. 160-63, where she discusses "grace" and "breeding."

[16]*Jason and the Argonauts* is the most striking example I can think of. And of course many still believe that the Virgin Mary's statue will on proper occasions weep real tears. For recent arguments (contrasting) on the statue's meaning see Marie-Madeleine Martinet, "*The Winter's Tale* et Julio Romano," *Etudes Anglaises* 28 (1975):257-68, and Robert R. Hellenga, "The Scandal of *The Winter's Tale*," *ES* 57 (1976):11-18.

[17]Notably by Traversi and Knight, in the works already cited.

[18]This one was iconoclastic in its unambiguous accusation of Leontes, but traditional in the cryptic bit about losing and finding.

[19]Another way to put this argument is to say that conventions of any sort—literary, psychological, dramatic, from an actor's posture to Aristotle's rules for tragedy—by their very existence must be seen as artificial (a deliberate creation, a learned behavior or attitude) and natural (reflecting or arising from obvious characteristics of the human animal). By forcing us to recognize the artificial aspect of convention Shakespeare also forces us to ask what it reflects. All art potentially does this; *The Winter's Tale* incorporates the required shifts in perspective into its speeches and dramatic procedures, making our consideration of these questions inevitable. What I refer to as coherent patterns of manipulation (and later, in the next paragraph, as limits) may be thought of as something like tact: Shakespeare seems to know not to disrupt the action too much, or in too silly a way, for us to transform our irritations into admiration.

[20]Neither would evil be possible, at least in Shakespeare's plays, without such choices.

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