

CHAPTER THREE

THE WINTER'S TALE

Art and Nature

Ben Jonson had no patience for Shakespeare's last romances. He calls them in the induction to his own *Bartholomew Fair* "a nest of antics...*Tales, Tempests*, and other such like drolleries" (132). He himself, Jonson declares there, will never stoop to such a degrading level, "mix[ing] his head with other men's heels", for he "is loath to make Nature afraid in his plays" (133, 131).

By accusing Shakespeare's romances of making nature afraid, Jonson is, first of all, accusing the events in the plays of being implausible and unrealistic, in other words, untrue to the laws of nature. Not only do these plays proceed through sudden movements which apparently do not operate under the logic of cause and effect, they also contain bizarre details which defy other rules of reality and nature. *Bartholomew Fair*'s induction lists a "Servant-monster" and "a nest of antics". The former probably refers to Caliban in *The Tempest*, who is more than once called a "servant-monster" in the play (3.2.3, 3.2.4, 3.2.7), while the latter may allude to the satyrs' dance in *The Winter's Tale*, since "elsewhere Jonson criticized the '*Concupiscence of Daunces, and Antickes*'" (Partridge, qtd. in Jonson 10, note to ll. 129-32). Alternatively "a nest of antics" might also be, as John Pitcher suggests, "a jibe at the scene where Jupiter hovers on his eagle over a family of ancient ghosts" (86) and therefore a passing criticism of *Cymbeline*. Possibly Jonson also had in mind the seacoast of Bohemia in *The Winter's Tale* and Prospero's magic in *The Tempest* when he refers specifically to "*Tales*" and "*Tempests*".

Shakespeare does not need Jonson to point out to him that his romances are unrealistic. In *The Winter's Tale*, he himself acknowledges the fact freely and repeatedly. Its title alone seems enough to discourage any expectation of strict realism. The piece is after all only a "tale", a fictitious piece of narrative imaginatively recounted, "[a] mere story, as opposed to a narrative of fact; a fiction, an idle tale; a falsehood" ("Tale, n.", Def. 5a). It is, moreover, not just any tale, but a "winter's tale", in

other words a particularly fanciful story about sprites, goblins and supernatural phenomena told to while away long winter evenings. And as the play is not just *a* winter's tale but *the* winter's tale, it announces itself to be the ultimate fanciful and artificial story whose own mode is the excuse for its unaccountably jealous husband, turns of events which depend on chance, and statue that comes to life.

In some ways *The Winter's Tale*, or at least the first three acts of it, can be looked on as the fanciful “sad tale”, deemed “best for winter” (2.1.27), which Mamillius is just starting to tell when he is interrupted at the beginning of Act 2. The young prince has just begun narrating his tale of sprites and goblins with “[t]here was a man...[d]welt by a churchyard” (2.1.31-2) when a man, his father, bursts in on the scene. Leontes, eventually losing his family and spending sixteen years of his life in daily mourning and penitence upon Hermione's grave, can easily be that man who dwells by the churchyard in Mamillius' sad tale for winter. And although no goblins or sprites turn up in the course of *The Winter's Tale*, the first three acts do contain the account of a spirit, the onstage appearance of a bear, and the mention of “fairy's gold” (3.3.112). Considered thus, it is almost as if Mamillius has a status as a sort of chorus figure, verbally preparing the audience for what they are about to witness as the plot unfolds. I hasten to add that with this I am not suggesting that somehow the real playwright-figure or the agent of control in the piece is Mamillius rather than Paulina, Time, Nature or the god Apollo. What I do want to suggest is that by having Leontes rushing in just as Mamillius is starting to tell his tale, Shakespeare creates a situation in which subsequent events are heralded by an act of storytelling—storytelling, moreover, by a little child who, in relating his tale (were he given the chance) would very probably be incoherent at times and overly imaginative throughout, which reiterates the message already imparted by the title of the play: that *The Winter's Tale* can be anything but a realistic piece of art aimed at faithfully reproducing nature.

While one must do a bit of “over-imagining” oneself to see Mamillius as the Chorus which ushers in the dramatisation of the winter's tale in the first half of the play, no such exercise is required for one to perceive the figure of Time as the Chorus who introduces the audience to the tales in the second half. Time's appearance on stage is designed for more than the purpose of announcing that sixteen years have passed, for if the playwright merely wishes to inform the audience that a considerable temporal gap stands between the end of Act 3 and the start of Act 4, Camillo's remark that “[i]t is sixteen years since I saw my country” (4.2.3) at the opening of the second half would be sufficient. Shakespeare, however, makes a point

of introducing Time to the audience. Time is directed onto the stage first of all as a visual intrusion into the action of the play. The sight of an abstract concept personified on stage dispels any false impression or expectation of realism that members of the audience may have formed in spite of the Oracle, the tempest and the bear.¹ Moreover, in having Time come up as a director-figure who arranges plot manoeuvres, Shakespeare foregrounds the idea of authorial manipulation. Time's "fast forwarding" of the story reminds the audience that the play's dramatic arrangements are determined by a playwright according to his own design rather than that of nature, who, like Time, "o'erthrow[s] law, and in one self-born hour / ...plant[s] and o'erwhelm[s] custom" (4.1.8-9).

Not only does Shakespeare acknowledge his play's unrealism by its title, tableaux of storytelling, and the personified Time, he also has the characters call the audience's attention to the incredibility of the events they are witnessing. During her trial, Hermione declares plainly that she cannot comprehend Leontes' sudden jealousy: "My life stands in the level of your dreams" (3.2.79). And Leontes, in answering bitterly that "[y]our actions are my 'dreams'" (3.2.80), reveals to some extent the illusory nature of his "reality". Antigonus, although deciding that he would be "squared" (3.3.40) by the vision of Hermione, acknowledges that "[d]reams are toys" (3.3.38). "Toy" here is usually interpreted as "trifle", perhaps more in the sense that it is

[a] false or idle tale, told (a) to deceive, cheat, or befool, (b) to divert or amuse; a lying story, a fable, a fiction; a jest or joke; a foolish, trivial, or nonsensical saying ("Trifle, n.", Def.1)

¹ Of course, the bear itself may have been realistic, in the sense that a real bear may have been employed in the original production. To this day it remains a debatable issue whether the King's Men used a bear or merely presented the audience with an actor in a bear costume. But whether real or fake, the bear makes a startling intrusion upon the scene. If any member of the audience has been inclined to take the play as a non-fanciful tragedy as a result of the seriousness and pathos of events presented so far, the bear will have probably jolted him or her out of that inclination, as it is inevitable that its appearance will induce an emotional response very different in kind from that to the trial scene or the news of Mamillius and Hermione's deaths. Thus in effect, the bear, whether represented by a live beast, an actor or some form of artificial contrivance, joins the Oracle, the tempest and the figure of Time in signaling the play's participation in the romance tradition and thus its inherent unrealism.

than that it is small and unimportant. Antigonus resolves to follow the orders of this trifle “superstitiously” (3.3.39). In other words, he is going to believe in it, but also knows that his belief is invested in an illusion.

These reminders of incredibility and incredulity become all the more prominent towards the end of the play, in the reports and discussions about Perdita’s return. Prior to Florizel and Perdita’s arrival at the Sicilian court, Paulina declares that the prospect of finding Perdita again is

as monstrous to our human reason
As my Antigonus to break his grave
And come again to me. (5.1.41-3)

And when the lost princess is indeed restored to her father, the gentlemen at court discussing the reunion voice their incredulity by comparing the event to an old tale: “This news which is called true is so like an old tale that the verity of it is in strong suspicion” (5.2.25-6). Indeed, its incredibility even exceeds that of an old tale, for “[s]uch a deal of wonder is broken within this hour, that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it” (5.2.21-2). The circumstances surrounding Antigonus’ death also come to light during the reunion, upon which the Third Gentleman’s comment is that it is “[I]like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse though credit be asleep and not an ear open” (5.2.55-6). It is a comment which works both within the context of the play and metadramatically. Within the plot, it is the onstage audience’s response to Antigonus’ bizarre death as a real event which took place sixteen years before. Outside the story, it is Shakespeare’s self-observation on the bear sequence as well as perhaps his articulation of the offstage audience’s possible reaction to the episode.

The gentlemen also mention that the royal party is going to see a statue of Hermione in Paulina’s keeping. The statue sequence is the final scene in *The Winter’s Tale*. It is also Shakespeare’s final reiteration of his play’s distance from realism. Some still debate whether Hermione literally dies and is resurrected in this scene, or whether she has been alive all along. I myself think that Hermione’s “thou shalt hear that I...have preserved myself to see the issue” (5.3.126, 128-9) is pretty clear in implying that she does not die in 3.2. But either way, the statue scene has little to do with artistic realism. If Hermione, as some believe, is restored from death to life here, then Shakespeare is presenting his audience with a miracle which is clearly no true reflection of the order of nature. If, on the other hand, she has been alive these sixteen years, then the audience is not in fact watching a piece of art coming to life. There is no statue, and therefore the kind of mimetic realism in art represented by the mastery of Giulio Romano described by the gentlemen and exulted by the spectators

at the beginning of 5.3 in fact has no bearing on the dénouement. Northrop Frye remarks that “whatever Romano’s merits, neither he nor the kind of realism he represents seems to be very central to the play itself” (“Recognition” 241).

Frye goes on to say that “the literary equivalent of realism is plausibility...There is little plausibility in *The Winter's Tale*” (ibid.). Indeed, what Shakespeare is doing in this play is building his story upon implausibility and then continually directing the audience’s attention to it. He either does it overtly, through the play’s title and stage devices such as the figure of Time, or subtly, through allusions to old tales in in-text comments about dramatic events. The result is a play which clearly displays a self-consciousness about its implausibility and artificial nature.

While most members of Shakespeare’s original audience would have been alerted to the unrealistic nature of the play by the frequent mention of “tales” and what Frye calls “ridiculous and outmoded devices” (“Recognition” 242), the “intelligentsia” among them who knew their Aristotle or Sidney—Ben Jonson, for instance—would have discovered more transgressions of the rules of nature. When Jonson in *Bartholomew Fair* accuses Shakespeare’s last plays of making nature afraid, he not only means that they contain presentations of improbable details and implausible sequence of events, but also that they ignore and upset artistic rules of drama which aim at keeping products of art within nature’s laws. This is particularly true of *The Winter's Tale*. The verb “discover” in the first sentence of this paragraph is perhaps not the best word to describe the experience of the Jonsons in the audience, for it implies effort or unexpectedness, while in fact the play’s construction is so flagrantly “false” that it fairly accosts them at every turn with its negligence of proper, neo-Aristotelian rules of dramatic composition.

Jonson has not time nor space to go into details about Shakespeare’s transgression of these rules in the induction of *Bartholomew Fair*, but his predecessor in the neo-classical school, Sir Philip Sidney, has devoted a few passages his *Defence of Poesy* on the subject of “silly” drama. The points he raises there might serve as an index. Although this criticism had been written some twenty years before Shakespeare started drafting his last plays and was in fact directed at popular English drama of the 1570s, it feels as if it could have been written *after* Sidney had attended one of the performances of *The Winter's Tale*.

For the neo-classical scholars, a good piece of drama must above all observe rules of the unity of time and of space. Sidney writes that these are

the two necessary companions of all corporal actions. ...[T]he stage should always represent but one place; and the uttermost time presupposed in it,

should be, both by Aristotle's precept, and common reason, but one day.
(73)

But sadly, the ignorant playwrights of his time conceived of such fantastical plots that shattered the unity of space, where

you shall have Asia of the one side, and Afric of the other, and so many other under kingdoms, that the player, when he comes in, must ever begin with telling where he is, or else the tale will not be conceived. Now shall you have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by, we hear news of shipwreck in the same place, then we are to blame if we accept it not for a rock. Upon the back of that comes out a hideous monster with fire and smoke, and then the miserable beholders are bound to take it for a cave: while, in the mean time, two armies fly in, represented with four swords and bucklers, and then, what hard heart will not receive it for a pitched field? (ibid.)

They also overturned the unity of time by dramatising stories in which

two young princes fall in love; after many traverses she is got with child; delivered of a fair boy; he is lost, groweth a man, falleth in love, and is ready to get another child; and all this in two hours' pace. (73-4)

And apart from their indifference to the unities, contemporary plays on the London public stage pained Sidney with their abuse of genre. These were

neither right tragedies nor right comedies, mingling kings and clowns, not because the matter so carrieth it, but thrust in the clown by head and shoulders to play a part in majestic matters, with neither decency nor discretion; so as neither the admiration and commiseration, nor the right sportfulness, is by their mongrel tragi-comedy obtained. (75-6)

It is not hard to see how Jonson's neo-classical artistic sensibilities were outraged or to imagine how Sidney's would have been by *The Winter's Tale*. It is in this particular piece that almost every one of these indiscretions of dramatic construction seems to have made an appearance. The setting of the story, though not exactly expanding the continents of Asia and Africa, is in two kingdoms hundreds of miles apart. The switch of the story's location from Sicilia to Bohemia is indeed announced by a player as he comes in, expressed in the form of an inquiry if the "ship hath touched upon / The deserts of Bohemia" (3.3.1-2). The figure of Time in the next scene performs a similar function in informing the audience that the action of the next part will take place "in fair Bohemia" (4.1.21). A

hideous monster does come out from backstage, rapidly succeeded by the account of a shipwreck. In terms of temporal movement, the plot spans no less than sixteen years, during which time a queen is indeed got with and delivers a fair child, who is lost and, by the time it is returned to its parents, in love and upon the threshold of marriage, presumably ready to get another child—and all these in two hours' pace. And finally, in terms of genre, *The Winter's Tale* is neither a comedy nor a tragedy. It is dominantly tragic in the first three acts, largely comic in the fourth, and ends with a happy reunion tinged with pathos in the fifth. Kings are mixed with clowns. And in that the presence and doings of the clown-figure Autolycus do not really precipitate the plot in anyway (he is in fact completely removed from the Lambs' prose version in *Tales from Shakespeare*, with no ill effect on plot coherence), it might be said that at least one “non-majestical” character in the play is there because he is “thrust in by head and shoulders” for the purpose of making mirth rather than because “the matter so carrieth it”.

Years after Shakespeare had died, Jonson, in a conversation with the Scottish poet William Drummond, famously remarked that the playwright “wanted art”. *The Winter's Tale*, in terms of its mixture of tragedy and comedy and its serious negligence of classical regularity, certainly seems to be an example which justifies Jonson's comment. But while it does seem to present a playwright wanting art, it also bespeaks one wanting it by choice rather than by ignorance, for to have been able to write a play in “the wrong way” with such thoroughness and, as it were, precision, suggests a man familiar with the neo-classical theory—especially the version voiced by Sidney—on dramatic composition, not one who is altogether ignorant of these rules.² Indeed, one can almost picture Shakespeare having a copy of *The Defence of Poesy* by his side as he worked on *The Winter's Tale*, double-checking now and again to make sure that every undesirable feature observed by Sidney was written into his new play. Of course, whether or not he was continually referring to Sidney's work as he wrote his own one cannot know, but it does seem that in *The Winter's Tale* he is ignoring rules of “proper” dramatic construction by design. These ostentatiously rule-upsetting artistic arrangements fairly flaunt the play's disinclination to be true to nature in the face of the literati, just as repeated references to old tales and the use of out-dated stage devices carry the same message across to the general audience.

² *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Tempest*, one of Shakespeare's earliest works and one of the last, show that the playwright was knowledgeable about and able to conform to the classical unities at both ends of his career.

Shakespeare, then, is both aware of, and apparently wants his audience to be equally alert to, how much *The Winter's Tale* has deviated from the order of nature in its dramatic details, in the story's want of plausibility, and in the play's deliberate disregard for neo-classical rules of dramatic construction.

Jonson's choice of phrasing in describing the unrealistic and unruly nature of Shakespeare's last plays, "to make Nature afraid", is more than a comment on how the playwright's art fails to be true to nature. In alluding to nature's frightened reaction to these plays, he is also expressing the concern that these fantastical stories, by disobeying nature's rules and creating an alternative reality, would in turn have a negative effect on nature and reality.

Jonson in fact has an ally in the play itself who would second his opinion. Perdita is quite in earnest in her worries about art's negative effect on nature. Were she among the audience watching this or any other late Shakespearean romance, she would probably be even more critical than Jonson was, for these plays, in pushing the plot forward through "contrived turns of fate, accidents and pretended magic" (Pitcher 61), appear to compete with nature in creating an impossible alternative reality which overturns natural orders. Perdita does not believe in art tampering with nature in any way. Because she has

heard it said
There is an art which in their piedness shares
With great creating nature, (4.4.86-8)

she bans streaked gillyflowers from her garden. She is equally dismissive of art's ability to arouse admiration and passion where they should not. In answer to Polixenes' request that she make her garden "rich in gillyvors" (4.4.98), Perdita stoutly refuses by saying that

I'll not put
The dibble in earth to set one slip of them,
No more than, were I painted, I would wish
This youth should say 'twere well, and only therefore
Desire to breed by me. (4.4.99-103)

For her, it is unacceptable that gillyflowers, which ought to be single-coloured by nature, should gain streaks through horticultural art, or that love should be inspired by the art of makeup.

Of course, streaked gillyflowers in themselves are quite harmless, as indeed is rouge or lipstick. What can make nature afraid, however, is the cumulative effect of art's attempt to modify it according to men's will. Therefore, in rejecting streaked gillyflowers and expressing unease about the delusional powers of makeup, Perdita is displaying a concern for "the damage art may do to Nature when it forces it to become what the mind desires" (Pitcher 56). One has to say that in this respect she is quite forward-looking, as the twenty-first century, with its worries about health risks caused by genetically-modified food, countless cases of hazardous cosmetic surgery, and other human-inflicted damage on nature, fully justifies, hundreds of years later, her wise fastidiousness in insisting on the artlessness of her garden.

In harbouring an aversion to art's audacity to compete with nature in creating an alternative reality, Perdita, besides showing foresight, also unconsciously (and perhaps instinctively) relates back to her own origin, for she is herself, though of course she does not realise it at the time, a victim of art's negative effect on nature. She was separated at birth from her parents and deprived of her royal status because of her father's sudden unjustifiable conviction that her mother had committed adultery. In the loose sense that art is the product of the mind—art is imagination expressed, while imagination is the product of the mind—Leontes' sudden jealousy and its disastrous consequences can be looked on as *The Winter's Tale's* more detailed presentation of Perdita's side of the argument in the art-nature debate: that art can have severely negative effects on nature.

In coming to terms with the tragic first half of the play, much research effort has been (and still is) put into investigating causes of Leontes' apparently inexplicable outburst of jealousy. Theories about patriarchal fears, social space, and sexual provocations abound. However, whether the Sicilian king's violent suspicion should be interpreted as an expression of "Oedipal anxieties and repressed homoerotic desires" (Snyder and Curren-Aquino 24), or as "a type of spatiotemporal derangement of the ethos of gift, hospitality, and expenditure" (Bristol 154), or as an understandable reaction to the provocative implications of the sight of Polixenes elaborately highlighting, while standing beside a visibly pregnant Hermione, the fact that his stay has lasted nine months (Coghill 31-3, my summary), the nature of Leontes' eventual conviction of Hermione's guilt remains the same: a construction out of his imagination. By skipping over the dramatisation of a cause for his suspicion—which, were it included, would have taken up much plot space and stage time, as the other two famous jealousy plots in the canon have proven—Shakespeare directs, as it were, the limelight on the stage-by-stage unfolding of the king's process

of constructing Hermione's guilt, a process which Frye terms "a parody of a creation out of nothing" ("Recognition" 243).

The play's presentation of Leontes' rapid descent into jealousy and, to all intents and purposes, madness officially starts with his

Too hot, too hot:
To mingle friendship farre is mingling bloods.
I have *tremor cordis* on me. (1.2.110-2)

Of course, during a performance, depending on the director or/and the actor's interpretation, Leontes might show signs of discomfort or anxiety well before this speech. But in print, this is the first clear indication that he suspects foul play between his wife and his friend. Up to this point he has been either cordial, or, when Hermione, at his own request, is trying to persuade Polixenes to stay, silent in the background, but now he unleashes his suspicion, in language already fairly vehement, in this aside to the audience.

As is the case with Posthumus in *Cymbeline*, once the suspicion of a wife's infidelity rears its head, it is little time before it turns into fierce conviction. Leontes rapidly moves on to the next stage in his construction of Hermione's guilt. After the initial "budding" of his jealousy, he proceeds to weigh the "evidences". But since his assessment mainly involves interpreting gestures exchanged between Polixenes and Hermione on the premise that the two *are* having an affair, not much weighing is really involved. In his eyes, they are

padding palms and pinching fingers,
... and making practised smiles
As in a looking-glass; and then ... sigh[ing], as 'twere
The mort o'th'deer, (1.2.117-20)

while in reality Polixenes is probably simply lending an arm or hand to Hermione in a gentlemanly spirit. Hermione would then of course acknowledge her gratitude, with a smile and perhaps a few words. Again, as etiquette dictates, Polixenes would probably smile back in response. It is, potentially, all perfectly innocent and above board. But to Leontes, who already has an opinion and is suiting the evidence to his interpretation, such gestural exchange is quite enough to incriminate. What he is starting to do as he speaks these lines is, in a way, to bend nature to his will, forcing it to become what he thinks it is.

Leontes' act of reconstructing nature involves not only warping what he sees into the shape of what he believes it to be, but also forcing *himself*

to become what he thinks he is. As Wilson Knight puts it, Leontes is “a man tense, nerving himself to believe, to endure—more, to *be*—the hideous, horned, thing” (82). This process of moulding himself into the Leontes of his imagination is displayed in his soliloquy-like conversation with Mamillius:

Can thy dam—may't be?—
 Affection, thy intention stabs the centre.
 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. Then 'tis very credent
 Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost—
 And that beyond commission; and I find it—
 And that to the infection of my brains
 And hard'ning of my brows. (1.2.139-48)

This passage has been called, and in my opinion not at all unjustly, “the obscurest passage in Shakespeare” (Van Doran, qtd. in Pafford, “Appendix I” 165) and the “passage which no one has been able to read” (Stewart, qtd. in *ibid.* 166). Interpretations of it are many and varied, depending on how an editor or reader understands the keyword “affection”. It is very likely, however, that during a performance, spectators, particularly if they are hearing the lines for the first time, would have no time nor spared attention to make much sense of these lines at all. Polixenes’ immediate question, “What means Sicilia?” (1.2.148), though not exactly directed at Leontes’ private musings, nevertheless probably voices the audience’s incomprehension. But even if the exact meaning of the passage is lost on them, the knotted language and the choice of words (“possible”, “dreams”, “unreal”, “nothing”, “credent” and “something”) would convey to the listeners a sense of how Leontes is struggling between the possible and the impossible, the real and the unreal, and nothing and something. It is also clear from the last few lines that the result of this struggle is that he becomes convinced by the unreal, accepts the impossible, and believes that there is something. He has in fact, through this mess of a reasoning process, himself planted the horn upon his brows.

Closer examination of the speech enables a clearer insight into Leontes’ process of hardening his brows. Different interpretations of the word “affection”, as I have mentioned, will result in fairly divergent ways of understanding the speech’s meaning. One thing that remains unchanged, however, is the fact that Leontes, by the end of his

meditations, has completely submitted his reality to the rule of his imagination.

Most editors take “affection” to mean “passions”, though no unanimous conclusion has been reached on what and whose passions he is brooding on. One possible interpretation is that by “affection” he is alluding to Hermione’s “lustful passions”. In this case, roughly translated, his argument probably runs thus: “since lust can cause people in the throes of such passions to engage themselves in imaginary relationships with an entirely non-existent person, it is conceivable that it will lead them to transfer that pretended relationship onto a real-life one”. One must confess that this in itself sounds quite logical as a statement. However, despite the appearance of logical reasoning, the passage in fact shows that Leontes is rapidly losing his faculty of reason, for, notwithstanding his pose of logical meditation, he is arbitrarily confirming his suspicion of Hermione’s faithlessness upon “evidences” gathered from a piece of general observation which is by no means the indisputable truth. That in his argument, he immediately jumps from acknowledgement of the possibility of a scenario—“’tis very credent / Thou *mayst* co-join with something” to establishing his case, the non-sequitur “and thou *dost*”, once again demonstrates that he is not suiting his judgement to reality, but bending reality to his judgement. Moreover, in believing that an imaginary physical relationship induced by strong passion can attach itself to real-life objects and manifest itself in the external world, he displays a firm conviction of imagination’s rule over nature, which prepares for his eventual arrival at the belief that his imagination is the only truthful reflection of nature, a state of mind which becomes evident during his conversations with Camillo and, later, Paulina and Antigonus. In short, reading this passage in the light of “affection” meaning Hermione’s lustful passions reveals a man bent on constructing his wife as an adulteress and himself a cuckold. For him, what imagination deems possible is as good as a confirmation of reality.

Another possible explanation of the “affection” here is that Leontes is alluding to his own jealousy. If so, then whatever else he may be thinking of, he is also at the same time making an effort to come to terms with his own bitter suspicion. He reasons that since strong jealousy, partaking dream’s power (“communicate” here meaning “to have a common part or share” (“Communicate, v.”, Def. II 6b)), can make possible things normally held impossible, in other words give existence to that which has no existence (“nothing”), it is then, to him, very plausible that that which has no physical existence may join onto that which exists in reality (“something”) and effectively become reality itself. In short, it is entirely

credible that his groundless jealousy should have a ground. This is horrible logic, of course, and founded upon a serious confusion of imagination and reality. Leontes' association of "affection" with "dreams" puts the premise of his argument strictly within the realm of imagination, for although the impossible can indeed be made possible by dreams, it only remains so as long as one is dreaming. Once one wakes up, reality steps in and undoes imagination's work. Similarly, jealousy may propel someone to conceive the inconceivable, but, unless there is solid evidence of betrayal, the idea remains just a thought in this person's mind instead of a solid fact in the external world. Leontes, however, heedless of the boundary between the imagined and the real, forces his "dream logic" upon reality in the second part of his argument and concludes that imagination can be unconditionally applied to objects of physical reality. So in the end, what he has accomplished through his "reasoning" is the same as what he has done in interpreting Hermione and Polixenes' "paddling fingers and pinching palms": he is suiting nature to his imagination. According to his reasoning, the idea of an adulterous Hermione should fit the real Hermione, just as the idea of a cuckolded Leontes can be applied to the real Leontes. He has thus reasoned himself into a horned man.

That his fantasy should so fit the present state of affairs, Leontes confesses, infects his brain. H. C. Goddard remarks that in declaring so he has "hopelessly confuse[d] cause and effect", for "the truth of course is the other way around: it is the infection of the brain that has fitted the fantasy to the present instance" (qtd. in Pafford, "Appendix I" 166). Another reading of the passage, however, suggests that Leontes is initially aware that he may have a delusional brain, but rather than wisely refraining from making any judgement as a result of this awareness, he grows to believe that this "affection" has in fact given him unique insight into truth which no one else in the Sicilian court has. This reading is proposed by Pitcher, who suggests that "affection" here, rather than referring to someone's passion or jealousy, in fact has a more technical meaning of brain fever and delusion. This psycho-medical meaning of the word, according to him,

derived from the Latin *affectio*...It was a kind of severe mental sickness, a seizure with recognizable physical symptoms: agitation followed by palpitations, feverish sleeplessness and exhaustion, all of which Leontes experiences (e.g. 1.2. 110-11; 2.3.1-2, 8-9, 30-8). (41)

In this reading, in 1.2.139-48, Leontes starts out clearly aware that a diseased brain may produce hallucinations, but switches halfway from a comparatively sensible diagnosis of his own mental condition to a sudden

acceptance of the hallucinations produced by his mind. The sudden switch is probably the result, Pitcher suggests, of his uttering the sexually-charged words “nothing” and “something” so that “saying these words, with their powerful sexual meanings, makes Leontes think of adulterers having sex” (ibid.), which makes him lose his reason altogether. From this point onwards, he is firmly in the grips of his own imagination, believing that “his mental breakdown leads him to divine the truth of things, because his unsettled mind is a stronger source of truth than anything outside him” (42).

Whether or not Leontes starts out thinking his brain is infected is still debatable, as is whether his mental balance is finally tipped over by the sexual implications of “nothing” and “something”. However, Pitcher’s observation that Leontes has in the end come to view his mind as *the* source of truth is shrewd. 1.2.139-48 marks his completion of his construction of an alternative reality in which he is cuckolded. The rest of the first three acts, before the news of the loss of his son and wife shocks him back to his senses, sees him moving into that imaginary reality and categorically denying as well as destroying the real world around him.

Leontes’ procedures in annihilating reality include, first of all, pronouncing anyone who does not see what he thinks he sees a traitor, a liar and/or a fool. Among his victims are Camillo, Antigonus and Paulina. Camillo, by remarking that Polixenes has changed his mind about going for the honourable reason of wishing to “satisfy your highness, and the entreaties / Of our most gracious mistress” (1.2.234-5), draws upon himself the verdict that he is either “not honest”, “a coward” or “a fool” (1.2.244, 245, 249). And when he refuses to acknowledge that Leontes’ accusation is just, the king calls him a liar and heaps insults and accusations on him:

You lie, you lie.
I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee,
Pronounce thee a gross lout, a mindless slave,
Or else a hovering temporizer, that
Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil,
Inclining to them both. (1.2.301-6)

Leontes continues this almost childish way of rejecting a second opinion after Camillo flees the Sicilian court with Polixenes, which to him is concrete proof of Hermione’s transgression. He responds to Antigonus’ entreaties that he should see reason by cutting him short with

Cease, no more!
 You smell this business with a sense as cold
 As is a dead man's nose (2.1.152-4)

as well as commenting that “[e]ither thou art most ignorant by age / Or thou wert born a fool” (2.1.175-6). He calls the lords collectively “[a] nest of traitors” and “liars all” (2.3.82, 146), while his names for Paulina are “[a] mankind witch”, “[a] most intelligencing bawd” and “[a] callat / Of boundless tongue” (2.3.68, 69, 91-2). This is by no means an exhaustive list of his insults, but I think it is sufficient to show how the man is doggedly determined to make his imagination his reality. Lack of constructive argument or solid evidence presents no obstacle to him. He simply denounces reality as a traitor and a fool.

Paulina succinctly and accurately diagnoses Leontes' condition:

I'll not call you tyrant;
 But this most cruel usage of your queen—
 Not able to produce more accusation
 Than your own weak-hinged fancy—something savours
 Of tyranny. (2.3.116-20)

Something else which savours of tyranny is Leontes' stout refusal to take counsel of any sort. Apart from denying anyone who attempts to reason with him the possession of adequate intelligence or integrity, he states out loud that he does not need a second opinion. He makes it very clear to the lords that he calls on them not because he requires advice or that proper government requires him to convene a council, but because he is gracious enough to enlighten them:

Why, what need we
 Commune with you of this, but rather follow
 Our forceful instigation? Our prerogative
 Calls not your counsels, but our natural goodness
 Imparts this; which, if you—or stupefied
 Or seeming so in skill—cannot or will not
 Relish a truth like us, inform yourselves
 We need no more of your advice. (2.1.163-70)

Similarly, he sends for the Oracle of Apollo not in order to seek guidance for himself, but so that he can

Give rest to th'minds of other such as he,
 Whose ignorant credulity will not
 Come up to th'truth. (2.1.193-5)

When it turns out to contradict his false accusations, Leontes simply adds the Oracle to his list of liars and traitors: "There is no truth at all i'th' oracle... This is mere falsehood" (3.2.138-9).

The sight of Leontes asserting his royal "rights" reminds the audience that he, besides being a delusional individual, is at the same time a king with prerogatives, and as such has the power not only to deny reality, but drastically to modify it to the point of destruction. And destroy it he does. Ever since he has convinced himself of Hermione's infidelity in the "Affection" speech, besides verbally abusing his courtiers, Leontes has been acting upon his conviction. He orders Polixenes to be poisoned, removes Mamillius from the care of Hermione, throws his wife in prison despite her heavy pregnancy, instructs Antigonus to exile the queen's newborn child, and subjects Hermione to a public trial. The results of these actions are catastrophic. Apart from the poisoning scheme, which is thwarted by Camillo's refusal to collaborate, all the other measures reap death, loss and despair. Antigonus is devoured by a bear in Bohemia. Perdita is lost. Mamillius dies fearing for his mother. Hermione apparently dies. The kingdom now faces an heirless future which may entail chaos, war and yet more deaths. Leontes' construction of an alternate reality is finally complete.

Leontes' case, in certain ways, greatly resembles the process of artistic creation. It starts out as an idea, a fancy, a sort of highly subjective interpretation of certain aspects of nature. It is then given a shape by the artist—usually as a painting, a statue, a poem, a piece of music, or a drama—though in Leontes' case his fancy is manifested in acts of imprisonment, exile and trial. The finished artistic product usually has some degree of impact on nature, bringing aesthetic pleasure or shock to the ear and/or eye, or perhaps giving its audience a new, though not necessarily better, perspective on nature. Leontes' "artistic production" certainly has an impact. It almost completely destroys the real world at the Sicilian court. In presenting the case of Leontes' self-inflicted tragedy, which not only tortures the "artist" but also the innocent others around him, *The Winter's Tale* offers an elaborate support for Perdita's scepticism, expressed through her rejection of the cultivated streaks on gillyflowers, of art's effect on nature when human beings seek to bend the latter to their will.

During the debate in Act 4, Perdita's doubts about art's interference with nature meet with Polixenes' counter-arguments, which appear to be equally reasonable and valid. Polixenes attempts to persuade her to raise gillyflowers by maintaining that art is in fact nature, for

nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean. So over that art
Which you say adds to nature is an art
That nature makes. (4.4.89-92)

Thus a gardener might undertake to change gillyflowers' natural colour-schemes, but ultimately the streaks on the flowers can only be formed through the power of nature itself.

Polixenes' is a "sound humanist view" (Frye, "Recognition" 241). It is also in a way infallible, for human beings are, after all, nature's creation themselves, and the materials they are working with fundamentally elements of nature, so that in a sense all art and artificial products are ultimately products of nature, or nature's way of making a difference to nature. Thus Aristotle argues that what one means by art perfecting nature is really that nature perfects itself: "a doctor doctoring himself: nature is like that" (qtd. in Pitcher 54).

Of course, conventionally a distinction is still made between human creation—art—and nature's own. Nevertheless, in the age-old debate about the relationship between art and nature, a good number of thinkers have concluded that the two are not separate. Plato writes in his *Laws* that a good legislator "ought to support the law and also art, and acknowledge that both alike exist by nature, and no less than nature" (qtd. in *ibid.*). Similarly, Sidney states in *The Defence of Poesy* that

[t]here is no art delivered unto mankind, that hath not the works of nature for his principal object, without which they could not consist, and on which they so depend, as they become actors and players, as it were, of what nature will have set forth. (12)

Art, in short, is dependent on nature and, as such, can be considered ultimately a part of nature.

Polixenes' argument that "art is nature", like Perdita's doubts about art's negative effect on nature, is elaborately enacted in *The Winter's Tale*, in this case by the statue episode. As has been discussed earlier, Paulina's presentation of Hermione in the last act involves no real statue. Thus, rather than a scene showing art becoming nature, it is one which depicts nature improving nature in the guise of art. Leontes' eventual redemption

from his sin comes not in the shape of stone miraculously coming to life, but in that of the living Hermione posing as a statue which responds to his repentance by “hang[ing] about his neck” (5.3.113). In a very literal way, where the “statue” of Hermione is concerned, the art *is* simply just nature.

During the debate in 4.4, Polixenes elaborates upon what he means by “art is nature” by a horticultural example. He explains to the shepherdess that art, rather than harming nature, is nature’s way of improving on itself:

You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature—change it rather; but
The art itself is nature. (4.4.92-7)

To this Perdita responds by admitting “[s]o it is” (4.4.97), though still stoutly refusing to allow “nature’s bastards” to have a place in her garden. It has been observed that it is hardly surprising that Polixenes fails to persuade Perdita, as he hardly seems to have convinced himself with the example of grafting, judging from his furious refusal to marry his son Florizel, “a gentle scion”, to what he perceives as a lowly shepherdess, “the wildest stock”. Most consider that this ironic twist rather undermines the forcefulness of his defence of art. Technically, however, Polixenes’ opposition to the union of Florizel and Perdita only proves that all do not practice what they preach. The validity or lack of validity of his two arguments—that art is nature, and that art can have mending effect on nature—remains intact.

Although Polixenes’ argument is not backed by his own actions, the idea that art improves on nature is supported in the play by a scenario in, again, the final scene. Apart from Hermione’s “statue”, which is simply nature disguised as art, 5.3 incorporates other forms of more straightforwardly “man-made” art, namely drama and music. Rather than simply informing the party that Hermione has been alive all along, Paulina stages the reunion as a theatrical spectacle, complete with the drawing of curtains, plot suspense and background music, with herself as narrator, guiding the spectators through to the climatic moment of revelation. Paulina’s stated reason for this manoeuvre is that

That she is living,
Were it but told you, should be hooted at
Like an old tale. (5.3.116-8)

The artistic frame in which nature is put, then, is considered to be able to add credit to nature's own incredible truth and thus help it to communicate.

But Paulina's drama serves an even more important purpose than just assisting nature to tell its tale. Her theatrical imitation of a miracle puts across to the spectators the message that "[i]t is required / You do awake your faith" (5.3.94-5)—faith, not simply in the impossible (which Leontes already amply had sixteen years before), but more importantly in a person other than oneself (for example, trusting that Paulina can indeed ask the stone to come to life), in wonder and thus in divine justice. These "three faiths" are reminders to audiences both on and off the stage, but to Leontes in particular, that lack of faith in one's God and fellow men may have devastating consequences. Leontes' case has made this abundantly clear, for it is his serious distrust of his wife and friend, of his counsellors and of Apollo's Oracle that has victimised his son, daughter, queen, courtiers, kingdom and, of course, himself. Such reminders serve to warn him against relapsing into tyrannical self-assurance now that he has had his family (what is left of it) back and has secured the kingdom's future. The lesson is driven home through the dramatic spectacle's step-by-step arousal of expectation, astonishment, remorse, wilder expectations, and finally wonder and joy. Such effects probably would not have been achieved were Hermione's preservation only reported as a matter of fact. Therefore art, in helping nature to communicate its wonders, also improves nature, in this particular case curing Leontes of his lack of faith in anything other than his own mind.

Apart from reminding both the on- and off-stage spectators of the importance of faith in divine justice, miracles and their fellow men, when the playwright has Paulina require the king's party to awaken their faith, he himself is also making an appeal for another kind of faith to his own audience: an appeal for faith in art. If the first three acts' presentation of Leontes' imaginative construction is a portrayal of "artistic creativity" going wrong, the statue scene balances that negative representation with a positive one which shows art doing good. In *The Winter's Tale*, the late romances' signature ending of reunion, restoration, reconciliation and revelation is achieved directly through Paulina's theatrical efforts, a combination of representational and performative arts. This scene, where art is given centre stage, lifts the mood of the play not only from the tragedy of the first three acts, but also from the "earthiness" of the merry sheep-shearing festival onto a level that is heartwarming, solemn and sublime.

Thus, Perdita and Polixenes' debate on art and nature extends beyond the thirty or so lines of exchange initiated by Perdita's rejection of cultured flowers. A debate about the relationship between art and nature in fact runs throughout the play. Both Perdita and Polixenes' positions receive a correspondent elaboration in the events of the plot. Perdita's suspicion about art seems to have been justified by Leontes' destructive imaginative construction of his wife's infidelity, while Polixenes' point about art's beneficial effects finds its support in the statue scene.

It therefore would seem that, similar to his presentation of topical discussions in *Cymbeline*, here Shakespeare is also endeavouring to give the art-nature debate balanced treatment. Dramatic arrangements in the debate scene in 4.4 in particular and other parts of the play in general certainly contribute to the appearance of ambivalent presentation.³

³ The balanced treatments of the debate include, first of all, undermining each party's argument by each's own action. Without this twist, hypothetically speaking, to the audience, at the time of 4.4, Perdita's argument should carry much more weight than her opponent's. For one thing, the play's elaborate support for her argument—in the form of Leontes' fateful "artistic construction"—has already been presented, while Polixenes' still awaits elaboration. For another, the girl, with her youth, beauty, modesty and innocence, would be much easier for the audience to sympathise with than Polixenes, who is potentially a threat to the happiness of the younger generation. Therefore, should a debate between the two be presented without some twist of circumstances, it is likely that the audience would conclude that the playwright's own view on art and nature sides with Perdita's. To prevent this, Shakespeare takes care to add in dramatic details which reduce the forcefulness of each's argument. Polixenes, as we have seen, jeopardises his own persuasiveness by refusing to marry his son, a prince, to Perdita the shepherdess. Similarly, Perdita, knowing Forizel to be of noble birth and believing herself to be a commoner, in accepting his proposal of marriage is really putting into practice the horticultural art of grafting which she has hitherto kept assiduously out of her own garden.

Another aspect of the debate scene which balances the forcefulness of the arguments against and for art's effect on nature is the fact that both Perdita and Polixenes are "in disguise", in other words made up by art. Perdita is decked out in splendour for the festival like a goddess or queen. Polixenes is dressed in lowly garments as a commoner. To the audience, who are in the know, Perdita's festival costume in fact reveals her true identity as royalty, while Polixenes' hides his as the king and Florizel's father. Thus in another ironic twist, Perdita, who does not think much of makeup and art, is really enacting Polixenes' argument that art is nature. On the other hand, Polixenes, who believes that art and nature are one, in seeking to cover nature with art, is in a way emphatically differentiating between the two.

However, in *The Winter's Tale*, the respective forcefulness of the presentations of art negative and positive is in the end not neatly balanced, but in fact tipped over in art's favour. The statue scene, one should remember, is strategically placed at the very end of the play. Thus the sense of joyous solemnity achieved through art is what would presumably remain the freshest in a spectator's mind as the play closes. It is also probably the view of art which the playwright wanted his audience to take home with them.

At work in tipping over the balance are not only the statue scene's resemblance to a divine miracle and its strategic position at the closing of the play, but also the scene's invocation of classical tales about the power of art. In having Hermione restored to her husband in the guise of a statue coming to life, Shakespeare reanimates the Ovidian tale of Pygmalion, whose own statue, this time a genuine piece of artistic creation out of ivory, also comes to life. Pygmalion's story is first of all an illustration of "one of Ovid's favourite ideas, the power of art to equal or indeed outdo nature" (Kenney 434), as Pygmalion

With marvelous triumphant artistry
 ...gave [his ivory] perfect shape, more beautiful
 Than ever woman born. (Ovid, Book X 299-301)

This statue is able to inspire him, who is

Horried
 At all the countless vices nature gives
 To womankind (294-6)

with love—a case of the power of artistic creation scoring over that of nature. The Pygmalion story also shares with the last scene of *The Winter's Tale* a stress on the importance of faith. Pygmalion's "faith in Venus" (Crider 153) is instrumental in bringing his artwork to life. Had he not gone before the altar to pray to the goddess for a bride who would be the living image of his statue, however superior his craftsmanship, the

The play's more elaborate presentations of the relationship between art and nature also seem to be constructed with balance in mind. The much-commented-on diptych structure of the play not only marks a somewhat even split between winter and summer, past and present, the older generation and the younger, and tragedy and comedy, but also art's destructive power and its regenerative effect. After all, the whole story of *The Winter's Tale*, in a sense, is triggered by a destructive act of artistic construction, and eventually resolved by one that mends.

ivory statue would remain ivory. In other words, “Pygmalion’s art is necessary for Galatea’s metamorphosis, but it is insufficient. Prayer is required” (ibid.). Thus, with its invocation of the story of Pygmalion, the statue scene in *The Winter’s Tale* makes its message about the positive power of art and the importance of faith doubly forceful.

Triply, as a matter of fact, for the statue scene not only has the story of Pygmalion at its back, but that of Orpheus as well. One should not overlook the fact that in *Metamorphoses*, the story of Pygmalion is told by Orpheus, the bard of Rhodope. Like that of Pygmalion in his tale, Orpheus’ own experience first of all demonstrates the power of artistic excellence. His songs are not only able to make others forget their own sufferings—

So to the music of his strings he sang,
And all the bloodless spirits wept to hear;
And Tantalus forgot the fleeing water,
Ixion’s wheel was tranced; and Danaids
Laid down their urns; the vultures left their feast,
And Sisyphus sat rapt upon his stone— (Ovid, Book X 48-53)

but also move the gods of the Underworld to such an extent that they give him back his Eurydice, as

The Furies’ cheeks, it is said, were wet with tears;
And Hades’ queen and he whose scepter rules
The Underworld could not deny the prayer. (55-7)

As in the Pygmalion tale, the art of the poet triumphs over nature, giving life back to the lifeless.

But the Orpheus-Eurydice story, unlike that of Pygmalion, is ultimately tragic. Ignoring the terms of Eurydice’s release (that he should not look back until they are out of the Underworld), Orpheus turns back his eyes and Eurydice is immediately lost to him once more, this time forever. What makes the fate of Orpheus a contrast to that of Pygmalion is that, while the latter has demonstrated a faith in Venus, the former does not entirely trust Hades and his queen. “Orpheus’ faith is not as strong as Pygmalion’s” (Crider 157). The story of Orpheus’ own experience in the Underworld, therefore, while exulting art’s power to move even nature, at the same time puts its emphasis, through Orpheus’ personal tragedy, on the importance of faith. Art can imitate and move nature; but for it to become nature, faith is needed.

The Pygmalion-Galatea story is told by Orpheus after the “double death” of his Eurydice. In granting Pygmalion his bride, Orpheus is in a way envisioning an alternative ending to his own tragic experience. But more importantly, by telling the tale of a fellow artist who shares his own great craftsmanship but not his distrust in the gods, he is reflecting upon his own experience and summarising his lesson. In short, he is educating himself through art, in this case in the form of narrative poetry. Thus, in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*, while the presentation of Orpheus’ experience in the Underworld tells of art’s power to win over nature and how that power only lasts while faith is upheld, scenes of his tale-telling after retreating with a broken heart to Rhodope demonstrate art’s ability to make sense of and perhaps improve on nature.

By installing at the end of his play a scene which reanimates the Pygmalion and Orpheus stories, Shakespeare is effectively portraying three examples which support Polixenes’ argument that art is and can mend nature: Orpheus’ story of Pygmalion, Ovid’s story of Orpheus, and Shakespeare’s own of Hermione and Leontes. Similarly, when Paulina requests her audience that they should awaken their faith, she is not only putting her own message across, but also passing forward appeals for faith in love and art from Pygmalion, Orpheus, Ovid and Shakespeare. The rich literary associations of the statue scene therefore add weight to the forcefulness of its defence of art, enabling it not only to balance but moreover to override the negative presentation of art’s damage to nature in the case of Leontes’ maddened fancy—which after all occupies three acts in a five-act play—thus overcoming the audience’s instinctive allegiance to the aversion of art expressed by Perdita, with whom their sympathy might instinctively lie.

The final scene’s association with the poetry of Orpheus, the resurrection of Hermione in the form of a play-within-the-play, and the fact that Shakespeare himself was a playwright make one suspect that the statue scene’s appeal for faith in art, while applicable to all branches of artistic creation, may have been specifically made on behalf of narrative art, particularly drama, which is a blend of poetry, old tales, physical action and music. A survey of the dramatic arrangements of the play seems to lend support to this speculation. Shakespeare, apart from installing a dénouement which brings a solution to the plot in the form of an awe-inspiring theatrical event, appears to have made the act of tale-telling and/or poetry-making a source of solace in times of distress (particularly to the audience) throughout the course of the play.

The first instance of this comes at the beginning of Act 2 in the form of Mamillius telling a winter's tale to the womenfolk. Before this happy domestic scene, the audience have been confronted by the obsessive suspicion of Leontes and his vicious plan of having Polixenes poisoned. Fleeting though it is, the sight of Mamillius in the act of entertaining the ladies with his fantastical tale nevertheless temporarily relaxes the mood of the play from the brooding tension of the first act. It is also the last snatch of light-heartedness the audience is allowed before the end of Act 3.

Mamillius' tale, as we have seen, is cut short by Leontes' entrance. For the next two acts the audience and the Sicilian court are put through a whirlwind of distressing events culminating in the deaths of the young prince, the queen and Antigonus. Release from the winter of Sicilia eventually comes in the shape of Autolycus singing his merry ballads. After the grotesque scene with the storm and the bear, and after Time has waved sixteen years away, he enters singing about daffodils and springtime and proceeds to tell tall tales about himself to the Clown. Later he also makes an appearance at the Old Shepherd's place, this time selling his ballads, which share with Mamillius' winter's tale (and Shakespeare's own) the quality of being incredible:

Here's one to a very doleful tune, how a usurer's wife was brought to bed of twenty money-bags at a burden, and how she longed to eat adder's heads and toads carbonadoed. (4.4.253-5)

Although Autolycus as a character has little bearing on the progress of the play—as has been mentioned, the plot operates smoothly without him—he and his farfetched tales framed in poetry do play an important role in shifting the play from its tragic half into the predominantly comic mode in which it will remain.

The jarring note in the otherwise merry Act 4 is struck by Polixenes as he reveals his identity and opposes the union of Florizel and Perdita, promising punishment which rivals in violence and cruelty those issued by Leontes sixteen years ago. This crisis, of course, is finally averted when it is revealed the shepherdess is really Sicilia's lost princess. Shakespeare, instead of directly dramatising this reunion, has it brought to the audience in narrative form. They are presented with the spectacle of Gentlemen of the Court relating to each other the miraculous event which has taken place. In other words, to the audience, the solution to Act 4's crisis comes once more in the form of storytelling.

The climax of, and resolution to, the whole play, as has been discussed at length, comes in the form of a carefully planned play-within-the-play.

Much has already been said in earlier paragraphs about the final scene's association with drama and poetry, so I shall not go into it again here. But I would like to point out that *The Winter's Tale*, like its predecessor *Pericles*, ultimately ends with the prospect of more rounds of storytelling, as Leontes closes the play with

Good Paulina,
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. (5.3.152-6)

Tales and poetry, then, retain their positive power not only throughout the action, but also beyond the two hours' traffic of the play.

The Winter's Tale's pattern of averting a disaster (or a potential one) by a sort of "story session" brings to mind the dénouements of Shakespeare's other two romances, *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, where the act of storytelling (or verbal exchange of information) takes centre stage and functions more or less as a solution to the accumulated complexities of the plot. However, the format here in *The Winter's Tale* is vitally different from that of the other two plays in one respect, which is that storytelling, or any other form of manipulation of verbal communication, does not really initiate the tragedy in the plot here. Unlike *Pericles*, whose misfortune is set off by Antiochus' daughter's riddle and furthered by Dionyza's lie about Marina, and unlike *Innogen* and *Posthumus*, who both fall prey to Giacomo's perfidious reports, Leontes' doubts about his wife are not put into his head by false information supplied by a third party. They are entirely self-inflicted. Moreover, Shakespeare has arranged it so that, in print at least, it is not clear what has given rise to his jealousy. It might well be some words, but it might also be a look, a gesture, or nothing at all. The point is that in the tragedy of *The Winter's Tale*, there is no interested beguiler sabotaging by telling deliberately false stories. The only character in the entire play remotely resembling a Giacomo or Dionyza is Autolycus, whose tales of misfortune (plus his acting skills) trick the Clown into pitying him. But while his act of storytelling is immoral, it is not portrayed as evil. For all his roguery, Autolycus is paradoxically quite a likeable character. And his ballads, as we have seen, do much to alleviate the suffocating tension of the first three acts. Thus in this play, unlike in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* where words and tales are presented as both decidedly damaging and ultimately restorative, the destructive potential of stories is never fully unleashed. Tales in *The Winter's Tale* are associated with the ludicrous and the miraculous, but not

with the evil. Shakespeare's attitude towards storytelling as a human activity therefore seems to be much more firmly positive in this piece.

Metadramatically, *The Winter's Tale* itself is, of course, an elaborate narrative told by its dramatist and a company of actors. Shakespeare makes sure that his audience is fully and constantly aware of the fact by drawing attention to the artificiality of the dramatic arrangements. Out-moded devices like the bear and Time and consistent references to the incredibility of old tales impress upon them that they are watching the telling of a story, and moreover a story fictive rather than realistic. Thus while the mode of the play, dramatised romance, asks for the audience's "willing suspension of disbelief" (Bullough 155) in taking in the plot, the play's dramatic details, by continually reminding them of the fictional nature of the narrative—in effect highlighting the boundary between the real and the imaginary—at the same time checks the complete liberation of their imagination. In other words, the playwright presents to the audience an alternative universe (and possibly a better one, with its assurance of divine justice, triumph of true love and reward for sincere penitence), but prevents them from becoming fully immersed in it, so that they do not repeat Leontes' mistake of living in an imaginative construction.

Shakespeare's way of making art ostentatiously artful in *The Winter's Tale* is, in a way, also a resolution to Perdita's—and Jonson's—fear of art making nature afraid. Perdita's worry is that art, in daring to presume to share great nature's creating power, may in the end mistake its subordinate status and bend nature at will, thus ultimately bringing destruction upon nature. But a piece of art like Shakespeare's play, in being both self-consciously and almost flauntingly artful, clearly distinguishes between the artificial and the natural, and thus successfully prevents both its creator and its public from committing the folly of confusing imagination with reality. In fact, in watching *The Winter's Tale*, the audience is subjected to an experience not unlike Orpheus' as he, living in the misery of having lost Eurydice due to his own lack of faith, sings to himself the happy tale of Pygmalion gaining his Galatea. Orpheus is soberly aware of reality and at the same time drawing solace from, as well as being chastened by, glimpses of a more idealistic but clearly imaginatively constructed alternative. In parallel, the audience are continually made conscious of the improbability of *The Winter's Tale's* plot details, but at the same time can enjoy themselves and, hopefully, learn, amongst other things, to awaken their faith from watching the play. An unrealistic tale, in the end, helps those living in the real world make better sense of it. In other words, nature is not made afraid by this tale about the edifying effect of tales, but rather made more comprehensible.

While Orpheus consoles and teaches through his narrative poems, Shakespeare does so through the medium of drama. In making dramatic storytelling the major medium for revealing and penetrating reality in *The Winter's Tale*, the playwright is both following and developing Sidney's argument about the supremacy of poetry in *The Defence of Poesy*. For Sidney, poets stand apart from the other artists in that they are not tied down by nature but in fact "grow, in effect, into another nature: in making things either better than nature bringeth forth, or quite anew" (13). This second nature created by poets, according to him, is in fact even better than the original, for while "her [nature's] world is brazen, the poets only deliver a golden" (ibid.). The merit of this poetic golden world lies mainly in its ability to teach through delighting. Shakespeare, with the in-text example of Paulina's theatrical triumph and the metadramatic one of his dramatisation itself, is claiming the same status and power of artistic supremacy for the dramatists. They are also somehow free of the subjugation of nature—they are free to add a seacoast to Bohemia, conceal the not-easily-concealed survival of a "dead" queen, or make an heirless king live sixteen years without a consort—and can create a "golden world" better than brazen reality, as in the latter divine justice seems not assured, love does not always triumph, and repentance does not guarantee restoration and reconciliation. In delighting his audience with the story of *The Winter's Tale*, the dramatist also makes them see reality more clearly and thus in effect "teaches" them a new way of considering, and experiencing, the real.

Similarly, with the composition of *The Winter's Tale* in particular and the last plays in general, the playwright is also suggesting that what poets can put into poetry, dramatists can animate to great effect on stage, frequent geographical changes and great temporal gaps included. After all, Aristotelian classicists' objections to the disregard of the unities arise mainly out of the concern that leaps of time or switches of setting may interfere with an audience's comprehension of the plot. With clear (and often subtle) announcements of transitions, however, comprehension is not a problem for the audience, as Forman's accounts prove.⁴ Thus, as long as careful treatment is applied, the points of faulty construction which Sidney finds in his contemporary theatre in fact become opportunities for Shakespeare. They, because of the broadness of time, space and action implied, help to extend the plot from the imitation of "one action", as

⁴ Forman's account of *The Winter's Tale* can be found in Chambers, E. K. *William Shakespeare: A Study of Facts and Problems*. Vol. 2. 1930. Reprint. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951. 340-1. 2 vols. Print. Although he left out a few details, Forman's summary of the basic plot is sound.

defined by Aristotle, to an imitation of life, which is itself, in a manner of speaking, one continuous action spanning space and time. Moreover, it is Aristotle himself who writes that

the limit as fixed by the nature of the drama itself is this: the greater the length, the more beautiful will the piece be by reason of its size, provided that the whole be perspicuous. (*Poetics*)

Shakespeare's deft stagecraft assures perspicuity and enables him to enact what Sidney deems acceptable in his own *Arcadia*—high-born princes dancing with lowly shepherds and mythical fawns, beasts jumping out without warning from nowhere, and love stories spanning more than one generation—successfully on stage, releasing the audience's imagination but at the same time preventing it from wandering unchecked, thus avoiding what Aristotle and Sidney fear—incomprehension—as well as what Perdita and Jonson dislike—imagination taking over. The result is one play whose disregard for the classical unities brings it richness and magnitude, which in turn give it beauty.

As has been mentioned near the beginning of this chapter, Shakespeare's thorough application of what Sidney deems as ignorant and unacceptable dramatic arrangements in his play appears to be a deliberate gesture. It is a gesture which serves the purpose of his play, for by keeping his narrative unrealistic, he is able to impress upon his audience that they are, like their onstage counterparts, attending a series of “storytelling sessions” which are entertaining as well as edifying. It also expresses the play's ultimate conclusion about the relationship between art and nature, which is that the former, as long as it remains self-conscious about its deviation from the latter, rather than harming nature, in fact helps people understand it better.

The Winter's Tale's engagement in the art-nature debate is in keeping with Shakespeare's general concern about art, particularly dramatic art, displayed in the last plays.⁵ Both *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, as demonstrated in earlier chapters, in a way develop around the destructive and restorative powers of language and theatre. *The Tempest*, as we shall see in the next chapter, appears to have taken its cue from *The Winter's Tale's* last scene and focuses its action around the “theatrical arrangements” of Prospero, who is a sort of combination of storyteller, magician and dramatist. *Henry*

⁵ It is also possible that the extensive presentation of the art-nature debate in *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's contribution to a topical discussion, as “just around the date of *The Winter's Tale*, the art and Nature debate had come alive again” (Pitcher 55), stimulated perhaps by the development of experimental science.

VIII employs dramatic spectacles extensively. And *The Two Noble Kinsmen* is, again, the retelling of an old tale.

Moreover, Shakespeare was probably using *The Winter's Tale* as a response to Jonson's criticism of his recent work, though not specifically to the "making nature afraid" comment, as that only came after the production of *The Tempest*. Jonson had started accusing Shakespeare of "pander[ing] to and ruin[ing] popular taste" (Pitcher 60) by his inattention to artistic rules around 1600. It is generally believed that *The Tempest*, with its strict conformation to the unities of time and space, was Shakespeare's retort to Jonson's criticism of his ignorance of the classical rules. It seems that *The Winter's Tale* may have been another such response. Through the play's extensive references to the works of Sidney, Jonson's forerunner, the playwright demonstrated that his "lack of art" was by choice and with purpose rather than by ignorance. More importantly, he made a case for ostentatiously unrealistic art, showing that it could be equally efficacious in communicating the truths of nature. Considering the continuing popularity of Shakespeare's wildly "flawed" romances today and the relative indifference shown to Jonson's own rule-conforming comedies, it seems that Shakespeare's neo-classicist colleague was either very wrong in his verdict about nature's reaction to his rival dramatist's art, or very right about how he had utterly "ruined" popular taste.

Linguistic Realism?

While few dispute that in terms of plot manoeuvres *The Winter's Tale* is not what one would call realistic, opinions concerning its characterisation, specifically the relationship between speech and characterisation, are divided. One school of thought argues that, unlike his treatment of the plot, Shakespeare's characters are imbued with realism, with each individual's speech tailored to suit and reflect his or her character. A. D. Nuttall, for example, is of the opinion that the dialogue in *The Winter's Tale* is "acutely naturalistic" and "without parallel in the Romances" (*Winter's* 16). J. H. P. Pafford writes that "all characters...use language which gives a strong illusion of reality" and that "[t]he language characterizes both speaker and scene...throughout the play" (lxxxvi). Similarly, A. F. Bellette remarks that in this play—indeed in all the last plays—"each person speaks in a way which is most directly expressive of his or her nature" (65).

On the other hand, in direct contrast to these views are those of scholars such as S. L. Bethell, Anne Barton and Russ McDonald, who

believe that, in keeping with Shakespeare's late habit of separating character and speech, *The Winter's Tale's* dramatis personae collectively speak in a late-Shakespearean style, rather than respectively in a Leontes-, Paulina- or Florizel-style. Bethell comments that "there is little attempt to indicate character by giving a particular type of verse permanently to a particular stage personage" (23). Barton, using Leontes' "I have drunk, and seen the spider" speech (2.1.38-55) as a starting point, proceeds to suggest that Shakespeare's concern in the last plays is to "express situation before character" ("Leontes" 138) and that he

in his Last Plays, destroyed that close relationship between language and dramatic character which had seemed the permanent achievement of his maturity. (136)

McDonald agrees with Barton in her estimate of the playwright's late style, and points out that stylistic features which one tends to associate with the speeches of one particular character in one particular frame of mind are in fact to be found in abundance in the language of other characters harbouring other kinds of emotion.

On the whole I am more inclined to agree with the latter school of thought. Style and speaker in *The Winter's Tale* are mostly separated, as they are in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*. While it is true that one is unlikely to confuse the speeches of, say, Paulina with those of Leontes, I believe that such distinction is more the result of differences in matter rather than manner. A comparison between some examples will, I hope, illustrate the point.

I suspect that the impression that characterisation is reflected in linguistic distinctions in the play is mainly caused by the compatibility of Shakespeare's late style with the mental state of Leontes in his jealousy. The late stylistic feature of repetition, both of sounds and words, for example, seems a perfect illustration of a darkly obsessed mind capable of only one line of thought:

Come, captain,
We must be neat—not neat, but cleanly, captain.
And yet the steer, the heifer, and the calf
Are all called neat. —Still virginalling
Upon his palm? —How now, you wonton calf—
Art thou my calf? (1.2.124-9)

Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I
Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. (1.2.188-91)

Apart from the obvious lexical repetitions of “captain”, “neat”, “calf”, “play” and “will”, in these two extracts there are also subtler reiterations of sounds: the liquid /l/ in “cleanly”, “calf”, “all”, “called”, “still”, “virginalling”, “palm”, “play”, “will” and “knell”, the combination sound of /ɔ:l/ in line 1.2.127 “**all called**...virginalling”, the hissing /s/ in 1.2.189-90’s “disgraced”, “issue” and “hiss”, and finally, the harsh constant /k/ that runs through the two speeches which are in fact quite some sixty lines apart in the play, “come”, “captain”, “cleanly”, “calf”, “contempt”, and “clamour”.

Incessant repetitions in speech, however, though possibly a hallmark of the language of the crazed Leontes, are not confined to the speeches of the Sicilian king in his unreasonable jealousy. They, and especially the subtle reiteration of sound, are also an important feature in the speeches of other characters whose personalities are perceptibly different from his, and who are speaking under fairly dissimilar circumstances, as for example, in Hermione’s dignified defence during her trial:

Sir, spare your threats.
The bug which you would fright me with, I seek.
To me can life be no commmodity.
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
I do give lost, for I do feel it gone
But know not how it went. My second joy,
And first fruits of my body, from his presence
I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,
The INNOCENT milk in its most INNOCENT mouth,
Haled out to murder, (3.2.89-99)

or when Florizel speaks to Perdita at the beginning of the sheep-shearing festival:

Thou dearest Perdita,
With these forced thoughts I prithee darken not
The mirth o’**th**’feast. Or I’ll be **th**ine, my fair,
Or not my **f**ather’s. For I cannot be
Mine own, nor *anything* to any, if
I be not **th**ine.⁶ (4.4.40-5)

It may be observed that not only the “technique” of syllabic repetition is adopted by both Hermione and Florizel on very different occasions, some

⁶ I have marked the “th”s pronounced /ð/ in bold and /θ/ in italics.

of the elements of repetition are shared as well. Hermione's speech in court, for example, shares with Leontes' two speeches the incessant reiteration of the /s/ and /k/ sound, while Florizel repeats his /f/'s and /m/'s, as Hermione does. One can go on listing such instances of syllabic or semantic repetitions in *The Winter's Tale*, but I think the two examples, Hermione on trial and Florizel in love, are adequate to show that such repetitions are not the exclusive properties of the language of the crazed Leontes.

On a syntactic level, the elliptical, digressive and often ambiguous quality of Leontes' speeches in the first half of the play is often believed to be specially tailored to demonstrate his disordered mental state, as in the following example:

Ha' not you seen, Camillo—
 But that's past doubt; you have, or your eye-glass
 Is thicker than a cuckold's horn—or heard—
 For, to a vision so apparent, rumour
 Cannot be mute—or thought—for cogitation
 Resides not in that man that does not think—
 My wife is slippery? (1.2.269-75)

Seen in print, the first thing a reader would notice is the repeated appearance of dashes: three pairs in seven lines. In other editions they may have been replaced with round brackets, though it is possible that neither was Shakespeare's original choice. However, despite the uncertainty of these punctuation marks' authenticity, they are not out of place here, as pairs of dashes and brackets are visual markers of divagations in thought and speech—and Leontes' is one very digressive speech. His point, when one strips away the added-in contents between the dashes, is to ask if Camillo has any suspicion that Hermione is false, as grammatically this whole seven-line speech is but one not overly complex question: "Have not you seen or heard or thought, Camillo, that my wife is slippery?" But instead of asking it straight out, the king leaves his listeners suspended in the air, expanding the simple question to its present size by a series of parenthetical phrases in which he insists why Camillo must have seen, heard and thought that Hermione is unfaithful. The resulting speech, in postponing the audience from getting to the point in the final line, reflects a Leontes whose mind is not working as clearly and as straightforwardly as a reasonable man's should. At the same time, it also shows him, despite this feverish and chaotic mind, doggedly set on establishing the guilt of Hermione, for with the help of these fairly abusive parenthetical phrases he is not so much asking for an opinion as forcing out a concurrence from

And damnable ingrateful. Nor was't much
 Thou wouldst have poisoned good Camillo's honour
 To have him kill a king—poor trespasses,
 More monstrous standing by, whereof I reckon
 The casting forth to crows thy baby daughter
 To be or none or little, though a devil
 Would have shed water out of fire ere done't.
 Nor is't directly laid to thee the death
 Of the young prince, whose honourable thoughts—
 Thoughts high for one so tender—cleft the heart
 That could conceive a gross and foolish sire
 Blemished his gracious dam. This is not, no,
 Laid to thy answer. But the last—O lords,
 When I have said, cry woe! The Queen, the Queen,
 The sweet'st, dear'st creature's dead, and vengeance for't
 Not dropped down yet. (3.2.170-200)

Like Leontes' question to Camillo in 1.2, it is immediately noticeable that Paulina's tirade here also contains a fair number of dashes which signal interpolations. But more strikingly, almost the whole of the speech (ll.173-98) is in fact technically a digression, for upon being asked by the lord "What fit is this?", Paulina's immediate answer should be that the queen is dead, the announcement of which is also her ultimate object in coming into the room. But instead of getting straight to the point, she expands her announcement by asking what tortures Leontes has in store for her since he has shown quite a talent for cruelty in his treatment of Polixenes, Camillo, baby Perdita, Mamillius and the queen. She lists the violence the king has done to these people and interpolates the course of this accusation to qualify points, for example what Leontes' jealousy really was, or how truly honourable, considering his age, Mamillius' thoughts were. It is not until the very last sentence in this 31-line torrent of a speech that she delivers the news of the "death" of Hermione. And even then she delays the actual announcement, calling the name of the queen twice and dwelling on her qualities: "The Queen, the Queen, / The sweet'st, dear'st creature", before finally revealing the news. Therefore, stylistically speaking, both Paulina's speech here and Leontes' question to Camillo quoted earlier share, amongst other things, the striking quality of heavy interpolation and suspension.

But, where Leontes' interpolations and grammatical suspensions appear to reflect a mind slipping out of control, here in Paulina's speech the same features can be looked on as having the contrasting effect of revealing cool calculation. The speaker is in perfect control of her logic and rhetoric. For one thing, although the beginning of the speech—

questions about the king's plans to torture her—appears to be a great deviation from the purpose either of answering the lord's "what fit is this" or of announcing the queen's "death", it nevertheless ties in logically with the rest of the speech, for Paulina's purpose of introducing the "torture motif" is to remind Leontes one by one of the acts of violence he has committed against all those who love and serve him, culminating in the greatest crime of all, the murder, in effect, of the queen. For another, all the delays in listing Leontes' previous crimes add weight and impact to the final revelation and throw all the speech's force into the "fact" of death. McDonald writes about this speech that

[a]s the tirade unfolds, we perceive that Paulina's joint purposes are intertwined: she will simultaneously condemn Leontes and reveal his most appalling crime. The first objective waits upon the second...Every line looks forward explicitly or implicitly to the climax. ("Poetry" 322)

Moreover, this structure which delays the announcement of "death" also suggests that Paulina has envisioned and weighed the situation before opening her mouth. She is sure that the king, anxious to know how the queen does, will hang upon her every word until he gets the information he wants. Thus if she reserves the news of the "death" of the queen until the very end, her admonitions will be listened to. On the other hand, if she immediately tells of her "death", Leontes would probably be too stunned to take notice of anything else. Besides, all these other crimes would seem to pale in magnitude and significance in comparison with this last one that it might seem rather futile to list them *after* the revelation of Hermione's "death". Her deviations and interpolations, then, are techniques calculated to achieve maximum rhetorical effect.

However, this analysis of the effect of her employment of deviations and suspensions is rather based on the presumption that Paulina, contrary to Leontes, is in possession of her senses and probably knows by now that Hermione is not in fact dead. But if one is to suspend for a moment the impression, created by what Paulina has done so far (standing by the queen, endeavouring to persuade the king to see reason, and scolding him when he obdurately pronounces the new-born babe a bastard), that she is sane, resourceful and a good rhetorician, it would be equally possible to see this speech as the reflection of a mind possessed by grief and indignation, so that its speaker is no longer conscious of the conventions of conversation, indulges herself in speaking out loud what she thinks, and does not get to her point, which sounds not unlike what Leontes is doing in 1.2. Similarly, if one forgets for a moment that Leontes' jealousy is unfounded and his suspicion erroneous, it is not impossible to conclude

that his speeches in the first act, rather than revealing a muddled and obsessed brain, in fact present a king whose faculties of reasoning remain more or less intact and who is coolly estimating the situation, as indeed some scholars believe him to be: “Leontes’ words are not the ravings of insanity but a careful meditation on the relation of experience to certitude” (Knapp 270). Therefore, in the case of characterisation and language in *The Winter’s Tale*, it is our pre-formed opinion of the character—formed mainly through observing their actions and the content, instead of the manner, of their speech—that leads us to perceive the effect of their language. It is not their linguistic style that offers us insight into their character but vice versa.

Other features of Shakespeare’s late style are, like repetition and divagation, to be found throughout the play, in the language of most characters instead of restricted to the speeches of one in particular. Thus, as in the cases of *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, verse style does more to distinguish the play from Shakespeare’s earlier comedies and tragedies than to differentiate character from character within the same play.

Although the language in *The Winter’s Tale* is largely non-speaker specific, there is one exceptional example which appears to support the claim for consistency between language and speaker. This is found, not between the differences in speech between one character and another, but rather between that of one particular character in the two different halves of the play. This one particular character is, of course, Leontes.⁷ And there

⁷ The Old Shepherd’s language is also occasionally used as an example of character-specific style in *The Winter’s Tale*. Although his verses still display many of the traits of the late Shakespearean verse (most noticeably metrical irregularity, elisions and ellipsis, and enjambments), syntactically they tend to have a simpler, more straightforward quality rarely found in the language of royalties. Bethell, though of the opinion that verse style and characterisation are generally separate in the play, remarks on the exception of the case of the Shepherd, “whose rural common sense and simple piety are at times thrown into relief by a type of verse relatively nearer to ordinary speech” (23).

But the example of the Old Shepherd’s *verse* rather seems to work both ways. It is true that syntactically, its simplicity seems to reflect its speaker’s rustic background. Yet on the other hand, the fact that for a considerable part of the fourth act he is speaking in verse might also be looked on as further proof that Shakespeare at this stage in his career was indeed not particularly concerned with the consistency of linguistic style with the character of its speakers, for, had he wished to mark out the difference of the Shepherd from the court people, the most obvious and efficient way would be to stick to convention and have him speak prose throughout.

is indeed a noticeable change in his way of speaking as he moves from the first three acts to the miraculous last act, or, as Bethell puts it, “[t]here is less difference in the quality of the verse between Leontes and Perdita than between Leontes jealous and Leontes penitent” (23). This change in language, however, is not brought about by dramatic adaptation of syntactical or “acoustic” style. Shakespeare still has Leontes elide, omit his relative pronouns and conjunctions, alliterate, interpolate, and employ enjambments in the last act, though admittedly less ostentatiously so than in Acts 1 to 3. Instead, Leontes’ change of style is mainly achieved through his changed diction. As Jonathan Smith points out, the Sicilian king in the first half of the play, in selecting his words, is wont to go to extremes, either speaking mainly in Anglo-Saxon monosyllables—as McDonald puts it, “the language of blood” (“Poetry” 318)—or Latinate polysyllables. Two thirds of the latter appear in *The English dictionary, or the new interpreter of hard English words* (emphasis mine) compiled by Shakespeare’s contemporary Henry Cockeram. Moreover, a great number of these are placed in this dictionary under the section where Cockeram

insert[s] (as occasion served) even the mock-words which are ridiculously used in our language, that those who desire a generality of knowledge, may not be ignorant of the sense even of fustian-terms, used by too many who study rather to be heard speake, than to understand themselves. (Cockeram, qtd. in Smith 319)

Putting it another way, these are words that are pompous and supercilious to the point of unintelligibility. In contrast, the Leontes in the last act “has found the true language of a king...unequivocal, purged now of the pseudo-rational phraseology and the portentous” (Smith 326). What Latinate words he uses fall within the range of common usage and are not to be found in the dictionary of hard English words. As a result, the sense of emptiness of meaning, of speaking with manner but without matter is removed from the speeches of Leontes in the second half of the play. This change in diction marks Leontes’ transformation from a pompous, self-absorbed and not infrequently gibbering tyrant to a humble and penitent ruler.

This difference in treatment of Leontes’ language in the two halves of the play seems to support both the suggestion that Shakespeare here is suiting language to characterisation, and the theory, expounded in the chapters on *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, that the playwright in the last plays is in the habit of using language to characterise the structure of the play, as this change in style also reflects the plot’s move from the oppressive wintry first half to the light-hearted glorious second. This, I suggest, is

because in *The Winter's Tale*, much of the plot in fact develops around the mental health (or lack of it) of one character, Leontes. This is especially evident in the first three acts, where his unreasonableness is the dominating force which propels the story forward. Similarly, the miraculous dénouement would not work, and probably would not even take place, had Leontes' mental state remained the same. Therefore, because in the case of the Sicilian king, characterisation and plot development are intertwined, Shakespeare's late style, with the added effect brought about by differences in diction, is able to illustrate both character development and plot structure. In other words, in *The Winter's Tale*, due to the fact that the development of the character of Leontes and that of plot has a kind of cause-and-effect relationship, in addition to its parallels with the structure of the plot and actions of the play, linguistic style also has the additional function of enhancing characterisation.

The Winter's Tale is thus distinguished from *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* in having a relatively focused plot which evolves around the development of one single character, who also strings together the main- and sub-plots of the story. That last clause sounds rather like a redundant qualifier, except that it is indeed necessary, for in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, despite their episodic structure, in their respective plots there is nevertheless one character whose involvement in all the episodes enables some semblance of unity to the story but whose mentality experiences either very little or absolutely no development during the course of the play. *Pericles*, because he technically commits no sin in the whole of *Pericles* (despite my previous discussion of the possibility of considering him succumbing to the sin of despair), need not and does not develop his character; while *Cymbeline*, although his personality can do with a good deal of improvement, remains exactly the same as he was before his experience of the Romano-British war and the temporary loss of his daughter. Indeed, almost no major character in *Pericles* experiences any great personal spiritual development. In *Cymbeline*, Posthumus, like Leontes, does transform from a jealous husband to a penitent one, but he is not "central" to the whole plot in the way that Leontes is to *The Winter's Tale*. The present play's intertwining of the transformation of Leontes and the development of the plot thus appears to mark Shakespeare's development in dramatising the genre of romance, shifting gradually from conformity to the episodic structure of prose romance to a more focused way of narrating these stories which span time and space. This technique he would explore further in *The Tempest*, in which the events taking place on different parts of the island are directly in the control of the omniscient Prospero, whose development from a man wholly confident in his art-derived power to one

who is disillusioned about art's capacity to bring about change determines the movements of both the main- and sub-plots.

It is also this focused quality of the narrative that helps to create the impression of “naturalness” or “realism” in the language in *The Winter's Tale*. Because Leontes' feverish mental state is at the centre of two thirds of the play, and because Shakespeare's tortuous, elliptical, incantatory and often obscure linguistic style is well-suited to the portrayal of the tormented mind, the play avoids giving the impression, as *Cymbeline* unfortunately does to some, that “the tone is frantic for little evident reason” (Kermode, *Language* 265). Instead, it is not surprising that an audience would form a general impression of realism of linguistic presentation in the tragic half of the play, since the plot is essentially built upon and propelled forward by Leontes' brooding madness. Moreover, a slight moderation on the part of the playwright in the succeeding comic half—introducing Autolycus' ballads and the Clown's prose, as well as changing Leontes' diction—easily throws into relief the quality of simplicity of the pastoral scenes and the wonder of the reunion episodes, again creating the impression of realistic character- or mood-specific speech, even though syntactically speaking much of the verse in the second half displays ample features of the late style found in abundance in the tragic first half.

“Naturalness” and “realism” of speech not only refer to the way in which language reflects occasion and, in the case of Leontes, characterisation, but also to the closeness of dramatic language to “natural” conversation. Certain linguistic features typical of Shakespeare's late verses do in fact contribute to creating an impression of the latter. Metrical irregularities, feminine endings and enjambments seem to be the most obvious examples, for, after all, no one in real life really speaks in perfect iambic pentameter—or in verse at all, for that matter. Similarly, interpolations which break up the progress of a sentence or passage help evoke a sense of spontaneous, rather than studied or recited, speech. In a way, they are also “realistic”, for few in reality when speaking impromptu for more than three or four minutes are able to manoeuvre from one point to another without occasionally wandering off the subject.

However, in speeches which contain elements for naturalistic effects mentioned above, artistic control is nevertheless evident. Metrical irregularities, feminine endings and enjambments, however natural-sounding, are in the end variations to the rhythmic-scheme of the iambic pentameter and are thus to be found in verses, which only the characters created by a playwright would be using as the default form for

communication. Moreover, the “naturalness” created by these late-style features is balanced, if not frequently overshadowed, by the excessive artificiality of another set of late-verse features: heavy alliterations, internal rhymes and semantic repetitions. Similarly, most of the speeches with frequent interpolations “spoken” by characters in the play inevitably leave the audience with the impression that they are evidently recitations of pieces of writing penned by someone who has thought them through, for in spontaneous communications in real life, no one who interpolates him- or herself as frequently and elaborately as Leontes and Paulina do is likely to successfully and seamlessly return to his or her main clause.

This “double-quality” of naturalness/realism and artificiality in the verses of *The Winter’s Tale* is a linguistic reiteration of the play’s treatment of the subject of art and nature. As the play’s dramatic arrangements flaunt the tale’s unrealistic nature, this language calls attention to its own artificiality, thus helping the playwright to further impress upon the audience that they are in the theatre watching and listening to fictional characters. Its efforts at imitating natural speech, on the other hand, remind the audience of the relationship between art and nature, as the presentation of characters speaking with an intensified rhetorical control and musicality not often found, but often desired, in reality once more demonstrates, through this artistically-produced “natural” language, that good art is the golden version of brazen nature.

To sum up: on the whole, the linguistic style of *The Winter’s Tale* is similar to that of *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, with frequent elisions, alliterations, internal rhymes, semantic repetitions, ellipsis, divagations, suspensions and other features characteristic of Shakespeare’s late style. These features are to be found throughout the play in the language of different characters speaking under different circumstances, so it is possible to conclude that, for the most part, linguistic style is not directly linked to characterisation here, and is, in Hallet Smith’s words, used not so much as to “characterize the speaker as dramatize the occasion” (qtd. in Barton, “Leontes” 136). However, the case of the languages of Leontes jealous and Leontes penitent proves an outstanding exception to the rule, where a marked change can be perceived in the speeches of the king in his two phases, an effect achieved largely through differences in diction. This, I suggest, is closely related to Shakespeare’s development of the way of dramatising romance, switching tentatively from a mostly episodic narrative to one which evolves around the spiritual development of a central character. Since “occasion” and “character” in the case of Leontes are intertwined, language which dramatises the occasion takes on the

additional function of characterising the speaker. It is an experience that we will encounter again in *The Tempest*.

The verses in *The Winter's Tale* also re-enact on a syntactic and semantic level one of the main themes of the story: the relationship between art and nature. Their often almost flaunting display of artistic control echoes the play's frequent allusion to its own unrealistic nature, while at the same time the sense of naturalness achieved through such control reinforces the play's conclusion on the subject of art and nature, which is that self-conscious art produced with good intention does no harm to, but can improve on, reality. Moreover, by evoking almost contradictory responses to their quality and effect, the verse of late Shakespeare, in its services rendered to the making of *The Winter's Tale*, proves once more the enduring topicality of the investigation into the relationship between art and nature.

