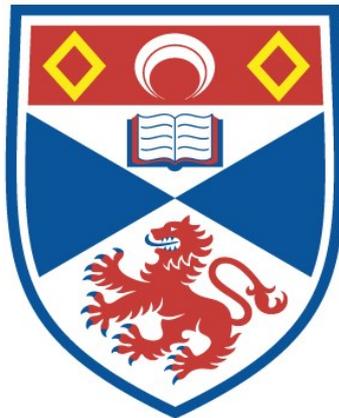


**AWAKENING FAITH IN SHAKESPEARE:  
RELIGION AND ENCHANTMENT IN *THE WINTER'S TALE* AND  
*THE TEMPEST***

**Micah W. Snell**

**A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of PhD  
at the  
University of St Andrews**



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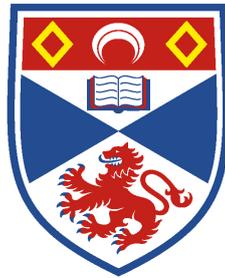
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AWAKENING FAITH IN SHAKESPEARE:  
RELIGION AND ENCHANTMENT IN *THE WINTER'S TALE* AND *THE TEMPEST*

MICAH W SNELL



University of  
St Andrews

THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED FOR THE DEGREE OF  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY  
AT THE  
SCHOOL OF DIVINITY  
UNIVERSITY OF ST ANDREWS

JANUARY 2017

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**ABSTRACT**

This thesis considers *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* as William Shakespeare's last great plays which foster re-enchantment for an age suffering spiritual disenchantment.

Chapter 1 identifies a critical context for studying these between theological studies of the arts and literary-critical studies of Shakespeare and religion. Section 1 surveys David Brown's work on religious enchantment and imagination through the arts. Section 2 takes in literary criticism's turn to Shakespeare and religion. Section 3 explores recent theological studies of theatre and Shakespeare. Section 4 revives overlooked criticism from religious poets of the past.

Chapter 2 introduces a progression of theoretical constructs that revitalize these plays as spiritually re-enchanting. Section 1 looks at affect theory as a means to understand the body-spirit relationship in the context of performance. Section 2 draws on Scott Crider's reading of *The Winter's Tale* as the performance of a complete ethical rhetoric demanding both theatrical and mythical interpretations. Section 3 expands T. G. Bishop's study of the theatre of wonder as Shakespeare's affective convergence of reason and emotion. Section 4 builds on the preceding sections to reestablish Renaissance alchemy as the most directive evidence for reading these plays as spiritually re-enchanting.

Chapter 3 is my reading of *The Winter's Tale*. I argue that a wondrous, alchemical reading of the play suggests Hermione dies and is bodily resurrected in the last scene. Paulina's alchemical art is cryptic, but the resolution is a corporate miracle that re-enchants the audience through the awakening of faith.

Chapter 4 is my reading of *The Tempest*. I identify Prospero as an all-powerful and benevolent alchemist who, instead of imposing vengeance on everyone within his control, at the end relinquishes his potent art in exchange for the less certain but greater spiritual enchantment of redemption through the free and loving act of forgiveness.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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My wife Jennifer's resistless energy of love has never ceased to amaze and sustain me. Without her this project would not have been possible. I dedicate this work to her.

*A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your body, and I will give you an heart of flesh.*

~Ezekiel 36:26

*When supernatural religion disappears, art becomes either magic that is run by authorities through force or fraud, or falsehood that becomes persecuted by science.*

~W. H. Auden

*There are geniuses who, in the fathomless depths of abstraction and pure speculation—situated, so to say, above all dogmas, present their ideas to God. Their prayer audaciously offers a discussion. Their worship is questioning. This is direct religion, full of anxiety and of responsibility for him who would scale its walls.*

~Victor Hugo

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All quotations of Shakespeare are from the 2<sup>nd</sup> edition of *The Riverside Shakespeare* unless noted. Quotations of Scripture are from the 1560 edition of the *Geneva Bible*. Spelling, lettering, and punctuation have in some cases been silently modernized where it is expedient.

## CHAPTER 1: CRITICAL ENGAGEMENTS OF SHAKESPEARE AND RELIGION

### Introduction

This first chapter surveys existing scholarly writings for the sake of contextualizing a new perspective on the religious significance of Shakespeare's last plays. Both in theology and early modern studies, recent decades have seen a swell of attention to Shakespeare's evident fascination with matters of religion. This is but the latest turn to the subject, which has been of critical interest to some degree as long as there has been critical interest in Shakespeare. Studies in theology have tended to prioritize drama as illustrative of theological considerations. Early modern studies are inclined to legitimize criticism of Shakespeare and religion with methodologies detached from Christian faith and practice. Four hundred years later, Shakespeare's art continues to evoke highest praise for perception and creativity.<sup>1</sup> I wish to explore the possibility that William Shakespeare had a creative and sincere religious imagination worthy of consideration in its own right, and this religious imagination climaxes in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. I propose that in his final works Shakespeare offers a dramatic enchantment of awakening faith, and that in order to best appreciate religion in his plays we should be open to the possibility that these plays may affect their audiences spiritually.

Criticism into the twentieth century at times approached religion in literature with deference to this kind of awakened faith. The current disregard for such a perspective in secular criticism might be identified as a kind of critical disenchantment. Despite all the recent attention to Shakespeare and religion, there remains opportunity between literature and theology for a study of the romances as what they appear to be: works of spiritual re-

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Bloom's apotheosis of Shakespeare is neither the first nor the greatest. Samuel Johnson finds Shakespeare next unto Homer in excitement and inventiveness, and Samuel Taylor Coleridge compares Shakespeare to Dante and Milton. See: Harold Bloom, *Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human* (New York: Riverhead, 1998); Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12*, ed. R. A. Foakes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 2008), 110; Samuel Johnson, Preface to *The Plays of William Shakespeare* (1765), in *Samuel Johnson, Selected Writings*, ed. Peter Martin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 371, 376.

enchantment for a disenchanted age. Such a study may be situated between the two poles of criticism already identified: The first pole is theological consideration of the arts nascent in recent decades, which has engaged theatre generally and Shakespeare specifically. The second pole is critical attention to Shakespeare and religion in early modern and literary studies, which tends toward secular and sceptical methods and inferences. The first perspective takes Shakespeare's spiritual significance seriously, but such studies tend to treat Shakespeare as material for ulterior considerations more than as theologically creative in his own right. The second perspective takes Shakespeare's artistic and creative significance seriously, but tends to treat religion in secular terms and assume in some way that Shakespeare must have done the same. Between these perspectives is a balance of the two: Shakespeare was one of the greatest artists ever to reflect on religion, and his art embodies original creative expression of enduring spiritual significance. This first chapter situates this third perspective.

Initially, I briefly address the matter of Shakespeare's late writing, which affects why his final plays are suitable for such a study. In the first major section of this chapter I survey the work of David Brown, whose theological writings have broadly refocused attention to the vitality of the arts for Christian thought and practice. Relying on Brown's work, I suggest Shakespeare is an ideal subject for continuation of such study, since the playwright remains an artist of the highest caliber as well as one attentive to the very concerns Brown identifies. In the second section I turn to the literary critical study of Shakespeare and religion. After considering what should be retained from those critics sceptical about Shakespeare and religion, I transition to an extended exposition of the work of Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti as well as those who have followed their lead in identifying new methodologies of criticism with the decline of New Historicism. Jackson and Marotti find that as attention to Shakespeare and religion has waxed, this need has continued. Finally I give considerable

attention to Sarah Beckwith's *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* as a literary-critical close reading of religion in Shakespeare's late plays. Beckwith's thoughtful reading indicates great possibilities for the plays as spiritually affective, but ultimately her own conclusions are limited, finding the bonds of religion too human, too functional, and too frail. In the third section of this chapter I turn back to theological studies of drama and of Shakespeare. I consider eschatological readings in the work of Paul Fiddes, Christopher Hodgkins, and Judith Wolfe, then turn to essays by Ben Quash, Ivan Khovacs, and Malcolm Guite, whose careful theorizing of theatre and poetry bear on my own efforts to gain insight into the religious significance of the late plays. The last section returns to criticism from poet-critics who have taken questions of Shakespeare and religion seriously in order to recover what may have been overlooked. Included are Samuel Taylor Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare, Charles Williams' *The English Poetic Mind*, and the poetry and criticism of W. H. Auden. Having situated my own study in light of these thinkers, the second chapter picks up with what may yet be added in the development of a new perspective on Shakespeare and religion.

### **Late Writing**

A word is desirable about the critical justification of focusing on the religious significance of Shakespeare's late works. *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* are the four plays generally considered together as the final movement of Shakespeare's creative output. These plays obfuscate category and nomenclature, variously identified as problem plays, post-tragedies, tragi-comedies, romances, last plays, or late plays. My own use of terms is merely-descriptive and according to context.<sup>2</sup> Until recently

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<sup>2</sup> For further consideration of terms, see Charles Moseley, 'Literary and Dramatic Contexts of the Last Plays', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 47-51.

scholars have tended to favor the histories and tragedies in attempting to understand Shakespeare's religion. Why now the increased attention to problem/romance/late plays?

Lytton Strachey set the stage for 20<sup>th</sup> century criticism of the late plays when, in 1906, he famously decried them as the absurd result of a bored poet slouching towards retirement.<sup>3</sup> The tentative order in which Shakespeare had written his plays was still newly-enough established in Strachey's time to foreground questions about their overarching development as well as Shakespeare's state of mind in writing them. To Strachey, the great tragedies were the apex of realism in character and action. Shakespeare subsequently turned from greatness to write dull plays, not even making a pretence at realism (though Strachey conceded the poetry was sublime). *The Tempest* was the greatest offender.<sup>4</sup> Strachey's name has endured in this context for his derision, though his objections have long ceased to merit serious response. Nevertheless he was instrumental in the revision of critical attitudes about late plays and late writing.

W. H. Auden suggested more positively that Shakespeare's late works have the identifiable hallmarks of a genre in which authors end their writing careers with a chosen difference. Auden contends late writing is indifferent to popular and critical acclaim. Whereas an author's early works may be obscure because his artistic vision is unfamiliar, late writing focuses on particular artistic problems that the author finally makes a point of working out for their own sake because he cares particularly about that difficult perspective.<sup>5</sup> Such late writing indicates a project of personal importance, and if it is unfamiliar it should be considered more carefully rather than less.

More recently, Gordon McMullan has been sceptical about late writing as a genre at all, let alone one in which Shakespeare wrote. He claims that if late writing as a conscious

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<sup>3</sup> Lytton Strachey, 'Shakespeare's Final Period', in *Books and Characters* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1922), 64.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 61-62, 65-69.

<sup>5</sup> W. H. Auden, 'Pericles and Cymbeline', in *Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Arthur Kirsch (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000), 271.

endeavour is a legitimate phenomenon, it is at the earliest a Romantic phenomenon, and for Shakespeare would have been anachronistic. McMullan sees the late works of authors as varied in their creativity, and late writing is a critical construct, not a given reality.<sup>6</sup> Late writing is usually a redemptive fantasy of rejuvenation or a self-conscious effort by the author to fulfill the criteria of late style.<sup>7</sup> McMullan may have a point about the formalization of late writing as a critical construct, and perhaps about authors' subsequently posturing in this genre, but he is too negative in his scepticism about Shakespeare, whose work is arguably more significant than the genre being ascribed to it. Auden's theory of late writing seems reasonably developed out of his study of Shakespeare as an exemplar.

Andrew Power and Rory Loughnane make the biographical point that between starting *Antony and Cleopatra* and finishing *Pericles*, the major events in Shakespeare's life were remarkable: His daughter Susanna married John Hall at Holy Trinity Church Stratford on 5 June 1607. His younger brother Edmund's illegitimate son Edward was buried in London on 12 August 1607. That winter Edmund himself was buried at St Saviour Church Southwark at Shakespeare's lavish expense. His granddaughter Elizabeth Hall was baptized at Holy Trinity Stratford on 21 February 1608. Finally, on 9 September 1608 Shakespeare's mother Mary Arden was buried. Beyond personal life events, an unusually harsh winter, famine, riots, and the plague not only elevated the general level of human suffering in London, they also closed the theatres for prolonged periods.<sup>8</sup> Average lifespan was forty-seven. In the poorer parts of London it sank as low as twenty-five, and half the population of the city was under twenty.<sup>9</sup> If Shakespeare was forty-three when he started *Pericles*, this is

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<sup>6</sup> Gordon McMullan, *Shakespeare and the Idea of Late Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 275.

<sup>8</sup> Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane eds., *Late Shakespeare, 1608-1613* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 1.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Ackroyd, *Shakespeare: The Biography* (New York: Nan A. Talese, 2005), 4.

old enough to feel circumspect about life and for every third thought to be inclined towards matters of enduring significance.

Shakespeare's artistic vision continued to mature throughout his career, and for the four late plays there is a clear shift to new and experimental modes. Studies of Shakespeare have increasingly benefited from overcoming the latent bias against the late plays as inferior. That he continued to write at all through personal loss and hardship suggests possible reasons for the kind of changed focus Auden finds significant. He did not need the acclaim or the money. After the completion of the late plays Shakespeare laid down his pen.<sup>10</sup> It is thus reasonable to look for religious significance—perhaps the most religious significance—in these final plays, and to do so with an eye towards possibilities of re-enchantment. There is a curious tendency in criticism of late Shakespeare to focus on *The Winter's Tale* or *The Tempest*, but not to attend to both in the same project. Restrictions of scale mean the present project limits itself to these two plays, but I propose it is ideal to consider them together as the two most important movements of Shakespeare's visionary climax.

### 1.1 DAVID BROWN – THEOLOGY AND IMAGINATION

Some early modern scholars have pointed to the Protestant reformation as creating a cultural vacuum for ritual. When the cults of the saints were suppressed as inappropriate devotion, when music was stripped of its adornment, and when visual narratives in stained glass, sculpture, and paint were struck down, then the human craving for imaginative and aesthetic ritual was left unsatisfied by the church. The establishment of the secular theatre, ostensibly coincidental in timing, offered a place less-regulated by church strictures on ritual. The need for imaginative satisfaction of relatable narrative and shared human experience

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<sup>10</sup> G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin, 'Chronology and Sources', in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, ed. G. Blakemore Evans and J. J. M. Tobin (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1997), 87. I defer to Evans and Tobin throughout for the dating of Shakespeare's plays. *Henry VIII*, the lost *Cardenio*, and *The Two Noble Kinsmen* all postdate *The Tempest*. However, these collaborations with John Fletcher, while meriting consideration as something of a phenomenon in their own right, postdate his active London writing career and do not belong in the conversation about Shakespeare's late creative climax.

found its fulfilment in the liberties of the theatres.<sup>11</sup> This was available irrespective of affluence, social class, or even literacy. Theatre taking the place of church is difficult to prove; in criticism it has been endorsed as much as a secularizing hypothesis as a religious one.<sup>12</sup> The point worth retaining is that there was in the early modern period an expression of the continual struggle to nourish the human need for imaginative fulfilment.

Anthropologically, the struggle has been universal irrespective of time or place, and this has been no less the case for Christianity. It is also a dynamic of interest to theatre, where the creative confluence of embodiment, imagination, and performance frequently has been in tension with religion.

David Brown is helpful in ways both scholarly and pastoral, suggesting theological grounds for the creation and experience of embodied meaning. The broad endeavour of Brown's five-volume series published by Oxford University Press between 1999 and 2008 was to develop a practical theology conducive to meaningful religious engagement through valid imaginative perception. By examining diverse expressions of art and culture, his project continues to reclaim for Christianity 'a form of perception that has largely been lost in our utilitarian age, experiencing the natural world and human imitations of it not just as means to some further end but as themselves the vehicle that makes possible an encounter with God, discovering an enchantment, an absorption that like worship requires no further justification.'<sup>13</sup> The theological concerns Brown identifies in our present day were, in their historical variations, recognizably present for Shakespeare to engage with from his position as a dramatic artist. Shakespeare is ideal for a case study informed by, but also reflective

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<sup>11</sup> For scholarship pursuing this line of inquiry, see: Adam Max Cohen, *Wonder in Shakespeare* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012); Stephen Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Regina Schwartz, *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> See: Anthony Dawson, 'Shakespeare and Secular Performance', in *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*, ed. Paul Edward Yachnin and Patricia Badir (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008), 83-97; Dawson, 'Claudius at Prayer', in *Religion and Drama in Early Modern England*, ed. Elizabeth Williamson and Jane Hwang Degenhardt (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2011), 235-248.

<sup>13</sup> David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 36.

upon, Brown's broader endeavour to expand meaningful religious experience. Thus a survey of his work is constructive.

In the first volume *Tradition and Imagination: Revelation and Change*, Brown's chief concern is to find a way between the inherent faults in Enlightenment reason and historicism on the one hand, and postmodern relativism on the other. Without qualified engagement, these are opposing responses to the same issue. The Enlightenment tried in its own ways to embrace the expanding vision of science, philosophy, history, and religion, and to reintegrate all of these into harmonious relation. This search for a more-elaborate but also comprehensible unity of cosmos and logos was not a new Christian ideal.<sup>14</sup> However, as Brown points out, the difficulty newly presented was a realization brought about by the rise of science: that Scripture and ecclesiastical authority could no longer be easily reconciled with the universe as it was now understood.<sup>15</sup> Christianity burdened the literal facts too greatly. The Reformed ideals of *sola scriptura* and the primitive church, deprived of extra-biblical adornments and rituals that had been a part of Christian faith and practice in the intervening centuries, became the 'deposit' of faith and practice. Protestant Christianity's limiting of inspiration to a fixed form and content stripped the Gospel of its imaginative reception, reducing it to historical facts that, as time increasingly passed, became evermore historically distant.<sup>16</sup> It is worth recognizing explicitly in the context of Brown's work that by the time Shakespeare was working these dynamics were present and increasingly influential.

Reacting in due historical course to the fallout of modernity's Reformed Enlightened literal and historic fixedness, postmodernist expressions of faith have tended to posit anew the agency of inspiration and meaning in contemporary community. Postmodernity emphasizes flourishing immediacy and the relevance of present external concerns. An

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<sup>14</sup> See C. S. Lewis, *Discarded Image* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 11. Lewis suggests the medieval synthesis is itself a third work equal to the *Summa Theologica* and the *Divine Comedy*.

<sup>15</sup> Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 14.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

unchanging historical text could not be expected to mediate revelation in circumstances that would not possibly have been anticipated. While Brown is unequivocal in his expressed conviction that Scripture is the root of Christian revelation and needs to be held in the highest possible regard, he concedes it is inadequate in its ability to speak mediately to contemporary issues from its position of historical fixity. He concludes, ‘The Enlightenment was right to raise questions of historicity and objectivity, but postmodernism is also correct in noting the conditionedness of all thought and therefore the necessity for recognition of the role of community and tradition.’<sup>17</sup> In both quarters there is an identifiable need to develop a robust construct for the role of imagination in Christian experience—an imaginative structure capable of speaking relevantly to believers who accept the obligation of venerating their historical and scriptural heritage on the one hand, but also recognizing that the church cannot return to any earlier, simpler ideal.<sup>18</sup>

One instructive counterexample to these forms of source tradition is myths. Myths have tended to function with the validity of the myth centred in its imaginative usefulness more than any concern about historical veracity, changeless form (which myth does not possess), or literal vindication. Myths function through images and narrative rather than esoteric reasoning, and are their own way of thinking.<sup>19</sup> Imaginative metaphor and fiction are forms of discourse for which both the Enlightenment and postmodernity have too little capability in their theology. Myths are in their own way as capable of meaningfully embodying truth as literal and historical patterns of discourse. Mythological narrative and imagery—particularly in Ovid as a poet of myth—are deeply integral to Shakespeare’s imaginative and religious constructs.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 366.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 367.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>20</sup> The most-helpful studies are: Jonathan Bate, *Shakespeare and Ovid* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992); A. B. Taylor, ed., *Shakespeare’s Ovid* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

The primary media in which most early modern people experienced religion were the ecclesial arts of liturgy, music, and architecture.<sup>21</sup> Even in preaching instruction is best communicated through narrative and how the audience is made to feel. Increases in literacy and education have not indicated that most people can or should function chiefly in propositional modes of religious engagement. The imaginative faculty is not such that it can be ignored or transcended, and its vitality has been too-often neglected in Christian practice.<sup>22</sup> What is needed is an imaginative paradigm capable of speaking mediately to believers who accept the burden of venerating their historical religious tradition, but who also realize that the circumstances of the primitive church to which Scripture was revealed do not have a one-to-one correspondence with present circumstances. As Brown concludes his first volume:

The imagination too needs its critics. But just as Wordsworth...corrects his classical religious inheritance, so we too need to acknowledge how much religion flourishes, and thus the revelation that God seeks to address to humanity, by the reader in each generation being set free to appropriate what the imagination can discover in the interstices of the 'moving' texts that are a religion's story. For that to be possible truth cannot be narrowly confined to 'fact'; nor can the biblical text be allowed the final say. Image, text and truth need to work together, not in opposition.<sup>23</sup>

*Discipleship and Imagination: Christian Tradition and Truth* expands on the role of the imagination for those struggling with God's apparent metaphysical distance. Religious arts and forms of devotion can reflect how people perceive relationship with God in practice. Medieval iconography, Renaissance art, and legends of the saints represent in their respective ways how God is perceived as immanently near or transcendentally distant. Medieval theology had so emphasized God's transcendence that even the incarnate Christ was felt to be unapproachable. Eucharistic rites, through foreign Latin and limited access, kept the masses largely distanced from what was taking place. Imaginative hagiographies compensated as a medium of immanence for the God who was perceived as distant. Cults of relics and miracles

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<sup>21</sup> Brown, *Tradition and Imagination*, 322-23.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 376.

functioned imaginatively and concretely as immanent contact points to divine transcendence.<sup>24</sup> Brown suggests that the imaginative legends grew, regardless of veracity, ‘precisely because they were a way of working out what Christ-like sanctity might be like in what had hitherto been uncharted waters, under conditions of life quite different from Jesus’ own.’<sup>25</sup> Brown writes with reference to medieval circumstance, but the struggle to balance this dynamic is historically common. Christianity has struggled, sometimes emphasizing immanence at the expense of transcendence, sometimes vice versa. The human spiritual need is evident: an imaginative connection to God’s relevant and active presence. The relationship of immanence and transcendence is another common thread between religion, literary criticism, poetics, theatricality, and Shakespeare’s plays. About this subject I and others shall have much more to say.

*God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* begins a progression in David Brown’s last three volumes towards studies of enchantment, sacramentalism, and experience. Brown is concerned that in contemporary culture a habituation of instrumental rationality pervades the church. The church does not devalue the arts per se, but it is inclined to value them insofar as they have utility for ulterior purposes such as evangelism.<sup>26</sup> Christianity has lost a step by letting ethics and politics dominate its focus. The instrumental forms and practices of the church cannot be dismissed, but neither are they sufficient, and cannot be a substitute for non-instrumental spiritual necessities that are less pragmatic and more affective. Here Brown is identifying from a theological and pastoral perspective a trait in contemporary religious culture that has made it the strange bedfellow of literary criticism. As shall be seen in the next section, religion has been made derivative of—or instrumentally subject to—external pragmatic considerations.

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<sup>24</sup> Brown, *Discipleship and Imagination* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 73.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

<sup>26</sup> Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 22.

Brown defines enchantment as ‘...the discovery of God under such [non-instrumental] forms, whether or not any further practical consequences follow.’<sup>27</sup> Enchantment is attained through sacramental experience: God mediated through material forms. Where Brown ‘rebels’ against traditional sacramental theology is by contending sacramentality is not mediated exclusively through the traditional dominical and ecclesial sacraments.<sup>28</sup> Where the church has yet to recover from instrumental approaches to the outward forms of piety and worship, there is need for enchanted spiritual fulfilment that may allow Christians to experience God more directly and personally, even—perhaps for some *especially*—outside established forms of the sacraments contained to limited ecclesial contexts. Art, nature, and music are contexts in which many people graciously experience God as present, beautiful, and familiar. While sacramental traditionalists may find this unsettling, Brown recognizes the felt need of contemporary religious experience as well as the significance of Romantic thought to religion. What are needed in light of Brown’s work are not only theologians, but also artists who are thoughtful about both the power of their creativity and its limits. Shakespeare is perhaps the paradigmatic artist reflecting on the limits of his art. In the last section of this chapter I also acknowledge the work of critics who should be taken seriously because they are themselves artists.

*God and Enchantment of Place* returns to the subject of God’s immanence and transcendence to redress the historical difficulty of balancing these in proper perspective. Brown offers by way of extended illustration the different emphases of iconography and Renaissance art. Enlightenment and Reformation modes of thought could be accused of corrupting God’s immanence by collapsing it too much under the weight of his unchangeable transcendence. The postmodern error is to corrupt God’s transcendence by collapsing into it his apparently malleable immanence for the sake of relatability. Just as Brown sought a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 410.

middle way between the habituated critical faults of the Enlightenment and postmodernity, a present spiritual need is a balanced emphasis of immanence and transcendence, by which we might more mediately approach God and the sacred. Brown laments that churches no longer sufficiently evoke immediate or intuitive responses to the divine. He suggests that we have lost touch with how people experience God, and there is need for a re-enchantment, along the careful lines he has proposed, for the church to become the place of ‘...a God present and actively concerned throughout his world, a world in which experience of the divine was once the norm and not the exception, and can be so again.’<sup>29</sup>

This is worth pressing towards Shakespeare. Brown’s methodology is both theoretical and pastoral. An academic study need not be directed towards such pastoral concerns *per se*, but Brown is identifying pastoral considerations regarding immanence and transcendence that, as we shall see, have bearing on the limitations of secular literary criticism (identified by Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti) and Shakespeare’s own creative interest (identified best for my purposes by Malcolm Guite). If a proper theoretical perspective on Shakespeare’s religious artistry is salubrious for us both in our scholarship and in our religious experience, then this would be a *pastoral* working out of the subject in question—the pastoral of course being not only a matter of theology but a genre of art. In *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* Shakespeare embraces the pastoral, and we should not be surprised if a pastoral perspective both artistic and religious is helpful to experiencing these plays as more than thought experiments. Both Shakespeare’s era and our own could be described as enlightened but disenchanted. For an age lacking enchantment—per Brown, God’s revelation under non-instrumental forms—it is worthwhile to consider the response of an artist like Shakespeare and whether his creative re-enchantment is mere escapism (as it is often considered) or a more substantial renewal in light of perceived spiritual need.

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<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 413.

In the concluding volume *God and Mystery in Words: Experience through Metaphor and Drama*, Brown picks right up exploring ‘...how language can sometimes be said to function sacramentally, in conveying experiences of divine presence.’<sup>30</sup> Brown reiterates that Christianity’s historic movement towards linguistic containment and determinism—driven in part by the desire to fix the formula and validity of sacraments—to be a development with tragic consequences. Verbal denotation made the sacraments of the medieval period too wooden as formula prevailed to the detriment of imaginative profundity.<sup>31</sup> Though the endeavour was no doubt well-intentioned, it ignored the wider way that words were themselves a means of divine mediation.<sup>32</sup> The emphasis on surety and limit neglected the metaphorical dimension of language. Brown argues that the unfolding expression of the divine is inescapably linguistic.

Poets, by nature of their art, have more sensitivity than theologians and liturgists to apprehend words’ seemingly-inexhaustible capacity to present what is other and divine. Good poets’ function is to unify experience through association of apparent unlikenesses in a reality that on theological principle must ultimately stem from the same creative source.<sup>33</sup> In the poet’s mind, disparate likenesses form new relational wholes by means of metaphor, constructing in the tension between unlikes the full power of imaginative association. Single metaphors are potent; extended combinations of metaphors accumulate imaginative complexity.<sup>34</sup> Theatre, so often identified as a complex metaphor for the world, resides next

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<sup>30</sup> Brown, *God and Mystery in Words* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 17. The fourth volume *God and Grace of Body: Sacrament in Ordinary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) makes broad consideration of the grace that may attend sex, dance, food and drink, classical music, pop music, the Blues, musicals and opera, and the eucharistic body. While insightful into those respective expressions of art and meaning, *God and Grace of Body* primarily examines these in their own right insofar as they might be considered ordinary experiences with sacramental significance. Because my study is specific to Shakespeare and his dramatic form, the bearing of *God and Grace of Body* on the present study is tangential; where there is constructive bearing it is sufficiently expressed in the preceding or succeeding volumes to mitigate particular consideration.

<sup>31</sup> Brown, *Mystery in Words*, 56.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 43.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 54.

unto the drama of ecclesial liturgy at the apex of metaphorical significance. At the highest level, the Incarnation was itself a *poesis* of the Incarnate Word in a multiplicity of metaphors that language has always struggled to fully articulate: ‘The words, like the flesh itself, function sacramentally in both pointing to a divine reality beyond themselves, while at the same time mediating, however inadequately, something of that reality.’<sup>35</sup> Attempts to propositionalize or collapse Christ’s irreducibly metaphorical action flatten the incongruity of what Christ actually did, and they likewise weaken the necessary imaginative struggle to think and wonder about it. Appreciation and comprehension are more variegated to a poet who has recourse to more than a single familiar perspective. Poems and great texts—and the Bible itself is the superlative example—reward repetitive readings because they cannot be resolved into a single perspective. Shakespeare of course mastered this form in drama. *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest* are as fascinating as any of his plays because of the perhaps-unprecedented extent to which they obfuscate reduction to any single interpretive perspective.

Words, poetically, communicate an experience rather than serve as mere commodities for didactic transfer. Poetry is powerful by nature of its sense of something present within and beyond itself, and this metaphoric experience is in so many ways strangely familiar to the eucharistic experience.<sup>36</sup> This sacramental construct has obvious affinity with the theatrical construct.<sup>37</sup> The vitality of metaphorical comparison exists in the tensed middle between unlikes. Either image in its own right may be seen as complete. Metaphorically considered in light of the other, their comparison points to deeper meaning beyond either, the higher source of truth pervading all incomplete representations.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

<sup>37</sup> See Marilyn McCord Adams, ‘Eucharistic Drama: Rehearsal for a Revolution’, in *Theatrical Theology*, ed. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014), 204, 208-09.

<sup>38</sup> For an historically relevant literary study of the same dynamic, see Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh: Sacrament and Poetics in Post-Reformation England* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014). Johnson argues the diversification of eucharistic theology regarding sign and substance affected the poetry of Herbert, Taylor, Donne, Crashaw, etc. Rather than the texts of their religious lyrics substituting for a sign and thereby promulgating a view of the eucharist, their verse reflects the confusion inherent in eucharistic

Contemporary drama is for Brown too much set in dark, acoustically muted, elongated theatres where spectators are palpably separated from the stage and their fellow attendees.<sup>39</sup> This hearkens to bad liturgy, set in bad architectural space, where the mysteries front and centre may be as remote and unfamiliar as the mumbled eucharistic rite of an ignorant celebrant in a dark age. The result is an isolated, passive experience of drama (or liturgy) that dampens the metaphoric tension between distant stage and torturous comfy chairs. Such affective distance was impossible in a crowded stone amphitheatre or early modern performance space. The historically similar experience at the reconstructed Globe Theatre recreates what the vibrant interactions between the players and a rowdy audience can be in such a space. Like good ecclesial liturgy, play-going defies reduction to an intellectual exercise. Properly put on, the metaphoric tension with which performance fills a live theatre activates the *liturgia* of the play in an experience most-comparable to music—a dynamic to which Shakespeare consciously draws attention with music itself, plays within plays, and also the music of poetic language.

The conclusion of *God and Mystery in Words* returns to the opening request of *Tradition and Imagination* with an appeal for the recovery of natural and revealed theology by attending to the cultural embeddedness of both, as well as the role of imagination in all things. Nature and the arts are not exclusive—nor the most important—means of experiencing God, but as increasing numbers of people find no correspondence between attending church and their belief in God, Christian theology must admit the need to re-place its own relationship with these instead of depending on ‘an intellectual system...that now

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semiotics. Their ‘antiabsorbative’ eucharistic poetic was one of immanence, emphasizing the sign even to the neglect of the substance. The poetic mindset was imposed on the theological one—the verse itself preeminent over whatever the meaning behind it.

<sup>39</sup> Brown, *Mystery in Words*, 157.

hangs free of the once universally shared assumptions on which it was based: the divine reality available everywhere to be encountered.’<sup>40</sup>

In the context of Shakespeare studies, Brown takes religion and art seriously with a perspective from which literary and early modern criticism might benefit. From the counter perspective of literature and art, Brown suggests Shakespeare’s religious significance is more robust than traditional theology as a critical discipline has allowed until recently. This perspective opens the possibility of hearing Shakespeare in a way that is imaginative but also affirming in its consideration of faith.

## 1.2 LITERARY CRITICISM AND THE TURN TO RELIGION

In balance with David Brown’s theology of imagination and the arts, it is important to recognize complimentary literary criticisms that have recently afforded further opportunities to reconsider the same subject. Delineating categories for studying Shakespeare and religion can become its own critical endeavour. John Cox, having surveyed the documentary evidence for Shakespeare’s personal convictions and, owing to a lack thereof, the interminable debate that follows, suggests four categories of criticism based Shakespeare’s written record: 1) traditional faith, 2) reformed faith, 3) faith with no recognizable position, 4) no faith.<sup>41</sup> The first category has evolved a branch of ‘decoding’ Shakespeare’s cryptic Catholicism, however Cox points out not only the inconclusiveness of these studies but also that the method can result in alternate conclusions like Stephen Greenblatt’s that Shakespeare was an ardent secularist.<sup>42</sup> In the fourth category Cox identifies those with a functional view of religion as social or political power.<sup>43</sup> Some scholars such as Beatrice Batson have endeavoured to ‘pluck the heart out of Shakespeare’s mystery’ from his writings, but her

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 271.

<sup>41</sup> John Cox, ‘Was Shakespeare a Christian, and If So, What Kind of Christian Was He?’, *Christianity and Literature* 55.4 (Summer 2006): 546, 559 n.1. For ‘traditional faith’ Cox follows Eamon Duffy’s terminology for pre-Reformation Christianity.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 549.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid. On this Cox follows: Sarah Beckwith: ‘Stephen Greenblatt’s *Hamlet* and the Forms of Oblivion’, *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 33.2 (Spring 2003): 261-280.

succession of volumes lack focus and coherence.<sup>44</sup> Three streams are expanded here: religious scepticism, post-historicist criticism, and Sarah Beckwith's reading of Shakespeare's 'grammar of religion'.

### **Religious Scepticism and Shakespeare**

A strain of scholarship on Shakespeare and religion sees the integration of these in a negative light. Shakespeare was perhaps more capable than anyone of representing scepticism in his work, and this includes scepticism about religious matters. Though it most likely climaxes in the great tragedies, such scepticism is represented right through the late plays. Negative readings need brief acknowledgement, but sceptical readings have their place in proper context.

Few scholars are as strident as Eric Mallin in *Godless Shakespeare*, who makes an atheist critique that despite the panoply of religious language, imagery, and biblical references, God is absent from the plays and Shakespeare is hostile towards him. Apparently only a Cartesian degree of certainty would satisfy Mallin that Shakespeare took any person or attribute of religion as more than a plaything.<sup>45</sup> Alison Shell more carefully identifies Shakespeare as 'one whose language is saturated in religious discourse and whose dramaturgy is highly attentive to religious precedent, but whose invariable practice is to subordinate religious matter to the particular aesthetic demands of the work in hand.'<sup>46</sup> More than for his contemporaries, Christianity was to Shakespeare a subordinate narrative. Apparently-religious language and ritual are used to empower secular theatre, and the world dramatized is not precisely Christian.<sup>47</sup> Shell's conception of what Christianity must have been is primarily as an adapted source narrative. Not seeing Christianity represented without blemish in Shakespeare, she concludes he was no sympathizer. Shell does not consider

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<sup>44</sup> Cox, 'Was Shakespeare a Christian', 556.

<sup>45</sup> Eric Mallin, *Godless Shakespeare* (London: Continuum, 2007).

<sup>46</sup> Alison Shell, *Shakespeare and Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2015), 3.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 205.

Christianity in early modern culture as something credibly prevalent, on which Shakespeare might have been creatively reflecting.

Richard McCoy's *Faith in Shakespeare* is an entire monograph dedicated to dissolving faith into poetic faith. Faith in Shakespeare was 'more theatrical and poetic than spiritual. The credibility of his characters and stories derives from no higher power than literature.'<sup>48</sup> The paradox is that we are moved by apparently religious scripts even as we are meant to see through them.<sup>49</sup> For McCoy, faith in Shakespeare may be rational and humane, but this amounts to enjoyable food for thought, not hope for salvation.<sup>50</sup> McCoy sides with Deborah Shuger that the Renaissance division of visible form from spiritual substance led to spiritual fragmentation and wide scale secularization.<sup>51</sup> He concurs with Stephen Greenblatt's suggestion that Protestant anti-theatricalism exposed the fraudulence of ritual and drama, killing the credibility of the supernatural.<sup>52</sup> He dismisses with scant consideration Regina Schwartz's *Sacramental Poetics at the Dawn of Secularism* and Sarah Beckwith's *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* as instances of "spilt religion," swamping all distinction between religious and poetic faith.<sup>53</sup>

For McCoy, the Romances only operate at the human level, aiming to elicit merely poetic faith: 'These purely human achievements are the true basis of faith in Shakespeare, and the imagination, rather than the gods or spirits or magic, sustains this poetic faith.'<sup>54</sup> McCoy dedicates an entire chapter to a sceptical reading of *The Winter's Tale*, culminating in the conclusion that the faith required at the end is poetic faith and the willing suspension of disbelief in the face of illusion. This is the case for the characters in the play as well as the

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<sup>48</sup> Richard McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), ix.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 9; Debora Shuger, *Habits of Thought in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 37, 67.

<sup>52</sup> McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 9; Greenblatt, *Shakespearean Negotiations*, 109, 113.

<sup>53</sup> McCoy, *Faith in Shakespeare*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 116.

theatre audience.<sup>55</sup> In *The Tempest*, magic within the plot is stagecraft only meant to be seen through. Prospero's Epilogue is akin to the Wizard of Oz stepping out from behind the screen to humanize his imperfect character in a bid for pity.<sup>56</sup> The paradox of faith in Shakespeare is that we are tempted to believe in illusions even as we see through them.<sup>57</sup> This disenchanting view of faith may be sceptical, but for McCoy it is a necessary realism in which heaven and earth are reflections of ourselves. Such cosmic egoism is myopic. More-robust religious imaginations are represented in the work of David Brown, in Malcolm Guite's articulation of the Shakespearean poetic imagination in section 1.3 of this chapter, and in Thomas Bishop's theory of wonder to which I appeal in the second chapter.

There are any number of publications that may not self-identify with scepticism but construe Shakespeare's religion predominantly as a plaything. Sean Benson's *Shakespearean Resurrection: The Art of Almost Raising the Dead* makes a thorough catalogue of Shakespeare's plays looking for language or appearances of resurrection. From these we are supposed to glean the effects of resurrection ideas, all the while seeing through the plays as illusions.<sup>58</sup> Arguing for the seriousness of resurrection while identifying it merely as salubrious theatrical deception is not entirely satisfying. Other attempts to address Shakespeare's private or performed religion have weakened the success of their efforts through equivocation. Joan Hartwig's less-recent *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision* sets up idealized expectation of the transcendent in Shakespeare's late plays, but her readings under-deliver on interpretations of lasting significance.<sup>59</sup> Jean-Christophe Mayer's *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* tries to avoid a one-sided view of Shakespeare's religion by acknowledging where necessary when criticism crosses into speculation about any private or performed

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 141, 145.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>58</sup> Sean Benson, *Shakespearean Resurrection* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 2009).

<sup>59</sup> Joan Hartwig, *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1972).

religious convictions.<sup>60</sup> This is a historically-oriented study focused on the history plays. Mayer offers sympathetic yet careful speculation about Shakespeare's Catholicism. However, as John Cox comments, Mayer prioritizes historical and political readings over moral and religious readings.<sup>61</sup> Historical criticism of Shakespeare and religion has been prevalent enough that it is the subject of the following section.

John Cox has himself more constructively split distinctions of Shakespeare, religion, and scepticism. *Seeming Knowledge: Shakespeare and Skeptical Faith* identifies in Shakespeare a kind of critical scepticism in the vein of Desiderius Erasmus and Thomas More:

Skepticism for these two did not supplant their faith; rather, skepticism and faith complemented one another as essential aspects of the same vision of the human situation. They were skeptical of the human pretension to rational knowledge, because they regarded human beings as too fallible to achieve anything certain, perfect, or complete on their own, and this view of human incapacity derived not from reason itself but from scripture and ecclesiastical tradition—in other words, from faith.<sup>62</sup>

Cox reads Shakespeare as appealing with thoughtful geniality to the widespread religious belief of his community—especially the elements that would have been held in common regardless of Christian division.<sup>63</sup> These included an accepted rule of morality, a suspicion of human nature, a sense of Christian aspiration to virtue despite frailty, and remedy through 'grace, mercy, charity, and forgiveness'.<sup>64</sup> Piety and virtue may increase even if perfection is not possible this side of the *eschaton*. In my own reading, this sets up possibilities for greater eschatological perfectibility in the late plays.

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<sup>60</sup> Jean-Christophe Mayer, *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

<sup>61</sup> Cox, review of *Shakespeare's Hybrid Faith*, *Renaissance Quarterly* 59.2 (Summer 2009): 219. Other publications subject to the same critique include: Timothy Rosendale, *Liturgy and Literature in the Making of Protestant England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007); Joseph Sterrett, *The Unheard Prayer: Religious Toleration in Shakespeare's Drama* (Leiden: Brill, 2012); Daniel Swift, *Shakespeare's Common Prayers: The Book of Common Prayer and the Elizabethan Age* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>62</sup> Cox, *Seeming Knowledge* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007), 14.

<sup>63</sup> *Ibid.*, 29.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 25-26, 62.

The balance Cox identifies between scepticism and faith avoids the disenchanting of critics who find either unmitigated scepticism or vapid faith. These are neither particularly poetic nor faithful by any robust construct.<sup>65</sup> The hard-line scepticism by which Shakespeare is sometimes read lacks nuance and is arguably anachronistic. It is, however, important to consider in detail the historicist movement of some such criticisms.

### **Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti – The Literary Critical Turn to Religion**

In the early twenty-first century, most European and American Shakespeare scholars are probably agnostic, atheistic, or religiously indifferent—hostile to confessional apologetics, as well as resistant to criticism that mystifies real-world economic, political, and social relations by accepting early modern religious languages and religious points of view as intellectual frameworks adequate to understanding the culture and the literature of a time distant from our own. Living in religiously pluralist or secular societies with intellectual elites that are rightly antagonistic to any manifestation of religious fundamentalism, but also uncomfortable with religion in general, they find it hard to take a fresh look at manifestations of the religious in the work of a dramatist whose openness to interpretation has facilitated modern secular understandings of his plays. If they deal with religious subject matter, they prefer to analyze it historically as just one feature of the cultural context of Shakespearean drama. *The problem with this approach is that it does not allow us to take seriously the religious thought, beliefs, or crises that both energized and disturbed Shakespeare when he wrote and that, in transformed shapes, still manifest themselves in our world.* In the wake of the current ‘turn to religion’ in literary studies, however, and in response to the writings of postmodern theologians and philosophers, including Jacques Derrida in the final phase of his career, Shakespeare scholars have been more sympathetically responsive to the presence of the religious in that author’s work, if they have not also used it to think through perennial philosophical and religious issues of which we have become more aware. As the essays in this collection demonstrate, there are serious religious stakes for Shakespeare in his plays and for us in our scholarship.<sup>66</sup>

The purpose of this section is to identify the strengths and limitations of literary critical studies of Shakespeare that have turned to religion in light of the decline of New Historicist criticisms. Studies of Shakespeare and religion have been ongoing both in their

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<sup>65</sup> For a positive, post-Coleridgean expansion of poetic faith into a construct beyond the suspension of disbelief that looks back to Shakespearean romance and forward to Tolkien, see Michael Tomko, *Beyond the Willing Suspension of Disbelief: Poetic Faith from Coleridge to Tolkien* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016).

<sup>66</sup> Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, Introduction to *Shakespeare and Religion*, ed. Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011), 19-20, emphasis added.

readings and their development of criticism, but they have remained largely secular and focused on theory. The above summation of criticism on Shakespeare and religion was made by Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti in 2011 in the introduction to their collection of essays *Shakespeare and Religion: Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*. Jackson and Marotti have been at the forefront of this vein of criticism since the publication of their 2004 article ‘The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies’. More than a decade later this publication has proven to be a critical turning point in early modern studies of religion, contributing particularly to the dismissal of New Historicist criticism. Jackson and Marotti have sought with like-minded scholars to fashion methodologies of criticism that adequately sympathize with the presence of religion in Shakespeare’s work—religious thought which remains capable of energizing or disrupting the present age. Jackson’s and Marotti’s account of New Historicism’s movement bears summarizing at length since current criticism has not entirely escaped the lingering implications of its critical methodology. Ultimately I concur with their perception that despite increased sympathy to the presence of religion in Shakespeare’s work, there remains opportunity with such content to consider matters of religious significance relevant then and now.

Jackson and Marotti contend early modern studies have always been interested in religion. The difference for New Historicism is that even in the ostensible turn to religion, its critical methodologies have chiefly addressed topics other than religion. To the extent religion was considered it was transferred into social, economic, or political methodologies as ‘scholars who have discussed religious material in political analysis...approach religion and politics as religion as politics.’<sup>67</sup> Adopting the stance of analytic observers decoding religious language and ideas, these New Historians and literary scholars approached religion as a falsely-conscious mystification of economic, political, and social structures. Paradigms of

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<sup>67</sup> Jackson, and Marotti, ‘The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies’, *Criticism* 46.1 (2004): 168.

religion more acceptable to late twentieth century cultural assumptions were used to translate the ‘otherness’ of early modern religion into something more palatable. This ‘presentism’ was often relentless in imposing present-day constructs anachronistic in their relation to the period under scrutiny, thereby misconstruing both the objects of study and their significance to the present day, which was in effect predetermined by the starting construct.<sup>68</sup> Stephen Greenblatt’s hypothesis secularizing the church’s traditional religious mystification into enculturated phenomenological magic in a theatre detached from religious disputes is a typical example. In subsequent criticism there has been something of a re-turning towards the theatre as a place of vibrant religious expression and experience, but this too has often proven to be a turn more in name than substance, more interested in the effects of religious beliefs than religious beliefs themselves.<sup>69</sup>

The turn to religion by New Historicist critics provided opportunities to examine their familiar concerns with ethnographic curiosities that are a subset of a larger cultural text and shed light on modes of representation.<sup>70</sup> But with the turn to religion, this central respect for otherness in marginalized cultural and historical groups resulted in a productive irony for New Historicism’s methodology:

...the dominant anthropological ‘self’ of New Historicism tends to render religion an alien other or makes that other over in its own image. ... Illuminating this process of othering—creating a version of difference between oneself and other beings or cultures that benefits only the self/same—thus became the methodology of early modern studies. As this methodology has been employed, however, its limited engagement with its philosophical roots gradually became more visible. Indeed, we would suggest the turn to religion in early modern literary studies and New Historicism is prefigured by a turn to religion in the French Continental philosophy that informs it.<sup>71</sup>

The productive irony derives from religion having a significant role in the origins of the methodology that has turned its criticism towards it. Continental philosophy has since

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 176.

recognized this discrepancy and sought to redress it, but New Historicism persisted in its methodologies without incorporating the subsequent correction in the philosophy that undergirds them. The problem is dense and technical, hanging between the works of Edmund Husserl, Emmanuel Levinas, Søren Kierkegaard, Jacques Derrida, and Alain Badiou, and involving phenomenology, epistemology, ethics, and theology. Passing through Jackson's and Marotti's extensive articulation of the problem, the pertinent conclusion is that, however much early modern studies may have resisted it, this very ethical/religious strain underpinned the secular critical interest in alterity. Despite Derrida's address of the philosophical problem by his own turn to religion in the 1990's, most early modern scholars remained ignorant or indifferent to this subsequent wrestling with the aporia between self and other, continuing to rely on under-theorized grounds for alterity criticism.<sup>72</sup> The turn to religion in New Historicist criticism is what allowed the gradual recognition of the non-viability of such critical methodologies. As Renaissance religion proved resistant to alterity criticism and revealed the epistemological problems encoded in New Historicism, 'the methodology that sought to respect the difference of a distant past actually reveals our proximity to the early modern world, narrowing the gap between the secular and the sacred.'<sup>73</sup> The turn to religion then may ultimately reveal even the most secular critical methodology to have been more religious than it desired.

Summarized another way, New Historicism's 'othering' of religion was prone to alienate religion or remake it in a self-reflective image, thereby misconstruing what religion might have actually been. Ironically, the methodologies of othering were themselves based on an epistemological problem that troubled criticism with the very religion it purported to critique. There was thus a need to revise methodology, refocus criticism in the warp and woof of religion's enculturation *and* absolute otherness, and re-examine the early modern period

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 178.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 179.

both through its familiarities and its strangenesses.

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It is worthwhile to consider some of the positive responses to Jackson's and Marotti's 2004 article that culminated in *Shakespeare and Religion*. The evident pattern of these scholars was to embrace New Historicism's fall and revise methodologies of criticism that could readdress the turn to religion. The result was fine scholarship, yet the confluence of Shakespeare and religion has continued to increase in complexity as a subject of critical study.

In the spring of 2006 Julia Reinhard Lupton, Ken Jackson, Graham Hammill, and Philip Lorenz published a cluster of essays in *English Language Notes* addressing the advancement of the question of literary history and the turn to religion.

Reinhard Lupton's 'The Religious Turn (to Theory) in Shakespeare Studies' suggests the 'religious turn',<sup>74</sup> in reflecting religion's affiliation with philosophical thought and claims to universal instead of local cultural validity, represents 'the chance for a return to theory, to concepts, concerns, and modes of reading that found worlds and cross contexts, born out of specific historical situations, traumas, and debates, but not reducible to them.'<sup>75</sup> Reinhard Lupton prescribes three original maxims for new work on religion: First, religion is not identical with culture. Nor is it an aspect of culture, but accommodates culture in order to survive.<sup>76</sup> Second, religion is a testing ground for struggles between the universal and the particular. In its 'universality' religion disengages from 'routines of reality through...acts of creative critique....'<sup>77</sup> Third, religion is a form of thinking. Religion should be re-affiliated with formal disciplines *and* common rumination, singular in its capacity to speculate away

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<sup>74</sup> The use of quotation marks by theorists in reference to the turn to religion is frequent but not consistent. I have endeavoured to preserve their use in reference to their own work.

<sup>75</sup> Julia Reinhard Lupton, 'The Religious Turn (to Theory) in Shakespeare Studies', *English Language Notes* 44.1 (Spring 2006): 146.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*, 147.

from culture ‘in the momentary suspension of acculturated embodiment that occurs when the mind lets itself go....’<sup>78</sup> We are to intellectually and subjectively read texts and their readers as agents of thought.<sup>79</sup> This is, by Reinhard Lupton’s titular admission, primarily a turn to theory.

Ken Jackson’s “‘More Other than you Desire’ in *The Merchant of Venice*” rephrases New Historicism’s philosophical weakness: absolute respect for ‘the other’ would require suspension of ethical judgements to access such otherness. New Historicism thinks it has the ethical ability to access the absolute other, yet this is impossible merely by assertion of will. Per Derrida, religious duties are prescribed by an absolute law that is other. Accessing a relative or self-selected other becomes objectively impossible when confronted with an otherness that is absolute. This is a critical paradox of New Historicism: it is reduced to subjectivism when confronted with an otherness that is absolute.

Graham Hammill’s ‘The Religious Turn: Exegesis against the Theological Imaginary’ considers Machiavelli’s and Spinoza’s pitting of exegesis and theological imagination against one another. The *arcana imperii* (‘mystery of state’) became an early modern conflation of politics and religion—a strategy for the sovereign to control power through violence but also theatric pretence of deference to their subjects. Machiavelli and Spinoza both address this imaginative theatricizing conceit as theology for the sake of politics with the sovereign relying on the construction of a self-serving ‘theological imaginary’ at the core of public collective life.<sup>80</sup> Both turn exegesis of scripture against the theological imaginary to examine religion as political thought.<sup>81</sup> For Hammill, the context for a religious turn in criticism is political theology. Theology and the imagination as construed in my project bears little resemblance to Hammill’s deployment of the ‘theological imaginary’.

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>80</sup> Graham Hammill, ‘The Religious Turn: Exegesis Against the Theological Imaginary’, *English Language Notes* 44.1 (Spring 2006): 158.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid.

Philip Lorenz's 'Notes on the "Religious Turn": Mystery, Metaphor, Medium' explores Renaissance religious language and its own turns ('the tropes of theology that screen and animate') and the relation between metaphor and Francisco Suárez's 'mystery'. Mystery marks a border where a certain kind of knowledge ends and another of faith begins. To relate mystery to early modern drama, Lorenz turns between Pierre Legendre's psychoanalysis, Jacques Derrida's *enigma*, Samuel Weber's actualization of theatre, and Ernst Kantorowicz's political theology.<sup>82</sup> While the subject is familiar, such criteria are more difficult to closely relate to Shakespeare's own religious imagination.

Later in 2006, Hammill and Reinhard Lupton co-edited *Religion & Literature's* dedicated volume on 'Sovereigns, Citizens, and Saints: Political Theology and Renaissance Literature'. Introducing the collected essays, they summarized and reiterated the tenets of preceding articles. Religion is not reducible to culture. Religion is:

...a reservoir of foundational stories, tropes, and exegetical habits that structure and give shape to political institutions and literary forms in ways that occur in culture—in specific spatio-temporal moments—while also manifesting a shaping power not fully reflective of the historical settings in which they are exercised.<sup>83</sup>

Religion also 'instantiates discourses of value that aim to transcend culture, by creating trans-group alliances and affiliations around shared narratives, commandments, and principles.'<sup>84</sup>

Religions, like 'ghosts or viruses' leap groups and epochs, accommodating cultures in order to outlast them; what distinguishes religion from culture is 'absurd insistence and persistence beyond the local habitations of custom and habit, practice and power.'<sup>85</sup> Religion here is considered 'in its constitutive dialogue with forms of political organization in the early

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<sup>82</sup> Philip Lorenz, 'Notes on the "Religious Turn": Mystery, Metaphor, Medium', *English Language Notes* 44.1 (Spring 2006): 164. Lorenz expands this theme in *The Tears of Sovereignty: Perspectives of Power in Renaissance Drama* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), however its relevance is negligible.

<sup>83</sup> Hammill and Reinhard Lupton, 'Sovereigns, Citizens, and Saints: Political Theology and Renaissance Literature', *Religion and Literature* 38.3 (Autumn 2006): 1.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

modern West.’<sup>86</sup> The aim of the volume was ‘to use the motifs of political theology—the iconographies and typologies of sovereignty, sanctity, and citizenship—in order to orient the study of religion and Renaissance literature historically, but without going the way of historicism.’<sup>87</sup>

In 2009 Reinhard Lupton published ‘Renaissance Profanations: Religion and Literature in the Age of Agamben’ in *Religion and Literature*. She remarks that with ‘the rise of anthropological and materialist approaches to religion, scholars are more likely to engage a range of media, performance practices, and ritual objects in the search to variegate our picture of religious life and thought as well as the different shapes and possibilities for secularization in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.’<sup>88</sup> She continues that, in addition to historicism, the ‘religious turn’ in critical theory has incorporated modern and postmodern theorists of language, politics, and philosophy in pursuit of questions on, among other things, religious expression, confessional conflict, and post-religious forms of life that take their points of departure from the early modern period. Giorgio Agamben is an example of such a philosopher whose work has diverse implications in multiple fields of criticism including studies of Renaissance religion. Reinhard Lupton highlights *Profanations* and its articulation of ‘the reclaiming for common use of sacred spaces and sacred times, a process he distinguishes from secularization.’<sup>89</sup> Because of his attention to a plurality of influences ranging from Classics and the New Testament to postmodern philosophy, Agamben’s work has been of increasing interest to scholars working in related fields. Reinhard Lupton concludes her brief article, having surveyed the turn to religion in light of Agamben’s profanation with, ‘What I am calling the Renaissance profane sets aside a zone for literature distinct from religion, yet at once richer and more creative, as well as more haunted and more

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<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>88</sup> Reinhard Lupton, ‘Renaissance Profanations: Religion and Literature in the age of Agamben’, *Religion and Literature* 41.2 (Summer 2009): 1.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid.

transitional, than the word “secular” can adequately communicate.<sup>90</sup> While Reinhard Lupton’s scholarship is not in question, her deference in matters of religion to literary criticism rather than theology is evident.

While acknowledging that religion must be something more than culture, the turn to theory has struggled to construe religion as something most adherents of religion could recognize. Jackson and Marotti press this issue in both directions:

...at its most profound, Shakespeare’s dramatic religious questioning presses against what we normally tend to think of as constituting religion—its dogmas, institutions, beliefs, and practices—to the point where one is asked to question what, if anything, ‘religion’ can mean. *The lines between secular and sacred, transcendent and immanent blur so continuously that we begin to doubt our own vocabulary and historical paradigms in our attempts to describe the strange otherness of Shakespeare’s religion*, the way in which he can, again, deliberately and systematically strip away the layers of religion until nothing is left—nothing except the desire for something more or better that cannot be fully disentangled from religion.<sup>91</sup>

This is a critical description of Shakespeare’s performed religion, but it is also a renewed assertion that Shakespeare’s resistance to critical theory indicates its ongoing limitations.

Early modern criticism has subsequently needed to broaden its search for constructs that will thicken historical perception and contemporary relatability. This framework remains secular, political, and in the shadow of historicism.

There is opportunity for a revised perspective on early modern religion where it might be more recognizable to traditional adherents of that religion then or now. I will argue that Shakespeare’s work in general, and his late plays particularly, indicate sympathetic possibilities for vexing religious questions. A perspective from which to consider questions about Shakespeare and religion might be one which accepts the religion in question under its own ideal terms, and allows that there may have been ways in which Shakespeare did so as well.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>91</sup> Jackson and Marotti, *Shakespeare and Religion*, 9, emphasis added.

**Sarah Beckwith – *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness***

As the title of her 2011 monograph alludes, Sarah Beckwith's interest is the English Reformation's revisions to the ritual language of penitence, or 'grammar of forgiveness'. As a medievalist and linguist Beckwith is particularly sensitive to historical changes of religious language and their influence. In proximity to Jackson and Marotti, Beckwith's work is not only timely and perceptive, it also has an ethical bent. Of the scholarship surveyed in this chapter, Beckwith's work is so far the most predicated on primary reading. Her close readings of the late plays realign the critical questions of theatre and religion through a method focused primarily on Shakespeare's own creative hermeneutic. As such, extended consideration of Beckwith's work is constructive.

Beckwith recognizes the astonishing experimental nature of the late plays and the influence in them of the grammar of forgiveness.<sup>92</sup> Transformation in languages of penitence proved influential to changes in speaking and relating. The *Book of Common Prayer* altered the procedures of reconciliation, and by extension destabilized the figure of authority as well as the effects of reconciliation. The theatre, Beckwith argues, traces the trajectory of the changed work of language that follows a change of language itself.<sup>93</sup> With the voiding of sacerdotal authority in penitential speech acts, authority is looked for in revision of the speech acts themselves.<sup>94</sup> She provisionally concludes, 'So Shakespeare's theater is a search for community, a community neither given nor possessed but in constant formation and deformation. This puts him in powerful continuity, of course, with a theater he is often thought to have entirely superseded and overturned.'<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>92</sup> Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2011), 1.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>94</sup> See again Kimberly Johnson, *Made Flesh* for extended consideration of this matter, though, Johnson attends to poets historically proximate but hardly at all to Shakespeare himself.

<sup>95</sup> Beckwith, *Grammar of Forgiveness*, 5. Beckwith is referring to the mystery plays, which are the subject of her earlier monograph *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

Beckwith looks especially to the ‘post-tragedies’, because these plays work through and past tragedies’ failures at the act of acknowledgement. The romances look for recovery in renewed ideas of mutual acknowledgement:

Acknowledgment is the ground of our relation to other minds, *which skepticism intellectualizes as metaphysical lack*. It is always particular; it is always of someone for something; it is not so much what we choose to do as what we cannot avoid doing. It is not a substitute for knowledge, for it includes and assumes knowledge, but it is a medium through which both response and responsibility are unendingly exacted through the commitments of human speech and action. It might include—it usually does include—self-knowledge and the ways we avoid it, recognition and the ways we avoid it, responsiveness and responsibility, and the ways we evade and avoid them. I am proposing here that the history of acknowledgment and therefore its fortunes in Shakespearean tragedy and post-tragedy can be best told in relation to the sacrament of penance and its complex afterlives.<sup>96</sup>

Beckwith’s concern is a spiritual problem. Like David Brown’s appeals for the pastoral and ethical desirability of imagination in theology, Beckwith is partly motivated by the applicability of her research. Her first chapter explores *Hamlet* as the picture of a mind in exile from its own body and soul. Under such a condition self knowledge is impossible, therefore knowledge of others is impossible, and such a self loses all touch with itself and others, ruining identity and by extension community. Beckwith is unstinting in her critique: ‘It is my belief that much contemporary criticism inhabits this very split, and so the therapeutic and diagnostic power of Shakespeare’s dramaturgy is unavailable to it.’<sup>97</sup>

From the perspective of theology this is appealing. Beckwith’s study is for the reader interested in Shakespeare who also wants to practice the difficult act of forgiveness, and it is a self-conscious attempt ‘to enact a critical practice that engages with the ethical and aesthetic as much as the historical and political dimensions that have been the preoccupation and the *doxa* of recent criticism.’<sup>98</sup> Shakespeare was genuinely concerned about the bonds of charity, and worked to evolve the movement of his theatre to restore ‘the art of our shared

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<sup>96</sup> Beckwith, *Grammar of Forgiveness*, 6-7, emphasis added.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

embodiment'.<sup>99</sup> This transformation is not a mode of content but a form of participation  
fragilely existent in the conversation of the theatre.<sup>100</sup>

Beckwith describes Shakespeare's diagnosis of the English Reformation as leaving its adherents bereft of a way to reconcile inner thought and outward behaviour. His capacity for language gave him unparalleled ability to adapt the range and precision of language as a sole means of human relation. Yet, when human bonds depend only on fragile mutual intelligibility, how can they be remade stronger through conversation? This spills out in the great tragic characterizations of Hamlet, Macbeth, Othello, King Lear, etc. Disconnecting interior identity from outward expression denigrates culture, but it also violates fundamental engagement in the theatre. Reconciling inner thought and outward behavior would be 'the miracle in an age where all miracles are past.'<sup>101</sup> Shakespeare's response is to develop theatrical forms centred on reconciliation.<sup>102</sup> He rejects a popish characterization of language as some kind of hocus pocus efficacious *ex opere operato*—beyond the agency of the speaker. He also rejects the countervailing Protestant attempt to remove all human mediation of God's direct action because it would contaminate divine sovereignty.<sup>103</sup> Between the tension of these two views of language, Shakespeare offers human speech as the effective source of bonds *between people*.

Beckwith acknowledges the criticism of scholars like Anthony Dawson, Jeffrey Knapp, and Regina Schwartz who have identified the theatre as filling a eucharistic or sacramental vacuum around the Reformation. She finds Thomas Bishop (whose theory of wonder is integral to my second chapter) persuasive in his articulation of Shakespeare's theatrical meaning being inextricably related to sacramental embodiment.<sup>104</sup> What such

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 12.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid., 34.

scholars lack is consensus on sacramental theology by which to produce a unified, coherent idiom of theatre as sacrament.<sup>105</sup> Beckwith proposes as a corrective the inextricable connection between the sacraments of eucharist and reconciliation as the balance of morality and justice, ‘For the eucharist is the entire forgiven community.’<sup>106</sup> There is a connection between the removal of confession as a sacrament and the subsequent search for certainty of knowledge about identity, justification, and absolution. Shakespeare works through this connection in his late plays.

In *Pericles*, which is the first of these, the play’s turning point is the moment of recognition between Pericles and Marina when, rather than the romance convention of recognition by tokens, they recognize one another by the telling of a story that belongs to both of them:

In working the recognitions through the fundamental act of speaking rather than through the tokens or signs that ratify social identity, Shakespeare is making the form of romance into something new. In this play, with its extraordinary focus on the fact of utterance itself, Shakespeare finds the recovery of self and community all at once, and this becomes central to the grammar of forgiveness as it is explored in the subsequent three plays....<sup>107</sup>

When at the end of *Pericles* the protagonist hears the music of the spheres (V.iii.229), Beckwith attributes this to a harmony between divine and human agency established through human voice.<sup>108</sup> Marina’s voice breaks through Pericles’ rejection of the world and points to a more graced world. ‘It is a *grace that works through nature in a felt wonder*, a pattern of slow recognition that is utterly marvelous, yet utterly natural.’<sup>109</sup> Life can be felt as a miracle, and grace can be felt in (re)generation. This is ordinary miracle.<sup>110</sup>

*Cymbeline* is a play that ends with a community that has embodied forgiveness, imagining restoration for each individual uniquely, but also intimately and inextricably within

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 34-35.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 102.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., emphasis added.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

the restored community.<sup>111</sup> Beckwith describes this as a eucharistic community because it has embodied forgiveness. She draws attention to five progressive confessions that allow the detoxification of the community, catalyzed by the queen's deathbed *confession*.<sup>112</sup> *Cymbeline's* sudden and extreme reversals of trust indicate the fragility of human bonds that rest on understanding and good faith. Deceit can destroy faithfulness more effectively than unfaithfulness can. In *Cymbeline*, the re-placement of signs and their true meaning allow the restitution of trust through spoken truth.<sup>113</sup> The last scene is about the redemption of language itself.<sup>114</sup> By the collective telling of their respective stories, all those present are placed in their restored communal context.<sup>115</sup>

So language returns as gift through the offerings of truthful speech, speech animated by the realizations, the making real of each to each in remorse. This is Shakespeare's real presence, his remembrance which finds its own complex fidelity, and its own peace, with a discarded and vilified past, a past whose rejection seems structural to the thought of so many of his contemporaries.<sup>116</sup>

In the next section I consider Malcolm Guite's reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, which recognizes in the earlier comedy a non-sacramental theology of unity through imagination and recognition. Guite and Beckwith do not allude to each other's work, but the romance's story of minds transfigured so together into something of great constancy is an evident return to the earlier theme.

Turning to *The Winter's Tale*, Beckwith explores how rites of reconciliation and eucharist are integral to the spirituality of the play. *The Winter's Tale* 'consciously replaces the memory theater of the ghost world with the memory theater of a new theatrico-religious paradigm of resurrection.'<sup>117</sup> These returns from apparent death offer transformation that

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 105.

<sup>112</sup> Cornelius, in recounting, labels it 'confession' distinctly five times (V.v.33, 37, 44, 49, and 244).

<sup>113</sup> Beckwith, *Grammar of Forgiveness*, 124.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid., 125.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 126.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid., 128.

takes up and redeems past error.<sup>118</sup> ‘Resurrection’ in Beckwith’s context means reappearance and complex encounter with past offenders.<sup>119</sup> *The Winter’s Tale* is not a special case, and what may have actually happened to Hermione is unimportant in light of the fact that she has survived.<sup>120</sup> The paradigm for interpreting these encounters as forgiveness narratives is the Gospel resurrection narratives, mediated through the eucharistic liturgy and the medieval Corpus Christi theater.<sup>121</sup> Truth will exist as story in these enactments of memory because of the narrative condition of faith. And, ‘This new grammar of theater will seek not so much to communicate new ideas as to construct shared possibilities to which the understanding of grace as forgiveness will be central.’<sup>122</sup>

In *The Winter’s Tale*’s final scene, religious and artistic agency embody the destructive effects of time as well as possibilities for reconciliation.<sup>123</sup> Liturgical discourse is integral to understanding the possibility of reconciliation. Per Beckwith’s central theological distinction, the body of Christ is liturgically enacted as a fellowship, and ‘precisely not the wafer held between the hands of the priest, whether understood as the transubstantiated elements of bread and wine, or as a memorial enactment of Christ’s redemption.’<sup>124</sup> Hence, reconciliation of believers to the body is essential for such an enacted body.<sup>125</sup> Despite Leontes’ protracted penitence, he cannot secure a state of forgiveness. Forgiveness, like grace, must come through religious theatrical enactment.<sup>126</sup> His remorse has made him aware of who Hermione really was, but without mutuality, acknowledgement remains incomplete. According to Beckwith, in confrontation his shame and repentance become ‘the very

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 130.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 131.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 135.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 140.

substance of the grace' he receives.<sup>127</sup> In risking confrontation, Leontes and Hermione are restored from illusion into reality. A 'new presence' is made possible.<sup>128</sup> This is sacramental theatre:

For in it "how we present ourselves to each other (the classical domain of theater) and how we are present to each other (the domain of the sacrament)" have once again become both theological and theatrical resources, and the Pauline tropes of mortification and vivification are both figurative and actual.<sup>129</sup>

Just as Shakespeare has rejected any instrumental or institutional embodiment of grace, Beckwith suggests, he equally rejects the eradication of human embodiment or agency in reformed articulations of grace.<sup>130</sup> This is a suggestion of Shakespeare doing theology in theatre through the language of liturgy.

In her conclusion about *The Winter's Tale*, Beckwith returns to her suggestion of the internal incoherence of cognitivist models that inform academic discourse on religion. Such discourse identifies belief as *about* people or propositions, not belief *in* these.<sup>131</sup> The statue scene does not require that we believe any precepts about it, only that we believe in it, trusting Paulina's authority for the reward of the result, as 'credibility of the resurrection is bound to the credence of believers.'<sup>132</sup> The awakening of faith is a tautological attunement of attitude; the condition of wonder is a matter of commitment, not opinion or understanding.<sup>133</sup> Leontes needs epistemologically to have as little foundation for his faith as he had for his doubt.<sup>134</sup> In short:

*The Winter's Tale* has been called a miracle play. But the miracle is only ordinary just as another human life is both miraculous and ordinary. It is as if theater requires the resources of both art and religion because credit and trust

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 141.

<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 142.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 143.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid., 144.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Ibid., 144-45.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 145.

have come to seem not so much the ground of our intelligibility to each other, as phenomena that require nothing short of a miracle.<sup>135</sup>

In *The Tempest*, Beckwith suggests that Prospero, despite relinquishing his magic, continues to theatricalize his identity.<sup>136</sup> Only Miranda is capable of compassion and wonder because of her innocence. A hopeful future depends on innocence. Beckwith asks, ‘Can wonder and pity survive experience, betrayal, irreparable loss, powerlessness?’<sup>137</sup> Her question is rhetorical. Prospero, in putting back on his old self, has relinquished any fantasy of self fashioning.<sup>138</sup> The world is only brave and new for Miranda; for Prospero it turns out to be neither brave nor new. Beckwith says this is the sadness that overhangs the conclusion of the play. Rather than the sadness of the author’s adieu to the stage, the sadness is one of universal human disappointment. Having glimpsed the fantasy beyond human horizons, we like Prospero are unable to permanently escape, and must be dragged back to the human constraints of desire, expression, and redemption.

The conclusion of this great play is, it turns out, the unsurpassable horizon of our mutual response to others. ... Nothing underwrites this community, or can act as its guarantor; it can come to no final resolution, but only commit itself to future conversations that cannot supersede the horizons of our agreements *in language*. ... Pardon comes not from a sovereign will but is granted from sinner to sinner in mutual acknowledgment, forgiving as we are forgiven. Only in this way, without enforcement, without enchantment, can art yield its good works.<sup>139</sup>

Beckwith does not think *The Tempest* speaks to any realistic hope of redemption and renewal, just as she saw *The Winter’s Tale*’s grounds for hope as fragile. Without some guarantee of the possibility of forgiveness, the ending would seem futile. Prospero having emptied himself of his enchantments, Beckwith thinks the play lacks a sovereign will to enact pardon, and only by non-coercive disenchantment can art yield its good works. This is to see

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid., 171-72.

Shakespeare as relinquishing the affectiveness of theatre in the most self-consciously theatrical conclusion of this most self-consciously theatrical play.

Here is where a continuation of this line of inquiry may find it helpful to make a nuanced appeal to Shakespeare's own self-conscious role, and to a creative hierarchy of art and nature. Just as Prospero has made the kenotic gesture of opening himself to scrutiny or abuse, Shakespeare can reasonably be allowed a kenotic gesture towards his art being freely judged in its outworking. But the very gesture of kenosis implies a power laid down, not an illusion of power disabused. (Beckwith thinks that Prospero costumes himself as Milan to disguise the vulnerability his enemies have reduced him to on the island.<sup>140</sup>) Through its disabusing of lesser images of theatricality within a greater theatrical dramaturgy, the play offers a non-ironic, self-conscious appeal to meta-theatrical authority. Shakespeare, standing in the place of that authority, is capable of writing this play as the climax of his creative vision without inherent cynicism. The island where the play ends remains a place of enchantment, not escapism. It is not utopia or Eden despite Gonzalo's protestations, but it is a tabula rasa return to nature without institutionalized mechanisms of government or religion, and Prospero is master of it by art, not illusion.

Beckwith's reading of Shakespeare is commendable for its basis in the text, and for the way it contextualizes theological and cultural issues swirling in the fallout of the English Reformation. As her readings progress they move even closer not only to the language of acknowledgement and forgiveness but to its grammar as well. Beckwith exemplifies profitable reading of Shakespeare down to the level of grammatical construction. Despite locating the restoration of Shakespeare's theatrical community in the language and action of confession, that restoration is merely a 'real presence' between those in the fellowship. Religion regresses into functionality as the divine fades away.

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 167.

### 1.3 THEOLOGY AND THEATRE

Turning again to the discipline of theology, at this point it is helpful to consider work of the last decade or so pertinent to theatre. In addition to David Brown, scholars such as Jeremy Begbie and Trevor Hart have renewed critical interest in the relationship between theology and the arts. Theatre is only one area of consideration in this expanding field, but it has proven itself to be an important one, with conference proceedings and monographs appearing steadily. Many projects relate appropriately to the work of Hans Urs von Balthasar or Kevin Vanhoozer. The general value of such studies is to those that consider theatre for the purpose of theological insight with respect to post-Enlightenment theology.<sup>141</sup>

My present effort is a study of William Shakespeare's dramatic art for its ongoing religious significance. If theatre is profound in its connection to other aspects of life, we do well to carefully consider the image, the reflection, and the relationship between them. Theatre is not merely an embodied metaphor for other constructs, and no artist or theorist worked more carefully than Shakespeare to explore the significance of theatre to all aspects of life. It is evident Shakespeare's creative imagination embraced religion both to draw from it and reflect upon it. How he did so, and towards what possible ends, are the subjects upon which both theology and literary criticism strive to elaborate. From a theological perspective, a benefit of literary criticisms' turn to religion and Shakespeare has been the expansion of our understanding of Shakespeare's relationship to religion as well as the limitations of that understanding. Rather than another attempt to reconcile Shakespeare's religion to any of the categories it has resisted for the last 400 years, what might now be said? In this section I look at Shakespeare and eschatology in the work of Paul Fiddes, Christopher Hodgkins, and Judith Wolfe, then turn to a second trio of essays by Ben Quash, Ivan Khovacs, and Malcolm Guite.

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<sup>141</sup> e.g. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart, eds., *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014); Vander Lugt, *Living Theodrama: Reimagining Theological Ethics* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2014).

## Eschatology and Shakespeare

In a theological context, *The Tempest* particularly attracts eschatological readings, and the work of three scholars is helpful in situating the present project: Paul Fiddes, Christopher Hodgkins, and Judith Wolfe.

Paul Fiddes has written of his interest in Shakespeare's reticence to offer traditional Christian images of the afterlife—what we might consider Shakespeare's eschatology. More than once Shakespeare suggests immortality through art, as evidenced by the sonnets and tragedies.<sup>142</sup> In tragedies the hero makes death her or his servant by dying in a way that summons the ideals by which she or he tried unsuccessfully to live.<sup>143</sup> However, Shakespeare will go on to disrupt the consolation of immortality in art in *The Tempest*. Fiddes reads the ending of *The Tempest* with Prospero in the Epilogue having already broken his staff and drowned his book.<sup>144</sup> The surprise of the Epilogue is that, contrary to theatrical convention, Prospero remains in character. Instead of the actor craving indulgence for inadequacies of performance as an indirect appeal for commendation, the character bids for release from imprisonment by means of applause, and the 'gentle breath' of vocal response to fill his sails back to Milan. The audience's applause must express willingness to be merciful, as Prospero has been merciful. Art is crossing over into life. By forgiving the character, the audience participates in the human act of forgiveness: 'We are being invited to participate in the next stage of the story, in the uncertainty of life beyond the charmed island. The drama has not finished after all, and we feel that it never will be.'<sup>145</sup> The future is unpredictable and eschatologically anxious.

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<sup>142</sup> Paul Fiddes, 'Patterns of Hope and Images of Eternity: Listening to Shakespeare, Blake and T. S. Eliot', in *Art, Imagination and Christian Hope*, ed. Trevor Hart, Gavin Hopps, and Jeremy Begbie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012), 32. Fiddes commends Sonnet 65: 'That in black ink my love may still shine bright.' Sonnet 55 expresses the same sentiment in its final line: 'You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes.'

<sup>143</sup> Fiddes, 35.

<sup>144</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid.*

For Fiddes, the reference points of Prospero's great speech about the ending of revels are five-fold: to the wedding masque, to Prospero's larger dramaturgy on the island, to *The Tempest* the play itself, to the end of human life, and to the dissolution of the whole world at the last judgement.<sup>146</sup> Time and eternity are open in the future. Prospero's concerns are not the subplots of treachery, but conflicts to come from nature and human evil. His arts are limited to this life, not triumph over death. The play opens up the possibility of the threat of evil being overturned by the power of forgiveness, which cannot be controlled by art. Prospero forgives, then begs the indulgence of forgiveness, the act of which remains on our hearts as we leave the theatre.<sup>147</sup> In Shakespeare generally, the uncertainty of the future is held in tension with enduring artistic representation. Fear and hope abide together. What is helpful about Fiddes' reading is that it capitalizes on hope and forgiveness as characterizations of redeeming virtue. Human hearts will be healed, but not by human arts.

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In 2010, Christopher Hodgkins contributed 'Prospero's Apocalypse' to Beatrice Batson's final collection of essays on Shakespeare. Hodgkins recognizes the extent to which Shakespeare drew from St John's revelation for the imagery and themes of *The Tempest*. He concludes that Prospero, in his final movement towards humane reconciliation seems profoundly Christian, while his secular gesture is remarkably focused on the afterlife. He writes, 'To pray for human mercy, pity, peace and love, for justice and forgiveness to embrace, is to pray for Kingdom Come, and for a true Apocalypse. And it is also to admit that we are still in Middle Earth and that the Kingdom has not yet come.'<sup>148</sup> Prospero the prophet of the apocalypse defeats Prospero the spirit of Antichrist. These are the central competing spiritual forces of the play working themselves out in Prospero's struggle to

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>147</sup> Ibid.

<sup>148</sup> Christopher Hodgkins, 'Prospero's Apocalypse', in *Word and Rite: The Bible and Ceremony in Selected Shakespearean Works*, ed. Beatrice Batson (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 164.

divorce them. Prospero's struggle is the human one that is not won until the Kingdom of Heaven comes once and for all.<sup>149</sup> The play, in the spirit of true apocalypse, tempers justice with mercy as wrath gives way to paradise.<sup>150</sup> Yet redemption is possible for unlikely candidates (Caliban) but not universally forced on those who will not embrace it (Antonio).<sup>151</sup>

Prospero's identification with the spirit of Antichrist is more complex. Hodgkins identifies Prospero with the image of John Dee as blasphemous conflator of sorcery, Reformed theology, and colonial empire.<sup>152</sup> Such a magus would use metaphysical power, raising himself above his human status, to regain political power. This profanation is the crux of our polarizing reaction to Prospero. He seems to be good, but the power he wields is corrupting him.<sup>153</sup> Hodgkins suggests a parallel with Tolkien's One Ring which the bearer cannot use without being consumed. Both metaphysical and political power are God's to give, and Prospero's repentance at the end is of usurping divine right. By extension, presuming *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's apology to—not for—the theatre, Prospero-Shakespeare's epilogue performs an act of repentance not only for metaphysical and political transgression, but also for the reality of 'theatrical spectacle which many in Shakespeare's day saw as forwarding the work of Antichrist by (supposedly) competing with the spiritually transformative rites, ceremonies, and preaching of the church.'<sup>154</sup> The associations of witchcraft, stagecraft, and statecraft (readily identified by so many scholars) in this context are infernal, and Shakespeare's apology is for the art he mastered as well as Prospero's.<sup>155</sup> Prospero ends in a troubled state; his only hope having abjured his rough magic is to redeem himself after the play concludes.

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<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 166.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 158.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid.

<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid., 162.

Hodgkins rejects the frequent interpretation of the conclusion as the fundamentally secular disavowal of anything like a true apocalypse. Prospero, like Shakespeare, turns from imperialism, enchantment, and performed spectacle. His rejection of godhood is an acknowledgement of God rather than a refusal. By returning to his proper place in the order of divine hierarchy, he revivifies his greatest opportunity for redemption.<sup>156</sup> Genuine love and forgiveness of his enemies is, if not the end of all things, an anticipation of the culmination of God's divine purpose. Shakespeare's Christianity in *The Tempest* is then performed repentance and an implied anticipation of the fullness of the Kingdom of Heaven that is to come.

While Hodgkins' reading is sympathetic it has limitations. If Shakespeare is abjuring his own art, it would take explaining that he does so within the medium, and Prospero's epilogue does not self-consciously disavow the theatrical construct nor even evidently break character. It would take further explanation how to understand the play as self-abjuring in anticipation of the fulfilment of all things. It is at least rhetorically confusing. The play, as imperfect image, would have to be reconciled with the world it represents but also anticipates as God's full purpose. Hodgkins takes Shakespeare's treatment of the metaphysical seriously. Yet, Hodgkins sees Prospero as a well-intentioned character corrupted by his spiritual prowess. He assumes such spiritual power must be corrosive. We cannot easily assume Shakespeare shared this perspective. We also may not be able to so easily conclude Shakespeare would reject his own art by means of that art. Despite attention to eschatology, Hodgkins' treatment itself leaves more anticipation than fulfilment.

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A more helpful study of the eschatological *Tempest* is one Hodgkins overlooks: Judith Wolfe's "Like this Insubstantial Pageant Faded": Eschatology and Theatricality in *The*

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid., 164.

*Tempest*'. Her premise is complex but largely sympathetic. The essay is also an example of deference to Shakespeare's performed religion. In the seventeenth century St John's apocalypse was perceived as a drama.<sup>157</sup> The spectacle before the throne of God bears enough resemblances in form to the ceremonies of the Roman imperial court that some scholars have supposed a connection,<sup>158</sup> and further supposed an association with Jacobean court masques.<sup>159</sup> Wolfe rejects a similarity of function despite a similarity of form. Court masques emphasize the authority and strength of the monarch in the here and now, whereas apocalypse reveals 'a transcendent reality that is yet to come, and therefore effects in readers not complacent celebration, but *eros* or longing.'<sup>160</sup>

Prospero imposes both a masque and an apocalyptic vision in the self-conscious drama that he meticulously enacts, desiring to affect not only his present political authority but also a climax of judgement *and* reconciliation.<sup>161</sup> By conflating these he intends to usher in something of his own millennial order.<sup>162</sup> The plan goes awry, as at the betrothal masque he forgets the subplot of Caliban's treachery, and disorder ensues. Wolfe reads the failure of this masque as Shakespeare's exposition of the inadequacy of Prospero's theatre (and by extension James' court masques) to conflate the present and the *eschaton* into one dramatic framework that validates the regent.<sup>163</sup>

A major current of Christian criticism of drama emphasizes this 'claim of complete elucidation' in the correspondence of theatre and world. Wolfe recognizes that Shakespeare is aware of its limitation, and at the climax of Prospero's power, in a play that is arguably the climax of his own opus, he breaks off that power to broach 'the possibility of a different form

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<sup>157</sup> Judith Wolfe, "'Like this Insubstantial Pageant, Faded': Eschatology and Theatricality in *The Tempest*", *Literature and Theology* 18.4 (Dec 2004): 371.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 373.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid.*, 374.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 375.

of drama, which does not aim to contain, but acknowledge the uncontrollability of both time and other people.<sup>164</sup> Wolfe proposes as an alternate model for understanding *The Tempest's* ending the Roman eucharistic liturgy.<sup>165</sup> The eucharist was instituted by Christ, unifies nature and super-nature by its celebration in the present, and will be fulfilled—and done away with—in the *eschaton*. Real presence is achieved in the fullness of time's movement, unlike a masque's attempt to freeze the moment of fullness in tableau.<sup>166</sup> This acknowledgement of incompleteness allows for vulnerability and therefore genuine interaction with God and fellow believers.<sup>167</sup> The liturgy dissolves into ordinary life as not merely an anticipation of redemption but also the participation in redemption until its ultimate fulfilment.<sup>168</sup>

Wolfe proposes to read *The Tempest's* threat of disintegration according to this model. Prospero interrupts his triumphal masque to give the 'revels' speech, just before the final dance that in conventional masque would have integrated masquers and spectators.<sup>169</sup> He recognizes the real world and the masque are unified by the necessity of their dissolution, not their mutual artifice of stability.<sup>170</sup> Wolfe suggests Prospero is moved towards the ordinary, but despite endeavouring to abjure his magic, cannot extricate himself from the theatrical fiction he has performed, and must await his own final dissolution with the ending of the play. According to the liturgical model, worshippers participate in the re-enactment of the sacrament of their redemption in order to hasten its proximate and final consummations.<sup>171</sup>

In his epilogue, Prospero self-consciously acknowledges his theatricality, placing himself within the performance, unable even to authenticate his own existence. The

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 376.

<sup>165</sup> Ibid. Wolfe refers to the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, but also recognizes that at least in practice the liturgy and theology to which Shakespeare was exposed would have been fungible.

<sup>166</sup> Wolfe, 376.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid., 377.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid.

<sup>170</sup> Ibid.

<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 378.

audience's applause affirms his worthiness as well as his fictionality, and he dissolves in the process of validation.<sup>172</sup> The audience is involved in a similar renunciation. By acknowledging the play's dissolution they dissolve the medium through which the characters are present, thus surrendering control of others' presence. In so doing they also have to confront as Prospero does their own transience, mortality, and tendency towards dissolution:

This shared confession and 'indulgence' ...makes possible a true encounter between Prospero and the audience at the threshold of the play—an encounter that images, prepares, and stirs desire for a greater encounter at the threshold of time, without usurping that final event.<sup>173</sup>

This is all theatrically and theologically helpful, but I wonder what happens when the play ends. It seems necessary to identify Prospero with the eucharistic priest *in persona Christi*, which would figure into Shakespeare's convergence of eucharist and eschatology. Liturgically, the priest's eucharistic role ends, but his ontological character continues. How should we consider the character, the actor, the text, and the dramatist when the applause ends? Does the theatrical conceit end? *The Tempest* ends in dissolution as it began, which apparently is not an ending but the beginning of a greater salubrious work. Apparently Shakespeare has within the play destroyed the illusory work of revels, had his thaumaturgist both exhibit and then relinquish his unparalleled power, distinguish it from illusion, and then turn, as the sacraments do, away from any perception of *hocus pocus* and towards the active Christian graces of faith, hope, and love through which we participate in the redemption of the world now. The relationship to the world to come is more complex. The turn to grace suggests another perspective on Shakespeare and penitence.

### **Ben Quash, Ivan Khovacs, and Malcolm Guite – Theatre and Theology**

Last in the succession of theological considerations of theatre, it is worthwhile to consider a trio of essays from the 2007 collection *Faithful Performances: Enacting Christian*

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>173</sup> Ibid.

*Tradition*: Ben Quash's 'Real Enactment: The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', Ivan Khovacs' 'A Cautionary Note on the Use of Theatre for Theology', and Malcolm Guite's work on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*.<sup>174</sup> Quash advocates the theological value of a polyphonic, unfinalizable, dialogical theatricality. Khovacs emphasizes that drama's theologically-promising artistry is activated by performance. Guite adds a third perspective that takes from Shakespeare's own art a theologically-significant relation of poetry and imagination.

From von Balthasar, Quash develops two theological priorities with respect to the 'dramatic field of metaphor': First, the linearity of time and that how we live in time has genuine stakes. Second, the Christian life has a 'polyphonic character' that is attested to by Scripture and the Church.<sup>175</sup> Though Quash makes only passing reference to Shakespeare, both themes are integral to Shakespeare's creative purpose in *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* and it is advantageous to consider Quash's analysis. In contrast to most early modern criticism on Shakespeare and religion, Quash follows von Balthasar as a helpful source for consideration of theology and drama, who contends the truth of Christian revelation is not fully possible without commitment to the implications of committed action. Moreover, 'Theology is done not outside or above the drama of Christian living, it is itself part of the drama.'<sup>176</sup> If Shakespeare is a Christian dramatist, it is plausible a Christian would have an easier time appreciating the significance of his religion.

The significance of action in time ties thematically to Christ's death and resurrection as the turning point of human history. Christ's incarnate—*embodied*—and enacted mystery

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<sup>174</sup> A condensed version of Guite's essay was originally published in the same volume as those of Quash and Khovacs as 'Our Truest Poetry is the Most Feigning ... Poetry, Playfulness and Truth'. The full version appears as 'Truth and Feigning: Story and Play in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*'—the second chapter in Guite's monograph *Faith, Hope and Poetry* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2012). References herein are to the second.

<sup>175</sup> Ben Quash, 'Real Enactment: The Role of Drama in the Theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar', in *Faithful Performances*, ed. Trevor Hart and Stephen Guthrie (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 30-31.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

does not allow for esoteric or metaphysical understanding or response. A tidy solution is not sufficient, and the mess of resolution in the wake of what looks like tragedy ensues.<sup>177</sup>

Christ's atoning work does not supersede the drama of continued existence, but rather in the eschatological scheme of things the stakes are raised to the highest extent. As time progresses the engaged response is not a passive one:

That said, tragedy is not despair, and for von Balthasar most certainly, the emphasis on the momentousness and irreversibility of historical action in the theo-drama (both Christ's and ours) should certainly *not* issue in resignation, nor in a negative evaluation of our finitude. On the contrary, it should positively enhance our sense of the significance of each moment of time, and of the action of human agents in time.<sup>178</sup>

Quash draws attention to twentieth-century Theatre of the Absurd, where nothing is decided or conclusive, and time is without purpose or direction. In contrast, Greek and Shakespearean tragedy are super-charged with momentous significance. In such extreme compression of time it is possible to make sense of life and death, and greatness is possible. Von Balthasar insists the Christian view of time is not the modern indifference:

To take up discipleship of Christ – to agree to be led by God – is to have time recharged with intense significance again, to know oneself summoned to a sort of destiny, though not a solitary and self-aggrandising one but rather a social one in which people and cities and the creation are made new. It is to see one's time as given for the purpose of witness and transformation. It is to be called to performance. The time of the Christian is therefore more nearly like the time of fierce plenitude – that fullness of meaning – to which Shakespeare and the tragedians testify; at its heart there stands the urgency of the divine call which addresses the whole person – everything he or she is – and asks that person to make something of his or her life.<sup>179</sup>

Finally, the compression of significance does not reduce the quality and variety of roles but instead expands them. The action of each person in response to this dramatization of time is not one of withdrawal, but embracing one's unique calling and becoming more distinctively oneself. The saints are extreme in their examples of obedience to this calling.<sup>180</sup> This

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<sup>177</sup> Ibid., 18.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>179</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>180</sup> Ibid., 21.

proliferation of roles leads to a polyphony of voices, and thus the dramatic field of metaphor is apropos for considerations of theology. Unlike monologues or prose, where the finished product may have all intervening stages of consideration evened out, drama is less instrumental in communicating a situation in its entirety with a progressive plurality of feelings and perspectives.<sup>181</sup>

Quash at this point turns to Mikhail Bakhtin's theorizations of the novel because they add to von Balthasar's case for the value of drama. Further, Quash argues Bakhtin's theory is best fulfilled in the dramatic form, which Bakhtin overlooks for the sake of the novel. For Bakhtin novels have three merits: First, novels affirm everyday speech for its aesthetic value. Everyday speech sustains vigour and creativity. Contrary to 'monologism' which unifies under one explanatory theory, 'The multiple meanings generated in the movement and interpenetration of people's everyday communicative activity...cannot be exhaustively mapped.'<sup>182</sup> Second, novels reflect 'unfinalizability', which like real life is the character of multiple possibilities at any moment in time. Unfinalizability protects realistic creativity and freedom as events unfold. Human agency may contribute to shaping history as it develops.<sup>183</sup> Third, novels are dialogical. Life is essentially dialogical, with questions, responses, arguments, etc., forming the basis of human interaction. The plurality of voices form a world of polyphonic abundance where, 'All the participants supplement each other, each having the richness of a unique field of vision, but each profiting from the bounty of the vision of those around her, which is necessarily additional to her own, and helps to fulfill (though never to finalize) her on sense of herself.'<sup>184</sup> Even good characterizations are not dogmatic and final, lending forward movement beyond the conclusion or reconsideration of the stories heard.<sup>185</sup> Possibly because of inadequate access to the right plays, Bakhtin overlooked drama as the

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<sup>181</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid., 24.

<sup>183</sup> Ibid., 24-25.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

obvious fulfillment of his theory. He sought to vindicate the novel in these respects, and ultimately struggled to find much more than some works of Dostoevsky that lived up to his idealization. Bakhtin even provisionally considered the Church as a place for such polyphonic unity before rejecting it as too static and closed into unity that became detrimental.<sup>186</sup>

Where Bakhtin is negative about prospects within the Church, von Balthasar hopes for possibilities to ‘open up the inner structure of God’s self-disclosure to the world, and to show that this structure has the character of address, response, and counter-response in an ongoing, ramifying series of articulations of truth, goodness and beauty, all born out of the mutual interaction of God and his free creatures.’<sup>187</sup> This would be ‘a genuinely Christian embodiment of that polyphonic, unfinalizable and dialogical ideal in the form of the Church.’<sup>188</sup> Preachers and theologians should embrace this possibility, and theology should encourage dialogue with voices outside the Church as well. Truth, for von Balthasar, is dramatic, and dramatic tension—representative of reality—may be deepened by a greater plurality of voices.<sup>189</sup> Quash’s final exhortation is for the Church to exercise such dialogical polyphony. The conclusion is a return to the case of the church. This is appropriate, but it also leaves open the possibility of a return to drama to further reconsider plays or artists for their theological merits in light of these.

While there are qualifications for how Bakhtin’s work applies to Shakespeare’s specifically,<sup>190</sup> the playwright continues to present old opportunities through which to consider new theological perspectives such as that which Quash proposes. I will argue Shakespeare’s work is more than ideal—its culmination deliberately engaging these dynamics for the sake of reconsidering and remaking them. *The Winter’s Tale* and *The*

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<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>187</sup> Ibid.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>190</sup> See Ronald Knowles, ed. *Shakespeare and Carnival: After Bakhtin* (London: Macmillan, 1998).

*Tempest* are the best possible case studies of a dramatist doing theology in a way to which the church should listen.

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Published in the same volume as Quash's essay, Ivan Khovacs' 'A Cautionary Note on the Use of Theatre for Theology' also follows von Balthasar's premise of 'drama as an analogue for describing God's incarnate action in the world.'<sup>191</sup> However, Khovacs adds the caution that the exchange between theology and theatre is still in an emerging stage of development, and 'merely exploiting drama to enrich the language of theology frustrates what could otherwise be a real commitment to a theological-theatrical exchange.'<sup>192</sup> Such commitment would require theologians to learn and respect theatre's artistry as 'a three-dimensional, performative event,' and take into account not just selective abstracts from dramatic literature but also 'the rich particularities of performance interpretation.'<sup>193</sup> This leads Khovacs past von Balthasar's work which, despite its monumental significance, favors abstraction of formal theological categories from dramatic literature, but disregards performance as the medium which activates drama.<sup>194</sup>

To balance von Balthasar's adoption of dramatic style and form but not content, Khovacs appeals to Kevin Vanhoozer and Shannon Craigo-Snell who are sensitive to the significance of 'interpreting text through an embodied performance.'<sup>195</sup> For Vanhoozer the word of God is something to be performed as an aspect of faith.<sup>196</sup> Scripture is God's active role in the world revealed as story. Revelation is 'God's communicative initiative' to which believers must respond through action in order to comprehend.<sup>197</sup> Khovacs sees this as a

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<sup>191</sup> Ivan Khovacs, 'A Cautionary Note on the use of Theatre for Theology', in *Faithful Performances*, ed. Steven Guthrie and Trevor Hart (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 33.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 33, 39.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 40.

helpful progression, but also in danger of slipping towards a form of speech-act theory which privileges the text and its communication as the primary objective, with the performance as the playwright's vehicle for didactic transfer, and this is not sufficient to appreciate what is taking place in the embodiment of text through performance.<sup>198</sup> As Khovacs writes:

For the dramatist, the playscript as a communicative act fraught with meaning goes without saying, as does the fact that not only the text but also the actions implied 'between the lines' *mean* [sic]. So it is not merely that playwrights have something to say (that plays 'mean') but that they want to say it in a certain way – that plays mean through performance. Performance, moreover, happens as an interpretive process when playwrights put ink to paper, directors elicit truthful emotions, as designers manipulate space, light and sound in service of dramatic action. The actor, for her part, takes up the playscript and commits body and voice to performance under the conviction that the author's communicative act demands an incarnate equal.<sup>199</sup>

Additionally, the non-verbal characterizations are what is integral to theatre—dramatic action that Peter Brook famously identified as the 'spaces between the words'.<sup>200</sup> These are not a matter of the text but of the performance. Vanhoozer privileges cognition for the sake of interpreting what has been communicated by the performance, and this reduces the experience too much to propositions at the expense of drama's particular eloquence.<sup>201</sup> We cannot ignore an audience's interpretation 'in the aesthetics of live-action.'<sup>202</sup>

Khovacs suggests interpretation is closer to what happens in the process of production, as everyone involved in preparing for a performance works through just how it will be put on.<sup>203</sup> Following Shannon Craigo-Snell, rehearsal is where the process of discovery that leads to interpretation takes place, not in a performative speech act. Spiritually, the Christian life in relation to scripture is a preparation in anticipation of an eschatological

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<sup>198</sup> Ibid., 42-43.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 41.

<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>201</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>202</sup> Ibid.

<sup>203</sup> Ibid., 44-45.

performance that is to come. We act now, we embody performance, for the sake of the show at the final curtain.<sup>204</sup>

Khovacs helpfully recognizes that the theatre von Balthasar, Vanhoozer, and Craig-Snell are thinking of is that of the last century, and he like Quash recognizes this theatre as largely godless. The same cannot be dismissively said of classical and early modern theatre. From the perspective of theology, Khovacs' cautionary note is helpfully made that the relationship between theology and theatre is nascent. Ultimately, his expressed interest also remains the embellishment of theology through consideration of theatre. With respect to my own project, one of the opportunities provided by early modern criticisms' attention to theatre and Shakespeare and religion is that it has opened up a vast field for consideration from careful theological perspectives. All the dynamics Khovacs identifies as theologically significant are dramatically significant to Shakespeare, not only as aspects of performance but also as objects for scrutiny through the medium of theatre. Shakespeare is the ideal case study of play, theatre, and performance for their religious significance, and how they may in turn shed light on questions pressing to theologians today.

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The third pertinent publication is Malcolm Guite's close primary reading of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*. Looking as David Brown and others have done to contribute to theology's continued recovery from 'an atomizing, reductive, demythologizing period', Guite's purpose is to consider the role of poetry as a medium of imagination, and imagination as a truth-bearing faculty related to reason rather than in opposition to it.<sup>205</sup> Guite traces the presumed opposition back to early moderns who sought to bifurcate reason and imagination (such as they understood them); art and faith were caught in the middle. Working just before this bifurcation took hold, and retaining the idealism of the

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<sup>204</sup> Ibid., 47-48.

<sup>205</sup> Guite, 1.

past in the face of the future, Shakespeare is the paragon of an artist who embraced storytelling for the sake of exploring truth. Shakespeare retains his relevance today as both science and theology continue to reposition the relationship between reason and imagination.<sup>206</sup> With respect to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *The Tempest*, Shakespeare is in the line of strong theological tradition 'that saw dreams as giving potential glimpses of a Heavenly Realm that both transcends and undergirds our own.'<sup>207</sup> At stake are truths apprehensible only through story and image, and 'Shakespeare enjoyed a cultural freedom to play with language, to play with stories and dreams, to play in the end with even the most sacred things, and yet through that very playfulness to restate the great themes of Transfiguration, Death and Resurrection in a new and wonderfully life-enhancing way.'<sup>208</sup>

*A Midsummer Night's Dream* (written tentatively in 1595-96) is an early play among those given most weight for matters of imagination and poetry,<sup>209</sup> but Guite is a helpful guide as to how this play fits into Shakespeare's corpus. His reading focuses on the pivotal exchange between Theseus and Hippolyta at the beginning of Act V. The lovers, having returned from the forest properly re-matched and happy, relate their story uncertain whether it is more than just a dream. The king and queen quarrel over believing them, and it is a disagreement of substance between the king embodying reason and the queen embodying imagination.<sup>210</sup> Here is their complete exchange:

*Hippolyta* 'Tis strange, my Theseus, that these lovers speak of.  
*Theseus* More strange than true. I never may believe  
 These antic fables, nor these fairy toys.  
 Lovers and madmen have such seething brains,  
 Such shaping fantasies, that apprehend  
 More than cool reason ever comprehends.  
 The lunatic, the lover, and the poet  
 Are of imagination all compact.  
 One sees more devils than vast hell can hold;

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<sup>206</sup> Ibid., 2-3.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>208</sup> Ibid.

<sup>209</sup> Evans and Tobin, 81-82.

<sup>210</sup> Guite, 55.

That is the madman. The lover, all as frantic,  
 Sees Helen's beauty in a brow of Egypt.  
 The poet's eye, in a fine frenzy rolling,  
 Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven;  
 And as imagination bodies forth  
 The forms of things unknown, the poet's pen  
 Turns them to shapes, and gives to aery nothing  
 A local habitation and a name.  
 Such tricks hath strong imagination,  
 That if it would but apprehend some joy,  
 It comprehends some bringer of that joy;  
 Or in the night, imagining some fear,  
 How easy is a bush suppos'd a bear!  
*Hippolyta* But all the story of the night told over,  
 And all their minds transfigur'd so together,  
 More witnesseth than fancy's images,  
 And grows to something of great constancy;  
 But howsoever, strange and admirable. (V.i.1-27)

In the name of reason, Theseus denies the veracity of the lovers' stories as the workings of overwrought imagination. The irony is that he undercuts his own scepticism. He does so first with a robust articulation of the poetic imagination's faculty for apprehension that Hippolyta will dignify in reply. Second, Theseus forgets that he himself exists only in imagination through 'antique fables': 'Here is Theseus remade in the imagination of Shakespeare, and engendered or embodied in us by the power of Shakespeare's poetry, telling us, in the very medium of that poetry, "...well of course you all know there's nothing in poetry".'<sup>211</sup> The interpretive significance of this is pivotal: 'The very fact that imagination is able to discern a form that bodies it forth and find a name for it may suggest that it not only has its own mode of existence but that its existence is able to impinge on and to have effects on, to operate as a cause within, the realm of things that reason can in fact comprehend.'<sup>212</sup> Imagination is the only means by which we enjoy apprehension, but even more its playfulness is a bridge between reason and apprehension which can concretize abstractions and allow for sustained

<sup>211</sup> Ibid., 56. See also *The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1996), 177. Regarding 'antique fables', the First Folio renders this 'antick fables'. *The Riverside Shakespeare*, 282 n.V.i.3, attributes 'antic' to the Second Quarto and the First Folio but 'antique' to the First Quarto. In Theseus' use 'antic' would be more to his point. The entendre of 'antique' remains appreciable.

<sup>212</sup> Guite, 57.

reflection and comprehension.<sup>213</sup> Guite recognizes the greatest expression of this is itself a meta-image: a glass that is all at once a created object, a means of reflection, and a window through which to comprehend what the poet has apprehended.<sup>214</sup>

The meta-image of the glass is profoundly Shakespearean if not uniquely Shakespearean. Other poets have meditated on the same image, though it has perhaps been impossible to do so irrespective of Shakespeare at least since Hamlet spoke of the end of playing as ‘to hold as ‘twere the mirror up to nature’ (III.ii.21-22). Guite deftly points to Herbert’s use in ‘The Elixir’:

A man that looks on glass,  
On it may stay his eye;  
Or if he pleaseth, through it pass,  
And then the heav’n espy.<sup>215</sup>

If Herbert’s 1633 poem is intended reflection on Shakespeare’s imaginative use it is a muted reflection. What is also of significance is that in the full poem Herbert is cognizant of the alchemical unity between heaven and earth that is represented in the glass. In the second chapter I argue alchemy is an overlooked resource for questions of Shakespeare and religion. The image of the glass is one to which I shall also return in consideration of the theatre of wonder.

Years before Shakespeare gave Hamlet utterance on philosophy’s failure to dream of all the things in heaven and earth, Theseus speaks with the same impulse for reason and comprehension. Yet, as mentioned, Theseus also represents the poet as the one actually capable of giving comprehensible shape to meaningful abstractions. The poet bodies forth the forms of things unknown including apprehensions of the heavenly in comprehensible earthly shapes.<sup>216</sup> Theseus calls this a trick, but especially as we see in light of Hippolyta’s reply that

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<sup>213</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid.

<sup>215</sup> George Herbert, *The Country Parson, The Temple* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1981), 311; Guite, 16.

<sup>216</sup> Guite, 59-60.

ennobles the better angels of his nature, the theological implications go as far up as thinking about the Incarnation as God's transcendent poiesis. Made in his image, our imagination is enabled 'to create symbols which are energized between the poles of immanence and transcendence.'<sup>217</sup> As David Brown identified, art has the ability not just to alleviate theological burdens but to directly offer solutions. Guite's reading as a poet-theologian-critic is evidence, and indicate why the readings in the next section are also important.

Hippolyta's rejoinder to Theseus not only translates his critique into a defense of imagination, it adds an apology for the corporate imaginative experience of the theatre. The lovers' story told together 'grows to something of great constancy'. More than just a unified account that must be true by corroboration, here also is an expression of how imagination and poetry should be judged:

The achievement of art is the transfiguring of minds, by means of imagination, so that we see both what the artist sees and what they see through the things they see. There is a corporate transfiguration, a corporate entering into the world of the poet's imagination and a corporate seeing through it, of the truth he intends. In the case of the playwright's art it is the transfiguring of our minds together. ...we are seeing into the heart of language itself, into the very forge and generative place of poetry, as Shakespeare celebrates the mystery of his art.<sup>218</sup>

Guite suggests the imaginative growth to great constancy is indicative of an organic unity that takes on its own identity beyond being merely the work of its author.<sup>219</sup> That imagination might be capable of such transfiguration may seem re-enchanting to us, but Guite very helpfully draws attention to *History in English Words*, where Owen Barfield demonstrates that in Hippolyta's speech Shakespeare transfigures our very conception of imagination from something like fancy into a prototypical idea of the concept no one before Coleridge fully appreciated.<sup>220</sup> *A Midsummer Night's Dream* works out such organic, imaginative meaning in

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid., 60f.

<sup>218</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 62-63. I take it this could be a reason why at the end of *The Tempest* Shakespeare sets his art free.

<sup>220</sup> Guite, 63; Owen Barfield, *History in English Words* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1967), 213-14.

its own structure. Theseus' and Hippolyta's exchange treats everything that has gone before as a preface to their marital union. The play, which begins or restores four unions in marriage is about 'the fruitful conjunction of opposites at every level, the bringing together of contraries that seem to quarrel, but in whose conjunction is not only harmony but a kind of overflow of creative energy into fruitfulness and blessing.'<sup>221</sup> Hippolyta as a character sets up this dynamic in response to the stories told, and in anticipation of the Rude Mechanicals failure to bring this to bear in the utterly disenchanted play shortly to be within the play. This becomes a meta-theatrical moment when the audience of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* may identify that it has collectively given its imagination over to the performance, self-consciously recognizing that this is not only submission to artifice but also an experience of transformation into the mystery of the art and the truth it embodies. As Guite summarizes, 'The success of Shakespeare's play depends on a kind of invited feigning, on a mutual consent that our minds should be transfigured together. In some sense we have agreed to be deceived in order to reach a truth.'<sup>222</sup>

I have deferred until the fourth chapter some of Guite's helpful reading of *The Tempest*. However it is worth noting here the conclusion of his rare converging of theology, literary criticism, and primary reading. *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's other play that employs magical characters to create reflections of the relationship between appearance and reality, between inner and outer natures. This is not escapism but fantasy as the supreme imaginative context in which to explore resolution of the darkest themes of tragedy.<sup>223</sup> In light of this play also self-consciously enacting meta-theatrical reflection, and arguably because of Shakespeare's deliberate laying-down of his own artistic mantle, this play is the climax of art, performance, and reflection. Until the end of Act IV *The Tempest* builds as a revenge

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<sup>221</sup> Guite, 64.

<sup>222</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>223</sup> Ibid., 66-67.

tragedy.<sup>224</sup> Prospero, having thoroughly prepared and taken advantage of auspicious circumstances, meticulously orchestrates every detail of plot and interplay through to the final revealing encounter with himself. Through the betrothal masque that he puts on and through its interruption, Prospero comes into a final confrontation with himself culminating in the ‘Our revels now are ended’ speech. Perhaps it is not until this recognition that he himself knows he will desire mercy rather than sacrifice, but it is in his post-masque reflection that we see the revenge arc will finally break down.<sup>225</sup> In its place, the counter-theme of unexpected mercy and restoration running concurrently throughout the play finally eclipses the vengeance an unknowing audience expects, and sets the stage for Act V.<sup>226</sup>

How Shakespeare works out Prospero’s choice of mercy as well as the dissolution of the world into the play is difficult and wondrous. Guite also recognizes the significance of an eschatological reading—the dissolution of the pageant leads to an encounter of judgement that turns out to be one of forgiveness and reconciliation. The final interpretive context is a heavy one:

But if...the ‘insubstantial pageant’ is not only the play within the play but the whole world and all of us in it, then the strong implication is that when, at the cosmic level, ...we ourselves will step from the seemings of this world, from the theatre of the great globe, not into the nothingness of Macbeth’s alienation, but into an encounter as potentially fraught, but also as potentially fruitful, as that which occupies Act V of *The Tempest*.<sup>227</sup>

What this could mean is inevitably uncertain to some degree. Shakespeare has exploded so many layers of metaphor and reflection that the ending of *The Tempest* is frequently read as one of despair. But if there is an edge of despair, Guite helpfully sees that *The Tempest* revives the magical engine of *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* and that the final anticipation of all things might be a heavy one, but it retains a weight of glory:

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<sup>224</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>225</sup> Ibid.

<sup>226</sup> Ibid.

<sup>227</sup> Ibid., 71-72.

Throughout this play, as throughout all his works, Shakespeare has been playing with ideas about truth and feigning, appearance and reality, the relation between the nature to which his art holds a mirror and that other nature, beyond or behind the nature Reason measures, from which so much light shines through the window of his art. In this final epilogue he throws out a bridge from the reality of the play, through the reality of the actor/playwright, to the reality of the audience's own lives; and the keystone of that whole bridge, binding all these realities together and allowing them to communicate with one another, is the over-arching presence and mercy of One who is present to every level of reality and who is to be apprehended by imagination, and engaged and pierced by prayer.<sup>228</sup>

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My own project finds itself situated between these three engagements of the theological-theatrical exchange and facing forward. Ben Quash has commented on theatre as a paradigmatic model for dialog that is polyphonic and unfinalizable with respect to profound matters of truth. Ivan Khovacs has suggested that in the careful working out of the newly-appreciated interplay between theatre and theology, performance must be related to the careful deliberative process of production, and that interpretation must consider the embodied meaning in performance where the non-textual elements of meaning come into play. Malcolm Guite turns appropriately to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where he finds Shakespeare creating in the play a meta-theatrical suggestion of how an audience, reflecting imaginatively together, may be transfigured collectively towards a unifying revelation of truth. *The Tempest* returns to the same plane with explicit consideration of mercy, forgiveness, and hope activated by prayer. There is benefit in further considering Shakespeare's work not only for the sake of theology, but as itself creative theological reflection.

#### 1.4 PAST CRITICISM FROM RELIGIOUS POETS

In this section I glance across 300-plus years of criticism, landing briefly on writings relevant to Shakespeare and religion by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Williams (and

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<sup>228</sup> Ibid., 74.

through him William Wordsworth), and W. H. Auden. As a survey of historic criticism this selection is parodic, but it would also be irresponsible to suggest the subject is only recently credible. Since Shakespeare's embodiment and critique of religion is itself poetic, the criterion for this selection is that criticism of poetry is ideally left to critics themselves capable of the art. As identified, David Brown makes a theological case for this, but the same criterion has been advanced by Alexander Pope,<sup>229</sup> Wordsworth, Williams,<sup>230</sup> et al. The poets and critics considered are also those whose faith is awake in their thought. In advocating a return to awakened faith as the best means of understanding Shakespeare's late thought, it is important to identify poet-critics who recognized its value.

In preface, two twentieth century critics of Shakespeare and religion are best acknowledged here: G. Wilson Knight and Roland Mushat Frye. Knight saw *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* as progenitors of Wordsworth's reintegration of nature, re-creation, and miracles.<sup>231</sup> In this Knight sees pantheism, with Prospero as Shakespeare, and Shakespeare as god. Shakespeare's art turns with *Antony and Cleopatra* from tragedy into mysticism. Miracle and myth become the only tropes for what Shakespeare has left to say. Beyond this point Shakespeare's poetic intuition is in search of immortality.<sup>232</sup> Music becomes the driving symbolism of resurrection and reunion. Symbolic of pure aesthetic delight, music heightens the mystic nature of the performed act, anesthetizing critical faculties and opening the mind to the extraordinary: '...music, like erotic sight, raises the consciousness until it is in tune with a reality beyond the reach of wisdom.'<sup>233</sup> Art is the creative imagination's outward expression of the same thing which, as an inward expression,

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<sup>229</sup> Alexander Pope, 'An Essay on Criticism', in *Rape of the Lock and Other Major Writings*, ed. Leo Damrosch (London: Penguin, 2011).

<sup>230</sup> Charles Williams, *The English Poetic Mind* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932), vi-vii.

<sup>231</sup> G. Wilson Knight, *The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation of Shakespeare's Final Plays* (London: Methuen, 1965), 127, 251. Knight's decades of scholarship would culminate in *Shakespeare and Religion: Essays of Forty Years* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968), but his most pertinent essays were first anthologized in *The Crown of Life*, and his ideas vary insignificantly in revision. His seminal essay 'Myth and Miracle', published in 1929, became the first chapter of *The Crown of Life* and is quoted therein.

<sup>232</sup> Knight, *Crown of Life*, 13.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

Knight identifies as religion.<sup>234</sup> Yet Christian concepts in *The Winter's Tale* are subservient to Shakespeare's pantheism and unorthodox despite their appeal to Christian apologists.<sup>235</sup> Hermione's resurrection is a mystery Shakespeare the poet cannot clarify, because he himself does not know the answer.<sup>236</sup> Knight sees Shakespeare in *The Tempest*, as the climax of his artistic vision, elevating his own self-conscious role to an unparalleled degree. Shakespeare traces outwardly in the play the inward image of his own soul: 'He is now the object of his own search, and no other theme but that of his visionary self is now of power to call forth the riches of his imagination.'<sup>237</sup> *The Tempest* otherwise lacks definite theology except insofar as wonder and magic unify nature and the miraculous.<sup>238</sup>

In *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (1963) Frye takes Knight to task specifically for bad theology. Reading Knight almost exclusively through his disciples, Frye accuses him of presenting subjective religious interpretations without evidence of contemporary historical judgements.<sup>239</sup> Denying any probability that Shakespeare read Luther, Calvin, or Hooker, Frye identifies him as a secular poet not fit to be compared to the religious likes of Milton and Bunyan. Whereas Knight finds Shakespeare's Christianity subjugated to his own apotheosis, Frye finds Shakespeare's Christianity decorative—deliberately failing to bridge the sixteenth-century Protestant division between literature and theology.<sup>240</sup> In fine, Shakespeare and doctrine do not mix: 'Though the view of art as a mirror was in good measure didactic, there is, to my knowledge, no evidence in the critical writings of the Elizabethan age which would lead us to interpret Shakespeare's "mirror up to nature" in terms of saving grace and revealed theology.'<sup>241</sup> It is easy enough to agree Shakespeare's

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<sup>234</sup> Ibid., 22-23.

<sup>235</sup> Ibid., 97.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 125f.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid., 251.

<sup>239</sup> Roland Mushat Frye, *Shakespeare and Christian Doctrine* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), 19.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid., 9, 12, 78.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid., 269.

artistry is not doctrinally derivative or subservient. The question is whether Shakespeare's artistic vision is sympathetic to a recognizable religious form in its affects and in its effects. For this it is helpful to turn to poet-critics who tried to fathom the religious significance of Shakespeare's art.

### Coleridge on Shakespeare

Shakespeare had drawn his share of literary criticism in the centuries intervening between his death and Coleridge's lectures of 1811-12. Critics had run the spectrum from dismissive to Bardolatrous. Essays on the critical merits of Shakespeare were put forth by such prominent figures as John Dryden (*Essay of Dramatic Poesy*, 1668), Alexander Pope in the Preface to his 1725 edition of Shakespeare's collected works, and Samuel Johnson, also in the Preface of his 1765 *The Plays of William Shakespeare*. While the criticism of these and others does much to establish the parameters of all subsequent critical work, Coleridge is the first major critic to draw credible attention to religious content in Shakespeare's secular plays. From our present perspective, these centuries of silence are surprising. Before Coleridge none of these consider associating Shakespeare with religious theatre—neither religion in the secular theatre, nor the religious heritage of the mystery cycles. Perhaps, unlike for Shakespeare, the mystery plays had passed from living cultural memory. Perhaps their judgement was too focused by neoclassical criteria of ancient theatre.<sup>242</sup> Perhaps, given the persistence of religious and dramatic controversies, one or both subjects were nearly always suspect. Coleridge's own interests drew him to this religious question. And perhaps, to borrow his own thought, it was the perceptive distance afforded by time that allowed him to see anew religious significance in Shakespeare's secular drama. Coleridge and

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<sup>242</sup> See Robert Stock, *Johnson and Neoclassical Dramatic Theory: The Intellectual Context of the Preface to Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973).

Wordsworth together present the greatest confluence of poetry, theory, theology, and criticism since Shakespeare's death. Shakespearean romance is not equitable with the Romantic movement, but Coleridge and Wordsworth are the chronological midpoint between Shakespeare's romances and our consideration of them. Coleridge's 1811-12 lectures on Shakespeare give us the general idea of his thought.<sup>243</sup>

In his eighth lecture, Coleridge identifies religion as the 'Poetry of all mankind' with three common objects: First, generalizing our notions and broadening attention beyond individual circumstances to mankind as a whole. Second, casting intellectual objects of deepest interest beyond slavish sensual apprehension, so they must rather be apprehended by the imagination. Third and most importantly, both religion and poetry have as their object the perfecting of human nature.<sup>244</sup> Poetry is thus the form in which divine religious truth is revealed—not in sectarian opinion, but in the heartfelt sentiment on which religion feeds. The poet is the unsubdued soul who bears the wonder and feeling of a child into the adult inquiry for knowledge until it reaches its limits and lapses back into wonder.<sup>245</sup>

Early modern theatre, owing to limitations of medium, had to appeal to imagination. Contrary to classical theatre which was obliged to rules of concrete representation in space and time, the early modern dramatist transcended these to appeal to the better angels of human nature rather than bind the audience to nature's meanest part.<sup>246</sup> In a later letter Coleridge would elaborate on this dynamic: Images and thoughts possess innate power independent of our judgement or understanding, by which we try to correlate reality to these images and thoughts. This is how the mind acts when dreaming. Combined with the voluntary suspension of disbelief, the result is the basis of stage illusion—equally distant

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<sup>243</sup> R. A. Foakes, introduction to *Coleridge on Shakespeare: The Text of the Lectures of 1811-12*, by Samuel Taylor Coleridge, ed. R. A. Foakes (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1971). The lectures were reconstructed later from audience notes.

<sup>244</sup> Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, 88-89.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*, 100.

from an absolute principle of delusion as well as from Johnson's contention that judgements are fully cognitive during a performance.<sup>247</sup> As Malcolm Guite succinctly interpolates: 'We are so used to the conventions of fiction, so used to engaging in what Coleridge called the willing suspension of disbelief, that we miss the paradox beneath our noses, that truth arises not from the laboring reason of the poet but from his playfulness, his freedom to invent.'<sup>248</sup>

Comparisons of Shakespeare to Homer—so continuous as to be cliché by Johnson's time<sup>249</sup>—reveal an inclination to claim Shakespeare was already to the English imagination the same kind and degree of inventive genius. Without rejecting this, Coleridge laments neoclassical critics' failure to see Shakespeare's work according to his own singularities of circumstance and imagination.<sup>250</sup> Critics would excessively judge Shakespeare's perceived inadequacies according to criteria too formal or anachronistic to be credible.<sup>251</sup> Coleridge's critique needs reviving.

### **Charles Williams – *The English Poetic Mind***

Geoffrey Hill credited Charles Williams as 'a good theologian and, at his best, a great critic', who 'would have understood the fundamental dilemma of the poetic craft: that it is simultaneously an imitation of the divine fiat and an act of enormous human self-will.'<sup>252</sup>

Williams was a poet, novelist, playwright, theologian, and critic—a rare individual in whom these vocations could be simultaneously present. Though his 1932 monograph *The English Poetic Mind* has been undervalued by literary critics in recent decades, Hill credits it as his

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<sup>247</sup> Coleridge, to Daniel Stuart, 13 May 1816, in *Letters from the Lake Poets to Daniel Stuart* (London: West, Newman, 1889), 198.

<sup>248</sup> Guite, 54.

<sup>249</sup> Stock, 170.

<sup>250</sup> Coleridge was not the first to identify this fault. Alexander Pope wrote in his 'Preface to Shakespeare' (accessed online): 'To judge therefore of *Shakespear* by *Aristotle's* rules, is like trying a man by the Laws of one Country, who acted under those of another.'

<sup>251</sup> Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, 102.

<sup>252</sup> Geoffrey Hill, 'Eros in F. H. Bradley and T. S. Eliot', in *Collected Critical Writings*, edited by Kenneth Haynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 562-63.

critical masterpiece.<sup>253</sup> *The English Poetic Mind* makes a concerted effort to understand English poetic genius formally, then to study it in the greatest English poets. Williams defers to Wordsworth for theory, then makes his most prominent study on Shakespeare's dramatic poetry.<sup>254</sup>

*The English Poetic Mind* was not formally concerned with religion in Shakespeare, but he is attuned to issues that have religious bearing, and his analysis is sympathetic. The conclusion of his long chapter on Shakespeare is the best place to start:

...in the plays that concluded his working life it is something other than felicity which seems to return. Felicity for the characters, perhaps, but for us Wordsworth's word is preferable—beatitude; they are the beatitude of poetry. Shakespeare himself may or may not have been happy. But there is about those last plays something which is at a little distance from us; they are difficult to fully apprehend, being clear as crystal. ... There are no more unknown modes of being; all things are subject to poetic power. The thought is so impersonated that there is no division between image and vital soul. ... No other of our poets has so wholly attained to such a final simplicity; and this, among so much else, is his greatness—that in him the poetic genius perfectly, or at least to the greatest perfection we can imagine, fulfilled itself.<sup>255</sup>

As a pious literary critic, writing a non-religious critical study of poetic genius, Williams is an ideal figure to consult in a study of religious thought in secular dramatic poetry.

Wordsworth's *Prelude* is the only long study *in poetry* of the poetic mind, and as such it is the best guide by which to consider poetry. The poetic spirit, according to Wordsworth, suggests how the sensational apprehension of completeness in one being allows the poetic mind to identify completeness in other separate objects. This is the power which in poetry afterwards comes to create 'Composure and ennobling Harmony.'<sup>256</sup> The mind becomes aware of 'unknown modes of being',<sup>257</sup> and this pressure of the genius on the outer

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<sup>253</sup> Ibid., 563.

<sup>254</sup> Knight's essay 'Myth and Miracle' predates *The English Poetic Mind* by three years, but Williams is silent on the pertinence, if any, of Knight's work.

<sup>255</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 210-11.

<sup>256</sup> William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, ed. M. H. Abrams, Jonathan Wordsworth, and Stephen Gill (New York: Norton, 1979), 7.771. Williams was too familiar for citations; references have been correlated to the 1850 *Prelude*.

<sup>257</sup> Wordsworth, 1.393.

consciousness is what poets uniquely strive to express in words with increasing exactitude and power. Great poets unite in their style the ‘discordant elements’ by the ‘inscrutable workmanship’ of their genius.<sup>258</sup> Such poets foster the visionary mood wherein there is always more to gain; they desire their analyzing and synthesizing to reach the height of ‘sublimity’, and they measure their achievements in the scale of the infinite.<sup>259</sup> Great poetry results when all ulterior motives are eclipsed and the poet reaches the extreme moment of expectation where nothing but poetry matters.<sup>260</sup> The great poet is aware of both diversity and unity of things; he feels—and know that he feels—the power of Imagination moving within him.<sup>261</sup> Too briefly, this is Wordsworth’s model by which Williams proposes to assess poetic greatness. I have deferred to Williams’ exposition of Wordsworth because he derives from Wordsworth a great poet’s model for interpreting great poetry, and the model advances questions of Shakespeare and religion.

Williams hastens through nearly all of the plays to draw out a progressive arc in Shakespeare’s poetic genius. A gloss of highlights and the culmination of his thought must suffice here. The undergirding theme of *Macbeth* is thought and action separating themselves from the natural order. Whereas Othello is ruined by distraction, Macbeth chooses, and instead of being ruined his mind is greater at the end than at the beginning. But Macbeth’s separation is one of rebellion against nature that ends in dissolution.<sup>262</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra* is a union of intense opposites—‘this is the progression of the poetic mind discovering fresh powers of knowledge in itself’.<sup>263</sup> In the climax even love and death are inextricably mingled. Death ceases to be an unknown mode of being, becoming known as far as anything can be

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<sup>258</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 14-15; Wordsworth, 1.340-44.

<sup>259</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 16; Wordsworth, 2.318.

<sup>260</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 21.

<sup>261</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>262</sup> *Ibid.*, 88-90.

<sup>263</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

known through poetry.<sup>264</sup> This discovery is for Shakespeare progress beyond tragedy to a concern not with death but with *life*.<sup>265</sup> Ultimately:

Cleopatra's poetry is a thing which reconciles and unites [the world which cannot be and is, and the world which is and cannot be]. It is not that she feels herself triumphant; that is not the thing which, for poetry, matters. The supreme thing in that scene is the consummation of the poetic mind which here manages to know those two worlds as one: *discovering that knowledge by expressing it*.<sup>266</sup>

Williams passes by imagination in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, but to offer continuity with Malcolm Guite's reading of the earlier play, in *Antony and Cleopatra*—perhaps the latest of the great tragedies<sup>267</sup>—Shakespeare revives the discovery of knowledge through expression. This is comprehension through apprehension, except in *Antony and Cleopatra* Shakespeare progresses across the horizon of death to suggest the possibility of comprehending what is beyond it. This, for Williams, is the point at which Shakespeare becomes the greatest English poet, who is at times able to render by his art the undivided expression of actions and words, the essential unity of thought and nature. This is participation in the work of redemption that renders not death but *life*.

Having made an extensive interpretive survey for the purpose of elevating the late plays, Williams gives them surprisingly short shrift. He does not attempt to draw any conclusions about the implications for religion (though this is outside the scope of the stated project). He recognizes the alchemical tropes deeply embedded in these plays but does not make more than passing reference to them, which is surprising since Williams knew alchemy as one of the greatest expressions of unity in thought, poetry, and religion.<sup>268</sup> Williams' summary conclusions are generally terse: The late plays all end with pardon. Also preconceptions about characters must vanish. Further, nothing was precluded from

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<sup>264</sup> Ibid., 94.

<sup>265</sup> Ibid., 90-96.

<sup>266</sup> Ibid., 98, emphasis added.

<sup>267</sup> Evans and Tobin, 86.

<sup>268</sup> Alchemy is the thematic centre of *Many Dimensions*, the novel Williams published a year before *The English Poetic Mind*.

Shakespeare's genius. Williams does not imagine that Shakespeare was bored or had gone soft, but he does think Shakespeare was concerned with the subjects of the plays and not their dramatic arrangement. He thinks Hermione's seclusion and statue are silly, and that *The Tempest* resorts to magic. The last act of *Cymbeline* is comically wild.<sup>269</sup> But, *Cymbeline* is less a play than the person of Imogen, who is a single union of directness of action and directness in words—an image so close to fact there is no disjunction. Imogen symbolizes a world of sheer experience. Miranda too is not a way of thinking about love, she simply is the pure experience of wondrous love to Ferdinand. There is no comment implicit in her words, nor can comment be made about them; she is love itself just being.<sup>270</sup>

Poetically, Pericles hears the music of the spheres, but that is indirect. Ariel is an even further extension of this ontological simplicity, suggesting what is beyond man. Mortals, both characters in the play and the play's auditors, are enchanted by the elemental purity of Ariel's songs: 'A little more, and all our human world would undergo that almost terrifying alchemy, our joys would be pearls, our griefs coral.'<sup>271</sup> Shakespeare's poetry is on the verge, Williams intimates, of veritable transmutation of spiritual realities into material realities. This hints at the significance of Prospero's 'insubstantial pageant':

But that significance is not primarily a human but a poetic significance. Our awareness of the baseless fabric of a vision is aroused, of the dissolution of all the actors, and opposed to that is the music of Ariel. With all kinds and classes of men, with the great globe itself and all which it inherit, poetry has done what it can. The elemental simplicities of the last plays, the facts of being arresting their essential nature, alone remain.<sup>272</sup>

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<sup>269</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 104.

<sup>270</sup> *Ibid.*, 106-107. Reference is to *The Tempest*, III.iii.77-86.

<sup>271</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 107.

<sup>272</sup> *Ibid.*, 108. Williams rephrases this in *The Figure of Beatrice* (New York: Octagon, 1983), 201: 'If, on the other side of Ariel's songs, Shakespeare had developed an intellectual heaven to which "Where the bee sucks" was prelude, we might in English have had a comparison [to the *Paradiso*]. But he did not; he stayed on the arch-natural verge. *The Tempest* may indeed be said to imagine an island of purgation, but we cannot press it. Even Dante must, for the sake of his fame and our intelligence, have a "compensation", and Shakespeare is that compensation.'

Possibly Williams was swept away by the poetry, and did not look as hard as he could have into the religious themes outlined. I am unsure why he has stopped short of reading *The Winter's Tale* as a story of spiritual reality transmuting material elements through the power of music into a redeemed unity of thought and matter. *The Tempest* is a difficult play, but in the context of criticism that poetically finds so much transcendence in the lyric, hearing the play's conclusion as Shakespeare's melancholy swan song would be a clash of poetry and theme. For whatever reason, this work has been left to lesser imitators.

### **W. H. Auden**

W. H. Auden was a gifted poet and a renowned essayist. Auden was personally close to Charles Williams, though his relationship with Christianity was troubled yet cherished. These works merit attention: his essays of literary criticism in *The Dyer's Hand*, his poem 'The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', and his lectures on Shakespeare. Auden's interests were vast, but Shakespeare, and *The Tempest* particularly, were of enduring influence on his imagination.

Auden identifies himself as a critic while gesturing that, owing to the nature of human egoism, good critics are more rare than good poets or novelists.<sup>273</sup> If he is only slightly more optimistic about critics than Coleridge, he at least practices his craft with a refreshing degree of irony. Auden famously and insightfully observes in a later essay that Shakespeare critics reveal more about themselves than Shakespeare, but he is also perceptive enough to suggest that self-revelation should be the final effect of Shakespeare on each auditor.<sup>274</sup> While this is good advice for any critic, I suggest Auden ultimately falls prey to his own criticism, seeing in Shakespeare a pessimism that is the critic's reflection rather than the image through the glass. It is also perhaps telling that Auden should be gloomy about *The Tempest*—the play that was by all accounts his enduring favourite. While a student at Gresham's School, in 1925

<sup>273</sup> Auden, 'Reading', in *The Dyer's Hand and Other Essays* (New York: Random House, 1962), 8.

<sup>274</sup> Auden, 'The Prince's Dog', in *Dyer's Hand*, 182.

he auditioned successfully for the part of Caliban in the school production of *The Tempest*. A blurry photo of Auden in character exists on the internet, and it is perhaps as revealing as any image could be of Auden's mind at work. Caliban had captured his imagination before this, and would do so continuously.<sup>275</sup>

'The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on *The Tempest*' (originally published 1944) is a critical engagement with the play in the form of poetry. In other words, it is the kind of criticism through poetry for which Charles Williams identified the need. The poem devotes half of its thirty pages to Part III: Caliban to the Audience, where Caliban comprehensively disenchanting the audience after the conclusion of Shakespeare's play. Caliban is the only character in Auden's poem to speak prose instead of poetry. We might expect that none of Caliban's words would be pretty, but it is telling that he should remain for Auden the character 'who will always loom thus wretchedly into your confused picture.'<sup>276</sup> Caliban is sympathetic, and perhaps tragic. Auden is not much more hopeful about the other characters, nor the role of the audience for that matter.

Auden's lectures on Shakespeare were given in New York in 1946-47, but were only published (from the notes of people present) in 2000. In his lecture on *The Tempest*, Auden recognizes three interpretive points that bear foregrounding for Shakespeare's work as a whole. First, the magician's art should be paralleled with the dramatist's art. This is well-established, but Auden elaborated that by intervening with illusions the magician leads characters to disillusion and self-knowledge. Yet, magic as an art cannot dictate what use people make of an experience that it gives them. Prospero can manipulate men but not transform their character.<sup>277</sup> Second, there are few, if any, tidy divisions of good or bad

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<sup>275</sup> Humphrey Carpenter, *W. H. Auden: A Biography* (London: Faber and Faber, 2011), accessed electronically.

<sup>276</sup> Auden, 'The Sea and the Mirror: A Commentary on Shakespeare's *The Tempest*', in *W. H. Auden Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 325.

<sup>277</sup> Auden, 'The Tempest', in *Lectures on Shakespeare*, 306-07.

characters, just as there are few tidy divisions between tragedy and comedy.<sup>278</sup> Third, Auden recognizes that Shakespeare, like all of his contemporaries, inherits a Christian psychology: Men are equal in their possession of a will capable of choice, and we are all subject to temptation and suffering, but character is not determined by fate, and through repentance suffering can be a means to unearned redemption. It is profoundly un-Christian to assume that divine justice must be retributive, that success equals virtue, and that forgiveness and pity are a form of weakness.<sup>279</sup> All of this is insightful.

*The Dyer's Hand* was first published in 1962 as a deliberately-arranged collection of previously-published essays.<sup>280</sup> The cumulative result is Auden's critical sensibilities to poetic and religious dynamics in literature. While Auden's criticism cannot be followed systematically, a few key ideas merit recognition. In 'Balaam and His Ass', Auden states the imagination is beyond good and evil, neither corrupt (because it cannot be) nor restrained (because it should not be). Imagination is not conscience nor desire; it only sees what is imaginatively possible. Having become by imagination who he or she should be, one should free the imagination to play without limitations. This is the relationship of Ariel to Prospero, who is freed at the end of the play.<sup>281</sup> In 'Robert Frost', Auden states that poetry should be beautiful—a verbal expression of earthly paradise and unadulterated play—that contrasts the travail of human experience. Auden attributes this characteristic to Ariel. (We might reasonably see this as a form of enchantment.) Poetry should also be true, proffering revelation that sets us free from deception or self-enchantment, and this makes poetry harsher in its realism. This attribute Auden identified with the character of Prospero. (We might reasonably see this as a form of disenchantment.) Most poetry is dominated by the one or the

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<sup>278</sup> Ibid., 311.

<sup>279</sup> Ibid., 312.

<sup>280</sup> Auden, *Dyer's Hand*, xii.

<sup>281</sup> Auden, 'Balaam and His Ass', in *Dyer's Hand*, 133-34.

other, the balance of beauty and truth is rare.<sup>282</sup> ‘Music in Shakespeare’ is the essay of climactic prominence in *The Dyer’s Hand*, and the essay itself ends with further reflections on *The Tempest*. Auden describes *The Tempest* as full of all kinds of music, yet not as a play in which, symbolically, harmony and concord overcome disorder. Whereas the preceding three plays end triumphantly, the last note of *The Tempest* is a sour one. Justice prevails through force as a matter of duty rather than as a result either of joy on Prospero’s part or of a harmonious finale. Prospero anticipates silence and isolation with his ‘Every third thought shall be my grave.’<sup>283</sup>

In *The Dyer’s Hand*’s concluding ‘Postscript: Christianity and Art’, Auden offers three thoughts that add complexity to his earlier pessimism about the conclusion of *The Tempest*. First, the godlike Christian is not a hero of extraordinary action but a saintly doer of good deeds. A good Christian must be discrete, silently drawing attention not to the doer but to God. ‘This means that art, which by its nature can only deal with what can and should be manifested, cannot portray a saint.’<sup>284</sup> If Auden is right about this, we must not always look for embodied spirituality immediately in what is depicted but in the tangential, affective spirituality of an experience. Shakespeare does not need to give us straight religion for the experience of his plays to have religious significance. Second, penitential poetry unsettles Auden even more. Good poetry by its nature desires to be an object of admiration, but it is idiosyncratic for poets such as Donne or Hopkins to make such a performance out of private feelings of guilt and penitence.<sup>285</sup> Shakespeare’s self-abasement in *The Tempest*, which is only implied, indicates he also sees the idiosyncrasy. Third, activities of sacred importance are governed by notions of orthodoxy. When art becomes secular, the artist has freedom of

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<sup>282</sup> Auden, ‘Robert Frost’, in *Dyer’s Hand*, 338.

<sup>283</sup> Auden, ‘Music in Shakespeare’, in *Dyer’s Hand*, 526.

<sup>284</sup> Auden, ‘Postscript: Christianity and Art’, in *Dyer’s Hand*, 458.

<sup>285</sup> Ibid.

expression for whatever subject sparks his imagination.<sup>286</sup> Thus, Shakespeare had religious freedom in the secular theatre, and through it embodies orthodoxy to a remarkable degree.

In light of the above, the poetic relationship identified between beauty and truth in ‘Balaam and His Ass’ suggests a connection to Charles Williams’ assertion that Shakespeare finds in the late plays the capacity for pure poetic expression of an image that is the thing itself existing without interpretation. Auden identifies this theological dynamic as reason and imagination being fused through the incarnation of the Word made Flesh. But rather than embrace the possibility of such poetic fusion, Auden ultimately retreats to poetry always needing a tension between reason and imagination.<sup>287</sup> In his lecture on *The Tempest*, Auden had stated that Shakespeare’s basic assumptions change little but his verse continually develops.<sup>288</sup> Further, he had stated that in Shakespeare’s plays there is a continual process of simplification as Shakespeare holds a clearer and clearer mirror up to nature.<sup>289</sup> Where Williams sees expanding potential for the poesis of undivided experience, Auden in the end does not bear up under the weight of his earlier convictions. The ready explanation is the divergence of their opinions on *The Tempest* as Shakespeare’s culminating creative effort. Auden the poet seems to have lacked faith in the end to see theologically what Williams the lay theologian saw poetically. It would be unfair to condemn Auden for inconsistency between critical essays published separately on different topics, yet it is curious that Auden of all critics does not imagine Prospero as a figure in this nexus between portrayed sainthood, performed good deeds, penitential poetry, and artistic liberty. Auden’s perspective on his favourite play is relatively gloomy. His thought on the relationship of art, imagination, and theology somehow does not filter down to *The Tempest* which is, I think, strikingly

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<sup>286</sup> Ibid., 460.

<sup>287</sup> Ibid., 459.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid., 313.

<sup>289</sup> Ibid., 319.

illuminated by the better angels of his criticism. As a critic Auden thinks first like a poet, and his initial sensibilities are valuable even when his conclusions seem less so.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have attempted to open a position for a new perspective on Shakespeare and religion in his final plays. Between literary criticism, theological studies of the arts, and relevant historic criticism, such a survey is inevitably short shrift. Yet, David Brown has offered a way to reconsider the necessity of recovering the arts in general and theatre in particular for human and spiritual flourishing. Ken Jackson and Arthur Marotti have shown literary criticism's turn to religion is both justified and in need of revitalization in its methodology. Sarah Beckwith's study suggested just how carefully we may read Shakespeare's employment of religion even though her conclusions find said employment to be human and fragile. Paul Fiddes, Christopher Hodgkins, and Judith Wolfe have demonstrated that Shakespeare was keenly attuned to eschatology and made expansive sympathetic use of it. Ben Quash, Ivan Khovacs, and Malcolm Guite have given strong readings that demonstrate the significance of theology to studies of Shakespeare and religion. Finally, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, Charles Williams, W. H. Auden, et al. endure as examples of why we do well to privilege those whose poetry and spirituality precede their criticism. The second chapter moves now to the incorporation of rhetoric, wonder, and alchemy.

## CHAPTER 2: THE EARLY MODERN TURN TO RHETORIC, WONDER, AND SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY

### Introduction

Having situated the present study between theological and literary-critical studies of Shakespeare and religion, the current chapter continues to attempt difficult maneuvering between introducing thematic correctives, attending to extant criticism, and readings of Shakespeare. All of these are necessary, given the complexity of the endeavour, to turn in the last two chapters to readings of *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. Between literary and theological studies, there is a crack in the door for reading these plays as works of profound spiritual enchantment. This chapter seeks wedges to widen the gap.

The first section looks at the Affect Theory as a recent movement through which critics have sought to consider holistic, embodied dynamics of exchange that do not rely on singly-determinative models of significance. Drawing attention to the limitations of materialist Affect Theory, I appeal for theological correctives to C. S. Lewis and Graham Ward. In light of these I turn to scholarship on affect and Shakespeare, relying chiefly on *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and his Contemporaries* edited by Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan.

The second section turns to rhetoric and myth in Scott Crider's reading of *The Winter's Tale*. Crider argues that *The Winter's Tale* must be read mythically as well as theatrically, but these two readings are impossible to fully reconcile, and between them Shakespeare has created a gap that can only be spanned by faith. To understand these two readings Crider appeals to the Orpheus cycle in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and the Pauline exhortation to unity in I Corinthians. Crider argues that the play is a complete ethical rhetoric that moves its audience through words towards the ideal response.

The third section moves from ethical rhetoric to wonder as the convergence of thought and feeling in the reflective atmosphere of the theatre. I primarily appeal to T. G. Bishop's *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder* and his poetics of incarnation. Bishop carefully theorizes wonder in the context of classical poetics and medieval theology before turning to readings in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*. Bishop too appeals to Ovid, reading Perdita's self-identification with Proserpina as a corrective. The conclusion of the play is the greatest dramatic risk a playwright has attempted, yet *The Winter's Tale* succeeds because in the collision of thought and feeling wonder becomes the reflection in which everyone sees themselves and through which they see what might be by faith.

The fourth section moves from wonder as the threshold of supernatural experience to alchemy as a model for thinking about the confluence of matter, spirit, and art. Charles Nicholl has written in *The Chemical Theatre* of three alchemical manuscripts that were in print in the 1590's, to which Shakespeare must have been exposed, how they allow us to see his profoundly active alchemical imagination at work. Having surveyed these, I glean what I can from other scholarship on alchemy and Shakespeare. Finally I offer a study of the alchemical significance of the grave and how Shakespeare used this image consistently throughout his career for the conjunction of death and rebirth. Cumulatively we see alchemy as a profound and sanctifying theme, as alive in Shakespeare's imagination, and as conducive to greater religious possibilities within his last two plays.

## 2.1 THE TURN TO AFFECT THEORY

Both in the sciences and across the humanities, in recent years there has been a critical mass of theorists in whose work we witness a 'turn to affect'.<sup>1</sup> What is of present interest for a study of religion and drama is a turn away from both text-determinant and purely-cognitive models interpretation, and a turn towards approaches that embrace more holistic, embodied

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<sup>1</sup> Patricia Ticineto Clough and Jean Halley, eds., *The Affective Turn: Theorizing the Social* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

modeling of significance between author, text, performers, and audience. The forms of criticism that have maintained dominance in early modern studies and theology over the last decades have increasingly shown limitations, and affect theory has been considered as a methodology for rebalancing critical perspective. For this project Affect Theory is a constructive diagnosis of critical and thematic issues, offering a pivot to reconsideration of Shakespeare and religion in light of overlooked ideas.

### **Secular Criticism and Affect**

Although theories of affect have existed at least since Aristotle, and Spinoza is generally credited with the modern construct, the recent turn to affect is its own iteration of theory and must be spoken of, at least initially, in its own terms. Affect is a process of modulation or transformation outside of conscious awareness that is distinct from feeling and emotion despite its intimate connection to these. There is no single origin of the current expressions of Affect Theory, but Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle identify two prominent trajectories in the humanities from articles published in 1995. The first is from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's and Adam Frank's 'Shame in the Cybernetic Fold: Reading Silvan Tomkins', which harkens back to the work of this psychologist and philosopher who studied neuro-physiological response mechanisms evolved to function without conscious engagement. The second is from Brian Massumi's 'The Autonomy of Affect', which traces its origins back to Spinoza (though it does so on its own terms and through the heavily-elaborative philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari). In principle, current Affect Theorists hearken back to a pure philosophical notion of affect. In practice, many studies of Affect Theory quickly reveal that current theories and their criticisms are diverse, incongruous, and prone to obscurity through jargon.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Marie Thompson and Ian Biddle, *Sound, Music, Affect* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 6.

Affect Theorists' interest in affect is persistently for *what* it does, and often *how*, more than for what it might *mean*.<sup>3</sup> Affect is the extension of states of relation and the passage of forces or intensities between 'bodies'. Consensus is that bodies can affect other bodies without cognitive intervention.<sup>4</sup> Massumi considers affect to be the excluded middle: a third state between activity and passivity, or what happens in the gap between content and effect.<sup>5</sup> Stimuli between these, though not cognitively comprehended, are nevertheless in play as bodies affect one another. Affect Theorists fault established forms of criticism for a tendency to foreground the locus of affect in one body. An example would be literary criticism where questions of agency attend predominantly to the author, the text, the audience, or the interpretive method. Such methodologies are considered too narrow. Understanding of affective exchanges, the critique goes, are inescapably limited where one locus of agency predominates. Affect Theorists insist that the tensed interplay of bodies is integral to behavior, and therefore to any consequent consideration of significance.

Indeed, questions about whether these interactions transcend physiological phenomena or impose upon conscious apprehension would be considered by many theorists as of secondary significance. Where the varying strains of Affect Theory differ is where the lines between affect, feeling, and emotion are drawn, and how these would be differentiated.<sup>6</sup> Though Affect Theorists study the intangible and uncertain dynamics between bodies, and such theories are themselves sometimes imprecise, proponents nevertheless point to apparent instabilities as indications of affect's importance.<sup>7</sup> Affect Theory does not oppose the proliferation of interpretations—for which varying forms of criticism are desirable—rather it

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>4</sup> 'Bodies' in the language of Affect Theory is derived from Spinoza's use but only loosely recognizable in terms of his own philosophy. For my rude understanding of Spinoza I am obliged to Dr Thomas Michael Ward's personal correspondence and article 'Spinoza on the Essences of Modes,' *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 19.1 (2011): 19-46.

<sup>5</sup> Brian Massumi, *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>6</sup> Thompson and Biddle, 7.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

opposes the insufficient consideration of the fundamental dynamic of transfer between bodies. Affective models of behavior may be integral to interpretation, but they must not be confused as themselves critical models of interpretation. Affect Theory, then, is a proposed corrective for static models of behavior and biased models of interpretation.

There are obvious implications for studies of the theatre as a complex dynamic space, especially for a playwright intent on dramatic affective exchange. Such studies should not avoid the affective transfer between theatrical bodies of author, text, performers, audience, and theatrical space. This seems especially true for a study of Shakespeare and religion that suggests the playwright wrote for the performed embodiment of enchantment and wonder. Affect is most helpful in light of a constructive critique that brings together present theological perspectives and older scholarship ripe for renewal.

In 2011 historian of science Ruth Leys published ‘The Turn to Affect: A Critique’ as well as a reply to a critical response, identifying a deep and problematic affinity in Affect Theory, which is a mistaken commitment to a presumed separation between affect systems and meaning.<sup>8</sup> Affect Theorists hold that philosophers and critics have excessively valued reason, reducing human agency to dispassionate adjudication while ignoring subliminal and affective intensities that can influence belief and behavior. These affects, such theorists contend, are visceral and pre-subjective, affecting thought and judgement but separate from cognition.<sup>9</sup> Such affections would have developed through evolution, and conscious comprehension would eventually have arisen out of these. Kosofsky Sedgwick and her adherents embraced biology through Affect Theory as a way of providing an account of emotions independent of intention for their validity. She intended to avoid crude reduction to

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<sup>8</sup> Ruth Leys, ‘Affect and Intention: A Reply to William E. Connolly,’ in *Critical Inquiry* 37.4 (Spring 2011), 799-800.

<sup>9</sup> Leys does not defer to Aristotle, but his definition endures. *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Christopher Rowe, ed. Sarah Broadie (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 1105b20: ‘By affections I mean appetite, anger, fear, boldness, grudging ill will, joy, friendly feeling, hatred, longing, envy, pity—generally, feelings attended by pleasure or pain.’

either genetic determinism (whereby behavior is derivative and therefore amoral) or rational intentionalism (whereby behavior is subjective and therefore amoral) by appealing to dynamic, non-determinative terms that would have emancipatory qualities.<sup>10</sup> By embracing behavior as pre-cognitive and pre-cultural yet corporeally meaningful, Kosofsky Sedgwick sought to venerate cultural minority reports as signs of dynamism, evolution, and liberation rather than causes for shame and moral culpability.

As part of her response, Leys offers an extensive critique of the theoretical and experimental scientific evidence that Tomkins relied on, little of which was widely accepted, and all of which was outdated by the time Kosofsky Sedgwick turned to Tomkins' work decades later. Beyond this, Leys objects to the shared commitment of Affect Theorists to anti-intentionalism. Her critique is that if autonomic responses below the threshold of consciousness separate cognition from intention, thinking comes too late to have any generative capacity for meaning.<sup>11</sup> Sub-comprehensive responses would be indifferent to ideas and beliefs and would have regard for the content of argument. While endeavouring to avoid a mind-body dualism by making affect primary, these theorists commit to an idealized metaphysical dualism of cognitive mind divorced from body and brain, and arguments thus become meaningless or inconsequential.<sup>12</sup> The radical separation between affect and reason thus makes comparative analysis of individuals or cultures indifferent to ideological dialogue.<sup>13</sup> Affect Theory's naturalist anti-intentionalism thus renders it meaningless in the context of criticism or comparative thought. Leys' evident purpose is the dismissal of inadequate theory rather than its constructive replacement.

## **Theology and Affect**

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<sup>10</sup> Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect: A Critique,' in *Critical Inquiry* 37.3 (Spring 2011), 441.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 443.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 455.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 472.

In the context of Leys' critique there is opportunity for theology to contribute to the reconsideration of Affect Theory. One corrective has existed since C. S. Lewis wrote the essay 'Transposition'. Lewis is attempting to understand the relationship between emotion and physical sensation, including how spiritual experiences might manifest physically. In contradistinction to the secular stream of Affect Theory, Lewis takes the emotional life to be higher than physical sensations in their richness, subtlety, and variety (though not morally higher).<sup>14</sup> Because emotional life is too varied and complex for each to have a corresponding physical experience, affections may have overlapping corporeal manifestations that make their sensations difficult to distinguish despite the plenitude of infused sensation. Lewis describes this as like writing a language that has more sounds than alphabet characters, or like transposing an orchestral piece for performance on the piano.<sup>15</sup> Emotion likewise *transposes* as it descends into the body, where it infuses sensation with 'transubstantiated' significance.<sup>16</sup> Imagining that the spiritual is derived from the natural is a mistake only a sceptic who does not understand the lower order of things would make.<sup>17</sup> One trying to understand only from the lower medium may see facts but he cannot see meaning (a view easily identified with disenchantment).<sup>18</sup> Any search for meaning must be oriented towards what is above, seeking to apprehend the spiritual in order that it may be transposed and in some limited way comprehended (a view easily identified with re-enchantment). Lewis ties this presciently to the problem of materialism which Affect Theory must seek a way through:

As long as this deliberate refusal to understand things from above, even where such understanding is possible, continues, it is idle to talk of any final victory over materialism. The critique of every experience from below, the voluntary ignoring of meaning and concentration on fact, will always have the same plausibility. There will always be evidence, and every month fresh evidence, to show that religion is only psychological, justice only self-protection,

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<sup>14</sup> Lewis, 'Transposition,' in *They Asked for a Paper* (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1962), 170.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

politics only economics, love only lust, and thought itself only cerebral biochemistry.<sup>19</sup>

More recently other scholars of religion have turned to Affect Theory. It might be fair to apply Lewis' categories to such efforts as those attempted from below and those attempted from above. Religious Studies as an academic field has, like nearly every other, taken some interest in Affect Theory. The American Academy of Religion announced in 2013 a five-year initiative on religion, affect, and emotion. This particular turn follows the course of Affect Theorists taking interest in religion as emergent from determinative relationships between affective bodies.<sup>20</sup> This turn to affect in religion is only nominally distinguishable from many non-religious studies, and may be a disenchanting project subject to Lewis' criticism of all facts without meaning.

Graham Ward is a theologian seeking to gain from Affect Theory what is useful for understanding meaning from above. His 2012 article 'Affect: Towards a Theology of Experience' merits detailed consideration. Ward's purpose is an engaged systematic theology concerned with the interrelated issues of the sanctification and formation of the soul—'its sentient life, its inner reflective life'—and secondly the soul's environment, because embodied souls continually undergo interactions with the world that fashion change.<sup>21</sup> Ward's concern is for the soul's mutability through interaction rather than some mechanistic visceral response of activated bodies. His interest is our non-conscious engagements prior to the will to act. These are not momentary conversions, nor biologically ingrained reactions, but changes accomplished through a lifetime of attunement. Affections are connected to emotional life, which is intimately connected with physiology, so the question is how these

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 181.

<sup>20</sup> Religion, Affect, and Emotion, a program unit of the American Academy of Religion annual conference, 2013-2017, accessed online 25 July 2016.

<sup>21</sup> Graham Ward, 'Affect: Towards a Theology of Experience,' in *Radical Orthodoxy: Theology, Philosophy, Politics* 1 (2012): 55.

integrate.<sup>22</sup> Ward's engagement of Affect Theory in terms of the active, dynamic, mutable soul, like Leys' critique and Lewis' turn to what is above, signal a way in which matters of interest to Affect Theory point to its potential significance.

Ward suggests emotions are always embodied. Cognitive science's research into affect enables an understanding of the vulnerability of the self with respect to immersion in the world. Coming to terms with such immersion involves somatic and cognitive processing to understand and manage our responses. The emotional processes for these responses are much more complex than the rational processes. The grace of God is what keeps this process from being impossibly overwhelming. These are not abstract engagements but embodied and contextual engagements that eclipse neither body nor context.<sup>23</sup> This unavoidable immersion would be unbearable alone, but our immersion is a participation in Christ's immersion in the world.<sup>24</sup>

The soul is conscious and preconscious, operating in cognitive, somatic, and spiritual fields. Spirit is the life within given to us as a gift and the life of God operating in and through Christ in creation.<sup>25</sup> Learning the way of a love which has no fear of death, no defensiveness, and no self-protective reaction is an undoing of evolutionary biology that adapted to ensure the survival of the species. Such learning would engender a biological transformation at the level of instinct, a part of our emotional memory to which we have no conscious access without revelation through prayer.<sup>26</sup> Ethical life begins in the heart's orientation towards fully loving God (heart knowledge), rather than obedience to civil rules or religious codes which are a matter of mind (head knowledge). Knowing in the heart may acknowledge rules as guides, but following God fully is a matter of the heart's orientation as much as obedience, and following is affective and corporeal, and thus it matters for the soul

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 73.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 74.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 75.

and spirit.<sup>27</sup> This is a form of prayer that is thinking *with* the material world in which God operates, in Christ, by the power of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is obedience and service that is active as well as receptive; duty but also free response. Patient endeavor is the way by which to transform mental assent and dutiful obedience into free spiritual cooperation with grace and nature.<sup>28</sup> The kind of renewal David Brown is advocating in theology and the arts is conducive to religious practice that thinks and creates with the material world.

Balanced with ‘Transposition’, Ward’s articulation of the soul as the link between conscious and preconscious engagement with God and the material world, as illuminated by prayer, for the purpose of human transformation, synchronizes helpfully into a starting point from which to reflect further upon religion and enchantment in a theatrical context. Affective exchange, such as might take place in the theatre, is not merely the arrival at propositional conclusions but includes the descent of the higher into the lower for the sake of transformation through experience. This is not clinical, nor is the experience the same for all participants; rather the transformation is as personal as it is actual. If such transformation is difficult, it is at least possible, and affective to some degree, by which we can infer some importance of traditional spirituality as well as engagement that transcends functionality for the sake of imaginative reflection. The task at hand is to consider how creative works may affect their audiences with religious experience, orient the audience towards the divine, and perhaps even mediate grace.

### **Early Modern Affect**

Shakespeare’s dramatic use of affect language is as intriguing as it is obfuscating. ‘Affect’ and fourteen derivative variations appear in all but four plays. Affect language appears in the first scene of eighteen plays. There are five speeches where language of affect is deliberately repeated. Venus and Mars are common referents for Shakespeare, but only

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 76.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

appear together in the same speech three times, and affect language is present in two of them.<sup>29</sup> Affections are vividly imagined as wrestling or being wrestled three times:

*Lewis* A noble temper dost thou show in this,  
And great affections wrestling in thy bosom  
Doth make an earthquake of nobility.'

(*King John*, V.ii.40-42)

*Hero* They did entreat me to acquaint her of it,  
But I persuaded them, if they lov'd Benedick,  
To wish him wrestle with affection,  
And never to let Beatrice know of it.'

(*Much Ado About Nothing*, III.i.40-43)

*Celia* Come, come, wrestle with thy affections.  
*Rosalind* O, they take the part of a better wrestler than myself!

(*As You Like It*, I.iii.21)

Shakespeare's awareness of Aristotle is occluded, but both speeches that mention him by name include affect language. Tranio's use in *The Taming of the Shrew* (I.i.25-40) is comical, but Hector's speech in *Troilus and Cressida* is so politically, rhetorically, and theoretically high-minded as to warrant quotation in full:

Paris and Troilus, you have both said well,  
And on the cause and question now in hand  
Have gloz'd, but superficially, not much  
Unlike young men, whom Aristotle thought  
Unfit to hear moral philosophy.  
The reasons you allege do more conduce  
To the hot passion of distemp' red blood  
Than to make up a free determination  
'Twixt right and wrong; for pleasure and revenge  
Have ears more deaf than adders to the voice  
Of any true decision. Nature craves  
All dues be rend' red to their owners: now,  
What nearer debt in all humanity  
Than wife is to the husband? If this law  
Of nature be corrupted through affection,  
And that great minds, of partial indulgence  
To their benumbed wills, resist the same  
There is a law in each well-order'd nation  
To curb those raging appetites that are  
Most disobedient and refractory.

(II.iii.163-82)

<sup>29</sup> *Antony and Cleopatra*, I.v.15-18; *Troilus and Cressida*, IV.v.177-80. If 'The Passionate Pilgrim' is authentic it also is an exception.

Leontes' in the first act of *The Winter's Tale* is perhaps the most provocative:

Affection! thy intention stabs the center.  
 Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
 Communicat'st with dreams (how can this be?),  
 With what's unreal thou co-active 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.) (I.ii.138-46)

And Prospero's use describing Ferdinand and Miranda's betrothal is also striking:

Fair encounter  
 Of two more rare affections! Heavens rain grace  
 On that which breeds between 'em! (III.i.74-76)

As we might expect, Shakespeare's use is varied and creative, but more evidently expressive of his own creative purposes than theory. How carefully might he have incorporated such language?

Happily, there have been a company of scholars who have looked through the turn to affect for contact points with early modern thought and culture. Some studies, like Donald Hedrick's 'Advantage, Affect, History, *Henry V*' are a turn to affect mostly in name. Drew Daniel's *The Melancholy Assemblage: Affect and Epistemology in the English Renaissance* is a focused study of physiological melancholy.<sup>30</sup> *Historical Affects and the Early Modern Theater* is a collection focused on political, economic, historicist, and materialist studies of the period in question but through a secular post-new historicist lens.<sup>31</sup>

The most pertinent advance is Richard Meek's and Erin Sullivan's 2015 collection *The Renaissance of Emotion: Understanding Affect in Shakespeare and His Contemporaries*. Their contributors turn between recent historicizing of emotion and Affect Theory towards Renaissance ideas of emotions, passions, and affects to see how these studies might be

<sup>30</sup> Drew Daniel, *The Melancholy Assemblage* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013).

<sup>31</sup> Ronda Arab, Michelle M. Dowd, and Adam Zucker, eds. *Historical Affects and the Early Modern Theater* (New York: Routledge, 2015).

mutually informative. Most studies of emotion have tended towards physiological determinism and the body as the passive subject of feeling.<sup>32</sup> Such studies have benefitted our understanding of a major current of historical phenomenology with respect to humoralism, however they have also obscured other present theories and practices.<sup>33</sup>

Meek and Sullivan advocate reconsideration of ‘what we believe to be three of the most important areas of influence: religious and philosophical belief, linguistic and literary form, and political and dramaturgical performance.’<sup>34</sup> Shakespeare particularly is exceptional in the extent to which medical-humoral theory does not account for his character’s emotional states and ripe for reconsideration in light of these areas of influence.<sup>35</sup>

In 2004 Gail Kern Paster, author of the prominent *Humoring the Body: Emotions and the Shakespearean Stage* offered a provocative critique:

One reason that we have preferred to talk about the body rather than the soul is that most of us as secular humanists no longer believe literally in the soul but have no choice but to believe literally in the body. I would argue 1) that we cannot recover the early modern body without its soul; and 2) that we are still far from doing all that needs to be done on the ensouled body.<sup>36</sup>

Meek and Sullivan have assembled one of the first major responses to this assessment. The volume’s Afterword questions the prospect of human value and liberty in a world wholly subject to materialism: ‘If we aren’t distinct, but simply subject to the same laws matter is (matter conceived as *without* might or soul) it is hard to find a place for agency, freedom.’<sup>37</sup> Whereas humoral psychology downplays human agency, there were Renaissance thinkers who imagined human life as capable of emotional freedom, and Shakespeare ascribed especial power to feelings as capable of engaging higher cognitive power and revealing some things in their truest form. Religion, art, and philosophy are the likely places to turn in

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<sup>32</sup> Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan, eds., *The Renaissance of Emotion* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015), 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 5.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>36</sup> Mary Floyd-Wilson, Matthew Greenfield, Gail Kern Paster, et al, ‘Shakespeare and Embodiment: an E-Conversation, in *Literature Compass* 2 (2005): 3.

<sup>37</sup> Peter Holbrook, Afterword to *Renaissance of Emotion*, 266.

looking for further revelation about how Shakespeare might have considered such matters, and where we might find insight into our own continued reflection on human value and agency.<sup>38</sup>

I am obliged to Sullivan for her reading of Thomas Wright's *The Passions of the Minde in Generall*, which has been under-read in focusing on physical humours to the neglect of Wright's philosophical and religious emphases. Published in 1601, *The Passions* is chronologically present to Shakespeare and thus indicative of contemporary treatment of the passions. As Sullivan explains, the affective relationship of body and soul was complex and views were not homogenous. Wright's theorizing is not a directive on how works like Shakespeare's must be interpreted, but there is latitude within which to read such works as giving serious account to spiritual thought.

*The Passions* identifies affective experience as 'part of a larger intellectual project addressing the complex relationship between the physical and the spiritual, the body and the soul, in both the private and public domains.'<sup>39</sup> According to Thomas Dixon, 'affection', while experientially similar to 'passion', had been more associated by Augustine and Aquinas with divine rather than worldly affectivity.<sup>40</sup> Wright, as a Jesuit Englishman, follows medieval philosophy in supposing faculties of reason and will in the non-corporeal, intellectual element of the soul.<sup>41</sup> Just as the mind could derive knowledge from the physical senses, the will could take up passionate sensation and become rational feeling. Hence:

'...embodied passion may apprehend something not only useful, but also otherwise unattainable by, the disembodied will, promoting the creation of a kind of affection that is essentially a form of reason. In this sense, passion, affection and reason are part of the same virtuous project, bound by an

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 265, 270.

<sup>39</sup> Erin Sullivan, 'The Passions of Thomas Wright: Renaissance Emotion across Body and Soul', in *The Renaissance of Emotion*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 33-34, 38; cf. Thomas Dixon, *From Passions to Emotions: The Creation of a Secular Psychological Category* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> Sullivan, 37.

integrated and holistic psycho-physiology that none the less retains scope for more dualistic and delimited forms of phenomenological experience.<sup>42</sup>

The theories and terminology involved were complex, and their use was often dependent on immediate context, but affectivity was thought capable of altering not only the body as it intermingled with mind and soul—especially in connection with the divine yearnings of the intellective soul.<sup>43</sup> In light of C. S. Lewis’ articulation of higher emotions transposing into physical manifestations, and Graham Ward’s consideration of affect as a form of prayer that thinks with the material world to orient the heart towards God, Meek and Sullivan provide a gate to thinking about the same matters as they were present to Shakespeare. The places to look deeper are religion and philosophy, linguistic and literary form, and political and dramaturgical performance. In the remaining sections of this chapter I take the preceding work and pivot towards a deeper connection to the closely-related subjects of rhetoric, wonder, and spiritual alchemy as integral to reading Shakespearean affect in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*. The final two chapters seek to draw all of these together in readings of this great couplet of plays.

## 2.2 RHETORIC AND MYTH IN *THE WINTER’S TALE*

Erin Sullivan acknowledges that in her treatment of Thomas Wright she did not include his persistent emphasis on rhetoric as a means of affective persuasion.<sup>44</sup> Such a study does at least exist on the literary questions of rhetoric and myth in *The Winter’s Tale*. Philip Lorenz has commented that early modern criticism’s turn to religion would have to negotiate how religious and rhetorical readings were related, ‘if only as a preliminary movement on the way to reconstituting the rhetoricity of the religious trope.’<sup>45</sup> Lorenz’s purpose for such an outcome has been considered, but rhetoric is an important subject for religion and for

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Lorenz, ‘Notes on the “Religious Turn”’, 168.

Shakespeare. The most successful conjunction of these three is Scott Crider's 2009 monograph *With What Persuasion: An Essay on Shakespeare and the Ethics of Rhetoric*. For reasons of scope I have been forced to leave aside the majority of Crider's fine rhetorical theory and focus on two points of significance: First, there are two ways of reading *The Winter's Tale*, and for an interpretation to have integrity it must attend to a mythical reading as well as a theatrical reading. The theatrical reading is the only one to have received consideration in the majority of criticism, and this is an oversight. The second point is that in *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare performs a complete ethical rhetoric, which compels the audience to embrace the narrative reality in which it is participating, and the uncertainty of which affects wonder and religious feeling.

In the last decades of criticism on Shakespeare and religion, no scene has been more scrutinized than the statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*, but these readings seldom recognize what Crider identifies as the mythical reading of the play. In contrast Crider explains why, according to play's intrinsic rhetoric, it is inadequate to ignore this interpretation. Crider's analysis is sympathetic to David Brown's assessment that myths are their own way of thinking. The play's ambiguity denies the exclusivity of either a theatrical or a mythical reading, 'enacting a tension between the two which is itself mythic, demanding as it does that the audience experience the moment as simultaneously both.'<sup>46</sup> Crider cites Jean-Pierre Vernant's explanation: '...myth brings into operation a form of logic that we may describe, in contrast to the logic of non-contradiction of the philosophers, as a logic of the ambiguous, the equivocal, a logic of polarity.'<sup>47</sup>

The mythical reading of *The Winter's Tale* is contingent on Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. Pygmalion is readily recognized as a source for *The Winter's Tale*, but Crider expands the Ovidian focus by remembering it is Orpheus who tells the tale. The Orphic frame is of a wife

<sup>46</sup> Scott Crider, *With What Persuasion* (New York: Peter Lang, 2009), 163.

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, trans. Janet Lloyd (New York: Zone Books, 1988), 260.

dead but able to be resurrected through art. She is not, but only because Orpheus doubts. The death of Eurydice is contrasted by the animation of Pygmalion's statue—a romance Orpheus tells to understand his own tragedy and rhetorically enact his 'desire for a mimesis which can transform the real.'<sup>48</sup> Orpheus' own story is a pagan mystery where death is absolute because his musical art is adequate for resurrection, but his faith and love are not.<sup>49</sup> Pygmalion has the inverse of Orpheus' virtues. His art is necessary but not sufficient to give life; yet his love for his beloved and his faith in the gods are unmitigated. Orpheus' telling of this tale is a comment on his failures of faith and/or love that makes his own tragic error intelligible, suggesting he is capable of educating himself.<sup>50</sup> For Orpheus this romance is unrealized idealism. The story he tells comes too late to be enacted. Shakespeare is perceptive enough to connect tale with frame, and close the gap in the pagan mystery.

The perfection of faith and love implicit in Ovid is explicit in 1 Corinthians. Crider focuses on the intertextual moments of faith, hope, and love in 13:13 and resurrection in chapter 15. The frame of 1 Corinthians is also important, and itself deliberately rhetorical. St Paul, the penultimate Christian rhetor, purposes to reconcile a community divided by dissension and immorality.<sup>51</sup> Chapter 13 is the great Pauline paean to love, culminating in verse 13: 'And now abideth faith, hope & love, even these three: but the chiefest of these is love.' The 1560 Geneva Bible marginal commentary on love in 13:13 reads, 'Because it serveth both here & in the life to come: but faith and hope aperteine only to this life.' Crider draws attention to the commentary for 13:2 where faith is 'the gift of doing miracles'.<sup>52</sup> The central miracle is resurrection, and faith is a gift of doing, rather than merely bearing witness to, an activity that exceeds nature's capacity. Where faith assumes that the body can be

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<sup>48</sup> Crider, 164.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 174.

redeemed, hope desires it. Crider tidily summarizes his interpretation: ‘If hope is a desire for redemption, and faith an assumption of its possibility, then love is its achievement.’<sup>53</sup>

In chapter 15, Christ’s resurrection is a sign of love that graciously fulfils his obedience unto death. Crider interprets 15:12-13 to mean that Christ’s bodily resurrection is possible because bodily resurrection is possible: ‘Now if it be preached, that Christ is risen from the dead, how say some among you, that there is no resurrection of the dead? For if there be no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen.’<sup>54</sup> Shakespeare does not limit his art to Christological resurrection, and can work it out in *The Winter’s Tale* as the uncertain conjunction of Ovid’s return from death to this life (that fails for lack of faith), and the Pauline triumph of faith over death that emphasizes the life to come. The earthly body dies because of sin, but is raised through human participation in divine grace that is expressed as faith, hope, and love.<sup>55</sup>

Shakespeare, again, has not only appropriated his sources but metamorphosed them. The statue scene is an interrogation of the relationship of art to nature, an interrogation of what it means for mimesis to become reality.<sup>56</sup> This interrogation takes place, thanks to the Orphic frame, animated by the romantic desire to conquer death.<sup>57</sup> The potential for resurrection through art is activated by Christian virtues’ completion of classical virtues. The mimetic world of the play opens a mythopoesis between the Ovidian and the Pauline, wherein Hermione dies, then is a statue, then becomes a woman.<sup>58</sup> This is the mythical reading of *The Winter’s Tale*.

The theatrical reading assumes narratively that Hermione never died. Having been cloistered, in the last scene she pretends to be a statue, performing the animation from stone

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 175.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 168.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 162-63.

to person and awakening faith through imitation of resurrection. In live performance this is exactly what happens. The potential narrative doubling of performed realism is, as so many critics recognize, itself imaginatively compelling, especially for those who take a sceptical view of enchantment as illusion. But Crider rejects this exclusive interpretation because it cuts against the narrative grain of the play. Crider identifies seven points in the play that have bearing on the question of Hermione's resurrection. Each can be interpreted theatrically or mythically, but neither mode can offer the best account of more than five of them.<sup>59</sup> It is helpful to see these in comparison for the sake of their effects:

1. Paulina declares Hermione is dead.	Theatrical	Mythical
2. Antigonus recounts the visitation of Hermione's ghost.	—	Mythical
3. Paulina suggests Leontes remarry when Hermione again lives.	Theatrical	Mythical
4. The Third Gentleman tells of the statue's existence.	Theatrical	Mythical
5. The Second Gentleman says Paulina visits the chapel daily.	Theatrical	—
6. Hermione explains the events in the chapel.	Theatrical	—
7. Leontes states he saw Hermione dead.	—	Mythical

The theatrical interpretation can only account for the visitation of Hermione's ghost to Antigonus as his imagination. We also have to believe that when Leontes says he saw his wife dead (5.3.140) he was mistaken. Mythically, assuming Hermione has died, we struggle to understand why, according to the Second Gentleman's indirect account, Paulina would daily visit the chapel where Hermione is entombed. Even more puzzling is Hermione's explanation of events in the last scene, that she has preserved herself to see the issue.

Shakespeare has constructed a plot that cannot be reconciled to itself, and the intricacies of interpretation are even more complex than Crider indicates, for he does not make Hermione's wrinkles a point needing reconciliation. The disenchanting fallback is that the theatrical interpretation must be correct despite its shortcomings, since any performed meaning will be effected theatrically.<sup>60</sup> This disregards the central ambiguity Shakespeare designed to make it impossible for any performance to be fully persuasive one way or the other. The main point is that the mythical logic of the play cannot be ignored, and can only be

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 171.

experienced on its own terms. Crider suggests Shakespeare has created a play where the theatrical and the mythical readings have to be taken equally into account, and within the mythical reading the pagan and Christian influences are equally subverted to Shakespeare's larger creative purpose that does not privilege either. As Crider asks, 'Can we awaken our faith in the presence of death?'<sup>61</sup> He sees Shakespeare's logic as polar in its mysticism. But if awakened faith, like resurrection, is possible, it seems worth further considering if it be predicated on more than such a disjunction.

The second main point from *With What Persuasion* is the rhetorical fulfilment of the first: *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's performance of a complete ethical rhetoric, which compels the audience to embrace the narrative reality in which it is participating, and the uncertainty of which affects wonder and religious feeling. Shakespeare's education at the King's New School, suited as it was to the training of clerics, lawyers, and soldiers, included extensive practice in the art of rhetoric. His teachers being Ciceronian humanists, the lessons were more than rhetorical *techne*:

The rhetor fashions the souls of his or her audience to be disposed toward the subject at hand and to act upon that disposition, and in the selection of means to end, one sees a standard of ethical rhetoric: The good sought must be shared; the means must be legitimate and effective.<sup>62</sup>

Rhetoric, in order to be complete and ethical, must be virtuous in its means and its ends. The rhetor leads souls through words.<sup>63</sup> *The Winter's Tale* is Shakespeare's best example of this complete ethic of the rhetor leading and the auditors being led. Rhetoric is introduced thematically into *The Winter's Tale* through Shakespeare's combined use of *Metamorphoses* and I Corinthians. The two ultimate rhetors, Orpheus and Christ, represent the highest potential of both classical and Christian rhetoric, which in the play suggest 'the power to animate the subject matter of speech, the power finally...to raise the dead, an act that both the

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 172.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 187.

classical and the Christian rhetorical traditions imagine as fulfilling the art of ethical rhetoric.<sup>64</sup> Rhetoric is introduced theatrically through Paulina as the idealized rhetor. It is her agency that leads the souls of the characters and audience to ethical rejuvenation through wonder.

Shakespeare's use of enthymeme to draw together the effect of *The Winter's Tale* is his highest creative rhetorical art: 'An enthymeme is an elliptical syllogism composed of probable premises, as opposed to a fully articulated syllogism made of either certain ones (as in a scientific syllogism) or probable ones (as in a dialectical one).'<sup>65</sup> The successful rhetor knows to leave unsaid the proof that the audience already believes.<sup>66</sup> This is, according to Aristotle, the very 'substance of rhetorical persuasion,'<sup>67</sup> and the *body* of rhetoric which must be interpreted.<sup>68</sup> Crider argues the enthymeme encompasses *logos*, *ethos*, and *pathos*, and the soul that corresponds to the body of rhetoric is 'the human association of rhetor and audience: the enthymeme is the discursive body of community.'<sup>69</sup> Shakespeare becomes fascinated in the late plays with this triangle of influence between rhetor, audience, and subject, and he starts to discover beyond rhetorical formulae an art of ethical persuasion that exceeds political speech.<sup>70</sup> *The Winter's Tale* is boldest and most successful in representing an ethical rhetoric with the power to animate the subject matter. The play literally depicts the discourse of rhetor, subject, and audience in Paulina, the statue, and the gathered characters. Crider goes a step further to contend that in Paulina's rhetorical enterprise we see Shakespeare's understanding of his own ethical rhetoric, with the above associations representing his understood roles for himself, the image of the play, and the audience.<sup>71</sup> Much ink has been

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 145-46.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid., 40 n.13.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 39, citing *Poetics* 1354a15.

<sup>68</sup> Crider, 66.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 70 n.61.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid., 78.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 146.

poured out on Shakespeare's ostensible self-identification with Prospero. Crider's reasonable extrapolation of Shakespeare's self-conscious yet discreet art in *The Winter's Tale* broadens the context in which we must make such considerations. Leontes' faith causes Hermione's reanimation,<sup>72</sup> but Paulina's requirement that 'You do awake your faith' is grammatically ambiguous, meaning that she may be speaking to him, to the audience in the play, or, by now-obvious implication, the audience of the play. The play may reveal the character of the auditor's faith, but rhetorically the opposite is also possible: the faith of the audience reveals the character of the play. Shakespeare has appealed to this, as the soul of entymeme reanimates the subject of the body. Such faith is not possible without hope, and love is the fullness for both. Per 1 Corinthians 15, the dead shall ultimately be raised incorruptible. The ideal human anticipation of this *telos* is grace cooperating with nature to redeem the body. However imperfect most results may be, the ideal of leading souls through words has no lower aspiration than being born again. The heart of stone is made flesh after all.

For an age of critical scepticism such as the present, the mythical enchantment of the play is so dissonant it cannot be heard. For an age like Shakespeare's own, predisposed in so many ways to sentiment and superstition, the jarring uncertainty of Hermione's resurrection could also have been difficult. This is perhaps a reason *The Winter's Tale* has at times been disliked, yet so few Shakespeareans can ignore it. Crider writes:

Can the lyre of Orpheus really raise the dead? A just representation of such a question must be double, both theatrical and mythic simultaneously. If the theatrical dominates, as it now does, death overwhelms art, and a nihilistic version of scepticism reigns; if the mythical were to dominate, art would overwhelm death, and a sanguine piece of sentimentalism would do so. Shakespeare succeeds in holding that doubleness in so fine a tension that a mature performance of the play requires that those involved, on the stage and in the audience, must descend into the ambiguity of (im)mortality. For some, Hermione does not die, so she is not reanimated; for others, she dies, so she is. Both responses are inadequate. Ultimately, the play discloses to us the

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 156. Leontes' faith is one of the efficient causes of reanimation.

character of our own faith, compelling us to live a question about ourselves:  
Can we awaken faith in the presence of death?<sup>73</sup>

This ambiguity of (im)mortality is the serious business of romance. Awakening faith in the presence of death is not a subject disenchanted criticism takes seriously, and so precludes a full half of the interpretive possibilities of *The Winter's Tale*. The mythical reading of *The Winter's Tale* is ripe for further consideration, and I am obliged to Crider for opening prospects for such a study from another necessary perspective. Crider also leaves off with *The Winter's Tale* whereas I suggest it is best understood together with *The Tempest*. I suggest Prospero's rhetoric is powerful as his magic is powerful, and he abjures this too in favour of a greater freedom of the soul.

### 2.3 WONDER IN SHAKESPEARE'S THEATRE: THE POETICS OF INCARNATION

In 2012 Adam Max Cohen's *Wonder in Shakespeare* was published posthumously. Despite the significance of the subject, and the addition of essays from a number of his colleagues, the book has a disappointing lack of complexity. This is probably the unfortunate result of his draft manuscript being rushed to completion in the face of terminal illness. We can only wonder what the result might have been had a scholar of Cohen's calibre completed it under normal circumstances. The subject is an important one, and for questions of religion it has been underutilized. From a theological perspective there seems promise in the title of Cecilia González-Andrieu's 2012 monograph *Bridge to Wonder: Art as a Gospel of Beauty*. The book itself however is more generally apologetic for the role of art as revelatory: 'Our desire to find and our ability to interact with revelatory symbols is one way to provide a positive answer to the question about the existence of God, and also to cultivate an experience that will effectively and affectively continue to activate the answer in the human person.'<sup>74</sup> González-Andrieu's proposal relies on systematic theology and aesthetic

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<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 172-73.

<sup>74</sup> Cecilia González-Andrieu, *Bridge to Wonder* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2012), 22.

experience, but it remains task-oriented, and wonder is a self-evident object to which we should endeavour to build a bridge.<sup>75</sup> David Richman makes a cursory identification of wonder as an appropriate response to miraculous or surprising events as well as a response to poetry.<sup>76</sup> Wonder is in many ways akin to affect: The elevated experience of ‘betweenness’ that signifies meaning tensed between bodies. For T. G. Bishop’s articulation of theatrical wonder, the tension signifies meaning beyond the performed experience, which functions in a manner unmistakably familiar to religion.

*Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* has been in print for two decades, but I now turn back to it because Bishop’s perceptive reading of Shakespeare, despite appearing in a plethora of critical biographies since its publication, has been more silently acknowledged than recognized for its significance to questions of Shakespeare and religion. Bishop’s exposition of wonder is, I think, a religious study in the form of a literary one—offering grounds from a literary-critical perspective for imaginative engagement between religious experience and art. Bishop precedes Scott Crider and other more-recent scholars who have reformed profitable studies of Shakespeare balancing criticism through philosophy, theology, rhetoric, and aesthetics. These are considered in light of classical, medieval, early modern, and subsequent periods of theory as well as present-day criticism. Besides sympathy with David Brown’s theological work on the same subject, this is the kind of study called for by Jackson and Marotti as well as Meek and Sullivan.<sup>77</sup>

Like Charles Williams et al, Bishop sees in Shakespeare’s corpus a continuous developmental arc. Moreover, Shakespeare’s deliberate and creative incorporation of a theory of wonder is not a late development but already integral in so early a play as *The Comedy of*

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>76</sup> David Richman, *Laughter, Pain, and Wonder* (London: Associated University Presses, 1990), 93. Richman’s study is oriented towards direction and performance history with its subsequent value here superseded by other scholarship.

<sup>77</sup> Neither *Shakespeare and Religion* nor *The Renaissance of Emotion* acknowledge *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder*.

*Errors*.<sup>78</sup> The romantic turn to wonder is not a late climactic revelation but a mode of which Shakespeare was aware from the beginning and to which he continually returned. Bishop opens with Aristotle's articulation of drama as an alternate form of knowledge to philosophy that also reflects on itself as a form of knowledge.<sup>79</sup> He then moves to reading through Thomistic philosophy a theory of wonder sensitive to medieval influences of sacramental signs. Finally Bishop reads Shakespeare's reworking of an inherited dramaturgy of wonder into a 'poetics of incarnation.'<sup>80</sup> For Shakespeare, this is a therapeutic magic with a natural impulse to restore a world somehow gone wrong.<sup>81</sup>

### **Classical Poetics, Medieval Theology, and Wonder**

Bishop opens from the position that theatre audiences deliberately surrender to the play's control of the dramatic experience. Unlike written narrative, the tempo of the experience cannot be controlled, neither can it be suspended subject to receptive mood. There is no push-button skipping ahead or repetition. And, whereas music and film play out in a unity of time that the audience experiences, theatre is unique in that it moves at once in two 'moments': the remote moment of the narrative in which the audience and actors acquiesce to the common fiction, and the performative moment of theatre in which the play is activated in the audience's presence through words and gestures. It is the latter moment from which actors can deliberately or spontaneously appeal to the audience as well as respond to it. A stage actor moves between these moments, and across the footlights: 'The deepest work of theatrical representation is to make spectators see and feel these two moments in mutual implication.'<sup>82</sup> Short of breaking off surrender to the dramatic experience, the way for an audience member to affect the performance is to become an active participant. Most

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<sup>78</sup> Evans and Tobin, 79: *Comedy of Errors* is dated circa 1592-94.

<sup>79</sup> T. G. Bishop, *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 13. Jean-Pierre Vernant's description of myth above is also sympathetic for Bishop's articulation of drama.

<sup>80</sup> Bishop, 15.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

audiences navigate across this boundary in a way both sophisticated and unreflective, and it is in this transfer that theatre is most strange and powerful.<sup>83</sup>

This ‘betweenness’ is different from other perceptions between observer and observed in that theatre doubles the perception:

We see what is not in what is, a fabling link the more insistent in that so much of the material out of which theatrical fiction is made is demonstrably real material: real bodies, real objects, words really uttered. Seeing, feeling, and knowing are peculiarly framed and directed at themselves, and the various ways from sense to its objects and back are opened to exploration. Perception is liable at any moment to become the theater’s subject, so that theater is always about to suggest a theory of itself, just as at the same time it points beyond itself to an imagined ‘regular’ world. Again, it is in the relation between the two inquiries, into itself and into the world, that the theater performs its poetic work.<sup>84</sup>

Wonder is an elevated experience of theatre’s betweenness. The intermediacy tenses emotion between performance and response, between possibility and impossibility, between belief and doubt, between reason and sentiment. More than the effect of spectacle, wonder is the affect between players and auditors—who are themselves actively seen and heard.<sup>85</sup>

Both Plato and Aristotle held wonder as an intermediary between poetry and philosophy.<sup>86</sup> Aristotle more-particularly thought of wonder as an emotional response to events framed under a particular pressure towards revelation of significance.<sup>87</sup> Perhaps unlike philosophy, theatre does not seek emotion to analyze it, nor as an intermediary to critical thought. Theatre fosters wonder that elevates subjects and objects of perception under extreme conditions. Wonder is a ‘switch point’ for exchanges between emotion and reason. This places emotion relative to understanding, so that it weighs in the significance of thought or action. Rather than acquiring knowledge, wonder is directed towards perception of

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Plato’s reservations about the unpredictable effects of poetry are well-known and readily identified in *Republic* III, X, and elsewhere, but allegations that he wished to deny or reject the power of poetry do not amount to credible interpretation.

<sup>87</sup> Bishop, 3.

meaning.<sup>88</sup> Wonder does this as it also holds the emotional connection between the audience and the performance.<sup>89</sup>

For Aristotle, wonder is integrated in the learning and reasoning of mimesis.<sup>90</sup> Passing over Bishop's fine exposition of Aristotle, the outcome is that the audience's attention is directed to the performed fiction that is charged with significance. In the performed fiction's doubled moments, the audience's attention is also directed to the dramatic medium creating the fiction, akin to seeing a reflection in glass through which one simultaneously looks to see what is beyond. This is the same meta-image we have already seen in others' theorizing of poetry and poetic faith, here applied through Aristotle to dramaturgy: the mechanism is made a part of the image for which it is the semiotic. The transparent but reflective mechanism is the looking glass to wonderland. The theatre, activated by this wonder, allegorizes itself and the audience's participation in it.<sup>91</sup> Images of theatre-as-world and world-as-theatre transcend mere metaphor through this dynamic. Wonder is an elevated self-reflective experience, and Aristotle suggests it is emotional pressure towards revealed significance. This is a poetics of incarnation, but Bishop does not expressly consider what might be beyond in this looking glass that focuses the image, the medium, and the reflection. Malcolm Guite is less reticent to baptize this poetics of incarnation: 'From that window sometimes shines a more than earthly light that suddenly transforms, *transfigures* all the earthly things it falls upon.'<sup>92</sup>

The revival of Aristotle's *Poetics* in the middle of the sixteenth century generated immense attention from Italian and French humanists. Bishop identifies a large movement to converge Aristotelian poetics with interpretations of Plato on the same subject, filter these through the Neo-Platonists, and contextualize the culminative result in the rhetoric of Horace and Cicero. While Shakespeare's direct awareness of any Aristotelian thought or writing is

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 11.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>92</sup> Guite, 16.

not demonstrable, at least two themes were consistently significant to Aristotle and Shakespeare: *admiratio* ('wonder') as a goal of dramatic structure, and *katharsis* as moral and social justification of poetry. While *katharsis* has been the subject of four-plus centuries' uninterrupted critical scrutiny, *admiratio* had until recently dropped from critical attention despite Renaissance theory placing it as the primary goal of poetry.<sup>93</sup> Though Shakespeare was by consensus less attentive to formal theory than contemporaries such as Ben Jonson, he is clearly interested in drama as a species of knowledge. Transitioning from classical theatre through medieval mystery plays to early modern drama, wonder becomes not a form of audience coercion towards prescribed effects, nor mere aesthetic pleasure, but 'a site for the complex modulation of audience identification and detachment, making the "between" of the theoretical performance a space of semiotic and psychological experiment, through which the audience, like the characters, must negotiate a way.'<sup>94</sup> This is the early modern theatricization of the dynamic now drawing attention from Affect Theorists.

Moving to medieval thought, Bishop identifies the theology of sacramental signs as a bridge between an individual gesture and its figurative resonance. This connection was the essence of the priestly performance of the mass. A sacrament is a sign of a sacred reality that pertains to men and provides their sanctification.<sup>95</sup> Thomas Aquinas further articulates:

Now it is connatural to men to arrive at a knowledge of intelligible realities through sensible ones, and a sign is something through which a person arrives at knowledge of some further thing beyond itself. Moreover the sacred realities signified by the sacraments are certain spiritual and intelligible goods by which man is sanctified. And the consequence of this fact is that the function of the sacrament as signifying is implemented by means of some sensible realities. The case here is similar to that in the holy Scriptures where, in order to describe spiritual realities to us, corresponding sensible realities are used to illustrate them.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Bishop, 37.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid.*, 43, in reference to *Summa*, 30a.60.2.

<sup>96</sup> Bishop, 44; *Summa*, 3a.60.4. Bishop's unattributed translations are quoted as his own (cf. Bishop, p.179 n.14).

Thomas, student of Aristotle that he was, proposed understanding intelligible realities through sensate material realities. The cognitive activity of a church audience is oriented by what they see towards understanding what they cannot see.<sup>97</sup> The sensible aspect is not discounted since it is the material/immanent expression of the divine/transcendent. The same divine order permeates both; the divine is seen through the glass of the material.

Dramaturgically, medieval mystery plays emphasized revelation through material enactments of the ultimate reality that is beyond.<sup>98</sup> Lacking formal sacramental identity, drama should not have been confused with sacramental realities, but Thomas acknowledged signs apart from the seven sacraments which may not signify *and* sanctify, but do ‘signify a disposition to sanctity.’<sup>99</sup> According to Bishop, the space where materials and bodies form a signifying correspondence with spiritual realities is the space governed by wonder as the elevated experience of performed betweenness. Despite their differences, medieval mystery cycles and Greek theatre share a dramaturgical urge to fuse voice and substance—an expression of the mystery underlying the sacramental order: *the word was made flesh*.<sup>100</sup>

### **Wonder in *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter’s Tale***

Turning from classical theory and medieval theology to wonder in Shakespeare, Bishop first considers *The Comedy of Errors* at length to identify the model that Shakespeare developed very early for the secular theatre. Present in the narrative, poetic, and social dimensions of performance, Shakespeare’s dynamic of wonder turns in its climax to self-

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<sup>97</sup> Bishop, 44.

<sup>98</sup> Ibid.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 44. Reference is to *Summa*, 3a.60.2. Thomas references the sprinkling of holy water and consecration of altars. Solemn Corpus Christi processions of a consecrated host and other para-liturgical acts could fit this category. David Brown has also written about the significant role of sacramentals in Catholic life, though he does not adhere to Catholic theology’s distinction of sacramentals’ importance under the auspices of formal sacraments. Bishop, following Aquinas, recognizes the distinction. See Brown, *Enchantment of Place*, 29 and 410. See also *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Washington, DC: USCCB Publishing, 2000), 2.4.1.1667; *Catholic Encyclopedia* (New York: Robert Appleton, 1912), s.v. ‘sacramentals’; and *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Thomson Gale, 2003), s.v. ‘sacramentals’.

<sup>100</sup> Bishop, 47.

recognition of its own practice.<sup>101</sup> This ‘revisionary conservatism’ is a self-conscious reworking of inherited sources and themes, by which he subjects said sources to critical analysis, remaking them in the process for their present purposed significance.<sup>102</sup> Unlike others working in the same period who sought antiquated forms for legitimization of their own work (e.g. Gosson, Jonson), Shakespeare preferred to absorb these without polemic, adapting them through metaphor and metamorphosis.<sup>103</sup>

According to Bishop, *The Comedy of Errors* is technically a transformative *contaminatio*<sup>104</sup> from romantic dramas of wandering, Plautine dramatic linearity, and Pauline sacramental community.<sup>105</sup> In brief, through twin characters and oppositionally-twinning metanarrative emblems (chain/line : water :: law : nature :: Plautus : Paulus), Shakespeare creates a hybrid narrative that addresses what new kind of story might overcome death.<sup>106</sup> The linear narrative of time is unopposable in the Plautine-lawful-chained trajectory, but that trajectory dissolves in the oceanic-natural when Shakespeare completes the Pauline dimension. ‘Line’ has the expansive meaning not only of linearity and rope/chain—both of which are abundant in the imagery of *Comedy of Errors* as images of binding and ordering—but also the structure of verse. Bishop traces out in detail that Shakespeare’s poetry is working the method of its storytelling in the structure of its line patterns.<sup>107</sup> The doubled narrative lines of the play cross and re-cross without binding until the end when Shakespeare adds a third strand. This is the dissolution of order. However, it is not the breakdown of order into chaos and death but a re-ordering unto *life*.<sup>108</sup> Bishop identifies that from very early on, ‘Shakespeare’s principal point of connection to theology is not through sin but through the

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>104</sup> *Oxford Classical Dictionary*, ed. Simon Hornblower and Antony Spawforth (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), s.v. ‘*contaminatio*’: ‘A word used by modern scholars to express the procedure of Terence (and perhaps Plautus) in incorporating material from another play which he was adapting.’

<sup>105</sup> Bishop, 75.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 84.

notions of incarnation and the sacramental, where word and matter, spirit and flesh are explicitly confounded in the creation of communal forms of life.’<sup>109</sup>

Drawing together the Plautine and the Pauline, it is the latter (whose epistle to Ephesus seeks to heal a fragmented community) which transcends. Overcoming the inexorable narrative linearity of time and death, Shakespeare does something new, dividing and fragmenting not to dissolve into chaos but to resolve into a greater compound.<sup>110</sup> This is activated by love:

Metamorphic Eros occupies the middle ground between rope and water, ‘error’ as fatal mistake and ‘error’ as endless deviation. The fusion of the erotic with the sacramental is a combination that comes to be characteristic of Shakespeare’s work. ... The crucial importance of Paul’s letter to the play thus comes into clearer focus. Paul’s vision of erotic desire in marriage as a social counterpart to the Word-as-Flesh undergirds Shakespeare’s contamination of boundary with flux, a move that at once dissolves law and circumscribes ocean.<sup>111</sup>

Homophonically, the play is, nearly, *The Comedy of Eros*.<sup>112</sup> *Eros* is metamorphic, but it is activated by the metaphoric. Rope/chain/line is a figure of bondage and law, but as metaphor it highlights a contrary poetic power of language both ordered and generative.<sup>113</sup> It is *Pauline*, but it is also Shakespeare doing something more.<sup>114</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Ibid. Other scholars have made the same connection, though not always with the same geniality. Besides the work of Sarah Beckwith, Kimberly Johnson, and Regina Schwartz, see: Jeffrey Knapp, *Shakespeare’s Tribe: Church, Nation, and Theater in Renaissance England*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009); Michael O’Connell, *The Idolatrous Eye: Iconoclasm and Theater in Early-Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

<sup>110</sup> Bishop, 84.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid. Bishop also comments on the suitability of Plato’s *Phaedrus* for the theorizing of wonder (e.g. 22-25, 29, 89). Shakespeare’s familiarity with the *Phaedrus* is more readily conceivable than his familiarity with other Platonic dialogues (Knight affirms this also, *Crown of Life*, 228), and there is a recognizable similarity between *eros* in Shakespeare’s use and Socrates’ great myth of the charioteer.

<sup>112</sup> Paul Meier, ‘The Original Pronunciation (OP) of Shakespeare’s English’, 6: The last syllable would have received heavy r-coloration.

<sup>113</sup> Bishop, 86.

<sup>114</sup> The analysis here is Bishop’s, but he does not acknowledge this weighty pun. Bishop also does not mention Solinus’ line at I.i.5: ‘The enmity and discord which of late’ bears a curse of death. Nor does he mention Dromio of Ephesus’ chiasm at V.i.289-291: ‘Within this hour I was his *bond*man, sir, / But he, I thank him, gnaw’d in two my *cords*: / Now am I Dromio, and his man, unbound.’ Discord begets death, but also liberty. The overlap of string, music, and heart (Latin *cor*, *cordis*) in ‘cord’ warrants continual consideration in Shakespeare’s usage.

This exposition needs careful religious handling. Shakespeare's use of Pauline epistles is not doctrinal but rather, as Scott Crider has also demonstrated, an imaginative poesis of incarnation as a unifying trope. This includes unity between play and audience. Incarnation as the goal of poetry is a form of 'real presence' where language is the informing power. Language and dramatic experience twin in their symbiosis, offering an imaginative unity familiar to medieval theology in its being a sign that acts.<sup>115</sup> The theology is a natural theology, bound in sacramental semiosis but unbound from an ecclesial framework either Catholic or Reformed. Yet, in its ordering principles the theology is traditional: the material world images deeper spiritual realities, and these are activated through words. Shakespeare is neither playing God nor defying him. This is not a secularization but a re-sacralisation that gives vitality to flesh through language.<sup>116</sup> Contrary to the New Historicist endeavours to trope religion through its alterity for some ulterior interpretive purpose, Bishop presents a model sympathetic to sincere, lived spiritual vitality. This adds to the means by which Shakespeare and religion may be read together sympathetically.

For *The Comedy of Errors* the proof is in the conclusion. The amelioration of the narrative concludes in the figure of Aemilia, who is motherhood and matrimony. She is earthly mother to the Dromios. As abbess she is also spiritual mother. She is Egeon's earthly wife, but also the bride in whom the living body of the community is restored by her spiritual labours. Flesh and spirit are doubled as self and other, but recognized as one, just as the twins mirror each other in their images and their language.<sup>117</sup> The gratifying paradox of these doublings shows the extent of Shakespeare's dramaturgy through knowledge and wonder. Incarnate in the characters, who in the end finally share the audience's knowledge, the exhilaration of wonder is mutual across the porous boundary between players and audience,

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<sup>115</sup> Bishop, 87. Jeffrey Knapp, credited for a similar conclusion, does not reference *Shakespeare and the Theater of Wonder in Shakespeare's Tribe* (2002) or *Shakespeare Only* (2009).

<sup>116</sup> Bishop, 88.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

who in their own doubling reflect beyond themselves to something more transcendent.<sup>118</sup> But this doubling is obviously not dualist. Good and bad, spiritual and material are not gnostically polarized. The chain that binds is the great chain of being. The world may be broken, but it can be repaired, and is worth repairing, and by creative generation people may contribute to its restoration.

After the *Comedy of Errors*, Bishop skips to the end of Shakespeare's dramatic career with readings of *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. A few of Bishop's points on *Pericles* are constructive to the larger thesis. In V.i Pericles is confronted by the natural sign of Marina's family resemblance, which allows him to vent his suffering. Despite what Pericles thinks is true, her 'miraculous' presence provides a reassurance whereby he can see and say what is actually true though he does not know he knows it.<sup>119</sup> Shakespeare's metaphoric tension—between self, world, and language—allows the possibility that the correspondence between these might be true, however unlikely or difficult to achieve. In this first post-tragic play, the miracle is that the metaphor comes to be precisely true. Marina's needlework and songs (once again lines and lines, cords and chords, remade by *ocean*) exemplify this precise correspondence of her matching material images to knowledge. This is done in confrontation with those who threaten her, remaking the apparently-inevitable tragic outcome. By metaphor the world is delivered to itself in a more desirable form.<sup>120</sup> Metaphor may identify an image's unchanging value without making it static. Through narrative (David Brown and Scott Crider would say 'myth') comes a way of telling a story that makes the past intelligible for the sake of what may yet become true. The power of such narrative is thus uncertain, even unsafe, but the destabilizing dynamic of wonder is this salubrious disruption of self and world.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 116.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 117.

Bishop suggests that Marina is an image of Shakespeare's poetic inheritance and how he transformed it. Between the medieval and modern conceptions of what poetry is, at the historical midpoint of Western culture's continually-vexed reflection on the Incarnation (troped as a miraculous conjunction of the natural and the verbal), Shakespeare pushes the envelope of subjection to natural processes, 'deliberately using that liminality as a source of intensely figurative energy.'<sup>122</sup> Bishop calls this a 'miraculous yet non-transcendent' poetic labour in play form.<sup>123</sup> Shakespeare may have been reticent in *Pericles* to represent transcendence, but he has at least pushed his poetics of incarnation far enough that Pericles hears the music of the spheres.

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Shakespeare creates a hybrid plot where narrative begets life. The story breaks the inevitability of time and death into disorder, which in a comedic turn of love is able to resolve not into death, but into a greater life than what was lost. Eros is the tension between fateful inevitability and dissolution into chaos that derives meaning from disorder. Bishop's point is that what can be said about *The Comedy of Errors* can also be said about *The Winter's Tale*. The latter however is much more tragic in the first three acts. Bishop connects the central theme of *The Winter's Tale* to its working-out of the title in Mamillius' 'A sad tale's best for winter' (II.i.25). Both Mamillius' tale and his playing are a child's models of what takes place in the drama writ large:

Change, ambivalence, the presence of contrary states of being or feeling in developmental dialectic with one another: how are these to be accommodated, processed, and represented by and to the ongoing self that mediates them? ... Shakespeare's play will also be understood as a tale told to mediate a complex ambivalence, to respond to a developmental pressure by acting on it symbolically through the control and disposition of the energies of narrative.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 121.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 143.

These complexities multiply in the middle of the play. Leontes' tragic theatricizing of uncertainty and blame is juxtaposed with the theatricizing of Cleomenes and Dion as they present the oracle's certain knowledge.<sup>125</sup> By their recounting at the beginning of Act III, the revelation of the oracle is wondrous affair. Were we to experience the absolute nature of their account directly, the removal of any allowance for scepticism would abolish the theatrical conceit itself. The oracle's unusual clarity is an anti-theatrical revelation whose meaning is independent of context.<sup>126</sup> But because we, like Leontes, only experience the content of the oracle and not its revelation, we are not affected through direct apprehension and therefore knowledge is delayed. Subsequent to the tragic consequences of Act III, Paulina's theatre of remorse is a stasis of abjection that cannot move the gods to compassion (III.ii.210-14) or find its own resolution. Leontes seeks to pay the price of his transgressions, not transcend them. He, just as much as Hermione if not more so, is ossified in the tableau of penitence. Despite his repentance, for sixteen years Leontes retains a heart of stone. Without the presence of Hermione with whom he is one flesh, and further lacking progeny who are his flesh and blood, a tragic conclusion has been forestalled but not prevented.<sup>127</sup>

*The Winter's Tale* resists resolution through self-fashioning. Leontes' attempt to do so is disastrous. Not until Prospero do we see such a capability, and he too comes to realize the limitations of such perceived autonomy. Paulina may have projected some final work that is hers to accomplish, but she too is dependent, waiting for the circumstantial resolution of the oracle. The mere-theatrical reading of *The Winter's Tale* insists on Hermione living reclusively until the last act, and that her transformation from stone to life is performed in every respect. The question of her death however could be seen as almost entirely contingent: Hermione is the object of petrification, and her change is predicated on Leontes redemption

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 147.

<sup>126</sup> Ibid., 148.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 149.

as the subject. He himself is petrified in a self-fashioned remorse wherein he too can only wait for salvation.

Bishop follows Jonathan Bate in identifying Perdita with Proserpina as the figure who counteracts the terrible dark king.<sup>128</sup> Like Scott Crider identifying that Orpheus sings of Pygmalion as a correction of his own error, here is a second Ovidian myth wherein the moral of the story is learned, except Perdita learns the lesson before it is too late. This daughter of perdition is the one who returns to the moment of death and undoes it. Perdita self-identifies with Proserpina (IV.iv.116-17: ‘O Proserpina, / For the flow’rs now, that, frightened, thou let’st fall’), but Bishop recognizes Shakespeare has remade her as the maiden who learned Proserpina’s lesson before being ruined: Perdita imaginatively controls any challenge to her sexual purity, and by the retention of integrity is the agent that dissolves the theatrical falsehoods with which she is affronted from the moment she first appears.<sup>129</sup> Perdita is empowered to herself ‘play’ the role for which she is dressed (IV.iv.133-35: ‘Methinks I play as I have seen them do / In Whitsun pastorals. Sure this robe of mine / Does change my disposition.’), in the process winning Florizel to *eros* but also to virtue. She does so by creating a fiction in response to the changing motion of desire (hence the unity of the tale and the play).<sup>130</sup> Leontes’ fiction of control led to destruction. Perdita’s fiction is decorous and genitive.<sup>131</sup> Perdita is cast out to the remote desert of Bohemia, which turns out to be a pastoral plenitude of fiction and theatrical play.<sup>132</sup> As Bishop explains, ‘From this point of view the infamous Bohemian ‘sea-coast’ is neither a blunder nor a thumbing of the nose, but an insistence on the transgressive prerogative of the imagination in answering the needs of

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 151.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 153, 155.

<sup>130</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>131</sup> Ibid.

<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 159.

survival.’<sup>133</sup> Sicilia remains too much like Denmark: a prison where the girl with the flowers would have gone mad.

Shakespeare was daring in his metamorphoses of fictions. Where Ovid’s accounts are changes of bodily shapes, Shakespeare is remaking stories, but not merely as narratives adapted into other narratives. He is, like Perdita, learning how the necessities of the stories have become outmoded, and he is recreating them into new ways of telling. One attribute of his remaking is to elevate the role of the audience.<sup>134</sup> Theatricality is enfolded into fictions that are remade in script, and then remade in performance. At least in *The Winter’s Tale* and *The Tempest*, these performed fictions are themselves relinquished in the climax of performance. Shakespeare’s romantic theatre lets go of its matter and its art ‘towards some more direct recognition which will have no need of shadows, even if the latter have been the very media by which the imagination has arrived where it is.’<sup>135</sup> Bishop contends Shakespeare’s greatest dramatic risk is bringing all the pressure of *The Winter’s Tale* to bear on such a concentrated conclusion.<sup>136</sup> The necessity of risking excess is also part of the point. Had the scene failed, or appeared to fail, it would have more critics than the long strange conclusion of *Cymbeline*. Consensus is that the conclusion of *The Winter’s Tale* works, but we do not (arguably cannot) fully comprehend why. Approaching the scene with too much credulity or too much scepticism will be disastrous:

It is in just such a ‘between’ as this that the peculiar and overwhelming effect of the scene develops: within the ambit of powerful transactions between words now and their counterparts then, between the statue and the living body (of both actor and character), between the present fiction and its pressing analogues, between stage and audience. The risk the critic runs is that of the characters – Leontes or Hermione in particular – of negotiating the transition between impression and expression, between silence and speech, between stone and flesh, improperly. The scene is one of general trial and to venture onto its ground is dangerous. Paulina knows this very well, and how failure to negotiate this exchange may rebound disastrously on all. Hence her

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<sup>133</sup> Ibid.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

protestations, her stern protocols and caveats, which must be ours too in approaching the articulation of our wonder at what the scene stirs in us.<sup>137</sup>

At this point it is worth reiterating that Bishop's project is ostensibly secular. His interest is a theory of wonder grounded in Aristotelian poetics. The raft of interest in Shakespeare's religion that focuses on *The Winter's Tale* suggests that it has the highest degree of significance to questions on the subject, but as recognized this interest is disenchanted. Possibly Bishop's secular perspective has more in common with what Christians have historically been able to identify as the practice of faith. Most of what the turn to religion in Shakespeare has identified as religion with respect to Shakespeare falls apart if we add the possibility that Shakespeare took Christianity seriously and may have even tried to foster it with a degree of sincerity. If we add the same premise to Bishop's reading, the play becomes an exercise of supernatural faith—especially because it teeters on the knife-edge between credulity and scepticism. Faith seeking understanding is burdened by this betweenness. Bishop describes V.iii as the unsaying of the spell, the gradual undoing of what has proceeded it.<sup>138</sup> Conjuring and exorcising these ghosts with so many spectators is dangerous and could more easily fail into tragedy than succeed into romance.<sup>139</sup>

Bishop carefully covers so much theory that it is difficult to find fault. Yet, for scholarship that climaxes with the climax of *The Winter's Tale*, the reading of that scene is contracted. Bishop suggests Paulina's incantation to awaken Hermione has a tone of entreaty and prayer, as if 'to suggest that it is in the end up to the statue to approach them rather than to be summoned.'<sup>140</sup> These lines are the crux of the play's turbulent energy of wonder, crystallizing together exultation, power, fear, and vulnerability.<sup>141</sup> Yet still the play hooks into the liminal space between knowledge and emotion the experience of wonder that is

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<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid., 163.

<sup>139</sup> Ibid.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>141</sup> Ibid.

reflective on its subject and itself as a medium.<sup>142</sup> It is as if Shakespeare had pushed *Romeo and Juliet* much further beyond all reasonable constraints of age, betrayal, separation, and death, yet the play resulted in the ending Friar Lawrence conceived.

Rather than resolve and clarify all questions after the final reconciliation, the play ends hastily at Leontes' bidding. The play having been made and then remade, it is then unmade, and the theatre itself is in turn given up to wonder and to faith amidst uncertainty. Time—in the play a Father Time who is part muse, part chorus—suggests with his glass that time both flows and turns.<sup>143</sup> Yet the flowing back of time, which will awaken stone, fill up a grave, and redeem from death by life, is still incomplete. The wonder which pulls so affectively at the hearts of audiences also creates an awareness of the fine balance of the temporal in the imaginative.<sup>144</sup> The genius of Shakespeare's turn here is that we see time flowing back far enough for great evils to be undone, but not the complete restoration or redemption of all things. The play cannot be resolved. The actors who put the play on must struggle to interpret and perform a script that inevitably resists. Every performance inevitably unmakes itself. As Bishop elaborates:

The ancient metaphor of the human being as an actor and life as a stage here touches a new elaboration: the making and unmaking, the composition and decomposition of the self in its fictions becomes a process of continual dialectical pulsion and response, like the actor making his performance – not in slavish obedience to the script, but in interpretive and immediate tension with it.<sup>145</sup>

In the end, the audience is wrapped into an ecstatic agony of interpretation so that the enchantment of the play climaxes in the witness of a resurrection too good to be believed. Then, in the ensuing anticipation of a greater revelation of clarity, we are painfully denied the fullness of all things. The theatrical interpretation must settle for any greater enchantment being in the mere appearance of a greater enchantment. If this is true it is ultimately a form of

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<sup>142</sup> Ibid.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 171.

disenchantment. Alternately, the reward for the awakening of faith is the possibility of some greater re-enchantment.

## 2.4 SPIRITUAL ALCHEMY

C. S. Lewis wrote that, unlike medieval magic which was mostly an unexplained underpinning for romance, Elizabethan magic was the widely-accepted practice of science, medicine, and entertainment that might be found on any street corner. Perhaps they were desperate, perhaps they were superstitious, but, ‘Shakespeare’s audience believed (and the burden of proof lies on those who say Shakespeare disbelieved) that magicians not very unlike Prospero might exist.’<sup>146</sup> Lewis identifies disregard for this perspective as the cause of strange readings of *The Tempest*, which is neither fantasy nor allegory. This disregard persists, and we would do best to think of alchemy as closer to science and science fiction. Albert Poisson suggested that alchemy is more complex than scholastic philosophy.<sup>147</sup> Approaching such a vast subject is difficult from a twenty-first century perspective. The sixteenth century was one of transition for the theory and practice of magic. We see in Shakespeare’s characterization of Paulina and Prospero a reticence to explicitly label their magical powers. Intentionally obscure and prone to corruption through witchcraft and confidence trickery, alchemy’s idealism was nevertheless profound in imaginative and spiritual influence. The scientific revolution would seek to supersede as much as it could of its origins in Neo-Platonism, occult theory, and alchemical experiments, but this would not be

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<sup>146</sup> Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century Excluding Drama* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1973), 8. See also Peggy Muñoz Simonds, ‘Alchemical Structure of *The Tempest*’, *Comparative Drama* 31.4 (Winter 1997/1998): 538: Audiences not only believed in such magic but were capable of understanding it better than we today generally understand physics and chemistry.

<sup>147</sup> Albert Poisson, *Théories & Symboles des Alchimistes* (1891), referenced in Gareth Roberts, *The Mirror of Alchemy* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1995), 7.

accomplished at least until Newton, and Shakespeare's creative career was near the midpoint of this long transition.<sup>148</sup>

Through a survey of scholarship on spiritual alchemy and readings of Shakespeare, this final section will demonstrate that Shakespeare was keenly aware of alchemical theory, and that he deployed this source material for enchanting purposes. Alchemy was captivating then for the same reason it could be captivating to Carl Jung and can be captivating today—it works symbolically and imaginatively.<sup>149</sup> Despite the burden of misinterpretation, alchemy is a material and spiritual construct, is sympathetic with immanent re-enchantment, and works as a combination of scientific, spiritual, and poetic searches for truth and virtue. It was a form of inquiry with a moral code inspiring enough that the church, the royal court, and the university could take it seriously. Critics who pigeon-hole alchemy as superstition or fraud are condemning lesser forms of an idealistic endeavour to redeem nature through art. Noble-minded alchemists resisted the Promethean urge to aggrandize themselves by stealing spiritual fire.<sup>150</sup> This was a transgression Shakespeare ultimately recognized and resisted, first by insisting in *The Winter's Tale* on faith preceding understanding, then showing in *The Tempest* that the sacerdotal impetus to transmute spiritual realities into material expressions is, even if potent, not the culmination of all things. There is spiritual power above works *ex opere operato*, and it seems to be activated by humility, grace, and prayer. Refusing to play God, we must also not waver in working to heal division and restore harmony to the created order.

### Shakespeare's Alchemical Sources

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<sup>148</sup> Betty Jo Teeter Dobbs, *The Janus Faces of Genius: The Role of Alchemy in Newton's Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991). Alchemy thrived through the Copernican Revolution, and as late as Newton and Boyle the experimental pursuit of transmutation seemed scientifically plausible.

<sup>149</sup> And according to Jung subconsciously, as alchemical symbols are universal archetypes. See Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, Collected Works of C. G. Jung 12, trans. R. F. C. Hull (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1968), 183-84, 223.

<sup>150</sup> This moral lesson has longstanding relatability. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* and Michael Crichton's *Jurassic Park* embrace science while warning of the dangers of playing God. These are also examples of science fiction that resemble fantasy, but in their heyday seemed all too possible.

Attempts to reconcile alchemy with biblical and natural theology have been ongoing since at least the middle ages (with admittedly varying degrees of success). Few attempts satisfy current critical standards, yet by reviving the early modern mind-set it is possible to see creative theology at play. The requisite critical work on alchemy is well-established. In the twentieth century Titus Burckhardt, Mircea Eliade, and Frances Yates were among those who demonstrated alchemy's ideological sophistication and overturned the position that alchemy was superstition later overcome by actual science.<sup>151</sup> In 1980, Charles Nicholl made the retrospective claim in *The Chemical Theatre* that the prevailing notion of alchemy was of twinned parts primitive science and impossible magic. Where bad science left off, bad art (occult or theatrical) took over, and the alchemist was the dreamer bridging the divide.<sup>152</sup> René Descartes may not have intended the complete divergence of natural law and divine inspiration, but the predominance of thinkers followed that secularizing, disenchanting trajectory. Nicholl's published diagnosis is largely true now decades later, and the prejudice inflects on critical attitudes towards Shakespeare's ideas of religion: Either Shakespeare was too sceptical to take all the bad science and *hocus pocus* seriously (and it becomes theatrical artifice), or he was himself too fuddled by fantastic superstition and cannot be taken seriously except as a reflection of the ignorance and gullibility of his age.

The late-modern prejudice against alchemy, if theoretically dead, remains propped up by historians of science, un-credentialed spiritualists who like to self-publish, and the fantasy entertainment industry. There has however continued a steady counter-current of scholarship on alchemical idealism including its relationship to Shakespeare. Both historically and critically, between the corruptions of Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Jonson's *Doctor Subtle*, there remains the possible re-enchanting idealism of Paulina and Prospero. A critical

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<sup>151</sup> See also Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1973), e. g. 321: 'Most of the leading alchemists accordingly thought of themselves as pursuing an exacting spiritual discipline, rather than a crude quest for gold. The transmutation of metals was secondary to the main aim, which was the spiritual transformation of the adept.'

<sup>152</sup> Charles Nicholl, *The Chemical Theatre*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980), 1.

corrective has long been in process. Stanton Linden has identified Francis Bacon's unprejudiced scrutiny of alchemy's physical and metaphysical foundations while retaining a practical interest in it.<sup>153</sup> Though Bacon thought of alchemy, astrology, and natural magic as too beholden to imagination and belief, he also advocated their rehabilitation through methodological integrity.<sup>154</sup> Malcolm Guite's identification of the problems that ensued from the bifurcation of reason and imagination has already been related in the previous chapter, but it is worth adding in light of a theory of wonder that Bacon was not entirely dismissive of magic, seeing it as 'the science which applies the knowledge of hidden forms to the production of *wonderful* operations; and by uniting (as they say) actives with passives, displays the *wonderful* works of nature.'<sup>155</sup> Publications continue to appear, such as Bruce Janacek's *Alchemical Belief: Occultism in the Religious Culture of Early Modern England* and Margaret Healy's *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination*.<sup>156</sup> Nicholl's *Chemical Theatre* is the benchmark for studies of Shakespeare and alchemy, building off the work of Frances Yates to clarify alchemical texts as Shakespeare would have received them. Nicholl identifies three central alchemical texts published in English the last decade of the sixteenth century: *The Mirror of Alchimy*, *The Compound of Alchymy*, and the *Monas Hieroglyphica*.

*The Mirror of Alchimy* (1597) introduces the basic tenets of the alchemical opus: casting corruption off from matter, eliminating dualities that divide nature, and infusing supernatural properties of harmony and purity. The scientific tenets are Aristotelian: elements are a duality of matter and form; the qualities of cold/hot and moist/dry combine to make the four primary elements earth (cold-dry), water (cold-wet), fire (hot-dry), and air (hot-wet). All

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<sup>153</sup> Stanton Linden, 'Francis Bacon and Alchemy: The Reformation of Vulcan', in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 35.4 (1974): 549.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 549, 557.

<sup>155</sup> Francis Bacon, *Works IV*, 366-67, emphasis added, cited in Linden, 549.

<sup>156</sup> Though the last is unsatisfying in its reliance on wooden alchemical theory that proves little. See Aaron Kitch, review of *Shakespeare, Alchemy and the Creative Imagination* by Margaret Healy, *Renaissance Quarterly* 111.3, E319-22.

substances are formed from combinations of these. Elements could therefore conceivably transform into other elements by altering their qualities. A chemical agent capable of producing this result was known as the Elixir or Stone, hence the ideal of alchemy was to isolate this elixir and wield it to advance the process of transmutation.<sup>157</sup> While the transmutation of lead into gold was the temptation of such material proficiency (*exoteric* alchemy), the idealist was interested in philosophical gold—the restoration of matter to its uncorrupted, undivided harmony of qualities. If attained, this projection could not just transmute metals but restore human physical and spiritual health to their uncorrupted forms (*esoteric* alchemy). Alchemists thus sought to understand Nature's impulse to return to its ideal created form, and through art to speed up or complete the process inhibited by corruption.<sup>158</sup>

The prescribed chemical process of material transformation was a cycle of dissolution and coagulation. The principle materials were Mercury and Sulfur, representing essential properties and principles in a tensed dual relationship. Alchemical Mercury was *argent vive* ('quick silver'), the aspects of matter that were moist, vaporous, volatile, spiritual, and female. Alchemical Sulfur represented the aspects of matter that were solid, combustible, fixed, bodily, and masculine.<sup>159</sup> In the *magnum opus*, a solid would be sublimated into vapour, then condensed into a purified solid. The cycle would add a variation then repeat. By this process, body and spirit would lose their oppositions and be harmonized in one balance of form and matter. Besides the principal materials, the two essentials for this process were a forge and an alembic vessel that could sustain the process of transformation.<sup>160</sup>

George Ripley's *The Compound of Alchymy* (1591) represents a more advanced prescription for the alchemical process in poetic form. The following points are relevant: The

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<sup>157</sup> Nicholl, 25-26.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. Per Linden, 556, Francis Bacon concurred that 'sulphur and mercury are the primordial principles which give rise to all matter'.

<sup>160</sup> Nicholl, 30.

stage of putrefaction was known as the ‘Chemical Wedding’, symbolized by the death of king and queen (Sulfur and Mercury) in coitus. This *nigredo* (black) stage of putrefaction is the lowest point of matter’s dissolution and the turning point of the opus.<sup>161</sup> If successful, the next stage of congelation yields the first form of the philosopher’s stone—the White Stone—indicating the completion of the most important part of the work called the *albedo* (white) stage. The final *rubedo* (red) stage transmutes the White Stone into the Red Stone, which is the final restoration of undifferentiated matter.<sup>162</sup> The overall process is congruent with *The Mirror of Alchemy* as the alchemist kills matter and resurrects it to new life. Opposites are liberated, clarified, and married back together:

The blackness of putrefaction is followed by the whiteness of rebirth, when the fled spirit returns to quicken the stricken matter to new life. ... The shape of the work is thus circular, a going-out and coming-back: the Mercurial spirit is released in order to return and redeem, matter is brought to nothing in order to become new matter.<sup>163</sup>

*The Mirror of Alchemy* and *The Compound of Alchemy* were retrospectives on traditional alchemy. John Dee’s *Monas Hieroglyphica* was republished in 1591. Dee was a charismatic figure, representative of alchemy’s revitalized identity in the late sixteenth century. While alchemy had been practiced for centuries with varying degrees of integrity and public support, Dee moved with celebrity status in the highest circles of the court and the intelligentsia both in England and on the continent. A Renaissance man in the truest sense, he was preeminent in the fields of mathematics, geography, navigation, invention, astrology, and astronomy. Because of his principled approach to the unity of all forms of knowledge, Dee was a lifelong devotee to magic and alchemy. This is who C. S. Lewis describes as prototypical of the Elizabethan ideal. Dee typified a new emphasis in alchemy on spiritual interaction. He had a sustained interest in channeling celestial influences into matter, and identified the Mercurial spirit as the intermediary for imbuing matter with living spiritual

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<sup>161</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>162</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>163</sup> Nicholl, 41.

presence.<sup>164</sup> The similarity of Prospero to Dee is great enough to infer a deliberate imitation on Shakespeare's part with Ariel as his Mercurial spirit.<sup>165</sup>

Scholarship on alchemy in the romances does exist. Lyndy Abraham has drawn out the alchemical emblems in *Pericles*, including an instance of the *rex marinus*—a king redeemed when he is saved from drowning—that precedes the one in *The Tempest*.<sup>166</sup> Charles Nicholl identifies not only the aborted alchemical movement of *King Lear*, but also offers alchemical exposition of the cave scene in *Cymbeline*, a play with a plot resolution that is either absurd or miraculous.<sup>167</sup> Although the alchemical thread in *The Winter's Tale* has been identified, this aspect of such a perplexing play remains in need of study.<sup>168</sup> While Shakespeare's exposure to alchemical texts can be taken for granted, and his deployment of alchemical language and images is unmistakable, his creative use cannot be tied to a particular source or method. The host of symbols and their endless variegation of significance must have appealed to him even as they led to a proliferation of meanings. I have heavily relied on Abraham's *A Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, which is the best current critical resource for negotiating an art sufficiently complex to encompass everything in the cosmos.

### Scholarship on Alchemy and Shakespeare's Romances

Studies have identified alchemy in *The Tempest*. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden Vaughan recognize some alchemical elements in their notes and identify the title of the play as itself an alchemical term for the process of transmuting base metal into gold, suggesting

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<sup>164</sup> Ibid., 47.

<sup>165</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, introduction to *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2011), 27, 38, 67.

<sup>166</sup> Abraham, 'Weddings, Funerals, and Incest: Alchemical Emblems in Shakespeare's *Pericles, Prince of Tyre*', *Journal of English and Germanic Philology* 98.4 (October 1999): 524; Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'king': 'In the alchemical myth of the *rex marinus* the name 'king' is applied to the matter of the Stone from its conception until its ultimate perfection.'

<sup>167</sup> Nicholl, 226-236.

<sup>168</sup> Nicholl, 225; György Szőnyi, 'Pastoral, Romance, Ritual and Magic in Shakespeare and *The Winter's Tale*', in *Centers and Peripheries in European Renaissance Culture*, ed. György Szőnyi and Csaba Maczelka (Szeged: JATE, 2012).

Prospero's project is an attempt to transform the corrupt characters.<sup>169</sup> One extended attempt to read *The Tempest* as alchemical is Peggy Muñoz Simonds' "My Charms Crack Not": The Alchemical Structure of *The Tempest*'. She reads the play as a theatrical exercise in alchemical transmutation, and credits Prospero with achieving a golden age of restored political and social order within the play.<sup>170</sup> The plot is usually considered original to Shakespeare, but Muñoz Simonds contends alchemy is the shaping pattern for the narrative itself by identifying nine alchemical stages in the play.<sup>171</sup> However, she does not offer a rationale or unified source for the nine stages she identifies out of a plenitude of possibilities and variations. She does not tie her nine identified alchemical stages to a recognizable progression of the play, instead moving back and forth between scenes and characters, and for a progression of stages this is unsatisfying. Muñoz Simonds sees Prospero's promise to abjure his 'rough magic' as an established rhetorical gesture by which to deflect accusations of necromancy, dispel his own vain illusions, and make a pretense of giving up exoteric alchemy.<sup>172</sup> Despite his success, at the end Prospero is morose, and Shakespeare refuses to condemn or vindicate him.<sup>173</sup>

Muñoz Simonds reads *The Tempest* as a theatrical exercise in transmutation entirely within the context of the play. What such a reading lacks is consideration of the theatre as itself alchemical and its affects contingent on performance. Sceptics of Prospero's magic have pointed to street magicians and theatrical artifice as models by which to suppose Prospero is merely an illusionist.<sup>174</sup> John Dee's reputation as a conjurer itself began while at Cambridge, where his productions of stage spectacles were impressive enough to be

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<sup>169</sup> Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 63-64; Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'cloud'.

<sup>170</sup> Muñoz Simonds, 541.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 542.

<sup>172</sup> *Ibid.*, 556-57.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*, 566.

<sup>174</sup> Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 63.

supposed magical.<sup>175</sup> In performance Prospero's magic is illusion through theatrical art, but dismissal of art as mere illusion denigrates the power of performance for art (e.g. wonder through rhetoric and poetry) and overlooks the latent significance of the theatre as itself alchemical. Alchemical works were themselves sometimes called 'theatres', and the work was considered theatrical in nature with the different stages sometimes referred to as scenes.<sup>176</sup> Alchemists even viewed their alembic 'as a theatre in which the miniature creation of the Stone imitated the creation of the greater world in microcosm.'<sup>177</sup> The alembic was known by many names, including 'globe'.<sup>178</sup> Frances Yates, goes into meticulous detail in her identification of the Globe as a model of a memory theatre.<sup>179</sup> While the connection of memory theatre to rhetoric is straightforward, a secondary revelation is that the Globe also had hallmarks of alchemy and the alchemical process. The theatre itself embodied an alchemical space of performed experiment and transformation. Waxing even more esoteric, Mircea Eliade suggests the origin of alchemy is the ancient conception of the Earth-Mother giving forth living matter whose own life was complex and *dramatic*, and 'it is the mystical drama of the God—his passion, death and resurrection—which is projected on to matter in order to transmute it.'<sup>180</sup> The religious rituals of miners and artisans would contribute to the development of larger rituals including ancient theatre, which would in turn through classical influences contribute to the development of medieval and early modern theatre. Tracing such a development would be its own extensive endeavour, but for present purposes it is sufficient to suggest the relationship between alchemy and theatre could be profound, active, and self-conscious. When Shakespeare turns to mystical and theatricizing confluences at the ends of

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid., 67.

<sup>176</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'theatre'.

<sup>177</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'theatre'.

<sup>178</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'alembic'.

<sup>179</sup> Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966).

<sup>180</sup> Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), 149-50.

*The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, they incorporate the audience into the final wondrous revelations in expectation of transformation.

### **The Grave Matter of Shakespeare's Alchemy**

Shakespeare rarely names alchemy in his plays. He could rely on audiences having a high degree of familiarity with alchemical language—as could Jonson for the complexity of inside knowledge displayed in *The Alchemist*. But where Jonson wrote theatrical satire to amuse and to dissolve, Shakespeare's alchemical purpose could be higher and subtler. Drawing on the language and imagery of alchemy, the re-enchanting impetus in such instances is towards restoration. In tragedies that include alchemical symbolism, the aborted alchemical opus corresponds to the tragic movement of the conclusion. Alchemical comedies run towards wondrous reconciliations and golden conclusions.

One further study adds immediate complexity to Shakespeare's use of alchemical language. Language of the grave is present in all of Shakespeare's major works except *Love's Labour's Lost*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, and *Troilus and Cressida*. Alchemically, the grave is:

The alchemists' vessel during the nigredo, when the matter of the stone, the united sulphur (male) and argent vive (female) undergoes death, dissolution, and putrefaction. ... The emblem of the lovers and the tomb occurs as a three-dimensional tableau in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. ... In alchemy the souls of the dead bodies, sometimes depicted as one hermaphrodite body, are released and fly to the top of the alembic, leaving the blackened, putrefied bodies to be washed and purified so that they become the white foliated earth of the albedo. This earth (or cleansed body) is then pure enough to reunite with the soul (or united soul/spirit), and from this union the philosopher's stone is born. Thus the vessel which is the tomb of death is also the womb of new life, of generation....<sup>181</sup>

Shakespeare clearly makes use of this symbolism. As one of Shakespeare's most sympathetic priests of nature, Friar Lawrence's powers are considerable. He broaches the duality of womb and tomb in his introductory speech:

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<sup>181</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'grave'.

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;  
 What is her burying grave, that is her womb;  
 And from her womb children of divers kind  
 We sucking on her natural bosom find... (II.iii.9-12)

John Milton no doubt had alchemy and these lines in mind when he composed *Paradise Lost* II.911-13: 'The womb of nature, and perhaps her grave, / Of neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire, / But all these in their pregnant causes mixed.'<sup>182</sup> Friar Lawrence concocts by his knowledge Juliet's sleeping potion, the efficacy of which is seldom if ever scrutinized by sceptics of magic. The apothecary is a counterpoint to Friar Lawrence: He is an aspiring alchemist based on what is in his shop,<sup>183</sup> but a bad one because he is in penury. He can produce a draught of death, but not death and life again.

Further examples strengthen the conclusion. Foreshadowing the play's end and expanding the alchemical imagery, the grave is associated with marriage<sup>184</sup> by both Juliet and her mother:

*Juliet* Go ask his name.—If he be married,  
 My grave is like to be my wedding-bed. (I.v.134-35)

*Lady Capulet* Ay, sir, but she will none, she [gives] you thanks.  
 I would the fool were married to her grave! (III.v.139-40)

Mercutio is a mercurial agent in the play, and his famous pun to Romeo has alchemical entendre: 'Ask for me tomorrow, and you shall find me a grave man' (III.i.95-98). *Romeo and Juliet* is one of Shakespeare's most hopeful tragedies, with Friar Lawrence the physical and spiritual healer ultimately able to perform not only the reconciliation of the Capulets and the Montagues, but also—nearly—a marriage triumphant over dissolution and death. Verona has to settle for a glooming peace and the erection of a golden statue.

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<sup>182</sup> John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett, 2003). On Milton's creative use of esoteric alchemy, see Michael Lieb, *The Dialectics of Creation: Patterns of Birth and Regeneration in Paradise Lost* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1970).

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, s.vv. 'tortoise', 'crocodile' (for 'alligator'), 'seed', 'rose'.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'chemical wedding'.

The imagery of the grave was not original to *Romeo and Juliet*. In the very early *Richard III*,<sup>185</sup> the Duchess of York says:

O ill-dispersing wind of misery!  
 O my accursed womb, the bed of death!  
 A cockatrice hast thou hatch'd to the world,  
 Whose unavaoided eye is murtherous. (IV.i.52-55)

The cockatrice, or basilisk, is a monster but also 'a symbol of the alchemical elixir which could transmute base metal into gold.'<sup>186</sup> It is the same womb-grave association of life and death. Richmond (afterwards Henry VII) gives the valediction of *Richard III*:

Inter their bodies as become their births.  
 Proclaim a pardon to the soldiers fled  
 That in submission will return to us,  
 And then as we have ta'en the sacrament,  
 We will unite the White Rose and the Red.  
 Smile heaven upon this fair conjunction,  
 That long have frown'd upon their enmity!  
 What traitor hears me, and says not amen?  
 England hath long been mad and scarr'd herself:  
 The brother blindly shed the brother's blood,  
 The father rashly slaughter'd his own son,  
 The son, compell'd, been butcher to the sire.  
 All this divided York and Lancaster,  
 Divided in their dire division,  
 O now let Richmond and Elizabeth,  
 The true succeeders of each royal house,  
 By God's fair ordinance conjoin together!  
 And let their heirs (God, if thy will be so)  
 Enrich the time to come with smooth-fac'd peace,  
 With smiling plenty, and fair prosperous days!  
 Abate the edge of traitors, gracious Lord,  
 That would reduce these bloody days again,  
 And make poor England weep in streams of blood!  
 Let them not live to taste this land's increase  
 That would with treason wound this fair land's peace!  
 Now civil wounds are stopp'd, peace lives again;  
 That she may long live here, God say amen! (V.v.25-41)

The bodies of the dead are buried with the double meaning that it 'become their births'. The sacrament will facilitate the ending of division through union of the White Rose of York

<sup>185</sup> Evans and Tobin, 78: *Richard III* is dated circa 1592-93.

<sup>186</sup> Abraham, *The Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.vv. 'basilisk', 'cockatrice'. The same creature is mentioned even earlier in *2 Henry VI*, III.ii.324 and *3 Henry VI*, III.ii.187. It also appears in *Romeo and Juliet*, III.ii.47; *Twelfth Night*, III.iv.196; *Cymbeline*, II.iv.107; and *The Winter's Tale*, I.ii.388.

(Elizabeth) and the Red Rose of Lancaster (Richmond/Henry VII).<sup>187</sup> Heaven will smile upon this fair conjunction.<sup>188</sup> The union will be fruitful if blessed. Divine peace and prosperity will reign. Shakespeare's talent for found symbolism was on display early with the wedding of the red king to the white queen ending the War of the Roses. Death is the threshold of life, and Shakespeare returns repeatedly to it, including in every one of the romances.

Alchemical readings could be continuously added. Alchemy is key to *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* and will be revisited in the following chapters. Cumulatively, Shakespeare's England had in alchemical lore an old tradition invigorated by idealism and celebrity.<sup>189</sup> The same alchemical engine powered three credible expressions: the ancient esoteric tradition of mysteriously perfecting matter, the Elizabethan mystagogue intent on spiritual perfection, and the physician seeking the power to heal the body.<sup>190</sup> There were countless variations of what alchemy was or would become, and there were corrupt usurpers just as there always have been. Present-day scholars often struggle to reconcile their criticism with such idealism. Despite the weight of best criticism, it becomes a stumbling block that Shakespeare could be taken seriously in taking alchemy thus. Sceptical criticism results in readings that become, as Lewis foretold, strange.<sup>191</sup> Poetically, Charles Williams describes Ariel's music as so powerful it is one step removed from the transmutation of the spiritual into the material: 'A little more, and all our human world would undergo that almost terrifying alchemy, our joys would be pearls, our griefs coral.'<sup>192</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>187</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.vv. 'rose (white)', 'queen (white)', 'rose (red)', 'king'.

<sup>188</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'heaven'.

<sup>189</sup> Nicholl, 54.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>191</sup> Tangentially, one of Lewis's most provocative characters is alchemical. Emeth in *The Last Battle* is named from Hebrew, see *Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon*, s.v. אמֶת: 'firmness', 'faithfulness', or 'truth'. However, John Dee also appended 'Æmeth' as a title of the Sigillum Dei alchemical amulet he used in channeling angels, see Deborah E. Harkness, *John Dee's Conversations with Angels* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 35-37. Given Lewis's familiarity with Dee, it hardly seems coincidental he would use a Renaissance Hebrew reference to faithfulness.

<sup>192</sup> Williams, *English Poetic Mind*, 107.

To return briefly to the study of affect at the beginning of this chapter, in the Afterword to *The Renaissance of Emotion* Peter Holbrook writes, ‘Shakespeare often presents not just highly emotive human experiences but a world with all the qualities of mind and feeling – a mindful, ensouled world that *feels* with humanity.’<sup>193</sup> If materialism is correct, Holbrook asks, what remains of human agency and free will? Undermining human autonomy is itself a devaluing of humanity.<sup>194</sup> Holbrook reads *Coriolanus* as a picture of freedom. Coriolanus is evidently subject to a choleric humour up until his mother comes to him. In response to her plea he emotionally breaks down as he holds his mother silently by the hand. He abandons his plan to destroy Rome in response to ‘words, an appeal to mind, imagination, *and* feeling, not a random physiological event’.<sup>195</sup> When Coriolanus sees his family in the last act it causes him to give up his aspiration to live as if inhuman: ‘I melt, and am not / Of stronger earth than others’ (V.iii.28-29). This is a moment of salvation not only for Rome but for Coriolanus as well in that ‘paradoxically, this moment of self-mastery presents itself as one of self-dissolution, a fatal “melting” of the self, a flowing into and with others.’<sup>196</sup> The self affectively linked with others and the world itself is also suggested in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, where Holbrook suggests:

We see a world quickened with life and desire – reality is not a series of stable, separable entities but, rather, a whole, or continuum of mobile and plastic moments of togetherness or interaction. ... In this vision everything reaches out to and involves everything else. Nothing is absolutely alone, including we humans: everything is folded within a complex whole. ... this is to apprehend the world as instinct with feeling and value – not as a mere blank, a meaningless material space of cause and effect – and to look forward to ways of apprehending the world that we are perhaps beginning to recover today.<sup>197</sup>

The only thing left unsaid is that this idealism has been called spiritual alchemy since before Shakespeare took the subject into his venerable hands. Having turned from materialism to

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<sup>193</sup> Holbrook, 265.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 266.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 267.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 268.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 269.

affect, to rhetoric, to wonder, we have turned finally to a re-enchanting harmony of matter and spirit that ennobles creation, liberates humanity, and facilitates our participation in the redemption of all things.

### CHAPTER 3: 'BE STONE NO MORE' – READINGS IN *THE WINTER'S TALE*

#### Introduction

*The Winter's Tale* is the performance of a miracle. It is a story where reason and imagination are both tested. The story is an experiment that succeeds, but we are mystified as to how and why. At stake is re-enchantment through the awakening of faith.

C. S. Lewis, close to the time of his conversion, wrote that *The Winter's Tale* 'is able to give us an image of the whole idea of resurrection'.<sup>1</sup> How far is it possible to extend a spiritually re-enchanting reading of this play? Shakespeare refused to be transparent or coercive about the spiritual significance of *The Winter's Tale*. He also succeeded in setting the spiritual hooks so deeply in our reason and imagination that this is a play we cannot ignore. If we hear this play with the clear eyes and full hearts of awakened faith, how are we enlightened and edified?

In light of all that has gone before, this chapter turns to primary reading of *The Winter's Tale* as the triumph of grace over grave—the triumph of life over death. There is, of course, no such thing as merely reading Shakespeare. His art is the product of a mind in which all things were continually present. In his work at large we see movement in rhetoric, mythopoesis, wonder, and alchemy right up to the threshold of the supernatural. While *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* begin the thematic reversal of the tragedies, *The Winter's Tale* exceeds all precedent. Also to an unprecedented degree, the audience of the play has no special knowledge about what occurs and is wrapped into the enchantment of the conclusion. I have endeavoured to narrow my focus to mythopoesis and spiritual alchemy as wondrous directives for a spiritual reading of *The Winter's Tale*. We are offered the healing of reason and imagination: spiritual re-enchantment for a disenchanted age.

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<sup>1</sup> C. S. Lewis to Arthur Greeves, 5 September 1931, in *The Collected Letters of C. S. Lewis*, vol. 1, ed. Walter Hooper (New York: Harper-Collins, 2004), 968.

As a transition towards primary reading, I propose three interpretive questions integral to *The Winter's Tale*, then begin to address them with examples from Shakespeare's mythopoesis and alchemical creativity. The remainder of this chapter is dedicated to reading and interpreting the play as it unfolds dramatically in Shakespeare's penultimate re-enchantment of nature and spirit through art. I draw attention to Shakespeare's incorporation of wonder, myth, and alchemy. Acts I and II must be read briefly in the context of the identified themes and the final three acts.

In Act III, the second scene is Hermione's trial and death. Paulina assumes direction of Leontes' penance. The third scene is the dissolution of tragedy and the introduction of wonder as Hermione appears to Antigonus, Perdita is left in Bohemia, and the Shepherd is blessed.

In Act IV, Time the Chorus inverts the natural course of decay, and the play's trajectory reverses towards re-enchantment. We see this inversion in Autolycus, who despite his ill repute is an integral Mercurial character on whom the resolution of the play depends. The re-enchantment continues in the pastoral comedy of the extended fourth scene, which within its delightfulness retains thematic continuity on the relationship between art and nature as well as the mythical presence of the supernatural.

In Act V, the first scene is where Hermione is made rhetorically present through memory, then in name, then in spirit, then through direct address. Leontes' penance ends in his willingness to accept truth beyond reason's ability to comprehend it. The second scene is where wondrous things are heard and believed though they are not seen, raising the audience's faculty to imagine things greater still when the final mystery is revealed. The third scene is the resurrection of Hermione. I propose a way to read Paulina's incantation as the reanimation of Hermione's body with her spirit through a corporate miracle of faith.

Related to the host of interpretive issues inherent in *The Winter's Tale*, here are the interpretive questions I think a critical reading must engage (though most do so inadequately): What is the role of the oracle? What is Paulina expecting in the final resolution? What is Hermione's identity as a statue?

What is the role of the oracle? Sceptics who refuse to entertain the possibility of Hermione's resurrection need to be consistent. In addition to dismissing any miraculous conclusion, as well as dismissing the apparition of Hermione's vexed spirit to Antigonus, sceptics need to disenchant the oracle. The oracle is unusually transparent in its revelation—lacking any ambiguity we would expect considering the medium—leaving no margin for self-fulfillment. Leontes' first great act of faith is to believe the oracle he initially rejected, then to yield to its driving force for a decade and a half. Faith in the oracle is precisely rewarded by the accuracy of the resolution. For the disenchanted, this wager of faith must overcome such odds as to beggar the suspension of disbelief. The internal logic of the play must be respected, and if readers are going to accept some supernatural interjections but dismiss others they need a coherent rationale for doing so.

What is Paulina expecting in the final resolution? Whether the resolution is theatrical or mythical, we assume Paulina knows what will happen. Perhaps she does. If Paulina and Hermione have hatched a plot to cloister the latter until the time of Perdita's return, their wager is predicated on the oracle as divine revelation and belief that they can sustain the ruse indefinitely without being discovered. The burden to credulity is great. Paulina also offers to make an oath that Hermione is dead:

I say she's dead; I'll swear't. If word nor oath  
Prevail not, go and see. If you can bring  
Tincture or lustre in her lip, her eye,  
Heat outwardly or breath within, I'll serve you  
As I would do the gods.

(III.ii.203-07)

Thirty lines later, Leontes asks to be taken to the bodies of his wife and son. We do not see what happens, but he is convinced of their deaths. These have to be accounted for given that Paulina's persuasion and spiritual authority over Leontes are predicated on her integrity. How can Paulina lie to Leontes and retain her integrity? How could Hermione be dead, yet Paulina hold out for herself and Leontes a hopeful resolution? If Hermione has died, there must be some way of considering that Paulina knows Hermione's resurrection to be possible, or even expected under the right circumstances.

What is Hermione's identity as a statue? Properly considered, this is the most vexing question. Robert Greene's *Pandosto* is a recognized source for *The Winter's Tale*, but this is not a question that can be resolved by appealing to this source. In Greene's romance, Bellaria does die accused of adultery, and Pandosto takes his own life at the end.<sup>2</sup> The inference is that because Shakespeare lets Leontes live he must have done the same for Hermione. This would be as blatant as Shakespeare's other inversions of *Pandosto*, such as making the jealous king ruler of Sicilia instead of Bohemia, casting the child ashore so she ends up in Bohemia rather than casting her adrift so she ends up in Sicilia, etc. Such consistent inversions without variation would be less creative rather than more. If *The Winter's Tale* directly mirrored *Pandosto* in all major aspects, audiences would, after the initial narrative shock at the play's premiere that Hermione is alive at the end, begin to think theatrically about how to interpret the play. But this is tantamount to the reward of art being in seeing through its artifice, and poetic faith would give way to the willing suspension of belief. Shakespeare flagged the inadequacy of such one-to-one correspondence with the absurdity of giving Bohemia a coastline. He is not bound to spare the queen from death, and we should expect from such a playwright some kind of profound inversion of the source material. Current opinion prevails one way or another that Hermione could not be resurrected, and so

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Greene, *Pandosto, or, The Historie of Dorastus and Fawnia* (New Rochelle, NY: The Elston Press, 1902).

she could not have died. Shakespeare does not preclude this interpretation, but it raises as many problems as the alternative.

Antigonus exits bearing the unnamed child at the end of Act II, 150 lines too late to hear the oracle that associates her with ‘that which is lost’. Antigonus indirectly recounts how her spirit tells him to leave the child in Bohemia and call her Perdita. The direct explanation of the connection of her name to the oracle is Hermione’s intercession from beyond the grave. The statue would have to be just a statue, or Hermione’s body petrified by the departure of her spirit. Mythically both are viable.

Hermione’s statue has been ‘in the keeping of Paulina—a piece many years in doing and now newly perform’d by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano’ (V.ii.95-97). Romano is a scandalous figure,<sup>3</sup> and it is unclear if he is supposed to be painting the old statue or making a new one. Once again we only hear about this without direct knowledge. The disenchanted reading assumes he and his work are entirely misdirection. The enchanted reading infers that he is misdirection so Paulina is not accused of sorcery, or that his art is complicit with Paulina’s efforts to revivify Hermione.

If Hermione has died, it is harder to explain the Second Gentleman’s claim in V.ii.104-07 that Paulina visits the ‘remov’d house’ two to three times daily. The disenchanted explanation would be that she is caring for the live Hermione. The mythical explanation would be that she has some Pygmalion-like endeavour to bring a stone Hermione to life. We do not know if the removed house is the ‘chapel’ Leontes says he will visit daily (III.ii.238-39), the ‘gallery’ as he calls it at V.iii.10, or these are all one and the same.

The advanced age of the statue is the greatest narrative wrinkle. If Hermione did not die, how did she visit Antigonus? If she died, how is she resurrected sixteen years later having aged correspondingly? Most critics think her aging conclusively resolves the matter.

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<sup>3</sup> John Pitcher, ed., *The Winter’s Tale* by William Shakespeare (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2010), 46: ‘...the sculptor is said to be Giulio Romano, an Italian artist associated with Rome, papal politics, and pornography.’

Scott Crider does not make much of Hermione's wrinkles, suggesting they are a reminder to Leontes of the time of flourishing lost because of his error,<sup>4</sup> and also the element of the ridiculous that comes in from the Pygmalion narrative.<sup>5</sup> Ovid's accounts of after-death experience do not suggest any significant interlude of time, and Shakespeare has greatly extended the interval of delay.<sup>6</sup> For an enchanted reading the answer must be in the relationship between body and soul beyond death.

Hermione's own explanation is less satisfying than it initially seems. She tells Perdita in V.iii.125-28, 'for thou shalt hear that I, / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / gave hope thou wast in being, have preserv'd / Myself to see the issue.' The explanation is cryptic, and the 'thou shalt hear' may warn against hearsay. Could Hermione have been preserved spiritually in anticipation of bodily resurrection at the fulfillment of the oracle? Scoffers must acknowledge that this would not be the first miracle. After the oracle itself and Hermione's appearance to Antigonus, this would be a third miracle, and a third miracle is much harder to deny even if it is the greatest.

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In the previous chapter I appealed to Scott Crider's reading of 1 Corinthians 13 as integral to *The Winter's Tale*, but it bears reiterating: the exercise of faith pertains to this life, not merely waiting for the next. The 1560 Geneva Bible marginalia describes faith as the gift of doing miracles, not merely bearing witness. Miracles are supernatural transformations that exceed natural capacity in response to human agency. The central miracle is resurrection.

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<sup>4</sup> Crider, 159.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 169.

<sup>6</sup> An unlikely source is Platonic myth about the separation and reunification of body and soul. Ben Jonson owned at least one Latin translation of Plato's works during the time that he and Shakespeare were friends. The *Phaedrus* is a myth of the reincarnation of the soul into a new body. *Republic X* includes the myth of Er as a man who leaves his body, experiences the afterlife, and returns transformed. Various scholars have tried to account for Shakespeare's familiarity with Plato, but their analyses range from tenuous to flimsy. Renaissance Neo-Platonism is a more likely prospect, but this is best considered in the context of alchemy. See Anna Baldwin and Sarah Hutton, eds., *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 118; Kenneth Haynes, *English Literature and Ancient Languages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

Christ's resurrection was possible because resurrection is possible. If *The Winter's Tale* is a supernatural story, and we cannot reasonably reject that it is, then in light of careful reading a miraculous resurrection is at least as plausible as the alternative. The contrary critical perspective comes down to 'But it's just a play and there aren't really miracles.' *The Winter's Tale* is gracious also to those whose faith slumbers, to those whose minds are not yet transfigured so together.

Cora Fox has written that, 'In dialogue with humoral conceptions of the body, Ovidianism registers the interdependence of body and self, but it also reveals the way the self can outlive the body, even as it aestheticizes and attaches cultural value to the body as the site of metamorphosis.'<sup>7</sup> Perhaps nowhere is this more evident than Shakespeare's mythopoesis of Hermione as a Ceres figure. At IV.iii.116 Perdita self-identifies with Proserpina. Scott Crider suggests, 'If Perdita is a Proserpina, then Hermione is also a Ceres, awaiting her dead daughter.'<sup>8</sup> Crider does not expand on the significance of the association with Ceres, but his own method may be adopted to do so.

The narrative frame is that, in *Metamorphoses* V, Minerva is visiting the Heliconian Muses. When Minerva asks about the presence of nine magpies, Calliope repeats for her the song she sang when they were challenged to a contest by the nine singing daughters of Pierus and Eupipe. The challenger sings of the battle of gods and giants, and how Typhoeus harassed the gods all the way to Egypt where they hid in the form of animals. In response Calliope (the muse of epic poetry and the mother of Orpheus) sings the Ceres-Proserpina myth: Typhoeus, having been defeated, was buried under Sicily. Dis, coming back from confirming that Typhoeus' shakings and eruptions will not split the earth and let light into hell, is struck by Cupid's arrow and abducts Proserpina. Sicily is specially cursed by Ceres

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<sup>7</sup> Cora Fox, *Ovid and the Politics of Emotion in Elizabethan England* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Crider, 168 n.16.

for its injustice to her as the mother of the lost daughter. Jove returns the daughter to the mother for half the year, and the land returns from barrenness to seasonal fruitfulness.

In Arthur Golding's translation, when Arethusa tells Ceres the fate of her daughter, the reaction is, 'Hir mother stode as starke as stone, when she these newes did heare'.<sup>9</sup> While the mother being struck to stone upon hearing of the loss of the child is deeply resonant with *The Winter's Tale*, Golding's first line is a straightforward rendering of Ovid's.<sup>10</sup> Golding's next line is more striking: 'And long she was like one that in another worlde had beene.'<sup>11</sup> This is much more an interpolation of Ovid's 'attonitaeque diu similis fuit', and could just as easily serve as a description of Proserpina. Lynn Enterline writes, 'It is left to Shakespeare's Hermione to return from that "other world" of stone in order to be reunited with her Proserpina.'<sup>12</sup> But Enterline has no intention of suggesting Hermione crosses into the afterlife and back, assuming Hermione's transformation must be entirely metaphorical like Ceres'. This gives less attention than it might to Ovid's larger reflection on selfhood beyond the metamorphosing body and Shakespeare's transformation of Ovid/Golding.

Calliope's song was first sung as a rebuke to blasphemous human vanity. The challengers to the Muses are turned into the magpies. As we hear it in Ovid's frame, the song is repeated as the muse of poetry edifying the goddess of wisdom. Hermione is a type of Ceres, but here we have another Shakespearean remaking of myth: Perdita, the type of Proserpina, crosses back from the outer darkness of Bohemia, which turns out to be rather Elysian, into the claustrophobic, hellish stasis of Sicilia. However, her sojourn is earthly,

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<sup>9</sup> Ovid, *Ovid's Metamorphoses: The Arthur Golding Translation 1567*, trans. Arthur Golding, ed. John Frederick Nims (Philadelphia: Paul Dry, 2000), V.632. The presence of Golding's translation in Shakespeare's work is well-established, e.g. T. W. Baldwin, *William Shakespere's Small Latine & Lesse Greeke* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1944), 436-451.

<sup>10</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses I-VIII*, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), V.509: 'Mater ad auditas stupuit ceu saxea'. Miller's translation is similarly close: 'The mother upon hearing these words stood as if turned to stone'.

<sup>11</sup> Ovid, trans. Golding, V.633.

<sup>12</sup> Lynn Enterline, *The Rhetoric of the Body from Ovid to Shakespeare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 225.

never tripping across the horizon of death. Shakespeare appears to have taken Golding's image of mother-as-stone who has crossed into another world, then inverted the roles with the daughter restoring the natural order and interceding for the return of her mother from death. The deeply-embedded suggestion is that Hermione has bodily become stone and spiritually crossed over into the afterlife. Perdita is the agent of the oracle's fulfilment and the catalyst of her mother's recovery from death.

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As a means of thinking about spiritual themes within the romances, spiritual alchemy remains underutilized. The alchemist has been identified as the midwife of nature, who by art facilitates the supernatural consummation of nature. The entire play could be read as a study of the relationship between art and nature. Alchemy is also strongly present. The basic alchemical process of corruption, dissolution, purification, and resolution maps onto the narrative structure of the play. Shakespeare did not explicitly label the play as alchemical, but a plenitude of alchemical language and imagery is undeniable once recognized, and he wields his intimate knowledge of this subject deeply and creatively. Alchemy in *The Winter's Tale* pushes difficult interpretive matters towards an enchanted reading.

I have suggested that in order to understand this play it is necessary to address the role of the oracle, Paulina's expectation in the final resolution, and Hermione's identity as a statue. Alchemically, they should be considered in the opposite order. Hermione's identity as a statue is both evident and mysterious in an enchanted reading. As discussed earlier, to be revived in a living body she would have to be preserved spiritually in some manner from which she can return. Such a return would also result in her body having aged sixteen years. The statue would be ambiguously her petrified body or an actual stone statue that is animated. Such a relationship between body and spirit must ultimately be mysterious. That I am aware of, there is no mythical or alchemical precedent for such a resolution. The veil of death is not

transparent. From this mystery a few inferences are possible: First, Shakespeare weights human essence not in body but in spirit. If some find this controversial, Shakespeare at least has the theological high ground. Second, Shakespeare has pushed the theatrical and spiritual envelopes beyond all precedent, and I take it he did so deliberately. He did not want his own mysterious experiment criticized as imitation, and, duly considered, he has succeeded. Third, faith—at least Christian faith—cannot be reduced to something finally calculated and comprehensible. In giving us this greatest theatrical mystery, Shakespeare has succeeded in the play itself becoming an exercise of faith.

Alchemically, Hermione's identity is much more transparent. Her name is synonymous with mercury, which is the central symbol in alchemy, and 'Hermes is also the name of the divine spirit hidden in the depths of matter'.<sup>13</sup> Hermione is also identifiable with the philosopher's stone: 'It is the figure of light veiled in dark matter, that divine love essence which combines divine wisdom and creative power, often identified with Christ as creative Logos'.<sup>14</sup> In V.iii Hermione is referred to as 'stone' five times before her descent at Paulina's final reference in 'be stone no more' (99). In the process of alchemical resolution, a white stone is attained at the albedo and a red stone at the rubedo. Hermione's statue is said to be stone that is painted. Paulina protests that she may not be touched because the paint is wet, but in the descriptions of Hermione she is described as reddening by Leontes' 'Would you not deem it breath'd? and that those veins did verily bear blood?' (V.iii.63-64), Polixenes' 'The very life seems warm upon her lip' (66), and Paulina's overt 'The ruddiness upon her lip is wet' (81). The symbolism is evident.

In an enchanted reading, the question of Paulina's expectation in the final resolution hinges on Hermione being dead, yet Paulina anticipating she may be resurrected. The solution is that Paulina is herself an alchemist, and the conclusion of the play is the

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<sup>13</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'Mercurius'.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'philosopher's stone'.

consummation of her opus alchymicum. Knowing the conditions of the oracle, her secret work in her removed house is preparation for the restoration of Hermione when the opportunity arrives. In the alchemical projection, ‘the body is made spiritual and the spirit made corporeal. ... Metaphysically, the descent of the soul into dense matter is seen as a part of the necessary experience which leads to the ascent into full “philosophical” consciousness.’<sup>15</sup> Paulina performs this work, and Hermione comes back to life. Does she expect it to work? This is less clear. In my reading of the final scene, I suggest we see from how Paulina speaks that she is distressed. She has anticipated what would be necessary for such a resolution and optimally prepared for it. I do not believe she is certain of the outcome. Perhaps Paulina’s faith is proven to be the greatest of all, and by her miraculous accomplishment she is the most powerful Shakespearean figure except Prospero.

The role of the oracle is the hardest to attach to an alchemical reading, but there are reasons to entertain this. In III.i when Cleomenes and Dion are discussing the oracle there are multiple alchemical signals. Apollo himself is associated with both the hot, dry, active, masculine principle of the opus and the gold of the final projection.<sup>16</sup> Cleomenes says, ‘The climate’s delicate, the air most sweet, / Fertile the isle’ (1-2). Sweet fragrance indicates cleansing and the resurgence of life.<sup>17</sup> Delphi is not an island, but the foundation from which the opus alchymicum grew was identified by some alchemists as an island, and that it is fertile is also suggestive.<sup>18</sup> Dion predicts the results of the prophecy will be rare (13, 20) and the issue gracious (22). From their testimony we should expect an ideal resolution from the oracle’s proclamation, and it does turn out to be precisely accurate.

The identity of the chapel (or removed house, or gallery) returns to the subject of the grave as tomb and womb introduced in the last chapter. *The Winter’s Tale* adds complexity to

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid., s.v. ‘distillation and sublimation’.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., s.v. ‘Apollo’.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., s.v. ‘fragrance’.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., s.v. ‘philosophical tree’.

this established image. Once noticed, the grave is a prominent referent in the play. At I.ii.173, Leontes, having grown suspicious of Hermione in her efforts to persuade Polixenes to stay, says he will walk with Mamillius and ‘leave you to your graver steps’. A few lines later he says to Mamillius, ‘Thy mother plays, and I / Play too, but so disgrac’d a part, whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave’ (187-89). At II.i.155-57, Antigonus says that if Hermione is unfaithful, ‘We need no grave to bury honesty, / There’s not a grain of it the face to sweeten / Of the whole dungy earth.’ At III.i.4-6, upon return from the oracle Dion says he will report the ‘celestial habits / ...and the reverence / Of the grave wearers.’ At III.ii.53-54, Hermione ends her not-guilty plea rebuking her nearest of kin who ‘Cry fie upon my grave’.

Most importantly, the conclusion of Act III is Leontes’ speech of repentance:

Thou didst speak well  
 When most the truth; which I receive much better  
 Than to be pitied of thee. Prithee bring me  
 To the dead bodies of my queen and son.  
 One grave shall be for both; upon them shall  
 the causes of their death appear (unto  
 Our shame perpetual). Once a day I’ll visit  
 The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there  
 Shall be my recreation. So long as nature  
 Will bear up with this exercise, so long  
 I daily vow to use it. Come, and lead me  
 To these sorrows. (232-43)

We are led to believe Leontes will see Hermione and Mamillius dead, will have them interred in the same grave, and will visit the chapel daily. Narratively it is difficult to conceive how Paulina could so quickly contrive a plot to falsify Hermione’s death, gain Hermione’s acquiescence to the conspiracy, and hide it from Leontes for so long.

As previously considered, the grave is synonymous with the alchemical vessel. We should not infer on Leontes’ part any alchemical intention, however his ‘tears shed there / Shall be my recreation’ has unwitting significance. He speaks of ‘recreation’ as spiritual consolation, but re-creation is also implied. Alchemically, tears are ‘the mercurial waters which cleanse the blackened, dead matter of the Stone lying at the bottom of the alembic. ...

The tears are an expression of sorrow at the death of the Hermetic Bird...or the hermaphroditic body of the lovers (sulphur and argent vive), after they are united in the chemical wedding.<sup>19</sup> The chemical wedding is also a central image of the opus alchymicum as the reconciliation of opposites and the cycle of dissolution and coagulation of the matter of the philosopher's stone in the alembic. The chemical wedding may also be represented as the conjunction of mother and son. The creation of the philosopher's stone always involves some deathly sacrifice.<sup>20</sup> When the play returns to Sicilia in Act V, we should recall the mental image of the king weeping at the grave which bears his dead queen and child. We are later given the impression Paulina has the keeping of the same crypt, and we know that she is doing something mysterious.

Hermione's statue ends up in Paulina's keeping but the details are not explained. At the beginning of V.iii, Leontes does not see the statue in the gallery because it has been set apart. Something is new or he is not familiar with this space. The statue's alcove is not described, and, as I discuss in my reading of V.iii below, clear stage directions are not part of any early edition of the script. Staging this scene is one of the great challenges for any theatrical producer. This is because the theatricality of the scene is highly self-reflective. Further, the last scene makes itself into an alchemical experiment, expanding the alembic to incorporate the whole theatre. Whereas alchemists thought of the alembic as a microcosmic theatre in which they recreated the greater natural order, Shakespeare inverts this, turning the dramatic theatre into an alchemical chamber of transformation. The theatre becomes the reflective vessel which purifies, bringing the incorporated elements to their ideal resolution. The conclusion is an experiment and a mystery. We judge it successful even if we do not fully understand. This is because we too have been subjected to the artistry of the master.

## READINGS

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'tears'.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'chemical wedding'.

In light of the preceding introductory considerations, the remainder of my attention to *The Winter's Tale* takes the place in the context of the play as it unfolds. No scene can be examined as thoroughly as it merits. Beyond what has already been suggested about the first acts, there are a few more points integral to the mythical and alchemical reading of the play's enchanted reading.

Act I is Hermione's intercession on Leontes' behalf to Polixenes that he remain in Sicilia. Her effusive persuasion triggers Leontes' mysterious *tremor cordis*, resulting in his suspicion he has been cuckolded by Polixenes, and Hermione's child is his bastard. Leontes' 'infection of my brains / And hard'ning of my brows' (I.ii.145-46) has been much diagnosed as some form of illness or psychosis. All such diagnoses involve a degree of speculation. Leontes' motive is uncertain and destructive. Alchemically there may be a clue in his name, as the lion can represent the raw ore and unclean matter that must be purified in the opus alchymicum.<sup>21</sup> By his title as king he is associated with sulphur—the corrosive hot, dry, active, male principle of the opus, and Leontes is all of these to an excessive degree.<sup>22</sup> The act ends with Camillo being tasked to poison Polixenes, but instead these two escape to Bohemia.

In Act II Hermione is accused by Leontes and imprisoned against her own protest and the objections of the court. Leontes dispatches to Apollo's temple at Delphos to give rest to the minds of others. Under duress, Hermione delivers a healthy daughter early. Paulina takes the child to confront Leontes. In the third scene we learn Mamillius has taken ill, which Leontes blames on the dishonor to his mother. Leontes' passionate jealousy is further inflamed by Paulina's insubordination despite her protest of being his loyal servant, physician,<sup>23</sup> and obedient counselor (54-55), and he accuses her of witchcraft and heresy.

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'green lion'.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., s.v. 'king'.

<sup>23</sup> The conflation of the Pauline and the Hermetic is reminiscent of Acts 14:12, where Paul is mistaken for Hermes at Lystra: 'And they called Barnabas, Jupiter, and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.'

Paulina departs leaving with the king her unbridled condemnation and the child. Leontes relents from killing the child (which he only ever refers to as ‘bastard’) on Antigonus’ oath to execute justice by taking her to a remote and desert land beyond the kingdom and exposing her so that her fate is left to chance. The return of the messengers from the oracle is announced, and Leontes declares that Hermione shall have a public trial also in the name of justice.

### ACT III

Act III, Scene ii follows Cleomenes’ and Dion’s paeon to the oracle in the short first scene, and opens with Leontes reiterating that he will not be tyrannous in rendering a just verdict by due process. Hermione enters accompanied by Paulina. Curiously, they never exchange words on stage until the last scene of the play. III.ii is the first scene where Hermione and Paulina are seen together on stage. Paulina is not introduced until II.ii when she comes to the jail. Paulina takes the baby from Emilia with the Jailer’s consent, never interacting with Hermione who is sequestered off stage. For two figures alike in character, and supposed by the disenchanted interpretation to be co-conspirators, they are notably separate in action and speech.

Hermione is accused of treason, adultery, and conspiring to kill the king. She protests her fidelity and honor, rejects Leontes’ injustice, and defers to the oracle and Apollo as her judge. The oracle reads, ‘Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found’ (132-36). Leontes declares the oracle a falsehood and

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The Douay Rheims, the Geneva Bible, and the Authorized Version all follow the Vulgate alteration of the Greek Ἑρμῆν (*Hermes*): ‘et vocabant Barnabam Iovem, Paulum vero Mercurium, quoniam ipse erat dux verbi.’ The names are so interchangeable it is not worth pondering again Shakespeare’s less Greek. Paul is confused with Hermes because he does all the talking, but there is more to St Luke’s account. St Paul was first venerated because he healed a man crippled from birth whom he perceived had faith to be healed (14:9). Paul was identified as an adept in the Mercurial art of medicine before that of speech. The roles of physician and rhetor are combined ideally in the identity of the alchemist.

begins to proceed when he is interrupted by word that Mamillius has died. Immediately it is taken as a sign:

*Leontes* Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves  
Do strike at my injustice. [*Hermione swoons.*] How now  
there?  
*Paulina* The news is mortal to the Queen. Look down  
And see what death is doing. (146-49)

The stage direction '*Hermione swoons*' is an interpolation. The First Folio contains no direction, and any suggestion here is subsequent to its introduction by Nicholas Rowe for his 1708 edition of the *Complete Works*.<sup>24</sup> It would be unfair to predicate centuries of misunderstanding Hermione's death entirely on Rowe's interpolation. The play has always been liable to tensed theatrical and mythical interpretations. But III.ii becomes more ambiguous when we are not told what to think is happening. We only know that something has happened to Hermione from the responses. Paulina says the news is mortal. 'And see what death is doing', instead of referring to the death of Mamillius as the cause of Hermione swooning, could also immediately refer to death taking her.

Leontes bids that Hermione be removed and (presumably to Paulina), 'Beseech you tenderly apply to her / Some remedies for life' (152-53). Rowe interpolates Paulina's exit with other Ladies bearing Hermione; this makes the most sense if Paulina is his physician. Leontes begs Apollo's pardon and concedes every part of the oracle. Paulina returns within twenty lines of her departure, apparently not having heard Leontes' repentance. Her anger at Leontes is again unbridled, and she rages at him before saying that the Queen is dead, then offering to swear it. Oaths matter in this play (Leontes binds Antigonus' mission and the veracity of the oracle with oaths). It is worth noting that Paulina does not actually swear, only says that she will. The disenchanting interpretation must assume that Paulina is prepared to swear falsehood, which is difficult to believe. She is precluded from swearing by Leontes'

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<sup>24</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, xix, 1653; Pitcher, 230 n.144, 456.

submission to her, his vow of penitence, and his being led to see the bodies. Paulina, having retained her credibility as the only one besides Hermione who refused to give Leontes tender counsel, exits the scene leading the king in every sense of the word.

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T. G. Bishop identified in *The Comedy of Errors* how the linear narrative of time cannot be opposed in the classical and lawful chain of order towards death. This linear order is dissolved into the natural order of ocean and the Pauline, which means it is not dissolved into chaos but prepared for ultimate resolution into higher order and life. This motif is alchemical and one of Shakespeare's favourites. Any play featuring shipwreck or tempest and ensuing disorder should be with consideration of this, including *Twelfth Night*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and most of all *The Tempest*. *The Winter's Tale* is not frequently thought of as a play of storm and shipwreck, but it has both in Act III, Scene iii. Antigonus, having laid Perdita in Bohemia, barely has time to make his valediction to the child: 'The day frowns more and more; thou'rt like to have / A lullaby too rough. I never saw / The heavens so dim by day' (54-56). His '*Exit pursued by a bear*' is simultaneously pitiful and hilarious, as in that moment the play turns right-side up from tragic nadir to comedic beginning.

Wonder is mentioned eight times in *The Winter's Tale*, but not until III.iii at the midpoint of the play, when the Shepherd finds Perdita with 'What have we here? Mercy on's, a barne? A very pretty barne! A boy, or a child, I wonder? A pretty one, a very pretty one: sure some scape' (69-72). Perdita is the fulcrum of wonder through which the play turns from tragedy to comedy. Even Antigonus' macabre end and the destruction of the ship and sailors is recounted by the Clown in humorous fashion. It remains for the Shepherd to wax philosophical as he tells the Clown, 'Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born' (113-14). Alchemically we are led to expect the change of fortunes, as it

turns out that Perdita is laden with gold. In taking Perdita in, the Shepherd instantly prospers, and exits planning to do good deeds in response.

#### ACT IV

Time is integral to both *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*, though in different ways. *The Tempest* observes unity of time between the play's narrative and performance. In *The Winter's Tale*, Time is the Chorus, who in Act IV, Scene i turns his glass and reverses the progression of things back towards re-enchantment. Shakespeare's Time is recognizably iconic with his wings and his hourglass as the force who 'makes and unfolds error' (2), overthrows law (8), and plants and overwhelms custom (9). Yet unlike Robert Greene, whose romance had the full title *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, but whose treatment of time is prosaic, Shakespeare did not leave this convention untouched. John Pitcher indicates that with the turning of his glass, Time prompts the audience that they will see the social order turned upside down.<sup>25</sup> This too is inadequate.

'Time the devourer of things' ('tempus edax rerum') was a popular aphorism coined by Ovid. The context is illuminating:

And Helen when she saw her aged wrinkles in  
A glasse, wept also: musing in herself what men had seene,  
That by two noble princes sonnes she twice had ravisht beene.  
*Thou tyme, the eater up of things*, and age of spyghtfull teene,  
Destroy all things. And when that long continuance hath them bit,  
You leisurely by lingring death consume them every whit.  
And theis that wee call Elements doo never stand at stay.  
The enterchaunging course of them I will before yee lay.  
Give heede therto. This endlesse world conteynes therin I say  
Fowre substances of which all things are gendred.

...

yit every thing is made  
Of thesame fowre, and into them at length ageine doo fade.

...

No kind of thing keepes ay his shape and hew.  
For nature loving ever change repayres one shape anew  
Uppon another. Neyther dooth there perrish aught (trust mee)  
In all the world, but altring takes new shape. For that which wee

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<sup>25</sup> Pitcher, 77.

Doo terme by name of being borne, is for to gin to bee  
 Another thing than that it was: and likewise for to dye,  
 To cease to bee the thing it was. And though that varyably  
 Things passe perchance from place to place: yit all from whence they came  
 Returning, do unperrished continew still the same.  
 But as for in one shape, bee sure that nothing long can last.  
 Even so the ages of the world from gold to Iron past.<sup>26</sup>

Hermione is not Helen (though in antiquity she is daughter to Helen by Menelaus), the glass here is a mirror not an hourglass, and Shakespeare's Time is not the devourer. But the wrinkled queen, the glass, and the intervention of time have bearing in *The Winter's Tale*. This is elucidated by the *Metamorphoses*, but also by Sonnet 16. Clustered near Sonnet 16 are others that have resonance with *The Winter's Tale*. Sonnet 19 line 1 is 'Devouring Time, blunt thou the lion's paws'—as true a commentary as exists on Leontes' sixteen years of penance. Lines 9-10 of the same sonnet bid Time, 'O, carve not with thy hours my love's fair brow, / Nor draw no lines there with thine antique pen'. Sonnet 22 begins:

My glass shall not persuade me I am old,  
 So long as youth and thou are of one date,  
 But when in thee time's furrows I behold  
 Then look I death my days should expiate.

The glass of Sonnet 22 is most apparently a mirror, with a secondary suggestion of an hourglass. Shakespeare has considered this association more than once. Wrinkles also appear multiple times to suggest the inevitable signs of age.

For an enchanted reading of *The Winter's Tale*, and but that it predates the play, Sonnet 16 could serve almost without comment as the transition between Acts I-III and IV-V:

But wherefore do not you a mightier way  
 Make war upon this bloody tyrant Time?  
 And fortify yourself in your decay  
 With means more blessed than my barren rhyme?  
 Now stand you on the top of happy hours,  
 And many maiden gardens, yet unset,  
 With virtuous wish would bear your living flowers,  
 Much liker than your painted counterfeit:  
 So should the lines of life that life repair

<sup>26</sup> Ovid, trans. Golding, XV.255-64, 268-69, 276-86, emphasis added.

Which this time's pencil, or my pupil pen,  
 Neither in inward worth nor outward fair  
 Can make you live yourself in eyes of men.  
 To give away yourself keeps yourself still,  
 And you must live drawn by your own sweet skill.

The tyranny and decay of I-III must be opposed by means more blessed than barren rhyme. Lines 5-7 are indicative of Perdita in IV.iv. Lines 8-12 suggest the painted counterfeit statue. The 'lines of life', especially in proximity to Sonnets 19 and 22, suggest lines of poetry and wrinkle lines—both of which must be overcome to live in the eyes of men. The sweet skill required for living is mysterious in the end.

In the *Metamorphoses*, the meditation on Helen is part of a discourse given by Numa Pompilius, an exile of tyranny who was enlightened by Nature and his mind's eye. In the context of metamorphosis, Helen aging as time devours her is part of the transitory nature of all things. Everything transitions into and out of the four primal substances. Nothing keeps its shape permanently because nature loves change, but nothing perishes either, being reborn even as the ages of the world transition from gold to iron. Numa's Aristotelian physics of transformation and decay is not positively alchemical, but the same elements and processes are where alchemy focused its studies for the reversal of the material process.

When Shakespeare's Time turns his glass there are a plurality of significations. Time is not merely suggesting what follows will be jumbled upside down. The flow of time will not be irrevocably forward from gold to iron, but turned right-side up and reversed towards re-enchantment. Having been dissolved into its baser elements, the matter of the projection begins to resolve through art into its finer form. The final projection is not just one of matter which may decay, but also of spirit which is eternal. Spiritual restoration instills material restoration. Chronologically the glass is a sand timer. Alchemically the glass is an alembic. Poetically the glass is a mirror. This returns to the mirror as the glass surface through which to apprehend greater images beyond, in which to comprehend what is reflected, and at which

itself we may wonder. Time the Chorus self-consciously draws this threefold reflection into a theatricizing of poetic faith:

I witness to  
 The times that brought them in; so shall I do  
 To th' freshest things now reigning, and make stale  
 The glistening of this present, as my tale  
 Now seems to it. Your patience this allowing,  
 I turn my glass, and give my scene such growing  
 As you had slept between. Leontes leaving—  
 Th' effects of his fond jealousies so grieving  
 That he shuts up himself—imagine me,  
 Gentle spectators, that I now may be  
 In fair Bohemia, and remember well,  
 I mentioned a son o' th' King's, which Florizel  
 I now name to you; and with speed so pace  
 To speak of Perdita, now grown in grace  
 Equal with wond'ring. (11-25)

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The second scene in Act IV is the brief establishing scene of Polixenes and Camillo conspiring to catch Florizel with Perdita. The third scene is the introduction of Autolycus. This rogue could easily be overlooked as an integral alchemical figure. In name, Autolycus has been identified as 'Lone Wolf',<sup>27</sup> which is fitting enough, but here Shakespeare's less Greek comes into play: *αυτος λευκος* (*autos leukos*) would be 'whiteness itself'. 'Rouge' is only two inverted letters different than 'rogue'. In the second couplet of Autolycus' introductory song, we have an affirmation of this alchemical reddening of the white, as well as a pun on the title of the play: 'Why, then comes in the sweet o' the year, / For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale' (3-4). Autolycus self-identifies as 'litter'd under Mercury' (25). This is genuine to *Metamorphoses*, but there is something more. Like his father he is 'of crafty nature, well-versed in cunning wiles. For he could make white of black and black of white, a worthy heir of his father's art.'<sup>28</sup> Autolycus in *The Winter's Tale* is the quack

<sup>27</sup> Pitcher, 142 n.24.

<sup>28</sup> Ovid, *Metamorphoses* IX-XV, trans. Frank Justus Miller (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), XI.313-15. In addition to inheriting a part of his father's identity that would come to be associated with alchemy, Autolycus was the twin birth of Philammon, whose father was Apollo. Mercury and Apollo had

alchemist, looking to turn tunes, tricks, and trifles into coin. Like Face in Jonson's *The Alchemist*, Autolycus is a trickster and a thief who is integral to the play's narrative resolution, and escapes in the end without punishment or profit. Unlike Jonson, whose presented alchemy is all confidence larceny, Shakespeare makes his quack recognizable as an alchemical red herring. This signals the presence of an ideal alchemist (Paulina), and an idealism beyond the mere reconciliation of narrative.

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Too little can be said about Act IV, Scene iv. In the Shakespearean canon, only the final scene of *Love's Labour's Lost* is longer. If the lines are uncut, and the songs and dances are given their due, this scene alone can take an hour to perform. Certainly it incorporates topsy-turvy elements of pastoral comedy and carnival that make such scenes so amusing and popular. However, between the rustic pageantry, the badly-disguised antics of the nobility, and the prolonged hilarity of innumerable plot twists, there is a continuity of re-enchantment through art and nature.

Perdita, the princess who thinks she is a shepherdess, is adorned as a goddess for the festival of sheep-shearing. Through her pretending to be what she thinks she is not, her true nature becomes evident. When Polixenes and Camillo arrive, pretending to be what they are not, Perdita gives them flowers and the following exchange occurs wherein the relationship between art and nature is made explicit:

<i>Perdita</i>	Sir, the year growing ancient, Not yet on summer's death, nor on the birth Of trembling winter, the fairest flow'rs o' th' season Are our carnations and streak'd gillyvors (Which some call Nature's bastards). Of that kind Our rustic garden's barren, and I care not To get slips of them.
<i>Polixenes</i>	Wherefore, gentle maiden, Do you neglect them?

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assaulted Chione on the same day, and the sons were born twin to different fathers.<sup>28</sup> Apollo and Mercury are the deities that preside over *The Winter's Tale*.

*Perdita* For I have heard it said,  
 There is an art which in their piedness shares  
 With great creating Nature.

*Polixenes* Say there be;  
 Yet 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. 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. (79-97)

Thought and image interweave deeply here. Perdita has no gillyvors (white carnations streaked with red), which she seems to resist calling ‘Nature’s bastards’. They are not illegitimate but the superior product of an art shared with ‘great creating Nature’, and she is reticent to ply this art. Polixenes picks up on the insinuation of conceiving greater out of lesser. He speaks of art as husbandry and objects to debasing gentler stock with wilder. Subsequently, it is evident Polixenes judges on appearances and changes thereof (which he only thinks he understands). Perdita intuits—in accord with her character—that appearances are accidental and transformation is a matter of essence.

Perdita invokes Proserpina at line 116. According to Ovid, Proserpina was gathering violets and white lilies.<sup>29</sup> Shakespeare lets us hear of these flowers in lines 120 and 126, but Perdita adds:

No, like a bank, for love to lie and play on;  
 Not like a corse; or if—not to be buried,  
 But quick and in mine arms. Come take your flow’rs.  
 Methinks I play as I have seen them do  
 In Whitsun pastorals. Sure this robe of mine... (130-134)

As Bishop has suggested, Perdita as the figure of Proserpina has learned the lesson of that tale and moved away from death in love to love in life. In her self-conscious performative adornment, she also alludes consciously to Pentecost, and by extension to the giving of the

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<sup>29</sup> Ovid, trans. Miller, V.392.

Holy Spirit. François Laroque recognizes the scene's rites of rural English festivals, games, dances, and plays that mark the commencement of spring, and he locates the significance of these in the context of the Pentecost rebirth rites of passage.<sup>30</sup> As an alternate solemnity to Easter for baptism, Whitsunday was a time not only of wearing white for baptism, but for wearing new clothing.<sup>31</sup> Perdita's 'unusual weeds' do not merely mark her function as queen of the feast. She is adorned as one making her debut, but also as one reborn. About this scene Laroque concludes:

The pastoral festival thus serves here as a long-drawn-out transition between the world of tragedy and the final reconciliation. Its effect is rather like that of the light of dawn dissipating the darkness and, as the sun climbs to its zenith, the play is split in two. Yet the shadows are not completely chased away, for beneath all the talk of hospitality there runs a covert thread of violence and death. Magical though it seems, the festivity does not provide a complete cure for evil. Nature, however strongly reaffirmed, cannot do without the helping hand of art (Hermione's patience and Paulina's cunning) if the hope that flowered timidly during the festival is to take firm root in this wasteland, ravaged by jealousy and tyranny.<sup>32</sup>

Polixenes is the reminder in this scene of jealousy and tyranny. He, like Leontes, presumes to see what he wants to see, and fails to recognize the truth about those who are before him. His threats to delegitimize Florizel and execute Perdita—whom he derides as 'witchcraft' (423) and 'enchantment' (434)—are only less cruel than Leontes' wrath in consequence, not intention.

Once again it is Camillo who saves the victims from the jealous king. Their plot hatched, they make Autolycus their 'instrument' (624). As thief, messenger, and master of disguise, Autolycus serves them doubly so, providing a cover for their escape, but also alerting the Shepherd to the details of how he may vindicate Perdita with the emblems of her noble birth. The ideal resolution of the final act is facilitated by the rogue to the ultimate benefit of nearly everyone except himself.

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<sup>30</sup> François Laroque, *Shakespeare's Festive World: Elizabethan Seasonal Entertainment and the Professional Stage*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 218-19.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 137.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 221.

## ACT V

The first and second scenes of *The Winter's Tale's* fifth act are often passed over in the rush to interpret the irresistible climactic scene. These scenes importantly add to the building of narrative and thematic suspense. They also reload the affective cues of wonder and enchantment introduced in the Bohemian pastoral but now transferred to Sicilia, and it is a mistake to overlook them. The first scene is the longest in Act V; other establishing scenes are much shorter, and in addition to resetting the Sicilian context it is also a scene of delayed suspense. Some of the most pointed considerations of the final scene are diminished by neglect of what leads up to it.

The opening dialogue begins with Cleomenes assuring Leontes he has 'done enough, and have performed / A saint-like sorrow' (1-2). Leontes has 'paid down / More penitence than done trespass' (3-4). There is also an echo of the *Pater Noster* with 'heavens' (5), 'evil' (5), and 'forgive' (6) in addition to 'trespass'. In his effort to exonerate Leontes, Cleomenes has deferred to the language of a Catholic piety perhaps rote or trivializing. Leontes has paid more than he owes and should do as the heavens have done, forget his evil, and forgive himself. That Cleomenes should be the one to say this, and Dion to affirm it in line 25, suggests continuity since they were the bearers of the oracle. Leontes resists. Rather than forget his evil and forgive himself, he will 'remember / Her and her virtues' (6-7) and think of wrongs that destroyed issue and heir.

The exhortation to forget and forgive begins several references to remembrance. In this respectably-long scene of 233 lines, memory or remembering are spoken of by Leontes (6, 50), Dion (25), Paulina (67), and Florizel (219). Four out of five are in the first third of the scene—all of these except the second in direct reference to Hermione.<sup>33</sup> Leontes objects that

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<sup>33</sup> William Engel, 'Kinetic Emblems and Memory Images in *The Winter's Tale*, in *Late Shakespeare, 1608-1613*, ed. Andrew J. Power and Rory Loughnane (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 78. Engel's focus is an interpretive key to the play's concern with the exercise of spiritual redemption. He looks to the Art of Memory and images 'which can condense whole histories into compact narrative niches', but he

while Hermione and her virtues are remembered he cannot forget his wrong (6), a chief consequence of which is that the kingdom is heirless through the death of Mamillius and the casting out of Perdita.

Paulina affirms Leontes in his assertion of his fault, stating hyperbolically that he could not parallel Hermione if he ‘wedded all the world’ (13), or ‘from the all that are, took something good / To make a perfect woman’ (14-15). Whatever restorations have been made or anticipated, the air of tragedy still hangs over Sicilia. There is, however, a significant implied pun on re-membering. The perfect woman, Paulina says, Leontes might re-member to take as a wife. This would not equal the Hermione of past memory, but it anticipates Hermione’s reanimation. It also makes Hermione present through the act of remembering.

Shakespeare’s cognizant use of classical rhetoric and liturgical theology is worth considering on this point. *Anamnesis* is remembering someone in a way that makes them present. As Gregory Dix writes, ‘But in the scriptures both of the Old and New Testament, *anamnesis* and the cognate verb have the sense of “re-calling” or “re-presenting” before God an event in the past, so that it becomes here and now operative by its effects.’<sup>34</sup> Given the continuity between *The Winter’s Tale* and 1 Corinthians, there is a eucharistic impulse in the connotations of ‘this do ye in remembrance of me.’ Through rhetorical *anamnesis*, Hermione is made present by words and memory before the final scene. She is present in spirit. This presence begins the escalating presence of Hermione throughout the fifth act. In the second scene we will hear of and accept her physical presence in the form of a realistic statue. In the last scene spirit and body come together in her real presence.

Paulina speaks severely in remembering Hermione but does not name her, only making indirect references such as ‘she you kill’d’ (15). Cleomenes would have Paulina

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overlooks V.i in this respect. Engel’s identification of Hermione as the key image of the play is sound, but in drawing in memory arts, Spanish visual arts, and the *Phaedrus*, Engle overlooks *anamnesis* as more proximate rhetorical and liturgical constructs.

<sup>34</sup> Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 161.

speak 'a thousand things that would / Have done the time more benefit, and grac'd / Your kindness better' (21-23). Paulina infers Cleomenes would have Leontes remarry. Dion suggests she lacks pity for the state, the perpetuity of the sovereign's name, and his 'present comfort' (32). Paulina reiterates the lack of a worthy replacement for Hermione (34-35). Her tone may rise, but it is evident she is the lone voice of femininity and reason. Further, she is fulfilling the role agreed upon—and reaffirmed in this scene—between her and Leontes. She emphasizes the ultimate conditions of the oracle as the only means for possible restoration. No heir shall be found until the lost child is found (40), though this prospect be 'as monstrous to our human reason / As my Antigonus to break his grave, / And come again to me' (41-43). Antigonus will do no such thing, but the signal is mixed. The monstrosity to human reason of the lost child recovered is as great as the monstrosity of one dead returning from the grave to the spouse. From the perspective of the characters in V.i, there is no indication the oracle is about to be fulfilled. Paulina's expectation of how the oracle will be fulfilled remains unspecified, and her role has no doubt been one of hardship and perseverance. But we as well as Leontes are being prepared to accept a monstrosity to reason.

Hermione is first mentioned by name when Leontes again makes her present through memory: 'Good Paulina, / Who hast the memory of Hermione, / I know, in honor' (49-51). In the exchange that follows we are given a horrific image that is paradoxically a foreshadowing of the beatific restoration yet to come.

<i>Leontes</i>	Thou speak'st truth: No more such wives, therefore no wife. One worse, And better us'd, would make her sainted spirit Again possess her corpse, and on this stage (Where we offenders now appear) soul-vex'd, And begin, 'Why to me—?'
<i>Paulina</i>	Had she such power, She had just cause.
<i>Leontes</i>	She had, and would incense me To murder her I married.
<i>Paulina</i>	I should so: Were I the ghost that walk'd, I'd bid you mark

Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't  
 You chose her; then I'd shriek, that even your ears  
 Should rift to hear me, and the words that follow'd  
 Should be 'Remember mine.'(55-67)

At line 60 Paulina interjects—something she does to a noticeable degree in keeping the rhetorical movement under her control—to remark with subjunctive uncertainty that if Hermione had the power to return as a sainted spirit and possess her corpse, she would have just cause to haunt Leontes for taking another wife. Being conditioned to Hermione's presence in memory, those present are now conditioned for her presence in spirit. Sarah Beckwith suggests Hermione is being stage conjured.<sup>35</sup> The 'sainted spirit' possessing a corpse (which Paulina calls a 'ghost') is a haunting image. Leontes comments that she would drive him to murder any new wife. There is both a recollection and inversion of *Hamlet*, with the king/father being unfaithful to the memory of the queen who was unjustly killed. King Hamlet's 'remember me'<sup>36</sup> is echoed by Paulina's 'Were I the ghost that walked...the words that follow'd / Should be "Remember mine"' (63, 66-67). 'Remember mine' is the third time Hermione is made present in memory, and this one is reminiscent of life that remains unsettled after death, not before.

There are further ambiguities. The First Folio places the closing parenthesis in line 59 after 'appear'; later editions place it after 'now' or remove the parentheses. Either way 58-60 are grammatically confusing, but 'soul-vex'd' refers to 'sainted spirit' despite being closer to 'we offenders'. 'This stage' is probably a dais on the theatrical stage, but it is also theatrically self-conscious.<sup>37</sup> So, the prospect of a reanimated corpse appearing on stage encloses the theatrical audience in the experience of such an enchantment.

The conclusion of the first scene's opening exchange is the oath Paulina gets Leontes to swear: that he will only remarry with her assent, that Paulina will choose the queen, and

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<sup>35</sup> Beckwith, 127.

<sup>36</sup> *Hamlet*, I.v.91.

<sup>37</sup> Pitcher, 315 n.58.

the bride will be ‘As like Hermione as is her picture’ (74), and ‘when your first queen’s again in breath’ (84). Scott Crider suggests V.i is a scene in which to read hope. The oath which Paulina extracts would require the marital virtue of maintaining a vow (something at which Leontes previously failed), and it would require such a vow despite the apparent impossibility of fulfilment. Paulina prepares Leontes for faith by persuading him to hope for the impossible.<sup>38</sup> As far as Leontes knows, he has committed himself indefinitely to an act of hope.

It is narratively convenient that as soon as Leontes’ oath is made, the Servant enters with word of the arrival of Florizel and his princess. Leontes discerns at once the irregularity of this visitation. His inquiry about Florizel’s train (92) is perhaps a hope for the presence of Camillo. Two parts of the oracle were that Polixenes is blameless and Camillo a true subject. The remaining condition of the oracle would be the return of the lost princess, but except perhaps for an inkling Antigonus would have tried to take the child to Bohemia, there is no reason to expect her return from there. If Leontes considers Florizel’s arrival auspicious, he is reserved in response. Pressed about the princess, the Servant emphasizes she is ‘the most peerless piece of earth, I think, / That e’er the sun shone bright on’ (94-95). Paulina, reacting perhaps to Leontes, perhaps to the Servant, speaks forcefully:

O Hermione,  
 As every present time doth boast itself  
 Above a better gone, so must thy grave  
 Give way to what’s seen now! (95-98)

Paulina appears to be more jealous of their attention than anxious for the fulfilment of the oracle. The reference to the grave giving way to the princess sounds more like jealousy for Hermione’s memory than anxiety about the fulfilment of the oracle. After this Paulina chastises the servant for forgetting he previously lavished such praise on Hermione. This is Paulina’s second reference in this scene to a grave giving way to life, but her tone errs

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<sup>38</sup> Crider, 157.

towards pathos. On the other hand, now, in addition to being present in memory, present in name, and present in spirit, Hermione is spoken to as present.

In V.iii Hermione is identifiable with a statue of cult worship, but she is the second identified in this respect, not the first. The Servant praises the princess a third and fourth time:

*Servant* The other, when she has obtain'd your eye,  
 Will have your tongue too. This is a creature,  
 Would she begin a sect, might quench the zeal  
 Of all professors else, make proselytes  
 Of who we but bid follow.

*Paulina* How? not women?

*Servant* Women will love her, that she is a woman  
 More worth than any man; men, that she is  
 The rarest of all women. (105-12)

This is the cult of the princess, the Servant performing his own minor enchantment on the court so that their anticipation of Perdita's arrival may rise closer to that of the play's audience. When Perdita arrives she proves to be almost entirely an object of admiration and discussion. Her one speech is barely three lines.

Leontes sends all but Paulina to escort the new arrivals, and the two of them have a private exchange. Between the end of Act III and the first two scenes of Act V we are only given vignettes of the relationship between Leontes and Paulina, but circumstantially their relationship is longer than any of the marriages depicted or arranged. Paulina's shepherding of Leontes' penitence has been remarkably intimate but also pious. Leontes remarks on the strangeness of the unannounced arrival. Paulina reminds him that Mamillius 'Jewel of children' (116) would have paired with Florizel whose age is within a month of the dead Sicilian prince. Leontes' response is that speaking of Mamillius repeats the experience of his death. Commentators have often remarked that however wondrous the resolution of *The Winter's Tale* may be, it is incomplete because Mamillius is not restored. Yet this tragic relief is preempted in V.i rather than brought to bear in the wonder of the second scene or the

enchantment of the final scene. Leontes tells Paulina that when Florizel reminds him of Mamillius, her chastisements will ‘Unfurnish me of reason’ (123). Leontes may not realize it, but this is the completion of Paulina’s ethical rhetoric. Reason, the absence of which allowed him to accept that which did not seem not true, will finally again in its absence allow him to accept that which can not seem true. It is the finishing touch of Paulina’s long preparation in him.

Into this context come Florizel and Perdita. Leontes is struck by Florizel’s unmistakable ‘print’ likeness to his father (125). Having told Paulina that Florizel would remind him of Mamillius and unfurnish him of reason, he instead acknowledges Polixenes’ likeness at that age (127) and is sympathetically reminded more of deeds wildly performed in youth (129-30). He confirms the Servant’s praise of Perdita and gives the couple mutual praise:

And you fair princess—goddess! O! alas,  
I lost a couple, that ‘twixt heaven and earth  
Might thus have stood, begetting wonder, as  
You, gracious couple, do...’ (131-34)

Leontes draws attention to the present couple ‘begetting wonder’. They do so from, according to Leontes, the interstice of heaven and earth. If Leontes has a premonition this is the fulfillment of the oracle, he projects the conjunction of wonder and grace onto the new but familiar image before him. In a comedy we might see this played out as the happy ending. This would be Leontes’ best imagining of the fulfilment of the oracle.

This idyllic moment is broken first by Florizel’s lie about their circumstances. The prince is given away by the youthful lie that Perdita is Libyan. The joke is on Florizel, but Leontes indulges the conceit and marks their presence as fortunate: ‘The blessed gods / Purge all infection from our air whilst you / Do climate here!’ 168-70. A second interruption destabilizes this invoked serenity when Polixenes’ arrival is announced. Florizel and Perdita are exposed as unmarried and she as a shepherdess. Florizel asks Leontes to be his advocate,

and the peace is almost broken again when Leontes briefly fancies asking for Perdita as his own wife. His attraction is a function of her resemblance to Hermione—‘I thought of her, / Even in these looks I made’ (227-28)—and the fact that he is reformed but not perfect. Perdita is the noble and pure copy of her mother, and the closest substitute Leontes might expect to the fulfilment of the oracle. Some critics infer from *Pandosto* an incestuous desire on Leontes’ part, but any such attraction is fleeting and his affection overall paternal. Leontes is chastened by Paulina, and the scene ends with him agreeing to advocate for Florizel.

This intensely creative scene re-establishes the Sicilian context as one of penitence and waiting for restoration. The movement is subtly alchemical and predominantly rhetorical, with Hermione being made increasingly present in memory, then in name, then in spirit, then as spoken to. Throughout, Leontes and all those who hear are prepared to accept something beyond their reason. The plot and character elements of a comic resolution are set in place. All the while the suspense continues to build. The disenchanted reading accounts for all of these as clever rhetorical artifice by which we are fooled into an illusion of faith at the end. However before the conclusion there is the intervening second scene, where rhetorical persuasion gives way to the movement of wonder.

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Scene ii is an indirect recounting of the penultimate reconciliation. It is also the final scene for the pastoral characters. Autolycus is the transitional figure, mediating one last time between royal and rustic. The events of V.ii are the stuff of traditional comedy’s final scene: True identities are revealed, families are reconciled, and the wedding is set. However, because of the second-hand account, we experience none of this directly, and all of it in prose instead of poetry. Shakespeare’s ability to write such a scene was never in question. This scene exists as the final ebb before the crash of V.iii. We are forced to experience this resolution indirectly. Just as in V.i the language and imagery of unbelievable things has been

queued in memory, in V.ii the happy ending is related in such a way that we are drawn into its wonder indirectly. This is the only scene where wonder is named more than once. Besides references to amazement and admiration, wonder is mentioned three times, yet we do not see what is wondrous. The tale should be believed as it is told rather than believed because it is seen. Wonder is not an end but an instrument towards a greater end. These are wonders to which we assent but do not experience. When V.iii escalates the possibilities of what is portrayed, imagination is already active to apprehend a level elevated above what is experienced.

Autolycus exhorts the 1<sup>st</sup> Gentleman to recount the reconciliation. The 1<sup>st</sup> Gentleman assumes from him the role of interlocutor, and we see by the twentieth line that the story has begun to eclipse the rogue:

I make a broken delivery of the business; but the changes I perceiv'd in the King and Camillo were very notes of admiration. They seem'd almost, with staring on one another, to tear the cases of their eyes. There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they look'd as they had heard of a world ransom'd, or one destroy'd. A notable passion of wonder appear'd in them; but the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could not say if th' importance were joy or sorrow; but in the extremity of the one, it must needs be. (9-19)

Shakespeare again prolongs the suspense. The 1<sup>st</sup> Gentleman saw the reconciliation of Leontes and Camillo, which was itself an occasion of 'admiration' (11). Gesture is described as speech (13-14). There was a 'passion of wonder' (16) that defied the wisest onlooker to say if it was joy or sorrow. Those who saw the reconciliation knew what it was by its appearance if not its essence. Seeing is believing. Or so we hear. This continues an escalation of apprehension from auditory to visual to something greater.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Gentleman confirms the oracle is fulfilled and the whole kingdom is celebrating. Indeed, 'Such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot express it' (23-25). It may seem ironic that we hear this, but the recounting in V.ii is

strictly prose. The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman, who is Paulina's steward, enters and answers the interlocutions of the 1<sup>st</sup> Gentleman, escalating the account to the tokens of recognition and the comic reconciliation we would expect of a comedy. However, beyond the comic resolution, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman is also he who recounts how those from Bohemia hear of Hermione's death (85). The account of Hermione's death that the 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman relates was told for Perdita's sake, but Polixenes and Camillo likewise had no prior knowledge of Hermione's and Perdita's fates.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman says that in response to her mother's death Perdita 'did (with an 'Alas!'), I would fain say, bleed tears; for I am sure my heart wept blood' (88-89). This is possibly melodramatic recounting, but Perdita's tears at least hearken to the cult imagery of weeping statues, and she has already been identified as the object of cult worship.

Alchemically, 'The tears symbolize the mercurial waters of grace which seemingly drown the body but which in reality wash away the impurities and make it ready to receive the enlivening soul'.<sup>39</sup> The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman's following remark 'Who was most marble there chang'd color' (89-90), anticipates V.iii as well as representing the alchemical transmutation from white to red.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> Gentleman's final revelation is the statue of the Princess' mother, 'which is in the keeping of Paulina—a piece many years in doing and now newly perform'd by that rare Italian master, Julio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could put breath into his work, would beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape' (95-100). Anyone familiar with *The Winter's Tale* is so aware of the statue it is easy to forget that narratively this is the surprising moment of its revelation. Immediately its identity is complicated by Julio Romano's new performance and his ability to perfectly ape Nature. The questions surrounding the truth about the statue and this artist's function have been considered. The 3<sup>rd</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'tears'.

Gentlemen, even as Paulina's steward, does not know or does not reveal anything of significance. The expectation is the revelation of a perfect likeness. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Gentleman reveals Paulina has been visiting her 'great matter' (104) multiple times a day ever since the death of Hermione. The gentlemen exit so they may add to the rejoicing, witness the birth of new grace, and augment their knowledge.

Autolycus is briefly left to reflect. As a Mercurial figure he rises and falls between royal and rustic company. His identity is necessary to the story but also transitory. He can avoid the curse of a damning fault, but lacks the constitution to rise to a permanent higher station. Likewise he may deserve punishment, but he will not get it. He adapts to the profits and the strokes of his vocation. Autolycus' ruse works far enough for him to mingle with gentlemen for the retelling, but then fall back in with the rustics whose baseness he also shares. The Shepherd and the Clown may have gentle heirs (127), but their place is not in the court, and if they are present in the final scene it is anonymously. Perdita has been returned to her blood family, and they that preserved her fortunes until the fullness of time return to their station materially enriched but not spiritually elevated. They promise through false oaths to be Autolycus' good masters. Perhaps, unwittingly, they keep Autolycus from further miscreance. Once again that which is greater is beyond our apprehension, and we are left with lesser minds to comprehend. The Clown has the last word, including a final reference to wonder: 'If I do not wonder how thou dar'st venture to be drunk, not being a tall fellow, trust me not' (170-72). We are meant to believe that even wonder will become ridiculous in light of what is to follow.

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G. Wilson Knight suggests Hermione's resurrection is so effective in performance because, under intense dramatic pressure, the revelation is gradual so it is experienced

imaginatively rather than conceived intellectually before it is complete.<sup>40</sup> All the rhetoric, all the wonder, all the myth, and all the alchemy of *The Winter's Tale* bear down on the revelation in this final scene. When Paulina requires the awakening of faith, the interlocking complexity of this requirement is greater than sceptics have considered. The characters surrounding Leontes are included in the exhortation to awakened faith. The audience of the performance is also included.

The final mystery is revealed but not explained. It is both impossible to read this scene too carefully, and impossible no matter how carefully it is read to resolve it into a single conclusive perspective. A tensed ambiguity of meaning—that in *Hamlet* perfectly encapsulates a bifurcated mind that cannot be resolved—here expresses a single resolution that cannot be parsed. Ultimately the resolution is revelation in the wake of faith. The image that we mythically apprehend is theatrically dissolved before we can comprehend it. Act IV, Scene iv of *The Winter's Tale* is five and a half times longer than the final scene. Even in Act V, at 155 lines the third scene comes third in length, following a first scene of 233 lines and a second scene of 174.

We must be cautious about reading too much into counting lines and words, but a cursory examination is intriguing. V.iii is 155 lines with 1,285 words. The opening stage direction of the First Folio is '*Enter Leontes, Polixenes, Florizell, Perdita, Camillo, Paulina: Hermione (like a Statue:) Lords, &c.*' If Perdita's Bohemian family is present they are among the extras. Neither Florizel nor any of the unnamed extras speak. The allocation of spoken parts is striking:

<b>Character</b>	<b>Speeches</b>	<b>Lines</b>	<b>Words</b>
Leontes	14	76	541
Paulina	14	76	536
Polixenes	5	10	59

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<sup>40</sup> Knight, *Crown of Life*, 127.

Camillo	2	7	48
Perdita	2	7	44
Hermione	1	8	57

Line counts are inclusive of partial lines. There are only five changes of speaker that break at the end of complete lines.<sup>41</sup> Only Camillo's couplet at 112-13 begins and ends a speech without interrupted lines, yet even in this the second line is missing two metrical feet. Even without a comprehensive analysis of the play and Shakespeare's work in general, the evident symmetries are remarkable. Because of split lines, Leontes and Paulina cover 152 of 155 lines in the scene, or 98%. They dominate the speaking with 1,077 of 1,285 words (84%). They take all but ten of thirty-eight speeches. The parity of Leontes and Paulina might be expected. That they so dominate the scene is more surprising.

The meter in this scene falls short of the crystalline poetry glimpsed in *Cymbeline* and consummate in *The Tempest*. Frequently the meter is overtly troubled, especially, and perhaps most surprisingly, in the speech of Paulina. Only her incantation in 94-109 approaches poetic mastery. Is her verbal hesitance a manifestation of her uncertainty about the resolution of the play? In a disenchanted interpretation, if she knows that the revelation of Hermione is an inevitable reconciliation, why are not her lines masterful? Consistently, Leontes has the superior verse. I have marked some overruns of iambic pentameter with a vertical bar (|').

The unifying alchemical significance of the grave has previously been identified. It is the first thing Leontes mentions in this scene:

O grave and good Paulina, the great comfort  
That I have had of thee? (1-2)

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<sup>41</sup> Paulina at 30, Camillo at 49, Leontes at 67, Paulina at 74, and Camillo at 112.

Line 2 is punctuated in the First Folio with a question mark rather than an exclamation point, and the interrogative mood for this scene is apropos. Paulina's response reestablishes comedic unity: debts repaid, families reunited, and sovereignty preserved:

What, sovereign sir,  
I did not well, I meant well. All my ser|vices  
You have paid home; but that you have vouchsaf'd,  
With your crown'd brother and these your contract|ed  
Heirs of your kingdoms, my poor house to vis|it,  
It is a surplus of your grace, which nev|er  
My life may last to answer. (2-8)

She is humble about her own role and discreet about any present purpose, suggesting the debt of grace is hers, not Leontes'. In response Leontes asks to see the statue and comments on the 'gallery' (10) having 'much content / in many singularities' (11-12), but the statue is not evident. Gallery suggests an exhibition space for works of art where Hermione's statue would be displayed. Gallery may also suggest the platform on the interior wall of a church or theatre which provides extra space for an audience. Leontes' description of what is in the gallery is unspecific. Perhaps he refers to works of art. Perhaps it is an unenlightened description of Paulina's alchemical laboratory and its contents. Just as likely, it is a meta-theatrical reference, and Leontes is quipping about the audience having much content and many singularities, but there being no statue. The last two senses may be combined. We cannot be sure the dramatic space resembles a laboratory. As the scene progress it becomes clear the theatre functions as the alembic, and it draws all of its contents into the final resolution.

Paulina describes Hermione's 'dead likeness' as excelling anything yet seen or made by the hand of man (16-17). She tells them to prepare to see life mocked as well as sleep mocks death. In other words, the dead statue mocks the living Hermione. The only actual direction at this point is Paulina's 'But here it is' (18) indicating the statue's location, and an

actual revelation with ‘Behold, and say ‘tis well’ (20).<sup>42</sup> Even without a stage direction there is a definite moment of silence, after which Paulina again speaks: ‘I like your silence, it the more shows off / Your wonder; but yet speak.’ This is the play’s final reference to wonder. Finally, after Hermione has been made spiritually present in V.i, and after we hear of wondrous restorations and the existence of the statue in V.ii, we finally have wonder attached to seeing a material Hermione. In performance the resolution of the play hinges on this moment of revelation. How effectively can the actor sustain the image of a statue? A film adaptation would decide the nature of the statue. In the theatre, we have been prepared for Hermione’s living presence in spirit but her bodily presence in stone. For an unfamiliar audience, which way would minds be tricked, and for how long? The disenchanted presumption ‘Well, of course it’s a living person’ is a *post hoc ergo propter hoc* dismissal of the story’s mythos. When Leontes breaks the silence he reinforces that the statue is stone:

Her natural posture!  
 Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed  
 Thou art Hermione; or rather, thou art she  
 In thy not chiding; for she was as tender  
 As infancy and grace. But yet, Paulina,  
 Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing  
 So aged as this seems. (23-29)

Leontes is so struck that he speaks directly to the statue, but speaks as though it is not Hermione, because despite the likeness it lacks speech. Speech will turn out to be the last proof Hermione is living. Only gradually does Leontes notice the irregularity of wrinkles. Paulina attributes the wrinkles to ‘our carver’s excellence’ (30) that makes the statue ‘As she liv’d now’ (32). Leontes is overwhelmed in response:

As now she might have done,  
 So much to my good comfort as it is  
 Now piercing to my soul. O, thus she stood,  
 Even with such life of majesty (warm life,

<sup>42</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1654: Rowe placed the direction ‘[Paulina draws a curtain, and discovers] Hermione [standing] like a statue.’ It is an interpolation of the First Folio’s opening direction: ‘Enter...Hermione (like a Statue:)’ . The revelation by drawing a curtain is not indicated by the text until line 83 when Paulina alludes to drawing one closed.

As now it coldly stands), when first I woo'd her!  
 I am asham'd; does not the stone rebuke me  
 For being more stone than it? O royal piece,  
 There's magic in thy majesty, which has  
 My evils conjur'd to remembrance, and  
 From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,  
 Standing like stone with thee. (32-42)

Sarah Beckwith interprets these lines to mean Leontes weeps when presented with the statue.<sup>43</sup> The text does not directly support this, but in performance it would play well. We see Leontes' soul-piercing contrition and confession when confronted with the person of Hermione. Leontes feels himself more stone than the stone itself. Stage conjuring is again mentioned, but this time Leontes speaks of the magic in the majesty of the statue conjuring his evils to remembrance. His heart of stone has, through the eclipse of reason, been purged. Perdita too has apparently had her spirits taken, for she too stands statue-like with her mother.

Alchemically, this is the moment when the king, the queen, and the child are joined in death to unify the matter of the stone. This is the image of the alchemical wedding.<sup>44</sup> Leontes embodies alchemical sulphur—the active, hot, dry, male principle of the opus.<sup>45</sup> Hermione embodies alchemical mercury.<sup>46</sup> Hermione is overtly Mercurial in name, but more pointedly she is the white queen, the 'stone attained at the albedo; a symbol of the receptive, cold, moist, female principle of the opus.'<sup>47</sup> Perdita is the philosophical child: the philosopher's stone when first born from the chemical wedding. The stone can be represented as an orphan and as a female child embodying wisdom.<sup>48</sup> The grave is the alembic of the alchemical transformation—the vessel that is tomb and womb to recreate life from death.<sup>49</sup> Including the mention of 'grave' in the first line, the unmistakable identity of the philosopher's stone, and Leontes' drawing in of everyone in the gallery, the theatre itself becomes the alembic and

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<sup>43</sup> Beckwith, 140.

<sup>44</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'chemical wedding'.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'sulphur'.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'Mercurius'.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'queen (white)'.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'philosophical child'.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, s.v. 'grave'.

draws everyone within into the final resolution. From this static image of the chemical wedding the movement is from death towards life.

The philosophical child first breaks the stillness of this moment and begins the continuity towards new life. Perdita says:

And give me leave,  
And do not say 'tis superstition, that  
I kneel, and then implore her blessing. Lady,  
Dear queen, that ended when I but began,  
Give me that hand of yours to kiss. (42-46)

Having been identified in V.i with her own cult of devotion, here Perdita is the literal and symbolic pilgrim, and makes an act of obeisance. She implores a blessing from Hermione as 'Lady, / Dear queen' and moves to kiss the blessed mother's hand.

Now Paulina's objections begin in earnest and she draws out the suspense of the reanimation even longer. Here the question of her expectation about the final resolution may be asked in earnest. Is this hesitation? Does her own faith in the outcome waver? Is the delay necessary for the other characters? She bids them wait: 'O, patience! / The statue is but newly fix'd; the color's / Not dry' (46-48). This is the first time Paulina refers to Hermione as a statue. Until this point she has let others lead with their impression of the statue's identity. The meter here is almost entirely wrecked. However, the forcefulness of Paulina's diversion is effective. Camillo and Polixenes both tell Leontes to give up his sorrow for joy. These two, which next to Hermione have the most against Leontes, are incorporated into this reconciliation by their acts of forgiving. Paulina makes as if to conceal the 'poor image' (56) for Leontes' sake, saying that the 'stone' (58) is hers. When Leontes objects, Paulina tells him not to gaze on the statue, or fancy will make him think it moves.

Paulina's warning to disregard movement is itself disregarded, and the final alchemical transformation of the rubedo begins. Hermione's statue reddens as Leontes observes to Polixenes, 'Would you not deem it breath'd and that those veins / Did verily bear

blood?’ (64-65). Polixenes sees warm life upon the lip (66). Leontes sees motion in the eye (67). Paulina may have suggested motion, but the specific observations are made by the kings. Notably, they follow the progression when Pygmalion’s statue comes to life:

When he returned he sought the image of his maid, and bending over the couch he kissed her. She seemed warm to his touch. Again he kissed her, and with his hands also he touched her breast. The ivory grew soft to his touch and, its hardness vanishing, gave and yielded beneath his fingers... The lover stands amazed, rejoices still in doubt, fears he is mistaken, and tries his hopes again and yet again with his hand. Yes, it was real flesh! The veins were pulsing beneath his testing finger. Then did the Paphian hero pour out copious thanks to Venus, and again pressed with his lips real lips at last. The maiden felt the kisses, blushed and, lifting her timid eyes up to the light, she saw the sky and her lover at the same time.<sup>50</sup>

This statue is transformed gradually by the touch of the artist. It is also private. The transformation is a cause for wonder, but Pygmalion’s faith is rewarded before he performs the statue’s material transformation. Hermione’s transformation is witnessed by those present, but she is untouched until she descends. The transformation itself corresponds to the progressive increase of belief, and it is accomplished in such a way that the audience participates equally in the experience. Paulina as the alchemical midwife of nature has ordered the circumstances for transformation, but the miracle itself is a corporate miracle. The pattern of Hermione’s vivification corresponds to Ovid’s progression from stone to woman: Perdita makes as if to kiss the statue, then there is the movement of breath in the breast, then pulse in the veins, then life upon the lips, and then motion in the eye. The pattern is one familiar to Paulina as well, for her next warning is against belief that the statue lives (69).

In response Leontes begs ‘O sweet Paulina, / Make me to think so twenty years together! / No settled senses of the world can match / The pleasure of that madness. Let’t alone’ (70-73). Leontes is waxing into the madness in which the lunatic, the lover, and the poet are of imagination all compact. Having surrendered reason in V.1, here he would

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<sup>50</sup> Ovid, trans. Miller, X.280-84, 287-94.

abandon his senses too if by further retreat from comprehension if he might apprehend his living wife. Leontes leads this movement towards transfiguration, but the other minds present are likewise growing towards something of great constancy.

Now at last instead of resisting, Paulina offers to afflict Leontes further, and he immediately accepts. He describes his affliction as sweet. The repetition, after calling Paulina sweet earlier in line 70, suggests again the sweet fragrance that is the alchemical sign for the resurgence of life. Paulina objects ‘The ruddiness upon her lip is wet’ (81), simultaneously protesting she is a statue and confirming its redness. When she asks if she should draw the curtain, Leontes and Perdita both plead that she continue, to which she responds:

Either forbear,  
Quit presently the chapel, or resolve you  
For more amazement. If you can behold it,  
I’ll make the statue move indeed, descend,  
And take you by the hand; but then you’ll think  
(Which I protest against) I am assisted  
By wicked powers. (85-91)

This charge is the most extreme in its warning and its claim of supernatural ability. Paulina calls the place a chapel, raising again the question of the identity of the place. Is it the chapel Leontes declares he will daily visit at the end of Act III, and the grave upon which he said many a prayer (140-41)? This is not clarified, but there is no mistaking that now this has become a sacred place. The theatre-turned-alembic is now a place of spiritual transformation. ‘Resolve you / For more amazement’ pushes the wonder of the resolution into the heart of Leontes (and by extension all those present). Paulina claims for herself the power to make the statue move, descend, and finally touch. She also preempts any accusation of sorcery. Leontes bids her go on, anticipating that speech will follow motion as the final demonstration of life:

What you can make her do,  
I am content to look on; what to speak,  
I am content to hear; for ‘tis as easy  
To make her speak as move. (91-94)

Now comes Paulina's great and explicit exhortation to awaken faith. In keeping with the nature of faith, the requirement is unequivocal, unelaborated, and divisive:

It is requir'd  
 You do awake your faith. Then, all stand still.  
 On; those that think it is unlawful business  
 I am about, let them depart. (94-97)

The common assumption here is that Paulina is speaking to Leontes primarily and the stage audience by extension. This is uncertain. In Act V, Leontes' faith has consistently met or preceded every expansion of such a requirement. He already apprehends that Hermione is coming back to life. What last vestige of his faith must awaken? Perhaps this exhortation collects all those present into the same commitment of faith. Their reactions throughout the scene and their faith are known to themselves alone.

I submit a third mythical possibility: Paulina is speaking to Hermione. Hermione is, after all, the one who awakens. On this reading, the revivification of Hermione's body from death and reanimation with her spirit are not homogenous. As the work of Richard Meek and Erin Sullivan demonstrates, Shakespeare's conception of personhood cannot be adequately explained by appealing only to physical humoralism, and Shakespeare's body-spirit dualism needs to be reconsidered as a means of reinterpreting the greatest and most-perplexing aspects of plays such as *The Winter's Tale*.

If Paulina is speaking to Hermione when she says 'It is requir'd / You do awake your faith', this has further implications. First, Paulina's work is not complete, nor is the outcome certain. Her exhortation that Hermione awaken her faith is also Paulina's final great act of faith. When Paulina says 'Then, all stand still', 'Then' would signal a change of address to those present. We may infer from 'On' that those present comply. This is a movement of corporate sympathetic enchantment, as every living person present becomes statue-like in

their attendance. Leontes speaks for all against the enchantment being broken by telling Paulina, ‘Proceed; / No foot shall stir’ (98-99). At last comes the final enchantment:

Music! awake her! Strike! [*Music.*]  
 ‘Tis time; descend; be Stone no more; approach;  
 Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come;  
 I’ll fill your Grave up. Stir; nay, come away;  
 Bequeath to Death your numbness; for from him  
 Dear Life redeems you. You perceive she stirs.<sup>51</sup> (98-103)  
 [*Hermione comes down.*]

For the first time in this scene, Paulina’s speech comes together metrically. The music employed would greatly affect the impact of Paulina words, but there is nothing to go on in this instance, and even that this is a cue for music is inferred.<sup>52</sup> This inference is reasonable, though Pericles has before this play heard the music of the spheres when no one else can.<sup>53</sup> Mythically, music with the power to resurrect is unmistakably Orphic. Orpheus’ song about Pygmalion and the transmutation of statue into living woman is equally significant.

Bishop points out the imperative nature of Paulina’s incantation: ‘Each seems to punch itself into being against a resistance, a resistance registered in the strange sense of violence and blockage in the lines, as if Paulina’s call had somehow to bore through or chisel away layers of deafness to reach its target ear.’<sup>54</sup> He also registers the impression that it is up to the statue to approach rather than a mechanistic summoning presuming the response.<sup>55</sup> The stage direction ‘[*Hermione comes down.*.]’ is Rowe’s,<sup>56</sup> based on Paulina’s ‘descend’ at line 99. This is typically taken to mean that as a statue she is on a dais or pedestal, and at Paulina’s cue steps down. Continuing the mythical alternative that Paulina requires Hermione to awake her faith, Paulina’s intercession to descend is not spoken to the figure of the statue,

<sup>51</sup> The capitalizations here of ‘Strike’, ‘Stone’, ‘Grave’, ‘Death’, and ‘Life’ follow the First Folio.

<sup>52</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1654: Again the stage direction ‘[*Music*.]’ is interpolated by Rowe. See also Pitcher, 383-84: Unlike the songs of Act IV, for this scene there is no indication about tune or voice and no documentary clues regarding performance.

<sup>53</sup> *Pericles*, V.i.223-233

<sup>54</sup> Bishop, 166.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 167.

<sup>56</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1654, n.V.iii.103.

rather it is spoken to Hermione's spirit, bidding that she descend and be reunited body and spirit. On such a reading, the imperatives to 'approach', 'Come', and 'Stir; nay, come away' make directional sense, as does leaving recognition of movement until 'You perceive she stirs.' Paulina resumes:

Start not; her actions shall be holy, as  
 You hear my spell is lawful. Do not shun | her  
 Until you see her die again, for then  
 You kill her double. Nay present your hand.  
 When she was young, you woo'd her; now, in age,  
 Is she become the suitor? (104-109)

If Paulina has just accomplished some miraculous and unprecedented enchantment, the remainder of her lines need to be read with a degree of uncertainty about how much she is apprehending for the first time versus interpreting for others what she already comprehends. Her speech here is directed to those now uncertain what is happening. She avers Hermione is holy because the spell heard is a lawful spell. Otherwise she explains little. Leontes shows hesitation, for despite his earlier eagerness, he is reticent to finally touch Hermione. When he does, he has the sense experience that for Pygmalion was the first indication of new life: 'O, she's warm! / If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating' (109-111). Some scholars have supposed a magic art lawful as eating has a eucharistic insinuation of transubstantiation. While this is sympathetic it is also speculative.

Camillo asks: 'If she pertain to life let her speak too' (113). Polixenes makes the association with Eurydice by following with: 'Ay, and make it manifest where she has liv'd, / Or how stol'n from the dead' (114-15). In both there is a note of doubt. Hermione does not respond to either request for an explanation, and Paulina continues both to interpret and to intercede:

That she is living,  
 Were it but told you, should be hooted at  
 Like an old tale; but it appears she lives,  
 Though yet she speak not. Mark a little while.  
 Please you to interpose, fair madam, kneel,

And pray your mother's blessing. Turn, good lady,  
Our Perdita is found. (115-21)

The wonders of V.ii were told and accepted because they were believable. But here the story that could not be believed if heard cannot be denied when seen, even without yet having Hermione's direct testimony. By extension the play presents a more persuasive image of the whole idea of resurrection in performance than it does in script. The 2013 RSC production of *The Winter's Tale* played the reanimation as an event surprising and overwhelming to Hermione herself, and the effect was truly enchanting.

'Mark a little while' indicates Hermione's recovery is gradual and she needs time. We cannot tell what Paulina is thinking, but it seems she is herself trying to understand what is happening and respond appropriately. What Hermione herself comprehends could only be considered in performance as the role is silent. Paulina's suggestion to Perdita that she kneel and pray her mother's blessing looks like it is as much for Hermione's sake as Perdita's. Even to this Hermione is not immediately responsive. She has some memory of Perdita that can be invoked but no recognition of what is taking place. Only when Paulina speaks directly to her again and reaffirms that the prophecy is fulfilled does Hermione finally speak as the last sign of restoration:

You gods, look down  
And from your sacred vials pour your graces  
Upon my daughter's head! Tell me, mine own,  
Where has thou been preserv'd? where liv'd? how found  
Thy father's court? for thou shalt hear that I,  
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle  
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserv'd  
Myself to see the issue. (121-28)

Hermione's benediction is mysterious. This is her only speech after her resurrection. She invokes the gods first, then speaks only to Perdita. In the First Folio 'vials' is 'viols', suggesting the continuation of heavenly music in the scene. 'Vials' was Alexander Pope's

interpolation.<sup>57</sup> Audibly the variation is practically indistinguishable and the strength of both meanings suggests intentional doubling. This speech too would play strongly with weeping. Since Perdita is kneeling, the graces pouring on her head may be her mother's tears. For those listening, they hear speech, but Hermione has blessing and questions for Perdita, not answers to their inquiries.

Line 125 presents a difficulty beginning with 'for thou shalt hear that I...'. If Hermione has been slowly recovering her faculties, here she does seem suddenly cognizant and aware of what has happened all along. The meaning though is not clear. Already Paulina has warned against the unbelievability of what shall be heard but not seen. Perhaps Hermione also warns against hearsay. A paraphrase of what Hermione seems to say is, 'You are going to hear that Paulina told me the oracle gave hope you were still alive, so I have remained alive to see the fulfillment of your return.' John Pitcher speculates that Shakespeare may have forgotten that Hermione heard the oracle,<sup>58</sup> but this precisely overlooks the condition that negates the certainty of what we are going to hear. Hermione did hear the oracle, therefore we cannot deduce that she must have remained alive. If Hermione has come back to life, it is admittedly difficult to see how she would piece together so quickly her memory of the oracle and what she sees after her reanimation, then create her own rhetorical response. If Hermione intends further clarification, she is prevented by Paulina's interruption that there will be time later to trouble joys with such relations. The mystery remains ultimately mysterious. Paulina, her work done, turns to sadness. It remains for Leontes to console her:

O, peace, Paulina!  
 Thou shouldst a husband take by my consent,  
 As I by thine a wife: this is a match,  
 And made between 's by vows. Thou hast found mine,  
 But how, is to be question'd; for I saw her  
 (As I thought) dead; and have (in vain) said many  
 A prayer upon her grave. (135-41)

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<sup>57</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1654.

<sup>58</sup> Pitcher, 345.

Leontes too professes confusion about how this matter has been resolved, seeming also to lean backwards from faith towards a more natural explanation that Hermione has been ‘found’. Having been persuaded by the most reliable sense of sight that Hermione was dead, his many prayers upon her grave have apparently been in vain.

Having made a match between Camillo and Paulina, Leontes catches Hermione looking at Polixenes and asks their pardons. He then explains to Hermione who Florizel is and that he is troth-plight to Perdita. His concluding request is that Good Paulina once more lead them away so everyone may ask and answer every question. From such comprehension we are at the last precluded.

### **Conclusion**

Sceptics will never see this play as mythically enchanting. Part of Shakespeare’s generosity is that he is neither dogmatic nor coercive about anything, let alone religion. In light of all the criticisms and interpretations presented, the door for an enchanted reading is wedged ever so slightly more open, and that is all that is needed to continue a balancing of consideration with respect to the mythical and religious possibilities of this play without sinking to outdated, disproven, or simply bad models of interpreting religion. We do not need Shakespeare to be a closet Catholic, or a card carrying Protestant, or a systematic theologian, or even overtly a creedal Christian, to see that he is interested in matters of the heart that have earthly and eternal significance. Ethically and affectively Shakespeare points us towards orthodoxy if we trust our native sentiments and condition our minds to the religious possibilities.

The reanimation of Hermione’s body with her spirit through Paulina’s alchemical art is an original reading to the best of my knowledge. It is not conclusive, because the play resists any precise resolution of the theatrical and mythical threads through which it is woven.

However I think it is a coherent reading. In light of the ongoing fascination with religion in this play, and in light of critical work that has pushed established constructs of interpretation to their limits, I have endeavoured to open a possibility for this as a play where transcendence breaks through. Through faith, the artist may apprehend transcendence and make art that is transformative. Through faith, we may begin to comprehend this art and be transformed.

## CHAPTER 4: PROSPERO'S FIRE, PROSPERO'S FREEDOM – READINGS IN *THE TEMPEST*

### Introduction

*The Tempest* is the performance of an all-powerful enchanter who, instead of coercing a natural conclusion that is within his power, abjures his rough magic for a supernatural reconciliation that is free and gracious. Much of this reading of *The Tempest* follows an enchanted reading of *The Winter's Tale* as the performance of an uncertain miracle that succeeds through corporate faith.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge's lectures on Shakespeare (1811-1812) are the historical midpoint between Shakespeare's writing of *The Tempest* and present consideration of it. Coleridge's perspective is likewise a helpful midpoint. As himself a poet and a preeminent theorist of faith and imagination, Coleridge had manifest respect for Shakespeare.<sup>1</sup> His interpretive principles situated between art and criticism offer an ideal starting position. According to Coleridge, Shakespeare's characters are ideals of reason and imagination:

They have the union of reason perceiving and judgment recording actual facts, and the imagination diffusing over all a magic glory, and while it records the past, [it] projects in a wonderful degree to the future, and makes us feel, however slightly, and see, however dimly, that state of being in which there is neither past nor future, but which is permanent, and is the energy of nature.<sup>2</sup>

*The Tempest* is a paradigmatic example of a play constructed according to a rule of imagination.<sup>3</sup> This play cannot be judged either with detached reason or surrender to delusion. The play must be heard from the perspective of wonder, which is typified by Miranda.<sup>4</sup> Ariel has the character of air: reason divested of moral character, and intellectual delight abstracted from purpose.<sup>5</sup> His imagination is not human. He is incapable of having or

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<sup>1</sup> Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, 45-50, 104.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 106. Though Coleridge is aware that Shakespeare had been criticized for ignoring the classical rules of dramatic unity (57), he does not draw attention to *The Tempest* as Shakespeare's only play that observes these rules. As such, we should appreciate the play more rather than less for its construction according to a rule of imagination.

<sup>4</sup> Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, 108.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

receiving sympathy. Caliban has the character of earth: he is brutish but has more than animal instincts. He has understanding but not moral reason. He has a human imagination that draws highly poetic images from nature.<sup>6</sup> Caliban attracts our sympathy whether or not he himself is capable of any. According to Coleridge, wonder, like Miranda, is raised between these two poles. Prospero is the internal agent of the play's enchantment. Hence, in the play's protracted state of wonder, between abstracted reason (Ariel) and sympathetic nature (Caliban), under the presidency of enchantment (Prospero) poetic faith arises.<sup>7</sup>

The keys to approaching *The Tempest's* religious significance have a great deal in common with those for understanding *The Winter's Tale*, and *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* before it. However, alchemy is more overt in Prospero's so-potent art than in any preceding play. Dramatically, there is a great surprise when the play climaxes in the third act with the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda.<sup>8</sup> This is also the alchemical climax, and in the confluence of dramatic and alchemical modes we see the consummation of Prospero's intended purpose. Yet, what follows is the relinquishment of Prospero's control that is the subject of so much scrutiny and the challenge to reading the play's ending. Whereas *The Winter's Tale* turns from tragedy to comedy between Acts III and IV, then moves past comedy to enchantment in V.iii, *The Tempest* nearly moves past comedy with the betrothal of Ferdinand and Miranda and the repentance of Alonso by end of the third act. The subplot conspiracy of Stephano, Trinculo, and Caliban interrupts the spiritual harmony of Prospero's masque, but this disenchantment leads only to the greater re-enchantment that ensues.

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>8</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan, Introduction and notes for *The Tempest*, by William Shakespeare, ed. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden T. Vaughan (London: Bloomsbury Arden Shakespeare, 2011, 15 n.1).

## CHARACTERS AND THEMES

The characters in *The Tempest* are more imaginatively distinct than any other Shakespearean ensemble. For this reason it is helpful to consider interpretive themes within the context of the principal characters. Caliban is a creature of earth. Ariel is a spirit of air. Miranda is the quintessence of wonder. Prospero is the dramaturgical and alchemical enchanter whose supernatural agency begets redemption for all who will receive it.

### Caliban and Earth

Caliban's identity is deliberately mixed. Postcolonial criticism identifies Caliban as the noble savage whose kingdom is usurped, but this ignores the rule of imaginative enchantment according to which the play is constructed. According to the play's imaginative construct, Caliban's mother is an African witch, and his father is a pagan Patagonian devil.<sup>9</sup> He is spiritually corrupt and only about half human. This is what makes him a monster, but a sympathetic monster.

Caliban's non-human identity is sufficiently confusing that he is inconsistently described. Prospero describes him as dog-like: 'the son that [she] did litter here, / A freckled whelp, hag-born' (I.ii.282-83), as does Trinculo when he refers to Caliban as 'this puppy-headed monster' (II.ii.154). At the beginning of the same scene Trinculo debates with himself whether Caliban is a man or a fish (25-36). Stephano and Trinculo emphasize Caliban's deformity by calling him 'moon-calf' (106, 111, 135)—one deformed due to lunar influence at birth.<sup>10</sup> By the end of the scene Stephano and Trinculo are drunkenly emphatic that he is a monster, calling him such more than a dozen times. Feeling himself treated by Prospero with undue cruelty, Caliban too-readily allies himself with the first alternative. While he has been taken into their confidence, and ostensibly been shown sympathy by them, we also see that

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<sup>9</sup> Virginia Mason Vaughan, 'Literary Invocations in *The Tempest*', in *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare's Last Plays*, ed. Catherine M. S. Alexander (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 40.

<sup>10</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1673 n.106.

Caliban is too easily gulled by fools, then increasingly bullied and taken advantage of in III.ii and IV.i. His drunken initiation and misdirected worship of the inebriated conspirators is funny, but it is humour that on reflection engenders sympathy for his hardship and foolishness. Our sympathy increases the more we realize that the drunken hilarity of Stephano and Trinculo hides their cruel and usurpatious natures.

Prospero enslaves Caliban and treats him harshly, addressing him as ‘poisonous’ (I.ii.319), ‘lying’ (344), ‘Filth’ (346), etc. This is often seen as unjust. On the other hand, whereas everyone else sees Caliban as a monster or villain, only Prospero recognizes him as human at all and able to be redeemed. At the end he takes responsibility for Caliban, seeing in the creature the depths of his own depravity: ‘this thing of darkness I / Acknowledge mine’ (V.i.275-75). Caliban is capable of being educated, as evidenced by his being taught to speak. He is also resistant to education, as evidenced by his inclination to use this ability to curse. Caliban’s speech is deeply poetic, suggesting the elegance and profundity that even the basest nature is capable of under the right formation. Coleridge says Caliban has understanding but not moral reason. By the end though, because of Prospero’s harsh pedagogy not in spite of it, even Caliban acknowledges the folly of his ignorance and rebellion, promising to ‘be wise hereafter / And seek for grace’ (295-96). We do not know Caliban’s ultimate fate, but it is as likely as anything that when the Italians depart he remains as the king of his island, and perhaps because of Prospero’s education, this time he will be able to rule it.

### **Ariel and Air**

Ariel’s agency in *The Tempest* is second only to Prospero’s. He is not human (V.i.20), and as a spirit he has been empowered through Prospero’s art. As with Caliban, only Prospero truly understands Ariel, reminding him that in service to Sycorax ‘thou wast a spirit too delicate / To act her earthy and abhorr’d commands’ (I.ii.272-73). Prospero had the

power to undo Sycorax's spell which imprisoned Ariel, and in service to Prospero he grows to the apex of his ability.

Ariel should not be Christianized, however there are Biblical sources for his character. Uriel is an angel who appears in 2 Esdras 4:1, 5:20, and 10:28.<sup>11</sup> Ariel's name may perhaps be reminiscent of Uriel, but this is a weak suggestion for supposing him a better angel of nature. Christopher Hodgkins recognizes Ariel's namesake in Isaiah 29: אֲרִיאֵל is 'lion of God', and Hodgkins identifies this as an alternative title for the besieged Jerusalem.<sup>12</sup> This shortchanges the allusion in Isaiah, which merits consideration in greater detail through the first eleven verses:

- <sup>1</sup>Ah [Ariel], [Ariel] of the citie that David dwelt in: adde yere unto yere: let them kil lambes.
- <sup>2</sup>But I wil bring [Ariel] into distres, and there shalbe heavines & sorow, and it shalbe unto me like an [Ariel].
- <sup>3</sup>And I wil besege thee as a circle, & fight against thee on a mount, & wil cast up ramparts against thee.
- <sup>4</sup>So shalt thou be humbled, & shalt speake out of the grounde, and thy speache shalbe as out of the dust: thy voyce also shalbe out of the grounde like him that hath a spirit of divination, and thy talking shal whisper out of the dust.
- <sup>5</sup>Moreover, the multitude of thy strangers shalbe like smale dust, and the multitude of strong men shalbe as chaffe that passeth away, and it shalbe in a moment, even suddenly.
- <sup>6</sup>Thou shalt be visited of the Lord of hostes with thundre, and shaking, and a great noyse, a whirlwinde, and a tempest, and a flame of devouring fyre.
- <sup>7</sup>And the multitude of the nacions that fight against [Ariel], shalbe as a dreame of vision by night: even all they that make the warre against it, and strong holds against it, and laye sege unto it.
- <sup>8</sup>And it shalbe like as an hungrie man dreameth, and beholde, he eateth: and when he awaketh, his soule is emptie: or like as a thirstie man dreameth, and lo, he is drinking, and when he awaketh, beholde, he is fainte, and his soule longeth: so shal the multitude of all nacions be that fight against mount Zion.
- <sup>9</sup>Stay your selves, and wonder: they are blinde, & make you blinde: they are dronken, but not with wine: they stagger, but not by strong drinke.
- <sup>10</sup>For the Lord hath covered you with a spirit of slomber, and hath shut up your eyes: the Prophetes, and your chief Seers hath he covered.

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<sup>11</sup> Harkness, 49: Uriel was also named as one of the angels with whom John Dee claimed to converse. See also Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 332 n.371-72, 503 n.403: Milton names a fallen angel Ariel at *Paradise Lost* VI.371, but Merritt Hughes indicates in his notes how Milton's homage is to gnostic and pagan sources besides Shakespeare.

<sup>12</sup> Hodgkins, 158.

<sup>11</sup>And the vision of them all is become unto you, as the wordes of a booke that is sealed up, which they deliver to one that an read, saying, Read this, I pray thee. Then shal he say, I can not: for it is sealed.

The first obvious correlation to Ariel is in verse 6, where the description could actually be describing the tempest of Act I. Second, the Geneva text translates the first verse ‘Ah, altar, altar...’, and repeats this usage for verses 2 and 7, but the marginal comment clarifies the gloss: ‘The Ebrewe worde Ariel signifieth the lyon of God, and signifieth the altar, because the altar semed to devoure the sacrifice that was offred to God’. Sarah Beckwith reads a eucharistic suggestion from the banquet in III.iii.<sup>13</sup> Whether or not this is intended, Ariel furnishing the feast before clapping his wings upon the table to make it disappear suggests Shakespeare’s familiarity with the Geneva commentary.

There are further echoes of Isaiah 29:4, 7, and 8 in Caliban’s famous description of the island to Stephano and Trinculo:

Be not afeard, the isle is full of noises,  
 Sounds, and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not.  
 Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments  
 Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices,  
 That if I then had wak’d after long sleep,  
 Will make me sleep again, and then in dreaming,  
 The clouds methought would open, and show riches  
 Ready to drop upon me, that when I wak’d  
 I cried to dream again. (III.ii.135-43)

The political strife, the drunken conspirators, and even Prospero’s sealing up of his book are also suggested in Isaiah 29. The conflation of Jerusalem as the temple city and the altar, which ultimately stand for God’s apocalyptic judgement on the whole world, is enticing as a corresponding image for the world, the theatre, and the stage.

Ariel’s poetry and songs are the apex of Shakespeare’s poetic enchantment. Charles Williams has suggested Ariel’s music is so transcendent that if it were any more powerful material transformation would result from the performance. These airs are the spiritual power

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<sup>13</sup> Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 151.

of poetry that Prospero has bridled for the direction of men's bodies and spirits, which plays out in his enchantment of the characters in *The Tempest* and of the audience in performance. If this enchantment is not always recognized, it is because the poetic burden of *The Tempest* is that it can be too burningly transparent to even see.

Only Prospero can see Ariel in his natural state and, so far as the text indicates, even knows of his existence. All of Ariel's spoken exchanges are with Prospero alone. There is no evidence that Prospero has made his familiar spirit known even to Miranda. The *Riverside Shakespeare* suggests that when Ariel is introduced he wears a costume that by convention signals the audience can see him but other characters cannot.<sup>14</sup> Prospero tells Ariel 'be subject / To no sight but thine and mine, invisible / To every eyeball else' (I.ii.301-303), but this is as much for the sake of the audience understanding Ariel as it is for directing Ariel specifically not to be seen as a water nymph. Whereas in *The Winter's Tale* the identity of Paulina's art is not revealed as part of the play's enchanted resolution, in *The Tempest* the audience has direct and exclusive insight into Prospero's art and its agency. Ariel is the affective agent that connects us as the audience to what is going on behind the scenes of Prospero's dramaturgy. We see everything unfolding as Prospero directs, right up until his scenery collapses at the truncation of the wedding masque. Ariel is the agent of enchantment who works on us like he works on all the characters in the play. That we know he is doing it adds a layer of awareness, but this does not diminish the power of the affect.

### **Miranda and Wonder**

As Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charles Williams have identified, Miranda is the embodiment of wonder, unadulterated and uncorrupted, such that we have a difficulty apprehending her.<sup>15</sup> As Williams would say, her character is too dense and pure—like

<sup>14</sup> *Riverside Shakespeare*, 1666 n.374.

<sup>15</sup> Coleridge, *Coleridge on Shakespeare*, 108. Coleridge says that Miranda is Shakespeare's favourite character, but regrettably does not elaborate.

crystal—for us to readily apprehend her value. She is the focal point of enchantment, as Ariel is the medium and agent of enchantment. Miranda has been raised on a strange isle between Prospero as a father and Caliban as a servant. She has retained her purity, and a great deal of innocence, and it must be to Prospero's credit that she has had the opportunity to do so.

Miranda's name affirms that she is the embodiment of wonder. In their first exchange Prospero addresses her twice in close succession by name (I.ii.48, 53). Ferdinand, before he knows her name, addresses her as the goddess upon whom the music of the island attends and concludes his prayer: 'My prime request, / Which I do last pronounce, is (O you wonder!) / If you be maid, or no?' (426-28). She replies, 'No wonder, sir, / But certainly a maid' (428-29). Shakespeare's Latin is good enough to interpolate not only the adjectival form 'wondrous' but also the non-finite, future passive gerundive that takes the same construction. Miranda is 'she who is to be wondered at.' This is born out in Ferdinand's pun when he learns her name: 'Admir'd Miranda, / Indeed the top of admiration! worth / What's dearest to the world!' (III.i.37-39). She is the focal point of wonder for the entire play.

Perhaps surprisingly, Bishop's *Shakespeare and the Theatre of Wonder* gives negligible consideration to wonder in *The Tempest*. Miranda as the embodiment of wonder would suggest it is as integral as for any other play if not more so. Bishop writes by way of his own conclusion:

Shakespeare's evocations of wonder...are profoundly transactional, delicate, and full of difficult turbulences. His plays insist on a much deeper negotiation between the subject and his or her experience, so that wonder becomes a space of much more radical flux. Shakespearean practice of wonder is not the hierarchic and settled epiphany of Jonson's masques, and is underpinned by little aesthetic theory articulated anywhere in the period. It is rather the dramaturgy of a deep psychology of metaphor that has its roots in Ovid and its later counterparts in certain aspects of Blake, in Wagner, and in Freud.<sup>16</sup>

Bishop identifies in Shakespeare's theatre of wonder what could now be called an affective model of signification—one that foregrounds the role of the audience in the co-constitution of

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<sup>16</sup> Bishop, 176-77.

meaning, for a holistic, embodied experience of dramatic affect. It works metaphorically and psychologically, in relation to the text as well as cognitive and cultural models of interpretation. But this co-constitution of meaning cannot be reduced to calculation or given over to rootless emotion. The audience plays an integral role in the embodiment of experiential meaning, and itself affects the performance while also receiving the affect of dramaturgical enchantment.

Bishop describes this phenomenon as ‘intellect and emotion...in intimate contact with one another in such a way that unexpected results can emerge’.<sup>17</sup> Wonder is not coercive or instrumental, but reveals unexpected thoughts and feelings. This is theatre taking the place of liturgical experience, being common, aesthetic, purgative, and conciliatory:

Where the masque embraced an ideal pictorialism with clean lineaments, Shakespeare’s practice is much more implicative, collusional, and messy. Its aim is not rebuke, instruction, and redress, but interrogation and, perhaps, recompense. In this aim, the complex calculus between emotional and intellectual response that is characteristic of the theatre of wonder becomes a keen and powerful ally.<sup>18</sup>

Between the classical idealisms of rhetoric and myth, combined with the liturgical aesthetic still haunting the English Reformation, Shakespeare initiated an ostensibly secular theatrical experience that has provoked religious reflection ever since. Religious doctrine was not his burden. Rather, he sympathized with the need for experiences of spiritual enchantment.

However, just as *The Winter’s Tale* makes wonder the penultimate theatrical experience of the play’s greater enactment of faith, so too in this play wonder is essential theatrically, but not the play’s greatest enchantment. In light of this it is further surprising that faith is not also explicitly elevated in *The Tempest*. Unlike *The Winter’s Tale*, where faith becomes the overt movement of the climax, in this play faith is mentioned twice. In response to Miranda’s lament that Alonso has died in the shipwreck, Ferdinand replies, ‘Yes, faith, and all his lords’ (I.ii.438). When the banquet is spread mysteriously before the party of Milanese

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 177.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

and Neapolitan lords, and they doubt whether they should partake, Gonzalo says reassuringly, 'Faith, sir, you need not fear' (III.iii.43). In both cases 'faith' is reduced to a minor oath.

Coleridge suggested that poetic faith arises from the play's protracted state of wonder, which is raised between reason and nature under the enchantment of sympathetic magic. This may be said of most of the play, but in the last act these are disbanded, leaving the question of what is left of wonder and therefore poetic faith. In terms of theological virtues, the most obvious possibility is love.

### **Prospero and Alchemy**

Prospero should be not excluded from the company of Shakespeare's greatest characters. In name alone Prospero is immediately associated with fortune and felicity. Yet he is not a stage conjurer or Willy Wonka; his past inadequacies and proximity to corruption are evident. As the play begins, Prospero confronts his own past shortcomings as well as those who took advantage and did harm to the polity it was his duty to protect. More personally, his enemies subjected his daughter to the hardships of exile and marooning. He was a character of sufficient power that he could subdue the isle to his rule. Shakespeare has leavened *The Tempest* with just enough doubt and imperfection that Prospero must be read carefully in his faults as well as his virtues. Still, these faults do not justify the interpretations of Prospero as an illusionist or sorcerer.

It is impossible to separate Prospero's character from his identity as a magician. As historical opinions have varied about the sanctity of identifiable magic, there have been corresponding tendencies to identify Prospero's magic as sanctified, infernal, or theatrical subterfuge. Largely through Prospero's initial exchange with Miranda, Coleridge identifies him as a sympathetic magician and as the internal agent of the play's enchantment. Virginia Mason Vaughan and Alden Vaughan represent the general stream of criticism that now

identifies, as C. S. Lewis did,<sup>19</sup> that Prospero's magic is that channeled through Marsilio Ficino and John Dee, with the play itself proposing an esoteric alchemical corrective to Jonson's disenchantment in *The Alchemist*.<sup>20</sup> However, advancing the identity of Prospero's magic to recognizable forms of Renaissance Hermetic arts and occult philosophies does not immediately resolve the problem. Mason Vaughan and Vaughan conclude: 'Aside from the temptation to use his magic for vengeance, study of the occult had distracted Prospero from his princely duties twelve years earlier; if he is to return to Milan and resume his ducal powers, he must abandon it.'<sup>21</sup>

John Mebane, writing about *The Tempest*, recognizes the extent to which Shakespeare draws eclectically on sources of inspiration for Prospero's magic, adapting them creatively for his unique artistic vision.<sup>22</sup> Some of the things which Prospero does are those Marsilio Ficino contended that 'the perfected magus, as an agent of God, can perform: a human soul dedicated to God may be granted the power to "command the elements, rouse the winds, gather the clouds together in rain," cure diseases, and perform other miraculous feats which may suit God's purposes.'<sup>23</sup> In the context of the various idealistic strains of Hermetic and occult philosophy, Mebane writes:

Alchemy, in particular, is an attempt to purify the fallen world by bringing earthly creatures into more perfect unity with their governing Ideas, and Shakespeare may well have been aware of the alchemical meaning of the term *tempest*: it is a boiling process which removes impurities from base metal and facilitates its transmutation into gold. Because the human *Mens* is a part of the series of minds which constitutes the order of Providence, the magus gains intimate knowledge of God's providential purposes and consequently becomes an agent of the divine Creator. Through assent to Providence the magus could then liberate himself from the control of Fortune, gaining the true freedom which comes from aligning oneself with the will of god. The magus possesses the power to manipulate stellar influences and to contribute to the course of earthly events, but the power of the benevolent magician consists solely of the

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<sup>19</sup> Lewis, *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century*, 8.

<sup>20</sup> Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 62-64.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>22</sup> John S. Mebane, *Renaissance Magic and the Return of the Golden Age* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), 179.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

ability to help fulfill providence, never to thwart it: Ariel's assertion that he and his fellows are 'ministers of Fate' (III.iii.61) is literally true. An evil magician, such as Faustus or Sycorax, might obtain rudimentary powers, but never anything approaching Prospero's. In fact, many Renaissance occultists agreed with orthodox theologians that an evil magician's powers are almost entirely illusory.<sup>24</sup>

The way to read Shakespeare's alchemy is creatively and symbolically in the context of his own artistic vision. Some of this symbolism is consistent with conventional expressions, but ultimately Shakespeare's greater imaginative purpose determines how these things should be interpreted.

Mebane points out that *The Tempest* cannot be read as a revenge play. Prospero's magic is not an escape from life but preparation for it through contemplation, book learning, and dramaturgy. Whatever his past negligences, Prospero has corrected these, and if revenge was his intention, he could have had it at any time from the beginning of the first scene. His motive for retribution only diminishes as the play goes on. His aim is to bring his enemies to repentance in greater service to humankind, and it is through his magic that he stages the restoration of political order and familial peace to both Milan and Naples. He is severe at the beginning to the usurpers and conspirators because corruption must be dealt with severely if it is to be turned towards spiritual rebirth.<sup>25</sup> Sorcery could have no such power or ideal for Satan casting out Satan.

Prospero is further buffered from accusations of necromancy by the counter-example of Sycorax. Sycorax is a 'foul witch' and a 'damn'd witch' (I.ii.258, 263). Her magic was black and destructive. Like the apothecary in *Romeo and Juliet*, Sycorax could wield the power of death but not life. In a fit of rage she imprisoned Ariel in a pine tree, but she could not undo this torment (291). Prospero can tear a pine tree out by the roots (V.i.47-48). It was

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 181-82. For a more overtly theological reading of *The Tempest* as a story of God's providence, see Timothy J. Goringe, 'Raising a Tempest: Brookian Theatre as an Analogy for Providence', in *Theatrical Theology: Explorations in Performing the Faith*, ed. Wesley Vander Lugt and Trevor Hart (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2014).

<sup>25</sup> Mebane, 182-83.

Prospero's art that had the power to liberate Ariel from Sycorax's curse (291-93). Further, part of Prospero's threat to Ariel is that if he does not conform, Prospero will split an oak and imprison him there. The oak implies the ability to split Jove's tree with the god's own lightning—a power Prospero later explicitly claims (V.i.44-46). Having been the medium of Jove's lightning on behalf of Prospero in the play's first scene (I.ii.201-205), Ariel knows the extent of this power. At the very end Prospero describes Sycorax to those assembled as 'a witch, and one so strong / That could control the moon, make flows and ebbs, / And deal in her command without her power' (V.i.269-71). This is the greatest claim about the strength of her power. This too, however, Prospero has preemptively trumped. At the beginning of the same scene, in his incantation he declares power to control the sun as well as make the land move (41-47). Caliban himself confirms that Prospero's art is of sufficient power to control Setebos and make him subject (I.ii.372-74). Perhaps nothing is more telling of Sycorax's diminution than that, having been unable to resist exile from Argier, she withered and died, defeated by age and frailty rather than a contest with political or spiritual power. Prospero suffered the same exile, but he was able to recover and increase his enchantment to the point that when the circumstances aligned, the island, the air, and the sea itself became his theatre of operation. Sycorax was not enlightened, misunderstood, and unjustly persecuted. Like the daughters of men in Genesis 6:4 who bore monsters to demons, Sycorax was a witch who bore the seed of a devil. Her sorcery made her dangerous and abhorrent.

Prospero's power is recognizably alchemical. He rules the elements through the learning of his books and secret studies (I.ii.77). He rules his servants of earth and air through understanding and directive will. Caliban fits tidily into elemental alchemy as the base matter for regeneration. To Coleridge's description of Ariel as reason without moral character, abstract intellectual delight, and non-human, non-sympathetic imagination, we should add alchemical Mercury. Prospero the alchemist rules nature, and Ariel is the agent for his

alchemical opus. Whereas Ariel was too delicate for Sycorax's earthy demands, Prospero empowers the relationship of air and fire, and in his service Ariel ignites.<sup>26</sup> In addition to being 'aerial', Ariel's name also matches the last three syllables of 'Mercurial'. As the universal agent of transmutation, his alchemical identity is as complex and varied as any aspect of the opus:

Mercurius or Hermes is also the name of the divine spirit hidden in the depths of matter, the light of nature, the anima mundi, the very spirit of life which must be released in order to make the philosopher's stone. ... Mercurius [can be] seen as an aerial spirit or soul symbolized by clouds or fume, indicating that the alchemists were aware of the psychic nature of their transformative substance. ... Mercurius is present everywhere and at all times during the opus. ... Mercurius is not only the prima materia... which is sought at the beginning of the work, but also the ultima materia (the philosopher's stone), the goal of his own transformation. Mercurius is not only the matter of the work but stands also for all the processes to which the materia is subjected. He is simultaneously the matter of the work, the process of the work, and the agent by which all this is effected. ... Metaphysically, Mercurius carries that divine love essence which kills falsehood and illusion and allows truth to arise.<sup>27</sup>

Ariel can be understood as all of these things. Many of them are self-evident in his Mercurial spirit. Ariel is less-evidently the matter and process from beginning to end, but these too are plausible if we recognize Ariel as the unique connection between Prospero and the audience in the theatre, especially in the context of Isaiah 29's identity of the altar-temple-world that corresponds to stage-theatre-world.

We may be tempted to see Ariel as superior to Caliban, but these two characters are equally essential as polar opposites all the way down to their elemental natures. Caliban, as earth which is cold and dry, has the exact opposite characteristics of Ariel, who as air is hot and moist. Caliban has gravitas; Ariel is flighty.

The elements of fire and water also fit into this elemental scheme of *The Tempest*. The character most closely associated with water is Sycorax, who had the power to control the tides. Caliban inherits his coldness from his mother as well as perhaps his fishier attributes.

<sup>26</sup> Ovid, trans. Golding, XV.271-72: Again there is resonance with Numa Pompilius' teaching: 'The aire eeke purged cleere / From grossnesse, spyreth up aloft, and there becommeth fyre.'

<sup>27</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'Mercurius'.

Sycorax's strength was closest to the ocean's power of death and dissolution, but long before the beginning of the play she has succumbed to her own proclivity. Rather than Sycorax, the ocean itself which surrounds the island is the presence of elemental water. When the play begins, order is tempestuously dissolved in ocean so that a greater resolution may begin. As Bishop has pointed out, this motif goes back at least as far as *The Comedy of Errors*.

Prospero's sympathetic magic of enchantment is elemental fire, which is hot and dry. Thus, Prospero's ability to relate to and rule Caliban and Ariel is because he shares both of their stronger properties of dry and hot. Fire's purifying and unifying force is set opposite the dissolving strength of the ocean. In his final incantation, Prospero explicitly claims the power of fire, and power over air, water, and earth:

[I have] call'd forth the mutinous winds,  
 And 'twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault  
 Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder  
 Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
 With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory  
 Have I made shake... (V.i.42-47)

On the island which is set between the elements, Prospero fires everything in the play towards his purposed conclusion. Before the end, however, the relinquishing of his power follows this same elemental scheme:

But this rough magic  
 I here abjure; and when I have requir'd  
 Some heavenly music (which even now I do)  
 To work mine end upon the senses that  
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book. (50-57)

The book is dissolved in the ocean to bring full circle Prospero's opposing power and the movement of the first scene. At the end fire is left without opposition, but also without connective power to coerce.

Most interpretations focus on the play's human dynamics and changes in relationships. These are important, but Shakespeare represents them elementally to indicate their re-ordering through Prospero's redemptive work. If we make Caliban and Ariel too human, we anthropomorphize them and create the wrong kind of sympathies. Prospero, flanked by Caliban who is Sulphur and Ariel who is Mercury, is the consummate alchemist who wields spiritual fire. He graciously rules death and dissolves insubstantial appearances. Through such redeeming work comes the opportunity for the ideal restoration of order between all things earthly and spiritual. Miranda may seem left out as the odd fifth character, but this is by design. She is the wondrous quintessence raised in the balanced harmony of the other four.

Read alchemically, the movement of *The Tempest* is certain and enchanting through Act III. In Act IV heaven breaks through to earth at Prospero's instigation. In Act V Prospero relinquishes his power, restores order, offers pardon, then asks for the greatest pardon. Grace cannot be imposed on the unwilling. All must be relieved by prayer. These matters are best considered in the play's narrative context.

## READINGS

Mebane alleges that the dramatic climax of *The Tempest* is in III.iii when Alonso repents and makes it possible for Prospero to liberate Milan from Naples and resume his dukedom.<sup>28</sup> Mark Rose previously identified that *The Tempest* is Shakespeare's most conspicuously designed play. Rose counts nine scenes in the play, with the central scene III.i triply-framed as the play's crucial emblematic tableau: 'the picture of Ferdinand joyfully carrying logs, laboring to win Miranda, while Prospero, who has set the task to discipline the youth "lest too light winning / Make the prize light"' (I.ii.452.53)<sup>29</sup>. Rose's concept is correct, and his focus on III.i is correct, though his model disregards the structural

<sup>28</sup> Mebane, 183.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Rose, *Shakespearean Design* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1972), 173.

significance of I.i and V.i/Epilogue. Adjusting Rose's model to account for the first and last scenes, III.i is surrounded by a quadruple frame:

I.i	I.ii	II.i	II.ii	III.i	III.ii	III.iii	IV.i	V.i
All <i>Dissolution</i>	Prospero Miranda Ferdinand	Alonso Sebastian Antonio	Caliban Stephano Trinculo	Miranda Ferdinand [Prospero]	Caliban Stephano Trinculo	Alonso Sebastian Antonio	Prospero Miranda Ferdinand	All <i>Resolution</i>
1	2	3	4	5	4	3	2	1

This simplistic model disregards the presence of important minor characters, the effective presence of Prospero and Ariel in every scene, etc., but the structural significance is evident: the turning point is the romance of Ferdinand and Miranda in the fifth scene. Rose reads Shakespeare's return to structural unity as correlative to the play's central theme, which he identifies as discipline.<sup>30</sup> 'Discipline' is narrow as a central theme. Whether or not the story is true that Shakespeare wrote his last play according to classical rules of unity just to prove to Ben Jonson that he could (and cast Richard Burbage as Prospero shortly after he had been cast as Dr. Subtle in *The Alchemist*), the structural unity of *The Tempest* is as meticulous as its temporal unity. This unity of structure and time corresponds to the thematic unity as Mebane describes it:

On one level Prospero's art is, quite literally, Hermetic magic; on another...it is 'art' in the broadest sense of the term, the civilizing power of education and moral self-discipline. On yet another, Prospero's magic is theatrical art, which Shakespeare sees as analogous to magic not only in that it creates visions, but also in that it strives to effect moral and spiritual reform. One of the most fascinating aspects of *The Tempest* is the manner in which Shakespeare correlates all of these dimensions of the play, so that they complement and enrich one another.<sup>31</sup>

Unity of structure, unity of time, and unity of themes pull together so that for play, players, and audience there is a direct correspondence of shared experience. All of these are directed by Prospero as the alchemist, and the unity between all things is one reason why *The Tempest* more than any other play points to Shakespeare's self-conscious agency. Especially by dint of

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 174.

<sup>31</sup> Mebane, 179-80.

the unity of time, Shakespeare himself performs a theatrical experiment of esoteric alchemy. As Mircea Eliade expresses the unity of time and action: ‘One common factor emerges from all these tentative probings [of man the maker’s dream to collaborate in the perfecting of matter and himself]: in taking upon himself the responsibility of changing Nature, man puts himself in the place of Time’.<sup>32</sup>

The alchemical resonance in III.i begins with Ferdinand’s opening soliloquy:

There be some sports are painful, and their labor  
Delight in them sets off; some kinds of baseness  
Are nobly undergone; and most poor matters  
Point to rich ends. This my mean task  
Would be as heavy to me as odious, but  
The mistress which I serve quickens what’s dead,  
And makes my labors pleasures. (1-7)

Ferdinand may be young and idealistic, but he speaks more truth than perhaps he knows. Baseness nobly undergone and poor matters that point to rich ends describe the conjunction of material and spiritual alchemy. In context, his reference to quickening what is dead does not refer to his father but to his own sadness. He has been revitalized with joy through wonder.

In the middle of the scene Ferdinand and Miranda exchange professions that the other is the dearest thing in the world (39, 55), with Miranda adding innocently, ‘Nor can imagination form a shape, / Besides yourself, to like of’ (56-57). Ferdinand presents himself as a king, and in response to Miranda’s question ‘Do you love me?’ (67) swears ‘O heaven, O earth, bear witness to this sound, / And crown what I profess with kind event / If I speak true!’ (68-70). She weeps in response. The stock alchemical images have all been previously identified, and Shakespeare lays them together thickly enough so as to be unmistakable. The conjunction of heaven and earth crowning a true union of king-to-be and queen-to-be is a picture of the alchemical wedding. Miranda weeps, and Prospero, the alchemist of this

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<sup>32</sup> Eliade, 169

resolution, reiterates a blessing reminiscent of Hermione's: 'Fair encounter / Of two most rare affections! Heavens rain grace / On that which breeds between 'em!' (74-76). Heaven corresponds to the quintessence, or perfection of matter.<sup>33</sup> The boiling dissolution of the tempest has been commuted to the blessing of tears and heavenly rain. The union is spiritually fruitful even as it is promised, and Prospero retires to the business of his book.

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When next we see these characters in Act IV, Scene i, Prospero first offers blessing beyond what Ferdinand might have been led to expect. Miranda is his 'rich gift' (8) that will exceed all praise. Second, he offers a severe warning against the violation of chastity outside of sanctimonious ceremonies and the ministration of full and holy rite (16-17). Many commentators find Prospero excessive or distasteful in his strictures, but as Mebane explains:

It is helpful to recall the emphasis in *The Tempest* upon marriage as a means of guiding natural creative powers into constructive channels: the physical dimension of nature becomes fulfilled through institutions which are associated with the controlling power of our higher faculties, and the process is completed through religious ceremonies which invoke the aid of divine grace. Our natural powers are gifts which, if used properly, enable us to participate in the process of creative love which defeats time and change; if we abuse them they become destructive. Prospero's repeated admonitions to chastity, although they may seem overly zealous or even comical to a modern audience, are in accordance with this principle: if Ferdinand keeps his procreative desires within the confines of marriage, his union with Miranda will be harmonious and fruitful; if not, it will be barren and filled with discord (IV.i.13-22). The marriage ceremony itself is a form of divinely inspired art, just as Prospero's masque or Ariel's music is. It is a means through which grace effects a miraculous change in nature.<sup>34</sup>

The masque, which Prospero presents through Ariel, is the spiritual imaging forth of the earthly union that is being accomplished. Even Prospero is swept up in this celestial harmony as the mythical goddesses and nymphs appear to 'help to celebrate / A contract of true love' (132-33).

<sup>33</sup> Abraham, *Dictionary of Alchemical Imagery*, s.v. 'heaven'.

<sup>34</sup> Mebane, 194-95.

Before the pageant ends Prospero starts suddenly back to reality and the heavenly apparition heavily vanishes. The conspiracy of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo nearly gets the better of his idyllic departure, and he is reminded that the troubles of earthly life cannot be avoided. This is the lesson he had to learn through error in Milan, and this time he remembers in time. Ferdinand says to Miranda, ‘This is strange. Your father’s in some passion / That works him strongly’ (143-44), and she responds with equal dismay, ‘Never till this day / Saw I him touch’d with anger, so distemper’d’ (144-45). Erin Sullivan has identified that in the context of Thomas Wright’s thought the movement to passion or distemper can be associated with divine rather than worldly affectivity.<sup>35</sup> The interruption of the pageant is the heavenly being interrupted by the earthly, and even Prospero is vulnerable to being caught between in such a passion.

Prospero seems to recover enough to take time between heavenly vision and earthly conspiracy to offer his great meta-theatrical reflection. The actors are spirits who melt into thin air, and the theatrical trappings of scenery are baseless fabric. It is uncertain whether *The Tempest* was originally performed at The Globe or an indoor theatre like Blackfriars.<sup>36</sup> Regardless, the reference to ‘the great globe itself’ (153) would have reflected theatrically as well as cosmically. When Prospero says ‘We are such stuff / As dreams are made on; and our little life / Is rounded with a sleep’ (156-58), this is in reference to himself, Ferdinand and Miranda as characters. Also, in light of the pageant within the play, it is a reference to themselves as the more real people who are present. As Malcolm Guite describes:

Whereas for Macbeth the actors in the play of life are ‘walking shadows’, Prospero’s choice of word is spirits – ‘These our actors, / As I foretold you, were all spirits’. They are the natural inhabitants of a realm beyond the one in which they have been playing. ...they, and the ‘cloud-capped towers’, melt from us into something else, or in their melting reveal something else. This

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<sup>35</sup> Sullivan, 34.

<sup>36</sup> Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 7.

sense is carried by the context of Prospero's speech in the wider plot. These lines occur at the beginning of the *fourth* act, not the end of Act V.<sup>37</sup>

The theatrical audience, in seeing this, should realize they are themselves implicated—both as even more real, and yet also as insubstantial compared to the greater transcendent reality that will round them too as a dream. When Prospero dissolves the pageant he in effect dissolves the play as well, and by gesturing to the theatrical conceit dissolves the experience of all those present into a dreamlike experience from which they are bidden to awake. This collapse of the theatrical conceit makes the barrier between performance and audience permeable both ways. Just as in *The Winter's Tale* the audience is incorporated into the final resolution, in *The Tempest* not just the audience but the theatre itself and the world which it images could be said to crash into the construct of the performance. By confusing the interpenetrating layers of appearance, substance, and reality, the audience is, before Prospero's final bid for relief, incorporated into the penetrating reality of the play's spiritual resolution.

Act IV, Scene i ends by returning briefly from the sublime to the ridiculous, as Caliban's conspiracy proves itself less competent the more sober it gets. The natural order cannot be ignored, it must be corrected. Prospero soon enough recovers, and through his magic returns things to the order of his plan.

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Act V is a source of consternation to readers. Many see in it Prospero's recantation of his dark art, or his slipping into despond, or both. The question of dark art has already been put aside. The question of Prospero's sadness is also predicated to some extent on willful interpretation combined with a loss of familiarity with the interpretive possibilities of alchemy and enchantment. This is a solemn scene of liberation and reconciliation.

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<sup>37</sup> Guite, 71-72.

Prospero opens the scene with alchemical language and a reaffirmation that his power is unimpeded: ‘Now does my project gather to a head: / My charms crack not; my spirits obey; and Time / Goes upright with his carriage’ (1-3). Ariel reports that Alonso is repentant, Gonzalo united with him in mourning, and the others distracted. In response to Ariel’s near-pity, Prospero steels himself with ‘nobler reason’ (26) against both furious vengeance and weak pity. Upon the report of their repentance, Prospero commands:

They being penitent,  
The sole drift of my purpose doth extend  
Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.  
My charms I’ll break, their senses I’ll restore,  
And they shall be themselves. (28-32)

Vengeance was never his intent. By his art he has orchestrated for those who are deceived or corrupted the opportunity for correction. As he is waiting, alone except for the theatrical audience, Prospero gives the second of his great speeches in which he both affirms the extent of his magical power and relinquishes it. Most perplexing are his apparent invocation of pagan magic, and his claim to have power over the dead.

Prospero, like Paulina, is a grave figure. Ariel’s first words greet Prospero explicitly as such: ‘All hail, great master, grave sir, hail!’ (I.ii.189). There are two places in the play where the grave has burdened commentators. The first is Prospero’s invocation of Ovid’s Medea in the speech that includes: ‘Graves at my command / Have wak’d their sleepers, op’d, and let ‘em forth / By my so potent art’ (48-50). Second, Prospero’s penultimate thought before the Epilogue is, ‘And thence retire me to Milan, where / Every third thought shall be my grave’ (311-12). This is often taken as a sign of despondency, leading to a heavier reading of his line in the Epilogue ‘And my ending is despair’ (15). Prospero’s grave would overflow with the ink spilt on it. However, in light of the grave as the spiritual and alchemical locus of death and rebirth, Prospero’s grave fits into an enchanted reading of *The Tempest*.

When Prospero claims power over graves and their sleepers, this is frequently taken as proof of necromancy or mere rhetorical posturing. There is an element of the macabre in this speech, but there is also a deeper insinuation of redemption through resurrection. Disenchanted critics overlook any account of resurrection as fictionalized, misunderstood, or exaggerated by superstition. In early modern culture (and for Shakespeare as well barring conclusive evidence to the contrary), resurrection after death was assumed to be real. As Scott Crider has pointed out, the central miracle of Christianity was Christ's resurrection, which was possible because resurrection was possible. Resurrection was not precluded from the miracles that could be experienced in earthly life, especially on the evidence of scripture. In the Old Testament, Elijah raises the son of a widow (1 Kings 17), Elisha raises the son of the Shunammite woman (2 Kings 4), and an anonymous man is resurrected by touching the bones of Elisha (2 Kings 13). Jesus raises the dead son of the woman of Nain (Luke 7), the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8), and Lazarus (John 11). St Peter resurrects Tabitha in Joppa (Acts 9). St Paul brings Eutychus back to life (Acts 20). At Christ's own death, 'the graves did open them selves, and many bodies of the Saintes which slept, arose, And came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holie Citie, and appeared unto many' (Matthew 27:52-53). Per 1 Corinthians 15, resurrection will be for all:

<sup>54</sup>So when this corruptible hathe put on incorruption, & this mortal hathe put on immortalitie, then shal be broght to passe the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up into victorie.

<sup>55</sup>O death, where is thy sting! O grave where is thy victorie!

<sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sinne : and the strength of sinne is the Law.

<sup>57</sup>But thanks be unto God which hathe given us victorie through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Scriptural significations are less remarked upon than Prospero's ostensible imitation of Medea. The homage to the *Metamorphoses* is often taken to indicate Prospero's black magic,<sup>38</sup> but this comparison is more illuminative in parallel:

*The Tempest* V.i.33-57

Ye elves of hills, brooks, standing lakes, and groves,  
 And ye that on the sands with printless foot  
 Do chase the ebbing Neptune, and do fly him  
 When he comes back; you demi-puppets that  
 By moonshine do the green sour ringlets make,  
 Whereof the ewe not bites; and you whose  
 pastime  
 Is to make midnight mushrumps, that rejoice  
 To hear the solemn curfew: by whose aid  
 (Weak masters though ye be) I have bedimm'd  
 The noontide sun, call'd forth the mutinous  
 winds  
 And twixt the green sea and the azur'd vault  
 Set roaring war; to the dread rattling thunder  
 Have I given fire, and rifted Jove's stout oak  
 With his own bolt; the strong-bas'd promontory  
 Have I made shake, and by the spurs pluck'd  
 up  
 The pine and cedar. Graves at my command  
 Have wak'd their sleepers, op'd, and let 'em  
 forth  
 By my so potent art.

But this rough magic  
 I here abjure; and when I have requir'd  
 Some heavenly music (which even now I do)  
 To work mine end upon their senses that  
 This airy charm is for, I'll break my staff,  
 Bury it certain fadoms in the earth,  
 And deeper than did ever plummet sound  
 I'll drown my book.

Prospero's speech shows clear signs of imitation, but this is hardly a copy-paste.

Prospero's 'Graves at my command...' itself sounds closer to St Matthew than Medea. T. W.

*Metamorphoses* VII.258-77

O trustie time of night  
 Most faithfull unto privities, O golden starres whose light  
 Doth jointly with the Moone succede the beames that  
 blaze by day  
 And thou three headed Hecate who knowest best the way  
 To compass this our great attempt and art our chiefest stay:  
 Ye Charmes and Witchcrafts, and thou Earth which both  
 with herbe and weed  
 Of mightie working furnishes the Wizardes at their neede:  
 Ye Ayres and windes: *ye Elves of Hilles, of Brookes, of  
 Woods alone,*  
*Of standing Lakes,* and of the Night approche ye  
 everychone.  
 Through helpe of whome (the crooked bankes much  
 wondering at the thing)  
 I have compelled streames to run cleane backward to their  
 spring.  
 By charmes I make the calme Seas rough, and make the  
 rough Seas plaine  
 And cover all the Skie with Cloudes, and chase them  
 thence again.  
 By charmes I rayse and lay the windes, and burst the  
 Vipers jaw,  
 And from the bowels of the Earth both stones and trees doe  
 drawe.  
 Whole woods and Forestes I remove: I make the  
 Mountaines shake,  
 And even the Earth it selfe to grone and fearfully to quake.  
*I call up dead men from their graves:* and the O lightsome  
 Moone  
 I darken oft, though beaten brasse abate they peril soone  
 Our Sorcerie dimmes the Morning faire, and darkes the  
 Sun at Noone.<sup>39</sup>

<sup>38</sup> e.g. Mason Vaughan and Vaughan, 66: '...having his protagonist openly speak words that some in his audience would recognize from Medea's speech in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* was Shakespeare's signal that the magician's power is not really benign and must be rejected.'

<sup>39</sup> Ovid, trans. Golding, emphasis added.

Baldin has thoroughly dissected the influences of Ovid's Latin and Golding's English, and rejects treating Shakespeare's use as derivative:

In Shakspeare's treatment of the Jason-Medea story we have probably an accurate illustration of his typical modes of using Ovid. He already knows Ovid's story and for parallel situations turns to it for suggestions on how to handle his own story. If the situation demands or suggests it, he can use the original Latin, with Golding's translation to give him further suggestion. But for general survey there is no indication that he does more than run through Golding's translation. The train of ideas once started, he uses his memory of other passages to produce his artistic effect, and cares not at all whether that memory be accurate or not, so the effect be good. Shakspeare is not the pedant seeking to impress others by his accuracy in unimportant detail, but the artist seeking material from which his imagination can evolve some marvellous effect—and the effect is all.<sup>40</sup>

Further, Medea's invocation is not transparent sorcery. Jason has plead with her for the rejuvenation of his aged father, offering his own youthful vitality in exchange. Medea refuses the sacrifice, choosing to give freely of her own art.<sup>41</sup> Her magic is sacrificial, for the sake of another, and performed out of love. It is the beginning of Medea's opus to restore the father to his son—echoed in *The Tempest* by the restoration of Alonso to Ferdinand. Medea's art is pagan, though Golding's 'Witchcrafts' and 'Wizardes' are in Ovid more benign as 'artis que magorum' and 'magos'.<sup>42</sup> *The Winter's Tale* V.i gives immediate precedent for fearful anticipation of a monstrous resurrection that turns out to be benevolent. The controversial part of Prospero's claim is not the nature of resurrection, but that he can command it. All we have as evidence is Prospero's own testimony. In light of the precedent of *The Winter's Tale*, his recognizable art, and preceding demonstrations of power, we would be justified in giving him the benefit of the doubt.

The question of 'Every third thought shall be my grave' is likewise not inherently morbid. In light of the grave as the place from which sleepers awake, and with the suggestion of the grave as a pretext for the study of esoteric alchemy, Prospero may be turning from

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<sup>40</sup> Baldwin, 451.

<sup>41</sup> Ovid, trans. Miller, VII.176-77.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, VII.195, 196.

earthly matters to his own preparation for eternity. His ability to control the elements is not in question, but by the end he has realized even this is rough magic. We do not know how old Prospero is, but given the age of Miranda he is plausibly-close to Shakespeare's own age. At the time Shakespeare wrote *The Tempest* he had exceeded life expectancy in London. Those of good health could live much longer, but nothing could be taken for granted.<sup>43</sup> Prospero, having completed the work of securing polity and family, confronts his own mortality in recognition of the perils to the soul of being prince and magus. To those with antipathy for dying unprepared, it sounds more like piety than morbidity to devote a third of one's reflective time to dying well in anticipation of the life to come.

To return to the beginning of Act V, it is immediately after claiming supreme magical power to wake sleepers from their graves that Prospero, mid line, swears to abjure such 'potent art' as 'rough magic'. These are difficult to reconcile as real and benign. Part of the difficulty is the word 'abjure'. The *OED* associates the recantation of heresy with its primary definition and includes Prospero's use as a specific example. However, despite frequent ecclesial use the meaning was not exclusively such, and the most general definition is 'To renounce an oath, forswear; to withdraw, retract, recant (a heresy or other opinion or position formerly held).' Prospero's abjuration has the power of an oath, but it is not an admission of heresy. The incantation claims power to employ the 'elves' (33), 'demi-puppets' (36), and 'weak masters' (41) by whose aid he has ruled the respective elements in their strongest forms. The power over graves and their sleepers is also a power to employ spirits in the reanimation of their respective material forms, which, in context, does not seem any greater feat than ruling nature by its spirits. That such sleepers can awake signals the ultimate reality of resurrection. Prospero does not claim the power of the last resurrection, and the precedent for any intervening reanimation is more scriptural than pagan. The power that Prospero

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<sup>43</sup> Ackroyd, 4, 111.

abjures is over nature and spirits. When he forswears this capacity, he releases both from his direct influence.

Another way of addressing the problem is to consider when Prospero actually abjures his magic. We do not see him bury his staff or drown his book, and there is a regular assumption that Prospero retains magical control until he releases Ariel in his last line. Yet there is no evidence that Prospero does any magic after he declares he will drown his book. The First Folio stage direction after this speech indicates Prospero has made a circle before or while speaking. His recantation states that after he requires some heavenly music, '(which even now I do) / To work mine end upon their senses that / This airy charm is for' (52-54) he will break his staff. The music is immediately set in motion. Then we have the alchemical neutralization of air, earth, and water. In performance, the action of breaking the staff could be done right then on stage.

Ariel continues the course upon which he was already set through to the end of the play. There is a secondary question in this reading whether Ariel is in fact free before he is pronounced free and does not realize it, or continues to serve willingly. Since Prospero also relinquishes his magic robe, which is synonymous with his art (I.ii.25), and Ariel helps to attire him in his ducal vesture, it is not unreasonable to infer Ariel's final acts of service are willing. He expresses delight in his activity and a desire to please Prospero beyond necessary posturing. Ariel does not know Prospero has forsworn his magical control. The last thing Ariel actually says is before he drives Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo in, and it is to ask in an aside to Prospero, 'Was't well done?' (240). Prospero's response is 'Bravely, my diligence. / Thou shalt be free' (241).

In light of the dissolution of the theatrical conceit in Act IV, combined with Prospero relinquishing his magical power at the beginning of Act V, nearly all of the fifth act may be read as theatrically and magically disenchanting. The play continues, but as the spells wear off

everyone regains personal agency. What remains is spiritually-enveloped but un-coerced human interaction. In this context Prospero embraces Alonso with welcome (109-10). Alonso, as soon as his mind is clear from magical enchantment (115), relinquishes the dukedom of Milan and asks Prospero's pardon (119-20).

Prospero speaks privately in an aside to Sebastian and Antonio of their further treachery (126-29), evidently hoping they will repent and be reconciled. Sebastian in response accuses Prospero of devilry (129). Prospero forgives Antonio's worst fault and reclaims the dukedom that Alonso has freely declared his. Sebastian and Antonio are silent in the face of forgiveness. Sebastian later declares at line 177 that the recovery of Ferdinand is 'A most high miracle!' His sincerity is suspect and this is most likely an attempt to ingratiate himself with Alonso. The only other words from Sebastian and Antonio are brief derision of Caliban, Stephano, and Trinculo (263-66), and these too are just as easily read as flattery of the dukes against conspirators who have been condemned as such. Their silence when forgiven is usually taken as a sign of unrepentance. The truth is we cannot know their hearts, and their ends are not revealed. Prospero sticks with his plan, offers forgiveness freely, and leaves the rest to Providence. He has realized (perhaps all along) that greater spiritual virtue can only be freely practiced and freely received. The greatest hope at the end of *The Tempest* is that love freely and unconditionally given will lead to it being freely received and returned. If Prospero did not fully acknowledge this before Ferdinand and Miranda fell in love, their romance at the crux of the play may be credited for this final enchantment of spiritual freedom.

Miranda's wonder is innate. Even her accusations that Ferdinand is cheating at chess are in the register of delight. The most control we ever see Prospero exert over her is to cause her to fall asleep at I.ii.86, so that she will not know the pandemonium going on around her.

Prospero has protected her, but her nature is wonder, and here in the last scene she says in a state of disenchantment:

O wonder!  
 How many goodly creatures are there here!  
 How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world  
 That has such people in't! (181-84)

This is not naïveté. ‘O wonder!’ is the unadulterated expression of herself just being. The singular wonder Miranda sees are creatures that are good and beautiful in a world that has been remade brave and new. She directly comprehends the truth that nearly everyone else struggles to apprehend. Miranda allows us to hope that we may work towards redemption, so that at least our children may be able to retain such wonder. Perhaps this is why Coleridge thought that Miranda was Shakespeare’s favourite.

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Ariel’s release belongs closely with Prospero’s Epilogue. The insubstantial pageant having faded, Ariel is no longer a character or a mere theatrical conceit. Prospero’s last charge to Ariel is for calm seas and auspicious gales, then he is freed to the elements (317-19). When he is released, this Mercurial, musical, spirit of air is released not into the narrative conceit of the play, but out of the theatre which the narrative has overflowed. Ariel, who has been the focal contact between Prospero and the audience, remains a spirit at-large of the free spiritual re-enchantment which has not ended. Ariel is no longer Prospero’s spirit but ours, if we will have him. Prospero ties Ariel and the audience together, which we see in the fullness of the Epilogue: the gentle breath that would fill his sails (11) is the same wind that is Ariel’s charge.

Prospero does not follow the convention of breaking character in his Epilogue to apologize for the shortcomings of what has been seen. The Epilogue is Prospero’s prayer, ostensibly spoken to the audience. He has no more charms and little strength (1-2). Prospero

asks for release, as he has released those who sought to entrap him. The binding spell is now the audience's, and theirs is the power to pardon:

For the second time the revels have ended and still Prospero, who has forgiven and delivered his enemies, survives the dissolution and stands in need of deliverance himself. He steps as it were from the Great Globe, from the whole theatre of life, to find that he is still himself and still has an audience.... And so he appeals to his audience for mercy on the grounds of mercy, both for the mercy he has shown and the mercy his auditors might themselves hope for....<sup>44</sup>

When Prospero says his project was to please (13), the assumed audience is the theatrical audience. This is the closest Prospero comes to the convention of an epilogue. Here also Shakespeare's dramaturgical spectre hovers most closely. This conflation too allows for a plurality of significances. The theatrical and magical enchantments having ended, the character audience and the theatrical audience are conflated. Again by extension, the audience incorporates the greater reality beyond the spatial confines of the theatre. His project to please submits to those who have the power to judge him. Prospero of all people knows that however powerful he was, there is a power greater and more sovereign, before whom no service is perfect. His acknowledgement is Shakespeare's acknowledgement.

The next to last sentence of the Epilogue is often taken as a sign the play ends on a melancholy note, at least for Prospero:

Now I want  
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,  
And my ending is despair,  
Unless I be reliev'd by prayer,  
Which pierces so, that it assaults  
Mercy itself, and frees all faults. (13-18)

If spoken to the audience, this does come across as needy and despondent. Yet, again, the greatest audience for such a prayer is not theatrical but spiritual. Having broken open the boundary between earth and heaven, Prospero speaks literally when he says his prayer pierces

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<sup>44</sup> Guite, 73.

and assaults Mercy itself. We are included into Prospero's corporate act of penitence, but he has at the last turned the secular theatre into a sacred place of supplication.

The last couplet is a change of address to those present in the theatre, who by their response are freely incorporated into the final loving enchantment of forgiveness:

As you from crimes would pardon'd be,  
Let your indulgence set me free.

### **Conclusion**

According to an enchanted reading of *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina's art is uncertain, but the conclusion is spiritually certain. *The Tempest*, in contrast, gives abundant evidence that Prospero's art is certain, but the conclusion is spiritually uncertain. This does not mean that we should doubt it, only that spiritual freedom cannot be imposed. When Prospero could have enforced by art the visible and human reconciliation of justice, instead he relinquishes his power. Not because he was corrupt or in error, but because coercion would only subjugate those less powerful than himself, and hearts are not moved towards faith and love by coercion, however benevolent. 'Free' is the last word.

## EPILOGUE

If this study has succeeded, the result will be further questions for research and critical engagement. I have endeavoured to demonstrate the mutual benefit to literary criticism and theology of studies that take seriously the probability that William Shakespeare and his contemporaries erred on the side of sincere religious belief. Shakespeare is not a recognized theologian, but his imagination was capable of apprehending anything of possible religious significance, and translating it into dramatic form for audiences' comprehension and sometimes even spiritual edification. *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* alone suggest serious creative engagement with matters often relegated to theology: divine providence, a cosmic order that includes nature and the supernatural, the problem of evil, bodily resurrection, the eternality of the spirit, miracles, faith and reason, man's creative role in redemption, and aesthetics—to name some of them. Shakespeare seems to have trusted his audiences to recognize these topics and benefit from engagement with them in the secular theatre. Presently there is a disconnect between the predominant ideological mindset of Shakespeare's day and our cultural mindset as we continue to try and understand the enduring spiritual significance of Shakespeare's dramatic art. Shakespeare does not have to be studied from a religious perspective, but there is increasing evidence that to the extent scholars are interested in the question of Shakespeare and religion, they benefit from treating that religion less as an outmoded artifact and more as the embodiment of faith that still awakens many to this day.

To return to the language of disenchantment and re-enchantment, it is not hard to identify a sustained critical trend of disenchantment that has sought to understand Shakespeare and religion by disenchanting both. Such studies have cast into relief a great number of critical opportunities for which Shakespeare studies are the better. However, perhaps in light of Shakespeare's ongoing resistance to secularizing hypotheses, there is

opportunity for theological correctives that carefully recover critical and spiritual re-enchantment in their methodologies. This study now concluded will, I hope, suggest other opportunities for further studies that may apprehend interpretive possibilities not usually considered by those who limit their comprehension to reason alone without imagination or faith.

If ever there was an age when disenchantment led to spiritual turmoil and cultural distress, it was Shakespeare's. It would be historical snobbery to presume we are much better or worse off, but certainly there is need for the cultural recovery of the enchanting ideal that our world makes sense, our lives have purpose, and we are not helpless in the face of tragic circumstances. Those who have closed themselves off to spiritual renewal are nevertheless looking for some reassurance that things are better than they comprehend. Shakespeare knew such people could not always be found in church. Perhaps he hoped to find them in the theatre.

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