THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

THE WINTER'S TALE

EDITED BY JOHN PITCHER

THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

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THE WINTER'S TALE

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THE ARDEN SHAKESPEARE

THE WINTER'S TALE

Edited by
JOHN PITCHER

Arden Shakespeare

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The Editor

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For love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave: the coals thereof are fiery coals, and a most vehement flame.
Song of Solomon

And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind.
John Milton

These are not things transformed.
Yet we are shaken by them as if they were.
We reason about them with a later reason.
Wallace Stevens

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GENERAL EDITORS' PREFACE

The earliest volume in the first Arden series, Edward Dowden's *Hamlet*, was published in 1899. Since then the Arden Shakespeare has been widely acknowledged as the pre-eminent Shakespeare edition, valued by scholars, students, actors and 'the great variety of readers' alike for its clearly presented and reliable texts, its full annotation and its richly informative introductions.

In the third Arden series we seek to maintain these well-established qualities and general characteristics, preserving our predecessors' commitment to presenting the play as it has been shaped in history. Each volume necessarily has its own particular emphasis which reflects the unique possibilities and problems posed by the work in question, and the series as a whole seeks to maintain the highest standards of scholarship, combined with attractive and accessible presentation.

Newly edited from the original Quarto and Folio editions, texts are presented in fully modernized form, with a textual apparatus that records all substantial divergences from those early printings. The notes and introductions focus on the conditions and possibilities of meaning that editors, critics and performers (on stage and screen) have discovered in the play. While building upon the rich history of scholarly activity that has long shaped our understanding of Shakespeare's works, this third series of the Arden Shakespeare is enlivened by a new generation's encounter with Shakespeare.

THE TEXT

On each page of the play itself, readers will find a passage of text supported by commentary and textual notes. Act and scene divisions (seldom present in the early editions and often the product of eighteenth-century or later scholarship) have been retained for ease of reference, but have been given less prominence than in previous series. Editorial indications of location of the action have been removed to the textual notes or commentary.

In the text itself, unfamiliar typographic conventions have been avoided in order to minimize obstacles to the reader. Elided forms in the early texts are spelt out in full in verse lines wherever they indicate a usual twenty-first century pronunciation that requires no special indication and wherever they occur in prose (except where they indicate non-standard pronunciation). In verse speeches, marks of elision are retained where they are necessary guides to the scansion and pronunciation of the line. Final -ed in past tense and participial forms of verbs is always printed as -ed, without accent, never as -'d, but wherever the required pronunciation diverges from modern usage a note in the commentary draws attention to the fact. Where the final -ed should be given syllabic value contrary to modern usage, e.g.

> Doth Silvia know that I am banished?
> (*TGV* 3.1.214)

the note will take the form

> 214 **banished** banishèd

Conventional lineation of divided verse lines shared by two or more speakers has been reconsidered and sometimes rearranged. Except for the familiar *Exit* and *Exeunt*, Latin forms in stage directions and speech prefixes have been translated into English and the original Latin forms recorded in the textual notes.

COMMENTARY AND TEXTUAL NOTES

Notes in the commentary, for which a major source will be the *Oxford English Dictionary*, offer glossarial and other explication of verbal difficulties; they may also include discussion of points of interpretation and, in relevant cases, substantial extracts from Shakespeare's source material. Editors will not usually offer glossarial notes for words adequately defined in the latest edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary* or *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*, but in cases of doubt they will include notes. Attention, however, will be drawn to places where more than one likely interpretation can be proposed and to significant verbal and syntactic complexity. Notes preceded by * discuss editorial emendations or variant readings from the early edition(s) on which the text is based.

Headnotes to acts or scenes discuss, where appropriate, questions of scene location, Shakespeare's handling of his source materials, and major difficulties of staging. The list of roles (so headed to emphasize the play's status as a text for performance) is also considered in the commentary notes. These may include comment on plausible patterns of casting with the resources of an Elizabethan or Jacobean acting company and also on any variation in the description of roles in their speech prefixes in the early editions.

The textual notes are designed to let readers know when the edited text diverges from the early edition(s) or manuscript sources on which it is based. Wherever this happens the note will record the rejected reading of the early edition(s), in original spelling, and the source of the reading adopted in this edition. Other forms from the early edition(s) recorded in these notes will include some spellings of particular interest or significance and original forms of translated stage directions. Where two or more early editions are involved, for instance with *Othello*, the notes also record all important differences between them. The textual notes take a form that has been in use since the nineteenth century. This comprises, first: line reference, reading adopted in the text and closing square bracket; then: abbreviated reference, in italic, to the earliest edition to adopt the accepted reading, italic semicolon and noteworthy alternative reading(s), each with abbreviated italic reference to its source.

Conventions used in these textual notes include the following. The solidus / is used, in notes quoting verse or discussing verse lining, to indicate line endings. Distinctive spellings of the basic text (Q or F) follow the square bracket without indication of source and are enclosed in italic brackets. Names enclosed in italic brackets indicate originators of conjectural emendations when these did not originate in an edition of the text, or when the named edition records a conjecture not accepted into its text. Stage directions (SDs) are referred to by the number of the line within or immediately after which they are placed. Line numbers with a decimal point relate to centred entry SDs not falling within a verse line and to SDs more than one line long, with the number after the point indicating the line within the SD: e.g. 78.4 refers to the fourth line of the SD following line 78. Lines of SDs at the start of a scene are numbered 0.1, 0.2, etc. Where only a line number precedes a square bracket, e.g. 128], the note relates to the whole line; where SD is added to the number, it relates to the whole of a SD within or immediately following the line. Speech prefixes (SPs) follow similar conventions, 203 SP] referring to the speaker's name for line 203. Where a SP reference takes the form e.g. 38+ SP, it relates to all subsequent speeches assigned to that speaker in the scene in question.

Where, as with *King Henry V*, one of the early editions is a so-called 'bad quarto' (that is, a text either heavily adapted, or reconstructed from memory, or both), the divergences from the present edition are too great to be recorded in full in the notes. In these cases, with the exception of *Hamlet*, which prints an edited text of the quarto of 1603, the editions will include a reduced photographic facsimile of the 'bad quarto' in an appendix.

INTRODUCTION

Both the introduction and the commentary are designed to present the plays as texts for performance, and make appropriate reference to stage, film and television versions, as well as introducing the reader to the range of critical approaches to the plays. They discuss the history of the reception of the texts within the theatre and scholarship and beyond, investigating the interdependency of the literary text and the surrounding 'cultural text' both at the time of the original production of Shakespeare's works and during their long and rich afterlife.

PREFACE

I am sure I am not the first editor to have a mix of feelings as they complete an Arden edition – glad to see it gone, but regretful as it goes, or as Shakespeare put it, looking with one eye auspicious, the other dropping. Some of the regret, which every editor feels, is that there is more I might have done, glossing this line more succinctly, explaining that idea more carefully. What I have missed or misunderstood is entirely my fault, because I've had the best examples before me. The modern editions of *The Winter's Tale* I have drawn on – especially Arden, Cambridge and Oxford – are full of learning and good judgement, and the 2005 New Variorum edition is a hugely impressive work of scholarship. I am indebted to all the earlier editions of the play.

I owe individuals just as much. Richard Proudfoot invited me to edit *The Winter's Tale*, and he has forgiven my ignorance and dilatoriness more times than I care to remember. His guidance on the commentary in particular was invaluable. I trust he knows how important his support has been. Ann Thompson made tactful, decisive interventions about the shape of the Introduction; whatever clarity it has now is in large part due to her. Henry Woudhuysen read everything here in many drafts, with unnerving perspicacity and attention to detail. There were times when he asked for more and yet more from me (be clearer, be consistent, make the argument tauter) and I could cheerfully have wrung his neck. But he has been an exemplary general editor and an outstanding friend: he has made the edition much, much better than it would have been without him.

This is equally true of Hannah Hyam, who has copy-edited the edition. I don't exaggerate when I say that in places Hannah has become my co-editor, quizzing, correcting and gently nudging me towards what she's sure I meant to say. I am deeply grateful to her. Lizzy Emerson, at an earlier stage, read the whole edition in draft. Her improvements and encouragement helped no end. My debt to the Arden commissioning editors is considerable – first to Jane Armstrong, then to Jessica Hodge and latterly to Margaret Bartley. I hope they will think their persistence with me has been worth it.

Special thanks are due to Christopher Wilson, who transformed what I had said about the music into something far more convincing. He has generously provided the scores, assisted by his colleague Michael Fletcher in the Salmon Grove Studios in the University of Hull. Other friends and colleagues have assisted, with help and advice of various kinds: Margaret Berrill, Tony Boyce, Anna Brewer, Terence Cave, Susan Cerasano, David Cunnington, Malcolm Davies, Sarah Dewar-Watson, Jason Lawrence, Michael Leslie, Charlotte Loveridge, John Montgomery, Matthew Nichols, Pat Parker, Mike Purcell, Frank Romany, Linden Stafford and Francis Warner.

Bob Welch – poet, novelist and critic – has been a star I've set my course by for many years, and in the work for this edition too. I am grateful for his friendship. The person to whom I owe most is Alexandra; in Mandelshtam's words, 'the sea and Homer – all is moved by love'.

John Pitcher
St John's College, Oxford

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale* at the end of his career, in late 1610. He had already written more than thirty plays, which had made him well known to theatre-goers and at court. In his first ten years, until about 1599, he wrote mainly comedies and histories, but then, for another decade, from *Hamlet* onwards, he turned to tragedy. He became particularly interested in mixing genres, so that his later comedies have darker, potentially tragic themes and their endings are less and less happy. In this period, in part because of his plays, the status and sophistication of public stage drama rose considerably. It was no longer unthinkable that a common player like Shakespeare might write about themes and debate questions that had long been reserved for court poetry and for the social elite. In his last five years as a writer, Shakespeare enlarged still further what the public might see, in a series of philosophical romance plays, at the centre of which was the group *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*.

To understand *The Winter's Tale* we need to look first at its generic and intellectual framework. From this we can see at once how intriguing a play it is. Everyone knows it ends with a statue that comes to life, but Shakespeare won't let us be fully sure what we have seen. Did Hermione die, and this is her reanimation? Or was she just hidden, waiting, numbed and dead to the world? This is the question which this Introduction begins with (in 'Death and art'), and from which everything else flows. The play has a daring generic shape (a tragedy and a comedy held together at mid-point), which Shakespeare developed out of *King Lear* and out of Greek tragedy – but so transformed that it was no longer tragedy, where a wronged queen must die, but had become romance, in which she is able to die and not die ('Tragedy into romance').

The Winter's Tale is alive with such romance impossibilities. They are the stuff of childhood dreaming and wish fulfilment;

in a more sinister form they supply the fantasies we see in adult males who refuse to grow out of controlling everyone and knowing everything (discussed in 'Childhood'). Shakespeare leads us from the obsession and self-infantilizing in this – Leontes' condition – into the biggest of Renaissance philosophical questions. What can be known? Is there truly a reality outside the mind that is Nature ('Knowledge')? And what *is* Nature? Simply the physical matter that God gave humankind, irretrievably ruined by sin? Or the space that the human mind, through art, might reshape triumphantly in its own image ('Pastorals' and 'Nature and art')?

These are the big questions behind everything that happens in *The Winter's Tale.* Of special importance, because it is a drama, is the psychological state known in the Renaissance as 'Wonder', by which the mind, according to philosophers and critics, understood what was around it. The function of wonder in art, and Shakespeare's reflections on his own dramatic art, are considered in general terms in 'Rules and types in drama' and more specifically in 'Disguising'. This part of the Introduction concludes with 'Time', and its place in the scheme of things.

DEATH AND ART

In the past hundred years human beings have learnt how to postpone death. Drugs and surgery slow the progress of illness and decay, and resuscitation can return people to life even after their heart stops. However, the point when the body actually dies is still our horizon, whatever medical research may make possible in the future.

In Shakespeare's England, there were no antibiotics or anaesthetics and men and women often died early, messily and in pain – in childbirth or from a gangrenous wound or the plague. The Church said that there was eternal life in the next world, but getting through the door to it, in the final moment, wasn't always easy. One response was to say that how you died showed who you were: a calm, courageous end could complete a well-lived life, or put right a misguided one. 'Nothing in his life became him like the leaving it' is said of a traitor facing execution in *Macbeth*. Thinking and talking about death was a national pastime. Not to do so was undutiful, suggesting that you were too much in love with the world's transient pleasures. Despite Protestant teaching, however, Elizabethans couldn't stop thinking about the other possibility, that they might live on as ghosts, neither in heaven nor in hell. The orthodox view was that this was a remnant of unreformed Catholic England – only superstitious papists believed it – but no one in the lower orders paid any attention. Ghosts had bodies, albeit spectral ones, that had survived death.

This outlook gave Shakespeare an opportunity. His first ghosts, eleven people murdered by Richard III, came onstage and cursed the king as he slept. Next it was Caesar's ghost (appearing to Brutus not in a dream but as he sat wide awake), and after that, Old Hamlet, and Banquo in *Macbeth*, spectres who sometimes couldn't be seen by anyone but the tormented hero. Ghosts thrilled audiences. They were revengers, unreal but substantial enough to be played by real actors. Equally enthralling were Shakespeare's other survivors of death, the women who only seemed dead, or who came back to life, unaccountably. Juliet, and Imogen (*Cymbeline*), take mysterious drugs that show them dead, and Thaisa (*Pericles*) is placed in a coffin, her life functions gone, yet they all wake up. Othello stifles Desdemona to death, yet she returns, for a moment, struggling for breath, in part absolving her murderer. Hero in *Much Ado About Nothing* swoons at the altar, but her death, which had convinced her detractors, turns out to be feigned.

For twenty years Shakespeare kept the ghosts separate from the women who wouldn't die. Then at the end of his career he brought them together in *The Winter's Tale*, in the same person, the queen Hermione. In Act 3, when she hears her son is dead, Hermione collapses and is carried offstage, where, according to Paulina, she dies (3.2.200; see Fig. 1). In the next scene her death

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1 ‘Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved / All tongues to talk their bitterest’ (3.2.212–13). Eileen Atkins as Paulina and Tim Piggott-Smith as Leontes, at the news that his wife and son are dead, in the 1988 National Theatre production, directed by Peter Hall. The designer, Alison Chitty, modelled Sicilia on the neoclassical English court of the 1630s, with Van Dyck settings, lace and silk costumes, and statues on pedestals (as here): a place where a miracle of art might, in the end, outdo Nature

is confirmed for the audience by Antigonus' description of the figure that appeared to him in a dream – or was he awake and visited by the spirit of the dead queen, a revenant (3.3.15–18, 36–8)? The spectre of Hermione, all in white, bowed to him, wept and gasped before it spoke. He must take her baby to Bohemia, it said, and give her the name Perdita, since the child was 'counted lost for ever' (32; see List of Roles, 8n.). For his part in the crime against Perdita, it prophesied that Antigonus would never see his wife again.

This is as far as Shakespeare would go. Spirits of dead women were rarely shown on the Elizabethan stage, and female wraiths and revengers were rarer still (Dolan, 219–26). By describing but not showing it, he kept the spectre's secret. Was it an unholy apparition, or a figment of Antigonus' guilty mind, or an instrument of Apollo and providence, protecting the child? Or was there a woman's murderous resentment and 'fury' beneath its sorrow and beauty (3.3.20–5)? Whatever it is, this offstage dream spectre is as real and necessary as any ghost in Shakespeare, and it proves, almost certainly we say, that Hermione is dead.

Yet despite this, at the end of the play, a marvellous statue of the queen comes to life in Paulina's chapel (5.3.99–103). Common sense tells us that this is impossible. A woman can't literally die, reappear as a spirit and then be alive again. This is even more implausible than a statue becoming a living person. Surely we know the truth. Hermione, aided by Paulina, went into hiding in 3.2, to wait, preserving herself, she says, for her daughter's return (5.3.125–8). In a play full of deceptions – Autolycus' disguises, the Shepherd concealing how Perdita was found – Hermione's death is the final grand illusion that audiences need to believe in, up to the point of un-enchantment in 5.3, when the statue moves.

But if Hermione isn't dead, where did that creature in white come from, directing Antigonus, naming Perdita, and foretelling his death? Ghosts by convention could do such things, but only when the person was dead and buried. We may say the plot requires the apparition to intervene, and the oracle too ('*the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found*', 3.2.132–3). What matters is Shakespeare's art – his completion of the story – rather than death or ghosts. Yet the feeling remains that he wanted this perplexing contradiction to stay with us, particularly at certain moments: in Act 5, for instance, when Leontes imagines how, were he to remarry, Hermione's spirit would assume her dead body and stalk the stage, telling him, horribly, to murder his new wife (5.1.56–62).

Some critics try to explain away the contradiction because they see it is irrational and intractable. They speculate that in the first version of the play (a guess, for which there is no solid evidence) Hermione really did die; when Shakespeare revised it to bring her back to life he failed to rewrite Antigonus' dream (see pp. 90–1). Others see in the contradiction – Hermione surpassing the deadness of the spectre and the statue, her life outdoing un-life – the grounds for a redemptive miracle, modelled on the Christian mystery of resurrection.

Romance is the literary form in which contradictions like these thrive, and we should take our cue from it with *The Winter's Tale*. In romance a green knight can be beheaded, ride away with the head under his arm and reappear a bit later, his head back on, as an impish magical lord. Romance lets us have it both ways: in modern terms the counterfactuals (the what if) persist alongside the facts (the what happened). Hermione, in romance, is and isn't dead; she exists as a factual woman but also a counterfactual spectre and statue.

Romance is the place for delusion, too, when it is hard to bear the difference between what is and what you want there to be. After the trial in Act 3 Leontes believes he has killed all his family, so in romance terms what might his best 'counterfactual' dream be? That he might see his dead wife again in the pagan hereafter, where she might return, gentle and unvengeful, to pardon his polluting and murdering her? Shakespeare's spectre isn't like this, however, and it isn't Leontes that dreams or sees it. According to romance logic, the creature that Antigonus encounters – a Fury from Greek tragedy as much as a Kindly One – is the displaced, distorted version of the forgiving Hermione that Leontes wished for.

A full response to *The Winter's Tale*, not just to rich strands of it in isolation (spectral emanations from a guilty mind or the indestructibility of Nature), requires that we look again at what can and can't be, this side of death and beyond, and what human hearts and minds are capable of. In *All's Well That Ends Well*, a play Shakespeare wrote six or seven years before *The Winter's Tale*, the heroine Helena is a wise healer. The king she wants to heal won't believe she can cure his fatal sickness, because every rational treatment has been attempted, so she tells him to start trusting in the miraculous sixth sense her art can wake inside him. He does what she says and he is healed. This is the art of recuperation, in the face of impossibility, that audiences are urged to experience in *The Winter's Tale*. As Helena puts it, in a cunning woman's riddle,

> what impossibility would slay
> In common sense, sense saves another way.
> (*AW* 2.1.176–7)

*

At the date of *The Winter's Tale*, there was another sense in which art might triumph over death. Critics and philosophers, following the ancients, claimed that a really great artist – poet, painter or sculptor – if he were true to Nature, could create works of art that would live on after his own death. In his *Sonnets* Shakespeare shows that he was acutely aware of this claim. When he died, contemporaries praised him in these very terms. Ben Jonson, in his memorial poem prefacing the First Folio of 1623, said of Shakespeare that he had matched everything in Greek and Roman drama; he was 'not of an age, but for all time'.

For Renaissance writers, fame after death came from outdoing predecessors. The classical poet Virgil wrote pastorals about shepherds and the country life, so Elizabethan writers, if they wanted to be as famous as Virgil and to live as long in people's memory – conquering Time as he had – must also write pastorals, to better him if they could. Getting literary fame was competitive and involved theft as well as obligation. The most impressive way of achieving immortality was to create something that earlier artists had attempted but failed in. This is what Giulio Romano in *The Winter's Tale* is said to have done. His statue of Hermione is so lifelike that 'they say one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer' (5.2.98–9).

Shakespeare appears to have invested aspects of his own identity in these themes of creativity, theft and life-giving in *The Winter's Tale*. He was forty-six when he wrote the play, very likely the same age as the protagonist Leontes when it ends (see List of Roles, 1 and 2nn.). This doesn't mean that Shakespeare thought of himself as Leontes, but it does emphasize the unsettling parallel between the king's perverse imaginings, whereby he denies everything that is real, and the artist's impulse to outdo Nature. Shakespeare's desire for fame, by writing something never accomplished before, is also visible in *The Winter's Tale*; indeed his ambition gives the play its novel tragicomic shape. It begins as a tragedy of manners – jealousy and pathology inside a love triangle – which turns, with a comic step-change, into a philosophical romance, an enquiry into what in *King Lear* is called the 'mystery of things' (5.3.16), which only discloses itself because of tragedy.

It is in his choice of materials for this hybrid that Shakespeare the writer shows himself most openly. The plot in the first half of the play he took from a romance novel by his contemporary, Robert Greene (1558–92). The philosophical and high aesthetic elements in the second half (the fertility princess, the statue that breathes, the wife back from the dead) he borrowed from the Greek dramatist Euripides and the Roman poet Ovid. These writers provided Shakespeare with storylines and characters, but other elements too, their reputations and associations, which he gathered into a personal mythology. Euripides was present as the father of tragicomedy, the form every Renaissance dramatist dreamed of mastering. Greene was there because early in the 1590s he – or rather the Greene persona someone else created after his death – had attacked Shakespeare as a money-grubbing plagiarist, an uneducated imitator who stole lines from more original writers. At the heart of the mythology was Ovid, from whom Shakespeare learnt that the gods gave immortality to artists who had enough skill to trust in their own genius.

We don't know how private Shakespeare's personal mythology was. Early audiences may have recognized more easily than we do the interconnections between writers and works. Autolycus, for instance, is from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, but he looks suspiciously like Shakespeare's alter ego, a personification of the disreputable, greedy thief in Greene's slander – the same Greene from whom Shakespeare 'borrowed' another couple of works for *The Winter's Tale*. Perhaps the resemblance was obvious in 1611, or perhaps it was just a personal stimulus, or even a private joke Shakespeare used to breathe life into his fictions (Pitcher, 'Autolycus', 252–5, 265; Greenblatt, 371).

There is one area, however, where the mythology is more public. Ovid's story of Pygmalion, the sculptor who made a statue of a woman and fell in love with it, was ubiquitous in the Renaissance. It combined scandalous wish-fulfilment with piety: the perfect artist Pygmalion prayed to Venus for a perfect wife but she gave him his true desire, the statue brought to life. Shakespeare invokes Pygmalion in 5.3 of *The Winter's Tale* – incomparable art, a statue, a perfect wife and an appeal to faith – but there are differences. Pygmalion's statue is real marble until Venus transforms it, and Ovid says nothing of a wife restored to life. If Hermione never actually died, and her death and statue were just faked, probably the most we can say is that the pretence was humane and benign (a distant recollection of Ovid), because it insisted that faith, channelled through art, is vital to us even when we don't believe in miracles.

This is the prevailing modern view of the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*. No miracle happened, unless we think Hermione forgiving Leontes would be close to miraculous. Inside his personal mythology, however, Shakespeare may have had other ideas. The Pygmalion story was a comedy (the sculptor shaped the girl he wanted and a god blessed him with marriage), but the person who told the story in Ovid was the arch-poet Orpheus, whose own famous story was utterly tragic. When his wife Eurydice died, Orpheus went into hell to rescue her. The gods, moved by his singing, let her return with him, on condition he didn't look back as he led her up into life. His moment of weakness, turning to check she was there, then seeing her fall back into hell, brings him unending grief and regret. Not even a supreme artist can restore the dead to life unless he has complete faith in something. Orpheus, when he told the story of Pygmalion, the sculptor who never once doubted Venus, was compensating for his own tragedy with a comedy of new life or, as recent critics have seen it, with a life-giving romance (Crider, 155–62).

Orpheus' failure to overcome death is compensated for in *The Winter's Tale* as well. For this, Shakespeare, in a masterstroke, turned to another ancient romance about a wife who died, but who was brought back to life through a struggle and a profound ritual. This romance was Euripides' 'tragedy' *Alcestis*, in which death did indeed give way to art.

TRAGEDY INTO ROMANCE

The cycle of human life, from birth to death, has been a preoccupation in Western art for thirty centuries at least. In literature, writers from antiquity to the Renaissance examined this cycle, and attempts to evade or cheat it, through the different genres, or species of writing. In Greek tragedy, the cycle of life was shown as a dangerous riddle. 'What is it', the Sphinx asked Oedipus, 'that goes on four legs in the morning, two at noon, and three at the end of the day?' To us now, the answer is easy, 'a man' – crawling baby, an adult walking on two legs, old age leaning on a stick – but to the ancient Greeks such a riddle could only be solved by uncovering the mysterious continuity of human consciousness.

Beneath the puzzle about stages of self-awareness in a man's life was another mystery, about fate, the gods, and biology. Oedipus, unknowingly, murdered his father and slept with his mother, impregnating the womb he had come from (Sophocles, *Oedipus*, 242). Was it the gods who tricked him with their oracle, enjoying his painful realizations, or was there something in him that led ineluctably to his crimes? The shock of tragedy was that it mattered less which of these was true than that there was no escape from either. It was inevitable that Oedipus would be an incestuous parricide, a perversion of the life cycle, just as it was inevitable that Agamemnon, conqueror of Troy, would be murdered on the bathroom floor by his wife Clytemnestra, in revenge for his sacrificing his daughter Iphigenia (Aeschylus, *Agamemnon*, 160–6).

Agamemnon's sacrifice of Iphigenia, appeasing a dark goddess by cutting the girl's throat so that the Greeks might sail for Troy, was stubbornly tragic until Euripides drew out of the episode an astonishing new genre, which we now know as romance. Euripides wrote the story twice, refusing to let the girl die. In his first version, as the sword fell, the goddess Artemis snatched Iphigenia from death and hid her in Tauris, among the barbarous peoples of the Black Sea. There Iphigenia became a grisly priestess, forced to sacrifice foreigners landing on the shore, until one day her brother Orestes and cousin Pylades arrived, though she had no idea who they were. The first tragedy was averted, but it seemed that a yet more terrible one was about to close on the family: the rescued daughter would unwittingly murder her brother.

Escaping this seems impossible, yet Euripides makes it happen, by the most unbelievable chance. Iphigenia, trying to send a message to Orestes (standing beside her, though she doesn’t know it), repeats aloud what she wants Pylades to memorize and to take to him. When she discloses who she is, in this provocatively roundabout way, a recognition scene begins between her and her brother, and the play changes direction completely. Iphigenia, suddenly a bold and clever liar (like all women, Orestes says), uses an elaborate ruse to carry off the holy statue of Artemis and get everyone home safely. The final part of the play, all narrated, is pure romance: tricking the barbarian king and his soldiers and scrambling on board a ship, only to have the waves draw them back, bit by bit, to their enemies on the beach. At last they are saved by Athene, who brings them the official view from Olympus – but who by now believes it or cares? – that everything that happened was ordained by Necessity (Euripides, *Tauris*, 176–8).

Euripides’ great discovery was that tragedy, tested to destruction, did not necessarily become hyper-tragic but might develop into romance. His genres of tragedy and romance were not alternatives (one delving into painful mysteries about men and gods, the other encouraging escapes into fairy tales); rather they were successive stages in human feelings. Euripides was not the first Greek poet to make romance emerge out of another literary form (Homer had done it centuries earlier with epic and romance in the *Odyssey*), but his was the breakthrough in drama that helped free it from its roots in religious festival, and nearly freed it from the gods themselves.

Perhaps this is why, when Euripides wrote the Iphigenia story again, he treated it as an ethical problem, placing the sacrifice at the close of the play. This time, in Aulis, just as the priest struck at Iphigenia, she vanished and was replaced by an animal sacrifice, a mountain deer spattering the altar with its blood. It was said that the girl was with the gods, but no one knew for sure whether this meant she was dead (Euripides, *Aulis*, 425–6). It is possible that Euripides simply lost his nerve about what he had shown the gods to be. Romance, with its emphasis on impossible reversals, capriciousness, and the restorative function of fantasy and ceremony, threatened to make the gods of tragedy just one among many forces; it even made Necessity seem less inescapable.

Years earlier, long before Iphigenia, Euripides had looked at another part of the life cycle in his treatment of Alcestis, the wife and mother who agreed to die in place of her husband, Admetus. Much of *Alcestis* deals with preparations for her approaching death, and the guilt Admetus feels at her sacrifice, but the conclusion, once again, is high romance. When all seems lost, and Alcestis has died, the buffoon hero Hercules, half-god half-man, intervenes to save her; offstage he wrestles with Death at the funeral and snatches her back into life. The way she is returned to her husband is one of the most intriguing moments in ancient literature. Hercules leads her in, not as Alcestis, but as a veiled lady, another wife to replace the irreplaceable one. Admetus is horrified, insisting he'll never marry again, but Hercules persists. Be bold, he says, 'take her hand in yours', and then for Admetus comes recognition:

> O gods! O gods! What marvel is this? Is it true?
> I see my wife, her very self! – Or is this joy
> Some mockery sent by the gods to drive me mad?
> (Euripides, *Alcestis*, 78)

Throughout, Alcestis stays utterly silent: she says nothing about her husband's effort to believe that even death can be overcome.

Two thousand years after Euripides, in an open-air wooden theatre on the south bank of the Thames in London, the story of Alcestis surfaced again, in Shakespeare's plays, first in *Much Ado About Nothing* around 1600 (via an Italian novel), and then more openly a decade later, in *The Winter's Tale*. Hero, the heroine in *Much Ado*, appears to die from shock at being slandered by her husband-to-be on their wedding day. When she is returned to him, at the altar, Hero comes back not as herself, but disguised as her cousin, an exact double, whose face, like Alcestis', is hidden (*MA* 5.4.51.2). In *The Winter's Tale*, the slandered dead wife Hermione doesn't reappear as a living double; rather, as a statue that looks as she would have looked much older, that suddenly comes to life. In this version, a curtain concealing the statue replaces the veil, and Alcestis' silence in her reunion with Admetus is transformed into Hermione's mysteriously saying nothing to her husband when they are reunited, though she speaks to her daughter.

The Alcestis story reached Shakespeare through novels and poems and through Euripides' original play. It used to be said that because Shakespeare's Latin was limited, and his Greek even more so, he was unlikely to have read *Alcestis* in the original, or in a Latin translation. This is no longer tenable. His Greek probably wasn't good enough but *Alcestis*, like Euripides' other plays, was published in readable Latin versions several times in the sixteenth century. Shakespeare, educated in an Elizabethan grammar school (a school for teaching Latin to adolescents by drilling them in grammar and translation), would have been able to read these (Schleiner, 36–45, argues that Latin versions of Euripides' *Oresteia* were shaping influences in the writing of *Hamlet*).

One indication that Shakespeare knew *Alcestis* comes from early in Euripides' play when Admetus, watching his wife in her dying moments, promises to grieve as long as he lives, and never again to have feasts or music in their home. 'I shall order a cunning sculptor (*dextera . . . ficta*) to carve your image in stone, and lay it in our bed', he says, and continues (in George Buchanan's Latin translation of 1556, reproduced more fully on p. 446):

> *amplectar illam manibus, illi procidens*
> *tuum vocabo nomen; ulnis coniugem*
> *caram tenere, non tenens, fingam tamen.*
> *est ea voluptas frigida . . .*
> (ll. 361–4; Buchanan, 222)

‘And I shall prostrate myself before it (*illi procidens*), and throw my arms round it, and speak your name’, Admetus tells Alcestis, ‘and I shall imagine that I’m holding my dear wife in my embrace, even though I am not (*non tenens*); it will be a pleasure with no warmth in it.’ Shakespeare revisited some of this material in Act 5 of *The Winter’s Tale* – an imaginary statue, a sculptor with a commission, and a husband’s painful awareness that her image will be stone cold (5.3.35–6) – but only after he had combined it with the story of Pygmalion (see pp. 9–10, 93–4, 97–9).

Euripides’ discovery that tragedy and romance were not independent, unchanging kinds of drama, but might evolve one out of the other, even within a single play, confirmed for Shakespeare something he himself had been working towards. Dramatists, academics and courtiers around him in London at the same date were excited by the possibility of fresh creation and movement within and between the dramatic genres. The first wave of excitement had started half a century earlier in Italy, when poets and philosophers read (in Greek and in Latin) the newly published *Poetics*, Aristotle’s account of tragedy, unknown in Renaissance Europe before 1500.

The *Poetics* introduced Aristotle’s ideas of how tragedy came into being, how it affected audiences, through catharsis and wonder, and how it might be compared with epic. Along with these went his perplexing notion of satisfactory plots in tragedy: in the events of a play, he declared, a probable impossibility was to be preferred to an improbable possibility; and the concession, it appeared, that a tragedy might properly have a happy ending, or at least not an unfortunate one (see Aristotle, 123–4, 135–9). This stimulated a question: might it be possible to create a new mixed genre that combined tragedy and comedy?

Because Aristotle had not said much directly about comedy, some Italian critics felt freer to invent ‘Aristotelian’ ideas about mixed genre. The poet and academic Guarini went further and claimed that in his play *Il Pastor Fido* ('The Faithful Shepherd'), acted at Italian courts in the 1580s, he had achieved a synthesis of the genres, which he called tragicomedy. This new genre, he acknowledged, was anticipated in part by Euripides, but he (Guarini) was the first writer to create it according to precise rules and give it proper status (though he didn't add that the term 'tragicomedy' was mocked in antiquity by the Roman dramatist Plautus).

Guarini's was a grand claim, outrageous and arrogant to some, and much disputed across Europe. By the time *Il Pastor Fido* arrived in England, around 1600, the concept of tragicomedy was avant-garde, but suspiciously foreign. To some, it was compelling, to others a literary mongrel. But in Protestant London, far removed from counter-Reformation courts and culture, how useful could 'tragicomedy' be to Shakespeare and other professional dramatists, writing, not for erudite aristocrats as Guarini had, but for the general public in the commercial theatres? Elizabethans were used to rumbustious plays that mixed moods, events and outcomes (e.g. Thomas Preston's *Cambyses*, described on its title-page as a 'lamentable tragedy, mixed full of pleasant mirth'). In such plays, certain death might suddenly be averted by the appearance of a magician, a big-hearted king, or even a god. Wasn't there an unbridgeable gap between Guarini's highbrow neoclassical tragicomedy and this native English drama that for half a century had subsumed tragedy and comedy into romance plots, daft confusions of the kind found in love comedies, allegorical moralities, melodrama and fairytale happy endings?

The Winter's Tale is Shakespeare's masterclass in bridging this gap between high and low art. His contemporaries weren't entirely sure what to make of the play, and four centuries later we have still not settled what generic name to give it (romance, late comedy, tragicomedy, romantic or pastoral tragicomedy have all been used). One recent solution has been to define the first three acts as tragedy – a mini-tragedy which concludes, in neatly Aristotelian terms, with death and recognition when the husband at last realizes that his wife and son have died because of his jealousy – followed by an unusual kind of two-act comedy.

Shakespeare may indeed have been thinking along these lines. The third act doesn't conclude in Sicily, with Leontes vowing penitence for his fatal jealousy, but a thousand miles north on the coast of Bohemia, with the Shepherd finding Perdita, and the Clown describing how the Bear ate Antigonus and the ship went down in the storm. 'Now bless thyself', the Shepherd tells the Clown, 'thou met'st with things dying, I with things newborn' (3.3.110–11).

This is the turning point in the play, when the themes of rebirth and regeneration are announced. But the line is even more significant in terms of genre, because Shakespeare appears to have in mind a famous definition in Latin by Evanthius, a grammarian of late antiquity (it was printed in editions of Terence's comedies studied at school), of how comedy and tragedy differed (Hardman, 229–31). In comedy, it was said, 'the beginning is turbulent, the end tranquil, while in tragedy the opposite holds true. Tragedy depicts life as something to be fled, comedy, as something to be seized' (Miola, 329). This modern translation is accurate, but it doesn't make visible all the meanings in the Latin. The phrase in the original, '*prima turbulenta, tranquilla ultima*' ('the beginning is turbulent, the end tranquil'), can mean 'comedy begins with a tempest, and ends with peace', and the words '*fugienda vita*' ('life as something to be fled') have other meanings too, of dying or of shunning a kind of life, or even of the fleetingness of life.

Shakespeare joined the two genres together in *The Winter's Tale*. At the join ('thou met'st with things dying, I with things newborn') he confirms what he has done, alluding to the familiar definition. The play's miniature tragedy begins with peace and harmony (‘*tranquilla*’) between the brother princes, followed by more and more turbulence until Act 3 when there is literally a tempest (‘*turbulenta*’) that wrecks the ship and kills the crew, and in which Antigonus dies fleeing the Bear (‘*fugienda*’). At the close of Act 3, according to this argument, the comedy begins with the same tempest in Bohemia, but it ends in Sicily with reconciliation, joy and new marriages. There are similar patterns in Shakespeare’s other plays of 1610–11. *The Tempest* opens in a storm, and *Cymbeline* concludes with repeated references to peace after a battle. In *The Winter’s Tale*, the comic life to be ‘seized’ is shown in the festival in 4.4: young people, passionate and in love, bring their parents – an older generation grieving, resentful and dead to one another – back to life.

Shakespeare’s direction to us – look how newborn things have come out of these commonplaces about tragedy and comedy – is completed by the entry of the Bear. The Roman poet and critic Horace thought very little of popular drama, that it was mere crowd-pleasing, not much better than baiting animals and watching gladiators fight to the death. On occasions, Horace complained, right in the middle of a play, irrespective of the plot and just to keep the mob happy, a couple of boxers would be sent onstage, or perhaps a bear or two (Randall, 91). Shakespeare’s response to this in the middle of *The Winter’s Tale* was to send on the Bear, one that could resolve a complication in the plot by eating Antigonus since he mustn’t get home and reveal where he had abandoned the baby princess. Shakespeare uses the Bear to seal Antigonus’ fate, but also to seal up the join in the play where the genres have been put together abruptly, and where apparently incompatible upper- and lower-class tastes in drama meet. As modern productions confirm, the Bear is terrible and ridiculously funny, its explosive entry nearly unstageable but the best pantomime around.

To these ideas about the genres, we might add other shaping influences, especially those from Roman writers: the comic formula of Plautus’ New Comedy, for instance, where children outwit and replace obstructive parents in the way spring replaces winter, or the macabre union of speechifying, dilemma and murderousness the Elizabethans delighted in finding in Seneca's tragedies. Shakespeare had drawn on all this inheritance since his earliest plays. The models and theories that came later in his career, such as Euripides' mixed tragedies, may have encouraged him to be more groundbreaking and startling.

Looking at genre as something external, that Shakespeare used or adapted, only tells us part of the story. His innovations in genre were achieved most often inside his plays, and between earlier plays and later ones. It is generally agreed that for *The Winter's Tale* the key influence was *King Lear*, written about five years earlier in 1605. There is visible flow between the plays – a reference in *King Lear* to being caught between a bear and a raging sea (3.4.9–11) is made real in *The Winter's Tale* – but there are deeper points of connection too. The most unsettling one is in the harrowing final lines in *King Lear*, where the old king holds first a mirror then a feather to his daughter Cordelia's mouth, searching for breath from her lifeless body. One moment Lear says she'll 'come no more' but the next, his own dying moment, he asks, as he sees something no one else can,

> Do you see this? Look on her: look, her lips,
> Look there, look there!
>
> (5.3.309–10)

In his delirium Lear believes that Cordelia's lips have life in them. In the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*, when Leontes faces what he thinks is the inanimate statue of his dead wife, he sees (in words someone else has to express for him) that 'The very life seems warm upon her lip', and in his heightened state, painful but as sweet as 'any cordial comfort', he thinks Hermione is breathing and tries to kiss her (5.3.66, 76–7). This time, though, the man who wrongs a woman gets her back. The attention in the life cycle shifts from daughter to mother, or rather to a mother who returns to life for her daughter.

Shakespeare's audacity, daring to go beyond his own earlier tragedy, with the same motif and words (especially the half-hidden, bitter-sweet pun passing from 'Cordelia' to 'cordial'), is not to be underestimated. He did it in *Cymbeline* as well, when Arviragus carries onstage the body of his sister, Imogen, apparently lifeless. In fact Imogen isn't dead but in a drugged trance (4.2.195 SD). This is a deliberate reversal, romance for tragedy, of Lear's coming from the prison, holding in his arms Cordelia, who really has died (5.3.254.1). In the interval between these plays and *King Lear* Shakespeare, like Euripides before him, took another of the steps in drama leading from tragedy to romance.

Even in *King Lear* itself, so overwhelmingly tragic, tragedy seems to open naturally into romance. An old, blinded nobleman is brought – he believes – to the edge of a cliff at Dover by a crazed beggar, in reality the loyal son he has wronged. The father plans to kill himself by jumping, but the son deceives him, first with a made-up description of the great height of the cliff (fishermen walking on the beach below look as small as mice) and second, after his father thinks he has stepped off the edge, with an astonished exclamation, in another put-on voice, that the old man's survival is a miracle, he must have fallen like a feather. Then Edgar the son asks Gloucester the father what thing it was that stood with him at the precipice. 'A poor unfortunate beggar', Gloucester replies, but Edgar says no,

> As I stood here below methought his eyes
> Were two full moons. He had a thousand noses,
> Horns whelked and waved like the enraged sea.
> It was some fiend.
>
> (4.6.69–72)

This episode (borrowed from Sidney's romance *The Arcadia*) is, as one recent critic puts it, an invitation to us to participate in romance. Gloucester's attempt at suicide produces for us 'the beneficent illusion of a death which proves to be none, but rather a kind of redemption or new birth' (F. Parker, 112–13). So his fall from the cliff proves to be no fall at all, but a means of rising. The non-existent thing that concealed itself from Gloucester (an imaginary devil of bits and pieces, with two white, blinded eyes) turns out to be one of the nightmare monsters that disappear when we wake (see pp. 30, 133–4).

The cliff at Dover is an illusion, but it is more real for us than any real place could be. Romance has many definitions, but this aspect of it, the truth of an illusion, is what matters most. In this it resembles folk tales and fairy tales. When we are told that a princess has slept for a hundred years, waiting for a prince to wake her with a kiss, we aren't troubled that this is literally impossible. As children, we know that an envious witch would want to put a princess to sleep; as adults, that children must sleep long in adolescence to prepare them for maturity.

Shakespeare knew the truth of folk and fairy tales (*King Lear* begins with a version of Cinderella and her sisters), and he knew that the illusion most important in romance, which we long to believe, is that the dead don't die. In tragedy, we are robbed of this illusion and it hurts; in comedy, we are shown that other illusions matter more (death comes to everyone, so why not just laugh, especially at marriage, greed and pomposity?). Only in romance is the illusion of overcoming death treated with the respect it deserves. Romance acknowledges that tragedy is right: there is no escape from destiny and biology; but it shows that this isn't the full truth about us. The need to believe in the truly impossible (life after death) and to take consolation and even pleasure from it, is part of our humanity.

Romance has other forms – heroic adventures or quests for enlightenment and spiritual wholeness – but in Shakespeare it has a distinctive mode of expression. In *King Lear*, it appears in the exquisitely stylized description of Cordelia weeping when she heard how her sisters had mistreated their father. Then, says a gentleman,

> patience and sorrow strove
> Who should express her goodliest. You have seen
> Sunshine and rain at once, her smiles and tears
> Were like a better way. Those happy smilets
> That played on her ripe lip seemed not to know
> What guests were in her eyes, which parted thence
> As pearls from diamonds dropped.
> (4.3.16–22)

When we least expect it, Shakespeare presents Cordelia to us as if she were one of his romance heroines, like Marina in *Pericles* or Imogen in *Cymbeline*. What was Shakespeare thinking of here, we ask, confusing romance and tragedy like this? And he may well have asked himself the same question, because this passage and the scene around it, although they are present in one text of *King Lear* (the 1608 Quarto), aren't in the other (the 1623 Folio: see Weis, 228–33).

Many scholars now believe that Shakespeare revised his first version of *King Lear* – to speed up the action, to emphasize different themes, to change our perception of characters (e.g. the Fool: see Kerrigan, 218–30). One argument advanced recently about this Cordelia scene is that Shakespeare took it out, along with similar passages, to extrude the romance element: to make *King Lear* more definitely a tragedy and less of a proto-romance (see Jones, 208–15). If this is indeed what happened, the revision could have been stimulated, around 1610, by the writing of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*; alternatively, Shakespeare's drive to purify *King Lear* of romance may have led him towards plays in which tragic beginnings have romance endings. Of course the revision might not be all one way, and it might not be consistent. Lear's final, 'Look on her: look' lines, quoted above, are in the 1623 Folio (said to be the theatrical version) but not in 1608, printed, it is said, from Shakespeare's papers.

This explanation rests on circumstantial evidence and a still-contested hypothesis that it was Shakespeare himself who altered *King Lear*, rather than an actor or functionary in the playhouse. Nevertheless, when we look beyond 1610, to the very last plays Shakespeare wrote, collaborations with John Fletcher in 1613–14, we find that all three are romance dramas. One of them, *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, is a chivalric story borrowed from Chaucer's *The Knight's Tale*, another is *Cardenio*, from Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, and the third is a fantasy history of Henry VIII entitled *All Is True*. Significantly, in the story from Chaucer, a serio-comic subplot has been added, in which a lower-class girl falls in love with a knight. When she can't have him, she goes mad and behaves like a parody of another of Shakespeare's tragic young heroines, the distraught Ophelia in *Hamlet*. In her lovesick lunacy this lower-class girl certainly inhabits romance, albeit a distorted, burlesque version of it.

In many places after *King Lear*, Shakespeare signals that romance is his goal. The creative practice that led him from comedy to romance is well understood by modern critics; indeed this evolution has become the chief way we look at his comedies from the early 1590s forward. Perhaps we may refine this, however, by arguing that throughout his career, in tragedy as in comedy, Shakespeare had always been heading towards romance. A small but telling illustration is in the 'comedy' he wrote around 1597, *The Merchant of Venice*, at the point when half-blind Old Gobbo comes to visit his son, Lancelot Gobbo. The first thing young Gobbo does, with no motive but to raise a laugh, is to put on a voice and pretend he is someone else, to baffle his father. He tells the old man his son is dead, just to make him weep (2.2.45–62).

To modern tastes the scene is funnier than it ought to be (is it right to laugh at a blind man goaded by his son?), but we can see in it, with hindsight, that Shakespeare had already started on the path of romance leading to blind Gloucester and his seeing son on the imaginary cliff at Dover. Even Lancelot's name points the way: he is a stock figure out of English comedy, a cheeky, unreliable servant stumbling from one malapropism to another, but he bears the name of the most famous knight in all romance.

So after all this what shall we call *The Winter's Tale*? A romance that flows out of *King Lear*, with the catastrophe reversed and part of the harm mysteriously undone, or a tragicomedy, in which tragedy is joined halfway through by comedy? Happily, these are not rival categories. For Shakespeare's making and thinking about the play, the term tragicomedy is indispensable; this is what *The Winter's Tale* is. For the spirit of the play, however, and the intellectual and emotional goals it urges audiences towards, romance is the only proper word.

CHILDHOOD

To Elizabethans, romances were instructive stories about upper-class people, chiefly knights and ladies. The stories might have implausible or unbelievable aspects – a flying horse or a magician that changed shape – but these were justified so long as there was a didactic purpose, especially if it was a warning against the destructive effects of love. When a story was too unbelievable or didn't have a clear moral aim, it was said to be 'a tale'. The phrases 'the tale of a tub' and 'the tale of a roasted horse' (Tilley, T45 and T44) were used of yarns and falsehoods. An 'old wives' tale' (Tilley, W388) was a silly, made-up story that only old women or witless men would listen to or bother to repeat. The phrase 'a winter's tale' referred to gossip, outright lies, or to the kind of trivial fairy story that no one but nursemaids and children would find entertaining. The ghost story Mamillius starts telling his mother is of this kind: 'A sad tale's best for winter', he says, 'I have one / Of sprites and goblins' (2.1.25–6).

Shakespeare used the title *The Winter's Tale* to challenge the audience, as he had with earlier plays (for example 'what you will', the alternative title for *Twelfth Night*). Calling the play '*the* winter's tale' distinguished it from the commonplace saying. This is it, the title declares, this is the ultimate fanciful story: how much of it will you believe? And the title also reminded the audience that Shakespeare had taken the play from a well-known but ageing romance, *Pandosto*, by Robert Greene: see how Greene's winter's tale, old and hoary, has been deepened and given new life, made green again (Shakespeare couldn't resist playing on Greene's name, linking it to revivification: see Everett, 12–13).

The biggest challenge in the title, however, was to the kind of watching (or reading) that the play would require. The Elizabethans weren't supposed to prize childhood or the condition of being a child, so it was highly unusual to offer them a story or a play into which childlike and childish sentiments and thinking had been woven, and in which they too were invited to be like a child. This is what Shakespeare did in *The Winter's Tale*. The hard thing for Elizabethan audiences – and this is true in the modern theatre – is that they needed to have childlike trust and openness about what they were shown, but they had to be very sophisticated in interpreting it.

We don't know whether early audiences thought about *The Winter's Tale* like this. The modern emphasis on children and childhood in the play didn't appear explicitly until the 1810s. This was when the German Romantic critic Friedrich von Schlegel declared that *The Winter's Tale* recovered in us the child's power to imagine. It is one of those tales, Schlegel wrote, that are

> peculiarly calculated to beguile the dreary leisure of a long winter evening, and are even attractive and intelligible to childhood, while animated by fervent truth in the delineation of character and passion, and invested with the embellishments of poetry lowering itself, as it were to the simplicity of the subject, they

> transport even manhood back to the golden age of imagination.
>
> (Bate, *Romantics*, 558)

Here the Elizabethan commonplace that a 'winter's tale' was childish and trivial is turned on its head. As adults (according to this Romantic idea) we lose the experience of Nature and beauty we had as children. A work of art like *The Winter's Tale* returns us to the experience of childlike wonder (the startling appearance of the Bear, the statue moving). Schlegel's was the first step in the post-Enlightenment revaluation of childhood in the play, but his notion had little impact in the theatre or lecture-hall. It was Freud, another German Romantic, with a darker version of childhood, whose views reshaped the understanding of *The Winter's Tale* on stage and in the study. Freud claimed that childhood was not innocent: it left adults mentally scarred by fantasies and fetish because they repressed their feelings, or tried to forget some awful sexual incident. Therapy, the cure of talking about their infancy, was one way for guilty grown-ups to free themselves from their past. This caricatures Freud, of course, but modern directors in particular have tried to represent *The Winter's Tale* as a Freudian sexual fable of childhood.

On stage in the twentieth century, Freudian 'caricatures' of *The Winter's Tale* have enlarged immeasurably how we understand aspects of the play that seemed, to earlier generations, inexplicable or false. The most celebrated production to do this was directed by Trevor Nunn in 1969 for the Royal Shakespeare Company (see Tatspaugh, 33–9). This was the year after the mix of harmonies and dissonance in the Beatles' famous *White Album*, the moment when everyone in public life and the arts was supposed to be young, 'with it' and high on drugs. Nunn himself wasn't thirty – he had just been made the youngest director ever at the RSC – and he took his cue from the mood in Britain and the United States, fostered by rock lyrics, newspapers and television, that a sexual revolution was sweeping away old moral and political verities: no one should want or need to grow up.

Nunn made his production open in a nursery where everything was creamy white, from the set and faux Regency costumes to the familiar childhood toys, some oddly oversized, including a rocking horse. The chic royal couple (Barry Ingham as Leontes, Judi Dench as Hermione) seemed adult enough at first, though a bit puppyish, clambering on and off the rocking horse with Mamillius. This was how an elite 1960s couple should be: young, fashionable, and indulgent with their young son. Polixenes wasn't dressed in white, however, but in what appeared to be, in the glow, a russet-red version of Leontes' outfit.

The difference in colour soon made sense. 'The mellow light turns abruptly white and cold', one reviewer wrote, 'the actors freeze, and then glide in slow motion',

> Hermione's voice becomes salacious, inviting, and Polixenes wolfishly strokes her pregnant stomach. We are being shown Leontes's hallucinations: the sickness has struck and, after a few more lucid intervals, it overwhelms him. He remains certifiably mad until the shock, some might say the trauma, of Apollo's vindication of Hermione. Even then the illness isn't over. He is left with a psychosomatic symptom, the slight dragging of a foot.
>
> (Nightingale, 746)

Polixenes' suit changed, in the white glare, to blood red, then back to russet in the brief intervals when Leontes returned to sanity, and the light softened. In Nunn's production, white was first the colour of the nursery, then the symbol of the asylum, and red stood for Leontes' incandescent jealousy. The key was Autolycus' enigmatic line 'the red blood reigns in the winter's pale' (4.3.4), which for Nunn contained encrypted knowledge about the pathology of boy-men who couldn't mature.

Nunn's approach shocked the critics: if Leontes' crimes were explained away as a Peter Pan syndrome, how could there be high tragedy in the play? Even more shocking was Nunn's treatment of the festival in Act 4, which he populated with lazy urban hippies, not working rustics taking a holiday. The reviewers didn't doubt Nunn's intelligence and inventiveness. The quarrel was about the kind of fable Shakespeare had written, and whether the play should be driven by actors – Eric Porter's many-sided portrayal of Leontes for the RSC in 1960, for instance, which led audiences to feel for the man even though they hated what he had done – or instead by a director's Big Idea, in Nunn's case about male sexual development.

Productions of *The Winter's Tale* after 1969 have broadly accepted Nunn's childhood interpretation. Even in the 1992 'alternative' version mounted at the Lyric Theatre in Hammersmith by Théâtre de Complicité under the direction of Annabel Arden, the premise was the same. This was a troupe of improvisers and clowns, whose production began with the court tumbling through an overlarge wardrobe, the kings in clothes too big for them, like children dressed up as adults. The party games, balloons, the characters' jumble-sale clothes, the magic tricks, the giant white tablecloth – which became, in later scenes, snow covering Sicily and then, astonishingly, an amorphous, monstrous, fanged bear (Fig. 2) – were all made to tell the same story, in the manner of a circus, that too prolonged a childhood was the root of Leontes' jealous condition.

Théâtre de Complicité added for the audience the capacity to see things as a child, watching with delight how the actors morphed into new roles, sometimes with a sly wink (not just doubling parts but quadrupling them or more: see p. 120). At the end of 4.4, when Perdita and Florizel sailed from Bohemia, the actors moved around the stage carrying above their heads a toy ship, a prop from Mamillius' box in Act 1. Soon they were followed by Polixenes and Camillo, carrying a larger toy ship; as the actors circled slowly in a wheel, pursuers and pursued, they

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2 ‘This is the chase’ (3.3.56). Dhobi Oparei as a bedsheet-demon Bear in the Théâtre de Complicité production, directed by Annabel Arden, on tour in the UK in 1992

and the rest of the cast, with Autolycus spinning at the centre, peeled away clothes and hats and false moustaches and dressed themselves anew, as they walked, in black veils and sheets, entering Act 5 as a procession of mourners in Sicily following Leontes.

Shakespeare looked at being like a child from different angles in *The Winter’s Tale*, and he didn’t hesitate to show how crude it might be. In Act 3, for instance, he has the Clown rush onstage, half-stupefied after seeing the mariners drowning in the sea and the Bear eating Antigonus. ‘But I am not to say it is a sea, for it is now the sky’, the Clown says, ‘betwixt the firmament and it you cannot thrust a bodkin’s point’ (3.3.82–4). Sometimes he could see the mariners, sometimes not, ‘now the ship boring the moon with her mainmast, and anon swallowed with yeast and froth, as you’d thrust a cork into a hogshead’ (89–92), and then