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"BEHOLD, AND SAY 'TIS WELL": THE REDEMPTIVE MOMENT IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE WINTER'S TALE*

KEN R. HANSSEN[1]

Nord University, Bodø, Norway

ABSTRACT

In Shakespeare's romance *The Winter's Tale* there is a fundamental sense of mutability imposed by the passage of time. Things come into being and they pass into oblivion; sorrow glazed over by prayers for grace, joy tempered by the remembrance of loss. Within a complex time-scheme of past, present, and future, joy and sorrow remain inextricably entwined, and this is what lends this most melancholy play such a profound emotional intensity.

Youth, beauty, happiness; these qualities remain evanescent at the somber close of the play. Tragedy is not purged by laughter, there are no traces of escapism; the awareness of the reality of time, of the inexorable moral responsibility for losses beyond recovery, is what makes the graces received all the more keenly felt, more wondrous. This sense of wonder arises from an elaborate resurrection scene in which, simultaneously cold and warm, at once eternal and ephemeral, Hermione's marble, the finest symbol of the romance conception of time, is wooed into being.

Exploring the structural function of time in the play and its relation to this redemptive moment, in which Hermione's body comes to represent a translation into human terms of a Neoplatonic idea of cosmic order, reveals how the play, beyond offering an idle meditation on art and nature, articulates a profoundly moral vision of existence, and will supply a useful framework for further critical investigations of both the play itself and Shakespearean romance as a whole.

Keywords: Shakespeare; *The Winter's Tale*; time; art; nature: Neoplatonism.

"I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror / Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error, / Now take upon me, in the name of Time, / To use my wings" (*The Winter's Tale*, 4.1.1–4). As winged Time enters the stage delivering his stilted

[1] Ken R. Hanssen, Dr. Philos., Associate Professor, Department of English, Nord University, 8049 Bodø, Norway, e-mail: ken.r.hanssen@nord.no.

couplets, the mimetic reality of the play recedes and becomes indeterminate in form and structure; in the sweeping rush of Time's plumage, line quivers, color blurs, and a great silence enfolds the characters. The present yields because it is contained within him, as is the past and the future, in a vast modulation of loss and recovery: "… it is in my power / To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour / To plant and o'erwhelm custom" (*WT*, 4.1.7–8). In Time all things have their beginning and their end – "Let me pass / The same I am, ere ancient'st order was / Or what is now received" (*WT*, 4.1.9–11) – a perspective that leaves him acceptant of the human condition's multifarious expressions; as he contains all, the characters are all part of him, their mundane, transitory concerns constituting his confounding infinity. Time as choric device certainly evokes a sense of wonder, but it also serves a crucial thematic function, in that it frames the play's engagement with the difficulty of coming to terms with lived experience. This is not merely a matter of the romances as expressions of a specifically Boethian consolation, in which God's providential design manifests itself beyond the bounds of our subjective spatio-temporal perception. Rather, the long gap in time between acts 3 and 4 fundamentally alters the nature of the play, defining how the characters in it appear to themselves, each other, and the audience.

Exploring *The Winter's Tale*'s conception of time, its complex layering of past, present, and future, will suggest something about the generic dynamics of Shakespearean romance as a whole, but will also prepare the ground for a discussion of how the play's iconic and much-debated final scene, the animation of Hermione's statue, not only rehearses the aesthetic tension between marble and flesh, between nature and art, but evokes Neoplatonic theurgic energies integral to the articulation of the play's moral vision. If, at the end of the play, the regal characters have come to terms with the ravages of time, it is because their cumulative experience, their long years of bitterness and remorse, has conditioned them for a transcendent encounter in which the beauty of art manifests the unity of being, forging a link between the finite self and the infinite universe.

Any presentation of events, relying on the 'unities' or not, exhibits a double temporal sequence, story time and narrative time, which relation should be considered. In *The Winter's Tale*, the awareness of an extensive story time is an important consideration when assessing the events unfolding in the mimetic plot. To the reader, the weakening of causality produced by the expansive story time draws attention to the artifice of the narrative design, to the negation of human psychology, to the subordination of events into a myth-like symbolic structure. Through the radical discrepancy in duration between the characters' lives and the movement of the plot, we are estranged from them as fellow human beings, seeing them from the outside as figures in a design entirely removed from their discrete existence. And this is a conception of time at the heart of all the four romances, the action of which spreads over many years, though the dramatic presentation

may not, as in *The Tempest*, with its wake of past iniquity. It is important that we not confuse this model of time with that of the novelistic Greek romance, famously defined by Mikhail Bakhtin, where nothing *essential* happens between the outset and the conclusion of the plot:

> Two adjacent moments, one of biographical life, one of biographical time, are directly conjoined. The gap, the pause, the hiatus that appears between these two strictly adjacent biographical moments and in which, as it were, the entire novel is constructed is not contained in the biographical time-sequence, it lies outside biographical time; it changes nothing in the life of the heroes, and introduces nothing into their life. It is, precisely, an extratemporal hiatus between two moments of biographical time.
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> (Bakhtin 1981 [1938]: 89–90)

In Shakespearean romance, on the other hand, there is a fundamental sense of mutability imposed by the passage of time; even the divine realm – archaic, belonging to a different age – is perceived as part of this potential transience. Things come into being and they pass into oblivion, sorrow glazed over by prayers for grace, joy tempered by the remembrance of loss. Martha Ronk, in a perceptive article on Shakespeare's deployment of visual allegory, made the intriguing observation that "[a]s emblematic figure, Hermione stands in contrast to the figure of Time who takes his emblematic place at the center of the play. The emblem of Time moves things forward, but the emblem of Hermione moves things to the past, to memory" (Ronk 1996: 131). Perhaps time itself is what predicates the difference between Shakespearean tragedy and romance, a result of the former receiving its significance through character, the latter through plot? In tragedy, the temporal scheme is greatly compressed. Even when the action is extended, as in *Macbeth*, the overpowering sense of narrative speed denies the passage of time; indeed, it is as if Macbeth's betrayal of Duncan and fall to Macduff is a simultaneous event. Similarly, in *Hamlet*, the most famously dilated of all of Shakespeare's tragedies, the young prince's cogitations are raised to a pitch indistinguishable from madness by the call for revenge swift as meditation; whether he takes decisive action or not, he is already doomed when his father's ghost appears before him with its story of murder most foul. In romance, however, time expands the view, opening for deliberation, reflection; it is in the gaps in the causal relationships – between action and reaction, between injury and redress, between punishment and forgiveness – that we find a grief that not only shapes our way of looking but also the characters', who must live with their suffering beyond the temporal bounds imposed by tragedy. Hence we may say that the nature of pain in tragedy and romance is different; the suffering in tragedy is sudden, violent, but the pain in romance is that of a slow recognition, of living (rather than dying) with the knowledge of one's culpability. Suffering, in other words, is a state, not an event.

"Come, and lead me / To these sorrows" (*WT*, 3.2.239–41), Leontes says at the end of act 3, and these are the final words of the devastated survivors of any tragedy – perhaps Albany's ("Bear them from hence. Our present business / is general woe…" [*King Lear*, 5.3.318–19]), perhaps Edgar's ("The weight of this sad time we must obey…" [*Lr.*, 5.3.324]) – words that entomb the present, leaving the past the only habitable reality. At the opening of Act 5, far from the merrymaking of rustic Bohemia, Leontes is still overcome by grief over his actions and their consequences: "Whilst I remember / Her and her virtues, I cannot forget / My blemishes in them, and so still think of / The wrong I did myself (*WT*, 5.1.6–9). But while to the audience the passage of time implies a structure of redemption and reconciliation, this is a perspective denied the characters who actually inhabit this time, an aspect of the play noted by Inga-Stina Ewbank: "Time … has to Leontes meant unceasing grief over a self-inflicted loss. His sense of time is entirely retrospective; he looks into the future only to lament that it does not exist to him" (Ewbank 1995: 149). Sixteen years pass between these two passages, between Leontes' dedication of himself to a winter of grief and the imminent arrival of spring in the guise of the long-lost Persephone-Perdita, sixteen years demanding, in spite of the stage presentation, a macroscopic view.

As such, the omission of intervening time is not, as argues Jeremy Tambling (2015: 47), "only a way of joining one significant moment to another". To us it is but a moment, but to Leontes it is not. He shoulders a lifetime of contrition, during which he will inevitably gain a different perspective; like Pericles before him, he withdraws into himself – "Th' effects of his fond jealousies so grieving / That he shuts up himself" (*WT*, 4.1.18–19) – to the point of becoming a bodiless subject, his outward appearance merely drifting about the physical world without engaging with it. He is no longer solipsistically concerned about Sir Smile his neighbor, but reflects endlessly on his own culpability for the terrible events that occurred. He is alone, desolate, and the universe he inhabits is a moral one. Northrop Frye, in a highly interesting passage, talks of how

> … tragic heroes are wrapped in the mystery of their communion with that something beyond which we can see only through them, and which is the source of their strength and their fate alike. In the phrase which so fascinated Yeats, the tragic hero leaves his servants to do his 'living' for him, and the center of tragedy is in the hero's isolation, not in a villain's betrayal, even when the villain is, as he often is, a part of the hero himself.
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> (Frye 1971: 208)

The tombstone with its inscription may as such be a monument to Leontes' crimes, but, through the process of figuration, he himself also comes to be such a monument; it is the time that passes that allows a view from the outside, that

allows Leontes to become a spectator to his own tragedy. And what could possibly arouse greater fear and pity? What time brings, then, is not healing, but a catharsis that purifies and humanizes Leontes the spectator, elevating his grief into a tool of metaphysical recognition, which is why his change of character between Acts 3 and 5, while frequently criticized as poorly motivated, in my view is perfectly consistent.

The extensive story time causes the characters, reflecting on their own experiences, to look back in time, while the audience, reflecting on dramatic structure, looks forward; to the characters it is a tale of fall and remorse, to the audience a tale of remorse and redemption. This static and dynamic, tragic and comic view is what, taken together, gives shape to Shakespearean romance which, Janus-like, simultaneously looks both towards what has been and what shall be. Consider, here, the oft-quoted words of the Shepherd to his son, spoken at the very hinge of the action, that ostensibly epitomize the play's spiritual vision: "Now bless thyself! thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born" (*WT*, 3.3.109–10). For the defining characteristic of romance is not that of a happy ending arrived at by an unusually perilous route (McDonald 1996: 167), an assumption that, however common, demands a considerable degree of sophistry when differentiating romance from comedy proper. The conventional line of argument, here, presumably deriving from John Fletcher's famous definition of tragicomedy,[2] is that in romance you are brought closer to the edge of a higher abyss before being more forcefully yanked back, a view I find to be wholly irreconcilable with the pervading sense of loss that characterizes not merely the action but also the conclusion of the romances, plays that rather than averting tragedies, however narrowly, contain them in time.

No, what I would argue distinguishes romance is not merely a matter of degree, but that it does not allow the weight of the past to be discarded; what is tragic cannot be purged, and the restoration to happiness is always tempered by an awareness of what has been lost. Hence the comedy ending, with all its pairings and reunions, takes place even before the final scene of the play. Within a complex time-scheme of past, present, and future, joy and sorrow remain inextricably entwined, and this is what lends this most melancholy genre such a profound emotional intensity: "They looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed. A notable passion of wonder appeared in them. But the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could not say if the importance were joy or sorrow" (*WT*, 5.2.15–19), one gentleman remarks to the other of the reunion he has just witnessed, and the reports unanimously stress the strong

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[2] "A tragi-comedy is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy" (Fletcher 1897: 7).

nature of the emotion, such as "[t]here might you have beheld one joy crown another, so and in such manner that it seemed sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears" (*WT*, 5.2.43–46), or "[o]ur king, being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now become a loss, cries 'O, thy mother, thy mother!'" (*WT*, 5.2.49–51), or "But O, the noble combat that 'twixt joy and sorrow was fought in Paulina!" (*WT*, 5.2.71–72), *et cetera*.

The action of the play arrives at its redemptive conclusion, certainly, but Mamillius, the sweet boy whom we in a heartbreaking scene saw entertain his mother with a sad tale of winter, will never come back, nor will Antigonus, notoriously rent by a bear, nor will the time squandered on discord and remorse; the unsullied world of the opening of the play cannot be restored. Indeed, from the very moment he surfaces from the depths of his jealous madness, Leontes is fully aware of what he needs to do – "Apollo, pardon / My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle! / I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo" (*WT*, 3.2.151–54) – but he cannot. In romance, tragedy is not purged by laughter; man suffers until the end, but he comes to terms with his suffering. Unlike a tragedy, then, in which the hero eventually succumbs to his demons, Leontes lives; and unlike a comedy, in which the lovers, even the most mismatched and ill-suited ones, unite in a bond that offers the hope of regeneration, he regains his Hermione well into middle age. Loss and bitterness may give way to restoration and forgiveness, but the royal couple must carry the burden of their guilt and bereavement into an unknowable future.

By remembering this, I think we may identify a perspective that denies the facile redemptive reading – that old lie of all elegies, that we only lose in order to recover something greater – a perspective that encompasses the fullness of the lived life. Leontes' jealous madness was no Fortunate Fall, where evil brings about good and light emanates from darkness. The king and his queen may reconcile, but there is no sense of joy in recognizing the greater good, or awe in intimating God's providential order. Neither of them suspect that it all turned out for the better, that it was all for the best. I would thus question sanguine conclusions like Howard Felperin's: "For our final impression of the play is of a world where time and death, though they exist for certain, are purged of their terror, and whose inhabitants, though they cannot frisk forever in the sun, are nevertheless hard at play" (Felperin 1995: 241). My tremendous respect for Felperin's work aside, I find it difficult to extract from the somber exit of awed and chastised characters a world 'hard at play.'

Peter Lindenbaum, incidentally, remarks on the peculiarity that Robert Greene's 1588 prose romance *Pandosto*'s 'triumph of time' should have come to be seen, in contemporary Shakespeare criticism, as the 'triumph *over* time,' and observes that "these interpretations of the play – as embodying the Christian scheme of man's

fall and redemption, or as re-enacting the pagan fertility myth's cycle of death and rebirth – lead almost inevitably to the assertion that time is finally not important in the play and has been conquered, either by Christ or by great creating Nature" (Lindenbaum 1995: 201). Richard Hillman, similarly, in an essay on romance and anti-romance, cannily notes that "even that aspect of the mystery implying victory over death is part of its poetic expression, not its essence. Characters are pointedly reborn, after all, into a world of time and a state of continuing physical subjection to death" (Hillman 1985–1986: 151). This is undoubtedly true. Youth, beauty, happiness, these qualities remain evanescent at the somber close of a play where, unlike at the end of a tragedy or a comedy, further loss is implied (the resolution is not absolute; what has been regained will again be lost). I find Lindenbaum's position of stoic affirmation at this inexorable momentum admirable: "It is Shakespeare's considerable achievement in *The Winter's Tale* that he can bring us to accept the view of time as constantly moving forward and hence as eroding and destructive, and to accept it not with resignation or depression but with equanimity, confidence, and even enthusiasm" (Lindenbaum 1995: 216). At the close of the play there are no traces of escapism; the awareness of the reality of time, of the ineludible moral responsibility for losses beyond recovery, is what makes the graces received all the more keenly felt, more wondrous.

This sense of wonder arises from an elaborate resurrection scene, a scene for which the play exists, the visceral impact of which would seem to almost defy articulation. Felperin, for instance, contents himself by asserting that "no one who has seen the play well performed will doubt that it does work" (Felperin 1995: 239), while Hannah Wojciehowski, in a discussion of the early modern transition from a visually to a textually mediated religious experience, explicitly links the animation of Hermione to a sublimated longing for "the embodied practices of worship associated with medieval Christianity" (Wojciehowski 2014: 310). Harold Bloom, on the other hand, laments that "I may be the only critic who finds this scene not one of the glories of *The Winter's Tale*" (Bloom 1998: 660), but he is not alone: Andrew Gurr, too, raises a voice of dissent, and, in a puzzled conclusion to a discussion of the geographical switch of Sicilia and Bohemia, asserts that "[w]hat is perhaps most striking about these sophisticated games is that they occur in a play which also features two such extraordinarily crude theatrical tricks as the bear and the moving statue" (Gurr 1983: 422); citing Roland Barthes' hierarchy of reader responses (from *Le Plaisir du Texte*), he affirms that "If we choose to believe in the fiction of a Hermione transformed from art to life, we stay with the first half of the double-take, down at Barthes' hysteric level of audience response" (Gurr 1983: 425).

Still, the near-universal contemporary and historical critical response to the scene is an anatomy of wonderment. Like Stevens' jar, Hermione instantaneously orders experience around herself, making it irreducible, infusing it with a spiritual

potential not found before. But how are we to understand this ineffable sensation, this redeeming miracle? The incisive radical critic John Joughin justly despairs that:

> In practice, the closing scene of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* tends to operate as a type of critical degree zero for locating some of these [essentialist] issues in a more critical context. In its eloquent silence and unfathomable recovery, the puzzle of Hermione's restoration at the end of the play immediately invites idealization, and often does so precisely in terms of those old-style critical unities which would endorse a sense of the literary artifact as the source of some unsullied or immanent value.
>
> (Joughin 2000: 68)

He is right, of course, but only partly so. Almost four decades ago, critics tended to consider this subject in the light of treatises on Italian cinquecento art, as in the exemplary works of Frederick Waage (1980) and Leonard Barkan (1981). More recently, however, B. J. Sokol has qualified this relation, in a book-length study (1994) brilliantly relating the presence of art to the process of human misapprehension, redefining the terms of current iconographic investigations. While finding the essentialist underpinnings of the scene all but irresistible, contemporary criticism has taken a few steps towards reconciling the role of the ideal and the real. The onus is on us, then, to further explore this ambiguity, something I think that can be best accomplished by considering how this is a scene in which the present displaces the past, or, more accurately, the past becomes present in a synchronous whole.

Drawn to that moment, having passed through the purgatorial gallery of Paulina's country estate where the artwork refines the soul as well as any fire, the small company finally ascends to a place apart, and the visible parts like a curtain to reveal a truth beyond:

> PAULINA. As she lived peerless,
> So her dead likeness, I do well believe,
> Excels whatever yet you looked upon
> Or hand of man hath done. Therefore I keep it
> Lonely, apart. But here it is. Prepare
> To see the life as lively mocked as ever
> Still sleep mocked death. Behold, and say 'tis well.
>
> (*WT*, 5.3.14–20)

All the past has led the characters to this perspective, seemingly random lines converging into a vanishing point that unifies and focuses their experience. The revelation itself is brought about by Paulina, however, who, as Renuka Gusain parenthetically suggests, shares an affinity with Prospero in *The Tempest* through her determination to direct the course of events through artistic means (Gusain

2013: 67). Her redemptive moment is deliberate, purposeful, carefully wrought from the fabric of experience. Art – all art, even the most realistic – represents a transformation of reality, though this transformation, rather than being understood as an attribute of relative verisimilitude, functions on the level of human perception itself, mediating its transparency. Thus, the idea behind 'defamiliarization' [*ostranenie*], that well-known concept of the Russian Formalists, concerns itself not with the representational strangeness of the image itself, but the use to which it is put, its effect on our way of perceiving relation. (It is a similar idea that informs the great Italian idealist philosopher Benedetto Croce's distinction between representation and expression.)

And so what the characters see, their very position as beholders calling attention to the revelatory, sacred nature of the scene, is Hermione and yet not Hermione. "The fixture of her eye has motion in't, / As we are mocked with art" (*WT*, 5.3.67–68), Leontes exclaims, his ecstasy equal parts joy and grief, the emotion evoked by all great art. In Hermione there is an ambivalence between marble and flesh, a continual fluctuation between art and life.

> LEONTES. But yet, Paulina,
> Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
> So aged as this seems.
> POLIXENES. O, not by much.
> PAULINA. So much more our carver's excellence,
> Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes her
> As she lived now.
>
> (*WT*, 5.3.27–32)

I am reminded of an essay by Barthes on Greta Garbo, where he dwells on what I feel is an identical opposition. Arguing that the aging Swedish actress came to embody the shift of feminine signification in cinema from mask to face, from awe to charm, from concept to substance, Barthes writes that "Garbo's face represents this fragile moment … when the clarity of flesh as essence yields its place to a lyricism of Woman" (Barthes 1972: 57). Not a degradation of perfection nor an elevation of the fallen, the tension is between absence and presence; cold and warm, at once eternal and ephemeral, Hermione's marble is wooed – as Cerimon did Thaisa, as Marina did Pericles – into being. Waage perspicaciously intuits a fundamental reciprocity of creation, here, noting that:

> The sublimity [of the animation] depends upon a recognition that Shakespeare demands for this scene – a suspension of his spectator's disbelief in dramatic probability, the same suspension that Leontes demands of his followers (*his* audience) while 'breathing' his faith into the statue in *imagining* that it is 'breathing' toward him. As Leontes says, he is 'wooing' the statue into life, as he wooed the living Hermione years before in the time of innocence, thus restoring and recreating that innocence *within* himself.
>
> (Waage 1980: 77)

It is a critical commonplace that Shakespearean romance is informed by a curious blend of both Christian and Neoplatonic thought. But while the specifically Christian elements of the resurrection scene have been subject to considerable recent debate – notably by such critics as Ruth Vanita (2000), Phebe Jensen (2004), and Maurice Hunt (2003, 2008, 2011) – and Hermione herself has been very liberally imagined as an amalgam of "wife, mother, Mary, and Christ … all represented in a single character" (Benkert 2015: 47), the Neoplatonic aspects of the plays, while habitually alluded to, more often than not by a passing reference to Baldassare Castiglione's 1528 *The Book of the Courtier*, remain largely ill-defined, superficially understood, and in need of further consideration. William Engel, in an interesting investigation of kinetic emblems and memory images in *The Winter's Tale*, concludes that "Shakespeare superimposes onto Hermione a series of mythopoetic associations and quasi-religious tendencies … by virtue of … the latent theurgic energies activated in the performance of the statue scene" (Engel 2013: 86), an assessment that is apt but associated only with the image of Hermes Psychopompos and Christian martyrs. Exploring the Neoplatonic tenor of these theurgic energies is a necessary complement to such readings, not only because Neoplatonism generally and Neoplatonic notions of beauty specifically – mediated through Augustine, Boethius, Macrobius, and Pseudo-Dionysus, as well as through university scholars and Latin and vernacular poets – exercised significant influence on medieval and early modern culture, but because it helps us recognize exactly how, beyond being merely ornamental or even sentimental, the redemptive moment is integral to the articulation of the play's moral vision.

Acknowledging the mystical revelation at the heart of any art, the Neoplatonists were at pains to stress the function of art as an inherent mode of knowledge; to them the individual work of art implied a process of discovery. Art is consequently a form of *gnosis*, a knowledge beyond rationality, but although art resists the analytic and discursive language of science, that does not necessarily imply a contradiction between the rational and the intuitive. Plotinus, deliberating on the nature of wisdom, writes: "If we have failed to understand, it is that we have thought of knowledge as a mass of theorems and an accumulation of propositions, though that is false even for our sciences of the sense-realm" (*Ennead V*, 8.4). To Plotinus, art symbolically represents reality in a structurally condensed, perceivable form, affording the beholder the perspective of God, and he argues that "each manifestation of knowledge and wisdom is a distinct image, an object in itself, an immediate unity, not an aggregate of discursive reasoning and detailed willing" (*Ennead V*, 8.6). What form describes, then, is an object of transcendent contemplation, a site where the temporal and the divine remain inextricably bound. The Greek tradition likened this dichotomy of art to how the object of love is finite whereas the emotion it inspires is infinite; developing a

still well-known example from Plato's *Phaedrus*, Plotinus articulates the Neoplatonic doctrine that beauty in form is suggestive of a still higher beauty that is formless: "[S]o long as the attention is upon the visible form, love has not entered: when from that outward form the lover elaborates within himself, in his own partless soul, an immaterial image, then it is that love is born, the lover longs for the sight of the beloved to make that fading image live again" (*Ennead VI*, 7.33).

What we see in art, in the most general sense, then, is a beauty which represents a higher order from which all individual experiences of beauty derive; consider Socrates' instructress in the art of love, Diotima, who in Plato's *Symposium* remarks that "the beauty in every form is one and the same" (*Symposium*, 210). This beauty is identical to the one found in mathematics where axioms and theorems express an underlying structure, order, and relation, and in that sense the pleasure man takes in art and mathematics is the same, both deriving from the recognition of an underlying principle of order governing a universe where only undifferentiated phenomena seem to exist. This is the idea of order that underpins a variety of elaborations of Platonic aesthetic theory, allowing it to reach beyond the transitory and relative, into the realms of the permanent and universal. The language of art differs from that of mathematics, however, in suggesting that universal order or harmony is best described figuratively, as this order defies or rather transcends rational categorization.

Proceeding from Neoplatonic categories, we may as such understand Hermione as a dual representation in which the transcendent element exalts the human but does not negate or abstract the material reality from which it arises. The process is that of figuration, which is the opposite of personification or allegory; rather than expressing an abstract idea metonymically through a subject with its attendant symbolic objects – hourglass of time, scales of justice, et cetera – the subject is as itself invested with a more expansive, ineffable meaning. The effect of art on our perception, then, is that it establishes a numinous link between the temporal and the divine, joining that which had remained separate. Experiencing art, we sense both the higher beauty and the beauty within ourselves; there is a sense of oneness with the divine, an accord between a finite self and an infinite universe. On the most fundamental level, art reveals the unity of being, perhaps the principal argument of Neoplatonic aesthetics.

As Hermione, sixteen years dead, is unveiled amidst Paulina's artwork, the characters thus see what they imagine they are seeing. Their minds conditioned to this final revelation – "Your gallery / Have we passed through, not without much content / In many singularities; but we saw not / That which my daughter came to look upon" (*WT*, 5.3.10–13) – the beholders immediately recognize her not as herself, as a woman, but as a work of art, as something sacred. This shift in emphasis has been commented on by several of the play's most sensitive

critics; Ronk, for instance, argues that "at the end Leontes sees Hermione not as his wife but as an alien object not yet to be spoken to" (Ronk 1996: 129). The aging king remains transfixed, his past sins conjured to painful remembrance. Perdita, on her part, falls to her knees and implores the effigy's blessing. It is this moment of absolute separation between subject and object, the recognition of this shocking distance, that allows for the profoundly cathartic experience that humanizes and redeems the fallen world of the play. "No settled senses of the world can match / The pleasure of that madness" (*WT*, 5.3.72–73), Leontes cries, his pleasure, his madness produced by an imitation which is ostensibly exactly that. We should as such not forget that looking at an imitation is very different from looking at the original. To Leontes, the image of the woman – retrieved from history, form imposed on matter – signifies a truth beyond the temporal world, her body – removed from the sensual, matter yielding to form – representing a translation into human terms of that divine harmony from which they have all fallen, and that they so desperately seek to regain. In viewing Hermione, simultaneously veiled and revealed, the characters are truly catching a glimpse of the divine, admiration giving way to awe:

> O, thus she stood,
> Even with such life of majesty – warm life,
> As now it coldly stands – when first I wooed her!
> I am ashamed. 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 conjured to remembrance and
> From thy admiring daughter took the spirits,
> Standing like stone with thee.
>
> (*WT*, 5.3.34–42)

Hermione's statue induces not merely aesthetic pleasure but moral self-examination, and that is the difference between Hermione as woman and Hermione as art. The stone may bear her likeness, but its power to move does not reside in the conventional categories of visual beauty, such as proportion, harmony, and symmetry; rather, following Neoplatonic reasoning, Hermione's image – imperfect, marked by the passage of time – manifests an idea of beauty and through beauty an idea of the good. This implies a process of integration, both in the individual self and in the group as a whole. As they gaze at the statue, the long-estranged family members and friends, having crossed wastes of time and space to arrive at this moment, are awakened to the Neoplatonic insight that art, beyond merely imitating nature, intimates the potential for transcendence in the embodied individual. They recognize that Hermione is not only conjured to life through her image, but that her image reveals something to them about themselves and the true nature of their own circumstance. Confronted by the

statue they let go of their residual feelings of bitterness and speak only words of sympathy and consolation in an effort to heal and reconstitute the jagged and broken world they inhabit. Beyond evoking Catholic Shakespeare in discussions of the late romances, therefore, it might well be productive also to consider the Neoplatonic Shakespeare, in as far as that it helps us establish a background onto which we may project the characters’ sense of wonder as Hermione, animated by music, descends from her plinth to embrace the penitent Leontes:

> ‘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.
>
> (*WT*, 5.3.99–103)

Reaching from beyond the ambiguity of form is Hermione, not the Blessed Virgin; this is the resurrection of a woman, not the incarnation of an icon. Hermione and Leontes meet as equals, as ordinary human beings enduring the common bond of humanity; the silent tragedies of life – the loss of a child, youth, friends – have caused a loss of innocence, but have also pushed them towards spiritual enlightenment, towards a calm acceptance of the fullness of human experience, the continuity of time. Art has reminded them both that the human is inseparable from the divine, but their embrace acknowledges man not just in those attributes that elevate him. Nothing could be more ennobling.

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