

THE ACTS OF CONVERSION AND FORGIVENESS IN SHAKESPEARE'S LAST PLAYS

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INTRODUCTION

Whether we like it or not, characters in Shakespearean drama can easily be divided into the ethical categories of good and evil, villains or victims. Despite the fact that in Shakespeare's theatre the complexity of the character, the multiplicity of the plot, the paradoxical nature of truth and the relativity of most action transcend and radically question the simple black-and-white vices and virtues of medieval morality plays, Shakespeare did not entirely abandon his medieval heritage. However, I hope to show that these categories were neither final, nor unchangeable.

For Shakespeare, human nature is a process: characters change radically and go through (frequently traumatic) inner transformations. In the tragedies, this process usually works from good to bad: consider, for instance, the internalization (or, infection) of evil in *Macbeth*.

However, in Shakespeare's post-tragic period this process works in the opposite direction: initially evil characters (again through purifying, sometimes purgatorial, traumas) arrive at a better self-knowledge and come to acknowledge their guilt or crime. They will not so much as be purified through their remorse but the harm caused to their victims is cured – as much as it can be.

The study of various expressions of religious conversions in early modernity has become a strong focus of interest since the recent – mainly American – „turn to religion” (Ken Jackson. Arthur F. Marotti) in Shakespearean studies.¹ The exciting *Conversion Narratives in Early Modern Europe* was launched at the University of York in August 2013 by Helen Smith among others.² The subject of forgiveness in Shakespeare was discussed in relationship to medieval drama by Robert G. Hunter in 1965,³ then by Michael Friedmann in 2002⁴ and most recently from a wide theoretical, theological, philosophical, and literary perspective by Sarah Beckwith.⁵ The theme of confession or acknowledgement in *Cymbeline* has also been discussed by Sarah Beckwith.⁶

SIN AND CONFESSION: TRAGIC AND COMIC EXAMPLES

Sin in Shakespeare’s time was frequently conceived in biblical terms, it was understood as disease, the sickness of the body. The corporeal and the spiritual was not meant to be separated and thus the healing of the body entailed the healing of the soul and vice versa. When William Tyndale revised his 1525 New Testament nine years later, he replaced the original „health” (i.e. the Greek *soteria*, and the Latin *salus*) for what he had probably thought a modern sounding „salvation”.⁷ It is much to our regret, because

¹ Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, “The Turn to Religion in Early Modern English Studies”, *Criticism* 46 (Winter 2004): 167-190; Julia Reinhard Lupton, „The Religious Turn (To Theory) in Shakespeare Studies”, *English Language Notes* 44 (Spring 2006): 146-149; Fabiny Tibor, „Sámson haja előbb-utóbb mindig nőni kezd. Shakespeare és a vallás”, *Szenárium* 2 (6 2014): 11–26.

² *Conversion Narratives*, <https://europeanconversionnarratives.wordpress.com/> downloaded on 21 October, 2016; Helen Smith, „Grace and Conversion”, in Hannibal Hamlin (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare and Religion*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017, 7.

³ Robert Grams Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1965.

⁴ Michael D. Friedman, *The World Must be Peopled: Shakespeare’s Comedies of Forgiveness*, Cranbury, New Jersey: Associated University Presses, 2002.

⁵ Sarah Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2011.

⁶ Sarah Beckwith, „Acknowledgement and Confession in *Cymbeline*”, in Ken Jackson and Arthur F. Marotti, *Shakespeare and Religion. Early Modern and Postmodern Perspectives*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2011. 97-126; Nicolas Stebbing, *Confessing our Sins*, Mirfield: Community of Resurrection, 2002.. For repentance see also the Tudor *Homily on Repentance and True Recognition Unto God*, http://www.footstoolpublications.com/Homilies/Bk2_Repentance20.pdf. Downloaded on 21 October, 2016.

⁷ Fabiny, „Sámson haja előbb-utóbb mindig nőni kezd. Shakespeare és a vallás”, 11–26.

in his effort to make his message more accessible, Tyndale, probably contrary to his own intentions, made the posterity inclined to forget that salvation was ultimately health. And if so, the lack of salvation was disease that called for cure and to be cured meant to be converted. The word „health” has, of course been included in the general confession of the Morning Prayer of *The Book of Common Prayer* since 1559: „We have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and we have done those things which we ought not to have done; and there is no *health* in us.”⁸

Throughout the 16th and 17th century it was obvious that the healing of the soul was seen as an aspect of the healing of the body: cure meant conversion and, reciprocally, conversion meant cure as Helen Smith has amply illustrated in her brilliant 2014 article: „Metaphor, Cure, and Conversion in Early Modern England”.⁹

Some Shakespearean characters suffer from what I call „spiritual sclerosis”; the hardness of the heart which means they bind themselves in their sins so much that they are unable to be cured, regenerated or redeemed. Cure and reparation may come only when the heart is broken by contrition. In the traditional mediaeval system conversion could come only first by the contrition of the heart (*compulsio cordis*), confession into the ear (*confessio auris*) and the satisfaction of works (*satisfactio operis*). Going through this process the act of absolution was proclaimed (*ego te absolvo*) to the sinful and the recuparated sinner was reintegrated into the community.

Discussing the penitential Psalm 51 (*Misere mei*) Hannibal Hamlin compared Claudius’ attempt to pray in the „Chapel” in Act 3 Scene 3 to David’s penitential prayer in Psalm 51 when, having been moved by Nathan’s parable (2Sam 12) David’s heart was broken (“contrition”) and he acknowledged to have sinned against God.¹⁰

⁸ Brian Cummings, ed., *The Book of Common Prayer, The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011, 103.

⁹ Helen Smith, „Metaphor, Cure and Conversion in Early Modern England”, *Renaissance Quarterly* 67 (Summer 2014), 473-502.

¹⁰ Hannibal Hamlin, *Psalm Culture and Early Modern English Literature*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, 215-217. Hamlin acknowledges his indebtedness to Targoff: Ramie Targoff, „The Performance of Prayer: Sincerity and Theatricality in Early Modern England”, *Representations* 60 (Fall 1997): 49-69. There is an excellent booklength discussion of the late medieval and early modern interpretation of the penitential psalms by King’oo: Clare Costley King’oo, *Miserere Mei, The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England*, Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2012.

Claudius's Prayer (Claudius vs. Gertrude and Old Hamlet)

Hamlet, 4,3,40-103 (Folger Electronic Text)

KING

My offense is rank, it smells to heaven;
It hath the primal eldest curse upon 't,
A brother's murder. Pray can I not,
Though inclination be as sharp as will.
My stronger guilt defeats my strong intent,
And, like a man to double business bound,
I stand in pause where I shall first begin
And both neglect. What if this cursèd hand
Were thicker than itself with brother's blood?
Is there not rain enough in the sweet heavens
To wash it white as snow? Whereto serves mercy
But to confront the visage of offense?
And what's in prayer but this twofold force,
To be forestallèd ere we come to fall,
Or pardoned being down? Then I'll look up.
My fault is past. But, O, what form of prayer
Can serve my turn? "Forgive me my foul murder"?
That cannot be, since I am still possessed

David's Prayer (David vs. Bathseba and Uriah

Psalm 51 – Miserere Mei (King James Version)

¹Have mercy upon me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness: according unto the multitude of thy tender mercies blot out my transgressions. ²Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. ³For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. ⁴Against thee, thee only, have I sinned, and done this evil in thy sight: that thou mightest be justified when thou speakest, and be clear when thou judgest. ⁵Behold, I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me. ⁶Behold, thou desirest truth in the inward parts: and in the hidden part thou shalt make me to know wisdom. ⁷Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. ⁸Make me to hear joy and gladness; that the bones which thou hast broken may rejoice. ⁹Hide thy face from my sins, and blot out all mine iniquities. ¹⁰Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. ¹¹Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me. ¹²Restore unto me the joy of thy salvation; and uphold me with thy free spirit. ¹³Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee. ¹⁴Deliver me from bloodguiltiness, O

Of those effects for which I did the murder:

My crown, mine own ambition, and my queen.

May one be pardoned and retain th' offense?

In the corrupted currents of this world,
Offense's gilded hand may shove by justice,

And oft 'tis seen the wicked prize itself

Buys out the law. But 'tis not so above:

There is no shuffling; there the action lies

In his true nature, and we ourselves
compelled,

Even to the teeth and forehead of our
faults,

To give in evidence. What then? What
rests?

Try what repentance can. What can it
not?

Yet what can it, when one cannot repent?

O wretched state! O bosom black as
death!

O limèd soul, that, struggling to be free,

Art more engaged! Help, angels! Make
assay.

Bow, stubborn knees, and heart with
strings of steel

Be soft as sinews of the newborn babe.

All may be well.

He kneels

God, thou God of my salvation: and my
tongue shall sing aloud of thy

righteousness. ¹⁵O Lord, open thou my

lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy

praise. ¹⁶For thou desirest not sacrifice;

else would I give it: thou delightest not in

burnt offering. ¹⁷The sacrifices of God are

a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite

heart, O God, thou wilt not despise. ¹⁸Do

good in thy good pleasure unto Zion: build

thou the walls of Jerusalem. ¹⁹Then shalt

thou be pleased with the sacrifices of

righteousness, with burnt offering and

whole burnt offering: then shall they offer

bullocks upon thine altar.

Enter Hamlet

HAMLET

Now might I do it pat, now he is a-praying,
And now I'll do 't.

And so he goes to heaven,

And so am I revenged. That would be
scanned:

A villain kills my father, and for that,
I, his sole son, do this same villain send
To heaven.

Why, this is hire and salary, not revenge.
He took my father grossly, full of bread,
With all his crimes broad blown, as flush
as May;

And how his audit stands who knows save
heaven.

But in our circumstance and course of
thought

'Tis heavy with him. And am I then
revenged

To take him in the purging of his soul,
When he is fit and seasoned for his
passage?

No.

Up sword, and know thou a more horrid
hent.

He sheathes his sword

When he is drunk asleep, or in his rage,
Or in th' incestuous pleasure of his bed,

At game, a-swearing, or about some act

That has no relish of salvation in 't—
Then trip him, that his heels may kick at
heaven,
And that his soul may be as damned and
black
As hell, whereto it goes. My mother stays.

This physic but prolongs thy sickly days.
HAMLET *exits*.

KING, *rising*
My words fly up, my thoughts remain
below;
Words without thoughts never to heaven
go.
He exits

The two situations are strikingly similar: as David was motivated to murder Uriah out of lust for and adultery with Bathsheba, wife of Uriah, Claudius had also committed the murder of his brother, old Hamlet partly out of his lust for Gertrude, wife of Old Hamlet. However analogous the situation is, Claudius, though he also feels guilty and fears damnation, understands that he cannot be forgiven. He hangs onto the fruits of his crime: the crown and the Queen: „May one be pardon'd and retain th' offence?" (3,3,56). Claudius is unable to be contrite. He understands the meaninglessness of his attempt to pray: „My words fly up, my thoughts remain below, / Words without thoughts never to heaven go". (3,3,43-46).

The truly repentant David, however, said: „I acknowledge my transgression" (51,3); „Against thee, thee only have I sinned" (51,4), „Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean" (51,7); „Create in me a clean heart" (51,10); „a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (51,17).

Nathan's „prophetic parable" proved successful in David case, Hamlet's „prophetic mousetrap" failed, or, resulted only in partial success with Claudius. Hamlet's mousetrap evoked shock and fear but was unable to soften Claudius's heart. Claudius remains unregenerate, unconverted and is, probably, damned.

CONVERSION IN THE ROMANCES

So far we have seen examples of those who harmed their natural bond either by violent fratricide (Claudius) or by envious hatred (Oliver), criminals who could or could not become converts. Crime or harm done to your own environment, especially to your closest kindred (the bond of the family), and then the recognition, or acknowledgement of that violence resulting in confession and ultimate cure and restitution/restoration, is an overriding concern of *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest*. The fairy-tale elements: myth, magic, mystery, dream, theophany; the motif of lost royal children found, the frequent emblematic devices (riddles, impresas, masques, pageants, dumb-shows) and, last but not least, the life-death-rebirth pattern corresponding to the seasonal cycles are characteristic features of all the four romances, including *Pericles*.

Pericles - Conversion as Recognition

Pericles (1607-8), the first of the romances seems to be radically different from the other three tragi-comedies as neither conversion (penance), nor the grace of forgiveness is acted out. The drama, as Helen Cooper observed, „shows Shakespeare's strongest commitment to medieval romance... and [i]t represents not just the continuing life of the medieval, but the invention of medievalism, the valuing the medieval world for its own sake.”¹¹ *Pericles'* constant voyage on the Mediterranean sea reminds us of Everyman's metaphorical voyage of human life in a world which is, in Marina's words, „a lasting storm” (4,1,28). According to Douglas L. Peterson *Pericles* is the emblematic elaboration of the tempest-emblem and its variants.¹² *Pericles*, Thaisa, Marina, Helicanus in Tyre, the fishermen in Pentapolis, Cerimon in Ephesus, and last but not least the goddess Diana radiate light and purity where worldly and political wickedness and corruption dominate as in the characters of Antiochus and his daughter with their servant Thailard; Dionyza with his servant Leonine; the Pandar, Boult, the Bawd in the brothel-scene.

¹¹ Helen Cooper, *Shakespeare and the Medieval World*, London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2010, 196.

¹² Douglas L. Peterson, *Time, Tide and Tempest, A Study of Shakespeare's Romances*, (San Marino, California: The Huntigton Library, 1973), 71-103.

The good ones are the victims of evil characters, or, of the vicissitudes of fortune, the tempests of human life. They have been seriously harmed but have done harm to no one and, therefore, they have no real cause for conversion. They usually go through Job-like trials as if the gods above were testing their patience, chastity and endurance.

However, conversion is not only transformation but also recognition. Too much suffering might distort your personality. It can freeze your personal horizon or drive you into total depression. However, conversion is also cure, restoration to health and happiness. Moreover, this brings people back to life. Conversion is resurrection. Conversion is re-turning.

There are three recognition/resurrection scenes in *Pericles*: the first one is the benevolent Cerimon's almost mysterious, miraculous medical art of reviving the supposedly dead Thaisa when the chest containing her body reaches the shores of Ephesus in Act 4, Scene 2. His art and skills remind us of Friar Laurence in *Romeo and Juliet* (2,3,15-16). Before he is confronted with the chest Cerimon describes the nature of his art:

'Tis known I ever 35
 Have studied physic, through which secret art,
 By turning o'er authorities, I have,
 Together with my practice, made familiar
 To me and to my aid the blessed infusions
 That dwells in vegetives, in metals, stones; 40
 And can speak of the disturbances
 That Nature works, and of her cures; (3,2,35-42).

When the chest with the apparent dead body is brought to him, Cerimon is immediately ready to help and remembers analogous situations.

Death may usurp on nature many hours,
 And yet the fire of life kindle again 95
 The o'erpressed spirits. I heard of an Egyptian
 That had nine hours lain dead,
 Who was by good appliance recoverèd. (3,2, 94-8)

Then Cerimon ceremoniously enacts, or, performs the liturgy of healing. Cerimon's vials of medicine are brought in, fire is kindled, prayer is said by the first Gentleman: „The

heavens, through you, /Increase our wonder" (4,2,97-9); and eventually music is played. There is experience, art and benevolence in Cerimon's „white magic" which seems to work. There is even a speech act on Cerimon's part „Live, / and make us weep" (4,2,104-5).

As in most of Shakespeare's plays, the saved person is clothed; this time into „linen" (4,2,112) as if she were a new-born babe.

The second recognition scene is performed upon Pericles, who is wrapped up in total despair on the board of his barge near Myteline believing that his beloved wife Thaisa had died in the tempest and he was made to believe that Marina, their daughter born on the sea and passed on to the care of Cleon and Dyonzia, had also died in Tharsus. The audience knows that before her viciously planned murder by the servant of the jealous Dionyza, Marina was kidnapped by pirates and taken to a brothel, where, contrary to the bawd's expectations, she would ruin their business by „divinity preach'd there" (4,5,4) as she „would make a puritan of the devil" (4,6,9).

The recognition of Marina by Pericles have frequently been compared to Lear's recognition of Cordelia by Lear in *King Lear* Act 4 Scene 7. Cordelia was brutally harmed by being banished by her raging father in Act 1. By banishing her, Lear banished love, yet true love forgives him without the condition of pardon. The return of Cordelia, her mere presence has therapeutic effect on the mad Lear. Prayer is instrumental to bringing the madman back to normality, the half-dead father out of his grave:

CORDELIA
 O, you kind gods,
 Cure this great breach in his abusèd nature!
 Th' untuned and jarring senses, O, wind up,
 Of this child-changèd father!

Music, just as in the reviving of Thaisa, has a crucial role in the ritual of healing. However, neither the ritual, nor the liturgy would be effective without the entirely committed self-sacrificial love.

Music.

DOCTOR

Please you, draw near.—Louder the music there. 30

CORDELIA, *kissing Lear*

O, my dear father, restoration hang

Thy medicine on my lips, and let this kiss
 Repair those violent harms that my two sisters
 Have in thy reverence made.

Though at the beginning Lear believes he is in purgatory upon a „wheel of fire” (4,7,53) and Cordelia is but a spirit, the restorative cure has its effect and Lear comes to the recognition that „I think this lady / To be my child Cordelia” (4,7,78-79).

The recognition-scene in *Pericles* is almost like a rewriting of the recognition in *King Lear*, though the recognition of Marina is a longer process. Pericles’s despair is as deep as Lear’s madness. Marina is well known for her singing, thus Lysimachos and Helicanus invite her to the old dumb Pericles so that she would bring him back from his total despair. Marina will tell her story the wording of which, as Helen Cooper has reminded us, came very close to Gower’s words in *Confessio Amantis*.¹³

MARINA

I am a maid, my lord, 95
 That ne’er before invited eyes, but have
 Been gazed on like a comet. She speaks,
 My lord, that may be hath endured a grief
 Might equal yours, if both were justly weighed.
 Though wayward Fortune did malign my state, 100
 My derivation was from ancestors
 Who stood equivalent with mighty kings.
 But time hath rooted out my parentage,
 And to the world and awkward casualties
 Bound me in servitude

Marina begins in the third person singular and thus Pericles is gradually recognizing his own story in Marina’s story. Even the image of Thaisa is conflated with Marina’s face:

PERICLES

I am great with woe, and shall deliver weeping. 120
 My dearest wife was like this maid, and such
 A one my daughter might have been: my queen’s
 Square brows, her stature to an inch;
 As wandlike straight, as silver-voiced; her eyes

¹³ Cooper quoted by Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 94.

As jewel-like, and cased as richly; in pace 125
 Another Juno; who starves the ears she feeds
 And makes them hungry the more she gives them
 speech.—

As Sarah Beckwith perceptively observed: „He [Pericles] begins to interrogate her breathlessly, prompted by this likeness. From his terrible withdrawal he now yearns for her language like a starving man who has found nourishment”.¹⁴ Mutually sharing their stories of suffering, they are reunited. Rebirth is again emblemized by the fresh garment:

PERICLES

Now, blessing on thee! Rise. Thou 'rt my child.—
 Give me fresh garments.—Mine own Helicanus,
 She is not dead at Tarsus, as she should
 Have been, by savage Cleon. She shall tell thee all,
 When thou shalt kneel, and justify in knowledge 250
 She is thy very princess. Who is this?

HELICANUS

Sir, 'tis the Governor of Mytilene,
 Who, hearing of your melancholy state,
 Did come to see you.
 PERICLES, *to Lysimachus* I embrace you.— 255
 Give me my robes.—I am wild in my beholding.
They put fresh garments on him.
 O heavens bless my girl! But hark, what music?

Marina's ability to bring Pericles back to existence is seen by him a genuinely begetting activity:

PERICLES

Thou that beget'st him that did thee beget (5,1,229).

Then Pericles falls asleep and in his dream the goddess Diana addresses him to go to her temple in Ephesus. This takes us to the third recognition-scene. In Diana's temple Thaisa, who stands at the goddess' altar as high-priestess, faints on recognizing Pericles's voice

¹⁴ Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 101.

and Pericles, reciprocally, believes he hears „the voice of dead Thaisa” (5.2,34). Only when Thaisa points to the ring Pericles received from her father does he realize that Thaisa’s presence is not an illusion but a down-to-earth (rather mouth-to-mouth) reality. In a moment of ecstasy (not unlike with the one at the recognition of Marina) he offers Thaisa a second burial; this time into his arms. Not only husband and wife are reunited but Marina’s heart „leaps to be gone into [Thaisa’s] bosom” (5,3,44-5). Now with fourteen years of trials and sufferings behind them the division is healed and the royal family is miraculously reborn. Such a miracle and mystery of the atonement (at-one-ment) is properly celebrated by prayer and the consummation of nuptial joy. Romance is indeed, with the words of Sarah Beckwith, „the form in which chance is converted into providence”.¹⁵

To sum up: although *Pericles* was neither the drama of confession or forgiveness, it was nevertheless about conversion in so far as conversion is recognition.

Cymbeline - the Theatre of Penance

The dramatization of our topic *par excellence*, however, is *Cymbeline* (1609-10): a crime enacts a series of new ones; it behaves as a virus on the net; each crime is multiplied and dispersed until it reaches its climax and destroys itself, or, through a crisis, is converted into confession and annulled by an act of forgiveness.

Crime or sin has a destructive power as it involves harming and damaging others. Cymbeline, the King of Britain had harmed Belarius a generation earlier, when he had banished him unjustly. Belarius, in return, abducted the king’s infant sons and brought them up in the pastorally idyllic forests of Wales, pretending they were his own. Cymbeline’s harming hamartia (error of judgement) continues when, at the beginning of the play, he banishes Posthumus, the Roman, whom he adopted and whom his daughter Imogen secretly married. Cymbeline’s sin is naiveté that he lets himself be manipulated by Imogen’s stepmother, the wicked Queen who wants to have both Imogen and the crown for Cloten, her loutish, boorish, vain and equally wicked son. Posthumus’ and Imogen’s romantic love and marriage would survive even in such hostile

¹⁵ Beckwith, *Shakespeare and the Grammar of Forgiveness*, 102.

circumstances unless Posthumus, now in Italy, would not yield to the manipulating waging by the flamboyantly speaking Iachimo.

Posthumus commits the fatal mistake of boasting with the beauty and chastity of his beloved wife Imogen: „Your Italy contains none so accomplished / a courtier to convince the honor of my mistress, / if in the holding or loss of that, you term her frail” (1,5,101).

Posthumus' power of words generates envy¹⁶ in Iachimo and by dissimulation (hiding in a trunk) makes his way to Imogen's bedroom while she is asleep and makes a record of the inner details of her bedchamber as well as of the spot on her left breast and, unnoticed, takes off her bracelet (Act 2, Scene 2). On his return to Rome this both the ekphrasis-like description of the bed-chamber and especially the stolen bracelet will serve as enough evidence of gradually planting the seeds of jealousy in the soul of Posthumus. Iachimo is a small-scale Iago and Posthumus is as gullible as Othello. Just as in the case of Othello, deception takes place through the ear by the means of the image-provoking destructive power of words.¹⁷ The fatally duped Posthumus gives Iachimo the ring of Imogen. Iachimo is the emblem of envy, calumny and slander which, though frivolous on the surface, is so destructive that it immediately transforms the so far loyal, faithful and honest Posthumus not only into a misogynist misanthrope (2,5,1-36) but into a most aggressive and violent („green-eyed”) monster as he orders his servant Pisanio (3,2) to take her away to Milford Haven to murder her. However, Pisanio is entirely convinced of Imogen's innocence and in Milford Haven (3,4) instead of killing her, he suggests her to disguise herself as a young boy and offer her assistance to the Roman Lucius so that she could get close, though unnoticeably, to her Posthumus. This scene is in fact an important turning point of the tragic-oriented action.

The other chain of evil action is incited by the wicked Queen, who wants to get some poison to gradually murder Cymbeline but the cunning and good-willed apothecary Cerimon, suspecting her hidden motivations, cheats her by providing her with pills that would only create the image of death. When Imogen's escape from the court is discovered, Cloten decides to chase Imogen (in the garment of Posthumus) with the desire to rape her. In the meantime Imogen (dressed up as a boy) meets Polidore and

¹⁶ On envy's iconography see Peggy Munoz Simmonds, *Myth, Emblem, and Music in Shakespeare's Cymbeline, An Iconographic Reconstruction*, Newark, London and Toronto: The University of Delaware Press, 1992, 18-20.

¹⁷ Fabiny Tibor, „The Ear as a Metaphor – Aural Imagery in Shakespeare's Great Tragedies and Its Relations to Music and Time in Cymbeline and Pericles”, *Hungarian Journal of English and American Studies* 11 (1 2005): 189–202.

Cadwalloes sons of Morgan (in fact that of Belarius) by accident who are her lost brothers (Guiderius and Arviragus), though they do not know it. Immediately, a gentle and noble friendship develops between Imogen (disguised as Fidele) and the boys. While they are away, Guiderius decapitates the stupid and aggressive Cloten while Imogen is taking the pills that make her look as if she died. Here the lyrical episodes (the funeral dirge of Imogen as Fidele) is followed by Imogen's ironical and grotesque mourning of Posthumus, in fact, the decapitated Cloten in Posthumus' garments.

As Britain refused to pay the due tribute to Rome, the war is on and the Romans arrive on British soil. The desperate Posthumus disguises himself as a British peasant and decides to fight on the side of the Britons though, to hasten his death, he reveals he was a Roman and thus is taken to prison. In the prison Jupiter, the spirits of his father, mother and brother appear to him and encourage him not to give up. Jupiter's „Whom best I love I cross" (5,4,103) is especially a word of comfort in tribulation and despair. Moreover, he awakes to find a tablet on his breast with the enigmatic but positive prophecy about the lion's whelp, the tender air and the lost branches joined to the old stock that would mark the end of his misery and Britain's glorious fortune.

Cymbeline was taken captive by the Romans, however, he was freed by the young unknown heroes who eventually turn out to be his own sons Guiderius and Arviragus.

Having seen the complicated and intricate network of crimes, let us see the process how the plot is converted into a theatre of penance step-by-step. Wrongdoers and harmers come to the climactic contrition (crisis) of self-knowledge and are going to acknowledge or confess their evil deeds. Though the so far spiritually slumbering Cymbeline was „deeply" touched and „amaz'd" by the „madness" of his Queen because of the absence of his son already in Act 4 Scene 3, the real unfolding of reality and the series of cathartic recognitions will happen only after the British victory in the final episode in Act 5 Scene 3.

Penitence is the pricking of conscience. If such a contrition works isolatedly, it may be self-destructive, if not suicidal, as it is neither communicated to the harmed one, nor to an outside confessor, who would have the power or key to absolve the sin of the penitent. If sin was ultimately a communal infection, an individual's private contrition would never lead to the healing of the community.

Pentitential language is used by Posthumus while he is alone in prison in Act 5 Scene 4, while praying to the gods to take his life for his sin of having Imogen murdered.

Posthumus feels remorse, and remorse is the recognition of the the reality of the other(s) we have harmed.

My conscience, thou art fettered
 More than my shanks and wrists. You good gods, 10
 give me
 The penitent instrument to pick that bolt,
 Then free forever. Is 't enough I am sorry?
 So children temporal fathers do appease;
 Gods are more full of mercy. Must I repent, 15
 I cannot do it better than in gyves,
 Desired more than constrained. To satisfy,

If of my freedom 'tis the main part, take
 No stricter render of me than my all.
 I know you are more clement than vile men, 20
 Who of their broken debtors take a third,
 A sixth, a tenth, letting them thrive again
 On their abatement. That's not my desire.
 For Imogen's dear life take mine; and though
 'Tis not so dear, yet 'tis a life; you coined it. 25
 'Tween man and man they weigh not every stamp;
 Though light, take pieces for the figure's sake;
 You rather mine, being yours. And so, great powers,
 If you will take this audit, take this life
 And cancel these cold bonds. O Imogen, 30
 I'll speak to thee in silence. *He lies down and sleeps.*
 (5,4,9-31)

However, if sin is an infection within the body of a community, then penance, or, the unpoisoning should also be acted out before the community. In Act 5 Scene 5 Shakespeare's theatre of the world is transformed into a theatre of penance. Several of the characters are in disguise, to some of them even their own identity is unknown.

The process of the purging, or, disinfection of the community begins with Cornelius bringing the news of „horror” of the Queen's death preceded by her „confession”, that she never loved Cymbeline, „abhorred” him, and even wanted to poison him to secure

the throne for Cloten. She confessed that she had only pretended to love Imogen while in reality she hated her. It is reported that she „so / Despairing died” (5,5,71).

The first public confessor is Iachimo when Imogen (still disguised as Fidele) points to the ring on his finger:

CYMBELINE

That diamond upon your finger, say
How came it yours.

IACHIMO

Thou 'lt torture me to leave unspoken that
Which to be spoke would torture thee.

CYMBELINE How? Me? 170

IACHIMO

I am glad to be constrained to utter that
Which torments me to conceal. By villainy
I got this ring. 'Twas Leonatus' jewel,
Whom thou didst banish, and—which more may
grieve thee, 175

As it doth me—a nobler sir ne'er lived
'Twixt sky and ground. Wilt thou hear more, my lord?

CYMBELINE

All that belongs to this.

IACHIMO

That paragon, thy daughter,
For whom my heart drops blood and my false spirits 180
Quail to remember—Give me leave; I faint.

CYMBELINE

My daughter? What of her? Renew thy strength.
I had rather thou shouldst live while nature will
Than die ere I hear more. Strive, man, and speak.

IACHIMO

Upon a time—unhappy was the clock 185
That struck the hour!—it was in Rome—accursed
The mansion where!—'twas at a feast—O, would
Our viands had been poisoned, or at least
Those which I heaved to head!—the good
Posthumus— 190

What should I say? He was too good to be
Where ill men were, and was the best of all

Amongst the rar'st of good ones—sitting sadly,
 Hearing us praise our loves of Italy
 For beauty that made barren the swelled boast 195
 Of him that best could speak; for feature, laming
 The shrine of Venus or straight-pight Minerva,
 Postures beyond brief nature; for condition,
 A shop of all the qualities that man
 Loves woman for, besides that hook of wiving, 200
 Fairness which strikes the eye—
 CYMBELINE I stand on fire.
 Come to the matter.
 IACHIMO All too soon I shall,
 Unless thou wouldst grieve quickly. This Posthumus, 205
 Most like a noble lord in love and one
 That had a royal lover, took his hint,
 And, not dispraising whom we praised—therein
 He was as calm as virtue—he began
 His mistress' picture; which by his tongue being made 210
 And then a mind put in 't, either our brags
 Were cracked of kitchen trulls, or his description
 Proved us unspeaking sots.
 CYMBELINE Nay, nay, to th' purpose.
 IACHIMO
 Your daughter's chastity—there it begins. 215
 He spake of her as Dian had hot dreams
 And she alone were cold; whereat I, wretch,
 Made scruple of his praise and wagered with him
 Pieces of gold 'gainst this, which then he wore
 Upon his honored finger, to attain 220
 In suit the place of 's bed and win this ring
 By hers and mine adultery. He, true knight,
 No lesser of her honor confident
 Than I did truly find her, stakes this ring,
 And would so, had it been a carbuncle 225
 Of Phoebus' wheel, and might so safely, had it
 Been all the worth of 's car. Away to Britain
 Post I in this design. Well may you, sir,
 Remember me at court, where I was taught
 Of your chaste daughter the wide difference 230

'Twixt amorous and villainous. Being thus quenched
 Of hope, not longing, mine Italian brain
 Gan in your duller Britain operate
 Most vilely; for my vantage, excellent.
 And to be brief, my practice so prevailed²³⁵
 That I returned with simular proof enough
 To make the noble Leonatus mad
 By wounding his belief in her renown
 With tokens thus and thus; averring notes
 Of chamber-hanging, pictures, this her bracelet— 240
 O, cunning how I got it!—nay, some marks
 Of secret on her person, that he could not
 But think her bond of chastity quite cracked,
 I having ta'en the forfeit. Whereupon—
 Methinks I see him now— 245
 (5,5,166-245)

Posthumus, still believing, that he had Imogen murdered accuses himself with a self-torturing confession:

O, give me cord, or knife, or poison, 250
 Some upright justicer.—Thou, king, send out
 For torturers ingenious. It is I
 That all th' abhorrèd things o' th' Earth amend
 By being worse than they. I am Posthumus,
 That killed thy daughter—villainlike, I lie— 255
 That caused a lesser villain than myself,
 A sacrilegious thief, to do 't. The temple
 Of virtue was she, yea, and she herself.
 (5,5,250-258)

When Imogen (still as Fidele) is unknowingly struck by Posthumous, it is time for Pisanio to confess that he misled Posthumus to believe that Imogen had been killed on his orders. Imogen still accuses Pisanio for trying to poison him when Cerimon confesses that the poison ordered by the Queen was a „certain stuff” only to make the recipient seem dead.

Imogen and Posthumous being happily reunited receive the blessings of Cymbeline. When the death of the Queen is mentioned, Pisanio also reveals that not Posthumus but

Cloten, wearing Posthumus' garment, was decapitated. Guiverius, whose identity unknown is to everybody with the exception of Belarius, announces that he killed Cloten. Killing a Prince (especially decapitating him) is a capital crime for which there is no excuse even if such a person saved the king's life. The final revelation comes from Belarius, identifying the boys as Cymbeline's lost sons and himself as the banished lord. Testimonies and tales are told and the acts of confession are duly followed by the acts of forgiveness. „Pardon's the word to all.” (5,5,515) is said by Cymbeline before the soothsayer Philarmonus (lover of harmony) deciphers Jupiter's prophecy about the lion's whelp, a piece of tender air, the stately Cedar and the lopped branches joined to the old stock, as it appeared in Posthumus's dream with Lucius' vision of the Roman eagle flying to the west: a sacrifice will celebrate the uniting of the two visions and the reconciliation between the Romans and the Britons will mark the coming of universal peace.

The Winter's Tale – Penance and Resurrection

In *The Winter's Tale* (1611), perhaps the most fairytale-like of the romances, unlike in *Cymbeline*, there is only one great sinner, Leontes, King of Sicilia, whose gigantic crime of unmotivated jealousy of his innocent wife Hermione outweighs perhaps all the crimes in the romances discussed so far. We may easily come up with a giradian explanation that since Leontes and Polixenes were each other's doubles, since they used to be as „twin'd lambs that did frisk in th'sun, /And bleat the at th' other” (1,2,85-86), Leontes charges Herimone: „You have mistook, my lady, / Polixenes for Leontes” (2,1,102-3).

However, our task is now to investigate the pattern of crime and remorse, or, the lack of remorse. This interest of ours is justifiable because Leontes, even in his „prelapsarian” state, as he himself admits, used to confess his sins to Camillo:

I have trusted thee, Camillo,
With all the nearest things to my heart, as well
My chamber-counsels, wherein, priestlike, thou
Hast cleansed my bosom; I from thee departed
Thy penitent reformed. (1,2,292-6)

On hearing Leontes's horrifying suspicion of Hermione's alleged adultery with Polixenes and of his plan, Camillo is immediately and properly abhorred to notice Leontes's mind as diseased:

Good my lord, be cured
Of this diseased opinion, and betimes,
For 'tis most dangerous. (1,2,359-61)

Interestingly, Mamillius, right at the beginning of the play was decribed by Camillio just the opposite: „a gallant child; one that, indeed physics / the subject, makes old hearts fresh” (1,1,41). Though apparently Camillo yields to Leontes' request but on talking to Polixenes he reveals that

There is a sickness
Which puts some of us in distemper, but
I cannot name the disease, and it is caught
Of you that yet are well. (1,4,461-4)

Camillo and Polixenes escape, Hermione is sent to jail, where she gives birth to a baby-girl. When Paulina, the couragous woman takes the newborn baby to the king, who is said not to have slept, she stubbornly insists on coming to cure the King with the power of her words:

I /
Do come with words as medicinal as true,
Honest as either, to purge him of that humor
That presses him from sleep. (2,3,42-45)

Paulina first humbly offers herself as a physician to Leontes:

Good my liege, I come—
And I beseech you hear me, who professes 65
Myself your loyal servant, your physician,
Your most obedient counselor, yet that dares
Less appear so in comforting your evils
Than such as most seem yours—I say I come

From your good queen (2,3,64-71)

Leontes insists on seeing the baby „bastard”, „brat”, „it”, and hysterically tries to dismiss Paulina as „bawd”, „mad”, „callat”, „gross hag”, „lozel” „Lady Margery”, „lewd-tong’d wife” and so on. Paulina, alone in the company of the snivelling male characters, has the courage and power to defy the tyranny of the mad King. Leontes is a lunatic, a man of diseased mind, whom Paulina is trying to „purge” by reproving and admonishing him with the power of her words. This is a pedagogical, therapeutical, and pastoral purpose.

Paulina despartely tries to make Leontes repent, but, though her speech, as Kenneth Graham pointed out, is the example of the Christian *parrhesia* (bold-speaking), „*The Winter’s Tale* dramatizes in the person of the plainspeaking Paulina both discipline’s rhetorical power and the limits of that power when the prince refuses to repent”.¹⁸

Nevertheless, Paulina’s rhetorical skills are indeed excellent; she presents the baby to her father to remind him of their similarities, thus trying to arouse paternal sympathies in him. Graham says Paulina achieves this both by *ekphrasis*, using words for a detailed description of the visual and also by *enallage*, a mode of profound substitution (i.e. using „he” instead of „she”)¹⁹.

Behold, my lords,
 Although the print be little, the whole matter
 And copy of the father—eye, nose, lip,
 The trick of ’s frown, his forehead, nay, the valley,
 The pretty dimples of his chin and cheek, his smiles,
 The very mold and frame of hand, nail, finger (2,3,125-32)

However, neither school-like pedagogical admonishments, nor pious penitential pressures, nor the excellent rhetorical skills of Paulina, not even the eloquent words of Hermione’s self-defence in the trial in Act 3 Scene 2 (“You speak a language I understand not”; „The Emperor was my father”) would displace Leontes from his (self)harming, psychotic imaginary world.

¹⁸ I am grateful to Professor Kenneth Graham (Waterloo, Canada) for sending me a copy of his SCSC lecture: Kenneth Graham, „Religious Instructions and Rhetorical Education in *The Winter’s Tale*”, manuscript, lecture at the SCSC Conference, Brugges, Belgium, 2016.

¹⁹ Graham quotes Mann: Jenny C. Mann, *Outlaw Rhetoric: Figuring Vernacular Eloquence in Shakespeare’s England*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2012, 148.

After Leontes' stubborn denial of Apollo's prophecy and the subsequent announcement of Mamillius' death, Paulina returns with the final and shocking news of Hermione's death. Though Leontes immediately regrets his unfounded jealousy and the violation of the divine order, Pauline's verdict on Leontes is perpetual despair, eternal winter or spiritual death in the waste-land of final damnation.

But, O thou tyrant,
Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee
To nothing but despair. A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert. (3,2,228-36)

Leontes' self-imposed penitence, or, satisfaction is to visit the chapel in Paulina's house where he wants to be confronted daily with his shame:

Prithee, bring me 260
To the dead bodies of my queen and son.
One grave shall be for both. Upon them shall
The causes of their death appear, unto
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there 265
Shall be my recreation. So long as nature
Will bear up with this exercise, so long
I daily vow to use it. (3,2,260-8)

While in Sicilia eternal winter reigns, there is life and joy in pastoral Bohemia as sixteen years pass by and Perdita is brought up by shepherds and is in love with Polixenes' son, their identities mutually unknown. Camillo frequently expresses his desire to go back to his home Sicilia where the „penitent” king also wants to see him.

King Leontes has sincerely repented and to amend his crime, he has done sixteen years of satisfaction. William Tyndale, caveat that Latin „penitencia” originating from Greek „metanoia” should rather be translated as the changing of the heart, to come to

the right knowledge, rather than *ageret poentientiam*, which is a mere action and not necessarily the consequence of faith.

And the very sense and signification both of the Hebrew and also of the Greek word is, to be converted and to turn to God with all the heart, to know his will, and to live according to his laws; and to be cured of our corrupt nature with the oil of his Spirit, and wine of obedience to his doctrine. Which conversion or turning, if it be unfeigned, these four do accompany it and are included therein. Confession, not in the priest's ear, (for that is but man's invention,) but to God in the heart, and before all the congregation of God; how that we be sinners and sinful, and that our whole nature is corrupt, and inclined to sin and all unrighteousness, and therefore evil, wicked, and damnable; and his law holy and just, by which our sinful nature is rebuked: and also to our neighbours, if we have offended any person particularly. Then contrition, sorrowfulness that we be such damnable sinners, and not only have sinned, but are wholly inclined to sin still. Thirdly, faith (of which our old doctors have made no mention at all in the description of their penance), that God for Christ's sake doth forgive us, and receive us to mercy, and is at one with us, and will heal our corrupt nature. And fourthly, satisfaction, or amends-making, not to God with holy works, but to my neighbour whom I have hurt, and to the congregation of God, whom I have offended, if any open crime be found in me; and submitting of a man's self unto the congregation or church of Christ, and to the officers of the same, to have his life corrected and governed henceforth of them, according to the true doctrine of the church of Christ. And note this, that as satisfaction or amends-making is counted righteousness before the world, and a purging of sin, so that the world, when I have made a full mends, hath no further to complain; even so faith in Christ's blood is counted righteousness and a purging of all sin before God.²⁰

The four aspects were (1) confession to God; (2) contrition (a feeling of shame and remorse in your heart); (3) faith, which was not really mentioned by medieval theologians but Luther and Tyndale attribute to it utmost significance as it is the experience of the act of forgiveness and the reception of the grace and mercy of God, which has a healing effect; (4) satisfaction, which is the act of making amends.

²⁰ William Tyndale, „Repentance”, in „*William Tyndale's New Testament. Translated From the Greek 1534*”, David Daniell (ed.), modern spelling edition, New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989 (1534), 9-10.

Act 5 Scene 1 begins with the words of Cleomenes to Leontes „no fault could you make / Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down / More penitence tha done trespass”. Cleomenes exhorts him that the heavens have forgotten his evil and thus he should also forget them. Leontes however, cannot forget them himself until he remembers Hermiones's virtues.

There are two well-known recognition-scenes in *The Winter's Tale*: the first is the recognition of Perdita's parentage that is told in retrospect as an *ekphrasis* or dumb-show by the two gentlemen in front of Autolycus at the beginning of Act 5 Scene 2. It is said to be like an old tale about the fulfilment of the oracle of the child being lost and found. This lyrical narrative followed by the comic interval with Autolycus and the shepherds now turned, as they say, into „born” gentlemen serve only to prepare the audience for the final great resurrection-scene.

There is an air of overall solemnity as Leontes, Polixenes, recently reunited with their lost children Florizel and Perdita, as well as the loyal Lord Camillo enter into the chapel in Paulina's house to see the statue of Harmione said to have been created by the sculptor Julio Romano. For Paulina, this royal visit to her house is said to be a „surplus of grace”. With the curtain drawn they come to see the statue which they all behold with awe and silence. The statue of Hermione depicts her exactly the way she looked when Leontes first woo'd her. Therefore, this is a „piercing sight” and arouses his shame. Sixteen years' remorse was a long enough period for him to repent how he had harmed and ruined others as well as himself. In mundane life humans can feel what they have done wrong but at the resurrection they shall see all their errors face to face. The scene evokes the imagery of the apocalypse (which means: revelation): „and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him” (Rev 1,7).

By showing the sight of Hermione, Paulina does stir up Leontes' own shame but when she wants to stop him afflicting himself any further, Leontes does want more of it as „affliction has taste as sweet/ As any cordial comfort”. In his ecstasy, Leontes wants to kiss the „statue” and Paulina can hold him back only by promising to make the statute move. Leontes would not charge Paulina with magic as he is excited to see her moving. Leontes' „suspension of disbelief” is at work, when Paulina utters the key-sentence: „It is required/ You do awake your faith”. (5,3,118-19)

In *Pericles* and *King Lear* music is played to follow the beauty and wonder of resurrection. In *The Winter's Tale*, when Hermione's statue approaches Leontes, he can

only say „O, she’s warm!” Recognition and music is accompanied by Hermione’s asking the blessings of the gods once lost and now found:

You gods, look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter’s head! (5,3,153-5)

From the elevated moment of exultation Paulina brings us down to earth soberly, reminding everybody that she is but an „old turtle” who would make her wing to some withered bough. It is, however, now Leontes’ turn to find Camillo for her as a mate so that the elevated resurrection story, just like in the Bible, could also be acted out in a down-to-earth, realistic context. Shakespeare would not be Shakespeare if he were to let us rapture for good; at the very end, he takes us back to the matchmaking of ordinary life.

Life, death, rebirth, or, rather resurrection is indeed the topic in *The Winter’s Tale*. The ritualistic magic and the miracle of the theatre might bring Hermione back to real life and the broken family is almost *healed*. Camillo could be a surrogate husband of Paulina for her beloved and lost Antigonus. In the Kingdom of Sicilia Florizel could perhaps function as the surrogate Mamillius but the loss of their unique characters is unredeemable. Though the harm and division is ultimately healed by the restorative power of love the wound, as a *memento* on the body (of the family) remains to be seen in order to remind.

We may quickly conclude from the analysis above that repentance was the condition of Leontes’s forgiveness. Shakespeare’s audience could, however, understand that the process was working rather in the other direction, the source of the possibility of any transformation was grace. Article X of the 42 articles taught that „The grace of Christ, or the Holy Ghost by him given does take away the stony heart, and giveth a heart of flesh”.²¹

²¹ Quoted by Sarah Beckwith 2011a, 127. I modernized the spelling.

The Tempest – The Art of Forgiveness

The Tempest (1611) is about crime, crisis, conversion and cure but unlike the other three romances, the act of remorse and forgiveness is presented not from the perspective of the harmer, but from the harmed one. As Sarah Beckwith put it: „If *The Winter’s Tale* through the figure of Leontes explored the contours of remorse in the mind of the harmer, *The Tempest* examines the hold of the past over the one who has been harmed, and the means by which the present can make its peace with the past.”²²

Prospero, not unlike the Duke in *Measure for Measure*, is not only the architect of the plot but plays a strange game in hiding his identity from his enemies in order to humble or just test, so that he could eventually forgive them. In this sense, as I showed elsewhere²³, both Prospero and Duke Vincentio is doing what, according to Luther, the biblical Joseph in Genesis was doing when his brothers were going up to Egypt during the famine (Gen 42-45). According to Luther, Joseph, while pedagogically appeared to be a threatening alien to them, was an example of the hidden God (*deus absconditus*), who concealed his love of his (partly wicked) brothers by hiding his love from them under a mask of his opposite (God’s mercy is hidden under the mask of his anger; the *opus alienum* is the mask of the *opus proprium*). Like Joseph, who confuses and humbles his brothers until he bursts out in tears saying: „I am Joseph” (Gen 45,3), Prospero is likewise playing with them, humbling them before making himself recognized in his robe as the lawful Duke of Milan.

By his white magic, Prospero brings together all his enemies not to punish them, even less to take revenge but to forgive.

The rarer action is
 In virtue than in vengeance. They being penitent,
 The sole drift of my purpose doth extend
 Not a frown further. Go, release them, Ariel.
 My charms I’ll break, their senses I’ll restore,
 And they shall be themselves. (5,135-40)

²² Beckwith 2011a 146-147.

²³ Fabiny 2006. See Chapter 7 of this book.

We may say that this perspective is anagogic: both past, present and future as from the Father's perspective in Book III of Milton's *Paradise Lost*. Prospero's „divinity” is as dignified as the Father's, though while being on earth, i.e. Milan, he was as exposed to vulnerability as the Son who had emptied himself and was obedient unto death (Phil 2). Prospero's „death” was his banishment, i.e. political death, if not character-death. In spite of all that, he uses his supernatural power to teach his enemies the art of forgiveness.

What, is, ultimately, forgiveness? The best definition I found is from Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) in his book on *Jesus of Nazareth*.

What is forgiveness, really? What happens when forgiveness takes place? Guilt is a reality, an objective force; it has caused destruction that must be repaired. For this reason, forgiveness must be more than a matter of ignoring, of merely trying to forget. Guilt must be worked through, healed, and thus overcome. Forgiveness exacts a price---first of all from the person who forgives. He must overcome within himself the evil done to him; he must, as it were, burn it interiorly, and in so doing renew himself. As a result, he also involves the other, the trespasser, in this process of transformation, of inner purification, and both parties, suffering all the way through and overcoming evil, are made new. At this point, we encounter the mystery of Christ's Cross. But the very first thing we encounter is the limit of our power to heal and to overcome evil. We encounter the superior power of evil, which we cannot master with our unaided powers.²⁴

Throughout the play Prospero's „labour” was to bring his enemies to the shore to show them, as if in a mirror, who they were and who they are. Solemn music is heard once again, when they are arranged in a circle and „charmed”. It is only Gonzalo, whose graces and goodness are publicly acknowledged but the rest are condemned – before being pardoned. First, King Alonso and his brother Sebastian are summoned.

Most cruelly
Didst thou, Alonso, use me and my daughter.
Thy brother was a furtherer in the act.—
Thou art pinched for 't now, Sebastian.—Flesh and
blood,
You, brother mine, that entertained ambition,

²⁴ Joseph Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI), *Jesus of Nazareth*, (New York: Doubleday, 2007), 158-159.

Expelled remorse and nature, whom, with Sebastian,
Whose inward pinches therefore are most strong,
Would here have killed your king, I do forgive thee,
Unnatural though thou art.— (5,1,80-5)

King Alonso responds with a humble petition of pardon:

Thy dukedom I resign, and do entreat
Thou pardon me my wrongs (5,1,130-1).

However, when Prospero turns to his wicked brother Antonio, the lawful Duke of Milan does not hesitate to identify him as a most abominable sinner. He nevertheless forgives him. His free act of forgiveness has no cause (as Antonio actually never repented!) and, unlike in the case of all the other sinners, „prevenient grace” will have no effect whatsoever in the future either. That is unconditional forgiveness.

For you, most wicked sir, whom to
call brother
Would even infect my mouth, I do forgive
Thy rankest fault, all of them, and require
My dukedom of thee, which perforce I know
Thou must restore. (5,1,154)

This forgiveness is unconditional, even if Ariel’s words when dissolving the miraculous banquet („You are three men of sins”, Act 3 Scene 3) can be interpreted as excluding King Alonso. R.M.Hunter suggested that it might recall the exclusion of the unrepentant sinners from the Communion table according to the 1559 *The Book of Common Prayer*.²⁵

Prospero’s Epilogue has rightly been interpreted both as a call for applause and a call for prayer. It is the artist, the magician, the great forgiver, who wants to be forgiven. The audience’s prayers are begged to assault Mercy, which, just as Truth, has the power to set as free.

Let me not,5

²⁵ Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness*, 234. Cummings (ed.), *The Book of Common Prayer. The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1662*, 124.

Since I have my dukedom got
And pardoned the deceiver, dwell
In this bare island by your spell,
But release me from my bands
With the help of your good hands. 10
Gentle breath of yours my sails
Must fill, or else my project fails,
Which was to please. Now I want
Spirits to enforce, art to enchant,
And my ending is despair, 15
Unless I be relieved by prayer,
Which pierces so that it assaults
Mercy itself, and frees all faults.
 As you from crimes would pardoned be,
 Let your indulgence set me free.

CONCLUSION – ROMANCE AS A GENRE OF THERAPY

It is not just because they are called tragicomedies, that the romances are different from both the tragedies and the comedies. A tragic action usually results in catharsis, while the happy ending of comedies cheers up the audience by creating a sense of freedom through laughter.

Unlike the comedies, the romances do not avoid the tragic but transcend it. It is not only that royal princes and princesses or spouses are lost and found; it is not only that family members believed to have died turn out to be alive. Their main theme is obviously resurrection but it is important to bear in mind that the possibility of resurrection could become real because sin as the original disease was healed by some special acts of speech: the speeches of acts.

Romance, as the old tale of witches, serpents as well as of giants and gods is able to cure *humanum genus*. In a lecture on „Literature and Therapy” (given 14 months before his death) Northrop Frye reminded his audience that „we should not overlook the immense recuperative power” of literature.²⁶

²⁶ Northrop Frye, „Literature as Therapy”, in Northrop Frye, „*The Eternal Act of Creation. Essays, 1979-1990*”, Robert D. Denham (ed.), (Indianapolis: Bloomington, 1993), 33-34.

In romances - no „wonder“ (!) - resurrection, miracle or cure is almost always accompanied by music, the art of restoration and therapy. A central motif of the romances is reconciliation, or, atonement in the sense of at-one-ment. When William Tyndale commented the word *hislamos* (reconciliation, propitiation, forgiveness) in 1John 2,2, he wrote:

That I call satisfaction, the Greek calleth *ilamos*, and the Hebrew Copar: and it is first taken for the suaging of wounds, sores, and swellings, and the taking away of pain and smart of them; and thence is borrowed for the pacifying and suaging of wrath and anger, and for an amends-making, a contenting, satisfaction, a ransom, and making at one, as it is to see abundantly in the bible.²⁷

As we have already seen, salvation is health. And the romances may, perhaps, help us to be cured, to become wholesome i.e healthy, by „making at one“ our scattered bones and ashes dispersed by the destructive power of evil, the invisible worm that was secretly blighting the rose.

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