

interpretation

A JOURNAL OF POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

September 1981

Volume 9 Numbers 2 & 3

- 141 Larry Arnhart The Rationality of Political Speech:
An Interpretation of Aristotle's *Rhetoric*
- 155 Jan H. Blits Manliness and Friendship
in Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar*
- 169 Mary Nichols *The Winter's Tale*:
The Triumph of Comedy over Tragedy
- 191 Jerry Weinberger On Bacon's *Advertisement Touching A Holy War*
- 207 John Parsons, Jr. On Sir William Temple's
Political and Philosophical Teaching
- 229 Susan Power John Locke:
Revolution, Resistance, or Opposition?
- 245 Barry Cooper The Politics of Performance: An Interpretation
of Bolingbroke's Political Theory
- 263 Philip J. Kain Labor, the State, and Aesthetic Theory in the
Writings of Schiller
- 279 Michael H. Mitias Law as the Basis of the State: Hegel
- 301 Stanley Corngold Dilthey's Essay *The Poetic Imagination*:
A Poetics of Force
- 339 Kent A. Kirwan Historicism and Statesmanship
in the Reform Argument of Woodrow Wilson
- 353 Richard Velkley Gadamer and Kant: The Critique of Modern
Aesthetic Consciousness in *Truth and Method*
- 365 Robert C. Grady Bertrand de Jouvenel:
Order, Legitimacy, and the Model of Rousseau
- 385 William R. Marty Rawls and the Harried Mother
- 397 Jürgen Gebhardt Ideology and Reality:
The Ideologue's Persuasion in Modern Politics
- 415 Kenneth W. Thompson Science, Morality, and Transnationalism
- Discussion*
- 427 Peter T. Manicas The Crisis of Contemporary Political Theory:
on Jacobson's *Pride and Solace*
- Book Reviews*
- 437 Patrick Coby *The Spirit of Liberalism*,
by Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr.
- 439 Will Morrisey *Political Parties in the Eighties*,
edited by Robert A. Goldwin

interpretation

Volume 9 numbers 2 & 3

Editor-in-Chief Hilail Gildin

Editors Seth G. Benardete • Hilail Gildin • Robert Horwitz
• Howard B. White (d.1974)

Consulting Editors John Hallowell • Wilhelm Hennis • Erich Hula •
Arnaldo Momigliano • Michael Oakeshott • Ellis
Sandoz • Leo Strauss (d.1973) • Kenneth W.
Thompson

Associate Editors Larry Arnhart • Patrick Coby • Christopher A. Colmo
• Maureen Feder • Joseph E. Goldberg • Pamela
Jensen • Will Morrisey

Assistant Editor Marianne C. Grey

Production Manager Martyn Hitchcock

Authors submitting manuscripts for publication in INTERPRETATION are requested to follow the *MLA Style Sheet* and to send clear and readable copies of their work. All manuscripts and editorial correspondence should be addressed to INTERPRETATION, Building G Room 101, Queens College, Flushing, N.Y. 11367, U.S.A.

Copyright 1982 • Interpretation

THE WINTER'S TALE:
THE TRIUMPH OF COMEDY OVER TRAGEDY

MARY POLLINGUE NICHOLS
Catholic University of America

At the end of the *Symposium*, Socrates tries to persuade a tragic poet and a comic poet that the same man can dramatize both tragedies and comedies (223d). Socrates' assertion seems paradoxical because of the great differences between tragedy and comedy as we ordinarily understand them. The choice of one of these dramatic forms seems to imply a view of the human situation—and consequently of the function of the poet—that is at odds with the choice of the other. One can see the different responses to life that characterize the two genres by contrasting the masks associated with each one.

Shakespeare, however, wrote both tragedies and comedies, and even plays that contain elements of both. *The Winter's Tale* is the most obvious combination of tragedy and comedy: it has the appearance of two distinct dramas, a three-act tragedy followed by a two-act comedy. The two parts of the play are separated by a sixteen-year time span and involve two sets of principal characters. What is the difference between tragedy and comedy? How can one man compose both kinds of plays? And, given what Shakespeare has done in *The Winter's Tale*, how can one play contain both a tragedy and a comedy and nevertheless not lose its unity? The answers to these questions and the whole formed by the play come to light through an analysis of the action of its parts: the tragedy, the transition to the comedy, and the comedy.

The Tragedy

Archidamus, a lord of Bohemia, opens the play by reminding Camillo, a lord of Sicily, of a "great difference" between Bohemia and Sicily. Although Archidamus does not indicate what he means, he immediately reveals one difference between Bohemia and Sicily: when Leontes, king of Sicily, returns the present visit of his childhood friend and king of Bohemia, Polixenes, "our entertainment shall shame us," for "we cannot with such magnificence—in so rare—I know not what to say" (I. i. 8–13).¹ Archidamus is embarrassed by his country's failure to match Sicily's magnificent courtly entertainment. Sicily appears richer and more splendid in its court life than Bohemia. Archidamus jokes that Bohemia will give "sleepy drinks" to its visitors "that [their] senses (unintelligent of our insufficiency) may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us" (I. i. 13–15). In Sicily desires are indulged and to some extent satisfied, while in Bohemia they are moderated, or perhaps dulled.

¹All citations to *The Winter's Tale* are to the Arden edition (London: Methuen, 1866).

Camillo moves the conversation from the "insufficiency" of Bohemia's entertainments to the incompleteness of the kings' friendship. Although the kings were "train'd together in their childhoods," because of "royal necessities" their friendship continued through "interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies," rather than through personal contact (I. i. 22–29). Since Bohemia is now visiting his old friend, the affection "rooted betwixt them" in childhood "cannot choose but branch now" (I. i. 23–24). For Camillo, time does not destroy but only arrests. What Camillo presents as necessary, however, he soon prays for: "the heavens continue their loves" (I. i. 31–32).

In Camillo's commonplace appeal to heaven, Shakespeare warns us of trouble: a quarrel between the friends will initiate the play's action and the tragedy of the first part of the play. The "great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicily" can refer to the quarrel between the kings, who are often called by the names of their countries, as well as to the differences between the countries. Shakespeare's pun prepares us to reflect on the relationship between dissimilarity and hostility. The tragedy of the first part of the play involves the impossibility of friendship between dissimilar human beings.

Archidamus turns the conversation, rather abruptly, to the excellence of Leontes's son, Mamillius, "a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note" (I. i. 35–36). (We see that Archidamus is revealing another difference between Bohemia and Sicily when we find out in the next scene that Polixenes also has a son, with whom Archidamus must also be familiar.) Mamillius, Archidamus says, is "an unspeakable comfort" to Sicily; Camillo agrees that the child "physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh: they that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man" (I. i. 37–40). The prospect of seeing the maturity of an excellent human being is a fit reason for living, Camillo believes, although one be otherwise unfortunate. The conversation has moved from the anticipated completion of a friendship to the anticipated maturation of an excellent human being. As the scene ends, we see a disagreement between the lord of Sicily and the lord of Bohemia. Without anything to live for, men would be content to die, Camillo asserts. Archidamus, however, thinks that since men desire to live, they will invent a reason for living if they do not have one: "If the king had no son they would desire to live on crutches till he had one" (I. i. 44–45). Archidamus should know about this, for he comes from the country that boasts neither "magnificence" nor a human being "of the greatest promise." Sicily seems to have greater goods than the more moderate Bohemia. The insufficiency of moderation might be suggested by the fact that it is Polixenes who apparently initiates the renewal of the old friendship. He is the visitor, and remains in Sicily for the rather long period of nine months.

Political duties now call Polixenes home, but Leontes, ignoring Polixenes's fear "of what may chance / Or breed upon [his] absence" (I. i. 11–12), urges him to stay another week. When Leontes asks his wife Hermione to try to

persuade their friend to stay, she reproaches her husband for charging Polixenes "too coldly" (I. ii. 29–30). Her rhetoric proves successful. She first suggests to her husband that he should argue that "All in Bohemia's well." She acknowledges the validity of public demands upon a ruler's private inclinations, but she denies that demands are now being made. Nor does love for his son move Polixenes to return home, she argues, for he does not give this as a reason for leaving. Hermione next attempts to bargain: if Polixenes stays now, Hermione will allow Leontes a longer visit in Bohemia. Hermione's concession, a move that in a political situation might indicate weakness, is premised on her own rule of Leontes. When Polixenes refuses her compromise, Hermione threatens to employ force: "Will you go yet? / Force me to keep you as a prisoner, / Not like a guest?" (I. ii. 51–53). Because Polixenes prefers to be a guest rather than a prisoner, he yields. If Hermione's rhetoric were simply political, she would have moved from gentleness to harshness, from argument, to compromise, and then to threats of force. But Hermione is obviously being playful, and Polixenes is not her political opponent but her friend. Because a friend desires to be with his friends out of affection for them, Polixenes would desire to be with Hermione and Leontes as long as there were no compelling reasons for departing. When Hermione assumes that she has overcome Polixenes's reasons for departing and proceeds to bargain and to threaten, she is pretending that a friend must be induced to do what he is naturally inclined to do. Hermione's playful threat of force succeeds because it implicitly appeals to Polixenes's friendship: indicating how much Polixenes's presence is desired, Hermione's threat of force says, in effect, stay because I want you to stay. Although Polixenes placed his political duties above his private desires in planning to return home, he is not always immune to the appeals of love or friendship. Underlying Hermione's playful political rhetoric is a rhetoric of love or friendship. Her speech masks what is playful and loving in a form that is serious and political.

Having charged less coldly than her husband, and succeeded where he failed, Hermione turns the conversation to the playful days of childhood that Polixenes and Leontes shared. Something that she notices in Polixenes apparently leads her to think that he is different from her husband: "Was not my lord / The verier wag o' th' two?" But Polixenes does not see any difference. The friends were alike in their childhood innocence as well as in their youth, when their "weak spirits" were "higher rear'd with stronger blood" (I. ii. 71–73). Because of their high spirits, Polixenes avers, they must admit their guilt to heaven. Perhaps to cover up his suggestion that he and his friend have yielded to sexual desires forbidden by God's law, Polixenes claims that the temptations that led them to sin were their wives. But Polixenes has only entangled himself further, for he has implied that sex, lawful or unlawful, is sinful. Hermione vehemently objects to such an implication (I. ii. 67–68). We may suppose that Polixenes is grateful to Leontes for interrupting by inquiring whether Polixenes

has been persuaded to stay. Because Leontes has not been listening, he has not learned from Hermione how to appeal successfully to a friend. He does bring into the conversation, however, an example of his own success at persuading, and at the same time puts forward an approval of love and marriage that contrasts sharply with Polixenes's hint that even lawful sex is sinful. Hermione spoke only once to better purpose than she just spoke in winning Polixenes over, Leontes says, namely, when she accepted Leontes's marriage proposal. At that time Leontes had some difficulty in winning her: "Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death / Ere I could make thee open thy white hand / And clap thyself my love" (I. ii. 102–04). He was the lover, she the beloved (see V. iii. 36).

Hermione agrees that she twice spoke to good purpose and offers Polixenes her hand. In an aside Leontes abruptly and violently speaks of Hermione's infidelity. His friend has made him a cuckold. Why else would he yield to his wife's entreaty to stay but not to his own? Perhaps even his son, Mamillius, is not his own. What has moved Leontes to such thoughts? Although his passion seems inexplicable, the insecurity underlying his jealousy might be fostered by his inferiority to Hermione—an inferiority that we glimpse in comparing Hermione's speech to Polixenes with Leontes's cold charge, and that Leontes himself suggests in his description of his courtship.

When Leontes is unable to hide his passion, Hermione asks the cause of his "distraction" (I. ii. 149). He thought he saw himself as a lad when he looked at his son, he says, but he lies: his passion involves his inability to see himself in his son with any certainty. Although Mamillius might bring comfort to subjects because of his great promise, he gives his father "some comfort" because he is said to look like him (I. ii. 208). But it is women who say this, and women will say anything (I. ii. 130–31). Mamillius might bring comfort to others, but he makes his father anxious.

Leontes's excuse for his distraction changes the subject to the kings' love of their sons. Polixenes claims that his son is

all my exercise, my mirth, my matter;
 Now my sworn friend, and then mine enemy;
 My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all.
 He makes a July's day short as December;
 And with his varying childishness cures in me
 Thoughts that would thicken my blood
 (I. ii. 166–71).

Polixenes's son's "varying childishness" (or his ability to play even contradictory parts) gives his father a new perception of time and cures "Thoughts that would thicken [his] blood"—perhaps thoughts as sad and fearful as death. In moving his viewer from sadness to mirth, the child prefigures the course of *The Winter's Tale*.

Leontes goes for a walk and meets Camillo. He assumes that his wife's adultery is well known and that he has been made a laughingstock (I. ii. 215–19). He insists that Camillo poison Polixenes. Camillo soon meets Polixenes, who has just encountered Leontes and noticed how upset he is. Perhaps conscious of Leontes's lack of restraint, Camillo had earlier warned him, "with a countenance as clear / as friendship wears at feasts keep with Bohemia / and with your queen" (I. ii. 343–45). Leontes cannot conceal his passion, and Polixenes supposes that Leontes's grief is that of a man who has lost some dearly loved province (I. ii. 370–71).

When Camillo warns Polixenes and they escape to Bohemia, they leave Hermione to feel the full force of Leontes's passion. Not yet suspecting danger, she asks Mamillius to tell her a tale. He chooses a sad tale rather than a merry one, for "a sad tale's best for winter" (II. i. 25). He offers one of "sprites and goblins"—of forces or elements over which man has no control. He evidently tells such tales frequently, for Hermione observes "you're powerful at it" (II. i. 27–28). By chance, a winter's tale, a sad tale, is appropriate now, for Leontes is on his way to imprison Hermione, and thus to initiate a series of events that have tragic consequences.

Enraged by Polixenes's departure, Leontes is certain that Polixenes, Camillo, and Hermione are plotting against his life and crown. Just as Leontes assumed that Polixenes's admiration for Hermione meant that he would try to commit adultery with her, he now assumes that Polixenes will try to replace him entirely. In assuming that Polixenes has no restraint, Leontes assumes that Polixenes is like himself. Leontes's mistaken assumption about his similarity to Polixenes is the ironic counterpart to Polixenes's belief that he and his friend are alike.

Hermione gives birth to a daughter in prison. Her companion, Lady Paulina, takes the baby to Leontes because he "may soften at the sight of her child" (II. ii. 40). Paulina's boldness or hardness contrasts with the gentleness that Hermione has shown in previous scenes. Although Paulina undertakes the task of informing the king of the birth of his child because "the office / Becomes a woman best" (II. ii. 31–32), she expresses her determination in forceful terms:

I'll use the tongue I have; if wit flow from 't
As boldness from my bosom, let 't not be doubted
I shall do good (II. ii. 52–54).

Paulina has a deserved reputation for boldness: after he imprisoned Hermione, Leontes commands "that audacious lady" Paulina not to come near him (II. ii. 42–44). Nevertheless Hermione lets Paulina take her baby to Leontes. Perhaps she sees that her own gentleness is insufficient to move Leontes and that she must rely on Paulina's boldness. Hermione's earlier threat of force was, after all, only playful. (See V. iii. 26–27.) But Paulina's boldness only makes matters worse. Leontes becomes more enraged. In the end Paulina leaves the

baby with Leontes, who tricks Paulina's husband, Antigonus, into agreeing to abandon the baby on some deserted isle.

In the third act, Hermione is brought to public trial for adultery and treason. Leontes desires that her trial be public so that he may be "clear'd / Of being tyrannous, since we so openly / Proceed in justice" (III. ii. 4-6; cf. II. i. 163-65). Leontes depends greatly on the good opinion of others for his self-esteem. From the moment he suspected adultery, Leontes has shown a fear of being laughed at (I. ii. 188-90; I. ii. 217-18; I. iii. 23-26; II. i. 50-52; II. i. 196-98). Leontes wants neither to be ridiculed nor to be considered a tyrant. Yet his passion now forces him to dismiss all sensible advice, and his "most cruel usage of [his] queen," as Paulina says, "something savours / Of tyranny" (II. iii. 116-19). His desire not to be laughed at has turned him into a tyrant.

Although Hermione shows no concern over being laughed at, she does want to maintain her honor. She desires to do so less for her own sake than for her children's, for she passes her honor onto them. Indeed, this honor is more valuable to her than her life (III. ii. 42-45). When Leontes asks for her death, she claims not to consider it a punishment, for she has been deprived of the goods that made her life worth living: Leontes's favor, Mamillius (from whom she is now barred), her infant daughter, and her public dignity. She wonders "what blessings I have here alive / That I should fear to die?" (III. ii. 107-08). She confirms Camillo's opinion that people desire to live only if they have something good to live for. But while Camillo thought the sight of an excellent human being to be that good, the goods that keep Hermione alive appear to be private or personal.

At the news of Mamillius's death, Hermione swoons and is carried out. The chastened Leontes asks Apollo's pardon, and states his intention to reconcile himself to Hermione. But Paulina enters screaming tyranny and announcing Hermione's death. She informs Leontes that his crimes allow no forgiveness (III. ii. 207-14).

Leontes has none of the reasons for living that Hermione earlier designated: a spouse's favor, Mamillius, an infant daughter, or public dignity. As for Leontes's public dignity, Leontes will engrave the cause of his wife's and son's deaths on their gravestones "unto / Our shame perpetual" (III. ii. 236-38). Leontes's model in Shakespeare's source, *Pandosto*, wants to "offer [his] guilty blood a sacrifice to those sackless souls whose lives are lost by [his] vigorous folly."² Leontes, in contrast, without any reasons for living, indicates no desire to die, although tears and mourning will characterize his future (III. ii. 238-43).

We are now in a position to ask why the action of the first part of the play has ended in sadness. What are the elements of a tragedy? Why did it happen? We begin with two men who are trying to be friends, yet who are different and

²Robert Greene, *Pandosto*, reprinted in *The Winter's Tale*, p. 198.

do not understand that they are different. If each man did not act as if the other were like him, there would have been no quarrel. Polixenes is familiar with Hermione; he is a moderate man, and his moderation permits his familiarity. He is surprised when Leontes supposes that his familiarity implies impropriety. Polixenes acts as if his friend's judgment would be identical to his own. For the immoderate Leontes, familiarity without impropriety would be impossible, and he too supposes that his friend is like himself. If Polixenes were like Leontes, he would not unwittingly make Leontes jealous; if Leontes were like Polixenes, Polixenes' actions would not make him jealous. There would be no tragedy either if Leontes and Polixenes were alike or if they fully understood their differences.

Other factors contribute to the tragedy. By retreating from Sicily, Camillo and Polixenes convince Leontes that his suspicions are justified. Their flight seems weak and unmanly. Leontes did threaten Camillo's death. Paulina, however, argues vehemently with Leontes, and nevertheless does not suffer the cruel punishments that he threatens (II. iii. 94–95; 113; 132–40). In contrast to her, Camillo appears too cautious. His lack of boldness contributes to the outcome. On the other hand, part of the tragedy is the "loss" of the new princess, and for this Paulina's boldness is responsible. Paulina claimed that showing the princess to Leontes would be a bold move to soften his anger, but when Paulina leaves her with Leontes in a rage, she divorces boldness from a reasonable calculation of success. Tragedy occurs because Camillo's cautious acts and Paulina's bold ones strengthen Leontes's passion. Just as Camillo should not have left Hermione in the hands of Leontes, so Paulina should not have left the princess in his hands.

Tragedy occurs also because Mamillius languishes and dies, and Hermione collapses when she hears the news. Their desire to live is not so strong that it endures even when they are deprived of the good things for which they live. Too much nobility leads to tragedy (III. iii. 12–17). It is not surprising that Leontes cannot see himself in his son. Mamillius's weak will is no doubt related to his propensity to tell frightening winter tales of sprites and goblins. A world inhabited by such beings is irrational and hostile to man—a world man cannot make his home. If men are necessarily separated by their differences, if friendship is impossible, if human actions necessarily have undesirable and even tragic consequences because of their one-sidedness, then the world does appear irrational and hostile to man—a condition metaphorically expressed by a belief in fearful sprites and goblins.

Tragedy occurs not least because of Leontes's passion. His violent jealousy reveals his desire to be loved by his wife and by his friend. Underlying a desire to be loved is a desire to be lovable, but Leontes can demand their love with justice only if he is worthy of it. His anger at the supposed injustice done him indicates that he believes he is in fact worthy of their love. At the core of

his passion, which is most obviously the cause of this tragedy, is a suppression of the disjunction between wish and reality. Leontes's actions deny that he is less than perfect and result in great disorder.

A tragedy occurs when human beings with certain imperfections interact with one another. Their imperfections do not always indicate their vices, but often seem concomitant with their virtues. Men's differences, manifested in their virtues, lead them to misunderstanding and hostility. (Polixenes's moderation and Leontes's inordinate desire for good things are examples, as well as Hermione's gentleness, Paulina's boldness, and Camillo's caution.) Since the good things that men do harm them, and the good things about them are mixed with imperfections, there seems to be something in the order of things, whether natural or divine, that is hostile to man. Two attitudes toward this situation, a soft one and a hard one, are presented as leading to tragedy. One may be so resigned to the frustrating character of life that one loses one's will to live, as does Mamillius. The frightening sprites of his tales, inexplicable and threatening, appear to control the actions of those most dear to him. On the other hand, one might rebel against the sprites, and act as if nothing mysterious will have any effect on one's life. Specifically, Leontes acts as if he can understand his wife, who is superior to him, and his friend, who is different from him. He assumes he can righteously dispense justice upon the guilty. He acts as if the world permitted complete understanding and control. In the last part of the play, comedy appears possible not simply because there is a mean between resignation and rebellion, but also because some men may not be subject to a condition that demands resignation or rebellion.

The Transition to the Comedy

The last scene of the third act and the first scene of the fourth act provide a transition to the play's comedy. The former involves Antigonus's abandonment of the princess and his death; the second is a soliloquy by the deathless chorus Time, who informs us of the passage of sixteen years and its interim events. The two scenes, taken together, provide reflection on man and the natural order and thereby help us to understand how comedy can supersede tragedy in *The Winter's Tale*.

Antigonus is at sea, looking for a place to abandon Hermione's daughter. A storm threatens. While the mariner believes that the storm reveals that the heavens oppose the loss of Perdita, Antigonus views the storm as heaven's means to her destruction. Natural phenomena are presented as opaque guides to heaven's will.

Antigonus abandons Perdita in Bohemia. A shepherd, who is trying to find his lost sheep before they are devoured by a wolf, finds the baby and takes it up "for pity" (III. iii. 76). He believes that the gold he finds with the baby is fairy gold, for "it was told me I should be rich by fairies" (III. iii. 116). We are

moving from a world in which sprites and goblins frighten men to one in which fairies are thought to bring joy. The shepherd also supposes that the baby is "some changeling"—a child left by fairies in exchange for some mortal one. At the same time that there arises the possibility of a world inhabited by fairies who bring joy, there also arises the possibility of a human being who somehow transcends ordinary human limits.

A clown, the shepherd's son, reports that Antigonus's ship is destroyed at sea and that Antigonus himself is being torn and eaten by a bear. When Antigonus saw the clown, he called for help, but the clown did not interfere. The clown is unlike his father, who wishes that he would have "been by to have help'd the old man!" (III. iii. 106–07). Antigonus's misfortune reminds us of his earlier wish for the child he is forced to abandon:

Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens
To be thy nurses! Wolves and bears they say,
Casting their savageness aside, have done
Like offices of pity (II. iii. 185–88).

But a bear, from whom Antigonus expected pity, mauls him to death. He dies not because of nature's malice, but because of its indifference, for, as the clown notes, bears "are never curst but when they are hungry" (III. iii. 128–29). Antigonus dies also because of human vice, the clown's cowardice.³ The office of pity is performed by the shepherd, who takes Perdita "for pity." Nature's indifference, human baseness, and human goodness operate in Antigonus's destruction and the baby's salvation.

At the beginning of Act IV, the chorus Time reveals the existence of an amoral order that overlooks human events: Time is both joy and terror for the good and the bad, a force that both makes and unfolds error (IV. i. 1–2). Not only is Time indifferent to the virtue and the vice of those whom it affects, Time inclines equally to making error and bringing it to light. Time also claims an absolute power over man: "it is in my power / To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour / To plant and o'erwhelm custom" (IV. i. 7–10). Time is a force that lords over and limits the structures resulting from human striving. Time nevertheless observes that the audience would pass its time well by watching the play, and wishes that its time never be worse spent than in this manner. By concluding with an expression of goodwill for all its audience, Time surprises us, inasmuch as Time began by proclaiming an indifference to man.

The beginning of the fourth act repeats the end of the first part of the play—the indifference of Time to man is reflected in the indifference of nature (the storm and the bear) to the mariners, Antigonus, and Perdita. The pity that moves the shepherd is a reflection of Time's benevolence. The new beginning of the play generalizes the end of the tragedy in that it provides a cosmic

³The clown later responds to a call for help when there is no risk to his own life (IV. iii. 51–77).

restatement of what has happened on a human level. The question of the relationship between the two halves of the play, at which juncture the chorus Time appears, turns on the possibility of goodwill or benevolence in a world where destruction and salvation occur at random.

The Comedy

The chorus Time, having chronicled the passage of sixteen years, sets the scene in Bohemia. Time tells us of Leontes's grief, of Polixenes's son Florizel, and of Perdita "now grown in grace / Equal with wond'ring" (IV. i. 24). We look forward to the possibility that Perdita will fulfill the promise that Mamillius was thought to bear. If Time's effect has not been to heal all wounds, the passage of Time nevertheless allows for the birth of new possibilities. (See III. i. 105–07.) Shakespeare violates the traditional dramatic unities in order to present a fuller vision of human life.

The play has begun again in another sense as well, for again someone is expressing a desire to leave someone who persuades him to stay. This time Polixenes persuades Camillo to stay in Bohemia, although Camillo desires to return to Sicily to die at home and to comfort the penitent Leontes (IV. ii. 5–9). As Polixenes earlier wanted to leave Sicily for political reasons, he now wants Camillo to stay for political reasons: "Thou, having made me businesses, which none without thee can sufficiently manage, must either stay to execute them thyself, or take away with thee the very service thou hast done" (IV. ii. 13–17). Because we have just been reminded of time, we can see more clearly what Polixenes does not reckon on. He should not so completely depend on what is mortal: Camillo wants to go home because he foresees his death. But for Polixenes it is "death" to permit him to return to Sicily (IV. ii. 2). His attempt to hold off change is reminiscent of his description of his own childhood, when he thought "there was no more behind, / But such a day to-morrow as to-day, / And to be a boy eternal" (I. ii. 63–65).

Polixenes abruptly changes the subject to his own son, Florizel, who is spending time at the cottage of a shepherd girl "Of most rare note" (IV. ii. 43). Polixenes and Camillo agree to go disguised to the shepherd's cottage to find out what is going on.

Meanwhile on a country road we meet the rogue Autolycus, very ragged, but singing a happy song. He gives a brief account of himself, and therefore stands out not simply as the only singer in the play but as one of its most reflective characters. Autolycus used to wear fine clothes and serve Florizel, but he has been dismissed. According to his song, he does not mourn over his misfortunes, for he has means to live still (IV. iii. 1–22). While he claims to have joy because he has life, it also appears that he has life because he has joy. His second song praises the virtues of being merry: mirth is more useful than sorrow, because the merry can accomplish their goals more quickly (IV. iii.

119–22). Autolycus can obtain what is necessary for life, as a despondent man might be unable to do. We see the truth of this statement confirmed when we witness a playful rendition of its converse: sorrow is not conducive to life. When Autolycus sees the clown approaching, he grovels on the ground, and pretends to be a gentleman who has been beaten, and robbed of his money and clothes by Autolycus, who dressed him in his present rags. Implying that his condition is so miserable as to warrant death, he groans to the oncoming clown, “pluck but off these rags; and then, death, death” (IV. iii. 52–53). In this condition Autolycus cries the classic tragic lament, “O that ever I was born!” (IV. iii. 56). He reminds us of a tragic teaching that life is miserable, that the best thing is not to have come into existence, and the next best is, having come into existence, to leave it as quickly as possible.⁴ In his feigned despair, Autolycus acts out playfully the truth conveyed by Mamillius’s death. Now, however, tragedy appears as something to be mocked and to be used as an instrument to cloak one’s purposes.

Autolycus’s pretense brings the clown close enough to have his pocket picked. Autolycus then looks forward to the sheep-shearing festival of which the clown spoke, where like a wolf he himself will shear the unsuspecting sheep (IV. iii. 115–18). Autolycus’s name literally means “the wolf itself.” His pretense before the clown, however, is in one sense not a pretense at all. If one assumes that Autolycus is responsible for having been thrown out of court, it is indeed Autolycus who has beaten, robbed, and dressed Autolycus in rags. The facts of Autolycus’s story are true, but his reaction to those facts is a pretense. Only to the better man Autolycus pretends to be is death an appropriate response to disgrace or misfortune. Autolycus does not justify his life by finding reasons for living any more than does Leontes, whose name also is the name of a beast. The similarity between the two men, however, goes only so far. Autolycus’s indifference to his petty vice finds no counterpart in Leontes’s grief for the great harm he has caused. While Leontes does not consider suicide, he does not, like Autolycus, parody the possibility. The lion is the king of beasts; the wolf is the antithesis of the good shepherd.

When we reflect on Autolycus’s relation to tragedy, we can see how the same man might write both comedies and tragedies. A comedy in which Autolycus starred would be a lowly imitation of a tragedy: a character less noble than one finds in tragedy acts in a way that would bring a nobler character to grief. Autolycus has lost the favor of the one he served, disgraced himself at court, and disrupted his life; he has suffered a pallid version of what Leontes has suffered. But he is joyous, and even ridicules the possibility of being distraught in such circumstances: he playfully pretends to be someone who wants to die in the face of the world’s evil. His joke doubly serves life: the humor and the mirth of the joke support life, if we may view his joke in the

⁴See Sophocles, *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1224–26.

way in which he views his merry song; and his joke brings him the sustenance of life out of the clown's picked pockets. Autolycus thus lacks the nobility of a tragic figure. Without the nobility, there is no pain; when we see comedies we can forget or blind ourselves to the suffering about which tragedy reminds us, and laugh at what with nobility and without forgetting would cause tears.⁵ A comedy of Autolycus's exploits could be written by a tragedian who abstracts from nobility. Such a comedy serves life, just as Autolycus's joy serves life. But since this kind of comedy blinds and therefore deceives us, it is a joke on us, just as Autolycus's joke is on the clown. Perhaps being deceived or blinded is a small price to pay, if our knowing necessarily brings sorrow and defeat.⁶

Before the guests arrive at the sheep-shearing festival, we meet Florizel and Perdita. Florizel sees the festival as "a meeting of the petty gods, / And you [Perdita] the queen on 't" (IV iv. 3-5). Perdita, in contrast, is ill at ease with her goddess' costume as well as with the prince's country garb. Florizel tries to console her with the thought that he merely imitates the gods, who "Humbling their deities to love, have taken / The shapes of beasts upon them" (IV iv. 26-27). He then claims superiority to the gods, since "my desires / Run not before mine honour, nor my lusts / Burn hotter than my faith" (IV iv. 33-35).⁷

When Perdita claims that Florizel will not be able to resist his father's opposition to their marriage, Florizel protests:

Or I'll be thine, my fair,
Or not my father's. For I cannot be
Mine own, nor anything to any, if
I be not thine. To this I am most constant
Though destiny say no (IV. iv. 42-46).

Florizel resists not merely the authority of his father and king, but also that of destiny itself. Whatever Florizel means by destiny, he does not mean something powerful enough to determine his life in a way contrary to his desires. Perdita responds to Florizel's view of destiny with a prayer: "O lady Fortune, / Stand you auspicious!" (IV. iv. 51-52).⁸ Florizel appears not to realize that

⁵Paulina, rebuked by Leontes's lords for blaming Leontes for what he has done, acknowledges, "Let me be punish'd, that have minded you / Of what you should forget" (III. ii. 225-26). Does Paulina's later contrivance of a resurrection scene serve as her penance?

⁶This kind of poetry would be like Archidamus's "sleepy drinks" that prevent awareness of "insufficiency." Camillo protests that such drinks are unnecessary (I. i. 11-18).

⁷Cf. Falstaff, who, dressed as a deer for his lovemaking, questions, "When gods have hot backs, what shall poor men do?" *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, V. v. 11-12. See Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 1080-82.

⁸Soon at the sheep-shearing festival, Perdita reminds others of limits to human achievement. When the disguised Camillo envisions Perdita as a shepherdess who cares for mankind, he claims he "would leave grazing . . . and only live by gazing" at her (IV. iv. 109-10). "You'd be so lean that blasts of January / Would blow you through and through," Perdita reproaches him. She reminds men not only of the limitations of chance and of the wills of other men, but also of bodily necessities.

fortune may turn out badly for him, that chance may not be a force that, without any activity on his part, will conform events to his benefit or desires. Perhaps the chance that brought him to Perdita supports his confidence: "I bless the time," he says, "When my good falcon made her flight across / Thy father's ground" (IV. iv. 14–16). Perdita immediately cautions, "Now Jove afford you cause!" Florizel's faith in chance is evinced by his lack of any plan to counter his father's certain opposition to his marriage to Perdita (IV. iv. 412–14). The difference we see between Florizel and Perdita may be a reflection of a difference between life in court and life in the country.⁹ "Florizel's greatness," Perdita says, "hath not been us'd to fear" (IV. iv. 17–18). Because Florizel is the son of a king, she means, necessity has imposed upon him no need to limit his desires. He is accustomed to getting whatever he wants.

Florizel stands in contrast to Mamillius. While Mamillius told sad tales that provoked fear, Florizel attempts to remove fear. When Perdita fears the future, he counsels her "let's be red with mirth" (IV. iv. 54), "be merry" (IV. iv. 46), "darken not / The mirth o' th' feast" (IV. iv. 41–42; see also IV. iv. 24–25). The word "mirth" appeared in the tragic part of the play only in Polixenes's description of his son (I. ii. 165–71). Florizel is merry and urges others to be so because he senses no restrictions on his ability to fulfill his desires. It is not surprising that he sees no cause for sadness. The sad tales of Mamillius portrayed a world in which frightening goblins affected men's actions.

Perdita, in her awareness of human limitation, resembles her brother. Consistent with this awareness, she is not inclined to rule. When the guests arrive at the festival, Perdita's stepfather chides her for not presiding over the feast (IV. iv. 62–70; see also IV. iv. 71–72). Although Perdita begins to play the feast's mistress when rebuked by her stepfather, her silence soon allows others to make the decisions concerning the entertainment (IV. iv. 153–54; 214; 310–14; 341–42).

Perdita's primary act as mistress of the feast is distributing flowers to her guests. When the disguised Polixenes and Camillo receive flowers that last throughout the winter, Polixenes observes that Perdita appropriately "Fit[s] our ages / With flowers of winter" (IV. iv. 78–79). True to character, Perdita derives from his remark a standard by which she tries to distribute flowers to all her guests—each guest should receive flowers appropriate to his age. Her dispensation of flowers will remind the recipient of his relationship to time, that is, of his mortality.

Perdita's distribution of the fitting soon encounters an obstacle. Polixenes

⁹Shakespeare makes no attempt in *The Winter's Tale* to represent country life as idyllic, either with respect to the natural setting or with respect to the inhabitants. He omits any rendering of the conversation in Greene's *Pandosto* between Dorastus and Fawnia (the counterparts of Florizel and Perdita) in which Fawnia praises country life in contradistinction to court life (p. 208). In the first scene in the Bohemian countryside, we see a bear who mauls Antigonus to death (III. iii. 57–58), and then a shepherd who complains of the vices of the young (III. iii. 58–68).

and Camillo deserve not the flowers of winter but the flowers of autumn, she asserts, but the fairest flowers of autumn are “nature’s bastards,” which she refuses to cultivate because they are grown by crossbreeding, which she thinks repugnant to nature (IV. iv. 87–88). Because Perdita will distribute only what nature produces, she is doubly limited by nature: autumn flowers, appropriate for Polixenes and Camillo, do not bloom in midsummer, when sheep-shearing occurs; even if it were autumn Perdita could not give them the fairest flowers because she will not crossbreed.

It is fitting that a ruler responds to Perdita’s intimation that the role of art in human affairs is illegitimate. If art is illegitimate, the laws by which rulers govern and the art of statesmanship are also illegitimate. If there is an art that improves nature’s products, Polixenes says,

Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean: so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race (IV. iv. 89–95).

It is ironic that Polixenes upholds a matchmaking practice he is about to condemn in his son’s case.¹⁰ While Polixenes sees the importance of art in improving nonhuman nature, he does not appear to understand that art can improve men. Unlike his counterpart in *Pandosto*, Polixenes does not attempt to arrange a marriage for his son with a suitable princess.¹¹ He seems unaware that the statesman must manage the passions. Perhaps like Florizel he trusts to chance to make things work out well.

Although Perdita now says she agrees with Polixenes’s theory of art and nature, she still refuses to crossbreed, arguing that the improvement is only cosmetic. She will cultivate nature’s bastards, she says, “No more than, were I painted, I would wish / This youth to say ’twere well, and only therefore / Desire to breed by me” (IV. iv. 101–03). But even if one disapproves of cosmetics, it does not follow that all art is similarly worthy of disparagement. For example, Perdita does not show how her censure of cosmetics applies also to gymnastics. Appropriately, since Perdita’s disapproval of art allows no place for education, her excellence does not proceed from education (IV. iv. 582–84). Later a servant announces that she could rule everyone, for everyone

¹⁰J. H. P. Pafford, editor of the Arden edition of *The Winter’s Tale*, points out the irony of this passage (p. 94, note to lines 88–97).

¹¹Egistus (Polixenes), realizing his own age and his son’s age, tells him that “the only care that I have is to see thee well married” (*Pandosto*, p. 203). “Thy youth warneth me to prevent the worst, and mine age to provide the best” (p. 202). Although his foresight proves ineffectual, Egistus does understand that he should be a matchmaker and that he should be watchful over his son’s passions.

would love and follow her (V. i. 105–12). Her excellence is the product solely of nature, and she could rule everyone, it is said, without art. That we cannot accept the servant's assertion is shown by Polixenes's resistance to her marriage to his son. He rejects for his son the naturally beautiful in favor of the conventionally sound. Similarly, sixteen years earlier, he did not try to make the beautiful Hermione his own in defiance of all convention.

Perdita's failure to rule Polixenes simply by beauty is matched by Polixenes' failure to persuade Perdita to cultivate by art the most beautiful flowers. His rhetoric is defective: Perdita will not cultivate nature's bastards, just as Camillo will not, at Polixenes's request, stay in Bohemia. And Florizel and Perdita later respond to Polixenes's command that they never see each other again with silence (IV. iv. 426–42). They will immediately disobey it. We wonder whether Polixenes thinks that speech alone is sufficient to rule, whether Hermione's playful threat of force pointed to his own weakness.

Continuing her distribution, Perdita gives to some guests flowers of summer, because they are men of middle age (IV. iv. 103–08). She earlier told Polixenes that he and Camillo should have autumn flowers, not winter ones as he had suggested, in order to match their age. At that point the reason for her correction was ambiguous: either Polixenes and Camillo are not old, or winter flowers are not appropriate to the old. Because midsummer flowers belong to men of middle age, Perdita must have given autumn flowers to Polixenes and Camillo not because they are of middle age but because autumn flowers are appropriate to the old. Her distribution thus reserves a place for the dead: winter flowers must be appropriate for the dead. Polixenes's belief that the last flowers of the year belong to the old neglects the dead. The man who argues that art should improve nature and therewith defends the possibility of human achievement, perhaps defends the possibility so strongly because he forgets to give a place to death. He ignores whatever might limit his powers. In spite of the difference between Polixenes and Florizel, Florizel is the true son of his father.¹² Perdita's correction of the flowers due to the old silently calls to mind what the statesman omits from his reckoning.

When Perdita comes to Florizel and the other youths, she wishes that she had "some flowers o' th' spring, that might / Become your time of day" (IV. iv. 113–14). To all except the middle-aged, to the group no member of which is named, Perdita lacks the appropriate flowers to give. Because it is midsummer, she has only midsummer flowers; her criterion for distribution is absurd. Only the least important are given their due.

Shortly after Perdita's distribution of flowers, a servant announces a singing peddler, who turns out to be the disguised Autolycus. The servant claims that the peddler's singing resembles the pied piper's piping (IV. iv. 183–88). If all men's ears do grow to Autolycus's tunes, as the servant says,

¹²Compare Florizel's "what I was, I am" (IV. iv. 465) with the characterization of Polixenes presented above.

he would rule all men by means of his singing. (We are reminded of another servant who declares Perdita to be so beautiful that all men would follow her.) But Autolycus's powers fall short of his promise. The clown suggests that Autolycus continue his singing for the clown and the shepherdesses, for "My / father and the gentlemen are in sad talk, and we'll / not trouble them" (IV. iv. 310-13). Others, therefore, are unaffected by the "merry ballad" Autolycus sings (IV. iv. 287); preoccupied with discovering his son's intentions concerning Perdita, Polixenes does not listen to Autolycus. Neither Perdita's beauty nor Autolycus's music can relieve him from concern over Florizel's intentions.

Autolycus "hath songs for man or woman, of all sizes," the servant says, and "no milliner can so fit his customers with gloves" (IV. iv. 193-94). According to this description Autolycus can give to each what is fitting—the very thing Perdita attempted to do. It is obvious at once that Autolycus's distribution does not suffer the limitation to which Perdita's is subject. Since he dispenses man-made ballads, he need not wait the bounty of nature. The servant gives us no hint whether Autolycus fits ballads to his hearers' souls, as Perdita tries to fit flowers to her guests' age, or to a specific condition of their bodies.

While Perdita distributes out of hospitality or goodwill for her guests, Autolycus distributes in his own interest. Not only does he demand payment for his ballads, but he sells such things as laces, ribbons, and clothing. Autolycus defies man-made articles by means of his singing, the servant informs the gathering, so that his listeners desire to have them; his singing renders what he sings about lovable (IV. iv. 209-13). Because Autolycus uses his ballads to sell his articles, he might be said to give his listeners a desire for what is not necessary or appropriate to them. In this regard, however, Autolycus is not omnipotent: just as his merry songs cannot distract Polixenes from his sad talk, his songs fail to make his merchandise attractive to Florizel and Perdita (IV. iv. 357-61).

Only the clown and the two shepherdesses want to purchase Autolycus's ballads. Before they request ballads, an interchange among the three of them reveals their relationships. The clown has made love with one of the women and has promised to do the same with the other. Both women are aware of the situation and neither is jealous of the other, nor does either seem to have ill will for the clown. They joke about their situation (IV. iv. 233-50).

The clown and the two women ask for ballads, buying the third, after rejecting the first two Autolycus offers. The clown evidently seeks a ballad that combines joy and sorrow, for he loves "a ballad even too well—if it be doleful matter merrily set down, or a very pleasant thing indeed and sung lamentably" (IV. iv. 189-92).

The first two ballads offered involve outlandish predicaments that fit the crime. In the first, a usurer's wife gives birth to money bags (IV. iv. 263-66). True to character, Autolycus here rebukes an excessive love of gain; Autolycus

is only a "petty cheat," because of the punishments attached to the greater crime of highway robbery (IV. iii. 27–30). His moderation is in the service of his self-preservation. He sees only that one is punished for immoderation, and not that excessive desire may bring a reward: if the usurer's wife loves money excessively she might prefer to give birth to money bags more than to children. Later Autolycus acknowledges that he is insufficiently a rogue, for he does not thrive as much as he might if others were ignorant of his knavery (V. ii. 113–23). While all Autolycus's disguises succeed, Autolycus fails to disguise the fact that the undisguised Autolycus is a rogue (IV. ii. 13–14; 98; 103). By showing that Autolycus fails to thrive because he is not more a rogue than he is, Shakespeare playfully indicates that he disagrees with Autolycus's immoderate condemnation of immoderation.

The villain of Autolycus's second ballad is a woman "turned into a cold fish" because she "would not exchange flesh with one that loved her" (IV. iv. 176–82). Autolycus understands the resistance to bodily impulses, a kind of attempt to conquer nature, as ridiculous rather than tragic. Far from having any dignity, the woman is only "a cold fish." Again, Autolycus reveals himself in his ballad. He also reveals his listeners: they are moderate lovers of gain and do not hesitate to "exchange flesh"; they follow the teachings of the ballads Autolycus wants to sing for them. The clown expresses his love for the shepherdesses by paying them with trinkets that peddlers sell, and the shepherdesses are satisfied with such favors. They are all selfish, but they do not desire very much for themselves. Shakespeare emphasizes the low aspect of the relationship among these characters by later contrasting a love that delights in giving and receiving trifles with the love of Florizel and Perdita (IV. iv. 357–61).

Perhaps because the clown does not see that these two ballads about the punishment of vice actually teach the virtue of his own vices, he rejects them in favor of a third, "Two maids wooing a man" (IV. iv. 290). Mopsa and Dorcas join Autolycus in singing, for the ballad has three parts—two maids each speak to a man who has promised his love to each of them. Singing the third ballad evidently with reference to the clown and the shepherdesses, Autolycus shows them their own situation as merry rather than as reprehensible or dangerous. A triangle without jealousy and with mirth, provides a contrast to what is dramatized in the first part of *The Winter's Tale*: a triangle with jealousy and without mirth. The first two ballads together help us to understand why a triangle may be without jealousy and hence without tragedy. The characters of this triangle neither want enough nor sacrifice enough to involve themselves in tragic situations.

Autolycus and the characters about whom and to whom he sings are not noble enough for tragedy. Shakespeare contrasts the love of the clown and the shepherdesses not only with the tragic triangle of the first part of the play, but also with the love of Florizel and Perdita, who are the main characters of

The Winter's Tale's comedy. He thus indicates that low comedy is not the only alternative to tragedy. Aristotle said that tragedy involves better men, while comedy involves baser or lower men who are ugly without giving pain.¹³ Autolycus, the clown, and the shepherdesses fit Aristotle's description of comic characters, but Florizel and Perdita do not. In fact, they impress us as being no less noble than the characters of the tragedy of the first part of the play. Shakespeare's comedy would fit Aristotle's definition if it involved only men like Autolycus.

After Autolycus exits, the guests are treated to a dance by countrymen dressed up like satyrs. During the dance, Polixenes and the shepherd whisper about Florizel and Perdita. As a consequence of the conversation, Polixenes decides that the affair is "too far gone" and "'tis time to part them" (IV. iv. 345). Since the shepherd has already informed Polixenes of Florizel's declarations of love for Perdita (IV. iv. 170-78), he now evidently tells him of Florizel's intention to marry her. Not until his son confirms the shepherd's report does Polixenes's anger burst forth. Florizel's intention reveals that he places love above every political concern. Unlike Leontes, Polixenes can conceive of a man loving a woman without attempting to possess her.

Not only does Florizel choose a wife without considering what is politically advantageous, but he also tells his disguised father that no goods are for him worth possessing unless it be for the sake of placing them in the service of Perdita (IV. iv. 372-79). When Florizel thus shows himself to be so different from his father, Polixenes reveals his identity and threatens the lovers. Like Leontes, he has difficulty in seeing himself in his son.

Polixenes's anger and his threats of harsh punishments are reminiscent of Leontes's anger and threats in the first part of the play. Here the potential for tragedy arises, since Florizel and Perdita might be separated, or Polixenes might carry out his threats if the lovers remain adamant. As the earlier conflict turned on the difference between Leontes and Polixenes, the present conflict turns on the difference between Polixenes and Florizel. Despite Polixenes's anger, however, it is Florizel who parallels Leontes. Both Leontes and Florizel are passionate and determined lovers who reject anything that runs counter to their passions. Moreover, as the jealous Leontes will not listen to reason, Florizel refuses to listen to the reason of Camillo and will be advised only by his "fancy." If his reason does not obey his fancy, he welcomes madness (IV. iv. 479-80). The problem of the last part of the play is why the events we witness do not result in tragedy.

When Florizel determines to avoid his father's commands by running away with Perdita, Camillo recommends that the couple go to Sicily. He plans to inform Polixenes of their destination and then go with him in pursuit, thus fulfilling his desire to return home. How this will help Florizel and Perdita is not clear. Camillo decides that Florizel should disguise himself in order to

¹³Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1448a1-5 and 1449a31-38.

reach the ship safely. Autolycus enters, musing on the success of the sheep-shearing and on the gullibility of men. "Admiring the nothing" of his song, men have come close enough to have their pockets picked. To Autolycus's delight, Camillo proposes to exchange Florizel's courtly dress for Autolycus's rags. Autolycus, formerly in Florizel's service, now serves him again. And Autolycus, thrown out of court by Florizel, is now dressed in courtly garments by him. This servant and master appear to be in need of each other. Florizel has recently declared his intention to risk all for love (IV. iv. 539-42). But Florizel also risks the lives of Perdita, the shepherd, and the clown, along with his own (V. i. 151-52). Autolycus, on the other hand, although a lover of gain, does not seek gain if he must risk his own life (IV. iii. 26-30; see also IV. iii. 102-03). When he runs into Camillo and Florizel, he shakes in fear lest they have overheard his boasting of roguery (IV. iv. 628-30).¹⁴ We first encounter Autolycus after a quarrel with Florizel. Later, in the last act, once the recognitions and reunions occur, Autolycus persuades the shepherd and the clown to give a good report of him to Florizel (V. ii. 156-57). Perhaps Autolycus and Florizel will be reconciled.

In the last act, Leontes's counsellors try to persuade him to forget his past sins for which he has paid the penance of sixteen years of sorrow. He should remarry, they believe, so that his kingdom will have an heir (V. i. 27-29). Paulina opposes his remarriage by reminding him that he killed the flawless Hermione (V. i. 12-16; 34-35). Leontes is definitely a changed man, for he is now easily ruled by Paulina. However, he is ruled by Paulina only because she exploits the passion and grief that control him. In speaking to him of the good of his kingdom, his counsellors are reasonable.

Soon after Florizel and Perdita arrive at the Sicilian court, a lord announces Polixenes's approach. Florizel appeals to Leontes to try to persuade Polixenes to allow his marriage to Perdita. He appeals to Leontes's youth, when "you ow'd no more to time / Than I do now" (V. i. 218-19).¹⁵ In contrast to Polixenes, whose admiration of beauty (e.g., IV. iv. 156-59) does not sway him from convention's restraints, Florizel and Leontes ignore conventions of social station when attracted by beauty. Not only does Leontes think that Perdita's lowly station is no impediment to her marriage to a prince, but he even desires to have her for himself. Paulina must rebuke him, and remind him of Hermione (V. i. 223-26).

Meanwhile Perdita's stepfather, who has come along on Florizel's ship, has been apprehended by Polixenes. The scene is set for recognitions and reunions, for the shepherd will reveal how he found Perdita. Father and daugh-

¹⁴The clown, in spite of his simplicity, perceives that Autolycus must become courageous in order to amend his life, or that his fear of death is his strongest passion (V. ii. 154-75). Does the clown perceive Autolycus's defect because he too is a coward (III. iii. 96; 126-28)?

¹⁵Florizel earlier reminded Leontes of other "affections" of youth. When Florizel entered, Leontes is so reminded of Polixenes that he is tempted to "call [Florizel] brother, / As I did him, and speak of something wildly / By us perform'd before" (V. i. 127-29). Does Leontes still not perceive that Polixenes would not, like Leontes, delight in reminiscing about the errors of youth?

ter are united, and Florizel may now wed Perdita without opposition. The joyous assembly goes to Paulina's house to see a statue of Hermione that so apes nature that one expects it to speak. Had the sculptor "himself eternity and could put breath into his work," he "would beguile nature of her custom" (V. ii. 93–101). All are filled with wonder at the sight of the statue. Leontes believes that he sees Hermione herself; he knows that to think the statue lives is madness, but he prefers "the pleasure of that madness" to the "settled senses of the world" (V. iii. 71–73). (Here again we see a resemblance between the old king of Sicily and its future king, Perdita's husband. See IV. iv. 483–85.) Paulina soon claims that she can make the statue move. Leontes would have her do so, apparently unconcerned whether she is assisted by "wicked powers" or about some "lawful business" (V. iii. 89–98). When the statue moves, Leontes asserts "If this be magic, let it be an art lawful as eating" (V. iii. 110–11). What he declares lawful is coincident with the means to the fulfillment of his desires. Just as he earlier declared lawful the means by which Hermione would die, he now declares lawful the means by which she will live.

It is soon clear that there has been no statue and Hermione is alive. Collecting clues the poet has laid, we suppose that some sleep-inducing drug gave her the appearance of death and that she has lived these sixteen years at Paulina's house (V. iii. 18–20; V. ii. 104–07). She has preserved herself, she says, to see Perdita, for the oracle gave hope that Perdita would be found. We are reminded of the beginning: subjects on crutches would desire to live to see Mamillius mature, so excellent a man he promised to be. Hermione, however, has had no way of knowing Perdita's excellence; she preserved herself to see her because she is "mine own" (V. iii. 123).

Paulina encourages everyone to rejoice, while she, "an old turtle, / Will wing me to some wither'd bough and there / My mate, that's never to be found again, / Lament till I am lost" (V. iii. 132–35). The play would end with this reminder of death if Leontes had not at this point proposed that Paulina marry Camillo. Since these two characters have been implicitly contrasted throughout the play, their marriage appears to be a marriage of opposites that will have a good effect on each. Leontes's proposal appears not as something planned beforehand, but as a reaction to Paulina's plan to lament the death of her husband until her own death. Leontes appears exasperated when Paulina introduces a sad note into the general rejoicing, and he acts immediately to stamp it out (V. iii. 135). (His reaction resembles Florizel's reaction to Perdita's warning that events may not turn out well for them.) While Leontes can replace the prospect of death with the prospect of marriage so that the play ends on one note rather than the other, marriage cannot forestall death, at least not for long. While joy may promote life, there are limits. Leontes can rejuvenate his subjects little more than he can resurrect the dead Mamillius.¹⁶

¹⁶Paulina enacts a kind of resurrection from the dead when she summons Hermione down from the platform or pedestal. It has often been observed that Christianity makes tragedy impossible

The end of the play, by means of its references to the statue of Hermione, raises the question of the power of art (V. ii. 94–101; V. iii. 15–20; 65–68; 110). If man can make perfect reproductions of men, and then cause them to live, he might nullify the power of death. Here art is not imitating nature (V. iii. 19–20; 68), but human beings are deceiving others by suggesting that art can do so.

Shakespeare, however, does what the imaginary sculptor and Paulina are supposed to be able to do, for he creates lifelike figures and makes them move and speak. Because Shakespeare's art is not a pretense, like Paulina's, his imitation is not a mockery of men. But what kind of nature is Shakespeare imitating? The nature embodied in Mamillius's winter tale is hostile or at least indifferent to man—a world of frightening sprites and goblins. The nature that tragic man faces is characterized by disunity: the good things cannot be conjoined because they are contradictory. Tragedy occurred when characters interacted who had some virtue, but who seemed necessarily to lack an opposite virtue. As long as one human excellence contradicts others, the good for which men strive does not exist. Men might resign themselves to this fact, rebel against it, or make themselves callous to it by forgetting it. As we have seen, the first two reactions lead to tragedy, the last to the low comedy of Autolycus. But Shakespeare's play ends not with the disunity that prevails in the first part of the play, but with the unions and the reunions of the characters. The differences among the characters do not appear to be in conflict at the end. Unity appears as natural as disunity. Man can respond to nature not with resignation, rebellion, or forgetting, but with joy. Moreover, the unions and the reunions that the poet shows on stage may be a reflection of a unity of the various human goodnesses in his own soul.¹⁷

At the beginning of the play, Camillo maintained that seeing the completion of an excellent human being made life worth living. Just as Shakespeare finishes the winter's tale that Mamillius left unfinished, he may also point to the fulfillment of the prophecy Camillo made about Mamillius. Mamillius's understanding of the meaning of a winter's tale is as one-sided as Mamillius

because it removes the sting of death. (See, for example, Paul's Letter to the Corinthians, I Corinthians 15: 55–57.) Here, however, Paulina can "resurrect" Hermione only because she has not died. The Christian imagery at the end of *The Winter's Tale* points to the contrast between Christianity's triumph over tragedy and Shakespeare's.

¹⁷The union of boldness and moderation in the complete human soul, for example, is reflected on the political level not only in the union of Paulina and Camillo, but also in the reconciliation between Florizel and Autolycus and the marriage of Florizel and Perdita. Florizel is a man who would resist even destiny itself in order to fulfill his desires (IV. iv. 42–46); he immoderately risks his life and even the lives of others. Autolycus, with his strong desire for preservation, and Perdita, with her more elevated submission to nature, serve as correctives to Florizel. But if either of these characters simply ruled Florizel, the marriage between Florizel and Perdita might not have taken place: Perdita might have submitted to Polixenes' demands (IV. iv. 442–51), and Autolycus would not see the point in risking one's life for the woman who appeared to him only as an encumbrance (IV. iv. 678–80).

himself. He understands a winter's tale to be a sad one, one appropriate to a winter's day. But a winter's day does not necessarily connote the gloom of winter. A winter's day is a short one, or one when time flies because it is well spent (I. ii. 169). The chorus Time provided the transition between the tragedy and the comedy. The neutral or indifferent Time was transformed by the end of his speech into a beneficent one, who wished man to spend his time well and suggested that watching *The Winter's Tale* was the way to do it. Time wished men well as if he loved them. Perhaps the poet himself speaks at the end of Time's soliloquy. Or perhaps we are seeing the poet remake Time in his own image. His benevolent influence on the affairs of men replaces the indifferent influence of Time. His benevolence is possible because of his comprehensiveness.

Comedy and tragedy are not equally commingled in *The Winter's Tale*; rather, comedy triumphs over tragedy. We do not have a low comedy that blinds us to suffering and to the situation that necessitates suffering, but a comedy that asserts that this tragic condition is not universal. If man can satisfy his desires, then life need not be a ceaseless striving, and death does not necessarily find man unfulfilled. At least in this sense, death would not be as great a cause of sadness as it otherwise would be.¹⁸ Shakespeare's comedy brings not the blindness of laughter but the joy of insight. Midst the general rejoicing, the assembly exits, each of the cast looking forward to telling his part "in this wide gap of time since first / We were dissever'd" (V. iii. 152–53). Leontes reminds us that the play has been about the differences that separated the characters and that now those differences no longer dissever them. Unity appears to reign.

¹⁸But see Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1117b10–15.