

Doubles and Likenesses-with-difference: *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*

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In her classic study, M. M. Mahood concentrated on wordplay in Shakespeare. My interest here is in non-verbal double meanings and their interplay with the verbal text. Structurally *The Winter's Tale* is obviously a double action divided by Time the Chorus. Part 1's narrative, the movement from court to country and from kings to shepherds, is reversed in Part 2's movement from country to court and from shepherds to kings, as if in a diptych or pair of hinged mirrors: and this double pattern is repeated in other terms: Part 1's suspected disguises are repeated in Part 2's real disguises, and in each part accusation is followed by flight, then by confrontation. At the hinge between the two Parts death meets birth; the end of Part 2 reunites the figures from the beginning of Part 1.

This pattern of doubling, the repetition in the two Parts of events and even individual words, composes patterns of likeness-with-difference—conceits which are far-fetched over a gap between tragedy and comedy, Sicily and Bohemia, winter and spring. Shakespeare makes his double design of the play emphatic but at the same time it is riddling, something that is most obviously emphasised by the two *coups de théâtre*—the bear and the statue—where the stage images embody deep conceits; but also by the mischievous spirit of travesty in which the whole pastoral episode of 4.4. is presented. The double design in fact extends to the smallest verbal links between the two halves of the play, as with the single word “hook,” used by Leontes gloating at the prospect of seizing Hermione: “she / I can hook to me” (2.3.7) and by Polixenes rebuking Florizel: “Thou a sceptre's heir, / That thus affectst a sheep-hook” (4.4.420): or the single word “slip,” used by Perdita in 4.4.100 in the sense “a twig, sprig or small shoot taken from a plant or tree for purposes of grafting

or planting" (*OED* sb.² 1.) but earlier used in another sense, "sin," by her mother playfully ("slipp'd," 1.2.85) and her father savagely ("slippery," 1.2.273). There is something residually difficult in this whole pervasive system of likenesses-with-difference.¹

Early in his career, Shakespeare deliberately explores varied comic styles. He is fascinated by extremes, concentrating intensely in *Love's Labour's Lost* on words and the idea of double meaning, while in *The Comedy of Errors* it is action and the meaning of the double which is thoroughly explored. It is presumably because *The Comedy of Errors* is chiefly concerned with the play of meanings in doubled persons and situations, rather than in words, that it did not earn itself a place in *Shakespeare's Wordplay*; nevertheless I have been struck when re-reading *The Winter's Tale* by the way it has kept reminding me of *The Comedy of Errors*, and looking again at this early comedy from the unusual perspective of *The Winter's Tale* seems to me to illuminate interesting features in both plays—there is the conscious pointing to the absurdity resulting from the extreme pressure placed on narrative conventions, there is the way a whole plot can have a double meaning apparent to an audience but not to the characters—although it is not so much in technique as in substance that the later Shakespeare is still able to draw inspiration from this early piece.

In *The Comedy of Errors* the changes Shakespeare makes to his main source, Plautus, emphasise the pathos of human capacity for error and man's subjection to the power of Fortune. The doubling of masters and servants results in situations in which innocent actions appear guilty; the fact of identical twins puts in question the very idea of Nature, as well as the human quest for self-knowledge. Shakespeare ensures that the audience know more of the situation than the characters do (except for the very last revelation), which increases the impression that the characters are victims, thereby producing effects both ridiculous and pathetic. The wife Adriana declares (2.2.110-46) her belief in the sanctity of marriage as a spiritual union, she and her husband being "undividable, incorporate." The audience is aware—though she is not—that her husband has an identical twin, and that it is to this man, a complete stranger, that she is declaring herself indissolubly knit. The metaphysical paradox that man and wife are one flesh is thus confronted by the

physical paradox that man and brother are identically the same. The longing for reunion that one twin feels for the other is contrasted with the frustration both husband and wife feel within the bonds of marriage. It is in this central concern with twins as a challenge to the exclusive union of man and wife that I find the strongest connection between *The Comedy of Errors* and *The Winter's Tale*; and with this common theme goes a similarity of dramatic technique (allowing for the general development in Shakespeare's art) in the dividing of an audience's attention so that an episode can be understood from two opposite points of view simultaneously—so that the narrative itself, in short, has a double meaning, and generates whole orders of subsidiary double meanings. A clear instance is the already-mentioned episode where the wife, Adriana, fearing her husband is being unfaithful, suddenly comes upon him. She passionately appeals to him to uphold the ideal of marriage as spiritual union:

For know, my love, as easy mayst thou fall
 A drop of water in the breaking gulf,
 And take unmingled thence that drop again,
 Without addition or diminishing,
 As take from me thyself and not me too. (2.2.125-29)

The audience, knowing that this is not her husband but his twin, will not respond with full sympathy to her speech—they will be more interested in its effect on the bewildered Antipholus of Syracuse. He does his best to respond clearly and formally (2.2.147):

Plead you to me, fair dame? I know you not:

but the situation gives this simple utterance two opposite meanings: the audience can see that it is perfectly reasonable—since he is a stranger—but it is equally clear that to Adriana it must appear to be frightening evidence of a sudden change in her husband—it is either calculated malice or madness. Moreover, Adriana's speech with its simile of the drop of water will have another quite unintended significance to this Antipholus, since in his first scene he had likened himself, seeking his lost twin, to

a drop of water,
That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth
(Unseen, inquisitive), confounds himself. (1.2.35-38)

—a speech all the more poignant in retrospect since it marks his last moment of sanity before the entry of the wrong Dromio plunges him deeper and deeper into an ocean of confusion, until he fears he is among

Dark-working sorcerers that change the mind,
Soul-killing witches that deform the body (1.2.99-100)

Although the image of the drop of water, transparent and volatile, can be understood in Christian terms as the soul, in *The Comedy of Errors* these same qualities of transparency and volatility are also associated, ironically, with instability and loss of identity. In the play the image of the drop of water is used as a paradoxical simile both for the relationship between twin and twin and for husband and wife. As the play unfolds, Adriana's assertion of indivisible union with her husband is belied by her suspicion that he is unfaithful, by the audience's observation of his temper and of his relations with the courtesan, and by the remarks of the Abbess about jealous wives; so that the ultimate issue is the crisis in the marriage, something not caused, but only precipitated, by the arrival of the twin: thus a resonant double-meaning is focused in Adriana's passionate question:

How comes it now, my husband, O, how comes it,
That thou art then estranged from thyself? (2.2.119-120)

Here are several hints for the stagecraft as well as the subtext of Act 1 Scene 2 of *The Winter's Tale*, which likewise concerns a married couple, the husband having a (spiritual) twin brother, then being struck suddenly by mistaken jealousy, the wife virtuous but, victim of an apparently compromising situation, exposed to his madness and vindictive rage, amid accusations of witchcraft and conspiracy. Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale* manipulates the audience's perception so that they see events in a double sense: the husband is a tyrant but at the same time

a victim, he is a tragic figure and at the same time as ridiculous as Antipholus of Ephesus in pursuit of Dr Pinch.

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In 3.2. of *The Comedy of Errors* Luciana appeals to her brother-in-law Antipholus to be kinder to his wife: even if he does not love her, she says, at least he could conceal it: if he must commit adultery, then “do it by stealth,” “Be secret-false,”

Look sweet, speak fair, become disloyalty;
Apparel vice like virtue’s harbinger; (3.2.11-12)

Unfortunately she does not realise this is the wrong twin brother, who while being confused by much of what she says, reacts eagerly to what he thinks might be a sexual invitation:

Lay open to my earthy, gross conceit
Smothered in errors, feeble, shallow, weak,
The folded meaning of your words deceit (3.2.34-36)

It is, characteristically for this play, the situation which gives this language its ambiguity. The word “folded” can be glossed (*OED* “folded” *ppl.a.*) as concealed, doubled, twisted, and is equivalent to “implied.” Folding a letter before the ink is dry produces a double image; but of course the usual reason for folding is to conceal the contents. Still, in a play about undiscovered doubles, two sets of identical twins, “folding” seems a suggestive word for Antipholus to use here: doubled, concealed meanings are of the essence.

If, psychologically, a certain threat is inherent in self-mirroring, it may be because the self is naturally prone to division. In *The Comedy of Errors* there is no mistaking the fearful implications of the loss of self-possession, the idea of confounding, the suggestion of drowning implicit in the simile used by the twin to explain that he is “like a drop of water”

That in the ocean seeks another drop,
Who, falling there to find his fellow forth
(Unseen, inquisitive), confounds himself. (1.2.36-38)

From his early plays forward Shakespeare shows a fascination with likenesses-without-difference, in twins and doubles. When Viola in *Twelfth Night* thinks of her lost twin brother she says, to reassure herself, "I my brother know / Yet living in my glass" (3.4.379-80); but when she and her brother, at last reunited, stand side by side, the sight unnerves the hitherto robust Antonio:

How have you made division of yourself?
An apple, cleft in twain, is not more twin. (5.1.222-23)

Her twin is identical except for his opposite sex—Shakespeare developing further from *The Comedy of Errors* his concern with same-sex identical twins, and hence producing in *Twelfth Night* a more complex treatment of issues of sexual identity as well as jealousy.

In *A Midsummer Night's Dream* 3.2. the idea is of spiritual twinning, of the growing together of the two girls Helena and Hermia:

So we grew together,
Like to a double cherry, seeming parted,
But yet an union in partition,
Two lovely berries moulded on one stem;
So with two seeming bodies, but one heart, (3.2.208-12)

Their childhood unity is stressed at the point when sexual rivalry divides them. Helena appeals to Hermia to remember how in childhood they were like identical twins, but whatever she might pretend in these lines, the play makes it clear that the girls are physically quite unlike (e.g. 3.2.290-91). It was not physical but spiritual identity they shared so intensely, but Helena lets her rhetoric run away with her: the unintended confusion of the simile (does this double cherry have two stones or one?) reveals a certain emotional falseness in the speaker, especially as the cherry's propriety as an image of girlhood is undermined minutes earlier by the use Demetrius has made of it, addressing Helena: "Thy lips, those kissing cherries, tempting grow."

Helena's lines are too neatly divided, the similes whimsically pretty but too like one another, making an effect more repetitious than incremental:

We, Hermia, like two artificial gods,
 Have with our needles created both one flower,
 Both on one sampler, sitting on one cushion,
 Both warbling of one song, both in one key,
 As if our hands, our sides, voices, and minds
 Had been incorporate: (3.2.203-8)

This is the rhetorical equivalent of a child's sampler, where time stands still; but for Helena and Hermia sexual love now involves growing apart. The episode concerns love's inducement to betrayal as much as self-betrayal—Helena is at least right to feel that it is intolerable to be treated as if she were a mere sexual token exchangeable for her erstwhile spiritual twin.

At the very beginning of *The Winter's Tale* a conversation between two courtiers stresses, as something extraordinary, the boyhood intimacy of the two kings Leontes and Polixenes—an intimacy which now must inevitably change:

They were train'd together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them
 then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now. (1.1.22-24)

Polixenes asserts of himself and Leontes that they were

Two lads that thought there was no more behind
 But such a day to-morrow as to-day,
 And to be boy eternal. (1.2.63-5)

The play's intense concern with double-meanings in language and stage-imagery—with true ambiguity in interpretation—springs from and returns to this original concern with twinning. In *The Comedy of Errors* the wrong Antipholus twin is unfortunately admitted by the other's wife to "dine above"—to an intimate reconciliation with the unwitting risk of adultery, and in *A Midsummer Night's Dream* the distress of Helena hinges on her erotic exchangeability with Hermia. In this play Leontes and Polixenes, as boys, feel themselves to be twin brothers, and there is the implication that their boyhood parting and their subsequent marriages involve a latent (however suppressed) sense of infidelity, since marriage constitutes a rival kind of union, expressed in the metaphysical

conceit that man and wife are one flesh. The stage action of 1.2. involves an audience in assessing the manner, the signals of voice, face and body, of three figures who at first seem undivided in affection—and the two kings may, in stage performance, be very similar in appearance. Yet the kings' continuing sense of being twins (both are prone to childhood reminiscences) means that Hermione is aware of being subtly excluded, while she is no less aware that, in sharing things with one, she is in a way also sharing with the other: she must find it difficult to distinguish between them in her manner. Her relation to Polixenes will naturally be a close one yet it must not break—and must not be believed to break—the taboos; although among people of royal rank, manner may permit itself some privileged largesse.

Shakespeare complicates the interpretation of body-language by drawing attention to Hermione's state of advanced pregnancy. This might be supposed to guarantee her a degree of sexual immunity: but while it may allow her a more relaxed closeness to Polixenes, it may involve a slight sexual distancing from her husband Leontes, which could naturally produce tension. Furthermore Polixenes' wife, although briefly referred to in 1.2., is absent, and this gives visual emphasis to an exclusive triangular relationship. As the action unfolds attention is concentrated on the way each of the three adults is divided in turn from the remaining pair; and then for Leontes there is a further stage of alienation triggered by the presence of his two offspring, the unborn child as significant as the boy Mamillius. Thus Hermione finds herself in this scene dividing her attention between the two kings, showing affection in different ways to both, and provoking equivocal responses from each. Polixenes is divided between an obligation to go home and requests that he stay. To Leontes the sense of sharing affection with these two is suddenly supplanted by the sense of division as decisive as that in a theatre between spectator and actors. He turns from Hermione, carrying the unborn child, to his boy Mamillius, as if they constituted another choice, rather than mirroring his self-division: the unborn child's survival as a branch of a family, though Leontes tries to kill it, will lead to the growth of a whole new narrative from Act 3 forwards.

Consulting the *OED* under "implicate" I find a quotation of 1610 describing how "the boughes and armes of trees twisted one within

another so implicated the woods together." Here the readiness of the writer (Holland) to exchange the word "armes" for "boughes" strikes a chord if one thinks of Shakespeare's stagecraft in 1.2. of *The Winter's Tale*. In 1.1. Camillo remarks of the two kings "They were trained together in their childhood" (22-23), and he will not let go of the image of the boys' intertwined arms: they "shook hands, as over a vast, and embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed winds" (30-31). Here courtly hyperbole, as it seems, too abruptly magnifies, with the effect of distortion and painful strain—and "vast" can refer to a great stretch of time as well as space. The stress on vastness of scale seems apparently to be a function of courtly rhetorical style, to accentuate the positive, (as is the negative construction), but it will soon enough take on an opposite meaning, as untimely storms both emotional and actual cause destruction. And the onset of this storm will be in Leontes' sudden obsessive attention to simple on-stage actions of Hermione and Polixenes—joining hands, putting an arm round a waist, embracing. Several scenes later the image of arms is still obsessing him, in his Macbeth-like rumination: "the harlot king / Is quite beyond mine arm . . . but she / I can hook to me" (2.3.4-7).

In 1.2. Leontes disgustedly describes the two figures of Hermione and Polixenes: Polixenes "wears" Hermione

like her medal hanging
About his neck (1.2.307-8)

Not until the very last moment of the play is the "great gap of time" closed (5.3.154), its closing emphatically marked by the simple action as Hermione and Leontes enclose one another in embrace; at this Camillo exclaims "She hangs about his neck" (5.3.112). It seems evident from this remark that the major impact here is to be visual, in their embrace, and that the powerful verbal image of 1.2.307 is now triumphantly redeemed in being visually imprinted in action on stage.

In the first scene Camillo's courtly paradox "embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed winds" (1.1.30-31) is so absurd one might almost suspect Shakespeare of a sly pun on Puttenham's term for hyperbole, which is "the over-reacher"—and yet embracing "from the ends of

opposed winds" will be seen retrospectively to be a surprisingly cogent, even epigrammatic comment on this weird story, where the defiant interplay between contrary emotions, surface and depth, microcosmic and macrocosmic scales, easily outdoes anything in Donne.

In the theatre a decision must be made as to how far, if at all, the behaviour of Hermione and Polixenes makes Leontes' interpretation plausible. In the important production of 1910 at New York the two kings were made to look extraordinarily similar, with identical neat, black Italianate beards and similar crowns and furred gowns. In 1.2. Hermione took the hand of Leontes as she spoke the line

The one for ever earn'd a royal husband; (1.2.107)

and she turned to Polixenes with the next line

Th'other for some while a friend.

and took his hand. Moving away, she sat by Polixenes and—as a photograph shows,² read his hand, their heads very close together. When Leontes spoke the lines

To your own bents dispose you; you'll be found,
Be you beneath the sky. (1.2.179-80)

Polixenes placed a shawl on Hermione's shoulders as they moved towards the garden. Such a staging, in placing central emphasis on the actors and reading the dialogue closely for explicit and implicit stage directions, maintains a lifeline to the non-scenic theatre of the Elizabethans; it shows the potential in the non-verbal codes of theatre for a play on meanings which is equivalent to that in the dialogue, and it maintains a tension between dialogue and action. Nevertheless *The Winter's Tale* was the subject of massive adaptation for the Victorian spectacular theatre, and productions continue to efface important features of Shakespeare's style by imposing cuts, changes and anachronistic ideas on the opening scenes. Anthony Quayle in 1948 at Stratford cut all but fifteen lines of 1.1., substituting a "Kean-like Bacchanalia of barbaric intensity: leaping, screaming, knife-throwing Russian dancers".³ In this

production the court for 1.2. was macabre in red, black and gold, dominated by a Tartar Leontes, "the tyrant of the fairytale."⁴ Such a context gave Shakespeare's sophisticated, witty, supple dialogue no chance, and summarily disposed of the question of Leontes' motivation. Trevor Nunn in 1969 disposed of the question with no less clarity, and imposed an alien set of ideas—this time Freudian—with no less force, if with more intellectual self-consciousness. He presented Leontes' soliloquies as part of a dream sequence, Polixenes and Hermione in the dim light, with alternately stylised and naturalistic gestures, enacting the sexual fantasies of Leontes: on the words "How she holds up the neb, the bill to him" Hermione raised her nose and lips to Polixenes in the half-dark.⁵ Given the subtlety of the text, the frequent modern recourse to heavy-handed stage symbolism seems particularly obtuse.

A contrasting tradition is illustrated by Peter Wood's 1960 production which (like the 1910 New York production) showed how stage action and gesture can be derived in detail from the dialogue; this gave Leontes' outbreak of jealousy considerable plausibility. Leontes and Polixenes locked arms as Polixenes said "Farewell, our brother" (1.2.27) and Hermione took the hand of Polixenes and kissed it. At "Tongue-tied our queen" Leontes and Hermione held out their hands to Polixenes, then Leontes moved up-stage watching the other two unobserved, came downstage in time to hear "If you first sinned with us," Hermione embraced Leontes at "The one for ever earned a royal husband" and she embraced Polixenes on the next line, "Th'other for some while a friend," then drew him downstage, holding hands. Leontes was clasped round the waist by Mamillius after his soliloquy "O that is entertainment / My bosom likes not." Later, playing with Mamillius, he fell forward on his knees and Mamillius put his arm round him. A reviewer wrote of this interpretation of Leontes that its details "build a personality open to the storm like tissue paper to a fire."⁶

Even in stage productions closely attentive to the text there is still, after all, a considerable range of choice: Hermione and Polixenes may be shown to display nothing beyond conventional good manners, and in that case Leontes' comments will seem glaringly misplaced, implying him to be either already covertly a prisoner of obsession before the scene begins, or suddenly, inexplicably seized by it in mid-scene. Such an

interpretation, while legitimate, accords less well with the detailed texture of the dialogue, and seems less interesting dramatically, than one where Hermione and Polixenes do show affection which could plausibly be misinterpreted—as in the production of 1910 in New York, or in 1960 by Wood, or more recently, Peter Hall.⁷

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Happiness is identified with the negation of time, an idea Polixenes touches on again when he says his small son “makes a July’s day short as December,” preventing thoughts that “would thicken my blood” (1.2.171). He stresses the idea of youth as freedom from choice: that is how it was with himself and Leontes,

We were as twinn’d lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun,
And bleat the one at th’other. What we chang’d
Was innocence for innocence, we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream’d
That any did. (1.2.67-71)

The two lambs replicated each other, their discourse was identical (well, it was out of the mouths of babes and sucklings), sheer repetition of innocence and innocence: though they were two there was no individuation nor self-division; but when change came (in dream as well as waking) it was because their “weak spirits” were “reared with stronger blood” and this had the direct consequence of guilt.

Had we pursu’d that life,
And our weak spirits ne’er been higher rear’d
With stronger blood, we should have answer’d heaven
Boldly, ‘Not guilty’; (1.2.71-4)

This usage of “blood” is complicated: taken with “reared” it can literally apply to the human child’s progression from being milk-fed (like lambs) to a red-meat diet; and while “blood” is, positively, the full vigour of life, its negative connotation (according to “the doctrine of ill-doing”) is as the seat of animal or sensual appetite, lust and anger. Given the royal status of the boys, the sense of “blood” meaning family and lineage

is present; and in the Bible "blood" often refers to blood shed in sacrifice, and this strengthens the typological association of the lamb with Christ, the redemptive power of innocence sacrificed. If there is a more pervasive Biblical influence in the play than the idea of the Garden of Eden it is (as in *The Comedy of Errors*) that of St Paul, in the Epistles. The idea that in childhood one is filled with the milk of innocence and this is only changed by one's being given a new diet, recalls Paul in Hebrews: "For every one that useth milke, is unexpert of the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But strong meate belongeth to them that are perfect, even those which by reason of use, have their wits exercised to discern both good and evil" (Heb. 5:13-14). Polixenes implies that with adulthood inevitably comes sin, specifically sexual sin, something from which they would have been protected by remaining boys and sharing boyhood affection. It should be noticed how firmly this identifies the adult world of the court with sexual guilt and contrasts it to the child's world of natural innocence, though at the same time implying that it is according to Nature that a child develops from a state of innocence to guilt; and this leaves the door ajar, so to speak, for the Freudian interpretation of childhood.

"Sicilia cannot show himself over-kind to Bohemia" (1.1.21-22) says Camillo, and he is, as M. M. Mahood says, ambiguous. He means "however strong the expression, it cannot exceed Leontes' feelings of love," but can also mean "Leontes tries but fails to keep up the appearance of love" and also "Leontes must not show that his love for Polixenes goes too far." The negative construction casts its shadow, touching as it seems unintentionally on just those areas which give maximum possible embarrassment. Yet this embarrassing issue is very important: it is the implicit concern with forbidden love which contributes greatly to the feeling of release at the end, in the lawful union of the two kings' children. The extent to which the love of the two kings involves anxiety is nevertheless left implicit, and this accounts for much of its power, and is a sign of Shakespeare's mature art. Comparison with *The Comedy of Errors* shows how explicitly, but therefore less deeply, that play explores the experience of delusion, sexual jealousy, cruelty, in relation to Christian ideas of demonic possession and redemption.

The Winter's Tale presents a fascinating exploration of the interplay of the categories of the civilised and the natural, as in the remark:

They were train'd together in their childhoods; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now. (1.1.22-4)

"Training" in Shakespeare usually signifies educating, bringing-up, rearing, but in the horticultural sense training means artificially imposing a shape on a tree as it grows, often by use of a frame or espalier; whereas "branch," to put out a new growth, can also mean to divide into two lines, to deviate, and to turn single into double; and in genealogy—by extension from the metaphor of the family tree—"branch" is used to mean a child. This last sense is at the back of Leontes' mind when he takes his son Mamillius aside to examine his face, anxiously brooding on fatherhood and its shameful issue, cuckold's horns, in his words "o'er head and ears a fork'd one" (1.2.186). It is no accident that "fork'd" suggests not only the branching of horns above but also of the loins below: the image of man as "a poor bare forked animal." Nothing is more tricky than the *faux-naïf* mode of Pastoral. We may think of branching as the natural doubling of a single line. Is it then less natural for identity, having once branched out from the main stem to single separateness, to divide again, become double? If double may mean twice the value of single, in Shakespeare single can also mean weak, and double can mean false.⁸

Implicit in the play's idea of nurture is the intermingling of human cultural practice with natural law, but also of the divine with both these: in the case of the two boys raised together, Nature apparently was made to go against her own idea of individuation as their roots intermingle: they become twins though they are not born twins, and they feel their later separation as damage. The two young princes grew into a loving intimacy like that of naturally-born twins, although they were not: and then this exclusive intimacy persisted beyond the normal time-span, which certainly diverges from cultural norms if not natural law: indeed, the courtier says, it was their royal rank that forced them apart ("royal necessities made separation of their society" 1.1.25-6) but despite that they continued to interchange "loving embassies." If one is aware that

"affection" could have the meaning "lust," however (as in *Lucrece* 271) then an alternative sense, almost the opposite, is implied: that there seeded itself between them this plant and now is its time to grow (branch), widening a division between them.

The image of branching recurs in the second part of the play when used by Leontes' disowned daughter, Perdita, who wishes she had flowers of the Spring for those shepherdesses

That wear upon your virgin branches yet
Your maidenheads growing . . . (4.4.115-6)

In 1.1. Camillo says that the two young boys/trees were planted very close so that they could be trained together: and furthermore, as the gardener pruned and interwove their young branches by art, below ground their roots grew together by nature. Nature and culture impose their double authority, and this is interesting in relation to the phrase "cannot choose": the negative construction has the function of emphasis, stressing sheer irresistibility, but it does not quite efface associations of "branch" with "choice": so Christianity teaches that in due time comes man's adulthood, marked by acquisition of a capacity to exercise free will, not be enslaved to blind instinct.

Associated with this is the idea of natural law as expressed in the time taken by its proceedings, and the trouble caused by disruption of Nature's timing by delay or haste: so pruning aids growth, but must be done at the right time, and in nature too-forward young buds may be killed by late wintry storms. The first words of Polixenes assert that he has delayed his return to his duty and his family during nine months, the natural period for pregnancy but here a delay made by choice and associated with guilt. At a public level Polixenes shows good manners, but taken to an extreme; at a personal level his nine months stay involves over-favouring of his friend as well as neglect of his own wife.

Men and women, though subject to instinct, do also exercise choice in the case of marriage-partners. Leontes stresses that he chose Hermione for love (he makes no reference to dynastic considerations); and Hermione exercised her right of choice too—but Leontes recalls that "three crabbed months soured themselves to death" (another tree-image,

though this crab-apple seems not just characteristically sour but dying (of a disease) as she delayed her choice. To Leontes in his jealousy, memory of Hermione's three months delay suddenly suggests a suspicious link to Polixenes, whose first words are of nine months. For Leontes—himself rashly jumping to conclusions and burning with impatience for revenge—haste, just as much as delay, can be a sign in others of guilt: in 1.2. Leontes obsessively supposes lustful Hermione and Polixenes driven to frantic impatience,

wishing clocks more swift?
Hours, minutes? noon, midnight? (1.2.289-90)

whereas Hermione good-humouredly teases Polixenes about when the due time came for him to experience temptation (1.2.75-86).

Shakespeare goes on to play obliquely with the idea of delay or haste in relation to Nature's measure of time, when Hermione's son Mamillius, surprisingly, shows a marked forwardness, a precociousness, in banter of a sexual kind with the court ladies in 2.1. In 2.3. the audience learns that Perdita's own birth was brought on by Leontes' rage: Hermione consequently was delivered "something before her time" (2.2.23). The second half of the play will open in 3.3. with the Old Shepherd's remark that youth is a prolonged wait for adulthood, a kind of delay in the life-cycle, producing nothing but impulsive disruption, "getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting" (3.3.61-63). In 4.4. stress falls on the forwardness—the precociousness—of youthful Florizel as well as of young Perdita, and how this exposes them to a father's wrath. Perdita, unaware of her own past history, or her dead brother's, or of the present threat posed by Polixenes, dwells on the vulnerability of the very young to premature death, of young maids like flowers that risk a too-hasty appearance in early Spring "before the swallow dares," or like pale primroses

That die unmarried, ere they can behold
Bright Phoebus in his strength (a malady
Most incident to maids) (4.4.123-25)

Perdita, in unaccustomed robes, with the rashness of extreme youth, disputes the theme of art and nature with Polixenes disguised as an old

man (4.4.83-103). She makes a point of insisting she will never touch slips from “bastard” plant varieties, wants nothing to do with “art” because it also can mean artifice. Shakespeare trips Perdita up; a shepherd’s daughter, willing subject to clandestine royal courtship, costumed and garlanded as queen of a Spring festival, likened to Flora and alluding to Persephone: and does she claim herself free of artifice? For his part, Polixenes may very wisely declare that to marry a “gentle scion” to the “wildest stock” (4.4.93) is both natural and bettering nature, but this does not prevent him violently contradicting himself in practice only minutes later.

There is a clear element of travesty in this repetition of themes and episodes from the first half of the play—it goes beyond establishing the contrasting comic mode. When Polixenes does unmask in rage to disrupt the proceedings, Florizel, undismayed, declares himself “delay’d”

But nothing alter’d; What I was, I am;
More straining on for plucking back. (4.4.464-65)

Here this by now well-worn motif of delay/haste takes an unexpected form: and it is ingeniously echoed in the case of the Old Shepherd who, having successfully delayed death well beyond the traditional life-span of the Bible, three score and ten years, fears he is now to be all too hastily cut off:

a man of fourscore three,
That thought to fill his grave in quiet; yea,
To die upon the bed my father died, . . . (4.4.453-55)

Another example of the strain involved in uncovering patterns of likeness-with-difference in this play is the throw-away jocular remark of Autolycus about the Old Shepherd’s fate: “Some say he shall be ston’d; but that fate is too soft for him, say I” (4.4.778-79): this collocation stoned/soft bizarrely anticipates the description of the Old Shepherd weeping “like a weather-bitten conduit of many kings’ reigns” (5.2.55-56), a statue-image that reverses Autolycus’ stoned/soft opposition, and which, though in travesty-form, anticipates the words of the “marble-breasted” Leontes before the statue of Hermione—“does not the stone rebuke me / For being more stone than it?” (5.3.37-38) and the reverse

transformation of Perdita, rapt in admiration, "Standing like stone" beside the statue of Hermione (5.3.42). Obliquely this is also a transformation of the haste/delay motif into that of eternity/time, art/nature.

The play ends with a final wry twist to this motif of time stretched by delay or compressed by haste, of time suspended in dream or illusion contrasted to time measured by the beat of the pulse. In the play's last moment Leontes looks back on its events and concludes that everybody present has "perform'd" a "part" in "this wide gap of time." His word "gap" signifies a measurable extent of time, between then and now, but also a sheer blank, a nothing. To Leontes it is almost as if time had been suspended while they performed a dream-like comedy of errors, and now they are awake again.

* * *

In *The Winter's Tale* successive local dramatic situations carry surface conviction, and drive forward a positively resolvable plot (since this is a Romance, and we know Perdita's true origins, it is ultimately a matter of time), whereas the system of patterning is fraught with discrepancies, with double-meanings. What is striking about the beginning of 1.2. is the stress on subtle divisions between the three figures even before Leontes begins to lose control. Act 5 scene 1 offers an intricate reflection of 1.2. since instead of Hermione and Polixenes it is Perdita and Florizel who confront Leontes, and in this instance comprise a complex of doubled images. The baby present though not yet born in 1.2., and disowned by Leontes, is here in 5.1. grown up: that is to say Perdita, first freed and enfranchised from her father's rage, then again subject to rage from Florizel's father, is now again with her own father and once again unintentionally provoking Leontes, this time erotically. Thanks to Paulina's strong presence, the scene is framed by memories of Hermione: as it begins, Leontes laments his rage that caused his son's death and Hermione's:

I might have look'd upon my queen's full eyes,
Have taken treasure from her lips . . . (5.1.53-54)

As the scene ends Paulina reminds an emotionally reviving Leontes of how beautiful Hermione was, and he responds, in a tone of wonder, that while he has been gazing at Perdita it is Hermione he has been thinking of.

The first sight of Florizel is also a source of wonder to Leontes: he exclaims that Florizel looks like the young Polixenes:

Your mother was most true to wedlock, Prince,
For she did print your royal father off,
Conceiving you. (5.1.124-6)

This recalls the moment in 1.2.122 when Leontes found comfort in Mamillius, saw they were alike, that in fact the boy's nose was "a copy out o' mine." There is also another echo, more interesting because more teasing, of 2.3., when Paulina insisted that Hermione's new-born baby reprinted Leontes' features:

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 (2.3.98-101)

Perhaps no-one in real life is on oath when first showing a father his new-born child, certainly not Paulina. Nevertheless, this insistence on minute details of facial likeness is striking. Now in 5.1. this child, which Paulina had so strongly urged to be a copy of Leontes, is said to be very like Hermione. Perdita is the child of Hermione and Florizel the child of Polixenes, but also, they are doubles for Leontes' two lost children, the baby and Mamillius.

That is to say, this pair, as they stand before Leontes, therefore represent three remembered figures from the past: his wife, his best friend, and himself. These are the very figures which tortured his alienated mind at the beginning of the play. Now the mood is altered, strange but auspicious. Paulina's concern, in reminding Leontes that Florizel was born in the very same hour as Mamillius, is to awaken loving associations in Leontes' mind, but to the play's spectators the information certainly is news, seeming to invite the suggestion that, in the form of a son-in-law, Leontes' lost son is redeemed—but also, more

obscurely, that the twinning of the fathers could have been replicated in the sons. And yet of course he cannot be redeemed, the deeds of 1.2. are irreversible, the fantasy of wish-fulfilment is impossible, loss is permanent, including loss of innocence and twinship.

The emphasis on the likeness of Mamillius and Perdita may be supported, in stage performance, by the same actor doubling the roles; what cannot be done plausibly (though it has been tried), and should not be done thematically, is for one actor to double the roles of Perdita and Hermione. There must be likeness-with-difference between them. Florizel and Perdita are like their parents, but they must not be exchangeably identical to them: that would mean they are destined to repeat the cycle of events that constitute their *Winter's Tale*. Here contrast with *The Comedy of Errors* seems illuminating.

The question of the meaning of the double in *The Comedy of Errors* is distilled finally in stage images which are visually, conclusively, identically double. At the climax the entrance of the Abbess unwittingly brings the two long-separated pairs of twins together. A sense of incredulity combines with deep satisfaction and light-headedness all round: Antipholus wonders "If this be not a dream I see and hear" (5.1.377), but for his brother the preceding action, which the audience know to be entirely explicable as error, has been rather one of nightmare, in which the people he knows best have acted like strangers or treated him insolently or declared him a victim of witchcraft and satanic possession and insanity, and the simplest sensory experience has proved untrustworthy.

Astonishment, therefore, but also a powerful undertow of awe and fear, are palpable as the Duke sees the twins together: "which is the natural man, / And which the spirit?" (5.1.334-35) Their reunion results in the restoration to the Abbess of her sons, and then of her husband, rescued from the gallows in the nick of time. The Abbess, in a conceitful "over-reacher" remarkably anticipating the manner of *The Winter's Tale*, describes this separation as a pregnancy of thirty-three years now astonishingly delivered: "After so long grief, such nativity" (407), and Dromio jests to his twin: "Methinks you are my glass and not my brother" (418). The question of the double is resolved in the figure of the Abbess-mother, long-lost yet always present (though hidden),

combining the opposites of holiness and naturalness, priestess and wife, in a manner to be characterised by Edgar Wind's term of *serio ludere*;⁹ it is Shakespeare playing with serious things and being serious in a playful style.

In the final scene of *The Winter's Tale* Florizel is not identical to, but only like, Polixenes, a likeness-with-difference. This crucially releases him, and his symbolic role, into the future: this is not to be the world of Beckett's *Play*. Perdita is emphatically identified with Hermione but then decisively separated from her, precisely at the point where the statue is seen to have (like old Aegeon in *The Comedy of Errors*) marks of "time's deformed hand" upon it. Hermione returns so much altered, unlike what she was (and Perdita shows what she was like) but truly like her present self, that is, alive to a revived Leontes.

The statue transformation is Hermione's play of incarnation, which distinguishes between the ideal, figurative meanings of Hermione—what she is like for her husband and for her child and for her husband's twin Polixenes—and the actual meaning to herself of being a woman with a husband and daughter, who exists in time, where truth is not to be divided from change.

In this play Shakespeare uses stagecraft, the composition of stage images and action, in the same spirit as he uses words: in the spirit of *serio ludere*. The play is a unique kind of tragicomedy in that it deliberately heightens one's sense of discrepancy and incommensurability, the impossibility of complete resolution, so that when a conclusion is achieved the surprise and pleasure are increased without suppressing the unassimilable elements—indeed it is clear how much must remain unredeemable, and this is the difference from *The Comedy of Errors*. The final stage image, then, can mean what it says, although it is by no means plain and unvarnished.

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NOTES

¹In her study *Shakespeare's Wordplay*, M. M. Mahood pointed to the ambiguity of the word "branch" in *The Winter's Tale*, and used it and other examples to suggest the complex verbal patterning of the text. In her wake, Richard Proudfoot, "Verbal reminiscence and the two-part structure of *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Survey* 29 (1976): 67-78, went on to add instances of verbal patterning between the two halves of the play, but noted "What the verbal links seem to invite is rather a toying with such associations than any attempt to use them as the basis for a systematic exegesis" (69). Proudfoot also suggested some possible doubling of parts which, in stage performance, might extend audience awareness of this two-part structure.

My own approach assumes that Shakespeare writes in the spirit of *serio ludere* (as described by Edgar Wind, see n9 below) and that the double patterns are the basis for a consciously paradoxical exegesis; on this see also Andrew Gurr, "The bear, the statue, and hysteria in *The Winter's Tale*," *SQ* 34 (1983): 420-25, or Brian Gibbons, *Shakespeare and Multiplicity* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993) 73-74 and chapter 8 generally.

All references to Shakespeare are to G. Blakemore Evans, ed., *The Riverside Shakespeare* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

²Reproduced in Dennis Bartholomeusz, *The Winter's Tale in Performance in England and America 1611-1976* (Cambridge: CUP, 1982) 139.

³Bartholomeusz 203.

⁴*The Times*, 7 June 1948, cit. Bartholomeusz 203.

⁵Bartholomeusz 217.

⁶*The Times* 31 August 1960, cit. Bartholomeusz 209.

⁷On Peter Hall see Irving Wardle's review of Hall in *The Times* 20 May 1988, and Roger Warren, *Staging Shakespeare's Late Plays* (Oxford: OUP, 1990) chapter 3.

⁸For "single" meaning weak see 2 *Henry 4* 1.2.183, *Coriolanus* 2.1.37; for "double" meaning "false" see *Much Ado About Nothing* 5.1.169, *Coriolanus* 4.4.13. *Macbeth* offers a well-known instance at 1.6.15-16 of quibbles on "double" and "single": "All our service / In every point twice done, and then done double, / Were poor and single business."

⁹Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (1958; rev. ed. London: Faber and Faber, 1968) 222-35 cites Cusanus, Pico and especially Bruno as important influences on Elizabethan writers in "naturalising" *serio ludere*: "experiments in metaphor, semi-magical exercises which would solemnly entertain and astonish the beholder. These serious games (*serio ludere*) consisted in finding within common experience an unusual object endowed with the kind of contradictory attributes which are difficult to imagine united in the deity" (222). Wind makes the point that the Renaissance thought a baffling account, patently incomplete, should be given, "so that the reader may be induced to figure out the concealed part for himself" (234).