

Emily Hastings
ENG 332 Billing
Research Essay
March 8, 2016

“Lawful as Eating” and as Necessary: Art and Magic in *The Winter’s Tale*

Art and magic play complex roles in *The Winter’s Tale*. While there are certainly fantastic elements in the play’s troubled world, it is not always clear which of these forces is at work in these moments in the play, nor is it certain whether either is appropriate or “lawful as eating,” as Leontes remarks in the final scene (Shakespeare 5.3.111). Robert Appelbaum and others have suggested that this statement of Leontes’ is, in effect, a declaration of the legality of art and magic in the play; I accept this idea, but I take Appelbaum’s line of reasoning even further. I argue that art and magic, despite the debates surrounding their lawfulness or appropriateness, are not only lawful but also necessary in the play to reestablish the disrupted natural order.

That the natural order of the play has been upset is clear in the first half of *The Winter’s Tale*. Rather than ruling over his family and a peaceful kingdom, Leontes has gone mad with jealousy, preventing him from effectively fulfilling his duties as King. Mamilius, Hermione, and others are (seemingly) dead, Perdita lost, and Polixenes and Camillo fled; these characters have all abandoned (willingly or not) their natural roles, leaving the two kingdoms in turmoil. Jennifer Munroe, drawing on early modern husbandry texts, locates the source of this chaos in the loss of mastery Leontes and the other male characters experience; she specifically notes Leontes’ fears of Hermione’s infidelity (146), though Antigonus’ inability to “rule” Paulina when she confronts Leontes is another instance of this failure (Shakespeare 2.3.46). Munroe argues that the language of these early scenes further emphasizes a “deviation from the ‘natural’” (146); of particular interest is the agricultural imagery present in both the first act’s description of the young kings as

“twinned lambs” (Shakespeare 1.2.67) and in Leontes’ representation of wives as ponds “sluiced [in their husbands’] absence” (1.2.193), among similar metaphors: “Whereas husbandry images should point to how men (especially Leontes) might master both their wives and the things of nature, we see instead that they have no control over either; such lack of control signals an imbalance that must be corrected for stasis to resume in the kingdom” (Munroe 146). This interpretation of the language, then, suggests that in order to restore balance to the kingdoms, the characters must regain control over their surroundings (though Munroe ultimately argues that the women need not submit to the men, an idea to which I will return later).

In addition to the imagery of husbandry that Munroe describes, I would also suggest that the play’s uncertain genre conveys the same sense of disorder. The Norton editors note that *The Winter’s Tale* first appeared in print in the First Folio, listed at the end of the comedies, but it is clearly “neither purely comic nor tragic... [existing] in a fluid space between” (3121). Audiences expecting a comedy would likely have been very concerned by the outcome of the first half of the play, a “sad tale” if there ever was one (2.1.26). Scholars like Huston Diehl, Charles Forker, and others have remarked on this “dramaturgical and conceptual dividedness” (Forker 96). Diehl in particular points out the somewhat ironic fear of intermingling several of the characters exhibit: Leontes, in his first moments of doubting Hermione, exclaims, “Too hot, too hot. / To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods” (1.2.108), and Polixenes makes an “impassioned denunciation of his son for ‘mingling faiths’ with a shepherdess” (69). In spite of these worries, “however, Shakespeare creates a play that is something of a *tour de force* in the way it mixes genres, cultural myths, and temporal eras, enacting, it would seem, the very adulteration that its characters fear” (69). By creating what Diehl calls “a mongrel drama” (69) with such a curious mixture of generic traits, Shakespeare is able to keep audiences feeling as unsettled as the

fictional Sicilia and Bohemia are. This “mongrel,” in fact, could even be called unnatural, much like the grafted gillyvors Perdita names “nature’s bastards” (4.4.83); perhaps some of the genre-induced anxiety the play evokes in audiences stems from the potential unnaturalness of this literary grafting, which causes concern just as the violation of nature occurring in the plot does.

Although the disorder faced by the kingdoms and characters of *The Winter’s Tale* at the beginning of the play is easy to see, its solution is not as obvious. Munroe proposes that the play’s men should yield to their wives, “being made subject both to woman and to the natural world” (145), but this alone seems inadequate, especially since Hermione is out of Leontes’ reach at this moment in the play. Appelbaum, I believe, comes closer to the mark when, in his discussion of the meanings of “lawful” in Leontes’ “If this be magic, let it be an art lawful as eating” (Shakespeare 5.3.110-1) in the statue scene, he suggests that “the solution to the problem may involve an embrace of supplementary artifice... or even of undecidability” (Appelbaum 36). Appelbaum is speaking specifically about “crises of legitimation” (36) at this point in his essay, but it appears that the problems causing the kingdoms’ disorder fall into this category. Leontes, in questioning Hermione’s chastity, is anxious about his children’s legitimacy; similarly, Polixenes’ later concerns over Florizel’s choice of wife revolve around making sure their children are “the fruit of the lawful marriage between a monarch and a *rightfully chosen* consort” (35, emphasis added). Since the play’s major conflicts are “crises of legitimation,” then, Appelbaum’s suggestion of “supplementary artifice” appears to be a suitable solution.

Curiously, though, Appelbaum does not appear to make this connection, or at least does not explain it adequately. Immediately following his suggestion of artifice, he pronounces that “in *The Winter’s Tale* the trauma of Leontes’s madness, tyranny, and violence comes to an end when the highest of tribunals—the divine oracle of Apollo—speaks its verdict” (36). Applebaum

seems to present the oracle here as the ultimate, inviolable authority; if he is construing Apollo's declaration as artifice, he does not appear to be adhering to any of the definitions of the word in the *OED*. If artifice is to be the answer to the play's problems, though, there is a useful definition in the list: "Technical skill; artistry; ingenuity" ("artifice"). Arguably, both art and magic (and their practitioners) possess these qualities, so it seems that a solution may lie in this direction.

Indeed, the play makes a major transition when the first elements of artifice appear. The arrival of the supernatural Time in the beginning of the fourth act signals not only the shift in the setting to Bohemia, but also a transition in genres from the tragic events of the first half of the play to the pastoral and comedy of the second. This change immediately lends a lighter tone to the play and relieves some of audiences' anxiety, which seems to suggest that it will be able to do the same for the characters. Art and magic appear numerous times throughout this section of the play, from Time, to the "unusual weeds" that both leave Perdita "goddess-like pranked up" and hint at her true heritage (Shakespeare 4.4.1, 10), to the final statue scene restoring Hermione to her family. It is not always clear, however, which of these events are magical and which are merely art—nor is it clear if this is even a useful distinction.

The episode most controversial in this sense is the statue scene at the end of the play. Hermione's statue, according to the Third Gentleman of the previous scene, was ostensibly created "by that rare Italian master, Giulio Romano" (5.2.89-90), a well-known painter of the Mannerist movement (Nuyts-Giornal 64). In her work, Joséé Nuyts-Giornal explains that Mannerist art often involved the "appropriation and perpetual recycling of ideas and inventions in its flexible borrowings from different artistic supports," leading to "one artistic medium cross-breeding with another... which finally blurred the established norms and limits attached to a *métier*" (66-7). Interestingly, this description is strikingly similar to Diehl's earlier portrayal of

the play itself as a “*tour de force*” of intermingling, suggesting a very deliberate choice of the artist on Shakespeare’s part. Complicating the matter, though, is the fact that Romano died in 1546, long before the play’s publication (Roberts 139), indicating perhaps that the statue’s real creator is someone else. This is assuming, of course, that the statue actually is a statue and not Hermione’s body preserved in stone, or even a living Hermione posing as art only for the duration of the final scene.

Many critics either reserve judgment on whether magic is involved (as Appelbaum does) or seem to agree with Gareth Roberts that “apparently... in the fictional world of *The Winter’s Tale* ... magic is not real” (140), citing Hermione’s “I... have preserved / myself to see the issue” (Shakespeare 5.3.125-28) as proof that she was alive and in hiding after her supposed death. I take a slightly different approach to the question; while I do not rule magic out as a possible explanation of the statue scene (mostly because Leontes apparently saw Hermione’s dead body), I believe that in some sense it does not matter whether this and the other fantastic elements of the play are magical or not. Art and magic were very closely related in Shakespeare’s time, and both are literally supernatural, existing contrary to nature and perhaps able to influence it. To me, the uncertainty seems more important than actually reaching a consensus in this question; the ambiguity certainly appears to be intentional on Shakespeare’s part, since, as Roberts notes, the explanations offered by Hermione and Paulina are “not exactly explicit” and are “not giving much away” (140). It is even possible, because the distinction between the two is so unclear, that both art and magic are required to solve the characters’ problems. This idea is also appealing because it supports Appelbaum’s suggestion of the possible need for “undecidability” and again reflects the uncertainty in the play’s genre.

If both art and magic are necessary, then, we should look to Paulina for a solution to the play's problems, since she, as the Norton editors note, "emerges [in the play's second half] as the chief representative of the ameliorative artist who uses her skills to make better the world around her" (Shakespeare 3129). She is responsible not only for Hermione's wondrous resurrection (whether it comes about by magic or art), but also for artfully grooming Leontes and the court to be prepared for it. Incidentally, through her constant rebukes of Leontes to this end, Paulina also seems to fulfill Munroe's desire for the play's men to submit to women and nature, as Leontes willingly obeys and follows Paulina, even after the restoration of his wife, and finally recognizes his natural daughter as his own. This submission is perhaps not as tidy as Munroe would like, though, as the matter is complicated by Leontes' sudden betrothal of Paulina to Camillo, possibly an attempt to maintain power even as he begs her to "hastily lead [the characters] away" (5.3.155). The betrothal also violates the natural image Paulina paints of herself as "an old turtle" planning to "wing [her] away to some withered bough" and lament her "mate, that's never to be found again" (5.3.132-34). Perhaps this reassertion of male power over women and nature is also part of restoring the natural order, though; in destroying the picture of nature created by Paulina, Leontes regains control over his family and court, reclaiming his "rightful" place at the top. At the same time, he neatly pairs off the only unattached characters remaining onstage in an ending that befits the comedy the play has become.

Despite the fact that her actions bring about this restoration of the play's natural order, Paulina herself seems to be concerned with the appropriateness and legality of her artifice, revealing to Leontes her fear that those present during the statue scene will think she is "assisted / By wicked powers" or that she does "unlawful business" (5.3.90-1, 96). Her anxiety suggests that audiences should concern themselves with this matter as well. Indeed, Charles Forker warns

that some of the occurrences of art in the play might be illegitimate, “bastard art, art of the kind that bears no mimetic relation to the truth and that interferes... with the sanctity of ‘great creating nature’” (99). Forker’s comments almost seem to echo the antitheatricalists of Shakespeare’s time, who as Diehl notes, “denounced [art and the stage] as idolatrous” (74) for a variety of ethical and religious reasons. Given the religious – and particularly Catholic—imagery of the statue scene (characters desiring to kiss the statue, bowing to it and asking its blessing), Shakespeare appears to be deliberately alerting audiences to potential wrongdoing.

Among both characters and audiences, there seem to be two main concerns in the scene: that Paulina’s actions are witchcraft and therefore unlawful, and that something un-Protestant is happening (and therefore the events of the scene are equally unlawful). Regarding the first issue, both Roberts and Appelbaum argue that Leontes, in his line, “If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (Shakespeare 5.3.110-1), legitimatizes Paulina’s seeming magic as art. Though grammatically the line is a subjunctive conditional, Appelbaum says, Leontes’ status as king makes it a command of lawfulness, almost forcing the questionable actions to agree with human, natural, or divine law:

“Let it be lawful” can mean any of these things, and probably, in the context of a play where a divine oracle establishes its authority over everyone and everything, and yet where art and nature and the difference between the two are so frequently an issue, means all these things at once. “Let it be lawful” can signify, let it accord with eternal law; let it accord with human law; or let it accord with natural law. (38)

Letting Leontes’ line signify concurrence with “eternal law” begins to address the second concern of the scene as well, though as Appelbaum notes, “it would be presumptuous for

Leontes to exert authority over divine” law, even if he is king (38). Diehl suggests instead that many of the religious anxieties antitheatricalists and others have with the statue scene can be resolved by exploring Paulina’s connections to the biblical Paul.

According to Diehl, Paul himself was “a hybrid figure, both a Roman citizen and a Jew who converted to Christianity” whose “vehement opposition to the older, pagan forms of belief resonated strongly with early Protestants, who identified the religions of the Greco-Roman world—religions Paul attacked as idolatrous and superstitious—with Roman Catholicism” (70). While Paul’s hybrid nature connects him to the play as a whole, his specific ties to Paulina are of particular interest in dismissing the religious concerns of the final scene. Not only do the two figures share a name, but they also share a powerful rhetorical form, the rebuke, which Paulina utilizes to great effect against Leontes throughout the play. By so emphasizing the links between Paulina and the apostle revered by early Protestants as fiercely anti-idolatrous and newly anti-Catholic, Shakespeare seems to be proclaiming the former’s potentially troublesome actions of artifice above suspicion, and the statue a “wonder born of rebuke and remembrance” rather than an idolatrous crime (80).

With these concerns regarding the final scene addressed, it seems that art and magic are not only lawful in the world of the play but also answer the character’s problems. The question that remains, then, is why they are necessary to reestablish the natural order. It certainly seems a paradox that forces so contrary to nature are needed to restore it; the play itself does provide a few hints, though. It is fitting, perhaps, that Paulina, before resorting to artifice, first attempts to convince Leontes of Perdita’s legitimacy by virtue of the “good goddess Nature” alone, citing the similarities between the baby’s appearance and his own as proof of her parentage (Shakespeare 2.3.103). This plan, however, fails when Leontes refuses to accept Perdita. Nature,

then, is unable to halt the tragedy of the first half of the play. This failure seems significant, and is perhaps the reason why artifice in the form of art and magic is required: Leontes' unreasonable jealousy is so contrary to nature that only "operations which transcend nature" are able to restore the characters' lives to what they should be (Roberts 137). Polixenes may even refer to these "operations" in his famous debate with Perdita during the sheep shearing scene; his mention of "an art / Which does mend nature" (Shakespeare 4.4.95-6) seems an apt description for the role art and magic play in *The Winter's Tale*.

Art and magic are potentially very contentious subjects in the play. In a world where the natural order has been so obviously upset, it seems unlikely that forces considered the opposite of nature would be able to help. However, this kind of artifice shows itself to be the solution to the play's problems, restoring Hermione and Perdita to their rightful places and setting up a new generation of legitimate rulers for the two kingdoms. Paulina's artifice especially plays a role in this restoration, and despite fears of superstition and idolatry from both within and without the play, it proves lawful through the woman's vehement denials of wrongdoing and her connections with the apostle Paul, as well as Leontes' declarations of legality. That such supernatural powers as art and magic are required to repair the natural order is surprising, and almost seems to convey a very bleak opinion of humans on Shakespeare's part, namely that we are able to make mistakes so bad that even nature cannot fix them. In contrast, however, the necessity of artifice in the play may actually point to the belief that humans are capable beings, able to use their skills (whether in art, magic, or something else) to restore what we have destroyed. If this is the case, then the role of this variety of artifice in *The Winter's Tale* is really a matter of hope, and as the Norton editors suggest, one "of exquisite joy wrested by work, art, and good fortune from the pains of the imperfect world that men and women have made" (3130).

Works Cited

- Appelbaum, Robert. "‘Lawful As Eating’: Art, Life, And Magic in *The Winter’s Tale*." *Shakespeare Studies* 42. (2014): 32-41. *MLA International Bibliography*. Web. 14 Feb. 2016.
- “artifice, n.” *OED Online*. Oxford University Press, December 2015. Web. 26 February 2016.
- Diehl, Huston. "‘Does Not The Stone Rebuke Me?’: The Pauline Rebuke and Paulina’s Lawful Magic in *The Winter’s Tale*." *Shakespeare and the Cultures of Performance*. Eds. Paul Yachnin and Patricia Badir. Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2008. 69-82. Print.
- Forker, Charles R. "Negotiating The Paradoxes Of Art and Nature in *The Winter’s Tale*." *Approaches to Teaching Shakespeare's The Tempest and Other Late Romances*. Ed. Maurice Hunt. New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1992. 94-102. Print.
- Munroe, Jennifer. "It’s All About The Gillyvors: Engendering Art and Nature In *The Winter’s Tale*." *Ecocritical Shakespeare*. Eds. Lynne Bruckner and Dan Brayton. Surrey, England: Ashgate, 2011. 139-154. Print.
- Nuyts-Giornal, Josée. "Shakespearean Virtuosity in *The Winter’s Tale* and the Mannerist *Tour De Force*." *The Spectacular in and Around Shakespeare*. Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars, 2009. 63-81. *ILLiad*. Web. 15 Feb. 2016.
- Roberts, Gareth. "‘An Art As Lawful As Eating’? Magic in *The Tempest* And *The Winter’s Tale*." *Shakespeare’s Late Plays: New Readings*. Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh UP, 1999. 126-142. Print.
- Shakespeare, William. *The Winter’s Tale*. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Ed. Stephen Greenblatt. 3rd ed. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2016. pp. 3133-3204.