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Introduction

As my title indicates this book is not a study of the text of *The Winter's Tale* alone; it is a study of the text performed over a period of time. But what is 'performance'? The word 'perform', derived from *parfournir* (OF), originally meant 'to accomplish completely'. In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries the word had this sense, 'to complete by adding what is wanting', 'to finish, perfect' (OED). Some such meaning is in play when Prospero questions Ariel in *The Tempest*:

> PROSPERO: Hast thou, spirit,
> Perform'd to point the tempest that I bade thee?

'Performed to point' means 'to the smallest detail, exactly, completely'.[1] Ariel responds saying that he has actualised the tempest

> To every article.
> I boarded the King's ship. Now on the beak,
> Now in the waist, the deck, in every cabin
> I flamed amazement: sometime I'ld divide,
> And burn in many places; on the topmast,
> The yards, and bowsprit, would I flame distinctly,
> Then meet and join. (I.ii.193–201)

Ariel's performance is not merely finished to the last detail; it has a great deal of energy, flames amazement and burns in many places while possessing a necessary unity of form which 'meet and join' suggest. In the end Ariel pleases the man who conceived the idea of his performance, for Prospero commends him:

> Ariel, thy charge
> Exactly is performed (I.ii.237–8)

Yehudi Menuhin once said that the greatest praise he ever received came after he had played a composition by Bartók, when the composer, who was in the audience, congratulated him saying: 'You performed my music exactly as I had imagined it.' Composers like Bartók and playwrights like

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Shakespeare knew that their texts achieve completion only in performance. The text, even Shakespeare's, is only the score which requires expression if its imagined form is to be achieved.

A play needs the art of dramatic performance to complete itself. And unlike the arts of painting, of poetry and fiction, the dramatic art cannot be completed by the playwright alone. He needs the co-operation of the actor as well as numerous other performers, all the craftsmen of the stage, the director, the set designer, the director of lighting, the creator of costumes, the designer of properties, the composer, the musical director, the stage-manager, the prompter, the carpenter, the wardrobe mistress, and all those who assist them. In poetic drama, the devices of the Elizabethan playwright's craft like the soliloquy and the aside needed the thrust-stage and an audience around it. Performance demands the co-operation of a multitude of practical elements, a co-operation that on the nights of rehearsal and performance may demand an orchestral precision. There may be some cultures so philistine that retreat and seclusion may become the necessary condition of great art. In such cultures a genuine dramatic art will become nearly impossible, for the art of drama involves participation in a living human community.

As the instruments of this art are human, the patterns of interpretation change from one age to another. The necessary absence of the immutable is both the strength and weakness of the art of performance. For the human element on the stage can sometimes be impervious to genius, intractable, as W. B. Yeats found out:

> My curse on plays
> That have to be set up in fifty ways,
> On the day's war with every knave and dolt,
> Theatre business, management of men.
> ('The Fascination of What's Difficult')

Yet the art of performance we know can touch the sacred and become like the miraculous bird set upon a golden bough to sing to lords and ladies of Byzantium of what is past or passing or to come, even while it draws its vitality from the fury and the mire of human veins.

Performance in its ideal sense is an act of creation distinguished by its inwardness, the understanding of the play from within, as well as the firm grasp of every objective detail on its surface. But the history of performance, as we might expect, shows some astonishing crevasses yawning between such an ideal and the changing realities of the stage. The Ariels of the stage have not always completely understood *The Winter's Tale*. In Garrick's hands an adaptation of the play became a popular as well as a critical success in eighteenth-century terms but, had Shakespeare come back from

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the dead to Drury Lane, he would have seen the great open stage that he had known reduced to a ledge, a charming eighteenth-century picture in the style of Fragonard filling the frame, his play reduced to its comic, pastoral and romantic elements, the tragic first half described in a brief conversation, the unities in this way carefully restored. The ghost of Ben Jonson might have hovered in the wings rather pleased by all this, and by the restoration of geographical fact, for Shakespeare's sea-coast has been transported to Bithynia, and the sea-coast of Bohemia can no longer give occasion for scandal. When in the second half of the eighteenth century the actors re-formed *The Winter's Tale*, it gave the most critical and enlightened members of their audience much pleasure. Such acts of performance tell us more about the values, the taste and theatrical conventions of the age, less about Shakespeare's play. As acts of criticism they may have a useful negative function, forcing us to consider the play afresh.

In the age of Romanticism, with its discovery of the pleasures of the untrammelled imagination, respect for the neo-classic unities began to fade. John Philip Kemble restored the tragic first half of the play and was serenely untroubled by its historical and geographical inconsistencies. Bohemia with its imaginary sea-coast was restored to the stage, though the text was still knocked about a good deal. Kemble made some structural alterations to the play and preferred Garrick's ending. To the Victorian age the absence of the unities presented no problem, but the historical and geographical inconsistencies in the play certainly did. In Charles Kean's immensely popular production, one of the longest-running performances of the Victorian era, Polixenes once more ruled the kingdom of Bithynia, which had a verifiable sea-coast on maps of Asia Minor, and any historical references inconsistent with right dates for the Delphic oracle were removed, like the reference to the Renaissance painter Giulio Romano, or Christian allusions, whether to Judas, to Christian burial or to grace, or any suspicious aroma of Warwickshire England in Shakespeare's time. Kean almost succeeded in making *The Winter's Tale* a Greek play for Victorian times. Literalising a metaphoric vehicle by creating elaborate, realistic settings he attempted to resurrect the period of the Delphic oracle, four hundred centuries before Christ. The form he imposed on the text in performance was not as Shakespeare might have imagined it, and depended very much on a linear Victorian view of time. A study of the long-running popular productions of *The Winter's Tale* from Kean to Mary Anderson tells us a great deal about Victorian taste. It has a significant place in social history and the history of theatrical forms, but is of minor significance only in the history of Shakespearian criticism. The truth is the Victorians respected Shakespeare as a poet, but hardly enough as a playwright. A. C. Bradley, after all, read *King Lear* for its poetry, not for its drama.

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That the dramatic principles, the theatrical values and the poetry are inseparable in Shakespeare's mature art was not re-discovered in the professional theatre until 1910 in New York, and 1912 in London. The play within which this discovery was first made, and which therefore occupies an important place in the history of Shakespearian performance, was *The Winter's Tale*. The Shakespeare revolution on the stage was in part a return to Elizabethan principles at work in Shakespeare's theatrical art. That the discovery of the distinctive rhythms of the swift succession and continuity of his scenes, of the art of the direct address of the Shakespearian actor to his audience, of the cyclical, Elizabethan sense of time was first made in the professional theatre through *The Winter's Tale*, is not without its significance. The play perhaps as Shakespeare imagined it was first presented at the Globe and at the court of James I. At court it was evidently liked more than *King Lear*, and was not presented again in a comparable form until Winthrop Ames gave it at the New Theatre in New York, and Granville-Barker at the Savoy in London. Barker's production was both contemporary and Elizabethan. A study of his production makes Shakespeare look like a contemporary of Picasso and Matisse, of Bakst and Diaghilev, while remaining himself. When Joseph Wood Krutch saw a production of *The Winter's Tale* some years later in New York he observed that an age which could respond to the gay and grave arbitrariness of a Matisse would find the play immediately apprehensible.

Perhaps the time was right. The early seventeenth century was better understood in the early twentieth century than at any other time. The young T. S. Eliot felt at the time that he had more affinities with Donne and the Jacobean dramatists than he had with the great Victorians, the Romantics, or the poets of the eighteenth century. Shakespeare's cyclical sense of time, which accounts for the coexistence of past and present in *The Winter's Tale*, of the amalgamation in a dramatic present of the Delphic oracle, of Judas, Giulio Romano and Warwickshire in the seventeenth century, is a good deal like Eliot's 'historical sense', which he defined not as a sense of 'the pastness of the past but of its presence'.[2] The cyclical sense of time informs that most haunting of contemporary poems, 'The Waste Land'. D. H. Lawrence believed that this sense of time was pre-Christian: 'To appreciate the pagan manner of thought', he wrote, 'we have to drop our own manner of on-and-on-and-on, from start to finish, and allow the mind to move in cycles, or to flit here and there over a cluster of images. Our idea of time as a continuity in an eternal straight line has crippled our consciousness cruelly.'[3]

The Victorian age found *The Winter's Tale* irresistibly attractive for the wrong reasons, imposing a convention of spectacular, elaborate realism upon it, as Charles Kean did, or blending the convention with conventions

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of romance, of 'feerie' in the second half of the play, as the Saxe-Meiningen Company attempted to do, which was slightly less limiting. The age of high modernism in the early twentieth century was attracted to it for the right reasons. Had Shakespeare been present when Granville-Barker presented *The Winter's Tale* on the stage in England, Winthrop Ames in America, Reinhardt in Germany and Jacques Copeau in France, he would not, I think, have wanted to sue for damages, as he almost certainly would have done had he been there when Garrick staged the second half of his play only or when Charles Kean staged a linear version of it. He would probably have been appalled by the fact that those versions of his play were popular successes and would have wondered what had happened to English audiences since his time.

There has been no automatic rising curve of progress since Granville-Barker staged the play in 1912. But some of the most creative directors of our time, from London and Stratford-upon-Avon, to Stratford, Connecticut, and Ashland, Oregon, among them Peter Brook and Trevor Nunn, have attempted to come to terms with the play's conventions and its form, as well as with the living texture of its dramatic poetry, re-creating it for our time, less brilliantly than Barker perhaps, but with greater understanding of its art than either Kean or Garrick.

Macbeth and the Players considered interpretations of the two principal characters in that play on the English stage. In '*The Winter's Tale' in performance* I have attempted, rather like the person in hell who peered at Dante and Virgil as a tailor peers through the eye of a needle, to look at whole performances. *The Winter's Tale* lends itself to such an enterprise as mine, for it is not really a star vehicle. It depends more than *Macbeth* on the whole ensemble and rests more on the shoulders of a whole range of characters, down to the small but immensely significant roles of the bear and Time.

A historical study of a play in performance can unfold many complex cultural significances, while extending our understanding of the text and enriching our awareness of its form and meaning. Such a study can open up new areas of enquiry if it is conducted in terms of the principle that the historical study of poetic drama on the stage, to be of any use, must be sensitive to poetic and dramatic as well as theatrical values. Theatrical research dedicated to the pursuit of the fact will lie inert until warmed into life by the encounter with critical and creative issues, when it can help to illuminate this or that aspect of a play's art or its peculiar form.

A purely literary–critical approach on the other hand is not adequate for an understanding of *The Winter's Tale*, for it was the supreme artistic expression of a popular dramatic and theatrical tradition still surviving in early seventeenth-century England, and soon to be extinguished. If *The*

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Tempest is the finest expression of the neo-classic traditions of the Renaissance, preserving with artistry and no sacrifice of essential life the unities of time, place, and action, and using these exacting canons to give the dramatic poetry concentration and intensity, *The Winter's Tale* is the supreme expression of the popular, native tradition of drama,[4] that folk tradition which Sir Philip Sidney with elegant, neo-classic embarrassment thought was 'faulty' in place and time, 'the two necessary companions of all corporall actions':

> Now ye shall have three ladies walk to gather flowers, and then we must believe the stage to be a garden. By and by we hear news of a shipwreck in the same place and then we are to blame, if we accept it not for a rock. . .
>
> Now of time they are more liberal . . . she is got with child, delivered of a fair boy, he is lost, groweth a man, and is ready to get another with child, and all this in two hours space.[5]

While on the surface *The Winter's Tale* looks very much like the folk drama Sidney describes, a close reading shows that the carelessness is quite careful, the disorganisation apparently deliberate. Had Polonius been there he would doubtless have informed Hamlet that the play was tragical-comical-romantic-pastoral and probably historical; yet the disparate forms are welded into a new whole through an intricate pattern of correspondences, verbal, dramatic and theatrical.

The disparate forms reflect the concerns and preoccupations of a whole society. In the gracious civilities of the opening scene Shakespeare holds a mirror up to a romantic, courtly ideal once achieved, Castiglione tells us, in the Urbino of Guidobaldo da Montefeltro. The chit-chat of Archidamus and Camillo sounds familiar but not coarse, elegant but not ostentatious. But this serenely civilised surface is shattered by the coarse and tragic sexual jealousy of Leontes. The ideal of courtly civilisation is severely tested by the sheer arbitrariness of the tragic, by 'devouring Time', which threatens the pastoral Arcadian world as well – Eden set in the Warwickshire countryside. What is historically and humanly significant is not just that Shakespeare fleshes out the pastoral Arcadian world where beauty can be scratched with briars and the dream of courtliness which sexual jealousy and the blind exercise of arbitrary power can turn into a nightmare, but that he gives us a glimpse of their possible interrelationship in an organic culture where princes like 'twinned lambs' 'frisk i'th'sun', where a princess is brought up as a shepherdess, a 'queen of curds and cream'. If we glimpse in Leontes the abysses of the human spirit, a view of the world cynical in its disillusion, at the end of the play we experience a harmony which takes into account the ravages of Time, the 'wrinkles' of Hermione. Grace works within nature. The personal rhythms of destruction and renewal are profoundly linked to the wider seasonal rhythms. Through the poetry of the

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seasons we sense in *The Winter's Tale* the continuity of a culture that reaches back to the world of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. As in that poem the high dream enshrined in myth is experienced in the landscapes of a richly local world, so in the play Dis's flowers fall from a wagon trundled through the Warwickshire countryside.

The red blood reigns in the winter's pale. Life hibernates beneath the desolation of ice and snow, and in the psychological world as well tragedy and comedy become part of a single experience. 'Blossom, speed thee well!' (III.iii.45), says Antigonus when he leaves the babe Perdita on the desolate coast of Bohemia, as the bear prowls about the stage and the storm rages. The bear spares the child but devours Antigonus; a hush descends after the grim comedy of the Clown's speech when the Shepherd reminds us of the mysteries of death and renewal:

> Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born.
> (III.iii.109–10)

Shakespeare gives the ancient theme of the child lost and found an English setting and a Christian illumination, but the moment draws its power from pre-Christian memories: the theme of the child who redeems the time can be found in an ancient fragment of a comedy, *The Arbitration* by Menander, or in its tragic form in *Oedipus Rex*. The personal rhythms are linked through theatrical and verbal images to the wider, cyclical rhythms of destruction and growth. *The Winter's Tale* is the last completely inward glimpse in English drama of an organic English culture (the plays of John Millington Synge, which deal exclusively with the Irish folk, seem slight by comparison). The play has been appropriately entitled by Shakespeare not *A Winter's Tale* but *The Winter's Tale*.

The play and its critics

Eighteenth-century critics with their neo-classic assumptions were not sympathetic readers of *The Winter's Tale*. Pope thought the play was not Shakespeare's work at all except for a few scenes and stray passages. The cavalier treatment of chronology, as well as the map of Europe, what Dr Johnson and Warburton saw as 'improbabilities', did not present a problem to Romantic critics like Coleridge and Hazlitt. Coleridge in fact was impressed by the play's realism, and saw it as a remarkably accurate study of sexual jealousy. Hazlitt freely accepted its play of opposites, the tragic passion, the comic vitality and the romance. He welcomed the courtship of Florizel and Perdita as we welcome the return of the spring.

At the end of the Victorian age, critics like Arthur Quiller-Couch suggested that *The Winter's Tale* was essentially a fantasy, and Lytton Strachey

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regarded it as a part of the literature of escape. This response tells us a good deal more about Strachey than about the play. The passage is worth quoting as a curiosity:

> It is difficult to resist the conclusion that Shakespeare was getting bored himself. Bored with people, bored with real life, bored with drama, bored, in fact, with everything except poetry and poetical dreams. He is no longer interested, one often feels, in what happens, or who says what, so long as he can find place for a faultless lyric, or a new unimagined rhythmical effect, or a grand and mystic speech.[6]

As Philip Martin has pointed out in an unpublished essay, this note is struck again, oddly in 1952, by John F. Danby:

> Up to 1606 Shakespeare was growing . . . After that time all his work seems to be that of a man who has got things finally clear and is no longer worried . . . he can even be careless . . . The last plays are the fancies of Lear dreaming of Cordelia refound. They exist at a remove from reality. They give us a schema for life rather than life itself.[7]

F. R. Leavis was not speaking entirely about the past when he pointed out that in academic tradition *The Winter's Tale* was one of the 'romantic' plays; the adjective implying among other things a certain fairy-tale licence of spirit, theme and development – an indulgence, in relation to reality, of some of the less responsible promptings of imagination and fancy.[8] The critics who established this tradition were Arthur Quiller-Couch and E. K. Chambers. 'Purpose and structure in *The Winter's Tale*', Chambers wrote, 'are shaped alike by the canons of romance; if indeed one is justified in using the term canon to denote a principle which is founded on the negation of law.'[9] Critics who approach the play in these terms tend to flatten Shakespeare's characters, as E. C. Pettet does in *Shakespeare and the Romance Tradition*, when he questions whether Leontes, Hermione, Polixenes, Florizel and Perdita are anything more than names, 'the names of puppets – speaking some magnificent verse, of course – who dance to the compulsive strings of an extravagant, highly coloured story?'[10]

The flattening out of character can be one of the dangers inherent in comparable attempts to find principles of organisation in the play in terms of allegory, symbol and myth, though this tendency goes a long way back. Horace Walpole in the second half of the eighteenth century was the first of the allegorists. Suggesting that several phrases used by Hermione during her trial were imported directly from the letters of Anne Boleyn, he argued that Leontes was Henry VIII, 'who generally made the law the engine of his boisterous passions', and Perdita Queen Elizabeth the rejected child who brings harmony to the kingdom.[11] The point of Walpole's interpretation, as it is of Glynne Wickham's (see p. 23), is to suggest, each for very different reasons, that *The Winter's Tale* is a political allegory unified by

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a historical purpose. For S. L. Bethell in his introduction to the New Clarendon edition of the play, it is ultimately a religious allegory. Perdita is 'symbolically the life of grace that Leontes has lost'.[12] The play has provoked responses which have moved from allegory and symbol to myth. F. C. Tinckler has glimpsed an anthropological pattern in the play, a sophisticated vegetation myth, its ultimate meanings reaching back to folk ritual.[13] In recent years the symbolic principle has influenced interpretations at Stratford-upon-Avon and Stratford, Connecticut. This has not always meant an immediate enrichment, for the symbolic approach even in the theatre may become abstract and hygienic.

I have in mind D. J. Enright's sharp reaction to the symbolic method of reading Shakespeare: 'we have been rescued', he wrote, 'from the smoke and fire of romanticism only to be dropped into the hygienic incinerators of symbolism'.[14] It is useful at this particular time to remind ourselves that there is a tradition of criticism which has responded to the strain of realism in *The Winter's Tale*, beginning with Coleridge, who influenced Samuel Phelps at Sadler's Wells, and Granville-Barker, whose production had much in it that was not anti-poetic but anti-poetical; he firmly resisted any temptation to make the pastoral scene a romantic set piece.

The most powerful symbols are intensely real; they possess the many-sidedness of life itself. The daffodils are symbols of new life in *The Winter's Tale* but they resist any fixed meanings, where they

> come before the swallow dares, and take
> The winds of March with beauty; (IV.iv.119–20)

It is not really possible to apprehend symbolic writing of this kind without awakening imaginatively in our own being to its distinctive resonance. The daffodils as the biting winds of March blow around them reveal an unexpected strength. The music of the line awakens feelings, at the edge of consciousness, of freshness, of warmth and gaiety. The daffodils take the cold winds of March not with force but with the beauty of their attitude and presence. Yet if we remember the daffodils as Autolycus sings about them the correspondence creates a rich irony. For in his song they

> peer,
> With heigh, the doxy over the dale, (IV.iii.1–2)

The play does hold a mirror up to nature. Shakespeare confronts the sexual reality, taking into account its disturbing elements and giving us a sense of its place in human life as a whole.[15] There is reality in the romance of the pastoral scene. 'Jupiter / Became a bull, and bellowed' (IV.iv.27–8), says Florizel, describing Jove's sexual delight in terms of life on an English

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farm. The marriage of opposites in *The Winter's Tale* is best described in stanzas by Wallace Stevens, not intended for this purpose but still thoroughly appropriate:

> Two things of opposite natures seem to depend
> On one another, as a man depends
> On a woman, day on night, the imagined
>
> On the real. This is the origin of change.
> Winter and spring, cold copulars, embrace
> And forth the particulars of rapture come.
>
> Music falls on the silence like a sense,
> A passion that we feel, not understand.
> Morning and afternoon are clasped together
>
> And North and South are an intrinsic couple
> And sun and rain a plural, like two lovers
> That walk away as one in the greenest body.[16]

If its paradoxical, contradictory life makes *The Winter's Tale* an early seventeenth-century play, which the school of Donne would have understood, this distinguishing feature of its structure and texture makes it very much a play for our own time. As the Mexican philosopher José Vasconcelos has observed, the very concept of truth in our time has become different. It has become a function of the unification of disparate elements which are combined without being subject to logical identification.[17]

The symbolic life of the play cannot be ignored but, as F. R. Leavis has pointed out, it is part of a larger ordering in 'a great work of art' like *The Winter's Tale*, 'a matter of a strict and delicate subservience to a commanding significance, which penetrates the whole, informing and ordering everything – imagery, rhythm, symbolism, character, episode, plot – from a deep centre'.[18]

Leavis, despite some hesitancies before the statue scene, saw nothing jerry-built or boring about the play; instead he described it rightly as 'a supreme instance of Shakespeare's poetic complexity', pointed to the local effects, 'so inexhaustibly subtle in their interplay of the poetry', and suggested that it was more dramatic than *The Tempest*.[19] The poetic complexity, the local effects have been explored in recent years by M. M. Mahood,[20] Derick Marsh,[21] Ernest Schanzer,[22] and Richard Proudfoot.[23] Ernest Schanzer and Richard Proudfoot have shown how verbal correspondences help to unify the two-part structure of *The Winter's Tale*.

The first critic to ask searching questions about that structure was Thomas R. Price, the American critic, who argued in 1890 that the two-part structure was a brilliant experiment in a new form that failed to achieve unity.[24] For more recent American critics, like Edward Tayler, the problem

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