Studia Anglica Posnaniensia XXX, 1996

A PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS A SHAKESPEAREAN CHARACTER IN *THE WINTER'S TALE*

JACEK FABISZAK

Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań

It is rather commonplace to say that art plays a crucial role in *The Winter's Tale*. But the part it is given – even in the literal sense – is so extraordinary and overwhelming that this statement seems necessary to ensure that the present paper may be felicitous. The introduction of theological overtones is purposeful here: the denouement of the play brings an interesting case of artistic transubstantiation: a work of art is changed into a living character. We witness a most profound metamorphosis, which is, in fact, the most spectacular one of the whole series of transformations effected in the last act. Such conversions were Shakespeare's specialty and, indeed, his art. Critics have long since noted that; with reference to our drama, it was handsomely verbalized by Baldwin Maxwell 1969: 1334: "[the] meeting of all farmers' daughters [in Greene's *Pandosto*, Shakespeare's main source] is transformed by Shakespeare, *the artist*, into the magnificent sheep-shearing scene. Also, Shakespeare introduces the character of Autolycus, missing in Greene." (see also Zbierski 1988: 514)

Consequently, an artist is endowed with powers to influence and even alter the reality (if only for a while), which (another commonplace) makes him equal to a magician. Just as Faustus desires to achieve the status of a "demigod" by means of magic, so an artist seems to reach for a semi-(or quasi-)magical mastery. The artist (either a poet or a member of a theatrical company) is allowed a kind of creativeness which makes it legitimate to model and shape alternative reality (Zbierski 1988: 513). Both Paulina's and Leontes's insistence on the legality of the former's acts illustrate the illusive border between the domains of art and magic: "If this be magic, let it be an art/Lawful as eating" (Shakespeare 1991: 159; V. iii. 110-111). Shakespeare's Last Plays, being so much concerned with the miraculous, are sometimes treated as a continuation of and a variation on the theme of art and magic, and how the artistic receives the force of the magical until the dimension of artistic white magic is acquired. We can find an appropriate

comment in the now classic essay by J.M. Nosworthy 1958: 66: "as Shakespeare proceeded with the romances, he gave increasing prominence to music. *The Winter's Tale* is quantitatively far in advance of its predecessors, yet only a relatively small proportion of the play has musical embelishment whereas music informs the action of *The Tempest* at all points."

Out of the whole range of art, music is not the only representative in our play. As Mary L. Livingston (1969: 346) aptly remarks, "most readers notice that *The Winter's Tale* contains an astonishing number of art forms: a tragedy, a comedy, a pastoral, a tale, a dream-vision, a statue, songs and ballads ..., a shepherds and shepherdesses' dance, an anti-masque, a poem, a picture, and suggestions of a play within." Also, most readers will register that the majority of them are squeezed into the latter part of the drama, that occurring after the location is moved to the shores of Bohemia (by no means is it to say that only Bohemia is a place where art is successfully practised). This points to a most significant trait of the structural framework of the play: the division into two disinct segments separated by the choric part of the character of Time. The two sections differ in the presentation of the dramatic world: the initial one looms morbid and awe-inspiring, being a place from which not only art but also divine grace is removed. To emphasize this aspect, I suggest that we view it as an attempt at rendering reality within the dramatic form. On the other hand, the part that follows, studded with numerous miracles and wonders, demonstrates the power of fiction. Naturally, these two worlds merge in the end producing a bridge over the stage's edge where both the onstage and offstage audiences are allocated the same position and artifice becomes one with reality. Joan Hartwig 1972: 5-6; 21 also traces this interesting effect of theatrical communication:

> The sporting quality of the last plays derives from a heavy stress on artifice, and this stress forces the audience to see the art as art, disallowing a false fusion between art and life. Toward the end of the play we seem to find the two disparate worlds have merged; yet when we leave the theater they separate again. In the process, we have experienced the unique pleasure of having our imagination touched and revitalized.
> The important impact at the end of each of these tragicomedies is the audience's renewed awareness of art as a focusing agent for reality.

It seems to hold true for onstage and offstage audiences alike.

A Shakespearean artist is acutely aware of his social role and his social business. The social milieu is of paramount importance in any analysis of character. According to Robert Weimann 1981: 26, "A dramatic personality is wasted until his private qualities are successfully (or otherwise) tested in public. The testing itself ... not the qualities as such (as a given condition or heritage), is the dramatic source of the character." Some of the dramatic personages who are such 'social artists' mirror the artistic conditions of Shakespeare's contemporaries, if somewhat in a distorted way: "playwright and stage manager in Elizabethan times were like Autolycus: simultaneously artists (treated, however, like craftsmen) and entrepreneurs, intent on 'emptying the audience's purses' with their songs." (Hartwig 1972: 118) There must be, nevertheless, an audience willing to spend their money and give attention to the performance to meet the felicitous conditions of such an exchange. And this audience seems to be missing in the first part of *The Winter's Tale*.

Leontes's jealousy transports him beyond any social contract. Moreover, he rejects the voice of the divine. His lack of faith, necessary for art, magic and religion to be effective, bars any artisitc activity in Sicilia. At the same time, though, Leontes stages a show – Hermione's trial – and consistently proceeds with it. This show is ruined not only because of the actors' insubordination (a most striking and shocking, indeed, example of which is Mamillius's death), but primarily because Leontes turns out to be a false artist, or – paraphrasing his "we are mock'd with art" (Shakespeare 1991: 157; V. iii. 68), a mock artist. Stanley Cavell (1987: 196) calls Leontes's production a "theater of jealousy" which leads him to see in his wife, the chief character in what becomes a tragedy, "the ... grace ... of cunning artifice ('practised smiles') and of erotic favour ('paddling palms')" (Battenhouse 1980: 129). Through his madness, Leontes perceives reality as "[a] staged play, playing parts, [which] implies an external controller, and being a cuckold depends more on being cast to play the part than upon a deficiency in the individual's will or personality." (Hartwig 1972: 107) This is echoed in Sicilia's ironic address to his son:

> Go, play, boy, play: thy mother plays, and I
> Play too; but so disgrac'd a part, whose issue
> Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour
> Will be my knell. Go, play, boy, play.
> (Shakespeare 1991: 16; I. ii. 187-190)

Leontes wants to take control; he desires to be the director, rather than a mere actor. However, he achieves his ends by prepareing a performance and carrying it out till the climax in which Hermione, unexpectedly both to the unwilling spectators and the director himself, is pronounced guilty. The form in which the spectacle is arranged is "like an old tale [that] should be hooted at" (Shakespeare 1991: 159; V. iii. 116-117), to borrow Paulina's words from the last act, which aptly describe the audience's reaction (protests against accusing Hermione of adultery). First of all, Leontes's choice of actors and dramatic genre is definitely wrong. The roles he allocates to his actors are misapplied in any sense one can think of. It is best illustrated by the way Hermione is iconized by her husband and by the fate of Mamillius. When Camillo inquires about the nature of the Queen's malady (as it is figuratively presented by the King), Leontes answers: "Why, he that wears her like her medal, hanging about his neck, Bohemia" (Shakespeare 1991: 22; I. ii. 307-308), which an appropriate note in the Arden edition explains in the following manner: "as if she were her own miniature portrait pendant about his neck". The belittling of such a morally and aesthetically great character as Hermione is instantly apparent here, especially in view of what is to come in the last scene

where she will be revealed as a large statue in a spectacle staged by a true manager. Furthermore, another of the important actors is, again, underestimated by the fatal director and is not able to bear his part. Mamillius, virtually the only character in the first part who is able to tell stories (cf. Shakespeare 1991: 31; II. i. 25-26), like a poet or artist, is completely disregarded by his father and, suffering from emotional imbalance, dies. With his death, all tokens of art are removed from Leontes's environment, which is aggravated by the reported death of the other miscast actor: Hermione. Certainly, this was not the epilogue that the jealous tyrant envisioned.

Apart from the two characters who are so tragically abused, there are some heroes who consistently attempt to resist Leontes's folly and redirect the show he prepares. These are, of course, Paulina and Camillo. However, Sicilia remains deaf and blind to their speeches and dumb shows as exemplified in Camillo's prologue-like exhortation to the King, which contains theatrical (artistic) overtones:

> If ever I were wilful-negligent,
> It was my folly: if industriously
> I play'd the fool, it was my negligence,
> Not weighing well the end: if ever fearful
> To do a thing, where I the issue doubted,
> Whereof the execution did cry out
> Against the non-performance, 'twas a fear
> Which oft infects the wisest: these, my lord,
> Are such allow'd infirmities that honesty
> Is never free of. But, beseech your Grace,
> Be plainer with me;
> (Shakespeare 1991: 20; I. ii. 255-265)

and Paulina's intention to arouse Leontes's conscience with the image of the "naked new-born babe" (Shakespeare 1992: 39; I. vii. 21): "The silence often of pure innocence/Persuades, when speaking fails." (Shakespeare 1991: 42; II. ii. 41-42)

The change of the locality, marked by the passage on the sea and Antigonus's dream, in the form of a masque, still infected by Leontes's false art leads us to the fantastic world of Bohemia (fantastic also in the geographical sense: Bohemia is pictured with a seaside) which seems to sever completely any links with the cruel Sicilian universe. Antigonus dies a most surprising death while his companions are drowned in the sea. They represent Leontes's foul theatre and must not be granted entry into a place where true art prevails (at least, in most of the Bohemian scenes). Furthermore, their deaths are extraordinary, indeed: Antigonus is presented as one who makes his "Exit, pursued by a bear" (Shakespeare 1991: 69; III. iii. 58). William H. Matchett (1969: 101) sees in it an instance of underscoring the fantastic atmosphere of Bohemia: "Shakespeare chooses to bring the bear on stage and thereby cuts in upon audience response with an inevitable reminder that this is art, not life." Also the Clown's report of the ship's sinking points to a

wondrous event, partially by virtue of somewhat extravagant language: "the ship boring the moon with her main-mast, and anon swallowed with yest and froth, as you'd thrust a cork into a hog's head." (Shakespeare 1991: 71; III. iii. 91-94) Moreover, these incidents bring about another important occurrence in the play: the miraculous recovery of the royal daughter: she survived the voyage and was spared by the enraged bear. The recovery is also symbolic as the girl was given a name and was no longer an anonymous "new-born babe".

A more formal introduction that adds to the atmosphere of fictionality in this part of the play is Time's prologue. The prerogatives of time, particularly its power to "slide/O'er sixteen years" (Shakespeare 1991: 75; IV. i. 5-6) and the sense of observation: "I witness to/The times that brought them in" (Shakespeare 1991: 75; IV. i. 11-12) seem to overlap with those of an artist: "remember well/*I* mentioned a son o' th' king's, which Florizel/*I* now name to you;" (Shakespeare 1991: 76; IV. i. 21-23) (my italics). Professor Zbierski (1988: 513) goes even further in the recognition of artisitc attributes in the character of Time; he says that by producing such a witness who was present when the world came into being, Shakespeare - the poet – reminds one of the creative freedom granted to an artist[1], which, again, stresses the idea of art as one of the governing principles of *The Winter's Tale* in general, and Acts IV and V in particular. Thus, it seems fairly valid to treat Time as an alter ego of the (or a) playwright, or at least "as the controller of events" (J.H.P. Pafford, "Appendix I", in: Shakespeare 1991: 168).

The famous sheep-shearing scene which is the core of the recipient's sojourn in dramatic Bohemia brings along a plethora of dances, songs, ballads, etc., which make this world so benevolent since music was considered an instrument of divine love and order, and dance, being ordered movement, a force opposing chaos (Nosworthy 1958: 60). This festival needs a director who is responsible for the sequence of events, costumes, and properties. Naturally, it is the graceful Perdita who becomes the Mistress of the festivity and its chief actress. Not only does she organize everything, but takes care of the guests who freely cross the border between the stage and the auditorium: "[in the sheep-shearing scene] almost everyone is disguised, and ... part of the scene's structure resembles the masque, a sophisticated court entertainment." (Hartwig 1972: 130) Characteristically, the piling up of levels of disguise is reminiscent of the Elizabethan theatrical convention which allowed boys to dress up as women who, as heroines in a drama, sometimes put on the mask of a man. Here, no cross-sexual disguise (in the dramatic world) is necessary, but the irony of this section of the play (cf. Hartwig 1972: 130) is that Perdita is dressed as the Queen of the festival while she (and everybody else except the Clown and his father) believes she is the Shepherd's daughter, while she in fact is a royal daughter, while – in the eyes of the theatrical audience – she is a boy playing a female role. The role of the director and the protagonist is complimented by that

---

[1] The original Polish version has it in the following way:

Shakespeare powołuje się na 'świadectwo" czasu przy stworzeniu świata, co nosi w sobie znamię kreacyjnej poetyki, wypływającej z estetycznych konsekwencji neoplatonizmu i baroku. ... Czas jest tutaj nie tylko 'świadkiem" powstawania świata, ale także 'świadkiem poety". Jest w tym wypadku Shakespeare rzecznikiem poetyki, która nie mieściła się w ciasnych granicach mimetyzmu ... .

of a prologue who presents the playwright's artistic programme (as it is understood by Zbierski 1991: 498). Of course, I am referring now to the celebrated debate between Perdita and Polixenes, so aptly described by H.W. Fawkner (1992: 117) as "a discursive tableau". The serenity of the whole festival is disturbed by the revealing of the King's identity and his stepping between Perdita and Florizel/Doricles. But even here, where art is apparently conquered by life, Perdita is seen as one skillful in magic: Polixenes calls her "fresh piece/of excellent witchcraft" (Shakespeare 1991: 114; IV. iv. 423-424) and "enchantment" (Shakespeare 1991: 115; IV. iv. 435). It reminds the reader/spectator of Leontes's perception of Paulina and anticipates their mutual worry of the legitimacy of Paulina's 'magic' in the last scene.

Before the complication occurs, however, we will witness the appearance of another director or artist: Autolycus. Like Leontes, he is also a mock artist because he cheats people and picks their pockets, which is morally unacceptable. In Bohemia, however, the harm done by Autolycus is completely insignificant (the festival does not seem to lack anything although the Clown who was to buy the necessary utensils and food was robbed of the money by Autolycus). Consequently, his mockery is of a different kind and, ultimately, will play its part.

Autolycus introduces himself as, among others, a puppet master: "he [=Autolycus] compassed a motion of the Prodigal/ Son" (Shakespeare 1991: 86-87; IV. iii. 93-94), which notes provided by J.H.P. Pafford translate as "went round with a puppet show". As we know, this is one of the many guises he assumes; it does characterize his personality, though, and emphasize the artist in whatever he does. A number of critics have noticed it; Joan Hartwig (1972: 346) points to his part as a director in the sheep-shearing scene: "Throughout the pastoral interlude he acts as artist, stage manager, variously costumed actor, and commentator." Furthermore, she underscores Autolycus's share in adding to the sense of fictionality in Bohemia: "The pun and metaphor (like disguise) are his tools and with them Autolycus transforms life into artifice which he sells back to the Clown on a literal level." (Hartwig 1972: 119) It looks like a distorted version of what Paulina will offer Leontes in the final scene. Stanley Cavell (1987: 14) may have had this hypothesis in mind when he wrote: "I emphasize Autolycus as an artist figure, in balance with the solemnity of the Giulio Romano artistry at the play's close." Moreover, Autolycus's show is also necessary to neutralize the effect of Polixenes's interfering with his son's affair (Frank Kermode (1963: 35) makes a similar point, too).

Autolycus's art is not high. He deals in songs and ballads which "represent the lowest imaginative expression" (Livingston 1969: 346), and which used to serve as drinking-songs (cf. Nosworthy 1958: 63). Therefore, his directing is acccurately called 'an interlude' prepared by a "'fallen' Apollo, a pedlar of ballads" (Hartwig 1972: 117) who charms the country folk with a kind of false magic: "they throng who should buy first, as if my trinkets had been hallowed and brought a benediction to the buyer" (Shakespeare 1991: 123; IV. iv. 601-603). This spectacle is soon overshadowed by more serious matters which require a true and mature artist. Polixenes's attempt at separating Florizel and Perdita echoes the events in Sicilia: like

Leontes in his conviction about Hermione, he is blind and does not recognize Perdita's true identity despite her resemblance to her mother. In Bohemia, fortunately, the climate is conducive to artistic activity and this is where Camillo comes in to stage a multilayered performance for the young couple, who become his actors: "it shall be so my care/To have you royally appointed, as if /The scene you play were mine." (Shakespeare 1991: 122-123; IV. iv. 592-594). As Wilbur Sanders (1987: 94) observes, "This wise old fox is very much needed by the young lovers. They have a ship, but no destination. They have parts to play, but no costumes. Camillo supplies all these commodities, on his own terms and at his own price." His aim is more complex, as this same spectacle is simultaneously intended for another audience: Leontes and Polixenes. In the words of Roy Battenhouse 1980: 135, "Camillo's strategy turns flight into mission ... [and it] accords ... with Camillo's love for Polixenes and Leontes alike."

Camillo's art is from the beginning compared with religion and medicine. Leontes turns to him with the following address: "priest-like, thou/Hast cleansed my bosom: I from thee departed/Thy penitent reform'd." (Shakespeare 1991: 19; I. ii. 237-239) For this reason, his artistic position is special, equal to that of Paulina, who – as we know – calls herself Leontes's physician (Shakespeare 1991: 46; II. iii. 54). No wonder that these two characters are given prominence in the final section of the play where the action is taken back to Sicilia so that Leontes's tableau of sorrows ("A saint-like sorrow", Shakespeare 1991: 135; V. i. 2) can be painted out.

Camillo's task is to restore the good relations between the two monarchs. He is the only person to do that as he is recognized as a most faithful and trustworthy servant by both of them. Furthermore, he does not abuse this trust. Lastly, he is truly an excellent stage manager, capable of pulling a number of strings at a time and maintaining control throughout. Incidently, as it were, he has the privilige of making Apollo's prophecy come true restoring the heir (and the daughter) to depressed Leontes. This scene is reported to us by the Third Gentleman who presents it in very vivid and figurative terms. Nevill Coghill (1958: 39) finds them quite natural and is far from diminishing the artistic merit of these lines (Shakespeare 1991: 146-151; V. ii. 2-112): "if we admire Donne and Crashaw, [we] should not gird at the conceits of the Three Gentlemen."

Their excited accounts contain references to what might be termed as play-acting; the First Genleman, describing the meeting of Leontes and Camillo offers to his listeners the picture of a dumb show: "there was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed" (Shakespeare 1991: 146-147; V. ii. 13-15). There is more stage business to come in the description of the Third Gentleman: "There was casting up of eyes, holding up of hands" (Shakespeare 1991: 148; V. ii. 47-48). The whole 'goodly show' was best summed up by the First Gentleman who stressed that "this act was worth the audience of kings and princes; for by such it was acted." (Shakespeare 1991: 149; V. ii. 79-80) All present at this exchange of incredible news agreed that the spectacle they witnessed was "like an old tale" (Shakespeare 1991: 147;

V. ii. 28; 62) thus attaching weight to the fictionality and artistry of the performance at least partially prepared, and enacted, by Camillo.

A similar thought occurred to Paulina when she staged her grand play. The fantastic nature of the event is plastically echoed in the theatrical metaphor: "That she is living,/Were it but told you, you should be hooted at/Like an old tale" (Shakespeare 1991: 159; V. iii. 115-117). As in the case of Camillo's masque, it accentuates the idea of art. It is less spontaneous than that of her future husband, though. "As the stage director, she has remained outside the emotional renewal of the others, carefully controlling the art of the revelation." (Hartwig 1972: 133) Her mastery and authority is so overwhelming that, like Prospero on his island, she "seats her audience, draws curtains and calls for music" (Sanders 1987: 115). Also, the language she uses when she addresses her actress is somewhat reminiscent of the magic formulae of Prospero: expressions are short and mostly imperative (cf. A.F. Bellette 1978: 73). Nevill Coghill (1958: 40) observed that "when ... Hermione is bidden to descend Shakespeare does not allow her to budge; against all the invocations of Paulina he piles up colons, twelve in five lines; it is the most heavily punctuated passage I have found in Folio." This passage, beginning with: "Music, awake her; strike!" (Shakespeare 1991: 159; V. iii. 98), compels Leontes to "marvel at the art of her words which make the image move." (Livingston 1969: 344). Furthermore, the miraculous awakening of Hermione brings other than merely artistic or magic connotations thus complimenting these two roles of Paulina. She can additionally be viewed as a priestesses performing the act of transubstantiation on the altar. According to the Third Gentleman, the royal company departed to Paulina's gallery in order to see the statue of Hermione and with the intention of having *supper* there: "there they intend to sup." (Shakespeare 1991: 151; V. ii. 102-103) A quasi-religious reading of this scene seems justified to a degree.

Paulina "achieves, with the confident skill of ... a good playwright, the fusion of illusion and reality into joyful truth." (Hartwig 1972: 116) The truth is full of significant changes: Hermione and Perdita are brought back to life in the Sicilian court; Leontes and Polixenes's friendship is restored; the Shepherd and the Clown become gentlemen, while Autolycus turns into an honest man. There is one more transformation which simultaneously affects the main artists of the play, responsible for all the other political, social and moral metamorphoses: Camillo and Paulina are married by Leontes, which Stanley Cavell (1987: 217) sees to be "located as the art, the human invention, which changes nature, which gives birth to legitimacy, lawfulness." Although they may seem to be absolved, in this way, from their artistic duties, Leontes, no longer "sadder" but still "wiser" has learnt his lesson and treats this marriage as a guarantee of future happiness, asking Paulina to continue her directing: "Good Paulina,/Lead us from hence" (Shakespeare 1991: 161; V. iii. 151-152).

REFERENCES

Baldwin, Maxwell.
1969 "The Winter's Tale: Introduction", in: Alfred Harbage (ed.), 1334-1336.

Battenhouse, Roy
1980 "Theme and structure in The Winter's Tale", *Shakespeare Survey* 33: 123-138.

Bellette, A.F.
1978 "Truth and utterance in The Winter's Tale", *Shakespeare Survey* 31: 65-75.

Cavell, Stanley
1987 *Disowning knowledge in six plays of Shakespeare*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Coghill, Nevill
1958 "Six points of stage-craft in The Winter's Tale", *Shakespeare Survey* 11: 31-41.

Fawkner, H.W.
1992 *Shakespeare's miracle plays: 'Pericles', 'Cymbeline' and 'The Winter's Tale'*. London and Toronto: Associated University Presses.

Harbage, Alfred (ed.)
1969 *William Shakespeare. The complete works*. New York: The Viking Press.

Hartwig, Joan
1972 *Shakespeare's tragicomic vision*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press.

Kermode, Frank
1963 *Shakespeare: The final plays*. London: Longmans Green & Co.

Livingston, Mary L.
1969 "The natural art of The Winter's Tale", *Modern Language Quarterly* 30 (3): 340-355.

Matchett, William H.
1969 "Some dramatic techniques in The Winter's Tale", *Shakespeare Survey* 22: 93-107.

Nosworthy, J.M.
1958 "Music and its function in the romances of Shakespeare", *Shakespeare Survey* 11: 60-69.

Sanders, Wilbur
1987 *The Winter's Tale. Harvester New Critical Introductions to Shakespeare*. Brighton: The Harvester Press.

Shakespeare, William
1992 *Macbeth. Edited by Kenneth Muir*. The Arden Shakespeare edition. London and New York: Routledge.
1991 *The Winter's Tale*. Edited by J.H.P. Pafford. The Arden Shakespeare edition. London and New York: Routledge.

Uhlig, Claus – Rüdiger Zimmermann (eds.)
1991 *Anglistentag 1990 Marburg proceedings*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag.

Weimann, Robert.
1981 "Society and the individual in Shakespeare's conception of character", *Shakespeare Survey* 4: 23-31.

Zbierski, Henryk
1988 *William Shakespeare*. Warszawa: Wiedza Powszechna.
1991 "The dynamics of character grouping", in: Claus Uhlig – Rüdiger Zimmermann (eds.), 494-506.