Paradox in Shakespeare's Tragicomedies: Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest

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MONTCLAIR STATE UNIVERSITY

PARADOX IN SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGICOMEDIES
PERICLES, CYMBELINE, THE WINTER’S TALE, AND THE TEMPEST

by

Seamus Gilson

A Master’s Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of
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Paradox in Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies – Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest – is employed to explore the human experience, a journey filled with contradictions that thrive together. Shakespeare’s use of paradox takes on a different dimension in each play and, therefore, this essay will look at the paradox, or paradoxes, specific to individual plays. The value, then, of paradox in Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies is that they forge boundaries and evoke thought.

The essay is divided into the following sections: Introduction; Tragicomedy, discusses the tragicomic form; Paradox, takes a brief look at the subject of paradox; the discussion of paradox in Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies is presented in The Plays; and the Conclusion.
PARADOX IN SHAKESPEARE’S TRAGICOMEDIES

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A THESIS

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
For the degree of Master of Arts

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Montclair, NJ

2013
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# Paradox in Shakespeare’s Tragicomedies

*Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest*

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Paradox in Shakespeare’s Tragicomedies

Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest

INTRODUCTION

Shakespeare’s tragicomedies – Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest1 – like most tragicomedies, combine the seriousness of tragedy with the whimsy of comedy, creating fertile ground for paradox. Perhaps the most well known incidence of paradox among Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies occurs in The Winter’s Tale when the stone sculpture of Hermione comes to life and steps down from her pedestal (V.iii.98-103). In this moment, the boundary between reality and appearance is blurred and the “paradoxical blending of nature and art” (Platt 200) is in full view.

According to Giambattista Guarani, tragicomedy’s “chief Renaissance theorist” (Foster 312), “tragicomedy is not a compound of two favole, one of which is a perfect tragedy and the other a perfect comedy...but it is a mixture of those tragic and comic parts which can stand together with probability” (Ristine 41). But there is no exact formula for the proper mixture of tragic and comic elements to make the perfect tragicomedy. Madeleine Doran says that tragicomedy “is so protean that the writer may sometimes doubt its entity....Anyone on the trail of the tragicomedy, therefore, is on an uncertain quest, and must be prepared to hear, on his return, that he has got a pigeonhole without a pigeon” (124). Michael Neill also focuses on the variable nature of the form: “the protean qualities of this drama, the violent switches of attitude and behavior, are not

simply resources of theatrical expediency: they reveal the dramatists’ sense of a world knit up of contraries, inherently unstable and liable to sudden alteration and peripety” (321). The genre of tragicomedy, with its amorphous form, is like a paradox in that both are hard to pin down. No two people define tragicomedy in the same way, just as no two people assign the same meaning to Shakespearean paradox in his tragicomedies. The idea of paradox is so unstable that when John Donne was prompted to define paradox, he opted instead to relate what it did rather than define what it was (Colie PE 36-37). This essay will interrogate Shakespeare’s use of paradox in his tragicomedies as a means of exploring the human experience, a journey filled with contradictions that thrive together.

Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies are also commonly known as “romances,” but the term “tragicomedy” is more suited to the topic of paradox than is the phrase “romantic story,” the history of which Madeleine Doran traces in her Endeavors of Art (186). According to Doran, the romantic story “got pulled about and shaped into the separable forms of tragedy and comedy,” meaning that it preceded the tragicomedy as “an anomalous mixture of distinctive forms” (186). Nonetheless, Doran also establishes a logical “kinship” between the term “tragicomedy” and “romance” by describing tragicomedy as an “attainment of skill in manipulation of a type of story characteristic of romantic drama” (188). While the terms “tragicomedy” and “romance” are at times used interchangeably by some of the critics cited in this essay, the focus of this essay will be on the term “tragicomedy” because of the inherent conflict between the genres that compose the word.

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2 The original application of the term “romance,” as applied to Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest, can be traced to Irish poet and critic Edward Dowden’s 1875 publication of Shakspere, wherein he coined the term (Wallace 820n8). The derivation of Dowden’s terminology, “romances,” is discussed in the essay section, Tragicomedy.
A Shakespearean comedy or tragedy ends with social and political reorganization and regeneration, but each arrives at its destination through different means. Northrup Frye offers a sufficient characterization of what happens in comedy as well as what happens in tragedy (*Anatomy* 163-85; 206-22), but C. L. Barber and Naomi Liebler, respectively, see these Shakespearean forms as sites of contestation and confrontation of social and political issues. Barber says that Shakespearean comedy is distinguished by the communal experience and observance of “periodic sports and feast days” (5), events which he termed “saturnalian” (3). These events were granted “temporary license, a ‘misrule’ which implied rule,” by the “Anglican and Catholic culture” (Barber 10), thereby implying a sense of temporary disorder that is restored to order at the end of the celebration. Liebler says: “Thus, both comedy and tragedy are festive genres. The former (as Barber demonstrated) recognizes, negotiates, and celebrates the social operations that reaffirm and revitalize social institutions, while the latter discloses the consequence of misrecognizing or debasing those operations by diverting or disjoining them from the structures through which a society normally derives its meaning” (8). What differentiates one form from the other is the level of disorder and recognition inherent in both. Comedy contains controlled turmoil and recognition of social operations while tragedy is characterized by chaos and misrecognition of social and political institutions. These two extremes meet and interact in tragicomedy.

Part of this essay is a study of the genre of tragicomedy, for to understand the natural resistance between tragedy and comedy is to understand the use of paradox in Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies. Shakespeare’s use of paradox takes on a different dimension in each play and, therefore, this essay will look at the paradox, or paradoxes, specific to individual plays. The plays are analyzed in order of publication because of
how they can feed sequentially on one another, almost as if *The Tempest* was the result of three prior experiments. In *Pericles*, Shakespeare uses paradox to interrogate the role history plays in defining the present, perhaps so that his audience will consider their belief between providence and free will, and maybe to consider the premise that patriarchal power may, in fact, be dependent on women; in *Cymbeline*, he uses paradox to exhibit how opposing, irreconcilable character traits create an identity when compared side by side; in *The Winter’s Tale*, there are competing images of appearance and reality (Hermione’s descent) that demonstrate a coexistence between truth and falsehood, nature and art; and in *The Tempest*, actors and audience can be interchangeable revealing a startling similarity between fictive stage drama and real life.

This essay is divided into the following sections: Tragicomedy, discusses the tragicomic form; Paradox, takes a brief look at the subject of paradox through the eyes of long-noted expert Rosalie Colie and the more current scholar Peter Platt, who focuses solely on Shakespearean paradox in his book, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*; The Plays contain the discussion of paradox in Shakespeare’s tragicomedies; and the Conclusion.
The term “tragic-comedy” was first used by Roman playwright Plautus in *Amphitryon*, a tragicomedy “which presented gods (Jupiter and Mercury) disguised as mortals involved in domestic intrigue, i.e., traditionally tragic personages involved in traditionally comic affairs” (Herrick 1). The fickle nature of the genre is deified in the figure of the wavering god. Charles Passage dates the original text somewhere in the 190’s B.C.E. (pref.) and links the origins of Plautus’ tragicomedy to Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, both of which contain a character named Amphitryon. The connection is the contested parentage of Herakles and the potential for him to be part man, part god. Both epics provide proof that Alkmene is his human mother, and *The Iliad* offers proof that the “king of gods” (Passage 1), Zeus, was his father, but *The Odyssey* leaves open the possibility that his father could have been either Zeus or the mortal Amphitryon (Passage 1-2). If Zeus was his father, Herakles would embody the conflict between a dominant god and the dominated mortal where the tone of conflict and the concept of being betwixt and between two divergent worlds are centered. In this instance, Herakles would be a combination of god and mortal, a hybrid in much the same way a tragicomedy is a hybrid of each genre.

Italian poet and playwright Battista Guarini is considered the force behind tragicomedy: he transformed it into a legitimate and accepted form of the Renaissance

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3 Now for the favor that I’ve come to ask you for, and then I’ll tell you all about our tragedy.
   – What’s wrong? Why do you frown? Because I said the play would be a tragedy? But I’m a god – I’ll change it:
   I’ll change the play from tragedy to comedy, if that’s what you want, without a single change of lines!
   Well, yes or no? would you like that? What a dunce I am!
   As if you didn’t know what you want – and me a god!
   I understand exactly what you have in mind:
   I’ll scramble them and make a tragie-comedy (Passage 42)
audience. Doran says that Guarini “defined tragicomedy in such a way that it had a chance to be regarded as a legitimate species distinct from comedy and tragedy, not merely as an amorphous mixture” (192). Guarini considered tragicomedy a composite of tragedy and comedy:

From the one it takes the noble characters, not the action, the story, probable but invented, the emotions, stirred but tempered, the delight, not the sadness, the danger, not the death; from the other, the decorous mirth, the sober gentleness, the invented plot, the happy change, and above all the comic order. (Ristine 36-37)

The first reference is to tragedy where emotions are tempered and death is merely a threat. The second reference, comedy, substitutes invented plot for tragic action and happy change for death. Not all observers of the new form were supportive of the new genre. Guarini’s *Il pastor fido* (circa 1589), a play with “a most ingeniously constructed plot,” of “interminable length” with “various crossed love difficulties,” (Ristine 34) sparked its own controversy of tragicomic theory (Lyne 91). Lyne and Ristine describe the debate between Guarini and Giasone de Nores, a “Paduan professor of moral philosophy,” who characterized tragicomedy as a “monstrous and disproportionate composition” (Ristine 35). Guarini and his *Il Pastor Fido* may have been the forces which ignited the tragicomedy movement in 1589, but the team of Beaumont and Fletcher are responsible for perfecting the renaissance form in the early seventeenth century (Doran 186; Ristine 81, 87). Shakespeare’s tragedies and comedies may have had a significant influence on this “distinguishable Fletcherian form” (Doran 188), but his plays, and the plays of his contemporaries such as Chapman, Dekker, and Marston (Doran 210), were not of the same measure. According to Doran, typical Renaissance
tragicomic form, usually associated with Beaumont and Fletcher, was characterized by the “high rank of the principal characters, in certain solemnity of sentiment, and in clever management of plot so that a surprise recognition or change of heart brings about a dramatic reversal from extreme peril to good fortune” (186-87), and also being a mixture of “tragic and comic episodes...of social classes” and “a combination of the serious action of tragedy with the happy ending of comedy” (193).

There is no single description of tragi-comedy that fits every Shakespearean tragi-comedy, but Ristine provides a comprehensive description of the genre. Ristine refers specifically to the plays of the Beaumont and Fletcher team and Davenant. The former were contemporaries and successors of Shakespeare and the latter wrote in the subsequent Caroline period (139), but the description applies well to the four tragi-comedies:

Perhaps the first impression gained from reading any such group of plays is one of startling unreality. The reader is transported to a no man’s land, beyond the ken of human experience, where men take on superhuman characteristics, where strange events happen, and imaginary history is made and unmade in the twinkling of an eye. The checkered fortunes of monarchs, generals, and lords and ladies of high degree engross his chief attention; war, usurpation, rebellion – actual or imminent – furnish a subordinate interest; while a comic touch or sub-plot is the diverting accompaniment of the romantic action. Love of some sort is the motive force; intrigue is rife; the darkest villany is contrasted with the noblest and most exalted virtue. In the course of an action teeming with incident and excitement, and in which the characters are enmeshed in a web of
disastrous complications, reverse and surprise succeed each other with a lighting rapidity, and the outcome trembles in the balance. But final disaster is ingeniously averted. The necessary *dei ex machina* descend in the nick of time: wrongs are righted, wounds healed, reconciliation sets in, penitent villany is forgiven, and the happy ending made complete.

(Ristine xiii)

Unreal experiences, such as "startling unreality," are matched with real life events like "war" and "rebellion." These types of pairings set the stage for paradox. Ristine's definition describes the individual elements of tragicomedy, but Northrup Frye offers up a meaning that characterizes its structure.

In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Northrop Frye argues that "Romance, like comedy, has six isolatable phases, and as it moves from the tragic to the comic area, the first three are parallel to first three phases of tragedy and the second three to the second three phases of comedy" (198). The three tragic conventions are the "birth of the hero," the "innocent youth of the hero," and the hero's quest while the three comic conventions are the "maintaining of the integrity of the innocent world against the assault of experience," a "reflective, idyllic view of experience from above," and the "end of a movement from active to contemplative adventure" (198-202). When we look more closely at the clashing elements of tragedy and comedy in the tragicomedies, we will see that Frye's approach serves as a sound, general guide, but that Shakespeare's plays frequently divert from the template Frye defined. Hunter's definition of romance, "The romance is a journey which ends in lovers meeting, but necessary preludes to the triumph of love are the separations and temptations which test its strength" (65), nicely captures the arc between tragedy and comedy: "Shakespeare imposes on the disordered series of thrilling
adventures that constitute actions of such plays as *Pericles*, a meaningful pattern of sin, repentance, and forgiveness” (141). The structural settings offered by Frye and Hunter, where the hero is tested during his journey, are the framework within which the paradox of tragicomedy evolve.

Orgel tells us that literary critic Dowden was the first to apply the term “romance” to this body of Shakespeare’s work, providing this description:

There is a romantic element about these plays. In all there is the same romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear – the daughters of Pericles and Leontes, the sons of Cymbeline and Alonso. In all there is a beautiful romantic background of sea or mountain. The dramas have a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to render the name ‘comedies’ inappropriate; we may smile tenderly, but we never laugh loudly, as we read them. Let us, then, name this group consisting of four plays, Romances. (*Tempest 4n3*)

Dowden does not identify the tragic component of romance. However, just as one may “never laugh loudly” as one might in a comedy, the audience will know of the death of minor characters, such as in *Pericles* (II.0.35-36), but never quite grieve for the lost souls of romance in the same way they might for the fallen hero of tragedy.

Perhaps the tragicomedy/romance explanation that best captures this effect is that offered by Beaumont and Fletcher: “A tragie-comedie is not so called in respect of mirth and killing, but in respect it wants death, which is inough to make it no tragedie, yet brings some neer it, which is inough to make it no comedie” (Bowers 3:497). Tragicomedy explores binary pairings and shows us that, not only do they coexist, but that there is a necessary mutual dependence. One cannot exist without the other.
However, Giasone de Nores, the Paduan professor who argued with Guarini over the “preposterous nature of tragicomedy” (Ristine 35), might have had a problem with Beaumont and Fletcher’s characterization of tragicomedy as a genre which “wants death.” His argument was that death is terrifying and, if death is merely a danger, then there is no terror. Ristine characterizes the de Nores’ argument as a paradox, “for ‘How,’ he asks, ‘can there be danger of death unless there is terror’” (37). This type of argument is characteristic of paradox in tragicomedy. Doran characterizes tragicomedy with phrases like “softening of both tragic and comic attitudes,” a “crumbling of the edges” (187), and a “blending of tones” (203) each of which recalls Greenblatt’s observation that Shakespeare “learned that the boundary between comedy and tragedy is surprisingly porous” (34) and echoing an observation made by Norman Rabkin regarding the indistinct line between nature and art (134). Tragicomedy, a form unto itself, yet highly reflective of tragedy and comedy, is inherently contradictory and contains boundary crossings, a topic discussed further in Part II.

The journey of tragicomedy in the first part of a play is a slowly building crescendo toward tragedy and, in the latter part, an urge toward comedy, neither of which fully realizes their generic mission, only to come together in their opposition to create the unique and undefined experience of romance. This bumping of binaries creates the space in which characters and communities are plunged into turmoil, a place where change occurs and boundaries are breached, resulting in some type of transformation. The colliding of divergent ideas and principles is at the heart of tragicomedy and the dramatic form that Shakespeare employs in *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest* to explore the paradoxical workings of the total human experience.
Paradox

A paradox, in its simplest form, is a contradictory statement that challenges convention. There are more comprehensive definitions, but their essence lies in the inherent conflict they present and the argument that they frequently leave unresolved. Paradoxes work by pairing differing opinions against established doctrine. The result of this clash may reinforce existing policy, replace it with new opinion, or spark further debate, but in any event the juxtaposition exposes contrary arguments that, incomprehensibly at times, exist side by side. The value, then, in the exercise of paradox is the on-going challenge it expresses to the status quo.

Cicero’s Paradoxa stoicorum contains one of the earliest collections of paradoxes wherein the Roman philosopher and statesman describes the astonishing effect and polarizing bias of paradox: “These doctrines are surprising, and they run counter to universal opinion” (Platt 2). The word “paradox” is a combination of the Greek words “para,” meaning “by the side of, beside;” and “doxy,” meaning “opinion.” When the two are combined into the word “paradoxy,” or paradox, then they can be read as “by the side of opinion” or “beside opinion,” which, in either case, imparts the sense of two divergent arguments standing in the same space.

John Donne, noted for his use of paradox, ended his sonnet “Death, Be Not Proud” with a paradox: “One short sleepe past, wee wake eternally, / And death shall be
no more, Death, thou shalt die” (Donne 342). The poem is a religious reference to the pleasure of eternal life which must, in turn, mean the death of death. But how can death die? If it dies, doesn’t death survive? Death seems to live and die in this poem. Rosalie Colie said that, “To define paradox is, by definition, a self-defeating enterprise,” citing Donne’s letter to a friend, Sir Henry Wotton according to Platt (12n44), who merely “told what they did, without seeking to describe, define, delimit, or determine the form in general” (39). Of the complex, contradictory nature and sometime disheartening sense of paradox, Donne wrote:

Only in obedience I send you some of my paradoxes; I love you and myself and them too well to send them willingly for they carry with them a confession of their lightnes. and your trouble and my shame, but indeed they were made rather to deceave tyme then her daughter truth: although they have been written in an age when any thing is strong enough to overthrow her: if they make you to find better reasons against them, they do their office: for they are but swaggerers: quiet enough if you resist them. if perchaunce they be pretly guil, that is there best for they are not hatcht: they are rather alarums to truth her then enemies: and they have only this advantadg to scape from being cald ill things that they are no things; therefore take heed of allowing any of them least you make another. (Colie PE 36-37)

By characterizing paradox as something which carries “lightnes” and being “no thing,” while simultaneously admitting that paradoxes “make you to find better reasons against them” and that “they are rather alarums to truth her then enemies,” Donne defines paradox with a paradox. There is an inherent contradiction against finding truth out of
nothing. A. E. Malloch writes that paradoxes "tease the intellect as an optical illusion teases the eye," tricking the mind into a false recognition, and that "the paradoxist...makes something out of nothing, giving utterance to an argument that is not there" (193). But perhaps Donne and Malloch are being agile, maybe even deceptive, when they characterize paradox as "no things" or as "nothing" since one of the reasons to engage in paradox is the potential to create something new within that space between two opposing sides.

One of the more noted paradoxes is the Liar paradox: "Epimenides the Cretan said, 'All Cretans are Liars'" (Colie PE 6). The paradox works only if Epimenides is Cretan, otherwise the statement is merely an accusation. Colie explains the paradox: "If he told the truth, then his statement is a lie, and so he didn't tell the truth; if he lied, then his statement is true, but he did not lie. In terms of logic and of language the statement is a perfect self-contradiction, a perfect equivocation" (PE 6). Likewise, a failure to commit would be another paradox wherein the not committing is actually a commitment (Colie PE 38). Wavering paradox also can provide cover to politicians who want to avoid alienating any part of an electorate by siding against none. Platt establishes this notion, in part, as one of his guiding principles of paradox: "Paradox implies a deferral of commitment and therefore provides safety in controversial issues, especially in political and religious arenas" (13). While paradox can have this paralyzing effect, it seems that it is more important to raise issues, a Shakespearean commonplace, than to ignore them. Another example of paradox is Colie’s observation of a mirror:

The psychological effect of mirrors is that they both confirm and question individual identity – confirm by splitting the mirrored viewer into observer and observed, giving him the opportunity to view himself objectively, as
other people do; question, by repeating him as if her were simply an object, not “himself,” as he surely “knows” himself to be, by repeating himself as if he were not (as his inmost self insists that he is) unique.

(355-56)

The reflective, repeating image of the mirror creates the paradox because identity is both confirmed and questioned.

If paradox contains two divergent sides, than those sides must each have boundaries, boundaries that in paradox are crossed and, in doing so, ignite contradiction. Colie recognizes the significance of the in-between spaces of paradox, and their implied boundaries: “paradoxes play back and forth across terminal and categorical boundaries – that is, they play with human understanding, that most serious of all human activities” (Colie Paradoxia 7). Boundary crossing and conflict are at the heart of Victor Turner’s liminal thesis. According to Turner, “Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (95). The root of Turner’s “liminality” is derived from Van Gennep’s view on rites de passage: “Van Gennep has shown that all rites of passage or ‘transition’ are marked by three phases: separation, margin (or limen, signifying ‘threshold’ in Latin), and aggregation” (Turner 94). Van Gennep’s rites de passage were predicated on individual transition, such as “boundary-crossings, changes in social status, seasonal and other kinds of temporal change” but, importantly, Turner “expanded his discussion to ‘ritualistic’ action as distinct from ritual per se,” imbricating the concept of liminality on the individual as well as on society (Liebler 117-18). Turner also regarded liminality “as a time and place of withdrawal from normal modes of social action” (167). Platt equates Turner’s “withdrawal from normal modes of social action” with “drama” (142), allowing
an audience "a period of scrutinization of the central values and axioms of the culture in which it occurs" (Turner 167).

Thinking about paradox as a situational oxymoron\(^7\) is a concise way to grasp such a circular concept. Shakespeare provides his own example in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. After offering Theseus three arguably tragic wedding masques, Philostrate proposes a masque that introduces the ideas of paradox and tragicomedy:

‘A tedious brief scene of young Pyramus
And his love Thisbe, a very tragical mirth’?
Merry and tragical? Tedium and brief?
That is hot ice, and wondrous strange snow!
How shall we find the concord of this discord?

(V.i.56-60)

"Tragical mirth" is very close to word "tragicomedy" in name and certainly conveys its inherent sense of conflict. Shakespeare couldn't be more literal in demonstrating paradox: merriment is opposite tragic; something brief cannot be tedious; ice is cold, not hot; and how can concord be a part of discord? Antithetical pairings and an inability to resolve contradiction are at the core of tragicomedy, and the inclusion of such a reference in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, a comedy, would seem to set the stage for the later four tragicomedies more than a decade later.

Platt specifically discusses the culture of Shakespearean paradox in his book, *Shakespeare and the Culture of Paradox*, and defines paradox in the context of the stage

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\(^7\) Prof. Naomi Liebler made this observation during a seminar on Shakespearean tragedy at Montclair State University (January 25, 2005). Abrams also made a connection between “paradox” and “oxymoron”: "If the paradoxical utterance combines two terms that in ordinary usage are contraries, it is called an oxymoron; an example is Tennyson’s ‘O Death in life, the days that are no more’"(119).

as “a discourse in which opposites can coexist and perspectives can be altered” in which an audience “would be forced, if only briefly, to reconsider accepted opinions, beliefs, truths” (1). This means that paradox, like tragicomedy, carries with it an air of subversion, an apt notion for a concept of opposites. Further, Platt explains that Renaissance paradox “startles its ‘audience’ into marvel and amazement; it contains opposites without necessarily resolving them; and it challenges convention and commonly held opinions, often reshaping thought in the process” (8). And, according to Stephen Orgel, the “Renaissance audience tolerated, and indeed courted, a much higher degree of ambiguity and opacity than we do” (Platt 40). Neill makes a related observation: “the Renaissance fascination with paradox, even in its more frivolous expressions, was more than a trick of style: it corresponded to whole way of thinking about the world” (320). These mixed mode, tragic-comic plays are, by definition, going to create problems for an audience looking for the clear focus of one genre or another because they are, in the end, indeterminate – which may be Shakespeare’s point. He’s not providing answers, he’s provoking thought which can, but may not be, in line with common consideration. These plays can be considered learning tools of life and an experience that compels their audiences to exercise judgment. Gabriel Harvey “saw the instructional and intellectual value of the paradox:”

I would vpon mine owne charges, trauaile into any parte of Europe, to heare some pregnant Paradoxes, and certaine singular questions in the highest professions of learning, in Physick, in Law, in Diuinity, effectually and thoroughly disputed pro, & contra. (Platt 25) Harvey sought an education through the “pregnant Paradoxes” and their rich and fertile grounds of contradiction. The very image of fertility should direct our attention toward
the creation of something new, even though it may be hard to comprehend, as Donne and Malloch had suggested, that there is a birth from nothing.

Platt sees an instructional value of Shakespearean paradox when he says that the “Shakespearean theater...does not define thought but causes thinking” (203) and he is right when he notes that “something important happens in the in-between space of paradox” (205) because the outcome of paradox is not concrete resolution, but the coexistence of two divergent concepts. Platt’s sentiment seems to be a modern day expression of the same didactic aim of Shakespearean drama that Edward Dowden wrote about in 1875: “Shakspere does not supply us with a doctrine, with an interpretation, with a revelation. What he brings to us, is this – to each one, courage, and energy, and strength, to dedicate himself and his work to that, – whatever it be, – which life has revealed to him as best, and highest, and most real” (430). The unknown associated with “whatever it be” carries with it potential threat and, as Brian Vickers said, “the threat of the paradox is that it could come true” (307). Paradoxes pique our curiosity while simultaneously making us uncomfortable because they can be subversive. The combination of tragic and comic elements in tragicomedy serves as an agitating force that allows Shakespeare to create paradox in his four tragicomic plays.
The Plays

Pericles

Shakespeare’s first tragicomic play, *Pericles*, evokes the past to show the value of history to the present; it charges the audience to consider the difference between providence and man’s exercise of free will; and it forces us to question the legitimacy of patriarchal power by demonstrating that that power may be dependent on the authority of women.

Ancient Gower returns from the dead “To sing a song that old was sung” (I.i.1), “To glad your ear and please your eyes” (I.i.4) and his “purchase is to make men glorious” (I.i.9). The “startling unreality” (Ristine xiii) of Gower’s return from the dead signals that we are immersed in tragicomedy and that we can expect opposition and contradiction. Indeed, we are not disappointed; no sooner has Gower set the stage for festive restoration (I.i.8) than he begins the gloomy tale of incest in Antioch, hardly making “men glorious.” The play opens with a violation of kinship and the incestuous father-daughter relationship between Antiochus and his unnamed daughter. Once Pericles discovers the meaning of Antiochus’ not so cryptic riddle, he is forced to flee Antioch in order to save his life and the future of his kingdom, Tyre. As noted by Jeanie Moore: “Like most romances, *Pericles* centers on a royal family in which the desire for children becomes and imperative dynastic need” (36). An improper familial relationship is the initial, impelling force that motivates the journey of *Pericles* in which its protagonist searches for a bride who can provide offspring and assure his royal lineage and the future of his kingdom. But first, Shakespeare creates a delicate, tenuous link between Pericles and Antiochus by allowing Pericles to nudge up against thoughts of incest when he says, “All love the womb that their first being bred” (I.i.108). The general
sentiment of this line is that all parents love their children, but it is not beyond the ken to conclude that Pericles may be concerned with his own incestuous thoughts given the context in which he makes this statement (Gossett 188n108). At this moment, Pericles may fear his own buried and unknown darkness more than the prospect of death. We are forced to consider if “the darkest villany” has been contrasted with “the noblest and most exalted virtue” (Ristine xiii), or are they in closer proximity to one and other than comfort would allow? Is Pericles in danger of crossing the boundary over-stepped by Antiochus? The ongoing incest between Antiochus and his daughter is depraved, but it also endangers the continuance of the government of Antioch: “The physical violation of a daughter is patriarchal power in a most abusive form, the abuse is the very act which destroys the patriarchy....When Antiochus keeps his daughter to himself, killing all her suitors, he eliminates the possibility of his own posterity” and his own “legitimate succession” (J. Moore 37). The dynastic goals of Pericles seem purer than those of Antiochus, but one cannot ignore these darker signals. Gower’s “purchase” at the beginning was to make the image of man shine, but his story of Antiochus did the exact opposite and it causes the audience to question his veracity. Perhaps this is a thread which Shakespeare borrowed from Plutarch’s “The Life of Pericles” where Plutarch wrote about how the distance of time can obscure the truth: “considering long processe of time, doth utterly obscure the trothe of matters, done in former times” (20). Since Gower represents the past in Pericles, the audience has a right to exercise caution and always question history. This makes Gower central to our first paradox, the value of history to the present, and the first contradiction this essay will examine in Pericles.

Richard Hillman argues that Shakespeare adapted John Gower’s Confessio Amantis for Pericles calling Shakespeare’s use of Gower’s name “the most sustained
literary allusion to be found in Shakespeare” (428). John Gower was “the widely read and greatly admired figure who was part of a living tradition of English poetry” (Hillman 427) and, as such, would have lent some level of authority to his narrating namesake and some inclusion of the past into the play. *Confessio* is a poem in which the character Genius, a priest, “in his role as confessor, helps to restore the afflicted Amans-Gower to spiritual equilibrium,” a tale concerned with “what is natural love and with the proper response to adverse fortune” (Hillman 428), topics which are examined in *Pericles*. Hillman concludes that Shakespeare used Gower “not only as mouthpiece but also as muse” (437). David Hoeniger describes the line narrated by Gower, “*Et bonum quo antiquius eo melius*” (I.i.10), which means “the older a good thing is, the better” (Gossett 172n10), as a phrase which “confirms that the story too is antique” arguing: “We gather that the very idea of reviving the medieval poet on the stage and having him present his own ancient story was meant to appeal to an audience that had developed a liking of things old-fashioned and antiquarian” (464). Gower’s qualified presence introduces a sense of history to the play, but his role must be more than a mere sentimental inclusion.

Amelia Zurcher discusses a “growth of antiquarianism in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries” and argues that *The Winter’s Tale* and *Pericles* “are deeply concerned with the approach that a contemporary interpretive community should take to accounts of the past, by which I mean accounts both about and from the past” (904). And by taking account of the past, communities can find instructive value, or utility, in the lessons of history. Quoting Nietzsche, Zurcher discusses two closely related types of history, monumental and exemplar, that bring models or examples from history for the benefit of the present (906-08). Archetypes that complement modern civilization have utility and are a brought forth presumably for their positive influence on the present.
However, reaching back into history can connote failure in the present or a “disregard for the present, which must, by definition, be a denial of current failures” (Zurcher 907). Nonetheless, while one can interpret a return to the past as a means of escaping the present, it seems more logical that one would look to the past to learn from the lessons of history to help guide modern concerns. There is nothing wrong with looking to experience to help guide the present and it would seem prudent to do so in order to keep the present on a healthy track. The “disregard” and “denial” of situated social or political doctrine or government implies a level of subversion, but it can also be seen as the location where change can occur. And change is vital to the long term survival of a community. The mere presence of Gower is one of the reasons Zurcher says *Pericles* “calls attention repeatedly to its source’s remoteness in time and to its respect of that remoteness” (917). Further, when Pericles becomes indebted to the fishermen who return his father’s armor (II.i.112-62), an emblematic return of his past, Zurcher suggests that the “debt left hanging functions...as a resistance to the relationship the play establishes between the present and the past” (924). On the contrary, the armor seems to connect Pericles to his father rather than distance the two. Zurcher calls this connection a “resistance,” but the acquisition of the armor and the subsequent debt facilitates Pericles’ purpose of procuring a bride, offering a solution, not impedance. But to Zurcher, “*Pericles* rejects utility entirely” (922) because incest is regressive and isolates the present from the past because of its degenerative effect: “Incest...stands for a corrupted return to origins, in which instead of moving forward in history the daughter regresses to become her mother” (918). Zurcher may be correct if we think strictly in terms of the effect that incest has on the people of Antioch, but these are the elements that *Pericles* seems to resist. While Pericles may have had latent thoughts of incest, he does not act on...
them, and his family and realm end the play intact. The same cannot be said for Antiochus, his unnamed daughter, and the people of Antioch. This would be progressive for Tyre.

So what evidence does the play offer regarding whether or not history provides utilitarian value to the present? Kenneth Semon writes, echoing Nietzsche in effect, “Gower suggests that man can profit from the telling of old tales” (92) presumably because they are “restoratives” (I.i.8), but Zurcher observes that the “characters do not seem educated by their travail” (918), that Pericles “obdurately resists presence in favor of a preference for what is gone” (924). Gower suggests that we should “hear an old man sing” (I.i.13) and begs that we “Pardon old Gower” (II.0.40), indicating that he is aware of his anachronistic presence, yet nonetheless guides the action of the play. Taken at face value, “old” refers to Gower’s age, but his presence does bring history into the fore. He is not only a narrator but his pedigree also makes him an experienced, trusted guide to the audience. His trustworthy authority gives the audience a sense of comfort, but we cannot forget his opening contradiction in which his intent is to make “men glorious” (I.i.9) by telling a tale of incest. Nonetheless, what Gower is to the audience is what the parallel “ancient substitute” (V.iii.51) Helicanus is to Pericles, a trusted and experienced model on whom he can rely, a fact that Pericles himself expresses: “Fit counselor and servant for a prince, / Who by thy wisdom makes a prince thy servant” (I.ii.61-62). The role reversal of the servant-prince inversion between Pericles and Helicanus foreshadows the male-female role reversal between Pericles and Marina. Helicanus implores the Lords to “give experience tongue” (I.ii.36) which can mean that they should let Pericles speak of his encounter with Antiochus. In the alternative, and what speaks more to the experience that can come with age, the phrase may suggest that the Lords should let Helicanus speak
from his experience. His ensuing speech (I.ii.36-46) argues against the dangers of flattery in favor of the substance of truth. His honesty borders on insubordination in an exchange with Pericles (I.ii.47-54), prompting Pericles to rhetorically ask: “Thou knowest I have power / To take thy life from thee” (I.ii.55), to which Helicanus humbly and loyally responds: “I have ground the axe myself; / Do but you strike the blow” (I.ii.56-57) offering his life in service of his king rather than trying to preserve himself.

Trusted Gower lends his credibility to the character of Helicanus when he summarizes in the Epilogue that which we have learned in the five acts of the play: “In Helicanus may you well descry / A figure of truth, of faith, of loyalty” (7-8). Helicanus is an example of Zurcher’s discussion of the Renaissance debate of Stoic theory where the “collective will” is more important than “self-interest” (910), making Pericles a play set in the present but which longs for the past at a time when community mattered more than self interest. Comparing Pericles to Helicanus contrasts youth and inexperience against maturity and experience. The wisdom and sophistication of Helicanus is the star toward which Pericles navigates. The audience sees some evidence of Gower’s “glorious” (I.0.9) man in the specter of Pericles’ father who “in that glory once he was, / Had princes sit like stars about his throne, / And he the sun for them to reverence” (II.iii.37-39). Pericles may have his own father as an historic role model, in addition to Helicanus, but even by his own admission, Pericles is inconsequential compared to him, “Where now his son’s like a glow-worm in the night, / The which hath fire in darkness, none in the light” (II.iii.42-43). When Pericles admits that he does not compare to his father, he subverts his own authority as prince and calls conspicuous attention to the failure of the past to be of value to the present. Of course, his successful journey overturns this notion and demonstrates that looking to the past has value to the present. However, measuring up to
the standard of his elders is only part of his quest, a quest over which he seems to have only minor control, and it is the level of control over one’s destiny that is questioned throughout Pericles’ journey.

The second paradox of *Pericles* is the intervention of providence versus the exercise of man’s free will. One can argue that, in *Pericles*, Shakespeare puts on display the affiliation between man’s free will and divine intervention perhaps because it may have resonated with the audience of his day. A conflict within the church gave rise to the Protestant movement away from the Catholic religion. Central to this debate was the means by which man recovered from his fall from God’s grace; was it by his own efforts or through God’s salvation?9 Dennis Taylor observes that “‘Catholic values of the scared...the ritual, the communal, give way, in a ‘cascade of cultural destruction’ to the ‘Protestant values of the individual, the critical mind, the subjective’” (Shuger 557) (that is the same perspective voiced earlier by Zurcher when she discussed the emphasis of the individual over the group.) The long, convoluted journey of Pericles places him in situations where he is the agent of his own destiny. First, Pericles searches for a bride to create a family that will assure his lineage and, in theory, secure the future political stability of Tyre by eliminating any succession debate. He fears Antiochus, but in the height of his anxiety, he still commands his subjects: “All leave us else, but let your cares o’erlook / What shipping and what lading’s in our haven” (I.ii.47-48), meaning he knows that the commerce of his realm must continue despite his predicament. He flees to Tarsus

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in order to deflect the wrath of Antiochus away from Tyre and, while his leaving can also be viewed as an act of self-preservation, the delivery of grain to Tarsus saves a starving community (I.iv.83-94). Pericles will stand up to Simonides when he accuses Pericles of bewitching Thaisa (II.v.48), praising Pericles in an aside, “Now by the gods I do applaud his courage” (II.v.56). These acts are proactive, because Pericles initiates them of his own accord, but there is little like evidence throughout the play until we consider the characters of Cerimon and Marina.

Pericles has been an agency of his own destiny, but he is also quite often under the influence of others, or acts in response to the action of others. He expresses his helplessness in the shadow of the powerful Antiochus: “The great Antiochus, / ‘Gainst whom I am too little to contend, / Since he’s so great can make his will his act” (I.ii.16-18). Cleon echoes the same sense of vulnerability as Pericles approaches Tarsus: “Welcome is peace, if he on peace consist, / If wars, we are unable to resist” (I.iv.81-82). Pericles may be controlled by the will of Antiochus, but Cleon is just as susceptible to the will of Pericles. On the one hand, Pericles is passive, and on the other, he is active. Shakespeare embodies the providence-free will paradox in his title character. Running away is Helicanus’ idea: “Therefore, my lord, go travel for a while” (I.ii.104), which may divert Antiochus’ attention away from Tyre, or it may not. If it does not, leaving Tyre in its time of need may seem less than noble if the nation is sacked while its ruler is hiding in a foreign country. Pericles’ fate also is frequently controlled by fortune or the gods: Pericles “By waves from coast to coast is tossed” (II.0.34) until Fortune “tired with doing bad, / Threw him ashore to give him glad” (II.0.37-38); on their journey from Pentapolis to Tyre, the sailing party’s “vessel shakes / On Neptune’s billow” (III.0.44-45) prompting Pericles to plea to Neptune: “The god of this great vast, rebuke these surges / Which was
both heaven and hell, and thou that hast / Upon the winds command, bind them in brass, /
Having called them from the deep” (III.i.1-4); “Pericles / Is now again thwarting the
wayward seas” (IV.iv.9-10) on his voyage from Tyre to Tarsus which portends the bad
news he will receive on his arrival; leaving Tarsus, Pericles “bears / A tempest which his
mortal vessel tears, / And yet he rides it out” (IV.iv.29-31). Antiochus, fortune, and the
gods have determined, to a large extent, what happens to Pericles.

Pericles has reason to be torn between his belief in his own free will and the
intervention of providence. He realizes that he is a pawn in the world, but he also seems
to believe that he might just have a little control over his own fortune. He tells the three
Fishermen of Pentapolis that he is “A man, whom both the waters and the wind / In that
vast tennis-court hath made the ball / For them to play upon” (II.i.58-60) yet, this same
fortune also seems to cede some control when it delivers the armour of Pericles’ father
from the perilous sea: “Thanks, Fortune, yet, that after all thy crosses / Thou givest me
somewhat to repair myself” (II.i.117-18). This line melds the paradoxical pairing of an
omnipotent force, or god, together with the idea of control over one’s own fate, issues at
the heart of the sixteenth-century Reformation. Even Calvin, who preached the austere
“powerless depravity of human action and will before the reign of grace,” realized what a
difficult standard that was and would occasionally “generate ambiguity or imprecision”
(Finkelstein 103) in his writing to relieve some pressure from this strict interpretation.

When Shakespeare allows Pericles to “repair” himself (II.i.117), his free human
will is exercised within the confines of the will of the gods and divine grace “without
which human effort was useless” (Hillerbrand 13). A subtle example of these coexistent,
if not equal, wills is witnessed in the tournament scene when Pericles enters: “The sixth
Knight Pericles, passes in rusty armour with bases, and unaccompanied” (II.ii.38sd).
Pericles enters alone, whereas the other five contestants are attended by squires, outfitted in “rusty armour,” presenting the figure of an isolated and forsaken individual, one who stands alone but in control of his own actions, however lowly. But this sad-looking knight has a “graceful courtesy” (II.ii.40) in presenting Thaisa with “A withered branch that’s only green at top, / The motto, *In hoc spe vivo*” (II.ii.41-42) meaning “In this hope I live” (II.ii.42n). Pericles has a self-contained grace that is linked with the “hope” of winning over Thaisa. The use of “hope” implies some positive expectation of the future but not within the control of the person who has this hope. If one is not in control, than one’s fate lies in the hands of another.

The cross of providence and human agency are not solely embodied in the Prince of Tyre. Finkelstein notes that “The most forceful assertions of human agency in the play seem performed in its last part by Cerimon and Marina” (111). Focusing on Cerimon, it is easy to see Finkelstein’s point. Cerimon declares that he has “studied physic” (III.ii.32) and relates the story of “an Egyptian / That had nine hours laid dead, who was / By good appliance recovered” (III.ii.83-84), in each case acknowledging the effectiveness of medicine, a creation of man. But Shakespeare also gives his audience a reason to consider that the hand of providence motivates Cerimon’s talent: Cerimon’s “Virtue and cunning” (III.ii.27) will make “man a god” (III.ii.31); “Your honour has / Through Ephesus poured forth your charity, / And hundreds call themselves your creatures, who / By you have been restored” (III.ii.42-45), projecting a messiah image onto Cerimon through the following of all his “creatures”; and to Pericles, Cerimon is the man “whom the gods have shown their power” (V.iii.61). However, Cerimon’s character is paradoxical since he represents a moral excellence, “virtue,” at the same time that he stands for the contradictory skillful deceit, or “cunning.” Associating virtue with grace
implies a connection with Catholicism and, conversely, if a connection is made between cunning and self-interest, we see a link with Protestantism. There are many overt references to divine providence in the play, for example: “O you gods! / Why do you make us love your goodly gifts / And snatch them straight away” (III.i.22-24); “We cannot but obey / The powers above us” (III.iii.9-10); and when Gower says “In Pericles, his queen and daughter seen, / Although assailed with Fortune fierce and keen, / Virtue preserved from fell destruction’s blast, / Led on by heaven and crowned with joy at last” (Epilogue 3-6). These obvious references to the gods and heaven seem to defy the trend of early seventeenth century culture in which there was a movement away from the communal concept of providence and more toward individualism. Zurcher notes that there was a “particularly acute sense of a loss of faith in providence in the late sixteenth century and the turn to politic ideology” (908). Gower’s Epilogue may hold the key to Shakespeare’s position wherein virtue is “preserved from fell destruction’s blast” (Epilogue 5), where Catholicism is shielded from the self-interest of the Protestant movement.

Atonement for sin is a belief central to the Catholic religion and Marina will be the agent of Pericles’ redemption. Imbuing Marina with a sense of grace and power over a male informs our third paradox, which asserts that patriarchal power can be dependent upon the authority of women. Three of the prime beliefs of the Catholic religion, in its simplest terms, are the creation of man, man’s fall from God’s grace, and man’s attempt to atone for his sin. Man’s fall from grace is memorialized in the Genesis myth, which says “that in the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve had fallen from their paradise because of their disobedience to God” (MacCulloch 104). Man may make amends through the practice of penance that may lead God to forgive the sinner. Atonement also plays an
important part in the recovery of Pericles, but what was his sin? Is he guilty of thoughts of incest or by association with Antiochus? Is he being punished by the gods for blaming them for Thaisa’s death? Or, is he accountable for not being able to provide Thaisa a proper burial? Any of these reasons may impel his need to make recompense. Pericles vows, “Unscissored shall this hair of mine remain” (III.iii.30) until Marina marries, an extended sacrifice given that Marina is an infant when he makes this promise; Gower tells us, “He swears / Never to wash his face nor cut his hairs” (IV.iv.27-28) after Cleon and Dionyza show Pericles the tomb where Marina is purportedly buried, a vow he keeps: “Sir, our vessel is of Tyre, in it the king, / A man who for this three months hath not spoken / To anyone, nor taken sustenance / But to prorogue his grief” (V.i.19-22). Thorne indicates that this suffering makes Pericles a scapegoat meant to cleanse “society of its evil” (43), an evil which we presume to be the incest of Antiochus and his unnamed daughter. Up to this point, Pericles has not only lost his wife and daughter; he has also failed to provide an heir to his throne and secure the stability and longevity of Tyre. Pericles wants to prolong his grief and feel the pain of those he has lost as a form of penance, “O Helicanus, strike me, honoured sir, / Give me a gash, put me to present pain” (V.i.180-81), a punishment so severe it impedes his ability to function as a king and as a human. The play offers no motivating force to indicate that he would ever recover from his despair if not for his reunions with Thaisa and Marina later in the play.

If Pericles is the symbol of suffering in 
*Pericles*, Marina and Thaisa are figures of purity and redemption, although each undergoes her own form of penance. Thaisa will “never more have joy” (III.iv.10) living out the rest of her life in “Diana’s temple” (III.iv.12) as she falls into a despondency over the loss of her husband and daughter, just as Pericles did over the loss of his wife and daughter. And from the time Marina was
born into a storm, she lived without a biological mother and father, was betrayed by surrogates, captured by pirates, and fought becoming a prostitute. To Marina, “This world to me is as a lasting storm” (IV.i.18). Marina started life in a tempest and her experiences seem to reflect that inauspicious beginning. Indeed, Pericles describes her birth by comparing her “chiding...nativity” (III.i.32) to a clash between “fire, air, water, earth and heaven” (III.i.33), metaphorically linking a creation of nature and God. The Bawd touches the same note, “When nature framed this piece, she meant thee a good turn” (IV.ii.130-31), referring to nature in the feminine, and Gower says, “She sings like one immortal and she dances / As goddess-like” (V.0.3-4) and “Deep clerks she dumbes and with her nee’le composes / Nature’s own shape of bud, bird, branch or berry / That even her art sisters the natural roses” (V.0.5-7). This connection between Marina and the gods and Marina and nature impart upon her a sense of grace and fertility, but her fruitfulness, paradoxically, will be more than offset by her associations with chastity, and the grace which empowers her to redeem Pericles ultimately will be neutralized.

Marina’s grace demonstrates her power when her mere presence releases Pericles from his perpetual self-condemnation. Plutarch’s Marina-like character, Aspasia, also had “a marvelous gifte and power” (30) and was a person on whom Pericles relied: “Pericles resorted unto her, because she was a wise woman” (31). Shakespeare provides numerous examples of Marina’s grace and authority. Marina says, “The gods defend me” (IV.ii.81) and “something glows upon my cheek / And whispers in mine ear, ‘Go not till he speak’” (V.i.86-87), leaving the audience with the sense that she is an agent of god. The two gentlemen leaving the brothel comment on the effectiveness of Marina’s divinity preaching (IV.iv.1-9), and Lysimachus attests to Marina’s transformative powers (IV.v.106-11). Lysimachus also describes Marina’s ability as a “sacred physic” (V.i.67),
drawing a distinction between her heavenly art and Cerimon's "studied physic" (III.ii.32), an authority achieved through human agency. Finkelstein also notes this distinction: "Although with Cerimon, as later with Prospero, Shakespeare seems at times to exalt the effectiveness of individual agency before fate, his use of Marina strongly presents an opposing view" (118). Further to this point, Zurcher states, "Marina bestows grace for its own sake on those long beyond taking account of it" (920) and nowhere is this more evident than in the redemptive effect Marina has on Pericles. And Moore: "She is an agent of redemption, bringing Pericles the promise of posterity and effecting an almost magical transformation" (42). The scene where Pericles realizes that his daughter is still alive (V.i.74-202) represents a rebirth wherein Pericles changes from a lifeless soul to a reborn father. But Pericles' gain will be Marina's loss as we witness the emergence of Pericles and the regression of Marina. Without Marina, Pericles would have remained dormant as a human and as a father. Conversely, without Pericles and without a family, Marina was self-sufficient and useful to others. But Marina is not the only female figure in the play to author his new beginning.

Pericles is shaken when Shakespeare introduces Diana of Ephesus through the deus ex machina (V.i.226sd), and her appearance raises the conflicting issues of fertility and chastity. The Diana of Pericles refers to "the fertility goddess Diana of Ephesus" (Hart 347). Hart links the name Diana to Artemis of Ephesus, a "chaste woodland goddess," and to Cybele of Anatolia, a "Phrygian goddess...linked to moon worship, agrarianism, and fertility" (348) and embodies the fertility-chastity paradox. Diana is an ever present image in Pericles and one invoked by male and female characters including, for example, Pericles (III.i.10, V.iii.69), Gower (IV.0.29), Thaisa (III.ii.104), and Marina (IV.ii.140). Hart observes that Diana "gradually gains in importance" (361) in the play.
and, without her dream state visit to Pericles directing him to Ephesus (V.i.227-36), his recovery would be incomplete. Hart says that Diana of Ephesus “was one of a group of powerful ‘Mothers’ who had long been venerated in the eastern Mediterranean” (347-48), describing Ephesus as a place “often associated with the regenerative spirit of Pauline scripture...linked to images of religious division” (347). Ephesus, then, becomes a metaphor in Pericles for the debate between free will and providence as well as a symbol of restoration and fertility. Having recovered Marina and been reunited with Thaisa, the restoration of Pericles is complete. Pericles thanks Dian for her vision and vows “Night-oblations” (V.iii.71) underscoring the significance of female empowerment, for without Diana, Pericles is never fully restored. Thaisa will rule as “queen” (V.iii.80) at the side of Pericles and perhaps even be his partner in love. Last, her voice is heard throughout the play. She is never silenced.

Conversely, if Thaisa is a symbol of the fertile mother and Diana is a powerful instrument of Pericles’ recovery, Marina is the symbol of chastity who loses her voice by play’s end. Diana “gradually gains in importance” (Hart 361) in the play while Marina, a chaste figure, loses her independence and authority after she has redeemed Pericles. She is then directed into an unwanted marriage to the unsavory Lysimachus and is not heard from after she has been commoditized (V.iii.71-73) by Pericles. Paradoxically, Marina’s now helpless female persona overshadows the strong, male-like role she has enacted throughout the play, overturning “traditional beliefs about male strength and girlish suffering” (Gossett 382n127-8). The journey of Pericles begins and ends with him as Prince of Tyre, but in the intervening period he has been educated through the process of dismantling and reconstituting the component parts of his manhood. According to Annette Flower, those component parts include “true subject” and “‘mere man’” (32),
prince and son (33), sufferer-widower (34-35), Prince of Tyre (35), and father and husband (36). Pericles has experienced the suffering normally associated with a woman, but affirming his virility in the process. Marina’s journey is similar and Pericles implores Marina to “Tell thy story. / If thine considered prove the thousand part / Of my endurance, thou art a man, and I / Have suffered like a girl” (V.i.125-28), inverting the male-female relationship. She is born at sea in a fierce storm and “hast as chiding a nativity / As fire, air, water, earth and heaven can make” (III.i.32-33), she survives Dionyza’s murder attempt and being kidnapped by pirates, and she manages to maintain her virginity in a brothel, simultaneously demonstrating an intestinal fortitude normally associated with a man while suffering in her female role. Her dominant male persona that appears early in Pericles gives way to the dominated, muted female by play’s end.

There is a strong bias toward grace, instead of man’s agency, in seeking God’s salvation in Pericles. Christopher Baker observed that each of the “final romances (Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale, and The Tempest) possess overtones of divine grace or heavenly intervention, which suggest more emphatically a beneficial providence” (xii). But man’s exercise of free will is woven into the fabric of Pericles which creates a paradoxical blending with God’s grace. The other two paradoxes, the value of history to the present and the influence of women on patriarchal power, are threads that carry through in Cymbeline.

Cymbeline

Cymbeline attempts to define identity and demonstrate how that identity can change over time. And, whether Shakespeare is interrogating the identity of a nation or of a person, he presents the audience with opposing, irreconcilable attributes of each that,
when taken together, define that nation or person. The paradox of conflicting character traits situated in one individual will lead to the conclusions that identity is mixed, inherently unstable, and transient. *Cymbeline* also shows how identity can be changed with societal status, words, affiliation, reasoning, dress, circumstance, ideas, atonement, and by example, anointment, a name change, quitting, theft, and the distance of time. This section examines the paradox of identity as Shakespeare applies his focus on the close links and distinctiveness that Cymbeline’s England has with Caesar’s Rome, a mixture mirrored in the transforming identities of Imogen and Posthumus.

Underlying the confrontations between Britain and Rome, between Cymbeline and Augustus Caesar, and among the individual characters of the play is a common effort to forge identity, but the problem is that one cannot stand alone without being influenced by those around you. Cloten makes the isolationist argument, “Britain’s a world by itself” (III.i.13), but Cymbeline’s Britain is like the child who seeks to break away from its Roman parent. In an essay entitled “A Roman Thought: Renaissance Attitudes to History Exemplified in Shakespeare and Jonson,” G. K. Hunter writes, “for the English Renaissance, ‘the Roman past was...not simply a past but the past’...legendarily linked to the moment in which Britain itself emerged from history....Rome was as much a cultural parent as a cultural other” (qtd. Kahn 3-4). Cymbeline tries hard to distance Britain from its Roman origins, even arguing that Rome’s influence was an interlude rather than a start, but it is hard to ignore the evidence in the play which both affirms and negates each position.

The “struggles between the Britons and the Romans,” as noted in Holinshed’s Chronicle of “Kymberline or Cimberline” (228), can be seen as the bridge which connected Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* to its historic predecessor. Leah Marcus “takes
Shakespeare’s *Cymbeline* (1609) as a case study for the conflict between James and Elizabeth,” but she also “reads Cymbeline as having a ‘harmonious internationalism’” where “The British and Roman ensigns wave ‘Friendly together’” (qtd. Crawford 376n23). Indeed, “Set in Roman Briton,” the play seems to question James I’s proposed union of England and Scotland (Escobedo 62). These struggles, conflicts, and issues of national identity are captured in Holinshed’s *Cymbeline*:

Kymbeline being brought vp in Rome, & knighted in the court of Augustus, euer shewed himselfe a friend to the Romans, & chieflie was loth to breake with them, because the youth of the Britaine nation should not be depreied of the benefit to be trained and brought vp among the Romans, whereby they might learne both to behaue themselvese like ciuill men, and to atteine to the knowledge of feats of warre. (229)

Holinshed’s Cymbeline sought “to improve his isolated kingdom through educational exchanges that would foster in young Britons a balance of courtly manners and martial prowess” (Collington 311). The “youth of the Britaine nation” who can learn civility and the art of war imply that they do not currently possess those attributes and demonstrates Kymbeline’s “desire for an ancient and dignified past” (Escobedo 67), a concept explored in *Pericles*, especially in the characters of Gower and Helicanus and in the references to the father of Pericles (II.i.116-30 and II.iii.36-46), and noted in Cymbeline’s declaration of Britain’s independence to Caius Lucius (III.i.54-62). Shakespeare’s king Cymbeline, conversely, resists the ties to Rome, while also acknowledging them, and will fight all enemies, foreign and domestic, that attempt to taint the identity of his nation.

From Cymbeline’s perspective, the purity of Britain is threatened by the mixture of Imogen’s royal blood with the common blood of her new husband Posthumus.
Cymbeline's concern is well placed when considering the consequences suffered by Antiochus and his unnamed daughter in *Pericles*. As Bonnie Lander notes: "In question in *Cymbeline* is the purity of the nation....Control of female sexuality determines purity of descent" (172). Sicilius Leonatus, father of Posthumus, fought with honor and distinction against the Romans alongside Cassibelan (I.i.28-41), Cymbeline's uncle, but in the end they are not related and therefore not worthy of noble positions. Philip Collington argues, "Posthumus represents the lost scion of a military dynasty who, solely on his own merit, earns admittance to the innermost circle of Roman Britain's political elite" (301). Indeed, Cymbeline refers to Posthumus as a "base thing" (I.i.56) and says to him, "Thou’rt poison to my blood" (I.ii.59), indicating the low esteem in which Cymbeline holds Posthumus and the threat that the king sees to his royal roots. The notion of contamination is reinforced when Cymbeline says to Imogen, "Thou took’st a beggar, wouldst have made my seat a throne / A seat for baseness" (I.ii.72-73). But Cymbeline's words betray his past relationship with Posthumus whom he protected and bred from infancy when Posthumus lost his mother and father (I.i.36-41). Posthumus who, "liv’d in court / (Which rare it is to do) most prais’d, most lov’d; / A sample to the youngest" (I.i.46-48), this mirror of excellence, instantly became "base" and "poison" to Cymbeline, even though Cymbeline was responsible for his noble upbringing (I.i.42). Collington is right when he says that "Posthumus will be dogged throughout his life by uncertainty about his parentage" (301). The marriage immediately changed who Posthumus was to Cymbeline, no longer a "glass" (I.i.49) of perfection, even though at the moment of marriage he was still the same person he had always been. But Cymbeline's "mirror of excellence" lost his luster only from the point of view of the king. Later in the play, Iachimo will make the counter argument (I.v.12-15) that the
marriage enriched the reputation of Posthumus rather than tarnished his name. He states that the great reputation that Posthumus enjoys is merely a function of his relationship to Imogen: “This matter of marrying the king’s daughter, where-in he must be weighed rather by her value than his own, words him (I doubt not) a great deal from the matter” (I.v.12-15). Association and words, not deeds, are what define Posthumus to Iachimo. However, one must consider the source of the character definition.

Iachimo will expose his own conniving, untrustworthy side when he makes his bet with Posthumus and during his encounter with Imogen which may cause an observer to question the veracity of Iachimo’s assessment. From Iachimo’s perspective, Posthumus is a man defined by his wife and the audience cannot help but side, to some degree, with Iachimo as the stable character of Posthumus appears to unravel as the play progresses. Shakespeare hints at the change to come in Posthumus, through the eye of Imogen, as Posthumus transitions from man to thin air leaving the shores of Britain:

I would have broke mine eye-strings, crack’d them, but
To look upon him, till the diminution
Of space had pointed him sharp as my needle:
Nay, followed him, till he had melted from
The smallness of a gnat, to air: and then
Have turn’d mine eye, and wept. (I.iv.17-22)

The incomparable Posthumus will quickly transform into nothing as he leaves his life and nation behind. While Posthumus, still in a British state of mind, staunchly defends the honor of Imogen in his encounter with Iachimo (I.v.74-143), later he will call for her execution (III.ii.11), a symbolic attack on England, while located in Rome. Indeed, the tenor of the discussion between Iachimo and Posthumus is not only a wager against
Imogen’s honor, but can be characterized as two diplomats discussing national strategies since they have “articles betwixt us” (I.v.153-54), speak as enemies (I.v.157) of “assault” (I.v.159), and will settle matters by “sword” (I.v.161). Imogen is, in effect, a territory to be fought over and Posthumus has converted from husband to military attaché. Roman Iachimo launches his attack on Imogen, hence Britain, by convincing Imogen that Posthumus “Has forgot Britain” (I.vii.113) and by trying to deceive and violate her (I.vii.132-39). Iachimo has distorted Imogen’s perception of Posthumus through his demeanor and words and he begins to change the way Imogen sees Posthumus. At this moment, Posthumus is an exiled British citizen living in Rome defending Britain, but he will become the inverse of that, if only for the briefest of time, as the play proceeds, a proclaimed Roman fighting against his home country. There is a transition period in which we are not sure whether Posthumus is, in effect, still British or a newly molded Roman. The Queen foreshadows this liminal status when she says, “Return he cannot, nor / Continue where he is” (I.vi.53-54). Iachimo will continue his battle with Posthumus by strategically positioning himself to scout Imogen’s bedchamber and her body as if he were scouting a battlefield (II.ii.23-51). In the meantime, as the play reveals more of Cloten’s personality, Shakespeare further queries the idea of identity by affiliation.

Iachimo thought that the identity of Posthumus was defined by his relationship to Imogen. Conversely, Cloten’s character and reputation seem to bear little relationship to his mother the Queen. The Second Lord disparages Cloten with statements like: “To have smelt like a fool” (II.i.16), “He’s a strange fellow himself, and / knows it not” (II.i.35-36), and “You are a fool granted” (II.i.46), subsequently comparing Cloten to the Queen with, “That such a crafty devil as his mother / Should yield the world this ass” (II.i.51-52). The implication of the marriage between Imogen and Posthumus may be
that outsiders are unwelcome at court, but the fallacy is that Britain likely would have been worse off had Imogen married the blundering and unsophisticated Cloten. As Kahn notes, “Neither is fit to ‘be jointed to the old stock’ of Britain’s family tree, that ‘stately cedar’ identified with Cymbeline” (166). The king chooses to ignore the potential contamination to his throne had the incestuous marriage between Imogen and Cloten occurred. The Second Lord of Cymbeline’s court may have belittled Cloten, but Shakespeare quickly counters this perception by unexpectedly imparting on him an implied level of diplomatic authority, albeit as yet unsubstantiated in the play, when Cymbeline invites him to meet with Roman Ambassador Caius Lucius: “we will have need / T’employ you towards this Roman” (II.iii.61-62). Being part of Caius Lucius’ receiving party is the closest Cloten will come to being like his mother, and it is actually a job he does quite well. One may argue that he is too direct, but he plainly and accurately tells Lucius that there is no modern day Julius Caesar to challenge his nation (III.i.12-14), that Britain “is stronger than it was at that time” (III.i.34), and that there is no real reason to continue Rome’s monetary tribute (III.i.41-46). In these exchanges, his keen power of observation compares favorably to the Queen’s craftiness and makes us forget, if only for the moment, his less refined side. But Shakespeare again redirects our opinion when Imogen voices the ultimate insult to Cloten by telling him that his worth is less than that of an inanimate object such as Posthumus’ clothes: “His mean’st garment, / That ever hath but clipped his body, is dearer / In my respect, than all the hairs above thee” (II.iii.132-34). At least when the Queen was talking about the identity of Posthumus she described him in human terms, but Imogen says that Cloten is not even equivalent to the shadow of a man. Cloten is so offended that he can only manage a
series of scattered, stuttered responses (II.136-55) which repeat the slight he finds so incomprehensible.

One might, in this instance, draw a parallel to James I, who was widely perceived to be a crude outsider, just like Cloten. At work culturally between the lines of the play is an interrogation of England's identity after the death of Queen Elizabeth, an unmarried female monarch who kept England independent, and the beginning of the rule of James I, who was a Scottish, married, male monarch. Could there have been two more dramatically different, successive monarchs with more dissimilar characters and goals for Britain? James and Elizabeth seemed to enjoy a warm relationship before the queen’s death, for example: “I render you many thanks for your bond of firm and constant amity” (Elizabeth 383), but James seemed later to resent the memory of Elizabeth because, “After James accedes to the throne, viragos and warrior women are no longer celebrated....James defined his reign, in many ways, in opposition to Elizabeth’s” (Crawford 360). James I also sought to change the face of England by joining England and Scotland into a new Great Britain, thereby ensuring and consolidating his power base: “The most important matter on the agenda was James’ plans for Union between the kingdoms” (de Lisle 280). The problem posed by the proposed union is the fertile ground on which Cymbeline interrogates the question of national identity, and the paradox of identity alternately focuses on Imogen and Posthumus.

Shakespeare returns his audience to the duel between Iachimo and Posthumus, which is reflective of the battle between Rome and Britain as played out in the meetings and dialogue between Cymbeline and Lucius, by first reminding us that the distance of time may change perception. Specifically, Philario asks Posthumus, “What means do you make to him” (II.iv.3), meaning that he wants to know how Posthumus will persuade
the king that he is not “base” or “poison.” Posthumus responds: “Not any: but abide the change of time, / Quake in the present winter’s state, and wish / That warmer days would come” (II.iv.4-6). Posthumus has no plan, no device to effect that change, merely the hope that Cymbeline will change his mind as time passes. His hope appears to be based on the change in disposition Britain has taken toward the renewed threat of a Roman invasion. Long ago, Rome invaded Britain and won an annual tribute that Britain now refuses to pay. Posthumus does not believe that Cymbeline will agree to reinstate the tribute because Cymbeline’s Britain is stronger than the one defeated by Rome in another time: “Our countrymen / Are men more order’d than when Julius Caesar / Smil’d at their lack of skill” (II.iv.20-22). Posthumus would appear to hope for such a sea change in the attitude Cymbeline has toward him, but his reasoning is relegated to the background when Iachimo appears to have won Imogen’s virtue.

When Iachimo returns to Philario’s house, claiming to have seduced Imogen, he describes Imogen’s room (II.iv.80-91), produces her bracelet (II.iv.95sd), and accurately describes the location of Imogen’s mole “under her breast” (II.iv.134), thereby igniting murderous rage (II.iv.47-49) in Posthumus and transforming him from a loving husband (I.i.26-27) into a misogynist (II.iv.153-86). Imogen is no longer his wife, but someone who has “bought the name of whore” (II.iv.128), and his sudden hatred for Imogen alters his perception of all women: “The vows of women / Of no more bondage be to where they are made / Than they are to their virtues, which is nothing” (II.iv.110-14). He even includes his mother in the category of women as unvirtuous liars, “And that most venerable man, which I / Did call my father, was I know not where / When I was stamp’d” (II.iv.155-57), while simultaneously affirming the merit of being a man. When he realizes that man cannot exist without woman, “Is there no way for men to be, but
women / Must be half-workers” (II.iv.153-54), he reaffirms his masculinity by stating that the unpleasant composition of women is exclusive to them: “Could I find out / The woman’s part in me – for there’s no motion / That tends to vice in man, but I affirm / It is the women’s part” (II.iv.171-73). Posthumus’ reasoning imbeds an inherent male-female paradox. If men are virtuous and women are not, and men are made up, in part, of women, how can men not have a natural tendency toward being unvirtuous?

As the complex action of *Cymbeline* jumps from one subplot to the next, we are once again returned to the king’s meeting with Caius Lucius wherein Cymbeline asserts an identity for Britain that has evolved from the time when Julius Caesar “was in this Britain / And conquer’d it” (III.i.4-5). We have previously seen how precise Cloten was in defending Britain’s sovereignty and now Cymbeline takes it a step further by rattling the saber of war: Caesar “Did put the yoke upon’s; which to shake off / Becomes a warlike people, whom we reckon / Ourselves to be” (III.i.52-54). Cymbeline’s threat, though, is not merely a prelude to war encouraged by an unpaid tribute; rather Cymbeline is reclaiming the origins of his country stolen and corrupted by Caesar: “Our ancestor was that Mulmutius which / Ordain’d our laws, whose use the sword of Caesar / Hath too much mangled...Mulmutius made our laws, / Who was the first of Britain which did put / His brows within a golden crown, and call’d / Himself a king” (III.i.55-62). Escobedo summarizes the opposing Roman and British positions this way:

Caesar may have conquered the island several generations earlier, but Dunwallo (“Mulmutius”) established civilized British culture well before that, at least according to Geoffrey of Monmouth. Anticipating Edmund Bolton’s admonition, this scene of *Cymbeline* defines the nation’s present through its past. (68)
This is the very same point made in the *Pericles* section. Cymbeline’s Britain is an agglomeration of the identity bestowed upon it by Mulmutius and by Caesar, even though one side denies the other. This denial reflects back to the question Posthumus posed regarding who “stamp’d” (II.iv.157) him and it forces the audience to question the origins of identity.

Up to this point in the play, Imogen has not changed much from the love-struck and tormented virgin bride (III.ii.26-83), a person who has yet to be corrupted by the influences of society outside the walls of her court. But all that changes with a change of clothes. Imogen will travel to Milford-Haven in disguise: “provide me presently / A riding-suit; no costlier than would fit / A franklin’s housewife” (III.ii.76-78). By changing her clothes she will, presumably, be able to travel without the notice that her more courtly garments would attract. Her disguise facilitates her travel, but it does more than that. The clothes of a “franklin’s housewife” begin to change her identity, for she is no longer a princess, but a common spouse of a landowner. This is the beginning of an educational experience, reminiscent of Pericles’ journey, that will change her perspective of the world even though she will always be a princess. Her impending transition from female to male is foreshadowed by her curious statement to Pisano: “I see before me, man” (III.ii.79). Initially, one might think that she is referring to Pisano who stands in front of her, but that serves no purpose. Perhaps she is referring to the expectation that Posthumus will stand before her in Milford-Haven? Or, possibly, is the path before her open only to men? Does this imply that she may have to become a “man” in order to travel down that path? Her reference to “a fog...That I cannot look through” (III.ii.80-81) can mean that, as a woman, she has no real insight into what it means to be a man. It is impossible to tell her precise meaning, but she is moving away from the person she is.
Imogen equates herself to “a garment out of fashion” (III.iv.52) when she learns of Posthumus’ accusations, and we must remember how Imogen told Cloten that he was worth less than a garment. She has now devolved from princess, to common housewife, to a shadow of her former selves. Imogen will redefine all men in the same negative vein that Posthumus redefined all women as unvirtuous liars: “Men’s vows are women’s traitors! All good seeming, / By thy revolt, O husband, shall be thought / Put on for villainy; not born where’t grows, / But worn a bait for ladies” (III.iv.55-58). Posthumus is no longer her husband, but someone who “Wilt lay the leaven on all proper men” (III.iv.63), souring Imogen on the entire male species. Posthumus asserted his masculinity when he made his declaration against all women, but Imogen does the opposite and moves instead toward becoming a man. Imogen is a woman at a crossroads that typically only men can travel, and she asks, “What shall I do the while? Where bide? How live? / Or in my life what comfort, when I am / Dead to my husband” (III.iv.130-32). Her identity as a princess is in question and begins to crossover from her female world to the male world suggested by Pisano: “You must forget to be a woman” (III.iv.156). Imogen cannot return to her court in Britain, yet she doesn’t belong in the plains to Milford-Haven. She is in the same liminal place that Posthumus finds himself. Her transformation unfolds as she appears “in boy’s clothes” (III.vi.sd) and names herself “Fidele” (III.vii.33). She is a female inhabiting male identity and even says that she would willingly “change my sex to be companion” (III.vii.60) with Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus, a concept which completely controverts her assessment that all men are villains.

The passage of time allows Imogen to discover her new friends, and we witness the effect that the passage of time has on identity. Pisano hopes “But to win time / To
lose so bad employment” (III.iv.111-12), meaning that if he waits long enough he may not have to execute Imogen as he was commanded to by Posthumus; he hopes something will intervene. The Queen is more explicit: “Since the exile of Posthumus, most retir’d / Hath her life been: the cure whereof, my lord, / ‘Tis time must do” (III.v.36-38). Much has already been noted about the passage of time and how the distance of time can alter one’s perception. Belarius counsels Guiderius and Arviragus on the related topic of perceptions being changed by physical distance: “Consider, / When you above perceive me like a crow, / That it is place which lessens and sets off, / And you may then revolve what tales I have told you / Of Courts, of princes; of tricks of war” (III.iii.11-15). Belarius will “tread these flats” (III.iii.11) while his adoptive sons observe him from above as a soaring crow might. From these heights, they will see Belarius as they’ve not seen him before, and he counsels them to consider the lessons he has taught them from a new perspective. This indicates that people see things another way when they look at them from a different viewpoint enabling the paradox of identity.

Imogen learns the lesson that Belarius taught his sons: “Gods, what lies I have heard! / Our courtiers say all’s savage but at court; / Experience, O, thou disprov’st report” (IV.ii.33-34). She has discovered that the world beyond her myopic court existence is not as bad as has been represented, that Belarius, Guiderius, and Arviragus are not savages, but “kind creatures” (IV.ii.32). Her perception of the world changed when she changed her vantage point.

Guiderius and Arviragus learn the same thing. Guiderius complains that their cave is a “cell of ignorance” (III.iii.33) which feels like a “prison” (III.iii.34) and Arviragus complains that they have not had the same advantage of experience provided to their father (III.iii.35-36), that they “have seen nothing” (III.iii.39). Belarius attributes
their restlessness to an inherent feel for something else: “I’ th’ cave wherein they bow, their thoughts do hit / The roofs of palaces, and Nature prompts them” (III.iii.83-84). Belarius understands that it is hard to “hide the sparks of Nature” (III.iii.79) because he knows that they are the biological sons of Cymbeline and that he “stole these babes” (III.iii.101) when they were young children.

Belarius is known as “Morgan” (III.iii.106) in the hills of Wales where he settled after being banished by Cymbeline and his double identity signals a mixed personality. Morgan says, “Cymbeline lov’d me, / And when a soldier was the theme, my name / Was not far offf” (III.iii.58-60), but when “two villains...swore to Cymbeline / I was confederate with the Romans” (III.iii.66-68), he was exiled. Morgan was an honorable soldier, but when he felt betrayed by Cymbeline he became a kidnapper. Imogen is similarly undone by Iachimo’s lies to Posthumus and, like Morgan, will be compelled to adopt another persona. Lies, in effect, began the process of change to their identities. As time passes, Morgan’s identity will evolve from kidnapper to strong father figure as he notes the princely demeanor of his adopted sons (III.iii.80, IV.ii.169-72). The courtly backdrop and polish which Posthumus earned under the tutelage of Cymbeline and Imogen stands in contrast to the country upbringing imparted by Belarius to the biological sons of Cymbeline. Robert Adams describes the contrast as “between the florid and often dishonest wit of the court and the flat, even foolish, but genuine speech of the country” (67) and argues that “‘Court’ stands for formality and authority but also for softness, ‘country’ for natural affection but also for austere masculine virtue” (81). Leanda de Lisle makes a related comparison between Scotland and England:

In Scotland they still lived in ancient manses furnished only by a few basic necessities. In England, by contrast, they had new, light, airy houses
embellished with elaborate plaster ceilings and carved chimneypieces and furnished with wall hangings, carpets and furniture, crystal and silks.

Cymbeline might have considered Polydore and Cadwal "base" and "poison" if he had encountered them as country peasants, but he may have embraced Guiderius and Arviragus if he knew their real identities. This is exactly what happens to Posthumus. He went from being the "mirror of excellence" to banished commoner based on the perception of Cymbeline, yet he was the same person. This reflects badly on Cymbeline because he banishes a man, Posthumus, who is not a threat, while not realizing that his crown has been usurped by Belarius. Belarius kidnapped Guiderius, the "heir of Cymbeline and Britain" (III.iii.88). A Roman invasion is certainly a serious threat, but perhaps a greater threat came from within Cymbeline's court. By blocking the ascension of Cymbeline's heir, Britain's identity has been hijacked and the court was too ignorant to respond.

The identities of Guiderius-Polydore and Arviragus-Cadwal are themselves a paradox. Belarius says that "cowards father cowards, and base things sire base" (IV.ii.26) meaning that offspring are reflective of their parentage. Thus far we have only witnessed the actions of Polydore and Cadwal and they are all attributable to Morgan. Belarius is a kidnapper, but Morgan is an adoptive father. We cannot ignore that the Belarius-Morgan combination has raised two kind and capable young men who, by Cymbeline's standard, would likely find them crude warrior peasants. Conversely, while the king is their biological father and Belarius touts their inherent nobility (IV.ii.176-81), Cymbeline has had no impact on the men that they have become. So what is the right interpretation of Guiderius-Polydore and Arviragus-Cadwal? Are they crude countrymen
or are they displaced members of the court? Are they warriors or potential nobles? Are they intelligent, observant and independent, or are they simple, unaware, and dominated? The answer is that their identities are comprised of all these characteristics and the only variance from this is the degree to which they embody each of those attributes. They are, paradoxically, products of their parentage and environment and express the attitudes of each.

Cloten calls Guiderius “a robber, / A law-breaker, a villain” (IV.ii.74-75) to which Guiderius responds, “To who” (IV.ii.76) which reinforces the notion that identity can be in the eye of the beholder. Cloten based his opinion on the dress of Guiderius and on the location of their encounter. Cloten does not know that this base villain has higher standing in the court than he does, a place Guiderius has never visited. Cloten will not survive outside that comfort zone. Before he meets Guiderius, Cloten had defined himself against the identity of Posthumus: “the lines of my body are as well drawn as his; no less young, more strong, not beneath him in fortunes, beyond him in the advantage of time, above him in birth, alike conversant in general services, and more remarkable in single oppositions” (IV.i.9-13). None of these attributes speak to the true character of a man. Cloten appears ever to be searching for his identity and he wonders why Guiderius doesn’t recognize him based solely on his dress: “Know’st me not by my clothes” (IV.ii.81). Of course, Cloten’s apparel does not identify him to Guiderius because Guiderius does not know what the clothes of a noble might look like. Even if he did, the message seems clear, that the clothes do not make the man. It is ironic that Cloten would want to be recognized by his dress because he became incensed when Imogen suggested that he was worth less than Posthumus’ “meanest garment.” Apparently, Cloten has been searching for his identity for some time because Belarius says, “time hath nothing blurr’d
those lines of favour / Which he then wore” (IV.ii.104-05). This implies that the passage of time does not always change people. Cloten’s elusive identity comes to a head when Imogen mistakes his corpse for that of Posthumus (IV.ii.295-311), but this is more than a commentary on the character of Cloten, it reflects on Posthumus, as well. Stephen Orgel observed, “The headless corpse scene is an astonishing moment, not least because it requires us to reconsider just how different the loathsome, murderous rapist really is from the adored, idealized husband: they turn out, at this moment, to be all but identical” (Cymbeline 279). Even worse, Imogen denies Cloten even in death, not only by mistaking his corpse for Posthumus, but by fabricating for him the entirely fictional identity of “Richard du Champ” (IV.ii.377). The lack of identity beyond the walls of his home has cost Cloten his life because he could not function beyond their protection. Posthumus and Imogen face the same challenge.

Once he was banished early in Act I, Posthumus transforms from favored son and husband, to exiled British citizen, and last to murderous misogynist by the end of Act II. A span of three full acts passes before he appears again at the beginning of Act V. One might call this absence a dramatic necessity given the level of action in the intervening scenes, but we might also see it as proof that the distance of time changes people, especially since the play offers no reason for the forgiveness and repentance Posthumus will now display. Posthumus wonders, “how many / Must murder wives much better than themselves / For wrying but a little” (V.i.3-5) seemingly acknowledging the error of his response to Imogen’s alleged infidelity. But should she pay for her deed with her life? Is the punishment commensurate? Posthumus’ logic is flawed because Imogen was either unfaithful or she was not, but she cannot wry “but a little.” Nonetheless, he recognizes that love is not perfect and laments his loss: “You snatch some hence for little
faults; that’s love” (V.i.12). As his thoughts turn toward his future, we learn that he has lived “Among th’ Italian gentry, and to fight / Against my lady’s kingdom” (V.i.18-19), but pledges: “I’ll disrobe me / Of these Italian weeds, and suit myself / As does a Briton peasant” (V.i.22-24). And, just when we believe that he has resolved his crisis in identity, he sinks to the lowest possible level and seeks death, the ultimate loss of self: “so I’ll fight / Against the part I come with: so I’ll die / For thee” (V.i.24-26). But even though Posthumus seeks death, there is reason to believe that his future may prove different because he looks to his roots for strength: “Gods, put the strength o’ th’ Leonati in me” (V.i.31).

The second scene of Act V is set in a “Field between the British and Roman Camps” where Posthumus follows Roman General Lucius and the Italian Iachimo “like a poor soldier” (V.ii.sd). The location between opposing camps is symbolic of Posthumus’ indeterminate heritage because, at this moment, he is neither British nor Roman. He is on the fringe of both, but part of neither, making him a being without place and a person in turmoil. In the initial staging of the scene, Posthumus fights on the side of the Romans, but once they leave the stage and then return, Posthumus is seen fighting Iachimo whom he has “vanquisheth and disarmeth” (V.ii.sd). Posthumus helps rescue Cymbeline (V.ii.13sd), engages in battle in the “straight lane” (V.iii.7) with his British compatriots, but surrender himself as “A Roman” (V.iii.89), all to engage death. The “straight lane” could have ended life for Posthumus, but as Kahn notes, “Posthumus’ valor in the narrow lane establishes him, finally, as a fit bridegroom for Imogen and future ruler of Britain” (168). Paradoxically, the location that was planned for his death turned out to be a location that was part of his rebirth, something Posthumus has yet to recognize. He is jailed for being a Roman enemy and he still seeks death: “For Imogen’s dear life take
mine” (V.iv.22). The journey of Posthumus through the identity quagmire requires a jolt to lift him from his nadir, and that shove is provided by the images from his dream (like Pericles). Sicilius, his father, appears as a ghost and reinforces his origins: “Great nature, like his ancestry, / moulded the stuff so fair, / That he deserved the praise o’ th’ world, as great Sicilius’ heir” (V.iv.48-51). We see very early in the play that Posthumus was born of good stock and that the encounter with his father in the dream is meant to remind him of his roots and move him to regain his position. Posthumus will act on his father’s wish, prompted additionally by the prophecy of the “book” (V.iv.133), and regain the favor of Imogen, “Hang there like fruit, my soul, / Till the tree die” (V.v.263), once he realizes that she is not dead. He also comes full circle with Cymbeline as the accepted husband to Imogen: “We’ll learn our freeness of a son-in-law: / Pardon’s the word to all” (V.v.422-23). Posthumus may appear to be the same person at the end of the play that he was at the beginning, but his experiences have reshaped his character and revealed to the audience the complex, conflicting nature of his identity. He is far from the perfect man first described by the First Gentleman, and he may be back in the good graces of the king, but the balance of power within Cymbeline’s own family is about to change.

The marriage of Imogen and Posthumus prompted Cymbeline to banish Posthumus and forced Imogen to run away. Events conspired against them and triggered a change to their personas that saw them devolve as individuals. Posthumus hit the bottom of that abyss when he sought death. Similarly, Imogen urged Pisano twice to end her misery, “Do thou thy master’s bidding” (III.iv.66) and “The lamb entreats the butcher” (III.iv.98), but this is not the moment that she completely loses herself. Belarius observes that Imogen, disguised as Fidele, “appears he hath had / Good ancestors” (IV.ii.47-48), yet when asked by Lucius, “What art thou” (IV.ii.367), Imogen replies “I
am nothing” (IV.ii.368). There is no transformative push to revitalize Imogen in the same way that the ghosts of Posthumus have moved him. Instead, Imogen goes from “nothing” to a duteous servant as Lucius sings her praise (V.v.83-92) so that Cymbeline will spare her life. Belarius was right about her “Good ancestors” because Cymbeline sees something in her that gives him comfort, “Boy, / Thou hast look’d thyself into my grace, / And art mine own” (V.v.93-95), and what he sees is a reflection of himself. But only eleven lines later Imogen will abandon Lucius after seeing Posthumus’ ring on the hand of Iachimo (V.v.102-04), telling Cymbeline that “He is a Roman, no more kin to me / Than your highness” (V.v.112-13). Imogen is true to her British roots by siding against a Roman, but her lack of loyalty to Lucius, or even sympathy for him, reveals an unsavory side that we would not have seen at the beginning of the play. Yet, on the other hand, while she disclaims Lucius, she simultaneously says that she is not related to Cymbeline when, in fact, she is. So, if she is lying about being related to the king, she must be lying about being “kin” to Lucius. She is, at once, a Roman and Briton. Ultimately, her true identity is revealed (V.v.264-65) and she again is heir to her father’s throne, until Cymbeline learns that Guiderius and Arviragus are his biological sons (V.v.331-32). Imogen first lost her right to the crown when she married Posthumus and, now that the true lineage of Guiderius is discovered, she has lost it again as Cymbeline makes clear: “O Imogen, / Thou hast lost by this a kingdom” (V.v.373-74). She may no longer be heir to the crown, but she is at least a king’s daughter again (V.v.401-02) and a wife whose husband has been embraced by her father. Posthumus, once again, owes a part of his identity to his relationship with Imogen, a theme that reverberates back to the discussion in Pericles about the dependency that men have on women.
Cymbeline ends with the reconciliation and reunion common to tragicomedy. King Cymbeline is reunited with his lost sons Guiderius and Arviragus, he has reconciled with Belarius, Imogen, and Posthumus, and the evil Queen and her clumsy son have been eliminated. The play has chronicled many transformations of identity, personal and national, and Britain has prevailed over Rome securing its independence. Why, then, does Cymbeline take the seemingly incongruous action of returning tribute to Caesar and the Roman empire, “Although the victor, we submit to Caesar, / And to the Roman empire” (V.v.461-62), the very person and nation from whom and which the British sought distance? Escobedo argues that, “They return to the Roman model, but on their own terms” (70), which would actually bring the nations closer together. Going back to the “Roman model” makes sense if Crawford is right about James’ link to Rome: “James consciously placed a ‘Roman stamp on his reign’...and James’ critics were leery of his Roman identifications” (360). We can even extend Crawford’s conclusion about the play Bonduca, where “Caratach’s loyalty to men (Roman soldiers) ultimately overrides his loyalty to Britain, and at the end of the play he capitulates to Rome” (365), to the conclusion of Cymbeline. This line of reasoning implies a sense of disloyalty and may, subversively, be taking issue with the rule of King James I. Kahn says that “Cymbeline is driven to acknowledge Rome’s preeminence, to maintain that cultural tie through a nominally hierarchal relationship that recapitulates Rome’s dominance when it no longer actually obtains” (161), meaning Britain had a choice in determining payment of the tribute. And that, in the end, is where Holinshed’s Cymbeline began, with an option to pay tribute: “he was at libertie to pay his tribute or not” (228). Either Cymbeline drama, Holinshed’s or Shakespeare’s, had this option at one time or another. Augustus Caesar initially granted Holinshed’s Cymbeline the option, but the option was lost when Caesar
died. Shakespeare’s king initially had no option, but fought for that right. One can argue that Cymbeline used poor judgment in reinstituting the tribute, but maybe it reflects more positively on him than that. Maybe Cymbeline was showing a national gratitude that, in and of itself, identifies his Britain as being more civil for having made the gesture. Britain is independent, but is now more like Rome. The passage of time granted the citizens of Britain the opportunity to effect that independence through the resolution of the paradoxical pairing of irreconcilable, yet coexistent, identities. *The Winter’s Tale* delves deeper into the structure of those identities by examining the difference between their appearance and their reality.

*The Winter’s Tale*

Shakespeare’s tragicomedies generally move from a point of crisis and darkness toward resolution and a lighter tone. The initial crisis in *The Winter’s Tale* is spurred by lack of trust. The title of the play associates winter with bleakness, but winter is seasonal and the natural movement toward happy resolution suggests a future connection with spring and, therefore, the broader backdrop of the cycle of life. Dylan Thomas said of his poetic creations that “any sequence of my images must be a sequence of creations, recreations, destructions, contradictions” (Tritschler 422). This description is also a reflection of nature’s process of creation, destruction, and rebirth, “the paradox of life creating and consuming itself” (Tritschler 422). Winter has a metaphoric association with death because of its characteristic dormancy just as spring has a similar association with life and birth. The emergence of one at the expense of another implies a friction between opposites. Shakespeare seems to purposely invite collision between, and among, these opposites in order to accentuate them while simultaneously highlighting their
differences. Contradiction is an integral part of this sequence and in *The Winter's Tale* we can track incongruity through competing images of appearance and reality. The coexistence of truth and falsehood can be discerned by looking closely at the characters of Mamillius, Autolycus, Antigonus and Camillo and by seeing how they interact. The interrogation of truth over the space of sixteen years will demonstrate that appearances can deceive and that, ultimately, time reveals the truths that lie behind appearance. Hermione’s transformation and Polixenes’ assertion that nature supersedes art are also fertile grounds for this comparison. Movement through life’s cycle requires metamorphosis, and there is no better example of this in the play than when Leontes repents.

In *The Winter’s Tale*, the paradox of life creating and consuming itself begins with Leontes’ destruction of his family and relationships, and ends with the happy reconstruction of his family in conjunction with the promise that life will continue after he and Hermione are gone. The play begins in winter with the destructive effects of Leontes’ jealousy and false accusation, “for ’tis Polixenes / Has made thee swell thus” (II.i.61-62), and then makes a transition to the spring “celebration of that nuptial” (IV.iv.50) between Florizel and Perdita. The divide between the dark side of winter and the lighter side of spring is so distinct that Shakespeare provides a literal break point between the tragic and comic components of his tragicomedy in the conversation between the Old Shepard and the Clown: “thou met’st with things dying, I with things new-born” (III.iii.112-13). The Clown witnesses the bear eating Antigonus and Old Shepard discovers the infant Perdita. Among others, Dennis Biggins notes that, “This transition, from the melodramatically remote world of Antigonus’ soliloquy via the bear to the earthily comic reality of the old shepherd’s speech, ‘not only expresses the sense of
different worlds but has an important technical work to do, that of throwing a bridge across the two halves of the play”” (4). Indeed, the Shepherd’s line can make it seem as if Shakespeare merely glued a tragedy onto a comedy in order to produce *The Winter’s Tale*, a concept on which Colie comments:

In its own peculiar shorthand, *The Winter’s Tale* is a truncated torso of a play. It pays no tribute to those demands for classical modulation between genres and modes that drove Guarini and his defenders so carefully to explain how to mix comic and tragic genres in one decorum. Shakespeare’s play simply forces us to face what is ‘tragic’ and what is ‘comic’ in life and in plays, forces questions of genre and decorum. The playwright makes no compromise with generic expectations or even with conventional verisimilitude: tragic and comic members of this body are not articulated, and the differences between them are not at all glossed over, but pointed stressed” (Colie *SLA* 266-67).

Pointedly stressing differences and disputing truth serves in *The Winter’s Tale* to emphasize the paradox between the coexistence between truth and falsehood and appearance and reality. The quick turn from the tragedy of Antigonus’ death to Perdita’s new life seems to purposely bracket death and life. The death of Mamillius and the epiphany experienced by Leontes have the same effect. By locating such stark tragic and comic circumstances so closely together, the audience is compelled to face their conflicting emotions. *The Winter’s Tale* is, at once, two genres simply strung together as Colie describes, but it also follows the intricacies of Beaumont and Fletcher’s typical “tragie-comedie.”
Life cycles occur over time and in the intervening period the human experience happens where the ups and downs of life are more intertwined and less distinct. And, in this experience, there are many episodes where truth and falsehood collide. The title of the play, *The Winter's Tale*, implies that we can expect some level of falsehood because it is a tale, something that is imaginary, in doubt, or untrue. The Second Gentleman validates this initial perception when he says: “This news, / which is called true, is so like an old tale that the / verity of it is in strong suspicion” (V.ii.27-29). Paulina makes a similar reference when she says that the story of Hermione’s secret existence “should be hooted at / Like an old tale” (V.iii.116-17). These references force the audience to question the very play that they are experiencing if for no other reason than it has been openly labeled as a tale. Lee Cox observes that, “Shakespeare is constantly reminding the reader of the unbelievableness of a tale” (284). Mamillius’ observation that “A sad tale’s best for winter” (II.i.25) will cue Leontes’ false accusation of Hermione’s unfaithfulness. Shakespeare underscores that one cannot trust appearances by the seemingly magical transformation of Hermione from stone to human. The effect of Hermione’s apparent infidelity, her supposed death, and her seeming rebirth each serve to stress the paradoxical relationship between appearance and reality.

Differences are evident from the start of the play when Archidamus says: “you shall see, as I have said, great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicilia” (I.i.3-4), referring to Polixenes and Leontes respectively. In trying to persuade Polixenes to remain in Sicilia, Hermione says: “How say you? / My prisoner? Or my guest” (I.ii.54-55) and “Not your gaoler then, / But your kind hostess” (I.ii.59-60). There is great disparity between being a “prisoner” and a “guest” and between being a “gaoler” and “hostess,” but whether you are one or the other is a matter of intent and perception. If
Polixenes yields, he is a “guest” and Hermione his “hostess.” If not, then Polixenes will have to stay in Sicilia anyway and be Hermione’s “prisoner” and she his “gaoler.” Leonard Barkan makes an analogous argument regarding the relationship between Paulina and Hermione during Hermione’s sixteen year absence: “Either Hermione died and was resurrected in marble, or else she spent sixteen years in a garden-shed on the grounds of her husband’s palace, a solitude broken only by daily visits from her protectress – or jailer?” (640). Difference may suggest distinction, but it does not have to mean a lack of coexistence and we see this in the bond between the two kings. The relationship between Leontes and Polixenes is based on a solid foundation that was formed in their youth and continued into adulthood:

They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, have been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies, that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook hands, as over a vast; and embraced, as it were, from the ends of opposed winds. (I.i.22-31)

Though Leontes and Polixenes are different people and live apart, their long term mutual affection flourishes because of their strong “rooted” bond despite their royal obligations and physical separation. In this instance, the appearance and the reality are rather obvious, “that they have seemed to be together, though absent.” This is in marked contrast to Hermione stepping down from her pedestal where the line between appearance and reality, or in that instance between art and nature, is much less certain. Another example of the bridge that Shakespeare makes between the tragic and comic
components of his tale is reflected in the image of the two kings shaking hands across a
physical divide functioning in the play much like the Old Shepherd’s link between life
and death. We see differences that, nonetheless, allow a cohesiveness that would not be
expected between opposites and which further underscores the paradox linking the two.
The key to their relationship, and the thing that allows them to overcome obstacles to that
relationship, is the “affection” that is “rooted betwixt them” because a strong foundation
is the base of all truth. The relationship between Leontes and Polixenes survives,
ultimately, because of the strength of their rooted bond.

Key to the success of any relationship is the foundation upon which it is built. Camillo recognizes the unstable basis of Leontes’ misperception, “The fabric of his folly,
whose foundation / Is pil’d upon his faith, and will continue / The standing of his body” (I.ii.429-30), but he also understands that Leontes has “faith” in what he believes and that
it is therefore unshakable. Leontes’ error is in his belief, not in his conviction, and the
crises that follow his erroneous judgment demonstrate what happens when a “foundation”
is improperly set. And this appears to be a concept that Leontes understands, even before
he imprisons Hermione: “if I mistake / In those foundations which I build upon, / The
centre is not big enough to bear / A school-boy’s top” (II.i.100-03). He knows,
paradoxically, that false assumptions eventually will collapse under their own weight but,
since he has faith in what he believes, he is oblivious to the dangers of his own error.
Paulina sees “the root of his opinion, which is rotten / As ever oak or stone was sound”
(II.iii.89-90) as a “curse” (II.iii.87) that Leontes cannot be compelled to denounce
because he believes too strongly in what he thinks he has witnessed. Only the death of
Mamillius will jolt Leontes back to reason: “I have too much believ’d mine own
suspicion” (III.ii.151), a “suspicion” that foreshadows the conclusion of the Second
Gentleman regarding the “verity” of a tale. The contact between Hermione and Polixenes, observed by Leontes, may well have been “Too hot, too hot” (I.ii.108) and cause for his jealousy, but “suspicion” is something without proof and Leontes may well have averted several disasters if he had relied upon the strength of his friendship with Polixenes and trusted in his marriage to Hermione. Having trust in a relationship or marriage stems from an exchange of truth between these parties, and this is where Leontes falters.

Leontes’ jealousy clouds his judgment so completely that he overtly contradicts himself regarding the oracle, a presumed source of absolute truth. He correctly observes that “circumstances / Made up to th’ deed, doth push on this proceeding” (II.i.178-79) and seeks “greater confirmation” (II.i.180) of Hermione’s infidelity “from the Oracle” (II.i.185). Leontes seems to acknowledge that the proof he has relied upon is secondary to the facts and that, rightly, he should obtain corroborating evidence. He tells Antigonus that the counsel of the Oracle will either “stop or spur me” (II.i.187) in Hermione’s condemnation. Yet, when the Oracle rules, “Hermione is chaste” (III.ii.132), Leontes declares, “There is no truth at all i’ th’ Oracle: / The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood” (III.ii.140-41). The Oracle is a symbol of truth, and there will be a price to pay for ignoring its declarations. When the Servant tells Leontes that Mamillius is dead, Leontes views his death as the vengeance of the gods: “Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice” (III.ii.146-47). Leontes has suffered loss based on his mistaken trust in appearance. He will recover as he repents and begins to understand his misplaced trust for, as James Siemon writes, “Loss has come through trusting too readily in appearance, and recovery is accompanied by insistence that there is a truth which lies behind appearance and which men ignore at their own peril” (12). One must
wonder why the Oracle might extract its revenge on Leontes through the death of his son. Of course, Mamillius' death will penalize Leontes the most, but his death seems to serve a larger purpose in the play. Peter Erickson thinks that "Mamillius and Antigonus are sacrificed to exorcise Leontes' wrath" (823). But, Mamillius is an innocent child, "Go play, Mamillius; thou'rt an honest man" (I.ii.211), and "a gentleman of the greatest promise" (I.i.35-36). He is almost the perfect counter-character to Autolycus who is a noted, and self-acknowledged, thief. The death of Mamillius can imply that pure innocence cannot survive on its own, that just a little bit of treachery in one's character can be useful. Camillo might just be the perfect example of this.

Leontes has a strong bond with Camillo, "I have trusted thee, Camillo, / With all the nearest things to my heart" (I.ii.235-36), and he is undoubtedly a valued and honest servant. But trust is a matter of convenience for Leontes, who, when Camillo objects to Leontes' charge against Hermione, turns on Camillo and says "thou art not honest...thou art a coward" (I.ii.242-43), and accuses him of being "negligent" and a "fool" (I.ii.247). Camillo admits to some of these flaws in his character (I.ii.249-62), but argues: "these, my lord, / Are such allow'd infirmities that honesty / Is never free of" (I.ii.262-64). In the short span of about five lines, Leontes has coupled trust with dishonesty, and it compels the audience to consider the possibility that both characteristics can exist at the same time within one person, that "allow'd infirmities" are a part of the human makeup. Is this a resolution to the inherent human paradox that allows fact and fallacy to reside together? The answer depends on who is asking that question. Camillo's speech makes us feel as if Shakespeare is telling us that no man is perfect, that there is simultaneous strength and weakness of character in everyone, but in different proportions. Camillo's honest side will win out when he refuses to obey Leontes' order to poison Polixenes
(I.ii.356-59). His dilemma, defy Leontes and die or obey him and become a murderer, leaves Camillo with no choice but to flee if he desires to stay true to himself. In the process, Camillo proves Leontes right when he accused Camillo of being “a hovering temporizer that / Canst with thine eyes at once see good and evil, / Inclining to them both” (I.ii.302-04). Camillo does know the difference between good and evil and he will use the distance of time to extricate himself from his predicament. Camillo is a good man who uses deception to avoid performing an evil act. He lies to Leontes when he tells him that he will poison Polixenes and he will survive to play’s end for his masterful tact, all the while remaining true to himself.

Antigonus is not as clever as Camillo, nor will he be as fortunate. Leontes challenges Antigonus’ conviction to save Perdita from being burned (II.iii.131-33), “what will you adventure / To save this brat’s life” (II.iii.161-62), to which he responds, “Anything, my lord, / That my ability may undergo / And nobleness impose” (II.iii.162-64). Hearing this response, Leontes directs Antigonus to abandon Perdita to “some remote and desert place...Where chance may nurse or end it” (II.iii.175-82). Like Camillo, Antigonus has been an honest and faithful servant whose loyalty is to be tested by moral dilemma. Antigonus sees only two choices where Camillo, faced with a similar dilemma, found three: dispose of Perdita as directed and condemn her to almost certain death, but save Paulina and himself, or save Perdita and put his life and Paulina’s life in jeopardy. Antigonus imagines no other alternative, such as running away or sacrificing himself, that could have saved Perdita and Paulina. Up to this point, Shakespeare made Camillo and Antigonus equal, both honest lords of Sicilia, loyal servants to their king, and of similar kind nature, but he differentiates them by the choices each makes. Hermione appears to Antigonus in a dream and tells him that he has gone “against thy
better disposition” (III.iii.28) and for this “thou ne’er shalt see / Thy wife Paulina more” (III.iii.35-36). Unlike Camillo, Antigonus chooses the less noble path, going against his better judgment, and it is an error in judgment that will cost him his life: “I am gone for ever” (III.iii.58). But his decision, like the decision Leontes makes earlier in the play, is based on a weak foundation for, as he says to the infant Perdita, “That for thy mother’s fault are thus exposed” (III.iii.50). Antigonus also assumes that Hermione was unfaithful and, as a result, his destruction ensues. James Siemon concludes that, “Loss has come through trusting too readily to appearance” (12) and this aptly applies to Leontes and Antigonus. A comparison of Camillo and Antigonus demonstrates that appearances can lead one down the wrong path and toward horrible consequences and, critically, that a little larceny in the heart doesn’t hurt.

Camillo practices deception in an effort to do the correct thing, but Autolycus uses it as a tool in his trade, that of a common thief. His father was Mercury, “god of thieves, pickpockets, and all dishonest persons” (Pafford 82n25), so being a thief is in his blood. And Autolycus knows who and what he is. The Clown wants to know “What manner of fellow was he that robbed you” (IV.iii.83) and Autolycus, pretending to be a victim of an unidentified road thief, identifies himself as a “rogue” (IV.iii.96) and indicts himself by name, “Some call him Autolycus” (IV.iii.97) as if he were proud of his identity. To Lee Cox, this self-indictment mirrors Leontes’ self-induced crisis: “However, in his guise as highway victim, Autolycus represents himself as robbed and beaten by Autolycus, a comment that reminds us of the self-destructive nature of Leontes’ wrong-doing and which precedes Leontes’ lament over the wrong he did himself” (288). Of course, the Clown knows the reputation of Autolycus and describes him as “Not a more cowardly rogue in all Bohemia” (IV.iii.102), but Autolycus is
unfazed by this characterization because it is confirmation to him that he is good at his art. Norman Rabkin discusses this creativity in comparing Thomas Mann’s Felix Krull, from *The Confessions of Felix Krull*, with Shakespeare’s Autolycus when he says: “Both rogues glory in an amoral mastery of the raw materials of life by force of their artistry as well as their outrageous yet delightful playing on the weaknesses of all those who become grist for the mill” (129). And Autolycus is an artist, but in the less popular sense. He is a master artist of deception. He tells the Clown, still pretending to be someone else, but referring to himself, “I cannot tell, good sir, for which of his virtues it was, but he was certainly whipped out of court” (IV.iii.86-87). The Clown responds, as most logically would, “His vices, you would say; there’s no virtue whipped out of the court” (IV.iii.88-89). But what may have offended the court is what Autolycus characterizes as a “virtue” and, hence, his statement, from his perspective, is accurate. To Autolycus, being a robber is a virtue and part of his “artistry.” Being a master of the false connects him to the telling of a tale: “Tales are false” and Autolycus is “the practitioner in falsehood, the dealer in tales. But the false tale masks truth” (Cox 284). His repertoire includes playing the part of other people which he does innocently enough singing a ballad with Mopsa and Dorcas: “I can bear my part; you must know ’tis my occupation” (IV.iv.296-97). He naturally mocks honesty and trustworthiness, “Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is! And Trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman” (IV.iv.596-98) and says that he stays “constant to my profession” (IV.iv.683) when he conceals the truth about Florizel’s plans for escape from King Polixenes. He later declares to the audience, out of view from the Clown and the Old Shepard, “Though I am not naturally honest, I am sometimes by chance” (IV.iv.712-13). By helping the Clown and the Old Shepard, Autolycus will likely benefit personally, so his good deed merely occurs by chance, not by his natural
inclination. If Autolycus is "not naturally honest," then he is naturally dishonest and the inverse of Mamillius. However, unlike Mamillius, Autolycus will survive because he is an artisan who happens to specialize in the art of deception and his constantly changing appearance masks his true character. And yet, as Lee Cox notes, "In the face of seeming pointlessness and paradox, of good working unnecessarily through evil, one is forced to weigh the evil" (287). His continued presence reminds us that falsehood can coexist with a little bit of honesty just as Camillo’s honesty can coexist with a little bit of his ability to deceive. These two extremes, honesty and deceit, coexist in Antigonus and Camillo; however, it is the weak foundation of Antigonus which dooms him and the strong base of Camillo which preserves him. Autolycus stays true to his character and Antigonus does not and it is the reason that one survives and one does not. Honesty and falsehood exist, paradoxically, inside each man. Shakespeare shows that the characters of Mamillius, Camillo, Antigonus and Autolycus are each naturally conflicted, that honesty and falsehood cannot exist one without the other and that they are mutually dependent.

Shakespeare provides an obvious example of the difference between appearance (falsehood) and reality (honesty) in the character of Autolycus, but other characters, in addition to Camillo, selectively employ his art as well. Leontes, while trying to trap Hermione and Polixenes, in an aside says, "I am angling now, / Though you perceive me not how I give line" (I.ii.180-81). Paulina vows that Hermione is dead, "I say she’s dead: I’ll swear it" (III.ii.203), which fools not only the characters of the play, but the audience as well. There can be a reward or a reckoning that accompanies the use of deception and that seems, in *The Winter’s Tale*, to depend on how it is being used, by whom, and whether or not the intent is noble. Leontes’ “angling” only augments his earlier delusion and ruins all his relationships, while costing Mamillius his life, before his reconciliation.
with Hermione and his reunion with Perdita. And that would not be possible if Paulina had not lied about Hermione’s death and kept her secreted away for sixteen years. One can argue that Leontes suffers for his deceit and errors in judgment but, because his intent is not evil, forgiveness in tragicomedy allows absolution. Polixenes and Camillo will attend the sheep-shearing festival in disguise (IV.ii.55) “not appearing what we are” (IV.ii.48-49) in order to confirm what “angle...plucks our son thither” (IV.ii.47), and therefore using an “angle” in order to determine an “angle.” Florizel will pretend to be Camillo as part of his plan to affect his marriage to Perdita and reconcile Leontes and Polixenes: “it shall be so my care / To have you royally appointed, as if / The scene you play were mine” (IV.iv.592-94). Perdita’s “unusual weeds” (IV.iv.1) transform her from shepherdess to queen of the sheep-shearing festival (IV.iv.2-5), a role in which she reluctantly participates. She also wonders how she would withstand the wrath of Polixenes once the artifice of her relationship with Florizel is discovered: “Or how / Should I, in these borrowed flaunts, behold / The sternness of his presence” (IV.iv.22-24). After Polixenes removes his disguise (IV.iv.418sd) and reveals himself to Florizel, Perdita’s fears are realized: “I told you what would come of this: beseech you, / Of your own stake take care: this dream of mine - / Being now awake, I’ll queen it no inch further” (IV.iv.448-50). Perdita’s realization connects deception with dreaming. When Polixenes takes off his disguise, he too moves from a world of make believe and reenters the world of reality. If they are not in a dream-state, a world of non-reality, then they must be awake in the real, or natural, world.

Leontes, in his deluded state, comments to Camillo about the presumed deceit of Hermione and Polixenes: “But we have been / Deceiv’d in thy integrity, deceiv’d / In that which seems so” (I.ii.239-41). He was talking about Hermione’s infidelity, but because
they were fooled by appearance, rather than seeing the reality, his observation reminds us of the effect of observing art. Art presents an appearance created by the hand of man.

There are many definitions of the word art, but the one that is most relevant to our discussion can be defined: “Human workmanship or agency; human skill as an agent. Opposed to nature.”¹⁰ Key to this definition is the differentiation between human agency and nature and it reminds us of Rabkin’s permeability of nature and art that is exemplified in The Winter’s Tale by Hermione’s change from stone to human and where art and nature course back and forth. Rabkin aptly describes Hermione’s transformation as the “permeability of the barrier between art and life” (134). Paulina’s audience experiences shock and disbelief when they are confronted with a situation that cannot exist. Stone does not turn to flesh and as Siemon notes, “The joy of Hermione’s recovery is inseparable from the pain of her loss” (15). Just as Paulina deceived everyone with Hermione’s “statue,” Shakespeare has deceived his audience with his art, the art of the playwright and the illusion of the stage, crossing the boundary between make-believe and actuality. The audience does not know that Hermione is alive until she steps down from her pedestal. One intent of art can be to evoke an emotive response and we experience, along with the characters of the play, the sensation of amazement and distrust because what we have witnessed is a contraction between an appearance and the reality. Paulina’s art gives us Hermione the statue, but it is nature that gives us Hermione the being.

Nature plays a prominent role in The Winter’s Tale. Hermione’s pregnancy, the creation of life, is at the heart of the play’s crisis and Leontes’ “diseas’d opinion” (I.ii.297). And, when Paulina attempts to remove infant Perdita from her mother’s cell,

she persuades the Gaoler by invoking the enormity of mother nature: "This child was prisoner to the womb, and is / By law and the process of great nature, thence / Free’d and enfranchis’d; not a party to / The anger of the king, nor guilty of (If any be) the trespass of the queen" (II.ii.59-63). Perdita is, at once, the offspring of her mother and the product of "great nature." When Polixenes asks Perdita why she does not cultivate the "streak’d gillyvors" (IV.iv.82), it sparks a debate in which Perdita acknowledges the awesome power of nature and her reluctance to alter it: "For I have heard it said / There is an art which, in their piedness, shares / With great creating nature" (IV.iv.86-88). Polixenes takes issue with the idea that nature and art may be equivalent:

Yet nature is made better by no mean
But nature makes that mean; so, over that art,
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race. This is an art
Which does mend nature – change it rather – but
The art is itself nature. (IV.iv.89-97)

In his view, nature is responsible for the creation of everything including the art required to modify the "streak’d gillyvors." Said another way, nature is responsible for creating the art that improves itself, that "The art is nature itself." When the Second Gentleman says that, "Julio Romano, who, had he himself eternity and could breath into his work, beguile Nature of her custom, so perfectly he is her ape" (V.ii.96-99) he means that Romano is so skilled in his art that he can do nature's work for her. But Romano himself
is a product of nature and if his skill “adds to nature,” then nature is responsible for his
talent just like the ability of Perdita’s unseen botanist shared with “great nature” in
crafting the “streak’d gillyvors.”

The sheep-shearing scene continues the play’s interrogation of art and nature. The
celebration seems to be a pastoral version of the more sophisticated court masque.
Most everyone is in disguise, there is music, and most invitees participate in dance. Joan
Hartwig writes, “The pastoral world seems to have at least as much sophistication in form
as the court, despite simpler, more basic experiences it celebrates. The debate on nature
and art comes appropriately into the focus of a scene which observes natural seasons in
artificial forms” (32). Nature gives man a platform to create art and man mimics nature
with that platform, but that imitation is also a part of nature and is what generates the
paradox between them. Sculptors and playwrights are artisans and imitators of life, but
parents, particularly women, are the ultimate artisans as they duplicate nature by
producing offspring, offspring that mirrors their creators. Paulina stresses the physical
similarities between Leontes and Perdita and nature’s helping hand in them: “Behold, my
lords, / Although the print be little, the whole matter / And a copy of the father…And
thou, good goddess Nature, which hast made / So like to him that got it” (II.iii.97-104).
And Leontes observes that Florizel is a perfect copy of his father: “Your mother was
most true to wedlock, prince; / For she did print your royal father off, / Conceiving you”
(V.i.123-25). Of course, he notes the fidelity of Florizel’s mother based on Florizel’s
likeness, but does not make the same leap of faith when it comes to his own wife and
daughter.

Paulina tells her audience that “It is requir’d / You do awake your faith” (V.iii.94-95)
before Hermione descends and it is Leontes turn to faith that reanimates her: “it is
indeed Leontes’ faith that enables the statue of Hermione to return to life” (Lim 319). Looked at retrospectively, one can argue that it was Leontes lack of faith that took the life out of her, that effectively turned her to stone. However, Shakespeare in this scene asks his audience to do what he has warned them against: trust appearance. No one expects Hermione to come back to life, but when she does we are ensnared in the liminal space between humanity and humanity’s sculptured representation. What we have just seen does not compute, yet it occurred right in front of us. Barkan said that “Shakespeare depended upon all those traditions which saw sculpture as both prime among the arts and closest of all the arts to real life” (658) and it just may be that Shakespeare traverses the boundary between nature and art to mirror the effect of conflicting qualities in humans. Recall the inverse relationship between Autolycus and Camillo. One is more deceitful than the next, and vice versa, but each on some level is simultaneously fraudulent and honest. Leontes said “we are mock’d with art” (V.iii.67) when Paulina first reveals Hermione’s sculpture, but “If the statue was no statue, then it is life that mocks art” (Barkan 663). Either way, Paulina’s audience and the play’s attendees are surprised when Hermione descends. No one anticipated such a shocking turn of events, and the scene is characterized by a sense of disbelief and curiosity that accompanied cabinets of curiosity common in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Zytaruk 2). Platt describes the paradox in the “singularities” (V.iii.12) and “rarities” (V.iii.12n) of Paulina’s gallery: we witness an astonishing version of the paradoxical blending of nature and art that is characteristic of these cabinets. For we – along with the other visitors – see a statue of Hermione, but one that miraculously seems to have aged; she is and is not Hermione. More paradoxical still, the “dead” Hermione – at Paulina’s beckoning – steps from the pedestal into
life....the play presents the naturalistic and the marvelous participating in a tense, paradoxical dynamic, one that requires not the subordination of one to the other, but rather an on-going dialectical exchange between the two.

(200)

An artist may create a sculpture and a playwright a play, Autolycus may create the perfect deception, and Perdita’s botanist may create the perfect hybrid, but each is a creation of nature and, therefore, the real art is nature itself. Art is defined by its human agency which, in turn, is a part of nature’s agency. Nature is the base, the root, the foundation in the cycle of life to which all art harkens and, therefore, it is the seat of repeating human truths. The Winter’s Tale privileges nature over art, but it also warns us that we cannot always be sure which one we are observing at any given moment. The effect of opposing binaries, Platt’s “dialectical exchange,” is to create teaching moments since all of human existence is defined by the ongoing coexistence of disparate parts. Yet, these incompatible pieces, which are not always as they appear, cannot exist in isolation one from the other.

The Tempest

The boundary between the real world and the world of fantasy continues to fade in The Tempest. And the exacting differences between binaries – Caliban (earth) and Ariel (air), reason and emotion, or masque and antimasque, for example – become much less certain to the point where one cannot be defined without the other. The marvelous theatricality of Hermione’s transformation from stone to human is replicated multiple times in The Tempest, but the movement between binaries is more fluid and not restricted to one direction. In particular, there is interplay between the characters of the play and its
audience that blurs the edge between the stage and the world outside. Such paradoxical correspondence between the two posits that the short duration of the play is similar to the brief interlude of a human life and that they share an equally evanescent quality.

Shakespeare fools Miranda and his audience. The play opens in a fierce storm where life hangs in the balance with the ship's crew and their royal passengers one step away from drowning. The drama is heightened by the argument between crew and passengers, amongst “A tempestuous noise of thunder and lightening heard” (I.i.sd) and “A confused noise within” (I.i.60), that mirrors the chaos of the tempest while inverting the inherent power structure between the two. On land, authority and power are seated with Alonso, King of Naples, but at sea, the Shipmaster and Boatswain must have that control, especially in a storm. Sebastian and Antonio attempt to reassert the king’s control at the height of danger and their incongruous focus in the face of the storm highlights their detachment from reality while simultaneously elevating the drama. But Mother Nature is indifferent to the allocation of power among humans, as the Boatswain says: “What cares these roarers for the name of king” (I.i.16-17). The crew and passengers are about to die in front of Shakespeare’s audience as the ship founders: “We split, we split! – Farewell my wife and children! – Farewell brother! – / We split, we split” (I.i.60-62). Gonzalo’s repetition of “We split,” accompanied by the likely urgency in the voice of the actor playing Gonzalo, puts us on edge and we might believe we are watching a tragedy. However, taunting death is a part of tragicomedy and Shakespeare brings his audience back from the brink when Prospero informs Miranda, hence his audience, “There’s no harm done” (I.ii.15). We thought that when we observed Hermione’s statue that we were looking at art until Paulina and Shakespeare revealed the truth to their respective audiences, audiences that are at once together, yet apart.
Similarly, Prospero has used his art to trick Miranda just as Shakespeare has used his playwright skill to manipulate his audience. The margin between drama and life begins to get fuzzy and, if *The Winter’s Tale* exposes the boundary between nature and art, then *The Tempest* explores the related permeability of reality and the stage.

An island seems like an apt setting for *The Tempest* because it evokes an image of a finite space quite similar to the confines and limitations of a stage, contributing to a likeness between actor and audience. Mary Moore says that the island is “analogous to the stage” (509). The sea between the island and the mainland is the liminal space that connects one place to the next and, when someone crosses that liminal plain from a space of certainty to one of uncertainty, he has exposed himself to a level of disorder that can transform him. Regarding this exposure, Liebler says: “Whatever is undefined is vulnerable; its identity is at stake because identity is a matter of definition and boundary....Hence the importance of liminality, the transitional time or condition in which one, or a group, or a territory, or the season, is not what it was and not what it will become, but something in between, something marginal, vague, and flexible” (117). Prospero left Milan a deposed ruler and arrived on the island thirsty for revenge, but he leaves the island in control of Milan and Naples as a man whose reason and compassion overcame his emotion and harshness. Prospero’s experience on the island changes him and it will also change Miranda. Miranda matures in the shadow of the island’s desolation under Prospero’s tutelage and protection. And, while the island is noteworthy for its incubator-like role in fostering transformation, the appearance and function of the island itself varies depending on whose perspective is being considered: “The ‘actuality’

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11 Liebler’s *Shakespeare’s Festive Tragedy*, Chapter 4 – Communitas, Hierarchy, Liminality, Victimage offers an in-depth discussion of liminality.
of the island is always at a dream-like remove from the characters’ perceptions of it. Relativity of perception characterizes the court party, each of whom has a decided opinion on the climate and qualities of the island, and none of whom agree” (Magnusson 59). Gonzalo remarks, “How lush and lusty the grass looks! How green” (II.i.55), to which Antonio responds, “The ground is indeed tawny” (II.i.56). How can they be looking at the same landscape and see two entirely different images? This is a paradox rooted in contradictory perceptions, but in it there seems to be a correspondence between virtue and perception. Gonzalo is “A noble Neapolitan” (I.ii.161) and sees the vitality of the island, but Antonio’s perspective reflects his immorality as one who has usurped the Milanese dukedom and set his brother and niece adrift to die. Adrian’s paradoxical description of the island embodies their conflicting opinions: “Though this island seems to be a desert….Uninhabitable and almost inaccessible….It must needs be of subtle, tender and delicate temperance….The air breathes upon us most sweetly” (II.i.37-49).

The journey of the audience to the theater and the transformation that takes place during the play can have a similar effect. People must travel between their homes and the theater in order to attend a performance and that performance has the potential to change an element of their lives. If a play has been well thought out and staged, it has the potential to return home an audience that may be different from the one that just shortly before had arrived. Their journey to and from the theater, and any change the spectacle may impart on their being, is impacted by crossing borders or moving beyond the edge of their normal existence. The paradoxical representations of the play can provoke thinking.

Caliban is at home on the island. He is a native and travels nowhere except within the confines of its borders. Miranda is a transplant who does not travel either, but the difference between her and Caliban is that she has been nurtured by Prospero for
another, eventual existence that requires her to change. Caliban begins and ends the play as a commodity, as a slave, and the only alterations in his persona are that he has learned a language he does not value and he has become cynical and skeptical: “You taught me language, and my profit on’t / Is I know how to curse. The red plague rid you / For learning me your language” (I.ii.364-66). Shakespeare paints him as an abused and disgruntled being whose worth exists only in his ability to serve others. He attempted to rape Miranda – “thou didst seek to violate / The honour of my child” (I.ii.348-49) – and he is nothing more than a “thing of darkness” (V.i.275-76) to Prospero. It’s hard not to side with Prospero, but maybe Caliban is more benign than represented. When Caliban’s mother died, he was left to fend for himself as the only human-like being on the island until Prospero and Miranda arrived (I.ii.281-84). What Prospero and Miranda interpreted as an attempted rape could be construed as an action which followed a natural impulse to mate. After all, Prospero worries about Miranda’s chastity when she first encounters Ferdinand, “They are both in either’s powers, but this swift business / I must uneasy make, lest the light winning / Make the prize light” (I.ii.451-53), and he warns Ferdinand against acting on his natural impulse before the wedding ceremony (IV.i.13.-23). On the other hand, Caliban seems to have an understanding of what would have happened had his rape been successful: “O ho, O ho! Would’t had been done; / Thou didst prevent me, I had peopled else / This isle with Calibans” (I.ii.350-52), but we cannot know his motivating force. But Caliban’s disposition is deceptive and his natural impulses, with a focus on nature that was typical of the late Renaissance, also let him see the poetic beauty of the island:

Be not afeard. The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometimes voices,
That if I then had waked after long sleep,
Will make me sleep again; and then in dreaming,
The clouds, methought, would open and show riches
Ready to drop upon me, that when I waked
I cried to dream again. (III.ii.135-43)

While the island is home to Caliban, it is also a stage that enchants him. A play also can be “full of noises” that “delight,” and include “twangling instruments” and “voices” (dialogue), inducing its audience into a state of “dreaming.” Ferdinand and Miranda experience the same sense of harmony and wonder when they first encounter each other. Ferdinand says to Miranda, “O, you wonder” (I.ii.426) and Miranda is so enthralled by Ferdinand that she can hardly contain herself: “I might call him / A thing divine, for nothing natural / I ever saw so noble” (I.ii.418-20). Miranda is equally captivated when she meets everyone else: “O wonder! / How many goodly creatures are there here! / How beauteous mankind is! O brave new world / That has such people in’t” (V.i.181-84). Their expressions mirror the reactions we might encounter while watching a play. We will hear voices, we will be mesmerized and astonished, and we will be transported from the reality of our seat into the fantasy of the stage. And, if we especially enjoy the performance, we will long for more. Caliban enjoyed the fantasy of the island before the arrival of the interlopers shattered his dream. He, in effect, had done what Ferdinand wished he could do: “Let me live here ever” (IV.i.122). Shakespeare “does not even tell
us if Caliban will remain alone on the island in freedom, or whether he is to accompany
Prospero to Milan” (Bloom 6). We do not know if Prospero takes Caliban off the island,
but if he did, Caliban cannot live in his dream forever either.

The island was given to Caliban by his mother and is taken from him by Prospero:
“This island’s mine by Sycorax, my mother, / Which thou tak’st from me” (I.ii.332-33).
The deposed has become the deposer. Prospero lost Milan to his brother Antonio and
Caliban has lost the island to Prospero: “Caliban’s original-and dynastic-claim to the
island remains undisputed; he is, like Prospero himself, a usurped ruler” (Pask Prospero’s
391). The odd circumstance is that Sycorax was banished from Algiers (I.ii.265) to the
island just as Prospero was banished from Milan. Prospero, the banished duke, also has
become usurper to the banished. The view one has of each character, and of the power
each wields, depends entirely on which part of the prism one looks into. We can
sympathize with, or demonize, Prospero and Sycorax.

Caliban may have been master of the island when its population was one, but
there is no doubt that he is a slave to Prospero and Miranda. He is enslaved to Prospero
when The Tempest ends, but he will always be the natural master of his island in a way
that Prospero cannot because Caliban is at home and Prospero is just an outsider. At first,
Caliban was taken with Prospero and Miranda, “I loved thee / And showed thee all the
qualities o’th’isle” (I.ii.337-38), and Miranda attempted to transform this “savage”
(I.ii.356): “I pitied thee, / Took pains to make thee speak, taught thee each hour / One
thing or other” (I.ii.354-56). But when Caliban attempted to rape Miranda, or mate with
her, he became an “Abhorred slave, / Which any print of goodness wilt not take, / Being
capable of all ill” (I.ii.352-54). This is the one time in The Tempest that Miranda shows
any sign of anger, but is not the only time that she will show emotion. Of course, she
would be angry over his attempted rape, but she also seems discouraged that her teaching and culture are meaningless to Caliban. He understood what she taught, but it was not in his nature to accept those lessons and she abandons him: “But thy vile race / (Though thou didst learn) had that in’t which good natures / Could not abide to be with” (I.ii.360-61). Miranda denies the paradoxical coexistence of good and evil that this essay argues; to her Caliban is “all ill” and there is no room within him for anything else. And she penalizes Caliban for being different; to her, he is Stephano’s “mooncalf” (II.ii.105) and Prospero’s “thing of darkness” (V.i.275), nothing positive.

Whether Caliban is a slave, “mooncalf,” “thing of darkness,” a naïve servant to Stephano, or the poetic being who paints the island with his verse, he also seems to exist in the play in contrast to Ariel. He is “Thou earth” (I.ii.315) to Ariel’s “spirit” (I.ii.193), substance to the immaterial, and body to soul. Yet they are both slaves. Ariel was a slave to Sycorax and is in servitude to Prospero. Shakespeare imparts a level of goodness to Ariel that he does not grant Caliban. Ariel “wast a spirit too delicate / To act her earthy and abhorred commands” (I.ii.272-73). The use of “earthy” elevates Ariel at the expense of Caliban even though in his rage Prospero refers to Ariel in Caliban-like fashion as a “malignant thing” (I.ii.257). Shakespeare presents a dark Caliban and a whimsical Ariel but, if we look closer, we might just stretch our imagination and believe that the appearance and the reality are inverted. Inversion by itself is not necessarily paradoxical, but it is if we can see contradictory traits within the same character. What bad deed has Caliban enacted? Shakespeare constructed a semi-human character that automatically cast him as an outsider and who is mistreated by everyone. Perhaps it is a comment on the dark side of slavery? The rape incident is debatable and he may have intended to murder Prospero, neither of which actually occurs. He performs his slave
duties and tries to improve his life by courting a benevolent master. Ariel, on the other hand, helps Prospero position his enemies for revenge: “My high charms work, / And these, mine enemies, are all knit up / In their distractions. They are now in my power” (III.iii.88-90). Prospero certainly practices “rough magic” (V.i.50) and Ariel is big part of his magical repertoire. We learn that Ariel was responsible for the terror that the shipmates felt before their vessel burned and sank (I.ii.195-206). He spooks Ferdinand with his “invisible, playing and singing” (I.ii.375sd), and when Prospero stages his imaginary banquet, Ariel enters “like a harpy, claps his wings upon the table, and with quaint device the banquet vanishes” (III.iii.52sd), completely intimidating the “three men of sin” (III.iii.53). Together, Prospero and Ariel will frighten Stephano, Trinculo and Caliban: “A noise of hunters heard. Enter diverse Spirits in shape of dog and hounds, hunting them about, Prospero and Ariel setting them on” (IV.i.254sd). Ariel scares and manipulates people, which is in contrast to Caliban who merely seeks a simple existence. Both arguments have merit and there is no right or wrong answer, just provocation of thought. Platt wrote that “paradoxes...were meant to instruct by means of going contrary to received wisdom or knowledge” (202) and by considering multiple versions of Caliban and Ariel, we may come to a new realization about human nature. We are not asked to draw a conclusion, and Shakespeare does not offer one, but we are positioned to interrogate what we are seeing.

Prospero is like a play director in that he directs the movement of Ariel; Ariel’s actions contain a sense of theatricality. He seems particularly aware of his showmanship as he “flamed amazement” (I.ii.198) aboard the ship and we begin to realize that we are witness, in concert with the play’s actors, to a series of spectacles within the play. The foundering ship helped Prospero’s plan, “Now does my project gather to a head” (V.i.1),
but it was staged by Prospero for the benefit of Miranda and the people on board. It was also staged for the play's audience. In the same way, the "playing and singing" were meant to entice Ferdinand and the vanishing banquet was meant to torment Alonso, Sebastian, and Antonio. These are scenes of Prospero's drama as well as in Shakespeare's play, blurring the boundary between dream and reality. Hermione's descent taught us that we cannot always trust appearance and Prospero's art is his ability to manipulate, sway, and cause uncertainty. We do not know in the beginning of The Tempest that the storm is under the control of a sorcerer and that the people on the ship are never really in danger even though Shakespeare has taught us to be alert, to not be sucked into the performance. Miranda knows this because she has seen her father's act before: "If by your art, my dearest father, you have / Put the wild waters in this roar, allay them" (I.ii.1-2). Prospero's art released Ariel from his pine prison (I.ii.291-93) and it was his art that brings Ferdinand and Miranda together (I.ii.420-21). An astute observer might have concluded at the beginning of the play that Prospero was near the end of his project when he tells Miranda, "Be collected; / No more amazement" (I.ii.13-14), because if the surprise has ended, so then has the play. The use of the word "amazement" by Prospero and Ariel, combined with the meaning of Miranda's name, an expression of wonder, should draw one to the realization that they are immersed in a spectacle about playing. Shakespeare dazzles his audience the way that Prospero engages his, by authoring drama. Prospero's purpose, his "project," is clear. He wants revenge, he wants to marry his daughter, and he wants to "please" (Epilogue 13). Magnusson says: "While the goal of his 'project' is never explicitly stated and remains somewhat obscure, it surely involves the recovery of his dukedom, peace with Naples, and provision both for the future of his daughter and for the future of the two kingdoms" (59). What is
Shakespeare’s project? We will never know. But Prospero’s last aim, to please, is suspect because he is talking directly to the audience. He is both in character and out of the play. He is on the stage, but in dialogue with the audience. The audience, in turn, is witness to Prospero’s show, but in dialogue with an actor. One does not exist without the other. Where is the divide between the stage and audience, between audience and stage? The dynamic, two-way paradoxical exchange between stage and audience, audience and stage, is in full view. Art imitates life and vice versa.

Shakespeare appears to have used a form of the Jonsonian masque in *The Tempest* to continue the dissolve between observers and observed, while upsetting the order of the traditional masque so that the chaotic element of the masque is not overcome. In “Caliban’s Masque,” Kevin Pask speculates on the interplay between Shakespeare and Ben Johnson: “At about the time of *The Tempest*...Jonson was using the masque as a form of commentary on Shakespearean theater, making it more likely that Shakespeare was engaged in using the public theater as a form of commentary on the Jonsonian masque” (747). Ben Jonson’s court masques were a noted form of Jacobean entertainment that blurred the edge between actor and observer, incorporating competing elements of disorder and authority, with the authority of the court always reaffirmed. A key component to the masque was the interaction near the end where the actors and attendees danced together on stage, softening the line between the two. Orgel writes: “The end toward which the masque moved was to destroy any sense of theater and to include the whole court in the mimesis – in a sense, what the spectator watched ultimately he became” (*Jonsonian Masque* 6-7). Lesley Mickel says that the masque “was created for an aristocratic elite of courtiers who were directly involved with it, both as masquers and as participants in the revels at the end of the entertainment” (1).
Gilson’s “foul conspiracy” (IV.i.139) interrupts the joyful conclusion of the wedding masque, upsetting the expected order of the entertainment in which an antimasque precedes the masque proper. In this instance, the negative memory of Caliban, the antimasque, upsets the intended joyful ending of Prospero’s “present fancies” (IV.i.122), the masque, rather than the other way around. According to Mickel, “‘Masque’ refers to the Court entertainment as a whole, but it is also used to describe a constituent part. Critics also refer to the ‘masque’ when alluding to the courtly component of the court entertainment, which was often prefaced by an ‘antimasque’” (24n1). An audience of the time would have expected to see the antimasque handily vanquished by the positive elements of the masque because, as Ernest Gilman notes, “their order remains constant” (215). Gilman describes the form and function of the masque and antimasque:

Typically, in the Jonsonian structure of the contemporary masque, the raucous antimasquers pose an initial threat to the orderly celebration of the main masque; they and their indecorous commedia dell’arte antics must be vanquished before the revels can proceed. The kind of threat posed, and the (usually effortless) way it is dispensed with, enhance the serene triumph of the virtues made visible in the end. By its temporary opposition to the revels, the antimasque offers contrast between a fleeting, hollow, misshapen world of noisy but ultimately insubstantial appearances, and an ideal world of harmonious and enduring value. (215)

By reversing the order of contrasting elements, an antimasque and masque that exist within the confines of a single court entertainment, Shakespeare does not affirm the authority of the court. Instead, he allows the chaos, in this instance Caliban’s “foul conspiracy,” to contradict the merry ending of the wedding revels. The antimasque in
this case is not so fleeting. Mickel is not referring specifically to *The Tempest* when she says that the “masque enables a dialectical exploration of the nature of royal authority” (16), but her comment applies because, by subverting authority, we are questioning authority. Gilman interprets the interrupted masque as having a retrospective, learning function:

At the moment of its disruption we are dislocated, dislodged from the illusion of the masque. The unexpected antimasque jars us into realizing that we can’t live here ever; it deprives us for the moment of our sense of ending, and reopens the scene to perils that demand a new urgency of purpose and the will to act. We re-place our hypothetical view of the revels-as-culmination with a revised understanding of the revels-as-prologue to a movement as yet unfinished....we direct our energies forward by going backward: hindsight provokes foresight. (226-27)

The paradoxical nature of the masque form, and in particular the interrupted masque of *The Tempest*, is a good example of contrary, coexistent entities that provoke thinking beyond the borders of accepted thought. As Platt said, “paradoxes...were meant to instruct by means of going contrary to received wisdom or knowledge” (202). And by vacillating back and forth between past and present, “past” can be “prologue” (II.i.253). The sudden stoppage of the revels also serves to amaze the audience, unnerve them, keeping them alert because Prospero’s project is not yet complete. It also creates a sense of tension in a play that is not supposed to surprise because we know that Prospero is in control of everything. But the interruption tells us that control can be transitory and that uncertainty does play a role in every life. In the neat and tidy world of a Jonsonian masque we are safe, but when Shakespeare interrupts that world, he shows us the illusion
of the masque. Once again, we are asked to discern between appearance and reality with
the understanding that the difference between the two is not always distinct.

One of the main purposes of a masque was to keep in power those in power, but
the masque is a fantasy because real life does not function that way. The cycle of life is a
series of ups and downs, a recurring sequence of antimasque-masque. Glynne Wickham
discusses the sequence of the vanishing banquet (III.iii.52sd) and the interrupted masque
(IV.i.138sd), two antimasque elements, “Instead of being left to consider each of these
visual diversions singly and in isolation, we were invited to view them in conjunction,
one as the sequel of the other” (3), but the notion of undulating opposites is clear. *The
Tempest* shows this. Even before the play begins, Prospero has been usurped and
banished (I.ii.120-51), a facet of disorder. The wedding of Alonso’s daughter Claribel
(II.i.70-72) represents order, and this happy occasion is followed by the tempest that
maroons the crew, a representation of disorder. The trials of Alonso and his crew, the
fight that Ferdinand must entertain in order to win Miranda, and even Prospero’s (at
times) unstable execution of his project are part of the detailed interplay between order
and disorder. *The Tempest* ends with the typical reunion and reconciliation of
tragicomedy and the promise of a wedding celebration leaves behind prior trials,
interruptions and disturbances. But there are shadows of antimasque on the horizon.
Caliban’s future is undetermined and he is still a slave, Prospero and Alonso and their
contingents must travel from the island, and the union of Ferdinand and Miranda is
untested.

Shakespeare makes it clear in the revels speech that our lives can be ephemeral
like a play: “We are such stuff / As dreams are made on, and our little life / Is rounded
with a sleep” (IV.i.156-58), making the line between fact and fiction even harder to
define. Plays last but a short time as they present snippets of being and, likewise, the lifetime of an individual is but a moment in the span of human existence. Each is finite. There is an element of resignation in Prospero’s voice following the revels speech: “Say again, where didst thou leave these varlets” (IV.i.170), forgetting all about the “foul conspiracy” of Caliban, Stephano and Trinculo just 30 lines after being disturbed by them. Prospero has reached the crescendo of his performance: “At this hour / Lies at my mercy all mine enemies” (IV.i.262-63) and “Now does my project gather to a head. / My charms crack not; my spirits obey; and time / Goes upright with his carriage” (V.i.1-3). The “sleep” (IV.i.158) of the revels is near for Prospero and “time” will shortly end his personal drama. Prospero is beginning to peer beyond his plan for revenge and he seems uncertain as to what is next. His attention is straying and his drive ebbing: “Say, my spirit, / How fares the King and’s followers” (V.i.6-7). Ariel tells Prospero that his “charms so strongly works ‘em / That, if you now beheld them, your affections / Would become tender” (V.i.17-19), and it is in this moment that his reason overtakes his emotion: “Though with their high wrongs I am struck to th’ quick, / Yet with my nobler reason ‘gainst my fury/ Do I take part” (V.i.25-27) and he realizes that “The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (V.i.27-28). Prospero, paradoxically, has grabbed substance out of nothing. He has converted the airiness of emotion with the help Ariel, “thou, which art but air” (V.i.21), into the substance of reason that manifests itself in the release of his “enemies.”

Miranda makes the reverse leap from reason to emotion when playing chess with Ferdinand. She uses her intellect to discern that Ferdinand may be cheating, “Sweet lord, you play me false” (V.i.172), an expected element of the traditional, disordered game of chess: “The broader tradition contains not only kings and courts, but cheating, betting,
beating, fighting, class conflict, civil unrest, and seduction” (Poole 53). William Poole observes that “Shakespeare seems to have privileged the military, oppositional dimension of the game, not its air of courtly relaxation” (55) which, along with his preceding description regarding the disorderly nature of chess, is an antimasque argument imbedded within reunion and reconciliation. But Miranda immediately allows her emotion to override her reason when Ferdinand denies her assertion and she responds with: “Yes, for a score of kingdoms you should wrangle, / And I would call it fair play” (V.i.175). Even though he may be cheating, an act that a rational person might object to, she endorses his falseness. The emotion of her love for Ferdinand now rules. Margaret Jones-Davies equates the true-false interplay between Ferdinand and Miranda to the chessboard before them: “The false and the true become mixed up on this chessboard, one substituting for the other like equivalent pawns following the diagonals of a chiasmus” (qtd. Poole 58). Indeed, the checkerboard surface of a chess board serves as a visual metaphor for life’s necessary contrasting opposites. The chess board is comprised of contrasting colored squares and the game of chess cannot be played without this opposition for, without it, there is no game. Each square of the chess board, embedded in a checkerboard pattern, represents a myriad number of strategic moves in any given match. Individual positions are won or lost based on the soundness of strategy. Every match will have a triumphant and a conquered (unless it’s a draw), but the strategy deployed in each set will always vary, making the journey of the contest all important. When the outcome of the contest is determined, the board and all its pieces are reset and the game begins anew. Pending a draw, someone will always win and another will always lose, that is always certain, but the rhythm of the game continues in perpetuity and there is no one contest that is played
like another. Key to the checkerboard, then, are the contrasting squares, each infinite in their representation, but none which exists without its adjacent other.

Paradoxical binaries have been a steady trope of *The Tempest* and we can see that a play does not exist without an audience and that an audience does not exist unless there is a play. In the Epilogue, Prospero embodies both positions and so does the theatergoer: “He speaks at precisely the moment in the play when we too are midway between our own world and the world of the theater” (Kirsch 349). But the interplay between character and audience is a Shakespearean commonplace, especially in the comedies. Prospero’s address to the audience brings the spectators into the world of his stage and he to their position, mirroring the action of the end of a masque. The edge between the two is lost and Prospero and listeners are located in the liminal space between the two worlds experiencing a dialectical exchange. But if Ferdinand cannot live “here ever” (IV.i.127), neither can Prospero or his audience. Prospero was master to Caliban, Ariel and, through his “art,” everyone else in the play, but now he finds himself in the role of slave begging for “release” (Epilogue 9). He ends up immersed in a paradox of his own creation. His project as sorcerer during *The Tempest* essentially was to assure his royal lineage and now, as an actor who has exhausted his performance, his project is “to please” (Epilogue 13). He is “confined” (Epilogue 4) onstage and only through the “indulgence” (Epilogue 20) of his viewers, the ones who made him possible in the first place, can set him free.

From the perspective of the audience, we must realize that what we have just seen is an illusion, an evanescent existence. We too must depart the theater, but we are more skeptical now in how we discern appearance and reality. The fantasy and the short term nature of drama mirrors and imitates our brief stint of life, bringing the two together and acknowledging their codependent existence.
CONCLUSION

All plays express human drama at some level. Tragicomedy combines the seriousness of tragedy with the whimsy of comedy and urges temperance between the two. The contestation of social and political issues, ignited by the crisis of the play, is resolved through their reorganization and regeneration; and there is always optimism at the end of Shakespeare’s four romances. In tragicomedy, the tragic circumstances are never fatal and the mirth is never excessively celebratory, making the tragicomic form the balance between tragedy and comedy. As a result, tragicomedy’s modulation is more reflective of our existence. Tragicomedy’s protean quality is also fertile ground for paradox. Shakespeare’s four tragicomedies use paradox to interrogate contradictions that define the human experience. That human experience is predicated on our identity.

The plays were analyzed in the order of their publication and also because there seemed to be a progression from one to the next. A rough pattern emerged. We discuss in *Pericles* the value of history to the present and it shows that our heritage and background are the foundation of our identity. *Cymbeline* demonstrates the many ways that identity is influenced – through words, reasoning, dress, and the passage of time, to name a few – and how it is not fixed. *The Winter’s Tale* and Hermione’s transition warn us that the appearance of that identity can be manipulated. And we see in *The Tempest* that, to some extent, each of us changes our own identities to suit our present purpose, paradoxically making us all actors in real life.

Binary relationships are the location of paradox. *Pericles* defines the present by looking to the past, places providence and free will in the same discussion, and suggests that women empower men. There are many forces that define identity in *Cymbeline* and
they are centered on Posthumus, who is at once British and Roman, and Imogen, who is simultaneously a court princess and a pastoral, male Fidele. Hermione is a statue and a human being in The Winter's Tale making her a product of man and nature at the same time. In The Tempest, the character of Prospero reflects how our identities vacillate between being an actor and being a receiver of play acting.

Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter's Tale, and The Tempest each put us in dialogue with paradox, that space of coexistent contraries. We travel from one binary to the next, altering our perspectives, riding a tumultuous liminal wave until each of us makes a decision based on what we have learned by examining paradox. The value of paradoxes in Shakespeare's four tragicomedies is that they challenge positions, forge boundaries, and evoke thought. They do not dictate. It is the audience's job to make a judgment from the cycling, ever-changing, and unstable world of uncertainty, of human existence, to always recalibrate and move forward toward the never-ending chain of paradoxes.
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