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## Ceremonies and Time in Shakespeare

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### ABSTRACT

This essay considers some moments in Shakespeare's texts which exemplify the Janus-faced quality of ceremonies: their enactment in the present looking backwards to past traditions and forwards to inaugurate new social relations. The argument draws on Victor Turner's theorization of ritual as an event that gives shape to "liminality," that which "eludes or slips through the network of classification that normally locate states and positions in cultural space," and argues that this applies to time as well. It also considers the construction of time in terms of *kairos*, a moment of time infused with meaning. The essay analyses ceremony in three Shakespearean genres. First, it examines Bertram's and Helena's ring exchange in *All's Well That Ends Well* as a "distended" ritual that collapses time. It then turns to *Richard III*, unpacking its complex sequence of ceremonies of betrothal, mourning, and sovereignty that are "continuously disrupted". The final section describes the ceremonial time of romance in *The Winter's Tale*, unfolding the power invested in the kairotic time evoked by the oracle of Delphi, the sheep-shearing ceremony, and Paulina's "resurrection" of Hermione.

### KEYWORDS

Kairos; ceremony; comedy; romance; tragedy

The lavish christening ceremony which concludes *All Is True* licenses an ingenious playfulness with time that is found throughout the Shakespearean canon. The presiding Archbishop Cranmer promises words of "truth" to onstage fictional characters and offstage spectators, who occupy different temporal zones but are brought together by the ceremony as witnesses and celebrants. His speech collapses chronological boundaries between past, present and future, enacting a process that is typical of ceremony. He speaks simultaneously in the present moment of performance, the fictional past of Henrician England and the historical present of Jacobean Britain when he announces that "this royal infant", Princess Elizabeth, "yet now promises / Upon this land a hundred thousand blessings / Which time shall bring to ripeness" (5.4.18–20). The speech is both prophecy and eulogy. Although Elizabeth will die a "maiden phoenix", her ashes will, "create another heir / As great in admiration as herself" in James (5.4.40–42). Cranmer looks forward to a future that memorializes not just Elizabeth but also James, and, self-consciously, the great age of Shakespearean drama too: "Our children's children / Shall see this and bless heaven" (5.4.54–55). The ceremonial moment allows the speaker to transcend chronological time, creating a dynamic continuity between past, present and future that invokes us, the generations of children's children who "see this" performed on stages over a span of 400 years. The role of Archbishop, along with the full panoply of Anglican ritual in costume, gesture, and Christian rhetoric, point to the way ceremony invariably draws its authority from a connection with the divine.

This essay will discuss a selection of ceremonies in Shakespeare's plays to argue that they are a peculiarly adept means to tease out the complexities of time and to make connections between

*chronos*, or the flow of chronological time, and *aion*, eternity. In doing so, they engage questions of ontology, belief, agency, predestination, value, and they invoke profound emotional responses. They are therefore far from superficial, in spite of their frequent use of spectacle. I propose that ceremonies on stage function as moments of *kairos*. This concept of time from ancient Greek philosophy and rhetoric has no verbal equivalent in English so I will begin by outlining its qualities in order to explain how ceremonies enact *kairos* and how Shakespeare's use of the English word "time" refer to it. In its most complex incarnations, *kairos* holds two opposing ideas of "timeliness" in dynamic tension. The paradoxical quality of *kairos* goes back to its first appearance, lexically and conceptually, in Homer's *Iliad*, where, as Phillip Sipiora observes, "it denotes a vital or lethal place in the body, one that is particularly susceptible to injury and therefore necessitates special protection" (116). From the outset, then, *kairos* is linked to the fundamentals of human experience: vitality and death.

The two opposing understandings of *kairos* as "timeliness" that developed with reference to classical rhetoric are usefully explained by Carolyn R. Miller. For Cicero and the Stoics, *kairos* is "associated with propriety and decorum"; timeliness in this sense involves rhetorical "accommodation to convention" and "predictability" (Miller xii). In Shakespeare, this sense of *kairos* informs the Elizabethan consciousness of history as cyclical, summarized neatly by Warwick in *2 Henry IV*:

There is a history in all men's lives  
Figuring the nature of the times deceased;  
The which observed, a man may prophesy,  
With a near aim, of the main chance of things  
As yet not come to life, who in their seeds  
And weak beginnings lie intreasurèd.  
Such things become the hatch and brood of time; (3.1.75–81)

Henry IV and Warwick acknowledge the cyclical "hatch and brood" of time as the working of "necessities" (3.1.87–88), a "revolution of the times" governed by the "book of fate" (3.1.44–45). However, they are simultaneously aware that the "chance of things / As yet not come to life" relies on the choices taken at significant moments in individual "men's lives". Indeed, Henry's own sovereignty has been established by such a timely moment of opportunity.

This is a very different understanding of *kairos*, attributed to Gorgias and a school of relativist or process philosophy, which sees "timeliness" as a "uniquely meaningful" human action in "unfolding and unprecedented circumstances" (Miller xiii). Timeliness in this sense is associated with grasping opportunity in response to change, and with a philosophy of Becoming. Lady Macbeth's feeling "the future in the instant" which can transport her from the "ignorant present" (1.5.55–57) is probably the most concise expression of *kairos* as opportunity in Shakespeare, drawing on an emblematic tradition where *Occasio* is personified poised on a wheel or sphere, offering a long forelock to be seized (Baumlin 148). As Carolyn Miller observes, the most interesting rhetorics, from ancient times to contemporary practice, set these diametrically opposing dimensions of *kairos* side by side.

I argue that ceremony is a multimedia "rhetoric" of this type, keeping both the propriety or predictability, and the uniquely timely, or radically particular moment in balance. Participants in a ceremony adhere to a set of scripted conventions, as in Ciceronian Stoic theory, while the enactment for all involved is also a uniquely meaningful moment of Becoming or change. Stagings of ceremony in Shakespeare's plays manage the productive tension between the two in dazzlingly seductive ways in order to bring *out* the puzzling questions of human existence which ceremonies distil, and to bring *in* spectators' emotional and intellectual engagement with those issues. As noted above, the ceremony in *All Is True* looks to the past and the future simultaneously, incorporating participants in a moment of *kairos* which is "history in the making" (Smith 55). Paul Tillich remarks that for those "conscious of an ongoing creative life", time is "laden with tensions, with possibilities and impossibilities. Not everything is possible at every time, not everything is true at every time, nor is everything demanded at every moment. ... In this tremendous, most profoundly stirred consciousness of history is rooted the idea of the *kairos*" (Tillich, *Protestant Era* 33).

As Lady Macbeth, Warwick and Cranmer all recognize, however, “the main chance of things / As yet not come to life” in *kairos* is not just chance in the sense of opportunity. It is also the “right time” determined by what Lady Macbeth calls “fate and metaphysical aid” (1.5.28). Phillip Sipiora points out that “the kairic dative of time also suggests something like “God’s Time,” (115). Thought of in these terms, *kairos* intersects with *chronos*, and *occasion*, or opportunity, linking these with *aion*, an eternity separate from the rhythms and flows of chronological, earthly time. In early modern thought *aion* is often conceived as encircling chronological time as in Wither’s Emblem XL which presents Time as “a Flowre, *that’s found / Within Eternities wide Round*” (Wither 1635 cited in Baumlin 154). A striking example of how early moderns understood *kairos* as the intersection of “God’s time” with earthly opportunity appears in John Calvin’s *Commentarie upon the Epistle of Saint Paul to the Romanes, written in Latine by M. Iohn Cilium*, translated by Christopher Rosdell in 1583. Commenting on Chapter 13, verse 11, Calvin notes “He [Paul] saith, the time or season is known to the faithfull, because the day of Gods calling and visitation requireth newe life and newe maners, as for exposition sake he addeth afterwarde, it is time to arise. For it is not *Chronos* but *Kairos*, by which worde is noted the occasion or fit time” (Calvin, fol.176v). Theologian Paul Tillich’s book *The Protestant Era* identified the need for *kairos* or exceptional, occasional moments outside the flow of chronological time, in situations of crisis or change such as the Reformation, which is staged in Shakespeare and Fletcher’s *All Is True*. Tillich was himself coming to terms with the radical shift in Western culture which followed the decline in religious belief in the 20th century. Devan Stahl argues that, for Tillich, the ultimate goal is to create “‘theonomous moments’ wherein secular culture and religion are brought together”. Although such moments are “always temporary and finite for Tillich” (Stahl 268), their potential to connect everyday life with deep religious experience, especially in times of crisis, makes them extremely valuable. Tillich’s liberal Protestant theology is helpful for reading the deep significance of ceremonies. His word “theonomous”, to describe a temporary, finite moment replete with meaning-giving power, perfectly describes the metaphysical dimension of *kairos* and ceremony.

From a secular perspective, anthropologists such as Arnold van Gennep and Victor Turner have analysed the Janus-faced quality of ceremonies: their enactment in the present looking backwards to past traditions and forwards to inaugurate new social relations, as a way to manage change. Ceremonies orchestrate a set form of words, gestures, costumes, props within a specified venue, according to traditional or accustomed practice to create an “occasion” which gives shape to “liminality”; that which “eludes or slips through the network of classifications that normally locate states and positions in cultural space” (Turner 90). The key points of change in the chronological span of human life (for example, birth, adulthood, betrothal, marriage, retirement, death) are managed emotionally and socially by what van Gennep called rites of passage. Ritual practice enacts three phases: separation, liminality or levelling, and reincorporation. The same processes operate on a macrocosmic scale to manage changes of monarchy, leadership or government.

With these ideas about ceremony as *kairos* in mind, I now turn to consider how *staged* ceremony works, before considering three examples from Shakespeare: betrothal as a rite of passage in *All’s Well That Ends Well*, then *kairic* moments and the making of history in the first tetralogy and, finally, the staging of theonomous ceremonies in *The Winter’s Tale*. A theatrical performance is, like a ceremony, a space and time protectively separated from the everyday flow of *chronos*, though paradoxically governed by the “two hours traffic” of commercial exchange which inevitably puts any enunciation of “redeeming” or “wasting” time into a definition of *kairos* as profit (Wilson). Furthermore, all those in the theatre are aware that any ceremony represented on stage is empirically “false”. Nevertheless, unique non-material profits can be gained from playing and witnessing a ceremony in the theatre. Because ceremonies and rituals are themselves performative (what Henry V calls idle / idol ceremony *HV* 4.1.237), their re-enactment is, in some sense, true to the “originals”. The displacement of a ceremony to a fictional arena does not necessarily diminish its affective power. Spectators and actors bring their individual and collective experiences in chronological time together to experience the *kairic* moment of performance. As Phillip Sipiora remarks, “*kairos* always contextualizes or mediates circumstances, usually in making situations conducive for the persuasive act of

belief and trust, which lead in turn to changes in conviction, emotion, and action” (120). The staging of fictional ceremonies gives space and time to experience these transformative effects safely, and perhaps to translate the personal, political and spiritual insights into action. The familiarity with, if not direct experience of, traditional ceremonies, makes their affective power transhistorical too. For this reason, ceremonies can, I believe, function as temporal wormholes: giving points of cultural and affective access to Shakespeare for spectators watching 400 years later.

The ceremony of betrothal in *All's Well* proceeds in an agonizingly contorted fashion through chronological and stage time, but such a disrupted linear plot creates opportunities to use ceremony's *kairic* qualities. Diana tells Bertram that, as time proceeds, their exchange of rings “May token to the future our past deeds” (4.2.64). Diana imagines the betrothal as commitment to a future plotted by herself and Helena (who will swap places in the bedchamber), where a ceremonial swapping of rings will recall the past and remake the future. Bertram had insisted that Helena must get the ring from his finger and be with child by him to claim him as a husband. Having secured Bertram's ring, Diana vows that he will fully understand the significance of their ring swapping “When back again this ring shall be delivered”, and promises

And on your finger in the night I'll put  
Another ring, that what in time proceeds  
May token to the future our past deeds. (4.261–64)

In the bed trick, Helena will give Bertram the ring that the King gave her. The distended ceremony thus re-marks the betrothal between them, enforced by the King. The night-time tryst described by Diana revisits and completes the peremptory process inaugurated by the King in act 2 scene 3:

Good fortune and the favour of the king  
Smile upon this contract, whose ceremony  
Shall seem expedient on the now-born brief  
And be performed tonight. (2.3.178–81)

As we know, Bertram flees that night, refusing to consummate the marriage, so the final performance of the bedding ceremony, the “tonight” staged by Helena and Diana, takes place much later. The unravelling of the plot, later still, is nearly thwarted by a second betrothal arranged by the King, between Bertram and Lafeu's daughter. Like the first, this is inaugurated hurriedly; the King fears that the “inaudible and noiseless foot of time” may thwart even his “quick'st decrees” since he is old (5.3.41–43). His confidence that “All is whole” and that another royally commanded betrothal ceremony can redeem the “consuméd time” of Bertram's past misdeeds, sounds absurd (5.2.40). The King's drive to “take the instant by the forward top” (5.3.38–39) or seize the moment of opportunity by the forelock, sounds like *kairos* but the play shows that it is *occasio* unsupported by the metaphysical authority needed to make this “right time”. *Kairos* is not simply an act of individual human will. The King functions as a living cautionary emblem, recalling Wither's condemnation of the vanity and folly of those who “suppose / That men, at pleasure, might redeeme the Time” (Withers 1635 cited in Baumlin 148–49).

The working of *kairos* is a more lengthy, collaborative process, involving “patient” (5.3.222) suffering and restraint as well as self-assertion for all involved, especially Helena. Her process of Becoming imitates a scriptural model of *kairos*, in which Christ is said to come “*en kairo*, sometimes translated as “the fullness of time” (Smith 55). The fullness of time when Bertram has his ring returned “back again”, in a public fulfilment of the bond, occurs much later than the bed trick. It must be months later, chronologically, since Helena's pregnant body can “feel her young one kick” (5.3.304). The ceremony of ring exchange in *All's Well* thus “token[s] to the future our past deeds” prophesying and committing to fulfilment in the future while repeating the ceremony of betrothal from the past. As this example shows, ceremonies are heightened moments outside the steady pace of chronological time. They are examples of *kairos* as “a point in time filled with significance”, and, in Frank Kermode's words, “charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end” (Kermode 48) but also to its beginning.

The ceremonies of betrothal, mourning, religious worship, penitence and sovereignty are continuously disrupted in Shakespeare's first tetralogy, whose historical proximity for its late Tudor spectators raises additional questions about ceremony's affective power. From the rudely interrupted funeral of Henry V which opens *Henry VI Part I*, spectators are confronted with a series of broken ceremonies: Henry and Edward IV's non-betrothals to Margaret and to the Lady Bona unravel bonds of kinship and international alliance. Joan la Pucelle and Eleanor of Gloucester's failed rites of witchcraft, and the false "miracle" of Simpcox's healing at St Albans, demonstrate a religious vacuum, in spite of Henry VI's personal piety. Richard of York's ceremonious occupation of the throne at Westminster in the opening scene of *3 Henry VI* shows that the kingdom, the power and the glory that should unite in God's deputy have been fractured by civil war. If Talbot's death drew tears from spectators (Nashe 25) lamenting the end of feudal heroism, how did they respond to Jack Cade's carnival kingdom whose parody of courtly rituals advertises the savagery of sovereignty?

Richard III recognizes the immediacy of these issues to late Tudor listeners in his famous opening words "Now is the winter of our discontent" (*Richard III*, 1.1.1). He says "now" three times in this speech, three times more when he interrupts Lady Anne's procession of mourning to advance his own suit, and, indeed, he speaks twenty-seven of the seventy-six occurrences of "now" in the play. Richard's god is *kairos* as *occasio*, the uniquely timely figure of Opportunity, which transforms the present into the exceptional (the same process enacted by a ceremony). Richard's performance of ceremonies in the "now" of the theatrical present, whether "aloft, between two bishops" (SD 3.7.95) or as the spirit of family reconciliation (2.1.66–72); or on his knees as a forsaken lover, has the power to seduce off-stage spectators just as readily as characters like Lady Anne. In act 1 scene 2 his present passion interrupts the sedate ceremony of eloquent mourning with violent affect. Offering her the dagger, "Nay, now, dispatch" (1.2.169), Richard turns her reflections on the past to a future which is first in her hands and next in her command: "even with the word / This hand – which for thy love did kill thy love – / Shall, for thy love, kill a far truer love" (1.2.176–78). Richard's risk gives him, not her, control of the future.

By contrast, when Richard tries to make a second proposal, it is Queen Elizabeth, taught by Margaret the ghostly historian of the play, who controls the time to come. Elizabeth's use of stichomythia and repeated vows in act 4, scene 4, marks the undoing of ceremony — and chronological time — which the civil wars and their misshapen offspring, Richard, have produced. Queen Elizabeth counters each of Richard's protestations of future love for Princess Elizabeth with reminders of his grisly past. At the climax of the scene, she confounds his attempt to seize the present in ceremonial protestations of truth: he has "profaned" and "pawnd" the honour and virtue associated with Order of the Garter and St George; he has "disgraced" the "kingly dignity" of the crown; he has dishonoured the memory his father, misused the world, himself, and God, whose "wrong is most of all" (4.4.301–08). Queen Elizabeth shows Richard that he no longer has the power to seize the present and make it exceptional. His defensive wish to swear "[By] the time to come" violates the form of ceremony itself, which is enacted in the present. Elizabeth responds by upstaging his plans for a betrothal by conducting a micro-ceremony of mourning. Her ritualistic lines invoke and enact a metaphysical *kairos*, cutting across both the historical order and the opportunism embodied by Richard, with the effect of projecting the future into the past and denying him the right to swear by "the time to come":

That thou hast wrongèd in time o'erpast,  
 For I myself have many tears to wash  
 Hereafter time, for time past wronged by thee.  
 The children live, whose parents thou hast slaughtered —  
 Ungoverned youth, to wail it in their age.  
 The parents live, whose children thou hast butchered —  
 Old barren plants, to wail it with their age.  
 Swear not by time to come, for that thou hast  
 Misused ere used, by times ill-used o'erpast. (4.4.319–27)

This ceremony of mourning reverses the pattern in act 1, scene 2 where Richard transforms mourning to betrothal. Instead, Elizabeth assumes control of “the time to come”, by betrothing her daughter to Richmond, not Richard, thus founding the Tudor dynasty that extended across time to her great-granddaughter Elizabeth I. Furthermore, Queen Elizabeth’s lines arrest the chronology of performance because they articulate and give shape to a communal grief beyond her immediate loss: that of her future pain, and the audience’s own past experiences. Philip Schwyzer has argued that the 1590s was “still thoroughly pervaded by traces and remnants of Ricardian time”, including “inherited memories” of his reign from grandparents and great-grandparents (Schwyzer 217). Elizabeth’s vision includes the memories of ancestors, the children “whose parents thou hast slaughtered” and who “wail it in their age”. What makes the speech so powerful in its live moment of utterance is the technique of layering time: what Matthew Wagner calls a “marked constitution of past and future”, of beginning and end “not as they line up sequentially, but as they stack simultaneously” (66).

Elizabeth’s words create a thickening of time and emotion that reaches across another boundary: that between the fictive play world occupied by the characters and actors, and towards the reservoir of emotions of loss and pain felt and feared by spectators in the theatre. The play’s final speech, delivered by Richmond, picks up on the current of sympathy to invoke applause for the performance and for the collective Tudor values that have emerged victorious over Richard’s seductive individualism. Early anthropologists such as Emile Durkheim and Gabriel Tarde recognized that human values are infused with emotions and saw ceremony’s importance in creating and shaping those emotions and values. Tarde’s *La Logique Social* argues that ceremonial celebrations are the sovereign procedure through which the social fabric is organized, and Durkheim observes that “collective ceremonies ... produce a state of effervescence among those who take part in them” (399). Randall Collins uses Erving Goffman’s work on social interaction to develop a theory of how emotional energies, Durkheim’s idea of “collective effervescence”, functions through ritualistic activities. Interaction ritual is, Collins explains, “a theory of momentary encounters among human bodies charged up with emotions and consciousness because they have gone through chains of previous encounters” (3). These anthropological ideas are useful for reading Richmond’s speech: lines that summarize the collective experience of civil war — bodies and consciousnesses who have gone through chains of previous encounters with the Wars of the Roses, in their own lives and through watching parts or all of the tetralogy (5.8.15–41). The actor playing Richmond performs the closing ceremony of the play, whose culmination is not on Bosworth field but in the media space of the theatre itself.

Although Richmond does not, like Henry V, call explicitly for a *Te Deum* (song of praise to God), his concluding speech ceremonially (“as we have ta’en the sacrament” 5.8.18) offers a prayer for a marriage that will bring peace between the houses of York and Lancaster and to the kingdom as a whole. It is both a peace ceremony and a request for applause. The prayer aligns Richmond’s imminent sovereignty with that of God. Listeners onstage and off are petitioned to support Richmond’s rule with the word “amen” and God is likewise petitioned to say “Amen” to peace under Tudor rule. Indeed, Richmond insists “What traitor hears me and says not ‘Amen?’” (5.8.22). As a result, spectators of the history of Richard III are drawn into a national *communitas* to celebrate the myth of Tudor unity in which they are presently living. Who dares not say “amen”?

My final section on ceremonies in *The Winter’s Tale* departs from the theories of Heidegger, Husserl and Wagner who have thought about *kairos* as charged with exceptional meaning derived from its relation to “end time”, with reference to mortality and to the ending of the theatrical performance. As Frank Kermode explains in *The Sense of an Ending*, the Christian narrative changes the nature of *kairos*. While the Greek gods could not change the past, Christ did change it “rewrote it, and in a new way fulfilled it” (Kermode 49) thereby creating a different “thickness” to time. The incarnation can make God’s time, eternity or *aion*, part of the present. Ceremonies, temporary, finite and radically particular moments, connect *chronos* and *aion* in what Paul Tillich calls “theonomous” moments, through the actions of celebrants and witnesses. Tillich’s theology finds an early modern equivalent in Quaker belief in the “indwelling Christ”, a doctrine of presence that brings together the biblical past, and the second coming of Christ (the future), in the body and spirit of the believer in the

present (Hinds 82–99). In Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale* extends the process of *All's Well That Ends Well* which shows “a heavenly effect in an earthly actor” (*All's Well* 2.2.25).

*The Winter's Tale* self-consciously dramatizes the constructed nature of its theonomous ceremonies, not to hollow out their significance but to advertise the incarnation of the divine in and through artistic, theatrical means. John E. Smith observes “in the domain of art, *kairos* is the right measure of proposition directed by the aim of creating a unified, individual work” (58). As well as presenting a personification of Time to announce the passage of sixteen years, the text stacks up a range of narratives: ancient Greek history, seasonal cycles, myth and miracle, in the present of performance. Alongside Greene’s tragic prose romance *Pandosto, or the Triumphs of Time*, Shakespeare’s Sicilia invokes the history of Dionysius I (432–367 BC), tyrannical ruler of Sicily, the most important of the Western Greek colonies of *magna Graecia*, and Theocritus’ pastoral *Idylls*, which are firmly set in Sicily. Shakespeare would have known Dionysius I’s story from the “Life of Dion” in North’s 1579 translation of Plutarch’s *Lives*, and by the time he wrote *The Winter's Tale*, a “Life of Dionysius” had appeared in the expanded 1603 version of Plutarch’s *Lives*.<sup>1</sup> It offers a more detailed, but hitherto unnoticed authority for Shakespeare’s play, opening with an epigraph that suggests a parallel with the dramatic life of Leontes:

Base Tyranny is wrongs unhappy mother  
 Witnesse this wretch, in shew both grave and wise:  
 Yet he himselfe beguiling, and each other  
 shew'd that his heart was fierce, and full of vice. (Plutarch 33)

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes’s irrational jealousy — which beguiles him — differs from Dionysius’ more general fears of usurpation, yet Shakespeare’s play does seem to draw a parallel life to that of the tyrant who is “determined to have put his brother in law Polyxemus to death, but hee, having an inkling of it, fled out of SICILIA” (Plutarch 33). Dionysius is flattered by his courtiers but publicly reprimanded by his sister, Tescha, who, Paulina-like, “answered him with a bold countenance” and calls him a “tyrant” (Plutarch 47). In Plutarch’s account Dionysius retires to his moated lodgings to “shut himselfe in with great feare” (Plutarch 48). The first part of *The Winter's Tale* bears the weight of ancient history, staging a fall from the idealized, prelapsarian past which Polixenes and Leontes played as boys eternal, into the clock time of adult masculinity where months, weeks, days and hours are counted. The play dramatizes how the chronological ancient history of men’s lives leads towards tragedy. Like Chronos, Leontes destroys (or seeks to destroy) his children, writing himself into the tradition of Greek tyrant tragedy. Mamilius’s metanarrative commentary that “a sad tale’s best for winter” finds a parallel in Plutarch’s “Life of Dionysius” which recounts that, as an obsessive pastime, the tyrant used to “write verses, & to make Tragedies,” dying as “the oracle had foretold him” while one of his tragedies was being performed in Athens (Plutarch 46, 50). Leontes’s self-spun tragedy that gives *The Winter's Tale* its title, demonstrates the tragic limitations of chronology as a means by which to live.

The “violent carriage” (3.1.17) of man-made history is interrupted by the return of Cleomones and Dion from the Oracle of Apollo in Delphos, a scene which, as A.D. Nuttall pointed out, moves the play into an entirely different register. Visiting the oracle and temple and witnessing its ceremony involved extracting themselves from the sequential progression of time:

*Dion*: I shall report,  
 For most it caught me, the celestial habits –  
 Methinks I should so term them – and the reverence  
 Of the grave wearers. O, the sacrifice –  
 How ceremonious, solemn, and unearthly  
 It was i'th' offering.  
*Cleomenes*: But of all, the burst  
 And the ear-deafning voice of the oracle,  
 Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense  
 That I was nothing. (3.1.3–11)

As a phenomenological experience, the ceremony is overwhelming. It is a circumscribed, multimedia event that so surprises the senses that the participants are taken from being to non-being: “I was nothing”. The air feels “delicate” and smells “sweet”; the sight / site of the building invokes awe (3.1.1–3); the “celestial habits” and reverent actions of the celebrants “catches” the visitors, arresting the flow of everyday experience, so that they hear “Jove’s thunder” and sense the divine in the deafening sound of the unearthly oracle’s voice, and the “solemn and unearthly” accompaniment to the sacrifice. The *kairic* moment, full of meaning, has transported them from the present to the eternal. They have moved from *chronos* to *kairos* and glimpsed *aion*. Back in chronological time, Cleomenes and Dion haste to summon “Fresh horses” so that the “rare” contents of the oracle “will rush to knowledge” (3.1.20–21). Nevertheless, Dion tellingly observes that the “event” of the journey has been “rare, pleasant, speedy, / The time is worth the use on’t” (3.1.11–14), probably referring as much to his own transformative experience as his hopes for Hermione. Frederick Sontag argues that, although temporal human beings cannot grasp non-temporal entities with the perfect control which God exercises, *kairic* moments make us “aware of our temporality as contrasted to all that is possible but not actually in being,” so we may be released from temporality “into the non-being of the infinite possible modes of being” (293). This is what Cleomenes seems to have experienced when he confesses that the divine oracle’s voice “so surprised my sense / That I was nothing” (3.1.10–11).

Even though Leontes blasphemously dismisses the oracle to continue his tragic history, in dramatic terms the reported ceremony enacts a rite of passage, detaching the play from the chronological burden of ancient history and setting it adrift in a liminal space of fiction where supernatural figures like Flora, Proserpine and Neptune mix with the carnival sheepshearing festival and the extraordinary appearance of Time. Critics have observed that the play’s three phases move from ancient tragedy, to a pastoral “intermezzo” (Lupton 177), and to romance or to “something very close to contemporary Christian” (Martz 137) but have not remarked on how the tripartite structure plays out van Gennep and Turner’s three phases of ritual practice: separation, liminality, and reincorporation. In the “liminal” sheepshearing ceremony, fragments of Greek romance and myth mix with English ballads and a pastoral tradition originating in the *Idylls* of Theocritus. The *Idylls*, like the sheepshearing scene, combine references to the local habitation and to the wider divine panopticon, including Jupiter, Minerva, and “thou Proserpina, who with thy mother, hast renowne”. With the help of such gods, idyllic pastoral peace and prosperity can return to Sicily “and sheepe upon the downes maie blete / By thousandes infinite, and fat” (Theocritus, A6).<sup>2</sup> Shakespeare’s own temporal juggling in the liminal space of Bohemia is self-consciously advertised by the sudden appearance of Time, whose power to “o’erthrow law, and in one self-born hour / To plant and o’erwhelm custom” (4.1.8–9) offers the fluid concept of time, most famously articulated by Heraclitus in his image of Time playing with pieces on a board game (Allen 69). Shakespeare and his spectators would have been aware of the “wide gap” or contradictions between *chronos* (χρόνος), sequential time, and *kairos* (καιρός), and *aion* (αἰών) or eternity, that went back to ancient Greece where “time was not inexorable, regular or fully predictable” (Allen 72). As Scott Maisano has astutely observed, Time in *The Winter’s Tale* “repeats the word ‘now’” more often any other speech in Shakespeare. Time “is the onstage action” and the now of performance “serves as a continuously moving boundary between past and future” without limitation since “it has no extension or duration in time” beyond the present moment of dramatic action or enunciation (Maisano 380, 374–75).

Following the liminal interlude of the sheepshearing ceremony, in which gods, humans and time are thrown into flux, and ancient deities with power over life and death are remembered, the characters and spectators are reincorporated into Sicilia, where the theurgic (god-working) power of myth reanimates the statue of Hermione. William E. Engel’s reading of *The Winter’s Tale* as a memory theatre, argues that “The Art of Memory was among the principle ways that myth, linked to the release and working of theurgic power was mobilised” by Shakespeare in order to create drama that moved beyond the unities of time, place and action outlined by Aristotle (Engel 72). When Paulina commands “Tis time” (5.3.99) the “magic” stage-managed ceremony constitutes a *kairic* moment of liminality where time (*chronos*) touches eternity (*aion*). This enacted ceremony works differently

from that reported by Cleomenes and Dion where witnesses are “transported” beyond the flow of sequential events to apprehend a divine simultaneity “outside” time. I propose that that rather than translating humanity to nonbeing as Apollo’s oracle does to Cleomenes and Dion, Paulina’s ceremony functions more like a prototype for the Quaker idea of embodied simultaneity: it looks back to the past and enacts a second coming in the present that is human and divine.<sup>3</sup>

As a theatrical spectacle, the ceremony also reincorporates the sacred into the theatre. It is an instance of what Paul Tillich calls a “theology of culture” in which a work of art is a result of a “creating ecstasy” and can be “religiously expressive” (*Theology of Culture* 48). Paulina’s ceremony picks up what Cleomenes and Dion could only report, however eloquently, and presents it as live action to all. The First Gentleman invites actors, characters and theatregoers to participate when he urges “Who would be thence, that has the benefit of access? Every wink of an eye some new grace will be born. Our absence makes us, unthrifty to our knowledge” (5.2.108–11). The chapel setting constitutes those who witness and enact the ceremony in communion as well in *communitas*. Like the celebrants at Apollo’s shrine, Paulina makes use of multisensory appeal in carefully stage-managing the elements of visual spectacle, music, movement, smell and touch in her ceremony of resurrection. She invokes “wonder” at the artistic skill followed by “marvel” at the “living” Hermione (5.3.22, 100, 116). Whether those present witness this as a miracle of resurrection or as a restoration of a living body is deliberately ambiguous, but if the “creating ecstasy” that produces a work of art can be “religiously expressive”, then the question is irrelevant. Paulina points out all that is needed to make a miracle happen: “It is required / You do awake your faith” (5.3.94–95) Perdita kneels in the chapel to ask a “blessing” of the statue in Marian tradition, only to find that the icon is filled with the spirit of life, so she kneels again to “pray for your mother’s blessing” (5.3.121).

What new knowledge and self-knowledge does this ceremony offer to on- and offstage participants? For Leontes the ceremony functions as a confession and spiritual rebirth. He experiences “my evils conjured to remembrance” when he beholds “magic in the majesty” of the statue (5.3.39–40) and, as with the statue, he is silent until the revived Hermione touches him and reanimates his flesh. For Hermione and, to a lesser extent, Polixenes, the ceremony is a ritual of forgiveness. For Hermione and Perdita it enacts restoration, one which inspires Hermione to ask the gods to look down “And from your sacred vials pour your graces / Upon my daughter’s head” (5.3.123–24) thus invoking the ceremony of baptism which is enacted in the present and for all time, thus making time touch eternity. Just because these interactional rituals are celebrated by human participants and across temporal generations, does not mean they cannot transcend sequential time. Even more so than Gloucester’s “fall” from Dover Cliff, Hermione’s resurrection proves, for everyone in the theatre, “thy life’s a miracle” (*King Lear* F.4.5.55).

Nevertheless, the indwelling light or immortality revealed in moments of *kairos* runs simultaneously with *chronos*. Hermione, like Cleopatra, is “wrinkled deep in time” (*Antony and Cleopatra* 1.5.29) and Mamillius, like Hamnet, and Antigonus are “never to be found again” (5.3.135). The ceremony has temporarily detached characters from sequential time even while they remember it. Both Leontes and Perdita both protest that they could “Stand by, a looker on” within the chapel for twenty years (5.3.83–85). Paulina, presumably speaking for Shakespeare himself, preserves the sacred moment of ceremony for as long as possible, postponing Hermione’s desire to hear Perdita’s history with an abrupt “There’s time enough for that” (5.3.129). The separate time given to those on and off stage must be protected “Lest they desire upon this push to trouble / Your joys with like relation” (5.3.130–31). It must be savoured because although Leontes does request a “leisurely” account by everyone of what they have “Performed in this wide gap of time”, his final direction to all in the theatre, is “Hastily lead away” (5.3.153–56). In this ceremony, Shakespeare the writer foregrounds the very human but magical context of live theatre and its value; he demonstrates its power as a ritual process through which social hierarchies can be dissolved, personal identities can be renewed, and where the transformative energies it generates can make time come round in redemptive ways.

## Notes

1. The “Life of Dionysius” appears on pp. 33–50 of the “liues newly added” at the end of the book.
2. Thomas Bradshaw’s *The Sheperds Starre* also offers “A Paraphrase upon the third of the Canticles of Theocritus” (B1ff), but makes no reference to Sicilia.
3. On this, see Huston Diehl’s wonderful essay.

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