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SHAKESPEARE

The Late Romances

Pericles • *Cymbeline* • *The Winter's Tale* • *The Tempest*

Edited by David Bevington and David Scott Kastan

THE NEW BANTAM SHAKESPEARE

William Shakespeare

THE LATE ROMANCES

PERICLES

CYMBELINE

THE WINTER'S TALE

THE TEMPEST

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SHAKESPEARE

THE LATE ROMANCES

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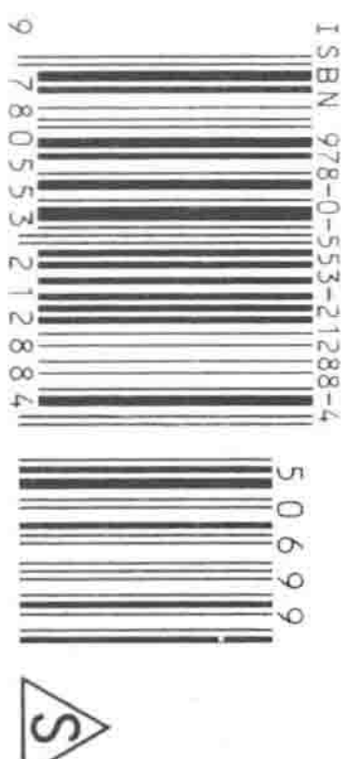

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William Shakespeare was born in Stratford-upon-Avon in April 1564, and his birth is traditionally celebrated on April 23. The facts of his life, known from surviving documents, are sparse. He was one of eight children born to John Shakespeare, a merchant of some standing in his community. William probably went to the King's New School in Stratford, but he had no university education. In November 1582, at the age of eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway, eight years his senior, who was pregnant with their first child, Susanna. She was born on May 26, 1583. Twins, a boy, Hamnet (who would die at age eleven), and a girl, Judith, were born in 1585. By 1592 Shakespeare had gone to London, working as an actor and already known as a playwright. A rival dramatist, Robert Greene, referred to him as "an upstart crow, beautified with our feathers." Shakespeare became a principal shareholder and playwright of the successful acting troupe, the Lord Chamberlain's Men (later, under James I, called the King's Men). In 1599 the Lord Chamberlain's Men built and occupied the Globe Theatre in Southwark near the Thames River. Here many of Shakespeare's plays were performed by the most famous actors of his time, including Richard Burbage, John Lowin, and Robert Armin. In addition to his 37 plays, Shakespeare had a hand in others, including *Sir Thomas More* and *The Two Noble Kinsmen*, and he wrote poems, including *Venus and Adonis* and *The Rape of Lucrece*. His 154 sonnets were published, probably without his authorization, in 1609. In 1611 or 1612 he gave up his lodgings in London and devoted more and more of his time to retirement in Stratford, though he continued writing such plays as *The Tempest* and *Henry VIII* until about 1613. He died on April 23, 1616, and was buried in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford. No collected edition of his plays was published during his lifetime, but in 1623 two members of his acting company, John Heminges and Henry Condell, put together the great collection now called the First Folio.

THE LATE ROMANCES

THE LATE ROMANCES

In the summer of 1608, as Shakespeare neared retirement, his acting company, the King's Men, signed a twenty-one-year lease for the use of the Blackfriars playhouse—an indoor and rather intimate, artificially lighted theater inside the city of London, close to the site of St. Paul's Cathedral, which would serve as a winter playhouse for the company. A private theater had existed there since 1576, when the acting company known as the Children of the Chapel and then another juvenile company, Paul's Boys, began acting their courtly plays for paying spectators in this building that had once belonged to the Dominicans, or Black Friars. The adult troupes of the late 1600s were well aware that they needed to cater more directly to courtly audiences. Their popular audiences were becoming increasingly disenchanted with the drama. Puritan fulminations against the stage had gained in effect, especially when many playwrights refused to disguise their satirical hostility toward Puritans and the London bourgeoisie. Several of Shakespeare's late plays may have been acted both at the Globe Theatre and at Blackfriars. The plays he wrote after 1608–1609, *Cymbeline*, *The Winter's Tale*, and *The Tempest*, all show the distinct influence of the dramaturgy of the private theaters. Also, we know that, while Shakespeare's plays certainly continued to be acted at the Globe to the very end of his career, an increasing number were acted at the court of King James.

Shakespeare's last plays, written with an eye to Blackfriars and the court as well as the Globe, are usually called romances or tragicomedies or sometimes both. The term "romance" suggests a return to the kind of story the author and playwright Robert Greene (1558–1592) had derived from Greek romance: tales of adventure, long separation, and tearful reunion, involving

shipwreck, capture by pirates, riddling prophecies, children set adrift in boats or abandoned on foreign shores, the illusion of death and subsequent restoration to life, the revelation of the identity of long-lost children by birthmarks, and the like. The term "tragicomedy" suggests a play in which the protagonist commits a seemingly fatal error or crime, or (as in *Pericles*) suffers an extraordinarily adverse fortune; in either case he must experience agonies of contrition and bereavement until he is providentially delivered from his tribulations. The overall tone is deeply melancholic and resigned, although suffused also with a sense of gratitude for the harmonies that are mysteriously restored.

Tragicomedy and pastoral romance were, in the period from 1606 to 1610, beginning to enjoy a fashionable courtly revival. The leading practitioners of the new genre were Francis Beaumont and John Fletcher, though Shakespeare made a highly significant contribution. The appropriateness of such plays to the elegant atmosphere of Blackfriars and the court is subtle but real. Their old-fashioned naïveté, which would seem to be out of place in a sophisticated milieu, is only superficial. Perhaps also sophisticated audiences responded to pastoral and romantic drama as a nostalgic evocation of an idealized past, a chivalric "golden world" fleetingly recovered through an artistic journey back to naïveté and innocence. The evocation of such a world demands the kind of studied but informal artifice we find in many tragicomic plays of the period: elaborate masques and allegorical shows, descents of enthroned gods from the heavens (as in *Cymbeline*), quaint chorus figures such as Old Gower or Time (in *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*), and the quasi-operatic blend of music and spectacle. At their best, such plays compel belief in the artistic world thus created. The very improbability of the story becomes, paradoxically, part of the means by which an audience must "awake its faith" in a mysterious truth.

Shakespeare did not merely ape the new fashion in tragicomedy and romance. In fact, he may have done much to establish it. His *Pericles*, written seemingly in about 1606–1608 for the public stage before Shakespeare's company signed their lease for Blackfriars, anticipated many important features not only of

Shakespeare's own later romances but of Beaumont and Fletcher's *The Maid's Tragedy* and *Philaster* (c. 1608–1611). Still, Shakespeare was on the verge of retirement, and the future belonged to Beaumont and Fletcher. Shakespeare was gradually disengaging himself, spending more and more time in Stratford. His last known stint as an actor was in Ben Jonson's *Sejanus* in 1603. Sometime in 1611 or 1612 he probably gave up his lodgings in London, though he still may have returned for such occasions as the opening performance of *Henry VIII* in 1613. He continued to be one of the proprietors of the newly rebuilt Globe, but his involvement in its day-to-day operations dwindled.

The themes that dominate Shakespeare's later romances suggest retirement—from the responsibilities of parenthood, from art, from the theater, from life itself. Fathers and their grown daughters are an omnipresent configuration in these plays. In the tender but complex relationship between the two, the father's business is to learn to accept his inevitable aging and the transfer of his daughter's affections to another man. (Shakespeare's own daughter Susanna was married to Dr. John Hall in Holy Trinity Church, Stratford, on June 5, 1607, and the couple's first child, Elizabeth, was christened on February 21, 1608.) This lesson must be learned, moreover, against a background like those of Shakespeare's great tragedies, with their relentless explorations of the possibilities of disaster in the father-daughter relationship. Brabantio refuses to recognize the right of Desdemona to marry Othello; King Lear is unwilling to see that he cannot expect his daughters, especially Cordelia, to love their father as the sole center of their lives. "Sure I shall never marry like my sisters, / To love my father all," says Cordelia (1.1.103–4).

The protagonists of Shakespeare's romances face similar dilemmas, though usually the outcomes are more benign. *Pericles* is filled with variations of the conflict, from the tragic and cautionary example of the incestuous King Antiochus to the pretended jealousy of King Simonides, whose possessiveness is only (or perhaps mainly) a ruse designed to make the young

couple's eventual amorous reward all the sweeter. In this environment of fatherly possessiveness, Pericles must work out his own relationship to his daughter Marina. Cymbeline's resistance to his daughter Imogen's preference in love drives Posthumus Leonatus from the court and thereby sets in motion the potentially tragic events that are resolved only after years of separation, estrangement, and eventual reunion. Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, having ordered that his daughter, Perdita, be exposed to the pitiless elements, is spared from being a murderer only by a strange providence that restores Perdita, the lost one, to him after many years of penance. As happens with Marina and Imogen, the reunion of this father and daughter is a rediscovery that coincides with the father's acknowledgment that his daughter is ready to marry and begin a family of her own. Prospero in *The Tempest*, like King Simonides, invents a jealous contretemps for Miranda and Ferdinand so that their love may seem all the more wondrous once it is earned by tribulation. We can see at the same time, though, that Prospero is partly acting out of his own troubled feelings of possessiveness, trying to lay them to rest as best he can. He succeeds in freeing Miranda from her tie to him, whereas the fathers in the earlier romances, Pericles, Cymbeline, and Leontes, have had to struggle more painfully with their ties of affection. Even Prospero's success in freeing Miranda is all the more convincing because it is not easy.

Some of the fathers of the late romances are also husbands who rediscover their wives. Pericles's reunion with Marina, as precious as it is, serves also as a prelude to his finding his wife, Thaisa, at the Temple of Diana. The daughter, so like her mother of many years before, is a manifestation of the eternal renewal of life; the mother, still lovely though now aged, displays the process of growing toward death that is common to all creatures. Pericles must learn to accept the aging of his wife and of himself, and must rediscover an affection for one whom he has cast aside. The story says that Thaisa was apparently dead when the sailors on board ship insisted on her being thrown overboard, but Pericles must grapple with his own responsibility for her long and arduous odyssey. During their separation, she

devotes herself to the retired life of a priestess in the temple of the goddess of chastity, and it is her generosity that is needed to restore the wandering Pericles to marital happiness. (A similar motif of a wife lost at sea and found again after many years in a life of religious seclusion occurs in Shakespeare's early—or earliest—comedy, *The Comedy of Errors*.) In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes's jealousy is directly to blame for his denunciation of his wife, Hermione, and in this instance it is clearly the husband's failure that is the cause of his wife's enforced seclusion. Like Thaisa and Emilia, Egeon's wife, Hermione adopts a life of chaste retirement. She too ages. Given a kind of spiritual authority by her innocence and suffering, Hermione bestows on her erring and contrite husband a forgiveness that he (rightly) believes himself not to deserve.

Through the grace of forgiving women and the ministrations of a benign comic providence, tragedy turns to poignant comedy in these plays. Essential to these transformations is that the men have not in fact done the dreadful things they have contemplated and even attempted. Thaisa, washed ashore by a storm of fortune that both afflicts and restores all mortals, is brought to life by Cerimon. Posthumus Leonatus orders the murder of his wife, but, unlike Othello, does not succeed, because a loyal servant puts human compassion ahead of obedience. Leontes wants to do away with his wife and daughter but is forestalled by his wife's apparent death and by beneficent happenings on the seacoast of Bohemia that include the participation of a bear. Later, an engaging thief and scoundrel named Autolycus is instrumental, in ways that no one could have predicted, to the restoration of happiness. Antonio and Sebastian attempt murder in *The Tempest* only to be thwarted by Ariel, whose invisible presence symbolizes the overseeing providence through which romance averts tragic circumstance. The gods or abstractly allegorical figures—the chorus figure Gower and the goddess Diana in *Pericles*; the spirits of the Leonati and the god Jupiter in *Cymbeline*; the chorus figure Time and the voice of Apollo through his oracle in *The Winter's Tale*; and Ariel, Iris, Ceres, Juno, and other spirits in *The Tempest*—repeatedly express their

concern or intervene on the side of order and happiness. Forgiveness for erring men is possible in these plays (as, earlier, for Claudio in *Much Ado About Nothing* and Angelo in *Measure for Measure*, among others) because the men have been saved from their own worst instincts and have not committed their envisaged crimes.

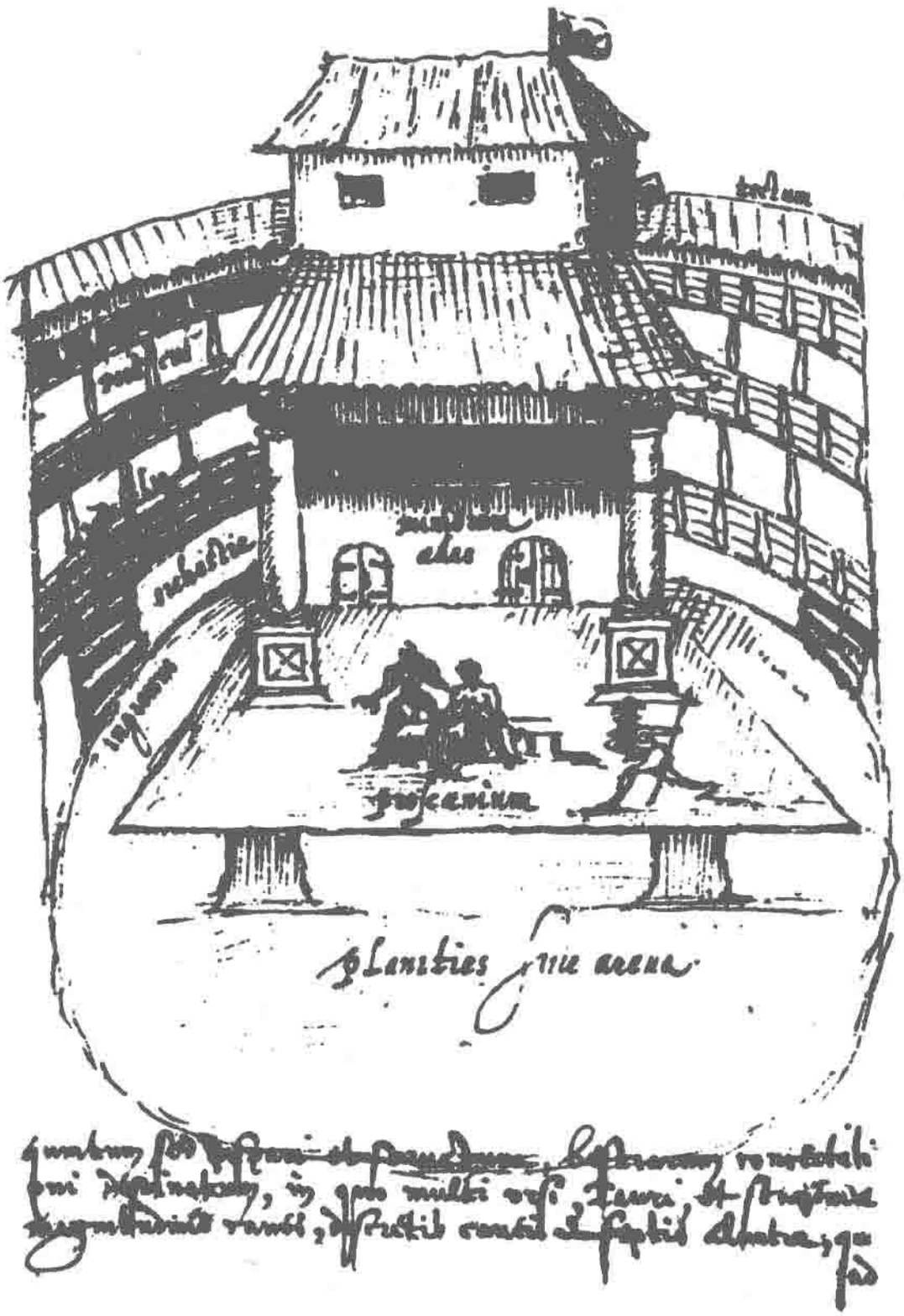
Shakespeare's celebration of his art and his farewell to it are evident everywhere in these late plays. Cerimon, in *Pericles*, is an artist figure whose seemingly supernatural skill preserves the life of Thaisa and so makes possible the comic resolution. The gods manifest their will in Act 5 of *Cymbeline* in a way that stresses, through the very improbability and artifice of the events in the theater, the artist's role in contriving a providential restoration. Paulina, in *The Winter's Tale*, fulfills a role essentially like that of Cerimon, bringing Hermione back to life and thus preserving the heroine for her climactic act of forgiveness. Paulina's reflections on her art as permissible rather than black magic (5.3.95–105), her insistence that Leontes and the others awake their faith in order to bring the miracle to fruition (ll. 89–95), and her reenactment of the miracle through which the dead are brought to life all define the dramatist's art and justify the illusions through which theater works its magic. Prospero, aided by Ariel, is the most visibly theatrical and artistic of these miracle workers, as he leashes and unleashes storms, puts people to sleep and awakens them, and, in a moving peroration, boasts of his theatrical ability to wake sleepers from their graves.

The boast is, it turns out, only a preamble to his resolution to set aside the audacious power given him by art and to drown his books (5.1.33–57). In these late plays Shakespeare's farewell to his art is an integral part of his vision of setting aside everything that life holds dear. Yet the renunciation is also a celebration, a renewal, for life will go on and art will continue to cast its spells.

THE PLAYHOUSE

From other contemporary evidence, including the stage directions and dialogue of Elizabethan plays, we can surmise that the various public theaters where Shakespeare's plays were produced (the Theatre, the Curtain, the Globe) resembled the Swan in many important particulars, though there must have been some variations as well. The public playhouses were essentially round, or polygonal, and open to the sky, forming an acting arena approximately 70 feet in diameter; they did not have a large curtain with which to open and close a scene, such as we see today in opera and some traditional theater. A platform measuring approximately 43 feet across and 27 feet deep, referred to in the de Witt drawing as the *proscaenium*, projected into the yard, *planities sive arena*. The roof, *tectum*, above the stage and supported by two pillars, could contain machinery for ascents and descents, as were required in several of Shakespeare's late plays. Above this roof was a hut, shown in the drawing with a flag flying atop it and a trumpeter at its door announcing the performance of a play. The underside of the stage roof, called the heavens, was usually richly decorated with symbolic figures of the sun, the moon, and the constellations. The platform stage stood at a height of 5½ feet or so above the yard, providing room under the stage for underworldly effects. A trapdoor, which is not visible in this drawing, gave access to the space below.

The structure at the back of the platform (labeled *mimorum aedes*), known as the tiring-house because it was the actors' attiring (dressing) space, featured at least two doors, as shown here. Some theaters seem to have also had a discovery space, or curtained recessed alcove, perhaps between the two doors—in which Falstaff could have hidden from the sheriff (*1 Henry IV*, 2.4) or Polonius could have eavesdropped on Hamlet and



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This early copy of a drawing by Johannes de Witt of the Swan Theatre in London (c. 1596), made by his friend Arend van Buchell, is the only surviving contemporary sketch of the interior of a public theater in the 1590s.

his mother (*Hamlet*, 3.4). This discovery space probably gave the actors a means of access to and from the tiring-house. Curtains may also have been hung in front of the stage doors on occasion. The de Witt drawing shows a gallery above the doors that extends across the back and evidently contains spectators. On occasions when action "above" demanded the use of this space, as when Juliet appears at her "window" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2 and 3.5), the gallery seems to have been used by the actors, but large scenes there were impractical.

The three-tiered auditorium is perhaps best described by Thomas Platter, a visitor to London in 1599 who saw on that occasion Shakespeare's *Julius Caesar* performed at the Globe:

> The playhouses are so constructed that they play on a raised platform, so that everyone has a good view. There are different galleries and places [*orchestra*, *sedilia*, *porticus*], however, where the seating is better and more comfortable and therefore more expensive. For whoever cares to stand below only pays one English penny, but if he wishes to sit, he enters by another door [*ingressus*] and pays another penny, while if he desires to sit in the most comfortable seats, which are cushioned, where he not only sees everything well but can also be seen, then he pays yet another English penny at another door. And during the performance food and drink are carried round the audience, so that for what one cares to pay one may also have refreshment.

Scenery was not used, though the theater building itself was handsome enough to invoke a feeling of order and hierarchy that lent itself to the splendor and pageantry on stage. Portable properties, such as thrones, stools, tables, and beds, could be carried or thrust on as needed. In the scene pictured here by de Witt, a lady on a bench, attended perhaps by her waiting-gentlewoman, receives the address of a male figure. If Shakespeare had written *Twelfth Night* by 1596 for performance at the Swan, we could imagine Malvolio appearing like this as he bows before the Countess Olivia and her gentlewoman, Maria.

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