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The Pedagogy of Emotional Response: Feeling Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

Author(s): James Lambert

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# "The Pedagogy of Emotional Response: Feeling Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*"

by James Lambert

At the beginning of one of my general literature courses a few years ago, I taught John Donne's Holy Sonnet "Death Be Not Proud." The students' reaction to it, although I provided some historical context, was one of bafflement about its supposed "Old English" and confusion about its metaphysical properties. Towards the end of the semester, we read Margaret Edson's Pulitzer-Prize winning play *Wit*, which makes powerful use of that same sonnet in some emotionally-charged scenes. Only two of my students even recognized the poem, while the other twenty-one students claimed that they had never seen it before. Yet after finishing, and crying through, Emma Thompson's performance in the Mike Nichols-directed HBO movie version of *Wit* (2001), most of the students had at least three lines of the Donne poem memorized, and when we subsequently did our "analysis" (the second of the semester) of the poem, the students floored me with the depth of their interpretations. When I asked why the poem meant so much more to them this time, one of my students said, "when the poem means something to the characters in the play, and we care about those characters, then

it is going to have to mean something to us.” Another student declared that “this time I saw how the poem felt rather than trying to figure out what it meant.”

These two undergraduate students offered what was, to me, surprising insight into the way we might teach difficult texts, like lyric poetry and Renaissance drama. It was not the fact that Donne’s sonnet had been repurposed in a more contemporary setting that seemed to engage the students but rather that it had been placed in a new narrative and emotional context. As teachers of medieval and Renaissance literature, seldom do we place critical interpretation and emotional response on equal pedagogical footing, often to the point of asking students to set aside their emotional investment in a text in order to analyze it more objectively. Just recently, I directed a student that was having trouble writing a literary analysis paper toward Purdue University’s wonderful and reliable OWL website, only to have him come back more frustrated when the site instructed him to “begin with your evidence rather than starting with emotion” (Purdue). To this particular student, there was no point in writing a paper that was devoid of his emotional investment in the particular text, and so I asked him to do precisely the opposite: start with his emotional reaction and show me the “evidence” that his emotions were authentic responses to the text.

This essay seeks to explore the possibilities inherent in a pedagogical approach that places emotion at the forefront of critical interpretation. By first exploring some of

the recent trends in the study of emotion, both physiological and cognitive, I will then offer an example of how focusing on emotion might work in the classroom without sacrificing historical rigor or analytical acumen. To do this, I will advance a reading of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* as a play that teaches us how to engage with the rhetorical and hermeneutic possibilities of emotion while still allowing us to have a reaction that can conceivably be called emotional. That is, we might use our emotional response to *The Winter's Tale* as a catalyst to then interpret and understand complicated and specific narrative structures, historically- and culturally-accurate modes of critical response, and the almost universal pathos that characterizes Shakespeare's late romance.

### **"Affection!": *The Winter's Tale* and Emotional Resonance**

In a review of the Royal Shakespeare Company's *The Winter's Tale* in New York in the summer of 2011, Charles Isherwood of *The New York Times* begins with the rather effusive statement, "A thrill of true feeling runs through virtually every scene" (Isherwood). Just two years earlier, also in *The New York Times*, Ben Brantley reviewed Sam Mendes's *The Winter's Tale* by claiming that "The feelings that [Leontes] generates are too intense, too authentic, and — this is the scary part — too familiar for cool on-the-spot analysis" (Brantley). It seems that one can hardly review Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* without invoking some kind of personal feeling experienced while

watching it, and the authenticity of “true feeling” becomes the commonplace of the critics’ evaluative rubric.

Popular reviews echo much of the current criticism on the play by focusing on feeling. In a recent refutation of Stanley Cavell’s influential “skeptical” reading of *The Winter’s Tale*, Charles Altieri argues that “Cavell’s investments lead him to stress the affective dimensions only of the fundamentally cognitive values organized around his concern for what we can learn. . . . [Cavell] takes [the characters’] affective states as primarily phenomena to be interpreted rather than forces inviting our participation” (Altieri 267). Altieri’s critique of Cavell suggests that feeling in *The Winter’s Tale* is the thing: the play’s power comes in its ability to create intense feeling not for analysis but rather for participation, as Ben Brantley emphasizes. Perhaps this is why Trevor Nunn’s 1976 *The Winter’s Tale* was met with slight disappointment. The major criticism of Trevor Nunn’s production was that it was an “interpretation” rather than an “experience” of theater. The “emotional impact of the [statue] scene was blunted” (Hunt 363) because of the interpretive ingenuity, said Robert W. Speaight, and Gareth Lloyd Evans explained that “one comes away [from the production] dazzled with interpretation and musing upon what happened to experience” (Hunt 366).

Paulina, in her final lines of the play, makes a similar move. After Hermione asks for explanations of all that has led to the moment of reconciliation, Paulina refuses her with an almost transcendental plea for presence and affective participation:

There's time enough for that  
Lest they desire upon this push to trouble  
Your joys with like relation. Go together  
You precious winners all. Your exultation  
Partake to everyone. (5.3.162-66)<sup>[1]</sup>

Paulina exhorts those who have been reunited to keep their joy untroubled by the “relation” of explanation. Instead, she encourages each character on stage, and surely the audience in a metatheatrical gesture, to “go together . . . all” and spread the available “exultation” to “everyone.” Clearly, a feeling shared has more theatrical impact than a feeling analyzed, and Paulina, the last act’s puppeteer, anticipates an audience of “precious winners” with untroubled joys.

The play has, in Charles Frey’s terms, a “mysterious power to move its audience” (Frey 5-6), but that power seems to me not so mysterious at all—it is the culmination of a narrative that has been concerned with emotional movement from the beginning. As the play opens, Archidamus describes that for Polixenes and Leontes in childhood, “there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now” (1.2.19-21), as if that affection will naught but spread as the play progresses. Of course, that affection becomes the fragile marker of misreading on Leontes’s part, but

the line indicates how “affection” will drive much of the action. It is no coincidence that the play opens and closes with mention of affection and exultation spreading among the players, and, by proximity, the audience and readers. After all, the title of the play comes from the young Mamillius’s categorization of tales based on their emotional content. “Merry or sad shall’t be?” he petitions his mother when asked to tell a tale, to which she responds, “As merry as you will” (2.1.25-26). His refusal to tell her the merry tale—“A sad tale’s best for winter”—both confirms that the “winter’s tale” will not only be characterized by its emotional output but also be operating on the “merry” to “sad” scale, often with little distinction between the two.

But perhaps the greatest indicator that we ought to approach *The Winter’s Tale* through an examination of its emotional resonance comes from Leontes’s own recognition that his passions have overtaken his ability to see or think straight, or, as I put it to my students, emotions have created his state of permanent suspended disbelief.

Affection, thy intention stabs the centre.  
Thou dost make possible things not so held,  
Communicat’st with dreams—how can this be?—  
With what’s unreal thou coactive art,  
And fellow’st nothing. (1.2.140-44)

Leontes’s acute understanding of how “affection” has altered his vision to “make possible things not so held” has the immediate negative connotation that his emotions

are forcing him to see his wife's infidelity even when it is the stuff of "dreams." His rational sense of the situation has vanished and in its place affection has created the "possible" out of the "unreal." Not only, however, does the passage suggest that "affection" creates the real out of the unreal—makes him see his wife's invented infidelity—it also goes one further, into the realm of "art." "Thou coactive art," an art mutually created by the supposed object of vision and the viewer's affection, pushes aside rational interpretation and moves Leontes to a state of suspended disbelief. In Leontes' case, affection forces him to cease believing in the loyalty of his wife in favor of the belief in his own dreams, which invent a narrative of disloyalty and treachery. For the audience, "affection" will attempt to alter the belief in a rational world that cannot allow a statue to descend in a moment of "coactive art" and wonder. "Affection" may "stab the centre" of Leontes's vision, but it also stabs the center of *The Winter's Tale's* plot, allowing audience and reader to believe.

### **Feeling and Emotion: The Sensation of Literary Response**

If affection is at the "centre" of *The Winter's Tale*, it seems clear that it ought to be used as a conditional frame for teaching the play to undergraduates. The pedagogy of teaching through emotion has been of some concern in recent studies of education, although those studies tend to focus on childhood education rather than higher learning. Daniel and Michel Chabot, in their influential textbook *Emotional Pedagogy:*

*Incorporating Emotional Intelligence into Your Teaching Strategies*, build their techniques around Cognitive Emotional Pedagogy (CEP), a relatively recent theory that maintains that the brain's cognitive functions are activated by a person's emotional memory and state. Chabot claims that with new cognitive studies of how learning takes place, it is only necessary to recognize that "in order to learn, one must feel" (Chabot 3).

Cognitive Emotional Pedagogy is an exciting and fertile approach to teaching, but the reason it has not affected higher levels of education, including university- and graduate-level training, is probably because it asks teachers to integrate their own emotional experience with that of the students, which can result in the discomfort of confession and self-exposure. Too often a student's preconceived emotional state, like anger or depression, is brought to bear in class discussions rather than their *a priori* emotional response to a text within the class. My own interest in "emotion" leaves the student's previous emotional state alone to instead examine the rough combination of rhetorical, theoretical, and historical responses to a narrative or dramatic text. Besides, it is not enough to teach literature through emotional response alone, but rather we might teach how emotional response is triggered by an indicator in the textual object. This, it seems to me, is specific to the world of narrative. As teachers, we probably already understand that narrative invites emotional investment, but we often want to quickly redirect student emotional investment into intellectual engagement. But that redirection

often becomes a false move, primarily because a student's emotional response is already in itself an intellectual engagement.

The intellectual content of emotion has been of some concern in the research of "feeling," a word that simultaneously conjures a physical response with an inward emotion. James R. Averill, in his psychological work on emotions, highlights that "emotion" "stems from the Latin *e + movere*, which originally meant 'to move out,' 'to migrate,' or 'to transport an object'" (Averill 107), in this case a feeling moving out from the body. Emotion depends on movement, perhaps the witnessing of movement whether it is the movement of a plot or of a body — emotional experience needs a catalyst, a narrative, and an appropriate context. Recently, approaches towards emotion have circled around psychological chronologies: the question has shifted to what causes emotions rather than what do emotions cause. I follow William James's lead in maintaining that feeling comes from certain perceptions, perceptions that trigger a bodily response that then is categorized under an understood field of associations that we might call "sorrow" or "joy." James relates that "we feel sorry because we cry, angry because we strike, afraid because we tremble, and [it is] not that we cry, strike, or tremble, because we are sorry, angry, or fearful, as the case may be" (James 450). This theory, which requires that emotion stems from outside stimuli, suggests that physiological change is as conducive to feeling as is intellectual understanding. This physiological experience, I am suggesting, ought to be recorded and analyzed in a

course, whether through discussions, reading journals, or performance. Bodies interacting with the text, whether it is through crying, sighing, sitting up, and so on help create feeling, which is the only way to produce a memorable experience. In a recent course I taught on ghosts in the Western Canon, I asked students to record their physical reactions to *Turn of the Screw*, highlight the moments in the novel that those physiological responses occurred, and how it affected their emotional state. The students' written responses varied—some said they were yawning a lot more than anything else while others mentioned that they felt “chills” at one point or “heavy” at another. By and large the articulations of their emotional experiences were clearer and more specific after they understood the physiological precedent. Likewise, Leontes's first recognition of his rash jealousy is physiological in nature. Before he names his emotional state, he identifies his bodily reaction:

Too hot, too hot  
To mingle friendship farre in mingling bloods.  
I have *tremor cordis* on me. My heart dances  
But not for joy, not joy. (1.2.110-113)

Leontes feels “too hot,” he has “*tremor cordis*,” the Latin for heart palpitations, and he recognizes at least that these bodily manifestations are “not joy,” but he has yet to identify the feeling itself. He sees Hermione acting courteous towards his friend, his body responds, and his emotional identification has yet to be articulated.

But let me go further. It is often said that emotion can never be studied outside of its discursive context. The question, however, of an emotion's reliance on a discourse as opposed to its cognitive genesis has been a subject of debate for the last twenty years. Beginning with the work of neuroscientist Antonio Damasio in the early 1990s, emotions were categorized as a cognitive process wholly dependent on the workings of the body. Damasio locates the genesis of emotion in the brain's reactions to the body's stimuli, and subsequently inaugurates a field of emotion studies with a cognitive approach. Martha Nussbaum, in her magisterial *Upheavals of Thought*, follows Damasio's lead by suggesting that these cognitive processes operate under the influence of art, making the study of philosophy and literature the study of emotional judgments through cognitive evaluations (Nussbaum; Damasio). Damasio's subsequent work and research continues to build on these ideas, finally separating emotions and "feelings" into a ordered process: emotions come first, built within the brain awaiting their trigger, from a moment of judgment, followed by the manifestation of that emotion, or feeling. This order carefully follows the neuroscience of affect—it structures emotion into a passive receptacle that can at any moment turn into action, feeling. Imagine a student that has just a high neuro-recepticle for despair reading something like *King Lear*, and then bursting into tears throughout.

My initial resistance to Damasio is not with his brainwork—I have little to say about the accuracy of neuroscience's contribution to our understanding of emotions,

but I wonder about his order of emotion to feelings, an order that he ascribes to evolutionary development: as humans were evolving we developed emotions first, feelings later, and so we hitherto experience them in that manner. But what of the contagion of laughter? The spreading of despair among any congregation, or even the communal experience of clapping? In fact, what if that same student reading *King Lear* were to see it among a group of students that could not stop laughing at all of its black comedy? Daniel Gross, in *The Secret History of Emotions*, refutes Damasio and Nussbaum's order of emotions in order to claim that emotions are "irreducibly social," operating under the reality of performance rather than the biological development of the brain (Gross 13). Gross, following Judith Butler, claims that phenomenology, cultural studies, and hermeneutics will tell us more about emotions than neuroscience, with its generalizations about the stability of the human brain over time and cultures. If we are to know anything about emotion, we would be wise to study public rhetorics, Gross says, and steer clear of the cognitivists.<sup>[2]</sup>

Of course, we would do well to include both methods to really understand the operation of emotions—they do not seem to me to be mutually exclusive by any means. But to understand the historical or cultural use of an emotion already assumes greater stake in Gross's position, simply because trying to get access to the biological workings of others' brains, long since worm food, presents certain obstacles. Even more difficult is determining the way emotions—within the brain—are triggered by texts, a central

concern of mine. Jenefer Robinson recognizes this issue in her masterful book *Deeper Than Reason: Emotions and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*, where she lays out the recent theories of emotion and evaluative judgments only to show how those theories give us an incomplete picture of how emotions function as “affective appraisals,” a stimulus that involves physiological change, emotional memory, and environmental stimulus (Robinson 9). In other words, these “affective appraisals” come from some combination of physical expression, cognitive judgment, and cultural and environmental context: James, Nussbaum, and Gross.

Patrick Colm Hogan, a literary critic who has made a fascinating career out of using Nussbaum’s cognitive approach, articulates another version of Robinson’s work in his recent *What Literature Teaches Us About Emotion*. He suggests that there is only so much empirical evidence one can gather about the emotional response to, say, *King Lear*, mostly because that response depends on the preconditions of the experience of seeing or reading the play, whether it is backgrounds, historical periods, or location. But even more difficult to gauge is what an emotional response is supposed to mean because “we are often somewhat inarticulate about our emotional states” and “our objective tests are currently rather crude,” unable to isolate both the emotion being felt and the aspect of the text that elicited that emotion. Although Hogan believes deeply in the value of the cognitive reality of emotional response, he suggests that the only way to

understand that cognitive response is to study the texts themselves as external objects of emotion, which hold what he calls “suggestions” of affect (Hogan 4-5).

This is precisely why a teacher needs to identify the “suggestions” of affect in any literary text: these are ports of entry for the emotional cognizant if perhaps critically unsophisticated student. For example, when Leontes’s “heart dances/ But not for joy, not joy,” he has already indicated two crucial components of the play: 1) that the physical manifestation of emotion can overpower the ability to articulate clearly what that emotion is, and, even more specifically 2) that “joy” will invariably become the foil for Leontes and a suggestion of affect to the audience (this point I will emphasize in my reading of Act V below). The line also gives the teacher a crucial question to ask her students: what is “joy” for Leontes, and why can’t he feel it? The answer can involve a historical inquiry into “joy” in Early Modern England, a philosophical discussion of “joy” in the history of ideas. Of course, this is “not joy,” so to discuss “joy” might be pressing the issue a bit, but the suggestion of affect presents itself in a moment where Leontes’s inability to read correctly comes from his overt physical reaction and emotional confusion.

So far, then, the study of emotions in a literary context would involve understanding the cognitive judgments of the brain, the rhetorical hermeneutics of emotional performance, and the text, or object’s, “suggestions” towards affect. Here I

begin teaching: after students have read Acts 1 to 3 of *The Winter's Tale*, I put the names of the major characters on a board and ask students to articulate how they physically feel as I point to each name. My students have, for the most part, enjoyed this activity as it gives them a chance to focus on their own emotional self. As I point to the name Leontes, students often describe strong feelings of disgust—a “hot” feeling, a tightening of the lips, lungs filling with air to calm the quickening heart. Leontes is, after all, responsible for the death of his son and the supposed death of his accused wife, and students feel their body react to his joyless injustice. I then ask them to reread the “too hot, too hot” lines. In my most recent version of this activity, several students recognized Leontes’s identification of his own body’s reaction to Hermione’s supposed infidelity as strikingly similar to their own bodily reaction to Leontes’s misinterpretation, and they subsequently understood that emotional stimulus is not only narrative-based but clued by a character’s articulation of appropriate emotional and bodily response. Although the reader’s reason for feeling “too hot” is almost exactly the opposite of Leontes’s, Leontes and the audience still share the powerful passion of heated response.

To get from locating emotional reaction and recognizing it as a central concern of the text to critical interpretation and analysis requires that the students use their own emotions to work backwards. I ask students to look for the words throughout the first three Acts that indicate reactions of the body to interior events, or emotions. I then ask

them to find words that indicate interior events, or emotions, that react to the actions of the body. Through this exercise, students identify the ubiquity of certain metaphors that act as physiological as well as emotional: disease, vision, tongue, and heart. As a result, the students' emotional recognition has turned towards critical analysis and interpretation.

As might be gathered, the term "emotion" might be too general a rubric for my method, especially because the term "emotion" carries very little emotional signification in itself, at least as opposed to the more specific categories embedded within it: sorrow, anger, surprise, joy, and so on. While teaching *The Winter's Tale*, I focus the class discussion towards those emotions both named and implied in the text to highlight the ways in which they become conduct our affective appraisals as readers, as I have already demonstrated: "not joy" is not only an indication of what Acts 1-3 might feel like, but also an implied foreshadowing of what might come: "joy." After my students' discussion of the emotional weight of Acts 1-3, they are eager for a remedy, and I had at least one student who insisted that "it can't get any more depressing" than the end of Act 3 with Mamillius dead and Hermione supposedly dead.

I, in turn, ask them to assign what the rest of the play "should" feel like, therefore setting up certain emotional expectations, a practice that Jenefer Robinson urges as the single most important indicator of future emotional memory. Several

students pick up on the cues of the last scene, during the storm on the shores of Bohemia, in Act 3, where a bear pursues Antigonus and the shepherds come into view to save Perdita and report how the bear “dined” on Antigonus. This easily recognizable tonal shift allows students to predict that the rest of the play will either be bleakly comic or calming, depending on the emotional desire of the student. By and large, the students are correct in their assessment of the future Act 4, primarily because the affect of Act 3.3 nudges them towards a kind of dark mirth. Because I break up our reading of *The Winter’s Tale* into three days (Acts 1-3, Act 4, Act 5), I can spend each day on a different emotional resonance and repeat this exercise. Act 4 becomes the discussion of mirth, in which we define Early Modern conceptions of mirth and festivity and discuss whether this emotion adequately mitigates the anger and “heat” of Acts 1-3. Again, students find the words that become suggestions of affect, “merry” seems to be identified most often as the primary description in Act 4, and analyze how those words inform the bodies and material objects. I had one student when I first taught the play through this method that identified Act 4 as the “false joy” that is not “not joy” of Acts 1-3 but is still not “joy.” That kind of observation counted to me as perhaps the sharpest bit of criticism on the play that I have encountered, and I will use it to begin my extended discussion of teaching emotion through Act 5.

## **Uplift, Elevation, and Feeling Good: Understanding Emotion through Joy**

In 2009, the late and beloved film critic Roger Ebert, in what was then his new and increasingly popular blog, described the ways in which he is moved to tears during movies: “I never cry during sad moments in the movies, only during moments about goodness . . . What I experience is the welling up of a few tears in my eyes, a certain tightness in my throat, and a feeling of uplift” (Ebert). Ebert’s confession was part of a larger discussion about “positive psychology,” a recent movement in contemporary psychology that attempts to reconstruct human evolution based on our “positive” traits, such as kindness, generosity, love, and empathy, or what Dacher Keltner has called “survival of the kindest” (Keltner 2). The trend sounds a little like Oprah’s solutions to global conflict, but the practice has gained a marked respect in the mainstream media culture as well as in academics. Of course, there is something alluring, as well as radical, about academic respect for the study of goodness and sincerity, what with the holy trinity of Hobbes-Nietzsche-Freud dominating politics, art, and psychology with such acrimony for so long. But back to Ebert. The rest of his blog entry is devoted to the moments in films that give rise to audience “elevation,” Jonathan Haidt’s term for the communal response “elicited by acts of virtue or moral beauty” (Haidt 276). According to Jonathan Haidt, elevation occurs in response to the staging of virtue or beauty, the witness of good acts that result in something akin to “the joy of receiving love,” as one of his test cases put it. It is partly my intention in this project to describe, in aesthetic

and generic terms, how this communal sense of “elevation” might function for an audience, or a group of students, in response to a work of literature, and I am going to use the final scene of Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* as a test case. With its astonishing final scene, *The Winter’s Tale* seems to me a precise model for the study of aesthetic elevation and communal joy. Ebert’s examples from film almost invariably come from the endings, and involve a sense of suspended joy; “When the movie is over, I don’t want to talk to anyone. After such movies I notice that many audience members remain in a kind of reverie.” Ever the populist, Ebert describes affect in communal terms—his experience is unique to the movie house and probably could not be duplicated in the privacy of a living room. I imagine something similar could be said of the theatre, but it would be described differently due to the mandate of an audible response to live actors: the “reverie” that Ebert speaks of is that quick moment between the end of play and the first sound of applause, perhaps. I assume Ebert speaks of his own experience with such confidence because his “reverie” is similar to many experiences in theater and playhouse, and, of course, the collective of students in a classroom.

I do not wish to press too insistently on the psychological concept of “elevation,” as attractive as the notion is, primarily because the current conversation surrounding it is out of my particular field. Yet the term is useful in that it allows literary scholars and literature teachers to revise accepted histories of reader, audience, and, in our case, student reception. In searching for a seventeenth-century aesthetic term that is the

equivalent to “elevation,” one would inevitably be blocked by the general lack of affective language outside of Aristotle’s prescribed responses to tragedy and comedy. “Elevation” might be best thought of as a secondary emotion of one of Paul Ekman’s primary emotions, “joy” (the seventh) whose trigger is the approach and manifestation of the “desired situation” (Ekman 550-553). This is why I am using the joy model for *The Winter’s Tale*.

A caveat: historically, the sense of joy is not secular, and in Early Modern England the term is used most often to describe one of the varieties of religious experience. The word is invoked with astonishing ubiquity among Early Modern religious writers, yet is most often used in the context of a received joy from being witness to truth and God’s love. I bring this up because it seems that as teachers of literature, we are often hesitant about highlighting feeling precisely because it seems “religious,” or outside the bounds of rational thought and regular critical discourse and therefore uncomfortable. However, for many literary texts, particularly those that I teach, feeling is the whole point of the enterprise, and the major rhetorical device. The transmission of a literary text that takes place in reading, whether it is in a classroom or just by a rote instruction ought to be guided by a movement from text to emotion, or, we could say, the process of being moved.

## **“It should take joy”: The Emotional Movement of *The Winter’s Tale* Act V**

Act 5 of *The Winter’s Tale* is the joyful harvest of a play sown in sorrow. Yet the reaping of joy has its own process. After my students have been conditioned in external mirth in Act 4, shown physical manifestations of gladness in song, dancing, and, in response to Autolycus, laughing, the emotional, internal narrative still has not resolved itself. On the contrary, the wordly—“false,” as my student put it—joy of Act 4 has been a distraction from the heavier things that truly need resolving—things that, when resolved, promise a joy that will make the previously experienced lesser joy pale in comparison. The first line of Act 5, in which Cleomenes tells Leontes “Sir, you have done enough, and have performed/ A saintlike sorrow,” is an immediate indicator what kind of emotional narrative we have returned to once we get back to Sicily. The audience is immediately reminded of the grave sorrow still lingering, the “not joy” of Acts 1-3, yet the line simultaneously also puts that sorrow in the immediate past, allowing the reaping of joy to finally become the inevitability.

The first moment of actual joy in Act 5 is more explicit in its articulations, yet it is not witnessed visually by the audience, and my students claimed frustration that they were only given a description of the event rather than the event itself. Leontes’s reunion and recognition of his long-lost daughter Perdita is described by a “Third Gentlemen,” a random spectator of the scene who seems particularly sensitive to the way “joy” operates in what he had just witnessed. The description of that reunion is marked by

four different uses of the word “joy,” culminating in tears that are shed equally for the joy of reunion as for the sorrow of Leontes’s continued separation from Hermione. “Did you see the meeting of the two kings,” the Third Gentleman asks. “No,” replies the Second,

Then have you lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of. There might you have beheld one joy crown another, so and in such manner that it seemed Sorrow wept to take leave of them, for their joy waded in tears. There was casting up of eyes, holding up of hands, with countenance of such distraction that they were to be known by garment, not by favor. Our king, being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter, as if that joy were now become a loss, cries ‘O, thy mother, thy mother!’ then asks Bohemia forgiveness; then embraces his son-in-law (5.2.47-53).

The emphasis is immediately on witnessing. The joy that the Third Gentleman sees “cannot be spoken of,” but then he describes it in physiological detail. In so describing, the Third Gentlemen creates verbal expectations for what a performance of this kind of emotion would look like, anticipating the possibility that the actual audience may get to see something similar soon. After all, he claims that these joys come gradually, so that “one joy can crown another,” the same way many joys build to climax. This passage resonates deeply with students, who on the one hand claim that this description adequately summarizes how beautiful witnessing goodness can be. On

the other hand, certain students have suggested that they still have lingering anger towards Leontes's behavior in Acts 1-3, and are not ready to see a joyous reunion with the daughter he condemned to abandonment.

Nevertheless, the Third Gentlemen's emphasis on the inability to adequately describe the joy conditioned my students, before they recognized it, to anticipate a similar scene that might defy description. The Third Gentlemen's description of the reunion scene articulates a joy and loss that has yet to be witnessed apart from a character's recount, but in that description students are unwittingly conditioned as the audience with the proper suggestions of affection when that moment comes. As my students and I list the provocative physiological and performative descriptions of weeping, "casting up of eyes," "cries," "one eye declined . . . another elevated," the anticipation of emotional outbreak is given imaginative and verbal proximity. The Third Gentlemen positions himself as part of the audience privy to the scene of joy, and his own profound reaction articulates what might happen when Hermione is revealed to be alive. Eventually, the First Gentleman says, perhaps metatheatrically, that "The dignity of this act was worth the audience of kings and princes, for by such was it acted" (5.2.60-61) to which the Third Gentlemen replies that "Who was the most marble there changed color; some swooned, all sorrowed. If all the world could have seen't, the woe had been universal." (5.2.68-70). The Third Gentlemen's suggestion that had all seen it, the emotional response would have been "universal" remains the rhetorical

effect of the play. What the Third Gentleman does is actually provide a physical and emotional expectation for what a miraculous reunion scene ought to look like: he is conditioning his students to recognize a certain kind of emotion.

The class should probably be ordered to perform a collective reading of this scene before getting to the statue scene because of the way it lays the emotional expectation for the final scene. This brings us to the actual pivotal moment of the play, the actual representation of those emotions that thus far have only been described. Here Paulina presents the statue of the long-dead Hermione to her surviving husband Leontes, and when Paulina draws the curtain to the statue of his Hermione, Leontes's speech is paralyzed, and Paulina notes that "I like your silence. It the more shows off your wonder" (5.3.24-25). The line nicely echoes Claudio's "Silence is the perfectest herald of joy" (2.1.384) in *Much Ado about Nothing*, in which Claudio also reunites with his betrothed after the error of jealousy, and it exemplifies the commonplace that labels unspeakability as the greatest marker of joy's fullness.

At this point in our class discussion, I ask students to reread the scene aloud (with different students performing different parts), and then I ask everyone to allow 45 seconds of silence following the stage direction to reveal the statue. Perhaps this is where my instruction on emotional reaction veers into emotional manipulation, but the collective silence has so far effectively created an emotional reaction, or at least

emotional identification, that can indicate what Paulina means by “wonder” in its emotional sense. Innumerable sermons on “true joy” in the early seventeenth century all point back to 1 Peter 1:8, proclaiming that upon believing God “ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory.” This moment, indeed, is the first moment (of several) that would literalize the Third Gentleman’s identification of a “scene, which cannot be spoken of.” It is wondrous, bedecked by silence, or perhaps, in Ebert’s case, a “reverie” in which talking would only diminish the experience.

The silent joy of the reunion scene between Leontes and Hermione eventually does get a kind of articulation, though. Immediately following Leontes’s silent reaction, Paulina asks him to speak, but all that can come out of his mouth are words of sorrow. Camillo chides Leontes for this by observing that Leontes’s language and conscience had been so “laid on” by sorrow for sixteen years that he cannot articulate any joy still. Camillo’s observation is especially poignant for the emotional tenor of the scene when he mentions that “Scarce any joy/ Did ever so long live; no sorrow/ But killed itself much sooner” (60-63). This particular joy is bound by sorrow and is, perhaps, ephemeral, but this is precisely why Leontes cannot bear it, and also why the final scene is so exhilarating for the audience: each successive joy is ephemeral, it kills itself with the memory of Leontes’s misdeeds, but each successive joy also builds towards climactic joy. The joy of the act comes in fits and bursts, conditioning the senses to receive the full joy that is yet to come.

When Paulina threatens to close the curtain for fear of confusing Leontes's senses even more, Leontes responds that his passions will settle themselves with time. But I am not sure Leontes wants to settle his passionate response to what he sees—his sorrow is changing into something else. "No settled senses of the world can match," he says, "The pleasure of that madness. Let't alone." (90-91). The "pleasure" that comes from his emotional frenzy is a marker of his emotions changing—his "affliction has a taste as sweet / As any cordial comfort" (95-96). Leontes seems to be having trouble describing exactly what he is feeling: "pleasure," "madness," "affliction," "sweet," and "comfort" all come within six lines of each other—he is recording his emotions in real time, creating, in a sense, an immediate diary of personal reader response. I interject: witnessing, experiencing, this moment in *The Winter's Tale* seems to me to be the only way to adequately approach a formal description of this scene's emotional payoff—to try to describe it is always to do it injustice. Perhaps I doth sentimentalize too much, but the definition of joy can only be approached through experience, which is precisely how Shakespeare's romance operates: the joy of Hermione's descent is bound in the narrative that comes before it, the experience of joy is predicated on the experience of emotional progress. But this is also the moment that makes the play worth something, what makes it memorable. As cognitive scientists have identified, emotion is the primary marker of memory—if there is no emotion attached, the thing won't be remembered. Here the play, at the climax of joy, confirms itself to its audience.

The scene uses the delay strategy, in which the audience waits and anticipates as Paulina repeatedly stalls the statue from reanimating. As the audience stares at the statue, aware of its possible reanimation, the anticipation of joy builds, but time extends it into an analogous realm of long sorrow and extended pain. The joy will be that much greater once the wait is over, and once the wait is over, Hermione embraces Leontes, tears are shed, and the uplift of the characters becomes the joy of the audience, “which was to be seen, but cannot be spoken of.”

When Paulina subsequently exhorts the players and the audience to “Go together/ You precious winners all. Your exultation/ Partake to everyone,” the audience’s “exultation,” both an expressive term of joy and a religious term of salvation, would likely be a stand-in for the religious sense of joyful wonder, and the feeling of reverie and elevation: an Ebert-approved ending. Paulina, when she urges all to not spoil “your joys,” invites the audience to universally “partake” in the emotional resonance of what is being witnessed, like a common invitation to rejoice.

Because an invitation for my students to rejoice would not only edge towards manipulation but completely jump towards forced happiness, I redirect their attention to what the emotional possibilities would be in the theater or playhouse, even in Shakespeare’s England. But how would the audience have reacted to such an invitation? Perhaps with reverential silence; after all, in Shakespeare’s character’s own

terms, silence remains the perfect herald of joy. But at this moment in the play, the end, the audience does react audibly without speaking: they clap. Applause would have been the appropriate expression of joy in this moment, and the gesture of applause would have a kind of joyful and sacred significance. Andrew Gurr claims that clapping became the norm once the passing of the hat began to wane in the mid-sixteenth century. Clapping at performances came into more public fashion about the same time that common prayer was established as the religious practice of England, and both “performance” modes would have been met with a similar gesture (Gurr 11-12). John Bulwer describes clapping as appropriate “when [an audience] cannot contain their joy in silence . . . there is nothing more common with them than by clapping their hands to signify their exceeding joy and gladness of heart” (Bulwer 34). Ramie Targoff associates applause with the liturgical “amen” as a vocal utterance of approval and consent, and the use of clapping in the Renaissance playhouse becomes analogous to a vocal expression of consent. Bulwer’s emphasis, though, is on silence and joy, and clapping becomes the joyful expression without like “relation.” That is, it is a non-verbal sign without utterance nor narrative to ground it in time. The silence and applause at the end of a play like *The Winter’s Tale* is the affirmation of the timeless, heavenly sense of joy without the binding and earthly nature of time. Yet that clapping, as Targoff suggests, implies consent, approval of what has come before as well as an emotional answer to the sacred nature of the performance witnessed, whether it was a service,

sermon, or play (Targoff 77). It may take too much to assume that an early modern audience would be enthusiastically applauding *The Winter's Tale* without real records to show it, but the response would have been a standard joyful consent. The sensation, by its emotive and physical conjunction, of seeing Hermione brought back to life at the end of the play, has its physiological accompaniments built in. In an unpublished paper given at the 2010 Shakespeare Association Conference in Chicago, Michael Witmore claims that Leontes's emotional sense is awakened alongside his physical sense: "He names the sight, sound, touch ("she's warm") and even taste ("an art as lawful as eating"). Tears here, if they come, are not simply an expression of joy, but the pluperfect trace of sensation itself—a having felt of one's own feelings" (Witmore). The tears, the happy tears, are the physical embodiment of silent joy, and the clapping, always done communally, is the audible sound of ineffable joy. Without asking or urging students to cry, giving a historical framework for its appropriateness allows them to at least contemplate its power.

This to me, as a teacher of Shakespeare and a lover of a good cry, remains the most powerful effect of the play, and the initial experience of seeing the play is dominated not by exegesis but by emotional investment. I would suggest that this is the case for students as well—although the academy too often teaches that initial emotional responses are not to be trusted and we must look deeper into the text to discover its true meanings, our students often remain unconvinced one way or another, unless they have

had some sort of emotional experience in reading or seeing a work of literature, which then paves the way later for “like relation,” in Paulina’s words, or in my words, clear and engaged literary interpretation.

Let us return to the moment in which Leontes is first introduced to the statue, before he knows of its true nature. At that moment, Camillo takes grave note of Leontes’s forceful emotional response to the statue—Camillo wonders why Leontes can’t see how good a sculpture it is instead of blubbering about his own emotional state, a response that completely overwhelms the appreciation of its aesthetic qualities. Leontes’s reaction is one of sorrow, which Camillo emphasizes, whereas it should be joy in the beauty of the thing itself. At any rate, Leontes cannot see the aesthetic nature of the statue through his emotionally-strewn tears, but his reaction is ever the more powerful for it. Nevertheless, Leontes’s reaction is more accurate than we suspect; after all, he is looking at his wife, not an aesthetic object, and an emotional outpouring would seem to be the only appropriate response, even if he doesn’t know it yet. What if the audience’s response to the end of the play functions the same way—what if we are looking at the possible joys of our own lives instead of *The Winter’s Tale*? What if the suspension of disbelief that creates our emotional reaction is actually the affirmation of belief that we had all along? To suspect that our overwhelming emotional response to the final scene of reconciliation is an illegitimate interpretation is to not see the truth behind the aesthetic object. Once we know how something feels, figuring out what it

means is much easier, and often we'll discover that the true meaning was the feeling in the first place.

## Endnotes

[1] Quotations from *The Winter's Tale* come from the Folger Shakespeare Library Edition, ed. Barbara A. Mowat and Paul Werstine, Washington Square Press, 1998.

[2] For an excellent summative discussion of the competing theories of emotion and its relation to rhetoric and emotional appeal, see Brian Jackson, "Neuroscience and the New Urgency of Emotional Appeals," *JAC: Journal of Rhetoric, Culture, and Politics* 31.3-4 (2012).

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