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Enemy Brothers Reconciled: Shakespeare’s *As You Like It*¹

There is mirth in heaven,
When earthly things are made even
Atone together (*As You Like It*, 5.4.107–9)

The two basic relationships in human life are the sacred (vertical) man-to-God connection and the personal (horizontal) man-to-man relationship. Ideally, the human being nourishes and is nourished by these relationships, but in practice these connections have usually been perverted, corrupted or ruined. The experience of alienation and hatred have displaced the “natural bond” of human relations; thus peace and forgiveness has to be won, “bought back”, by hard labour, frequently by vicarious sacrifice. The original personal drive in human beings (fear, hatred, etc.) has to be transformed by the touch of the sacred in order to rehumanize this drive by the purgatorial experience of forgiveness. I shall read Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* as a case study for reconciliation.

1. Dramatic Theology

One of the premises of the present essay is that atonement and reconciliation are interchangeable synonyms, though atonement has been more frequently used in a theological context and “reconciliation” has had a wider application.

I will use reconciliation and atonement as synonyms following John W. de Gruchy:

“Reconciliation” is one of the words used in English to describe this experience, though the word “atonement” has often functioned as its equivalent in theological textbooks. But “at-one-ment” is a peculiarly

¹ This paper is a shortened and slightly altered version of the following essay: “Hymen’s Truth: »Atonement« from Shakespeare to Tyndale and from Tyndale to Shakespeare.” *Early Modern Commun(ication)ions*. Eds. Kinga, Földváry and Erzsébet, Stróbl. New Castle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2012. 132–151.

English construction coined to describe God and humanity through the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. (45)

De Gruchy mentions that the Greek version of “reconciliation” or “to reconcile” only occurs 15 times in the New Testament (218),² and he also argues that for Paul “reconciliation” is a controlling metaphor expressing the gospel along with “salvation”, “redemption”, “deliverance” or even “justification” (45).

The theologian Kevin J. Vanhoozer argues that “drama and dogma” go hand in hand, namely, that the doctrine of atonement is the most dramatic of all Christian narratives and doctrines. It is indeed the climax of the grand “theo-drama”. Hans Urs von Balthasar rightly says that no theory can express the dramatic richness as the one encapsulated in the “five-dimensional plot of the cross:” “(1) the Son *gives himself* “for us”, (2) the Son gives himself “for us” *by exchanging places with us*; (3) the Son *saves us from* something (sets us free); (4) the Son *saves us for* something (i.e. participation in the life of God); (5) the Son does all this out of obedience to the Father, who sets the whole process in motion because of his love” (qtd. in *The Drama of Doctrine*, 383).

Gustaf Aulén’s book on the three main concepts of atonement remains a classic. As in his 1931 work *Christus Victor* (1931), the Swedish theologian stresses the dramatic nature of the atonement in its emphasis on Christ’s victory over death. Vanhoozer speaks about the cross as “the historical outworking of an eternal improvising by which the triune God loves the ungodly creatively while remaining himself” (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 389).

Drama, however, never exists in a vacuum. It comes to life only if it is performed.: “The purpose of the doctrine of the atonement [...] is to help us understand the theo-drama, to clarify our role in it, and to direct us to play our part as well” (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 392).

We come to understand the theo-drama only in the theatre of the church where we are also involved. Vanhoozer says that “[t]he church, as the theatre of the gospel, celebrates the person and work of Christ: God with us and for us. [...] Those who worship in spirit and truth become participants—communicants and celebrants—in the drama of redemption” (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 409).

What does the performance of the atonement mean in the “theatre of the gospel”—i.e., the church? The church is a reconciliatory theatre that

² “The noun (reconciliation) *καταλλαγῆ* appears four times (Rom 5:11,11:15; 2 Cor 5:18,19), and the verb (to reconcile) eleven times *ἀποκαταλάσσω* (Eph 2:16; Col 1:20,22), *διαλλάσσομαι* (Mt 5:24), *καταλάσσω* (Rom 5:10 twice; Col 1:20,22); 2 Cor 5:18,19,20), *συναλλάσσω* (Acts 7:26). On one occasion the English translators have used »reconciliation« to translate the Greek word for peace *εἰρήνη* (Acts 12:20).”

revolutionarily proclaims the script of the Gospel and prophetically imitates the lives of her martyrs.

[T]he church is itself the end of the goal of theo-drama: the fulfilment of God's covenant promise to make a people for himself and to be that people's God. [...] When the church participates fittingly in the drama of redemption, then, it assumes the role of corporate witness to the reality of the new creation wrought by the Father in Christ through the Spirit. (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 434–435)

Christian dogma is substantially dramatic and Christian drama is substantially dogmatic. Drama reanimates dogma and dogma is not only a proposition but ultimately and originally a story told and re-enacted. In a world turned upside down—i.e., ruled by an enemy—the theatre of the gospel is necessarily subversive: “The church is a theatre of divine wisdom, a participatory performance of the doctrine of atonement, precisely when it is a theatre of »holy folly«” (*The Drama of Doctrine*, 439).

2. Theological Roots of Literary Studies

Among literary critics it was my colleague Péter Dávidházi who, in his groundbreaking work on János Arany, recognized that the aesthetic principle of reconciliation is deeply rooted in the Jewish and Christian idea of “atonement”. For nineteenth-century poets and critics it was evident that poetry and art suggest a religious connotation of reconciliation which is deeply rooted in the aesthetic category of catharsis.³

When I began to teach Shakespeare over thirty years ago, I was always struck how frequently the word “reconciliation” was used by literary critics, saying, for example, that in the romances the young couple are the “agents of reconciliation”. I wondered why drama theory has not really explored the depth of the subject. We know, of course, that “reconciling the opposites” was a favourite term of Coleridge.⁴

Most recently, in a collection of essays on *Reconciliation in Selected Shakespearean Dramas* (Batson 2008), a doyen of the “Shakespeare and

³ More on this: Péter, Dávidházi. “Megváltástan és katarzisélmélet határán: a »kiengesztelődés« mint közös világnézeti norma.” *Hunyt mesterünk: Arany János kritikai öröksége*. Budapest: Argumentum, 1992. 222–39. See also his “A végső birtokbavétel rituálja felé: engesztelő áldozat, irodalmi kanonizáció és rejtett testvérharc a Kazinczy-ünnepélyen.” *Egy nemzeti tudomány születése: Toldy Ferenc és a magyar irodalomtörténet*. Budapest: Akadémia Kiadó, Universitas, 2004. 265–82.

⁴ Cf. Snyder, Alice D. *The Critical Principle of the Reconciliation of Opposites as Employed by Coleridge*. Ann Arbor: The Ann Arbor Press, 1918. and also Miklós, Szenczi. “Coleridge irodalomesztétikája (1975).” *Tanulmányok*. Budapest: Akadémiai Kiadó, 1989. 349–444.

Christianity" school, Chris R. Hassell Jr. publicly confessed how he regretted to have omitted the word "reconciliation" from his recent (2005) dictionary of *Shakespeare's Religious Language* and said: "I assure you that 'reconcile' will be the first word added into the second edition" ("»Why, All the Souls That Were Forfeit Once«, 6).

It would be an exciting, tempting but a long-time project to illustrate how atonement, or reconciliation, is at work as a structural principle in most of the comedies, especially *Measure for Measure*, or, in all of the romances, especially in *The Winter's Tale*, *Cymbeline* and, last but not least, *The Tempest*.

At the end of the comic and romantic plots the odds are made even, Jacks find their Jills, lost family members are found, those who were thought to have died turn out to be alive, couples are brought together after a series of misadventures, the generation gap is solved, conflicts are healed, lovers united, and the wicked forgiven. Moreover, hostile nations like Britain and Rome make peace, former enemy brothers repent and embrace one another and the idea of reconciliation— i.e. at-one-ment of heaven and earth—is celebrated by music in a solemn banquet.

In comedies reconciliation and catharsis are achieved through the happy ending. Northrop Frye distinguished between the satirical comedy of Ben Jonson and the romantic comedy of Shakespeare: "There are two ways of developing the form of comedy: one is to throw the main emphasis on the blocking characters; the other is to throw it forward on the scenes of discovery and reconciliation" (*Anatomy of Criticism*, 166). At the end of his analysis of *Measure for Measure*, Frye remarked:

Shakespearean comedy usually ends [with] the vision of a renewed and regenerated society, with forgiveness, reconciliation, and the pursuit of happiness all over the place. Forgiveness and reconciliation come at the end of a comedy because they belong at the end of a comedy, not because Shakespeare 'believed' in them. (*Northrop Frye on Shakespeare*, 153)

In the case of the tragedies, there is of course catharsis, but reconciliation is of a different kind, the nature of which we cannot investigate here.

3. Oliver and Orlando in *As You Like It*

In the rest of my essay I wish to concentrate on one particular episode of *As You Like It* that both exemplifies and dramatizes the nature and meaning of atonement. This is the reconciliation between Oliver and Orlando, as narrated by Oliver to Celia and Rosalind in Act 4, Scene 3.

As You Like It is one of the great romantic (“green world”) comedies of Shakespeare that both celebrates and ridicules the pastoral tradition. The drama is as paradigmatic about role-playing and cross-dressing as it is emblematic about the nature of the theatre: Jacques’s “All the World’s a Stage” monologue just conformed to the *Totus mundus agit histrionem* motto of the new Globe Theatre opened in 1599. And above all, like all comedies, *As You Like It* is also about love: after the necessary vicissitudes, four couples are about to consummate their mutual affections at the end of the play.

However, there is an archetypal pattern woven into this multi-layered play: this is the motif of enemy brothers. The pattern is well-known from the Bible from the conflicts of Cain and Abel, Ishmael and Isaac, Esau and Jacob, Joseph and his brothers and so on. Some New Testament parables begin with the phrase: “A father had two sons”. While reading, for example, the parable of the prodigal son it is not easy to decide whether the prodigal is the lost one, or the one who had remained at home and let himself be captive of his envy and jealousy.

Shakespeare seems to have been obsessed with this issue. (Mr Best says in James Joyce’s *Ulysses* that “that brother motive [...] we find in old Irish myths. [...] The three brothers Shakespeare”, 210)

Sibling rivalry is a pattern in the history plays, especially in *Richard III*: not only between Gloucester, Clarence or King Edward but even in the emulation of the ill-fated young princes as well. It is there, of course, in *Hamlet* as Claudius himself admits to have the “primal eldest curse”—i.e., “the mark of Cain”—upon himself. It is there in the desire of the bastard Edmund to “top the legitimate” Edgar in *King Lear*; it is there in Prospero’s banishment by his usurper-brother Antonio in *The Tempest*.⁵

Most poignantly it is there even on two levels in *As You Like It*. The play begins where any of the tragedies ended: in a world of rottenness and death where time is out of joint. Duke Frederick, the usurper rules his wasteland and the good-hearted banished Senior Duke meditates upon the romantic beauty of exiled life which is “exempt from public haunt” (2.1.14). Duke Frederick is the prototype of the ambitious and jealous tyrant whose court everybody gradually deserts to find freedom in the forest of Arden. The tragic enmity of brothers, is, however, transcended by the mutual and gentle affection of their

⁵ For more on this, see: Tibor Fabiny. “Brothers as Doubles: Birthright and Rivalry of »Brothers« in Genesis and Shakespeare.” *Míves semmiségek: Tanulmányok Ruttkay Kálmán 80. születésnapjára. Elaborate trifles: Studies for Kálmán G. Ruttkay on his 80th Birthday*. Eds. Gábor, Ittész and András, Kiséry. Piliscsaba: Pázmány Péter Katolikus Egyetem, 2002. 35–47.

daughters Rosalind and Celia who “like Juno’s swans, / Still [...] went coupled and inseparable” (1.3.71–72).

While the brotherly enmity between Duke Senior and Duke Frederick is the framing façade of the play, the details of their conflicts remain in the background and are assigned into the gloomy past; its lower-levelled same pattern: the archetypal rivalry and hatred between the wicked Oliver and his oppressed younger brother Orlando is brought into the foreground. It is heard already at the very beginning of the play when Orlando complains to his loyal servant Adam about Oliver: “He lets me feed with his hinds, bars me the place of a brother [...] mines my gentility with my education” (1.1.18–19).

When he is confronted with Oliver he continues the complaint

The courtesy of all nations allows you my better, in that you are the first born, but the same tradition takes not away my blood, were there twenty brothers betwixt us. I have as much of my father in me as you, albeit I confess your coming before me is nearer to his reverence. (1.1.45–51)

He clarifies the cause of his complaint: “My father charged you in his will to give me good education: you have trained me like a peasant, obscuring and hiding from me all gentleman-like qualities.” (1.1.66–69).

Oliver unashamedly reveals his wickedness and falsely deceiving him, prompts Charles the wrestler to suspend his inhibition to kill him because Orlando is “full of ambition, an envious emulator of every man’s good parts, a secret and villainous contriver against me his natural brother.” (1.1.141–43).

When left alone Oliver himself is shocked by the irrationality of his hatred for his brother:

Now I will stir this gamester. I hope I shall see an end of him; for my soul—yet I know not why—hates nothing more than he. Yet he’s gentle, never schooled and yet learned, full of noble device, of all sorts enchantingly beloved, and indeed so much in the heart of the world, and especially of my own people, who best know him, that I am altogether misprised. But it shall not be so long; this wrestler shall clear all. (1.1.161–70)

However, the wicked design of Oliver is “overthrown” just as Charles, contrary to the expectations of many, is “overthrown” (1.2.243) in the wrestling game by the Hercules-like power of Orlando. But in the moment of his triumph Orlando himself is “overthrown” (1.2.249) by Rosalind’s love at first sight.

The loyal old servant Adam alerts Orlando that Oliver when hearing him being praised “means / To burn the lodging where you use to lie, / And you within it [...] this house is but a butchery.” (2.3.21–23, 26). Hatred inflames hatred: on learning Celia’s escape from the court the raging Frederick commands Oliver to find his brother and “bring him dead or living / Within this twelvemonth, or turn thou no more / To seek a living in our territory” (3.1.6–8). Like cures like. Oliver openly admits: “I never lov’d my brother in my life” (3.1.14).

The rest of the play takes place in the forest of Arden, where all the banished or self-banished characters flee. In this counterpart of the apparently civilized but in fact brutally uncivilized courtly world the good-natured characters find not only themselves but their providentially provided lovers. As it is well-known, this happens at several levels of the play.

The crucial scene for the sake of which this essay is written, is in Act 4, Scene 3. Rosalind-as-Ganymede-as-Rosalind in the company of Celia is eagerly waiting for Orlando to return at the promised hour so that they can continue Rosalind’s “curing” of Orlando’s love for Rosalind.

Contrary to expectations, Celia welcomes an unknown gentleman who brings a bloody napkin from Orlando. He narrates the details of how Orlando, while “pacing through the forest”, suddenly caught sight of a “wretched rugged man”, who, while sleeping under an old oak-tree was threatened by a “green and guilded snake”, which, upon Orlando’s approach, “did slip away into the bush”. But there a lioness was “catlike” watching the sleeping man awake.

Orlando then recognized it was his unnatural, wicked brother who was chasing him: “Twice did he turn his back, and purpos’d so. / But kindness, nobler ever than revenge, / And nature, stronger than his just occasion, / made him give battle to the lioness, / Who quickly fell before him” (4.3.127–30).

The words “kindness, nobler ever than revenge” are theologically loaded words in Shakespeare’s works. They are also echoed by Prospero in *The Tempest*: “The rarer action is / In virtue than in vengeance” (5.1.27–8). In *The Merchant of Venice* Portia also says that “mercy seasons justice” (4.1.193), just as in *Measure for Measure* Isabella pleads for Angelo’s mercy on the same grounds: “Why, all the souls that were forfeit once, / And He that might the vantage best have took / Found out the remedy” (2.2.73–75).

“Unnatural” wickedness can only be overcome by a supernatural, supralapsarian nature: i.e., goodness, or mercy. This is the “kindness”, the original, God-given “nature” that is nobler than revenge.

OLIVER.

From miserable slumber I awaked.

CELIA.

Are you his brother?

ROSALIND.

Was't you he rescu'd?

CELIA.

Was't you that did so oft contrive to kill him?

OLIVER.

'Twas I. But 'tis not I. I do not shame
To tell you what I was, since my conversion
So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am.

ROSALIND.

But for the bloody napkin.

OLIVER.

By and by.
When from the first to last betwixt us two
Tears our recountments had most kindly bath'd—
As how I came into that desert place—
In brief, he led me to the gentle Duke,
Who gave me fresh array and entertainment,
Committing me unto my brother's love,
Who led me instantly unto his cave,
There stripp'd himself, and here upon his arm
The lioness had torn some flesh away,
Which all this while had bled; and now he fainted,
And cried in fainting upon Rosalind. (4.3.132–49)

According to Oliver's narration, his own brother whom he was chasing with hatred was not only willing to overcome his impulse for revenge by letting him die "justly", but he felt motivated to fight for his enemy brother while even risking his life. Fighting to rescue your enemy, save someone who means to kill you by offering your own life in return is not what normal people do. It is a "supranatural" act but constitutes real kindness and original nature.

Orlando, so far pagan Hercules, now becomes Christ-like Hercules. This is the voluntary sacrifice, or, even, the vicarious sacrifice in which the innocent victim willingly offers himself to save the life of the unworthy—this is the mystery of atonement.

Just as one experiences the power of Christ's redemptive love on Calvary and lets one's heart be stirred, so is Oliver's so-far wicked human nature and heart suddenly healed and he becomes a reborn, regenerate human being. This is what he means when he says: "Twas I. But 'tis not I. I do not shame / To tell you what I was, since my conversion / So sweetly tastes, being the thing I am" (4.3. 135–7). Oliver, whose hard-heartedness had trapped him and wrapped him up in the net of his own hatred, is now melted and now, being purified, is ready to love and be loved.

Atonement is reconnecting: i.e., the making "one" of two, the creating of a unity out of a breach: "There can be no reconciliation [. . .] if there has not been a sundering", says Stephen in *Ulysses*. (195)

The great curse of earthly, historical existence is this "sundering", division, separation, conflict, enmity and so on. Between brother and brother, child and parent, husband and wife, east and west, north and south, centre and periphery, a nation and its neighbour, minority and majority, liberals and conservatives, heaven and earth, and God and man. This "sundering" needs reparation, redemption, reconciliation, atonement. In the words of Martha S. Robinson:

In *As You Like It* the practice of mercy is in fact the chief mark of the heavenly city, and testifies to the reconciliation of brothers as well as the atonement of earth and heaven. Shakespeare's vision of the redeemed as a community of brothers who, practicing mercy, 'find way to heaven / By doing deeds of hospitality.'⁶(164)

4. Conclusion

Shakespeare was aware of the Christian semantics of "atonement" as has been demonstrated by examples from many of his plays. From our discussion of "theodrama" we have turned to Shakespearean drama to investigate how a theological term has become an aesthetic principle. It has been noticed that only a few literary scholars, such as Péter Dávidházi, seem to be aware of the theological roots of the principle of artistic reconciliation.

Shakespeare's great romantic comedy *As You Like It*— particularly its narrated episode of Oliver's conversion—has been chosen as a case study to demonstrate that "reconciliation at work" and thus "Hymen's truth" (quoted in the motto) is justified.

The drama of reconciliation, both in theology and in literature, perfectly illustrates how ruined human personal relationships—in this case, the hatred

⁶ Robinson quotes 2.4.79–80 from *As You Like It*.

of brothers— cannot be remedied by human measures. Only the experience of the self-denying, selfless forgiveness—if necessary, vicarious atonement—is needed to cure, moreover, to restore fatally damaged human relationships.

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