



**Scott F. Crider**

WEEPING IN THE UPPER WORLD: THE ORPHIC FRAME IN 5.3 OF  
*THE WINTER'S TALE* AND THE ARCHIVE OF POETRY

When there is poetry,  
it is Orpheus singing.  
—Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus* (1.5)

It is now a critical commonplace that Hermione is merely pretending to be a statue in the last act of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and that, as a consequence, there is no actual animation represented there. As Stephen Orgel explains in his introduction to the Oxford edition of the play, "Hermione is not, after all, a statue" (60). The evidence of the play, however, is rather less conclusive than Orgel's confidence would suggest. Using Jonathan Bate's fine distinction in *Shakespeare and Ovid*, we can say that Orgel has decided against the "mythic" reading of the scene and in favor of the "theatrical": A mythic reading would allow that, within the mimetic world of the play, Hermione is a statue and then becomes, in the mythic mode, a woman; a theatrical reading assumes that she is pretending to be a statue and performs, in the theatrical mode, the animation. Bate's reading of the play is characteristically fine, but he too precludes a "mythic" reading, and he too assumes rather than argues the case:

[T]his is not really an animation or a resurrection. Paulina is staging a theatrical coup. Shakespeare has triumphantly moved from Ovid's key of myth into his own of drama . . . . As the preserved Hermione pretends to be a statue coming to life, so does the boy actor. When we realize that Paulina and Hermione are staging a performance and when we see the correspondence between character and actor, we recognize that the magic which Paulina claims to be lawful is that of theater. (237–8)

Throughout, Bate assumes that theater and myth are mutually exclusive. This assumption cannot do justice to the play's ambiguity, because there is textual evidence for both the theatrical and the mythic readings. The question is this: Is the animation actual, or is it a representation of an animation? Both Orgel and Bate assume that, without a doubt, we may not say that a statue of Hermione becomes Hermione herself. Hermione must never have been dead. Again, the play does not share their confidence. In fact, its very ambiguity denies that the two modes—theatrical and mythic—are exclusive, enacting a tension between the two which is itself mythic, demanding as it does that the audience experience the moment as simultaneously both. As Jean-Pierre Vernant explains in *Myth and Society in Ancient Greece*, "[M]yth brings into operation a form of logic that we may describe, in contrast to the logic of non-contradiction of the philosophers, as a logic of the ambiguous, the equivocal, a logic of

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*Weeping in the Upper World*

polarity” (260). This “logic of the ambiguous” is the mythic logic of the statue scene in 5.3 of *The Winter’s Tale*, yet Bate’s humane skepticism would preclude our discernment of that mythic logic, a logic which allows Shakespearean *mimêsis* to have two objects at once: a mythic *praxis* and a theatrical.<sup>1</sup>

Why does Shakespeare do this? To answer the question, I would like first to examine the intertextual relationship in the scene between Shakespeare and Ovid, the trace within 5.3 of both the Pygmalion tale and the Orphic frame of that tale in the tenth book of the *Metamorphoses*. I know of only two discussions of this point.<sup>2</sup> My provisional argument is that the play demands a double-reading, one in which Hermione is both dead and alive, and the statue scene is both mythic animation and theatrical performance. No reading of the play can perform the scene one way without suppressing the other. We begin to discern Shakespeare’s intention when we remember that the Pygmalion tale, so often recognized as a source for the scene,<sup>3</sup> is actually told by Orpheus in Ovid’s epic poem, one of the many tales he tells after Eurydice’s death and before his own at the hands of the Thracian women. The Pygmalion tale *per se* is not a source for the scene; the tale *as told by Orpheus* is. Once we recognize that we must attend, not simply to the tale, but to the tale-within-the-tale, we can begin to explore the play’s central ambiguity. There are three parts to my full discussion: The first examines Ovid; the second, Shakespeare’s appropriation of Ovid; the third, that appropriation as a figure for literary history itself, the archive of the poetic tradition. The Orphic frame of the Pygmalion tale in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* suggests that the particular tale is a romance Orpheus fashions to make his own tragic circumstances intelligible to himself, a romance which, because of the frame, enacts Orpheus’ desire for a *mimêsis* which can transform the real. This Orphic romance, including both the animation of Pygmalion’s statue and the death of Eurydice, is a classical, pagan mystery, a mystery for which death is an absolute horizon because both faith and love, though not art, fail before the ultimate givenness of mortality. When Shakespeare appropriates and transforms the tale of Pygmalion, he also appropriates and transforms the Orphic frame, disclosing an Orphic presence in the statue scene which will not allow us to preclude Hermione’s actual animation. Shakespeare’s revision of Ovid will allow the possibility that art, faith, and love might be able to triumph, if only briefly, over death; this is a Renaissance, pagan mystery in which *mimêsis* can transform the real.<sup>4</sup> For Shakespearean romance, art, faith, and love are not completely powerless before death. Indeed, Shakespeare’s poetic friendship with Ovid, a friendship Bate has gone a long way to illuminate, reveals that the literary tradition is itself a series of reanimations in which the living bestow life on the dead.

The archive of poetry is the temple of Orpheus: We examine now only its historicized ruins, the pieces of stone we can see and measure; what such an examination fails to sense is the music which animates stone, a music at once both ancient and present. Shakespeare is not only an early modern, but also a late ancient. His lyre is Orpheus’. Ovid gave it to him.

Scott F. Crider

I

[S]tories . . . make enduring our losses.

—George Steiner, “Two Cocks” (384)

The story is worth the telling. Orpheus’ bride Eurydice dies on their wedding day, bitten in the heel by a snake (10.1–10), and Orpheus descends into the underworld to restore her, singing there a song (11–39) which persuades Pluto and Proserpina to release Eurydice on one condition: as Orpheus leads her up and out to the upper world, he is not to look back at her (40–52). Leading her out, he does just that, losing her again. After mourning for her in the underworld itself, he returns to the upper world where he forsakes the love of woman for that of young men (52–85). On a hill in Thrace where the trees have gathered to him (86–142), Orpheus sings five songs to himself: After his invocation and designated subject (148–54), he sings of Jupiter and Ganymede (155–61), Apollo and Hyacinthus (162–219), Pygmalion and Galatea (220–97), Cinyras and Myrra (298–502), and Venus and Adonis (503–739). (Venus herself tells the tale of Atalanta and Hippomenes to Adonis [566–707]). After singing his songs, Orpheus is dismembered by the Thracian women and reunited with Eurydice in the underworld, where the two play their game of “follow-the-leader” (11.1–85). All the tales must be understood metafictionally within the context of Orpheus’ own tragic circumstances, especially the tale of the misogynist Pygmalion, the sculptor who, disgusted by the Propoetides, fashions through his own art an ideal woman he then desires and, after Venus’ intervention, animates and marries. Interestingly, this is the one tale which does not enact the subject Orpheus earlier announced:

But now I need a milder style to tell of pretty boys  
That were the darlings of the Gods: and of unlawful joys  
That burned in the breasts of Girls, who for their wicked lust  
According as they did deserve, received penance just.  
(152–4; 157–10)<sup>5</sup>

The “pretty boys” are Ganymede, Hyacinthus and Adonis; the “Girls” of “unlawful joys” are Myrra and Venus. (The tale of Venus and Adonis combines both subjects.) What of the tale of Pygmalion, though? The tales before it enact the first subject; those after, the second. Because the Pygmalion tale itself does not fit the announced subjects, I would suggest that it is a tale the teller had not planned on telling, a tale whose catalyst is Apollo’s mourning for Hyacinthus. Apollo accidentally kills his pretty boy, remember, because the disc he threw takes a bad bounce and strikes him dead. As Orpheus has Apollo lament,

*Weeping in the Upper World*

Thou fad'st away, my Hyacinth, defrauded of thy prime  
Of youth (quoth Phoebus) and I see thy would my heinous crime.  
Thou art my sorrow and my fault: this hand of mine hath wrought  
Thy death: I like a murtherer have to thy grave thee brought.  
(196–9; 207–10)

Orpheus, aware of the parallel between Apollo's responsibility for Hyacinthus' death and his own for Eurydice's, then fashions a romance calibrated to make endurable his loss.

If one reads the Pygmalion tale with reference to its Orphic frame, one discovers that it is a more serious narrative than it appears in isolation. In *Orpheus: The Myth of the Poet*, Charles Segal reads Orpheus as Pygmalion's double in the tale (85–9), a doubling which reveals Ovid's poetic purpose: "By enclosing the story of Pygmalion within that of Orpheus, Ovid reflects on both the power and the limitations of art" (89). For Segal, Pygmalion's capacity, with Venus' divine assistance, to animate the statue comments upon Orpheus' inability to have brought Eurydice back from the dead; because the Pygmalion tale concerns only love and art, though—and not love, art and *death*—it is not a serious tale (88–9). For Segal, the power of Pygmalion's art to triumph over lifelessness, figured in Ovid's poem as stone, is diminished by the fact of Orphic art's failure before death.


This interpretation is true if one isolates the two narratives, then compares them as independent tales. This isolation diminishes the nature of the two stories, though; Ovid chooses to tell the one inside the other. Strictly speaking, there are not two narratives; instead, there is one narrative within another. Ovidian narrative is a *perpetuum . . . carmen* (1.5), remember; its "course" will run "directly" (1.4), according to Golding. The poem is ultimately one tale, all the tales within it versions of a single human action: the narrative of metamorphosis, "shapes transformed to bodies strange" (1.1–2; 1.1).<sup>6</sup> Ovid wants us to see one, continually changing story. Granted, one can separate the tales. In the case of Orpheus' songs, however, such a separation is not a good idea. One should not isolate the Pygmalion narrative from its Orphic frame because the *mimēsis* Orpheus fashions represents his own *praxis* in order to make it intelligible to himself. Romance is not simply mystification; it is also clarification. Romance clarifies for us our desire to transcend our own mortality and to help others transcend theirs. Romance clarifies the fact that the beloved's death is often the result of the lover's inadequate love, not his or her inadequate art. In the Ovidian account, after all, Orpheus' failure is not a failure of art. His song to Pluto and Proserpina succeeds in reclaiming Eurydice from death: "And neither Pluto nor his Lady were so strong / And hard of stomach to withhold his just petition long" (46–7; 50–1). Orpheus' art saves her; his ethical weakness, his incapacity to keep the terms of her release, loses her. What, exactly, is that ethical weakness? The text is ambiguous. As they are ascending, he does indeed look back:

Scott F. Crider

They took a path that steep upright  
Rose dark and full of foggy mist. And now they were within  
A kenning of the upper earth, when Orpheus did begin  
To doubt him lest she followed not, and through an eager love  
Desirous for to see her his eyes did backward move.  
Immediately she slipped back. (53–7; 56–60)

Ovid provides two tragic errors, both of which indicate ethical failure: First, Orpheus fails because he is eager to see her; second, he fails because he begins to doubt that she is following him. The first weakness is incontinence. What is the second? The Ovidian narrator passes by the doubt silently, saying only—and sarcastically—“For why what had she to complain, unless it were of love / which made her husband back again his eyes upon her move?” (61; 65–6). The reader, remembering as he or she will how Orpheus lost her again—it has only been ten lines—cannot fail to notice that the narrator stresses only Orpheus’ incontinence, not at all his doubt. What is the nature of Orphic doubt? Who is its object, the gods or his wife? Does he believe that Pluto and Proserpina have failed to stand by their word, or does he believe that Eurydice has failed to make the journey? The text is indeterminate: How, after all, is one to translate “*ne . . . deficeret*” (56)?<sup>7</sup> Orphic doubt may be either erotic or metaphysical or both, and the Ovidian indeterminacy may disclose an affinity between piety and love.

What we can say with certainty is this: Orpheus’ failure is not artistic. If the arts of our poet and our sculptor are triumphs, then, Orpheus’ faith is not as strong as Pygmalion’s, and Orpheus recognizes as much in his romance by emphasizing Pygmalion’s faith in Venus. Pygmalion’s art is necessary for Galatea’s metamorphosis, but it is insufficient. Prayer is required. At Venus’ festival, Pygmalion prays for a woman like the statue he loves (250–76). Having fashioned a *mimēsis* of an ideal woman, he now desires a real woman like her (276), a real simulation of his imaginary simulation of a real ideal. Pygmalion reveals piety, humility and—given his earlier autoerotic activities with the statue (251–69)—a portion of foolishness here. He is not in the least skeptical about his beloved or his gods. Orpheus was. If examined alone, the romance Orpheus fashions is ridiculous; if examined as *his* tale, it is quite serious indeed, although not without Ovidian humor. Ovid indicates that Orpheus’ desire to transform the real by means of *mimēsis* fails through doubt. It is no accident that the presiding deity in Orpheus’ own tragic life is Death, but that the presiding deity in his story is Love. Depending on the nature of his doubt, Orpheus either fails to love Eurydice enough or doubted the gods too much. Pygmalion’s miracle is Orpheus’ comment upon both. In the middle of a series of tales of erotic “deviancy,” Orpheus makes his own tragic error intelligible to himself, an intelligibility which, in the Aristotelian understanding, is what poetry is *for*. The Pygmalion tale, then, is not, as Segal would have it, “pure indulgence” (88–9); instead, it allows the reader to see that Orpheus is

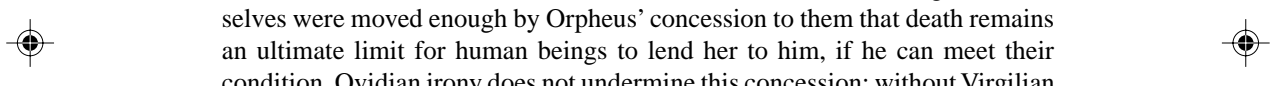


*Weeping in the Upper World*

capable of educating himself through poetry. The tales within the Orphic frame constitute an inseparable whole, and—in the metafictional relation between Pygmalion and Orpheus—the Ovidian object of representation turns out to be art's limited capacity, when activated by the faith of love, to suspend death, if only for a short time. Of course, even romance has its limits.

After all, Galatea will eventually die, and, even had Orpheus achieved Eurydice's life, she too would have eventually died. He concedes as much in the song he sings in the underworld, a song which I believe is more moving than is often recognized. Orpheus' song appeals to Pluto and Proserpina by highlighting the necessity of death, even if—in this one case—it is postponed. Orphic transcendence is limited:

All things to you belong.  
And though we lingering for a while our pageants do prolong,  
Yet soon or late we all to one abiding place do roam:  
We haste us hither all: this place becomes our latest home:  
And you do over human kind reign longest time. Now when  
This woman shall have lived full her time, she shall again  
Become your own. (31–7; 33–9)



Pagan reanimation, unlike Christian resurrection, still operates within the horizon of death, and there are other than Christian miracles. The gods themselves were moved enough by Orpheus' concession to them that death remains an ultimate limit for human beings to lend her to him, if he can meet their condition. Ovidian irony does not undermine this concession; without Virgilian sentiment, Ovid moves us. Orpheus' tales are indeed a fusion of the serious and the ridiculous, neither element a repudiation of the other.<sup>8</sup> Like Ovid, Orpheus is both mythographer and ironist.

Indeed, Orpheus operates in the *Metamorphoses* as a figure for Ovid himself. If William Anderson is right in "The Orpheus of Virgil and Ovid" that Orpheus is "a performer, egotistic, calculating, self-dramatizing" (47), so too is Ovid, yet neither *vates* is simply that.<sup>9</sup> Ovid is the poet who dwells inside the archive of his own poem, both animating others and awaiting animation, both Orpheus and Eurydice, Pygmalion and Galatea. He awaits a lover capable of leading him out into the upper world, and in the final lines of Ovid's own cosmos, even as he is reanimating Horace through the Horation formula of poetic immortality,<sup>10</sup> he himself awaits reanimation: "And time without all end / (If poets as by prophesy about the truth may aim) / My life shall everlastingly be lengthened by fame" (878–9; 993–5). Ovid believes that he will live [*vivam*], that his presence will endure as does the presence of other poets, those he himself ironizes and honors. Ovid waits inside his poem for his own lover.

II

[F]or her to return to him is for him to recognize her; and for him to recognize her is for him to recognize his relation to her; in particular what his denial of her has done to her, hence to him. So Leontes recognizes the fate of stone to be the consequence of his particular skepticism.

—Stanley Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (481)

When Shakespeare reanimates Ovid in *The Winter's Tale*, he does so by appropriating and metamorphosizing not only the Pygmalion tale, but also its Orphic frame. The statue scene interrogates the essence of aesthetics, of course, the relationship between art and nature, between the mimetic and the real.<sup>11</sup> If the scene is “theatrical,” then Hermione performs *as* a statue who comes to life; if it is “mythic,” she *is* one who does so. The metafictional narrative of Ovid’s poem, including as it does the tale-within-the-tale, assists us in a reading of the scene and the play. Though I will concede the scene may be read either theatrically or mythically, I will read it mythically first, only allowing the theatrical reading later. That is, I will assume for now that Hermione has actually died.

The Pygmalion tale will often obscure the sequence unless the Orphic frame is called upon for assistance. Leontes and Perdita have come to see “the statue of our Queen” in Paulina’s gallery (5.3.10), and, when Paulina exhibits it to them, they are silent (21). Leontes’ response indicates that Giulio Romano is a kind of Pygmalion, one able to represent with such mimetic force that one might imagine the stone has human being:

Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed  
Thou art Hermione—or rather, thou art she  
In not chiding; for she was as tender  
As infancy and grace. (24–7)

“Thou *art* Hermione”: Unlike Pygmalion’s statue, this is not a statue of an ideal woman; it is a statue of Leontes’ wife, a woman whose death he himself caused through faithlessness. Though 5.3 often employs the ridiculousness of the Pygmalion sequence in Ovid—Hermione’s wrinkles (28), for example, or the prospect that Leontes will smear the statue’s paint, not yet dry, were he to kiss it (42–48)—the Orphic frame reminds us that Leontes is standing before a representation not only of his dead wife, but also of his own tragic error or *hamartia* in destroying her. It is he who destroyed her, death figured as the hard stillness of stone. After Paulina explains “Hermione’s” age by pointing out that the sculptor made her, not as she *was*, but as she *might have been*, had she lived,<sup>12</sup> Leontes begins a meditation upon his own Orphic failure:

O, thus she stood,  
Even with such life of majesty—warm life

*Weeping in the Upper World*

As now it coldly stands—when first I wooed her.  
I am ashamed. Does not the stone rebuke me  
For being more stone than it? O royal piece!  
There's magic in thy majesty, which has  
My evils conjured to remembrance . . . . (34–40)

Pygmalion's statue is only an actual person once Venus animates her, but the statue of Hermione is a representation of a person now dead, whose very death was this observer's responsibility. Leontes is both Pygmalion and Orpheus in the sequence; or, drawing upon my reading of Ovid, he is Orpheus as Orpheus imagines himself as Pygmalion. Leontes' "evil" was doubt, here a more specific doubt than Orpheus'—doubt concerning Hermione's fidelity—but doubt nonetheless; essentially, it was the doubt concerning the presence of the other. Both Orpheus and Leontes doubted female presence and destroyed the women they loved through such doubt. Only by means of a form of mimetic madness both Orphic and Pygmalionist—Orpheus' madness in descending to the underworld, Pygmalion's in imagining that his statue is an actual woman—can Leontes repair history: Art can conquer death only through the faith of love. This scene appropriates both the ridiculousness of Pygmalion and the seriousness of Orpheus in order to transform the source into a moment that reads Orpheus' understanding of his own tale: Belief in the presence of the other is an act of faith; we are all stone before the loveless gaze, all animated by the glance of love. Our contemporary conversation concerning desire has obscured the madness of love, a madness which compels Orpheus to pass over to the dark side of being in search of his dead beloved:

PAULINA: I'll draw the curtain.  
My lord's so far transported that  
He'll think anon it lives.  
LEONTES: O sweet Paulina,  
Make me to think so twenty years together!  
No settled senses of the world can match  
The pleasure of that madness. (68–73)

Mimetic madness is necessary for reanimation, but it is not, however, sufficient. Only faith can animate stone. As Paulina instructs him, "It is required / You do awake your faith" (94–5). It is, of course, at this moment that music begins and "Hermione" the statue becomes Hermione, "[b]equeth[ing] to Death [her] numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems [her]" (102–3). The romance of *The Winter's Tale* is Orphic: Leontes is both Orpheus and Pygmalion; Hermione is Eurydice. Without the Orphic frame, one might assume that the scene is moving because it rejects Ovidian irony; with the frame, though, we see that it moves us because it transforms Ovidian irony by actualizing a sentiment potential within Ovid which Ovid did not himself, however, actualize,

leaving only implicit the relation between tale and frame. The Ovidian frame augments our understanding of Shakespearean romance, animated as that romance is by the desire to conquer death. The scene certainly enacts, as Leonard Barkin puts it in *The Gods Made Flesh*, “a pagan mystery” (287), one which concerns the animating principle of human recognition of the presence of the other, a principle which Orpheus doubts, but Leontes by 5.3 believes.

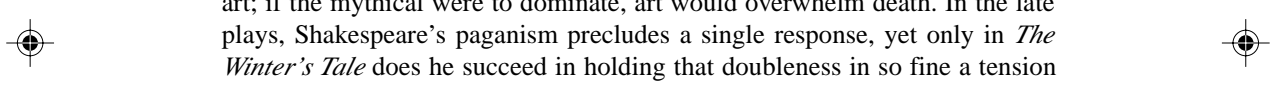
This reading has all along assumed that Hermione did in fact die and that the statue *of her is* not Hermione pretending to be a statue *of herself*, yet the play is no more unambiguously “mythic” than it is unambiguously “dramatic.” Ultimately, I am trying to qualify, not refute the theatrical reading of the play. I count seven moments in the play where one must choose a reading either mythical or theatrical: First, Paulina’s announcement that Hermione is dead (3.2.170–241); second, Antigonus’ relation of Hermione’s visitation (3.3.15–45); third, Paulina’s suggestion to Leontes that he remarry when Hermione is alive again (5.1.77–84); fourth, the Third Gentleman’s relation of the existence of the statue (5.2.102–6); fifth, the Second Gentleman’s report of Paulina’s daily visits to the chapel (125–30); sixth, Hermione’s explanation of events in the chapel (5.3.125–30); and, seventh, Leontes’ statement that he saw Hermione dead (139–41). All seven moments will allow either reading, but some are easier to perform one way rather than the other. The “theatrical” reading would interpret each piece of evidence something like this: Paulina lies when she announces Hermione’s death in order to preserve her until Perdita returns (1), as Hermione herself explains after her performance of animation (6); Antigonus’ vision is only a dream (2); Paulina, knowing that Hermione is really alive, can offer Leontes the possibility that she will return (3); the statue Romano fashioned (4), either from a living Hermione or from some idea or image of her, is still around somewhere, Hermione having imitated it during the chapel scene, or it was a fiction all along; Paulina visited the chapel twice a day to feed Hermione (5); and Leontes only thought he saw her dead (7). This reading works, but I hope my reader will allow that it is less than fully persuasive concerning Antigonus’ dream (2) and Romano’s statue (4). The “mythical” reading, on the other hand, would interpret each of the six pieces of evidence something rather like this: Paulina announces an actual death (1); Antigonus has a genuine vision of Hermione’s ghost (2); Paulina believes that Leontes will be able to reanimate the statue, so she offers him the hope that she will return (3); Romano’s statue, the one others have seen and spoken of, is what all in 5.3 actually see before it becomes Hermione herself (4); Paulina’s magic, whatever its exact nature, requires that she be in the chapel twice a day to prepare the lawful miracle (5); Hermione’s report that she “preserved” herself (5.3.127–8) is a lie to preclude questions about the reanimation, which is why Paulina cuts her off (6); and Leontes did, in fact, see her dead (7). This reading too works, but I concede that it is less than fully persuasive concerning Paulina’s visits (5) and Hermione’s explanations (6). Each reading accommodates five



*Weeping in the Upper World*

of the seven moments. The play will allow, then, either reading, yet neither reading will be fully persuasive. If my reading of the evidence has been at all adequate, no critic should ever be allowed to assume uncritically the theatrical reading now so dominant that it simply goes without saying that Hermione is not, after all, a statue.

Why does Shakespeare design into the play this central ambiguity?<sup>13</sup> Or, rather, why does he design the ambiguity in such a way that no full performance will ever fully persuade an audience of the governing interpretation? Because he wants the mythic logic of the play experienced as such. Its plot or *muthos* is double, and a performance of that plot precludes the viewer from dwelling comfortably within either a skeptical or an enchanted mimetic world. Why, then, does he desire this doubleness? Because the human action represented is double. We are beings who, through an art motivated by love and faith, both can and cannot save the dead from death. The theatrical reading reminds one of Hermione's death; the mythical, of her reanimation. After all, we who weep in the upper world long for souls who have passed from bodies, and—in our most inspired moments—fashion new bodies for them, mimetic vessels we hope somehow will contain and carry their presences. Do such vessels *really* contain them? Can the lyre of Orpheus *really* raise the dead? A just representation of such a question must be double, both theatrical and mythic simultaneously. If the theatrical dominates, as it now does, death overwhelms art; if the mythical were to dominate, art would overwhelm death. In the late plays, Shakespeare's paganism precludes a single response, yet only in *The Winter's Tale* does he succeed in holding that doubleness in so fine a tension that a mature performance of the play requires that those involved, on the stage and in the audience, must descend into the ambiguity of (im)mortality. For some, Hermione does not die, so she is not reanimated; for others, she dies, so she is. Both responses are inadequate. Ultimately, the play discloses to us the character of our own faith, compelling us to live a question about ourselves: Can we awaken our faith in the presence of death? In Ovid's poem, Orpheus fails; in the first three acts of Shakespeare's play, Leontes too fails. In the last act, though, Leontes does not fail. How fully he succeeds is the question the play enacts. About the fact of the death of the beloved, we experience the logic of polarity in silent wonder. Any other response would make death unintelligible.



Scott F. Crider

### III

There is neither friendship nor justice toward soulless things.  
—Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* (1161b2)

STRANGER, if you passing meet me and desire to speak to  
me, why should you not speak to me?  
And why should I not speak to you?  
—Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (175)

Shakespeare's appropriation and transformation of Ovid offers a figure for literary history itself, the nature of the archive of poetry. To see how, one may begin with what is now a mythic moment in Shakespearean studies, Steven Greenblatt's failed "desire to speak with the dead":

If I never believed that the dead could hear me, and if I knew that the dead could not speak, I was nonetheless certain that I could re-create a conversation with them. Even when I came to understand that in my most intense moments of straining to listen all I could hear was my own voice, even then I did not abandon my desire. It was true that I could hear only my own voice, but my own voice was the voice of the dead, for the dead had contrived to leave textual traces of themselves, and those traces make themselves heard in the voices of the living. (1)



Though he assumes both that he is hearing only his own voice and that his voice has been fashioned by the voices of History, he does not forsake listening to simulated voices, "for simulations are undertaken in full awareness of the absence of the life they contrive to represent, and hence they may skillfully anticipate and compensate for the vanishing of the actual life that has empowered them" (1). I admire this author for expressing the desire to speak with the dead, but I want to question his assumption that this desire must fail. As one of his own chosen authors, Michel Foucault, cautions us, "It is not enough . . . to repeat the empty affirmation that the author has disappeared" (105).<sup>14</sup> I would like to argue that the author may, perhaps *must*, reappear if we are to fashion an understanding of the nature not only of literary history, but also of human association, if we are to discern, in effect, an ethics of historiography.<sup>15</sup> I do not believe that we ought to efface the "illuminating conversations" Steven had with Michel in Berkeley when Foucault was present there (viii). On the contrary, we ought to realize both that the intertextual relation was, in fact, a personal one and that such an association would have been ethical; by doing so, we would discover our own ethical responsibilities to that friendship. I no more doubt the human presence of Foucault than I do that of Greenblatt. I simply ask that we accord the dead the respect that we accord the living, that we imagine for the moment, in order to see if it is possibly true, that our cul-



*Weeping in the Upper World*

tural ancestors still do have presence, and that the voice-in-the-text we hear is neither a mere simulation of the imagination, nor a mere projection of historical narcissism, but the actual voice of the other. The archive of poetry is the temple of Orpheus, and it is full of voices. Those voices are more difficult to hear than the voices of the living, yet we may be forgetting how difficult it is to hear the living and how quickly the living become the dead. As Joyce puts it in “The Dead,” “One by one, [we are] all becoming shades” (222). Indeed, perhaps the friendship and justice which Aristotle argues are impossible toward the “soulless,” if practiced properly toward the dead, could be better practiced toward the living.

Present within Greenblatt’s myth is the myth of Orpheus: Reader attempts to reanimate the voice of the dead, only to discover that the voice he hears is, all along, only *his*. Let us imagine that Orpheus figures both intertextuality itself, an author’s desire to bring the dead poet back to life within a new poem, and at least one form of historiography, a critic’s desire to write the story of such intertextuality. Orpheus’ song might also figure poetry’s power to reanimate dead poetry; his turning back, historiography’s failure to trust the presence almost retrieved from absence. Must historiography fail thus? Or is it possible that, with a certain disposition toward the dead, their actual voices might be heard? An ethics of historiography will have to become mythographical.



I imagine that I am not supposed to say these things, that to do so puts me outside the academic discourse community. Yet I must confess that I find the theoretical stories I hear insufficient before my own experiences, imaginary and real. Shakespeare introduced me to Ovid, and I am grateful to him for having done so. I do not know how else to put it. The purpose of the following speculations is to discern conceptually how such an introduction is possible and how gratitude might then be called for.<sup>16</sup> My argument is composed of eight propositions: First, a text discloses the presence of a person; second, an intertextual relation discloses a mediated association between persons, either one of whom is dead, the other alive, or both of whom are living or both of whom are dead; third, intertextual relations are, by their associative nature, ethical; fourth, a literary historiographer may, perhaps must, not only recognize intertextual association as ethical, but also participate him/herself in that association, often the living historiographer reflecting upon a relation between two dead people, one of whom, however, was alive during the relation; fifth, that association is not synchronic, but diachronic, made possible by, but not limited to, historical time; sixth, in extraordinary intertextual relations—poet-to-poet or historiographer-to-poet(s)—the living animate the dead, recognizing and actualizing the living presence of the person(s) in the text(s); seventh, that recognition and actualization are essentially Orphic, revealing both the possibility of reanimation and an inherent tendency toward failure, failure due to doubt concerning presence, the hesitancy to believe that the dead have presence; eighth, that doubt is now the ideology of literary studies, the convention

that the author is dead now an article of faith, so the literary historiographer may, perhaps must, question that convention in order to understand the ethics of the intertextual, becoming in the process a literary mythographer. Let me take these speculative points up one at a time.

A text discloses the presence of a person. Multiple authorship, whether in the form of co-authorship or in the form of compositional traditions, does not at all refute authorship. It certainly attenuates authorship, and makes it much more difficult, perhaps even impossible, to identify all the individuals and their respective contributions. That simply means that in such instances, and they are surprisingly rare in the literary traditions of the West, one cannot extricate the voices from one another, individualize one's relationship to a presence in the text, the presence of the dead author. The death of the human body is certainly a death, but it need not preclude the presence of the author within a new, textual body, one which is immortal, though not eternal.<sup>17</sup> This is, in fact, Ovid's own conception. *The Metamorphoses* ends, remember, with Ovid's boast to his gods and his ruler that, having fashioned a textual body for himself, he is free of their terror (15.871–9). When Shakespeare read both Ovid and Golding's translation of him, Ovid's text argued that Shakespeare was, in fact, holding the new, textualized presence Ovid was himself able to construct through his poetic craft and his regime's imperial power. Whatever human presence is, we assume that it either dies with the physiological body or that, if immortal, it is not so within the text itself. I am suggesting that we take, in good pagan fashion, the metaphor of the text-as-body quite seriously. I concede that this first principle is undemonstratable. The presence or "soul" of the other certainly can be denied, the consequences ranging all the way from loneliness to genocide; even so, that denial is no more firm than my affirmation. We do not know what *exactly* human presence is; even so, one either does or does not wager on presence.<sup>18</sup> I do not quite see how one wagers on absence without (re)living, in some fashion, Leontes' tragedy.

An intertextual relation discloses a mediated association between persons, then, often one of whom is dead, the other alive. Given that the new, textual body has as its medium language, often enough poetic language which can literally be voiced, why do we assume that the voice performed has no trace of the dead within it? Shakespeare's plays, for example, are representations of fictional voices, and I certainly concede that voicing *him* voicing them is difficult, yet this is one of the distinct pleasures of reading/performing Shakespeare: the sense of a presence, one quite near, playing all the parts and inviting—"STRANGER, why should I not speak to you?"—us into his company. Is voicing Shakespeare voicing them impossible? Is there any reader/performer who imagines that Shakespeare admires Leontes' mad jealousy? If so, would we not agree that such a reading/performance is tone-deaf?<sup>19</sup> Intertextual relations are associations, the mediation subtling the relationship, but not making it impossible. Perhaps we might imagine intertextual relations as Dante does in *The Divine Comedy*, when Dante the character sees Virgil on the horizon, "one

*Weeping in the Upper World*

whose voice seemed weak from long silence” (1.63). In the poem, Dante is reading Virgil, and he figures this reading as the living being led by the dead: Somewhere within the imaginative experience of reading, Dante meets with Virgil’s soul. I grant that the association is *imagined*, but deny that it is *imaginary*; after all, we must, in fact, imagine the living, as well, but that does not for a moment deny their real presence. Once one concedes my first principle, the second follows.

Such intertextual relations are, by their very associative nature, ethical. Reading is an associative activity and, as such, it is ethical. Let me explain. In Aristotelian ethics, one begins with human association, the fact that we are essentially social; sociality entails a shared form of life and any form of life assumes human goods *as* goods, including the good of human virtue itself. Virtue ethics does not demand Kantian, transcendental speculation; instead, it begins where we actually are, within a form of life with flexible rules of human conduct.<sup>20</sup> If a literary text is a new, textualized body for the soul of the poet, then reading is associative. As Whitman would have it, one is his associate when reading his poem; one is his Camerado. This entails certain intellectual and moral virtues. Because intertextuality is ethical, the same ethical principles that shape one’s practical form of life ought to inform one’s reading and writing. Harold Bloom’s *The Anxiety of Influence* goes a long way to personalize intertextual relations: “In ways that need not be doctrinal, strong poems are omens of resurrection” (xxiv). Now, I would desire a greater number of descriptive possibilities than anxiety alone. I suggest that we consider the descriptive possibilities of Aristotelian virtue ethics, in great part because his categories of the virtues are those we employ within our own form of life. Their very prosaic character makes them useful. Even if we were not to agree that *his* ethics ought to govern our personal and textual lives, however, we would still require *an* ethics; even if we were to agree that we needed more than one ethics, we would still need to be able to assume one of them at any moment within a designated context.

A literary historiographer may, perhaps must, then, not only recognize intertextual association as ethical, but also participate him/herself in that association, often the living historiographer reflecting upon a relation between two dead people, one of whom, however, was alive during the relation. Once one recognizes such intertextual associations as ethical, one must respond to them as such, employing an ethical vocabulary to define the relationships. The metaphor here is an introduction: A friend introduces you to someone; his or her disposition toward the other disposes you, as well, though it does not determine your response. I have friends who do not like one another; their perceptions of one another have to be questioned. I am not myself persuaded by Bate’s argument concerning Ovid in Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*; even so, I am grateful for an introduction some of whose details I have come to question. This association is a great deal more complicated than we acknowledge.

Scott F. Crider

This is true in great part because that association is not synchronic, but diachronic, made possible by, but not limited to, historical time. Time is not a constant, but we treat it as such in our investigations. Because we are separated by time from the historical contexts of our texts, we imagine they are other; they are, but not as we imagine it. As Levinas explains in *Time and the Other*, time is itself the result of ethical association: “[T]ime is not the achievement of an isolated and lone subject, but . . . the very relationship of the subject with the Other” (39). We imagine that the association is attenuated to such an extent that it obscures presence. Why? It may very well be true that the text is available because of History. Shakespeare, after all, was a reader of Ovid because of the nature of English Renaissance education. Even so, he then became a reader of Ovid. If the poem is a new, textualized body, then History carries that text to one; it does not determine what one does once one has it, though. Poets continually speak as if there is another order of time, one in which they can speak with the dead. If temporal orders must be imagined to be experienced, then we might imagine a temporal order that can provide the space for such ethical associations. Perhaps the presence of the other, carried in the new, textualized body, can only be recognized through the power of our imagination. This is impossible to demonstrate, of course, but no more so than when considering living human beings. All follows from the first principle.

In extraordinary intertextual relations—poet-to-poet or historiographer-to-poet(s)—the living animate the dead, recognizing and actualizing the living presence of the person(s) in the text(s). This means that our recognition of presence actualizes what is only potential within the text; that is, without recognition, the presence is faint, but with it the presence grows stronger. Being is associative. Discursive practices do not merely see objects of discourse; they make possible the object’s appearance. If there is a presence in the text, it is not imaginary, even if it must be imaginatively fulfilled by the reader. That recognition and actualization are essentially Orphic, revealing both the possibility of reanimation and an inherent tendency toward failure. Orpheus’ failure to believe that Eurydice is present results in her loss. In my reading, the tragedy of the myth of Orpheus is doubt concerning the presence of the dead. If that reading is adequate, then the turn of this desirous glance reveals doubt, the doubt concerning her presence; the doubt then destroys her presence, Eurydice slipping into absence. The Ovidian myth, then, figures the consequences of the very refutational doubt I have been responding to; in fact, that doubt is self-confirming since, once he turns, he loses her again. My argument is that he is not destined to fail; his agency is qualified, but not extinguished, by the extraordinary circumstances of his journey. This is, in fact, one of his own discoveries in the myth of Pygmalion, the tale Ovid has Orpheus tell. Pygmalion’s slightly mad desire for stone to become animate, for dead matter to be infused with life, attended as it is by the prayer to Venus, animates such stone. Doubt concerning presence stones people into absence. The framing



*Weeping in the Upper World*

here is crucial: The Pygmalion tale is the romance of presence Orpheus tells himself in order to make intelligible to himself his own tragedy of absence. Leontes is Orpheus and Pygmalion, the man who can—by means of Romano’s art and Paulina’s guidance—bring Hermione back from absence into presence. We are now ready to see that Shakespeare’s own friendship with Ovid is Orphic: He brings him up out of the underworld into the upper, where he then introduces him to us. I have myself met Ovid because Shakespeare introduced him to me; indeed, I met Ovid because Bate introduced me to Shakespeare’s introduction of him. Bate’s own father appears to have introduced him to Ovid (xii). We are reluctant to put it this way, of course, because of the very doubt of skepticism Shakespeare enacts in Acts 1–3 of *The Winter’s Tale*.

That doubt is now the ideology of literary studies, the convention that the author is dead now an article of faith. Even so sensitive a reader as Greenblatt, one whose Orphic desire is both perceptive and admirable, turns back in doubt: “It was true that I could hear only my own voice . . .” It certainly became true, yet did it need to? We nod—knowingly, sadly—that, of course, the recognition of presence must always fail. The myth of Orpheus in *The Winter’s Tale* suggests it need not, even though it so often does. Pygmalion’s prayer is Orpheus’ own response to his doubt, and it is only with such a mimetic prayer that he is himself prepared for reunion with his wife. Without the prayer that itself signals to and responds to the other, there will be no ethics of historiography. Aristotle is right: “There is neither friendship nor justice towards soulless things.” That the soul is itself a myth, a presence whose *presence* must be imagined to be activated, need not disturb us. Literary historiographers must become literary mythographers if we are to be ethicists. We have been all along, of course, postmodernity having proven that there are only myths. Perhaps, reader, you do not find my myth persuasive. What shall our myth of the other in the text be?<sup>21</sup> Please do not respond with *the myth of absence*. STRANGER, we need a new myth. Concerning both archive and city, I suggest the myth in *The Winter’s Tale*, the myth of Orpheus, singing.<sup>22</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> The understanding of *mimēsis* here is thoroughly Aristotelian: For Aristotle in the *Poetics*, emplotment [*muthos*], the arrangement of episodes, is the essence of the dramatic art, making intelligible to the audience as it does the nature of human action [*praxis*]. See Chapter 6 of the *Poetics* (1449b21–50b20). For fine readings of the *Poetics* in this regard, see the following: Stephen Halliwell, *Aristotle’s Poetics*, especially Chapter 4, “Mimesis,” 109–137 and his article, “Aristotelian Mimesis Reevaluated”; Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, especially Volumes 1 (52–87) and 2 (7–28). An Aristotelian aesthetic is assumed throughout.

<sup>2</sup> In his reading of the Romances, “The Dismemberment of Orpheus,” David Armitage argues that “[a] suggestively Ovidian metamorphosis marks the presence of Orpheus in the statue scene (5.3), in which Shakespeare, like Ovid, combines the myths of Orpheus and Pygmalion” (130). His discussion is suggestive, but brief. In Lynn Enterline’s fine reading of the play, “‘You speak a language that I understand not,’” she argues that the scene “both claims and disavows the Orphic power for which it longs”; that power is “the rhetoric of animation” (41),

a rhetoric which she sees as essentially patriarchal. Hers is a brilliant discussion, one which qualifies my own idealization of the scene. I cannot, however, see why the rhetoric of animation she examines so sensitively must by necessity be patriarchal.

<sup>3</sup> In *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Geoffrey Bullough excerpts the Pygmalion tale (10.243–97) without the Orphic frame. Brooks Otis in *Ovid as Epic Poet* mistakenly argues that Orpheus' tales are only “nominally” his (190).

<sup>4</sup> Though this understanding is very likely to have been made possible by the idea of Christian resurrection, Shakespeare's romance here is not that romance. Pagan reanimation does not deny death; it only postpones it. Shakespeare often distinguishes between and among three horizons of life, two of which are temporal, one eternal: The life of a human being is limited; the life of human history is less so, but is still finite, nonetheless; eternity is infinite. Here, as in the *Sonnets*, Shakespeare's focus is on the second horizon: “So till the judgment that yourself arise, / You live in this, and dwell in lovers' eyes” (55.13–4). Of course, within the first horizon—that of a human life—one might reanimate someone who will, even so, still die within that first horizon. For discussions of paganism's presence in the Renaissance, see Leonard Barkan's *The Gods Made Flesh: Metamorphosis and the Pursuit of Paganism*. I am indebted to Barkan throughout, especially the chapters on Ovid (19–93) and Shakespeare (243–88). For a marvelous reading of both Ovid and Shakespeare, see Kenneth Gross's *The Dream of the Moving Statue* (72–9 and 99–109). Neither Barkan nor Gross notice the Orphic frame.

<sup>5</sup> The translation here is Golding's, spelling modernized. When I refer to text without citation, line numbers refer to the Loeb edition; when I cite, I provide two references, the first to the Loeb, the second to Golding. As Bate points out, even though Shakespeare's Latin was certainly good enough that he did not need to rely upon Golding, he would no doubt have used it “for speed and convenience” (7–8). Bate himself shows that Shakespeare is often revising Golding's translation within his own intertextual relationship with Ovid. Even so, Golding remains Shakespeare's Ovid-in-English, so I cite his translation.

<sup>6</sup> On the question of the relationship between narrative and metamorphosis, see Joseph Solodow's *The World of Ovid's Metamorphoses*. Ovid's unifying action may very well be his own narrative act, the *praxis* of a dramatized narrator fashioning a narrative cosmos for himself.

<sup>7</sup> See William Anderson's note on the passage (479–80) in his commentary, where he explains that Ovid, unlike Virgil in the fourth *Georgic*, keeps the focus throughout on Orpheus. For a discussion of both poets in Shakespeare's education, see William Baldwin's *William Shakspeare's Small Latine and Lesse Greeke*, vol. 2 (417–97).

<sup>8</sup> The Ovidian aesthetic is akin, then, to the Shakespearean, which fuses what the Aristotelian separates, tragic seriousness and comic ridiculousness, as Johnson himself explains so well: “Shakespeare's plays [or Ovid's poem] are not in the rigorous and critical sense either tragedies or comedies, but compositions of a distinct kind; exhibiting the real state of sublunary nature, which partakes of good and evil, joy and sorrow, mingled with endless variety of proportion and innumerable modes of combination; and expressing the course of the world . . .” (266–7).

<sup>9</sup> William Anderson argues in his essay on Ovid and Virgil that Ovid's parody of Virgil makes Orpheus “a cheap orator-poet” (47). I grant that Ovid's Orpheus is often more ridiculous than Virgil's, but Ovidian irony is not as deconstructive as is often thought: Like Shakespeare, who may very well have learned to mix generic tones from him, Ovid fuses the serious and the ridiculous. Ovid cannot abide Virgil's relentless seriousness and often treats moving moments with greater distance than Virgil, without, I would argue, turning the whole into mere parody.

<sup>10</sup> See Horace's *Ode* 3: “I shall not altogether die, but a mighty part of me shall escape the death-goddess” (quoted from the Loeb translation by Booth, 227–8). For a discussion of the historical awareness such “immortality” discloses within the Renaissance, see Thomas M. Greene's *The Light in Troy* (1–80).

<sup>11</sup> For a fine reading of the issues, see Mary Ellen Lamb's “Ovid and *The Winter's Tale*” and her bibliography of the relevant readings (84).

<sup>12</sup> Her point is Aristotle's about poetry: It represents not the actual, but the hypothetical (1451a36–9): “[I]t is not the poet's function to relate actual events, but the *kinds* of things that

### *Weeping in the Upper World*

might occur and are possible in terms of probability or necessity.” Had Hermione lived, she would have looked like the statue, the sculptor having made “her / As [if] she lived now” (31–2). It is an Aristotelian commonplace that art can actualize natural potentialities that nature itself cannot and that art can, as a consequence, augment the given.

<sup>13</sup> In *Appropriating Shakespeare*, Brian Vickers has made a compelling case that authorial intention is a legitimate object of literary study. His chapter on “Creator and Interpreters” (92–162) is persuasive that intertextuality is itself one way of discerning such intention. That the statue scene is, as is often noted, Shakespeare’s own transformation of *Pandosto, or the Triumph of Time* indicates the importance of 5.3 for understanding the whole of the play’s enactment of the limited defeat of time.

<sup>14</sup> Foucault’s discursive project does not, as far as I have yet to ascertain, explain whether or not there is human agency within a discursive practice; if so, that would make possible my project, though I am quite aware that this is not a Foucauldian ethics. Again, it is thoroughly Aristotelian. If Foucault’s argument is that there is no agency, then our projects would be incommensurate.

<sup>15</sup> The modal auxiliary here will, I suspect, frighten some readers with its Kantian timber of an imperative; I employ it in a deliberative, I hope not an authoritarian, manner. Tolerance need not preclude persuasion, and this essay hopes to be persuasive.

<sup>16</sup> Christopher Ricks presented a moving reading of Beckett’s gratitude to Shakespeare at the World Congress of International Shakespeare Association Meeting in Los Angeles (April 1996).

<sup>17</sup> Again, the frame of reference is the second horizon of human comprehension: neither individual, human time nor divine eternity, but collective human time, the order of culture, an order which will last, but not forever.

<sup>18</sup> For a brilliant discussion of this issue, see George Steiner’s *Real Presences*, especially Chapter 3 (135–232).

<sup>19</sup> See Howard Felperin’s “‘Tongue-Tied Our Queen?’” for such an ingenious, yet tone-deaf, reading of Leontes’ suspicion as sensible.

<sup>20</sup> See Book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics* for Aristotle’s method; Books 2 and 3.1–4, for his conception of “virtue ethics.” Nussbaum’s superb *Fragility of Goodness* emphasizes just these prosaic limitations within the Aristotelian method (240–63) and offers an excellent reading of his ethical thought (264–372). Useful as well is Wayne Booth’s *The Company We Keep* (168–373). Both Nussbaum’s and Booth’s discussions of ethics and literature concern only narrative, though their perceptions are, with attentive qualification, most enabling with regard to drama.

<sup>21</sup> For a fine discussion of the general question of “literary history,” see David Perkins’ *Is Literary History Possible?*

<sup>22</sup> I would like to thank the editors of *Studies in the Literary Imagination* for their editorial assistance. The following people have also provided generous assistance, correction and/or support: John Briggs, Lowell Gallagher, Theresa Kenney, Bob Miola, Martha Nussbaum, Lance Simmons, Stanley Stewart, Glen Thurow, Gerard Wegemer, Grace West, Deborah Willis, and the students in Studies in Myth (Mayterm 1996). As well, I would like to thank both Kyle Lemieux and Bryant Mason, whose production of *The Winter’s Tale* at the University of Dallas (Spring 1998) demonstrated that a “mythic” reading of 5.3 can, in fact, be performed. This essay is dedicated to my father, Hollis M. Crider.

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Scott F. Crider

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*Weeping in the Upper World*

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