

SICILY AND THE OTHERWORLD IN THE WINTER'S TALE: FROM PROSERPINA TO
PURGATORY

by

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(Under the Direction of Ronald Bogue)

ABSTRACT

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare inverts the settings of his source, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, by placing Leontes, the jealous husband and parallel to the Bohemian king Pandosto, in Sicily and Polixenes, the opposite of Greene's Sicilian king Egistus, in Bohemia. It is unclear why Shakespeare makes this change, and the purpose of this project is to investigate the possible reasons for this reversal. I believe Shakespeare made this change both to place Leontes literally in the vicinity of the entrance to the Christian otherworld, and to strengthen the parallel between the myth of Proserpina and the loss and recovery of Perdita (and Hermione). Examining the Christian elements of the play alongside the myth of Ceres and Proserpina will be the focus of this essay.

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SICILY AND THE OTHERWORLD IN *THE WINTER'S TALE*:
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Introduction

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare inverts the settings of his source, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, by placing Leontes, the jealous husband and parallel to the Bohemian king Pandosto, in Sicily and Polixenes, the opposite of Greene's Sicilian king Egistus, in Bohemia. It is unclear why Shakespeare makes this change, and the purpose of this project is to investigate the possible reasons for this reversal. I believe Shakespeare made this change both to place Leontes literally in the vicinity of the entrance to the Christian otherworld, and to strengthen the parallel between the myth of Proserpina and the loss and recovery of Perdita (and Hermione). Examining the Christian elements of the play alongside the myth of Ceres and Proserpina will be the focus of this essay.

In Geoffrey Bullough's *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare*, Bullough says the most probable cause for Shakespeare's changing of the settings of Greene's story is that "Sicily was well known for crimes of jealousy and revenge," while Bohemia was a center for romantic adventure (Bullough, 125). He also notes that the only evidence to support the claim that Shakespeare chose Sicily as Perdita's birthplace in order to identify her with Proserpina is found in Perdita's allusion to the myth at IV.3.116-118. I believe Bullough's conclusions leave

room for expansion and that Shakespeare's decision to switch the settings was motivated by more than a desire to take advantage of Sicily's reputation for crimes of jealousy.

It is my hope that examining this topic will not simply explain why Shakespeare changed the settings from Greene's novel but also shed light on the perception and role of purgatory in Shakespeare's England and in Shakespeare's own views on and use of purgatory in his works. I would also like to explore the play's relationship with Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in general, with particular focus on the Proserpina and Ceres myth and other myths concerning the dead and the underworld. Finally, I would like to explore the representations of Sicily and Mt. Etna as purgatorial and infernal loci in the early modern mind and for *The Winter's Tale* in particular.

The first part of this thesis will discuss the stories from Ovid's *Metamorphoses* that are influential in *The Winter's Tale*. In addition to a detailed study of the Proserpina myth and myths involving Ceres, I will examine links between *The Winter's Tale* and the myths of Phaethon, Deucalion and Pyrrha, Ino and Athamas, Polyphemus, Niobe, Apollo and Coronis, Autolycus, Arachne, Pygmalion and Medea. The tales of Deucalion, Autolycus and Pygmalion are either referenced directly in the play or are an obvious source, but I believe that Shakespeare made intentional connections with the other myths as well. Phaethon unintentionally breaks open the underworld, blurring the boundaries between the living and the dead; Athamas is afflicted with madness and murders his child; Polyphemus inhabits Sicily; Niobe loses her children as a result of her pride and disrespect for Apollo; Coronis conceives a child by Apollo but is destroyed by him for being an unfaithful lover; Arachne is punished for her disrespect of the gods; and Medea performs dark magic in order to restore Jason's father to youth. Each of these stories afford useful comparisons for interpreting *The Winter's Tale*.

In the second part of this thesis, I will examine the Christian elements that are present in the play and discuss their importance for the change in setting. I believe that a Christian reading is crucial for understanding the play, and by placing Leontes in Sicily, associations with Hell and Purgatory can be made.

Stephen Greenblatt's *Hamlet in Purgatory* discusses many ideas that are integral to my project, specifically perceptions of purgatory and funerary rites in early modern England, how they developed, and how they appear on the Elizabethan stage. As his primary interest in this work is with ghosts, Greenblatt's discussion of *The Winter's Tale* is limited to Antigonus' vision of Hermione's ghost, and a brief comparison of Paulina and Leontes' discussion of a hypothetical situation in which Hermione's specter would surely rebuke Leontes for remarriage, with Thomas More's discussion of dead husbands' horror at their wives' remarriage. He makes even less mention of Sicily, and does not discuss Sicily or purgatory within the context of *The Winter's Tale*. I would like to extend some of his arguments for the presence of purgatory on the stage to *The Winter's Tale*.

The source for *The Winter's Tale*, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, is influenced by Chaucer's *The Clerk's Tale*. Chaucer credits this story to Petrarch, who was influenced by Boccaccio's Griselda story. Geoffrey Bullough does not mention either *The Clerk's Tale* or Boccaccio in his definitive work on Shakespeare's sources; other critics¹ have argued that Shakespeare was possibly influenced directly by *The Clerk's Tale* and indirectly by Petrarch and Boccaccio. We know that Shakespeare was familiar with the patient Griselda story because of a reference made to it in *The Taming of the Shrew* (2.3.303). Anna Baldwin has argued that this reference is to Chaucer's Griselda, citing the popularity of *The Clerk's Tale* in Shakespeare's lifetime as one

¹ Baldwin, (208-209).

factor in her conclusion. The influence of the Griselda tale has been argued as an analogue and as a source for Hermione's treatment, but I will contend that Shakespeare goes beyond the model of Hermione as an analogue for the innocent, good and patient Griselda and that the madness of Leontes is different from the contrived scenarios created by the inexplicably cruel husband in *The Clerk's Tale*. In *Pandosto*, the mad king is the king of Bohemia and his wrongly accused friend the king of Sicily. Shakespeare swaps the two, placing the longsuffering Leontes in Sicily, and I believe that he makes this change to place Leontes near Purgatory.

In Greene's *Pandosto*, the characters meet undesirable ends, both in their lifetimes and in the afterworld. Greene's Queen Bellaria dies and Pandosto commits suicide (so we know that he is in Hell) in Bohemia, but Shakespeare's Hermione and Leontes are rewarded at the end of the play with a restoration of their family. They are reunited, their daughter is found and everyone's suffering is ended. In a Christian world they could go to Heaven while Pandosto could not. Long-suffering Leontes is purged of his sin while patient Hermione is restored to life and good standing with her husband.

Part I : *The Winter's Tale* and Ovid's *Metamorphoses*

Chapter One: *The Winter's Tale* and the Proserpina Myth

Like many of Shakespeare's plays, *The Winter's Tale* borrows from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. The Proserpina myth in particular may explain why Shakespeare chose to reverse the settings of the events from his source, Robert Greene's *Pandosto, The Triumph of Time*. In *Narrative and Dramatic Sources of Shakespeare Vol. 8*, Geoffrey Bullough states that "there is little to support this mythological interpretation" other than Perdita's own association of herself with Proserpina in Act IV.² Perdita is clearly associated with Proserpina but not identified with her, says Bullough.³ But should this exclude the Proserpina myth as a motivating factor for the change in setting? There is a significant amount of evidence that the Proserpina myth, along with several others, is highly important for the play and for Shakespeare's deviations from Greene's original plot. Shakespeare used the Sicilian setting purposefully, resulting in significant consequences for the play's meaning. Instead of presenting the downfall and damnation of a morally despicable king, *The Winter's Tale* focuses on atonement, forgiveness, and ultimately, renewal.

Though Bullough does not view *The Winter's Tale* as a fertility myth, there is evidence suggesting that fertility mythology is central to the play.⁴ Due to the deaths of Hermione and Mamillius and the loss of Perdita, Leontes and his kingdom enter an indefinite state of winter. It is a time of sadness for Sicily, and it becomes a kingdom with no heirs. Though Leontes imposes his own punishment on himself and freely chooses not to take a new wife, he is also

² Bullough, (125).

³ Bullough, (135-136).

⁴ Bullough, (135-136).

bound to do so by the oracle's prophecy: "And the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (3.2 .134-135). His choice means that the royal bed is left fallow and unproductive. His lack of heirs is unsettling for his subjects, who worry about the political stability of their country. It is a serious threat that parallels the loss of crops, particularly in Sicily, that comes with Ceres' wrath in Ovid's Proserpina myth. It is not until the oracle is fulfilled and the daughter who was lost returns with a husband that the winter breaks and the royal bed becomes productive once more. Though Perdita is restored, Mamillius is not, and Leontes only recovers a part of what he lost. Mamillius is truly dead, and Leontes' male line is ended. Like Ceres and Proserpina, the family of Leontes does not enjoy a full recovery.

One critic who promoted the prominence of the fertility myth in the play was F.C. Tinkler. In the introduction to *The Winter's Tale: Critical Essays*, Maurice Hunt says that Tinkler "grasped the importance of the power of nature in the play."⁵ Tinkler notes that the importance of Mamillius is stressed throughout the play, and that he represents the principle of fertile renewal.⁶ He is linked to the idea of winter by his "sad tale [that]'s best for winter" (2.1.25). This connection gives him undeniable significance for the play as a whole since his lines give *The Winter's Tale* its name. The permanent loss of Mamillius together with the restoration of Perdita creates an analogue of the Proserpina myth. Mamillius' statements let us know that the events in the beginning of the play occur in the winter. After Leontes loses his family, spring never comes to him from that time until the arrival of Perdita and Florizell in Act V. In the meantime, Leontes metaphorically lives in a perpetual winter, acting out Paulina's description of penance on a barren mountainside in an endless snowstorm. As Sicily is barren of heirs and in a continuous state of winter during the absence of Perdita, so was Sicily ravaged and

⁵ Hunt, (20).

⁶ Hunt, (20).

made agriculturally barren by the wrath of Ceres while Proserpina was lost. Leontes' jealousy, notes Tinkler, has blighting consequences that create a wasteland: a land without heirs.⁷ He and his subjects are the victims of this blight, and his wife is killed or driven into hiding until the time when the blight is ended through the restoration of her daughter, creating a parallel with Ceres and Proserpina.

Ceres is connected to the play because of her role as goddess of agrarian nature. She controls blight, rain, and crop success; the production of food is completely dependent upon her favor. Though Proserpina is restored to Ceres, the rape cannot be reversed and she must return to Dis each year, never failing to cause her mother grief. Just so is the loss of Mamillius a 'winter' that Leontes must always carry as a burden. But if Mamillius is associated with winter, Perdita and Florizell represent spring; they bring renewal to Sicily, snapping Leontes out of his unremitting winter and restoring balance. Leontes knows joy through Perdita, Florizell and Hermione, but sadness through the memory of Mamillius. As in the Proserpina myth, though disaster and total loss are averted, Leontes' house is never the same as it once was. Loss and winter are a permanent part of their lives.

Tinkler believes Perdita and Florizell symbolize spring after Leontes' winter. In the absence of Leontes' family, the kingdom of Sicilia has been barren, without heirs. So when Perdita arrives, Leontes' winter is over, and the arrival of this new spring comes with the recovery of the daughter and son-in-law. They "green" the dry land.⁸ Tinkler traces the movement of the seasons in the play and relates the cycle to that of death and resurrection. Florizell and Perdita are in the prime of their youth—their springtime. The most important evidence that they bring renewal is Leontes' warm welcoming of Florizell to Sicily, saying

⁷ Hunt, (20).

⁸ Hunt, (21).

“welcome hither,/ as is the spring to th’ earth” (5.1.150-151). Florizell brings the new spring with him, in himself and Perdita and their ability to produce new heirs.

Bullough says that if Perdita is associated with spring, it would be strange for Shakespeare to place her in Bohemia rather than Sicily if Sicily is meant to be a place of eternal spring. He concedes that Ceres and Proserpina may have reminded Shakespeare of Perdita and Hermione’s situation, but that “the seasons of the year and of man’s life are introduced poetically but not allegorically, and Perdita is not identified with Proserpina.”⁹ His footnote goes further:

If Shakespeare read N. Come’s *Mythologiae* ‘De Proserpina’, he would find reference to Cicero’s elaborate description of Sicily’s fertility ‘whereby flowers bloom there almost all months of the year.’ This would make the choice of Bohemia as setting for Perdita’s shearing-feast and flower-poetry extraordinary if there were allegorical intention.¹⁰

In *The Winter’s Tale* and in the Proserpina myth, however, Sicily loses its fertility and becomes a blighted land, not the locus of eternal spring. Without the presence of the cherished offspring, it is barren. In addition, would the tradition of Sicily as a place of spring not make it all the more striking when the land is blighted by Ceres or by Leontes’ crimes? Not only is Leontes’ kingdom without heirs, but it is also without a queen to bear children. Leontes, himself called by the name of his kingdom, Sicilia, suffers through a long winter of grieving.

Clearly Perdita is not sent to become the queen of hell as Proserpina was, and Bohemia is not associated with Hades. Perdita’s time in exile is not at all like Proserpina’s. But what about Mamillius, and what about the Christian layer of Shakespeare’s play? It is Hermione and Mamillius who die, and though Hermione’s death is ambiguous, Mamillius dies in truth. If we look at Mamillius as a counterpart to Perdita, and view them as two halves of a whole, being

⁹ Bullough, (135-136).

¹⁰ Bullough, (135-136).

Leontes' offspring, the situation begins to look more like Ovid's Proserpina myth. In Arthur Golding's 1567 translation of the *Metamorphoses*, Jupiter, in his response to Ceres' upbraiding of him for allowing Proserpina to be stolen by Dis, calls their daughter a collop: "My daughter is a Jewell deare and leefe:/ A collup of mine owne flesh cut as well as out of thine," (650-651).¹¹ Leontes uses this same word when addressing Mamillius in Act I, possibly linking Mamillius with Proserpina directly: "Sweet villain!/ Most dear'st! my collop!" (I.2.136-137). Paulina also speaks of Mamillius as "our prince,/ Jewel of children," in Act V (5.1.116-117).

In the pre-Christian literal setting of the play, Mamillius' spirit would have been in Hades. Both Mamillius and Perdita are lost to Leontes, and he knows not if Perdita lives. For him and for his subjects, the entire royal family other than Leontes is presumed to have departed the land of the living and descended to Hades. Thus from Leontes' perspective, the return of Perdita, accompanied by Florizell, is welcomed as the coming of spring. Shakespeare's intentions may not have been allegorical, but that does not diminish the importance of the Proserpina myth for the play.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Sicily lies heaped over the chained titan Typhon's body. Mt. Etna lies over his head, whence he belches flame, and he causes earthquakes as he struggles to free himself. Pluto fears that Typhon will break open the earth, as Phaethon did, exposing the underworld. The two spheres are clearly meant to be kept wholly separate; it is imperative to the established order that they remain so. While both gods and heroes may occasionally cross this boundary at times of great need, Proserpina becomes "the only divinity common to both realms" (566).¹² She is the link between the two worlds; when she is among the dead, the land is barren, but when she is with the living, the land is fruitful. She is more powerful as queen of the dead,

¹¹ Ovid. *Metamorphoses*. Trans. Arthur Golding. (130).

¹² Ovid, *Metamorphoses*. Trans. David Raeburn. (201).

but her presence on earth among the living is vital, for without it Ceres would blight the land and there could be no crops.

Proserpina would have been a goddess of spring if she had her choice, but instead she becomes the divinity that embodies the life-death-rebirth cycle; her 'death' each year, when she descends to the realm of the dead, brings on the decay of winter. Her 'rebirth' when she returns to the land of the living brings renewed life, warmth and growth. It is likely that she descends to Hades and emerges thence from one of the portals at Sicily. Sicily was the place of her original descent in the chariot of Hades, and the place where her mother discovered her fate. In *The Winter's Tale*, the recovery of a part of his family banishes the winter of Leontes, just as Ceres renews the land when her daughter is found. When Florizell and Perdita arrive at Sicily, Leontes greets them as the coming of spring. Shakespeare also reminds us of the context of the Roman myth by mentioning Neptune: "Welcome hither,/ As is the spring to th' earth. And hath he too/ Exposed this paragon to th' fearful usage,/ At least ungentle, of the dreadful Neptune,/ To greet a man not worth her pains, much less/ Th' adventure of her person?" (5.1.150-155). Leontes still speaks of himself as unworthy of Perdita's presence even though he does not know her identity.

In the *Metamorphoses*, Proserpina is abducted from Lake Pergus, a place of eternal spring near "Sicilian Henna" (Bk 5, 385) as she gathers "bunches of violets or pure white lilies" (Bk 5, 393). In Act IV scene 4 Perdita names these flowers among those that Proserpina "let'st fall from Dis's wagon" (4.4.117-118). Perdita says that she herself lacks these flowers to give to Florizell just as Proserpina lacked them after Dis captured her, associating herself with Proserpina. In the *Metamorphoses*, Venus feared that Proserpina would reject her and forever remain a maiden of youthful, virginal spring, so she afflicts Pluto with love and causes him to violently tear Proserpina from her abode of eternal spring and to steal her maidenhood in one fell

swoop. Proserpina's initial abduction causes Ceres to blight the land in anger, destroying crops everywhere before they can be harvested, but in Sicily most of all.

After Dis snatches Proserpina from her spring at Henna, they cross over the lakes of Palica, "reeking with sulphur and boiling up through a crack in the earth" (Bk 5, 405) to Syracuse. There are two springs at Syracuse, both of which are connected to the underworld by the time Proserpina is found. Cyane, the nymph of one of these springs, tries to bar Pluto's way, but in anger he opens her spring to the underworld and through it he carries Proserpina down to Hades. The nymph cannot bear the desecration of her spring and slowly turns to water herself, and so cannot tell Ceres where her daughter has gone. Ceres, meanwhile, searches for Proserpina "by land and ocean," and she lights two torches in the flames of Etna to light her way as she searches "from west to east" (Bk 5 439-445).

When there is nowhere else to look, Ceres at last returns to Sicily. It is the place of both the loss and recovery of her child, just as it is for Hermione and Leontes. Upon finding Proserpina's girdle in Cyane's pool, she mourns wildly; she curses and blights all the earth, but Sicily most of all, as it is "where she finally found the traces of what she had lost" (Bk 5, 476-477). She slaughtered cattle and farmers alike, "she instructed the fields to default on the dues that they owed, and blighted the fruits of the earth. Sicily's worldwide fame as a fertile country was given the lie" (Bk 5, 479-482). If Shakespeare did indeed use this myth prominently in *The Winter's Tale*, in contrast to Bullough's assertions, it would not be strange for Perdita to be seen in Bohemia rather than Sicily in light of this passage. Though Sicily may be famed for its eternal spring, when Proserpina is lost Ceres snuffs out its fertility more thoroughly than that of any other place.

Her anger causes more than a winter; it withers the crops before they have ripened. The loss of Perdita and Mamillius bears a striking resemblance; they are lost to Leontes before reaching adulthood and reproducing, leaving him without heirs. Without a new wife, whom he will not take, Leontes has no way to gain new, legitimate heirs. That which he might 'sow' is taken from him by death, or so it would seem, and he has nowhere to plant his seed. According to the oracle, only Hermione's offspring will be suitable as heirs. Just as Leontes chooses to abide by the oracle and thus cannot move on, Ceres cannot or will not accept her daughter's marriage to Dis and her removal from the upper world.

As Ceres focuses her wrath upon Sicily, Arethusa, the other spring of Syracuse, appears in order to tell Ceres that she has seen Proserpina. Her spring is also connected to the underworld; Diana had saved her from an amorous pursuer by changing her to a river and sending her down through Hades, where she saw Proserpina, to eventually emerge in Sicily. This portal makes three entrances to Hades in Sicily: Etna, Cyane's pool, and Arethusa's spring.

When Ceres learns the truth, she is "long dumbfounded, as though she were stone or struck by thunder" (Bk 5 509-510). In *The Winter's Tale*, Hermione is presented as an image made of stone, and only returns to her living form when her daughter is restored to her. Ceres confronts Jupiter, the father of Proserpina, who says that Pluto has not committed a crime but an act of love, and that they should be pleased with the match. If Ceres insists on recalling Proserpina, he says, she will only be permitted to return if she has not eaten, but she had famously plucked a pomegranate from a tree and eaten the seeds. A god called Ascalaphus was the only one who saw her, and he reported her act. Ovid tells the tale in a way that makes it seem as though Proserpina just barely failed to escape her fate, if not for Ascalaphus. He is the "son of Orpheus, [...] she's said to have borne him in hell's dark woods to her lover Acheron" (Bk 5 540-

541). His birth is proof of Venus's success in extending her empire to Hades; he is a product of love in the underworld and is Ovid's key to binding Proserpina to Dis. Thus does Proserpina become the only divinity common to both realms.

In Ovid's myth, Ceres initiates the reclamation of Proserpina, but whether or not Proserpina can answer the summons depends upon her actions in Hades. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes' penance is necessary for the restoration of Perdita, but Polixenes' anger is the catalyst that drives Perdita and Florizell out of Bohemia rather than a summons by Leontes. She is expelled from Sicily and finds haven in Bohemia at the beginning of her life, and later she is driven from Bohemia and finds haven in Sicily, whereas Proserpina was abducted and then recalled. As for Mamillius, it is not through the direct agency of Leontes that he is killed, but as Leontes' punishment by Apollo for ignoring his oracle. Just as Leontes' heirs are restored to him and the people of Sicily celebrate the return of a productive royal couple, Ceres restores the earth's crops after Proserpina is returned to her.

One other myth in the *Metamorphoses* features Ceres prominently. In Book 8, the impious king Erysichthon desecrates a sacred grove of Ceres' and is punished. Erysichthon despised the gods; he never gave offerings and he orders Ceres' sacred oak to be cut down, insulting her directly: "“This needn't be merely the goddess' tree, but the goddess herself for all I care, but its leafy top must be brought to the ground!”" (Bk 8 755-756). Like Leontes, Erysichthon has servants more pious than himself, who try to persuade him to stop, one of whom he beheads: "“All were appalled, but one who was bolder than all the others endeavored to halt this evil and counter the axe's cruelty”" (Bk 8 764-765). Antigonus and other lords successfully convince Leontes not to kill his infant daughter then and there, but they are unable to dissuade him from decreeing that she be abandoned. "“And we on our knees beg,/ As recompense of our

dear services/ Past and to come, that you do change this purpose,/ Which being so horrible, so bloody, must/ Lead on to some foul issue. We all kneel,” says one of Leontes’ lords (2.3.148-152). In a cruel compromise, Leontes asks Antigonus what he will “adventure/ To save this brat’s life” (2.3.161-162). When Antigonus says he will do anything to save the innocent, Leontes makes him swear to perform his bidding, then commands him to take the babe and abandon it somewhere remote.

The nymph of Ceres’ tree, beloved of the goddess, prophesies as she dies that Erysichthon will pay for his crime. The dryads report to Ceres, who vows to punish him by letting “Hunger torture his body. [...] Hunger acted on Ceres’ bidding, although their functions are ever opposed” (Bk 8 784-815). Ceres tasks Hunger with attaching herself to Erysichthon, to vie with Ceres’ own nourishing power and defeat it (Bk 8 791-793). As Ceres’ had planned, Erysichthon is unable to satiate the hunger that gnaws at him day and night. After bankrupting himself for food, he sells his household, including his daughter, into slavery in his vain attempt to satisfy his eternal hunger. Eventually he devours himself.

Leontes avoids such an utterly self-destructive fate by repenting and enduring sixteen years of penance. Similar to Erysichthon’s lack of satiation, Hermione, the source of Leontes’ children and heirs, is withheld from him, be it through death, transformation or seclusion, thus preventing him from gaining new heirs. According to Apollo’s oracle, no matter how many wives Leontes might take, he would have no heir until Perdita is found; his desire for an heir would never be satisfied. Unlike Erysichthon, Leontes controls himself; he does not attempt to fulfill his lack, seeking penance instead.

Both mortals are determined to carry out their own wills despite the gods. Unlike Erysichthon, Leontes does not despise the gods. He consults Apollo’s oracle, but he ignores the

god's will. He is determined to punish Hermione even though Apollo's own prophet says that he is wrong. Both men are bound to punishment through a prophecy: Leontes by Apollo's oracle and Erysichthon by the murdered nymph's dying words. Though Leontes does not actually harm the members of his court with his own hands, as does Erysichthon, he does threaten them, body and soul, and there is no reason to doubt that he would make good on this threats: "On thy soul's peril and thy body's toruture,/ That thou commend it strangely to some place/ Where chance may nurse or end it" (2.3.180-182). He forces Antigonus to commit an act that destroys him and his crew, just as Erysichthon orders his own servants to defy the gods or suffer his wrath. In the end, it is Leontes' penance and renewed piety that separate him from Erysichthon and a fate of condemnation.

Chapter Two: *The Winter's Tale* and Other Myths from Ovid

Phaethon

In the myth of Phaethon, his mother Clymene is accused of lying about Phaethon's paternity. Like Hermione, she is "spotless" in this of which she is accused, and she calls upon Helios to reveal the truth to his son (2.2.131). In the end, this series of events leads to Phaethon's destruction and the near-destruction of the earth. In *The Winter's Tale*, it is Leontes who doubts Hermione's fidelity and the paternity of Perdita, but their son Mamillius is also destroyed due to paternal doubts.

Phaethon confronts Helios in all his splendor and extracts a promise from him that he will give Phaethon any gift he asks for as proof of his paternity. Phaethon asks to drive the chariot of the sun, and Helios is bound by his rash promise to comply. As Phaethon prepares to depart, a distraught Helios gives him advice on how to drive the chariot, even though he knows that it is too late to save his son from his own pride. He concludes: "the rest I resign to Fortune; I pray her to help and take care of you better than you take care of yourself" (Bk 2, 140-143). Almost as soon as he sets out, Phaethon regrets his decision and wishes he had taken his father's advice, just as Leontes suddenly sees his error when he presses on past the point of no return by disregarding Apollo's oracle.

In his wayward course, Phaethon sets the earth on fire, causing all moisture to dry up; he scorches the corn, and "parched grain offered the perfect fuel for self-ruination" (Bk 2, 213). Etna is "ablaze to the heavens, its flames now doubled" (Bk 2, 220). The destruction that Phaethon causes creates a hellish image of a world on fire; even Hades itself is penetrated.

Cracks in the earth open up, exposing the underworld and breaking the barrier between the realms of the living and the dead. Phaethon creates a breach in the fabric of the world, allowing sun into Hades, where it has never been and should not be. Jupiter finally smites Phaethon with a bolt, flinging his body from the chariot and his life from his body (Bk 2, 312-313).

Leontes, too, is a victim of self-ruination and his actions makes the royal bed barren, destroying the precious bounty: his children. Like Phaethon, Leontes presses on against the will of the gods, and his son is struck down in swift retribution. The moment Leontes declares that he will disregard Apollo's oracle, a messenger appears with news of Mamillius' death. Perdita is lost to them; she is left to fortune and found by the clown and shepherd in Bohemia, and it is beyond Leontes' control to find her and bring her back. Hermione is lost out of grief for her son (as is Phaethon's mother Clymene). Unlike any of the figures in the Phaethon myth, however, all of the characters in *The Winter's Tale* are pitiable rather than mocked. Like Phaethon, Leontes is justly punished, but he takes on the punishment willingly and eagerly, and is truly sorry for his sins and not for himself alone.

Phaethon's mother searches the world over for him just as Ceres searches for Proserpina; once they find his grave, she "steeped it in tears" and his sisters "weep[ed] in useless tribute" over his fate (Bk 2, 341). "They loudly called on their brother, whose ears their wailing could never reach," before turning into trees, weeping sap eternally (Bk 2, 342-343). Similarly, Leontes says that he will pray and shed tears over his wife and son's graves each day: "Once a day I'll visit/ The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there/ Shall be my recreation. So long as nature/ Will bear up with this exercise, so long/ I daily vow to use it" (3.2.236-240). In a Catholic context, this act would not be useless, but for Protestants it would be as useless as it is for Phaethon's sisters.

In another similarity with *The Winter's Tale*, Cycnus, a friend of Phaethon, abandons his kingdom to lament his friend and is turned into a swan. Leontes does not go so far as to abandon his kingdom, but in the eyes of many of his lords, he neglects his duty to the stability of Sicilia by not taking a new wife and begetting new heirs. In contrast to Ovid, though, Shakespeare does not punish Leontes for his overlong mourning, but rewards his devotion and penance.

Deucalion and Pyrrha

In the *Metamorphoses*, after the great flood that the gods use to destroy the first race of corrupted men, Deucalion and Pyrrha, the last mortals, land on Mt. Parnassus. There they pay homage to Themis, the goddess of prophecy who controlled the Delphic oracle that is later attributed to Apollo. They are guiltless of sin and devout in worship. They pray to the sacred oracle and kiss the altar as they pray: "If the prayers of the righteous can soften the hearts of the gods and win them over, [...] declare to us how to repair the loss of our wretched race" (Bk 1, 377-380). They are humble and reverent in their dealings with the oracle, whereas Leontes is defiant and dismisses the oracle's prophecy outright: "There is no truth at all i' th' oracle./ The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood" (3.2.138-139). Deucalion and Pyrrha have their prayer granted immediately (though they must work out the meaning of their instructions first) whereas Leontes must suffer greatly before he can be forgiven. After he repents, his devotion to honoring Hermione and Mamillius' graves is finally rewarded.

The oracle tells Deucalion and Pyrrha to "cast the bones of their mighty mother behind their backs"; Deucalion concludes that oracles must say and do only what is holy, in marked contrast to Leontes' treatment of the same oracle (Bk 1, 383-393). Whereas Deucalion trusts and

obeys the god even though he does not fully understand the prophecy, Leontes remains defiant and must spend years atoning for his impiety. Whereas Ovid would most likely have punished him through an unpleasant and permanent transformation or death, Shakespeare gives him a second chance; he is able to redeem himself through penance.

When Deucalion and Pyrrha eventually realize that the oracle is referring to stones when she says their mothers' bones, they obey and repopulate the earth by tossing stones over their shoulders, which turn to new men and women. This is one of only two transformations from stone to flesh in the *Metamorphoses*, the other being Pygmalion's statue. Most of the transformations *to* stone in the *Metamorphoses* are for punishment, and are permanent. Ovid rarely writes of temporary transformations. In this tale though, he shows the gods rewarding piety and uses transformation as a generative act; Shakespeare does the same in the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*.

We know that the myth of Deucalion and Pyrrha was in Shakespeare's mind as he was writing *The Winter's Tale* because Polixenes makes reference to Deucalion in his upbraiding of Florizell in Act IV: "we'll bar thee from succession,/ Not hold thee of our blood – no, not our kin - / Farre than Deucalion off" (4.4.428-430). Polixenes' reference to Deucalion anticipates Hermione's transformation from stone to flesh in Act V. It is unclear at the end of the play if Hermione has been dead, alive, or even preserved in stone for sixteen years, but Paulina intends her audience (Leontes, Perdita and their companions) to perceive a miraculous transformation from stone to living woman.

Ino and Athamas

The myth of Ino and Athamas is important for *The Winter's Tale* in that Shakespeare appears to have deliberately invoked and averted it. In Leontes' anger, which is sudden and violent, he declares that he will send Perdita away or destroy her. He threatens to dash Perdita upon the floor if Antigonus will not take her to be burnt at once: "Take it hence/ And see it instantly consumed with fire [...]. If thou refuse/ And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so./ The bastard brains with these proper hands/ Shall I dash out" (2.3.133-140). This is exactly what Ovid's Athamas does in fact do in his own madness, induced by Juno. In revenge against her mortal rival Semele, Juno sends the Fury Tisiphone to torment Semele's sister, Ino, and her husband Athamas. The Fury pours her poisons into them, causing them to go mad, and Athamas, believing his wife and infant son to be a lioness and her cub, kills his own child, ripping it out of Ino's arms and dashing it to the floor. In the myth, Ino flees with her child and leaps into the ocean. Venus pities her and convinces Neptune to turn Ino and her son into sea gods. Though Leontes does not hallucinate, he does imagine a plot against him that does not exist and inadvertently kills his wife and son as a result of his unjustified anger. Like Ino and her son, Hermione and Perdita are preserved and returned at the end of the play, possibly with divine assistance in Hermione's case.

Polyphemus

In Book 13 of the *Metamorphoses*, Ovid describes a prophet who visits Sicily; the prophet "put into Sicily close to Mt. Etna" (Bk 13, 770). He warns Polyphemus that if he does

not take care, he will be robbed of his eye by Ulysses. Polyphemus, who is absorbed in his lust for the nymph Galatea, laughs at the prophecy, saying “you are wrong, most stupid of prophets. My eye has already been robbed by another!” (Bk 13, 774-775). Ovid’s narrator says, “And so he rejected that truthful but useless warning, and pompously trampled the shore with his giants’ steps” (Bk 13, 775-776) Like Polyphemus, Leontes ignores a prophecy to his extreme loss. Polyphemus is robbed of his sight and Leontes of his family. In the tale that follows, Polyphemus, like Leontes, erupts in a fit of jealousy over an affair between Galatea and the mortal Acis. Though this love affair is real, Polyphemus has no claim upon Galatea, who rejects his wooing. He crushes his rival Acis under a boulder, but he is thwarted when Galatea manages to save Acis by changing him into a river. Similarly, Leontes unsuccessfully attempts to have Polixenes murdered by Camillo. Not only does Polixenes escape death, but he also takes Camillo with him. Camillo, a valuable royal servant, and Polixenes, a once cherished friend, become the first people to be lost to Leontes as a result of his anger. Unlike Polyphemus, however, Leontes is able to recover most of what he loses through dutiful penance.

Niobe

In Book 6 of the *Metamorphoses* Niobe pridefully claims the rites of the gods. She boasts that her father Tantalus was permitted to feast with the gods, though she conveniently omits his gross abuse of this privilege. She also boasts of her many children, claiming to be greater than the goddess Latona, and wishes to be honored with incense herself, a rite reserved only for the gods. Leontes does not go so far as Niobe, but he willfully ignores Apollo’s oracle, believing his own judgment greater than the god’s. Like Niobe, Leontes brings upon himself the loss of all his

family: he loses his son, his daughter and his wife, through whom he should have begotten yet more offspring. Both Niobe and Leontes are punished swiftly. Apollo even cuts off his mother Latona's speech so that he and Diana may set out to punish Niobe without delay. Apollo kills Niobe's sons, and her husband Amphion subsequently kills himself in grief. Quite similarly, Apollo kills Mamillius the instant that Leontes declares his intention to ignore the prophecy and Hermione dies of grief moments later.

In response to Apollo's punishment, Niobe does not humble herself, but boasts that with seven daughters left, she still has more children than Latona. It is here that Leontes takes a different course than Niobe. He immediately sees his error and his injustice toward Apollo and his own family: "I have too much believed mine own suspicion," he laments (III.2.149). He is as one who has a spell lifted from him, and begins a prayer to Apollo: "Apollo, pardon my great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle! / I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo, / Whom I proclaim a man of truth and mercy; [...]" (3.2.152-155). He even says that he was "transported by [his] jealousies," implying that he committed his profane acts while in an altered state of mind. Leontes had been stone-hearted, but the death of Mamillius softens him. He immediately seeks forgiveness through penance, acknowledging his mortal inferiority and his unjust actions.

In contrast to Leontes' repentance, Niobe is too proud and refuses to bow before Apollo and Diana: "In my grief I have more than you in your joy! Although you have murdered all of my sons, I can still outshine you!" (Bk 6, 284-285). Only at the last moment, when it is too late, is Niobe humbled enough to beg for the life of her last child. When her last daughter dies, she sinks to her knees in grief and shame: "Then childless, she sank to the earth by the corpses—her

sons, her daughters, her husband—and there in her sorrow her body grew rigid” (Bk 6, 301-303). She is turned to stone, tears flowing eternally down her cheeks.

Apollo and Coronis

Book 2 of the *Metamorphoses* contains an example of Apollo’s reaction to an unfaithful lover. In this case, his lover Coronis was indeed unfaithful to him, unlike the wrongly accused Hermione. Apollo is furious and kills Coronis in his rage; as she dies, Coronis admits that she herself is justly punished but that her unborn child, Apollo’s son, is unjustly slain: “‘Phoebus,’ she cried, ‘I might have paid you the price I deserved, yet given my child to you first; as it is, we shall leave you together, mother and baby in one’” (Bk 2, 608-610). Upon Coronis’ death, Apollo is immediately filled with regret, and in vain he attempts to heal her. Despite her betrayal, he mourns Coronis and gives her funeral rites that she does not deserve of him:

Apollo sorely regretted exacting a vengeance so cruel, but all too late. [...] He clasped her fallen limbs to his breast, belatedly struggling to baffle fate, but his healing arts were deployed to no purpose. Finding that all his attempts were in vain, that the funeral pyre was being prepared and those limbs would soon be on fire in the flames, at last he burst into pitiful groans from the depths of his being [...]. He poured on his loved one’s breast his ungrateful offering of incense, embraced her once more and performed the rites that should not have been due.

(Bk 2, 612-627)

As a final act of love for Coronis, Apollo saves their child, Aesculapius, from destruction, snatching him from Coronis’ womb out of the burning funeral pyre.

In this story, Apollo smites his lover for her actual infidelity in his anger; his anger is just, for her infidelity is real, but even so, she is the mother of his child and he remembers this and regrets his rash action against her. Like Apollo, Leontes seeks to kill his (believed by him) unfaithful wife despite their son together and her pregnancy. He too feels regret, after his mind is cleared by Apollo's punishment, and though Perdita is preserved, Mamillius is lost forever. Apollo sets an example of respect for the mother of one's children, which Leontes does not follow. Leontes will not hear any arguments that Perdita is his own, and even when Apollo's oracle says that Hermione is faithful and that Perdita is his daughter, he dismisses it and proceeds, committing his greatest crime yet. His actions directly contrast with Apollo's, with the interesting addition of Apollo's oracle as the source of truth concerning Hermione's fidelity. It is not until Apollo himself strikes down Mamillius that Leontes repents: "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves/ Do strike at my injustice" (2.2.144-145). By then, it is too late for Leontes to save his children.

By contrast, Apollo saves his own child and mourns Coronis, though she little deserves it. Leontes only imagines that his wife is unfaithful; were he correct, his treatment of her would be just. Apollo gives him the information to make the right decision, and he rejects it. There also exists the precedent of Apollo's own rash action and regret; his oracle gives Leontes the opportunity to avoid the mistake the god once made, a mistake that would be doubly painful for Leontes since Hermione is faithful. Apollo, who justly killed his own unfaithful consort but saved their son, takes away Leontes' son when Leontes wrongly attempts to execute his queen. It is as if Apollo were saying that he mourned his unfaithful and undeserving lover despite her betrayal because she was the mother of his child, but Leontes blasphemes as he refuses to halt his persecution of his faithful and deserving partner. Like Coronis, she is mourned by her husband

after her death, but unlike Apollo's consort, Hermione is restored in the end after Leontes' atonement. Her restoration is appropriate in the context of this myth, since she is innocent. It also ties in heavily with the Christian themes of the play, and shows that Shakespeare's reworking of Ovid's tale allows for the possibility of Christian redemption.

Autolycus

The Winter's Tale's Autolycus is taken directly from the *Metamorphoses*. Shakespeare's Autolycus introduces himself: "My father named me Autolycus, who being, as I/ am, littered under Mercury, was likewise a snapper-up/ of unconsidered trifles" (4.3.24-26) The mythical Autolycus was sired by Mercury; his mother, Chione, was desired by both Mercury and Apollo. In the tale, Mercury and Apollo are opposed and each fathers a son by Chione. Autolycus is a rogue, Apollo's son a musician. As Mercury's knavish son, Autolycus was "wily and skillful in every kind of deception, a rogue who was thoroughly versed in his father's arts and perfectly happy to turn pure white into black, jet black into white" (Bk 11 313-315). Shakespeare's Autolycus proves himself able to change "pure white into black, jet black into white," first claiming to have been robbed of his decent clothes and "these detestable things put upon [him]" when he had already told the audience that he came by his clothes "with die and drab" (4.3.26-61). Later, he is able to exchange clothes with Florizell, putting on the attire of a gentleman and changing his speech and demeanor accordingly. He even decides to aid Florizell (though admittedly he expects to gain from it himself) by sending the Shepherd and Clown, who have Perdita's royal tokens, to the prince. In doing so, he causes them to be changed from their lowborn status and comically made into "gentlemen born."

Autolycus' birth by Chione as a child of Mercury is one of two references to him in the *Metamorphoses*, the other being his reference to Mestra's husband. Mestra, daughter of Erysichthon, who was punished by Ceres, had the ability to change herself like Proteus, making her a fitting wife of a rogue versed in disguises, which Shakespeare's Autolycus uses quite often as well. It is not only Autolycus, though, who employs disguises in *The Winter's Tale*. Florizell imagines that Perdita looks like Flora, a Roman goddess of spring, creating an inversion wherein this mortal is disguised as a goddess: "These your unusual weeds to each part of you/ Do give a life—no shepherdess, but Flora/ Peering in April's front" (4.4.1-3). He himself is disguised as a country shepherd, beneath his station: "Your high self, [...], you have obscured/ With a swain's wearing, and me, poor lowly maid,/ Most goddesslike pranked up" (4.4.7-10). Florizell names Jupiter, Neptune and Apollo as setting the precedent to disguise oneself humbly for love; he says Apollo dressed even as he is now, disguised as a shepherd: "The gods themselves,/ Humbling their deities to love, have taken/ The shapes of beasts upon them. [...] Golden Apollo, a poor humble swain,/ As I seem now" (4.4.30-31).

In addition, in the myth that Florizell references, Mercury takes advantage of Apollo's absence while he was off in his shepherd disguise and rustles his cattle: "the god of Delphi was playing the herdsman, [...]. While his thoughts were distracted by love and he mooned away on his panpipes, the cattle he'd left unguarded [...] were sighted by Mercury, Atlas' grandson, who craftily rustled and hid them away in the forest" (Bk 2 680-686). Autolycus similarly takes advantage of the situations he happens upon in *The Winter's Tale*; he fleeces the Clown, acquires Florizell's fine clothing in exchange for his own rags, and tricks the Shepherd and Clown into bringing Perdita's jewels to Florizell, among other exploits.

Arachne

The disguises of the gods that Florizell uses as precedents to justify his shepherd's costume are portrayed in the *Metamorphoses* in Arachne's web. In her weaving competition with Athena, Arachne portrays the gods' misdemeanors of deception against mortals:

Arachne's picture presented Europa seduced by Jove in the guise of the bull; [...] You could see how he caught Alcmena disguised as her husband Amphitryon, then how he stole fair Danae's love in a shower of gold; how he cheated Aegina as fire, Mnemosyne, dressed as a shepherd; [...] There was Apollo, dressed as a farmer, [...] The fair-haired warrior goddess resented Arachne's success and ripped up the picture betraying the gods' misdemeanors.

(Bk 6, 103-131)

Minerva herself was disguised as a crone during the competition. Though Arachne's weaving is flawless, Minerva strikes her down as punishment for her insolence and pride, just as Apollo punishes Leontes.

One image that Shakespeare does not use is that of Jupiter seducing Proserpina as a serpent: "[he seduced] Proserpina, Ceres' child and his own, as a speckled serpent." Shakespeare comes near this example but does not use it. Had he wanted Leontes to follow Pandosto in his attempts at incest, this image in Arachne's web would have made a striking parallel, especially if Perdita is associated with Proserpina. Instead, he goes out of his way to have Leontes explicitly state that he thought only of Hermione when he looked upon Perdita's beauty: "I thought of [Hermione] even in these looks I made" (5.1.227). Clearly Shakespeare wanted to focus on redemption and repentance; he rescues Leontes from Pandosto's fate and gives him redemption through penance. He did not take advantage of a clear opportunity to associate Perdita and Leontes with incestuous love or the Christian image of the serpent.

Pygmalion

In the *Metamorphoses*, the sculptor Pygmalion rejects marriage because he is disgusted with the vices of women. He sculpts a beautiful woman in ivory: “This heavenly woman appeared to be real; you’d surely suppose her alive and ready to move, if modesty didn’t preclude it; art was concealed by art to a rare degree” (Bk 10, 250-251). Pygmalion falls in love with his creation and prays to Venus to allow him to wed a woman resembling his ivory maiden, for he dared not ask the gods directly to bring her to life to be his wife. Venus, however, “understood what Pygmalion meant,” and granted his prayer; as he stroked the statue, the stone responded to his touch and lost its hardness, becoming a real maiden. The story of Pygmalion is the only one of its kind in the *Metamorphoses*. Many mortals are changed to stone or animals, but this is the only one, besides Deucalion and Pyrrha’s repopulation story, that features a stone transforming into a human.

The story of Pygmalion is more important for the ending of *The Winter’s Tale* than any other in the *Metamorphoses*. The reanimation of Hermione’s statue is very similar to the coming to life of Pygmalion’s ivory maiden; Shakespeare clearly drew from the myth and used it as a model for the ending of *The Winter’s Tale*. Shakespeare sets up the parallel in Act V, scene 1 of the play, where Paulina invokes the idea of the ideal woman, similar to that which Pygmalion sculpts, before the audience even knows of the existence of Hermione’s statue: “Or [if] from the all that are [in existence] took something good/ To make a perfect woman, she you killed/ Would be unparalleled” (5.1.14-16). Just as Pygmalion’s art is “concealed by art,” so does Hermione’s statue appear intensely lifelike to those who accompany Paulina to view it. Leontes is astounded

and moved by the beauty and exquisite craftsmanship of the statue as it seems to him that he looks not upon marble but his lost wife:

Her natural posture!
Chide me dear stone, that I may say indeed
Thou art Hermione; or rather, thou art she
In they not chiding, for she was tender
As infancy and grace. [...]
What was he that did make it? See, my lord,
Would you not deem it breathed? And that those veins
Did verily bear blood? [...]
The fixture of her eye has motion in't,
As we are mocked with art. (5.3.64-68)

Like Pygmalion, Leontes wants to kiss the statue of his beloved and watches as she comes to life. In Leontes' case, it is the likeness of his once-living wife, whereas Pygmalion fell in love with the beauty of the statue itself first. Like Hermione, the (formerly) ivory maiden surpasses all other women. In *The Winter's Tale*, it is Hermione's wifely qualities that are most important, rather than her physical beauty (though her beauty is unsurpassed as well). Her statue and living body, once she is brought to life, are aged. Even so, both Pygmalion and Leontes prize their wives above all other women; they will have no other. Both men are allowed the pleasure of using their own hands to welcome the beloved into life. Pygmalion's miracle is made possible by Venus, just as Leontes' wish to kiss the statue impels Paulina to use her magic to bring Hermione back to life.

Medea

Ovid's Medea performs a service for her husband, Jason, similar to that which Paulina performs for Leontes. Both women use magic to restore a loved one, but their methods of implementation differ greatly. Throughout the scene of Hermione's reanimation, Paulina insists that she is not assisted by wicked powers and that her magic is lawful; she chants her spell in view of everyone:

If you can behold it,
I'll make the statue move indeed, descend
And take you by the hand. But then you'll think—
Which I protest against—I am assisted
By wicked powers. [...] It is required
You do awake your faith. Then all stand still;
Or those that think it is unlawful business
I am about, let them depart. [...]
Music! Awake her! Strike!
'Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach;
Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come,
I'll fill your grave up. Stir, nay come away;
Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him
Dear life redeems you.
You perceive she stirs. (5.3.87-103)

Medea does her magic by moonlight, calls on the gods of the underworld to assist her, and allows no one to see her art. She visits the shrine of Hecate, a three-formed underworld goddess of dark magic, and there she prays to Pluto and Proserpina in her ritual to restore Jason's

father. She alters Aeson by magic, restoring his youth and thus giving him a new lease on life, by draining out his blood and refilling his veins with a youthful potion.

Depending on the interpretation, Paulina either brings a statue of Hermione to life through a miracle or she preserves Hermione all along but stages a miracle for Leontes. It is unclear whether Paulina has used her 'arts' to preserve Hermione secretly or if she has been dead during the sixteen year interval and Paulina is truly bringing her back to life. She claims to use magic to restore Hermione, and it appears to Leontes and the audience that she has; she does not, however, demonstrate the use of black magic like Medea's. While Aeson's restoration is gruesome and dark, Hermione's is not graphic and is even accompanied by music. Medea must pray to the gods of death to allow Aeson to postpone the time of his becoming a subject of the kingdom of the dead. Paulina's magic is performed in view of a crowd of onlookers, not in secret, and Hermione is made to appear naturally aged sixteen years; she is more wrinkled than before. It is her life-breath that is restored, but not her youth.

Part II : *The Winter's Tale* and the Christian Tradition

In addition to classical associations of Sicily with the underworld, there are Christian reasons for the association as well. In the late Middle Ages, Sicily was one of the two primary locations, along with Lough Derg in Ireland, which were rumored to have entrances to Purgatory and Hell. It is easy to extend Sicily's classical underworld connections to Christian mythology, but additionally, there were contemporary stories that were part of the foundational doctrine of Purgatory that linked it with Sicily.¹³ These connections would have made Sicily a far more attractive place than Bohemia to set the Pandosto/Leontes character's story, particularly in light of the major changes and additions that Shakespeare made to Robert Greene's plot. In addition to the geographical reversal providing a better parallel to the Proserpina story (the reference to Proserpina and Dis being original to *The Winter's Tale*), Sicily's associations with Purgatory made it the ideal location to set Leontes' long, self-imposed penance. It is both the place where he endures his long punishment and the place from which Perdita and Hermione depart and eventually return. Hermione's whereabouts are shrouded and never revealed, but the presence of her ghost allows the possibility for a journey in the other world. In this chapter, I will first examine the details of the Sicilian links to the other world found in the Christian tradition and how Shakespeare exploited them, and then look more closely at Leontes' penance in this context. First, I will look at the play generally and establish that there is an intentional Christian perspective.

¹³ Le Goff, (201-205).

Chapter One: A History of Criticism and a Defense for a Christian Reading

Though the play was popular in the early seventeenth century, particularly at court, as it aged it was less and less understood, especially as the Aristotelian unities became the norm for plays' structures. From the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-eighteenth century, *The Winter's Tale* fell out of favor and was not performed at all, and it was not until the beginning of the nineteenth century that the play was revived in anything close to its complete form.¹⁴ In the introduction to *The Winter's Tale: Critical Essays*, Maurice Hunt explains that, "For reasons that still are not wholly clear, the interregnum and early years of the Restoration created a great barrier to retrospective understanding of the complex romance conventions according to which *The Winter's Tale* was constructed."¹⁵ In 1856, Charles Keane's productions of the play, among other historical 'corrections,' erased the so-called anachronisms that made reference to Christian elements.¹⁶ By 1918, Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch argued that *The Winter's Tale* was a "clumsy experimental play" with many mistakes, insisting, "I maintain that he bungled it."¹⁷ Following E.M.W. Tillyard's assertion that Shakespeare must have been "in a state of mind akin to the religious"¹⁸ when he wrote the late romances, it was not until 1947, in the first book-length study of the play, *The Winter's Tale: A Study*, by S.L. Bethell, that the Christian references were discussed as anything other than the sloppy mistakes of Shakespeare's romance-era slump. Bethell argued that the play should be viewed as taking place in different "planes of reality," and that it is moved into a "universal realm" that is outside a local time and place, and so allowed for

¹⁴ Hunt, (3-6).

¹⁵ Hunt, (4).

¹⁶ Hunt, (10).

¹⁷ Hunt, (15).

¹⁸ Hunt, (22-24)

a Christian reading of the play.¹⁹ The anachronisms, or mistakes, as the Christian references were once known, are many and are found in nearly every scene of the play.

The first Christian imagery occurs in I.2, in the conversation between Hermione and Polixenes. Polixenes describes to Hermione how totally innocent he and Leontes were when they were young boys; in his description he uses the ultimate Christian symbol of innocence, the lamb:

We were as twinn'd lambs that did frisk i' the sun,
And bleat the one at the other: what we changed
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream'd
That any did. Had we pursued that life,
And our weak spirits ne'er been higher rear'd
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
Boldly, 'not guilty,' the imposition cleared
Hereditary ours. (1.2.67)

He refers to original sin, (the imposition [...] hereditary ours) and says that not only were they innocent in having committed no sins, but they had been cleared of the burden of Original Sin, referencing the sacrifice of Christ. Though they were as innocent as lambs in their youth, they matured into adults who have “slipped,” Hermione infers. If Mamillius (and also Florizel, though he is not present in this scene) are copies of their fathers, as we are told several times, then Mamillius' death could take on a greater significance through his utter innocence. Similarly, Perdita is most commonly associated with innocence, possibly connecting her (and Mamillius) with the Holy Innocents: “the innocent milk in its most innocent mouth” (3.2.105) and thereby comparing Leontes to Herod and the Massacre of the Innocents.

¹⁹ Hunt (23-24)

The prince is foremost a casualty of Leontes' folly and a loss that serves the narrative purpose of wounding and punishing the king. It is Mamillius whom Apollo claims first in retribution for Leontes' denial of his oracle. In this Christian context, Mamillius is like a sacrificial lamb, who washes away Leontes' sins and enables the eventual reunion of the rest of his family. Leontes cannot be forgiven in exchange for the blood of his son, though. The sacrifice of the son is not enough, and penance is required to cleanse Leontes and make him worthy of Hermione again; Leontes must submit to purgation through penance.

As Polixenes describes his and Leontes' innocence as something of the past, Hermione assumes that the two "have tripped since." The discussion between them that follows implies that the sins referred to are carnal, and the implication is that Hermione and Polixenes' Queen were the temptations to which the two men had succumbed. Hermione responds:

Grace to boot!
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils. Yet go on.
Th' offenses we have made you do we'll answer,
If you first sinned with us and that with us
You did continue fault and that you slipped not
With anyone but us. (1.2.99-105)

Here Hermione jokes about Polixenes' and Leontes' marital faithfulness, but in her comments she takes the inherent sin for granted, using the words "fault," "slip," and "sin" as euphemisms for sex. While this conversation serves to make the audience (and possibly Leontes) think of sex in association with Hermione and Polixenes, since that topic will imminently become the crucial plot point, the terms in which it is discussed are subtly Christian. It would seem that Shakespeare

deliberately included this context that would have been familiar to his audience, but not overtly. By disguising the Christian context with a pagan setting and gods he was able to avoid incurring censure for broaching topics that could have been too controversial for the stage.

In 1.2 when Leontes accuses Camillo of being complicit in the affair between Polixenes and Hermione, he describes his past relationship with Camillo: “I have trusted thee, Camillo. [...] / [in] my chamber councils, wherein, priestlike, thou / Hast cleansed my bosom, I from thee departed / Thy penitent reformed” (1.2.232-238). This language makes clear reference to the Christian rituals of confession and absolution between parishioners and priests, and also introduces the image of a penitent Leontes early in the play. Leontes demonstrates that he knows the value of penance and foreshadows his long penance to come.

When Polixenes finds out about Leontes’ suspicions, in his lament he makes reference to Judas Iscariot’s betrayal of Christ: “O, then my best blood turn / To an infected jelly and my name / Be yoked with his that did betray the Best!” (1.2.488-490). Shakespeare here invokes not just any betrayal, but the ultimate Christian betrayal and the most infamous sinner in Christianity. This comparison is similar to that of the lamb’s innocence in 1.2. Shakespeare has chosen the most powerful and recognizable symbols of innocence and of sin for a Christian audience.

When Leontes and Paulina imagine the reaction of Hermione’s ghost to his remarriage, “(where we offenders appear now) soul vexed, why to me?” the phrase “soul vexed” is a clear reference to the recitation of Psalm 42 from the burial rituals of *The Book of Common Prayer*: “My God, my soule is vexed within me: therefore will I remember thee concerning the land of Jordane, [...],” and “Why art thou so vexed, (O my soule) and why arte thou so disquieted within

me?”²⁰ A second reference to the burial section of *The Book of Common Prayer* is found at 4.4.475. The Shepherd’s dismayed exclamation that he will be hanged and buried by the executioner “Where no priest shovels in dust,” is a reference these lines:

Then the priest castyng earth upon the Corps, shall saye.
I COMMENDE thy soule to God the father almighty, [...].²¹

It is significant not only that Shakespeare makes reference to this Christian book, but also that he alludes to the parts of it that concern burial and the passage of the soul into the next world. The boundaries between this life and the next are explored throughout the play.

During the Bohemian pastoral scenes, there are several references to overtly Christian elements. Though he is named after the son of Mercury, it is from Autolycus that we hear many of the Christian references in Act IV. Autolycus discusses his own virtues and vices, purposely referring to his vices as his virtues in accordance with his roguish priorities. Speaking of himself while in disguise:

AUTOLYCUS: I knew him once for a servant of the prince. I cannot tell, good sir, for which of his virtues it was, but he was certainly whipped out of court.

CLOWN: His vices, you would say. There’s no virtue whipped out of the court. They cherish it to make it stay there, and yet it will no more but abide.

AUTOLYCUS: Vices, I would say sir. (4.3.84-90)

At the end of this scene, Autolycus vows to attend the sheep-shearing festival and steal from the Clown again, saying “If I make not this cheat bring out another and the shearers prove sheep, let me be unrolled [from the book of thieves] and my name put in the book of virtue” (4.3.119-122).

²⁰ The Book of Common Prayer of 1549 (x. Of Buriall).

²¹ The Book of Common Prayer of 1549 (x. Of Buriall), as cited by Hunt, p. 24.

Just before his encounter with Autolycus, as the Clown is headed to market to purchase goods for the feast, he mentions that the shearers are “three-man songmen all, and very good ones; but they are most of them means and basses, but one Puritan amongst them, and he sings psalms to hornpipes” (4.3.42-3). Stephen Orgel notes that this is a “rare Shakespearean sneer at Puritans.”²² Autolycus goes on to say that at one point in his career he was a puppeteer running a showing of *The Prodigal Son*. Finally, Autolycus describes the feast-goers’ clamor to purchase his wares “as if my trinkets had been hallowed and brought a benediction to the buyer” (4.4.684-685). This comment references the sale of relics and could perhaps bring to mind the sale of indulgences as well. At the very least it concerns profits made by the church or by unscrupulous opportunists like Chaucer’s Pardoner, who is unashamed to admit that he sells false relics.

In Act IV, Perdita mentions Whitsun Pastorals and the giving of alms (4.4.156), which are clearly out of place in a classical setting. This “anachronism” is one of the most flagrant and egregious to those who were of the opinion that these Christian elements were mistakes on Shakespeare’s part. If these Christian references were indeed mistakes, then Shakespeare was extraordinarily careless in the composition of this play. It seems much more likely that the Christian language was intentional, and that the play is meant to be understood on some level as having a Christian context. If we allow for the existence of the play in a sort of “universal plane” as S.L. Bethel suggests, a place where separate times and histories may be freely mingled, the play is considerably enriched through multiple contexts that may be understood simultaneously. But what does this mean for the focus of this study? What is the reason for the switch in geographical location of the action from Shakespeare’s source? How did the switch enrich the play?

²² Orgel, (713).

Jacques Le Goff has documented Sicily's role in the formation of Purgatory and its part in the mythology that surrounded Purgatory before its attack by reformers. Aside from its presence in the history of Purgatory, Sicily had a longstanding connection to Hell. The roots of this connection can be found in classical sources linking Sicily to the underworld, which I examined at length in the first part of this paper. But in a Christian context, Sicily also had a longstanding association with Hell, one that was difficult to overcome for those who wished to link Sicily with Purgatory.²³

One of the earliest and largest questions of Purgatory was where did the purgation take place? Gregory the Great suggested that the purgation occurs in the place where the sin was committed.²⁴ Most of the early builders of Purgatory did not trouble with finding a place for the fire. Instead they focused on the spiritual function of a purgatorial place and the ways in which the living could aid those who resided in that place: the souls in purgatory could be aided by prayer and suffrages. These acts enabled the living to “support their relatives and friends beyond the grave and to sustain their own hopes of benefiting in turn from similar assistance.”²⁵ Once Purgatory was established (by the end of the twelfth century) as existing neither in Heaven nor Hell, but on its own, scholars began to look more closely for a space where it might corporeally or spiritually exist.²⁶

Le Goff notes several texts that associate Sicily with a purgatorial place or with the entrance to Purgatory (as he does with Ireland as well), but also notes that Sicily did not long remain the locus for Purgatory as it had too deep an association with Hell (built from the foundations of classical myth). Purgatory needed independence from Hell, even though when it

²³ Le Goff, (208).

²⁴ Le Goff, (34).

²⁵ Le Goff, (34).

²⁶ Le Goff (150-151).

finally came into being it closely resembled Hell and its punishments rather than a benign place of waiting.²⁷ Even if Purgatory was only temporarily recognized as a locus for Purgatory, it remains likely that Shakespeare exploited this link with it in *The Winter's Tale*.

Some medieval scholars (Peter Comestor being one) asserted that either man or God could administer purgatorial punishments. If penance and punishment for those who repented were not completed in one's earthly life, then God would continue the sinner's purgation in the afterlife.²⁸ This belief that a sinner could begin purgation in this life is highly applicable to the story of Leontes. If we also look at Gregory the Great's idea that purgation could occur in the place where the crime was committed,²⁹ then we are given much to consider in relation to the penance of Leontes. In Greene's *Pandosto*, rather than perform penance, Pandosto commits suicide in shame. Leontes' penance is an addition made by Shakespeare that dramatically alters the course of the play and sets up the return of Hermione. Pandosto's queen Bellaria does not return, and both are lost. If Shakespeare had made Leontes king of Bohemia, more directly paralleling his source, the king could just as easily have completed his penance there. In fact, Sicily, known for its abundant crops, makes an excellent location for the fertility link between Perdita and Florizel, so he could still have taken advantage of Proserpina's link to the underworld. So what would be gained by switching the locales? It seems unlikely that it would have been simply for further distance from the source text. Instead, when Leontes, who is the only main character (other than Paulina) who does not travel between Sicily and Bohemia, is placed in Sicily, he is given a further link with a recognized entrance to the Christian otherworld, whether Hell or Purgatory: Mt. Etna.

²⁷ Le Goff (201-208).

²⁸ Le Goff (156).

²⁹ Le Goff (91-92).

We can consider Leontes' physical proximity to this entrance in two ways, in that Sicily has associations with both Hell and Purgatory. We can say positively that Shakespeare associated Etna with this link if we look at lines from *Titus Andronicus*: "Now let hot Etna cool in Sicily, /And be my heart an ever-burning hell!" (3.1.241-242), cries Titus' son Marcus in anger. Additionally, in III.1, Titus's body could be a metaphor for the idea of Mt. Purgatory. Shakespeare gives us an image of Titus, the weathered but strong old soldier, standing on stage with his maimed limb pointing down and his intact hand raised to Heaven: "O, here I lift this one hand up to heaven, /And bow this feeble ruin to the earth. /If any power pities wretched tears, /To that I call!" (3.1.206-209). He follows by saying that his sorrows are bottomless, as are his passions. He then compares himself to the earth: he says his bowels, the bowels of the earth, cannot hide heaven's woes, but he must vomit them forth (3.1.218-233). The speech also uses language of binding and confinement, and bursting out in passions or vomiting that remind the reader of Typhon chained under Etna, particularly when paired with Marcus Andronicus' explicit reference to Aetna that immediately follows. As this is one of Shakespeare's early plays (c. 1590-1593), this example shows that Shakespeare was thinking of Sicily and Etna's link to the underworld long before the composition of *The Winter's Tale*.

If Shakespeare meant us to make the association between Sicily and Hell, what does this mean for our question since in the end Leontes is redeemed? Perhaps being so close to the entrance to Hell, with its fires so near and the loss of his family and heirs so acute, Leontes is motivated to continue his penance for as long as he must. Fear of Hell was a great motivational tool wielded by the church, and in the play it is wielded by Paulina. In her initial berating of Leontes, she in fact tells him that he is essentially damned, and that there is no hope for him:

Do not repent these things, for they are heavier
Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee

To nothing but despair. A thousand knees
Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,
Upon a barren mountain, and still winter
In storm perpetual, could not move the gods
To look that way thou wert. (3.2.228-33)

Her condemnation of him is absolute. She says that even if Leontes were to spend an enormous amount of time in a position of supplication, enduring a never ending winter storm on a mountaintop, naked and without nourishment, this would be insufficient penance for the gods even to look his way. Her description is one of Hell, for she advises him to have no hope, which is the key difference in many depictions of Hell and Purgatory, which are otherwise identical. Stephen Greenblatt notes an example of an illustration of Purgatory and Hell in a fifteenth-century illuminated manuscript. There are side-by-side depictions of two separate chambers, each containing

a yawning hell-mouth within which are crowded the suffering figures of the dead, [...]. The images are virtually identical, save for a single differentiating feature: on one side an angel is hovering near the top, reaching out to one of the souls who raises up his hands to be pulled out of the horrible mouth; on the other side a devil blocks the exit, and none of the souls has any hope of escaping.³⁰

The picture Paulina paints for Leontes is that of the hopeless soul with no chance of escape. Leontes, however, is not in Hell yet. He is still in this world, and still able to repent. He passes Paulina's test and shows penitence. Not only does he repent, but he does not express fear for his soul, which we know is at stake within the context of the play. Though we have no details on exactly what sort of damnation might await an unrepentant soul, we do know that the soul can be endangered by one of the threats Leontes makes to Antigonus. When Leontes commands him to

³⁰ Greenblatt, (51-52).

be the one to dispose of the infant Perdita, he says, “I do in justice charge thee, /On thy soul’s peril and thy body’s torture” (3.2.179-180). With Paulina’s assistance, he is able to repay his debt.

Leontes repents truly and takes the burden of penance upon himself, calling for Paulina to punish him with words, for it is emotional torture for him to think about what he has done to Hermione, Perdita, and most of all, Mamillius. The lack of total despair is supported by the oracle itself, which allows Leontes’ heir to be restored if “that which was lost is found.” The fact that Perdita could have survived, though it is unlikely, provides the narrative with the possibility of hope. Like this part of the oracle, Purgatory offered medieval Christians hope both for more souls to be allowed into Paradise, and for the possibility of easing the suffering of those souls through prayer and suffrages.

Leontes’ actions could be seen as a reaction to the threat of Hell; he is very near to Hell in both body and spirit. His soul is clearly in jeopardy as a result of his crimes against his family, Camillo, Polixenes and Antigonus. But his reaction is not one of despair. He immediately makes plans to visit the bodies of his wife and son, and to daily “visit /The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there /Shall be my recreation. /So long as nature /Will bear up with this exercise, so long /I daily vow to use it” (3.2.136-140). He will do what he can for those he has wronged, combining his penance with remembrance of the dead. If we open the door to a purgatorial interpretation of the play, then this act of praying for the dead gains further meaning in the Christian context.

In this context, Leontes’ prayers for his dead family serve not only to remember them, but also to assist them. It is his duty as their closest of kin to perform this task, though if he remained deceived about Hermione’s innocence, he could certainly have chosen not to do this

duty. In her defense speech Hermione hypothesizes this very situation, saying that if she were actually guilty, she should be detested:

[...] if one jot beyond
The bound of honor, or in act or will
That way inclining, hardened by the hearts
Of all that hear me, and my near'st of kin
Cry fie upon my grave! (3.2.49-51)

This reference to her nearest of kin is clearly an evocation of the significant familial obligation to pray for the souls of one's dead family members.³¹

Those who prayed for the dead did so partly in hopes that when they were no longer living, their remaining family members would do the same for them. We know that Leontes meant these prayers to be efficacious in some way, for when Hermione is restored at the end of the play, he says "I saw her, /As I thought, dead, and have in vain said many /A prayer upon her grave" (5.3.139-141). It makes sense to allow the possibility that the prayers that Leontes provides for Hermione and Mamillius are meant to speed them into Paradise.

An additional example from Leontes' vow that he will spend his days remembering those two whose deaths he has brought about is his intention to have the cause of their deaths etched on their gravestones, epitaphs that will mark him as the cause, "unto /Our shame perpetual" (3.2.235-236). This act is highly reminiscent of the practice, most prevalent in Spain, of hanging *sanbenitos* (the clothing worn by heretics, some penitent, some not, during their march to an auto-de-fé, and marking them as such), emblazoned with the heretic's name, hung on the wall of the cathedral, "unto their shame perpetual." There are even recorded instances of *sanbenitos* that were made anew and replaced when they grew too old and worn. The shame therefore stayed

³¹ Greenblatt, (145-147).

with a family for generations, acting as a warning and a deterrent for those who might be tempted to commit the same sin. This act on Leontes' part is one of penance, and therefore of hope. Like the prayers for the dead, it requires a belief that the crimes can be purged through such acts.

Leontes' loss is total; he has no children, no wife, and therefore no heirs, and a decree from god stating that he will receive no heir even if he takes a new wife. The loss of Hermione, though, is treated as something greater than the loss of a beloved spouse. Paulina says that the destruction of Hermione at Leontes' hands is exponentially graver than all of the other losses that came from Leontes' error, including the death of Paulina's own husband. Why is it that Paulina deems Hermione of such high value in comparison with Mamillius, Perdita, Camillo and Antigonus? For S. L. Bethell, "Hermione embodies the Christian virtues of 'clear vision, firmness and patience.'"³² She is in grace.

³² Hunt, (24).

Chapter Two: Leontes' Crimes and Hermione's Virtue

Leontes

First, let us examine Leontes' crimes that Paulina deems lesser than the destruction of Hermione, how he is punished for them, and how he atones. His first crime was the false accusation of Polixenes. For this transgression, he loses his closest friend. In act V, he seeks to aid Florizel, the son of his friend, in any way that he can, and agrees to attempt to convince Polixenes to allow Florizel to marry Perdita. When he finally meets Polixenes again face to face, he begs his friend's forgiveness.

His second crime was against Camillo, whom he attempted to coerce into murdering Polixenes upon pain of death. Similarly to the result of his first misdeed, he loses the services of Camillo, which we are told by Polixenes in Act 4, are highly valuable. Polixenes says, "The need I have of thee thine own goodness hath made. Better not to have had thee than thus to want thee" (4.2.11.13), as he begs Camillo not to return to Sicily. Leontes clears Camillo's name, confessing his own part in Camillo's flight. He reconciles with Camillo upon his return to Sicily and in the final scene of the play, offers him Paulina as a wife.

The third victim of Leontes' madness is his son Mamillius, whom he loves and always believes to be his own. In accusing Hermione publicly, Leontes so wounds Mamillius that he takes ill and dies. Leontes knew that such a public accusation would harm his son. Before Polixenes escaped with Camillo, Leontes was content to have him murdered, ending his revenge there. He had planned not to accuse Hermione publicly for the sake of Mamillius. Camillo urges him to think of his son: "Provided that, when he's removed, your highness /Will take again your

queen as yours at first, /Even for your son's sake" (1.2.334-336), and Leontes agrees: "Thou dost advise me /Even as mine own course have set down. /I'll give no blemish to her honor, none" (1.2.339).

But he soon chooses the pursuit of vengeance over the preservation of his son's wellbeing and name. He turns his full fury on Hermione once Polixenes is out of his reach, with no regard to his son's welfare at all. He even first publicly accuses Hermione with Mamillius present, interrupting Mamillius' 'winter tale' that he is telling his mother and ripping him from her side. He sends his son away, the audience never seeing the young prince again: "Bear the boy hence, He shall not come about her" (2.1.59). Mamillius soon falls ill; Leontes is highly concerned for his son, not sleeping and asking for hourly reports about the boy's health, but he does not believe that he himself is at fault, placing the blame on Hermione: "To see his nobleness! /Conceiving the dishonor of his mother, /He straight declined, drooped, took it deeply, /Fastened and fixed the shame on't in himself" (2.3.12-15). The language Shakespeare uses to describe Mamillius' attaching of the shame onto himself is again reminiscent of the *sanbenito* and other outward marks of shame. Here Mamillius takes on a shame that is not his own, attempting to bear its weight, but he is not strong enough and does not survive.

Mamillius' death is what finally lifts the veil from Leontes' eyes and allows him to see his folly. He has denied the word of god, and he is punished by losing his son. In this way Leontes' offense against Mamillius is two-fold: he damages his son's health and reputation by publicly accusing Hermione of infidelity, and when Leontes rashly offends Apollo, Mamillius becomes collateral damage. He is destroyed because he is dear to Leontes and valuable as Sicily's heir. Leontes begins his confession upon the death of Mamillius, attempting to right the wrongs he has done to offend Apollo. There is no bringing his son back, but he offers Mamillius

what direct aid he can by praying over his grave. In addition, he heaps shame upon himself and makes penitence the focus of all his days. Guided by Paulina, he does not waver in his daily devotion, and he is still devastated by his son's death sixteen years later when we see him again in act V: "Prithee, no more; cease. Thou know'st /He dies to me again when talked of" (5.1.118-119).

After Mamillius, Perdita is Leontes' next victim. He will not recognize her as legitimate and has Antigonus cast her out. His first choice was to kill her, either by having her burned or by dashing her to the floor, but she is saved from that fate by Antigonus, who begs for her life in exchange for his. Without his daughter, he is made heirless by the death of his son. When the two are reunited in the final act, which is described to the audience by several gentlemen who witnessed the scene, we are told that Leontes, "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!'" (5.2.49-51). The gentleman also describes how Leontes related the circumstances of Hermione's death to Perdita: "One of the prettiest touches of all, [...] was when, at the relation of the queen's death, with the manner how she came to't bravely confessed and lamented by the king" (5.2.80-84). As he confessed to Apollo earlier, Leontes offers Perdita a confession of his crimes as atonement. Even until the moment in the final scene when Hermione is revealed, Leontes remains penitent.

Antigonus, the second victim who is not restored, was lost due to his part in the abandonment of Perdita, and his situation is more complex. Leontes extracts an oath from Antigonus, which forces him to be the one to dispose of the princess. Leontes chooses Antigonus for this task specifically as punishment for not 'ruling' his wife Paulina when she forces herself into Leontes' presence and presents Perdita to him. In this scene, Leontes clearly reveals before

Antigonus and his other lords that his suspicions are wild and erroneous; it should be obvious to them that his accusations are false when he calls all of them liars in regards to Paulina's actions as Perdita's advocate (2.3.145). Leontes accuses them of conspiring with her against him, but they all know that Antigonus attempted to stop Paulina. This fact should be proof enough for Antigonus to know that Leontes is wrong, and that it would be a crime to do his bidding. Antigonus is placed in what is the most unenviable position of anyone in the play, and he chooses to sacrifice himself, hoping for the best. Not only is Antigonus bound by his oath to Leontes and his loyalty to the crown, but he also must protect his family when Leontes threatens to kill Paulina if he does not obey. Antigonus does, however, have a choice, like Camillo, and instead of following in Camillo's footsteps he chooses to believe Leontes and obey him. Not only did Camillo not believe the false charges against Polixenes and Hermione, he refused to kill a king. When he abandons Perdita, Polixenes was already in Bohemia. He could have found refuge at Polixenes' court as had Camillo, but he does not take that path, and instead meets his gruesome end by a wild bear. In a way, he too betrayed his wife by not believing her in regard to Hermione's innocence.

In what becomes a chain reaction of wrongs that Leontes sets off, Paulina loses her husband to Leontes' madness (and his ship's crew is lost as well). Leontes is to blame, and Paulina reminds Leontes that it is his fault when she lists all of the people Leontes has destroyed: "I'll speak of [Hermione] no more, nor of your children; /I'll not remember you of my own lord, /Who is lost too" (3.2.227-229). Paulina is still mourning for her husband when she receives confirmation that Antigonus was indeed killed, "But O, the /noble combat that /'twixt joy and sorrow was fought in /Paulina! She had one eye declined for the loss of her /husband, and another elevated that the oracle was fulfilled" (5.2.71-74). Leontes allows Paulina to guide him

on his path of repentance and follows her instructions without fail. In a final act of reconciliation, he gives Paulina to Camillo in marriage, uniting the two figures that opposed him in his madness.

Finally, the one he injures most of all is Hermione. He publicly accuses her of infidelity and thereby of treason as the queen; he imprisons her at the end of her pregnancy, causing her to give birth prematurely in prison; he drags her to trial when she was physically weak from recently giving birth; and he causes the death of her son and casts out her daughter. As a result of all of these crimes against Hermione, she collapses and is presumed to have died. Leontes not only loses his beloved companion, but his heirs and the means to attain new heirs:

Whilst I remember
Her and her virtues, I cannot forget
My blemishes in them, and so still think of
The wrong I did myself, which was so much
That heirless it hath made my kingdom and
Destroyed the sweet'st companion that e'er man
Bred his hopes out of. True? (5.1.6-12)

He offers Hermione the same gift that he offers Mamillius; he prays each day at her grave, and makes it known to all, including their daughter, that he is the cause of her death. Paulina even refers to Hermione in act V as “she you killed” (5.1.15). After fifteen years it still pains Leontes to think of Hermione’s death in those terms, but he accepts the fact that it is true:

I think so. Killed?
She I killed? I did so, but thou strik'st me
Sorely to say I did. It is as bitter
Upon thy tongue as in my thought. Now, good now,
Say so but seldom. (5.1.16-20)

Potentially the greatest sacrifice Leontes makes in remembrance of Hermione is that he does not remarry. He is urged to do so by his lords, who are worried for the future of the kingdom while there is no heir, but Paulina counsels him to avoid taking a new wife, and he heeds her advice. “There is none worthy, /Respecting her that’s gone. Besides, the gods /Will have fulfilled their secret purposes; /For has not the divine Apollo said, [...] /That King Leontes shall not have an heir /Till his lost child be found?” (5.1.34-40).

In 3.2, Paulina declares that the destruction of Hermione is the greatest of all of Leontes’ crimes:

That thou betrayedest Polixenes, ‘twas nothing;
[...] Nor was’t much
Thou wouldst have poisoned good Camillo’s honor,
To have him kill a king, [...]
Whereof I reckon
The casting forth to crows thy baby daughter
To be none or little, [...]
Nor is’t directly laid to thee, the death
Of the young prince, [...]
This is not, no,
Laid to thy answer. But the last – O lords,
When I have said, cry ‘Woe!’ – the queen, the queen,
The sweet’st dear’s creature’s dead, and vengeance for’t
Not dropped down yet. (3.2.181-200)

Hermione is many times referred to as ‘good’ or the ‘good queen’. She is also frequently associated with the word grace, sometimes spoken by her. In 1.2, she uses the exclamation “Grace to Boot!” (1.2.81) (meaning heaven help me). In referring to her “first good deed,” as she infers from Leontes’ praise of her having spoken only once before to better purpose than when

she convinced Polixenes to stay with them, she calls this first good deed the older sister of her current one: “It has an elder sister, /Or I mistake you. O, would her name were Grace!” (1.2.98-99). When Leontes tells her that it was when she agreed to marry him, she replies, “’Tis grace indeed” (1.2.130).

When Leontes first accuses Hermione, she tells him that he is mistaken, and when he persists, her first thought is for the pain that it will cause him when he eventually realizes his error: “How will this grieve you, /When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that /You thus have published me! Gentle my lord, /You scarce can right me throughly then to say /You did mistake” (2.1.96-100). She goes on to say that she must be patient, marking her first explicit association with Griselda (2.1.106). As she prepares to be led away to prison, she counsels her weeping women not to cry: “Do not weep, good fools; /There is no cause. When you shall know your mistress /Has deserved prison, then abound in tears /As I come out. This action I now go on /Is for my better grace” (2.1.118-122). According to Hermione, enduring the suffering of prison will be beneficial to her. Through a trial of patience she will come to “better grace.” Her comments come very close to naming her imprisonment as a trial of purgation that will bring her closer to the state of grace of the elect in Paradise. The innocent who suffer willingly are made better by their suffering, as are the penitent. As she leaves, she says to Leontes, “I never wished to see you sorry; now /I trust I shall” (2.1.147-148). She remains confident that her name will be cleared, and that Leontes will suffer for his error, though she does not wish suffering upon him.

As Antigonus and the other lords attempt to convince Leontes of his error, they warn him of the suffering he will cause to himself, Hermione and Mamillius if he is wrong in his suspicions. This attempt to avoid suffering is contrasted later in the play when Leontes has carried out his crimes against his family and has need of suffering as penance. One lord pleas in

Hermione's favor, "Please you t'accept it, that the queen is spotless /I' th' eyes of heaven and to you—I mean, /In this which you accuse her" (2.1.131-133). The lord says she is spotless in the eyes of heaven, which is what truly matters in a Christian context. It is the final judgment that is most important; the judgment of Leontes, or any court of the living, is subject to human error. Though the punishments meted out by man are vulnerable to being misapplied, these punishments take on their true significance through the context of divine truth. God does not overlook the suffering of those who, like Hermione, are wrongly punished, and counts it toward their 'sentence' of purgation.³³ This suffering could not benefit the unrepentant, but for those who repent and those who are innocent, suffering is a valuable currency in the context of the afterlife. The lord's clarification that Hermione is spotless "In this which you accuse her" shows that Hermione, being human and therefore not perfect, whether tarnished by original sin or the inevitable small sins that affect humans, is able to benefit from the suffering she is about to endure.

Hermione

We first see Paulina onstage when she goes to visit Hermione in prison. She will become Hermione's best and most fervent advocate. Her first comments concerning Hermione are, "Good lady, /No court in Europe is too good for thee" (2.2.3-4). This opinion sets the tone for Paulina's defense of Hermione throughout the play, and Paulina indirectly refers to many of Hermione's virtues each time she mentions her. She notes Hermione's honesty, honor and grace:

³³ Le Goff, (156).

“Here’s ado, /To lock up honesty and honor from /Th’access of gentle visitors” (2.2.9-10), and “How fares our gracious lady?” (2.2.21).

In the following scene Paulina brings Hermione’s newborn daughter to Leontes, and says to those who try to stop her, “Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas, /Than the queen’s life? A gracious innocent soul, /More free than he is jealous” (2.3.28-30). Hermione is many times called innocent, meaning in the most obvious sense that she is not guilty of the crime that Leontes has accused her of committing. We are told that Hermione compares herself with Perdita in innocence: “My poor prisoner, I am innocent as you” (2.2.38-39). Paulina says that Hermione is free, though she is in prison; she is clearly not referring to Hermione’s physical liberty. It seems likely, then, that she refers to Hermione’s spirit, which is “spotless—in that which [Leontes] accuse[s] her” (2.1.156-158), Her soul is not only innocent, but also gracious.

When Paulina confronts Leontes with the infant, they have an exchange in which Paulina argues for Hermione’s goodness:

PAULINA: Good my liege, I come—

And I beseech you hear me, [...]

I say I come

From your good queen.

LEONTES: Good queen?

PAULINA: Good queen, my lord,

Good queen. I say good queen,

And would by combat make her good, so were I

A man, the worst about you. [...]

The good queen,

For she is good, hath brought you forth a daughter [...]. (2.2.52-66)

She is emphatic that Hermione is indeed Leontes’ good queen, and she will do everything in her power to convince him that she is faithful. Though her efforts are fruitless, she applies the same

level of dedication to guiding Leontes on his path of penance later in the play. If she does not convince Leontes, she makes a good case for the audience to believe her, and if we look at her words in hindsight, after the truth of Hermione's innocence is confirmed, we can form a detailed portrait of Hermione's virtues. We receive one of the most telling impressions of Hermione's character, though, from her own speech in defense of herself during her trial.

When the official list of the crimes of which she is accused is read, there are charges on it that are new to the audience; Leontes has exaggerated his charges against her and Camillo to even greater heights, making them sound all the more absurd if we look at the ways in which his accusations have grown over time. He has not only accused Hermione and Polixenes of adultery and therefore treason on Hermione's part, but has added that she conspired with Camillo to murder Leontes, which is a perverse inversion of Leontes' own intentions to have Camillo murder Polixenes. He has also added that Hermione aided Camillo and Polixenes in their flight.

Hermione first points out that her testimony in her defense is backed only by "what comes from myself" (3.2.24), and that she has no proof to substantiate her words. Her admission throws into relief the fact that Leontes also has no proof in his accusations against her, except that which comes from him. Here she begins a pattern of comparing her own actions to Leontes', in which she is shown to be full of virtue, and Leontes full of vice. She goes on to say that since her integrity is counted as false, so her words will not be trusted. She does not waver in her confidence that god will prove her right: "if powers divine /Behold our human actions, as they do, /I doubt not then that innocence shall make /False accusation blush and tyranny /Tremble at patience" (3.2.27-31). She knows that God is on her side, and that Leontes will be punished. She describes how, before Polixenes came to Sicily, she "was in [Leontes] grace" (3.2.46). This

phrase reminds the audience of God's grace, and it would seem that Shakespeare has given us evidence that Hermione is indeed in God's grace.

In the exchanges between Hermione and Leontes during her defense, Leontes first brings the term vices into their discussion: "I ne'er heard yet /That any of these bolder vices wanted /Less impudence to gainsay what they did /Than to perform it first" (3.2.53-56). Though he means to describe Hermione's actions and vices, he comes closer to describing the vices in himself. His words are angry and his rebuttals short. By contrast, Hermione seems calm and collected. She does not make counter-accusations against Leontes, but simply and humbly denies that she has done what she is accused of. She addresses Leontes as "Sir," while in contrast Leontes threatens her and tells her that he will soon have her executed. In this scene the distance between the king and queen grows greater, as he descends further into sin and she is lifted into grace. Hermione says that she does not fear the death with which he threatens her; she lists the reasons why her life holds little value for her now, and it is indirectly a list of Leontes' crimes against her:

Sir, spare your threats.
The bug which you would fright me with I seek.
To me can life be no commodity.
The crown and comfort of my life, your favor,
I do give lost, [...] My second joy,
And first fruits of my body, from his presence
I am barred, like one infectious. My third comfort,
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast [...]
Haled out to murder. Myself on every post
Proclaimed a strumpet: with immodest hatred
The childbed privilege denied, [...] Lastly, hurried
Here to this place, i' th' open air, before

I have got strength of limit. Now, my liege,
Tell me what blessings I have here alive,
That I should fear to die? (3.2.91-107)

She does not phrase these crimes against her as accusations, which would be unbecoming of her state of grace. Hermione's lack of accusations is pointed out by Leontes in the final scene when he begs the statue to admonish him, but then declares that its silence is more fitting: "Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed /Thou are Hermione; or rather, thou art she /In thy not chiding, for she was as tender /As infancy and grace" (5.3.28-31).

She finishes her defense by asking that Apollo be her judge, which Leontes agrees to, saying that her request is just. In Hermione's final lines before the reading of the oracle, she expresses the wish that her father could see her here on trial, but that he would be full of pity and not revenge. Unlike the tale of Hamlet, this story is not about revenge at all (excepting Leontes' misguided revenge, which is his undoing and which is diffused by the end of the third act of the play). It is here stated explicitly that in this story, pity is more important than revenge. Though Apollo takes revenge for Leontes' denial of his oracle, Hermione does not seek vengeance; she seeks the correction of her husband's errors and the purgation of his sin. In Hermione's final word, after the oracle clears her name, "Praised!" she gives thanks to the gods for restoring her honor, which was her only wish. Her exclamation links her with the favor of God, and she is worthy of it. It is for this reason that Hermione's loss is so much more detrimental than that of the others; her virtue merits it. Because her value is so great and her loss so terrible, so will her restoration be equally great and worthy of her, and the miracle that brings her back is dramatic and stunning. But before she can be returned to life, her husband must make himself worthy of her. Her high ideals that exemplify the virtues of God are destroyed by Leontes, and he must seek to regain these virtues, and thereby his wife and heirs, through a long penance.

Chapter Three: Leontes' Penance and Hermione's Return

Hermione's Ghost

Before we look at Leontes' penance, we should at least partially address the ambiguity of Hermione's death. It is impossible for the audience to know if Hermione has truly died or if she has gone into hiding; this ambiguity, if intentional (and I believe it is), allows Shakespeare to make use of narrative elements of both scenarios.³⁴ The hiding Hermione allows for a close parallel with Griselda, which was an important part of *Pandosto* and was certainly a consideration of Shakespeare's as well, as he has Hermione associate herself with patience on more than one occasion. But if Hermione is hiding, then what is the vision that Antigonus sees in 3.3? The ambiguity of Hermione's situation allows for a possible reading that Antigonus is correct and that he has indeed seen Hermione's true ghost, along with the implications and associations of staging her spirit's return to give Antigonus her message.

When the idea of Purgatory was newly formed in the late Middle Ages, it was often 'confirmed' by the accounts of those who experienced visions of visiting the underworld or who died and were revived. Similarly, accounts of Purgatory were given by those who experienced a visitation from one of the dead, who confirmed its existence.³⁵

Antigonus believes that his vision of Hermione was real, and that it was her ghost that visited him:

I have heard, but not believed, the spirits o' the dead
May walk again. If such thing be, thy mother

³⁴ "Weeping in the Upper World: The Orphic Frame in 5.3 of *The Winter's Tale* and the Archive of Poetry," in *Studies in the Literary Imagination*, Vol. 32, No. 2, Spring, 1999, p. 154.

³⁵ Greenblatt, (41).

Appeared to me last night, for ne'er was dream
 So like waking. To me comes a creature,
 Sometimes her head on one side, some another.
 I never saw a vessel of like sorrow,
 So filled and so becoming. In pure white robes,
 Like very sanctity, she did approach [...]
 Did this break from her: "Good Antigonus,
 Since fate, against thy better disposition,
 Hath made thy person for the thrower-out
 Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,
 Places remote enough are in Bohemia;
 There weep and leave it crying. And, for the babe
 Is counted lost forever, Perdita,
 I prithee call't. [...]" And so, with shrieks,
 She melted into air. [...]
 Dreams are toys;
 Yet for this once, yea, superstitiously,
 I will be squared by this. I do believe
 Hermione hath suffered death, [...]. (3.3.15-41)

The presence of her ghost and its manner suggest a link with Purgatory or at the very least a pagan otherworld. Antigonus' statement that he will "superstitiously" believe that he has seen Hermione's ghost links this passage with the Catholic "superstitions" that Protestants spent much time denouncing. That word is used frequently by Protestants to describe various elements of Catholic doctrine that they wished to dismiss. If we take the use of the word superstition as a reference to Catholicism, then the appearance of Hermione's ghost opens new possibilities for interpretation. (Similarly, Perdita asks that she not be called superstitious when she kneels to pray before the statue of Hermione in an obvious reference to Catholic iconography.) The ghost tells us several things: it wants Antigonus to name the infant Perdita and take her to Bohemia; it

also warns Antigonus that his part in Perdita's abandonment, though not entirely his fault, will doom him. If we look at the appearance of the ghost, it is unhappy, first dissolving into tears and wails, and departing "with shrieks." This is counter to the portrayal of Hermione as being in God's grace and therefore in Paradise, but we are also told that she is dressed "in pure white robes, like very sanctity." This appearance would suggest that she is not a purgatorial ghost like the father of Hamlet. Her ghost has contradictory elements from a Christian perspective, and cannot be clearly identified. This does not mean, however, that we should completely discount these aspects of the ghost. If we look at them separately and forget for a moment that they are contradictory, her ghost's presence in itself and the fact that it wails and shrieks suggest a purgatorial ghost. Unlike the ghost of Hamlet's father, Hermione's ghost is not vengeful. Its primary purpose in appearing is to instruct Antigonus in Perdita's care. This purpose, along with her white robes, suggesting that she is cleansed of all sin, reminds us of a beatific vision. In the end, though, her doleful manner is much more prominent than this "becoming" appearance of "sanctity."

In act V there is further discussion of Hermione's ghost, this time as a hypothetical specter. Paulina and Leontes imagine what Hermione's ghost would say to him if he were to take a new wife:

LEONTES: No more such wives; therefore, no wife! One worse,
And better used, would make her sainted spirit
Again possess her corpse, and on this stage
(Where we offenders now) appear soul-vexed,
And begin, "Why to me?"

[...]

PAULINA: Were I the ghost that walked, I'd bid you mark
Her eye, and tell me for what dull part in't

You chose her. Then I'd shriek, that even your ears
Should rift to hear me, and the words that followed
Should be "Remember mine." (5.1.56-67)

While Paulina's purpose is primarily to remind Leontes that no new wife could ever come close to being as good as his former queen, the scene they set up is reminiscent of reported hauntings of widows, such as the one from *The Ghost of Gy*, who are haunted by their deceased spouses.³⁶ It is particularly similar to the descriptions by Thomas More in *The Supplication of Souls*.³⁷ Leontes offers not one but two Christian references, the first being the description of Hermione as a sainted spirit. This description of Hermione as sainted is somewhat contradictory to Leontes' daily prayers for his dead wife, as well with her appearing to chastise him for taking a new wife, but even so, it serves to put the conversation in a Christian context. The second, the description of her appearing "soul-vexed," references burial rites in *The Book of Common Prayer*, as discussed above.

Paulina's hypothetical account describes a wilder, angrier ghost that cries out with ear-splitting shrieks. While Leontes' Hermione-ghost asks "why to me?," invoking pity and guilt in her husband, Paulina's gives a threatening command: "Remember mine." This phrase comes very close to that of the ghost in *Hamlet*, who demands of his son, "Remember me" (Hamlet, 1.5.116).

Leontes' Penance and Hermione's Return

As Leontes' descent into madness and sin against those whom he should love is steep and extended, so will his climb back to virtue be long and difficult. It is through the guidance of

³⁶ Greenblatt, (107).

³⁷ Greenblatt, (146).

Paulina that he is able to accomplish this feat and have grace restored to him. If we look again at the end of 3.2 when Mamillius dies, we see that this is the moment when Leontes realizes that he has been wrong and that he has caused the death of his son as punishment for denying Apollo's truth. When Hermione swoons, Paulina tells us that the queen is dying: "This news is mortal to the queen. Look down /And see what death is doing" (3.2.146-147). Leontes does not yet know the full extent of his punishment, and insists that Hermione will recover, but even so, he begins a long confession, addressed to Apollo but highly public, in which he confesses even to those crimes not known to those around him before now:

Apollo, pardon
My great profaneness 'gainst thine oracle!
I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,
New woo my queen, recall the good Camillo,
Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy;
For, being transported by my jealousies
To bloody thoughts and to revenge, I chose
Camillo for the minister to poison
My friend Polixenes, which had been done,
But that the good mind of Camillo tardied
My swift command,
[...] How he glisters
Through my rust! And how his piety
Does my deeds make the blacker! (3.2.152-71)

In his confession, he also names the things he plans to do in order to atone for his crimes. His punishment will momentarily be increased, however, by the loss of Hermione. Leontes will not be allowed to name the terms of his penance; Paulina will guide him through it instead.

If we take Paulina at her word, she has witnessed Hermione's death and holds Leontes responsible. She admonishes him, and the language she uses is significant. She begins by addressing Leontes, before she has even announced Hermione's death, with imagery that is commonly found in descriptions and depictions of both Hell and Purgatory:

What studied torments, tyrant, hast thou for me?
What wheels? racks? fires? what flaying? Boiling
In lead or oils? What old or newer torture
Must I receive, whose every word deserves
To taste of thy most worst? (3.2.171-77)

She goes on to describe in full Leontes' crimes, painting them as small compared to the killing of Hermione, and tells Leontes that his case is hopeless, as discussed earlier. Leontes' reply to her verbal lashing is appropriate to his position as penitent: "Go on, go on. /Thou canst not speak too much. I have deserved /All tongues to talk their bitt' rest" (2.3.213-214). His immediate acceptance of his punishment, and his wish for more of it, parallel the responses of those in Dante's *Purgatorio* who endure their punishment without complaint, in contrast to the hopeless souls in *Inferno*, many of whom are bitter and unrepentant. Not only does he eagerly ask Paulina to upbraid him, but he also invites "all tongues" to punish him for his crimes, which he says he deserves. Paulina follows by saying that she herself repents of faults whenever she commits them: "I am sorry for't. /All faults I make, when I shall come to know them, /I do repent. Alas, I have showed too much /The rashness of woman. [...] Now, good my liege, /Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman" (3.2.216-225). Here Paulina guides Leontes in his penance not only by helping him to purge his sins but also by example. At the same time, though, she contradicts what she claims to do for Leontes' benefit. She says that she will not remind him of what he has done, but in so naming those who are lost, she reminds Leontes of his victims again. In her first test, she

told Leontes not to attempt repentance because his case was hopeless. She tests him again, offering the temptation to let “[w]hat’s gone and what’s past help [...] be past grief” (3.2.220-221). She goes further, framing the penance as an offering that Leontes should refuse: “Do not receive affliction /At my petition. I beseech you, rather /Let me be punished, that have minded you /Of what you should forget” (3.2.221-224). She ends her speech by telling Leontes to be patient and she will cease tormenting him: “Take your patience to you, /And I’ll say nothing” (3.2.229-230). Her reference to patience is a final reminder of Hermione; Paulina has said quite a lot in her protestations that she will say nothing.

Leontes, however, passes her test again: “Thou didst speak but well /When most the truth, which I receive much better /Than to be pitied of thee” (3.2.231-232). Again suffering is spoken of as something to be received, and Leontes wishes to receive it. He immediately asks to be taken before the bodies of Hermione and Mamillius, where he will be physically confronted with their deaths. He takes Paulina’s “affliction” and seeks more punishment for himself in beholding the lifeless bodies of his wife and son.

In the next reference to Leontes, Time tells us that the action will leave him behind in Sicily, “Th’ effects of his fond jealousies so grieving /That he shuts up himself” (4.1.18-19). The audience presumes that he continues his self-imposed penance, guided by Paulina, as we follow Time to Bohemia. But when we arrive there, though Time has said that we will leave Leontes and Sicily behind, the next scene opens with a discussion of both. Camillo wishes to return to his home and his master, “the penitent king” (4.2.6). Polixenes begs Camillo not to mention either: “Of that fatal country, Sicilia, prithee speak no more, whose very naming punishes me with the remembrance of that penitent, as thou call’st him, and reconciled king, my brother, whose loss of his most precious queen and children are even now to be afresh lamented” (4.2.20-25). Their

discussion tells us that Leontes is still penitent, sixteen years later, and that the loss of his family is still, rightly, his focus. Polixenes also associates even the thought of Sicily with punishment. From this information from Time, Camillo and Polixenes, we gain an image of Sicily as a prison where Leontes is shut up, continuously undergoing penitential punishments.

When we return to Leontes at the beginning of Act V, the focus is still on his penance. It has become his defining characteristic. Cleomenes says “Sir, you have done enough, and have performed /A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make /Which you have not redeemed— indeed, paid down /More penitence than done trespass” (5.1.1-4). Cleomenes characterizes Leontes’ suffering as a form of currency and insists that his debt is not only “paid down,” but that he has overpaid. He begs Leontes to “do as the heavens have done, forget your evil; /With them forgive yourself” (5.1.5-6). But Cleomenes does not have the authority to declare Leontes free of sin, nor is he most concerned with the state of Leontes’ soul. What concerns him most is the state of the kingdom, which is still heirless. In his concern with this worldly affair, he has overlooked the provision of the oracle that there will be no heir until Perdita is found; he is a pragmatic statesman, not a priest.

Paulina, however, does take on the role of priest as she guides Leontes down the path that will lead to his purgation as well as the restoration of his heir. She never allows Leontes to forget his crimes, nor the fact that the oracle of the god had not been fulfilled, which would signal the end of his punishment. Until the moment that Perdita is found, there exists the possibility, and the fear for Leontes and his kingdom, that the oracle might never be fulfilled. Leontes has faith in her and in the oracle. He continues his penance over the protestations of his lords. Dion accuses Paulina of leading their king on a course that will prove detrimental to their country: “You pity not the state nor the remembrance /Of his most sovereign name, consider little /What

dangers, by his highness' fail of issue, /May drop upon his kingdom and devour /Uncertain
lookers-on. What were more holy /Than to rejoice the former queen is well?" (5.1.25-30). Like
Cleomenes, Dion's shortsighted concern for the state discounts the oracle. His comment
concerning Hermione shows that he too believes that Leontes has fully atoned for his sins; he
considers the queen to be enjoying Paradise, having been aided by Leontes' prayers for her.

Paulina keeps faith in the oracle and begins to prepare Leontes and the audience for
Hermione's return: "Yet, if my lord will marry—[...] give me the office /To choose you a queen.
She shall not be so young /As was your former, but she shall be such /As, walked your first
queen's ghost, it should take joy /To see her in your arms" (5.1.76-80). Shakespeare's
preparation for the return of Hermione continues to be built up through the scene, with Leontes
declaring to Florizel "The blessed gods /Purge all infection from our air whilst you /Do climate
here!" (5.1.167-169). This line marks the third and final time that the word "purge" appears. The
first time, Paulina says that she will purge Leontes with her words: "I /Do come with words as
medicinal as true, /Honest as either, to purge him of that humour /That presses him from sleep"
(2.3.42-45). She is Leontes' physician before she becomes his spiritual guide. Though the word
is used always in the medicinal sense, Leontes very obviously undergoes a spiritual purgation;
when viewed in this context, a link to Purgatory is suggested.

At the end of 4.4, Autolycus tells the Clown and the Shepherd that Polixenes "is gone
aboard a new ship to purge melancholy and air himself" (4.4.853-854). The audience knows that
Polixenes and Camillo are boarding that ship in order to sail to Sicily after the Prince. The fact
that Autolycus says indirectly that Polixenes sails to Sicily for his purgation is striking when
compared to a story from Gregory the Great's *Dialogues* in which Gregory tells the story of a
man, Eumorfius, who one day "sends his slave to his friend Stephen to say, 'Come quickly

because the ship that is to take us to Sicily is ready to leave’”³⁸ Gregory goes on to explain, at the request of the monk to whom he is telling the story, that “more than any other place, it is in the isles of that land that the fire-spitting cauldrons have opened up. [...] It is the will of almighty God that these places be shown as a corrective to the men living in this world, [...] so that those who refuse to believe on the basis of hearsay alone may see with their own eyes.”³⁹

In the final scene of the play, Leontes completes his penance. The scene opens with Leontes thanking Paulina for her guidance and comfort through the fulfillment of the oracle. Paulina responds by saying “all my services /You have paid home” (5.3.3-4). They have come to Paulina’s house to visit the statue of Hermione that Paulina has commissioned. When the statue is revealed, at first Leontes is speechless with wonder. As he looks upon it he says, “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 and /From thy admiring daughter took the spirits” (5.3.37-41). When confronted with Hermione’s likeness, he feels shame and disgust with himself more acutely than we have seen since his wife and son first perished. Yet he will not allow Paulina to draw the curtain over the statue; his shame is tempered with the pleasure of the image of Hermione alive again: “Would I were dead, but that, methinks, already,—[...] /Would you not deem it breathed? And that those veins /Did verily bear blood?” (5.3.62-65). When Paulina says that she could “afflict” him more, he replies: “Do, Paulina, /For this affliction has a taste as sweet /As any cordial comfort” (5.3.75-76). He has reached the end of his penance and has shed his burden of suffering. His suffering has become his joy.

The fulfillment of the oracle could have been a suitably happy ending for the play, with Leontes reconciled to Polixenes and his daughter and his heirs restored, but the great

³⁸ Le Goff, (206).

³⁹ Le Goff, (206).

reconciliation of the play is that of Leontes and Hermione. Paulina requires that her audience “do awake [their] faith” (5.3.92-93) as she prepares to bring Hermione back to them. Paulina assures them that her spell is lawful and Hermione’s actions holy. Leontes and the others are only too happy to accept Paulina’s conditions.

As they marvel at Hermione’s return, Polixenes brings up the ambiguity of Hermione’s state of being during her absence: “Ay, and make manifest where she has lived, /Or how stol’n from the dead” (114-115). The question is not answered, and is brought up again by Leontes in the final lines of the play: “Good Paulina, /Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely /Each one demand and answer to his part /Performed in this wide gap of time since first /We were dissevered. Hastily lead away” (5.3.151-155). The ambiguity is intentionally held up before the audience, and though the questions are shortly to be answered for the characters in the play, we are left wondering. In preserving the ambiguity to the end, Shakespeare allows for both interpretations; it could be that a true reanimation takes place, or that Hermione, like the patient Griselda, has been awaiting the end of Leontes’ trials.

There also remains the question of Hermione’s statue: should we compare it to an icon? Before Paulina awakes the statue, Perdita kneels before it and asks its blessing: “And give me leave, /And do not say ‘tis superstition, that I kneel and then implore her blessing. Lady, /Dear queen, that ended when I but began, /Give me that hand of yours to kiss” (5.3.42-46). In referencing the “superstition” involved in her action (as Antigonus potentially associates his belief in Hermione’s ghost with the Catholic superstition of purgatorial ghosts), Perdita reminds us of the Catholic practice of praying before the statue of Mary. After Hermione has awoken, Paulina, still like a priest, urges Perdita to “interpose” and “Kneel /And pray your mother’s blessing” (5.3.119-120). Hermione responds requesting the gods’ blessing for Perdita: “You

gods, look down, /And from your sacred vials pour your graces /Upon my daughter's head!"

(5.3.121-123). As we were told previously that Hermione's spirit is presumed sainted, it is unsurprising that Shakespeare gives us a scene in which she receives requests for blessings and performs acts that are appropriate for a saint. This comparison makes Leontes' statement that he has "in vain said many /A prayer upon [Hermione's] grave" (5.3.140-141) doubly accurate as she has no need of them since she is not dead, just as a sainted spirit would have no need of them in Paradise.

At the end of the play, Leontes' penance is complete, Hermione is returned to him and Perdita is found. The oracle is fulfilled, but Hermione's restoration goes beyond the prediction of the oracle; Shakespeare rewards Leontes' purgation by returning Hermione, who brings with her Grace. These scenes take on greater significance by taking in place in Sicily, with its longstanding associations with the otherworld, rather than Bohemia.

Conclusion

Both the classical tradition of Ovid and the contemporary religious climate are used to great effect by Shakespeare in *The Winter's Tale*. He exploits many links to the underworld from both traditions, allowing for a rich tale of redemption. Through the explicit connection to the underworld through Perdita's association with Proserpina and Hermione's death and return, the door is opened for an exploration of the relationships between the living and the dead. Once Leontes has been purged of his "black deeds" and is the heavenly Hermione's spiritual equal in patience, he is finally rewarded. He does not want Paulina's pity; he only wants her punishment, and his repentance is true. Leontes chooses the correct path, and Paulina guides him to its end. He does not pity himself but loathes that in himself that was unjust. The ritual acts of penance that Leontes engages in not only aid his own recovery, but also assist the souls of his dead relatives. Leontes' ritual involves a mutual exchange of benefits between the dead and the living; he satisfies their need for remembrance with a palpable offering of tears. His mourning and praying for the dead, an act associated with Purgatory, saves them all.

Through the evidence presented in this thesis, I believe that there is a case to be made that Shakespeare's geographical changes of the action from his source material was done with purpose. This change has created confusion for scholars for many years, and has generally been dismissed as unimportant for an understanding of the play. Taking a closer look at the implications of this change provides a useful study of the ways in which the play explores interactions between the living and the dead. While it is impossible to determine to what extent Shakespeare may have intended Leontes' presence in Sicily to be associated specifically with Catholic Purgatory or Hermione's return to be seen as a true reanimation, I believe that these are

important questions to examine. It is my hope that the evidence presented here has provided a useful study of this traditionally neglected aspect of *The Winter's Tale*.

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