

Chapter 6

The Winter's Tale

In the play discussed in the previous chapter, we see Othello's jealous rage boil over, causing him to murder his innocent wife. In this chapter, we look at King Leontes, who, much like Othello, is blinded by fear and motivated by a jealous rage. The fate of Leontes, from his jealous rage to his humiliating fall to his ultimate redemption, is staged by a craftsman who was acquainted with the theology of the Protestant Reformation. In *The Winter's Tale*, we witness Shakespeare's use of the controversial religious issues of his day. The atmosphere in the kingdom of Sicilia is ripe with controversy as the play opens up on a debate over that which is owed and that which is given freely. This key tension invites the audience to consider the ideas about judgment and redemption at work in the play, as well as the nature of the hope of grace as personified by the birth of young royalty. The Protestant nature of Leontes's redemption is set in contrast to the Roman Catholic theology of works, which is personified in the priestlike characterization of Paulina. *The Winter's Tale* is often seen as a play about the nature of creative art,¹ or as a stage in the literary evolution of the pastoral.² It is also, as I argue in this chapter, a play about Protestantism. Various people, such as René Girard, Louis Martz, Jeffrey Knapp, and Maurice Hunt³ have engaged with the redemption in the play in various senses, and it is to this strand of recent criticism that my reading here is a contribution.

In the opening act of *The Winter's Tale*, Camillo and Archidamus, lords in the service of their respective kings, are engaged in a discussion that revolves around the laws of

hospitality:

Archidamus: If you shall chance, Camillo, to visit Bohemia, on the like occasion whereon my services are now on foot, you shall see, as I have said, great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicilia.

Camillo: I think, this coming summer, the King of Sicilia means to pay Bohemia the visitation which he justly owes him.

Archidamus: Wherein our entertainment shall shame us: we will be justified in our loves: for indeed—

Camillo: Beseech you—

(*The Winter's Tale* 1.1.1–10)

Archidamus's first statement offers an important value judgment. He has been the beneficiary of some lavish hospitality in Leontes's kingdom, and he feels compelled to prepare Camillo for the more simple arrangements available in Bohemia. In this passage, Archidamus seems to be reacting to the Stoic tradition of hospitality, an understanding that has its roots in the writings of Cicero, specifically in *De Officiis*, where Cicero reflects on various forms of hospitality. Cicero notes that although giving generously to one's peers is a noble act, the receiver of gifts will be expected to return a gift of comparable value, thereby putting a certain measure of pressure on the receiver.⁴ Cicero further warns that one must give thoughtfully, as overgiving may be recognized as shameful ambition or simple foolishness.⁵

In this opening conversation, Archidamus reveals that he is aware of custom and fears that his kingdom will not measure up to the standard of excellence set by Sicilia. Bohemia will not be able to reciprocate with an equal gift of hospitality. When Archidamus speaks of being shamed in his conversation with Camillo, he invites the reader to consider

the meaning of grace. It is grace that must be offered by Sicilia, according to Archidamus, who understands that any form of kindness must be repaid in like degree. Archidamus hopes his country will be able to give an offering of love, an offering that will justify them before the Sicilian king.

The words employed in this section are words that remind us of a debate that was at work in Shakespeare's England, a debate that dealt with that which is "owed" and that which is given freely. In Shakespeare's England, the debate between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism raged as both sides fought for a different understanding of law and grace. Christopher Haigh points to the most confrontational differences between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism by explaining that the former is a "Works religion"⁶ and the latter is a "Word religion."⁷ In the Roman Catholic tradition, a measure of redemptive participation was required of men and women—a participation that had become an integral part of English culture, consisting of generational customs and nationwide traditions. Roman Catholics understood that God wanted them to make proper satisfactions for their sins and take part in earning divine grace by performing good works. These satisfactions, mirrored in Archidamus's desire to satisfy Sicilia, were offered in the form of penance, which could range from fasts to alms giving, a series of prayers, the purchasing of indulgences, the celebration of feasts and festivals, or many other types of offerings.

A Roman Catholic in the Elizabethan Age was familiar with a religious justification that required some form of payment. The Reformation challenged the Roman Catholic traditions of sacrifice and the paying of penances. It was Martin Luther who argued that men and women could not satisfy the demands of God through payment of any kind. According to Luther, justification was not to involve human participation but rather only the work of God himself through the onetime sacrifice of Jesus Christ: "By grace alone

(Sola Gratia), through faith alone (Sola Fide), according to scripture alone (Sola Scriptura), for God's glory alone (Soli Deo Gloria)."⁸ This sixteenth-century Reformation motto compressed the dramatic turn from human participation into a statement that rejected several hundred years of church tradition. Quoting Walter Benjamin from his text *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Jennifer Rust writes, "A melancholic impulse arises in response to the 'empty world' generated by the Reformers' denial of any transcendent value in earthly works and emphasis on salvation through faith alone, a perspective that leads the most sensitive, those who cannot sustain the requisite faith, to view 'the scene of their existence as a rubbish heap of partial, inauthentic actions'"⁹ Rust continues in this way by looking at the structure of "depersonalization" imposed on people of faith by the Reformation "stripping" of custom and participation.¹⁰

By removing human participation from Christianity, the Reformers toppled religious tradition despite its long history. The Protestant emphasis on the inability of mankind to make a payment or offering of any kind to God resulted in the emphasis on human contrition and humiliation. These alone were the signs of a redeemed soul humbled by the realization of God's goodness and man's baseness. When Archidamus speaks of his kingdom's need for justification, he foreshadows one of the central questions posed by the play: How can a man be redeemed?

Archidamus: Wherein our entertainment shall shame us: we will be justified in our loves . . .

Camillo: . . . You pay a great deal too dear for what's given freely.

(The Winter's Tale 1.1.8–9, 17–18)

It was this question that dwelt at the center of the Protestant

Reformation.

In the second half of the first scene, the conversation between the two lords shifts to an interesting discussion about the young prince Mamillius, who according to the lords is a “gentleman of the greatest promise” and “a gallant child” (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.1.34, 37). The conversation between the two lords takes an interesting yet strange turn as they discuss the impact that Mamillius has had on the people of his country:

Camillo: [Mamillius is] one that, indeed, physics the subject,
makes old hearts fresh: they that went on crutches
ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man.

Archidamus: Would they else be content to die?

Camillo: Yes; if there were no other excuse why they
should
desire to live.

Archidamus: If the king had no son, they would desire
to live on
Crutches till he had one.

(*The Winter’s Tale* 1.1.39–45)

Though it is not necessary to interpret Mamillius as a Christ figure, the conversation lends itself to a comparison of the image painted of Christ in the Old Testament book of Isaiah. Just as Mamillius is portrayed as a symbol of hope in this scene, so Christ is portrayed in Isaiah: “For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; and the government will rest on his shoulders; And his name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.”¹¹ The connection to Christ is strengthened by Camillo’s reference to people who would long to extend their lives in order

to see the prince.

The longing that Camillo describes, and on which Archidamus strangely builds, bears a resemblance to the Roman Catholic feast often called the Purification of the Virgin or Candlemas. This feast celebrated the presentation of Christ at the temple, where, according to the New Testament account, the Christ Child was presented to Simeon the Righteous:

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon; this man was just, and feared God, and waited for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Ghost was upon him. And it was declared to him from God by the Holy Ghost, that he should not see death, before he had seen the Lord’s Christ. And he came by the motion of the Spirit into the Temple, and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to do for him after the custom of the Law, then he took him in his arms, and praised God, and said, Lord, now lettest thou thy servant depart in peace, according to thy word, for mine eyes have seen thy salvation, which thou hast prepared before the face of all people, a light to be revealed to the Gentiles, and the glory of thy people Israel.¹²

The tradition of sacrifice in the Old Testament pointed to a promised Savior, the Prince of Peace who would usher in a new covenant of grace and abolish the Old Testament requirement of sacrifice. While I do not argue that Shakespeare is dramatizing the Christian scriptures, he is indeed working with some of the controversial religious issues of his day. The major voices of the Protestant Reformation sought to emphasize mankind’s depravity and his desperate need for justification. The Reformers further emphasized mankind’s

inability to offer an adequate sacrifice or to take part in its own redemption. From Archidamus's concern over his justification to Camillo's praise of the long-awaited prince, the opening scene of *The Winter's Tale* is dominated by two key themes: justification and redemption. Julia Lupton claims that the themes introduced by Shakespeare at the beginning of *The Winter's Tale* allow him to create "a stony world of law unredeemed by grace."¹³ It is in this stony world and within this "child's tale" that Shakespeare gives life to what was certainly one of the most powerful philosophical-religious shifts of the preceding century. Describing the relationship between Leontes and Hermione in *The Winter's Tale*, Stephen Greenblatt writes, "There is here, as so often in the ordinary conversation of husbands and wives, at once nothing and everything going on."¹⁴ The same conclusion may be drawn about *The Winter's Tale* as a whole, set before us as a "tale," a child's story of "sprites and goblins," yet at the same time suggesting deep spiritual meaning—"at once nothing and everything going on."¹⁵

In *Spiritual Shakespeares*, Ewan Fernie argues that spirituality in Shakespeare is most often associated with "ideas of emancipation and an alternative world."¹⁶ It is this kind of spirituality, one involving the emancipation of Leontes in *The Winter's Tale*, that may indeed be the central issue at play. In his important work of comparison between *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale*, David Lee Miller affirms this claim: "If *Hamlet* is deeply marked by the son's need to reform his mother . . . *The Winter's Tale* is just as deeply marked by the wish to redeem its murderous patriarch."¹⁷ The humiliation of Leontes offers a picture of spiritual redemption. While I appreciate the excellent work that Ewan Fernie, among others,¹⁸ is creating through a philosophical and spiritual approach to Shakespeare's works, it is my intent to employ Fernie's work as a place of departure, a springboard into a more specific historical-religious analysis. I hope to use his

new and compelling philosophical and spiritual approaches to uncover the inner workings of the religious and doctrinal influences within *The Winter's Tale*. From Reformation doctrine, Shakespeare gleams the concept of redemptive humiliation, a concept that transcends restrictive denominational categorizing. The spirituality of *The Winter's Tale* is most poignantly illustrated in Leontes's humiliation, for in this humiliation Shakespeare preserves what Kiernan Ryan explains as "everything that confounds common sense."¹⁹ How can it be that a man is lifted up by being brought to his knees? When is a man given true sight through the confirmation of his blindness? This is the paradox of the Reformation as explained most powerfully in the writings of Martin Luther.

In addition to the redemptive humiliation experienced by King Leontes, the Roman Catholic understanding of repentance and its accompanying traditions of penance are rejected. The play supports the fact that the king is redeemed long before he is attacked by the priestly Paulina, who demands that he suffer and pay for that which is given freely. The conversation in the opening passage of *The Winter's Tale*, as previously mentioned, is heavy laden with religious language and particularly the language of Martin Luther's Reformation platform. In a tract analyzing the Psalms, Luther writes, "Since of ourselves we are nothing but have everything from God, it is easy to see that we can give Him nothing; neither can we repay Him for His grace. He demands nothing from us. The only thing left, therefore, is for us to praise and thank Him."²⁰ In *The Winter's Tale*, Camillo scolds Archidamus, "You pay a great deal too dear for what's given freely" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.1.16). Archidamus's desire to pay for a gift is a struggle of pride, pointing to one of the key elements of the Reformation debate. Luther in particular focuses much criticism on the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of repentance. Luther continues in this way:

“Furthermore, in the New Testament the offering of thanks is to be the true worship of God, and no works are to count at all. Grace cannot stand it when we want to give to God or establish merit or pay Him with our works. This is the greatest of blasphemies and idolatries and is nothing less than the denial and even ridicule of God.”²¹ Archidamus understands the traditions of hospitality and just and fair repayment; he does not want to be thought poorly of by Camillo or anyone in Leontes’s train. Camillo’s rebuke is a Protestant correction; it is representative of the campaign waged by English Protestantism to rid the nation of what Luther called “the greatest of blasphemies.”²² Introduced in what seems a simple discussion of hospitality at the outset of the play, the theme of justification runs a clear course through the remainder of the play.

Reformation scholar Alister McGrath describes Luther’s teaching of justification in this way: “[Luther claims that] man must recognize his spiritual weakness and inadequacy, and turn in humility from his attempts at self-justification to ask God for his grace. God treats the humility of faith (*humilitas fidei*) as the precondition necessary for justification under the terms of the pactum.”²³ McGrath’s statement is helpful in that it describes the religious shift required by the Reformation.

The recognition of spiritual weakness and inadequacy is a call for the humiliation of the redeemed. “Humility of faith”²⁴ as a precondition of salvation is an affirmation of the vital role of humiliation in the life of the would-be redeemed. Without humiliation, there is no redemption. In *Will in the World*, Stephen Greenblatt makes an interesting statement about Shakespeare’s handling of the concept of restoration in *The Winter’s Tale*: “The emotion of restoration is powerfully present—the sense that what was seemingly irrevocably lost has been reclaimed against all hope and expectation—but the recovery is never quite what it seems: the past that

is recovered turns out to be an invention or a delusion or, in the worst case, an intensification of loss.”²⁵ Greenblatt recognizes something curious about Shakespeare’s handling of restoration in *The Winter’s Tale*. It is a restoration that comes at the cost of traditional belief, a difficult tearing away of that which was known and understood. Richard Hooker describes the tearing away from tradition in very simple terms, claiming that the Reformation removed the Roman Catholic tradition of sacrifice so “[Christians] have properly now no sacrifice.”²⁶ Clear support for the denunciation of Roman Catholic “corporal” sacrifice is also found in the Geneva translation of the New Testament, especially in Hebrews 13:15 and its accompanying note:

Let us therefore by him offer the sacrifice of praise always to God, that is, the fruit of the lips, which confess his Name.

Margin note: Now that those corporal sacrifices are taken away, he teacheth us that the true sacrifices of confession remain, which consist partly in giving of thanks, and partly in liberality, with which sacrifices indeed God is now delighted.²⁷

The Reformation doctrine of substitution undermines the Roman Catholic doctrine of sacrifice and participation. As proposed by the Reformers, the sacrificial work of Christ renders any and all participation by men and women unnecessary and even, according to Martin Luther, blasphemous.²⁸ John Calvin affirms Luther’s insistence on the rejection of personal sacrifice and describes Christ’s work of substitution in this manner: “Our filthiness deserves that God should hold it in abhorrence, and that all the angels should spit upon us; but Christ, in order to present us pure

and unspotted in presence of the Father, resolved to be spat upon, and to be dishonored by every kind of reproaches.”²⁹ In *The Renaissance Bible*, Debora Shuger presents an interesting commentary on this passage from Calvin. She writes, “Particularly in Calvin, Christ’s suffering and humiliation work something like a projective charm, where what happens to Christ will not happen to me. A highly literal version of substitution allows each of Christ’s torments to ‘undo’ a piece of our deserved punishment.”³⁰ The doctrine of substitution and the extent to which the Reformers sought to dismantle the tradition of personal sacrifice within Christianity is significant to our understanding of the religious climate of early modern England. In many ways, the early modern Christian was being encouraged to see him- or herself as a much different person before a much different kind of deity.

As mentioned previously, Eamon Duffy and Christopher Haigh describe the Reformation as a painful stripping away of traditional religious practices from the English people.³¹ The Protestant Reformation, according to Duffy, Haigh, and others, is now understood as being just as much a cultural reformation as a religious reformation. It was the traditions and practices of common men and women that were attacked by this new spirituality. Haigh writes, “The theological foundation of works-religion was challenged, and the ‘ignorant multitude’ mocked for its reliance on artificial aids and external acts . . . The hallowed routines of the religion of doing were forbidden . . . The ordinary way to God was declared closed.”³²

Stephen Greenblatt and Louis Montrose have also weighed in heavily on this account, asserting that by Elizabeth’s reign, the Reformers had cleansed the church of a wide array of penitential traditions.³³ The removal of these traditions, asserts Greenblatt and Montrose, left a great vacuum in English life. Each of these critics employs this hypothesis to argue that post-Roman Catholic English culture was des-

perate to satisfy its need for ritual and penitential tradition. According to Greenblatt, the English found this satisfaction in the theater.³⁴ In *Shakespeare’s Tribe*, Jeffrey Knapp takes an interesting and important step beyond both Montrose and Greenblatt by suggesting that the church played a key role in investing the Shakespearean theater with religious purpose.³⁵ Knapp draws on critics Paul Whitfield White and Debora Shuger, who argue convincingly for a theory that claims that the subject of Shakespeare’s theater was largely influenced by the powerful religious controversy of his day. White writes that Reformed doctrine must have had a strong impact on the “composition, performance, and reception” of plays because “Reformation orthodoxy was, by the midpoint of Elizabeth’s reign, not merely the official doctrine of the national church but internalized as a major feature of the national consciousness.”³⁶ Shuger argues in like manner: “If it is not plausible to read Shakespeare’s plays as Christian allegories, neither is it likely that the popular drama of a religiously saturated culture could, by a secular miracle, have extricated itself from the theocentric orientation informing the discourses of politics, gender, social order, and history [at the time].”³⁷

Among many others, the traditions of pilgrimage, indulgence, and penance were an integral part of English religious life, offering the medieval Roman Catholic an opportunity to “please” God and to “work out” his or her salvation.³⁸ These traditions and their place in culture made up in large part the religious psyche of the early modern Christian. This was a Christian who had the opportunity to enter the eternal realm by performing simple religious duties, a fact that placed a measure of value on the spiritual exercises of men and women. When the Reformers took center stage in the religious forum, it was this participation in the salvific process that was attacked most vehemently. In the face of a more optimistic view of man’s ability to do proper penance, the

Reformers stressed the depraved state of mankind and therefore man's inability to perform works that were pleasing to God. The Reformation emphasis on man's depravity placed a new importance on the humiliation of the sinner. It was this humiliation that led toward what the Reformers considered a proper and ideal view of self.

In *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare poses Leontes as a Reformation saint, one who experiences true redemption through a process of violent and painful humiliation. This humiliation, one that brings Leontes to his knees, allows the king to recognize his depraved condition and to find himself redeemed by God. After commissioning Hermione the task of convincing Polixenes to extend his stay in Sicilia, Leontes is suddenly disturbed by a violent sense of jealousy. Leontes praises Hermione for having spoken well enough to convince Polixenes to stay, claiming that there was only one other time that she had spoken "to better purpose" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.88). Hermione's response to Leontes, though she speaks in jest, offers an interesting bit of foreshadowing:

Hermione: My last good deed was to entreat his stay:
What was my first? It has an elder sister,
Or I mistake you: O, would her name were Grace!
(*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.96–98)

In a play that is dominated by themes of law and grace, things owed and things paid, Hermione's cry for "Grace" cannot go unnoticed. When Leontes tells her that her first "good deed" was confessing her love for him, Hermione credits divine grace:

Leontes: Why, that was when
Three crabbed months had sour'd themselves to death,
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand,

And clap thyself my love; then didst thou utter
"I am yours for ever."

Hermione: 'Tis Grace indeed.

Why lo you now; I have spoke to th' purpose twice:
The one, for ever earn'd a royal husband;
Th' other, for some while a friend. [Giving her hand to
Polixenes]

(*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.102–8)

In this passage, Hermione confirms that her good deed was inspired by grace, an understanding that lines up with the Reformation view of good works and deeds. Reformation theology asserts that all good works are inspired by Providence and it is by the hand of God that men and women choose to do good deeds.³⁹ This interchange also reveals much about the relationship between Hermione and Leontes.

Stephen Greenblatt comments on this exchange, noting that it is "powerfully convincing in its suggestion of entangled love, tightly coiled tension, and playfulness."⁴⁰ It is the tension in this scene—"the slightly edgy intimacy"⁴¹ that Greenblatt notes—that elicits what many have called an unexpected rage from Leontes. On one level, I agree with R. A. Foakes and others when they claim that Leontes's reaction is wild and unreasonable: "It is true that an actor playing Leontes could show incipient signs of passion before this point, but there is nothing in the text to warrant it. It seems rather that Shakespeare deliberately made Leontes blaze out unexpectedly in a concern precisely to leave aside or ignore questions of motive or possible explanations for his behavior."⁴² Janet Adelman also claims that his jealousy is unexpected: "Leontes' jealousy erupts out of nowhere and breaks his world apart, as it breaks the syntax and rhythms of his own speeches apart; in the violence and obscurity of

its expression, it draws the audience into its own sphere, causing us to snatch at nothings, to reconstruct the world (as Leontes himself does) in a reassuringly intelligible image.”⁴³ A close reading of this spousal exchange will, however, introduce some fairly strong justification for Leontes’s initial reaction.

In this exchange, we see Leontes humble himself in the way he describes his courtship of Hermione. Leontes describes her as having forced him to wait three difficult months and to work for her hand in marriage. Leontes’s courtship of Hermione did not involve his sweeping her off of her feet or any courageous act of heroism on his part. Leontes describes the courtship as one in which he was forced to beg for her hand, wait sourly, and clasp for her affection. Although Hermione admits to having earned a “royal husband” (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.104), this admission is once again soured by her quick reference to the winning of Polixenes’s friendship. The latter admission, coupled by Hermione’s touching of Polixenes’s hand, may provide justification enough for the audience to allow for Leontes’s jealousy. Even the mere physical touch between Hermione and Polixenes, depending on how it was staged, could justify a jealous reaction from the king. Additionally, Hermione betrays a quick wit and a flirtatious edge in her baiting of Polixenes. When Leontes invites her to help him convince Polixenes to stay, she begins with a rebuke:

Hermione: I had thought, sir, to have held my peace
until
You had drawn oaths from him not to stay. You, sir,
Charge him too coldly.

(*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.28–30)

Although Leontes affirms her statement with a “Well said,

Hermione” (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.33), it may in fact be that Leontes found some initial embarrassment in Hermione’s approach and then further embarrassment in her use of very physical language:

Hermione: a lady’s Verily’s

As potent as a lord’s. Will you go yet?

Force me to keep you as a prisoner,

Not like a guest . . . How say you?

My prisoner? or my guest?

(*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.50–55)

Hermione takes control of the situation with such command that it is not surprising that Leontes finds fault with her. She takes Polixenes as her guest who she will draw away to question, “Of my lord’s tricks, and yours, when you were boys” (*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.61) and to hear stories about when Polixenes and Leontes have acted rebelliously:

Polixenes: we knew not

The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dream’d

That any did . . .

Hermione: By this we gather

You have tripp’d since . . . Yet go on;

Th’ offences we have made you do, we’ll answer,

If you first sinn’d with us, and that with us

You did continue fault, and that you slipp’d not

With any but with us.

(*The Winter’s Tale* 1.2.69–70, 75, 82–86)

Hermione is employing the language of infidelity and thereby questioning Polixenes about his sexual exploits as a

youth. Leontes interrupts the conversation in an awkward manner, which suggests that he is disturbed by the direction of the conversation.

Janet Adelman suggests that Hermione's pregnant body adds tension to this scene, drawing a connection between Leontes's boyhood lusts and his wife's sexualized figure.⁴⁴ This added tension, according to Adelman, is far too much for Leontes to bear, thus leading him to a place where he must, as Adelman writes, "reconstruct the world . . . in a reassuringly intelligible image."⁴⁵

To add to the discomfort of the exchange, Hermione gives her hand to Polixenes in a manner that further disturbs Leontes. This offering of her hand may have been the final offense. Leontes makes much of this touching, and it would be a mistake for the reader to underestimate the power of the affection that Shakespeare stages between Polixenes and Hermione: "Paddling palms . . . pinching fingers" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.115); "Still virginalling / Upon his palm!" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.125); "Affection! thy intention stabs the centre" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.138); "How she holds up the neb, the bill to him! / And arms her with the boldness of a wife / To her allowing husband!" (*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.182–85). Can all this jealousy be considered mere madness? Does Shakespeare remove the Iago tempter from this play to isolate the madness in Leontes, or does he want his audience to see Leontes as an everyman, tempted by jealous thoughts and vulnerable to his own imagination?

As a man infected with sin and unable to make accurate decisions and judgments, Leontes rushes forward in jealous rage, all the while believing himself wise. As an everyman struggling with jealousy and pride, Leontes seeks to justify his position with Camillo. With a clear mind, unclouded by passion and fear, Camillo speaks the truth to Leontes's deaf ears:

Camillo: You never spoke what did become you less
Than this; which to reiterate were sin
As deep as that, though true.

Leontes: Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? . . . horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift? . . .
. . . is this nothing?
Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing . . .
Camillo: . . . Good my lord, be cur'd
Of this diseas'd opinion, and betimes,
For 'tis most dangerous.

(*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.282–89, 293, 297–99)

The king is presented as being tragically unaware of his ignorance, unaware that he himself is blinded by his own pride and insecurity. He is, as Camillo states, diseased and much like the sick man Luther writes of in his *Lectures on Romans*. In his character Camillo, Shakespeare creates another rejected physician.⁴⁶ Leontes is confronted by both Camillo and Paulina regarding his sickness, yet the king finds it far too easy to cast his trusted advisors off.

Leontes's rejection of his advisors resembles King Lear's rejection of Cordelia and Kent, revealing him to be another king who is clearly lacking self-knowledge and the accompanying ability to see his own sickness. Leontes is quick to dismiss Camillo's logical pleadings as ignorant and naïve and even swifter to dismiss Paulina as a foolish, nagging woman. Paulina expresses her desire to the guards who seek to keep her away from Leontes, "I come to bring him sleep . . . / with words as medicinal as true" (*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.34, 37),

and she continues,

Paulina: Good my liege, I come,—

And, I beseech you hear me, who professes

Myself your loyal servant, your physician . . .

(*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.53–55)

In *King Lear*, Shakespeare employs the same reference through Kent, whose passionate devotion to Lear is clear to all but the king himself:

Kent: My life I never held but as a pawn

To wage against thine enemies, ne'er fear to lose it,

Thy safety being the motive.

Lear: Out of my sight!

Kent: See better, Lear, and let me still remain

The true blank of thine eye . . .

Lear: O vassal! Miscreant!

Kent: . . . Do, kill thy physician, and thy fee bestow

Upon the foul disease.

(*King Lear* 1.1.156–60, 162, 164–65)

Ignoring the prognosis of his would-be physicians, Leontes follows the model set out by Martin Luther of the unrepentant sinner.

Like Luther's sinner, Leontes refuses to admit his sickness and in turn accuses Camillo, Paulina, and his lords of treason (*The Winter's Tale* 2.3.72). Overcome by pride, Leontes abuses Camillo in this way:

Leontes: It is: you lie, you lie:

I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee,

Pronounce thee a gross lout, a mindless slave,

Or else a hovering temporizer . . .

(*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.298–302)

In his essay "'Standing in Rich Place': The Importance of Context in *The Winter's Tale*," Maurice Hunt claims that Leontes's statements above are the most "vivid example of despotic speech in Shakespeare's non-tragic drama."⁴⁷ Leontes's pride and murderous rage cause him to abuse his faithful servant Camillo, who under great pressure refuses to aid Leontes in his desperate desire to be justified. Leontes continues to reject the counsel of his aides and trusted servants, even going so far as to reject the decision of the Oracle:

Leontes: There is no truth at all i' th' Oracle:

The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood.

(*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.140–41)

At this final word, Leontes reaches his greatest point of arrogance and is swiftly cut down by what turns out to be a sovereign act of grace. David Lee Miller compares the humiliation of Leontes with the humiliation of Gertrude in *Hamlet*. As one of the most powerful actions in each play, the redemptions of these two characters seem to overtake much of the plot lines and nearly all the plays' concerns. While Miller does not recognize the impact of Luther's writing on Shakespeare's plays, he is certainly responding to the Reformation ties that are evident in each play's structure, leading him to confess that "in *Hamlet* and *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare is responding as powerfully to the Reformation . . . as he is to classical epic or popular romance."⁴⁸

In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes is humbled by an act of the gods, and his restoration is disturbingly swift. Though he must wait sixteen years to be reunited with his wife and

daughter, Leontes's moral and spiritual health is restored with an immediacy that is distinctly Lutheran, as he does not require any offering of penance or purchase of indulgence. In just moments, Leontes moves from a bold dismissal of the Oracle—"There is no truth at all i' th' Oracle" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.140)—to the following humiliating confession:

Leontes: I have too much believ'd mine own suspicion . . .

. . . 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 . . .

. . . how he glisters

Thorough my rust! and how his piety

Does my deeds make the blacker!

(*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.151, 153–57, 170–72)

While Louis L. Martz credits Paulina with the true reformation of the king, arguing that Paulina's words lead Leontes toward "a scene that may be called a restoration of faith,"⁴⁹ it is unclear what in fact Martz considers the powerful moment of repentance in act 3, scene 2. It is actually here, in this very scene and long before the resurrection of Hermione, that Leontes is redeemed. If we fail to recognize this pivotal moment in the play, we will certainly miss the significance of Paulina's continued abuse of Leontes long after his repentance and reformation. Martz calls Paulina "a bitter reminder of the evil that Leontes has done,"⁵⁰ and while this is true, Paulina's reminder signifies far more.

Leontes's swift repentance is a radical rejection of the traditional Roman Catholic doctrine of penance. While

Leontes is still on his knees confessing that he "too much believ'd [his] own suspicion" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.151), Paulina takes on an interesting persona that stays with her until the close of the play. Paulina's immediate reaction to Leontes's repentance is of particular interest as it bears no grace and demands far more than Leontes can give. My criticism of Paulina opposes a critical tradition that tends to view Paulina as a lovely miracle worker,⁵¹ and yet, if viewed through a historically sensitive lens, Paulina must be understood as a figure of harsh legalism. Paulina speaks the truth of the law to Leontes and makes demands of him that he cannot possibly meet. Luther's description of the law is insightful as we analyze the character of Paulina. Luther writes, "He who masters the art of exact distinction between the Law and the Gospel should be called a real theologian. These two must be kept apart. The function of the Law is to frighten men and drive them to despair, especially the coarse and secure sinners, until they realize their inability to meet the demands of the Law or to obtain grace."⁵² Because Paulina rejects Leontes's repentance, it is clear that she speaks the law, yet within the context of the play, her words seem mistimed and misplaced, for Leontes is already a repentant sinner, no longer in need of the harsh law but requiring the hope of grace:

Paulina: O thou tyrant!

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.

(*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.207–13)

It is interesting that Leontes, although he admits to deserving the blame and damnation that Paulina delivers, is never required to perform any acts of penance, purchase indulgences, or follow priest ordered forms of purgation. His repentance is a result of what the Reformers had begun to call a work of the Holy Spirit. John Calvin explains it this way: “Man is not possessed of free-will for good works, unless he be assisted by grace.”⁵³ Leontes’s ability to repent is granted him, according to Reformation theology, by divine grace. Following Leontes’s redemption, he determines to reconcile himself to Polixenes, to “new woo” (*The Winter’s Tale* 3.2.155–56) the queen, and to apologize to Camillo for the wrongs he dealt him. These good works, according to Calvin and consistent with the larger body of Reformation theology, are evidence of a redeemed soul that is being aided by divine grace.⁵⁴

Paulina is staged as Shakespeare’s priest; she thereby conforms to the standards of works religion and acts as a foil to the Reformation theme of grace woven into the play. Within such a religiously saturated culture, Shakespeare’s use of a Roman Catholic foil would most certainly have been appreciated. According to Huston Diehl, it was very common for characters to be used in this fashion: “The religious practices of Elizabethan England may well have predisposed Shakespeare’s audiences to interpret the characters portrayed on stage as lively images of virtue and vice, their stories as manifestations of divine will. And Shakespeare’s representational theater may well have thrived in an early Protestant culture that was hostile to other forms of human artifice because it directed its spectators’ attention to human characters played by human actors—the living images of God—rather than to the imaginary and erroneous, ornamental and lifeless images made by the hands of men.”⁵⁵ In Paulina, we have an image of Roman Catholic ritual, and

in her role, we witness a commitment to the eradicated doctrine of penance. In the shadow of Reformation doctrine, Paulina is an overbearing priest demanding what is unnecessary and irresponsible from Leontes. Her demands are irresponsible because they are misplaced and mistimed, capable as Robert Burton writes, of driving the redeemed into “religious melancholy.”⁵⁶ John Calvin and Martin Luther were equally concerned with what they believed was the Roman Catholic tendency of demanding the impossible and unnecessary from penitent Christians.⁵⁷

In pure Lutheran fashion, Leontes is confronted by God, brought from a station of pride and arrogance, and powerfully humiliated. Through this divine interaction, Leontes is given the grace to see his great sin and to repent. Leontes’s sudden repentance, if interpreted in light of the most prominent religious debate of Shakespeare’s age, must be understood as the most powerful and perhaps the most disturbing action of the play. G. Wilson Knight describes Leontes’s miraculous repentance in this manner: “No dramatic incident in Shakespeare falls with so shattering an impact, no reversal is more poignant than when, after a moment’s dazedness, Leontes’ whole soul-direction changes.”⁵⁸ A change in soul-direction, according to Reformation theologians, is credited exclusively to an act of divine intervention. Reformation theologian and pastor William Perkins explains that any movement toward God or change in soul-direction in this manner is wholly contingent on the grace of God: “When God receiues any man into couenant of eternall life, it proceeds not of any dignitie in the man whom God calleth, but from his mercie and alone good pleasure. . . . As for the opinion of them that say, that foreseene faith and good workes are the cause that mooued God to chose men to saluation, it is friulous.”⁵⁹ Joel Beeke writes extensively on Perkins’s notion of grace, further explaining that without God’s grace, “man cannot fulfill God’s demands, whereas

with it, man finds his will renewed through the Holy Spirit to the point that he is capable of choosing repentance.”⁶⁰ By Reformation standards, Leontes’s ability to repent and the resultant moral clarity he experiences are clear indications that he has been redeemed.

It is significant that Paulina continues to badger Leontes long after his repentance. With a miraculous humility, Leontes absorbs Paulina’s damning rebuke; he is clearly mindful of his sin, yet he does not give in to the despair she seems to wish for him. Paulina’s damnation of Leontes is of particular interest in that it continually seeks to demand his allegiance. Paulina acts in a manner that is consistent with Luther’s view of the Roman Catholic clergy of his day: “Therefore it was the height not only of insanity but of wickedness when the monks were so zealous in enlisting the youth of both sexes in the monasteries for their religious and, as they called them, ‘holy’ orders, as a sure state of salvation; and then, once they were enlisted, they commanded them to doubt the grace of God.”⁶¹ Susan Snyder, in her study of despair in the Renaissance, draws together the dominant Reformation understanding of despair:

Calvin joins Luther in identifying Catholicism with the old law. Papist churches are “synagogues of the devil,” and the schoolmen are “the Pharisees of our day.” Roman practice conceals God’s mercy, “which alone can calm the terrors of the conscience” (*Inst.*, III, II, 15). For Calvin, Catholic ceremonialism is a kind of Judaism. The conditions of the rites are impossible to fulfill (for example, complete confession and perfect contrition for penance). Thus they lead either to despair or hypocrisy. The Catholics, like the Jews, are vainglorious: they arrogate God’s decisions to themselves, deciding who shall be saved (*Inst.*,

III, 22.4) . . . In the people of the law, pride and despair are inextricably combined.⁶²

Luther’s teaching on the oppression of the pope closely resembles Shakespeare’s characterization of Paulina. Paulina is not a Pauline figure as argued by G. Wilson Knight, Velma Richmond, Maurice Hunt, and others, but rather a foil to Pauline literature.⁶³ In his essay “Standing in Rich Place,” Hunt writes, “Given her name, Paulina’s harsh but purifying words evoke the image of Pauline Christianity. She is the blessed thorn in the King’s flesh. The Pauline notion of mortification and renewal provides a setting for Leontes’ self-abasement and inner struggles.”⁶⁴

It was Luther’s reading of Pauline literature that motivated him to compose his Ninety-five Theses and to speak out against the Roman Catholic Church. It was the Pauline epistles in fact, and the Reformer’s focus on them, that started the Protestant Reformation. While Hunt’s essay provides some compelling insight into Protestant redemption, his failure to approach Pauline Christianity with an eye for Reformation doctrine keeps him from fully understanding what Shakespeare seems to be doing through Paulina. A Protestant reading of Pauline theology would negate any and all need for the ongoing mortification and humiliation of a man who has expressed sincere repentance. Leontes’ confession in act 3 reveals his brokenness: “Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice” (*The Winter’s Tale* 3.2.146–47). The king is not coerced into a humble position, and Paulina does not lead him to repentance.

While his research appears flawed in parts, Hunt accurately spells out the phases of Protestant redemption, the spelling out of which proves very effective for my analysis —“a plunge into depravity and ignorance, a great spiritual crisis, conversion, heart’s sorrow and repentance, and receptive faith”⁶⁵—but he fails to carefully consider Leontes’s

journey in light of these phases. Leontes plunges into a state of great humiliation upon giving in to his ferocious jealousy. René Girard describes Leontes's jealous rage as a sudden transformation into a "wild beast."⁶⁶ Girard writes convincingly about the great depravity that resides in Leontes, claiming that Leontes is "an Othello without his Iago, a Claudio without his Don John."⁶⁷ Leontes plunges into ignorance by claiming to have an impeccable discernment; able to sense when someone is untrue:

Leontes: Dost think I am so muddy, so unsettled,
To appoint myself in this vexation . . .
Without ripe moving to 't? Would I do this?
Could man so blench?

(*The Winter's Tale* 1.2.325–26, 332–33)

Leontes's overconfidence is his greatest error, and it keeps him from correcting his path by hearing wise council. Leontes's great spiritual crisis comes when he rejects the Oracle's pronouncement, after which Mamillius is pronounced dead and Hermione unconscious. Leontes's conversion and repentance come immediately after his crisis, and they are full of passion and intensity. The audience is given no reason to believe that Leontes is merely putting on a show of grief in the repenting scene rather than expressing some strong desires for reform that are evidence of true conversion.

Leontes's heart's sorrow is unmistakable, and one would wonder how Hunt and others have missed the fact that Leontes arrives at this place of true salvation not by an act of human coercion but by "a divinity that shapes" his ends.⁶⁸ This divinity, an Apollo of Reformation making perhaps, is a divinity that is staged as one who values humiliation above participation. The final stage of Protestant redemption is receptive faith, a stage that we witness in Leontes as he

humbly accepts the refining abuse that the gods see fit to pour out on him through Paulina. Evidence of Leontes's receptive faith may also be in the promise he makes, of his own accord, to regularly visit the tomb of his wife and son (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.236).

Paulina's abuse of Leontes is an additional aspect of the play that we can more fully appreciate with an understanding of Reformation theology.

Paulina: If, one by one, you wedded all the world,
Or from the all that are took something good,
To make a perfect woman, she you kill'd
Would be unparallel'd.

Leontes: I think so. Kill'd!

She I kill'd! 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.

(*The Winter's Tale* 5.1.13–19)

Sixteen years after Leontes is humbled by Apollo, we find Paulina still abusing the king.

From her early damnation of his prayers, "Do not repent these things, for they are heavier / Than all thy woes can stir" (*The Winter's Tale* 3.2.208–9), to her final abuse of him in her gallery, Paulina is an image of judgment that must serve to counter the theme of grace that colors the final act of this play. Of this final scene, Richard Wilson writes the following: "At the end of *The Winter's Tale* Paulina marches Leontes on an exhausting tour of her art gallery, which seems like a reprise of the penance he has paid at the tomb of his wife and son ever since he promised, sixteen years before, that 'Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, /

And tears shed there shall be my recreation” (*The Winter’s Tale* 3.2.236).⁶⁹ Shakespeare stages Paulina as a characterization of the Roman Catholic Church. The “exhausting tour” that Wilson refers to may in fact serve to suggest an additional connection between Paulina and the Roman Catholic Church. It is in this gallery—a place associated above all with images and icons—that Paulina has clearly invested much of her time. In the gallery, Paulina continues her demand for penance and her pursuit of legalistic constraints—“Give me the office / To choose you a queen” (*The Winter’s Tale* 5.1.77–78)—which positions her as a clear foil to the grace-declaring theologians of the Reformation. Luther was often criticized for what his opponents believed was an overemphasis on the grace of God. He was harshly critiqued for statements like the following: “But what does the wisdom of the Holy Spirit teach us? It maintains that God is not the kind of God who wants to frighten the frightened or break the broken even more, but one who loves the broken, afflicted, and humble, who expects and hears the sighs and voices of the wretched.”⁷⁰

In addition to Paulina’s legalism, her resurrection of Hermione is in fact very similar to the staged miracles of the Roman Catholic Church. These staged acts would draw money from men and women, promising everything from a shorter purgatory for loved ones to guaranteed salvation for sinners, yet according to Luther, they only offered bondage to a system of legalism:

So it is certain that false signs will happen in Christendom and that the false Christians will look upon them as true and genuine signs. This has really been happening in the papacy, though in Turkey, too, there are many such priests and special saints. You can read about this in the books and legends, especially in what the monks

have written. They are all crawling with miracles, though they were really nothing but lies andascalities. How they have made fools of the people nowadays with all those pilgrimages to the Grym Valley, to the Oak, or to Trier!⁷¹

Dennis Taylor makes note of the very Roman Catholic nature of Hermione’s resurrection, calling the episode a “simulation of a Catholic miracle.”⁷² Paulina’s incessant desire for control is also evident in her commanding of Hermione. Is it possible that Paulina has kept Hermione under her control by a similar legalistic oppression for all these years? Though in some ways Paulina’s staged miracle of resurrection resembles the miracle plays of Roman Catholic indulgence salesmen, as well as the Roman Catholic doctrine of transubstantiation, the more interesting fact is that Shakespeare juxtaposes the tradition of Roman Catholic penance through Paulina’s character—namely, through her demand for Leontes to work for his salvation.

The humiliation of Leontes, a redemptive experience orchestrated by the gods, lies at the heart of *The Winter’s Tale*. The significance of this redemptive humiliation is best understood through the lens of Reformation doctrine. It is through this lens that we make sense of Leontes’s swift and radical change of heart, and his subsequent humility and clarity of thought. It is through this lens that we can better appreciate the Roman Catholic foil that Shakespeare creates through the priestly Paulina. By employing such a foil, Shakespeare forces us to consider the powerful and disruptive invasion of Word religion on a landscape formerly dominated by the traditional Roman Catholic understanding of Works religion.