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Bloodied Hearts and Bawdy Planets: Greco-Roman Astrology and the Regenerative Force of the Feminine in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*

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BLOODIED HEARTS AND BAWDY PLANETS: GRECO-ROMAN ASTROLOGY AND
THE REGENERATIVE FORCE OF THE FEMININE
IN SHAKESPEARE'S *THE WINTER'S TALE*

by

CHRISTINA FARELLA

A master's thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, The City University of New York

2020

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Liberal Studies in satisfaction of the thesis requirement for the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

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Advisor: Dr. Elizabeth Macaulay-Lewis

This thesis offers a new reading of William Shakespeare's late play *The Winter's Tale* (1623), positing that in order to understand this complex and eccentric work, we must read it with a complex and eccentric eye. In *The Winter's Tale*, planets strike without warning, pulling at hearts, wombs, and blood, impacting the health and emotional experience of characters in the play. This work is renowned for its inconsistent formal structure; the first half is a tragedy set in winter, but abruptly shifts to a comedy set in spring/summer in its latter half. What's more, is that planets, luminaries, and stars above constantly interfere with human life, due to their gravitational pull. I argue that in order to fully comprehend *The Winter's Tale* and all its nuance, one must read it with an understanding of Renaissance astrology, a science that was fully embedded in Shakespeare's cultural milieu. The astrological worldview accepts that the motion of planets in the heavens impact life on earth, and this is crystallized in the Renaissance belief of micro- and macrocosmic interplay. By tracing planetary language in *The Winter's Tale*, we find a deeper reading of the play's gender dynamics than previous scholarship has offered. *The Winter's Tale's* central focus is Leontes, king of Sicilia, who believes his wife has committed adultery. This launches him into unwarranted fits of misogynistic destruction, inadvertently instigating the

seeming death of his family and other tragic events. Shakespeare drew richly, in all of his works, from Greco-Roman myth, Greek drama, and history, and embedded in all of those disciplines is the biopolitics of the *polis*. Classical Athenian culture purposefully limited the rights of women, who were thought to lack emotional control, in comparison to men. The Renaissance was a moment of cultural rebirth, heavily influenced by classical Greek cultural materials, of which astrology was much a part. Astrology colored Renaissance ideas about the body and gender, and thus is instrumental in deepening our understanding of this eccentric play. Reading *The Winter's Tale* with astrological awareness offers a new reading of the play's gender dynamics, and shows that Shakespeare was lampooning the acts of tyrants who fear the regenerative power of feminine agency.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	vi
Introduction: Renaissance Bodies, Renaissance Astrology, and their Classical Origins in <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	1
The Classical Roots of Seventeenth Century Astrology	10
A Brief Overview of Relevant Astrological Principals	11
The Popularity and Prevalence of Astrology in Seventeenth Century England.....	14
Heaven and Earth in <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	17
Seeing the Ancient Mediterranean in <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	18
“A Sad Tale's Best for Winter”	21
Heavenly Presence	28
Planets, Liquids, and Hearts	34
Bio-Political Readings and Their Classical Roots	43
Seasons, Genre, and the Wheel of Fortune	54
Works Cited	55

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Introduction: Renaissance Bodies, Renaissance Astrology, and their Classical Origins as Reflected Through the Winter's Tale

Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* depicts a world where stars and planets appear, intervening in human affairs with shocking precision and power. Apparent movements of celestial bodies dictate the flow of blood in veins, interfere with the healthy function of bodily organs, and cloud a king's ability to discern truth, when presented with it. The play is famed for its unique, if not lopsided and difficult, structure: the first (tragic) half of which takes place in winter, the latter (comedic) half, a summer affair, calling to mind Greek romances with its jovial tone. The ancient Mediterranean world, its gods, goddesses, and stories permeate the play, imbuing it with mythic resonance. This is a work which stands on its own as a tale of betrayal, destruction, and rebirth. The most striking moment arrives late in the play, when the statue of Hermione, presumed dead for 16 years, comes to life before the Sicilian court. Paulina, a noblewoman and Hermione's elder confidante, calls out:

Music, awake her, strike!

Music

'Tis time: descend; be soon 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 refers you. You perceive she stirs.

Hermione descends.

Start not: her actions shall be holy as

You hear my spell is lawful.¹

This moment, no doubt, was marvelous to behold, were you watching the play unfold as an audience member of Shakespeare's Globe theatre. The scene in which it takes place reverses the greatest of tragedies: the presumed death of Hermione and the loss of Perdita, her infant daughter, who were banished both by King Leontes out of the latter's paranoid tyrannical fear that Hermione cuckolded him with another king. When Paulina, who is referred to alternatively by Leontes as a "crone," a "gross hag," "a lewd tongued wife," steps in to revive Hermione with the call of music, a magic spectacle takes place on the stage. Whether the intervention of the gods, providence, something divine, it recalls the Greek myth of the sculptor Pygmalion, who appeals to Aphrodite to bring his statue of a lover to life, and indeed his wish is granted. Paulina cautions those in the crowd against worrying that her "spells" are not lawful, reminding us that although folk remedies and magic charms were popular in Renaissance England, the kind of natural magic performed by women was often labeled witchcraft, and persecuted thusly.

In the world of *The Winter's Tale*, characters keep a watchful eye on planetary movements, and reference methods from astrology. Scholars have long acknowledged that in Shakespeare's day, as in the rest of Renaissance Europe, there was wide-spread belief in the power of the stars. There is evidence of this in the many almanacs and prognostications which have been preserved, in the numerous writings for and against astrology, and in countless astrological statements and references in the literature of the time. In particular the frequent mention of astrology in the drama, which baffles even learned

¹ V.iii 97 - 106

commentators today, presupposes an audience familiar with the subject and its technical terminology.²

Many of these ideas were transmitted by Marsilio Ficino, among the most influential philosophers of the early Italian Renaissance, who translated works of Plato and Plotinus. Through the study and translation of classical texts, Ficino was exposed to, and made use of, astrological techniques. His major work *De Vita*, argues that “the human body is connected with the heavens and can be influenced and cured by heavenly forces.”³ Ficino writes

That the cosmos is animate just as any animate thing, and more effectively so, not only Platonic arguments but also the testimony of Arabic astrologers thoroughly proves. In the same works, the Arabic writers also prove that by an application of our spirit to the spirit of the cosmos, achieved by physical science and our affect, celestial gods pass through to our soul and body.⁴

Owing to the popularity of Neoplatonic philosophies in the Renaissance, “ensoulment,”—i.e. the belief that all living matter, human, animal, and beyond, was imbued with life force, or a soul—doctors, philosophers, and lay people believed that “in relation to the body...there are direct links with the living cosmos, which can be demonstrated, for example, through astrology and magic.”⁵

For a Renaissance doctor it was thus necessary to bear in mind a patient’s astrological chart, even

² Sondheim, Moriz. “Shakespeare and the Astrology of His Time.” *Journal of the Warburg Institute*, vol. 2, no. 3, 1939, pp. 243–259.

³ “From Astrology to the Cult of Dissection: The Renaissance.” *Recovering the Body: A Philosophical Story*, by CAROL COLLIER, University of Ottawa Press, 2013, pp. 105–132.

⁴ Ficino, *de Vita*

⁵ *Ibid.*

in relation to the doctor's astrological chart, citing "the relation between the infected parts of the body and their governing planets, and the positions of the stars and planets at the moments of medication."⁶ These ideas were transmitted to Renaissance scholars through the

recovery and translation of original works of Plato and other Greek writers. The original works of the Greeks, which had been lost to the Christian world, had been preserved in the Byzantine world; they became available to Western scholars at the time of the fall of Constantinople. Thus, scholars now had access to the original Plato and other ancient writers, which resulted in a revival of pre-Christian thought...⁷

Stuart Gillespie writes that the "importance of the [Greek] romances in the Elizabethan ocean of stories, that mackerel-crowded sea of translated, retold, recycled, summarised and excerpted tales...formed a pan-European storehouse for poets and dramatists."⁸ Indeed, we see the Greco-Roman world alive and well in nearly all of Shakespeare's works,⁹ either by way of characters having Greek or Latinate names, or by referencing other Greek works in subtle yet important

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Gillespie, S. 2004: "Shakespeare and Greek Romance: 'Like an old tale still.'" In Charles Martindale and A. B. Taylor (eds.), *Shakespeare and the Classics*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 225–40.

⁹ Scholar Amy Burnette writes, "Although Ben Johnson's notorious reference to Shakespeare's 'small Latin and less Greek' has long been a critical commonplace in arguments against Shakespeare's familiarity with the *Alkestis*, Euripides play made itself known to Shakespeare through contemporary prose fiction, poems, essays, and collections of tales... Another, perhaps equally likely, nondramatic source, and one that scholars have previously overlooked within the context of *The Winter's Tale*, is Philemon Holland's 1603 translation of Plutarch's *Moralia*."

ways.¹⁰ Character names and uncanny references, however, are not the only items of the play with roots in the ancient Mediterranean. Embedded in the classical texts were biopolitical notions regarding gender.

King Leontes's tyrannical insistence on Hermione's infidelity leads to the latter's doomed attempt to reason with him. But the play's central conflict derives from an axiomatic belief that women have no loyalty. It is a classic expression of misogyny, and it contributes to all death and destruction in the play. Mamilius, Hermione, Perdita, Antigonus—all seem to perish.¹¹ Polixenes, once a loyal friend, is banished from Sicilia (not to mention Camillo, his cupbearer, banished too). Leontes's rage wreaks havoc upon his court; it is too late when he realizes he is mistaken, that no crime has been committed save the crimes of his own paranoia, of which he claims to have “shame perpetual.”¹²

Numerous scholars—including Amy Burnette, Tanya Pollard, Beatrice Bradley, Michelle Ephraim, and Helen Hackett—have made important feminist interventions in scholarship around *The Winter's Tale*. It is to their credit that they have expanded the ways in which we read gender in the play. Although the extant scholarship comprehends important explorations concerning childbirth and “bearing death,” or bereaved mothers and sacrificial daughters, almost none seriously takes into account seventeenth century astrology's impact on the play, apart from noting its

¹⁰ One instance that comes to mind in *The Winter's Tale* is after Hermione's “return” from hiding, or reanimation via magic, Paulina comments that she has not yet spoken. This calls to mind Alcestis's return from the underworld in Euripides's *Alcestis*, who is saved from death by Hercules, but remains silent upon her return.

¹¹ Though it should be noted that Hermione and Perdita are revived, or recovered, by the play's end.

¹² III. ii. 1479

influence, as though it were mere background. Less still has explored—as I will—the demonstrable connections to be made between the Greco-Roman ideology of *sophrosyne* and its complex relation to astrology in the play.

Astrological language would not have been lost on audience members in Shakespeare's time;¹³ thus when Hermione, standing accused of adultery in the Sicilian court, delivers the following speech, those present likely knew that Hermione refers to the influence of transiting planets on sublunary life:

There's some ill planet reigns:
I must be patient till the heavens look
With an aspect more favourable. Good my lords,
I am not prone to weeping, as our sex
Commonly are; the want of which vain dew
Perchance shall dry your pities: but I have
That honourable grief lodged here which burns
Worse than tears drown...¹⁴

The term “ill planet” is a reference to a *malefic* planet such as Saturn or Mars (the celestial agents of destruction). The phrase “Looking out for a more favorable aspect” refers to the practice of identifying the geometric relationships of bodies as they circulate in the cosmos at their respective speeds. For astrology, the movements of planets impacted existence on earth, reflecting thereby the Hermetic maxim, “As above, so below.” This was the governing principle of the

¹³ Costello, Priscilla. *Shakespeare and the Stars: the Hidden Astrological Keys to Understanding the World's Greatest Playwright*. Ibis Press, 2016.

¹⁴ II. i. 725 - 732

microcosm/macrocosm model so very popular in Shakespeare's time. Besides the astrological references embedded in Hermione's speech—appearing as they do alongside commentary on gender difference—there are numerous others which appear alongside discussions of gender difference.

The Hellenic world saw the founding of democracy,¹⁵ which coincided with the interdiction of the female-led funerary lament—a cultural role for women, endowing them with considerable power in their communities. According to Christian Billings, “Recent feminist scholarship has shown that the Athenian move towards democracy during the fifth century BC led to the contradictory suppression of women in public life.”¹⁶ Apparently as ancient Athens made its first turns toward the establishment of democracy, granting voices to all (male) citizens, women were summarily dismissed from public life, relegated to the realm of the private, domestic space. The inception of democracy required the elimination of the rights of women.

The role of the lament and others were abolished by the statesman Solon who, in the fifth century BC, outlawed “disruptive” funerary rituals, characterized by loud and visceral public displays of grief and mourning. Protracted mourning was a normal part of life in the ancient Mediterranean, and the role of the lamenter was in fact prestigious. Mourning had apotropaic and symbolic functions, culturally, as life and death were more greatly integrated than they would eventually become. Due to accusations of such rituals fueling internecine wars,¹⁷ “Solon ‘forbade laceration of cheeks, singing of set dirges [*pepoiēmena*], and lamentation at other people's

¹⁵ Though of course, Renaissance England was monarchic, not democratic.

¹⁶ Billings, Christian M. “Lament and Revenge in the Hekabe of Euripides.” *New Theatre Quarterly*, vol. 23, no. 01, 2007

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

tombs.”¹⁸ In “The Gender of Sound,” Anne Carson writes about the Greek ideal of *sophrosyne*, defined as “excellence achieved through a soundness of mind,” a trait which was applied solely to men, and deemed lacking in women.¹⁹

Leontes’s continual, violent, masculinist denouncements of Hermione and Paulina’s chastity, honesty, and worth, are an echo of this pre-classical moment. Hence I argue that our understanding of *The Winter’s Tale* improves from a thorough understanding of the impact of seventeenth century ideas concerning astrology’s effect on bodies and human events. The play becomes a fascinating link in that age-old conversation in which men are deemed rational and women not so. That Shakespeare makes his King Leontes absolutely irrational, paranoid, and hysterical, while imbuing Hermione and Paulina with an admirable blend of grace under pressure, compassion, and mental clarity seems to suggest that the playwright was in some way aware of the problematic nature of this conversation, and wanted to comment on the hypocrisy of such gender essentialism.

It is necessary that we read the play with an understanding of seventeenth-century astrological knowledge because the play is full of “bawdy planet(s),” and references to heavenly movement and intervention ring like bells. Tracking astrological speech in *The Winter’s Tale* illuminates the deep impact of gravitational pulls on liquids like blood, lymph, wombs, beverages, and human behaviors, bringing fits of madness and clarity alike. Rooted in Hellenistic astrological beliefs, 17th-century astrology carried its own misogynist ideas, for instance, equating

¹⁸ Alexiou, Margaret. *The Ritual Lament in the Greek Tradition*. London: Cambridge UP, 1974. Print.

¹⁹ Carson, Anne. *Glass, Irony, and God*. New Directions Books, 2005. The etymology of *sophrosyne*: σωφροσύνη, “*sōphrosúnē*,” from σώφρων “*sōphrōn*,” “sane, moderate, prudent,” from σῶς, “*sōs*,” “safe, sound, whole” + φρήν, “*phrēn*,” “mind.”

women with the moon. Cycles of menstruation after all were believed to be tied to the lunar cycle, and so women were denounced as “lunatics” owing to the influence of this unstable luminary. By contrast, men were seen as solar, meaning they were life-giving, rational; and most importantly, more emotionally continent than women. Leontes, the king, speaks excessively of his heart, the part of the body ruled by the masculine, fixed, fire sign Leo, a clue also contained in his very name. Hermione laments that Perdita, her newborn child, was “Starr’d most unluckily.” Upon realizing that Leontes has lost his mind, Hermione notes that an “ill planet reigns”; and while in a fit of rage, Leontes compares intercourse to a “bawdy planet” that “strikes when ’tis predominant,” a phrase which seventeenth century astrologers would recognize to mean a planet “in its ascendant.”²⁰

Exploring the proliferation of astrological references in *The Winter’s Tale* exposes us to classical justifications of women’s repression, of which each era has its own reification. Leontes’s continual references to Paulina as a crone, a witch to be burned at the stake, and even a sexually promiscuous person, remind us that in Shakespeare’s time, though there were practitioners of magic, in which astrology played a major part, male astrologers were thought of as high magicians, while women were thought of as satanic witches. Which is not to say that astrological inquiry is inherently repressive against women—just that by engaging with astrological tropes, we are able to glimpse another layer of potential for misogynist abuse, something Shakespeare in turn reveals as unsustainable, cruel, and murderous.

²⁰ Cummings, Peter. “Shakespeare’s Bawdy Planet.” *The Sewanee Review*, vol. 101, no. 4, 1993, pp. 521–535.

This thesis contributes a perspective to the discourse long established on *The Winter's Tale*, a perspective that takes seriously its cosmic and planetary language, augmenting our understanding of the gender dynamics at play between Leontes, Hermione and Paulina, and lastly showing that the king's behavior is steeped in Athenian gender conceptions. Shakespeare's wry twist, of course, is to portray Leontes as the one utterly lacking in *sophrosyne*, just as all tyrants lack it, guided as they are by narcissistic passions, paranoia, and greed.

The Classical Roots of Seventeenth Century Astrology

In order to understand the influence of Hellenistic astrology on an Elizabethan milieu, we must first establish an understanding of Hellenistic astrology in general, as the language connected with this art form will be alien to most contemporary readers; moreover it is a complicated language with a complicated history. In this chapter, I aim to provide a foundational understanding of Hellenistic astrology, and its origins, and some of its key components. Finally, I give a perspective on the various opinions of astrology in Elizabethan culture, in order to substantiate my argument: that the principles of Hellenistic astrology were readily at hand to many in Shakespeare's milieu and thus he would easily have been able to import it into his dramatic works.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines astrology as follows: "The calculation and prediction of natural phenomena and meteorological events (such as the measurement of time, the times of tides and eclipses) on the basis of astronomical observations."²¹ Astrology is the practice of observing the motions of planets in the sky, and, with the understanding that the cosmos is a macrocosmic reflection of human life—the microcosm—these motions are interpreted with the intention of understanding events on earth. Astrology is rooted in the ancient world. It appeared,

²¹ *OED*

somewhat mysteriously, roughly 4,000 years ago in ancient Mesopotamia, a region which is more or less equivalent to modern day Iraq.²² Scholar Chris Brennan writes of this ancient astrology:

Around this time, people began recording observations about correlations between celestial movements and earthly events. These observations were usually recorded as simple celestial omens in the form of conditional statements that followed the formula, ‘if x , then y .’ A hypothetical celestial omen might read: ‘if there is an eclipse, then the king will die.’... The Mesopotamian astrologers began recording hundreds of these types of omens on tiny clay tablets, using the wedge-shaped script called cuneiform. Many of the oldest surviving omens that were collected are lunar eclipse omens that date to the Old Babylonian period (2000 - 1600 BCE). Eventually large libraries of celestial omens were amassed, and the astrologers began standardizing their collections by creating compilations, the most popular of which was known as the *Enūma And Enlil*.²³

Astrological techniques were transmitted from Mesopotamian cultures through history, from the time of ancient Babylon through that of the Roman empire. As I discuss in this chapter, due to the cultural explorations of the Renaissance period, the astrology relevant in the seventeenth century was derived from these traditions. Our understanding of Hellenistic astrology today comes from the translation of ancient texts.

A Brief Overview of Relevant Astrological Principals

²² Brennan, Christopher. *Hellenistic Astrology: the Study of Fate and Fortune*. Amor Fati Publications, 2017.

²³ Ibid.

Hellenistic astrologers studied the movements of the two luminaries, the Sun and Moon, and five planetary bodies: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn. Astronomers noticed that these bodies moved through a specific path in the sky, through twelve constellations, which they called the *ecliptic*, or the path of the Sun. This sequence of constellations was called the zodiac, and was standardized by astrologer-astronomers in Mesopotamia in the fifth century BCE.²⁴ The constellations involved are Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, Leo, Virgo, Libra, Scorpio, Sagittarius, Capricorn, Aquarius, and Pisces. The zodiac, according to Brennan, is “measured relative to the seasons, which begin at the precise degree of the equinoxes and the solstices. The starting point is the vernal equinox, which coincides with the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere, and this then becomes the beginning of the sign Aries.”²⁵ The summer solstice coincides with the sign Cancer, the autumn equinox initiates the sign Libra, and the winter solstice marks the beginning of the sign Capricorn. The various planets, noted above, were named after the gods of Roman myth, and were interpreted to influence matters on earth in the very way those gods would. For instance, Mars was the patron of war and sexual force, and so the planet Mars governs matters pertaining to violence, conquest, and domination in human affairs. Similarly, Venus is the goddess of love and beauty and, in astrological terms, governs matters of love, art, pleasure, and harmony.

The influence of the planets could be broken down into two camps, the *malefic* planets, and the *benefic* planets, the former having a negative impact on earthly matters, and the latter seen as supportive to happy and healthy living. Venus was the lesser benefic and Jupiter the

²⁴ Ibid. pg. 216

²⁵ Ibid. pg. 217

greater, Mars the lesser malefic and Saturn the greater. Mercury was dual natured, depending on his place in a horoscope, perhaps due to Mercury's supposed ability to travel to the depths of the underworld as well as to the heights of Mount Olympus, for indeed he was messenger of the gods.

A nativity, or natal chart, was erected by observing the exact time, place, and date of a birth. But charts could be erected for such various events as a marriage or a hypothetical battle or a coronation. Astrologers made interpretations of horoscopes based on the arrangements of the planets in the ecliptic, as well as the geometrical relationship the planets formed to one another.

As Brennan notes, "few texts from the [Hellenistic] period survive in their entirety; and the fragments and testimonies to which we are now reduced derive for the most part from jejune epitomators or hostile commentators."²⁶ However, scholars note that "the last surviving cuneiform birth chart from the Mesopotamian tradition dates to 69 BCE, right around the same time as the first extant Greek birth charts begin to appear in the mid to late first century BCE."²⁷ There is evidence that there was an awareness of Mesopotamian astrology from approximately 400 BCE:

Cicero cites Eudoxus of Cnidus (c. 365 - 340 BCE) as having said "no reliance whatever is to be placed on the Chaldean astrologers when they profess to forecast a man's future from the position of the stars on the day of his birth. Eudoxus was a student of Plato, and

²⁶ Algra, *The Cambridge History of Hellenistic Philosophy*, pg xi

²⁷ Brennan, pg. 19

this shows that the concept of natal astrology as starting to become familiar to the Greeks already by the first half of the fourth century BCE.²⁸

After this point, there are repeated references to astrology in Greek and Roman writings, which suggests to us that astrology had taken hold as a practice in the ancient Mediterranean. After the first century BCE, astrological documents become vastly more common, and seem to have been widely popular through the height of the Roman empire.²⁹

The Popularity and Prevalence of Astrology in Seventeenth Century England

Of the Renaissance, scholar Richard Tarnas writes, “such a prodigious development of human consciousness and culture had not been since the ancient Greek miracle at the very birth of Western civilization. [In the Renaissance] Western man was indeed reborn.”³⁰ One of the characterizing features of this rebirth was the reintroduction of ancient knowledge into the scholarly mainstream, owing to translations of texts from the ancient Mediterranean world. If the Renaissance was a period of cultural rebirth, then it “could hardly fail to involve the field of astrological studies, [complete with] a direct confrontation with the lessons of the classical writers on this topic, especially with the greatest among them, Claudius Ptolemy.”³¹ We know too that the Hellenistic astrologer Vettius Valens was widely read in the Renaissance,³² as well as Plato, Aristotle, and other classical authors who carried with them information about astrology and a Hel-

²⁸ Ibid. pg. 19

²⁹ Ibid. pg. 24

³⁰ Tarnas, Richard. *Cosmos and Psyche: Intimations of a New World View*. Penguin Group USA, 2007. pg 224

³¹ Dooley, Brendan. *A Companion to Astrology in the Renaissance*. 1st ed., 2014.

³² Burns, William E. *Astrology through History: Interpreting the Stars from Ancient Mesopotamia to the Present*. ABC-CLIO, 2018.

lenic worldview. This was filtered through the writings of Marsilius Ficino, a doctor and astrologer who translated works of Plato and Plotinus. Here is Ficino on the old astrological theme of microcosm and macrocosm.

You will bend your efforts to insinuate into yourself this spirit of the world above all, for by this as an intermediary you will gain certain natural benefits not only from the world's body but from its soul, and even from the stars and the daemons. For this spirit is an intermediary between the gross body of the world and its soul; and the stars and daemons exist in it and by means of it.³³

Combining Platonism, Neo-Platonism, and Stoicism, Ficino sought to establish a worldview which was highly syncretic (a characterizing feature of future Renaissance thinking). He viewed the human body as sympathetically connected to the macrocosm, and is one of the most significant thinkers of his era, read widely during the Renaissance.

Though astrology had its detractors, it was a popular tool for both royalty and masses alike, and was a method for divining the connection between the heavens and the earth. Carroll Camden writes, "Practically every court in Europe at this time had astrologers in its employ, and most courtiers were eager votaries of the practice of the science."³⁴ The wide popularity of astrology in the Renaissance is evidenced here, in the words of the theologian William Perkins: "the starres haue a very great force, yet such as manifesteth it selfe onely in that operatio which it hath in the foure principall qualities of naturall things, namely in heate, colde, moysture, and

³³ Ficino, *De Vita*

³⁴ Camden, Carroll. "Astrology in Shakespeare's Day." *Isis*, vol. 19, no. 1, 1933, pp. 26

drines.”³⁵ Meanwhile George Carleton, the English bishop writes, “The Starres incline the humour, the humor inclineth the body, the body inclineth upon the minde; through all these inclinations the starres come at last to work upon the Soule.”³⁶ Cornelius Agrippa wrote of astrology that “the effectes, the forces, and mouinges of all liuinge creatures, stoones, mettals, hearbes, and what thinges so euer be created in these inferiour places, doo proceede from the Heauen.”³⁷

There is ample evidence that astrology was widely popular in the Renaissance as a court fixture: “Henry VII,” writes Camden, “is reported to have directed his Christmas keeping by means of the stars. Henry VIII’s physicians made no diagnosis without astral consultations... Queen Elizabeth and her famous astrologer John Dee...popularized astrology.”³⁸ In addition to this, astrology was taught at universities. There is an instance of a sixteenth century scholar admitted to Oxford to study astrology; “astrology,” according to Camden, “formed a part of the regular training of the physician during this period...Indeed, astrology was recognized as one of the seven liberal arts.”³⁹ Further to these higher instances of astrology in court and academe, “books on witchcraft, alchemy, and astrology were always sure of a public. Then too, type for the various astrological signs of the zodiac, planets, etc., were contained in the fonts of all printing houses.”⁴⁰

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

Thus we see that there is ample evidence for astrology as part of the mainstream in Renaissance England, from high courts to almanacs. A belief that the planets in the heavens influenced life on earth was readily accepted by many, and was certainly part of the cultural life of Shakespeare's time. Let us now turn to an examination of the heavens in *The Winter's Tale*.

Heaven and Earth in The Winter's Tale

Having established a basic understanding of the relevance of astrology in Shakespeare's time, as well as setting down some foundational concepts of astrology, it is time to turn to the play itself. In *The Winter's Tale*, the word "heaven" (or "heavens") makes eighteen appearances, a continual presence in the play's environment and dialogue. In this section, I engage four critical components in *The Winter's Tale* which I believe support the argument that the world in this play is inherently influenced by and in conversation with astrological concepts. Those four criteria are 1) the presence of Greek mythological names and places, 2) the play's basis in the seasons, 3) language explicitly about the heavens and planets, and 4) the influence of heavenly interference on bodies, bodily fluids, and human perception, together reflecting an adherence to a micro-/macrocosmic worldview, relevant not just to Renaissance perspectives, but to astrological perspectives. By rendering these components of *The Winter's Tale* explicit, we are able to facilitate an understanding of the astrological influence on characters and events in the play, and deepen our understanding of the play itself.

Seeing the Ancient Mediterranean in The Winter's Tale

The play's geographical location as well as character names reveal an association with the ancient Greek or Roman world. Leontes is King of Sicilia, a region that Michael Steffes re-

minds us was “culturally Greek in ancient times.”⁴¹ This is the first cue that *The Winter’s Tale* has ancient Greek roots, as this location was not randomly chosen by the playwright; his choices are always wryly intentional. Character names, too, are deliberately chosen. A 1963 edition of *The Arden Shakespeare* notes that a translation of Plutarch circa 1603 was “Shakespeare’s primary source for character names in *The Winter’s Tale*,” and that “Pafford [the editor this *Arden* edition] lists Leontes, Camillus, Antigonus, Cleomenes, Dion, Polyxenus, Archidamus, Autolycus, Hermione, and Amelia as characters in Plutarch”⁴²—these being names identical to the characters in *The Winter’s Tale*. Earl Showerman writes that the names, derived from Plutarch, Hesiod, Euripides, and Ovid make clear that the “naming scheme refers directly to fifth-century Greece,”⁴³ and that “much of the mystical power of this drama derives from these archetypal Greek sources, from the histories and mythologies embedded in its characters’ names.”⁴⁴ The Sicilian environment populated by Greek names is our first clue to a Hellenic influence on the world of the play.

Toward further establish a Greek connection, we must address explicit reference to Greek myth beyond the nomenclature of the characters. The world of *The Winter’s Tale* is rife with Greek mythic echoes, bolstering the connection to a potential Hellenic, and therefore astrological, worldview. Shakespeare drew richly from the history of stories and narratives that preceded

⁴¹ STEFFES, MICHAEL. “The Ancient Greek Wild in ‘The Winter’s Tale.’” *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance Et Réforme*, vol. 27, no. 4, 2003.

⁴² Showerman, Earl. “Look Down and See What Death Is Doing: Gods and Greeks in The Winter’s Tale.” *The Oxfordian*, vol. 10, 2007.

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

him, and *The Winter's Tale* is no exception. One of the key dramas of the play, the loss of the young daughter Perdita, banished to the wilds of Bohemia, seems, as Showerman writes, “allegorical of the Greek myths of Demeter and Proserpine.”⁴⁵ To summarize that myth: while picking flowers, Proserpine is abducted by Pluto, god of the underworld, and taken to his subterranean domain. Her mother, Demeter, goddess of the harvest, searches high and low, laments the loss of her daughter and, in her despair, brings death and winter to all crops. Proserpine is eventually recovered as the result of a compromise negotiated between Zeus and Pluto. And because of Proserpine having consumed six pomegranate seeds in the underworld, she is to spend six months of the year with her mother, the other six with Pluto. Thus the seasons came to be.

The Winter's Tale shares this structure in that Hermione loses her daughter, who is stolen from her and abandoned in a wintry wilderness. The loss of Perdita (whose name means “lost”) brings about the *apparent* death of Hermione, and the actual death of Mamilius, thus ending Leontes’s family line. Winter, then, corresponds to Perdita’s loss, spring to her reappearance in the social world, and Perdita’s reunion with Hermione coincides with the season of summer, which reflects their joyous restoration. Regarding the scholarship of W. F. C. Wigston on this play, J. H. P. Pafford explains that Wigston “elaborated the ‘extraordinary parallel presented between Perdita and Persephone (Proserpine), and between Hermione and Demeter (or Ceres)’ and said that since, with the recovery of Persephone, the spring comes again to the earth, the ‘myth of Demeter is thus a Winter’s Tale.’”⁴⁶ It is not irrelevant, either, that the island of Sicily was conse-

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

crated to Ceres, or that the sixteenth century English writer George Sandys describes “Sicily as ‘sacred of old unto Ceres and Proserpina’ and ‘famous for the Rape of Proserpina.’”⁴⁷

The miraculous loss and recovery of Perdita, as well as Hermione, echoes elements of Euripides’s *Alcestis*,⁴⁸ a tragedy of which, Burnette tells us, “there were several different versions of, and allusions to, Euripides’ romance available to Shakespeare, which allowed him to develop his own personal mythology through which he could dramatize and retell old tales.”⁴⁹

Of celestial figures, we hear the name “Mercury,” as the Autolycus claims to have been “littered under Mercury,”⁵⁰ Florizel references the gods “Jupiter,” “Neptune,” and “Apollo,”⁵¹ and Perdita calls out to “Proserpina, / For the flowers now that, frighted, thou let’st fall / From Dis’s wagon!”⁵² The god Apollo plays a pivotal role in *The Winter’s Tale* (just as he does in Euripides’s *Alcestis*), as Leontes sends away for a message from the oracle at Delphi, Apollo’s oracle, as proof of Hermione’s infidelity. So sure of her guilt, Leontes says that “the great Apollo suddenly will have the truth of this,”⁵³ and Leontes’s messenger Cleomenes describes the experience of approaching the oracle in full mythological wonderment: “the burst / And the ear-deafen-

⁴⁷ Steffes, pg. 30

⁴⁸ The *Alcestis* by Euripides features a faithful wife who dies to save her selfish husband, and is subsequently “rescued” from the underworld, returned to his side in a miraculous manner (she is saved by Heracles). This is often compared to Hermione’s death due to Leontes’s selfishness, and her miraculous reanimation/return from the dead at the play’s end.

⁴⁹ Burnette, pg. 4

⁵⁰ IV. iii. 25

⁵¹ IV. iv. 26 - 30

⁵² IV. iv. 116 - 120

⁵³ II.iii. 199 - 200

ing voice o'th'oracle, / Kin to Jove's thunder, so surprised my sense / That I was nothing."⁵⁴ And so we see that, despite Shakespeare's audience, the old gods are very much present, and old rituals, such as consulting an oracle, are presented as viable methods of ascertaining the truth.

In this Shakespearean work, as in Greek tragedies from fifth century BCE, Leontes's life is destroyed by the gods when he defies the oracle. When an officer of the Sicilian court reads the message from the oracle that Hermione is "chaste,"⁵⁵ Leontes thunders, "There is no truth i'th'oracle!"⁵⁶ and immediately news arrives that his son Mamilius is dead. Hermione collapses, also apparently dead, and Leontes reflects: "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice."⁵⁷ The world of *The Winter's Tale* is one in which the gods, and hence the macrocosm, are engaged, observant, and influential upon the microcosm of human life.

"A Sad Tale's Best for Winter"

Ancient astrology was predicated on the seasons, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, each bringing a unique astrological impact owing to planets and signs activated during their respective time of year. The observance of solstices and equinoxes implies a cyclic understanding of time, a perspective through which life, death, and rebirth were all linked to the year's continual seasonal shift.

The Winter's Tale conspicuously contains the name of one of the four seasons in its title, and within the scope of the play, the seasons shift from winter to summer. With that seasonal

⁵⁴ III.i. 18 - 20

⁵⁵ III.ii.131

⁵⁶ III.ii.138

⁵⁷ III.ii.147 - 48

change comes an additional change of genre, from tragedy and winter in the first half, to romance and summer in the latter. Bearing in mind the importance of seasonality from an astrological perspective, and the thematic focus of the seasons in *The Winter's Tale*, I assert that Shakespeare used the changing seasons motif to deepen the impact of the tragedy of loss in the first half of the play, as well as exalt the joy of resolution at the play's end. It is a simple gesture that would have resonated with his audience, who understood that winter was a time of loss and death, and summer a time of fertility. People would have known this, in part, due to the prevalence of astrological knowledge at the time. The remainder of this section, then, engages seasonal references in order to establish the micro- and macrocosmic connections that exist between heaven and earth in *The Winter's Tale*.

In Act II, scene I of this play, Mamilius, the young son of Hermione and Leontes, tells a story to his mother and other women of the court—"a sad tale's best for winter, I have one / of ghosts and goblins."⁵⁸ There is a closeness between mother and child here, as Hermione asks Mamilius to sit on her lap and "give't me in mine ear."⁵⁹ It is a tender moment in sharp contrast to what follows it: Hermione's subsequent trial for adultery, then Leontes's thundering exhortation of women as "mankind witch[es]"⁶⁰ which eventually leads to several deaths and the destruction of his family line.

Winter of course is a season that is bitterly cold (in the northern hemisphere), forcing most people indoors. According to Burnette, who cites the OED, winter has the following sec-

⁵⁸ II.i.25 - 6

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

ondary definition: “winter-house n., winter quarters n.; of localities in their winter state and things serviceable in winter” (3.b), a realm traditionally associated with women and with, in Shakespeare’s day, “unbreached” children (*The Winter’s Tale*, I.ii.155), but which also includes, as in Elyot’s dictionary, “painted tables and bokes of stories,” that is, art.”⁶¹

The winter portion of *The Winter’s Tale* is, moreover, features references to adverse astrological events, rendering a connection between winter—a season governed primarily by the planet Saturn, ruler of signs Capricorn (December 22 - January 22), and Aquarius (January 23 - February 22)—and the greater malefic in the zodiac. In one instance, when Hermione states that an “ill planet reigns,”⁶² Paulina speaks of the “dangerous unsafe lunes i’ the king”⁶³ (the word “lune” defined as “Fits of frenzy or lunacy; mad freaks or tantrums,” or “Anything in the shape of a crescent or half-moon”).⁶⁴ The linguistic connection between insanity and the Moon is established with a singular word uttered by Paulina, expressing that the king has become, like the Moon, changeable, unstable, perhaps obscured by a shadow like the crescent or half-Moon, this being the lunacy leading to the court’s destruction. Leontes too lashes out against “a bawdy planet, that will strike / Where ’tis predominant; and ’tis powerful, think it, / From east, west, north, and south.”⁶⁵ After delivering Perdita in a jail cell, Hermione laments that the child was “Starred most unluckily,”⁶⁶ which might be taken as a literal, rather than a metaphorical reference, to

⁶¹ Burnette, pg. 444

⁶² II.i.105

⁶³ II.ii.29

⁶⁴ *OED*

⁶⁵ I.ii.201 - 3

⁶⁶ III.ii.98

Perdita's natal horoscope. There are continual references to the negative impacts of the heavens, suffusing the first half of the play, lending the Sicilian winter a dismal, malefic, and hopeless character, both astrologically and emotionally.

By comparison, the latter portion of the play takes place in spring/summer, and bursts with floral imagery, comedic lightness, the miraculous reunion of Perdita, the revival of Hermione, and Leontes's redemption. Act IV shows a sheep-shearing festival, a springtime rite held in "April's front."⁶⁷ Indeed the spring equinox initiates the season of rebirth and renewal, and is ruled by the sign Aries, the ram. The connection here is a symbolic one; the play has been transfigured to one of regeneration. Characters speak and sing of flowers: "daffodils,"⁶⁸ "rosemary and rue,"⁶⁹ "carnations and streaked gillyvors."⁷⁰ These flowers are emblematic of spring and summer; or, in other words, the renewal of life. Perdita in particular speaks often of these flowers and cycles of time. And at the sheep-shearing festival, a high-spirited Polixenes offers

Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram;
The marigold, that goes to bed with' sun
And with him rises weeping; these are flowers
Of middle summer, and I think they are given
To men of middle age...⁷¹

⁶⁷ IV.iii.127

⁶⁸ IV.iii.53

⁶⁹ IV.iii.74

⁷⁰ IV.iii.82

⁷¹ IV.iv.104 - 108

To her shepherdesses, she offers “virgin branches” and exclaims “O Proserpina, / For the flowers now that, frightened, thou let’st fall / from Dis’s wagon! Daffodils / that come before the swallow dares.”⁷² Along with the festival rites of sheep-shearing—romantic scenes of love and admiration of youth, dances of shepherds, shepherdesses, and satyrs—Act IV brims with the promise of youth, and of life’s springtime renewal. The actions of characters map easily on to the springtime scene, linking environment and human behavior, or micro- and macrocosmic confluence.

Northrup Frye writes the following about seasons and genre:

Rhythm, or recurrent movement, is deeply founded on the natural cycle, and everything in nature that we think of as having some analogy with works of art, like the flower or the bird’s song, grows out of a profound synchronization between an organism and the rhythms of its environment, especially that of the solar year. [...] In ritual, then, we may find the origin of narrative, a ritual being a temporal sequence of acts in which the conscious meaning or significance is latent: it can be seen by an observer, but is largely concealed from the participators themselves. The pull of ritual is toward pure narrative, which, if there could be such a thing, would be automatic and unconscious repetition. [...] All the important recurrences in nature, the day, the phases of the moon, the seasons and solstices of the year, the crises of existence from birth to death, get rituals attached to them...⁷³

Frye here establishes the semiotic interconnectivity of seasonality, genre, and natural cycles. The innate “analogy” between works of art and nature is important to recognize, in that humans have

⁷² IV.iv116 - 120

⁷³ Frye, Northrop. “The Archetypes of Literature.” *The Kenyon Review*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1951, pp. 92–110.

always made art based in their lived experience. That Frye states that these cycles of nature are based in a “solar year” underscores the importance of the heavens in the seasonal scheme. Ritual emanates from earth connection, and the seasons form the basis of human behavior. As Frye says, “the literary anthropologist who chases the source of the Hamlet legend from the pre-Shakespeare play to [12th century Danish historian] Saxo, and from Saxo to nature-myths, is not running away from Shakespeare: he is drawing closer to the archetypal form which Shakespeare recreated.”⁷⁴ Or, said otherwise, it is not merely frivolous to tease out a literary work’s connections to ritual, for Shakespeare’s plays were steeped in it.

The play opens on winter in Sicilia, as signified by Mamilius’s remark that “a sad tale’s best for winter, I have one / of ghosts and goblins.”⁷⁵ Insofar as scholars categorize *The Winter’s Tale* as part tragedy, part comedy, we would do well to look to Frye’s assessment of tragedy and its associated season: “[The archetype of tragedy is identified as] the sunset, autumn and death phase. Myths of fall, of the dying god, of violent death and sacrifice and of the isolation of the hero. Subordinate characters: the traitor and the siren.”⁷⁶ Nearly all of these qualities are present in the first tragic half of *The Winter’s Tale*: accusations of infidelity which lead to Hermione’s seeming death, the death of the son, Mamilius, the abandonment of Perdita, and Leontes’s descent into tyrannical isolation. The latter portion of the play is identified as comedy, which Frye associates with the following key terms: “The zenith, summer, and marriage or triumph phase. Myths of apotheosis, of the sacred marriage, and of entering into Paradise. Subordinate charac-

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ II.i 25 - 6

⁷⁶ Frye, Ibid.

ters: the companion and the bride.”⁷⁷ The summer is associated, too, with the pastoral, which emerges in the sheep-shearing festival of the second half of the play. The shift from tragedy to comedy, then, in the play signifies a shift from the cold to the warm seasons, a shift perhaps alien to the tragic genre, but eminently natural in life as it is experienced in its fullness.

Recognizing this organizing principle in *The Winter's Tale*, which is seasonal, helps us to see that this was a play indebted to a mythic past. However, Frye does not associate winter—after which the play is named—with tragedy. For Frye, fall is associated with tragedy while winter is associated with *satire*: “The darkness, winter and dissolution phase. Myths of the triumph of these powers; myths of floods and the return of chaos, of the defeat of the hero...”⁷⁸ The question, then, worth asking is whether play’s first (ostensibly tragic) half is in fact not tragic, but satirical. If so, what is being satirized?

The play’s title, as Burnette writes, is a reference not only to a fairy-tale told in winter, but specifically “a woman’s story at a winter fire.”⁷⁹ Insofar as winter is a season of restriction, darkness, and retreat, the title “*The Winter's Tale* announces that it will dramatize death’s ‘tale,’ death’s story, death’s art. The possessive ‘Winter’s’ of its title signals this; winter represents death in ways related to infertility, hibernation, withdrawal.”⁸⁰ Therefore, we see that this story of death is, in fact, “a woman’s story.”⁸¹ Burnette’s insight helps us see that, though the story focuses on Leontes’s rage and subsequent descent into isolation, the power rests with the women of

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Burnette, pg. 444, borrowing the phrase from *Macbeth*, III.iv.65

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid. pg. 445

the play, specifically Hermione, Paulina, and Perdita, mother, crone, and maiden—characters who can be mapped onto the very cycle of life itself. Using Frye’s framework, we see it makes sense that the larger portion of the play’s satire takes place in winter. The target of satire here is Leontes’s patriarchal response to women’s agency, a topic that I will support more fully in a later section where I engage with the decidedly gendered reactions to cosmic interference. But for now, I would like to offer the following reading of Leontes’s behavior. Far from depicting him (tragically) as acting out of patriarchal rage, Shakespeare is lampooning him (satirically), criticizing his behavior. The play has a successfully happy ending due to the actions of Hermione and Paulina, who had the wisdom to keep a watchful eye on the planets, as well take seriously the oracle’s prophecy. They had faith that though they were witnessing a moment of death in the winter, spring would eventually return, and so too would symbolic rebirth arrive in Sicilia.

Heavenly Presence

The word “heaven” appears seven times in *The Winter’s Tale*, and the word “heavenly” appears eleven times. The heavens—the sun, moon, stars, and planets—are continually referenced by Leontes, Hermione, and Paulina, as well as Camillo and Antigonus. The heavens mirror actions, desires, and emotions in the play. I posit that though the above-mentioned characters are in conversation with the cosmos, not all reactions are equal. In *The Winter’s Tale*, the heavens 1) keep an omnipresent watch over human life, 2) influence actions between characters, and 3) reflect emotional circumstances. While Hermione and Paulina are skilled at looking out for a better moment, a “more favourable aspect,” Leontes rails against the planets, becoming hysterical and detached from reality. I will map out the prevalence of the heavens in *The Winter’s Tale*, and then

engage in a reading of the impact of these planets, and gendered responses to planetary interference.

In astrology, “planets are factors that transmit energy in steps from the Godhead into the created world.”⁸² In *The Winter’s Tale*, the sun is referenced seven times, the moon is referenced four times. The sun, in astrology, is associated with vitality and willpower. The sun appears in Polixenes’s fond memory of childhood play, as he reminisces that he and Leontes would “frisk i’the sun,”⁸³ this being the only mention of the life-giving luminary in the first half of the play. The remainder of solar references appear in Acts IV and V: the Clown sings a song about the sheep-shearing that involves spices, fruit, and the sun,⁸⁴ Perdita references marigolds as flowers of the sun,⁸⁵ and, in a moment of trying to facilitate harmony between Polixenes and herself, states that the “selfsame sun that shines upon his court / hides not his visage from our cottage but / looks on alike.”⁸⁶ This particular solar reference demonstrates the way in which Perdita regards the sun as a macrocosmic force, omnipotent and in relationship with human life. For her part Florizel says that the “sun sees”⁸⁷ human activity, while Autolycus tells a story in which the sun is “looking with a southward eye”⁸⁸ upon the earth. In the play’s conclusion, the Gentleman

⁸² Costello, p.13

⁸³ I.ii.132

⁸⁴ IV.iii.1761

⁸⁵ IV.iv.1981

⁸⁶ IV.iv.2369

⁸⁷ IV.iv.2421

⁸⁸ IV.iv.2761

compares Perdita to “the most peerless piece of earth, I think, / That e’er the sun shone bright on.”⁸⁹

This accumulation of solar references shows the presence and the character of the luminary as a watchful astrological force. The sun illuminates the world, brings life to crops, and allows humanity to move about its environment with confidence. That the sun is conspicuously missing from the play’s first half suggests it is a world of darkness. Winter, in the northern hemisphere, is characterized by short days, while the long days of summer are what bring plant life, warmth, and a sense of ease back to life.

The moon, which in astrology represents the feminine principle (lunar cycles tied neatly to menstrual cycles), as well as emotional instability and flux, appears four times. Once referenced by Camillo, who notices how the sea obeys the moon,⁹⁰ once by the Clown, who tells a story of a ship appearing to “[bore] the moon with her mainmast, and anon / swallowed with yest and froth, as you’ld thrust a / cork into a hogshead.”⁹¹ In this instance, the sexual force suggested by the “thrust” of the ship’s mast into the moon, further reinforces the sense of the moon as feminine. Autolycus, the thief, states that he wanders at night thanks to the “pale moon [which] shines by night,”⁹² aligning lunar behavior with thieves and playful miscreants. Lastly, the Old Shepherd speaks of Florizel’s gentle love for Perdita, stating “never gazed the moon / upon the

⁸⁹ V.i.94-95

⁹⁰ I.ii.555

⁹¹ III.iii.1583

⁹² IV.iii.1724

water as he'll stand and read / As 'twere my daughters eyes."⁹³ The moon is involved in scenarios of love, play, oceanic reflection, as well as sexual potency.

The heavens are watchful throughout the play. When discussing his childhood experiences with Leontes, Polixenes remarks, "we should have answer'd heaven / Boldly 'not guilty;' the imposition clear'd / hereditary ours."⁹⁴ The idea of "answering" heaven implies that the heavens are probing, asking questions, and looking for a response. In Act II, the First Lord references the "eyes of heaven."⁹⁵ Act III sees the Mariner exclaim, "the heavens with that we have in hand are angry / and frown upon's."⁹⁶ In Act V, the "heavens take angry note,"⁹⁷ and have the ability to "direct."⁹⁸ The heavens are not only watchful, but responsive.

The concept of a watchful sky is aligned with the astrological worldview, and as the heavens look on, influence, and reflect earthly circumstances throughout, the characters of the play take note. Hermione, after Leontes accuses her of infidelity, states, "There's some ill planet reigns: / I must be patient till the heavens look / with an aspect more favourable."⁹⁹ This is a direct astrological reference, as astrologers believed in the influence of malefic planets, such as

⁹³ IV.iv.2057

⁹⁴ I.ii.138

⁹⁵ II.ii.755

⁹⁶ III. iii.1492-93

⁹⁷ V.i.3030

⁹⁸ V. iii. 3468

⁹⁹ II.i.725-727

Saturn and Mars, to be limiting, bringing illness or destruction.¹⁰⁰ Though I cannot prove that she is directly referencing Saturn or Mars, from an astrological standpoint, those are the two “ill” planets that would be interfering with her earthly experience. Also of astrological note is the use of the word “aspect,” which the OED defines, primarily, as “the action of looking at,” yet a secondary definition of the word is “II.4. *Astrology*. The relative positions of the heavenly bodies as they appear to an observer on the earth's surface at a given time. (properly, The way in which the planets from their relative positions, look upon each other, but *popularly* transferred to their joint look upon the earth.”¹⁰¹ Hermione has just been wrongly accused of infidelity, and her first thought is that an ill, or malefic, planet is aspecting, thereby influencing, her circumstances.

In astrology, planets make aspects, or mathematical relationships, to one another as they move through their orbits. Some aspects are harmonious and supportive, while others are destructive. Thus, Hermione waiting for “a more favorable aspect” refers to the act of awaiting a more astrologically propitious time to fight against the injustice to which she is subjected.

This suggests a knowledge of astrology and its functions. As Ann Geneva writes, there is “overwhelming evidence for the permeation of astrological practices and beliefs in every

¹⁰⁰ From Chris Brennan’s *Hellenistic Astrology*, in which he quotes 2nd century BCE skeptic Sextus Empiricus: “as to the stars, they say that some of them are “beneficent,” some “maleficent,” and some “common;” thus Jupiter and Venus are beneficent, but Mars and Saturn maleficent, while Mercury is “common” since it is maleficent when with maleficent. But others believe that the same stars are at one time beneficent, and at another maleficent, according to their varying positions...” pg.184

¹⁰¹ *OED*

space”¹⁰² in the Renaissance. If this is so, why wouldn’t Hermione, a queen (like Queen Elizabeth I, who loved astrology), possess such knowledge?

After Camillo reveals to Polixenes that Leontes plans to poison him due to his belief that he committed adultery with Hermione, Camillo speaks of the stubbornness of Leontes’s plan. He states the king will

Swear his thought over
By each particular star in heaven and
By all their influences, you may as well
Forbid the sea for to obey the moon
As or by oath remove or counsel shake
The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
Is piled upon his faith and will continue
The standing of his body.¹⁰³

This passage speaks of the “influences” of the stars, surely a reference to a micro-/macrocosmic worldview of which astrology is a part.

The word “influence” also has an astrological meaning, even if its primary definition is not astrological. The *OED* gives the following, secondary definition: “The supposed flowing or streaming from the stars or heavens of an ethereal fluid acting upon the character and destiny of men, and affecting sublunary things generally,” as well as “Disposition, nature, or temperament,

¹⁰² Geneva, Ann. *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars*. Manchester University Press, 1995. p. 1

¹⁰³ I.ii.425-432

as held to be the result of astral influence.”¹⁰⁴ Influence, here, is fluid, a liquid form that flows down from the heavens.

We know that the moon, referred to in this play as the “watery star,”¹⁰⁵ is the luminary associated with women, liquid (ocean tides), menstruation, and flux. There is thus a possible connection between astrological influence and feminine agency; after all, so (mistakenly) convinced is Leontes that Hermione has been unfaithful, that Camillo compares his sureness with the sureness with which the sea obeys the moon, and by which the stars influence life on earth. What is more, the cosmos impacts Leontes’s perspective as well as his body.

Planets, Liquids, and Hearts

The world of *The Winter’s Tale* reflects the Renaissance concept of micro- and macro-cosmic relation, summed up succinctly in the Hermetic maxim, “as above, so below, as within, so without.”¹⁰⁶ The planets bear down on bodies in the play, creating unfavorable aspects, and “striking” characters at random, which is why we must look at characters’s physical experience to form a complete picture of astrological impact in the play.

In this world, the human body is subject to the influence of planetary movements, rendering bodies and their functions vulnerable to the gravitational pull of the heavens. Liquids like blood and beverages, as well as bodily organs (filled with blood and other humors) share a watery nature. I argue that the impact of the planets on bodies mirrors the effect of the moon on the tides—as life in nature, like the sea—and even the turning of the seasons—is impacted by plane-

¹⁰⁴ *OED*

¹⁰⁵ I.ii.44

¹⁰⁶ This oft quoted phrase is important in Renaissance Hermeticism, found in the *Emerald Tablet*, attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.

tary movements, so too is the human body. In what follows, I closely examine the behavior of blood and other liquids in relation to planetary movements in *The Winter's Tale*, as well as emotional experiences, to further the claim that this world is beholden to planetary influence.

The Winter's Tale bursts with images of infected hearts and poisoned blood. The word “heart” appears a total of twenty-six times, accompanied by variations on the theme of “heart” (hearts, heartiness, sweetheart, heartily). Through the interplay of the heart and the blood, we see the body reveal what lives in the heart, as well as the power of one’s perception to poison their reality. To look closely at language in this play reveals blood, the heart, and the sense of sight, as meaning-makers too easily affected by jealousy and resentment. The body is permeable, the heart and blood changeable materials. They are manipulated by emotions as well as planets. Renaissance beliefs about the body, inherited from Plato and Aristotle, give some further context to the interaction between the senses, the heart, and the environment. In the world of *The Winter's Tale*, the body is a second stage where the dramas of rage and jealousy play out. Hot blood is infected under the influence of stars and planets, bringing destruction to Leontes and his world.

In Act I, Leontes sees Hermione speaking intimately to his Polixenes, and Leontes becomes poisoned by a jealous rage. His heart explodes in a flurry of violent shocks which slowly infect his perception, moving from his heart to radiate through his blood. The mere sight of suggested intimacy between Hermione and Polixenes is enough to convince Leontes that all he knew before was false—his wife has deceived him and is now carrying his friend’s child—driving him to destroy the world around him, infecting all with fear and lies. He exclaims:

Too hot, too hot!

To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.
I have tremor cordis on me: my heart dances;
But not for joy; not joy. This entertainment
May a free face put on, derive a liberty
From heartiness, from bounty, fertile bosom,
And well become the agent; 't may, I grant;
But to be paddling arms and pinching fingers,
As now they are, and making practised smiles,
As in a looking-glass, and then to sigh, as 'twere
The mort o' the deer; O, that is entertainment
My bosom likes not, nor my brows!¹⁰⁷

This language, delivered by the thundering Leontes, reveals a conflict that first manifests inside the body. Leontes's "*tremor cordis*" (in Latin, "trembling heart") references a condition in which overheated blood causes sickness in the heart. This is our first mention of heart-illness, and we see that it has physical repercussions: it makes the heart "dance," transforming a rhythmical beat to an unpredictable chaos. Though the phrase is Latin, the word "tremor" is certainly used in English, and is defined as either "Terror," "Involuntary agitation of the body of limbs, resulting from physical infirmity or from fear or from other strong emotions," or "A tremulous or vibratory movement caused by some external impulse; a vibration, shaking, quivering."¹⁰⁸ The violence

¹⁰⁷ I.ii. 108 - 118

¹⁰⁸ *OED*

and upset associated with this tremor adds to our impression of the dancing heart. Leontes is expressing a powerful event in his heart's sickness.

Leontes sees Hermione and Polixenes's familiar contact as that of "mingling bloods," bringing with it connotations of intimacy and even sexual intercourse. The *OED* defines the word "mingle" in a few ways: Firstly, "To mix (substances or ingredients together...) so that they become physically united for form a new combination..." "To intermingle, mix or join oneself *with* or *among* others; to marry, to have sexual intercourse with," or to "mix up so as to cause confusion, to confound."¹⁰⁹ From the physical union of bodies to the creation of confusion, the "mingling" of friendship brings far more than simple platonic connectivity. And of course to mingle "bloods" brings with it connotations of mingling bloodlines in the act of reproductive sex. Notably, Aristotle in his *On The Generation of Animals* wrote that "the basic component of semen was blood, and therefore that sexual intercourse was a mingling of bloods."¹¹⁰ This small phrase speaks immediately to the danger of Leontes's mistaken identification of infidelity: it is so strong that it brings sickness to his heart, rooted in Hermione and Polixenes's mingled blood.

Additional observations of contact in the "paddling" and "pinching" arms and fingers of his wife and friend compound this idea of frenetic movement associated with *tremor cordis*. The *OED* defines "paddling" as "The action of walking or wading in shallow water, mud, etc., or of dabbling or splashing in water with one's feet or hands," or "The action of trifling, wasting, or squandering something." Dashing one's hands across a still body of water is certainly an evocative way of representing the act of Hermione's hands against Polixenes's. They bring rippling

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Orgel, pg. 100

waves of disturbance to an ordinarily still surface. The connection to “paddling” being wasteful is also suggestive of Hermione’s relations with Polixenes being less than legitimate: contact between two people who are not married is perhaps a waste of a touch, for no relation between the two of them will lead to a legitimate union or even legitimately recognized child. Leontes’s rejection of his daughter, Perdita, is an additional expression of this waste, as he believes the child is illegitimate.

Leontes’s sense perception is running wild at this moment, and all small sounds and movements are amplified to their most extreme iteration. He likens a sigh, perhaps Hermione’s, to “the mort o’ the deer,” which is a reference to the horn blown in a hunt after a deer is killed. We can imagine the shrillness of the horn in a still forest, a sound that signified triumph of a hunter over the hunted. These amplified sense perceptions Leontes returns to again and again serve to create a case for his destructive jealousy, and communicate his deep disturbance. His “bosom” is also referenced, which of course is the “breast of a human being” but can also relate, poetically, to “the surface of the sea, a lake, a river...,”¹¹¹ connecting us once again to a watery surface disturbed by this perceived injustice. We will see the consequences of this disturbance of the bosom radiate forth, their consequences as unstoppable as blood from the heart.

Leontes’s arrhythmic *tremor cordis* also shakes the hearts of those around him, and upon learning about Leontes’s belief that he has slept with Hermione, Polixenes’s blood becomes the ultimate barometer of truth, acting against its nature by changing from a liquid to a solid form. He laments “O then my best blood turn / To an infected jelly...”¹¹² Polixenes knows the allega-

¹¹¹ *OED*

¹¹² I.ii. 412 - 413

tions against him and Hermione are false, and this derangement of the truth is so powerful that it causes his blood to turn to an “infected jelly,” solidifying in his veins and bringing about a poisonous infection. The *OED* defines “infection” as a “corruption or morbid condition of the blood, another humor, or a body part; an instance of this or condition resulting from this.” Blood becomes “infected jelly,” which Polixenes’s name will henceforth be “yoked”¹¹³ to, like a laboring ox, always tormented by the heaviness of his infected reputation. Just as people who are sick with an infection are avoided, Polixenes knows that he will be shunned. Infections are insidious, and on a basic biological level invade our bodies and disrupt healthy physical functionality, causing pain and disorientation. Leontes’s infected perception and blood, highly contagious, turns Polixenes’s blood from a liquid humor to jelly. Here we see Leontes’s passionate jealousy negatively impact Polixenes’s health, changing the composition of his body.

The body in *The Winter’s Tale* is all too vulnerable to outside influence, its very materials at the mercy of the emotional environment, which is at the mercy of the planets. Throughout the play, the word “blood” appears sixteen times, and each time it appears in a different iteration. Blood thickens,¹¹⁴ is scandalized,¹¹⁵ and turns to an “infected jelly.” There can be “too much blood” in a child’s body,¹¹⁶ and it can be an indicator of kinship.¹¹⁷ Most magically, it seems that the heart and blood can take on characteristics of other body parts, as we see the heart “wept

¹¹³ I.ii. 414

¹¹⁴ I.ii. 255

¹¹⁵ I.ii. 439

¹¹⁶ II.i. 670

¹¹⁷ II.i. 670, IV.iv. 2352, IV.iv. 2667, and IV.iv. 2670

blood”¹¹⁸ and veins “bear blood.”¹¹⁹ “Bear” of course having the meaning of “carrying” something, but also “To bring forth, produce, give birth to.”¹²⁰ The blood, like the heart, is subject to a multitude of changes based on the experiences of these people, all seemingly at the mercy of each other.

After all this talk of hearts and blood, we must press upon the fact that Leontes, by watching, *sees* proof of his wife’s infidelity in her moment alone with Polixenes; we must explore the impact of vision on the world of *The Winter’s Tale*. Leontes is someone who bases his sense of the world on what his eyes deliver to his heart. When Hermione is on trial, he likens the truth derived from his observations to a story in which

There may be in the cup
A spider steeped, and one may drink, depart,
And yet partake no venom, for his knowledge
Is not infected; but if one present
Th’abhorred ingredient to his eye, make known
How he hath drunk, he cracks his gorge, his sides
With violent hefts. I have drunk, and seen the spider.¹²¹

The *OED* defines the word “steep” as: “To soak in water or other liquid; chiefly, to do so for the purpose of softening, altering in properties, cleansing, or the like, or for that of extracting some

¹¹⁸ V.ii. 3198

¹¹⁹ V.iii. 3364

¹²⁰ *OED*

¹²¹ II.i. 38 - 45

constituent,” “To soak, saturate, thoroughly moisten. Const. *in*, rarely *with* (water, blood, dye, etc.),” or “To soak or imbrue (a weapon, etc.) *in* blood, poison, etc.” Like the infected blood that poisons the bodies and minds of those in the play, so the body of a poisonous spider, when submerged in hot liquid, imbues the drink with its venom, bringing with it sickness and infection. Seeing the spider makes one crack his “gorge” which can be understood as “The external throat; the front of the neck; said both of human beings and of animals,” as well as “... to express extreme disgust or (in later use) violent resentment.”¹²² To use sight to determine that a drink contained a poisoned spider is enough to crack open your throat, or in another interpretation can crack your disposition, unleashing a flood of disgust and subsequently, violence.

And so we see that this play revolves around much discussion of the heart and its vulnerability to emotions, which are at the mercy of cosmic forces. The most heart-obsessed figure in the play is Leontes. Herein lies another astrological link, supporting the claim that reading this play with an understanding of astrology enables a richer interpretation. It has been established that Shakespeare intentionally had chose the names of his characters, lifting them from Plutarch (as I established in an earlier section). Leontes’s predecessor in Plutarch was “the misogynistic Leonidas I, King of Sparta (489-80 BC)...renowned as the leader of the Spartan army at the Battle of Thermopylae.”¹²³ With all this talk of hearts, I find it all the more significant that Leontes’s name contains the word “Leo,” the sign of the zodiac which rules, as per Agrippa, “the heart.” Medical astrology, a branch of astrology practiced in Shakespeare’s time, based on Hellenistic practices, states that each sign of the zodiac rules a body part, and each planet too has gover-

¹²² *OED*

¹²³ Showerman, pg. 58

nance over the body in a unique manner.¹²⁴ The Leo connection in Leontes's name, thus, is very likely a sign of Shakespeare's astrological awareness. Hermione's name, too, is Greek, its root stemming from the name Hermes, god of travel and information. Hermes maps onto the Roman god Mercury, a planet which, according to Agrippa, ruled over the "womb."¹²⁵ A great deal of Hermione's struggle emanates from challenges posed to her by Leontes regarding the sanctity of her womb. And so we have yet another astrological link, at the level of character names.

There is much to be made of the pull of planets on bodies, liquids, organs, and emotions in *The Winter's Tale*. As the stars, moon, and planets bear down on Leontes in his fits of madness and self-righteousness, we see that the macrocosm has the ability to disrupt and influence the microcosm, or life on earth. *Tremor cordis* grips Leontes's heart as well as the heart of the play, bringing with it violent tremors, hot, and poisonous to the blood. He fights against planetary influence, which affect liquids on earth. Lunar and feminine connections to the water element, and any other slippery or viscous material, are also reviled by Leontes.

Bio-Political Readings and Their Classical Root

The question of Leontes' misogyny is inseparable from his rejection of the influence of the macrocosm and of nature. I have already established that there is evidence to support the claim that *The Winter's Tale* is influenced by a pre-classical worldview, owing to its incorporation of Greek mythological figures, references in character names, location names, motifs, and

¹²⁴ From Agrippa's *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*: "Aries governs the head and face, Taurus the neck, Gemini the arms, and shoulders, Cancer the breast, lungs and stomach, Leo heart, stomach, liver, and back, Virgo the bowels, and the bottom of the stomach, Libra the kidneys, thighs, and buttock, Scorpio the genitals... Sagittarius the thigh and groins, Capricorn the knees, Aquarius, legs and thighs, and Pisces, the feet."

¹²⁵ Agrippa von Nettesheim, Heinrich Cornelius, and French, John. *Three Books of Occult Philosophy*. Printed by R.W. for Gregory Moule ..., 1651. pg 48

astrological interference. While it is true that all characters are impacted by the motions of the planets in the heavens, the tyrant Leontes's reactions differ vastly from those of Hermione and Paulina, i.e. the "mother" and "crone." Where Leontes rails against planetary pull, Hermione and Paulina move with wisdom about the cosmos, knowing that, in order to survive, they will have to wait for better stars to align, so to speak.

Leontes castigates the women in his life, comparing them to witches and other unsavory insults.¹²⁶ By comparison, Hermione and Paulina remain relatively calm, refrain from "weeping"¹²⁷ in the face of Leontes's unfair accusations, and are able to survive his tyranny. In fact, because Paulina is wise enough to listen to Apollo's oracle, she is able to keep Hermione hidden in her home for sixteen years, until Perdita returns to the Sicilian court.

In a stunning turn, Paulina presents Hermione as a statue come to life in the play's last scene, which was no doubt magical to behold. Paulina, Hermione, and Perdita represent the regenerative feminine principle, while Leontes stands for the destructive force of patriarchal tyranny. In what follows I trace the roots of this gendered reading, linking the misogyny in the play to the misogyny of the classical world, from which Shakespeare drew so much inspiration.

In the first half of the play, Leontes has a great deal to say about his wife and women in general, most of it harsh and hateful. He states that women will "say anything"¹²⁸ when considering whether Hermione would insist that Mamilius, their son, is indeed his child. He refers to his

¹²⁶ It should be noted that this author does not view the word "witch" as an insult—that is the insult of a patriarch. A witch is threatening to small minded men due to her self-possession.

¹²⁷ II.i.108

¹²⁸ I.ii.131

wife as a “pond fished by his next neighbour,”¹²⁹ the “gates” of his wife which we can understand as her legs, “opened, / as mine, against their will.”¹³⁰ He then states, “Should all despair / That have revolted wives, the tenth of mankind / Would hang themselves.”¹³¹ Leontes refers to Hermione as “slippery,” a “bed-swerver,”¹³² and “a hobby horse, deserves a name / As rank as any flax-wench.”¹³³ His misogyny is not reserved just for his wife; he also castigates Paulina as “a mankind witch,”¹³⁴ a “gross hag,” and calls Antigonus, her husband a “lorel...worthy to be hanged, / That will not stay her tongue.”¹³⁵ Women are nothing except a “nest of traitors”¹³⁶; even his infant daughter should be “instantly consumed with fire.”¹³⁷ The blisteringly violent language against women is one of Leontes’s most notable contributions to the play’s dialogue, so sure he is that Hermione is duplicitous and that women uniformly are undeserving of trust or equality.

While on trial for the deeds of which Leontes accuses her, Hermione retains her composure, and speaks solemnly to her court, telling them “Good my lords, / I am not prone to weeping, as our sex / Commonly are; the want of which vain dew / Perchance will dry your pities.”¹³⁸

¹²⁹ I.ii.195

¹³⁰ I.ii.197-98

¹³¹ I.ii.197-200

¹³² II.i. 93

¹³³ I.ii.276

¹³⁴ II.iii.67

¹³⁵ II.iii 107-108

¹³⁶ II.iii.82

¹³⁷ II.iii.133

¹³⁸ II.i.107-110

She is so sure of her innocence, and her rational stance on the matter, that she refuses to shed a tear to move the court; rather she stays focused, clear, and logical. She is also calm and reminds the court that

if powers divine

Behold our human actions—as they do—

I doubt not then but innocence shall make

False accusation blush, and tyranny

Tremble at patience.¹³⁹

Hermione is guided by her understanding that the heavens are observant of human experience, and that she is falsely accused by a tyrant. All this contrasts deeply with Leontes's hysterical and dissociative outbursts which occur without any basis in reality. The irony is in the fact that he accuses Hermione and Paulina of being gross and emotional creatures, when in fact he is the one with an overheated heart, not to say distracting emotions. Leontes refuses to hear any words from Hermione or Paulina in Hermione's defense. Furthermore, his desire to stay Paulina's tongue is one that has classical associations. I now shift our focus slightly in order to discuss the history of misogyny in the West.

In 594 BCE, the Greek statesman Solon passed legislation prohibiting women's involvement in Athenian public life. He specifically barred them from unrestricted lamentation of the dead at funerals and festivals. Prior to this moment, in ancient Greece, women controlled the sacred events of birth and death. While the existence of midwives and nurses is well known, it is perhaps less known that in ancient Greece there was a professional class of female mourners who

¹³⁹ III.ii.27-31

elevated the practice of ritualistic mourning to that of an art form in its own right. Some scholars reference pre-democratic Athens' powerful shift away from pagan rituals of aristocratic cult-clans to the nuclear family-centric *oikos* in the early *polis*. Others point to the power of the female-led lament to cause social disorder, specifically in Sicily (notably the setting of much of *The Winter's Tale*). In these regions, funerary laments were passionate enough to inspire and perpetuate blood feuds between warring families, and women were accused of fanning the flames of chaos and violence.

I argue that citing lamentation as a punishable offense in ancient Greece enabled pre-democratic society to limit the rights of women. Under the guise of reason and rationality, lawmakers were not simply interested in creating a more peaceful culture, but sought to revoke women's power and limit their visibility in public life. I also posit that Shakespeare was aware of the tradition of limiting women's rights on the basis of their so called "irrationality," due to his knowledge of other Hellenic cultural materials like astrology and Greek myth and drama. It is by design, a kind of wry or carnivalesque inversion, that allows him to depict Leontes as the emotionally incontinent character, while the women hold their own power.

In what follows I discuss the restriction of the lament as an early form of cultural misogyny transmitted through history—even through such sciences as astrology, which carries within it biopolitical bias against women. After all, it is a relic of the Greco-Roman world. Understanding the role of the lament, the Greek concept of *sophrosyne*, and how this finds its way into *The Winter's Tale* helps give a richer reading of the play's gender dynamics.

In ancient (pre-classical) Greece, women had a crucial social role, that of the professional poet-lamentress.¹⁴⁰ After a death, women in a community would carry out all aspects of preparation for wake, burial, and funeral mourning, and these tasks were theirs alone. Bodies would be bathed and adorned with ritual herbs to cleanse them and lead them to the afterlife. In a procession, women would walk the body to the gravesite, calling wildly to the deceased, enunciating wails of pain, tearing their hair and garments, and rubbing dirt on their faces. Female family members of the deceased would lead this procession, and their calls would be echoed and amplified by a chorus of professional lamentresses, in a call and response, antiphonal, fashion. This would continue at graveside, where a female family member would call out remembrances of the beauty and bravery of the dead and would even express their own misfortune at the loss of this family member. Evidence suggests that these laments were seemingly endless and emotionally disturbing to behold. In southern regions like Sicily, funerary laments were passionate enough to inspire and perpetuate internecine violence between warring families. Women were accused of fanning flames of chaos and violence.

Athenian statesman Solon came to power in 594 BCE, initiating democratic reforms more than two hundred years before Plato's *Republic* and Aristotle's *Poetics*, but at this point Athenian democracy, founded in 508 BCE, had set a precedent for the displacement of folk ritual in preference of the rational. By 380 BCE, Plato had composed *The Republic*, a set of dialogues which detailed the proper composition of the ideal city-state. In Book III, Socrates advises Adeimantus

¹⁴⁰ Alexiou, Margaret. *The Ritual Lament in Greek Tradition*. Cambridge: U, 1974. Print.

...[W]e'd be right in taking out [of poetry] the wailings of renowned men and we'd give them to the women—and not to the serious ones, at that—and to all the bad men. Thus the men we say we are rearing for the guardianship of the country won't be able to stand doing things similar to those such people do.¹⁴¹

In an effort to set a good example for the guardians of the city, Socrates would abolish these laments which were excessive in nature. Surely, if people were to read in literature or see performed on stage a recitation of the lament for the dead, how could leaders effectively cultivate a brave army when death is the inevitable outcome of war? This was something that had to be avoided at all costs. In Book X, Socrates advises Glaucon that one must not “spend their time in crying out; rather one must always habituate the soul to turn as quickly as possible to curing and setting aright what has fallen and is sick, doing away with lament by medicine.”¹⁴² Though Socrates acknowledges that it is human nature to enjoy the tragic poetry of Homer “or any other of the tragic poets imitating one of the heroes in mourning and making quite an extended speech with lamentation... singing and beating his breast,”¹⁴³ that one can only admit “so much of poetry as hymns to gods or celebration of good men.”¹⁴⁴ To let any other sort of poetry into the city like “the sweetened muse in lyrics or epics, pleasure and pain will jointly be kings in your city instead of law.”¹⁴⁵ Socrates finds it suitable then, to “send [poetry] away from the city on account

¹⁴¹ Plato, and Allan Bloom. *The Republic of Plato*. New York: Basic, 1991.

¹⁴² Ibid. pg 288

¹⁴³ Ibid. pg 289

¹⁴⁴ Ibid. pg 290

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

of its character.”¹⁴⁶ This we will see is a crucial reflection of attitudes towards poetic lamentation— something which Socrates knew full well was “reserved” for women and considered wildly excessive at this point in time.

Perhaps that women were taking these laments to extremes was a root cause for Solon’s sixth century restrictions, but as Gail Holst-Warhaft writes:

[T]hat the *polis* found it necessary, almost from its inception, to legislate against what seems to have been the traditional behaviour of women in these situations suggests that there are deeper issues involved than bawdy nights on the tiles of Athens or banshee-like wailing over the dead bodies of men and gods.¹⁴⁷

Placing strict restraints on the lament seems to indicate that the *polis* was attempting to become more rational, less “superstitious,” but there is some evidence that contradicts this supposition.

Plutarch delineates the decree against the lament in his work *Solon*:

He regulated the walks, feasts, and mourning of the women and took away everything that was either unbecoming or immodest; when they walked abroad, no more than three articles of dress were allowed them; an obol’s worth of meat and drink; and no basket above a cubit high; and at night they were not to go about unless in a chariot with a torch before them. Mourners tearing themselves to raise pity, and set wailings, and at one man’s funeral to lament for another, he forbade. To offer an ox at the grave was not permitted, nor to bury above three pieces of dress with the body, or visit the tombs of any besides their own family, unless at the very funeral; most of which are likewise forbidden by our laws, but this is fur-

¹⁴⁶ Ibid.

¹⁴⁷ Holst-Warhaft, Gail. *Dangerous Voices: Women's Laments and Greek Literature*. London: Routledge, 1992. 102.

ther added in ours, that those that are convicted of extravagance in their mournings are to be punished as soft and effeminate by the censors of women.¹⁴⁸

Women were no longer permitted to lead processions to the grave and even had to walk behind men in silence on their way to the tomb. The lament became a punishable offense by the “board of censors for women for weak and unmanly behaviour, and for carrying their mourning to extravagant lengths.”¹⁴⁹ Special police, the *gynaikonómoi* were appointed to deal with those who flouted Solon’s laws. Margaret Alexiou points out that

[F]rom the earliest times the main responsibility for funeral ritual and lamentation had rested [on women]: they were therefore in control of something which in the archaic period had played a vital part in the religious and social life of the clan, and it may be suspected that they gained access in this way to decisions about property.¹⁵⁰

Perhaps there was an economic concern at hand in Solon’s restrictions of women and their public laments. Similarly, restriction of the lament may have been initiated to minimize superstitious pagan beliefs in Greek society, but fascinatingly, at the *same time* that the lament was outlawed, hero-worship and the mystery cults were instated in the *polis*. Women were given the annual Eleusinian mysteries at this time as compensation for the restrictions on personal laments. As one form of superstition was substituted for another, support for a more rational *polis* seems weak here. Regardless, the effects on women’s lives were negative, silencing and prohibiting their cul-

¹⁴⁸ Plutarch. "The Internet Classics Archive | Solon by Plutarch." *The Internet Classics Archive | Solon by Plutarch*. Trans. John Dryden. MIT, n.d.

¹⁴⁹ Holst-Warhaft, 99

¹⁵⁰ Alexiou, 21

tural rituals, and paving the way for the establishment of a *polis* in which women are secondary to men, and quiet.

In her essay “The Gender of Sound” Anne Carson theorizes about the history of misogynistic attitudes towards women, often seen as too loud, expulsive, disorganized, or irrational, in the view of “rational” men. Classical Greeks valued *sophrosyne*, which can be understood as excellence achieved through a soundness of mind. Carson writes, “Verbal continence is an essential feature of the masculine virtue of *sophrosyne* ... that organizes most patriarchal thinking on ethical or emotional matters. Woman as a species is frequently said to lack the ordering principle of *sophrosyne*.”¹⁵¹ The Greeks emphasized the importance of this so called verbal continence (which, by the way, calls to mind the troubling *incontinence* of the Bakhtinian lower bodily stratum, associating it implicitly with women) as a marker of an ideal citizen. Plato dedicates an entire dialogue, the *Charmides* to the project of defining *sophrosyne*. This idea of *sophrosyne* was foundational for Hellenic Greeks and was eventually carried over into the early Christian era, where it existed as virtue, or self-control. One could say that where the *threnos* or lament ends, *sophrosyne* begins.

As *The Winter's Tale* is full of ancient Greek associations, from mythology to astrology, I argue that the blatant misogyny that emanates from the historical restriction of women's cultural role is present in Leontes's misogynistic disposition, which brings death and destruction to his family. Sexist standards of social behavior, for example, that women are influenced by the moon and therefore emotionally disturbed, whereas men are more rational and able to think clearly, are

¹⁵¹ Carson, Anne. "The Gender of Sound." *Glass, Irony, and God*. New York: New Directions Book, 1995. 119-36. Print. 126.

rooted in classical literature from Plato to Solon. What Shakespeare does in this play is invert that expectation, as he does in so many of his other plays. This inversion magnifies the ridiculousness of such divisions between gender and behavior. In this case, he is also drawing attention to the ridiculousness of tyrannical male behavior, which Leontes displays with ferocity.

I mentioned before that Perdita, Hermione, and Paulina represent the maiden-mother-crone triad, a pagan archetype that symbolizes cycles of life (mother), death (crone), and rebirth (maiden). At the play's finale, we see Paulina produce a statue of Hermione which was produced by "Italian master, Julio Romano"¹⁵² which miraculously comes to life. In front of a gallery of courtiers, including Leontes and the newly returned Perdita, Paulina cries out, "Music, awake her strike! (*Music*) Tis time: descend; be stone no more; approach; / Strike all that look upon with marvel. Come, / I'll fill up your grave. Stir; nay, come away. / Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you."¹⁵³ The crowd is stunned, and to Leontes Paulina quips, "Start not: her actions shall be holy as / You hear my spell is lawful."¹⁵⁴

Hermione's return recalls the recovery of Alcestis in Euripides's drama, and the reanimation of a statue reminds us of the myth of Pygmalion, who carved a woman from marble, which Aphrodite brought to life. Paulina, though, not Aphrodite or any other entity, is the one who protected Hermione's health and safety. Where Leontes was foolish enough to spurn the Delphic oracle, Paulina listened carefully. We know this because Hermione says to Perdita, "I, / Knowing by Paulina that the oracle / Gave hope though wast in being, have preserved myself to see the

¹⁵² V.ii.95

¹⁵³ V.iii.98-103

¹⁵⁴ V.iii.104-105

issue.”¹⁵⁵ As mother, maiden, and crone gather together on stage for a final time, we are given a depiction of the true power of the feminine principle, the generative and regenerative energy that women in this play manage to maintain and put forth into the world. Leontes, ashamed at his tyranny, repents to Hermione his regret that he “e’er put between your holy looks / My ill suspicion,”¹⁵⁶ and accepts a “heaven-direct[ed]” mandate that Perdita be wed to Florizel.

As Leontes called Paulina a “mankind witch” in Act II, who he would love to have “burned,”¹⁵⁷ the use of the word “spell” in Paulina’s address to Leontes is worth engaging briefly. As the *OED* tells us, a spell is “A set of words, a formula or verse, supposed to possess occult or magical powers; a charm or incantation; a means of accomplishing enchantment or exorcism.” Paulina’s role as Hermione’s confidant, protector, and advocate extends to Paulina defying Leontes’s authority and actually keeping Hermione hidden away in a chapel for over a decade, letting Leontes believe his wife is dead. Presenting Hermione as a beautiful statue which then steps down off its pedestal is perceived as a kind of witchcraft, some kind of necromantic miracle. While is it beautiful to conceive of Paulina as a powerful witch, the real magic here stems from Paulina’s strong sense of personal authority, and common sense to protect Hermione from further masculine harm. The alchemy here is not celestial, but feminine. Paulina is able to restore life to the Sicilian court by trusting that the oracle of Delphi was correct, and thus acted in accordance with powers both divine and practical, to continue the cycle of life for Hermione, Perdita, and Leontes.

¹⁵⁵ V.iii.126-128

¹⁵⁶ V.iii.148-149

¹⁵⁷ II.iii.113

Seasons, Genre, and the Wheel of Fortune

To conclude, *The Winter's Tale* is a rich and complex play which benefits from a deeply engaged reading which is cognizant of classical motifs relevant to Renaissance art, like astrology and Greco-Roman myth and history. Like the triad of mother-maiden-crone which is represented by Hermione, Perdita, and Paulina, cycles of life as expressed through astrological influence and transit permeate this play, influencing emotion, blood, and behavior along the way. Classical restrictions on women's social rights also influence the deeply misogynist behavior of Leontes, our tyrant. I here return to Frye's conception of genre—the play is set in winter not because it is necessarily a tragedy, but really a *satirical comment* on the ridiculousness of masculine, sexist authoritarianism. Leontes becomes a joke at the play's end, tricked by Paulina into believing that Hermione was transformed from woman to statue due to a good spell cast by this witch.

In Act IV, Polixenes addressing Perdita says that “art itself is Nature.” Hermione's statue was apparently carved by a master Italian sculptor—she was a work of art. Paulina calls upon music to “awake her, strike!”¹⁵⁸ and thus the work of art is animated by music, another form of art. We must remember that women, wedded to principles of the divine feminine, cycles of death and rebirth, are actually the facilitators of art, as they are nature. *The Winter's Tale* requires us to read it with an eye toward the magical, the astrological, and then we are able to see that the feminine triad had agency over the tyrant the entire time, creators of their own art.

And so we see that this play, previously thought by scholars to have a disjointed or confusing structure, is more cohesive than it appears at first blush. It is functioning according to the

¹⁵⁸ V.iii.98

schema of astrology, and is not quite a tragedy, but a satirical comment on the preposterousness of misogynist and restrictive gender roles.

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