

The Winter's Tale

Week 6

The opening lines establish the new setting: a deserted shore in Bohemia.¹

The stormy weather clearly reflects the sombre prospects for the infant – explained in the text as the heavens ‘frowning’ at the business on which Ant. & the mariner are engaged;

Ant. submits himself to the will of the gods and urges the mariner to return to their ship and is warned, in his turn to be wary of straying too far from the shore since the place is “famous for the creatures/ Of prey” (12-13).

Left alone on stage Ant. reflects upon events: believing Her. to be dead he addresses the infant, speaking of having dreamed of Her. “last night”, a lifelike manifestation striking attitudes of profound mourning. She came to Ant.’s cabin dressed all in white robes like an embodiment of holiness (“sanctity itself”) (23), “thrice bow’d” and, opening her mouth as if for speech, her eyes poured forth “two spouts” of tears and addresses Ant. – in performance there is the option of using Her’s own ‘voice’ for lines 27-36:

The language also characterizes speakers and episode in the dream of Antigonus. The bluff Antigonus of II. i and II. iii has sacrificed self-interest and put his life in peril; he has taken charge of a babe and he has, in a dream, a spiritual visitation. His experiences have changed his character, and his language has changed. There is something finer, even a nobility, in his last speech which characterizes the new Antigonus and lightly foreshadows his death.

Fate has decreed that Ant. should be the “thrower-out” of Her.’s baby – even though it was “against thy better disposition”; he must place the child in some remote place where he must “weep” and be punished for his complicity: “thou ne’er shalt see/ Thy wife Paulina more” (35-36).

Since the child “Is counted **lost** forever” it shall be called ‘Perdita’. The ‘vision’ melts away “with shrieks”.

¹ The ‘stage direction’ has prompted much learned discussion – your own editor will probably summarise the options, though it is usually explained as ignorance on Shakespeare’s part.

8 **PERDITA** **feminine** of the Latin adjective *perditus*, past participle of *perdere*, 'lost'. 'Perdita' is a translation of the phrase in Apollo's prophecy, borrowed verbatim from *Pandosto*, i.e. the king would live without an heir unless 'that which is lost' was found (3.2.133). She is named by the dream-spectre that appears to Antigonus (3.3.31–3). In classical Latin *perditus* also meant 'desperate' or 'abandoned'; *OED* says that at this date the English adjective 'perdite' meant abandoned or debauched, i.e. cast away or morally lost (the adverb 'perditly' had similar meanings). 'Perdita' and 'perdite' sound similar enough for Antigonus to believe the baby 'lost' in both senses: left to perish, and illegitimate, the outcome of adultery. Cf. Marina in *Per*, 'born at sea' (3.3.13), and Miranda in *Tem*, whose name means 'she is to be wondered at' (see 3.1.37–9); the name is usually stressed on the first syllable, but perhaps on the second at 4.4.589. No one in *WT* asks why she is called Perdita.

Her.'s death signifies her guilt.]

Addressing the child with affection ("Blossom" = 'little flower') Ant. hopes for its good fortune and leaves "these" (i.e. coins and jewels) to help to pay for her upbringing.

As a storm begins to gather Ant. feels himself "most accur'd" that "**for thy mother's fault**" the child is exposed to ruin ("loss") and laments that through an oath of "loyalty" to Leon. he is a party to the child's fate. Nevertheless, he finds himself unable to "weep" as Her.'s vision had instructed.

The storm intensifies to "A savage clamour" and Ant. wonders whether he will be able to get back to the ship ("Well may I get aboard", 57). Instantly Ant. becomes aware of a hunt in progress (a bear hunt, presumably...?) – perhaps he sees the bear approaching and exits anticipating his own death with "I am gone forever!" (58).

It takes some time for Ant. to regain his composure, having thought initially that the vision was real. Normally Ant. regards dreams as insignificant things ("toys") but for once he will allow himself to be directed by superstition and conclude that Her. "hath suffered death" and that Apollo has willed that the child should be left in the country "Of its right[ful] father" – **i.e. Polixines.**

[N.B. Protest doctrine decreed that a belief in the 'supernatural' significance of dreams was irreligious.

Ant. had left the court before the pronouncements of the Oracle and therefore had no knowledge of its contents. He therefore assumes that

The stage direction '*Exit, pursued by a bear*' is undoubtedly the most notorious in Shakespeare. Arden (2nd Series) observes that 'A "bear" episode was popular at this time' (p. 69) but some have interpreted it in terms of the savagery that had characterised Leon.'s paranoia and which, like Ant., is now "gone for ever" (58). [Many articles have been written on the episode and two such can be found on TWT web page: <https://www.just-shakespeare.co.uk/the-winters-tale.html> .]²

The arrival of the Shepherd announces a major shift in the focus and tone of the play. All of the characters hitherto have been aristocrats or courtiers but here we have the introduction of the 'pastoral' element which occupies much of what remains of the play.

We note the abrupt change from blank verse to prose as the elderly Shep. laments the behaviour and morals of the 'young people of today' in terms that have echoed down the centuries:

Perhaps addressing the audience directly, he complains that young (male) people between 10 and 20 are only interested in "getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting" (61-62); hearing the sounds of the hunt he is critical of young hot-heads ("boiled-brains") of 19-22 who go hunting in such weather and who have "scared away two of my best sheep" which he fears will fall prey to the wolf, though he still has hope that they may be found by the sea "browsing of ivy" (sea weed/sea holly...?) and hopes for good luck if the gods will it.

It is at this point that he notices the child on the ground and is clearly startled by the discovery. He immediately assumes that it is illegitimate and the result of a furtive sexual encounter between a man of rank and a serving girl;

His instinct is to "take it up for **pity**" (76) – N.B. the impulse to pity is a noble instinct of which there has hitherto been very little evidence in the first half of the play.

He will await the arrival of his son who had called out a moment before and calls out himself to attract the boy's attention.

The boy arrives also calling out. The Folio has '*Enter Clowne*'. His father is anxious to show him the child but can see that the boy is himself in a state of shocked excitement.

² The New Cambridge edition (ed. Snyder etc.) also has an extensive discussion of the subject pp. 30-33.

23 **CLOWN** Clown was a Tudor word for a countryman or rustic, often a boorish, rude one. By 1600 it also meant a stage fool or professional fool at court or in great houses (e.g. Feste in *TN*). Autolycus refers to the character as ‘My clown’ at 4.4.609. The Clown is in his late teens or early twenties when he first appears (implied at 3.3.58–64).

88-102 His account spills out in a stream-of-consciousness referencing with considerable vividness and immediacy the severity of the storm and the fate of the ship and its sailors commingled with the fate of Antigonus at the hands (paws/jaws...?) of the bear.

The speech concludes with

notions of the extent to which mankind is powerless in the grip of natural phenomena – the word “mocked” characterises Nature’s response to the predicaments of both sailors and Ant..

Again there is evidence of compassion in both Shep. & Clo. – “poor souls ... poor gentleman ... Would I had been by to help the old man ... Heavy matters ...”.

Nevertheless, in turning the conversation away from the fates of the ship, the sailors and Ant. and towards the infant child the Shep. marks a **crucial transformation in the whole thrust of the play**: “thou met’st with things dying, I with things new-born” (112-13).

Shep. points out the child’s fine baptismal shawl (“bearing-cloth”) – presumably the ‘mantle’ of Queen Hermione (see 5.2.33) – and observes that he had been ‘told’ that he would be rich and thinks the child might be a “changeling” (117).³

The instruction to “open’t” (117) is often interpreted as referring to a box that Ant. has left on the ground beside the child. Clo. is excited to find that it contains gold but Shep. is more cautious: it should be kept “close” – i.e. **kept secret** since it was believed that gifts from the fairies must not be spoken of, otherwise ill luck would follow.

Nevertheless Shep. clearly believes that they are now sufficiently prosperous not to have to worry about looking for the lost sheep (124) and is anxious that they return “home” by the quickest way. The Clo. remains concerned with the fate of Ant. and proposes to see how much of him remains uneaten by the bear (128) and to bury any of him that

³ **changeling**: a child left by the fairies in place of a human child they have stolen.

131. *good deed*] To bury the dead is by ancient and widespread tradition a good deed. If the body has not been decently buried the dead person's spirit is restless and unhappy. Cf. the ghost of Jack, taking service with the impoverished Eumenides to repay his good deed: 'are not you the man . . . that gaue all the money you had to the burying of a poore man, and but one three-halfe-pence left in your pursse' (Peele, *Old Wives' Tale*, 1595, Malone Soc., 1908, 893-6).

remains – a gesture that Shep. recognises as “a good deed” (131). At the same time, he tells that Clo. to see if there anything about that “which is left of” Ant. to indicate his rank (i.e. “what he is”, 132).

Act 4

4.1

150 On the occasion
4.1 Time's speech is in 16 rhymed couplets – a couplet for each year that has passed since the end of 3.3. These are the only end-line rhymes in the play, except for those in the songs in 4.3 and 4.4 (rhymes in the middle of lines are discussed on pp. 123-5). This difference in the form emphasizes that Time is outside the action: see p. 81.
0.1 Time See pp. 76-81 and Fig. 15.
Chorus Classical plays in Renaissance editions had an Argument that summarized the story (see 27-9). The Chorus, one person or several, commented on and sometimes participated in the action.

Time:4

This is perhaps Shakespeare's most blatant rejection of the classical Unities of Time, Place and Action.

Time is the tester of all things (1) who now uses his/her authority to “slide/ O'er sixteen years” without giving any detailed explanation of what has happened during the interim; Time has the power to both make law and to break

custom “in one self-born hour” (8).

Time remains always the same, before the oldest laws and customs were established or what is now generally accepted (“received”); Time will make old and dull the shiny newness of present convention just as his/her tale now seems out of fashion. Time's acknowledgement of our “patience” (15) is a mild joke at our expense since we have no control over Time's actions – s/he therefore turns his hour glass that will measure out the time taken for the second half of the play [**Remember the “two hours' traffic of our stage” from the Prologue of *R&J***] observing

⁴ Arden (3rd Series, ed. Pitcher), pp. 81-83 has an extensive passage on the Time figure. See also ‘This Wide Gap of Time: *The Winter's Tale*’ on TWT web page.

that he will advance the action of the play so that we will think we have slept between now and 16 years hence.

Leaving Leon. – who grieves so much about the effects of his foolish jealousy – we must imagine Time now to be in “fair Bohemia”; we are reminded of Pol.’s son (**mentioned in 1.2.164-71**) who is named Florizel and thus proceed to Perdita (i.e. the abandoned infant) who has grown in beauty and charm fully deserving the wonder they inspire. S/He chooses not to foretell what befalls to her though all will be revealed in due course. She is a shepherd’s daughter and what concerns her is the subject of Time. So, if we permit (another Time ‘joke’) then if we have ever before spent our time worse than in watching this play, if we allow what Time has asked (i.e. letting 16 years go by) at least believe that Time himself hopes we never will.

4.2

The opening exchanges – presumably set in Polixenes’ court – are in prose: Pol. & Cam. are speaking in private and have known each other for the past sixteen years. Pol.’s addressing Cam. in terms of “thee/thy” suggests their friendship and familiarity.

Notice how 4.2 is a parallel echo of 1.2:-

1.2 Leontes’ court -> 4.2 Polixenes’ court;

1.2 Polixenes longs to return to his own country (Bohemia) -> 4.2 Camillo longs to return to his own country (Sicilia);

In each case the home-sick character is persuaded to remain.

In spite of Pol.’s earnest attempts to dissuade him it becomes clear that – after sixteen (“fifteen” is probably a mistake) years’ absence – from his own country Cam. wishes to return and “lay my bones” in Sicilia. Besides, Leon. (“the penitent king”) has sent for him and Cam. presumes to believe that he may yet be able to relieve something of Leon.’s suffering;

Pol. presses Cam. to stay hoping that Cam. will not cancel out his previous years of valuable service – better not to have had him at all than to lack his contribution; there are numerous projects in hand that Cam. has started and which cannot come to completion without his involvement; if Pol. has not rewarded Cam. sufficiently for his previous service then it will be Pol.’s aim to remedy any deficiency, Pol.’s own “profit” will be the heaping up of Cam.’s friendly services.

Pol. urges Cam. not to mention “that fatal country” (i.e. Sicilia) since the very name reminds him of “that penitent” (i.e. Leontes) – “as thou call’st him” suggests that Pol. either agrees that ‘penitent’ is the correct word, or doubts whether Leon. could ever repent enough. Having been reminded, Pol. observes that the deaths of Her. and her children “are even now to be fresh lamented” – i.e. as if they had only just died (‘even now’).

Having mentioned ‘children’ Pol. now speaks of his own son, Florizel, observing that kings are just as unhappy if their heirs are disobedient, as they would be if they lost virtuous children. [**For Pol. his son’s rebelliousness is a loss comparable to Mam.’s death.**⁵]

Cam. confirms he has not seen Flor. about the court for three days though he has no idea what “happier affairs” might have occupied him – he observes that Flor. has also neglected his “princely exercises” (33) – i.e. royal duties, including horsemanship and book learning;

Pol. reveals that he has his spies who observe Flor.’s activities – he is “seldom from the house of a most homely (humble) shepherd” (38-39), someone, it is rumoured has grown “from very nothing” to an estate (wealth) that is beyond value;

Cam. observes that he has heard that the man has a daughter “of most rare note” (of most rare distinction), such that it impossible to believe that she has come from such humble origins;

Pol. has also heard something of the girl and fears that she is the ‘bait’ that tempts his son from the court [**We recall that Leon. had used the metaphor of **angling** when seeking to confirm his suspicions of his wife’s adultery with Pol. (1.2.180).**]

He determines that he and Cam. will travel in disguise (“not appearing what we are”) and interrogate the shepherd from whom – since he is such a simple man – it will not be difficult to discover the reason for Flor.’s remaining there;

He urges Cam. to accompany him and to put from his mind all thoughts of returning to Sicilia – Cam. readily agrees.

⁵ Shakespeare had explored the theme of a king’s rebellious son in the Henry IV plays (Parts 1 & 2), though the son (Prince Hal in *H41 & 2*) becomes England’s heroic soldier-king in *Henry V*.

