Constant Love in *The Winter’s Tale*

Introduction

As is his habit, Shakespeare obliquely introduces his overall theme in the opening scene of *The Winter’s Tale*. Archidamus admits that were Leontes to return Polixenes’ visit to Syria, as is expected, the relative poverty of the hospitality that Bohemia would be able to offer him could be “justified in [their] loves” (1.1.1-16).[[1]](#endnote-1) Camillo underlines the significance of this casual remark when he reassures Archidamus that the “rooted” attachment between the two kings, formed when “they were train’d together in their childhoods,” obviates any need for Polixenes to repay the “magnificen[t]” hospitality which he has enjoyed in Sicily (1.1.17-24). So assiduously has the two kings’ early “affection” been sustained through a constant

interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies, that they have seem’d to be together,

though absent; shook hands, as over a vast; and embrac’d as it were from the ends

of oppos’d winds.

(1.1.28-31)

This conversation highlights both the strength of the drive to establish and maintain intimate attachments and the painstaking, equitable “interchange” of care that it entails.

The apparently arbitrary introduction of the subject of Leontes’ son, Mamillius, at this point is more pertinent than it seems, for, although Archidamus claims that nothing “in the world” could ever “alter” the attachment between the two kings, he knows in reality that love can only be “continue[d]” in some sense after death through the “unspeakable comfort” of children (1.1.31-35). The prince provides “hope…that, indeed, physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh,” presumably because he represents a “promise” that their beloved country will flourish after their own deaths (1.1.35-39). The adoration of Mamillius has almost become a cult among the older subjects, who are the most aware of their own mortality: “they that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man,” and in fact would perhaps “be content to die,” were they not sustained by the patriotic hopes which they have invested in him (1.1.39-42). Camillo qualifies this claim with characteristic scepticism– “Yes; if there were no other excuse why they should desire to live”–but Archidamus refuses to accept that any passion could act as a substitute for this need to “continue…loves,” and at the same time makes it clear that the point is essentially a general one: although Mamillius “is a gallant child,” even “if the king had no son, they would desire to live on crutches till he had one” (1.1.38-46). The overall implication of this conversation is that the overriding intensity of parental, or in this case quasi-parental, devotion is driven by a combination of the instinctive need for constant attachments and a rational awareness of mortality.

Thus, the opening scene hints that Shakespeare’s aim is to explore the intense desire to form intimate attachments and to “continue” these, both in life and, as far as possible, posthumously, which expresses itself both through a painstaking “interchange” of care in friendship and romantic love, and a deep investment in the “promise” of children. The main body of this essay is structured around these three types of attachment, although there is also a section on the broader influence of attachment, exemplified in the opening scene by the patriotism which so “physics the subject.”

Friendship

Surprisingly, it is the reunion of Leontes and Camillo, rather than that between the two kings, or even Florizel and Perdita’s nascent love, which best illustrates the true nature of constant attachment (5.2.10-19).[[2]](#endnote-2) This friendship was initially triggered by Camillo’s consistent loyalty, which led Leontes to trust him repeatedly “with all the nearest things to [his] heart,” after which, “priest-like,” the faithful courtier habitually “cleans’d [the] bosom” of the “penitent” king (1.2.235-39). Ironically, Leontes turns first to Camillo to help him revenge himself on Polixenes, precisely because he attributes to him the virtues of wisdom, moderation and courage which both men agree are the essential requirements for a loyal friend (1.2.242-67; see below for a fuller analysis of this conversation). Later, in an unexpectedly extended eulogy–which, at fifteen and a half lines long, completely dwarfs the one and a half which he spends on his plans to “reconcile…to” Polixenes and “woo [the] queen”–the penitent king affirms fervently, although not as we shall see entirely accurately, that his friend possesses precisely these virtues, since his “good mind” could not be moved to murder Polixenes either by promises or threats, but rather chose the “hazard” of exile (3.2.155-72). This speech represents a belated acknowledgement that Leontes’ deepest attachment has always been to Camillo. Camillo has earnt Leontes’ special trust through his thoughtful restraint, which has allowed him to care for his friend assiduously, without demanding the reciprocal concern which the king is at first unable to provide.

When summoned from Bohemia by Leontes, Camillo quickly engineers his return (see below), in order to resume his role as confidant (4.2.6-9). When the two friends are reunited, Leontes seeks Camillo out first and exclusively, unlike his other guests, whom he subsequently sees together (5.2.10-19, 5.2.43-58). The very fact that both men simultaneously and wordlessly share their horror at the enormity of Leontes’ offence against their friendship is itself enough, not only to remind them of the depth of their bond, but to deepen it still further:

They seem’d almost, with staring on one another, to tear the cases of their eyes.

There was speech in their dumbness, language in their very gesture; they look’d as

they had heard of a world ransom’d, or one destroy’d. A notable passion of wonder

appear’d in them; but the wisest beholder, that knew no more but seeing, could

not say if th’importance was joy or sorrow, but in the extremity of the one it must

needs be.

(5.2.11-19)

The two men are full of “wonder,” presumably at the power of a truly intimate attachment to endure under the most adverse circumstances. Guilt and “sorrow” at the loss of his friend, which feels like a “world…destroy’d,” have finally taught Leontes to moderate his proud self-assertion. The sympathetic connection between the two men, which is underlined by the first gentleman’s repeated use of the third person plural pronoun, is allowed to flow, untrammelled by any attempt at self-justification or self-regarding pleas for forgiveness on the part of the king, or indeed seemingly by any words at all. It is in this way that Leontes “ransom[s]” the attachment which fulfils his deepest desires.

On his part the wise and moderate Camillo neither reproaches Leontes nor demands an apology. He knows that this moment of absolute harmony “justifies” all of Leontes’ destructive actions, in Archidamus’ phrase, since it not only promises to satisfy his own “thirst to see” his friend and yearning to “allay” his “feeling sorrows,” but also suggests that his care might finally be fully reciprocated (1.1.9, 4.4.512-13, 4.2.7-9). Thus, Camillo’s humble, diligent, unobtrusively passionate investment of care, which goes well beyond what Polixenes could have managed (see below), and which has therefore earnt a much deeper trust from Leontes, is ultimately rewarded in a way which perhaps exceeds his wildest dreams. Leontes now assumes the burden of unselfish care which must inevitably be shouldered by all truly passionate lovers: it is significant that his final act in the play is to arrange a marriage for Camillo, rather than to attempt to ingratiate himself with his own queen.

Whereas Leontes speaks to his other unexpected guests, to “ask Bohemia forgiveness,” to show Perdita how much he regrets his treatment of her mother, and to thank the shepherd, he simply shares with Camillo a “speech in dumbness, language in their very gesture,” in which the “changes” observable in the two men are “very notes of admiration” -that is, exclamation marks, rather than words (5.2.42-58, 5.2.10-14). The two men are struck “dumb…” at this moment, I would suggest, because they are experiencing the *summum bonum* of a constant intimacy, which, precisely because it provides the ultimate standard by which all endeavours are measured, cannot itself be appraised in any rational way, but can only be intuited by those who are able to align themselves with their own deeper nature. The corollary of this point is that Leontes’ comparative eloquence in the presence of Polixenes and Perdita reflects the relative superficiality of his relationship with his daughter and his oldest friend. Analysis of the means by which intimacy is established can be useful, as is demonstrated by the play itself, and by Camillo and Leontes’ earlier discussion of the virtues of a true friend (1.2.243-64, 1.2.301-02), but speech about love itself is only truly useful in courtship: Florizel’s passionate speeches are motivated by a yearning to secure the “wave” of constant intimacy, the fulfilment of which would render them redundant (4.4.140-46).

The first gentleman’s “broken delivery” shows that he is indeed one of those who can appreciate true depth of feeling, whereas the smooth eloquence of the third gentleman– evident, ironically, in the redundancy of his claim that the “encounter…lames report to follow it and undoes description to do it”–undermines the latter’s declaration that the king’s meeting with Polixenes and Perdita is so passionate that it is “a sight to be seen, cannot be spoken of” (5.2.9, 5.2.56-58, 5.2.42-43). Indeed, we can infer from the third gentleman’s initial concern to establish that his interlocutor did not actually “see the meeting of the two kings” that his account may even be partly invented, or at least highly overblown (5.2.39-40). Whereas the first gentleman describes Leontes and Camillo as simply staring at each other, as if they are about “to tear the cases of their eyes,” the third gentleman has the two kings “casting up” their eyes and “holding up” their hands in a much more stylised manner (5.2.46-47). It is possible to infer that the two reunions get the narrator they deserve: while the less intimate encounter is rendered still shallower by the third gentleman’s self-important and clichéd additions and exaggerations, the first gentleman’s “broken” account of the violent, but apparently entirely silent intensity of Leontes’ reunion with Camillo stands out as a sincere attempt to convey in words the inexpressible core of a deep intimacy.

It is significant that Shakespeare himself has chosen not to dramatize the reunion of Leontes and Camillo: he uses the perspective of “the wisest beholder, that knew no more than seeing” to appeal to the sympathies of those in the audience who retain an intuitive appreciation of the good, rather than attempting any sort of rational articulation or appraisal of the emotions which the two men are experiencing (5.2.15-19). He provides the third gentleman’s account, which focuses mainly on the principal characters in hierarchical order, for those in his audience who are concentrating primarily on the main story-line, assuming, with characteristic restraint, that many will not appreciate the significance of this passionate encounter (5.2.42-56). Nevertheless, his underlying purpose is to illustrate in its purest form the ultimate good of a trusting intimacy, which almost all of the characters in the play are pursuing, whether they know it or not.

Early on in the play, Leontes and Camillo agree that constant friendship requires moderation, wisdom and courage, since it involves eschewing the “willful-negligen[ce],” “folly” and “fear” respectively of “a gross lout, a mindless slave, or else a hovering temporizer” (1.2.243-64, 1.2.301-02). The unexpectedly precise way in which the point is made, and then reiterated fifty lines later, offers a characteristically veiled hint that the play’s analysis of constant attachments is structured around these three cardinal virtues and their corresponding vices. Camillo, Paulina and Hermione are used to explore the roles played by wisdom, courage and moderation in creating the just exchange of self-denying care that can deliver a constant intimacy. The first two also exemplify “fear” and “folly” respectively, while Leontes himself embodies the “willful-negligen[ce]” of a “gross lout.” The fourth of the cardinal virtues, justice, which is the overall product of the other three, is fully represented in the play only in the reunion between Camillo and Leontes and in the romance between Florizel and Perdita, where there is a precisely equitable exchange of sympathetic concern. Since the enduring element of romantic love is intimate friendship rather than physical desire, we shall see that many of the following points apply equally to committed sexual relationships (see below).

Camillo presents his thoughtful ability to “weigh…well the end,” which he implicitly identifies as his intimacy with Leontes, as underpinning all the other virtues, since it has enabled him to restrain potentially divisive desires and fears (1.2.250-62). His distinctive prudence is shown by the fact that his efforts to prevent Leontes from “reiterat[ing]” his “dangerous” fantasies are from the start as vehement as his defence of Hermione (1.2.279-84, 1.2.296-98). After recognising relatively quickly the futility of further argument, he surprisingly considers actually committing the murder that the king is proposing, but only on the condition that Leontes would “give no blemish to [Hermione’s] honor, none,” not only for her sake and that of her son, whom, as the opening scene implies, Camillo also loves deeply, but also for the sake of the country as a whole, which might otherwise be exposed to “the injury of tongues in courts and kingdoms known and allied” to Sicily (1.2.333-41). Although Camillo soon breaks this informal contract, the very fact that he toys with the idea of murder demonstrates, albeit in a highly unorthodox manner, that he does indeed “weigh…well” both “the end” and the means by which it may be achieved: killing Polixenes “with no rash potion, but with a ling’ring dram that should not work maliciously like poison,” would have enabled him to protect all his beloveds at once, as well as the country to which he is so clearly devoted (1.2.319-21; see also 4.4.666-67).

At the same time, Camillo’s momentary impulse to murder Polixenes confirms that he is passionate as well as thoughtful. Like the young lovers, who put the shepherd’s life in such danger (4.4.420-22, 5.1.198-202),[[3]](#endnote-3) the prudent and restrained Camillo is for a moment tempted to allow his devotion to his queen and country to override all other duties and ties, as he seriously contemplates murdering a man to whom he has acted as cupbearer for nine months, and whom he evidently respects as a loyal friend to the king (1.2.345, 1.1.21-32). Thus, Shakespeare suggests that constant attachments, in this case in the form of friendship and patriotism, naturally override codes of honour and nobility.

However, Camillo eventually abandons queen, prince and country to their fate, not, apparently, deterred primarily by the enormity of the crime which he is contemplating–although he claims parenthetically that he would “not do’t” either way–but by the prudent reflection that there is no “example” of anyone who has “flourish’d after” killing a king (1.2.356-63). Fearing that “to do’t, or no, is certain…a break-neck,” since either way he would know too much about Leontes’ turpitude to be allowed to survive, he decides to flee, rather than making any attempt to protect Hermione, whether by murdering Polixenes, or in any other way: “O miserable lady! But for me, what case stand I in…” (1.2.362-63, 1.2.351-52). It is probable also that a doubt as to whether Leontes would keep his promise to spare Hermione plays a part in Camillo’s decision not to commit the murder, since he admits from the start that he can be “fearful to do a thing, where [he] the issue doubted,” even when he is sufficiently convinced of the need to act for “the execution [to] cry out against the non-performance” (1.2.258-62).

Although Camillo’s abrupt flight is of course a perfectly understandable response to the enormous pressures to which he is being subjected, it nevertheless demonstrates that his attachments are in the end not quite strong enough to override his instinct for self-preservation. It is significant that in the exploration of the virtues conducive to friendship discussed above, Camillo expresses a confidence that he generally avoids “folly” and “willful-negligen[ce],” but admits that “fear…oft infects the wisest”: we can infer that moderation comes much more naturally than courage to those of a prudent temperament (1.2.254-64). The contrast between Camillo’s flight and the absolutely courageous constancy displayed by Florizel, Perdita and Paulina highlights the limitations of the former’s prudent temperament. Unlike the lovers, who are prepared to elope unaided, albeit as a last resort, Camillo not only prioritises his own survival over his attachment to queen, prince and country, but also takes care to establish that Polixenes is grateful enough to offer him service in Bohemia before making his escape (1.2.439-41, 1.2.460-62, 4.4.498-504). Thus, the suggestion is that prudent temperaments tend to baulk at the dangers which deep attachments may entail, presumably because they can anticipate them with peculiar clarity (4.4.565-72).

As he grows older in self-imposed exile, however, Camillo realises that his prudence cannot moderate his deepest desires. It is clear that he has led an unfulfilled life in Bohemia, despite having thrived under Polixenes in worldly terms, for, like the shepherd, who wishes above all to be buried with his father’s “honest bones,” he is driven by a compelling “desire to lay [his] bones” in the place where he was born, and has a “woman’s longing” for “dear Sicilia” (4.2.4-20, 4.4.455-56, 4.4.511, 4.4.665-67). Above all, Camillo has finally been “sent for” by the “penitent King,” whom he still humbly thinks of as his “master,” and whom he now “thirst[s] to see,” since he longs once again to be in a position to “cleans[e his] bosom” of his “feeling sorrows” (4.2.6-9, 4.4.512-13, 1.2.238). His unconditional forgiveness of Leontes is contrasted with the ongoing vexation of the less passionate Polixenes, who has determined to “speak no more” about him, and in fact only sees his oldest friend again because of his angry pursuit of Florizel (4.2.20-23).

Despite his innate shrewdness, Camillo is therefore a deeply unworldly and genuinely passionate character. Driven as he is by love for Leontes, he is completely unmoved either by Polixenes’ hints that he might offer him financial rewards to stay in Bohemia– “heaping friendships”–or by his flattering assurances that he is vitally important to Bohemian politics (4.2.10-20). The contrast between the passionate Camillo and the courtly Polixenes is highlighted when the former praises the “sound affection” which leads Florizel to swear to value power, beauty and knowledge purely as the means to deepen his love for Perdita, while the less passionate and more status-conscious king merely comments grudgingly that his son’s heartfelt devotion is “fairly offer’d” (4.4.370-79). Whereas Leontes trusted Camillo “with all the nearest things to [his] heart,” offering him worldly rewards purely out of love (1.2.235-39, 1.2.313-14; although see 1.2.309-11), Polixenes’ response to his request to be allowed to return home shows that the king’s priorities are, characteristically, primarily political; in fact, he shows as little sympathetic concern for Camillo as Leontes showed when responding to Polixenes’ own similar wish earlier in the play (4.2.1-21, 1.2.1-19).[[4]](#endnote-4)

Camillo’s shrewdness remains a formidable force, but it is now entirely focused on providing the means by which he can resume his life in Sicily with Leontes. He does not openly oppose Polixenes’ insistence that he stay in Bohemia, but manages to engineer his own repatriation without risking the king’s wrath, simply by encouraging Florizel to go to Sicily and then informing his father of his plans in the hope that he will pursue them there (4.2.4-33, 4.4.466-72, 4.4.508-13, 4.4.662-66). This plan is as wily as the one which allowed him to escape from Sicily in the first place, since he “betray[s]” Florizel, who has hitherto trusted that his “honesty…endur’d all weathers,” and tricks both the kings with as little compunction as he deceived Leontes at the start of the play (5.1.193-95). Although this second voyage is different in that it also allows him to secure “love and honor” for the prince, to whom he shows considerable generosity, and for whom he clearly feels considerable affection, Camillo is nevertheless prepared to sacrifice his lesser ties if necessary, as he was when contemplating murder, since he knows that there is no vantage point higher than the passion of lovers from which these unscrupulous tactics could be condemned: it should not be forgotten that from Camillo’s perspective, Leontes could easily have taken Polixenes’ side once he understood that Perdita was a commoner (4.4.510, 4.4.585-94). All in all, Camillo’s thoughtfulness allows him pursue his deep attachments without the encumbrance of artificial conceptions of nobility.

Camillo’s underlying nature remains deeply erotic, despite the fact that his prudence can occasionally degenerate into fearfulness. His name, which means ‘acolyte,’ might imply that he is in the process of learning the mysteries of constant love as the play goes on. He actually admires Perdita for countering his own argument that love is “alter[ed]” by “affliction” with the assertion that troubles may “subdue the cheek, but not take in the mind,” acknowledging that he could learn a great deal from her stalwart passion: “she seems a mistress to most that teach” (4.4.572-83). After the “wonder” of his reunion with Leontes, he is less sceptical about the power of love to endure, for even as he urges the king to allow time to “blow away” his sorrows, as it does almost all passions, he tacitly excepts truly constant attachments from this rule: joys which last may be “scarce,” but he now concedes that they do nevertheless exist (5.3.49-53). It is hard, although not quite impossible, to imagine him leaving Sicily again at the end of the play, even if he were in great personal danger, for experience has taught him that a loveless life is not worth living. Camillo’s wisest act may be to marry the staunchly constant Paulina, whom he has apparently always admired, since she is likely to ensure that his characteristic prudence will never again lapse into expediency (5.3.141-43). Such a lapse would otherwise, however, remain a perpetual possibility, since temperaments such as Camillo’s are innately fearful.

Paulina shows precisely the courageous determination which Camillo lacks, when, defying his threat to have her “burnt,” she insists that Leontes’ treatment of the queen “savors of tyranny” (2.3.114-23). Before boldly fabricating Hermione’s death, she confronts Leontes with the destruction which he has caused in a characteristically assertive manner, daring him to retaliate by “tortur[ing]” her (3.2.175-214). It is the intensity of her love for the queen, “the sweet’st, dear’st creature…,” which allows her to defy Leontes in this way, while his less passionate courtiers “creep like shadows” around him (3.2.201, 3.2.228, 2.3.34).[[5]](#endnote-5) As well as herself caring for the queen in a “remov’d house,” and visiting her “twice or thrice a day” for sixteen years, she constantly demands that the king and his courtiers remain devoted to her memory (5.2.104-07, 5.1.23-84, 5.1.94-106, 5.1.224-27). Shakespeare shows the power of her staunch constancy to generate trusting relationships: the jailer is easily persuaded to let her have the infant Perdita because he knows that Paulina is “a worthy lady,” who will “stand betwixt [him] and danger;” Emilia respects her deeply; Antigonus gives her “the rein” to rebuke Leontes because “she’ll not stumble;” Hermione presumably relies on her entirely for sixteen years; Leontes comes to depend on her “worth and honesty;” while the discriminating Camillo seems always to have admired her (2.2.4-18, 2.2.63-64, 2.2.40-44, 2.3.50-52, 5.1.81-82, 5.3.141-46).

However, Paulina fails to see that her insistent attempts to “soften” Leontes’ heart “at the sight o’ th’ child” might be counterproductive: indeed, since he has made no effort to see the baby, and his initial reaction is simply to demand that she be taken away, we may infer that it is precisely this insistence which eventually provokes the king into exposing Perdita (2.2.35-40, 2.3.74-183).[[6]](#endnote-6) Paulina has no further strategy once her “true” words turn out not to be “medicinal” in the way that she had hoped (2.3.36-39). Her plan to conceal Hermione permanently–as she must presume–arguably shows a similar strategic naivety, since it involves attempting to prevent the king from remarrying, even though “dangers, by his Highness’ fail of issue, may drop upon his kingdom,” thus indirectly threatening all that she loves (5.1.27-29). There is therefore an unintentional irony in her remark that she is sure to “do good” if “wit flow from [her tongue] as boldness from [her] bosom,” for her “wit,” although by no means inconsiderable, is thoroughly overshadowed by her “boldness” (2.2.50-52). Her very passion leads her to adopt direct methods which are often highly imprudent.

By contrast, we have seen that the prudent Camillo quickly sees the futility of opposing Leontes’ rage (1.2.279-350). Camillo, who, as Polixenes confirms, is a shrewd politician, would disagree with Emilia’s view that “goodness” such as Paulina’s “cannot miss a thriving issue,” since he knows that indirect or unscrupulous tactics are often necessary, even if one’s aims are benevolent: it is significant that his deception of Florizel allows him to secure the young lovers “love and honor,” even as he satisfies his own desire to return home, whereas Paulina’s direct and noble assault on Leontes could easily have led to Perdita’s death as well as her own (4.2.10-17, 2.2.40-44, 4.4.508-13). However, we have seen that Camillo’s prudence can collapse into simple fearfulness (albeit only under extreme pressure): whereas he abandons both his country and Hermione, despite understanding fully their “dangerous” and “miserable” position, Paulina risks her life to defend the queen and then gives her refuge for sixteen years (1.2.296-98, 1.2.351). Paulina and Camillo’s engagement can therefore be taken as an indication that, just as their shortcomings are contrasting–one tends towards “folly” and the other to “fear”–so their virtues are complementary: thus, the suggestion is that prudence and courage need to be combined in an ongoing dialectic (5.3.141-46).

Quite apart from her lack of prudence, Paulina refuses to acknowledge that passionate constancy itself has its natural limits. Her own love for the queen naturally continues undimmed, since she is actually seeing her two or three times a day, but Leontes is ready to remarry after sixteen years of grief and guilt, as his desire for Perdita suggests (5.2.104-07, 5.1.95-103, 5.1.224-27). Paulina’s reminders that Leontes has in effect “kill’d” a “perfect woman” and a “jewel of children” extend the penitent king’s guilt and sorrow to a point where they seem likely to “unfurnish [him] of reason”: one courtier tells her that she could have said “a thousand things that would have done the time more benefit, and grac’d [her] kindness better” (5.1.12-23, 5.1.115-23).[[7]](#endnote-7) The fact that she attempts to persuade courtiers as well as the king to retain their love of the queen confirms that these reminders are inspired by her own continuing adoration of Hermione–there is “none [so] worthy”–rather than simply by a worry that Leontes might end up unconsciously committing bigamy (5.1.94-106, 5.1.34-35).

Paulina argues that a second marriage would “to the heavens be contrary”–as did her namesake, St. Paul–for Apollo has proclaimed that the king “shall not have an heir till his lost child be found,” and plays on Leontes’ piety further by conjuring up a fearful vision of Hermione’s ghost shrieking “Remember mine” in protest if he were ever to remarry (1 Corinthians vii, 5.1.34-71). These words seem to echo the invocation of the ghost in *Hamlet*, which shocks the prince of Denmark into what I have argued elsewhere is an imprudent and unnaturally prolonged allegiance to his father’s memory.[[8]](#endnote-8) Like the ghost, the spirited Paulina assumes that it is shameful as well as impious to allow love to “ebb…” after the loss of a beloved (5.1.95-105). However, the very fact that she has to turn to conventional codes of piety and honour in an effort to sustain Leontes’ and the unknown courtier’s devotion to Hermione in all its original intensity is itself evidence that this intensity will naturally soften somewhat after a bereavement, even if grief never fully fades. The noble steadfastness that Paulina strives to instil artificially in Leontes and the courtier is thus very different from Florizel’s brave resolve to devote himself to Perdita come what may, which stems from an entirely natural desire to ensure that his current joy will continue indefinitely, like “a wave o’ th’ sea” (4.4.140-42).

One cannot, therefore, dismiss Camillo’s opinion that mourning which is “too sore laid on” should be left to “kill…itself” (5.3.49-53). Indeed, Paulina’s tacit willingness to marry Camillo, despite having just declared that she will spend the rest of her life “lament[ing]” her “mate (that’s never to be found again),” like “an old turtle,” indicates that her own effort to maintain absolute loyalty is ultimately unsustainable after a bereavement (5.3.132-46). Perhaps she understands in the end that such an effort must be driven by artificial principles of nobility and piety, since it is no longer being sustained naturally, by a delightful interchange of constant devotion. Her engagement to Camillo may suggest that prudent thought is more consistently useful to stalwart lovers than the piety which Antigonus embodies (see below), despite the occasional tendency for such prudence to degenerate into mere expediency. In sum; just as Paulina’s steadfastness will no doubt continually remind Camillo that affliction cannot “take in the mind,” so the shrewd and sceptical Camillo provides the antidote to Paulina’s tendency to extend her spirited loyalty beyond its natural limits, or to exercise it in a manner that is virtuous rather than productive.

Just as Camillo and Paulina are used to explore wisdom and courage respectively, so the relationships between Polixenes, Leontes and Hermione are designed to illustrate the role played by moderation and its corresponding vice, “willful-negligen[ce],” in constant friendships (1.2.254-56). The courtly Polixenes’ repeated attempts to soothe Leontes’ disappointment at his decision to return home bears out the implication of the opening scene that the king is prepared to exert himself in order to “justif[y] in [his] loves” Leontes’ lavish hospitality (1.1.8-31). Aware that mere expressions of gratitude will not be sufficient to mollify his more passionate friend, he uses a variety of strategies to excuse his departure, assuring the king that he would stay longer “were there necessity in [his] request;” highlighting the “charge and trouble” which his visit has caused; and claiming that his return is motivated by pressing “fears of what may chance or breed upon [his] absence,” even though messengers have recently reported that “all in Bohemia’s well” (1.2.1-33). These tactful remarks, when taken alongside his eventual decision to extend his already lengthy stay in Sicily by a week, demonstrate that Polixenes entirely understands that constant friends must strive to soften the impact of potentially divisive desires, lest they disrupt the exchange of sympathetic care which sustains the friendship (1.2.38-59).

However, Polixenes’ eventual concession is a minor one, while his tactful words cost him nothing. His attempt to shoulder some of his friend’s guilt at the end of the play may be dismissed as nothing more than a decorous gesture, just as his easy rapprochement with Leontes may remind us that he has less invested in the relationship than characters like Camillo and Hermione, whose whole “world” has been “destroy’d” by the king’s actions (5.3.53-56; 5.2.43-52, 5.2.14-15). In fact, Polixenes substitutes a superficial courtliness for the humble care which truly passionate attachments demand. He is by no means completely passionless, as his affectionate relationship with Florizel shows, but compared to Leontes he is relatively unerotic, as the queen perhaps implies when she assumes that her husband was “the verier wag o’ th’ two” friends when they were children (1.2.65-66).

If, as the above argument suggests, the level of self-denial shown by friends tends to be commensurate with the intensity of their attachment, then Leontes is clearly the exception, at least in the first half of the play, since the king is simultaneously more passionate than his friend and much less moderate. Leontes fails to persuade Polixenes to stay because his proud self-love leaves him with no strategy other than to issue peremptory demands, which he insists there is “no gainsaying”: “Stay your thanks a while, and pay them when you part” (1.2.9-19). His direct and unrestrained assertion of desire is bound to be divisive, as we can see when Polixenes’ resentfully compares his friend’s tyrannical approach to a “whip” (1.2.23-25). Overall, Leontes’ spirited self-assertiveness leads him to resist the paradoxical process which Florizel’s courtship exemplifies, by which the desire to possess the beloved for oneself, which is the foundation of all passionate attachments, is naturally sublimated into humble self-denial and loyal care, once it is understood that this is the only way to establish the sympathetic union which is in fact the deepest and most enduring form of possession.

By contrast, Hermione’s pleas succeed precisely because of her restraint and sympathetic care. She indirectly conveys her appreciation of the strength of Polixenes’ paternal devotion (see below) through her insistence that she would “thwack him hence” if he were to confess that his true motive for returning home was that “he longs to see his son” (1.2.34-37). She is able to pretend to ignore this longing because of Polixenes’ gruff reticence, but she gracefully disarms him, not only by her implicit acknowledgement of her own sly tactic and her insight into his motivation, expressed with such tactful indirectness, but also by her implication that she is requesting a fairly minimal extension precisely because she does not wish to ride roughshod over his paternal feelings: “Yet of your royal presence I’ll adventure the borrow of a week” (1.2.38-39). She manages to make the same point as Leontes about the inadequacy of Polixenes’ “thanks”–indeed, at one point almost in the same words–but in a gentler, more bantering manner, calculated to appeal to the king’s own conscience, while at the same time defusing the tension which her husband’s more domineering approach has created by playfully threatening to keep him “as a prisoner, not like a guest” (1.2.51-56; compare 1.2.9-10).

Unlike the comparatively bland Polixenes on the one hand and the intensely demanding Leontes on the other, Hermione combines moderation with intense passion: her tactful pleas are motivated mainly by a desperate desire to win Leontes’ praise (1.2.90-101), but also partly by a real affection for Polixenes, which is evident in her unexpectedly passionate insistence that she would “thwack” him hence immediately, if he were to confess to a longing to see his son.[[9]](#endnote-9) Her promise to encourage her husband to extend his proposed return visit by a month, which would more than requite Polixenes for agreeing to stay for another week, illustrates her capacity for self-denial, since, as she declares with humble understatement, she loves Leontes “not a jar o’ th’ clock behind what lady she her lord” (1.2.39-44, see also 1.1.5-7). Polixenes succumbs to her persuasion almost immediately because he recognises that it would be churlish to assert his own desires too forcefully in response to such an onslaught of graceful charm (1.2.56-59). Thus, Hermione engages as gracefully as Florizel in the complex negotiations which intimate attachments inevitably demand, fostering trust and gratitude by ensuring that any expression of need is balanced by demonstrations of sympathetic concern. The contrast between Hermione and Leontes underlines the fact that the latter is too proud to accept that the constant intimacy for which he longs can only be achieved by restraining his own desires and pride, while focusing instead on caring diligently for his beloveds.

Even leaving aside the fact that he has no evidence for his suspicions, Leontes’ relationship with the queen seems too cool to spark his jealous rage. At the same time, he surely could not have gained the affection of Camillo as well as Polixenes if he were habitually given to such arbitrary outbursts (1.2.235-39, 1.2.324, 4.2.6-9, 4.4.512-13, 1.2.238). As Leontes himself points out, Paulina would not dare to suggest that he was a tyrant if he actually were one (2.3.116-24).[[10]](#endnote-10) I would argue that his jealousy is in fact focused on Polixenes: his priorities can be deduced from the fact that he only belatedly modifies his claim that Hermione “never spoke… to better purpose” than when persuading his friend to extend his stay, after her query has prompted him to except the moment when she agreed to marry him (1.2.88-105). Whereas he courted his wife merely for “three crabbed months,” his “interchange” with Polixenes has been sustained diligently since childhood (1.2.101-05, 1.1.22-32). His apparently casual remark, “At my request he would not [stay],” marks the moment when he suddenly suspects that his friendship is not fully reciprocated, deducing, with some justification as we have seen, that Hermione’s successful persuasion of Polixenes is a sign that she has developed a deeper intimacy with his friend than he himself has ever managed to do (1.2.87). The misleading casualness of this aside is in fact a sign of his determination to repress this insight, which he finds unbearably humiliating.

This interpretation is borne out by the fact that it is Polixenes whom the king initially tries to poison, whereas his original aim is apparently to spare the queen with “no blemish to her honor, none” (1.2.312-41). Only when it becomes evident that “the harlot king is quite beyond [his] arm…plot-proof” does he begin to wonder whether, if Hermione “were gone…a moi’ty of my rest might come to me again” -thus implying that he might actually have kept his promise to Camillo spare her, which he claims at the time only formalises the “course” already “set down” in his own mind (2.3.1-9, 1.2.339-41). It is the “thought of him” that disrupts Leontes’ peace, while punishing his wife is a secondary consideration (which is not to deny that some of his jealous spite is reserved for her, as the object of his friend’s apparently fickle affection): “For present vengeance, take it on her” (2.3.18-23). It should be no surprise that there is “a jealousy of friendship, as well as of love,” as one astute critic claims, for Shakespeare habitually presents friendship as rivalling romantic and parental devotion in its power to generate deep and enduring attachments.[[11]](#endnote-11)

Since Leontes resembles the lion after which he is named in his fierce pride and concentration on his own gratification, his response to his sudden realisation that he is less intimate with Polixenes than he had thought–a frustration which is, as we have seen, itself an inevitable consequence of his arrogant approach to relationships–is not to strive humbly and diligently to become a better friend, but to search for an external cause for the king’s fickleness. The invention of the adulterous affair not only provides such a cause, but goes some way towards justifying the vindictive rage by which he attempts to relieve his humiliating sense of exclusion. Leontes can only avoid acknowledging his intense frustration at his failure to achieve the same level of intimacy with Polixenes as Hermione by displacing his pain in the most disruptive manner possible.[[12]](#endnote-12) It is a measure both of the intensity of this pain and, ironically, the intransigence of his self-love that the fantasy by which he hopes finally to find “rest” eventually involves not only destroying or attempting to destroy all those to whom he is closely attached, but also “disgrac[ing]” and tormenting himself with “goads, thorns, nettles, tails of wasps” (2.3.1-2, 2.3.8-9, 1.2.187-90, 1.2.325-33).

To sum up on the play’s exploration of friendship: passionate friends have an intuitive appreciation that the ultimate good is a perfectly harmonious, constant intimacy, which naturally leads to a thoughtful effort to control potentially divisive desires and fears. Thus, enduring, intimate friendships are founded on moderation, wisdom and courage. The contrast between Hermione’s and Leontes’ approach to their relationships illustrates Shakespeare’s teaching that an intense desire to unite with a beloved forever can only be fulfilled by humbly moderating any direct assertion of this desire and focusing instead on establishing trust through sympathetic care. It is therefore an absolute priority for passionate friends to restrain their pride, since it is this that is likely to prevent them from engaging in this paradoxical process. At the same time, courage and thoughtfulness need to be carefully balanced: thought underpins the moderation of intimate friends, and helps them to pursue their attachment prudently and without regard for conventional morality, but it may easily collapse into fickle pusillanimity, whereas stalwart constancy, although one of the key attributes of a loyal friend, is not necessarily pragmatic or even ultimately, in the long aftermath of a bereavement, emotionally sustainable. All these points apply equally to romantic love, the enduring element of which is trusting intimacy, although we shall see that the initial intensity of sexual desire generates a unique set of problems and opportunities.

Romantic Love

The young lovers provide the benchmark by which the other romantic relationships in the play can be judged. Florizel’s name suggests that he embodies the qualities traditionally represented by the spring flowers that Perdita wishes to give him: these comprise daffodils, violets, primroses, oxlips, the “fleur de lis” and “the crown imperial,” or fritillaria, which symbolise respectively hope, faithfulness, virginal innocence, “bold[ness],” chastity and perpetual devotion, the latter of which is, I would argue, the overall goal, or ‘crowning’ achievement, that is facilitated by these virtues (4.4.118-29).[[13]](#endnote-13) This list indicates that even the intense, but potentially fleeting sensuality of young adulthood, which is the only element in romantic love that distinguishes it from intimate friendship, may well express itself–perfectly naturally, as the floral imagery which pervades the conversation implies–as a constant, self-denying devotion, which regulates both desire and fear. This is because many young lovers can recognise that faithful devotion–as represented by violets–although relatively “dim,” may, when fully reciprocated, be “sweeter” than immediate physical desire, symbolised here by “the lids of Juno’s eyes, or Cytherea’s breath” (4.4.120-22). Perdita’s own chaste fidelity illustrates this point, although at the same time her reference to Proserpina’s rape, her own longing to have Florizel “quick and in mine arms” and her mistaken assumption that Mopsa and Dorcas are virgins all serve to remind us of the almost ungovernable intensity of sexual desire (4.4.109-32).

Whereas Shakespeare assigns wisdom, moderation and courage to particular characters in his study of friendship, he ensures that the young lovers combine all four of the cardinal virtues. The romance is founded on justice and wisdom, which are the overarching virtues of the four. Florizel’s apparently self-effacing willingness to renounce his right to succeed to the throne in order to marry Perdita actually forms part of a perfectly just, or equitable, erotic transaction: the price of this enduring intimacy is high, nothing less than constant care, but the reward is the ultimate good of Perdita’s commensurate trust and fidelity - “there is not half a kiss to choose who loves another best” (4.4.31-51, 4.4.175-76). “I’ th’ virtue of [his] daughter” the shepherd can offer Florizel “a portion equal” to the prince’s own extraordinary prospective wealth, for, as in the case of the two kings, material inequalities between lovers may be “justified in [their] loves” (4.4.383-89, 1.1.9). Indeed, Florizel has to make a much deeper and more self-denying investment in his courtship than less passionate characters like the clown or Polixenes, who buy their mistresses “knacks” and “silken treasury” simply in order to secure a “happy holding” (4.4.309-23, 4.4.347-56). Just as Polixenes can easily deprive his wife of his presence for nine months, since he sees his marriage merely as a way of satisfying his “stronger blood”–the sensitive Hermione does not even consider the possibility that it is marital devotion which has triggered the king’s determination to return home (1.2.71-75, 1.2.34-37)–so he is entranced primarily by Perdita’s dancing rather than, by the combination of her dancing, singing and conversation, as are Florizel, and, no doubt, the shepherd, who delights in her ability to do “anything” equally skilfully (4.4.176-77, compare 4.4.57-58, 4.4.136-43).

Although attachment is an absolutely fundamental instinct, which is by no means even exclusively a human preserve,[[14]](#endnote-14) in rational beings it is refined by an understanding of what is required to secure a lasting intimacy. Although Florizel is seemingly “advis’d” purely by “fancy” in choosing to be “heir to [his] affection” rather than the conventional crown which he would otherwise inherit, his assertion that “reason” might also “thereto be obedient” hints that his apparently “desperate” determination not to “violat[e]…[his] faith” could actually be seen as prudent from the largest perspective, since he knows that he must strive at every turn to prove his loyalty to his passionate, but understandably distrustful, mistress (4.4.482-85). Unlike Paulina, however, he combines this insight with a pragmatic evaluation of the means by which the ultimate good can best be achieved: although he is ready simply to seek his own fortune as a last resort, he is under no illusions as to the dangers of such a course, as is shown by his willingness to adopt Camillo’s devious plan (4.4.520-94).

Nevertheless, Florizel is without doubt courageous, as well as just and wise, since he would have abandoned the comforts of court in order to elope with Perdita, leaving himself with no means of support (4.4.462-504). Quite apart from such extreme sacrifices, Autolycus provides a glimpse of the stalwart, humdrum self-denial which constant love necessarily entails, when he reports ruefully that he was unable to raise the subject of the shepherd’s bundle on the voyage to Sicily because the “overfond” prince was focusing entirely on caring for the “much sea-sick” Perdita, even though he was “himself little better” (5.2.114-20).

Florizel is also moderate, or, more accurately, he subordinates all his other desires to his intransigent passion:

…were I crown’d the most imperial monarch,

Thereof most worthy, were I the fairest youth

That ever made eye swerve, had force and knowledge

More than was ever man’s, I would not prize them

Without her love; for her, employ them all,

Commend them and condemn them to her service,

Or to their own perdition.

(4.4.372-78)

Florizel’s pride, curiosity and physical attraction–a list which perhaps dimly echoes the classical tripartite division of the soul, as seen most famously in Plato’s *Republic*–are all regulated by a desire to win Perdita’s trust. In particular, his sexual desire does not “burn hotter than [his] faith” (4.4.34-35). As we have seen, Florizel admires his beloved’s conversation, her singing and her dancing equally, which suggests that the beauty of her intellect, passionate spirit and body have merged together seamlessly in his mind (4.4.136-46). The potentially transient sexual element in this attraction–which, both here and elsewhere in the scene, is symbolised by dancing–is subordinated to an ongoing reverence for the “singular” majesty of her character, “that crowns what [she is] doing in the present deeds” and makes him wish that she “might ever do nothing but” dance, as “a wave o’ th’ sea” might roll on indefinitely (4.4.140-46). Thus overall, Shakespeare suggests that the cardinal virtues are ultimately derived from the austere imperatives of love: Florizel’s clear-sighted decision to devote every effort to earning a constant intimacy with Perdita through disciplined care drives him to control any potentially divisive desire or fear.

Perdita is courageous because her desire for the supreme prize of Florizel’s love overshadows even her intense fear of Polixenes (4.4.16-24). After Polixenes’ intervention, she declares that she would not have been too “much afear’d” to tell him that “the self-same sun that shines upon [his] court hides not his visage from our cottage,” but implies that she was distracted from the king’s threats by the much more fearful prospect of losing her beloved (4.4.434-50). This remark shows that Perdita’s courageous pursuit of the *summum bonum* is supported by her thoughtful ability to make the distinction between nature and convention, which was integral to philosophy as it was classically understood.[[15]](#endnote-15)

As we have seen, Camillo praises the wisdom of her remark that “affliction may subdue the cheek, but not take in the mind,” presumably because it reinforces his own growing sense that the potential rewards of love justify any outlay of steadfast fortitude (4.4.575-79). He sees that Perdita’s willingness to risk execution, or at the very least a life of penury, as it must seem, by eloping with her beloved is underpinned by her understanding that love must be earnt (4.4.420-504).

Perdita’s moderation also stems from an instinctive fear of losing Florizel, which is reinforced by prudent thought: she reproaches herself hastily for allowing the prince to tease her into comparing him to “a bank, for love to lie and play on,” for she knows that her beloved may well have “woo’d [her] the false way,” or will not in the end be able to bring himself to renounce his birth-right (4.4.127-34, 4.4.146-51, 4.4.35-40, 4.4.446-50). Perdita knows that sexual desire can distract lovers from their underlying needs, while offering only ephemeral rewards in return. She draws on the distinction between nature and convention to suggest that a primarily physical passion may only ever be sustained by artificial means: she compares the “art” designed to “mend nature” that “nature” itself originally “makes,” which is what enables the grafted “gillyvors,” or carnations–significantly, their latter name is derived from their flesh-like colour–to remain “the fairest flowers o’ th’ season” even as “the year grow[s] ancient,” to the use of ingenious aids to stimulate and prolong physical attraction, declaring that she would not wish Florizel to “desire to breed by [her]” simply because she was “painted” (4.4.79-103). Thus, Perdita understands that immoderate lovers may dissipate their energies in an engrossing effort to prolong sensual pleasure through artificial stimulation, which is yet bound to be frustrated in the end: ultimately, even the grafted carnations will be destroyed by winter.

Perdita’s passionate attachment and thoughtful ability to align herself absolutely with her deepest needs regulate not only her sensuality, but her pride. She reproaches herself for self-love as well as sensuality after fantasising about “play[ing] on” Florizel, declaring that “with wisdom [she] might fear” that his “praises are too large”: thus, her worry that “this robe of mine does change my disposition” reflects her understanding that vanity–that is, the pleasure of being admired by any lover, let alone a prince–may often work hand in hand with physical desire to distract lovers from their underlying need for constant intimacy (4.4.130-51). The “piedness,” or variegated colour, of the carnations hints at the way in which this combination of pride and unrestrained sensuality can be grafted on to attachments, as it were, thus distorting their underlying nature: of course both these more ephemeral motives are, like the carnations, rooted in nature, but both have to be weeded out with care, since they culminate in artificial, “painted” displays, which provide no substantial fulfilment. Perdita’s prudent restraint forces Florizel to realise that there is no point in buying her “silken treasury” in the way that Polixenes suggests, since “she prizes not such trifles,” but only the “gifts [which] are pack’d and lock’d up in my heart”: the queenly outfit which he has bought Perdita is not designed to flatter her, or to increase her beauty, but to symbolise his decision to enthrone her as his ultimate, or ‘crowning’ good (4.4.347-60, 4.4.1-14).

By contrast, Mopsa and Dorcas, who are less prudent and restrained, use artificial aids to beauty, exemplified by the trinkets which Autolycus peddles, in a sort of escalating arms race, which bolsters their vanity and prolongs their own sexual pleasure, but, as Autolycus’s third ballad implies, leaves them without the security of an enduring commitment: their part in the song is to beg the clown repeatedly, but ineffectually, to reveal his plans (4.4.218-50, 4.4.297-308). The clown’s recent jilting of Dorcas confirms that the shepherdesses’ immoderate sensuality is likely to be counterproductive in the end, for, in contrast with Florizel, the stimulation which their lover is pursuing is as fleeting as his material outlay is nugatory: “being enthrall’d as I am, it will also be the bondage of certain ribbons and gloves” (4.4.231-41). The shepherdesses thus practise an art designed to “mend nature” which “nature makes”: by grafting a garish display, inspired by pride and sexual desire, onto their underlying attachment, they have in fact reduced their chances of securing the lasting commitment which they most of all desire, since sensual pleasure will fade in the end, however skilfully it is prolonged (4.4.81-97).

Autolycus’ first ballad implies that worries such as Perdita’s can only be avoided by those who totally lack passion: the “usurer’s wife,”–the song’s main protagonist–whose marriage was presumably purely prudential, and who longs to eat only cold-blooded creatures, “adders’ heads, and toads carbonado’d” when she is in labour, produces only “money-bags,” indicating that she is concerned entirely with self-advancement (4.4.262-65). The other two ballads outline the dilemma which male inconstancy poses for more passionate women, who hope to form warm attachments, and to nurture children who will “continue their loves,” rather than merely generating “money-bags” (1.1.32). The protagonist of the second ballad undergoes a surreal version of the fate which Perdita herself would have suffered if Florizel had proved disloyal, namely, that of being “turn’d into a cold fish for she would not exchange flesh with one that lov’d her” (4.4.275-80). (Perdita probably expects this to be her fate at the start of the scene, since she figures primroses, which represent chastity, as “maids” who “die unmarried, ere they can behold bright Phoebus in his strength” -4.4.122-25). Nevertheless, the third song implies that even this frustration is ultimately preferable to the insecurity and jealousy of Dorcas and Mopsa, who have clearly committed themselves deeply, and “exchange[d] flesh” with the clown, without securing any guarantees of his future intentions (4.4.286-308, 4.4.237-41, 4.4.162-63).

Traditionally of course the onus has been on women more than men to practise continence. This is partly because illegitimate children are naturally a more pressing problem for women: the “streak’d gillyvors,” which are “Nature’s bastards,” bloom freely in high summer, but Perdita is determined not to “get slips” of them -a term which can be applied both to bastards and carnations (4.4.82-85). Although at some point Dorcas may disrupt the clown’s carefree life by attempting to “give him again” the baby which Mopsa alleges her rival has conceived, he would still perhaps have the option of denying that he was the father (4.4.239-41).

There is, however, a more fundamental reason for this imbalance in gender roles: Autolycus’ songs about female continence and male fickleness are quickly followed by a “rough” and extremely energetic dance involving twelve men (4.4.324-31). The suggestion is that the twelve dancers share natural characteristics which are generically male, since, despite being drawn from a variety of manual occupations, they all perform the same “gambols.” The fact that they are all dressed as satyrs, or “men of hair,” provides a hint that men in particular have a tendency to concentrate directly and exclusively on their own sexual gratification. The implication is that this narrow focus on “pleas[ing]” themselves “plentifully” in such an unrestrained way, combined with the spirited pride which leads some of them to “report” that they have “jump[ed] twelve foot and a half” at court, prevents them from showing the restrained care which is needed to develop romantic relationships, for the women reject the dance as “a gallimaufry of gambols, because they are not in’t” (4.4.324-39). It even prevents them from forming close friendships, it would seem, since they share only a rough camaraderie in “threes.” These points are supported by the clown’s earlier reflections on the “four and twenty nosegays for the shearers” which Perdita has requested for the feast: they are again “three-man song-men all and very good ones,” but they have no-one to sing the treble notes, since “they are most of them means and bases,” except, significantly, a restrained “Puritan,” who only “sings psalms to hornpipes” (4.3.41-45). The implication of all this is that men in particular are prone to succumb to a heady mixture of spirited pride and physical desire, which is incompatible with enduring romantic love.

The clown embodies the mixture of physical passion and pride which is symbolised by the twelve dancers, since he not only uses the hapless Mopsa and Dorcas to satisfy his sexual desire, but appears to relish the power which he exerts over them: he is “so in love with” Autolycus’ third song that he allows the latter to pick his pocket while he is learning “both tune and words” (4.4.309, 4.4.604-09). The tension in male nature between these distracting elements and the longing to form constant attachments, which inevitably entails restraint, is reflected in the disagreement between the shepherd, who wants to send the dancers away, and the king, who insists on being “refresh[ed]” by the entertainment (4.4.332-41). Typically, the moderate shepherd is swayed by the fact that his guests “are pleas’d,” but has no interest in their frenzied performance himself (4.4.340-41). Like Florizel, the shepherd’s enjoyment of watching his beloved wife “dance her turn” in an orderly way–unlike the twelve men, he did not take centre stage himself–merged naturally with an ongoing admiration for her singing and speaking (compare 4.4.55-62 and 4.4.136-46).

The shepherd has had a life-time to discover what really pleases him, but Shakespeare does not underrate the power that sexual desire exerts over younger men: perhaps even the deeply passionate Florizel might at first have been distracted by the intense stimulus of artificially enhanced physical pleasure, if Perdita had been less continent–although now he would doubtless hotly deny any such imputation–since he implies that he too would have bought his mistress “silken treasury,” if she had not scorned such “trifles” (4.4.356-60). The prince may find it even harder to moderate his sexual desire than Perdita: it is noticeable that, although he declares that his “lusts” do not “burn hotter than [his] faith,” he never claims that they burn any more coolly (4.4.33-35).

The dancers’ foregrounding of pride and physical desire is ultimately perverse, even though both are of course entirely natural drives, for paradoxically their dance, like the grafted carnations, is an “art” designed to “mend nature” that “nature [itself] makes” in the first place: they have in fact deliberately “made themselves all men of hair” and presumably rehearsed their graceless dances, in what is, despite appearances, an artificial display (4.4.326). This implies that, paradoxically, men too have to distort their underlying nature in order to give free rein to their spirited pride and physical desire, even though they are particularly prone to such incontinence, since they too can only ultimately fulfil their nature through constant attachments. The men’s apparently wild leaping is implicitly contrasted with the beautiful dancing of Perdita and the shepherd’s wife, who, as we have seen, restricts herself to “danc[ing] her turn” (4.4.58, 4.4.140-43, 4.4.176). This measured mode of dancing is an apt symbol for a passion which is restrained by a grace that serves to unite lover and beloved in a perfectly harmonious experience, since the instinctive vigour of such dances is naturally regulated by a sympathetic sense of what might be pleasing to the onlooker.

Whereas men often find it difficult to moderate their pride and physical passion, even though many will instinctively understand that this is the only way to fulfil their nature, the fact that the three main female characters in the play are all motivated primarily by their deepest attachment indicates that women are less easily distracted from their underlying needs: indeed, the plot is carefully designed to allow Paulina, Hermione and Perdita to provide the benchmark for constancy in friendship, parenthood and romantic love respectively, thus covering the three main types of attachment which the play examines. Although the two shepherdesses are perhaps the nearest female equivalent to the twelve dancers in their vanity and focus on physical desire, they come closer to acknowledging their own deeper passions than the “men of hair,” or their lover, for, as we have seen, their part in Autolycus’ third song is to express a desperate need for constancy; indeed, their self-beautification is itself partly motivated, however mistakenly, by a desire to secure the clown’s love.

Overall, therefore, Florizel and Perdita set the standard of absolute constancy by which the other romantic or sexual relationships in the play are judged. They demonstrate that in order to earn a trusting intimacy, lovers must show courage and moderation, subordinating not only all potentially divisive fears and desires, but any manifestation of pride, or self-love, to their ruling passion. The lovers are wiser than they seem, for their initial continence will help to generate a deep and constant intimacy, whereas the artificially stimulated pride and sensuality of the clown and his mistresses are bound to be ephemeral. Moreover, although Perdita seems to be a “bark of baser kind” from the perspective of the conventional hierarchy, her relationship with Florizel is in fact absolutely just, or equitable–as, ironically, Polixenes himself unconsciously implies when he defends “marry[ing] a gentle scion to the wildest stock”[[16]](#endnote-16)–for in reality she is an aristocrat of the soul, so to speak, since her upbringing has prepared her to deliver the ability to cultivate “the crown imperial” of a constant, reciprocal devotion (see below), which, as Florizel realises, is a far more substantial reward than any artificial crown (4.4.92-95).

The shepherd’s marriage illustrates the enduring joy which will be Florizel and Perdita’s reward if they can sustain their mutual care. Like Florizel, the shepherd admired his beloved’s conversation, her singing and her dancing equally, as has been noted, and no doubt helped to stimulate his wife’s unstinting “labor” with extended, heartfelt eulogies such as the one he delivers when he is exhorting Perdita to imitate her virtues (4.4.55-62). In contrast with Leontes’ marriage, where both praise and trust are in short supply (1.2.90-101; see below), the shepherd clearly came to trust his diligent wife so deeply that, far from feeling jealous, he could actively relish the way in which she was “now…on his shoulder, and his,” as she strove to make their parties a success (4.4.57-58).

The flowers of “middle summer”–all pungent herbs–that Perdita considers to be appropriate gifts for middle aged men, invite us to reflect on the ways in which trust is developed, or on the contrary degraded in mature romantic relationships, since they represent respectively mistrust, virtue, sexual love, joy and grief/jealousy:

Hot lavender, mints, savory, marjoram,

The marigold that goes to bed wi’ th’ sun,

And with him rises weeping.

(4.4.104-06)

Although Hermione is not the principal target of Leontes’ jealous rage, as has been argued above, the king’s paranoid suspicions and the callous way in which he acts them out are of course indications that his marriage is not securely founded on mutual trust and sympathy. His attachment to his queen is primarily physical: he describes his courtship–which was “crabb’d,” even though it only lasted three months, reflecting his characteristic, fiery impatience–in typically sensual terms, as an effort to “make [her] open [her] white hand” (1.2.101-05). After he has driven her away, he misses her “full eyes” and the “treasure” of her lips, rather than, for instance, her singing or her conversation, and, when he finally sees her again, he is disconcerted by her wrinkles (5.1.53-54, 5.3.27-29). Leontes’ perfunctory plan to “new woo [his] queen” betrays a complete inability to appreciate the depth of Hermione’s anguish over her son’s death (3.2.156). Although he undoubtedly has a “bitter” sense of loss after his wife’s apparent death, he is still focused on “the wrong [he] did [him]self,” rather than on the pain he has caused Hermione: he blames himself only for having “destroyed the sweet’st companion that e’er man bred his hopes out of” (5.1.6-12). Thus, even a penitent Leontes finds it difficult to moderate his self-love and sensual desire sufficiently to display the sympathetic care which love demands.

By contrast, Hermione’s love for her husband is almost as deep as Perdita’s for Florizel–it is in fact she who initiates one of the play’s recurring images by referring to him as “the crown and comfort of [her] life”–although, as we shall see, she is constantly hurt by his graceless behaviour (3.2.94). She responds indignantly to Polixenes’ implication that the queens whom he and Leontes have married are in effect “devils” whose physical beauty has “tempt[ed]” them away from the “innocence” of their original friendship, declaring that this claim could only be justified

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

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

With any but with us.

(1.2.84-86)

Leaving aside her bantering reference to the probability that the kings were not virgins when they married, the serious part of Hermione’s riposte is her sardonic demonstration of the absurdity of Polixenes’ idea that a constant marriage could ever amount to a distracting “temptation.” This implicit argument is undermined, however, by the fact that she cannot find a stronger measure of Leontes’ constant love than his sexual continence.[[17]](#endnote-17)

Hermione’s repeated, sardonic pleas for “Grace,” in response to Leontes’ remark about her never having spoken “to better purpose,” which is no doubt just the latest example of his boorish disregard, echo her indignant reaction to Polixenes’ implicit denigration of her marriage– “Grace to boot!”–in such a way as to highlight the crucial role played by “grace” in mature relationships (1.2.99, 1.2.105. 1.2.80).[[18]](#endnote-18) To lack ‘grace’ is to lack the reciprocal interplay of gratitude and gratification that generates the joyous sense of unity which Shakespeare sees as the ultimate, irreducible good: Hermione is desperate for Leontes to show that he returns her single-minded devotion by praising her, for “praises are [the] wages” which can drive lovers “a thousand furlongs” (1.2.91-96). Ironically, it was a desire for praise which led Hermione to exert herself to make Polixenes extend his stay in the first place: she had intended to remain silent until the latter had sworn to depart, presumably so as to earn the maximum gratitude from Leontes when she eventually stepped in to change his friend’s mind (1.2.28-30).

Thus, although Hermione’s problems are less immediately obvious than the shepherdesses’, her position even at the start of the play is almost as wretched, since she too has chosen the wrong partner in whom to invest her devotion. The marriage has in fact been sustained more by her passionate desire to gain Leontes’ “favor” than by an actual reciprocal intimacy (3.2.94). Even as Hermione is suggesting that “for ever earn[ing] a royal husband” should take precedence over “for some while [earning] a friend,” Leontes is fuming with a jealous anger which, quite apart from the fact that it is focused on his friend rather than his wife, is symptomatic of the underlying pride which has prevented him from returning her sympathetic care (1.2.106-08). In this way, Shakespeare illustrates the torment that can be inflicted within many supposedly well-established relationships, when the craving for intimacy is thwarted.

Hermione is quite ready to die after losing both her husband and her children, since, like the shepherd, she values her family ties more than life itself (3.2.42-45, 3.2.92-101, 4.4.454-56; see below for Hermione’s maternal affection). She embraces Leontes at the end of the play–having been given several opportunities to appreciate the earnestness of his repentance by the diligent Paulina[[19]](#endnote-19)–as she must do in order to re-enter society, but does not speak to him; her passionate words are reserved for Perdita, for whom alone she says she has “preserv’d [her]self,” and the play ends with a match made between Camillo and Paulina rather than with a rapprochement between the king and his queen, as one might have expected (5.3.23-42, 5.3.71-73, 5.3.111, 5.3.141-46). The silent implication–made without interrupting the apparently harmonious ending of the play–is that Hermione could never forgive Leontes for his abandonment of Perdita and the death of Mamillius.[[20]](#endnote-20) Thus, Shakespeare illustrates the inevitable corollary of his teaching that constant devotion must be earnt through self-denying, sympathetic care: through his narrow self-love the king has entirely alienated Hermione, who was in fact offering him the ultimate good.

Parenthood

Shakespeare outlines a hierarchy of erotic devotion in the play, in which characters are ranked not only by their capacity to form constant attachments, but also by their ability to transmit this capacity to future generations through parental care. As the opening scene implies, parental investment in the “hope” and “promise” of children is the consequence of an inevitable clash between the instinctive desire to perpetuate attachments and a rational awareness of death. The intrinsic satisfactions that parents derive from aligning themselves with the interests of their children–which are, as we have seen, common to all deep attachments–are reinforced by the vicarious relish which they take in their child’s future happiness, which arms them against the inevitable moment when death will strip them of all their attachments. Here again Hermione and the shepherd provide the standard by which the other parental figures in the play can be judged. In contrast with Leontes, who, as we shall see, concentrates narrowly on the bodily resemblances between himself and Mamillius, and disowns his daughter because he considers her to be a bastard, the shepherd’s successful adoption of Perdita serves to abstract the desire to “continue…loves” as a motive for parental care from the urge to reproduce genes. (This contrast is sharpened by the fact that he too assumes that the baby is illegitimate, but directs his censure only at the lack of care which its parents have displayed -3.3.72-76.)

The instinctive “pity” which the shepherd feels for the “pretty” child represents the first stage in a process which ultimately leads parents to deliver sympathetic care in order to nurture the “promise” of children (3.3.70-76). His characteristically modest remark that he “should be silent,” rather than boasting of Perdita’s “feat[ness]” and her ability to give Florizel “that which he not dreams of,” actually betrays the fact that his praise of her is partly a celebration of his own achievement in transmitting his passionate constancy to his daughter (4.4.176-80). The vicarious satisfaction which he derives from Perdita’s future happiness is intensified by his knowledge that her loving heart has been nurtured by his own care. The shepherd has indeed made every effort to pass on to Perdita the diligent generosity which has allowed him and his wife to lead such fulfilling lives: in his opening speech he reminds his daughter that she cannot “retire…as if [she] were a feasted one,” but that now, as “the hostess of the meeting,” she should imitate her adopted mother’s “labor,” and welcome even “unknown friends…for it is a way to make us better friends, more known” (4.4.55-68). Secure in the knowledge that he has exerted himself in this way, he can simply relish the intimacy that she has developed with Florizel as an extension of his own passionate attachments, rather than focusing primarily on the sadness of losing a child (4.4.168-80). The thought that it is possible to “continue…loves” into future generations through parental care therefore gives a particularly forceful impetus to parental devotion, even in comparison to the intensity of romantic love or intimate friendship.

In contrast with Polixenes, whose extreme fury with Florizel stems, as I will argue, from his fear of an unremembered death, the shepherd values his life only insofar as it forms an integral link in a great chain of attachments, stretching from his forebears to his descendants: his first reaction to Polixenes’ threats is not to rebuke Perdita, but to pray for his life to end “within this hour,” lest a summary execution should prevent him from fulfilling his wish to “die upon the bed my father died, to lie close to his honest bones” (4.4.453-56). Because he has devoted himself to this enduring chain of attachments, he is able to “keep seeming and savour all the winter long,” like rosemary and rue, the “flow’rs of winter” and of old age, which represent “grace and remembrance” respectively, rather than focusing on his own physical decay and eventual death (4.4.74-76). Just as he honours the memory of his father’s virtues, so he gracefully merges his interests with those of the next generation through his sympathetic care.

Although one might be tempted to imagine that Perdita is “too noble for this place” because of her royal blood, the truth is, therefore, that her inheritance is a much more substantial “crown imperial” than Florizel’s, since she has been primed to practise and transmit passionate constancy by adopted parents who have themselves received this care from their own “honest” forebears -whereas the prince has experienced a parental love which is, as we shall see, sincere, but in fact impeded precisely by Polixenes’ sense of his own royal dignity (4.4.156-59). Perdita has learnt from her parents’ example that each act of painstaking care is an investment which might gain the supreme reward of an intimate attachment. The role of hostess perfectly illustrates the combination of open-heartedness and discipline which is required to generate such attachments: Perdita’s tactful “labor” to ensure that her two guests are not offended by being offered winter flowers serves to “make [her] better friends” as surely as Hermione’s equally graceful efforts to put Polixenes at ease (4.4.72-79, 4.4.103-12).[[21]](#endnote-21) This mixture of generosity and self-control may be partly what inspires Camillo to assist the young lovers, since he praises her both at this point in the play and later, when she blushes at Florizel’s compliments in a way that is simultaneously passionate and modest (4.4.159-61). Similarly, it is the combination of Perdita’s concern lest Florizel woo her “the false way,” and her passionate “swear[ing]” to imitate the turtle doves who “never mean to part” that induces Polixenes, almost despite himself, to express admiration for her “noble” demeanour, thus no doubt facilitating his eventual acceptance of a shepherdess for a daughter-in-law (4.4.146-59).

The shepherd reminds Perdita of the example set by his wife, rather than directly rebuking or instructing her, because he knows that children have their own strong passions, which are not necessarily amenable to any direct form of control. This point is highlighted in the most dramatic manner by Perdita’s secret affair with a prince, but the clown also illustrates perfectly his father’s rueful comment that in the “age between ten and three-and-twenty…there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancientry, stealing, fighting” (3.3.59-63). The shepherd wisely limits himself to venting his criticisms of the “boil’d brain[ed]” clown in private–and even there in highly generalised terms, as if he can hardly bear to admit that he is talking about his son–and avoids rebuking him when he eventually appears, although the youth, who is perhaps nineteen (3.3.64), has not only failed to help him to gather the flock, but, judging by the huntsman’s cry with which he announces his presence, was actually himself involved in the very hunt which has just “scar’d away” the “best sheep” (3.3.63-80). The shepherd does not even rebuke the clown for failing to come to Antigonus’ aid, despite the fact that the latter “cried to [him] for help,” although he does leave his son in no doubt that he himself would have interceded (3.3.107-08, 3.3.96).

When the clown reappears sixteen years later, now presumably in his mid-thirties, and so well beyond the danger period outlined by his father, he seems to be much more reliable, since he has clearly been trusted to sell a large amount of wool and to procure everything that Perdita needs for the feast (4.3.32-49). Moreover, he shows a sympathetic concern for the supposedly beaten Autolycus, which contrasts strikingly with the callousness of his response to the deaths of Antigonus and the mariners (compare 4.3.54-114 with 3.3.83-131). Even the pride which he takes in his conquests (see above) is tempered by a degree of shame, for he makes persistent attempts to conceal his incontinence both from his father and from the guests at the party (4.4.161-65, 4.4.242-48, 4.4.309-13). All of this implies that if parents remain patient and concentrate on consistently modelling self-denial and sympathetic care, even the most obdurately wilful child may well come to appreciate the advantages of these virtues. The apparently disinterested generosity consistently displayed by the shepherd, which might even have led him to risk his life in order to defend Antigonus from the bear, can therefore be seen as prudent on the deepest level, since, even where it fails to gain him friends, it enables him to demonstrate to his children the virtues by which the chain of love is sustained.

In contrast to lovers and friends, parents cannot rely on any return other than the vicarious delight which they take in their children’s current and future happiness, although one can see from the shepherd’s desire to be buried alongside his father that a well-cared for child is almost bound to feel deep gratitude and a desire to perpetuate his or her parents’ values. By adopting Perdita, the shepherd has certainly gained a daughter who could become the mainstay of his old age after the death of his wife–as is implied by the skilful way in which she assumes the role of hostess at the sheep-shearing feast–but it would be unwise to assume that even the most passionately grateful children will consistently reciprocate parental care. On the one hand younger children are primarily needy or “parasit[ic],” in Polixenes’ condescending phrase, while on the other, the vivid attachments and “stronger blood” of adolescence and early adulthood naturally tend to override filial gratitude: leaving aside the clown’s unruliness, Florizel “mean[s] not to see [Polixenes] any more” after eloping with his beloved, while, as we have seen, Perdita’s concealed courtship actually puts the shepherd’s life in mortal danger twice (1.2.168, 3.3.59-63, 4.4.494-95, 5.1.198-202, 4.4.420-22). Even in the best circumstances parents must usually accept that their children will leave them to start their own families, and therefore ideally restrain any trace of possessiveness as gracefully as the shepherd, since any other response might disrupt the alignment of interests which they have striven to establish (4.4.379-91). Overall, parental devotion thus requires an even greater degree of self-control than other forms of constant attachment -although this effort is, as we have seen, “justified” by the fact that the potential rewards are far more enduring.

As we have seen, Hermione’s family is her ruling passion: at her trial she declares that she “only…stand[s] for” her honour because “’tis a derivative from me to mine,” since protecting her children from disgrace matters far more to her than her status as “a great king’s daughter,” or even her own life (3.2.37-45). Subsequently, we have noted that she takes refuge with Paulina mainly because she cannot forgive a husband who has apparently destroyed both of the children who formed the heart of the family to which her life has been devoted. At the end of the play, she declares that she has only “preserv’d [her]self” at all in order “to see the issue” of the oracle’s announcement that Perdita may return some day (5.3.121-28). It is significant that Paulina, who knows Hermione so well, imagines her ghost shrieking “Remember mine,” rather than “Remember me,” like the ghost in *Hamlet* (5.1.65-67). Overall, Hermione is courageous because her self-love is entirely subordinated to her parental devotion.

Hermione’s parental devotion is wise and restrained as well as courageous. Whereas the first lady retaliates indignantly when Mamillius rejects her–partly for speaking to him as if he “were a baby still” and partly because he prefers a second lady with more attractive “black brows,” the humble queen restrains herself from rebuking the “troubl[ing]” boy, and instead puts the onus on him to tell her a story–because he is “pow’rful at it”–even though this means being subjected to “sprites and goblins” (2.1.1-32). In contrast with the first lady, Hermione’s concern for him is undiminished by the prospect of a second child: she takes the shortest possible break before resuming her effort to give him the undivided attention which he still needs at the age of five (for Mamillius’ age compare 4.1.5-6, 5.1.115-18 and 5.1.126-30). After coaxing Mamillius repeatedly to sit down next to her, just as he has no doubt done countless times before, she is eventually able to recall him to the special intimacy which they both clearly enjoy so much: they decide together that he should tell the tale “softly,” right “in [her] ear,” so that the ladies in waiting “shall not hear it” (2.1.27-32).

Under Hermione’s auspices the prince learns that he can only satisfy his craving for intimacy by moderating his proud assertiveness and nit-picking concern with physical appearance, and speaking “softly” to those he loves. Without his mother’s guidance Mamillius might have wasted his life–if, that is, he had reached adulthood–in a thrusting and boorish pursuit of a fleeting sensual stimulation, which, like the grafted carnations and the clown’s desire for Mopsa and Dorcas, would have been generated naturally, but subsequently enhanced by artificial means: he already declares that he prefers eyebrows to display “not too much hair there, but in a semicircle, or a half-moon made with a pen” (2.1.6-11). Mamillius’ ultimately fatal terror at the prospect of his mother being executed for adultery is a measure of the extent to which Hermione has secured his enduring affection through her humble, sympathetic care (3.2.144-45). If her son had lived, this care would doubtless have enabled Hermione, whose name means ‘messenger of the gods,’ to transmit her capacity to form deep attachments to future generations. This is the only recompense that devoted parents can reliably expect to gain, but it ‘justifies’ all their sacrifices. If the patient sympathy which Hermione shows Mamillius is distinctively maternal, then it is possible that women are particularly well suited to making these sacrifices, and are therefore more likely than men to gain the ultimate reward.

By contrast, Leontes’ influence is apparent precisely in the boorish arrogance and superficial concentration on physical appearance which Mamillius exhibits when he deserts the first lady for the second -as is perhaps implied by the second lady’s surprised question, “Who taught’ this?” (2.1.7-11). The king praises Mamillius only for his feisty willingness to “fight” anyone who does him down, which he no doubt sees as perpetuating his own noble spiritedness, and, as we have seen, models a marital relationship in which he does not compliment Hermione at all, unless one counts his graceless reference to her “open[ing] her white hand” to his “crabb’d” advances (1.2.153-63, 1.2.101-05). Mamillius may not love his father, as is implied by the wary neutrality of his response to being called a “calf”– “Yes, if you will, my lord” (1.2.127)–but he is certainly influenced by him: the curious abruptness of his declaration that he is “like” Leontes suggests that he has understood enough of the king’s meditations on their physical resemblances and on the fickleness of “a bawdy planet” to feel the full insecurity of his own position (1.2.121-46, 1.2.187-208).[[22]](#endnote-22) It is possible indeed that his “troubl[ing]” behaviour in the next scene represents a deliberate effort to confirm this “like[ness],” or even to unleash both in himself and others the “bawd[iness]” which he might now assume to be pervasive. We can infer that the sympathetic Hermione senses that her son’s perspective on the world has somehow shifted, and encourages him to tell his “sad tale…of sprites and goblins” partly in order to exorcise the darker feelings–perhaps adumbrated by the imagery of the “black brows” and the “half-moon”–which are driving him to “trouble” her “past enduring” (2.1.1-32). Thus, the indications are that, without Hermione’s influence, Leontes’ would have passed on to Mamillius only the sensuality and untrammelled pride which lock the king into his own fleeting existence, and so condemned his son to a similar fate.

Leontes loves his son partly because he reflects his own proud self-assertion and partly because they are physically “almost as like as eggs” (1.2.129-35; see also 1.2.122, 1.2.153-63, 2.1.57-58). He is capable of showing a casual concern for Mamillius’ future well-being– “happy man be’s dole” (1.2.163)–but, although he observes him closely enough to worry about his loss of “spirit…appetite [and] sleep” as the trial of Hermione approaches, his assumption that his decline is caused by his “nobleness” reacting with “shame” to “the dishonor of his mother,” leads him to overlook the “conceit and fear of the Queen’s speed” which is in fact what eventually kills him (compare 2.3.10-18 and 3.2.144-45). Thus, Leontes’ proud insistence that Mamillius has inherited his own spirited assertiveness prevents him from forming the sympathetic parental bond which might have allowed him to care for his son.

Leontes’ emphasis on Mamillius’ inherited assertiveness shows that he too is motivated by the “hope…” for the future which underlies all parental love, although in his case this “promise” is distorted by self-love (1.1.34-46). This point is confirmed by the fact that it is Mamillius’ death rather than Hermione’s apparent demise, or Paulina’s remonstrations, or even Camillo’s flight, that recalls the king to the underlying needs which he has temporarily displaced by his proud rage (3.2.145-72, 3.2.232-43). From this moment on he feels deeply “the wrong [he] did [him]self” in leaving his kingdom “heirless” (5.1.8-10). When Paulina reminds him that he has “kill’d” Hermione, he simply asks her to “say so but seldom,” as the memory is so “bitter,” whereas, by contrast, his son “dies to [him] again when talk’d of,” in a way that is likely to “unfurnish [him] of reason” (5.1.12-19, 5.1.119-23). Mamillius’ death inspires Leontes to display a degree of humble self-discipline, perhaps for the first time in his life: he visits his and Hermione’s grave every day–the latter being included in this ritual, one may infer, mainly because he has “bred his hopes out of” her (3.2.234-43, 5.1.11-12).

Leontes’ willingness to forgive Florizel’s deception and plead the cause of the young couple, who remind him so powerfully of his own children (5.1.130-34), suggests that his losses have at last forced him to appreciate that it is only by striving to merge his interests with those of the next generation through humble, diligent service that he can hope to “continue [his] loves” (5.1.204-34). However, Leontes still feels self-pity rather than an agonised appreciation of the pain that he has caused his children– “What might I have been, might I a son and daughter now have look’d on, such goodly things as you”–and, as we have seen, regrets mainly “the wrong [he] did [him]self” in leaving his kingdom “heirless” (5.1.176-78, 5.1.8-10).[[23]](#endnote-23) We are reminded of his limitations when he “worries…his daughter with clipping her,” and “wound[s]” her in his anxiety to “bravely confess…” to and “lament…” his treatment of her mother–no doubt in an effort to receive an assurance of forgiveness–rather than gaining her trust by applying himself diligently to the bitter task of actually appreciating her feelings (5.2.53-54, 5.2.84-89). Thus, Leontes is unable to complete the alchemical process which has allowed Hermione and the shepherd to transmute the possessiveness of their parental attachment into apparently selfless care. Nevertheless, although he is seemingly only able to suspend his self-love completely in his friendship with Camillo, where he can gain the ongoing reward of a commensurate, reciprocal care, he is clearly straining to restrain his tyrannical impulses in his generous and humble treatment of the young lovers.[[24]](#endnote-24)

As has been noted, the sensitive and passionate Hermione guesses that Polixenes’ desire to return home is sparked by an intense “long[ing] to see his son,” rather than by marital devotion–which she silently discounts as a possible motive, having presumably already understood that he views wives primarily as sexual “temptations”–or by the political threats which he himself blames for his departure (1.2.34-37, 1.2.76-80, 1.2.11-14, 1.2.23-24, 1.2.30-33). Her theory is confirmed later in the scene, when Polixenes himself finally admits that, “if at home,” his son is “all my exercise, my mirth, my matter” (1.2.165-71). Although Polixenes is undoubtedly extremely attached to his son, the disapproval implicit in Hermione’s unceremonious threat to “thwack him hence” if, as she believes, he is indeed feeling the pull of parental devotion, reminds us that a thoroughly devoted father would not voluntarily leave his son for nine months (1.2.36-37). Like Leontes, the ambivalent Polixenes does not seem to appreciate the extent of his need for his son (or his son’s need for him), until he suddenly realises that he feels bereft without him (see below).

Unlike Leontes, who, despite claiming to be as “fond” of Mamillius as his friend is of Florizel, is in fact too taken up with his proud anger to pay him any attention as they walk together, Polixenes genuinely relishes his son’s “varying childness,” partly for its own sake, since he is a “sworn friend,” who “cures in [him] thoughts that would thick [his] blood,” and partly because he shows promise as a “soldier, statesman” (1.2.164-211). Here Polixenes encapsulates the two chief motives for parenthood, but gives them his own distinctive twist, as befits his political priorities: Florizel’s trusting attachment is valued for its own sake, but also for the promise that he can “continue” a tradition of proud and noble patriotism. However, Polixenes’ also notes, with a plaintiveness which is only partly bantering, that his son is a “parasite” who cannot directly return his care, and indeed is as likely to be his “enemy” as his “friend” (1.2.167-68). Taken together, these points indicate that Polixenes occupies an intermediate position in the erotic hierarchy: not only is he as concerned that Florizel should become an honourable “statesman” as he is for his welfare–although this concern is doubtless itself passionately patriotic as well as proud–but his self-love makes it difficult, if by no means entirely impossible, to sustain the asymmetric care that parental devotion inevitably requires.

The conflict between Polixenes’ proud desire to prevent the royal blood from being sullied by a “sheep-hook” and his genuine concern for Florizel’s happiness, implicit in his declaration that the “noble” Perdita would be “worthy” of his son, “but for our honor therein,” leads him to hesitate before parting the lovers at the sheep-shearing feast, even after he has established beyond doubt that Florizel, “a sceptre’s heir,” is treating Perdita as something more than a temporary mistress (4.4.19-20, 4.4.434-37, 4.4.344-417). Even as he is finally steeling himself to “part them” in what he probably hopes will be a relatively calm and measured intervention, his plan is unexpectedly derailed by Florizel’s apparently callous anticipation of his death, which clearly gives the king a pang of intense and purely personal anguish: “One being dead, I shall have more than you can dream of” (4.4.344, 4.4.387-89). At this point Polixenes abruptly forgets about his official mission and resorts to urging Florizel repeatedly to consult his father about the marriage, in a desperate effort to prove to himself that his son is not devoid of filial affection (4.4.391-414). The king’s disguise now becomes symbolic of his fragmented personality: his pleas spring from his underlying needs rather than a concern to uphold the status of the royal family, and appeal to Florizel’s filial feelings rather than his pride in that status -a father’s “joy is nothing else but fair posterity” (4.4.408-09). This impromptu, unacknowledged love test threatens to undermine the king’s proud political mission in a manner reminiscent of the opening scenes of *King Lear*, for if Florizel had relented, Polixenes could hardly have simply forbidden him to marry Perdita after arguing that the choice of a wife should be left to “reason,” aided by “some counsel” (4.4.406-10).

The vicious and uncontrolled nature of Polixenes’ eventual response to Florizel’s determined refusal to seek his advice is more a reflection of the shock that he feels at his son’s apparent callousness than his statesmanlike worries about the royal blood (4.4.417-41). However, it is typical of the dignified king to channel his personal anguish into a haughty excoriation of Florizel for stooping to so “base” a courtship -just as he used a political pretext to justify his desire to return home at the start of the play (4.4.418-20, 1.2.11-14). His rage, like that of Leontes earlier in the play, which is also prompted by a beloved’s apparent inconstancy, therefore illustrates the power of pride to distort deep attachments, but also the power of such attachments to sway even the proudest souls (1.1.32).[[25]](#endnote-25)

Polixenes’ plan to part the lovers is contrasted with the simple relish which the shepherd takes in the young couple’s love and his assumption that the role of parents is merely to “know” the “choice” which their children have made, secure in the knowledge that they have already modelled the devotion which is needed to establish a happy marriage (4.4.168-76, 4.4.379-91, 4.4.415-16). This serenity might seem foolish, since the young couple are actually concealing Florizel’s real identity, but it is justified on a deeper level, since the shepherd has indeed enabled Perdita to choose a lover who will show her constant care. In contrast with Polixenes, his ability to care about his child’s future and accept that she must now leave him to pursue her new life both stem from, and in their turn reinforce, his confidence that she will “continue [his] love….”

Although, unlike his less restrained friend, Polixenes restrains himself from torturing his son’s own beloved in the way that he threatens, he nevertheless almost destroys the very intimacy which he craves through his proud anger, since, but for Camillo’s prudent efforts, Florizel might well have deserted him completely at this point: “I mean not to see him any more” (4.4.422-26, 4.4.494-95). Ironically, Florizel’s casual reference to his inheritance is by no means evidence of a callous indifference, as Polixenes assumes: his affection has in fact been secured by a father who has in the past made him “all [his] exercise”–at least when he was at home–as is evident from the guilt and sympathetic concern which the prince shows in requesting Camillo to “cast [his] good counsels upon [Polixenes’] passion,” “when he shall miss me” (1.2.165-71, 4.4.492-96). Nevertheless, Florizel’s elopement does indeed confirm that children are unlikely ever fully to reciprocate the care that has been invested in their upbringing, since they will inevitably prioritise their own friendships and romantic relationships, and ultimately their own children over filial gratitude; not just because of their “stronger blood,” but because they too are arming themselves against time: they know that their parents’ lives are likely to end even before their own. As we have seen, parents should humbly accept this imbalance, since their primary aim is to transmit passionate devotion to future generations through sympathetic care, rather than to establish a reciprocal intimacy.

Underlying the distress which Polixenes feels over his son’s casual remark is his growing sense of his own mortality, evident in his insistence that he is “not stupid with age and alt’ring rheums” (4.4.394-402). The king’s pride prevents him from emulating the shepherd’s ability to transcend his own finitude through “grace and remembrance,” as is suggested by his implicit rejection of the “rosemary and rue,” flowers of winter and old age, which Pedita offers him (4.4.73-79, 4.4.454-56). Ironically, this slightly churlish act forces his hostess to substitute a much less complimentary gift, for, as we have seen, “the flow’rs of middle summer, and…of middle age” can signify mistrust and grief as well as virtue and joy (4.4.103-08). In fact, the ambiguous flowers of middle summer are absolutely appropriate for the ambivalent Polixenes, whose name, which means “one who entertains many strangers” perhaps suggests that he can simultaneously entertain a variety of diverse, and indeed contradictory motives. Although Polixenes loves his son, his self-love prevents him from integrating himself humbly into a network of ongoing attachments, which is the only way of mitigating the mortifying, and ultimately annihilating, depredations of time.

Polixenes’ name also perhaps hints that he is a product, or victim, of the political hierarchy. Although it is entirely natural for less erotic souls to experience a tension between attachment and pride, since both are instinctive drives, the amour propre which divides Polixenes from his son, and indeed from his own loving heart, is undoubtedly aggravated by his elevated position in this hierarchy. The gulf between father and son in this respect is revealed by the king’s mistaken assumption that Florizel shares his own love of high rank sufficiently to be controlled by the threat of being “bar[red]…from succession” (4.4.429-31). Unlike his son, Polixenes’ passions are not sufficiently intense to override the pride which his social status has encouraged him to prioritise: as has been noted, his attachment to Florizel is from the start tangled up with the pride which he takes in his son’s potential to become a “soldier [and] statesman” (1.2.168). The tension between these two motives is demonstrated when Florizel, who is in fact an affectionate son, actually “yield[s]” to his disguised father’s arguments for consulting him about the match in theoretical terms, but still feels forced to conceal his commitment to Perdita, precisely in the manner that Polixenes finds so painful, by his knowledge that the king would haughtily condemn his love as inconsistent with the “gracious…virtues” which are appropriate to his rank (4.4.410-13, 4.2.26-28).

The corollary of Polixenes’ relatively unerotic nature is that his attachments are not sufficiently intense to override his concern with social status: he is so far from apologising for his rage that he pursues Florizel to Sicily, where he continues to threaten the shepherd with execution, and presumably only accepts him as a “brother” eventually because Perdita turns out to be a princess (5.1.181-85, 5.1.198-202, 5.2.141-42). As with Leontes, his rage is fuelled by thwarted affection, but unlike his friend, his response continues to be steered by his self-love. It is ultimately the more passionate Leontes who supports the young couple, even after realising that they have deceived him, and regardless of his assumption that Perdita is a commoner (5.1.208-33). Thus, Leontes’ serious, if flawed effort to moderate his pride, which he eventually realises is the only means of satisfying the desire to “continue [his] loves,” is contrasted with Polixenes’ ongoing, futile concern with conventional status, which allows the king to maintain a degree of civilised decorum even in his rage, but which ultimately threatens to prevent him from satisfying his most fundamental needs. The young lovers will always know that it was Leontes, rather than Polixenes who had their best interests at heart in the end. However, Polixenes remains a hybrid character to the end, designed to show the mutually distorting influence which pride and attachment can exert: not only has his early care helped to prime Florizel to love Perdita in the first place, but, as we have seen, his rage is itself fuelled by his deep attachment to his son.

Whereas Polixenes’ pride is sublimated into a concern for his public status, Leontes’ rawer self-love is merely facilitated by his political power, leaving him relatively free of worldly pride. Both types of pride obstruct the devoted care which is the primary business of parenthood, but at first Polixenes’ sense of his own dignity leaves more room for such care than Leontes’ straightforward self-assertion. Whereas the younger Leontes lacks the restraint which is required to sustain the one-sided care that parenthood demands, Polixenes is naturally more stolid and has therefore been a much better father. This implies that moderation is a more vital requirement for fathers than passion, for the aim of parenthood is to deliver and model care rather than to establish an intense intimacy. However, Polixenes remains an intermediate figure in the hierarchy of parental affection precisely because of his relatively unerotic nature, whereas, by the end of the play, Leontes is straining to reach the level attained by Hermione and the shepherd, whose radical moderation is, paradoxically, a function of their passionate attachment to their children.

Overall, therefore, parental devotion is more deep-seated than romantic love or friendship, because it offers a much more radical way of transcending the narrowness of human existence than other forms of attachment. It is parental love that disrupts the two kings’ apparently impermeable self-love: whereas Polixenes is not deeply affected by Leontes’ rage, or indeed, it seems, by his own marriage (1.2.76-80), the thought that Florizel might be callously indifferent to him overrides his pride–albeit temporarily–and then drives him to stage a far more vehement intervention than his official self might consider appropriate. Similarly, almost as soon as Leontes’ suspicions begin to take hold, his main concern is with Mamillius’ legitimacy (1.2.120-35), while his eventual repentance is triggered and sustained by the guilt which he feels over his son’s death rather than the loss of Polixenes, Hermione, or even Camillo. Even though Leontes’ attachment to the latter is in the end more deeply fulfilling, the posthumous “hope” and “promise” which children offer is still bound to be his most urgent concern. However, although the two kings are used to show that parental affection continues to exercise a pervasive, often unacknowledged influence, even when overlaid and distorted by pride, their stories primarily demonstrate the power of self-love to stunt the humble, generous care which is required to fulfil this promise.

The Reach of Attachment

The play as a whole implies that the yearning for constant attachments exerts a powerful influence over a wide variety of ideologies and natural drives. As we have seen, truly passionate lovers tend to moderate sexual desire so that it can facilitate a lasting intimacy, whereas the less passionate or prudent may remain content with pleasures which are intense, but fleeting. By contrast, however, passionate friends, lovers and parents strive to eliminate self-love altogether, since it is absolutely incompatible with the humble care which constant attachments demand. Florizel’s willingness to renounce his title to the throne is only the most extreme example of a series of moments in which the play’s most deeply erotic characters sacrifice their pride: thus, Camillo has no more desire to rebuke the penitent Leontes than Hermione has to assert herself in response to the “troubl[ing]” Mamillius, or indeed to stand on her royal dignity in the trial scene, where she defends her honour only because it is “a derivative from me to mine” (5.2.10-19, 2.1.1-32, 3.2.37-45). At the start of the play, Hermione’s almost humiliatingly honest plea for praise contrasts directly with the proud rage expressed by the less temperate kings in response to a similar sense of exclusion (1.2.90-101).

Lower down the erotic hierarchy, however, attachment and self-love constantly clash, with complex and mutually disruptive effects. Leontes himself registers with some surprise the strength of the feelings which, as we have seen, ultimately spring from his thwarted attachment to Polixenes, although, as we have seen, his pride prevents him from acknowledging their true source:

Affection! thy intention stabs the centre.

Thou dost make possible things not so held,

Communicat’st with dreams (how can this be?).

(1.2.138-40)

The rages of both kings are driven by frustrated love, but their frustration is itself the consequence of their pride, and their response to it is not to offer humble, devoted care, but to double down on this pride in a manner so savage that, ironically, it disrupts their proud dignity as well as their closest attachments.

However, even the two kings, whose haughtiness has doubtless been habitually encouraged by their high status, are eventually forced by the very thwarting of their longing to “continue their loves” through their children to acknowledge humbly the depth of this longing -if only temporarily in Polixenes’ case. Although parenthood may therefore be the most powerful natural antidote to pride, the influence of constant attachments in all their various forms is pervasive: it is the dominant force in those who are passionate enough to align themselves with their deeper needs, and, as we can see from Camillo’s desperation to return home and the shepherdesses’ frustrated song, tends in the end to regulate the behaviour even of friends and lovers who are prone to being distracted by more superficial concerns. There is only one example of an absolutely intransigent self-love in the play–that is, Autolycus, although this exception is itself qualified in the manner outlined below–to set against the self-denying devotion of Florizel, the shepherd and the three female characters.

The need for constancy exerts a similarly pervasive influence on those, like Autolycus and Antigonus, who seek deliberately to deny or defy this need, whether for base or noble reasons. Although Autolycus’ hedonism seems to contrast so diametrically with Antigonus’ piety, the two characters are linked, I would argue, by their ineffectual efforts to deny their own most fundamental desires. Having lost his position at court, Autolycus seems at first to approach his new life of petty, itinerant crime in an entirely jaunty spirit: he boasts in his song that he “most go[es] right” when he freely “wander[s] here and there,” stealing, drinking and whoring (4.3.87-100, 4.3.5-18). Typically, he appears unconcerned by the prospect of being called a “rogue,” for being so far officious” as to bring up the subject of Perdita’s provenance, claiming that he is “proof against that title, and what shame else belongs to’t,” and maintaining that “’tis all one to [him]” whether “preferment drop on [his] head” (4.4.837-41, 5.2.113-23).

However, it is significant that, rather than actually claiming to be “merry,” Autolycus has to enjoin himself to “jog on, jog on…and merrily hent the stile-a,” since “a merry heart goes all the day” while “your sad tires in a mile…” (4.3.123-26). He presumably sings about “the red blood reign[ing] in the winter’s pale,” that is, in spring-time, when “daffadils begin to peer,” despite the fact that the year is “growing ancient”–the sheep-shearing feast is traditionally held at midsummer, “not yet on summer’s death, or the birth of trembling winter”[[26]](#endnote-26)–precisely in order to buoy up his “merry heart” and avoid an unproductive “sad[ness]” (compare 4.3.1-4 with 4.4.79-81, 4.3.123-26). Even the thought of the “pale” of winter–taking the phrase to refer to the ‘pallour’ of the season rather than the transition to spring–is in fact bound to oppress the “red blood” and “merry heart” of those, like Autolycus himself, who have no home to protect them against the elements.

Although Autolycus is arguably the only character in the play who experiences no need to form intimate attachments, Shakespeare shows that even he maintains a sort of loyalty to Florizel, whom he still regularly calls his “master” (4.4.710, 4.4.834, 5.2.151). With typical insouciance, he claims to refrain from telling Polixenes about Florizel’s elopement simply because it is “the more knavery to conceal it,” but when this action is considered alongside his subsequent concern lest the shepherd’s plan to inform the king that Perdita is a “changeling” may form an “impediment…to the flight of [his] master,” it becomes clear that he is actually endeavouring to help the prince (4.4.678-83, 4.4.709-10). His underlying purpose in attempting to give Florizel the news first is to “do the Prince my master good; which who knows how that may turn back to my advancement?” (4.4.834-35). The “honest[y]” which leads Autolycus to pass over two opportunities of being rewarded by the king in order to help Florizel, does not therefore happen “by chance,” as he misleadingly claims, but is, it seems, carefully designed to help him regain the comfort and security of a position at court (4.4.712-13). Although his immediate plan fails because his ‘master’ is concentrating exclusively on caring for the sea-sick Perdita until the lovers arrive in Sicily–at which point the shepherd happens to deliver his news before Autolycus can claim any credit for introducing him to Florizel–he still persists in his effort to be reemployed at court, “beseech[ing]” the receptive clown to give him “a good report to the Prince” (5.2.113-14, 5.2.149-69).

Although Autolycus has made a fool of the clown three times in the most egregious manner, it may be significant that he concludes the play as his determinedly dutiful servant: it is the virtuous shepherd and his son who have led the more secure life, even according to Autolycus’ own entirely material criteria, as is evident from the large profit that they will make from selling their wool, the product of their committed labour throughout the year (4.4.50-122, 4.4.604-18, 4.4.783-805, 4.3.32-34). Quite apart from the way in which he has been able to provide for a family who will transmit and to some extent return his love, the shepherd’s diligence has enabled him to protect himself from the “pale” of winter much more successfully than Autolycus.

After acknowledging to himself that he could now earn “preferment” for helping the prince, were it not for the “discredits” of his “former life,” Autolycus vows to “amend” in order to gain the support of his new “good masters,” the shepherd and the clown (5.2.113-22, 5.2.149-74). His self-love remains untrammelled either by close attachments or by divine or human sanctions–he braves the “terrors” of “beating and hanging” and “sleep[s] out” any nagging “thought[s]” about “the life to come” (4.3.28-30)–which means that he will always have the capacity to behave unscrupulously where he can be sure to do so with impunity (5.2.171-73), but he now thoroughly appreciates the importance of diligently maintaining the appearance of virtue. The genuine services which he performs, or attempts to perform, for Florizel indicate that there are many circumstances under which such an effort might be quite indistinguishable from true loyalty.

Overall, Autolycus therefore exemplifies in its crudest form the paradoxical process by which an originally selfish need for lasting security may ultimately express itself through the provision of dutiful service. Shakespeare demonstrates that even a man who completely lacks emotional attachments, and whose relationship with his fellow men is in fact entirely predatory–Autolycus, whose name means ‘the wolf itself’, is named after a mythical thief–may well be driven to provide loyal care in return for lasting material security. Thus, the lowest level of the play’s erotic hierarchy not only reflects, but even sheds light on the highest, since Autolycus has no pretensions to altruism, as lovers often do: the alchemical process which he illustrates reaches its apogee in Camillo, who similarly wants nothing more than to resume his relationship with his “master,” and Florizel, whose ambitious desire to secure the “crown imperial” of constant, reciprocal devotion is transmuted into a far more painstaking self-denial than Autolycus would ever feel the need to display.

One of the implications of the above argument is that claims to live entirely in the moment–as when Autolycus attempts to fool himself that the neediness which drives his effort to help Florizel is “knavery,” and asserts that he is only “honest…by chance”–are likely to be nothing more than a proud affectation (4.4.681-83, 4.4.712-13). Thus, even at Autolycus’ low erotic level, amour propre conflicts with the humble service which is needed to create any sort of secure attachment.

Like his namesake, Antigone, Antigonus is ruled by his piety. It is clear that his religious belief generally supports his attachments, reinforcing his compassion for the infant Perdita and reverence for the queen: he worries that Leontes will not “be prosperous” after effectively “condemn[ing]” the “poor thing” to death, unless “blessing against this cruelty fight on [his] side,” and initially makes an even more concerted effort than Camillo to defend Hermione against Leontes’ accusations, while covertly supporting Paulina’s more passionate intervention (2.3.189-92, compare 2.1.140-72 with 1.2.279-324, 2.3.41-52).

Unlike the thoughtful and unscrupulous Camillo, however, who immediately breaks his promise to murder Polixenes, realising that the duty of “obedience to a master” may be suspended when the latter is “in rebellion with himself,” Antigonus feels constrained on his “soul’s peril” to abide by his pious “oath” to expose Perdita, even though Leontes tricked him into engaging in this “ungentle business” in the first place by encouraging him to vow to do anything to save the baby (1.2.318-63, 3.3.30, 3.3.52-53, 3.3.34, 2.3.162-85). From the start, Antigonus disguises the harshness of his mission by imagining that “some powerful spirit [will] instruct the kites and ravens to be [Perdita’s] nurses,” while later his determination to brave a terrible storm and the notorious ferocity of the local predators in order to expose the child in the deserts of Bohemia is reinforced by the conviction that he is the instrument of “sacred wills (2.3.186-89, 3.3.4-14). Moreover, he takes a dream in which he is addressed by what he imagines to be the ghost of Hermione–although of course she has not actually “suffer’d death,” as he assumes–as evidence that Apollo has decreed that the baby should be abandoned in Bohemia, “upon the earth of its right father,” regardless of the fact that the ‘ghost’ makes no reference to the gods or admission of marital infidelity (3.3.15-46). His sudden conviction that Hermione is in fact an adulteress, which runs completely counter to his stout defence of her in act 2 scene 1, shows him unconsciously adapting his piety to rationalise injustice and suppress his instinctive urge to protect the baby.

These comforting rationalisations are, however, only achieved at enormous psychological cost. The fact that Antigonus cannot in fact “weep” in the way that he is invited to do in his dream, although his “heart bleeds,” reflects his subconscious awareness that his grim mission requires him to repress his “better disposition” (3.3.51-52, 3.3.27-32). His abandonment of the infant Perdita is contrasted–and in fact directly juxtaposed–with the shepherd’s decision to care for her, which is taken out of “pity” and a spontaneous love for the “pretty” child, rather than a forced conception of his duty (3.3.69-76). The intensity of Antigonus’ instinctive remorse manifests itself in an insistence that he is “accurs’d,” which is arguably what makes him vulnerable to the bear’s attack: even as he flees–without even attempting to defend himself– he cries, “I am gone for ever” (3.3.52-58). Most crucially perhaps, the guilt which he feels for acting in a way that runs so dramatically counter to his wife’s passionate devotion to the queen and her children–a wife who he has always believed would not stumble” (2.3.52)–is so desperate that it intrudes into his dream, in the form of another pious conviction; namely that he will be punished by never seeing her again (3.3.34-36). In reality, this ‘premonition’ may reflect a fear–which is in fact quite misplaced (5.3.132-35)–that the obdurate Paulina could never forgive him.

Thus, Antigonus’ piety initially leads him to oppose the king’s brutal plan, and although it subsequently allows him to justify abandoning Perdita, in the end it reinforces his sense that he has offended against imperatives dictated by his own deepest needs. These contradictions hint that, although the conventional codes of the day can be used to rationalise offences against these natural imperatives, they tend in the end to be subordinate to the human heart, which is constantly at work, reshaping these codes in its own image: it is thus only to be expected that one of Apollo’s traditional roles is to protect young children. The apparently harmonious marriage between Antigonus and the passionate Paulina points to the broad compatibility between piety and constant attachments, but Paulina’s forthcoming second marriage might remind us of the underlying moral of Antigonus’ story, especially when this story is contrasted with Camillo’s; namely, that prudence may be a better guide for passionate individuals than pious or noble principle.

Overall, therefore, despite the obvious contrasts, there are significant parallels between Autolycus and Antigonus, as the similarity between their names might suggest.[[27]](#endnote-27) Whereas Autolycus is forced to admit his need to protect himself against the harshness of nature and therefore to behave like a loyal friend, Antigonus realises that he cannot live with religious principles which conflict with the loyalties which are his *raison d’etre*. In other words, although hedonism and piety present themselves as guiding principles, in practise neither can override the need for constant relationships.

Leontes himself is used to illustrate further the complex relationship between piety and constant attachments. The king’s plan, however abortive, to use the oracle to “give rest” to those who are swayed by “ignorant credulity”–he specifies Antigonus–and the way in which he reinforces the conventional loyalty of his “liegeman” by tricking him into swearing to expose Perdita, certainly demonstrate that piety may be exploited to justify the arbitrary will of an autocratic ruler (2.1.189-93, 2.3.158-83). However, as with Antigonus, Leontes’ underlying fear of the gods moderates his callousness as well as facilitating it: he revokes his order to burn the infant Perdita, for instance, after his courtiers all insist that it is “so horrible, so bloody” that it “must lead on to some foul issue” -although of course exposing her would seem merely to be a less openly barbaric means of execution (2.3.147-63). Not only does Leontes’ involvement of the oracle in the first place imply a superstitious trust on his part that Apollo will take his side, but he is ultimately unable to ignore its unexpected judgement–despite his initial impulse to do just that–after Mamillius’ death catalyses his latent fear of the gods: “Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves do strike at my injustice” (3.2.145-47).

From this point on Leontes’ religious belief consistently reinforces his natural grief and guilt: he reflects–not entirely accurately, as we have seen–that Camillo’s “piety” makes his own “deeds…the blacker,” and vows to visit the chapel where Hermione–as he assumes–and Mamillius are buried “once a day” (3.2.171-72, 3.2.238-42). When Florizel first appears, he sees him as a “bless’d” reward which Polixenes “from heaven merits,” whereas by contrast, the gods, having taken “angry note” of his own “sin,” have “left [him] issueless” (5.1.168-76).[[28]](#endnote-28) Possibly inspired by Leontes’ recently expressed fear that Hermione’s “sainted spirit” might haunt him if he were to marry again, Paulina presents the statue’s animation–which is staged in a chapel–as a “holy…spell,” which “require[es] him to “awake [his] faith,” perhaps in the hope that his pious “amazement” will reinforce his brittle attachment (5.1.56-71, 5.3.86-105).[[29]](#endnote-29)

Thus, Leontes’ story, like that of Antigonus, shows that although religion can be exploited in perverse ways, it is ultimately more likely to reinforce the guilt which stems naturally from a failure to live up to the austere imperatives of constant attachment. Elsewhere in the play we can see that piety generally supports passionate fidelity: at her trial Hermione does not doubt that “pow’rs divine” know that she is innocent, and therefore gladly refers her case to Apollo (3.2.28-32, 3.2115-16). She is sustained during her long retreat by the oracle, which “gave hope [Perdita] was…in being,” while her first impulse when she sees her daughter again is to pray that the gods will “pour…graces” from their “sacred vials” upon her head (5.3.121-28). Similarly, the shepherd shows how religion, and presumably the belief in an afterlife, can help to satisfy the innate need to “continue…loves”: he wishes to be buried alongside his father by a “priest shovel[ing] in dust” (4.4.455-58).

Conversely, however, Florizel responds purely aesthetically to Perdita’s way of praying and giving alms, listing it alongside the grace with which she “buy[s] and sell[s]” simply as a random example of her adorable “present deeds,” for in his eyes she herself is the “queen” of this “meeting of the petty gods” (4.4.138-46, 4.4.1-5). The intransigently passionate prince seems to be as indifferent to conventional beliefs as to the established hierarchy: he has dressed his mistress up “goddess-like,” and blasphemously figures himself as Apollo, transformed through his passion into “a humble swain” (4.4.10, 4.4.27-35). This tableau may be designed to hint that it is love itself which generates, and therefore ultimately regulates, the gods.

The fact that the need to form constant relationships ultimately determines the behaviour of characters who represent such diametrically opposing principles as Autolycus and Antigonus implies that it exerts a pervasive influence on a wide variety of codes and conventions. Camillo and Leontes’ analysis of friendship in act 1 scene 2 suggests that even the four cardinal virtues themselves are ultimately rooted in intimate attachments: the young lovers show how all four virtues are needed to generate a perfectly just, and therefore perfectly trusting, reciprocal devotion, while the relationships of Camillo with Leontes, Paulina with Hermione and Hermione with Polixenes and Leontes are used to show respectively how wisdom, courage and moderation ultimately derive their value from the role which they play in forging attachments. Paulina’s apparent failure to devote the rest of her life to the memory of her lost beloved, or indeed to cajole the unnamed courtier into doing so, implies that absolute constancy cannot be sustained purely by a noble, or, as we would say, moral determination, once it has been divorced from its roots in intimate interaction. The corollary of this is that there is no higher aim than the pursuit or defence of love which could provide the standard by which Camillo’s deception of Florizel and the young lovers’ unscrupulous disregard for their fathers’ wishes, or even, in the shepherd’s case, his safety, could be condemned. Thus, one could argue that moral principles, like piety, are both derived from, and therefore ultimately limited by, the need for constant attachments.

In a similar way, the Sicilian court’s adoration of Mamillius indicates that patriotism represents a natural obtrusion of this need into the political sphere (1.1.34-46). The prudent Camillo is so desperate to prevent Leontes’ fantasies from endangering his country that he even contemplates murdering Polixenes, and later he has a “woman’s longing” to “re-view Sicilia,” which rivals his desire to see his friend (1.2.296-98, 1.2.333-39, 4.4.511-13, 4.4.666-67). The ruling elite are as likely to be motivated by their love of country as by pride, as Camillo, Dion and Polixenes himself all demonstrate (5.1.24-34, 4.2.10-20).

However, there is no doubt that the tendency towards overbearing self-assertion which both the kings exhibit has been encouraged by their high status (5.1.24-34, 4.2.10-20). Similarly, the shepherds’ sudden urge to make authoritative, but baseless claims about Autolycus and their own social origins is clearly caused by their sudden elevation (5.2.126-68). While Perdita’s lowly upbringing certainly allows Shakespeare to contrast a natural hierarchy of attachment to the conventional social order, the examples of the twelve men of hair on the one side and Hermione on the other imply that pride and the longing for constant attachments both exert a pervasive influence which transcends social class. Thus, sexual desire, piety, hedonistic egotism, moral virtue and political life are all either regulated, or at least radically modified by the desire for constant attachments, but in all of these areas this desire is also liable to be disrupted by pride.

Conclusion

Shakespeare starts from the intuition that the ultimate good is to be gained by lovers, friends and parents aligning their interests with those of a beloved as closely and as constantly as possible. This is the only useful point that can be made about the good itself, for, as the wordlessness of Camillo and Leontes’ reunion indicates, there is no higher standard by which it could be judged; but Shakespeare can conduct an exhaustive analysis of the means by which the good can be achieved, and of the pervasive, if partial influence which it exerts, not only over competing natural drives, such as self-love and sexual desire, but over ideologies ranging from piety to hedonism. He shows that, although it is perhaps as instinctive for passionate lovers to be ruled by their constant attachments as it is for turtle doves (4.4.154-55, 5.3.132-35), this instinct has endless ramifications for rational beings, who have an awareness of death, and, to a greater or lesser degree, a capacity for self-denial and sympathetic care.

The main argument divides constant attachments into parental affection and mature love, and then in turn subdivides the latter category into friendship and romantic relationships.

The discussion of the means by which both types of mature attachment are formed and preserved is structured around the virtues of justice, wisdom, courage and moderation. Justice and wisdom are the overarching virtues of the four: passionate lovers understand that they must subordinate all potentially divisive desires and fears to their instinctive yearning for constant love, prioritising sympathetic care for their beloveds in an effort to generate a completely harmonious rapport, based on mutual gratitude and trust.

The forthcoming marriage of Camillo and Paulina implies that friends and lovers need to balance the virtues of courage and prudence, which have contrasting weaknesses and complementary strengths. Paulina demonstrates that those who are primarily spirited and courageous will defend their attachment against external threats in the most steadfast manner possible, but also often in a manner which is noble and sincere, rather than effective. Not only must staunch loyalty be tempered by pragmatism at times, but it is prudent to recognise that even such loyalty itself cannot be maintained with undiminished intensity after a bereavement, since attachments are ultimately sustained by the interchange of care described above. However, whereas the wily and sceptical Camillo can regulate passion in precisely these ways, being completely unmoved by conventional ideas of nobility, he can also learn from Paulina’s–and indeed Perdita’s–intransigent determination to pursue and defend the ultimate good in the face of “affliction,” for those of his thoughtful temperament are particularly prone to fearfulness.

Hermione and Florizel embody Shakespeare’s paradoxical teaching that the yearning to possess the beloved in the closest possible way is naturally expressed through humble moderation, since the gratitude and trust which go to establish an intimate rapport are gained by showing self-denying, sympathetic concern rather than through a direct assertion of desire. By contrast, the rage with which Leontes responds to his failure to achieve such a rapport, which is in the first place the inevitable consequence of his overbearing approach to relationships, shows how his pride has combined with his passionate yearnings to stunt his ability to provide self-denying care. Self-love must be restrained because, whether in the shape of Leontes’ raw spiritedness, or in the sublimated form of Polixenes’ concern with worldly status, it serves only to lock its adherents into their own narrow existence, thus preventing them from achieving the ultimate good.

The above points apply equally to romantic or marital love and to friendship, since all truly intimate attachments must be founded on the trust which courageous, prudent, moderate, reciprocal care engenders. Sexual desire, which is the only distinctive element of romantic love, can often serve as a powerful catalyst for a lasting intimacy, merging seamlessly with an ongoing intellectual or spiritual admiration for the beloved. In order to achieve such an intimacy, however, truly passionate romantic lovers must prudently moderate physical desire, delaying consummation until they are sure that it will facilitate a constant attachment, rather than serving as a distraction. By contrast, intemperate lovers focus on gratifying vanity and physical passion in ways that are bound to be fleeting, even though they may perpetuate their pleasures for a while through an artificial stimulation of desire. Women generally lead the effort to avoid such diversions, partly because they suffer more directly from the effects of an unwanted pregnancy, but mainly because they have less to distract them from the *summum bonum* than men, whose deeper needs are often thwarted by a combination of their more intensely physical libido and a greater proclivity for proud and spirited self-assertion.

The third and most intense mode of constant attachment that Shakespeare explores is parental love. The primal power of parental devotion, which is even stronger than romantic love or friendship, because it offers a more enduring “hope” and “promise,” is shown by Polixenes’ furious reaction to Florizel’s apparent callousness, and by the fact that Leontes’ rage begins with an intense examination of Mamillius’ legitimacy and ends with his death. Although loving parents derive great satisfaction simply from their child’s devotion–as Polixenes’ early relationship with Florizel shows–since any trusting alignment of interests is intrinsically pleasurable, their ultimate aim is not to establish an absolutely equitable, mutual devotion, as in the other two types of attachment, but rather to “continue their loves” beyond their own deaths by merging their interests with those of their children, while modelling the care which will allow future generations to establish constant intimacies.

As with mature attachments, parenthood requires wisdom, courage and moderation. However, devoted parents must practise a more radical self-denial than true lovers and friends, since they cannot expect their care to be fully reciprocated, for children are at first “parasite[s],” and subsequently are bound to prioritise their friends, lovers and ultimately their own families over filial affection -although one can see from the shepherd’s desire to be buried alongside his father that a well-cared for child is almost bound to feel deep gratitude and a desire to perpetuate their parents’ values. Aware of this intrinsic imbalance of investment in the relationship, prudent parents are also reluctant to intervene directly in their children’s lives, understanding that it is more productive to instruct by example. Their restraint is, however, fully justified in the end: they and their children will both be armed against the depredations of time, since they will experience their own lives as links in an enduring chain of love. By contrast, parents who are primarily self-loving cannot escape a mortifying sense of their own ephemerality, and transmit to their children only the frustration which is the inevitable consequence of an unremitting focus on their own transient existence.

Overall, the influence of constant attachments is sufficiently powerful either to regulate or radically modify competing natural drives like pride and sexual desire. By contrast with sexual desire, which can be the catalyst for an enduring love, passionate lovers strive to eliminate pride completely, realising that it is absolutely incompatible with the humble care which a trusting intimacy demands. Lower down the erotic hierarchy, however, self-love often continues to conflict with the yearning for constant attachments, with each of these powerful natural drives exerting a strong gravitational pull over the other, although souls which are both proud and passionate may well be forced by loss ultimately to realise that they have exposed themselves to the depredations of time, and consequently begin to moderate their self-love.

Principles as disparate as hedonism and dutiful piety are also regulated by the need for constant relationships. At the basest level, Autolycus’ proud claim to be happy pursuing his own pleasures in isolation is undermined by the recognition that he will be exposed to the harshness of nature, unless he can earn Florizel’s protection by serving him in a manner which is to all intents and purposes loyal. At the other extreme, pious duty is shown to be equally untenable where it clashes with deep attachments: although religion can be used to rationalise and justify actions that run counter to the heart’s own imperatives, in the end the piety of Antigonus and Leontes emphatically reinforces the instinctive guilt which they feel for contravening these imperatives, just as it reinforces the constant devotion of Hermione and the shepherd. Indeed, Shakespeare implies that religion is ultimately derived from, and therefore regulated by, these very imperatives: at the apex of the erotic hierarchy, Florizel and Perdita have no need for the support of piety, since they understand that their passion itself constitutes the highest authority by which human action can be judged. Paulina’s eventual replacement of Antigonus with Camillo suggests that truly passionate lovers need no other guide than a prudent analysis of the most effective means of securing fulfilment.

The influence of constant attachments is pervasive. Although self-love is more likely to be encouraged and to become engrained among the upper echelons of the social hierarchy, Florizel, Hermione and Camillo are all capable of passionate devotion, and the political elite are as likely to be motivated by patriotism, which is a natural extension of attachment, as by self-love. Even the cardinal virtues may themselves ultimately be derived from the austere imperatives of love, since they represent the only means by which an absolutely trusting, reciprocal care can be established. This means that the unscrupulousness of the young lovers and of Camillo at the end of the play is naturally unlimited, since there is no good greater than deep attachment by which their behaviour might be regulated. Paulina’s putative decision to abort her attempt to devote her life to the memory of Antigonus exposes the corollary of this point, namely, that a completely selfless nobility is beyond the scope of human nature.

As the title of the play implies, the symbol of winter is central to Shakespeare’s argument. It seems a natural image for the potential of time to “try all,” both through the ageing process and its inevitable conclusion, and through the intrinsic transience of physical desire (4.1.1).[[30]](#endnote-30) Perdita is thoroughly aware of the threat which time presents: she knows that the sheep-shearing feast, which, as we have seen, was traditionally held at midsummer, when Phoebus–habitually associated by Shakespeare with sexual desire–reaches his zenith, marks the moment that the world is “growing ancient, not yet on summer’s death, nor on the birth of trembling winter” (4.4.122-25, 4.4.79-81). Unlike Autolycus, she immediately rejects her fantasy that it is still spring and that she could “play on” Florizel forever, “strew[ing] him o’er and o’er” with vernal flowers, as if at a “Whitsun pastoral…” (4.4.130-34). By dismissing Camillo’s desire to spend his time “gazing” at her as part of her flock– “You’ld be so lean, that blasts of January would blow you through and through” (4.4.109-12)–Perdita implies that the true measure of love is not immediate pleasure, but the ability to remain constant in the face of “affliction.”

Those parents who exercise “grace and rememberance” can, like rosemary and rue, “keep seeming and savour all the winter long,” because, unlike the proud and sensual characters, who are bound to find their physical decay and ultimate mortality humiliating and frustrating, their main focus is on perpetuating a great chain of love across the generations (4.4.74-75). On a humbler level, friends and lovers can also satisfy their need to maintain constant attachments through “grace;” a word which is repeatedly used to encapsulate the interaction between self-denying service and heartfelt gratitude that sustains constant attachments. This process is embodied in the sheep-shearing feast, which gracefully commemorates the diligence of the shepherds who have ensured that the “good flock shall prosper,” often during fierce winter storms, conducted with no little expense and with an effort on the part of the leaders of the community to “serv[e] all,” as “pantler, butler, cook” (4.4.70, 3.3.2-6, 3.3.84-86, 4.3.32-49, 4.4.55-57).[[31]](#endnote-31)

By contrast, Leontes’ hopes of visiting Polixenes “this coming summer” are thwarted by his proud fury, which strips him of all his attachments, and thus, at least from an audience’s point of view, condemns him to a winter that lasts sixteen years (1.1.5-7). Not only this, but, as we have seen, he is in danger of arresting Mamillius’ development in the same way: the boy’s “sad tale…for winter,” set in or near a churchyard, doubtless features a ghostly apparition, which, like the ghost in *Hamlet*, can be imagined making a melancholy or terrifying attempt to perpetuate its anger (2.1.23-32). Conversely, Shakespeare’s own winter’s tale resembles Hermione’s humble effort to comfort Mamillius: the queen accommodates herself to her son’s “sad tale…for winter,” since the life-negating influences that surround him cannot be ignored, but at the same time “softly” shows him, and indeed anyone else who can eavesdrop on their conversation, how to secure a lasting warmth. Shakespeare himself transmits his passionate love in the least dogmatic manner possible, since he encourages audiences to assume that his own play is nothing more than an inconsequential folk tale.[[32]](#endnote-32)

1. All references to the play are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans et al. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1997). [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. For a thoughtful analysis of the “wonder” of this meeting, see Traversi, “The Final Scenes,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”; A Casebook,* ed. Kenneth Muir (London: Macmillan Press Ltd., 1968): 174-75. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Mrs Inchbald, “British Theatre,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 31. [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. This parallel is noted by Richard Proudfoot, “Verbal Reminiscence,” in *The Winter’s Tale”: Critical Essays*, ed. Maurice Hunt (New York and London: Taylor & Francis Group, 1995): 282. [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Helen Faucit, “On some of Shakespeare’s Female Characters,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 46. [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Anna Jameson “Shakespeare’s Heroines,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Derek Traversi notes that Paulina “imposes upon Leontes an abstraction from the current world that will be, in the long run, impossible to maintain”: “The Final Scenes,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 165. [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. This and the subsequent paragraph repeat some of the points made in the essay on *Hamlet* on this website: “*Hamlet*: The Limits of Constancy.” The echo of *Hamlet* in the phrase “Remember mine” and the parallel between the contrasting positions of Camillo and Paulina and those of the Player King and the Player Queen might even suggest that the two plays are companion pieces, which must be read together in order to understand Shakespeare’s overall teaching on constancy. Neither Paulina nor the Player Queen are able to sustain their determination to remain faithful after their bereavement: see “*Hamlet”* in *The Riverside Shakespeare*: 1.5.91, 3.2.155-223. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. Jameson writes that “her passions are not vehement,” but at the same time “unfathomable, and inexhaustible”: “Shakespeare’s Heroines,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 33. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Robert G. Hunter, “Shakespeare and the Comedy of Forgiveness in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*:159. [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. H. N. Hudson, “Introduction to *The Winter’s Tale,”* in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale*”*;* *A Casebook*: 39. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. Although the argument is very different, Kay Stockholder is, I believe, correct to say that Leontes’ “fantasy allows him to externalize…self-hatred”: “From Matter to Magic: *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 323. [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. For the crown symbolism, see Wilson Knight, “Great Creating Nature,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 144-45. [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. John Bowlby, *Attachment* (London: Pimlico, 1997): 180-98. [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, *The History of Political Philosophy*, ed. L. Strauss and J. Cropsey, 2nd ed. (Chicago: Rand McNally College Publishing Co., 1972): 3-4. [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Joan Hartwig, “The Tragicomic Perspective of *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 192. [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. For an analysis of the way in which Hermione “takes Polixenes to task” in this conversation see Peter Lindenbaum, “The Uses of Pastoral in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 204. [↑](#endnote-ref-17)
18. The word is in fact consistently associated with Hermione: Northrop Frye, “Recognition in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 110; Peter Lindenbaum, “The Uses of Pastoral in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 208; Patricia Southard Gourlay, “Female Metaphor in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 267. [↑](#endnote-ref-18)
19. Helen Faucit, “On some of Shakespeare’s Female Characters,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 47. [↑](#endnote-ref-19)
20. Robert Bridges notes that “the impossibility of reconciliation is passed by in silence,” in “The Influence of the Audience in Shakespeare’s Dramas,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 57. For the view that this is “no easy happy ending, see Stanley Wells, “Shakespeare Performances in England, 1987-88,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 416. [↑](#endnote-ref-20)
21. For the parallel between Hermione and Perdita as hostesses see Richard Proudfoot, “Verbal Reminiscence,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 282. [↑](#endnote-ref-21)
22. Ellen Terry, “Four Lectures on Shakespeare,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 59. [↑](#endnote-ref-22)
23. For Leontes’ lack of deep remorse, see Arthur Sewell, “Character and Society in Shakespeare,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 66. [↑](#endnote-ref-23)
24. Leontes’ transformation is in some ways similar to that of another Sicilian tyrant, Hiero, who Xenophon portrays as being persuaded that tyranny is not ultimately in his interests: Leo Strauss, *On Tyranny. An Interpretation of Xenophon’s “Hiero,”* 2nd ed.(Glencoe Illinois: The Free Press, 1963): 59-62. [↑](#endnote-ref-24)
25. For the parallel between the two rages see Ernest Schanzer, “The Structural Pattern,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 92. [↑](#endnote-ref-25)
26. Ernest Schanzer, “The Structural Pattern,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 89; Peter Lindenbaum, “The Uses of Pastoral in *The Winter’s Tale,”* in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 210. [↑](#endnote-ref-26)
27. Richard Proudfoot notes that both either suffer, or pretend to suffer damage to their shoulders, and suggests that they could easily be played by the same actor: “Verbal Reminiscence,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 287-89. [↑](#endnote-ref-27)
28. Traversi, “The Final Scenes,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 170-71. [↑](#endnote-ref-28)
29. Traversi, “The Final Scenes,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 182-83. [↑](#endnote-ref-29)
30. For a general discussion of the importance of time in the play see Inga-Stina Ewbank, “The Triumph of Time in *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 139-55. [↑](#endnote-ref-30)
31. For the shepherd’s prudence see Joan Hartwig, “The Tragicomic Perspective of *The Winter’s Tale*,” in *“The Winter’s Tale”; Critical Essays*: 190. [↑](#endnote-ref-31)
32. For the repeated suggestion that the play is merely an “old tale,” see S. L. Bethell, “Antiquated Technique and the Planes of Reality,” in *Shakespeare: “The Winter’s Tale”;* *A Casebook*: 121. [↑](#endnote-ref-32)