Theme of Benevolence in *The Winter’s Tale*
The theme of benevolence, like *Pericles* and *Cymbeline* also dominates in *The Winter's Tale*. Here, too, the major characters repent after committing sin. Their suffering and repentance ultimately lead them to redemption and resurrection. The supernatural powers keep constantly playing their benevolent roles.

Shakespeare's primary source for *The Winter's Tale* is Robert Greene's romantic novella, *Pandosta* (1588), the subtitle of which is *The Triumph of Time*. However, Shakespeare's version differs from Greene's in the addition of Hermione's restoration and her reunion with Perdita and Leontes, and the creation of the long pastoral episode based on Greene's brief mention of a sheep-shearing feast. Shakespeare also adds and expands several characters. Paulina is entirely Shakespeare's creation. She is Hermione's champion and protector, and the fearless accuser of Leontes' jealousy, as well as the guide of his actions and the keeper of his conscience during his period of remorse. Camillo, the poisoner and revealer of the poisoning plot, becomes the one who orchestrates the movement of all the Bohemian characters back to Sicilia. And Autolycus, who assists with this
orchestration, is a magnificent and comic expansion of Greene's Capnio, an wily old servant.

The most critical change is Shakespeare's creation of two separate worlds and the movement between them. Greene's *Pandosta* begins in Bohemia, and then moves to Sicilia. However, this movement does not serve to underscore the themes of the story as it does in *The Winter's Tale*. Shakespeare reverses the locations and adds the return to the Sicilian kingdom. The court in Sicilia is chaotic and artificial, a cold, confining place where Leontes' jealousy can grow into an unreasonable rage which tragically destroys marriages, families, friendships, even life itself. In contrast, the kingdom of Bohemia is natural, delightfully comic and festive, a life-restoring world where Florizel and Perdita's love can blossom. In this pastoral setting, the issues of courtship and marriage are treated lightly and hold the potential for a happy resolution. The return to Sicilia unifies these contradictory worlds in a new realm of serenity and acceptance. Here, love and friendship are renewed, and faith in the spontaneous, mysterious processes of Nature is restored in one miraculous moment. This movement between Sicilia and Bohemia marks the redemptive, renewing qualities of the passage of Time which along with the human journey through the life, are the primary themes of the play. Shakespeare also makes drastic changes in the events of the story. He adds the statue scene from another source, because in Greene's romance, Bellaria, the equivalent of Hermione, actually dies after her trial. Also, it is Bellaria who asks that the oracle be consulted.
'The Pygmalian story has also its influence'\textsuperscript{1} on \textit{The winter's Tale}. According to Benson, the Pygmalion story from Book 10 of Ovid's Metamorphoses, in which Venus grants the artist's prayer to animate his sculpture, is also a major influence on the scene as well, as are possibly some scenes from French and Spanish romances where statues are brought to life. Any one of those, such as the Spanish Amadis de Gaule (1532), may be the "old" or "winter's" tale to which the play refers (5.2.29). Thus, \textit{The Winter Tale} represents not so much the triumph of one source over another as it does Shakespeare's masterful blending of these sources into his own unique vision.

\textit{The Winter's Tale} is said to be a play superior to \textit{Cymbeline} and truly it is more pleasing. It has generally received positive and favourable remarks from the critics. F. R. Leavis, says '\textit{The Winter's Tale} has been considered a superior work than '\textit{Cymbeline}'\textsuperscript{2}. However, Kenneth Muir feels that '\textit{The Winter's Tale} is an amalgam of \textit{Pericles} and \textit{Cymbeline}.'\textsuperscript{3}

The conflict between benevolence and malevolence permeates the play. At the beginning, suspicion engulfs Leontes' mind, against his very close friend Polixenes and his wife Hermione. Evil triumphs as a destructive force on Leontes' complex mind. It destroys his peace, separates his family and friends. Leontes loses his wife,

\textsuperscript{2}F. R. Leavis, "The Criticism of Shakespeare's Late Plays: A Caveat", Scrutiny, X (April, 1942), 340.
his son, his friend and loyal courtiers. But in terms of Shakespeare’s plan Leontes has to be redeemed to work out the design of benevolence. Therefore, Leontes goes through a long period of penance, and mourning which paves the way for benevolence.

Almost spiritual atmosphere pervades at the beginning of the play. The opening scene, its environment of friendship and peace is quite alluring. Polixenes’ description of the shared boyhood of himself and Leontes, indicates the divine atmosphere:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun,} \\
\text{And bleat the one at th'other. What we changed} \\
\text{Was innocence for innocence. We knew not} \\
\text{The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed} \\
\text{That any did. Had we pursued that life,} \\
\text{And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared} \\
\text{With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven} \\
\text{Boldly, "Not guilty," the imposition cleared} \\
\text{Hereditary ours.}
\end{align*}
\]

(I.ii.67-75)

It stresses the friendship of the two kings- ‘there is not in the World, either Malice or Matter, to alter it’ (I.i.33-34). Apart from references to the oracle and occasional invocations to the gods, and examples drawn from their behaviour, the atmosphere is overwhelmingly Christian in tone. Great piety and resignation pervades the play, but the repentance is a Christian repentance, through prayer,
open confession, and good works. There is very little of the so-called Greek spirit in
the play.

But this entire spiritual atmosphere is marred by Leontes jealousy. Polixenes
acceptance of Hermione's request to stay for a couple of days more, which also has
Leontes' approval, led Leontes to suspect his own wife. He accuses Hermione of
adultery. Leontes' stubborn and obstinate mind prevents him to listen to anything
from the outside world. Hermione is shocked. She fails to understand Leontes'
accusation, who dreams to lay down his life for Leontes. She says:

    Her. Sir,
    
    You speak a Language that I understand not:
    My Life stands in the level of your dreams,
    Which I'lle lay down.

Leontes replies:

    Leo. Your Actions are my dreams.
    You had a Bastard by Polixenes,
    And I but dream'd it!

(III.ii.79-84)

The jealous mind alienates himself further from the outside world by
determining the fate of Polixenes before listening to anyone. He is not ready to
listen even to Camillo. Hence, the harmony and peace of Sicily is torn apart:

    Leo. lower messes
Perchance are to this Business purblind? Say!
Cam. Business, my lord? I think most understand
   Bohemia stays here longer.
Leo. Ha?
Cam. Stays here longer.
Leo. Ay, but why?
Cam. To satisfy your highness, and the entreaties
   Of our most gracious mistress.
Leo. Satisfy?
   Th' entreaties of your mistress? Satisfy?
   Let that suffice.
(I.ii.227-235)

Leontes is driven to insane passion and feels that he is a cuckold, or a foolish man whose wife has been unfaithful. He suspects his wife, but no one in Sicilia believes him. His councilor Camillo bluntly contradicts the king, and characterizes Leontes's jealousy as "diseased opinion":

Cam: I would not be a stander-by, to hear
   My sovereign mistress clouded so, without
   My present vengeance taken: 'shrew my heart,
   You never spoke what did become you less
   Than this; which to reiterate were sin
   As deep as that, though true.
   (I.ii.279-284)

Leontes' jealousy is the major source of conflict in the first part of the play. Critics like Quiller-Couch, Coleridge, Nathan, Pafford and Brooke have different
opinions on this question. Quiller-Couch is emphatic that the dramatist 'bungled it' while Coleridge thought the early action 'well calculated to set in nascent action the jealousy of Leontes', and Nathan went even further, seeing Shakespeare's treatment of the passion as 'another proof of his craftsmanship'. S.L. Bathell feels: 'This is his sin, the sin of sexual jealousy, and it comes upon him with no warning, apparently from without ... Sin comes from without, as in the Christian scheme it comes from the temptation of the devil—we are concerned, I think, with the general origin of evil as well as with the particular sin of Leontes.  

The factors that could motivate jealousy as detected by Coleridge seem to be quite reasonable. What Coleridge suggests is that Polixenes' 'obstinate refusal' to comply with Leontes' request, followed by great willingness and enthusiasm with which he is persuaded by Hermione, leads Leontes to suspect Hermione of unfaithfulness. His suspicion has tormented him from within. He expresses his inner thoughts. 'Leontes is shown as a man inwardly tormented. His misery expresses itself in short, stabbing sentences of great force':

\[\text{Too hot, too hot!} \]
\[\text{To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods.}\]

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4 Quiller-Couch, Workmanship, p.290
5 Coleridge, p.167.
7 Bethell,p.78
8 Loc. cit.
I have tremor cordis on me: my heart dances
But not for joy; not joy

(I. ii. 109-112)

His anguish is expressed in these words:

Go play, boy, play; thy mother plays, and I
Play too, but so disgrac'd a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave: contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. There have been
(Or I am much deceiv'd), cuckolds ere now,
And many a man there is (even at this present,
Now, while I speak this) holds his wife by th' arm,
That little thinks she has been sluic'd in s' absence,
And his pond fish'd by his next neighbour, by
Sir Smile, his neighbour . . .

(I. ii. 187-196)

Finally, he calls Hermione 'slippery'. Paulina tries to persuade Leontes but in vain. She goes to the prison to take the newly born babe in order to show the similarities between the infant and Leontes. Paulina's speech of divine freedom in the prison is marvelous when the jailer does not allow her to take the infant from the prison. She tells the jailer the child is free 'By law and process of great nature'. Hence, there is no reason for him to fear:

You need not fear it, sir:
The child was prisoner to the womb, and is
By law and process of great nature thence
Freed and enfranchis'd . . .
Now the diseased mind of Leontes terms Paulina a witch, when she shows him the newly born babe. He is not ready to change. He is not ready to accept that the infant is his daughter. He shouts: 'Out! A mankind witch!' (II. iii. 67). He orders the infant to be killed. He is, as Paulina observes, 'mad' (II. iii. 71). His attack gets more violent and excessively ugly. He does not even leave the poor infant and terms her 'bastard':

Traitors!
Will you not push her out? Give her the bastard,
Thou dotard! thou art woman-tired, unroosted
By thy dame Partlet here. Take up the bastard,
Take't up, I say; give't to thy crone.

(II. iii. 72-76)

He continues abusing and threatening Paulia in outrageous manner:

Leon. I'll ha' thee burn't.

Paul. I care not:

It is an heretic that makes the fire,
Not she which burns in't. I'll not call you tyrant;
But this most cruel usage of your queen—
Not able to produce more accusation
Than your own weak-hing'd fancy—something savours
Of tyranny, and will ignoble make you, Yea, scandalous to the world.

Leon. On your allegiance,
Out of the chamber with her! Were I a tyrant,
Where were her life? she durst not call me so,
If she did know me one. Away with her!

(II. iii. 113-124)

In casting out of Perdita and imprisoning Hermione, Leontes firmly opposes the divine order. The order to kill Perdita is the most horrible crime. This intended murder is "what Shakespeare makes the symbol for complete wickedness: the command to murder a child". In the play infanticide takes an added horror from the fact that the child is Leontes's own.

Unjustified sexual jealousy destroys his peace of mind. The country was at peace when the play begins. But Leontes destroys his peace of mind, peace of his family and peace of his kingdom by suspecting his innocent wife and friend. He is responsible for destroying an orderly love dominated world. His diseased mind causes chaos at the moral and social level in the country. What he does is against any religion, established belief or faith. It is completely against the ethos of Bible. According to Bible, "How many fools serve mad jealousy!" Further, "The ear of jealousy heareth all things, and the noise of the grudging shall not be hid."

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11 Geneva Bible, *Wisdom of Solomon* (Apocrypha) 1.10

12 Geneva Bible, *Song of Solomon* 8.6b
Camillo, one of Leontes' courtiers is unable to understand Leontes' neurotic misconceptions. He fails to understand as to why Polixenes' agreement to stay in Sicilia is seen as a sexual favour to Hermione. The opposition of Leontes is general. It is not only Camillo who opposes the king but Antigonus too raises his voice in dissent:

\[
\textit{Be certain what you do, sir, lest your justice} \\
\textit{Prove violence, in the which three great ones suffer,} \\
\textit{Yourself, your queen, your son.}
\]

(II.i.127-129)

Camillo's tone is echoed by all the courtiers. All come forward defending the queen which reflects possibility of human decency. They deny the accusation unequivocally which makes Leontes even more furious and he tries to justify his diseased opinion:

\[
\textit{Is whispering nothing?} \\
\textit{Is leaning cheek to cheek? is meeting noses?} \\
\textit{Kissing with inside lip? stopping the career} \\
\textit{Of Laughter, with a sigh? (a note infallible} \\
\textit{Of breaking honesty) horsing foot on foot?}
\]

(I.ii.284-288)

Leontes's diseased mind denounces everything after his imagined sexual offences:
Is this nothing?

Why then the world, and all that's in't, is nothing.

The covering Sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,

My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,

If this be nothing.

(I.ii.295-296)

Hermione patiently endures her suffering and leaves judgment on God. Her patient endurance of her husband’s cruel abuse epitomizes the major theme of the romances: “This action I now [undergo] is for my better grace” (II.i.121-22). Confident that divine powers will vindicate her, she courageously surrenders to Leontes’ will as she is taken off to prison. Later, at her trial she is eloquent and articulate in her own defense, yet she finally rests her case with the gods: “Apollo be my judge!” (III.ii.116) Kenneth Muir writes Molly Mahood’s opinion about Hermione that she plays the "symbolic role of Heavenly Grace" and "reappears literally as Patience on a monument" while “Perdita stands for his [Leontes’] self-forgiveness...”¹³.

Hermione’s love is the manifestation of God’s love. Her love is not sensual. It is more than a romantic love. The ultimate aim of this love is to achieve divine grace. It will continue if it is given due importance, in other words it is accepted. As M.M.Mahood has put it, Hermione “acts the role of regenerative grace to Leontes”¹⁴

¹³ http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/uni/nec/muir61.htm
¹⁴ Shakespeare’s Wordplay, p.151
and all the varieties that are sustained in the opening scenes of the play have their ultimate source in the divine grace. But the grace can only continue if it is accepted. Leontes destroys it by rejecting the manifestation of grace.

Leontes, in the meantime, sends Cleomenes and Dion to the Oracle of Apollo for 'greater confirmation', realizing the danger of rashness and wishing to 'give rest to the minds of others' (II. i. 179-92). Cleomenes and Dion return awestruck, deeply impressed by the island's 'delicate' climate, the 'sweet' air and general fertility (III. i. 1-3). They pray that 'great Apollo' and the package sealed by 'Apollo's great divine' may quickly turn all 'to the best' and disclose something 'rare'.

Hermione is brought to trial. Leontes opens the proceedings with a disclaimer:

\[ \textit{Let us be clear'd} \]
\[ \textit{Of being tyrannous, since we so openly} \]
\[ \textit{Proceed in justice . . .} \]

\( (\text{III. ii. 4-6}) \)

Hermione's defence is characterized by lucidity and reason. Her 'integrity' (III. ii. 27) is in every syllable. She wields a martyr-like strength:

\[ \textit{Her. But thus, if powers divine} \]
\[ \textit{Behold our human actions, (as they do),} \]
\[ \textit{I doubt not then but innocence shall make} \]
False accusation blush, and tyranny
Tremble at patience.

(III. ii. 28-32)

She appeals to Leontes' conscience. Her language grows more and more convincing:

Her. Sir, spare your threats:
The bug which you would fright me with I seek.
To me can life be no commodity;
The crown and comfort of my life, your favour,
I do give lost; for I do feel it gone,
But know not how it went. My second joy,
And first-fruits of my body, from his presence
I am barr'd, like one infectious. My third comfort,
(Starr'd most unluckily), is from my breast,
(The innocent milk in its most innocent mouth),
Hald out to murder . . .

(III. ii. 92-102)

Cleomenes and Dion swear on a 'sword of justice' (III. ii. 124) that the 'holy seal' (III. ii. 128) is intact; and the package is opened. The communication of divine truth is blatantly in Hermione's favour:

Hermione is chaste; Polixenes blameless; Camillo
a true subject; Leontes a jealous Tyrant; his inn
cent babe truly begotten; and the king shall
live without an heir, if that which is lost be not found.

(III.ii.132-35)
For Leontes this is the terrible truth about his sinfulness. It should bring him through self-knowledge to contrition. But in his wrath, Leontes blasphemes by rejecting the words of gods:

*There is no truth at all i'th' Oracle:*
*The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood.*

(III.i.140-141)

He pronounces the oracle ‘mere falsehood’ that outrages divine power. Punishment follows with the death of his son:

*Serv. The Prince your son, with mere conceit, and fear*  
*Of the Queen’s speed, is gone.*

*Leo.*  
*How! gone?*

*Ser.*  
*Is dead.*

*Leo.*  
*Apollo’s angry, and the heavens themselves*  
*Do strike at my injustice.*

(III.ii.154-159)

The death of Mamillius is the most painful experience for Leontes. His death may be explained at two levels: first, naturalistically he dies because Leontes was cruel to his mother. He had put her in chains. His mother was charged of adultery. He dies as a result of torture to his mother by his father. He has also attempted to
murder his daughter, Perdita. At the supernatural level, death of his son is the result of his defying gods. He wanted to destroy all the manifestations of God's grace except his son Mamillius. He did not want to lose this gift of god. Therefore, God punishes him by taking away from him what he does not want to lose at any cost. In fact Mamillius becomes the instrument of God to Punish Leontes. In Cymbeline too God employed the instruments to punish the one who defies this law. There, it was the evil instrument, the queen and Cloten, who were 'cast into the fire': Here, it is the child who is the very symbol of innocence, the child whom they destroy or allows Leontes to destroy. But, the punishment which follows Leontes is not only punishment to him alone. Mamillius is the son of Hermione as well.

Death of Mamillius opens Leontes' eyes. He realizes that God is angry. He now feels that he has committed a sin. He is suddenly overcome by a sense of his own sinfulness, experiences, contrition, and asks the god's pardon, confesses what he now realizes are his sins, and expresses his desire to make satisfaction to those he has wronged:

Apollo, pardon
My great profaneness 'gainst thine Oracle!
I'll reconcile me to Polixenes,
New woo my Queen, recall the good Camillo...

(III.ii.153-156)

His repentance, however, comes too late to save Hermione. She loses consciousness at the announcement of Mamillius' death and is later reported dead. Leontes next
speaks two revealing phrases: 'I have', he whispers, 'too much believed mine own suspicion', he admits 'being transported by [his] jealousies'. (III. ii. 152, 159) Leontes decides to spend rest of his life in remorse and penitence. However, according to Richard Proudfood, "His response to the first blow, the death of Mamillius, is selfish fear of Apollo's anger not compassion for Hermione."\(^{15}\)

"Evil is inherent in human nature and the innocent suffer as a result"\(^{16}\). The death of Mamillius embarrasses most of the critics of the play. Paul N. Siegel writes, "The loss of [Leontes] son is more than made up for by the recovery of his wife and daughter"\(^{17}\). God punishes Leontes by taking away from him, his most beloved son. Mamillius' death is in fact a lesson to a father who fails to understand his chaste mother and innocent angel like sister. Since, evil is inherent in human nature and the innocent suffer as a result, Shakespeare as a great artist never hesitates to use any of the farfetched devices of romance that will serve his purpose. Both happiness and misery "both joy and terror" are human possibilities, and he insists upon the reality of both.

Paulina describes the intensity of his sin. She is highly critical of his remorse. She says that the gods will never accept his repentance as his sin is far greater and

\(^{17}\) Siegel, op. cit
heavier. Divine powers, through their instrument Paulina, conceal from Leontes the fact that Hermione is alive, which is the source of his sixteen year long penance. Like Posthumous, Leontes too, endures the false belief that he has killed the woman he loves but his suffering is far lengthier and more intense than him. Further, Paulina keeps on pricking Leontes' conscience saying that his prayer is not enough:

\[\text{betake thee}\]
\[To nothing but despair. A thousand knees\]
\[Ten thousand years together, naked, fasting,\]
\[Upon a barren mountain, and still winter\]
\[In storm perpetual, could not move the gods\]
\[To look that way thou wert.\]

(III.ii.209-214)

Antigonus, exactly obeying Leontes' command, brings the child to a 'remote and desert place' on the sea-coast of Bohemia, where 'chance may nurse or end it' (II. iii. 175, 182). It is to be thrown at the mercy of nature:

\[\text{Come on, poor babe:}\]
\[Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens\]
\[To be thy nurses! Wolves and bears, they say,\]
\[Casting their savageness aside, have done\]
\[Like offices of pity. (II. iii. 184-188)\]

The supernatural powers, however, take charge of this infant. They direct Antigonus in his dream to leave the child to this fierce and rugged spot. 'Their sacred wills be done' (III. iii. 7), he says. He recounts how Hermione has appeared to him in a dream, 'in pure white robes, like very sanctity' so that he regarded her as a 'spirit' come from the 'dead'. She tells him to leave the child in Bohemia. The dream was
so convincing that it seemed more real than 'slumber'. He, therefore, forms an opinion that Hermione 'hath suffer'd death' and that, the child being in truth Polixenes', and it is Apollo's will to leave the child in his kingdom. So, either 'for life or death', he leaves the baby upon the 'earth' of this inhospitable place. He buries it, as a seed, to live or die, praying, 'Blossom, speed thee well'

Antigonus was unfortunate and unlucky too. Because of his role in disposing the infant Perdita on a remote, stormy seacoast, the nobleman Antigonus is chased offstage and eaten by a bear. This grotesque episode symbolizes the evil nature of man as well as the unpleasant and ugly consequences of psychological abuse. Even the mariners transporting Antigonus and the newborn daughter of Hermione—Perdita, “the lost one”—are drowned by an angry sea, which, like the bear, acts as Nature's instrument of retribution. Antigonus’s death complicates the working of gods and the means by which heavens bring about the fulfillment of its designs. He had the ill luck to become the instruments of both Leontes and the heavenly powers.

He, however, does not want the infant to die. He is afraid of god.

The moral problem of the oath shown by Antigonus is debatable. The Anglican Church has taken a specific stand on it. According to the “Homilies”: 'If a man at any time shall, either of ignorance or of malice, promise and swear to do anything which is either against the law of Almighty God or not in his power to
perform, let him take it for an awful and ungodly oath.' Again, 'the example of such an oath given by Homilies is that of Jephthah (Judges xi.30-39) who promised to sacrifice to God the first person he would meet upon the successful return from the battle, and who forced him to kill 'his own and only daughter.' It is possible to see Antigonus as a sinner who is punishable as he does not fulfill the oath to Leontes. However, the oath he has given to Leontes requires a crime done which is worse than the oath-breaking. It does not, however, justify his killing by the bear. He becomes a victim of the gods' unalterable design for Leontes. The false apparition of Hermione defines the moral position of 'Good Antigonus' as follows:

\[
\text{fate, against thy better disposition} \\
\text{Hath made thy person for the thrower-out} \\
\text{Of my poor babe, according to thine oath,} \\
(III.iii.28-30)
\]

Quiller-Couch attributes the presence of bear in the play 'to make a popular hit'. Biggins, in an extensive study of bears in Elizabethan drama, finds that 'there is no substantial proof that a real bear ever appeared in a play on the Elizabethan public stage, or elsewhere'. From this point of view Quiller-Couch's suggestion seems unlikely: Shakespeare must have had other reasons for disposing of Antigonus.

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18 Griffiths, p.78
19 Ibid, p.77
20 Quiller-Couch, Workmanship, p.292 p.293
in this manner. Hunter refers to the 'terrifying hilarity' of the bear, while Pafford sees the account as 'semi-comic'; but both avoid the issue of what is tragic and what is not, preferring to see the episode as a blending of the two. Wilson Knight says 'We must take the bear seriously', and Bullough suggests that the incident is not laughable but a 'sharp and frightening climax to a scene of pity and foreboding'. The bear is Nature's means of punishment, and the death of Antigonus at 'Exit pursued by a Bear' is the precise moment at which the tragic portion of the play ends.

The see-coast of Bohemia where Antigonus abandons Perdita on her fate waits for a divine agent. The role of the mysterious divine power comes into effect. The bear's exit is immediately followed by the entrance of a symbolic figure - the good shepherd. He is searching for his lost sheep and he finds the lost Perdita instead. The shepherd is an instrument of God, whose design of benevolence is presented to us in inexplicable ways. The baby is found with a casket of gold. The shepherd calls it a 'changeling' (III.iii.117) and attributes his luck to the 'fairies' (III. iii. 116). The storm which could symbolize divine displeasure may also represent the tempest of birth. The turning point is underlined by a remark made by the Shepherd, who discovers the infant Perdita, to the Clown, who witnessed the

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22 Hunter, Comedy, p.196
23 Pafford, p.lix n.
24 Wilson Knight, The Crown of Life, p.98
25 Bullough, VIII, 141.
destruction of Antigonus: “Thou met’st with things dying, I with things new-born” (III.iii.112-113). Antigonus has paid with his life for the sins against Nature, and so his death is, in a sense, an act of regeneration.

Now, the play begins in a pastoral setting, where Bohemian shepherds and shepherdesses enjoy a simple life away from the artificiality and corruptions of court. In this natural setting the kind old shepherd who finds the abandoned baby Perdita has reared her. She is now a beautiful young girl. Florizel, the prince of Bohemia, falls in love with her. Presiding over the sheep shearing festival as Flora, the goddess of flowers, she is the very beauty of spring with its renewal and rebirth. Life in Bohemia is not without adversity, however. The rogue Autolycus has come from the court to spy on country folks.

The theme of Time, however, pervades the play, because it is ‘Time’ which manages to restore peace to the scared spirit of Leontes. It is probably for this reason that Shakespeare introduces his Chorus costumed as Time. Only Time can eventually bring forth truth, after long repentance. But the cycle of Time covers the cycle of growth, decay, and regeneration in humankind as well as in Nature. The emphasis in The Winter’s Tale is continually on regeneration and fertility. Perdita and Hermione disappear: Hermione in effect goes to the underworld, so also does Perdita, while the pregnancy of Hermione is discussed by her ladies in terms of a frank joy in fertility and the renewal of human life.
Camillo, who has become indispensable to Polixenes, begs to be allowed to return to Sicily to lay his bones there. Polixenes refuses. He asks Camillo to accompany him, in disguise, to the house of a shepherd whose daughter 'of most rare note' draws Florizel there daily. When the disguised Polixenes discovers that his son, also in peasant clothing, loves a lowly shepherdess, he is at first charmed by this beautiful young woman's behavior and appearance. Soon thereafter, like his friend before him, Polixenes explodes with anger. It is not the anger of jealousy but the anger of a father who does not want his royal son yoked to a common "queen of curds and cream." The young couple's plans for marriage thus seem shattered.

Florizel finds himself in a difficult situation. He believes that breaking ties with Perdita at this juncture would be quite unfaithful:

*It cannot fail, but by*

*The violation of my faith; and then*

*Let nature crush the sides o' th' earth together,*

*And mar the seeds within!*

*(IV.iv.478-81)*

Camillo advises Florizel and Perdita to flee to Sicily. His idea is that Polixenes and he, will then pursue them there, and everyone will be reconciled. Autolycus overhears the plan and tells the shepherd and clown who resolve to follow them to Sicily. Fleeing Polixenes' sudden cruelty, the young lovers arrive in Sicilia, where the long barren winter of evil and suffering has persisted for 16 years. But
Leontes is now a wiser man than Polixenes, and the whole final action is concentrated at his court, where the young lovers take refuge. Leontes graciously welcomes them. At their reunion Leontes greets Perdita, before he knows she is his daughter, with the auspicious words: 'Welcome hither / As is the spring to th'earth', indicating that he too at last has 'restored to nature':

Penitence and devotion ... can be raised to the level of sanctity, and the functions of 'blood', no longer the cause of jealousies and divisions which have exhausted their tragic consequences with the passage of time, can now become a source of life to the unified and gracious personality.\(^{(26)}\)

Using both Christian symbolism and natural mythology, Shakespeare transcends the tragic pattern of sin, suffering, and death by incorporating resurrection and reconciliation in the final scene. To use Tillyard’s phrase, they are now in a new plane of reality,\(^{(27)}\) with the neurotic, disordered, violent world of Sicilia a remote memory.

Leontes offers to mediate between Florizel and his father. Therefore, when Polixenes arrives in pursuit of the elopers, Leontes embraces the friend; he so badly wounded 16 years earlier and asks his forgiveness.

\(^{(26)}\) Derek Traversi, *An Approach to Shakespeare* 2, p.298
As Leontes gazes on Perdita, Paulina remarks that his eye 'hath too much youth in't' (V. i. 225), and reminds him of Hermione. 'I thought of her', he answers, softly, 'even in these looks I made' (V. i. 227).

The old shepherd follows Perdita and Florizel to the court and tells the story of how he got Perdita as a gift of God some sixteen years ago on the sea-coast of Bohemia. He shows the jewels in a casket he found along with Perdita. The king recognizes Hermione’s jewel and the jewels she had put on her neck. In a bittersweet reunion Leontes and Perdita rejoice in each other’s presence but feel deep sorrow when Leontes tells his daughter of the fate of Hermione, the mother whom Perdita has never known. Their meeting was the occasion both a joy and sorrow. Their reunion was marked with wonder and alacrity:

First Gent. They seemed 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 looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed: a notable passion of wonder appeared in them; but the wisest beholder, That knew no more but seeing, could not say if the importance were joy or sorrow; but in the extremity of the one it must needs be.

(V. ii.11-19)

With the reunion of Leontes and his daughter: ‘the Oracle is fulfilled; the king’s daughter is found.’(V.ii.22-23). Now, the stage gets ready for Hermione’s resurrection. Paulina plays an important role in the resurrection of Hermione. She
is, in fact, pattern of Leontes' conscience. 'Paulina, represents the pure Christian conscience'.

Leontes, however, does not return to normal condition as he still feels responsible for the death of his innocent wife. Cleomines and Dion persuade Leontes to return to normal life for the sake of his people as he has suffered enough:

*Cleo. Sir, you have done enough, and have perform'd
A saint-like Sorrow: no fault could you make,
Which you have not redeem'd; indeed, paid down
More penitence, than done trespass: at the last
Do as the Heavens have done, forget your evil;
With them, forgive yourself.*

(V.i.1-6)

Paulina too, says to him that he has fulfilled the will of gods by subjecting himself to a nightmare existence of self torment. She prays to gods to take pity on his sufferings and allow him to awaken from his nightmare.

Now she takes Leontes, Polixenes and others to her 'chapel', which is probably her private chamber, where Leontes last saw Hermione's dead body. Paulina shows them the statue, which excels anything the 'hand of man hath done' (V. iii. 17); and they are quickly struck again with the word 'wonder' (V. iii. 22).

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Leontes gazes, and recognizes Hermione's 'natural posture' (V. iii. 24); asks her to chide him, yet remembers how she was tender 'as infancy and grace' (V. iii. 27):

\[
\begin{align*}
O! \text{ thus she stood,} \\
\text{Even with such life of majesty, warm life,} \\
\text{As now it coldly stands, when first I woo'd her!} \\
\text{I am ashamed: does not the stone rebuke me} \\
\text{For being more stone than it? O, royal piece!}
\end{align*}
\]

(V. iii. 34-38)

Leontes remains still. His soul is pierced by her remembrance. Paulina, however, speaks realistically of the statue as art, saying how its colour is not dry yet. She apologizes for the way it moves him. Her phrase 'for the stone is mine' (V. iii. 58) re-emphasizes how miraculous is this piece of art and her authority on this miraculous stone. She offers to draw the curtain, fearing lest Leontes' 'fancy may think anon it moves' (V. iii. 61). But Leontes remains quiet, fixed, in an other-worldly consciousness, a living death not to be disturbed, yet trembling with expectance:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Leon. Let be, let be!} \\
\text{Would I were dead, but that, methinks, already--} \\
\text{What was he that did make it?}
\end{align*}
\]

(V. iii. 62-64)

Now the statue seems no longer cold:
See, my lord,
Would you not deem it breath'd, and that those veins
Did verily bear blood?

(V. iii. 63)

'Masterly done', answers Polixenes. To him 'the very life seems warm upon her lip' (V. iii. 65). We are poised between motion and stillness, life and art:

The fixture of her eye has motion in't,
As we are mock'd with art.

(V. iii. 67-68)

Paulina reiterates her offer to draw the curtain to which Leontes replies:

No settled senses of the world can match
The pleasure of that madness. Let't alone.

(V. iii. 72-73)

He would stand here, spell-bound, forever; forever gazing on this sphinx-like boundary between art and life. Paulina, having functioned throughout as the Oracle's implement, becomes now its priestess. She hints at new marvels:

I am sorry, sir, I have thus far stirr'd you: but
I could afflict you further.

(V. iii. 73-74)

She has long caused, and still causes, Leontes to suffer poignantly, and yet his suffering has undergone a subtle change, for now this very “affliction has a taste as sweet as any cordial comfort” (V. iii. 76). As Paulina is about to “resurrect” Hermione, she says, “It is required you do awake your faith” (V.iii.94-95). ‘Faith is
a prominent theme in Christianity; the entire eleventh chapter of Hebrew's is a powerful discussion of faith\textsuperscript{29} Walter S. H. Lim writes in his article:

Faith in what? For Leontes, it is faith in the reality of miracles, the coming back to life of a queen who has been dead sixteen long years. For William Shakespeare's audience, it is faith tied to the willing suspension of disbelief, a readiness to accept that theater is capable of representing just about anything.\textsuperscript{30}

What he feels that 'After all, faith, as the Bible puts it, has the power to move mountains'\textsuperscript{31}. When the "statue" is about to stir, Paulina says: "Bequeath to death your numbness; for from him/Dear life redeems you" (V.iii.102-103). These lines, according to Naseeb Shaheen have strong religious overtones\textsuperscript{32}.

Paulina makes the statue move with her design of wonder. Hermione steps down from the pedestal. Thus the emotional climax of the play comes to an end in the final scene, with its totally unexpected resurrection of Hermione. Leontes cries:

\textit{Leon.} O, she's warm!

\textit{If this be magic, let it be an art

Lawful as eating.

\textit{Pol.} She embraces him!}

\textsuperscript{29} Naseeb Shaheen. \textit{Biblical References in Shakespeare's Plays}. University of Delaware Press. 1999.p.719
\textsuperscript{30}Walter S. H. Lim. "Knowledge and Belief in the Winter's Tale." Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900 41.2(2001):317
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid
\textsuperscript{32} Shaheen,op.cit.
Cam. She hangs about his neck!

(V.iii.109-113)

As in Pericles and Cymbeline, the final state of harmony is achieved in The Winter's Tale, too. According to Hunter, this is "Shakespeare's most inspired moment of reconciliation and forgiveness". And "the sense of miracle is overwhelming". Hermione singles out Perdita, the Sicilian hope of harmony and regeneration, for her benediction:

You gods look down,
And from your sacred Vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter's head!

(V.iii.121-123)

The moment of resurrection is depicted as Leontes true repentance. His reunion with Hermione and his daughter is the benevolent design of God. He loses his son Mamillus in this process but gets Florizel in exchange. Paulina is "the final artist and wonderworker of the play". She is "a true descendant of her namesake, the Apostle Paul," because she, too, awakens our faith in a way similar to Paul's call. Hermione's coming down is suggested as "the iconography of Christ's Resurrection". Today, when all established norms and systems have collapsed, Shakespeare through the tale asks us to awaken our faith. The younger generation

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34 Ibid
36 Ibid
37 Ibid
ushers in ‘new innocence and new hope’\textsuperscript{38}. There is reconciliation between the two generations at the end of the play. And it is the design of a great benevolence made dramaturgically manifest once more.