THE MADNESS OF LEONTES: MALE HYSTERIA AND GENDER INSTABILITY IN

*THE WINTER’S TALE*

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ABSTRACT

Over the course of this thesis, I argue that King Leontes of Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale performs the feminine gender through a representation of the disease hysteria. Hysteria within the play thus functions in response to Leontes’ initial expressed desires to remove himself from normative heterosexual productivity. Leontes’ rejection and fear of adult masculinity might allow him to remain “unbreeched, / In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled” (1.2.154-5). However, the hyper-femininity he then experiences through hysteria reveals that a refusal to ascend to manhood leads to a cessation in lineal progression through the climactic death of his heir Mamillius and the following death of Hermione as the wife that would provide him with future offspring. By exploring sixteenth century conceptions of hysteria, its portrayal by Shakespeare in The Winter’s Tale, and twentieth century productions of the play, I argue that not only does Leontes display hysterical symptoms, but he also expresses gender instability as a result of the disease.
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CHAPTER I

Hysteria as a disease holds one of the longest written histories throughout the Western World. From the ancient Greeks and Romans to the Freudian psychoanalysis of the early twentieth century, hysteria’s background is long and compelling. Mark S. Micale notes, “Hysteria is among the oldest described disorders in the history of medicine, and among the most gendered” (5). It is this gendering of hysteria that offers the compelling opportunity to analyze its manifestation and influence within William Shakespeare’s The Winter’s Tale. However, first the history and sociological effect of the disease must be fully explained and examined to better form arguments regarding potential interpretations of Shakespeare’s Jacobean romance.

After beginning with an examination of hysteria’s classical origins, and particularly the Greco-Roman treatment of male hysteria, I will move to the English Renaissance approach to the disease. While hysteria does have a history within Eastern medical texts, Shakespeare draws primarily from the English medical texts extant within his own time period. These texts in turn follow a primarily Greco-Roman tradition of medical writings on hysteria. Therefore, this historical survey will examine only a European hysterical record.

The first known mention of hysteria in Western writings comes from the papyri of ancient Egypt. “An Egyptian medical papyrus dating from around 1900 B.C., one of the oldest surviving documents known to medical history, records a series of curious behavioral disturbances in adult women. As the ancient Egyptians interpreted it, the
cause of these abnormalities was the movement of the uterus, which they believed to be an autonomous, free-floating organism that could move upwards from its normal pelvic position” (Micale 8). However, while in the Egyptian papyri “the disturbances resulting from the movement of the womb were described, […] they had not yet been given a specific appellation” (Veith 10). Plato, in his *Timaeus*, describes the affects of hysteria with:

> The animal within them [women] is desirous of procreating children, and when remaining unfruitful long beyond its proper time, gets discontented and angry, and wandering in every direction through the body, closes up the passages of the breath, and by obstructing respiration, drives them to extremity, causing all varieties of disease.¹

While Plato mentions distinctive symptoms of the disease, including respiratory distress and the movement of the womb, he does not identify the disease with a specific name or potential cure. It was not until the *Corpus Hippocraticum*, a compilation of the writings of the Greek physician Hippocrates (c. 460 BCE – c. 370 BCE), that hysteria as a disease was properly acknowledged and defined.

It is in the thirty-fifth aphorism of the Hippocratic writings, that the term “hysteria” is first revealed. The text claims, “when a woman suffers from hysteria or difficult labour an attack of sneezing is beneficial” (Veith 10). Ilza Veith speculates, “in light of the Egyptian prescriptions this might mean that the spasm of sneezing would push the uterus back in place” (10). After the initial Hippocratic claim, hysteria continued an association with respiratory functions. Greek literature began to frame hysteria as a symptom of “certain forms of respiratory difficulty in which the choking

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sensation was believed to be due to the pressure of the displaced uterus” (Veith 10).

Thus, a tradition began within the medical representation of hysteria that the condition of the uterus itself is less emphasized than the various other bodily symptoms that a diseased uterus might provoke.

While no conclusive theory on the origin of hysteria exists within the Greek texts, a majorly prescribed view holds that “this phenomenon was thought to occur primarily within mature women who were deprived of sexual relations” (Veith 10). The lack of sexual act apparently led to “demonstrable organic changes in the womb” by causing a “dry[ing] up” of the womb and, “in its search for moisture, rises towards the hypochondrium, thus impeding the flow of breath which was supposed normally to descend into the abdominal cavity. If the organ comes to rest in this position it causes convulsions similar to those of epilepsy” (Veith 10). For Hippocratic writings, the positioning of the uterus is key in the representation of the diseased body. The texts describe:

If [the uterus] mounts higher and attaches itself to the heart the patient feels anxiety and oppression and begins to vomit. When it fastens itself to the liver the patient loses her voice and grits her teeth, and her complexion turns ashen. If the uterus lodges in the loins, the woman feels a hard ball, or lump, in her side. But when it mounts as high as the head, it causes pain around the eyes and the nose, the head feels heavy, and drowsiness and lethargy set in. Beyond these specific symptoms, the movement of the womb generally produces palpitations and excessive perspiration and convulsions similar to those observed in epilepsy. (Veith 10)

Helen King comments, “By locating female difference at the level of the flesh, Hippocratic medicine incorporates the ideas of fundamental difference, sexuality, and bloodshed into its image of woman” (18). With such a varied litany of symptoms, it is
unsurprising that suggested curative techniques towards the disease are similarly lengthy in quantity, as well as specific to the female body.

Hippocrates did attempt a more standardized method of evaluation in an initial determination of whether a patient truly suffered from the disease hysteria. First:

the physician was to undertake a manual examination to search for the dislodged uterus taking special care to avoid touching the liver; also a bandage was to be applied below the hypochondria to prevent further ascension of the womb. Into the forcibly opened mouth of the patient the physician was to pour strongly perfumed wine. Fetid fumigations for the nose and aromatic ones for the uterus were to help return the organ to its normal abode. (Veith 11)

Unfortunately, other remedies are far more extensive, particularly in the case of a widow suffering hysterical attacks. Widows and spinsters are the presumed sole subjects of the Hippocratic treatise, and although later Greek writers did extend the category to include potentially all women, and, as I will later examine, some men, women who were assumed to abstain from sexual conduct, like widows and spinsters, were textually hysteria’s main targets. For spinsters who showed hysterical symptoms, “the physician advises her to take a husband”, and while for widows, “the best [remedy] is for her to remarry and to become pregnant”, she often faced cures including, “a strong purgative and subsequently a draught of ass’s milk […] aromatic fumigations to the uterus […] an aromatic injection into the uterus, and on the following morning [the application of] a pesary (soaked in) mint” (Veith 11). However, other Hippocratic treatises proposed still more remedies, including the drinking of “juniper wine and Ethiopian cumin,” a fumigation of the womb composed of “some barley in the husk and some tamarisk, also some deer horn, and [mixed all] with wine,” and various other “fetid fumigations” (Veith 12-13).
Veith notes that, like the Egyptian papyri, the Hippocratic treatises held a similar goal of “induc[ing] the uterus to move downward” through fumigative concoctions, “namely, those with malodorous substances which were to be inhaled or sweet scented aromas which were applied below” (13). However, no remedy is so highly or repeatedly suggested as that of either marriage or remarriage (depending on whether the patient be widow or spinster). Veith argues, “it is this recommendation that translates the sexual element, initially implied in the earliest concepts of hysteria into tangible terms and that […] continued to be among the standard prescriptions for more than two thousand years” (13). Hippocrates’ observations remained within the medical discourse for thousands of years and are crucial as a foundation for examination of hysteria’s evolution to the time of Shakespeare.

Immediately post-Hippocrates comes the first instance of a hysterical revivification, a trope that immediately intertwines into the literature of hysteria and repeats constantly until the time of Shakespeare, to be used by Shakespeare himself.² The Greek philosopher Heracleides of Pontus (c. 390 BCE – 310 BCE), in a lost work described by Galen, “says that that woman who had neither breath nor pulse could only be distinguished from a corpse in one way: that is she had a little warmth around the middle part of her body.”³ The writer Diogenes Laertius (c. 3rd century CE) adds further detail to Galen’s description of Heracleides text and reveals:

The story told by Heracleides apparently concerns Empedocles, who told his friend Pausanias how he had realized the woman was not dead from observing the

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³ Galen, On the Affected Parts. K 8.415
innate heat. Clearly she was able to breathe through her skin, and eventually recovered, much to the amazement of the onlookers who attributed this to a miracle performed by Empedocles. (King 34)

The Roman author Pliny continued the tradition of this particular story and claims that in Heracleides’ original text, the woman “was seven days without breath but was called back to life” (King 34). Pliny’s popularity in the Renaissance ensured that this particular description of hysterical revivification remained “very popular in the sixteenth century” (King 34) and thus available and likely known to Shakespeare.

From the time of the Greeks, I move now to the first example of the treatment of hysteria in the Roman period. Veith observes, “the survival of the Hippocratic tradition and the transmission of its doctrine is evidenced in the writings of Aulus Cornelius Celsus. His work is the first systematic treatise on medicine which has come down to us” (20). Celsus is a particularly intriguing medical figure as, due to his use of patrician Latin, “it has been assumed that Celsus himself was not a practicing physician but a most erudite layman” (Veith 20) and thus his writings were never included in the larger canon of Greco-Roman medical literature. The treatise was rediscovered during the Renaissance and “was greatly read and widely admired, for the exquisite beauty of its Latin style as well as for its medical content” (Veith 21).

Celsus mimics Hippocrates in his description of the disease, noting that it is “a malignant disease of the womb; and next to the stomach, this organ is highly susceptible of being affected either in itself, or by sympathy affects the rest of the body. Sometimes this affection deprives the patient of all sensibility, in the same manner as if she had
fallen into epilepsy," and also gives a Hippocratic focus on the means and goals of
treatment. Like Hippocrates, Celsus wishes for a curative method that will replace the
uterus in its initial position. To this aim he prescribes, “exercise and massage,” along
with “the use of blood-letting during the attack, a form of treatment which in later
centuries became universal and unquestionably often injurious. If the patient did not
seem sufficiently strong to withstand such a seriously depleting measure, Celsus
recommended as an alternative, the application of suction cups at the groins” (Veith 22).
Although Celsus does not repeat Hippocrates exact prescriptions for the treatment of
hysteria, his adherence to a Hippocratic visualization of the uterus as key agent of the
disease highlights the continuation of Hippocratic influence from the Greek period and
into the Roman.

Following Celsus came the critical medical writings of Arataeus of Cappadocia
(c. 1st century CE). Arataeus “was even more single-minded in his adherence to
Hippocrates than was Celsus” (Veith 22). His medical writings are useful, “chiefly to
submit a summary exposition of all preceding thought” (Veith 22). Arataeus continues
the idea of the “wandering uterus” as the primary cause of hysteria and writes:

In the middle of the flanks of women lies the womb, a female viscus, closely
resembling an animal; for it is moved of itself hither and thither in the flanks, also
upwards in a direct line to below the cartilage of the thorax, and also obliquely to
the right or to the left, either to the liver or the spleen; and it likewise is subject to
prolapsus downwards, and in a word, it is altogether erratic.\textsuperscript{5}

\textsuperscript{4} Targa L. (ed.). Aul[us] Cor[nelius] Celsus on Medicine in Eight

\textsuperscript{5} Adams, Francis (Ed. and Trans.), The Extant Works of Aretaeus the Cappadocian (London;
Syndenham Society, 1856. 185
His view of the erratic nature of the womb links closely to both Plato and the earlier Egyptian medical papyri as well. He mimics the Platonic view of the womb with “the womb is like an animal within an animal”\textsuperscript{6} as well as a verification of the Hippocratic dependence on fumigatory curative techniques with the observation that the womb “delights, also in fragrant smells, and advances towards them; and it has an aversion to fetid smells, and flees from them.”\textsuperscript{7}

Arataeus is also crucial to an understanding of the development of the conception of hysteria in the early modern world for another reason. Previously, in the Greco-Roman medical treatises dealing with hysteria, the sole patients discussed were female. As Micale notes, “Males, according to these age-old theories, were definitionally excluded from the disease” (10). However, Arataeus strikingly writes of hysteria, “in women there also arises another affection resembling this form, with the sense of choking and loss of speech, but not proceeding from the womb; for it also happens to men in the manner of catochus”\textsuperscript{8}. Veith comments “that [Arataeus’] powers of observation were extraordinarily keen is proved by his assertion that there was a form of hysteria unconnected with the uterus which could also affect men” (22). While hysteria still remained predominantly a disease of the female body, a new possibility for male representation of the disease had now entered medical discourse.

Veith argues, “it is apparent that the Graeco-Roman writers were generally unoriginal and derivative in their approach to the problem of hysteria. A notable

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{6} Ibid. 185
\item \textsuperscript{7} Ibid. 186
\item \textsuperscript{8} Ibid. 287
\end{itemize}
exception, however, is Soranus of Ephesus, known to his contemporaries and immediate successors as ‘Prince of the Physicians’ (*Medicorum princes*)” (25). The respect for Soranus was widespread and continued long into the Middle Ages (Veith 25). Soranus’ major text *Gynaecology* is a treatise “specifically dedicated to women as an object of medical knowledge” (Flemming 230) and in it he strongly argues against the fumigatory techniques espoused by Hippocrates and Galen, “for the uterus does not creep out, like a wild animal, from its lair, delighting in fragrant odors and fleeing unpleasant ones.”

Soranus instead advises a curative method “derived from his classification of the affliction as ‘constricted,’ violent, and either acute or chronic” (Flemming 242). In yet another departure from the previously held views of the disease, e also advises against the practice of sexual activity as a means of banishing hysteria.

The classical physician Galen of Pergamum (b. CE 129) also redefined notions of hysteria, as well as the medical field, with his writings on humoral theory and the potential cause for hysteria’s occurrence. Veith summarizes Galen’s hypotheses and notes his belief:

> [T]hat the hysterical manifestations in such women occurred either because of the suppression of the menses or of the outflow of the semen, no matter what the symptoms were. In pursuing this theory, Galen offered the following further hypothesis: if repressed semen, i.e., abstinence or lack of sexual relations gave rise to troubles in women it was logical that a similar cause would lead to analogous disorder in men. Thus ran his explanation of the existence of male hysteria. His recognition of a syndrome resembling hysteria in males was a most significant contribution. He noted that such states also followed sexual abstinence, and he therefore assumed that they were caused by retention of sperm. From this he derived his frequently reiterated conviction that failure of spermatic emission was more deleterious even than failure of the menstrual flow. (38)

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9 Soranus. *Gynaecology*. Trans. Flemming. 3.29.5 (CMG IV.113.3-5).
Galen also critically rejects the notion of the “wandering womb” and writes, “we must consider as totally preposterous the opinion of those who, by means of this reasoning, make the womb into an animal.”

Unfortunately, Galen’s dismissal of the womb’s potential for movement did not continue into the Renaissance period, as did his other medical and humoral theories.

Galen’s observations on the potential for male hysteria serve to further Arataeus’ own thoughts on hysteria’s bi-gendered potential. While previously, female expressions of hysteria had been believed to occur due to lack of sexual activity, men are now revealed to suffer the same consequences from abstinence. However, these observations were “ignored by [Galen’s] contemporaries and did not reappear for nearly a millennium and a half, at which time it was again disregarded” (Veith 22). While a possibility for male hysteria was present within classical literary writings, the view of the disease as predominantly affecting women remained strong until the Renaissance period.

As the Roman Empire weakened and the transition from the Classical era began, hysteria also evolved in its treatment. Micale notes, “the coming of Christian civilization in the Latin West initiated the first paradigm shift in the history of hysteria. From the fifth to the thirteenth centuries, naturalistic pagan views were increasingly displaced by supernatural formulations” (10). G.S. Rousseau argues that the rise of the persecution of witches in the medieval period at the same time as hysteria’s transformation is far from coincidental and claims “modern hysteria or conversion syndrome, as distinct from hysterike pnix, first rises to prominence as an explicit diagnostic category within the

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development of demonology” (98). Although “[t]he doctors by 1400 had generated no single theory or even multiple theories of hysteria” (Rousseau 99), and medical texts did attempt to argue with the clerical insistence that hysteria was a result of witchcraft, the supernatural remained the assumed leading cause of the disease until the Renaissance period.

During Shakespeare’s lifetime, the rediscovery of classical writings, particularly the medical texts of Galen, Soranus, and Hippocrates, led to a renewal of attention on hysteria as an earthly disease rather than one rooted in the supernatural. Unfortunately, this influx of competing medical theories was not resolved by Renaissance physicians. As Peterson notes, “this conglomeration of inherited traditions comprising sixteenth and seventeenth century medicine makes possible a panoply of contradictory claims, and Renaissance medicine does not appear overly concerned to resolve them, or to do so with anything resembling speed” (244-5). While Renaissance anatomy gave no possibility for womb movement, as dissection had made clear there was no space for the womb to move within the body cavity, medical theory still strikingly attempted a return to the Hippocratic belief in uterine relocation.

Thus, the major issue in contest between the Renaissance physicians is the same that plagued their classical predecessors. Like Galen and Hippocrates, they disagreed intensely on whether or not the womb should be classified as a moving “animal” and thus at fault for hysteria through its wandering. While Phillip Barrough in The Method of Physick “imagines a ‘flying’ womb according to what looks like strictly Hippocratic logic” (Peterson 243), Ambroise Paré uses a combination of classical medical texts to
“describe uterine movement and links fetid uterine contents (Galen) to swollen ligaments (Soranus) and uterine movement (Hippocrates) in an all-encompassing gesture to classical medicine” (Peterson 243-4). However, Paré remains cautious and “hedges about womb movement by qualifying its potential for mobility and ability to oppress breathing in the female subject” (Peterson 244). Peterson further notes that Renaissance “writers often attribute some degree of sentience to the uterus while affirming simultaneously the inability of the organ to move substantially” (244). However, although they dealt with incredibly conflicting claims regarding the nature of the womb, Renaissance medical authors still managed some forms of innovation in their approach to the phenomenon of hysteria.

Firstly, although far from positive through a feminist lens, was the newly negative perception of the womb’s powers of reproduction and fertility. Medical writers began to portray the womb less as the sentient but inhuman animal of the classical period and rather began to inscribe it with a human morality, potentially one that reflected the woman’s own moral or amoral actions. Mary E. Fissell theorizes:

The remaking of the womb as a problematic or troubling body part is, as I have suggested, a part of the longer reform of the body. As most Englishmen and women came to think of themselves as Protestant, and no longer remembered their grandmothers and great-grandmothers’ devotional that linked pregnancy with the Virgin Mary, eventually they came to adopt a new view of the female reproductive body that did not echo the divine. (73)

While the Catholic Middle Ages had venerated the fertility of the Virgin Mary and her benedictions towards childbirth, the rejection of all Catholic dogma espoused by the Protestant Renaissance held entirely negative effects on the perception of the womb and
its reproductive abilities. Fissell further notes that it was not merely the womb that fell prey to negative opinion for:

The new emphasis on the womb’s bad qualities comes in part from a larger cultural shift in the meanings of motherhood. From the 1560s onwards, cheap print began depicting bad mothers in dramatic and sensational ways. Stories of witches and infanticidal mothers depicted woman, and mothers in particular, as dangerous figures. (74)

In my later examination of The Winter’s Tale, knowledge of this societal shift in viewpoint will prove incredibly important as part of my discussion of Hermione and Leontes’ surprising disdain for her fertile pregnant body.

Early modern physician Edward Jorden (b. CE 1569) was one of the first early modern writers to embrace this newly negative view of the female reproductive system. Jorden initially wrote his 1603 pamphlet, A Briefe Discourse of a disease called the Suffocation of the Mother, as a response to the 1602 case of Mary Glover. Glover, the 14-year-old daughter of a shopkeeper fell ill:

Her throat swelled shut and she could not eat, she was stricken dumb and blind, and she suffered terrifying fit […] The doctors argued about whether or not Glover suffered from a disease called ‘suffocation of the mother’, while many Londoners debated whether she was bewitched or suffered from a natural but puzzling ailment. (Fissell 55)

Jorden, as a medical practitioner, stood strongly on the side of the “natural but puzzling ailment” and, in his testimony at the trial, made many claims for Glover’s condition as one of hysteria and “suffocation of the mother” rather than the supernatural.

Unfortunately for Jorden, he was not believed, and thus he decided “to have the last word by publishing a pamphlet in 1603 about the ailment known as ‘fits of the mother.’” As Mary E. Fissell points out, “Jorden’s account of the womb is profoundly
negative” (59). Jorden begins his treatise with a warning that “the Symptoms of this
disease are sayd to be monstrous and terrible to beholde” (2) and swiftly moves to assert
that while “the Suffocation of the mother” may seem a “marvell”, it is actually a serious
medical condition with physical factors causing its occurrence. He then historically
grounds his research by appealing to the scholarship of Hippocrates and Galen and the
concept of the humors, with their imbalance acting as the major cause of the development
of the disease. Jorden explains that according to Hippocrates, “if these symptoms do
yields unto naturall remedies, they must also bee naturall themselves” (4) and thus
supernatural origins cannot be the cause. In the pamphlet, Jorden focuses intensely on
the possibility that:

The womb’s ability to feed a fetus is potentially dangerous to the mother. Jorden
retells the story of a woman who accidentally cut a vein in her leg, whereupon the
loss of blood provoked fits of the mother because the womb struggled to retain or
acquire sufficient blood to nourish any possible fetus. A moist and nourishing
diet restored her to health, but the underlying message of the tale was that the
womb’s reproductive faculties might endanger a woman’s life. (Fissell 60)

This view of the womb as the womb is also reflected in the medical writings of
his contemporaries John Sadler and Jakob Rueff. In speaking on the production of moles,
Fissell notes that Rueff argues:

The womb, because it is lusty stirs up seed, blends it with menstrual blood, and a
monstrous being is made. Where the womb was previously wonderful because it
turned a little bit of semen into a new person, here it becomes a more ambitious
organ. It is as if the womb mimicked the woman herself. The woman lacked
control, being too lascivious – and the womb lacked the careful direction of the
male seed, that proper contriver. (Fissell 65)

No longer was the womb merely an animalistic organ, wreaking indiscriminate havoc on
the woman’s interior, but rather one reflecting the woman’s own moral compass. This
creates the troubling notion that if a woman was apparently displaying hysterical symptoms, then they existed due to her own immoral actions.

Jorden’s largest focus, however, is on the potential for the appearance of death due to “suffocation of the mother.” He claims the disease is called “the Suffocation of the Mother, because most commonly it takes them with choaking in the throat” (5) and leads to fits and fainting within affected women. This choking results from an excess of blood within the body that forces the womb upwards into the throat. This excess and humoral imbalance comes from “the temperament and scituation of the Mother” (5). In the most extreme cases of the disease, the excess is so great as to affect other bodily responses and even “sometimes respiration, sence, and motion do altogether faile, and yet the pulse remaine good” (7) and the body enters a state of suspended animation. Jorden offers several examples of this grave condition, and, as Mary E. Fissell describes it:

Even more frightening than these depictions of young women seemingly tortured by their faulty wombs are the tales Jorden told about the threat of being buried alive […] He cites a number of authorities about the length of time that families should wait before burying an apparently dead woman, noting that three days was usual. However, he adds, there was a case where a woman lay for seven days as if dead and was then restored to life, and then mentions a six-day case, rendering his three-day advice troubling. (61)

The most frightening example of all he draws from Ambroise Paré. Paré describes how “the sixteenth century anatomist Vesalius began to dissect the body of a Spanish gentlewoman. At the second cut, ‘she cried out and stirred her limbs’, and came back to life” (Fissell 61). The trope of revivification from hysterical suspended animation had survived from the text of Heracleides in the classical period and now appears even more likely to have been crucial to Shakespeare and his contemporaries.
Jorden is a critical author not merely for his examination of hysteria in the early modern period. He was also the first of Shakespeare’s time to return to the assertion of a potential male hysteria. Jorden, working from the Platonic tripartite understanding of the soul, concluded that all hysterical symptoms must originate from the brain, or “the animal faculty”, rather than solely from the womb as many other physicians had assumed. Ilza Veith states:

The third function of the animal faculty, control of motion, explained spasms, paroxysms, palsies, convulsive dancing, stretching, yawning, and all the other disorders of movement which accompany hysterical attacks. Thus, the cardinal symptoms of hysteria were all affections of the animal faculty, and since it was mediated by the brain, it is this organ which was the source of hysterical manifestations. (122)

From this observation, Jorden was then able to move to the conclusion that hysteria affected all peoples, regardless of respective gender. As Veith further notes, “Jorden’s transfer of the seat of all hysterical manifestations from the uterus to the brain constituted a major turning point in the history of hysteria” (123) and particularly within the conception of hysteria as present within men.

Jorden’s contemporary medical writers swiftly came to similar conclusions. Robert Burton, author of *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, shared Jorden’s view of hysteria “as an affliction of the mind and the body” (Veith 124). Similarly, the French physician Charles Lepois (b. CE 1563), who wrote under the *nom de plume* Carolus Piso, argued for the attribution of hysteria to issues in the brain rather than the womb. From this observation, Piso claimed “the hysterical symptoms are almost all common to both men and women” (Veith 129). He also noted, “headache, which he had come to recognize as an important hysterical manifestation in both men and women, served as an irrefutable
argument in favor of his etiological theories. He reasoned that headache must have the same cause in both sexes and thus ruled out any involvement with the womb” (Veith 129). Therefore, as one begins an analysis of hysterical symptoms in The Winter’s Tale, two major ideas can be assumed. Firstly, that the possibility for male hysteria was known throughout the period’s medical discourse and could be drawn upon by Shakespeare, as his use of the disease in the earlier King Lear also shows. Secondly, while male hysteria was possible, it was still far less known and commented upon than was the typically female version. Therefore, when analyzing its representation in Leontes, along with the other female attributes that he expresses, one must look through a lens of feminine depiction.
CHAPTER II

Judith Butler, in her groundbreaking *Gender Trouble*, argues for the social construction of gender as a performative act. She also states, “the subject is not *determined* by the rules through which it is generated because signification is *not a founding act, but rather a regulated process of repetition* that both conceals itself and enforces its rules precisely through the production of substantializing effects. In a sense, all signification takes place within the orbit of the compulsion to repeat” (198). While a body might ostensibly be stated as one gender, it is through the body’s repeated actions that gender is truly performed. Within Shakespeare’s romantic tragicomedy *The Winter’s Tale*, one might expect King Leontes of Sicilia to perform a hyper-masculinized gender role as a symbol of political lineage and productivity. On the contrary, Leontes’ overly emotional reaction to suspicions of infidelity on the part of his wife Hermione establishes a feminine gendered position. Leontes’ response, which strongly correlates to symptoms of the Renaissance version of the typically feminine disease hysteria, consistently establishes physical traits and emotions linked to the medical representation of the female body during Shakespeare’s time. If masculine acts must be performed in repetition in order to establish the male gender, then how does one interpret a previously male character now performing feminine acts and responses?

Stephen Greenblatt notes in *Shakespearean Negotiations*:

At least since the time of Galen it had been widely thought that both males and females contained both male and female elements […] the predominance, rather than the exclusion, of one or the other helped, along with the original position of the seed in the womb and other factors, to determine sexual identity and to make
possible a harmonious accord between sex and gender. Predominance was never – or at least rarely – absolute, nor, in the opinion of most, was it established in final and definitive form in the womb. (78)

With feminine elements dormant within a male figure, how might they then appear in the male character that rejects the traditional masculine role of sexual productivity? The representation of gender and “perceptions of gender doubleness were almost always closely linked to a belief in an internal power struggle between male and female principles” (Greenblatt 78). If a man of Shakespeare’s time then purposely suppressed his male principles, then those of the female might gain in power. While I do not suggest that Leontes engages in an actual physical transformation between the sexes over the course of *The Winter’s Tale*, it does not seem far-fetched to assume that feminine traits, including that of hysteria, might appear due to suppression of masculine characteristics out of a desire to reject adult masculinity. While this femininity is not desired by Leontes, it establishes social punishment within the play as a means of condemning and regulating his refusal to embrace adult sexuality as a means of productivity.

Over the course of this thesis, I will argue that Leontes’ performance of the feminine gender through a representation of the disease hysteria functions as a disciplinary measure in response to his initial desires to remove himself from normative heterosexual productivity. Leontes’ rejection and fear of adult masculinity, resulting in a turn to the female gender, might allow him to remain “unbreeched, / In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled” (1.2.154-5). However, the hyper-femininity he is then made to experience through hysteria reveals that a refusal to ascend to manhood leads to a cessation in lineal progression through the climactic death of his heir Mamillius and the
following death of Hermione as the wife that would provide him with future offspring.

At the play’s conclusion, with the return of the proven chaste Hermione, Leontes is both regretful and masculine as the ultimate message of normative heterosexual productivity is restored.

Leontes’ mimicry of hysteria manifests quickly within the play, interestingly immediately following Polixenes’ relation of the idyllic childhood the two monarchs spent together. Greenblatt comments, “virtually all males experienced a transition during childhood from a state close to that of females – indeed often called ‘effeminate’ – to one befitting an adult male” (78). Leontes’ desire to return to this childhood, a place bereft of procreation and adult maturity, is also one of femininity and, therefore, fitting as the memory that inspires his hysterical outburst. As Polixenes describes to Hermione:

We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i’ th’ sun
And bleat the one at th’ other. What we changed
Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
That any did. Had we pursued that life,
And our weak spirits ne’er been higher reared
With stronger blood, we should have answered heaven
Boldly ‘Not guilty,’ the imposition cleared
Hereditary ours. (1.2.67-75)

Polixenes focuses on the “innocence” of a scene of male homosocial relations. He conveys that if Polixenes and Leontes had remained in that lifestyle, completely free of female contact, then they would have remained forever “Not guilty” in the eyes of heaven. Hermione, however, with her question, “Was not my lord / The verier wag o’ the two?” (1.2.65-66), emphasizes the potential for a mischievous nature within her future husband. She casts doubt upon the “innocence” of her husband so stressed by Polixenes
and thereby taints the purity of the memory that Polixenes relates. Polixenes’ veneration of his and Leontes virginal and homosocial state thus appears apt against Hermione as the woman who attempts to taint this innocence.

Sexual acts with women, even if for reproductive purposes, are cast by Polixenes as sinful and inspiring “stronger blood”. Sexual activity as a result appears as intrinsically changing bodily chemistry by inspiring heavier passions through the blood and affecting humoral balances. Janet Adelman notes, “both in Polixenes opening speech and in his pastoral myth, the sexualized female body is the sign of male separation and loss. Moreover, in its very fullness, that body becomes the register of male emptiness” (221); Peter Erickson also comments, “Hermione’s visible pregnancy activates a maternal image that seems in and of itself to provoke male insecurity” (819). Walter S.H. Lim goes further to claim, “masculine anxiety in The Winter’s Tale manifests itself then as a general distrust of genital sexuality, which is linked directly to sin[ning]” (325). Sexual activity has led to increased passion within Leontes, just as heightened passion appears within hysterical patients; however, Polixenes’ espousal of the rejection of sexual activity as a taint to innocence mimics the main putative cause behind hysteria’s appearance.

Polixenes follows this initial speech by confirming to Hermione, “Temptations have since then been born to’s; for / In those unfledged days was my wife a girl; / Your precious self had then not cross’d the eyes / Of my young play-fellow” (1.2.76-79), and clearly stating that Hermione and her female Sicilian counterpart are the reason for the loss of innocence for the two kings. Hermione responds with a surprising conflation of her own self with the Sicilian queen as she comments:
Of this make no conclusion, lest you say
Your queen and I are devils: yet go on;
The offences we have made you do we’ll answer,
If you first sinn’d with us and that with us
You did continue fault and that you slipp’d not
With any but us. (1.2.81-85)

She grasps onto Polixenes’ mention of “sinning” and twists it for her own rhetorical purposes. The way Polixenes has portrayed the situation, she claims, leaves no possible outcome except for herself and her fellow queen to take on the role of “devils” who have caused the “innocent” child kings to fall in a scene hearkening to the loss of Edenic innocence, an analogy potentially complicated by the casting of two male figures as Adam and Eve.¹¹

Hermione speaks for the other queen with “we’ll answer,” and while she does not elaborate what this answer will entail, she creates ambiguity between herself and her female counterpart as well as the two kings through “If you first sinn’d with us and that with us / You did continue fault and that you slipp’d not / With any but us”. The “you” is heavily uncertain for while it could refer to either of Polixenes or Leontes separately, it can also refer to them as a pair, interchangeable from one another, just as Hermione and the other queen are through “we” and “us.” Interestingly, this exchange gives the most evidence for Leontes’ sudden belief that Hermione has been acting in a sexually unfaithful manner towards him, for if she and Polixenes’ queen are equivalent, as are Polixenes and Leontes, then she claims that any sexual activity between herself and Polixenes cannot be deemed illicit.

The conflation between Hermione and Polixenes’ queen can be further scrutinized when one examines Polixenes’ initial lines concerning his trepidation over the situation in his own country during his prolonged absence. Polixenes comments:

I am questioned by my fears of what may chance
Or breed upon our absence; that may blow
No sneaping winds at home, to make us say
‘This is put forth too truly;’ besides, I have stayed
To tire your royalty. (1.2.11-15)

His words here question the chastity of his wife and what she may “breed” with another while he is gone, thereby seeding a suspicion towards the ability of women to control their sexual desires when their husbands are not present. If Polixenes feels reason to doubt the fidelity of his own wife, whom Hermione portrays herself as equivalent to, then Leontes can easily assume a similar doubt. The initial background of a world where women apparently cannot be trusted to abstain from adultery lends more credence to why Leontes might immediately suspect Hermione of infidelity. That Polixenes has visited Bohemia, “Nine changes of the watery star” (1.2.1), serves to further heighten suspicion considering Hermione is now apparently close to her time of childbirth. Thus, Polixenes may have possibly fathered her child rather than Leontes, and if Hermione views both men as equal to each other, and herself as equivalent to Polixenes’ own queen, then her boundaries prohibiting adultery begin to blur and potentially disappear altogether.

Leontes’ paranoia, therefore, does rest on tenuous reasoning and he exploits it fully. His response to Hermione’s persuasive efforts towards Polixenes shows this growing suspicion and paranoia, reminiscent of hysterical symptoms, as he reminds her of the one other occasion in which she “spok’st / To better purpose” (1.2.88-89). This
time turns out to be when she acquiesced to his request for her hand in marriage; however, Leontes’ description of the act reveals his already present discomfort with female sexuality. He announces:

Why that was when
Three crabbèd months had soured themselves to death
Ere I could make thee open thy white hand
And clasp thyself my love: then didst thou utter
‘I am yours for ever.’ (1.2.100-105)

The Oxford English Dictionary notes that while “crabbèd” may mean “perverse” and “irritable”, when it refers to trees, it means “crooked”. That “crabbèd” and “soured” are mentioned together brings to mind the crabapple tree, with its crooked form and sour apples. While Polixenes had previously described an Edenic pre-Fall childhood for himself and Leontes, Leontes now connects Hermione’s dismissal of his wooing attempts to a “sour” apple tree. While ostensibly the “crabbèd months” are merely Leontes’ negative opinion of the time before Hermione consented to his hand in marriage, the also reflect his opinion towards her independent spirit. Hermione refused to marry Leontes and remained “close-handed” and in control of her sexuality prior to her acceptance of his proposal. One can therefore also view Leontes’ words as a rejection of independent female sexuality and a condemnation of Hermione herself, not just the months prior to her proclamation of “I am yours for ever.” Hermione spoke well in accepting Leontes’s control over her physical body and sexual actions; however, now that she has again begun to display her independence through her convincing and possible seduction, of Polixenes, Leontes again returns to his view of Hermione’s individual actions as “crabbed.” While he has tasted the fruit of sexual knowledge, as Hermione’s pregnancy
obviously shows, he has received no pleasure from tasting it; instead of emphasizing fruitfulness and productivity, he focuses on the “perverse” and “crookedness” that such an act has brought into his life. Although Hermione has produced an heir for him, in the form of Mamillius, Leontes neglects to appreciate her fecundity and instead views her as a corrupting force through her vanquishing of his sexual innocence.

His subsequent focus on Hermione’s “white hand” serves to further emphasize his mistrust and revulsion of her, as well as to link back to Hermione’s own description of herself as a “devil”. The whiteness of the hand could be a marker of innocence and virtue; however, in the context of Leontes’ own disgust for the “sourness” of female sexuality, the concept of “the white devil” can also be a possibility. The proverb “the white Devil is worse than the black” was commonly known and used in Renaissance drama\(^\text{12}\), and thus the use of the adjective “white” can hold sharply negative connotations. That Hermione has a “white hand”, immediately following language that deems “perverse” her copulation with Leontes, implies that, like in a white devil, her whiteness and purity is merely a mask for the rotting sinfulness that lies beneath. Hermione may appear chaste in the exterior, but internally Leontes suspects her body shows its true status as a sinful creature that has led him to fall from the Edenic grace of his childhood that Polixenes has just described. With his focus on sin within Hermione and her ability through sexuality to lead men to a fallen state, when she “gives her hand to Polixenes” in a stage direction, Leontes’ rage and suspicion is immediate.

Leontes’ initial hysterical reaction is dramatic and striking in its adherence to typical hysterical symptoms and presumed female humoral responses. He cries out, “Too hot, too hot! / To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods. / I have tremor cordis on me; my heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy” (1.2.107-110). The “too hot” he speaks of holds a dual meaning. While he ostensibly refers to the heat of the sexual passion he believes he observes between Hermione and Polixenes, “too hot” can refer to his own body temperature as well. As humoral theory dictates, heated blood within the body leads to heightened passions, a significant symptom of hysteria. Lesel Dawson notes, “hysteria is frequently represented as the physiological consequence of an excessive passion, in which the violent emotions that disturb the body incite a hysterical attack” (67). Humoral theory also claims, “men’s bodies were thought to be hotter and drier, women’s bodies colder and more spongy” (Kern Paster 77). That Leontes thus becomes “too hot” is another sign of his body transitioning into one of more feminine attributes. His body does not actually become physically hotter, but rather he is no longer able to control its innate masculine heat.

While once this heated body was his physiological ideal, if he rejects his masculinity and becomes more feminine he will be unable to withstand its higher temperatures. As Erickson describes it “the innate heat in man may be greater and thus more perfect, but that heat needs to be controlled and moderated or the animal will become disordered and fly apart” (2), just as Leontes threatens to do through his hysteria. By his desire to avoid adult masculinity, Leontes loses physiological control, and it is unsurprising that his next observations relate to physical manifestations of his hysteria.
Leontes claims to have “tremor cordis” and “heart danc[ing]” in yet another physical connection to both hysteria and femininity. Stephen Orgel notes that tremor cordis was a condition attributed to “overheated blood”:

Christopher Wirtzung’s General Practise of Physicke (London, 1617) lists as possible causes ‘abundant moisture…in the closet of the heart…, pain of the stomache, …offense of the heart, of the liver, the lights, …wind, ill damps, corrupted blood…great heat, sudden and great cold, great emptiness, great sorrow, fright, great fear, and other motions of the mind.’ (footnote, 100)

Thus, Leontes’ tremor cordis is a striking sign of a hysterical response as it implies other symptoms common to hysteria: particularly “other motions of the mind” are also present within him. Also critical is the mention that tremor cordis results from “abundant moisture.” As previously noted, moisture was predominantly considered an innate feminine condition by Renaissance physicians. Leontes’ belief that he presents the disease therefore indicates another connection to a female attribute as opposed to the dry heat physicians believed he would inherently possess through his masculinity.

While Leontes’ bodily references heighten his development of feminine traits, his exhibition of violent hysterical symptoms show an even more obvious transition. When speaking to his son and heir Mamillius, his speech is jarring and marked by an inability to retain a single train of thought for a lengthy amount of time. He comments to Mamillius:

Come, captain,
We must be neat – not neat, but cleanly, captain.
And yet the steer, the heifer and the calf
Are all called neat – Still virginaling
Upon his palm? – How now, you wanton calf,
Art thou my calf? (1.2.121-126)

While he initially desires to avoid use of the term “neat” for its association with cattle and therefore the horns of cuckoldry (Bevington footnote 1533), he swiftly changes his mind
and embraces the idea by then referring to Mamillius as “my calf.” While “the steer, the heifer, and the calf” may point to symbols of infidelity, they also imply the pastoral landscape and imagery to which Polixenes earlier referred and are thus positive elements to Leontes. Leontes’ deteriorating attention span, indicated by the sudden increase in dashes and therefore pauses within his dialogue, combined with alternating positive and negative reactions to certain metaphors, closely follows the symptoms of a hysteric, for “women afflicted with hysteria are said to suffer from impaired respiration, loss of speech, incoherence, delusions, and a lack of sensation in the limbs” (Dawson 61-2).

Leontes suffers from both incoherence and a loss of speech, as signified by his multiple pauses, within this address.

Leontes soon begins to display as well the symptom of delusion as his hysteria begins to grow and the discourse of disease enters both his own language and that of those speaking of him. He continues to Mamillius:

Thou want’st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,  
To be full like me: yet they say we are  
Almost as like eggs – Women say so,  
That will say anything. But were they false  
As o’er-dyed blacks, as wind, as waters, false  
As dice are to be wished by one that fixes  
No bourn twixt his and mine, yet were it true  
To say this boy were like me. (1.2.128-134)

Again, Leontes focuses on his relationship to his son, this time not only questioning his paternity, but also expressing a desire to be of an age of innocence like Mamillius. If he and his son are “Almost as like eggs,” this implies that they currently appear very similar, but due to age they can never be exactly the same, as Leontes was with Polixenes his “twinned lamb.” While he acknowledges the “Women say so, that will say anything,”
the dash between the two statements allows “Almost as like eggs” to stand alone. He does continue on to question the veracity of such a claim when given by women, but initially the desire for himself and Mamillius to be “like eggs” is unequivocal. His final lines, “yet were it true / To say this boy were like me” therefore both acknowledges Mamillius as similar enough to him to likely be his son, but also corroborates his first statement of similarity.

The claim “Almost like eggs”, like many others made by Leontes, can also take on another meaning. While one reading is that he and Mamillius are almost as similar as two eggs might be, another is that they are almost eggs themselves and thus innocent babes. Even as Leontes comes deeper into the grip of hysteria, he refuses to reject his desires to remain in a childlike state, free of adult productivity through sexuality. Leontes swiftly moves from this wistfulness to an attack on women, the very ones who removed Leontes from his Edenic childhood and will eventually do the same to Mamillius. However, while he rages against the “fals[ity]” of women, he does not wish to relinquish his claim upon Mamillius and thereby shows his appreciation for the value of his heir. By conceding, “were it true / To say this boy were like me,” he is able to reinstate his ownership of Mamillius without relying upon the words of women to support his claim.

Leontes’ delusions continue as he insists upon Hermione’s infidelity, using Mamillius as a receptacle for his mad ravings. He demands:

Come, sir page,  
Look on me with your welkin eye. Sweet villain,  
Most dear’st, my collop – can thy dam, may’t be  
Affection! – thy intention stabs the centre.
Thou dost make possible things not so held,
Communicat’st with dreams – how can this be?
With what’s unreal thou coactive art,
And fellow’t nothing. Then ‘tis very credent
Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost,
And that beyond commission, and I find it,
And that to the infection of my brains
And hard’ning of my brows. (1.2.134-145)

Again, his language is abrupt and he lacks focus. While Leontes ostensibly begins his speech with the intention of addressing Mamillius, who is likely too young to understand the substance of his ravings, his attention clearly moves away from him as he begins to ask rhetorical questions (“how can this be?”) that a child cannot be expected to answer. While Leontes appears initially to question his suspicion of Hermione with “can thy dam,” he is swift to move to an immediate response of “Affection!” He wonders at the jealousy invading his mind and recognizes he possesses an “infection of my brains,” but he continues on his suspicious rampage by dismissing questions and announcing instead the “hard’ning of my brows” and the assumption that Hermione must be cuckolding him. The observations made by Jorden on hysteria suggest strongly that Leontes has a disease of the brain. His refusal to consider this possibility and to continue instead to indulge his delusions further strengthens a diagnosis of hysteria.

When Leontes speaks with Camillo concerning his suspicions, Camillo’s dialogue serves to further reveal that not only does Leontes suffer from some form of disease, but it is one that cannot be revealed. Camillo first attempts to condemn merely Leontes’ “opinion” with, “Good my lord, be cured / Of this diseased opinion, betimes, / For ‘tis most dangerous” (1.2.293-5). By placing blame for Leontes’ infection onto an “opinion” rather than Leontes himself, he is able to keep the purity of Leontes’ body and
masculinity intact. This purity is crucial for Camillo not merely as Leontes’ nobleman and confidant, but also as a subject of his kingdom. If the masculinity of a king is threatened, then a kingdom, so thoroughly tied to the well-being of its monarch, will also suffer. Camillo therefore acts as a Bohemian who fears for the integrity of his kingdom, not just a nobleman who fears for the purity of his king, when he refuses to acknowledge Leontes’ bodily infection but rather describes it simply as his “opinion.”

However, soon Camillo must acknowledge Leontes’ actual bodily distress. He cries, “my ground to do’t / Is the obedience to a master, one / Who in rebellion with himself will have / All that are his so too” (1.2.349-352). Camillo now reveals that Leontes’ disease is one causing internal strife. Hysteria, with its hallucinations and violent responses, fits this depiction perfectly, especially in the case of Leontes whose strife is not merely humoral, but also gender driven. Camillo finally concedes, when speaking with Polixenes, that Leontes suffers from “a sickness / Which puts some of us in distemper, but / I cannot name the disease” (1.2.379-381). Camillo must know the disease, for he realizes that it can cause a symptom of distemper; however, he is unwilling to reveal it. Hysteria, a typically feminine disease now manifesting itself in a king whose role is to provide a hyper-masculinized symbol for his country, cannot be spoken of for the repercussions that the questioning of a king’s gender might hold.

As Leontes’ hysterical disease thus continues to grow, even as it remains unnamed, he still maintains his desire for eternal innocence and youth. He comments to Hermione regarding Mamillius:

Looking on the lines
Of my boy’s face, methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched,
In my green velvet coat, my dagger muzzled
Lest is should bite its master and so prove,
As ornaments oft do, too dangerous.
How like, methoughts, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman. (1.2.153-160)

There is significance in Leontes’ description of Mamillius as “my boy,” rather than acknowledging Hermione as his mother. Leontes thereby reveals his ultimate desire to possess an heir, but without the presence of a maternal figure. His entire speech thus emphasizes his rejection of a normative heterosexual reproductive landscape. Adelman notices, “in this construction of likeness, the signs of Mamillius’s difference from him are signs not of an illegitimate father, but of his mother’s contaminating presence in her son: if he is her child, then he is not fully his father’s” (225). He not only wishes to reject the “sinful” woman, but also desires to join Mamillius in his youthful and innocent state. His desire is so vast that it inspires a hallucination within him, adding to his hysterical symptoms of delusions, so that he sees “[him]self unbreeched.” The notation of breeching is particularly striking for it not only indicates the young age that Leontes wishes to return to, but also rejects his own masculinity in a revelation of another feminine influence. Before children are breeched, they wear the same gowns regardless of gender. By desiring a return to this time, Leontes also wants to again inhabit an ambiguously gendered state, for, if all little boys and girls are dressed alike, then they lose clothing as a crucial marker of gender.

Leontes mention of a “dagger muzzled” reveals that he wishes to return to a state free not only of gender, but also of sexuality. His “dagger” can easily be reinterpreted as a phallic reference. That he wishes for it to be “muzzled” implies that he not only has no
desire for sexual copulation, but also none for the production of offspring for which a non-muzzled dagger would be necessary. Interestingly, he fears more that the dagger will turn against himself than anyone else, and for this reason he holds it “muzzled.” His statement implies that he fears some form of harm if he engages in sexual acts. This fear, however, has already been confirmed by Polixenes’ tale, for it was indeed sexual desire and consummation that led to an expulsion from the Edenic pastoral of their childhood. Therefore, he regards his dagger (or phallus) as merely an “ornament” for decorative purposes but with no actual function in his life as well as an object that must be carefully controlled with any potential for sexual action removed through “muzz[ling].”

As Leontes’ hysteria continues to build, he expresses more strongly strikingly feminine characteristics. His disdain for adult masculinity, emphasized through his desire to return to the desexualized boyhood that Mamillius now inhabits, leads to a necessary surging of femininity. As Greenblatt has illustrated, a constant power struggle between male and female features consumed the human body, and if one rejects a particular gender, as does Leontes to sexualized masculinity, then the dormant will emerge. Leontes’ exhibition of female markers allows him to develop the predominantly feminine disease of hysteria. Male hysteria was, according to the medical views of Edward Jorden and his contemporaries, a theoretical possibility in the Renaissance and thus Leontes could possibly fall victim to the hysterical disease. But, since the disease was widely believed to develop from uterine fury, Leontes’ hysteria holds intensive female implications. As Leontes’ hysteria grows more violent and aggressive, he moves
closer to his point of ultimate fall to the disease, and its consequences, in Hermione’s trial and “death” scene.
CHAPTER III

Leontes has shown that even when facing typically feminine hysterical symptoms as a result of his refusal to assume adult masculinity and the sexual productivity it entails, he still maintains a desire for the innocent and sterile state of boyhood. However, Leontes’ disdain for masculinity necessarily entails an emergence of feminine attributes under the Renaissance model of the one sex, in which gender is formed by practice and both male and female gender constantly struggle for domination over a particular body. With the further loss of masculine features as Leontes’ hysteria rises, he must eventually surrender the most masculine of his accoutrements, those that proclaim his reproductive abilities, specifically his heir and his wife (who could produce more heirs). The trial of Hermione is the key moment for these losses to occur and acts as the catalyzing moment for Leontes’ realization of the necessity of encompassing adult masculinity, particularly in his status as monarch and symbol of his nation.

As Hermione’s trial begins, Leontes focuses on certain physical aspects of his own self that hold a surprisingly feminine connotation. He comments, “This sessions, to our great grief we pronounce, / Even pushes ‘gainst our heart; the party tried / The daughter of a king, our wife, and one / Of us too much beloved” (3.2.1-4). He focuses on the intense emotion that he feels towards the proceedings and towards Hermione who has been “too much beloved” by him. His inability to control his emotions mimics Renaissance assumptions of women. Renaissance medical texts argue that women, due to humoral makeup, are less rational than their male counterparts and thus unable to reign
in passions and desires. Noga Arikha, in describing French physician Jacques Ferrand’s (c. CE 1623) treatise on love-melancholy, remarks that “in a chapter entitled ‘Whether Love in Women Is Greater and Therefore Worse Than in Men,’ he explained that, although women had a naturally cold and humid temperament, lacking in heat, while the erotic impulse was stronger in hot and dry temperaments, women in fact tended to be more passionate, ‘witless, maniacal, and frantic from love’ than men, simply because, as Galen had written, they did ‘not have the rational powers for resisting such strong passions’” (163). Leontes’ loss of rational ability in his emotions towards Hermione, already expressed through his harsh condemnation of her earlier in the play, reflects his continued loss of masculine attributes in a turn towards the typically presumed feminine. Just as Leontes had commented upon the changing status of his physical body in earlier scenes through the rise of his hysteria, his references now serve to further expressions of both his hysteria and the femininity that it grants to him.

The heart functions as a major symbol of the emergence in Leontes of dormant feminine physical traits. Leontes’ first mention of the heart came with, “Too hot, too hot! / To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods. / I have tremor cordis on me; my heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy” (1.2.107-110). As in the case of his loss of rational ability regarding Hermione, Leontes is now overly passionate, unable to control the “dancing” of his heart. Just as hysterics lose control over their bodily functions, so Leontes no longer possesses restraint concerning the movements of his heart. Again, his specific description of, and association with, an organ of passion and, therefore, implicit femininity emphasizes that Leontes rejection of adult masculinity has led to the necessary
takeover of gendered attributes by his dormant feminine elements. Furthermore, Aristotle and Galen both agreed that the heart “is the primary ‘reproductive’ organ in the body” (Erickson 4), and Leontes’ focus on his heart thereby serves to emphasize his continued fixation towards reproduction, specifically its necessary sexual nature.

His “twinned lamb” turned presumed traitor, Polixenes, also comments on Leontes’ heart and his lack of control regarding it. When Camillo describes the “disease” he cannot name to Polixenes and reveals that it is jealousy over believed adultery, Polixenes responds with, “I do believe thee: / I saw his heart in ‘s face” (1.2.445-446). Leontes has lost control of his heart and let it rule his “face” and his actions in a manner apparent to all. In thrall to passion, in a humorally believed feminine matter, Leontes’ turn away from masculinity becomes ever more evident. Before the trial, Leontes proclaims to his noblemen:

    Summon a session that we may arraign
    Our most disloyal lady, for, as she hath
    Been publicly accused, so shall she have
    A just and open trial. While she lives
    My heart will be a burthen to me. Leave me
    And think upon my bidding. (2.3.202-207)

As one who is in charge of a trial, he plans to be “just and open,” but his confession that his heart affects him so intensely is troubling. The arbiter of a court of law should remain rational and detached from the court proceedings. Ideally, a king, as the pinnacle figure of masculinity and power within a kingdom, should also embody these ideals of justice and rationality. Leontes, however, thinks more upon his heart, and its influence upon his body and actions, rather than his more masculine reason. He fully acknowledges that an
organ symbolic of femininity and passion holds sway over his emotional control and his conduct of the trial.

Leontes’ goes even further as he specifically identifies the heart as an organ inherently displaying femininity. When Paulina approaches him to plead for Hermione and young Perdita, Leontes snidely responds to Antigonus:

Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to this.  
My child? away with’t! Even thou, that hast  
A heart so tender o’er it, take it hence  
And see it instantly consumed with fire (2.3.131-134)

Leontes portrays Paulina’s heart as out of her control and as an independent force. It is not Paulina who is “tender o’er” the child, but rather her heart that is given the responsibility for this emotion. Again, passion and loss of control over bodily organs is depicted as a significantly feminine attribute.

Leontes’ fulfillment of the trope of infanticide serves as well to confirm the feminine connection to passion and illogical actions. During Shakespeare’s time, “infanticide was the major cause, after witchcraft, for the execution of women” (King 212), and Leontes’ desire to kill his newborn female child is inherently feminine in the connotations it evokes. As Leontes proclaims to Antigonus:

We enjoin thee,  
As thou art liege-man to us, that thou carry  
This female bastard hence and that thou bear it  
To some remote and desert place quite out  
Of our dominions, and that there thou leave it,  
Without more mercy, to its own protection  
And favour of the climate. (2.3.173-179)
he evokes the socially presumed maternal desire to expel an infant child. Stephanie Chamberlain writes extensively on the early modern concept of maternal infanticide through the character of Lady Macbeth. She notes:

While [Lady Macbeth] clearly seeks power, such power is, I would argue, conditioned on maternity, an ambiguous, conflicted status in early modern England. Indeed, the images of nursing and infanticide that frame Lady Macbeth’s act one fantasy invoke a maternal agency, momentarily empowering the achievement of an illegitimate political goal. (73)

Maternal agency through infanticide was a dangerous prospect in the early modern period and “that mothers could underline patrilineal outcomes, in fact, contributed to a generalized cultural anxiety about women’s roles in the transmission of lineage” (Chamberlain 73). Leontes identification as committer of infanticide not only leads to further feminine portrayal, but also recalls that the act he now orders, in an attack on his own lineage, is equivalent to the very crime of which he accuses Hermione. Hermione is “slippery” (1.2.272), and “a hobby horse, deserves a name / As rank as any flax-wench that puts to / Before her trothplight” (1.2.275-277), according to Leontes. A main reason for his anger is apparently concern over the dissolution of his blood line. Leontes’ direct questioning of Mamillius with, “How now, you wanton calf? /Art thou my calf?” (1.2.126-127), confirms his fear that the possession of his heir has been taken from him through cuckoldry. That Leontes now partakes of the very patrilineal attack with which he accused Hermione serves to even further highlight his growing appropriation of feminine traits and rejection of adult productive masculinity.

The conception of Leontes’ heart becomes a further point of gender conflict upon Hermione’s swooning after the reading of the Delphic oracle’s proclamation. Leontes
shows little concern for Hermione as he proclaims, “Take her hence / Her heart is but o’ercharged; she will recover” (3.2.149-150). He immediately associates an overwhelming emotional response with an affliction of the heart, heedless of his own manifestation of this same disorder. Hermione’s performance of what critic Kaara Peterson calls “a parody of the hysterical device, available to Shakespeare to exploit only because such lore is familiar to early modern culture” (251) continues to emphasize Leontes’ own development of the disease. While Leontes does not perform the “swoon” of sudden death attributed to womb suffocation in hysterical women, he still exhibits the same heart “o’ercharg[ing]” as does his emotional and fallen wife. Hermione’s hysterical display also allows for her removal from Leontes as a means of reproductive linearity. Her proclaimed death, along with the actual death of Mamillius, provide Leontes with the ultimate realization that without an appreciation of mature sexuality, no reproduction can take place for a continuation of his lineage, and thus cause him to enter a period of penitence and maturation, during which his masculine characteristics can reassert themselves over the feminine.

Paulina encourages this representation of the heart as feminine with her own later words highlighting the power of her heart’s passions over exterior forces. Following Hermione’s swoon, Paulina reenters with, “Woe the while! / O, cut my lace, lest my heart, cracking it, / Break, too” (3.2.172-174). She receives a response of, “What fit is this, good lady?” (3.2.174), from one of Leontes’ lords, emphasizing her obvious distress. Her heart is given the blame for her intense emotion and highlighted as a symbol of passion, with its connotations of a feminine status. Her heart is powerful enough to break
from her body and “crack” the lace stays of her dress, and it is her female passion that gives the heart this strength.

Paulina further expresses the femininity of the heart as she explains the events that have befallen Hermione and young Mamillius following Leontes’ rejection of the words of the oracle. In response to beratement by the lord, who scolds, “Say no more: / Howe’er the business goes, you have made fault / I’ the boldness of your speech” (3.2.216-218), she cries out, “Alas! I have show’d too much / The rashness of woman: he is touch’d / To the noble heart” (3.2.220-222). As a woman she should not have spoken frankly to Leontes and disobeyed social custom. However, Paulina reuses this custom for her own purposes when she agrees she has “show’d too much” of her emotions, and she then blames this upon “The rashness of woman.” As Leontes has just acted in a rash manner through his dismissal of the oracle, that “rashness” is proclaimed as the domain of women emphasizes the commonly believed feminine attributes that Leontes now possesses. His femininity is further stressed when Paulina comments on the status of his heart. While it is still “noble” as befits a monarch, it has also been “touch’d” and taken out of Leontes’ own control. Just as a woman’s heart controls her actions and responses, so Leontes’ heart now controls him and forces him to act passionately and imprudently, causing the assumed death of Hermione.

Throughout the trial, Leontes, who, as king, should portray a masculine voice of reason, instead falls further into overly emotional and hysterical symptoms. Hermione notes that he “speak[s] a language that I understand not” (3.2.80), emphasizing the nonsensical nature of his ravings. Leontes then claims, “Your actions are my dreams”
(3.2.82), and his focus on “dreams,” which are likely hallucinations, as reasonable evidence in a trial is far from rational. Leontes now openly admits that he is fixated on Hermione’s “actions,” which he has never actually seen. Thus, his dreams must be created from his own imagination in the paranoid manner of hysterics.

It is Leontes’ summary rejection of the oracle, however, that finally leads to his loss of his ultimate masculine attributes. Hermione has already set up the precedence of the oracle as the highest of authorities with, “Your honours all, / I do refer me to the oracle: / Apollo be my judge” (3.2.114-116). The lords of court agree to this request and one comments, “This your request / Is altogether just: therefore bring forth, / And in Apollo’s name, his oracle” (3.2.116-118). Apollo and his divinity are apparently unquestioned by all. Leontes confirms this view as the voice of initial suggestion to seek the words of the oracle for verification of Hermione’s presumed crimes. He announces:

I have dispatched in post
To sacred Delphos, to Apollo’s temple,
Cleomenes and Dion, whom you know
Of stuffed sufficiency. Now from the oracle
They will bring all, whose spiritual counsel had
Shall stop or spur me. (2.1.183-188)

However, when the oracle disagrees with his hallucinatory claims toward Hermione by writing:

Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found” (3.2.132-136)

Leontes immediately and irrationally disagrees with the oracle’s proclamation. He sternly decrees, “There is no truth at all i’ th’ oracle / The sessions shall proceed. This is
mere falsehood” (3.2.140-141) and speaks entirely on emotion. In this instance, he follows the humoral view of women as the more passionate sex in its most extreme form. Leontes has become delusional to the level where he will ignore the words of the gods, who hold authority far beyond his own as a mortal king. The oracle proclaims that Leontes must find Perdita to regain his heir, but, one can read, he also notes that if Leontes’ does not rediscover his lost adult masculinity, he will never again be worthy of a patrilineal heir.

Immediately following his descent into unreasoned passion, the court receives word of the death of Mamillius, Leontes’ sole male heir. Following that announcement comes the swoon of Hermione and the loss of Leontes’ wife. Stunned and forcibly feminized, Leontes swiftly changes his attitude. “I have too much believed mine own suspicion,” he states (3.2.151), but the return of his rationality comes too late. While infection by feminine hysteria has removed Leontes of the adult male gender he wished to escape, it has come at the cost of his son and wife as symbols of his sexual productivity. Through his disdain for sexually mature masculinity, he has unwittingly allowed feminine elements to assert physical control and display the female dominant disease of hysteria. This hysteria has then led to a loss of Leontes’ critical male accoutrements, while emphasizing that in order for patrilineal succession to appropriately take place, the patriarch must fully embrace reproductive masculinity.

After the exits of Mamillius and Hermione, Leontes must also disappear from the narrative of the play as it shifts to the overly abundant and fertile land of Bohemia, a significant contrast to Leontes’ newly gained status of sterility. He vows to never
remarry and will instead “visit / the chapel where [Mamillius and Hermione] lie”
(3.2.238-239) daily. While Leontes spends the entire first half of the play desirous of a
return to his youthful state of innocence, free from the “sinfulness” of sexual
productivity, he now reaches the play’s midpoint in the very state of desexualization for
which he had longed. However, as the loss of Hermione and Mamillius has revealed,
such a desire for removal from mature sexuality can only result in disastrous
consequences. Leontes’ chaste sixteen year absence from the narrative not only serves to
emphasize his punishment, but also allow him to reach sexual maturation from the
childish position he reentered at the play’s midpoint. When he reappears in the play’s
closing scenes, he has learned not to fight against normative social behavior and
embraces its ways he had earlier rejected and the future productivity of his daughter and
son-in-law. Ultimately, the force of feminine hysteria does press Leontes into a state of
acceptance towards productivity. However, the consequences he receives for the
necessity of this disciplinary action are far from mild.
CHAPTER IV

While a textual analysis of *The Winter’s Tale* can make a compelling argument for hysteria as the cause of Leontes’ sudden and violent rage, how might stage actors then use this possibility in dramatic performance? Have any theatrical productions used hysteria as the reasoning for Leontes’ jealousy? Even if not, how might certain aspects of hysteria have appeared in both actor’s and director’s decisions concerning the portrayal of Leontes? How has the portrayal of Leontes’ madness changed from Shakespeare’s time to the early twenty first century?

To answer these questions, one must first examine the critical performances of *The Winter’s Tale* to properly analyze the development of acting and directorial choices for the role of Leontes. For even further analysis of these questions, I have chosen selected scenes from two modern Shakespeare performances to detail and discuss throughout this chapter. Firstly, I will look at Act 1, Scene 2, Act 2, Scene 1, and Act 3, Scene 2 from the 1981 television production, directed by Jane Howell and starring Jeremy Kemp as Leontes and Anna Calder-Marshall as Hermione. Next, I will discuss Act 2, Scene 1 of the 1999 Royal Shakespeare Company Barbican performance, directed by Greg Doran with Antony Sher as Leontes and Alexandra Gilbreath as Hermione.

*The Winter’s Tale* has a long and varied performance history. While popular during the early years of its production, the eighteenth century was unable to properly understand the values of the play and cut it into smaller parts, which focused on the humorous and pastoral scenes of the original play’s latter half. It was not until the
nineteenth century that *The Winter’s Tale* regained its prominence in its full and original form. Through the play’s history, the performance of Leontes has reflected the play’s own production developments. As one examines modern performances of Leontes in *The Winter’s Tale*, theatrical decisions by actors and directors have very clear precedents within the performance history.

Dennis Bartholomeusz comments of *The Winter’s Tale* “during the early seventeenth century *The Winter’s Tale* was performed more often than *King Lear*; while this is no guarantee of its artistic merit it shows that the play was popular at court” (12). While it may therefore be surprising that the play then lost its popularity in the eighteenth century, Bartholomeusz is quick to explain that “the play does hold a mirror up to nature. Shakespeare confronts the sexual reality, taking into account its disturbing elements and giving us a sense of its place in human life as a whole” (9), as a means of explaining this occurrence. The denizens of the eighteenth century preferred to focus on the play’s lighter elements at the expense of its darker initial scenes, as well to preserve the classical unities, which Shakespeare had ignored. A popular adaptation by David Garrick was a play “reduced to its comic, pastoral and romantic elements, the tragic first half described in a brief conversation, the unities in this way carefully restored” (Bartholomeusz 2). It was not until 1802, under the direction of John Philip Kemble, that the play’s first half was finally performed again.

Reviews and stage directions of these early productions reveal a surprising evolution of the portrayal of Leontes’ jealousy. During the play’s initial Renaissance staging “implicit stage directions in Leontes’ first soliloquy, when his sexual jealousy
surfaces, suggest stage business which feeds that jealousy: ‘to be paddling palms and pinching fingers’ (I.1.115)” (Bartholomeusz 17), and thus Leontes is presumed reasonable in his suspicions towards his wife and best friend. This performance of jealousy disappeared with the first half during the eighteenth century, but its reemergence under Kemble shows a strikingly different performance technique. Kemble established a new scene for the play to take place within “The King’s Closet” following the courtroom trial. The scene would reveal the repentance of Leontes and through it “Kemble wished to suggest the passage of time, during which grief could gather and self-realisation mature in Leontes. The scene possibly served to make Leontes’ grief less public, more private, convincing on a naturalistic plane” (Bartholomeusz 47). The scene also held the consequence of revealing the falsity of Leontes’ initial suspicions and cementing Hermione’s innocence. While the Renaissance performances of the play may have cast doubt on Hermione’s purity, Kemble’s staging assures that her fidelity has never been questionable.

Costumes became meaningful in Kemble’s production, and Leontes’ own held direct correlation to his jealous rages. As Bartholomeusz notes:

Kemble’s first costume for Leontes suggested the formalities and rich ceremonial of Tudor rather than Elizabethan or Jacobean times. He wore a velvet and gold mantle – presumably this was velvet upon velvet – a blue and gold dress, and white hose with black sandals. He also wore a sword, and a gold coronet with white plumes on a velvet ground. The jealousy of Leontes possibly stood out in sharp relief against the formal elegance and royalty of the costume. His second costume (V.i.) was in contrast an austere black. (50-51).
As I will later discuss in detailed case studies, costuming for Leontes became a critical part of the staging of Leontes. Whether it is through color or material, clothing takes on higher significance when attached to his hysterical outbursts.

However, not just clothing or props aided an interpretation of Leontes’ jealousy. A later production of the play by William Macready, beginning in 1823, “appears to have done little to change the visual forms established by Kemble” (Bartholomeusz 64), but “his interpretation of Leontes was startling in its emotional realism. The shifting colours of feeling in Kemble’s Leontes were not as unpredictable, not as magnificently physical as Macready’s, whose art poised on the edge of absurdity was yet very moving in its abandon and fine excess” (Bartholomeusz 65). Macready’s performance was a shock to the London theater scene. A review by *The Times* on November 6, 1823 describes:

Macready’s jealousy was not an instantaneous revelation. It was incipient […], ‘gradually ripening into a conviction of his consort’s guilt and finally terminating in bitter hatred.’ The jealousy was ‘traced through all its torturous ramifications’ though the differences in detail suggest an essential difference in style. (Bartholomeusz 66)

While the reviewer disliked Macready’s less “dignified” performance than that of Kemble, he did note that Macready played Leontes with more passion and energy. Macready also was unafraid to distort Leontes’ speech for the sake of displaying intense emotion. As Bartholomeusz describes, “when he came to the outrageous questions to Camillo, which Kemble had asked with insane clarity, the rapidity of his speech blurred the meaning, an effect perhaps intended” (66). While critics negatively responded to Macready’s obscuring of the lines, the practice of allowing Leontes’ voice to reflect his jealous energy became standardized for many later performances of the play.
Harley Granville-Barker took the helm of one of the first 20th century productions of *The Winter’s Tale* at London’s Savoy theater in 1912. Henry Ainsley acted Leontes to controversial effect. Bartholomeusz retells the story of one critic:

Sil Vara, the German critic, who came over to see the production, registered the shock of the contrast between the nervous jealousy of Leontes and his unique surroundings, the primary colours of the costumes, the strange patterns created by the play of light on the set. Ainsley’s Leontes appeared to him to be a neurasthenic, driven to self-destruction and murder by a mania. He could see in his pale, mad face, in his black, streaky hair (unique streaks of hair which were made by the finest wigmaker of the day, an artist in his craft, William Clarkson) how a hurt sexuality could be converted to cruel madness. (151)

Gone were the days of a Leontes who might receive sympathy and understanding for his suspicions. Barker had recognized the development of a mental insanity within Leontes and directed Ainsley accordingly. He did not find rational, Leontes’ outbursts and

“Ainsley, directed by Barker, did not see the jealousy of Leontes as dignified, noble or tragic, but as perverse and pitiable. Jealousy was not ‘noble’ as in *Othello*, for jealousy upon any foundation, Barker had argued, was less than jealousy” (Bartholomeusz 170). Ainsley also borrowed Macready’s vocal techniques and “took the later speeches in a measured way with grave gentleness, whereas ‘the whole of the first, jealous, phase was shadowed in the jerky, hurried measure of the verse’” (Bartholomeusz 152). Both actors recognized that Leontes’ madness was all consuming and thus his speech and vocal abilities must be affected in performance, even to the detriment of the clarity of Shakespeare’s lines.

The motivation of Leontes’ jealousy, along with the reactions to him of those around him, became the new subject to develop in the mid to late 20th century. A 1937 Stratford-upon-Avon production by Iden Payne “suggest[ed] that Shakespeare wished to
show that the emotion of jealousy had been aroused in Leontes before the play began. Baliol Halloway accordingly played the jealous man from the start. The idea we know had occurred to Benson, to H.B. Irving, and to Charles Kean before them” (Bartholomeusz 202). By contrast, in a 1958 Stratford, Ontario production “it became clear very gradually that Christopher Plummer was playing Leontes as a victim. Plummer’s anguished Leontes expressed this most powerfully and movingly, showing him as a man singled out for destruction by a power outside himself” (Bartholomeusz 187). However, by 1975, Leontes appeared again as an unsympathetic figure in the Oregon Shakespeare Festival at Ashland. Bartholomeusz describes “James Edmondon, who played Leontes, saw mainly the impassioned animal in the king, a lion without control, without dignity in the first half of the play” (192). Edmondon also varied his speech to emphasize emotional outrage and lack of control. During his performance ‘Is whispering nothing?’ (I.ii.284) was whispered to Camillo, on the edge of tears, with great self pity. ‘Shall I be heard?’ was screamed out hysterically, making a sharp contrast with the restrained, suddenly desolate patience of Hermione” (Bartholomeusz 192). The contrast between an outraged Leontes and a restrained Hermione appears again in both of the plays I have selected for closer study, suggesting a newly adhered to trope for productions of the play.

In 1981, the BBC produced a television movie version of The Winter’s Tale, as part of their attempt to film versions of all known Shakespeare plays. Directed for television by Jane Howell, and with Jeremy Kemp as Leontes and Anna Calder-Marshall as Hermione, the film shows the influences of many earlier stagings of the play, through
both directorial decisions and the acting choices of Kemp for Leontes. From costuming
to props to acting decisions by Kemp and Calder-Marshall, previous innovations through
*The Winter’s Tale’s* performance history can be obviously seen.

The choice of costume color for the major characters in the play’s first half works
critically to establish their various statuses throughout the play’s actions. While the
costumes are ambiguous in cultural and historical background, they are muted for all of
the characters. Fur is incorporated, with Leontes’ clothing mainly composed of an
enormous fur coat, while Hermione’s garments merely use animal fur as decorative trim.
Polixenes and Hermione both wear white and light tan draping robes with similar fur
trim. By contrast, Leontes is dressed in immense black garments. Leontes’ black fur
serves several purposes, one of which being to subtly foreshadow Antigonus’ later death
by bear, for while Leontes himself never follows through on his various death threats to
Antigonus, that Antigonus is later killed by a bear, whom Leontes initially resembles
through his attire, provides interesting imagery. Leontes is also a tall man with extreme
facial hair dissimilar to Polixenes own clean shaven face. All of Leontes’ lords, as well,
are either barefaced or with very minimal facial hair. Leontes’ facial hair acts as a
marker of his excessive masculinity; however, it is also shown negatively, for this
masculinity then leads to his extreme jealousy. This production portrays Leontes as
overly masculine, leading to his excessive passion, rather than feminine, but he still does
not embrace the socially approved form of the male gender as revealed in a textual
analysis of *The Winter’s Tale.*
Leontes’ differing clothing color from Polixenes and Hermione sets a clear tone for the onset of Leontes’ jealousy in 1.2. As Polixenes and Hermione move away from Leontes, he turns to speak quietly and directly to the camera. All of his moments of aside are handled in this manner and lend an element of uncertainty to the viewing experience. Leontes begins speaking to the audience without clarifying if he knows he is speaking to others or if he believes himself to be speaking only to himself. If Leontes does speak without an awareness he is breaking the fourth wall of audience participation, then his mental instability becomes far more evident, right at the moment when his jealousy first begins to brew. His vocal level when speaking to the camera is surprising, for he whispers rather than speaks normally as if the other characters might overhear his words. Again, two interpretations exist, for either the other characters can hear his words when he speaks aside to the camera and so he must whisper as to not attract attention, or the words he speaks he considers so heinous that he must whisper them to avoid their reality.

As Leontes continues to speak to the camera, he is placed in foreground while Hermione and Polixenes remain in the background, only viewable over Leontes’ right shoulder. Leontes acts as speaker to the audience as well as providing them the same view of the Polixenes and Hermione that he holds. Using this angle, the director allows the audience to see the couple and draw their own conclusions. In this instance, the actions of Polixenes and Hermione appear perfectly innocent, thus Leontes’ view of the two as adulterous loses merit and emphasizes his development of hallucinations. Polixenes and Hermione, in their matching white clothing, do appear to be a perfectly matched couple giving the potential for credence to Leontes’ suspicions; however, the
light color of their clothing also hearkens associations of purity and innocence and thus
his jealousy appears unwarranted. In addition, the purity evoked by Polixenes’ and
Hermione’s color of dress draws attention to the heavy black clothing worn by Leontes
and lends a possible interpretation of Leontes as already diseased and infected by
darkness.

While Leontes speculates further on the relationship between Polixenes and
Hermione, he continues in a low tone until the entrance of Mamillius. Mamillius is
dressed in a light grey suit, which, drawing upon the coloring of Hermione and Leontes’
own garments, gives an obvious symbol of his lineage from both of them. However,
Mamillius possesses darker hair, similar to Hermione’s, rather than the light reddish
hair of Leontes. Physically, Mamillius looks far similar to Hermione, which gives more
evidence to aid Leontes’ suspicions about his son’s parentage and whether they are
actually “like as eggs.” Since they are far from physically identical, this implies that they
are thus not “like as eggs” and the women who say so are liars, providing further
suspicions towards these women’s, particularly Hermione’s, honesty on other matters.

Leontes continues his speech to the camera while he attends to Mamillius and his
back and forth between the viewing audience and his son highlights his changing moods.
He speaks cheerfully to Mamillius and acts as a normal father, but when he turns to the
camera, he gives his suspicions over his son’s background in a low and harsh tone. With
his first aside as he comments, “They say [Mamillius’ nose] is a copy out of mine,” his
tone still retains some of the happiness from his conversation with Mamillius; however,
the harshness has begun to master his speech. As his asides of suspicion grow more
numerous, his tone becomes angrier in his interactions with Mamillius as well. While initially, his particular “mental” voice used to air his suspicions maintained a tone separate from his real world actions with Mamillius, it swiftly begins to enter into these interactions. As his voice from his asides has entered into the world of the play from his own mind, his suspicions have jumped from solely his internal monologues to his reality. His voice also begins to raise and take on a more violent quality from his initial whisper. Through this technique, Howell is able to subtly show the onset of Leontes’ madness as his voice reflects and symbolizes the movement of his paranoid thoughts from his hallucinatory imagination to his full vision of his reality.

Leontes’ asides while playing with Mamillius also bring up the earlier issue as to whether other characters from the world of the play are capable of hearing his words directed to the camera and thus to the viewing audience. Mamillius occasionally glances at Leontes during his asides, allowing that he potentially hears Leontes’ ravings but chooses not to respond. Again, this heightens the uncertainty over how much of Leontes’ words can be heard by those who surround him. As he closes his speech to Mamillius, Polixenes and Hermione look at him and wonder what causes his agitation. Either all around him can actually hear Leontes’ words, in which case his ravings become all the more an actual sign of hysteria, or, if the words are being spoken by him only internally to himself, he still physically has become angered enough to alert Hermione and Polixenes.

After Leontes assuages the worries of Hermione and Polixenes, he begins to speak of young Mamillius and his wistfulness when looking at Mamillius and recounting
his own childhood is obvious. That this wistfulness immediately follows his anger and suspicions towards Hermione allows it to become both a yearning for childhood as a time of general innocence and a yearning for childhood as a time before his marriage to Hermione and ensnarement by a female betrayer. He then expresses his anger with Hermione as he begins a new monologue, while she leaves with Polixenes. Mamillius slowly creeps up to him, only to be rebuffed with calls to “go play!” by Leontes. As Leontes grows more passionate, his calls to Mamillius take on an angrier tone. Mamillius moves away from Leontes, only to end up in a position over Leontes’ left shoulder in the background. He now hold a similar position to the one Polixenes and Hermione did in the viewpoint of the audience during Leontes’ earlier rant, except over the opposite shoulder. The vision of the young boy thus represents the potential for reproduction between Polixenes and Hermione, and by equating him with them, more fully expresses Leontes’ deep suspicions over the paternity of both of his children.

The first scene of the second act begins with young Mamillius’ loving interactions with his mother and her ladies. Mamillius is comfortable in the female environment and a light atmosphere is set. However, the entrance of Leontes immediately ruins the peacefulness of this feminine area. While Mamillius is able to happily exist among the women of his mother’s court, Leontes, who focuses on the homosociality of his childhood, is too hypermasculine to ever enter the fabric of such a world. When Leontes enters with his lords, who are all dressed in black, they represent a sharp visual divide from Hermione and her women, who dress all in cream and other light colors. Mamillius, again in grey, symbolically bridges the gap between them, although, because of his
youth, still takes after his mother more with the lightness of his clothing. As a boy, he is still able to step into the female world, but the implication is that when he grows older, he will darken and join the male world of his father and the gender divide will be reestablished.

After Leontes confers with his men on Hermione’s guilt, he turns to the camera and begins a new diatribe directed to the audience. His face fills the screen and Howell takes advantage of the actors’s own physical features to display Leontes’ descent into madness. Jeremy Kemp’s right eye is much smaller than his left, and the asymmetry of his face as he begins to rant adds to a deranged look and emphasizes his hysteria. He speaks softly and conspiratorially to the camera, although the speed of his speech conveys his unstable emotions. This again creates an uncertainty as to whether those who surround Leontes can hear his words, thus heightening the sense that he might appear hysterical to those within the world of the play, not just the viewing audience.

As he turns to his men and away from the camera, he manages to subdue the anger of his diatribe to the audience and speaks with a tone of command rather than his previous outrage. However, his means of controlling his anger is through the tactic of speaking directly to his men rather than to Hermione, allowing him to neutralize his emotional reaction by not addressing the object of his ire. He moves to circle Hermione, emphasizing his larger physical stature and threatening presence but continues to speak to the lords rather than her, although his words are for her ears as well. By speaking only to the men, Leontes also does not allow Hermione any opportunity for response. He uses a conspiratorial tone, similar to the one directed to the camera and the viewing audience, as
he whispers to the lords the entirety of his evidence against Hermione without ever allowing her time or an opening for rebuttal. Only when he has finished displaying his litany of evidence does he give a full denunciation of Hermione, yet he still does not speak to her but only to his men as he refuses to engage with her.

When he finally turns to address Hermione, he immediately takes on a more angered tone of voice. While he makes his initial accusation to his lords in a level voice, once he turns to Hermione, his voice raises and becomes more volatile. As his volume goes up and down, his mood swings and lack of emotional control becomes evident. His hysteria is obvious as he displays the major symptom of inability to maintain vocal control. In an attempt to regain control, he moves back and forth between his lords and Hermione, for when he speaks to the lords rather than her, he is able to find a more measured and reasoned tone. By contrast, Hermione always speaks directly to Leontes, and her voice is always very level and modulated. This serves to emphasize Leontes’ own inability to control his vocal level and appear reasoned in his denunciation. In the 20th century world of the production, Leontes’ passionate and violent anger signifies a heightened masculinity; however, in the early modern understanding of humoral medicine, Leontes’ irrational rage skews far more to a portrayal of female behavior. After Hermione leaves the scene, Leontes places his hand to his mouth as if in pain. The display shows his weakness in a more feminine manner than did his previously displayed hypermasculinity. His mental state is obviously in turmoil as he stares at nothing and avoids the eyes of his lords as they entreat him for Hermione’s life. With the final accusation of Hermione, he has now lost all semblance of vocal control and as he speaks
with his lords, the volume of his voice rises and falls with little consistency, continuing to show his extreme division from the measured tones of the rational Hermione.

As Hermione’s trial begins in the second scene of the third act, an immediate change in atmosphere has occurred. Hermione is now dressed in grey clothing. As her innocence has been questioned, she no longer wears the white robes of purity. Leontes’ black “infection” as shown by his dark furs has tainted Hermione and left her a victim of his hysterical disease. However, that her dress now reflects a mixture of white and grey, similar to that of Mamillius, also shows her allegiance and connection to Leontes. She no longer wears clothing of the same shade as Polixenes but rather has embraced her bond to Leontes by incorporating his blackness into her white attire.

The scene begins with a close-up on Hermione’s face but with Leontes’ voice heavy in the background. The words of Leontes, as king of the realm, are enough to condemn Hermione entirely, and this staging emphasizes that while Leontes’ body, in the grip of his hysterical disease, is not fully present, it matters not as long as his voice is clear enough to condemn from his royal position of authority. As the camera moves back, the viewing audience sees Hermione from the perspective of the in-play audience watching the trial. This device is far from new as it was used in Barker’s 1912 production. As Bartholomeusz explains, in Barker’s performance “the realistic, neurasthenic element was made doubly more effective during the trial scene through the device of making the audience in the theatre take the place of the audience in court” (153). The remainder of the scene uses this same technique of viewing from the in-play audience perspective. A barren tree blocks Leontes from view, highlighting that he has
now become an unfruitful and unproductive presence, like the tree that takes his place in
our view of the scene. As he begins his initial proclamation against Hermione, it is as if
the tree, as a symbol of barrenness, speaks against her, who, rather than he husband, is an
obvious symbol of fruitfulness through her pregnant body.

Hermione’s response, as in her earlier scenes, maintains a tone of leveled reason.
Although her face shows intense emotion, she does not allow it to overwhelm her ability
to speak rationally to Leontes as she gives measured and reasonable arguments in her
defense. By contrast, Leontes shows no ability to control his voice: it is obviously
emotional and violently fluctuates in both volume level and tone. Even when Hermione
directly addresses the camera, she displays none of the emotion of Leontes when he
portrays the same act, and shows her mental state is as calm and rational as her outer
appearance. Hermione portrays a rational presence through her voice, as well as her
staging in opposition to Leontes’ violence. The lighting of the scene shows her as bright
and almost glowing, while Leontes’ presence under his canopy makes him appear
darkened and in shadow. Leontes’ position on his throne is a continuation of a tradition
within productions of *The Winter’s Tale*. Kemble set his trial scene so that “Leontes sat
up stage centre on a throne under a canopy modeled on the coronation throne in
Westminster Abbey, with single banners, and guards, six on each side of him, below
them pages, stage right and left” (Bartholomeusz 53), and Howell has created a similar
scene. This allows darkness to fall upon Leontes and the shadow reflects how
extensively his disease has consumed his body. At one point, while he speaks, he is shot
from below and appears physically enormous and bloated by the jealous disease that consumes him.

Hermione does, however, become emotional in her speech to Leontes, but she manages to swiftly quiet the emotions and recontain them. Through this, Hermione shows she possesses greater control over her own actions and emotions than does Leontes. With “speak a language,” she regains this control over her voice and also reveals to Leontes that she cannot speak or understand Leontes’ “language” of violent and emotional speech. The movement of the camera around the scene reveals that Hermione is not alone in her rationality. Her women are also dressed in similar shades of sober grey and her side of the stage represents reasoned discourse and level emotions while Leontes’ side, with a backdrop of his lords in black, represents infection, corruption, and violence through emotions and irrationality. One of Leontes’ lords in black does stand to Hermione’s side, showing that not all of Leontes’ men take his side of delusion and some do question him in the face of Hermione’s reason.

As the argument between the king and queen becomes more heated, Leontes stands and begins to physically move towards Hermione. His steps are jerky and he appears to not have control over his physical actions. In response, Hermione points to Leontes in a mirroring of his pointing to accuse her in the previous act. With the announcement that the proclamation of the oracle has appeared, Hermione turns to the camera for her only speech directed to the audience during the performance. She has now taken over Leontes’ position as the character with which the viewing audience identifies and understands. The reading of the oracle also highlights Leontes’ physical
dehumanization. He is placed in the background of the reading, so that the viewing audience may clearly see his reaction, and as the oracle’s pronouncement is read, his face appears pinched and twisted and his eyes dart around the scene madly.

Leontes’ denouncement of the oracle’s message evokes an immediate reaction as a messenger races in from offstage with the news of Mamillius’ death. Leontes’ physical descent into madness, shown through his deranged appearance, and his refusal to accept the words of the gods has provoked a quick response. He reaches out to Hermione as she falls and attempts to regain his productive ability, but it is too late. His madness and hysteria have resulted in a full loss of his heir and any possibility to gain a new one. Only upon his forgiveness of Hermione and a movement to an appropriate form of gender that is no longer hyper-masculinized can he regain his productive potential, and Perdita as his heir. The production emphasizes this through Leontes’ attire in the final scene. He is now dressed in brown, the color of the earth and thus productivity. He no longer wears his massive furs and hat and appears far smaller. He has lost the bloated infection of his hysterical disease and is ready to reenter his socially appropriate position.

In 1999, The Royal Shakespeare Company included *The Winter’s Tale* in their yearly program. Directed by Greg Doran and starring Antony Sher as Leontes and Alexandra Gilbreath as Hermione, it is a fascinating production to analyze in contrast with the 1981 television version, as well as the earlier stagings of the play. Act 2, Scene 1, with its violent accusations by Leontes towards Hermione is a useful scene to
accomplish this aim as it displays interactions between Hermione, Mamillius, and Leontes, as well as illustrating Leontes in the midst of his descent into hysteria.

A curious decision by Doran for the production involves the character of Mamillius. Mamillius is played by a female actress, who then doubles as Perdita later in the play. While this provides interesting possibilities concerning Leontes’ heir – for while he loses Mamillius, he gains Perdita who, according to this production, is entirely equivalent – it also makes Mamillius as an older character and, possibly to hide the actress’ real gender, places the boy in a wheelchair. Stripped of the freedom of movement of the young Mamillius in the 1981 production, this Mamillius is not as energetic, nor as obviously innocent. Hermione, however, makes up for this lack, and she is far more active and expressive than she was portrayed in the earlier production. She is also less inherently regal and, especially in the context of her grey and purple clothing rather than white, appears less obviously innocent.

Leontes’ enters the scene loudly and obviously intruding into the female space. He is already viciously angry and his men attempt to soothe his ire as he strides towards Hermione. In response, Hermione covers herself with her scarf in a gesture of protection and modesty. While such modesty might highlight her innocence, it also shows her desire to hide from her husband and forms the question of what she might need to keep secret from him. Leontes’ physical difference from his 1981 version is extreme. While Howell emphasized Kemp’s large girth and height as a marker of his hysteria, Sher is a far smaller man. He is the same height as Hermione, but shorter than the other male characters on stage. Rather than creating Leontes as a hyper-masculine figure, as in the
earlier production, his height in this version detracts from his masculinity and causes him to appear less masculine than the role of king might demand.

As Leontes approaches Hermione, he immediately distinguishes himself from his predecessor by his direct speech to her. While ostensibly his words are to his lords, he always speaks them directly to Hermione and retains eye contact with her. He attempts physical closeness and grabs her by the hand to move her around the stage. He then clasps her face and keeps their heads close, as he attempts to make Hermione understand his words. This clasp is an intimate gesture and one that is inappropriate before her ladies and his men. He appears tender but always with an edge of violence, and his speech is labored and slow, as if he were drunk or drugged. His men are never a presence as Leontes’ focus always remains entirely on Hermione.

Leontes continues his diatribe to Hermione with an apparent lack of control over his words. He appears confused at times and on several occasions loses track of his diction, causing stuttering and frustrated vocal utterances. At one point, he puts his hand to his mouth in horror, an action also seen in the 1981 production. It is an oddly feminine gesture and adds his lack of masculinity, displayed by both his physical appearance and his hysterical outbursts. When he cries, “mark her, lord,” he points sharply at Hermione in another identical moment from the earlier version. Leontes has lost full control over his speech and must now rely upon physical gestures, along with raised vocal volume, to emphasize his arguments.

Leontes’ emotions, as well as his voice, are out of his control. He appears to cry and starts to hug Hermione; however, he then has a swift change of mood to anger and
pushes her harshly away. Leontes continues these mood swings by moving sharply between quiet speech and vicious and violent anger, sometimes displayed physically as at one point he grabs Hermione and threatens to hit her. Leontes is stereotypically masculine for the modern world of 1999 in his violent responses; however, as in the 1981 production, he goes too far. He portrays a hyper-masculinity, although, mixed with the femininity of his physical appearance and gestures. At one point he stands rigidly with his hands to his sides and appears uncomfortable in his body. He seems to lack control over his physical movements as he is torn between expressing violent anger and soft tenderness towards Hermione. This can be seen as his body battling between the two genders present within him, and his fluctuations are the result. His lords appear to notice this dangerous combination and back away from him in fear as he continues to threaten Hermione.

Once Hermione begins to respond to him, he crosses his arms protectively and refuses to meet her gaze by looking down. He realizes his hysterical accusations appear weak in the face of her reasoned defenses and so instinctively protects himself and his hallucinatory beliefs. In his response, he still slurs his words and has difficulty in listing the reasons for which she must be punished. He works to defend his argument to his men, but his confusion is too great for him to do so properly. He then refuses to look at Hermione and begins to walk offstage as she begins her monologic entreaty, in stark contrast to his earlier consistent focus upon her. After she closes, he is immediately angered. Leontes is now breathing hard and sweating with widened eyes. Hermione’s rebuttal has led him to portray even more extreme physical markers of his hysteria. She
holds out her hand to him and he moves to her, appearing to hold back tears as he again vacillates between anger and tenderness towards her.

After Hermione is pulled offstage by Leontes’ guards, his hysteria continues to develop. He pulls out a cigarette, showing his reliance upon chemicals to retain his physical and mental stability. He begins to search through the purse Hermione has left behind, ostensibly to discover more evidence against her, while his lords begin to entreat him on Hermione’s behalf. However, he ignores them in favor of the purse, even after he appears to find nothing of note. This search emphasizes that Leontes has little evidence against Hermione for her presumed crime, and his finding nothing in her purse further signifies that she is innocent.

When Leontes does finally respond to his lords, it is in a far different manner than the 1981 production. In this version, Leontes acts and is staged against his lords and does not try to form a conspiratorial group with them. He is alone in his desire to accuse Hermione. He even uses violence against one of the lords to show not only his isolation from them, but to reveal his inability to now use any language other than violent rage. As the scene closes, Leontes is positioned with his back to the audience, just as he has turned his back on reason and rationality. When the play moves to the next scene, it is now clear to the viewing audience that Leontes has lost all physical and mental control to his hysterical disease.

By close analysis of the 1981 and 1999 productions of The Winter’s Tale, it is clear that both are greatly indebted to the many performances of the play that have come before. While the plays contain many differences in staging and acting, what remains
similar is the instability of Leontes’ gender when compared to accepted gender norms. In the 1981 version, Leontes is hypermasculinized to the point where he alienates his fellow men and cannot maintain any form of existence within a female landscape, like Hermione’s chambers. This complete inability to tolerate femininity thus leads him to an unproductive existence, for without a melding of genders through procreation, no heirs or children might be produced. In 1999, Leontes is more feminine, largely through the physical stature of Antony Sher and his emotional instability, stereotypically linked to the feminine, but also through his alienation from his men, even more completely than in the 1981 version. While neither production explicitly questions Leontes’ gender, enough hints are present within both to suggest that any performance of The Winter’s Tale necessarily includes this gender instability through its indelible presence within the original text of the play. As previously explored, gender instability is a key signifier of hysterical symptoms within The Winter’s Tale. Therefore, through the use of atypical expressions of gender, performances of the play are able to more thoroughly explore the manifestation of Leontes’ hysteria.
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