

Shakespeare's Own *Metamorphosis*: From Hermetic Revenge to Ovidian Alternatives in *The Winter's Tale*

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Abstract

This paper explores transformation in connection with female agency in *The Winter's Tale*, which features Hermione's metamorphosis. In this play late in Shakespeare's career, not only does the reader perceive Shakespeare writing at the height of his artistic powers, but one can also glimpse his own transition into a more perceptive reader of Ovid. Despite Shakespeare's arguably limited treatment towards women early in his oeuvre, he demonstrates an aesthetic transformation with his final romance, with Hermione's resurrection as supreme example. This paper demonstrates how Shakespeare forgoes his former preoccupation on revenge to value forgiveness in *The Winter's Tale*, where he invents creative alternatives to masculine authority by empowering women through female rhetoric, agency, and transformation, resulting in a more complex representation of gender. The paper argues that the aesthetic transformation in both *The Winter's Tale* and the playwright himself appears most explicitly in the statue scene in V.iii, in which Shakespeare reveals a more developed understanding of Ovidian episodes than he demonstrated earlier in his career in plays such as *Titus Andronicus*. Specifically, Shakespeare rereads and re-contextualises Ovid in order to distance himself from the insular logic of revenge, and in this process he creates alternatives to masculine power by reworking the tales of Pygmalion and Orpheus and Eurydice. The paper concludes that *The Winter's Tale* provides an inherently different representation of females, characterized in their newfound eloquence and agency through the Ovidian intertext. As opposed to his previous plays, Shakespeare grants female characters more creative and productive possibilities to shape their own fates. Even in the earliest scenes of the play, females possess qualities like eloquence, initiative, and perseverance; this pattern does not at all change by the end of the play, as Hermione is redeemed through Paulina's aesthetic vision. The force of Paulina's Ovidian-inspired creation transforms the male characters in the play and turns the playwright's classicism into contemporary critique. The paper ultimately argues that Shakespeare has become the honey-tongued Ovidian equal at last, as he no longer fears female power or oppresses it through hermetic revenge; he grants the women eloquence, agency, and creative alternatives, which leads to their empowerment.

Key words: Shakespeare, Ovid, Intertextuality

1. Introduction

The *Winter's Tale* is a play which features transformation and female agency in Hermione's resurrection which is directed by Paulina; however, one's understanding of the play's representation of transformation cannot be limited to a singular focus on Hermione's resurrection—the magic of the scene tends to obscure the sustained work in which the play's female characters engage to transform their world; furthermore, the play's investment in the force of both a singular and expansive notion of transformation is the evidence of Shakespeare's very own protracted metamorphosis into a better reader of Ovid and a better playwright. Shakespeare interweaves the Ovidian episodes of Orpheus and Pygmalion in this surprising ending, in which the central heroine is resurrected from statue into flesh. Whereas Shakespeare would not have given a female who does not conform to a patriarchal society a second chance with a positive outcome earlier in his career, he forgivingly and gracefully creates an innovative alternative for Hermione through her transformation and a dominant and ruling position for Paulina, forgoing his former limited vision and treatment towards women. This paper will demonstrate how Shakespeare forgoes his former

preoccupation with revenge to assume a more favourable attitude towards women in *The Winter's Tale*, where he invents (Ovidian) creative alternatives to revenge by empowering women through female rhetoric, agency, and transformation, resulting in a more complex representation of gender.

Multiple critics have distinguished the remarkable role of women in *The Winter's Tale*, although some assign more power to the female gender than others. Mary Ellen Lamb identifies female power and its success in the play. She identifies the rhetorical power of Hermione, her transformation, and especially Paulina's role in it: "Shakespeare appropriates the power of the female body to compose the miraculous conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*."⁷ Lamb equates Paulina's agency and power to Shakespeare's and suggests the fates of the audiences become similar: "Shakespeare's stagecraft merges with Paulina's, for his audience is as ignorant as hers that Hermione still lives this statute scene, often associated with the power of the playwright, which makes of this play a "winter's tale."⁷ Lamb even goes further into the image of both a powerful woman and a creative Ovidian aspect: "Moreover, it is in this scene that a woman directly takes on a creative role."⁷ Barbara Rico builds further upon the power of Paulina, especially during the statue scene, as she points out how "Paulina's meditation prevents the Pygmalion ritual from taking on the idolatrous or unseemly aspect that it earlier assumed."¹² This insight identifies both the power of Paulina, the play, and the myth of Pygmalion in transforming female treatment. Carol Thomas Neely focuses on rhetoric in *The Winter's Tale*, and how it aids Hermione and especially Paulina in their triumph: "the limitations of language are momentarily forgotten. Speech is the means by which Hermione's life is restored and the mark of this restoration. [...] In the final scene language compels gesture, and the two interchangeable now, bring reconciliation to perfection."¹¹ Neely concludes that "[female] speech completes and celebrates the renewal and embodies the union of thoughts and tongue and eye which is necessary for the preservation of human life."¹¹ William Morse identifies Paulina's general role as dominant force in the play: "Humanist critics find in Paulina a Prospero-like figure of the Renaissance mage, and all these elements are drawn into a powerful seasonal rhythm shepherded by Time himself as chorus, and presided over by "great creating Nature" (4.4.88) as the centred and authorizing deistic presence."¹⁰ He links this exceptionally powerful position to her willingness to submit to the power of language: "In opposition to the parodic world-destroying narratives of Leontes, Camillo and Paulina both submit themselves to the power of language and imagination, and from this submission gain the power to manipulate and direct this human habit of shaping towards satisfactory ends."¹⁰ Eric Langley argues that Shakespeare has distanced himself from the pornographic and misogynistic elements in the original Pygmalion tale thanks to the actions of Paulina and Hermione: "By evoking then rejecting our recollection of the period's principle pornographic artists, Paulina and Hermione demystify the masculine fantasy of artistic omnipotence 'whereby a passive and formless raw material is given shape by a man's productive power': the stories of women are more 'real' than the artistic and erotic fantasies of men."⁸ He mainly credits Paulina for forgoing the completion of male desire by means of her dominating presence: "In Shakespeare's revision of the tale, Paulina guides Leontes away from fulfilling the hot example of his incestuous predecessor, reminding him of his penitential identity, averting his gaze, and thereby circumnavigating an incestuous inheritance from his textual forebears."⁸ These critics all agree on the exceptional power of women in the play; they recognise the less limited options for Paulina and Hermione and link it their ability to forgo these limitations through creativity in speech and drama which ultimately results in success and female empowerment.

Other critics, however, remain sceptical concerning the female speech and power in relationship with the Ovidian intertext. Lynn Enterline does acknowledge Hermione's verbal power, as she suggests "not only that Hermione's concluding silence criticizes the symbolic-erotic economy inaugurated in Book I of *The Metamorphoses* developed in the Orpheus-Pygmalion sequence, but that this economy itself tells us something important about why Hermione's speech is so unexpectedly powerful."³ On the other hand, however, she also argues that "female voices in *The Winter's Tale* acquire an oblique but telling power: the power to point out that, in the Ovidian tradition, stories about poetic authority, creativity, or 'voice,' however purely 'poetic' their claims may seem, nonetheless entail violence against the female body."³ Joel Davis joins Enterline in her opinion about both the tension between male and female desire and the remaining danger for females. He introduces Paulina as a determining factor in the play, in relation to the intertext and female desire, yet, he still identifies delicate elements about both male and female desire: "She recalls the Ovidian tension, between the urge to know or possess the female and the prohibitions against seeing or touching, that excites masculine desire."¹ Sarah Dewar-Watson focuses on the deterioration of Hermione's formerly strong speech, and consequently, her power: "Hermione's reticence toward Leontes renders the mood of the scene awkward (although she does embrace him [5.3.111-12])...Hermione's affable and witty manner in 1.2 and the confident rhetoric with which she marshals her moral and forensic arguments in 3.2 have vanished. With the significant exception of her address to Perdita (5.3.121-28), Hermione remains silent to the end."² Donna Hamilton discusses the remaining patriarchal forces which render her powerless: "Displaced to a domestic narrative, the idea of bounty is here reconstituted in Hermione, an impeccably noble wife, hostess, and mother. So domesticated and purified, bounty and union are mystified as the values that create and sustain society ... But however representative Hermione may be of absolute value, she is not a figure who has any real power, and hence she is powerless to reverse the effects of her husband's exclusionist rhetoric."⁶ Peter Erickson claims that the positive outcome is paired with "a contraction of power" for both females: "Hermione

most vividly illustrates the reductive effects of the play's logic of transformation. In her first appearance, she is vibrant, feisty, forceful, but once accused of adultery, she adopts a stance of patience and stoic passivity.¹⁴ He additionally has qualms concerning Paulina's provocative role in the play: "Her challenge to Leontes's tyrannical authority is sharp, but is also limited. . . . Since her anger is in the service of the maternal function, she does not seriously violate the code for appropriate gender behaviour . . . Her domineering role is also limited. At the end she removes the mask of punitive and demanding mother, resuming her normal place when she accepts a second marriage, which Leontes arranges for her."¹⁴ While these critics still perceive some (temporary) change in female treatment, they are quick to argue that, after all, the women fall back into the same patriarchal confinement as previous female characters did, as they too undergo the treatment of being silenced and objectified.

2. Shakespeare's Own Metamorphosis

Throughout *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare gives his audience the impression of a three-fold shift. First of all, one notices the shift in mood and setting, as the play transforms from a tragic narrative dominated by jealousy and death by leaving the court to a more comedic tale in a pastoral setting. However, one experiences the shock of not seeing the expected paradise as the stage seems to have transformed but the actions have not, for even Bohemia is not completely harmonious. Secondly, the shift in the treatment and perception of women is most prominent. Whereas the female voice and agency resulted in defeat and death before the shift, those concepts provide their victory in Act V. A third layer, however, can be added as well. There is a possibility that the shift experienced in *The Winter's Tale* serves as a metaphor for Shakespeare's own career. The young Shakespeare had been giving little agency or voice to women. One only has to think of characters such as *Titus Andronicus's* Lavinia, who loses her tongue and hands after being raped, to understand Shakespeare's former opinion about female power.

In *The Winter's Tale*, however, one can see the playwright's increasing commitment to challenging female oppression before the major transformation in the play's final act, as Hermione resurrects and regains her life and dignity thanks to Paulina's defining role in the second half of the play. Shakespeare depicts these women (and especially Paulina) as agents in their own fate by supplying them with powerful rhetoric, determined agency, and in the end an outcome which they desire, leading to a more nuanced treatment of women. In that logic, the first three acts might very well be a reflection of Shakespeare's negative representation of women before he transformed into a more accepting writer towards them. The latter is the main argument of this paper; Shakespeare becomes more Ovidian through his own transformation, symbolised by the play's major shift. That is to say, he grants women more opportunities by the means of their creative power and eloquence, and even, in Hermione's case, her own aesthetic transformation from stone to flesh.

3. Female Speech and Power in *The Winter's Tale*

One of the aspects which empowers women in the play is female speech. In the first scenes, although effective, their speech is not capable of providing gender equality because of Leontes's irrational jealousy and tyrannical nature. Leontes's first discourses are typical for a tyrant; to him, only his words and thoughts matter. His first lines in I.II consist of commands, as he says: "stay your thanks a while/ and pay them when you part."¹³ Similarly, he displays his limited rhetoric, reflected by his short, broken sentences. Realising that Polixenes will not stay, Leontes consults his queen Hermione, who is asked whether she is "tongue-tied."¹³ In flawless, elegant rhetoric she advises her husband, creating a large contrast between their verbal proficiencies. She uses strong and self-confident rhetoric as she teaches her husband how to woo his friend strategically, and she not only uses her own speech as a powerful weapon to persuade Polixenes, she also uses his own utterances, such as his "verily," against him, as she utters: "Verily! / You shall not go. A lady's 'verily' is/ as potent as a lord's. Will you go yet? / Force me to keep you as a prisoner/ Not like a guest; so you shall pay your fees/ when you depart, and save your thanks.

My prisoner? Or my guest? / by your dread 'verily' one of them you shall be."¹³ Hermione surpasses him in style and content, as she gives Polixenes the impression of having an option by proposing being "prisoner" or "guest." Additionally, she emphasizes how "a lady's 'verily' is as potent as a lord's," and thus, she grants her entire gender the power instead of calling it her own "verily."¹³ As the verbal swordfight between Hermione and Polixenes continues, Leontes is completely at loss: "Is he won yet?"¹³ In his unawareness and incapability to comprehend his wife's actions, he convinces himself his own jealousy and mentions their marriage: "Then didst thou utter/ 'I am yours for ever."¹³ Hermione skilfully sets up another parallelism, as she says: "I have spoke to th' purpose twice; the one for ever earned a royal husband/ The'other for some while a friend"¹³, which results in Leontes's utter jealousy: "Too hot, too hot/ To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods."¹³ Because of this incident of misunderstanding, Leontes accuses Hermione of being an adulteress and a traitor and makes her plead guilty in court, despite her innocence. This event characterises a pattern one would see in *Titus Andronicus*; the female power seems to vanish permanently as Hermione's agency quickly weakens because of her tyrant's suppression.

Despite this grim prospect, Shakespeare introduces another strong(er) female voice in II.II: Paulina. The audience witnesses a female ally, who empowers her own gender; Paulina clearly and fearlessly points out her loyalties, as she says: “Commend my best obedience to the Queen/.../ I’ll show’t the King, and undertake to be/ Her advocate to th’loud’st. ...”¹³ She addresses her own eloquence and agency, as she says “I’ll use the tongue I have. If wit flow from’t / As boldness from my bosom, let’s not be doubted / I shall do good.”¹³ Paulina’s rhetoric resembles Hermione’s; she speaks persuasively, using well-structured sentences and antitheses. She controls the dialogue; her sentences are flowing and well-composed, whereas Leontes can only utter short sentences. She, self-aware, references to her own eloquence and proclaims her noble intentions which will be carried out through her verbal domination. Leontes, as a furious tyrant, continues his childlike behaviour to get rid of Paulina, according to him “a mankind witch”¹³, who clearly had the upper-hand. Despite being detested by Leontes, she is able to continue her verbal prowess, without being stopped by the tyrant, although he easily could have subjected her to Hermione’s destiny.

After Hermione’s trial, Leontes loses both his son, Mamillius, and his wife, Hermione, who is now silenced for two acts. Paulina is again granted large portions of speech as opposed to both King Leontes and the Lords. Recurring subjects such as Leontes’s jealousy and tyranny appear in her speech, when she attempts to deliver the news of Hermione’s death: “I say she’d dead; I’ll swear’t / .../ But thy, oh tyrant / Do not repent these things, for they are heavier / Than all thy woes can stir. Therefore betake thee/ To nothing but despair. ...”¹³ After these words, one can notice the progress which will eventually lead to the main shift in the entire play; the audience sees a change in Leontes’s behaviour. Whereas he attempted to silence Paulina and Hermione and, in fact, all his subjects, such as the Lords, and even an equal king such as Polixenes, he now encourages Paulina to carry on: “Go on, go on/ Thou canst not speak too much; I have deserved / All tongues to talk their bitter’st”¹³ Leontes accepts Paulina’s advice and instructions at last, after rejecting her words in the previous acts. The condition of the female gender, however, has changed; Paulina, as only woman on stage, receives the right to talk, and thus, she has remarkable power in guiding the king.

4. Paulina’s Influence on Hermione’s Transformation

The most remarkable events of the play, however, do not occur until V.III, with Hermione’s transformation. Leontes’s perception of Paulina has changed after Hermione’s death: “O grave and good Paulina, the great comfort / That I have of thee!”¹³ His language, with epithets and hyperboles, sounds as if he is addressing a tyrannical figure, as he assigns utmost importance to her presence and judgement. The language contrast between this scene and the first two acts is striking—a shift from disdain to respect. He does not command her anymore; he keeps decorum as opposed to his earlier childlike impatience, as requests to see “the statue of our queen.”¹³ Paulina continues her discourse of alliance and female support as she praises the former queen: “As she lived peerless / So her dead likeness I do well believe / Excels whatever you looked upon / Or hand of man hath done; therefore I keep it / Lonely, apart.”¹³ Whilst she expresses her perpetual loyalty, she establishes her hegemony over the scene. She is peerless, too, being the privileged possessor of the statue who decides the conditions of the statue, which is alone in location and in excellence. As Paulina, about to reveal Hermione’s statue, proclaims; “Prepare / To see the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death,”¹³ she uses an antithesis of life and death, which refers to the actual statue of Hermione, possibly still alive, considering the stage directions: “Paulina draws a curtain and reveals Hermione standing like a statue.”¹³ “Like a statue” might be the key to the truthfulness of the transformation; Shakespeare suggests that she is merely taking on the closely counterfeited likeness of a statue to make her re-appearance even more touching and her possible disguise as statue more credible. Paulina decided over and introduces the statue and draws the curtain, as Andrew Moran states that: “The scene ... is replete with theatrical references and imagery, and so the standard reading of the scene is that Hermione has not died and Paulina has staged a piece of theatre [...] Paulina ... is the director of 5.3.”⁹ She gives Leontes the impression that he has more power, by granting him the privilege of breaking the silence first, but his silence suggests that he indeed has changed. Wonder dominates the scene; Leontes is perplexed by the liveliness and accuracy in the statue, and “the magic in thy majesty.”¹³ Paulina’s lack of wonder and seeming omniscience of the scene’s events grant her again superiority over Leontes, who has undergone a significant change. Thus, one could argue that Leontes too has undergone a transformation, but his is more of the inner kind and similar to Orpheus’s. Michael Von Albrecht contemplates on similar transformations between couples and argues “dass sich in Orpheus eine innere Metamorphose vollzogen hat. Zwar ist Ovid zu höchstem Pathos fähig, aber er will bewusst nicht dabei stehen bleiben. [that an inner Metamorphosis has been executed in Orpheus. Admittedly, Ovid is capable of the highest Pathos, but he does not deliberately come to a standstill concerning this Pathos]”¹⁴ This observation could explain why the pairing of Orpheus and Pygmalion work in the case of *The Winter’s Tale*, as the transformation explores the change to or from stone, double death and the resurrection, and the gaining and loss of eloquence. Michael Von Albrecht explains the occurrence of human petrification which results in the disappearance of his eloquent speech: “Die Versteinierung eines Menschenpaares weist hier unter dem Eispanzer entlegener Mythologie auf die

ergreifende Tatsache hin; dass Orpheus, statt laut zu klagen, Eurydices Tod innerlich miterlebt. Der Meister des Wortes verliert die Sprache, stirbt gleichsam mit Eurydice. Der Schluss seines Gesanges mit dem Hinweis auf den Tod beider war keine leere Phrase [the fossilization of a human couple exhibits a moving scene under an icy, remote mythology: that Orpheus, instead of complaining loudly and blatantly, experiences Eurydice's death internally. The master of words loses his speech and dies together with Eurydice. The ending of his song together with the allusion of death was no empty expression.]¹⁴ Multiple elements of this occurrence are intertwined with both Pygmalion's tale and the play. Whereas Orpheus metaphorically turns into stone, Pygmalion's statue turns into flesh for the first time, and Hermione regains her human body. The fluctuating nature of eloquence emphatically occurs in Orpheus's case as demonstrated by Von Albrecht, but the fact that the Pygmalion's new wife assumes human life and identity inevitably leads to the possibility of eloquence and female voice as well. Hermione first appears as woman full of eloquence but loses this power because of her husband's tyranny and her appearance of "statue." Paulina's rhetoric, however, is able to bring back Hermione's former voice.

In her powerful position, Paulina is able to force laws upon Leontes, in a similar manner as Pluto and Proserpina did to Orpheus. In *The Metamorphoses*, Ovid narrates the tale of singer Orpheus, who prematurely loses his wife Eurydice and descends into the underworld to retrieve her. Upon his arrival, he impresses with his eloquent song to such degree that Pluto and Proserpina allow Eurydice to resurrect, provided that Orpheus does not glance backwards to her in this climb. Paulina is similarly the ruler of life and death in this scene but she also is the one who dictates the laws and conditions under which the statue may be seen. As Orpheus was not allowed to gaze to Eurydice, Paulina forbids Leontes to touch the statue, for she claims: "the stone is mine."¹³ which make her the female equivalent of Pygmalion as well. Thus, simultaneously, Ovid's tale of Pygmalion becomes the play's other intertext. Ovid's Pygmalion loathed mortal women to such a degree that he fashioned a statue, which became the only female object which he deemed worthy of his affection. He treats her as a living creature, constantly caressing her and adorning her with jewellery, until he entreats Venus to grant him a woman similar to his statue, upon which request Venus intervenes which an upwards transformation and a marriage between creator and creation. Joel Davis illustrates the myth's significance by stating the unusual nature of the use of the Pygmalion episode: "the story of Pygmalion, which is typically understood as a wish-fulfilment of masculine heterosexual desire, instead unfolds as the rejection of masculine heterosexual desire."¹¹ He explains that the fact that the lack of fulfilment of desire is the actual twist on the usual outcome where the male figure is granted his wish: "By creating the statue as an object to be seen but not touched, and by then bringing readers into Pygmalion's imaginary tactile experiences, Ovid evokes desire."¹¹ Initially, the men are indeed gazing upon a representation the perfect object of their desires, created by a male sculptor. Leontes becomes another Pygmalion as he addresses the statue as he would Hermione: "Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed / Thou art Hermione; or rather; thou art she / In thy not chiding, for she was as tender / as infancy and grace."¹³ He imagines her to be the real Hermione, but is puzzled by her aging features, which Paulina appoints to the excellence of the sculptor. Leontes employs the rhetoric of the Pygmalion myth when the statue is in the midst of its transformation: he speaks of Hermione's "warm life / as now it coldly stands," he asks "would you not deem it breathed, and that those veins / Did verily bear blood?" and "Still methinks / There is an air come from her. What fine chisel / Could ever yet cut breath? Let no man mock me / For I will kiss her."¹³ By all means, Hermione's appearance as a statue awes; she is a silent, stone version of the real Hermione, and thus, for the males, the perfect version of Hermione. Leontes and Polixenes admire her body, until Paulina intervenes and threatens to "draw the curtain," and orders "No longer shall you gaze on't, lest your fancy / May think anon it moves" and then repeats her threat because "[her] lord's almost so far transported that / He'll think anon it lives"¹³ Paulina is consistent in her orders and literally takes over Pluto and Proserpina's command, as she forbids the male gaze. Paulina eventually decides to grant Leontes his wish, emphasising again her own power: "If you can behold it / I'll make the statue move indeed, descend / And take you by the hand: but then you'll think / Which I protest against – I am assisted / By wicked powers."¹³ She declares that she has the ability and authority to make the statue alive and touchable but that she does not want to risk falling in Leontes's unfavourable graces again. Leontes's sudden wish for her to speak in reply is surprising: "What you can make her do / I am content to look on; what to speak / I am content to hear; for 't is as easy / To make her speak as move."¹³ After he has expressed his wish, Paulina again makes use of her theatrical tools, demanding music, and orchestrating the play herself.

With Hermione's resurrection, Shakespeare again refers to the tale of Orpheus and Eurydice, as Hermione, like Eurydice, comes back to life upon request of her male lover, and thus, will inevitably die twice. Davis captures the combination of the episodes and their meaning: "By invoking the double death of Eurydice, Paulina compares Leontes's initial jealousy to the grief of Orpheus on Eurydice's death and Pygmalion's initial policy of avoiding women."¹¹ Davis discusses the significance of the presence of the two episodes: "The statue scene, then, does not merely re-enact a version of Pygmalion in order to construct a surprise comedic ending (although it does have that effect); rather, it stitches together narrative remnants of Orpheus's failed quest to recover Eurydice."¹¹ Additionally, Davis recognises the way Shakespeare plays with the narratives in order to obtain the surprising ending: "Moreover, the statue scene reverses the imperative that Orpheus not look at Eurydice as he tries to bring her back from the dead: by rhetorically "painting" Hermione with the story that she is a statue, Paulina has made it "lawful"

for Leontes to look at Hermione and desire her.”¹¹ Paulina also assumes Venus’s task in the Pygmalion myth when she orders the statue to change into flesh. She continues her pattern of orchestrated actions when she orders: “’Tis time; be stone no more; approach / Strike all that look upon with marvel / ... / Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you. You perceive she stirs.”¹³ Pygmalion prayed to Venus to provide any marriage partner similar to his statue and received a living version of the actual statue. Leontes, however, begged Paulina to use her powers to provide a resurrection for Hermione, who is the only option Leontes desires. Willy Evenepoel argues that the reason of the transformation is two-fold, pairing Paulina’s role in the transformation with Leontes’s own imagination: “Leontes ... [wordt] in het vijfde bedrijf geconfronteerd met een levensecht beeld van zijn vrouw, dat deels door het optreden van een vertrouweling van Hermione, deels door wat de koning zich zelf inbeeldt, op mysterieuze wijze tot leven komt [Leontes is confronted with a lifelike statue of his wife in Act V, which partly because of the performance of Hermione’s confidant, partly because of the king’s own imagination, resurrects in a mysterious manner].”¹⁵ Evenepoel stresses the importance of both performance and illusion in the course of the transformation of Pygmalion’s statue and Hermione’s pseudo-statue, even linking it to the double life and death of Eurydice: “Tweemaal komt het beeld tot leven, de eerste maal in de verbeelding van Pygmalion, de tweede maal echt. Leuk genoeg is Pygmalion de eerste maal geneigd te geloven dat het beeld leeft (hij wil het geen ivoren beeld meer noemen, v. 225), hij neigt tot zelfbedrog, maar is hij de tweede maal, wanneer het beeld dankzij Venus echt tot leven komt, terughoudend, ervoor beducht zichzelf te bedriegen [The statue comes to life twice, the first time in Pygmalion’s imagination, the second time in reality. Interestingly, Pygmalion is initially inclined to believe that the statue is in fact alive (he refuses to call it a statue fashioned out of ivory, v.255), he tends to give in to his self-deception, but the second time, when the statue really becomes alive thanks to Venus, he is reluctant and careful to deceive himself again]”¹⁵ While Evenepoel assigns some importance to the imagination and self-deception of both Pygmalion and Leontes, he still assigns Venus’s role to Paulina, whose power is thus associated with divine destiny. She restores her mistress’s marriage, a task which could also be assigned to the goddess of Love. When “Hermione descends,” Paulina refers to a double murder: “Do not shun her / Until you see her die again, for then / You kill her double.”¹³ Her threatening warning again reminds of the rule imposed on Orpheus in the underworld, associated Paulina again as the equivalent of the divine figure in the respective myth. Barbara Rico argues that Paulina’s guidance indeed is necessary to avoid the victory of the male gaze: “Paulina’s meditation prevents the Pygmalion ritual from taking on the idolatrous or unseemly aspect that it earlier assumed.”¹² The men do not have any understanding of the events: Leontes merely marvels: “If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating,”¹³ and Camillo wishes “If she pertain to life, let her speak too.”¹³ They want her to speak, whereas marvelling upon her beauty seemed sufficient earlier. They still comment upon her and try to interpret her, but because of their lack of understanding, they realise that Hermione should speak, but she merely addresses her lost daughter Perdita with questions. Regardless, she has regained her life, identity, and eloquence, thanks to the tenacity of Paulina. Hereafter, Leontes interrupts Paulina, who is longing for a husband, again, for the first time: “O Peace, Paulina / Thou shouldst a husband take by my consent / As I by thine a wife.”¹³ Leontes’s “peace” appears more like a hopeful comment. While Leontes does tell her to keep “peace,” it appears to be more of an encouraging comment about how she will be able to marry, just like he regains his wife in human form. He still talks about “her consent” and its valour to him, which again is evidence of Paulina’s remaining influence. Despite the fact that Leontes interrupts Paulina again, and seems to fall back in his old habit, it does not need to be seen as a recurrence of gender difference or inequality. Paulina still prevails in the end as she has succeeded in her initial objective and proves to be a valiant example of female power and alliance.

While there is no certainty as to whether Hermione reaches the complete, Ovidian ideal of transformation by magic, the essential thought or impression of transformation is present. The audience sees Hermione’s resurrection, truthfully or artificially, and she regains her dignity in a creative, artistic manner. The prevailing influence and interaction of Paulina in this “transformation” makes the outcome of the play the more remarkable. Hermione, after being unjustly accused of adultery, not only regains exoneration but also her life, with possibilities to start anew with her husband. In *Othello*, for example, Desdemona does not receive the same redeeming treatment despite the occurrence of a similar misunderstanding. She simply dies an oppressed woman, much like Lavinia in *Titus Andronicus*, which forms a sharp contrast to the refreshing possibilities as a nightingale granted by Ovid to Philomela. This redemption and sense of creative alternative used to be the lacking element earlier; women did not stand as much of a chance until Shakespeare allows Hermione’s metamorphosis.

5. Conclusion

The Winter’s Tale, therefore, presents women differently in terms of how they respond to their condition with language and creative purpose. Hermione and Paulina already establish themselves as powerful women in Act I and II, however, without any success. By the end, they still possess the same qualities like eloquence, initiative, and perseverance like before; the main change is how others in the play view them. The only literal change is Hermione’s resurrection, while Leontes and the men have undergone something bigger, as they emotionally and

intellectually reach another level of acceptance and understanding. Through Ovidian tales, the focus and reverse of male desire becomes obvious, and Shakespeare is allowed to include a pseudo-Ovidian transformation. But, most importantly, Shakespeare has become the honey-tongued Ovidian equal at last: he no longer fears female power and no longer oppresses it by hermetic revenge; on the contrary, he embraces it, as he recognizes at last female eloquence, agency, and the creative power they always possessed, which eventually enables those forces for which the play is rightly famous—redemption and love.

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