The Winter’s Tale

Week 9

Act 5

5.1

Back in Sicilia

Cleomenes urges Leon. to “forgive yourself” (6) – his language reflects the Christian concept of sin -> repentance -> absolution: “saint-like sorrow ... redeem’d ... penitence ... trespass”;

Leon., however, is, as yet, unable to do so – he constantly acknowledges Her.’s “virtues” and contrasts his own “blemishes” – moreover, he is aware of the “wrong” he committed to himself as king of Sicilia, not only leaving his country “heirless” but also leaving himself without the “sweet’s companion...” [N.B. the Renaissance notion of the Dual Identity of a monarch – as king/queen and as an individual human being.];

Paulina is not a woman to ‘sweeten the pill’ and seems intent on tormenting Leon. further: if he married, individually, all of the world’s women or took individual virtues from each of them “To make a perfect woman” they still could not be equal to “she you kill’d” (15).

[The allusion here is to the Five Maidens of Croton, a popular legend about the Greek painter Zeuxis, who lived in the fourth century B.C. supposedly a master of mimesis. The source of the story is Cicero's De Inventione (85 BC) and Pliny's Natural History (before 79 AD). Cicero's version is set in Sicily, Pliny's version is set in Croton.

The story goes that Zeuxis was commissioned by the elders of Croton or Agrigento to paint a portrait of Helen of Troy. In Antiquity, depicting Helen was a remarkable challenge, so , the maidens of the city were auditioned as models, but not one of them possessed the perfection of the concetto, the image of ideal beauty in the artist’s imagination, so Zeuxis painted an imaginary composite –i.e. he took the best quality from each of the five virgins and combined them into a single ‘perfect’ image.]

“... she you kill’d” is a brutal choice of words – but one that Leon. freely acknowledges as fitting his sin; at the same time, he observes that the words are “as bitter/ Upon thy tongue as in my thought”;

Cleo. Chides Paul for reminding Leon. of past folly but Paul. is unrepentant, asking, sourly/sarcastically, if Cleo. would wish/advise him to “marry again”;

Dion’s perspective is less personal than Paul.’s: he suggests that an incentive to Leon. to re-marry could be for the good of the country which stands currently without an heir (Per.’s existence is not yet known in
Sicilia, of course). He asks her to consider what may “drop upon his kingdom” (28) if the people of Sicily are left without secure succession. He presents a contrary perspective in which they should “rejoice” that Her. is “well” (i.e. in heaven). That being the case what could be “holier” than to “repair” (restore) the royal line of succession and encourage king and people with the prospect of “future good” by Leon.’s re-marrying and so “bless the bed of majesty”? [Note the use of religious language.]

Paul. remains adamant: no other woman could possibly ‘replace’ Her. as Leon.’s wife [We must wait until 5.3 to discover quite why Paulina is is so adamant that Leon. should not marry again.];

Besides, the Oracle had decreed that Leon. should be without an heir “Till his lost child be found” – an event as impossible to contemplate as for Antigonus (her husband) to “break his grave” (42) and return to her, having ‘perished’ with the infant. The advice he receives from Dion would be “to the heavens be contrary”.

To Leon.: he should not concern himself with getting an heir; “The crown will find an heir” (47): [Perhaps a compliment to King James who had succeeded to the crown after Queen Elizabeth’s death but had not been formally named as her successor by the Queen.]

Leon. regrets that he had not taken the assurances of “Good Paulina” of Her.’s faithfulness – if he had Her. might still be alive;

He echoes Paul.’s sentiments in believing no other woman equal to Her.; if he did take another wife “her sainted spirit [would]/Again possess her corpse” and “on this stage” (i.e. the earth) return to demand why he had treated her so badly. [N.B. This statement has an heir of prophecy given the play’s dénouement in 5.3.]. He even contemplates the notion of Her.’s ghost exhorting him to murder his second wife should her ghost materialise;

Paul. affirms that she would certainly do so “Were I the ghost that walk’d”, she would tell him to “mark/ Her eye” and demand “for what
dull part” he chose his second wife – then her shriek would piece his eardrums followed by the ghost’s demanding “Remember mine (i.e. her eyes)”.

Her’s eyes were like stars, by comparison with which all others are merely “dead coals” (68) – Paul. need not worry that he will ever take a second wife;

Paul. presses Leon. to swear formally that he will never re-marry – “Unless another, / As like Hermione as is her picture, / Affront his eye”

Ignoring the protest of Cleo. Paul. demands that “if my lord will marry” then he should give herself the role of choosing his wife who “shall not be so young/ As was your former, but she shall be such/ As, walk’d your first wife’s ghost, it (i.e. the ghost) should take joy/ To see her in your arms” (78-81);

Leon. readily accepts this condition which prompts Paul. to complete the ‘impossible’ circumstances in which this should come about: “That/ Shall be when your first queen’s again in breath:/ Never till then”.

[Clearly in these lines Paul. sets up the context for the play’s dénouement in 5.3.]

A servant/Gentleman Poet...? announces “Prince Florizel,/ Son of Polixenes, with his princess”.

Leon. comments on the lack of the usual ceremony (“greatness”) that would normally accompany such a “visitation” – obviously surprised he asks about a “train” [Remember that each of the various suitors for Portia’s hand in MoV came with a substantial retinue] and learns “But few,/ And those but mean”;

His “princess”, however, is “the most peerless piece of earth...” [We need constantly to remind ourselves that this “peerless” creature is Leon.’s daughter and heir to the throne of Sicilia...!];

To which Paul. responds to the Gentleman(?): ‘Oh Her. – just as every age boasts that it’s better than a superior past, so you, now you’re in your grave, must yield precedence to what is currently marvelled at’. He (the poet) had written previously that “She (Her.) had not been,/ Nor was

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1 The phrase recalls the Ghost of Hamlet’s father who demands that he “Remember me” (Ham. 1.5) in circumstances not unlike those suggested here since Hamlet’s mother, Gertrude, had re-married her first husband’s brother (Claudius).
likely to be equall’d” – such praise is “shrewdly ebb’d” (‘shrewdly’ = wickedly, severely; ‘ebbed’ = declined, deteriorated – said ironically...?).²

Gent. says that he had “almost forgot” Her. – “the other” (i.e. Per.) will render you speechless when you see her; ‘if she began a new religious sect she would cause all who professed other forms of religion to change their views and make converts of all that she merely told to follow’ (Arden2, p. 140).³

Paul. is sceptical that women would also choose to follow her but Gent. declares that women would think her of “More worth than any man” while men would regard her as “The rarest of all women” (112).

Leon. urges Cleo. and the other courtiers(?) to bring the visitors so that he may embrace them in friendship.

*Courtiers Exeunt.*

Paul. speculates that if Mamillius had survived he would have been the same age as “this lord” (Flor.);;

Leon. urges her not to remind him of his son whose death still pains him and he wonders whether he will be driven mad to see “this gentleman” (120).

_Enter Flor., Per., Cleo. & others._

123-29 Seeing Flor. Leon. recognises the facial features of his father, Pol., and affirms that the close resemblance indicates that “Your mother was most true to wedlock”. [Ironically, of course, the close resemblance between Mam. and himself failed to convince him of Her.’s ‘truth’.];

If Leon. were 21 years old he would greet Leon. as “brother” just as he had Pol. and reminisce about the times when they had behaved “something wildly” in their youth.

Turning to Per. (his own daughter, remember...!) he greets her as “goddess!” He is cruelly reminded of the “couple” (i.e. son & daughter, Max. & Per.) ‘who might have stood together like this, causing astonishment in everyone who beheld them, whether gods or men’ [Arden3, p. 320-21];

² This is awkward as it is unclear whether Paulina is addressing Leontes or the ‘Gentleman Poet’...? Much depends on how individual editors have chosen to punctuate it.
³ Possibly an echo of Jesus’ command to his disciples to “Follow me” [Mark, 10.21; Luke, 9.23].
Sadly he speaks of his having “lost” them by his own folly – together with the company and friendship of Flor.’s noble (“brave”) father, who – though weighed down with misery – he longs to see again.

Flor. responds – as from his father – with every greeting that a king by way of friendship could send a brother; and were it not that sickness which comes with age has overwhelmed his desired ability to travel he would have journeyed across land and sea to see Leon. “whom he loves” more than royal sceptres and “those that bear them”(144-45). [Note the Renaissance distinction between the office of king and the man who holds that office – a dual ‘identity’.]

Leon. again dwells on the “wrongs” he has done to Pol. and acknowledges Flor.’s gracious greetings which now remind Leon. of his own “behind-hand slackness” in showing marks of friendship to Pol.. Leon. now gives him such a welcome as one gives the coming of spring;

Lightly/ruefully(?), he expresses astonishment that Pol. can have exposed Per. (“this paragon”) to the vagaries of “dreadful Neptune”, risking her life to greet someone unworthy of the trouble of the journey, let alone the risk to life itself (i.e. himself).

Flor. introduces Per. as being from Libya. [Arden3 sees this as a racial joke that might have ‘brought the house down’ in Shakespeare’s time since Libyans were expected to have dark skins [the editor cites Othello] which would have contrasted with Per.’s pale skin and her mother’s Russian features' [Arden3 (p. 322)].

On the other hand, even if Per. is of royal blood and therefore ‘gentle’ would her pale skin have survived an upbringing in the company of shepherds – BUT, there again, if her skin did remain pale surely that would be no more unlikely than the many occasions in the play when Shakespeare asks us to take the ‘truth’ of this “old tale” on trust...!];

Leon. acknowledges Libya’s king, Smalus, “That noble honour’d lord, is fear’d and lov’d”

[cont. below]
When the action returns to Leontes’ court in 5.1, in an almost throw-away line the king gives a clue as to his criteria for the ideal monarch. Upon hearing mention of Libya, he recalls its ruler, ‘the warlike Smalus, / That noble honoured lord, [who] is feared and loved’ (5.1.156–7, italics mine). A king who inspires respect, awe, and love is one who would seem to have learned the distinction James I drew in his accession speech to Parliament (19 March 1603) between a righteous king and a tyrant:

That whereas the proud and ambitious tyrant does think his kingdom and people are only ordained for satisfaction of his desires and unreasonable appetites, the righteous and just king does by the contrary acknowledge himself to be ordained for the procuring of the wealth and prosperity of his people, and that his greatest and principal worldly felicity must consist in their prosperity; if you be rich I cannot be poor, if you be happy I cannot but be fortunate: and I protest that your welfare shall ever be my greatest care and contentment . . . 51

Flor. affirms that the king of Libya parted tearfully from his daughter; they have had a friendly wind to carry them to Sicilia to carry out the office bestowed on them by Pol.;

Flor. claims to have dismissed the chief members of his (non-existent) retinue who have returned to Bohemia to report not only his success in Libya (in securing Per. as his wife) but also his safe arrival with his wife in Sicilia.4 [The plot by this time has assumed positively Byzantine degrees of complexity.]

Leon. calls on the gods to purify Sicilia’s air while he and Per. remain in Sicilia – and then couches his praises of Pol. and his own past deeds in religious terms: “holy father ... sacred ... I have done sin ... blest/ (As he from heaven merits it) ... goodness” 167-75;

He concludes by reflecting on what “what might...” have been if he still had his son and daughter.

At this moment of high success for Cam.’s grand plan – Enter a Lord whose news, he says, would be disbelieved without the evidence being so close at hand;

He continues that Pol. – via the Lord – send his personal greetings and asks that Leon. arrest (“attach”) his son who, having abandoned both his

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4 It emerges later in the scene that Perdita is not yet Florizel’s wife.
self-respect/rank, has run away from his father (and his father’s hopes for the boy) – and with a shepherdess;

The Lord has just come from Pol. “Here in your city”; the Lord, he says, speaks in a bewildered manner which befits his own amazement. It seems that Pol. while hurrying after Flor. & Per. had met the Shep. & Clown who had also left Bohemia with Flor..

Flor., naturally, assumes that the hitherto loyal Cam. has “betrayed me” (193) – the Lord confirms that Cam. is with Pol..

Leon. is astonished that Cam. should be in Sicilia and with Pol. and learns that Cam. is interrogating Shep. & Clo. who are terrified and contradict themselves in attempting an explanation while Pol. refuses to listen and threatens them “With divers deaths in death” (201).

Now in despair, Per. suspects that the gods themselves are determined to frustrate the lovers’ desire to marry – while even Flor. has to admit to Leon. that they are not, joining Per. in suspecting almost supernatural forces (205);

Leon.’s tone changes as he who had earlier praised Per. as “this paragon” (152) now demands “Is this the daughter of a king?” But now challenged, by Leon. Flor. again remains firm in asserting that Per. will be “When once she is my wife”.

There is genuine sadness in Leon.’s response that marriage will be achieved “very slowly” and his “sorry/ Most sorry ... as sorry” carries sincere regret that division has grown between Pol. and Flor. and that the difference in their ranks (“worth”), notwithstanding that Per. is “rich in beauty” (213);

Seeing that Per. is disconsolate, Flor. tries to cheer her with the affirmation that fortune has no power to “change our loves”;

Appealing to Leon., Flor. asks him “Remember” the time when he had been the same age as Flor. with similar affections/passions and to act now as his “advocate” with his father since at a request from Leon., Pol. “will grant precious things as trifles” (221).

If Pol. would do so, says Leon., then Leon. would “beg your precious mistress” [for himself]. [N.B. This is the only incestuous hint in TWT whereas in Pandosto it constitutes a major thread of the plot.]

Seeing the danger implicit in such a remark Paul. is quick to intervene, remarking, gently(?), that he is far too old for such a young person – and
in any case, Her. was more beautiful than Per. even when nine months pregnant.

Reflectively, Leon. observes that for a moment he had seen Her.’s looks in Per. – such moments have the air of *déjà vu* when 5.3 is worked through;

Startled back to reality Leon. willingly agrees to approach Pol. on Leon.’s behalf since his honour has not been overcome by his desire for Per. [Flor. had declared his love to be honourable at 33-35].

He is now eager to fulfil his promise and urges Flor. to “mark what way I make” and to follow.

### 5.2

Here Aut. acts primarily as a ‘prompter’ for the Gent.s to describe the off-stage action, though he soon retires upstage as the Gents reveal their news – **N.B.** The ‘old’ Aut. would have his ears and eyes alert for any information that he can exploit for his own profit. However, the play demonstrates that **all sinners are capable of redemption** – including rogues and scoundrels. During the exchanges that follow (below) Aut. can be affected by the offstage revelations learned from the Gentlemen and which contribute to a change in his outlook.

1. The opening of the “fardel” and Shep.’s account of how it was found – although ordered out of the chamber when the general significance of the items was revealed, 1stG. received a “broken” account of what was said – the change in the appearances of Pol. & Cam. who even though they seemed unable to speak expressed wonder, though whether of joy or sorrow it was impossible to say;

Notice that throughout the ‘reporting’ passages of he Three Gents. the language – although expressed in prose rather than blank verse – is courtly, ornate and artificial. It requires close attention from the audience and the number of is often reduced by judicious cutting in performance.

*Enter 2ndG.*

2. Brings news of general celebrations (“bonfires”) – “the Oracle is fulfilled: the king’s daughter is found” – such a tale is quickly taken up by the ballad-makers – **more fodder for Aut. and his profession**;

*Enter 3rdG.*
He is Paul.’s steward who it is hoped will be able to confirm the veracity of a narrative that is “so like an old tale” that its strict adherence to truth must be doubted;

3. 3rdG confirms that the tale is “Most true”, made convincing by evidence (“circumstance”, 32) and its consistency: Her.’s “mantle” (shawl/cloak/blanket), the jewel round the infant’s neck, the letters of Antig. in his handwriting (“character”), the young woman’s dignified bearing, like that of Her., her nobility which her nature shows is above her humble upbringing quite apart from “many other evidences” (39);

43-50 He speaks of the successive expressions of joy that greeted these revelations and describes their physical expressions;

50-57 Leon. goes from one person to another fluctuating between expressions joy and anguish as he reflects further on his injustice to Her. & Pol. and gratitude to Shep.;

4. 3rdG also confirms Antig.’s death – “torn to pieces with a bear” (64) – still like an “old tale” that seems difficult to believe – but supported by the Clo.’s producing a handkerchief & rings “that Pauline knows” as well as by his guileless simplicity (“innocence”).

N.B. The deliberately ‘unbelievable’ is a vital element of Shakespeare’s position in this play. Time and again he ‘tries’ or tests us with moments that are literally incredible when measured against the ‘real world’. It is all leading to the point in 5.3 when Paulina says “It is required/ You do awake your faith.” Faith is the essential ingredient – the willingness to ‘believe’ – in theatrical terms to ‘suspend one’s disbelief’ – but it also defines aspects of religious faith.

5. 3rdG confirms the loss of the ship that had carried Antig. & the infant Per. to Bohemia together with all of those who had helped to cast out the child;

72-78 Paul.’s emotions were also divided between sorrow for the death of her husband and joy “that the Oracle was fulfilled” (76);

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5 You might care to have a look at ‘Choosing Not to Believe: Realistic Unrealism in The Winter’s Tale’ on TWT page of the web site – and a fairly basic search should bring up much else on the web. Also, see Chapter 3 of Reconsidering Shakespeare’s ‘Lateness’: Studies in the Last Plays by Xing Chen on the same web page: https://www.just-shakespeare.co.uk/the-winters-tale.html.
6. 3rd G One of the most affecting aspects of these revelations – and one which brought tears to the Gent.’s/Steward’s eyes (“angled for mine eyes”) was the intensity with which Per. heard the account of her mother’s death;

Even those present who were the most hard-hearted (“marble”) changed colour – the allusion to a sculptured statues clearly anticipates 5.3 (see references in the Arden3 footnote left).

For the first time we learn of the Her.’s “statue, which is in the keeping of Paulina”;

The sculptor is named as Julio Romano, a sculptor so skilled that if he was granted eternal life he could “put breath into his work” and so deprive Nature of her trade;  

[cont. below]

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6 Romano is the only artist whom Shakespeare names directly in his works: Julio Romano (b Rome, ?1499; d Mantua, 1 Nov. 1546). Italian painter, architect, and designer. He was the only major Renaissance artist who was a native of Rome, but he worked mainly in Mantua. In his youth he was Raphael’s chief pupil and assistant (although exactly what part he played in his workshop is uncertain) and later one of the outstanding figures of Mannerist art and architecture. It is not known when Giulio began working for Raphael, but it was probably in about 1515, when he was still very young; after the master’s death in 1520 he became his main artistic executor, completing a number of his unfinished works, including the decorations of the Villa Madama: https://artuk.org/discover/artists/giulio-romano-c-14991546 .

7 Another allusion to the ancient Greek painter, Zeuxis, who was famed for painting lifelike pictures and was said to have painted grapes so realistic that birds mistook them for real grapes.
Indeed, his sculpture of Her. is said to be so close to Her. herself that “one would speak to her and stand in hope of answer” (100-101). [Note that 3rdG speaks of the statue as “her” rather than “it”]

Those characters involved in the principal revelations described above have now gone to see the statue intending to “sup” (i.e. feed their emotions);

2ndG reveals that he had suspected that there was some important matter afoot since Paul. had privately visited the “removed house” where Romano was creating the sculpture “twice or thrice a day” ever since the death of Her..

The three Gents./Stewards Exeunt, eager to see Romano’s masterpiece.

[The first part of 5.2 has been marked by its high-flown prose style. We now need a change of pace and tone in order to prepare us for the high drama of the final coup de théâtre.]

Aut. now comes forward: his talking of “the dash⁸ (i.e. taint/stain) of my former life” suggests that Aut. represents himself as having left behind his former unscrupulous ways;

He explains his own role during the sea voyage from Bohemia to Sicilia:
(a) bringing Shep. & Clo. on board ship with Flor.;
(b) telling Flor. of the “fardel” – but he was too anxious about Per.’s being sea-sick to listen – so “the mystery remained undiscovered” (121);

Philosophically, Aut. acknowledges that even if he had succeeded in informing Flor. it would not have brought him (Aut.) any benefit when set against “my other discredits” – another welcome example of Aut.’s

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⁸ dash, n. b. A small quantity (of something) thrown into or mingled as a qualifying admixture with something else; an infusion, touch, tinge. Usually figurative. [OED, citing this example from Autolacus]
self-knowledge and perhaps a suggestion that his character is undergoing a transformation...?

Seeing Shep. & Clo. approach Aut. reflects on how he has brought benefits to them “against my will”.

Shep. reflects that although he is too old to be fathering children his son’s children will all be “gentlemen born”:

Clo. reminds Aut. that previously Aut. had refused to fight with Clo. on the grounds that Clo. was ‘not a gentleman’ – [Aut. was wearing Flor.’s clothes and acting like a gent.]. Since Clo. thinks he is now a gentleman – and is wearing the clothes to prove it – Aut. cannot refuse to fight with him.

Clo. congratulates himself on having been a ‘gentleman’ fully four hours (hardly ‘born’ a gent., then..!) and lists the various personal acknowledgements of the royal family that prompted “the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed” (145);

The cowardly Aut., of course, doesn’t want to fight and makes a fulsome apology for previous “faults” while asking for “a good report” to “the prince my master” (i.e. Flor.) – he clearly hopes to resume his former employment as;

Shep. & Clo., now very conscious of their social elevation, are anxious to behave graciously – like gentlemen – and manage to elicit a promise from Aut. that he will “amend” his life (154);

158-72 However, Clo. becomes embroiled in the niceties (now he is a gentleman) of swearing an oath in respect of Aut. being “a tall fellow”:

Hearing that “our kindred” are leaving to see “the queen’s picture” they are anxious not to
be left out and exit, promising to be true advocates for Aut..

[5.2 – a useful summary]

The phrase ‘gentleman born’ is repeated seven times in just ten lines (lines 125–35) and ‘gentleman-like’, ‘gentle’, ‘gentlemen’ and ‘gentleman’ (twice) all crop up in the next twenty. Shakespeare forces us to dwell on the words and so ask the question what does ‘gentle’ mean, after all? Perhaps he was thinking of Chaucer’s Ballade of Gentlesse (c.1390) and its insistence that true gentility has nothing to do with rank, everything to do with decency, practical virtue. By a clever movement we see that Honesty and Trust, in the shape of the Clown, are not as foolish as Autolycus imagined (IV.4.592). The young man sees the rogue for what he is: ‘I know thou art no tall fellow / of they hands, and that thou wilt be drunk’ (lines 161–2). But his generosity is stronger than his disappointment. And so, unlike the case of Malvolio at the end of Twelfth Night (1600), the final resolution will include even the man who has done everything in his limited power to keep off the path of virtue. It is a reflection of the two Kings’ magnanimity, ‘the two kings called my father brother’ (lines 137–8); such a marked relief from the endings of Shakespeare’s earlier comedies where at the end the courtiers unite to scoff at the rustics.

[Lynn & Jeff Wood, The Winter’s Tale, Advanced Notes, p. 64]