



GINA BLOOM

“*Boy Eternal*”: *Aging, Games, and Masculinity*
in *The Winter’s Tale*

Then was Jack Falstaff, now Sir John, a boy . . . I see him break Scoggin’s head at the court gate when a was a crack, not thus high. And the very same day did I fight with one Samson Stockfish, a fruiterer, behind Gray’s Inn. Jesu, Jesu, the mad days that I have spent! And to see how many of my old acquaintance are dead. (2 *Henry IV*, 3.2.15–31)¹

Although early modern moralist Samuel Bird includes brawling, along with pranking and torturing birds, among the list of “games that be filthie,” Shakespeare’s Shallow speaks for many of Bird’s contemporaries who viewed aggressive play as a promising sign that a boy is on a stable path toward becoming a man.² Shallow’s perspective on the function and legitimacy of violent sport is perhaps best expressed by Volumnia in *Coriolanus*, who commends young Martius as “[o]ne on’s father’s moods” when she hears about how he captured a butterfly and then “did so set his teeth and tear it” (1.3.62, 60). But Shallow does more than express appreciation for little Jack Falstaff’s pugnacious recreations. He goes on to draw a connection between young Jack’s playful tussles with Scoggin and his own display of courage through his fight with Samson Stockfish. Emphasizing that these events happened “the very same day,” Shallow links the boy’s and the young man’s masculine recreations. Moreover, these memories of youthful sport lead

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1. Citations of Shakespeare’s plays follow *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt, et al., 2nd ed. (New York, 1997).

2. Samuel Bird, *A Friendlie Communication or Dialogue between Paule and Demas wherein is Disputed how we are to use the pleasures of this life* (1580), esp. sig. 15v.

Shallow directly to contemplating his present advanced age, as he laments his comrades' and his own inevitable passing from life. By using games to trace out this narrative of developing masculinity—of the crack boy as continuous with the rakish youth who grows into an old man—Shallow comes to terms with himself as an aging subject. The boy in play is a crucial feature of this psychic journey, for by memorializing recreation, Shallow affirms and gains comfort from his connection to boyhood. Significantly, unlike the nostalgic, aging *puer eternis* Falstaff, Shallow is depicted in this speech as able to pull back from this investment. Rather than collapse the difference between boy and youth, youth and old man, Shallow's recollections of boyhood play lead to acceptance of the aging process.

This essay investigates the psychic and cultural work performed by aging men's nostalgia for boyhood play, focusing on Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*. The play's concerns with the passage of time are formalized through its striking dramatic structure, the second half occurring sixteen years after the first. To explore the process by which the mature male characters of *The Winter's Tale* use games to negotiate, and fail to negotiate, anxieties about growing old, I draw on a range of early modern historical writings on play, from Roger Ascham's treatise on archery to John Stow's recollections of English pastimes. In using the term "play" to encompass a broad range of recreational activities, I am not implying that early moderns considered these activities to be identical to each other. As is evident in Bird's description of "unlawful" sport, the definition of "play" was being contested in this period; what one writer considered to be legitimate recreation another considered to be sinful vice.³ Yet the fact that early modern writers labor to distinguish forms of recreation points to an underlying, uneasy assumption that these forms share something fundamental. To investigate that commonality and its consequences, my essay brings modern theoretical perspectives on play to bear on these historical debates. I argue that as Ascham and his contemporaries use the figure of the boy at play to set up a comforting narrative about growing old, so, too, *The Winter's Tale* depicts Leontes and Polixenes turning to their youthful sons in order to confront anxieties about aging. But what is for Shallow, Ascham, and others a productive coping strategy fails to work for Leontes and Polixenes.

3. Gregory M. Colón Semenza, *Sport, Politics, and Literature in the English Renaissance* (Newark, Del., 2003).

Instead, their recollections of boyhood games lead to a displaced obsession with youth and recreation. Ultimately, Leontes comes to terms with aging once he demonstrates recognition of what anthropologist Gregory Bateson calls the “frame” of play.

My reading of Leontes complements but differs from that proffered in key feminist work on *The Winter's Tale*. Following Janet Adelman's influential argument, critics have often seen Leontes' paranoia and antagonism toward Hermione as stemming from anxieties about his, and all men's, dependence on women.⁴ Mamillius, according to this reading, is a point of tension because the boy embodies a connection to the feminine sphere that Leontes repudiates. In their assumptions that masculinity takes shape through a conflicted engagement with femininity, such arguments overlook the ways in which early moderns define masculinity not only as a function of gender, but of age. It is Leontes' and Polixenes' relations to boyhood, not just womanhood, that threaten to emasculate them.⁵ The model of masculinity I propose involves more than shifting attention to age. In outlining early moderns' emphasis on developmental masculinity, I also rework the deconstructive models of identity that have prevailed in scholarship on masculinity—even scholarship that attends to age difference.⁶ For example, in his work on the beard Will Fisher importantly recognizes the ways facial hair materializes the difference not only between men

4. Janet Adelman, *Suffocating Mothers: Fantasies of Maternal Origin in Shakespeare's Plays, Hamlet to The Tempest* (New York, 1992). See, e.g., Susan Snyder, *Shakespeare: A Wayward Journey* (Newark, Del., 2002); Mary Ellen Lamb, “Engendering the Narrative Act: Old Wives' Tales in *The Winter's Tale*, *Macbeth*, and *The Tempest*,” *Criticism* 40, no. 4 (1998); Katherine Eggert, *Showing Like a Queen: Female Authority and Literary Experiment in Spenser, Shakespeare, and Milton* (Philadelphia, 2000), esp. pp. 162–68. A related perspective can be found in Carol Thomas Neely, *Broken Nuptials in Shakespeare's Plays* (New Haven, 1985). On breast-feeding as a significant manifestation of such dependency, see Gail Kern Paster, *The Body Embarrassed: Drama and the Disciplines of Shame in Early Modern England* (Ithaca, 1993), esp. pp. 260–80.

5. In *Dreams of the Burning Child: Sacrificial Sons and the Father's Witness* (Ithaca, 2003), esp. p. 94, David Lee Miller offers a reading of Mamillius that is much closer to my own, arguing that Leontes' attachment to Mamillius stems from the father's need for a flesh and blood sign of his paternal body, which is otherwise invisible. The play is thus concerned with “the father's desire to be copied.” I propose that the mimetic bond between Leontes and Mamillius works in the reverse direction: rather than wishing for his son to be a copy of him, Leontes desires to be a copy of his son.

6. E.g., Will Fisher, “The Renaissance Beard: Masculinity in Early Modern England,” *Renaissance Quarterly* 54, no. 1 (2001); Jennifer A. Low, *Manhood and the Duel: Masculinity in Early Modern Drama and Culture* (New York, 2003), esp. ch. 3. Bruce R. Smith argues elegantly for a shift away from deconstructive models, describing male identity as produced not only in opposition to others, but in fusion with them. See *Shakespeare and Masculinity* (Oxford, 2000), esp. ch. 4.

and women, but between men and boys; yet the beard serves for Fisher as a sign of an “antithesis between men and boys.”⁷ However, early modern models of normative masculinity also emphasize continuity between boys and men. Leontes’ and Polixenes’ anxieties stem from their failure to place themselves comfortably within a developmental narrative of manhood—the kind of narrative Shallow engages.

Although I diverge from Fisher in my emphasis on the proximity between boys and men, I join him in using an historicist lens to problematize psychoanalytic approaches to masculinity. In defining the narrative of male development, especially as it is represented in *The Winter’s Tale*, the psychoanalytic critical tradition assumes male psychic trauma stems primarily from a conflict with women and/or femininity, eliding the role of age. Moreover, many of the influential feminist readings of the play grow out of a critical consensus in the 1980s that in the late plays male anxieties about female power and the (often concomitant) loss of male–male friendship cause psychic and social ruptures that ultimately are healed through the plays’ concluding affirmation of generational continuity.⁸ Perhaps because it presumes generational continuity to be the key signifier of psychic and social stability, this reading overlooks some of the ruptures left unhealed at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*. For although the play represents Leontes’ ultimate progression toward early modern manhood in his recommitment to his marriage and his acceptance of death, it simultaneously dramatizes Polixenes’ regression through his unhealthy fixation on youth and boyhood games. In this way *The Winter’s Tale* questions as it produces a linear narrative of male development, folding back on itself to portray the cyclical nature of the aging process.

II

In analyzing Shakespeare’s representations of male aging, it is crucial to keep in mind that the basic structure of early modern English society

7. Fisher, p. 178. This essay is reprinted in modified form in Will Fisher, *Materializing Gender in Early Modern English Literature and Culture* (Cambridge, Eng., 2006).

8. C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler, *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare’s Power of Development* (Berkeley, 1986); *Representing Shakespeare: New Psychoanalytic Essays* ed. Murray M. Schwartz and Coppélia Kahn (Baltimore, 1980); W. Thomas MacCary, *Friends and Lovers: The Phenomenology of Desire in Shakespearean Comedy* (New York, 1985).

was both patriarchal and moderately gerontocratic. Although men accumulated privileges as they aged, the apex of power was imagined to be achieved during what we might call “middle age,” the stage at which men exhibit the most culturally valued attributes, like virility, wisdom, and courage. In *The Differences of the Ages of Man’s Life* (1608), Henry Cuffe underscores the perfections of this time of life when he labels the first sub-stage of manhood “Prime.”⁹ Prime manhood is only temporary, however, for as the body continues to age, the man begins to resemble an infant again; in *As You Like It*, Jacques cites a commonplace view of old age when he calls it a return to “second childishness and mere oblivion” (2.7.164).¹⁰ So while men may claim gerontocratic privilege as they grow older, they also take on the burden of continuing to perform markers of masculinity that dissolve with age as virility becomes weakness, wisdom becomes forgetfulness, courage fear, stability inconstancy, and so forth.¹¹

It is not surprising that early modern writing on age and aging turns repeatedly to the idea that boyhood lies on a continuum with manhood. To compete with the body’s circular narrative, which muddles the lines between adulthood and childhood, some writers produce a more comfortable, linear narrative that emphasizes the development of boys into men, insuring the perpetuity of masculinity: boys are always-already in the process of becoming men, and men, by implication, are merely grown-up boys. This progressive narrative provides comfort on a broad, systemic level by underscoring the ways a modified gerontocratic patriarchal society can reproduce itself; as long as boys grow up to become men, there will be men to assume positions of social and political power. On a more personal, psychic level, the

9. Henrie Cuffe, *The Differences of the Ages of Mans Life* (1607), sig. I4.

10. Several different models of the aging process remained current during Shakespeare’s time: Ptolemaic, Galenic, Aristotelian, and Christian. See J. A. Burrow, *The Ages of Man: A Study in Medieval Writing and Thought* (Oxford, 1986). For a helpful summary of these models and how they relate to Jacques’ speech, which draws on the first two, see Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, esp. pp. 71–75. Although Jacques’ negative view of old age was common, especially in Shakespeare, some early modern writers, drawing on Cicero’s *De Senectute*, also praise old age, claiming it brings men wisdom and moderation. See, e.g., Thomas Sheafe, *Vindiciae Senectutis, or A Plea for Old-Age* (1639). For an overview of attitudes toward aging in prose treatises of the first half of the seventeenth century, and particularly the ideas that old age involves a reversal of earlier stages of life and is accompanied by undesirable characteristics, see Steven R. Smith, “Growing Old in Early Stuart England,” *Albion* 8:2 (1976).

11. On early modern understandings of the cyclicity of life and their particular implications for men, see Smith, *Shakespeare and Masculinity*, ch. 3.

narrative of masculinity as a linear progression offers the aging subject some illusion of control over the body's fall into "second childishness." Crucially, developmental narratives of masculinity do not collapse the difference between boyhood and manhood. The teleology of masculinity, wherein boys turn naturally into men, relies on and produces an ontological paradox: boys and men are fundamentally alike but at the same time fundamentally different. The dialectical tension inherent in similitude is crucial to these narratives' cultural and psychic appeal, for they imagine masculinity as constant and persistent despite, and indeed because of, temporal change.¹²

For early moderns games were an ideal forum through which to contemplate this similitude, for defenders of games return repeatedly to a theory of similitude and concomitant developmental theories of masculinity in order to legitimize play. As Gregory Colón Semenza points out, early modern English writers well into the seventeenth century reiterated ancient functionalist arguments for sport, promoting certain games as ways to prepare males for war.¹³ These arguments are interesting not only because they legitimize play in a society that was often critical of pastimes, but because they affirm a narrative about the perpetuity of masculinity, defending the virtues of recreation by associating pastimes with boyhood. Defenses of archery are a case in point. Tudor monarchs intent on preserving this aristocratic sport attempted to insure that English boys were taught to shoot. Following her father's example, Elizabeth I mandated that "every man having a man child or men children" between the ages of seven and seventeen needed to keep a bow and two shafts in his house to encourage and train youths in the sport.¹⁴ Roger Ascham's pro-archery treatise *Toxophilus* (1545)

12. In effect, early modern writers enact a version of the "strategic proximation" that Jonathan Gil Harris urges early modern scholars to practice. Using Michel Serres' analogy of time as a crumpled handkerchief—which demonstrates how two distant points can approach each other at one moment and become distant from each other the next—Harris calls for thinking about temporality as "untimely proximity and affinity as well as orderly distance and difference." See "Untimely Mediations," *Early Modern Culture: An Electronic Seminar*, issue 6, 2000–2008 (cited April 7, 2007), available from <http://emc.eserver.org/1-6/harris.html>.

13. Semenza, esp. ch. 2. On the Jacobean court's strategies for defending pastimes, see Leah S. Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago, 1986). Marcus' and Semenza's important arguments, however, do not account for the role of age in early modern literary and political treatments of sport.

14. *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin, (New Haven, 1969), II, 359.

helps elucidate the logic behind the court's emphasis on boyhood recreation. Writing to gain patronage from Henry VIII,¹⁵ Ascham trumpets archery as the recreation of choice, especially for boys, claiming that shooting has been integral to England's successful military history and that continued virility depends on training the next generation. The functionalist argument is tricky to execute, for archery was quickly becoming simply a pastime in England, with little practical application in war. The very battle Ascham claims to be the inspiration for his writing (Boulogne) was not won by archery, but by guns.¹⁶ Yet it is precisely because of the sport's dwindling practical use that its advocates recruited boyhood as its crucial site of preservation. Boy shooters can better maintain the illusion that archery still serves a long-range military purpose because, Ascham implies, they are more distanced from military involvement, necessarily using archery only as a form of play.¹⁷

While Ascham urges all men—indeed, men of every class, occupation and age—to practice archery, he repeatedly emphasizes the importance of the young learning the sport, urging that “*youth shulde use it for the moost honest pastyme in peace, that men myght handle it as a mooste sure weapon in warre,*” and that shooting “*can not be done mightelye when they be men, excepte they learne it perfitelye when they be boyes.*”¹⁸ At stake in this training, Ascham maintains, is the production not simply of good soldiers, but of manly men: “*Princes beinge children oughte to be brought up in shoting; both bycause it is an exercise moost holsom, and also a pastyme moost honest: wherin labour preparerth the body to hardnesse, the minde to couragiousnesse, sufferieng neither the one to be marde with tendernesse, nor yet the other to be hurte with ydlenesse.*” That this developed toughness of

15. Roger Ascham, *Toxophilus*, ed. Peter E. Medine (Tempe, Ariz, 2002), intro., p. 17.

16. Ascham, pp. 19–20. On the dwindling effectiveness of functionalist arguments for sport in light of military changes, see Semenza (pp. 41–43), who argues that like other defenses of noble pastimes, Ascham's treatise was motivated by class-based fears about the ways guns democratize warfare.

17. I do not mean to imply that early moderns associated games exclusively with youths and war exclusively with adults. To be sure, youths fought on battlefields and adults enjoyed many forms of games and pastimes. But in a culture where the definition of play was hotly contested and where leisure was politically loaded, one strategy by which writers defend recreation is by associating it with youth. This strategy, however inaccurate in reality, enables writers to draw more easily on ancient functionalist arguments about sport as preparation for war, and thus, more broadly, for the legitimacy of play.

18. Ascham, p. 39, my emphasis; p. 54.

mind and body is gendered is evident in Ascham's warning against those who "were not brought up with outward honest payneful pastymes to be men: but cockerde up with inward noughtie ydle wantonnesse to be women" (p. 53).

The role of sport in male development is elucidated in other treatises celebrating English pastimes. In John Stow's *A Survey of London* (1603), the author recalls games he probably played as a youth, many of which seem designed to inculcate traits of martial masculinity such as courage and strength. In one game young men file onto a field where they practice "feates of warre."¹⁹ In another, two youths run on the ice and bash each other with poles in what seems an early modern version of ice hockey. While conceding the sport can be dangerous, Stow maintains it serves a developmental function: "eyther one or both doe fall, not without hurt: some breake their armes, some their legges, but youth desirous of glorie in this sort exerciseth it selfe agaynst the time of warre" (p. 94).

These games are not only about youth performing great feats, but about adults watching the events. Stow relates how "[u]pon the bridge, wharfes, and houses, by the rivers side, stand great numbers to see, & laugh therat," and that during Shrovetide "after dinner all the youthes go into the fields to play at the bal. The schollers of every school have their ball, or baston, in their hands: the auncient and wealthy men of the Citie come forth on horsebacke to see the sport of the yong men, and to take part of the pleasure in beholding their agilitie" (p. 93). Why does Stow emphasize the gerontocrats that witness these youthful recreations? What is so pleasurable for aging men about observing or, in Ascham's case, describing youths playing games that mimic war? Richard Carew's *Survey of Cornwall* (1602) offers an answer in its discussion of the sport of "hurling." Hurling resembles modern American football, but, in its "country" form, it was played across several parishes, with the teams incorporating real-world battle strategies, like lying in wait behind bushes or riding in on horseback to ambush the opposition. Carew is ambivalent about whether to accept hurling's violence, which is crucial to its manliness: "I cannot well resolve, whether I should more commend this game, for the manhood and exercise, or condemne it for the boysterousness and harmes which it

19. John Stow, *A Survey of London: Conteyning the originall, antiquity, increase, moderne estate, and description of that city* (1603), p. 93.

begetteth: for as on the one side it makes their bodies strong, hard, and nimble, and puts a courage into their hearts, to meete an enemie in the face: so on the other part, it is accompanied with many dangers, some of which doe ever fall to the players share. For prooffe whereof, when the hurling is ended, you shall see them retyring home, as from a pitched battaile, with bloody pates, bones broken, and out of joynt, and such bruises as serve to shorten their daies; yet al is good play, & never Attourney nor Crouner troubled for the matter.”²⁰ Despite his concerns, Carew admits he enjoys watching the sport and seeing participants overlook its physical risks. Ultimately, “al is good play,” a sentiment seemingly shared by the cheering fans that Stow describes. In essence, Carew and Stow recognize what anthropologist Gregory Bateson calls the “frame” of play: a somewhat arbitrary boundary, predicated on consensus, it establishes a difference between play and not-play while paradoxically recognizing that these may be indistinguishable in appearance.²¹ The bloody bodies on the field after a hurling match look much like the bodies of soldiers after battle, but they are not the same, for the hurlers somehow have signaled to each other that the fighting is to be interpreted as play. For early modern writers like Carew, this consciousness of frames has a productive purpose not addressed in Bateson’s writings: positing similitude (rather than equivalence) enables authors to invest masculinity with a developmental teleology. By insisting that there is some difference between boys with their playful games and men with their serious pursuits, authors can iterate that boys who play archery or hurl well will become good warriors: that boys will become men.

III

As in analogies between hurling and war, the logic of similitude that connects boys with men functions only as long as the two terms can also be distinguished. Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* dramatizes what can happen when the difference between boyhood and manhood collapses entirely, and when consciousness of the frame of play

20. Richard Carew, *Survey of Cornwall* (1602), sig V3v.

21. Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Fantasy,” in *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind* (New York, 1972). I am grateful to Flagg Miller for helping me clarify my approach to Bateson.

disappears. The seeds of that collapse are sown early, as Leontes and Polixenes, bidding farewell, nostalgically recall the games they played together during their youth, “twinned lambs that did frisk i’th’ sun, / And bleat the one at th’other” (1.2.69–70). They had no other wish than to be “boy eternal” (1.2.66). Of course the frisking boys became men, a transition that early moderns across the socioeconomic spectrum identified as happening at the time of marriage.²² The responsibilities of kingship and manhood demanded that Leontes and Polixenes put aside youthful, homosocial sport as “more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society” (1.1.21–22). Polixenes’ extended visit to Sicilia has rekindled the spirit of their boyhood friendship, giving both men a chance to recollect their pleasurable youth together and momentarily forget that they are mature men, expected to govern kingdoms and families. It is no wonder Leontes begs his friend to remain.

Leontes’ paranoid reaction to the news that Hermione has persuaded Polixenes to stay has been the subject of much critical debate. In their explanations for Leontes’ sudden madness, critics often focus on Leontes’ fears of being cuckolded and his concern that his best friend has become a rival for his wife’s affections.²³ Although fear of cuckoldry is certainly evident, Leontes seems just as fixated on the ways his wife has become a rival for his friend’s affection.²⁴ Moments before Leontes’ famous aside, Hermione alludes to her friendship with Polixenes and how it parallels her relationship with her husband—

22. Ilana Krausman Ben-Amos, *Adolescence and Youth in Early Modern England* (New Haven, 1994).

23. See, e.g., Mark Breitenberg, *Anxious Masculinity in Early Modern England* (Cambridge Eng., 1996).

24. Stephen Guy-Bray, who argues for a sexual relationship between Polixenes and Leontes, makes a similar point. Leontes “is jealous of his wife because he thinks she has sex with his friend and of his friend because he thinks he has sex with his wife.” See *Homoerotic Space: Poetics of Loss in Renaissance Literature* (Toronto, 2002), esp. p. 206. However, the relationship between Polixenes and Leontes need not be construed as sexual in our modern terms in order for it to be significant. As various critics have pointed out, many early modern texts use the language of friendship between equals to engage a classical discourse of male-male love (*amicitia*), that can be erotic without necessarily being genital-centered. See, e.g., Jeffrey Masten, *Textual Intercourse: Collaboration, Authorship, and Sexualities in Renaissance Drama* (Cambridge, Eng., 1997), and Alan Bray, *The Friend* (Chicago, 2003). For a useful discussion and extension of these ideas toward thinking about early modern female-female friendship and its erotic valences, see Valerie Traub, *The Renaissance of Lesbianism in Early Modern England* (Cambridge, Eng., 2002).

a parallel Leontes himself had introduced when he compared Hermione's speech convincing Polixenes to the speech she gave to Leontes when they married.

HERMIONE: I have spoke to th' purpose twice.
The one for ever earned a royal husband;
Th'other, for some while a friend.

LEONTES [aside]: Too hot, too hot:
To mingle friendship farre is mingling bloods. (1.2.108–11)

Hermione's response appears to confirm the comparison between "royal husband" and "friend," but it is Leontes who forces Hermione's articulation of the parallel when he interrupts her full metered line, clipping its end so that "husband" and "friend" are forced to occupy the same syntactical position in their respective lines.²⁵ And in his subsequent paranoid aside, Leontes focuses his concerns on this "friendship."

To understand that concern, it is useful to keep in mind Alan Bray's important argument that early modern sworn brotherhood created a binding and reliable form of kinship that existed alongside and overlapped with other kinship structures such as marriage.²⁶ Although we do not witness Leontes and Polixenes reciting oaths of sworn brotherhood like some of the male couples Bray describes, their acts of friendship—the exchange of "gifts, letters, loving embassies" (1.1.24), the ways they "shook hands" (l. 25) and "embraced" (l. 26) across the seas—conform to this model. Polixenes' visit to Sicilia has reinforced these bonds of kinship, as is evident through the men's repeated references to each other in 1.2 as "brother" (ll. 4, 15, 27). And until the turmoil of 1.2, the brotherhood appears to have coexisted peacefully with Leontes' marriage to Hermione. What disrupts the fraternal bond the men shared as children and renewed these last nine months is not just Polixenes allegedly cuckolding Leontes or their impending physical separation, but Polixenes' "mingle[d]" friendship with another.

Monogamous male friendship serves a psychic purpose that is implicit, although not directly addressed, in Bray's work on sworn

25. Leontes' interruption further compromises Hermione's claim because the monosyllable "friend" is stressed at the end of her line, underscoring the ways "husband" weakens the preceding eleven-syllable line.

26. Bray, *The Friend*. See also Rebecca Ann Bach, "The Homosocial Imaginary of *A Woman Killed with Kindness*," *Textual Practice* 12:3 (1998).

brotherhood. Reading the inscriptions on companionate burial tombs, Bray emphasizes the intimacy of friends. But the tombs also attest to the ways male friendship offers a prophylactic against anxieties about mortality. By promising to support each other until death and arranging to be buried together, sworn brothers steady themselves against the instabilities of aging and the unknown of the afterlife. Friendship connects the aging subject not only to his future, but his past. As in the nostalgic speeches of Shallow and Polixenes, fraternal bonds can be built through the recollection of shared history and particularly memories of men having played together in childhood or adolescence. More to the point, as aging friends recall this history of play, they bind themselves more firmly to their youth, reaffirming their place in a comforting, continuous narrative of developing masculinity.

This broader context for male friendship helps explain why at the end of his paranoid rant, Leontes turns to his son Mamillius and proceeds to play. His sudden engagement of Mamillius with the question “Art thou my boy?” (1.2.122) points to Leontes’ loose rationale that Hermione’s alleged current infidelity renders suspect his paternal claim to Mamillius. So it is not surprising that he goes on to contemplate his likeness with his son, noting that Mamillius’s nose is said to be “a copy out of mine” (1.2.124) and that, according to others, the two are “[a]lmost as like as eggs” (1.132). But Leontes’ investments in Mamillius and their similarities extend beyond an interest in familial resemblance. Through Mamillius he seeks the connection to boyhood that Polixenes once offered. Mamillius begins to serve as a substitute for Polixenes, a new boyhood friend. Janet Adelman, Peter Erickson, Carol Thomas Neely, Susan Snyder, Thomas MacCary, and others argue something similar when they describe Leontes as seeking in Mamillius a substitute “mirror-comrade” now that he believes he has lost Polixenes, his “twin lamb.”²⁷ In this reading Leontes wishes to polarize male and female worlds, and fixates on Mamillius because of their common maleness, epitomized through their visual similarities.²⁸ However, Leontes cathects onto Mamillius as much for his age as his gender.

27. Snyder, p. 215. Peter Erickson, “Patriarchal Structures in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *PMLA* 97.5 (1982), 819–29, argues that the son is the “lifeblood of the [patriarchal] system, its source of rejuvenation” (p. 821). It is not just the son’s connection to the father that enables him to insure the perpetuity of patriarchy; it is also his youth and his promise of eventual manhood.

28. Although offering a very different reading from these critics, Guy-Bray also focuses on Mamillius’ gender, arguing that Leontes seeks in Mamillius a substitute object of homoerotic affection.

Leontes does not, as Snyder argues, pursue a “premature masculinizing of his son” in order to “realign his son with himself,” or as David Lee Miller suggests, in order to fulfill his “fraught and anxious demand to be copied.”²⁹ Rather, he attempts to realign himself with his son in order to imitate and inhabit the youth his son represents.³⁰ Leontes proceeds to disport himself with Mamillius. Cleaning a smudge on his son’s nose, he calls Mamillius his “captain” (1.2.124; 125), as if they are engaging in an informal game of toy-soldiers (a game played as early as the fourth century). Mamillius eagerly engages with Leontes, interpreting his father’s query, “Art thou my calf?” (1.2.129) as a typical invitation to engage in make-believe play. Mamillius’s response, “Yes, if you will” (129), serves as a verbal sign of cooperation that, play theorists argue, is commonly used when children negotiate the rules of spontaneous imaginative ventures.³¹ Playing with Mamillius initially seems to ground Leontes, alleviating his sadness at the loss of his friend (potentially to his wife) and the concomitant loss of his own connection to his youth. But Leontes’ engagement with the child aggravates as much as it alleviates his anxieties. Unlike Shallow, whose recollections of boyhood games enable him to grapple with his age and the losses that attend it, Leontes fails to deploy his nostalgia productively. Pretend play, as it helps him reengage boyhood pleasures, initially brings Leontes closer to his son, but instead of indulging in his similarities to Mamillius, Leontes fixates on the differences, observing that his son does not yet show the “rough pash and the shoots” (1.2.130) and is not “full” (l. 131) like his father. Disturbed by the necessary distance between boy and man, Leontes attempts to collapse the categories so that he can enact the fantasy of being “boy eternal.”

To accomplish this conflation, Leontes turns to the language of games, figuring women as enemies to the good, honest play that he and Mamillius enjoy. Distrusting the women who say his son looks just like him, he compares these women to gamblers who cheat at dice: they “will say anything,” being “false / As dice are to be wished by one that fixes / No bourn twixt his and mine” (ll. 133–36). Leontes refers here to a scheme in dice-play where the swindler substitutes his rigged dice

29. Snyder, pp. 212, 215; Miller, p. 94.

30. Mamillius would be a particularly fixating presence for Leontes if he has been breeched and thus has begun to exhibit sartorially signs of emerging manhood.

31. Among the best applications of this sociolinguistic approach to ludicity is L.R. Goldman, *Child’s Play: Myth, Mimesis, and Make-Believe* (Oxford, 1998).

for the ones currently used, claiming there is no difference between the two.³² Through this analogy Leontes distances himself and his games with Mamillius from an adult world where cheating is rampant, and at the same time he revisits doubts about his similarity to the boy.

The larger stakes of Leontes' investments in his likeness to Mamillius become more evident when Leontes responds to public queries about his odd behavior. When asked by Hermione and Polixenes about his apparent "distraction" (1.2.151), he relates what we can now recognize as a conventional nostalgic narrative about the aging process:

Looking on the lines
Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil
Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched,
In my velvet coat; my dagger muzzled,
Lest it should bite its master, and so prove,
As ornament oft does, too dangerous.
How like, methought, I then was to this kernel,
This squash, this gentleman. (1.2.155-62)

Looking on his son prompts Leontes to reminisce about his childhood, specifically to the time before he was breeched, that point in the life cycle when male infants were put into gender-specific clothing, signaling their entry into the category of maleness.

Stephen Orgel reflects the critical consensus when he reads this speech as an explanation for Leontes' mental instability: Leontes' nostalgia indicates his desire to "return to childhood" and thereby "retreat from sexuality and the dangers of manhood."³³ To be sure, what Leontes fears about normative adult manhood is what follows from marriage and the necessity of generational reproduction: sexual contact with women. At stake in this anxiety, as Valerie Traub convincingly argues, is the very integrity of masculine subjectivity, for early moderns often viewed male-female intercourse as leading, either positively or negatively, to chaos and the dissolution of the male subject, who loses his mythic sense of wholeness in the act.³⁴ At the root of Leontes' fear

32. A description and condemnation of this con-game appears in Bird, sig. F7v.

33. Stephen Orgel, *The Winter's Tale* (Oxford, 1996), p. 23. See also Neely, who argues that Polixenes and Leontes cannot regenerate themselves because the "continuity that they need and desire . . . cannot be achieved by their own return, through their children, to the incestuous ideals of childhood innocence and father-son symbiosis" (p. 196).

34. Valerie Traub, *Desire and Anxiety: Circulations of Sexuality in Shakespearean Drama* (London, 1992), esp. p. 27. For a related argument concerning Leontes' anxieties about

of conjugal coupling is a concern about mortality. Leontes reveals a significant flaw in the commonplace early modern view that sexual reproduction immortalizes the male subject. While reproduction insures generational continuity, a form of immortality, it does so only at the cost of the integrity of male bodily and psychic wholeness.

While I agree with Orgel and others that Leontes ultimately responds to this anxiety by regressing to childhood, I would qualify this reading. For one thing, although Leontes later will regress to childhood, in this particular speech he pursues what early moderns would recognize as a productive relationship to his youth; like Shallow, Leontes attempts to reconnect through boyhood play with youth in order to cope with anxieties about aging and mortality. Moreover, these recollections of childhood games do not inherently comprise a retreat from adult sexuality and its dangers. This would assume that childhood is antithetical to adulthood, whereas Leontes depicts them as part of the same developmental narrative. Leontes represents Mamillius as a figure in the process of maturing; the series of descriptors for Mamillius build on each other to create a trajectory of development from “kernel” (or seed) to “squash” (or unripe peapod) to gentleman.³⁵ Mamillius does not represent some ontological, stable category of “boy,” but rather signals a teleological process, a gentleman who hasn’t yet ripened.

heterosexuality and the “[f]ear of degenerative change,” see Martin Orkin, *Local Shakespeares: Proximations and Power* (London and New York, 2005), esp. p. 114. Catherine Belsey corroborates a link between conjugal bliss and death in her analysis of early modern marriage furniture and tapestries, which often incorporate skulls and skeletons in their Garden of Eden iconography. See “The Serpent in the Garden: Shakespeare, Marriage and Material Culture,” *The Seventeenth Century* 9:1 (1996).

35. In his analysis of the term “squash” as applied to Cesario in *12N*, Jeffrey Masten points out that the term need not necessarily refer to a boy in the process of developing into a man. For instance, in *MND* “squash” refers to a woman. In the case of *WT*, however, where the term follows “kernel” and leads to “gentleman,” it seems more clearly a reference to developing manhood. Nevertheless, it is worth observing Masten’s larger point about the “definitional and categorical fluidity” of the boy figure. It is precisely because of the boy’s capacity to signify so widely that Mamillius can emblemize this developmental narrative. See Masten’s “Editing Boys: Gender, Eroticism, Performance, Print,” in *Performance to Print in Shakespeare’s England*, ed. Peter Holland and Stephen Orgel, *Redefining British Theatre History* (New York, 2007) esp. p. 117. My thanks to Masten for productive conversations about boyhood. On early modern boyhood, especially as represented on the stage, see the essays by Kate Chedgzoy and Lucy Munro in *Shakespeare and Childhood*, ed. Kate Chedgzoy, Susanne Greenhalgh, and Robert Shaughnessy (Cambridge, Eng., 2007) and Edel Lamb, *Performing Childhood in the Early Modern Theater: The Children’s Playing Companies (1559–1613)* (New York, 2008).

This investment in continuity becomes more evident when we observe that Leontes' memory, like Shallow's, focuses on childhood play. Leontes remembers himself as a boy essentially playing a man, holding a muzzled dagger at his side. At its simplest level the dagger is a toy, an aristocratic version of the pen-knives that many early modern boys carried.³⁶ While possessing a mundane utilitarian value, pen-knives were also used for games, such as mumbledepeg, as well as for carving playing instruments, such as spinning tops. As boys grew into men, pen knives and muzzled daggers might be exchanged for more manly playthings, such as weapons. Children's games and toys underscore the ways childhood was imagined on a continuum with adulthood.

Far from evincing a disturbed psyche, as most critics conclude, Leontes' reminiscences of childhood play might put his audience on stage and in the theater at ease insofar as they resonate with familiar narratives about male development. The concerns of Hermione and Polixenes are allayed, and for a moment playgoers may wonder if Leontes' paranoia has subsided. One way to read this speech is as a virtuoso performance of sanity by Leontes. More likely, it conveys a moment of clarity, intimating that Leontes is on the verge of reclaiming perspective and, like Polixenes and Shallow, will emerge from nostalgia to face the situation before him. But as we saw in his earlier engagement with Mamillius, Leontes fails to find comfort in the narrative of linear male development. Instead of leading him to accept his aging self, recollections of youthful play remind him painfully of the boyhood he has lost. Stalled in a vicious cycle, Leontes once again responds by clinging to Mamillius. He turns immediately to his son, whom he calls his "honest friend," distinguishing between Mamillius and the deceitful Polixenes.

Leontes goes on to defend the substitution of Mamillius for Polixenes. The first question he asks the man whom he now suspects has cuckolded him is, "Are you so fond of your young prince as we / Do seem to be of ours?" (1.2.165–66). And when he hears Polixenes describe in loving detail the ways his son is the complete companion, the ideal playmate—"all my exercise, my mirth, my matter . . . My

36. Pen-knives regularly appear among the lists of schoolboys' belongings in the period. See, e.g., John Brinsley, tr. *Corderius Dialogues* (1636), book 1, p.52; Brinsley, *Ludus Literarius: or, the Grammar Schoole* (1612), p. 29.

parasite, my soldier, statesman, all" (1.2.167–69)—Leontes is reminded that he has been and will be replaced, if not by Hermione then by this young competitor. Leontes responds with a glorified “me, too”—“So stands this squire / Officed with me” (ll. 172–73)—and promptly sends Polixenes and Hermione off together, while he takes Mamillius for his company. He goes on to reaffirm his friendship with Mamillius when he instructs Hermione to take care of Polixenes: “Next to thyself and my young rover, he’s / Apparent to my heart” (ll. 177–78). What appears a compliment to his old friend is in fact a statement of Polixenes’ now inferior rank in Leontes’ affections.

Left alone with his son, Leontes regresses fully, becoming fixated on play, an activity, I’ve argued, that he associates with his boyhood. He pouts to Mamillius, “Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I / Play too; . . . Go play, boy, play” (ll. 188–91). Leontes imagines his world as a big game of make-believe, where Hermione’s secret frolicking with Polixenes resembles his son’s boyish games, which resemble his own regressive recreations. Rather than finding solace in comparisons between children’s games and adult life, as Ascham, Carew, and others do, Leontes collapses the difference between boy and man, and between game and reality. When he sends Mamillius away, he conflates the categories of boy and man: “Go play, Mamillius, thou’rt an honest man” (l. 211).

Leontes turns his life—friends, family, kingdom—into a pastime, but one he takes very seriously. When he first publicly accuses Hermione, he uses the language of games, declaring, “My wife’s a hobby-horse” (1.2.278). Although editors gloss the term “hobby-horse” as whore, its more literal meaning at the time is a kind of toy, a stick topped with a horse’s head. Children ride it the way that Leontes maintains Polixenes “rides” Hermione. The hobby-horse is also more generally a name for a performer in a morris-dance, an early entertainment where the performer essentially mimics a rollicking horse. The implication is that Hermione is the player but also the toy with which Polixenes plays. It is worth noting that the more limited definition of whore that most editors use attributes all the blame for the alleged affair to Hermione, when Leontes directs part of his anger at Polixenes, a trend we’ve seen from the beginning. The editorial gloss also assumes that it is only the erotic nature of the Hermione-Polixenes relationship that concerns Leontes, whereas even their friendship is a threat.

Leontes returns again to the language of game-playing during Hermione's trial, claiming he has produced his case against Hermione the way a schoolboy constructs a spinning top: "if I mistake / In those foundations which I build upon, / The centre is not big enough to bear / A schoolboy's top" (2.1.102–15). Although "centre" can mean earth, the gloss of most editors, the literal definition is the point of equilibrium in a body or the axis around which an object turns.³⁷ In the early modern top-spinning game, the winning top will spin the longest because it is built with a sound center, a peg or stick that serves as the top's axis.³⁸ Used at a moment when life and death hang in the balance, Leontes' analogy is deeply troubling. Not only does he compare the case against Hermione to a children's game, but he offers this analogy as proof that the case against her is sound, as if the schoolboy's playground game provides the benchmark for true justice. Games have come to provide Leontes with the language through which he understands and participates in the larger world, but he appears wholly unconscious of this as a language. Adrift in a fantasy world, he no longer recognizes the frame of play.

There is a parallel between Leontes' nostalgia for the playfulness of boyhood and Ascham's nostalgic portrayal of England's boys practicing archery. In both cases boyhood recreation keeps certain kinds of loss at bay—losses brought about by the temporality of the human body and its inevitable move toward old age as well as by the waning of English traditional life and the temporal movement toward modernity. Boyhood play provides a focal point for constructing the past as an idyllic time, whether the personal, individual past or, in the cases of Ascham and Stow, a collective English past. Such efforts can only be temporary, however, as the forces of time exert themselves. Readers of Ascham's nostalgic treatise would have known full well that the book could not halt the modernization of England's military. And so the audience to *The Winter's Tale* is encouraged to condemn Leontes for his childishness, and to cheer as he is dragged in the second half of the play sixteen years into the future.

37. OED, 3rd ed., s.v. "centre/center."

38. Andrew Leibs, *Sports and Games of the Renaissance* (Westport, Conn, 2004), p. 188, describes the game as played in Renaissance Oceania. In *The Sports and Pastimes of the People of England* (1801), ed. J. Charles Cox (Detroit, 1968), pp. 304–05, Joseph Strutt cites English evidence of spinning tops, including an anecdote from a manuscript wherein Prince Henry recalls playing with tops.

IV

Although Leontes' transformation is delayed until act 5, the first stirrings of change occur when Leontes learns that Mamillius has suddenly died. Mamillius' death is significant not only because he is heir to the throne, but because Mamillius represents for Leontes a connection to boyhood play and the psychic security it promises. If Leontes conflates manhood and boyhood, regressing to the latter in an effort to escape the pressures of aging, Mamillius' death reveals the costs of such a conflation.³⁹ Boyhood, now associated with death rather than continuity, no longer provides a safe haven from anxieties of aging.⁴⁰ With attachment to boyhood now a source of discomfort, Leontes relinquishes his interests in play and declares that he will make grief for his wife and son his only sport: "Once a day I'll visit / The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there / Shall be my recreation" (3.3.236–38). This total abjection of all games and play is extreme, and insufficient to Leontes' full transformation; Leontes, *The Winter's Tale* will suggest, needs to find a productive place for recreation, not simply to eschew it.

The precursor to that ultimate recovery is the visit in act 5 of Florizel, who may be the first youth that Leontes has encountered in sixteen years. Florizel is a dangerous temptation because he reminds Leontes of both the boyhood friends he has lost: Florizel not only physically resembles the young Polixenes, but he is the very age that Mamillius would have been had he survived: "[t]here was not full a month / Between their births" (5.1.117–18). Leontes shuns both comparisons, however. When Paulina muses "Had our prince, / Jewel of children, seen this hour, he had paired / Well with this lord" (5.1.115–17), Leontes quickly silences her, refusing to think of Mamillius as grown and alive. As Stephen Guy-Bray observes, the suppression of this pairing of Mamillius and Florizel is in keeping with the suppression of homoeroticism in the second part of the play. Given the pitfalls of Leontes' attachment to boyhood, his avoidance of this image of

39. I am extending Erickson's insight that the death of Mamillius cures Leontes of his delusions because it forces him to recognize that he has equated father and son (p. 821). The problem with such an equation is that it collapses not only familial, but age, categories.

40. This is one of the many similarities between these two phases of the life cycle, as early moderns envisioned it. Children were thought to be extremely vulnerable to sickness as a result of their weak—wet and cold—constitutions.

boyhood friends is also significant to the play's representation of his progression through the life cycle toward normative manhood. A notable sign of this progression is Leontes' ability to reminisce about, without becoming lost in, his boyhood relationship with Polixenes. To be sure, when Leontes looks on Florizel, who so resembles the young Polixenes, Leontes regresses momentarily to the past and almost forgets his advanced age:

Were I but twenty-one,
Your father's image is so hit in you,
His very air, that I should call you brother,
As I did him, and speak of something wildly
By us performed before. (5.1.125–29)

But Leontes' nostalgia is carefully bracketed by conditionals that frame the past as the past: "were I but twenty-one . . . I should call you brother." And in keeping with his newfound acceptance of his mature years, Leontes does not break into a nostalgic recital of things "wildly performed . . . before." Moreover, when Florizel reminds Leontes of his youth, urging him to think back to the time he was Florizel's age and take pity on the young couple, Leontes reacts very differently than he did in act 1. When he recalls being on the cusp of marriage, Leontes does not grip the past and repudiate women but greedily eyes Perdita and explains (or maintains) that he thinks of Hermione (5.1.226–27). Insofar as Leontes' nostalgic recollection stimulates desire and/or thoughts of his dead spouse, he demonstrates acceptance of the ways male-male relationships (whether homo-social or homoerotic) can exist alongside marriage and heteroerotic desire.

Through his encounter with Florizel, Leontes may begin to perform what early moderns define as normative adult masculinity, but the ultimate test of his transformation is the final scene of the play, where Leontes not only comes to accept his aging self, but does so through recognition of the frame of play. Leontes' greater comfort with old age becomes evident when he first views the statue of Hermione and observes that its face is wrinkled, more aged than Hermione's face was when she was alive. Leontes is not disturbed by Paulina's explanation that Hermione is represented as she would look at present, even though the statue crystallizes the passage of time, reflecting back Leontes' own lined face. Leontes even gestures to his mortality. When

Paulina expresses concern that Leontes may think the statue moves, Leontes swears on his life that he has seen it move, “Would I were dead but that methinks already” (5.3.62). His contemplation of death is expressed more explicitly when, insisting that Paulina keep the curtain open, he declares twice that he wishes to look on the statue for the next twenty years (5.3.71, 84). Given that Leontes is now in his forties, he projects himself forward to his sixties, the approximate time of death for many early modern men.⁴¹ Leontes thus not only accepts his wife as his companion into old age, but crucially accepts the aging process and the reality of mortality.⁴²

Notably, this acceptance is developed through Leontes’ participation in one of the period’s most popular forms of recreation, the theater. Paulina’s carefully crafted revelation of the statue and Hermione’s virtuoso display of stillness are theatrical performances, albeit performances of which Leontes and his fellow audiences are at first unaware. By not divulging this pretense, Paulina forces Leontes to reexperience his confounded delusions from the start of the play: where he once was so completely emmeshed in boyhood games that he lost the ability to recognize the frame of play, now he is denied awareness that there is a frame. Paulina offers Leontes the opportunity to discover the frame on his own, and he does. While Paulina expertly maintains the illusion—naming the artist, calling attention to the wet paint, drawing and undrawing curtains—Leontes hesitantly but persistently tests the fuzzy

41. Keith Wrightson, *Earthly Necessities: Economic Lives in Early Modern Britain* (New Haven, 2000) notes that the average life expectancy rose over the course of the sixteenth century, from about 32–34 in the first half of the century to about 38–41 by 1580 (p. 127). It is important to note that these averages are calculated across the life cycle and do not reflect that children who lived past age five had a higher than average life expectancy. In “Growing Old,” Steven R. Smith finds that in the seventeenth century many people lived to age sixty, with about a third living to seventy or more (p.126). At the same time Steven R. Smith and Peter Laslett, *Family Life and Illicit Love in Earlier Generations: Essays in Historical Sociology* (Cambridge, Eng., 1977) point out that the statistics on old age can be misleading since individuals may have inflated their reported age in a culture that esteemed the elderly. For an historical overview of early modern attitudes toward death and religious rituals involved, see David Cressy, *Birth, Marriage, and Death: Ritual, Religion, and the Life-Cycle in Tudor and Stuart England* (Oxford, 1997).

42. Inga-Stina Ewbank, “The Triumph of Time in *The Winter’s Tale*,” *Review of English Literature* 5, no. 2 (1964) argues that Leontes, as he comes to accept time’s natural passage, also accepts his subjection to time as a destructive force. I find this useful but question the presumption that the play represents Leontes as passively subject to time’s effects. Leontes’ recovery at the end of the play is contingent on his capacity to shape the relations among past, present, and future, something games and recreations, particularly theater, ultimately encourage. See Harris for a useful critique of Ewbank.

boundary between pretense and reality. As he stares at the statue, he is certain that has seen it move, that “it breathed” and wonders if others note that “those veins / Did verily bear blood?” (5.3.64–65). He goes on to insist, “The fixture of her eye has motion in’t” (l. 67) and, again, that he sees her breathing (ll. 78–9). There is even some intimation that Leontes discovers the pretense before the other onstage witnesses, for as he embraces Hermione, Camillo and Polixenes, stunned, seem unable to grasp that this has all been a performance. Although it is now clear that Paulina does not direct the statue’s movements, Camillo and Polixenes still ask her to make the statue speak and narrate its history (ll. 114–16). Their deferred recognition matters little, however, for the performance has been scripted and played primarily for Leontes, an opportunity for him to exercise the kind of consciousness of frames that was missing when he first wronged Hermione.

Only once he has proven he can engage productively in play is Leontes ready to resume his adult duties. And as Leontes becomes aware that, in Carew’s words, “al is good play,” he confronts his aging body and his temporally circumscribed future, like Shallow and the gerontocrats Stow describes. Where Leontes once looked on the lines of his boy’s face, he now looks at the wrinkles on Hermione’s statue, and instead of retreating to the past, he projects himself into the future, seeing before him the years he has left to live and gaze upon this representation of passing time. Instead of abandoning games and pleasures, Leontes turns to recreation, theatrical recreation, as a vehicle through which to accept the aging process. Through Leontes’ new approach to play, *The Winter’s Tale* underscores early modern views of the rejuvenating benefits of sport, re-creation indeed.

V

The Winter’s Tale presents itself, in sum, as a story of Leontes’ development from troubled to normative adult masculinity. Notably, the play has been described as a triumph of linear over cyclical time, the latter associated with the homosocial pastoral that dominates the first act.⁴³

43. Such a triumph has been read as a function of genre (the happy ending typical of tragicomedy) or, as Guy-Bray argues, of ideology (a conservative shift from male homoeroticism and homosociality to heterosexual marriage and reproduction).

Nora Johnson argues, however, that ultimately this rite of passage narrative from homoerotic youth to fertile adulthood is disrupted.⁴⁴ Johnson locates that disruption solely in the early modern theatrical performance space and its use of boy actors, but the disruption is also embedded in the play's plot structure and representation of character, specifically its story of Polixenes' anxious regression to boyhood in acts 4 and 5.

To understand how and why Polixenes' story of regressive masculinity undermines Leontes' story of progression and normative masculinization, it is useful to read the play in terms of what Annamarie Jagose calls "sexual sequence." Jagose argues that heterosexuality asserts its normativity by positing homosexuality as its derivative, and the secondariness of homosexuality is insured through a logic of sequence wherein it is figured as part of the "prehistory" to heterosexuality.⁴⁵ The tension Jagose describes between homosexuality's chronological primacy and its ideological secondariness is useful to my exploration of aging and masculinity in *The Winter's Tale*. I have argued that in a linear, developmental model of masculinity, asserting the chronological primacy of boyhood renders boyhood derivative of normative adult masculinity: boys are like men, but not quite, and boyhood, as Freud writes about homosexual desire, is something the "healthy" subject grows out of.⁴⁶ And yet, as Jagose points out in relation to sexuality, the logic of sequence cannot help but reveal itself to be an anxious effort to distance the subject from its prehistory. In a similar fashion, *The Winter's Tale's* triumphant master narrative of the inevitability of maturation and linear development is undermined and denaturalized. For Leontes' story is redramatized through Polixenes, but with a difference. Whereas Leontes' narrative is one of progression from boyhood into adult manhood and ultimate acceptance of marriage and mortality, Polixenes' is one of the failure to progress beyond childish games, of

44. Nora Johnson, "Ganymedes and Kings: Staging Male Homosexual Desire in *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Studies* 26 (1998).

45. Annamarie Jagose, *Inconsequence: Lesbian Representation and the Logic of Sexual Sequence* (Ithaca, 2002), esp. p. 81.

46. Bruce R. Smith, *Homosexual Desire in Shakespeare's England: A Cultural Poetics* (Chicago, 1991) locates a similar rhetoric at work in early modern educational discourse. Pastoral verse, with all its homoerotic content, was often considered a "youthful kind of poetry subject to re-vision from the wiser perspective of middle age" (p. 93), and thus students might read and write pastoral verse in their youth but were expected, with age and maturity, to move on to "higher" forms, like epic.

the persistent fear of dying, and the unflagging desire to remain “boy eternal.” With Polixenes *The Winter’s Tale* circles back to where it began, disrupting the sequential logic that generates momentum for Leontes’ manly transformation and exposing this linear, developmental narrative as by no means the last word on masculinity.

The parallels between Polixenes and Leontes are abundant. Act 4 begins with Polixenes begging his male companion, Camillo, not to leave.⁴⁷ And as was true for Leontes, for Polixenes it is the fear of growing older and of dying that partly fuels this desperation. Polixenes associates Camillo’s departure with death (4.2.2); and Camillo confirms the link when he explains that he wants to leave so that he can “lay my bones” (4.2.4–5) in Sicilia. Perhaps uncomfortable with the idea that Camillo is going home to Sicilia to die, Polixenes avoids subsequent talk of mortality, steering quickly away from mention of Leontes and the “loss of his most precious queen and children” (4.2.19–20). Notably, the contemplation of loss leads Polixenes, as it once did Leontes, to turn his attention immediately to his youthful son.

Anxious about his son’s remoteness, Polixenes, like Leontes, uses games, particularly games of pretend, as a way to reconcile the distance. “I fear . . . the angle that plucks our son thither” (4.2.39–40), he tells Camillo, and then recommends that they don disguises to dupe the simple Shepherd into betraying information about Florizel’s activities. At first this game of pretend is figured as fairly light-hearted deception, as Polixenes and Camillo jest with the country-folk, agreeably playing the old men at the sheep-shearing festivities. But much like Leontes’, Polixenes’ games are revealed to be nefarious in the hands of an aging patriarch who uses play to escape anxieties about his mortality.⁴⁸ Such

47. Because of the status differences between Polixenes and Camillo, this “friendship” is of a very different sort than that between Polixenes and Leontes. Nevertheless, the bonds between Polixenes and Camillo are significant and, given the unusual circumstances under which Camillo comes into the service of Polixenes, their relationship might be read as another form of voluntary kinship.

48. The ethical limits of sporty deception are raised quickly after Polixenes hatches his plan. For in the very next scene Autolycus uses an analogy from the recreation of fowling to describe how he will trick the Old Shepherd’s son out of his money: “If the springe hold, the cock’s mine” (4.3.33). Insofar as the woodcock is known to be easy prey, Autolycus’ analogy links the simplicity of the clown with Polixenes’ view of the simplicity of the Old Shepherd. And like Autolycus, Polixenes lures his easy prey by pretending to be vulnerable; whereas Autolycus pretends to have been robbed and beaten, Polixenes pretends to be old.

an escape proves impossible. For when the Old Shepherd offers a dowry to equal Doricles', Florizel opaquely observes that "One being dead, / I shall have more than you can dream of yet" (4.4.373-74). Playing the old man, Polixenes finds he has become one in his son's imagination, and the game is no longer such a pleasure for him. Although he continues to pretend, he now uses play as a façade to cover up his effort to entrap his son. Probing into why Florizel's father is not present at the wedding, Polixenes intimates that Florizel, by distancing himself from his father, relegates his father to old age:

Is not your father grown incapable
Of reasonable affairs? Is he not stupid
With age and alt'ring rheums? Can he speak, hear,
Know man from man? Dispute his own estate?
Lies he not bed-rid, and again does nothing
But what he did being childish? (4.4.385-90)

Polixenes rehearses the quintessential symptoms of what early moderns call decrepit old age, ending with the sign of most concern to adult men: the return in final years to childhood. Florizel's response aggravates these concerns. Although he explains that his father is in excellent health, he reminds Polixenes of the feebleness that accompanies old age when he says, "He has his health, and ampler strength indeed / Than most have of his age" (4.4.391-92). Florizel reiterates this negative view of old age later in the play when, to avoid Leontes' suspicions about Polixenes' absence from the voyage to Sicilia, Florizel explains that his father could not travel because "infirmity / Which waits upon worn times, hath something seized / His wished ability" (5.1.140-42). Florizel's marriage generates anxiety for other reasons as well, for marriage signals Florizel's transition into manhood and, most importantly, out of youth, a troubling change for a gerontocrat who has already admitted in act 1 that his son is "all my exercise, my mirth, my matter . . . My parasite, my soldier, statesman, all" (1.2.167-69). Given how much pleasure Polixenes derives from his youthful son, it is not surprising that when he reveals himself during the wedding ceremony, he emphasizes Florizel's immature years, calling him "young sir" (4.4.405) and "fond boy" (l. 414).

Although Polixenes finally accepts his son's decision to marry, he surrenders his young playmate to manhood only in the presence of his childhood friend Leontes. As Leontes once used Mamillius to

compensate for the loss of Polixenes, now Polixenes uses Leontes to compensate for the loss of Florizel.⁴⁹ The reconciliation between Leontes and Polixenes has been treated, by most critics, as an important feature of the play's climactic conclusion. In his influential study Erickson points to the elasticity and power of the play's "male network," maintaining that "[t]he primary indication of the resilience of male bonds in this play is that Leontes does not have to give up his friendship with Polixenes to regain Hermione" (p. 824). But what evidence is there, other than critics' desire for symmetrical reconciliations across and between the genders and generations, that Leontes and Polixenes have returned to being "twinned lambs"? The reunion of kings is neither complete nor climactic, a point underscored by the play's refusal to stage it.⁵⁰

When the kings do appear together, their friendship seems strained by inequalities and differences. For one thing, Polixenes expresses reluctance about old age. When Leontes observes that the statue of Hermione exhibits many more wrinkles than Hermione had when he knew her, when she was "nothing / So agèd as this seems" (5.3.28–29), Polixenes quickly responds, "O, not by much" (l. 29), as if to challenge the idea that Hermione looks old. And unlike Leontes, Polixenes seems unprepared to combine married life with homosocial friendship. Presumably having lost his wife, Polixenes stands alone among the cluster of matrimonial couples that close the play. He continues to cling to Leontes, offering himself as an emotional resource:

Dear my brother,
Let him that was the cause of this have power
To take off so much grief from you as he
Will piece up in himself. (5.3.53–56)

But Leontes does not accept the offer of fraternal comfort. Remaining transfixed on the statue, Leontes implies that he would rather have his grief than stop gazing on Hermione's likeness. Perhaps rebuffed, Polixenes withdraws. His remaining lines in this scene are superfluous: in addition to asking Paulina to make the statue speak—a request that

49. To be sure, Polixenes supports Florizel's marriage in large part because Perdita's newly discovered royal status renders her a fitting dynastic match. But Perdita also serves as a flesh and blood connection to Leontes.

50. Snyder offers an interesting but not fully convincing case that the scene may have been staged in some original version of the play, serving as its conclusion.

indicates his failure to recognize the frame of play as quickly as Leontes does—he merely confirms Leontes’ observations about the statue’s lively form (5.3.65–66), and when the statue touches Leontes, he observes, “She embraces him” (5.3.112). Since theater audiences can see this embrace for themselves, the line seems to function merely as a stage direction, which further removes Polixenes from the emotional center of the ending. At most the line conveys a sense of surprise, and perhaps regret, as Polixenes realizes that Leontes no longer reserves his affections exclusively for his boyhood friend.

Critics often maintain that at the end of *The Winter’s Tale*, all breaches are healed.⁵¹ If one reads the perpetuation of dynasties as a signal of healing, then this appears to be true. But if the breaches are produced in part by men’s over-investments in boyhood as a way to avoid anxieties of aging and mortality, then the play’s conclusion leaves questions open. Young heirs, while they may serve as comforting reminders of youth, can also be a source of anxiety about the aging process. The play shows one king overcoming fear of aging and death through a more productive engagement with games and youth, while another undergoes the identical struggle with less success. And so *The Winter’s Tale*, which valiantly works to offer a comforting linear narrative of male development through the story of Leontes, cycles back on itself, much like the process the body undergoes with age. If Leontes represents a triumphal story of the renewal available to those who face mortality, Polixenes points to a more sobering portrait of old age as a return to less exalted beginnings.⁵²

More than simply dramatizing this contrast, *The Winter’s Tale* offers audiences the chance to enact Leontes’ transformation. Theatrical recreation provides Leontes the opportunity to deal successfully with the paradox of similitude that structures early modern thinking about both

51. A key exception are feminist critics who question the neatness of the marital unions at the end of the play, particularly raising doubts about whether there is evidence that Hermione forgives Leontes (to whom she does not speak), not to mention the sudden and odd pairing of Camillo with the vigorously independent Paulina. The reunion of the two kings, however, has raised few if any doubts.

52. Although my focus here has been on how the parallel stories of Leontes and Polixenes diverge from each other and what the significance of this divergence may be for the play’s representation of aging and masculinity, an interesting question remains why their paths should differ. One possibility lies in their respective advisors: Polixenes is advised by Camillo, who so fears loss of his own life that he abandoned Hermione in Sicilia; Leontes is advised by Paulina, who herself has experienced profound loss and who, having engaged Leontes in a complex game of pretend for sixteen years, exhibits a strong understanding of play.

developmental masculinity and recreation. In the final scene he proves able to contemplate without collapsing the similarities between boys and men and between games and more serious adult pursuits. For the theater audience, too, the final scene presents a series of paradoxes around masculinity and play, as a male actor pretends to be a female character that pretends to be a statue that comes to life. What is more, on Shakespeare's stage these paradoxes of similitude would have been embodied literally by a playing boy. Even as the statue scene blurs pretense and the real, however, it uses emphatic metatheatricality to insure that audiences will, like Leontes, resolve these indistinctions and recognize that "al is good play."

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