

LOOK DOWN AND SEE WHAT DEATH IS DOING

Gods and Greeks in The Winter's Tale

Earl Showerman



Leontes: If this be magic, let it be an art lawful as eating.

Winter's Tale Act V Scene 3



RITICS have long regarded *The Winter's Tale* as derived from Robert Greene's 1588 romance, *Pandosto, The Triumph of Time*. As the introduction in *The Arden Shakespeare* states: "there are more verbal echoes from *Pandosto* than any other novel used by Shakespeare as a source." Yet the differences between the earlier prose novella and the play are as striking as are the manifold similarities, for Shakespeare not only upgraded the style of Greene's moral tale, he transformed it into a Renaissance version of a classic Greek trilogy, enriched with references to a library of ancient sources. More than simply portray in the florid manner of Greek romance the cruel death of Greene's virtuous Queen and the self-destruction of a jealous and sexually-obsessed monarch, Shakespeare's version of the story ends with what the great Shakespeare critic G. Wilson Knight has called "the most strikingly conceived and profoundly penetrating moment in English literature," the resurrection scene in the final act when the statue of Hermione comes to life.

The classical names of the characters, the preeminence of Apollo, the themes of vengeful jealousy with attempted regicide and infanticide, and the mysterious resurrection of Queen Hermione all point to sources from the earlier classical period. Thus, to the near certainty that *Hamlet* was developed in large part out of the only extant trilogy of the golden age of Greek tragedy, *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus,¹ I believe we can now credibly add Euripides's tragicomedy *Alcestis* (438 BCE) to Shakespeare's portfolio of classical Greek sources. While Greene's story took names and themes from the second-century Greek romance tradition, Shakespeare chose to craft his romantic masterpiece in the venerable tradition of fifth-century Greek drama.

Nineteenth-century scholars like W.W. Lloyd (1856), Israel Gollancz (1894), A.E. Haigh, (*The Tragic Drama of the Greeks*, 1896), and H.R.D. Anders (*Shakespeare's Books*, 1904) all recognized *Alcestis* as a source for the mysterious statue scene in *The Winter's Tale*, but as the twentieth century passed the mid-mark, acknowledgment of the connection faded as scholars began to react to the limits on Shakespeare's knowledge of the Greek canon imposed by the Stratford grammar school education. Since then, contemporary scholars have tended either to ignore *Alcestis* or relegate it to a footnote.

In *Shakespeare and the Classics* (1952), J.A.K. Thomson intentionally ignored the Greek classics almost entirely, believing that it would have been impossible for the Stratford author to

read Greek. More recently, neither *The Riverside Shakespeare* (1974) nor *The Norton Shakespeare* (1997) editions make any mention of *Alcestis*. Only the Arden edition of 1963 includes a passing line and brief footnote. Most scholars now tend to rely instead on the Pygmalion story from Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, which was available in English (in Arthur Golding's translation), as the source of the reanimation of Hermione in the statue scene. Jonathan Bate does mention *Alcestis* as a source for *Much Ado about Nothing*, but makes no mention of it in his commentaries on *The Winter's Tale* in his 2006 RSC edition of the Complete Works.

That the situation was different over a century ago may be because an education in the Humanities still required the ability to read the Greek and Latin classics in their original languages. The recognition of Greek influences on Shakespeare by nineteenth-century scholars was never more focused than on the remarkable similarities between the Statue Scene in Act V and the final scene of *Alcestis* and can be found in a number of commentaries from this period. After first considering the Shakespeare's "Plutarchan" nomenclature in *The Winter's Tale*, and acknowledging the central significance of god Apollo in both dramas, we will examine in detail the evidence supporting *Alcestis* as Shakespeare's inspiration for Hermione's resurrection.

A classical cast

Although Pandosto certainly provided the plot, primary characters, and geography² for *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare altered just about everything else. Greene gave his characters traditional Romance names like *Pandosto and Bellaria*, *Dorastus and Fawnia*; by renaming them for legendary Greek and Roman heroes, Shakespeare added nuanced meanings best appreciated by an audience educated in classical Greek history and drama, a point that seems to have escaped modern editors. Although *Winter's Tale* editor Pafford of *The Arden Shakespeare* (1963) asserts correctly that, for this play, Shakespeare got his characters' names from Plutarch, he neglects to identify most of them. More important, he and virtually every other Shakespeare editor fails to recognize them as an integrated group of personalities, connected in myriad ways both historically and poetically. Citing North's 1603 translation of Plutarch as Shakespeare's primary source for character names in *The Winter's Tale*, Pafford lists Leontes, Camillus, Antigonus, Cleomenes, Dion, Polyxemus, Archidamus, Autolycus, Hermione, and Amelia as characters in Plutarch whose names are represented among the *dramatis personae* of the play:

In Plutarch, the names occur chiefly in the lives of Camillus, and of Agis and Cleomenes;

Dr. Earl Showerman is a graduate of Harvard College and the University of Michigan Medical School. Having received post-graduate training at the University of Washington, he practiced emergency medicine for over thirty years. At Providence Medford Medical Center, he served as emergency department medical director, EMS supervising physician, and medical advisor to the Center for Health Promotion. For years, he taught the ethics of resuscitation in advanced life support courses for physicians, nurses, and medics. In 1986, he co-founded Epic Software Systems, providing over 500 hospitals and clinics with patient after-care instructions. He has been a dedicated patron of the Oregon Shakespeare Festival for over 30 years. He has served as a trustee of the Shakespeare Fellowship and the Shakespeare Authorship Coalition, and in 2004 published his class research on the Oresteia and Hamlet in THE OXFORDIAN VII. Since then he has presented papers at Concordia University, the LA Shakespeare Authorship Roundtable, and both the Ashland and Ann Arbor Shakespeare Authorship Conferences.

and Shakespeare was possibly indebted to the *Lives* for rather more than the names: Camillus, for example, is a kind of nobleman in Plutarch as Camillo is in the play, where he is mainly Shakespeare's creation. Apart from the Roman plays, Shakespeare's debt to Plutarch has not been fully explored. (164)

Howard Hunter Furness, editor of *The New Variorum Edition* (1898), was perhaps the first to note Shakespeare's reliance on Plutarch, almost never Greene's *Pandosto*, in selecting his characters' names. The names Leontes, Polixenes, Perdita and Florizel also appear nowhere else in all of Renaissance drama. Ironically, although he knows their source, Furness admits ignorance regarding the meaning of their use (though he blames this on Shakespeare):

In his nomenclature, Shakespeare is never merely servile in following his originals; but exercises a remarkable independence, sometimes simply adopting, sometimes slightly varying, sometimes wholly rejecting, the names he found in them. It is difficult to imagine that this conduct was merely arbitrary and careless. Euphony must of course have had its influence; often there must have occurred other considerations of no trifling interest, if only we could discover and understand them. . . . Shakespeare's names are curiously mixed . . . out of the various traditions he confusedly adopted and *languages, which he imperfectly knew*. (1, emphasis added)

That nomenclature from Plutarch, Hesiod, Euripides and Ovid lends symbolic meaning in *The Winter's Tale* apparently never occurs to traditional critics. What should be clear is that the naming scheme refers directly to fifth-century Greece as it includes three sequential rulers of Sparta between the periods of the heroic battles with the Persians at Thermopylae through the

The Alcestis of Euripides, both in treatment and incident, has many points in common with The Winter's Tale. Admetus, fated to die, is permitted by Apollo to prolong his life by furnishing Death with a voluntary substitute. He asks his aged parents, who refuse and when his wife, Alcestis, volunteers, he grieves, but selfishly accepts. No word of reproach passes the lips of Alcestis; but the coldness of her farewell shows her loss of respect. Like Hermione, she dies onstage, and it is not until her husband returns from the entombment, and stands before the doors of his widowed household, that his nobler self emerges, and he realizes too late that his wife has shown the nobility that he lacks. The Chorus comforts him, urging the reparation of funeral honor. Meanwhile the all-powerful Hercules brings the veiled Alcestis back from the dead, pretending that she's a prize he won at the games. Offering to leave her with Admetus, he even refers to the possibility of renewed wedlock, drawing from the anguished king words that comfort the revived though hidden queen similar to those that Paulina draws from the remorseful Leontes. Like Leontes gazing at the statue of Hermione, Admetus is raised to a state of agitation, until the form of his wife is finally unveiled, and he recognizes her. She remains speechless however; the purifications due to the gods must first be performed before she is allowed to speak. A three days' interval must elapse before he may hear her voice; and thus in her silent presence Euripides's play concludes.

Based on W.W. Lloyd in H.H. Furness (357-8)

first battles of the Peloponnesian War. Equally of interest is the fact that Euripides himself served in the Athenian military and that he wrote topical tragedies such as *Andromache* that demonized the Spartan King, Menelaus, and his daughter, Hermione—a detail that a Shakespeare ignorant of Greek is most unlikely to have found of interest in Latin commentaries or to have “picked up” in pubs.

In fact, the integrated, even self-referential, nature of Shakespeare’s naming scheme is very revealing. For instance, Paulina’s expressed faith in Alexander the Great’s worthy successor as expressed in Act V is a direct allusion to her deceased husband, Antigonus: “Great Alexander/ Left his to th’worthiest; so his successor/ Was like to be the best” (5.1.46-49); Antigonus I was the greatest of Alexander’s generals and succeeded him to the throne of Macedonia.

By examining the personalities and relationships of the names used for the characters of *The Winter’s Tale*, one can more fully appreciate the Greek context out of which Shakespeare built his story. I believe that much of the mystical power of this drama derives from these archetypal Greek sources, from the histories and mythologies embedded in its characters’ names. In contrast to the confused naming scheme suggested by editor Furness, Shakespeare chose virtually all his major characters names from Greek sources: Leontes, Hermione, Polixenes, Perdita, Autolychus, Antigonus, Archidamus, Dion and Cleomenes can all be traced to dramatically relevant historic and mythic characters in Plutarch, Livy, Euripides, Herodotus, Hesiod and Homer. His “Greek cast” includes the three kings of Sparta, the successor to Alexander, the King of Sicily, two princesses of the Trojan War, and Hermes’s son.

Among the classical names in The Winter’s Tale:

Leontes: the misogynistic Leonidas I, King of Sparta (489-80 BC), who succeeded his half-brother Cleomenes, and was renowned as the leader of the Spartan army at the Battle of Thermopylae.

Hermione: as found in Homer, Euripides, Plutarch, and Ovid, she was the daughter of Menelaus and Helen of Troy. The name is used in two early Elizabethan dramas, Horestes (1567) and for a male in The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune (1581-2). In his 1592 novel, Euphues Shadow, Thomas Lodge portrayed a slandered wife named Eurimone (a near-homophone) who dies and is transformed into a painted statue.

Polixenes: possibilites: Polyxemus, son of Medea; Polyxenus, son of Agasthemnes, high priest of Demeter and the Eleusinian Mysteries; Ployxena of Troy, youngest daughter of Priam and Hecuba.

Perdita: “that which is lost.” From the Oracle in Robert Greene’s Pandosto.

Paulina: (Gaius Suetonius Paulinus): the first Roman general to cross the Atlas Mountains, was governor of Britain during the reign of Claudius. Although vastly outnumbered, his legions destroyed the Britons, and wreaked a most severe revenge. Tacitus reports a death toll of 80,000 Britons to only a few hundred Roman dead.

Camillo: (Marcus Furius Camillus, 446-365 BCE): the second founder of Rome; reported by Plutarch in 75 ACE as having obtained “the highest commands and greatest successes” and was five-times chosen dictator.

Autolychus: The son of Hermes and Chione, a famous thief who could make himself invisible, taught wrestling to Hercules, sailed with the Argonauts, and was grand-father to Odysseus who wore his magic helmet in the Trojan war.

Dion: Described in Plutarch as the fourth-century ruler of Syracuse in Sicily, and a personal friend and ardent follower of Plato. Plato came to Sicily on Dion’s request, only to be sold into slavery by Dionysius II who felt insulted by him.

Antigonus (I, 382-301 BCE): a renowned general under Alexander the Great, satrap of Asia and King of Macedonia after Alexander’s death and father of Demetrius, the Besieger.

Of prophetic Apollo and Time

What is noteworthy first in comparing Euripides's *Alcestis* and Shakespeare's romance is the unique preeminence and prophetic power of Apollo in both plays. While the handful of references to Apollo in *Pandosto* are mostly traditional appeals to the god, there are over twenty-five allusions to him or his oracle in *The Winter's Tale*. God Apollo is also of central importance in *Alcestis* where he recites the first twenty-seven lines as a prologue, followed by an extended argument with Death for the next fifty. *Alcestis* is set outside the palace of Admetus, King of Thessaly. As the play begins, the center doors of the palace open and the god steps forward, carrying a large, unstrung golden bow. Raising his hand to the palace in salutation, Apollo speaks:

Dwelling of Admetus, wherein I, a God, deigned to accept the food of serfs! / The cause was Zeus. He struck Asclepius, my son, full in the breast with a bolt of thunder, and laid him dead. Then in wild rage I slew the Cyclopes who forge the fire of Zeus. To atone for this my Father forced me to labour as a hireling for a mortal man; and I came to this country, and tended oxen for my host. To this hour I have protected him and his. . . . The Goddesses pledged me their faith Admetus should escape immediate death if, in exchange, another corpse were given to the Under-Gods./ One by one he tested all his friends, and even his father and the old mother who had brought him forth—and found none that would die for him and never more behold the light of day, save only his wife. Now, her spirit waiting to break loose, she droops upon his arm within the house; this is the day when she must die and render up her life./ But I must leave this Palace's dear roof, for fear pollution soil me in the house.

Enter Death

See! Death, Lord of All the Dead, now comes to lead her to the house of Hades!
Most punctually he comes! How well he marked the day she had to die! (1-2)

Following this, the two engage in a dialogue in which the son of Zeus appeals to Death to preserve Alcestis until she is older and “richer,” but Death shows no mercy, because those who die young yield him a “greater prize.” Apollo then invokes prophetic powers to suggest the possibility of a *deus ex machine*:

Yet you shall change, most cruel though you are! For a man comes to the dwelling of Pheres, sent by Eurystheus to fetch a horse-drawn chariot from the harsh-wintered lands of Thrace; and he shall be a guest in the house of Admetus, and by force shall he tear this woman from you. Thus shall you gain no thanks from us, and yet you shall do this thing—and my hatred is upon you. (64-71)

Apollo exits and does not appear again in the play. Although there are numerous allusions to other gods, including Zeus, Hades, Fate, Charon, Hermes, Demeter, Ares, Orpheus, Perseus, and Gorgon, none of these gods appears on stage during the drama.

Apollo's divine qualities are also featured by Euripides through two songs of the Chorus.

The first comes at the turning point of the play following the death of Alcestis and the arrival of Hercules. Admetus conceals his own deep grief and shame from his friend by dissembling about a “stranger” who had just died, and offers hospitality. The hero reluctantly accepts and as Hercules goes into the palace, the chorus sings its paean to Apollo as the protector of the kingdom, and the source of harmony, both in music and among the creatures of the earth:

Strophe I

O house of a bountiful lord,
 Ever open to many guests,
 The God of Pytho,
 Apollo of the beautiful lyre,
 Deigned to dwell in you
 And to live a shepherd in your lands!
 On the slope of the hillsides
 He played melodies of mating
 On the Pipes of Pan to his herds.

Antistrophe I

And the dappled lynxes fed with them
 In joy at your singing;
 From the wooded vale of Orthrys
 Came a yellow troop of lions;
 To the sound of your lyre, O Phoebus,
 Danced the dappled fawn
 Moving on light feet
 Beyond the high-crested pines,
 Charmed by your sweet singing. (*Alcestis* 568-576)

In *Alcestis*, Admetus grieves over his dying wife, regretting his decision to allow her to die in his place, promising her that he will keep her memory sacred:

Often you will gladden me, appearing in my dreams; for sweet it is to look on those we love in dreams however brief the night. / Ah! If I had the tongue and song of Orpheus so that I might charm Demeter’s Daughter or her Lord and snatch you back from Hades, I would go down to hell; neither Pluto’s dog nor Charon, Leader of the Dead, should hinder me until I had brought your life back to the light. (326-47)

Admetus’s reference to Orpheus is a clear allusion to their godly patron, Apollo, whose musical art he intends to abjure; later the king orders that “there be no noise of flutes or lyre within the city until twelve moons are fulfilled” (430). Euripides’s reference to the “Libyan

flute” in this passage may have some relationship with Shakespeare’s choice of Libya as the fictitious home of Perdita. The dialogue in which this falsehood is given includes another internal allusion from Plutarch; to the historic Dion of Sicily, according to Arden editor Pafford:

Florizel: Good my lord,
 She came from Libya.

Leontes: Where the warlike Smalus,
 That noble honour’d lord, is fear’d and lov’d? (5.1.155-8)

Pafford writes in his footnote that Plutarch’s life of Dion includes a passage that speaks of sailing from Libya to a Sicilian village governed by a Carthaginian captain Synalus. Noting the similarity between the *yn* and a tailed *m*, he suggests that Shakespeare took this name from Plutarch, as he did “most of the others” (143). The “Libyan flute” allusion is also used by Euripides in several other dramas, including *The Trojan Women*, *Iphigenia of Aulis*, and in *Helen*, where Helen calls on the Sirens to come to her funeral mourning with “Libyan flute.”

Although Apollo does not appear onstage as a divine character, as do gods in *Pericles* and *Cymbeline*, the extent to which Shakespeare has invested his own play with manifold aspects of the god, is beautifully elaborated by David Bergeron in his 1995 essay:

Clearly Shakespeare wants us to pay attention to Apollo in this play. Of the twenty-nine references to Apollo in his canon, thirteen come in *Winter's Tale*. Three early comedies, *Love's Labour's Lost*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, and *Taming of the Shrew*, contain a few references; but then we skip all the way to *Winter's Tale* before Shakespeare alludes to Apollo again in comedy. Only in [this] romance does Shakespeare refer to Apollo’s power as an oracle. (362)

Bergeron refers to Thomas Heywood’s Jacobean dramas, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *The Golden Age* which also include scenes of and allusions to Apollo’s oracle, underscoring “the reliance on intermediaries, priests or priestesses, as a means of approaching the god” (365). He suggests that Leontes’s name may derive from an Apollonian aspect. Stephen Batman’s emblem of Apollo in his *Golden Book of the Leaden Gods* (1577) includes a description of the sun god standing on “a Dragon having three heades”—of a lion, a wolf, and a dog. “The head of the lion,” Batman insists, “symbolizes ‘tyme present’ while the others represent, respectively, time past and time to come” (368). John Lyly’s *Midas* also includes an allusion to Apollo as prophet and one who puts into the king’s heart “a lion’s mind.” The jealous tyrant, Leontes, is leonine in character as well as name, which connects with a minor tradition associated with Apollo.³

Bergeron also considers Apollo an embodiment of the change of seasons, and so the allegorical representation of Time in Act VI of *The Winter's Tale* is another manifestation of his influence. According to the tradition, Apollo has knowledge of the past, present, and future, and, as the god of medicine, he is the source of the healing powers of Time. After sixteen years, Leontes’s transformative contrition is authentic. The Oracle is ultimately fulfilled when Paulina produces Hermione and murmurs, “’Tis time.” As Bergeron suggests:

against thy Oracle! / I'll reconcile me to Polixenes, / new woo my queen, recall the good Camillo, / Whom I proclaim a man of truth, of mercy." However, it is too late; dramatically Paulina brings worse news yet. For his tyrannical sins, jealousies, and betrayals, for his devilish "casting forth to crows thy baby daughter," he must now add this misery: cry "woe!—the queen, the queen, / The sweet'st, dear creature's dead: and vengeance for't / Not dropped down yet" (3.2.200-02). Hermione too shows oracular powers when earlier, in his dream, she tells Antigonus to name the child Perdita and to deliver it to remote Bohemia, adding "For this ungentle business, / Put on thee by my lord, thou ne'er shall see / Thy wife Paulina more." (3.3.34-6)

Bergeron draws attention to the reappearance of Cleomenes and Dion in Act V as tangible evidence of the presence of Apollo, confirming a spiritual dimension by virtue of their having experienced the Oracle sixteen years earlier. Appropriately their messages are of mercy and justice, as Cleomenes expresses at the beginning of the act: "Do as the heavens have done, forget your evil:/ With them, forgive yourself" (5.1.5-6). Dion urges Leontes to abandon his grief. The King must consider his sacred role to remarry and thus provide for a stable political succession in Sicilia. Paulina counsels that the gods have "secret purposes; / For has not Apollo said, / Is't not the tenor of his Oracle, / That King Leontes shall not have an heir, / Till his lost child be found?" (5.1.37-40).

Before the next scene, Florizel and Perdita arrive at Court, paving the way for the grandest of all classical Greek tropes, the recognition scene with its requisite foreshadowing, as when Paulina claims the right to choose Leontes's next queen, and when the King agrees, she replies enigmatically that he will remarry "when your first queen is again in breath: / Never till then" (5.1.83-4):

Yet, if my lord will remarry—if you will, sir;
No remedy but you will—give me the office
To choose you a queen; she shall not be young
As was your former, but she shall be such
As, walked your first queen's ghost, it should take joy
To see her in your arms. (5.1.76-81)

Euripides has Alcestis herself forbid the king to remarry, although her reasons for it are very different from Paulina's mystifications. After lamenting how beautiful it would have been had her husband's aged parents been willing to die for him, Alcestis says she could not conceive of living with fatherless children. Her reasons for insisting that Admetus not remarry were their children: "The new step-mother hates the first wife's children, the viper itself is not more cruel" (306-314).

Bergeron sees Camillo and Paulina as performing healing actions throughout the play, often using medical metaphors that reinforce their connections to Apollo's curative powers. Camillo uses his moral strength to quickly forswear the villainy of poisoning an anointed king and he rejects Leontes's murderous plan. Later, having served Bohemia for sixteen years, he is again called on to rescue the disobedient Prince Florizel, who is threatened with being disowned and barred from succession by Polixenes:

Camillo promises that he will point Florizel in the right direction, bringing him to a place where he shall be royally received and enabling him to marry Perdita. In astonishment at such tantalizing prospects, Florizel says: "How, Camillo,/ May this, almost a miracle, be done!/ That I may call thee something more than man." If more than man, Camillo must possess the agency of a god; he serves Apollo's mission. As Camillo instructs Perdita on her role in the new adventure, he says to her "let my prophesy come home to ye!" (374)

Camillo's service to Bohemia parallels Paulina's service to Sicilia. Paulina has no analogue in *Pandosto*, in which the Greek connection is weak or missing. As Bergeron asserts, her courage, moral authority, and magic lend her the aura of a priestess of the god:

In what constitutes a working definition of Apollo's attributes, Paulina says that she comes as Leontes' "loyal servant, your physician,/ Your most obedient counsellor. . . ." Calling Paulina a "mankind witch" and "gross hag," Leontes in exasperation threatens: "I'll ha' thee burnt." But Paulina retorts: "I care not;/ It is an heretic that makes the fire,/ Not she which burns in't." (374)

In the final resurrection scene, Paulina's mastery as a priestess of Apollo is consummated when she announces "resolve you / For more amazement. If you can behold it, I'll make the statue move, indeed, descend" (5.3.86-8); and before the moment of Hermione's reanimation: "It is required you do awake your faith" (94-5); and then, after the queen moves, "Start not; her actions shall be holy as / You hear my spell is lawful" (105-6).

The mystical tone of Paulina's speeches, combined with the effects of the music and the "many singularities" of Art, epitomizes the spirit of Apollo, according to Bergeron who also perceptively notes that when the Second Gentleman says, "Nothing but bonfires: The Oracle is fulfilled; the king's daughter is found," he is referring to the countless bonfires as so many grateful sacrifices to Apollo:

We recall that traditions link Apollo to the Nine Muses, to music and art. Paulina creates a complete Apollonian moment at her house where music, art, and theatre interconnect at a propitious time. Like Romano and like Apollo, Paulina sculpts this experience to produce mystery, wonder, faith, and eventually catharsis. (377)

Thus, we may conclude that there is a deep Apollonian imprint on both dramas, even though it is only in Euripides that the god appears onstage. Shakespeare's Apollo functions at many levels: as prophetic Oracle, as Time, through the divine instruments of music and art, and the kindness of human agents like Paulina, Camillo, and even the Shepherd who rescues Perdita, a victim of tyranny, injustice, and abandonment.

Shakespeare may not have revealed his reliance on Euripides through direct quotations or allusions, but his awareness of the ambiance of a time that worshiped Apollo is obvious. It seems highly unlikely that this awareness and dramaturgic borrowings could have been acquired through reading about the Greeks in the meagre English sources of the time, or by observing puppets at fairs, as suggested by the Martindales.

***Alcestis* and the Shakespearians**

Shakespeare scholars first noted a connection between *Alcestis* and *Winter's Tale* 150 years ago. The New Variorum editions, from 1898 up through 1964, included commentaries in the "English Criticism" section of the Appendix by W.W. Lloyd, taken from S.W. Singer's second edition of Shakespeare (1856). Editor H.H. Furness included the complete text of Lloyd's summary of the dramatic and psychological similarities of the final scenes of the two plays. As editor J.H.P. Pafford reveals in his introduction to *The Arden Shakespeare* (1963), this tradition continued in footnotes long after the emphasis had shifted to Ovid's "Pygmalion and Galatea":

Many have noted Shakespeare's indebtedness to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which he knew well, probably in Latin as well as in Golding's translation. One relationship is in the story of the rape of Proserpine. . . . Another is in Autolycus, and yet another is in the story of the ivory statue of a woman made by Pygmalion and at Pygmalion's prayer given life by Venus, from which Shakespeare probably took the idea of Hermione as a statue. However, in the revealing of the statue there are several striking parallels with the *Alcestis*. (xxxxiv)

This is followed by a footnote in which Pafford refers to comments made by Israel Gollancz in his 1894 edition of *The Winter's Tale* wherein he suggests that Shakespeare may have seen a Latin translation of the *Alcestis*⁴ as well as George Pettie's "Admetus and Alcestis," in his 1576 anthology of romance tales, *Pettie's Petite Pallace*. Pettie's story, however, deals only with the travails of the lovers. It does not include a scene in which the queen is restored from the dead.

Contemporaneous with Gollancz, Greek scholar A.E. Haigh's analysis of *Alcestis*, published in *The Tragic Drama of the Greeks* (1896), includes a comparison to *The Winter's Tale* very similar to Lloyd's. Haigh asserts that *Alcestis* is the only extant Greek tragicomedy and that it was produced in 438 B.C.E. as a substitute for the satiric drama that traditionally followed a trilogy:

Every critic has admired the pathos and dramatic effect of the final scene, in which Alcestis is brought back disguised as a stranger and received at first with reluctance until she is gradually recognized. Two points in the scene deserve notice. The first is the curious resemblance to the conclusion of *The Winter's Tale*, where Leontes is taken to see, as he imagines, the statue of his dead wife and finds instead the living Hermione. Second is the silence of Alcestis after her return from the grave. The silence is due, not to theatrical exigencies and the absence of a third actor, as some critics have supposed, but to the deliberate choice of the poet. For one who has just been restored from the darkness of the tomb, no form of words could be as appropriate as the mute and half-dazed torpor in which she stands. (285)

Baconian scholar William Theobald in 1908 drew a similar conclusion regarding *The Winter's Tale* in *The Classical Element in the Shakespeare Plays* (1908). Citing Paulina's lines to Hermione's statue—"Come / I'll fill your grave up. Stir, nay, come away, / Bequeath to death your numbness, for from him / Dear life redeems you"—he comments: "It is impossible to avoid the conviction that the restoration of the dead wife to her husband is based on the pathetic incident of the revival of *Alcestis*, either as told by Euripides, or through the Latin version of the play by Buchanan" (162-3), first published in 1557 in Paris.

A “bleak truth”

Scholars of the late nineteenth century who suggested *Alcestis* as a source for *The Winter's Tale* created a problem for Shakespeare biographers because no translations of Euripides's play in either English or Latin had yet been published in England. Perhaps it was assumed that the Buchanan Latin version, published in Paris in 1557 by the masterful Henri Estienne, and later included in two collections of dramas (1567, 1598) was too hard to locate, too difficult to translate, or too expensive to be accessible to the author. In any case, by mid-twentieth century the opinions of scholars became more constrained than ever by the Stratford biography. Most recently, A.D. Nutall in his chapter, “Shakespeare and the Greeks” in *Shakespeare and the Classics*, edited by Charles Martindale and A.B. Taylor (2004), summarizes current expert opinion on Shakespeare's “lesse Greek”:

That Shakespeare was cut off from Greek poetry and drama is probably a bleak truth that we should accept. A case can be made—and has been made—for Shakespeare's having some knowledge of certain Greek plays, such as Aeschylus's *Agamemnon*, Euripides's *Orestes*, *Alcestis*, and *Hecuba*, by way of available Latin versions, but this, surely, is an area in which the faint occasional echoes mean less than the circumambient silence. When we consider how hungrily Shakespeare feeds upon Ovid, learning from him, or extending him at every turn, it becomes more evident that *he cannot in any serious sense have found his way to Euripides*. (210, emphasis added)

Whatever the cause, doubt that Shakespeare of Stratford could have become sufficiently fluent in Greek to have read the plays of Aeschylus or Euripides in their original forms has caused scholars from Robert Kilburn Root to Thomson and the Martindales to see no discernable evidence of primary Greek sources in the works or simply to dismiss the possibility out of hand without bothering to seek further. While Adrian Poole compares the dramatic effects of the statue scene in *Winter's Tale* with *Alcestis* in his *Tragedy: Shakespeare and the Greek Example* (1987), he draws no conclusions about it as a possible source. In their 1990 *Shakespeare and the Uses of Antiquity*, the Martindales dwell on the many connections between *Winter's Tale* and Ovid's treatment of the Pygmalion story in *The Metamorphoses*, but dismiss any similarities to *Alcestis* as “fortuitous.”

The descent of Hermione has an elemental flavour of myth beyond Ovid's description of the metamorphosis of the statue. This is not—or not merely—because of any supposed Christian undertones of Shakespeare's play, since the closest parallel to the effect of the scene—and one which has indeed been claimed as a direct source—occurs in another pagan work, Euripides's *Alcestis*. This was one of the plays which Buchanan chose to translate into Latin, and there were other Latin versions available, but we have already expressed skepticism about the idea that Shakespeare read Greek plays in Latin translations. (81)

Like Gilbert Murray in his “Orestes and Hamlet,” the Martindales are in favor of some sort of mystically subconscious transmission of archetypes as the explanation for Shakespeare's mastery of Greek dramatic forms in *The Winter's Tale*: “Shakespeare's ability to discern, behind the

generally commonplace romance materials he was using, the possibilities of patterns of actions and emotion which had in fact resided in the great poetry of classical Greece *which he never read*" (82, emphasis added).

In his *Shakespeare and Ovid* of 1993, Jonathan Bate adopted a similarly convoluted view of how Shakespeare acquired his knowledge:

Despite the resemblances between *The Winter's Tale* and *Alcestis*, *Titus Andronicus* and *Hecuba*, it cannot be proved that Shakespeare knew any of the plays of Euripides. But there is no doubt he derived a Euripidean spirit from Ovid. Euripides taught Ovid what Ovid taught Shakespeare (239)

Since then Bate has revealed ambivalence. While he specifically cited Ovid's "Pygmalion" as the source of the statue scene in 1993, barely a year later, in "Dying to Live in *Much Ado about Nothing*," he argues that *Alcestis* is the source of the seeming resurrections of both Hero in *Much Ado* as well as Hermione in *Winter's Tale*:

The Winter's Tale, with its hinged tragicomic structure, is the logical conclusion of Shakespeare's work. That play is certainly the fully matured reworking of *Much Ado*. The temporary consignment to the grave is not only an analogue for the audience's experience in the theatre, and for the tragic element in comedy, it is also central to most myths and religions. . . . Shakespeare made much of certain classical myths of temporary death and rebirth—the dying god, Adonis; Proserpina, goddess of spring, who dies to live and who is the archetype of Marina and Perdita; Orpheus bringing Eurydice back from the underworld. The ultimate "source" for the Hero plot of *Much Ado* is a Greek myth, that of *Alcestis*. Shakespeare could have known a Latin translation of Euripides's play on the subject; he certainly received the story at secondhand through the prose romances that were the direct sources of *Much Ado about Nothing*. (Bate 79)

While Emrys Jones, in *The Origins of Shakespeare* (1977), made no mention of a potential connection between the two plays, he did see a connection between Euripides's *Hecuba* and *Titus Andronicus*: "All the extant Greek tragedies were made available in editions and in Latin translations during the sixteenth century, so there is no question that they would have been accessible to anyone with not much more than a moderate reading ability in Latin" (91). He points out that Euripides, more than either Aeschylus or Sophocles, was frequently translated during the sixteenth century into Latin, French, Spanish, and Italian, and was imitated, "no doubt for many reasons, including his choice of subjects, his style, and his prominent use of rhetorical argument and debate" (92). According to Jones, *Hecuba*, *Iphigenia of Aulis* and *The Phoenissae* were especially popular and had numerous Latin translations, in particular the very influential translations of *Hecuba* and *Iphigenia* by Erasmus (96).

Buchanan, Chaucer, Pettie, and Oxford

Bate too cites unspecified "sixteenth-century Latin translations of Euripides' play," asserting, "there was a brief version of the story in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*." Chaucer's poetic



Leontes reacts to the first stirrings of jealousy as he observes Hermione with Polixenes in this nineteenth century engraving.

introduction to *Legend* does include a long discourse on Queen Alcestis, who advises the poet on how to mend his relationship with the God of Love, but not a shred of poetry describing her return from the dead and reunion with Admetus. The story is also told by George Pettie in “Admetus and Alcest” in his 1576 collection of romance tales, *A Petite Pallace of Pettie his Pleasure*,

but Pettie’s version also includes no dramatization of the Queen’s resurrection.

When the Martindales and Bate refer to “Latin translations,” they are no doubt referring to George Buchanan’s translation of *Alcestis*, printed in Paris in 1557, and then again in 1567 in a collection entitled *Tragediae Selectae Aeschyli, Sophoclis, Euripides*. There was also a collective edition of Buchanan’s *Tragediae Sacrae et Exterae* printed in 1597 (Irving 31). Buchanan was an internationally renowned sixteenth-century Scottish poet, historian, and scholar. Tutor to both Mary Queen of Scots and the young King James, he later also taught Michel de Montaigne while lecturing in Bordeaux. He published many works, among them Latin translations of Euripides’s *Medea* and *Alcestis*. No other Latin translations of *Alcestis* have been cited by any scholars, so it’s probable that the “sixteenth century Latin translations” Bate refers to are actually multiple printings of Buchanan’s work by his Parisian publisher.

Oxfordians, of course, have no problem accepting Shakespeare’s knowledge of his Greek sources. In “Shakespeare’s ‘Lesse Greek’” Oxfordian Andrew Werth argues convincingly that “the Greek classics were important to Shakespeare, and that he read them in Greek” (11). Homer’s *Iliad*, Sophocles’s *Ajax*, Euripides’s *Rhesus*, and Lucian’s *Timon* were all identified by Werth as sources in Shakespeare that were untranslated at the time the playwright was working.

As Stephanie Hopkins Hughes reports, Edward de Vere, Earl of Oxford was tutored for eight years from age four to twelve by the Cambridge scholar and statesman Sir Thomas Smith (1). Earlier, during his years at the university, Smith held the post of Greek Orator, which required that he give regular lectures and readings in Greek from Homer and the Greek dramatists (Strype 10). According to John Strype, Smith and his colleague John Cheke were credited with making the study of Greek part of the university curriculum and with arguing for an improved system of pronunciation that in later years became the standard (13). Wrote Strype in 1698, “In

his [Smith's] Greek lectures, among other good authors (as Aristotle and Homer) he read Socrates and Euripides for philosophy and morality" (13-4).

Following his years with Smith, Oxford spent most of his teens in the household of William Cecil, who had studied Greek in his youth at St. John's Cambridge under Cheke and Smith. While at Cecil House Oxford came to know the leading translators of the time, including Arthur Golding (Ovid's *The Metamorphoses*, 1567), George Gascoigne (Euripides's *Phoenissiae*, 1572), and Arthur Hall (the first ten books of Homer's *Iliad*, 1581) among others (Conley 19). As for access to editions of the dramas of Euripides and the other Greek sources, both Smith and Cecil had Greek editions of Homer, Aeschylus, Sophocles, Euripides and Plato in the catalogues of their libraries (Strype 275-81, Jolly 8-13). Neither had Ovid's *Metamorphoses* in their libraries at the time that Oxford was with them, but that is hardly necessary to connect Oxford with Ovid's great poem since the translator was his uncle, Arthur Golding, who did the translation while he and Oxford were both residing at Cecil House c.1563-65.

Recognition and resurrection: the statue scene

The theme of resurrection or rebirth as depicted in the statue scene of *The Winter's Tale* is most frequently seen by modern scholars as allegorical of the Greek myths of Demeter and Proserpine, though many also see it as derived from the story of Pygmalion in book ten of *The Metamorphoses*,⁵ as can be seen in the commentaries of Hallet Smith, editor of the 1974 Riverside Shakespeare:

There are obvious suggestions of the Pygmalion story in the statue scene as there are of the Proserpina story in connection with Perdita. Although the posing of a woman as a statue may seem silly enough to a reader, Shakespeare's audience was accustomed to it in the court masques, and the scene has proved strikingly effective on the public stage. (1566)

Arden Shakespeare editor Pafford goes so far as to cite Baconian W.F.C. Wigston as evidence that the play is based on the classical myth of the changing seasons:

[Wigston] . . . elaborated the "extraordinary parallel presented between Perdita and Persephone (Proserpine), and between Hermione and Demeter (or Ceres)" and said that since, with the recovery of Persephone, the spring comes again to the earth, the "myth of Demeter is therefore a Winter's Tale," which Shakespeare had in mind when choosing the title for a play which . . . contained "a planned Spiritual rebirth or Revelation through time." (xlili)

Pafford notes particularly that Proserpine is also alluded to in the debate over nature and art between Perdita and Polixenes in Act VI: "It is chiefly from this short passage that comparisons of this play are made with the Proserpine myth and the theme of the seasons "interwoven with that of youth and age, of death and resurrection" (lxi).

Charles and Michelle Martindale, on the other hand, argue for Ovid's Pygmalion story as the primary source of the statue scene. Asserting that this is one of the finest stories in *The Metamorphoses*, and that it demonstrates Ovid's "mythopoetic powers," they note that



The 18th-century actress Elizabeth Farren as Hermione in this portrait by Johan Zoffany of the statue scene. The pedestal on which she leans depicts two scenes from Euripides's *Alcestis*.

Pygmalion's myth is actually an invention of the Augustan poets, remodeled from an earlier story of a king of Cyprus who was reputed to have had sexual intercourse with a statue. Noting that the dramaturgy of the statue scene is unique in Shakespeare, the Martindales see the revivification of Hermione with her silent descent from the pedestal to the accompaniment of music as a means of investing the scene with "the quality of the supernatural in an artificial world which unites, in romance time, the Delphic Oracle with the art of Giulio Romano . . . so that a pagan mystery can be metamorphosed into spiritual renewal, in which the gods look down and from their sacred vials pour their graces." (81).

Those scholars who claim to see Pygmalion as Shakespeare's primary source ignore the fact that Pygmalion has nothing to do with rebirth or resurrection. His Galatea had no life until he created her. Theirs is an entirely different story—about how an artist can fall in love with his own creation. If there is any more to it than that it may also be about claiming magical powers for lifelike works of art, but this is surely peripheral at best to the grim themes and sober purpose of *The Winter's Tale*.

While seeking other, easier parallels, these scholars ignore how closely the dramaturgic elements in *Alcestis* resemble Shakespeare's play and how much more there is beyond the simple parallels to the mysterious return of a dead queen and her restoration to her grieving husband. For instance, both kings, Admetus and Leontes in the moments leading up to their marital reunions, comment longingly on the form of the mysterious female vision before them. While Admetus says in *Alcestis*: "O woman, whosoever you may be, you have the form of Alcestis, and your body is like hers When I look upon her . . . my heart is torn asunder—tears flow from my eyes. . . . I taste the bitterness of my sorrow" (1054-1065); Leontes says in *Winter's Tale*: "Her natural posture! / Chide me, dear stone, that I may say indeed / Thou art Hermione;" and "Now piercing my soul. O, thus she stood . . ." (5.3.23-34)

In the final scenes of both plays, the kings are portrayed as reluctant: Admetus, struggling to remain true to his vow to forswear remarriage, is reticent to take the hand of the veiled young woman, refusing three times before Heracles forces the issue. Conversely, Leontes is reluctant to have the statue covered again; even when his emotions show that his soul has been penetrated, he refuses three times to allow the curtains to be closed: "Do not draw the curtain"

(5.3.59); "Let't alone" (72); and Paulina: "Shall I draw the curtain?" Leontes: "No: not these twenty years" (82).

Music and prayerful thanks conclude both dramas. While Paulina calls for music at the moment of Hermione's restoration, "Music, awake her; Strike!" (5.3.98) and Hermione calls for a blessing, "You gods, look down / And from your sacred vials pour your graces / Upon my daughter's head!" (5.3.121-3). In the *Alcestis* it is Admetus himself who decrees choruses of joy and prayer in the last speech of the play:

(To Hercules) Good fortune to you, and come back here! (To the Chorus) In all the city and in the four quarters of Thessaly let there be choruses to rejoice at this good fortune, and let the altars smoke with the flesh of oxen in sacrifice! Today we have changed the past for a better life. I am happy. (1153-8)

In both plays the queens are described in the same idealized language ("sacred lady," "blessed spirit," "peerless," "the best and dearest"); both are honored by tombs that are described in their respective dramas as sacred shrines, monuments that bear evidence of both husbands' shame. In the Chorus' final song of the play, the tomb of Alcestis is given special dignity and status:

Ah! Let the grave of your spouse
Be no more counted as a tomb,
But revered as the Gods,
And greeted by all who pass by!
The wanderer shall turn from his path,
Saying: 'She died for her lord;
A blessed spirit she is now.
Hail, O sacred lady, be our friend!
Thus shall men speak of her. (996-1006)

Leontes makes a similar, though more personal, lifelong commitment to honor the tomb of his deceased wife and child at the end of Act III, Scene 2. Addressing Paulina, he says:

Prithee, bring me
To the dead bodies of my queen and son:
One grave shall be for both: upon them shall
The causes of their death appear, unto,
Our shame perpetual. Once a day I'll visit
The chapel where they lie, and tears shed there
Shall be my recreation. . . . (3.2.234-243)

Although *Alcestis* does not return to Admetus in the form of a statue as Hermione returns to Leontes, she too was to have a lifelike statue made of her. As she lies dying, Admetus makes her this promise:

Your image, carven by the skilled hands of artists, shall be laid in our marriage-bed; I shall

clasp it, and my hands shall cling to it and I shall speak your name and so, not having you, shall think I have my dear wife in my arms—a cold delight, I know, but it will lighten the burden of my days. (326-47)

Of all the links that connect the two plays, surely this is the most difficult to ignore.

Shakespeare's paean to the Greeks

In contrast to the confused naming scheme suggested by editor H.H. Furness, Shakespeare chose his characters' names very intelligently and selectively from among the personae of ancient Greek culture. Even the five-act structure of the play itself has a Grecian flavor, the first three acts forming a tragic trilogy concluding with a stormy pastoral epilogue, while Act IV, with its disguised characters, singing thief, and dancing satyrs parallels the lighthearted satyr plays that typically followed the mournful trilogies of the Athenian tragedies.

Alcestis was the ancient model of wifely goodness. Portrayed by Plato in his *Symposium* as the ultimate example of altruism, she was also the revered subject of Chaucer's lengthy prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*, where, married to the God of Love, she counsels the poet to laud the great women of antiquity. Shakespeare picks up where Chaucer left off; standing on the shoulders of Euripides, Plato, and Chaucer, with another good woman, Paulina, as his agent, he brings to modern life this ancient and medieval figure of feminine goodness and honor.

As paean to Apollo, the Greek poet's muse, Shakespeare's *Winter's Tale* is a tribute to the Greeks of antiquity who invented western drama. The largely fifth-century Greek *dramatis personae*, the many manifestations of Apollonian agency, the dramatic buildup to the final recognition scene, climaxed by the resurrection of an Alcestis-figure of loving goodness, all point to sources from fifth-century Greece and its greatest dramatist, Euripides. So compelling is the effect of the resurrection scene that it is known to have been performed quite frequently over the years, often as a prelude to other dramas (Orgel). From Greene's morally troubling romance Shakespeare created a vehicle for the very kind of ecstatic release the Greeks knew as *catharsis*, the passionate communal healing that was their primary purpose in creating what to us is the earliest western theater, but to them was a religious rite, a Dionysian celebration of life itself.

As H.R.D. Anders wrote over 100 years ago in *Shakespeare's Books*, "The striking resemblance in the closing scene of *The Winter's Tale* where Hermione reappears as a statue, to the last of Euripides's *Alcestis* has often been noticed. I have no doubt but that the story of Admetus and Alcestis was known to Shakespeare" (286). The resistance by twentieth-century scholars to the importance of Greek drama in understanding Shakespeare diminishes the integrity of modern editions of the plays. What many scholars of 100 years ago understood about Shakespeare's love of the Greek dramatists has been replaced by a disregard based on the deficiencies of the Stratford biography. It is high time we set aside these constraints and recognized the truth about the sources of *The Winter's Tale*. _____

Notes

1 In "Orestes and Hamlet: From Myth to Masterpiece" in the 2004 issue of THE OXFORDIAN I reintroduced Gilbert Murray's idea that *Hamlet* was developed directly out of the only extant trilogy of the fifth-century golden age of Greek tragedy, *The Oresteia* of Aeschylus.

2 For the complete text of Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, see Elizabethan Authors: <http://www.elizabethanauthors.com/pandosto1.htm>.

For the complete text of *Alcestis* see the E-text library: <http://etext.library.adelaide.edu.au/e/euripides/alcestis/>

3 In John Lyly's *Midas* (1592) there is a musical contest between Apollo and Pan. Midas has mistakenly judged in favor of Pan, receiving ass's ears as his reward from Apollo. Eventually Midas determines "I will to Delphos" (5.1.50). Here he hopes to find relief from his punishment. Going to Apollo, Midas takes appropriate gifts: "To Apollo I will offer an ivory lute for his sweet harmony, and berries of bays as black as jet for his love Daphne, pure simples for his physic, and continual incense for his prophesying" (33-36). Thus Midas has summed up the functions traditionally associated with Apollo. (Bergeron 364)

4 Gollancz suggests that although there were no English editions of *Alcestis*, "there were several editions in Latin before 1611." He offers no proof of this last point. The parallels noted by Gollancz in his 1894 edition discuss a possible parallel for Hermione's self-sacrifice in Pettie's conclusion of his version of *Alcestis*: "This seemeth strange unto you, gentlewoman, that a woman should die and then live again, but the meaning of it is this, that you should die to yourselves and live to your husbands" (196).

5 Martindale: "It was Ovid who made Pygmalion a sculptor and the statue his creation, eventually brought to life and marriage by Venus. In this form, the story has the inevitability and shapeliness that we associate with the great myths. Ovid has retained from his source a strong erotic character, which he never quite pushes firmly in the direction of definite sexual perversion. Even his arch comment that the statue looked as beautiful naked as adorned (266) does not destroy the unexpected, underlying sense of innocence: the description of Pygmalion's actions as the statue's lover, suggestive of the world of Roman love elegy (the winning words; the bringing of gifts including shells, birds and flowers; the kissing and fondling) is witty and touching rather than merely salacious. In the final metamorphosis, joy and the sense of the miraculous release as stone becomes flesh prevails against any encroachment of the grotesque" (77).

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