FILLING THE PARENTAL GAP: FAMILIAL BONDS IN WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE'S *THE WINTER'S TALE* AND JEANETTE WINTERSON'S *THE GAP OF TIME*

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Abstract: *The purpose of the present paper is to analyze the social implications of Shakespearean adaptations in contemporary fiction, by exploring the ways in which the relationships between parents and children are portrayed in both the early seventeenth and the twenty-first century. In* The Gap of Time*, Jeanette Winterson deals with analogies by placing her reimagined work as a reaction to William Shakespeare's play,* The Winter's Tale*. In this sense, the rendering of the patriarchal nature of the Leontes and Polixenes characters fits the twenty-first-century discourse in regard to family patterns and gender roles, which are questioned and dismantled. Additionally, the youth are deemed as genderless when taking into consideration the significance of familial matters presented in both the play and the novel. Thus,* The Winter's Tale *and the adapted text portray childhood virtue as the answer to the issues raised due to the parents' lack of righteousness.*

Key words: *adaptation*; *family patterns*; *gender roles*; *patriarchy*; The Winter's Tale; *Winterson*

With this paper, my aim is to discuss how children can represent the salvation of their own parents, when the former are symbolic of changes and the hope for a better future, while the latter stand for decay and the ugliness of the passing of time, as represented in William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Jeanette Winterson's reimagined version in the novel *The Gap of Time.* Thus, it will be proved how both the play and the novel are relevant to the theme of the passing of time, in direct correspondence to familial bonds and the dynamics of power struggles in regard to the relationships between parents and children in both the seventeenth and the twenty-first century.

In the Hogarth Shakespeare collection of Shakespeare's rewritings, the novel becomes an instrument for rendering new interpretations of social aspects such as power struggles and familial bonds. Thus, in *The Gap of Time*, Jeanette Winterson plays with analogies by placing her reimagined work as a reaction, rather than a revision of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

Children play important roles in Shakespeare's works, their innocence being the catalyst in the adult's recognition of their misbehaviour and mistakes. In his article "Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and the Myth of Childhood

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Innocence," Thomas Kullman discusses Shakespeare's inclusion of children in pivotal roles:

> Shakespeare had a thing for children. Not only do they appear in his plays far often than in the work of any of his contemporaries, but they are also given the quality of being perfectly innocent, and thus, as a group, opposed to the adult characters, most of whom becomes a prey to sinful temptations and mental derangements. (328)

In this sense, *The Winter's Tale* portrays childhood virtue as the answer to the issues which arise due to the parents' lack of righteousness. The same happens with *The Gap of Time*, in which Winterson engages in the significance of the lack of communication and the sociological symbolism of the family relations. Moreover, both the play and the novel engage in the subject of psychological affairs, psychosis and their implications in family matters, which are more prominent and more elaborately discussed with Winterson's twenty-first century rewriting.

The Winter's Tale is an unusual play, being often described as far-fetched or exaggerated, in the sense that it does not follow the classical structure of a play (time, place and action)[1], according to which the action should not exceed twenty-four hours and its having introduced mythical elements still does not make up for some of the missing explanations found within the play, such as Hermione's resurrection from death. This is probably the reason why Shakespeare introduced Time, the equivalent of the Chorus in the Greek tragedies, in the first scene of the fourth act, as a way of making up for skipping ahead sixteen years into the future at a certain point during the action. However, the literary critic G. Wilson Knight argues that these inadequacies of the play should not be disregarded; on the contrary, the audience must "understand them as important tonal building blocks that help comprise the play's beautifully indeterminate vision" (Wilson Knight qtd. in Bloom[2] 57). Therefore, the play surpasses time and space, with its elements of action in the same light of singularity as *The Tempest*. Furthermore, with such complex characters as King Leontes or King Polixenes, Shakespeare dwells on psychological matters, while maintaining the romantic and comical elements. The literary critic J. I. M. Stewart reads the play under psychoanalytical circumstances, having Freudian theories as a foreground, arguing that

[1] A classical play should follow the following rules: 1) the action should take place within 24 hours; 2) the action should take place in one geographical location/setting; 3) one main plot and no sub-plots should be played. However, like many other Shakespearean plays, *The Winter's Tale* does not follow these rules.

[2] All references to Bloom's text in this chapter are keyed to *Bloom's Shakespeare Through the Ages - The Winter's Tale*. (2010)

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"Leontes' jealousy is rooted in an unconscious homosexual desire for Polixenes" (Stewart qtd. in Bloom 58). Furthermore, Winterson dwells upon the homoerotic side of Leontes' and Polixenes' friendship, actually giving it a backstory, thus making up for the missing information in the play, which does not give reasons for certain patterns of behaviour found with some of the characters.

Jeanette Winterson focuses on the fault of time found with Shakespeare, using temporality as a symbol throughout the novel. Furthermore, she makes up for certain misconducts in the plot by using a contemporary device, very familiar to most of today's consumers of literature, that is, videogames. Thus, all the mythical elements and any other surreal aspects are rendered in a very realistic manner through Polixenes' character equivalent in the novel, who is Xeno, a present-day and fanciful videogame designer, whose mysterious identity generates the suspense that transforms the action throughout. Leontes' role is also differently rendered in the novel, as he becomes an investment management trader, who uses wealth and prestige to intimidate his way around the globe and the business world. Hermione becomes Mimi, a performer of soul music in Winterson's rewriting of the play; in this manner music becomes an important symbol in the novel as well. Space is also transferred from the play to the novel, with slight changes; the imaginary world of Sicily and Bohemia in Shakespeare's play becomes cold London and a sunny southern American city reminiscent of New Orleans in Winterson's *The Gap of Time*.

Parents and Children in *The Winter's Tale*

The Winter's Tale is a deeply complex play, with mythical elements tangling with aspects of Shakespearean realities, such as the introduction of children as answers to the adult's sorrow. The play features the story of five children, since, beside Florizel, Perdita and Mamillius, the King of Sicilia, Leontes and the King of Bohemia, Polixenes, could also be part of the children's group: the play opens with two of their respective servants talking about how the two kings grew up together and how their friendship will stand the test of time, although adulthood separated them physically. In this sense Camillo, the Lord at Leontes' court tells Archidamus, who is a Bohemian lord, that:

> They were trained together in their childhoods; and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection, which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters (though not personal) have been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies; that they have seemed to be together, though absent; shook

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> hands, as over a vast; and embraced, as if it were from the ends of opposed winds. (I.i.19-28)[3]

Therefore, this description of Leontes' and Polixenes' friendship foreshadows, through the use of the words "cannot choose but branch," the friendship between their children, Perdita and Florizel, although the use of the adverb "now" is inaccurate, since another sixteen years will have passed until the king's relation with his friend Polixenes is taken back to its course. In the same discussion, Camillo and Archidamus also mention Mamillius, the King of Sicily's son, who, they believe, will grow up in a beautiful manner, perpetuating their fathers' friendship. However, Leontes' son's death creates a rupture between the two worlds and their leaders, until the point of Florizel and Perdita finding out the truth about the girl's royal origins.

Furthermore, given that one of the most astounding aspects of *The Winter's Tale* is the presence of the time gap, one angle from which the play could be read is that of the differences between the young and the old generations. To this end, the play explores the disparity between the parents and their offspring's development. The older generation, represented by Leontes and Polixenes, is liable for the disunion of family and friends, enormous hurt and suffering, as they are unable to communicate and settle their misunderstandings. When the youth comes of age, that is, when Perdita and Florizel reach adolescence, their love and affection for one another has the effect of re-establishing familial connections and augment the hope for a more positive future. Still, the younger generation cannot erase any of Leontes' sins. Young Mamillius' and old Antigonus' irreversible deaths stand as cautionary examples that certain things and some people are lost permanently and cannot be revived. Thus, mistakes have to be accounted for, which is an ironic kind of teaching, since, with Shakespeare, the father Leontes has to learn this lesson in morality from his own children, through Perdita's finding her place of origin and Mamillius' death. Richard P. Wheeler discuses in his article "Deaths in the Family: The Loss of a Son and the Rise of Shakespearean Comedy" the implications of Mamillius' death:

> But even in *The Winter's Tale*, with its powerful ending centered on the recovery first of the lost daughter Perdita and then of the lost wife Hermione, it is the death of Mamillius earlier that restores the connection to reality which Leontes has lost in his madness, even as it empties that reality of its life. (153)

[3] All references to Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* are keyed to the Wordsworth Classics edition, edited by Cedric Watts (2004). Indications of act, scene and lines will be given parenthetically in the text.

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Thus, Leontes seems disconnected from reality altogether, until the moment he realizes that Antigonus and his son are not going to be brought back; this is the detail that actually led to his being anchored back in reality. However, although the first three parts of *The Winter's Tale* are dominated by Leontes' anger causing misery and distress, the latter half of the play is more about love, repentance and rebirth. The real identity of Perdita is discovered, the daughter is reunited with her father and mother, Hermione, who is in fact "resurrected" from the dead, as the characters from Greek tragedies, whose stories are resolved by means of the Deus Ex Machina device.[4] In this sense, the first three acts of the play are dark and convey a sense of claustrophobia, as they are set at the Sicilian court.

The mood of the play changes radically as the setting moves to Bohemia, after sixteen years since the dreadful events caused by Leontes in Sicily. In Bohemia, where the spring festival of sheep-shearing is ongoing, the love between Perdita and Florizel blooms. The celebratory atmosphere dims momentarily when Polixenes threatens the contentment of the young couple, but the heavy mood begins to lift almost as soon as the Bohemian cast makes its way to the Sicilian court, that Florizel and Perdita sail to.

On the same note of childhood innocence, Polixenes describes his friendship with Leontes during more peaceful times, before adulthood got in the way of their relationship. Polixenes claims that they were like "twinned lambs that did frisk i'th'sun," (I. ii. 67). The use of this metaphor provides a clear image of the simplicity and happiness they enjoyed as children. This description also implies that during their youth, Polixenes and Leontes were remarkably similar; thus, through this metaphor of joint union in friendship, Polixenes underlines the fact that through their guiltlessness, all children represent the sameness and equality all people should enjoy. Moreover, the simile, which directly compares the two boys with lambs, only reinforces the ideas of purity and innocence. It was only during their adulthood that this lovely portrayal of the virtually identical boys led to something darker:

> We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th'sun,
> And bleat the one at the other: what we changed
> Was innocence for innocence; we knew not
> The doctrine of ill-doing, nor dreamed
> That any did. Had we pursued that life,
> And our weak spirits ne'er been higher reared
> With stronger blood, we should have answered Heaven

[4] A plot device through which an issue that is apparently impossible to solve in a story is unexpectedly and suddenly resolved by an unforeseen and improbable occurrence.

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> Boldly, 'Not guilty'; the imposition cleared,
> Hereditary ours. (I.ii.67-75)

Fascinating enough is the fact that Polixenes regretfully believes that if they had remained young and innocent Leontes and himself might not even have been "guilty" of the original sin[5]. Thomas Kullman argues that "Polixenes indulges in memories of childhood perfection which almost take on a transcendental quality and make him challenge a central religion doctrine" (Kullman 318). In other words, Polixenes implies that if they had not become interested in carnal experiences, which is entailed by the expression "stronger blood,"[6] they would have been able to remain without sin. This could be an indication of the conclusion of youth, which occurs the moment they developed more profound feelings towards women, presumably an argument towards Polixenes' and Leontes' not being as similar as they once were.

An important but controversial symbol in the play is the bear, which attacks and kills Antigonus, after he abandons Perdita in the middle of nowhere. On the one hand, the interpretations are layered and many of them revolve around Leontes' inhumane decision to disregard his own child; thus, the bear acts as a warning for Leontes' decisions. However, the bear mauling is believed to be in fact Antigonus' punishment for being compliant to Leontes' coercion. On the other hand, several other literary interpretations revolve around the fact that the occurrence of bear mauling appears to mirror stereotypes of fertility rituals.[7] As the literary theorist Jean E. Howard argues, these fertility rituals could also involve the sacrifice of an elderly man in order for the spring season to come faster, which would carry a certain reproductive fulfilment (Howard 6). This last reading of the scene makes the most sense in the light of the parent-child relationship in the play, since Perdita could be seen as a symbol for spring in the sense of rebirth, while her father is representative for winter and the decaying of nature.

Accordingly, the presence of the passing of time as well as that of the different seasons are relevant to the way the connections between parents and children develop throughout the play. The first half of it is set during the freezing winter months at the court of King Leontes. The one who signals the season is Mamillius, who tells his mother "A sad tale's best for winter" (II.i.26), after Hermione asked him to tell her a story. The frigid season appears

[5] The concept of "the original sin" is the belief that all human beings are born defiled as Adam and Eve had been, after they sinned in the Garden of Eden, according to the Genesis chapter of the Bible.

[6] Referring to "men's passion and desires." (Watts, "Notes on *The Winter's Tale*" 128)

[7] These fertility rites might conclude with the death of "a primal animal, which must be sacrificed in the cause of fertility or even creation." (Jaffé, "Symbolism in the Visual Arts" 264)

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entirely fitting in a place where Leontes' cold-hearted actions lead to the loss of his family and his friend. Furthermore, in this scene, Mamillius acts as a representation of the calm before the storm, since he prepares to tell his mother a tale fit for the present season; thus, he is somehow dehumanized into becoming an instrument with a dramatic function.

However, in the second half of the play, the Sicilian winter descends into the Bohemian countryside sixteen years later during the spring, a season which is mostly connected to growth and rebirth. Fittingly, Bohemia is a vibrant land full of hope and youthful spirits. It is where the lovely Perdita grew up, after being found by Shepherd and his son, Clown, who raised her as their daughter and sister respectively. In the fourth scene of the fourth act Perdita is compared to the goddess of flowers, Flora, by Florizel, Polixenes' now adolescent son:

> These your unusual weeds, to each part of you
> Do give a life: no shepherdess, but Flora
> Peering in April's front. This, your sheep-shearing,
> Is a meeting of the petty gods,
> And you the Queen on't. (IV.iv.1-5)

Without their knowledge, Perdita really is of royal heritage; thus, the play dwells once again on foreshadowing of the following action, when Perdita will find her true identity, a thing which reflects Cedric Watts'[8] assertion: "part of the irony, of course, is that [Polixenes] opposes the prospective 'cross-breeding' of his noble son with the supposedly low-born Perdita. Another part is that she is not 'low-born' at all" (Watts, "Introduction" 17). Therefore, Bohemia is still not only the place where the youthful love of Florizel and Perdita blossoms, but also the location where almost everything seems probable, particularly during the vibrant festival of sheep-shearing, although Polixenes resembles a patriarchal figure in his stance against his son's friendship with Perdita.

When Florizel and Perdita travel to Sicilia Leontes welcomes them with content: "Welcome hither,/ As is the spring to th'earth!" (V.i.151-152) Leontes, whose winter-like life in Sicilia has been enduring for sixteen long years, suggests with these words that Florizel's appearance is similar to the spring's emergence after a long and cold season, since, as Arlin J. Hiken observes in the article "Shakespeare's Use of Children," the fact reveals "Shakespeare's interest in the child that he increased the age of the boy to allow him to be a speaking and part-taking actor" (Hiken 247). Therefore, spring is

[8] All references to Watts' text in this chapter are keyed to the introduction of the Wordsworth Classics edition of *The Winter's Tale* (2004).

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also an indication of the newer generation taking the place of their parents. Moreover, the youthful influence of Florizel and Perdita seems to have a calming impact on the king and his ailing court, which never fully healed from Hermione and Mamillius' deaths and the loss of the daughter. Thus, it might be assumed that Florizel and Perdita, as representatives of the new generation in the play, carry the spirit of spring with them and fill the play with passion, comfort and forgiveness.

Furthermore, as a father, Leontes primarily failed his son, Mamillius, who, as Hiken observes, "is closer to his father than to his mother" (Hiken 247). This is also seen in reverse, as this scene reveals a lot about the father–son relationship on which Shakespeare dwells. In his outrage and burst of jealousy, Leontes wonders whether Mamillius is also the result of adultery on Hermione's part, but dismisses the thought immediately, thinking of how much the boy resembles him. The moment when Mamillius' death is announced highlights the deep feelings that exist between father and son, as this scene entails great grief on Leontes' part. This is even more distressing, as the audience finds out by the end of the story that, while the equilibrium is re-established with Hermione's resurrection and Perdita's coming back home, Mamillius' death is permanent. With this, justice seems to be served and life seems to have its course back, the story having an almost happy ending, with the characters reunited and the families rebound.

Parents and Children in *The Gap of Time*

Jeanette Winterson describes *The Winter's Tale* herself by the end of *The Gap of Time*: "It's a play about a foundling. And I am. It's a play about forgiveness and a world of possible futures—and how forgiveness and future are tied together in both directions. Time is reversible." (284-185) All these aspects were kept in her contemporary rewriting of the play. In this sense, Winterson begins her novel, *The Gap of Time*, with the subtitle "cover version" and with this she raises awareness towards what the readers are about to encounter within the pages. Generally speaking, the term "cover version" is used in connection to pieces of music, reinterpreted by other artists than the original performer, because they are either an admirer of the original performer of the song or they want to restate the relevance of a certain musical piece. Therefore, in Winterson's case, she performed a Shakespearean piece as well, proving its relevance after its four centuries of existence, with only slight changes, so as to make it more appealing to the contemporary readers. Furthermore, the title of the novel is a most fitting one, since Time in the original play has been a disputed subject among scholars across centuries, as stated in the previous subsection:

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> And the world goes on regardless of joy or despair or one woman's fortune or one man's loss. And we can't know the lives of others. And we can't know our own lives beyond the details we can manage. [...] And time that runs so steady and sure runs wild outside of the clocks. It takes so little time to change a lifetime and it takes a lifetime to understand the change. (Winterson 269-270)

With Winterson, Time finds its important place as well, since in Shakespeare's play it had a most peculiar introduction. However, its pertinence is unquestionable because of its literal healing powers, the ability to make amends and to bring people back together. Furthermore, the medium allowed Winterson to dwell largely on the characters' inner worlds. Thus, the novel provides lengthy explanations and reasoning for most of the characters' actions, as the psychological element plays an important part in the novel. In this manner, the protagonists are contemporary but the action in the novel maps itself to the play, with only a few minor alterations.

In this cover novel, King Leontes is Leo, an arrogant, paranoid post-crash London hedge-fund manager and his friend, King Polixenes, is Xeno, a dreamy, introverted video-game developer. Winterson invented a back story about a deeply rooted sexual connection between the two, making Leo's overhyped anger and unreasonable jealousy much more believable than it was in the original text. Leo keeps his negative mindset and takes the same decisions as in the play and, in a description attributed by René Girard to Leontes, there is easily observed a mirror image between the original character and his reinterpreted counterpart:

> The traditional critics have always found Leontes simultaneously disturbing and unintelligible. Complaining that his jealousy is "insufficiently motivated," they find him unsatisfactory as a protagonist of "serious drama." (Girard, "The Crime and Conversion of Leontes" 54)

With all its violent scenes, the novel presents a subtle cultural criticism of male chauvinism, and the accompanying brutality fuelled by wealth flows significantly under the exterior of the novel. However, this is only part of Winterson's ability to catch the emotional weight of her tales with sentences that flame along, stunning, unpredictable and fast. Piece by piece, the plot escalates, and characters become increasingly complex and dramatic.

The parent–child relationship is given new meaning in Winterson's cover version, according to the contemporary times and the sociological componence of the family in the twenty-first century. For instance, the novel places a lot of emphasis on the relationship between Xeno and Zel, who are the

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embodiments of Polixenes and Florizel. If the play only focuses on them from the father's point of view, in whose opinion the son should marry, then the novel presents Zel as being a very rebellious teenage boy, with a father more absent than present in his life, as he himself declares: "My dad's my dad, but I don't know him. He could be anybody's dad. I could be anybody's son" (Winterson 173). With this, Zel gives way to the traces of an identity crisis, caused by his own father's absence. However, changes occur throughout the story, as the father learns from his own son's kindness and, as Bruce Young argues, "paradoxically, parents humble themselves in some sense before the child or receive renewed life from the child to whom they had earlier given life" (Young 199). Thus, besides the already known conclusion of the story, with Leo/Leontes, Mimi/Hermione and Perdita brought back together, the novel also provides closure to the father–son relationship between Xeno and Zel: "Zel hesitated. Then he smiled. Xeno hesitated. Then he smiled. 'I'd like to get to know you.' Zel hesitated. 'I guess I'm walking down there. You walking too?' (Winterson 281) In this father–son moment, both of them are breaking the walls built around themselves and are trying to overcome the coldness in their souls, caused by their own sorrow; Xeno's over losing Mimi and his friend, Leo and Zel's over losing something that he never even had, that is a father figure. Thus, going back to Bruce's remark over parents' humbleness, in this instance Xeno changes his attitude in order to gain human connection, which is, as the novel suggests, more valuable than any assets one might have. Taking into consideration Thomas Kullman's observation, according to which "it is children who take a natural part in this order[9] while adults may be tempted to leave or even destroy it" (Kullman 325), then it can be believed that in both the play and the novel the older generation causes damage to the natural order of affairs, which should flow naturally and uninterrupted. In this sense, the children need once again to repair the adults' injuries.

Winterson's substitution of Leontes' court with the financial markets of today—the true seat of contemporary influence—is insightful and humorous, and Xeno's technical forays into virtual reality offer the writer the freedom to maintain any of the more surreal aspects of the play without interfering with the authenticity of the story. In Winterson's novel, the characters of the older generation are intriguing, with Xeno being fluid in his homoerotic existence, loyal to both the rough Leo and the gracious Mimi, although Xeno does not allow his friend to overpower him. However, the

[9] Thomas Kullman refers to a "natural order characterized by perfection and innocence" which might have been present in the Sicilian realm, before Leontes' outrageous decisions towards his family, in *The Winter's Tale.* (325)

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bonds are ruined by the fact that Leo cannot stand sharing his loved ones with others.

Winterson's versions of the play's protagonists are given vivid backgrounds, such as Leo's psychosis caused by his own parents' missing from his childhood and the suppressed homoerotic feelings for his friend Xeno. An observation made by René Girard in regard to Leontes' and Polixenes' friendship is on the same wavelength with Winterson's reinterpretation of the novel, since it insists on how the two men grew apart, in spite of their lamb-like innocence:

> Childhood friends are as far from actual sin as any two human beings can be; all they exchange is innocence for innocence. And yet, as they grow up, they turn to ravening wolves, either simultaneously or successively; it does not matter. Even in these lambs, especially in them, the potential for evil is enormous and perfectly continuous with the innocence in which it is rooted. ("The Crime and Conversion of Leontes" 55)

In other words, while neither the play nor the novel presents any true villain, the story does not exclude evilness altogether, which can spring out of the past childhood innocence, corrupting whatever was considered pure in the first instance. Furthermore, the homoerotic component of the novel adds to Girard's observation about children's innocence being removed by the time they reach adulthood. However, in comparison to other plays written by Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, although reminiscent of a tragedy at times, supplies the necessary elements for a happy ending—forgiveness and the opportunity of righting a wrong, which can also be found with Winterson's *The Gap of Time*, as they constitute the main subject matter of the novel.

Filling the Parental Gap

In contemporary literature on education such terms as "continuous learning" occur, where education is associated not only with the formal discipline that the child might acquire, but also with the instructions given by the parent to the child. In this sense, Ann Blake discusses the implications of parenthood in the primal steps of a child's upbringing:

> Contemporary writing on the education of the young begins with a sense of the innate imperfection of children as beings who must be closely watched and severely disciplined for their own good, in the hope that soon rational faculties will be sufficiently developed to restrain natural evil impulses. (294)

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These evil impulses, noticed by Ann Blake, are the adults' experiences and bitterness gathered throughout life; thus, the parents feel a certain need to control their offspring, in order for them to avoid certain mistakes that they made when they were young. This tendency towards control is seen with a father figure in *The Winter's Tale* and its contemporary rewriting, *The Gap of Time*, both of which present Leontes not merely as a patriarchal figure, but as a dominant person, driven in his judgement by greed and a need to control those around him, starting with his own wife and his childhood friend.

Jeanette Winterson even goes to such an extent as turning Leontes/Leo into an abuser, both physically and mentally, of his wife, Hermione/Mimi and his friend, Polixenes/Zeno. Transforming the action of the play into a compelling, almost cinematographic novel, Leo almost runs Zeno over with his car, into a metaphorical maze, that is, a parking lot, after which he violates his own wife, in a deep state of anger. Thus, the novel emphasizes the undetected mental problems that Leo might face, such as lack of empathy, sociopathy and even a mild psychosis or, what René Girard calls "mimetic desire"[10]:

> Leontes resembles the way in which Shakespeare himself long applied the mimetic law in his own theater, creating plays from which innocence was practically banished. Innocence was especially impossible in the case of triangles involving childhood friends. ("The Crime and Conversion of Leontes" 52-53)

With such outrageous decisions, especially towards his childhood friend, Winterson transmits the abnormalities of Leontes present with Shakespeare in the first place, since Leontes not only proves to not have the capacity of fulfilling his duties in the role of a father, but he is also driven by unnatural forces, which condemns him to resort to inexplicable trivial aggressions exactly in relationship to those towards whom he should only show affection.

By the end of *The Gap of Time*, Mimi is revealed to be back home, performing in an emotional piano concert in which all the other characters participate; thus, in a similar moment to that of *The Winter's Tale*, good is restored and families are reunited. However, there is one more aspect that needs to be considered in discussing familial relations in both the play and the novel. Jeanette Winterson includes herself in the story, claiming her role as an omniscient narrator, in a postmodern moment of breaking the fourth wall and

[10] René Girard refers to the mimetic nature of desire, "such that the characters can be called jealous or snobbish depending on whether their mediator is a lover or a member of high society," which could be attributed to Leontes, who is mediated in his anger by both his wife (lover) and his friend, King Polixenes (a member of high society). (*Deceit, Desire and the Novel*24-25)

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addressing her readers directly, much in the same manner as Prospero does with his audience, by the end of *The Tempest*. This time though, Winterson ends by claiming that she left the characters in the theatre for now and she went out to take a walk "in the summer night" (Winterson 284), then the novel continues with her own analysis of the play and, more precisely, the characters. She also mentions Shakespeare and his lack of enthusiasm when it comes to families and their existence: "Shakespeare was not an enthusiast of familial life; would you want to be raised by a Montague or a Capulet? Would you want parents like Hamlet's parents?" (Winterson 286) However, by presenting the negative side of family life and the links between parents and children, Shakespeare actually anticipates Freud; Shakespeare "puts the threat where it really is: on the inside," as Winterson observes (Winterson 288). In *The Gap of Time*, the writer actually ponders upon this psychoanalytical aspect, especially on one parent's side, that is, her version of Leontes, thus focusing to a greater extent on the meaning of fatherhood and the significance of the interactions between fathers and their children. Leontes' psychosis persists throughout the story, up until the end, when it seems that it disperses as if by magic, when he sees his wife singing on stage. The familial calmness presented at the end seems almost therapeutic. However, just as seen in the plot, there is proof throughout the novel that Leo and his son, Milo, were very close as well: "Leo hugged Milo. They loved each other. That was real" (Winterson 24). With this, Leo proves his share of fatherhood affection, although Xeno accuses him of placing his work above his family, a thing for which he blames the previous generation: "We had horrible families. Every generation gets the chance to do it better." (Winterson 36) In the same manner as the play, certain elements foreshadow certain events; thus, Xeno's assertion acts as a warning for Leo's subsequent behaviour. However, as René Girard notes, the negative actions performed by Leo/Leontes are not proof of evilness:

> Among the plays of unfounded jealousy, *The Winter's Tale* is not unusual solely for its innocent childhood friend and its innocent wife. Something else makes it exceptional in its category, and it is the lack of a villain. ("The Crime and Conversion of Leontes" 53)

Thus, all these patterns of behaviour on Leo's part underline the fact that he is not the villain of the story, as he also takes part in the teachings provided by the younger generation's innocence, which include the premature death of his son. Furthermore, Leo is a balanced rewriting of the Leontes character, with the added psychotic characteristics, shaped by his own familial experiences as a child.

In Winterson's version of *The Winter's Tale*, the man who finds Perdita and actually adopts her is given a greater part than in Shakespeare's play, with

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Winterson emphasizing the importance of a parent in a child's upbringing. In this sense, the novel begins with Shep, who is Shepherd's contemporary equivalent. Furthermore, Perdita's two fathers, Shep and Leo, are presented in antithesis, since the former is transparent and loving, while the latter is self-centred, determined only to gain wealth and strength. Whereas the play skips the moment of Leontes' and Shepherd's meeting, the novel fills this gap with an interesting discussion between the two fathers, which gives way to two different perspectives on fatherhood:

> '[...] I figured that anyone who could abandon his own child wasn't fit to be a father.'
> 'I didn't believe Perdita was my child,' said Leo. 'I thought she was Xeno's.'
> 'I knew she wasn't mine,' said Shep, 'but I loved her.' (Winterson 261)

Consequently, the novel presents the children as being mirrors of their parents, as seen in the case of Xeno and Zel, both of whom embody the same cold attitude towards each other. However, Perdita has acquired Hermione's beauty and grace, Shep's kindness and generosity, but she seems to have nothing genetically inherited from Leo, as Georgianna Ziegler also observes in her article "Parents, Daughters, and *That Rare Italian Master*":

> Perdita turns out to be much more her mother's child [...] we recognize that her honesty of expression, [...] and even her physical appearance are inherited from the Hermione [...]. And all of this comes about despite the lack of her mother's presence or that of another worthy gentlewoman in her upbringing. (210)

Thus, while Leo highlights the importance of blood and genetics in raising a child, Shep, whose position on the social scale does not compare to that of Leo, has a healthier approach to parenthood and considers the responsibility of fathering a child as being placed above heredity or any other egotistic consideration.

Conclusion

Where Winterson offers descriptions of the characters' behaviours, Shakespeare creates gaps in which the readers are encouraged to construct their individual interpretations. Ultimately, the provision of transparent or straightforward explanations would have been simplistic, as they close down the interventionist challenge provided by Shakespeare. Winterson's response is *The Gap of Time*; thus, she herself, part of Shakespeare's audience, fills the gaps of time left by the playwright. Through her novel, she places a lot of

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emphasis on the familial relationships and the beneficial effect of the passing of time that the contemporary world takes into consideration when it comes to human connections. This is also something that Shakespeare dwells upon in his later plays, as Winterson herself asserts in *The Gap of Time*: "Shakespeare knew all about revenge and tragedy. Towards the end of his working life he became interested in forgiveness." (Winterson 285) In other words, forgiveness is one of the results of moving forward in time; with both the seventeenth-century Shakespearean play and the twenty-first century novel written by Winterson, people forgive and forget, repent and try to resolve past issues.

In regard to repentance, it is safe to say that in both *The Winter's Tale* and *The Gap of Time* parents are the ones to atone for their mistakes, with Leontes/ Leo trying to make amends, after literally banishing all his loved ones, only for him to realize his own overreactions later in life. With the novel, however, he even gets a set of explanations and a backstory, which make him a little more sympathetic than the play's portrayal of the same character. Notwithstanding his various flaws, he is not the villain of the story; on the contrary, he could be considered to be the embodiment of a lesson that can be learned in any social context and at any given time. Moreover, children represent the binds that close the vicious circle opened by the adults, as their innocence and candour act as pivots in resolving the past's issues, with Mammilius/ Milo symbolizing the primacy of violence thrown upon himself and Perdita and Florizel/ Zel depicting the flourishing of hope for a better future.

Furthermore, while many of the coincidences found with Shakespeare sound indeed a little exaggerated, they are only a reflection of his ability to use them relatively liberally and still to put together an exhaustive plot, which enables a negotiated settlement among the protagonists. Winterson uses these coincidences to the novel's benefit, by giving them a psychoanalytical component that provides the text with certain implications and new meanings, which may not have been available when Shakespeare wrote the play, but which were somehow anticipated. Be that as it may, Jeanette Winterson's cover version of *The Winter's Tale* only proves the relevance in contemporary times of the sociological component that the original text entails. Through transfers of certain elements, such as characters or events, the novel, as a more widely consumed literary form, accommodates an old story that can stand alone anew.

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