

The Winter's Tale and the Child

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Introduction

At the end of Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*,¹ Perdita, the daughter once lost, and Hermione, the wife believed to have been dead for sixteen years, all come back in front of the desolate king Leontes. Could it be touching if Mamillius, the unfortunate son, cheerfully took part in that reunion, or if Mamillius, instead of Perdita, was found? In other words, why is it that Mamillius has to die, and why is it not Mamillius but Perdita that is allowed to survive to move the audience?

Although it seems that people had not necessarily been interested in children in English or world history as much as they are today, it will be natural to think that children are always precious to people and society regardless of time and place. In literary works children have always been depicted, but their representation is diverse, depending on the period. In Shakespeare's works, child characters rarely appear as major characters on stage, although curiously they have strong presence in stories.

In the case of *The Winter's Tale*, which is one of Shakespeare's later works belonging to romance plays and was first on stage in 1611, Mamillius and Perdita, and probably Clown, the son of Shepherd who brings up abandoned Perdita, play significant roles for the story that starts as a tragedy and ends with the happy reunion of the family, like Shakespeare's other romance plays. Florizel, the son of King Polixenes, might also be representative of such child characters who have strong presence in stories. Although some of these characters are half grown-up, I am going to discuss children in a broad sense in this essay, including adolescent sons and daughters, as well as infants and little children.

This paper aims at interpreting the representation of the child on Shakespeare's stage, which seems to be highly related to the psychology of the audience and their society.

1. The Child in Early Modern England

The child has various images reflecting adult feelings such as expectation, desire, and fear, both in literary works and in real life. For example, in *The Winter's Tale*, Mamillius seems to act as the mirror of Leontes. In order to investigate the theatrical psychology of *The Winter's Tale*, I am going to examine the social context of the child in early modern England in this chapter.

As Peter Coveney mentions in *The Image of Childhood*, it was not until the last decades of the eighteenth century that the child came to exist as an important and continuous theme in English literature (29). When Shakespeare was engaged in his writing, it seems that the concept of the child was just in the process of development.

Lawrence Stone states in his work, *The Family, Sex and Marriage in England 1500–1800*,² that there are many indicators that show the trend towards a more child-oriented society and that the tendency began in the late sixteenth century in England (408, 9). According to him, the mortality of children and infants seems to have been related to the trend:

For a child-oriented society to develop, . . . it is essential that children should be less liable to sudden and early death than they were in the early sixteenth or again in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. . . . [T]he value of children rises as their durability improves. . . . There is reason to believe that the last two-thirds of the sixteenth century was a period of relatively low infant and child mortality rates, although the rates rose again sharply in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. One could hypothesize that the sixty years of low child mortality may have given an impetus to the growth of a new respect for, and attention to, children, which could not be arrested by a fresh relapse into the old pattern of high mortality rates in the seventeenth century. The attitude survived into the new era of sustained decline in infant and child mortality, which seems to have begun in about 1750. It was perhaps this renewed fall which provided the final stimulus for the eventual development of the permanently child-oriented, and increasingly contraceptive, family type. (420)

Shakespeare created his works exactly when “the value of children [rose]” (Stone 420) and “infant and child mortality rates . . . rose again” (Stone 420). Taking Shakespeare’s increased interest in family reunion in his later works written in the early seventeenth century into account, it can be assumed that the higher mortality rate of children has something to do with the child image represented in his creation of romances including *The Winter’s Tale*.

Stone also explains the psychological distance between children and parents before Shakespeare’s time, which was improved around the time when he was writing plays, in relation to the strong probability of death and the cultural habit of that time:

The late medieval and sixteenth-century family welcomed both aid and direction from the kin and the community. There was no sense of domestic privacy, and inter-personal relations within the conjugal unit, both between husbands and wives and between parents and children, were necessarily fairly remote, partly because of the ever-present probability of imminent death, partly because of cultural patterns which dictated the arranged marriage, the subordination of women, the neglect and early fostering out of children and the custom of harsh parental discipline. Child-rearing practices, especially

swaddling, the lack of a single mothering figure, and the crushing of the supposedly sinful will by brute force at an early age, tended to create special psychological characteristics in adults: suspicion towards others, proneness to violence, and an incapacity to develop strong and emotional ties to any one individual. The result was a family type whose characteristics of psychological distance, deference and publicity were congruent with the basic values and organization of the hierarchical, authoritarian and inquisitorially collectivist society of Early Modern England. . . . In the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, this family type was modified by the loss of a sense of trusteeship to the lineage, by the decline of kinship and clientage, and by the concurrent rise of the power of the state and the spread of Protestantism. (652, 3)

What is interesting here is that the time when the relations between family members became more intimate corresponds with the time when Shakespeare wrote his plays.

Moreover, this period of time when the family type was improved accords with the politically stabilised period of the Elizabethan era. As John Peck and Martin Coyle state that “it seems more than a coincidence that William Shakespeare’s most celebrated works, his major tragedies, were written around” (53) when “Elizabeth I died unmarried and without a direct heir in 1603” (53), the political context is related to Shakespeare’s works. Likewise, it can be assumed that there is a relation between the political context concerning the issue of the family of that time and the representations of the child in Shakespeare’s works.

Then, how did people see the child in early modern England? According to Stone, “there are four possible views about the nature of the new-born child . . .” (405). He writes, “[t]he first, and most common, was the traditional Christian view, strongly reinforced by Calvinist theology, that the child is born with Original Sin, and that the only hope of holding it in check is by the most ruthless repression of his will and his total subordination to his parents, schoolmasters and others in authority over him” (Stone 406). He continues, “[t]he second view was the environmentalist one, that a child is born with a propensity towards neither good nor evil, but is a tabula rasa, malleable and open to being moulded by experience” (Stone 406). He also examines, “[t]he third view was biological, that the character and potentialities of the child are genetically determined at conception, that there is little that subsequent environmental influence and educational efforts can do except to reinforce good habits and restrain bad ones. This view was of course fundamental to astrological theory, according to which both character and fate are largely determined by the configuration of the planets at the moment of birth (or possibly conception)” (Stone 406). Lastly he states, “[t]he fourth view was utopian, that the child is born good and is corrupted only by his experience in society. This was an idea which had been propounded by some Renaissance humanists, but it had disappeared under the onslaught of the

Calvinist doctrine of Original Sin” (Stone 406).

It seems that the difficulty of considering the child in early modern works comes from these different views on children. The first view that children are born with Original Sin and the fourth one that children are originally good are contrary to each other. The same goes for the second view and the third one. In *The Winter’s Tale*, these views, especially the first and the fourth one, are expressed and related to the characters’ psychology intricately.

According to Stone’s arguments mentioned above, the concept and image of the child were not fixed and the interest in children was growing throughout the early modern period with the decline of mortality of children and the changing social situations. As regards the increase of the death rate again in the seventeenth century, it is assumed that the fear of losing children might be reflected more strongly in the image of children in Shakespeare’s later plays. Then in *The Winter’s Tale*, which was created when the social sense of uneasiness seems to have increased, what kinds of images of children appear? In the next chapter, I will focus on the various images of the child concentrating on the fictional description, including the ideals of the society apart from the real social conditions seen in this chapter.

2. Various Images of the Child in *The Winter’s Tale*

In *The Winter’s Tale*, the sons and the daughter play important roles similar to these in other Shakespearean romances, and there are many lines which are concerned with children in the story. As Peck and Coyle mention, in terms of the romances, Shakespeare takes “a shift to the world of fairy tale and magic, to the distant, the remote and the improbable, where children are lost and recovered, and time is overcome” (68). The theme of the romances is highly connected with family reunion, which turns tragedies into happy endings, and there, the existence of children is indispensable. Although there seems to be no consistent and correct answers from Shakespeare to the question of what children are, several images of children appear repeatedly, and such images suggest a certain figure of children for the author as well as the society at that time.

One of the images which appear in *The Winter’s Tale* is children, or youth, as a symbol of life bursting with vitality. When Shepherd appears on the stage for the first time toward the end of Act 3, he mentions the youth like a clown:

I would there were no age between ten and three-and-twenty, or that youth would sleep out the rest; for there is nothing in the between but getting wenches with child, wronging the ancienty, stealing, fighting - hark you now, would any but these boiled brains of nineteen and two-and-twenty hunt this weather? They have scared away two of my best sheep, which I fear the wolf will sooner find than the master. (3.3.58-65)

These lines are spoken at the big turn of the plot, soon after Antigonus abandons Perdita and is pursued by a bear. After Shepherd enters, the scene changes dramatically into a peaceful pastoral world, so the utterance here is important. He seems to be sighing over delinquencies of youth at first sight, but he is actually praising the most beautiful age of life with the opposite meanings of words like a clown does. In fact, if “[t]hey have [not] scared away two of [his] best sheep” (3.3.64), he could not encounter Perdita, and she would have died eaten by crows. Therefore, he expects young people to stay sparkling and maintain their lives here.

Especially in the latter half of the play, children are frequently depicted as the symbol of life with the description of flowers. In the scene where Antigonus lays down Perdita on the deserts of Bohemia, he says to her, “[b]lossom, speed thee well” (3.3.45). According to John Pitcher, the editor of *The Winter’s Tale*, Antigonus is wishing the baby good luck and showing his endearment with the word “blossom” (238). The flowering image suggests her growing up “in grace [e]qual with wondering” (4.1.24, 5). Perdita’s lover’s name, Florizel, also evokes the image of flowers. Furthermore, flowers of spring are connected with the youth in particular. For example, Florizel praises Perdita with the image of spring flowers in the scene of the sheep-shearing in Act 4:

These your unusual weeds to each part of you
Does give a life; no shepherdess, but Flora
Peering in April’s front. This your sheep-shearing
Is as a meeting of the petty gods,
And you the queen on’t. (4.4.1-5)

According to Pitcher, “[Florizel’s] love [of Perdita] gives him insight into the real nature of things” (50) and he expresses it comparing her to “Flora, the goddess of flowers and spring, embodying beauty and fruitfulness” (50). Perdita also has the lines that liken youth to spring flowers:

Now, my fair’st friend,
I would I had some flowers o’ the’ spring that might
Become your time of day; (4.4.112-4)

She regrets not having those flowers which suit Florizel. Then she admires spring flowers:

Daffodils,
That come before the swallow dares, and take
The winds of March with beauty; violets, dim,

But sweeter than the lids of Juno's eyes
Or Cytherea's breath; (4.4.118-22)

It seems that Perdita indirectly compliments the beauty and sweetness of youth saying that those spring flowers charm even the wind and are more beautiful and sweeter than certain body parts of goddesses. By breaking the convention that beauty is compared to goddesses, the beauty of the spring flowers is emphasized, and accordingly the joy of life is heightened. Interestingly, while Florizel likens Perdita to Flora in a conventional way, Perdita seems to surpass him reversing convention.

When the long winter ends, tragedy ends as well. Autolycus' song at the opening of Act 3 Scene 3 symbolically informs the end of winter:

When daffodils begin to peer,
With heigh, the doxy over the dale,
Why then comes in the sweet o' th year,
For the red blood reigns in the winter's pale. (4.3.1-4)

Spring flowers come into bloom, and the tragedy ends. It suggests that children or youth with the image of spring flowers help tragedy change into comedy.

Another way of presenting the image of children in *The Winter's Tale* is to show them as a comfort to adults. One example is in the beginning of the play. When Archidamus and Camillo, lords of Bohemia and Sicilia, have a conversation about each country, they express how people think of Mamillius with hope:

ARCHIDAMUS . . . You have an unspeakable Comfort of your young prince, Mamillius. It is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.

CAMILLO I very well agree with you in the hopes of him. It is a gallant child; one that, indeed, physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh. They that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man. (1.1.33-41)

As Pitcher comments that "this is a key theme in the play, that youth renews life, giving older people, closer to death, a reason to live" (148), Mamillius is seen as the comfort of adults here. When Leontes and Polixenes talk, the same image appears:

LEONTES . . . My brother,
Are you so fond of your young prince as we
Do seem to be of ours?

POLIXENES If at home, sir,

The queen receives
Much comfort [in the baby]; says, 'My poor prisoner,
I am innocent as you.' (2.2.26-8)

Then Paulina suggests bringing Perdita to see Leontes:

The silence often of pure innocence
Persuades when speaking fails. (2.2.40-1)

Paulina adds:

This child was prisoner to the womb, and is
By law and process of great Nature thence
Freed and enfranchised, not a party to
The anger of the king, nor guilty of -
If any be - the trespass of the queen. (2.2.58-62)

By using the image of imprisonment in the prison and womb, the innocent images of Hermione and Perdita are emphasized together. In addition, in the trial scene of Hermione in Act 3, she states:

My third comfort,
Starred most unluckily, is from my breast,
The innocent milk in it most innocent mouth,
Haled out to murder; (3.2.96-9)

Hermione shows her innocence and accentuates Perdita's innocence by the double use of "innocent." Again, she thinks of the child as her comfort as mentioned earlier.

The innocent image of the child draws out one's childhood memories. Childhood is a fantasy for adults who believe that they lost their innocence, and it seems that preserving those days is important for the adults' psychology. Believing that children are innocent is like ensuring the adults' refuge, and in terms of this point, the loss of Leontes' senses is likely to be connected to the image of his childhood.

The title of the play, *The Winter's Tale*, itself contains the image of children. In the play, the word "tale" appears many times. In particular, when Perdita is found and when Hermione is brought to life, characters say, it is "like an old tale" (5.2.228, 5.2.60, 5.3.17). Mamillius' recounting of a tale to Hermione in Act 2 Scene 1 is impressive as well. According to Pitcher, "[t]he phrase 'a winter's tale' referred to gossip, outright lies, or to the kind of trivial fairy story that no one but nursemaids and children would find entertaining. The ghost story Mamillius starts telling his

mother is of this kind. . . . [t]he title declares, this is the ultimate fanciful story: how much of it will you believe?" (24, 5). Pitcher continues:

The Elizabethans weren't supposed to prize childhood or the condition of being a child, so it was highly unusual to offer them a story or a play into which childlike and childish sentiments and thinking had been woven, and in which they too were invited to be like a child. This is what Shakespeare did in *The Winter's Tale*. The hard thing for Elizabethan audiences - and this is true in the modern theatre - is that they needed to have childlike trust and openness about what they were shown, but they had to be very sophisticated in interpreting it. (Pitcher 25)

At the last scene when Hermione is restored from a statue, such abilities are needed for the audience. In that sense, this play may have been intended for adults who are concerned with returning to their childhood while being fully aware that they cannot do so. Belsey states in *Why Shakespeare?* that "the manifest gap between the imaginary possibilities that fiction allows and the actual limits imposed by reality may invest the conclusion of old wives' tales with a unique kind of melancholy for their hearers" (84). This "melancholy" (Belsey 84) might be the very feeling generated by friction between the wish to be a child who can believe in a supernatural thing and the fact of being an adult who cannot do so.

The images of the child taken up in this chapter are the symbol of life, the comfort of adults, and the fantasy of innocence in *The Winter's Tale*. The flowery descriptions are often accompanied with their vigorous images. However, unlike these images of children, they sometimes work as the factor which causes people to imagine one's death and to grow uneasy in the play as well. Through the masterly title of *The Winter's Tale*, which lets the audience have a feeling of faint hope of seeing the play bringing back a child, the confused world between adulthood and childhood is shown with subtle, often anxious images about children. In the next chapter, I will consider those negative aspects of the image of the child, deliberating over the most incomprehensible enigma of Leontes' psychology.

3. The Child and Leontes' Psychology

Why Leontes starts to be suspicious and why he suddenly regains his senses again are beyond comprehension. The most convincing explanation would probably be that there are no reasons for his psychological change because he himself might not know the reasons, and it seems to be the natural way of human psychology that one's state of mind is not always familiar to oneself. Therefore, it seems impossible to find correct answers to those questions, but there is a close relation between Leontes' psychology and his image of children, childhood, or maternal body, which will be clues in

considering his state of mind. On the supposition that those images concerning the child are fatal to Leontes and such images uncover his unconsciousness with fear, this chapter argues the psychological effects of the child, especially on Leontes.

In the source story of *The Winter's Tale*, *Pandosto*, the king accepts Apollo's judgement at once, before he hears his son's death (Pitcher 229). Thus, the direct cause of Leontes' recovery is Apollo's oracle. However, Shakespeare changes the cause to Mamillius' death. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes denies the oracle at first, then as soon as he knows that Mamillius has died, he says, "Apollo's angry, and the heavens themselves / Do strike at my injustice" (3.2.143-4). The change brought by Shakespeare appears to make the story more realistic than his source in which the supernatural divinity brings about a transformation in Leontes' mind, because it should not be the oracle but the death of his own son that is really dreadful to him and the audience. In other words, the oracle becomes powerful only after Mamillius dies.

Then, why is Mamillius' death so striking for Leontes? It would not be simply because Mamillius is the heir. Mamillius plays an important role in Act 1 as a listener of Leontes' mutter, or as a mirror of his hidden desire. When Leontes erupts with jealousy, he sees himself in Mamillius' face, and says:

Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have
To be full like me. Yet they say we are
Almost as like as eggs - women say so,
That will say anything. (1.2.128-31)

He also states:

Looking on the lines / Of my boy's face, methoughts I did recoil / Twenty-
three years, and saw myself unbreeched, / In my green velvet coat; my dagger
muzzled, / Lest it should bite its master, and so prove, / As ornaments oft
does, too dangerous. / How like, methought, I then was to this kernel, / This
squash, this gentleman. (1.2.153-60)

Leontes remembers his childhood looking at his son's face, as they are quite alike. The childhood he recalls is deeply connected with the memories of Polixenes. Polixenes tells Hermione about those days:

We were as twinned lambs that did frisk i'th' sun / And bleat the one at
th' 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 / Boldly, ‘not guilty’, the imposition cleared / Hereditary ours. (1.2.67–75)

Susanne Greenhalgh describes that the childhood is expressed here with “the kind of adult nostalgia for its supposed innocent playfulness” (118). Pitcher states, “[f]or Polixenes to go back like this to when he was a child needn’t be dangerous: people do it all the time. He knows this is a perfected reminiscence, a pastoral pre-pubertal idyll, not real at all. . . . [However,] something different happens with Leontes” (34). It seems that Leontes starts to be captivated by his childhood that is full of fake when he is listening to Polixenes’ lines.

While Polixenes is conscious enough of his being an adult and no more in his childhood, Leontes still finds his identity in his childhood faked by himself. According to Pitcher, this interpretation suggests a thinkable answer to the question why Mamillius’ death can make Leontes come to his senses:

[I]f we see Leontes’ fantasy as a *deliberate* regression, we have the beginnings of tragedy. . . . His mood swings - from adult despair and despondency to childish glee at how clever he is - and his sudden, wholly unexpected release from delusion the moment Mamillius is dead (3.2.141–4) all point to one conclusion. Leontes objectifies his fears and frustration, making a false man-boy image of them. . . . He doesn’t get free of this image until the real boy, Mamillius, has been sacrificed to it, his death killing off the fake ‘boy’ element in his mind. . . . To be so aware that his imagination might delude him, and yet still persist in believing what it showed him, makes Leontes wicked, not feeble-minded or mad. . . . [H]e chooses to believe he can make truth whatever he says it is, irrespective of what it costs others. (Pitcher 37, 8)

In fact, Leontes seems to confuse his own image and that of his son when he says:

Sweet villain,
Most dearest, my collop! Can thy dam? May’t be
Affection? - Thy intention stabs the centre,
Thou dost make possible things not so held,
Communicat’st with dreams - how can this be? -
With what’s unreal thou coactive art,
And fellow’st nothing. (1.2.136–42)

The illegibility of Leontes’ lines above directly reflects the complexity of his psychology. Although *The Oxford English Dictionary* states that the word “collop” had the meaning of “offspring” as well as “morsel of meat” (qtd. in Pitcher 161), it

gives a strong impression of the bodily connection between the father and the son. Leontes puts too much of himself into Mamillius.

Creating his fake pastoral childhood in Mamillius intentionally, Leontes might be trying to protect himself from unidentified fear. If so, what does Leontes fear? It seems that he worries about being an adult, being aware of what he does not want to know, or losing his identity. Janet Adelman describes in *Suffocating mothers: fantasies of maternal origin in Shakespeare's plays, Hamlet to The Tempest*³ that what he fears is “nothingness” (225). Similar to the case of Leontes’ creating the fake childhood, she says, “[t]hreatened by absolute loss, he seizes on the fantasy of Hermione’s adultery as though it in itself could give him something to hold on to: better the ‘something’ of cuckoldry than the nothingness into which he would otherwise dissolve. . . . Through the self-born delusion of Hermione’s betrayal, he thus gives himself a recognizable place to stand. . .” (224). Leontes insists that Hermione’s betrayal is true obsessed with the word “nothing”:

Is this nothing?
Why then the world and all that’s in’t is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,
My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,
If this be nothing. (1.2.290-4)

Before he tells Camillo these above, Leontes asks his son whether he is his son or not:

Mamillius, / Art thou my boy? (1.2.119-20)
How now, you wanton calf! / Art thou my calf? (1.2.126-7)

Mamillius answers:

Ay, my good lord. (1.2.120)
Yes, if you will, my lord. (1.2.127)

Finally, Mamillius says to his father, “I am like you, they say” (1.2.207). Those lines show the process of Leontes becoming less confident of being Mamillius’ father and of knowing anything with the uncertain answers by Mamillius. Leontes becomes unable to be assured of anything but his invented story that Hermione is unfaithful.

A psychoanalytic approach may help to understand Leontes’ confusion. In the scene of Hermione’s trial, she says to Leontes, “Sir, / You speak a language that I understand not. / My life stands in the level of your dreams, / Which I’ll lay down” (3.2.77-9). With his suspicion of everything in the world, relying only on his

imagination, Leontes cannot communicate with others using understandable language. It suggests Jacques Lacan's third register called the Real. Jonathan Gil Harris explains, "the 'Real', which [Lacan] saw as separate from the Symbolic register of language and the Imaginary register of fantasy and the mirror stage. The Real, which is not the same as reality, is distinguished by phenomena that shatter the meaning of the Symbolic and the wholeness fantasized by the Imaginary: death in particular, but also the senseless cracks within those fantasies that we so often mistake for meaningful reality" (94). Unable to express with language, Leontes feels something important is missing. For instance, his relationship with Polixenes in his childhood has been lost by his marriage. The feeling of something missing causes the fear of nothingness, or death, and it grows when he looks at the face of his child.

In terms of the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes, it is also possible to think that Leontes tries to find a twinship with Mamillius creating a fake childhood in exchange for the lost twinship with Polixenes. When male relationships are more important than conjugal relations are, Leontes might feel jealous of Hermione who interrupts the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes. Polixenes says to Leontes:

Press me not, beseech you, so.
There is no tongue that moves, none, none i' th' world
So soon as yours, could win me. (1.2.19-21)

However, what actually wins him and succeeds in making him stay is Hermione's tongue, while Leontes tries to keep Polixenes eagerly but he cannot. Leontes tells Hermione that she spoke well twice. The first time was when she accepted him and said, "I am yours for ever" (1.2.105). The other was when she persuaded Polixenes into staying longer this time. Hermione replies:

Why, lo you now, I have spoke to th' purpose twice.
The one for ever earned a royal husband;
Th' other for some while a friend. (1.2.106-8)

Leontes' parallelizing of these two sounds improper today because the marriage and the friend's stay are unbalanced. However, in view of the fact that the male relationship was more important than the heterosexual relationship, the unpleasantness of Leontes and his utterance is imaginable. He loses his childhood together with Polixenes by the existence of Hermione.

According to Adelman, the female body, especially Hermione's pregnant fullness, is the register of male emptiness (221). This would also make Leontes feel the nothingness being with her. In Act 1, there are many indirect utterances on Hermione's pregnancy. For example, as Pitcher comments, Polixenes' lines such as

“Nine changes of the watery star” (1.2.1) and “like a cipher, / Yet standing in rich place, I multiply / With one ‘we thank you’ many thousands moe / That go before it” (1.2.6–9) remind Leontes of Hermione’s full-bellied pregnancy (149, 50). Those fulfilled images lead Leontes to his lost “pre-linguistic relation with the mother” (Harris 94), or Lacan’s “Imaginary.”

The child is a factor which lets Leontes think of nothingness in some way, and the feeling of nothingness is scary to him, like death. He associates the image of children with death in his lines. He talks to Mamillius:

Go play, boy, play. Thy mother plays, and I
Play too; but so disgraced a part, whose issue
Will hiss me to my grave. Contempt and clamour
Will be my knell. Go play, boy, play. (1.2.186–9)

The matter of course that the old leaves this world while babies are born is stated here by the now clownlike Leontes. He laments going to die in exchange for the new life. Although such a life cycle is a matter of course, every old person might have felt this way, becoming aware of its own death. At the same time, the natural feeling that the child is precious and adorable would exist in their mind in contradiction to the fear of the death related to the child.

Let me reconsider the final scene of the family reunion. As Leontes says that “O, she’s warm! / If this be magic, let it be an art / Lawful as eating” (5.3.109–11), the scene when Hermione comes back to life from the statue is magical and moving with the effect of Paulina’s ceremonial way. Although the embrace of Leontes and Hermione is touching and magical enough, the most dramatic part would be the next scene when Hermione confronts and talks to Perdita:

You gods, look down,
And from your sacred vials pour your graces
Upon my daughter’s head! Tell me, mine own,
Where hast thou been preserved? Where lived? How
Found
Thy father’s court? For thou shalt hear that I,
Knowing by Paulina that the oracle
Gave hope thou wast in being, have preserved
Myself to see the issue. (5.3.121–8)

These lines are the first words of Hermione after her resuscitation, while she does not say anything to her husband. From these lines, Hermione’s excitement and rejoicing of seeing her daughter again are conveyed, and it is understood that she has

kept living to meet Perdita rather than to take revenge on Leontes. Perdita's life and her return make the family reunion possible. In addition, the discovery of Perdita suggests the lasting generation and the bright future. As the oracle predicts that "the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (3.2.132-3), now that Perdita has come back, it is expected that Leontes will have his successor and that the peace of the country will be maintained. Shakespeare might have tried to show that what is really magical is not that Hermione has stayed alive for sixteen years but that the child has grown up and come back to the parents' side in the world difficult to survive. Considering the rising mortality of children in the early seventeenth century as mentioned in Chapter I, and the author's loss of his own son in the late sixteenth century, it is imaginable that many parents including the author wished to see their lost children again. This joyful ending would be moving precisely for such heartrending sorrow of the audience. The child can be a trigger of people's unidentified fear, but at the same time, people still cannot help having a special feeling for the child.

The answer to the question why Leontes becomes suspicious and recovers himself all of a sudden seems to have a certain relation with the early modern imagination of childhood. The childhood and the presence of the son that are exactly like his father's are the place to reflect Leontes' fantasy, and therefore, to lose them is to be exiled from the place of safety for him. When he looks at his son, he feels that he lacks something, and such a feeling of nothingness makes Leontes create a fantasy that he had an innocent childhood and that he is betrayed by Hermione and Polixenes. However, Leontes' strange psychology is still incomprehensible and inconsistent, and it seems to have a lot to do with what the child meant in Shakespeare's times. Therefore, the existence of children is that much influential and deeply moves the characters in the play and the audience.

Conclusion

The image of the child may involve every aspect of human and social psychology as represented in literary works. Although the description of children is not as distinct as that of the works created after the eighteenth century, Shakespeare's children and childhood also reflect something important in the society at that time. Considering the child in Shakespeare's works is the key to understanding early modern England, and further, the psychology of all times.

There is a broad scope for future study on the child in the works of Shakespeare and his contemporaries in early modern England. In particular, the application of psychoanalysis to the study of the child in Shakespeare's works seems still worthwhile and should be discussed further on. Discussion of the child would be more complex and interesting if the religious and the political aspects of that time are taken into account.

The child is hard to comprehend in the fluctuating time when the value of things quickly changes. Still, the feeling that children are important and lovable should be in every human mind all the time. *The Winter's Tale* reminds us of that obvious feeling, especially at the tragic death of Mamillius and the surprising survival of Perdita, with an old figure of Leontes. At the time when the play was put on the stage, it is imaginable that people felt certain uneasiness in the changing world and hoped to go back to their childhood like Leontes. For those who experienced the death of children, the miraculous ending may have been what they longed for. In the story, adults can have a dream of forgiveness, restoration, and family reunion, as if they were listening to an old tale resting their heads on their mothers' laps.

Notes

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- 1 The quotations from *The Winter's Tale* in this essay are based on the editions of The Arden Shakespeare Third Series.
- 2 I mainly referred to Chapter 9 about parent-child relations in Part four to examine the existence of children for adults.
- 3 Janet Adelman considers the fantasies of maternal power invested in female characters in Shakespeare's tragedies and romances, and the cost they have to pay because of the fantasies by male characters from the perspective of psychoanalytic criticism (10). I referred to Chapter 8, which takes up the romances, when I studied Leontes' psychology relating to Hermione's body.

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