

We'll Milk Our Ewes and Weep; but We Will not Run Wild: Compliance, Conformity and Domesticated Endurance in *The Winter's Tale*

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The term 'wild' can be found in almost all of Shakespeare's plays and it appears more than a hundred times. It is deployed frequently as adjective for animals or plants (*MND* 2.1.228; *Ant.* 2.2.186; *AYL* 2.7.86; *Cym* 4.2.392; *1H4* 2.3.8; *2H4* 4.3.260)¹ in order to help the dramatist define, express, and ultimately resolve concerns over unbridled human conduct within civilized society. The attribution of 'wildness' to character behavior, within specific dramatic and generic contexts, allows Shakespeare to produce a wide range of meanings. Between the expected unruliness of youth and the terrifying rage of mature rulers, Shakespeare uses 'wildness' to define also: the

¹ With the exception of *The Winter's Tale*, quotations from Shakespeare's plays refer to the Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor Oxford Shakespeare edition. I will be using John Pitcher's wonderful Arden Shakespeare edition for all references to *The Winter's Tale*.

wanton behavior of erotic, sexual or literal inebriation, the behavior of an erratic personality, the rebellious audaciousness of ambition, the tendency to respond recklessly in the face of a personal or a political crisis, the collapse of intellectual and emotional certainties, the expression of savagery in words or acts. All these conceptualizations of wildness are clearly political in nature because they all frame 'wildness' as a departure from what the polis understands as normal conduct.

Even though *The Winter's Tale* tells the story of a king whose behavior Shakespeare could have easily described as wild, the dramatist is peculiarly wary of explicitly deploying the term. While an irate Leontes showers his subjects with insults and threats, Shakespeare prefers to anchor his play to a series of self-reflecting discussions about domestic animals like horses, cattle, sheep, and the like. Early modern audiences, however, understood the difference between the domesticated and the wild as a difference in degree, not in kind. This understanding was reinforced by Shakespeare himself whose other plays consider instances when things tame "defective in their natures, grow to wildness" (*H5* 5.2.55), plunging the state into crisis. Based on this premise, and following a point already made by Simon C. Estok (94-5), I will try to contextualize the play's obsessive preoccupation with images of domesticated animals and see how they relate to the sociopolitical reality of Leontes' court.

David Daniell describes this Jacobean play as a romance that has "a strong realistic streak" (118). In agreement with this view, I will leave out the romance-inspired episodes of the piece and will concentrate on the events that unfold in Sicilia. This is done because I want to explore the realistic kernel of *The Winter's Tale* and propose a politically sensitive analysis. My argument is this: Shakespeare uses the images of domesticates to register the power of Leontes' seemingly dominated courtiers, but also, in order to draw a parallel between the king's wild behavior and the nervousness of a manhandled court lion. Additionally, this approach will

provide a much needed critical appreciation of the character of Hermione. Even though critics have sometimes turned much-needed attention to the queen of Sicilia (Maveety; Snyder; Kaplin), they have generally neglected her complex and precarious alliance with the courtly community. My reading will illustrate that the queen's troubles begin when she speaks on behalf of Leontes' administrative class. I will also insist that her victimization as a member of her "sex" (2.1.108) is related to her gradual isolation from the governing nobility.

My reading begins by scrutinizing an observation that Queen Hermione makes in the course of a discussion with her husband. Her argument is that a person can "ride" an animal "with one soft kiss a thousand furlongs" (1.2.95), whereas, the same animal, if forcibly spurred on, will just "heat an acre" (1.2.96). Hermione understands the relationship between domesticates and their masters as a relationship of power that is maintained through mutual and negotiable participation. This is an argument recently made by one of the leading researchers on domestication, Melinda A. Zeder. The noted evolutionary anthropologist deploys the term "domestic partnership" to describe a "relationship between humans and target plant or animal populations" (105). This relationship is characterized by "its cultural component" and "the dominant role humans play in consciously and deliberately perpetuating it to their own advantage" (107). And yet, Zeder is somehow able to argue that, to this type of relationship, "both partners respond [...] in ways that enhance respective pay-offs and further deepen their mutual investment in its continuation" (106).

Jacques Derrida would rightly denounce such arguments because they endorse the "*unprecedented proportions*" of our modern "subjection of the animal" (25). But Hermione is aiming at something very different when she humanizes what Zeder calls "respective pay-offs" and depicts a master's kiss or praise as "wages" (1.2.94). As is often the case with Shakespeare's characters, Hermione is not really concerned with animal/human relations.

Her husband, King Leontes, has just paid her a compliment for having, upon his own request, convinced Polixenes, the reluctant king of Bohemia, to extend his visit by a week. Within this context, Hermione is playfully expressing her eagerness to hear more praise, showing a pet-like desire to be spoiled by her master's loving hand. An expert practitioner of courtly double-coded talk (Van Elk 438), Hermione is thus able to imbue her speech with an extra sense of domestic contentment. Her emphasis on the effectiveness of "soft," affectionate treatment forges a link between the ridden beast and the sexually cooperative wife, since, visibly in an advanced stage of pregnancy, she addresses her bedfellow having been already fattened by his affection.

But Hermione is not really celebrating female domesticity. A more careful reading of what immediately precedes Hermione's argument reveals that the queen's self-depiction as a happily kept animal has a sharper ironical function. It was triggered by the manner in which Leontes had chosen to extol her recent accomplishment. Instead of extending a direct compliment, Leontes had commented on how his wife had "never" spoken "to better purpose" (1.2.88-9). Shakespeare saw fit to have this ambiguous exclamation of approval fuel the following exchange:

HERMIONE. Never?

LEONTES. Never, but once.(1.2.89)

Leontes' brutally unflattering "never but once" (1.2.89) induces Hermione's passive aggressive attitude, which is signaled by the character's feigned expression of delighted surprise: "What? Have I twice said well? When was't before?" (1.2.90) It is at this particular point in time that she goes on to say:

I prithee tell me; cram's us with praise, and make's

As fat as tame things. One good deed, dying tongueless
Slaughters a thousand waiting upon that.
Our praises are our wages. You may ride's
With one soft kiss a thousand furlongs ere
With spur we heat an acre.[...] (1.2.91-96)

Far from being a sign of encouragement, then, this over-staged invitation becomes a sarcastic comment on Leontes' miserly rolling out of "wages." When she reaches the point of linking the practice of praising with the goal of taming, a hint of rebelliousness becomes operative: maybe, an expecting Hermione is suggesting that a woman's submission to the reproductive demands of her husband is not a sign of complete subordination. In fact, one can identify a touch of threat regarding her future sexual and political availability: if her "good deed" as sexual partner and royal hostess is to earn her a "tongueless" ingratitude, she might as well remain unproductive.

This is a pivotal moment in the play because, as we shall see, Leontes will blow out of proportion the magnitude of this challenge. This moment of insolence will teach her husband to believe that, behind "practiced smiles," the queen hides the thoughts and desires of a "most disloyal lady" (1.2.116; 2.3.201). Still, what the queen touches upon, during this tense episode, goes far beyond an attempt to reflect upon and negotiate her personal relationship with Leontes. Her argument has wider political implications.

The utilitarian framing of her discussion enables her to comment on the shortsightedness of Leontes' overall approach as leader. The Sicilian king had already shown a tendency to underpay his dues in the manner he had dealt with Polixenes. At the beginning of 1.2., the latter courteously expresses his desire to return to his kingdom but Leontes responds with monosyllabic, dismissive haughtiness. Noticing this, and aware that the

effusive and hyperbolic gratitude of a guest must be repaid with a show of warm, unassuming hospitality, Hermione is quick to find fault with her husband for charging Polixenes “too coldly” (1.2.30).

This is the first time Shakespeare lets Hermione speak, promptly giving us proof of this character’s political astuteness. Hermione demonstrates further her diplomatic sharpness when she deploys a particularly risqué strategy of persuasion in order to stop Polixenes from leaving Sicilia. For Lynn Enterline, this demonstrates the queen’s superior and, distinctly female, “rhetorical power” (17). While entirely appropriate, such readings understate how Hermione’s witty ‘cornering’ of Polixenes relates to an awareness that her husband’s coldness might have insulted the King of Bohemia. Such a markedly political interpretation of Hermione’s motivation is, I think, productive. It explains why the queen brings her intervention to an end by having Polixenes reminisce about his childhood: the time when the two men were as close as “twinned lambs” (1.2.67). To put it simply, both Hermione’s words and actions are consistent with an effort to attenuate the potentially negative political effects of Leontes’ imperious handling of his guest.

Most readers of *The Winter’s Tale* underestimate the political role that Hermione plays in Sicilia. Martine Van Elk is one of the few critics to understand the court in Sicilia as a state institution and to recognize the queen’s place within it. But in her argument, courtly speech is discussed as a self-promoting tool that enables ambitious courtiers to “establish and maintain” a high “social position” (434). I would argue, however, that words translate into political actions and that Hermione prevents a constructive state visit from going sour. To put it differently, Hermione’s courtly performance should be understood as work for the state.

Shakespeare makes it very clear, in 1.1., that this is the case. We should not overlook so easily that Hermione salvaged the fruit of sustained ambassadorial efforts. Polixenes’ visit, Leontes’ chief courtier explains, had

long been prepared by officials of both states. Camillo expresses a hope that the previously "not personal," but "royally attorneyed" encounters, might finally "branch" into a more concrete form of "affection" between states (1.1.27; 1.1.24). Thus, he sets out a political roadmap for a project of some significance: a stronger political alliance which Leontes and his off-putting attitude will come close to ruining.

Only by bringing in this wider political context can we fully grasp what Hermione is trying to express when she warns Leontes against keeping one's animals uncompensated. She is not only expressing the point of view of a woman whose courtly labor goes by unnoticed; she speaks for an entire group of courtiers whose work behind the scenes is taken for granted. Her tendency to identify with members of Camillo's class and profession is implied by her use of the first-person plural and her specific reference to horses. A horse, after all, is not only a creature most valued by a king in war (R3 5.7.7) or sport, but also, the animal most involved in the political "interchange of gifts, loving letters, loving embassies" (1.1.28). As such, metonymically, the horse stands for Leontes' emissaries, who will travel "a thousand furlong" in order to ensure that kings may shake "hands / as over a vast" (1.1. 29). Simply put, Hermiones' figurative identification with domestic animals is of a deliberate and specific nature, subliminally expressing the underlying frustration of an entire court.

The idea that Leontes' entourage might be dissatisfied has already been suggested in the opening scene of the play. During a conversation with his Bohemian counterpart, Camillo explains that Leontes' son "physics the / subject, makes old hearts fresh" (1.1.38). Clearly he voices a courtier's relief over the fact that succession is likely to be smooth. But Camillo's hyperbolic representation of Mamillius also suggests that the king's subjects are lingering on, hoping that, once the heir to the throne reaches manhood, they will be released from an unhealthy and disheartening state of current affairs. Leontes' retirement, then, is the unspoken precondition for

Mamillius's hoped-for accession to the throne.

The play underlines the crucial role that Hermione plays in helping this widespread "desire" materialize (1.1.32) and endorses her complaints regarding work that remains upraised. The first scene of Act two takes us to the queen's private chambers. There we witness the amount of work that must be done behind doors in order to shape the prince into a widely acknowledged "galland child" (1.1.38). According to Susan Snyder, Shakespeare presents us with a typical upper-class nursery setting: a "potentially unruly" (Cressy 55) all-female space where the "mother-child bond" is established (Snyder 5). However true, Shakespeare is not interested in merely documenting where and how a typical upper class boy becomes a man. Dramatically, this episode offers a lightly comic insight into the way in which a specific child, Mamillius, is brought up within an undeniably courtly setting. This scene also provides invaluable insight into the way in which Hermione runs her 'nursery.'

The first unguarded words uttered by Hermione during this episode underscore the laborious and frustrating business of raising the next king. "Take the boy," she exclaims as she hands Mamillius over to her ladies-in-waiting, "He so troubles me, 'Tis past enduring" (2.1.1). Soon we get to realize why the job warrants assistance. It is a balancing act to handle the self-centered naughtiness of a boy that must be trained in order to assume his future position as the realm's dominant alpha male. Mamillius' inexperienced assertion of male empowerment over his minders must be endured in self-effacing good humor. The first lady, whose "hard" affectionate kisses make her an undesired "playfellow" (2.1.3), dutifully engages Mamillius in an exchange that will enable him to practice, at her expense, his future male prerogatives. Leontes' son is allowed to assert himself over this group of fully grown female courtiers in a sport that requires of them to tolerate and encourage the development of a dominant personality. Acting out their institutionalized parts, the ladies entitle him to

rate them and to consolidate a slighting knowledge about women whose noses, Mamillius knows, might turn "blue" (2.1.13), not only because of age or disease, as John Pitcher explains ² but also, I would suggest, as a result of domestic violence.

Hermione's management of her subordinate ladies must be noted here because it contrasts with her husband's ungainly model of governance. Her way of running the royal nursery is characterized by a system of burden delegation and she makes sure that the ladies are rewarded through positive affirmation. Hermione gives herself only a brief break from the irksome task of mothering and resumes her work by enquiring over the "wisdom" that "stirs amongst" her ladies (2.1.21). Far from exerting her authority as mother and queen, she too must humor the willful prince. Instead of answering Hermione's request for a "merry" tale that would please all (2.1.24), Mamillius is eager to play his own game. The story "of sprites and goblins" he insists upon telling (2.1.26), Hermione astutely and caustically remarks, is intended to exhibit his "powerful" art and "fright" her (2.1.28).

There is no doubt that gender plays a role in this scene. But there is no reason to think of Mamillius' machismo as normal within the social environment of Sicilia. His point of reference in terms of masculinity is specifically his father. Leontes' first "kernel" (1.2.159), the cherished fruit of his loins, is not only the spitting image of the king's "unbreached" self (1.2.155) but, also, an underage mirror to the king's behavior. This has important implications for my analysis. I would stress that the manner in which Hermione and her ladies cope with Mamillius mirrors the way in which the Lords of Sicilia typically deal with their King.

My point is that the scene offers a comically diagnostic lens through which the entire court's dealings with Mamillius role model can be

² See note 15, p. 187.

understood. The audience knows that these women are in full control. Their ironical subservience invites us to laugh at the child's expense. Unable to detect their condescending view of him, Mamillius is given the false impression that he 'calls the shots.' A careful perusal of the play illustrates that the King's aristocratic subjects deploy a more guarded version of the same strategy. The character of Paulina suggests as much when she depicts Leontes as a man susceptible to infantile "fancies" and "fooleries" (3.2.178, 181) and his courtiers as people "that creep like shadows by him" and "sigh / at each his needless heavings" (2.3.33-34). Paulina's own cautious conduct when she first addresses the king ironically proves her point. Leontes' courtiers are, indeed, accustomed to tread carefully around him and roll with the punches when necessary.

The nursery scene demonstrates that, politically, this is a winning strategy. Hannah Arendt, who advises us not to "reduce public affairs to the business of dominion" (143), explains that true power "depends on numbers" and this applies as much to "the various forms of monarchy" as it does to "democracies" (140). Her view suggests that, if isolated, a troublesome king, or a difficult prince, can at best be figures of violence within the state; they will not be able to exert true power.

This is probably what Shakespeare's was thinking when he recreated Robert Greene's Pandosto in the guise of a shaggy-haired Leontes (1.2.119). Shakespeare's works often challenge the typical association between lions and power. Thinking that "a living lion" is the most "fearful wildfowl" (*MND* 3.1.29), Bottom and his fellow actors know that its dreadful presence can be dramatically exploited. A similar, albeit more markedly political, discussion about performing lions can be found in *The Life and Death of King John*. In this text, Shakespeare offers a reflection that links explicitly the use of lions to the art of projecting kingship. Contrary to its wild counterparts, one of Shakespeare's shrewdest politicians informs us, a "lion fostered up by hand" can be "no further harmful than in show" and, as

such, "may lie gently at the foot of peace" (*Jn.* 5.2.75-77).

This point draws from the practice of displaying a male lion's "threatening colours" upon royal coats of arms (*Jn.* 5.2.73); a measure intended to intimidate a nation's opponents in times of war and to signify a state's power over its subjects in times of peace. What makes this practice effective, Cardinal Pandulph reminds us, is the subliminal affirmation of a monarch's ability to domesticate the wildest of beasts and have it act in accordance with his will. It must be said, however, that Cardinal Pandulph represents a mentality that sees kings not as embodiments of unquestionable authority but as players/pawns within a wider political game. The function behind the visual, political and social prominence assigned to kings is that of serving the institutions that raise them by courtly hand, support them and keep them in their rarified place within the state.

A monarch like Elizabeth might have accepted this, but in Leontes' autocratic mind, this would be like playing the "disgraced part" of a tamed beast (1.2.185). I would argue that Hermione's clever talk about treating his beasts as partners presented him with such a humiliating vision. This explains why, after Hermione's argument, the king sees himself, his wife and his son as a "neat" family comprised of "the steer, the heifer and the calf" (1.2.124). This image speaks to Leontes' fears as he envisages an intolerable fall from a state of royal husbandry to that of impotent docility. This is further evidenced by the fact that he goes on to address his son as a piece of consumable flesh, his "collop" (1.2.137). Consciously or not, the king is processing the idea that he might be nothing more than a glorified clog in a machine aligned to the fresh production of royal meat.

Soon after such self-deprecating thoughts, Leontes will burst into Hermione's rooms and subject the queen to his own version of a frightening "winter tale." He takes Mamillius from her and calls her an "adulteress" (2.1.73), a woman "horsing foot on foot" with Polixenes

(1.2.286), a publically used "Hobby-horse" (1.2.283).

Most read such behavior as the outcome of Leontes' pathological jealousy. Some critics explain his change psychoanalytically (Nevo 105), or see it as the outcome of a mental condition (Cavell; Harold Bloom), or a reaction to his own linguistic impotence (Laird 27). But what I have tried to set up is a reading that, as Pierre Bourdieu would have it, traces all "sentiments" back to "social structures"(15). My reading insists that Leontes' feelings of suspicion and anger emerge as he becomes conscious of his political irrelevance within his own court.

Indeed, Leontes' notoriously wild treatment of Hermione, Camillo and many of his courtiers makes better sense if we abandoned the interpretative model of conjugal jealousy (Kermode 283) and viewed it instead as the reaction of a King who is trying to find his place within a court that has structurally and institutionally outgrown royal absolutism. Politically speaking, he is trying to reaffirm his position within the palace, and to do so he must contain Hermione's seditious presence. In order to sever her ties with the rest of his court, he puts an end to his wife's institutional role as royal parent. This renders her automatically irrelevant to his subjects' projections over the state's future. At the same time, Leontes takes action seeking to reform his courtiers, forcing them to comply with an aggressively male-centered model of domestic husbandry.

In the remainder of this paper, I will try to illustrate how Leontes drives a wedge between the court and Hermione. I will argue that Leontes does not succeed in getting his lords fully onboard until Antigonus, the courtier most resistant to his efforts, is out of the picture. With him gone, the remaining courtiers find themselves accepting and thriving under a regime established by Leontes' "straight mind," as Monique Wittig would call it (23). Even though Hermione puts up a clever fight, she is ultimately driven out as a member of an underclass: a plain woman, a creature that is politically invisible.

But, why is a generally overlooked character like Antigonus such an obstacle to Hermione's demise? Even though the old courtier was not the first person to vouch for Hermione's innocence, he was the only one to do so in a manner that harked back and reignited her courtly perspective on the metaphorical association between animal husbandry and governance. The idea that Hermione has been "horsing" around is to him so unlikely that he vows:

If it prove
 Otherwise, I'll keep my stables where
 I lodge my wife; I'll go in couples with her;
 Than when I feel and see her, no farther trust her;
 For every inch a women in the world,
 Ay, every dram of woman's flesh, is false,
 If she be. (2.1.133-9)

Ignoring Leontes, who warned his lords to "hold" their "peaces" (2.1.140), Antigonus completes his thought by adding that, were she to be "honour-flawed," he would be obliged to have his own young daughters "pay for't" (2.1.146). "I'll geld them all," he vows, even though, he admits, this would be a form of self-castration (2.1.146). Given that the damage had already been done, and the queen's honour had already been "flawed" by Leontes' public accusations, Antigonus here is insightfully describing the type of husbandry his king is trying to force upon his lords. They are all expected to follow suit and emulate the wasteful and unproductive gender politics that Leontes is spearheading. Turning their wives into beasts and rounding up their co-heirs (daughters) as if they were property would mean crossing a social and organizational threshold. The lords' own lives, he shrewdly insinuates, would change, having to turn themselves from court officials to paranoid stable masters. Not a fair prospect for those accustomed to run the state: a career misspent, stalking their suspect mares

and mutilating their own “fair” issue.

I am not claiming that Antigonus is able to offer a radical proto-feminist perspective, soaring above the androcentric social institutions of the Early Modern age. Even though, elsewhere, he professes himself ready to let his wife “take the rein” (2.3.28), in this speech he succumbs to an old “straight” tradition which values women as breeders of men’s issue. My point is rather that Antigonus is consistent with his professional and social place, offering a materialist vision in line with the social and institutional dispositions of a courtly lifestyle. He is, to put it simply, the most vocal and articulate exponent of his colleagues’ interests, providing a cogent warning against letting their king restructure the existing status quo.

At the same time, Antigonus’ pragmatism also explains why rebellion is impossible. Like everyone else, he will (fatally for him) opt for patience in the face of adversity, rhetorical resistance against royal taunting, and compliance to diplomatic maneuvering; a mixture of measures intended to tire the lion out.

This ethos of endurance and patience that fuels the palace’s pragmatic interaction with their troublesome king, Hermione is also careful to uphold. As a means of opposing her isolation from the courtly community, Hermione will defend simultaneously her own integrity and the honesty of Camillo who, having fled with Polixenes, is accused of treason (3.2.78). Subtly will she keep on encouraging her husband’s lords to see her as they see themselves: assailed by “honorable grief,” an undeserving target of Royal wrath whose destiny depends on their “measure” (2.1.110; 125). Not expecting a firmer form of resistance from the court, she can only “be patient” while the “ill planet reigns” over the king’s dominion (2.1.105).

During the trial, she lets her chips fall where they may, asking the onlookers to “behold” (3.2.36) as she lays down her “life” against Leontes’ “dreams” (3.2.79). Assuming the image of a sacrificial lamb, she seeks to voice a general hope that “tyranny” will “tremble at patience” (3.2.7). Although she

appears resigned to the imminent loss of her life, Hermione will persist in channeling the male institutional politics of the palace that have already bought her some time.³ She hopes to stay away from the slaughterhouse.

Shakespeare proves her half-right. No lord will come to her rescue, but she will survive. In a perhaps sardonic tone, Shakespeare cannot imagine anyone stepping up to the plate. The dramatist will bring out the oracle to poetically end the tug of undeclared war between Leontes and his court. The divine verdict vindicates Hermione and Camillo but patience is once again demanded of all before order is to be restored. But the prize for having endured the lion is unequally distributed across the palace. Leontes learns to behave himself with his honor intact, since, he will be tamed by no other than by "the heavens themselves" (3.2.143). His lords will go back to "business more material" (1.2.205) and Leontes' "saint-like sorrow" (5.1.12) will get him out of their way. Hermione will get "o'er sixteen years" (4.1.6) of house arrest, hiding in Paulina's "removed house" (5.2.118).

One should perhaps not wonder that Hermione will only be able to stir when the prophesized return of Leontes' daughter comes true (5.3.103). Leaving the puzzling *mise-en-scene* (Bristol 166) aside, the queen's gentle spectators ultimately watch her as she "hangs about" her husband's neck (5.3.111). She is still tearless, still alive, but cautious. She speaks only to her lost daughter. As the 'curtain' falls, we see her, under Leontes' instructions, "hastily" led "away" (5.3.154). If, as I have suggested, a queen's words are her actions, this silence reveals that her fall has, indeed, been great. What awaits her is the life of an "unequal partnership"; one that she so diplomatically bargained for, sixteen years earlier. One, however, cannot help but wonder: are such partnerships worth the wait?

³ Leontes, aware that the arraignment of Hermione must have some legitimacy, asks confirmation from Apollo's oracle before the issue of Hermione's guilt is settled.

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ABSTRACT**We'll Milk Our Ewes and Weep; but We Will not Run Wild:
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This paper will explore Shakespeare's use of images of animal domestication in *The Winter's Tale*. The aim will be to illustrate that references to (and discussions about) livestock are inextricably connected with the play's overall preoccupation with power, royal sovereignty, and the issue of female participation in practices of courtly governance.

Shakespeare's dramatic handling of these images and conversations, I believe, allows us to link a number of important episodes in a fresh way and, thereafter, realize that the rupture between Leontes and Hermione is of a profoundly political nature. The crisis, I argue, begins when the queen of Sicilia urges her husband to reward more 'softly' his faithful domesticates. Considering the tension that characterizes the relationship between the King and his long-enduring noble subjects, Hermione's plea exposes the experience of a 'tame' court that is, nevertheless, dissatisfied with Leontes' rule.

My analysis will then will go on to trace how Hermione's intervention comes back to haunt her. Leontes becomes aware that his status is contingent upon the precarious support of his lords and he seeks to alter the dynamics in his court. To do so he targets the court's self-appointed mediator, his wife. Thus, I am able to claim that Leontes' wild behavior during and after the nursery scene (2.1) should be understood as part of an effort to reconnect with his power base. His strategy is to reformulate his court on the basis of a female-unfriendly structure of state governance. My paper concludes with an attempt to evaluate to what extent this 'leonine' game of power succeeds.

Key Words | William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Wildness, Conformity, Domestication

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