

What Mamillius Knew: Ceremonies of Initiation in *The Winter's Tale*
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I have an epigraph: Childhood is not a place for children.

The Mamillius in my title is, of course, the small boy who appears in only two scenes of *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare's great tragicomedy. He is the son and heir to Leontes, king of Sicilia, and Hermione, who is pregnant with a second child when the play opens. Mamillius dies after his mother has been taken to prison, accused of treason and adultery with Leontes' boyhood friend Polixenes, king of Bohemia, and the news of his death is given to Leontes during the trial of Hermione, when the oracle, disdained by Leontes, pronounces her innocence. Hermione's daughter, Perdita, abandoned as a baby on the shores of Bohemia, is found again sixteen years later, and the family are reunited through the ministrations of Paulina, who shows them what seems to be a statue of Hermione that then comes to life.

The move from stone to flesh, the possibilities of this stage resurrection, are dependent on an awakening of faith in the audience on and off stage, and Leontes and Hermione are remarried. In Nicholas Hytner's production at the National Theatre, Hermione embraces Perdita in a kind of piéta, as Leontes walks offstage without her. The death of Mamillius thus hangs over this scene. It is the cost of Leontes' corrosive, groundless skepticism over his wife's fidelity, irrecoverable in the play's other wondrous recoveries.

Now, imagine the following figures, collected together in an imaginary place:

- First, Mamillius, in the traffic of his two rich scenes in *The Winter's Tale*.
- Second, the child at the beginning and center of the twentieth century's great work of philosophy, the *Philosophical Investigations*.
- Third, the children that strut and fret their way across the stage at Blackfriars, Whitefriars in St. Paul's, who in the children's companies were mediums of nearly all the sixteenth and seventeenth century playwrights, except Shakespeare.
- And fourth, the speechless infant at the baptism font, initiated into Christian culture, and its economy of salvation.

These disparate but, I believe, connected figures show childhood to be a source of extraordinary cultural anxiety and generativity, both the medium and the object of reflection into how a culture is inherited, passed on, in the wake of the profound transformations in sensibility that followed from England's reformations.

Mamillius is an extraordinary character in the history of theater and the history of philosophy: the child who is given a voice. In this lecture, I'll be introducing you, first of all, to the brilliant mental landscape of the play, in an exploration of the texture of the first scene in which Mamillius appears. Then, I'll explore Wittgenstein's picture of initiation in his famous math lesson, "add 2", in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I'll then briefly introduce you to the controversies around infant baptism, and the phenomenon of the children's theater, before returning to *The Winter's Tale*.

So, the first section: "Art thou my boy?": Mamillius's language lesson.

"Art thou my boy?" In the scene in which this question is asked, Leontes has set a series of little tests for Hermione and Polixenes. In putting them to the test, he has already enacted a kind of self-exile, for the distance he puts between himself and them is also a withholding of himself from them. As he isolates himself from their society, feeling not so much that he has exiled himself, as that they have excluded him, he seeks out his son to occupy him, to allay his fears, to comfort him. At least I have a son, you might imagine him thinking. We might feel that this is the form of his self-pity. But the consolation is only too open to the doubt whether his son is his. "Art thou my boy?" It's not a question that Mamillius can answer to calm the spirit in which it has been asked. Neither can anyone in this play.

Leontes in this scene has introduced a new game. The mood is decidedly not, That's my boy, a chip off the old block, like father, like son. Not the game in which the assumed likeness is a wonder and a permanent delight to the parent, a delight in which the child, being the object of it, can happily share. Mamillius is puzzled by what seems a trouble, a question, and an agitation, and the anxiety the question carries. But he himself is game, and he'll try to play, to respond in whatever way he can. He can surely answer, "Ay, my good lord," as if it's the old game, the one he's played before. Confusion at his father's question clouds in.

But they start again. "Art thou my calf?" "Yes, if you will, my lord." What and whose is the will and the willing here, the wishing and the wanting, divided between father and son? I am your calf if you want me to be. I can be yours only in the acknowledgment. I will be disowned by you, not yours at all, should you so choose. Or, an answer to Leontes' narcissism. I can be yours, only to the extent that you see me as yours, and outside of that, what am I?

It's hardly surprising that Mamillius will seek to secure himself a place in the world, a son to his father, by saying reassuringly, as if he understands that it is his task to comfort, "I am like you, they say." Everyone says I'm like you, we might imagine him thinking. But I no longer know from your tone, from your words, who I'm like.

Trapped in the ruling logic of likeness, there are few places for Mamillius to go. He is like, or unlike, his father. That is all. The circular, redundant nature of the logic of likeness emerges when Paulinas shows the baby, not yet named Perdita, to Leontes. The whole matter and copy of the father, says Paulina, "So like you 'tis the worse." The positing of paternal relations, of likeness to me, will lead nowhere. But if Leontes wonders if his son is like him, he'll also be unsettled by his likeness to his son.

Looking on the lines of his boy's face, he thinks how like he is. "Methoughts I did recoil / Twenty-three years, and saw myself unbreeched," he says. Mamillius is his diminutive self, and the unsettling image is one of regression, dependency, of unmasculine vulnerability, so one form of likeness is covered by another as compensation, consolation.

Mamillius speaks only a few lines in the play, 21 in all, but he is an important presence in the two scenes in which he appears. In the first scene, he is in the force field of his father's desire, and in the next scene in which he appears, in his mother's. Finally, pulled away from the one by the other, in an attempt to excise the mother's part in him, he dies from conceit and fear of what has happened to the queen. He is Leontes' surest victim, and his poor frame gives up under the impossibility of being the child of both his parents, when one seeks to destroy the other.

When Leontes says, "Give me the boy," he makes Mamillius hostage to the murderous, irreparable effects of his skeptical doubt, and the fertile, deadly imagination in which he can breed fear and suspicion from nothing. His disappearance from the play stands for the cost of Leontes' failures of acknowledgement. His death, like that of Antigonus, is never recovered in the revivals and resurrections of the last scene. His tutelary spirit thus pervades the play, not just because it is from his tale, whispered into the ears of his mother, that the play gets its title, "A sad tale's best for winter," but also because the play so vitally concerns questions of inheritance, of initiation.

It is an intergenerational romance, and so what is at stake are relations between adults and children, and the anxiety of that relation in a culture which does not know what it has to pass on, and a younger generation that has been brutally disinherited and so does not know what to call its own. The fantasies of childish innocence and inevitable fall that link the childhoods of Polixenes and Leontes help us to see that this is a story about what it means to grow up, and the anxieties that this entails.

So now, second section, "Add 2."

Shakespeare's plays frequently explore situations in which the inheritability of the world is at issue. Paul Kottman says, "Shakespeare increasingly dramatized the fate of protagonists whose lives are conditioned by authoritative social bonds—kinship ties, civic relations, economic dependencies, political allegiances—that end up unraveling irreparably, and who therefore find that they can no longer find a livable or desirable form of sociality."

It is Wittgenstein and the Harvard philosopher emeritus Stanley Cavell who bring to the fore the significance of how we learn language, and so the difficulties of inheriting a world from our elders. The *Philosophical Investigations* is a work, says Cavell, that begins with a scene of inheritance. The beginning of the *Philosophical Investigations* has a very famous quotation from Augustine's *Confessions*, in which Augustine is describing how he learned language. "It is a work that begins," says Cavell, "with a scene of inheritance, the child's inheritance of language. It is an image of a culture as an inheritance, one that takes place in the conflict of voices and generations. The figure of the child is present in this portrait of civilization more prominently and decisively than in any other work of philosophy I can think of, with the exception, if you grant that it is philosophy, of Rousseau's *Emile*."

Given that I'm claiming that *The Winter's Tale* is essentially concerned with questions of initiation into a culture, and in particular, with the language lessons learned at the hand of a skeptic, I'm going to rehearse briefly why Wittgenstein, especially in Cavell's reading, wants to show us that in our pictures of childhood and learning, we mistake instruction for initiation, and that this mistake is consequential. In paying attention to Wittgenstein's concerted focus on the figure of the child, Cavell is drawing our attention to a striking aspect of Wittgenstein's contemplation of the inheritance of language. How will the adult teach the child? Will the child learn what the adult teaches? As Cavell puts it, "Will one convey sufficient instruction in order that the other can go on alone?"

This observation is related to Wittgenstein's parable of learning in the *Investigations*. "We ask a pupil to continue a series. Add 2 beyond 1000. And he writes 1000, 1004, 1008, 1012." Here is Wittgenstein (and by the way, the *Philosophical Investigations* is a very dramatic book; it has voices). So here's Wittgenstein: "We say to him, 'Look what you are doing!' Dash, dash, dash. He doesn't understand! We say, 'You should have added 2. Look how you began the series.' Dash. He answers, 'Yes, isn't it right? I thought that was how I had to do it.' Dash, dash. Or suppose he pointed to the series and said, 'But I did go on in the same way.' Dash, dash, dash." (Dash is very important in the *Investigations*.) "It would now be of no use to say, 'But can't you see,' and go over the old examples and explanations for him again. In this way, because explanations come to an end somewhere, the adult must stand in as exemplary for his or her culture, and this may be hard."

The teacher, the parent, are, whether they wish to be or not, exemplary. They are the representatives of the community into which the child is being invited and initiated. This is part of a whole series of examples in which Wittgenstein is tracking philosophy's flight from the ordinary, is attempting to lead us back from abstract conceptualizations home to their uses in the contexts in which we have learned them. The contexts in which we ordinarily use them. These examples are, as Cavell says, very upsetting. They come with a new sense of depth in the idea that language is learned, and in the recognition of how little can be taught. How, so to speak, helpless or impotent the teaching is, compared with the enormity of what is learned. He finds one of the motives to philosophy as rectifying the horrifying asymmetry between teaching and learning.

But he insists the mind cannot be led at every point. Reasons, my control, come to an end. Then the other takes over, and the object of my instruction, my assertions, questions, remarks, encouragement, rebukes, is exactly that the other shall take over, that he or she shall be able to go on alone. These scenarios are enormously anxiety-inducing, because they concern the limits of the child's understanding, and the limits of our intelligibility to others. Nothing, it appears in this reading, keeps our practices in line, except the reactions and responses we learn in learning them. My ability to communicate with a child will depend on his or her natural understanding, her reaction, our mutual achievement in judgments. There's no firmer ground to get to than this.

So Cavell says, "We learn words in certain contexts, and then we are expected, and expect others, to be able to project them into further contexts. Nothing ensures that this projection will take place." This is why Cavell prefers to think of learning as initiation.

Instead, then, of saying either that we tell beginners what words mean, or that we teach them what objects are, I will say we initiate them into the relevant forms of life held in language, and gathered around the objects and problems of our world. For that to be possible, we must make ourselves exemplary and take responsibility for that assumption of authority. Teaching here would mean something like showing them what we say and do, and accepting what they say and do as what we say and do, and this will be more than we know or can say.

The third section: Ceremonies of initiation.

The ceremonies of initiation and inheritance, which are so central in *The Winter's Tale*, and that are explored so deeply in the *Philosophical Investigations*, are in fact a source of deep controversy in the arguments that develop around the sacrament of baptism in sixteenth and seventeenth century England.

These arguments bear on the figure of the child and why it might become newly significant. As human beings, we imagine that we can be born more than once, that the beginning of our lives, at which we were not present, can be started over. The quintessential religious expression of this is baptism. As Richard Hooker puts it, in *Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity*, which contains his apologia for the Elizabethan Book of Common Prayer, "For as we are not naturally men without birth, so neither are we Christian men, in the eye of the church of God, but by new birth, nor according to the manifest ordinary course of divine disposition newborn, but by that baptism which both declareth and maketh us Christians."

The spiritual regeneration of baptism is a sacrament that gives to the baptized the life of salvation, and makes the priest midwife to that new birth. But every second chance depends on the extension of the metaphor of rebirth. For Pericles, Marina is, "Thou that beget'st him that didst thee beget." For Romeo, love itself is a baptism. "Call me but love, and I'll be new baptized." There is baptismal imagery at the end of *The Comedy of Errors*. "Go to a gossips' feast, and go with me. / After so long grief, such nativity!"

One might say, one might even say, that every time someone emerges from the sea in Shakespeare's plays, it is a form of baptism. This water birth is made literal. For example, in the stunning childbed of Marina, born at sea, in the miraculous recovery of her mother Thaisa, out of the sea by Cerimon, and in Pericles landing like a fish out of water, with his father's armor on the shore of Pentapolis.

Baptism is of course the rite of initiation par excellence. How it is conducted, and what it means is profoundly issued during and after the Reformation. "Baptism," suggest David Martin, the sociologist of religion, "will be a problem in a society which changes character." Baptism crystallized the most pressing question about what it meant to enter Christian society, and thus about what were the contours of that society. It is no surprise to see that baptism, which retains its sacramental status across the Reformation, remains the topic of protracted debates about its ceremonies. Rehearsing some of those debates will take us to some of the anxieties around the figure of the child as the entrant, the neophyte, who stands on the threshold of society, and who therefore, as I have just explored, sponsors anxiety about how that society is going to be passed along and inherited and how we account for it, answer to it, to the child.

The ceremonies of baptism raise the most crucial questions, such as who speaks for the child, when the child cannot speak for him or herself. About what it means, therefore, to be spoken for. About instruction and initiation, and the crucial differences between them. About how the figure of the child worries away at the community of elders around her. The minister, the midwife, the parents, the god-seps. Who is authorized to perform baptism? Is it the minister alone, or can the midwife or parent perform it in extremis? Should one be baptized as an infant at all, as had been

customary from about 1200, or as Anabaptists maintained, only as an adult, once one had reached the age of reason.

The medieval ceremony of baptism had at its heart an exorcism, performed as soon after birth as possible, sometimes on the day of birth itself, sometimes between two or four days later, leaving room for baptism, lay baptism, by midwives or others. The ceremony consisted of a whole host of gestures and movements designed to keep the devil at bay.

The structure of the medieval ceremony is twofold, one part of it happening at the church porch, the other at the font. The baby is not yet Christian, and cannot enter the church proper, until the priest has made the sign of the cross on his forehead and exorcised it with salt placed in his mouth with two further signings of the cross on his forehead. In addition, the priest must spit on his left hand and use the thumb of his right hand to moisten the infant's ears and nostrils with saliva, a reference to the way Jesus had healed the deaf and dumb man. He finally makes the sign of the cross on the infant's right hand, so that, as he says directly to the baby, "You may sign yourself and repel yourself from the party of the enemy." Regeneration, the central premise and promise of baptism, is thus made on his behalf by the elders in his life. The questions of the priest are addressed to the baby, and they're answered on his behalf by the godseps, his relations in God.

In the reformed Book of Common Prayer, 1549, the sign of the cross is retained, and the reformed ceremony therefore. conservatively and controversially, retained elements of exorcism. In the second Prayer Book of 1552, the sign of the cross is retained, but removed until after baptism. Luther retained the sign of the cross before baptism, Calvin got rid of it. It was perhaps no wonder that Nonconformists such as Henry Barrow could say that the baptismal font as it was represented in the Book of Common Prayer, was, quote, "An abomination. An idolatrist, popish, enchanted, hallowed relic." Some reformers also felt it to be simply ridiculous that the godparents should answer on behalf of the child.

The intense, protracted debates over ceremony, particularly in England and over infant baptism, show what is at stake in these differing theologies of sacrament, as they also show how sacramental logics bear profoundly on questions of how to become incorporate in Christian society. In medieval baptism, the child is entering Christian society, and not simply membership of one confessional church. The contours of the church and the contours of Christian society are assumed to be identical. But the doctrine of election rendered the contours of Christian society uncertain, and made a defense of infant baptism hard. The child was already admitted to Christian society by God's eternal providence, so what did the words of the minister actually do?

Some of the most intense arguments within the reform traditions concerned questions of faith, of understanding and meaning, and some of their contradictions are worked out most pointedly and intensely in relation to the topic of infant baptism. Infant baptism, as I have mentioned, remains the normal mode of operation from around the turn of the thirteenth century. Yet it was hard to defend once reformers had argued through a different sacramental logic, which no longer assumed that the words of the priest were efficacious signs that, covered by the church, as scholastic theology has it, and working as the ordained voice of God, effected what they signified.

In "reformed logic," to put it crudely, as there is no such simple thing, sacraments can be of no value if they do not give rise to understanding and if they do not awaken faith. Zwingli, the Swiss reformer, certainly enjoyed the anachronistic Latin understanding of *sacramentum* as a soldier's oath, testifying to the loyalty and the solidarity of the grace already received from God. In his view, a sacrament cannot be a means of grace, but a testimony that grace has been received. It therefore should not be administered to children.

Reformed sacramental logic makes axiomatic the faith of the receiver. As Luther had said of the mass, but with a logic that equally applies to baptism, everyone takes and receives it for himself only in proportion as he believes and trusts. God, according to Calvin, adopts our children before they are even born. So there is no cause for anxiety over the unbaptized. It follows, he says, that the baby children of believers are not baptized to make them sons and daughters of God for the first time, as though they were strangers to the church before. Rather, because they already belong to the body of Christ, by the privilege of the promise, they are received into the church by a solemn sign. Baptism is thus an action that memorializes what Christ has already done for us. It's very hard, I think, for reformed logic to protect itself against the logic of Anabaptism, which is one reason why the reformers are really quite hysterical about the specter of Anabaptism, the doctrine that baptism is for adults only.

I've no time to explore in detail here the various reformers' logic, but I want to reinforce the point that controversies over infant baptism reflect the vexed question of how one comes into Christian society, and by what agency. English nonconformists found it childish and superstitious to promise on behalf of the infant what it was not in their powers to perform. Perhaps some of these anxieties are reflected in the idea that the questions asked of the child in the 1549 and medieval rites, are in 1552 and afterwards asked of the godparents: "Dost thou forsake the devil? Dost thou believe in the Holy Ghost? Wilt thou be baptized in the faith?" Furthermore, the 1662 Prayer Book adds a baptism for those of riper years.

For Richard Hooker, the baptism of infants is proof that sacraments are about infinitely more than instruction. "It greatly offendeth," he says, "that some, when they labor to show the use of

the holy sacraments, assign unto them no end, but only to teach the mind, by other senses, that which the word doth teach by hearing." Why would you administer to infants if instruction alone was the issue, is his question. Quote, "And unto infants, which are not capable of instruction, who would think it a mere superfluity that any sacrament is administered, if to administer the sacraments be but to teach receivers what God doth for them?"

Hooker's brilliantly inverse logic begins with the assumption of the necessity of infant baptism, and then deduces the inadequacy of any sacramental theology that cannot address the necessity of that moment of initiation into Christian society, of the inevitability, that by virtue of being children or of having once been children, others simply do speak for us. Indeed, Cranmer had specified in his reform of the Prayer Book that baptism should be administered on Sundays and on holy days when the most number of people come together, so that the whole congregation can receive the child into Christian society, as also "because in the baptism of infants, every man present be put in remembrance of his own profession made to God in his baptism."

People rely on their elders, of course, for their very memory of baptism. Infant baptism acknowledges that it is structural to being human that we are deeply, fundamentally dependent on others, that we could not learn to speak at all were it not for the fact that others speak for us, and before us, and around us. This is a period of dependency that we might prefer to forget with myths and fantasies of independence, of stoicism, or the supremacy of the rational will. Leontes certainly wishes to deny that there are any others in his life, as I will go on to explore. When we learn to speak for ourselves, we do so in the same words of our elders. And this is why the process of learning is a long, never-ending process of initiation. In the emphasis on cognition and on the receiver, some reformed logic had replaced initiation with instruction, and thus its logic leads to a forgetting of the child.

Before I finally return to *The Winter's Tale*, I want briefly to explore one other way in which childhood is pondered and worried over in Shakespeare's time, and how and where it becomes a theatrical resource. As is well known, a large share of the business of playing was undertaken by the children's companies, which emerged in the 1570s and were reincarnated after the closure of Blackfriars, the former Dominican friary, in 1584, and St. Paul's in 1590, such that during the first decade of the seventeenth century, the children's companies are associated with a highly innovative theatrical repertoire.

As is well known, the association of the children's companies with Shakespearean dramaturgy is remarked upon in Hamlet's reference to "the little eyases." In their storied but controversial role in the so-called Poet's War, and above all, from the fact that James Burbage leased rooms in Blackfriars, intending them for the use of the Lord Chamberlain's Men. Burbage's heirs, however, had to lease the property to the revived chapel children in 1600, and it wasn't until ten

years later that Shakespeare's company gained control of the playhouse. The great popularity of the children's companies is remarkable, and has led to many claims about the genres best suited to diminutive players—satire, tragicomedy, to speculations about the greater malleability of the actor in relation to the authority of the playwright, such as Ben Jonson, and to the general relation of the children's theater to scandal and criticism, the ubiquity of sexual innuendo and the highly sophisticated nature of many of the plays in which they appeared.

I can't explore or settle any of these controversies here, but I want to claim that the fascination of the children's theater, the cultural and central agency of children as actors, arguably stems from a culture that had recently transformed its own rites of initiation, had insisted liturgically on a relation to the mother tongue, and on cognition and understanding in questions of faith.

Mike Witmore has recently suggested in his superb book *Pretty Creatures* that the child is a figure for the power of fiction. I wish to suggest that the child of the children's playing companies is also fascinating, because in a world where skepticism, doubt about the interior of other minds, doubt about the very existence of the world, doubt, as exemplified in Leontes' case as doubt that his child is his, in a world where such skepticism is taking hold, the child's relation to the world is pre-skeptical, founded on acceptance and not based on knowledge about what the world is.

To come to speak a language, as Wittgenstein has taught us, is simply to interact with the world, not to learn about it. Doubt, therefore, has no part in children's language games. Through language, the child learns what the world is like, and what things in the world are like. It does not learn that things in the world exist.

So now, returning to *The Winter's Tale*.

The delight, pleasure, and shock of the little actors in the children's companies emerges from the fact that adult truths are newly estranged in the mouth of the young. The children are generators of an almost constant dramatic irony in that they utter truths beyond their understanding, and so adult complacency about the shape of the ways of that world are both undercut, estranged, and shored up. In the repertoire of the children's companies, children or youths get to play adults. In *The Winter's Tale*, a child is given voice precisely as a child.

There's really nothing quite like the figure of Mamillius in any other Elizabethan or Jacobean drama. It is as if here in this play, that so centrally figures a male skeptic, and explores his devastating picture of the world and its relations to models of selfhood and language, Shakespeare wants and needs to give the child a voice. Here is a child, fully self-conscious about the way he's called upon to ventriloquize adult voices, and the play explores the pains, the cost,s

of an actual child, as well as the dangerous, self-regarding adult fantasies of childhood, as represented in Polixenes' image of the eternal boyhood of the twin lambs of Polixenes and Leontes. A world without women, a world without time, and a bold rewriting of the doctrine of original sin, a world without sin. It's no wonder, then, that a play which most centrally figures and analyzes the costs and consequences of skepticism in the figure of Leontes should be so invested and interested in the figure of the child.

I've rehearsed some of Leontes' painful language lessons with Mamillius. Leontes' narcissistic jealousy is at once pathological—no one else in the play sees any cause for it whatsoever—and an instance of a terrible anxiety into which any of us could, at any time, fall.

It's not so much that we might all become intensely jealous of our partners for no reason, it might happen, but that we might crave a firmer foundation for our relations than simple acceptance and trust of their words. And once in this cast of mind, forms of trust can all too easily look like stupid credulity, and we'll desperately seek for ways of defending ourselves against any ways in which we have to rely on, depend upon, or trust others at all. When Stanley Cavell sees Leontes as a kind of skeptic, I think it's this insight that he wants us to see. And unless we have ever felt ourselves to be in such straits, they might be very hard to fathom.

What Leontes attempts to construct once this anxiety has taken hold is a private language, a world in which the response of others is unnecessary. The conversational double bind into which Leontes places his interlocutors is painfully illustrated in the context of Mamillius. With his other interlocutors, he begins to pattern out a world constructed entirely of his own assertion.

Let's look at what happens to the language of Leontes as his skeptical suspicions take hold. I want to abuse an important expression of Wittgenstein's here to say that Leontes wishes to speak a private language, by which I mean not so much as Wittgenstein did, a language which only the one who can seize it can understand, but rather a language which is full his to define and control. Leontes' new suspicions lead to his immediate distrust of the language of others. Words have lost their innocence for him.

"Satisfy!" He pulls up his friend and counsel, Camillo, when he's finally cornered into answering his question as to why Polixenes should stay at the queen's behest and not his. His suspicion at Camillo's words, in this instance, are here crucially twinned with his rejection of Camillo as a confessor figure, whom he has trusted like a confessee to priests. "I have trusted thee, Camillo, / With all the nearest things to my heart, as well / My chamber-counsels, wherein, priestlike, thou / Hast cleansed my bosom; I from thee departed / Thy penitent reformed."

It's clear that the kind of self-knowledge and consolation available in this model of conversation is no longer available. The words of others, unless they exactly mirror his own suspicions, can't be trusted. He now understands language as his own possession. Something he can engage, as it were, unilaterally, the definitions coming from his side alone.

"I have said / She's an adult'ress; I have said with whom." His invocation of the oracle speaks the absolute sufficiency of his own knowledge: Though I am satisfied and need no more than what I know, yet shall the oracle give rest to the minds of others. His own knowledge is all-sufficient to him, and he'll destroy the very world to protect it. His wife, his children, the trust and friendship of Polixenes, his counselors, and his gods. The oracle is just to reassure others of his own prior determination. Language here is being taken out of any circulation at all of commerce with others. With no longer any dependencies on others, or on the divine, the self is sufficient. It is a language cut off from all response or conversation, counsel and consultation, and so a language so completely willful and private, that it must provide its own foundations.

The play provides us with two important instances of Leontes' self-founding foundations. The first usage of the word "foundations" is by Camillo to Polixenes, and it's used to indicate that, fragile as these foundations are, there is nothing so unarguable, so invincible: "Swear his thought over / By each particular star in heaven and / By all their influences, you may as well / Forbid the sea for to obey the moon / As or by oath remove or counsel shake / The fabric of his folly, whose foundation / Is piled upon his faith and will continue / The standing of his body."

The second important and strategic use of the word "foundation" is when Leontes responds to Hermione's intuition of his future grief, the grief and remorse that are loosely outlined for her the moment he makes his accusations. She will try to tell him that if he takes this action, there will be no way to repair it. "How this will grieve you, / When you shall come to clearer knowledge, that / You thus have published me! Gentle my lord, / You scarce can right me throughly then to say / You did mistake."

There will come a moment, she sees, and says with utter clarity, when justifications are seen to be hollow, when apologies will not avail, where the harm cannot be put right. This cannot be called a prediction. It is rather a remark about the very nature and limits of apology. If Hermione is grace, it is not yet hers to bestow. But Leontes' response shows what he stakes. "No. If I mistake / In those foundations which I build upon, / The center is not big enough to bear / A school-boy's top." Since we know that Leontes does indeed mistake, we see his whole universe teetering on a schoolboy's top, and the gravity and the regressive childishness of his stakes are utterly apparent. Camillo knows that Leontes cannot be argued with. His fantasy is so necessary to his sense of himself.

The most emblematic moment of Leontes' isolation and tyranny, and, of course, the two are completely linked, is when his counselors all kneel to beg him not to kill his daughter. And it's a very potent image, the baby Perdita lying at the feet of this counsel of men. It's of significance here that Antigonus and the other counselors never go about to seek proof of Hermione's innocence. They know it. They accept it, rather, and they are willing to stake themselves on it completely.

That doesn't mean they know she is innocent, that they have been offered proof. It means that Hermione is the very touchstone of fidelity, and that the future health of the very social order they inhabit rests on their fundamental credence of that. It is that trust that is the foundation of their social order, and that is why their speech is continually lauded with conditionals. If she be, if this prove true, if it be so. The counselors stake themselves on their "if." In insisting that his word alone counts, Leontes destroys the trust in words that is the unspoken, tacit, and taken-for-granted basis of every human act of communication.

The word "credit" appears several times in the play. We credit others all the time, and when we don't, when we can't, the withdrawal of all trust from words creates a Lenten desert of chaos and destruction. It creates a sterile, lifeless world, which cannot move into the future, which, in the idiom and central pun of the play, has no issue. Leontes has regarded his own children as no more than reflections. To return to himself, he must be able to receive his daughter Perdita again as gift, not possession. Perdita, freed by nature from the prison of her mother's womb, the play's hopes of recovery depend on Leontes' ability to revive his wife and to receive his daughter by honoring that fact.

What is lost through one child is only partially recovered through another, and the recovery depends on risk and trust. Mamillius' death is bound up with Leontes' version of language, Leontes' recovery with his ability to accept Perdita as a gift, of which he is not the origin, at Paulina's hands.

It's no wonder that in assuming language as a private possession, he has had to disavow both his own childhood and that of his son, for this pre-skeptical nature of the child is both threatening and alarming. It is a picture of our deepest dependencies. The fact that there is nothing deeper than our mutual attunement is apt to appear terrifying. It's the assumption, the idiom, and the theme of the late romances. It explains the immense fragility and risk of their worlds, how subject to loss and destruction, and so how miraculous are the mutual achievements they end up achieving.

"It is required you do awake your faith," cautions Paulina, as she prepares her audience for the miracle of stone becoming flesh, which is no more than the miracle of a woman no longer

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petrified by her husband's refusal to acknowledge her. *The Winter's Tale* here stakes itself on the cultivation of a post-skeptical wonder. But as the figure of Mamillius reminds us, every child is necessarily pre-skeptical. The child learns by believing the adult. Doubt comes after belief, as Wittgenstein puts it in *On Certainty*.

The Winter's Tale is of course a play of second chances, of beginning again. The logic of baptism, one might say, is the logic of human forgiveness, as if, as for Luther, quote, "The whole of life is a baptism," here rendered in the capacity to grant each other the space to start anew. In such a way, we are reminded of our continuing initiation, of the costs of forgetting that we began life as children, and that Shakespeare's theater is what Stanley Cavell said philosophy beginning in wonder might be: an education for grown-ups.

