

'tis time



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

Unlike most of Shakespeare's earlier plays, *The Winter's Tale* moves from tragedy to comedy. The disastrous consequences of Leontes' jealousy and tyranny are resolved by the passing of time. Only after sixteen years can the two royal families come together again. Time also plays a significant role in the reading of the chosen passage. The passage is full of commas, colons, semi-colons, and periods, which force the lines to be slowed and pausing. The frequent punctuations draw the reader's attention to time and its effects on the words being spoken by the characters. The scansion of the passage illustrates Shakespeare's mastery of time as he manipulates the rhythm of the lines using varying feet and meters. Time seems to be the crucial element in not only the scansion of this passage, but in the development of the play as a whole.

Line ninety-eight begins with a half-line consisting of only two feet, "No foot shall stir." The brevity of the line and the slowness of the opening spondee help to create the tension before Paulina attempts to summon the statue of Hermione. Leontes wants everyone to stand still while Paulina tries to give life to the statue. He says, "No foot shall stir" (98). Meanwhile, the metrical feet in line ninety-eight do "stir" as the pentameter is broken up into two half-lines. This contradiction of what Leontes wants and how the feet in the lines are set up conveys the lack of Leontes' total authority. In many instances of the play, Leontes' requests are not heeded to, despite his position as king. When Leontes wants Camillo to poison Hermione, Camillo does not do as he says. Instead, he runs off with Polixenes, buying precious time for everyone. Camillo and Polixenes evade death, and Hermione is given enough time to stage a death so that she can avoid being killed also.

Camillo's noble defiance gives everyone valuable time; the key factor which allows people to take shelter from Leontes' tyranny.

The second half-line of line ninety-eight consists of a trochee and two iambs: " Music, awake her; strike!" Since the only varying foot of the latter half-line is the trochee, " music," Shakespeare seems to be emphasizing the significance of music. In a sense, music is a representation of time because it is defined by its time signatures, which designate much of its rhythmical patterns. Music is also the magical element that accompanies the transformation of the still Hermione into the living Hermione, which makes it an agent of change. In other words, Shakespeare conveys that music, or time, has the power to change. Paulina calls for the music to " awake her" (98), and it does. Time is the essential element that frees Hermione from the bondage of her hiding.

In line ninety-nine, Paulina is summoning Hermione from the statue. She indicates that it is time for Hermione to reveal herself. The line begins with the two iambs, "'Tis time; descend;". Because the iamb is the most basic and common Shakespearean foot, the two iambs that begin the line seem to indicate appropriateness. The appropriate time for Hermione's re-emergence has finally come.

In the next two spondaic feet, Paulina utters, " be stone no more;" (99). The two rigid spondees seem to not only reflect the stiffness of the statue, but also the inflexibility of time. No one has the power to undo what has happened and bring back the years lost during her hiding. Sixteen years must pass by in order for Hermione to be united with her family.

The spondee at the beginning of line one hundred, " Strike all," provides a powerful shift in Paulina's beckoning of Hermione. Incidentally, the word " strike" is also a term associated with clocks, which were common by the 1500s (Gomez). When speaking in terms of time according to clocks, " strike" is a commonly used term that marks the passing of an hour, or the beginning of one. Paulina first uses the word " strike" in line ninety-eight to mark the beginning of the music, which as mentioned before, is a symbol of time. It seems that Shakespeare uses the word " strike" in reference to time, more specifically, to the marking of time passed. In line one hundred, Paulina urges Hermione to show that she is alive, and in a way, it seems that she really wants Hermione to reveal to everyone what Time can do. Although Hermione has aged, Time keeps her safe and living for many years. Time also allows Perdita to grow and return to Hermione and in the end, it is responsible for bringing the entire family back together.

In the entire last scene of the play, Leontes' is overcome by feelings of genuine grief after seeing the statue of Hermione. He comments on the statue's realistic appearance, then wonders why the statue appears wrinkled and aged. Polixenes argues that the statue of Hermione does not seem so aged. Leontes then mentions the majestic appearance of the statue by saying, " Even with such life of majesty" (V. iii. 35) and " There's magic in thy majesty" (V. iii. 39). Because Hermione understands the power of time and is able to endure those years in hiding, Time seems to favor her and allows her to age gracefully. Paulina responds by saying, " So much the more our carver's excellence, / Which lets go by some sixteen years and makes her / as she liv'd now" (V. iii. 30-1). In reality, there is no actual stone carver,

but only Time, which has been gracious to Hermione's appearance over the years.

Understanding the effects of time and having a good sense of it seems to be essential to the play. Hermione is perhaps the most perceptive of Time. When Leontes begins to make fierce accusations about her infidelity, she says, " I must be patient till the heavens look / With an aspect more favourable" (II. I. 106-7). She realizes that she is powerless against Leontes' jealous rage and resorts to the powers of Time to work against Leontes' tyranny. Although she has to wait many years, she is successful in making Leontes realize his mistakes and avoids imprisonment and even death.

Camillo is also quite perceptive of Time. When he is told by Leontes to poison Polixenes, Camillo informs Polixenes and finds the right time for the two of them to escape safely to Bohemia. Also, after some years in Bohemia, Camillo notices that he has not seen Prince Florizel for three days (IV. ii. 30). His keen perception of time leads both him and Polixenes to realize the increasing absence of Florizel, which results in their discovery of the love between Florizel and Perdita. This discovery enables Camillo to help the young couple by sending them to Bohemia, which is the beginning of the play's reunion.

Unlike Hermione and Camillo, Leontes has a poor sense of time. At the beginning of the play, when Polixenes decides to go back and tend to his royal duties in Bohemia, Leontes urges him to stay another week. At the request of Leontes, Hermione successfully persuades him into staying, even though it has been nine months since he left his duties. Polixenes' extended

stay, which Leontes wants, ends in disaster. As a result, Leontes' family is broken up and he loses a dear friend.

When Cleomenes and Dion return astonishingly quickly with the oracle, Leontes takes it as a sign that the oracle will support his suspicions of Hermione and Polixenes. However, Leontes interprets the briefness of their trip inaccurately. When the oracle is read, it proves Hermione and Polixenes' innocence. Leontes' dull understanding of time leaves him blind to the truth.

The image of the oracle appears to be yet another symbol of time. The oracle that Leontes requests, reveals the truth and predicts the future. Although Leontes promises to abide by the oracle, which is in a way, a symbol of time because it is able to jump ahead in time and foresee what is to come, he refuses to follow it after finding that it disproves his doubts about his wife and Polixenes. His stubbornness towards the oracle, and towards the fate of Time, ends in the tragedy that lasts for sixteen long years.

Even Paulina, who appears to have a good sense of time because of her role in Hermione's lengthy hiding, lacks good timing when she approaches Leontes with his newborn. In an attempt to appease Leontes' fury, Paulina brings the baby to him, despite being warned that the king is lacking sleep and should not be approached. Paulina insists that the truth shall release him from his misunderstandings, while in fact, only time is able to do so. When Paulina brings the baby to Leontes in his agitated state, he flies into a rage and eventually orders Antigonus to abandon the baby in a far off place.

Although Antigonus is noble enough to offer his own life for the baby's, he has a poor grasp of time, which kills him. When he finally reaches the deserts of Bohemia, the mariner foresees a storm and Antigonus promises to return quickly. Instead of hurrying like he promises, Antigonus begins telling the baby about his dream of the ghostly figure of Hermione. Antigonus fails to hurry and takes too much time. Consequently, he is brutally attacked and killed by a bear. Antigonus' delay not only kills him, but the entire crew of his ship. The storm develops rapidly while he is away and shipwrecks all on board. Antigonus' underestimation of Time, ends in tragedy.

In Act IV, Shakespeare uses a Chorus symbolizing Time to indicate the passing of sixteen years. In this scene, Time speaks of its powers and abilities. Time begins by saying, " I that please some, try all" (1). Indeed, no one is impervious to Time; it affects everyone in the play. Even though Time makes it possible for Hermione to reunite with her family at the end, she loses sixteen years of her life in hiding. Time also tries Leontes. At the beginning of the play, he almost has no understanding of Time, yet, with the help of Paulina, Leontes successfully endures the long years by mourning for his wife and not remarrying. Leontes' willingness to wait in mourning enables him to pass Time's trial, which he is rewarded for at the end of the play.

Time proceeds to illustrate its omnipotence by saying it does not adhere to the rules of law or custom, that it can completely overturn what is to be expected. Time says, " since it is in my power / To o'erthrow law, and in one self-born hour / To plant and o'erwhelm custom" (7-9). In addition to being omnipotent, Time also claims to be omnipresent. " The same I am, ere

ancient'st order was, / Or what is now receiv'd" (10-12). It is clear that Shakespeare makes Time the most powerful force in the play.

Time clearly plays the largest role in the story. It is by no accident that Shakespeare titles the play *The Winter's Tale*, since winter is a time of the year. Furthermore, winter is the coldest and bleakest season of the year. Subsequently, the play begins in tragedy, and it seems as though there is no hope for Leontes to regain what he has destroyed. Only Time is able to convert this tragedy into comedy; the sixteen years that pass brings back nearly all that is destroyed by Leontes. Time is able to miraculously heal the wounds of the two royal families, but it cannot undo their mistakes. Unfortunately, the lost time cannot be regained. Through *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare conveys the significance of time and the importance of one's understanding of time. If used wisely like Hermione and Camillo, time can spare one's life and shelter an individual from imminent danger. When time is misused or misjudged, as seen in Leontes' hasty accusations and also in Antigonus' tardiness in returning to the ship, Time can lead to utter destruction.

## **Works Cited**

Shakespeare, William. *The Winter's Tale*. Ed. J. H. P. Pafford. London: Routledge, 1994.