Control, Emotions, and Father-Daughter Relationships in Shakespeare

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In the plays *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* by William Shakespeare, the characters of Leontes and Prospero both direct the plot of their respective stories because of their lack of trust in others. Leontes has a paranoid fear that his wife is unfaithful, and his emotional outbursts in retaliation for the imagined affair affect both his family and his subjects. Prospero, too, acts in retaliation, but he works instead towards correcting the situation that led to his banishment. His strategy involves seizing control of his daughter and everyone else on the island over which he has given himself dominion. These two father-daughter relationships parallel the ruler-subject relationships in both plays. In *The Tempest*, this is because of Prospero's need for control. In *The Winter's Tale*, this is because Leontes places his own emotions above all other considerations.

One major theme of *The Tempest* is that Prospero acts a playwright within the play, acting as the mastermind behind everything that happens on his island. This naturally affects the men who arrive on the island by shipwreck, all of whom become something like Prospero's subjects the moment they set foot on the island. Prospero orchestrates everything from the state of their arrival to when they sleep and who they meet (Shakespeare). This is all is down to his insatiable need for control, which he uses to get whatever he wants. In this case, that is revenge on those who wronged him, as well as to get off the island and be duke once more. By controlling what happens to his makeshift subjects on the island, he is able to achieve his goals, making him a grand puppet master of sorts, the perpetrator behind the action of the play. He is able to do this by using magic, but also by using the power and control that come along with it.

Prospero's need to control also appears with his daughter, Miranda, and it isn't hard to look at him "as a manipulative father and governor who exerts a rough and self-serving authority

over his daughter" (Slights). As with his subjects, Prospero is in charge of who his daughter sees once the island becomes more populated, making sure she only has contact with Ferdinand for the most part (Shakespeare). He also puts her into an enchanted sleep at one point, just as he does with the others. Prospero's manipulation of Miranda could just be seen as the protective fatherly gestures of a parent who does not want his daughter to fall in love with the wrong person. Prospero knows fully well that Ferdinand is the right person, however, and not just for Miranda but for himself as well. Prospero needs the marriage between Ferdinand and Miranda for his plan to work (Shakespeare), but instead of letting the lovers figure it out themselves, he controls and manipulates both of them every step of the way. This proves that Prospero's need for control creates the parallel between his daughter and his subjects when it comes to his master plan.

Prospero does not only use his magic to put people to sleep, however. He also frequently makes people hear and see things that are not there (Shakespeare). For example, Caliban describes the island as being "full of noises, / Sounds and sweet airs, that give delight and hurt not…and then, in dreaming, / The clouds methought would open and show riches / Ready to drop upon me that, when I waked, / I cried to dream again" (3.2.140-48). Here, Caliban describes the illusions as being so lovely that they seem like dreams, making him think he would rather be asleep than awake. This shows that Prospero is using his magic to control Caliban's view of the island. Caliban's life as Prospero's slave is shown to be fairly unpleasant, but Prospero's illusions are calculated to make the island seem like a much better place than it actually is.

Prospero does not only do this with Caliban, but with Ferdinand and Miranda, too. In Act IV, he throws a beautiful and extravagant masque in celebration of the impending union of the happy young couple (Shakespeare). Prospero's magical party illusions are so dazzling to his daughter and future son-in-law that they exclaim things like, "This is a most majestic vision…

Let me live here ever!... this place [is] paradise" (4.1.118-24). This clearly shows that Prospero is using magic to make the island seem like a wonderful and perfect "paradise," when in reality, it has its flaws. In fact, the masque is so captivating that when Prospero ends it suddenly, Miranda remarks that "Never till this day / Saw I him touch'd with anger so distemper'd" (4.1.144-45). It is likely that this statement is hyperbole, as Miranda has lived, in many aspects, alone with Prospero for twelve years (Shakespeare). She must have seen him quite angry before, especially when the circumstances of their banishment are taken into account, but Prospero has been using the illusions of the masque to control Miranda's viewpoint of the island so effectively that the contrast between the party and the aftermath of its sudden end is jarring. Altogether, the evidence proves that Prospero's use of illusions is another manifestation of his desire to be in control.

The Tempest ends with the famous soliloquy from Prospero in which he renounces his powers and gives up magic forever (Shakespeare). Prospero also sets free his spirit servant, Ariel, who helped him carry out many of his magical deeds (Shakespeare). Some would argue that these actions are indicative of Prospero giving up control, but on the contrary, he is still very much in control here. His powers were neither stripped from him by force nor faded away with the passage of time; rather, he made his own decision to give them up, showing that he has as much control over his own life as ever. Prospero's magic is now a remnant of his old life that he no longer needs, and the fact that he recognizes this shows great presence of mind. There is power in making choices for oneself, and this is an especially large choice that Prospero makes. Setting Ariel free is also indicative of control because Prospero is deciding to change himself and become a better person than he was before. Prospero proves he is in charge of both who he is and what happens to him, with or without his magic.

The same can also be said of Prospero's relationship with Miranda at the end of the play. He expresses happiness at leaving the island and traveling to Naples to see his daughter and Ferdinand get married (Shakespeare). In giving up his powers, Prospero has forfeited the ability to control his daughter's viewpoint, but this does not mean that he has given up control. He is still her father, and it is evident from the text that he will continue to be an active participant in his daughter's life. Miranda in turn clearly adores Prospero, frequently referring to him as "dearest father" (1.2.1) and even going so far as to say that she could have had "no greater father" (1.2.21) than Prospero. It is not difficult to see why she feels this way, as "of all the Shakespearean fathers of daughters, Prospero is undoubtedly the most successful in enacting his proper role. His purpose…has always been to educate, discipline, and nurture Miranda so that he can set her free, as he does Ariel" (Boose). Miranda's feelings do not appear to have changed by the end of the play (Shakespeare), so all of these signs indicate that Miranda intends to keep Prospero and his influence as her father in her life. It is therefore fair to posture that Prospero's desire to have some control over his daughter's life has not completely faded with his powers. This helps to illustrate the parallel between Prospero's relinquishment of both his subjects and his daughter and show how giving these things up does not necessarily equal a loss of control. His servants and daughter have not yet been freed completely from his influence; Prospero has decided their fate as his final act of control. After all, a freed slave is no longer a slave, but only because his master chooses to let him go.

In *The Winter's Tale*, similar parallels can be drawn between Leontes' relationship with his daughter, Perdita, and his other subjects. Leontes' choices in his relationships are not driven by a need to control, however, but rather by a compulsion to place his own emotions above the needs and considerations of others. At the beginning of the play, these emotions are mostly

unpleasant, ranging from paranoia and distrust to indifference and outright cruelty. It all begins when Leontes becomes jealous of Hermione's relationship with Polixenes, which sows the seeds of doubt that he is the father of his unborn child (Shakespeare). Stubborn and rather ridiculous, Leontes refuses to believe Hermione's innocence despite the fact that he promised he would take the Oracle at her word (Shakespeare). On hearing that the Oracle professed Hermione's purity, Leontes dismisses this news, saying, "There is no truth at all i' the oracle: / The sessions shall proceed: this is mere falsehood" (3.2.151-52). This shows that Leontes is too wrapped up in his own feelings and beliefs on the matter at hand to consider anyone else's opinion, not even that of the Oracle, whose job is to relay the opinions of the gods. Instead, he soldiers on with Hermione's trial, either not taking into account or simply not caring that he is hurting other people by doing so. He is blinded by his own suspicions and jealousy.

These feelings also inform Leontes' behavior towards his daughter when she is born. When Paulina brings the newborn Perdita to see Leontes for the first time, Leontes says, "This brat is none of mine; / It is the issue of Polixenes: / Hence with it, and together with the dam / Commit them to the fire" (2.3.119-22). This is an extreme reaction that can possibly be attributed to the fact that Paulina is "impersonating the mother figure that haunts Leontes. In adopting Perdita's cause, Paulina becomes a foster mother, a surrogate for the imprisoned Hermione" (Erickson) with whom Leontes is so angry. He is also angry with Polixenes, however, and the fact that Leontes brings up Polixenes at all shows that he is still irrevocably fixated on the idea that his wife is unfaithful.

He then dismissively orders that Hermione and the child both be burned to death, making it clear that it is "out of his insane anger [that] Leontes rejects and expels the infant Perdita" Ziegler). The extreme threat also highlights just how much Leontes' false ideas have taken him

over. He expresses love for Hermione elsewhere in the play, and it is often said that the love between parent and child is paramount to any other experience in life. This is obviously not true for Leontes, as he takes things a step further by saying that if the child is not burned, he will "the bastard brains…dash out" (2.3.175-76) with his bare hands. In this scene, his fixation on the belief that he is not the father is more important and more real to him than his own child before him. He allows his raw emotions to dictate his relationship to her, meaning that he chooses no relationship. Leontes is eventually persuaded to let Perdita live, but his orders to take the baby "to some remote and desert place…and leave it, / Without more mercy, to its own protection / And favor of the climate" (2.3.217-20) can hardly be seen as merciful. Either way, she is likely to die, as newborns generally do not fair well alone in the wilderness. These descriptions of Leontes' attitude towards Perdita serve to parallel his behavior towards his subjects, as in both cases his emotions prevent him from thinking or acting on the behalf of anyone besides himself.

At the end of the play, however, Leontes is a changed man. Sixteen years have passed since the fateful day that the king lost all three members of his family, and all of his suspicion and spite has been replaced with penitence, charity, and humility (Shakespeare). One of his subjects, Paulina, constantly reminds him of his past wrongdoing as she "resolves to correct Leontes' misdeeds by concealing Hermione…until [he] has undergone a painful contrition for his jealousy" (Lenker). She is always saying things like, "If, one by one, you wedded all the world, / Or from the all that are took something good, / To make a perfect woman, she you kill'd / Would be unparallel'd" (5.1.14-18). When Paulina says things like this in the earlier section of the play, Leontes threatens to kill her. Here, he meekly replies, "She I killed? I did so, but thou strik'st me / Sorely to say I did. It is as bitter / Upon thy tongue as in my thought" (5.1.20-22). The contrast between his replies in each half of the play is striking. Not only is Leontes taking

ownership of the destruction that his previous actions caused, but he is also treating Paulina that much the better for it. The acceptance that his actions affected people other than himself shows a great deal of emotional growth for Leontes, and he seems penitent and humble in admitting that he was wrong. His actions are still clearly driven by his own emotions because a good amount of guilt sits behind his words, but this occurs in a much different way this time around.

These changes in Leontes are also clearly present in his comparable interactions with Perdita when she arrives home again at last. Although the reader does not see the father-daughter reunion directly, Leontes is described as "being ready to leap out of himself for joy of his found daughter" (5.2.51-53) when he realizes who Perdita is. This highlights the extreme difference between Leontes' attitude toward his daughter when he last saw her and now, as he then threatened to have her killed many times over. The linked usage of the words "leap" and "joy" in this description are also noteworthy as yet another example of how Leontes allows his own emotions to inform his actions. This has not changed over time, though many other things have. There is also no reference to Perdita's thoughts or actions on the matter here, making it appear that the king's joy is centered on himself and his feelings, rather than something mutual that both father and daughter could share.

When Hermione, too, is returned to Leontes, his feelings of joy reach such a pitch that they once again spill over to influence his actions (Shakespeare). He exclaims, "O, peace, Paulina! / Thou shouldst a husband take by my consent…Come, Camillo, / And take her by the hand, whose worth and honesty / Is richly noted and here justified" (5.3.170-81). Here we see Leontes trying to do good for others, but as always, these actions are driven first and foremost by how he feels. He is joyful and wants to spread his joy to others, but he never stops to take into account how Camillo or Paulina might feel about his matchmaking, and since Leontes' speech is

the final part of the play, the reader never finds out. Overall, his actions towards Paulina parallel those towards Perdita, not only because he grants them both marriage but because he continues to act while only taking his own thoughts into account, no matter how much the quality of those thoughts may have improved over the course of the play.

In conclusion, there are a great many similarities between how the main characters treat their daughters and their subjects in both plays. In *The Tempest*, Prospero's all-consuming desire for control is evident as he orchestrates the lives of everyone around him. He uses magic to make them see what he wants them to see, and refuses to relinquish control even when he releases his magical hold over Miranda and his servants. In *The Winter's Tale*, Leontes never learns to put the emotions or considerations of others ahead of his own, and this affects all of his actions and interactions with other characters. This does not change throughout the play, although his feelings toward his daughter and his people do as he realizes the error of his previous paranoid ways. Examining at the father-daughter relationships of both men changes the readings of the plays by adding new layers to their characters. Drawing comparisons between their actions as leaders and as fathers allows the reader to clearly and objectively see them as both, as well as draw conclusions about how one informs the other. The parallels are clearly present, so the questions remains as to whether Prospero and Leontes see their subjects as children, or their daughters as subjects.

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