Destroyers, Creators, and Thieves: Claiming Women's Voices in *The Winter's Tale*

In the woman-silencing world of *The Winter's Tale*, one powerful king unnaturally transforms and re-characterizes women through language in response to their power to hold his hereditary fate in flux. Women — slippery, treasonous, untrustworthy women — paradoxically *must* be trusted for Leontes to believe in his progeny and future political power. They control the creation narrative. Is his heir truly his heir? Only the mother knows. Struggling with this cognitive dissonance and paranoid in his paternal identity, Leontes attacks those who biologically hold the marionette strings. He shatters a world in which he perceives himself as powerless, transforming women into personifications of his own insecurity. In his mouth, a woman's eloquence becomes trickery, courtly ladies become bawds who deserve to be burned, and honorable wives become traitorous witches.

Women control Leontes' identity through language. As queen, Hermione can manipulate the future of Sicilia, and Leontes has no way of truly knowing or proving whether or not she is plotting against or cuckolding him. He must believe or disbelieve her, at his own peril. His mind is distorted by visions of "the female grotesque" — the "sexual animal" and "innate heretic" that women supposedly are (Stallybrass 273). Leontes tries to tame, silence, and vilify powerful women, calling them witches, adulteresses, and traitors. Once he has been converted, recognizing his mistakes and trusting the women he once abhorred, he redeems these women, first by endowing them with a voice and listening to them, but ultimately and paradoxically by silencing them, repurposing their language and claiming it as his own. Thus, Leontes' kindness and supposed trust in women prove just as dangerous as his rage: he strips them of their speech under the guise of gracious redemption and celebration.

As King of Sicilia, Leontes' word is law. Yet with his dominance come insecurities and paranoia: he fears usurpation, murder, and being cuckolded into raising an heir not his own, thus turning over his kingdom to a stranger. Present power belongs to Leontes, but the future belongs to his heir, and there begins his jealousy. Armed with the belief that a woman "lacks either chastity or kindness," Leontes starts suspecting his wife, the virtuous Hermione, of infidelity (Stallybrass 258). He perceives her interactions with Polixenes, his beloved boyhood friend and fellow king, as indicative of a secret sexual tryst. Hermione's eloquence is dangerous in Leontes' eyes; she convinces Polixenes to stay when Leontes could not do so. Although Leontes put her to that very task by commanding her to "speak," his skewed and suspicious perspective perceives Hermione as a usurper and a threat (1.2.28). Neither silence nor speech can save Hermione from her husband's baseless suspicions: as Schalkwyk notes in "A Lady's 'Verily' Is as Potent as a Lord's," "while Hermione's silence in 1.2 is perceived to betray an indifference to her husband's concerns, her speech on his behalf, by its very forcefulness, wit, and above all its success, pronounces her a whore" (248). She rules linguistically over Leontes' peer, Polixenes, and by extension, Leontes himself. She succeeds where he fails by employing speech more movingly than Leontes does or perhaps can. He promptly rationalizes his jealousy, confusion, and power insecurity by accusing her of infidelity. She must have some secret sway over Polixenes, beyond language.

Leontes builds his deeply paranoid worldview based on the notion that women's words cannot be trusted, as their actions and words do not coincide. Women "will say anything" and deceive anyone, even a king, for their own selfish, lustful desires (1.2.130). Indeed, in Leontes' eyes, the more a woman speaks, especially when she speaks eloquently, the less she can be trusted. Legal discourse at the time also acknowledged "the connection between speaking and

wantonness" (Stallybrass 255). Thus, Hermione is in danger upon taking the stand at her trial: complete silence will be taken for an acknowledgement of guilt, but when she speaks to assert her innocence, she must tread carefully to not seem slippery or deceitful. By speaking at her husband's order in 1.2, by obeying and respecting him, she seals her doom — a doom sealed by her own virtue.

Leontes is determined to imprint his own delusions onto a pure world. He perceives that Polixenes and Hermione are "paddling palms and pinching fingers" and "making practised smiles / As in a looking-glass" (1.2.114, 115-116). He turns every innocent action and word into an indictment against them. When others question this delusional narrative, he enmeshes them into his destructive, paranoid worldview: when Camillo defends Hermione's honor, Leontes declares him "a gross lout, a mindless slave," and tells him that he hates him (1.2.298). As his love for Hermione sours into vicious rage at an instant, so do his feelings towards the men of his court. When the lords and Paulina advocate for Hermione's innocence, Leontes declares them "a nest of traitors" and "liars all" (2.3.82,145). His ideal countryman is obsequious to the point of disingenuousness. Leontes sees treachery, adultery, murder plots where there are none, and he wants his men to mindlessly agree with and obey him. He dismantles a world of love, brotherly companionship, fatherhood, and wifely loyalty, in favor of a bleak, constricted, loveless "nothing," and he expects support in his quest to demean and destroy his honorable wife (1.2.290). Ironically, his fear of illegitimate progeny — the fear that governs his suspicions and transforms his love for Hermione to hatred and a thirst for revenge — becomes irrelevant if "the world and all that's in't is nothing" (1.2.290). He linguistically destroys the very creation for which he destroyed his relationship.

As Hermione makes something out of nothing, Leontes makes nothing out of something. While Hermione creates life, Leontes destroys his own contentment, relationships, and the health of his kingdom. As Leontes reinterprets Hermione's every action to be an indictment against her, he realizes that his distrust for Hermione must extend to his progeny. He must either trust her protestations and admit his own mistake, banishing misogynistic ramblings and embracing woman's power of speech and creation — or continue "rejecting and reviling Hermione," thus destroying "Mamillius, the 'comfort' of the state" (Schalkwyck 253). "If patriarchy does not wish to extinguish itself, it has at least to pretend to take both the verbal and human issue of women at face value," or else castrate itself by admitting no heirs on the basis that a woman's word cannot be trusted (253). The identity of a kingdom lies in a woman's womb. The baby's father is ultimately a mystery to all but the mother. Leontes possesses sociopolitical power in the present, but Hermione's body holds and has held the future: the prince, Mamillius, and the princess-to-be, Perdita. To believe, as Leontes does, that "it is a bawdy planet" is to discredit women as mothers, just as proclaiming that Hermione is "an adulteress" and "bed-swerver" increases paternal insecurity to the boiling point (1.2.199; 2.1.88, 93). Leontes will not be cuckolded. He wants to know what he cannot ever truly know, and in the face of this eternal uncertainty, this terrifying mystery that will survive long after he has died, he chooses to negate and destroy what the mother and possibly he have created.

Thus, his cruel distrust of woman, the creator, causes the death of his firstborn male heir and distances him from his newborn daughter. In Leontes' eyes, "Mamillius is already tainted by association by his mother's supposedly free and bestial sensuality which has ruptured the greater body aristocratic" (Schalkwyk 246). Leontes cannot be certain that Mamillius is his son. He asks the young Mamillius if he is indeed his "boy" and "calf," seeking validation from a fellow male

regarding a woman's honesty (1.2.119, 126). Yet Mamillius' affirmative answers cannot fully satisfy Leontes; Mamillius has too much of his mother in him. As Leontes reinterprets Hermione's actions through the lens of infidelity, he does not use his and Mamillius' physical similarity as proof of Hermione's loyalty. Rather, he calls into question his own vision. He believes that women have been tampering with his perception of the world; they have been feeding him falsehoods. He has staked his faith and fatherly legitimacy on "the very word that is intrinsically faithless, deceptive, empty — women's word" (Schalkwyk 245). Women tell him that he and Mamillius look alike, but they "will say anything" (1.2.130). Although he does not imprison or banish Mamillius, the question remains: how does a king speak and act if he can never be certain of his own bloodline, when his identity as a father is dictated by a woman? Does he choose trust and risk rumors, cuckoldry, and usurpation? Or does he use his powerful, masculine voice to construct falsehoods and spew vitriol, destroying what the mother has created?

Leontes chooses the latter, defying Hermione's speech and actions and reinterpreting them as traitorous. He, the supposedly righteous king, rebels against nature and his own bloodline, prompted by the "horrific instability of social relations that literally depend upon something as shifting and insubstantial as a woman's word" (Schalkwyk 245). The patrilineal society that carried him to the throne and justifies his rule is based upon nothing more than a woman's word — a vow of fidelity from an inhuman and vile "thing" (2.1.82). Motivated by fear and a frenzied desire for control, Leontes tries to tame — or vanquish — the powerful Hermione and Paulina, and all who advocate for them, through his own speech. Using his political power to fight their natural and biological power, he slanders Hermione as "a hobby-horse," Paulina as a "gross hag" who is "worthy to be hanged," and Camillo as "a coward" and a "fool" to remain

loyal to Hermione (1.2.273; 2.3.107,108; 1.2.240, 244). Frightened of Hermione's ability to transform him from father to cuckold with a single sentence, he works to linguistically disfigure her and her supporters.

He perceives women's language as his enemy because it threatens his self-perception as supreme ruler. He labels himself as the royal "we," but the true, future "we" are Hermione and her children. They determine the future of the kingdom: Hermione has passed her genes, or "blood," onto her children, both Mamillius and the baby, and Mamillius is heir to the kingdom (2.1.58). The children and Hermione, hereditarily, will live on after Leontes' death, but Leontes cannot be sure his blood is in either child. Instead of trusting in his wife's fidelity, he falls into rage-filled destruction, sentencing Hermione to prison and her baby, the "brat" and "bastard" whom he insists is the "issue of Polixenes," to be burned (2.3.92, 75, 93). He would rather destroy his flesh and blood than risk a creation not his own ascending to the throne. Upon great protestation from the lords, and at risk of his cruelty spurring questions about his fitness to rule, Leontes changes his sentence for the baby from malicious murder to death by the elements. He orders that Antigonus transport the baby to "some remote and desert place quite out / Of our dominion" where "chance may nurse or end it" (2.3.175-176, 182). Leontes elects willful neglect, fatherly abandonment, where he could have proven his own virtue. Likewise, his imprisonment of Hermione precipitates his son's death: "with mere conceit and fear / Of the Queen's speed," Mamillius perishes (3.2.141-142). The rhetorical falsehoods Leontes layers onto the innocent Hermione, the betrayal of her honor, and her imprisonment lead to the physical death of Sicilia's future: language affects concrete reality. It stunts growth and kills. As easily as it can build unity and friendship, as does Hermione when she convinces Polixenes to remain a guest, it can destroy kingdoms through misinterpretation and tyranny, as does Leontes when he

misconstrues Hermione and Polixenes' relationship and delusionally spirals into ordering Hermione's and her baby's fates.

When he bellows his false accusations, Leontes expects a chorus of support, but he is instead met with disapproval and defense of Hermione's honor. As Cristina León Alfar notes in *Women and Shakespeare's Cuckoldry Plays*, "the reception of that accusation by other men leaves Leontes alone in his suspicions. In fact, it calls his sanity into question" (174). Leontes, not Hermione, is subject to the misgivings and disbelief usually surrounding a woman's word, inverting the lens of gender expectations. His lords and Hermione's well-spoken advocate, Paulina, attempt to protect Hermione where Hermione's own words would be misinterpreted. When a woman speaks, not to mention expresses her innocence, she automatically places herself in a perilous position in which she may be accused of harlotry or witchcraft. At the time, "a man who was accused of slandering a woman by calling her 'whore' might defend himself by claiming that he meant 'whore of her tonge,' not 'whore of her body'" (Stallybrass 255). A woman can commit adultery or sexual acts simply by opening her mouth and protesting a tyrant's sentence. As Stallybrass notes, "silence, the closed mouth, is made a sign of chastity. And silence and chastity are, in turn, homologous to woman's enclosure within the house" (255). However, Leontes believes that within his very home, Hermione has been unchaste. He believes he cannot control her sexual actions regardless of how geographically restricted she is. His perception of highly personal treason forces Hermione's words into an especially vulnerable position, exceedingly at risk to be misperceived: one slip of the tongue and she is a witch to be burned.

With this danger in mind, the eternally loyal Paulina advocates on Hermione's behalf, defiantly displaying brilliant rhetoric to an outraged and illogical Leontes. Alfar notes that

Paulina "characterizes slander as a violent and permanent accusation, impossible to take back once loosened into the public sphere, and rotten at its core" (168). As a woman understanding the permanent and painful stain of an adultery accusation, Paulina will not be silenced. While Leontes commands his lords to remove her, she passionately spins a narrative, speaking decidedly out of turn. She gives them no choice but to listen, and chastises the lords for turning a blind eye to Hermione's suffering:

> Fear you his tyrannous passion more, alas,
> Than the Queen's life? A gracious, innocent soul
> More free than he is jealous!
>
> (2.3.28-30)

Paulina linguistically usurps King Leontes, advocating for the Queen's life over his cruel commands and fits of jealousy. She rallies the lords to note the baby's physical likeness to Leontes, comparing the baby to a miniature book: "Behold, my lords, / Although the print be little, the whole matter / And copy of the father" can be seen in the child (2.3.97-99). Thus, she works to wheedle a sense of paternity out of the rageful Leontes. She comes to court to "use that tongue I have" to advocate for the Queen's innocence and tell the king on no uncertain terms that the baby is his (2.2.51). However, she does not focus her attention solely on him. As she realizes the depth of his delusions, she changes her tactics, calling upon other powerful men to validate the lady's honor, to give credence to her otherwise-untrusted words. She is a woman; to truly be heard, she needs male voices to verbalize their agreement. When the lords fail to rally behind her, she castigates those who are "so tender o'er his follies," claiming that they will "never do him good" (2.3.127-128). Their silence as men proves particularly shameful; they compromise the good of the righteous to please a mercurial and horribly mistaken king. Paulina fearlessly embraces the harlot, or "callet," label in defense of her Queen (2.3.90). Stallybrass notes that "the signs of the 'harlot' are her linguistic 'fullness' and her frequenting of public space," both of

which characterize Paulina. She expresses herself with what Leontes describes as a "boundless tongue" and travels to court from prison, having appointed herself as chief emissary for Hermione's cause (2.3.91). Continuing to speak despite Leontes' emotional ejaculations of "I'll ha' thee burnt" and "take her hence," she works to metamorphose the skewed story and the characters within it: cuckolded king becomes wronged queen, Leontes' truth becomes "weak-hinged fancy" (2.3.113, 111, 118). She casts herself not as an "audacious lady," as Leontes sees her, but rather as Leontes' "physician" and his "most obedient counsellor" (2.3.42, 54, 55). When she speaks, it is not "noise" but rather "needful conference" (2.3.40). She seizes the men's attention by claiming territory that does not belong to her gender, committing "a transgression, an appropriation of a discourse that is wholly out of bounds" for women (Schalkwyk 256). She, a woman, speaks her mind and claims that she can cure Leontes, not only a man but the king, if he will but "hear" her speak (2.3.53). Thus, she asserts her power to both transform his mind through language and declare what is natural and right for the kingdom. She goes as far as far as branding him as "a most unworthy and unnatural lord," though she then qualifies her statement by tacking on "can do no more," thus absolving Leontes of the permanent designation; she offers him an escape from the "tyrant" label, if he ceases his slandering of Hermione and her baby (2.3.112, 113, 115) . Paulina's deft tongue gives Leontes a flexible identity — one based on his speech and actions towards his wife and her infant. She asserts that her judgment of his actions determines his political identity: king or tyrant. "As the emissary of a traitor who presumes to teach the King, she enacts a form of misrule that finally provokes Leontes' threat to visit the punishment reserved for heretics and witches" — being burned. Yet she cleverly inverts Leontes' threat, stating that "it is an heretic that makes the fire, / Not she which burns in't" (2.3.114-115). She robs Leontes' words of their authority, turning them against him as she recharacterizes him

as the true heretic. In a world where men misperceive women's speech and silence is the mark of chastity, Paulina prioritizes "committing honour" over feminine ideals, social propriety, and how Leontes chooses to label her (2.3.50). She is steadfast and confident in her identity as Hermione's advocate, fearlessly deflecting Leontes' linguistic attempts to transform her from advocate to witch, even as her confident, free speech, "the only weapon available to a woman," further bolsters his suspicions of "treachery, heresy, and the corruption not only of his Queen's body, but also of the body of the state" (Schalkwyk 256).

In her argument to make Leontes see reason and convert to mercy, Paulina appeals to Leontes' notion of public honor and reputation. She threatens that Leontes' "cruel usage" of Hermione will seem "scandalous to the world" (2.3.120). His honor, not just Hermione's, is in danger. Even in their separation, Paulina links their identities through shame — the shame Leontes has falsely imposed upon an innocent Hermione, and the shame Leontes will experience if he does not repent and welcome Hermione and her baby back into his court. Paulina plants the seed for rational social insecurity, as opposed to raving, baseless accusations: What will people think of you if you continue on this false, tyrannical trajectory? Thus, she linguistically repurposes Leontes' concern about public image that he expresses as an aside in 1.2: he believes that "they're here with me already whisp'ring, rounding, / 'Sicilia is a …'—so forth" (1.2.214-215). He avoids saying the word "cuckold," as though simply speaking it will enforce its truth. Paulina rejects Leontes' suspicion of cuckoldry and instead suggests that he will be accused of tyranny: if he continues mistreating Hermione, people will be whispering not about how she cheated on him, but rather about how he does not deserve to be king due to his paranoia and cruelty. Paulina seamlessly intertwines marriage and politics; she will not let Leontes forget Hermione's plight, nor how it affects his public image.

Leontes does indeed slander Hermione, abusing his kingly privileges to denounce her as a "strumpet" on "every post" (3.2.100, 99). In the face of this male-imposed infamy, Hermione begs at her trial not for her life, but rather for her "honour," which she "would free" (3.2.108, 109). She does not want to be remembered posthumously as a strumpet and traitor. By mercilessly publicizing his wife as an adulteress and conspirator, Leontes attempts to exercise the linguistic control that Hermione and her sex naturally wield. As her language (when she declares the father of her child) determines Leontes' future, his heir to the throne, he attempts to control her future — how she is remembered in the eyes of society — with his own toxic speech. Jealous of a woman's unique ability to validate or invalidate a ruler, he abuses his power of expression to invalidate the queen, an exercise based on delusions but affecting reality. Hermione respectfully beseeches Leontes to step away from his grotesque sexual fantasies and back into what is real:

> Sir,
> You speak a language that I understand not.
> My life stands in the level of your dreams,
> Which I'll lay down.
>
> (3.2.78-80)

In his frenzied paternal insecurity, Leontes punishes Hermione, the creator, by working to destroy her reputation, transforming his suspicions into legal fact. She accuses him of inscribing his imagination into his jurisdiction: "rigour and not law" would condemn her upon proofless "surmises" and "jealousies" (3.2.112, 110, 11). His punishment of his wife only exacerbates his sense of powerlessness as social repercussions prove him, not Hermione, the liar.

The Oracle undermines Leontes and confirms Paulina and Hermione's "tyrant" accusations, but it is not until his son and lawful heir, Mamillius, dies, that he realizes the error in his words and actions. Leontes then must "confess his wrong and seek redemption" (Alfar 172). But even in his confession, he minimizes his role in the destruction. He admits that he has "too

much believed mine own suspicion," but in the same speech says that the fallen Hermione's "heart is but o'ercharged; she will recover" (3.2.149, 148). He does not take her ailment seriously, and even insinuates an air of validity in his suspicions. He claims to have believed them too much, but as Stanley Cavell asks in *Disowning Knowledge*, "How much would have been just enough? And what would prevent this excess of belief in the future" (196). Leontes demonstrates an "insufficiency of recovery," as his skepticism remains unstable; to believe something, he must be shown, rather than simply told (197). His trust is not rooted in trust at all but rather in what he perceives as factual verification. The Heavens have punished him with the death of Mamillius, so Hermione must have told the truth. Although he grieves at the announcement of Mamillius' and Hermione's deaths, there is no way of knowing whether the next time Leontes is confronted with uncertainty, he will react with the same level of fanaticism and mindless rage all over again. He may not have learned his lesson at all.

Leontes may have metamorphosed from cruel tyrant to humble repenter, but he suffers relatively little for the pain he inflicted on others. His "ego remains resolutely unbruised," as "the restored Hermione accepts him back [and] Perdita reappears to provide him with the heir" he destroyed (Orgel 35). Thus, Leontes and his kingship remain intact, his marriage and bloodline preserved, his legacy anxieties assuaged. Likewise, Leontes' repentance transforms Paulina from a vehement, truth-telling punisher into a comforting counsellor, from vicious to acquiescent. She proclaims herself a "foolish woman" and vows to "say nothing" (3.3.225, 230). Leontes, however, welcomes her advice, and begs her to speak the truth. She obeys, guiding him away from temptation and towards fidelity. Leontes' realization of the truth tames "the most powerful moral voice in the play," not fully silencing her but defining her self-expression as a service for the man she once so vigorously upbraided (Orgel 36).

This shift raises the question: Does Paulina only exist to be the moral compass for a man? Indeed, there is no character like her in Robert Greene's *Pandosto*, the source text for *The Winter's Tale.* Shakespeare gives Paulina what were originally Pandosto's internal monologues: after the death of Pandosto's son and wife, he berates himself and then attempts suicide, but his peers stop him. In *The Winter's Tale*, Paulina berates him, taking the role of his conscience. Unlike their first onstage interaction, Leontes does not try to silence her but rather encourages her to "go on / Thou canst not speak too much" (3.2.212-213). Leontes' attitude change prompts Paulina to apologize and blame her sex for "rashness" (5.2.219). From this time forward, she reminds Leontes of Hermione and the Oracle, and protects him from lustful, foolish decisions. While the other lords try to convince him to marry anew, she honors Hermione's memory, claiming that "there is none worthy, / Respecting her that's gone" (5.1.34-35). Compared to Hermione, no woman can possibly measure up and ascend to the throne. Likewise, Paulina recalls the Oracle: "King Leontes shall not have an heir / Till his lost child be found" (5.1.39-40). When the beautiful Perdita arrives at court, Leontes finds himself attracted to her. Paulina quickly catches him: she accuses him of eyeing Perdita, whose identity is not yet known, far too lustfully, and reminds him that his queen "was more worth such gazes / Than what you look on now" (5.1.225-226). Leontes recovers, says the girl simply reminded him of Hermione, and continues. Without a Paulina figure to guide his mind back to his queen, Pandosto languishes in lust. He propositions his daughter, whose identity he does not yet know, to "'yield thy consent to Pandosto [and] I will both increase thee with dignities and riches'" (Greene 269). When she refuses, he threatens her with force. Morally similar to Hermione, his daughter asserts that she would "rather choose death than dishonour" (Greene 271). He flies into a rage, assuring her that he will put her to death. After he learns that she is his daughter, he commits suicide because, not

only has he betrayed his friend and caused his wife's death, but also "contrary to the law of nature, he had lusted after his own daughter" (Greene 274). If actively lusting after his daughter is the final factor in his decision to take his life, Paulina's interception in Leontes' interaction with Perdita may have saved his life. She may be a major reason why *The Winter's Tale* ends in rejoicing rather than tragedy.

Although Paulina serves as Leontes' moral compass, she possesses her own agency and agenda: to honor the memory of her beloved Hermione. Leontes respects her voice as that of an advisor and regrets rejecting her opinions before Hermione's fall. He promises her that he'll "have no wife" but by Paulina's own "free leave" (5.1.69, 70). Paulina thus becomes both Hermione and Leontes' keeper. Her language holds power over Leontes; he needs her permission before making a decision about the future of the kingdom. If mothers are future-bearers, then Paulina mothers Sicilia in Hermione's absence.

In the reanimation scene, Paulina choreographs Hermione, Perdita, and Leontes in a dance of unification, parading her powers of speech and magic without fear of being silenced or accused of witchcraft. She orders Leontes to "not shun" Hermione and "present your hand;" Perdita to "kneel / And pray your mother's blessing;" and her "good lady" to "turn" (5.3.105, 107, 119-120, 121, 120). Paulina commands physical action, and all obey, including the king. Her power is at its apex. Yet once Hermione speaks, Paulina finds herself irrelevant. The living queen has returned; there is no need for another female counsellor. Thus, Paulina tells the "precious winners" to exult while she goes to "some withered bough" to grieve the loss of her husband and eventually die (5.3.131, 133). Leontes swoops in with a seemingly generous proposal: he matchmakes Paulina and Camillo, instructing Camillo to "take her by the hand" and join in the festivities (5.3.144). He orders this marriage without either of their consent, and while

Camillo can at least rebel by choosing not to take Paulina's hand, Paulina has no power in the situation. She neither speaks, nor has the chance to communicate physically. Her hand, not her mind or her heart, is all that is necessary for the match to come to fruition. Leontes further reclaims language as he validates Paulina as a valuable woman. He tells Camillo that her "worth and honesty / Is richly noted, and here justified / By us, a pair of kings" (5.3.144-146). With this character endorsement, Leontes fully, and seemingly mindlessly, deflates Paulina's hard-won agency and power, both to act and to speak. He restores this power to himself and his fellow king, Polixenes. Neither Paulina the witch nor Paulina the confidante can be trusted. She is a woman. Her ascendance precipitates her silent destruction. Despite Camillo, and the audience, having seen her commit worthy and honest acts throughout the play, Leontes decides to declare his own seal of approval – a gift, but one feeding into the notion that she needs a man to vouch for her character, no matter how well she presents herself. Thus, the cycle of silencing women and repurposing their language continues. Hermione has returned and Perdita is Leontes' true heir, a proven princess based on material evidence and her natural "majesty" (5.2.29). Once Leontes is sure of his legitimate fatherhood and political future, he reclaims women's language and actions for himself. Has Leontes learned nothing? Yet in the midst of Leontes' booming voice, Hermione stands center stage, a woman resurrected, one who has chosen to speak not to her husband, the king, but rather to her daughter; perhaps Hermione will reclaim her voice with a new vigor, leading Leontes as Paulina does in the final exit.

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