

The Trauma of Time in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and Winterson's *The Gap of Time*

Shakespeare'in *The Winter's Tale* ve Winterson'ın *The Gap of Time* Eserlerinde Zamanın Travması

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Abstract

William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* and its rewriting in the novel form by Jeanette Winterson both handle the concept of time traumatically. In the play, the traumatic events culminating into tragedy is linked to the second part of the play, after an interval of 16 years, with the help of the emblematic character "Time" that winds the play towards a seemingly happy ending. In the novel, on the other hand, the narrator takes up the role of Time and changes the setting in time and space. The change in temporality not only disrupts the flow of time signifying trauma, but also leads way to an otherwise impossible reconciliation entailing the trauma of forced compromise without a proper denouement. Trauma is attempted to be treated in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* through miracle and forgiveness and in Winterson's novel through forgiveness and in the belief that the next generation will not make the same mistakes as the old one. This paper evaluates the trauma of the gap of time in these two works through Cathy Caruth's theory on the effects of forgetting the past trauma and Thomas de Quincey's concept of being carried to the normal flow of time in Shakespearean dramatic action.

Keywords: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Gap of Time*, Time, Trauma

Öz

William Shakespeare'in *The Winter's Tale* oyunu ve bu oyunun roman türünde yeniden yazımı olan Jeannette Winterson'ın *The Gap of Time*'i zaman kavramını travmatik olarak işlemektedirler. Shakespeare 'in oyununda, trajediye yol açan travmatik olaylar 16 yıllık bir aradan sonra "Zaman" karakterinin yardımıyla görünüşte mutlu bir sona doğru yöneltilir. Winterson'ın romanında ise anlatıcı Zaman karakterinin rolünü üstlenerek yer ve zaman değiştirir. Bu zaman değişikliği hem travmanın sonucu zamanın akışını bozarken hem de aslında başka türlü mümkün olmayacak bir uzlaşmayı olanaklı kılarak tam bir çözümleme olmadan, zoraki bir uzlaşmanın getirdiği travmaya sebep olmaktadır. Travma Shakespeare'in *The Winter's Tale* oyununda mucize ve affetme yoluyla, Winterson'ın romanında ise affetme ve yeni kuşağın eski neslin hatalarını tekrar etmeyeceğine olan inanç ile geçirilmeye çalışılır. Bu makalede, bu iki eserdeki zaman boşluğunun travması Cathy Caruth'un travmatik olanı geçiştirmenin etkisi teorisi ve Thomas de Quincey'nin Shakespeare'in dramatik eyleminde normal zaman akışına taşınma kavramı doğrultusunda incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *The Winter's Tale*, *The Gap of Time*, Zaman, Travma

Introduction

Jeanette Winterson's *The Gap of Time* is a rewriting of William Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*, a novel written on the occasion of the 400th anniversary of the bard's death. Both works, as their titles suggest, have a preoccupation with time and are attempts to recover and recover from what is lost in time by employing different approaches. The play carries many elements that are found in Winterson's own work: tragedy, comedy, irony, lost or adopted child, a nonlinear handling of time, a fairy tale quality of redemption and forgiveness, and moreover, a pervasive feeling of loss, of what Winterson calls "the missingness of the missing" (2016, p. 128) that entails trauma. *The Winter's Tale* thus turns into "Winterson's Tale" in its retelling.

The Winter's Tale is a play that Shakespeare wrote relatively late in his career and it shares many elements with his three other plays that he produced between 1607 and 1611: *Pericles* (1607-8/1608), *Cymbeline* (1609-10/1623), *The Winter's Tale* (1611/1623) and *The Tempest* (1611/1623), which are categorized as "Shakespeare's romances" or "late plays" that bear some common themes with regard to their interest in parent-child relationships, an

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involvement in loss and finding, destruction and renewal, along with journeys and separation, tears and reconciliation.

Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* (2010), starts with harmony in which King Leontes of Sicilia hosts his childhood friend King Polixenes of Bohemia. Leontes, believing that his loving wife Hermoine is having an affair with his friend, falls into a jealous rage and has the pregnant Hermoine publicly tried for adultery. Polixenes escapes back to his own country ending the former expectation in their childhood that the two kings would always be together as "boys eternal", starting a time of "still winter / In storm perpetual" and "shame perpetual" (Shakespeare, 2010, pp. 154, 234-35, 229) as a result of Leontes's actions. After the report that Hermoine died in prison after giving birth to a daughter whom Leontes believes to be illegitimate, he orders Antigonus to leave the new-born baby in nature to die, despite the protests of his nobles, especially Paulina. As Antigonus abandons the baby girl whom he names "Perdita" (meaning "little lost one" (Winterson, 2016, 105) on the Bohemian coast with gold and tokens regarding her identity, he famously exits pursued by a bear. Meanwhile, Leontes and Hermoines's son, Mamillius, the only heir to the throne, dies in agony for what happened to his mother just as the Oracle at Delphi reports Apollo's message that "Hermoine is chaste, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his innocent babe truly begotten, and the king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found" (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 229).

Leontes admits his injustice in remorse and regards this catastrophic event as Apollo's revenge and is now seems to be cured of his "diseased opinion" (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 174) that caused all calamity. The first part of the play, thus, ends with a catastrophic feeling with a single hope that "which is lost," that is Perdita, would be found to end the curse perpetrated by her father so as to end this "still winter" so that "things dying" will be replaced by "things new-born" (Shakespeare, 2010, pp. 242-43).

Shakespeare inserts a sixteen-year-gap fast-forwarded by introducing the allegorical Time as Chorus on stage with the appearance of an old man with wings and an hourglass to be turned as we watch the sands of time flow through. Time seems to have both temporal and spatial dominance, telling us about his powers of destruction and creation for which some are pleased, some are not:

I, that please some, try all, both joy and terror
 Of good and bad, that makes and unfolds error,
 Now take upon me, in the name of Time,
 To use my wings. Impute it not a crime
 To me or my swift passage, that I slide
 O'er sixteen years and leave the growth untried
 Of that wide gap, since it is in my power
 To o'erthrow law and in one self-born hour
 To plant and o'erwhelm custom. (2010, p. 244-45)

Time has a power to overthrow the law of nature and custom and close the gap of the "still winter" as a result of the tragic consequences of the first three acts. Only after Time's intervention does the setting gain a pastoral quality reminiscent of the Forest of Arden in Shakespeare's earlier romantic comedy *As You Like It*. As David Bevington suggests, what is different in this change in setting from the court to the countryside is the fact that

we sense in the late romances and especially in *The Winter's Tale* a new preoccupation with humanity's tragic folly. The vision of human depravity is world-weary and pessimistic, as though infected by the gloomy spirit of the great tragedies. And because humanity is so bent on destroying itself, the restoration is at once more urgently needed and more miraculous than in the "festive" world of early comedy.

Renewal is mythically associated with the seasonal cycle from winter to summer. (Bevington, 2009, p. 802)

This summer, miraculously made possible by the intervention of Time, is not that free of the old tragic consequences. Perdita, found, saved, and reared by a kind Shepherd in Bohemia, is the romantic interest of Florizel, Polixenes's son. Polixenes is strongly against this match and rejects such a possible union between the heir to the throne of Bohemia and a simple shepherdess. Polixenes threatens Perdita with death and his rage is identical to his childhood friend's undiscerning behaviour, which is the cause of all sorrow and calamity in the first part of the play. The young lovers rely on the help of Autolycus, a pickpocket and Camillo, Leontes's former courtier, and they get on a ship with the Shepherd and his son, a Clown to go to Sicilia posing to be on a diplomatic mission. With the arrival of Polixenes and Camillo, things unfold and Perdita regains her identity, which rejoices Leontes and his court. Shakespeare introduces yet another miracle with the newly-made statue of Hermoine suddenly reviving. Shakespeare does not provide the audience with what happened to Hermoine in the sixteen-year-gap and rushes us to forgiveness and reconciliation now that "what is lost" seems to be "found" (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 229). In a classical comedy denouement, the complications are overcome and the lovers are united. But what about the trauma caused by this "tragic folly"? What about the "gap of time" and the sixteen years of grief? The trauma caused by the tragic folly has turned the eternal sunshine into a still winter, interrupting the normal flow of time, interrupting the life of the older generation.

Cathy Caruth, defines that "[i]n its most general definition trauma describes an overwhelming experience or sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs on the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (1996, p. 11) that "returns to haunt the survivor later on" (1996 p. 4). Underlying the unique temporal quality and belatedness of trauma, Caruth finds such experience to be too intense to be expressed as a whole due to its pathology since it surpasses the individual's capacity to understand the experience fully. Therefore, it is registered belatedly with temporal latency or delay. Moreover, reading Freud, she claims that "the wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world—is not, like the wound of the body, a simple and healable event" but instead, it "is experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" since trauma "is always the story of a wound that cries out, that addresses us in an attempt to tell us of a reality or truth that is not otherwise available" (Caruth, 1996, p.4). Caruth further asks, "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it?" and she suggests that "At the core of these stories" is "a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a *crisis of death* and the correlative *crisis of life*: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (1996, p. 7).

Hermoine appearing as a lifeless statue is a metaphor for this double telling. The statue coming back to life represents both the crisis of death and the crisis of life. At the point of her resurrection, she has lived through sixteen years as a stone having been deprived of a life, husband, son, daughter. Her appearance does not represent the moment of the trauma but of the passing of time, as Hermoine appears sixteen years older which for Leontes is "so much wrinkled, nothing/ So aged as this seems" (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 339). "Nothing" is a reminiscent of the repetition of the word used in one of his jealous fits, when he was making up scenarios in his mind "Is whispering nothing?/ Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?/ [...] ...wishing clocks more swift?/Hours, minutes? Noon, midnight?/ [...] is this nothing?/Why then the world and all that's in't is nothing;/The covering sky is nothing;/ Bohemia nothing;/ My wife is nothing; nor having these nothings,/ If this be nothing"

(Shakespeare, 2010, p. 173-74). When everything is reduced to a state of “nothingness,” Leontes faces his trauma as it is laid out that the passage of time for the sake of “nothing” is the most precious loss (both in relation to Lear’s presumption that “Nothing will come out of nothing” and the destructive effects of wrongful “noting” in *Much Ado About Nothing*). Hermoine may have lived as a statue for all these years but aging shown through the wrinkles on her face represents the passing of time and her reemergence represents the trauma of time. Shakespeare avoids a proper confrontation as Leontes asks Paulina to guide them to another place “where [they] may leisurely/Each one demand and answer to his part/Performed in this wide gap of time since first/[They] were dissevered (Shakespeare, 2010, p. 347). Although the focus of the play is no longer the old couple but the new, the fact that Polixenes repeats Leontes’s mistake in terms of his rage in the new sense of time, leads way to the repetitive quality of trauma. Therefore, no matter how the past trauma is forgotten through forced compromise, calamity caused by male jealousy and the intervention of the old generation in the lives of the young will be repeated over and over again.

The statue is an important symbol to underline the trauma of time. As James E. Young (1993, n.p.) asserts memorials are “contingent on the time and place in which they were created.” Statues are erected for memory often commemorating traumatic events. They are embodiments of things that must not be forgotten and are attempts to unite the past and the present either celebrating or reminding a traumatic event. They are sites of memory reaching out to the future in an attempt to link it with an often-traumatic past, either as warnings or reconciliation. Hermoine’s statue is thus a reminder of the traumatic past, but her resurrection does not fully heal the sixteen years of grief caused by “nothing” in stillness of time, opening a wide “gap” in time. Hermoine, in this case, becomes both a means to remember the past as a statue and an agent of time in her resurrection.

Jeanette Winterson, while rewriting Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale*, focuses on the traumatic aspects of time and loss in her “cover story,” conveying that she sees all history as a “vast Lost-Property Department” (2016, p.127). Although, as it is stated in the novel that even “the body remakes itself every seven years,” “memory” continues to be “a painful dispute with the past” (Shakespeare, 2016, p. 11). Following the main storyline, Winterson “updates” the characters. Leontes is Leo, a London hedge-fund manager who believes that her French singer wife MiMi (for Hermoine) is having an affair with and impregnated by his childhood friend and one time lover Xenon (for Polixenes) and sends his new-born baby to New Bohemia (very much a place like New Orleans), with Tony Gonzales (for Antigonus) despite the protestations of Pauline who works for Leo and is Paulina’s counterpart as the only character with common sense. Tony manages to put the baby in a BabyHatch, erected in front of the hospitals for families to dump their babies, before he is murdered by street thugs for the money and jewelry he carries for Perdita. The baby is found by Shep, a black jazz pianist, and Clo, his unassuming son, to be reared as a part of their family. Meanwhile, MiMi and Leo’s only son dies at the airport as a result of his father’s neglect as he was trying to take him away from MiMi.

After an eighteen-year-gap, we see that Perdita has become a singer like her mother performing with three other foundlings HollyPollyMolly in a group aptly named the Separations (regarding social psychologist Stanley Milgram’s theory of six degrees of separation). She falls in love with Xenon’s son Zel (for Florizel), an auto repairman with a philosophy degree, who works wonders with DeLoreans. Zel, is the only heir to his now alcoholic father’s computer gaming industry which is fueled by a game based on the fallen angels in which “Time” is a player: “Time can stand still, move faster, slow down. But you are playing against Time too. That’s what it’s called – ‘The Gap of Time’” (Winterson, 2016, p. 39). MiMi’s music career, as it is stated in her Wikipedia page, is “inspired by the French poet Gerard de Nerval – who dreamed that an angel fell from heaven and was trapped in a narrow courtyard” (Winterson,

2016, p. 42) that “[i]f the angel tried to escape by opening his wings, then the buildings would collapse. But if the angel didn’t open his wings, he would die” (Winterson, 2016, p. 63). The immediate cause of trauma is heightened in the novel. Instead of the public trial Hermoine goes through, Leo rapes the heavily pregnant MiMi brutally. MiMi’s trauma then is both physical and psychological, both bodily and spiritual.

MiMi retreats to a phantom existence after the trauma caused by her husband. Her existence is reduced to a static character in Xeno’s computer game as she lies “like a tomb knight in a chapel. White and made of stone. [...] She was Sleeping Beauty who wouldn’t wake up. There was no kiss. [...] She was always here but she could be elsewhere. Walking like a statue through a statue garden. Alive and not alive. Sleeping and not sleeping. She is by the river sometimes. They say it’s her” (Winterson, 2016, p. 217). In real life she is a ghost in tabloid magazines without proof that it is her in the sightings “in dark glasses and a scruffy coat” (Winterson, 2016, p. 227).

Winterson does not provide MiMi with a miraculous resurrection that would revoke the idea of forgiveness as Hermoine’s symbolic coming back to life on stage entails in *The Winter’s Tale*. Despite the wrinkles proving the passage of time, MiMi is regenerated from her phantom existence as Perdita is found: In the concert that brings all the characters together, a woman appears “standing like a statue in the light. She’s wearing a simple black dress and red lipstick, her heavy hair cut short” which was how she looked like before and “She does not move. Then she does” ending her silence saying “this song is for my daughter. It’s called ‘Perdita’” (Winterson, 2016, p. 284).

Winterson does not focus on how MiMi spent her life during the gap of time despite the physical elements of aging. This is related to the very experience of trauma for Caruth since “[u]nlike the body, [...] the barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organism by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time.” Moreover, the cause of trauma “is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind’s experience of time” that is experienced “by the mind one moment too late” and therefore it is “not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the missing of this experience, the fact that, not being experienced in time, it has not been fully known” (1996, p. 61-62).

Different from the play, Leo does not accept his mistake and show remorse and continues to be the same man he was that disturbed so many lives:

He didn’t think about MiMi because he couldn’t think about her. She was radioactive. She had to be sealed.

The memory of her had to be encased in waterproof concrete. He didn’t deny what he had done or the consequences of what he had done. To think about that was to think about himself. His stupidity. His jealousy. His crime. He knew how to think about himself.

But her? It was the thought of her that threatened him. He could not allow her inside his head. (Winterson, 2016, p. 227).

Although in the play, it is implied that Hermoine and Leontes’s marriage will continue, there is no hint of such reconciliation between MiMi and Leo despite the apparent forgiveness to which they all comply.

The past in its essence is deemed as tragic and traumatic in *The Gap of Time*. Forgiveness can offer reconciliation but does not bring back the time, which entails loss. Time, “can stand still, move faster, slow down,” but rewinding it is impossible. Since “the past cannot unhappen” (Winterson, 2016, p. 209), going back in time is only possible through remembering or in the case of trauma, through forgetting, which brings about the surfacing of trauma. A

recurring motif in the novel is the 1978 *Superman* film in which Superman reverses time to save Lois Lane. “But you can’t reverse time, can you?” asks Winterson in an effort to turn all love “into speed and light—forcing time to defeat itself” (2016, p. 89) and states, quoting William Faulkner, “The past is not dead. It’s not even past” (Winterson, 2016, p. 166).

Can what caused trauma be forgiven and forgotten? For Caruth, “The historical power of trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced after all” (1996, p. 17). Winterson, therefore, by the retelling of *The Winter’s Tale*, gives us a chance to remember the trauma of time. Although Shakespeare resides in a fantastical solution and the power of forgiveness, Winterson communicates her belief in the next generation, for the trauma can perhaps be healed through love and by not repeating the same mistakes. Still, by stating that “everything is imprinted forever with what it once was” (Winterson, 2016, p. 215), Winterson underlines the importance of the power of the past even when it feels like it’s forgotten:

And the story fell out stone by stone, shining and held, the way time is held in a diamond, the way the light is held in each stone. And stones speak, and what was silent opens its mouth to tell a story and the story is set in stone to break the stone. What happened happened.

But.

The past is a grenade that explodes when thrown. (Winterson, 2016, p. 260).

And how can Leontes/Leo be forgiven? As Thomas de Quincey remarks in his seminal piece on *Macbeth*, the wronged, the murdered “would little suit the purposes of the poet.” Therefore, the writer “must throw the interest on the murderer. Our sympathy must be with *him*.” In the murderer that “a poet will condescend to, there must be raging some great storm of passion [...] which will create a hell within him; and into this hell we are to look” (1823, pp. 558-61). It is with this kind of interest that both authors shift their attention more on Leontes/Leo instead of Hermoine/MiMi. In Leontes we see such a grief and remorse that compensates with tragic passion. However, tragedy does not make a change in the pervasive character of Leo, other than a physical one. He does not regret and comes to terms with his mistake of objectifying people around him, since he, after all, “hadn’t invented capitalism” (Winterson, 2016, p. 21). Leo continues to be the man he was until the last part in the novel whose transformation from an egotistical man to a benevolent one is hinted by his help to the local community when there are “No excuses. No reasons. No forgiveness. No hope” (Winterson, 2016, p. 230) anymore for him. His inclination to tear down a theatre building to open space for “purposeful contemporary living” buildings for the rich takes a different turn after his reuniting with his family and friends. As things unveil, that the girl applying for a position at Sicily, Leo’s company is Perdita, even Pauline cannot decide whether Leo would “smash the moment into pieces or let it open into time” (Winterson 2016, p. 262) as Leo, who made the time stop still, now wants “everything to happen at once” (Winterson, 2016, p. 263).

De Quincey further states that “[i]n order that a new world may step in, this world must for a time disappear” so the murder “must be insulated—cut off by an immeasurable gulph from the ordinary tide and succession of human affairs [...] that the world of ordinary life is suddenly arrested—laid asleep—tranced,” “[u]ntil there is a knock at the gate to wake us up” (1823, p. 559). The atrocities of Leontes/Leo have cut us off from time. When Perdita is found, she wakes us up, carries our consciousness back into the normal flow of time.

Caruth dwells on this nature of trauma in her explanation of Freud’s burning child, whose father dreams of his burned to death child “pleading for him to see the fire” and “it is by this plea” that “commands us to awaken” (Caruth, 1996, p. 9). Perdita, in both works, is the burning child, whose father “has once again seen too late to prevent the burning” (Caruth, 1996, p. 100) imprisoning the father in a loop of time as she needs to be lost in order to be found.

However, Perdita is also the “waking child” in response to de Quincey’s reading of *Macbeth*, which represents survival or return to life. Since after the horrible deed is done, “time is annihilated” until the knocking is heard that “makes us profoundly sensible of the awful parenthesis that suspended [it]” (1823, p. 60).

Instead of one, Winterson adds two intervals to signify the spatial and temporal change where she also comments on the two main themes of the novel: Time and Loss and the “so many stories of lost and found.” And it is with this understanding Winterson suggests that

The Winter’s Tale is a play where the past depends on the future just as much as the future depends on the past. The past in *The Winter’s Tale* is not history; it’s tragedy. And tragedy can’t happen without consciousness. It is the scale of the loss, the sense of it and its senselessness, that makes the jealousy and violence of the first act so painful. (2016, p. 286)

As a reference to the abrupt ending of the play, Winterson (2015, p. 284) offers a coda with three possible endings that can culminate in Revenge, Tragedy, Forgiveness. As MiMi emerges on the stage Leo starts crying “long tears of rain” as “That which is lost is found”. Winterson (2015, p. 288) accepts that “the past mortgages the future,” but also suggests that “the past can be redeemed” since for her, “[w]e were not trapped after all. Time can be redeemed.” However though, the trauma of lost time cannot be simply healed by forgiveness.

As Winterson explains “The late plays of Shakespeare depend on forgiveness” and asks “But what is it that’s forgiven?” Like Shakespeare, Winterson finds the reconciliatory power in Perdita and in the next generation to come depending on the assumption that the Young will not make the same mistakes as the Old. This is the reason why Winterson (2015, p. 289) gives the last word to Perdita. She is aware of the past and the future whose pains she will overcome by love:

Maybe then I will remember that although history repeats itself and we always fall, and I am a carrier of history whose brief excursion into time leaves no mark, I have known something worth knowing, wild and unlikely and against every rote.

Like a pocket of air in an upturned boat.

Love, the size of it. The scare of it. Unimaginable. Vast. Your love for me. My love for you. Our love for one another. Real. Yes. Though I find my way by flashlight in the dark, I am witness and evidence of what I know: this love.

The atom and jot of my span.

In Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* and Winterson’s *The Gap of Time*, trauma has fractured the sense of time where past, represented by the old generation, is not sequential and the present, represented by the younger generation, is manifold interrupting the fluidity of time. In both works, Perdita is the key to make the sins of the past forgiven, who becomes, from Freud’s the burning child that torments the father to awaken, to de Quincey’s knock at the gate as the waking child, to take us back to the normal flow of time with the hope, in Winterson’s point of view, that the next generation will not make the same mistakes their parents did. As we watch the sands of time pass by, “what’s past is prologue” for Shakespeare and Winterson. In both works, while love and forgiveness can be redeeming, however, the trauma of the loss of time, of the missingness of the missing, is pervasive which is what Tennessee Williams should have meant (1999, p. 105) by suggesting that “the monosyllable of the clock is loss, loss, loss, unless you devote your heart to its opposition.”

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