

A Comment on the Naming of Characters in *The Winter's Tale*

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Professor Leimberg's article on "Golden Apollo, a Poor Humble Swain . . .': A Study of Names in *The Winter's Tale*" in the *Deutsche Shakespeare-Gesellschaft West Jahrbuch* 1991 (135-58) is a fascinating study of the names of characters in *The Winter's Tale*, and I have no quarrel with the general argument, nor with nearly all the particular examples. Indeed, Professor Leimberg discusses in a more learned and sophisticated way several of the topics on which I have written during the last fifty years. One example is the article I wrote on "The Uncomic Pun."¹

Although it is true that "the sources transmitting the relevant mythological lore were easily accessible to every educated person of Shakespeare's time" (135), Ben Jonson would not have regarded his great rival with his "small Latin and less Greek" as fully educated. No doubt he would have conceded that Shakespeare made brilliant use of translations—of Golding's *Metamorphoses*, North's Plutarch, Holland's Pliny and others. He was, indeed, better educated and more widely read than the average graduate in England and America.

So we need not doubt that Shakespeare played with the sounds linking Hermione, Harmonia and Harmony. He may well have added Hermes to the chain. It is certain that he saw Florizel and Perdita in a mythopoetic light, as both Professor Leimberg and I have stressed.²

I am less convinced that in changing the names of his main source, *Pandosto*, Shakespeare chose names with similarity of sound because this would suggest similarity of meaning. The triads mentioned by Professor Leimberg do not appear to be linked by similarity of meaning. In the trio Camillo/Mamillius/Autolycus one name comes from Plutarch, one from Greene's Mamillia, and the third from Golding. The characters

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have nothing in common, although Camillo does encounter Autolycus in Act 4.

Shakespeare knew where to look for appropriate names when dramatising *Pandosto*. Ten of his names he would have found in North's Plutarch, a book in which he had quarried since 1595.³ There is no evidence that he took the names from Pausanias whose work was not available to him in translation. Few have credited I. A. Richards' belief that Shakespeare was familiar with Plato.⁴

Jonathan Bate's recent book⁵ on the influence of Ovid on Shakespeare brilliantly demonstrates that Meres was right to regard him as essentially Ovidian: "The sweet witty soul of Ovid lives in mellifluous and honey-tongued Shakespeare." Even so, Shakespeare did not disdain to make use of Golding's translation of the *Metamorphoses*, while correcting it by reference to the Latin original.⁶

My chief disagreement with Professor Leimberg is that she seems to imply, if I have not misunderstood her, that Shakespeare was consciously and deliberately doing what I suspect to have been largely unconscious or semi-conscious. After all, popular Elizabethan dramatists were busy people, continually worried by deadlines. Those who were also actors were even busier, lurching from crisis to crisis. There are many signs of haste and carelessness in the surviving texts, and not all these can be blamed on the printers. Even in his more relaxed years, after his retirement to Stratford-upon-Avon, Shakespeare remained on call. Between 1608 and 1613 he wrote four or five plays, collaborated in four others, and probably did some revision of others.⁷

The community of poets and the commonwealth of scholars were both closely knit and, of course, they overlapped. The scholars all wrote verses and the poets were all scholars to some degree. Shakespeare had plenty of opportunity of picking up information from people more learned than himself. One such was Leonard Digges, stepson of the overseer of Shakespeare's will, who lived near Stratford-upon-Avon. He translated Claudian's *Rape of Proserpine* soon after Shakespeare's death. It is possible that his admiration of *The Winter's Tale* and Perdita's address to Proserpina made him feel that his translation was a suitable tribute to his friend. A year or two earlier he had compared Lope's sonnets to those

of "our Will Shakespeare"; and a year or two later he was contributing one of his tributes to Shakespeare in the First Folio of 1623.⁸

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NOTES

¹*The Cambridge Journal* 4 (1950/51): 472-85.

²"The Future of Shakespeare," *Penguin New Writing* 28 (1946): 118-19; *Last Periods of Shakespeare, Racine and Ibsen* (Detroit: Wayne State UP, 1961) 48-51.

³When he wrote of the early sexual adventures of Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*.

⁴Ivor Armstrong Richards, *Speculative Instruments* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1955).

⁵*Shakespeare and Ovid* (New York: OUP, 1993).

⁶Bate 8.

⁷*Pericles, Henry VIII, The Two Noble Kinsmen, Cardenio*. I am not yet convinced that Middleton wrote part of *Timon of Athens*.

⁸Another tribute in which he speaks of Shakespeare's popularity as greater than Jonson's, may have been suppressed by the editors for fear of offending their chief contributor. I have suggested elsewhere that Digges may have introduced Shakespeare to some of Lope's works. See *Hispanic Studies in Honour of Geoffrey Ribbans*, ed. and introd. Ann L. Mackenzie, *Bulletin of Hispanic Studies*, Special Homage Volume, 1992 (Liverpool: Liverpool UP, 1992) 91-96.