

The Winter's Tale Study Guide

The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare

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Contents

The Winter's Tale Study Guide.....	1
Contents.....	2
Plot Summary.....	3
Act I.....	4
Act II.....	11
Act III.....	15
Act IV.....	18
Act V.....	23
Characters.....	27
Symbols and Symbolism.....	30
Settings.....	32
Themes and Motifs.....	33
Styles.....	35
Quotes.....	37



Plot Summary

The Winter's Tale, a play by William Shakespeare, opens with two childhood friends, Leontes and Polixenes, discussing the fact that Polixenes feels the need to return to his home. Leontes is the king of Sicilia and Polixenes is the king of Bohemia. When Polixenes refuses Leontes' request that he extend his visit by a few days, Leontes turns to his wife, Hermione. She pleads with Polixenes to remain another week and laughingly threatens to hold him prisoner if he refuses. Polixenes gives in and all are happy. Leontes then tells Hermione that the only time her words carried a greater impact on him were when she pledged her love to him. As he later thinks over the situation, he becomes convinced that Hermione and Polixenes are having an affair. Hermione is pregnant, and Leontes is convinced that Polixenes is the father.

Everyone but Leontes believes that Hermione and Polixenes are innocent. Leontes has a friend promise to poison Polixenes but the friend alerts Polixenes to the plot instead. Polixenes leaves for home and Leontes takes his action as sign of his guilt. He has Hermione imprisoned and she's there when she gives birth to a girl. Her friend, Paulina, believes that Leontes will change his mind if he sees the baby. She takes the infant to him but rather than being moved, Leontes instructs a friend to leave the child in some desolate place so that her survival is left to fate. The friend instead takes the baby, later named Perdita, to Bohemia where she is taken in by the Old Shepherd. Back in Sicilia, Hermione and her son, Mamilius, die. A prophesy from the god Apollo indicates that the kingdom will remain without an heir until Perdita is found.

Sixteen years pass. Perdita has grown up and meets Florizel, son of Polixenes and heir to the Bohemian throne. Florizel and Perdita plan to marry, but Polixenes finds out about it. He is furious, believing that Perdita is merely the daughter of a lowly shepherd. The Sicilian Lord Camillo has been in Bohemia all these years but sees a way to return to his home. He advises Florizel to go to Sicilia and pretend to be there as an emissary from his father.

Camillo tells Polixenes of Florizel's plans and Polixenes sets out for Bohemia. Meanwhile, the Old Shepherd plans to tell Polixenes the story of how he came to find Perdita in an effort to escape the king's wrath. Once Polixene and Camillo see the package that the Old Shepherd says he found with Perdita, they realize that Perdita is the long-lost daughter of Hermione and Leontes. When they reveal this to Leontes, everyone is happy but they all still miss Hermione. A lady of the court, Paulina, reveals that she's had a statue commissioned of Hermione. A group, including Leontes and Perdita, go to the room where the statue stands. They remark that Hermione looks very life-like but not as young as she was when she died. Paulina says that was on purpose. She then offers to order Hermione to come to life and Leontes tells her to go ahead. Hermione steps down from the pedestal, embraces Leontes, and blesses her daughter. As the play comes to an end, Leontes happily says that Paulina and Camillo should be married.



Act I

Summary

Act I

Act I, Scene I, takes place in “An Antechamber in Leontes’ Palace” in Sicilia. The Sicilian Lord Camillo and the Bohemian Lord Archidamus enter the room. Camillo says he believes the Sicilia's King Leontes plans a visit soon. Camillo says that the hospitality of each country is based on the fact that their kings were raised together. Leontes of Sicilia and Polixenes of Bohemia are no longer able to spend all their time together because they have duties to their own countries. However, they still keep in touch. Archidamus predicts there is nothing in the world that could change the friendship. He then says that the people of Sicilia should be pleased with “your young Prince Mamilius,” son of Leontes. He says Mamilius shows promise for being a great leader someday. Camillo says everyone is anxious to see him as the great man he is going to become. The two then exit.

Act I, Scene II, also takes place in Sicilia. The act is titled, “The same. A Room of State in the Palace.” King Leontes and King Polixenes enter with Leontes’ wife, Queen Hermione, and their son Mamillius. Camillo and some other attendants are also present. Polixenes points out that he has been visiting with them for nine months. He thanks them for their hospitality but says it is time for him to return to his own country. Leontes urges him to stay but Polixenes says he fears he has worn out his welcome and that there might have been problems at home during his long absence. Leontes asks that Polixenes remain another week; but, Polixenes says that he is more likely to give in to Leontes than to anyone else. He again points out that he has duties.

Leontes then turns to Hermione. He asks if she’s “tongue-tied” and urges that she ask Polixenes to stay. Hermione reassures Polixenes that everything is fine in Bohemia and that he should feel at ease to remain another week. Hermione says that if Polixenes remains with them another week she’ll give permission for Leontes to remain at Bohemia an extra month when it’s his turn to visit. Polixenes again refuses. Hermione then changes her tactics. She teasingly threatens to keep Polixenes as her prisoner for a week unless he agrees to stay of his own free will. Polixenes says he would be “offended” if he were held prisoner so decides he will be their guest for another week. Hermione says since she is his hostess rather than his jailer, she would like to hear more stories of his childhood with Leontes. Hermione asks if Leontes was the leader, but Polixenes says they were like “twin lambs” and that they were quite innocent in their actions. He says this was long before Hermione had met Leontes.

Leontes asks if Hermione has convinced Polixenes to stay and she says she has. Leontes says that he was unable to convince Polixenes but that Hermione was successful. He says she has never spoken “to better purpose.” She asks if that’s true and Leontes amends his statement, saying there was one other time. She begs Leontes



to tell her what other time he refers to and he says it was when she pledged her love to him. She says that the two statements were beneficial. With one, she “earned a royal husband” and gained some additional time with a friend with the other. She reaches out her hands to Polixenes as she says this and Leontes, in an aside, says the friendship between the two is “too hot.” He says he is suddenly worried and asks if Mamillius is his son. Mamillius answers that he is. Leontes says that everyone points out that Mamillius and he are very similar in appearance but believes they would say that whether it’s true or not.

Polixenes says something seems to be bothering Leontes and Hermione agrees. They ask him if he’s well and he tries to pretend there’s nothing wrong. He asks Leontes about his relationship with his own son. Leontes says that he is very devoted to his own son. Leontes says he’s going to leave and urges that Hermione provide anything Polixenes wants. Hermione says they’ll be in the garden and Leontes says they can go wherever they want. Leontes criticizes the way Hermione and Polixenes appear to be overly familiar with each other.

Leontes questions Camillo who says he noticed that Polixenes wouldn’t stay when Leontes asked but gave in when Hermione asked. Leontes believes this means everyone is already talking about how stupid he’s been not to see the affair. Leontes says people believe that Polixenes gave in to please both Leontes and Hermione but Leontes dismisses that idea. Leontes says he believes Camillo might have been negligent in his duty to Leontes or that he might have been foolishly misled or fearful to tell the truth. Camillo apologizes for having done something wrong and asks Leontes to tell him what he is talking about.

Leontes asks if Camillo knew that Hermione was having an affair. Camillo says he believes Hermione to be virtuous and says that Leontes’ thoughts are “dangerous.” Leontes insists that he’s right, though Camillo can’t believe it’s true. Leontes says that he needs a loyal friend who feels his pain. He calls on Camillo to avenge his honor by killing Polixenes. Camillo says he’ll give Polixenes a poison that will work slowly so there is no indication that he has been murdered. He continues to say that he can’t believe Hermione would be unfaithful, but Leontes refuses to hear it. Leontes says he’s thought it through and Camillo says that he must believe Leontes’ claim. Camillo agrees to take action immediately but insists that Leontes then drop the matter, keeping his marriage to Hermione and their relationship in tact for the sake of their son’s position in the kingdom. Leontes agrees that no one will know of Hermione’s unfaithfulness.

Camillo is wrestling with the situation when Polixenes enters the room. He says it seems he is not truly welcome here anymore. Polixenes says he just saw Leontes who barely looked at him and rushed away. Polixenes asks Camillo what’s happened. Camillo says there is an illness going around. He says he’s pleased Leontes isn’t ill. Leontes grows angry, saying that Camillo knows what’s wrong with Leontes. Polixenes seems to realize he might be in danger and urges Camillo to tell him. Camillo confesses that he is supposed to murder Polixenes, on orders of Leontes. Polixenes is shocked and asks why. Camillo tells him that Leontes believes Polixenes and Hermione have had an affair. Polixenes wants to know how Leontes came to that conclusion. Camillo



says Polixenes would be better off spending his time and energy getting out of town. Camillo pledges to help Polixenes escape, and he agrees to get out of the country at once.

Analysis

The opening scene in *The Winter's Tale* introduces some of the major characters, including the two kings and Mamillius, son of Leontes and Hermione. Archidamus and Camillo talk about the close bond between Leontes and Polixenes and Archidamus goes so far as to predict that nothing could come between the two kings. As is typical for Shakespeare, that line is meant to dramatize the situation when that friendship is broken.

An interesting aspect of the conversation between Archidamus and Camillo is their discussion of the Sicilian Prince, Mamillius. Camillo says that the people are very hopeful that he will be a great leader. To emphasize the point, Camillo says that old men are clinging to life only because they want to see Mamillius as the leader he will be as an adult. Archidamus asks, apparently joking, if this is the only reason these men cling to life and Camillo says it is. He then says that if Mamillius wasn't in the picture, these old men would cling to life just to see Leontes father a worthy heir. This is another case of presenting facts that will make a later scene more dramatic. When Mamillius later dies and it seems that the old men of the country who were clinging to life only to see him as ruler now have nothing to live for.

Leontes goes on a serious rant when he first comes to believe that Hermione and Polixenes are having an affair. He compares the situation to a man who fishes in his neighbor's pond. While Leontes is furious over what he believes is betrayal by his best friend and his wife, he seems more angry over the fact that other people probably already know. Shakespeare uses the word "cuckolds," which is a somewhat antiquated term for the clueless husband. It's an important aspect of his personality that Leontes' first and strongest reaction to the situation is his fear that people have ridiculed him behind his back for being ignorant of the affair.

When Leontes confronts Camillo about the affair he believes is ongoing between Hermione and Polixenes, he initially accuses Camillo of keeping it secret from Leontes. Camillo is shocked by the accusation that Hermione is having an affair and tells Leontes that his thoughts along this line are "dangerous." Leontes then tells Camillo that Hermione is not innocent. He compares her morality to her physical health, saying that if the liver in her physical body was as "infected as her life," she'd die within an hour. It's another example of the depth of hurt Leontes is feeling. Though he is wrong in his assumption that Hermione is having an affair, his pain is obviously real.

Camillo's loyalty could be called into question over his actions toward Polixenes. Camillo is confronted by Leontes about the affair. It's the first Camillo has heard of it and he truly believes that it isn't true. While he is loyal to Leontes, he also fears what it will



do to Leontes if he has his best friend murdered and then finds out that his suspicions are incorrect.

Leontes learns that Polixenes has left. He asks how he managed to get his ships out of the harbor without being questioned. An unnamed lord points out that Leontes has given Polixenes the authority to do whatever he wants while visiting Sicilia and that no one questioned him because of that. This is evidence of the trust that existed between the two men before Leontes got the wild notion that Polixenes and Hermione are having an affair.

In Scene II, Leontes learns that Polixenes has left the country and immediately jumps to the conclusion that it is a sign of Polixenes' guilt. The reader who looks objectively at this situation knows that Polixenes becomes aware that his life is in danger and he runs away to avoid being killed. It's a reasonable action and the fact that Leontes so completely misinterprets it is just another sign that he's determined to justify his actions.

There's a heated exchange between Polixenes and Hermione when he accuses her of having an affair, and at least one sentence may have been designed to provoke laughter from the audience of Shakespeare's contemporaries. When Hermione says that Leontes has made a mistake, Leontes responds that Hermione "mistook ... Polixenes for Leontes." The modern reader will not recognize much of the humor and many of the references that would have been accepted and understood by the audience of that period.

Interestingly, several people dare to argue with Leontes when he declares that Hermione is an adulteress. One lord says that he wishes Leontes was a liar because that would be easier to bear than to believe that Hermione is an adulteress. The fact that several people are outspoken on Hermione's behalf is a statement of her virtue. They would not have dared risk making Leontes angry without truly believing in Hermione.

When Paulina and Emilia discuss the birth of Hermione's daughter, Paulina's first question is whether the baby is a boy. She hopes that to be the case because boys were regarded with more favor than girls. Her plan is to take the baby to Leontes in the hope that he will realize his mistake and will be reunited with Hermione because of the baby. Emilia says that the baby is a girl and adds that she is "like to live," or likely to survive. Many babies didn't survive infancy and the mortality rate for infants was incredibly high during this period. While the modern day reader might not understand the reference, the health of the child was never taken for granted during this era, especially among the noble families.

In Scene III, there's another instance in which Shakespeare's contemporaries are likely to find humor though it may be lost on the modern reader. When Paulina insists that she see Leontes, he asks if Antigonus is incapable of controlling his wife. Leontes says that Antigonus deserves to be hanged if he can't control his wife. Antigonus responds that if Leontes began hanging all husbands who were incapable of controlling their wives, there would be only a few men left in the entire country. The irony is that Leontes



believes that Hermione cheated on him. If she actually had cheated, it would mean that Leontes, the king himself, was also incapable of controlling his wife.

There are some very honorable people in the court as is seen by Paulina who risks her life trying to reconcile Leontes and Hermione. Her husband, Antigonus, also seems honorable. When Leontes orders the infant princess killed by fire, Antigonus argues against that. Leontes asks how far Antigonus is willing to go to save the child's life and Antigonus seems willing to trade his life for that of the baby. It's a dangerous wager because kings of this time period literally could have ordered that Antigonus be put to death. For that matter, any of them could have been executed just for arguing with Leontes.

The scene in the courtroom when Apollo's message is read gives some important clues about Leontes' character. When the message is read, Leontes' first reaction is one of disbelief. It can't have been easy for him to hear himself referred to as a tyrant. His reaction seems very typical of what a human might think, especially since the message indicates that the kingdom will be without an heir unless Perdita is found. Leontes knows that he has a son, Mamillius, and that probably makes him certain that the message isn't true. The delivery of the news that Mamillius is dead comes immediately after Leontes' statement, leaving no doubt that the child's death is an act of the god Apollo.

Paulina makes the announcement that Hermione is dead but it seems that no one other than Paulina sees her body. There's a reference by Leontes to his plans to bury her with Mamillius but there's no indication that actually happens. This is important because a statue of Hermione later comes to life and it seems possible that Hermione actually hides out for the next sixteen years and then pretends to come to life by magic. It's left to the reader to decide what actually happens.

The scene in which Antigonus is chased and killed by a bear is not typical of Shakespeare who usually kills off characters at the hands of other characters or by suicide. Some historians believe at least one early rendition of the play included the use of a real bear in that scene.

There's a comment in Scene II when Polixenes and Camillo are discussing the shepherd regarding the man's wealth. It's noted that there's no explanation for his recent change in status and the hint seems to be that Florizel is giving the man money for some reason. They may believe that Florizel is so enamored with the Old Shepherd's daughter that he is giving the family money. In truth, the family's situation has changed because of the package of money that the Old Shepherd found with Perdita.

There is a speech given by a servant when the sheep-shearing festival is just beginning that is clearly aimed at humor. The servant describes the peddler who is at the door and who offers to sing songs to those gathered for the event. This would have been a common occurrence in this time period and a person able to make up songs would have been in high demand. In this case, the servant describes the man's songs, saying that



he sings love songs that are “without bawdry.” The servant is indicating that the man’s songs are without the references to sex that would have been common. However, the servant goes on to describe some of these songs and says there is a reference to “jump her and thump her” and another to a sex toy that the servant obviously doesn’t recognize for what it is.

Autolycus is identified as a rogue; and, it seems his entire life is spent trying to do whatever society believes is wrong. He steals from the Clown and later steals from several of the people at the sheep-shearing festival. He says that the items he has for sale are not worth what he asks for them, but that everyone pays the price anyway. Then, when Perdita and Florizel head to Sicilia, Autolycus considers briefly whether he should tell the king about the plan. He says that the wrong thing to do would be to conceal what he knows from Polixenes, and that’s therefore what he’s going to do. Autolycus says of himself that he’s nothing if not predictable. However, a few minutes later he says he is sometimes honest, purely “by chance.”

Paulina is in the court when Leontes is lamenting his situation. The reader should remember that some sixteen years have passed since Hermione’s death and that Leontes has apparently spent most of that time grieving for his wife and children. He expresses guilt over his role in the deaths of Hermione and Mamillius and that the kingdom lacks an heir because of his actions. Paulina might be the person to comfort Leontes and he seems to be hoping that she will. However, she tells him that he can never find a woman as good as Hermione. She goes to the extreme on this, saying that if he married every single woman in the world and took something good from each of them “to make a perfect woman,” Hermione would still be a better woman. It seems rather cruel and the reader is reminded that Paulina was very devoted to Hermione.

Paulina continues to insist that Leontes shouldn’t remarry. She is adamant and goes so far as to make him pledge to her that he won’t marry again unless she blesses it. Leontes promises to do as she asks. Even though Paulina touts the fact that Apollo said there wouldn’t be another heir to the throne unless Perdita is found, it seems a little extreme that she would insist that Leontes not remarry. This is a hint that Paulina may already know that Hermione is going to return or that Hermione isn’t really dead at all. There is later a statement that Paulina has gone to a particular house everyday for a long time. Some believe that she’s been going there to watch the construction of the statue to Hermione but it may be that Hermione is not really dead and that Paulina has been spending time with her.

The conversation between the Old Shepherd and the Clown is meant to be humorous and even the modern reader might be able to see the funnier side of this scene. The Clown points out to Autolycus that he is now a gentleman, referring to the fact that he has been accepted into the royal family because of his relationship to Perdita. When Autolycus, who is openly ready to do whatever it takes to win favor with the right people, says that he can see the Clown is “a gentleman born,” the Clown responds that he has been for the past four hours. He then says that he became a gentleman before his father because the prince called him “brother” before the kings made the same statement to the Old Shepherd. The Clown then says that both he and his father wept at



the situation, and that “there was the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed.” Autolycus, as always looking out for himself, begs forgiveness for the wrongs he did to the Clown and Old Shepherd earlier. The Old Shepherd tells his son that they have to behave as gentlemen now.

Blemishes, penitence, exultation, singularities, preposterous, fain, beguile, conduit, countenance, merits, paragon, amity, zeal, proselytes, rift, incense, vexed, sainted, sovereign, redeemed

Discussion Question 1

Describe the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes. How and why does it change dramatically in Act I, Scene II?

Discussion Question 2

How does Leontes come to the conclusion that Hermione and Polixenes are having an affair and why is he most angry about it?

Discussion Question 3

Describe the role Camillo is supposed to play in Leontes' quest for revenge. What does he do instead? Why?

Vocabulary

Limber, galore, eternal, doctrine, imposition, hereditary, furlongs, recoil, knell, cuckolds, bawdy, predominant, pertinent, conceit, extraordinary perchance, penitent, cogitation, impudently, temporizer.



Act II

Summary

Act II

Act II, Scene I, takes place in “Sicilia. A Room in the Palace.” Hermione enters with Mamillius and several ladies. Mamillius is about to tell a story when Leontes enters with Antigonus and several others. Antigonus says he encountered Camillo and Polixenes “behind the tuft of pines.” He says he watched as they went to Polixenes’ ships. Leontes takes this as confirmation that Polixenes is guilty and has run away in shame. Leontes says that Hermione will no longer have any contact with Mamillius. She initially believes he’s teasing her but she quickly realizes that he’s serious. He announces that the baby she carries is fathered by Polixenes and that he won’t recognize it. He announces to everyone present that they might believe Hermione to be virtuous but that she’s actually an adulteress.

Hermione says that Leontes won’t be able to apologize enough when he discovers the accusation is false. Leontes responds by ordering Hermione imprisoned. Hermione says she isn’t going to cry in front of everyone but assures them that she is hurt. She says that everyone who cries for her should hold back their tears unless they discover that she has committed adultery and deserves to be imprisoned. Hermione and her attendants leave the room. Several lords plead with Leontes to reconsider but Leontes refuses to listen. They assure him they are looking out for him but he says they can’t see the situation as clearly as he. However, he says that he’s sent someone to Apollo’s temple at Delphos to request the truth from the god. Leontes says he is certain what the answer will be but wants to set the minds of others at ease with regard to Hermione’s guilt.

Scene II of Act II takes place in “The Same. The Outer Room of a Prison.” Paulina enters with her attendants and orders the guard to summon the keeper of the prison. The Keeper recognizes Paulina, who is an important lady in court. Paulina asks to see Hermione but the Keeper says he’s been ordered not to allow visitors. Paulina says that is unfair and asks to see one of Hermione’s ladies instead. She suggests a woman named Emilia and the Keeper agrees. The Keeper insists that Paulina’s attendants leave the room and that he be allowed to remain for the meeting between Pauline and Emilia. Paulina greets Emilia who says Hermione is holding up well and has already given birth to a daughter. Paulina says Leontes must be told about the birth and that it would be best coming from a woman. She asks if Hermione will trust her with the newborn princess and predicts that Leontes will “soften” when he sees his daughter. The Keeper questions the legality of letting the baby leave the prison, but Paulina argues that the baby was not guilty of any crime committed by her mother and is therefore free to leave. The Keeper sees logic in that argument and Paulina also pledges that she won’t let him be punished for it.



Act II, Scene III, takes place in “The Same. A Room in the Palace.” Leontes enters with Antigonus and some other lords and attendants. Leontes asks one of the attendants about “the boy,” referring to Mamillius. The attendant says that he rested well the previous night and that there’s hope that he is past the sickness. Leontes says that Mamillius has fallen ill because he accepts the shame of Hermione, his mother. Leontes instructs the attendant to go check on Mamillius again. Leontes believes that Camillo and Polixenes are probably laughing at him for his ignorance. Leontes says they wouldn’t be laughing if he could reach them to punish them. He pledges that Hermione will be punished.

Just then, Paulina enters with the infant. One lord tries to stop her but she refuses, saying that she’s acting on the hope that she will endure his anger briefly but ultimately make him see that imprisoning Hermione is wrong. Paulina predicts that once he sees the baby, he will find peace. Leontes hears the argument and calls out.

Paulina enters and she argues with Leontes as well. She says that he has nothing more than “weak-hinged fancy” to prove that Hermione is an adulteress. He threatens her but she doesn’t back down. She does say that she’ll leave as soon as Leontes takes a look at his daughter. Leontes accuses Paulina’s husband, Antigonus, of arranging the scene but he denies it and several lords back him up. Leontes orders the child killed by fire but the lords argue against that and Leontes relents only far enough to say that the baby is to be abandoned in some remote place, leaving her survival to fate. Antigonus pledges to do as Leontes orders though he says a fast execution might have been kinder. He leaves the room with the baby.

Leontes, apparently still trying to convince himself he’s done the right thing, says he won’t be responsible for raising a child fathered by another man. At that moment, a servant enters with the news that the messenger has returned with the oracle’s evaluation of Hermione’s unfaithfulness. Leontes orders that everyone prepare for a public trial. He says that his heart will continue to be burdened as long as Hermione lives.

Analysis

When Leontes learns that Polixenes has left, he asks how he managed to get his ships out of the harbor without being questioned. An unnamed lord points out that Leontes has given Polixenes the authority to do whatever he wants while visiting Sicilia and that no one questioned him because of that. This is evidence of the trust that existed between the two men before Leontes got the wild notion that Polixenes and Hermione are having an affair.

Leontes learns that Polixenes has left the country and immediately jumps to the conclusion that it is a sign of Polixenes’ guilt. The reader who looks objectively at this situation knows that Polixenes becomes aware that his life is in danger and he runs away to avoid being killed. It’s a reasonable action and the fact that Leontes so completely misinterprets it is just another sign that he’s determined to justify his actions.



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When Paulina and Emilia discuss the birth of Hermione's daughter, Paulina's first question is whether the baby is a boy. She hopes that to be the case because boys were regarded with more favor than girls. Her plan is to take the baby to Leontes in the hope that he will realize his mistake and will be reunited with Hermione because of the baby. Emilia says that the baby is a girl and adds that she is "like to live," or likely to survive. Many babies didn't survive infancy and the mortality rate for infants was incredibly high during this period. While the modern day reader might not understand the reference, the health of the child was never taken for granted during this era, especially among the noble families.

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There are some very honorable people in the court. One such person is Paulina, who risks her life trying to reconcile Leontes and Hermione. Her husband, Antigonus, also seems honorable. When Leontes orders the infant princess killed by fire, Antigonus argues against that. Leontes asks how far Antigonus is willing to go to save the child's life and Antigonus seems willing to trade his life for that of the baby. It's a dangerous wager because kings of this time period literally could have ordered that Antigonus be put to death. For that matter, any of them could have been executed just for arguing with Leontes.



Discussion Question 1

Why does Polixenes abruptly leave Sicilia and what is Leontes' reaction to his departure?

Discussion Question 2

What are the attitudes of the people when Leontes declares that Hermione has been unfaithful to him?

Discussion Question 3

Describe Paulina's plan for making Leontes see his mistakes. What do you think will happen?

Vocabulary

Wanton, pander, calumny, adulteress, instigation, stupefied, conjecture, approbation, sufficiency, oracle, credulity, moiety, languished, audacious, heretic, scandalous, recompense, enjoin, dominions.



Act III

Summary

Act III

Act III, Scene I, takes place in “Sicilia, A Street in Some Town.” Two Sicilian lords, Cleomenes and Dion, are talking. They believe that the message from Apollo will clear Hermione’s name. They rush to get the message back to Leontes.

Act III, Scene II, takes place in “The Same. A Court of Justice.” Leontes announces the charge of adultery against Hermione and she’s brought into the court. The formal charge is read and Hermione is accused of having an affair with Polixenes and then plotting to kill Leontes once he discovered the affair. Hermione is given a chance to answer the charges and she says that it’s pointless to say she’s not guilty. Since they are already accusing her of being a liar, there would be no reason to believe anything she says. She says she has been completely faithful to Leontes and their marriage. She asks Leontes to search his conscience for any true evidence that she has wronged him. Leontes says that a person who has done wrong will then deny it. Hermione admits that’s true but says it doesn’t apply to her. Leontes asks her to confess. She says she loved Polixenes as she should love anyone who was her husband’s best friend. She says she would have been disobedient to her Leontes if she had felt any differently about Polixenes. She also denies knowing why or how Camillo left the court.

Leontes threatens to put Hermione to death . She says that she isn’t afraid. She cites her current situation, including that she’s denied any interaction with her son and that her daughter has been taken away from her. She says she is denied her rightful place beside her husband and on the throne. She has also been publicly accused of an affair. Hermione says all these things make her unafraid of death.

The message from Apollo arrives and is read aloud, declaring that Hermione, Camillo, and Polixenes are all innocent of the charges Leontes brought against them. Leontes is called a tyrant and the message concludes that Leontes will remain without an heir unless he finds Perdita and returns her to the kingdom. Leontes reacts by saying the message isn’t true. Just then a servant enters, saying that Mammilius has died out of fear for his mother. Leontes realizes that Apollo’s message is the truth but before he can do more than say so, Paulina announces that news of Mammilius’s death caused Hermione to pass out. Leontes believes she will revive and says that he has been wrong. Paulina and the other ladies leave with Hermione.

Leontes cries out, begging Apollo for forgiveness. Paulina returns and makes a scene. One lord asks what’s wrong, and Paulina goes into a speech. Her speech cites all the things Leontes has done wrong. At the end of the rant, Paulina says that Hermione has died. One says it can’t be true. Paulina challenges them to find any sign of life in Hermione. Leontes says that he deserves the anger from Paulina. Paulina apologizes to



Leontes. She says that she is a “foolish woman” who had great affection for Hermione. She can see that Leontes is truly sorry for his actions and promises never again to speak of Hermione, Mammilius, Perdita, or of Paulina’s own husband, Antigonus, who she says is also lost to them. Leontes orders a single grave for Hermione and Mamillius. He pledges that his daily “recreation” will be to cry at the temple for what he’s caused.

Act III, Scene III, takes place in “Bohemia. A Desert Country near the Sea.” Antigonus arrives on the scene with the infant and an unnamed Mariner. Antigonus asks if the Mariner is certain they are in Bohemia and the Mariner confirms it but points out that there’s a storm nearing. He says they need to hurry because the land is known for its “creatures of prey.” The Mariner returns to the ship at Antigonus’s command. Antigonus talks to the baby, saying he’d seen a vision of Hermione the previous evening and he wonders if that means Hermione is dead. The vision tells Antigonus that the baby’s name is Perdita and instructs Antigonus to leave it in Bohemia. She also tells Antigonus that he will never again see Paulina. Antigonus believes the vision means that Hermione wanted Perdita returned to the land of her biological father. Antigonus leaves a package with Perdita and, shortly after placing the baby and the package on the ground, is chased away by a bear.

An Old Shepherd enters, talking to himself, and sees Perdita. He guesses that there was a question about her parentage that prompted someone to abandon her. Just then the Old Shepherd’s son, the Clown, enters the scene. He says that he’s just seen a man eaten by a bear and a ship torn to pieces by the storm. The Clown says there was nothing to be done to help either the man attacked by the bear or the men who died at sea. The Old Shepherd says that while those men were dying, he found a newborn baby. They then discover that there is gold in the package that was left with Perdita. The Clown says that he’s going to check on the man eaten by the bear to see if there’s anything left to bury. The Old Shepherd agrees, saying they’ve had such good fortune in finding the baby that they should do good deeds in return.

Analysis

The scene in the courtroom when Apollo’s message is read gives some important clues about Leontes’ character. When the message is read, Leontes’ first reaction is one of disbelief. It can’t have been easy for him to hear himself referred to as a tyrant. His reaction seems very typical of what a human might think, especially since the message indicates that the kingdom will be without an heir unless Perdita is found. Leontes knows that he has a son, Mamillius, and that probably makes him certain that the message isn’t true. The delivery of the news that Mamillius is dead comes immediately after Leontes’ statement, leaving no doubt that the child’s death is an act of the god Apollo.

Paulina makes the announcement that Hermione is dead but it seems that no one other than Paulina sees her body. There’s a reference by Leontes to his plans to bury her with Mamillius but there’s no indication that actually happens. This is important because a statue of Hermione later comes to life and it seems possible that Hermione actually



hides out for the next sixteen years and then pretends to come to life by magic. It's left to the reader to decide what actually happens.

The scene in which Antigonus is chased and killed by a bear is not typical of Shakespeare who usually kills off characters at the hands of other characters or by suicide. Some historians believe at least one early rendition of the play included the use of a real bear in that scene.

Discussion Question 1

What is Leontes' first response when he hears the declaration from Apollo? Why do you believe he has this reaction?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the deaths of Hermione and Mamillius. What is Leontes' reaction to this news?

Discussion Question 3

What is the fate of Antigonus?

Vocabulary

Celestial, tyrannous, purgation, indictment, moiety, derivative, strumpet, blusters, sanctity, firmament, vessel, grimly, perpetual, beseech, woes, vengeance, glisters, mortal, chaste, surmises, immodest, conspiracy.



Act IV

Summary

Act IV

Act IV, Scene I, opens with Time entering. Time says that he has the power to speed past the sixteen years after Leontes is seen grieving for his lost family. Time reminds the audience of Florizel, the prince of Bohemia, that Perdita has been raised as the daughter of a shepherd. Time doesn't offer up many details except to say that Perdita has grown into a graceful young woman.

Act IV, Scene II, opens in "Bohemia, A Room in the Palace of Polixenes." Camillo and Polixenes enter the room together. Camillo says he's received word that Leones is sorry and wishes for Camillo to return to Sicilia. Camillo is homesick and wants to return to Sicilia. Polixenes begs him not to go, saying that Camillo has become such an integral part of Polixenes' life that he can't imagine life without him now. Polixenes says the thought of Hermione and her children still cause him pain.

Changing the subject, Polixenes asks when Camillo last saw Polixenes' son Florizel. Camillo says he hasn't seen the prince for three days. Polixenes says he has learned that Florizel is spending a great deal of time in the home of a "homely shepherd." Camillo says he has heard that the shepherd has a beautiful daughter. Polixenes asks that Camillo join him on a trip to visit the shepherd. Camillo agrees and they plan to go in disguise.

Act IV, Scene III, takes place in "The Same. A Road near the Shepherd's Cottage." A rogue named Autolycus enters the scene. He talks about his life and the perils of living as a rogue, constantly fearful of being punished. Just then, the Clown enters the scene. He's trying to figure prices as he considers the items his "sister" wants him to pick up at the market. They are preparing for the sheep-shearing feast and he notes that there are several workers who are "mean and base," but "one puritan amongst them." He relates the items he's supposed to buy, including prunes, dates, nutmegs, ginger, currants, sugar, and rice.

Autolycus begins rolling around on the ground, calling out for help and saying that he wishes his "rags" could be cast off. The Clown notes that Autolycus needs more clothes, not fewer. Autolycus says he is offended by the clothes. He says he was robbed and beaten, then given these poor rags to wear. The Clown helps Autolycus to his feet. He pretends to have trouble standing and picks the Clown's pocket while feigning weakness. The Clown offers to give him money but Autolycus says he would be offended by the offer. He says he has friends nearby and will go to them for help. The Clown questions Autolycus further about his attacker. Autolycus says the man has been many things, including a bailiff, and that he is nothing more than a rogue. He says his attacker's name is Autolycus. The Clown says he's heard of the man. Autolycus then



says he'll go on his way and the Clown says he has to purchase the items for their sheep-shearing festival. The Clown leaves the stage and Autolycus says the Clown doesn't have enough money to buy the items now, and that he plans to attend the sheep-shearing festival.

Act IV, Scene IV, takes place in "The Same. A Shepherd's Cottage." Florizel and Perdita enter the room. Florizel is complimenting Perdita but she responds that she isn't worthy of him nor of his praise. Florizel says he is happy that his falcon "made her flight across thy father's ground," indicating that's how he first met Perdita. Perdita says Florizel has never had to be afraid but that she knows fear. She says she is in constant fear that Florizel's father, King Polixenes, will happen to come by their home and discover Florizel there. Florizel says his love for Perdita is honest and strong, and that they can stand against any opposition. Perdita disagrees, saying the king won't allow them to be together. Florizel suggests Perdita put her worries aside for the moment and enjoy the sheep-shearing feast. He reminds her that they have promised to marry each other and that they should be treating the day as a celebration of their upcoming marriage. Perdita calls on "Fortune" to be in their favor. Florizel says the guests are arriving and that they have to put on a happy face for them.

The Old Shepherd enters with the Clown, Polixenes, and Camillo, along with several others. The Old Shepherd chastises Perdita, saying that her job is to serve everyone and to be the hostess. He says his wife, when she was alive to oversee the event, was busy serving everyone but never failed to welcome each new guest. He says Perdita is acting as if she herself is a guest, waiting to be served. Perdita turns to Polixenes, who is wearing a disguise, and welcomes him, then does the same to Camillo.

There is a conversation about flowers and seasons between Polixenes, Florizel, and Perdita. As Perdita and Florizel go off together to dance, Polixenes tells Camillo he is amazed by Perdita's beauty, but he says her grace and bearing make him think she is not the daughter of a shepherd.

Polixenes asks the Old Shepherd for the identity of the "fair swain" who dances with Perdita. The Old Shepherd says the boy calls himself Doricles and that he has proven that his love for Perdita is true. Polixenes says that Perdita "dances well." The Old Shepherd responds that Perdita does everything well. He admits that he is her father and might be biased.

A servant enters with news that there's a peddler at the door who sings wonderful ballads. The Clown says he loves a good ballad. The servant describes some of the songs, and the Clown then asks if the peddler also has items to sell. The servant says he has ribbons of all colors and that he sings about his wares as if "they were gods or goddesses." The Clown instructs the servant to allow the peddler inside. Perdita says the peddler is to be instructed not to use any "scurrilous" words in his songs.

Autolycus enters, singing about the items he has for sale. The Clown says he could resist the peddler's songs, but he will buy some things because of his love for Mopsa and his desire to give her pretty things. Mopsa says he promised to buy her things



before the sheep-shearing feast. The Clown is upset and reminds her that he was robbed. Autolycus responds that there are thieves everywhere and says that it pays to be vigilant. The Clown responds that the peddler, who he doesn't recognize as the man who robbed him, is safe in this gathering of people. They begin by having Autolycus tell them about the songs he has written down that are for sale. Dorcas, Mopsa, and Autolycus sing a song together. The Clown sees that his father is having a serious conversation with some "gentlemen" and invites the peddler to another room to show the items he has for sale. Dorcas and Mopsa leave with them. As they are leaving, Autolycus says to the audience that those who buy from him "shall pay well."

Just then a servant enters and announces to the Old Shepherd that workers have arrived. The servant says the workers want to dance first. The Shepherd initially refuses, saying there has been too much "foolery" already, but the servant says that some of the men claim to have danced for the king. They are invited in and dance.

After the dance is complete and the men leave, Polixenes approaches Florizel. Polixenes says that Florizel is obviously in love with Perdita and asks why Florizel didn't buy something from the peddler as a gift for her. Florizel says Perdita isn't interested in those kinds of items. Florizel says Perdita wants only his love and to marry him. Florizel says that even if he were a monarch, his life would mean nothing without Perdita. The Old Shepherd asks Perdita if she feels the same. She says she does but isn't able to express herself as well as Florizel. The Old Shepherd says he will give Perdita to the young man she loves, and he calls for everyone to witness the engagement of the two.

Polixenes interrupts, asking Florizel if he has a father. Florizel says he does, and Polixenes suggests that Florizel should ask his father's permission before formally entering into the engagement. Florizel says his father is alive and well but that he has his own reasons for not involving his father in the event. Polixenes reveals his identity and threatens Florizel. He says Florizel won't be allowed to take the throne and goes so far as to threaten death if Florizel dares return to the Old Shepherd's home or ever sees Perdita again. He then leaves.

Perdita says she knew this would happen. The Old Shepherd says he'd hoped only to live out his life in peace and to die in peace. He curses Perdita, saying she knew Florizel was the prince and that she's brought him great pain. Florizel responds that nothing has changed for him. Camillo warns Florizel that he should stay away from Polixenes until the king has time to calm down. Perdita says again that she'd always known they would be in trouble if the king found out about their love. Florizel says that he's determined to marry Perdita even if it costs him the throne. Florizel says he has a ship nearby and Camillo realizes that Florizel plans to leave the country rather than give up his marriage to Perdita.

Camillo sees an opportunity to return to Sicilia and tells Florizel he has a plan. He says that Florizel should go to Sicilia and present himself to King Leontes. He predicts Leontes will be happy to have the son of his childhood friend and that he'll welcome Florizel as a prince should be welcomed. Florizel is skeptical but Camillo knows that



Leontes is sorry for having ended his relationship with Polixenes. Camillo advises Florizel to say that he's there on behalf of his father.

Autolycus enters the scene. He says he was in the midst of robbing everyone at the gathering until the situation with Perdita and Florizel caught their attention. Camillo, Florizel, and Perdita have been talking among themselves but now return to center stage. Camillo has Autolycus trade clothes with Florizel and instructs Perdita to disguise herself as well. Perdita and Florizel step to the side to discuss their plans and to make sure they haven't forgotten anything. Camillo says to the audience that the next part of his plan is to tell Polixenes where the young couple has gone. He believes Polixenes will follow them and allow Camillo to go back to Sicilia with them.

The Old Shepherd enters with the Clown and they begin to discuss the situation. They know that they will likely pay for Perdita's action. The Clown says they have to convince Polixenes that Perdita isn't really the Old Shepherd's daughter. The Old Shepherd agrees, saying that he'll also inform the king that Florizel hid his true identity. Autolycus tells the Old Shepherd and the Clown that he's a courtier and asks what their business is with the king. Autolycus says Polixenes is aboard a ship, clearing his head over the situation with Florizel. Autolycus says the king is pledging revenge on those responsible for the situation, specifically the Old Shepherd and his son. The Clown insists that his father give the king the package found with the infant Perdita to prove they aren't her biological family. They become convinced that Autolycus is a member of the king's court and that he can help them in this task. Autolycus says he is now in a position to get some money and to do a service to the king, which might later earn him some favor.

Analysis

There's a comment in Scene II when Polixenes and Camillo are discussing the shepherd regarding the man's wealth. It's noted that there's no explanation for his recent change in status and the hint seems to be that Florizel is giving the man money for some reason. They may believe that Florizel is so enamored with the Old Shepherd's daughter that he is giving the family money. In truth, the family's situation has changed because of the package of money that the Old Shepherd found with Perdita.

There is a speech given by a servant when the sheep-shearing festival is just beginning that is clearly aimed at humor. The servant describes the peddler who is at the door and who offers to sing songs to those gathered for the event. This would have been a common occurrence in this time period and a person able to make up songs would have been in high demand. In this case, the servant describes the man's songs, saying that he sings love songs that are "without bawdry." The servant is indicating that the man's songs are without the references to sex that would have been common. However, the servant goes on to describe some of these songs and says there is a reference to "jump her and thump her" and another to a sex toy that the servant obviously doesn't recognize for what it is.



Autolycus is identified as a rogue. It seems that his entire life is spent trying to do whatever society believes is wrong. He steals from the Clown and later steals from several of the people at the sheep-shearing festival. He says that the items he has for sale are not worth what he asks for them, but that everyone pays the price anyway. Then, when Perdita and Florizel head to Sicilia, Autolycus considers briefly whether he should tell the king about the plan. He says that the wrong thing to do would be to conceal what he knows from Polixenes, and that's therefore what he's going to do. Autolycus says of himself that he's nothing if not predictable. However, a few minutes later he says he is sometimes honest, purely "by chance."

Discussion Question 1

What is the role of Time in this play? Why do you believe Shakespeare made Time appear onstage as a character?

Discussion Question 2

Describe the relationship between Florizel and Perdita. What are their plans and why is Perdita worried?

Discussion Question 3

What is the conversation Polixenes has with Florizel while Polixenes is in disguise? What does Polixenes ask and what is Florizel's response?

Vocabulary

Importunate, penitent, allay, countenance, nuptial, auspicious, mirth, sprightly, doleful, lamentably, bawdry, scurrilous, coifs, cozened, doleful, usurer, trumpery, affliction, benediction, lethargy, impediment.



Act V

Summary

Act V

Act V, Scene I, opens in "Sicilia. A Room in the Palace of Leontes." Leontes enters the room with Paulina and several other members of the court. One member, Cleomenes, pleads with Leontes to set aside the grief and heartache that have been with him constantly since Hermione's death. Paulina says Leontes will never find a woman as good as Hermione. Another courtier, Dion, says Paulina needs to encourage the king to remarry. Dion points out that they have no heir to the throne and that the kingdom would be in trouble if something happened to Leontes. Paulina counters, insisting that no one can live up to Hermione. She also points out that Apollo declared the kingdom would remain without an heir unless Perdita is found. Paulina then asks Leontes to swear that he will never marry without her blessing and he makes that promise. She says it won't happen until "your first queen's again in breath."

Just then an unnamed gentleman enters the room saying that a man identifying himself as Prince Florizel has arrived. Leontes knows that Florizel's unannounced and unexpected arrival means there is something wrong. The gentleman says the young princess accompanying Florizel is the most beautiful woman he's ever seen. Paulina reminds him of Hermione's beauty and he apologizes but says the princess is so beautiful that men would obey her every command and women will recognize her as "the rarest of all women." Several of those present leave to welcome Florizel and Perdita leaving Paulina and Leontes behind. Paulina reminds Leontes that Florizel and Mamillius were almost the same age and would have been good friends. Leontes pleads with her to stop reminding him of all he's lost.

Just then, Florizel and Perdita enter. Leontes remarks on the resemblance between Florizel and Polinexes and says that appearance alone would make him treat Florizel as a brother. Leontes says he wishes with all his heart to again see Polinexes. Florizel lies, saying that his father sends greetings. He tells Leontes that he's recently arrived from Bohemia and Leontes accepts the stories, welcoming Florizel without question.

A lord enters and tells Leontes the truth, that Florizel has fled Bohemia and that the girl is not a princess but is actually a shepherd's daughter. He says Polixenes requests that Leontes hold Florizel. Leontes asks where Polixenes is now and the lord says Polixenes is on his way. Leontes then learns that Camillo is also in the city and that the Old Shepherd is pleading for mercy from Polixenes. Perdita becomes distraught.

Leontes turns to Florizel, asking if he and Perdita have already married. Florizel says they haven't and that he's coming to realize that it will never happen. Leontes asks if Perdita is a princess and Florizel answers that she will be "once she is my wife."



Leontes says he is sorry their marriage won't be allowed. He then says he wants to talk to Polixenes and they exit.

Act V, Scene II, takes place in "The Same. Before the Palace." Autolycus enters and asks a man if he was present during a specific conversation. The man says he heard the Old Shepherd tell Polixenes how he came to find Perdita as an infant. He says that once Polixenes and Camillo saw the package that was found with Perdita, they became very excited. The man says he couldn't tell whether they were happy or sad, but that their emotions were strong. A second man named Rogero enters. He says that the "oracle is fulfilled" because King Leontes' daughter has been found. A third man, Paulina's servant, enters. He says that Perdita looks so much like her mother that there's no doubt that she is the daughter of Hermione and Leontes. There were also letters from Antigonus in the package the Old Shepherd found with Perdita.

One of the men then describes the reunion of Polixenes and Leontes. He says Leontes is overjoyed, then sorrowful to remember that he lost Hermione, then overjoyed again at being reunited with Polixenes and his daughter. The Clown delivers up a handkerchief and a ring that he took from the body of Antigonus, further proof of their story.

The men continue their discussion of the events. One of them says Perdita learns that there has been a statue constructed of Hermione and the group agrees to go see it. Another of the men says he wondered about the place where the statute has been constructed. He says Paulina has gone there several times a day for all the years since Hermione's death. They decide that they should rush over and see the statue for themselves. The men leave the stage, leaving Autolycus alone. He says he brought the Old Shepherd and the Clown aboard Polixenes' ship and that he'd inadvertently done a good thing, bringing the men together.

The Old Shepherd and the Clown enter the scene. The Old Shepherd says that he is too old to father more children, but he predicts that the Clown will have children and that they will all be "gentlemen born." They say both kings, Perdita, and Florizel have declared the Old Shepherd and the Clown their family, making them part of the nobility.

Act V, Scene III, takes place in "The Same. A Room in Paulina's House." Paulina takes them to the room where Hermione's statue is kept. Leontes sees the statue and says that it looks very much like Hermione except that the statue appears with wrinkles while Hermione died young, before she had wrinkles. Paulina says the carver created the statue to appear as Hermione would if she were alive now. Perdita kneels and says she wants to kiss her mother's hand. Paulina says the statue is very new and that the "color's not dry." Everyone notices that Leontes is becoming overly distraught. Paulina prepares to pull the curtain, hiding the statue again from view. She says she fears that Leontes will begin to imagine that the statue moves. Even Polixenes says the statue is so lifelike that it seems as if her lips are warm.

Paulina again says she'll pull the curtain around the statue to save the others further agony but they object. Then she says she can make the statue step down from its place but she fears they will think she's a witch. Paulina says everyone who believes should



do so and those who believe what she's about to do is illegal should leave. Leontes says everyone will stay. Paulina calls for music and it begins. She then instructs the statue to "be stone no more." Hermione steps down. Paulina says no one should shun Paulina and Leontes hugs her. He says she is warm to the touch and declares that Paulina's magic is "as lawful as eating."

Hermione is introduced to Perdita who kneels in front of her mother. Hermione offers a blessing to her and asks how Perdita has survived. Paulina says they should all go enjoy themselves but that she is going to grieve for her husband because she knows now that he is truly dead. Leontes says that Paulina and Camillo should now become husband and wife.

Analysis

Paulina is in the court when Leontes is lamenting his situation. The reader should remember that some sixteen years have passed since Hermione's death and that Leontes has apparently spent most of that time grieving for his wife and children. He expresses guilt over his role in the deaths of Hermione and Mamillius and that the kingdom lacks an heir because of his actions. Paulina might be the person to comfort Leontes; and, he seems to be hoping that she will. However, she tells him that he can never find a woman as good as Hermione. She goes to the extreme on this, saying that if he married every single woman in the world and took something good from each of them "to make a perfect woman," Hermione would still be a better woman. It seems rather cruel. The reader is reminded that Paulina was very devoted to Hermione.

Paulina continues to insist that Leontes shouldn't remarry. She is adamant and goes so far as to make him pledge to her that he won't marry again unless she blesses it. Leontes promises to do as she asks. Even though Paulina touts the fact that Apollo said there wouldn't be another heir to the throne unless Perdita is found, it seems a little extreme that she would insist that Leontes not remarry. This is a hint that Paulina may already know that Hermione is going to return or that Hermione isn't really dead at all. Later, there is a statement that Paulina has gone to a particular house each day for a long time. Some believe that she's been going there to watch the construction of the statue to Hermione. However, it may be that Hermione is not really dead and that Paulina has been spending time with her.

The conversation between the Old Shepherd and the Clown is meant to be humorous. The Clown points out to Autolycus that he is now a gentleman, referring to the fact that he has been accepted into the royal family because of his relationship to Perdita. When Autolycus, who is openly ready to do whatever it takes to win favor with the right people, says that he can see the Clown is "a gentleman born," the Clown responds that he has been for the past four hours. He then says that he became a gentleman before his father because the prince called him "brother" before the kings made the same statement to the Old Shepherd. The Clown then says that both he and his father wept at the situation and that "there were the first gentleman-like tears that ever we shed." Autolycus, as always looking out for himself, begs forgiveness for the wrongs he did to



the Clown and Old Shepherd earlier. The Old Shepherd tells his son that they have to behave as gentlemen now.

Discussion Question 1

What is Paulina's reaction to Leontes' grief over the death of Hermione? Why do you believe she has this attitude?

Discussion Question 2

Do you believe Hermione was dead for the past sixteen years or was she hiding? Support your answer.

Discussion Question 3

What are the reactions of Leontes, Perdita, and Polixenes to the statue of Hermione?

Vocabulary

Blemishes, penitence, exultation, singularities, preposterous, fain, beguile, conduit, countenance, merits, paragon, amity, zeal, proselytes, rift, incense, vexed, sainted, sovereign, redeemed.



Characters

Leontes

Leontes is the Sicilian king. He is the husband of Hermione and father of Perdita and Mamillius. Leontes is very happy as the story opens because his best friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, is visiting. When Polixenes declares that he has to return to his home, Leontes pleads with him to stay, but Polixenes insists. Then, Hermione begs him to stay another week and he gives in. Leontes takes that as a sign that there is something more than friendship between Polixenes and Hermione. He flies into a jealous rage and plots to murder Polixenes for this imagined crime.

Leontes is unable to think rationally because he is a loyal person, unable to tolerate the idea of disloyalty in others. When Leontes reads the words of the god Apollo and realizes that he has made a mistake, he is heartbroken.

There is no indication of Leontes' actions during the sixteen-year lapse; but, his friends talk about his deep regret. He has not taken another queen, indicating that he is truly sorry for jumping to this conclusion. When he has the opportunity to make up with Hermione, Polixenes, and Perdita, he takes it and continues to apologize for his error. While it may be easy for the reader to judge Leontes' action in jumping to the conclusion of infidelity in the first place, most will be able to empathize with the emotions that lead him to such hasty acts that impact the lives of so many others.

Paulina

Paulina is a lady of the court and wife of Antigonus. She is very close to Hermione and is willing to stand up for her friend when Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery. Paulina goes to the prison where she convinces the guard to allow her to see one of Hermione's servants. Paulina then reveals her plan to reunite Leontes and Hermione by showing Leontes the newborn baby. This is a dangerous plan and puts Paulina at risk. She appears to be willing to take the risk because she believes her action to be right. When Paulina is unsuccessful in this, she remains in court, apparently as a show of support for Hermione. The actions are dangerous because Leontes, as king, has the power to order Paulina imprisoned as well. Paulina takes yet another daring step when Leontes refuses to listen to reason. Pauline announces that Hermione has died. Paulina might have been helping Hermione escape a death sentence and then helping Hermione hide for the next sixteen years. She might merely have commissioned the statue in honor of Hermione. Either action shows Paulina's devotion to her friend and her willingness to go above what most people would have done. While Paulina isn't really one of the major characters, there's no doubt that her actions keep the story line flowing and drive the resolution.



Polixenes

Polixenes is the king of Bohemia. He is an honorable person who is loyal to his childhood friend Leontes. When Polixenes discovers he is being accused of having an affair with Hermione, his first response is that he wants to figure out who made the accusations and what prompted them to do such a thing. He's advised to leave those questions alone and to focus on saving himself, which he does by fleeing back to Bohemia. Little is revealed about the sixteen-year gap during which Perdita is growing up. When Polixenes discovers that his son Florizel is involved with the daughter of a lowly shepherd, he is furious and sets out to stop their marriage. As the story comes to a close, he is reunited with Leontes and happy with the union of their children.

Hermione

Hermione is the Sicilian queen. She is the wife of Leontes and mother of Perdita and Mamillius. Hermione is faithful to her husband; but, she is accused by Leontes of having an affair. She appears to die, possibly of a broken heart, when her husband publicly declares her an adulteress. She isn't seen for sixteen years, and everyone assumes she's dead. When Perdita is found and returned to her home, a close friend of Hermione reveals a statue dedicated to Hermione. When the friends and family are viewing it for the first time, the statue comes to life. The reader is left to decide whether the statue was magically reincarnated or if Hermione has been in hiding for sixteen years and uses this as a means of revealing herself.

Perdita

Perdita is the daughter of Hermione and Leontes. She is abandoned by her father as an infant because he believes she is not his biological daughter. Perdita is left in a barren spot but is found by the Clown who takes her home where she is raised as the sister of the Clown and daughter of the Old Shepherd. Perdita grows into a beautiful, graceful young woman who catches the eye of Florizel, the prince of Bohemia. There isn't a great deal about Perdita's character revealed, though it's noted that she is much more refined than a shepherd's daughter should have been.

The Old Shepherd

The Old Shepherd takes Perdita into his home after she is abandoned. He becomes very successful because of the valuables that were left with the baby. He is honorable and raises Perdita as if she were his own daughter. However, when Perdita runs away with Prince Florizel, the Old Shepherd reveals to Polixenes that Perdita is not really his daughter, apparently in an effort to avoid punishment for her actions.



Antigonus

Antigonus is the husband of Paulina and a lord in the Sicilian court. He is in the presence of Leontes when Paulina arrives with the infant Perdita. Antigonus is ordered to take the child to remote place and leave her there, allowing the fates to decide whether she lives or dies. When Antigonus has deposited the infant in the place of his choosing, he is chased and killed by a bear. Antigonus believes that Leontes is making a mistake; but, his actions indicate that he is willing to follow his king's directive, even when he disagrees with it.

Camillo

Camillo is a lord in the Sicilian court, Camillo is very close to Leontes. When Leontes discovers what he believes to be an affair between Hermione and Polixenes, he calls on Camillo. Leontes says that he wants to kill Polixenes for his actions. Camillo agrees to give Polixenes a poison that will kill him in a few days' time. Camillo predicts that once Leontes discovers that there really wasn't an affair at all, he'll greatly regret killing his best friend. Instead of killing Polixenes, Camillo warns him of the plan; and, the two go to Bohemia together. Camillo is with Polixenes when they discover that Florizel is planning to marry Perdita.

Autolycus

Autolycus is a rogue who appears in both Bohemia and in Sicilia. He tells stories at the event where Florizel and Perdita become engaged. When he learns that the Old Shepherd and the Clown have items they want to show the king, Autolycus arranges to get them on board Polixenes's ship, hoping to earn the favor of the king. He's amazed when things turn out so well and says he, as a rogue, had not intended to do the right thing.

Mamillius

Mamillius is the son of Leontes and Hermione. He dies young when his mother is imprisoned on false charges of infidelity.



Symbols and Symbolism

Time

Time has a role in this play. An actor appears on stage as “Time” and announces the passage of sixteen years during which Perdita grows up and the attitudes of those involved change.

Public Opinion

Leontes comes up with the idea that his wife is having an affair with his best friend. While he is furious over the situation as a whole, it seems he is very concerned with what others think of him. He seems to honestly believe that people are probably feeling sorry for the stupid husband who was the last to see evidence of the affair. Leontes seems to be more concerned with the opinion of others than with his love for his wife, his marriage, or his children.

The Statue of Hermione

The Statue of Hermione is built in honor of Hermione who is believed to have died sixteen years prior to its unveiling. The statue is either Hermione who has been living in hiding all this time or is actually a statue that magically comes to life as Hermione as the story comes to a close.

The Court of Justice

Hermione’s trial takes place at the Court of Justice. It is at the Court of Justice where Hermione apparently dies shortly before the message from Apollo is read, exonerating her of adultery.

The Sheep-shearing Fest

The sheep-shearing Fest is an event hosted by the Old Shepherd and his family at the annual shearing time. This is where Polixenes and Camillo discover the relationship between Florzel and Perdita.

Doricles

Doricles is the name Florizel gives for himself to Perdita’s father while he is courting Perdita, obviously in an effort to hide his true identity from the Old Shepherd.



Paulina's House

Paulina's house is where the statue to Hermione is built and where Leontes and the others are when Paulina orders the statue to come to life.

Apollo

Apollo is one of the gods worshiped during this time period. He issues a statement that relates the following: Hermione and Polixenes were not having an affair; Perdita is the daughter of Leontes; Leontes is a tyrant; and, the kingdom will be without an heir until Perdita is found and returned to her rightful place. Leontes declares that the statement is false until he learns a few minutes later that his son has died.

A Bear

A bear is the creature that kills and partially eats Antigonus after he leaves Perdita on the shore in Bohemia.

A Rogue

Autolycus is described as a rogue. It seems that he is not trustworthy. Even he admits that he tries not to do what's right, though he sometimes does it accidentally.

Settings

Sicilia

Sicilia is the country where Leontes is King. The country is not described in great depth, though there are a few pieces of action that give hints about the country as a whole. It seems that Shakespeare gave the country specific settings and attributes that it may not have actually had, meaning the reader could consider it a fictional place.

Bohemia

Bohemia is a country ruled by Polixenes. This is where Perdita grows up, raised by the Old Shepherd. The country apparently has at least some area devoted to sheep herding as there is a large festival attended by the shepherds. As is the case with most of Shakespeare's settings, there is not a great deal of detail offered about the place.

The Prison

Located in Sicilia, this prison is not the traditional prison of modern times. Hermione is held here; but, she has her attendants with her. She is probably living quite comfortably, though she is not free to leave. This is where Perdita is born.



Themes and Motifs

Love

Love is an important theme throughout this play and is why some classify this among Shakespeare's love stories. Leontes loves Hermione so much that he drives himself to jealousy. It's this fear that causes him to publicly accuse her of adultery and drives his best friend away. The fact that Leontes is later repentant and that he spends some sixteen years mourning Hermione is another testament of his love for her. This love even conquers death though it's possible that Hermione was never dead but had merely hidden until she was certain her life was no longer in danger. If Hermione does, in fact, die, the statue erected in her honor comes to life in the presence of the love of her husband, daughter, and good friends. The next example of this theme is seen in the love between Perdita and Florizel. Perdita predicts that they will face adversity but Florizel doesn't care. He swears that his love for her is stronger than any opposition they might face. When they are confronted by Polixenes, Florizel refuses to give up his plan to marry Perdita. Instead, he flees with her to Sicilia where he concocts an incredible story about meeting her in another country altogether. When Polixenes finds them, Florizel seems to despair. Florizel tells Leontes that Perdita will be a princess once they are married.

Deep Friendship

When Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery, many of their friends object, saying it can't possibly be true. Leontes is so certain that it's true that he wants to kill Polixenes. He seems to convince Camillo to poison Polixenes for his action; but, Camillo believes that Leontes will later realize that he was wrong and will then be upset that he had Polixenes killed. While Camillo is willing to obey Leontes, he does what he believes is the honorable thing and helps Polixenes escape though it means Camillo is then exiled from his own home. Another example of this theme is seen when Paulina goes to the prison. It would have been inappropriate for a lady of Paulina's standing to go to the prison but she goes anyway because of her friendship to Hermione. She takes the baby to the king though it makes Leontes very angry, and she does it out of the belief that the king's heart will soften once he sees the child. Later, Hermione continually reminds Leontes that Hermione was a perfect woman and that the oracle has decreed his fate so that he never remarries. Finally, Paulina either hides Hermione for some sixteen years or commissions a statue to her honor and then uses magic to revive her. Either possibility is an example of her deep devotion to Hermione.

Fate

When Leontes declares that Perdita will be killed, Paulina intervenes. Leontes decides that the baby will be abandoned in some remote location so that the fates will decide



whether she lives or dies. As Antigonus is doing as Leontus orders, he has a vision of Hermione. He believes this means that Hermione is dead. In this vision, Hermione reveals the name of the baby and instructs Antigonus to leave the child in Bohemia. Antigonus takes this to mean that Hermione wants the child to be left in the homeland of her biological father. He leaves items with the child that later is used to identify her. Another important fateful event during this time is the death of Antigonus and his entire crew. The Clown who buries Antigonus takes a ring and handkerchief from the body and that's later used to positively identify him. The fact that his crew cannot be found means Leontes is unable to try to track her down after he realizes the words of Apollo are true. Another instance of this theme is that Florizel happens to cross the Old Shepherd's land while hunting and meets Perdita. This chance meeting results in their falling in love which eventually leads to the revelation of Perdita's identity and returns her to her real parents.



Styles

Point of View

The Winter's Tale by William Shakespeare is presented in first person from the limited perspective of the various characters, though there is an omniscient quality as well. This comes from the fact that various characters take the stage, each revealing information about himself or herself at various times throughout the play. For example, the early action takes place in Sicilia but then the reader is taken to Bohemia where it's revealed that sixteen years have passed. The reader is left to wonder what happened in Sicilia over those years but sees from Camillo's character that Leontes has begged forgiveness for his actions. An interesting aspect of the play format is that characters don't have thoughts that are revealed only to the reader as thoughts. Instead, those thoughts become statements from the character to the audience in an "aside." This is seen several times throughout the play. Autolycus points out to the audience that he is, by nature, a rogue and that he doesn't ever choose to do what's right. He says, however, that sometimes he does what's right by accident. This is designed to give the reader and the audience a better look into his character. It's important that the reader realize the kind of man he is in order to fully appreciate his actions later. The limited perspective is reasonable and appropriate to the work.

Language and Meaning

As is always the case with Shakespeare, some readers will have trouble following the story simply because of the antiquated speech and wording. While some are able to become accustomed to the writing, others struggle to make sense of the writing. While the reader with a reasonably-broad vocabulary will find few unfamiliar words, the difficulty usually lies in the sentence structure and in the use of antiquated terms, such as "dost." In some cases, the British spelling is used and in other cases, words are spelled in keeping with the speech patterns of the day. For example, the word "looked" is presented as "look'd" and "fixed" becomes "fix'd." The word "color" is presented as "colour." The story is presented as a play, complete with some stage direction. The majority of the story is dialogue which is reasonable, given the time and the author but which may be lost on the modern-day reader. For example, the servant who announces the arrival of Autolycus posing as a peddler makes a sexual comment though he seems not to realize what he's saying. This would have been a point of humor for the audience of that day though the modern-day reader may not understand the reference.

Structure

The Winter's Tale is divided into five acts and a total of fifteen scenes. The play opens in Sicilia where Leontes is the king. The entire act serves as an introduction to several of the characters, including the two kings, Leontes and Polixenes. Both scenes take place



at the palace. The first is in an antechamber of the palace and the second scene in a stateroom. Act II continues in the palace in Sicilia. The first scene is in an unnamed room in the palace and the second in a prison room in the palace where Hermione is being held. Scene III moves back to another room in the palace. Act III moves outside the palace and the first scene takes place on a street in the city. The second takes place in the Court of Justice where Hermione is being tried for her infidelity. Scene III moves to Bohemia in a “desert country near the sea.” Sixteen years pass between Acts III and IV. The action takes back up in Bohemia, this time in the palace where Polixenes is king. Scene III occurs in the countryside near the shepherd’s cottage and the final scene of that act takes place inside a shepherd’s cottage. The final act takes place back in Sicilia. Scene I is set inside the palace in a random room and Scene II takes place outside the palace. The final scene is set in Paulina’s house where the story comes to a conclusion with the revelation of Hermione.



Quotes

At my request he would not. Hermione, my dearest, though never spok'st to better purpose.

-- Leontes (Act I, Scene II paragraph 29)

Importance: Leontes is initially thanking Hermione for convincing Polixenes to remain another week. A short time later, Leontes comes to believe Polixenes accepts Hermione's offer because they are lovers.

A sad tale's best for winter.

-- Mamillius (Act II, Scene I paragraph 2)

Importance: Mamillius has been called on to tell a story to provide entertainment. This is a reference to the play's title; and, it could be a reference to the fact that the tales traditionally told during the winter months were not true. The reader should remember that the people of this time have little entertainment and storytelling is something of an art.

I have said, she's an adulteress; I have said with whom: More, she's a traitor and Camillo is a federary with her.

-- Leontes (Act II, Scene I paragraph 30)

Importance: Leontes is making the accusation publicly for the first time. He sent Camillo to poison Polinexes. When he learns that Polixenes and Camillo are leaving, he takes this as a sign of guilt.

Though I am satisfied, and need no more than what I know, yet shall the oracle give rest to the minds of others such as he whose ignorant credulity will not come up to the truth.

-- Leontes (Act II, Scene I paragraph 59)

Importance: Leontes has just argued with men in his court who can't believe that Hermione has been unfaithful. Leontes believes he is correct and expects that the oracle will bear out his beliefs. However, he says that he only calls for the oracle in order to convince other people of the truth. It's obvious that Leontes is not open to hearing anything other than what he believes - that Hermione has been involved in an affair.

He must be told on't; I'll take't upon me.

-- Paulina (Act II, Scene II paragraph 23)

Importance: Paulina has decided to take the newborn baby to court in the belief that Leontes will melt once he sees that baby. She seems to believe that she is the person who will have to perform this task.



Behold, my lords, although the print be little, the whole matter and a copy of the father - eye, nose, lip.

-- Paulina (Act II, Scene III paragraph 37)

Importance: Paulina has just presented Perdita to Leontes and the court. Leontes insists that the child isn't his; but, Paulina points out to everyone that there are marked resemblances between father and daughter that indicate otherwise.

Hermione, queen to the worthy Leontes, king of Sicilia, thou art here accused and arranged of high treason, in committing adultery with Polixenes, king of Bohemia; and conspiring with Camillo to take away the life of our sovereign lord the king, they royal husband.

-- An Officer (Act III, Scene II paragraph 6)

Importance: This is read for everyone to hear that Leontes has formally accused Hermione of having an affair with Polixenes and then plotting to kill Leontes when the affair was discovered.

Hermione 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.

-- An Officer (Act III, Scene II paragraph 21)

Importance: This is the message from Apollo when called on to judge the truth of the situation. Leontes will later recognize that this is the truth. Initially, he refuses to believe it. The message is that Hermione did not have an affair with Polixenes and that Camillo did not plot to kill Leontes. The reference to the "babe" is that Perdita is Leontes' daughter and the final note is that there won't be another heir to the throne unless Leontes finds Perdita. That doesn't make sense to Leontes until a few moments later when he learns that his son Mamillius has died.

The report of her is extended more than can be thought to begin from such a cottage.

-- Camillo (Act IV, Scene II paragraph 7)

Importance: Camillo is talking to Polixenes who says he has heard reports that Florizel is spending a great deal of time at the cottage of a lowly shepherd. Camillo reveals what he knows of the girl who lives there. The girl is later identified as Perdita. There are indications throughout this act of people believing that Perdita is overly-graceful and beautiful. That seems to be atypical of what one would expect of a shepherd's daughter.

Even now I tremble to think your father, by some accident, should pass this way, as you did.

-- Perdita (Act IV, Scene III paragraph 5)

Importance: Perdita is talking to Florizel. She says she knows he is accustomed to getting his way and to doing whatever he wants without fear. However, she is afraid of what will happen if the king finds out about their romance.



The oracle is fulfilled: the king's daughter is found: such a deal of wonder is broken out within this hour that ballad-makers cannot be able to express it.

-- An Unnamed Gentleman (Act V, Scene II paragraph 8)

Importance: The man is explaining to a group of men, including Autolycus, what happened after it was discovered that Perdita is the princess. He goes on to tell about the proof that this is true.

Tis time; descend; be stone no more; approach.

-- Paulina (Act V, Scene III paragraph 35)

Importance: Paulina is talking to the statue of Hermione after telling Leontes that she is able to bring Hermione to life.