



The Winter's Tale (Folger Shakespeare Library)

By William Shakespeare

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The Winter's Tale (Folger Shakespeare Library) By William Shakespeare

The Winter's Tale, one of Shakespeare's very late plays, is filled with improbabilities. Before the conclusion, one character comments that what we are about to see, "Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale."

It includes murderous passions, man-eating bears, princes and princesses in disguise, death by drowning and by grief, oracles, betrayal, and unexpected joy. Yet the play, which draws much of its power from Greek myth, is grounded in the everyday.

A "winter's tale" is one told or read on a long winter's night. Paradoxically, this winter's tale is ideally seen rather than read—though the imagination can transform words into vivid action. Its shift from tragedy to comedy, disguises, and startling exits and transformations seem addressed to theater audiences.

The authoritative edition of *The Winter's Tale* from The Folger Shakespeare Library, the trusted and widely used Shakespeare series for students and general readers, includes:

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Essay by Stephen Orgel

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Editorial Review

About the Author

William Shakespeare was born in April 1564 in the town of Stratford-upon-Avon, on England's Avon River. When he was eighteen, he married Anne Hathaway. The couple had three children—an older daughter Susanna and twins, Judith and Hamnet. Hamnet, Shakespeare's only son, died in childhood. The bulk of Shakespeare's working life was spent in the theater world of London, where he established himself professionally by the early 1590s. He enjoyed success not only as a playwright and poet, but also as an actor and shareholder in an acting company. Although some think that sometime between 1610 and 1613 Shakespeare retired from the theater and returned home to Stratford, where he died in 1616, others believe that he may have continued to work in London until close to his death.

Barbara A. Mowat is Director of Research *emerita* at the Folger Shakespeare Library, Consulting Editor of *Shakespeare Quarterly*, and author of *The Dramaturgy of Shakespeare's Romances* and of essays on Shakespeare's plays and their editing.

Paul Werstine is Professor of English at the Graduate School and at King's University College at Western University. He is a general editor of the New Variorum Shakespeare and author of *Early Modern Playhouse Manuscripts and the Editing of Shakespeare* and of many papers and articles on the printing and editing of Shakespeare's plays.

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Characters In the Play

LEONTES, King of SICILIA

HERMIONE, Queen of Sicilia

MAMILLIUS, their son

PERDITA, their daughter

POLIXENES, King of BOHEMIA

FLORIZELL, his son

CAMILLO, a courtier, friend to Leontes and then to Polixenes

ANTIGONUS, a Sicilian courtier

PAULINA, his wife and lady-in-waiting to Hermione

CLEOMENES *courtier in Sicilia*

DION *courtier in Sicilia*

EMILIA, a lady-in-waiting to Hermione

SHEPHERD, foster father to Perdita

SHEPHERD'S SON

AUTOLYCUS, former servant to Florizell, now a rogue

ARCHIDAMUS, a Bohemian courtier

TIME, as Chorus

TWO LADIES attending on Hermione

LORDS, SERVANTS, and GENTLEMEN attending on Leontes

An OFFICER of the court

A MARINER

A JAILER

MOPSA *shepherdess in Bohemia*

DORCAS *shepherdess in Bohemia*

SERVANT to the Shepherd

SHEPHERDS and SHEPHERDESSES

Twelve COUNTRYMEN disguised as satyrs

ACT 1

Scene 1

Enter Camillo and Archidamus.

ARCHIDAMUS If you shall chance, Camillo, to visit Bohemia on the like occasion whereon my services are now on foot, you shall see, as I have said, great difference betwixt our Bohemia and your Sicilia.

CAMILLO I think this coming summer the King of Sicilia means to pay Bohemia the visitation which he justly owes him.

ARCHIDAMUS Wherein our entertainment shall shame us; we will be justified in our loves. For indeed --

CAMILLO Beseech you --

ARCHIDAMUS Verily, I speak it in the freedom of my knowledge. We cannot with such magnificence -- in so rare -- I know not what to say. We will give you sleepy drinks, that your senses, unintelligent of our insufficiency, may, though they cannot praise us, as little accuse us.

CAMILLO You pay a great deal too dear for what's given freely.

ARCHIDAMUS Believe me, I speak as my understanding instructs me and as mine honesty puts it to utterance.

CAMILLO Sicilia cannot show himself over kind to Bohemia. They were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt them then such an affection which cannot choose but branch now. Since their more mature dignities and royal necessities made separation of their society, their encounters, though not personal, hath been royally attorneyed with interchange of gifts, letters, loving embassies, that they have seemed to be together though absent, shook hands as over a vast, and embraced as it were from the ends of opposed winds. The heavens continue their loves.

ARCHIDAMUS I think there is not in the world either malice or matter to alter it. You have an unspeakable comfort of your young Prince Mamillius. It is a gentleman of the greatest promise that ever came into my note.

CAMILLO I very well agree with you in the hopes of him. It is a gallant child -- one that indeed physics the subject, makes old hearts fresh. They that went on crutches ere he was born desire yet their life to see him a man.

ARCHIDAMUS Would they else be content to die?

CAMILLO Yes, if there were no other excuse why they should desire to live.

ARCHIDAMUS If the King had no son, they would desire to live on crutches till he had one.

They exit.

Users Review

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Henry Perry:

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