

# THE WINTER'S TALE

A blue line-art illustration of a hand holding a yellow sun. The hand is positioned to the right of the word 'THE' and above the word 'WINTER'S'. The sun is a solid yellow circle.

Study Guide 2018



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***Rehearsal Time: Florizel and Perdita (center) dance while Polixenes (far left) spies on his son during the Shepherd's (beside Polixenes, right) sheep-shearing festival in Bohemia.***  
*Credit: Mary Marotte*

# A Brief Synopsis

All is well in the court of Sicilia as childhood friends Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and Leontes, King of Sicilia, rekindle their friendship over nine months. After being coaxed by Leontes's pregnant wife, Hermione, into staying a week longer, things take a turn for the worst. Leontes asserts that Hermione has been unfaithful with Polixenes, and, in fear of death, Polixenes and Camilla flee back to Bohemia.

Leontes imprisons Hermione, where she gives birth to a beautiful girl—Perdita. Hermione's friend Paulina takes the infant to Leontes hoping that the newborn will lighten his mood. Instead, Leontes explodes, demanding the baby be abandoned and left for dead.

Leontes devises a trial where he will prove Hermione's unfaithfulness by an Oracle. When Leontes objects to the Oracle's message of Hermione's faithfulness, Leontes's son, Mamillius, dies and Hermione swoons into death.

Paulina's husband, Antigonus, assumes the task of abandoning the baby in the woods of Bohemia and, in the process, is mauled by a bear. A kindly Shepherd finds Perdita and raises her.

Sixteen years pass, and Leontes has become deeply remorseful and Polixenes's son, Florizel, and Perdita have fallen in love. Polixenes, in disguise, goes to spy on his son at the Shepherd's get-together, where he witnesses the Shepherd marrying Perdita to Florizel. Enraged, he removes his disguise and threatens to disown Florizel and execute the Shepherd.

Florizel and Perdita flee back to Sicilia. Polixenes pursues them, and one grand reunion occurs at the kingdom of Sicilia, where they then go to see a newly constructed statue of Hermione at Paulina's house.

Paulina tells Leontes that the statue can come to life with the power of faith, and in a moment of magical suspense, the group witnesses the unthinkable; the statue moves and Hermione comes to life before their very eyes!

# Background Information

Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale* later in his life, around 1610-1611. At this point in his career, Shakespeare was dabbling in both the genre of "romance" as well as the combination of different genres. The term "romance" is highly subjective to the time period it is used in, and in the Renaissance the "romance" was characterized by adventure, magic, or courtly love. Shakespeare's career is typically divided into three distinct categories: comedies, tragedies, and romances. However, some of Shakespeare's plays do not fit the mold of any of these genres. Some of these plays, such as *The Winter's Tale*, exhibit characteristics of different genres in one play. Consequently, while *The Winter's Tale* is characterized as a "romance" in the First Folio, it is contemporarily characterized as a "tragicomedy." This "tragicomedy" implies a tragic plotline that ends in happiness--either in unity, resurrection, or marriage.

The magical and mystical romance of *The Winter's Tale* is forefront in the essence of the play. The incorporation of a character called "Time," Hermione's resurrection in the end, the 16-year jump in time, and the constant change of setting gives way to the "romantic" quality of the performance. By manipulating these variables, Shakespeare imparts a magical aura into the performance and complicates the definition of "reality." In the words of John Pitcher, editor of *The Arden Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, "this is the ultimate fanciful story: how much of it will you believe?"

# About the Production

## *An Interview with Director Nisi Sturgis*

*The Dramaturgy team for **The Winter's Tale** interviewed Director Nisi Sturgis to get further visionary insight into the play. Nisi is a Conway, Arkansas native and has an expansive professional career in theatre. She's worked with Denver Center Theatre Company, Illinois Shakespeare Festival, Shakespeare Theatre of New Jersey, and had a recurring role on HBO's **Boardwalk Empire**—just to name a few. Nisi has been with Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre for a number of years, but this production was her first time directing!*



**Nisi Sturgis**

*Credit: goodmantheatre.org*

*What has been the most difficult part of this experience so far? Most fun/interesting part?*

- Nisi's most difficult part of the experience was limited rehearsal time. She stated that it is difficult to balance the demands of sharing members of the cast during rehearsals. Her favorite part of the experience was casting, where she stated that "80% of directing is casting well." While it is initially a singular experience, she loves to see the entire cast together and see what comes of the choices she made.

*When creating your vision for the play, what message did you want to communicate to your audience?*

- Nisi stated that there is so much room for every person, and that it doesn't matter what you change, whether it be race, gender, background, culture, it's the "dynamics of the human heart" that matter. With her heart on her sleeve, she stated, "We can heal if we do the work, but it takes time...This play simultaneously breaks and heals my heart...[It's] what we do with our mistakes that matters."

*How would you describe your directing style?*

- Nisi was quick to answer this one, and she immediately answered "collaborative" and called herself an "idea gal." She likes to throw as many ideas as possible out there and "check in" with questions. She also stated that it is important to "hold ideas lightly," and that it's all about the "curiosity of how we get there."

*So you're going to direct *The Winter's Tale*. What's the next step in your directorial process?*

- Nisi approached this question as immediately as the last one, quickly calling out the audience as her next step in approaching the play. Being from Conway, this is a "homegrown" audience, which definitely helps her since she is familiar with her audience. Nisi stated that "the spirit of the play" is an important concept that she can deliver to the audience; "How do[es] [she] do this and not scald anybody with the violence [of the play]?" Her first thought in approaching this question was Mamillius, where children can be the "caretakers" of the story. She also stated that she has read the play a lot, to the point where she has almost memorized the entire play.

*How did you envision the magical side of the play? In other words, how did you use magic in tandem with all the other elements of the play?*

- She replied with hesitation to this question, stating "It's tricky for me." She went on, stating "Our own world is magic[al], and we are distracted from it...we are less curious...we don't give things time to unfurl and see the alignments..." She went on to describe the magic of faith. She declared that we "want to balance the magic with what allowed for it to happen—People's faith in something beyond us that connects us." She ended on an emotionally resonant note: "Faith--to lose and find [it] again--is magical."

*What character are you most fascinated with in this play?*

- When asked this question, she laughed and said her first instinct was Leontes, but said it is truly Autolycus. To her, Autolycus is a reflection of identify, which is constantly in question. She states that this lost identify is "clearly expressed" by someone (Autolycus) who hides, lies, steals, entertains, and "throws themselves out in the mercy of opportunity." To her, Autolycus is an artist that figures people out. He "stumbles into saving people's lives." She also paralleled Autolycus's search for identity with Prince Hal's search in *King Henry IV*.

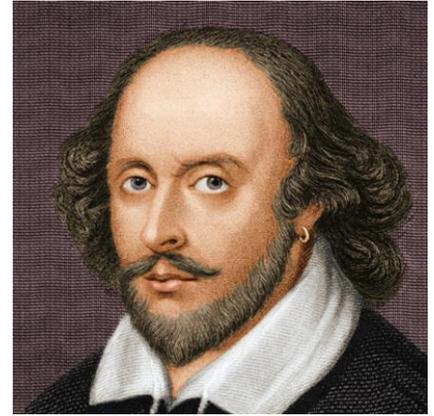
*How long does it take for your vision of the play to develop? Do you usually get the idea right away and stick with it, or does it constantly change and develop?*

- As soon as the question had left lips, she swiftly interjected with "A lifetime!" and laughed cheerfully. She stated that "everything [she] [is] and who [she] [is] influences [her] approach to [her] work and [it] is always shifting." She hopes that her vision is "something that is alive." She stated that she trusted instinct "deeply," and supported this claim with her own directorial view of puppetry in this production. She jokingly said that outdoor shadow puppetry in Arkansas during the summer may not have been the best idea, but she felt it important enough to keep. She also described the image of a child seeing their shadow for the first time, illustrating the importance of the abstract and nothing like looking in a mirror. She ended the interview on an artistically compelling declaration: "[There's a] tug of war of dark and light in all of us...[it's] playful and scary."

# All About William Shakespeare

William Shakespeare is no less than a legend. However, he's a legend whose life is primarily a mystery to us. There are few records that give us much insight into who Shakespeare really was. Although, we do know he was a talented actor, poet, and playwright with the power to enchant his audience even centuries after his death.

**Family Life:** Shakespeare was born in April, 1564 and died in April, 1616. He grew up in Stratford-upon-Avon in England with his seven other siblings. His father, John Shakespeare, was a leather merchant and his mother, Mary Arden, was a local landed heiress. Later on, his father held several official positions in the town—including one that resembled mayor. At age 18, Shakespeare married the already three month-pregnant Anne Hathaway (age 26). The couple soon had their daughter, Susanna, and later twins: Hamnet and Judith.



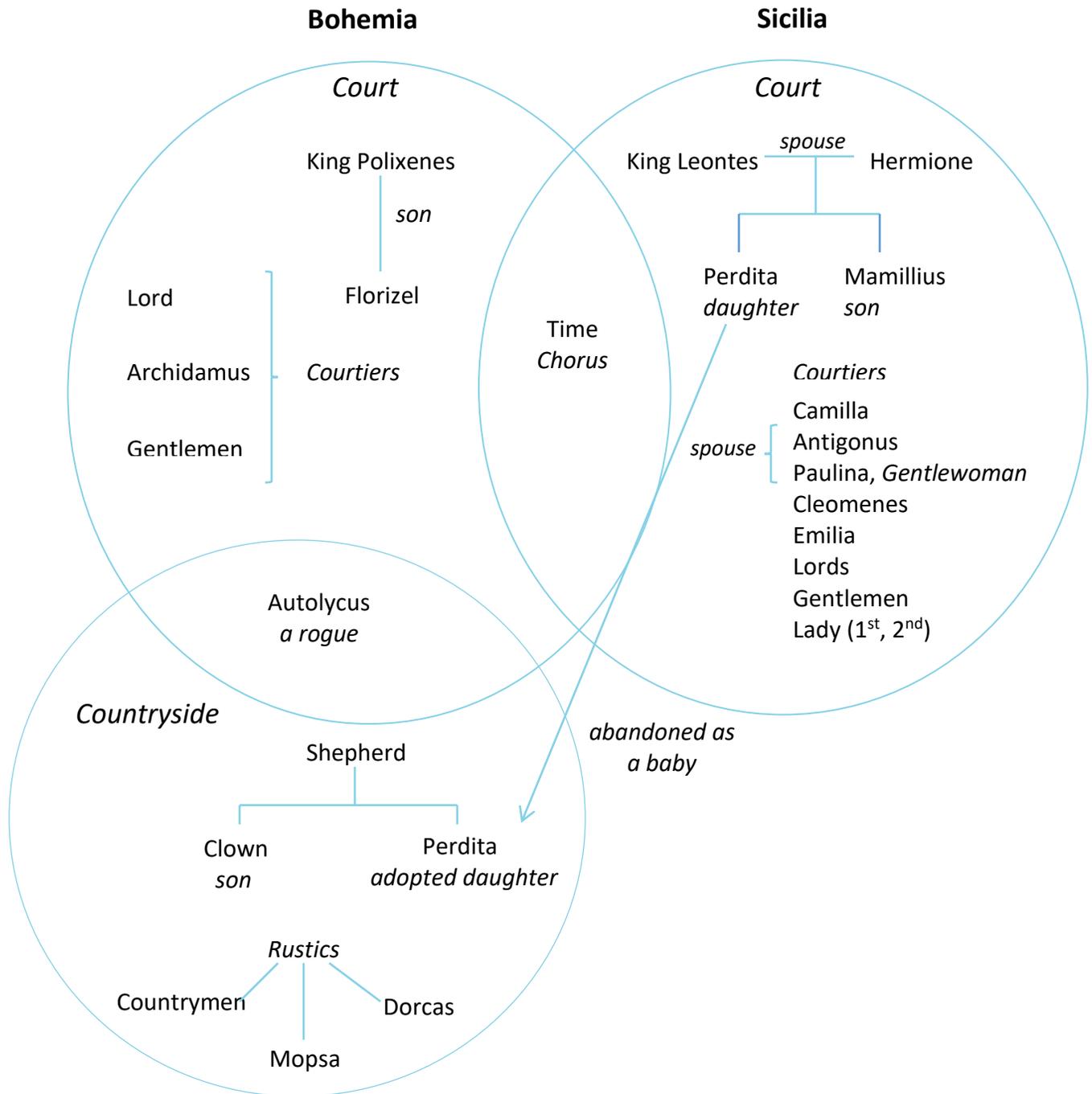
*William Shakespeare*  
*Credit: Getty Images*

**Education:** While it cannot be proven where Shakespeare would have gone to school, it is likely that he attended the King's New School in Stratford. This was a "grammar school" where students would become familiar with Latin grammar and literature, formal writing, Latin history, and Greek. There are also no records of Shakespeare attending a university. Although, it's clear that he was extremely well-read. Considering how little we know about his education, some scholars actually believe that Shakespeare is not the true author of these works, proving to be a much debated topic.

## ***Fun Facts:***

- Shakespeare has contributed 1700 to 3000 words to the English language.
- With no clear explanation, Shakespeare would sign his name "Willm Shapk."
- Those scholars that are unsure of the authorship have debated Queen Elizabeth, Christopher Marlowe, and Edward de Vere (earl of Oxford) to be among the possible authors.
- In his will, Shakespeare only left his wife the "second-best bed."
- Shakespeare's headstone includes a curse warning those that might move his bones.
- Phrases we say today that we owe to Shakespeare: "dead as a doornail", "love is blind", "fight fire with fire", "Knock, knock! Who's there?"

# A Character Map



# About the Costumes

Talking with *The Winter's Tale* costume designer, Tyler Wilson, was a fantastic way to gain insight into the production's artistic direction. According to Tyler, the inspiration for the color scheme in this production is the contrast between colors with regard to historical reference in Sicilia and Bohemia. Sicilia's reds and golds starkly contrast the blue, grey, and silver colors of Bohemia, as shown by the illustrations to the right. The Bohemian design and color schemes are based off of earlier European folk-art and folk-ware, while the Sicilian color scheme accentuates the insignias and emblems that were embellished on the court's clothing.



**Leontes, King of Sicilia**  
Credit: Tyler Wilson Designs

The two transitory characters in the play, Perdita and Camilla, have costumes that reflect their shifting roles. Perdita's transitions from abandoned infant, to shepherdess, to princess and Camilla's transition between kingdoms are reflected through their color scheme and costume design.

When asked about the direction that was taken for Perdita's costume and color scheme, Tyler was keen on accentuating Perdita as the "motivator" of the story. Perdita's pastoral dress derives, according to Tyler, from the Russian embellishments of her mother, Hermione, with some contrast. With green silhouettes,



**Polixenes, King of Bohemia**  
Credit: Tyler Wilson Designs

a column-like stature, and flowery garnishes, Tyler explained that Perdita's dress makes her the equivalent of a modern day Coachella queen. Tyler also stated that it was a struggle to balance



the “Full-Shakespearean” tendency of her dress and that by utilizing a “floral softness” this difficulty was mitigated.

Camilla’s costume inspiration was, as Tyler put it, a Sicilian Noblewoman “with a twist.” This “twist” is achieved by creating the inspiration of a 16<sup>th</sup> century noblewoman and progressively modernizing it. Camilla’s color scheme includes heavy blacks and champagne embroidery. Since the original text has her as a male (Camillo), Tyler wanted to introduce an androgynous flare to accentuate this shift of gender as well.



*Camilla, Sicilian Noblewoman*  
Credit: Tyler Wilson Designs

# Attending a Performance

When attending a theatrical performance, knowing proper theatre etiquette is extremely important! Knowing this etiquette not only saves you from possible embarrassment, but also allows you to be polite and courteous to other members of the audience allows you to enjoy the performance even more.

- ❖ It is usually recommended to arrive about 30 minutes before the performance begins in order to hear important announcements, be seated easily, and, most importantly, to avoid a tardy arrival!
- ❖ Listen to the opening announcements as they may contain important information such as fire exit locations.
- ❖ Cellphone should be silenced or turned off before the performance begins. Sound and even light can be distracting to the audience or actors.
- ❖ Remain in your seat for the entirety of the play (or until intermission) unless there is an emergency. This keeps from distracting the audience as well as actors on stage.
- ❖ Do not talk at all during the performance. Talking, whispering, or singing is rude to other audience members and distracting.
- ❖ In theatre, snacks and food are saved for the intermission and after the performance, but eating during the performance is frowned upon.
- ❖ Clapping is difficult to gauge. Clapping is usually reserved for the conclusion of an act or set, the end of a long speech or solo, and the end of the performance. When in doubt, follow the rest of the audience. Additionally, if the audience extends their clapping at the end of the performance, the actors will take a second or third bow.
- ❖ Most importantly, enjoy the performance! Laugh when you find the parts of the performance funny, show emotion, and stand up and applaud at the end if you thought the show was excellent!

# Going to a Renaissance Theatre

Society has changed quite a bit since Shakespeare's day! Anything from daily life to technology has changed and progressed so much since the days of Renaissance England. Nevertheless, it is important when watching a play, reading a book, or looking at a piece of art to consider the time period in which it was created. This allows us to gain insight as to the type of society in which the work was created and, consequently, allows us to understand the work even better. For example, a book written in 1586 England has drastic social and cultural differences to a book written in 1936 Latin America. Listed below are some of the experiences someone would encounter going to a Shakespearean play in Renaissance London!

- ❖ To start, getting into the playhouse would cost a penny, while going to the gallery, which meant getting a seat, cost another penny, which was paid to a *gatherer*, or usher.
- ❖ A patron would be there for about two hours; the average Elizabethan play was normally two hours. During the Jacobean period, plays were much shorter since King James I liked shorter plays.
- ❖ Vendors would sell refreshments while walking among the crowd of patrons.
- ❖ Copies of the play, called *quartos*, were sold outside of the playhouse
- ❖ When the play begins, the stage would be completely bare (except for The Globe, whose heavens were painted with stars, a sun, and moon). Sometimes larger props were used, but backdrops, curtains, or *sets* in the modern sense did not exist. The dialogue conveyed important information for the audience, such as time and setting. Playwrights relied on the imagination of the audience to "set the scene" and play along.
- ❖ Additionally, we do not know the characters on the stage. There was no pamphlet or handouts that displayed the characters. This information had to be deduced from the dialogue.

- ❖ The term “scene” usually referred to a change in location, not a change of dramatic action, time, or other modern changes used today.
- ❖ Since these plays were put on in broad daylight, verbal cues were used to denote day and night. The audience had to actively listen for the audible cues. Sometimes props were used, such as torches which would ironically denote nighttime. Indoor theatres had more control over the issues of light.
- ❖ Lavish and extraordinary costumes were essential (and expensive) to the theatre.
- ❖ Women did not act on the English stage until after the Restoration in 1660. Consequently, the female roles were played by boys (with the exception of some older female roles played by men).
- ❖ Clothing and props denoted key details about location or circumstance. Swords and shields were worn “outside.” Clothing was also telling, as gowns represented a late time of night or a surprised awakening and headwear denoted various social statuses.

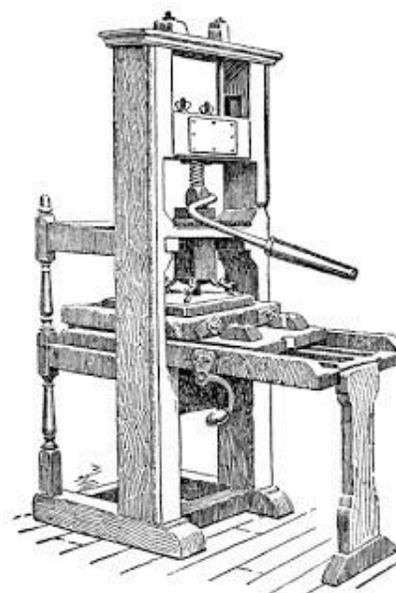
# From the Page to the Press

## *The Many Manuscripts*

The printer could choose from three different manuscripts to print: an original manuscript (frequently called the *author's foul papers*), a *fair copy*, and a *book of the play*. Although the foul papers probably aligned most closely with the author's vision for the play, it also was not as legible and would frequently contain marginal notes and deletions. Because of this, either a dramatist or a professional scribe wrote a *fair copy* for theatrical use. However, it would still contain errors. Therefore, a member of the theatre company would write a third manuscript, called the *book of the play*, by marking up the *fair copy*, paying particular attention to technical details.

## *Printing in the Renaissance*

After the printer has chosen which manuscript to print, it's time to head to the print shop. The printer would start with a handmade piece of paper 18 inches by 14 inches (depending on the text, page size would vary). The page would then be cut down and folded once, making two "leaves" (four pages total front and back). This would cut the size of the book down to about 7 inches by 9 inches—the average size of a large paperback. All of the folded sheets were gathered "in sixes" (6 sheets of paper, 12 pages front and back), sewn together, and bound. Interestingly, the pages were not printed in numerical order and depended on the size of the gathering. For example, pages 1 and 12 were printed on one side of a sheet and pages 2 and 11 on the reversed side. Before the pages were sent to the printing machine, the printer would need to estimate the amount of text per page, called the *casting off process*. After this process was complete, the compositors began setting the type. The metal type, containing each letter and punctuation, was placed into the frame that was then locked into the bed of the press. Then, the blank sheet was pressed onto the bed and imprinted, removed, and proofread. This work was a dirty job as well. For example, the pressmen had to soak the leather print balls overnight in human urine in order to remain supple. As a result, print shops were plagued with flies. While the printing process saved a considerable amount of time, there were still errors. Nonetheless, the invention of the printing press was an incredible feat, and has allowed us to read and perform Shakespeare today.



*A Renaissance printing press*  
Credit: Google Sites

# Activity: Critical Thinking

Below are a few discussion questions to keep you engaged throughout the play. Challenge yourself to use your critical thinking skills, and discuss your answers with your classmates (during the intermission, of course). Remember, there can be more than one right answer!

1. Everything is going well in Sicilia until Leontes abruptly accuses Hermione of infidelity. Then, the Sicilian court is thrown into chaos. Is there any explanation or justification for Leontes's jealous actions? What does this reveal about his true character?
2. What is the effect of having a two-part play structure: the first part a tragedy, the second part a comedy?
3. As explained in the background information (page 4), *The Winter's Tale* is a romance. Therefore, there is a strong presence of magical elements: the resurrection of Hermione, a killer bear, Time as a physical character, and the Oracle. What is the significance of having these magical elements? How would the play be different without them?
4. In the beginning of the second half the play, we are introduced to Bohemia's countryside. What differences do you find between Bohemia and Sicilia? Are there any similarities?
5. Autolycus is a sly, sneaky, and humorous character throughout the play. What purpose do you think he serves here? Why would Shakespeare include Autolycus when writing the play?
6. In the end, the lost Perdita returns home to Sicilia with her love, Florizel, Hermione is resurrected, and all is forgiven. However, the young Mamillius is still gone. Because of this, some hesitate to say *The Winter's Tale* has a "happy ending." What do you think? Is this a "happy ending" or has too much already been lost?
7. In your own opinion, what is one important message this play communicates? Why did this message stick out to you the most?

## Three Important Sources

Shakespeare's genius lies in his ability to take a story already told, twist and manipulate the plot, characters, and setting, and create a brilliantly, and beautifully rebuilt story. It is a misnomer that Shakespeare's plays are entirely his own creation. Listed below are brief plot summaries to three of the more important works that Shakespeare used to influence the creation of *The Winter's Tale*.

### ***Pandosto, Robert Greene***

Pandosto, the King of Bohemia, accuses his pregnant wife of being unfaithful with the king of Sicilia. After Pandosto's wife gives birth, he forces the baby to be abandoned. Meanwhile, Pandosto's jealous tyranny causes his wife and son to die. Then, the abandoned infant is found and raised by a Shepherd. When the infant grows up, she falls in love with the son of the King of Sicilia. In the end, Pandosto kills himself as a result of the immense grief he felt for the pain he caused his friends and family.

### ***Alcestis, Euripides***

Alcestis, wife of Admetus, sacrifices herself to save her husband from execution. Hercules goes to save Alcestis, where he wrestles with death and is able to snatch Alcestis from the hands of death back to life. Hercules then presents a veiled Alcestis to Admetus and he rejects this disguised woman in grief and remorse for his deceased wife. Hercules tells Admetus to believe that she truly is his wife, he takes the hand of Alcestis in disguise and, in the end, husband and wife are reunited.

### ***The Story of Pygmalion from Metamorphoses, Ovid***

Pygmalion, a sculptor, creates a statue of a woman out of ivory. The woman that he sculpts turns out to be so beautiful and so life-like that he falls in love with the statue. Consequently, he begs the gods to turn her into a human. The goddess Venus grants his wish and turns the statue into a woman, to which Pygmalion and the statue fall in love.

# Sheep-Shearing Festivals

Renaissance Sheep-Shearing Festivals were an important means for community in the rural and agriculturally-inclined areas of England. The Renaissance sheep-shearing festivals were typically held in the late-spring through the summer months, coinciding with the harvest time of the fall. These festivals promoted communal gathering, togetherness, and harmony among neighbors, or, as Shakespeare and his contemporaries called it, “Good Neighbourhood.”

These festivals had a multitude of activities: Communal eating, drinking, dancing, caroling, gift-giving, and crop blessing to name a few. These festivals were “quasi-religious”;

while being based off of religious sentiments, they were by no means as religious as other official holidays. Many of these festivals were socially active, as members of the aristocracy would sometimes attend these festivals. Concerning social activity, an interesting part of the sheep-shearing festivals was the reversal of the social hierarchy. During these festivals, lords would free their servants and men would free their women. Shaming of social deviants was also prevalent in these festivals. Peddlers, pedophiles, unruly women, and submissive husbands were all subject to forms of shaming, from being cross-dressed to riding backwards on a donkey!

In *The Winter’s Tale*, springtime is alluded to several times. Spring is recurring and “winter evergreens” never leave, which illustrates the natural and green sense of spring. There are also references to springtime through numbers. The 16-year gap in time compares the speedy change of nature to the slow progression of humanity, and the 12 dancing satyrs represents the



Credit: denmarkarts.org

12 months in a year and a possible allusion to the winter evergreens. Perdita's flowers that she gives to the patrons of the festival are additionally symbolic of spring or summer.

Communal eating was one of the most important events of the sheep-shearing festival. It promoted unity by bringing people together and allowed for close-quartered communication. Many types of meats were eaten at these festivals, such as lamb, venison, rabbit, and quail. Beer was the drink of choice over water as it was guaranteed to be safer. Aristocratic members and those of importance sat at the "head" of a "salt cellar," a large and ornate bowl of salt, while the lower class individuals sat farther down. Gentlemen also had to be extremely familiar with the methodology of cutting meat, from the proper way to cut to the proper terms to use when cutting.



*Credit: goreplace.org*

# Don't Stop Here!

*Check these out for more information after the play!*

## Readings:

- ❖ *The Bedford Companion to Shakespeare*, Russ McDonald
  - An excellent book on everything Shakespeare. This is a fantastic read for anyone interested in Shakespeare, from students to professors, wanting to increase their knowledge.
- ❖ *The Arden Shakespeare: The Winter's Tale*, Edited by John Pitcher
  - *The Arden Shakespeare* is the go-to source for a particular play (not just *The Winter's Tale*). It contains an excellent introduction, filled with a variety of interesting information, the actual play with plenty of valuable footnotes, and various information, such as music scores and source information.
- ❖ *The Norton Shakespeare*, Stephen Greenblatt
  - Stephen Greenblatt's wealth of Shakespearean knowledge fills the pages of *The Norton Shakespeare*. This anthology, while geared more towards academia, is filled with valuable and recent information about Shakespeare and his plays.

## Online:

- ❖ Arkansas Shakespeare Theatre Company  
<http://www.arkshakes.com>
- ❖ Royal Shakespeare Company  
<https://www.rsc.org.uk>
- ❖ Folger Shakespeare Library  
<https://www.folger.edu>

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Note: All photos are credited in caption

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