

**STUDY  
REVISE** **AND**  
for AS/A-level

# The Winter's Tale

by William Shakespeare

- ▶ Written by experienced teachers and examiners
- ▶ Learn how to respond critically to your text
- ▶ In-depth analysis of all aspects of the text

**Martin Old**

Series Editors:  
Nicola Onyett and Luke McBratney

 **HODDER**  
EDUCATION  
LEARN MORE

# Contents

|   |    |
|---|----|
| Using this guide.....                                 | iv |
| Introduction.....                                     | vi |
| 1 Synopsis.....                                       | 1  |
| 2 Scene summaries and commentaries.....               | 4  |
| 3 Themes.....   | 24 |
| 4 Characters.....                                     | 34 |
| 5 Writer's methods: form, structure and language..... | 42 |
| 6 Contexts.....                                       | 50 |
| 7 Working with the text.....                          | 69 |
| Assessment Objectives and skills.....                 | 69 |
| Building skills 1: Structuring your writing.....      | 70 |
| Building skills 2: Analysing texts in detail.....     | 82 |
| Extended commentaries.....                            | 86 |
| Top ten quotations.....                               | 89 |
| Taking it further.....                                | 94 |

# Using this guide



## Why read this guide?

The purposes of this A-level Literature Guide are to enable you to organise your thoughts and responses to the text, to deepen your understanding of key features and aspects, and to help you address the particular requirements of examination questions and non-examined assessment (coursework) tasks in order to obtain the best possible grade. It will also prove useful to those of you writing an NEA piece on the play as it provides a number of summaries, lists, analyses and references to help with the content and construction of your assignment.

Note that teachers and examiners are seeking above all else evidence of an *informed personal response to the text*. A guide such as this can help you to understand the text and form your own opinions, and it can suggest areas to think about – but it cannot replace your own ideas and responses as an informed and autonomous reader.

All line references/quotations used in this guide are taken from the Penguin edition of the play (2005), edited by Ernest Schanzer.

## How to make the most of this guide

You may find it useful to read sections of this guide when you need them, rather than reading it through from start to finish. For example, you may find it helpful to read the 'Contexts' section before you start reading the text, or to read the 'Scene summaries and commentaries' section in conjunction with the text – whether to back up your first reading of it at school or college or to help you revise. The section relating to the Assessment Objectives will be especially useful in the weeks leading up to the exam.



# Key elements

This guide is designed to help you raise your achievement in your examination response to *The Winter's Tale*. It is intended for you to use throughout your AS/A-level English literature course. It will help you when you are studying the play for the first time and also during your revision.

The following features have been used throughout this guide to help you focus your understanding of the play:

## Context

**Context** boxes give contextual evidence that relates directly to particular aspects of the text.

## Build critical skills

Broaden your thinking about the text by answering the questions in the **Build critical skills** boxes. These help you to consider your own opinions in order to develop your skills of criticism and analysis.

## CRITICAL VIEW

Critical view boxes highlight a particular critical viewpoint that is relevant to an aspect of the main text. This allows you to develop the higher-level skills needed to come up with your own interpretation of a text.

## TASK

Tasks are short and focused. They allow you to engage directly with a particular aspect of the text.

## Taking it further ►

**Taking it further** boxes suggest and provide further background or illuminating parallels to the text.

## Top ten quotation

A cross-reference to Top ten quotations (see pages 89–93 of this guide), where each quotation is accompanied by a commentary that shows why it is important.

Top ten quotation

# Scene summaries and commentaries



## Target your thinking

- How does Shakespeare develop his themes and characters as the drama progresses? (AO1)
- What dramatic impact does each scene have on an audience? You should keep a scene-by-scene diary to note the dramatic features that Shakespeare uses. (AO2)

## Act I scene 1

The play begins in the Sicilian Court in winter, during a visit by King Polixenes of Bohemia to his childhood friend King Leontes. Archidamus, a Bohemian dignitary, tells Camillo, a Sicilian lord, that when a reciprocal visit occurs next summer the Bohemians will not be able to equal the Sicilians' generosity. Camillo claims that Leontes' generosity is because of his 'great love' for Polixenes, which nothing can threaten. Archidamus heaps praise on Leontes' son, Mamillius, as the most promising young man he has ever met. Camillo agrees, claiming that he brings joy to the Sicilian people and that great things are expected of him when he comes of age.

**Commentary:** Like many of Shakespeare's play openings, this short but vital exchange begins in the middle of a conversation. It introduces the opposing Sicilian and Bohemian contexts of the play and establishes that the hospitality of the Sicilians has perhaps been excessive: it has certainly made Archidamus uneasy about the Bohemians' abilities to reciprocate. The audience learns that Leontes and Polixenes have been friends since childhood and that, perhaps, a part of Leontes' nature is extreme: if his entertainments are overzealous, we wonder whether other aspects of his nature also likely to be excessive. In terms of its imagery, much of the language of this opening scene describes estrangement: love is presented as between persons who 'shook hands, as over a vast; and embrac'd, / as it were, from the ends of opposed winds' (lines 21–22). Leontes and Polixenes are presented as living poles apart, both emotionally and physically.

## Act I scene 2

Polixenes announces that after nine months in Sicilia he must leave the next day. Leontes urges Polixenes to stay but he refuses, claiming that if any tongue in the world could persuade him to stay it would be Leontes'. After four failed attempts to change Polixenes' mind, Leontes prompts his heavily pregnant wife, Hermione, to persuade Polixenes. When Polixenes continues to resist, Hermione



▲ Tara Fitzgerald as Hermione, Jo Stone-Fewings as Leontes and Adam Levy as Polixenes; Royal Shakespeare Company, January 2013

cleverly manipulates him into staying, either as her 'guest' or as her 'prisoner'. Not wishing to cause offence, Polixenes agrees to stay one more week before reminiscing about his boyhood with Leontes. Polixenes recalls that as 'lads' they were as innocent as lambs. When teased about their subsequent loss of innocence as adults, Polixenes explains that neither he nor Leontes had yet met the women that they would eventually marry. Hermione then asks if their wives made them sinners or if they had sinned with others. Perhaps overhearing snippets of their conversation, or noticing its vivacity, Leontes asks 'Is he won yet?' (line 86) Hermione confirms that Polixenes will stay, to which Leontes responds with the ominous 'At my request he would not' (line 91). Leontes congratulates his wife on her persuasive powers, reminding her that only 'once' before has she spoken to better purpose and that was when she agreed to marry him. Hermione and Polixenes withdraw to another part of the stage and Leontes tortures himself over every small gesture they each make, seeing sexual impropriety everywhere. Leontes begins to examine Mamillius for signs of possible illegitimacy. Noticing the sudden change in Leontes' demeanour, Polixenes and Hermione enquire if he is well. Leontes lies, saying that while he was looking at Mamillius, he was transported back 23 years and reminded of his own 'lost' childhood.

### CRITICAL VIEW

Some directors, for instance Jane Howell in the 1981 BBC version, elect to make Leontes middle-aged when the play opens. Leontes says, however, that Mamillius reminds him of his 'unbreech'd' self of 23 years ago. J.H.P. Pafford (Arden Shakespeare edition, 1963) argues that Mamillius is about seven, although he could be as old as ten, which makes Leontes between 30 and 33. Shakespeare clearly intended Leontes to be a vigorous younger man, not a tired older specimen.



▲ This 1596 portrait of Lady Anne Pope and her children from her previous marriage to Henry, 3rd Lord Wentworth, shows two unbreached boys, Thomas and Henry (in red), and a girl, Jane, in ivory. The ceremony of 'breaching' in England could occur at any time after the age of three, but eight to ten years seems to have been the most popular age. Thomas (on the left) is sporting a small sword as a sidearm, similar to the 'muzzled' dagger Leontes speaks of (line 166). Another interesting link to *The Winter's Tale* in this painting by Marcus Gheeraerts the Younger is the fact that Lady Pope, like Hermione, is heavily pregnant.

### Context

British historian and Liberal politician Lord Acton (1834-1902) famously wrote in a letter of 1887 that 'Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Great men are almost always bad men.' Other writers were aware of the idea before Acton and many had said similar things, but since the late nineteenth century Acton's words have become popular with leftist thinkers of all shades.

Leontes asks Polixenes if he is fond of his son; Polixenes replies that his son means everything to him. Leontes concurs and says Mamillius means everything to him too; he then announces that he will walk with his son, encouraging Polixenes and Hermione to walk elsewhere. Hermione says they will walk to the garden, and they depart. Leontes admits he is 'angling' now, trying to catch his wife and friend in their adultery. Leontes sends Mamillius away and reveals his suspicions to the dumbfounded Camillo. Implacable and unable to listen to reason, Leontes orders Camillo to poison Polixenes. Camillo agrees that the task would be easily accomplished, especially since he is Polixenes' 'cupbearer'. He promises to poison Polixenes if Leontes promises to treat Hermione as if nothing sinister has happened – for the sake of Mamillius and for the purpose of maintaining Sicilia's international reputation with its allies. After Leontes agrees, Camillo urges him to join Polixenes and Hermione and outwardly to appear friendly towards them.

In soliloquy, Camillo reveals the impossibility of his dilemma: he must either disobey a king or murder one. When Polixenes enters, feeling confused about the change in Leontes' behaviour, Camillo cautiously admits that he has been ordered to murder Polixenes. Nothing, Camillo claims, can 'shake / The fabric of [Leontes'] folly' (lines 447–48), so the appalled Polixenes accepts Camillo's plan for the pair of them and the Bohemian entourage to secretly slip away in twos and threes, and he promises Camillo asylum and to treat him as a father in return for his courage. Polixenes praises the rare qualities of the gracious Hermione and expresses his fear that Leontes' unfounded suspicion of Polixenes will result in bitterness and violence.

**Commentary:** This scene propels the play from apparent harmony and goodwill to broken friendships, madness and danger. Perhaps the first psychological rupture in the play is Camillo's: in the previous scene he was praising Leontes' unbreakable bond to Polixenes and here he is now tasked with his assassination. Some critics find Leontes' sudden descent into jealous madness psychologically unbelievable, and all students of the play – as well as all actors who play Leontes – will need to reach a decision about this element of the play. Shakespeare, however, does give us a hint that after 'nine changes of the watery star' (line 1) Polixenes wants to leave, and that consciously or subconsciously Leontes links his friend's sudden departure to his wife's pregnancy. Furthermore, the conversation between Hermione and Polixenes is, in many ways, somewhat strange: she seems keen to learn about Leontes' boyhood behaviour but is also keen to find out about the onset of Leontes' sexual life. This duologue sets up an uneasy theatrical dynamic: the audience is invited to question the appropriateness of the conversation; also it shows that Hermione is unaware of important parts of her husband's past, indicating his reluctance to speak about sex. We also see the gulf between the innocence of childhood and the knowingness of adulthood. Dramatically the exchange is vital: how much of it has Leontes' overheard – none of it? Some of it? He clearly has not heard the whole exchange or he would not need to ask 'Is he won yet?'

(A detailed analysis of Leontes' language and behaviour between lines 101 and 206 of this scene is given in the 'Analysing texts in detail' section, pp. 82–85.)

In his illness Leontes orders an assassination, believes the worst of his innocent wife and puts his most trusted councillor in an impossible situation. Mamillius too is caught in the epidemic. Camillo and Polixenes are here shown as sensible and realistic, but helpless. Though they both acknowledge that Leontes is 'diseased', they have to flee before they themselves are infected.

### Context

In Shakespeare's time, madness was frequently linked to the loss of reason and here Leontes, seriously unhinged by jealousy, cannot brook Camillo's appeals to reason. Hamlet feigns insanity, which leads his uncle King Claudius to comment that 'Madness in great ones must not unwatch'd go' (*Hamlet*, III.1.90). Madness in people at the top of the social hierarchy has the potential to be catastrophically dangerous for everyone.

### TASK

Why do you think Shakespeare shows that Polixenes is aware of the danger Hermione is in but does nothing either to warn or to rescue her? Think carefully about plot as well as about themes and characterisation.

## Act II scene 1

Mamillius entertains Hermione and her ladies with his precocious wit. The birth of Hermione's baby is imminent. Hermione asks Mamillius to tell her a tale; he decides that '**A sad tale's best for winter**' (II.1.25). He whispers the story to her so that the ladies cannot overhear.

Leontes interprets the news of Camillo's and Polixenes' departure as proof of their guilt. He believes that, as well as his wife's infidelity, a plot had been hatched by Polixenes, Hermione and Camillo to steal his crown. Leontes demands that Hermione hand over Mamillius, and orders that the boy be kept from his mother, cruelly adding that Hermione can amuse herself with the child she is now carrying by Polixenes. Hermione protests her innocence but Leontes replies that she may be 'goodly' to look at but she is not 'honest'. Hermione denies the accusations and predicts that Leontes will grieve when he finally knows the truth. Leontes orders her to prison and says that anyone who speaks on her behalf will be judged as guilty as she is. Hermione comments that 'some ill planet reigns' (line 110) and stoically decides to be patient until the disorder is corrected.

As soon as Hermione departs, Antigonus prophesies that Hermione, Leontes and Mamillius will all suffer for this act. One lord wagers his life that the queen is innocent. Leontes is amazed that his lords do not trust his assertion. One of the lords says that he would prefer to disbelieve his king than to accept this judgement; furthermore, he would prefer to believe in Hermione's honour than in Leontes' suspicions. The furious Leontes decides he will have to rely on his own 'natural goodness' for counsel. Next he informs the lords that he has sent Cleomenes and Dion to the Oracle at Apollo's temple in Delphos to put his evidence to the test, and he promises to abide by its verdict.

Top ten quotation

Top ten quotation

**Commentary:** Like Act I, Act II opens in a harmonious domestic environment that Leontes will soon destroy. The title of the play comes via Mamillius' words '**a sad tale's best for winter**' (II.1.25) and thus Shakespeare presents the play's key question: is the play *at heart* sad, merry or something altogether different?

Context

Plutarch (CE46-120), a Greek historian, essayist and biographer, served as a High Priest at the Temple to Apollo at Delphi. His best known work is *Parallel Lives*, a series of biographies of Greeks and Romans arranged in pairs to compare and contrast their relative moral strengths and weaknesses. Shakespeare was familiar with Thomas North's translation, *Plutarch's Lives*, which was published three times - with new lives added each time - in 1579, 1595 and 1603.

CRITICAL VIEW

In Kenneth Branagh's introductory film to his and Rob Ashford's 2015-16 version of the play at the Garrick Theatre in London, Branagh - who also performed the role of Leontes - said that his vision of the play was of a journey from 'Mediterranean Winter to Bohemian Spring' and that, taken as a whole, the play was a 'tragic fairy tale'.

We never do hear Mamillius' sad winter's tale and in that we can see a metaphor for the silent mystery that lies at the heart of life. In Leontes' behaviour, not only are we watching the 'madness of a great one' but we may also be reminded of Richard III's phrase, 'the winter of [our] discontent'. Leontes' actions now create an ongoing winter in Sicilia: his suspicions will create death without any immediate hope of spring's rebirth and regeneration. Leontes' destruction of his family mirrors the destruction of his friendship with Polixenes in the previous act. In a way that would remind the original audience of the debate about the Divine Right of Kings, Leontes reminds his advisors that in his new winterscape, absolute power takes precedence over what is morally right. He is now a tyrant. The advisors defend Hermione's innocence and Antigonus even tells us in an aside that Leontes' actions will cause ridicule and 'laughter'.

Context

Leontes' behaviour has some similarities to that of Henry VIII, who divorced Katherine of Aragon in 1533 to marry Anne Boleyn. Henry had his daughter Mary, born legitimately to Katherine, declared a 'bastard'. Later Henry also made Elizabeth, his daughter to Anne Boleyn, illegitimate in order to accommodate the succession of Edward, his son with his third wife, Jane Seymour. Though well beyond living memory of the original audience of *The Winter's Tale*, the events of Henry's reign were well known.

While the play began in the enclosed environment of the Royal Court, Shakespeare begins to use settings that are consistently reducing in size: Hermione is moved to confinement in prison, Mamillius is confined to his quarters, and Leontes places himself in an extremely lonely psychological space. A good production will show Leontes' growing isolation as he stands apart from his advisors or stands under an isolating spotlight washed in cold colours. It is important that the audience feels a growing sense of claustrophobia as the first part of the diptych develops. Some audiences may wonder about Hermione's stoic purity and goodness: is she

too good to be true? The play works on the level of myth; as Leontes increasingly becomes an ogre, Hermione must begin to represent a mythical character such as the Good Fairy, under attack from the forces of darkness, or the innocent and pure damsel imprisoned in a remote tower.

## Act II scene 2

Paulina asks to visit Hermione but the gaoler has no authority to allow this. He agrees to bring Emilia, one of Hermione's attendants, to Paulina, and Emilia reports that Hermione has given birth to a premature baby girl. Paulina decides to take the baby to Leontes in the hope that he might soften at the sight of the child. Paulina convinces the gaoler that the baby entered the prison as an 'innocent' in her mother's womb and therefore needs no warrant to be able to leave. This argument sways the gaoler and Paulina pledges to stand between him and any 'danger'.

**Commentary:** In most productions the audience can see Paulina's power before we actually hear from her, as the entourage Shakespeare gives her inspires a degree of awe as it sweeps on to the stage. In contrast to Hermione's gentle, obedient reaction to Leontes' tyranny, the audience sees Paulina's fearlessness: we are in no doubt that she plans to confront Leontes personally. This is the first of several episodes where Paulina defends Hermione and speaks up for her when the queen cannot speak up for herself.

## Act II scene 3

This scene breaks down into four dramatic movements. The first movement presents Leontes as suffering from sleep deprivation and fantasising about taking revenge on Polixenes and Camillo, who he imagines are laughing at him. He thinks that by 'burning' Hermione he will find a modicum of relief. When a servant reports that Mamillius may be recovering from his illness, Leontes says that the boy's ill health is caused by shame about his mother's dishonour.

The second movement begins when Paulina enters with the baby. When warned that the king should not be approached, Paulina argues that she will cure Leontes and bring him 'sleep'. Leontes explodes in anger at Antigonus for not being able to 'rule' his wife. Paulina pronounces herself a 'physician' and a 'counsellor', praising Leontes' 'good queen' before presenting him with his baby. Leontes calls her a witch and a traitor and orders that both she and 'the bastard' be pushed out of his presence. After ordering that both the baby and Hermione be thrown into a fire, Leontes calls for Antigonus to be hanged because he cannot control his wife's speech, then threatens to burn Paulina, who replies: **'I care not; / It is an heretic that makes the fire / Not she which burns in't'** (lines 114–20). Brushing off the courtiers who try to bundle her out of the room, Paulina exits under her own volition, leaving the baby girl at her father's feet.

The third movement begins when Leontes accuses Antigonus of encouraging Paulina to berate him. He orders Antigonus to burn the baby within the hour, or he and all his family will die. Should Antigonus refuse to obey, Leontes promises that he, himself, will 'dash out' the 'bastard brains' of the baby. All present swear

Top ten quotation

that Antigonus did not send Paulina to confront Leontes, but the king declares them all liars. Sensing a crisis, the lords beg Leontes to repay their past loyalty by refusing to carry through his terrible plan. Leontes relents a little and changes his command to Antigonus, ordering him to abandon the baby in a remote place and leave it to Fate. Antigonus reluctantly agrees to obey and leaves the stage.

The fourth movement begins when a messenger announces the return of Cleomenes and Dion. Leontes takes this as a sign that the Oracle's message will support his accusations and confidently orders the lords to prepare a 'just and open trial' for Hermione.

**Commentary:** Despite Leontes' evident mental torture – illustrated in his violent threats to 'burn', 'hang' and 'dash out' the brains of his imagined enemies – he is presented not as an uncompromising one-dimensional psychopath, but as 'a feather for every wind that blows' (line 160). Paulina, the baby and Hermione are spared from immediate destruction, but Antigonus is given what will in effect become a death sentence.

Dramatic conflict never abates here. Leontes, beyond reason and not yet ready for healing, finds Paulina's presence unbearable. Paulina does prove, however, that her bravery may at least curb the king's tyranny, for he cannot exercise his cruel orders until she is removed from the scene, by which time the lords' appeal enables a compromise to be reached. This part of the scene gives huge scope for a good actor: is Leontes incredulous? Does he rage silently or is he caught in a conflict between the man he was – full of natural fatherly devotion – and the stubborn maniac he has now become? The sanity exhibited by Paulina and Antigonus in this their last night together on earth is an example of civilised and rational humanity. Their behaviour goes some way to keep up the audience's spirits in the hope that Leontes will indeed be cured of his diseased opinion when we hear the Oracle's judgement.

### Act III scene 1

Cleomenes and Dion report on the religious atmosphere of Delphos. Cleomenes remembers vividly the 'ear-deafening voice o' th' oracle' (line 10); Dion says that he hopes the trip will prove as successful for the queen as it has for them. Both agents are hopeful that Apollo's divination will prove Hermione's innocence.

**Commentary:** The divine perception of Hermione's innocence in this brief scene builds audience anticipation for the trial scene to follow. Shakespeare intensifies the scene with language indicative of hope and heavenly justice: 'delicate', 'sweet', 'fertile', 'celestial', 'reverence', 'ceremonious' and 'successful' are all words designed to convey optimism for Hermione's trials ahead.

Structurally the scene functions in the same way as Act I scene 1: two courtiers are overheard in mid-conversation. Like the opening scene, these events will not deliver the hope and faith wished for by the characters we overhear: hopes will be dashed.

## Act III scene 2

It is convenient to break this scene down into three dramatic movements. In the first movement, Leontes orders Hermione to be brought into open court and the charges against her of high treason, adultery and conspiracy to murder the king are read out.

The second movement shows that Hermione can do little but deny the charges. She acknowledges that a plea of 'not guilty' will serve little purpose since her insistence that she is innocent has already been taken as a 'falsehood'. She believes that 'powers divine' will establish the truth and calls upon Leontes to remember her previous years of devotion and fidelity. Hermione is adamant that she loves Polixenes only in a way suitable to their rank and honour, as Leontes himself had 'commanded'. Furthermore, she declares that she has no knowledge of any conspiracy, adding that Camillo was an honest man and she has no idea why he departed. The horror of Hermione's predicament is brilliantly captured in the lines '**Sir / You speak a language that I understand not. / My life lies in the level of your dreams**' (lines 78–80). When Hermione appeals 'Apollo be my judge!' (line 115), the audience senses that we are reaching the climax of the tragic phase of the play. After following due rites and ceremony – thus building up even more tension – the verdict of the Oracle is read: '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' (lines 131–33). Joyful relief is shared by the onlookers but Leontes overrules the Oracle, declaring that the trial will continue.

A servant bursts in to announce, nervously, that Mamillius has just died. Hermione collapses and Paulina examines her, pronouncing that the news is 'mortal'. Leontes, now penitent and remorseful, orders that Hermione receive tender care until she recovers and confesses that he has 'too much believed mine own suspicion' (line 149). He begs Apollo to forgive his profanity and, in a burst of clarity at odds with his earlier ravings, promises to make amends to Polixenes, to 'new woo' Hermione and to restore Camillo to office.

The third movement of the scene is the most dramatic. Paulina furiously announces Hermione's death, boldly challenging anyone present to 'go and see' the body. She confronts the 'tyrant' king and catalogues his crimes, betrayals and jealousies. Repentance is futile; he must look forward to 'nothing but despair'. Leontes urges Paulina to continue berating him, believing that he deserves every word of her caustic criticism. Already a shadow of his former self, he asks Paulina to lead him to the bodies of Hermione and Mamillius, ordering one grave to be made for both bodies and the causes of their deaths to be inscribed upon it, to his 'shame perpetual'. He vows to visit the 'chapel' where they lie every day until his own death.

**Commentary:** This dynamic and dramatic scene is often viewed as the conclusion to the tragic first half of *The Winter's Tale* – but further deaths



Top ten quotation

### TASK

How far do you agree with the view that had Shakespeare written no more of the play, the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale* would be a brilliant example of Classical tragedy?

await us and we do not yet know the fates of Antigonus and the baby. It can be helpful, however, to regard the scene as the end of the first, Sicilian phase of the play.

Shakespeare leads us from being appalled at Leontes' jealousy to sympathising with him as realisation dawns of the carnage his wild fantasies have caused. Paulina is central to the action as she stage manages the announcement of Hermione's death. Shakespeare shows a sinful, flawed man being led to salvation by a priest-like, powerful woman in a bold, experimental move that subverts the theatrical and socio-political norms of the time.

Leontes at first maintains an air of judicial, fanatical arrogance: his claim that those shameless enough to commit serious crimes in the first place are always shameless enough to deny them afterwards is, perhaps, hollow but it reveals his mind-set that his wife is guilty and therefore beyond saving. He uses the regal personal pronouns 'our', 'us' and 'we' seven times in the first five lines. When Hermione brilliantly illustrates the gap between her husband's 'dreams' and her 'life', the audience recognises the impossibility of her situation, caught in someone else's psychosis. As in Acts I and II, Leontes responds to Hermione's gentleness with crude and savage outbursts: 'You had a bastard . . . thy brat hath been cast out' (lines 82–86). Some critics believe that this is the first time Hermione has learned of the fate of her baby daughter and that this shocking information makes her death-like faint utterly credible. Hermione, however, probably already knows of her daughter's exile as Paulina has accompanied her from gaol and would have surely told her. Prior knowledge of her baby's fate perhaps makes Hermione's bravura performance during the trial all the more remarkable: her evocative and moving account of her suffering before she has recovered from childbirth ('Myself on every post / Proclaimed a strumpet', lines 100–01) creates pity in everyone except Leontes.

As quickly as he fell into the winter of his mania, Leontes is peremptorily shocked into clear-sighted penitence at the news of Mamillius' death. Thanks to Paulina's flurry of well-aimed invective, Shakespeare manages to shift the audience's sympathies towards Leontes as the scene nears its end.

As Leontes humbly asks Paulina to lead him to the 'sorrows' he has caused, first-time audiences of *The Winter's Tale* will surely believe that not only Mamillius but also Hermione has died as a result of the king's jealousy.

### Act III scene 3

Antigonus, carrying the baby, lands in 'the deserts of Bohemia' as a terrible storm is brewing. The mariner who accompanies Antigonus urges him to stay close to the shore to avoid the wild beasts. Antigonus recounts a dream he had the night before, in which Hermione's spirit appeared to him and requested that Antigonus name the baby Perdita. Because of the 'ungentle' duty that Antigonus has been given, Hermione's spirit revealed that he would never see his wife Paulina again. Antigonus interprets the vision as proof of Apollo's judgement: that the queen was guilty of infidelity and that therefore, since she is Polixenes' daughter, the

baby should be left in Bohemia. He blesses Perdita and sets her down with a box and documents testifying to her identity, but as he makes his way back to the ship he is attacked and pursued by a bear as the storm rages around him.

The mood changes with the entry of an old shepherd, grumbling comically about the trouble caused in the world by boys aged between ten and twenty-three. He spots Perdita, acknowledges she is a 'very pretty' child and takes her up 'for pity', assuming she was born due to a 'backstairs' escapade. Shepherd is joined by his son Clown who, visibly upset, tells him of two terrible sights he has just witnessed: the shipwreck and drowning of all the sailors, and Antigonus being eaten by the bear. Shepherd shows Clown the child: **'Now bless thyself: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born'** (lines 95–96). As they attend to Perdita, they notice the box beside her and see that it contains gold. Knowing that the gold will change their lives, Shepherd decides to go home as soon as possible, ignoring his missing sheep, and Clown volunteers to give Antigonus a decent burial. Declaring this to be a 'lucky day' Shepherd and Clown determine to keep the matter secret and to 'do good deeds on't' (line 111).

**Commentary:** In this scene Shakespeare manages the difficult transition of the play from tragedy to comedy. The sailors' drownings and Antigonus' mauling mark the final deaths in the play and so conclude the tragic phase of *The Winter's Tale*. Shepherd's observation **'Thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-born'** (lines 95–96) is the transitional moment. This is an ambitious scene with many practical obstacles to overcome: Shakespeare includes a tempest, a baby (real or a doll, depending on the director's tastes), tales of ghosts and a stage direction that calls for a hungry bear to pursue a character off stage but leave the tasty morsel of the defenceless infant alone! The scene begins in bleak misery and ends in a mood of restorative hope; Shakespeare uses Antigonus and Shepherd to present these opposite forces. The scene is a diptych in miniature and the appearance of the bear acts as an unconventional and unexpected hinge.

The scene is vital for the advancement of the plot: Antigonus and the crew must die so that Perdita's whereabouts can remain unknown in Sicilia. Shepherd and Clown must represent different values to Leontes'; we are to leave behind the cold Sicilian winter and its claustrophobic interiors, but we are not yet in spring or summer. The transition has begun, however, and it is represented by the replacement of Leontes' unnatural rejection of the baby with Shepherd's desire to 'nurse' and love her, as Antigonus had hoped.

The elements of fairy story that featured so prominently in the first half of the play are maintained by Shakespeare here in the references to Perdita being a 'changeling' and to the treasure being 'fairy gold'. The fantastical tone of the play is further maintained by the references to Hermione as a 'spirit o' th' dead' and to the notion of Bohemia (then a sovereign state and now part of the Czech Republic), an entirely land-locked nation, having a coastline.

Top ten quotation

Top ten quotation

### Build critical skills

Michael D. Bristol in an article in *Shakespeare Quarterly* (1991) reveals that in Shakespeare's day a winter's tale was told of a bear that emerged from her cave after Candlemas 'to devour the souls of evil men'. Is it possible that Shakespeare, by having the bear devour Antigonus, wishes the audience to view him as a villain in the play?