



Rewarding Learning

eGUIDE//English Literature

Shakespearean Genres

Unit A2 1

The Winter's Tale

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Starting Point

In this unit there are 5 Assessment Objectives involved – A01, A02, A03, A04 and A05.

A01: Textual knowledge and understanding, and communication

In this examination, the candidate should be able to articulate informed and relevant responses that communicate effectively knowledge and understanding of the selected play.

This Assessment Objective (AO) involves the student's knowledge and understanding of the play, and ability to express relevant ideas accurately and coherently, using appropriate terminology and concepts. Quality of written communication is taken into consideration in all units.

A02: Dramatic methods

In this examination, the candidate should analyse Shakespeare's use of such dramatic methods as characterisation, structure, language and staging.

The student should analyse relevantly the ways in which meanings are shaped in plays. This means identifying dramatic features and showing how these features relate to the key terms of the question.

Discussing dramatic methods – advice to teachers and students:

In this component, equal marks are available for the candidate's treatment of the extract and other relevant parts of the text. As the unit is closed book, examiners will be realistic about the amount of detail from the wider text which can be provided in the time available. Every play has its memorable phrases which come to mind when writing, but it is anticipated that the larger-scale features of form, structure, language and staging will be helpful in constructing a relevant response. The student will, however, be expected to respond in a more detailed fashion to the use of language and dramatic methods within the given extract. A reminder of the process of identification (of methods), illustration, analysis, and relation to the question may be timely.

A03: Contexts

In this examination, the candidate should demonstrate understanding of the significance and influence of the contexts in which a play is written and received by drawing on appropriate information from outside the play.

Each question will specify a particular type of context in the stimulus statement/directive. In this unit the stipulated context will be literary and will focus on the nature of a particular Shakespearean genre. Contextual information offered should be of this stipulated type. It should be relevant to the question. And it should be external to the play itself.



Contextual information which is made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded. Students should be aware that little credit can be given for contextual information that is introduced merely for its own sake. They should remember that the text has primacy over the context. A good response will use contextual information sparingly and judiciously.

A04: Connections

In this examination, the candidate should explore connections within a Shakespeare play, and between the extract accompanying the question and the wider text.

The student should explore similarities and differences between characters, plot lines, themes, staging, and other dramatic techniques within the play and its wider context. Significant, pointed connections which are made relevant to the key terms of the question will be rewarded.

A05: Argument and interpretation

In this examination, the candidate should offer opinion or judgment in response to the given reading of the play, taking account of the key terms as the basis of the argument.

This AO is the driver of Unit A2 1 and is of primary importance.

A05 can be satisfied in full by the candidate developing his/her own reading in response to the given reading. If, however, critics are used, they must be:

- used with understanding;
- incorporated into the argument to reinforce or be seen as an alternative to the student's opinion;
- not used as a substitute for the development of the student's own opinion; and
- properly acknowledged.

Coherence and relevance of argument will be rewarded. Students should be aware of the importance of planning in the sequencing and illustration of the reading they wish to put forward. They should also beware of the danger of replacing the key terms of the question with others of their own choosing which they assume mean much the same thing.

The following information is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive, but is intended as a starting point for teachers and students. It reflects some of the stylistic and contextual issues which may be explored and developed further both in the classroom and through teachers' and students' own independent research.



Introduction

The nature of *The Winter's Tale* has long caused debate among scholars of Shakespeare's work. It has been variously referred to as a 'tragicomedy', a 'romance' or 'dramatic romance', a 'pastoral', a 'repentance play', even a 'comedy of forgiveness'. Its genre is so undecided that it is best known simply as one of Shakespeare's 'last' plays. Its 'statue' scene is its best known feature, yet many critics have condemned this as a poor effort; there is even some evidence to suggest it was not included in the play in Shakespeare's lifetime and was not written by him. *The Winter's Tale* defies straightforward interpretation, but far from being a difficulty, the play offers rich and numerous prospects for students to analyse alternative readings and show critical thinking and in-depth knowledge.



A01: Plot, Characters, Themes

Plot

Seized by sudden and groundless jealousy, King Leontes of Sicily suspects his wife, Hermione, of an affair with his childhood friend, King Polixenes of Bohemia, who has been visiting the Sicilian court. Leontes instructs his courtier Camillo to kill Polixenes, but instead Camillo warns him of the danger and they both flee to Bohemia. Meanwhile the heavily pregnant Hermione is imprisoned to await trial and gives birth to a baby girl. Refusing to listen to reason, Leontes demands that the baby, whom he believes to be Polixenes' child and not his, be abandoned on the shores of Bohemia. His courtier Antigonus takes the baby and sets sail. Word arrives from the Oracle that Hermione and Polixenes are both innocent and that Leontes will have no heir until the child is returned. A messenger immediately arrives to announce the death of Leontes' son and heir Mamillius and he realises his terrible mistake, but not before Hermione faints with shock and is declared to have died. With his family destroyed, Leontes grieves in the company of Paulina, the outspoken wife of Antigonus, whose reprimands he accepts as part of his penance.

The ship is wrecked by a storm. Antigonus, who had reached shore, is killed by a bear shortly after abandoning the baby, Perdita, but she is discovered by a shepherd and his son and raised in their family. Sixteen years pass. Now Perdita is in love with Prince Florizel, the son of Polixenes, and he with her, but his father is outraged by the idea of Florizel marrying a 'commoner' and angrily confronts them during a festival held in the rural community, demanding that they never see each other again. With the help of Camillo, they flee to Sicily, closely followed by Perdita's adoptive father and brother, the rogue balladeer and thief Autolycus, and Polixenes. Received by Leontes, all are reunited and the tale unfolds, revealing Perdita's true identity and persuading Polixenes to allow her marriage to his son. Paulina asks them all to observe a statue in her gallery, which 'comes to life' – it is Hermione, sequestered from her husband over the sixteen-year gap and keen to be reunited with her lost child. Leontes is forgiven and order restored to the kingdom.

Characters

As with many other Shakespeare plays, the majority of the characters are based on recognisable archetypes – the wronged woman, the tragic hero, the clown – and function as symbols in the action of the play. However, they also have individualising features that raise them from being flat and purely functional – most are a mixture of realistic/human attributes and symbolic significance.



Character	Attributes
Leontes	The King of Sicily, who in his childhood shared a bond of friendship with Polixenes that was close to brotherhood. He initially appears well-loved and generous of spirit, but his jealousy over his wife Hermione, coupled with his paranoia, self-obsession and misuse of his powers as King, leads to the tragic break-up of his family. His jealousy is apparently groundless and he is prone to making decisions based on supposition and fantasy rather than reason or evidence. When roused he is vengeful, cruel and tyrannical. He makes several references to his heart, suggesting genuine feelings of hurt rather than outright malice or overwrought pride as his primary motive, but he stubbornly refuses to listen to reason and his arrogance causes much pain. He particularly mistrusts women, leading some critics to conclude he is a misogynist.
Hermione	The Queen of Sicily, shown (however briefly) to be a good wife to Leontes and a good mother to Mamillius and Perdita. She is beautiful, virtuous and gracious; her eloquence and playful manner in dealing with Polixenes show her to be an attractive character, but these characteristics also arouse her husband's suspicions. Once accused Hermione shows dignity and self-possession; nevertheless, as a woman, she is at the mercy of her husband and can do little to convince him of her innocence, and while she is initially confident that Leontes will come to his senses, we see her almost literally undone by being separated from her children (one lost to banishment, the other to death). It is unlikely that her sixteen-year absence under the pretence of death was her own idea initially, but she certainly goes along with it, perhaps suggesting a belief on her part that Leontes deserves to be punished in some way and that she needs time to grieve and genuinely forgive.
Polixenes	The King of Bohemia and lifelong friend of Leontes, who knows his friend well enough both to be shocked by his suspicion of Polixenes' adultery and to know or at least believe there will be no point attempting to reason with him. In early scenes Polixenes is courteous, openly affectionate and displays good manners and sensitivity. Later, his wrath seems almost as cruel as that of Leontes when he realises his son intends to marry Perdita, whose perceived status is low. He takes his royal pride and honour seriously and behaves less than nobly when it is threatened (which it is by Florizel's attempt to 'marry beneath' his elevated social status as royalty).
Paulina	Outspoken and courageous, Paulina is a strong female figure. She variously acts as a defender of Hermione, a rebuker of Leontes and also as a kind of 'director' – she is almost certainly the instigator of Hermione's seclusion and the main architect of the statue scene. She has been seen as both an allegorically Christian figure (some critics point to her name, aligning her with St Paul, and point out parallels between his teachings of salvation through penance and her sometimes stern but ultimately supportive overseeing of Leontes' grieving process) and a kind of magician or even a witch. Criticisms of the latter are definitely levelled at her, partly because of her resistance to silently accepting her place in a patriarchal society, and she displays some characteristics of an archetypal 'scold', but she forms the strongest moral voice in the play and is arguably the main human agent of Leontes' expiation and the play's apparently happy ending.



Character	Attributes
Perdita	Functioning within the play as a symbol of hope and creation, Perdita is nonetheless also an unmistakably human and attractive character. She is shown to share many of her mother's positive personality traits – she has 'grown in grace' and displays honour, affection, purity and courage – as well as her beauty, emphasising the role nature plays in forming her. Her humble upbringing cannot change or hide her noble personality; at the time it was believed true royalty was born, not made or taught, and Perdita is an example of this. Her name comes from the Latin 'perditus', meaning 'lost', and she is also identified with Proserpine/Persephone, the Roman/Greek goddess who returned each year from the Underworld to banish winter and bring spring to the earth. Her feelings on 'natural' flowers as expressed in her debate with Polixenes further align her with the positive and beautiful aspects of nature, as well as showing her inherent integrity.
Florizel	The only son of Polixenes and heir to the throne of Bohemia, Florizel is a fine and upstanding young man who provides a suitable match for Perdita – noble, honourable, courageous, honest when it matters, faithful and loving. He is willing to sacrifice his birthright to be with Perdita and, like her, he symbolises positive hope for the future.
Antigonus	A loyal servant to Leontes, it is he who takes charge of abandoning Perdita in Bohemia, believing it is at least preferable to seeing her burnt alive. His compliance with his master's orders is the key issue raised by his role in the play. He shows both faith and reason, but neither is enough to save him from the figure of the bear – an example of nature at its cruellest, disregarding courtly values.
Camillo	Camillo is a loyal servant in some respects but cannot compromise his own ideals. He refuses to obey Leontes by killing Polixenes, instead deceiving his master and fleeing to Bohemia, yet Hermione insists he is 'honest' and the Oracle's message confirms his innocence. He does the right thing in each difficult circumstance, and works as an enabler of action and agent for good within the world of the play.
Shepherd	The old shepherd is kind of heart, taking in the abandoned baby Perdita, and while he sometimes expresses somewhat world-weary views (usually aimed at the younger characters), he nonetheless behaves with dignity and humility even when his fortunes are hugely elevated by the revelation of his stepdaughter's origins.
Clown	The shepherd's son is a caricature of a simple country peasant, referred to only by the name identifying his archetype, and provides a kind of foil to Autolycus; he is a figure for the audience's entertainment, but we laugh at him rather than with him on account of his witlessness. His description of the bear killing Antigonus is darkly humorous and helps shift the tone of the play from tragic to comic.
Autolycus	In Greek his name suggests 'The Wolf Himself' or lone wolf; his mythological namesake was known as the wily and cunning grandfather of Odysseus. He is a rogue and a knave, yet also the most socially responsible, subverting not power itself but the erroneous misuse of it by providing the key to Perdita's identity. Persuasive, eloquent, entertaining and roguish, he is quintessentially an 'actor', bridging the gap between audience and stage, taking us into his confidence and seamlessly adjusting his identity to manipulate other characters, usually but not exclusively, for selfish reasons.



Themes

Time – both as a personified ‘chorus’ that helps smooth the sixteen-year gap between Acts Three and Four and as a through-line enabling the mistakes of the past to be set right by the new generation; related to imagery of age and changing seasons.

Time is both a definitive theme and a personified character in *The Winter’s Tale*, emphasising its importance to understanding the events of the play. Some see the Time-as-chorus speech as a narrative ‘slip’, evidence of poor craftsmanship and/or even a contribution by an additional author of inferior skill. Others feel it functions as a pivot, working alongside the storm and the bear to signify a shift in tone to the audience. Certainly Time’s speech is unnecessary in terms of revealing or retelling details of the action, since the pertinent information it gives is shortly to be repeated by other characters, but it can be seen as a kind of bridge between two stories with high levels of action and immediacy, helping us bridge the gap of intervening years. A few critics have suggested the first-person references (‘my tale’, ‘my scene’) and direct address (‘Your patience this allowing’) are communiques straight from Shakespeare himself, particularly ‘Impute it not a crime/ To me or my swift passage that I slide/ O’er sixteen years’, which can be seen as an appeal to ‘bear with’ the action as he rips up the Unities and moves the action forward a generation.

As a theme, time is persistent; however, its locus is not in external, objective history but is rooted in the domestic, internally and subjectively, within families, defined by youth and age and the relationships between parents and children and between the male protagonists as lifelong friends. Time periods are juxtaposed as clearly as the two kingdoms – old and young, then and now, past transgressions and future hope. The seasons, too, are set in juxtaposition but also referenced for their cyclical nature through allusions to the likes of the Proserpina myth. Her story is also about time, explaining the cycle of the seasons as correlating with the goddess’ journeys to her home in Sicily and annual return to spend six months in the Underworld. Orgel asserts the possibility that Shakespeare bore the myth in mind as an underlying fable and that it may have informed his choice to switch locations between Sicily and Bohemia and then back again, completing the cycle. Perdita’s strong association with Proserpina leads her to associate the fruits of the season with time and also age, such as when she tells Florizel how she wishes to match his youth and beauty with flowers that correspond to his stage of life and vivacity: ‘would I had some flowers o’ the spring that might/ Become your time of day’ (IV.4.114).

Nature and Art – juxtaposed and aligned throughout the play, from the Act Four discussion between Polixenes and Perdita on the artfulness of nature and vice versa, to the statue scene itself, where a work of art ‘comes to life’. Ultimately these exchanges highlight the close interrelationship of the two rather than revering one over the other.

Relational Bonds – between friends, families, lovers and also courtiers who serve the king; the duties and responsibilities of relationships (e.g. Florizel’s constraints as heir, the duty of a courtier to serve the king no matter what his orders, the role of marriage as a diplomatic tool) as well as the benefits of them.

Forgiveness and Reconciliation – the symbolism of Christianity used throughout; the restoration of Hermione and Perdita (the former beyond our expectations); the opportunity for a ‘tragic hero’ figure to learn from his mistakes and be forgiven. Forgiveness and reconciliation lie at the heart of critics like Bethell who feel *The Winter’s Tale* has its basis in a “Christian scheme of redemption”. In examining them as major themes of the play, bear in mind that Shakespeare significantly altered the ending of



the source material (Greene's *Pandosto* – see Context section for more details), in which the falsely accused queen dies a real and permanent death and the king, having lusted after his newly-introduced daughter before she was identified as such, is overcome with feelings of guilt at his incestuous lust and commits suicide. Smith notes how our under-examined cultural assumptions that a tragic hero “learns something” from his mistakes offer hollow comfort if said hero then immediately dies a heroic (or otherwise) death and is never afforded the time, space or indeed the challenge of putting what has been learned into practice (e.g. *Othello*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth*, etc.). Better instead, perhaps, is the model found in *The Winter's Tale*, where the sinner is forced to live with and regret his mistakes, and eventually the sinned-against are restored, for their own well-being or as a reward for his penance, or possibly both.

Faith – Paulina bids Leontes to ‘awake his faith’; some see parallels between Christian resurrection and Hermione’s return.

Disguise and Play – Leontes’ grim pun on the word ‘play’; Perdita and Florizel in costumes that both conceal and reveal their true selves; Polixenes in disguise; the lovers fleeing disguised by Autolycus’ garments; Hermione as the statue coming to life. Some believe the statue scene to be a kind of urge for viewers to reconnect with the magic and wonder of theatrical plays themselves.

Regeneration – the use of the new generation to mend the wounds of the previous one; the changing of seasons and cycles of nature; the quality of forgiveness that promotes rebirth and new beginnings.

Innocence and Knowledge – the interplay between ignorant bliss and the burden of knowing; Polixenes’ account of his and Leontes’ childhood and maturing; Leontes’ spider imagery; the ‘innocent’ character of the child Mamillius; the roles of various characters in setting the story straight at the end.



A02: Dramatic Methods

Disguise and Costume

Disguise is a frequently employed trope in Shakespeare's works and *The Winter's Tale* is no exception; it can be used as a necessary device to further the plot or as a form of symbolism, and both can have an effect of dramatic irony because the audience is usually aware of the true identity of the disguised character when the other characters are not. Polixenes conceals his identity in order to elicit from his son the truth about his intentions regarding Perdita, leading to a dramatic showdown when he reveals his true identity and violently forbids their marriage. Florizel in turn dons disguise (the garments of Autolycus, himself a nimble master at disguising both his identity and his true intentions) in order to escape with his intended. Prior to this, at the sheep-shearing festival, both Perdita and Florizel have been dressed in festive costumes – he as a 'poor humble swain' and she 'most goddess-like prank'd up' (IV.4.10) as the 'queen' of the festival. Frey points out that their costumes mirror each other – Florizel reflecting Perdita's humble upbringing, and Perdita in the persona of 'no shepherdess, but Flora', whose name denotes that she belongs with Florizel – and that Perdita's guise as queen also shows her true nature and birthright. To Florizel, their costumes also signify a grander alternate reality in which their love is as important as gods and legends; he cites Apollo foregoing his status as a god to take the form of a shepherd in order to be with his love.

The Statue Scene

Considering its iconic status as a set piece in this play, there is some debate as to whether the statue scene was initially included by Shakespeare in the text or was added later. Working on the assumption that it was part of his original vision, we still face the question of what the scene means. Is it an actual statue that comes to life? An absurd pantomime by a human who faked her own death and hid for sixteen years? A magic trick performed by Paulina who was earlier accused of witchcraft? A dream or vision projected by Leontes, whose joy at reuniting with his child and heir is tainted by the stinging sense of loss and guilt caused by Hermione's death?

Most critics concur that the second scenario – the statue actually being Hermione, who did not really die – is the favoured interpretation based on textual evidence (e.g. Paulina's frequent visits to the building, presumably bringing supplies and providing companionship) and on the probable intent behind the narrative. The scene's function, visually and symbolically, is manifold; it can variously be read as a recreation of the Christian resurrection, an allusion to the Pygmalion myth, and a visual representation of everything from the 'recreation' Leontes' tears have earned him to the melting away of winter and the rejuvenating quality of spring. Some link it to Paulina's urging Leontes to have faith and believe it to be the playwright's attempt to rekindle in the audience a sense of wonder at the magic of theatre, accompanied by the visual spectacle for which Blackfriars Theatre performances were becoming known. Shakespeare chooses to forego dramatic irony and does not let the audience in on the secret, and he also chooses



to forego other significant units of possible denouement – the reunion of father and daughter, for example, or the spectacle of Perdita and Florizel’s wedding – and either relay them via the Gentlemen’s discussions (as with the former) or refuse to include them in the space and time of the play altogether (as with the latter). Because of these significant choices, we can be sure the statue scene was intended to have a dramatic impact on the audience, so whichever interpretation(s) you feel have most merit, be sure to note these structural clues if discussing the scene in any detail.

The Bear

‘Exit pursued by a bear’ is renowned as Shakespeare’s most famous stage direction – indeed, perhaps the most famous stage direction in all known theatrical productions. A somewhat surprising amount of energy has been expended by various scholars over the years in an attempt to discern whether early productions of *The Winter’s Tale* used a real bear for this scene; a definitive answer is yet to be provided. It is known that, aside from plays, London audiences of the period enjoyed watching gruesome bloodsports such as cock-fighting, and bear-baiting was extremely popular. Some theatrical venues even doubled as fight arenas, periodically sharing their performance space with barbaric bear fights; thus access to a live bear might not have been difficult to arrange. It would certainly have been difficult to control, however, and this is one reason that some critics prefer to imagine that an actor in a bear costume was used. More recent productions have employed everything from large sheets manipulated as if by puppetry, signifying both the storm and the bear as looming, threatening shapes, to using film projections across the stage (sometimes accompanied by growling/mauling sound effects).

Whichever methods are employed to realise the event in performance, it is almost certain that Shakespeare’s purpose in including such an outlandish feature was primarily to create comedy rather than terror. The bear can be seen to represent nature at its most hostile and savage; without mercy or reason it kills Antigonus, a faithful servant who was only doing what he was told, mauling him horribly. Yet the recounting of his torturous death as relayed by Perdita’s brother-to-be is amusing, and represents a complete shift in tone within the play, helping the audience transition from the tragic mode to something altogether different. From this point on, nature will show itself to be much more gentle, more noble and more awe-inspiring than the bear has been, and more concerned with propagating life than bringing about death.

Notes on Staging

In dealing with any play so widely deemed ambiguous as *The Winter’s Tale*, it is advisable to spend some time researching various ways in which directors have chosen to interpret the material throughout its performance history. This can equip you with particular insight into some of the more opaque or confusing elements and give you an advantage when discussing alternative readings.

Scenes such as the bear or the statue are already iconic standpoints from which a director’s artistic vision can clearly be signposted, but don’t overlook other aspects. A few notable examples are:

- The way in which the interactions between Hermione and Polixenes are presented during Leontes’ increasingly troubled speech as he witnesses them. Some directors take care to stress the unwarranted nature of Leontes’ jealousy by having the couple’s



body language remain strictly platonic; some have instructed their actors to behave as outlandishly as Leontes describes but use techniques such as a change in lighting to underscore the idea that we are seeing them as he sees them, not as they really are; some go for something in between, propagating the uncertainty Leontes feels by having Hermione and Polixenes behave in an equivocal manner that is definitely flirtatious but not overtly lewd.

- The possibilities for ‘doubling up’ characters. Some productions have successfully had the same actor play both Mamillius and Perdita; others (perhaps with less success) have tried to cast the roles of Hermione and Perdita in one. There is also the question of who portrays the figure of Time, and whether this choice reflects any deeper meaning on the rest of the play.
- The ending of *The Winter’s Tale* is largely accepted to be a ‘happy’ one; however, at least two notable productions have cast a shadow over the final scene by having the ghost of Mamillius appear in some way. In doing so they are reminding the audience of the lives lost and the cost of Leontes’ temper, and throwing the family’s future happiness, particularly that of the reunited husband and wife, into question; it is suggested that their dead child will always come between them as both an absence and an obstacle.

Settings

Shakespeare defies Aristotle’s ‘Unity of Place’ by setting the play in two separate kingdoms on three distinct occasions. The courtly setting of Sicily and the rural Bohemia which is exemplified in the earthy delights of the sheep-shearing festival are foils for each other, different in atmosphere and season as well as in the functions they have within the play. They also help introduce generic strands of courtly romance and pastoral plays, giving Shakespeare wider scope to play with generic conventions. The ‘high’ and ‘low’ settings reflect a mix of ‘high’ and ‘low’ characters, contributing to the overall sense of duality and contrast inherent in the play.

The Sicilian court is an established place of refinement, order and sophistication. In the opening scene Archidamus apologises in advance for the crude and unpolished hospitality that is all Bohemia has to offer: ‘Our entertainment shall shame us... we cannot with such magnificence...’ – he feels their court will seem shamefully rustic compared to the grandeur and elegance of Sicily. Leontes’ outburst and subsequent persecutions are a subversion of the courtly codes – he repudiates the laws of hospitality, the bonds of nature, and the created order, not only destroying his domestic happiness but also jeopardising his royal authority and the good of the kingdom by sacrificing both his heirs to his stubborn jealousy. Sicily’s sophisticated ‘cool’ becomes a deathly chill; it is a place of loss and isolation.

Bohemia by contrast teems with life both human and animal, and is imbued too with a sense of supernatural energy and things unseen – Antigonus’ dream vision of Hermione and the shepherd’s allusions to ‘fairies’ and identification of Perdita as a ‘changeling’ help introduce a setting that almost fizzes with natural and supernatural chaos. Leontes’ ideas of passions ‘too hot’ can clearly be seen as manufactured since his court was too cold and well-reasoned for such things; in Bohemia, by contrast, nature thrives in the warm weather and finds its way to fostering love between the prince and the shepherdess, and providing the abundance of flowers, food, drink, livestock and music that make the festival such a special occasion and the focus of a great deal of regenerative energy.

See the A04 ‘Connections’ section for more detail on links between Sicily and Bohemia.



Structure

The structure of *The Winter's Tale* is one that can be simplistically seen as two opposite sections, but is actually a little more complicated. It is certainly divided in two – by tone (tragedy and comedy), by setting (Sicily and Bohemia), thematically (old and new, sin and redemption, death and life, loss and gain, etc.) – but it also follows a cycle in its use of locations (from Sicily to Bohemia and then back again) and seasons as well as other imagery. Some argue that the intervention of Time provides a metaphorical bridge that carves out a third, smaller but definite section in the middle, and makes it a three-part structure rather than one of two halves. Still others believe that, while we might expect the action to end with the happy reunion of Leontes and Perdita and the revelation of her extraordinary story, the fact that the statue scene exists at all and that it is presented as both the play's 'satisfying' ending and as a kind of unexpected bonus – even a 'final twist' – helps redefine the play's structure as something more complex than two opposing sections.

Shakespeare makes a few small but significant alterations to the order of dramatic action in dealing with otherwise very similar scenes from his primary source material, Robert Greene's *Pandosto*. One of the most notable is the highly fraught scene in which the Oracle's pronouncement is read to the court. The original source has the pronouncement from the Oracle, then Leontes (or rather the character that is his parallel, Pandosto himself) recanting his accusations and lastly the announcement of the death of his son; Shakespeare switches these latter two events around. There is certainly a good deal of action taking place in quick succession in this scene, but by putting Leontes' denial before the news of his son's death, Shakespeare has given us an interesting insight in Leontes' character. He refuses to believe the Oracle, his son is lost, and he then sees this as divine retribution and accepts the Oracle's decree. He is so far invested in his paranoid fantasy that he will not accept reason from anyone, even the gods. Just as he created the baseless idea of Hermione's unfaithfulness out of no evidence, he chooses to believe the Oracle's verdict based on the equally baseless and arbitrary idea that Mamillius' death is revenge from the gods for not believing their representative without question.

Language

Shakespeare's use of language to convey character and heighten emotion is the key to his enduring appeal; it is skilful and demands close attention. What follows here is a starting point from which to extend and enhance your own study.

Some key elements of the imagery employed throughout *The Winter's Tale* are:

Nature – both positive and negative. Some stand-out examples are Perdita's catalogues of flowers and her debate with Polixenes regarding nature and art, the latter noting that 'that art/ Which you say adds to nature, is an art/ That nature makes' (IV.4.90-2). Paulina claims that the 'great goddess Nature' has made the new baby resemble her father (II.3.57), and Perdita too alludes to 'great creating nature' (IV.4.88). Leontes notes he and Polixenes were regarded 'as like as eggs' (I.2.209), a symbol of regeneration and birth; yet he also uses the same image in asking his son 'Will you take eggs for money?' in the same scene. 'Eggs for money' was an expression born of the abundance and cheapness of eggs at the time and meaning would he take something of lesser value in exchange for money i.e. be duped of his fortune. This debases Leontes' view of birth and new life with his fear of being cheated/cuckolded. He also uses an image of himself and his family as animals –



steer, heifer and calf – but debases a not-unpleasant allusion with the term ‘neat’, an old word for horned cattle which immediately evokes the ‘horns’ of the cuckolded husband. Autolycus sings lustily of nature – blossoms, birds, ‘tumbling in the hay’ – underlining its regenerative power. Perdita is described by the Third Gentleman in Act Five scene Two as having ‘nobleness which nature shows above her breeding’ – a kind of inherent nobility born of nature, not nurture. Some critics feel that Polixenes’ language immediately prior to Leontes’ suspicion – he mentions ‘breed’, ‘multiply’, ‘put forth’, ‘filling up’ and ‘standing in rich place’ in quick succession – is language of abundance and pregnancy and may subconsciously influence Leontes to associate his pregnant wife with his friend’s speech.

Hands – hand imagery abounds throughout the play, from Leontes’ plosive spite in noting ‘padding palms and pinching fingers’ (I.2.115) to Autolycus praising his own ‘nimble hand’ (IV.4.667), deeming it necessary for his dishonest profession. Florizel frequently bids Perdita give him her hand, showing their connection in love. Their respective fathers, at the beginning of the play, showed their affection when they ‘shook hands, as over a vast, and/ embraced’ (I.1.29-30). The Third Gentleman later relates a ‘holding up of hands’ as part of the reunion between father and daughter in Act Five scene Two. Perdita longs to kiss the hand of the statue when she sees it in the final scene, and when Hermione descends from the podium Paulina bids Leontes ‘present your hand’ (V.3.107), their first physical connection in sixteen years.

Seasons and Weather – ‘A sad tale’s best for winter’ – Mamillius (II.1.629). There is recurring winter imagery, from Paulina’s ‘winter/ In storm perpetual’ (III.2.1449-50) evoking the cold eternity of grieving that awaits Leontes, to Autolycus’ promise of budding spring, when ‘the red blood reigns in the winter’s pale’ (IV.3.4). The other seasons reinforce the themes of hope, rebirth and renewal – Perdita likes young ‘flowers o’ the spring’ to reflect the youthful qualities of Florizel and her shepherdess companions (IV.4.114) and tempers the ‘blasts of January’ with the friendlier ‘winds of March’. She references the mythical figure of Proserpina, goddess of the spring, and is clearly aligned with her herself; she is a propagator and distributor of flowers, just as the goddess was, and Leontes on meeting her declares she is as ‘welcome/ As is the spring to th’ earth’ (V.1.151).

Religious Imagery – we see the full extent of the new, sadder, chastened Leontes in his speech at V.1.167 – it brims with references to gods, heaven, sin and things that are blessed and sacred. Elsewhere the play alludes to Original sin, Whitsun pastorals, grace, wives as ‘devils’, the practice of burning heretics, Judas Iscariot, ‘saint-like sorrow’ and other Christian imagery – yet it also includes classical gods and myths as well as a superstitious belief in the power of the Oracle (Shakespeare even went to the trouble of bestowing classical Greek names on many of the characters – these had been altered from the old Greek source material by Greene when writing *Pandosto* – so clearly the ancient Greek tradition in this play was significant to him in some aspect). Look for contrasts between these ‘old’ and ‘new’ beliefs – do they appear on equal terms, and can they be related to the overarching themes of the play in any way?

Childhood and Innocence – exchanges Mamillius has with his mother, the ladies in waiting and even Leontes showcase his earnest outlook, sweetness and purity of emotion. His beginning of his ‘sad tale’, his refusal to be kissed and treated ‘as if I were a baby still’ (II.1.5-6) and even his assertion that he will fight all highlight his essential innocence. His potential as a ‘gentleman’ and as a symbol of hope for the future is emphasised by the courtiers’ discussion of him. Polixenes talks about his and Leontes’ childhoods as a kind of pre-Fall Edenic bliss, where they are symbolised as ‘twinn’d lambs’ and know nothing of evil. He also describes his own young son in glowing terms, adding that his ‘varying



childness cures' him (Polixenes); this speech also serves to highlight how important an heir is to a king, and underscores what is lost by Leontes and Hermione when Mamillius dies. Hermione alludes to the baby in II.2.99 and the 'innocent milk in its most innocent mouth', emphasising the child's blamelessness but also her own. Elsewhere, Leontes shows a childish petulance that suggests regression of his character; when Camillo protests he sees no evidence of adultery, Leontes' speech is that of a child's tantrum: 'You lie, you lie!/I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee.' (I.2.299-300)

Sickness and the body – Leontes' early 'tremor cordis' or heart murmur is a sign of how viscerally disturbed he is by what he thinks he sees. He looks to his son's 'smutched' nose for reassurance that he is, in fact, Mamillius' father (I.2.121) while Paulina uses similar bodily evidence to 'prove' the new baby his (II.3.52-56) and Leontes later notes Florizel's resemblance to his father, crediting the prince's mother thus: 'she did print your royal father off,/ Conceiving you' (V.1.124-5). Polixenes is so horrified by the swift deterioration of his dearest friendship that he employs an image of 'best blood' turned into an 'infected jelly' (I.2.417-8). Mamillius' illness and subsequent death occur as a result of how he 'threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep,/ And downright languished' (II.3.16-17) – Leontes too cannot sleep at this point in the play. Paulina asserts her tongue should 'blister' if she lies (II.2.33); Leontes bids his eyes become 'dead coals' for straying from Hermione (V.1.68). Polixenes alludes to the idea of Florizel's 'aging' father, asking 'is he not stupid/ With altering age and rheums' (IV.4.395) while the shepherd laments the 'boiled brains' of all the young. The Clown's description of Antigonus' agony in the prolonged bear attack denotes a very ill-used body indeed, as is that of the 'son, who shall be flayed alive' as detailed by Autolycus (IV.4.779). Leontes' 'knowledge' of his wife's misdeeds is crystallised in the spider image (II.1.54-55): 'I have drunk,/ And seen the spider'. It was a common belief at the time that consuming food or drink containing a poisonous spider or insect could not hurt one who did not know it was there; it is awareness that is fatal, he feels, and knowledge that injures.

There are of course numerous references to images of magic and the supernatural, marriage, loyalty and possession (including the repetitions of 'your' and 'yours', such as Paulina's insistence to Leontes that the child is his: 'Look to your babe, my lord; 'tis yours' in Act Two scene Three).

The language used to denigrate women may be worth noting (examples of this include: I.2.130, II.1.82-92, II.3.79 and III.2.54). Leontes uses his own feelings as evidence against Hermione; later in the play, Autolycus' humorous vouching for the 'authenticity' of his ballads (proclaiming the truth of one that had 'Five justices' hands at it, and witnesses more than/ my pack will hold' – IV.4.281-2) shows how flimsy and fallible 'evidence' can be.

Note, too, the differences in prose and verse and who speaks which way, as well as the use of song lyrics by Autolycus and the commentary they may provide.

A few other types of language to look for:

Puns – these are used frequently in most Shakespearean plays, and not always for overtly comic effect. Many are almost double entendres and somewhat lewd in nature, but others emphasise the duality and contrasts inherent in characters and situations. An example would be Leontes' loaded use of the word 'play' in Act One scene Two – he uses it four times within one sentence, in close succession but with several intended meanings. He tells Mamillius to go and 'play' as befits a child, but then says Hermione also 'plays', with connotations of sexual misconduct, and adds that he too will 'play' in the sense



of an actor playing a role, outwardly behaving as though everything were normal but inwardly aware of her supposed 'wrongdoing', and plotting his revenge for this. Another extremely significant pun occurs in Act Three scene Two, when a penitent Leontes states that 'tears... shall be recreation'. He means to suggest that he will find no joy in anything and will grieve away his free or leisure time; yet the word also suggests 're-creation' – that in processing his grief and guilt he will earn the chance of a new beginning and will be reborn a better man.

Soliloquy – the first extended speeches that Leontes utters in the play are soliloquies and some are extended asides, employed to show his disturbed thoughts as he witnesses what he believes is Hermione's infidelity. The audience immediately gains access to his psyche in this way, and can begin to process the contrast between what is real and what is imagined. Autolycus also employs soliloquies, though his are delivered to the audience in a way that positions them almost as co-conspirators in his roguery as well as viewers to be entertained by his performances; Leontes' are more akin to the process of thinking aloud, and are effective in showing how a central character alienates and isolates himself.

Paradox – a statement that contradicts itself in strictly logical terms, but still throws light on its subject. The baseless nature of Leontes' jealousy is illustrated by his paradoxical retort to Hermione that 'Your actions are my dreams' (III.2.81). This is arguably true – he has merely 'dreamed up' her transgressions – but makes little sense objectively, since if her actions are but dreams she cannot or should not be punished for them. From him, it indicates that he is haunted by what he believes her to have done, but to the audience, who knows she has done nothing wrong, it merely underscores Hermione's virtue – she does nothing unbecoming to one of her status, and her actions are positive, something any true king would 'dream' of finding in a wife.



A03: Contexts

Genre: The nature of Shakespeare's Last plays

The term 'Last Plays' is not entirely satisfactory, but there are some generally agreed-upon features which unite this group of plays. Usually *The Winter's Tale* is joined in this category by *The Tempest* (believed to have been written in the same year), *Cymbeline* and *Pericles*. Features shared among these plays include a heightened sense of visual spectacle, supernatural (or at least highly improbable) elements and a sense that younger characters can put right historical wrongs and imbue the future with hope. There is primarily a courtly setting, or at least a protagonist of noble birth, but contrasting 'low folk', usually rustic peasants, will also have a role to play in the action. Forgiveness and reconciliation are common themes, and an episodic structure takes in events occurring over a long period, usually in violation of Aristotle's 'Unity of Time', which recommended that the action of a play should take place in the course of one day.

The Winter's Tale has clearly identifiable elements of tragedy (Leontes' suspicions and the fatal consequences of these), comedy (such as Autolycus or the shepherd and Clown), pastoral (the rural Bohemian setting) and generic romance (the love of Florizel and Perdita culminating in the arrangement of their marriage). It contains music and dance, owing a debt to the lavish masque productions popular in England at the time. Its denouement is strongly dependent on visual spectacle rather than the expressive language we expect from a Shakespearean play, and its narrative is concerned with the fate of a royal family. Presented thus, it sounds like a haphazard assemblage – yet each of these elements can be justified or at least partly understood in relation to the play in its entirety and to other plays, both Shakespeare's and those of his contemporaries.

The early seventeenth century saw a fashionable revival of two genres that had been somewhat out of vogue – romance (which had been popular during the mid-Elizabethan era when the importance of chivalry was highlighted by the accepted persona of the "virgin queen", Elizabeth I) and pastoral. The pastoral genre itself held hidden depths. On one level a treatise for the 'simple' things in life – rural lifestyles, humble but happy peasants and the unworldly pleasures of being close to nature – pastoral plays often also functioned allegorically in a way that proffered comment on grander social circles and the wider world. That Shakespeare employs elements of both of these 'retro' genres as they enjoyed a revival in fortunes indicates willingness on his part to follow fashion and attract the popular market.

When plays were performed at The Globe theatre, they were taking place outdoors, in afternoon daylight and in most sorts of weather, with minimal capacity for provision of special effects or even scenery. By 1608, however, The King's Men were able to perform at the second building of Blackfriars Theatre (objections from the neighbourhood had precluded this before) and with this came some exciting new freedoms and capabilities. The theatre was indoors, completely closed off from the elements and was one of the first commercial theatre spaces to use artificial lighting, offering a very different atmosphere to the raucous outdoor throngs at the Globe. Protection from the weather meant more opportunities to use rich and lavish costumes such as those seen in masque performances



at court, and there was broader scope to experiment with special effects. In short, the theatre itself gave the company a more controlled environment in which to produce exciting and spectacular plays, and playwrights like Shakespeare would have begun to write accordingly. This, many believe, accounts for highly visual set-pieces like the statue scene – clearly calibrated for maximum impact of wonderment – which are a definite feature of those works deemed ‘Last plays’.

Of course, the two most readily discernible generic types present in *The Winter's Tale* are comedy and tragedy, and herein lies another common generic term for this and several other Shakespeare plays – the ‘tragi-comedies’. This designation isn’t as desperate as it may sound; tragi-comedy was in fact an up-and-coming genre of the era, gaining popularity with audiences and employed by writers such as Fletcher, one of Shakespeare’s collaborators and successors. It was characterised, straightforwardly enough, by a blend of tragic and comic elements – characters would face death but avoid it; trouble would arise but humour would abound; no lasting detrimental effects would be felt by the protagonists and a happy ending would ensue. What makes *The Winter's Tale* unusual – and, some would argue, clumsy – is its failure to blend these basic elements in any meaningful sense, opting instead to meld a tragic first half with a comic second half and conjoin them with offbeat occurrences to signify the change. Consider, too, the idea that a tragi-comedy, as defined by Fletcher himself, should not include deaths. Hermione’s demise may be a false one, but Mamillius and Antigonus are very much casualties of the play, not to mention those lost in the shipwreck on the Bohemian shore; this may indicate that Shakespeare’s use of the form was a light, experimental one and that the term is not rigidly applicable. In light of this, perhaps the ‘Last play’ label does indeed provide the best account of the genre of *The Winter's Tale*.

The world in which the play was written and received

Published as part of the so-called ‘First Folio’ in 1623, *The Winter's Tale* was first performed in 1611, and was written at some point prior to that but possibly as early as 1609. This was during the rule of King James I, who came to the throne in 1603. He became, among other things, the patron of the band of actors to which Shakespeare belonged, and as a result they changed their name from The Lord Chamberlain’s Men to The King’s Men.

James succeeded Elizabeth; he had been raised as a Presbyterian, studied theology and presided over the standard English translation of the Bible still in use today. This devotion to religion is interesting as many of Shakespeare’s ‘later’ (and difficult to categorise) plays – notably *Measure for Measure*, *Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* as well as *The Winter's Tale* – are concerned with themes of repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation, often in relation to a royal patriarch such as a duke or a king. Some critics believe this was to interest and flatter King James; others feel these qualities would have naturally been of concern to Shakespeare as he matured and grew older; some argue it could be Shakespeare’s attempt to reassert the idea that mercy and compassion should lie at the heart of true Christianity.

Given the important status of the Monarch in Renaissance times as well as the fact he was a personal patron of Shakespeare’s company, it was important that artworks produced reflected well on the life of the King or flattered his interests. Shakespeare did this in several of his plays – *Macbeth*, for example, contains witchcraft, a morbid interest of King James, and features one of James’ ancestors, Banquo, in a favourable light. The King wrote several books, one of which, *Basilicon Doron*, was a treatise on government. Written in 1599, it was almost certainly read by Shakespeare and most other literate citizens; it put forth the virtue of the principle of temperance (or the Aristotlean mean



– all things in moderation) and stated that rulers must, among other things, display virtue in action. Shakespeare's preoccupation in several of his plays with what made a good or bad ruler was surely, at least in part, inspired by an impetus to please the king. While James' rule was moderate in some ways, he certainly had fixed ideas pertaining to kingly virtues and how a monarch must be treated; the fact Leontes' courtiers still obey him and Hermione still conveys her respects in addressing him, even at the height of his hysterical suspicion, is important. So, too, is the fact that Perdita's royal lineage overrides her humble upbringing and makes her rich in the virtues needed in an heiress to the throne – Jacobean society retained the belief that rulers were chosen by God and divinely appointed, and as such, a 'royal nature' would have been believed to manifest clearly in the noble descendant no matter what the circumstances of their upbringing.

It is worth noting that, while royal babies lost, discovered and restored was commonly the stuff of fairy tales, Leontes' fears of cuckoldry and an illegitimate heir were not quite as fantastical. The English royal family had been haunted by the spectre of bastardy for at least three generations and even King James had been subject to fears of having his birth called into question and his path to the throne impeded irreparably. The question of Perdita's legitimacy is surrounded by complex legal and societal implications as well as Leontes' personal demons. The plights of Leontes' wife and daughter would have resonated with the audience as well – Hermione's trial has echoes of Anne Boleyn, another queen charged with adultery and treason, while Perdita is declared illegitimate by an act of the king's imagination, just as Princess Elizabeth had been by her father, King Henry VIII.

Shakespeare did not create the story of *The Winter's Tale* himself; like all of his plays, it had external sources in other stories and plays. The primary source is Greene's *Pandosto* (which was interestingly subtitled *The Triumph of Time*), though numerous other secondary influences have been suggested. Many of the characters in Shakespeare's play have direct parallels in *Pandosto* and many of the major dramatic incidents are similar, but the ending is extremely different (see Forgiveness and Reconciliation section in A01).

Shakespeare's only son had died some years before; he had two daughters and, as of 1608, a granddaughter. It is short-sighted to attempt to impose patterns from the little we know of Shakespeare's life onto his works as a kind of narrative insight – much of his working life took place apart from his family, who resided away from the city, and the wide-ranging scope of his work discourages us from putting too much credence in the idea of his wife and children as deep sources of inspiration. Nevertheless, some critics note a certain predilection for stronger and nobler female characters in the playwright's later works and also a greater (though arguably not 'new', considering earlier works like *King Lear*) focus on the relationships between fathers and daughters, particularly adult or nearly-adult daughters.

Autolycus' character is a culmination of both Greek myth and domestic Jacobean concerns. By the end of the sixteenth century, there was a deep concern about the nuisance of 'sturdy beggars' – those lacking masters to employ them and estates on which to live – and their lower class status as semi-criminal drifters and outsiders generated an almost mythical archetype of the Vagabond. A parallel to the character of Autolycus does not appear in *Pandosto* so he was created from scratch by Shakespeare; he does not take a superficial clown role but serves variously as a wry commentator, a link to the audience, an entertainer (through the music he provides as well as his comic asides) and as a definite part of the action leading to the Sicilian royal family's reunion.



A04: Connections

Students should be keenly aware that there are equal marks available for their treatment of the extract and the wider text in the exam. The focus should be on parallels or connections between the extract and the wider text which are relevant to the key terms of the stimulus statement. It may be beneficial for students to prioritise connections that also reveal their knowledge and understanding of the dramatic methods (A02) and the nature of Shakespearean Last Plays (A03).

When studying the play, you will note many connections and it may be useful to track elements which show parallels or contrasts. For example:

Parallels

In considering the play as two distinct halves, there are notable parallels that occur before and after the intervention of Time, the Chorus. Some are complementary episodes reflecting the nature of the comic or tragic section in which they occur (for example, Hermione's 'death' and her later resurrection); some mirror earlier incidents (such as Camillo's recurring role as a rescuer, of Polixenes in the first half and Perdita in the second). Camillo also appears in two brief prose scenes describing relationships between characters: the opening scene in which he and Archidamus discuss the friendship of Polixenes and Leontes, and Act Four scene Two, in which he and Polixenes discuss Florizel's relationship with the shepherd's 'daughter of most rare note' (Perdita). The trial scene and the statue scene both revolve around Hermione being put on show, though the circumstances obviously differ in each instance. There is also a connection in the fact that Hermione is persecuted by Leontes, and her daughter by Polixenes – both are attacked for their relationships with men, and both are found to be 'innocent' of their respective charges of adultery and 'low birth'.

Polixenes and Leontes

The relationship between the two men is the driving force at the start of the play. It's the first thing we hear discussed and provides the essential bridge between two very different kingdoms as well as the drive behind the initial action that sets the tragic half of the play in motion. Polixenes and Leontes are friends, brothers, colleagues and rivals all at once. Both are fathers and monarchs and both show a preoccupation with honour – Leontes through his fear of cuckoldry, Polixenes through his violent overreaction to the idea that his heir would marry an unsuitable wife, when royal duty would dictate he should make a match with another noble family for dynastic or political reasons.

Bohemia and Sicilia

The two places function as flip-sides of the same coin, though not quite as mirrors of their respective rulers. Sicily is stately, wealthy and refined, but also cold, artificial and secretive, if not outright deceptive. It is the place of winter, associated with isolation, regret and loss. Hermione figuratively turns to stone there; Mamillius' quiet and sudden



death chills the place of life. If Sicily was dignified artifice, Bohemia teems with unruly life. The opening scenes of the play acknowledge that Bohemia is less grand than Sicily, but it is a place of life and warmth where summer is beginning and love is blossoming alongside the flowers Perdita catalogues. The shepherd notes how cold the newly abandoned baby Perdita is ('they were warmer than that got this than the poor thing is here'), fresh from her distinctly chilly homeland, and takes her in; Bohemia is associated with hospitality and warmth. The wholesome, rustic lifestyle it provides has given Perdita space and means to 'grow in grace' and develop into an equally wholesome person. She brings life and warmth back to Sicily, and ultimately Hermione is imbued with life and warmth, transforming from statue into a living queen, wife and mother..

Hermione, Paulina and Perdita

The interrelationships of these characters are intricate and various. If we subscribe to the generally accepted theory that Hermione's death was a pretence and she is her real self all along, not a statue, then it seems Paulina is the one who kept her hidden and was likely the architect of the plan to do so – a thing that could not have been planned far in advance given the sequence of events in Act Three scene Two. Hermione is honest and dignified – she knows she has nothing to hide, yet Paulina has either persuaded her to stay hidden for sixteen years or has actively supported her decision to do so. The two are in collusion in deceiving the king, yet both have the higher moral ground in doing so. Elsewhere Perdita is also keeping a long-term secret, but is unknowing of this fact. All three women are insulted by men, condemned as whores or witches (Perdita is deemed a 'fresh piece of excellent witchcraft' by Polixenes, while Paulina is branded a 'manlike witch', combining her presumptuous attempts to speak on an equal footing with men and the essence of feminine evil) and persecuted to varying degrees, yet all three represent forces for good. All are faithful women – Paulina has not remarried in the intervening years, Hermione's innocence was proved, Perdita's chastity remains intact as both she and Florizel value their honour. Perdita and Hermione are alike in character and appearance; Paulina is presumed to be both stronger and wiser but shares their general outlook. Perdita's return signifies losses for Paulina – confirmation of her husband's death as well as the subsequent revelation of the 'statue', which presumably costs her Hermione's exclusive and ever-available company – but also completion of an intricate and longheld plan and the promise of new beginnings. As a matriarchal protector and her earliest champion, she is joyous at Perdita's homecoming.

Other Connections

Compare Leontes and Autolycus. Both are 'performers' – Autolycus of crowd-pleasing ballads, Leontes of a kind of pantomime of normality when he claims he will 'play... so disgraced a part' in Act One scene Two. Both use soliloquies, but differently – Autolycus employs his to connect with audience, while Leontes' show his increasing isolation. Autolycus claims he was born 'under Mercury', which in line with common astrological beliefs at the time would suggest he had a 'mercurial' or unstable nature, yet it is Leontes who seems the more changeable, unstable and prone to dangerous fantasies. Autolycus, in line with his name, is a 'lone wolf', while Leontes had close friendship, a happy family and loyal courtiers yet destroyed most of these relationships through his own agency. Introducing himself, Autolycus cheerfully and freely admits his own wrongdoing but the Sicilian king's acceptance of his own injurious behaviour is much harder won. Autolycus deals in deception yet helps expose the truth, while Leontes' reactions to what he perceived to be the truth lay the foundations for much confusion, deception and loss.



A05: Argument and interpretation

For your response to convince the examiner, it is important to have a well-structured argument so you need to plan before you write. It is a good idea to underline the keywords of the question before you begin to read and annotate the extract given – it will help you focus on the most relevant features.

Constructing an essay argument requires you to write thematically rather than chronologically, so make this easier for yourself by adding any relevant references from the rest of the play next to the notes that relate to them. You will be able to link them more easily and avoid missing connections that could have earned you marks before you go on to your next paragraph.

A very strong argument will examine alternative interpretations and explain why these have been dismissed as infeasible or ill-fitting. This does not need to form a large part of your essay, but it will show the examiner that you have thoughtfully considered other points of view and made an informed decision to reach your own conclusions.

Specimen Question:

Leontes is presented as being as loving as he is jealous.

By referring closely to Extract 6 and to other appropriately selected parts of the text, show to what extent you would agree with the view expressed above.

Your argument should include relevant comments on Shakespeare's dramatic methods and relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespeare's Last Plays.

N.B. Equal marks are available for your treatment of the given extract and other relevant parts of the text.

A05

Purely as an example (remember there is no one 'correct' interpretation), perhaps you wish to argue that Leontes *appears* to be loving but that actually he is primarily a self-serving character whose jealousy is motivated not by true love but by hurt pride and the sense of entitlement he gets from his status as King. You might begin by examining instances of his jealousy, suggesting perhaps that he is motivated by true love but then offer alternative interpretations to possible evidence of loving behaviour. Was he, for example, motivated to his jealous rage by love for his wife – or was it more about rivalry with his friend, the other supposed partner in the adulterous affair? Does his callous treatment of the baby Perdita and his repeated questioning of the provenance of even Mamillius, his 'honest gentleman', show any concern or love for the children themselves, or are they simply heirs to him and no use if illegitimate? Is his reaction to the statue one of shock and surprise on top of the joyous news his heir is returned to him, rather than love and affection? Does the fact he fails to remarry in the interim indicate that he loved



once and cannot love anyone but Hermione, or is it more the product of him feeling sorry for himself? Or is it perhaps even the latter coupled with a belief in the Oracle's prediction about having no heir until his daughter returned?

Use your knowledge of Leontes' situation and Shakespeare's techniques to present your argument. Perhaps you believe that Leontes is clearly too insecure to truly love anyone; perhaps you wish to point out the unhealthy psychological effect that the monarchy and its associated pressures – the idea of having been divinely appointed, for example, or the belief your will is greater than all others and shouldn't be questioned – would have on a person and how repercussions of that would exist in the person's relationships. Perhaps you would point out that marriages of the time were primarily business or political partnerships and not for love, so Leontes' lack of love for his wife could be entirely feasible.

A02

The question requires analysis of Shakespeare's dramatic methods which will be demonstrated throughout as you analyse both the given extract and your other chosen references from the rest of the play. Remember 'dramatic methods' refers to setting, plot and characterisation as well as language, but close language analysis is important, especially since you will have a specially selected printed extract in the exam.

A03

You must include relevant external contextual information on the nature of Shakespeare's Last Plays, meaning you will need to first be confident in explaining which interpretation(s) of the term 'Last Play' seem to be the most apt or useful. Ensure that your contextual knowledge is clear, applied appropriately and used where the argument requires it (as opposed to in one large chunk to 'tick the context box').

A04

As per the key terms stipulated in the question, obvious examples would be times when Leontes seems to clearly express his love. The extract focuses on references to Hermione, but bear in mind that the question asks you only to present evidence of his affections, not of the objects of them; you can therefore use as examples times when Leontes displays or discusses his affection for any other character. This could be the courtiers' and Polixenes' accounts of the close friendship Leontes shared with the latter in childhood, and even the relationship into which they have settled after their terrible rift. It could be some of his less frenzied exchanges with Mamillius, or his immediate reaction of deep regret when Mamillius dies. Even deeper, of course, is the regret he bears for falsely accusing and 'killing' Hermione – evidence of his love for her should be apparent in some of his speeches. His reaction in the statue scene would bear examination, as would the passage in which the Gentlemen report his and Perdita's joyous reunion. There may even be expressions of possible affection directed at his trusted courtiers, early on, and later at Paulina, his semi-constant companion and ostensible moral compass. His jealousy, of course, is easy to prove as the text yields multiple examples of his disturbed and disturbing accusations in the first three Acts.

Remember:

- Stick to the key terms used in the question.
- Think what the question is really asking you.
- Argue clearly – explore opposing points of view but explain why they don't sway you.
- Make connections throughout the text, demonstrating your knowledge of the play and your ability to link concepts, ideas and references.



Useful links

INFORMATION AND EXERCISES

<http://bit.ly/248XoAN>

Shakespeare's Words, *The Winter's Tale* Text. Has every scene of the play alongside definitions of unfamiliar terms.

<http://bit.ly/1oo2M2Q>

Royal Shakespeare Company, *The Winter's Tale*. Includes past performance and source information.

<http://bit.ly/1mGe7K0>

Spark Notes, Questions for Study. A good starting point for considering various aspects of the play.

<http://bit.ly/1Of3Yu5>

Crossref-it, *The Winter's Tale*. Lots of useful textual and contextual information as a basis for your own notes.

CRITICAL READINGS

<http://bit.ly/1KViaO3>

Enotes, Critical Essays, *The Winter's Tale*. An overview of some trends in criticism to help get you started.

<http://bit.ly/1KokSM7>

Pyakurel, Dikawar. Online essay – 'What if Stronger Women: Retelling *The Winter's Tale*', published 18 Nov 2014. Addresses some interesting issues with regard to a feminist analysis of the play.

PERFORMANCE

<http://bit.ly/1NDZl18>

Billington, Michael. The Guardian Online – Review of Kenneth Branagh's nationally screened theatrical staging of *The Winter's Tale* at the Garrick Theatre, 2015, starring Branagh, Judi Dench and Miranda Raison.

<http://bbc.in/1QkgtFO>

BBC Front Row, first broadcast on BBC Radio 4, Mon 19 Nov 2015. Kenneth Branagh discussing some of his concerns and ideas regarding directing and staging *The Winter's Tale*.

<http://bit.ly/1RKStBe>

Bartholomeusz, Dennis. *The Winter's Tale' in Performance in England and America 1611-1976* (Cambridge University Press, 1982). Link to Google Books edition.



General Glossary for A2 1

– this glossary is neither prescriptive nor exhaustive.

Antagonist	The main character who opposes the protagonist or hero in a narrative or drama; in simple terms he/she is the villain. (See protagonist.)
Aside	A brief remark made by a character during dialogue which is understood not to be addressed to or heard by other characters. In an aside true feelings are voiced, as distinct from what is being said for others to hear. See also soliloquy.
Blank verse	Non-rhyming lines of poetry, the standard verse form of Elizabethan drama, also known as 'iambic pentameter'. Each iamb is an unstressed syllable followed by a stressed one, like the sound of a heartbeat – five iambic feet make a ten syllable pattern per line, a rhythm frequently used in Shakespeare's work.
Characterisation	The means by which a character's traits are established, often through action and dialogue in drama.
Climax	The moment of greatest tension in a drama. It is usually near the end of the play where the rising conflict results in a high point of intensity.
Costume	The clothes or outfit worn by a character.
Denouement	The plot resolution of a narrative.
Dialogue	The words spoken between two or more characters in a play, novel or poem.
Dramatic convention	A set of rules which all parties in a dramatic performance accept (including, importantly the audience), e.g. the 'Three Unities' in classical Greek drama, the Shakespearean soliloquy, the missing fourth wall of a traditional nineteenth-century stage set, the impenetrability of disguise in Shakespearean drama.
Dramatic irony	A stylistic device where the audience is aware of the implications of a speech or act, but the character(s) involved is not. The audience has an understanding that the characters do not have.
Figurative language	Non-literal language – similes, metaphors, hyperbole and synecdoche, for example – used by writers to communicate additional meaning about characters and situations.
Imagery	This word generally applies visually, to vivid or figurative



language used in a more than literal way that stimulates a picture in the imagination. Tactile imagery appeals to the sense of touch. Auditory imagery appeals to the imagination by echoing or creating sound effects.

Juxtaposition	Placing two contrasting characters, things, ideas close together to illuminate meaning or create tension.
Lighting	Refers to the way the stage is lit and the equipment which provides artificial light effects.
Metaphor	Where one thing is described directly as another, to enhance meaning or effect. When this is used for a more protracted purpose it is called an extended metaphor.
Meter (or metre)	The pattern of rhythmic accents in poetic verse, formed of stressed and unstressed syllables in certain numbers and combinations.
Metonymy	A form of figurative speech in which a closely related term is substituted for an object or idea. One example would be referring to royalty or a monarch as “the crown”.
Motif	A dominant or recurring idea or figure of speech within a work of art or within the work of an artist, musician or writer.
Pathos	A quality of a play’s action or dialogue that stimulates the audience to feel pity for a character. Pathos is always present in tragedy, and may be present in comedy as well.
Props	Items used on stage by the actors.
Protagonist	The principal character in a novel or drama (See antagonist).
Soliloquy	A speech in which a character’s true feelings or intentions are voiced, usually but not always when that character is alone on stage. In general, soliloquies are longer than asides, which have the same revelatory function, and do not always involve turning ‘aside’ from an ongoing dialogue.
Sound effects	Sounds on the stage used to create the setting or atmosphere of the play, or for other dramatic effect.
Stage/Set design	This refers to the visual scenery on the stage, the creation of the background in which the play is set.
Stage directions	The directions written in the play script to indicate how the characters should speak and move. Shakespeare seems to have written very few explicit stage directions. These were added by later editors. There are however plenty of implicit stage directions in the Shakespearean text.
Structure	The way in which the parts of the plot are organised.



Synecdoche

A form of figurative speech where the whole concept of something is referred to by one of its parts. An example would be calling a car “wheels” or asking if someone can “lend a hand”.

Theme

A main idea or concern explored in a work of art.

