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# Such a Deal of Wonder: Structures of Feeling and Performances of *The Winter's Tale* from 1981 to 2002

Elizabeth Marie Burt  
*Brigham Young University - Provo*

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“SUCH A DEAL OF WONDER”: STRUCTURES OF FEELING  
AND PERFORMANCES OF *THE WINTER’S TALE*  
FROM 1981 TO 2002

by

Elizabeth Marie Burt

A thesis submitted to the faculty of

Brigham Young University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English

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of a thesis submitted by

Elizabeth Marie Burt

This thesis has been read by each member of the following graduate committee and by majority vote has been found to be satisfactory.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Richard Duerden, Chair

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Bruce Young

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Nelson



ABSTRACT

“SUCH A DEAL OF WONDER”: STRUCTURES OF FEELING  
AND PERFORMANCES OF *THE WINTER’S TALE*  
FROM 1981 TO 2002

Elizabeth Marie Burt

Department of English

Master of Arts

Structures of feeling represent the interaction between personal lived experience and fixed social values and meanings, which are found in interpretations of works of art. Studying various interpretations of any play in performance can provide a point of access into a culture because the choices made in the production can be compared to each other and to the written text and then reveal how the theatrical company views particular issues within their own time period.

This study looks at productions of *The Winter’s Tale* between 1981 and 2002 at the National Theatre and Royal Shakespeare Company. Using numerous versions of this play not only increases the depth of our understanding of the play but also reveals how the actors and directors interact with British culture. Each production reveals a director’s vision for the production as well as his own

experience within the culture. Some issues and ideas that are reflected in these interpretations include both optimism and cynicism with regard to the political situation and public figures, an increase in spectacle, and secularization.

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## *Preface*

This study concentrates on seven productions of *The Winter's Tale* done in London and Stratford by the National Theatre (NT) and the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) from 1981–2002.<sup>1</sup> This study gives a number of details for each production in question to help the reader picture the production with more vibrancy, to explain what the choices accomplish or bring to the play, and to determine how the production reflects and interprets values and meanings in British culture, using Raymond Williams' concept of structures of feeling.

## Chapter Summary

The introduction will lay out the general theory behind the thesis and summarize general conclusions that can be drawn from looking at all of the productions together. The next chapter describes the National Theatre productions in 1988 and 2001 in detail and concludes how each interprets cultural values. The final chapter focuses on the five Royal Shakespeare productions (1981, 1986, 1992, 1999, and 2002) and how they portray various structures of feeling within British culture.

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<sup>1</sup> I could not get access to The Globe's archives to study the production of *The Winter's Tale* done there within this time period. Therefore, only the NT and RSC have been included in this study.

## Research Purpose

Dennis Bartholomeusz compiled a comprehensive theatrical history of *The Winter's Tale* from the first performance in 1611 to 1976. His study recounts performances by historical period, analyzing how the main actors or directors and the time period influenced the performance. He looks at why text was cut or added and how spectacle changed what happened on stage. He also looks at what became tradition on the stage for *The Winter's Tale* and how each time period influenced the one following.

Patricia Tatspaugh also recently wrote a performance history of *The Winter's Tale*, concentrating specifically on the Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) from World War II to 1999. She breaks the play down scene by scene and simply describes what choices (acting, costumes, scenery, props, etc.) were made in each production.

My study constructs a performance history of the play for 1981–2002 using two of the best known and most influential theatres doing Shakespeare today, the RSC and the National Theatre (NT). Instead of simply determining what acting, costuming, or lighting choices were made in these productions, this study will attempt to understand why these choices were made—particularly what factors influenced those choices and how they reflect the culture. How directors and actors shape performances reveals as much about them and their relationship to their culture as it does about the play.

## Methodology

In order to compile this study, I have collected primary materials in the Shakespeare Centre Library Archive and the National Theatre Archive, including production notes, video recordings, photographs, programs, “bibles” (the notebooks that contain all information that governs a production), and reviews. Additionally, I discussed the productions with the archivists when possible.

There are a couple of difficulties with using these sources to analyze the productions instead of observing live performances. Video recordings of performances are not the same as watching the same performance live, given that the researcher cannot observe the audience reaction and the camera focuses on the stage instead of allowing the researcher to choose what to observe. Additionally, some video recordings are faint or not focused, making it difficult to determine the details of what happened on stage. That said, however, they can still give the impression of the choices that the actors and the director made, especially on a particular night. And except for when the microphones drop out, they can provide an excellent idea of how the lines were delivered, with what inflection, etc.

Another issue is that reviews are often written within the first week of a performance, while recordings may be made at any point in the play’s run (often in the middle or nearer the end). Therefore, choices may have changed from the reviews to the performance, making it difficult to find continuity in the research. However, recordings were not available for all performances (Hall’s 1988 production because it was too early and Warchus’s 2002 production because the archives had not yet received it from the RSC), so these descriptions rely more on

the bibles and reviews. Despite these difficulties, however, there is plenty of material to at least begin interpreting these performances.

## *Chapter 1: Introduction*

Drama is a social medium, suggested by the number of people involved in every production; it is written by an author, governed by a director, rehearsed and performed by actors, and (hopefully) watched by an audience. This social atmosphere pervades every performance: the audience will often respond as much to each other (as with the infectious laugh) as they do to what is happening on stage. Additionally, the actors will vary their performances depending on audience reaction; when those watching begin laughing hard in a comedy, the actors tend to be work harder to make the audience laugh.

Drama is also valuable as a sociohistorical record. The actual written piece reflects an author's viewpoint of a subject at a particular moment in time. Sometimes, plays address a particular issue in the culture that needs to be addressed; for example, David Hare's *The Permanent Way* (2004) addresses many of the problems that have surfaced since the privatization of the British railway system. Plays with political messages or aims identify cultural tensions or hotspots, but they are not the only plays that are valuable cultural records. All plays contain elements of a culture within them. The kinds of language that a culture uses (dialect, word choice, names, etc.) are represented. Costuming or sets

may represent the playwright's culture or the one from which they emerge. Plays reflect these fixed and established parts of culture.

The performance of those texts represents not only the culture presented in the play, but also the culture from which the actors, director, and audience emerge and how they all interact with these cultural elements. For example, directors may choose to update a Shakespeare play to a different time period, including their own, which may reflect how they view the play or the culture in which they live. Actors may inform their characters with experiences from their own lives. Audiences may respond differently to a performance because of their own background or expectations. These reflections may or may not embody the author's own interaction with his or her culture. Therefore, a performance represents one or more cultures at a time.

### Theatre and Culture

Raymond Williams, a prominent theorist considered the father of cultural studies, stresses viewing theatre in within a social context. According to Williams in *Marxism and Literature*, culture and society are fixed ideas that people perceive as having been created in the past and already articulated. However, this does not reflect what happens in practice because people form ideas and experience events actively in the present. Additionally, the "thought" represented by a culture is distinct from any thinking that an individual may do because it is personal, immediate, and subjective rather than pre-formed in the past. Williams believes this idea is particularly applicable to art, even though it may be

considered in an “explicit and finished” form because “to complete [the arts’] inherent process, we have to make them present, in specifically active ‘readings.’ . . . It is always a formative process, within a specific present” (129). For example, a play may have been written by Shakespeare four hundred years ago, but the act of interpretation of that play by a director, a company of actors, or an audience places the play and the reading in the immediate present.

Social change can be observed within these interpretations, which may indicate specific choices made as well as the effects of the change. These changes in a “particular quality of social experience and relationship,” whether in language, dress, or other forms of social life, are “changes in structures of feeling” (131-32). Structures of feeling can reflect the values and meanings of a culture as they are “actively lived and felt, and the relations between these and formal or systematic beliefs are in practice variable” (132). Williams believes that these structures are especially relevant to art and literature because “true social content is [often] . . . of this present and affective kind, which cannot without loss be reduced to belief systems, institutions, or explicit general relationships” (133). These structures may not be fully articulated yet within a society, but they still have an effect and reflect the personal lived experience of those within a culture or society.

The choices made to create and construe a production reflect how directors, actors, and audiences experience and interpret the values and meanings of a culture. Structures of feeling that are present in productions can contextualize

a performance, explain production choices, and shed light upon the theatrical companies and the culture in which they were produced.

In *The Long Revolution*, Williams shows how Elizabethan plays reflect playwrights' interactions with changing cultural values. For example, Elizabethan drama combined parts of the medieval traditions with the new individualism of the Elizabethan period. Many of the patterns and characters of the mystery plays are still seen in many plays written during this period. At the same time, cultural upheaval (dramatic changes in religion, language, exploration, and England's political power) is evident in how the playwrights of Shakespeare's generation change how language, structure, and character are constructed in their plays.

Shakespeare was a particularly inventive and bold playwright, adding more words to the English language than any other person. He also constantly changed dramatic structure as in *Hamlet*, where he completely transforms the revenge tragedy drama. *The Winter's Tale* is also representative of his willingness to play with structure—he incorporates a sixteen-year gap into the middle of the play, locates the play in two countries, and writes a scene that is 836 lines long, longer than any other of the period. Adapting *The Winter's Tale* from Greene's *Pandosto*, Shakespeare makes the characters and plot more emotionally complex; Leontes must in the end face the woman he caused ultimate grief and reconcile himself to her and his lost daughter, unlike his counterpart who kills himself after learning he has lusted after his own daughter. Greene's king commits suicide to execute justice; Leontes humiliates himself and repents to receive mercy. In

Shakespeare's canon, it is very clear that Elizabethan theatre reflects not only the past but also the constant change in the culture.

### Structures of Feeling

Structures of feeling identify how lived experience relates to a culture's values or systematic beliefs. An interpretation of a production may show how an individual or a company responds to these beliefs and values. The personal experience of a director may change the interpretation of a production, including statements that the director would like to make. For example, Peter Hall directed *The Winter's Tale* in 1988 as his final bow from the NT: he was determined to make a splash, to do something different and memorable in the face of continuing budget cuts under Thatcher. Nicholas Hytner needed to do something innovative to get positive attention for his directorial skills as his grand audition piece, so his production focuses on the political aspects of the play, providing him an opportunity to use Shakespeare to make a contemporary statement (which he does again with *Henry V* his first season as NT director). Personal experiences of actors may also affect a production. For example, the lived experience of pregnancy informs Gemma Jones' 1981 performance as Hermione.

Productions may respond or react to outside politics. Hall, as the director of the National Theatre, was particularly vocal about cutbacks to the arts under Thatcher's administration and therefore spent lavishly on his final three productions (including *The Winter's Tale*). Hytner's *Leontes* reflects cynicism about the pampered lifestyle of the current royal family.

Productions may be reactions to previous performances, particularly at the RSC, where each Shakespeare production is done at least every five or so years and previous interpretations are often still relatively fresh in the audience's (and in the company's) mind. These productions often seek to be dramatically different from the one before; their relationships often highlight what is considered important at the time, from current political events to academic discussion to other cultural influences, such as movies. Adrian Noble's 1992 production emphasizes the power of community in the wake of the fall of the Iron Curtain, Gregory Doran's 1999 production focuses on psychological discussions of jealousy, and Matthew Warchus's 2002 production reflects the impact of movies such as *The Godfather* and *O Brother, Where art Thou?*

#### Analyzing *The Winter's Tale*

Many scholars when studying a particular play attempt to focus on the author's intent, the meanings and themes of a play, or study some other aspect of the text. Those who compile performance histories often simply recount the particular choices that directors and actors make that distinguish one performance from another. Each critical perspective has a certain appeal, and some even provide new insight into the play and the canon. However, as with most (if not all) theoretical readings, the application of one theory segments the play, selecting incidents or lines from the play to the exclusion of the rest. For example, Frank Kermode responds to a standard Christian reading:

*The Winter's Tale* . . . deals with sin and forgiveness, and with the triumph of time—also a Christian theme. But we value it not for some hidden truth, but for its power to realize experience . . . It is not a great allegory or a great argument, but a great play. (qtd. in Frey 310)

The richness of the play is often lost because the simplification ignores all other possibilities present in the text. Harald Fawkner goes so far as to say, “*all* symbolic readings are weak . . . All such readings will be reductive for the simple reason that complex drama is not reducible to any system of thought outside it” (15). If an interpretation uses only historical elements, then the religious symbolism might be lost. If a scholar focuses on symbols, the character drama disappears. No one of the theories normally used to evaluate literature can actually capture everything that is present, particularly in a performance, which has layers of meaning and action beyond the written page.

To find a theory that might address the numerous themes, ideas, and contradictions within *The Winter's Tale* is a daunting task. Charles Frey suggests several modes within the play, “philosophy and dance, satire and miracle, realism and romance, sheer poetry and sheer spectacle, dislocations of space and time,” to which I would add male and female, court and country, justice and mercy, art and nature, dying and new (or re-) born (321). If, he indicates, a different theory is used to address each separate issue, the result is a fragmented failure because any useful interpretation must be unified. The irony is that “a cohesiveness gained through a single interpretive approach often proves disappointingly limited and

resists assimilation into the living encounter of reader or spectator with the play” (321). Again, many of the other elements that give the play richness and complexity are forgotten or ignored to make the interpretation stable.

Study of drama should incorporate the study of performance. Because performance is an intensely social medium, certain factors must be considered that are not when studying a written text. First, Frey reminds theatrical scholars that “the transactional nature of dramatic performance” should remind viewers that meaning is always subjective, or at least inter-subjective because of its social nature (326); it will change depending on the director’s or actors’ interpretations or the audience’s response. Scholars often try to pin down the one single meaning of a written text: performance reminds us that there are multiple interpretations of plays and characters (Rosenberg 136). Performance histories can help identify these multiple versions and then create a vision for the play that contains many layers.

Frey also suggests a social reading because, as was established before, drama is a social medium and *The Winter’s Tale* “drives toward the conclusion. . . that assumes a collective undertaking and the rightness of collective intercourse” (326). *The Winter’s Tale* is one of Shakespeare’s most social plays, a play that has community at its core. Though there are only a handful of central characters, the major scenes are all located within the larger community—the initial party, Leontes accusing Hermione, Paulina bringing Perdita to Leontes, the trial, the pastoral celebration, the retelling of Leontes’ and Perdita’s reunion, the statue scene. Though the community does not change the consequences of the major

characters' decisions, they are active participants and draw the audience into the action by parallel (the audience sees itself mirrored onstage, watching the events that transpire). In addition, the reunion of Leontes with his wife and daughter does not only heal a family; it heals a whole society that looks to the royal family as leaders and models, restores political relations between Bohemia and Sicilia, and creates new family units (Paulina and Camillo; Florizel and Perdita).

The play is not just social in the construction of the scenes; it also represents the social traditions of the late Elizabethan-early Jacobean drama. According to Bartholomeusz, "it was the supreme artistic expression of a popular dramatic and theatrical tradition still surviving in early seventeenth-century England . . . *The Winter's Tale* is the supreme expression of the popular, native tradition of drama" (6). The play encapsulates a number of Elizabethan styles and traditions: masques, Whitsun pastorals, spectacle, dances, and folk songs.

I am studying *The Winter's Tale* in performance for several reasons. Performance provides keys to the play that may not be apparent when just reading the text. For example, much is left unsaid during the statue scene (arguably one of the most powerful scenes in all of Shakespeare), so it can only be fully realized on the stage. The choices made by different companies give different interpretations of the play as well. There is not just one way to read any play, so the more interpretations are created, the richer the understanding of the play will be.

For example, in the statue scene, some productions choose to make the reunion between Hermione and Leontes uneasy because of Leontes' shame, Hermione's anger, or a general sense of awkwardness. These are all logical

interpretations. It has been sixteen years, and in most people's experience, old wounds can be slow to heal. It does not mean that they cannot heal completely, but it will take time. Other productions make the reunion between Leontes and Hermione joyful and heartwarming. They promote Hermione's complete and genuine forgiveness of Leontes, making her more saintly and the play more redemptive. Because people can hold the two interpretations in their mind at the same time, both aspects add a depth to the final scene. If it is portrayed as redemptive, we know that it could be much more difficult if Hermione chose to let it be. If it is portrayed as difficult, we know that she could have been more forgiving. Additionally, how the play ends reflects the director's feelings about reunion. If the director reunites the family and court happily, it reveals a hope for the ability to forgive and heal. If the director does not believe in the possibility in reconciliation, it reflects a cynicism about the culture and community and the ability to repair old wounds.

This play is highly problematic: there are a number of issues that readers may skim over that must be dealt with in interpretation on stage. For example, with Leontes' sudden jealousy, is there a motivation? Has Hermione given him any cause? Has she done something that could be misinterpreted? Is Leontes a jealous person by nature or did he have some sort of psychotic break? The productions in this thesis address all of these questions differently; the answers require variation in the interpretation.

Time, who manifests itself to introduce the sixteen-year gap in the play, is another issue that each of the directors has confronted differently. Productions

must assess what Time's role is in the play. Is it, as in Shakespeare's source *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time*, something that constantly has a hand in people's lives and eventually triumphs? Does it represent fate or is it simply an observer to the proceedings? Some productions have Time appear throughout the play or at least be foreshadowed. Some have Time replaced with characters from the play—revealing themselves to the audience instead of having Time do it for them. Sometimes, Mamillius returns from the dead to recite Time's lines, which gives an eternal and bittersweet reading of Time. Some productions include Camillo (and Polixenes on occasion) with the audience receiving Time's message, giving them foreknowledge of what is to come.

Finally, the statue scene has its own questions that must be answered. Discussed above is the final outcome of the scene, but many other choices must be made first. For example, is Paulina really a magician, a trickster, or a benevolent playactor? How do Perdita and Leontes react to the statue? What does this reveal about them? How should the statue look and where should it be placed on stage? In dealing with the last question, some productions make Hermione appear to be a religious icon, while others like a funerary effigy. Some productions have her face the audience, so everyone can participate in the miraculous transformation; others have her face upstage, so the audience can focus on the reactions of the court.

None of these interpretations is wrong—they add to the depth of our understanding. Each choice made by a production adds to a unique interpretation

of the play and reveals how those involved react to the culture in which the play was produced.

### Summary of Findings

The choices made in the following seven productions reveal themes that reflect how British culture is currently interpreted through this play. The following chapters will further illustrate these points.

#### *Cynicism versus Optimism*

There is a clear distinction between the two theatres in terms of their interpretations. Both of the National Theatre productions are very naturalistic and opt for a less than happy ending. These interpretations reflect a cynicism and disenchantment in London audiences and in London artists and, especially in Hytner's production, a political agenda critical of the government and the royals. The RSC productions are more likely to respond to earlier productions than to the current political climate, and all of them end positively, emphasizing a belief that the play is about hope, forgiveness, and reunion. Because audiences respond well to both interpretations, it is clear that British audiences are somewhat cynical about the current social situation but also that they, like most others, have not lost all optimism and many still hope for "happily ever after."

#### *Spectacle*

However, beyond the differences between the two theatres, these productions illustrate a great deal about the transformation of theatre in British culture. First, there is a growing trend toward at least some measure of spectacle

in productions of *The Winter's Tale* seen in Hall's gigantic metal zodiac, Noble's balloon tree and cyclorama, Doran's set playing with perspective, Hytner's Glastonbury Bohemia, and Warchus's magic tricks, falcon, and live bluegrass band. In some measure, this is to compete with the West End theatres that increasingly book big name stars and produce elaborate musicals. Hermione waking after sixteen years away seems tame compared to a helicopter landing on stage (*Miss Saigon*), a chandelier crashing from overhead (*Phantom of the Opera*), or a beast becoming a prince in a puff of colored smoke (*Beauty and the Beast*). Theatres are now also increasingly in competition with a couple hundred television channels and huge blockbuster movies where millions of dollars have been spent to produce fantastic special effects. However, the danger of adding spectacle to *The Winter's Tale*, seen in Warchus and possibly Hytner, is that it can overshadow the meaning and subtle power of the play.

### *Political Reflections*

For several productions, *The Winter's Tale* has been a means of commenting on the political situation in England. Though a large percentage of the British public is still composed of loyal royal watchers, many are disenchanted with the monarchy. The society is not ready to let go of the royal family yet, but numerous scandals have taxed the patience of many. The need for a monarch, while debated for decades, is coming more into question as Charles prepares to take the throne. Many argue that royalty simply drains the public coffers, repaying the country by making a poor impression abroad and not making a significant impact in society. On June 22, 2005, the Keeper of the Privy Purse

Alan Reid announced that the Royal Family cost £36.7m, the equivalent to 61p per person; Reid said he believed this represents a “value-for-money monarchy” (BBC). However, the general public is divided as to whether or not the monarchy really is of value. In addition to the royals, a number of politicians, especially the prime ministers (Thatcher, Major, Blair), have come under attack for bad decision making in either their public or private lives. Political readings force Leontes to carry the whole production on his shoulders, which all of the productions do except for Noble’s. Audiences respond to the scandals in *The Winter’s Tale* with familiarity, which leads to cynicism about the government and the royal family.

#### *Anti-establishment Sentiment*

Beyond the general scandals and disappointments of the royal family and prominent political figures, some of the productions also reflect strong anti-establishment cynicism because of a number of political decisions, particularly regarding funding. The art community particularly disliked Margaret Thatcher, who slashed the government arts budgets and showed through policy decisions that the theatre should be pure entertainment instead of an art form that can have a significant impact on audiences. The budget changes of the 1980s still have an impact on the NT and RSC, who now rely more on commercial sponsors for funding and support and who operate in a theatrical milieu that seems to reinforce Thatcher’s idea that theatre’s only value is entertainment, given the stunning success of the blockbuster musicals in the West End. The productions of *The Winter’s Tale* that have political leanings seem to reflect this anti-establishment sentiment.

### *Secularizing the Final Scene*

Performances of *The Winter's Tale* in Britain also provide an interesting study of how a primarily secular culture attempts to explain a possible religious theme. Though *The Winter's Tale* need not be read as being overtly Christian, most of the productions end with reconciliation, compassion, and forgiveness. Only Doran's production portrays Hermione as a Christian/Marian symbol dispensing divine mercy, an idea reinforced by using Eastern Orthodox priest to attend the oracle.

Eyre attributes the redemption at the end of the play to the power of art infused with religious feeling, if the 1981 program is an indication of his vision for the play. Hands fills his entire play with supernatural, though not specifically religious, motifs; Hermione's return seems like magic. The idea of community that drives Noble's production also makes reconciliation at the end hopeful and logical; the community cannot be healed without Hermione's forgiveness.

Warchus indicates through the coffin routine at the beginning of his production that Hermione's reappearance is a magic trick and her forgiveness is all part of the show. These productions avoid attributing a specific religious context to the final scene, removing the Christian parallels and attributing Hermione's mercy to something mystical or magical. These ideas and others will be explored in the following chapters.

## *Chapter 2: National Theatre*

### Introduction

The National Theatre (NT) proves a useful case study of structures of feeling within the theatre. Because *The Winter's Tale* has only been done twice in the last forty plus years (1988 and 2001), the productions are not a reaction to other directors in the company who have done it; instead, these productions are highly representative of the personal experiences of the directors. Peter Hall was leaving the National Theatre after fifteen years as director, and he was determined to make a memorable exit and defy Thatcher's funding practices for art by creating a series of three productions that were elaborate in design and scope. In 2001, Nicholas Hytner was auditioning to become the new artistic director, so he was motivated to take risks in his interpretation, including appealing to popular interest in the scandals of both the British royals and politicians and setting Bohemia in Glastonbury.

### Origins of the National Theatre

The idea of a National Theatre was discussed in London for more than a hundred years. A viable solution to financing and location was proposed as early as 1904 by William Archer and Harley Granville Barker (Findlater). Their plan

was to create a theatre that would be representative of the people. According to the preface of their proposal *A National Theatre: Scheme and Estimates*, a national theatre should not seem interesting only

to a specially literary and cultured class. It must be visibally [sic] and unmistakably a popular institution, making a large appeal to the whole community. . . . in the event of success, [it] would become absolutely the property of the nation. (qtd. in *National Theatre*)

In their conception, a national theatre would be representative of the diversity of the entire nation and a true social experience rather than an elitist one. However, by the time enough money was raised and a site selected, World War I interrupted all of Archer and Granville Barker's plans.

World War II disrupted the next round of plans, so it was not until 1963 that the National Theatre, led by Sir Laurence Olivier, actually gave its first performances in the leased Old Vic theatre. However, Olivier was not well enough to continue as the director, so in 1973, the directorship was given to Sir Peter Hall.

### Peter Hall

Sir Peter Hall was one of the original founders of the RSC and its managing director from 1960 to 1968, after which he continued directing plays for the RSC and then the National Theatre upon occasion. Because of his

reputation, Hall was one of the many directors, actors, and producers interviewed before the NT complex was designed and built on the South Bank.

After Hall became the director, he was open about the need for change at the NT and introduced a new ticket pricing scheme (which did not last), moved into the South Bank building one theatre at a time (when each was useable, though not complete), and drove away several associate directors because of his decisions. Most notably, Hall was outspoken about Margaret Thatcher's funding (or lack thereof) for the arts.

Though the government partially subsidized the National Theatre, the government moneys did not keep up with the 1980s inflation. Hall was very vocal about the lack of government support that forced huge cutbacks in the NT programs. To garner attention for the plight of subsidized arts in England, Hall made a very political move and closed the Cottesloe Theatre, indicating it would save the NT a half million pounds a year (Peacock 46). Hall told reporter John Whitley, "The whole National Theatre position is dismal. . . . They can't have a proper company with the resources they've got." The government advised that the National Theatre and other institutions receiving funding seek private backing, while Hall held a meeting of forty-seven artistic directors from subsidized theatres, where a vote "declare[d] no confidence in the Arts Council and contradict[ed] the government claim that there has been a real increase in funding" (National Theatre Archive, n.d.).

Hall was attacked publicly by the government because of his activism. Despite his disappointment in diminishing funds for the arts, he found having to

justify subsidizing the arts as distressing. “I thought *that* battle was over. We don’t have to *justify* what we spend on education. . . . The *soul* of this country, I believe, resides in its education, its universities, and in its art in all forms” (6). Hall received a lot of public support, and eventually Thatcher forgave him and restored some of the National Theatre funding.

Hall’s fifteen-year directorship at the NT ended in 1988. Before he left to create his own theatrical company, he attempted one of his most ambitious productions ever: staging *Cymbeline*, *The Winter’s Tale*, and *The Tempest* in repertory, first in the Cottesloe (which was reopened because of a generous grant), then on tour, and later in the Olivier, opening successive nights, and all directed by Hall. He threw all of his resources into this project, eventually exhausting the National Theatre’s reserve fund and putting the company £130,000 in debt. According to Irving Wardle, “Peter Hall emphatically described the event as a ‘call to arms’ rather than an elegiac farewell” (“Taking Leave”). Hall intended to show the British public that Shakespeare could be as elaborate and moving as anything playing at the West End and that theatrical companies would need money to do it.

Given the amount of time, energy, and money he devoted to the project, it is clear that he was trying to prove that Shakespeare could be moving and spectacular (though the spectacle may have hardly seemed to be worth it when the giant metal zodiac suspended above the stage stopped working on opening night). Hall was attempting to create a theatrical event that focused on Shakespeare’s

final plays; however, many found the intelligent production of *The Winter's Tale* restored forgotten themes of the play, though few found it moving or spectacular.

#### 1988 NT Production: Expensive Intellect<sup>2</sup>

Governing the entire production, above all, is a sense of intelligence. Repeatedly, reviewers mention that this is an intelligent production; this intellect influences every aspect of the performance from the costuming to the geometry of the stage itself to the language and acting. Hall's choices for this production result in increased clarity of language and themes, a darker feel to the play, and a brainy rather than passionate performance.

#### *Traditional and Pastoral*

Hall's production is considered both conventional and pastoral. The traditional costuming, for example, is neo-classical (see Billington and de Jongh) and color coded by country—Sicilia is represented by rusts and browns, while Bohemians wear green and cream. The actor playing the bear wears a costume made to look like a real bear and the satyrs are half-naked and bare-bottomed with their legs clad in fur (Billington). Other Bohemians, especially Perdita, are clad in flimsy muslin (seen in program pictures) and appear almost *au natural*, reemphasized by the stage that featured a large grassy circle underneath an

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<sup>2</sup> The 1988 production of WT does not have a video recording available, so all remarks are based on text material from the NT Archive: the bible, programs, and reviews. Page numbers for newspaper articles and reviews were not preserved by the NT Archive; therefore, most quotations do not have page numbers.

elaborate spinning metalwork zodiac. However, this pastoral setting is almost rational instead of playful and whimsical.

Not everyone agreed with this reading of the play. For example, Nicholas de Jongh indicates that the production is a “timid, limited rendition of much jovial simpering and pagan pastoral.” He believes that Hall was not willing to take risks and that a timid reading completely negates some of the more powerful aspects of the play. Paula Webb identifies specifically why this approach was wrong for *The Winter’s Tale*. She agrees that this conventional production is playing it safe and that

Hall has erred on the side of cowardice. The problem lies in his failure to acknowledge the theatricality of this play for he remains stubbornly within a naturalistic<sup>3</sup> framework . . . and fails to exploit the spectacle of reality pushed to its emotional and physical extremes.

There are many elements that contain a touch of magic or whimsy that are negated by a more realistic structure because such a production cannot adequately deal with the aspects of the play that make it more of a “tale”: the insane and immediate jealousy of Leontes, the bear, the sixteen-year gap, or the statue scene. All of these require the audience to suspend their disbelief, which can be more difficult for some audience members in a performance that seems more realistic.

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<sup>3</sup> By naturalistic, Webb means that the play avoids the magical and supernatural framework that many other productions use.

### *Geometry of the Stage*

In addition to a rational and pastoral setting, Hall pays particular attention to the geometry of the stage. The zodiac, suspended above the stage, is a constant motif. The sun is directly over Hermione's head when she appeals to Apollo in the trial scene (Wardle, "Taking Leave"). Then, the heavens revolve when the scene changed from Sicilia to Bohemia. The circular motif is also present in the grass stage centerpiece of the fourth act. The circles emphasize the cyclical motif in *The Winter's Tale*: seasons change and return, as do the generations.

More important to the production design than the circles, however, are straight lines. In Sicilia, upright plinths help create angles and straight lines of sight. These lines are particularly important in two scenes: the trial and the statue scene. During the trial, Leontes sits downstage center with his back to the audience, staring over the sword of justice in judgment of Hermione standing in the dock (Wardle, "Taking Leave"; *NT 1988 Bible*). During the trial, this straight line does several things. It emphasizes the separation of Leontes from Hermione and even from the audience: he has turned his back literally on the audience and figuratively on his wife. He is making it clear that he sits in judgment of her and has already made his decision. Secondly, it puts the focus of the scene on Hermione; she seems more vulnerable as the absolute center of attention, but it also emphasizes her veracity. Lastly, when Mamillius' death is announced from upstage, everyone on stage turns together, emphasizing the shock of the news (Wardle, "Taking Leave").

The same geometric lines are evident in the statue scene. According to Stanley Wells, the statue is brought downstage center with her back turned to the audience. The cast is then located upstage facing the audience. The focus of the final scene is on Leontes and his reactions to Hermione waking. It also sets up a parallel with the trial scene, emphasizing the separation that Hermione feels from Leontes and making him seem more vulnerable. Hermione is now the one in judgment, which is consistent with a darker and more difficult ending.

Stanley Wells vehemently disagrees with this placement, however. Though the audience is able to concentrate on Leontes, Wells contends that the audience “as well as [Leontes], need to marvel at Hermione’s appearance; and we should hold our breaths along with the actors, expecting against expectation that the impossible will happen.” Despite his valid point, Hall’s decision to stage it this way is consistent with his geometric design, which “functions like a universal chess board” and underscores the deliberateness of the production (Wardle, “The Winter’s Tale”).

### *Language and Acting*

From the time he was a director at the RSC, Hall put great emphasis on the meaning and music of Shakespeare’s language. In his final production at the NT, it is clear that Hall still believes that language is crucial to the performance. Wells indicates that a televised program tracing rehearsals of the final three plays showed that Hall was particularly concerned with language. Wells “was struck by the actors’ full comprehension of every nuance of meaning, along with their

sensitive attention to the poetic and musical qualities of their lines,” even if at times this emphasis caused “pauses at line-ending held a fraction too long, unnaturally interrupting the sense.” Sheridan Morley agrees with Wells that Hall’s language coaching is obvious in the performance: the actors make up in “poetic intelligence and understanding what they lack in stardom or mesmeric theatricality. . . . [T]his very scholastic treatment leads to an admirable clarity and intensity: it is like watching a Pinter puzzle.” Because of linguistic emphasis, the actors exude a confidence and clarity with the language that many other productions lack, another of Hall’s intelligent choices.

In addition to focusing on language, particular attention is paid to developing Leontes as a character. Because so much of *The Winter’s Tale* hinges on Leontes’ performance, it is natural that most reviews concentrate on the performance of Tim Pigott-Smith. Despite their varied reactions, the reviewers consistently comment on Leontes’ immaturity and the physical symptoms of his jealousy.

Geraint Lewis says that Leontes’ adolescence is obvious in his “unfixed personality fluctuating between the boisterous and the moody.” Wardle suggests that his immaturity is telegraphed “starting with boyish games” with Mamillius; it then becomes more apparent as he “resorts to dolls and toy daggers to express his murderous jealousy . . . simultaneously throwing his weight about and pleading for approval” (“The Winter’s Tale”).

Pigott-Smith makes Leontes’ jealousy physically obvious in several ways. First and foremost, as the jealousy seizes him, Leontes experiences *tremor cordis*,

gripping himself and twitching. In his anger after the birth of Perdita, Leontes takes a dagger and stabs Mamillius' doll and then Antigonus' hand. Additionally, Lewis mentions the "protracted stares of paranoia and the over-emphatic noddings of a mad self-righteousness" that continue as Leontes whips himself into a frenzy. Michael Billington indicates that the performance seems clinically accurate. In fact, he quotes Dr. David Stafford-Clark, who mentioned that the insane "are the pearls . . . when the string has broken." Billington concludes that "Mr Pigott-Smith's Leontes is truly unstrung."

Only Michael Coveney seems completely unconvinced by Pigott-Smith's performance, insisting that the *tremor cordis* is more "political hubris than gnawing jealousy" and that there is "no sign here of the sheer manic ridiculousness of Leontes." Despite Coveney's dissension, most reviewers, though unconvinced of Leontes' complete passion, are at least convinced of his jealousy and madness.

### *Intelligence versus Passion*

Because of the dominance of Hall's intelligent design, many reviewers exclaim that the production lacks passion. They appreciate the clarity of meaning and the fact that the audience's intellect is engaged, but they mourn the loss of passion and emotion that could and should be stirred by the play, particularly at the end. Coveney asks, "Where is the lightness and flexibility of verse speaking and playing encouraged by Hall in his early RSC days?" He insists that this production is "buttoned up, stiff and tense." Webb compares the production to a

chess match, in that Leontes “talks and walks us through rage and suspicion while extended family and a bevy of servants circle around him like two dimensional chess pieces. We are less moved than concerned for the move that will end in checkmate.” Again, the production, while intellectually stimulating, lacks emotional involvement of the actors or the audience.

Morley gives the most eloquent explanation of the difference between intelligence and passion in the production:

There is a lack of passion and romance and adventure . . . the blood has been drained out by the intellect, and the result is a little lifeless, almost as though the production had been conceived for radio rather than the stage. Intellectually, this is almost certainly the way to do *The Winter’s Tale*: but emotionally and theatrically it still resembles the statue around which it finally revolves, in that it only comes to life at the very end.

Hall’s stage decisions and focus on Shakespeare’s language are stimulating academically, and despite the lack of emotion, they also tend to clarify and call attention to themes in the play that are often missed; therefore, though many people felt unmoved emotionally, they agree that many elements of the play are restored.

#### *The Winter’s Tale Restored: Themes Revealed*

A number of themes in the play are emphasized in this production, particularly the cycles and opposites present within the play and the difficulty of

reunion and cruelty and pain that people can inflict upon others. The cycles are emphasized by the design of the stage and the costuming: the zodiac above the stage turns throughout the play and is mirrored in the grassy stage insert. The idea of seasons is represented in the costumes: the russets and browns of Sicilia represent autumn and winter, while Bohemia's greens and creams highlight the joy of spring and summer<sup>4</sup>. These cycles, more than even the seasons, represent the cycles of generations that are finally restored at the end.

Beyond the cyclical nature of the play, most people were struck at how well Hall brought out the darker elements of *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes was brutal and vicious, stabbing both a doll and his friend with a dagger. His madness was seen in violent convulsions as well as in his jealous ranting. Hermione, who was vivacious and warm with her family and friends, became withdrawn and finally broke down during her trial. According to Billington, "Instead of swathing the play in sentimental magic, [Hall] makes you sharply aware that Shakespeare in this late Romance is obsessed by cruelty and pain."

Nowhere are the darker elements emphasized more than in the statue scene's sombre family reunion, which is "both hard-won and extremely precarious" (Billington). Leontes broke down when he saw Hermione. She moved slowly down from the plinth, moving aside the curtains unsmiling. Hermione is warm as she greets her daughter, but she meets Leontes unsmiling with a "cold, statuesque stare" (Billington). They join hands, but it is clear that this is not a traditional happy ending. There are many issues yet to be resolved.

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<sup>4</sup> 4.4 takes place at the end of summer, which Shakespeare indicates very specifically in the scene (4.4.79-83). However, many directors associate Bohemia more with spring because of the thawing of winter.

### *Social Reflections*

Hall's 1988 production of *The Winter's Tale* is part of his magnum opus at the National Theatre—Shakespeare's Late Plays—productions of the romances that focus on the darker undercurrents and the language of each play, a recurrent theme in Hall's career. This ambitious project drained many of the National Theatre's resources to build an elaborate set and perform in three separate venues. Hall attempts to create a lasting impression about the power of Shakespeare and the need for better subsidized funding to compete with more commercial theatres.

The production of *The Winter's Tale* is successful in preserving the legacy of Shakespeare (one of the original National Theatre goals) while revealing aspects that were often ignored, like the violence inherent in Leontes' actions and the possible difficulty of reunion at the end.

The cast is adept and able to improvise, illustrated by one performance when the company was on tour and all of the electricity went out. The actors lit candelabra along the front of the stage and held candles as they delivered their lines. They conveyed so much through their language that the play was considered a triumph, despite the technical difficulties ("Black Arts?"). And in addition to being able to improvise, many critics indicate that the director and the actors understand the meaning of the play's language and convey it clearly to the audience.

However, most also feel like the emotional power of the play is somehow lost in the intelligence of the production. It is so intellectual that it fails to have

much emotional impact, which is essential to the play: audiences should feel outrage and horror at Leontes' brutality, pity and sympathy for his family, and awe and wonder at the final scene. The great impact of *The Winter's Tale* comes from caring about the characters. And though the sets and costumes were used in three different venues, it is hard to justify how much Hall spent on them. Given that the cast did just as well when the audience could not see them, it seems that the expensive trappings may have been unnecessary. However, Hall's spending is mentioned by a lot of critics, meaning that at least he was able to make his message public. Despite the emotion being overridden by intellect and the production being Hall's overly expensive call to arms, the production is considered by most a success and certainly representative of Hall's theatrical interests, as the 2001 NT production represents Nicholas Hytner's interests.

#### 2001 NT Production: A Risky Audition<sup>5</sup>

##### *National Theatre under Trevor Nunn*

When Nicholas Hytner returned to London from Hollywood to direct *The Winter's Tale* on stage, Trevor Nunn was the National Theatre director. Thatcher's influence was still felt because she helped permanently change the government funding structure for the arts in Britain. As a result of government cutbacks in the 1980s and 1990s, the National Theatre was still struggling for money, though the state subsidy had risen by the end of his tenure. In fact, Nunn had personally helped fund the 1999 repertory season—*Troilus and Cressida*,

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<sup>5</sup> As with the previous production, the page numbers for newspaper articles and reviews were not preserved by the NT Archives, so quotations do not have page numbers.

*Merchant of Venice*, and *Summerfolk*—which became one of the most successful under his directorship (Spencer, “Clever Trevor”). Nunn experienced a number of successes: the increased state subsidy (for which he could not take credit), a dramatically increased tour schedule, a younger audience coming to the Lyttleton through the creation of an experimental season, and a strong balance sheet (Whitley, “New act”).

Despite his successes, however, there were complaints that Nunn had too much single-handed control of the NT, that he did not welcome outsiders or experimentation, and that the theatre was largely populated with lavish musicals and classic revivals because of his personal tastes (Spencer, “The National’s new adventurer”). Though the musicals would often sell out, there were more than 2500 seats between the three venues that needed to be filled nightly, and the NT was not meeting the financial burden.

Nunn had already announced his retirement in 2001, and people in the theatrical world were discussing the options for the NT after he left. Several alternatives had been established *before* Nunn was appointed the director: close the building and use the money to establish three touring companies, split the facilities and the outreach programs among several directors, or run the theatre as a repertory, performing low-cost productions with small casts, similar to the Old Vic company’s transformation under Peter Hall (Whitley). The other alternative, of course, was to find someone who could direct the National Theatre and make the changes necessary to help it to survive.

### *The Audition*

Nicholas Hytner had been a director in London in the 1980s, respected enough at the time that his name was mentioned by many to become the next artistic director of the RSC (Macaulay). Hytner enjoyed popular and critical success, including at the NT, where he directed *Ghetto*, *Carousel*, and *The Madness of George III*. In the mid-1990s, when *The Madness of George III* gained considerable critical acclaim, Hytner left the London stage to try his hand at film direction, starting with *The Madness of King George*, which was closely followed by *The Crucible* and *The Object of My Affection*. However, by 2001, his film career had faded, and Hytner was ready to return to his roots, directing a Shakespeare play for the first time at the National Theatre and for the first time anywhere in Britain in more than a decade.

Many saw Nicholas Hytner's 2001 production of *The Winter's Tale* as an audition piece, part of the application process to become the next director of the National Theatre. In fact, many critics review the production in that light, either as stunning success that will assure Hytner became the next director or as a dismal failure that will impress no one.

Even with the media buzz around Hytner being the most eligible candidate to succeed Nunn, Alastair Macaulay listed for his readers a number of reasons why it might be wishful thinking on the part of critics and audiences alike. First, Hytner had already received the same kind of attention when the RSC was searching for a new director, but Hytner never applied for or expressed interest in the position. Secondly, he had gained a reputation for leaking information to the

press, causing him to be labeled by *Opera* “terminally indiscreet.” Third, Hytner had never run anything before. Finally, Hytner directed a number of smash hits (including *Miss Saigon* and *The Madness of George III*), but his major successes were in the past and his more recent productions were not consistent. That said, however, Macaulay and a number of others still believed that Hytner would be the best candidate for the job because, using *The Winter’s Tale* as an audition piece, Hytner completely redefined Shakespeare.

#### *The Winter’s Tale Redefined: Contemporary Messages*

If people had protested Hall’s production as being somewhat realistic, Hytner’s production took *The Winter’s Tale* even farther out of the storytelling realm into the real world by setting the play in the contemporary political world. The modern dress world that Hytner created on stage mimicked a political and social world that the audience found familiar, heightening the contrast between Sicilia and Bohemia and making revealing parallels with the current political landscape.

*The Winter’s Tale* is set in a highly political world. Throughout the first scenes, Leontes reads over messages brought in by assistants and pores over a report about China and “Don Ellesandro the drugs baron [being] arrested” (*NT 2001 Bible*). The oracle document, carrying multiple official seals, is delivered in an attaché case by two officials. Polixenes finds out about Florizel and Perdita from intelligence photos. The trial is set up like a Parliamentary hearing: long tables for the prosecutor and the defendant with attendant attorneys seated behind

microphones, giving the distinct impression that the trial is being broadcast. This is why Hermione pushes the microphone aside to deliver her defense—this is personal to her, not public, a disagreement between her and her husband instead of between two political figures.

The *2001 NT Bible* also includes an official proclamation absolving anyone of responsibility except for Leontes for what happened to Mamillius and Hermione; though it is unclear where in the play it is used, it does begin “Here lie Hermione, Queen to the tyrant King Leontes, and her son Mamillius, both hearts cleft by the King’s profaneness and injustice” and contains near the end “All this the tyrant Leontes freely admits, and here declares unto his shame perpetual.” Whether or not it was used on stage, the presence of such a document again suggests the very political nature of the play, which emphasizes the somber nature of the first half and even indicates a cynical view that many in the audience had of the contemporary political system.

In Britain, this “plausible world of tortured politesse” suggests to audience members their own royalty with their myriad scandals (Billington). The royal families in the play are heavily indulged and well-coiffed in Austin Reed and Armani, sipping champagne and milling about posh apartments with a wide panoramic view of the winter cityscape. Mamillius has every toy he could desire, including a ping-pong table in his nursery.

Audiences certainly felt some resonance in the comparison between Leontes and Hermione and the British royal family. The media intensely scrutinized Charles and Diana’s marriage as it fell apart and the aftermath of her

untimely death. Fergie made headlines in her separation from Andrew and subsequent affairs. Nicholas de Jongh (2001) recognizes the public's desire to keep up with gossip about the "sexual secrets and scandals of the royal family" reflected in Hytner's production. Savvy audience members know there was a slight chance that Hermione might have fallen for the visiting king, even though she proves completely innocent. For those in the audience "who have feasted on reports of philandering princes and princesses, . . . Shakespearean romance accordingly takes on a thoroughly modern perspective and immediacy, while we eavesdrop on royalty misbehaving and going virtually out of its troubled mind" (de Jongh).

In an article entitled "So when are the Windsors to be put out of their misery?" Kristy Milne says that the audience was very familiar with the characters on stage:

There was no mistaking the conscientious New Age king or the young prince in shell suit and shades. . . . But the theatre-goers' reaction was not affectionate or proprietorial. It was cynical and faintly sneering, as if they had caught a hint of Tony Blair or Richard Branson on stage.

This recognition of royals and other contemporary political figures behaving badly makes Leontes' behavior and the subsequent results much more plausible for many in the audience.

### *Glastonbury*

Compared to the rigid, stiff palace world of Sicilia, Bohemia is a fancy free love-in, populated with New Agers in tie dyed shirts spreading leaflets about alternative therapies, the Kyoto treaty, deforestation, and vivisection. Exaggerating the contrast between palace and country, Bohemia is filled with anti-establishment sentiment and reeferers. Most reviewers compare it to Glastonbury, both a Christian and a New Age pilgrimage site on the British western coast that holds a Woodstock-like rock festival every June. Autolycus joins the festival in a red and white puffy tracksuit, rapping a Shakespeare remix of lines ripped from across the canon with soul singers Mopsa and Dorcas as backup. During the scene change, Autolycus rocks out on his electric guitar under a spinning disco ball.

Though extreme, this version of 4.4 is a “riot of colour and song” far from the “sober boardrooms” of Sicilia (Inverne). Instead of avoiding the problems associated with the sixteen-year gap and another country, Hytner overemphasizes the differences between the two worlds, making the resolution at the end all the more peaceful, orderly, and welcome in comparison to the chaos and mayhem of Bohemia.

### *The Trouble with Modern Dress*

As with Hall’s production, some critics again express the need to look beyond the human story and see it as the tale they believe it to be. John Peter indicates that *The Winter’s Tale* has fairy tale aspects: “the dreadful crime, the

horrendous punishment, the inhuman grief, the miraculous restitution.” Most importantly, Peter indicates that Leontes’ actions should not be explained away with rational or relevant details because a “fairy tale needs [the presence of inexplicable evil], it needs its force so that it can show you that happiness and salvation come at a price.” To try and update the play and make it seem relevant to current events not only steals away some of the magic, it also sacrifices some of the meaning of the play.

Charles Spencer is also adamant that updating the play is a mistake because characters in the play constantly recount the unbelievable events in terms of it being like an “old tale.” The oracle, the miraculous return of Perdita, and the awakening of the statue are all components more suited to fantasy than a gossip magazine. For Spencer, attempting to make the play relevant by updating it reduces the play to silliness. However, most critics find that Hytner’s modern reading does make the play seem relevant and fresh and that the woes of the royal family and other politicians in the public eye give audiences a way to relate to an often mind-boggling Leontes.

#### *Time: The Grand Theme*

Though Hytner’s production contains parallels to contemporary figures, they have nothing to do with the overall theme that influences this production: Time cannot completely heal or restore; it can only create something different because nothing stays the same and no one lives forever.

The program contains a series of images of a cairn as the tide goes out; the pile of rocks looks tiny at first, but as the water recedes, the bulk of it is exposed. It also includes quotes and poems stressing how nothing stays the same and how life quickly passes. Of particular interest is a quote by Michel de Montaigne: “And yesterday dies in today, and today will die in tomorrow; and there is nothing that abides and is always the same.”

Lest the audience miss the idea, Hytner starts the play with Mamillius standing on a table in a black robe and holding a scythe, reciting Shakespeare’s twelfth sonnet, which says in part

Then of thy beauty do I questions make,  
That thou among the wastes of time must go,  
Since sweets and beauties do themselves forsake,  
And die as fast as they see others grow;  
And nothing ‘gainst Time’s scythe can make defence  
Save breed to brave him when he takes thee hence.

Mamillius points to Hermione’s belly at the last line, emphasizing the fact that having children is the only way to conquer Time and death. The irony, of course, is that Mamillius will not make it past the third act (though he does return robed and winged to deliver some of Time’s lines in 4.1). James Inverne does not agree with the choice to bring Mamillius back, but he appreciates the reason the choice was made: “the point is clear; time might heal but it does not restore.”

This idea is also obvious from the final scene. After Hermione awakes, she embraces Leontes for a long time then kneels to hold Perdita while Leontes

reconciles with others on stage. Echoing Inverne, Paul Taylor notes, “Clutching each other like shipwreck survivors, mother and daughter do not depart with Leontes and the rest of the court but remain behind in a grave tableau that reminds you of those things that Time cannot redeem.” It is an uneasy scene; most audiences want a happy ending where Hermione instantly forgives Leontes and they live happily ever after. In Hytner’s production, however, “The mother’s agonized sense of waste and loss is almost unbearable” (Brown). The end is uncomfortable, emphasizing again that nothing stays the same or can be completely restored by Time. Much like Robert Greene’s *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (Shakespeare’s source for *The Winter’s Tale*) where the Leontes character ends up killing himself, Time triumphs in this play, though in reunion instead of death.

### *Social Reflections*

Whether or not people agreed with his choices, it is clear that Hytner has a clear vision about what he wants to do in this production and conveys it in every detail. He is not afraid to produce something that might be unpopular. The modern dress and sets contemporize the play, and other elements emphasize the theme of Time. Audience and critical reaction is split: those who like it think Hytner succeeds masterfully (Macaulay indicates that “Hytner’s inventive wit . . . unlocks Shakespeare”); those who disagree with his choices think he makes the play trite and silly (Spencer in “A Vulgar Modern Shakespeare” is shocked to discover that Hytner “is capable of such crass vulgarity”).

Most polarizing in the play are the Bohemia scenes. Many people find it difficult to reconcile Glastonbury New Agers and rap stars with what they know of the play. One night, a patron was so offended by the scenes that, after Autolycus' song was over, he threw his program on the stage and stormed out of the auditorium (*NT 2001 Bible*). Despite some very vocal dissenters, however, most audiences seemed to enjoy the production, and it proved to be a very successful audition piece.

Why did Hytner audition with *The Winter's Tale*? Again, it is a play not often done at the National Theatre, and he seems to have definite statements that he could use the play to make. The “royals behaving badly” message seems to ring true for him and many of the audiences and reflects some of the political cynicism prevalent particularly in the arts community after Thatcher's funding fiasco. That social cynicism is also reflected in the difficult ending. And the choice to set Bohemia in Glastonbury is highly controversial, but it certainly gets people talking.<sup>6</sup> Hytner creates a production that was memorable, makes a political statement, and takes risks—all qualities that have since proven valuable for him as the National Theatre director.

#### Nicholas Hytner as National Theatre Director

Hytner was chosen to succeed Nunn and became the director of the National Theatre April 1, 2003. Qualities that were clear in his 2001 production were apparent in his theatre direction as he started his tenure. Hytner proved to be

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<sup>6</sup> However, Hytner was not the first director to interpret Bohemia this way; in 1969, Nunn at the RSC populates Bohemia with hippies in bellbottoms and bare bellies.

adventurous from the very beginning, stressing a desire to push the boundaries of theatre by encouraging new writing and new forms of theatrical art (Spencer, “In the spotlight”). Additionally, Hytner was determined as he began to make theatre more accessible to a wider (and younger) audience. His first step was to slash two-thirds of ticket prices to £10 for six months (and a number of £10 seats are still offered). In order to continue making money, he also decided to stage less lavish productions, relying on basic materials and a smaller company to produce quality work (Spencer, “The National’s new adventurer”). His first year was a smashing success.

Hytner has said of the current National Theatre that it is a great time to rise to the challenge of living up to our name. We want to tell the stories that chart the way the nation is changing. We want to bring front-line reports from new communities and generations, and we want to see the present redefined in the context of the past.

(National Theatre, *Archive*)

His 2001 production of *The Winter’s Tale* certainly does those things. In showing a portrait of contemporary politics, he redefines the characters and the way people see the play, and with *Bohemian Glastonbury*, Hytner provides a contrasting community that is rich and vibrant.

## Conclusion

Both Hall’s and Hytner’s productions end with a difficult reunion. Shakespeare gives Hermione no lines to say to Leontes, so each production must

choose how she should respond. These productions emphasize a darker element in the play and the problematic issues—why does Hermione wait sixteen years to return and how should she react to the person who caused her so much pain? Hall chooses to have Hermione glare at Leontes, a clear indication that all is not forgiven or forgotten. In Hytner’s production, everyone leaves the stage except for Hermione huddled on the floor, holding Perdita. For this production, Hermione returns to regain a daughter, not to forgive Leontes or reunite a family.

Difficult reunions are the logical conclusion to a production that chooses to emphasize the human elements and stories instead of the mysticism and magic of forgiveness and happy endings. Given how well these productions were received, it seems that the audiences were prepared to accept and even support a more cynical reading of *The Winter’s Tale*, perhaps reflective of a turn toward cynicism in the general public in the wake of continuous scandal, war, and disillusionment.

### *Chapter 3: Royal Shakespeare Company*

#### Basic History

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) has existed in some form since 1879 at its current site in Stratford-upon-Avon. Soon after the turn of the century, big actors from the London stage including Ellen Terry and Herbert Beerbohm Tree began performing in Stratford. A royal charter was granted to the company in 1925 after almost fifty years of performance. For the next several decades, the company continued to attract some of the best actors in England, including John Gielgud, Vivien Leigh, and Laurence Olivier, along with new and developing actors.

In 1960, Peter Hall reorganized the theatrical group and formed the Royal Shakespeare Company. With the change, the RSC began performing classics and some new work in addition to Shakespeare plays. Subsequent directors opened new theatres both in Stratford-upon-Avon and in London and established touring companies. Then, as now, their main objective has been to keep Shakespeare alive and contemporary for audiences, playwrights, and actors and to create a world-class theatre company.

The RSC is a different organization from the National Theatre, though they have many similarities. Both companies are supported by a royal charter and

receive a large percentage of arts funding given to the theatres by the government. Like the NT, the RSC has not been without controversy: Trevor Nunn and others had to leave the RSC over private money made from such productions as *Les Miserables* in the West End; Adrian Noble made headlines when he decided to close the Barbican venue and tear down the main stage in Stratford-upon-Avon (the last did not happen).

However, distance from London affords the RSC a special status, meaning it competes differently with the London stages than the NT does. Most people come to Stratford-upon-Avon because of Shakespeare, and these people are more inclined to attend a Shakespeare performance; tourists have many more diversions and productions to choose from in London, so the NT must contend more directly and visibly with other London theatres. That does not mean that the RSC does not attempt to produce quality shows; the best productions eventually run in London. However, RSC productions, especially when they first run, are more insulated from the cut-throat competition of London.

*The Winter's Tale* has been performed five times by the RSC in Stratford and London in the last 25 years.<sup>7</sup> Through those many performances, the ultimate message has always been one of redemption and the uplift of the community.

### 1981: The Play's the Thing

The layout for the 1981 program is replete with spiraling images: Spiral Jetty in the Great Salt Lake, the Bingham copper mine, constellations, spiraling

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<sup>7</sup> The RSC also sponsored a touring production in 1984 directed by Adrian Noble, which will be mentioned in passing. Because it toured in Eastern Europe, it is outside of the scope of my study; therefore, this production does not have its own section.

flight paths, and Escher's *Spirals*. Near the beginning of the play, a huge figure of Time lumbers out on stage revealing Mamillius underneath his cloak. The seasons are clearly apparent—a heavily white Sicilian court for winter, green summer hills of Bohemia, and browns and reds of the rustics. From these images, one would assume that this production is going to emphasize Time and its recursive path, returning to restore what may have previously been lost. However, the main theme of this production is taken from a lengthy conversation between Polixenes and Perdita in 4.4, in which they debate the virtues of art versus nature. Director Richard Eyre emphasizes the importance of art and theatricality in *The Winter's Tale* through most of the elements of the production.

#### *Dummies and Masques*

When the production first ran, the action began with actors retrieving their costumes from tailor dummies that were left on stage throughout the entire performance; this convention was eventually dropped, however, because many believed that this was a cliché and tired convention to indicate to the audience that they were watching a play. Eyre includes many other devices that remained in the play, though, that emphasize the same idea. After the actors don their costumes, the production begins with a masque that previews the entire play for the audience with the appearance of the Sicilians, the bear, the Bohemians, and then Time, who looms large over everyone else on stage. Leontes darts around on stage like a child, directing everyone with a toy trumpet, while Hermione walks in gracefully on Polixenes' arm carrying a sheaf of wheat, indicating her wisdom. The

Bohemians dance to folk music, Autolycus leads in the bear, while Cleomenes and Dion, the messengers of the oracle, escort in Time. The masque at the beginning is not as random as some critics believed it to be: masque was gaining favor at the time Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale*, and he plays with many of the masque conventions in the play. The tailor dummies and the masque “underline the artificiality of the theatrical experience . . . and further counter any expectations of realism that the audience might have entertained” (Draper 52). This emphasis encourages the audience to suspend their disbelief, so the fantastic elements of the play are more moving.

### *Setting*

The set itself also emphasizes the theatricality of the production: the stage is enclosed in wooden walls, even for the Bohemian scenes, which many productions stage in an outdoor setting. Because the setting is likely to be the first thing an audience notices, it can very quickly convey many things about the production: a mood, a time period, or other cues as to the company's interpretation (Draper). The cabinet walls evoke some of the venues where Shakespeare's troupe performed, including Middle Temple Hall, and force the audience to imagine along with the actors that they have really been transported to Sicilia or Bohemia. Roger Warren particularly likes *The Winter's Tale* as a “chamber production” because the walls help contain the Bohemia scenes, which can tend to ramble and get away from a production. However, he is in the minority; most critics feel that Bohemia should be a fully outdoor celebration

(Billington, Barber), especially in order to show a dramatic contrast between Sicilia and Bohemia. The contrast is often considered important to the resolution of the play: the joy and celebration in Bohemia make the transition back to a broken and repentant Leontes and a family reunion easier for the audience. In this production, the physical setting on stage does not change; therefore, other elements are required to identify the difference between the two countries.

### *Costuming and Music*

Costuming and music help identify the transition. Sicilia is filled with people in elegant white Victorian outfits suited for court: Polixenes and Leontes wear frockcoats and Hermione is in an embroidered robe. The Bohemians are dressed for an Edwardian country festival: the rustics wear reds, greens, and browns, and most of the men wear leather while posing for a picture in front of a hooded photographer (Orgill). Additionally, the music associated with Sicilia is stately—drums and trumpets—while Bohemia is characterized by vaudevillian and Gilbert and Sullivan-like music. Autolycus sings songs for the audience as if he were in a music hall, significantly lightening the mood after the seriousness of the trial and Antigonus' death. This tribute to vaudeville also contributes to the idea that the actors are performing a story or telling a tale.

### *Disguise*

In addition to a Gilbert and Sullivan pastiche, disguises also figure large in the Bohemian scenes. Camillo and Polixenes dress themselves in black robes to

attend the sheep-shearing unnoticed. Florizel masquerades as a peasant, so no one knows that he is a prince. Autolycus uses many disguises. He is first seen running across the stage from a large crowd of people; he stops and successfully pretends to be a scarecrow, eluding the angry mob. Autolycus then imitates a man who is beaten and robbed in order to pick the Clown's pocket. When he shows up at the sheep-shearing, Autolycus is dressed in a bow tie and top hat, performing magic tricks to wow the crowd. Eventually, he exchanges his disguise, including the moustache, with Florizel, so he and Perdita can leave unnoticed (Draper). All of these disguises remind the audience of performance, theatricality, and the art of illusion.

### *Leontes*

Patrick Stewart's portrayal of Leontes emphasizes this idea of performance and illusion. His Leontes is immature, self-absorbed, and jealous from the beginning, with a performance that ranges from petulant schoolboy to broken old man. Leontes starts the performance leaping around the stage and play-fighting with Mamillius. However, his jealousy seems apparent, though carefully hidden, from the beginning. He is boyishly playful, but his "manic enthusiasm" masks stronger emotions (Draper 59). Leontes roughhouses with Polixenes, twisting his arm to make him stay longer. Later, when he sits on the floor with his head in Hermione's lap, he stares stonily forward before he begins poking and prodding her like a little boy. And his possessiveness is evident with

Mamillius: when Polixenes tries to show the boy attention, Leontes pulls Mamillius back to him and will not let go.

When jealousy begins to completely take over, it strikes him like a heart attack or a seizure (Billington, Wardle) and physically changes him. Douglas Orgill describes him as “writhing, chortling, choking on the horror of his own imaginings,” while Irving Wardle details him gasping for air, undoing his cravat, and walking and gesturing unsteadily.

Despite all the physical changes that the audience sees when Leontes is alone, he still makes every effort to hide his jealousy, though he cannot completely contain it. He shows everyone around him a “smilingly poisoned mask” and makes many of his observations of Polixenes and Hermione jokingly (Wardle). Though he works himself up and hisses out part of his ranting, he smiles genially as he orders Polixenes’ death (Warren). Stewart’s Leontes tries to appear in control, while his jealousy is clearly getting the better of him.

### *Statue Scene*

All of the elements of this production emphasize art and illusion, culminating in the statue scene, where the theatrical arts combine to accomplish a higher purpose. Hermione pretends to be a statue, and Paulina uses music and theatricality to create a magical and ultimately redemptive atmosphere. A quote by Harold C. Goddard in the 1981 program suggests that humanity attempts to defeat death “either by the direct imitation of divinity by man (the way of religion) or by the indirect imitation of it through the creation of divine works (the

way of art)” but that a combination of the two is best, “for it is only the religion that speaks artistically that is articulate and only the art that is pervaded by a religious spirit that is redeeming.” This redeeming art is evident in the final scene, when a broken Leontes is overwhelmed by the return of his wife and daughter and together they hold hands, reforming the family circle.

### *Social Reflections*

The personal experiences of the actors involved and reactions to previous productions and directors help form this production. For example, the actors had a discussion about pregnancy as rehearsals for the play began. Gemma Jones, who played Hermione, confessed to being in a “state of introverted self-satisfaction which allowed for no intrusion and blinded me to needs outside myself” (qtd. in Tatspaugh 45). At the same time, Stewart and Ray Jewers (Polixenes) had “certain feelings of impotent isolation and rejection” when their wives were pregnant. They used these feelings from their own marriages to inform their performances: Hermione is somewhat unaware, until it is too late, of Leontes’ condition, and he feels isolated and rejected and thus more prone to be jealous.

This production was also a reaction to earlier RSC productions. In 1978, the RSC did David Edgar’s *Nicholas Nickleby*, which “grew out of collaborative play-making techniques that had been developed in the fringe theatre of the 1960s and 1970s” (Peacock 90). The actors were always on stage, even when not performing, and created props out of items that were already on stage. The

production drew attention to itself as theatre. Eyre's 1981 production seems to reflect some of this feeling.

Eyre's production draws attention to itself as theatre and relies on the art of performance and language to evoke the power of *The Winter's Tale* as opposed to imposing an interpretation upon it. In 1969 and 1976, Trevor Nunn and John Barton depict the winter landscapes of contemporary Britain and Scandinavia, respectively, to emphasize "male tyrannies overwhelming nature" (Pitcher). In those productions, the art and illusion are as much from the directorial vision as they were from the play itself, forcing the audience to accept a particular interpretation. Ultimately, *The Winter's Tale* is about art and illusion and the power of storytelling, so Eyre lets the play speak for itself.

#### 1986: Peter Pan the King

Eyre depends on Shakespeare's language to carry the 1981 production; in 1986, Terry Hands instead imposes a definite vision upon *The Winter's Tale* of a magical nursery kingdom where all is not well. The setting of the play is ethereal and otherworldly, which makes some of the more fantastic events (Hermione flying in to save Perdita or the statue scene) easier to accept. The music, particularly the boy soprano, emphasizes the melancholy that pervades much of the play. The bear, present in almost every scene, is a latent power that finally unleashes itself and then becomes benign, much like Leontes' jealousy. Leontes is the boy that never grew up, and his immaturity makes him petulant, possessive,

and tyrannical. In order to restore his family, he must grow up and atone for what he did.

### *Motifs*

The first glimpses that the audience has of the stage are enough to convey much of Hands' vision for *The Winter's Tale*. The stage floor is polished blue tile, and snowflakes drift across the stage, landing on large white pieces of nursery furniture. A large angled mirror anchored to the ceiling reflects a brazier on stage, its light playing off of a huge crystal. It reflects the actors at strange angles and incorporates the front rows of the audience in the stalls into the action, which disconcerts some of them. A huge polar bear rug covers a large portion of the floor (and therefore the mirror). The wintry images are reinforced with a mimed, slow motion snowball fight as the curtain rises, also revealing Mamillius cross-legged on the floor spinning a top (Tatspaugh 48). The guests are all dressed in Regency white, and people dance smiling to the tinkling of a music box and the strains of a boy soprano. The wintry world is attractive and melancholy at the same time, containing both beautiful and potentially darker elements.

Alexander Reid's costuming helps create vivid stage pictures. At first, the entire company is dressed in white; Mamillius is dressed like a miniature version of his father. Hermione is in a décolleté maternity dress, making her actions with Polixenes appear even flirtier than they might have otherwise, especially as she places his hands on her belly (Shrimpton). During the trial, Leontes and the court don red sashes (possibly a symbol of the blood-thirsty or of the blood they will

have on their hands). Additionally, Leontes dons an oversized robe and crown, giving him the appearance of a boy playing dress-up rather than a majestic king. Bohemia is a riot of color; the rustics wear red, orange, yellow, and brown, while Perdita and Florizel, the courtly characters, wear blue. This blue becomes the new color of Sicilia, where in the final scene everyone is dressed in shades “from midnight crushed velvet to ultramarine chiffon” (Hoyle). This new color of Sicilia represents the loss of innocence and a move towards the color of royalty.

The music box and boy solo, while beautiful, are in a minor key, indicating the possible heartache to come. This haunting motif is poignant, reappearing often throughout the play. First heard at the beginning of the play, it recurs before the shift to the nursery when Hermione is accused and at the jail when the audience learns of Perdita’s birth. The music underscores the thunder and lightning when Leontes defies the oracle at the trial and accompanies Hermione when she flies in as an angel or spirit to protect her daughter from the bear. During the sheep-shearing, the motif is repeated when Polixenes first meets Perdita, later when he rages at her, and then when Camillo shares his plan to return to Sicilia. For the statue scene, the boy soprano is joined by an entire choir, a richer and fuller sound than has been heard before.

This musical strain has many meanings. Nicholas de Jongh imagines it to be something from Leontes’ subconscious: “the noise of an innocent and untroubled time, long ago.” John Pitcher identifies it as a reminder of old and unhealed wounds. However, more than signifying loss, this aural motif represents hope and faith in the benevolent help of something outside the characters. After

all, the music is not just heard during negative experiences like the trial or Polixenes' raging. It is present when Perdita is born, when her mother miraculously saves her, and when Camillo helps to bring the family back together. The best evidence that there is something hopeful to the motif, despite its melancholy, is that it is filled out at the end with a choir and then orchestra as the family is reunited and old wrongs are forgiven.

The bear is perhaps the most commented on of all the symbols. The gigantic polar bear rug, evident from the beginning, compartmentalizes the stage in Sicilia (for example, it delineates the jail when Paulina gets the baby). The head staring out at the audience was also large enough to provide a platform for first Mamillius and then Leontes to stand on, emphasizing similarities between the two. Leontes also uses the head to sit on after he accuses his wife. It provides a venue for Dion and Cleomenes to tell the other men about the oracle. When Antigonus gets to Bohemia, the polar bear rears up, eyes glowing red, and swallows him up completely. Though the rug is gone from the second half of the play, the polar bear lives on. Autolycus emerges dressed as a polar bear to chase Camillo and Polixenes off the stage. He quickly removes the bear head but continues to wear the rest as a shaggy winter coat. When Autolycus and Florizel exchange clothes, Perdita ends up wearing the coat. The bear head remains on the stage when everyone returns to Sicilia.

As with the music, a number of reasons for the ever-present bear are given. Martin Hoyle suggests that the bear is "the play's softness and savagery personified," while de Jongh thinks it shows "the violence soon to come."

Nicholas Shrimpton cannot fathom any reason for the bear except perhaps to put “the ursine bad temper of Leontes (and subsequently Polixenes) in symbolic perspective” because Autolycus mentions that “authority be a stubborn bear” (4.4.791). The bear foreshadows what is to come: Leontes’ insane jealousy and subsequent attacking of his own family and the bear swallowing Antigonus. Once Leontes’ anger is spent and nature’s wrath has revenged Perdita’s exile, the malignant presence of the bear becomes benign: it is a disguise for Autolycus, who seems harmful but eventually helps the fleeing couple, and it is present (in much smaller form) as a reminder in the repentant Leontes’ court.

### *Hermione*

Though in the first scene Hermione was portrayed as somewhat flirtatious and sympathetic and then as strong and dignified throughout her trial, the real power of her character begins after her “death.” Terry Hands is the first RSC director to fly Hermione in during 3.3 to speak her own lines (lines that Antigonus usually recites from his dream). She appears behind the mirror in billowing fabric, accompanied by the music box and boy soprano. Though she does not “save” Perdita, her presence is otherworldly; of course, Antigonus says that he saw her in a dream, so her appearance was confusing to some in the audience. It does, however, emphasize that she is still a presence within the play, one who has a significant, even divine, impact.

The statue scene also has a supernatural feel to it. She stands as a statue on a pedestal surrounded by a circle of friends and loved ones, everyone reflected in

the mirror. Paulina begins to work her magic, raising her arms and beginning the choir music. The program indicates that this might be representative of Hermetic religious magic, which, according to Francis Yates, “involves . . . the return of moral law, the banishment of vice, the renewal of all good things, a holy and most solemn restoration of nature herself.” The choir music gets louder as Hermione descends to an overwhelmed Leontes, who cannot let her go. The haunting and melancholy melody is finally transformed into a full harmonized piece: the family and peace have been restored.

This reunion is moving and magical, except for Perdita. Penny Downie doubles Hermione and Perdita, which works well as long as the two characters are not on stage together. However, since both are on stage in 5.3, Hands chooses to veil Perdita and remove all of her lines so that another actress can take Downie’s place. This might not have been an issue, except Perdita becomes fearful and starts to run offstage when Paulina begins the reawakening, which detracts from the feel of the scene and is contrary to the way the lines run in the scene if all of them are included. Despite this distraction, however, Perdita comes back and is reunited with her family, which maintains the power of reconciliation.

*Leontes: Peter Pan the Tyrant*

The program for this production invites audiences to see Leontes as the focus of *The Winter’s Tale*, beginning with the front cover, which shows Jeremy Irons as Leontes wearing a crown out of a children’s Christmas cracker. The quotes in the program create the idea of Leontes as the ruler of a nursery

kingdom. One page shows a boy wearing a blanket robe and a toy crown leading his toy soldiers with a quote from A. A. Milne's *When We Were Very Young*: "I often wish I were a King, / And then I could do anything." Also figured prominently on the page is a quote from J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*: "No one is going to catch me, lady, and make me a man. I want always to be a little boy and have fun." These lines from the program, along with Polixenes' lines about his and Leontes' boyhood days, are played out in Jeremy Irons' performance and in the overgrown nursery furniture on stage.

From the beginning, it is clear that Leontes is immature, "the boy eternal" that Polixenes talks about. He is more comfortable playing with his son than his wife, and as he gets uncomfortable, he shifts his weight from foot to foot. As he begins to be jealous, "his tone becomes petulant and self-righteous," and he keeps repeating his accusations as if to convince himself of his justified wrath (Peter). He also stamps his feet and speaks childishly when he feels he is not getting his way. Pitcher, describing this Peter Pan Leontes, indicates that unlike other portrayals of Leontes that show him as a "neurotic adult skating on thin ice, terrified that at any moment his sexual fantasies will crack beneath the weight of his guilt," Irons' Leontes is so immature he cannot take complete responsibility for his own actions. Giles Gordon takes the Peter Pan metaphor even further:

He has married his Wendy-lady . . . and invited his pal King Polixenes from a nearby nursery . . . to stay. However, Leontes soon gets bored then jealous of Polixenes . . . and accuses him of being too friendly with the Wendy-lady.

Eventually, Gordon concludes, Polixenes, Hermione, and “the cushion in her stomach are expelled from the nursery.”

Upon the birth of his own daughter, Leontes proves his childishness to the rest of the court. Fighting with insomnia (probably both because of the guilt and because of the horrible images he keeps conjuring about Hermione), he has taken the blanket out of the nursery cradle and wrapped it around his shoulders like a shawl. When Paulina brings Perdita to him, he throws the blanket up over his head to avoid her. When Paulina finally bullies him into taking the baby, he stares at Perdita both with anger and with fascination. In fact, he cannot put her down and instead scoots across the floor with her in his arms, shushing her when she cries. However, petulance eventually wins out over fatherhood, and Leontes gives Perdita over to Antigonus, keeping her blanket.

At the trial, Leontes jumps onto the rocking chair, teetering over the court in an oversized robe and crown and carrying an “orb and scepter which all look toy-like,” as if he were playing King of the Mountain instead of presiding over a trial (de Jongh). After defying the ultimate authority, the oracle, he tumbles out of the chair and his regalia, looking lost and humiliated.

In addition to establishing Leontes as the little boy who never grew up, the program went to great pains to have audiences see Leontes as a tyrant. The section entitled *Fathers and Tyrants* contained information about the conflicts between fathers and sons, patricide versus infanticide, and descriptions of dictators. For example, Robert Rothberg’s description of Francois Duvalier (Papa Doc), the dictator of Haiti, suggests, “Megalomania often accompanies paranoia

and is a product of infantile feelings of omnipotence which are retained and recalled in later life.” Irons’ *Leontes* shows all of these signs, especially the infantile omnipotence.

Another quote in the program from Vera von der Heydt indicates that, in the father-son rivalry, “a very particular helplessness is experienced by the child who is in the power of the father, and by the father who is in the power of time.” This is not just a question of generational gap; it is a power struggle that ultimately the father cannot win. The tyrant clings to power and attempts to eliminate all of his rivals. In *Leontes*’ case, his rival Polixenes, his equal in power and age, escapes; his rival Mamillius, his son and successor, dies; and his rival Perdita, his only living successor, must be destroyed. Shrimpton sums up the connection between the child and the tyrant this way: “political tyranny re-enacts the egotism of a spoilt childhood”; therefore, *Leontes* becomes “a monster of the nursery, a fractious brat whose jealousy expressed itself in tears and tantrums.”

Many people dislike this reading of *Leontes*, feeling that it takes too much away from *Leontes*’ responsibility for his actions, distracts from the generational message of the play, and creates a different play than Shakespeare intended. However, there is some textual support for the reading: *Leontes* and his son are “as like as eggs,” Polixenes recounts the two kings’ wishes to be boys eternal, and *Leontes* puts his accusations in the context of a “schoolboy’s top.” And it is clear from Irons’ performance that the petulant schoolboy destroys his own family; to reunite them, he must grow up and pay for what he did.

### *Social Reflections*

This production centers on Leontes: reading him both as a tyrant and as Peter Pan. A number of tyrants are mentioned in the program: Caligula, Idi Amin, Papa Doc, and Mussolini. These tyrants, some of them current, are all megalomaniacal, self-absorbed, and paranoid. Despite the fantastical elements of the play, it also attempts to confer these qualities on Leontes through association with very real political figures.

This production also reflects and reacts to Peter Pan, a character who emerged in Edwardian England and has thrived on stage and in movies and books since. Stage productions of *Peter Pan* are often performed in Britain at Christmas, and the story is often associated with childhood, especially because Peter is the boy who would never grow up. He has become part of the British imagination, even having his own statue in Kensington Gardens. Like Peter, Leontes is a king in a winter fantasyland who either will not or cannot grow up. All of his decisions stem from immaturity and the desire to have complete control.

Early stage history of *Peter Pan* also associates Peter with another powerful political figure: Napoleon, who though not a tyrant, was a very powerful and occasionally petulant leader. The original production of the Peter Pan play contained a scene after Captain Hook and his sailors were defeated where the Lost Boys dressed as naval officers. Peter, dressed as Napoleon, stared out to sea at the wide frontier. The image from this brief scene persisted for at least 12 years, reproduced in photographs and on sheet music from the play (C20th). This

connection between Peter Pan and Napoleon also reflects upon Leontes as a political leader because he is juvenile, self-absorbed, and petulant.

### *Conclusion*

Hands, like Nunn and Barton before him, clearly imposes his own vision on the play. Many people disagree with his decisions, but the production does present a new viewpoint on the play that gives a possible explanation for Leontes' irrational behavior as well as show his growth from nursery tyrant to mature and wise king. The fantastical elements—the music, the bear, Hermione flying in from the rafters—contribute to a sense of magic and wonder that culminates in the final scene. Hands succeeds in combining “a psychological study with the breathtaking absurdity and naïve excitement of a fairy tale” (Peter).

### 1992: A Vision of Healing

Adrian Noble, like Hands before him, has a definite vision about *The Winter's Tale*. He believes the play is hopeful and healing, a concept conveyed through most of the elements on the stage. In 1984, Noble directed an RSC touring company doing *The Winter's Tale* in Eastern Europe, where he saw a number of people moved by messages of forgiveness and reconciliation. Many of the audiences, weary of years of communism and the Cold War, eagerly responded to the hope and redemption evident in the play. Noble notes that *The Winter's Tale* is a “great healing play, both through the extraordinary spiritual journey that is undergone by the protagonists and also through the sane, healthy

influence that the humble Bohemians have on their mighty masters” (qtd. in Tatspaugh 46). Though the 1992 stage concept is different from the 1984 touring production (which portrays Leontes as a Sicilian Mafia kingpin), Noble’s overall interpretation of the play as healing remains consistent.

### *Visual Images: Balloons*

In a production dominated by color, Noble creates a number of vivid stage pictures in both Sicilia and Bohemia. Perhaps most memorable are the colored balloons used throughout the production. Multicolored balloons appear on stage from the very beginning. Mamillius is playing downstage center watching everyone having a party, indicated by balloons tied to every chair scattered on the stage. However, once Leontes is overcome with his obsession, the balloons disappear from Sicilia completely. They do not return in the play until Bohemia, where Time is a message that floats down to Camillo on a red balloon while he does the Sicilian crossword puzzle. Autolycus makes his appearance from the ceiling, floating down with an enormous bunch of green balloons that eventually form the tree around which the party is built. The shearing festival is decorated with multicolored balloons, and the satyrs dance with various sizes of red balloon mock-testicles attached to their broomsticks.

Critics suggest a number of meanings for the balloons. Benedict Nightingale offers “joy, uplift, and enchantment.” Paul Lapworth also sees “pathos, mystery, fecundity, [and] coarse farce.” Paul Taylor, unsure what to make of the balloons, only suggests supernatural interference for 4.1, an

interpretation he feels diminishes Camillo's role and intuition at the sheep-shearing because he already knows Perdita's importance. The balloons seem to be delight and happiness; they cannot exist in Sicilia after Leontes becomes crazed with jealousy. They are also somewhat fanciful or magical, seen in Time's message and Autolycus both floating in from the sky. Balloons are not present upon return to Sicilia, but that is perhaps because more powerful fancy and magic are at work there and the balloons would only detract from the reawakening and reunion.

The program design mimics the colorful stage, with pages in bright colors and the front cover dominated by a picture of Mamillius' face lit in yellow and partially covered by a blue balloon. This connection between Mamillius and the balloons also suggests life, creativity, and innocence. The 1992 program, as did the program from 1986, contains a section called "To Be a Boy Eternal," but the focus of the 1992 section is on Mamillius rather than on his immature father. For example, Siegfried Sassoon's "The Child at the Window" is reproduced and tells of a father watching his son watch the world and feeling great joy despite all the troubles and wars that are in the world. The father feels his son "setting my spirit free" and remembering "How little things beloved and held are best." There is also a selection from *Alice in Wonderland*, where Alice is grown up and gathering her own children to tell them tales of Wonderland. It emphasizes that she kept her childhood in her heart and "[felt] with all their simple sorrows, and [found] a pleasure in all their simple joys, remembering her own childlife, and the happy summer days."

Mamillius was discussed more in the program than Leontes, indicating that this production was more about seeing the wonder inspired by the play (looking at the world through a child's eyes) than focusing on the sin and repentance of his father. The childlike fascination draws in the audience and encourages them to view the play with wonder. The program includes a quote by Terry Eagleton that suggests Mamillius was integral to the court community:

The removal of Mamillius drains the creative life of the court; the community of love which he bound together falls apart as he dies . . . It is in the breakdown of the individual life, the personal relationship, that the whole fabric of a community falls apart.

Therefore, if the balloons are associated with Mamillius, they suggest child-like wonder, vitality, creativity, and sheer joy.

#### *Visual Images: The Dark Scenes*

One of the most memorable scenes from *Sicilia* is the trial scene, staged outside with a backdrop of scudding gray clouds. It gives the impression of a funeral instead of a trial, with the entire court dressed in black and carrying umbrellas against the elements. Hermione, drained of energy and earlier vitality but robed in royal purple, refuses to give up on her husband, repeatedly holding him and trying to stop his mouth with her hand as he accuses her. After he thrusts her to the ground, she speaks other lines (such as "The Emperor of Russia was my father") to the courtiers who offer support and comfort. When Leontes defies the oracle, a violent rainstorm begins, complete with thunder, lightning, and a sudden

wind that blows down members of the court and sends their opened umbrellas careening all over the stage.

The storm continues over in Bohemia when Antigonus arrives. Immediately after he puts Perdita down, the bear rears up behind Antigonus, accompanied by flashes of lightning. The bear drops to sniff the little bundle emitting squeaks and cries. Hermione appears in the gauze box suspended over the stage<sup>8</sup>, white clothes billowing in the wind around her. She says no lines, but both the bear and Antigonus turn to look at her. Antigonus's resolve strengthened, he stands his ground until the bear swats at him and runs him off stage. Perdita saved, Hermione disappears.

Both scenes, while dark and stormy, remind the audience of the supernatural powers at work in the play. Jane Edwardes also comes to this conclusion: "spiritual values have been firmly re-established, both in the electric response to Leontes' defiance of the Oracle and in the protective presence of a phantom Hermione when the baby Perdita is threatened by a very Warwickshire bear." Because the spiritual element is restored to the play, Bohemia can now help begin the healing process.

### *Hope in Technicolor: Autolycus and Bohemia*

The transition to later Bohemia is first indicated by blue skies and fluffy clouds painted on a cyclorama that extend across the back of the stage. Camillo and Polixenes are relaxing in overstuffed chairs and khaki suits in the bright

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<sup>8</sup> This gauze box was a major element of the scenery and used for a number of reasons: it separated characters from each other and from the audience, created rooms on stage, indicated isolation, and when raised in the air, it represented supernatural activity.

sunshine. After reading Time's message, Camillo jovially pops the red balloon to wake Polixenes from his snooze. As they leave, Autolycus descends under the great green bunch of balloons. According to Richard McCabe, the actor who played Autolycus, Noble wanted the move to Bohemia to be a move from darkness to light—a transition to a completely different world. According to McCabe, “when the screen lifted to reveal a sky-blue cyclorama and brightly coloured balloon tree, the feeling of release in the audience was almost palpable” (qtd. in Tatspaugh 162).

The sheep-shearing itself is representative of an Edwardian English village. Picnic tables, banners, and strings of balloons are set up around the balloon tree, while a marching band plays oompah music. Various celebrants bring preserves and trifles, while young children run around in their Sunday-best. It is a nostalgic look at community. In fact, Noble says of the production, “I knew I had to create a real, recognizable community, and drew inspiration from the work of Stanley Spencer, who painted sacred subjects in the context of a small English village between the wars” (qtd. in Tatspaugh 160). Spencer created colorful, if somewhat impressionistic, portraits of everyday life in a village, which translates on Noble's stage into much of the stage business seen during the festival.

Autolycus, Bohemia's most colorful character, also helps audiences make the transition out of the darkness of Sicilia by allowing them to laugh. When Autolycus first appears on the balloon tree, he tries to blow the balloons back toward the ceiling because he notices the Clown on stage. When he realizes the

Clown is a rube, Autolycus relieves him not only of his money but also of his flask, handkerchief, hat, glasses, and bicycle. Once he arrives at the festival, he amazes the crowd by producing a number of items, including scarves from his sleeves and a necklace from his mouth, and then doing magic tricks like running a pin through a balloon without popping it. This production's Autolycus is also a master of disguise: "he's a shrewdly controlled identity crisis who can slip in and out of impostures (his snooty, cross Kraut is the funniest) as nippily as he slips in and out of other people's pockets" (Taylor). He is artful at convincing people to buy anything from trinkets to stories about being a courtier.

Autolycus is central to the story, the benign equivalent to Leontes. As a loveable rogue, Autolycus must earn the audience's forgiveness for his small transgressions because "by excusing his sins we are more able to pardon the repentant Leontes, and accept the enchantment of the final scene. . . . He allows us to forgive and move on" (McCabe, qtd. in Tatspaugh 163). A successful portrayal of Autolycus creates a bridge to Sicilia: his minor infractions are easy to overlook because he makes us laugh; the audience is then in a forgiving mood and ready to accept the reconciliation at the end of the play.

### *Social Reflections: Healing the Community*

Though Noble's production is full of vivid stage pictures, the overall vision is to create a version that focuses on reconciliation and the restoration of the community. So many productions hinge primarily on the actor playing Leontes because he becomes the focal point of the play. However, this production

opts for a stronger ensemble cast instead of a single star. The result shows how actions can affect the whole community and how humility and forgiveness can heal it. It can be argued that Shakespeare was appealing for this sense of community in *The Winter's Tale*. All of the major scenes happen in the context of the larger community—the party, the accusations, the trial, the sheep-shearing, the reunion, and the statue scene are all attended by a large portion of the community. Noble reemphasizes this idea by having Hermione face upstage as she awakens. Instead of making her the focal point of the scene, the staging forces the audience to focus on what Hermione's return does for the larger community. Though some reviewers find this staging off-putting, many more are moved by this performance than by the same staging in Hall's production, partly because the audience is emotionally involved throughout Noble's version.

Most agree that Noble achieves his vision of creating a healing play. He trusted in his ability to tell an engaging and moving story and to capture the magic inherent in the tale. Carole Woddis claims, "Elegiac and warm-hearted, the production seems suffused by an inner glow despite its limpid clarity." Barratt appreciates that Noble focused on the spiritual qualities of the play: "suffering and redemption . . . death and rebirth . . . sickness and healing." The dream that began during the Cold War in Eastern Europe is realized in Stratford after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Noble celebrates redemption and reunion in the midst of a strong community in this Technicolor masterpiece and reflects an optimistic view for the world at the time.

## 1999: The Psychotic and the Saint

Though earlier RSC productions of *The Winter's Tale* have definite themes and motifs to guide them, none embraces one single concept as much as Gregory Doran's 1999 production. Psychology, specifically a study of morbid or psychotic jealousy, drives this production from the scenery to the lighting to the time period to the performances. Additionally, the program uses SAD (Seasonal Affective Disorder) to explain the play—people who are extremely depressed in winter find their mood greatly improved in spring or summer. This production comes in the midst of a number of psychological studies exploring sexual jealousy and a debate in the academic community as to whether jealousy is an immature feeling that could be outgrown (Freudian psychology) or an evolutionary response to real threats imposed upon a relationship (evolutionary psychology). Additionally, jealousy is increasingly seen as “one of the seven deadly facts, or fantasies, threatening marriage” (de Jongh).

### *Setting Psychology*

It is clear from the beginning that not all is well in Sicilia. Everything about the set design, lighting, and sound reflects the inner workings of Leontes' mind. Before the play even begins, the audience hears “too hot, too hot” whispered throughout the house, and it continues as Leontes walks through his court. The curtain rises on a set that plays with perspective: columns and fabric panels line the sides of a sharply raked stage, dramatically decreasing in size as they move upstage. The effect makes those upstage appear huge, but they seem to

get smaller as they approach the audience. As Leontes descends into madness the columns move in, creating a claustrophobic space on stage. Draped across the ceiling is billowing fabric that is lighted to reflect Leontes' mood—grey at the beginning like gathering rain clouds, then turning taking on a green tinge as the jealousy takes hold. When Leontes begins his rants, everyone else on stage freezes, and the lighting changes to blue while his mind seethes.

Doran has set this production in Russia, taking cues from Hermione (“My father was the Emperor of Russia”) during the late Victorian or Edwardian period. There are certain advantages to setting it in this time period. Psychologically and sexually, it was a time of public repression of sexual expression but private indulgence. Those who were sexually conservative “faced new threats of feminism and sexual liberation” (de Jongh). There is also a real distinction between strict court protocols and Leontes' private unraveling.

In this world, Leontes and Polixenes, while elegantly dressed in ermine and purple robes in public, cannot wait to get back into normal suits and share a shot of whiskey and a cigar. Polixenes is a man clearly at ease with himself and his circumstances. He puts a record on the gramophone and dances with Hermione in a very courtly and jovial manner. Leontes, on the other hand, sits down at his desk to do paperwork, refusing his wife and friend's invitations to relax and join in. There is a clear distinction between his public and private persona: he dresses the public part, receiving the applause of the crowd, but he is clearly much more comfortable behind closed doors, a private world where he breaks down completely.

Despite the beautiful costuming and sets, setting this production in the early 1900s seems to have minimal advantages. While the contrast between public and private life is heightened and there is a suggestion of sexual rigidity, those elements are already reinforced by the text and no new insight is offered by changing the time period.

### *Morbid Jealousy*

The psychological interpretation makes Leontes and his jealousy central to the play. Antony Sher, who played Leontes, researched where his jealousy may have come from by interviewing psychiatrists. They indicated that the symptoms all point toward morbid jealousy, “an obsessive condition which can easily flip over into murder” (Edmonds). In rehearsals, Sher became more and more convinced that this analysis was correct and made his performance reflect this disorder.

The program is replete with quotes about jealousy to put the audience in the right frame of mind.<sup>9</sup> A quote from Ernest Jones in 1948 explains morbid jealousy further: “The fear here takes the form of a mad suspiciousness that overthrows all reason, that finds food in the most innocent trifles, and that distorts, misreads, misjudges evidence to such an extent that no sanity remains.”

Susie Orbach links jealousy to “the externalization of internal insecurity.” The

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<sup>9</sup> These quotes include the following:

Descartes: Jealousy is “a kind of fear related to a desire to preserve a possession.”

The Song of Solomon: “Love is strong as death, Jealousy is cruel as the grave.”

Francis Bacon: “Suspicious amongst thoughts are like bats amongst birds, they ever fly by twilight.”

Shakespeare’s sonnets 12, 64, 97, and 147 are also included in the program.

program also includes a quote that connects morbid jealousy with what some psychiatrists call the “Othello syndrome.”<sup>10</sup>

Sher’s Leontes follows the pattern of morbid jealousy, shows signs of insecurity, and misreads all of Hermione and Polixenes’ actions. His insecurity is evident from the beginning: Leontes is awkward with the sickly Mamillius who must be pushed around in a wheelchair, Leontes is reluctant to join Hermione and Polixenes dancing partly because of his physical discomfort and partly because it seems lighthearted, and he is a nervous smoker (Peter). His discomfort is evident in the public arena when he pulls out typed notes at the trial to make his public accusations (though he did not need this crutch in private).

The whispering at the beginning suggests that Leontes may have already started to misread his wife’s relationship with his best friend. The audience first sees an example of this misreading after Hermione and Polixenes have been dancing. She experiences pregnancy pains and nearly faints, so Polixenes helps her to sit down. His concern for her and her dependency on him are misread by Leontes as affection. It requires little more than this to get Leontes’ already fevered brain started. His first accusations are calm and even jovial, but his smile is not genuine and his eyes start to bulge with suspicion (de Jongh). He blows everything out of proportion and soon becomes physically and emotionally consumed by it.

Sher also takes cues from the beginning of *Pandosto*, recorded in the program: “Yea, whoso is pained with [jealousy] doubteth all, distrusteth himself,

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<sup>10</sup> However, Othello actually had reason to be jealous because Iago planted evidence to convict Desdemona.

is always frozen with fear and fired with suspicion, having that wherein consisteth all his joy to be the breeder of his misery.” Leontes’ paranoia feeds his jealousy; he believes that everyone is laughing at him, making his anger even worse, and no one, not even his most trusted advisors, can convince him otherwise.

As with other actors who portrayed Leontes before him, Sher manifests the jealousy physically. He attempts to stay in control at first, responding to his discomfort with embarrassed laughter and eye bulges. However, once he is gripped by morbid jealousy, he is like a rabid animal, rage seething just below the surface as he stalks around. Sher draws the audience into Leontes’ psychotic fantasies also, talking pointedly to a selected member of the audience each night and decrying the falsity of women, which unsettles most of the audience and makes them complicit in the events that followed.

Michael Billington believes Sher’s performance to be rather clinical, more a primer on morbid jealousy than an actual informed performance. However, by the time the video recording is made, Sher seems to embody the emotions, physically absorbed and completely committed. This is evident when he meets Perdita as a baby: he is truly conflicted, striding back and forth “sobbing and snarling,” compelled by his love for her and repelled by his belief that she is a product of an illicit affair (Taylor). It is also evident during the trial, when Leontes can barely walk straight up the dais from his turmoil and then completely shuts Hermione out with a stone-cold stare. John Peter claims that the genius of Sher’s performance is showing just how terrible jealousy is to watch, not just feel. Paul Taylor, on the other hand, believes that Sher’s great insight is that the

jealousy is actually a defense mechanism because Leontes has a shocking feeling of inferiority.

Originally, Sher was to be in almost every scene, not only performing Leontes but also Autolycus. This would reemphasize the idea suggested in 1992 that Autolycus is necessary to forgiving Leontes but to an even greater degree because the audience could not have looked at Autolycus without seeing Leontes. However, this would have made the production a one-man show, and the idea was abandoned.<sup>11</sup> As staged, the 1999 production features Sher playing a very forceful Leontes and resting the entire weight of the psychological reading successfully upon his own shoulders.

### *Hermione as Religious Symbol*

Alexandra Gilbreath, playing Hermione, must be Leontes' equal and foil because Hermione and religious symbolism are almost an antidote for Leontes' morbid jealousy in this production. The symbolism does not pervade the entire production, but Hermione's central scenes are replete with religious atmosphere.

Hermione, dressed in elegant Victorian clothing at the beginning, is brought handcuffed to the trial with her hair cropped and wearing a dirty shift. Sweaty and pale, she has clearly not been treated well after giving birth. Her dock is across the stage from Leontes' throne, where she stands suffering Leontes' accusations until she can bear them no longer. Finally, in her own defense, she

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<sup>11</sup> This production does, however, double an actress; Emily Bruni plays both the sickly Mamillius and Perdita. Therefore, when Perdita returns to Sicilia, she is a clear reminder both of what was lost and what has been found.

steps down from the dock and walks over to her disbelieving husband. Though dejected, she retains her dignity, and failing in her pleas to Leontes, she turns to the audience to beg their understanding. When she turns back to Leontes, it is with pity and sorrow instead of defiance or anger. Some critics credit Gilbreath or Doran with this particular insight, but this pity is clearly supported by the text.<sup>12</sup> For example, Hermione wishes that her father were at the trial to see what is happening: “yet with eyes / Of pity, not revenge” (3.2.121-22). Her benevolence towards Leontes, even when she is so wronged, helps establish Hermione as a religious figure.

In Doran’s production, the oracle reinforces this idea; it is brought in by a procession of Eastern Orthodox (Greek or Russian) priests and paraphernalia, including a censor with incense, a Bible, a sword, and a staff with the sun topping it. The priest gives a blessing over the oracle before he reads it. Many critics find the processional outrageous or unnecessary; however, the religious symbolism makes Leontes’ later defiance of the oracle a serious shunning of religion and God (the imagery presents a God more familiar to audiences than Apollo), something that he must repent for every day afterward. Additionally, the play may be a pagan world (given that they pray to Apollo), but it “preaches the Christian virtues of forgiveness and reconciliation,” which justifies the use of Christian clergy (Nightingale).

The final scene cements the idea of Hermione as a religious and redemptive figure. When the characters first see the statue, it is surrounded by

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<sup>12</sup> Additional support for Hermione’s benevolence is seen when Leontes first accuses her and sends her to jail. She tells him “I never wished to see you sorry; now / I trust I shall” (2.1.123-24).

candles. As the lights come up, the audience can see Hermione standing in front of a staff (possibly the one topped by the sun), which looks like a halo around her head. Very intentionally, Doran makes Hermione look like an icon of the Virgin Mary. In the 1999 program, Edwin Morgan's "Instructions to an Actor" state, "You must show that you have forgiven him. / Forgiveness, that's the thing. It's like a second life." Hermione is not just a symbol of forgiveness but also of resurrection and redemption, and her appearing as a religious icon adds to her ability to grant Leontes absolution. In the final scene, the magical becomes sacred, and the family and Leontes are restored and whole again.

### *Social Reflections*

Doran has created an intensely psychological reading that tries to find a rational explanation for Leontes' sudden jealousy and irrational behavior. The academic community had been debating the psychological nature of jealousy for a few years, and Doran's production uses much of the research (including Sher's interviews of psychologists) to develop a clinically accurate depiction of Leontes. This production also comes at a time when the public interest in both popular and criminal psychology is increasing. An increase in television shows at least partly devoted to understanding the criminal mind also illustrates this morbid fascination and may explain the overwhelming audience reception for this reading.

This production also emphasizes through action and time period the separation between public and private lives of those in power. After the numerous

political and royal scandals both at home and abroad, the audiences again relate to Leontes, who can barely control what is going on around him.

All of the elements of the first half contribute to a psychological reading, but the Bohemia scenes seem to have less meaning in this production. In fact, they are hardly mentioned in most reviews. The psychology is balanced, not by the joy and innocence of Bohemia, but by the religious symbolism present at the trial and the statue scenes. Religion, particularly tied to Hermione, is the means necessary to unite the community in the face of Leontes' insanity. In the end, it is clear that rational explanations cannot do enough to explain the magic of the play or the reunion at the end. As Paulina says, "It is required you do awake your faith" (5.3.94-95).

### 2002: An American Night at the Movies<sup>13</sup>

This production comes at a major time of transition for the RSC. Adrian Noble, as artistic director, announced in 2001 that a number of changes were needed to make the RSC more attractive to big-name actors and more economically viable. Therefore, he proposed replacing two-year contracts with several-month contracts for actors in the company to bring back people like Ralph Fiennes and Kenneth Branagh, former members of the RSC and vocal proponents of the move. Noble also hoped to tear down the main stage in Stratford-upon-Avon and replace it with a state-of-the-art theatre as the centerpiece of a theatrical

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<sup>13</sup> This production was not available on video; therefore, conclusions are based on reviews and the promptbooks. Where these conflict, the reviews are relied on more heavily because changes happen constantly in rehearsal and one must assume that the reviews reflect the most up-to-date version of the play.

village (a plan which never materialized due to loud and numerous protests). Additionally, Noble chose to abandon the Barbican as the RSC's London base in favor of a traveling venue to make RSC productions more accessible to people outside of London. Soon after Noble made the announcements, he took a leave as artistic director in order to direct *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang* in the West End, which also caused some controversy for the RSC.

The first venue the RSC used after leaving the Barbican (to stage a series of Shakespeare's late romances, much as the NT did in 1988) was the Roundhouse, an industrial brick railway building in Camden/Chalk Farm designed inside like "a towering, rough wood stadium" (Barratt), which went well over budget during renovation. It resembled an operating theatre with steeply banked seats and enough room on the stage platform for audience members to sit or promenade. The theatre design influences the production almost as much as the director's vision does and receives almost as much attention in the reviews.

Matthew Warchus, who directed the 2002 production, had directed other Shakespeare in London and Stratford. He was credited with "one of the worst *Hamlets* in living memory" (Gross). John Gross was not the only person to feel that way about the 1997 production, which had a severely cut text, eliminating the first scene on the watchtower, one of the gravediggers, and Fortinbras, among other changes. This production of *Hamlet* was also updated, though not overly successfully. Many objected to the film scenes of Hamlet's life shown at the beginning and end of the play, the revolver in place of a dagger or sword, and the white pills that Ophelia threw in lieu of flowers. Poor reception of Warchus's

earlier Shakespeare work may account for low ticket sales for the 2002 production, but his Americanized version of *The Winter's Tale* received much better reviews than his earlier work with Shakespeare.

### *Americanized Production*

Creating *The Winter's Tale* as an American tale was an extremely risky step for Warchus and the RSC, though there is some precedent for it. For example, most linguists agree that the English Shakespeare heard and spoke is much closer to present-day American than British English. Additionally, particularly in the last two decades, there have been a number of successfully produced plays that set Shakespeare in a distinctively American setting. A number of companies, including the Delacort Theatre in Central Park (Wolf) and the Stratford Festival in Ontario, have staged *The Taming of the Shrew* as a western, shedding new light on the gender roles within the play. In 2001, New York's Theatre for a New Audience staged an American version of *Cymbeline* that played in London to wide acclaim.

Despite the success of these productions (all of which were produced in North America) and the precedent for using an American accent, a simple geographic and dialect change is not enough to bring new insight into the play. Especially troubling to many in the audience for the 2002 production is the inability of most of the cast to retain a distinguishable accent (except for the three genuine Americans on the stage). For Leontes alone, reviewers identify his accent as a mishmash of any combination of the following: Deep South (or Texan),

Midwestern (or Chicagoan), and Brooklyn. Most of the actors drop in and out of the American accents, which is distracting at best for audiences. The accents also make it hard to believe that Hermione's father was the emperor of Russia.

However, the switch to America does enable the production to accomplish two things successfully: portray Leontes as a Mafia boss and set up the production as a cinematic homage.

### *Leontes the Godfather*

The idea of Leontes as the Godfather is also not without precedent. Adrian Noble directed a touring company in 1984 in which Leontes was portrayed as a Mafia boss who was based in Sicily. The 2002 production begins in a 1940's cabaret, filled with partiers and a billiard table. Leontes is imposing, a bald-headed Mafioso in a white tuxedo who loves his best friend but also feels like he is in competition with him, supported by the one-upsmanship illustrated as both he and Polixenes "duel" at the microphone about whether Polixenes should stay.

This device of Leontes as mob boss is justified by most of the reviewers. Nathan finds it a reasonable explanation for Leontes' sudden jealousy and paranoia; it is the kind that comes from watching his back all the time and expecting someone to try to kill him or his family. Kate Bassett claims that it illustrates Leontes' "patriarchal brutality." The Mafia (at least in the movies) is a world in which men rule and women passively accept or ignore what is going on; any challenge to that order is perceived as a threat, so women can be punished severely. Charles Spencer finds a number of justifications for this reading of

Leontes because it gives reason for his extremely violent and cruel behavior and his “fierce [but] misguided honour” that propels him through many of the scenes. Madeline North believes that the American accent employed by Leontes emphasizes his “vulgar and aggressive language.”<sup>14</sup>

The mob reading explains Leontes’ immediate suspicion of his lifelong friend and subsequent willingness to kill him, his imprisonment of his wife, his lack of sympathy for anyone else, his menacing condemnation of his wife, and his brutal treatment of Perdita. This Leontes is very physical: when he accuses his wife of the affair, he pins her head down to a table. He throws Perdita into a bag and eventually flings her off the balcony (evoking images of bodies being dumped in the Hudson) to Antigonus, who is commanded to leave her somewhere to die.

While all of these ideas certainly are supported by this reading of *The Winter’s Tale* and of Leontes, more than anything else, establishing Leontes as a mob boss draws inevitable parallels to *The Godfather* and other mafia movies.

### *Cinematic*

In the last few decades, many theatres have trended toward the placelessness (and often timelessness) of their Shakespeare productions. However, film began updating Shakespeare’s plays and setting them in a definite location. This cinematic style was recently advanced in film by Baz Luhrmann (*Romeo + Juliet* with Leonardo DiCaprio and Claire Danes), Michael Almereyda

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<sup>14</sup> That is an interesting social commentary in itself: according to North, American English is perfect because it already sounds harsh and aggressive as opposed to smooth and refined.

(*Hamlet* with Ethan Hawke), and Kenneth Branagh (*Love's Labour's Lost* with Branagh, Alicia Silverstone, and Nathan Lane).

The overall production design of the 2002 production makes *The Winter's Tale* seem more cinematic in the way these directors have done—creating a definite place and time, filling the play with showstoppers and special effects, adding music throughout, and introducing cuts and fades.

Leontes clearly evokes images of other movie heavies as does the actor who plays him. Douglas Hodge, who plays Leontes at the Roundhouse,<sup>15</sup> is variously compared to Marlon Brando in the *Godfather* movies and *Apocalypse Now*, Robert De Niro in *Raging Bull*, and Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane* (near the end when he begins to lose it).

To emphasize a particular time and place, the Sicilian first half is not only a tribute to the Corleone family and other mobsters but also a general nod to the film noir of the 1940s. The soundtrack for the first half alternated between the forties and the sinister kind often found in film noir. Time delivers his message over the radio (to a listening Camillo and Polixenes), while reporters at a bank of phone booths give news of Leontes and Perdita's reunion. The Bohemian section was invariably compared to *O, Brother, Where art Thou?* which was released in 2000. A live bluegrass band provides all the music and gets everyone on stage (including some members of the audience) dancing. Countrified characters in colorful costumes beg for music they can also jitterbug to (because the production

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<sup>15</sup> Leontes was played by Michael Cumpsty, an American, when *The Winter's Tale* moved to Stratford later that year, possibly because of Hodge's prior commitments. Using Cumpsty allowed the RSC to use an equally fine actor who could also sustain the accent.

has moved into the fifties). Hay bales and crates around the stage provide ample platforms for the actors to show off fancy footwork in this barn dance setting.

The styles set up a considerable contrast within the play. Sicilia is a brutal place, characterized by anger, tension, and fear. It is also a portrait in black and white—the costumes and set design all leaned toward the monochromatic. This not only emphasizes the film noir feel, but it also makes the move to Bohemia, where everything is multicolored and warm, much more dramatic.

Showstoppers and special effects also fill the production. For example, at the beginning of the play, Mamillius entertains the crowd at the cabaret by floating a woman (who looks amazingly like Hermione) into a coffin, which collapses to reveal that the woman has disappeared. She emerges later to deliver Polixenes his birthday present. Much as the masque does in 1981, for those who know the play, the trick foreshadows Hermione's story (seeming dead but appearing quite alive at the end). For some critics, this trick is too gimmicky and unsubtle; others find it thrilling.

During the trial, Hermione is chained to a bolt in the middle of the floor with no other props on stage, which astonishes many in the audience. They compare it to watching a bear-baiting or a gladiatorial match because of the physical space of the Roundhouse. Hermione maintains her dignity throughout the trial, but many in the audience fear for her safety as Leontes skulks around the edges of the stage and then lunges at her roaring. This is one of the most effective (and affective) scenes in the entire production, probably because it relies solely on the strength of the actors to carry it and because it emphasizes Hermione's

vulnerability and Leontes' brutality. However, there are mixed reviews about the oracle in the same scene: To exonerate Hermione, a blind boy accompanied by a nun arrives, reading the oracle's message in Braille. This touch seems unnecessary.

One of the first examples of a cinematic cut comes as Antigonus takes Perdita to Bohemia. Instead of mariners, he travels with aviators to the Appalachian Mountains, symbolized by a monoplane flown over the audience's heads. Then, an aviator, complete with leather jacket and goggles, emerges with Antigonus and the baby in a bag. And because they are in the middle of a rainstorm, it actually starts raining on stage, getting some members of the audience wet. The bear that sniffs around Perdita later is no less realistic, even terrifying some.

The fade occurs immediately after Perdita is found by the Shepherd. To ensure that the audience does not worry about her fate during the interval, Florizel's falcon is released over the audience and the full-grown Perdita appears. Again, this makes for a spectacular though superfluous experience.

### *Social Reflections*

Some critics were immediately captured by this production: Rhonda Koenig, who did not even like the play, is "thrilled to bits" by the production and describes a very proper gentleman next to her sobbing because he was so moved by the trial scene. Spencer indicates that this production is exactly what the RSC needs: a spectacular that will draw in younger audiences and prove to be a

showbiz hit. A hit could prove economically stimulating and competitive with the edgier productions in London, while proving that Shakespeare is not dead and irrelevant.

However, it is exactly that showbiz feel that seems to ultimately detract from this production and rob the power of the final scene, which should evoke awe and wonder. Instead, the special effects of earlier scenes overshadow the simplicity of Hermione reawakening. And when the final scene is deprived of power, the play loses its sense of direction, of forgiveness, and of redemption. Shakespeare's play relies on language (the reunion between Perdita and Leontes is talked about instead of shown), the contrast of theatrical form and space (tragedy in Sicilia in the first half, comedy in Bohemia in the second), and silence (Hermione says nothing to Leontes when she awakes) to create the magic that culminates in the final scene. While Warchus entertains and creates exciting moments throughout the play, his reading does not accurately represent Shakespeare's play.

This production was a director's experiment; for Warchus, "wanting to hear the play spoken in a different accent came first; envisaging the world came second" (Wolf). Warchus, instead of reacting to earlier RSC productions, experiments with language and setting. In addition, the 2002 production is highly influenced by the theatre in which it was developed. The Roundhouse enables Warchus to use the audience, having them stand for the trial scene or dance and sing along with the Bohemians. The Roundhouse represents a transformation for the RSC—they were changing venues, attempting to compete because their old

business plan no longer worked—but it was also a change itself, newly renovated, a new space in which to play. Warchus uses the space to alter *The Winter's Tale* (a tale chronicling the real life change made by Leontes) into a cinematic American production.

Despite other successful Americanized productions of Shakespeare, most audiences dislike British actors attempting to do American accents. The actors are not consistent with the dialects they used, which is confusing for anyone trying to pinpoint an exact American location and distracting for many used to hearing Shakespeare in British. Those who approve of the accents do so because American English emphasizes the brutality of many scenes (apparently because British English is not harsh enough to portray the violence). The American influence is more than just accents; Warchus depends on Hollywood for inspiration for style, setting, and soundtrack.

The spectacle of this production thrills many of the critics. However, in the end, Warchus's interpretation seems to add little depth to the play, except to give a logical explanation for Leontes' jealous rages and increase the menace and tension of his scenes. The cinematic style gives audiences something they can relate to, but no insight into the richness of the play, which is buried in the spectacle.

#### The RSC and *The Winter's Tale*

Socially, the RSC productions tend to respond to each other more than NT productions do. This is not surprising, as there are usually only five or six years

(sometimes fewer) between productions. In addition, the critics focus less on directors and more on the actors, the sets, and the actual performance. The RSC is often very personality and actor driven, so it is not unusual for an actor to become the centerpiece of commentary on a play.

The RSC also tends to have fewer political reflections than the NT, and directors seem to feel less of a need to be dark or cynical in their interpretations of *The Winter's Tale*. Trevor Nunn, who directed *The Winter's Tale* in 1969, indicates that this particular play “speaks to a time in need of moral certainty” (Tatspaugh 13). That feeling, that *The Winter's Tale* has a clear moral message that people need to hear, has been carried through all of the productions at the RSC covered in this study.

The moral message is clear because all of the RSC productions from 1981 to 2002 end with a joyful reunion between Hermione and Leontes. Noble, in 1992, firmly believes in the hope and power of redemption that is offered by the play but only fully realized if there is absolute forgiveness at the end. The 1999 production emphasizes this redemptive power by having Hermione as a statue appear like a religious icon. It is impossible to escape the parallels to Christ resurrecting and granting forgiveness, even to people who may not deserve it. Other productions emphasize the rebuilding of the family circle with at least Perdita, Leontes, and Hermione standing in a ring and often including more of the cast. In the RSC productions, *The Winter's Tale* is less a problematic play than a healing one.

#### *Chapter 4: Conclusion*

Structures of feeling represent the interaction between personal lived experience and fixed social values and meanings, which are found in interpretations of works of art. As this study of *The Winter's Tale* shows, the numerous versions of this play not only increase the depth of our understanding of the play, but they also reveal how the actors and directors interact with their own culture.

Both cynicism and optimism can be conveyed through these interpretations. The cynicism, which often comes out of a more realistic interpretation of the play, reflects dissatisfaction with prominent political and royal figures as well as the belief that forgiveness and time may not heal all wounds. The optimism, however, reflects a belief that the community is important and that one can ultimately repent and be forgiven, often portrayed in productions that lean toward the magical.

There is an increase in spectacle in the later productions, partly due to competition with West End theatres and other forms of entertainment. The spectacular sets, costumes, and even special effects at times overwhelm the message and internal power of the play, but these productions also indicate the NT and RSC's need to compete and to draw in audiences.

Additionally, the secularization of England is evident in how the productions deal with the final scene. The magic of forgiveness and reunion is often explained as a logical conclusion, the healing of community, or may fail to appear at all.

Studying various interpretations of any play in performance can provide a point of access into a culture because the choices made in the production can be compared to each other and to the written text and then reveal how the theatrical company views particular issues within their own time period.

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