

THE FINN-BRIT  PLAYERS

The Winter's Tale



Aleksanterinteatteri, Helsinki, November 4 & 5, 2006

EDUCATION PACK



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About this production

The Winter's Tale is staged at the Aleksanterinteatteri, Helsinki, on November 4th at 7PM, and on November 5th at 2PM and 7PM. There will be a question-and-answer period after the Sunday matinee.

About the Players

The Finn-Brit Players is a Helsinki-based amateur drama society whose origins date back to the early 1950s. Since becoming active again in 1981, we have staged over thirty productions. The choice of plays has included musicals, murder mysteries, classics, comedies, Shakespeare, children's entertainment, and drama. This year is our 25th anniversary, which is part of the reason why we're staging such a big show.

For a modest annual membership fee (10 Euros), **anyone can join**, and the group is open to all ages. Actors, directors and vital support crew have come from every continent. Although English is the working language, we welcome anyone interested in actively participating in live theatre. If you feel that you would like to contribute in any way to future productions, whether acting, directing, or providing essential backstage help, please contact us through the Finnish British Society or the committee.

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The Winter's Tale synopsis: all on one page

Leontes, the King of Sicilia, asks his dearest friend from childhood, Polixenes, the King of Bohemia, to extend his visit. Polixenes has not been home to his wife and young son for more than nine months but Leontes' wife, Hermione, finally convinces her husband's friend to stay a bit longer. But Leontes begins to think that Hermione has been unfaithful to him—with Polixenes. He orders one of his courtiers, Camilla, to poison Polixenes. Camilla says she'll do it, but when she sees Polixenes, she informs him of the plot. Polixenes escapes to Bohemia, and takes Camilla along.

When they escape, however, Leontes is absolutely convinced that they are guilty. He accuses Hermione of adultery, takes Mamillius, their son, from her and throws her in jail. He sends Cleomines and Dion to Apollo's Oracle at Delphi, to see what the god Apollo says about his actions.

While Hermione is in jail her daughter is born, and Paulina, her friend, takes the baby girl to Leontes in the hope that the sight of his infant daughter will soften his heart. But Leontes' heart will not be softened. He orders Antigonus, Paulina's husband, to throw the baby into the fire, but Antigonus will not. Leontes relents but commands that the baby be abandoned in a desolate place.

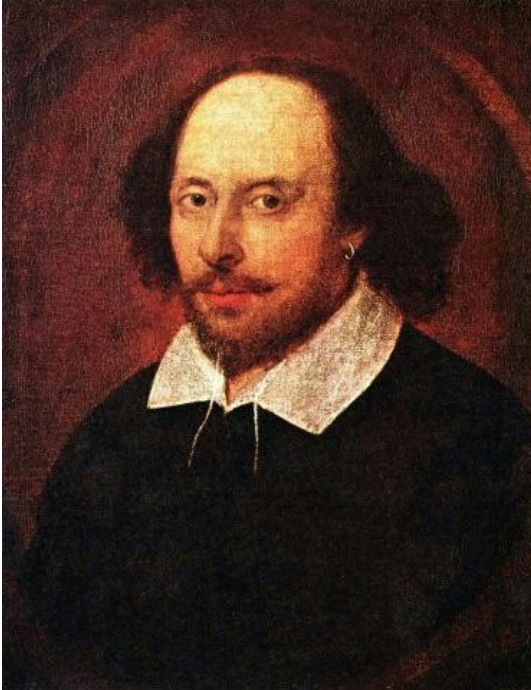
In Hermione's trial, however, the Oracle at Delphi confirms that she is chaste, the child is not a bastard, Camillo is honest, and Leontes is a tyrant. The oracle also says that *"The king shall live without an heir if that which is lost be not found"*. Leontes refuses to accept Apollo's truth. Immediately the news arrives that Mamillius, pining for his mother, has died. Hermione faints, Leontes realizes his terrible errors, and Paulina enters with the horrible news that Hermione, too, has died.

Antigonus arrives on the sea coast of Bohemia, having dreamt that Hermione is dead and has been found guilty. He leaves the baby, named Perdita, to her fate. Antigonus is killed by a bear and the baby is found by an Old Shepherd and his son, who decide to raise her as their own.

With the help of Time, we skip forward 16 years. Perdita is now a young lady, in love with the young man Doricles. He is actually Florizel, son of Polixenes. At Perdita's sheepshearing festival, we meet a whole new cast of characters, including the rogue pickpocket Autolycus. Polixenes goes searching for his delinquent son and finally catches up with him at the festival. Florizel asks the Old Shepherd to bless his betrothal to Perdita. Polixenes, whose permission has not been asked, removes his disguise and declares that the marriage will not happen and that the Old Shepherd will be executed for allowing a prince to court his daughter. In addition, Perdita's face will be *"scratched with briers"* and Florizel disinherited if he ever sees her again.

We return to Sicilia, where Leontes is still mourning the death of his family. Florizel and Perdita, having fled to Sicilia on the advice of Camilla, show up pretending to be on a diplomatic mission from Bohemia. It turns out that Polixenes knows of their escape and is hot on their heels, along with the Old Shepherd and his son. Leontes vows to help the young couple and they go off, to reunite with Polixenes and Camillo, after all these years. We then hear from three lords that the lovely young shepherdess is actually the long-lost heir of Sicilia, and that Paulina has revealed an amazing statue of the long-dead Hermione. They all go to see the statue, which, to true amazement, comes to life—and Hermione is reunited with her husband and daughter.

Shakespearean trivia



- Even though he was officially a glovemaker, Shakespeare's father once had to pay a fine to the local police—for illegal wool trading! So when Shakespeare describes a sheepshearing festival, he probably knows exactly what he's talking about.
- At the time Shakespeare was writing, there were no English dictionaries, and the language was picking up new words all the time. The words "assassination" and "bump" were invented by Shakespeare. If you say "laugh it off" you are also quoting Shakespeare. Other inventions included "puke", "bedroom", "torture", "eyeball", and the phrase "it's all Greek to me".
- Shakespeare's tombstone in Stratford's Holy Trinity Church bears this inscription, said to have been written by him:

Good friend, for Jesus' sake forbear to dig the dust enclosed here. Blest be the man that spares these stones, and curst be he that moves my bones.

- The animal world is well represented in Shakespeare's works. Over 3,000 references to some 180 different species of animals—both real and imaginary—have been identified in the plays. Everything from simple country wildlife—birds, bats, hedgehogs, insects, wild boar and deer—to more exotic species—rhinoceros, tiger, elephant and bear, as well as the mythical unicorn, phoenix, and dragon.
- Shakespeare was a kind of remix artist: only *one* of his 38 plays was an original story. The rest were reworkings of historical events or stories and plays by other writers.
- There were no actresses in Shakespeare's day. All the roles—even the women—were played by men. Young men, with higher voices and more delicate faces, would play the female roles. Women were not allowed on the stage in England until 1660, because acting was seen as an amoral profession—not that this prevented the London masses from filling the theatres! Even Queen Elizabeth I and King James I were fans of Shakespeare's players and supported them.
- Shakespeare never went to university, but he did attend school. Back in those days, pupils spent about seven hours reciting for every one hour of quiet reading. Now you know why people speak so elegantly in Shakespeare's plays!

How we see Shakespeare

An interview with Perttu Lipsanen (Polixenes), Adrian Goldman (Director), Johanna MacDonald (Director), Bruce Marsland (Clown), Jack Leo (Antigonus/Florizel), Diana Hännikäinen (Camilla), and Riitta Itäkylä (Paulina).

What is the most important theme or idea in the play for you?

Perttu: Misunderstandings and pride.

Adrian: Of course, the through-line of the play is redemption. We can be redeemed, I suppose, by love, but maybe more by the passage of time and the admitting of our faults. The play is full of sinners of various kinds, but the only one that "scapes whipping" is Autolycus, because he's an *honest* sinner.

Bruce: When you view the behaviour of another person, it is almost impossible not to put that view through some sort of mental filter, changing reality with a touch of expectation, a smattering of prejudice, a dose of paranoia, or whatever. Each of us sees the world differently. It happens, for example, with Leontes' view of Hermione and with Clown's view of Autolycus. We need to learn to step back and see the world from different viewpoints, without rushing to judgement.

Jack: I think the message of reconciliation and bravery in the face of adversity seem to recur throughout the play.

Isn't Shakespeare difficult? How do you approach the language?

Perttu: Not really. I approach it as English in general. Every era and writer have their idiosyncrasies, which I treat individually as they come.

Adrian: One has to approach it as poetry first, with a rhythm and structure that dictate musically the placement of stress on a line, in a scene, and even in the whole play.

Johanna: I read recently that Elizabethan schoolchildren spent seven hours reading out loud and reciting for every one hour of silent reading! These people really knew how to talk and how to listen, and the challenge is to awaken our modern-day senses to all the sounds and possibilities of spoken communication. Sometimes, when you hear a Shakespearean speech, you don't really understand it literally, but the words make images pop into your head, and somehow those images put together give you a profound sense of what a character feels. It's beautiful.



Adrian Goldman (Co-director): "It's not the surface likeness of almost all of the rest of drama but an *inside* likeness, full of the contradictions of a real human being."



Johanna MacDonald (Co-director): "I still remember the first time I saw a Shakespeare play in Canada. We'd been studying *As You Like It* in class, and none of us understood a word of the play. It was like reading hieroglyphics..."

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Diana: I try to "translate" the language to everyday speech. His plays are so intricate, it is a voyage of adventure to get to know a play intimately through rehearsals. It is interesting to follow the structure of the play, and to realize how *every word* is significant.

Riitta: I try not to see the Shakespearean language as an obstacle - its crucial to get to the underlying meaning behind the words and not get too caught on the fact that its not the everyday language we use. Having said that, one does have to respect the rhythm and flow of the text. The challenge is to find the balance between the technicalities of the language and the emotions within it, not too much stress on one over the other.

What's at the heart of your character - his/her main characteristics?

Perttu: Empathy behind a forced and haughty decorum.

Bruce: Why is Clown called Clown? That cannot be his real name, which is not spoken in the play. He is a rustic, certainly, with a very great innocence and a certain down-to-earth charm. To think of him as a circus act or village idiot is inappropriate, although he is a somewhat naïve and good-natured soul. Work is not easy but it needs to be done. There should be plenty of time for eating, drinking, dancing, and romancing. He rocks!

Jack: Florizel is impetuous, stubborn and obviously head-over-heels in love.

Riitta: In my mind, Paulina stands for principles and perseverance. When I first read the play I was surprised by the strength of the female characters and the fact that, unlike in some earlier Shakespeare plays, the power of women is not destructive or evil, quite the opposite! Paulina's anger is valid; it is based on an uncompromising sense of truth and justice.

What made you want to perform Shakespeare in the first place?

Adrian: Errr...Johanna called me up? "In the first place" was quite a long time ago. But reading *Shakespeare's Language* by Frank Kermode made me want to explore the late plays in particular. He comments that the late plays are less obviously rhetorical and it is almost as if Shakespeare is trying to verbalise *silence* - verbalise the process of thinking. This struck me as being much more contemporary than his early plays. *The Winter's Tale* is not as full of magnificent tropes as the earlier plays but it has a very different kind of beauty.

Johanna: I still remember the first time I saw a Shakespeare play in Canada. We'd been studying *As You Like It* in class, and none of us understood a word of the play. It was like reading hieroglyphics... of course, we *expected* it to be hard, which couldn't have helped. But anyway, we went to see the play performed and... BOOM! Every word was alive; I understood the characters. I had no idea what had just



Jack Leo (Antigonus/Florizel): "It is Shakespeare's understanding of human nature that keeps these plays fresh. People haven't changed in 400 years."

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happened. All I know is that I remember that entire afternoon very clearly and that ever since then I've had a passion for Shakespeare.

Bruce: Shakespeare is often a victim of the classroom! He has provided us with so much incredible material that it can be discussed over and over, from many different angles, until there is a danger of forgetting the heart of it all: living, breathing performance. If the plays exist only in a book or lecture, they exist only to a fraction of their potential. We can admire the lines on the page, but only through performance can we truly taste and feel the world that Shakespeare is presenting to us.

Riitta: The fact that this play will be performed in Aleksanterinteatteri really inspired me!

Why do you think these plays are still performed 400 years after the Elizabethan age?

Adrian: They work. He was clearly a "man of the theatre" - the plays are structurally unbelievably sound. In addition, the characters have a "true-to-lifeness" that is truer than almost anything written since with the possible exception of the big Russian novelists. It's not the surface likeness of almost all of the rest of drama but an *inside* likeness, full of the contradictions of a real human being.

Bruce: Whatever the context in which they are set, the plays tackle real emotions and personal choices that people have faced throughout time. They do not split the world into good and bad, but recognise the vast areas of difficulty and uncertainty that lie between. Simply, they deserve to be performed.

Jack: It is Shakespeare's understanding of human nature that keeps these plays fresh. People haven't changed in 400 years.



Hanna Aaltola (Mopsa) and Bruce Marsland (Clown) in rehearsal



Translating the scene: Act 2, scene 3

Here is an excerpt from *The Winter's Tale*, in Act 2, scene 3. Paulina has just departed, after bringing Leontes' newborn daughter to him in the hopes that he will realize the child is his. Leontes still thinks the child belongs to Polixenes, and is enraged by the sight of the child. Here he commands Paulina's wife, Antigonus, to deal with the infant.

On the right hand column is a modern-day "translation" of the scene—the sort of work that every actor has to do either with pen and paper or, if they're very good, in their head, so that they can understand and play the role properly. Try reading both and then read the Shakespeare text out loud with partners.

Test yourself! Take another speech from the play and make your own translation. Be as specific as you can!

Leontes. Thou, traitor, hast set on thy wife to this.

My child! away with't!—even thou, that hast
A heart so tender o'er it. take it hence
And see it instantly consum'd with fire:
Even thou and none but thou. Take it up
straight:

Within this hour bring me word 'tis done,—
And by good testimony,—or I'll seize thy life,
With what thou else call'st thine. If thou
refuse

And wilt encounter with my wrath, say so;
The bastard brains with these my proper
hands

Shall I dash out. Go, take it to the fire;
For thou sett'st on thy wife.

Antigonus. I did not, sir:

These lords, my noble fellows, if they please,
Can clear me in't.

First Lord. We can, my royal liege,
He is not guilty of her coming hither.

Leontes. You are liars all.

First Lord. Beseech your highness, give us
better credit;
We have always truly serv'd you, and
beseech you

Leontes. You, traitor, you made your wife do this.

My child? Away with it! You'll be the one to
take it, because you like it so much. Take it
away and burn it immediately:
You and nobody but you. Pick it up right now.

Within an hour bring me word that it's done,
and bring me proof, too, or I'll kill you
and take everything you call yours. If you
refuse

And would rather make me angry, just say so,
And with my own hands I'll dash this
bastard's brains out.

Go and burn it, because you encouraged your
wife to make me angry.

Antigonus. No, I didn't!

These lords, my noble friends,
Can tell you I had nothing to do with it.

First Lord. We can, my king,
It's not his fault Paulina came here.

Leontes. You're all liars.

First Lord. Please, your highness, believe us!
We have always been good to you, and we
ask you

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So to esteem of us; and on our knees we beg,
As recompense of our dear services
Past and to come, that you do change this
purpose,
Which being so horrible, so bloody, must
Lead on to some foul issue. We all kneel.

Leontes. I am a feather for each wind that
blows.

Shall I live on to see this bastard kneel
And call me father? Better burn it now
Than curse it then. But, be it; let it live:
It shall not neither.—[To ANTIGONUS.] You,
sir,

come you hither;

You that have been so tenderly officious
With Lady Margery, your midwife there,
To save this bastard's life,—for 'tis a bastard,
So sure as thy beard's grey,—what will you
adventure

To save this brat's life?

Antigonus. Any thing, my lord,
That my ability may undergo,
And nobleness impose: at least, thus much:
I'll pawn the little blood which I have left,
To save the innocent: any thing possible.

To think of us as on your side, and we beg on
our knees—in exchange for the everything
we've done for you in the past and will in the
future—that you change your mind,
because it's so horrible and bloody that it
must end badly. We all kneel.

Leontes. I have no control.

What will it be like to see Polixenes' child
kneel and call me dad? Better burn it now
Than curse it then. But, maybe it should live.
No, it won't!—[To ANTIGONUS.]
Come here.

You've been so tenderly offensive to me
along with your wife, your midwife, your
witch.

What will you do to save this bastard's life?
Because it is a bastard, as sure as your beard
is grey.

Antigonus. Anything, my lord,
That I am able to do
And that is noble: at least
I'll give up my life
To save the innocent child: anything possible.



Cue script exercise

Many thanks to the Propellor company for this exercise!

When Shakespeare wrote *The Winter's Tale* in 1611, the actors would not have been given the whole script. Instead, they would have been given their part (or 'role', literally a 'roll' on which their part was written). Printing or copying the whole play for each actor would have been far too expensive and time-consuming, and a playwright would not have wanted a disloyal actor to be able to give the whole play to a rival company.

As well as their lines, the actors would have been given their cues – just three or four words from the person who spoke just before them. Thus they would have their cues to enter, to speak and to exit. They would not be told how long the gap was between one of their speeches and the next. They simply had to listen for their cue and be ready to speak, trusting, of course that their fellow actors had learned their lines properly – if their cue wasn't given then they wouldn't speak!

Rehearsals were short – at busy times they would only have three or four mornings to rehearse a new play – so learning the script accurately and very quickly was crucial to the actor's craft.

The following pages are cue scripts (neatly word-processed!) for a scene from *The Winter's Tale*. You will need to cast Leontes, Hermione, Paulina, Officer, Servant and photocopy as many Lords' scripts as you need (you'll need at least two). Once you have tried to run the scene, come back to these notes.

What happened in your scene when Hermione fainted? How did the other characters react?

What clues are there in the script that tell you how to speak your lines? How much does listening become important? To whom are you speaking on each line? How do you know? Why do you think Shakespeare is helping you?

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Cue Script – Leontes

Break up the seals, and read.

(Cue) ...Praised!

Hast thou read truth?

...here set down.

**There is no truth at all i'th' oracle.
The sessions shall proceed. This is mere falsehood.**

...the King, the King!

What is the business?

...Queen's speed, is gone.

How, 'gone'?

...Is dead.

**Apollo's angry, and the heavens
themselves
Do strike at my injustice. How now there?**

...death is doing.

**Take her hence.
Her heart is but o'ercharged, she will recover.
I have too much believed mine own suspicion.
Beseech you, tenderly apply to her
Some remedies for life. Apollo, pardon
My profaneness 'gainst thine oracle.**

Leontes is expecting a different verdict in this scene. How has he changed from the beginning to the end? How are you behaving to let the audience know that you have changed? At which points in the scene does the situation change for you? Make sure that you are always speaking to someone (even if it is the god Apollo). Sometimes the person you are speaking to might have to change in the middle of a line.

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Cue Script – Officer

...(Cue) the seals, and read.

**Hermione is chaste, Polixenes blameless,
Camillo a true subject, Leontes a jealous tyrant, his
innocent babe truly begotten, and the King shall live
without an heir if that which is lost be not found.**

...Hast thou read truth?

Ay, my lord, even so as it is here set down.

You are holding the verdict from the oracle and it is your duty to deliver it. A great deal depends on what you say. How is the officer feeling as he breaks the seals? Is the occasion formal or relaxed, and how does that affect the way you give your lines? After you have spoken the scene continues. What is the officer doing? What does he hear and see, and how does it affect him?

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Cue Script – Hermione

...(Cue) be the great Apollo!

Praised!

...Is dead.

[Faints]

Hermione has been let out of her cell for this occasion. She has now been accused publicly of adultery and high treason. She, of course, is innocent. How does she feel mentally and physically? What are her biggest fears? How does she feel when she hears the verdict of the oracle?

Why does she faint?

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Cue Script – Servant

...(Cue) *This is mere falsehood.*

[Enter]

My lord the King, the King!

What is the business?

**O sir, I shall be hated to report it.
The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear
Of the Queen's speed, is gone.**

How, 'gone'?

Is dead.

How does the news the servant has to tell affect his/her entry onto the stage?

Why does the servant say 'the King' twice?

Why doesn't the servant say 'dead' the first time?

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Cue Script – Paulina

...(Cue) *How now there?*

**This news is mortal to the Queen. Look down
And see what death is doing.**

...remedies for life.


[Exit]



Paulina spends the first half of this extract saying nothing. What is she doing? How is she feeling? How do those feelings change throughout the scene?

What is her attitude towards Leontes?

What is she doing as she exits?



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Cue Script – Lords

...(Cue) *be not found.*

Now blessèd be the great Apollo!

...*remedies for life.*

[Exit]



You have been called to witness the verdict of the oracle. Have any of you brought Hermione here from her cell?
For whom do you feel the most sympathy?

What is your reaction to the servant's news?

What must you be doing when you exit?

