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The Winter's Tale: Third Series (Arden Shakespeare)



Synopsis

One of Shakespeare's later plays, best described as a tragic-comedy, the play falls into two distinct parts. In the first Leontes is thrown into a jealous rage by his suspicions of his wife Hermione and his best-friend, and imprisons her and orders that her new born daughter be left to perish. The second half is a pastoral comedy with the "lost" daughter Perdita having been rescued by shepherds and now in love with a young prince. The play ends with former lovers and friends reunited after the apparently miraculous resurrection of Hermione. John Pitcher's lively introduction and commentary explores the extraordinary merging of theatrical forms in the play and its success in performance. As the recent Sam Mendes production at the Old Vic shows, this is a play that can work a kind of magic in the theatre. For more than a century educators, students and general readers have relied on The Arden Shakespeare to provide the very best scholarship and most authoritative texts available. The Third Series editions' added emphasis on all aspects of Shakespeare performance extended the Arden editions readership to also become the preferred text for theatre professionals.

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Customer Reviews

The Winter's Tale contains some of the most technically difficult solutions to telling a story that have ever appeared in a play. If you think you know all about how a play must be constructed, read The Winter's Tale. It will greatly expand your mind. The play opens near the end of a long visit by

Polixenes, the king of Bohemia, to the court of his childhood friend, Leontes, the king of Sicily. Leontes wants his friend to stay one more day. His friend declines. Leontes prevails upon his wife, Hermione, to persuade Polixenes. Hermione does her husband's bidding, having been silent before then. Rather than be pleased that she has succeeded, Leontes goes into a jealous rage in which he doubts her faithfulness. As his jealousy grows, he takes actions to defend his misconceptions of his "abused" honor that in fact abuse all those who have loved him. Unable to control himself, Leontes continues to pursue his folly even when evidence grows that he is wrong. To his great regret, these impulsive acts cost him dearly. Three particular aspects of the play deserve special mention. The first is the way that Shakespeare ties together actions set 16 years apart in time. Although that sounds like crossing the Grand Canyon in a motorcycle jump, Shakespeare pulls off the jump rather well so that it is not so big a leap. The second is that Shakespeare captures entirely different moods from hilarious good humor to deep depression and remorse closely adjacent to one another. As a result, the audience is able to experience many more emotions than normally are evoked in a single play. Third, the play's final scene is as remarkable a bit of writing as you can imagine. Read it, and marvel! After you finish reading this play, think about where your own loss of temper has had bad consequences.

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