



# THE BRIDGE PROJECT

TEACHERS' RESOURCE PACK  
BY ELANOR WALLIS – SCOTT  
AND EMILY COOK

Supported by



# THE BRIDGE PROJECT RESOURCE PACK CONTENTS

## Part I: *The Cherry Orchard* by Anton Chekhov

Photo sheet of characters from The Bridge Project's <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	3
Life & Works: Anton Chekhov	4
Chekhov: The Russian Enigma	5
Contemporary Writers on Chekhov	7
<i>The Cherry Orchard</i> : A Brief Introduction	8
<i>The Cherry Orchard</i> : Synopsis	9
Production History	10
Activity: A Scene from <i>The Cherry Orchard</i>	11

## Part II: *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare

Photo sheet of characters from The Bridge Project's <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	14
Life & Works: William Shakespeare	15
Defying the Conventions	16
Shakespeare's Lasting Popularity	18
<i>The Winter's Tale</i> : Synopsis	20
Question & Answers from Members of the Cast	21
Activity: Scenes from <i>The Winter's Tale</i>	24

Part I: The Cherry Orchard

# THE CHERRY ORCHARD CHARACTER PHOTOS



# LIFE & WORKS ANTON CHEKHOV

**1860**

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov born on 17 January in Taganrog, a provincial seaport in South Russia, the third of six children of a grocer and his wife. His grandfather, a serf, had bought his freedom in 1841.

**1869**

Anton enters Taganrog High School.

**1875**

His father is bankrupted, and the family flee to Moscow, leaving Anton behind to finish school.

**1879**

He leaves school and joins his family in Moscow, where he enrolls in the university to study medicine.

**1880**

His humorous short stories and sketches are published. He supports his family with his earnings. Writes *Platonov*.

**1884**

He obtains his medical degree and begins to practise medicine.

**1886**

Publication of his first collection of stories, *Motley Tales*.

**1887**

*Ivanov*, his first full-length play to be produced, opens in Moscow. Publication of a second collection of stories, *In the Twilight*.

**1888**

His publications receive great praise, and he wins the Academy of Sciences' Pushkin Prize. He meets Constantin Stanislavski. Writes the one-act plays *The Bear*, *The Proposal*, *A Tragic Role*, *The Wedding*.

**1889**

*The Wood Demon*, the precursor of *Uncle Vanya*, is staged in Moscow, but lasts only three performances.

**1890**

Embarks on a scientific and humanitarian expedition across Siberia to a penal colony on the island of Sakhalin, where he interviews the prisoners, and publishes findings that are critical of the administration. His health suffers from the three-month visit.

**1892**

Writes *Ward No 6*, and publishes work in periodicals in Moscow and St Petersburg. He buys an estate in Melikhovo, 50 miles outside Moscow, where he writes many short stories. A model farmer and landowner, he builds schools for the peasants, and plants a cherry orchard.

**1896**

Writes *The Seagull*, which opens in St Petersburg. The production is a failure, and he vows to write no more plays. His health declines as a result of tuberculosis.

**1898**

He moves to Yalta in the Crimea. Under Stanislavski's direction *The Seagull* is staged to great acclaim by the recently opened Moscow Art Theatre.

**1899**

*Uncle Vanya* is produced successfully by the Moscow Art Theatre.

**1901**

*Three Sisters* is produced by the Moscow Art Theatre, but is poorly received. He marries Olga Knipper, a leading actress in the company.

**1904**

*The Cherry Orchard*, his last play, opens on his 44th birthday, with Olga Knipper as Ranevskaya. In July, after two heart attacks, he dies in a hotel bedroom in the German spa town of Badenweiler, where he has gone for treatment for his tuberculosis. He is buried in Moscow.

# CHEKOV THE RUSSIAN ENIGMA

## GORDON MCVAY ON CHEKHOV'S ELUSIVE PERSONALITY

Anton Chekhov – the son of a grocer and grandson of a serf – was born in the provincial south Russian port of Taganrog on 17 January 1860. Dr Anton Chekhov – world-famous short-story writer and dramatist – died in the peaceful south German spa of Badenweiler on 2 July 1904. For nearly half of his forty-four years Dr Chekhov had been afflicted by symptoms of tuberculosis, a disease which he long sought to ignore and conceal, but which inexorably claimed him.

His origins were inconspicuous. After 'a childhood that was no childhood' (as his brother Alexander recalled him saying), marred by a father who was both petty tyrant and religious fanatic, young Anton early cultivated the qualities of moral self-discipline, emotional and intellectual independence, and responsibility towards his large family (comprising mother, father, sister and four brothers). By the age of nineteen he had assumed natural leadership of this clan.

Shortage of money compelled him, while studying medicine at Moscow University, to compose and publish hundreds of comic short stories, often under the pseudonym Antosha Chekhonte. For several years he combined two professions, as doctor and writer. 'Medicine is my lawful wife, and literature is my mistress. When I'm tired of one, I spend the night with the other,' he wrote in September 1888.

The transition from slave to free man left an indelible imprint on Chekhov's soul. 'Write a story,' he suggested to his close friend Suvorin, with clear reference to his own painful evolution, 'about a young man, the son of a serf, a former shop-minder, chorister, schoolboy and student, who was brought up to fawn upon rank, to kiss priests' hands, and to worship others' thoughts....Write how this young man squeezes the slave out of himself drop by drop, and then wakes up one fine morning to discover that in his veins flows not the blood of a slave, but of a real human being.'

Throughout his life Chekhov jealously guarded his hard-won freedom against all those who would have trapped him beneath a religious, political or artistic label. 'I'm not a liberal, or a conservative, or a gradualist, or a monk, or an indifferentist,' he wrote. 'I should like to be a free artist and that's all....My holy of holies is the human body, health, intelligence, talent, inspiration, love, and the most absolute freedom imaginable, freedom from violence and lies, no matter what form these may take.'

It was perhaps his veneration of freedom that prompted him, in 1890, to undertake the unexpected and arduous journey across Siberia to Sakhalin, where he conducted a detailed census of some 10,000 convicts and settlers condemned to live out their lives on that Devil's Island.

Chekhov's own life-sentence, as decreed by his tubercle bacilli, was to be a further fourteen years, largely spent with the family on his estate in Melikhovo or at his villa in Yalta. Though professing a streak of south Russian indolence, he toiled unremittingly. His final years were plagued by haemorrhoids, blood-spitting, loneliness and depression, and brightened by his association with the Moscow Art Theatre and his marriage, in 1901, to the actress Olga Knipper. With enormous effort he managed to complete his last play *The Cherry Orchard*, and then slipped quietly offstage, to Badenweiler, to die.

The outer facts of Chekhov's life are well established, thanks to his voluminous correspondence, the memoirs of relatives and acquaintances, and the efforts of scholars. Evidence suggests that, besides being a brilliantly innovative and subtle writer, he was also an unusually admirable person. Whereas other 'great' Russian authors incline to excess, with elements of neurosis and *folie des grandeurs* (Lermontov, Gogol, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy), Chekhov presents a remarkably unified and balanced personality, devoid of rhetoric and megalomania.

In a land of preachers and partisans, he persistently refused to pontificate, with the result that he was often reviled for 'lack of principles' and absence of philosophical or political purpose. These charges worried him, although his life might serve as a model of positive practical endeavour. Despite his own ill-health, he supported his family, treated peasants for their everyday ailments and at times of famine and cholera, planted trees, built schools, donated books to the Taganrog library, and performed innumerable undemonstrative acts of kindness.

Because he was a celebrated author, women idolised him and colleagues envied him – but he soon perceived the falseness

of fame. 'Real talents always sit in the shadows,' he wrote in March 1886. His modesty, humility and sense of humour are endearing. There is an understandable temptation to regard Chekhov as a saintly figure, the gentle seer with tired, compassionate smile, pince-nez and blood-flecked beard.

And yet....While not denying its attractiveness, virtually all biographers are struck by the 'elusiveness' of Chekhov's personality. His reserve and restraint may be interpreted as aloofness and detachment; his oft-repeated call for 'objectivity' as a writer may signify indifference; his playfully bantering tone in letters to enamoured females may betoken evasiveness and insensitivity; his gregariousness masks his loneliness; his concern may conceal an inner cold.

Some of these suspicions or accusations are not wholly without foundation. Chekhov himself was conscious of the limits to his emotional energies. 'The fire in me burns evenly and sluggishly, without flashes and crashes....So what I write is neither outstandingly stupid nor remarkably intelligent....I have little passion.' Nor did he ever pretend to be a saint. 'In matters of morality I'm neither above nor below the average,' he wrote. 'Neither a hero nor a villain...I'm like most people.'

It may well be that Chekhov's equanimity, and the early onset of his illness, deprived him prematurely of youth's enviable elation. At the same time, however, his acute sense of proportion and his awareness of life's transience enabled him to see the folly of self-aggrandisement and the vanity of rank, power and worldly success. A person endowed with Chekhov's feeling for justice and freedom could never have succumbed to the fanaticism of Bolshevism or any other extremist dogma.

Chekhov devoted his limited time and energy to family, friends, creative work, and charitable enterprise. He avoided ostentatious self-revelation in his personal life, just as he constantly shunned overt subjectivity and didacticism in his writings. His reserve was a very natural quality, intensified by the application of will-power and self-control. Nevertheless, for those who – unChekhovianly – would seek to explain him away, the 'enigma' of Chekhov obstinately remains.

# CONTEMPORARY WRITERS ON CHEKHOV

**There is never a time when I'm not reading or rereading a story or play by Chekhov.**

Cristina Garcia

**In a short story that's next to the poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right. In the novel you can be careless but in the short story you can't. I mean by that the good short stories like Chekhov wrote. That's why I rate that second – it's because it demands a nearer absolute exactitude. You have less room to be slovenly and careless. There's less room in it for trash.**

William Faulkner

**I'm crazy about Chekhov. I never knew anyone that wasn't.**

Woody Allen

**Chekhov! Chekhov! Chekhov!**

Tennessee Williams, asked  
to name his favourite authors

**Reading Chekhov was just like the angels singing to me.**

Eudora Welty

**If I have to choose between Chekhov and most hip-hop, I'll go with Chekhov.**

Cornel West

**Read Chekhov, read the stories straight through. Admit that you understand nothing of life, nothing of what you see. Then go out and look at the world.**

Francine Prose,  
*Learning from Chekhov*

**Chekhov's stories are as wonderful (and necessary) now as when they first appeared. It is not only the immense number of stories he wrote – for few, if any, writers have ever done more – it is the awesome frequency with which he produced masterpieces, stories that thrive us as well as delight and move us, that lay bare our emotions in ways only true art can accomplish.**

Raymond Carver

**Chekhov wrote about six good stories. But he was an amateur writer.**

Ernest Hemingway

**Who better to learn from than Chekhov, who is here plainly in front of us to teach, as we can be plainly in front of him to learn.**

Romulus Linney,  
*Story Quarterly*, 37, 2001



# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

## A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

Anton Chekhov wrote *The Cherry Orchard* during the last year of his life. Chekhov intended the play to be a comedy, but when it was first produced by the Moscow Arts Theatre on January 17, 1904, producer Konstantin Stanislavsky insisted it should be played as a tragedy. Chekhov protested against this portrayal, but to this day, most productions emphasize the tragic elements of the piece. *The Cherry Orchard* is a play about the passing of an era; some critics have said that it is a play about nothing more than a wealthy family that loses its beloved cherry orchard and estate to a man of the rising middle class. There may be some biographical elements in the play; Chekhov's family had lost their home to repossession in 1876, and this may have been an inspiration for the story. He also found ideas for some of the characters while staying at the estate owned by Stanislavsky's mother in 1902.

*The Cherry Orchard* portrays the social climate of Russia at the beginning of the 20th century, when the aristocrats and land-owning gentry were losing their wealth and revealed themselves to be incapable of coping with their change in status. Many Socialist Soviet critics in Russia after the Revolution of 1917 tried to interpret this as an indictment of Russian society at the turn of the century; however, it is unlikely that Chekhov meant this play as an attack on the society of which he was so much a part. Though intended as a comedy, the tragedy of the situation in which Mrs. Ranevsky and her family find themselves is derived primarily from their inability to adapt to their new social and personal responsibilities. No longer able to live on the labour provided by the serfs (slaves) who worked the land, many wealthy landowners, like Mrs. Ranevsky in *The Cherry Orchard*, lost their fortunes and their estates.



# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

## SYNOPSIS

The play concerns an aristocratic Russian woman, Liubov, and her family as they return to the family's estate (which includes a large and well-known cherry orchard) just before it is auctioned to pay the mortgage. While presented with options to save the estate, the family essentially does nothing and the play ends with the estate being sold and the family leaving to the sound of the cherry orchard being cut down. The story presents themes of cultural futility – both the futility of the aristocracy to maintain its status and the futility of the bourgeoisie to find meaning in its newfound materialism. In reflecting the socio-economic forces at work in Russia at the turn of the 20th century, including the rise of the middle class after the abolition of **serfdom** in the mid-19th century and the sinking of the aristocracy, the play reflects forces at work around the globe in that period. Since the first production at the Moscow Arts Theatre, this play has been translated into many languages and produced around the world, becoming a classic work of dramatic literature. Some of the major directors in the West have directed this play, each interpreting the work differently. Some of these directors include **Charles Laughton**, **Peter Brook**, **Andrei Serban**, **Eva Le Gallienne**, **Jean-Louis Barrault**, **Tyrone Guthrie** and **Giorgio Strehler**. The play's influence has also been widely felt in dramatic works by many including **Eugene O'Neill**, **George Bernard Shaw** and **Arthur Miller**.

# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

## MAJOR PRODUCTION DETAILS

Premieres: 17 January 1904 (the playwright's birthday)

Venue: Moscow Art Theatre

Director: Constantin Stanislavski

Trivia: Chekhov disliked the Stanislavski production intensely, concluding that Stanislavski had "ruined" his play. The playwright's wife Olga Knipper played Madame Ranevskaya.

Date: 1934

Venue: Sadler's Wells Theatre, London

Director: Tyrone Guthrie

Translated by: Hubert Butler

Trivia: This production was among the first English-language productions of the play.

Date: 1977

Venue: Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

Director: Andrei Serban

Trivia: featuring Tony Award-winning costumes and set by Santo Loquasto, starring Irene Worth as Ranevskaya and Meryl Streep as Dunyasha.

Date: 1978

Venue: Royal National Theatre

Director: Peter Hall

Translated by Michael Frayn

Trivia: Starring Dorothy Tutin as Ranevskaya, Albert Finney as Lopakhin, Ben Kingsley as Trofimov and Ralph Richardson as Firs to nearly universal acclaim. A minimalist production directed by Peter Gill opened at the Riverside Studios in London at virtually the same time, to good reviews.

Date: 1981

Director: Peter Brook

Trivia: In French with an international cast including Brook's wife Natasha Parry as Ranevskaya, Niels Arestrup as Lopakhin and Michael Piccoli as Gayev. The production was remounted at the Brooklyn Academy of Music in 1988 after tours through Africa and the Middle East.

A film version starring Charlotte Rampling as Ranevskaya, Alan Bates as Gayev and Owen Teale as Lopakhin, directed by Michael Cacoyannis, appeared in 1999.

Date: 2009

Director: Sam Mendes

Translated by: Tom Stoppard

Venue: The Old Vic

Trivia: Part of The Bridge Project, a partnership between North American and U.K. theatres, featuring fine actors from both sides of the pond.

# EXPLORING THE CHERRY ORCHARD THROUGH TEXT

In preparation for reading scenes from *The Cherry Orchard* it helps to read a Chekhov short story. Try beginning with a few humorous stories, such as *Oh! the Public!*, or try one of Chekhov's most moving stories, *Misery*. Reading these prepares for the pace of life presented in *The Cherry Orchard* and allows pictures of the time to be easily accessible. Another recommended read is *Daily Life In Russia Under The Last Tsar* by Henri Troyat; it offers information about the political, personal, social and economic climate during Chekhov's writing.

Ask participants to read the scene on the following page. Emphasise these points:

The cherry orchard has been part of Liubov and Gaev's family for generations. There are thousands of memories, both happy and tragic. Everyone's lives have revolved around the cherry orchard and they characters will now see extensive changes.

After you've read the scene, you might want to ask for feedback and reactions from the group.

**How did they feel about the play's ending?**

**How are sound effects used in the scene? Do they help us understand the action?**

**What is the function of the character of Firs?**

**Memories?**

**How is 'Family' portrayed in the scene?**

**What do we learn about the Past, present, and future?**

Exercises to try:

Ask the participants to think about their character.

**How are they feeling about leaving the cherry orchard?**

**What might they do next?**

Write a monologue or diary entry for the character

- the day before they leave
- in the morning when they've packed
- after the doors have been locked.

Characters:

**Trofimov (Petya)** A student. To Trofimov the cherry orchard is a symbol of Russia's oppressive past and the dehumanization caused by serfdom. Its destruction shows that new exciting beginnings are possible.

**Varya** Liubov's adopted daughter. Her whole life and identity has been the cherry orchard; losing it is like losing her life. Any stability she may have acquired has been quashed. Everyone is separating and Lopakhin hasn't proposed to her, so she'll probably end up a spinster.

**Liubov Ranevsky** Owner of the cherry orchard. The cherry orchard has been in her family for generations. The beauty of the land and the quality of fruit grown was famous for miles around. It is unbearable that she's lost the cherry orchard and a torment that the buyer is part of the nouveau riche who's planning to destroy these ancient trees, therefore wiping out many precious memories and her family heritage.

**Gaev Ranevsky** Liubov's brother. Very upset for all the same reasons as Liubov. He's taken a job at the bank will be renting a room at the cherry orchard. The future is bleak and there's nothing for Gaev to look forward to.

**Lopakhin** A businessman. Elated at buying this famous property; he's finally climbed up the ladder of society. He wants to maximise on this property by building more houses on it and chopping down the orchard.

**Anya** Liubov's daughter, age 17. She will not inherit the house, which has been her life. She feels great despair.

**Firs** The footman, an old man of 87. Ready to die now that the house has gone and he thinks he's been left. It's the end of an era. He feels great sadness.

From the final scene of *The Cherry Orchard*

TROFIMOV

All aboard, ladies and gentlemen. It's time now. The train will be in soon!

VARYA

Petya – there are your galoshes, *[on the brink of tears]* and just look at the state of them.

TROFIMOV

*[putting on his galoshes]*

Let's go!

GAEV

*[distressed, frightened of bursting into tears]*

Off to the train... the station... In-off into the middle pocket, white off the cushion into the corner pocket...

LIUBOV

Come along!

LOPAKHIN

Are we all here? No one missing?

*He locks the side door on the left.*

ANYA

Goodbye, House! Goodbye, old life!

TROFIMOV

Welcome, new life!

*Trofimov goes out with Anya.*

*Varya casts a glance around the room and unhurriedly goes out. Yasha, and Charlotta with her dog, go out.*

LOPAKHIN

Well, that's it, till spring. Come on everyone. Goodbye!

*He goes out.*

*Liubov and Gaev remain alone together. They seem to have been waiting for this moment, and they collapse on each other's necks, sobbing quietly, afraid that they might be overheard.*

GAEV

*[in despair]*

Oh my sister... sister...

LIUBOV

Oh my poor, sweet, lovely orchard! My life, my childhood, my happiness, goodbye! Goodbye!

ANYA's voice

*[cheerfully, calling]*

Mama!

TROFIMOV's voice

[cheerfully, excited]

Hallooo...!

LIUBOV

One last look round at the walls... the windows. Mama used to love this room.

GAEV

Oh sister, sister

ANYA's voice

Mama!

TROFIMOV's voice

Hallooo...!

LIUBOV

We're coming!

*They go out.*

*The stage is empty. The sound of a key locking all the doors and then the carriages can be heard leaving. It grows quiet. Amidst the silence the dull thud of an axe against a tree, rings out solitary and sad. Steps can be heard. From the door on the right Firs appears. He is dressed, as always, in a jacket and white waistcoat, with slippers on his feet. He is ill.*

*Firs goes up to the door, tries the handle.*

FIRS

Locked. They've gone...

*He sits down on the divan.*

Forgot all about me. Never mind. I'll have a little sit down here. And Leonid Andreich, I'll be bound, hasn't put on his fur coat, gone out in his light overcoat, [sighs] I never looked to see. These youngsters.

*He mumbles something that cannot be made out.*

My life's gone by as if I never lived.

*He lies down.*

I'll just lie down for a bit. No strength left, you haven't, you've nothing left, nothing. Ekh, you... noodle.

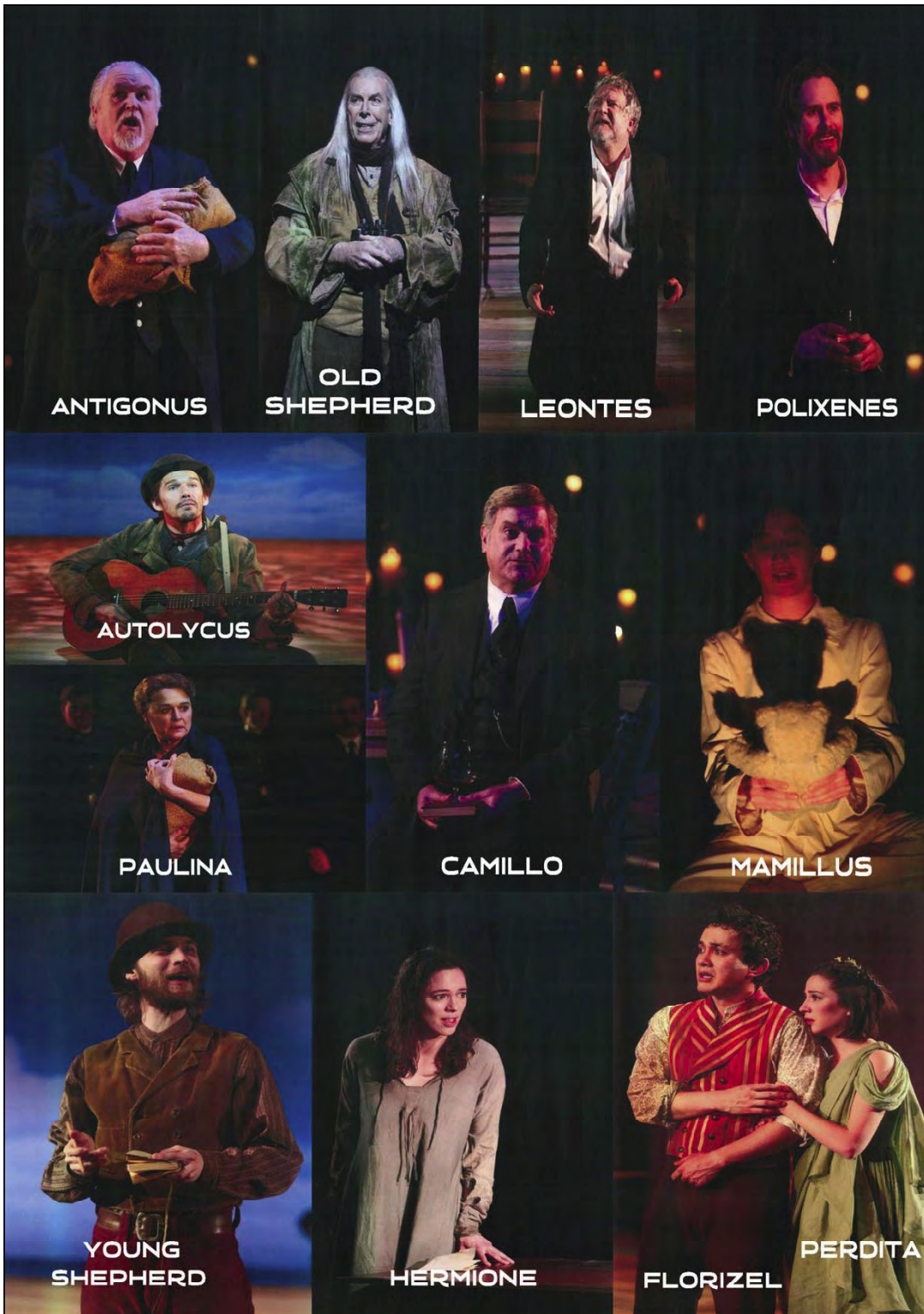
*Firs lies down motionless.*

*A distant sound, as though from the sky, is heard, the sound of a breaking string, dying away, sad. Silence descends, and the only thing to be heard, far away in the orchard, is the thudding of an axe against a tree. Then the distant sound of the train approaching.*

CURTAIN

Part II: The Winter's Tale

# THE WINTER'S TALE CHARACTER PHOTOS



# LIFE & WORKS WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

**1564**

William Shakespeare is born, probably on 23 April, to a glove maker and his wife in Stratford-upon-Avon.

**1582**

He marries Anne Hathaway. They have a daughter, Susanna, and twins, Hamnet and Judith.

**1585**

Shakespeare leaves Stratford for London.

**1588**

Playwright Robert Greene's Pandosto, the source material for *The Winter's Tale*, is published.

**1589–91**

*Henry VI Parts I, II and III.*

1592–3 *Richard III*, *Titus Andronicus*. The London plague closes the theatres until 1594.

**1593–94**

*The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*.

**1594–95**

*Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Love's Labour's Lost*. Shakespeare is a founding member – actor, playwright and shareholder – of the Lord Chamberlain's Men.

1595–96 *Romeo & Juliet*, *Richard II*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. His son Hamnet dies.

**1596–97**

*King John*, *The Merchant of Venice*. He buys New Place in Stratford.

**1597–98**

*Henry IV Parts I and II.*

**1598–99**

*Much Ado About Nothing*, *Henry V*, *The Merry Wives of Windsor*. The Globe, with Shakespeare as a shareholder, is built in Southwark. The Lord Chamberlain's Men becomes the resident company.

**1599**

*Julius Caesar*, *As You Like It*.

**1600–01**

*Hamlet*, *Twelfth Night*.

**1601–02**

*Troilus & Cressida*.

**1602–03**

*All's Well that Ends Well*, *Othello*.

**1603**

*Measure for Measure*. Death of Queen Elizabeth. England and Scotland unite under James I. The Lord Chamberlain's Men become The King's Men.

**1604–05**

*Macbeth*.

**1606–07**

*Antony & Cleopatra*, *Timon of Athens*.

**1607–08**

*Coriolanus*. Shakespeare becomes a co-founder of the Blackfriars, taken over as a winter theatre by The King's Men.

**1608–09**

*Pericles*, *The Sonnets*.

**1609–10**

*Cymbeline*.

**1610–11**

*The Winter's Tale*.

**1611–12**

*The Tempest*. Shakespeare retires to Stratford.

**1612–13**

*Henry VIII*. The Globe destroyed by fire (29 June 1613).

**1616**

Shakespeare dies, on 23 April. He is buried in Trinity Church, Stratford.



# DEFYING THE CONVENTIONS

## JAMES SHAPIRO ON THE MODERNITY OF SHAKESPEARE'S CHALLENGING PLAY

By 1610 or so, when he turned his attention to *The Winter's Tale*, Shakespeare had already written over thirty plays. He had, by then, an unrivalled command of the conventions of comedy, history, and tragedy. When he wanted to write in a naturalistic vein in any of these genres, he did so with seeming effortlessness.

His characters and stories, as a result, feel more real to us than those of Christopher Marlowe, Ben Jonson or Thomas Middleton. It's no surprise that modern audiences, products of a literary culture in which naturalism is so widely prized, are drawn to those plays in which realism feels most pronounced, and find themselves identifying with the passionate love of Romeo and Juliet, the blindness of an aging Lear, and the struggles of a melancholy Hamlet.

Yet Shakespeare was also keenly aware of the limits of realism, and was happy to defy its conventions when they stood in the way of what he wanted to say. Nowhere is this more so than in *The Winter's Tale*, a play John Dryden criticized as early as 1672 as one 'grounded on impossibilities.' Here, if he has to 'slide' over sixteen years, Shakespeare is content to bring someone on stage – and call him 'Time' – to tell us as much. If a character had to be violently removed from the action of the play, Shakespeare sends him packing, pursued by a wild beast. If the situation demands it, he can even bring, or seem to bring, the dead back to life. And if his plot requires that a land-locked country has a coastline, this too is easily arranged. It was the sort of thing that drove Ben Jonson, a champion of verisimilitude, half-mad. Years after *The Winter's Tale* was first staged Jonson was still complaining that 'Shakespeare in a play, brought in a number of men saying they had suffered shipwreck in Bohemia, where there is no sea near by some hundred miles.'

Shakespeare's willingness to dispense with conventional expectations extends to the play's language, even if that meant that on occasion an actor's words could barely be understood. So that, for example, it's as if intelligibility itself, let alone the familiar rhythm of iambic pentameter, gets strained to the breaking point when Shakespeare tries to capture the workings of a mind tortured by jealousy:

*Affection! Thy intention stabs the centre.  
Thou doest make possible things not so held,  
Communicat'st with dream (how can this be?),  
With what unread thou co-active art,  
And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis credent  
Thou mayst co-join with something, and thou dost  
(And that beyond commission), and I find it,  
And that to the infection of my brains  
And hard'ning of my brows.*

These lines, with their fits and starts, self-questioning, and parenthetical asides, feel as fractured as the mind of Leontes himself, who speaks them. We can only imagine what the actor who was first handed this role must have felt. As late as 1603, when Shakespeare was still regularly rehearsing and acting alongside his fellow-players, he would have been around to explain what needed explaining. But by the time he was writing *The Winter's Tale*, he was no longer spending long days in the company of his fellow-players. It's hard not to conclude that he was writing what he wanted to write, and leaving it to the players to deal with it as best they could. Happily, the greatest actors have always found this speech extraordinary, and key to Leontes' character.

All of which is to say that *The Winter's Tale* is a play that resists glib summary or even simple description. This was true even in Shakespeare's day, if the report of Simon Forman, astrologer and diarist, is representative. Forman saw the play at the Globe Theatre in May 1611 and jotted down the following: 'observe there how Leontes the King of Sicilia was overcome with jealousy of his wife with the King of Bohemia his friend...' 'Remember also how he sent to the oracle of Apollo, and the answer of Apollo, that she was guiltless and that the King was jealous, etc.' 'Remember also the Rogue that came in all tattered...and how he feigned him sick and to have been robbed of all that he had, and how he cozened the poor man of all his money.' After a good deal more of this, Forman sums things up: 'Beware of trusting feigned beggars or fawning fellows.'

Is this all that he took away from the performance? Vapid plot-summary and a moral one might find in a fortune-cookie? What's so infuriating about Forman's account, especially because it's the only contemporary one of this play to survive, is how poorly it does justice to so remarkable a work of art. But Forman is not to blame if the play disintegrates when reduced to plot summary. For how can anyone begin to account for those small moments that collectively account for the play's haunting brilliance. An actor's shrug, in defiance of the gods? Another's trembling fury about being misjudged by a jealous spouse? A child's confusion at watching one parent turn on another? Or even what it means to awaken one's faith?

Forman saw the play outdoors, at the Globe. But Shakespeare was also writing it with two other venues in mind, which may help explain what feels so different about the play. One of those venues was the Jacobean court, where the play was a hit. We know that it was performed there in 1611, and then again two years later during the festivities preceding the wedding of Princess Elizabeth (daughter to King James and Queen Anne) to Prince Frederick the Elector Palantine (afterwards – and this is a nice touch – King of Bohemia). And it was brought back again to court in 1618, 1619, 1624 and 1634, where it was noted that the play was 'liked'. No other Shakespeare play can boast of so many recorded court performances.

The other and even more significant venue was Blackfriars, a small indoor stage in the heart of London that held perhaps a sixth of the capacity of the Globe. After 1609 or so Shakespeare's company performed there annually from October to May, then transferred to the Globe for the warmer summer months. The effects that Shakespeare could achieve at Blackfriars were far more subtle than those possible on the large outdoor stage in Southwark. *The Winter's Tale*, with its often dense and understated dialogue, its intensely intimate opening and closing scenes, its reliance at its climax on music, and its mysteriousness – all staged in flickering candlelight – feels like a play written with the potential of a Blackfriars performance very much in Shakespeare's mind.

An exceptionally challenging play for even the most talented of contemporary directors and actors, and for too long overshadowed by that other late great work, *The Tempest*, *The Winter's Tale* seems very much a play for our own day, not least of all because of what it has to say about terrible misjudgements, and about longed-for second chances, however unrealistic they may seem to be.

# SHAKESPEARE'S LASTING POPULARITY

Welcoming The Bridge Project's *The Winter's Tale* requires the celebration of The Old Vic's long-standing love affair with William Shakespeare.

The Old Vic theatre opened in 1818 as the *Coburg*, and was renamed the *Royal Victoria* in 1833; it was soon known as the Old Vic. In 1914 it became a Shakespearean repertory company organized by Lillian Baylis; by 1923 the entire stage works of Shakespeare had been presented. After Baylis's death in 1937, other directors such as Michel St. Denis and Michael Benthall used the space for productions and actor training. From 1963–76 it was the temporary home of the National Theatre of Great Britain. Briefly closed in 1976 due to funding cuts, it reopened in 1983. Again threatened by lack of funds, it was purchased and preserved by a charitable trust in 1998. In 2003 it was announced that the theatre would once again become a producing house; a restoration drive was organized, and the formation a new Old Vic Company was revealed. Artistic director Kevin Spacey has since led the on-going development of the theatre, which has recently included Spacey's UK Shakespeare debut in *Richard II*, and Edward Hall's all-male *Taming of the Shrew* and *Twelfth Night*.

With the arrival of The Bridge Project, directed by Sam Mendes, another Shakespeare classic is resurrected in *The Winter's Tale*. How has Shakespeare's work remained so popular even, though his plays were written over five hundred years ago? Could it be that Shakespeare's themes and stories are timeless, and that people can feel a sense of affinity and fascination that human beings were displaying the same emotions and experiencing the same problems all those years ago? Despite the majority of Shakespeare's work revolving around the lives of Kings and Queens, we get some terrific insights into the lives of the characters who we so often feel so passionately for.

Shakespeare's language can seem difficult to understand because it's so different to how we use the English language now. Many students complain of feeling alienated by the words, yet allusiveness can be a mighty strength; think of some of Shakespeare's sonnets which are almost musical. His passionate and visual descriptions of sensations such as love, hate and envy encapsulate the meanings of the emotions, taking them further and managing to fit them all into beautifully structured rhythmic verse; this piece in *Romeo & Juliet* is a fine example of how Shakespeare's use of language is a feat worth applauding and another reason why his writing is so admired:

## JULIET

Give me my Romeo; and when he shall die, take him and cut him out in little stars, and he will make the face of heaven so fine that all the world will be in love with night, and pay no worship to the garish sun.

It's a marvel how it was possible for one man to fit in so much exquisite writing into 52 years of life. The works created are timeless classics which will always be welcome at The Old Vic.

## Tragedies

*Titus Andronicus, Romeo & Juliet, Julius Caesar, Hamlet, Othello, Timon of Athens, King Lear, Macbeth, Antony & Cleopatra, Coriolanus*

## Comedies

*The Two Gentlemen of Verona, The Taming of the Shrew, The Comedy of Errors, Love's Labour's Lost, A Midsummer Night's Dream, The Merchant of Venice, The Merry Wives of Windsor, Much Ado About Nothing, As You Like It, Twelfth Night, Troilus & Cressida, Measure for Measure, All's Well that Ends Well, Pericles Prince of Tyre, The Winter's Tale, Cymbeline, The Tempest*

## Histories

*Richard III, Richard II, King John, Henry VIII, 1 Henry VI, 2 Henry VI, 3 Henry VI, 1 Henry IV, 2 Henry IV, Henry V*

## Poetry

*'The Sonnets', 'A Lover's Complaint', 'The Rape of Lucrece', 'Venus and Adonis', 'Funeral Elegy'*

## Popular expressions

Bated breath (*The Merchant of Venice*)  
The be-all and the end-all (*Macbeth*)  
To beggar description (*Antony & Cleopatra*)  
We have seen better days (*As You Like It*)  
A blinking idiot (*The Merchant of Venice*)  
Brave new world (*The Tempest*)  
Brevity is the soul of wit (*Hamlet*)  
Cruel to be kind (*Hamlet*)  
A dish fit for the Gods (*Julius Caesar*)  
He hath eaten me out of house and home (*Henry IV Part 2*)  
Foregone conclusion (*Othello*)  
Laid on with a trowel (*As You Like It*)  
Neither rhyme nor reason (*The Comedy of Errors*)  
Short shrift (*Richard III*)  
Stern stuff (*Julius Caesar*)  
Too much of a good thing (*As You Like It*)  
A tower of strength (*Richard III*)  
Wild-geese chase (*Romeo & Juliet*)

# THE WINTER'S TALE

## SYNOPSIS

Polixenes, King of Bohemia, is visiting his childhood friend Leontes, the King of Sicilia. They enjoy a handsome nine months before Polixenes wishes to return to his own kingdom to attend to affairs and see his young son. Leontes desperately tries to make his friend stay but fails; he decides to send his wife, Queen Hermione, to try to convince Polixenes. Hermione agrees and is successful. Leontes is puzzled as to how Hermione convinces Polixenes so easily, and is suddenly consumed with an insane paranoia that his pregnant wife has been having an affair with Polixenes and that the child is a bastard. Leontes orders Camillo, a Sicilian lord, to poison Polixenes.

Instead, Camillo warns Polixenes and the two flee back to Bohemia. Hermione suffers the wrath and is arrested on charges of adultery and conspiracy against his life. She gives birth to a daughter in prison, and Leontes orders Antigonus to dispose of the infant. At Hermione's trial the Oracle at Delphos pronounces her innocent, but Leontes defies the oracle; he immediately receives word that his young son, Mamillius, has died of grief. Hermione faints and is reported to have died. Leontes regrets his poor judgement and swears to grieve for his wife and young son every day for the rest of his life.

Antigonus is sent by Leontes to abandon Hermione's newborn daughter on the seacoast of Bohemia. Hermione appears to Antigonus in a dream and tells him to name the girl Perdita (derived from the Latin word for lost). He is chased away by a bear (one of Shakespeare's most famous stage directions: "*Exit, pursued by a bear.*") Luckily, Perdita is rescued by a shepherd and his son also known as 'Clown.' There is a large amount of gold coins with the baby and the shepherd now is rich.

Time enters and announces the passing of 16 years. Leontes has spent the 16 years mourning his wife and children. In Bohemia, Polixenes and Camillo become aware that Polixenes' son Florizel has become infatuated with a shepherdess. In disguise, they attend a sheep-shearing festival and confirm that the young Prince Florizel plans to marry a shepherd's young beautiful daughter (Perdita, who is unaware of her true heritage). Polixenes objects to the marriage and threatens the young couple, so they flee to Sicilia with Camillo's help. Polixenes pursues them. Eventually, with a hand from a comical rogue named Autolycus, Perdita's heritage is revealed and she is reunited with her father. The kings are reconciled and both approve of Florizel and Perdita's marriage. They all go to see a statue of Hermione kept by Paulina, a lady of Hermione's court, the widow of Antigonus, and her most ardent defender in life and death. The statue comes to life and it is suggested that Hermione went into hiding in the hope of finding Perdita again, but it also appears that she has been brought to life by magical means. All the characters, except the deceased Mamillius and Antigonus, are happy at the end of the play.



## QUESTIONS & ANSWERS FROM MEMBERS OF THE CAST

We asked four of the actors in **The Bridge Project** about *The Winter's Tale* and the characters they portray. Here is what they had to say:

### **SIMON RUSSELL BEALE (LEONTES, KING OF SICILIA)**

#### **Leontes' jealousy is so sudden and violent. Where does it come from and what should audiences make of it?**

It seems to me that there are two possible ways of playing Leontes' jealousy. The first is that it is a violent reaction to what he thinks he sees in front of him. The second is a jealousy has been building up for some time before the play begins.

I have chosen the second option, although I recognise that jealousy often hits people very suddenly, like being mugged. That, I think, is what the audience, too, might recognise: that jealousy can come quickly and without warning or control.

#### **What is your favourite piece of text in the play and why?**

One of the greatest lines ever written in any play can be found in the final scene of *The Winter's Tale*. Leontes touches the statue of his dead wife and cries, 'O, she's warm!' In that short monosyllabic phrase is all human desire to be forgiven, to be comforted and to be loved.

#### **What do you find most interesting about Leontes?**

At the moment (and many new things will come up in the run of this play), what I find most interesting about Leontes is his overwhelming desire to behave rationally. He cannot see, in the first half of the play, that he can possibly be wrong, so he is desperate to abide by the law of the land, not to appear to be a tyrant, to behave like the good man he essentially is.

### **SINÉAD CUSACK (PAULINA)**

#### **How is the play different from the point of view of Hermione and Paulina?**

Paulina is a more mysterious character than Hermione because it is difficult for her to be sure of her position/status in the court. Hermione is queen, wife, mother; her status is clear and her downfall is tragic as a result of her husband's madness/obsession/hysteria. Paulina appears to have a special relationship with the king, Leontes. One would almost guess that they share a family connection because he allows her a license to criticize him. No other character in the play is allowed to do this without suffering immediate and horrible consequences.

#### **So, Paulina appears to be the ultimate insider.**

At the same time, she doesn't turn up in the play until after Hermione is imprisoned. When she arrives, it is with very little explanation and she proceeds to make huge decisions, like taking Hermione's new born babe to the King in an effort to soften his views.

Her actions from this point on are very extreme. She keeps secret from the King her knowledge that Hermione is alive. She condemns him and Hermione to a sixteen-year separation before she reveals the truth. One could accuse her of manipulation, but in my mind she sees this sixteen-year process as creating redemption for King Leontes.

**Is Paulina satisfied with how her situation resolves at the end of the play?**

It is the nature of the play, and its magical ending, that you learn that Paulina has lost a husband-Antigonus, famously eaten by a bear- and that she gained a new husband in the form of Camillo in the last speech of the play. I think that the scene where the statue is brought to life is not an easy experience for Paulina. She has taken the law into her own hands and I can't imagine that it has been an easy sixteen years for her either. So, the ending is a mixture of emotions for Paulina. She feels gratitude that all things have come right in terms of Perdita's arrival and Leontes' redemption, but she *has* lost a husband and she has put Leontes and Hermione, two people that she very obviously loves, through many years of sadness and pain.

**What passage in the play is your favourite and why?**

My favourite passage in the play is, 'I, an old turtle, will wing me to some withered bough.'  
It makes me laugh every time I come to it!

**REBECCA HALL  
(HERMIONE)**

**Hermione experiences such tremendous loss. How does she survive?**

I think that human beings are capable of much more than they ever realize until faced with the circumstances. Hermione survives because she has no other option.

**What text in the play do you find especially revealing about Hermione?**

I don't think that there is any passage that succinctly sums up her character but from the outset her status as queen and mother is neatly set up. Her ability to dominate conversations with wit and intelligence, to me, speaks of a woman who is both confident, charming, attractive and warm. Moreover, her speeches in the trial scene show her to be patient and forgiving, whilst also bold, and resilient. She is never afraid to stand up for what is right. At the end of the trial scene she speaks of wishing her father were here to see her trial – 'that he but did see the flatness of my misery, yet with eyes of pity not revenge' – I find this enlightening. It shows selflessness and compassion, in the light of very brutal treatment. She clearly loves her husband very much.

**Does Hermione forgive Leontes in the final scene?**

It's ambiguous, if you ask me. I think she wants to forgive, and does, in the sense that she still *loves* Leontes, wants to hold him, and is overwhelmed to see him. But starting a new life together, living with that history, and living with that breach of trust, and pain – is an altogether different matter. I think that ambivalence is very present in the writing. Hermione says nothing to Leontes, she only speaks to Perdita. What can she say? The weight of what they have been through is huge – she has lost a child and missed out on raising another. These are not easy things to get over. I think Shakespeare wants to show us a complicated, human situation. As there are often no clear black and white situations in real life, the consequence of whether or not Hermione forgives Leontes or does not forgive him remains muddled. I think in a sense the audience is left to decide.



## ETHAN HAWKE (AUTOLYCUS)

**Autolycus is a robber and a clown. How was your process of developing this comedic character for stage different from your process of developing the tragic character of Hamlet for the 2000 film directed by Michael Almereyda?**

Developing a character always happens differently.... some I base on myself, some on people I know, and some I improvise until I find something that works.

There is a long history of other actors playing the role of Hamlet to draw from. How did Mel Gibson attack this scene? How did Ralph Fiennes or Laurence Olivier do it? I studied the play and tried to really personalize the situations. Playing Hamlet was easier for me then for other people maybe because the movie was set in modern times. I just imagined what I would be like if my father was some giant rich mogul... what would that be like? What pressure would I feel? The big break though for me was realizing that Hamlet probably had a very bad relationship with his father; they have so little in common.

Autolycus for me has come from learning the music... I started studying the songs and tried to imagine what type of person would sing these songs—and ideas started to come.

**What are some of the ways you approach Shakespeare's text to make it accessible to audiences?**

I try to have fun with it. Sometimes people are precious with Shakespeare and they treat it like it's the Holy Bible or something. This tends to make everyone serious, thoughtful and respectful. But if you love someone, you tease them, you fight with them, you play with them... and I try to be that way with Shakespeare. (And I try to speed through the boring parts!) .

**What line that Autolycus speaks is your favourite?**

My favourite scene is the one with the two silly farmers. Autolycus pretends to be a Courtier, and the best line is when he turns to the audience and says, 'Though I am not naturally honest, I am so sometimes by chance!'

# STAGE 1 PICTURES / SENSE DATA / DAILY LIFE OF CHARACTERS

Insert attached pictures

# EXPLORING THE WINTER'S TALE THROUGH TEXT

To help us understand the play a little better I have enclosed two scenes. Extract A is the original text for a scene and Extract B is a modernised version of the same scene. Hand the students a copy of the original text (Extract A) and ask them to act it immediately. Invariably the student's understanding, inflections, and stress on words won't be very developed. Read through again with the modern script (Extract B). Because the language will be more familiar to them it should be easier to understand. Take them back to the original text; there should be a better understanding of what's being said and therefore, an improvement in their acting.

Extract A:  
Consumed with Jealousy  
Original Text

Characters:  
Leontes: King of Sicilia  
Hermione: Queen of Sicilia  
Boy: (Mamillius) their son

LEONTES

Give me the boy. I am glad you did not nurse him.  
Though he does bear some signs of me, yet you have  
too much blood in him.

HERMIONE

What is this? Sport?

LEONTES

Bear the boy hence; he shall not come about her.  
Away with him, (Mamillius is led out) and let her sport  
herself with that she's big with, for 'tis Polixenes has  
made thee swell thus.

HERMIONE

But I'd say he had not; and I'll be sworn you would  
believe my saying, howe'er you lean to th' nayward.

Extract B:  
Consumed with Jealousy  
Modern Text (Eastenders Version)

Characters:  
Leontes: King of Sicilia  
Hermione: Queen of Sicilia  
Boy: (Mamillius) their son

LEONTES

Give me the boy. I'm glad you didn't breastfeed him  
otherwise he would have got more of your traits.  
Although he looks like me, there is still too much of  
you in him.

HERMIONE

What is this? A game?

LEONTES

Take the boy away. Leave her with her game, the one  
she's so up on, because; was it not Polixenes that  
made you pregnant?

HERMIONE

That is not true! I swear on my life, please believe what  
I'm saying, no matter how much you lean the other  
way.