

The Winter's Tale: (e)i The significance of the title (Teachers' prompt sheet)

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Time / Narrator

- ❖ The switch between tragedy and comedy, and the balance provided, is obvious.
 - Shakespeare makes no effort to cover up the deliberate storytelling that is going on here.
- ❖ A narrator appears - the personified figure of Time.
- ❖ This is not necessary; Shakespeare is quite capable of indicating the passage of time without introducing such an artificial character
 - Time actually tells us nothing we don't hear elsewhere anyway.

The Bear

- ❖ 'Exit, pursued by bear': if this were a real bear, it must have been a very tame and unafrightening one; if a man dressed up, then it would be more comical than scary.
 - Even nowadays, with modern technology, it is not easy to produce a convincingly frightening bear.
- ❖ Surely, we have a *fictional* bear of some kind which, in any case, is reduced to comedy in the Clown's description of its eating of Antigonus.

Autolycus

- ❖ He deals in storytelling, sometimes in order to trick people ('I am robbed, sir, and beaten...'), and sometimes as a seller of ballads ('The ballad is very pitiful, and as true.').
- ❖ His speech and action encourage the audience to consider whether stories can be believed, and perhaps whether it matters if they are 'true' or not.
- ❖ He also appears in various different disguises as various different 'characters'.

- ❖ He crosses over the gap between stage and audience with his asides which reveal his tricks to us.

Pastoral

- ❖ Pastorals were popular *stories* which concerned shepherds, shepherdesses and (idealised) country life in general.
- ❖ IV,iv contains many pastoral elements.
- ❖ Perdita says, 'Methinks I play as I have seen them do / In Whitsun pastorals' (IV,iv,134-5). She later talks about the need to 'play a part' (651).

The Theatre

- ❖ There is plenty of deliberate dressing up and characters playing a part (often specifically commented on).
 - 'not appearing what we are' (Polixenes: IV,ii);
 - 'your unusual weeds' (Florizel to Perdita: IV,iv);
 - 'dislikens / The truth of your own seeming' (Camillo to Florizel: IV,iv), etc.
- ❖ Masques (lavish court entertainments) included music, dance, fools, satyrs, beasts, rustics and moving statues
 - Did Shakespeare have masques in mind when he wrote *The Winter's Tale*?
- ❖ In I,ii,185-7, Leontes says 'I / Play too, but so disgraced a *part*, whose issue / Will hiss me to my grave.'