

Some critics have claimed that the structure of "The Winters Tale is clumsy. Others have claimed it to be a masterpiece of skilful construction. What are your views?

'The Winters Tale was written by William Shakespeare, a man who wrote many magnificent scripts throughout his life, The Winters Tale was one of his last plays writing it in his last few years of his life. I feel this is why Shakespeare decided to experiment with the structure of the play and as a great philosopher once said "ars est celare artem" translated to English means The art is to hide the part. The play is intended to be a romantic comedy, it is split up into four main structures into which the play evolves around them. Possibly the most obvious structure is the location or setting of the play. The main two locations of the play are two countries Sicilia and Bohemia, these two countries. We start the play in Sicilia. It is the winter months in which we visit this country and most of the scenes take part in the kings court, therefore everything is bare, old and grey with dull colours on the set as well as the costumes. I think Shakespeare has used these winter months to portray a sense of old age and lack of life. All this dark and dull décor in the country, Shakespeare may also be trying to signify Leontes' dark, jealous thoughts about Hermione. "too hot, too hot! To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods." Bohemia on the other hand is set in the spring time which is full of light and colour signalling new life. It is set in the country with a very rustic culture.

Many of the people in this country are peasants and do not have a very good education which causes naïvety amongst there way of life which results to innocence and young love. Shakespeare has made this visible by referring to flowers in Bohemia "the marigold, that goes to bed with the sun and with him rises weeping; these are flowers of middle summer, and I think they are given to

men of middle age. You are very welcome" Plants are being handed over to suit the customer, in this case Camillo. He has been given flowers that rise in mid-summer which represents his age.

In this play, Location is tightly linked with chronology. This is the period of time passed within the play and before it. Before the play, we hear of 9 months having been passed "Nine changes of the watery star hath been the shepherds note since we have left our home" this is how long Polixenes have visited Sicilia for. In our first visit to Sicilia, we spend at least twenty-three days there during the trial of Hermione. We then turn to Bohemia where we only spend one single day, Also it is in one single act. Maybe this is meant to signify simplicity and youth in Bohemia. The total passage of time between our visits of Bohemia and Sicilia is sixteen years represented to us by Father Time. All of these time sequences are separated into acts. The first three acts are set in Sicilia they all notify us of Leontes and Polixenes' long friendship with each other. It then spirals out of control due to Leontes' jealousy over Polixenes, the death of Mamillius and the apparent death of Hermione. All of these incidents are filled with horror, misery, and deceit. Which fits well with Sicilia (being dark and dull). We then see act four in Bohemia. This is the longest act in the play and possibly the longest act in all of Shakespeare's plays. It has a lot more contented atmosphere about it with it being in spring time and the naïvety of the people creates a sense of happiness and belonging without concern. This is where we see young love first kindle between Florizel and Perdita. And the final act, Act 5 where we witness the return of Hermione back in Sicilia. And now, thanks to young love of Perdita and Florizel, the cold winter like Sicilia may have learnt its lesson and has been influenced by the young in the final fifth act where it seems season has changed from winter, back to spring again and all is well. Seasons play a big part in The Winters Tale. The main two seasons are winter and spring. They could represent a number of things. During the winter months the play is usually set in Sicilia. This could represent the elderly and the middle aged like Leontes and Paulina being dull and their life almost gone without any inspiration. It

could also represent the jealousy of the corrupted mind in Leontes thinking dark and devilish thoughts about Hermione and Polixenes. The spring time represents young, youthful innocence. With this we focus on Perdita and Florizel. With their young modest love they show their everlasting love. Their love is unspoiled by jealousy and deceit and is natural. A character between these two seasons is a man called Autolycus. He has said to have been a man of the court "I have served prince Florizel, and in my time wore three pile; but now I am out of service" and now he lives in the countryside. I think that he represents the mid-point of the year, with spring, bringing innocence and naivety and winter bringing superstition and deceit. Autolycus has a bit of both, leaving him to be a comedy character with no real meaning in the play apart from this. He preys upon unsuspecting rural folk as he has been from the courts and he realises his advantage over the rustic community. In this play, Shakespeare sets up several confrontations between two opposites of genres. Possibly the most obvious one is court versus country. The general idea of a king is that he is a sensible, rational, reasonable, level-headed and wise man. However Leontes on the other hand is the complete opposite when he comes to the conclusion that Hermione is pregnant with Polixenes' son "But to be paddling palms and pinching fingers as they now are, and making practis'd smiles.....that is entertainment my bosom likes not, nor my brows!" without hardly any evidence, he is now enraged with the two totally blowing the matter out of hand, not a type of reaction you would expect from a king. He uses animal imagery to display his anger "how now, you wanton calf!" and this displays his mercurial personality as just a few lines ago he was praising Polixenes, saying how good friends they are. This is not how the audience would expect a king to react. However, in Bohemia, Shakespeare meets the views of the audience with his over romanticised portrayal of the country and the rustic community. They are portrayed as pure, innocent and somewhat naive. Shakespeare uses Perdita as a good example of the country folk being connected to nature and how they dislike artifice. "For I have heard it said there is an art which in their piety shares with great creating nature" in this she is saying she shouldn't mix the two together like, artifice and nature are not meant to go together as she explains her views on grafting. This is quite ironic as she, Perdita represents nature and Florizel, a prince and representing the court which coincides with artifice, are now deeply in love. Florizel remains optimistic that their love will prevail. Unlike the Elderly like Leontes who is still in repentance over Hermione's death, and will not move on. The old in this play generally reside in the courts, a dark place with gloomy, dull colours. They are filled with pessimism while the young are full of life and optimistic towards their young love. The elderly are committed to their traditional views, horrified that Florizel loves a peasant girl.

Another main confrontation in the play is the conflict of men versus women. In the day when Shakespeare was writing this play, men were still viewed as superior to women. That women were incapable of dealing with problems and were irrational. However, in this play, women are seen in a strong light. Paulina is seen almost as a political 'animal' unlike the noblemen in the court, she is not just a 'yes' woman. She stands up for what she thinks is right. Also Hermione is extremely credible in this play. She has all the attributes of a great king. Valiant, brave, rational thinking and level-headed. She presents herself with great elegance not losing her calm unlike Leontes when she was under persecution. Perdita also is a perfect juxtaposition of what the woman was portrayed to be at that period of time. Regal in bearing. Idealistic and in control of things.

Men on the other hand seen as women were meant to be viewed. Take Leontes for example. He is seen as weak and extremely mercurial. He admits this to himself in act two, scene three, line 153 "I am a feather for each wind that blows" throughout the play Shakespeare uses the message of Christianity. The idea of sin, forgiveness and redemption. We can see this in Leontes. When Hermione dies, he vows to weep and visit her grave everyday. "Once a day I'll visit the chapel where they lie, and tears shed there shall be my recreation." we can see forgiveness in Hermione in act five. After all these years and all she has suffered she is still willing to forgive her husband. This shows a very important Christian message maybe to reassure Shakespeare as an elderly man

that god will forgive you as your days come to an end.

Like the start which was very quick to get into, the ending and to a climax and an ending very quickly and it seems rather rushed. Some may say this is an incident of clumsiness. However i still think this is a piece of shakespeare's genius.

As you can see. So much thought has gone into the making of this play. So many structures and conflicts between juxtapositions. It can be **anything but clumsiness.**