

With Reference to Act I, show how Leontes' Jealousy reveals him to be "in rebellion with himself"

Although the play ultimately presents itself as a comedy, I believe *The Winter's Tale* remains a multifaceted presentation of a man's attempt to destroy himself based on a misconception. Shakespeare often toyed with the idea of appearances and reality. In *The Winter's Tale*, the exploration of this concept enables him to examine a number of underlying ideas. Perhaps one of the most interesting of these, is Shakespeare's presentation of Leontes' journey through the stages of jealousy in the first act until he is, "in rebellion with himself". I believe this "rebellion" that Camillo refers to is both figurative and literal. Figuratively, Leontes is questioning two people who make up a huge part of himself: Mamillius and Polixenes. The tangible consequences of this are revealed in the effects on Leontes' sanity, and are reflected in other character's responses.

Leontes' jealousy clearly reveals him to be figuratively "in rebellion with himself", as he questions two people who make up an essential part of himself: Polixenes and Mamillius. In the very first scene, Leontes and Polixenes are presented as being extremely close, almost like brothers. This bond is reflected in the relationship between Archidamus and Camillo, lords from Bohemia and Sicilia respectively. Their conversation in the opening scene is very friendly and shows a very strong bond between the men, which implies that Polixenes and Leontes must be equally close. Furthermore, from their conversation, we learn that the Kings have been very close since childhood. Camillo says that "they were trained together in their childhoods, and there rooted betwixt / them then such an affection which cannot choose but

branch now”. As he continues to list all that the countries and Kings have done for one another over the years to retain this strong bond, the strength of the relationship is made very clear. Shakespeare also makes the strength of their friendship clear through the structure of their dialogues. As they are royalty, they speak in pentameter. However, they very frequently share lines, which indicates how close the men are. Furthermore, when Polixenes describes their friendship from boyhood to Hermione, he makes it clear how strong the bond between them was; that they were “as twinned lambs”. All these elements culminate in the idea that Polixenes and Leontes were so close that they were almost two halves of a whole.

Similarly, Mamillius, Leontes’ son, is presented as being extremely close to Leontes. This idea is first suggested in the first scene when we are told that everyone is waiting to see Mamillius as king and that, had he not been born, they would have waited for the King to produce a male heir: “if the king had no son they would desire to live on crutches till he had one”. This implies that both Mamillius and Leontes have the qualities of great Kings, and that Mamillius is a double of his father. Leontes’ bond with his son is strengthened by the fact that everyone acknowledges how similar they look: “they say we are almost as like as eggs”. Furthermore, when Leontes is spinning with jealousy and questioning his entire marriage to Hermione, he remains convinced, based only on Mamillius’ word, that he is his son. All these points indicate the strength of the bond between Mamillius and Leontes, and the strong parallel between the two.

When Leontes’ jealousy leads him to question his relationship with Mamillius and Polixenes, it is almost as if he is questioning a part of himself, because his bonds with

them are so strong. In this figurative sense, Leontes' jealousy puts him in "rebellion with himself".

This inner conflict that Leontes endures as a result of his jealousy is further illustrated by the effect of his accusation on his mind. As his envy grows, Leontes becomes increasingly incoherent, indicating that his jealousy is fighting against so much of himself, that he can no longer use reason to draw conclusions from facts. As a result, he begins to make unfounded leaps of logic in order to justify his jealousy. For example, he implies that, as Hermione has deceived him, all women are "false" and unworthy of his trust. Furthermore, Leontes' use of repetition and oxymorons make it clear that he is becoming increasingly deranged as his suspicion grows. For example, he mentions a "sweet villain" and in his monologue, repeats the word 'play' five times in the first five lines alone.

Leontes' sentences also become increasingly incoherent, as he talks almost in circles to convince himself he has been deceived. In fact, lines 138-46 are notoriously incomprehensible because Leontes' language is so convoluted and incoherent. Furthermore, his propositions become illogical, as his jealousy consumes him. For example, he suggests to Hermione, "how thou lov'st us, show in our brother's welcome", indicating that he is so overwhelmed by the idea that Hermione has been unfaithful that he is encouraging her to act inappropriately with Polixenes to prove his point.

Moreover, Leontes is soon unable to acknowledge other possible reasons for the behavior he sees between Polixenes and Hermione. I believe that is because, once he

convinces himself that part of who he is has been corrupt, he cannot see beyond that truth he has forced himself to believe. As a result, he cannot be convinced by Camillo, who has been his friend and confidant for a long time, that Hermione has not been unfaithful. In fact, he is fighting so much of himself in questioning Polixenes and Mamillius, that he becomes almost animalistic in his logic, reducing his jealousy to raw senses: “Is whispering nothing? / Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses? / Kissing...”

Leontes' inability to reach logical conclusions as a result of his envy shows clearly that his jealousy has put him so “in rebellion with himself” that he is unable even to use reason to explain himself. This is why he is so incoherent and unable to express himself clearly at certain points in his conversations with Camillo and Mamillius, and repeats the same ideas throughout his speech: he is questioning so much of himself that he must cling to what little evidence he can hold on to, so logic is beyond him.

Leontes' inner conflict is also reflected through parallels that Shakespeare draws between Leontes' mental state and that of other characters as a result of Leontes. For example, Camillo seems to be at war with himself, as result of Leontes' request that he kill Polixenes. Camillo is torn between loyalty to his king and friend, and honesty to Polixenes, who is in danger, although innocent. I believe the angst he experiences is a direct parallel to Leontes' inner conflict, in questioning so much of himself in Mamillius and Polixenes. This parallel helps to emphasize Leontes “rebellion with himself”, by putting Camillo through the same thing as a result.

Furthermore, the lexical field of disease dominates the conversation between Polixenes and Camillo, in reference to Leontes' suspicion of Polixenes and Hermione. The idea of 'diseases' has connotations of something you can't control and that tries to destroy you from the inside. Therefore, using this language suggests that Leontes is in conflict with himself and destroying himself from the inside with this idea.

In conclusion, Leontes' jealousy reveals him to be "in rebellion with himself" figuratively, in that he questions a huge part of himself by questioning two people who are so close to him. This inner conflict reveals itself in Leontes' logic, as he becomes increasingly incoherent in the language and arguments he uses. His "rebellion" is also reflected in other characters, such as Camillo, who endure similar struggles, as a result of Leontes' order that he kill Polixenes.