

DIRECTOR'S NOTES >> RAELE MYRICK-HODGES

One 18th century definition of celebrity is: groundless affection given to a person. The actor, the musician, and today, even the political analyst, are put in situations of groundless affection in contemporary society. And without challenge, groundless affection can turn into Obsession. This is where my story of Leontes begins.

In the world of the play, what reason could Leontes possibly have to react with such fear, disdain, and violence towards an unwarranted feeling? His obsession with Hermione, Leontes is obsessed with her beauty, her congeniality, and most importantly, he is obsessed with controlling all of it.

Setting the 'tale' in 1940s Hollywood and the hills of Southern California, my hope is to give context to Leontes' impulsive and dangerous behavior. What does it mean to love someone so intensely that you find it difficult to 'trust' them? How do we allow that distrust to turn into unwanted fear? How can that fear turn into something terribly dangerous? Most importantly, how can we bring ourselves back from that?

The Winter's Tale is a good fairytale. Its two settings are, in many ways, not real spaces, but contemplative ones—spaces that expand to fit more than the moment that you are experiencing on stage. The experience of the story has more to do with sense-memory than it does with the narrative itself. Sicily is a place to think about how you deal with your own jealousy, while its counter, Bohemia, looks into the repercussions of that jealousy.

And then there is the bear...

DRAMATURG'S NOTES >> ARIANE HELOU

"In *The Winter's Tale* at the Globe 1611 the 15 of May Wednesday, observe there how Leontes the King of Sicilia was overcome with jealousy of his wife with the King of Bohemia, his friend that came to see him..."

So begins the diary entry of Dr. Simon Forman, recording the first known performance of *The Winter's Tale*, which Shakespeare probably composed no more than a year earlier. In addition to the 1611 performances at the Globe, the play was performed at the court of James I in 1613, and revived at least four more times into the 1630s. For all its strangeness—of genre, of structure, of exits pursued by bears—*The Winter's Tale* seems to have been popular with audiences.

And a marvelous strange play it is. *The Winter's Tale* is grouped with Shakespeare's comedies in the First Folio of 1623, its first appearance in print. Today it is classified as a "romance," along with Shakespeare's other late plays that fuse tragic, comedic, and pastoral elements within adventurous travel narratives: *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*. The first three acts of *The Winter's Tale* constitute an intense psychological drama. In Act 4, the action jumps forward sixteen years and moves to the pastoral world of Bohemia. Courtly intrigue and domestic tragedy give way to a story of young love, set during a sheep-shearing festival. And does the play end as a comedy, with the lovers married and order restored, or as a tragedy, with losses that can never be recovered? The final act offers wonder and surprise; it asks that you "awake your faith."

It may seem strange to invoke "faith" in the context of Shakespearean drama. But faith is what this play demands of its audience. The play's first acts ask us to consider the essential value of truth: how can truth maintain any power in the face of suspicion and tyranny? Its conclusion rewards those who keep their faith in that truth as well as those for whom penitence leads to a new faith. In the world of *The Winter's Tale*, awakening one's faith means being open to confronting the truth: to accept the fact that some harms are irrevocable, but that sometimes, with time and work and a touch of grace, that which is lost may yet be restored.