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The Winter's Tales

**A comparison between *The Winter's Tale*
by William Shakespeare and two filmed productions of the play**

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Introduction

The plays of William Shakespeare have been performed for centuries. Even so, new productions are still made and there are plenty of interpretations of the same scripts. *The Winter's Tale* (1611) is a play set in the two kingdoms of Sicilia and Bohemia. The main story is about King Leontes and his jealousy of a possible affair between his queen Hermione and their friend King Polixenes. The interest for this essay emerged when I participated in a performance of an abridged version of *The Winter's Tale*. In order to learn more about the characters and the story in general, we watched parts of the play from two film versions. The parts we saw were not profoundly long, but even so they appeared to differ greatly. Why is that? Does a new production of the same play have to be interpreted differently? This essay will compare the text of *The Winter's Tale* with two film productions of the play. The first is a TV-production by the British Broadcasting Corporation (1981) and the second one is a filmed stage production of the play by The Royal Shakespeare Company (1998/99). Henceforth, they will be referred to as the BBC's version and the RSC's version, respectively.

There are of course bound to be some diversities since the two productions are made by individual people with their own views and experiences. But why do these two productions which are based on the same play script vary so greatly? In what ways do they contrast? And is there any potential evidence, so to speak, for different interpretations to be found in the original script which can indicate why they differ?

The purpose of this essay is to compare these two film adaptations with each other and with the original text of Shakespeare's play. I will discuss how they diverge from the script and from each other, and the possible reasons behind their differences. The essay will begin by giving further details about the general problems and positive effects that often occur while creating new productions or versions of Shakespeare's plays. Thereafter follows a short background to the BBC's version, along with a similar account of the RSC's version. Then comes the analysis where I will discuss further the two productions' choices when it comes to how the characters are depicted and how they express emotions, since this is one of the most obvious parts where they diverge from each other. The possible motives to why they have chosen to interpret the text in these ways will also be investigated, and I will present evidence for both interpretations in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*.

Adapting Shakespeare – From the stage to the screen

Since the beginning of filmmaking, novels and plays have been adapted for the screen. The very word adaptation has two descriptions: “the process of changing something to make it suitable for a new situation” and: “a film or a television program that is based on a book or a play” (“adaptation”). To adapt a play in general into a film is not a simple task. One of the main reasons for this is that changes to the script will be made, on purpose or not, while working with a material, and especially while working with a play (Buchanan 2-3; Hartley 173). The reason is, according to Buchanan, that every new version will be different from the previous adaptations and the result will always be something new (2-3).

There are several problems that occur while directing a film that are not present while working with theatre. One of the more important and prominent aspects is the audience. The people who go to the theatre are confined in a closed up, darkened room and are, hopefully, listening attentively for the whole course of the play. They are isolated from everyday life, the noise and happenings from anything outside of these four walls. It is thus possible to work with the audience and create an intimate dialog with them.

However, the audience is no longer confined to the intimate world of the theatre if they want to watch a play. Film adaptations and new TV-productions have widened the possibilities. The audience could be anywhere in the world and the people watching are going to watch Shakespeare’s plays during different circumstances: in the movie theatre; on the sofa alone, where the viewer can pause the play and even decide that it is too boring to finish; or it could be a class full of students in a brightly lit classroom with a teacher who decides they should just watch parts of the play or watch it in installments over the course of several weeks. Both Wells and Buchanan explain that this, among other features, makes it slightly more complicated to converting one of Shakespeare’s plays into a film instead of working with it in its natural context in the theatre (Buchanan 6; Wells 262). Hallian agrees and stresses the fact that it is always difficult to convert a work from one medium to another (134-135).

In *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespeare on Film*, Russell Jackson writes about both the positive and the negative aspects of adapting Shakespeare’s works to the screen (15-45). According to him, one of the main disadvantages of making films out of the plays is that the screen could be seen as a more limited medium than the stage. On the stage, many things can be happening simultaneously. The main plot can be accompanied by whispering people in the background or a small quarrel at one end of the stage, all going on at the same time without disturbing the audience’s focus on the main event. Willems is of the

same opinion and states that in a film or a TV-production, on the other hand, the focus is put where the director wants it to be (cited in Jackson 42). This could, however, be a great advantage, since the director can choose to do close-ups on the actors or show a wider perspective. But it can also be a disadvantage, since there might be limited possibilities for the director and actors to show what is going on in the sidelines without losing focus from the main event (cited in Jackson 42).

Another difference between a stage production and a film production is that the director's power over the recorded work ceases as soon as the production is complete (Wells 262). As mentioned before, the director has no idea who will watch his or her work, where it will be shown: on the big screen or in the living room. He or she cannot even know if the audience will watch it in colour or in black and white (262).

The danger with film adaptations and filmed stage performances in general lies in the fact that the audience might miss the point of the theatre and a live performance's purpose. Willems develops this further and states that

With video trying to encapsulate stage productions, we reach the height of paradox, since a live performance, which is something essentially ephemeral and fluid, is suddenly frozen, immobilized, preserved for endless repetition, although the singularity of a theatrical experience can never be recaptured.
(43)

On the other hand, a positive aspect of a film production or a recorded stage performance is that the word of Shakespeare is spread more easily. The ability to capture on film gives us a chance to preserve brilliant performances which otherwise would have been lost for future generations. Judith Buchanan argues further that by converting Shakespeare's plays into films and recorded productions, Shakespeare gets the biggest audience he has ever had (5).

Another frequent and important element of Shakespeare's plays is the soliloquies. A soliloquy in a film version can be whispered into the camera, but it can also be done as a voice-over in order to simulate thoughts (Jackson 25). This could be used as an advantage since the character can think the thoughts in his or her head while watching something happening, and the audience can hear the thought and see what the character sees simultaneously. On a stage there is typically no such possibility since the audience needs to hear clearly what the characters are saying, and a whisper will not be heard (Hallinan 134).

The BBC Shakespeare Series and *The Winter's Tale*

The BBC Shakespeare series was produced over the course of six years, with approximately six plays per year (Wells 262-263). One of the aims of the BBC Shakespeare series was to make sure that the world had access to the complete series of Shakespeare in a recorded form (Wells 263). When they started their production, however, there already existed several versions of filmed Shakespeare productions. Nevertheless, they still chose to make the complete series. There were many reasons to why, but one of the more obvious ones was to get more financial support. Wells explains it further: “‘The Complete BBC Shakespeare’ is a far stronger selling-point than productions of various, lesser-known plays to fill the gaps in a collection” (263).

Another aim of the series was to educate people. The series should be used as a way for teachers to collect the plays and use them as a bank of performances (Wells 262). There is a certain danger to this aim, as mentioned before, if the students have not read Shakespeare before they are shown the BBC version, they might consider the TV-production to be the correct version and not just an interpretation. Both Bulman and Willems argue about the risk of the students forgetting that they are watching a play, and consider it to be just another movie (Bulman 571; cited in Jackson 36). This risk is evidently applicable to any adapted TV-production or film production.

In the BBC Shakespeare series, there was a wish to have a so called house style (Wells 269). The aim of a house style was to create all the plays in the series in a way that followed a clear pattern and that all the productions would seem similar to each other. The positive aspect of this was that the BBC’s style would be recognized by the audience in every single production. The negative aspect of having a house style, however, is that some artists did not want to work with the series since it gave such limitations to what each individual could create (Wells 269).¹

The director of the BBC’s *The Winter's Tale* was Jane Howell. Howell’s personal preferred style was to take long continuous takes and she often took full advantage of the benefits that comes with a TV-production, namely to allow the actors to speak with a low voice close to the camera (Cook 326, 329). Howell and the producer of *The Winter's Tale*, Jonathan Miller, agree that Shakespeare’s plays should be seen as mainly productions for the stage and not for the screen, as will be discussed further on. (Bulman 547). She stated that

¹ An interesting fact is that Jonathan Miller tried to get Ingmar Bergman as one of his directors, but Bergman turned the offer down, probably for the reasons mentioned above (Wells 269).

“Television is not a realistic medium ... all that need be real is the actor’s performance” (547). In the directing of *The Winter’s Tale*, she chose to not be realistic in the choice of scenery, décor and props, but aimed for a neutral stage that could be anywhere (Rothwell 400; Wells 267). Her preference for close-ups is clearly evident in the BBC’s version, which will be discussed further in the analysis.

The producer of the BBC’s version, Jonathan Miller, had previously worked with Shakespeare in several contexts and he is famous for his various interpretations (Chinoy 7). He liked to work with Shakespeare’s plays, both for the fact that they are open for different interpretations and that the plays are dynamic and do not have any subplots (Chinoy 12; Hallinan 139). Miller argued that Shakespeare’s plays were written for the stage and not for the screen. He wanted to put focus on this and produce plays that are more accurate to their origin, the Renaissance society, instead of adapting them to our modern times (Bulman 573-574).

The RSC’s filmed stage production of *The Winter’s Tale*

The Royal Shakespeare Company (RSC) was founded in Stratford-upon-Avon in 1875, under the name Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Ltd. Incorporated (Key dates). The current name, and the company as it looks like today, was established in 1961. Ever since then the purpose for the people working here has been to inspire and amuse their audience, mainly with the works of Shakespeare, but also with heaps of other works, new and old alike. On the RSC’s webpage, the goals and aims of the company are explained further: “We believe in taking risks and pushing creative boundaries – finding new ways of doing things and learning through action. Our audiences are at the heart of all we do and we want to challenge, inspire and involve them” (Our work).

What is interesting about the RSC’s version of *The Winter’s Tale* is that it was not decided beforehand that it would be filmed, but this decision came later on. The production was considered so good that it was classified worthy of being recorded and preserved for later generations. The production is a so called filmed stage performance, but it is not done in the ordinary manner with only one camera put up at the back of the room. Instead, *The Winter’s Tale* is recorded with several cameras set up in different angles and at various distances. There are close-ups on the actors’ facial expressions, long distance cameras which can capture the whole ensemble, as well as cameras on the sidelines of the stage. The

play was recorded at the Barbican Theatre in London in April 1999, and the DVD itself is a combination of two different performances (Menu).

The director of the RSC's version is Gregory Doran. In the production casebook of *The Winter's Tale*, Doran gives his view on the production. First of all, Doran puts emphasis on the fact that the play is neither a comedy nor a tragedy, it is a mixture and a challenging play to produce, direct and perform (01:29, 01:50). Doran is of the opinion that this play is truly an original one, and he gives it the following description: "It is an astonishing, dangerous, difficult play of psychological depth and realism ..." (14:20).

Robert Jones, the set and costume designer of *The Winter's Tale*, explains how they aimed for a domestic royal court, with the feeling of an enclosed and a claustrophobic environment (02:42). The inspiration was given from a Romanoff photograph of a large room without ceiling (03:20). The room in the picture had panels and many windows. What Jones did, however, was to take away all the windows and leave the panels. This was done in order to give the characters numerous entrances and exits, and along with the illusion of a narrowing corridor, the stage itself represented Leontes' mind (15:15). When the actors enter and leave through the many openings in the panels it symbolizes Leontes' thoughts trapped in the labyrinth in his head. This pattern of thinking connects well with the RSC's version of Leontes, as will be discussed further on.

Analysis

The comparison between *The Winter's Tale* and the BBC's TV-production and the RSC's filmed stage production of the same play will focus on three main parts: King Leontes, the relationships between Queen Hermione and the two kings, and Prince Mamillius. The comparison will include manners, the interaction between the characters and portraying of emotions.

In this first section of my analysis, I have chosen to put my main focus on the King of Sicilia, Leontes. There are several reasons for this choice: First of all, he is one of the main characters of *The Winter's Tale*. Secondly, his jealousy is starting the play and his following actions set the rest of the story in motion. Thirdly, signs of his mad jealousy are portrayed very differently in the two film versions which this essay is comparing. Thereafter, comes a section on the very source to Leontes' jealousy, namely the relationship between his queen Hermione and his friend Polixenes. This relationship is worth looking into since it is

interesting to see how the two productions have chosen to portray it, if they have interpreted the text in a way that gives Leontes more or less evidence to his accusations. The relationship between Hermione and Leontes will also be briefly discussed. Finally, the prince Mamilius will have a section of his own, since his character is shown very differently in the two productions.

King Leontes and his jealousy

One of the main characters in *The Winter's Tale* is King Leontes of Sicilia. In the beginning of the play, he tries to persuade his good friend King Polixenes of Bohemia to prolong his visitation at Leontes' court. Only a couple of lines into the play, however, the signs of an upcoming madness or jealousy are rapidly starting to show. He says: "Too hot, too hot!/ To mingle friendship far is mingling bloods. / I have tremor cordis on me.² My heart dances, / But not for joy, not joy" (I.2.110-112). The interesting aspect of this is that Leontes' turning point from friendly host into a state of extreme jealousy is given more or less without warning. In the previously spoken lines, he reminds his wife Hermione of the first time when she spoke to the purpose, namely when she agreed to marry him. He also tells her that the second time she spoke to the purpose was when she convinced Polixenes to stay longer. The only possible hint for jealousy, before the previously mentioned section, is his comment on the new arrangement: "At my request he would not" (I.2 88).

The first part of *The Winter's Tale* takes place in the kingdom of Sicilia and it is here that Leontes has his main role to play. In the first scene, as mentioned before, the jealousy is gaining ground and in the bedchamber scene and trial scene that follow there is a minor indication that Leontes on some level is aware of his mad jealousy. At the trial he answers the accused Hermione with "Your actions are my dreams" (III.2.81). In one of his speeches, Leontes creates a logic of his own and calls it "infection of my brains" (Innes 10).

In the BBC's version, King Leontes of Sicilia is a tall man with red hair and beard, played by the actor Jeremy Kemp. He is dressed in an impressive black Muscovite-style fur coat and a matching black fur hat. This fur coat is not even removed for the trial scene that is supposed to be indoors, which Kenneth S. Rothwell argues to be peculiar (401). Leontes has, on the other hand, often been connected with the bear that later kills Antigonus

² The word *tremor* means: "a slight shaking movement in your body that you cannot control, especially because you are ill, weak or upset" ("tremor"). *Cordis* means heart in Latin ("cordis").

(Hunt 335). There is therefore a probable explanation to this choice, since there is a possibility that the director Jane Howell could have used the black fur coat as a way to emphasize this potential connection (Rothwell 401).

Kemp as Leontes has an air of impressiveness around him and his voice seldom leaves its calm low realm. While speaking, he often whispers and his facial expressions do not show a great deal of variation. His madness is portrayed as a seemingly more introvert disease. An excellent example of this is that he is often whispering his lines on a very short distance to the camera, as to show that this is a sickness that goes on in his own mind. As mentioned before, this is a preferred style of the director Jane Howell (Cook 326). Support for this view on Leontes' behavior could perhaps be found in the text where Leontes speaks in an aside:³ "I am angling now, / Though you perceive me not how I give line" (I.2 180-181). Angling means fishing, and Leontes is here leaving Hermione and Polixenes alone in order to be able to catch them in the act. "Though you perceive me not how I give line" (I.2 181), indicates that he tries to not reveal his feelings in front of the others.

Kemp is overall a very calm Leontes, but sometimes it is such a calm performance that it verges on the brink of being perceived as uninteresting. Wells agrees on this view and claims that "... Jeremy Kemp as Leontes used understatement in a way that removed the obvious danger of embarrassing emotionalism at the expense of depriving us of an appreciation of the character's anguish" (Wells 274). Rothwell describes Kemp's Leontes as: "... moody, meditative, contained, content to express the inner turmoil with an outer tension" (401). But he also suggests that Kemp's calm Leontes might have been a tactical choice: "Kemp's laidback style may be best for the intimacy of television" (401). But it is important to keep in mind that the BBC's version was meant for education as well, and it might therefore be a little bit daring to aim for a "laidback style". If the students encounter Shakespeare for the first time through the BBC's version of *The Winter's Tale*, one might fear the risk of them losing their potential interest in Shakespeare before it even got a fair chance to emerge.

In the RSC's version, a hint of King Leontes' upcoming mad jealousy is introduced already from the moment the performance begins. The King is walking in between two rows of whispering people accompanied by a single trumpet, and the single spotlight focuses on his perplexed expression (01:10). It is a rather ominous scene since you get the feeling that something bad is going to happen. Leontes is played by the actor Sir Antony Sher,

³ An aside means: "[W]ords spoken by an actor to the people watching a play, that the other characters in the play do not hear" ("aside").

who is not wearing any eye-catching fur coat, but a normal outfit similar to what the other characters are dressed in. He is a rather short, black-haired man with no extraordinary features.

Sher definitely expresses his emotions in a very different manner compared to Kemp in the BBC's version. While Kemp whispers into the camera, Sher violently screams to the people around him, tries to strangle his wife and then swiftly changes from completely furious to crying and helpless (Jays 38). These mood swings are prominent in the text, since there are several occasions where Leontes can switch subject and focus quickly. A great example of this is the frequently occurring phenomena in the text, where Leontes talks about jealousy and then abruptly switches to his son Mamillius (I.2 109-121, I.2 129-145, I.2 180-207). It is obvious that the people behind the RSC's performance wanted to intrigue, inspire and maybe even frighten the audience with Leontes' mad manners. Stanley Wells argues that this is a normal aim for the theatre and he explains it in the following way: "... every performance is the result of a two-way interaction between performers and audience: the performers, and through them the director, can constantly attempt to control reactions" (262).

In the casebook that comes with the RSC's version of *The Winter's Tale*, Sher talks about Leontes and the actor explains that he wondered if Leontes is only a mad psychopath or if he does have a real existing sickness that can be diagnosed (05:50). The aim for an actor is to try to show the character to the audience in a certain way, which means that even if the audience does not like a character, they can manage to understand the character in one way or another. Sher argues that it is far easier to feel compassion for a sick mad man than a mere psychopath (09:20).

Professor Maria Ron from the Maudsley Hospital provided Sher with information and could in detail put a diagnosis on Leontes and his behavior (07:54). Leontes could actually be diagnosed with an existing disease called morbid jealousy.⁴ One of the criteria is being completely unreasonable and paranoid, which corresponds well to the text. Leontes will not listen to what his advisors say (II.1 126-161), and he even, with great paranoia, believes Camillo to know about the adultery (I.2 242-249). Another criterion is to constantly turn and interpret everything everyone else is saying to him or her as evidence for his or hers own ideas and accusations. This happens when Leontes misinterprets Camillo when he explain why Polixenes stays longer: "CAMILLO: To satisfy your highness and th[e] entreaties / Of our most gracious mistress. LEONTES: Satisfy / Th[e] entreaties of your mistress? Satisfy; ..." (I.2 232-234). Leontes' answer shows that the only thing he pays

⁴ Morbid jealousy is nowadays a disease well known and the most frequent patients are men in their 40's, which is presumably the case of Leontes (08:00).

attention to and chooses to put focus on is the word “satisfy”. Morbid jealousy can also lead to a violent behavior, which Leontes shows signs of in his lines and use of words. When Leontes speaks to Camillo he expresses in anger: “You lie, you lie. / I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee, ...” (I.2 299-300), as well as: “Make that thy question and go rot!” (I.2 325). Another time when angry words occur is when Leontes accuses Hermione of adultery: “You have mistook, my lady, / Polixenes for Leontes. O thou thing!” (II.1 81-82). There are thus valid reasons in the text to why the RSC’s version has chosen to interpret Leontes as a more emotional and a fairly violent character, including giving him the diagnoses of morbid jealousy.

In a review by David Jays, a positive response to Sher’s Leontes is given: “Sher uses his curious quality of distant amiability, an intimacy that refuses to catch fire” (38). If Leontes was a bear in the BBC’s version, he might have been a lion in the RSC’s version, because according to Jays there are certain similarities when he has one of his more emotional moments: “... when his poise shatters he shakes his head like a tormented lion” (38).

As mentioned before, the RSC’s aim with *The Winter’s Tale*, as with their other productions, is to inspire and involve the audience. This is reflected well in their interpretation of Leontes. One could possibly criticize Sher’s acting as exaggerated and that the emotions are portrayed in an exorbitant manner, but it would be difficult to call it boring. In the same casebook which was mentioned before, Sher himself says: “... People shouldn’t read Shakespeare, they should perform it ... It was written to be spoken out loud, not to be looked at on the page” (12:00).

In the second part of *The Winter’s Tale*, 16 years have passed and King Leontes is now a changed man. In our first encounter with Leontes since the death of Mamillius and Hermione, Cleomenes says to the king: “Sir, you have done enough, and have performed / A saintlike sorrow. No fault could you make / Which you have not redeemed ...” (V.1 1-3). When Leontes later on sees the statue of Hermione he says himself that “I am ashamed” (V.3 37). He also asks Hermione and Polixenes for forgiveness in the final lines which end the play (V.3 147-149).

The two versions have both chosen to portray Leontes as a changed and humble man. In the BBC’s version, Leontes’ black fur coat has changed into a brown leather coat which immediately gives him a more humble appearance. He looks very tired and speaks with less disdain in his voice (02:18:53). In the RSC’s version, Leontes is reading a Bible, and he has a worn out look over him, resembling a man who has lost everything and deeply repents his ill-fated actions (02:24:11). In a review of the performance, the RSC’s version of Leontes’

newfound humility is given a positive response: “Sher’s ice-splintered voice is warmer, furred with regret and wonder and, though it would be too tempting to conflate his journey with Leontes’[...] he grows into his most generous performance yet” (Jays 39). It is fascinating to discover that these two versions, which up until now have not shown many resemblances, here have chosen to portray Leontes in a similar way.

Hermione’s relationships with the two kings

This jealousy / is for a precious creature. As she’s rare / Must it be great; and as
his person’s mighty, / Must it be violent; and as he does conceive he is
dishonored by a man which ever / professed [love] to him, why, his revenges
must / In that be made more bitter. (I.2 450-455)

These lines are spoken by Polixenes and they encapsulate the very essence of the play. As Hermione is a rare creature, Leontes a mighty violent king, and Polixenes apparently a betraying friend; the outcome of the play must therefore be harsh. The relationship between Queen Hermione and King Polixenes is the source of Leontes’ jealousy, since he is convinced that they are having an affair and that the child his queen is carrying is not his own. But first of all, the relationship between Leontes and Polixenes needs a short exposition. The nature of the relationship between the two kings is established already in the first act, where Archidamus and Camillo talk about their masters. They say that the two kings grew up together and that their love for each other has continued to grow ever since (I.1 21-31). This love between the two kings has probably affected Hermione as well, since she also has known Polixenes for quite some time. The lines in the script describe a long, loving friendship between the two kings, which abruptly comes to an end, seemingly without any obvious premonition. It is interesting to see how the two versions have chosen to portray these relationships, both the one between Leontes and Polixenes, and the ones between Hermione and each of the kings.

While studying the text carefully, there are signs of cracks in the marriage between Hermione and Leontes. One is when Leontes emphasizes the fact that a long time ago, he had to beg Hermione several times for her hand before she said yes (I.2 103-105). Another one is the possible sickness of their son Mamillius, which will be discussed later on. A sick child is a burden to any family, especially when he is the sole heir to the throne. But, on the

other hand, Hermione expresses at the trial scene that she believed that her relationship with Leontes was good before: “I appeal / To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes / Came to your court, how I was in your grace, / How merited to be so ...” (III.2 44-47).

In their first conversation to each other, Leontes wants Hermione’s help to persuade Polixenes and says: “Tongue-tied our queen? Speak / you” (I.2 28-29). The two film versions have chosen to portray this conversation very differently. In the BBC’s version, Leontes is only reaching out one hand behind his back to Hermione, expecting her to immediately obey his request. She comes up beside him straight away and they do not even share any eye contact (04:17). In the RSC’s version, while he is speaking this line, Leontes takes Polixenes by the hand and leads him to Hermione who is sitting down on a sofa (05:00). It appears to be a more equal relationship between Leontes and Hermione in the RSC’s version, since Leontes in the BBC’s version clearly demanded immediate obedience of his wife.

In the BBC’s version, Queen Hermione is played by Anna Calder-Marshall, and together with Kemp they represent the royal couple. Their relationship is peculiarly portrayed, seeing as there seems to be only happiness between them in the opening scenes, apart from the submission mentioned above. Hermione’s behavior is rather ambiguous because she often gives her husband huge smiles in combination with glittering eyes (08:55, 12:31). This would not normally be seen as a negative behavior in a marriage if it was not for the fact that her behavior to Leontes is profoundly similar to how she acts against Polixenes. King Polixenes is played by Robert Stephens, and the relationship between him and Hermione in this version is portrayed as very close friends, but there are some moments where they stare perhaps too deep into each other’s eyes (05:43, 07:14). They hold hands on several occasions and they stand very close to each other (07:46, 08:28, 10:28, 02:49:45). The behavior between the two friends is strikingly close to the behavior between the husband and wife.

If believing Leontes’ own words, there is plenty of evidence for Hermione’s and Polixenes’ inappropriate behavior in the text. In the beginning of the play, all three of them are onstage at the same time. Leontes then says in an aside that Hermione and Polixenes are touching each others’ hands and smiling at each other. (I.2 116-118). He also describes how Hermione looks up to Polixenes and is allowing him to hold her in a way that only a husband should be permitted to do (I.2 183-185). When Leontes later talks to Camillo, however, the accusations have deepened to a whole new level: “Is whispering nothing? / Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses? / Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career / Of laughter with a sigh? – a not infallible / Of breaking honesty! – horsing foot on foot? ...” (I.2 284-288). This

is merely the beginning of Leontes' speech about what he asserts that he has seen. The interesting aspect of this part is that it is open for various interpretations, since productions can choose to interpret this as the truth or only as the imagination of a mad man.

In the RSC's version, the relationship between Hermione and her husband appears to be a fairly good one. They often embrace each other and Leontes even kisses her cheek. They touch each other often, and they seem to have a more physical relationship. In this version, Polixenes is played by Ken Bones and Queen Hermione is played by Alexandra Gilbreath. In this production they are definitely great friends, but there are not many occasions of deep eye-contact and in comparison with the BBC's version, they seldom touch each other. The most notable exception of touch between them is when they do a slow waltz friendly together (07:50). This is, however, gravely misinterpreted by Leontes who finds the tune unbearable and sees the waltz merely as contribution to his suspicions, and therefore abruptly turns off the music (Jays 38).

On the other hand, there is genuine affection in the lines they share (06:14, 06:50, 07:35). This does not necessarily mean that they are having an affair of course, but it contributes to the ambivalence of the relationship. Gilbreath herself gives her view on the relationship and says: "Even though [it] is absolutely innocent, in some respect [it] could be considered rather ambiguous, that there is this rather tactile relationship between these two because they have known each other for a long time" (casebook 04:24).

At the trial scene further on in the play, Hermione says in her defense: "For Polixenes, / With whom I am accused, I do confess / I loved him as in honor he required - / With such a kind of love as might become / A lady like me, with a love even such, / So and no other, as yourself commanded ..." (III.2 61-63). This could be interpreted in different ways, since love can be a love between friends and does not necessary equal adultery and the love between lovers.

The BBC's version seems to have interpreted the text in a way that gives Leontes support for his accusations. Hermione and Polixenes are acting more like a husband and wife than merely two friends. This is founded on the fact that their behavior is the same as the one between Hermione and Leontes. The RSC's version however, has put more focus on the differences between the relationship between husband and wife, and the relationship between the two friends. Hermione and Polixenes' relationship is a bond between two close friends, who share love in their words, but the intimate love and the touching are primarily reserved for the marriage.

Mamillius

Mamillius is the prince of Sicilia, son to Leontes and Hermione. In the opening scene of the play, Archidamus and Camillo are talking about him. Archidamus says he is “[A] gentleman / of the greatest promise that ever came into my note” (I.1 35). What is fascinating is that the two versions of *The Winter’s Tale* have chosen to portray Mamillius very differently. In the BBC’s version, he is running around and playing. In the RSC’s version, on the other hand, he is placed immobilized in a wheelchair. It is interesting to see if there is any verification in the text for their deviating interpretations.

Mamillius’ character is a young boy, close to the age of Polixenes’s son Florizel (V.1 116-117). Florizel is, in the second part of the play after the time gap of 16 years, implied to be around 21 when Leontes speaks to him (V.1 125). Therefore, he and Mamillius should only be a little bit over 5 years old at the beginning of the play. Susan Snyder puts even more emphasis on validating Mamillius’ young age and argues that since Mamillius is attended by the women in the bedchamber scene, he is still a young boy. Had he been older he would have been living with the men instead (2). In the BBC’s version, Mamillius is played by Jeremy Dimmick, age 11. The age of 11 is not equal to the age of 5, but at least he is a young boy. In the RSC’s version, Mamillius is played by Emily Bruni, age 23. This choice might seem peculiar, but Bruni is also playing Perdita, Mamillius’ sister who is found 16 years after the prince’s death. Mamillius and Perdita can often be played by the same actor (Snyder 2). With that in mind, the choice might be considered to be a more logical one. It could even be one of the reasons to why Mamillius is placed in a wheelchair. Because while standing up, Bruni’s stature will not convince any audience in the world that she is a young child under the age of 10. Apart from his age, we learn from Camillo that Mamillius is “... a gallant child – one that indeed physics the sub- / ject, makes old hearts fresh” (I.1 37-38).

One of the central aspects of Mamillius is that he is often included in lines which indicate movement. In one of Leontes’ longer speeches, the king says to his son several times: “Go play, boy, play” (I.2 187, 190), one time it is “How now, boy?” (I.2 207) and he even finishes this part of the scene with “Go play, Mamillius” (I.2 211). In the BBC’s version, Mamillius stands in the background while Leontes whispers his speech into the camera, not always in view, but he is standing near the king whenever he is spoken to. He reacts to the “Go play, boy, play” with a hesitant movement, but is unwilling to leave completely (14:00, 14:10). In the last moments of Leontes soliloquy, Mamillius slowly walks up to his father in the background, thus standing really close to him when Leontes asks what he wants (14:30).

Leontes then gives the final request, "Go play, Mamillius ...", and Mamillius runs off stage (15:08). In the RSC's version, on the other hand, Mamillius is in a wheelchair and cannot move on his own. He sits still and only looks at his father when Leontes says "Go play, boy, play" (15:40). The "How now boy?" from Leontes is uttered almost in amazement, like he has not seen his son until now (17:30). For the last "Go play, Mamillius", a servant comes in and rolls the prince offstage (17:45).

In the bedchamber scene, Hermione urges her son to sit down on several occasions: "Pray you, sit by us ..." (II.1 22), "Come on, sit down. Come on, ..." (II.1 27) and a final "Nay, come sit down; then on" (II.1 29). In the BBC's version, this conversation is between Hermione and Mamillius, a mild admonition from a mother to son (29:40). The RSC's version, however, has chosen to interpret this scene in a more creative way. The first "Pray you, sit by us ..." is directed to Mamillius and a servant immediately rolls his wheelchair close to the queen (30:25). The rest of the requests however, which Hermione utters, are aimed at the servants standing around her (30:50). Since "you" can be interpreted either as singular or plural, there has been no particular alternation to the original text, merely a clever interpretation.

When it comes to the possible sickness of Mamillius, there are few and very vague hints in the text. At one occasion, Camillo asks Leontes to try to take Hermione back "... even for your son's sake" (I.2 337). This line could indicate that Mamillius has a delicate health, but it is also very possible that it is merely a general plea since the son is only a young child. Mamillius' sickness seems to lead to his death, but it is not clear exactly how he dies since he dies offstage and the chocking news is brought by a servant (III.2 142-143). In the BBC's version, Mamillius is a healthy boy whenever he is on stage, and in the first scene he is actually running around and plays with a ball (02:25). There is no visual evidence for a sickness. In the RSC's version Mamillius is, as mentioned before, confined to a wheelchair and is thus presented as sick already from the beginning.

In the text of *The Winter's Tale*, Mamillius seems to be healthy up until the point where Hermione is thrown into prison. We learn this from a conversation between Leontes and a servant, where the king explains the situation further: "To see his nobleness! / Conceiving the dishonor of his mother, / He straight declined, drooped, took it deeply, / Fastened and fixed the shame on't in himself, / Threw off his spirit, his appetite, his sleep, / And downright languished" (II.3 12-17). Snyder argues that this exclamation can be seen as Leontes' attempt to strengthen his own belief that Hermione must be taken away in order for their son to get better (4-5). It is, however, an indication in the text that the truth is the

opposite. When Leontes at the trial scene exclaims that the oracle is lying and it is implied that he will carry out the death sentence against Hermione, the news of Mamillius' death is given in the following way: "The prince your son, with mere conceit and fear / Of the queen's speed, is gone" (III.2 142-143).

Overall, the BBC's version seems to be more accurate and close to the text in their interpretation. Mamillius is a healthy young boy, who suddenly falls ill and even dies because of the immense injustice which has fallen upon his mother and Leontes's exclamation against the oracle. The RSC's version, on the other hand, might want to give the audience something that is easier to engage in and understand. It might be less difficult to accept Mamillius' death if he was already sick from the beginning. It could also be easier to relate to this explanation rather than that he died from mere injustice and the wrath of the oracle.

Support for the RSC's version of Mamillius is found in the world of the theatre, since plays actually require some sort of alternation. The audience and the acceptable values in society will change over time, as well as the general knowledge of different words and expressions. Andrew James Harley is of the same opinion and states that

... contrary to the editing practices employed in the production of a reading text, the construction of a performance script permits, even demands, modification of the textual "original" in order to render that original theatrically communicative in the present. (173)

Conclusion

This essay is comparing *The Winter's Tale* by William Shakespeare with the BBC's version and the RSC's version of the same play. The two versions differ greatly in several aspects. First of all, the BBC's version is a TV-production, part of a complete series of Shakespeare's plays, while the RSC's version is a recorded stage performance. The conditions for the two productions were not equal, but both of the productions have used cameras at various distances and used close-up angles to more easily show the actors emotions. However, the two productions have not used these advantages the same way.

The BBC's version is a very calm and collected production, with whispering agony and silent tears. One of the greatest advantages of a TV-production is that the actors can whisper to the camera in order to share their thoughts and feelings with the audience. This has been used in an almost exaggerating manner, which leaves the production to be a rather non-exciting experience. The BBC's *The Winter's Tale*, was made with preservation in mind and the purpose was already set before they started making it. BBC took on a massive responsibility when they aimed for public education. Already in 1984, when Bulman's article about BBC and the house style is published, Bulman states that

Over one hundred colleges and universities have purchased the entire series and countless others have bought or rented tapes of individual plays. It is fair to surmise, then, that tens of thousands of students watch at least one of The Shakespeare Plays annually; some watch many more than one. (571)

It is important that Shakespeare is spread across the globe, but if it is too boring to watch a film adaption, the interest for Shakespeare might disappear before it gets a fair chance to emerge, which is the risk if students watch to long episodes of Kemp's speeches.

The RSC's version, on the other hand, is made for the theatre. Its purpose is to catch the audience's attention and engage the people in the characters and the actions taking place on stage. The RSC has given us a more violent and emotional Leontes and he is more intoxicating to watch. Both versions of the king can clearly be found in the text by Shakespeare, since it is obvious that the king is mad but it is quite vague how he expresses it. The BBC's version and the RSC's version have merely chosen to show two different perspectives to the madness: One has an introvert angle while the other has an extrovert one.

When it comes to the relationship between Hermione and Polixenes, both interpretations have good reasons to portray it the way that they are. Several pieces of

evidence for a friendship as well as potential romance are everywhere in the text, and the play is certainly open for different interpretations. In the case of *Mamillius*, the BBC's version is according to the text the more accurate one, since the prince definitely appears to be a healthy boy. The RCS's version, on the other hand, aimed to inspire and connect with the audience, rather than being completely and utterly true to the original script. Thus it is possible to claim that both versions have reached their goals.

The question of why, and how, two works based on the same script vary so greatly is both a simple and impossible question. The simple answer is: they do not differ since the plot, characters and the spoken lines are the same. A more correct answer is: they are made by individual people with their own ideas and values, and every new production is always something original. As Judith Buchanan states in her work *Shakespeare on Film*: "Whether on stage or screen, all performances that begin life as a script are acts of recreation" (2). The works of Shakespeare will always be interpreted in new productions. There will always be something new to show the world or an angle to give a plot, or explain to the audience that the evil madman actually was afflicted by an existing disease. Even if a work is based on something old, the interpretation will always be something new.

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