

Leontes – jealous tyrant or moving figure? essay



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Jealousy is in our human nature and Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* shows the pure destructive power that it can hold. We see in *The Winter's Tale* how fickle the minds of powerful people can be and how simple acts can be misconstrued. The first example of this, and the first point towards Leontes being a jealous tyrant is in Act 1 Scene 2 where Leontes states "Too hot, too hot!" commenting on the alleged sexual tension between Hermione and Polixenes 'Paddling palms and pinching fingers'. The plosives in this sentence show the utter anger and disgust he carries over nothing but simple friendship and shows us how sudden an 'infection' can be.

The jealousy that Leontes feels is coupled with sense of paranoia believing that everybody is 'whispering' around him and also states that his heart 'dances, but not for joy' giving us a glimpse into what his feelings are at that moment. His paranoia is also shown in believing that he has 'seen the spider' in his cup, meaning he believes there is a plot to take his life and his crown. Shakespeare seems to suggest that jealousy is more than just an emotion but more like a disability, and through Leontes' jealousy his systematically destroyed his own life, being the cause of Hermione and Mamillius's death and also the abandonment of his second born, Perdita. The main point that shows Leontes for being a jealous tyrant is his imprisonment of the heavily pregnant Hermione, which we later discover leads to her untimely death.

This is a point to show his tyrannical ways, his misuse of power, how he throws the Queen of Sicilia into jail without any evidence of her doing wrong. He further insults her with comments such as 'bed-swerver'. This gives us the view that he is not entirely in his right mind, with him often speaking in

disjointed sentences (lines 267-278), which could be showing us how he is disjointed from his emotions, and disjointed from his sensible mind. This way of speech and the constant barrage of insults is met with rational thinking from Hermione, seemingly showing us the irrationalness of Leontes that a woman, who would be very low in knowledge and power in Shakespearian times is more virtuous than ' God's emissary'.

Personally I believe that Leontes does show the general traits of being a jealous tyrant, such as the misuse of power and threat of death, giving his ' enemy an lasting wink'. But he isn't a generic tyrant, as he instantly regrets what he has done leading me to believe that personally he isn't a bad person, just quick to judge. The view that the audience understands and is able to engage with Leontes is also a valid argument in the sense that Leontes presents a wide variety of emotions and experiences to the audience. This relates to the audience as most of them will have shared these very same feeling in their lives.

This technique works to Shakespeare's advantage, as the audience is naturally enthralled in the drama, and feels saddened by his ' saint like sorrow' and it shows that his remorse happens almost as quick as the jealousy began. Shakespeare also uses the idea of redemption to engage with the audience, allowing themselves to repent for their initial thoughts on Leontes, almost as if Shakespeare is showing the audience that even if you do something bad, if you regret it you will be forgiven. This view of Shakespeare's is out of context with his other plays (such as Romeo and Juliet) and is often believed to be so because he himself was nearing the end of his life and was trying to give hope of ' life after death'. The idea of <https://assignbuster.com/leontes-jealous-tyrant-or-moving-figure-essay/>

redemption continues throughout the entirety of the play and comes to a shocking climactic ending where Hermione is ‘revived’ and Perdita and Leontes finally rejoin with one another, this is thought of to be a reward through his ‘recreation’ of the ‘tears shed’ at the graves of Mamillius and Hermione.

This thought impacts with the audience as some will agree with the ending, that he did enough in the sixteen years to find a new appreciation and love towards them. Whereas the other half of the audience will disagree, and believe that he is still a murderer and doesn’t deserve any forgiveness. But none the less he will still manage to move the audience. Altogether I believe that Leontes does have an impact on the audience whether or not you feel the ending was good or not. I believe that Leontes has a momentary lapse of judgement and paid for it with everything, and this personally moves me to believe that he should have some closure in his grief. I also believe that the audience will recognise he is a jealous tyrant that deserved what he got but no matter what the audience’s beliefs of the ending is that it will always move the audience in either love or hate, therefore succeeding in a character.