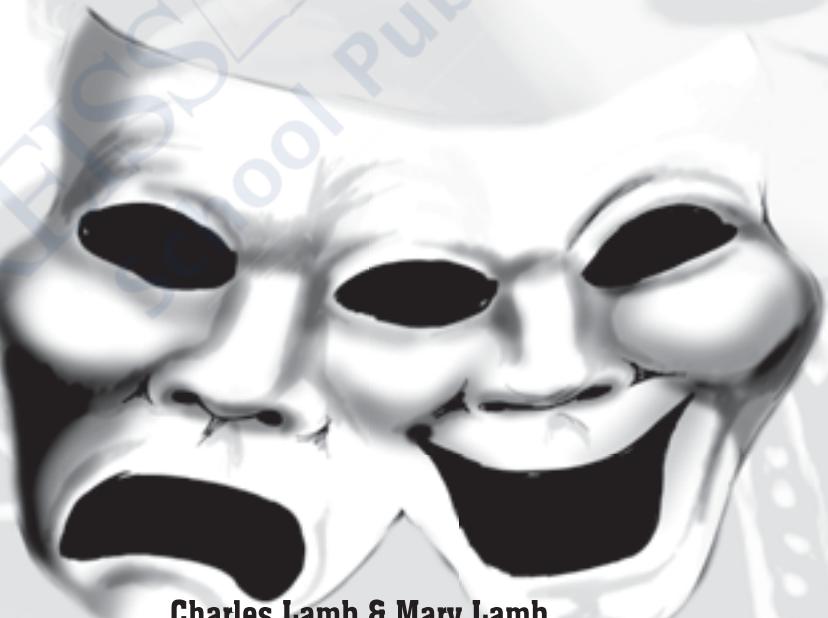


Classic Readers

MORE TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE



Charles Lamb & Mary Lamb

MORE TALES FROM SHAKESPEARE

Retold by Alfred Lee

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CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The Winter's Tale	7
King Lear	19
The Taming of the Shrew	31
Romeo and Juliet	43
Hamlet, Prince of Denmark	60
Othello	74
 Activities	87

Introduction

In 1807 Charles Lamb and his sister Mary Lamb were asked by their good friend, William Godwin, to write the stories from the best-known of Shakespeare's plays in a form that children could easily understand. The stories were intended as an introduction to Shakespeare for readers who were too young to read the plays themselves, and not as a replacement. It was suggested that girls in particular who would not in those days be able to use libraries as freely as their brothers, would profit from them. The result was Tales from Shakespeare. 'I think it will be popular among the little people,' Charles wrote to a friend at the time. And he was right: the stories succeeded beyond expectation, enjoying popularity (with people of all sizes!) until the present day.

At the beginning of the nineteenth century the moral tale was an important form of literature for children; stories were used mainly to teach children the difference between right and wrong. This affected the way the Lambs wrote the stories: the characters are shown as either good or bad in a way that is not so obvious in the plays, and the moral at the end of each story is very clear. The *Tales* attempt, wherever possible, to use Shakespeare's own words to retell the stories, but the language is made easier for the young reader.

Some of the stories have also been made less complicated, with fewer characters than the original.

For the Lambs, whose lives until this point had not been at all easy, the Tales were their first success in the world of literature. Charles was born in 1775, nine years after Mary Ann. Their father was a poorly paid lawyer's clerk in London. Charles was sent to the well-known Christ's Hospital School, but Mary, as a girl, did not have the opportunity for such a good education as her brother. For most of his life, Charles worked as a clerk at East India House, while writing in his free time.

His work was not well paid, and even though Mary earned a little money from needlework, the family was poor. Mary gradually became mentally unbalanced, and then a terrible event took place that changed the brother's and sister's lives for ever. In 1796 their mother tried to stop a fight between Mary and another girl. The fight ended when Mary killed her mother with a knife. At the court case that followed, Mary was judged to be mentally ill and was sent to a mental home. But Charles managed to persuade the courts to let him take responsibility for looking after her, and she was allowed to return home after three years. Charles spent the rest of his life caring for her, and never married. Because she was known to have murdered her mother and to have been in a mental home, the pair had to move house several times. But on the whole they led a calm and happy life together and brought up a child called Emma Isola, who had no parents, as their daughter. Charles died in 1834 and Mary 13 years later.

Charles was a friend of many famous figures of his time, such as the poets Wordsworth and Coleridge. He was a respected and original judge of literature who also wrote poems, plays and stories.

With Mary, he wrote several books for children they retold the story of the *Odyssey* *The Adventures of Ulysses* (1808); *Mrs. Leicester's School* (1809) and *Poetry for Children* (1809) followed.

William Shakespeare, whose plays are retold here in story form, is famous around the world for both his poems and his plays, but very few solid facts are known about his life. He was born in 1564 in Stratford-upon-Avon, England, to the trader John Shakespeare and his wife Mary Arden. He probably went to Stratford Grammar School, which offered free education to local boys. In 1582 he married Anne Hathaway, and they had three children, Susanna, Hamnet and Judith. In 1592 Shakespeare was known to be in London acting and writing plays, but he may have worked as a schoolmaster before this. Shakespeare became

an important member of a theatre company, which performed at two London theatres, the Globe and the Blackfriars. His plays were given special performances at the courts of Queen Elizabeth I and King James I and his success made him a wealthy man. We knew that he bought New Place, a large and impressive house in Stratford, for his family. He rebuilt the house, moved his wife and daughters there (his son had died in 1596), and spent his later years there himself when he left London. Shakespeare died in 1616 and was buried in a church in Stratford.

The stories in this collection are taken from plays written at different times in Shakespeare's professional life.

The Taming of the Shrew comedy of character, and one of the first plays that Shakespeare wrote. *The Winter's Tale* was almost his last play. It is called a comedy because the ending is happy, but the characters go through much pain and sorrow before that ending is reached. These two stories were written by Mary Lamb. The other stories were written by Charles, and are examples of Shakespeare's finest tragedies. *Romeo and Juliet* is an early play showing how the joys of young love are destroyed by the hatred of others. *Hamlet*, a terrible tale of revenge, is probably Shakespeare's most famous play. It is jealousy that leads to tragedy in *Othello*, while *King Lear* shows the shocking effects of an old man's bad judgment. This book introduces the reader to some of the most famous characters from Shakespeare's most powerful plays.

The Winter's Tale

Characters

<i>Leontes,</i>	King of Sicily
<i>Mamillius,</i>	Prince of Sicily
<i>Camillo,</i>	Lord of Sicily Antigonus lord of Sicily
<i>Cleomenes,</i>	Lord of Sicily Dion
<i>Polixenes,</i>	King of Bohemia and friend of Leontes
<i>Florizel,</i>	A prince, son of Polixenes
<i>An old shepherd,</i>	Lived to be father of Perdita
<i>Hermione,</i>	Wife of Leontes, Queen of Sicily
<i>Perdita,</i>	Daughter of Leontes and Hermione
<i>Paulina,</i>	Wife of Antigonus
<i>Emilia,</i>	A lady serving Hermione

Leontes, King of Sicily, and his queen, the lovely Hermione, once lived together in the greatest happiness. The love that they felt for each other made Leontes so happy that he had nothing left to wish for, except that he sometimes wished to see again his old companion and school friend, Polixenes, King of Bohemia, and to introduce his friend to his queen.

Leontes and Polixenes had been brought up together as children, but after the deaths of their fathers, each one had to rule his own kingdom. So they had not met for many years, though they often exchanged gifts, letters and loving messages.

At last, after repeated invitations, Polixenes came from Bohemia to the Sicilian court to pay his friend Leontes a visit. At first this visit gave nothing but pleasure to Leontes. He begged the queen to show special

care and attention to his dear friend and he seemed to have found perfect happiness now that he was with his old companion. They talked about old times; they remembered their schooldays and their youthful games. They told stories of these to Hermione, who always took a cheerful part in these conversations.

When, after a long stay, Polixenes was preparing to leave, Hermione, at her husband's wish, begged him to make his visit longer.

And now this good queen's sorrow began. Polixenes had refused to stay when Leontes asked him, but Hermione's gentle words persuaded him to do so. Leontes had no reason at all to doubt either the honesty of his friend Polixenes or the excellent character of his good queen, but he was immediately seized with an uncontrollable jealousy. Everything that Hermione did for Polixenes, although it was only done to please her husband increased the unfortunate king's jealousy. Suddenly, Leontes changed from a true friend, and the best and most loving of husbands, into a wild and cruel creature. He sent for Camillo, one of the lords of his court, and told him of his suspicions about his wife's unfaithfulness. Then he ordered Camillo to poison Polixenes.

Camillo was a good man, who knew that there was no truth in Leontes' suspicions. So, instead of poisoning Polixenes, he told him about his master's orders and agreed to escape with him from Sicily. Polixenes, with Camillo's help, arrived safely in his own kingdom of Bohemia. From that time, Camillo lived in the king's court and became his chief friend and adviser.

The escape of Polixenes made the jealous Leontes even more angry. He went to the queen's rooms, where her little son Mamillius was just beginning to tell his mother one of his best stories to amuse her. Taking the child away, the king sent Hermione to prison.

Though Mamillius was only a very young child, he loved his mother dearly. When he saw her treated so badly and realized that she had been

taken away from him, he became very unhappy. Gradually he lost his desire to eat and sleep, until it was thought that his sadness would kill him.

When the king had sent his queen to prison, he commanded Cleomenes and Dion, two Sicilian lords, to go to Delphos and ask the oracle at the temple of Apollo if his queen had been unfaithful to him.

★

After Hermione had been in prison for a short time, she gave birth to a daughter. The poor lady was comforted by the sight of her pretty baby, and she said to it: 'My poor little prisoner, I have done as little wrong as you have.'

Hermione had a kind friend, Paulina, who was the wife of Antigonus, another Sicilian lord. When Paulina heard that the queen had given birth to a child, she went to the prison where Hermione was kept and said to Emilia, a lady who served Hermione, 'I pray you, Emilia, tell the good queen that if she will trust me with her baby, I will carry it to the king, His heart may soften when he sees his little child.'

'My lady,' replied Emilia, 'I will tell the queen of your offer. She was wishing today that she had a friend who would dare to show the child to the king.'

'And tell her.' said Paulina, 'that I will speak to Leontes in her defence.'

'May God reward you for your kindness to our gentle queen!' said Emilia. Emilia then went to Hermione, who joyfully gave her baby into Paulina's care.

Paulina took the child and forced her way into the presence of the king, although her husband, Antigonus, who feared the king's anger, tried to prevent her. She laid the baby at her father's feet, and made a noble speech to the king in defence of Hermione. She criticized him for his cruelty and begged him to have pity on his wife and child, who had

done no wrong. But Paulina's words only increased Leontes' anger, and he ordered Antigonus to take her away.



When Paulina went away, she left the little baby at its father's feet. She thought that when he was alone with it, he would look at it and feel pity for it.

The good Paulina was wrong. As soon as she left, the cruel father ordered Antigonus to take the child out to sea and leave it on some empty shore to die.

Antigonus was not like the good Camillo; he obeyed the orders of Leontes too well. He immediately carried the child on board a ship and sailed out to sea, intending to leave it on the first lonely shore that he could find.

The king was so sure that Hermione was guilty that he did not wait for the return of Cleomenes and Dion from Delphos. While the queen was still weak and miserable at losing her much loved baby, she was brought before all the lords and nobles of his court for a public trial. When that unhappy lady was standing in front of them as a prisoner to receive their judgment, Cleomenes and Dion entered. They told the King that they had the oracle's answer.

Leontes commanded that the words of the oracle should be read aloud, and these were the words:



'Hermione is not guilty, Polixenes blameless, Camillo a true servant, Leontes a jealous and cruel king, and Leontes shall live without an heir unless that which was lost is found.'

The king refused to believe the words of the oracle. He said that the message was a lie invented by the queen's friends, and he asked the judge to continue with the case against the queen. But while he was speaking, a man entered and told him that Prince Mamillius had died