Speech Versus Spectacle: Autolycus, Class and Containment in *The Winter's Tale*

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Summary: *Shakespeare's Winter's Tale is a play in which theatrical spectacle triumphs over speech, as stage action obscures the incoherence of verbal representation. This paper identifies Autolycus as a composite of Jacobean anxieties about the sources of social instability, and explores his place in this dramatic process. The spectacular techniques of containment that reconcile all the other characters do not quite work on the sturdy rogue. He embodies the failure of Jacobean England's historical attempt, and the play's dramatic attempt, to assimilate those it has defined as unassimilable.*

On May 15, 1611, Dr. Simon Forman saw an early performance of *The Winter's Tale*, and recorded his observations. After tersely summarizing the plot, without mentioning the famous statue scene, Forman devoted about a third of his note to reflections on Autolycus:

Remember also the Rog that cam in all tottered like coll pixci/. and howe he feyned him sicke & to haue bin Robbed of all that he had and howe he cosoned the por man of all his money. and after cam to the shep sher with a pedlers packe & ther cosoned them Again of all ther money And howe he changed apparell wth the kinge of bomia his sonn. and then howe he turned Courtiar &c / beware of trustinge feined beggars or fawninge fellowse.¹

It is not surprising that Autolycus should command more attention than his place in the dramatic action warrants; indeed if Hamlet's comments are to be trusted, it might be surprising if a Shakespearean clown did not "steal the show" (3.2.38–45).² What is perhaps more remarkable is that the clown's clownishness does not, in this instance, provoke much comment. To be sure,

Forman is a moralizer — his notes on plays are made “for Common Pollicie” according to the manuscript heading — so we might expect his remarks on Autolycus to be cautionary, even if much of the Globe audience would have reacted quite differently. Still, Forman’s sense of Autolycus as dramatic character, rather than as stage clown, and his anxiety about Autolycus as the representative of a dangerous social type, must have been shared by some of the audience. This Autolycus is my chief concern here. Forman left the Globe worried about Autolycus because the spectacular techniques of containment that reconcile all the other characters do not quite work on the sturdy rogue. He embodies the failure of Jacobean England’s historical attempt, and the play’s dramatic attempt, to assimilate those it has defined as unassimilable.³

I begin with the commonplace observation that *The Winter’s Tale* is a divided play. Most obviously it is temporally and geographically divided, with a gap of sixteen years between the first three acts, set in Sicilia, and the last two, set mostly in Bohemia. The play is also *about* divisions: the division of families by Leontes’ tragic jealousy and Polixenes’ comic blocking of young love, and the division between social classes which is central (if eventually irrelevant) to the love plot. Since Perdita really *is* a princess there turns out to be no class barrier to her marriage with Florizel.⁴ These are the divisions the play works to heal, abandoning probability in the pursuit of a comforting resolution and reconciliation of the alienated parties. There are other divisions, though, which the play does not heal; not that it tries to do so and fails, but that it never really tries. One of these is also a class division of sorts, between Autolycus and everyone else, rustics and royals alike. Except for the dead Mamillius and Antigonus (who are, in a sense, replaced by Florizel and Camillo), Autolycus is the only principal excluded from the play’s final grand reconciliation. His exclusion is rendered emphatically as the Shepherd and the Clown flaunt their newly-acquired gentility, their “preposterous estate” in the penultimate scene (5.2.148), promising to help him regain his place in the Prince’s service. Yet this promise also hints at the incompleteness of his exclusion. As Northrop Frye remarks, Autolycus is, in the end, “superfluous to the plot.”⁵ There is no good *dramatic* reason for him to come to Sicilia. It is as if he has to be kept around in order to be excluded. The second unresolved division, connected to the first, is a perceptual one for the audience, a division between speech and spectacle, between what we hear, and what we are allowed, or made, to see.⁶ Autolycus

is an embodiment of this gap, the residue of a romance ideology of social harmony.

Autolycus's exclusion suggests that he is a deeply subversive character, one whom the play cannot afford finally to draw in. He is, of course, a criminal, but then, so is Leontes.⁷ Yet the King is forgiven and eventually exculpated, through a piece of verbal sleight of hand worthy of Autolycus himself. Commenting on the fate of Antigonus, one of the gentlemen reports that "all the instruments which aided to expose the child were even then lost when it was found" (5.2.70–72). As Joan Hartwig has suggested, Autolycus serves as Leontes' parodic double who "absorbs some of the disordering aspects of Leontes' disturbed imagination."⁸ I would go even further, and suggest that he absorbs the tendency towards disorder exhibited by all the characters. The division between speech and spectacle in *The Winter's Tale* — between, in the most striking instance, the *offstage* revelation of Perdita's identity, and the animation, if that is the right word, of Hermione — serves at once to unleash and to contain the subversive potential of which Autolycus is the play's only unequivocal representative. At various points in the play, challenges to the hegemony of royal families and courtly elites are articulated, given voice, only to be silenced again by the spectacular action of the play. In the course of the play, oppositional voices become, in a sense, disembodied, as the lost, banished and disaffected characters — Camillo, Hermione, Perdita and Paulina — rejoin the families and courts from which they have been alienated. Only their words remain, but those words cannot be withdrawn. Playing on the maxim that "seeing is believing," yet contesting that maxim at the same time, *The Winter's Tale* compels us, as an audience, to choose between trusting our eyes and trusting our ears.

The question of how the play manages the subversive potential which is a basic ingredient of dramatic action — for there to be a story, a stable initial situation must be disrupted — bears on the debate about subversion and containment which has preoccupied "New Historicists" and "Cultural Materialists" for more than a decade. This debate parallels the seventeenth-century struggle between the monarchy and church hierarchy on the one hand, and on the other, the reformist elements we have, rather uneasily, lumped together under the label of "Puritanism."⁹ Both participants in and commentators on this struggle pay special attention to popular seasonal festivities like Mayday, Twelfth Night, or the sheep-shearing festival which is the centerpiece of *The Winter's Tale*, and to the literary forms — stage plays, court masques, and celebratory lyrics like Herrick's "Corinna's Going

a-Maying” — which draw on these saturnalian and carnivalesque traditions of sanctioned and contained social insurrection.¹⁰ One view of these festive customs, drawing heavily on Bakhtin, emphasizes the potential for real opposition to emerge from such artificial instability, for the production of a discourse distinct from and opposed to the “official” culture of which the festival is nominally an element.¹¹ In Shakespeare’s day, the godly (as those who were derisively labelled “Puritan” would have called themselves) offered a similar analysis, albeit from the opposite point of view: they deplored Sunday sports and holiday festivities as pagan superstitions, violations of the sanctity of the Lord’s day, and of the Christian duty to labour diligently at a calling on other days.¹² The alternative view sees festivity as an instrument of social control, arguing that festivals serve the interests of the state by releasing oppositional energies, and forestalling genuine insurrection. For King James this is a good thing: in his *Basilicon Doron*, he defends the custom of “making playes and lawfull games in Maie, and good cheere at Christmas” as a “forme of contenting the peoples mindes ... used in all well governed Republics.”¹³ To a twentieth-century commentator like Stephen Greenblatt, this is an instance of the way power operates through “the constant production of its own radical subversion and the powerful containment of that subversion.”¹⁴

The Stuart court masques, despite, yet in some ways because of, their exclusive nature, exemplify the politics of festivity and spectacle, and have become a preferred site for such analyses. The masque, or the idealized version of it devised by Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones, is a composite form, consisting of a chaotic “antimasque,” performed by professional players who take all the speaking parts, followed and overcome by a spectacular main masque, *danced* by the members of the court. It constitutes an iconic drama of transgression and containment in which law, sovereignty, and rank, manifested in musical harmony and formally patterned dance, are temporarily suspended, in order that they might be restored, confirmed and celebrated. Though the texts of masques can be “instructive” to the monarch, flattering spectacle triumphs over speech, as harmony triumphs over discord.¹⁵

The fragmenting of perception in *The Winter’s Tale* weaves the terms of this debate into the structure of the play.¹⁶ The spectacular final scene in which the “statue” of Hermione comes to life, serves, like the final dance of a Stuart masque, to contain the chaotic tendencies released by the earlier action. And like the masque it does so with very few words.¹⁷ But this spectacular close resolves the play’s conflicts without offering any sort of

discursive coherence.¹⁸ Many questions remain unanswered. The response to Hermione's plea for an explanation of Perdita's survival — "Tell me, mine own, / Where hast thou been preserv'd? where liv'd? how found / Thy father's court?" — is forestalled by Paulina's interruption: "There's time enough for that; / Least they desire (upon this push) to trouble / Your joys with like relation" (5.3.123–25, 128–30). Explanations, especially explanations of Hermione's preservation, might introduce further disruption; they might "trouble [the] joys" of reunion and reconciliation. In the very last lines of the play, Leontes urges Paulina to

Lead us from hence, where we may leisurely
Each one demand, and answer to his part
Perform'd in this wide gap of time, since first
We were dissever'd. Hastily lead away (5.3.152–55).

Leontes' anxious desire to get off somewhere and hear the explanations for all that has happened isolates the audience in a state of incomprehension. The deferral of explanations at the end of the play is, for us, absolute. We must be, and yet we cannot be, content with what we have *seen*. In part it is this residue of dissatisfaction that compromises the containment process. Disembodying the oppositional voices in the play cannot entirely silence or erase them, rather it isolates and accentuates them.

The disjunction between speech and spectacle begins to be evident very early in the play, with the unaccountable emergence of Leontes' jealousy.¹⁹ Despite a number of similarities, the situation differs in crucial ways from that in *Othello*. In both plays the hero becomes jealous in what seems an implausibly short time. But in *Othello* much is *said* in that time. The temptation scene (3.3) is the longest in the play, and it contains a good deal of dialogue, along with a number of entrances and exits to help create the illusion of passing time. Dramatically, the scene is constructed to allow both the audience and Othello to suspend disbelief, as Iago works on Othello's imagination gradually and incrementally, through an elaborate series of insinuations and affected evasions. To put it another way, speech and spectacle, what happens and what is said, are roughly commensurate. Indeed the seductiveness of the dialogue may be said to overcome some fairly obvious deficiencies of verisimilitude — the fact that there has been no time for Desdemona to commit adultery with Cassio, and that Othello has just thrown down the handkerchief which Iago claims he has seen in Cassio's possession. In *The Winter's Tale*, there is no such harmony of speech and spectacle.²⁰ What we *see* is a man suddenly transported from begging a

boyhood friend to extend his visit, to a pathological conviction that his wife has been conducting an adulterous affair with their guest, who is the father of her soon-to-be-born child. What we *hear* is an entirely incoherent account of the relationship between “Affection” — a term that seems to conflate Leontes’ jealousy and Hermione’s alleged lust for Polixenes — and reality:

— may’t be? —

Affection! thy intention stabs the centre
 Thou dost make possible things not so held,
 Communicat’st with dreams (how can this be?),
 With what’s unreal thou co-active art,
 And fellow’st nothing. Then ’tis very credent
 Thou may’st co-join with something, and thou dost
 (And that beyond commission), and I find it
 (And that to the infection of my brains
 And hard’ning of my brows) (1.2.138–146).

The argument here is as ingenious as it is ludicrous. Since passion can be “co-active” with “what’s unreal,” with “*nothing*,” isn’t it far *more* likely to “co-join with *something*”? As one critic succinctly puts it, “Leontes begins by analyzing his emotions, and proceeds to justify them by insisting on the reality of their objects.”²¹ In contrast to *Othello*, *The Winter’s Tale* works, from the very beginning, to foreground its own implausibility. The process by which Leontes has become jealous is as incomprehensible to those on stage as it is to the audience. Prodded by Polixenes to explain “How should this grow,” Camillo is virtually speechless: “I know not; but I am sure ’tis safer to / Avoid what’s grown than question how ’tis born” (1.2.432–34). Leontes’ spectacular transformation, it seems, is beyond interrogation and analysis. Hermione, at her trial, is acute in her exasperated conclusion: “You speak a language that I understand not” (3.2.80). From the very beginning, then, the audience of *The Winter’s Tale* is faced with a problem of plausibility created by the gulf between speech and spectacle.

Juxtaposing Paulina’s deferral of explanations at the end of the play and Leontes’ incoherent explanations near the beginning suggests the nature of the play’s solution to that problem of plausibility — a deliberately incomplete one. We are asked, in *The Winter’s Tale*, to forego discursive coherence, answers to questions like “how could this happen?” and to content ourselves with a spectacular demonstration that it *has* happened, never mind how. This result is sometimes rendered as a critical first principle: *The Winter’s Tale* is a romance, and this is just the way things happen in romances, but it is not

that simple.²² The play, after all, keeps asking the questions that its structure and genre imply we have no business asking.

It asks them most insistently through its handling of the offstage reunion of Leontes, Polixenes, Florizel and Perdita. "That which I shall report," says the Lord who announces Polixenes' arrival in Sicilia, "will bear no credit / Were not the proof so nigh" (5.1.179–80). "This news," says one of the gentlemen relating the story of Perdita's discovery, "This news, which is call'd true, is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (5.2.27–29). Anyone who has missed it (as everyone in the audience has) has "lost a sight which was to be seen, cannot be spoken of" (5.2.42–43). A good many things in *The Winter's Tale* "will bear no credit," if language alone is to be trusted, nevertheless the visual evidence is "so nigh" that we must believe. Here, though, we are denied *either* a coherent account or a spectacular demonstration. The reasons usually given for Shakespeare's decision to omit a reunion scene at this point involve a desire to avoid tediousness, and to sustain tension for the final scene.²³ All this makes perfect sense, though it does little to describe the effect of the technique — an effect of focusing our attention on the absence or inadequacy of explanations.

The famous "gillyvors exchange" between Perdita the shepherdess and Polixenes is another example of this incoherence. To Perdita's scornful dismissal of "streak'd gillyvors / (Which some call Nature's bastards)" (4.4.82–83), Polixenes responds with a lecture on art and nature:

Nature is made better by no mean
But Nature makes that mean; so over that art
Which you say adds to nature, is an art
That Nature makes. You see, sweet maid, we marry
A gentler scion to the wildest stock,
And make conceive a bark of baser kind
By bud of nobler race (4.4.89–95).

The irony of Polixenes' metaphor is nearly always pointed out in commentaries on the passage. In the words of one critic, "Polixenes' ideas on horticulture do not extend to his own son, the 'gentler scion.' Polixenes is progressive with flowers, conservative with Florizel,"²⁴ as he demonstrates when he threatens to have Perdita's "beauty scratched with briars and made / More homely than [her] state," for her dalliance with a royal prince (4.4.425–26). The King's hypocrisy stands out in even sharper relief when juxtaposed to Perdita's egalitarian reflections, offered only after his furious exit:

I was about to speak, and tell him plainly
 The self-same sun that shines upon his court
 Hides not his visage from our cottage, but
 Looks on alike (4.4.443–46).

The interesting thing, however, is the light cast on these opposing views by subsequent events. While Polixenes' violent outburst illustrates the irrational and contradictory nature of his position, the larger action of the play works to vindicate him, and to efface the contradiction. The conventions of romantic comedy may lead us to sympathize with the lovers, against the *senex iratus*, but the fact of Perdita's noble birth implies pretty clearly that fathers really *do* know best, that classes really *do* need to stick together, and that "the gentler scion" really ought not to mate with "the wildest stock." Despite the staging of a debate, Polixenes' ideas about marriage and Perdita's ideas about flowers turn out to be quite consistent. Perdita's egalitarian speech about the same sun shining on court and cottage alike is merely a product of the temporary disruption of social order at the festival. Left hanging by the absence of its audience, her words are eventually isolated and abandoned, rendered irrelevant by the facts of her parentage. When Perdita eventually returns as a princess, nothing remains of the upstart shepherdess but a disembodied voice.

This pattern of restoration as a form of erasure is repeated several times. Paulina and Hermione are Leontes' harshest critics: neither shrinks from the word "tyranny." Nevertheless, both are reconciled to a penitent tyrant. Paulina's change of heart, or at least of tone and strategy, is particularly interesting. Very quickly after announcing Hermione's death she begins the process of reconciliation to Leontes (compare 3.2.207–14 and 220–26). Though she continues to remind him of his crimes, Paulina's place in Leontes' court in Act V is very different from what we saw in the first half of the play. No longer the adversary of a tyrant, she becomes counsellor to a penitent, the custodian of "the nearest things to [his] heart" — a role Leontes had described as Camillo's in Act I (3.235–39).

Camillo goes through much the same transformation, without even seeing the grieving King. When he urges Leontes to "be cur'd / Of [his] diseas'd opinion," the trusted counsellor's membership in the courtly elite is instantly revoked. The King declares him "a gross lout, a mindless slave" (1.2.296–97, 301). And though Camillo at first swears that Leontes' folly "will continue / The standing of his body" (1.2.430–31), the passage of time finds him pining to return to Sicilia (4.2.4–9), confident, as Polixenes

certainly is not, of Leontes' genuine penitence. Indeed he sees in the "free arms" of his former master the salvation of Florizel and Perdita's apparently doomed love. In a striking reversal, Sicilia becomes the lovers' forest of Arden, "the wood ... without the town" (*MNSD* 1,1.165). Leontes and his court are not merely redeemed over the course of the play, they become instruments of redemption.

Autolycus, then, is left to perform two rather awkward functions. On the one hand, as the momentum of reconciliation builds, he ends up carrying the entire burden of opposition, resistance and subversion. On the other hand, as Leontes is redeemed, Autolycus is left as the only criminal in the play, a convenient target for any lingering desire to see someone punished. Eventually these two functions converge, so that the crime in the play is transformed from tyranny (the criminal exercise of power) to vagrancy (the criminal response to powerlessness). Historian A. L. Beier connects Tudor and Stuart vagrancy policy with a "de-sanctification of the poor," in which poverty ceases to be a sign of holiness, and becomes a mark of depravity.²⁵ Here we seem to have an analogous process, a de-legitimation of resistance. The play takes us from the figures of Camillo and Paulina, who embody what Richard Strier calls "'Kent's paradox' of service through resistance,"²⁶ through Antigonus, whose crime is his obedience, to the figure of Autolycus, whose larger crime, the root of his other petty crimes, is being "out of service." As Autolycus works frantically to maintain his oppositional posture, the play works to compel him to serve, or in his own phrase, to make him do good against his will (5.2.124). Having overheard Florizel's plan to escape with Perdita, he engages in a wonderful bit of villain's casuistry: "If I thought it were a piece of honesty to acquaint the King withal, I would not do't. I hold it the more knavery to conceal it, and therein am I constant to my profession" (4.4.679-83). Autolycus may be the most self-conscious and class conscious character in the play. He names himself, describes his occupation and lineage, and changes dress and mannerisms in a calculated attempt to advance his own fortunes. Yet despite this protean quality, he is virtually the only one who tries to be "constant to his profession" in both senses of the phrase — to be "true" to his (false) word, and to the demands of his calling as a rogue, a man "out of service."

Ironically, yet fittingly, it is in the sheep-shearing festival, that symbolic "vision of nature[']s creative power"²⁷ which serves to naturalize and consolidate the social order, that we see Autolycus in pursuit of his disruptive calling. There can be little doubt that this festival, with the modest Perdita

as its mistress of misrule, the “queen of curds and cream” (4.4.161), and the outrageous but benign antics of Mopsa and Dorcas, fulfils the conservative function envisioned by most defenders of such events.²⁸ With their pockets emptied and their purses cut, the shearers have nothing to do *but* go back to work. Autolycus and his trumpery are clearly, on this level, central to the festivities. But for all of his connections to the festival, Autolycus bears a number of resemblances to the godly Jacobean sabbatarians who denounced such events. He is essentially indifferent to the holiday spirit. The seasonal changes that draw others *away* from their work turn Autolycus’s thoughts from pleasure to business: he “haunts wakes, fairs and bair-baitings” (4.3.102), not in pursuit of a festive release from the drudgery of daily life, but out of solid business sense. Spring is no time for a holiday. “This time of lethargy,” as he calls it, is occasion to find his victims conveniently assembled, so he can “cut ... their festival purses” (4.4.613–15). Autolycus, it seems, does not take holidays; he must be busy about his calling. Every day is a work day, every place a work place: “Every lane’s end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work” (4.4.685–86). Obviously there is irony here, but Autolycus is clearly constructing his identity out of the discourse of diligence common among the godly.

This adds considerable complexity to our picture of Autolycus. David Kaula has pointed out the affinities between Autolycus’s “trumpery” and the Puritan rhetoric of anti-Roman propaganda. For Kaula these echoes make Autolycus “a vehicle for satirizing the well-publicized activities of the missionary priests in England.”²⁹ But since Autolycus *uses* the language of *anti*-Catholic propaganda in describing his own merchandise, there is as much reason to identify him with the other users of that discourse, the godly opponents of “Popery,” as there is to identify him with its targets. His selling of “trumpery” and his participation in the festival are not so troubling in this context as they might seem; such hypocrisy is one of the standard allegations of anti-Puritan satire. As the Overburian character essay on “A Puritan” concludes, “if he can be brought to ceremony, and made but master of it, he is converted.”³⁰ Moreover the seventeenth-century rhetoric of abuse relies heavily on terms associated with vagrancy, like “rogue” and “runagate,” and it seems to have been especially satisfying for anti-Puritans to link their enemies with the practices most despised by the godly. Thus a Dorsetshire gentleman, Richard Christmas, is reported to have declared, in 1613, that “there were none but rogues and whores that would hear sermons.”³¹

Autolycus, then, is a composite character. In part, he is the vagrant thief and con artist, the "cony-catcher" made famous in popular pamphlets in the 1590s and early 1600s.³² As Beier has argued, the popular literature of the Elizabethan and Jacobean underworld combined with systematic attacks on vagrancy from the pulpit and in parliament to create the spectre of "a netherworld of vagabonds poised to overthrow society."³³ But these concerns were not directed only at genuine vagabonds. Both in London and the countryside, artisans and craftpeople, particularly the propertyless and the itinerant variety (of whom John Bunyan was to become the most famous example), generated similar anxieties.³⁴ And as William P. Holden points out, anti-Puritan satires of the 1590s and early 1600s "make no attempt to distinguish between the reforming party of the moderate right and the more eccentric groups of the extreme left,"³⁵ so it should not be entirely surprising that an Autolycus who represents the anarchistic anti-society of the godless underworld has some ironic affinities with the other Jacobean anti-society, that of the godly, the "industrious sort of people" in Christopher Hill's phrase, who opposed Stuart holiday pageantry for reasons of economy and religious principles.³⁶ For many Jacobeans the duplicity and opportunism of which Puritans were accused in contemporary satires linked them with the mysterious vagrant underworld, as conspirators against "an old conception of neighbourliness, of community harmony, of a social order held together by an interlocking network of mutual obligations joining people of all ranks and conditions."³⁷ This is not to *replace* Autolycus the thief or Autolycus the Papist with Autolycus the Puritan, but rather, to add one more role to the versatile rogue's repertoire of identities. To make the point more broadly, Autolycus, "having flown over many knavish professions, [and] settled only in rogue" (4.3.98–101), is a kind of composite of Jacobean anxieties about the sources of social instability: Jesuit and Puritan, idle vagrant and thief, ambitious merchant and itinerant artisan or peddler.

King James had some reason to be anxious in the fall of 1611 when *The Winter's Tale* was performed at court (having played at the Globe the previous spring). The preceding year had been a frustrating one. The Crown's accumulated debt was about £600,000, with annual expenditures in the same range, and revenues far below that figure. Negotiations with Parliament toward a "Great Contract" that would establish a steady revenue in exchange for the abolition of several ancient feudal privileges had collapsed, and royal finances were in a desperate state. The King had been compelled repeatedly to borrow from the city of London (£100,000 in the

fall of 1610), and from his courtiers, who could see no prospect of repayment. The sale of titles and crown lands provided some funds, but these sources of revenue were not sustainable. Moreover the “debasement” of title and aristocratic privilege seemed to many a significant disruption of social order and degree.³⁸

In this atmosphere it is understandable that royal entertainments would take a few shots at the King’s perceived enemies, and enlist the support of potential friends. The Christmas masque for 1611–1612, performed a little more than a month after *The Winter’s Tale* played at court, resembles Shakespeare’s play in interesting ways, and, I would suggest, reflects many of the same concerns. The synopsis in David Rigg’s biography of Ben Jonson identifies very clearly the features that connect *Love Restored* to *The Winter’s Tale*:

The villain of *Love Restored* is *Plutus*, the god of money, who wants to do away with masquing altogether. *Plutus* poses as *Cupid*, the god of love referred to in the title, but actually he is *cupidity*, the “reformed” Puritanical *Cupid*, who substitutes money for affection. His real-life analogues were the Puritans, parliamentarians and urban money-lenders who maintained that the King should reduce his expenses in order to pay his debts.

. . .

The task of rescuing the evening’s entertainment fell to “the honest plaine country spirit, and harmlesse: *ROBIN Goodfellow* . . .” Robin’s eagerness to help the courtiers perform their masque reconfirmed the King’s belief that the country, like the court (but unlike the puritanical city), preserved a due regard for holiday festivities and would respond to his pleas for help.³⁹

Charles Barber, one of the few critics who presents class and social organization as central issues in *The Winter’s Tale*, sees something very similar in Shakespeare’s play: “the hope for a regenerated England through a reunion of court with cottage.”⁴⁰ Though he sees Autolycus’s exclusion from this allegiance as especially telling, he also argues that “the actual agents of change in Shakespeare’s England — the engrossing merchants, the enclosing landlords, the smart lawyers, the rising yeomen — have no place in [the play].”⁴¹ Yet there are actually two such people in *The Winter’s Tale*, the prosperous old Shepherd and Autolycus. They are the social climbers in the play.⁴² The Shepherd is comparatively unthreatening and deferential; Autolycus is the one figure who does not assent to the system of rank and degree, except insofar as it serves his own ends. And it is one of the play’s calculated ironies that the Shepherd and the Clown receive, in recognition for their charity, the advancement Autolycus actively pursues. As Laura

Stevenson O'Connell has shown, the so-called "Puritan work-ethic," evident in some late sixteenth and early seventeenth-century sermons, and increasingly prominent in later evangelical writing, has not yet gained ascendancy, at least in popular discourse; the prevailing early modern attitude towards Autolycus's sort of acquisitiveness and ambition is still a hostile one.⁴³ The union of a royal family and a rustic one in *The Winter's Tale* is, *de facto*, an allegiance against Autolycus, his opportunism, ambiguous class identity and uncertain occupation; it is an attempt to impose servitude on the figure who declares himself "out of service" in his first spoken lines of the play (4.3.14).⁴⁴

This is clearest at the end of Act V, scene 2, where Autolycus is compelled to suffer the ludicrous posturing of the Clown, who is "now a gentleman born" (5.2.129–30), and has "been so any time these four hours" (5.2.136–37). Autolycus seems, finally, to have been drawn into the same circuit of containment as Paulina, Camillo, Perdita and Hermione. The sometime rogue begs the Clown, his former dupe, to intercede on his behalf with the Prince:

I humbly beseech you, sir, to pardon me all the faults I have committed to your worship, and to give me your good report to the Prince my master (5.2.149–51).

And yet, it is impossible to believe. It is "so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (5.2.28–29). Usually, some comic stage business is inserted here, to emphasize the insincerity of Autolycus's submissiveness.⁴⁵ The gap between speech and spectacle, troubling throughout the play, is unbearable, and unbearably funny, at this point:

See you these clothes? [says the Clown displaying his new finery.] Say you see them not and think me still no gentleman born. You were best say these robes are not gentlemen born. Give me the lie, do; and try whether I am not now a gentleman born (5.2.130–34).

The Clown unwittingly interrogates the ideology of noble birth which the whole play works to sustain, and which the final scene will triumphantly celebrate.

The response to this scene by the Jacobean courtly audience, a mixture of traditional English aristocracy, newly elevated peers, and James's Scottish favourites, might be similarly mixed. Many, no doubt, would conclude that true gentility is *only* achieved by birth, and ridicule the Clown's affectation. Others might be reminded — some with satisfaction and some with distress — of the fact lately discovered by James, and somewhat earlier by Shakespeare, that gentle births, coats of arms, and titles are commodities that

can be bought and sold in the marketplace.⁴⁶ Some few might go so far as to reflect that all “nobility” is affectation, and associate the Clown’s posturing with the manners of their supposed “betters” (especially given the King’s notoriously *bad* manners).⁴⁷

And what happens to Autolycus? Does the clown intercede for him? Does he regain his place? Did he ever have a place? We don’t really know. Though he refers to Prince Florizel as his master, and has, in fact, been doing so since the end of the festival scene, the two never meet on stage without their disguises, and there is no indication of his acceptance back into the Prince’s service. Neither is there any hint that he will be permitted to resume the practice of his disreputable calling. Autolycus seems too troublesome *either* to be kept around the court or to be turned loose in the countryside. Indeed the political problem is also a dramaturgical one: it is difficult to determine just where to locate Autolycus, or the actor playing Autolycus, *physically*, at the end of the play. The Clown’s last words are quite ambiguous: “Hark, the kings and the princes, our kindred, are going to see the Queen’s picture. Come, follow us; we’ll be thy good masters” (5.2.172–74). This almost sounds as if Autolycus, the Clown and the Shepherd should be on stage in the last scene. The stage directions offer no indication one way or another, but few directors would include them.⁴⁸ Autolycus’s presence in the gallery when the statue comes to life would clearly be disruptive; his absence might indicate either a return to his proper, subordinate position, or a return to dangerous marginality. The play’s silence on his ultimate fate, and the nonsense and inconclusiveness of the penultimate scene, liberate Autolycus, rather than containing him. They suggest that the artistic and political apparatus of the play and the state have, in the end, no place to put such a person.

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Notes

1. The transcription of Forman’s comment is from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974), p. 1842. References to Shakespeare’s plays are from this text. An earlier version of this paper was delivered for the “Shakespeare at Saskatchewan” lecture series, sponsored by the Humanities Research Unit at the University of Saskatchewan. I am grateful to the other participants in this series, and especially to William Slights, for valuable comments and suggestions. Thanks also to Paul Yachnin who read and commented on a version of this paper.

2. David Wiles argues that Autolycus would have been played by Robert Armin: *Shakespeare's Clown* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 156.
3. In *Shakespearean Subversions: The Trickster and the Play Text* (London: Routledge, 1992), p. 224. Richard Hillman comments on Autolycus in similar terms, but argues that he is "integrated, vices and all, into the new dispensation."
4. The importance of class issues in the play is seldom emphasized. In *Shakespeare and Social Class* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1988), p. 175, Ralph Berry acknowledges the role of "apparent opposition of birth" in the comic plot, but suggests that Shakespeare is merely "playing with class" at this stage in his career; Gary Schmidgall's *Shakespeare and the Courtly Aesthetic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981) barely mentions *The Winter's Tale*. Significant exceptions to this tendency include Carol Thomas Neely, "The Winter's Tale: The Triumph of Speech," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 15 (1975), 321-38; and Charles Barber, "The Winter's Tale and Jacobean Society," in *Shakespeare in a Changing World*, ed. Arnold Kettle (London: Lawrence and Wisher, 1964), 233-52. More broadly social and political analyses appear in David M. Bergeron, *Shakespeare's Romances and the Royal Family* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1985); Graham Holderness, Nick Potter and John Turner, *Shakespeare Out of Court: Dramatizations of Court Society* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990); Richard Wilson, *Will Power: Essays on Shakespearean Authority* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1993); and Stuart Kurland, "'We need no more of your advice': Political Realism in *The Winter's Tale*," *Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, 31 (1991), 365-386.
5. "Recognition in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 109.
6. Some aspects of this issue have been explored by Francis Berry, "Word and Picture in the Final Plays," in *Later Shakespeare*, ed. Russell Brown and Bernard Harris (London: Edward Arnold, 1966), pp. 81-102.
7. See J.H.P. Pafford's introduction to the Arden edition of *The Winter's Tale* (London: Methuen, 1963), p. lxxx, n. 5 and 6.
8. Joan Hartwig, "Cloten, Autolycus and Caliban: Bearers of Parodic Burdens," in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, ed. Carol McGinnis Kay and Henry E. Jacobs (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1978), p. 101.
9. Leah Marcus, *The Politics of Mirth: Jonson, Herrick, Milton, Marvell, and the Defense of Old Holiday Pastimes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), pp. 1-23. For a review of the debate about the usefulness of the term "Puritan," see Peter Lake, *Anglicans and Puritans?* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1988), pp. 4-6.
10. In Shakespeare studies the ground-breaking investigation of this subject is C.L. Barber's *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1959). More recent treatments include Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*; Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986); and Annabel Patterson, *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989). One recent application of this approach to *The Winter's Tale* is David Schalkwyk, "'A Lady's

"Verily" Is as Potent as a Lord's': Women, Word and Witchcraft in *The Winter's Tale*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 22 (1992), 242–72.

11. For Bakhtin's account of how carnivalesque practices, "linked externally to the feasts of the Church," nevertheless "offered a completely different, nonofficial, extraecclesiastical and extrapolitical aspect of the world, of man, and of human relations," see *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T. Press, 1968), pp. 6–8 ff.
12. See Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: Schocken, 1967); and Patrick Collinson, "The Beginnings of English Sabbatarianism" in *Studies in Church History*, ed. C.W. Dugmore and Charles Duggan, vol. 1 (London: Nelson, 1964), 207–21. For a view emphasizing the general prevalence of Sabbatarianism in Shakespeare's England see Kenneth L. Parker, *The English Sabbath: A Study of Doctrine and Discipline from the Reformation to the Civil War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
13. *The Political Works of James I*, ed. C.H. McIlwain (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1918), p. 27.
14. "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and its Subversion," *Glyph*, 8 (1981), p. 53; see also Jonathan Goldberg, *James I and the Politics of Literature: Jonson, Shakespeare, Donne, and Their Contemporaries* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983). Critics of a more materialist bent argue that such processes of containment are necessarily incomplete, a view my reading of *The Winter's Tale* tends to support. See, for example, Alan Sinfield, "Power and Ideology: An Outline Theory and Sidney's *Arcadia*," *English Literary History*, 52 (1985), 259–277; and James Holstun, "Ranting at the New Historicism," *English Literary Renaissance*, 19 (1989), pp. 189–225. For a historian's objections see David Cressy, "Foucault, Stone, Shakespeare and Social History," *English Literary Renaissance*, 21 (1991), 121–33.
15. The political symbolism of the court masque is explored more fully in Stephen Orgel, *The Illusion of Power: Political Theatre in the English Renaissance* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975); Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, pp. 64–139; and Graham Parry, *The Golden Age Restor'd: The Culture of the Stuart Court, 1603–42* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 40–63.
16. Annabel Patterson makes a similar argument about *A Midsummer Night's Dream* in *Shakespeare and the Popular Voice*, pp. 63–70.
17. See R.S. White, *Let Wonder Seem Familiar: Endings in Shakespeare's Romance Vision* (Atlantic Highlands: Humanities Press, 1985), p. 197, n. 27. The masque-like elements of *The Winter's Tale* and the other late plays have been discussed extensively. See Richard Proudfoot, "Shakespeare and the New Dramatists of the King's Men, 1606–1613," in *Later Shakespeare*, pp. 235–61; Jean Jacquot, "The Last Plays and the Masque," in *Shakespeare 1971: Proceedings of the World Shakespeare Congress, August 1971*, eds. Clifford Leech and J.M.R. Margeson (Toronto: 1972), 156–173; Northrop Frye, "Romance as Masque," in *Shakespeare's Romances Reconsidered*, pp. 11–39; Schmidgall, *Shakespeare and the Courtly Aesthetic*; and Russ McDonald, *Shakespeare and Jonson / Jonson and Shakespeare* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1988), pp. 137–83.

18. See Howard Felperin, "'Tongue-tied our Queen?': The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, eds. Patricia Parler and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985), 3–18; Stephen Orgel, "The Poetics of Incomprehensibility," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 42 (1991), 431–37; and Schalkwyk, "A Lady's 'Verily'."
19. For a contrary view of Leontes' jealousy, see Nevill Coghill, "Six Points of Stage-craft," *Shakespeare Survey*, 11 (1958), 31–41.
20. Northrop Frye remarks that in *The Winter's Tale* "things are presented to us, not explained," "Recognition," p. 113.
21. Neely, "Triumph of Speech," p. 327.
22. See, for example, Northrop Frye, *Northrop Frye on Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), p. 161.
23. Pafford ed., *The Winter's Tale*, pp. lxi–lxii.
24. Berry, *Shakespeare and Social Class*, p. 177. Still, some insist on seeing Polixenes' praise of the "art / Which does mend Nature" as a central thematic statement of the play. See, for example, Felperin, *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 237.
25. A. L. Beier, *Masterless Men: The Vagrancy Problem in England 1560–1640* (London: Methuen, 1985), p. 4. See also Paul Slack, *Poverty and policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London: Longman, 1988).
26. Richard Strier, "Faithful Servants: Shakespeare's Praise of Disobedience," in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, eds. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 120, 124–25.
27. Frye, "Recognition," p. 108.
28. Schalkwyk, for example, comments on the play's "negation of the carnival spirit ... in the name of propriety, hierarchy and patriarchy," in "A Lady's 'Verily,'" p. 262.
29. David Kaula, "Autolycus' Trumpery," *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 16 (1976), p. 292.
30. Sir Thomas Overbury *et al.*, *The "Conceited Newes" of Sir Thomas Overbury and His Friends: A Facsimile Reproduction of the Ninth Impression of 1616 of Sir Thomas Overbury His wife* (Gainesville: Scholars' Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), p. 112 (spelling modernized). See also the scurrilous anti-Puritan verses circulated in Dorchester in 1606, and quoted by Underdown in *Fire from Heaven* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), pp. 28–29. Kristen Poole has recently developed a similar line of argument in relation to Falstaff in "Saints alive! Falstaff, Martin Marprelate and the Staging of Puritanism," *Shakespeare Quarterly*, 46 (1995), 47–75.
31. Quoted in Underdown, p. 156. In the same vein, Bunyan's Faithful is condemned as a "runagate, heretic and traitor" in the trial at Vanity Fair in *Pilgrim's Progress* (London: Penguin, 1968), p. 144.
32. A selection of these is collected in Gamini Salgado, ed., *Coney Catchers and Bawdy Baskets* (Hammondsworth: Penguin, 1972).

33. Beier, *Masterless Men*, p. 7.
34. See R.A. Leeson, *Travelling Brothers: The Six Centuries Road from Craft Fellowship to Trade Unionism* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1979), p. 59; and Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England, 1586-1660* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), pp. 3-4.
35. William P. Holden, *Anti-Puritan Satire 1572-1642* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1954), p. 54.
36. Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, p. 121.
37. Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*, p. 32. See also Felicity Heal, "The Idea of Hospitality in Early Modern England," *Past and Present*, 102 (1984), 66-93. Autolycus is not unique in combining these contradictory attributes. In *Vagrant Writing* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), Barry Taylor traces the connections drawn between vagrancy, economic and social ambition, and social disruption in a wide range of English Renaissance texts.
38. Good general accounts of the Jacobean financial situation include David Thomas, "Financial and Administrative Developments," in *Before the English Civil War: Essays on Stuart Government and Politics*, ed. Howard Tomlinson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 103-122; Roger Lockyer, *The Early Stuarts* (London: Longman, 1989), 71-93; and Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age* (London: Longman, 1980), pp. 118-129. For the tensions within James's court, see also Parry, *The Golden Age Restor'd*; Maurice Lee, *Great Britain's Solomon* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1990), and Neil Cuddy, "The Revival of the Entourage: The Bedchamber of James I, 1603-1625," in *The English Court: From the Wars of the Roses to the Civil War*, ed. David Starkey et al. (London: Longman, 1987), 173-225.
39. David Riggs, *Ben Jonson: A Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 182-3. For a fuller discussion of *Love Restored* and Jacobean court politics see Marcus, *Politics of Mirth*, pp. 29-38.
40. Charles Barber, "The Winter's Tale and Jacobean Society," p. 251.
41. Barber, 251. Barber's description of the "agents of change in Shakespeare's England" rests on an account of early modern England informed theoretically by Marx and Weber, and articulated by "progressive" historians (not uniformly Marxists) like R.H. Tawney, C.B. McPherson and Christopher Hill. Increasingly this account, which sees Stuart England largely in class terms, has been undermined by revisionist studies stressing divergent local interests, factional struggles, court rivalries and hierarchical bonds of loyalty. See especially Conrad Russell, *The Causes of the English Civil War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990), and *Unrevolutionary England* (London: Hambledon Press, 1990); and for an overview, Tomlinson, ed., *Before the English Civil War*; and Kevin Sharpe, *Politics and Ideas in Early Stuart England* (London: Pinter, 1989). Critics of revisionism have responded by acknowledging that "the moves to [civil] war were complex, hesitant and contradictory," but continuing to explore "long-term ideological and social tensions," employing and refining revisionist methodologies: Richard Cust and Ann Hughes, "Introduction: After Revisionism," in *Conflict in Early Stuart England* (London, Longman, 1989), p. 17. See also Marjorie Kenniston McIntosh, *A Community Transformed: The Manor and Liberty of*

Haverling, 1500–1620 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); and David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven*.

42. Barbara A. Mowat may overstate the case in representing the Shepherd as a greedy encloser, in "Rogues, Shepherds and the Counterfeit Distressed: Texts and Infracontexts of *The Winter's Tale*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 22 (1994), 58–76, but there is no doubt of his prosperity and eventual social advancement. William C. Carroll identifies Autolycus, and Shakespearean vagabonds generally, as "that force that seeks to rise . . . a politicized energy" in "Language, Politics and Poverty in Shakespearean Drama," *Shakespeare Survey*, 44 (1992), 24.
43. "Anti-Entrepreneurial Attitudes in Elizabethan Sermons and Popular Literature," *Journal of British Studies*, 15, 2 (1976), 1–20.
44. Richard Burt also sees an allegiance against Autolycus, to "neutralize" the rogue's "critical potential." Still his account of the play's alignment of social forces, a "division between aristocratic art [with which the playwright and acting company align themselves] and rustic commerce" seems to me less persuasive than Barber's admittedly old-fashioned and incomplete account: *Licensed by Authority: Ben Jonson and the Discourses of Censorship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 97.
45. In a production of *The Winter's Tale* I attended while writing the first version of this essay, Autolycus palms the clown's handkerchief as he makes his speech. Garrick's eighteenth-century text adds twenty lines in which Autolycus bribes the clown "with his own money." These lines survive into the nineteenth century, and the stage business is further expanded in William Burton's 1856 American production. See Dennis Bartholomeusz, *The Winter's Tale in Performance in England and America, 1611–1976* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), pp. 43, 102.
46. James created the new hereditary title of baronet in 1611, largely as a money-raising scheme, having sold so many knighthoods that the revenue-generating potential was exhausted. In 1596 John Shakespeare was granted the coat of arms for which he had applied at least twenty years earlier. S. Schoenbaum conjectures that William Shakespeare, now prosperous, renewed his father's lapsed application, and paid the substantial fees charged by the Heralds' College: *William Shakespeare: A Compact Documentary Life*, revised ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 227–28.
47. Parry, *Golden Age Restor'd*, pp. 58–62.
48. Burt remarks that "the rustics are not invited to Paulina's house" (p. 98), but offers no explanation for the conclusion.