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"All mine own folly":
The Function of Folly in The Winter's Tale

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S ir David Lindsay, whose *Ane Satire of the Thrie Estaitis* was published by Robert Charteris with a specially printed title page in London in 1604, shortly after the accession of James I, uses the theme "stultorum numerus infinitus" for the sermon delivered by Folie at the end of the play.[1] During the course of this episode, he has Folie say, "Ye are all fuillis, be Cokis passioun" (l. 1640). In about 1595 Shakespeare has Puck conclude almost the same thing: "Lord what fools these mortals be" (*MND*, III.ii.115).[2] In the rational world of St Thomas Aquinas, human irrationality was manifest, in that human beings were all fools because they were all sinners. In terms of morality, the state of the fool had been identified in the Bible: "Dixit insipiens in corde suo: Non est Deus".[3] Lindsay may well have been influenced by the French dramatic tradition, which around 1500 in the *sotties* presented a dramatic world in which all the characters

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1   The comment appears at Ecclesiastes 1:15 in the Vulgate in a slightly different form. See also Lindsay, *Thrie Estaitis*, l. 1555 [4466] (II: 392), and n. to l. 4466 (IV: 235-36).

2   With the exception of *WT*, Shakespeare's plays are cited from *The Norton Shakespeare*, ed. Greenblatt *et al*.

3   "The fool says in his heart: There is no God" (Psalm 13:1 [Vulgate]). See the discussion of Thomist rationality by Duhl, pp. 49-55.

were actually dressed as fools (Arden, pp. 9, 14, 33).[4] Another pertinent portrayal of the universality of folly appeared in Sebastian Brant's *Narrenschiff* (1494), translated by Alexander Barclay as *The Ship of Fools* (1509).

It is not my intention to propose that Puck's comment necessarily applies to all the characters in *The Winter's Tale*, but I should like here to consider certain aspects of the play which suggest that Shakespeare did indeed use some traditional aspects of the concept of folly. It is not a topic which has been much discussed for this play, but I hope to show that it is related to some of its major features, particularly its structure and its theatricality. However, I do not think that it constitutes such a large part in this play as it had done in some of his earlier works, particularly *Twelfth Night* and *King Lear*. But in these plays we can see an awareness of the traditions and function of folly which inform its use in *The Winter's Tale*. As we shall see, there are a number of specific mentions of folly in the later play, and these we may connect with the two chief manifestations of it: the dramatic conceptions of Leontes and Autolycus.

I

The consideration of these two characters which follows involves what might be called the ideology of folly, as well as the use of the dramatic techniques of folly which had been established on the English stage and to which Shakespeare had himself had already contributed extensively. One may approach the former by noticing that folly was not seen necessarily as evil. Indeed, Erasmus, exploring the idea of the wise fool who exposes other fools, suggested that folly does teach us to be happy, and that life can be sweetened with the honey of folly.[5] In doing so he underlined an ideological ambiguity which made the concept usable in many contexts. But for him folly embodied differing and conflicting feelings. His personification of her in *The Praise of Folly* made her a fool herself and yet a wise commentator upon other fools.[6] This double perspective may have been pertinent to Shakespeare's presentation of folly in his plays, including the late group and *The Winter's Tale* among them. He seems to have made significant changes in relation to the latter, however, a play for which it has been found convenient

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4   This identification is partly dependent upon the distinction between farces and *sotties* discussed by Arden, p. 9.

5   See Erasmus, esp. pp. 87 and 94.

6   See Happé, "Staging Folly".

and appropriate to use the term "tragicomedy". This genre, falling between and dependent upon the ancient opposition of tragedy and comedy, has no doubt attracted much attention from stage practitioners as well as commentators precisely because of its position between the other two genres.

The Winter's Tale, then, is a play of contrasts in genre, theatricality and design, and it is not so surprising that Shakespeare's use of folly works very differently as between Leontes and Autolycus. In Leontes, folly is part of the characterisation, and it is demonstrated extensively that he is a fool. The development of the plot depends upon this demonstration, and once that is achieved it does not proceed to the final reconciliation without generating his recognition of folly within himself. But the dramatic mode of the play moves away from the intense psychological predicament of Leontes with the shift from Sicily to Bohemia. There we find that Autolycus is not a psychological portrait so much as a dramatic function. His exhibition of folly falls within metatheatrical parameters, and his characterisation is heavily weighted towards function rather than the psychological complexity discernible in the treatment of Leontes. Towards the end of the play, substantially in Act Five, with the move back to Sicily, the mood and dramatic styles change again.

The difference of this third section from the other two has been rightly noted by Pafford (Pafford, ed., *WT*, pp. lx-lxi), and it needs to be contrasted with the two-part reading which is commonplace. At this point in the play, the role of Autolycus is changed from that in Act Four. Nevertheless, the contrast between him and Leontes turns upon this substantial difference in the presentation of the two characters. With Leontes we find that Shakespeare has produced a character who acts foolishly and then comes to regret it: it is a return to the fall-and-rise structure of morality plays and interludes, though heavily aligned toward tragedy. Autolycus, on the other hand, may be himself a fool, but he works substantially with and upon the follies of others and comments upon them.

At this point I should like to take account of some aspects of Shakespeare's primary source for his play, Robert Greene's *Pandosto: The Triumph of Time* (1588), which contained two persistent ideas likely to have attracted his attention and which may have suggested his interpretation of Greene's story. He did make major changes to the narrative in respect of the ending, turning it from a disaster—"with a Tragicall stratagem" (p. 656), as Greene had characterised it—to resurrection and reconciliation, but Greene's emphasis upon the "infectious soare of Iealousie" (p. 620) in Pandosto, noted in the very first sentence

of his account, and his repeated emphasis upon folly appear to be ideas which Shakespeare chose to dwell upon. I shall later return to jealousy, which has a significant place in Shakespeare's work. Greene's condemnation of Pandosto's folly is conveyed in a distinctly moralistic tone, in compliance with the sense of rather sensational moral outrage running through his presentation. This has a psychological aspect, in that he associates it with Pandosto's emotional state: the phrase, "whose unbridled folly was incensed with his furie" (p. 626), is followed by a reference to his "witlesse furie" (p. 632). Later in the narrative this concept is made part of Pandosto's remorse, as he becomes ashamed of "his rashe folly" (p. 632), and he laments "those sackles soules whose lives are lost by my rigorous folly" (p. 633), referring also to his "forepassed folly" (p. 633). Greene's moralistic tone is partly conveyed by proverbial emphasis. Egistus (the original of Polixenes), speaking generally before the crisis over his son's affection for the shepherdess, remarks that "oportunities neglected are signes of folly" (p. 636) and that "Time past with folly may bee repented but not recalled" (p. 637).

It is striking that Greene also applies his discourse of folly to other characters. Fawnia, the precedent for Perdita, twice blames her own folly in her association with Dorastus (pp. 639, 642); Dorastus himself, not as loyal as Florizel, regrets the connection with Fawnia and finds that "his honour wished him to cease from such folly" (p. 643), and this leads to an inner emotional conflict for him as well. Meanwhile Egistus experiences "greefe for his sonnes reckless follie" (p. 649). The concept of "unadvised folly" is also applied to Porrus, the fostering Shepherd, who complains that Mopsa, his wife, speaks like a fool (p. 646). He also blames Dorastus, who he knows is a prince in disguise, for alluring his daughter to folly (p. 648). In the absence of Shakespeare's reconciliation in his last act, the disasters which conclude the tale of Pandosto are underlined as the result of folly. Dorastus, cast into prison by Pandosto, tells himself proverbially that "folly hath his desert" (p. 652), and Pandosto, who behaves with evil intent leading to his suicide in a state of melancholy, rages at Porrus in these terms: "thou old doating foole whose follie hath been such as to suffer thy daughter to reach above thy fortune" (p. 654).

The frequency with which folly is invoked by Greene is thus impressive and a key factor in his presentation, in that he sees folly in most of the principal characters. But I feel that we need to appraise Shakespeare's response to this lead with some discrimination. It is true that there are a number of specific references to folly in his play, as we shall see, but they do not give rise to an impression

that he perceives that folly is so extensive or dominant as it appears to Greene. The latter's perception of the general impact of folly is a staple of the moral interpretation informing his narrative. But for Shakespeare the observation of folly plays but one part among other concepts, and it is used practically, as a theatrical device, and more sparingly. In view of his much more extensive deployment of it in some of his earlier plays, this change of emphasis is both intriguing and informative. What might be termed the ubiquity of folly is also functional in these earlier plays, and it is notable that Shakespeare had used it for both a comic and a tragic effect.

This reference to a link between folly and genre must also play a part in our appreciation of folly in *The Winter's Tale*. From its first appearance in the 1623 Folio, the play has raised some doubt about its genre, and I think this issue is still alive today. There is no doubt that in the first half of the play, up to the deaths of Mamillius and, apparently, Hermione, Shakespeare is writing in a tragic mode. Typically, Leontes' obsessive slavery to passion and the wilful direction towards disaster match the behaviour and emotional turmoil of other Shakespearean tragic heroes. We notice that Erasmus opposed wisdom, which was ruled by reason, against folly, ruled by the passions.[7] With Leontes there is a tragic sense that things are getting progressively and inevitably worse, and nothing that Leontes or those about him can do helps to deter the expectation of disaster. Even the appeal to the oracle at Delphos is a further step towards disaster, since Leontes so emphatically disregards its message. The words of other characters, particularly Paulina and Camillo, who in their different ways might have deterred Leontes and diverted him from his tragic entanglement, are actually part of the rhetoric of tragedy, as they act as measures of his decline into disaster. Shakespeare had worked through such declines before, and in *King Lear* the Fool helps to mark stages in Lear's decline and his terrified awareness of it: "I am a fool, thou art nothing" (I.iv.169); "thou wouldst make a good fool" (I.v.32); and Lear exclaims, "O fool, I shall go mad" (II.iv.281). In *The Winter's Tale* Shakespeare appears to use his experience of having created tragedy in the past, but modifies it in terms of the pace as well as the structure that he needed to prepare for the changes to come in the second part of the play. We might regard the first half of this play as an accelerated tragedy.

7   See Erasmus, pp. 87 and 106.

As far as the genre of comedy is concerned, folly does not appear in this first half except for a few minor touches, and the contrast with the way it is deployed in *Twelfth Night* is remarkable. In the latter, the presence of the Fool is established and sustained, perhaps most prominently because he appears both in the house of Olivia and in the court of Orsino, acting as a link and a contrast, and because he is recognised as a fool in both. There is also the specific discussion between him and Viola which pinpoints his role in the world of the play (III.i.1-61). This exchange is particularly significant in that it draws attention to the metatheatricality of Shakespeare's use of a fool, even though Feste has a sort of reality within the play because, as he enigmatically claims, he lives by the church (3-7).

Nevertheless, there is a discourse of folly in the decline of Leontes, even though it is presented by other characters. There is also a process by which the audience is made conscious of his folly. This latter is a reflection of Shakespeare's stagecraft, as he engages the audience in a condemnation of the character. For example, the cause of Leontes' jealousy is not fully explained, and the suspicion may remain that it has no real basis. Notably, Shakespeare has greatly toned down the behaviour of Hermione from that exhibited by Greene's Bellaria, whose "countenance bewraied how her minde was affected towards [Egistus]", and who visited his bedchamber "oftentimes", so that "there grew a secret uniting of their affections" (p. 622). The enactment of the corresponding passage in Shakespeare is open to directorial decision, since some physical contact between Hermione and Polixenes may be inferred from the text, but the episode has nevertheless been treated with restraint by Shakespeare, compared with that in the source, and it is less markedly directed towards carrying blame for Hermione. If this is so, Leontes' suspicions may appear groundless, and that, indeed, might become part of the tragedy which reveals the growth of his destructive obsession.

Looking at the detail of this episode, we may notice that the perception of what is going on between Hermione and Polixenes is largely achieved through the already obsessive language of Leontes.[8] When it comes to performance, that language is manifestly what the audience perceives, and the director and the performers have to decide how far to justify it. There is a case for allowing very little that is unacceptable, and it has been suggested that there is an uncertainty here

8   See I.ii.108-205. Unless otherwise indicated, *WT* is cited from the New Cambridge edition, ed. Snyder and Curren-Aquino.

which is quite deliberate and indeed usable. It may indeed be that we are not going to be told because the persistence of uncertainty is valuable and because the main thrust of the dramatic experience is to show the development of Leontes' foolish obsession. He may be certain about what he sees, and he reinforces his belief vigorously, but there is dramatic advantage in not having the off-stage audience of the same mind as the character. This isolation of Leontes within his obsession is made all the stronger because of the reaction of the other characters on the stage when he reveals his conviction.

That Shakespeare in the late plays reworked and modified ideas and techniques from his earlier experience as a playwright is undoubtedly a fruitful way of considering his continuing innovation. I mentioned earlier that Greene makes jealousy a key topic, and it is likely that Shakespeare was drawn to this theme by its prominence in his predecessor. He also worked with the theme himself in both *Othello* (1604) and, somewhat differently, in *Cymbeline* (1611?). What is striking about the former for our purposes is the association between jealousy and folly. The issue of folly appears a number of times in Iago's speeches about both Othello and others, and it has rather more emphasis than it does in *The Winter's Tale*. But the climax is the realisation of folly in the last act. Emilia, as she unpacks the detail of her husband's deception of Othello, exclaims, "O murderous coxcomb! What should such a fool / Do with so good a wife" (V.ii.240-41). Realising the truth of what she says, Othello changes his earlier accusation against Desdemona's folly, as he had supposed, to the self-condemnation of "O fool, fool, fool!" (V.ii.333).[9] Somewhat similarly, Posthumus in *Cymbeline* realises his own folly as Iachimo unfolds the details of the deception he played upon him in pursuit of the wager:

> Ay me, most credulous fool,
> Egregious murderer, thief, anything
> That's due to all the villains past in being,
> To come! (V.vi.210-13)[10]

As the jealousy of Leontes is made more apparent to those around him, their condemnation of it as folly becomes more insistent. This is not seriously undermined by the uncertainty noted above about whether he has any cause.

9   See Cobb, pp. 31-35.
10   Posthumus is thus a fool, in some respects, like Leontes, but there is also an extensive discourse of folly surrounding Cloten.

Indeed, it seems more likely that the off-stage spectators in the audience become more and more inclined to the view that he is making a foolish mistake. This process is intensified as Leontes becomes increasingly impervious to suggestions that he is wrong, and his tyrannical enforcement of his response to Hermione's supposed adultery is a further reinforcement. Folly is presented first by Leontes himself very soon after he first shows his jealousy. He pretends that his "distraction" is a sign of weakness, without revealing to Hermione and Polixenes what is really troubling him. He claims that "sometimes nature will betray its folly / Its tenderness, and make itself a pastime / To harder bosoms!" (I.ii.150-53). But this preliminary manifestation of folly is developed shortly afterwards when he begins to question Camillo and seek his belief and support. With a certain irony, Shakespeare has Leontes accuse Camillo of foolishly not taking the charge of infidelity by Hermione with sufficient seriousness. He asserts that Camillo may be "a fool / That seest a game played home, the rich stake drawn / And tak'st it all for jest" (I.ii.246-48). The rather contorted syntax of Camillo's reply signals that the issues are not clear-cut and that Shakespeare may be playing with a number of possibilities regarding the effects of folly:

> My gracious lord,
> I may be negligent, foolish and fearful;
> In every one of these no man is free,
> But that his negligence, his folly, fear,
> Among the infinite doings of the world,
> Sometime puts forth in your affairs, my lord.
> If ever I were wilful-negligent,
> It was my folly; if industriously
> I played the fool it was my negligence,
> Not weighing well the end. (249-59)

Camillo's defence hints at the ubiquity of folly, since all may be guilty of foolish negligence and of not being aware of the outcome of such folly. His courtier's discretion, as well as his instinct for self-preservation, may lead him not to accuse Leontes directly of folly, but that does not mean that such a view is not part of the experience of the off-stage audience. At this point Camillo may not be fully aware of what Leontes now believes about the Queen, but the aggression in Leontes' words to him must have made him cautious, especially the punning play on "satisfy" (229-32).

As this hostility increases and Leontes makes more obvious the intensity of his jealous and foolish anger about the sexual intimacy he believes in, Camillo temporises. He accepts the royal command to murder Polixenes, but as soon as he is free from the presence of Leontes, he reveals to Polixenes directly the threat he now brings to him. In doing so, his words again lead to the conceit of folly, but this time it is fully orchestrated as a judgement upon Leontes and the scope of his foolish error:

> You may as well
> Forbid the sea for to obey the moon
> As or by oath remove or counsel shake
> The fabric of his folly, whose foundation
> Is piled upon his faith, and will continue
> The standing of his body. (421-26)

The metaphors of piling, as well as those about the security of a building, bring out the depth and severity of Leontes' folly.[11]

Although we have noticed that the idea of folly is extensively presented in *Pandosto*, it is notable that Shakespeare sustains and develops it through characters which are his own addition to the source, in particular Antigonus and Paulina, in the first part of the play, and Autolycus, whom I shall consider in the latter part of this essay. After the escape of Polixenes and Camillo, Antigonus and Paulina play their part in the discourse. Both express negation of Leontes' conviction. Antigonus is accused by Leontes of being born a fool for his insistence that Leontes should examine the basis of his conviction (II.i.173). But Antigonus is given the last words in this scene, as he gives a twist to Leontes' prophecy that these events will "raise [them] all" (198). Like a commenting fool, Antigonus twists this to suggest the raising will be "To laughter, as I take it, / If the good truth were known" (198-99).

But the role of the fool who brings wisdom is more markedly suggested and sustained by the words and deeds of Paulina.[12] Though the business she concerns herself with is deadly serious, she does introduce some comedy into the play by means of her challenge to authority and tyranny, and there is a sour comedy in the scene where Leontes seeks to force Antigonus to restrain his wife.

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11   "Fabric" relates to the firm structure of a building (*OED*, I.1), but perhaps there is also a hint of the fragility of cloth.
12   The name Paulina may allude to St Paul.

Leontes calls her "Dame Partlet" (II.iii.75), recalling Chaucer, as well as Falstaff's appellation for Mistress Quickly.[13] Her comments on Leontes' folly are made to other characters, as well as to the king himself. To Emilia outside the jail where Hermione is imprisoned, she speaks of "These dangerous unsafe lunes i'th' King, beshrew them!" (II.ii.29). The attendants come to protect the king meet with her castigation as they force her away form the royal presence: "You that are thus so tender o'er his follies / Will never do him good, not one of you" (II.iii.127-28). Much like Lear's Fool, she rubs salt into Leontes' wounds before he begins to admit to his own foolishness. She impugns the lack of evidence, telling him that he is "Not able to produce more accusation / Than your own weak-hinged fancy" (117-18). At the terrible climax, when Leontes hears of the death of Mamillius, she brings the news that that Hermione is dead, and in doing so once again she proclaims his folly, linking it with tyranny and the jealousies which are "Fancies too weak for boys, too green and idle / For girls of nine" (III.ii.178-79). Of the tyranny, she says,

> For all
> Thy bygone fooleries were but spices of it.
> That thou betrayed'st Polixenes 'twas nothing;
> That did but show thee of a fool, inconstant
> And damnable ingrateful. (182-85)

She attributes the death of Mamillius specifically to the folly of Leontes. The boy's honourable thoughts "Cleft the heart / That could conceive a gross and foolish sire / Blemished his gracious dam" (194-96). In these varied ways, she is the chief means by which the folly of the king is made clear, and as this is done, Shakespeare is bringing the audience to a clearer understanding of the extent of it and of its consequences. There are also two places where her link with folly is further developed. As she reminds Leontes of his past follies with apparent inadvertency, she accuses herself of folly: "Sir, royal sir, forgive a foolish woman" (225), and her next reminder is followed by "Lo fool again!" (226).

13   Shakespeare, 1H4, III.iii.44; see the note on this line by Snyder and Curren-Aquino, eds, *WT*.

II

If, as I suggested earlier, Shakespeare may have been aware of the prominence of folly in Greene's *Pandosto* and embodied it in the tragedy of Leontes, he developed his presentation of it in a quite different way in the second half of the play. There is, I believe, an excitement to be found in the changes of tone which characterise the latter, though it is important not to see the second half of the play as a simple contrasting unit separated by Time, particularly as the scenes in Act Four set in Bohemia are markedly different from those in Act Five, when the narrative returns to Sicily, albeit a Sicily very different from that of the first half of the play. In the course of the change and refocus, the perception of folly now shifts and centres upon Autolycus, who is confined to this second half but is given great theatrical emphasis within it, even though his impact upon the development of the plot is not strong. But the change is such that if we see Leontes as a fool who does not perceive himself to be one—even though others emphatically demonstrate it—until it is tragically too late, we find that Autolycus is the means by which folly is demonstrated in others, and that he also embodies folly metatheatrically in such a way as to keep the issue active. If this is so, his function would be a kind of comment or reflection on the first half of the action. As such, it would also make for coherence in the play as a whole and help to explain Shakespeare's remarkable decision about the structure.

Shakespeare has made the character's impact stronger by giving him a close associate in folly, in theatrical terms, by the introduction of the Clown, who, like Autolycus, is not in *Pandosto*. They are not close associates, as far as their existence in the story is concerned, but together, through several passages of interaction, they do form a significant theatrical instrument in performance. Whilst they are not exactly a sustained double act, they do operate together several times to provide theatrical entertainment through their representation of folly.

As with his earlier, perhaps more prominent examples of folly as a theatrical device, Shakespeare depends in part upon external circumstances of the stage culture of his time. Folly's large ancestry outside the theatre, not least in the court, is also worth considering. One of its chief features, shown up by Erasmus and others, is its moral ambiguity. It could be a force for good in its moral implications, and it could also be seen as working through indulgence and self-gratification. Autolycus touches both these aspects, as we shall see, and in common with the clowns and fools who were his theatrical ancestors, he makes them

part of the moral concerns of the play, as well as providing theatrical enjoyment through his mirth and vitality.

More specifically, he also reflects some of the characteristics of the Vice, who was another forbear. Shakespeare is remarkable for his many and varied adaptations of this figure. These include Richard III, Falstaff and Iago, as well as Feste and Lear's Fool.[14] Alongside this, it is noticeable that the presence and effectiveness of clowns, who became popular off the stage as well as on it, remain an influence. Indeed, it has been suggested by Norah Johnston that Shakespeare could not have avoided using clowns because of their entrenched position on the stage.[15] It may well be, as she also suggests, that for the spectators the clowns provided a distinct and separate appeal from the rest of the plays on offer.[16] A further aspect of what might be described as the tension between the performance tradition and that generated by literary playwrights, as suggested by Robert Weimann and Douglas Bruster. Their theory implies that the performance of clowns or fools met an expectation in the audience which might be different from that generated by the playwright in pursuit of literary objectives.[17]

The independence of fools and clowns implicit in such practices may be discerned in many of Shakespeare's fools. They sometimes have acts which stand alone, contributing very little to the action and providing a theatrical force similar to that which we find in Autolycus.[18] This starts with his dramatic intervention singing about the coming of spring—"When daffodils begin to peer" (IV.iii.1)—and in doing so contributing much to the change of tone which had begun with the Clown's conduct, as he watched the death of Antigonus taking place offstage.

We shall return to the links between Autolycus' performance and that of the Vice later, but for the moment the association between him and the Clown needs attention. The latter's intervention is part of a series of theatrical decisions which change the mood of the play, and as such it is essential to the overall

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14   See Happé, "Deceptions". Links between Autolycus and the Vice have been part of critical discourse at least since Hastings (1940).

15   See Johnston, pp. 136-44.

16   Johnston makes the point that clowns often performed their acts at the end of the plays and that consequently some spectators delayed their entry so as to be present only for the clown epilogues (pp. 18-19).

17   See Weimann and Bruster, p. 41.

18   Lance (with his dog) performs such an act in *TGV*, IV.iv.1-33. This would originally have been played by Will Kemp.

structure. The death of Antigonus comes at the end of the tragedy of Leontes, but the presentation, which is distinguished for its seriousness, is also part of the change to comedy, largely because after the brief appearance of the bear, which may itself be farcical, it is the Clown who witnesses and describes his death. His words, which do express sympathy, are also near to being comic: "and how the poor gentleman roared, and the bear mocked him, both roaring louder than the sea or weather ... nor [is] the bear half dined on the gentleman—He's at it now" (III.iii.89-96). The effect is not to deny that the death is tragic and terrible, a consequence of the evil destruction loosed by Leontes' tragic folly; but the shift of focus is brought about by making the Clown the observer and using his words for the narrative. These speeches by the Clown thus make a peculiar impression on us: we have to take them seriously, yet they are uneasily amusing. We notice, too, that as with some other sequences in the play, including the reuniting of Leontes with Perdita (V.ii.1-50), the choice of narration rather than enactment is significant because it allows a slant on what is narrated.

Subsequently, folly shows itself in the ascendancy in the relationship between the Clown and Autolycus, first in the robbing scene (IV.iii.30-105) and then in the ballad episode (IV.iv.210-305).[19] The first shows Autolycus making a fool of the Clown, using impersonation as well as disguise, and, as far as the theft is concerned, his dexterity recalls the role of cutpurse beloved of the Vice. From a theatrical point of view, there are two noticeable aspects. Autolycus is very much in charge of the misfortune, and he makes clear to the audience the success of his manipulation of his victim, beginning with "If the springe hold, the cock's mine" (IV.iii.34), and regarding the Clown as a "prize" (30). He also shows instant resourcefulness, which is a kind of improvisation, when he politely but rapidly refuses the Clown's tender-hearted offer to mitigate his sufferings by making a consolatory donation from the money he no longer has, unaware that Autolycus has already stolen it.[20]

The ballad episode shows different aspects of his versatility, this time as performer and salesman. During this passage he sustains his earlier manipulation of the Clown's loss by blaming the theft on someone called "Autolycus". Having performed one of the songs to stimulate the sale of his wares, which comprise trinkets as well as ballads, he makes a clean sweep of his market. In the

19   Wiles identifies the Clown as a foil for Autolycus (p. 146).
20   For improvisation by the Vice and by clowns, see Hornback, p. 48. For evidence of planned and unplanned improvisation, see Klausner, pp. 276 and 283.

manner of the Vice, he has a soliloquy in which he makes the audience aware of his off-stage success; he reminds the audience of the folly of his victims, using abstract personifications: "Ha, ha, what a fool honesty is! And trust, his sworn brother, a very simple gentleman" (IV.iv.592-93). Claiming that he has "picked and cut most of their festival purses" (591), he then elaborates the extent of his own craftiness (575-94). But in spite of this triumph in making fools of others, he is also at risk, and, comically, he nearly gets caught: "If they have overheard me now—why hanging" (605).

Later in the scene, and with a change of identity related to an enforced change of clothes, he presents himself as a courtier who may be able to assist the Shepherd and the Clown in their attempt to avert the impact of the wrath of Polixenes. Once again there is close playing between the two, especially when the courtier describes to the Clown the terrible but also comically exaggerated punishment which might befall him (745-51). As in the earlier episodes with the Clown, there is a distinction between Autolycus, as the clever exploiter of folly, and the Clown as his foolish victim. However, in contrast to the self-serving Autolycus, the Clown is more or less honest.[21] In the end the tables are turned, and Autolycus is subordinated to the Clown, once he and the old Shepherd have become gentlemen born (V.ii.127-29).

Autolycus shows himself as the exploiter of folly in the versatility of his playing. Perhaps because of the theatrical mode emphasising and exploiting energetic showmanship, which has been called "common playing" (Weimann and Bruster, p. 58), his stage presence does not constitute a coherent form of characterisation. In a Protean way, he changes his roles by the minute and in the process reflects the adaptability of the Vice and of the clowns to address different people and circumstances in appropriate ways. He has been described as having no centre, and in his roles, which range from peddler to puppet-master and from pickpocket to courtier, he also acts the ventriloquist in his speech style.[22] Of all the roles he adopts, there is one which might point directly to another link between Autolycus and folly. He admits to having served as an ape-bearer (IV.iii.96). Captive apes were linked with court jesters, and were led about as a part

21   See Vial, p. 176.
22   Palfrey offers a list (p. 120).

of their trade. Iconographic representations of Folly leading apes, sometimes to hell, have been identified, one in a sketchbook by Louis Cranach.[23]

But the absence of character consistency is part of the manifestation of folly which was traditional by the time Shakespeare created the part and also effective as a means of drawing attention to folly in its various forms. Like Haphazard in *Apius and Virginia,* and Courage in *The Tide Tarrieth No Man*, in the previous generation of Vices, he is the supreme opportunist. When the Clown and Shepherd approach in a state of distress, and still unable to recognize him, he tells the audience:

> Aside, aside, here is more matter for a hot brain. Every lane's end, every shop, church, session, hanging, yields a careful man work. (IV.iv.653-55)

The nature and techniques of folly he embodies may have been partially determined by the presence of Robert Armin in the King's Men. Armin specialised in performing the role of wise or artificial fools from when he joined them in 1599. Small of stature, he was particularly known for his skill in quick changes.[24] In another of his roles, that of Feste in *Twelfth Night*, he remains largely outside the action of the play, though his presence broods largely over it.[25] It is likely that Armin took the Fool's role in *King Lear*. In that play, the Fool remorselessly exposes the folly of Lear, and many of his lines are suitable to the convention of the artificial wise fool which Armin cultivated, though in view of the complex textual history of that play, it is not easy to decide whether this Fool is entirely artificial.[26] Here in *The Winter's Tale*, Autolycus also remains largely outside the action, except for his almost incidental involvement because his clothing is required by Florizel; and in a final twist he has to acknowledge the social supremacy of the Clown when the latter becomes a gentleman born (V.ii.114). Once again it seems that the

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23   See Janson, p. 211 and plates XXXVIc (1540) and XXXVIIa (Cranach). I owe this reference to Professor Cathy Shrank. Erasmus was interested in a Greek proverb which stated that an ape was always an ape even if clad in purple (see Erasmus, pp. 67 and 88). Cf. Shakespeare, *Ado*, II.i.34.

24   See Thomson, p. 417.

25   In Terry Hands's production for the RSC in 1979, Feste (Geoffrey Hutchings) never left the stage, and when not actively engaged he was always perceptible somewhere around the edge, though not necessarily looking at the action.

26   For the revision of the bitter artificial Fool in the Quarto to the pathetic natural Fool in the Folio, see Hornback, pp. 144-64. A more sceptical approach to this possible revision is offered by Foakes, pp. 33-47.

role of Autolycus within the play was in part determined by the inheritance of folly and that it should be interpreted as such.

The change in style of characterisation is remarkable. The foolish Leontes is presented in realistic terms in spite of the blurring of motivation at the beginning. He is a study in obsession. He may be a fool, but he could be as foolish as he is shown to be. But for Autolycus the style changes, as he is inside the action, and also outside: he is a metatheatrical focus and commentator, and his character is not realistically presented.[27] There is also the possibility that, in some respects, the role of Autolycus embodies parodic reflections of events in the first half of the play and that in doing so he turns around the function of folly in the play.[28] If the performances he gives, which we have been discussing, are in themselves a demonstration of folly and ones which the audience might be already conditioned to recognize as such, they might make for a new perspective on the earlier tragic folly and yet not arouse the essentially disastrous consequences we have considered. Instead, they would offer a kind of distanced parody.[29] By his activities Autolycus isolates the ignorant foolishness of the Clown. He manipulates others, as indeed does Leontes, though he (Autolycus) is less in control in Act Five than previously.[30] He sings a song with Mopsa and Dorcas, the two amorous shepherdesses, which makes fun of their rivalry for the Clown's affections (IV.iv.283-94). He exploits the Clown's credulity, first over the robbing and then at the sheep-shearing festival. He presents and describes ballads which are staggeringly incredible, and yet he provides a rationalization for believing them by the accumulation of witnesses.[31] It turns out that these monstrosities are believed by the willing listeners, at least for the time being. It may be that we, readers or audience, do not believe them but see them as a ridiculous joke or scam, and yet they raise in comic mode the question of what should be believed, and this is material to the tragedy of Leontes, as well as to the miraculous return of Hermione, which is the centre-piece of the last action of the play.

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27   See Evans, p. 158.
28   See Sokol, p. 180. For the suggestion that Autolycus is an antitype of Leontes, see Pitcher, ed., p. 66.
29   See Hartwig, pp. 91-103. She notices that both Leontes and Autolycus are aware that they are playing roles, but that Autolycus shares this with the audience, whereas Leontes does not.
30   Frey, p. 143, notes that Leontes creates roles for himself and for others around him.
31   Felperin, p. 15, suggests that the ballads re-enact the fantasies of Leontes comically.

In that last action, the audience do not know what has happened to her, and in her restoration, by which she turns from statue to beloved wife, credulity is once again stretched. In the end, the action and the emotional content compel belief, or at least a suspension of disbelief.[32] It may be that his final repentance also reflects that of Leontes. Perhaps this is anticipated by his acceptance that he will do good in spite of himself.[33] When Autolycus, prompted by the Clown, agrees to amend his life, the Clown's acknowledgement remains tinged with folly: "Give me thy hand. I will swear to the Prince thou art as honest a true fellow as any is in Bohemia" (V.ii.134-35). One of the things we may have learned is that oaths may not be believable.[34]

The argument that I have presented here proposes that there is a shift in the way folly is manifested half-way through the play. This shift is in line with many other features which make this play so remarkable, though I do not claim it is the only feature concerned with the shift in the structure. Nevertheless, the theatrical contrast between Leontes as the embodiment of folly who comes to realise the extent of his folly, as my title quotation from late in the play suggests, and the dynamic and energetic second embodiment in Autolycus, the manager and quasi-professional fool, who operates metatheatrically, is innovative. In his exposure of the folly of others he touches upon other important themes in the play. For example, the Clown's assumption that clothes make him and his father gentlemen is part of a discourse about social mobility.[35] But in the end both the characters who are manifestations of folly have to come to terms with their mistakes. Leontes' folly is circumscribed by his recognition of it, and the energetic folly of Autolycus, though it may have revealed folly in others, has to come to terms with its own limitations. The structure of the play thus appears not as a big mistake, as it was once thought, but as one of the features which arouse our curiosity as well as our admiration.

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32   Further aspects of belief may have a religious content, especially in regard to miracles; see Marsalek, p. 283.
33   In spite of calling Honesty a fool (IV.iv.592-93), he entertains the thought of being honest himself (IV.iv.680-81, V.ii.133).
34   On oaths, cf. I.ii.29-30.
35   See Richards, p. 90.

THETA X

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