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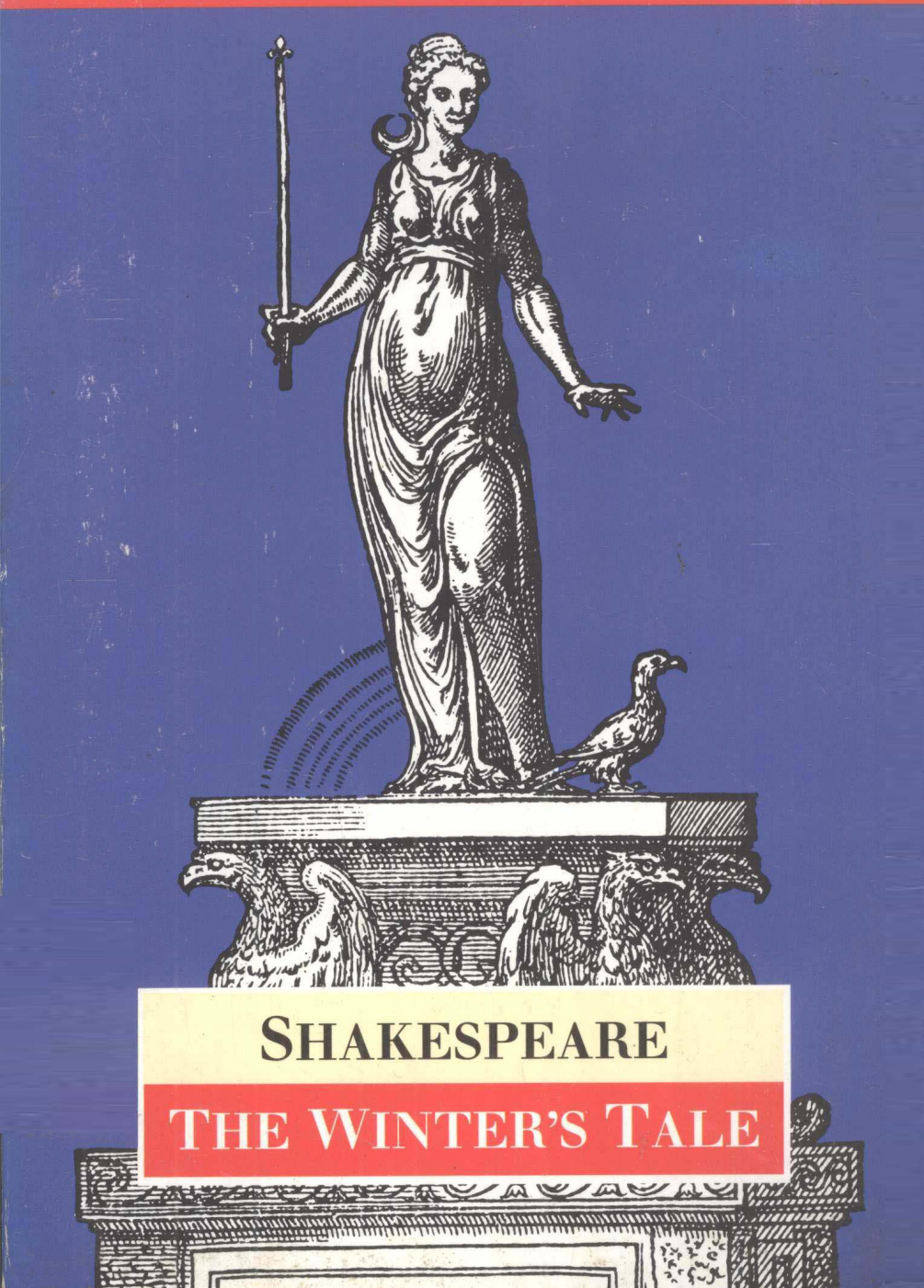

SHAKESPEARE

THE WINTER'S TALE

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Edited by
STEPHEN ORGEL

Oxford New York
OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Walton Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogota Bombay
Buenos Aires Calcutta Cape Town Dar es Salaam
Delhi Florence Hong Kong Istanbul Karachi
Kuala Lumpur Madras Madrid Melbourne
Mexico City Nairobi Paris Singapore
Taipei Tokyo Toronto

and associated companies in
Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

First published by the Clarendon Press 1996
First published as a World's Classics paperback 1996

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
Data available

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
Shakespeare, William, 1564–1616,
The winter's tale / edited by Stephen Orgel.
p. cm.—(The World's classics)
Includes index.
I. Orgel, Stephen. II. Title. III. Series.
PR2839.A2074 1996 822.3'3—dc20 95–52554
ISBN 0–19–812949–1 (hbk.)
ISBN 0–19–281956–9 (pbk.)

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

Printed in Great Britain by
Mackays of Chatham
Chatham, Kent

PREFACE

FOR references, elucidations and citations I am indebted to Leonard Barkan, John Bender, Caroline Bicks, A. R. Braunmuller, Christopher Highley, Lindsay Kaplan, Randall S. Nakayama, Paul Seaver, Willard Spiegelman, John Stokes and Marion Trousdale. Patrick Stewart gave me a fascinating afternoon discussing his experience performing Leontes, and I have learned much from Dr Robert Brofman's professional insight into Leontes' pychopathology. On the relation of textual to theatrical matters, I am grateful for the suggestions of Alan Dessen and Adrian Kiernander. For the solution to the problem of 'o'er-dyed blacks' in 1.2.130–1, I have Dr Edward Maeder and Karen Finch, OBE, to thank. John Manning called my attention to the King of Bohemia's *impresa* in Typotius. On pastoral matters I have benefited from the expertise of Paul Alpers. Philip Brett and Anthony Newcomb have been my guides through Renaissance music history and practice. Jonathan Crewe and David Riggs at different stages gave the introduction acute and sympathetic readings, and helped to bring it to its final shape. Christine Buckley has been a superlative copy-editor. Finally, the general editor has once again been exemplary, and most of his suggestions have been silently adopted.

STEPHEN ORGEL

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INTRODUCTION

IN 1672 Dryden, looking back at the drama of the last age, singled out *The Winter's Tale*, along with *Measure for Measure* and *Love's Labour's Lost*, for particular criticism. These plays 'were either grounded on impossibilities, or at least, so meanly written, that the Comedy neither caus'd your mirth, nor the serious part your concernment'.[1] Tastes in comedy change, and there is no disputing them; but the impossibilities of *The Winter's Tale* are undeniable, and the degree of seriousness the play lays claim to is certainly at least arguable: Dryden could have cited the title itself—a winter's tale is proverbially a fable, a fairy tale—in defence of his assertion. The play has had many subsequent admirers, but Dryden's criticism has also been echoed in every era: Charlotte Lennox, in 1753, found the play ridiculous, and the statue 'a mean and absurd contrivance'; Hartley Coleridge, in 1851, declared 'the queen's reanimation beyond all dramatic credibility'; D. G. James, in 1937, called 'Paulina's deception of Leontes and imprisonment of Hermione . . . preposterous'; and Terry Eagleton, in 1986, declared the play's resolution to 'rest not only upon a reactionary mystification of Nature but on a logical mistake'.[2]

The play had, however, been popular in its own time, and not only at the Globe, where Simon Forman saw it in the spring of 1611.[3] Seven performances at court are recorded before 1640; it was played before the King in 1611, when it was new, and two years later it was one of fourteen dramas selected to entertain King James's daughter Elizabeth and her fiancé the Elector Palatine during the two months of celebrations preceding their marriage. In 1633 it was still being performed at court by the King's Men, 'and likt'.[4]

[1] From *A Defence of the Epilogue, Or, An Essay on the Dramatique Poetry of the Last Age*, quoted in *Shakespeare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Brian Vickers (London, 1974), i. 145.

[2] The Lennox and Coleridge remarks are reprinted in the *Variorum*, pp. 352–4, 357; for the James, see *Scepticism and Poetry* (London, 1937), pp. 232–3; for Eagleton, see *William Shakespeare* (Oxford, 1986), p. 93.

[3] For Forman's account of the play, see Appendix A.

[4] Sir Henry Herbert's Office Book, p. 236; quoted in C. M. Ingleby *et al.*, *The Shakspere Allusion Book*, 2nd edn. (Oxford, 1932), p. 321. For a list of early performances, see below, pp. 62 ff.

Dryden's opinion, however, was not eccentric. After the closing of the theatres the play disappeared from the stage for a century, and Pope was of the opinion that no more than 'some characters, single scenes, or perhaps a few particular passages' were Shakespeare's.[1] It was successfully revived in the 1740s and 1750s, but during the eighteenth century achieved its greatest popularity in Garrick's truncated version, *Florizel and Perdita*, produced in 1756. Its reintroduction in a substantially complete form was the work of John Philip Kemble in 1811; thereafter it was regularly produced, often spectacularly and with major performers. Dryden's complaints that the play was illogical and neither funny enough nor serious enough still occasionally reappeared in reviews and in the critical literature, but they seemed finally to be answerable, if not answered, when Dowden, in 1877, declared that *The Winter's Tale*, along with *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*, was neither comedy nor tragedy, but romance, a category in which it remains firmly entrenched today.

Genres

Dowden's generic ploy undoubtedly enabled criticism to see the interrelations of these four plays more clearly, and probably served to disarm the most obvious rationalistic objections to their action. The creation and refinement of artistic categories has been one of the primary functions of criticism from Aristotle to Northrop Frye, and Dowden's claims for his new Shakespearian genre in fact did little more than systematize an observation already made by Coleridge in his *Notes on 'The Tempest'*, in which the play is referred to as a romance. In a sense, the new category summed up the nineteenth century's view of the late Shakespeare. Dowden's claims for the genre itself are, moreover, exceedingly modest—romance is defined simply as that which is 'romantic':

> There is a romantic element about these plays. In all there is the same romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear—the daughters of Pericles and Leontes, the sons of Cymbeline and

[1] Preface to Shakespeare, 1725, in D. Nichol Smith, *Eighteenth-Century Essays on Shakespeare* (Glasgow, 1903), p. 60; Pope is similarly dubious about *Love's Labour's Lost* and *Titus Andronicus*.

Alonso. In all there is a beautiful romantic background of sea or mountain. The dramas have a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to render the name 'comedies' inappropriate; we may smile tenderly, but we never laugh loudly, as we read them. Let us, then name this group consisting of four plays, Romances.[1]

The new genre, however, has proved as obfuscatory as it has been enlightening; various attempts to move beyond the circularity of the definition, refine its terms, establish the genre within a tradition, have revealed a good deal about the history of romance, but perhaps nothing so much as its ultimate inadequacy as a critical category for Shakespearian drama.[2] *The Winter's Tale* and *The Tempest* were comedies to the editors of the First Folio of 1623, when the plays first appeared in print; *Cymbeline*—despite its miraculous restorations and happy ending—was a tragedy. (*Pericles* does not appear in the First Folio at all.) These are the genres whose implications we must understand if we are to see *The Winter's Tale* as Shakespeare's audiences and first readers saw it. The crucial point here is that notions of genre have changed radically since the Renaissance. Genres for us are exclusive and definitive, whereas for the Renaissance they tended to be inclusive and relational. J. C. Scaliger's immense *Poetics*, first published in 1561, is a model for the age's attitudes towards literary categorization: it is essentially a filing system, and works are characteristically filed under a number of headings. Many plays (the *Oresteia*, for example) are declared to be both comic and tragic. In the same way, *Troilus and Cressida* is declared in the preface to the 1609 quarto 'as witty as the best comedy in Terence or Plautus', while the Folio editors included it in the section of tragedies. These claims do not contradict each other. Sidney's *Defence of Poesie* is often cited decrying the mingling of 'kings and clowns' in the 'mongrel tragicomedy' of his time; the objection, however, is not to the mixture of genres, but to the failure to observe decorum. He has already justified mixed forms by observing that 'if severed they be good, the conjunction cannot be hurtful': there is a comedy of wonder and delight fully appropriate to the decorum of

[1] *Shakespeare* (New York, 1877), pp. 55–6.

[2] See, e.g., Carol Gesner, *Shakespeare and the Greek Romance* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1970); Stanley Wells, 'Shakespeare and Romance', in J. R. Brown and Bernard Harris, eds., *Later Shakespeare* (1967), pp. 49–70.

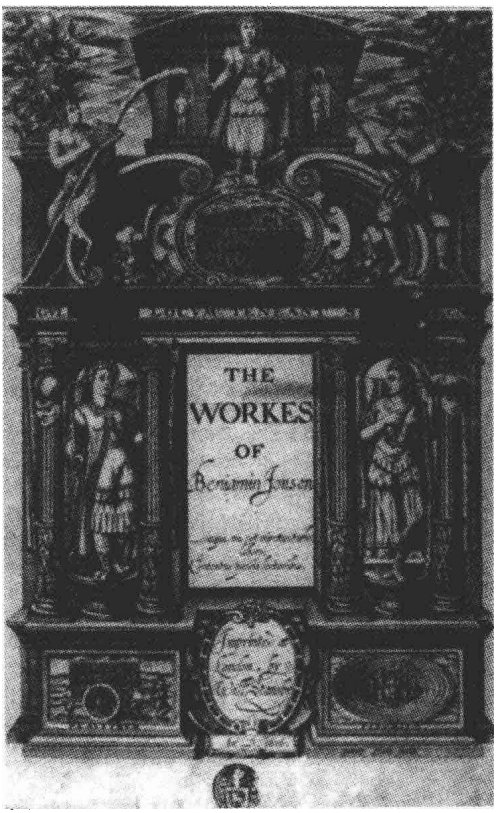
tragedy.[1] This is not to say that *The Winter's Tale*, which certainly mingles kings and clowns indecorously, would have been to Sidney's taste; but that does not distinguish it from any of the modern English plays Sidney considers—all are declared to be 'defectious in the circumstances'. But of course, Sidney died in 1586; a few seasons of Shakespeare might have moved him to revise his opinions.

Mixed genres disturb us; and since the early nineteenth century we have found ways of explaining away the comic scenes in Shakespearian tragedy, as De Quincey rescued *Macbeth* by arguing that the comedy of the drunken porter does not vitiate but rather increases the tragic momentum.[2] No doubt it does, though it is not clear that critics of Shakespeare's age would have viewed the scene in the same way: there is a large body of Renaissance critical theory that argues precisely for the necessity of comic scenes in tragedy in order to mitigate the form's overwhelming effects. Thus in Italy, tragedies were regularly performed with comic or satiric interludes between the acts, and in the Elizabethan theatre, tragedies invariably concluded with jigs.[3] When modern critics discuss the tragic impact of plays like *King Lear* and *Hamlet* on Shakespeare's audience, they invariably forget about the jigs. The mixture of genres was an essential element of the theatrical experience for Shakespeare's audience, and by the time *The Winter's Tale* was written tragicomedy had been established through an extensive critical debate as a dramatic genre of unquestionable seriousness. Thus on the frontispiece to the 1616 folio of Ben Jonson's *Works* (figure 1), the genres are anatomized: Comedy and Tragedy, on either side of the triumphal arch that surrounds the book's title and author, are surmounted by Pastoral, anatomized into its two forms, the

[1] The Sidney passage is in *Miscellaneous Prose*, ed. K. Duncan-Jones and Jan van Dorsten (Oxford, 1973), p. 114. For a fuller discussion, see my 'Shakespeare and the Kinds of Drama', *Critical Inquiry*, 6 (1979), 107–23.

[2] 'The Knocking at the Gate in *Macbeth*', first published in the *London Magazine*, October 1823.

[3] This has recently been called into question, but the evidence for it is quite solid. Thomas Platter, a visiting Swiss traveller, describes seeing the jig at the end of *Julius Caesar* at the Globe in 1599, and says it is customary; the Middlesex Justices in October 1612 ordered the suppression of jigs at the end of plays 'on the ground that the lewd jigs, songs, and dances so used at the Fortune led to . . . breaches of the peace' (Chambers, *Elizabethan Stage*, i. 304); and William Prynne, in 1633, says that 'now always they put at the end of every tragedy . . . a comedy or jig' (*Histriomastix*, p. 484).



1. Ben Jonson, *Works* (1616), frontispiece: Tragedy and Comedy on either side, bucolic and satiric Pastoral above, Tragicomedy at the top.

bucolic and satiric; above these stand the two presiding deities of theatre, the rational Apollo and the ecstatic Dionysus, and between them at the top of the arch is the crowned figure of Tragicomedy, the epitome of drama.

What this means is not that we can now comfortably declare the play a tragicomedy, rather than a romance, but that we can

see how fluid the concept of genre was for Shakespeare's age. To abandon the category of romance is at once to reveal that such plays as *Much Ado About Nothing, Measure for Measure, Othello,* even *The Comedy of Errors,* have at least as much to tell us about *The Winter's Tale,* even generically, as *Pericles, Cymbeline* and *The Tempest* have. It is also to abandon the fiction of Shakespeare at the age of forty-six declining into a serene old age, and producing a drama of wisdom, reconciliation and harmony. *The Winter's Tale,* like *The Tempest,* returns to issues that had concerned Shakespeare throughout his career, and its harmonies and reconciliations are as deeply embedded in the ideals, conflicts and anxieties of Jacobean culture and the historical moment as those of *The Tempest* are.

Obscurity and Elucidation

The play's problems for a modern audience are not, of course, merely generic. They are in every sense dramatic, the more so if one is aware of Shakespeare's earlier treatments of similar issues. Why does he set up the powerful tragic momentum of the opening three acts, only to disarm it with fantasy and magic? Why is Mamillius not restored, along with Hermione and Perdita; and moreover, why is the death of Mamillius—Leontes' only son and the heir to the throne—so much less of an issue dramatically than the death of his wife and the loss of his daughter? Perhaps most puzzling of all, why does Shakespeare preserve Leontes and ultimately exonerate him—why is he not treated in the fashion of all those other foolish, headstrong, misguided, tyrannical Shakespearian kings, who go to their deaths even in those cases where it is acknowledged that they are more sinned against than sinning? In fact, if we read *The Winter's Tale* in the context of Shakespeare's earlier dramas of royalty, we will be struck by how little distinction is normally accorded to the office of king, how close the dread sovereign is to the foolish, fond old man. There are in *Hamlet* no claims about the particular sanctity of kingship, nor is the murder of an anointed king represented as more heinous than the murder of anybody else. *Macbeth* does make such claims about the murder of Duncan, but not about the killing of Macbeth, who is no less a duly anointed king; and more significantly, the play has no

investment in making the king a good king—in educating Duncan in the proper management of his thanes and his realm, in rehabilitating Macbeth through penance, prayer, and the advice of a good woman, in ensuring that Malcolm will not repeat Duncan's mistakes by taking as his right-hand man a dubiously ethical soldier like Macduff. Why, then, the intense focus on the preservation and rehabilitation of Leontes? Why not let him atone by dying, and resolve the tragic issues through the accession of a new and innocent generation, on the models provided by the endings of *2 Henry IV*, *Macbeth* and *King Lear*? Shakespeare's source, indeed, gave him a strikingly dramatic model: at the conclusion of Greene's *Pandosto*, the repentant king falls in love with his still unidentified daughter; and when he learns who she is, kills himself, to be succeeded on the throne by his unsullied daughter and son-in-law. This is an ending that would be perfectly consistent with the tragedy of royalty as Shakespeare practised it, and both the preservation of Leontes and the mode by which it is effected are unique in his drama.

The play is problematic, too, in a more specific and local sense. It is syntactically and lexically often baffling, though this is an aspect of the text that has been generally ignored by editors and critics since about the middle of the last century. But if we consider the editorial debates over such passages as Polixenes' explanation of his need to return home (1.2.12–15), Hermione's protestations at her trial (3.2.45–50 and 103–4), most of all, Leontes' jealous ravings (1.2.136–44, and elsewhere), it is clear that even where a consensus has been reached, it is based on no real linguistic evidence. Here are two examples.

Hermione, in the course of her objections to her treatment, says to Leontes,

> I appeal
> To your own conscience, sir, before Polixenes
> Came to your court how I was in your grace,
> How merited to be so; since he came,
> With what encounter so uncurrent I
> Have strained t'appear thus . . .
> (3.2.44–9)

For the past hundred years or so, the last two lines have been taken to mean 'with what behaviour so unacceptable I have

transgressed that I should appear thus (i.e. on trial)'. This interpretation represents the consensus of three mid-Victorian editors, Halliwell, Staunton and White, and it has become, for us, simply the meaning of the passage. But to gloss the passage in this way is, at the very least, to conceal more than a century of debate and bafflement. The lines were, in fact, considered incomprehensible by most eighteenth-century editors including Johnson, who wrote of them, 'These lines I do not understand; with the licence of all editors, what I cannot understand I suppose unintelligible, and therefore propose that they may be altered . . .' Johnson's testimony in this matter is especially apropos, given his characteristic genius for finding a plain prose sense in the most elaborately conceited Shakespearian verse. In default of an interpretation, he produced a felicitous, if unconvincingly rationalized, emendation: 'With what encounter so uncurrent *have I* | *Been stained* to appear thus?' Even this, though it certainly makes a kind of sense, depends on its emendation to render the crucially ambiguous words *encounter* and *uncurrent* comprehensible. A detailed consideration of the history of similar attempts at elucidation would show no more than the relevant *OED* entries, for *encounter*, *uncurrent*, and *strain*: that the modern interpretation represents an essentially arbitrary selection of meanings from among a list of diverse and often contradictory possibilities, and does not so much resolve the linguistic problem as enable us to ignore it. The confident tone of the gloss conveying this interpretation will give no hint of two centuries of uncertainty, debate and disagreement.

A number of Hermione's speeches are similarly ambiguous, but they nevertheless constitute relatively simple cases; though particular expressions are obscure, Hermione's general drift is clear enough for us to see what we have to get her words to mean. Leontes' invective in Act I gives us no such confidence. Here is the famous crux as it appears in the First Folio:

> Can thy Dam, may't be
> Affection? thy Intention stabs the Center.
> Thou do'st make possible things not so held,
> Communicat'st with Dreames (how can this be?)
> With what's vnreall: thou coactiue art,
> And fellow'st nothing. Then 'tis very credent,
> Thou may'st co-ioyne with something, and thou do'st,

(And that beyond Commission) and I find it . . .
(1.2.136–43)

Find *what*? From Rowe onward, the passage has defied any consensus. Indeed, it is one of the rare places where Rowe, normally the most tolerant of editors, felt moved to radical revision:

Can thy Dam? may't be—
Imagination! thou dost stab to th' Center.

This can hardly be called emendation. And though no subsequent editor was persuaded, most editions since Rowe's time have adopted his equally radical repointing, whereby 'may't be—' stands alone, and 'Affection', no longer a predicate nominative in the simple question 'may it be affection?', is now the vocative subject of a new sentence, 'Affection, thy intention stabs the centre!'[1]

I have not proposed a new reading or declared the matter solved (though I cannot help remarking that I find some of the problems greatly simplified if we reject the ubiquitous and quite unnecessary repunctuation). What interests me is how little attention the editorial tradition has paid to the fact of a drama that speaks in this way—few commentators get beyond Pafford's observation that 'the speech is meant to be incoherent': Leontes is crazy, and his language is an index to his character. The problem with this is not merely that it commits the play to the imitative fallacy, but that this sort of linguistic opacity is not at all limited to Leontes. Hermione, Camillo, Antigonus and Polixenes all exhibit it on occasion as well. It is a feature of the play, and one to which I have tried to be true in the commentary.[2]

[1] The essential lexical work on the passage is that of Hallett Smith, 'Leontes' *Affectio*', *ShQ* 14 (1963), 163–6, which, however, depends on the eighteenth-century revision of the text. Charles Frey has an incisive discussion of the issues raised by the speech in *Shakespeare's Vast Romance* (New York, 1980), esp. p. 77; other provocative readings are in J. V. Cunningham, *Woe or Wonder* (Denver, 1960), pp. 110–12, Carol Thomas Neely, '*The Winter's Tale*: The Triumph of Speech', *SEL* 15 (1975), 324–7, and Jonathan Smith, 'The Language of Leontes', *ShQ* 19 (1968), 317–18. For a sensible counter-argument, that the speech makes better sense if 'affection' is not the technical philosophical term but the normal vernacular word for love, passion, or lust, see Maurice Hunt, 'Leontes' "Affection" and Renaissance "Intention" ', *University of Mississippi Studies in English*, 4 (1983), 49–55.

[2] For important and interestingly divergent discussions of the relationship between language and speaker in the late plays see James Sutherland, 'The Language of the Last Plays', in John Garrett, ed., *More Talking of Shakespeare*

What is concealed in the process of editorial interpretation (Johnson's methods constitute a striking exception) is the effort of will, or even wilfulness, involved in selecting from among the ambiguities of an open and fluid text a single, paraphrasable sense. Elucidation assumes that behind the obscurity and confusion of the text is a clear and precise meaning, and that the obscurity, moreover, is not part of the meaning. And since the editorial process is committed to elucidation, it is largely helpless before a text that is genuinely obscure. But what does it mean that a play speaks incomprehensibly? What are the implications for drama of a text that works in this way?—as *The Winter's Tale* undeniably does, if we think of it as a transaction between actors and audiences rather than between editors and readers; for even if we were persuaded that we had successfully elucidated all the play's obscurities, no actor can speak meaning, rather than words, and no audience, least of all Shakespeare's in 1611, comes supplied with the necessary glosses. Of course, we assume that we are, by elucidating, recovering meaning, not imposing it; but is this assumption really defensible? How do we know that the obscurity of the text was not in fact precisely what it expressed to the Renaissance audience? In this respect, the claims of Spenser for the 'dark conceit' of *The Faerie Queene*, of Chapman and Jonson for the virtues of the mysterious in poetry, may be more relevant to Shakespeare than our construction of literary history commonly assumes. A plain prose paraphrase may not, after all, be the bottom line in unlocking the mysteries of an occluded text.

We need to remember that the Renaissance tolerated, and indeed courted, a much higher degree of ambiguity and opacity than we do; we tend to forget that the age often found in incomprehensibility a positive virtue. The discontinuity between image and text in Renaissance iconographic structures has in recent years become a commonplace; symbolic imagery was *not* a universal language—on the contrary, it was radically indeterminate, and always depended on explanation to establish its meaning. When the explanation was not provided—as was often the case—the spectators remained unenlightened. But this was not a problem: 'no doubt', as Ben Jonson put it, 'their grounded

(London, 1959), pp. 144–58, and Anne Barton, 'Leontes and the Spider', in her *Essays, Mainly Shakespearean* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 161–81.

judgements did gaze, said it was fine, and were satisfied'.[1] This particular observation described the response of uneducated spectators, but even writing for an intellectual élite, Jonson strove for what he called 'more removed mysteries',[2] and his printed texts included explanatory commentaries designed, as he put it, finally, months or years after the event, 'to make the spectators understanders'.[3] The satisfaction in such cases derived precisely from the presence of the mystery, which assured the audience at abstruse spectacles, whether groundlings or scholars, that they participated in a world of higher meaning. We are familiar with such strategies in court masques, but they are also not alien to popular drama. *Pericles*, which Jonson attacked for pandering to popular taste, includes a procession of knights bearing symbolic shields and mottoes which require elucidation to be understood, but which are not elucidated.

All editors subscribe, however uncomfortably, to some version of Burckhardt's Renaissance, an integrated culture that still spoke a universal language. For theatre historians, this view of the period was, or at least should have been, seriously compromised when Aby Warburg analysed two of the learned spectators' accounts of the famous Medici *intermezzi* of 1589, probably the best documented of the great Renaissance festivals, and observed that the meaning of the performance, and indeed the very identity of the symbolic figures, was opaque to even the most erudite members of the audience.[4] Since Warburg's essay was published in 1895, it is time Renaissance studies began to take it into account: it bears on our general sense of the nature of Renaissance public discourse as a whole. The spectator of *The Winter's Tale* in 1611, we implicitly assume, would have understood it all. What we are recovering, we tell ourselves, is only what every Renaissance audience already knew. I want to argue on the contrary that Shakespeare's audience was more like the

[1] *Part of the Kings entertainment, in passing to his Coronation*, in C. H. Herford, P. and E. Simpson, eds., *Ben Jonson*, vol. vii (1941), p. 91, ll. 266–7.

[2] *Hymenaei*, lines 16–17.

[3] *Love's Triumph Through Callipolis*, line 1.

[4] Aby Warburg, 'I Costumi Teatrali per gli Intermezzi del 1589', *Atti dell'Accademia del Reale Istituto Musicale di Firenze: Commemorazione della Riforma Melodrammatica* (Florence, 1895), pp. 125–6. For a recent study with a similar point, see A. R. Braunmuller, '"To the Globe I rowed": John Holles Sees *A Game At Chess*', ELR 20 (1990), pp. 340–56.