The Role of Autolycus in The Winter's Tale

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Critical appraisals of Autolycus have usually dealt with limited aspects of his role (e.g., Autolycus as implementer of satire on country and court). A study of his large function in the context of the whole play reveals that, in adding the Autolycus passages to the story borrowed from Greene, Shakespeare provides illuminating, if playful, counterpoint to the Leontes story. Moreover, Autolycus—taleteller and singer, rogue-agent of Providence, man of masks and busy clothes-changer—serves to advance a variety of themes on art and nature, appearance and reality. Most important, at the conclusion of Autolycus's last appearance on the stage, the Clown's fanciful declaration of faith in the "tallness" of a man he knows is false is more than comic variation on Leontes's affirmation of faith in the life of what he sees as stone. Both scenes are part of a pattern which develops related propositions on the regeneration or "creation" potential in proper fancy and proper faith and on the truth of the art (even false tale or pied flower) grounded in "great creating nature."

SOME CRITICS, with Dryden, dismiss The Winter's Tale as "grounded on impossibilities" and contend that in this play Shakespeare reveals ignorance or failing creative powers. But if "authority be a stubborn bear" (IV.iv. 830-831), prizers of verisimilitude, rules, and convention might profit from the fate of Antigonus. On the other hand, some defenders of the play suggest that rules and consistency are expendable in a realm of fantasy. But three of the "impossibilities"—the monstrous and sudden transformation of a good friend and husband into a jealous tyrant, the sudden transformation of winter into spring and at the same time of youth into age, and the marvellous transformation of a statue into a woman—reveal a peculiarly consistent frame of reference.

Obviously, the monstrous and the sudden and the marvellous are native to the tale. And most recent critics of the play would agree with E. M. W. Tillyard that Shakespeare is concerned in this tale with "planes of reality." But they fail to emphasize the purposeful nature of the inclusion of the "impossible" in relation specifically to the denouement of the

1Citations from The Winter's Tale in my text are to The Complete Works of Shakespeare, ed. Hardin Craig (Chicago, 1951).
story. The important point is not that the tale-teller may exercise license in regard to fact; nor is it that in a realm of fancy Shakespeare may be free to create a "world in which illusion and reality are . . . the same." The important point is that Shakespeare is constantly reminding the reader of the unbelievableness of a tale which ends with the injunction, in specific relation to an unbelievable happening, "It is required / You do awake your faith."

Shakespeare repeatedly calls attention to the incredibility of both the tale in general and of his story in particular. He links the tale and the ballad, which is also composed of a "deal of wonder": the attester to the truth of the ballad about the usurer's wife is appropriately named Mistress Tale-porter. He not only reminds us that tales are made of the unreal (II.i.25-26), but he also reminds us that his story is a tale (IV.i.14) and repeatedly points to its wonderful nature. In these allusions to the nature of ballads and tales, Shakespeare illuminates the nature of The Winter's Tale. Tales are false: the talebearing Mistress Tale-porter is obviously a purveyor of falsehood, and so is Autolycus, the practitioner in falsehood, the dealer in tales. But the false tale masks truth: although Autolycus falsely declares that the tale of the usurer's wife "brought to bed of twenty money-bags" and the tale of the woman turned into "a cold fish" for not "ex-chang[ing] flesh with one that loved her" are true, he tells the truth. Moreover, we see by the speeches of the Gentlemen that the truth has to them the seeming of untruth. The verity of a certain series of events is, even to inhabitants of a world where Bohemia has a sea-coast, open to strong suspicion; yet the series concludes with an event illustrating reward for believing the unbelievable. If we cannot be sure with Mopsa that a tale is true if it is "in print o' life," neither can we believe, in the light of the reiterated comment on the nature of tales, that Shakespeare is unpurposeful in his use of "im-

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9 Of the return of Perdita, the Second Gentleman says, "This news which is called true is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion" (V. ii. 30-32); of the fate of Antigonus, the Third Gentleman says, "Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep and not an ear open" (V. ii. 66-68); and of Hermione's recovery Paulina says, "That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale: but it appears she lives" (V. iii. 115-117).
possibilities.” It would appear that we must have faith in the possibility of the seeming impossible, for thereby hangs this winter’s tale.

An argument for the meaningfulness and necessity of “impossibilities” in the play may be clarified by an analysis of the role of Autolycus. Critical comment on the rogue has generally been confined to such labels as “unique creation” or “breath of spring,” or to brief mention of limited aspects of his role, most often to his function as satirist or as implementer of satire. He has been described as the chief instrument for criticism of the court, as provider of a point of criticism for the rural mode, as a means for “burlesque of popular Jacobean broadsides.” Critics have seen him as antidote for sentiment in the pastoral comedy or with his music, fun, and falsehood as general leavening agent. But almost no attention has been given to the possibility that the story of Autolycus furnishes important counterpoint to the main story of the drama.

Yet Autolycus has a role which warrants consideration of his possible significance in relation to the whole drama. There are within this tale several taletellers (besides Mistress Taleporter, who is, significantly, also a midwife, there is Paulina, who is a sometime taleteller, who is called “midwife” by Leontes, and who officiates at a rebirth), but Autolycus is the professional, the most active teller of tales in this winter’s tale. And one of two ballad tales which he peddles concerns a monstrous birth, the other a monstrous transformation. Moreover, there are speeches given to the taleteller Autolycus by the taleteller Shakespeare which invite curiosity as to Shakespeare’s purpose. “Why should I carry lies abroad?” says Autolycus when asked whether his tales are true. Obviously,


he does carry lies abroad, and he does it in order to empty
the pockets of his audience and to fill his own. Why should
Shakespeare, himself telling a tale and constantly reminding
the reader of that fact, use a liar and pickpocket for a tale-
teller, a singer whose song is a means to a dishonest end?
And if other taletellers in the play either literally or meta-
phorically play the midwife, what has Autolycus (and the
taleteller Shakespeare) to do with such a pattern?

It will be my purpose in this essay to discuss the function
of Autolycus in relation to Shakespeare's general comment
on fancy and faith and on art and regeneration.9 If Shake-
spere is saying that falsehood may mask truth and that the
seeming untrue may be true, if he is saying that faith in the
false may lead to winter and yet faith in the seeming false
to the expelling of winter, then the role of Autolycus, the
epitome and the purveyor of falsehood, is most important.
And in a play suggesting that art may illuminate and extend
"great creating nature" if the latter informs art, the agency
of the rogue artist is worth attention.

II

There are repeated hints that Autolycus is the agent of a
superior power: "If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune
would not suffer me" (IV.iv.861-862), he says; and "He was
provided to do us good" (IV.iv.859-860), says the Clown of
him. Since it is by the interference of Autolycus that the
revelation of Perdita's identity takes place in Sicilia, a revela-
tion leading to a troth-plight that Leontes calls Heaven-
directed (V.iii.150), we can name him the agent of a power
for good. But this agency is not necessary. If the Shepherd

*In focusing on a part of Autolycus's function in the play, I trust that
I shall not be thought to falsify the tone of his role. That Shakespeare
may make high comment by way of his fools, clowns, and rogues, with-
out diluting their comic functions, is a fact that does not require
belaboring. He has Hamlet criticize actors who do not speak exactly
the words set down for the clowns "though . . . some necessary ques-
tion of the play be then to be considered." In considering necessary
questions of the play illuminated by Autolycus's words and actions, I
do not suggest that the tone of the rogue's role is solemn and im-
portant. Obviously, Autolycus is a high-spirited, merry, humorous,
ingenuous, frivolous, timorous, volatile, witty, satirical, scheming ras-
cal; and except for the encounter with the three gentlemen, the fol-
lowing soliloquy, and the final passage with the rustics, the scenes
in which he appears are, in large part, entertaining because of him.
and the Clown had taken the fardel to Polixenes as they originally planned, the revelation which helped to fulfill the "secret purposes" of the gods (V.i.35-40) could have taken place; and if the ship bearing Perdita and Florizel had sailed before Polixenes received the fardel, the truth could have been announced in Sicilia. An understanding of the function of Autolycus must lie, in part, in answer to the following questions: why did Shakespeare have Providence make use of an unnecessary medium and why such a choice? Autolycus is not like the good Paulina or the good Camillo, who deal in medicine and cure and health (see, e.g., III.iii.36-39 and IV. iv.595-597); nor is he like the good old Shepherd, who takes up the lost child "for pity" and is thus an agent with the Clown for restoring health to the court. Not only is Autolycus a helpless medium through whom a force for good is working, but he is also an unwilling medium ("Here come those I have done good to against my will," he says), a rogue who sets himself against the society which has rejected him and who apparently encloses himself in a vacuum of self-interest.

In the face of seeming pointlessness and paradox, of good working unnecessarily through evil, one is forced to weigh the evil. Autolycus is a man of masks; and he is so in a play wherein Providence itself wears a mask, and most busily so in an act filled with play-acting. Though by reputation he is

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10 Bertrand Evans, *Shakespeare's Comedies* (London, 1960), p. 308, says that the rustics could not have reached the court in time to deliver the fardel to Polixenes before the latter left for Sicilia. If this is true, Autolycus's agency is most necessary. But since Camillo says that he hopes to force Polixenes to follow after Florizel, since the rustics are on the way to the court as Camillo leaves for the court, and since the rustics then reach Florizel's ship before it sails, there is no reason to assume that they could not have carried out their original intention. Autolycus's speech to the rustics, "[The King] is gone aboard a new ship to purge melancholy and air himself" is a sample of his facility at tale-telling and should not mislead the reader as well as the rustics. Autolycus's decision not to tell the King of Florizel's "stealing away" is pointless if he really thinks that Polixenes has sailed. Northrup Frye, "Recognition in The Winter's Tale," p. 237, in speaking of the first recognition scene, points out that "in many comedies, though never in Shakespeare, such a cognitio is brought about through the ingenuity of a tricky servant. Autolycus has this role...but somehow or other the denouement takes place without him, and he remains superfluous to the plot." If we assume, with Evans, that the rustics could not have delivered the fardel to Polixenes, then Autolycus is not at all superfluous to the plot. But we cannot assume such an eventuality. Though Autolycus plays a part in the unfolding of the truth, his role is superfluous to this unfolding.
known to the country folk as “prig,” he appears to them to be a victim of highway robbery, a peddler, or a courtier. Possessed with this knowledge, the reader risks saddling himself with the role of gull if he assumes that the real Autolycus is the carefree rogue he seems at first glance. We know that behind the facade of the happy-go-lucky thief is a frightened man. The fearfulness of this haunter of wakes, fairs, and bearbaiting is apparently common knowledge, for the Clown says of him that there is “not a more cowardly rogue in all Bohemia” (IV.iii.112). Autolycus says that his fear stems from apprehension of the punishment of the world: “Beating and hanging are terrors to me,” he says; and we have evidence that he speaks truth, for Camillo comments on Autolycus's trembling when the rogue fears that his self-congratulation on an efficient picking and cutting of the festival purses has been overheard. However, in his guise as highway victim, Autolycus represents himself as robbed and beaten by Autolycus, a comment which reminds us of the self-destructive nature of Leontes' wrongdoing and which precedes Leontes' lament over the wrong he did himself (V.i.9). In the light of the parallel, there is an implication that the terror of a beating has an extension which Autolycus will admit to himself only indirectly. Certainly, beneath the fun of the falsehood there is truth. Possibly there is bravado in his “For the life to come, I sleep out the thought of it” (IV.iii.31), concern implicit in his very need to declare lack of concern over a wrong he has done himself. At the very least, the suggestion that behind the mask of unrepentant thief may lie the makings of a repentant man should not be ignored when one proposes to ascertain the sincerity of the frightened man's promise to try to be a tall man.

But though we know that the seemingly carefree rogue has his anxieties and though we may conjecture that the seemingly unscrupulous rogue masks a man with a moral sense still alive and kicking, nevertheless the fact remains that it is an unnecessary and unwilling agent who plays a part in the Heaven-directed revelation. Does Shakespeare want to make the point that evil can serve the ends of grace and that Autolycus, inconsequential and reluctant participant in the transformation of Leontes's court from sorrow to joy, partakes of transformation through his agency? The theme of transformation is in part developed in the pervasive clothes
imagery of the last two acts; and the clothes metaphor repeatedly informs scenes in which Autolycus appears. Man of masks and busiest clothes changer in the drama, Autolycus has his agency made possible by a change of clothes. Moreover, clothes and their putting on and putting off are informed, as the figurative pattern develops, with symbolic meanings which do throw a light on the purpose and effect of Autolycus’s agency.

The first words that Autolycus speaks to another character in the play are to the Clown: “O, help me, help me! pluck but off these rags; and then, death, death!” (IV.iii.55-56). Quite aside from the rogue’s intention to gull the Clown, aside from the amusing extravagance and pretense of the words, the reference to clothes and transformation, appearing as it does in Autolycus’s first words to the Clown, must be seriously considered. Moreover, the dialogue which is introduced by this mock entreaty is immediately followed by a dialogue beginning with “These your unusual weeds to each part of you / Do give a life” (IV.iv.1-2). The juxtaposition of and contrast between these two speeches, which connect first the removal of clothes with death and then the putting on of clothes with life, cannot be happenstance.

It might be profitable first to note some of the implications in the general development of the figurative pattern. Florizel’s speech above says that clothes give “a life”: play-acting, the putting on of the unusual, the art involved in adorning nature, are here connected with a life superimposed on life, as if clothes, acting, art, may imbue reality with a larger reality. Clothes may also inaugurate change: “Sure this robe of mine / Does change my disposition” (IV.iv.134-135), says Perdita, playing at being royalty. Here is not only a repetition of the suggestion that pretense and art may initiate a transformation, but also since Perdita is of royal birth, a repetition of the idea that unreality may both elicit and illuminate reality, that art may reveal a greater nature than one has been aware of. In both of these speeches we see that the clothes which mask the true identity (the shepherdess) play a part in revealing the true identity (the princess), just as a tale may falsify a lesser truth and play a part in revealing a larger truth. But while Perdita’s disguise and pretense reveal her true nature, her “high self,” Florizel’s high self is hidden by his disguise (IV.iv.7-9). The mask may both
reveal and obscure; art may serve both unreality and reality, but the revelation of art is dependent on nature.

The connection between clothes and new life, transformation, is repeated in other contexts and the metaphorical implications of inevitable relations between art and nature are reiterated. The Shepherd and the Clown, after playing their part in the general transformation from sorrow to joy, are rewarded with a rise in outward status. "See you these clothes?" says the Clown. "Say you see them not and think me still no gentleman born." As soon as the Clown puts on the outward signs of his good fortune and new position, a gentleman is born; the Clown insists on this, "Give me the lie, do, and try whether I am not now a gentleman born" (V.ii.145-146). The delight of the rustics over being gentlemen born is very amusing; but the ambivalent nature of the speeches, in the light of the figurative pattern, must not be ignored in the general fun of the exchange. "I know you are now, sir, a gentleman born," says Autolycus. A now is in the sentence, and it does not follow know; Autolycus repeats the construction of the Clown. Most significantly, the old Shepherd declares that they must be gentle now that they are gentlemen, and although the old man's pity when he takes in the lost child and the young man's goodheartedness when he offers aid to the highway "victim" suggest that it is a gentle nature which the surface transformation illuminates, their subsequent treatment of the rogue also suggests that the surface transformation elicits and enlarges their true nature, that they are in fact gentlemen born. In short, a change of clothes may signify a change in disposition, a change in position; a putting on of clothes may signify both the putting on of a new life and nature and a revealing of a life and nature not before evident.

But clothes and a "putting on" are shown to have another and contrasting character. Clothes may signify bondage: the Clown speaks of "the bondage of certain ribbons and gloves" (IV.iv.235). As highway victim clothed in rags, Autolycus tells the Clown that Autolycus has "put [him] into this apparel" (IV.iii.111). Behind the words of Autolycus lies a truth which extends the figurative comment. Though Autolycus declares that he is "out of service," he has put himself in service to his propensity for lying, cheating, and stealing. The putting on of clothes here, too, signifies the putting
on of "a life," a rogue's life. And when Autolycus says to the Clown, "O, help me, help me! pluck but off these rags; and then, death, death!" the literal meaning of his mock lamentation is that the "loathsomeness" of the "detestable things put upon [him]" so offends him that the help he asks for is not rescue from death, but the removal of the loathsome apparel before he dies. One suspects that Shakespeare is preparing us for reiterated comment on clothes and that Autolycus's mock plea may involuntarily mask a call for help to remove the habiliments of his sinful life (a call which the Clown, in his last scene with Autolycus and in a return to his role of Good Samaritan, is to answer). However that may be, the rogue's false entreaty that his rags be plucked off is to be followed by a scene wherein he is in fact subject to a forced plucking off of his "outside . . . poverty" and to a forced "putting on."

The whole seemingly pointless business of Autolycus's agency in the matter of the fardel is dependent on the clothes-changing scene, on the rustics' assuming from his dress that Autolycus is a courtier. Yet the clothes exchange itself appears superfluous. Camillo apparently decides that a disguise is necessary for Florizel's safe journey to his ship, and spying Autolycus, he says, "We'll make an instrument of this, omit / Nothing may give us aid." Yet Florizel is already in a disguise which Perdita has said obscures his "high self." We may assume that Camillo believes that Florizel needs another disguise, since the "swain's wearing" is rich enough for the rustics to believe it the dress of a courtier and since Florizel's disguise as swain has been revealed for what it is to a number of the country folk, who might thereby be able to identify him and report his whereabouts to his father. But since Polixenes has returned to Court, Florizel's ship "rides fast by," and no later reference is made to a result of Florizel's disguising himself as a peddler, the focus in the clothes exchange is on Autolycus. Shakespeare could easily have made Camillo's ruse necessary: if Polixenes had appointed someone to keep an eye on Florizel, the importance to Florizel of the clothes exchange could have been established. The very thinness of the excuse for the clothes-changing scene emphasizes the importance of Autolycus in this passage. Moreover, although Camillo says that they will omit nothing which may give them aid, the aid which Autolycus subsequently affords
Florizel in causing a change in the rustics' plans is not utilized by Florizel. The emphasis is not on the effect of the exchange on Florizel's fortunes, but on its effect on Autolycus's fortunes.

We have seen that the clothes image may suggest bondage, sin; and we have noted the possible implications in the rogue's mock plea, "Pluck but off these rags." Now Camillo orders the peddler to remove his apparel. "I am a poor fellow, sir," says Autolycus. "Why, be so still," says Camillo; "here's nobody will steal that from thee: yet for the outside of thy poverty we must make an exchange" (IV.iv.643-646). Camillo's emphasis on an "outside of . . . poverty" suggests its fellow: an inner poverty. And since Autolycus plucks off his outside poverty, there is the suggestion that the bondage figuratively embodied by the apparel may be affected with the removal of the false peddler's clothes, a suggestion that Autolycus's inner poverty may now be subject to change. Also, the clothes which Autolycus puts on are "unusual weeds," and so there is the suggestion that this change of apparel may mark an acquiring of "a life," may herald a change in disposition.\footnote{The use of the word case in this passage also develops the figurative implications of the clothes-changing scene. Case, like clothes a multiple image in the last two acts, is used to evoke an image of man's artificial covering, his natural covering, and his condition. The Clown, who hopes "though this case be a pitiful one" that he will "not be flayed out of it" (IV. iv. 843-844) and who is assured by Autolycus that he will be "flayed alive" and then "recovered . . . with aqua-vitae," is stripped of his countryman's attire and becomes a "gentleman born." And in another important passage case, like clothes, evokes an image of bondage, the removal of which is connected with a seeing, a ransoming, and a destruction: of the reactions of Camillo and Leontes at the first recognition scene, the Third Gentleman says, "They seemed almost . . . to tear the cases of their eyes . . . they looked as they had heard of a world ransomed, or one destroyed" (V. ii. 12 ff.). So Camillo's words to Autolycus that he should "discase [him] instantly" of "the outside of [his] poverty," by virtue of the extended clothes metaphor, suggests a possible "plucking off" or destruction of one kind of life, or a possible ransoming. And the same ideas are re-echoed and reinforced by the use of the word case.}

The clothes exchange does mark the beginning of a change in Autolycus. It is almost immediately followed by a speech wherein he contradicts his earlier declarations and by an impulse which is out of character for the Autolycus we have heretofore seen. Upon overhearing the rustics talk of going to Polixenes with a fardel, Autolycus says, "I know not what impediment this complaint may be to the flight of my master"
Autolycus, who has declared that he is "out of service" and who has described himself as "once a servant of the prince," now puts himself back in a service which denies, in one sense, that he is outcast and renegade. Moreover, he actually starts to act from a disinterested motive. Later, after he has been tempted by an unexpected "double occasion"—the rustics' gold and the opportunity to use the countrymen to accomplish his own preferment—he says, "If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune would not suffer me." But the fact remains that he has, if only momentarily, a mind to be honest; and a change of disposition, however transient, following a change of clothes, initiates his agency.

But if his momentary disinterested impulse is aborted, so are his plans for future profit. Fortune which makes him honest, which then will not suffer him to be honest, brings about an issue which rewards neither his honest nor his dishonest impulse. And the next time we see him in the scene where the Gentlemen relate truths so filled with wonder that the truth sounds like a tale, we find him unwontedly silent. Autolycus has said that if does not succeed in making the shearers prove sheep, he will "let . . . [his] name [be] put in the book of virtue" (IV.iii.130-131). And in his attempt to gain preferment at the expense of the rustics, he certainly does not shear the sheep. On the contrary, he believes that he has done the rustics good; at least, the end result of his plans is that they meet with good fortune and he does not. For the first time, when he sees the Clown and the Shepherd approaching in their gentlemen's dress, he does not assign to them such epithets as "sheep," "puppies," "choughs," "moles." While we cannot assume that his failure has determined him to let his name be put in the book of virtue, neither can we ignore the implications in the clothes exchange, discount the signs of change in Autolycus, and assume that in the last scene with the rustics Autolycus is still the rogue, still gulling the Clown, this time with a false promise of amendment.12

From the time Autolycus plays a part in an action re-

12G. Wilson Knight, The Crown of Life, pp. 112-113, says that Autolycus in this final scene is "subscribing to the very values which we thought he scorned," that "we see him now bowing and scraping to his former gull." But to see Autolycus as transformed into toady and hypocrite is to ignore the implications in his final soliloquy.
sulting in good, albeit that good was against his will, and from the moment he willingly initiates a good act from which he does not profit, he appears to grow in understanding. Before, Autolycus has been a rebel in society, knowing he risks hanging. It is a different matter to discover that when he does good, he is not rewarded: “Now, had I not the dash of my former life in me, would preferment drop on my head,” he says (italics mine). He has said that it is a time when the unjust man thrives (IV.iv.686-687). But not only does he (like Leontes) discover that the unjust man does not thrive; he also concludes that even if he were to make amends, he would not thrive: “Had I been the finder out of this secret, it would not have relished among my other discredits” (V.ii.131-133). Yet he is finally to discover that an opportunity for thriving lies in the fancy and the faith of the Clown, “who wants but something to be a reasonable man” (IV.iv.615-616).

III

It is easy to overlook serious comment in the final dialogue between the Clown, the Shepherd, and Autolycus. One tends to be like the three Gentlemen who hurry away to be present at a birth without realizing that, if what one of them says is true, a birth is at hand. “Every wink of an eye some new grace will be born,” says the First Gentleman; then the three wise men hasten to the house of Paulina. But the scene which occurs a “wink of an eye” after the First Gentleman’s declaration parallels and foreshadows the final birth of grace. The matter of fancy and faith and their relation to the achievement of the seeming impossible is humorously developed in the final exchange between Autolycus and the rustics, and reaches its culmination in the scene when the statue is transformed into a woman.

This matter is dealt with in a pattern developing throughout the play. From the beginning Shakespeare points to the need for proper fancy, proper advisement, proper faith. The true creation may be brought about by fancy and faith, but only if the latter are rooted in truth, in nature. Out of nothing the jealous Leontes produces an unreality, because the nature of his fancy and faith limits his production to falseness. He does what Perdita is later to condemn. Though fancy, partaking of “great creating nature,” may lead to creation,
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Leontes fancies falseness "and only therefore desire[s] to breed by [it]" (IV.iv.102-103). So in a parody of creation he brings forth destruction from nothing. A danger in fancy and faith, a danger in art, is that improperly grounded they may breed such monstrous hybrids as Leontes' fancy and faith breed in Sicilia.

It is important to note that whether the end result is destruction or creation, both Leontes and Florizel are advised by fancy and faith rather than by reason. Camillo says of the self-deluded Leontes that one cannot "by . . . counsel shake / The fabric of his folly, whose foundation / Is piled upon his faith." Later, Camillo tries as vainly to reason with Florizel, who says that he is "advised" by his fancy and that failure can come only from a violation of faith (IV.iv.468 ff.). Both Leontes and Florizel find it something other than reason that makes the seeming impossible possible. Leontes says, "Affection! thy intention stabs the centre: / Thou dost make possible things not so held" (I.i.138-139). And Florizel, who says, "I am heir to my affection," does not find proper advisement in reason: reason must be obedient to fancy; if not, his senses, "better pleased with madness," will welcome madness. This speech contains a reminder of Leontes's state at the opening of the play when fancy, refusing to be ruled by reason, breeds a world of madness; but it also contains a fore-shadowing of Leontes' state at the end of the play when just before faith and fancy, refusing to be ruled by reason, create reality, Leontes says, "O sweet Paulina, / Make me to think so twenty years together! / No settled senses of the world can match / The pleasure of that madness" (V.iii.70-73). Though lack of reason may breed the monstrous, human reason cannot conceive the miraculous, the product of faith, and may improperly define the seeming impossible. The possibility that Perdita may be recovered is called by Paulina "monstrous to our human reason" (V.i.41). Nevertheless, Perdita is recovered.

The difference, then, between the fancy and the faith which breed unreality from nothing and the fancy and the faith which bring forth reality from nothing does not lie in the reason. It lies in the intent of the "affection," in whether or not the "intention" partakes of "great creating nature." To illustrate with two hypothetical situations—if Hermione were, in fact a wanton and Leontes fancied her true and had
faith in her truth, then fancy and faith might achieve a transformation; on the other hand, if she were a wanton and Leontes fancied her false and had faith in her falseness, such fancy and faith would not illuminate or amend or transform: a breeding only on a fact of falseness could yield only a revelation of falseness. And as it was, the jealous Leontes' fancy and faith were not based on any feeling which intended toward creation. It intended toward a revelation of what, even in fact, would be a diminishing of the whole truth.

The developing comment on the transforming power of right fancy and right faith informs the last scene between Autolycus and the countrymen. And one hint of this lies in a re-echoing of a significant choice and arrangement of words insistently and subtly used throughout the play. Shakespeare illustrates the operation of fancy and faith by a repetition of the words say and swear: for example, "I say thou liest, Camillo, and I hate thee," says Leontes (I.ii.300), who swears by the truth of his fancy; "I'd say he had not, / And I'll be sworn you would believe my saying," says Hermione (II.i.62-63); "I say she's dead; I'll swear't," says Paulina (III.ii.204); "So turtles pair, / That never mean to part," says Florizel, and Perdita adds, "I'll swear for 'em" (IV. iv.154-155). Then in the scene between Autolycus and the rustics, just after Autolycus has asked the Clown for pardon and good report to the Prince, there is a repetition of "saying" and "swearing," a reiteration of the phrasing which earlier in the play has helped to define the process of fancy and faith:

Clown. Give me thy hand: I will swear to the prince thou art as honest a true fellow as any is in Bohemia.
Shepherd. You may say it, but not swear it.
Clown. Not swear it, now I am a gentleman? Let boors and franklins say it, I'll swear it.
Shepherd. How if it be false, son?
Clown. If it be ne'er so false, a true gentleman may swear it in the behalf of his friend: and I'll swear to the prince thou art a tall fellow of thy hands... but I know thou art no tall fellow of thy hands... but I'll swear it, and I would thou wouldst be a tall fellow of thy hands.
Autolycus. I will prove so, sir, to my power.
(V.ii.169 ff.)

"Every wink of an eye some new grace will be born," the
First Gentleman has said. If an account of a statue's transformation into a woman is like an old tale, so is a statement that the fancy and the faith of the Clown provide Autolycus with a way to transformation. But if the comment on fancy and faith is to hold, then in this scene behind a mask of nonsense and satire, there is a suggestion that a new grace has been born.

This scene and the final scene of transformation exhibit a basic similarity. Hermione seems lost to the King: repentance and amends are not enough. But Paulina tells the King that his fancy may make him see motion in the statue, whereupon Leontes says, “The fixture of her eye has motion in 't.” Then Paulina says that he will think it lives, whereupon Leontes says, “Still, methinks, / There is an air comes from her.” Having evoked his fancy, Paulina says, “It is required / You do awake your faith.” And through fancy and faith the seeming irrevocable is revoked and Leontes comes to grace, Hermione to “better grace.” Similarly, Autolycus in his soliloquy just before he meets the rustics, reflects that even when he does what would ordinarily bring preferment and even if he were to make other amends, he cannot escape or erase his “discredits.” Then the Clown says, “I know thou art no tall fellow . . . but I'll swear it, and I would thou wouldst be.” In lines “monstrous to our human reason” the Clown declares his faith in the truth of a man he knows is false, as Leontes awakes his faith in the living nature of something he thinks is stone.

But are we to believe that the rogue responds honestly to the Clown’s words? The latter’s declaration of faith may foreshadow the act of Leontes. But does the rogue’s reaction bear any likeness to the reaction of the statue? However different the natures of the principals in the two scenes, however different the tone, it would be characteristic of Shakespeare’s technique if the comic scene reinforced important comment in the later recognition scene. And Shakespeare emphasizes the sympathetic influence of the “affection.” When the King’s story affects Perdita, her feeling in turn affects the other listeners so that all who were “most marble there changed colour” (italics mine). Though the reader has been led to surmise that Autolycus is not all rogue, the Clown does not know what the reader knows, any more than Leontes knows that the statue is alive. The possibility that Autolycus
has some truth in him and the discovery that the statue is a woman do not deny the fact of transformation or dilute Shakespeare's basic comment. Without fancy and faith Leontes must have found the statue only stone. Shakespeare underscores the effect of proper faith on both the faithful and the object of faith. In the face of the Clown's declaration, Autolycus responds with an unwonted note of caution and truth, "I will prove so, sir, to my power." The whole force and movement of image, event, and theme attests to the sincerity of Autolycus's promise and to the conclusion that Autolycus is also a "precious winner." The Clown may be a fool and Autolycus an unlikely aspirant to the role of tall man, but their very inadequacies underline Shakespeare's comment on the power of faith and the good intention.

When Autolycus directs the rustics toward Florizel's ship and thus becomes an agent in a Heaven-directed revelation, the Clown says of Autolycus, "We are blest in this man, as I may say, even blest" (IV.iv.857-858). This fancy is later supported by implications in the figurative pattern. As the secret purposes of Providence working through the agency of Paulina result in an opening of the way to grace in the court, so Providence through the agency of Autolycus (as well as the rustics), opens the way to grace in the country. The Clown's reaction to test, his exercise of fancy and faith, brings him to "better grace." Shakespeare, then, through the agency of the rogue shows how Providence, working through falsehood and seeming falsehood, elicits truth and increases the store of good. The story of Autolycus, self-robber and self-deceiver, is a springlike variation of the winter story of Leontes. The progress of the Clown from foolish credulity to a knowing affirmation of belief in the seeming impossible is a light counterpart to the movement of Leontes from folly to wisdom. The abstraction that falsehood may serve the ends of grace and better grace is delineated in the reclaiming of the rogue and in the blossoming of the erstwhile coney, as it is in the eventual joy of Leontes and Hermione.

IV

The Providential agency of Autolycus contains comment, both implicit and explicit, on the operation and nature of art. Since Providence puts falsehood in service to truth and since fancy is instrumental in the giving of "a life," Shake-
Shakespeare's insistence on the false and fanciful nature of his tale suggests an observation on the possible function of the play and the possible role of the playwright. The false tale may serve a Providential agency and add to the store of truth; the taleteller may play a Providential role and bring forth something out of nothing. He is, whether his story gives birth to miracle or monster, a midwife of sorts. And since Autolycus, on becoming an agent for good, experiences a catalytic change which speeds the dissolution of his former life and the compounding of a new life, there may be the implication that the taleteller, as he is an agent for great creative nature, partakes in some manner of permanence and divinity.

But Shakespeare more explicitly defines the potential nature of art by paralleling the effect of the tale and of music with the effect of the voice of Apollo's agent. We have noted that the repentant Leontes, on hearing the fancy expressed by Paulina, implies that its effect is an unsettling of the "senses of the world." And when the country folk hear the ballads, "all their other senses stuck in ears...no hearing, no feeling, but my sir's song, and admiring the nothing of it" (IV.iv.619 ff.). Cleomenes, at Delphos, undergoes a similar experience: "The ear-deafening voice o' the oracle, /...so surprised my sense, / That I was nothing" (III.1.9-11). So the speaking of Paulina's fancy, the singing of the ballads, and the speaking of the god's word by "Apollo's great divine" all lead to an unsettling of the senses: it is a fancy, a "nothing," that entrances Paulina's and "my sir's" hearers, but like the sound "kin to Jove's thunder," it effects an abrogation of physical reality and self. On the other hand, the jealous Leontes, in proof of the honesty of his fancy, cites the evidence of his settled senses, an awareness of self and physical reality: to Antigonus he says, "You smell this business with a sense as cold / As is a dead man's nose: but I do see't and feel't, /...and see withal / The instruments that feel" (II. i.151 ff.). Similarly Autolycus says later: "I understand the business, I hear it: to have an open ear, a quick eye, and a nimble hand, is necessary for a cut-purse; a good nose is requisite also, to smell out work for the other senses. I see this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive" (IV.iv.683 ff.). Both Leontes and Autolycus prove wrong about the "business" so palpable to their senses. In short, the "senses of the world" may bear false witness. And the effect of the
oracle's voice on Cleomenes points to the inadequacy of the human senses to contain or define the other-worldly. The creative artist, then, cannot be circumscribed by physical appearances, and creative art, like the divine word, must nullify the self and loosen the bonds of physical reality.

But the nature of the art that gives "a life" is not only defined by a "putting off" of physical reality; it is also defined by a "putting on" of spiritual reality. When the music "awakes" the stone, we are reminded of Autolycus's songs "of all sizes," of the smock one would think "were a she-angel." As the unusual weeds give to each part of Perdita "a life," so the music, the effect of Leontes' fancy and faith, gives "a life" to Hermione. It would appear that the artist cannot limit himself to the seeming possible if he aims at awaking the stone.

In The Winter's Tale nothing is quite what it seems to be, and the line between reality and unreality is hard to find when a thief who pretends to rob himself pretends the truth and a fool exhibits in foolishness wisdom. Nevertheless, though Shakespeare shows us that reality may wear a mask of unreality and also that seeming may help to define truth, we boggle at "impossibilities." It is "impossible" that Autolycus could change so radically at the end of the play, as it is "impossible" that Leontes could change so at the beginning. Quite aside from the argument that these changes may be neither so radical nor so sudden as they appear on the surface, there is the possibility that Shakespeare purposefully encourages this very doubt. "Whither goest?" sing the country girls to Autolycus in the ballad of two maids wooing a man. Despite a careful repetition of such figurative hints, Shakespeare also makes it almost impossible for us to believe that the worldly and sceptical rogue is wooed by truth as well as falsehood and eventually chooses the right road. Yet are we not repeatedly asked to believe in the possibility of the seeming impossible?

Whatever view one may take of Autolycus's final words, it cannot be denied that in a tale it is peculiarly fitting that the false man should be a taleteller and that in a play where grace and better grace come out of evil, a false man should be an agent for truth. It is fitting that a man of masks, who in his last appearance on the stage comes before others without a disguise for the first time, should be a representative...
of a Providence whose "secret purposes" are revealed at the end of the play. The rogue, whom the Clown swears is not a rogue but a tall fellow, stands at the center of a play which masks a truth no one would deny, in a winter's tale, something no one would believe.

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