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THE WINTER'S TALE
 William Shakespeare

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 former editor of the *Shakespeare Quarterly*
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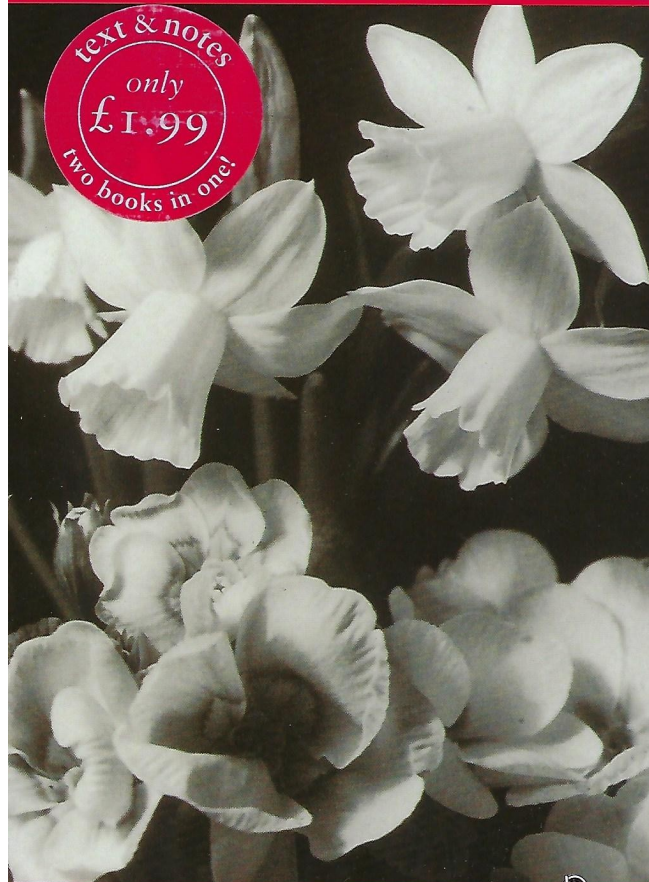
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THE WINTER'S TALE



THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

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FOREWORD TO *The Winter's Tale*

In the autumn of 1983 I missed a train. I had been visiting Lincoln to see the opening performances of the Royal Shakespeare Company's touring production of *Romeo and Juliet* in a sports hall on the edge of town. I used the intervening one and a half hours before the next fast train back to London to visit the town's beautiful medieval cathedral, which sits on top of a hill overlooking the Lincolnshire countryside. For some reason, the huge interior had been emptied of chairs and I found myself in this thrilling, deserted space: it was, at the same time, sacred, yet somehow ready and waiting to be filled with humanity. It seemed absurd that we were performing Shakespeare half a mile away in a volleyball court when we should be there – a place built for the community to congregate in. I left Lincoln greatly excited, determined to bring a Shakespeare play to this space in the following year.

I quickly lit upon a play that had fascinated me since drama school days, yet which I believed was almost unstageable; a play that has a sacred heart, yet requires a real sense of place. I decided to take *The Winter's Tale* on a tour, visiting towns and villages around the British Isles. Whenever possible we would seek out the buildings in which that particular community traditionally gathered. We would perform it promenade, with only a few seats for the elderly and disabled, and we would inhabit the great sheep-shearing feast with the very people of that area, sitting them at tables with the cast, feeding and watering them in a great village fête.

These ideas released the play for me, and my love and fascination for it grew during the rehearsal period in the summer of 1984 and during the tour, which, after its journeys round England, Ireland and Poland, where it played to hushed packed houses during the Popescu trials, finally arrived in London, where we performed in the beautiful Hawksmoor church in Spitalfields.

I became convinced that it is a great healing play, both through the extraordinary spiritual journey that is undergone by the protagonists and also through the sane, healthy influence that the humble Bohemians have on their mighty masters. It is Time, of course, that allows wounds to mend and grow strong again, and Shakespeare puts the Time chorus at the very centre of this broken-backed, fractured story. It seemed somehow symbolic that so often in 1984–5 we were visiting communities that were divided against themselves: in Poland certainly, but also in a number of mining districts in the hateful months of the long strike. We hoped that somehow Shakespeare's play sowed seeds of harmony.

Shakespeare's starting point is the most bitter and destructive human emotion, sexual jealousy. It is a theme that gave rise to some of his most violent writing – *Othello* and *Troilus and Cressida* are examples. It is a fiery, all-consuming, blind force which erupts on the play unheralded like a scream, a fist. It is highlighted by two brilliant devices. First, its unexpected nature – no one before or afterwards sees any evidence of its cause. It is Leontes' nightmare, his private hell, which gives us some of the most extraordinary convulsed, explosive monologues in literature. The second device is the introduction of the child Mamillius into the scene. On the page this is of minor importance but on the stage it gives the scene a pair of innocent, mostly silent eyes that watch and somehow bring into focus Leontes' monstrous behaviour and put into relief his suffering. We added to this effect by making the whole of the first act a party for Polixenes' departure, at which Mamillius was a beloved and treasured guest, allowed to stay up late as a treat.

Shakespeare develops his theme in a structure that is bold and highly dramatic. Leontes seeks to convince others that Hermione is an adulteress, fails, and, like all tyrants in history, takes refuge in revenge, fantasy and self-imposed isolation. The play, which begins with a huge public celebration, quickly moves to trios, duets, and monologues. Shakespeare's dramatic camera moves deeper and deeper into the heart of Leontes' mansion of darkness. Echoes of absolutism and the most tawdry domestic violence abound. Leontes eventually emerges to preside at a show trial (such resonance in Warsaw in 1984!) which is his nemesis. Had

Leontes killed himself on the news of his wife's death, Shakespeare would have written a near-perfect tragedy in the French tradition: a chamber-piece demonstrating the folly of blind jealousy, enacted within an astonishingly rigorous time discipline. Here he uses, to breathtaking effect, the double-time scheme. On the one hand it has taken a calendar month for the ambassadors Cleomines and Dion to return from Delphi; the other, much more dominant, dramatic clock, tells a story of one long night of tribulation: jealousy leading to domestic violence, leading to a premature birth, leading to the presentation of the child to the father, leading to the interruption by the returning ambassadors, leading, the following morning, to the trial scene. This is what the audience experiences, this is what the director and actors must create.

Then a miracle happens. A baby is saved from certain death as a tasty morsel for a hungry bear. We drew attention to the dramatic nature of this event in the 1984 production by placing the baby on a huge sheet of cloth and giving dozens of people a corner each, with the responsibility of saving the child. In a new production I directed in Stratford in 1992, we introduced a miraculous intervention by the spirit of Hermione, who appeared to Antigonus and the Bear.

The second half of the play mirrors, parodies, and reconstitutes the ingredients of the first half, for Time has done his work. If Part One is a near-perfect tragedy, Part Two is the near-perfect comedy, with all the traditional ingredients of runaway lovers and possessive partners, clowns and villains, songs and dances, vicissitudes leading to a happy ending. Indeed, one could argue that the long Act IV scene iv is the model for the modern musical comedy. As the first half was dominated by the Polixenes' party, the second half centres around the sheep-shearing feast. I relished all these ingredients and found my solution for the almost unstageable pastoral by enlisting the very local community that I had imagined thronging the empty nave of Lincoln Cathedral. In my later production, I knew I had to create a real, recognizable community, and drew inspiration from the work of Stanley Spencer, who painted sacred subjects in the context of a small English village between the wars.

Shakespeare's first audience would have approached the Statue

scene with the innocence of children. But even now the magic casts its spell. He goes out of his way to persuade us that Hermione is indeed dead. Antigonus, the most loyal and trustworthy counselor in the play, dreams that she has died; Paulina, his straight-speaking wife, says the same. We believe them, we suspend our disbelief, we willingly participate in the ritual of theatre, the creative conspiracy of affirmative silence. We think it's probably not true, but we readily agree to believe.

The awakening of the statue has the same power of confirmation of faith as the taking of bread and water – the transubstantiation. Matter, in their case grief and cynicism, is transformed. *The Winter's Tale* is unusual, if not unique, among Shakespeare's plays in that the entire plot revolves around the authenticity of a divine prophecy. Apollo allows the possibility that 'that which is lost' can be found. One woman, Paulina, believes in the god's words and conceals Hermione for sixteen years. This is an act of faith, hidden from the world, indeed hidden from the story of the play for a long time. In Paulina, the embryo of an idea gestates for sixteen years and finally gives birth to – what? A hoax which brings about reconciliation for the protagonists, and for the audience the possibility that suffering may have an end.

For me, the play is a fable which tells of a man who had a second chance. Everyone has done something that they profoundly regret. Art, the theatre, reveals a pattern of redemption. It is a play of infinite humanity.

Adrian Noble

ADRIAN NOBLE is the artistic director of the Royal Shakespeare Company. Educated at Bristol University, he began his professional training at the London Drama Centre and from there went to work in both community and young people's theatre at the Trinity Arts Centre, Birmingham. He joined the RSC in 1980 and quickly established a reputation as one of the leading directors of his generation. Most recently he has directed *The Winter's Tale*, *King Lear*, *Macbeth* and *Hamlet*, with Kenneth Branagh in the title role.

EDITOR'S INTRODUCTION TO *The Winter's Tale*

The Winter's Tale is one of the 'divine comedies' with which Shakespeare completed his tenure as the most gifted dramatist of England's golden age.

Though they all have what can be described as happy endings, the five romances that came at the conclusion of Shakespeare's professional life differ from his earlier comedies and tragicomedies in the earnestness with which they engage the grim realities of 'State and Woe' (*Henry VIII*, Prologue, line 3). In *Pericles* (1607–8), *Cymbeline* (1609–10), *The Winter's Tale* (1610–11), and *Henry VIII* (1612–13), for example, we either witness or hear reports of the demise of *dramatis personae*, and in *The Tempest* (1611) we sense that death is a real danger until the 'Release' which occurs when a victorious but ultimately compassionate Prospero bestows 'Virtue' upon enemies who deserve to be struck down by an outraged Heaven's 'Vengeance' (V.i.11, 27–28).

Romance is a term that might suggest sentimentality, and even escapism, but Shakespeare's experiments in the genre force us to confront a universe in which evil is omnipresent and in which even the most ordinary of pilgrimages are fraught with genuine peril. As a group, the dramas that signal the autumnal phase of the playwright's career reverberate with intimations of the numinous, and they frequently imply that the only way to evade the world's snares is through some benign suspension of Nature's normal operations.

Taken together, these mature tragicomedies offer a panoramic view of the human condition. Often they do so by emphasizing that the occurrences they feature are widely dispersed in time, location, and circumstance, as in *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter's Tale*. On other occasions they do so by basing their

events upon action that took place in the murky past, as in *The Tempest*, or by orienting their action to events that will transpire in some remote future, as in *Henry VIII*.

Most of them contain incidents that seem shocking, if not wildly implausible, as when a horrified Antigonus, having set foot upon an ominously overcast 'Seacoast of Bohemia', exits pursued by a bear in *The Winter's Tale*. They place an unusual reliance on storms, shipwrecks, and other 'acts of God' to advance their characteristically intricate plots, and in patterns that recall *The Comedy of Errors*, a proto-romance from Shakespeare's earlier years, they focus on families whose fate is to become scattered on land or at sea, to wander for seemingly interminable periods of distress, and then to be astonishingly reassembled at the close. When calamities are averted in these works, it is usually because of reversals that stem from unanticipated changes of heart or from unprecedented visitations by 'the Powres above' (*Cymbeline*, V.v.467). Cordelia-like daughters, maidens with symbolic names or pseudonyms (Marina in *Pericles*, Fidele in *Cymbeline*, Perdita in *The Winter's Tale*, Miranda in *The Tempest*), intervene as instruments of special grace, and it eventually becomes evident that one of their most important roles is to restore hope and perception to fathers who have lost their bearings and would otherwise perish in a welter of guilt and grief.

Rather than conceal their improbability or disguise the devices they deploy to forestall calamities that look inevitable, Shakespeare's romances tend to revel in their own artifice, on the one hand reminding theatregoers that what they are experiencing is only make-believe, on the other hand laying the foundation for some climactic marvel that will turn out to have been the *raison d'être* of the drama. In these titles what initially impress us as opaque 'Fumes', impenetrable to 'clearer Reason' (*The Tempest*, V.i.67–68), magically transfigure themselves into designer clouds with silver linings. 'Things dying' there may be, but in the cosmos of these latter-day mystery plays they almost always become metamorphosed into, or serve as precursors of, 'things new borne' (*The Winter's Tale*, III.iii.117).

Like the tragedies, Shakespeare's romances are suffused with suffering; but in a way that sets them apart from most of the tragedies, they depict pain as purgative and even beautifying. In these mellow tragicomedies 'the Seas threaten', and they sometimes drown, but in the last analysis they show themselves to be 'merciful': for if there is a first principle of romance ecology, it would seem to be this, that anything that can be made 'rich and strange' will be recycled and refined until it emerges as an emblem of the Providence that burnished it and made it lustrous (*The Tempest*, V.i.177, lli.399).

When he directed his attention to *The Winter's Tale*, probably around 1610–11, Shakespeare seems to have taken particular delight in twitting the ghost of a curmudgeonly predecessor. Back in 1592, in a diatribe advertising itself as Robert Greene's *Groatsworth of Wit*, an embittered veteran of London's literary wars had warned his fellow playwrights to beware of an 'upstart Crow', a provincial 'Shakes-scene' who had recently come to the metropolis as a lowly actor and was now bedecking himself in the 'feathers' of his betters. If Greene was the actual progenitor of the pamphlet bearing his name (the publication came out after his death, and some scholars now believe its true author to have been Henry Chettle, Greene's testamentary executor), and if he was accusing a young man from Stratford of plagiarism as well as presumption, the dead poet's bones must have done back-flips when word got out some two decades later that his erstwhile nemesis was still up to the same old tricks.

For the first three acts of *The Winter's Tale*, and for much of the fifth-act finale, Shakespeare appropriated material from *Pandosto*, *The Triumph of Time*, a prose novella that Greene had seen through the press in 1588.* Then, as if in an effort to make his pilfering impossible to ignore, he larded Act IV with episodes

* For comments about Shakespeare's use of *Pandosto*, see the selections in 'Perspectives on *The Winter's Tale*' by Nicholas Rowe (1709), Charles Gildon (1710), Charlotte Lennox (1753), Thomas Campbell (1838), E. M. W. Tillyard (1938), Inga-Stina Ewbank (1964), Northrop Frye (1965), Andrew Gurr (1983), and Howard Felperin (1985).

and phrases lifted from Greene's 1591–2 'Cony-catching' tracts about the swindlers and petty thieves who lay in wait for unwary travellers on the highways and byways of sixteenth-century England.

Autolicus, the merry-hearted rogue who enters *The Winter's Tale* in IV.iii, employs many of the same ruses that Greene had advised his urban and rural contemporaries to watch for. Like the sly playwright who invented him, Shakespeare's quick-thinking cutpurse is a 'Snapper-up of unconsidered Trifles' (IV.iii.26–27). He notes, paradoxically, that when he wanders 'here, and there', he most goes 'right' (IV.iii.17–18). He observes that though he is not 'naturally honest', he is 'so sometimes by Chance' (IV.iv.735–36). And as he weaves his way through the throngs he robs and cheats with such aplomb, he provides the dramatist with a wry means of thanking an old detractor for the 'charitable Office' (IV.iii.81) he has done a youthful rival. After all, not only has the compliant Greene supplied the narrative skeleton for the primary plot of *The Winter's Tale*; he has discharged an equally valuable service for the subplot by enumerating the techniques that confidence men like Autolicus use to hoodwink their unsuspecting victims.

But of course Robert Greene was not Shakespeare's only source for *The Winter's Tale*. As he had so often done in the past, the playwright also capitalized upon his lifelong love of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*. To introduce the second half of the drama, for example, he presented the return of 'the Sweet o'th' Year' (IV.iii.3) in a manner that would echo the Roman poet's version of the myth of Proserpina, the lass whom Pluto had abducted and installed as Queen of his gloomy Underworld. Shakespeare knew that after her offended mother Ceres protested to the Olympian council, Proserpina was authorized to spend the sunny months of the calendar helping the Goddess of Bounty ensure Nature's fruitfulness. So when he composed the great sheep-shearing scene that counterbalances the icy beginning of *The Winter's Tale*, he endowed 'The Queen of Curds and Cream' (IV.iv.161) with many

of the attributes that Ovid had ascribed to Prosperina as an embodiment of spring, summer, and harvest-time.

In Act V the playwright returned to Ovid for a brilliant variation on the story of Pygmalion, a sculptor so devoted to the female form he had carved in stone that he was able to persuade the gods to instil it with life. In this instance Shakespeare recast the myth so that the transformation which occurs at the climax of *The Winter's Tale* can be viewed as an antidote to the perverse metamorphoses that have resulted from earlier misconstructions by the play's protagonist.

As the play opens, Leontes, King of Sicilia, is possessed by the conviction that his wife Hermione has committed adultery with his closest friend, the visiting King Polixenes of Bohemia. What seems evident to everyone else, most notably Leontes' faithful steward Camillo and Hermione's lady-in-waiting Paulina, is that the King's suspicions are utterly groundless. Unfortunately Leontes is under the cloud of a black humour: he is incapable of hearing either the concerns expressed by his advisers or the pronouncements of the Delphic oracle that declare his loving wife innocent. Because of his jealousy he ends up divesting himself of Polixenes (who flees Sicilia when Camillo informs him of Leontes' wrath), his son Mamilius (whose untimely passing coincides with what the indignant Paulina declares to be a mortal swoon by the Queen), and his infant daughter Perdita (whom Leontes brands a bastard and orders to be abandoned in some exposed locale where the elements will prove fatal to her).

Once the King has been bombarded with what he interprets as signs that the heavens are rendering judgement on his behaviour, he snaps out of his seizure and vows to do penance for the rest of his days. By this point it is too late to reinstate his devastated court or to call back Antigonus and the bark that has taken him and Hermione's 'Blossom' (III.iii.45) to the shores of Bohemia. It is not too late, however, for Leontes' creator to set in motion a series of happenings that will nurture the King's remorse and gradually replenish his 'Faith' (V.iii.94).

Sixteen years pass, and then at the moment when he least expects it a king who had grown accustomed to 'Loss' suddenly finds himself 'standing in Rich Place' (V.ii.60, l.ii.6–7). To his joy he is reunited with his daughter, now betrothed to the disobedient, fugitive son of Leontes' boyhood soul-mate, and it falls to him to reconcile a radiant new couple with the bridegroom-to-be's furious father. A short while later, having been escorted to a chamber in which he is permitted to view a just-finished statue of his former Queen, Leontes suffers an 'Affliction' with 'a Taste as sweet / As any Cordial comfort' (V.iii.75–76). The issue of this agony is 'a Chance which does redeem all Sorrows' (*King Lear*, V.iii.264), and in a consummation that looks forward to the revelations that seal *The Tempest*, the reformed Leontes sees a 'World ransom'd' bloom from what he had long resigned himself to regard as a world 'destroyed' (V.ii.18).

It would be going too far, perhaps, to portray *The Winter's Tale* as a 'miracle play'. But if the responses of nearly four centuries of enthralled theatregoers provide a reliable index of its enduring appeal, this remarkable drama will continue to stir audiences in ways that can only be explained by the unique recreational talents of a wonder-worker who 'bears Celestial Liquor' (*The Tempest*, II.ii.126).

THE TEXT OF THE EVERYMAN SHAKESPEARE

Background

THE EARLY PRINTINGS OF SHAKESPEARE'S WORKS
Many of us enjoy our first encounter with Shakespeare when we're introduced to *Julius Caesar* or *Macbeth* at school. It may therefore surprise us that neither of these tragedies could ever have been read, let alone studied, by most of the playwright's contemporaries. They began as scripts for performance and, along with seventeen other titles that never saw print during Shakespeare's lifetime, they made their inaugural appearance as 'literary' works seven years after his death, in the 1623 collection we know today as the First Folio.

The Folio contained thirty-six titles in all. Of these, half had been issued previously in the small paperbacks we now refer to as quartos.* Like several of the plays first published in the Folio, the most trustworthy of the quarto printings appear to have been set either from Shakespeare's own manuscripts or from faithful copies of them. It's not impossible that the poet himself prepared some of these works for the press, and it's intriguing to imagine him reviewing proof-pages as the words he'd written for actors to speak and embody were being transposed into the type that readers would filter through their eyes, minds, and imaginations. But, alas, there's no indisputable evidence that Shakespeare had any direct involvement with the publication of these early editions of his plays.

What about the scripts that achieved print for the first time in the Folio? Had the dramatist taken any steps to give the permanency of book form to those texts? We don't know. All we can say is that when he fell fatally ill in 1616, Shakespeare was

* Quartos derived their name from the four-leaf units of which these small books were comprised: large sheets of paper that had been folded twice after printing to yield four leaves, or eight pages. Folios, volumes with twice the page-size of quartos, were put together from two-leaf units: sheets that had been folded once after printing to yield four pages.