

## METACRITICISM AND MATERIALITY: THE CASE OF SHAKESPEARE'S *THE WINTER'S TALE*

BY WILLIAM R. MORSE

New Historical criticism of Renaissance literature over the past decade has not only effected a revolution in the way that critics read the literature and its relation to the culture that produces it, but has helped us to reconceive the nature of culture itself. Nevertheless, if the great strength of the school's approach has been the fertility and subtlety of its analyses of the cultural density which produces and is produced by literature, the theoretical models by which it has organized its reading have at times seemed inadequate, and thus misleading. The prevalent New Historicist conception of a dominant absolutist ideology centered in the court, in particular, seems in some ways simplistic, in others misconceived, and has generally tended towards a hegemonic conception of the nature of "dominant ideologies" that misrepresents in its totalizing impetus the inevitably multiform pressures of any culture understood not as historical object but rather as evolving process. There is a critical *aporia*, a hidden teleological hindsight at work, for instance, in the elaboration of a theory of cultural containment, the appropriation of all discourse by a unitary dominant ideology, that progressively rejects the autonomy, and thus ultimately the reality, of all subversion. More significantly, the prevalent New Historicist analysis of the dominant Renaissance ideology, the absolutist court of Elizabeth and James, is certainly oversimplified, and perhaps misconceived in historical terms. Given the comments by Anthony Easthope on the ideological implications of the rise of iambic pentameter, the analyses by Jonathan Dollimore and Catherine Belsey of the inscription in Renaissance drama of the liberal subject, and most especially the analysis of the emergence of "the discourse of modernism" by Timothy Reiss,<sup>1</sup> the whole question of the degree to which absolutist ideology was dominant, and indeed of whether it is best conceived as a residual element of an older discourse, or the first articulation of an emergent modern one, remains open.<sup>2</sup>

Beyond this specific problem lies a larger question, for the totalizing tendencies of the New Historicism could be seen to follow

from a synchronic hypostatization of historical process. As Raymond Williams puts the issue:

In what I have called “epochal” analysis, a cultural process is seized as a cultural system, with determinate dominant features. . . . This emphasis on dominant and definitive lineaments and features is important and often, in practice, effective. But it then often happens that its methodology is preserved for the very different function of historical analysis, in which a sense of movement within what is ordinarily abstracted as a system is crucially necessary, especially if it is to connect with the future as well as with the past. . . . Such errors are avoidable if, while retaining the epochal hypothesis, we can find terms which recognize not only “stages” and “variations” but the internal dynamic relations of any actual process. (121–22)

Exactly insofar as the New Historicism fails to address these dynamics of culture, and begins to totalize the “dominant feature” of its “epochal analysis”—the hegemony of the court—thus far it is actually ahistorical in an important sense.

Related to this confusion is a certain imprecision in the use of the key term “ideology” itself. A number of recent critics, including Williams, have followed Louis Althusser’s lead in complicating and extending the conception of ideology in response to the question of its relation to culture.<sup>3</sup> Althusser develops the argument that, since “ideology has a material existence,” we must distinguish between on the one hand the traditional understanding of particular ideologies, implemented “by a ‘clique’ . . . who are the authors of the great ideological mystification” (165) and on the other “ideology in general . . . omnipotent and transhistorical” (160–61), of which it can be said that “there is no practice except by and in an ideology” (170). Although Williams uses the distinct terms “ideology” and “hegemony” in discussing these two senses of ideology, he develops a similar understanding based on Gramsci’s distinction between “rule” and “hegemony”:

“Rule” is expressed in directly political forms and in times of crisis by direct or effective coercion. But the more normal situation is a complex interlocking of political, social, and cultural forces, and “hegemony” . . . is either this or the active social and cultural forces which are its necessary elements. . . . Hegemony is a concept which at once includes and goes beyond two powerful earlier concepts: that of “culture” as a “whole social process” [shaped by individuals] . . . and that of “ideology” [as] the projection of a particular class interest. (108)

From this distinction he comments that “it is in just this recognition of the *wholeness* of the process that the concept of ‘hegemony’ goes beyond ‘ideology’ ” (108–9).

It is on the basis of Williams’s work that Dollimore distinguishes between the “cognitive view” of ideology, “the view of ideology as a process of conspiracy on the part of the rulers and misrecognition on the part of the ruled,” and a “materialist view,” which identifies the incompleteness of the cognitive view by stressing “the extent to which ideology has a material existence; that is, ideology exists in, and as, the social practices which constitute people’s lives. . . . Ideology becomes . . . the very terms in which we perceive the world, almost . . . the condition and grounds of consciousness itself” (9). Dollimore, following Williams, makes the valuable argument that the two articulations are “inextricably related” (10), and both are necessary to a full understanding of Renaissance culture. Nevertheless, he emphasizes the broader definition in his own analysis. This “materialist” analysis of ideology is at the heart of his reading of Renaissance drama as “radical tragedy,” and at the heart, too, of the materialist disagreement with New Historical readings of the “dominant ideology” of Renaissance England. A good deal of the recent debate can be traced to a confusion of these two distinct senses of the term, for a focus on cognitive rather than material ideology is the source of the emphasis on the hegemony (using the term now in the New Historical rather than in Williams’s sense) of the absolutist court.

A consideration of even so seemingly apolitical a play as Shakespeare’s *The Winter’s Tale* can help in representing the openness, the contingency, the play of culture and its inscription in the literary text, that are at work in this particular historical moment; not only does the text raise questions about the dominance of the court ideology in relation to the emergent modern discourse (this new discourse is itself clearly inscribed in the play), but it suggests ways in which the playwright is, if himself shaped by the culture’s discourse, also consciously critical of it.<sup>4</sup> We may accept Fredric Jameson’s dictum that we must “always historicize!”—that we must respect “the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts [and] the political perspective not as some supplementary method, not as an optional auxiliary to other interpretive methods current today . . . but rather as the absolute horizon of all reading and all interpretation.”<sup>5</sup> It doesn’t necessarily follow, however, that the drama can be reduced to the monolithic organ of Jacobean court

ideology described by Leonard Tennenhouse<sup>6</sup> or to Stephen Greenblatt's radically contained "voice of subversion" that is actually "produced by the affirmations of order," nor that every aesthetic text addresses itself to the ideological in explicit, overt ways.<sup>7</sup> We must attend as well to the more fundamental epistemological grounds or ideological *structures* interrogated by these texts.

Language is the most obvious such structure. Reiss, for instance, carefully elaborates the complex ways in which discursive practices in the sixteenth century generally inscribe themselves within the consciousness of their particular practitioners. He comments nevertheless that at this historical moment the culture "teetered in the gap between an old discourse of analogies and a new one of analysis. But no longer were these presented as contradictory elements within a single class of discourse, or even as a class and a 'subclass' of emergent elements. . . . a *choice* was possible" (168).<sup>8</sup> In the moment between the rising discourse's emergence from occlusion and its subsequent domination and suppression of the older orthodoxy, contradictions were briefly visible within the culture which both stimulated and authorized dissension. From this perspective Dollimore is correct to speak of "the period's developing awareness of ideology" (11).

Reiss argues that the distinction between an older analogical discourse of "patterning" and the modern "analytico-referential" discourse is to be found in "a passage from what one might call a discursive *exchange within* the world to the expression of knowledge as a reasoning *practice upon* the world" (30).<sup>9</sup> This suggests that absolutist culture itself, which deploys older, residual cultural elements in quite self-conscious ways, might more fruitfully be considered a preliminary manifestation of the newer discourse rather than the residual defender and champion of "custom and antiquity." As Stephen Orgel puts it, courtly mythology "was a mythology consciously designed to validate and legitimate an authority that must have seemed, to what was left of the old aristocracy, dangerously *arriviste*."<sup>10</sup>

From another perspective, Dollimore's insistence that Shakespeare's work be related to the skepticism of such figures as Machiavelli and Montaigne is especially promising because it emphasizes Shakespeare's self-conscious alienation from the absolutist discourse of the court; in raising the possibility that subversive tendencies of the Shakespearean drama might only be incompletely contained, he restores to the text a radical political open-

ness. In particular, Dollimore cites the possibility of “the appropriation of dominant discourses” (27) by dissident elements within the culture, and his theoretical framework can clearly be applied not only to particular performances and texts but to forms of thought and expression as well.<sup>11</sup> I would argue that at least the later Shakespearean romances provide a perfect example: the appropriation of a genre closely associated with the older metaphysical discourse in order to interrogate and recast that discourse. As in his earlier experiments with both comic and tragic form, Shakespeare’s self-conscious and artificial use of romance produces a disengagement within his audience that works toward the demystification of authority through the deconstruction of the transcendent conceptions of metaphysics and rationality that privilege and sustain it. Indeed, the relevance of romance itself could be conceived of as a structural subversion of the dominant discourse, bringing to fruition in Paulina’s and Prospero’s art the ironic challenge discernible as early as *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* to all that “cool reason omprehends.”

At the same time, however, because Shakespearean drama enacts a materialist critique of metaphysics, it is equally antagonistic to the emergent analytico-referential discourse. While Franco Moretti has persuasively argued that Shakespearean tragedy actively participates in the historic deconsecration of the absolutist monarch that eventuates in the execution of Charles I in 1649, the subversive implications of these works reach well beyond the status of the monarchy in itself. Moretti suggests that Renaissance tragedy defines the absolute monarch precisely in terms of an absolute disjunction between reason and will, will expressed in the *power* to act free of all rational restraint (11–12), thus effectually demystifying the monarch’s metaphysical authority. But Shakespearean drama is preoccupied quite generally with that power of the human will subversive of all discursive reason, the power of the body of desire that is anterior to all rational purposing, and Shakespeare’s critique of essentialist rationalism cannot but be equally subversive of an emergent culture whose fundamental empowering assumption remains, if reconstituted, human rationality.<sup>12</sup> The appropriation throughout the corpus of a dominant terminology of imagination, dream, and fantasy that inverts the normative schemes of psychic hierarchy works insistently to bring into question the grounds of the emergent discourse.<sup>13</sup>

Not only in *King Lear*, but in *Hamlet*, *Troilus and Cressida*,

*Macbeth* and *Antony and Cleopatra* as well, discursive rationality is cast in the role of self-serving and self-deceiving mask. The plays consistently invoke the medieval image of "right reason," Aquinas's *ratio superior*, dramatizing its absence as the context for their staging of the *ratio inferior* or discursive reason, the political policy and calculation that pass for reason in the emergent discourse of the Renaissance political world.<sup>14</sup> Thus they insistently demystify not only the motives but the vocabulary of this political landscape. The widespread current critical habit of reading Shakespeare as a proleptic deconstructionist could be seen as a recognition of his recurrent staging of this will-ful ideological world. If, in *The Winter's Tale* for example, the Bohemian pastoral of act 4 draws its energy from a complex interplay of the audience's attraction to and awareness of the pastoral vision, the earlier acts are equally involved in eliciting a dual response to the more overtly political activity of Leontes.

From this perspective we might immediately note that the romances evolve within an ideological landscape where the old regime has already been consigned to a residual position: far from addressing the absolutist culture of the court as a dominant ideology to be subverted, *The Winter's Tale* works on a theater audience's evolving, if as yet unarticulated, sense of absolutism's tangential status as it proceeds to other issues. So far from inscribing the mystifications of royalist idolatry within its presentation, the play actively assumes the typicality of the royal family and its psychic drama.<sup>15</sup> Leontes, the heir of Othello and Lear, is in need of no deconsecration before he can play his role of jealous husband: as Moretti implies in his discussion of "the birth of (the audience from the structure of) tragedy" (19–20), Renaissance tragedy has already created an audience sufficiently self-assured in its ability to discriminate and judge that such strategies would be superfluous. To read Leontes as an example of Moretti's tyrant is exactly to articulate the single most conventional aspect of the entire play, a founding assumption rather than a vital issue.<sup>16</sup>

This distance or disengagement of the audience from the character and fate of the stage monarch marks the degree to which the culture's emergent subjectivity in both its materialist and essentialist manifestations has already progressed. Whatever the commitment of the court faction around James I to the ideology of absolutism, whatever their estimate of the hegemony of their position in 1610, the evidence of the drama suggests that the emergent ideol-

ogy is already achieving cultural dominance, consigning the absolutist culture of the court to a residual status thirty years before political events confirm the shift. Indeed, Leontes can be read much more coherently as a “man” than as a king, as a representation of the new essentialist individual inscribed as a subject within a new discursive practice. Whatever emotional claims Leontes makes on an audience stem not from his metaphysical confrontation with fortune or destiny, but quite distinctly from the character’s confrontation with his own self-representation as a subject. The impetus to jealousy is coincident with the impetus to self-representation, and the need to particularize and denote that self within a rational field of knowledge is the underlying motivation of the king’s dementia. Belsey observes that “the subject of liberal humanism is required to know . . . [and this] knowledge is knowledge of things and people” (55). This observation coincides with the characterization of Leontes (as we shall see) and marks the play’s participation in the emergent discourse.

Criticism of the play has traditionally been vexed by a divergence in Leontes’s characterization between the emblematic and the realistic, most usually associated with a tension in the play between the demands of an archaic genre and a realistic psychology. But if we conceive of the unrealistic aspects of Leontes’s characterization—the abrupt onset and, later, rejection, of jealousy, the absoluteness of his positions, his blindness to the coherence of opposing arguments—as conventional romance elements that serve the playwright’s purposes, effecting the disengagement of a more sophisticated audience, we are left with a characterization that seems to a modern sensibility psychologically acute exactly because it embodies the modern essentialist conception of an autonomous, independent consciousness. In particular, the characterization of Leontes is carefully grounded in habits of self-contained self-representation, a positivist appropriation of unproblematic and external “nature,” and most centrally in the valorizing of discursive rationality itself.

If the representation of the self is to be fixed or centered in the new ideology, independent of the medieval order of the world inscribed within a divine *logos*, external reality must be hypostatized within the domain of consciousness, and this is accomplished by the promulgation of a nature fixed and essential beyond the vagaries of mutability and metamorphosis. Leontes, like the new man, assumes the coincidence of the logical field of discourse and the natural order of the world.<sup>17</sup> Speaking now of his self-perception

rather than the dramatic reality, his characteristic mode of address to the world in the opening acts is both "realistic" and rational: he is realistic in his disposition to judge of events within the framework of a preconceived conception of nature and the natural in human nature, and he is rational in the course of deductions which issue from this realism. The evaluation of his position proceeds in the context of a worldly common sense ("there have been . . . cuckolds ere now, and many a man there is . . ." [1.2.190–91]), and his most characteristic rhetorical formula is the logical dichotomy: "I have trusted thee, Camillo, . . . but" either "thou art not honest; or, if thou inclin'st that way, thou art a coward . . ." (1.2.235–43).<sup>18</sup>

Leontes's preoccupation with rationality is a particular effect of the character's place in a discourse of essentialist individualism: reason becomes a crucial concept within the play because it represents an authorizing ground for the individualism that Leontes pursues, fixing the play of significance within language and culture in order to stabilize the position of unified subject. In the romances more generally reason is revealed as a key ideological concept in the occlusion or suppression of those elements of cognition and self-knowledge resistant to the articulation of the essentialist subject. On the one hand the property of individuals, the locus of self-consciousness and a prime source of the stability and authority of the individual, on the other it serves to demonize and peripheralize other elements in the individual's consciousness such as fantasy and desire that would blur or undermine the sense of coherence. As a species of Galilean lens it distances the individual consciousness from the world of observable phenomena, thus resisting the metamorphic play of language that would work to draw the self into the world.

Leontes's madness—his surrender to the delusions of his sexual jealousy—is best understood in the context of this rationalist ideology. Because the basis of the rationalist project is a thoroughgoing hypostatization of primal reality, a transformation of mutable nature into conceptual field, change or flux is itself not merely inaccessible to reason, but fundamentally antipathetic to it. The power of Polixenes's edenic recollection in act 1, scene 2 grows not only from its asexuality, but from its evocation of unending constancy:

Two lads that thought there was no more behind  
But such a day to-morrow as to-day,  
And to be boy eternal.

(1.2.63–65)



At the first onset of doubt Leontes contains the possibility of inconstancy by reconceiving inconstancy itself as the unchanging rule of reality: “all’s true that is mistrusted” (2.1.48) follows immediately upon his curse “Alack, for lesser knowledge!” Since mutability can only be accepted by fixing it through conceptualization, Leontes is driven to reinvent his world: “Physic for’t there’s none. / It is a bawdy planet, that will strike / Where ’tis predominant” (1.2.200–202). Rejecting all belief at the first qualm of doubt (and here we recall that the new discourse elaborates itself from within the vacuum of a crisis in belief), Leontes recreates his world on a parodic ideal of “nothing.” His fundamental question to Camillo, “Is this nothing?” (1.2.284), echoes Lear’s materialist confusion over the slippery complexity of the negation; as with Cordelia’s love, so is this affair “no-thing.” But whereas Lear’s question is carefully inscribed within a medieval metaphysic implicitly delimiting Lear’s materiality by emphasizing the reality of that no-thing, *The Winter’s Tale* works quite otherwise. From Leontes’s perspective as centered subject this no-thing of the phenomenal world becomes real in the moment of conception. Of course, this recreative invocation is carefully juxtaposed to the external reality that contradicts it, thus foregrounding cognitive representation as the central issue of the play:

Is this nothing?  
 Why then the world and all that’s in’t is nothing,  
 The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia nothing,  
 My wife is nothing, nor nothing have these nothings,  
 If this be nothing.

(1.2.292–96)

The paradox of a rational identity based on “nothing” is, of course, richly ironic, and provides the tensive power of the first three acts: while Leontes’s mistake is self-evident to others, within the conceptual frame of his own world his conception remains absolute:

Swear his thought over  
 By each particular star in heaven, and  
 By all their influences, you may as well  
 Forbid the sea for to obey the moon  
 As or by oath remove or counsel shake  
 The fabric of his folly, whose foundation  
 Is pil’d upon his faith, and will continue  
 The standing of his body.

(1.2.424–31)

Nevertheless, the omnipresence of mutability makes any mastery of it ephemeral; so fearful of metamorphic reality, Leontes is pursued, like an Actaeon, by metaphor itself—the vital, aggressive insistence of his own supposedly rational language to metamorphose even as he speaks it.

Come, captain,  
We must be neat; not neat, but cleanly, captain:  
And yet the steer, the heckfer, and the calf  
are all call'd neat  
· · · · ·  
—How now, you wanton calf,  
Art thou my calf?  
· · · · ·  
Thou want'st a rough pash and the shoots that I have,  
To be full like me.

(1.2.122–29)

Thus Leontes's subjectivity (in all its senses) is the fulcrum on which the drama decenters the emergent ideology of the subject: having deconstructed the metaphysical ground of its rationality, the dramatic action leaves exposed the occluded ground of affection that motivates such rationalizing, and Leontes becomes the effect of desire and fantasy:

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

(1.2.138–46)

The celebrated difficulty of this passage is entirely appropriate, for the pseudological character of the soliloquy starkly reveals to the audience Leontes's self-representation, his own impulse to rational subjectivity. If we apply Thomas Cartelli's conception of subversive self-presentation in the Shakespearean set speech, "the foregrounding of orthodox ideological content in dramatic contexts that reveal the speakers' self-investment in the positions they advance and undermine the validity of their pronouncements," we have a very precise articulation of the effect of the audience alienation of

which I have been speaking.<sup>19</sup> Here it is the formal discursive properties of the speech rather than its content which is foregrounded, of course, for it appears in the midst of Leontes's passion, but the speech patently reveals the way in which reason panders will.<sup>20</sup> And, as Cartelli concludes about Ulysses and *Troilus and Cressida*, the effect of the alienation is to further "a habit of subversion that serves to demystify each of the drama's competing ideologies . . . which are revealed, in the end, to be equally imaginary, equally self-referential" (14).

At the same time, if taken ironically, that is, with Leontes's own rather than Hermione's presumed affection in mind, the passage brilliantly reveals both the state of Leontes's mind and the ideological implications of such a misordered representation of reality.<sup>21</sup> His opening line invokes, via the cosmological metaphor of "the centre," an ordered macrocosmic frame by which to judge the lack of such a dimension in Leontes's own psyche. Hearing in "centre" the premonition of the centered subjectivity we associate with modern discourse only emphasizes the illusory nature of such a self-conception. "Intention"—meaning both "tendency" and "intensity"—simultaneously reminds us of the fancy's roots in passion, and the extremity of Leontes's own case. Thus the line's overall impact is to reveal, even as Leontes turns his mind to analyzing his wife and friend, his impending self-destruction. The revelation that "thou [affection] dost make possible things not so held," following as it does upon the destruction of his present world, inaugurates a new one, manifestly built upon Leontes's own affection. Ostensibly imputing lust to Hermione's dreams, "unreal," and "nothing," and thence to the "something" of Polixenes's person, Leontes of course now more clearly reveals the role of his own affection in the generation of a very world of nothing, an anti-world of unreality not merely detached from, but actively antithetical to, any more generative representation. The faulty logic is so dramatically manifest that, at the critical point where he reasons from "thou may'st" to "thou dost," the move is marked by the utterly allogical connective "and."

Thus, if the first three acts function especially to reveal Leontes's complete conquest by his own affection, the particular thrust of this conquest's representation is its ground in an essentialist discourse. And the thematic import of the instance will be emphasized by its doubling later in the play, when Polixenes, originally a victim himself of Leontes's self-delusion, repeats Leontes's experience.

Polixenes reveals his rationality in a sound, if slightly trite, argument, only to be overcome by passion at the prospect of applying his logical dicta to his own affairs, in the person of his son. The parallel to Leontes is made explicit: Camillo first validates the lovers' natural inclination with his comment to Florizel that "this shows a sound affection" (4.4.380), and then casts the split between father and son in terms of reason. Polixenes's reason is as partial as was Leontes's:

Reason my son  
Should choose himself a wife, but as good reason  
The father (all whose joy is nothing else  
But fair posterity) should hold some counsel  
In such a business.

(4.4.406–10)

And Florizel emphasizes this by reminding us how partial Polixenes's reasons are:

I yield all this;  
But for some other reasons, my grave sir,  
Which 'tis not fit you know, I not acquaint  
My father of this business.

(410–13)

Such self-delusion is no different from Claudius's, from Lear's, from Macbeth's. The romances are tragicomedies, distinguished from the earlier comic world because we see in them not simply the heart's desire of the green world, but the emergent discourse's rational perversion of that desire by what Friar Lawrence termed "rude will" (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.3.28).

But if our response to the tragic drama of Sicily is founded on the progressive deconstruction of an essentialist discourse, with the move to Bohemia and the advent of the chorus we clearly enter into the experience of a different discourse; indeed, the dramatic shift (in particular both its pastoral tone and spaciousness) is created largely by means of this distinct discourse. But while this second mode has many of the attributes of a residual orthodoxy, it deploys these elements in a highly self-conscious counterpoint to the analytical discourse of Sicily, producing a coherent critique of that discourse rather than merely constructing an alternative model for its own sake.

The antithetical modes of *The Winter's Tale*, if not this reading of their significance, have of course been not just a commonplace, but the basis of the humanist critical tradition's approach to the play, for which the orthodoxy of its metaphysical elements has represented its ultimate meaning. This critical tradition would have no reservations about reading the play in terms of Reiss's description of the residual discourse of patterning, in which "patterns . . . suggest an *essence* that escapes its enunciator as a whole must its parts. . . . the greater the accumulation of such meanings, the nearer the approach to a wisdom conceived as knowing participation in a totality" (32).

Thus medieval discourse has an analogical-mythic structure foreign to analytico-referential discourse. The liberal tradition seizes upon just this mythical aspect of the older discourse in order to mark its alterity, its otherness, thus containing any challenge to its own hegemony. On the one hand, Francis Barker is correct in his judgment that a primary ideological function of modern literary criticism has been to maintain "the sign of the literary greatness of Shakespeare [which] has played a major part in remaking the late feudal world in the image of the bourgeois settlement that grew up inside it."<sup>22</sup> But an equally prominent strategy of containment has been to colonize the older discourse, identifying it as related but inferior, the primitive or imperfect forerunner of modern discourse, thus simultaneously drawing on its "religious" (that is, metaphorical or mythic) qualities to validate essentialist ideology even as it is denied the status of analytico-referential knowledge. This is possible because, as Dollimore makes clear, both discourses share an essentialist outlook on the human condition, each occluding the material conditions of human existence and centering "man" in its own way. If in its first stance humanist criticism has modernized and recuperated Shakespeare, most obviously by representing his characters as centered subjects, a complementary approach has been to impose on the text a "conservative Shakespeare," archaized, mythic, and metaphysical in outline.

Any clear recognition of the ideological boundary represented by the historical rise of modern discourse immediately foregrounds the inconsistency of these two strategies, thus tending to reveal their ideological premises; the Shakespearean text itself provides the best ground on which to trace these ideological inconsistencies. If in *The Winter's Tale* we have addressed the question of a centered subject in discussing Leontes, it remains to juxtapose to it the

mythic Shakespeare, the romance Shakespeare, the conservative Shakespeare. This strategy of colonization has worked so well because the play is indeed demonstrably constructed from elements of the residual analogical discourse.

The play's most immediate appropriation of the older discourse is the evocation in a variety of ways of totality—a metaphysical universe. A Christian terminology of belief, redemption, and providence is prominent, most obviously in the final scene, where the requirement that “you do awake your faith” (5.3.95) is a precondition to the miracle of the final revelation or resurrection of Hermione. The Bohemian pastoral draws heavily upon both Greek mythology and English folk custom, with the two married in the figure of Autolycus. Humanist critics find in Paulina a Prospero-like figure of the Renaissance mage, and all these elements are drawn into a powerful seasonal rhythm shepherded by Time himself as chorus, and presided over by “great creating Nature” (4.4.88) as the centered and authorizing deistic presence. If eclectic and patched, this bricolage has nevertheless been comfortably inscribed for three hundred years within, first, the mediation of the genre of Shakespearean romance itself, and ultimately the essentialist idealism (if not the literal orthodoxy) of traditional theocratic culture.

Nowhere has the covert ideological agenda of Shakespearean criticism, however, been more at odds with its text than in this struggle to totalize such heterogeneous materials within *The Winter's Tale*. On the other hand, relocating the play within the epistemic rupture (to use Foucault's term) of two discourses helps to unveil this agenda by foregrounding rather than suppressing the play's heterogeneity, which is now revealed as the sign of an ordering of discourse alien to the older tradition, the sign of an authorial stance self-consciously manipulative of it. The development of metacritical theory in the past twenty years has conclusively documented that texts like *The Winter's Tale* are explicitly self-reflective, consciously engaged in exploring the form-imposing and thus world-constructing nature of all human cognition; if materialist critics have rightly objected that such metacriticism remains uncritically inscribed within the ideology of the liberal humanist subject, it is nonetheless true that such a theory of self-conscious metaphoricality has important ideological implications.<sup>23</sup> For in appropriating and inverting the culture's peripheralized discourse of imagination, the text articulates an individual imaginatively and not rationally constituted; a discourse grounded in desire rather than thought; the

opacity and density of a language that re-presents rather than the clarity of a language assumed to represent; and thus the decenteredness of the individual. Such a dramatic project corresponds exactly to the skepticism of the historical moment of Renaissance disorder when custom fails, revealing its constructedness and thus the contingency of cultural truth.<sup>24</sup>

This play that is also a tale draws our attention throughout to the contingency and artifice of all human action. The romance genre makes natural the references to oracles, defenses, dreams, reports, ballads, old tales, statues, and plays, but can't in itself explain the careful development Shakespeare gives to their appearances. Over against Mamillius's tale in the second act that, presumably, gives the play its name—the naivete of which does not preclude its immediately coming to life when Leontes enters following the opening words, “There was a man . . . dwelt by a churchyard” (2.1.29–30)—we find a careful orchestration of myriad forms of human narration, the stories in all their forms that cultures tell about themselves and their world. Antigonus ponders the truth of dream, Autolycus manipulates the truth of report, the clowns question Autolycus concerning the truth of ballads, gentlemen question the truth of news, and Leontes himself, that of the Oracle—the list seems endless.

Of course, from the perspective of analytico-referentiality this multiplication of narratives can be conceived of as merely a generic vice, typical of all romance in its pandering to popular culture, although in *The Winter's Tale* the play at least is credited with refusing to take itself too seriously, and shows a playful self-deprecation, especially in its last scenes:

Ballad makers cannot be able to express . . . such a deal of wonder. . . . This news . . . is so like an old tale, that the verity of it is in strong suspicion. . . . I never heard of such another encounter, which lames report to follow it. . . . Like an old tale still, which will have matter to rehearse, though credit be asleep. (5.2.23–62)

But such a reading must carefully suppress the way in which narrative structure rounds on the rational perspective that would try to reduce it to benign similitude: “That she is living, / Were it but told you, should be hooted at / Like an old tale; but it appears she lives” (5.3.115–17). Within the rising incidence of encapsulated narratives, the instances that stand out are self-conscious. In opposition to the parodic world-destroying narratives of Leontes,

Camillo and Paulina both submit themselves to the power of language and imagination, and from this submission gain the power to manipulate and direct this human habit of shaping towards satisfactory ends. The aggressively fictive narrations play against “a [modern] relation of narration . . . assuming some commented exterior whose existence as a knowable reality is taken as prior to that of discourse (the discourse of analysis and reference, of historicism, of experimentalism)” (Reiss, 29–30). Language itself, in its re-presentative function, insists on the resolution of the multiple actions that are revealed to be multiple narrations. What else is represented by the self-conscious manipulation of “antic fable” (*A Midsummer Night’s Dream*, 5.1.3) that is Shakespearean romance than the reinscription of subjective analysis and reference within a culturally generated mythic realm of which it is, in reality, only an effect? Within the fiction that is the *Tale*, all narration is represented as “an ordering of the mind by the world” (Reiss, 30) rather than the reverse.

What are we to make, finally, of the last scene, one of the most compelling in drama? Certainly anomalous, it relies heavily on a participative engagement within the audience that dramatically contrasts with the disengagement or alienation that most of the play has sought to maintain. Although modern discourse will readily place the scene’s wonder within an analysis of the conservative Shakespeare—the author is said to use spectacle to confirm the orthodox effects of the play—this is clearly inadequate, for realistic elements of explanation are carefully deployed simultaneously to complicate and even undercut the engagement already mentioned, provoking a conscious awareness of wonder in the audience even as it experiences this wonder. It would be an oversimplification to say that the playwright has language confront spectacle here. For instance, the conversation of the previous scene, in relating events offstage, clearly contributes to the “wondrous” engagement of the audience in several ways, while the spectacle of Hermione “like a statue” (5.3.20, s.d.) is initially subordinated to a discussion of the representational realism of the art of “Julio Romano” (5.2.97). Nevertheless, insofar as the spectacular is indigenous to a discourse of patterning that exists “within the world,” and conversely foreign to a discourse of analysis and reference situating itself beyond the world, the scene firmly participates in the critical project that informs *The Winter’s Tale* from the first; while the vital engagement of the audience, almost against its will, strikingly dramatizes the



poverty and shrunkenness of the emergent discourse of modernism, the simultaneous demystification of such spectacle precludes any simple identification with a discourse as irretrievably decayed as the world of Hamlet's father's "antiquity forgot" (4.5.105). In other words, the metacritical effects of the scene insist on the cultural production of meaning, denying alike the older discourse's mystification of custom and the emergent discourse's reductive knowledge.

Thus the play confirms its relative emancipation from the constraints of a dominant ideology even as it also diverges from an emergent one. The complexity of Shakespearean drama, then, testifies in a vital way to the seminal significance of the Renaissance as a scene of epistemic rupture which reveals the omnipresence of ideology via particularly acute disjunctions in it. Situated in a moment when the analogic universe of medieval discourse is already in decline, and the emergent discourse of analysis and referentiality has clearly, if incompletely, begun to emerge, Shakespearean drama reveals these epochal shifts in the dynamic tensions and energies of its own conflicting modes of representation. Far from being hegemonic, English Renaissance culture is only dominated to a relative degree by the Elizabethan-Jacobean court, and the play of signification, as the play of power, is far more open than some New Historical criticism would suggest.

The important work of New Historical criticism in elaborating the complex relationships of literature to culture is far from complete, but to realize its radical potential it must evaluate its founding assumptions more carefully, and in particular its fascination with totalizing, hypostatized forms of the concept of hegemony. If it testifies to the hegemony of culture itself as the absolute horizon of all literary production, that is quite different from supposing culture ever to be coincident with any one historically determined structure within it. We need to return our attention to the historical contingency of all such dominations, the relativity of hegemony itself, and the unending play of power across the fissures and multiplicities that constitute the reality beyond any concept of culture.

*College of the Holy Cross*

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Anthony Easthope, in *Poetry as Discourse* (New York: Methuen, 1983), discusses the ideological impetus of the instauration of iambic pentameter as the regulative norm of Tudor culture, implicitly raising the issue of the ways in which that

culture already manifests elements of the emergent discourse; the texts featured by both Catherine Belsey in *The Subject of Tragedy* (New York: Methuen, 1985) and Jonathan Dollimore in *Radical Tragedy* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1984) firmly root the discursive developments they address in Elizabethan culture. Timothy Reiss's *The Discourse of Modernism* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1982) is the single most thoroughly researched and carefully articulated investigation now available of Foucault's concept of "epistemic rupture" as it applies to the Renaissance; his project is an examination of

aspects of the emergence and development, of the consolidation and growth to dominance, of modern Western discourse. . . . The book sets up a model to describe how one dominant discourse gives way to another. In particular, it shows the creation and development of the various elements fundamental to analytico-referential discourse, and it demonstrates at the same time the necessary occultation of other elements whose visible presence in discourse would subvert its overt aims. (9)

Reiss's elaboration of the development, over a period of almost two centuries, of a series of elements that eventuate in modern "analytico-referential discourse" greatly complicates any attempt to totalize the Tudor-Stuart political regime.

<sup>2</sup> Dollimore (note 1) develops his concept of residual, emergent, and dominant cultural elements from Raymond Williams's discussion in *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 121-27. Reiss's vocabulary of the "elements" of discourse corresponds exactly to Williams's perception, and his discussion of "emergent" elements is thus generally compatible with Williams's thinking.

<sup>3</sup> See Louis Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses," in *Len and Philosophy and Other Essays* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1971), 127-8.

<sup>4</sup> The single fullest account of the play in recent criticism is Charles Frey's excellent *Shakespeare's Vast Romance: A Study of "The Winter's Tale"* (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1980); Frey is especially important for his analysis of the "affective structure" of the play. C. L. Barber and Richard P. Wheeler's *The Whole Journey: Shakespeare's Power of Development* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1986) provides a complex psychoanalytic approach to the play; Barber's associates, Coppelia Kahn (*Man's Estate: Masculine Identity in Shakespeare* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981]) and Peter Erickson (*Patriarchal Structures in Shakespeare's Drama* [Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1985]), make recognizably cognate readings from a feminist perspective. With Frey, Howard Felperin carefully surveys the tradition that informs Shakespearean romance in his *Shakespearean Romance* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972). More recently, Felperin has authored an impressive deconstructive treatment of the play in his "Tongue-Tied Our Queen?: The Deconstruction of Presence in *The Winter's Tale*," in *Shakespeare and the Question of Theory*, ed. Patricia Parker and Geoffrey Hartman (New York: Methuen, 1985). David P. Young's *The Heart's Forest: A Study of Shakespeare's Pastoral Plays* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1972) perceptively explores the play from the perspective of pastoral; for a rejoinder to such a "pastoral" approach, see Richard Studing's "Shakespeare's Bohemia Revisited: A Caveat," *Shakespeare Studies* 15 (1982): 217-226.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1981), 9, 17.

<sup>6</sup> Leonard Tennenhouse, *Power on Display: The Politics of Shakespeare's Genres* (New York: Methuen, 1986). Tennenhouse, in his introduction, first makes the astute comment that "political conflict does not exist somewhere outside of these texts, for it concerns itself with the struggle among competing ways of representing power," but then immediately goes on to expel such "struggle" from the drama:

"Mine is, in other words, an account of a hegemonic process. . . . The strategies of theater resembled those of the scaffold, as well as court performance . . . in observing a common logic of figuration that both sustained and testified to the monarch's power" (15). The sudden move of this line of thought from the multiplicity of "competing ways of representing power" to a "hegemonic process" is difficult to accept, as is the assumption that a single mode of figuration can comprehend the cultural practice of the time.

<sup>7</sup> Stephen Greenblatt, "Invisible Bullets: Renaissance Authority and Its Subversion, *Henry IV* and *Henry V*," in *Political Shakespeare*, ed. Jonathan Dollimore and Alan Sinfield (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1985), 18–47. Greenblatt's brilliant argument for the ideological containment of subversion seems to recognize the possibility that the absolutist state is modern rather than medieval: in regards to the *Henriad* he comments that "the founding of the modern state . . . is shown to be based upon acts of calculation, intimidation, and deceit" (39). However, his totalizing tendency in arguing for the hegemony of the dominant discourse becomes clear in a statement such as "all kings are 'decked' out by the imaginary forces of the spectators, and a sense of the limitations of king or theatre only excites a more compelling exercise of those forces" (44).

Clark Hulse, in "Spenser, Bacon, and the Myth of Power," *The Historical Renaissance*, ed. Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), adapting a Bakhtinian model of "heteroglossia" to his discussion of the English Renaissance court, terms this adaptation only a "partial solution" exactly because it

tends toward a paradox dominated by the polar terms of authority and subversion, echoing perhaps a simplistic myth of modern politics and creating a duality that is almost as flattering to the central authority as an acknowledgment of total sway. . . . One must look beyond heterodox language to heterodox power. . . . One must move, that is, to a view of the power structure that gets behind the totalizing picture of the political myth to the network of local forces operating in any particular situation. (317)

Franco Moretti's argument advancing tragedy's role in the subversion of absolutism, "A Huge Eclipse": Tragic Form and the Deconsecration of Sovereignty," in *The Power of Forms in the English Renaissance*, ed. Stephen Greenblatt (Norman, Ok.: Pilgrim Books, 1982), 11–39, likewise seems explicitly to contradict a simple conception of hegemony by placing it within an ongoing historical process.

<sup>8</sup> James H. Kavanagh, in "Shakespeare in Ideology," *Alternative Shakespeares*, ed. John Drakakis (New York: Methuen, 1985) recognizes the same rupture:

Shakespeare occupied a unique proto-professional position of economic semi-independence between patronage and the market, while still under severe ideological compulsion . . . caught in an ideological space between modified absolutism and insurgent Puritanism. This position of relative economic independence combined with relative ideological constraint was itself the effect of a transitional alignment of classes. (149–50)

From his Marxist position Kavanagh is reluctant to grant the corollary that ideological consciousness might be a byproduct of this situation, but his own analysis implies at several points an authorial consciousness about the political alternatives inherent in such a position.

<sup>9</sup> The discourse of "patterning" is based on Michel Foucault's "episteme of resemblance":

Resemblance . . . largely guided exegesis and the interpretation of texts; it was resemblance that organized the play of symbols, made possible knowledge of things visible and invisible, and controlled the art of representing them. The universe was folded in upon itself: the earth echoing the sky, faces seeing themselves reflected in the stars, and plants holding within their stems the secrets that were of use to man. (*The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A. M. Sheridan-Smith [New York: Random House, 1970], 17)

Reiss (note 1) prefers “discursive classes” to “episteme” because he sees that although “one class is dominant, there may well be others that are contemporaneous with it,” though these others may consist in “activities . . . that escape analysis by the dominant model, that do not acquire ‘meaningfulness’ in its terms” (11). In effect, Reiss (as will Foucault himself in *The History of Sexuality*) detotalizes the earlier Foucauldian concept in order to address the multifarious forces at play within discourse.

<sup>10</sup> Stephen Orgel, “Making Greatness Familiar,” in Greenblatt, *The Power of Forms* (note 7), 41.

<sup>11</sup> Orgel (note 10) posits a distinctly similar understanding of the relation between the two sites of figuration:

The relationships I have been describing [between court and theater performance] sound fairly cosy; but in fact they are distinctly uneasy and involve a good deal of tension. Theatrical pageantry, the miming of greatness, is highly charged because it employs precisely the same methods the crown was using to assert and validate its authority. To mime the monarch was a potentially revolutionary act—as both Essex and Elizabeth were well aware. (45)

<sup>12</sup> Dollimore’s use of the term “essentialist” clarifies the idealist continuities in the transition from a medieval theocratic to a modern liberal-humanist discourse. From the perspective of a materialist criticism, Dollimore finds modern discourse, that is the humanist and liberal discourse of the individual subject that has defined Western culture since the Renaissance, to be as idealist in its authorizing assumptions as was medieval analogical discourse. If the older is essentialist in Christian terms, conceiving of a human soul defined by its relation to God, the seventeenth century turn towards a conception of the individual as “self-determining, free, and rational by nature” is founded upon “the idea that ‘man’ possesses some given, unalterable essence which is what makes ‘him’ human, which is the source and essential determinant of ‘his’ culture and its priority over [the material] conditions of existence” (250). In other words, in the face of an emergent Renaissance materialist subjectivity, modern discourse comes to dominance in part by reestablishing an essentialist metaphysic now suitably reinscribed within the subject himself. See Dollimore (note 1), especially 155–69 and chap. 16.

<sup>13</sup> The best single treatment of the Shakespearean appropriation of this terminology remains that of David P. Young in *Something of Great Constancy: The Art of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream”* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966); see also Marjorie B. Garber’s *Dream in Shakespeare* (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1974). Luiz Costa Lima, in *Control of the Imaginary: Reason and Imagination in Modern Times*, trans. Ronald W. Sousa (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1988) provides a critique of the progressive containment by bourgeois culture of this disruptive inversion.

<sup>14</sup> On the relevance of the scholastic tradition of reason see Terence Hawkes, *Shakespeare and the Reason* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), and Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ.

Press, 1962). See also my development of the details of Shakespeare's appropriation of the tradition in *Hamlet*, "Shakespearean Self-Knowledge: The Synthesizing Imagination and the Limits of Reason," in *Themes in Drama* 12 (1990): 47-59.

<sup>15</sup> Certainly New Historical criticism is correct in focusing on the political dimension of the Shakespearean family. But the implications of the comment by Orgel quoted in note 11 are important here: if the metaphoric association of the crown with the head of the household is a prominent absolutist strategy, the signifiatory force of the association is always open to appropriation, and within the theater the crown must be domesticated even as it lends majesty to the patriarch.

<sup>16</sup> In using *Gorboduc* to establish the paradigm, Moretti (note 7) comments that

precisely what makes Gorboduc a sovereign—universality and self-determination—also proclaim him . . . a *tyrant*. The key to the metamorphosis comes early in the play, when Gorboduc expresses his intention of abdicating to his counsellors. Though the latter attempt to dissuade him with various "rational" arguments . . . Gorboduc never bothers in the least to confute them. He is king not because he can reason and persuade, but simply by virtue of the fact that he *decides*. (10)

The comment applies exactly to the most conventional elements of the representation of Leontes in the opening acts.

<sup>17</sup> Reiss comments that

during the period of which I will be speaking, a discursive order is achieved on the premise that the "syntactic" order of semiotic systems (particularly language) is coincident both with the logical ordering of "reason" and with the structural organization of a world given as exterior to both these orders. This relation is not taken to be simply one of analogy, but one of identity. (31)

<sup>18</sup> All quotations of Shakespeare's plays are from *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974).

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Cartelli, "Ideology and Subversion in the Shakespearean Set Speech," *ELH* 53 (1986): 2.

<sup>20</sup> So too we might apply Cartelli's comment that the set speech is often "an extremely stylized mode of expression that tends to direct itself to subjects that presumably mean as much to its auditors as to its speaker" (3), where here we see that the subject in question is discursive rationality itself, and thus the "mode of expression" is coincident with the discursive "subject."

<sup>21</sup> I assume here the legitimacy of both major interpretive traditions concerning the passage, which emphasize a reading of "affection" in relation either to Hermione's supposed lust, or Leontes's own psychic involvement with that supposition. The importance of the speech, of course, resides precisely in its linguistic indeterminacy, and our consequent awareness of both references. See the discussion by J. H. P. Pafford in the Arden edition of *The Winter's Tale* (London: Methuen, 1963), 165-67.

<sup>22</sup> Francis Barker, *The Tremulous Private Body: Essays on Subjection* (New York: Methuen, 1984), 14.

<sup>23</sup> Since the publication of the seminal *Shakespearean Metadrama* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press, 1969), James L. Calderwood has remained the most prominent exponent of the metacritical approach. Jackson Cope's *The Theater and the Dream: From Metaphor to Form in Renaissance Drama* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1973) carefully pursues the development in the Renaissance neoplatonic tradition of "structural metaphor" eventuating in "the theater of the dream"

(211). Young (note 4) provides perhaps the best metadramatic reading of *The Winter's Tale*. Michael Shapiro provides a convenient overview of the main strains of the practice in "Role-Playing, Reflexivity, and Metadrama in Recent Shakespearean Criticism," *Renaissance Drama*, n.s. 12 (1981): 145–61.

<sup>24</sup> Thus Dollimore: "When epistemological and ethical truth was recognised to be relative to custom and social practice, then ideological considerations were inevitably foregrounded. Machiavelli, Montaigne and Hobbes all testify unambiguously to such recognition" (11).