

# Ralph Crane and "an olde play called Winter's Tale"

by

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Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale* is surrounded by a difficult history related to its publication in the 1623 Folio.<sup>1</sup> J. D. Wilson has observed that ". . . *The Winter's Tale* looks as if it nearly got left out of the volume altogether,"<sup>2</sup> a remark that is based upon the following set of facts: (1) the play occurs last in the Folio section under *Comedies*; (2) it is printed upon three quires of paper, each bearing its own special signature; and (3) it is preceded and followed by a blank page in the Folio.<sup>3</sup> There is, also, an important contemporary allusion to it by the Master of the Revels, Sir Henry Herbert, in a memorandum from his *Office Book*:

For the King's players. An olde play called Winter's Tale, formerly allowed of Sir George Bucke, and likewyse by mee on Mr. Heminges worde that there was nothing profane added or reformed, thogh the allowed booke was missinge, and therefore I returned it without a fee, this 19<sup>o</sup> of August, 1623.<sup>4</sup>

Herbert's entry is dated three months before the actual publication of the Folio. John Heminge, who with Henry Condell published the Folio, vouched for the "olde play" and was apparently acting as a *representative* for the King's players at this time.

Reconstructing the probable events leading to the publication of F<sub>1</sub>, E. E. Willoughby, from a study of bibliographical evidence, concludes that F<sub>1</sub> was printed during the ". . . summer and early fall of 1621 and the spring, summer, and autumn of 1623."<sup>5</sup> He claims, too, that *The Winter's Tale* was printed sometime in May, 1623, explaining that *King John* and a portion of *Richard II* (the first two plays following in the *History* section of the Folio) had been printed before *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>6</sup> He agrees, therefore, with Wilson that *The Winter's Tale* had been omitted from the initial printing of the *Comedy* section of the Folio, only to have been inserted at a later date. As for Herbert's memorandum, he suggests that ". . . it may have been the printed sheets of this play prepared for

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1. See the following works for a further discussion: J. W. Schroeder, *The Great Folio of 1623: Shakespeare's Plays in the Printing House*; E. E. Willoughby, *The Printing of the First Folio of Shakespeare*.

2. J. D. Wilson, "Introduction," Folio Facsimile, *The Winter's Tale*. By William Shakespeare.

3. *Loc. cit.*

4. *Loc. cit.*

5. E. E. Willoughby, *The Printing of the First Folio of Shakespeare*, p. 1.

6. *Ibid.*, fn. 3, p. 41.

the Folio that Herbert 'returned without a fee' and marked with his license." The "missing" book is, of course, of main interest to the problem, since it becomes obvious that someone (the publishers or the playhouse personnel) eventually did turn up a copy. J. D. Wilson and R. Compton Rhodes, working independently, conclude that new copies of plays were often derived from actors' parts and stage plots, and they relate this "assembled parts" theory to the problem of *The Winter's Tale*.<sup>8</sup> This concept neatly fits the evolving pattern and implies that Heminge may have bargained with the King's players, agreeing to assume full responsibility for a new transcription of the play as well as to oversee its licensing at Herbert's office. Should this have been the case, Heminge may also have obtained a reliable scrivener and have pieced out the Folio by inserting *The Winter's Tale* into the nearly completed work (accounting for the two blank sheets in the finished product).

The stage history of this play is important. From 1613 until 1624, there is no record of its having been acted.<sup>9</sup> If, by chance, the licensed copy had been missing during these years, the company may have been reluctant to produce the play, fearing official intervention. The fact that it is once again in production in 1624 is favorable to such an explanation. On the other hand, when one recalls that the Globe burned on June 29, 1613, he is intrigued by the coincidence of dates which indicates, at first glance, that the "missing" book may have been destroyed in the disastrous fire which also consumed the "virtuous fabrick." But, the important thing to remember is that someone, at one time or another, *did* make a transcription of this play which eventually was used by Heminge and Condell. The most likely candidate for this task, one who would have welcomed the employment at this time, was Ralph Crane, scrivener.

In 1620, Crane published the first of several editions of his poem, *The Works of Mercy*,<sup>10</sup> which contains the following autobiographical information in its preface:

And some employment hath my vsefull Pen,  
Had 'mongst those siuill well-deservuing Men,  
That grace the Stage with *honour* and *delight*,  
Of whose true *honesties* I much could write  
But will compris's (as a Caske of Gold)  
Vnder the Kingly-seruice they doe hold . . . .<sup>11</sup>

Here, Crane explains that he has worked as a scrivener for the King's players. Indeed, he had made a transcription of *Sir John van Barnavelt* in 1619 for the King's company.<sup>12</sup> Later, in 1624, Thomas Middleton was to employ him, possibly for a third time, to transcribe two copies of *A Game*

7. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

8. Wilson, *loc. cit.*

9. Hardin Craig (ed.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, p. 1217.

10. F. P. Wilson, "Some Notes on Authors and Patrons in Tudor and Stuart Times," *John Quincy Adams: Memorial Studies*, p. 560.

11. T. S. Graves, "Ralph Crane and the King's Players," *Studies in Philology*, XII (April, 1924), pp. 362-63.

12. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 23.

at *Chesse* (thought by some to be an example of an "assembled text").<sup>13</sup> When the Great Plague struck London in 1625, Crane was impoverished,<sup>14</sup> at which time he dedicated personal transcriptions of poems and plays to numerous patrons in hopes of financial relief.<sup>15</sup> One such Crane transcription is *Demetrius and Enanthe*, a play for which he received copy permission from the King's players.<sup>16</sup> During this same period, he also transcribed Ben Jonson's masque, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* (1619).<sup>17</sup> Since it becomes apparent that Crane enjoyed the respect of the King's players, it is possible to think that they might have recommended him as scrivener for *The Winter's Tale*. Indeed, it is possible and probable that Heminge employed him for this task. However, the answer must lie in a study of Crane's known calligraphic traits and their detection in the 1623 edition of this play, a study to be approached in the following manner: (1) the legibility and cleanliness of his copy; (2) his orthographic habits; (3) his style of punctuation (hyphen, apostrophe, parenthesis); (4) his act-scene divisions; (5) his use of stage directions; and (6) his reconstruction of plays from actors' parts and stage plots ("assembled text").

As for the neatness and orderliness of his manuscript, Crane was so celebrated for his accuracy that his hand would have presented few, if any, reading problems to a printer.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, were his transcription of *The Winter's Tale* the one which Jaggard's compositor was asked to follow, the printed text should be relatively free from printer-scribal error, as, indeed, it is. Such "textual tidiness," Wilson believes, is indicative of Crane's hand in the play.<sup>19</sup>

Crane's orthographic trademarks are highly important. From a study of Crane's transcription of *A Game at Chesse*, Bald concludes that *it's* is a characteristic of Crane's spelling,<sup>20</sup> as well as the use of *ha's* for *has*,<sup>21</sup> and the contraction *'em* for *them*.<sup>22</sup> But one must exercise caution at this point, because Crane's handling of contractions is, at best, rather unusual, since he preferred the longer form of a word and, in many cases, was known to have expanded contractions (*you'de* to *you would*, for example).<sup>23</sup> Scholars also believe that he always inserted an apostrophe between two full forms (as in *I'am*) when expanding a contraction,<sup>24</sup> a peculiarity called

13. *Ibid.*, p. 45.

14. *DNB*, V, (1950), p. 11.

15. F. P. Wilson, "Ralph Crane, Scrivener to the King's Players," *The Library*, VII, 4 (September, 1926), p. 205.

16. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 45.

17. *Ibid.*, fn. 1, p. 25.

18. F. P. Wilson, "Ralph Crane, Scrivener to the King's Players," *The Library*, VII 4 (September, 1926), p. 211.

19. *Loc. cit.*

20. R. C. Bald (ed.), *A Game at Chesse*, p. 34.

21. W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio*, fn. "H", p. 275; also Bald, *op. cit.*, p. 36.

22. W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio*, fn. "H", p. 275.

23. Bald, *op. cit.*, pp. 34; 105.

24. W. W. Greg, "Prompt Copies, Private Transcripts, and the 'Playhouse Scrivener'," *The Library*, VI, 4(1926), p. 217.

"Jonson elision."<sup>25</sup> A tabulation of such words in *The Winter's Tale* is useful:

Table I

Contractions	No. of Times, WT
it's	6
ha's	25
'em	4
Jonson elision	2

This evidence points to Crane. The minimum use of "Jonson elision" is not necessarily contrary evidence, since a printer, unless he were especially careful, might easily have overlooked the somewhat meaningless use of the apostrophe. For further evidence of Crane's orthographic tendencies, S. A. Tannenbaum has cited the following practices: (1) Crane wrote such words as *me*, *we*, and *he* with a single *e*; and (2) he wrote *yf* for *if* seventy-five percent of the time.<sup>26</sup> (While *if* is used exclusively in *The Winter's Tale*, it is possible that the spelling of *yf* could have been varied by the compositor, perhaps without thought.) The following table illustrates the prevalence of the single *e* spelling in *The Winter's Tale*:

Table II

"e" Words	No. of Times, WT
me	205
mee	12
we	91
wee	14
he	152
hee	29
be	120
bee	12
she	84
shee	23

Here, the evidence is overwhelmingly in support of Crane. Nevertheless, some scholars have attempted to discredit Crane's hand in the play by comparing many of his other known spellings with those which occur in *The Winter's Tale*. For example, they point out that Crane usually wrote *theis*, *byn*, and *lest*; while, in the play, one finds *these*, *beene*, and *least*.<sup>27</sup> However, this argument is not entirely convincing, for two reasons. First, by this time, *y* had been changed to *i* in most printing; and, secondly, English spelling had been shortened and modernized. It is known that printers of this period were more advanced or progressive in their spelling

25. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

26. Tannenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 84.

27. *Ibid.*, pp. 84-85.

habits than were authors.<sup>28</sup> Furthermore, Crane was an old man by 1623, so that his spelling might have been considered archaic. It is doubtful that he would have attempted a change in any habits at such a late date.

Crane's punctuation has also been the subject of much speculation. Although scholars agree that he made free use of the parenthesis, they must also admit that this characteristic was not Crane's alone.<sup>29</sup> Consequently, some 350 uses of the parenthesis in *The Winter's Tale* serve only to suggest the possibility of his hand in the transcription, although a glance at the other plays in the Folio reveals that 350 is a large and, perhaps, significant number. *The Winter's Tale* also contains three examples of the use of *parenthesis within parenthesis*, but here, again, scholars tend to minimize the evidence. Tannenbaum, for one, has said that "Crane was too much of a purist to have been guilty of such a solecism."<sup>30</sup> However, an examination of the first two passages in which this punctuation occurs reveals that the speeches therein are most complex and in need of some kind of outstanding or even spectacular punctuation to clarify their meaning (II.i.82-90; IV.ii.16-20). A modern rendering of these passages would probably make use of dashes, but even so, the meaning might still be obscured. The third passage in question (IV.iv.108-28) is so complex as to suggest that only the individual who had worked in close association with the text could have punctuated it in this manner (the author? the book-keeper-prompter? or the actor for whom the speech was composed?). It is unlikely, at any rate, that a printer or Crane himself would have been responsible for such an elaborate kind of punctuation. Crane probably transcribed what lay before him.

W. W. Greg, in discussing Crane's use of the hyphen, suggests six methods, four of which appear in *The Winter's Tale*. The first is the "metrical or emphasis" hyphen,<sup>31</sup> occurring thirty times in the play ("Watery-Starre," I.ii.1). Secondly, there is the "verb plus preposition" type,<sup>32</sup> appearing twelve times ("Will come-on very slowly," V.i.260). Thirdly, there is the use of the verb linked with an object, ("Shee hath made-me four and twenty Nose-gayes," IV.iii.45), five examples of which occur in the play. And, finally, there are approximately 170 uses of "miscellaneous anomalies,"<sup>33</sup> ("Who lo-you," I.ii.144). As for evidence of Crane's use of the apostrophe,<sup>34</sup> a mere glance at the text of this play reveals that its pages are literally dotted with this mark.

Scholars have also been concerned with Crane's method of constructing a playhouse manuscript, especially for act-scene divisions. F. P. Wil-

28. J. D. Wilson, "The New Way with Shakespeare Texts: An Introduction for Lay Readers. III. In Sight of Shakespeare's Manuscripts," *Shakespeare Survey*, IX (1956), pp. 74-75.

29. Bald, *op. cit.*, p. 172.

30. Tannenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 77.

31. W. W. Greg, "Prompt Copies, Private Transcripts, and the 'Playhouse Scrivener,'" *The Library*, VI, 4 (1926), pp. 213-16.

32. *Loc. cit.*

33. *Loc. cit.*

34. W. W. Greg, *The Shakespeare First Folio*, p. 415.



son, for example, has observed that all of Crane's extant dramatic manuscripts are fully divided,<sup>35</sup> and it is clear that the Folio text of *The Winter's Tale* has been taken from a document that was similarly constructed. The first act is divided two times; the second, three times; the third, three times; the fourth, four times; and the fifth, three times. The arbitrarily assigned date of composition for *The Winter's Tale* is 1610.<sup>36</sup> The first play known to have been divided into acts, *The Second Maiden's Tragedy*, did not appear until 1611,<sup>37</sup> and *Sir John van Barnavelt*, a Crane transcription, was not divided into acts and scenes until 1619.<sup>38</sup> There is sufficient reason, therefore, to think that Shakespeare was not the party responsible for the act-scene division of *The Winter's Tale*. Nor does it seem likely that the compositor was responsible, since only seventeen of the thirty-six plays contained within the Folio have been so treated. Once again, the evidence points to Crane.

The stage directions in *The Winter's Tale* also attest to the possibility of Crane's hand in the play. He is known to have treated stage directions in four ways. First, he often chose to ignore them.<sup>39</sup> Or, those which he did transcribe, he often placed in advance of their logical position in the text.<sup>40</sup> Usually, he gave them a literary flavor.<sup>41</sup> Finally, he preferred to list all of the characters (eventually to appear in a scene) at the heading of that scene, a method known as "massing of entrances."<sup>42</sup> In *The Winter's Tale*, a fifteen-scene play, there are only seven stage directions, exclusive of the commonplace *Enter* and *Exit* designations. These seven possess distinct literary touches, as the well known example, "*Exit pursued by a Beare*," will verify (III.iii). There are also three instances of advance stage directions. For example, Florizell, Perdita, and others "enter" upon a direction (V. i.) which marks their appearance some sixteen lines before they are called upon to speak. And, lastly, thirteen of the fifteen scenes in this play are preceded by "massing of entrances."

A final problem concerns the possible assembling of a play from the actors' parts and stage plot. Bald thinks Crane's transcription of *A Game at Chesse* an assembled text and shows that Crane was, indeed, capable of such an endeavor.<sup>43</sup> On the other hand, the stage plot was a document providing an outline of a play, ". . . with occasional notes of action," which was placed backstage for all to consult.<sup>44</sup> All entrances and exits were marked in it, and all scenes were delineated.<sup>45</sup> Characters to appear

35. F. P. Wilson, "Ralph Crane, Scrivener to the King's Players," *The Library*, VII, 4 (1926), p. 211.

36. Hardin Craig (ed.), *The Complete Works of Shakespeare*, pp. 1215-16.

37. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, p. 36.

38. *Ibid.*, p. 36.

39. Tannenbaum, *op. cit.*, p. 76.

40. W. W. Greg, "Prompt Copies, Private Transcripts, and the 'Playhouse Scrivener,'" *The Library*, VI, 4 (1926), p. 210.

41. F. P. Wilson, "Ralph Crane, Scrivener to the King's Players," *The Library*, VI, 4 (1926), pp. 212-213.

42. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, pp. 136-38.

43. Bald, *op. cit.*, p. 37.

44. W. W. Greg, *The Editorial Problem in Shakespeare*, pp. 46-47.

45. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

in a scene were also catalogued at the opening of that scene.<sup>46</sup> Therefore, the division into acts and scenes and the "massing of entrances" in *The Winter's Tale* may be directly related to the characteristics of the stage plot and to Crane's knowledge of such a document.

*The Winter's Tale* was apparently printed from a relatively accurate text of the play, manifest in the neatness of the Folio copy. At the same time, Crane's orthographic habits consistently are evident throughout the play. Furthermore, the use of the three marks of punctuation commonly associated with him—the parenthesis, hyphen, and apostrophe—is abundant in the Folio. Moreover, the act-scene division and the nature of the stage directions in *The Winter's Tale* strongly suggest his part in the transcription. Faced with this steadily mounting evidence, one proposes that it was Ralph Crane (or a scrivener who shared his scribal tendencies) who was responsible for the text of *The Winter's Tale* in the 1623 Folio. However, there are important problems yet to be resolved. For example, what did happen to the "original" or "allowed" copy? And did Ralph Crane perform similar tasks for Heminge and Condell in the preparation of other plays for inclusion in the 1623 Folio?

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46. T. W. Baldwin, *The Organization and Personnel of the Shakespearean Company*, p. 90.