THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

MATERIALE DIDATTICO
PER PROFESSORI

THE MERRY WIVES OF WINDSOR

by W. Shakespeare
(adaptation and translation by Andrea Pennacchi and Fiona Dalziel)

Nel 2016 decorrerà il quadricentenario della morte di William Shakespeare (1564-1616); nei 24 anni di carriera attiva presso i teatri di Londra in qualità di playwright , quest'uomo compose 36 drammi – se contiamo solo quelli di attribuzione certa – pochi dei quali non raggiungono lo status di "capolavoro".

Le sue opere figurano saldamente inserite nel Canone Occidentale, oltre a fondare le culture di un numero enorme di stati nazionali, tanto da dare ai suoi lavori un carattere universale, e la cultura italiana in questo non fa eccezione, è quindi per noi teatranti quasi un dovere ricordarlo e celebrarlo attraverso una delle sue opere migliori e con le più solide connessioni "italiane", grazie al debito riconosciuto nei confronti della Commedia dell'Arte (in sede di composizione) e all'influenza che ebbe sul "Falstaff" del nostro Giuseppe Verdi: "The Merry Wives of Windsor".

Teatro Boxer, per l'occasione, in collaborazione con il Centro Linguistico di Ateneo dell'Università degli Studi di Padova e con la professoressa Alessandra Petrina, che dell'opera sta curando una nuova traduzione per i tipi di Bompiani, ha elaborato un progetto volto a diffondere sul territorio l'arte del Bardo.

Un progetto in cui il teatro si fonde all'ausilio didattico nell'apprendimento dell'inglese, usando la straordinaria comicità del testo come mezzo per ampliare la comprensione linguistica e approfondire la conoscenza di una componente essenziale della cultura europea, avvalendosi di indubbie professionalità artistiche e delle tecniche di apprendimento di lingue straniere più aggiornate.

Un Cast di 3 donne e un uomo metterà in scena i due ambienti che ruotano attorno alla figura di Falstaff, il protagonista: la taverna e il paese. In ossequio alla tradizione del teatro elisabettiano, gli attori reciteranno in doubling, vestendo a turno i panni maschili e quelli femminili, mentre un narratore si occuperà di fornire al pubblico tutte le informazioni necessarie per comprendere la vicenda e la genialità del suo autore.

l'intera opera è dedicata ai diversi tipi di inglese che si parlavano nella società. È quindi la struttura perfetta per un lavoro bilingue che faciliti l'apprendimento dell'inglese.

Un narratore (o narratrice) farà da tramite tra il pubblico italiano e l'opera, spiegando – come nel teatro di Dario Fo – le scene e le conoscenze linguistiche rilevanti per comprendere il testo, mentre gli attori recitano in inglese contemporaneo, lasciando alcune

sequenze (quelle più poetiche) in inglese rinascimentale, adeguatamente spiegato per apprezzarne le specifiche. La presenza del narratore permette anche una grande adattabilità alla conoscenza linguistica del pubblico.

La vera domanda, quando si intende mettere in scena un Falstaff, non è: "perché?", ma "perché no?!". Il cavaliere pancione, da tempo riportato dai critici al suo giusto ruolo di Archetipo, di figura appartenente alle strutture profonde della cultura umana, rappresenta un insegnante (maestro di futuri governanti) e un buffone che incarna tratti di profonda saggezza, è un dispensario di difetti e debolezze umane, come lui stesso ama ripetere: "la carne è debole, e siccome io ho tanta carne sono tanto debole". Regge uno specchio alla natura, come la sua controparte magra e malinconica: Amleto. Ci mostra quei difetti che credevamo saldamente nascosti in un forziere, non è solo "witty": è quello che accende il "wit" (l'arguzia, più o meno) nelle persone che lo circondano.

Non è possibile sondare del tutto la figura di Falstaff, che col passare del tempo solo riflette cose più adatte ai tempi ma non muta, anzi rinnova come fa la luna (per citare Arrigo Boito, il librettista di Verdi). Siamo noi le allegre comari, i Ford, i Page, quando non i Pistola e i Bardolfo, che si vedono riflessi sul palco, ma non saremo mai Falstaff, larger than life, orchestratore, motore e vittima di scherzi cosmici.

Andrea Pennacchi and Fiona Dalziel

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"THE ADOPTION OF ABOMINABLE TERMS": THE INSULTS THAT SHAPE WINDSOR'S MIDDLE CLASS

BY ROSEMARY KEGL

I

I take the title of this essay from Francis Ford's first soliloquy in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*.[1] Misconstruing his wife's merriment as unfaithfulness, the distracted Ford laments:

> See the hell of having a false woman! My bed shall be abus'd, my coffers ransack'd, my reputation gnawn at, and I shall not only receive this villainous wrong, but stand under the adoption of abominable terms, and by him that does me this wrong. Terms! names! Amaimon sounds well; Lucifer, well; Barbason, well; yet they are devils' additions, the names of fiends; but Cuckold! Wittol!—Cuckold! the devil himself hath not such a name.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> I will prevent this, detect my wife, be reveng'd on Falstaff, and laugh at Page. I will about it; better three hours too soon than a minute too late. Fie, fie, fie! cuckold, cuckold, cuckold! (2.2.291–300, 310–14)

In this passage, Ford tests a series of interchangeable self-designations—Amaimon, Lucifer, Barbason—before settling upon the term to which his own particular hell entitles him: cuckold. It is a term that he prematurely adopts in order to distinguish himself from the "wittol," from the foolish husband who would knowingly endure his wife's infidelity. Ford announces that Alice Ford's adultery would threaten his control over her sexuality, over his wealth, and, most unendurably, over his good name. He emphasizes that she is his property and, more specifically, that she is property with which *she* cannot be entrusted. He does so by marshalling a string of proverbial insults about those who make "fritters of English" (5.5.143). "I will rather trust a Fleming with my butter," he says, "Parson Hugh the Welshman with my cheese, an Irishman with my aqua-vitae bottle, or a thief to walk my ambling gelding, than my wife with herself" (2.2.302–5). Ford pledges to diminish the threat of an "abus'd" bed by publicizing his wife's plans. He seals that pledge by reiterating the single, abominable term to which his identity has been reduced: "Cuckold, cuckold, cuckold!"

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Although Ford's fellow inhabitants of Windsor do not share his disruptive jealousy, they do share his preoccupation with the terms that designate their shifting and uneven relationships to one another. As the play's opening lines indicate, that preoccupation frequently takes the form of a perpetual naming and self-naming:

> Shallow: Sir Hugh, persuade me not; I will make a Star Chamber matter of it. If he were twenty Sir John Falstaffs, he shall not abuse Robert Shallow, esquire.
> Slender: In the county of Gloucester, Justice of Peace and Coram.
> Shallow: Ay, cousin Slender, and *Custa-lorum*.
> Slender: Ay, and *Rato-lorum* too; and a gentleman born, Master Parson, who writes himself *Armigero*, in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, *Armigero*.
>
> (1.1.1–11)

I begin my analysis of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* by citing these passages because I am interested in the terms that the play's characters adopt and impose upon one another. As each passage's emphasis upon abuse indicates, insults are central to this process of naming the relationships among Windsor's inhabitants. Accounts of Renaissance slander and defamation cases and accounts of Renaissance shaming rituals, such as the skimmington and the charivari, describe how insults also were central to a larger process of establishing the shifting authority relations among state, local, and ecclesiastical officials.[2] By focusing on Shallow and Sir Hugh Evans—the play's justice of the peace and parson—and by focusing on the history of Windsor and of its castle, I locate the play's network of insults within this larger social process. Within this framework, I examine how Shakespeare's "abominable terms" promote collective identities—"townsmen" and "gentlemen"—which participate in Renaissance struggles over absolutism and between commercial and industrial capital precisely by helping to define the range of possible intersections between regional and national affiliations.

In order to outline the significance of the terms with which Shakespeare locates his characters within Windsor, I want to consider briefly the terms with which Shakespeare's critics have located the play within Renaissance struggles over class. Critics often describe the townspeople in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* as alternately "bourgeois" and "middle class." For example, Camille Wells Slights refers to Windsor as a "robustly middle-class world" that is populated by "ordinary bourgeois English men and women." Carol Thomas Neely refers to Windsor as "a thriving bourgeois town" that is populated by "the middle class." Jan

Lawson Hinely analyzes Falstaff's relationship to this "middle class society" and its "bourgeois citizens." Peter Erickson cautions that any class analysis of the play must consider both Falstaff's and Fenton's relationship to Windsor's "bourgeois country folk"—the play's "middle class characters." Anne Barton writes that George Page, responding to Fenton, "displays the wariness of an English middle class accustomed . . . to the sexual maneuvers and depredations of an impoverished aristocracy." And, she explains, by rejecting the aristocratic Falstaff, Margaret Page and Alice Ford—unlike most middle class wives in contemporary city comedies—remain loyal to their husbands and to the "bourgeois community to which they belong." Sandra Clark also notes the wives' imperviousness both to a "gentleman-lover" and to his promises of upward social mobility. She writes that Margaret Page and Alice Ford "participate in the same code of bourgeois social values as their menfolk . . . . [Falstaff] underestimates both their intelligence and their loyalty to the ethic of the middle-class." Marvin Felheim and Philip Traci describe these women as, alternately, "rich bourgeoisie," "well-to-do middle-class types," and "attractive middle-class housewives."[3]

At first glance, this casual doubling of terminology might seem uncontroversial. As Immanuel Wallerstein explains, critics generally define members of the bourgeoisie either culturally (by their style of life and opportunities for consumption) or economically (by their relations to production and opportunities for investment). Whichever criteria they employ, they identify the bourgeoisie of Renaissance England as that feudal middle class that was neither nobility nor peasantry.[4] In keeping with this definition, Windsor's inhabitants locate themselves below that "too high a region" (3.2.73) where the noble Fenton "kept company with the wild prince and Poins" (3.2.72–73) and where the knightly Falstaff seems to have contracted his "dissolute disease" (3.3.191–92). And, in spite of Falstaff's boasting, those inhabitants do not prove to be the "peasant[s]" over whom he might "predominate" (2.2.282). Yet, as George K. Hunter has pointed out, although *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is often championed as one of Shakespeare's most "realistic" plays, its detailed descriptions of Windsor's inhabitants actually offer very little specific information about their relative material conditions or differing relations to production.[5] This is a persuasive claim. For example, Shakespeare critics roughly correlate the "bourgeoisie" or "middle class" depicted in the play with those whom members of Renaissance society increasingly labeled the "middling sort." This latter category generally designated property owners who might occupy a wide range of positions within the feudal and emerging capitalist modes of

production.[6] The varied composition of this "middling sort" might account for critics' disagreement about the enemies against whom Windsor's inhabitants define themselves: the upper classes (Barton, Hinely), the aristocracy (Barton, Felheim and Traci, French, Hunter), predatory capitalists (Freedman), gallants (Clark), the nobility (Hinely, Hunter), courtiers (Bradbrook, Hinely, Hunter, Felheim and Traci), knights (Hinely, Hunter, Felheim and Traci), and the gentry (Clark, Hunter)—the latter a term that, as Bradbrook and Hinely admit, also applies to Windsor's bourgeois or middle-class inhabitants.[7] In short, as Hunter suggests, the play frustrates any consistent definition of its middling sort. In fact, I would argue, its network of insults emphasizes that this middle realm is actually constituted by multiple and often contradictory interests that critics' double terminology has helped to obscure.

My understanding of this contradictory middle realm has been influenced by recent accounts of late twentieth-century workers who are middle class not because they are positioned between the aristocracy and the peasantry but because, within the capitalist mode of production, they are neither entirely bourgeois nor entirely proletarian. These accounts are offered by economists and political theorists who locate their work within—or, at least, in dialogue with—a marxist tradition. These writers generally agree to label "middle class" those groups whose political alliances are especially uncertain because their economic interests coincide with the interests of both the exploiters and the exploited within any dominant mode of production. For example, in Britain and in the United States, these workers currently include small business owners who do not employ wage laborers, and the entire array of white collar workers.[8] Analyses of these particular laborers cannot be imported directly into late sixteenth-century England, of course. Yet I find this work helpful because the contradictory structural location of the middle class prompts each of these writers to consider, more generally, how political identities are produced and to *re*consider the nature of political agency. For example, they ask how class struggle relates to other social struggles; when interests based on perceived common alliances coincide with those based on often unrecognized structural affiliations; under what conditions those affiliations become politically meaningful and thus available for organization into political alliances; how the political realm relates to the economic, to the social, or to the cultural; how we might distinguish not only among different objects of oppression but also among different structures of oppression; and under what conditions any group characterized by multiple and conflicting interests will pursue the

more radical of its affiliations. Discussions of the middle class are particularly useful in sorting through these issues because, although they do not accord an inevitable primacy to economic exploitation, they *do* retain the category of exploitation and ask how its structure of oppression might intersect with other oppressive structures. Drawing upon these discussions, I argue that Shakespeare's middle class is not a *thing* to be defined but, instead, a *process* of constructing alliances among groups characterized by their simultaneous participation in very different structures of oppression and thus by their multiple and often contradictory potential short- and long-term interests. In the next section of this essay, I examine how Shakespeare's insults reinforce categories through which members of such groups might experience their political identities.

II

After Falstaff sends identical love letters to Alice Ford and to Margaret Page, sexual slander becomes Windsor's most prevalent form of insult. Recognizing Falstaff's missives as dangerous attacks upon their honesty, the women vow to avenge themselves upon "this unwholesome humidity, this gross wat'ry pumpion" and to "teach him to know turtles from jays" (3.3.40–42). Pistol warns Ford that Falstaff plans to seduce his wife and predicts that the cuckolded Ford will be compelled to adopt a particularly abominable term:

> Pistol: Prevent; or go thou
> Like Sir Actaeon he, with Ringwood at thy heels—
> O, odious is the name!
> Ford: What name, sir?
> Pistol: The horn, I say. Farewell.
>
> (2.1.117–21)

Unlike Page, Ford refuses to trust the honesty of his wife, to let her actions "lie on my head" (2.1.184). Instead, he searches for Falstaff in her laundry basket, shouting, "Buck! I would I could wash myself of the buck! Buck, buck, buck! ay, buck! I warrant you, buck, and of the season too, it shall appear" (3.3.157–59). And, posing as Master Brook, he joins Falstaff in slandering Alice Ford's honesty: "Some say that, though she appear honest to me, yet in other places she enlargeth her mirth so far that there is shrewd construction made of her" (2.2.221–24). Asked by "Master Brook" whether he knows Ford, the knight responds by fulfilling Pistol's prediction:

> Hang him, poor cuckoldly knave. I know him not. Yet I wrong him to call him poor. They say the jealous wittolly knave hath masses of money, for the which his wife seems to me well-favor'd. I will use her as the key of the cuckoldly rogue's coffer, and there's my harvest-home. (2.2.270–75)

Unwilling to be labeled a wittol, Ford vows to make public the activities that have reduced him to a cuckold.

Yet he also acknowledges the risk of this course of action: if his wife actually *is* trustworthy, he will not be labeled a cuckold, yet his very name will become a proverbial insult:

> Help to search my house this one time. If I find not what I seek, show no color for my extremity; let me for ever be your table-sport. Let them say of me, 'As jealous as Ford, that search'd a hollow walnut for his wive's leman.' (4.2.160–64)

In the end, of course, the women save Ford from this fate. By costuming Falstaff with a buck's head and orchestrating his ritual humiliation, they allow Ford to repudiate his earlier jealousy and to turn Falstaff's slanderous speech upon the knight's own head:

> Now, sir, who's a cuckold now? Master [Brook], Falstaff's a knave, a cuckoldly knave; here are his horns, Master [Brook]; and, Master [Brook], he hath enjoy'd nothing of Ford's but his buck-basket, his cudgel, and twenty pounds of money, which must be paid to Master [Brook]. His horses are arrested for it, Master [Brook]. (5.5.109–15)

Because Ford has not been Falstaff's sole victim, the shaming ritual concludes with Ford, the Pages, and Evans insulting the knight who has been to them "as slanderous as Sathan":

> Ford: What, a hodge-pudding? A bag of flax?
> Mrs. Page: A puff'd man?
> Page: Old, cold, wither'd, and of intolerable entrails?
> Ford: And one that is as slanderous as Sathan?
> Page: And as poor as Job?
> Ford: And as wicked as his wife?
> Evans: And given to fornications, and to taverns, and sack, and wine, and metheglins, and to drinkings and swearings and starings, pribbles and prabbles?
>
> (5.5.151–60)

In order to describe the political alliances that these sexual insults help to promote, I return to an earlier instance of "pribbles and prabbles" in the

play and to the play's larger network of abuse. This entails considering Shakespeare's depiction of Shallow and Evans and of their roles, respectively, as justice of the peace and parson. And it entails asking, more generally, how these often-overlooked inhabitants of Windsor might help us to locate the play's "abominable terms" within Renaissance struggles over absolutism and between commercial and industrial capital.

In the play's opening lines, Shallow vows to prosecute the abusive Falstaff in the Star Chamber. This vow compels Evans to suggest alternative methods for keeping the peace:

> Evans: If Sir John Falstaff have committed disparagements unto you, I am of the church, and will be glad to do my benevolence to make atonements and compremises between you.
>
> Shallow: The Council shall hear it, it is a riot.
>
> Evans: It is not meet the Council hear a riot; there is no fear of Got in a riot. The Council, look you, shall desire to hear the fear of Got, and not to hear a riot. Take your vizaments in that.
>
> Shallow: Ha! o' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it.
>
> Evans: It is petter that friends is the sword, and end it; and there is also another device in my prain, which peradventure prings goot discretions with it.
>
> . . . . . .
>
> It were a goot motion if we leave our pribbles and prabbles, and desire a marriage between Master Abraham and Mistress Anne Page.
>
> (1.1.30–44, 54–57)

In spite of Evans's misinterpretation, Shallow's "Council" is, of course, a secular body—the Star Chamber, which did try cases of seditious riot.[9] Yet his plan to "make a Star Chamber matter of it" is remarkable in its assumption that committing "disparagements" unto "Robert Shallow, esquire" constitutes "a riot" (1.1.1–2, 31, 3–4, 35). In short, he equates Falstaff's abuse of him as a private individual—not as a public official—with sedition against the state.

Even those who were tried by the county assize courts for seditious speech were generally more direct than Falstaff in their attacks against the crown. For example, a 1592 Essex assize court sentenced Ralph Duckworth, a laborer, to be pilloried for his seditious public complaint that "this is no good government which we now live under, and yt was

merrye in Ingland when ther was better government, and yf the Queene dye ther wilbe a change, and all those that be of this religion now used wilbe pulled out." Duckworth punctuated his sentiments by striking John Debanck, a rector, over the head with a cudgel. And a 1590 Surrey assize court jailed Thomas Garner, a baker, for his public claim "that the Quenes Majestie was an arrant whore and his whore, and if he could come to her he wold teare her in peeces, and he wold drink blodd; and that he wold sett London on fyer and it wolde be a brave sight unto him."[10]

Unlike the justice of the peace, Evans recognizes that Falstaff's greatest injury is not to Shallow or to the state but, instead, to the peace of Windsor: Falstaff is a sower of discord who has created "pribbles and prabbles" (1.1.55) among the town's inhabitants. The parson offers to "make atonements and compremises" (1.1.33–34)—a suggestion for restoring the peace that implies the matter need not extend beyond the town's jurisdiction:

> Peace, I pray you. Now let us understand. There is three umpires in this matter, as I understand: that is, Master Page (*fidelicet* Master Page) and there is myself (*fidelicet* myself) and the three party is (lastly and finally) mine host of the Garter. (1.1.136–41)

The significance of the debate between Shallow and Evans hinges upon their positions as justice of the peace and as parson. In order to sort through the terms of this debate, I pause in my reading of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* to discuss the position of justices of the peace in late sixteenth-century England. For the purposes of this essay, I want to stress that a justice's decision about how to keep the local peace would have turned on his notorious dual alliance both to his local community and to the central government.

During the Renaissance, justices of the peace held allegiances to both state and local officials and, more generally, to both state and local notions of and methods for maintaining social order. They were members of the gentry who were appointed by the state to keep the peace in their local communities. Their immediate superiors were the judges of the assize courts, their immediate inferiors the town constables. Like the justices of the peace, assize judges were state appointees who were commissioned with the task of keeping the peace. Yet, unlike the justices, their jurisdiction was not confined to their native communities. Also known as "circuit judges," these men traveled the English countryside, presiding over semiannual county assize sessions. These sessions were designed to unite the executive and judicial powers of the monarch

and to extend those powers consistently throughout England. This closely-regulated judicial system was well-developed by 1597, the year generally suggested as the earliest probable date of the play's composition. Its effectiveness depended, in part, upon the willingness of justices to follow the instructions of the assize judges—both in the quarter sessions, over which the justices presided, and in their daily decisions about whether to prosecute cases that came to their attention.

In fact, ideally, the justices would literally earn their titles as gentlemen by mediating local disputes without recourse to the courts. The decision to mediate often hinged not only on state-sanctioned criteria—such as the strength of the physical evidence and the reputation of the accused—but also on the justices' less authorized concern that the letter of state law could disrupt the locally-defined social order or that, by referring a judgment even to the quarter sessions, they might announce that their local community needed outside assistance in maintaining social order.[11] Although the justice of the peace retained the final decision about whether to prosecute a case, cases generally came to the attention of the justice only after the community cooperated in identifying and apprehending the criminal. Private individuals often initiated cases by noticing suspicious behavior, spying on the perpetrator, entering residences in an effort to obtain physical evidence, and even, at times, gathering neighbors together in collective pursuit of the accused. Whether summoned by this collective "hue and cry" or by verbal and written complaints, the constable became crucial at this stage in the developing case. After leading the chase and capturing the accused, the constable might have been called upon to coordinate a local shaming ritual or to bring the captured man to the central government's representative, a local justice of the peace. The justice would then decide whether to prosecute and, if so, whether to settle out of court or to hold the accused for a trial at the next quarter session or the assize court. Unlike the justices, constables were selected from among the yeomen or husbandmen and were selected by the local court leet, county peerage, or town government. Yet, like the justices, they were bound by oath to serve the interests of the monarch and the central government.[12]

The Merry Wives of Windsor depicts this elaborate legal machinery as ludicrously ineffective. In spite of his role as justice, Shallow refuses to keep the peace by settling his differences with Falstaff out of court. Evans, of course, deletes the justice from his list of the "three umpires" (1.1.137) in the case against Falstaff. And, in spite of Nym's fear that Slender will "run the nuthook's humor" (1.1.167–68) on him, both instances of a hue and cry depicted in the play are unsuccessful. In an

effort to produce evidence of his own cuckolding, the jealous Ford spies not upon a suspicious neighbor but upon his own wife and repeatedly calls upon his fellow townspeople and "all the officers in Windsor" (3.3.107) to help him search his own home for Falstaff. When the men pursue the disguised knight, Falstaff eludes all of them, including the constable:

> I was like to be apprehended for the witch of Brainford. But that my admirable dexterity of wit, my counterfeiting the action of an old woman, deliver'd me, the knave constable had set me i' th' stocks, i' th' common stocks, for a witch. (4.5.116–20)

And the host, robbed of his horses by Evans and Doctor Caius's ruse, shouts to no avail, "Hue and cry, villain, go! Assist me, knight, I am undone! Fly, run, hue and cry, villain! I am undone!" (4.5.90–92).

Shallow does perform as a proper justice when, attempting to prevent a duel between Evans and Caius, he says, "Master Doctor Caius, I am come to fetch you home. I am sworn of the peace" (2.3.51–53). Yet, throughout this scene, Shallow oscillates between taunting and soothing the antagonists, and it is not Shallow but the host who ultimately prevents the duel. In so doing, the host actually provokes Evans and Caius to band together in their disorderly behavior. The parson tells the doctor:

> This is well! he [the host] has made us his vlouting-stog. I desire you that we may be friends; and let us knog our prains together to be revenge on this same scall, scurvy, cogging companion, the host of the Garter. (3.1.117–21)

The play stresses that this sometime-keeper of the local peace is not merely a justice but a *quorum* justice. When Shallow announces that he is an "esquire," his cousin Slender adds, "In the county of Gloucester, Justice of the Peace and Coram" (1.1.4, 5–6). In this way, Slender defines Shallow as a member of the local gentry who has been favored by the state with an appointment to the "Coram"—or quorum. Because of their skillful and experienced application of the law, quorum justices were those justices of the peace whose presence was necessary to actually constitute a bench that carried legal authority. In 1587, Lord Burghley urged that the number of quorum justices be reduced, in part because Elizabeth and her governors had traded coveted appointments to the quorum for the loyalty of the greater gentry families, which, they hoped, would counterbalance the threat of the peerage. In so doing, they had endangered their own carefully engineered system for promoting abso-

lute rule and a centralized state by overpopulating the quorum with justices who were not trained in the law. In other words, within the context of absolutism and centralization, quorum justices represented a particularly vexed instance of what I have described as the justice's dual alliance to his local community and to the central government.

Perhaps it is not surprising, then, that Shakespeare attributes the ineffectiveness of the Elizabethan judicial system in part to Shallow's method of resolving the justice's dual alliances. The cousins stress that Shallow is the county's principal justice—the "*Custa-lorum*" (1.1.7)—and that his three-hundred-year-old title as a local esquire is not merely the temporary designation granted by the state to justices during their tenure. Yet, as I suggested earlier, Shallow's insistence that Falstaff face Star Chamber charges suggests that he also identifies himself with the state and equates slander against a justice with slander against the central government. In the play's logic, these competing self-definitions are incompatible. Shallow does attempt to make them compatible by redefining the traits that characterize a local esquire. In order to do so, however, he must collapse the play's distinction between gentlemanly behavior and courtly affectation. In the play's opening lines, Slender reveals that this "gentleman born . . . writes himself *Armigero*, in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation, *Armigero*" (1.1.8–11). With this practice, Shallow stresses that he is a member of the armigerous gentry—a gentleman who, although not a peer, is entitled to bear a coat of arms. Yet, more importantly, he also stresses that he defines his gentility through the derivation of the term "esquire" from "armiger," an apprentice-knight who bore his master's armor. In short, in a speech designed to defend himself from Falstaff's abuse, Shallow actually locates himself as Falstaff's servant. At the same time, he announces his allegiance to an increasingly-anachronistic, martial form of status that Elizabethans often associated with the affectations of those courtiers who feebly mimicked a much earlier incarnation of the aristocracy.

The host of the Garter reinforces this association and claims that gentlemanly behavior and courtly affectation are incommensurate when, in one breath, he greets Page, "How now, bully-rook? thou'rt a gentleman," and summons Shallow, "Cavaleiro Justice, I say!" (2.1.193–94). The host's conjunction of "Cavaleiro" and "Justice" and Shallow's writing "himself *Armigero*, in any bill, warrant, quittance, or obligation" suggest that the play's justice of the peace performs his official duties by asserting his markedly ungentlemanly status. This behavior makes him an ineffective keeper of local peace and thus an ineffective agent of the state. For example, Evans suggests that Shallow settle his differences with Falstaff

out of court. Instead, in spite of his role as justice, Shallow responds to the knight's insulting behavior by shouting, "Ha! o' my life, if I were young again, the sword should end it" (1.1.40–41). The gentler Evans reminds him that "it is petter that friends is the sword, and end it" (1.1.42–43). Later, Page attempts to cast Shallow's affection for the sword as a youthful predilection which could only predate his serving as justice of the peace. "You have yourself *been* a great fighter," he says, "though *now* a man of peace" (2.3.42–43, emphases added). Shallow responds that his affection for fighting has not diminished: "Bodykins, Master Page, though I now be old and of the peace, if I see a sword out, my finger itches to make one" (2.3.44–46).

Shakespeare's depiction of Shallow is part of the play's more general emphasis upon royal efforts to use the resources of a centralized state in order to establish absolute rule in England. Shakespeare sets *The Merry Wives of Windsor* in the shadow of Windsor castle. Mistress Quickly reminisces about a time "when the court lay at Windsor" (2.2.61–62), and when Page, Shallow, and Slender observe Falstaff's ritual humiliation, they "couch i' th' castle-ditch" (5.2.1) into which royal officials famously cast the possessions of one treacherous Knight of the Garter, the earl of Northumberland. This setting accentuates both England's centralization and the nation's conflicted relationship to absolutism. Windsor castle is one of several English castles constructed by William the Conqueror both as military strongholds and as royal reminders of the power and pervasiveness of the monarchy. Almost three centuries later, Edward III continued this effort to unite England under royal control by founding the Order of the Garter at Windsor castle. Selecting the warrior St. George as the Order's patron, the king hoped to install as Garter knights nobility who would then support the French wars through which he intended to expand England's territory. Elizabeth I attempted to buttress England's increasingly-centralized state and its always-tenuous absolute rule by personally controlling and often withholding from the aristocracy their installation into the Order of the Garter, by increasing the public pageantry of Garter celebrations, and by relocating from Windsor to her residence in London the Order's annual feast of St. George.[13] As we have seen, Elizabeth and her governors also fostered an elaborate legal system that was designed to promote absolute rule and a centralized state. That system depended, in part, upon justices who derived their authority and their status both from state and from local structures. Yet Shakespeare discredits Shallow's effort to resolve this dual alliance to the central government and to his local community. In attempting to maintain both of these alliances, the ungentlemanly

Shallow retreats into anachronism and courtly affectation and, as a result, presides over the disintegration of Elizabeth's legal machinery.

By setting his play in Windsor, Shakespeare also stresses how royal efforts to use the resources of a centralized state in order to reinforce absolute rule often inflected tensions surrounding town demands for limited autonomy from the crown. In fact, the castle ditch from which Page, Shallow, and Slender observe Falstaff's shaming also marked the boundary between royal property and that of the town. Within this rubric, Windsor is remarkable among English towns because it was formed as a royal borough that owed neither rent nor loyalty to any overlord except the king. As a result of this relatively direct relationship between Windsor and the monarch, the authority relations that underpinned absolute rule were visibly feudal and visibly associated with royal prerogative. These authority relations were particularly clear at the time of the play's composition as Windsor's governing burgesses pleaded futilely for Elizabeth to renegotiate their town charter. Town charters were one forum in which the alliances and the tensions between town governors and their monarch were played out. When Elizabeth visited Windsor in 1586, the mayor, giving her his mace, stressed that he was

> offering up not only this small peece of government which we sustaine and exercise under your Majestie, but ourselves also and all that we have freely, not co-arctedly, joyfullie not grudgingly, to be for ever at your gratious disposing.

At Elizabeth's "gratious disposing," the corporation waited until James's succession before receiving their new charter. A series of town charters, beginning in 1277, and the town's charter of incorporation in 1467 had gradually extended the powers of the mayor, the bailiffs, and the burgesses and had made possible the eventual near-merging of the town's Trinity Guild with its governing burgesses or corporation. For example, the charter of 1439 assured the governing burgesses that they, rather than the justices of the peace, would have jurisdiction over all nonfelonious cases involving laborers or artisans; the burgesses would try these cases in the borough courts over which they presided in the guild halls. Although the membership of the town corporation and the Trinity Guild had long overlapped and although guild membership had long been the accepted route to town leadership, by the time of the play's composition, these two bodies actually shared one record book. The long-awaited charter, awarded in the first year of James I's reign, would outline in detail the corporation's internal structure and would further extend its legislative and economic privileges. In so doing, the charter

would promote the governing burgesses' increasing autonomy from the crown and would make formal their inseparability from the guild. In this respect, Windsor followed a pattern common to many English towns in the late sixteenth century.[14]

Although *The Merry Wives of Windsor* does not depict the intricacies of town charters, it does suggest that Shallow's effort to maintain his dual alliances actually threatens the limited autonomy from the crown that Windsor's corporation sought to extend and that town charters generally guaranteed. For example, if Shallow had made a "Star Chamber matter" of Falstaff's abuse, he would have announced that Windsor's magistrates were incapable of controlling disorder and thus required the direct intervention of the crown in their local affairs. Governing burgesses were particularly wary of this sort of intervention during the 1590s when Elizabeth often responded to local unrest by infringing upon rights that had been guaranteed to towns in their charters. It was precisely this sort of intervention that corporation directives, local shaming rituals, and justices' efforts at mediation often helped to prevent.[15]

In addition, rather than keeping the peace, Shallow actually contributes to one common form of local disorder—verbal abuse. In the play's opening scene, Evans describes Falstaff's abuses not only as property crimes against Shallow but also as insults that threaten the community's peace: Falstaff has "committed disparagements unto" Shallow and has sown "pribbles and prabbles" among Windsor's inhabitants (1.1.31–32, 55). Yet, ignoring Evans's plea that he make peace with Falstaff, the justice confronts the knight:

> Shallow: Knight, you have beaten my men, kill'd my deer, and broke open my lodge.
> Falstaff: But not kiss'd your keeper's daughter?
>
> (1.1.111–13)

In spite of this warning that Falstaff's abusive behavior might readily extend into sexual abuse, the pugnacious Shallow refuses to back down. The terms of the dispute escalate as Falstaff and his servants utter or provoke a barrage of insulting appellations which are not restricted to Shallow—"good cabbage," "cony-catching rascals," "Banbury cheese," "Mephostophilus," "Slice," "mountain-foreigner," "latten bilbo," "Froth and scum," "Scarlet," and "drunken knaves" (1.1.121, 124–25, 128, 130, 132, 161, 162, 164, 173, 184)—and as Falstaff exits by kissing Mistress Ford. Shallow allows Falstaff to become an uncontrollable threat to Windsor's peace. In so doing, the ungentlemanly justice also allows the knight to propel Ford into becoming yet one more sower of community

discord. The jealous Ford slanders not only himself and his wife but also George Page and his wife. He labels Page a wittol, a "secure fool" who "stands so firmly on his wive's frailty" (2.1.233–34) and plans to "take him [Falstaff], then torture my wife, pluck the borrow'd veil of modesty from the so-seeming Mistress Page, divulge Page himself for a secure and willful Actaeon; and to these violent proceedings all my neighbors shall cry aim" (3.2.40–44).[16]

In this way, Shallow's ungentlemanly behavior provokes a series of offenses that are situated increasingly within the jurisdiction of another Elizabethan keeper of local peace—the church. Evans's redescription of Falstaff's property crimes as "disparagements" (1.1.31), Evans's confusion between the secular and the ecclesiastical "Council," and Falstaff's remark about the keeper's daughter all signal that the knight's abuses are bordering upon ecclesiastical jurisdiction. As Shallow persists in antagonizing Falstaff, the knight combines nonsexual with sexual offenses and, eventually, focuses almost exclusively on sexual offenses—particularly the *sexual slander* with which he attacks the Fords and the Pages. His servants and the jealous Ford follow his lead. In the 1590s church courts, in spite of attempts by secular courts and by Puritans to restrict their power, remained primarily responsible for trying cases concerning fornication, adultery, incest, disputed matrimonial promises, scolding, theft of church property, and, perhaps most frequently, defamation. In ecclesiastical courts, the latter category designated cases in which the defendants had accused the plaintiffs of crimes that the church was empowered to prosecute. For example, when, earlier in the century, Elizabeth Johnson brought an ecclesiastical defamation charge against Alice Roper because Roper had purportedly accused Johnson of the "crimes of adultery and theft," the presiding church officer agreed to try Roper for defaming Johnson's sexual honesty. Yet he dismissed the charge that Roper had called Johnson a thief because theft was a secular crime. Church defamation cases overwhelmingly involved sexual slander—particularly accusations of adultery, whoredom, and cuckoldry. By trying these cases and by gradually broadening the definition of "defamation" to include disruptive verbal abuse and rumors that actually alleged neither secular nor religious offenses, church courts were one key instrument for quelling local disorder. Like the justices, church officials were encouraged, if possible, to settle these cases locally and peacefully by "compromise and arbitration" rather than forwarding them to the higher ecclesiastical courts. And, like the justices, these local ministers often relied upon community consensus that the accused had threatened the common peace.[17] Participating in this structure, Evans determines

that Falstaff's disparagements are a threat to Windsor's peace yet judges those abuses an inappropriate topic for a higher ecclesiastical court.

Evans then offers his services as local mediator precisely as an agent of the church. "I am of the church," he reminds Shallow, "and will be glad to do my benevolence to make atonements and compremises between you" (1.1.32–34). It is also as a man "of the church" that Evans lauds Page's offer to mediate between Falstaff and the recalcitrant justice of the peace:

> Shallow: Is Sir John Falstaff here?
> Page: Sir, he is within; and I would I could do a good office between you.
> Evans: It is spoke as a Christians ought to speak.
>
> (1.1.97–101)

Yet the parson is unable stop the characters' stream of insults—including the purely sexual slander that is squarely within his jurisdiction—and thus is unable to restore Windsor's peace and protect the limited autonomy of its governing burgesses from the crown. In fact, when Evans rebukes the "slanderous" (5.5.155) Falstaff, the knight seizes upon the parson's words, "*Pauca verba*; Sir John, good worts" (1.1.120), as an opportunity to insult him by drawing attention to his Welsh accent: "Good worts? good cabbage" (1.1.121). And, attempting to check Ford's incessant sexual slander, Evans advises ineffectually: "Master Ford, you must pray, and not follow the imaginations of your own heart. This is jealousies" (4.2.155–57). Ford compels Evans to bear witness both of the times that, searching his own home, he slanders his wife's honesty. The parson joins with Caius, Page, and Shallow in reprimanding Ford and in defending the honesty of his wife. During the first search, Evans warns Ford that his suspicions are merely "fery fantastical humors and jealousies" (3.3.170–71) and insists that Alice Ford "is as honest a omans as I will desires among five thousand, and five hundred too" (3.3.220–21). And when, during the second search, Ford demands to search his wife's dirty laundry, Evans draws attention to his inversion of the proper gender order: "Why, this is lunatics! this is mad as a mad dog! . . . 'Tis unreasonable! Will you take up your wive's clothes? Come away" (4.2.124–25, 141–42). The parson's words have no effect.

What is the significance of Shakespeare's depiction of Shallow and of Evans? Not surprisingly, keeping the peace in Renaissance England was very much a matter of constructing and imposing the terms of that peace. By depicting Shallow's and Evans's failed attempts to keep the peace, *The Merry Wives of Windsor* perpetuates a generalized fear of

local disorder. That fear often united otherwise disparate property-owners—small traders, master craftsmen, and local gentry—against the apprentices, peasants, and poor immigrants whose rebelliousness they feared. The fear of disorder was particularly well-developed in the 1590s after more than a decade of crop failures, inflation, and sporadic food and apprentice riots, and helped to prevent alliances between, for example, peasants and the lesser craftsmen.[18]

The play's depictions of Shallow and Evans also suggest that the justice and parson are unable to maintain local order precisely because they do not share the collective identities of "townsmen" and "gentlemen." When Shallow attempts to make sense of the justice's dual alliance to the central government and to his local community, he defines the local community from which he derives his status not as the town of Windsor but as the "county of Gloucester" (1.1.5). In order to maintain both his status as county esquire and his status as an agent of the central government, Shallow describes himself not as a town gentleman but as the aristocratic servant of a knight and, as a result, fosters local disorder. As a parson, Evans's social status would have been notoriously ambiguous and determined solely by his position within an ecclesiastical system that many contemporaries associated not with local English communities but with an absolute monarch and with "popery." Although it was not inevitable that parsons would further the interests of the religious hierarchy or the central government, those who disseminated the church's morality uncritically were fairly likely to do so. The play designates Evans as a parson whose status is determined by his role as an agent of the state church. Both Shallow and the host refer to him as "Sir Hugh"—a title that would have been conferred upon the parson solely because he was a church official.[19]

The play then attributes this church official's inability to control his neighbors' slander, in part, to the Welsh origins that override his identity as an inhabitant of Windsor. Several of the play's insults—"base Hungarian wight" (1.3.20), "Base Phrygian Turk" (1.3.88), "Flemish drunkard" (2.1.23), "Cataian" (2.1.144), "Ethiopian" (2.3.27), "Francisco" (2.3.28), "Castalion-King-Urinal" (2.3.33), "Anthropophaginian" (4.5.9), and "Bohemian-Tartar" (4.5.20)—suggest how race, ethnicity, and nationality help to define "Englishness" for the play's characters. And, although Evans and Caius are generally respected by their fellow inhabitants of Windsor, their regional and national origins expose them to a variety of insults. Even when those origins are not being insulted, they are insistently remarked upon as a source of curiosity and as a defining trait that is at least as crucial as their professions. Shallow tries to tempt Evans

into attending a duel by saying, "Sir, there is a fray to be fought between Sir Hugh the Welsh priest and Caius the French doctor" (2.1.200–202). And, in his eventual effort to stop that fray, the host calls out: "Peace, I say, Gallia and Gaul, French and Welsh, soul-curer and body-curer!" (3.1.97–98). In fact, in spite of Evans's belief that "it is petter that friends is the sword," he and the doctor are apparently susceptible to their martial, and anachronistic, threat to the local peace precisely because of their origins. Page has "heard that the Frenchman hath good skill in his rapier" (2.1.222–23), and Shallow asks Evans, "What? the sword and the word? Do you study them both, Master Parson?" (3.1.44–45).

Shallow's taunt refers, of course, both to Evans's occupation and to perhaps the most-remarked upon feature of Evans's and Caius's regional and national origins—the pronunciation that leads them to "hack our English" (3.1.77–78) and make "fritters of English" (5.5.143). Ford stresses that the parson will never entirely become an Englishman when he assures Evans: "I will never mistrust my wife again, till thou art able to woo her in good English" (5.5.133–34). Even when the disguised Evans speaks in unaccountably "good English" during the shaming ritual, the otherwise bewildered Falstaff shouts, "Heavens defend me from that Welsh fairy, lest he transform me to a piece of cheese!" (5.5.81–82). And, finally, Quickly stresses that Caius's pronunciation is actually an insult against the nation when she describes her employer's verbal insults with the same terms that describe his frittered English. Explaining to John Rugby why he must watch at the window for Caius's approach, she predicts that if the doctor were to "find any body in the house, here will be an old abusing of God's patience and the King's English" (1.4.4–6). In short, the parson is unable to keep the local peace because, in the host's words, he combines "proverbs" with "no-verbs" (3.1.105).[20] As this discussion about constructing "Englishness" indicates, the play does not diminish its fervid nationalism when it promotes the collective identities of "gentlemen" and "townsmen." *The Merry Wives of Windsor* does suggest, however, that justices and churchmen whose local loyalties are not *town* loyalties will serve neither the central government nor the town well. And it suggests that town gentlemen are best equipped to define and protect local and national order.

Yet, in spite of the play's emphasis upon gentle*men* and towns*men*, it is Alice Ford and Margaret Page who publicly shame Falstaff and, thus, restore Windsor's peace. This public shaming is one instance of the wives' merry response to Falstaff's insults. In a longer version of this essay, I focus on the tensions surrounding the term "mirth" in the play in order to analyze how men and women are situated quite differently

within the play's network of insults. I argue that *The Merry Wives of Windsor* participates in Renaissance struggles over the sphere and nature of women's activity precisely by distinguishing between men's and women's honest behavior. By restricting the terms of women's honesty to sexual propriety, the wives' merry response to Falstaff helps to restrict the proper sphere of women's activity to the conservation of that honesty and, thus, of their husbands' wealth. In this way, the play helps to support other Renaissance cultural practices that viewed women's activities primarily through the lens of their sexual honesty and that cast that honesty as a community concern.[21]

For the moment, however, I am interested in how the women's public shaming of Falstaff helps to create alliances within Windsor. The play attributes Evans's failure to restore the peace, in part, to his initial tendency to settle offenses privately. For example, he pledges to Shallow that he, Page, and the host "will afterwards ork upon the cause with as great discreetly as we can" (1.1.145–46). Shallow complains to Page that he will not be satisfied by discretion—by a confession "in some sort":

> Shallow: He hath wrong'd me, Master Page.
> Page: Sir, he doth in some sort confess it.
> Shallow: If it be confess'd, it is not redress'd. Is not that so, Master Page? He hath wrong'd me, indeed he hath, at a word he hath. Believe me, Robert Shallow, esquire, saith he is wrong'd.
>
> (1.1.102–7)

Shallow's seemingly excessive repetition—"He hath wrong'd me," "He hath wrong'd me," "Robert Shallow, esquire, saith he is wrong'd"—suggests that the justice would prefer that Falstaff receive a public and lengthy shaming. Here Shallow concurs with the officials who meted out punishments for secular and ecclesiastical offenses—including verbal abuse—and with contemporaries who complained when the county assize courts condemned criminals to a disappointingly speedy hanging.[22] Page echoes Shallow's sentiments. Ford invites Page, Evans, and Caius to dinner after admitting that his jealousy and slander are "my fault, Master Page," and after begging Alice Ford, "I pray you pardon me; pray heartly pardon me" (3.3.218, 226–27). Page accepts the invitation yet promises the parson and doctor that they will soon receive from Ford more than a simple "pardon me": "Let's go in, gentlemen, but (trust me) we'll mock him" (3.3.228–29). This preference for a lengthy shaming is also echoed by the play's plotting and deferred conclusions—the "fine-baited delay" (2.1.95–96) with which the wives cure Falstaff. Yet the

shaming rituals depicted throughout the play are generally meted out not by secular or ecclesiastical officials but by the women, and resemble not the public punishments sanctioned by the courts or the public shamings initiated by governing burgesses but, instead, popular Renaissance charivari and skimmington rituals.

In practice, these popular rituals often helped to maintain a social order—particularly a gender order—which the governing burgesses and the central government endorsed. Yet they were frequently instigated by men who did not occupy official positions of authority and were associated with unsanctioned peasant rituals and the threat of class subversion. For this reason, those who engaged in the rituals often risked appearing before Elizabeth's secular or ecclesiastical courts on charges of disturbing the peace and defamation.[23] In *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, it is the wives who assume that risk during their various shamings of Falstaff. Those shamings then culminate in a well-monitored reappropriation and staging by the town gentry of a tale that the "superstitious idle-headed eld / Receiv'd and did deliver to our age / . . . for a truth" (4.4.36–38). The town wives plan this shaming ritual after predicting that their husbands will "have him publicly sham'd, and methinks there would be no period to the jest, should he not be publicly sham'd" (4.2.220–22). In consultation with their husbands, they stage the public shaming not in the town but in the forest which was under royal jurisdiction.[24] And they cast this potential usurpation of royal authority as the patriotic poaching of a self-proclaimed "Windsor stag" in honor of that "radiant Queen" who "hates sluts and sluttery" (5.5.12–13, 46). In short, the wives' response to Falstaff's "abominable terms" actually restores social order by reinforcing the play's more general sense that town gentlemen are the ideal custodians of both the town and the nation.

By assigning to town gentlemen the task of defining and protecting local and national order, Shakespeare promotes, more precisely, the regional and national authority of the towns' official representatives—their governing burgesses. Throughout the sixteenth century, those burgesses feared incursions on corporation rights not only from peasants, apprentices, and poor immigrants from below but also from the county peerage and, at times, country gentry from above. Neither the peerage nor the country gentry were necessarily hostile to those burgesses and, in fact, those gentry were often strong allies. Yet the play's endorsement of town identities implies that the national patriotism of peerage and gentry is demonstrated by their willingness to support these town authorities. By promoting the national authority of the governing burgesses, Shakespeare further endorses the limited autonomy of town corporations from

the crown. That limited autonomy was generally a form of self-regulation not necessarily hostile to absolutism. In fact, local corporations, their members benefiting from Elizabeth's policies, often furthered not only the economic interests of the absolutist state but also those cultural and political practices that supported absolutism and its feudal authority relations. Yet, at the same time, this limited autonomy did sever the central government's direct control over those burgesses and often marked the corporations' growing dissatisfaction with both the crown's economic policies and its dedication to absolute rule.[25]

Finally, Shakespeare does not offer information about Ford's and Page's relations to production or their roles within town government. In this way his collective identities of "townsmen" and "gentlemen" support the regional and national authority of town corporations and yet obscure the role of those corporations and of the crown within struggles between commercial and industrial capital. Increasingly unable to obtain revenue from the feudal rents of her landed aristocracy, Elizabeth generally supported the commercial interests of merchants over the industrial interests of master craftsmen and the interests of both merchants and master craftsmen over the interests of the laborers whom they employed. When she legislated that towns' governing burgesses must rise to office primarily through prominent merchant guilds, she helped to consolidate the merchants' control over the town. In fact, Windsor's Trinity Guild probably emerged from an earlier medieval merchant guild, and the town's successive charters granted the corporation legislative and economic privileges often explicitly linked to its monopoly over trade on the Thames and within the town. For example, in 1560, 1576, and 1588 the corporation enacted legislation restricting the trading of foreigners and of nonburgesses. Yet this fairly straightforward relationship between the crown and commercial capital was complicated, in part, by tensions surrounding London merchants. By the late sixteenth century, particularly in clothing towns, retail traders began to join with master craftsmen in order to restrict industry to the town and thereby prevent larger London merchants from purchasing products from country manufacturers. These retail traders and master craftsmen often articulated this alliance between town commercial and industrial interests as a patriotic support for town privileges in opposition to country manufacture and to the prosperous London merchants who, with Elizabeth's support, specialized in foreign and export trade. Those London merchants, they claimed, were plundering the coffers of both the town and the nation.[26]

Falstaff depicts himself as one of those merchants whose prosperity

depends upon raiding the town's coffers. He speculates that Alice Ford and Margaret Page are in charge of their husbands' wealth. "I am about thrift" (1.3.43), Falstaff tells his servants. "Briefly—I do mean to make love to Ford's wife. . . . Now, the report goes she has all the rule of her husband's purse" (1.3.43–44, 52–53). He adds that Margaret Page "bears the purse too; she is a region in Guiana, all gold and bounty" (1.3.68–69). Falstaff then casts his attempt to obtain Ford's and Page's wealth directly from their wives as a violation of the town gentlemen's monopoly over trade: "I will be cheaters to them both, and they shall be exchequers to me. They shall be my East and West Indies, and I will trade to them both" (1.3.69–72). In these metaphors, the plundering of the women, like that of Guiana, is cast as an inherently uneven exchange whose primary victims, nonetheless, will be the purses of the town gentry. In fact, coached by the wives, Quickly assures Falstaff that he has distinguished himself in Alice Ford's eyes and thus that she will trade in "the way of honesty" (2.2.74) for those objects and "alligant terms" (2.2.68) that demonstrate his affection. By trading in her honesty, Alice Ford would transfer to Falstaff her husband's wealth.

In this way, the play's "abominable terms" promote political alliances among groups that are characterized by their multiple and often contradictory short and long term interests. The united resistance of these Renaissance "townsmen" and "gentlemen" to the crown's economic policies and their ability to secure town monopoly over trade and industry is predicated upon a network of insults that helps to obscure both the town gentlemen's varying relations to absolutism and their varying positions within the struggle between commercial and industrial capital.

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[1] All citations from *The Merry Wives of Windsor* are from the folio edition of the play in *The Riverside Shakespeare*, ed. G. Blakemore Evans (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1974). See Leah S. Marcus, "Levelling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 168–78, for a discussion about the differences between the folio and quarto editions—especially the ways in which the quarto depicts Windsor as a less particularized location.

[2] Susan Dwyer Amussen, *An Ordered Society: Gender and Class in Early Modern*

England (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988), 50, 95–179; Anthony Fletcher, "Honour, Reputation and Local Officeholding in Elizabethan and Stuart England," in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, ed. Fletcher and John Stevenson (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), 92–115; R. H. Helmholz, ed., *Select Cases on Defamation to 1600* (London: Seldon Society, 1985); Ralph Houlbrooke, *Church Courts and the People during the English Reformation 1520–1570* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1979), 55–88; Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987), 292–319; Andrew J. King, "The Law of Slander in Early Antebellum America," *The American Journal of Legal History* 35 (1991): 1–5; Louis A. Knafla, "'Sin of all sorts swarmeth': Criminal Litigation in an English County in the Early Seventeenth Century," in *Law, Litigants and the Legal Profession: Papers Presented to the Fourth British Legal History Conference at the University of Birmingham, 10–13 July 1979*, Royal Historical Society Studies in History Series, no. 36, ed. E. W. Ives and A. H. Manchester (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 50–67; Peter Rushton, "Women, Witchcraft, and Slander in Early Modern England: Cases from the Church Courts of Durham, 1560–1675," *Northern History: A Review of the History of Northern England* 18 (1982): 116–32; D[avid] E. Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: The Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England," in Fletcher and Stevenson, 116–36, and *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1985; paperback ed., 1987), 39; David Vaisey, "Court Records and the Social History of Seventeenth-Century England," *History Workshop: A Journal of Socialist Historians* 1 (Spring 1976): 185–91; and Carol Z. Wiener, "Sex Roles and Crime in Late Elizabethan Hertfordshire," *The Journal of Social History* 8 (1975): 46–49.

[3] Quotations, in order of presentation, are from Camille Wells Slights, "Pastoral and Parody in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *English Studies in Canada* 11 (1985): 12, 24; Carol Thomas Neely, "Constructing Female Sexuality in the Renaissance: Stratford, London, Windsor, Vienna," in *Feminism and Psychoanalysis*, ed. Richard Feldstein and Judith Roof (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 217; Jan Lawson Hinely, "Comic Scapegoats and the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Studies* 15 (1982): 37, 42; Peter Erickson, "The Order of the Garter, the Cult of Elizabeth, and Class-Gender Tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," in *Shakespeare Reproduced: The Text in History and Ideology*, ed. Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor (New York: Methuen, 1987), 126; Anne Barton, "Falstaff and the Comic Community," in *Shakespeare's "Rough Magic": Renaissance Essays in Honor of C. L. Barber*, ed. Erickson and Coppélia Kahn (Newark: Univ. of Delaware Press, 1985), 138, 139; Sandra Clark, "'Wives may be merry and yet honest too': Women and Wit in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Some Other Plays," in *"Fanned and Winnowed Opinions": Shakespearean Essays Presented to Harold Jenkins*, ed. John W. Mahon and Thomas A. Pendleton (London: Methuen, 1987), 254, 263; and Marvin Felheim and Philip Traci, "Realism in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Ball State University Forum* 22.1 (1981): 57, 59. In *Reappraisals in History: New Views on History and Society in Early Modern Europe*, 2d ed. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1979), 71–149, J. H. Hexter argues against historians who describe the Renaissance middle class as possessing a "group consciousness, group pride, or will to power" (99). Hexter's redefinition of the middle class is part of his larger attempt to undermine Tawney's and Stone's claims about the gentry and the English Revolution. Although I find Hexter's work useful because it describes the range of social positions that have been labeled "middle class," I am not in sympathy with his revisionist project. My chapter argues that the middle class is not a thing to be defined—or redefined—but a

process of forming political alliances among groups that occupy that range of positions.

[4] For a discussion of this definition of the middle class, see Immanuel Wallerstein, "The Bourgeois(ie) as Concept and Reality," *New Left Review* 167 (January/February 1988): 91–106, particularly 91–93.

[5] George K. Hunter, "Bourgeois Comedy: Shakespeare and Dekker," in *Shakespeare and his Contemporaries: Essays in Comparison*, ed. E. A. J. Honigmann (Oxford: Manchester Univ. Press, 1986), 1–15.

[6] Richard Cust and Ann Hughes discuss the elusiveness of "the middling sort" in historians' analyses of early modern culture ("Introduction: After Revisionism," in *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603–1642*, ed. Cust and Hughes [London: Longman, 1989], 33–38). Keith Wrightson argues that the category entered the language of "sorts" at the beginning of the seventeenth century and that it designated an increasingly large range of people ("Estates, Degrees, and Sorts in Tudor and Stuart England," *History Today* 37 [January 1987]: 22).

[7] Barton (note 3), 132–33, 138; M. C. Bradbrook, *Shakespeare the Craftsman* (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1969), 77, 79, 87, 88; Clark (note 3), 254–55, 263; Felheim and Traci (note 3), 57–59; Barbara Freedman, "Falstaff's Punishment: Buffoonery as Defensive Posture in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Studies: An Annual Gathering of Research, Criticism, and Reviews* 14 (1981): 172; Marilyn French, *Shakespeare's Division of Experience* (New York: Summit Books, 1981), 107; Hinely (note 3), 37–38; Hunter (note 5), 4–5, 8–14; and Slights (note 3), 15–17.

[8] Jon Elster, "Three Challenges to Class" in *Analytical Marxism*, ed. John Roemer (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1986), 141–61; Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies*, 2d ed. (London: Hutchinson, 1981), 99–117, 177–97; Stuart Hall, *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (London: Verso, 1988); Wallerstein (note 4), 91–106; and Erik Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (1978; reprint, London: Verso, 1979), 30–110, "A General Framework for the Analysis of Class Structure," in *The Debate on Classes*, ed. Wright (London: Verso, 1989), 3–43, and "What is Middle about the Middle Class?" in Roemer, 114–40.

[9] Perry Anderson, *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (1974; reprint, London: Verso, 1979), 119. The Star Chamber did claim jurisdiction over cases of seditious *libel* that threatened to violently disrupt the national peace—including writing that defamed the monarch and other public officials (if that defamation attacked those officials in their roles as agents of the state) (King [note 2], 5).

[10] The first quotation is cited in *Calendar of Assize Records*, vol. 3 (Essex Indictments, Elizabeth I), ed. J. S. Cockburn (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1978), 391 (court case #2364). The second quotation is cited in *Calendar of Assize Records*, vol. 5 (Surrey Indictments, Elizabeth I), ed. Cockburn (London: Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1980), 345 (court case #2055).

[11] For information about the court system and the justices of the peace, see J. S. Cockburn, *A History of the English Assizes 1558–1714* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1972), 1–11, 153–87, 219–37; T. C. Curtis, "Quarter Sessions Appearances and their Background: 'A Seventeenth-Century Regional Study," in *Crime in England 1550–1800*, ed. Cockburn (London: Methuen, 1977), 135–54; Cynthia B. Herrup, *The Common Peace: Participation and the Criminal Law in Seventeenth-Century England* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1987; paperback edition 1989), 1–92, 193–206; Wallace T. MacCaffrey, "Place and Patronage in Elizabethan Politics," in *Elizabethan Government and Society: Essays Presented to Sir John Neale*, ed. S. T. Bindoff, J. Hurstfield and C. H. Williams (London: Univ. of London, Athlone Press, 1961), 95–126; M. K. McIntosh,

"Central Court Supervision of the Ancient Demesne Manor Court of Havering, 1200–1625," in Ives and Manchester (note 2), 87–93; and Keith Wrightson, "Two Concepts of Order: Justices, Constables and Jurymen in Seventeenth-Century England," in *An Ungovernable People: The English and their Law in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. John Brewer and John Styles (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers Univ. Press, 1980), 21–46. The Bacon quotations are cited by Cockburn, *History of the English Assizes*, 13 and 153; the Coventry quotation is cited by Herrup, 52.

[12] Herrup (note 11), 42–92; Joan Kent, "The English Village Constable, 1580–1642: The Nature and Dilemmas of the Office," *The Journal of British Studies* 20 (1981): 26–49; and Wrightson (note 11), 21–46.

[13] W. H. St. John Hope, *Windsor Castle: An Architectural History*, Part I (London: Published at the Offices of Country Life, 1913), 4–7; Roy Strong, *The Cult of Elizabeth: Elizabethan Portraiture and Pageantry* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1977), 164–85; *The Transition from Feudalism To Capitalism* (1976; reprint, London: Verso, 1978), chapters by Maurice Dobb, Christopher Hill, Rodney Hilton, Eric Hobsbawm, and John Merrington; and *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: Berkshire* (1924; reprint, Folkestone: Dawsons of Pall Mall for the University of London Institute of Historical Research, 1972), 8–9, 29, 31. See Anderson (note 9), 113–42, and Ellen Meiksins Wood, *The Pristine Culture of Capitalism: A Historical Essay on Old Regimes and Modern States* (London: Verso, 1991), 22–28, 60–62, for discussions about the relationship between absolutism and centralization in England. Although Wood disagrees with Anderson's claims (elsewhere) about the development of English capitalism, both writers stress England's relatively early centralization and the relatively brief and limited character of English absolutism. Erickson ("Order of the Garter" [note 3]), describes how *The Merry Wives of Windsor* is able to celebrate an aristocratic national identity by drawing upon the popular and public drama of the Elizabethan Garter installation (126–27).

[14] Peter Clark and Paul Slack, *English Towns in Transition 1500–1700* (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1976), 126–40; *The History and Antiquities of Windsor Castle and the Royal College, and Chapel of St. George* (Eton: Printed by Joseph Pote, 1749), 1–30; Robert Richard Tighe and James Edward Davis, *Annals of Windsor, Being a History of the Castle and Town; with some Account of Eton and Places Adjacent*, 2 vols. (London: Longman, Brown, Green, Longmans and Roberts, 1858), 1:104–5, and 2:53–56; and *Victoria History* (note 13), 21, 57–61. The quotation is from *Victoria History*, 61.

[15] S[usan] D[wyer] Amussen, "Gender, Family and the Social Order," Fletcher and Stevenson (note 2), 205–17, and *An Ordered Society* (note 2), 159–79; Clark and Slack (note 14), 134–36; Underdown, "Taming of the Scold" (note 2), 132–35.

[16] In this way, Ford would have also violated the regulations of the Trinity Guild, which announced its interest in keeping the peace and protecting social hierarchies by forbidding fighting and scolding by its members—the "substauncylest and wysest men of the towne"—and by reserving its strongest punishments for those who would "stryke, myssuse, revyle, rayle or mocke" a fellow member of the guild (*Victoria History* [note 13], 60).

[17] Helmholz (note 2), xiv–cxi; Houlbrooke (note 2), 7–20, 55–88; Ingram (note 2), 1–24, 27–69, 292–319; and Wiener (note 2), 46–47. The Roper case is in Helmholz, 24.

[18] Peter Clark, "A Crisis Contained? The Condition of English Towns in the 1590s," in *The European Crisis of the 1590s: Essays in Comparative History*, ed. Clark (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1985), 44–66, and *English Provincial Society from the Reformation to the Revolution: Religion, Politics and Society in Kent 1500–1640* (Has-

socks, Sussex: Harvester Press, 1977), 221–68; Clark and Slack (note 14), 56–57, 82–96, 133; and R. B. Outhwaite, "Dearth, the English Crown and the 'Crisis of the 1590s,'" in Clark, *European Crisis*, 23–43.

[19] Amussen, *An Ordered Society* (note 2), 147–51; Ingram (note 2), 84–124; and Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (note 2), 29.

[20] For a different interpretation of Evans's role in the play, see Joan Rees, "Shakespeare's Welshmen," in *Literature and Nationalism*, ed. Vincent Newey and Ann Thompson (Liverpool: Liverpool Univ. Press, 1991), 22–40. Rees acknowledges that Shakespeare's Welsh characters are presented as distinctly "un-English" yet emphasizes the benevolence of this depiction. Assessing the role of Welshmen in the English imagination several decades after the Act of Union, she argues that "Shakespeare could genuinely have hoped that honour of both Welsh and English might be preserved and both subsumed in a common pride" (38–39). Patricia Parker, *"The Merry Wives of Windsor* and Shakespearean Translation," *Modern Language Quarterly* 52 (1991): 225–61, locates the pronunciation of Evans and Caius within the play's more general interest in translation. In addition, see Elizabeth Pittenger, "Dispatch Quickly: The Mechanical Reproduction of Pages," *Shakespeare Quarterly* 42 (1991): 389–408. Pittenger analyzes the relationship between the play's sexual and textual economies. Within this framework, she considers how "Quickly, as an unruly woman in the play and a surplus character in the scene, embodies an effect that is already, at least potentially, in place in the mechanisms of the translation" (402). Yet she notes that this scapegoating is "dispersed among all the characters, who to some degree display impropriety" (402). For example, Evans's Welsh pronunciation—particularly during the scene of Latin instruction—demonstrates how "the master's language is represented as sharing characteristics with Quickly's so-called female errancy" (402).

[21] I develop this argument in *The Rhetoric of Concealment: Figuring Gender and Class in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, forthcoming 1994). In situating the play within a larger social process of establishing the shifting authority relations among husbands, wives, and children, I take into account Evans's second plan for restoring the peace of Windsor—his suggestion that Slender marry Ann Page.

[22] Herrup (note 11), 5, 165–82.

[23] Amussen, "Gender, Family and the Social Order" (note 15), 196–217, and *An Ordered Society* (note 2), 95–133; and Underdown, "Taming of the Scold" (note 2) and *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (note 2), 39.

[24] *Victoria History* (note 13), 25.

[25] Clark and Slack (note 14), 97–140, and Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion* (note 2), 107–45. Tensions between Windsor and the monarchy would grow in the decades immediately following the town's receipt of a charter during the first year of James I's rule. During the early seventeenth century, its inhabitants were frequently cited for Puritan activity, and, during the revolution, their sentiments were predominantly antiroyalist (*Victoria History* [note 13], 61–62). Absolutism is not central to Clark and Slack's analysis of English towns; drawing upon my earlier comments about absolutism, I locate their claims in relation to this category.

[26] Clark and Slack (note 14), 97–110; Karl Marx, "Intercourse and Productive Forces," in *The German Ideology*, Part I, trans. S. Ryazanskaya (1932; Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1963), reprinted in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 2d ed., ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: Norton, 1978), 176–86; and George Unwin, *Industrial Organization in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (1904; reprint, New York: Augustus M. Kelley, 1963), 70–125.

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Levelling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts

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Levelling Shakespeare: Local Customs and Local Texts

Leah S. Marcus

Major changes are afoot. During the last ten years, there has been among Shakespeareans a growing discomfort with the time-honored editorial practice by which variant early texts are ranked hierarchically on the basis of their fidelity to a presumed Shakespeare "original." According to that practice, at least as it is reflected in standard twentieth-century editions, the texts that rank "high" are accorded lavish editorial attention while the texts that rank "low" are assigned to a curious limbo in which they can be mined for individual readings but are assumed to be debased derivatives of Shakespeare with no claim to unity or artistic integrity.

Since the pioneering work of Steven Urkowitz, Gary Taylor, and Michael Warren, Quarto texts previously regarded as low and contaminated versions of the plays are coming to be regarded as different instead of debased, as encoding distinct patterns of meaning worthy of consideration in their own right rather than as mere disfigurement of the "true" version.[1] This development is by no means unfamiliar to most readers of *Shakespeare Quarterly*; what perhaps deserve more emphasis are the ways in which our new attention to "low" texts of the plays can be coordinated with a new critical interest in "low," popular materials within the plays and with local interpretation more generally.

How can we use the new Shakespearean textual studies to open up the plays to "local" interpretation of a kind that has been unavailable before? And, just as important, how can our interest in local customs and topography help us to analyze different early versions of a single play? My use of the term "levelling" is adopted from early modern folk custom, where it can refer to the temporary, carnivalesque overthrow of social hierarchy or to longer-term social reform based roughly on the carnivalesque model, as in the Leveller Party of the Civil War period in England. I use the term here to characterize a similar recent disruption of hierarchical thinking in our

[1] Steven Urkowitz, *Shakespeare's Revision of* King Lear (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980); Gary Taylor and Michael Warren, eds., *The Division of the Kingdoms: Shakespeare's Two Versions of* King Lear (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). For more recent work in a similar vein, see Urkowitz, "Reconsidering the Relationship of Quarto and Folio Texts of *Richard III*," *English Literary Renaissance*, 16 (1986), 442–66; and "Good News about 'Bad' Quartos" in *"Bad" Shakespeare: Revaluations of the Shakespeare Canon*, Maurice Charney, ed. (London: Associated Univ. Presses, 1988), pp. 189–206; Annabel Patterson, "Back by Popular Demand: The Two Versions of *Henry V*," *Renaissance Drama*, 19 (1988), 29–62; and Michael Warren, "*Doctor Faustus*: The Old Man and the Text," *ELR*, 11 (1981), 111–47. My arguments for localism here in part derive from my *Puzzling Shakespeare: Local Reading and Its Discontents* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1988) and anticipate my book in progress under the working title of "Unediting the Renaissance: Shakespeare, Marlowe, Milton."

understanding of the Shakespearean text, by which, instead of analyzing different early versions of a play in order to decide which is the "true" version and which the deviations from it, we allow the various texts parallel status and analyze differences between them in terms of the distinct shape and local features of the text in which they appear. During the late Renaissance in England, the term "levelling" could refer either to an overturn of the traditional hierarchy, by which the low became high and the high low, or to an establishment of equal status among previously unequal classes of things. Although the iconoclastic thrust of textual levelling may appear to align our project with the former sense of the term, we need to imagine it rather in terms of the latter: to "level" Shakespeare is not to pull his "best" texts to the ground and to elevate the "worst" but to grant—at least provisionally and for exploratory purposes—all of the early texts equal claim to our critical attention.

Anthropologists are divided about the function of carnivalesque levelling in the early modern culture: did it reaffirm a status quo ante or did it open up a gap for new vision, new arrangements of reality? It is my hope that textual levelling will follow the latter, revisionist model—lead to a thorough rethinking of editorial practice toward all of Shakespeare's plays, not only Quarto *King Lear* as rehabilitated by Urkowitz, Taylor, and Warren. In some cases, particularly for single-text plays, our new "levelled" texts may look very much like the old. In other cases, however, as is already true of *Lear*, we may find ourselves gravitating toward a multiple editorial presentation of the plays that allows us and our students to explore deviations between texts not as symptoms of corruption but as signs of local difference.

One obvious way in which the levelling of Shakespeare texts allows us to talk about localism more easily is that some Quarto texts, unlike their Folio counterparts, announce a holiday occasion on their title page. The 1598 Quarto of *Love's Labor's Lost*, for example, specifies on the title page that it is being published "As it was presented before her Highnes this last Christmas" (1597 or 1598).[2] In this case the Quarto seems to carry more specifically elitist associations than its Folio counterpart in that it advertises the play for potential readers as having been performed at court. Except for the title page, the Quarto and Folio versions of this play are quite similar: we are dealing here not so much with the devaluation of one text at the expense of another (though some editors have done that) as with a local specificity carried by one text but not by the other. The Quarto text's strong association with Christmas at court allows us to pick up a number of holiday resonances that a less specifically located text might not carry. The play's lowlifes repeatedly refer to traditional holiday pastimes—to the hobbyhorse that is "forgot," to dicing and dancing the hey, to holiday license, to "Wakes and Wassels, meetings, markets, Faires" (pp. 303, 321). These popular pastimes have their counterpart at the Court of Navarre in the gift-giving, disguisings, pageants, "Reuels, Daunces, Maskes, and merrie houres" of the aristocrats (p. 315). High and low forms of Christmas revelry forge a link

[2] Michael J. B. Allen and Kenneth Muir, eds., *Shakespeare's Plays in Quarto* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1981), p. 292. Throughout this essay Quarto references will appear in the text and refer by page number to Allen and Muir's edition. Folio references will also appear in the text and refer by through-line number to *The Norton Facsimile: The First Folio of Shakespeare*, ed. Charlton Hinman (New York: Norton, 1968).

between the holiday season within the play and Elizabeth's court outside it.

Some of the pastimes in *Love's Labor's Lost* (wakes, the hey, and the hobbyhorse) are somewhat out of place at Yuletide, being more strongly associated with maying customs in the spring and early summer. But the play's importation of maying customs is highly functional in terms of dramatic form. At the beginning of the play, Berowne complains, "At Christmas I no more desire a Rose, / Then wish a Snow in Mayes new fangled showes; / But like of each thing that in season growes" (p. 295). To this, Dumaine's sonnet affirming that love's "Month is euer May" (p. 311) may be regarded as the appropriate lovelorn response; his attempted grafting of maying custom onto Yuletide has its folk counterpart in popular Christmas carols that borrow motifs from May Day carols. As it transpires, however, the young men's erotic courtships, like some of their pastimes, are indeed out of season. Berowne specifically links the truncated ending of *Love's Labor's Lost* with that of a Christmas pageant. What he has hoped for is a comedy in which Jack gets his Jill through the "courtesie" (p. 329) of the ladies; what he has instead is a play dashed "lik a Christmas Comedie" (p. 323), a play by country yokels that is brushed aside *in medias res* so that more important matters can be attended to.

Given the Christmas context of the 1598 Quarto, the four French lords' initial resolve to abjure revelry takes on a miserly and puritanical cast. When the Princess of France complains to Navarre about the baseness of her poor reception in the open fields—"I heare your grace hath sworne out Housekeeping: / Tis deadlie sinne to keepe that oath my Lord" (p . 301)—she can be seen as referring not only to his obligation as king of Navarre to entertain visiting dignitaries but more specifically to the obligation of keeping open house at Christmastide—an obligation which it is "sin" to abrogate as he and his fellows have done. In this area, too, they have acted out of season—put on Lenten abstinence at a time for banqueting and revelry. By going a-masquing to the ladies in their tents, Navarre and the others undo some of their crime of deficient hospitality, but eros in the 1598 Quarto is inextricably bound up with the liberty of the time. The movement at the end out of holiday revelry and into a harsh winter of deprivation will grant the young men a full year to disentangle sexual passion from holiday liberty and "charity."

As performed before Elizabeth, the play's mingling of caritas and eros would take on a host of additional resonances having to do with the queen's own eroticized style of rule, her tendency to bring courtiers up short, just as the French princess does in the play, if they violated the playfulness of the flirtatious games of courtiership. Performed before the queen at Christmastide, the play's depiction of the churlishness of hospitality denied could also take on a host of resonances relating to her relationships with the actual French princes after whom Navarre and his fellow hermits are named. To point to such intriguing, ephemeral parallels is, of course, to commit the high crime of "occasionalism" and to unleash a multitude of other topical interpretations that editors have much preferred to control.[3] But differentiating among early texts of the play allows us to recognize that occasionalist

[3] Richard Levin, *New Readings vs. Old Plays: Recent Trends in the Reinterpretation of English Renaissance Drama* (1979; rpt., Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1982); Alfred Harbage, "*Love's Labor's Lost* and the Early Shakespeare," *Philological Quarterly*, 41 (1962), 18–36.

interpretation can wax and wane according to the horizon of expectation established for a given text or performance. Later texts of *Love's Labor's Lost*—the 1631 Quarto and the 1623 Folio versions—are very close in action and language to the 1598 Quarto of the play but lack its specificity about occasion. A curious and under-acknowledged power is carried by such seemingly incidental localizations: the Oxford editors, for example, imply that the queen of France is more frequently given the speech prefix "Queen" in the Quarto, more frequently called "Princess" in the Folio.[4] Their sense of the predominance of "Queen" in the Quarto is not borne out by a comparison of the speech prefixes in both versions of the play. It derives instead, I would suggest, from the subliminal spell exerted by the Quarto title page, with its invitation to the discovery of parallels between the royal female within the play and the one before whom it was performed.

In *King Lear* localization can be carried further. The Quarto text not only announces a specific holiday occasion but displays significant textual divergences from the Folio that can be correlated with that occasion. According to its 1608 title page, Quarto *Lear* was "*played before the Kings Maiestie at Whitehall vpon S.* Stephans *night in Christmas Hollidayes*" (p. 663). As in the case of *Love's Labor's Lost*, the play's several violations of laws of hospitality toward kinsmen, strangers, and the lowly would carry special resonance in such a context, for St. Stephen's was, of all the twelve nights of Christmas, the one most strongly associated with "good housekeeping" and largesse toward the poor, as is its modern counterpart, Boxing Day, in Britain and Commonwealth countries. Through the middle of the play, King Lear and his servants travel the heath from house to house very much in the manner of poor St. Stephen's Day revellers in England. To deny food and succor on St. Stephen's was, according to the unwritten laws of hospitality, unthinkable; a house denying hospitality was termed a "hard house" by suppliants and considered fair prey for breaking and entering. That language enters the play: Gloucester's house, where Lear and his servants have been shut out by Regan and the Duke of Cornwall, becomes just such a "hard house," and Kent vows to return and "force / Their scanted curtesie" (TLN 1717, 1720–21).[5] Kent's speech occurs in both versions of the play, but only in the Quarto, with its evocation for readers of the feast of St. Stephen's, does the speech receive the moral validation of a holiday occasion.

If we "level" the Quarto and Folio texts instead of regarding either as intrinsically preferable to the other, we will find that in other places the St. Stephen's Day theme of social "levelling" and help for the unfortunate is more pronounced in the Quarto than in the Folio. The Quarto's mock trial scene, in which justice and folly trade places, is absent from the Folio; the Quarto refers to Lear as a "poore old fellow" (p. 682) where the Folio reads "poore old man" (TLN 1572); the Quarto, unlike the Folio, displays the faltering king actually held up by the lowly; the Quarto, through the

[4] Stanley Wells and Gary Taylor, eds., *William Shakespeare: A Textual Companion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), p. 275 n.

[5] For a more extended discussion of *King Lear* and St. Stephen's Day, see my *Puzzling Shakespeare*, pp. 148–59; Margaret Hotine, "Two Plays for St. Stephen's Day," *Notes and Queries*, 227 (1982), 119–21; and Joseph Wittreich, *"Image of that Horror": History, Prophecy, and Apocalypse in* King Lear (San Marino, Calif.: Huntington Library, 1984), pp. 16–33, 57–58, and 114–22.

comments of the two servants after the blinding of Gloucester, places more emphasis than the Folio on the justice of overturning socially sanctioned hierarchy by disobeying a corrupt master and on the particular hideousness of violence against one's host.[6] If Quarto *Lear* has frequently looked "base" to editors by comparison with the Folio, that may be in part because of its more searching and sympathetic portrayal of baseness.

Not uncommonly, Quarto and Folio versions of a Shakespeare play can be differentiated in terms of the class identification of an implied audience, with the Folio texts generally more elevated and "discriminating" and the Quarto texts more "common." Editors have picked up this difference but tend to register any appeal to a lower level of audience as a sure sign of textual corruption. A classic case of this is their marked preference for the Folio version of *The Taming of the Shrew*, their unwillingness to accept any elements of the early Quarto version, *The Taming of a Shrew* (1594), as Shakespearean. The case of the *Shrew* plays is much too complex to be treated here in more than outline form. Suffice it to say that in twentieth-century editorial practice *A Shrew* has regularly been regarded as a "debased copy" of *The Shrew*, one negligently thrown together by insensitive, dunderhead actors, the likeliest candidate being the actor who played Grumio, the "lowest" character in the Shakespeare "original." And in fact the actors are portrayed as poor and lowly itinerants in the Quarto, as urbane, polished professionals—rather as editors and others have liked to imagine Shakespeare himself—in the Folio. In the Quarto the drunken Christopher Sly is central: he remains onstage almost to the end, commenting on the action; he returns after Kate's taming to remark upon his extraordinary "dream," undercutting by his reappearance the reality of the taming plot. In the Folio the character of Sly is more peripheral: he falls asleep forgotten at the end of the first act and never returns as an active presence to the play. By "levelling" even texts so intractably different as the Quarto and Folio *Shrew*s, we will discover that the 1594 Quarto has been unacceptable to editors as "Shakespeare" at least in part because it identifies the acting company with an audience of lowlifes like Sly and hedges the play's patriarchal message with numerous qualifiers that do not exist in the Folio.[7] The case of the two *Shrew*s suggests that the differences between one text and another may sometimes register a difference in class mores and in the rituals surrounding and enforcing them.

Another kind of variable we can find in early versions of the plays is a difference in locale. One clear-cut non-Shakespearean example is Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus*, which is set in Wittenberg in the 1616 Quarto and in "Wertenberg" in the 1604 Quarto. If we "level" the two texts for heuristic purposes, "Wertenberg," which editors uniformly dismiss as a corruption of the "correct" location, has as much right to be an appropriate setting for the play as Wittenberg. And so, we quickly discover, it is—the first Quarto's

[6] See *The Division of the Kingdoms*; and Richard Strier, "Faithful Servants: Shakespeare's Praise of Disobedience" in *The Historical Renaissance: New Essays on Tudor and Stuart Literature and Culture*, Heather Dubrow and Richard Strier, eds. (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 104–33.

[7] I make this case at much greater length in "The Shakespearean Editor as Shrew Tamer," delivered in February 1990 as the ELR Prize Lecture at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst.

"Wertenberg" is the Duchy of Württemberg, a German state carrying its own rival set of associations with the legend of Faustus. To "level" the two Quartos is to discover a consistent pattern of theological and ceremonial difference that can be correlated with the difference in locale.[8]

For a Shakespearean example of similar relocation, we might consider *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, which exists in a Quarto of 1602 with an urban setting strongly suggesting London or some provincial city, and the standard copytext, the 1623 Folio version, which sets the play in and around the town of Windsor and includes numerous topographical references to the area, its palace, park, and surrounding villages. Like several other Quartos, the 1602 *Merry Wives* advertises its contents on the title page as having been "diuers times Acted . . . before her Maiestie, and else-where" (p. 551). In this case, unlike *Love's Labor's Lost*, however, it is the Folio rather than the Quarto that is thought to have had a specific royal occasion. In several places the Folio refers to the presence of the royal court at Windsor, and at the end Mistress Quickly as Fairy Queen offers a special blessing of the castle, its "Worthy" owner Elizabeth, and all its "sacred" rooms, especially the Garter Chapel and its "seuerall Chaires of Order" (TLN 2538–55). The play in its Folio form is believed to be in some way connected with the Garter ceremonies of 1597, at which Shakespeare's patron, Lord Hunsdon, was installed in the Order, the most likely date for its performance being 23 April 1597 at the Feast of the Garter before the queen at Westminster.[9]

I have no quarrel with this account of the Folio's occasion; what interests me particularly, however, is the way in which editors, once they have satisfied themselves as to the "correct" version of the play, dismiss the 1602 Quarto as a debased and mutilated piracy because it differs markedly from the authorized text. Instead, in accordance with our principle of levelling, I would suggest that we extend the same presumption of intentionality and integrity to the 1602 Quarto that editors have traditionally extended to the Folio. We will quickly discover that the pattern of difference is quite regular: the names of surrounding towns are similar in both versions, but in nearly every place where the Folio specifies a Windsor locale, the Quarto substitutes a more generalized location that could easily be London rather than Windsor. Falstaff's great "buck-basket" is carried "among the Whitsters in *Dotchet* Mead" in the Folio (TLN 1363–64), merely "to the Launderers" in the Quarto (p. 565). (The fat knight ends up in the same river in either case, since both London and Windsor are on the Thames.) In the Folio one set of characters runs madly "through the Towne [of Windsor] to *Frogmore*" while others run "about the fields with mee through *Frogmore*" (TLN 1134–35, 1144–45). In the Quarto they go "through the fields to *Frogmore*" (p. 563)—a slight change, but one that makes the line more parallel to the London experience of going "through the fields" to reach the open countryside. Characters in the Folio text habitually offer exclamations and comparisons anchored in their locale: "as any is in *Windsor*" (TLN 866), "neuer a woman in *Windsor*" (TLN 514–15), "for ye welth of *Windsor castle*" (TLN 1543). This trick of language does not exist in the Quarto text.

[8] Leah S. Marcus, "Textual Indeterminacy and Ideological Difference: The Case of *Doctor Faustus*," *RenD*, 20 (1989), 1–29.

[9] Leslie Hotson, *Shakespeare versus Shallow* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1931), pp. 111–22.

In nearly every case where the Folio refers to some feature of rural life in Windsor, enlivened by the presence of the court, the Quarto creates a more identifiably urban equivalent, but without any mention of the court. The Folio has Simple hiding in a "Closett" and Doctor Caius on his way to court (TLN 438–65); the Quarto has Simple hiding in a "Counting-house" and does not specify the Doctor's destination (p. 557). Mistress Quickly's long description of the court's visit to Windsor in 2.2 of the Folio (TLN 829–46) does not exist in the Quarto. The Folio's 2.2 has Ford praising Falstaff's "war-like, court-like" preparations; in the Quarto, Falstaff is simply "A man of such parts that might win 20. such as she" (p. 561); and in several other places, similarly, references to court exist in the Folio that do not in the Quarto.[10] Instead of the Folio's fairy visits to "Windsor-chimnies" and the castle, which must be kept clean since "Our radiant Queene, hates Sluts, and Sluttery" (TLN 2525–28), the Quarto has Puck sending Peane to the "countrie houses" and Pead dispatched to a more recognizably urban setting:

> go you & see where Brokers sleep,
> And Foxe-eyed Seriants with their mase,
> Goe laie the Proctors in the street,
> And pinch the lowsie Seriants face. . . .
> (p. 576)

And of course, the Folio's long, elaborate blessing of the castle itself and St. George's Chapel does not exist in the Quarto:

> Search Windsor Castle (Elues) within, and out.
> Strew good lucke (Ouphes) on euery sacred roome,
> That it may stand till the perpetuall doome,
> In state as wholsome, as in state 'tis fit,
> Worthy the Owner, and the Owner it.
> The seuerall Chaires of Order, looke you scowre
> With iuyce of Balme; and euery precious flowre,
> Each faire Instalment, Coate, and seu'rall Crest,
> With loyall Blazon, euermore be blest. . . .
> (TLN 2538–46)

Even Falstaff's language is sometimes more rural in the Folio than in the Quarto. In the Folio he says, "I will vse her [Mistress Ford] as the key of the Cuckoldy-rogues Coffer, & ther's my haruest-home" (TLN 1026–28). For "haruest-home" the Quarto has "randeuowes [rendezvous]" (p. 562). And finally, his punishment as "Herne the Hunter" in the Folio is imagined as part of an elaborate myth surrounding a long-dead keeper of Windsor Forest who haunts a giant oak known by all as "Hernes Oake"—a mysterious and "ancient" rural "tale" that is apparently Shakespeare's invention (TLN 2150–60). In the Quarto, "Horne the Hunter" is the subject of superstition but is not associated with an ancient keeper of Windsor Forest, a giant oak,

[10] See Hinman, TLN 445, 510, 1276, 1332–33, 1397 (the court of France), 1502 (the fashion of France), 2110, and 2304. The equivalent references in the parallel-text edition of *The Bankside Shakespeare I*, ed. Appleton Morgan (New York: Shakespeare Society, 1888), are on pages 75, 79, 125, 129, 133, 179, and 193. I have found only one reference to court in the Quarto that does not exist in the Folio; it is by Falstaff himself and does not imply the court's close proximity (Allen and Muir, p. 577).

or any topographical fable. He haunts "field" and "woods" more generally, and is, through his name and lack of other associations, more directly a figure of cuckoldry than the mighty Herne of the Folio. As Horne, Falstaff still calls himself the fattest stag "In all *Windsor* forrest" (p. 575), but that is almost the Quarto text's only reference to Windsor aside from the title itself.[11] The Folio version of *Merry Wives* is a comedy of small town and rural life, steeped in rustic customs and topography but also imbued with the "high" presence of the royal court; the Quarto version is "lower," more urban, closer to the pattern of city or "citizen" comedy.

Both versions of *Merry Wives* are teeming with folk rituals, but the way we interpret them will depend on which version we choose. Northrop Frye, Jeanne Roberts, and others have called attention to the scapegoating pattern in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*: in keeping with ancient seasonal folk ritual, Falstaff is symbolically slain and cast out to restore the community to health. After his punishment in the guise of Herne, he calls himself "Iacke-a-Lent" in the Folio (TLN 2611), which suggests a Shrovetide context like that which C. L. Barber has offered for Falstaff as scapegoat in the *Henry IV* plays; Jeanne Roberts prefers to associate the play with Halloween and All Saints' Day, and in fact *Merry Wives* was performed at the court of James I on 4 November 1604.[12] Even more suggestive is the fact that Falstaff's various trials, particularly the last, echo the pattern of the village "rough music," charivari, or skimmington, which was not a seasonal observance but a rather free-form ritual shaming performed as need arose. Charivari often culminated in the ducking of an adulterer in the local pond or stream, a punishment that resembles Falstaff's first trial in the buck-basket. Often, men in the charivari appeared in drag, and quite regularly the person representing its male target was carted about dressed as a woman, just as Falstaff is in his second trial, when he is beaten as the Witch of Brainford. But horns for an adulterer were an even more common feature of the charivari. In some versions townspeople dressed a symbolic victim in horns (like Horne or Herne the hunter) and punished him as a way of shaming sexually deviant neighbors into conformity with or departure from the community. Falstaff is both symbolic victim of the ritual and its real target since he is the one who has assailed the virtue of the wives.[13]

[11] I have noticed two others: "halfe *Windsor*" (p. 566), and "all *Windsor*" (p. 576). The presence of these few Windsor references in a text otherwise empty of them could be taken as evidence that the Quarto is a revised version of the Folio text; on the other hand, as will be shown below, there are ways in which the Folio seems revised from the Quarto—strong evidence that neither text is the "original."

[12] See Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1957), p. 183; Jan Lawson Hinely, "Comic Scapegoats and the Falstaff of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," *Shakespeare Studies*, 15 (1982), 37–54; C. L. Barber, *Shakespeare's Festive Comedy: A Study of Dramatic Form and its Relation to Social Custom* (1959; rpt., New York: Meridian Books, 1963), pp. 205–21; François Laroque, *Shakespeare et la fête: Essai d'archéologie du spectacle dans l'Angleterre élisabéthaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1988), pp. 283–85; and Jeanne Addison Roberts, *Shakespeare's English Comedy:* The Merry Wives of Windsor *in Context* (Lincoln: Univ. of Nebraska Press, 1979), pp. 78–83.

[13] David Underdown, "The Taming of the Scold: the Enforcement of Patriarchal Authority in Early Modern England" in *Order and Disorder in Early Modern England*, Anthony Fletcher and John Stevenson, eds. (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1985), pp.116–36. See also Underdown, *Revel, Riot, and Rebellion: Popular Politics and Culture in England 1603–1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985), pp. 102–11; and Buchanan Sharp, *In Contempt of All Authority: Rural Artisans and Riot in the West of England 1586–1660* (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1980).

In terms of our inquiry here, however, the most interesting aspect of the play's various echoes of folk customs is how differently we are likely to analyze their function in the play, depending on whether we are considering the Quarto or the Folio. In the Quarto version Falstaff is almost the only character with courtly associations: his punishment has very much the quality of middle-class townspeople's ritualized expulsion of the corrupting intrusiveness of the court, its attempted seductions and financial exploitation. In the Quarto version and that version only, courtiers and would-be courtiers are mocked by name. Brooke (Broome in the Folio) has been taken by editors as a thrust against one of the Lords Cobham, whose surname was Brooke; the thieving "cosen garmombles" of the Quarto (changed to "Cozen-Iermans" in the Folio) almost certainly glances at the German Count Mompelgard (later duke of Württemberg), who had toured England in the early 1590s and made himself a laughingstock at court through his eagerness to be installed as a Knight of the Garter. He was expected to be installed in the 1597 Garter ceremonies, with which the Folio *Merry Wives* is associated, but did not attend; and indeed in the Folio version an unnamed German duke connected with the cousin-Germans is expected at court but has not arrived (TLN 2109–19).

The Folio is much kinder than the Quarto to figures associated with the court. Not only are the references to actual personages disguised, but the population of Windsor within the play is, for the most part, deferential. The Fairy Queen and her minions actively bless Windsor Castle, its special knights, and its queen. Falstaff cannot personify an innate courtly corruption since the court is imagined as worthy. He is rather the debased imitator of courtly ideals articulated within the play itself. While the Quarto version can be seen as the citizenry's expulsion of a debauchery associated with courtliness in the form of corpulent Falstaff, in the Folio the image of the court and the Windsorites work together against Falstaff. The ritual function of the charivari is more strongly emphasized in the Folio: in that version, as they devise their trap for Herne the Hunter, the wives repeatedly aver that Falstaff must be "publiquely sham'd" (TLN 2101–03). But in the Folio the charivari, which was historically a ritual under village or town control, has been colonized by the court. Given the Garter context of the Folio version, Falstaff's punishment there, which follows directly upon the blessing of Windsor Castle and the Garter Knights, takes on the quality of a ritual expulsion of an unworthy desecrator of the rite as a way of cleansing the Order itself. He is a "corrupted hart" deserving the shame of "*Hony Soit Qui Mal-y-Pence*" (TLN 2551).[14] Moreover, in the Folio, Anne Page's successful wooer, Fenton, is also of the court. Master Page distrusts him because "hee kept companie with the wilde Prince, and *Pointz:* he is of too high a Region, he knows too much" (TLN 1332–34); Page finally learns by the end that things "high" and courtly do not necessarily merit distrust. In the denouement of this text, at least by comparison with the Quarto, the

[14] For Garter interpretations of Falstaff's punishment, see Hinely (cited in n. 12, above) and Peter Erickson's analysis in "The Order of the Garter, the cult of Elizabeth, and class-gender tension in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*," Jean E. Howard and Marion F. O'Connor, eds., *Shakespeare Reproduced: The text in history and ideology* (New York and London: Methuen, 1987), pp. 116–42. Although both are valuable, neither of these studies distinguishes between the Quarto and Folio versions.

court and Windsor citizenry are brought into closer proximity through the marriage.

It is tempting to account for the differences between Quarto and Folio *Merry Wives* in terms of a difference in audience: the Quarto version, even though it may, as its title page asserts, have been performed before the queen, seems more oriented toward a middle-class urban public; the Folio, toward the court itself. Such speculation is, of course, hazardous but is nonetheless supported by other elements of the play. In the Quarto the relationship between Anne and Fenton is presented in a sentimental and romantic vein; theirs is a love match predating the play. We never find out how much Anne is "worth" in money, and it is clear that Fenton, although initially attracted to her, as he admits, for her wealth, remains attached to her out of love. In the Folio the match is only being negotiated as the play itself unfolds. Anne is explicitly worth £ 700 plus the inheritance expected from her father. Fenton is distinctly more mercenary throughout, less convincingly in love with Anne than with her money. The Quarto's sentimental benevolence extends to other characters like Ford and even to Falstaff himself: in that text, once properly reformed, he is forgiven his debt of £ 20 to Ford; in the Folio he is expected to pay up.[15] We would expect the more romanticized version of Anne and Fenton's relationship to appeal more strongly to a middle-class urban audience, and the Folio's more skeptical and mercenary portrayal of middle-class mores to appeal more strongly to a "higher" audience more closely identified with the court. Given that the valorization of wedded love was more prominently associated during the period with the middle orders than with the aristocracy, to which it was only gradually beginning to spread, the Quarto version of the play can be seen as articulating a "lower" pattern of class expectations about family life than does the Folio. The sexual politics of the two versions are also subtly different: in the Quarto the wives and Mistress Quickly win an unequivocal victory against the court and jealous husbands; in the Folio they defeat Falstaff, but to the extent that their actions further Fenton's match, they are cementing an alliance with the court or, in a less charitable interpretation, helping a young courtier cash in on the market for middle-class wives even as they thwart the old courtier's rather similar ambitions. In the case of *Merry Wives*, as for some of the other plays we have discussed, use of a conflated text, in which Folio readings are combined with occasional borrowings from the Quarto, is likely to blur analysis of such social transactions because it intermingles patterns that are relatively distinct in either version when considered separately. In order to read Shakespeare in terms of the plays' engagement of local matters, of early modern patterns of ritual observance and interaction, we need to read "levelled" texts.

This swift and speculative essay is designed more to pique interest in the

[15] For Falstaff's payment compare the Quarto, page 577, and the Folio, TLN 2650–54. For Mistress Ford's greater sympathy for her husband in the Quarto, see the conversation between Mistresses Ford and Page at page 567 and its equivalent at TLN 1505–17. On Anne's inheritance and Fenton's tendencies to think in terms of money, see TLN 50–60, Anne and Fenton's wooing scenes in both versions, and page 575 versus TLN 2398–99. In the final scene of the Folio, Fenton asserts that he and Anne have been "long since contracted" (TLN 2705) but apparently not from before the beginning of the play. In the *Bankside* parallel-text version, the cited passages are on pages 212–13, 138–39, 51, 196–97, and 217.

project of levelling Shakespeare than to constitute a definitive statement on the relationship of any one text to another. In the case of *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, as for the other plays I have surveyed briefly here, we are at the beginning of a new scholarly venture that can be described (somewhat bombastically) as the mobilization of a holistic, New-Critical interpretive method (somewhat leavened with historicism) in order to combat traditional editorial practice for the purpose of advancing a poststructuralist sense of the multiplicity of the Shakespearean text and the undecideability of that bundle of conflicting energies that we like to call Shakespeare himself. I have tried for sharpness of definition in my differentiation between variant Quarto and Folio texts because I hope to demonstrate that, even in terms of the editors' own preferred interpretive strategies, "bad" texts can readily be shown to be "good" if we suspend our need to rank them hierarchically. The impact of textual levelling upon our analysis of Shakespearean folk customs and topography should be clear, since it is a corollary of the method itself: we will be less able, at least for a time, to talk in terms of archetypes and large ritual patterns, more able to talk about historical particularity and local difference.

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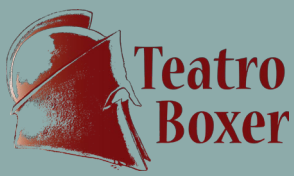

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