Winter's Tale Act IV Scene 4

AUTOLYCUS: Robert Nunez

*Enter AUTOLYCUS, singing*

Lawn as white as driven snow;

Cyprus black as e'er was crow;

Gloves as sweet as damask roses;

Masks for faces and for noses;

Bugle bracelet, necklace amber,

Perfume for a lady's chamber;

Golden quoifs and stomachers,

For my lads to give their dears:

Pins and poking-sticks of steel,

What maids lack from head to heel:

Come buy of me, come; come buy, come buy;

Buy lads, or else your lasses cry: Come buy.

Ha, ha! what a fool Honesty is! and Trust, his

sworn brother, a very simple gentleman! I have sold

all my trumpery; not a counterfeit stone, not a

ribbon, glass, pomander, brooch, table-book, ballad,

knife, tape, glove, shoe-tie, bracelet, horn-ring,

to keep my pack from fasting: they throng who

should buy first, as if my trinkets had been

hallowed and brought a benediction to the buyer:

by which means I saw whose purse was best in

picture; and what I saw, to my good use I

remembered. My clown, who wants but something to

be a reasonable man, grew so in love with the

wenches' song, that he would not stir his pettitoes

till he had both tune and words; which so drew the

rest of the herd to me that all their other senses

stuck in ears: you might have pinched a placket, it

was senseless; 'twas nothing to geld a codpiece of a

purse; I could have filed keys off that hung in

chains: no hearing, no feeling, but my sir's song,

and admiring the nothing of it. So that in this

time of lethargy I picked and cut most of their

festival purses; and had not the old man come in

with a whoo-bub against his daughter and the king's

son and scared my choughs from the chaff, I had not

left a purse alive in the whole army.

I understand the business, I hear it: to have an

open ear, a quick eye, and a nimble hand, is

necessary for a cut-purse; a good nose is requisite

also, to smell out work for the other senses. I see

this is the time that the unjust man doth thrive.

What an exchange had this been without boot! What

a boot is here with this exchange! Sure the gods do

this year connive at us, and we may do any thing

extempore. The prince himself is about a piece of

iniquity, stealing away from his father with his

clog at his heels: if I thought it were a piece of

honesty to acquaint the king withal, I would not

do't: I hold it the more knavery to conceal it;

and therein am I constant to my profession.

Aside, aside; here is more matter for a hot brain:

every lane's end, every shop, church, session,

hanging, yields a careful man work.

[Aside] Though I am not naturally honest, I am so

sometimes by chance: let me pocket up my pedlar's excrement.

Not he alone shall suffer what wit can make heavy

and vengeance bitter; but those that are germane to

him, though removed fifty times, shall all come

under the hangman: which though it be great pity,

yet it is necessary. An old sheep-whistling rogue a

ram-tender, to offer to have his daughter come into

grace! Some say he shall be stoned; but that death

is too soft for him, say I draw our throne into a

sheep-cote! all deaths are too few, the sharpest too easy.

He has a son, who shall be flayed alive; then

'nointed over with honey, set on the head of a

wasp's nest; then stand till he be three quarters

and a dram dead; then recovered again with

aqua-vitae or some other hot infusion; then, raw as

he is, and in the hottest day prognostication

proclaims, shall be be set against a brick-wall, the

sun looking with a southward eye upon him, where he

is to behold him with flies blown to death. But what

talk we of these traitorly rascals, whose miseries

are to be smiled at, their offences being so

capital? Tell me, for you seem to be honest plain

men, what you have to the king: being something

gently considered, I'll bring you where he is

aboard, tender your persons to his presence,

whisper him in your behalfs; and if it be in man

besides the king to effect your suits, here is man

shall do it.

O, that's the case of the shepherd's son: hang him,

he'll be made an example.

I will trust you. Walk before toward the sea-side;

go on the right hand: I will but look upon the

hedge and follow you.

If I had a mind to be honest, I see Fortune would

not suffer me: she drops booties in my mouth. I am

courted now with a double occasion, gold and a means

to do the prince my master good; which who knows how

that may turn back to my advancement? I will bring

these two moles, these blind ones, aboard him: if he

think it fit to shore them again and that the

complaint they have to the king concerns him

nothing, let him call me rogue for being so far

officious; for I am proof against that title and

what shame else belongs to't. To him will I present

them: there may be matter in it.