

## Comedy Notes....

General: One key element of the Renaissance is the rebirth of the interest in the classics (Plato, Aristotle, Homer, etc.), and in Shakespeare's case, in Ovid. From his plays, it is difficult to detect whether he was a Catholic – as a number of recent biographers have argued – or Protestant; however, one thing is for sure, and that is that he knew his classical thinkers. The following quote, which appears at the opening of Ovid's The Metamorphoses, provides a thematic nexus for understanding the philosophical underpinnings of Shakespeare's plays and *The Winter's Tale* in particular:

“ The elements themselves do not endure. Examine how they change and learn from me: nothing retains its form; new shapes from old, nature the great innovator ceaselessly contrives. In all creation, trust me, there is no death, no death but only change and innovation. What we men call birth is but a different new beginning; death is but to cease to be the same.”

C.L. Barber in Shakespeare's Festive Comedy:

Barber notes the intimate connection between the rituals of holiday (May Day, 12<sup>th</sup> Night, etc.) and the structures of Shakespeare's comic plays.

Key elements of festive comedy include the following:

1. The Lord of Misrule (Antigonus, Sir Toby Belch from 12<sup>th</sup> Night) pp.24, 26-27
2. The Vice (see p.5) // Clowning pp.12-13, a recognized anarchist who made aberration obvious by carrying the absurd to extremes.
3. Reversal of social and sexual roles (the saturnalian pattern, p.245).
  - The fundamental difference between men and women (242) “When the normal is secure (245)
4. Disguise, cross-dressing, and transvestism
5. Release can be dangerous... In comedy, order is restored at the end.

Key contrasts / tensions include the following:

- Holiday (p.5) vs. Everyday (p.10) Read the Puritanical passage on p.21 concerning Mayday.
- The movement from restraint through release to clarification.
- Note the difference between tragedy (in Hamlet) and comedy (in 12<sup>th</sup> Night) as it relates to madness, which Barber develops on p 260-61.

Discuss the unifying role of community vs. the attacks of the Puritan.

Also discuss the notion of love as a power beyond personality, p.130.