“Bearing Hence” Shakespeare’s
The Winter’s Tale

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Hitherto unexplored wordplay in the early acts of The Winter’s Tale involving forms of the word “bear” deepens our understanding of the importance for the play’s design of a bear’s notorious onstage pursuit and reported devouring of Antigonus. On the one hand, the wordplay confirms in a new way previous commentators’ assertions that the bear symbolizes Leontes’ savage authority over Antigonus and the king’s responsibility for the courtier’s death. On the other, it suggests that Camillo’s transporting Polixenes out of Leontes’ court and Florizel’s carrying Perdita away from her country home amount to redemptive “bearing[s] hence” that invite comparison with the fatal, literal “bearing hence” of Antigonus. These comparisons generated by wordplay on forms of the word “bear” serve to strengthen playgoers’ and readers’ impressions of the finally benign nature of Apollo’s providence, particularly their predilection to believe that the physical deaths of the play, each an ultimate bearing hence, whether of Mamillius or Antigonus, can be partly rationalized as enabling sacrifices.

The Winter’s Tale is preeminently a play of Ovidian metamorphoses, and Dennis Biggins, Michael D. Bristol, and Constance Jordan have argued that Shakespeare transforms Leontes’ tyranny over Antigonus into the bear that devours him. Biggins conflates a number of poetic passages within and without The Winter’s Tale so as to conclude that the bear is “an embodiment of Leontes’ savage cruelty.”¹ Citing passages in five other

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Shakespearean plays, he notes that for Shakespeare bears typify ferocity and remorseless cruelty, a metaphoric equation also found in the writings of contemporaries such as Edmund Spenser and Thomas Nashe. In this respect, Biggins references Antigonus’s (ironic) judgment when he picks up Perdita to transport her to some strange place, there to abandon her to Fortune:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Come on, poor babe,} \\
\text{Some powerful spirit instruct the kites and ravens} \\
\text{To be thy nurses. Wolves and bears, they say,} \\
\text{Casting their savageness aside, have done} \\
\text{Like offices of pity.}
\end{align*}
\]

Implacably savage, the bear of The Winter’s Tale, however, never qualifies as Perdita’s nurse because Antigonus’s fleeing diverts the animal, which attacks and consumes him instead. Biggins associates literary passages of ursine cruelty with the remark made by the old shepherd’s son late in act IV, “though authority be a stubborn bear, yet he is oft led by the nose with gold” (IV.iv.795–6), and claims that it makes the bear emblematically suggestive of Leontes’ harsh authority over his subjects, especially Antigonus. As support for his identification of Leontes and the bear, Biggins remarks that the king casts himself as a bear in his pun on bearbaiting. In Leontes’ paranoiac view, Paulina is “A callet / Of boundless tongue, who late hath beat her husband / And now baits me” (II.iii.90–2). Biggins’s argument becomes more credible once we realize that Leontes is the human authority figure of The Winter’s Tale, and that it is not simply by his stubborn but also his “bearishly” savage authority that Hermione is judged and convicted of the crime of adultery and Antigonus commanded to become a likely accomplice in murder. And while Leontes is not “led by the nose with gold,” the old shepherd who finds Perdita is. The gold Antigonus includes in the bundle left with the baby causes the shepherd and his clownish son to think the child is “fortunate,” and thus it reinforces their inclination to take her up and care for her. When the shepherd’s son compares authority with a stubborn bear, the motivating gold of his metaphor evokes recollection of the compelling gold in the portrayal of Antigonus’s death and so further encourages playgoers and readers to apply the values of the latter episode to details of the former scene. Concerning the introduction of bears in European Renaissance tragicomedy, including The Winter’s Tale, Louise G. Clubb has concluded that “[t]he bear
in pastoral seems both more and less terrible than the other wild beasts, because it is humanoid, capable of upright posture. If the bear of Shakespeare’s play assumes this “humanoid” posture as it chases Antigonus offstage, the spectacle reinforces its identification with Leontes.

Bristol, in a comprehensive survey of possible symbolic meanings of the bear in The Winter’s Tale, also concludes that, for Shakespeare’s audiences, “the natural fierceness of the bear is associated with the violence of secular authority.” As evidence for his claim, Bristol cites this passage from Edward Topsell’s The Historie of Foure-Footed Beastes (1607): “Vitoldus King of Lituania, kept certaine Beares of purpose, to whom he cast all persons which spoke against his tirannie, putting them first of all into a Beares skinne; whose crueltie was so great, that if he had commaunded anie of them to hang themselves, they would rather obey him then endure the terror of his indignation.” Jordan supports Biggins’s and Bristol’s symbolic equation of bear and tyrannical authority when, concerning the manner of Antigonus’s death, she remarks that the book of “Proverbs describes ‘a wicked ruler over the poor people’ as a ‘roaring lion’ or a ‘raging bear’ (28.15); pseudo-Aquinas, commenting on the [biblical] verse, identified such a ruler as a ‘faithless’ (impius) tyrant (De regimine principum, 18–9).” One can say that in a sense, Leontes “devours” Antigonus. Biggins notes that Antigonus and Paulina have no counterparts in the source of The Winter’s Tale, Robert Greene’s Pandosto: “[these characters] represent moral integrity, which in Paulina resists Leontes and endures to the end, but in Antigonus falters and finally yields to royal tyranny. Antigonus compromises his honor, undertakes to discharge what he knows to be an unjust and cruel commission, and dies falsely believing in Hermione’s guilt.” Biggins faults Antigonus a bit harshly for being unwilling to die a martyr and for believing the substance of a powerful dream vision. For to his discredit, while he is in the vision’s grip, Antigonus does believe that Hermione and Polixenes have committed adultery and that Apollo would have him deposit the child in the country of her father. In planting this corrupt idea of the queen and Polixenes in his courtier’s mind and in ordering him to kill Perdita, Leontes effects the moral death of Antigonus. Thus there is an aptness to Leontes-as-bear physically finishing off Antigonus on the seacoast of Bohemia.

One has to admit that the figurative metamorphosis of Leontes into the Bohemian bear of The Winter’s Tale is open to question, chiefly because the identification must be made indirectly, com-
posed from scattered passages in the play. After all, Leontes’ name refers to the lion, and some of the Shakespearean passages that Biggins cites about the prototypic savagery of bears include the mention of lions as equally ferocious and pitiless. Moreover, Jordan’s quotation from Proverbs mentions a “roaring lion” as symbolic of “a wicked ruler.” Though the equation would have been heavy-handed for Shakespeare, the playwright could have named the king of Sicilia “Orsino” (“from the Latin ursus, and more immediately from the Italian orsino: ursine”), had he wanted the largest number of playgoers to think of the Bohemian bear as a metamorphosed Leontes. Snug’s role in A Midsummer Night’s Dream reminds us that in the mid-1590s Shakespeare’s repertory company had a lion’s costume available in which one actor could chase another across the stage. What makes Biggins’s and Jordan’s assertions more plausible is a series of puns in the play that make Leontes bearish. After all, Shakespeare had used the name Orsino for Olivia’s sometimes silly suitor in Twelfth Night, and he may have been reluctant to recycle the name and give it to a king with profound tragic dimensions to his character.

While M. M. Mahood ranks “bear” twelfth in her list of Shakespeare’s most played-upon words, she does not describe this wordplay in her analysis of The Winter’s Tale. Nevertheless, the following verse from King Richard III—“You mean, to bear me, not to bear with me” (III.i.128)—that Mahood quotes to illustrate the wordplay authorizes its detection in The Winter’s Tale. Concerning this line, Mahood judges that, “where [Samuel Johnson] sees an improbable pun on bear the animal—he deserves our thanks for his quick response to Shakespeare’s wordplay instead of the blame he sometimes gets for failing to appreciate it.” Actually the pun on “bear” in the quoted verse is not improbable. Its larger context makes that much clearer:

**Prince Edward.** My lord of York will still be cross in talk.
Uncle [Richard Crookback]. Your Grace knows how to bear with him.

**York.** You mean, to bear me, not to bear with me.
Uncle, my brother mocks both you and me:
Because that I am little, like an ape,
He thinks that you should bear me on your shoulders.

(Richard III, III.i.126–31)

David Bevington glosses the final two verses: “At fairs, the bear commonly carried an ape on his back. The speech is doubtless
an allusion to Richard’s hump and puns triply on bear with, ‘put up with,’ bear, ‘carry,’ and bear, ‘an animal.’” Bevington might have added that, in this context, one rereads the phrase “bear with me” in York’s first line as “to act bearish with me [toward me]: “You mean to act bearish toward me, not to put up with me.”

Once playgoers and readers associate Leontes with the bear of the play, on reacquaintance with the text they can appreciate certain puns such as Leontes’ assertion that, “[t]hough [Mamillius] does bear some signs of me, yet [Hermione] / [Has] too much blood in him” (II.i.57–8), and his command to a lady-in-waiting, “Bear the boy hence; he shall not come about [Hermione]” (II.i.59). Mamillius dies before he shows bearish signs of his father the bear. On this occasion a lady bears Mamillius hence. But death will eventually bear the boy hence, even as it will Antigonus. But before these events occur, Leontes torments himself with adulterous imaginings—“Nor night nor day no rest. It is but weakness / To bear the matter thus” (II.iii.1–2). Bearing the matter of adultery passively, as chronic insomnia, identifies a weak cuckold in Leontes’ opinion. He will later “bear the matter” forcefully when he—as the ultimate authority in Sicilia—viciously prosecutes Hermione, a decision that gets refigured when he, metamorphosed, “bear[s] the matter” fatally against Antigonus.

Playgoers and readers who detect a bearish Leontes in act II of the play are likely to notice additional details in the scene set on the Bohemian seacoast that associate Leontes with the bear. These associations accrue from the babe Perdita’s characterization there. She wears, according to the old shepherd, “a bearing-cloth” (a Jacobean baptismal gown), fit for “a squire’s child” (III.iii.111). By this rich garment, Antigonus anachronistically signifies for Perdita’s hoped-for discoverer that the infant is a valued Christian. Beyond this meaning, the bearing-cloth by its name implies that she is the offspring of the bear Leontes. In this homonymic context, the repeated word “bairn” in the old shepherd’s exclamation and question—“what have we here? Mercy on’s, a bairn! A very pretty bairn” (III.iii.67–8)—can be heard not simply as a dialect term for “child” but also in its Jacobean pronunciation as an approximation of the spoken word “bear.” In the authoritative First Folio text of the play, the word appears “Barne,” a form that encourages the detection of additional wordplay involving the phrase “bare ’un.” The old shepherd has found “a princely child and also a naked human being, a ‘bare ’un.’” In this instance the pun on “bairn”/ “bear” becomes even more
apparent, mainly because a virtually perfect homonym is isolated for pronunciation in the initial distinct word of the almost elided two-word phrase “bare ’un.” While Jordan reads the small “bare ’un” as a vulnerable because a naked babe, she also seems to realize that the spoken phrase could make Perdita the cub of the bear Leontes; for her next sentence reads “[t]he misgovern-ment of Leontes (always leo and now also ursus) is thus inscribed in Bohemia’s desert.” Signature Shakespearean wordplay nomi-nates Perdita as the legitimate (albeit nonsavage) daughter of bearish Leontes, despite Antigonus’s supposition otherwise.

With its denotation of baptism, Perdita’s bearing-cloth lends a ritualistic dimension to the scene of her preservation and introduction into a new life. The old shepherd’s adoption of her, under a sky that “threaten[s] present blusters [rain]” (III.iii.4), can be thought of as a baptism into a country life that will foster homely virtues within her. In this context, Antigonus’s death can be regarded as a type of sacrifice, unintentional and yet strangely admirable. Antigonus, when asked earlier by Leontes what he would “adventure / To save this brat’s life?” (II.iii.161–2), replied, “I’ll pawn the little blood which I have left / To save the innocent” (II.iii.165–6), and the sight of fleeing Antigonus does distract the savage bear from Perdita. In this context, Antigonus’s death resembles the lethal consequence of a bearbaiting gone awry. Sidney Lee notes that “[t]he exhibition was at times diversified by the introduction of a blind bear, which was also secured to a stake by a long chain, and was attacked by men armed with whips. Occasionally the blind bear broke from its chain and ran amok among the crowd, with disastrous results.” Exit, actually pursued by a bear.

Rather than being the baiter, Antigonus becomes the sacrificial bait in Apollo’s providence, which entails saving Perdita’s life. The repeated description of a shoulder blade links Antigonus with Autolycus in such a way that Shakespeare suggests that in dying Antigonus undergoes a rebirth. A witness to Antigonus’s dismemberment, the old shepherd’s son remarks that “the bear tore out his shoulder-bone” (III.iii.92). Later in the episode wherein Autolycus picks the son’s pocket, the rogue’s account of his beat-ing, robbery, and loss of clothes parodies “the parable of the Good Samaritan, the pattern being completed by the clown’s continu-ation,” “Dost lack any money? I have a little money for thee” (IV.iii.77–8). In this setting, Autolycus exclaims, “O good sir, softly, good sir! I fear, sir, my shoulder-blade is out” (IV.iii.72–3). It is as though Antigonus has come back to life, with one odd detail from his previous death remaining—that dislocated shoulder blade.
The Christian context created by the evocation of a New Testament parable strengthens the resurrectional quality of what would pass, partly analyzed, as simply another metamorphosis in a play of metamorphoses.

Autolycus of course is not Antigonus; the resurrection is patently figurative. The “renewal” of Antigonus in Autolycus exists to establish the validity of the myth of Proserpina and her annual return from the underworld, which is pervasive in the play as a way of understanding the “rebirth” of the members of Leontes’ family. More specifically, this “renewal” authorizes Hermione’s “resurrection” from statue to breathing wife and queen. The actual death of Antigonus, grievous to Paulina, finds its place in a pattern of remarkable rebirths, which might be called Apollo’s divine comedy. The bearbaiting of act III, scene iii contributes to this impression of providential divine comedy, a kind of comedy validated by the presence of laughter in the episode. The old shepherd’s son says that Autolycus “haunts wakes, fairs, and bear-baitings” (IV.iii.99–100). Autolycus’s predecessor, Antigonus, was present at an unconventional kind of bearbaiting. Stephen Dickey concludes that, “to judge from the handful of contemporary eyewitness accounts of baiting matches, again and again the audience was pleased by what it saw, cheered it on, and laughed at it . . . [O]bservers’ testimonies about their pleasure, amusement, and contentment suggest that, were an Elizabethan audience to specify what genre of spectacle it was seeing at the Bear Garden, the answer might well be ‘a comedy.’” Granted this cultural attitude, Shakespeare invites contemporary playgoers to apply their generic perspective on bearbaitings to the scene involving Antigonus, Perdita, and the bear. They may have laughed heartily at the sight of whip-bearing performers running for their lives from the raging, blind bear loose in the bear pit and so also have laughed predictably at the spectacle of a bear chasing Antigonus. It is likely that the bear chasing Antigonus off the stage was a suited actor rather than a tame animal from nearby Paris Garden, and this effect may have struck spectators as especially comical.

The amusing metaphors coined by the clown as he recounts the drowning of the mariners offshore and the dismemberment of Antigonus are crucial to the nearly simultaneous humor and tragedy in the pivotal episode of Shakespeare’s tragicomedy. The old shepherd’s son speaks in a homely, even friendly, manner of the sinking of the ship as “swallowed with yeast and froth, as you’d thrust a cork into a hogshead” (III.iii.89–91). In the same
breath, he begins narrating “the land-service, to see how the bear tore out [Antigonus’s] shoulder-bone” (III.iii.91–2). When the old shepherd exclaims, “Would I had been by to have helped the old man,” the clown coins a pun involving the foundation of charities: “I would you had been by the ship side to have helped her; there your charity would have lacked footing” (III.iii.103–7). S. L. Bethell has claimed that the clown’s comedy “carries further the grotesque humour of Gloucester’s attempted suicide in King Lear.” I would argue, however, that the nongrotesque comedy of the Bankside bear pit invoked first in this scene of The Winter’s Tale carries over to the clown’s subsequent narration of disasters and provides a relatively undisturbing context for its reception. Such dramatic coloring through its nontragic tones accords with the consolatory overtones of Antigonus’s figurative resurrection in Apollo’s divine comedy.

Earlier dialogue between Camillo and Polixenes both anticipates and confirms the salvific dimension of Antigonus’s “bearing hence.” Having divulged Leontes’ paranoid suspicion of Polixenes to the king of Bohemia, Camillo adds,

If therefore you dare trust my honesty
That lies enclosed in this trunk, which you
Shall bear along impawned, away tonight.
Your followers I will whisper to the business,
And will by twos and threes at several posterns
Clear them o’th’ city.

(I.ii.429–34)

By saying his body—his physical “trunk,” which Polixenes will bear hence—is “impawned,” Camillo implies that it is capable of redemption, as a treasure placed in pawn generally is. While Camillo chiefly means that his “impawned” body is a “pledge” insuring the truth of his desperate warning, his metaphor also suggests that he may one day be “redeemed”—returned back to his native land, Sicilia. Polixenes appropriates Camillo’s bearing-hence conceit, in the process evoking a redemptive classical image recognizable to Jacobean s familiar with Virgil’s Aeneid. “Come, Camillo,” Polixenes concludes, “I will respect thee as a father, if / Thou bear’st my life off hence” (lines 455–7). Latent in this utterance is the famous image of Aeneas bearing on his back his old father Anchises out of the burning city of Troy. That Shakespeare often recycled this Virgilian image is apparent in Cassius’s account of bearing exhausted Caesar ashore out of the Tiber (Julius
Maurice Hunt

_Caesar_, I.ii.112–5) and Orlando's bearing on his back old Adam, famished, to the life-saving feast of Duke Senior (As You Like It, II.vii.166–8).

The classical image invoked by Polixenes' statement of gratitude informs the audience that Camillo's bearing Polixenes hence amounts to a brave deed of piety, one that makes the bearer a "father" to the father figure he carries. It reflects a respect for the authority that preserves a society. Camillo's response to Polixenes' urgent wish "Let us avoid," suggests that authority is a value associated with his life-saving bearing hence: "It is in mine authority to command / The keys of all the posterns," Camillo replies (I.ii.457–9). This response identifies Camillo as the authority of the opportune moment, the _kairos_ that must be seized in Time's progression.32 Whereas Leontes' tyrannical authority metamorphoses into the bear that fatally bears Antigonus hence, Camillo's courageous moral authority facilitates the bearing hence of Polixenes' life, not only to the Bohemian king's personal salvation but also to the eventual happiness of all the characters of _The Winter's Tale_ governed by Apollo's providence.

Camillo's bearing Polixenes hence is part of a pattern in _The Winter's Tale_ that constitutes a redemptive counterpart to Antigonus's bearing hence. The bearing hence of act IV that creates a pattern with Camillo's is not formed by wordplay on "bear," nor is it actually carried out. It materializes nevertheless as a result of the wordplay on "bear" to operate in a linguistic field of reference in terms that suggest a resolution to characterological problems defined by that field. In this play of myriad Shakespearean metamorphoses, the bear is only one of Leontes' transformations; another involves a bull. When Leontes, disturbed by his suspicion of adultery, sees Mamillius's "smutched" nose, he tells the boy, "[w]e must be neat" (I.ii.120, 122). With the word "neat" sliding in Leontes' mind into the Jacobean meaning of "horned cattle," Mamillius becomes a "calf" because the king suspects that Hermione is a compliant "heifer" for the mounting Polixenes (line 123). This corrupt image requires Leontes to think of himself also as a horned creature, a cuckold. In this context, the "rough pash" (head) and "shoots" (horns), which he says characterize him, create the image of a royal bull (line 127). Later, when illustrating for Perdita the notion that the classical gods humbled themselves for love, Florizel activates Leontes' latent metaphor involving the bull by alluding to a familiar Ovidian transformation of Jupiter into a bull, who "bellowed" out of love for Europa (IV.iv.27–8). Florizel refrains from acting out with Perdita Jupiter's bearing Europa hence. Instead, he chooses a whole-
some transport, which the following analysis reveals as a resolution of the motif I have been tracing in *The Winter's Tale*.

According to the classical myth, Jupiter as a white bull kneeled on the Phoenician seashore and, in a reversal of sexual mounting, coaxed the beautiful Tyrian princess Europa into climbing onto his back, whereupon he abducted her by swimming with her clinging to his horns to the island of Crete, where he ravished her. Florizel alludes to this notorious precedent of metamorphosis aimed at rape so as to assure Perdita (and playgoers) that he, who is chaste in his love for her, has no intention of selfishly bearing her hence. In the scope of the play, Jupiter's tempting Europa to mount him and then his bearing her hence would suit the bull Leontes' feelings of sexual inversion, while the active rape made possible by this passive behavior fulfills his implied complementary fantasy of royal sexual domination (played out in his mind by the image of Polixenes copulating with his "heifer" Hermione).

The cluster Jupiter/Leontes/Polixenes' bearing hence Europa/Hermione more closely resembles the image of the bear/Leontes' bearing hence Antigonus than it does the image of Camillo/Aeneas' bearing hence Polixenes/Anchises. That is simply to say that in the play's series of physical and imaginative bearings hence it is at basis destructive rather than creative or redemptive. One could say that Europa was partly compensated for her fate by her later marriage to Asterius, King of Crete; by her brother Cadmus's founding of the celebrated city of Thebes during his search for her; and by her name being given to a continent. Yet she was also said to be the mother (by Jupiter) of Minos and Rhadamanthus, the pitiless judges of the underworld, and—in some forms of her story—of the Minotaur, the infamous half-bull/half-man who, in Shakespeare's play, corresponds to the bull-man of Leontes' own disturbed fantasy.

Once Polixenes throws off his disguise at the sheep-shearing festival and prohibits his son's marriage to Perdita, Florizel resolves to elope with her to an unknown quarter of the world. Camillo again providentially bears hence a member of the Bohemian royal family when he convinces Florizel to sail his vessel to Sicilia and Leontes' court. The counselor promises to give the prince written directions for "[t]he manner of your bearing towards [Leontes]" (IV.iv.555). By the word "bearing," Camillo means "behavior," but heard in the context of its field of wordplay, the term jars auditors into realizing that here we have a bearing hence that can give closure to *The Winter's Tale*. Camillo neither bears the lovers figuratively on his back, nor does he ride in the ship
that bears Florizel and Perdita to her true home. Nevertheless, he sets Florizel on a bearing that will guide him and the rest of the cast of the play to relative happiness.

That Leontes can participate in the secular blessedness of Hermione’s “resurrection” owes much to his having reached the limit of suffering that a person can bear. Just before the statue scene, Leontes tells Florizel what he lost:

All mine own folly—the society,
Amity too, of your brave father, whom,
Though bearing misery, I desire my life
Once more to look on him.

(V.i.134–7)

Leontes still “bear[s] misery” at this moment because he still feels the effects of acting bearish toward Hermione, Perdita, and Antigonus. Bearing that misery is a load heavier than the weight of any man carried on his shoulders. But that numbing burden suddenly lifts with the first movements of posed Hermione and his stunning awareness that his wife and daughter live again. Then Leontes in his joy loses all traces of the bear to reemerge fully as the royal lion, the monarch aware of his responsibility for building an extended ruling family.

NOTES

2 Biggins, pp. 10–1.
4 Biggins, p. 13.
5 Ibid.
8 Edward Topsell, qtd. in Bristol, p. 160.
Biggins, p. 7. "When Antigonus enters at the beginning of [act III, scene iii] he is already an emblem of broken integrity; his soliloquy announces his final moral corruption" (p. 8).

John Pitcher, in "'Fronted with the Sight of a Bear': Cox of Collumpton and The Winter's Tale," N&Q 239, 1 (n.s., 41, 1) (March 1994): 47–53, 47, has noted that on at least one theatrical occasion "the bear has been represented . . . by Leontes himself, with a claw and a mitt of skin for his hand and arm, with which he towered over Antigonus, and tore at him." Also identifying the bear with Leontes is Kevin Crawford, "'He Was Torn to Pieces with a Bear': Grotesque Unity in The Winter's Tale," JFA 10, 3 (1999): 206–30, 213–4. Noting the Russian subtext of The Winter's Tale as well as Czar Ivan IV's appropriation of the bear as an icon for himself, Daryl W. Palmer, in "Jacobean Muscovites: Winter, Tyranny, and Knowledge in The Winter's Tale," SQ 46, 3 (Fall 1995): 323–39, 332–3, has argued that the bear in the play evokes the tyrannical authority of Ivan the Terrible.

Bristol notes that Shakespeare departed from his source by making Sicilia rather than Bohemia the locus of the initiating action and by changing the royal protagonist's name from Pandosto to Leontes: "In this new version the king of Sicilia, who is associated with summer, with the south, and also with fertility, is given the name of Leontes, that is Leo [the Lion], the central zodiacal sign of summer, identified with the sun as its planet" (p. 156).


Mahood, pp. 10–1.

Bevington, in Shakespeare, Complete Works, p. 654n131.


Jordan, p. 127.

Ibid.

See Dale B. J. Randall, "'This is the Chase': Or, The Further Pursuit of Shakespeare's Bear," ShJb 121 (1985): 89–95, 94.

In this respect, Shakespeare contradicts one of his possible romance sources. Velma Bourgeois Richmond argues that a woodcut in William Copland's Valentine and Orson (1550?) (which Shakespeare drew upon for certain details of Macbeth) bears upon the composition of act III, scene iii of
The Winter's Tale. Figure 13 of the prose romance "shows in a wooded landscape as two separate episodes the fate of the twins and the bear. On the left the bear carries away in his teeth a basket with one of the twins; on the right is a man picking up the other swaddled infant. Shakespeare's reference to bears and wolves suckling children in The Winter's Tale [II.iii.186-8] is sometimes noted as evidence that he knew Valentine and Orson" (Shakespeare, Catholicism, and Romance [New York: Continuum, 2000], pp. 181-2, 182). Shakespeare's bear, however, prefers pursuing Antigonus to picking up the bundled Perdita.

23 Sidney Lee, Shakespeare's England: An Account of the Life and Manners of His Age, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1917), 2:428-36, 430. In The Merry Wives of Windsor, Slender boasts to Anne Page, "I have seen [the notorious Elizabethan bear] Sackerson loose twenty times, and have taken him by the chain. But, I warrant you, the women have so cried and shrieked at it that it passed" (I.i.274-6). While comically exaggerated, Slender's boast appears based on the reality of dangerous bears occasionally loose in the baiting venues and perhaps even on the Bankside. During the summer of 1609, in a widely lamented incident, a bear killed a child that was negligently left in the bear house. Late in June, "according to the King's commandement, this Beare was bayted to death upon a stage; and unto the mother of the murthered child was given twenty pounds out of part of that money which the people gave to see the Beare kild" (qtd. in John Nichols, The Progresses, Processions, and Magnificent Festivities of King James the First, 4 vols. [London: J. B. Nichols, 1828], 2:259). Some playgoers in the original audience of The Winter's Tale may have momentarily thought of this case as Shakespeare's bear appeared on stage and rushed toward—but then past—the defenseless infant, Perdita.


26 Barbara L. Estrin, in "The Foundling Plot: Stories in The Winter's Tale," MLS 7, 1 (Spring 1977): 27-38, 35, 37-8, remarks that the conceit of hibernation links the bear of the play with Hermione's "resurrection." Paulina, according to Estrin, invokes the notion of hibernation in the statue scene when she tells her guests, "prepare / To see the life as lively mocked as ever / Still sleep mocked death" (V.iii.18-20). In the notion of sleep mocking death, Shakespeare, according to Estrin, "hint[s] at Hermione's bearlike retreat" (p. 35)—her sixteen-year period of suspended animation and present "sleep" on a pedestal. Like the hibernating bear, Hermione awaits a revitalization of spring, a secular resurrection.

27 Dickey, pp. 259, 263. Jason Scott-Warren has recently written provocatively about the overlap between early modern bear arenas and the theater in "When Theaters Were Bear-Gardens; or, What's at Stake in the Comedy of Humors," SG 54, 1 (Spring 2003): 63-82. Scott-Warren's essay (esp. pp. 70-4) complements Dickey's by suggesting the noncomic, knowledge-giving functions that the English sport of bearbaiting performed for spectators, such as the discovery or confirmation of the courage or cowardice of different species and breeds of animals.

Orgel explains that the pun involving two senses of the words “charity,” “footing,” and “foundation” implies that the old shepherd’s hypothesized charity “would therefore have been all the more charitable” (p. 158n 105-7).


“My father had spoken. But now through the town the roar of the fire came louder to our ears, and the rolling blaze brought its hot blast closer. ‘Well then, dear Father,’ I said, ‘come now, you must let them lift you onto my back. I will hold my shoulders ready for you; this labour of love will be no weight to me’ . . . So saying, I bent down and cloaked my neck and shoulders with a red-brown lion’s skin. I then took up my load” (Virgil, The Aeneid, trans. W. F. Jackson Knight [Baltimore: Penguin, 1968], p. 72).


The more common mythic version of the Minotaur ascribes its origin to the sodomization of King Minos’s daughter Pasiphae by a bull. This myth suggests a terrible distortion (but nevertheless a repetition) of the grandmother Europa’s copulation with a bull-god. After all, this union produced the cruel son, Minos, and through him the perverse Pasiphae. These connections stained Europa's reputation in the minds of many who were aware of her legend.