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“Exit pursued by a Beare”: A Problem in *The Winter’s Tale*

DENNIS BIGGINS

Exit pursued by a Beare”, the curt sentence that marks the end of Antigonus in *The Winter’s Tale* III. iii, must be the most notorious stage direction in the whole of Shakespeare. Commentators generally have agreed that this method of disposing of Antigonus is unsophisticated, to say the least, and that we are not meant to take the episode very seriously.

Mr. Nevill Coghill has recently defended Shakespeare’s dramaturgy in *The Winter’s Tale*, especially those aspects of the play criticized, notably by Sir Arthur Quiller-Couch and the late S. L. Bethell, as crude or incoherent. He quickly dismisses Q’s and Professor Dover Wilson’s assertions that Shakespeare wrote the scene only to exploit the novelty of a live bear’s appearing on the Globe stage, “to make a popular hit”, by pointing out that bears are dangerous and unreliable beasts and that an actor clad in a skin obviously played the bear. One might add that there is no substantial proof that a real bear ever appeared in a play on the Elizabethan public stage, or elsewhere, and that the internal evidence of the relevant texts itself supports Mr. Coghill’s argument.

The one apparently indisputable example of the use of live bears for dramatic purposes occurs in Jonson’s masque, *Oberon, The Fairy Prince*, in which Oberon’s chariot was “drawne by two white beares” when the piece was performed at Whitehall on 1 January, 1610/11, during the Court Revels. It is possible, though very difficult, I believe, to train Polar bears; brown bears, whether born albino or subsequently painted white, could stand in for their Arctic brethren, being less dangerous and less difficult to control; the function of drawing a chariot is, dramatically, simple. But it is equally possible, and far more probable, that Oberon’s chariot-drawers were bear-costumed actors. In Jonson’s *Masque of Queens*, performed at Whitehall on 2 February, 1608/9, the masquers enter in three chariots, drawn respectively by “Eagles”, “Griffons”, and “Lions” (p. 314). There can be no question as to the real nature of these beasts, nor can there be any about the three dancing “Beares” (pp. 629, 634 ff.) in the first anti-masque of Jonson’s *Masque of Augurs*, presented at Whitehall on 6 January, and 5 (or 6) May 1622, where it is clear from the various humorous references to them in the dialogue that actors impersonated the bears.

The only other Elizabethan play known to me in which a bear appears is *Mucedorus*. If a live bear was used in performances of this play, the spectacle

would have been no novelty in 1610/11, when the King's Men acted it before James at Whitehall "on Shroue-sunday night", for although an additional scene with the bear was written for this revival the animal was an original feature of the play as first printed in 1598. The antics of the bear in _Mucedorus_ indicate quite clearly that an actor impersonated the beast. In the scene (I. ii) added to the 1610 Q text, for example, the clown Mouse enters in fright, speaks and "As he goes backwards the Beare comes in, and he tumbles ouer her, and runnes away ..." (p. 107). Mouse's speech in this scene contains an ironic implication that the bear is not genuine: "A Beare? nay, sure it cannot be a Beare, but some Diuell in a Beares Doublet: for a Beare could neuer haue had that agilitie to haue frightened me." The original bear-scene (1598 Q; I. iii in 1610 Q) has a stage-direction almost as laconic as that in _The Winter's Tale_ III. iii: "Enter Segasto runing [sic] and Amadine after him, being persued with a beare." After a couple of lines of dialogue, "Segasto runnes away./Ama. Why then I die; ah helpe me in distresse! Enter Mucedorus like a shepheard with a sworde drawne and a beares head in his hande." It is clear from the dialogue in II. iv, where this episode is referred to, that in I.iii the "bear" chases Amadine about the stage with outstretched paws and open mouth, before following Segasto "off".

Before Mr. Coghill's article appeared, Professor G. B. Harrison had already pointed out that "a bear rampant is of all beasts the most easily personated by a man"; and, it may be added, Henslowe lists "j bears skyne" among the animal costumes mentioned in his Diary. We must, with Mr. Coghill, look for some profounder reason for Shakespeare's introducing a bear into his play than the desire to capitalize popular tastes in spectacle.

Coghill's defense of the bear-scene in _The Winter's Tale_ is, in essence and in effect, a partial reply to Bethell's, Q's and Sir Walter Raleigh's criticisms of it (although he does not quote Raleigh) by way of an expansion of Dr. E. M. W. Tillyard's remarks on it. Dr. Tillyard sees the bear episode, and Antigonus' soliloquy that precedes it, as the most violent example in the play of dramatic transition from one plane of reality to another. This transition, from the melodramatically remote world of Antigonus' soliloquy via the bear to the earthly comic reality of the old shepherd's speech, "not only expresses the sense of different worlds but has an important technical work to do, that of throwing a bridge across the two halves of the play." Shakespeare moves from the serious world of Leontes to the different, less violent but equally serious world of Perdita by turning tragedy into melodrama, which becomes farce ("it is easy enough to set the farcical or the grotesque against tragedy without fear of misunderstanding"), then comedy, and so back to the serious. "Out of this comedy grows the serious, sane, and transfigured earthiness of the Perdita scenes, which we now never dream of confusing with the world of Leontes and Hermione. The transition has obvious analogies with music" (p. 78).

Raleigh, on the other hand, cites Antigonus as an example of characters

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6 Professor Allardyce Nicoll quotes this together with other references to animal-costumes from Henslowe and the Revels Accounts in _The Development of the Theatre_ (3rd edition, London, 1940), p. 233.
whom Shakespeare sometimes disposes of "in the most unprincipled and reckless fashion":

He fulfils his task, and now, by the end of the Third Act, his part in the play is over. Sixteen years are to pass, and new matters are to engage our attention; surely the aged nobleman might have been allowed to retire in peace. Shakespeare thought otherwise; perhaps he felt it important that no news whatever concerning the child should reach Leontes, and therefore resolved to make away with the only likely messenger . . . . [Raleigh here quotes the lines describing the bear's pursuit of Antigonus.] This is the first we hear of the bear, and would be the last, were it not that Shakespeare, having in this wise disposed of poor Antigonus, makes a thrifty use of the remains at the feast of Comedy.  

This sorry business, says Raleigh, is an example of "the wild justice that is done in the name of Comedy" (p. 138). I know that in some quarters Raleigh's literary criticism is now regarded as that of an out-moded dilettante, but in his old-fashioned way he has made an objection to Shakespeare's methods here that by its unassuming wrong-headedness points the way to a deeper understanding of them than has yet appeared.

All the commentators mentioned above accept without remark the getting rid of Antigonus (although Bethell refers to his "casual disposal"). Coghill regards him as quite expendable in the service of structural antithesis: having dismissed the live-bear-for-spectacle argument, he goes on, "We are back, then, at Q's question 'Why introduce a bear?'

If we appreciate the problem in dramaturgy that faced Shakespeare at this turn in his story, the answer is clear enough: it was a *tour de force*, calculated to create a unique and particular effect, at that point demanded by the narrative mood and line of the play. It is at the moment when the tale, hitherto wholly and deeply tragic, turns suddenly and triumphantly to comedy. One may modulate in music from one key to another through a chord that is common to both; so, to pass from tragedy to comedy, it may not be unskilful to build the bridge out of material that is both tragic and comic at the same time.

Now it is terrifying and pitiful to see a bear grapple with and carry off an elderly man to a dreadful death, even on the stage; but (such is human nature) the unexpectedness of an ungainly animal in pursuit of an old gentleman (especially one so tedious as Antigonus) can also seem wildly comic; the terrible and the grotesque come near to each other in a frisson of horror instantly succeeded by a shout of laughter; and so this bear, this unique and perfect link between the two halves of the play, slips into place and holds. (Pp. 34-35)

This is acceptable enough, with some important reservations which I make below: the finely-shaded cross-hatching of tragedy with comedy is fundamental in Shakespeare, as was first remarked, I believe, by Johnson, and taken up by Coleridge in his observations on *Hamlet*, and developed later by G. Wilson Knight in his fine essay, "King Lear and the Comedy of the Grotesque" (*The Wheel of Fire*). Mr. Coghill's subsequent remarks illustrate how the speeches

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of the Clown and the Shepherd underline this balanced mixture of tragedy and comedy, this modulation in mood. But there is, I think, more to be said on the bear-scene.

Let us note first that there is no mention in the 1st Folio text of any kind of "well-timed knock-about routine" such as Coghill (p. 34) supposes between Antigonus and the bear, no grappling and carrying off: Antigonus merely hears "a savage clamor", announces his despair of escaping, and "Exit pursued by a Beare." In other words, Shakespeare, with his unerring dramatic instinct, recognizes the need for farce, but keeps it to a minimum at this atmospherically ticklish moment. Surely much of the humor of the bear lies in the comically laconic wording of that stage-direction? I have seen performances of The Winter's Tale at which the audience reacted perfectly seriously to the bear's brief appearance and Antigonus' hasty departure; the laughter came with the entrances and speeches of the Shepherd and the Clown.

Bethell comments:

An audience in 1611 would react to some aspects of The Winter's Tale (Antigonus' vision, his 'Exit, pursued by a bear' and the other examples I have mentioned) pretty much as a modern theatre audience reacts to a burlesque revival of Maria Martin or East Lynne. (P. 52)

This seems to me very much a piece of special pleading, attributing a degree of sophistication to the audience, and a quality of melodramatic naivety to the play, that are unsupported by the available evidence. Shakespeare's audiences of 1611, including James and his court, still enjoyed the far more naive old romance of Mucedorus, which, as far as we know, was played "straight". The melodramatic qualities of Antigonus' soliloquy have been exaggerated by critics; they reside very largely in the lines describing Hermione's weeping—and it is, after all, a dream that Antigonus is recounting; some rhetorical exaggeration or heightening is surely permissible:

... she did approach
   My Cabine where I lay: thrice bow'd before me,
   And (gaspings to begin some speech) her eyes
   Became two spouts; the furie spent, anon
   Did this breake from her....

If audiences in 1611 laughed at this, how, one wonders, did they react in 1607 to Levidulcia's lines in Tourneur's The Atheist's Tragedy?:

... could I make an ocean with my tears
   That on the flood this broken vessel of
   My body, laden heavy with light lust,
   Might suffer shipwreck and so drown my shame.
   Then weeping were to purpose ...

Or in 1613 to Bosola's lines in The Duchess of Malfi?:

These tears, I am very certain, never grew
   In my mother's milk: my estate is sunk

"EXIT PURSUED BY A BEARE"

Below the degree of fear: where were
These penitent fountains while she was living?
O, they were frozen up!12

No, on the whole I think that a contemporary audience, like a modern audience if the comic element is not deliberately exaggerated as an easy way out of what is admittedly a difficult scene to play, would react seriously rather than uproariously to Antigonus and his bear. G. Wilson Knight insists on the seriousness of the scene: "We must take the bear seriously, as suggesting man's insecurity in face of untamed nature; indeed, mortality in general."13 This seems to attach too large and vague a symbolism to the episode, but I feel that Knight is erring in the right direction: the bear is not merely a catalytic agent for the transformation of tragedy into comedy, but something more, a symbol.

We now have two aspects of the bear-scene to consider: the disposal of Antigonus (is it dramatically justified?), and the deeper significance (if any) of the bear. First let us examine Antigonus and what Q called "the deep damnation of his taking-off". On the most obvious level, that of literary sources, there is no parallel for either Antigonus or his end (with one possible exception, mentioned below). In Greene's Pandosto, Shakespeare's major source for The Winter's Tale, Pandosto's infant daughter, abandoned to the mercy of the waves in a cockboat, drifts ashore on the coast of Sicilia (Shakespeare's Bohemia), where she is found by a poor shepherd. It is just possible that the bear's devouring of Antigonus was suggested by a similar incident involving a lion in a tale referred to by Professor Kenneth Muir in his first volume on Shakespeare's sources:

it may be worth mentioning that in Emmanuel Ford's Famous and pleasant History of Parismus, the valiant and renowned Prince of Bohemia (1597) there is also a coast of Bohemia. In this novel a child is abandoned to the mercy of a nurse, who flies with it into the wilderness, and is eventually devoured by a lion.14

The change from a lion to a bear would be readily accounted for by the far greater ease of impersonation enjoyed by the actor playing the latter.

Likewise the most obvious explanation (on the superficial story level) for Shakespeare's disposal of Antigonus is Raleigh's, that his disappearance is necessary to make the mystery of the child's ultimate fate complete for Leontes. But these are hardly adequate explanations. In the first place, why did Shakespeare invent the characters of Antigonus and Paulina, who have no counterparts in Pandosto? They represent moral integrity, which in Paulina resists Leontes and endures to the end, but in Antigonus falters and finally yields to royal tyranny. Raleigh's objection to Antigonus' hasty demise is that of a reader whose sympathies have been engaged by his character as displayed in Act II of the play, where he appears as a forthright, sturdily independent spokesman for Justice and for Hermione's innocence. But 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. Even from the rather crude and sentimental viewpoint of poetic justice and outraged sympathies that Raleigh repre-

12 TV. ii, ibid., p. 215.
sents, Antigonus’ end is not unprepared for. Yet this, too, is an inadequate expla-
nation. Antigonus must be got rid of, just as Mercutio must be got rid of in
Romeo and Juliet, because his death opens the way to necessary development of
plot and character, and at his going hence he is made a symbol that functions
through violent destruction. Mutatis mutandis, a good counter to Raleigh’s ob-
jections is Johnson’s reply to Dryden’s disparaging assertion that Shakespeare
“said himself, that he was forced to kill him [Mercutio] in the third act to
prevent being killed by him”:

Mercutio’s wit, gaiety and courage, will always procure him friends that
wish him a longer life; but his death is not precipitated, he has lived out the
time allotted him in the construction of the play. . .

I do not think that it is too fanciful to see Antigonus’ taking-off as a com-
plex function of symbolic, tonal, and structural movements in the play. Coghill
remarks of the scene, “it symbolizes the revenge of Nature on the servant of a
corrupted court” (p. 35). It does this and more, a great deal more. When
Antigonus enters at the beginning of the scene he is already an emblem of
broken integrity; his soliloquy announces his final moral corruption—although
he obeys the supposedly dead Hermione he “superstitiously” takes the false for
the true, believing that Polixenes is the father of her child. Professor Harrison
comments: “It is curious that Antigonus should at this point believe in Hermi-
one’s guilt” (p. 132). It is curious only if we take Raleigh’s view of Antigonus
and fail to see his symbolic function at this point. In the previous scene we
have just witnessed the proving of Hermione’s innocence, and Leontes’ woeful
repentance that comes apparently all too late. From the end of this scene until
the last Act Hermione is believed to be dead, and Leontes is, figuratively, dead
too, until restored to the living world by reunion with his reincarnated queen—
“Bequeath to Death your numnesse: (for from him, / Dear Life redeemes
you)” (V. iii. 102-103), cries Paulina, surely to Leontes. The dramatic irony of
the bear-scene focusses Leontes’ now dead brutality and false suspicion on An-
tigonus, in order to destroy them dramatically (that is, in a realized stage
action). The movement of the play is, as Tillyard says, from destruction to
regeneration: through Antigonus the tragic world of Leontes’ jealousy is finally
manifested and symbolically destroyed.

What none of the critics or defenders of this scene has remarked is the care-
ful preparation for it made earlier in the play. All is worked out with characteris-
tically Shakespearian irony. In II. iii, before he swears to perform Leontes’
bidding, Antigonus replies to his question “What will you adventure, / To
save this Brats life?”: “Ile pawne the little blood which I have left, / To save
the Innocent”, and his exit-line is “(Poore Thing, condemn’d to losse)” (162-
163, 166-167, 192). This prophetic irony issues in the bear-scene, where it is
underlined by the dramatic irony of Antigonus’ soliloquy, and by the uncon-
scious irony of his utterances throughout the scene. The concepts of Destiny
and Providence, here personified through the pagan gods, notably Apollo, figure
prominently in the working-out of the plot, and we are constantly reminded of

15 “The Dramatic Poetry of the Last Age”, Dramatic Essays by John Dryden (Everyman edition,
these unseen forces in the speeches of various characters. So Hermione says in Antigonus' vision that "Fate (against thy better disposition) / Hath made thy person for the Th[...]ower-out / Of my poore babe, according to thine oath" (III. iii. 28-30). The counterpointing function of Antigonus' end, its linking of the themes of destruction and recovery, death and rebirth, the sense it gives of Fate and Providence co-operative, are made explicit not only in the frequently-quoted words of the Shepherd to the Clown—"Now blesse thy selfe: thou met'st with things dying, I with things new-borne" (III. iii. 116-117)—but also in the conversation of the Gentlemen towards the end of the play:

GENT. 2. What, 'pray you, became of Antigonus, that carryed hence the Child?
GENT. 3. . . . he was tore to pieces with a Beare. . . .
GENT. 1. What became of his Barke, and his Followers?
GENT. 3. Wrackt the same instant of their Masters death . . .: so that all the Instruments which ayded to expose the Child, were even then lost, when it was found. (V. ii. 62-77)

So much for the dramatic justification of the disposal of Antigonus (and of his "followers", for that matter). But, asks Q, "why, in the name of economy, not engulf Antigonus with the rest—or, better still, as he tries to row aboard?" He says elsewhere: "The bear is a naughty superfluity". Coghill's defense is made almost exclusively in terms of structure and theatrical effect—true up to a point, but not, I think, sufficient. G. Wilson Knight sees the bear simply as a vague symbol crystallized from Shakespeare's habitual image associations. He has pointed out that Shakespeare constantly uses storms as symbols of tragedy, and that wild beasts, especially bears, are often associated with them. In The Winter's Tale III. iii, says Knight, "Shakespeare is moulding events from his own past imagery. His recurrent association of tempests with rough beasts, especially bears (as at King Lear III. iv. 9-11), is here actualized: the storm starts, the bear appears, and we have a description of shipwreck". This may be so, but I think that Shakespeare had more dramatically cogent reasons for introducing the bear than the mere suggestions of image associations.

Storms in Shakespeare, besides symbolizing tragedy, often represent a disturbed moral order or outraged cosmos, or they are ominous forerunners or companions of disaster. So the storm in The Winter's Tale III. iii. follows with inexorable fatality upon Leontes' remorseful comment on the death of Mamillius: "Apollo's angry, and the Heavens themselves / Doe strike at my Injustice" (III. ii. 147-148). We are again reminded of an angry Providence, manifested this time in the world of Nature, at the beginning of III. iii, where the Mariner observes:

the skies looke grimly,
And threaten present blusters. In my conscience
The heavens with that we have in hand, are angry,
And frowne upon's.

Antigonus replies, with grim unconscious irony,

Their sacred wil's be done: go get a-boord,
Looke to thy barke, Ile not be long before
I call upon thee. (3-9)

The atmosphere of the whole scene is highly charged with foreboding and ironic tension. Antigonus delivers his soliloquy, and lays the child on the ground:

The storme beginnes, poore wretch,
That for thy mothers fault, art thus expos'd
To lose, and what may follow. Weepe I cannot,
But my heart bleedes: and most accurst am I
To be by oath enjoyn'd to this. Farewell,
The day frownes more and more... (49-54)

The close-packed ironies of these lines are starkly realized in the appearance of the bear a few moments later.

Now wild animals, especially carnivores, figure constantly in Shakespearian imagery as types of hideousness, ferocity and savage, remorseless cruelty. Bears especially carry these associations in a wide variety of contexts. Moreover, bears appear frequently in other Elizabethan literature as exemplars of these and similar unpleasant qualities. Of the nine proverbs referring to bears in M. P. Tilley's *A Dictionary of the Proverbs in England in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Ann Arbor, 1950), four specifically evidence their traditional fierceness and savagery. Other references to them in Elizabethan prose and verse parallel Shakespeare's; the following are merely a few random examples.

Spenser's "ugly beast" that came "from the sea": "The cruelle Leopard she resembled much: / Feete of a beare, a Lions throte she had",21 In Nashe's *The Unfortunate Traveller* (1594) a bear, with "his ugly shape", is described as "the most cruell of all beasts"22, and in the same author's *Piers Penniless* (1592) the Knight of the Post thus concludes his tale of the Bear, Ape and Fox: "Hawe I not described a right earthly Diuell unto thee, in the discourse of this bloody minded Beare?" (29-31, *ibid.*, I, 226). Spenser's Sir Satyrane is taught by his satyr father

To banish cowardize and bastard feare;
His trembling hand he would him force to put
Vpon the Lyon and the rugged Beare,
And from the she Beares teats her whelps to teare...23

These traditional literary associations extend back to medieval times. Bears are included among the fierce beasts the hero of the fourteenth-century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* fights in his journeying:

20 See, e.g., *Errors* III. ii. 139-160; *Dream* II. ii. 94-95; *Macb.* III. iv. 100-101; *Troilus* I. ii. 20; *Timon* III. vi. 105.
"EXIT PURSUED BY A BEARE"

Sumwhyle wyth wormes he werres, and with wolues als,

Bothe wyth bulles and beres, and bores otherquyle.24

Langland in *Piers Plowman* refers to

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| And woneden in wildernes . a-mong wilde bestes; |
| Ac dorst no best byten hem . by daye ne by nyghte. . . |

The moral defects of inhumanity and pitilessness, particularly, are suggested by the following Shakespearian examples: in the first, the pathologically misanthropic Timon of Athens apostrophizes the earth:

> Enseare thy Fertile and Conceptious wombe,  
> Let it no more bring out ingratefull man.  
> Goe great with Tygers, Dragons, Wolves, and Beares. . .  
> (IV. iii. 187-189)

The second is Prospero’s reminder to Ariel of the tortures from which he released him:

> thy grones  
> Did make wolves howle, and penetrate the breasts  
> Of ever-angry Beares. . . (Temp. I.ii. 287-289)

This last passage at once calls to mind the words of Antigonus when he accepts Leontes’ charge to abandon Hermione’s new-born daughter:

> I sweare to doe this: though a present death  
> Had beene more mercifull. Come on (poore Babe)  
> Some powerfull Spirit instruct the Kytes and Ravens  
> To be thy Nurses. *Wolves and Beares, they say,*  
> *(Casting their savagenesse aside) have done*  
> *Like offices of Pitty.* Sir, be prosperous  
> In more then this deed do’s require; and Blessing  
> Against this Crueltie, fight on thy side  
> *(Poore Thing, condemn’d to losse.) Exit. (II. iii. 184-192.)*

*My italics*

Here, surely, is a source of new light on the bear. When we remember that this is the last speech Antigonus utters before his re-appearance in the bear-scene, its prophetic and unconscious ironies become all the more apparent. In swearing to perform Leontes’ savagely cruel errand, Antigonus has, as it were, reduced himself to the level of the wild beasts he mentions—lower, indeed, for he acknowledges (with an oblique glance at such stories as that of Romulus and Remus) that even they at times know pity. It is only too ironically appropriate that he should be killed by just such a beast, which spares the innocent child, but destroys the corrupted agent of tyranny. Such an example of the justice of


Providence would have strongly appealed to an audience that still held something of the medieval belief in divine care for holy men and other innocents that lies behind the last line of the passage from *Piers Plowman*, quoted above. Biblical precedent for the employment of bears as the instruments of divine retribution would likewise be familiar to Shakespeare's audiences, in the story of Elisha (2 Kings ii. 23-24). Moreover, this notion of the inevitable vengeance of Heaven on unnatural, motiveless cruelty runs through *Pandosto*, especially that section dealing with Pandosto's treatment of Bellaria (Shakespeare's Hermione) and their infant daughter (Shakespeare's Perdita). When she learns of Pandosto's plan to commit the child "to the mercies of the seas and the destinies"\(^{26}\), Bellaria cries, "What father would be so cruel, or what gods will not revenge such rigour?" (p. 21). The Bohemian nobles, Franion (Shakespeare's Camillo), and Pandosto himself, in his grief for the deaths of Bellaria and his son Garinter (Shakespeare's Mamilius), all point out that "unnatural actions offend the gods more than men, and causeless cruelty never escapes without revenge" (p. 30).

Possibly this aspect of the bear as the instrument of divine wrath, sparing the helpless and innocent infant, but hunting down the guilty agent of tyranny, was emphasized by some simple piece of "dumb-show" in the original performances of *The Winter's Tale*; the necessary business would be far less complicated, and far less likely to arouse undue mirth, than that envisaged by Mr. Coghill. The emblematic qualities of certain animals are emphasized in the Elizabethan emblem books, which utilize them for moral exempla somewhat in the manner of the medieval bestiary tradition. Particularly apt to my present theme is the fable of the two friends and a bear in Henry Peacham's *Minerva Brittanica* (1612).\(^{27}\) In this two journeying friends vow never to forsake each other:

Thus wandring thorough deserts, here and there,
By chance they met, a great and ugly Beare.

At whome, amazed with a deadly feare,
One leaues his frend, and climbeth vp a tree:
The other, falles downe flat before the Beare,
And keepes his breath, that seeming dead to be,
The Beare forsooke him, (for his nature's such,
A breathles bodie never once to touch.)

Peacham's illustration shows the man up the tree looking anxiously down on the bear as it tentatively paws at his apparently dead friend, who is lying prone. Our concern here is not with the moral of the story, but with the bear's behavior, and the popular belief about it recorded by Peacham. For these suggest the way in which Shakespeare's bear acted. The infant Perdita (presumably a doll or other dummy was used) would be tightly swaddled in accordance with current notions of baby care, so that it could naturally be supposed to lie motionless, thus lending plausibility at once to the "child" and to the "bear's" actions in treat-

\(^{26}\) Greene's 'Pandosto' Or 'Dorastus And Fawnia' Being The Original Of Shakespeare's 'Winter's Tale' Newly Edited by P. G. Thomas (London, 1907), p. 20.

\(^{27}\) Reproduced with Peacham's original woodcut as Plate xi in Rosemary Freeman's *English Emblem Books* (London, 1948), f. p. 76.
ing it with respect, the animal perhaps sniffing gently at it before pursuing Antigonus off the stage.

In other words, what Shakespeare sought in the bear-scene was not economy, but emphasis, an underlining in fully dramatic terms of the swing in the play's course from destruction to re-birth, and of the significance of the means he employed. The care with which he prepared for this scene is apparent in a number of places. Apart from the foreshadowings in Antigonus' speech in II. iii, there is a hint right at the beginning of the bear-scene as to what is coming, when the Mariner reminds Antigonus: "this place is famous for the Creatures / Of prey, that keepe upon't" (III. iii. 12-13). Again, there is a reminder of the bear's further symbolic function in the Clown's last tragical-comical reference to it: "Ile go see if the Beare bee gone from the Gentleman, and how much he hath eaten: they are never curst but when they are hungry" (133-135). Bears, that is, are governed by natural and pardonable, or at least understandable, motives, unlike Leontes, whose "curst" jealousy, with all its ugly consequences, has no justification. A person of a surly, moody or savage disposition may still be figuratively referred to as a "bear"; although Leontes is nowhere directly compared with a bear, there is a suggestion of this figurative identification in the vicious pun he spits out at Paulina in II. iii: "A Callat / Of boundlesse tongue, who late hath beat her Husband, / And now bayts me" (90-92. My italics). A more remotely suggested affinity between the nature of bears and royal tyranny appears in the Clown's comment on Autolycus, who has passed himself off to the Shepherd and his son as a courtly representative of the enraged Polixenes:

He seemes to be of great authoritie: close with him, give him Gold; and though Authoritie be a stubborne Beare, yet hee is oft led by the Nose with Gold... (IV. iv. 829-831)

The apparent anomalies in the symbolism here are only apparent; Shakespearean symbols, in common with those of many other poets, often operate in several different directions at once, so that the bear here is, like Antigonus, at once an emblem of divine retribution and an embodiment of Leontes' savage cruelty.

To summarize my findings: in the figures of Antigonus and the bear Shakespeare brings together for dismissal several themes—destruction, broken integrity, Heavenly vengeance—that must now, at this transitional stage in the play, be cleared away so as to permit new thematic and atmospheric development. Leontes' false suspicions, his tyranny and cruelty, his inclemency, are focussed and magnified to extreme proportions before being finally dissipated in the strong light of comedy. All this is effected with careful preparation and dramatically heightened by means of subtly-varied irony. Once again we are forced to recognize the justice of Coleridge's reverential epithet, that acknowledged the finely-wrought art of the "myriad-minded" Shakespeare.

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