INTRODUCTION

> [I] would love to see a rep company do *The Winter's Tale* and *King Lear*
> together, same actors, same costumes, because I think Shakespeare wrote
> *The Winter's Tale* to answer *King Lear*'s tragedy with hope. The crucial
> difference between Leontes and Lear is that Leontes lives to regret and
> rethink his early selfish definition of love . . . and to accept the miracle of
> Hermione's revival. The play redefines love as a miracle and a gift, which,
> once accepted, allows all things, not only reappearances and resurrections,
> but even total forgiveness.[1]

Love, miracle, gift, resurrection, forgiveness. In three sentences, Jane Smiley, the
author of *A Thousand Acres*, the 1991 novel derived from *King Lear*, provides a
snapshot of key issues and themes that have dominated the critical and performance
afterlife of *The Winter's Tale*, a late play and one of Shakespeare's most theatrically
self-conscious and emotionally exhausting. To say that Leontes lives to regret and
rethink his earlier selfishness is to address the question of genre and the concept
of time that determines in no small measure the narrative and affective contours of
each generic type.[2] The proverbial wheel of fortune is allowed in the later text to
enter into a new, upward phase, compatible with hope. Leontes has time to get it
right – not perfect but certainly better – and to enjoy the fruits of a long and painful
journey of self-discovery, something denied Lear. The description of *The Winter's
Tale* as the hopeful complement to Shakespeare's great tragedy acknowledges a
practice not uncommon among artists, particularly those who leave behind sizeable
bodies of work: i.e., the revisiting of themes, situations, and characters explored
earlier, the rewrite often appearing more mellow and benign.

 The most significant connection between the two dramas, however, may be the one
that Smiley only hints at, namely, the sheer 'bigness' of each, or, copiousness.[3] *Lear*
features a cosmic storm; *The Winter's Tale* emphasizes that most cosmic of themes,
time. In Shakespeare's only tragedy with a fully developed subplot, there are, as
critics often point out, two of almost everything,[4] and all expressed in a language

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[1] Jane Smiley, 'Taking it all Back', Book World, *Washington Post* (21 June 1998), 8. For a helpful discussion
of the kinship between the two plays, see chapters 3 and 4 in David Young, *The Heart's Forest: A Study
of Shakespeare's Pastoral Plays*, 1972.

[2] David Scott Kastan provides a thoughtful analysis of the interplay between genre and time in *Shake-
speare and the Shapes of Time*, 1982.

[3] The early modern literary ideal of abundance is articulated in Erasmus' *De Copia* (1511), required
reading in Elizabethan grammar schools. For a brief but excellent treatment of the topic, see chapter
2, 'Eloquence and Copy', in Madeleine Doran's still indispensable *Endeavours of Art: A Study of Form
in Elizabethan Drama*, 1954, esp. 46–52.

[4] E.g., two unfilial daughters, two eyes plucked out, two suitors of Cordelia, two adulterous (in thought,
if not in deed) relationships, and two cases of madness (one real, the other feigned).

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marked by a preponderance of hyphenated words and the 'out' prefix as though to say that one word alone will not do to express the old king's folly and what he suffers as a consequence. Similarly,[5] *The Winter's Tale* – framed by the words 'vast' (1.1.25) and 'wide gap' (5.3.154), informed by 'a deal of wonder' (5.2.20), and marked by a style given to extensive hyperbole and syntactic amplification – requires a stretching of the imagination. The play's governing aesthetic of multiplicity is evident in the tripartite spatial movement from Sicilia to Bohemia and back to Sicilia, in the temporal passage of sixteen years at the beginning of Act 4, and in the separate plot lines involving the triangle of Leontes, Hermione, and Polixenes, the young love of Perdita and Florizel, and the antics of Autolycus.

The critical commentary that follows is intended to guide the reader through the labyrinthine ways of *The Winter's Tale* without presuming to exhaust the vastness and wonder essential to its 'winter's-taleness'. After an initial focus on genre, title, and iterative patterns, I turn to specific elements such as Leontes' jealousy, the bear episode, the figure of Time, the meaning(s) of Act 5, and the play's sense of an ending. Informing much of the selection of topics is Nevill Coghill's now classic essay defending the play against the charge of 'creaking dramaturgy'.[6] The points Coghill raises are especially useful because they encourage a dovetailing of literary analysis and performance history, thus demonstrating the now widely accepted symbiotic relationship between Shakespeare in the study and Shakespeare on the stage. Sections on the play's date and sources round out the introduction.

Genre and title

[*The Winter's Tale*] is a fairy tale – it is fact. It is romantic – it is realistic. It is tragic – it is comic. It is Christian – it is pagan. It is harsh and crabbed – it is simple and idyllic. It is this – it is that. It is a welter of anachronisms. Its geography is in spots fantastic. It has not only gods, but a bear, a storm, and a yacht, from the machine.[7]

Harold Goddard's description of the play's heterogeneity, cited here, implicitly raises the genre question: What exactly do we call *The Winter's Tale*? Judging from the classification assigned in the First Folio, Shakespeare's contemporaries saw it as a comedy, perhaps primarily because of an ending celebratory of spousal reunion (Leontes and Hermione) and of the pending nuptials of one young couple (Florizel and Perdita) and one not so young (Camillo and Paulina). Some critics continue to favour the rubric of comedy but with various modifiers to indicate a subgenre. The least helpful, though possibly the safest, is something along the lines of 'late comedy', suggesting only a chronological difference from what came before. R. G. Hunter's choice, 'comedy of forgiveness', is more attractive because it recognizes comic conventions but specifies a moral, even spiritual, meaning that distinguishes *The Winter's Tale* from earlier comedies like *The Comedy of Errors*, *The Taming of the Shrew*, and *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. That difference, however, is arguably

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5 Felperin (212) argues for even more amplitude and variety than that found in *Lear*.
6 See Coghill.
7 Harold C. Goddard, *The Meaning of Shakespeare*, 2 vols., 1951, 2:263.

one of kind, thereby militating against facile sub-genre status.[8] The story itself is filled with events not typically found in comic works (e.g., the sudden death of a child and the fatal savaging of a man by a bear); likewise, the value system of the first three acts and the fifth extends beyond the social concerns that are the usual purview of comedy to include the ethical and metaphysical assumptions informing tragedy. Such factors, among others, may be responsible for the rivalry between two terms that for over a century have vied for preeminence in the matter of the play's classification: romance and tragicomedy.[9]

ROMANCE, TRAGICOMEDY, TRAGICOMIC ROMANCE

In the late nineteenth century Edward Dowden became the first to classify *The Winter's Tale* and those final plays usually grouped with it (*Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Tempest*) as romances.[10] What Dowden seems to have had in mind were stories of exotic adventure and travel, shipwrecks, spiritual and/or moral quests, romantic love, reunions of lovers and families long separated, virtue tested and proved triumphant, and nobility hidden and then discovered – all unfolding in a world familiar with supernatural forces, wide-ranging marvels, magic, and enchantment. This romance tradition, primarily available to Shakespeare in narrative form,[11] also included the dramatic as in the medieval saint's play of trial and conversion, a genre replete with one marvel after another.[12] If Shakespeare's final dramas are understood as spiritual journeys ending in self-discovery by the central character,[13] then the saint's play (or miracle play, as it is sometimes called), 'popularly performed late

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[8] According to the comic *modus operandi*, one does not forgive so much as forget and let bygones be bygones; the Shakespearean comic paradigm is *MND*. In *WT*, the moral imperative is to remember, so as to make forgiveness not only possible but real (see pp. 56, 60–1).

[9] In what follows, I draw heavily on the first chapter in Felperin and on the cogent analysis of the naming problem in Mowat.

[10] Dowden discerned a common 'romantic incident of lost children recovered by those to whom they are dear', 'romantic' settings of mountains and seas, and perhaps, most important, 'a grave beauty, a sweet serenity, which seem to render the name "comedies" inappropriate' (*Shakspere*, 1877, 55–6).
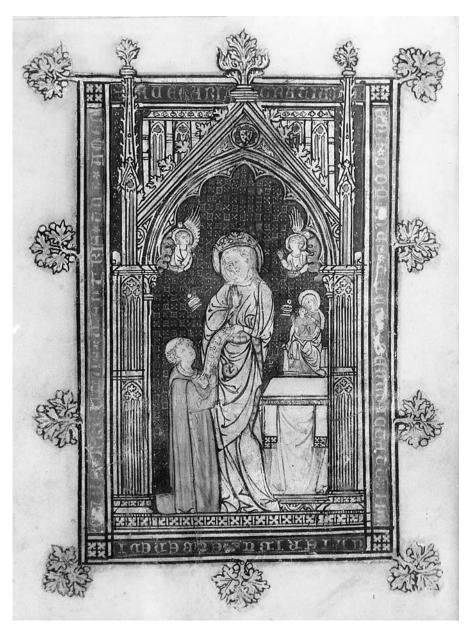
[11] See, e.g., the Greek *Daphnis and Chloe*, classical and medieval versions of the Apollonius of Tyre story, Malory's tales of King Arthur and his knights, Sir Philip Sidney's *Arcadia*, Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene*, and Thomas Lodge's *Rosalynde*.

[12] Assuming particular relevance for *Per.* and *WT*, the Digby *Mary Magdalene* (1480–90) features maritime journeys, marital separation, the birth of a baby in the midst of a storm, a wife's apparent death and her miraculous recovery courtesy of Mary's intervention, and a final reunion of husband and wife. Although not extant in English, the saint's play dramatizing the legend of the sixth century cleric Theophilus, a precursor of Faust, may hold analogic value among the intertextual materials surrounding *WT*, especially for the final scene in which a 'statue' comes alive. In Rutebeuf's *Le Miracle de Theophile* (c 1270) – discussed in Robert G. Hunter, *Shakespeare and the Mystery of God's Judgments*, 1976, 20–5 – a statue of the Virgin Mary becomes animated as she takes pity on the repentant sinner praying before her, eventually returning to him in the chapel with the contract she successfully wrestles from Satan. Marina Warner (*Alone of All Her Sex: The Myth and the Cult of the Virgin Mary*, 1976, 323) and Émile Mâle (*The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France in the Thirteenth Century*, 1958, 260) address the popularity of the legend in both literature and the visual arts. See illustration 1, p. 4.

[13] Warren, *Staging*, 239. He came to this view as a result of watching the rehearsal process of Peter Hall's 'romance' marathon at The National Theatre in London in 1988.

1   The miracle of Theophilus, from a fourteenth–century Book of Hours (permanent collection, Walters Museum, Baltimore, Maryland). 'Significant here is the presence of the Virgin as both sculpture and vision, underscoring the medieval belief in the power of prayer to gain access to the spiritual realm represented by the image' (from the leaflet guide to the exhibit 'Images of Devotion: Personal Piety in Medieval Manuscripts and Ivories', Walters Museum, 1999).

into the sixteenth century above and beyond the biblical mystery cycles' (Felperin, 13), may constitute the most significant influence on *The Winter's Tale* and its companion pieces in the Shakespeare canon.

While Dowden's choice has by and large become the norm, many critics since the early twentieth century have inclined toward 'tragicomedy', a classification well known in Shakespeare's time but not used by the Folio editors. In the preface to *The Faithful Shepherdess* (first performed *c*. 1608), John Fletcher defined the genre as 'want[ing] deaths, which is enough to make it no tragedy, yet brings some near it, which is enough to make it no comedy, which must be a representation of familiar people . . . A god is as lawful in [tragicomedy] as in a tragedy, and mean [i.e. ordinary] people as in a comedy'.[14] But typical of the tragicomedies by Beaumont and Fletcher written in 1608–12, which likely contributed to Shakespeare's foray into the genre, is an absence of the miraculous wonders and transformative journeys (whether actual or figurative) that mark Shakespeare's late plays. Even critics who manifest an affinity for the term assert essential differences between Shakespeare's final creative burst and such works as *The Faithful Shepherdess*, *Philaster*, and *A King and No King*.[15]

The title of the play tilts the debate in favour of 'romance' for, by definition, winter's tales were strange and fanciful oral narratives intended to while away the long, cold hours of the dark nights of winter and, therefore, not meant to be taken seriously or to withstand the rigours of logical interrogation.[16] Mamillius himself specifies a story of 'sprites and goblins' suitable for idle pastime (2.1.25–6). That the play's first reference to such a tale occurs in the domestic company of women (see illustration 2, p. 6) and is put in the mouth of the androgynous Mamillius – still 'unbreeched' (1.2.154) and whose name etymologically denotes 'breasts' – is significant, for this type of narrative in the patriarchal culture of the early modern period was traditionally gendered female.[17] Unlike the more serious and disciplined classical works learned in the grammar schools, where boys began the process of sharply defining their masculine identity, effeminate oral tales were considered trivial and inferior and, therefore, properly left behind in the nursery.[18]

[14] Lying behind Fletcher's definition is Guarini's *Compendio della poesia tragicomica* (1601), which provided the essential criteria: a story in which tragic and comic parts are mixed, with persons of high rank approaching death but ultimately avoiding it, and a 'happy ending' that purges melancholy.

[15] See, for example, Joan Hartwig, *Shakespeare's Tragicomic Vision*, 1972; Robert Henke, *Pastoral Transformation: Italian Tragicomedy and Shakespeare's Late Plays*, 1997; and Lee Bliss, ed. *A King and No King*, 2004.

[16] In an 1813 lecture devoted to *WT* and *Oth*., Coleridge (in Foakes, 1.551, 555), noted the 'exquisite significance' of Shakespeare's titles (singling out *MND*, *AYLI*, and *WT*). According to a report of the lecture in *The Bristol Gazette* (11 November 1813), *WT*'s title, in the manner of 'a bill of fare before the feast', announces 'a wild story, calculated to interest a circle round a fireside'. Schlegel had also thought that plays like *WT* and *MND* were most appropriately named *(A Course of Lectures on Dramatic Art and Literature by Augustus William Schlegel*, trans. John Black, 2 vols., 1815, 2.181).

[17] As in *Mac*. 3.4.62–5. See Lamb for an excellent discussion of this female gendering and of the male anxiety it prompted. The connection to the female in winter's tales suggests yet another link to 'romance', whose audience was and continues to be typically identified as female.

[18] Erasmus' disdain was common in contemporary childrearing manuals: 'A boy (may) learn a pretty story from the ancient poets, or a memorable tale from history, just as readily as the stupid and vulgar ballad, or the old wives' fairy rubbish such as most children are steeped in nowadays by nurses and serving women' (*De pueris instituendis*, in William Harrison Woodward, ed., *Desiderius Erasmus concerning the Aim ad Method of Education*, 1964, 214, as cited in Lamb, 531).

2 2.1.22–32: Mamillius tells his 'winter's tale' in the domestic company of women. Olivia Birkelund (Hermione), James Bonilla (Mamillius), and Diana LaMar (Lady/Emilia), from Irene Lewis's 2002 production for Center Stage, Baltimore, Maryland. Richard Anderson, photographer.

3 2.1.32 SD–60: Leontes invades the female domain that has nurtured Mamillius. Cliff Chamberlain (Leontes), Becky Peters (Hermione), and Kelli Holsopple (Mamillius), from Ralph Cohen's 2002 production for Shenandoah Shakespeare's American Shakespeare Center, Staunton, Virginia. Tommy Thompson, photographer.

But Mamillius' choice of a 'sad' tale as best for winter, like the seasonal refer-
ence itself to a barren time of year, complicates the surface meaning of such stories
as idle and fanciful, suggesting instead something serious and consequential, i.e.,
something potentially tragic. Its placement, quickly followed by one of the play's
most disturbing moments – the abrupt, violent severing of Mamillius from the
comfort of the female domain he has known – reinforces this sense.[19] Certainly
the figure of Time confirms a deeper signification of 'tale' (4.1.14) when he says:
'I, that please some, try all – both joy and terror / Of good and bad, that makes
and unfolds error' (4.1.1–2); 'error' here implies not just 'a mistake' but 'moral
transgression' (*OED* 5). By Act 5, where the words 'wonder', 'marvel', 'admirable',
and 'amazement' – along with references to an old tale, i.e. old-fashioned and far-
fetched – proliferate,[20] an overlay is in place that encourages an understanding
of the title as a fantastic 'old tale' of serious, moral things. The use of the defi-
nite article in the play's title furthers the sense that what is being dramatized is
not only the quintessential concentration of romantic fancy but also 'the essential
story of winter itself'.[21] The 'tale' of the text as we have it need not necessar-
ily correspond to the actual story Mamillius starts to tell about a man who dwelt
by a churchyard,[22] but a looser relation is probable: the sad wintry tale of the
first part (tragedy) completed by the (overall) joyous spring-like tale of the second
(comedy).

The passage perhaps most relevant to the genre question seems unequivocally
to identify the play as tragicomedy, although not in the conventional mould of
avoiding death. After several acts of jealous rage, vile accusations, a state trial, a
blasphemous rejection of Apollo's oracle, and the demise of several characters, the
genial and kindly Shepherd who enters at 3.3.57 italicizes the shift from tragedy
to comedy. Having discovered an abandoned baby girl, he announces to his son,
the Clown, fresh from his own grim discoveries: 'Thou met'st with things dying,

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[19] See Paster (Chapter 5, 'Quarreling With The Dug') on the profound effect this moment likely had
on early modern male audiences. Directors who have captured the psycho-physiological impact on
Mamillius include Noble (who kept the boy onstage as a horrified witness to his mother's plight),
Bergman (who positioned him behind a panel, from which he finally emerged visibly weakened and
distressed), and Syer (who had him, after everyone else had exited, return to pick up the pieces of the
toy he had left on the floor and which Leontes had crushed at 'schoolboy's top' (2.1.103), his sobbing
cough prophetic [Armstrong, 30]). See also illustration 3, p. 6.

[20] For 'wonder', see 5.1.132; 5.2.14, 20, 147; and 5.3.22; for 'marvel', 5.1.187 and 5.3.100; for 'admirable',
4.4.200; for 'amazement', 5.3.87; and for 'old tale', 5.2.25, 53; and 5.3.117.

[21] Overton, 70.

[22] Schanzer's view (8–9), a notion anticipated by Goddard who claims that Leontes' entrance at 2.1.32
'turns from narrative into drama the boy's tale of sprites and goblins, the first chapter of which he
has already enacted' (262). Of Tom Rowan's decision to open the play with a Mamillius 'in green
breeches reading a book', Katharine Goodland writes: 'The unfolding drama becomes an incarnation of
Mamillius' imagination as he peruses his storybook. This interpretation solves one of the longstanding
cruces of Shakespeare's play: the character so noticeably absent from the text after he dies offstage
emerges as the narrative agent, at once the desiring subject and the object of desire, the dreamer and
the dream' (*ShakB* 20.3 [2002], 20). Lapine's use of 2.1.22–9 as a prologue to the play served a similar
purpose.

4 An emblematic depiction of the play's generic division between tragedy and comedy artic-
ulated at 3.3.101–2, 'Thou met'st with things dying, I with things newborn.' From Andrea
Alciati, . . . *Emblemata* . . . , 1661 (Folger Shakespeare Library).

I with things newborn' (3.3.101–2).[23] Brian Bedford's staging of the end of 3.3 at
Stratford, Ontario in 1998 typifies the generic sea-change as conceived by directors:
the clouds lifted and the sun broke through to bathe the stage in a golden light.[24] But
just when it seems that the play has declared how it should be called, the Shepherd
heralds Fortune's newly benevolent phase as he and his son celebrate not only the
baby, but the riches found with her: 'This is fairy gold, boy, and 'twill prove so. . . .
Home, home, the next way. We are lucky, boy . . . 'Tis a lucky day, boy, and we'll do
good deeds on 't' (3.3.109–10, 120). In an instant, with the reference to fairies and
magic, we are brought back to the genre of romance.[25]

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[23] C. B. Hardman, 'Theory, Form, and Meaning in Shakespeare's *The Winter's Tale*', *RES* (n.s.) 36.
(1985), 229, quotes from Evanthius a passage that became the staple of early modern distincions
between comedy and tragedy:'in tragoedia fugienda vita, in comedia capessanda exprimitur' – i.e.,
'for tragedy ought to express the abandonment of life, and comedy the commencement of life'. See
illustration 4, above.
[24] From Ward, 'Bedford', 40.
[25] As was lyrically suggested in Lewis' production, where, following the post-Act 3 interval, a procession
of disparate souls – the actor who doubled the roles of Time and the Shepherd, accompanied by two
Bohemian denizens and a tame bear – made its way across the rear of the stage to herald Act 4 (see
illustration 5, p. 9); while Time spoke his monologue, the heretofore predatory bear now graciously
provided a comfortable bed on which the other two characters reclined to the dulcet tones of a
windpipe.

5   The lyrical and metamorphic opening to the second half of Irene Lewis' 2002 production for Center Stage, Baltimore, Maryland. Laurence O'Dwyer (Old Shepherd/Time), David Steinberg (Bohemian servant), and Warren 'Wawa' Snipe (Bear) carrying Karen Hansen (Dorcas). Richard Anderson, photographer.

Rather than restricting the naming question to an 'either/or' solution, Barbara Mowat persuasively argues for an inherited generic DNA that renders both *romance* and *tragicomedy* 'truly useful names for Shakespeare's late plays', especially when taken in combination (Mowat, 138). Looking to such sixteenth-century drama-tized romances as *Sir Clyomon and Clamydes*, *Mucedorus*, and *The Rare Triumphs of Love and Fortune*,[26] she detects an earlier tradition of tragicomedy compatible with romance. While Sidney may have had foremost in mind something like *Cam-byses* when he coined the phrase 'mongrel tragi-comedy' for plays given to the gross absurdity of mixing tragic and comic elements,[27] works such as the three cited above might also qualify in their to and fro between comic and tragic forces and between the impulses of Eros and Fortune. *The Winter's Tale* explicitly invokes the *Cambyses* model in the Clown's love of 'a ballad but even too well, if it be doleful matter merrily set down, or a very pleasant thing indeed and sung lamentably' (4.4.188–90). In the end, however, by making quests, family reunions, and improbable events central, 'mouldy tales' (Ben Jonson's phrase for old-fashioned, far-fetched stories) project a fundamental 'romance' ethos. The syntax of Mowat's proffered hybrid, *tragicomic romance*, effects a helpful rapprochement between the rival terms and perfectly embraces a play whose very title foregrounds 'romance'.

[26] These plays not only look back to the tradition of narrative classical and chivalric romance but also illustrate the gradual secular transformation of the saint's play (Felperin, 13).
[27] Sir Philip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry* (1595), ed. Geoffrey Shepherd, 1965, 135.

6 Act 1, scene 2 staged in the private, domestic setting of a nursery: Judi Dench (Hermione), Barry Ingham (Leontes), and Jeremy Richardson (Mamillius), from Trevor Nunn's 1969 RSC production, Stratford-upon-Avon. Tom Holte Theatre Photographic Collection, Shakespeare Birthplace Trust.

PASTORAL

Adding to the play's generic copiousness is the infusion of pastoral, a literary tra-dition bipartite in meaning and often tripartite in design; it is also a genre that easily coexists with both romance (e.g., the classical *Daphnis and Chloe* and Sidney's *Arcadia*) and tragicomedy (e.g. Guarini's *Pastor Fido* and Fletcher's *The Faithful Shepherdess*). At the heart of pastoral, etymologically derived from the Latin word for shepherd (*pastor*), is a basic contrast between the ways and means of the court (or city) and those of the country, with the latter typically idealized. Distinctions are cast in terms of sterility vs. fecundity, sophistication vs. simplicity, and artifice vs. naturalness. The trajectory of pastoral involves a journey from the court to the country (or a similarly remote world like Prospero's island), with movement back to the court either promised (*The Two Gentlemen of Verona, As You Like It*, and *The Tempest*) or actualized (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*). The journey to the other world, Northrop Frye's 'green world',[28] proves therapeutic in solving problems, repairing fractured relationships, and clearing true love's obstacle course of all its hurdles. *The Winter's Tale*, after almost three acts in the court of Sicilia and an act-long sojourn in the country setting of Bohemia, follows the spatial dynamic of *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. But in contrast to traditional pastoral, the character most in need of healing, Leontes, never makes the journey to Bohemia; instead, Bohemia comes to him, in the revitalizing presence of Perdita and Florizel (see 5.1.122 SD n.

[28] Frye, 'The Mythos of Spring: Comedy', in his *The Anatomy of Criticism* (1957), rpt. 1971, 163–86, esp. 181–6.