CHAPTER II

CRITICAL RESPONSES OF G. WILSON KNIGHT TO THE THEME OF HUMAN REGENERATION IN SHAKESPEARE’S LAST PLAYS

G. Wilson Knight has evolved a critical method which is distinctively his own and he has illustrated it most notably in *The Wheel of Fire*. Knight examines poetic imagery not as an index to the author’s mind, but as his principal means of insight into the total conception of each play as a work of art. In the introduction to *The Wheel of Fire* Knight explains his method of "poetic interpretation" as opposed to criticism, with its distinction between the spatial and temporal aspects of drama. In the *Imperial Theme* and in other works he applies his method to specific plays. Knight’s emphasis has always been upon any one of a play’s parts such as plot or character. His interest lies in Shakespeare the philosophical poet rather than in the man of the theatre.

Knight has sought to arrive at a total imaginative perception of each play, which only the critic of the most heightened sensibility may hope to achieve. Through imagery he has sought to approach the integrating themes in Shakespeare’s plays and to define a pattern by which each play is characterised. Knight says that these themes are often conveyed by conventional Christian symbols, and
it may be said that Knight has contributed more than any other critic of this century to an awareness of Shakespeare's symbolism and the relation of Shakespeare plays to Christian tradition and belief.

Wilson Knight explains Shakespeare's tragedies as the spectra of Christ's passion, death and resurrection. In *Shakespearean Dimensions* he writes: "I have been criticized for suggesting that Shakespeare's tragic heroes may be regarded as "miniature Christs."¹ In addition to *Shakespeare and Religion* he produced a masterpiece *The Crown of Life* (1947) on the Last Plays. Knight suggests that in terms of Christian thought the romances take up where the tragedies leave off. The basic concern in both is the same. In his *Shakespearean Production* he observes: "The unique act of the Christian sacrifice can . . . be seen as central to Shakespeare's tragedies while his final plays celebrate the victory and glory, the resurrection and renewal, that in the Christian story and in its reflection in the Christian ritual succeed the sacrifice."² G. Wilson Knight was the first one to interpret Shakespeare plays from the Christian points of view. He expounds *Measure for Measure*, for example, as a drama centred on the gospel injunction; "Judge not that you may not be judged."³
We find the influence of Knight most pronounced among those critics who contributed to the *Scrutiny Magazine* in England and have been associated with it as the Scrutiny Group. The New Critics in America also were influenced by Knight’s critical method. Knight’s method of concentrating on the text, without allowing outside factors to sway his critical judgement, is essentially New Criticism. The New Critics share Knight’s assumptions about the totality of the work of art and the importance of poetic imagery as its key. They work by methods of close textual analysis, and they ignore the assumptions of the historical critics that Shakespeare’s art can be studied profitably in the light of his own theatre and that its thematic content may be revealed by a study of the Renaissance intellectual milieu.

Among the Scrutiny Group who were influenced by this view two most important Shakespearean critics have been Derek Traversi and L. C. Knights. The controlling drive behind Leavis’s own criticism has been a search for value, cultural and moral, since an age’s culture and its morality are closely related aspects of a society’s ordering and perception of its experience. He has regarded this search as imperative in our century in which traditional aristocratic forms of culture are no longer operative and traditional values are no longer pertinent.
F. R. Leavis has been a moralist essentially in the tradition of Matthew Arnold, who believed that literature must reflect the best of which man is capable, that the perception of literature is a moral activity, and that the moral value of literature must be made to pervade society. F. R. Leavis thus opposed the historical critics who would limit their understanding of Shakespeare to the meaning he may have had for his own age, holding that the process of ordering experience which is reflected in poetry is a universal process and not limited to one age: if the moral vision of a writer like Shakespeare had validity for his own age, it must have that validity for our own age as well, and therefore the critic's focus must be on what poetry means today.

F. R. Leavis himself has written little on Shakespeare, although his essays on Measure for Measure and Othello are classics. His philosophy is manifest in the writing of L. C. Knights, who is concerned with describing the moral and cultural value of Shakespeare. Since poetry best reflects an age's values, it is with Shakespeare the poet that Knights is most closely occupied. To understand this poetry, Knights has used a method of close textual analysis, an exploration of language and the implications of image and symbol, which owes much to the methods of G. Wilson Knight. Knights was influenced also by I. A. Richards and Richards' pupil,
William Empson, who has been concerned with the ambiguities and connotations of words, divorced usually from historical and biographical considerations. Like Wilson Knight he has sought that integrating pattern which governs each play, and like T. S. Eliot he has held that no single play of Shakespeare's can be perceived fully without an awareness of the dramatist's entire artistic development. Knights has been particularly outspoken in his arguments against the historical critics denying the relevance of any specific historical setting to the universal truth of poetry, which is always a personal creation of the artist, and which can be perceived only by a direct experience of the poetry itself, exclusive of any external considerations.

Derek Traversi, although he has not written about his own critical premises so much as Knights or engaged so fully in countering the methods of other critics, has probably applied F. R. Leavis's principles to Shakespeare more consistently and comprehensively than any other of the Scrutiny critics. In An Approach to Shakespeare (1936) he explains his method and presents his view of the full development of Shakespeare's art. In subsequent volumes he has elaborated his views of the specific stages in Shakespeare's progression.
Ever since the time of Quiller Couch and J. Dover Wilson the Last Plays have been interpreted in the light of reconciliation and regeneration. Colin Still's *The Timeless Theme: A Critical Theory Formulated and Applied* was a landmark in allegorical interpretation. He argues that "The Tempest deals with those permanent realities of spiritual experience which were long ago embodied in the classical myths and mysteries." He divides the survivors of the shipwreck into "three parties": Ferdinand; the king and his company; and Stephano and Trinculo. The story of Stephano and Trinculo is a version of the myth of the Fall. The king and his party, on the other hand, make the passage through purgatory which constitutes the "Lesser Initiation" and Ferdinand makes the ascent to the celestial paradise which constitutes "the Greater Initiation." In this scheme, the island itself must play several roles: purgatory, Elysium and Paradise. Prospero is a figure of the supreme being. Caliban is the Tempter, while Ariel plays the same role as the Angel of God, or Hermes or the Conscience. Obviously Miranda is Persephone. Through many pages of detailed interpretation, Colin Still argues these identifications. On the surface, some of his points may appear illuminating, others ludicrous. In Colin Still, the mythic interpretation approaches the allegorical in rigidity and elaboration, and it may be indicative of the
modern temper that intelligent commentators and editors find his study useful. Colin Still, in effect, develops a parallel between the action of *The Tempest* and the initiation ceremonies of the Elensinian adepts.

The foregoing account of the critical methods of F. R. Leavis, Knights, Traversi and Colin Still is intended to give an idea of the critical landscape during the first half of this century. This would serve as a backdrop against which to present W. Knight, whose treatment of the theme of regeneration is the subject of the present investigation.

G. Wilson Knight prefers 'person' to 'character.' He is subjective and mystical in approach; he makes the Last Plays central to his interpretation of Shakespeare, and regards them as variations on the myth of immortality. In "Myth and Miracle" (1929), Knight indicated the strong thematic resemblances between *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*—the hero's loss of wife and daughter, the helplessness of a child, the miraculous restoration of wife and child, and the revival from death, real or apparent, of the wife. Readers sensitive to poetic atmosphere must necessarily feel the awakening light of some religious or metaphysical truth symbolized in the plot and attendant machinery of the two plays. They are concerned with immortality, metaphorically expressed in terms of machinery.
The Crown of Life consists of Wilson Knight's studies in the Final Plays. It sums up and develops his theory of human regeneration.

The Crown of Life: Essays in Interpretation, which discusses Shakespeare's Final Plays, originally adds Henry VIII to the Last Plays, arguing that it is the culmination of the vision implicit in the romances. While this is surely an original thought and somewhat teasing, it seems finally not a convincing concept. This book includes Knight's much earlier essay "Myth and Miracle" (1929) which proposes the ground-work for much of his criticism as it defines the belief that Shakespeare is moved by vision, not fancy, that he creates not merely entertainment but myth in the Platonic sense. Thus according to Knight in the Final Plays the dramatist expresses a direct vision about the significance of life.

Present in Pericles is the depth and realism of tragedy within the structure of romance, and it might be called a Shakespearian morality play. Great nature, unpossessive, ever-new, creative, is the over-ruling deity in The Winter's Tale and it is against this that Leontes' tyranny has offended. Resurrection does not occur until Leontes' repentance is complete and creation is satisfied by the return of Perdita.
Knight emphasizes in *Cymbeline* the vision of Jupiter which he finds in tune with the play's theological impressionism.

Further, we should analyse the use and meaning of direct poetic symbolism—that is, analyse events whose significance can hardly be related to the normal processes of actual life. Also the minor symbolic imagery of Shakespeare, which is extremely consistent, should receive careful attention. Where certain images continually recur in the same associative connection, we can, if we have reason to believe that this associative force is strong enough, be ready to see the presence of the associative value when the images occur alone. Nor should we neglect the symbolic value of natural effects such as the discharge of cannon in *Hamlet* and *Othello* or the sound of trumpets in *Measure for Measure* and *King Lear*.

Knight points out that the plays from *Julius Caesar* (C. 1599) to *The Tempest* (C. 1611), when properly understood, fall into a significant sequence. Therefore, in a detailed analysis of any one play it may sometimes be helpful to have regard to its place in the sequence, provided always that the thought of this sequence be used to illuminate and in no sense be allowed to distort, the view of the play under analysis.
G. Wilson Knight contends that the Final Plays are mythical representations of a mystic vision. He appreciates Colin Still's remarkable book *Shakespeare's Mystery Play: A Study of The Tempest*. At the same time he remarks that Colin Still's conclusions were reached by a detailed comparison of the play in its totality with other creations of literature, myth and ritual throughout the ages, while his own are reached solely through seeing *The Tempest* as the conclusion to "the Shakespeare Progress." An important critical principle that Knight upholds is that we should take a literary work as a visionary unit that obeys but its own laws. We should see each play as an expanded metaphor by which the playwright seeks the original vision into forms which correspond to actuality.

In myth, rituals and poetry of all ages there are embedded symbols of the human aspiration for and fulfilment of regeneration. Wilson Knight maintains that the Last Plays embody the theme of human regeneration. Knight points out that a concern with the power of ritual, both positive and negative, runs throughout Shakespeare's plays. It may be noticed that the comedies use ritual to celebrate personal and social concord, the histories and tragedies connect it with conflicts, division and destruction. Examples are many. In 1 Henry VI the Wars of the Roses begin with an invented ritual: Yorkists and
Lancastrians choose their emblems in the Temple Garden. In Richard II Richard creates his own rite of deposition. In Henry V, Henry reproaches mockingly the 'idol ceremony.' King Lear yielded the power of his office ceremonially. Brutus and Othello struggle to justify murder as ceremony, murdering those they loved as sacrifices to a noble cause. Brutus claims to be a better citizen by killing Caesar. Othello pretends to exterminate a disloyal woman in Desdemona from the face of the earth. "It can be seen that ritual structures were deeply rooted in the imagination of Shakespeare. Hence ritual is not only a mode of action in Shakespeare's plays, but a continuing human requirement."  

Knight describes the place of rituals in Shakespeare's time. The Elizabethan society was profoundly ritualistic. It gave prominence to the rites of passage—birth, marriage, and death. Puritans celebrated birth in three stages: the delivery of the baby, baptism and the churhching of the mother. Each of these three stages had its own tripartite structure. In order to ease the process of the delivery of the infant they used various kinds of lucky charms such as eagle-stones, etc. They insisted on the assistance of a midwife and active participation of several gossips: and there was the husband's generous provision of a modest feast which they called "groaning cake and cheese." The ceremony of
baptism included the more formal and public rituals of thenaked immersion of the infant, anointing with "chrism" oil, wrapping in the "chrism" cloth, presentation of gifts, such as plates, gilt spoons or christening shirts, and a christening feast. The churching of the woman began with her period of confinement which was followed by gifts of new clothes, attendance at a special church service and a feast.

The rites of marriage involved the preparation of the bride and bridegroom, an elaborate procession, a church service, a return procession and a feast. Adolescence was governed by Venus, according to Elizabethans, and customs of initiation and courtship overlapped. The conventional behaviour of young lovers writing sonnets, wearing of love-locks, and posturing in romantic attitudes fulfil many of the conditions of liminal experience both in Elizabethan society and in the comedies. The same is true of the conventional courting behaviour of young women.

Death was observed with pious and fascinating ceremonies. The funerals of the great as well as the lowly were observed with elaborate rituals. In the deathbed scenes, so important in the period, dying itself became a ritual act, with the protagonist conducting his own rite of passage—settling his last affairs, blessing his family and friends, and reconciling himself to God.
Once death occurred, the corpse was bathed, embalmed, wrapped in a winding sheet, and placed in a coffin. The funeral procession was a grand pageant among nobles. The mourners and pallbearers led the procession. They wore appropriate uniforms meant for the occasion. The procession was accompanied by musicians who played dirges and the coffin itself embellished with attractive herbs and flowers. On reaching the church, all but the musicians, formed the congregation for participating in the liturgical services in the presence of the dear departed person. The funeral service would be resumed in the churchyard. The grave would be ready well in advance for the last rites over the coffin.9

The above recounting of the rituals during the Elizabethan period is intended to show that the ritualistic nature of life during that period could not but have influenced Shakespeare. It is the contention of W. Knight.

_Taming of the Shrew_ ends with a feast. Each of these plays builds a world of melody where mistakes are corrected, aspirations fulfilled and the couples live happy ever after. This happy ending is a ceremony, a ritual characteristic of the world's most universal art-form. "Each such romance is a day-dream, if you will, but
one that outlines paradise and as such must be read as performed."\textsuperscript{10}

G. Wilson Knight passes on to the ritualistic nature of Shakespeare’s history plays. They develop the oppositions in England’s history in terms of military ardour, honour and the ideal of kingship. The succession of Kings is epic and biblical. It is epic in the magnificent feature of the military expeditions. It is biblical in so far as the consequences of the sins of rulers leave trails of divine vengeance upon their children to the second and third generations.

Remember the divinity of Richard II, and how the curse of his deposition and death is not lifted until Henry’s noble prayer before Agincourt. Royalty was believed to be blessed with a divine election in those days. The anointing of the King was a symbol of God’s approval of the deputy on earth. In that sense Kingship was considered to bear a sacramental nature. How many plays of Shakespeare are without their King or Duke? Even the fairies are a royalistic community. Kingship is central to Shakespeare’s life-pattern.\textsuperscript{11}
Shakespeare makes human tragedy a sacrifice. He conceives the sacrificial agony of the tragic heroes as ritualistic. Instances are many. Othello's words and acts in the murder scene have a ritualistic quality.

O perjured woman! Thou dost stone my heart
And makest me call what I intend to do
A murder, which I thought a sacrifice.

Othello (V.ii.66-68)

Wilson Knight makes the Last Plays central to his interpretation of Shakespeare, and regards them as "myths of immortality." His exposition of this view has had an extraordinary and, for the most part, a beneficial, influence over modern criticism.

In "Myth and Miracle" (1929) Knight indicated the strong thematic resemblance between Pericles and The Winter's Tale—the hero's loss of wife and daughter, the helplessness of a child caught in a sea-storm, the miraculous restoration of wife and child, and the revival from death real or apparent, of the wife. "A reader sensitive to poetic atmosphere must necessarily feel the awakening light of some religious or metaphysical truth symbolized in the plot and attendant machinery of the two plays." They are concerned with immortality, metaphysically expressed in terms of victorious love. Cymbeline with differences of machinery and stress, is
concerned with the same theme, but by introducing an anthropomorphic God it endangers the metaphor. The Tempest was a necessary development. "A prophetic criticism could, if The Tempest had been lost, have nevertheless indicated what must be its essential nature, and might have hazarded its name."

One of the manifestations of divine intervention in human regeneration is the tempest. Tempests in Shakespeare plays appear to be symbols of divine test. Knight writes: "Love, marriage, birth—all these are opposed by tempests, a whirl of sweet things rocked, lost yet saved amid tempestuous adventure."

He further adds:

Now I claim that Shakespeare's play The Tempest is strongly impregnated with mysticism. I regard its tempest as symbolical. But it is symbolically considered that The Tempest derives its name and action primarily from Sir George Somer's shipwreck. It is clearly impossible to prove that Shakespeare did not owe something to that event . . . . Shakespeare's imaginative infatuation with tempests in general does not preclude the possibility that he may have been also interested in a certain actual tempest in particular. And conversely that his having
heard with interest about an actual tempest need not necessarily have paralysed his imaginative development and control.\textsuperscript{15}

According to G. Wilson Knight, there are two possible approaches to \textit{The Tempest}. In \textit{The Crown of Life} he writes that we can regard it first as the poet’s expression of a view of human life. With the knowledge of Shakespeare’s poetic symbolism in memory, we will think of the wreck as suggesting the tragic destiny of man and the marvellous survival of the travellers and crew as another and more perfectly poetic and artistic embodiment of the thought.

The second approach is this: \textit{The Tempest} is a record crystallized with consummate art into a short play of all the themes of the spiritual progress from 1599 to the year 1611. According to this reading, Prospero is not God, but Shakespeare or rather the controlling judgement of Shakespeare, since Ariel and Caliban are also representations of dual minor potentialities of his soul.

It may be noted in the recent intellectual history that there are many ramifications of knowledge in every growing and separate discipline. These branches are basically and essentially interrelated and complementary. For instance, the advent of quantum physics inaugurated a revolution in our concept of the physical universe which has had an extensive effect on many areas of intellectual
activity. We no more entertain the idea that reality can be understood as an aggregate of separate entities existing independently of each other somewhere 'out there' and have moved to what has been called a "field concept" which emphasises that the parts can be understood only in so much as they form elements of a larger pattern of relationships, which includes the observer. This has affected not only disciplines such as philosophy, linguistics and anthropology but has also made itself felt in literary criticism.

In the history of Shakespeare criticism this shift from a classical method to a quantum mechanical worldview has been particularly noticeable in the twentieth century. The nineteenth century approach, culminating in the work of A. C. Bradley, was fundamentally classical. Its Aristotelian emphasis on character and plot as the central elements of the play resembled the classical view of atoms as fixed, indivisible building blocks of a universe which functioned in linear fashion with an intelligible relationship between cause and effect. Bradley’s work, accordingly, was severely limited in that it tended to compartmentalize, failing to give sufficient attention to the pattern of the whole. "He wrote of Shakespeare," as Kenneth Muir has said, "as though he were an actor studying all the parts, not as a producer to whom the characters are creations subordinated to a poetic
conception and existing only in relation to that conception and to each other.  

G. Wilson Knight was a pioneer of the quantum mechanical approach to Shakespeare. Just as quantum physics had dissolved the familiar world of time and space into a subatomic world consisting of dynamic patterns of energy, so Knight delved beneath the level of plot and character and grasped the essence of a play in terms of patterns of imagery and thematic correspondence. Knight’s concern with spatial patterns functioning independently of the temporal sequence of the plot seemed to parallel the simultaneous time-space continuum of the spatial theory of relativity, rather than the classical, linear world of time and space. His rejection of the term "criticism" which tended to objectify the work in favour of "interpretation" which tends to merge into the work it analyses was a translation into literary terms of the quantum mechanical principle that we are ourselves implicated in the world we study; the world involves rather than excludes our own consciousness.

Joan Hartwig is related to the school of Knight from the point of view of the mystical approach. She attempts to see the Last Plays within the confines of the genre tragi-comedy, one of the most elusive forms to define.
Human regeneration is a mystical experience. Resurrection of the person is a spiritual reality on the level of revelation and faith in God. Evidences are within the purview of faith. Yet reason can assist the logic of faith.¹⁷

Part of her approach revolves around the audience’s perception of the stage reality; somehow the audience is able to hold apparently opposite responses in equilibrium. The plays are illusions to illuminate the world of the actual, but the audience is aware of the difference. The final vision of the plays is reunion of the realm of human action and the realm of the divine. She emphasizes Shakespeare’s control in Pericles of the audience and the techniques and says he creates a conscious distance between stayed illusion and the audience. Like the other plays, Pericles’s achievement is the experience of joy which is shared with the audience. The constant concern in Cymbeline is the discrepancy between man’s true nature and his outward appearance. At the end of The Winter’s Tale Paulina fuses illusion and reality into joyful truth. She builds theimaginative excitement required of tragi-comic recognition. The audience suspends its rational judgement so that for a special moment it may glimpse the wonder in the world of human actions. Prospero as magician and man incorporates the power and the presence of divinity. All the major emphases of Shakespeare’s
tragi-comic vision are announced and enacted in *The Tempest* with great self-consciousness. The play in effect begins at the denouement of other romances. Looking over the final plays, one may observe that Shakespeare moves from direct supernatural manifestation to human embodiment.

The controversy among the Shakespeare critics on the theme of the immortality of the human soul, from the religious point of view, was set in motion by Guy Boas who asserted that the plays of Shakespeare give us no insight into the mysteries of birth and death. But morals alone do not constitute religion. He is of the view that Shakespeare fails to enlighten us on the mysteries of existence, the miracle of creation, the riddle of death, the hope of immortality. G. Wilson Knight responded promptly. He asserted that between the years 1599 and 1611 these very problems were agitating Shakespeare's mind and that he had left us as clear an answer as a mind of his depth and imaginative insight can give.

Knight's insistence is that from 1599 onwards Shakespeare was concerned with the passionate activity of the human spirit, that is, with values of ambition, with faithfulness and sorrow and above all with the supreme value, love: the pangs of its soul-torture, the ecstasy of its fruition. He was concerned also with death as a
gentle sleep and as the end of suffering. Guy Boas writes:

I think in writing Macbeth and King Lear, Shakespeare knew death to be in one sense the end of life, and the thought brought him peace, and yet somehow he had reached another life-truth firm and based in eternity, the mysterious eternity of value, of human aspiration and passion, unmoral, timeless, indestructible. And at the end of the great sequence of tragedies comes an act of poetic creation that surpasses all earlier examples of Shakespeare's tragic and poetic achievement, a vision and revelation of death, joyful, immediate and final . . . Antony and Cleopatra where all the threads of obstinate questionings, fears, passions and aspirations of the earlier great plays are caught up into those supreme moments where love and death--the two most recurrent of Shakespeare's problems--are harmonized into one spiritual reality and shown to be mutually relevant and explanatory.18

In support of his refutation of Boas's proposition: 'morals alone do not constitute religion,' Knight cites a statement made by Canon B. H. Streeter. Canon Streeter subscribes to the religious thought of W. R. Inge.19 He contends that the truth of immortality is to be read in
terms not of quantity but of quality, not of time but of value. Canon Streeter stresses that the truth of this timeless immortality can only be expressed should they assert the intuitive perception of value; for *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* are to be read as parables or myths. Knight maintains that we must cease to assert that Shakespeare throws no light on the eternal facts and that the Final Plays are inartistically 'unreal.' "In these Last Plays the loved and the lost one is found, restored to the mystic sounds of music. As in *Antony and Cleopatra* the love and death revelations are on since what we are shown are presentation of immortality in terms not of time but of quality and value which is love." 

Shakespeare hints at the miracle of creation as one of the mysteries of human existence. He does it through the birth symbolism in *Pericles*, *The Winter’s Tale* and *Cymbeline*. Marina, Perdita and Posthumus are thrown helpless at birth into the stormy turbulence of temporal existence, but they are protected by heaven and though they are lost, they are restored miraculously. This is a providential dimension of human regeneration, symbolic of the transcendental and physical resurrection. Just as Lazarus was revived, God’s miracle of creation takes place every moment in human lives. Shakespeare expresses his faith in the conservation of values and providence symbolically in the Last Plays.
Knight resumes his arguments in favour of human regeneration as presented in the Last Plays. The poet does not search for spiritual or religious truth. "Shakespeare writes of life, but unconsciously he writes not alone of life as we see but of the spiritual and poetic basis of life." He creates symbols and he fashions plots which seem to reveal to him the deepest significance of life: such are the plots of Greek and Shakespearean Tragedy. Shakespeare reveals the truth that in high tragedy there is no scope for pessimism. "Sometimes the Greek tragic poets made use of 'Deus Ex Machina' solution leaving direct representation of life for religious symbols and merging thus the two forms to create at once tragedy and the interpretation of tragedy. At the end of Euripides' Alcestis we have, in Gibbert Murray's translation, lines that speak the significance of tragic creation:

There by many shapes of mystery
And many things God brings to be,
Past hope or fear
And the end men looked for cometh not
And a path is there where no man thought
So hath it fallen here.

It is exactly this mysterious and transcendent mystic truth of tragedy that is the very basis of the curious plot texture of the Final Plays of Shakespeare.
Everyone has noted the mystic and religious atmosphere of the mythical succession; we have the 'Deus Ex Machina' theme in the persons of Diana in *Pericles* and Jupiter in *Cymbeline*; we have the Delphic oracle in *The Winter's Tale*; we have the chapels, temples, dreams and visions; we have in fact plays whose unreality is due to an attempt to body into fine acts of drama the purely spiritual and mystic truth of tragedy--the immortality of value.23

One discerns reflections of the Testament teachings in the Last Plays. Shakespeare finds that the poetic dramatist creates a series of love-parables whose plots of loss in tempest and reunion in music correspond to the vision of immortality. "In these final plays the interest is almost entirely concentrated on personal love loss and reunion. They unveil the curtain of love, birth, death, and resurrection. Tossed by jealousy, wrecked by unfaithfulness, personal love reaches the magic island in whose music all is restored and forgiven."24

Knight comments on the regenerative nature of love in Shakespeare plays.

In Shakespeare's earlier work we have two main themes: personal love and state order. The final plays reveal a spiritual rather than political salvation. The ultimate realities for
humanity are matters not of statecraft but rather the vast simplicities of life, love and death. For through love alone can life become significant and death a positive, not a negative experience. So in Shakespeare love at the last is divinely guarded. Yet this love is not a tranquil emotion; nor is it only spiritual. Rather, it is a warm, passionate, unrestful, very human love. Let us call it Eros. Now Jesus also preaches love: love universal. This is to be distinguished from the Shakespearean Eros in that it is not limited to individual persons.25

Jesus repudiates those who are not prepared to leave their families for the sake of the realm of God. To him mankind in general is the only true family. Yet this love is vastly beyond the comprehension of most of us since it is not only a matter of dutiful sacrifice but properly understood is itself rich with romantic splendours and romantic pain: not transcendental merely but instinctive; not merely divine but natural.

Knight shows how personal love develops into universal love. He describes the two concepts in terms of Eros and Caritas respectively. The Final Plays are testaments of the vigorous evolution of Eros into Caritas.
He cites analogies from the New Testament in order to corroborate his view. All the premises enable him to draw the conclusion that human regeneration implies an eschatological aspect: the communion of saints in God, with God and for God for ever and ever. The finality of human existence is the fulfilment of regeneration in attaining the essence: everlasting happiness. "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Mtt. 5.8). And Saint Paul reminds us that we see God now as though in a mirror, then face to face. Such ideas of human regeneration are brought home to the readers by Knight. He writes:

Therefore the New Testament can be shown to solve the Shakespearean antinomy of State order and the individual's romantic pain. In terms of the gospel of Love--and only in such terms--do the two converge. It is significant that Shakespeare continually sees the community as a 'body,' an organism, of which the individual is as a limb: whereas St. Paul too sees the brotherhood of man as a 'body' the body of Christ. Perfect love thus fulfils the creative purposes of individual and state alike. And like the Shakespearean Eros, Christian love is in St. Paul's writings, the very gateway to immortality.²⁶
Knight calls *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale* resurrection plays. It goes to Knight's credit to explain the theme of the myth of immortality in symbolic terms of the Christian dogma of physical as well as spiritual resurrection. He considers *The Tempest* an objective vision of life. He says that the progress from spiritual pain and despairing thought through stoic acceptance to a serene and mystic joy is a universal rhythm of the spirit of man. Nevertheless, he maintains that *The Tempest* is at the same time a record of Shakespeare's spiritual progress and a statement of the vision to which that progress has brought him. It is apparent as a dynamic and living act of the soul containing within itself the record of its birth: it is continually rewriting itself before our eyes. Shakespeare has in this play so mastered the whole of his own mystic universe that the universe at last perfectly projected in one short play into the forms and shapes of objective human existence, shows us, in the wreck of *The Tempest*, a complete view of that existence. And since it reveals its vision not as a statement of absolute truth independently of the author, but related inwardly to the succession of experiences that condition and nurture its own reality, it becomes, in a unique sense, beyond other marks of art, an absolute.
Knight maintains that in Shakespeare human regeneration comes about not through repentance but by recognition and acceptance. This implies a spiritual achievement. He calls it the Shakespearean progress. It involves a spiritual growth, an inner evolution which is perceptible in his plays. His spiritual life was positively that of a pilgrim's progress. He demonstrates that in the problem plays there is mental division; on the one side an exquisite apprehension of the spiritual—beauty romance, poetry; on the other the hate theme—loathing of the impure, aversion to the animal kinship of man, disgust at the decaying body of death. Shakespeare resolves this dualism in the tragedies; the hate theme itself is finally sublimated in Timon by means of the purification of great passion, human grandeur and all the aspects of high tragedy. The repeated poetic symbol of tragedy in Shakespeare is "storm" or a "tempest." The Last Plays excel the intuition of tragedy and their plots illustrate the myth of immortality. The dominant symbols are a loss in tempest and revival to the sounds of music. It is about twelve years from the inception of this lovely progress of the soul to the composition of The Tempest.
Knight acknowledges:

I here avoid the phrase 'resurrection themes' which, though valuable in pointing to a Christian relevance, is also in danger of suggesting too exact a relation to the Church's doctrine of the resurrection of the body. The word 'resurrection' was, I think, first applied to one of Shakespeare's Last Plays (The Winter's Tale) by Doctor Hugh Brown in the Hibber Journal sometime in the thirties; my own original choice was the word 'immortality' which may in face of current misunderstanding be safe.27

The myth of immortality means the general belief that the souls of the departed survive in a higher state or a tragic state depending upon the state of their conscience in the terrestrial life. Myth transcends reason and logic. Christians believe that the body and the soul are partners in human acts. They are collaborators in gaining God's favour or incurring the wrath of God. Grace and sin are at antipodes in dogmatic theology. A sinner can turn a new leaf through penitence and atonement. Thus the redeemed soul resurrects to eternal life while the impenitent soul is condemned to everlasting punishment. God alone is the Alpha and the Omega.
The concept of immortality, which is ingrained in man's conscience, has been the subject of innumerable myths which are as old as humanity itself. The most important of these myths are the Hellenic and the pre-Hellenic ones, which have profoundly influenced European thought. Apart from Greek mythology, Socrates', Plato', and Aristotle's philosophy, too, emphasized the immortality of the human soul. According to them anything has two principles: matter and form. As far as human beings are concerned, the human soul refers to the form while the human body refers to the matter. The form is immortal because it is simple and spiritual. Death is the phenomenon of the transition of the soul from the body to a higher state of existence. Therefore the immortality of this human soul stands to reason.

Shakespeare's later plays fall naturally into three groups: First, the plays of pain and intellectual despair, such as Hamlet; second, plays of tragic grandeur, superficially sad, yet inwardly strong with the mystic optimism of poetic tragedy—of these King Lear may be cited as a typical example—and third, a curious group of plays where the tragic theme is reversed and a happy ending is brought about contrary to the natural logic of human life and to the canons of ritualistic art. The Last Plays are examples of this. The poet who designs a happy ending naturally attempts to clothe his plot with some
outward probability. Shakespeare does not do this in the Last Plays. There is no attempt at realism. Therefore having regard to the succession which these plays continue and, moreover, to the fact that they are strongly impregnated with an atmosphere of religious mysticism—dreams, oracles, and divine appearances—Knight looks at them essentially as mystical resolutions of those difficulties and despairs which are the theme of earlier plays. They do in fact definitely and decisively contradict the earlier humanistic logic. They explicate the irrational optimism of tragedy in the form of myths or parables. Shakespeare’s greater tragedies are nearly all on the same theme: the failure of Love to body itself into any earthly symbol.

The Final Plays of Shakespeare, however, reverse this theme. In them the story is pursued to the brink of tragedy: and then tragedy is curiously averted. Thaisa, wife of Pericles, is cast apparently dead to the stormy waters; yet she and his lost daughter Marina are restored to him after a passage of years. Cerimon, the hermit, raises Thaisa to life in a scene which recalls the raising of Lazarus in the Gospels. In so far as we admit a universal tragic significance in earlier plays, we are forced to recognize a universal mystic significance in these final plays. They represent symbolically the resurrection of that which seems to die, but is yet alive;
the conquest of love over those stormy waters of temporal existence which appear to engulf it. It is significant that tempests, Shakespeare's current symbol of tragedy, appear in these two plays. But there is not only loss in the tempest; there is revival and resurrection to the sounds of music. Pericles, finding his long lost Marina, hears the mysterious 'music of the spheres' (V.i.231), just before his vision of Diana. In The Winter's Tale (V.iii.98) Hermione, too, is awakened to the sounds of music.

As though some insistent truth was yet striving for the fuller expression, we have these same themes amazingly multiplied within the compact plot-texture of Cymbeline. Belarius, Arviragus and Guiderius, long lost to Cymbeline through his mistrust, are restored to him in the end; and both Posthumus and Imogen think each other dead, only to be joyed at the loved one's miraculous survival. Most interesting of all, in this play, we have the vision of Jupiter which has baffled past commentators; yet it is a natural attempt on the poet's part to explain, in some degree, through an anthropomorphic theism, this mystic realization of the ineffable which is beating in his mind.

More exquisitely compact than Cymbeline, The Tempest is a record of Shakespeare's spiritual progress and simultaneously a vision of mankind tossed on the turbulent
waters of this life. Therefore, Prospero is both the supreme being from one point of view, and from the other Shakespeare, the poet. The story is simply this: a magician draws to him, by means of a tempest, a ship-load of men--good, evil, wise, and ignorant: them he both wrecks and saves. The mystic melodies of Ariel's pipe sing the travellers to the yellow sands where all is forgiven and all restored. The Tempest is a perfect work of mystic vision in English literature.

D. G. James holds that the essential myth of the romances is the finding of what is lost. Other aspects of it are the recurring theme of resurrection, the recovery of lost royalty by a royal personage, and the placing of lost royalty in situations of great danger. The myth is used to express the theme of deliverance from tragic existence into a new dispensation of mercy; it is found in a very pure form in Pericles but in the later plays the myth is tortured by the conflict among the symbols.

The plot pulls one way, the theme another. Thus, only Thaisa is really dead, and after her resurrection even she behaves with incredible stupidity; the others are not dead, and the theme takes on something of absurdity, and is introduced with a strange arbitrariness. This made Shakespeare's work silly to a degree it never had been before.
Similarly the royalty symbol breaks down in narrative. The progress from *Pericles* to *The Tempest* consists of an attempt to solve these and related problems. Shakespeare casts off the more explicit elements of his symbolism; there is less religious language and less suffering and the symbolism becomes on the whole less evident. But the vigour of the myth is consequently enfeebled. A defence can be made of *The Tempest* as in some respects transcending these limitations but one may be disappointed to find that it depends on a variety of the old-style allegorical reading devised in order to diminish the symbolic confusions.

D. G. James view is original, not in substance so much as in its working out of the implications. He undertook the heavy task of trying to see the "myths of immortality" as they manifested themselves in romance-plots. In doing so, he assumed a degree of parabolic intention in the plays which Knight would probably repudiate:

> It is dangerous both to expect plausibility of romance-narratives and to take liberties with words like 'myth' and that, if we are concerned at all with Shakespeare's intentions, we should try to define historically the area in which they can be usefully sought and studied.\(^{29}\)
Unlike G. Wilson Knight, James is concerned with Shakespeare's intention. Shakespeare, having failed to see human life as a neat, orderly and satisfying unity, had resort to myth for conveyance of his new imaginative apprehension of life. In this attempt he failed, because he could not allow Christian symbolism to direct his expression, or to have his symbols contaminated by assertion.

Roland Musht Frye repudiates G. Wilson Knight's religious exegesis of Shakespeare's Last Plays. He argues that Shakespeare's dramatic interest is almost entirely restricted to what the reformers called the temporal order. He writes:

The role of theology in Shakespeare's age may be misunderstood or distorted, but its importance can scarcely be over-estimated. Theology was everywhere discussed and the level of theological literacy among educated people was considerably higher than in our own time. Approximately half of the books published in England between the inception of printing and parliamentary revolution bore explicitly religious titles and religious ideas figured prominently or pervasively in many if not most of the others. An intelligent Christian of the
Elizabethan age would have had a rather sophisticated grasp of theology, when judged by our standards.\textsuperscript{30}

Literature and liberal arts were integrated. They were held independent of Christian revelation or of Christian theology or of any theological reference to the patterns of Christian salvation.

For Knight, the unique act of Christ’s sacrifice can be seen as central to the tragedies, while his final plays celebrate the victory and glory, the resurrection and renewal, that in the Christian story and in its reflection in the Christian ritual succeed the sacrifice.\textsuperscript{31} Frye’s counter argument is based on an external evidence. About Revered Francis Meres’ \textit{Palladis Tamia} (1598) he states that when Meres wrote admiringly of Shakespeare in 1598, he gave not even the slightest hint of finding Christ figures and the life, but rather made a solid linking of Shakespeare with the non-Christian classics.

R. M. Frye subscribes to Knight’s ideas of symbolism being central to the plays.

Each interpretative performance can, on the one hand, reveal an inner circle of truths about \textit{The Winter’s Tale}—truths that will win, because they deserve to win, the continuing assent of
most readers. The outer circles of interpretation remain, on the other hand, more suggestive than certain. . . . Leontes is "more stone" than the statue; Perdita stands "like stone" watching it. Camillo describes Leontes' sorrow as "too sore laid on," Polixenes would "piece up in himself" Leontes' grief. Leontes becomes "wrought" by the sight of the image, and Perdita could for "twenty years' stand by, a looker on." Shakespeare suggests that the statue is, in some sense, more active than its beholders. In the strange analogy of Paulina, it imitates life as sleep imitates death. Beyond the stone veil of the statue lies a superior life. There is magic in its majesty, conjuring evils to remembrance and taking the spirits from onlookers.32

R. M. Frye argues that although Shakespeare often used contemporary theological writings, and is generally Christian in his point of view, his plays were not written as Christian propaganda. Shakespeare's references to Christian theology have been drawn from a general background of knowledge rather than from identifiable books. Though Shakespeare was not intent upon dramatizing the Christian tradition, he could and did appeal to important elements in that tradition in constructing his actions and characters.
G. Wilson Knight equates Shakespeare's problem plays, tragedies and romances with L'Inferno, Il Purgatorio and Il Paradiso respectively. He calls these plays of Shakespeare taken together a Divine Comedia and concludes:

And what are both but reflection in the work of the two greatest minds of modern Europe—children respectively of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance—the incarnation in actuality of the divine Logos of poetry . . . . So we should centre our attention on the spirit which burns though them and is eternal in its rhythm of peace, endurance and joy.33

The theme of resurrection has been a continuing mystery in almost every culture, for the human mind has been baffled from the dawn of history by the seasonal, biological resurrection in Nature. Yet man's ingenuity has sought to overcome this difficulty by explaining the phenomenon through the formula of myths. The process of mythification was a kind of science in the ancient times when understanding of the world was sought in imagistic logic. Such myths invariably explain in a dramatic shorthand certain symbolic meanings of the perceived phenomenon. At times these mythical comprehensions of Nature are transmuted into culture values or mystified to be spiritual truths. But when such myths cease to serve
the purpose of structuring spiritual sensibilities, then they become modified in a variety of ways depending upon the changes in society and the cultural and religious modes.

Antony David Nuttal examines the growth of the mythic interpretation of the Romances. He joins a host of mythic interpreters and looks for exciting clues in the Last Plays. He discovers that the Last Plays shine with promise when they are read in the light of anthropology and comparative religion. Shakespeare schematised *Pericles, Cymbeline, The Winter’s Tale,* and *The Tempest* in myths and rituals because romance was always close to myths and rituals. The universal symbols of Royal Death and Rebirth, of vegetation Rites, of Fertility and the rest are enclosed in them.

He argues that great art is a process, a movement of events which relate to the greatest experiences of human nature. If we look at great works of art in the right way, we can see that they all contain the same elements. If we look at the great myths of mankind, from anywhere in the world, the right way, we find exactly the same elements. In both art and myth, they appear not as *dramatis personae,* or particular shaped sequences, but as symbols of something altogether larger and more universal.
Mythic approach is close to that of imposing allegorical meaning on to these plays, with the difference that now the imposed meaning is something grander than the allegorizers, and mythic pioneers find. Even Christ's crucifixion itself is only a symbol of something infinitely deep in universal human experience, the sacrifice of the young prince for the salvation of the tribe. G. Wilson Knight, Northrop Frye and E. M. W. Tillyard are allegorizers as well as myth miners. They are inspired by Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* and Jessie L. Weston's *From Ritual to Romance*. Antony David Nuttal comments:

That this need for assertion of a universal humanity, with emphasis on the infinitely significant value of sacrifice, came after the First World War, is not surprising. Frazer, in particular, seemed to be drawing aside a veil to show, deeply reassuringly, something of what C. J. Jung later called the collective unconscious.34

Drama contains another element which seems to make it perfect for such equations. It enacts for a community a performance with a beginning, a middle and an end. It can easily be said to be doing this on behalf of the community. That very progression, that longer and more
complex development from beginning to end is an ingredient not always found in myths which are usually uncomplicated in plot. Drama is performed by special people and there is some stress on them being the right people, properly capable of it. So drama has powerful ritual functions and as such is part of a stream of human experience that goes back to the beginning of culture and civilization. Humanity’s great religions and folk-customs and rituals provide stunning material for furnishing a comprehensive understanding of the whole work of Shakespeare.

Though early in the twentieth century it had been noticed how Shakespeare at the end seemed preoccupied with the theme of reconciliation, and the importance of the royal children and their survival, creating a new world out of what their parents had nearly destroyed, the classic statement of the appeal to myth came a third of the way through the century, in G. Wilson Knight’s enormously influential short essay "Myth and Miracle," published in 1929. Here the words ‘myth’ and ‘universal’ are constantly applied to the four last plays, and particularly to The Tempest. The Crown of Life, which opens with "Myth and Miracle," has a long chapter "The Shakespearean Superman: An Essay on The Tempest." This is less startling, though it does contain one influential suggestion. "The poetry is pre-eminently in the events themselves, which are intrinsically poetic." In that
chapter, there is a sentence about *The Tempest* which sums up much of the first chapter's thesis: "A myth of creation woven from his total work by the most universal of poets is likely to show correspondences with other well-authenticated results of the racial imagination."\(^{35}\)

To get to his much-referred-to 'universals,' Knight has a good deal to do with the words 'mystic' and 'mysticism.' He argues that there is a twelve-year period which takes Shakespeare from the problem plays through the great tragedies towards a spiritual fulfilment. On this word 'spiritual' on the first page of "Myth and Miracle" he writes, "That spiritual quality which alone causes a great work to endure through the centuries should be the primary object of our attention." He finds that tragedy is merging into mysticism, and what is left to say must be said not in terms of tragedy, but of 'miracle and myth'—which leads him to *Pericles* and *The Winter's Tale*. He writes of the apparition of the goddess Diana in *Pericles*: "A reader sensitive to poetic atmosphere must necessarily feel the awakening light of some religious or metaphysical truth symbolized in the plot and attendant machinery. The vision of Jupiter in *Cymbeline* has clear religious and universal significance." In view of 'the mystic significance' of it, we shall find it quite reasonable that Shakespeare should attempt a universal statement in direct language concerning the implication of
his plot. Knight sums up, on the three plays before The Tempest: "these miraculous and joyful conquests of life's tragedy are the expression, through the medium of drama, of a state of mind or soul in the writer directly in knowledge . . . of a mystic and transcendent fact as to the true nature and purpose of the sufferings of humanity."36

Thus a prophetic criticism could, if The Tempest had been lost, have nevertheless indicated what must be its essential nature, and might have hazarded its name. He opposes 'tempest-symbolism' to music, and 'the hate-theme' to love--ideas he finds consummated in The Tempest. The predominating symbols of the four plays are loss in tempest and revival to the sounds of music. It is about twelve years from the inception of this lonely progress of the soul to the composition of The Tempest. On the island, Prospero is master of his lonely magic. He has been there for twelve years. The Tempest is at the same time a record of Shakespeare's spiritual progress and a statement of the vision to which that progress has brought him. We are here, according to Knight, in a world of timeless absolutes. The progress from spiritual pain and despairing thought through stoic acceptance to a serene and mystic joy is a universal rhythm in the spirit of man.
Making his remarks on *The Tempest* Knight says:

As for my contention that the Final Plays of Shakespeare must be read as myths of immortality, that is only to bring his work into line with other great works of literature. Tragedy is never the last word: theophanies and reunions characterise the drama of the Greeks: they, too, tell us that with God all things are possible.37

A. D. Nuttal criticises Knight's vagueness on the concept of death. It is, indeed, noticeable that these plays do not aim at revealing a temporal survival of death but rather at the thought that death is a delusion. What was thought dead is in reality alive. He says that we watch the fine flowers of a mystic state of soul bodied into the forms of drama. Nuttal disagrees with Knight's making light of the pain experienced with death. He argues that there is something very wrong indeed here. Death was not a delusion for Mamillius or Antigonus in *The Winter's Tale* nor for the mothers of Caliban or, presumably, Miranda, in *The Tempest*. Nor was death a delusion for William Shakespeare.38

The Last Plays were central to all that Knight wrote of Shakespeare. A considerable body of his own work, and that of others like Derek Traversi, grew directly from
Knight's first essay. He wrote persuasively about themes common to two or more of the Last Plays, and his work had the attraction of fresh scientific observation. The binary oppositions, not only of love and hate but also of the tempest and music, and so on, gave the sense of looking at an important, and previously hidden, structure. Moreover, he made these themes not only immediate to the whole play, giving it again a Coleridgean organic unity: but at the same time the Last Plays were seen again to consummate the whole Shakespearean corpus. Just as the boiling together of world-wide myths and rituals by Frazer had seemed to reveal new chemical elements in human experience, so Knight seemed to be able to relate Shakespeare to common life—not just in Western post--Renaissance societies, but to all humanity.

Alex Aronson makes an appraisal of the approach of Knight to concepts and symbols. Elements of the symbolic meaning were abstracted by scholarship and equated with medieval philosophy. He says Knight is particularly afraid of the substitution of concepts for symbols and of the transformation of poetic experience into didactic arguments. Order symbols, for example, lend themselves to interpretation in terms of moral or political orthodoxy, and the drama can only too easily be reduced to the level of a moral tract. Knight wants us to keep our eyes unwaveringly fixed not on concepts, but on the living
symbol, from which any concepts we choose to draw must be regarded as provisional derivatives only.

But except for a few remarkable though idiosyncratic instances, such as in the work of G. Wilson Knight, there has been no sustained inquiry into what constitutes the life of the play. Even in those cases where comment was informed by a desire to provide the reader with new imaginative insights, the speaker’s voice frequently lacked conviction. Being uncertain of his bearings, he could merely hint at some new though not yet clearly definable vision. 39

The Tempest is a culture myth as G. Wilson Knight claims. Written at a moment of profound transformation in the history of the European psyche, it reflects and engages such a transformation in a way that mirrors the cultural past of Europe and anticipates its future. Prospero, in particular, contains within himself the burden and complexity of his times. On the one hand, his education, which the play presents dramatically, is that of the Renaissance magus as he moves through the ambiguous realms of the Hermetic sympathetic magic, resisting their temptations, to find the clearer and more modern light of a Baconian and Puritan ideology. On the other hand, Prospero’s vindication, which the play presents as a
masque, contains within it all the panoply of hierarchy and order associated with the divine right of kings. Prospero stands in both worlds. He is a medieval king, and he is a magus, distinct from the demonic magic of Sycorax but in the process of learning the limitations of his natural powers. The mystery of his personality lies in the synthesis which Shakespeare effects between these elements, for Prospero maintains in a precarious yet marvellous equilibrium the potencies and comprehensions which are the fruit of various powerful traditions in our culture. But the keystone is Miranda, the central value of the play's world, representing a simple and basic Christian ideal, so utterly vulnerable, yet surviving whole the hazards and transformations which bring Prospero through the pilgrimage of his life to wisdom.

There are three things, according to Alex Armson, to be noticed in The Tempest. The first is an explanation of Prospero's character and his development in terms of the education of Prospero which is of central importance to the play. Secondly, there is an assessment of the underlying ideology of the play in terms of a commonplace Augustinian tradition, centring, in this case, on the Christian concept of caritas, the touchstone by which Prospero is measured, as a man, a magus, and a king. Finally, the delicate interaction between the innovative Hermetic magic and the theologically commonplace has to be
studied. "All these show some fruitful synthesis between the influential claims of recent historians of Renaissance magic and the arguments of those who espouse a more traditional humanist approach to Shakespeare."  

Patric Grant feels that *The Tempest* is a work of enormous complexity. It is the art of Europe's greatest playwright at its fullest and ripest, and it has the dimensions of a myth, engaging the archetypes of the basic processes of civilization itself.  

The industry and insight Wilson Knight displayed in his *Crown of Life*, compel respect and require serious consideration. Yet the danger inherent in this method of investigation is two-fold. First, there is a general and almost unavoidable propensity to project one's own philosophy of religion to Shakespeare. Second, there is a particular tendency to give what appears to be a purely personal and highly conjectural interpretation of certain passages in the text of unquestioned validity, and use them accordingly. Now, one of the great merits of Wilson Knight's theory is that it encompasses, and tries to account for, the whole spiritual evolution of the poet throughout the plays, by bringing it into line with what he terms the 'universal rhythm of the spirit of man.' Shakespeare's final plays thus represent the last stage in the progress from spiritual pain and despairing thought
through stoic acceptance to a serene and mystic joy, and must be read as myths of immortality. To do but the barest justice to this contention means a thorough reconsideration of the whole problem of the Last Plays which would far exceed the scope of the present study.

We must therefore deliberately abstain from ascertaining in what measure such an interpretation may be said to reflect the ultimate meaning which Shakespeare's genius confers on the final plays, or to what extent Professor Wilson Knight's oracular utterances are but a projection into Shakespeare of his own mystical trends. But if we must needs remain provisionally non-committal towards the global theory as such, we do not think it impossible, on the other hand, to limit our inquiry to those aspects of the theory which bear upon the problem of the final scene in _The Winter's Tale_. Such a method is legitimate, provided we keep in mind the general pattern from which the few aspects under consideration here must be too artificially detached.\(^{42}\)

Now it appears from Wilson Knight's analysis that highly sensitive to poetic reality as he is, he has not always escaped the second danger lurking in the
imaginative approach, so much so that his interpretation of the final scene, however consonant he makes it appear with similar aspects in others of the final plays, and however attractive, proves, if not illusory, at least hypothetical to a high degree. To forestall the charge of a hasty generalization, we must now subject some of the main points to close scrutiny.

As a recent representative of philosophical interpretation observes, the rejectors of Bradley are wrong in pretending that the symbolic content does not also find its most controlled expression in the characters as people. Wilson Knight, of course, makes full allowance for stage necessity, and is sometimes even prone to dismiss those elements that do not fit into his scheme as merely due to the necessities of plot realism. Yet, on a crucial issue, in order to bring home better and enhance the transcendental meaning of Hermione's 'resurrection,' as he sees it, he contends that the poet carefully refuses to elucidate the mystery on the plane of plot-realism. The point is important, and if it were so indeed, the critic would have scored a palpable hit. A deliberate refusal to elucidate the mystery would go a long way towards proving that answers must not be searched for 'on this plane at all,' and would, therefore, make a transcendental explanation all the more plausible.
As a matter of fact, to take but one instance, there are probabilities that the poet deliberately avoided too accurate and systematic an integration of his hero into the historical background of the poem, to suggest and enhance the symbolic aspect of the great fights against the monsters. But in the present case, such a careful refusal, as postulated by Wilson Knight, is quite imaginary and the poet, on the contrary, subtly elucidates the mystery on the very level of plot realism. It is clear that thanks to the poet’s consummate technique in the whole ‘revelation’ scene and its preparation, the audience has been made perfectly aware of the minutes of Paulina’s successful plan.

Suffice it to stress that the second gentleman’s allusion to the statue business as some great matter in the hand of Paulina not only intimates, but retrospectively serves as a perfectly logical explanation of Hermione’s preservation. It is obvious that his explicit mention of Paulina’s having "twice or thrice a day, ever since the death of Hermione (i.e., for sixteen years), visited that removed house," transcends the mere necessity of providing board and lodging for Julio Romano, and decidedly points at Hermione having been secretly kept alive by Paulina.

In such circumstances, it is quite normal that Polixenes should eagerly ask how the coup de theatre has
been accomplished and mark how the ambivalent form of his question as to "where she was a live. / Or how stolen from the dead’ in no way prejudices the issue. At that juncture we actually know where she has lived and that it is only symbolically that she has been stolen from the dead. And it is quite as normal, too, that Hermione should wonder how Perdita has been preserved and found.

Shakespeare may very well have managed to intimate even a mystical apprehension of the fate of human life without its interfering in the least with plot realism. But whether Hermione’s ‘resurrection,’ reflects the poet’s mystic intuition of immortality, as propounded by Wilson Knight, is an entirely different question. And here, we must examine another point which, though necessitating a brief excursion into Prospero’s island, will bring us back, after an apparent sea-change, to the very core of the problem.

Commenting on the salvation of the voyagers on the coast of the magic island, Wilson Knight writes: Nothing is lost; ‘not so much perdition as an hair’ (I.ii.30) has touched the people in the wreck. Even their garments are unsoiled:

Not a hair perish’d;
On their sustaining garments not a blemish
But fresher than before (I.ii.217)
Where in the uncharted regions of higher imagination are we to get our axes of reference? In the Gospels, certainly: elsewhere perhaps only in the raising of Thaisa from her sea-burial and the resurrection of Hermione. Later on, the resurrection theme is hinted at again with reference to the same passage: "As though death were found to have left the body as well as soul intact." The parallel with Hermione makes it clear that we have to deal here with a similar interpretation, which again involves Shakespeare's supposed mystic intuition of immortality. Now let us provisionally admit that such interpretation is right in the case of *The Tempest*. If it is certain that our axes of reference are to be sought in the Gospels and if, as Wilson Knight further concludes, 'Prospero is a close replica of Christ,' the very words 'not so much perdition as an hair' and 'fresher than before' may then very well indeed point to the mystery of resurrection, which is not only that of a discarnate spirit, but with one's own body yet newer, stronger, more comely.

Now if we turn to Hermione, the lost thing, when recovered, is still flesh and blood, to be sure; but the terms 'not a hair perished,' and above all 'fresher than before' no longer apply. On the contrary, a visible alteration, a very prosaic change, indeed has taken place and, enraptured as he is in 'other-worldly consciousness,'
Leontes (and not Polixenes, who would normally be the one to take us back to commonsense) does not fail to notice it:

But yet, Paulina,
Hermione was not so much wrinkled, nothing
So aged as this seems. (V.iii.27-29)

It would be easy, too easy in fact to wave aside this reference to Time's irreparable outrage with a shrug of one's shoulders, and attribute it to the necessities of plot realism. As a matter of fact, we believe that this highly realistic touch is mainly used so as to provide the audience with a precise clue as to the real nature of the supposed statue, and not merely for the sake of adding to the verisimilitude of the whole occurrence, once the spectators have fully realized that Hermione has been kept alive for sixteen years. But this point (which is, after all, simply a plot-convenience rather than a plot-necessity) might have been easily dispensed with: it would not have affected in the least the development and effect of the scene at this juncture. If the awakening of the statue were actually to be conceived as a revelation of immortality, we cannot help feeling that this reference to Hermione's wrinkles and 'aged' appearance is strangely jarring with such a myth and its connotations. If the device points to a mystical apprehension of eternity, surely the lapse of those sixteen years impressing its
indelible seal on Hermione’s face should, to say the least, not have been thus emphasized. We quite agree, of course, that if intimated at all, the revelation has been poetically intimated and not explicitly or dogmatically set forth.

The passage about Hermione’s wrinkles, one feels, would be more compatible with a symbolical interpretation of the reawakening of the statue within the realm of our little life. Yet only the statue motive could afford the almost palpable and simultaneous relationship between Leontes’ love, now deepened and purified by sincere repentance, and the reawakening of what was dead in Hermione—of what had been killed in her through a crime of his. Perdita’s recovery is the sign that destiny has now allowed the consequences of Leontes’ crime to be retrieved, and we are aware that his long penitence is not foreign to the event. But it is only with the statue motif that we not merely grasp, but actually visualize, the power of Leontes’ love and repentance. The reanimation of Hermione’s statue may thus be considered a symbol of the redeeming power of true repentance which may win again a long lost love and atone for the disastrous consequence of a past crime. We know that such a deep repentance had to outlive an apparently hopeless number of years and Hermione’s wrinkles are but another eloquent reminder of the fact. The whole climax, or ‘miracle’ of
miracles, it does not therefore necessarily involve any mystic flight beyond the boundaries of human life and a distinctly human situation.

In sum, the contention that in *The Winter's Tale* (not to mention other later plays) the plot reflects 'the poet's intuition of immortality' is so hypothetical—though attractive an interpretation—that it can hardly be accepted otherwise than by a sheer effort of faith. One might be tempted to say that Wilson Knight's intimations of immortality from the resurrection of Hermione turn out to be a poem in Shakespearean interpretation, rather than an interpretation of a Shakespearean poem.

S. Viswanathan has related the theme of human regeneration to the Shakespeare progress. He joins the other scholars who think that Shakespeare underwent a mystic experience and that the plays from *Julius Caesar* (1699) to *The Tempest* (1611) reflect that spiritual evolution.

It may be noted that *Julius Caesar* is a play that violates the classical unities of plot, time and place. Despite the neglect of the classical rules of drama *Julius Caesar* attracted huge audiences and its successful performance provoked the jealousy of his fellow dramatists, chiefly Ben Jonson's. The rivalry led to the
War of the Theatres. *Julius Caesar* is a problem tragedy because it raises psychological and ethical problems in the life of the hero. References to the theme of human regeneration are very vague there.

*The Tempest* is the only play written in the light of the classical unities. It conveys magnificently the meridian of the regeneration and describes the trajectory of sin, suffering, repentance, penitence, forgiveness, and reconciliation. It also expresses vividly the force of the moral determinism: reward of virtue and punishment for sin. S. Viswanathan agrees with Roland Mushat Frye’s view that Shakespeare plays are essentially secular.

For Knight, on the other hand, they are religious in content. In the wake of Knight’s interpretation we have had and continue to have a great wave of supposedly theological analyses of Shakespeare; again and again we are informed of the discovery of some new Christ figure or Christ allusion in the plays or we are advised as to the eternal destiny in a future life of Shakespeare’s stage characters, or we are introduced to some doctrine which serves as a theological structure upon which an entire play is built.

S. Viswanathan perceives in the Shakespeare criticism of Paul N. Siegel the symbolism of the Paschal mystery.
He quotes him. In terms of Christ story, it is the analogy with the crucifixion which is the centre of the tragedies and the analogy with resurrection is the centre of the tragi-comedies. He maintains that Shakespeare was a poet of the Elizabethan age and that he sang on the relevance of eternal values which are fundamentally human and universal.

S. Viswanathan criticises Knight for his induction of Hegelian philosophy into Shakespeare interpretation. Knight introduces a dialectical pattern of antinomies. Wilson Knight sees sin in the plays as an omnipresent and mysterious reality brooding motionless over and within the plays’ movement. The belief in a set of metaphysical values goes with a tendency, ultimately Hegelian, though with Nietzschean and Bergsonian overtones, to think in terms of a dialectical pattern of antinomies. Everyday ethical standards which are usually applied to the judgement of Shakespeare characters and to the placing of them as good and evil are rejected as inadequate. The interpretation of good and evil is rejected as inadequate. The interpretation of good and evil, and good in evil characters and evil in good characters and their attainment to a state beyond good and evil make a new supraethical approach necessary.
S. Viswanathan admires the inestimable contribution of G. Wilson Knight to the exegesis of the Last Plays. He writes:

Wilson Knight’s interpretation of the Last Plays has been the most characteristic—and among the most influential—of his Shakespearean studies, and the strengths and weaknesses of his approach are displayed here most clearly. If one can speak of a twentieth century revival of critical interest in the Last Plays, and if the plays have come to be regarded as great masterpieces, like the tragedies, and not as mere indulgences or freaks, the pioneering commentary which inaugurated later writings was Wilson Knight’s first monograph on the Last Plays, *Myth and Miracle* published in 1929. A more elaborate and definitive interpretation of the Last Plays—including *Henry VIII*, another critical discovery of Wilson Knight came in 1947. *The Crown of Life* was published in 1947. Wilson Knight attaches special importance to the study of the Last Plays as they mark the successful completion of the ’Shakespeare Progress.’

Employing the argument from the Hegelian dialectical pattern of juxtaposed antinomies, Viswanathan sees the Last Plays as the ultimate spiritual synthesis reached
after the thesis and anti-thesis of the love theme and hate theme, the life theme and the death theme in the 'sombre' tragedies. Wilson Knight's insight into the Last Plays as a group is that they are to be seen as myths of immortality.

Paul N. Siegel is of the following opinion: The Tempest is unusual among Shakespeare's plays in that its title calls attention to a natural phenomenon. "This natural phenomenon is placed in conjunction with several others of tremendous metaphorical resonance: the sea, human exile, human conspiracy, an island, a ship and a society rejuvenated." 45

Human regeneration is the dominant theme in The Tempest. G. Wilson Knight considers The Tempest the expansion of the metaphor tempest. He says that the poetry is pre-eminently in the events themselves, which are intrinsically poetic. Now just as in Dante a visionary conception is expounded, as T. S. Eliot has observed, by an unmetaphoric and transparent style, so The Tempest will be found peculiarly poor in metaphor. There is the less need for it in that the play is itself metaphor. Applying the doctrine of G. Wilson Knight one can study The Tempest as a metaphor. The figures that establish the setting, appositions of characters and progression of plot in The Tempest make visible certain
archetypal desires, states, and action common to the experience of Christian pilgrims. That means they become signs of intangible human intentions and tendencies. The Tempest is a physical scene that allegorically figures forth the spiritual substance of its inhabitants. "Not only does this insular landscape figure their inward spirits, it induces them into self-revealing and self-summarizing action in the world, so that, like Dante’s damned and redeemed souls, they experience their spiritual conditions in a physical way." Spiritual rejuvenation of the characters is pictured adequately in visible means.

James Walter is of the view that "G. Wilson Knight’s mythic interpretation of The Tempest is established on the foundation of the allegorical exegesis of the first lines of Genesis propounded by St. Augustine in The Confessions (11-13)." 46

In a passage that seems to foreshadow The Tempest, Augustine imagines God’s spirit coming as a storm to disturb the darksome deep and raise its spiritual creature to the enlightenment of grace.

The Tempest portrays human ambition to regenerate: to make a new society based on a new man. Prospero had aimed at a Platonic world when Antonio usurped him to establish a Milan of his design. In the enchanted island there is a revision of the project. Prospero makes a revision of
life and designs a virtuous strategy to restore his status but in a higher degree. While Antonio plots on one part of the island, Caliban is plotting on another; and more innocently, so does Ferdinand after he discovers Miranda only to have his eros subsumed within Prospero's more inclusive "project." All the lesser plots are marked by degrees of impatience and forgetfulness, whereas Prospero's depends specifically on his attained powers of patience, verbal precision, and memory working under the rigour of a narrow time limit.

Prospero's chief work is to purify himself and purge his enemies. His readiness to forgive them and be reconciled with them makes him a superman. He adopts an admirable procedure to sanctify them. He wants them to use the Island's intrinsic power to bring hidden motives into the open and to restore memory. The reason behind this behaviour could be that the conspirators must imaginatively re-experience crucial moments when their natural feelings and consciences were insensible, in order to convert them, to regenerate them.

The Tempest develops a psychological imagery that allegorizes many distinct voices in the soul. The clear voice of reason expresses itself in categories of conceptual thought. There are other mysterious voices that speak from a dark depth of the soul and they cannot
be fully articulated in language, although spectacle, music and poetic image can convince an audience of their reality. To the least intelligent being, Caliban feels the impact of the voices but cannot conceptualise the various aspects of their significances. The other characters experience the prophetic quality of the supercelestial sounds. Caliban utters awesomely:

The isle is full of noises,
Sounds and sweet airs that give delight and hurt not.
Sometimes a thousand twangling instruments
Will hum about mine ears; and sometime voices
That, if I then had waked after long sleep
Will make me sleep again. (III.ii.138-43)

James Walter comments:

Human integrity of soul and self-knowledge depend on hearing these voices and acknowledging their authority. Among them are shame, guilt and conscience, all potentially destructive but capable, too, of restraining human beings from self-destroying and self-losing action. There are also voices of the child, of the primitive, of the ties of family and race, of the feminine in man, of prophecy, of dream, of the impetus to tell stories and of grace. All these voices can
be springs of new life for the soul oppressed or defaced by the grasping spirit, by the artificial and mechanical, or by hopeless impatience.47

In the foregoing discussion an attempt was made to disentangle the various stands of G. Wilson Knight's critical response to the theme of regeneration in Shakespeare's Last Plays. In the next chapter we move to a discussion on the views of E. M. W. Tillyard on the same theme: the fourth chapter is a comparative study in metacriticism of the views of Knight and Tillyard.

Human regeneration indicates the possibility of human perfection. Wilson Knight's metaphorical interpretation of the agents, of instruments and media of human regeneration is a development of one of the several allegorical interpretations of the Last Plays.
Notes


5 Ibid. 140.


7 Ibid. 23.

8 Derek Traversi, *Shakespeare: The Last Phase* 150.

9 *Scrutiny* 16 (June 15, 1949): 127.

10 Wilson G. Knight, *Shakespearean Production* 50.


12 Wilson G. Knight, "Myth and Miracle."

13 Ibid.


15 Ibid.


24 Ibid. 49.

25 Ibid. 69.

26 Wilson G. Knight, *Shakespeare and Religion* 70.

27 Ibid. 8.


32 R. M. Frye

33 Wilson Knight


36 Ibid. 224.

37 Ibid.

38 Antony David Nuttal, *Critics Debate: The Tempest* 58.


40 Ibid.


42 Ibid.


44 Ibid.


46 James Walter, "'From the Tempest to Epilogue': Augustine's Allegory in Shakespeare's Drama," *PMLA* 98 (15 June 1983): 75.

47 Ibid. 76.